ABSTRACT. The City of Cluj was and still is considered to be the 'capital of Transylvania' due to the fact that it is an important cultural and business center. Though, Cluj’s historical buildings and sites could not compete with those of Sibiu and Brasov they are interesting; its cultural life is reach and its business opportunities are complex. All those factors make from Cluj an important tourist destination for various type of tourist. But what is the situation of Cluj lodging capacities? Between 1990 and 1999, the number of hotels in Cluj grew slowly from 10 to 17 during this period. By the end of April 2005 we were able to identify 45 operational lodging capacities in Cluj and over 50% were open between 2002 and 2005.

The present paper would investigate the causes of this ‘explosion’ of Cluj lodging capacities and if this quick development generated hotels/ lodging capacities with distinctive features, capable to compete on a crowded market.

Introduction

The development of Cluj lodging capacities was triggered by the need for various types of accommodation services and by an easier access to financial resources (bank loans mostly) between 2000 and 2005. Graphic no.1 present Cluj lodging capacities’ structure using the year of construction:

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Our study revealed that 71.11% of the operational lodging capacities are small, offering between 5 and 49 rooms, as the graphic no.2 shows.

We consider that it is appropriate to present our study here because only 5 of 45 hotels are owned by big, incorporated companies (and this are hotels present on Cluj market before 1989) and one – Hotel Victoria – is owned by the local authorities. The other 39 hotels are owned by small companies – at least from the number of employee point of view.

Our study, also, revealed that around 67% of Cluj lodging capacities are hotels and almost 50% of these lodging capacities are included in 3 stars category – using the National Stars’ Classification System. Graphics no.3 and no.4 present these situations.

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3 Cluj Continental Hotel is owned by the Continental Inc.; Unita Turism Inc. is the owner of other 4 lodging capacities in Cluj: Vila Casa Alba, Hotel Transilvania (Belvedere), Hotel Sport and Hotel Vladeasa.
Material and methods
For our investigations we used:
- personal (face to face) interview based on a short questionnaire (5 clear, unambiguous questions; they were structured and unstructured); the information we got was neither sensitive, nor threatening; we got responses from 34 lodging capacities out of 45 (75.55%);
- visits at the lodging capacities;
- web-sites analysis (accessibility, originality, information);
- other materials used to promote the hotel/ lodging capacity.

Discussions
The information gathered through the interviews and some analysis of web-sites, was used for the construction of a positioning map. This positioning map uses 2 dimensions: the price (axis Oy) and the number of services (axis Ox) offered by Cluj hotels. The prices are between 22 EUR and 116 EUR (average 46.52) and the number of services varies between 5 and 22 (average 15.52).

The positioning map shows the position desired by the hotel on the market; it does not represent the customer point of view on the hotel services’ quality and prices. The map has 4 quadrants:
- in the high-high quadrant there are 14 hotels/ lodging capacities;
- in the high-low quadrant there are 2 hotels/ lodging capacities;
- in the low-high quadrant there are 5 hotels/ lodging capacities;
- in the low-low quadrant there are 13 hotels/ lodging capacities.

The map shows that the correlation exist between prices, number of services and hotel/ lodging capacity category (number of stars). The most crowded quadrants are high-high and low-
low, but there is enough space for new hotels, if they choose a right balance between services and prices. The quadrant low-high, also, shows that the existing and/or new hotels could offer more satisfaction to their guests. Unfortunately, two lodging capacities (Vila Residence – 4 stars; Vila Siesta – 3 stars) are in the high-low quadrant, where they should not be.

This negative situation – from the consumer point of view – could be explained by the fact that in the positioning map we considered all the lodging capacities which existed on the Cluj market by the end of April 2005 and those lodging capacities are considered ‘vilas’ and not hotels.

We like to highlight that the average prices are relatively high (46.52 EUR – around 18% from the average wage/Romanian economy in 2005) and the average number of services is relatively low – in fact very few lodging capacities in Cluj level the international standards for their category\(^4\). This situation is generated both by a level of demand above the market offer and by a low level of clients’ expectations regarding the number of services and brand name.

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\(^4\) This situation must be appreciated with a lot of flexibility, due to the fact that the classification systems vary widely all over the world and – sometimes – these systems are not compulsory.
In our attempt to identify distinctive features for Cluj’s hotels, we analyzed their presentation materials (printed) and their web-sites where it was possible. These sources of information are the most common nowadays – this was the main reason for our choice. Analyzing the web-sites availability, we found the following structure:

None of the 30 available sites could be considered original or very attractive; several sites just replicate the presentation materials, others are more elaborated. Considering the information contained by the web-sites and the images we decided to highlight only the very few negative situations:

- Pensiunea Junior had the worst web-site;
- Vila Rosa’s web-site contain just one image with the lodging capacity building;
- the web-site for Hotel Confort has a very long and boring introduction you can not skip;
- the web-site of Vila Eunicia must be reloaded for every information;

Some other findings regarding are:
- the web-sites of 7 hotels/ lodging capacities do not include any information about their location neither maps indicating the location;
- the web-sites of 4 hotels/ lodging capacities do not offer a virtual tour and for one hotel (Hotel Opal) the virtual tour is included in the general presentation through a constant change of images, but this situation can confuse the potential client; the web-sites for 5 hotels allow a complete virtual tour; the other 20 web-sites allow only very limited or restrictive virtual tours;
- the web-sites for 3 lodging capacities do not include any information on rooms’ type nor rates/ room/ night;
- all hotels with working web-sites allow reservation through e-mail;
- only 9 hotels/ lodging capacities with working web-sites do not allow on-line reservations;
- the web-sites for 5 lodging capacities are written only in Romanian language; this is the case of Vila Rosa and for the four hotels owned by Unita Tourism Inc. (Hotel Transilvania, Vila Casa Alba, Hotel Sport and Hotel Vladeasa).

Analyzing the Cluj lodging capacities location, the conclusions are mixed:
- 12 hotels/ lodging capacities are situated in the city center, but the location for 6 of these hotels/ lodging capacities can be considered hidden (those hotels are not situated on main streets or on open places); a strange situation can be observed for Hotel Cristian (2 stars) which is located in the very hart of Cluj market; we consider that this location limits the type of potential clients for this hotel;
- 6 hotels/ lodging capacities are situated near city center, 3 of them having also a hidden location;
- 3 lodging capacities (Hotel Pax, Hotel Beta and Pensiunea Junior) are situated very near Cluj’s railway station and other two can be considered near this station, but with hidden location (Pensiunea Casa Raul and Pensiunea Picola Italia);
- the location for other 16 hotels could be considered hidden; a peculiar situation for Hotel Olimp – its location is behind a construction material warehouse and many potential clients ignore the hotel.

If the hotels opened between 1990 and 1999 could choose a hidden location due to the lack of lodging capacities during that period and an increasing demand – allowing them to keep their clients, the hotels opened after 2000 could not afford to copy that behavior without a good strategy and without a good co-operation with travel agencies. Their only strength – when a hidden location situation is discussed – is the small lodging capacity, often under 50 rooms.

Further, we analyzed the architectural profile of hotel/ lodging capacities buildings, the interior design and if any of the hotels/ lodging capacities tried to develop a design or chromatic themes to differentiate them from their competitors.

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5 Those lodging capacities are: Hotel Rimini, Hotel Bestwestern Topaz, Pensiunea Deja-Vu, Pensiunea Junior, Hotel Meteor, Vila Meteor, and Hotel Premier.
6 Those lodging capacities are: Hotel Napoca, Hotel Meteor, Vila Meteor and Vila Rosa.
7 Those lodging capacities are: Hotel Central Melody, Hotel Fullton, Hotel Premier, Hotel Transilvania (Belvedere) and Pensiunea Deja-Vu.
8 Those lodging capacities are: Pensiunea Casa Raul, Pensiunea Junior and Hotel Premier.
9 Hotel Agape (hidden location), Hotel Meteor, Vila Siesta (hidden location), Hotel City Plaza (hidden location), Hotel Continental, Hotel Victoria, Hotel Melody Central, Vila Eunicia (hidden location), Hotel Fullton (hidden location), Hotel Cristian, Hotel Vladeasa, Retro Youth Hostel (hidden location).
As we mentioned above, we used mainly the information presented by the hotels/lodging capacities in their prints and on web-sites.

We could not analyze at all 4 lodging capacities (Pensiunea Colibri, Hotel Abi, Hotel Pax and Pensiunea Picola Italia; they represent 8.9% of total of 45) due to the lack of both presentation material and absent or not working web-sites. We were not able to analyze the rooms at Vila Rosa and Hotel Napoca due to the fact that their web-sites do not allow virtual tours and due to the lack of presentation materials.

We concentrated our findings in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Differentiating Elements Through Design</th>
<th>Hotel Napoca</th>
<th>Hotel Transilvania (Belvedere)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive distinctive features</td>
<td>the silhouette of its building remember the classic houses in Apuseni Mountains near Cluj(^\text{10}).</td>
<td>its location dominates</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^\text{10}\) The Hotel Napoca building architecture is explained on its web-site: http://pages.astral.ro/hotelnapoca/. But no other hotel gives any peculiar information about the building.
## Differentiating Elements Through Design

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the city center and the building is unique for Cluj.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Hotel Melody Central</strong> – its location and historical building.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Vila Casa Alba</strong> – its name and the color of its building; white</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>also seemed to be a chromatic theme in interior design.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Hotel Vladeasa</strong> – its old building resembling to old inns.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Pensiunea Deja-Vu</strong> – through its entire concept: a very coquette house; a decorative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>element repeated all over the public spaces; a chromatic theme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Hotel Olimp</strong> – its unique interior design for every room.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Hotel Agape</strong> – due to its 3 rustic (Hungarian style) restaurants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Hotel City Plaza</strong> – its lavatories of glass are unique in Cluj, for the moment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Vila Siesta</strong> – its consistent chromatic theme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Hotel Fulton</strong> – its coffee terrace which highlight a portion of the old citadel wall.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Vila Residence</strong> – thematic design using the cube (starting with the building and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>continuing with the shape of chairs and armchairs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Hotel Bestwestern Topaz</strong> – due to its affiliation to Bestwestern and through its rustic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>restaurant Ciuleandra.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Retro Youth Hostel</strong> – through its affiliation to Hostelling International and being</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>recommended by Lonely Planet. Also through including the old citadel wall as a decorative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>element in the rooms.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Negative distinctive features

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hotel</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Complex Hotelier Rimini</strong></td>
<td>– due to the kitsch present in all interior decorations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pensiunea Junior</strong></td>
<td>– a horrible combination between red of the roof, pink of the building and turquoise of the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>window frames.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Same chromatic palette in interior design

The following hotels/ lodging capacities use a combination of *earth colors* (maroon, yellow, orange, beige and white) which can generate a confusion for a client who use several of these capacities:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hotel</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hotel Victoria</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hotel City Plaza</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hotel Agape</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vila Europa</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hotel Zimbru</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hotel Sport</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pensiunea Deja-Vu</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hotel Melody Central</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vila Residence</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hotel Opal</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vila Meridian</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hotel Olimp (lobby)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hotel Capitolina (only in the restaurant)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hotel Cristian (lobby and restaurant)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hotel Premier (lobby, restaurant, some rooms)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following hotels used *red and dark-red* for decorating their public spaces and their rooms:
**CLUJ HOTELS’ DISTINCTIVE FEATURES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DIFFERENTIATING ELEMENTS THROUGH DESIGN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Complex Hotelier Rimini</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hotel Pami</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pensiunea Casa Raul (public spaces)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hotel Capitolina (mainly rooms)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Same colors for building exterior</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Orange and yellow</strong> were used for the building exterior of the following hotels/lodging capacities:**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vila Meridian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vila Meteor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vila Europa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pensiunea Casa Raul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotel Confort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotel Zimbru</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotel Liliacul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotel Opal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complex Hotelier Rimini</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotel Premier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotel Cristian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotel Paradis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotel Capitolina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pink</strong> is the color for the building of:**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pensiunea Junior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vila Rosa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pensiunea Dorobanti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Negative impression due to interior decorations</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The room decorations create a sensation of discomfort or reflect the bad taste of those who decided on these matters:**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pensiunea Dorobanti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pensiunea Junior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vila Monis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vila Europa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotel Beta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotel Confort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotel Liliacul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vila Eunicia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotel Vladeasa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We must add that 3 hotels (Hotel Sport, Hotel Univers T, and Hotel Transilvania) either have old fashion decorations (trendy during 1970s and 1980s) or combine in a bad manner old fashion decorations with new ones.

In one hotel (Hotel Pami) we were able to detect a chromatic theme which, unfortunately, was lost when the rooms were decorated.

Hotel Fullton can be considered a special case: the intentions of its owners were to decorate each room in a unique manner; the presentation material and the virtual tour on the web-site do not give enough information to confirm the initial intentions.

The situation is not so bad as we expected: 14 hotels/lodging capacities (representing 31.1%) have some distinctive features. But many management teams are not aware of these distinctive features and do not develop them any further.

The number of hotels which use same colors for interior design (19 – representing 42.2%) and exterior design (16 – representing 35.6%) is too big. This situation reflect not...
only the lack of imagination, but a trend observed in Romanian behavior in the last 5-6 years: to copy what other competitors have, not to be creative. The reasons can be various: from the current trend in interior design, personal taste (which mix the education background with a lot of other elements) and last, but not least, the money available for interior decorations.

But in the hospitality industry being different from your competitors is a must, if you want to keep your clients and to attract new others.

Conclusions

At international level since 1990s the trend in hotel development and design was to differentiate any new hotel from the existing others. Even big integrated hotel chains capitalize this differentiation strategy playing with local architecture and design elements when they open hotels abroad. The strategy to be different is more important for small hotels, if they want to compete in a crowded market. If we add to this the trend which suggest that any hotel must be – in its own way – the ambassador of its town or region through architectural and/ or design elements, interior decorations, the use of lobby and other public spaces as art galleries and through its atmosphere, we have an almost complete picture of what a modern hotel must be.

In our study we included localisation, number of services, architecture and design elements in our trial to identify distinctive features for Cluj hotels, as part of a differentiating strategy. As we already revealed at the end of our discussions, we were able to identify 14 hotels in Cluj with some distinctive features, which can make them different from their competitors. It became gradually clear for us that the management teams of Cluj hotels do not have in mind a differentiating strategies, otherwise those hotels with some distinctive features would have capitalized those features though thematic design and would have include those elements in their presentations. Hotels with names of precious or semiprecious stones (Topaz, Onix, and Opal) did not use the idea suggested by their names for their interior design. Hotels functioning in historical buildings (Hotel Continental, Hotel Vladeasa, Hotel Melody Central) did not use the idea of historical past in their interior decorations and were not able to create an atmosphere were clients would like to come back. Hotel Napoca and Hotel Transilvania did not use the special shape of their building to continue a special theme in interior design. All these hotels lost, for the moment, the opportunity to become independent tourist destinations.

Of course, a thematic design – in correlation with architecture and the client target - require not only a clear idea for what the hotel would become, but also the involvement of a team of professional designers and architects. And, of course, financial resources allocated for this purpose. For many hotels in Cluj (mostly for those opened after 2000) the use of professional designers and architects was not an option (claiming limited resources). This situation generated plain buildings, wrong colors mix, the use of personal taste of owners in interior decorations with the tendency to copy what they have seen elsewhere, not daring to be different. As a matter of fact few Cluj hotel owners even think to a differentiating strategy through architecture and design elements. There are in this business to make money quick – and if this work even when their hotel is almost identical with a competitor, that does not matter. Many of these hotel owners/ managers do not have a long term strategy and they do not know where they would be in 10 years from now. Such an attitude comes from the fact that the Cluj hotel business is not dominated by professionals, but by business people which developed hotels as secondary (or even lower rank) alternatives to their group of small firms.
CLUJ HOTELS’ DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

Cluj is an important tourist destination, but it competes with other tourist destination all over Europe. Of course, the quality and unique features of Cluj lodging capacities are important. If the lodging capacities available for Cluj would not develop distinctive features, Cluj as tourist destination would loose momentum and its lodging capacities would have to face a gloomy future. Even with 45 hotels the Cluj hotel market seemed crowded, but during the months of May and June 2005 we were able to identify other 8 working lodging capacities and other 5 under construction and we not sure (due to lack of official accurate information) that the figures are not even bigger (we found some lodging capacities absolutely by chance, walking some streets).

With almost 60 hotels/ lodging capacities on the market, to be different is a must. But for the moment this idea is far away from owners/ managers mind.

We must wait and see if some Cluj hotels would really dare to be different or they would play the same ‘copy the competitor’ attitude and what this would bring for Cluj hospitality market.

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