

# STRATEGIC ELEMENTS FOR SUCCESSFUL PLANNING OF FESTIVALS – THE CASE STUDY OF ELECTRIC CASTLE FESTIVAL

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**ABSTRACT.** Big events are playing an important role in our society and lives; therefore, there was an increase in their number in the past ten years, which automatically made them also an economic power in different countries. Throughout the paper, we are focusing on the music festival events that grew organically since their existence, and together with their development; it helped the society and economy of Romania grow. The study is focusing on good practice in organizing these events from planning to the target market and all the things that need to be taken into consideration when creating an event. The study focused on assessing the managerial team perceptions, attitudes, and values regarding the development strategy for this event with the scope to identify the key elements used in their process. To conduct the study analysis, we created a research process structured in two phases. Phase 1 involved observations of the main decisions and actions implemented during the previous editions of the festival and analysis of the official points of view of the festival's managerial team. The results of this part of the study together with the main aspects identified in the literature prepared the second part that aimed to detail more the strategical thinking of the managerial team. Therefore, this study's main goal is to identify what strategic elements are required to develop strong festivals' identities and brands in the market.

**Keywords:** *event management, festival music, development strategies, attendance experience*

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## Introduction

Music festivals had evolved during the years. Considering today's world and how much it evolved the need of the customers, the festival market had to adapt and to exceed customer's expectation. We not only talk about the type of music but the whole experience. Back in time, festivals were made to admire a live performance show and appreciate the artist in front of them. Now, they serve not only to delight the consumer, but also for the economy of the country, or to mark a place on the map and to attract visitors.

The Romanian festival market, in an emerging stage until 2010 (Drăgan, 2017), has registered in few years one of the most spectacular growth in the economy, not only in terms of audience, estimated for 2019 few over 1 million people but also in terms of revenues. Time changed, the desires changed and due to the high number of people interested in this area, the number increased significantly in the last years. A study done on this sector in 2019 (Juncu, 2019) mentioned a solid growth of revenues from 77 million lei in 2010 to 380 million lei in 2016 and over 600 million lei in 2019. Beyond the tickets sold, the festival business means additional revenues from services, from food and beverages to transportation, tourism, promotional products and related businesses. Together with the revenues, the professionalization of the business, the development of innovative marketing & sales solutions have determined a significant optimization of expenses for the organization of events, and the accordingly substantial advance of the profit, from 5.8 million lei in 2010 to 62.2 million lei in 2017 and 87.9 million lei respectively in 2018 (Juncu, 2019).

Today Cluj-Napoca is a top destination and a standard in this sector. Cluj-Napoca is the fourth largest city in Romania and it is one of the most important university centres, cultural and industrial from the

country. Considering all this, the events market is a really big one and has a lot of varieties: from different exhibitions, sports events, music festivals, movies, to theatres or concerts. Beyond increasing the tourist potential of the city, these big events organized in Cluj-Napoca, like Untold, Electric Castle, TIFFF, Jazz in the Park, developed horizontal businesses, with dozens of connected companies having a significant impact on the improvement of the well-being of the local communities.

The Romanian festival market evolved slowly before 2015, the most known big festival being B'est Fest from Bucharest since 2008, but cancelled in 2019, and Peninsula from Targu-Mures, which was also cancelled after 2014. Thus, the Electric Castle music festival entered the market when there were not as many competitors as there are now. It all started with the idea of a party in Cluj-Napoca that can host around 1000-2000 people. The organizer of the festival had a strong concept from the beginning based on a combination of good music, historical castle and quality activities offered for a community of people. Therefore, in 2010, after organizing a party with a foreign band, they realized that they are prepared to offer something bigger, by using an atypical location, namely the Banffy Castle from Bontida. In return for hosting the first edition there, they agreed to donate 2% out of the total revenue which was used for the construction of the rooftop.

The common characteristics of all festivals are related to the experience provided to its participants. All of them are seeking a great experience, either if it is a public free event, or a private paid one. The experience will have a great impact on emotions, preferably with a symbolic significance (Beech, Kaiser, & Kaspar, 2014). Some of the festivals relate the event to its location, culture or background. This method allows participants to connect with it and find a personal bounding.

Therefore, this study's main goal is to identify what strategic elements are required to develop strong festivals' identities and brands in the market. Because for a long-term successful event is essential to be able to build and maintain the event's partners' loyalty, the purpose of this study has been approached from the organizers and managers' points of view. In this process, the strategic thinking abilities of managers were taken into consideration due to their impacts to understand in-depth the customers' behaviour, identify untapped market opportunities that could be pursued and implement innovative decisions.

To achieve the goal, the study developed implied a qualitative exploratory methodology with data collected through in-depth interviews with decision-makers from one of the important festival on the Romanian market.

## **Literature review**

Music Festivals are more than a participant sees. It starts with an idea, which is shared among a small group of people and shaped by each of them. Brainstorming and focused groups with trusted people are an elementary key step on the road for a successful event. There needs to be a clear vision and a purpose of it. Making a profit can be one purpose, but it is not necessary for a long-term vision. Among other purposes, there is the purpose of increasing the number of visitors in the location of the festival, helping the local community and increasing the economy of one place. But the most important purpose of each music festival should be to offer a memorable moment for all its participants.

Like in the case of tourism destinations many studies from the literature (Whittington, 1993) highlighted the importance of strategic planning in the case of events and festivals. Hall and Getz argued that strategic planning represents an essential ingredient to create successful events which generate benefits for a long time and grow of a community along with them. Thus, there were developed different approaches of the strategic planning process in the case of large scale events based on three major perspectives: classical, processual and systemic (Bramwell, 1997). If the classical and processual perspectives tend to be inward-looking, the systemic approach is more oriented to the influence of external factors, like social, economic and political. In the classical approach, the strategic planning of a large-scale event is viewed as a rational and more scientific process, with a set of distinctive steps like event inventory, product evaluation, market assessment, identification of goals, action plan and a revision process. The processual perspective comes to revise the previous idea of a formal process, establish from the outset, emphasises more the strategy as an emergent process of learning and adaptation (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985). The third perspective considers that strategy evolves in time under the pressure of external influences which are more

and more important for the successful events and festivals, and due to this should be able to emphasize the social system as the context shaping the interests and outcomes of strategy (Bramwell, 1997).

Every person has now access to all kind of devices, sources of information, such as telephone, TV, and most importantly, the internet. All these devices and sources are generating entertainment which is only one click away or one video away. What we need to think about is that our target group is in those people who are interested in going out of their comfort zone and go out for that entertainment. We can attract them if we offer something more than just the concert, which can be easily found on the internet now. The saving point here is to sell the atmosphere and the energy that is transmitted in a live performance show, which will never be the same inside the house, in front of a laptop or TV. What makes a concert unique, is the excitement that is generated and that pure happiness of staying some feet apart of your favourite artist. People have a hunger now for intangible and memorable moments which gives them the chance to truly feel that moment. To have a successful event, Buck Hoyle suggested that there are three elements to be taken into consideration: entertainment, excitement, enterprise (Hoyle, 2002). These will help to develop awareness and increase the revenue of the event.

Thus, to create a full experience, the music shows and festivals enriched their offer providing a multitude of activities in addition to music. Some artists are offering a show with dancers, some interact directly with the public and all of them are offering also an eye delight, meaning special effects. These other forms of entertainment give a unique experience and became a significant element of the festival experience (Brown & Sharpley, 2019).

A lot of studies from the literature tried to identify what factors influenced the overall experience and identified that the festival's attendees satisfaction's level depends on both generic and specific entertainment features (Baker & Crompton, 2000) (Chen, Lee, & Lin, 2012) (Brown & Sharpley, 2019) Thus, these features represent a key element which influence in a positive way the perception regarding the festival's quality (Cole & Chancellor, 2009) (Wu & Ai, 2016). Regarding music festivals, the importance of other entertainment has the most influence on the festival experience, before the music and added value or the festival's image.

When promoting such an event, there needs to be an excitement in it and show this “wow” effect that is going to take place. Enterprise is referring to the risk taken when you want to offer something new. It may not be a success, but you would not find it until you try it. Therefore, this gives a better understanding of the needs and desires of the targeted participants. People will always want to experience something new and this kind of demand will never fail to happen. (Hoyle, 2002)

## **Methodology**

In this study, it was analysed the case of EC music festival’s organization through the lens of the managerial team. We were interested in assessing their perceptions, attitudes and values regarding the development strategy for this event with the scope to identify the key elements used in their process. To conduct the study analysis, have been created a research process structured on two phases. Phase 1 involved observations of the main decisions and actions implemented during the previous editions of the festival and analysis of the official points of view of the festival’s managerial team. The results of this part of the study together with the main aspects identified in the literature prepared the second part which aimed to detail more the strategical thinking of the managerial team. Phase 2 entailed a semi-structured interview with predetermined questions addressed to three different people from the management board of the festival. Therefore, ten questions were addressed in three key areas of the event organization process: marketing, production, and crowd management. Each of them was discussed with the event’s decision-makers and were involved since the first edition of the festival.

Therefore, for the marketing department, were established as main objectives: which are the key elements of the EC’s concept, how the customers perceived in time this concept and how they maintain it. Knowing that this department is directly related with attracting the customers, the following issues were considered important to understand more about the festival’ strategy: the relationship with the target group and how is maintained it and consolidated in time. During the years, there are only 35 people directly involved in the work behind the festival and due to the amazing results obtained the interview focused on identifying the

innovations implemented in attracting customers and which are their perceptions related to eco-friendly actions taken by the festival. Being a marketing department, and also a communication department, a good part of the information was found in the secondary data, by collecting the answers from different articles or direct interviews made for the press.

Regarding the production department activity, due to some technical terms or privacy of information, a lot of data remained confidential and are not made public. The activity of this department is the hardest one, considering the location and infrastructure from the nearby area. Besides, it is the department which improved the most during all the seventh editions of the festival. Since the Head of Production knows every part of the festival, being also one of the persons who came with very creative ideas and brought innovation for the festival, he was included in the study and interviewed. To have a better understanding upon how much evolved this festival in the semi-structured interview with him, have been considered the following aspects: the challenges to organizing the current location for all activities of the festival, the criteria used in arranging the festival areas (stages, backstage, food market, attractions, camping area, parking area) and logistic resources for them. The unpredictability of some factors, like bad weather, which completes the festivals culture and image, but from the production point of view representing a big problem, was another important aspect approached in the interview and accordingly were discussed the ways to managing the festival's activities in this context. After each edition the attendances could noticed an improvement on each level, which automatically raises the question which was the innovation brought to Festival Romania market /European market by Electric Castle.

Another person involved since the beginning and who knows all the managerial information about the festival is the Head of Booking and Festival Programmer. Therefore, the semi-structured interview with him pointed out some aspects related to the starting point of this festival which allowed us to understand more about their knowledge, vision and strategy from the beginning and what changes appeared during the seventh editions. Another topic was the impact of this event in the community and local area so were considered aspects like the local community involvement in the festival and how festival addresses to environmental sustainability issues and if the festival organizers have sustainable thinking for the long run and to what extent they are working on this level.

Data obtained through both phases of the research provided a reliable characterization of the EC music festivals organization and contributed to gathering new information about big events management process. This research could provide as well insights on the innovation's capacity in managing events. In this regards, the management activities were not only analysed as attractions or assets but as their inherent potential to create new tourist supply.

### **Analysis of EC music festival evolution**

Electric Castle has a big impact on how people are spending their summer or their holiday. It is not about just a regular music festival, it is about a community of people, who want to break free for a couple of days and relax in a built city at the edge of a village, 30 kilometres from Cluj-Napoca. It does not matter the name of the artist, it matters about the whole experience that the festival is offering to you and this is how you know that you have a successful festival.

The festival takes place in a small village, near Cluj-Napoca. This location was chosen, mainly for the Banffy Castle located there, and also for 30 ha of land, which gave the possibility to build a small village available for five days. Banffy Castle has a long history and is dated since the 14th century when it was first donated to the Banffy family by Sigismund of Luxemburg. The castle was finished only in the 17th century and was designs as a fortified monument with bastions as corners, and seven levels gate towers that served as the entrance. After many battles which affected directly the castle and time degradation, the authorities got involved after the communism time and now, it is one of the most beautiful castles from Transylvania, even if a lot of its parts do not exist anymore. Today it is open for visitors daily and it is the host for some of the Transylvania International Film Festival's events, which was also the first festival which held events there, but the castle is more known as the "Electric Castle" due to the music festival. (Condrea, n.d.).

The first edition took place in 2013, after two years of working on the idea and planning the whole project. It took place in 3 days of June and the attendances surpassed the organizers' estimations. This demonstrated



that there is a need for this kind of festival and people are willing to pay for it. Luckily, their first edition was in a moment where the festival market in Romania was not so developed and this laid the foundation for such a close community of people interested in this music festival. (Matei, 2015)

It started from a small idea but it managed to be one of the most successful music festivals from Romania, having in 2019 over 231.000 participants in five days and over 250 artists who performed on 10 different stages. Each year, the festival has the goal to improve and offer more to the public, therefore, in their last edition they were the first festival from Romania who offered a song language translator which offered a better experience for the ones with hearing impaired and they translated all major acts from the Main Stage. (Vanca).

The first edition started with four different stages and an additional place for riders and bikers, meaning a small skate park build in the festival, namely "Street Heroes by Burn- Best Line Day". This was created to give the participants an activity during the day and to attract a particular type of people. (Soare, 2013) At their 7th edition, in 2019, they managed to build ten different stages: Main Stage, Hangar by BT, Dance Garden, Booha Mansion by Ahead, Hideout by Havana Club, Courtyard by Coca Cola, ECO Stage by Lidl, The Beach by Gelatelli, Shizzle Stage by Burn and the surprise stage, The Mill. Each stage having a different genre of music and different aspect following the music.

**Table 1.** Data about the EC music festival evolution

Year	No of participants	No. of stages	No. of festival days	Space used for the festival (m <sup>2</sup> )
2013	32000	4	3	40.000
2014	79000	5	4	40.000
2015	97000	6	4	40.000
2016	120000	8	4	No data available
2017	174000	8	5	No data available
2018	210000	9	5	320.000
2019	231000	10	5	320.000

*Source: Authors' research*

Since the very first edition, the festival had to encounter bad weather which normally should've been a very big impediment, but not for Electric Castle. The organizers were able to transform this into a marketing

campaign and help them differentiate themselves even more. Moreover, the rain matches perfectly with the festival's culture allowing its participants to experience something different. The participants were allowed to vote if there is going to rain or not at the festivals, showing the organizer's proactive thinking, constant and engaging communication strategy.

Because Electric Festival is famous for its rainy weather and all its fans know that they need to have prepared their rainy boots and raincoat ready, the organizers thought of improving the infrastructure of the festival to be prepared better for rainy weather. Therefore, they invested a lot in covering the stages apart for the main one, to which they improve the feet surface. Besides, they put gravel on the alleys and improved the camping zone.

The whole process of building the festivals starts two months before the festival, and the load-out one month. After everything is cleaned from the festival surface, 1.5 tons of grass seed is used for re-sowing.

After being shortlisted for the sixth time for the „Best Medium-Sized Festival” by European Festival Awards, they won the award after the 2019 edition. In the same year, they were nominated for the „Green Operations”, is one of the most eco-friendly festivals from Europe. In 2018, they received the award for „Best Food and Drinks”, showing their interest in offering the best quality products for their participants. Moreover, in 2017, they received the award for the „Best Campaign Award”, which shows their professionalism among the other European Festivals. On the European market, it conquers with Melt (Germany), Balaton Sound and Volt (Hungary), I Love Techno (Belgium), Sea Dance Festival (Montenegro), all having budgets of millions of euros

Communication Manager of Electric Castle, states that the festival is offering an electric mix between electronic, rock and underground music. They try to keep an equilibrium and to follow the path that allows them to target both 18 and 30 years old public. The number of participants and the dimension of the festival was influenced by the notoriety of the artists and by the trust that both, the artists and the participants, had in the festival. To maintain the number of people under 100.000 per day and the size of the festival, they know that this can be done only by choosing properly the line-up. By booking mainstream artists the whole idea of the festival will be ruined. (Imbrea, 2019)

The festival wants to offer more than just music for its participants, therefore they introduce all kind of activities and design details that make this experience unforgettable, unique and complete, being one of the few European 24-hour festival.

One strange activity that can be found at the festival is “ice-skating” in the middle of summer. The organizers thought of all kind of activities that can be offered to the public to enjoy the whole experience. “All the Activities Tent” offers stretching and yoga sessions in the morning, and during the day, they have different contests and workshops. “EC Talks” is a session of different talks and debates provided by different Romanian journalists, actors, and influencers. They also arranged a small cinematograph behind the castle, where people can enjoy each evening a movie. (Scarlat, 2019)

“Sensorial Playground” is a concept presented for the first time at Electric Castle that makes music accessible to everyone through technology - mediated interactive experiences. “Reverse Bunjee” the challenge of letting yourself throw ten meters into the air is one of the most popular experiences of the sixth edition. The EC Billboard, which surprises the participants with different phrases and expression, and the “Royal Wheel”, that has become the festival's landmarks in recent years.

Another successful activity inside the festival is The Circus, which is made by a collaboration between artists from Metropolitan Citrus of Bucharest and Cirque du Soleil. Also, there are the activities provided by all the festival's sponsors, such as 360 degrees projection experience or different instruments available for participant's creation. (Neagoe, 2019)

The festival's organizers wanted to use every space available at the location and to make the best out of it, therefore they introduced the “New Media Concept” which facilitated the access to modern art for its participants, with the help of technology, creative coding, digital installation and interactive art installation. There were projections made inside the Castle, which until the 6th edition were not open to the public and they managed to bring to life all the rooms available. By using that space, they offered the change not only to its participants to enjoy pieces of art but to the students from University of Arts and Design from Cluj-Napoca to express and present their work to one of a kind festival. (Lipciuc, 2019)

## **Findings from interviews and discussions**

Head of Communication of Electric Castle Festival, and one of the persons involved in the project since the beginning, states that the team wanted to build a festival with a clear concept, one which is not only focused on music but more layers that will offer a better experience. This is how they manage to create an alternate world where people can escape and discover new artists, new people or just to be free for five days. The audience is always surprised by everything offered by the festival and they always try to challenge the status quo and change the way people are interacting with a music festival.

The communication with the audience is very important, this is why also Electric castle is keeping a constant communication throughout the year and they always try to learn from them and to improve the festival by using their feedback: "After all, it's their festival", states the head of communication department.

The festival has a mixed strategy in attracting its customers. Considering all the experiences that they offer, gives them automatically a wider variety to approach their customers. Firstly comes the eclectic line-up mixed with new media installations and performances, which automatically is a plus for the festival market from Romania. In addition to these, there are the breath-taking scenarios and the historical surroundings which allows its participants to discover, explore and enjoy everything available there. An important aspect that needs to mention is the high-quality of all the production, together with the impressive and internationally acclaimed architecture of the festival. All of these are products and services offered to the customers within the price set on the general access.

No business stays alive without its customers, therefore Electric Castle managed to stay on the market on the length of seven years. During this time, there were different kinds of customers who turned into clients and loyal fans. In 2013 there were only 32.000 tickets sold, while in 2019 there were 231.000. Out of these customers, there are the die-hard fans who buy their tickets with one year ahead of others, mainly because they trust the team behind it. During the marketing team, there are 20 people directly involved in working with attracting customers.

The team was build up with people who were at their first-ever event, with no previous work in such kind of project. It was a challenge from the start, having no idea how this is going to be perceived by the

crowd or even by international artists. Besides not having a real help from the local authorities, neither the experience needed, their only driven idea was their belief in creating a festival for their own, just like they imagined.

Considering that none of the people involved in the team had worked in such a project, for their first edition, they followed the plan of some music festivals from Serbia (Exit Festival), Budapest (Sziget Festival) and Austria (Nova Rock). Every year they worked on improving on each level and worked on making each edition better than the previous one, which involved starting from scratch sometimes. This is what the managerial board considers being the most interesting fact about working on a festival, reinventing yourself together with the idea behind it.

When asked about the sustainability of the festival, the Festival Programmer, said that Electric Castle is built with a focus on the environment and sustainability. Taking into consideration that the festival is built from scratch on a camp, their main goal is to always take extra steps to reduce the festival's footprint and their main drivers are to reduce the waste generated by the festival. One of the biggest challenges and barriers of addressing sustainability at the festivals include the financial costs, lack of time, and control over festival venues and the inability to source appropriate supplier or supplies. The biggest reward is when they see that most of the people are very engaged in the eco campaigns and they help them out.

Some of their future goals in terms of making the festival sector more sustainable were related to the elimination of all plastic containers and utensils used inside the festival perimeter. By the next edition, they will replace all drinks served in plastic cans, bottles or cups and encourage all their collaborators and partners to use bio-degradable materials. Each collection container will be split into three segments: plastic, waste, and aluminium. Because it is their main concern, plastic will be separated from everything else.

The festival started implementing eco-friendly strategies since 2014 when they started selecting waste and promoting bike tours to arrive at the festival. Same time, they designed the "ECO- Electric Castle Zero Carbon Footprint" project which is the festival's long term commitment to environmental protection. Their goal is to become the greenest influential electronic music festival in Romania, together with a promotion of a conscious

way of living to the 97.000 festival's young attendants. Back in 2014, they ran the pilot-program named "Stronger. Bigger. Better. Greener" whose positive outcomes led to the 2015's program "We are the people who green the world", which is the next step towards raising awareness about the importance of fighting climate change through music and sustainable events organization.

The key highlights of the Eco-awareness & CO2 Footprint Reduction Program at EC 2015 are the following: 2 Eco Spots active for 24 hours in the festival area and 12 hours in the camping area, with more than 5.000 person's traffic per day. More than 7.5 tons of packaging waste collected selectively, out of which 1.240 kg paper, 1.260 kg plastic, 2.500 kg metal, and 2.640 kg glass. 12 ECO-Ambassadors rode their bicycles to the castle from more than 250 km (total 5.421 km). Nine artists endorsers (both international and Romanian) for the Music Drives Change video campaign, who joined the eco calls-to-action. More than 700 WH produced by participants who pedalled on the Interactive Pedal Power bicycle system. In the "Battle of the Pedals" competition, there were 1.000 participants who raced in the dynamo bicycle. The ECO-Game was played by 507 festival participants, in which they rewarded the eco-friendly ones, meaning the ones active through alternative transportation, energy efficiency, and waste reduction, with a Giant bicycle, an EC2016 full pass, and three official T-shirts. A carbon footprint average of 8.2 tons per EC participant, based on the carbon footprint calculator overall results and 10.000 waste bags and 10.000 wipes spread in the camping.

For the 2016 ECO Challenge, the results include 30 eco-ambassadors which pedalled 16.754 km, in total, to reach the Banffy Castle. International Eco Ambassadors from Netherlands, London, Copenhagen, Vienna, and cyclists from all over Romania joined the initiative, supporting their causes through this trip. 2.258 festival participants came onboard in the ECO Challenge contest and learned about how they reduce daily carbon footprint by performing at least three actions from the ECO Challenge's categories of actions (transportation, water, energy, social, waste).

The 2017's edition was 1st year when Electric Castle embraces the #ZeroWaste mission as a long-term goal to reduce, reuse and recycle all the waste generated at the festival, which was also 4 Years cumulated of Sustainability Program at EC. The final results were 2/3 of the entire

waste generated at the festival, containing: 4.50 tons of PET, 1.70t aluminium, 1.40t plastic, 3.50t cardboard, 0.35t tetra pack, 8.50t glass, all cumulated being a total of 18.95 tons of waste recycled. This year 27 cyclists from all over the country pedalled 10.000 km to the Banffy Castle, who promoted 10 sustainability-related causes: Cycling as alternative means of transportation, deforestation, natural conservation and natural parks, awareness on people with disabilities and library of materials.

The Festival programmer and Head of Booking department states that the most significant impact of the festival is on the Castel's preservation. They are fully committed to supporting the Banffy Castle custodians in their long term efforts to restore the castle and historical buildings surrounding it to preserve the cultural heritage and attract more visitors. Besides the selective waste collection and heritage preservation, the festival is also fighting food waste. Considering the length of the festivals and the high number of people involved in it, namely 5 days, more than 200.000 people with 3 meals per day. Their goal is to collect usable leftovers food from all around the festival and working together with Food Bank from Cluj-Napoca, they will share it with different NGOs from the city that can further distribute it to those in need.

Electric Castle Festival is a client-oriented event which makes the organizer pay more attention to customer needs. After each edition the festival is asking its customer for short feedback which has the aim of discovering the pros and cons of the previous edition. In this way, they can see which department they will have to improve and what the customer's needs are. By doing this, they not only will improve on different levels but also will be able to think and rethink some aspects which will lead to innovation in the sector. Going from this aspect of creativity, Electric Castle managed to bring some innovations to the market. They came with a better approach to the bar service and took into consideration a wide variety of food, right from the first two editions, back in 2013 and 2014. From the production point of view, they made the biggest efforts, with upgrading the stages and they put a lot of investment in architecture and design of the overall festival area.

The festival innovations consist of improvements or new approaches to different production problems. On the festival market from Romania, Electric Castle brought a new approach of the saddle span structure, one

of the structure of the stages (Hangar Stage) which allowed them to offer cover protection to a lot of its participants, the Main Stage look and approach on detail and overall design, having the first stage with one of the biggest 8k resolution LED screen from Europe. Because it is the only and the biggest festival from Romania held on a camp in the countryside, this allowed the festival to innovate the infrastructure of it, together with bringing for the first time in Romania a Ferris wheel to a festival. The festival is trying to innovate and develop on each level, in every department, but within budget. Also, it attracted a lot of brands, therefore they started with brand activations.

Another innovation at the festival is the “New Media Castle” project. It started at the beginning of it when the team had quite a unique approach to architecture and design. In 2013 they had a scaffolding cube with python tubes in it and in 2014 they built a smoke labyrinth. In 2017 they introduced the brand activations like the Lords of Lightning or the Umbrella Projection and one year after different interactions and projections. In 2019 they were prepared to introduce something big, therefore they brought different audio-visual architecture controlled digitally to engage interactivity between art and the end-consumer. Because of the limitation of the expansion of the digital exhibition, they were forced to install it mainly inside the castled and in the old stables. Because the castle is under renovation and in a preserved state, it was impossible to attach or install something against the ceiling or the wall. A lot of creativity was involved to ensure that they can deliver a high-quality experience to its participants and also to preserve the interior. In this project, they started working together with professional artists in this area, together with promoting undergraduates from Cluj-Napoca University enrolled in the Faculty of Arts.

Each decision-maker states that the festival is trying to innovate on different level each year. Either through the way of the festival’s look, the line-up, the experiences that can be discovered during the five days or through the communication campaigns. Moreover, they intend to improve every year and they treat seriously the feedback got from the customers, after all, is their festival.



## Conclusions

Electric Castle is a music festival developed in a time when there was a weak competition on the events market, but managed to remain and even become stronger during all this period. It not only maintains its position but was able to build a community and a culture around it, which is still very powerful and will remain like this for a longer period. It started from an outdoor party in a medieval location and it transformed into one of the biggest festivals in Romania and the best medium size festivals in Europe.

All the members' managerial team involved had no previous experience or knowledge about big events management, but they did a great job since the beginning. So, the managerial skills play a vital role in the success of an event and for long-run perspective, we can add something that results in case EC the strategic thinking of the organizers and managers involved. Each edition was a step for them to rethink and restructure all the festival while learning new things and adapting to the fast-moving environment of music festivals. Besides, they even become better at some levels, than a lot of festivals from Europe. Even if the theoretical approach of strategic management process emphasises the importance of a formal plan from the outset, seems that in the case of EC the managers followed from the beginning the processual perspective and lately, after gaining more experience and when the festival's identity was more solid in the market, they moved to the systemic approach, paying attention to more external factors and interest groups on strategic planning.

Considering its size, the Electric Castle's goal is to remain a medium-sized festival and this is mostly due to the difficult part of the infrastructure and the difficulty of a high flow of people to get to the festival. How can they do that even though it is such in demand and popular? All of this is part of the line-up mostly. People come to the festival in the first place for a particular artist or bands, secondly for the experience and thirdly to be part of a group of friends. Therefore, the organizers of EC are choosing two or three headliners and the rests are built after them. This is how they manage to stay a medium-sized festival and stay within the culture. This aspect comes in accordance with Bramwell's results (1997) that the research and monitoring steps before and after the event are essential to

facilitate the planning process, to be flexible, fast in decision-making, more effective and fruitful the opportunities. The EC managerial team offers a wide variety of artists, from which people can discover other new artists. They try to keep it like this because if they would change the genre of music, this will automatically change the customers together with the entire festival image. Besides booking new artists on the market, they offer the chance to different new-comers to play at the festival. This is a very big opportunity for all music passionate and can be a springboard. They promote new artists also in the New Media Castle project, where they invite different students from Babes-Bolyai University to show their audio-visual projection. Together with these opportunities that DJs and young artists have within the festival, we can include also the volunteers. In conclusion, for maintaining the festival's image it is important to keep the same concept, even if the innovations are applied to diversify how the festival's activities are done. In this context another important strategic element is innovation. During the entire evolution of the festival's development was identified the same approach, to come with changes that create a strong identity for the festival and response in the same time to the participants' expectations.

What needs to be taken into account by all managers of big events is that there needs to be a specific targeting before starting the event and then adapt all the services and products around the target's needs. In this way, you will be able to create a community that will help you create stability on the market and grow even more. To do that, you will need to take into consideration all of their feedback and to deliver better services to the upcoming edition with the respected adaptability within their needs. By doing this, you will be able to maintain your status and to build trust among all people involved. Another important aspect is to be aware of the power you have after building a name on the market and a community around it. You will be able to educate your participants and to raise awareness of different causes you believe in. After all, a festival or a big event has in the centre the customer, which pays the service and which will return if the needs or expectations were met. To have success in this market, make sure you can offer everything you promise or more, to all of your participants.

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