

## FESTIVAL EXPERIENCES AND URBAN TOURISM: INSIGHTS FROM VISITORS' PERCEPTIONS OF MAJOR CULTURAL EVENTS IN ORADEA, ROMANIA

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**Abstract:** This study analyzes visitors' perceptions of three major cultural events in Oradea—the Easter Fair, the Medieval Festival, and the Christmas Fair. The objective compares visitors' perceptions of three cultural events in Oradea to assess whether statistically significant differences exist across key dimensions of the festival experience. Data was collected through 325 structured questionnaires administered on-site at the three events. Visitors' evaluations were analyzed using Chi-square tests to assess categorical differences, Kruskal–Wallis tests for ordinal distributions, and Welch's t-tests/ANOVA for subgroup comparisons by age and residency. The analysis indicates the varying strengths between the three events in Oradea. The Christmas Fair achieved the highest ratings in gastronomy and attracted a wide audience from different age groups, mainly due to its festive atmosphere. In contrast, the Medieval Festival was particularly appreciated for its artistic content, especially among older participants. Furthermore, the results show that both the Christmas and Medieval Festivals consistently outperform the Easter Fair in terms of atmosphere, authenticity related to local and handmade products, and organizational elements such as cleanliness and safety. Subgroup analyses show that younger visitors place greater emphasis on atmosphere, while older participants prioritize safety. Local residents tend to be more critical of organizational aspects. In particular, the Easter Fair seems to be the most inconsistent, presenting significant differences within the same group in terms of food offerings, atmosphere, safety, information, and facilities. Overall, these results highlight the fact that each festival offers a unique experience that attracts different audiences. The Easter Fair requires strategic improvements to enhance authenticity and organizational clarity, while the Christmas Fair and Medieval Festival demonstrate greater coherence but still demand target adjustments.

**Keywords:** cultural festivals, visitors' perceptions, Oradea, event tourism, urban tourism

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## INTRODUCTION

Positioned at the crossroads of culture and tourism, festivals contribute to diversifying and enriching the social, cultural, and economic fabric of host destinations. Within the expanding field of cultural and event tourism, they function as platforms for presenting local heritage, engaging visitors, and generating tangible social and economic outcomes. At the urban level, festivals can improve destination image, strengthen community identity, and contribute to urban revitalization efforts. For residents, these events provide opportunities for cultural engagement and leisure, foster social interactions, and create pathways for local artists and artisans to participate in the cultural economy.

In addition to direct economic impacts such as visitor spending and job creation, festivals facilitate intercultural dialogue by offering authentic insights into local traditions, history, and lifestyles. Ongoing community support is essential for maintaining their continuity and long-term viability. Although festivals have been extensively analyzed from the perspective of economic impact and urban branding, intra-destination, multi-event studies on visitor perceptions remain limited, especially in medium-sized cities in Central and Eastern Europe.

Positioned at the confluence of Central and Eastern European cultures, Oradea has strategically leveraged its rich historical heritage to establish itself as a vibrant cultural tourism destination in Romania (Bădulescu et al., 2018). The city demonstrates its commitment to this developmental model through an extensive portfolio of annual events, which not only serve as public celebrations but also act as catalysts for urban transformation and mechanisms for enhancing the city's image. This event-led strategy encompasses major seasonal festivals that significantly alter the urban landscape

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and draw considerable numbers of visitors. Noteworthy among these are the Christmas Fair, which animates the city center with traditional markets, festive attractions, and immersive lighting displays, and the Easter Fair, held within the historic Oradea Citadel. This event melds holiday-specific traditions with family-centered programming. The Citadel also serves as the authentic historical backdrop for the Medieval Festival, a weekend-long event that invites participants to engage with the region's rich history. Additionally, Oradea hosts significant single-day cultural initiatives, such as the Night of the Museums, which exemplifies a collaborative effort among local institutions to enhance the city's cultural offerings. By utilizing its heritage sites as venues for diverse and dynamic cultural experiences, Oradea actively diversifies its tourism product and invigorates its urban fabric. This approach highlights the potential for cities to harness cultural events as a means of stimulating tourism and promoting sustainable local development. Consequently, the literature provides little evidence regarding how different event formats and locations (seasonal fairs, historical festivals, distributed cultural initiatives) structure visitor experiences within the same urban context.

In this context, Oradea has developed as a recognized festival destination in Central and Eastern Europe, organizing recurring events such as the Easter Fair, the Medieval Festival, and the Christmas Fair, each drawing significant numbers of visitors. While these festivals are fundamental to the city's cultural and tourism development strategies, a systematic understanding of visitors' perceptions is necessary to inform future enhancements. Evaluations by visitors are closely linked to satisfaction levels and intentions to recommend the destination, serving as useful indicators for event managers and cultural policymakers. The present study addresses this gap through a comparative analysis of three emblematic events in Oradea, highlighting statistical differences across dimensions of the festival experience and the managerial implications for the local festival portfolio. The present study aims to analyze and compare visitors' perceptions of these three cultural events in Oradea. Specifically, it intends to determine whether statistically significant differences exist in the evaluation of key aspects of the festival experience. The analysis will highlight the relative strengths and weaknesses of each event, providing empirical insights into visitors' perceptions and identifying areas of divergence. The findings are anticipated to yield evidence-based recommendations that will support event management and cultural policy, bolstering Oradea's status as a regional center for cultural festivals.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Cultural festivals are increasingly acknowledged as essential elements of urban tourism, functioning as effective instruments for economic development, enhancing destination branding, and supporting cultural preservation (Carmichael, 2002; Muresherwa et al., 2023). Understanding the visitor experience is paramount, as it directly influences satisfaction, which in turn drives important outcomes like repeat visitation and positive recommendations (Cole & Chancellor, 2009; Tanford & Jung, 2017). The overall festival experience is a complex construct by visitors' perceptions of various tangible and intangible attributes. According to Sinha & Pratt (2021), the core of any festival lies in its artistic and cultural programming, which encompasses the quality and variety of performances, exhibitions, and activities that align with the event's theme. As Cole & Chancellor (2009) demonstrate, the quality of entertainment, including live music and performances, exerts a particularly strong influence on visitors' overall experience, satisfaction, and intention to return. Cultural festivals also provide opportunities for visitors to engage with the living culture of a destination, and Supriono et al. (2023) emphasize that authenticity and uniqueness of programming are therefore critical to their success. Moreover, Zhang & Deng (2022) identify the aesthetic presentation of cultural elements as a factor that shapes tourists' cognition and emotion, thereby enhancing their subjective well-being. Taken together, these studies underline that the artistic and cultural offer is not merely a supplementary feature but the central element from which visitors derive meaning and enjoyment.

Food and beverages constitute a fundamental dimension of festival experiences, complementing cultural programming and shaping both visitor satisfaction and economic impact. As Horng et al. (2013) note, food and beverages are increasingly central to the festival experience, often evolving from a secondary amenity into a primary attraction. According to Erdem (2024), the availability of traditional cuisine acts as a key driver for attendance, enhancing both the authenticity of the event and its contribution to the local economy. Cole & Chancellor (2009) further demonstrate that the quality and variety of food and beverages are consistently rated among the most important attributes by festival visitors. Similarly, Lee et al. (2011) and Park et al. (2008) highlight that opportunities to taste new foods and sample local delicacies contribute not only to the functional value of festivals but also to the emotional satisfaction derived from participation. Collectively, these studies confirm that gastronomy constitutes a core component of festival experiences, directly shaping visitors' perceptions and evaluations. Handmade crafts and local products represent another essential component of festival experiences, complementing cultural and culinary dimensions while reinforcing authenticity. Closely related to the culinary offer is the availability of crafts and local products. These tangible items serve as souvenirs and physical representations of local culture, allowing tourists to take a piece of their experience home (Uchinlayen & Suchana, 2021). The sale of local handicrafts provides economic benefits to local artisans and reinforces the cultural identity of the destination (Blešić et al., 2014). Such activities offer a platform for visitors to interact with local traditions and for residents to showcase their skills, which can foster community pride and encourage entrepreneurial activity (Erdem, 2024; Muresherwa et al., 2023).

Organizational aspects, particularly the quality of interactions with staff and volunteers, form another essential dimension of the festival experience. According to Stanovčić et al. (2021), these interactions represent a key element of service delivery, as kindness, professionalism, competence, and willingness to provide assistance strongly influence visitor satisfaction. As Lee et al. (2011) point out, such encounters occur at multiple touchpoints, from ticket counters to information booths, and significantly shape perceptions of organizational quality and hospitality. Li et al. (2021) further emphasize that a well-trained and motivated team, including volunteers from the local community, helps create a

welcoming environment and contributes to the overall success of the festival. Cleanliness and safety are basic conditions of the festival experience, influencing both visitors' satisfaction and perceptions of quality. As Cole & Chancellor (2009) note, a clean and well-maintained environment is a core amenity that shapes how attendees evaluate events. According to Muresherwa et al. (2023), festivals also create incentives for organizers and municipalities to improve public spaces, which is generally viewed positively by participants. Visitor safety has been consistently highlighted as a central concern.

Blešić et al. (2014); Asimah et al. (2023) show that a high level of perceived safety contributes to a relaxed atmosphere, fosters emotional solidarity, and strengthens the destination image. Information and orientation are equally important for ensuring a smooth visitor experience. Cole & Chancellor (2009) emphasize the value of clear pre-event publicity, on-site signage, printed programs, and information booths in reducing uncertainty and enhancing enjoyment. Lee et al. (2011) demonstrate that effective orientation allows participants to move more easily within event spaces, locate attractions, and use their time more efficiently. In addition, Mo et al. (2024) point out that digital platforms and mobile applications providing real-time updates and interactive maps have become increasingly relevant for guiding visitors and improving their overall experience. Facilities and logistics constitute the physical framework that supports festival operations. This dimension covers the suitability and accessibility of the venue, the availability and condition of restrooms, the presence of seating areas, and the management of parking and transportation (Blešić et al., 2014; Cole & Chancellor, 2009). As Lee et al. (2011) indicate, convenient facilities are closely linked to both the functional and emotional value that visitors attribute to the event. Conversely, shortcomings in logistics, such as traffic congestion or inadequate amenities, can generate negative experiences that overshadow otherwise successful artistic programming (Muresherwa et al., 2023). Well-organized facilities and logistical arrangements therefore enhance visitor satisfaction and contribute to positive overall evaluations of the event.

The literature consistently identifies a persistent tension within urban policy: festivals are often instrumentalized through an "urban entrepreneurial" lens to enhance city positioning, attract visitors, and deliver economic returns, while socio-cultural aims risk being sidelined (Quinn et al., 2024). This orientation can produce policy fragmentation in which wellbeing and inclusion are assigned to smaller events, whereas larger "premier" or "major" events are prioritized for branding and tourism objectives (Quinn et al., 2024). Empirical studies nevertheless indicate that tourism-oriented events generate non-economic benefits, enjoyment, sociability, inclusion, and belonging, by creating convivial spaces that foster social intimacy and community connection. For medium-sized cities, event scale should be assessed relatively, rather than against the benchmark of mega-events, when judging contributions to destination positioning (Quinn et al., 2024).

Within this debate, visitor experience is central: satisfaction with tangible services (programming, food, site) must be distinguished from the subjective, affective dimensions of experience, with the social component, relaxation, freedom, intimacy, often most valued (Vodanović Lukić, 2025a). Arts festivals also reshape the sense of place, reconfiguring perceptions and becoming markers of local identity through placemaking practices that mobilize tangible (public art, architecture), intangible (naming), and mixed tools (social practices, soundscapes) (Vodanović Lukić, 2025b).

Regionally, evidence from Southern Serbia underscores the role of integrated marketing, strengthened online visibility, infrastructural upgrades, and coordinated governance among organizers, authorities, and tourism bodies in leveraging festivals for cultural tourism while mitigating event overlap (Marić Stanković et al., 2024). Related research on Romanian destinations highlights how ecotourism certification supports sustainable management, conservation, and community engagement, with education needed to heighten visitor awareness of these efforts (Joshi et al., 2025).

The overall atmosphere constitutes an intangible but decisive factor shaping how events are perceived (de Rojas & Camarero, 2008). This unique experience atmosphere, characterized by elements such as ambiance, mood, and sensory environment, is a primary reason tourists are attracted to a celebration (Zhang & Deng, 2022). A festive setting is frequently cited as a primary motivation for participation and a key determinant of satisfaction, with many visitors motivated by the desire to "enjoy the festive and celebratory ambience of a festival" (Maráková et al., 2018). According to other studies, aesthetic elements such as lighting and decoration stimulate positive emotional responses and influence behavioral intentions (Stanovčić et al., 2021; Zhang & Deng, 2022). Indeed, enjoying the festival atmosphere is often ranked as one of the most important motives for attendance, alongside specific cultural content (Egresi & Kara, 2014). Furthermore, the physical environment and situational interactions play a decisive role in the contextual perception of an event's importance (Herman et al., 2023a; Herman et al., 2023b; Yolal et al., 2009). Muresherwa et al. (2023) further describe the "feel-good effect" of vibrant atmospheres, which supports social cohesion and creates lasting memories. Considering the information from the reviewed literature, this study examines the empirical evidence collected following three major cultural events in Oradea: the Easter Fair, the Medieval Festival and the Christmas Fair. Aligned with the study's applied objectives, the analysis aims to compare visitors' perceptions across core dimensions of the festival experience, accessibility, service quality, programming, price, value, promotion, social context, and overall satisfaction, testing for statistically significant differences between events and audience segments. By tracing points of convergence and divergence and isolating important contextual drivers, it aims to explain each event's relative strengths and weaknesses and to ground subsequent recommendations in empirical evidence.

## RESEARCH AND METHODOLOGY

In this study, visitors' perceptions were examined through structured questionnaires administered at three major cultural events in Oradea: the Easter Fair, the Medieval Festival, and the Christmas Fair. A total of 325 valid responses were collected—130 at the Easter Fair, 63 at the Medieval Festival, and 108 at the Christmas Fair—using an on-site intercept method, with enumerators approaching participants at different times of the day and in key locations within each venue. This strategy ensured diversity of responses and representation across visitor demographics. The questionnaire addressed multiple dimensions of the festival experience. Respondents were asked how they learned about

the event, with whom they attended, and how much they spent or intended to spend per visit, thereby capturing insights into marketing effectiveness, social dynamics, and economic impact. Additional questions focused on place of residence (Oradea, nearby areas, other counties, or abroad) and age group, allowing for the identification of demographic trends and attendance patterns. These findings are synthesized in Figure 1 and Table 1, which summarizes the socio-demographic characteristics and participation profiles of festival visitors.

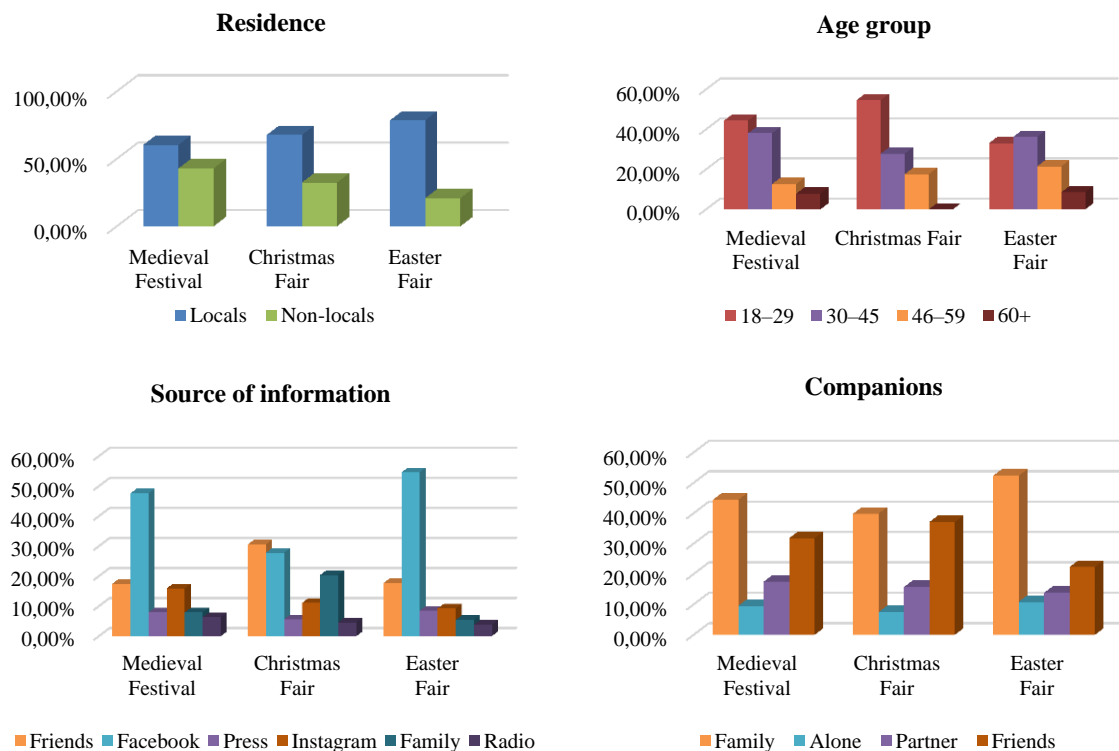


Figure 1. Comparative visitors' characteristics and engagement across events

The visitor profile analysis highlights notable differences across the three events. At the Easter Fair, locals accounted for 78.5% of respondents, confirming its strong community orientation, while the Christmas Fair drew 67.6% locals and the Medieval Festival 60.3%, with the latter attracting the highest share of non-local participants (42.9%). Age patterns also varied, Easter was balanced across age groups, Christmas was dominated by young adults (18–29, 54.6%), and Medieval displayed a mixed distribution. Information sources further reinforced these distinctions. Thus, Easter relied heavily on Facebook (54.6%), while Christmas attendance was driven by interpersonal channels such as friends (30.6%) and family (20.4%). Companionship trends show that visitors most often came with family, particularly at Easter (52.3%), whereas Christmas had more peer-group attendance (37.1%).

Table 1. Visitors' profile and participation characteristics across events

Characteristics	Category	Medieval Festival	Christmas Fair	Easter Fair	Interpretation (variable-level)
Residence	Locals	38 (60.3%)	73 (67.6%)	102 (78.5%)	Easter → highest share of locals
	Non-locals	27 (42.9%)	35 (32.4%)	27 (20.8%)	Christmas → more balanced, stronger attraction of non-locals
Age group	18–29	28 (44.4%)	59 (54.6%)	43 (33.1%)	Christmas → dominated by younger visitors
	30–45	24 (38.1%)	30 (27.8%)	47 (36.2%)	
	46–59	8 (12.7%)	19 (17.6%)	28 (21.5%)	Easter → most balanced distribution (including seniors)
	60+	5 (7.9%)	0 (0.0%)	11 (8.5%)	
Source of information	Friends	11 (17.5%)	33 (30.6%)	23 (17.7%)	Easter → social media dominant (Facebook 54.6%)
	Facebook	30 (47.6%)	30 (27.8%)	71 (54.6%)	
	Press	5 (7.9%)	6 (5.6%)	11 (8.5%)	
	Instagram	10 (15.9%)	12 (11.1%)	12 (9.2%)	Christmas → stronger word-of-mouth (friends, family)
	Family	5 (7.9%)	22 (20.4%)	7 (5.4%)	
	Radio	4 (6.3%)	5 (4.6%)	5 (3.8%)	
Companions	Family	28 (44.4%)	43 (39.8%)	68 (52.3%)	Easter → strongest family orientation
	Alone	6 (9.5%)	8 (7.4%)	14 (10.8%)	Christmas → more friends/peer groups
	Partner	11 (17.5%)	17 (15.7%)	18 (13.8%)	
	Friends	17 (31.8%)	38 (37.1%)	29 (22.3%)	
Expenditure per visit	<50 lei	17 (27.0%)	30 (27.8%)	36 (27.7%)	Higher spenders (>100 lei) → more visible at Easter and Medieval than at Christmas.
	50–100 lei	24 (38.1%)	57 (52.8%)	59 (45.4%)	
	100–150 lei	18 (28.6%)	20 (18.5%)	27 (20.8%)	
	>150 lei	6 (9.5%)	1 (0.9%)	7 (5.4%)	

Spending patterns indicate that the modal category was 50–100 lei per visit, though higher expenditures (>150 lei) were more frequent at Easter (5.4%) and Medieval (9.5%) than at Christmas (0.9%). Overall, the Easter Fair emerges as a community and family-oriented event, the Christmas Fair as a youth-driven social attraction, and the Medieval Festival as a culturally distinctive occasion with greater potential to attract non-local visitors.

### Research instrument and statistical methods

This study employed a quantitative approach, using a structured questionnaire to capture visitors' perceptions at the Easter Fair, Medieval Festival, and Christmas Fair. The survey comprised four sections: socio-demographic characteristics, evaluations of products and services, assessments of organizational aspects, and an overall event appraisal. All items were measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Poor, 5 = Excellent). The instrument was adapted from established studies on festival attributes and visitors' satisfaction (Cole & Chancellor, 2009; Blešić et al., 2014; Sinha & Pratt, 2021; Erdem, 2024).

To analyze the data, complementary statistical methods will be applied. First, Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) tests of independence will examine whether the proportion of "Excellent" ratings differs significantly across the three events. This method is widely used in festival research to test categorical outcomes such as service quality and satisfaction. Eight key dimensions frequently highlighted in the literature will be tested (Cole & Chancellor, 2009; Blešić et al., 2014; Sinha & Pratt, 2021; Erdem, 2024): *Artistic & Cultural Programming*, *Food & Beverages*, *Handmade & Local Products*, *Overall Atmosphere*, *Staff & Volunteers*, *Cleanliness & Safety*, *Information & Orientation*, and *Facilities & Logistics*. For the  $\chi^2$  analyses, each variable will undergo binary coding, with responses of "Excellent" assigned a value of 1, while all other categories will be coded as 0. Second, Kruskal–Wallis tests with Dunn's post-hoc correction will be employed to compare the overall distribution of Likert-scale responses across events. This non-parametric procedure is appropriate for ordinal data and avoids assumptions of normality and equal variances, aligning with best practices in festival and tourism research. Finally, subgroup differences will be examined using Welch's t-tests and Welch's ANOVA, which are robust to unequal sample sizes and heterogeneous variances. These tests will compare mean scores across locals vs. non-locals and age groups (18–29, 30–45, 46–59, 60+). Where omnibus Welch's ANOVA results prove significant, Games–Howell post-hoc tests will be used to identify specific pairwise contrasts. This procedure will allow the study to evaluate whether younger participants rate atmosphere more positively (Yolal et al., 2009) and whether residents judge organizational aspects more critically than non-locals, a dynamic observed in previous cultural event studies (Sinha & Pratt, 2021).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results present a comparative analysis of visitors' perceptions across the Easter Fair, Medieval Festival, and Christmas Fair in Oradea. Chi-square tests highlight differences in "Excellent" ratings between events, Kruskal–Wallis tests examine mean-rank variations in Likert responses, and Welch's tests explore subgroup differences by age and residency. This combined approach provides both cross-event contrasts and subgroup-specific insights into festival experiences.

Table 2. Chi-square test results for % Excellent ratings across events

Dimension / Variable	Easter Fair	Medieval Festival	Christmas Fair	$\chi^2$ (df=2)	p-value
	(% Excellent)				
Artistic & Cultural Programming	23.10%	44.40%	33.30%	8.441	0.015
Food & Beverages	21.70%	30.80%	36.10%	6.104	0.047
Handmade & Local	27.10%	47.70%	55.60%	20.747	<0.001
Staff & Volunteers	62.80%	67.70%	47.20%	8.879	0.012
Cleanliness & Safety	39.50%	63.10%	52.80%	10.379	0.006
Information & Orientation	45.70%	66.20%	61.10%	9.347	0.009
Facilities & Logistics	43.40%	41.50%	42.60%	0.063	0.969
Overall Atmosphere	17.80%	64.60%	70.40%	75.891	<0.001

The Chi-square tests (Table 2) show several significant differences in the distribution of "Excellent" ratings across the three cultural events in Oradea. The strongest variation was observed for Overall Atmosphere ( $\chi^2 = 75.891$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), where the Easter Fair scored markedly lower than both the Medieval Festival and the Christmas Fair.

Similarly, Handmade & Local products ( $\chi^2 = 20.747$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and Cleanliness & Safety ( $\chi^2 = 10.379$ ,  $p = 0.006$ ) showed Easter underperforming, indicating weaker perceptions of authenticity and organizational quality. Significant differences also emerged in Information & Orientation ( $\chi^2 = 9.347$ ,  $p = 0.009$ ), with the Medieval Festival evaluated more positively than Easter Fair. In contrast, Food & Beverages ( $\chi^2 = 6.104$ ,  $p = 0.047$ ) displayed only modest variation, with Christmas slightly ahead, while Artistic Programming ( $\chi^2 = 8.441$ ,  $p = 0.015$ ) highlighted the superiority of the Medieval Festival compared to Easter Fair. For Staff & Volunteers ( $\chi^2 = 8.879$ ,  $p = 0.012$ ), Easter and Medieval were judged more favorably than Christmas, suggesting stronger interpersonal interactions. No significant differences were found for Facilities & Logistics ( $p > 0.05$ ), pointing to relative uniformity in logistical aspects.

These results underline the multidimensional character of festival experiences. The superior evaluations of the Medieval Festival and Christmas Fair in Overall Atmosphere confirm prior research on the importance of symbolic and aesthetic elements for visitor satisfaction (Egresi & Kara, 2014; Zhang & Deng, 2022). The strong performance of the Christmas Fair reflects the cultural symbolism and decorative traditions of winter holidays, which enhance its attractiveness for visitors. The Easter Fair's weaker scores in Handmade & Local products and Cleanliness & Safety point to weaker alignment with expectations of authenticity and organizational standards. Previous studies emphasize that local

authenticity, often expressed through traditional foods and handicrafts, is central to visitor evaluations (Uchinlayen & Suchana, 2021; Supriono et al., 2023). Similarly, safe, well-maintained, and clean environments are considered fundamental visitor needs that significantly impact perceptions of quality and overall experience (Asimah et al., 2023; Cole & Chancellor, 2009; Muresherwa et al., 2023). By contrast, the relative uniformity in Food & Beverages and Artistic Programming suggests a degree of standardization across events in Oradea, consistent with findings that mature festival markets often converge in service quality (Lee et al., 2011). However, significant differences in Information & Orientation, where the Medieval Festival scored higher, indicate the continuing influence of managerial practices such as communication and visitor guidance, which are important for a seamless visitor journey (Cole & Chancellor, 2009; Mo et al., 2024). Overall, the stronger performance of the Medieval and Christmas festivals reflects their ability to combine immersive atmospheres with effective organizational practices, findings that resonate with prior studies in both Western and Eastern Europe (Blešić et al., 2014; Herman et al., 2023a; Herman et al., 2023b; Muresherwa et al., 2023).

The Easter Fair, by contrast, requires strategic improvements in authenticity, cleanliness, and information services to better align with visitor expectations and enhance satisfaction (Cole & Chancellor, 2009; Erdem, 2024).

Table 3. Kruskal–Wallis test outcomes for festival dimensions

Dimension / Variable	H (Kruskal)	p-value	Significant pairwise differences p<0.05	Interpretation
<b>Artistic &amp; Cultural Programming</b>	5.49	0.064	–	No significant differences
<b>Food &amp; Beverages</b>	5.69	0.058	–	No significant differences
<b>Handmade &amp; Local</b>	24.65	<0.001	Easter < Medieval (p=0.003); Easter < Christmas (p<0.001)	Easter is weaker in handmade/local products
<b>Staff &amp; Volunteers</b>	4.77	0.092	–	No significant differences
<b>Cleanliness &amp; Safety</b>	19.46	<0.001	Easter < Medieval (p<0.001); Easter < Christmas (p=0.005)	Easter lowest in cleanliness & safety
<b>Information &amp; Orientation</b>	7.53	0.023	Easter < Medieval (p=0.019)	Medieval stronger in information
<b>Facilities &amp; Logistics</b>	0.95	0.623	–	No significant differences
<b>Overall Atmosphere</b>	75.26	<0.001	Easter < Medieval (p<0.001); Easter < Christmas (p<0.001)	Christmas & Medieval stronger in overall atmosphere

The Kruskal–Wallis test results presented in Table 3 indicate significant differences across the three events for several dimensions. The strongest effect was observed for Overall Atmosphere ( $H = 75.26$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), where the Easter Fair was rated significantly lower than both the Medieval Festival and the Christmas Fair. Clear differences were also identified for Handmade & Local ( $H = 24.65$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and Cleanliness & Safety ( $H = 19.46$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), with Easter Fair scoring consistently lower than the other two festivals. Information & Orientation also showed significant variation ( $H = 7.53$ ,  $p = 0.023$ ), with the Medieval Festival outperforming Easter Fair. By contrast, Food & Beverages, Artistic Programming, Staff & Volunteers, and Facilities & Logistics revealed no statistically significant differences ( $p > 0.05$ ), suggesting a relatively uniform perception across events. These findings highlight the centrality of atmosphere and ambience in shaping visitor experiences, consistent with the literature emphasizing the role of aesthetics and symbolism in festival satisfaction (Egresi & Kara, 2014; Zhang & Deng, 2022). The Christmas Fair's dominance in this dimension is expected, given the symbolic and decorative features of winter festivities which create a unique experience atmosphere. Differences in Handmade & Local suggest that the Medieval and Christmas events are more strongly associated with traditions and local products, supporting the argument that cultural authenticity enhances visitor satisfaction (Supriono et al., 2023).

The results for Cleanliness & Safety confirm the importance of organizational aspects, as safe and well-maintained environments are central to positive visitor evaluations (Muresherwa et al., 2023). The absence of significant differences in Food & Beverages and Artistic Programming may indicate a growing uniformity in festival offerings, which can be interpreted both as a sign of consolidation and as a challenge for future diversification (Lee et al., 2011). Overall, the results align with previous studies which emphasize that successful urban festivals are those that combine aesthetic appeal, cultural authenticity, and organizational quality (Blešić et al., 2014; Herman et al., 2023a; Herman et al., 2023b).

Table 4. Significant subgroup differences across events (Welch's t-tests and ANOVA)

Dimension / Variable	Medieval Festival	Christmas Fair	Easter Fair
<b>Artistic Programming</b>	Older > younger (Welch ANOVA, p=0.036)	Not significant	Locals < non-locals (Welch t-test, p=0.013)
<b>Food &amp; Beverages</b>	Not significant	Not significant	60+ more critical, 30–45 more positive (Welch ANOVA, p<0.001)
<b>Handmade &amp; Local</b>	Not significant	Not significant	No significant subgroup differences were found
<b>Overall Atmosphere</b>	Not significant	Not significant	Age differences, 60+ less satisfied (Welch ANOVA, p=0.008)
<b>Staff &amp; Volunteers</b>	Not significant	Locals < non-locals (Welch t-test, p=0.049)	Not significant
<b>Cleanliness &amp; Safety</b>	Not significant	Locals < non-locals (Welch t-test, p=0.019)	Older more critical (Welch ANOVA, p=0.007)
<b>Information &amp; Orientation</b>	Not significant	Not significant	Younger more positive (Welch ANOVA, p=0.014)
<b>Facilities &amp; Logistics</b>	Not significant	Not significant	30–45 more positive vs. 60+ (Welch ANOVA, p=0.001)

The Welch's tests highlight several meaningful subgroup differences across the three events (Table 4 and Appendix). At the Medieval Festival, no significant differences were found between locals and non-locals in Cleanliness & Safety ( $t(48.770) = 1.940$ ,  $p = 0.058$ ), although older participants rated Artistic Programming more positively than younger ones ( $F(3,19.587) = 3.458$ ,  $p = 0.036$ ). At the Christmas Fair, residents evaluated Cleanliness & Safety ( $t(102.087) = -2.384$ ,  $p = 0.019$ ) and Staff & Volunteers ( $t(83.988) = -1.997$ ,  $p = 0.049$ ) less favorably than non-locals, while no significant variation was observed by age ( $F(2,42.901) = 1.928$ ,  $p = 0.158$ ).

The Easter Fair showed the strongest subgroup variation: locals rated Artistic Programming significantly lower than non-locals ( $t(52.736) = -2.580$ ,  $p = 0.013$ ), and Food & Beverages differed across age groups ( $F(3,42.751) = 7.339$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), with older participants (60+) more critical and the 30–45 cohort more positive. Collectively, these results confirm that Easter Fair generated the most divergent subgroup assessments.

The subgroup analyses indicate that visitors' perceptions are not uniform but reflect differentiated patterns across demographic and residency categories. At the Medieval Festival, evaluations of cleanliness and safety were consistent across audiences, while artistic programming was more strongly appreciated by older visitors.

This supports previous findings that heritage-based performances resonate with mature audiences, as motivations can differ significantly across age groups (Egresi & Kara, 2014).

At the Christmas Fair, residents were more critical than non-locals of cleanliness, safety, and staff interactions. This echoes earlier research showing that locals often apply higher standards of evaluation due to the events' proximity to their daily lives, a dynamic that justifies analyzing resident and tourist cohorts separately to capture their unique perspectives (Sinha & Pratt, 2021). By contrast, the Easter Fair revealed the most fragmented assessments, with locals less positive toward artistic programming and clear generational contrasts in perceptions of food and beverages.

This aligns with Yolal et al. (2009), who observed that different age groups prioritize distinct aspects of festival experiences. These varied responses also support the argument that events lacking a strong thematic identity tend to produce more heterogeneous audience perceptions.

Table 5. Summary of methods and findings ( $\chi^2$ , Kruskal–Wallis, Welch's tests)

Dimension / Variable	$\chi^2$ test (between events)	Kruskal–Wallis (ordinal distributions)	Welch's tests (subgroups)
<b>Artistic &amp; Cultural Programming</b>	$\chi^2=8.441$ , $p=0.015 \rightarrow$ Medieval higher than Easter	$H=5.49$ , $p=0.064$ (ns)	Medieval: age effect (older > younger, $p=0.036$ ); Easter: locals < non-locals ( $p=0.013$ )
<b>Food &amp; Beverages</b>	$\chi^2=6.104$ , $p=0.047 \rightarrow$ modest differences, Christmas slightly stronger	$H=5.69$ , $p=0.058$ (ns)	Easter: significant age differences ( $p<0.001$ ), 60+ more critical, 30–45 more positive
<b>Handmade &amp; Local</b>	$\chi^2=20.747$ , $p<0.001 \rightarrow$ Medieval & Christmas > Easter	$H=24.65$ , $p<0.001 \rightarrow$ Easter < both Medieval & Christmas	No subgroup differences
<b>Overall Atmosphere</b>	$\chi^2=75.891$ , $p<0.001 \rightarrow$ Medieval & Christmas > Easter	$H=75.26$ , $p<0.001 \rightarrow$ Easter < both	Easter: significant age differences ( $p=0.008$ ), 60+ less satisfied
<b>Staff &amp; Volunteers</b>	$\chi^2=8.879$ , $p=0.012 \rightarrow$ Easter & Medieval > Christmas	$H=4.77$ , $p=0.092$ (ns)	Christmas: locals < non-locals ( $p=0.049$ )
<b>Cleanliness &amp; Safety</b>	$\chi^2=10.379$ , $p=0.006 \rightarrow$ Medieval highest, Easter lowest	$H=19.46$ , $p<0.001 \rightarrow$ Easter < both	Christmas: locals < non-locals ( $p=0.019$ ); Easter: older more critical ( $p=0.007$ )
<b>Information &amp; Orientation</b>	$\chi^2=9.347$ , $p=0.009 \rightarrow$ Medieval > Easter	$H=7.53$ , $p=0.023 \rightarrow$ Easter < Medieval	Easter: younger more positive ( $p=0.014$ )
<b>Facilities &amp; Logistics</b>	$\chi^2=0.063$ , $p=0.969 \rightarrow$ no differences	$H=0.95$ , $p=0.623$ (ns)	Easter: significant age differences ( $p=0.001$ ), 30–45 more positive vs. 60+

As summarized in Table 5, the findings confirm that while Oradea has a strong festival portfolio, each event possesses a distinct profile of strengths and weaknesses. The Medieval Festival excels in delivering an authentic cultural and programmatic experience, and the Christmas Fair succeeds in creating a powerful and immersive atmosphere. The Easter Fair, while organizationally competent in fundamental logistics, appears to be weaker in creating a unique identity, a compelling atmosphere, and a sense of authenticity. These results refute the idea that all festivals within a city's portfolio are perceived homogeneously and highlight specific, actionable areas where managerial focus can enhance visitor satisfaction and strengthen the overall brand of Oradea as a premier festival destination.

## CONCLUSIONS AND LIMITS

This study examined visitors' perceptions of three major cultural events in Oradea, highlighting both cross-event differences and subgroup-specific variations. The findings provide valuable insights into how dimensions such as atmosphere, authenticity, and organizational quality influence audience evaluations in the context of urban festivals.

The statistical analyses show differentiated strengths across the three events. The Christmas Fair received the highest evaluations in gastronomy and was also distinguished by its festive atmosphere, while the Medieval Festival excelled in artistic programming. These outcomes were further nuanced by Welch's tests, which indicated that younger visitors valued atmosphere more highly, older participants prioritized safety, and residents expressed more critical views of



organizational aspects. Together, these results emphasize the need to interpret festivals as differentiated experience platforms, each catering to distinct visitor expectations.

The integrated analysis of  $\chi^2$ , Kruskal–Wallis, and Welch’s tests confirmed that the Christmas Fair and Medieval Festival consistently outperformed the Easter Fair, especially in atmosphere, authenticity (handmade & local products), and organizational dimensions such as cleanliness and safety. The Easter Fair emerged as the most fragmented event, with significant subgroup contrasts in food, atmosphere, safety, information, and facilities. Locals and older visitors tended to be more critical, while the 30–45 age group was more positive. In contrast, the Christmas Fair showed homogeneous evaluations across age groups, confirming its wide symbolic appeal, although locals remained more demanding in organizational assessments. The Medieval Festival was particularly strong in artistic programming, especially among older participants, while both Medieval Festival and Easter Fair received more favorable evaluations of staff and volunteers compared to Christmas, underscoring the variability of interpersonal interactions.

Overall, the findings suggest that Oradea’s cultural events attract distinct audiences and are perceived differently in terms of strengths and weaknesses. The Easter Fair would benefit from enhancing authenticity, organizational clarity, and culinary variety, while the Christmas and Medieval events already demonstrate greater coherence but still require targeted improvements. This research acknowledges several limitations, including its reliance on self-reported survey data collected within a single year and the specific urban context of Oradea, which may limit the generalizability of the findings.

Future studies should aim to expand the time frame by incorporating multi-year data, utilizing comparative approaches across different cities, and implementing advanced methodologies such as structural equation modeling (SEM) to more effectively capture the complexities associated with festival experiences.

Appendix. Welch’s t-tests and ANOVA subgroup differences across events

Dimension / Variable	Medieval Festival (Welch’s t / ANOVA)	Christmas Fair (Welch’s t / ANOVA)	Easter Fair (Welch’s t / ANOVA)
Artistic & Cultural Programming	t(53.274) = 0.888, p = 0.378	t(64.04) = -1.348, p = 0.182	t(52.736) = -2.580, p = 0.013
	F(3,19.58) = 3.458, p = 0.036	F(2,42.90) = 1.928, p = 0.158	F(3,38.87) = 1.950, p = 0.138
Food & Beverages	t(53.071) = 1.130, p = 0.264	t(65.47) = -1.178, p = 0.243	t(39.516) = -1.065, p = 0.293
	F(3,13.27) = 0.068, p = 0.976	F(2,43.47) = 0.762, p = 0.473	F(3,42.75) = 7.339, p < 0.001
Handmade & Local	t(52.50) = -0.019, p = 0.985	t(83.16) = -1.676, p = 0.098	t(37.855) = -0.890, p = 0.379
	F(3,13.22) = 0.221, p = 0.880	F(2,45.93) = 0.144, p = 0.866	F(3,39.23) = 2.751, p = 0.055
Overall Atmosphere	t(62.960) = -0.172, p = 0.864	t(81.33) = -1.007, p = 0.317	t(45.310) = -1.773, p = 0.083
	F(3,12.65) = 1.575, p = 0.244	F(2,41.00) = 1.007, p = 0.374	F(3,40.09) = 4.541, p = 0.008
Staff & Volunteers	t(48.579) = -0.014, p = 0.989	t(83.98) = -1.997, p = 0.049	t(41.886) = -1.016, p = 0.316
	F(3,15.09) = 0.438, p = 0.729	F(2,45.42) = 1.385, p = 0.261	F(3,38.91) = 1.281, p = 0.294
Cleanliness & Safety	t(48.770) = 1.940, p = 0.058	t(102.08) = -2.384, p = 0.019	t(48.258) = -1.118, p = 0.269
	F(3,14.56) = 0.738, p = 0.546	F(2,46.60) = 0.023, p = 0.977	F(3,41.08) = 4.584, p = 0.007
Information & Orientation	t(36.914) = 1.534, p = 0.134	t(95.489) = -1.768, p = 0.080	t(43.185) = -0.936, p = 0.355
	-	F(2,46.75) = 1.239, p = 0.299	F(3,38.58) = 4.039, p = 0.014
Facilities & Logistics	t(50.736) = 1.415, p = 0.163	t(73.302) = -1.154, p = 0.252	t(40.826) = -0.005, p = 0.996
	F(3,13.89) = 0.451, p = 0.720	F(2,44.38) = 0.748, p = 0.479	F(3,38.55) = 6.525, p = 0.001

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