IDENTIFYING BRAȘOV COUNTY'S TOURISTIC VISITORS' PROFILE USING EUROPEAN TOURISM INDICATORS SYSTEM

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Abstract: *The need for sustainable development of regions is a current topic that concern both local authorities and academic experts, as demonstrated by this paper through case study in Brașov County, one of Romania's main tourist regions. This paper is based on a research project meant to develop an original testing technique of European Tourism Indicators System of Sustainable Destinations (ETIS) for Brașov County. The paper presents the results of a market survey carried out on a sample of 1,119 visitors and meant to identify travel characteristics of tourists from Brasov County. This results allowed identifying Brașov County's touristic visitors' profile.*

JEL classification: Z32; M31

Key words: indicators for sustainable regions; European Tourism Indicator System; quantitative research; touristic profile

1. INTRODUCTION

Europe is considered to be the most popular tourist destination in the world (European Commission, 2016), and the demand for tourist products from the European destinations continued to grow steadily in the year 2015. Aware of the importance tourism has for the development of many European regions, as it contributes to employment and economic growth (European Parliament, 2016), in 2001, the European Union proposed a framework containing a set of measures to stimulate this field's businesses, (Commission of the European Communities, 2001), together with guidelines for developing sustainable and competitive European tourism such as the European Tourism Indicator System (ETIS) in 2013 (European Commission, 2016). This indicator system was launched as an informational support system

in evaluating sustainable development's level of a European tourist destination. As Braşov County is a significant Romanian mountain tourist destination, it was chosen as pilot location when organizing workshops for choosing the appropriate Tourism Indicators.

The ETIS toolkit also includes 5 questionnaires that can be used to identify the overall image of a tourist destination, manage the destination, as well as for presenting relevant information about companies, visitors and residents of a tourist destination. They can be used as such or adapted to the needs of study or specificity of a tourist destination. Some of these questionnaires has been already used in the case of some European tourist destinations, an example would be a study based on the ETIS questionnaire for the tourists from Istria, region of Croatia (Brščić et al., 2015). In Romania, the ETIS indicator system proposed by the European Commission has not so far been applied for any tourist destination.

In 2014, following a national competition, the scientific research project entitled Destination Intelligent Management for Sustainable Tourism (DIMAST) was financed. This project aims at designing and developing an original technical procedure for testing ETIS in Braşov county, via an innovative information system to support decision-making of GDSS type (functional model), that should directly and actively support the participative management of a sustainable tourism development within the destination Braşov county (DIMAST, 2016).

The present paper is based on the proposed questionnaire and has as main objectives to establish the travel characteristics. A series of solutions were also identified so that the research results might be used by the tourism stakeholders.

The chosen tourist destination, Braşov county, is a heterogeneous one, located in the centre of Romania, where various types of tourism are practiced (mountain, cultural historical, sport, scientific thematic, rural tourism, ecotourism, business etc.), types of tourism for different participants, for youth tourism, for instance (Bratucu & Demeter, 2014). Braşov County has a very important natural and anthropic tourism heritage (Braşov County Council, 2010).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

As developing a set of indicators for sustainable tourism development has proven to be a difficult task, due to reduced data reliability and to difficulties in defining tourism as an economic activity (Ceron & Dubois, 2003) several researchers proposed different indicators'

systems for assessing tourist destinations' sustainable development. The experts' opinions regarding the indicators to be used by tourist products' consumers in assisting their decision of choosing holiday destinations and promoting a sustainable tourism have been analyzed. This study's results highlighted the diversity of experts' viewpoints regarding sustainability, use of qualitative versus quantitative indicators and the role consumers' pressure can play in sustainable development (Miller, 2001). Another paper, starting from the need to monitor sustainable tourism development, emphasizes the importance of stating clear objectives before identifying indicators to be used, the importance of involving a multidisciplinary committee and creating an effective, flexible and adequate framework that can convert indicators' results into actions (Twining-Ward & Butler, 2002).

Roberts and Tribe (2008) proposed some indicators which can be used in evaluating the small tourism enterprises' progress towards a destination's long term sustainability goals. Schianetz and Kavanagh (2008) propose the systemic indicator system (SIS) system, which takes into account the interconnection between socio-cultural, economic and environmental issues and emphasizes the need for adaptive management practices.

Authors have identified local level sustainability indicators for a Mexican destination (Chávez-Cortés & Alcántara Maya, 2010), starting from the stakeholders' main values, stressing that these indicators have to be regarded as part of the governing process and that developing indicators of success greatly depends on their integration in this process.

To reconcile economic growth and sustainable development, a set of sustainability indicators was created for a Spanish destination, starting with the social and economic changes resulted from the tourism development and new local policies as response to these changes (Rebollo & Baidal, 2003)

A global efficiency indicator comprising a sustainable tourism index and an economic efficiency index (Cracolici et al., 2008) was suggested, starting from the idea that tourism development has serious consequences upon environment sustainability and, therefore, an assessment of pros and cons concerning tourism's eco-efficiency should be performed. There are proposals for indicators to measure community tourism development (CTD) within a sustainable framework. Choi and Sirakaya (2006), following a research they carried out, established a set of 125 indicators for CTD, respectively 32 political, 28 social, 25 ecological,

24 economic, 3 technological and 13 cultural ones. This set of sustainable tourism's indicators can constitute the starting point for developing a set of indicators at a local and regional level.

Cucculelli and Goffi (2016) developed the Ritchie and Crouch model of tourist destination competitiveness, introducing a set of sustainability indicators and testing their role in explaining this concept. The role of sustainability is also confirmed as a crucial determinant of tourist destinations' competitiveness. Another example supporting the theory that suggested indicators, either at a local level or at EU level (for example, ETIS), are not being used enough is in creating sustainable development plans by the local authorities is also supported by another study made in Ireland (McLoughlin & Hanrahan, 2015).

The profile of sustainable tourist is also researched, as well as the way material resources are spent, via a survey with 1,180 tourists-subjects which visited Andalusia, Spain, in 2013. The analysis was carried out on several destinations from this region, i.e., medium-sized towns. The final part of the paper includes a number of proposals for improving touristic management at medium-sized destinations (Cárdenas-García & Pulido-Fernández, 2016).

3. THE OBJECTIVES AND THE RESEARCH METHOD USED

The present paper presents the results of a market quantitative research (a survey), which used an adapted variant of ETIS proposed questionnaire of interviewing a destination's tourists. The questionnaire used by the authors was adapted according to measures identified by Brasov County's stakeholders as fit for the analysis and research of these destinations. For this purpose, the authors have coordinated two survey-preceding qualitative researches, one a group-interview type (a focus-group) and the other a semi-structured interview type. The results obtained from the two qualitative researches allowed authors to establish the objectives and hypotheses of the survey.

The quantitative research it was undertaken among Romanian and foreign tourists that visited the tourist destination of Brașov county during the research period, with the goal of quantifying the attitudes and behaviours of destination's visitors. The sample was validated in accordance with the following rules that fully ensure its representativeness (Constantin & Tecău, 2013, 124-125) it was constructed using a random sampling method; its size is large enough to cover the entire diversity of existing behaviours and attitudes and to ensure a reasonable margin of error for results at the level of the entire population; it reflects the structure of researched population in terms of relevant characteristics.

The research was carried out by the authors across Braşov County, in the year of 2016 (actual collection of data). The instrument for interviewing the subjects, namely the questionnaire, contained 18 questions and the relevant ones were analysed below. The questionnaire used was based on the questionnaire proposed in *Guidebook on the European Tourism Indicator System for Sustainable Destinations* (ETIS) to identify travel characteristics of Braşov County tourist destination.

Multistage sampling and simple random sampling were chosen to create samples for this research. Considering tourists stayed in accommodation facilities, data was collected placing the questionnaires at the reception desk in the accommodation units chosen to be part of the sample using the multistage sampling method, with the stages established as follows: the primary sampling units: Braşov County localities, the secondary units: researched units' classification. For the last stage authors have used systematic sampling. After selecting the accommodation facilities to be included in the sample, the simple random sampling method was selected in case of each unit, as hotel reception had a list of accommodated tourists. From this list, respondents were chosen using systematic sampling. At this research stage a total number of 1,119 complete questionnaires were obtained, reducing the value of maximum allowable error to 2.92%. Processing and analysing the data from the 1,119 interviews was realized using the SPSS system (Statistical Package for Social Sciences).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

After carrying out the market research on a sample made up of 1,119 subjects, the most important and relevant results are presented below.

Question No. 1. *What is your country of residence?*

To accomplish a demographic assessment of sampled visitors, they were asked to indicate their country of residence. The responses the 1,119 visitors provided revealed that the majority of respondents, or 85.8%, answered Romania, 5.4% Germany, 3.6% Italy, 3.5% Switzerland and 1.8% from Israel (Tab. 1).

Table 1: Tourists' countries of residence

Country	Nominal values	Percentage Values (%)
Switzerland	39	3.5
Germany	60	5.4
Israel	20	1.8
Italy	40	3.6

Romania	960	85.8
Total	1119	100.0

Question No. 2. Can you tell us what was your starting point to reach the destination?

To reach Braşov County tourist destination, the starting point was their own residence for 1,059 visitors (94.6%), and a previous destination for the remaining 5.4% (Tab.2). In case of those who have not departed from their own residence to arrive to Braşov, their previous destinations were Bucharest (1.8%), Buşteni (1.8%) and Cluj-Napoca (1.8%).

Table 2: Starting point for Braşov County destination

Starting point	Nominal values	Percentage Values (%)
Home	1059	94.6
Other destination	60	5.4
Total	1119	100.0

Question No. 3. Please indicate the primary means of transport used to reach the destination?

For 67.9% of respondents the primary means of transport used to arrive at destination was the car (their own, friends or company car). The next answer was the train, with 10.7%, closely followed by plain, with 10.6%. 8.9% of the visitors reached their destination by bus and only 1.8% of the tourists opted for rental cars (Tab. 3).

Tab.3: Primary transportation means to reach the destination

Transport mode	Nominal values	Percentage Values (%)
Train	120	10.7
Plane	119	10.6
Bus	100	8.9
Car (personal, friends', work's)	760	67.9
Car (rented)	20	1.8
Total	1119	100.0

Question No. 4. What transportation means you used/intend to use during your stay here?

Sample visitors were asked what transport means they intended to use during their stay at the destination, and the responses revealed 83.6% of the visitors intended to use their own car, sightseeing buses and taxis, while 16.4% of the tourists intended to use local public transport. (Tab. 4).

Tab. 4: Transportation means used to get around destination

Transportation means used to get around destination	Nominal values	Percentage Values (%)

Public transportation	180	16.4
Other (personal car, touristic bus, taxi)	919	83.6
Total	1099	100.0

Question No. 5. Did you stay/are you planning to stay overnight at the destination?

89.3% of the visitors answered affirmatively and they stayed overnight at the destination, while 10.7% answered negatively; therefore, they did not spend any night at the destination (Tab. 5).

Tab.5: Intention to stay overnight at the destination

Stay overnight	Nominal values	Percentage Values (%)
No	120	10.7
Yes	999	89.3
Total	1119	100.0

Question No. 6. If your answer is yes, please state how many nights you spent/will spend in the destination (Braşov County)?

26% of the visitors which responded affirmatively intended to spend one night in Braşov County, 24% wanted to spend two nights at the destination, 16% intended to spend three nights at the destination, while 15.9% wanted to spend 4 nights at the destination. In total, 50% of the visitors spent up to two nights at the destination and 12% of the visitors did not spent the night in Braşov County. Therefore, respondents spent on average 2.67 nights in Brasov county. Only 2% spent 10 nights in Braşov County.

Question No. 7. How much money did you spend per person and per day during your stay here? (including accommodation, transport within the destination, food and drinks, shopping and entertainment).

To have a correct assessment of resources spent visiting the destination, respondents were asked about the average daily spending per tourist during their stay, including accommodation, transport within the destination, food and drinks, shopping and entertainment. 16.4% of them spent on average less than 50 Euro per day, 38.1% spent between 51 and 100 Euro per day, 30.9% had expenses ranging between 101 and 200 Euro per day, and 14.6% said they spent more than 200 Euro per day. (Tab. 6).

Tab. 6: Average daily spending per tourist

Average daily spending	Nominal values	Percentage Values (%)
< 50 Euro	180	16.4
51 – 100 Euro	419	38.1

101 – 200 Euro	340	30.9
> 200 Euro	160	14.6
Total	1099	100.0

Regarding gender of respondents taking part in this research, we have accounted the responses of 585 women, 52.3% of total, and 534 men, 47.7% of total. 11.2% of respondents, respectively 125 persons, travelled alone, 58.6% of total (or 656 persons) answered they visited the destination as a couple/family without children, whilst 30.2%, or 338 respondents visited Braşov County as a family with children.

The age structure of sample visitors reveals that 290 persons, namely 25.9%, were in the 18-29 years old age group; 177 persons (or 15.8%) were in the 30-39 years old age group; 153 tourists (or 13.7%) belong in the 40-49 years old age group; 204 visitors, namely 18.2%, were in the 50-59 years old age group; 295 of respondents (26.4%) were aged over 60 years 4.

The analysis of responses regarding primary transport means chosen by visitors to reach the destination revealed that, regardless of their marital status (single, couple or family with children), the primary transport means was their own car, with a correlation coefficient of -0.54, respectively a moderate downhill (negative) correlation. A similar response structure was also noticed when accounting the age of respondents, with a correlation coefficient of 0.28, showing a weak uphill (positive) relationship. The use of a car as a means of transport was mainly preferred by women, with a correlation coefficient of -0.64, revealing a moderate downhill relationship.

Regarding the overnight stay at destination, depending on respondents' gender, a correlation coefficient of 0.48 appeared, expressing a moderate uphill relationship. There were no significant differences between female and male responses. Regarding visitors' responses and their marital status, most of the visitors which stayed at least one night at the destination, were families without children. The correlation coefficient was of -0.05, revealing a very weak downhill relationship. Analyzing the relationship between respondents' gender and their average daily spending, a coefficient of 0.31 was generated, a rather weak uphill relationship. Regarding average daily spending depending on visitor's marital status, it seems families without children spent most money. This analysis produced a correlation coefficient of -0.32.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Issues regarding infrastructure still remain, as main transport means of surveyed tourists (67.9%) is the car; highways construction became a priority, as Brașov is a traffic centre, used as transit to neighbouring counties and is located along a very important European traffic corridor.

Another research result reveals only 10.6% of total visitors used airplanes as transport means to reach their destination. Therefore, building an airport in Brașov has also become a priority for the development of regional transportation infrastructure, as evidenced by Development Strategy in the Central Region 2014-2020.

In the same time, the question of local public transport is also raised, as only a minority of tourists (16.1%) intends to use it, which means either they do not have enough information about it (which requires better information/promotion) or they are not satisfied with the way it works and the services it provides (which raises a problem of local level authorities' management).

Improving local infrastructure will have an important contribution to Brașov County's sustainable development, especially from the economic point of view (leading to an increased regional tourism mobility) and from the environmental point of view (reducing pollution problems).

The findings of this paper contribute to establishing Brașov County's profile as a tourist destination (offering information about tourists, average spending/day and person, length of stay, marital status, age, gender), profile that can be used by tourist destination's managing body, as well as by hospitality industry for creating profitable and sustainable tourism products and services, like boutique hotels, for instance (Baltescu & Boscor, 2016.). In addition, this information is also useful for establishing the communication/promotional strategies targeting current and potential tourists, including the use of social network (Chitu & Albu, 2013).

In conclusion, we are confident that the quantitative research presented in this paper, developed based on a tourists' questionnaire, together with the other ETIS proposed tools (such as destination's profile, the questionnaire regarding destination's management, the questionnaire for businesses and the one for resident population), adapted to specifics of a

given tourist destination, may be particularly useful in achieving Brașov County's sustainable development objectives as a tourist destination.

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