MEASURING THE LEVEL OF TOURIST SATISFACTION. CASE STUDY BRASOV COUNTY

Gabriel Brătucu, Ioana Bianca Chițu, Mădălina Ștefan

Transilvania University of Brașov,

gabriel.bratucu@unitbv.ro, ioana.chitu@unitbv.ro, madalina.stefan@unitbv.ro

Abstract: This study is based on one of European Tourism Indicators System (ETIS) questionnaire, proposed by European Commission in 2013, and has as main objectives to measuring the satisfaction level of the Romanian and foreign tourists arrived in Brașov. In order to achieve the above mentioned objective, a market survey was carried out on a sample of 1,119 visitors to Brașov County, in 2016. The results can be used by businesses and the local managing authorities in establishing the strategies for the sustainable development of tourism in the region.

JEL classification: Z32; M31

Key words: European Tourism Indicator System; quantitative research; tourist satisfaction

1.INTRODUCTION

According to information provided by World Tourism Organization, despite economic and social turbulences, Europe is still the most popular tourist destination (European Commission, 2016) and international tourist arrivals in Europe increased by 5% compared to the same period of previous year (European Travel Commission, 2015).

European Commission initiated a series of projects such as "European Tourism Day", European Destinations of Excellence (EDEN), co-financed sustainable transnational tourism products and developed the European Tourism Indicator System (ETIS) in 2013 (European Commission, 2016). ETIS 2013 was designed as a flexible and dynamic system, allowing a high level of customization, including adding new indicators if so deemed by the destinations implementing it. This system of indicators was conceived as a "process for monitoring, managing and enhancing the sustainability of a tourist destination" (European Commission, 2013) that is locally controlled and coordinated.

The study is based on one of ETIS questionnaire and has as main objectives to measuring the satisfaction of the tourists arrived in the destination Brașov and to identify solution that can be used by the local authorities and other tourism stakeholders.

Brașov County has the second highest tourists receiving capacity among Romania's counties, ranks secondly as far as arrivals and overnight stays are concerned, holding 9.7%, and 8.1% (Jan. 2016 - Sep. 2016). Attraction to this mountain tourist destination has increased in the period Jan 2016- Sep. 2016, arrivals of tourists registering an increase of 10,3% and overnight stays increased with 5.3% (Department of Statistics, 2016).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The collection of data regarding opinions of tourism stakeholders, tourists and residents has an extremely important role in quantifying authorities' efforts and outlining strategies and future action plans. This stage of data collection is often challenging, due to the difficult access to information, however it strengthens civil society's capacity to become involved in tourism and could allow changes towards a sustainable environment (United Nation, 2012).

At the same time, specialized studies also analyze tourists' opinions and satisfaction as starting points in elaborating sustainable tourism development strategies, either for urban localities (Zamfir, 2015), for example, for Bucharest, the capital city of Romania, towns from New Zealand (Pearce, 2015), or for other tourist destinations (Rahman & Daud, 2011).

Hillery et al. (2001) investigated the relation between environmental impact and tourists' perception for 10 Central Australia sites. Most of the tourists identified relevant threats to the environment, while a smaller proportion suggested management options to solve this problem. Tyrväinen et al. (2014) mentioned that recent plans for tourism development of nature-based tourist destinations rose concerns about how realistic are the objectives regarding development of areas sustainable from tourism point of view. The research, carried out on a sample of 1,054 foreign and local tourists, aimed to study tourists' preferences related to environment and accommodation in northern Lapland. The respondents were asked about their availability to engage in sustainable tourism practices and the use of lands in tourist destinations.

A study undertaken to find tourists' perception concerning tourism's impact, based on the social exchange theory, reached the conclusion that tourists were aware of both the

positive and negative consequences of tourism development (Moyle et al., 2013). There are also studies analyzing, by comparison, sustainability-related issues that are location-specific and assess the differences between the types of tourists and their sustainability perceptions, from two different destinations (Costa Rica and the Netherlands), concluding that sustainability's ecological dimension is perceived as most important, followed by the social, cultural and economic dimensions. The results demonstrate tourists' awareness regarding sustainability-related issues and that, in the long run, such awareness could lead to changes in their preferences (Cottrel et al., 2004).

The studies analyzing tourists' behavior at the destination are also very interesting; for example, the ones with young tourists as subjects (Buffa, 2015), regarded as the next generation of tourists. It is necessary to understand their attitude towards sustainability, so that tourism development should be carried out in accordance with future demand. A study conducted among 1,156 young people, researched their attitude towards sustainability, their motivations and travel behavior, and identified different profiles of young tourists with regard to this subject. The results confirmed young people are receptive to certain sustainability-related issues, which influence their behavior in making the decision about a tourist destination.

Another study analyzed the interaction between the motives underlying the selection of tourism products together with the environment-related motives, identifying several issues that could explain why tourists do not make selections in a responsible manner. Another part of the analysis includes a number of instruments meant to encourage tourists' responsible behavior, such as ecolabels, awareness campaigns, etc. (Budeanu, 2007).

3. METHODOLOGY

The present study was undertaken among the Romanian and foreign tourists who visited the tourist destination Braşov County during the period of research, and was aimed at quantifying some attitudes and behaviors of the visitors from this tourist destination, being based on a quantitative research, namely opinion survey. The research was carried out by the authors across Braşov county, in 2016. The questionnaire used was conceived on the basis of the questionnaire proposed to be applied to the tourists in the *Guidebook on the European Tourism Indicator System for Sustainable Destinations* (ETIS) and the main objective aimed to identify the level of visitors' satisfaction.

The sampling method selected for this research is the multistage sampling combined with simple random sampling (Constantin & Tecău, 2013, 124-125). Taking into account the fact that tourists are accommodated in accommodation facilities, option has been made to collect data by placing the questionnaires in the reception area of certain facilities included in the sample.

For the last stage, the systematic sampling was used. After selecting the accommodation facilities that were included in the sample, the simple random sampling method was selected for them, as at the reception of the hotel a list of the accommodated tourists was available. After the questionnaires were filled in, they were collected, gathering a total number of 1,119 complete questionnaires. The recomputed value of the maximum permissible error was 2.92%. For the processing and analyzing the data from the 1,119 interviews carried out the SPSS system (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) was used.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The most important results are presented below.

Question No. 1. Is this your first visit at this destination?

Of the 1,119 respondents, 32.1% visited this destination for the first time, whilst 67.9% have visited Brașov County before and returned (Tab. 1).

Tab. 1: First visit to the destination

First visit	Nominal values	Percentage Values (%)
No	760	67.9
Yes	359	32.1
Total	1119	100.0

Question No. 2. If your answer is no, how many times have you visited this destination over the last five years?

56.4% of the respondents which have previously visited Brașov County, have visited Brașov county one to three times over the last 5 years. The average number of visits made within the last 5 years is 3, in case of these 779 persons. This sample also included 1.8% persons which estimated that over the last 5 years, they visited Brașov County 50 times or so.

Question No. 3. Do you intend to return to destination during next 5 years?

When asked if they intend to return to this tourist destination during the next 5 years, 94.6% of the visitors answered affirmatively, respectively they intend to return to this tourist destination, 3.6% answered negatively. (Tab.2).

Tab. 2: Intention to return to the destination

Returning intention	Nominal values	Percentage Values (%)
No	40	3.6
Yes	1059	96.4
Total	1099	100.0

Question No. 4. 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. 8).

Question No. 5. Please put a check mark next to the answer representing best your opinion. ʺOverall, I am satisfied with my visit to this destinationʺ.

The visitors were asked to check the answer representing best their opinion with regard to the statement: ʺOverall, I am satisfied with my visit to this destinationʺ. 66.1% agreed to this statement and 33.9% agreed entirely to the above statement. Overall, the level of satisfaction is high (Tab. 3).

Tab.3: Level of satisfaction

Level of satisfaction	Nominal values	Percentage Values (%)
Totally agree	379	33.9
Agree	740	66.1
Total	1119	100.0

Question No. 6. What is your gender?

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 (Tab. 4).

Tab. 4: Tourist structure by gender

Gender	Nominal values	Percentage Values (%)
Female	585	52.3
Male	534	47.7
Total	1119	100.0

Question No. 7. What is your marital status?

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 (Tab. 5).

Tab. 5: Tourist structure by marital status

Marital status	Nominal values	Percentage Values (%)
Single	125	11.2
Childless family/couple	656	58.6
Family with children	338	30.2
Total	1119	100.0

Question No. 8. What is your age group?

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 (Tab. 6).

Tab. 6: Tourists structure by age

Age	Nominal values	Percentage values (%)
18-29	290	25.9
30-39	177	15.8
40-49	153	13.7
50-59	204	18.2
over 60	295	26.4
Total	1119	100.0

When establishing a correlation between destination's return intention and respondents' gender, a coefficient of 0.71 was generated, revealing a moderate to strong

uphill relationship. Greater differences for this question appeared when accounting for visitors' marital status. The majority of respondents which stated they would return to destination were families without children, namely 620 persons of the total 1,059. The correlation coefficient is 0.005, a very weak uphill relationship. Most of those wishing to return to destination, belonged to over 60 years', and in an equal measure to 18 to 29 years' age groups. The correlation coefficient is -0.002, expressing a very weak downhill relationship.

Most visitors were satisfied with their visit to Braşov County tourist destination were families without children, falling in the 18 to 29 years' age group, with a correlation coefficient of 0.78, or a strong uphill relationship.

In order to identify the level of satisfaction on the respondents' visit in Brasov county a five steps interval scale was used, with equal distances between levels. A distribution can be distinguished, which is inclined towards the responses that indicates a high level of satisfaction: 52.60% of respondents indicate this level and 26.70% indicate a very high level of satisfaction with the visited destination. Only 4.60% of respondents are less satisfied with the visit, and 7.60% of respondents are situated in the neutral response option (Tab. 14).

Tab. 7: Asess the satisfaction level of visitors regarding destination visit

Accord level	Gender		Total
	Male	**Female**	
Totally disagree	4.10%	5.00%	4.60%
Disagree	7.50%	9.40%	8.50%
Neither agree nor disagree	7.50%	7.70%	7.60%
Agree	52.80%	52.5%	52.60%
Totally agree	28.10%	25.50%	26.70%
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

From response distribution it can be observed that in the *agree* level, almost equal percentages of female and male population have been recorded. However, the relative frequency distribution of the two groups shows that the women's *disagree* level recorded a higher percentage than the men's. *Totally agree* level recorded a higher percentage among men than women. These results can mean significant differences between the two groups.

In order to verify this claim Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used. It is considered:

n_1 = the number of women in the sample; n1 = 585;   (1)

$$n_2 = \text{the number of males in the sample; n2} = 534; \qquad (2)$$

$$n = n_1 + n_2 = 1119 \text{ respondents.} \qquad (3)$$

Taking into consideration the cumulative relative frequencies of the two sub-samples, statistical assumptions are set out as follows:

H_0: The maximum difference between the cumulative relative frequencies for women (F_1) and men (F_2) is zero.

Tab. 8: Calculating differences between cumulated relative frequencies

Agree level	Relative frequences		Cumulate relative frequences		Difference $(F_1 - F_2)$
	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Totally diagree	4.10%	5.00%	4.10%	5.00%	-0.90%
Disagree	7.50%	9.40%	11.40%	13.30%	-1.90%
Neither agree, nor diasgree	7.50%	7.70%	18.90%	21.00%	-2.1%
Agree	53.00%	53.20%	71.90%	74.20%	-2.30%
Totaly agree	28.10%	25.80%	100%	100%	0%
Total	**100%**	**10%**			

The maximum difference between cumulative frequencies is:

$$D = \max_k |F_1(k) - F_2(k)| = |4.10\% - 5.00\%| = -0.90\%$$

Theoretical value of D was further calculated:

$$D_\alpha = 136 * \sqrt{\frac{n_1 + n_2}{n_1 * n_2}} \Rightarrow D_\alpha = 136 * \sqrt{\frac{585 + 534}{585 * 534}} = 8.037\%$$

According to the decision rule, the following results have been obtained:

$D_{calc} = -0.90 < D_\alpha = 8.037 \Rightarrow it\ is\ accepted\ H_0 \Rightarrow$ there is no difference between the two groups regarding the level of satisfaction concerning the visit of the analysed destination. Thus, advancing to measuring the respondent's satisfaction level regarding the visit was possible. Average recorded responses value was 2.11 on a scale from 1 (totally agree) to 5 (totally disagree).

5. CONCLUSIONS

Connecting the questions revealed that respondents which were not at their first visit were, generally, more satisfied than respondents visiting Braşov tourist destination for the first time. The analyses also revealed Romanians are biggest spenders, willing to spend in excess of 100-200 Euro/day/person. Visitors from Germany, Switzerland, Italy or Israel were willing to spend a maximum of 100 Euro/day/person. Persons willing to spend up to 100 Euro/day/person were very satisfied with their stay in Braşov tourist destination. People most satisfied with their stay had as country of residence Israel, Italy or Switzerland.

The fact that 67.9% of interviewed tourists have visited Braşov before, some of them up to three times over 5 years, together with the fact that 94.6% confirmed their intention to return to Braşov in the future, shows this destination is an attractive one and therefore, further efforts should be made to improve the destination and increase customer satisfaction (research results show 66.1% agreed, whilst the remainder 33.9% of respondents fully agreed with the following statement: "Overall, I am satisfied of my visit to this destination").

The research coordinated by the authors identified the ETIS 2013 indicators suitable for Braşov County tourist destination. Due to its complexity, data can be customized using the innovative decision support system, which is an original Romanian instrument, allowing the authors to apply it to all country's major tourist destinations with the support of the National Tourism Authority.

The functional models that will be developed within DIMAST project, along with the results obtained from the quantitative research presented in this article will support a comprehensive Business Intelligence tool aiming to support cooperative management decision making in tourism (Cismaru, 2016). This tool can be generalized and applied across the country. More specifically, the project will directly contribute to the improvement of touristic planning and sustainable development management. Therefore, based on ETIS 2013, the system will support the evaluation processes, strategy formulation and development of programs regarding tourism's sustainable development, ensuring assessing tourism's impact upon a tourist destination along the economic, environmental and social dimensions. Based on such a research together with a well-documented knowledge base concerning destination management and sustainable development, the information system to be developed will be

able to determine a destination's benefits concerning the management of its natural and human resources as well as its inhabitants.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST AND PLAGIARISM: The authors declare no conflict of interest and plagiarism.

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