

Study Regarding Foreign Tourists' Perception on Romania's Capital City as Major Tourist Destination in Southeastern Europe

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1. Introduction. Conceptual Framework

CITIES ARE one the oldest tourist destinations and represent nowadays a constantly growing tourism sector. Usually tourists choose cities either for their architectural, historic and artistic patrimony and for exceptional cultural creations, or as business destination (congresses, exhibitions).

Urban tourism represents one of the main economic growth factors for cities (Metaxas, 2010), that generates welfare and jobs. In the context of globalization and industrial delocalization, cities with high tourist potential use tourism in order to gain a strategic competitive position (Popescu and Profiroiu, 2012).

Reutsche (2006) in his paper "Urban Tourism: What Attracts Visitors to Cities?" focuses on the relationship between tourism and urban areas, which makes a clear difference between primary, secondary and additional elements of urban tourism. Primary elements represent the main reasons that determine tourists visit cities and are related to:

a. Places for performing activities:

- cultural facilities: museums and art galleries; theatres and cinemas; business centres; other types of attractions. Thus, specialists (Ispas et al., 2015) argue that East European urban tourism destinations are experimenting a new trend: the development of city-based heritage or cultural tourist attractions;

- sports facilities: indoor or outdoor; and

- entertainment facilities: casinos and lotteries, organized events, festivals.

b. Places for spending free time: historical boulevards; buildings; old statues and monuments; parks and green areas; waters.

Secondary elements (accommodation; catering facilities; shopping; markets) together with additional elements [accessibility; transport and parking; tourist information (maps, signposts, guideposts, travel guides)] are also very important for the success of urban tourism, but do not represent the main attractions for tourists (Popescu, 2008a).

In this context it is considered that tourism is important for cities and cities are important for tourism. “Tourism stimulates the development of new and improved cultural and commercial facilities, which can be used both by residents and tourists. Tourism allows collecting the necessary funds for preserving natural, archeological and historical monuments, art and cultural traditions and most of all it contributes to improving the quality of the environment” (Stănciulescu, 2004).

Within urban communities, tourism can bring significant benefits (Stănciulescu, 2004), such as:

- create new jobs;
- new perspectives for local tourism businesses;
- new investment possibilities;
- increased incomes and implicitly increased living standards for local communities;
- more resources from local taxes that might be used to maintain infrastructure and improve community facilities;
- improved infrastructure for both tourists and residents;
- secure financing sources for preserving natural areas, art, crafts, archeological and historical areas, cultural traditions (European Commission, 1998);
- improve environment quality (WTTC, WTO and Earth Council (1995); and
- build a positive image.

Shaw and Williams (1994) argue that tourism contributes to a low cost of capital for creating new jobs, boosts economic development through strong multiplying effects, improves buildings’ esthetic ambiance and multiplies spare time facilities for residents. Moreover, it offers support when alternatives for creating a strong economic base are missing: if cities do not compete for tourists financial resources, they have many chances to become losers in the global competition.

Needless to say, tourism development in cities is not possible without the development of long and medium term strategies, integrated into the overall strategy of the urban areas. In order to reach such goal, two major aspects must be taken into consideration: strategic planning (which enables the involvement of all relevant sectors, actors and institutions) (Blaga, 2013; Selcuk Can et al., 2014; Hințea et al., 2015; van Ravensway and Hamlin, 2015; Ruano, 2015) and citizens’ participation (compulsory for all long term planning processes) (Terzić et al., 2014).

2. Touristic Bucharest

2.1. General presentation

BUCHAREST, THE capital city of Romania and also the biggest city, industrial and commercial centre of the country¹, with 2.103.346 inhabitants (in 2015) (INS, 2016a) is the sixth-largest city of the European Union by population. In fact, Bucharest daily hosts more than three million people, and specialists predict a total of over four million in the next five years.

Due to its **geographical and geopolitical position**, as key elements for urban promotion, Romania’s capital city can be analysed from various perspectives (Popescu and Corboș, 2011):

– *at European level*, the municipality is part of the traditional capital cities category, but has a quite excentric position by comparison with Europe's economic and financial center of gravity. Bucharest is situated on the transcontinental road and rail corridors and also close to the Danube corridor and the Black Sea and Baltic Sea link; and

– *at national level*, Bucharest has a quite excentric localization, but manages to polarize a big part of the major routes.

In relation with the **European metropolis features** (Popescu, 2007; Popescu, 2008b), Bucharest:

– is a **metropolis according to its size**, however it does not have an international influence, as it does not host international institutions and does not perform functions of a metropolitan character;

– is situated in the **third category according to its size**, which refers to the interval 1 - 3 million inhabitants, but has an unfavourable dynamics caused by the demographic decrease in the 1990s. This gap can be addressed through demographic and socioeconomic policies, with visible effects in over two decades. On top of all these, policies to attract medium- and highly educated young people are needed to change the sectorial profile of the capital city; and

– it is part of the category of **regional peripheral metropolises, with limited international influence**, as tertiary services are not developed at metropolitan level standards and it does not exert important international functions, such as Athens and Lisbon. However it has the possibility to enter the superior category of regional metropolises with high international influence, a low specialized activity structure and international specialized or incomplete functions, such as Rome, Madrid or Berne.

2.2. Strategic Operational Tourism Marketing Plan for Bucharest 2011 - 2015

Context. Studies carried out have revealed that from a tourism standpoint Romania's capital city situation is not at all satisfactory. Thus:

– The capital city *is not properly promoted*², as Bucharest *is not mentioned as an attraction point in the most relevant travel books worldwide*³. A study carried out by THR & TNS for the Regional Development and Tourism Ministry (MDRT) in May 2010 concludes that “Bucharest municipality does not enjoy a high notoriety in the tourism field and is not associated with any specific feature. The city is compared with other smaller capital cities in the region, has a low level of popularity and a contrasting image” (MDRT, 2011a);

– *the accomodation offer is limited and nondiversified*. Thus, according to data provided by MDRT (2011a), in the top of European capital cities, Bucharest is in the last but one place according to the number of rooms per hotel per 1.000 inhabitants (Bulgaria's capital city, Sofia, is in the last place);

– *lack of policies* (1) *for integrated urban renovation and the maintenance-of heritage* (no monument in Bucharest is included in the UNESCO heritage list); (2) *for sustainable development* (and, therefore, sustainable urban tourism) and (3) *for strongly promoting events*; and

– *weak availability of tourist information* both related to preparing the journey, as well as during the travel experience; *lack of information and adequate guidance for Bucharest*

[most tourists flows are concentrated near the Parliament Palace, the Historical Center, the National Village Museum and Victory Lane (together with its museums⁴). In the online environment, Bucharest does not enjoy a better status, as it *does not exist on social networks* which, according to some authors (Hays, et al., 2013; Nica et al., 2014) are a key tool for reaching a global audience with limited resources, especially at times when public budgets are undersized.

Starting from this less favourable realities, in April 2011 the MDRT started developing a Strategic Operational Tourism Marketing Plan for Bucharest 2011 – 2015 to contribute to the promotion of the capital city in order to consistently raise the number of visitors. The plan was ready by the end of August 2011 and, according to MDRT (2011b), was aimed at:

- *an annual medium raise in the number of tourist of minimum 4,8%*;
- *a medium raise in the number of accommodation nights of over 6,8%*; and
- *improving the destination's popularity by over 15%, on at least 3 main tourist markets.*

In order to achieve these goals, apart from the *business tourism* sector, already existing in Bucharest, several new components were envisaged, such as *events tourism*⁵, *cultural tourism and health tourism* and, because of the intense night life and free spirit, a special focus was set on *tourism for young people* (which is the reason for Bucharest's new slogan "Europe is younger in Bucharest").

Tourism strategy. In order to achieve more popularity, Bucharest must better respond to tourists' expectations. The city should therefore be:

- a). *Practical* (the main tourist attractions are situated in the northern and central parts of Bucharest, therefore tourists should be better guided in these areas);
- b). *Magical, surprising* (informing and guiding tourists appropriately, Bucharest can become a city full of surprises); and
- c). *Entertaining, refreshing* (in this respect, there should be created areas dedicated to relaxation and more festivals and concerts should be organized).

A better response to tourists' expectations means a clear idea about the targeted clients. Thus, according to MDRT (2011b) the *main categories of public* for Bucharest as a tourist destination were:

- *business people* (clients important from an economic perspective);
- *young people* (image clients) (Bucharest is known as the best capital for entertainment in Southeast Europe. That is why the marketing plan recommends *positioning Bucharest as a destination for young people*);
- *city-break tourists* (foreign tourists that come to Bucharest can visit the Historical Centre, The Romanian Peasant Museum, The National Village Museum, areas around the capital city, and can enjoy the night life);
- *groups of seniors* (groups of friends that travel together by coach); and
- *thematic public* (such as consumers of medical tourism).

All these categories fall in the *exploratory-tourist* typology, *willing to experiment and discover new destinations.*

The action strategy proposed by the marketing plan had as a major goal the improvement of Romania's capital city image at international level. Specialists (Terzić et al., 2014;

Bercu, 2013; Boukas et al., 2012; Hiller, 1998; Zamfir, 2011) consider that the image of a destination can be designed making use of art, festivals, and cultural attractions. In this context, according to MDRT (2011a), the Romanian authorities followed *3 major objectives and 7 strategic axis*:

(1) *A common entity for collaboration and promotion* (the infrastructure of Bucharest's Tourist Office);

(2) *Strategic instruments* (a strategy for planning events; capitalization of the cultural heritage; developing periurban tourism; Bucharest Digital City); and

(3) *Promotion of the destination* (creating the Bucharest brand⁶; promotion).

The implementation of this plan was supposed to raise the number of tourists and also create new jobs and significantly increase local budgets⁷. Moreover, according to MDRT (2011c), the "international increase of Bucharest's notoriety might bring additional attractiveness to Romania's capital city and might improve foreigners' perception of Romania in general".

2.3. Effects of the Bucharest market plan implementation

In order to assess the changes that have occurred in this sector in recent years and also whether the market plan was successful, we present a series of statistics.

According to official statistics, in 2015 Bucharest was the most visited urban destination in Romania. However, the National Statistics Office (INS) (INS, 2016b) indicates that most visitors come to Bucharest for business, not on vacation.

Figure 1 presents the evolution of the number of tourists starting with the year 2000, when only 481,744 tourists visited Bucharest. In 2010 the number of tourists doubled and in 2015 it more than tripled. Nonetheless, we do not consider this increase very spectacular because public authorities have invested over 101,952 euros only for developing a marketing plan.

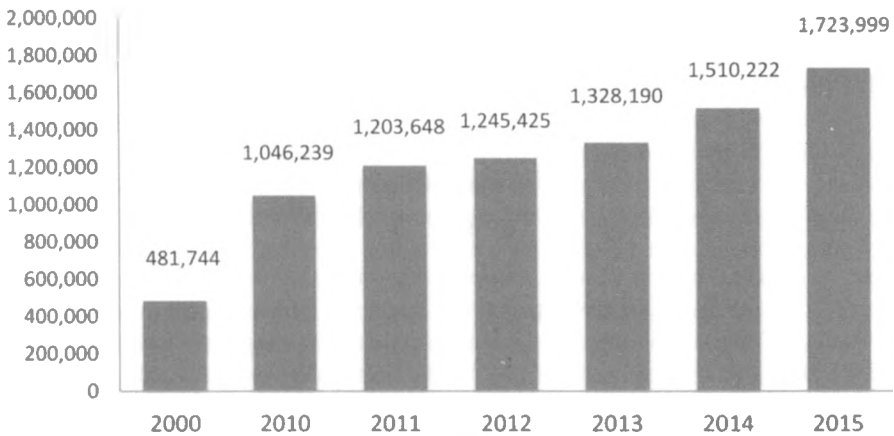
By comparison with the year 2000, when the capital was visited by approximately 200.000 Romanian tourists, in 2015 their number reached approximately 732.000 (figure 2) (meaning an increase of over 300%). This fact proves that Bucharest is a city that attracts population from other regions of the country to spend their weekends (city-break tourism), for business, cultural tourism or events.

Figure 2 highlights that the number of foreign tourists is on an ascendent trend, reaching almost 992.000 tourists in 2015. Nonetheless, according to the MasterCard Global Destination Cities Index 2015⁸ report (Hedrick-Wong and Choong, 2015, p. 8) Bucharest cannot be considered a top capital city tourist destination, as the officials' lack of organization does not allow a proper development of this economic sector, which could bring considerably more benefits.

However, the same report places Bucharest in the sixth position among the European cities with a fastest increase⁹ (7,8% in 2015 by comparison to 2009) and estimates the number of foreign tourists will reach approximately 1.02 million, who will spend approximately 300 million dollars in Romania's capital city (Hedrick-Wong and Choong, 2015, p. 20).

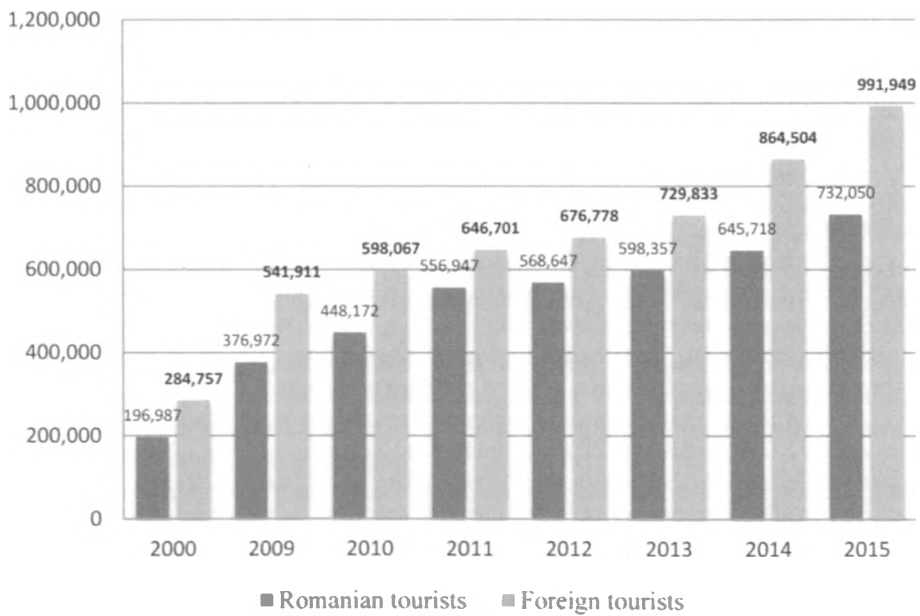
The evolution of the number of accommodation nights between 2000 and 2015 is directly correlated with the evolution of the number of tourists. The increase in the num-

FIGURE 1. Evolution of the number of tourists between 2000 and 2015



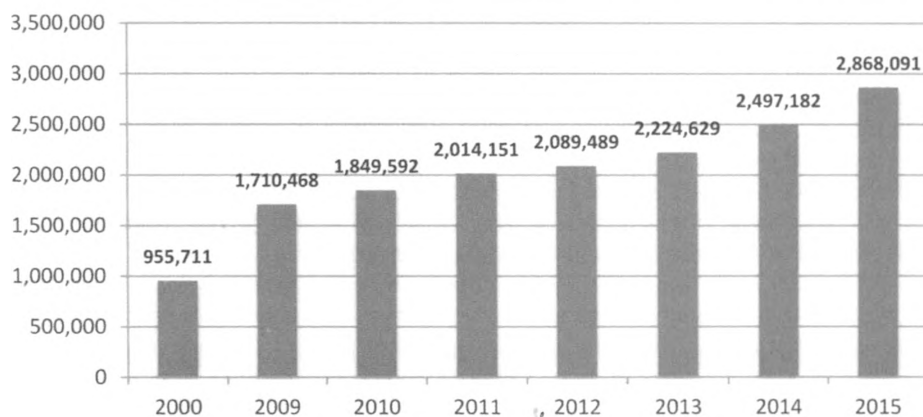
SOURCE: Tourists arrivals in tourist accomodation facilities. Available online at: <http://statistici.insse.ro/shop/index.jsp?page=tempo3&lang=ro&ind=TUR104A>

FIGURE 2. Evolution of the number of Romanian and foreign tourists between 2000 and 2015



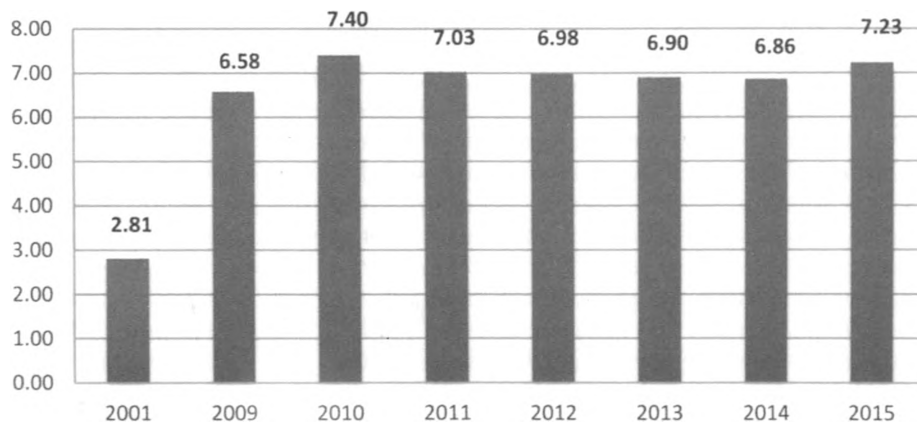
SOURCE: Tourist arrivals in tourism accomodation facilities. Available online at: <http://statistici.insse.ro/shop/index.jsp?page=tempo3&lang=ro&ind=TUR104A> and <http://statistici.insse.ro/shop/index.jsp?page=tempo3&lang=ro&ind=TUR107C>

FIGURE 3. Evolution of the number of accommodation nights between 2000 and 2015



SOURCE: Accommodation nights in tourist accommodation facilities, according to facility type, tourist category, macroregions, development regions and counties. Available online at: <http://statistici.insse.ro/shop/index.jsp?page=tempo3&lang=ro&ind=TUR105A>

FIGURE 4. Evolution of the number of accommodation places in Bucharest for the period 2001-2015 (thousands)



SOURCE: Existing tourist accommodation capacity, according to types of accommodation, counties and localities. Available online at:

<http://statistici.insse.ro/shop/index.jsp?page=tempo3&lang=ro&ind=TUR101A>

ber of accommodation nights is exponential, from less than 1 million in 2000, to almost 2.9 million in 2015 (figure 3). When looking at the number of tourists per year, we notice that accommodation nights average per tourist is approximately 2 nights, which indicates that Bucharest is a city visited by tourists for events, festivals or during weekends.

The number of accommodation places seemed to have an ascendent trend starting with 2001, reaching over 7.4 million accommodation places in Bucharest in 2010 (figure 4). However, because of the economic crisis and financial problems since 2010, the number of accommodation places decreased dramatically as several hotels in the capital city left this business. Only in 2015 this situation seemed to adjust.

3. Study regarding foreign tourists' perception of the image of Romania's capital city as a tourist destination in Southeastern Europe

AS THE above statistics reveal, the number of foreign tourists that reach Bucharest is still quite low by comparison with the other European capital cities, including those in Southeast Europe. Nonetheless, their number is continuously increasing, which is of course very satisfactory considering the fact that the capital city still lacks coherent tourism promotion activities and a tourism strategy.

Romania's capital city is still inexistent at international level when it comes to urban tourism. The lack of a city brand and several other shortfalls turn Bucharest into an ordinary town, rarely mentioned in specialized publications. Some of the shortcomings that contribute to the faded image of the city are:

- *The lack of clean, established commercial area* (such as Mariahilfer Street in Vienna, Vaci Utca in Budapest or Ifaistou Street in Athens). Shopping is one of the strongest motivations for urban tourism and the lack of a well-known commercial area leads to an insufficient exploitation of this trend;

- There are not enough *information places for tourists*;

- *It is not labelled as a very clean city*; and

- *It does not enjoy enough publicity on the internet*. Thus, on the *Google* search engine, Bucharest has a better position than Belgrade, but is strongly outranked by Zagreb, Kiev or Sofia, and on tourism specialized *social networks*, Bucharest has a limited notoriety by comparison with Berlin, Prague or Budapest.

Nonetheless, it seems that the few foreign tourists that visit the capital city are satisfied and wish to come back because of the active night life, low prices compared to other European capitals, and the Romanians' hospitality.

The main goal of this research is to identify the perception of foreign tourists of the image of the Capital seen as the main Romanian urban tourist destination and a possible top destination in Southeast Europe. *The secondary goals* of the research helped us identify:

- 1) How foreign tourists inform themselves before reaching Bucharest and during their stay in Bucharest;
- 2) Which is the opinion of foreign tourists on tourism and cultural attractions in Bucharest;
- 3) Which is the foreign tourists' perception related to the tourism services; and
- 4) Which is Bucharest's position by comparison to other Southeast European capital cities.

Our study tests three *hypothesis*:

Hypothesis 1: The low level of information of foreign tourists is determined by the weak promotion of the Capital abroad, as well as internally.

Independent variables: modalities of promoting the city abroad (mass-media, outdoor, direct marketing, online marketing, international fairs, festivals, press conferences, etc.); internal information modalities.

Hypothesis 2. Foreign tourists' perception of tourism services depends mostly on their diversity and accessibility, as well as on the quality/price ratio.

Independent variables: diversity of tourist services, accessibility¹⁰ of tourist services, quality/price ratio of tourist services.

Hypothesis 3: Foreign tourists' opinion on Romania's capital city is a positive one.

Independent variables: tourists' impressions related to the Capital; intention to come back and/or recommend the city to other persons; matching the Capital with one single, defining word; comparing Bucharest to other visited Southeast European capital cities; Capital residents' behaviour towards foreign tourists.

The present study is based on the *survey method*, using the *questionnaire instrument*, which was administered face-to-face to foreign tourists in Buchares in January and May of 2016 and online, at Wayn.com¹¹, considered to be "the fastest growing travel and lifestyle social networking community website in the world" (Wayn, 2015).

The investigated population was represented by foreigners that visited at least once Romania's capital city for various reasons (business, vacation, festivals/concerts, city-breaks etc.) and were more than 18 years old.

The sampling technique was based on *stratified random sampling*, meaning that participants to the survey were randomly selected from the group of foreign tourists over 18 years of age.

The sample includes 1,084 respondents, randomly chosen from the top 10 countries that provide Bucharest with the most numerous tourists, according to statistics (table 1).

Participants to the survey were approached within *Continental Hotels*¹², where questionnaires were administered to: 22 Italians, 34 Germans, 28 Americans, 47 Frenchmen, 19 Britons, 14 Spaniards; 8 Greeks; 18 Austrians; 4 Dutch. Most respondents took part in our study through the *Wayn.com*. network, which helped us collect answers from 890 persons: 198 Italians; 51 Britons; 123 Germans; 109 Israelis; 69 Americans; 73 Frenchmen; 131 Spaniards; 71 Greeks; 39 Austrians and 26 Dutch.

TABLE 1. Evolution of the main target markets between 2010 and 2015

	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010
<i>Israel</i>	131489	88,650	60,186	44,715	46,378	36,443
<i>Italy</i>	79496	66,669	68,073	67,360	69,422	58,686
<i>USA</i>	77997	73,379	58,953	56,150	56,148	56,752
<i>Germany</i>	76016	70,354	67,355	60,215	55,693	55,425
<i>United Kingdom</i>	74938	67,912	55,569	54,612	52,702	45,250
<i>France</i>	62631	60,722	55,395	50,953	49,690	48,211
<i>Spain</i>	35298	30,125	25,179	27,358	24,890	27,227
<i>Greece</i>	28983	28,383	26,189	22,338	22,781	23,498
<i>The Netherlands</i>	25845	23,701	21,951	22,187	17,995	15,984
<i>Austria</i>	22064	26,826	24,485	23,314	24,412	25,516

SOURCE: data processed from INS statistics for the 2010-2015 period

According to the country of origin, the structure of the sample is presented in table 2.

TABLE 2. Sample structure according to the country of origin

Country	Number of respondents
<i>Italy</i>	220
<i>Germany</i>	157
<i>Israel</i>	109
<i>USA</i>	97
<i>United Kingdom</i>	70
<i>France</i>	120
<i>Greece</i>	79
<i>Spain</i>	145
<i>Austria</i>	57
<i>Netherlands</i>	30

The questionnaire containing 22 questions was semi-structured (20 closed questions and 2 open questions) and divided into *three sections*:

1. *The first section* was a filter aimed at verifying whether the respondent was part of the sample. The six questions in this section helped collect identification data for respondents (nationality, age, education, income), as well as information on whether the respondent visited Bucharest or not:

- 63.8% of the respondents were *male* and 36.2% *female*;
- *the average age* of respondents was 27.3 years of age, which indicates that Bucharest is especially visited by young people, highlighting once again that the city is very attractive for its active night life; and
- 24.5% of the respondents went to college, 32.8% hold a bachelaurate degree, while 37.1% have a bachelor degree. These figures indicate that tourists visiting Bucharest

have a high education level and are therefore able to analyse whether Bucharest's tourism offer reaches certain standards met in other European capital cities.

2. *The second section revealed the purpose and length of tourists' stay* in Bucharest. 62.3% of respondents indicated leisure, while the remaining 37.7% indicated business.

3. The largest and also most important section of the questionnaire was the third one, aimed at testing the research hypotheses through 16 questions:

- *The first hypothesis* was tested using questions related to knowledge on the ways of promoting Bucharest abroad and at national level.
- *The second hypothesis* was verified through questions on tourists' impression related to the diversity and accessibility of Bucharest's tourist services and objectives, as well as their quality/price ratio. One particular question was aimed at comparing tourist services in Bucharest with those in the country of origin.
- Questions that envisaged the *third hypothesis* were aimed at gathering information on tourists' impression of Bucharest, their willingness to come back/recommended the city to other people, the extent to which Bucharest can be compared to other Southeastern Europe capital cities etc.

In order to process the information gathered we used *SPSS software (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences)*.

4. Results and Discussion

IN THIS study we chose to analyse the most relevant questions, which helped us test the hypotheses.

1. Hypothesis 1: The low level of information of foreign tourists is determined by the weak promotion of the Capital abroad, as well as internally.

69.2% of the foreign tourists claimed that they found most information on Bucharest on the Internet (using search engines, social networks or forums). 9.6% of the respondents got the information from friends/colleagues/acquaintances (most of whom had visited Bucharest in the last years). The rest of the necessary information was provided by newspapers/specialized magazines, tourism guides, brochures or tourism fairs (21.2%). It is interesting to notice that none of the respondents saw any Bucharest spot. Also, although foreign tourists used the internet to find out information on Bucharest, over 93% of them had not heard of Bucharest's official tourist website¹³.

Respondents mainly indicated four sources of information in Bucharest: information provided by the hotel reception (58.3%), information provided during the tour by Bucharest City Tour buses (24%), information got from the Bucharest Municipality Tourist Information Centre (5.7%) and information provided directly by Bucharest residents (12%). Thus, most foreign tourists interacted with Bucharest inhabitants using a foreign language. 87.5% said they managed to communicate very well with local people in foreign languages: English (approximately 89%), Spanish (approximately 4%), French (approximately 3%), German (approximately 2%) and Italian (approximately

1%). The other tourists used non-verbal communication (8.5%), or did not manage to communicate at all and handled the situation as best they could (4%).

After processing the answers to these questions it became obvious that Romania's most important cultural, financial and political center *does not benefit from a proper promotion for a European capital city, as only a few number of communication channels are being used, which do not offer tourists the possibility to inform themselves properly*. Therefore, we can conclude that *hypothesis 1 is verified*.

2. Hypothesis 2: Foreign tourists' perception of tourist services depends on their diversity and accessibility, as well as their quality/price ratio.

According to respondents, the most prominent *features of tourist services* in Bucharest are: accessible (23.7%), under potential (21.5%), not properly promoted (21%), diversified (15.4%) and little diversified (18.4%).

However, when analysed separately, accommodation, food and entertainment services received mainly positive feedback. Thus:

- as related to satisfaction with *accommodation services* in Bucharest, more than 70% of tourists provided positive feedback. More precisely, 14.6% of them are very satisfied with accommodation services, while 56.2% are satisfied. Nonetheless, 20.2% of respondents are not very satisfied and 9% are completely not satisfied; and

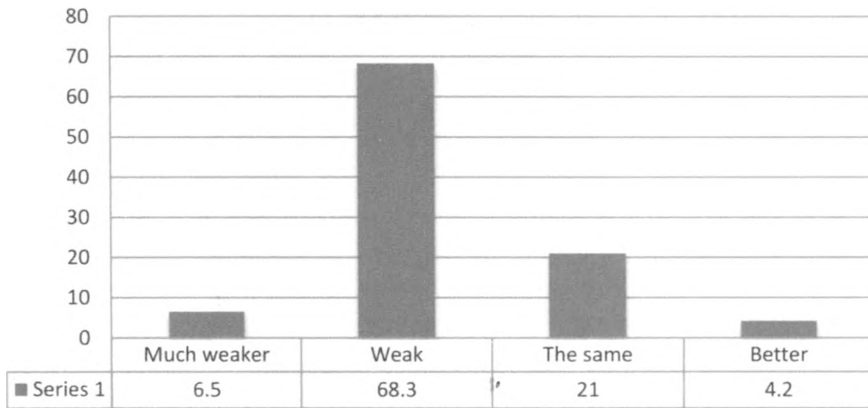
- 24.6% of respondents declared themselves very pleased with the services provided by various establishments they frequented (*restaurants, breweries, tea houses, pubs* etc.), while 54.7% of respondents said they are pleased. There are however tourists that were not satisfied with the services they received (14.2% unsatisfied, 6.5% very unsatisfied). The fact that a considerable percentage of the respondents is satisfied to a great extent by the services offered by restaurants, breweries, teahouses or pubs, demonstrates that locations in Bucharest are to a great extent client-oriented.

- an overwhelming percentage of respondents were pleased (29.4%) and very pleased (57.8%) with the entertainment services in Bucharest (concerts, festivals, clubs etc). Only 12.8% of respondents were not satisfied and none of the respondents were not satisfied at all.

One of the problems Bucharest faces is *public transportation*. An overwhelming percentage of tourists were not at all satisfied because information about public transport is limited and is very rarely translated into foreign languages. Only 14.1% said it was easy to visit Bucharest using public transport, while the rest of 85.9% said this kind of information is very difficult to find and even more difficult to understand. Thus, 58.5% consider information is scarce and not easy to understand and 27.4% are completely unsatisfied with this information, which did not help them at all.

As concerns the assessment of Bucharest tourist services by comparison with those offered by foreign tourists' capital cities, 68.3% of the respondents consider tourist services in Bucharest not as good as those offered by their country of origin (see figure 5). 21% of the respondents consider tourist services in Bucharest as good as those offered by their country of origin and 4.2% of respondents say they are better than in their coun-

FIGURE 5. Evaluation of tourist services in Bucharest, by comparison with those offered by the capital cities of the countries of origin



try. Only 6.5% consider tourist services in Bucharest of a poorer quality than those in the capital cities of their country of origin.

27% of respondents consider the quality/price ratio for tourist services in Bucharest is fair. More than half of the tourists (58%) consider tourist services of poor quality and at high prices, while 21% consider tourist services of high quality and at a low price.

The results obtained let us conclude that *hypothesis 2 is partially verified*, meaning that tourist attractions are considered to be accessible, but they are not considered to be diversified and do not have a proper price/quality ratio.

3. Hypothesis 3: Foreign tourists' opinion on Romania's capital city is a positive one.

According to figure 6, most foreign tourists that were part of our study (72.4%) have a good opinion about Bucharest and would recommend it to other persons. 17.8% of the respondents said Bucharest is a city they would always come back to, while 54.6% said Bucharest is a city that must be visited at least once in a lifetime. However some regret their choice: 14.5% of the respondents would never come back to Bucharest and 13.1% do not recommend visiting this city at all.

When asked to characterize Bucharest using a single, relevant word, respondents answered: "interesting city", "friendly, fresh, young", "energetic", "hospitable", "explosive nightlife", "interesting mix between old and new", "dynamic", "low prices", "very crowded city", "noisy", "with old ramshackle buildings", "with lots of Gypsies", "dirty", "robbers", "lots of stray dogs", "with lots of homeless people", "stressful", "infernal traffic" etc.

FIGURE 6. Intention to come back and recommend the destination to other persons

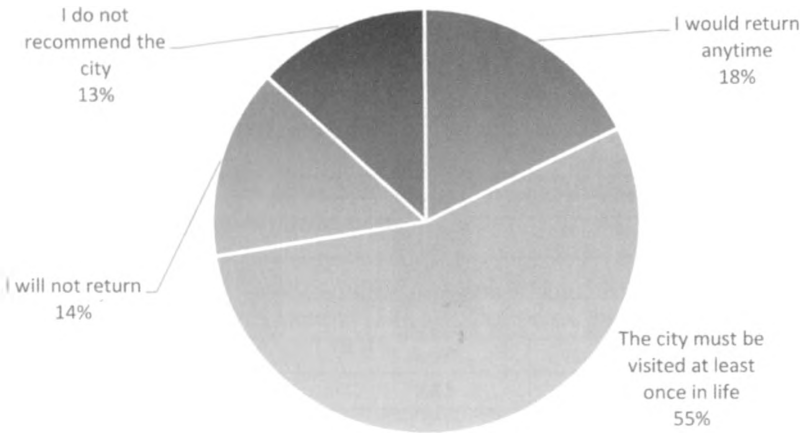
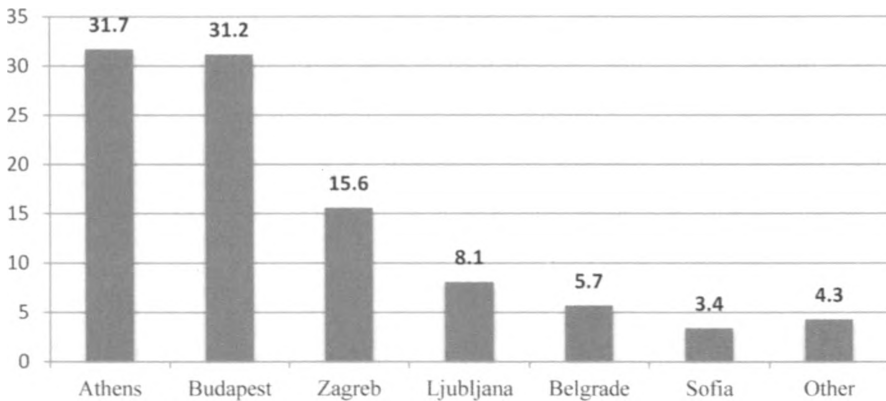


FIGURE 7. Other Southeast Europe capitals visited by respondents



All 1,084 respondents had also visited other Southeast Europe capital cities, among which the most attractive were considered: Athens (31.7%), Budapest (31.2%) and Zagreb (15.6%) (see figure 7). Ljubljana (8.1%), Belgrade (5.7%), Sofia (3.4%), Chişinău, Sarajevo or Tirana (4.3%) were considered less known and less attractive (by comparison to Bucharest).

Questionnaire results related to Romania’s capital city attractiveness as compared to other Southeast Europe capital cities are very eloquent. Thus, 66.8% of respondents said that in this specific part of Europe there are far more attractive cities than Bucharest (for example, Budapest or Athens), while 24.1% of those questioned declared Bucharest is on the same position with many Southeast European capitals from the tourism view-

point (Zagreb, Belgrad, Ljubljana). There were of course tourists that were pleasantly surprised by the city (9% of them claimed other capital cities are less or far less attractive by comparison to Bucharest). These figures clearly indicate that there is long way ahead for Bucharest to become a reference point in the Southeast Europe area. Thus, we can conclude that *hypothesis 3 is verified*, because most *foreign tourists appreciate Bucharest as a tourist destination in Southeast Europe*.

5. Research conclusions

THE AIM of the study was to reveal the *perception of foreign tourists of Bucharest's image, as Romania's main urban tourist destination and potential top destination in Southeast Europe*. Results indicate that foreigners perceive Romania's capital as a "promising city", but far behind other Southeast Europe capitals (especially Athens and Budapest).

Related to the specific objectives of the study, results clarify to a certain extent the way foreign tourists perceive the city and its services:

a). *Information for tourists/promotion of the capital city*: Bucharest does not benefit from an appropriate promotion for a capital city, as very few information channels are being used, which do not allow tourists to inform themselves properly. Thus, 69.2% of the respondents informed themselves on the internet. Despite this fact, 93% of them did not know about Bucharest's official tourist website. It is also worth highlighting that none of the respondents watched any publicity ad about Bucharest. Respondents indicated four main sources of information about Bucharest: information from the hotel reception, information provided during the tour by Bucharest City Tour buses, information provided by the Bucharest tourist information center and information directly provided by local people.

b). Regarding the *tourist and cultural attractions*, Bucharest appears to be a "promising destination", as most respondents said they were pleasantly surprised by what the city had to offer.

c). Regarding the *tourist services offered*: the most common features for tourist services in Bucharest are: accessible (23.7%), under potential (21.5%), diversified (15.4%) and little diversified (18.4%). Nonetheless, when analysed individually, accommodation, food and entertainment services received positive appreciations. According to respondents, one of the main challenges for Bucharest as a tourist destination is public transport. Thus, the vast majority of the study participants showed their dissatisfaction in relation to the access to information in foreign languages on urban public transport. 68.3% of tourists consider that Bucharest offers lower quality services than in their country of origin and 21% consider it offers the same quality. The quality/price ratio for Bucharest tourist services is considered to be an adequate one by 27% of respondents, while 58% indicate poor quality services at high prices.

d). Regarding the *place Bucharest holds among the Southeastern capital cities*: 66.8% of the respondents said that in this area of Europe there are far more attractive cities than Bucharest (for example, Budapest or Athens), while 24.1% of the respondents consid-

ered Bucharest as attractive as many Southeast European capitals (Zagreb, Belgrade, Ljubljana). Figures clearly indicate that *considerably much more effort is needed in order for Bucharest to become a landmark in Southeastern Europe*.

In conclusion it seems that as compared to the past years, Romania's capital city grew a lot from the point of view of tourism. Many tourists appreciate the quality of the services, the cultural attractions, as well as the hospitality of the local people. However, there are still various issues that must be solved, starting with infrastructure, tourism promotion, the capacity to correctly and efficiently inform tourists about the most important tourist attractions in the city and finishing with urban design and cleaning the city.



Notes

1. Bucharest generates over 22% of Romania's GDP.
2. Before 2011 several projects were developed (the cultural tourism project "*Bucharest in one day*", aimed at promoting the cultural and tourist heritage of the Capital, the program "*Touristic Bucharest*" launched by Bucharest Municipality, intended to improve Bucharest tourism image, the project "*Bucharest City Tour*" due to which several tourist routes have been created etc.), but their number and financing were too low to generate an international echo.
3. According to studies carried out in 2010, Bucharest was not included in the DK tourism guide (addressed to rich tourists), the Michelin Guide (for restaurants around the world), and Lonely Planet mentioned minimum information.
4. Romania's National History Museum and Romania's National Art Museum.
5. For example, the European League final in Bucharest, held on 9 May 2012, brought more than 40.000 foreign tourists, who spent over 30 million euros on hotels, restaurants, bars, travel agencies, museums, taxis. Thus, during their short stay, tourists (especially Spanish) spent on average 750 euros/person.
6. City branding means finding an unparalleled position for the city in question which arises from the elements that make it unique, recognizable and distinguishable as compared to other municipalities (Kádár, 2014).
7. For example, in 2010, tourism brought Bucharest approximately 140 million euros.
8. According to this study, the world's most visited cities in 2015 were London (18.82 million foreign visitors who spent 20.2 billion dollars), followed by Bangkok (18.24 million tourists that spent 12.4 billion dollars), Paris (16.06 million tourists who spent 16.6 billion dollars), Dubai (14.26 million and spendings of approximately 11.7 billion dollars) and Istanbul (12.56 million and spendings of approximately 9.4 billion dollars).
9. The first cities in this top were Istanbul (10.1% increase), Hamburg (8.6% increase), Copenhagen (8.3%), Lisbon (8.3%) and Berlin (7.9%).
10. Tourist services (according to art. 2, pct. 1 of Government Ordinance no. 107/1999, republished) include any of the following three groups of services, on the condition that their uninterrupted duration exceeds 24 hours or includes at least one accommodation night: (1) transport; (2) accommodation and (3) other services, that are not related to transport and accommodation and that represent a significant part of the tourist services, such as: food, entertainment and other such type of services.

11. WAYN is present in 193 countries and its membership has grown from 45,000 users in March 2005 to over 22.7 million members today” (Wayn, 2015).
12. Continental Hotels holds 3 hotels in Bucharest [Grand Hotel Continental (5 stars), Ibis (3 stars) and Hello Hotels (2 stars)] and offers facilities for both business and leisure tourists: accomodation, conferences and events, food and beverage.
13. www.seebucharest.ro

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Abstract

Study Regarding Foreign Tourists' Perception On Romania's Capital City as Major Tourist Destination In Southeastern Europe

Bucharest offers multiple opportunities for tourism development. In recent years considerable tourism infrastructure was created, together with numerous business opportunities, which led in the last decade to an important increase in tourism demand, mainly due to business tourism. However, the lack of an unitary development strategy and active partnerships between stakeholders have led to an inefficient promotion of the city, inexistence on external markets, a lack of appropriate facilities for tourists, inefficient capitalization of cultural objectives and insufficient actions for cultural monuments protection and conservation.

The main objective of this research is to identify foreign tourists' perception of Bucharest, seen as Romania's main urban tourism attraction and possible top destination in Southeastern Europe. Secondary research objectives focused on: (1) the way foreign tourists inform themselves before their arrival in Bucharest, but also during their stay; (2) the foreign tourists' opinion on tourism and cultural attractions in Bucharest; (3) level of satisfaction regarding tourism services; (4) whether Bucharest manages to catch up with other Southeastern Europe capital cities. The analysis and interpretation of the questionnaire revealed that foreigners perceive Bucharest as a "promising" city, but quite far from other Southeastern Europe capital cities (such as Athens and Budapest).

Keywords

urban tourism, foreign tourists, Romania's capital city, promotion, tourism and cultural attractions, tourism services.