

# THE FORTIFIED CHURCHES FROM TRANSYLVANIA – HOW WELL ARE THEY KNOWN BY THE ROMANIAN CITIZENS?

Șerb Silvana Valentina

*Babeș-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca, Faculty of Economics and Business Administration*

*The Fortified Churches from Transylvania represent an important category of historical and religious sights of the anthropic touristic potential - historic cultural potential of this region. However, they are not exploited from a touristic point of view at their fair value, one reason being the weak promoting activity, especially the lack of information among citizens about the existence of these churches. In this paper, I intend to highlight on the information level awareness among the Romanian citizens regarding the existence of these churches, to identify which are the most well known and visited churches and to establish the profile of those who visit the churches.*

*In the end, the results of this research impose a set of measures to improve the level of information among the Romanian citizens concerning the existence of this historic and religious heritage.*

*The paper is relevant for the doctoral research project called “Marketing Places – religious and historical sights of touristic interest from Transylvania” under the guidance of Professor Doctor Marius Pop, Babeș-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca, Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, during 1st of October 2009 – 1st of October 2012.*

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## 1. Introduction

Although Transylvania region has inherited a rich cultural and historical heritage, this legacy is not used to its fair value and a major part of residents and tourists are not aware of this potential. Through this paper I propose to demonstrate awareness regarding the existence of these objectives among Romanian citizens from different regions of the country.

Referring to previous studies in this area, although many papers were written in both national literature, but mainly in specialized international literature especially in German language, most of them treat the subject from historical, architectural or functional point of view and almost never in terms of tourism potential.

Further, in this paper a brief presentation of the fortified churches will be made, we will analyze the methodology and the research findings; develop proposals for improving awareness of the existence of these churches and present limitations and future researches.

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## 2. The Fortified Churches from Transylvania

Even though the Fortified Churches were built as defense systems with walls reaching 2m in thickness, sentinel passages, towers and surrounding trenches, most of them have significant religious value as well as demonstrating their builders’ skills in architecture, astronomy and the science of war (Mureșan 1998 : 33). These churches were built during the Middle Ages by the Saxons for protection and defense against Ottoman and Tatar invaders (Klimaszewski *et al.* 2010

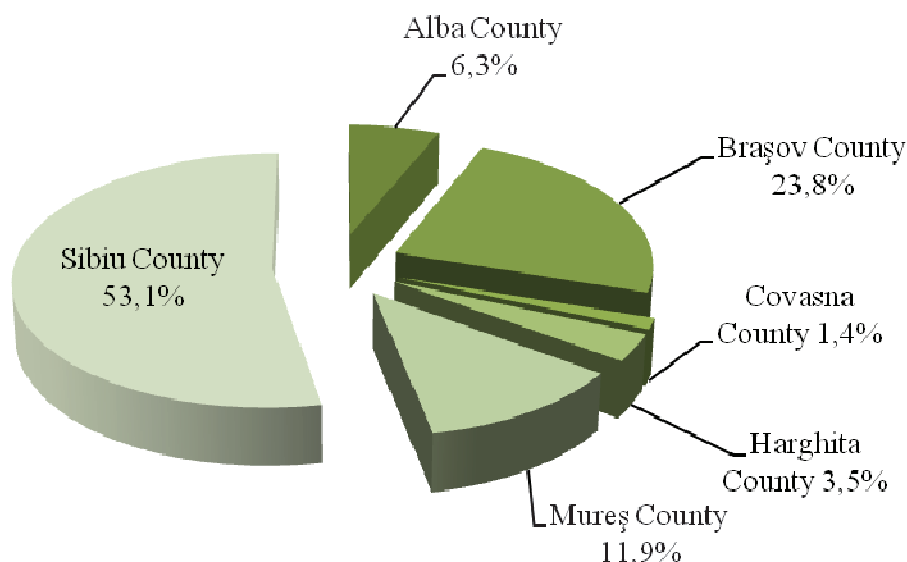
: 98), central-southern Transylvania being the place where it is found a high density of this kind of objectives (Dezsi 2006 : 172).

Around 1600 there were about 300 such buildings, half of them being kept so far. Although this type of construction is found also in other parts of Europe (Germany, Austria, France and Nordic countries), Transylvania is one of the few regions where there are three types of fortifications:

- church with fortified walls - the church does not contain defensive elements, but it is surrounded by walls;
- fortified church - being the result of the application directly on the church body of the defensive construction, including one or more parts of the building;
- fortress church - is the case where the fortified walls are provided with fortified storerooms for supplies and fortified with towers, bastions and fortified warehouses, often being surrounded by a water channel, and the church itself is designed for defense.

Fortress churches or “churches citadel” are related to citadels, but they differ because they were not permanently inhabited, but only in case of war and siege. Supplied with food and grains, on site or even inside the church was almost always a well, so the peasants could survive long enough in these small fortresses. Transylvanian constructions are the most powerful and comprehensive, the Prejmer church (Braşov county) with three walls that contain 260 storerooms of supplies, being the largest European fortress-church (Fabritius-Dancu 1980 : 2).

As I already mentioned, on Transylvania region were preserved more than 100 fortified churches. In Figure 1, I tried to highlight the counties where these almost 150 buildings are located.



**Figure 1. Distribution of Fortified Churches in Transylvanian counties**  
(Source: realized by author)

From these churches, a number of seven are listed on the UNESCO World Heritage List, namely: Biertan / Birthälm (Sibiu county), Câlnic / Kelling (Alba county), Dârjiu / Dersch (Harghita county), Prejmer / Tartlau (Braşov county), Saschiz / Keisd (Mureş county), Valea Viilor / Wurmloch (Sibiu county), Viscri / Deutschweisskirch (Braşov county), the best known of them being Biertan Fortified Church.

Even if I noticed that many authors include the cities of Braşov, Mediaş, Sibiu and Sighişoara in the category of fortified churches, I will consider them medieval cities and I will not consider them subjects of this paper.

### 3. Research methodology and results

#### 3.1. Questionnaire and data collection

This paper was drawn up using the survey method and the questionnaire was used as a research tool. The data have been collected both through personal interviews and Internet. In the first situation, tourists and excursionists have been questioned but also residents of cities where interviews were held, all the respondents were chosen randomly. In the second case, the questionnaire was distributed via the Internet by e-mail addresses of known Romanian citizens, also chosen randomly, with the mention to send the questionnaire on their known e-mail addresses thus forming a network, finally all completed questionnaires being returned to the original e-mail address. At the end, 113 questionnaires were completed (70 interviews and 43 online). The questionnaires are realized only in Romanian language and contain two categories of questions: the first category tries to determine the awareness of respondents regarding the existence of these churches, information sources, visitors number, reason for the visit and satisfaction following the visit, while the second category tries to determine the demographic characteristics of the respondents: nationality, region of origin, age, gender, income, education and religion. Regarding the type of questions used during the research, the second category contains exclusively closed questions, while the first category has on its compenence both closed and open questions in order to not influence the respondent in one direction but to leave him the opportunity and freedom to list all churches that he/she heard about or visited.

#### 3.2. Data interpretation and results

After processing all 113 questionnaires the following results were obtained:

From all approximately 150 existing Fortified Churches in Transylvania, 55 names were mentioned by 68,5% of respondents, 31,5% being unaware of any fortified church name. Figure 2 shows the most popular 21 names mentioned by the respondents, receiving a percentage of more than 1%, other 34 churches listed gaining just under 1%. It can be observed that the most well known is Biertan Church, achieving 21,9% followed by Cisnădie Church with 8,2% and Cisnădioara Church with 6,4%.

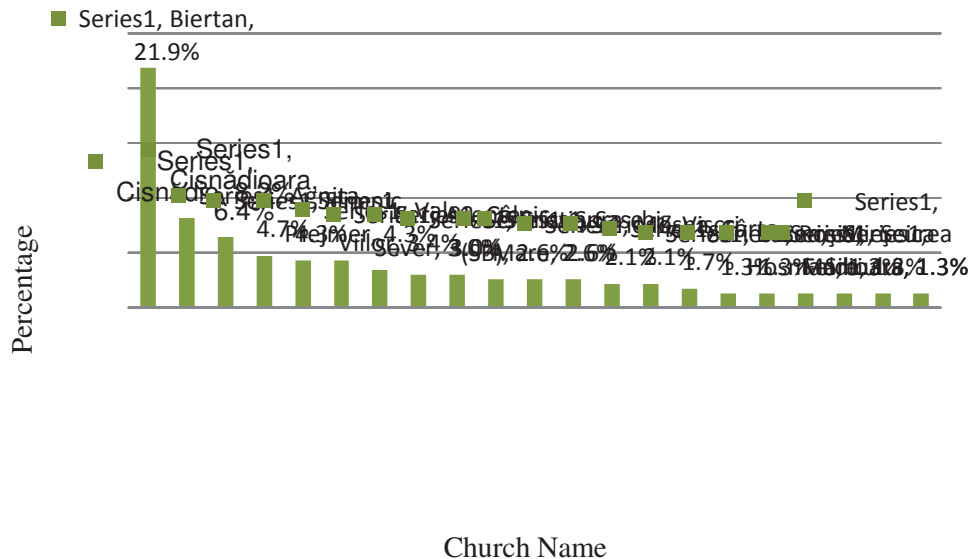
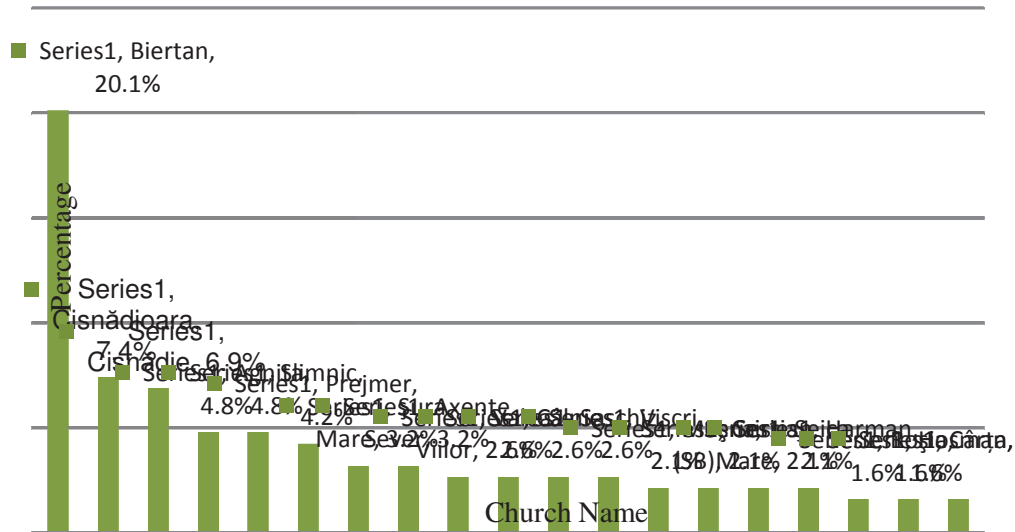


Figure 2. The most popular churches among the respondents

(Source: realized by author)

Regarding the visiting degree of these churches, only a percentage of 64,6% of the respondents had visited at least one of these churches. Figure 3 shows which the most visited churches are. Even if there were mentioned a number of 51 churches, only 19 of them recorded a visiting level exceeding 1,5% among respondents, the rest being below this percent. On the first three places among the most visited fortified churches are: Biertan Church (20,1%), Cisnădioara Church (7,4%) and Cisnădie Church (6,9%).



**Figure 3: The most visited churches among the respondents**

(Source: realized by author)

Regarding the reason for the visit, 44,8% of respondents replied that they made the visit for leisure, 19,2% due to a festival kept inside the location, 15,2% for cultural reasons, 7,2% were in school visits, 6, 4% for religious reasons, 4,8% were in organized trips, 1,6% for scientific reasons and only 0,8% were gastronomic visits. As informational sources the friends record the highest percentage (51%), being followed by the touristic brochures (9,8%), travel agencies (2,9%), web pages of the sites (7,8%), as well as other informational sources such as family, school, history books, radio, tourist information points or occasional visits in percentage of 28,4%.

Among those who visited the fortified churches, only 12,2% chose to spend a night or more in the site, the rest of the respondents just doing a few hours or one day trip. But no matter the reason or visit duration, the high degree of satisfaction of respondents after their visit was noticed. Thus, 97,2% confessed that they intend to revisit or visit other fortified churches in the future and all respondents would also recommend these objectives to other persons.

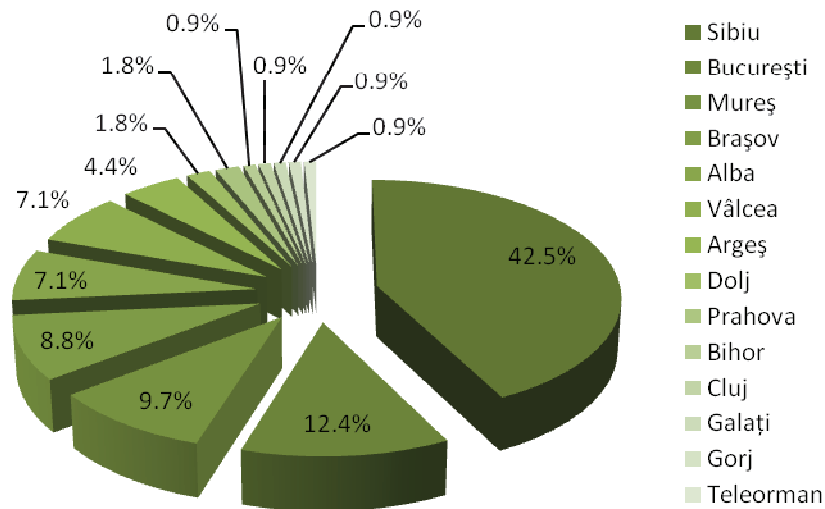
Table 1 shows the visitor's profile. In addition to the features described in this table, it must be noted that 97,3% of the respondents are of Romanian nationality, the difference (2,7%) being of Hungarian nationality.

**Table 1. Visitor's profile**

Gender	%	Age	%	Income	%	Educational level	%	Religion	%
Man	44,2	< 18	0,9	< 250 euro	14,6	Primary studies	0,9	Orthodox	94,7
Woman	54,8	18-25	10,7	250-500	32	High school studies	16,8	Greek catholic	2,6
		25-45	70,5	500-1000	38,8	University studies	58,4	Roman catholic	0
		45-65	16,1	1000 <	14,6	Post university studies	23,9	Protestant	0
		65 <	1,8					Other	2,6

(Source: realized by author)

Regarding the respondent's county of origin, the highest percentage was recorded by the Sibiu county (42,5%), followed by Bucharest (12,4%), Mureș (9,7%), Brașov (8,8%), Alba and Vâlcea with 7,1% each, Argeș (4,4%), Dolj and Prahova with 1,8% and Bihor, Cluj, Galați, Gorj and Teleorman with 0,9% each. Figure 4 highlights the origin of the respondents.



**Figure 4. Respondents counties of origin**

(Source: realized by author)

#### 4. Proposals for improving the information grade

Based on the information sources listed by the respondents who have visited at least one of these fortified churches, we can say that one of the main sources of information used, except the friends' recommendation, is the promotion of these sites in the media. Thus, a first recommendation would be to improve media communication nationwide (television, radio, newspapers and Internet) by TV broadcasting and issue articles that could tell the "story" of the place, highlight its history, architecture, construction and its role in order to raise the interest of the audience regarding the existence of the place and awake the desire to visit it.

Considering the reasons for which the respondents visited these places, we can develop the following proposals:

- more festivals should be organized on those locations. During this research it was noted that 19,2% of people who have visited at least one fortified church, made the visit due to a festival which was held inside or near the location. In this category, we can mention the International Theater Festival in Sibiu, which has representations inside the Cîsnădioara Church also and “Transylvania Fest” which has brought about 3,000 visitors in Biertan in 2010.
- promoting the fortified churches more as historical and cultural sights rather than religious objectives. This proposal comes from the finding that 15,2% of respondents had visited at least one church for cultural reasons and only 6,4% for religious reasons. Also, during the interviews we received rejections from some feasible respondents, arguing that they are Orthodox and they are not interested in visiting the churches belonging to other religions.
- introducing special courses in primary school and high school as well as school trips who’s aim is to basically inform about the existence of these historical and religious objectives.
- organized trips proposals from local and national travel agencies which contains routes that include these fortified churches.

Starting from the assumption that these fortified churches are a true national treasure, I believe that for their promotion and capitalization should exist a close cooperation between public institutions and private touristic sector.

## 5. Limitations, conclusions and future research

The main limitation of this research is the fact that it was not cover the entire country and the number of respondents was not balanced for each county. Another limitation is the online survey. Although it has been distributed more than 300 questionnaires all over the country, only 43 were completed, the reasons of not filling them might be: the lack of time, indifference to the subject, not access the e-mail account for a time period or others. Also, on-line questionnaires were conditioned by access to a PC or Internet. It was noted however, that 84% from all respondents are aged between 25 and 45 years old while 16% between 45 and 65 years old, and regarding the studies, 92% have university and post university studies and only 8% had graduated high school. In regard of “face to face” survey, this was limited by the access of interviews operators in different parts of the country in a given time. Thus, as observed during the paper, the majority of the respondents are coming from Sibiu county, and this has a direct link with the related result, namely that the most visited fortified churches are also found in this county.

Since only 55 name of fortified churches were known by only 68,5% of respondents, the difference of 31,5% knowing any names from this category and only 64,6% have visited at least one of these churches, can concluded that these religious and historical sights of touristic interest are promoted, but not enough. The same conclusion is reached also from the fact that the main source of information is the recommendation of friends and family and the questionnaires show that, as the respondent comes from a much distant county of southern Transylvania, is much less informed about the existence of these churches.

Regarding the future research, I propose to extend this study in order to include all the Romanian counties, the questionnaires being completed by an equal number of respondents in each county, and in this way it will be obtained results much closer to reality.

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