

WHAT MOTIVATES CULTURAL TOURISTS? AN ANALYSIS OF BUCHAREST INHABITANTS' MOTIVATION TO VISIT THE CENTRE REGION

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Abstract: *Cultural tourism is currently one of the main driving forces of the tourist phenomena, accounting for a significant part of the world's tourist flows. Cultural tourism may take many forms, according to the motivation behind tourists' impetus to travel to a certain destination. Cultural heritage and historical sites, dance, music and theatre performances, art galleries, museums and exhibitions, religious and worship sites and ethnic traditions are the main attractions for tourists motivated by knowledge seeking, self-development and the desire to experience other cultures. Although cultural motivations play an important role in the generation of tourist flows towards cultural tourism destinations, a tourism experience is rarely generated as a result of a single motivation. The act of choosing a specific destination and tourism product is influenced by multiple motivations, not only cultural but also connected to relaxation or family. Furthermore, tourism products are rarely homogeneous – a single holiday may include experiences with cultural content as well as leisure time, sports, adventure or entertainment. Thus, culture is not always the main motivation behind cultural tourism and may in fact be less central to the decision to travel than other factors. This is particularly true in the case of destinations which dispose of various cultural assets, but whose natural tourist resources – such as landscape, climate, access to the sea – also makes them attractive for other types of tourism. The aim of this article is to show that in the case of tourist destinations where cultural attractions represent the vast majority of the areas' tourist heritage, cultural motivations remains central to the decision to travel. Furthermore, we will seek to identify the main types of cultural attractions that motivate cultural tourism in Romania by investigating Bucharest inhabitants' perception of the Centre Region, a cultural destination par excellence in light of the latest statistics and developments. The article is based on the findings of an exploratory survey-based research carried out in the first three months of 2013 on more than two hundred tourists and potential tourists in Bucharest.*

Keywords: cultural tourism; tourist motivation; Centre Region; cultural attractions; cultural destination

JEL classification: L83, M31, Z10

Introduction

Among the forms of the „new tourism” defined by Auliana Poon (1994) is culture and heritage tourism, an industry which is both fast-growing as well as influential in what regards its capacity to change and improve life, knowledge and human relations.

Due to the fact that cultural tourism is often complementary to other forms of tourism, being practiced as a secondary activity, the nature and complexity of motivations influencing the travel decisions of cultural tourists still remains disputed among

scholars. Thus, apart from cultural motivations, the decision to travel to destinations disposing of cultural heritage assets also depends on factors associated with family, entertainment, relaxation and even business opportunities. However, cultural motivations – such as the desire to improve one’s knowledge, to discover and experience other cultures, to learn and develop – still remain important to cultural tourists.

1. Theoretical considerations on cultural tourism

Cultural tourism is currently „one of the most significant and fastest growing components of the tourist phenomena” (Alzua, O’Leary and Morrison, 1998). In fact, WTO estimates that cultural tourism currently accounts for almost 40 percent of all tourists trips worldwide (Isaac, 2008).

A study conducted at European level shows that 20 percent of tourists visiting Europe respond to cultural motivations, while 60 percent of travel flows in Europe include activities with cultural content (Nedea et al, 2011). In the former communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe in particular, cultural tourism has been regarded both as a new growth market as well as a means to produce, maintain and promote a favourable image of these countries (Hughes, Allen, 2005).

The terminology related to cultural tourism has been subject to confusion in the last decades (Hughes, 1996, Alzua, O’Leary and Morrison, 1998). According to Hughes (1996), cultural tourism includes „visits to historic buildings and sites, museums, art galleries and also to view contemporary paintings or sculpture or to attend the performing arts”.

The great variety of cultural attractions has lead to a classification of the many forms of this phenomenon. Thus, Hughes (1996) distinguishes between several forms of cultural tourism – **historical or heritage tourism**, which includes visits to historical sites, **arts tourism**, which refers to visits focused on museums, galleries and performing arts, and **ethnic tourism**, when the main motivation is to experience other cultures.

Regardless of the nature of the attractions which are subject to cultural tourism flows, culture and its forms of expression are generally considered the primary motivation behind cultural tourism. According to Lawrence (2008, cited by Ozel and Kozak, 2012), experiencing cultural assets is a major motivation in the decision to travel.

However, the centrality of culture as a motivation for travelling varies among consumers of tourism products (McKercher and du Cros, 2003). Opportunities for learning, cultural experiences and self-explorations are not always major motivations for cultural tourists (Hausman, 2007, cited by Ozel and Kozak, 2012).

Therefore, in an integrated tourism product, culture may be either a main motivation or a secondary activity, according to the structure of the destination’s heritage and the needs and interests of the tourist. Often, groups involved in cultural tourism also include people with little knowledge of the significance of the cultural asset that they visit (Hausman, 2007, cited by Ozel and Kozak, 2012).

In fact, a study conducted by Özel and Kozak (2012) shows that knowledge and experience – which are associated with cultural motivation – are rarely central for the decision to travel, being less important to tourists’ decision than rest, relaxation and experience. Still, the study has its limitations since it is conducted exclusively among Turkish tourists in the context in which Turkey is mostly regarded as a sun and sand destination, cultural motivations thus being secondary to leisure and relaxation. Thus, it would be possible for motivations to vary not only to the individual

profile of the tourists, but also according to the structure of a destination's heritage and particularly to the proportion of cultural attractions in the destination's overall heritage.

2. The Centre Region as a destination for cultural tourism

The Centre Region is situated in central Romania, covering the vast majority of the historical province known as Transylvania. The region comprises 6 counties: Braşov, Sibiu, Alba, Covasna, Harghita and Mureş, which, over the course of the past eight centuries, have been home for various ethnic groups and communities – Romanian, Germans and Hungarians.

The multicultural character of the region has been reflected in the variety and multitude of cultural sites and attractions, which make up a rich and extremely valuable heritage, both material as well as intangible. These cultural attractions may be grouped in several categories:

- Medieval urban citadels, which are nowadays an integral component of many urban centres, such as Braşov, Sibiu, Sighişoara, Alba Iulia;
- Peasant fortresses - such as Feldioara, Rupea, Râşnov, Saschiz – and fortified churches, such as Prejmer, Biertan, Viscri or Călnic;
- Castles from various time periods, such as the Bran castle, the Bethlen Haller castle in Cetatea de Baltă (Braşov county), the Apafi Manor in Mălâncrav, the Bethlen castle in Cris (Mureş county), the Kalnoki castle in Micloşoara or the Arcuş Castle in Covasna county;
- Museums and exhibitions, such as the Astra Museum or Rural Civilisation in Dumbrava Sibiului, the Bruckenthal museum in Sibiu (Sibiu county), the National Unity Museum in Alba Iulia (Alba county);
- Religious edifices, such as the Şumuleu Monastery near Miercurea Ciuc (Harghita county), St. Stephen's cathedral and the Coronation Cathedral in Alba Iulia (Alba county), the Black Church in Braşov, the Brâncoveanu monastery in Sâmbăta de Sus (Braşov county)
- Rural areas which have maintained a rich intangible heritage, such as traditional dances, music, clothing, food and handicrafts; the region comprises several such ethnographic areas: Mărginimea Sibiului, the Bran-Moeciu-Rucăr corridor, Țara Făgăraşului, the Târnava Mare area etc.

According to the National Institute of Statistics, since 2010, the Centre Region has been the development region with the highest number of tourist arrivals – 1.13 million in 2010 and 1.44 million in 2011 respectively (Figure 1). Furthermore, together with Bucharest-Ilfov, the Centre Region has been the only development region registering an increase of the number of tourist arrivals in 2010 and 2011, thus recovering from the severe decline in the 2008-2009 period. In fact, since 2010, the Centre Region registered a higher number of tourist arrivals than Bucharest-Ilfov – the main destination for business tourism – and the South-East region, the only region with access to the seaside and where sun and sand tourism is possible in Romania.

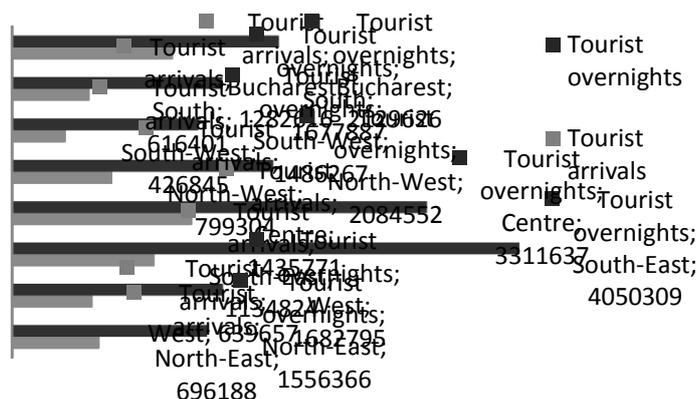


Figure 1: Number of tourist arrivals and overnights in Romania, per development regions

Source: *The National Institute of Statistics, 2013*

Despite of the fact that the Centre Region comes second – after the South-East region – in what regards the number of over-nights spent in accommodation facilities this is however natural since stays in regions which are fit for leisure and sea-side tourism are generally longer than in the case of cultural tourism or business tourism destinations.

Although data regarding the proportion of cultural attractions in the Region’s tourist heritage are not yet available, there are several studies discussing the proportion of cultural tourism in the overall tourist flows in the Centre Region. For example, a study conducted by Dulău and Coroş (2009) indicates that approximately 50 percent of foreign tourists visit the region for cultural purposes and that cultural sites in the area are highly appreciated by visitors. In fact, Dulău and Coroş (2009) determined that foreign visitors’ favourite activities while travelling in Transilvania are visits to churches and monasteries, and visits to historic and archaeological sites respectively.

Thus, we may state that cultural assets do play an essential role in tourists’ decision to travel to the Centre Region, the area being considered the most representative cultural tourism destination in Romania, together with Bukovina (Dulău and Coroş, 2009).

3. An analysis of Bucharest inhabitants’ motivation to travel in the Centre Region

The statistical indicators published by the National Institute of Statistics (2013) show that the Centre Region was in the 2010–2011 period the development region with the highest number of tourist arrivals in Romania and the second highest number of overnights spent in accommodation facilities, being exceeded only by the South-East Region. These statistics indicate that tourists in general are highly interested in the Centre Region, both those coming from within the borders of Romania as well as foreign tourists. Taking this into consideration, the present study sought to identify the motivations of Bucharest inhabitants to visit, but most importantly, to practice cultural tourism in the Centre Region.

