

The Image of the Tourism Destination – a Supporting Element in the Development of the Regional Tourism Brand Study Case: Muntenia*

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Abstract. *Nowadays, tourism destinations are increasingly determined to convey an unique and competitive identity within the consumer's mind. Despite the fact that a growing attention has been paid to the destination brand, in practice there is an inconsistency and sometimes an inexplicable lack of empirical academic studies, thus in some countries (without “a tradition in tourism”) there have been developed, shortly, artificial tourism brands without any substance and argumentation based on real images/perceptions of the tourists/prospects. This work aims to highlight the role that the tourism destination image plays in the development of the own brand and to identify the main tourism attractions and forms of tourism associated with each historical region of Romania.*

Keywords: tourism destination; tourism image; regional tourism brand; forms of tourism; destination marketing.

JEL Code: M31.

REL Codes: 14F, 14G.

* The other regions will be presented in the following issues.

Introduction

Considered to be one of the most important activity sectors at a global level, the tourism involves also other connected services such as transport systems, information and communication technologies, alternatives for recreation and relaxation (Dobrea, Ștefănescu, 2008, p. 40). In 2010, the travel and tourism industry generated 9.3% from the global GDP and assured around 236 million workplaces (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2011). For 2010, the same organization forecasted for Romania a direct contribution of this sector of 1.9% from GDP and the direct industry employment was estimated to be at 267.000 jobs.

All historical regions of contemporary Romania (Muntenia, Oltenia, Banat, Crișana, Transylvania, Bucovina, Maramureș, Moldavia and Dobrogea) are considered to be, in the same degree, micro-destinations with high tourism heritage, having numerous natural, artistic, cultural, historical and gastronomic attractions, fact that confers the tourists from worldwide unique, unforgettable experiences, that these may want to repeat.

1. Conceptual framework

The changes in the tourism sector, due mainly to the competition between the tourism products/destinations, as well to the more complex requirements and expectations of all categories of tourists, especially high-income tourists, constrain tourism destinations to become brands administrated exclusively from a strategic perspective.

The brand destination was defined by Ritchie & Ritchie (1998, p. 103) as “a name, symbol, logo, word mark or other graphic that both *identifies* and *differentiates* the destination; furthermore, it conveys the *promise* of a memorable travel *experience* that is uniquely associated with the destination; it serves to *consolidate* and *reinforce the emotional binding* between visitor and destination”.

The importance that destination brand gained during the time was anticipated one decade ago by Morgan & Pritchard (2001, p. 214), that stated: “the battle for customers in tomorrow’s tourism industry will not be for price, but for the customers’ hearts and minds – in essence, the branding (...) will be the key to succes”.

Brand identity and brand image are necessary ingredients for a successful destination brand (Qu et al., 2010, p. 2). While the identity is created by the sender (the destination marketer plays in this case a critical role) and it is supported by all or just a part of the tourism (natural and/or artificial) attractions, histories, people, with other words, elements that might later

become motivations of choice, the image is perceived by the receiver and it is supported by the previous experiences and communication strategies of the sender (adapted after Kapferer, 1997, p. 32). Between these two concepts, in most of the cases, there are some differences due to the fact that tourists within their selection process of the tourism destination take into account characteristics such as natural monuments, climate, infrastructure, art monuments, etc., and/or intangible characteristics such as freedom, security, relaxation, energy, etc. Thus, the determination of the target market is essential in destination marketing, since certain aspects of a destination may be positive for a segment and negative for another (Fan, 2006, p. 11).

A sensitive issue of the destination marketing is represented by the fact that the brand identity must remain constant, while the destination image can change over the time due to external/objective factors, or must be renewed after a certain period of time – due to internal/subjective factors (adapted after Mazurek, 2008, p. 31).

Henderson (2007, p. 262) defined the destination image as being “multidimensional, with cognitive and affective spheres (...) an amalgam of the knowledge, feelings, beliefs, opinions, ideas, expectations and impressions that people have about a named location”.

The relationship between brand identity and brand image is mutual (Figure 1). The brand image is a reflection of brand identity and plays an important role in its building. Based on the projected brand identity and through the communication strategies elaborated by the destination marketer, the tourist creates in his mind a destination image, image that is an important factor for the future option. The satisfaction or dissatisfaction that the tourist feels regarding a purchased tourism product depends mainly on the expectations that he had from the destination, on destination image previously held by him and how he perceived the performance at the destination (Pike, 2002, p. 543).

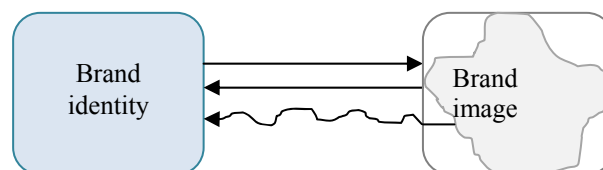


Figure 1. *The relationship between brand image and brand identity*

Keller (1993, p. 4) classifies the brand associations into three major categories: attributes, benefits and attitudes. According to the author, attributes are those descriptive features that characterize a brand. In other words, an

attribute is what a tourist thinks the brand is or has to offer and what is involved with its purchase or consumption (Qu et al., 2010, p. 3). The benefits that may arise are represented by the personal value that tourists associate with brand attributes in the form of functional, symbolic and experiential attachments – namely, what tourists think the brand can offer them. Brand attitudes are tourists' overall assessments of the brand and represent the underlying mechanism for the consumer behavior (e.g., brand choice).

Therefore, in order to build a destination brand, the marketer must take into account both cognitive and affective skills. Thus, he/she must establish the form/forms of tourism that prevail, and subsequently the appropriate tourism product or products, especially since the tourism destination is not a mere city, but a region (country).

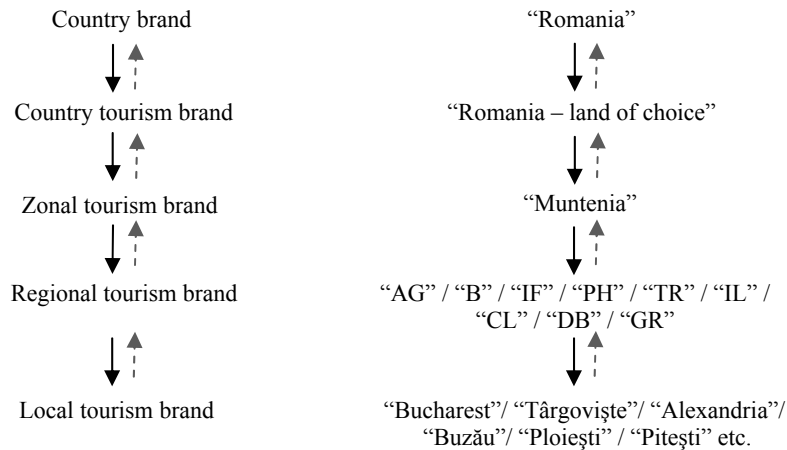
In the context of the current global economy, tourism destinations are in a permanent territorial competition. Since many destinations offer the same product (same territory, same infrastructure, same public education system), they must identify, valorize and promote their competitive (and/or unique) advantages that they held, in order to compete at global level for investments, tourism, political power, etc. (Messely et al., 2010, p. 20).

A region with an effective brand emphasizes elements such as: nature, landscapes, good weather, relaxing ambiance, accessibility, infrastructure (all form the artistic image), and also historical traces, art monuments, regional culture (customs and traditions, spectacles and events), tourism reception facilities (hotels, motels, restaurants, bars, etc.), regional gastronomy (all form the psychological image), stimulates the regional economy (through own products and services that are offered and consumed) and may contribute to the sustainable development of the whole region.

As the national identity „is not anything else than a summum (and, at the same time, a syntheses) of the regional identities (Moțoc, 2011, p. IV), the national brand too has to constitute itself as a summum and a syntheses of individual / local and regional brands, in order to support the development of a nation (or of a community) by pointing out, by converging themes, the common values, principles and beliefs“ (processed after Brad, 2011, p. V).

Stăncioiu et al. (2009, p. 287) highlight the great importance that “the family of brands” holds in order to create the identity of a region as a tourism destination. Due to the existence of a great variety of forms of tourism that can be practiced in our country, in the elaboration of the strategy for Romania's tourism brand, seen as tourism macro-destination, it is necessary to pass through the following successive stages (starting with the country brand): the country tourism brand, the constituent regional tourism brands, local community brand, individual tourism brands (Figure 2). The regional brands

(e.g., Muntenia brand) are influenced by the local brands, namely by the individual brands (Figure 3). The individual tourism brands must be starting points in the building process of the regional brands, which will constitute essential elements, absolutely necessary for the country tourism brand.



Source: adapted after Stăncioiu A.-F., Pârgaru, I. Mazilu, M. (2009): “Brandul destinației – câteva repere conceptual-metodologice în marketingul destinației”, *Proceedings of the The Second International Tourism Conference “Sustainable Mountain Tourism – Local Responses for Global Changes”*, Eșelnița, Drobeta-Turnu Severin, published by Universitaria Publishing House, Craiova, 2009, p. 288.

Figure 2. Family of tourism brands of Muntenia tourism brand

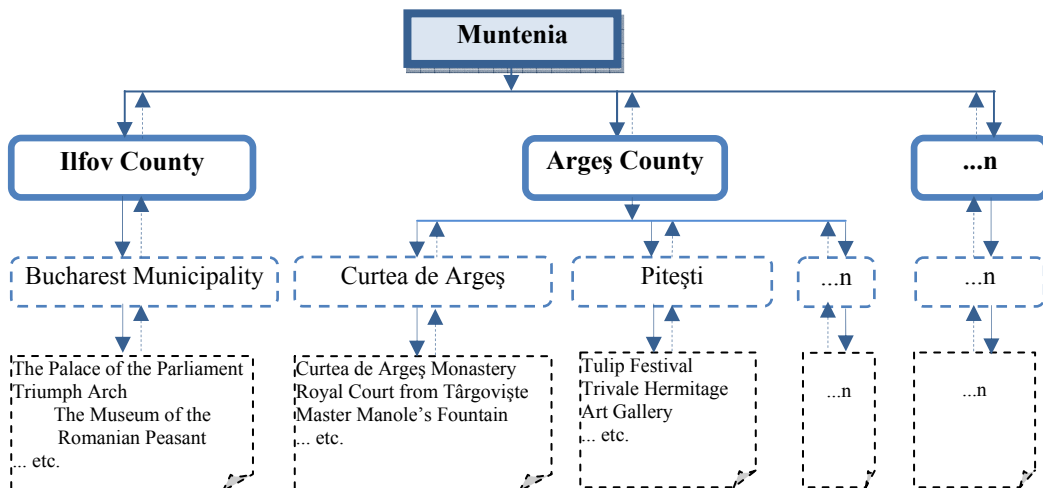


Figure 3. The regional tourism brand of the micro-destination Muntenia

To enhance the image of a tourism destination, starting from the peculiarity of the perceived image by the residents of various tourism regions, this study is necessary to be carried on with the perceived image of the foreigners (whether tourists or visitors, i.e. temporary users), of non-visitors (those that do not wish to visit the destination in the following period of time from emotional and rational reasons), then of return visitors (those that keep in mind particular images and later compare them to the existing image) and ending with the perceived images of the professionals who record, analyze and then create artistic or psychological images (adapted after Stăncioiu et al., 2009, p. 285).

The sum of the above mentioned perceptions builds the tourism destination image. The importance of an accurate analysis of the destination image arises from the fact that the following stages in the strategic planning of the destination, namely the audit (destination audit and marketing audit), the market segmentation and targeting, the SWOT analysis (of the destination and of every market segment), the determination of positioning objectives (for destination marketing and branding), and then, considering the tourism products provided by the main competitors (competitor analysis), the determination of the marketing objectives to attract each settled target market must all be performed in the same time as they are common to both the marketing planning of the tourism organization and the elaboration of the destination brand strategy.

2. Methodological framework

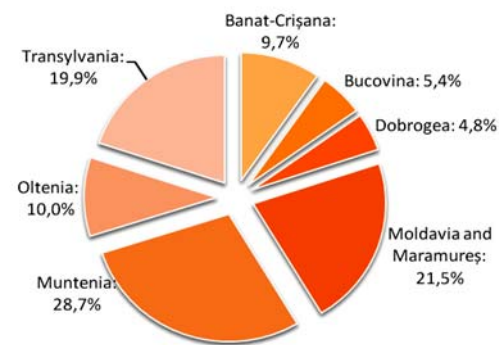
The aim of the research, assuming that the country brand includes the brand regions under its umbrella, was to identify to what extent perceptions of the residents from different regions of Romania regarding each region may help in the construction of its identity and image, and also in the elaboration of the destination marketing strategy. The knowledge of the respondents regarding the other tourism micro-destinations of Romania, their feelings and sensory experiences provide a great opportunity to have an overview of their perceived and/or experienced identity in the places that they have visited.

Thus, it was intended to identify the main forms of tourism for each region and the representative tourism attractions, that young people aged 20-24 years, actual and potential tourists, associate them with different micro-destinations of Romania (Muntenia, Oltenia, Banat, Crișana, Transylvania, Maramureș, Bucovina, Moldavia, Dobrogea). In October-December 2010 – January 2011, a statistical survey was conducted within more Romanian university centers (Bucharest, Brașov, Sibiu, etc.). In order to ensure the representativeness, four regions (Banat, Crișana, Moldavia and Maramureș) were merged into two, namely Banat-Crișana and Moldavia and Maramureș.

The main objectives of the research were:

- a) to identify the predominant form of tourism for each historical region of Romania, no matter of origin of the respondents;
- b) to identify the representative form of tourism for the selected destination taking into account the region of origin of the respondents;
- c) to highlight the tourism potential (natural and anthropic) of the historical region;
- d) to identify some representative tourism attractions that may contribute to the (artistic and psychological) image of the tourism micro-destination.

The sampling was represented by 1887 young people, aged between 20-24 years, persons with ongoing studies. In terms of age category and territorial distribution for Romania, according to the methodology established in the speciality literature, the sample is representative (Figures 4a and 4b).



Source: INSSE (2008/2009).

Figure 4a. The distribution of the population with age between 20-24 years old within the historical regions of Romania

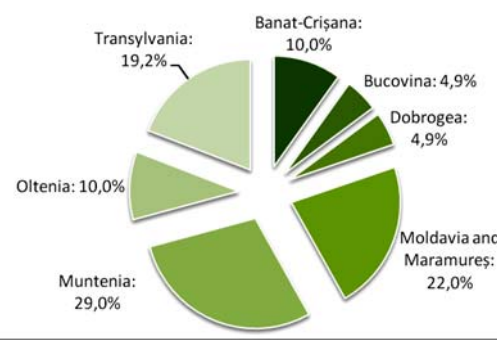


Figure 4b. The distribution of respondents by region of origin

The method used was the statistical survey and the instrument was the semistructured written questionnaire completed by the respondent.

In order to deal, as efficiently as possible, with the complex problem of the Romania's macro-destination image, the research will be presented in detail for each tourism micro-destination.

3. Case study: micro-destination Muntenia

Located in the southern part of the country, the tourism micro-destination Muntenia is geographically confined as follows: by the Carpathians to the North (bordering on Transylvania region), by Olt River to the West (bordering on Oltenia region), by the Danube River to the South and to the East (bordering

on Bulgaria and Dobrogea region) and by Milcov, Putna and Siret rivers to the North and East (bordering on Moldavia region) and incorporates three landforms (mountains, hills and plains). The area covers the counties and territorial units below: Argeș, Brăila, Călărași, Dâmbovița, Giurgiu, Ialomița, Ilfov, Prahova, Teleorman and the Bucharest Municipality. Among the major cities of this historical region are: Bucharest, Alexandria, Brăila, Buzău, Călărași, Giurgiu, Pitești, Ploiești, Slobozia and Târgoviște.

According to the classification of the forms of tourism proposed by the World Tourism Organization (WTO/UNO) in 1979, which starts from the reasons guiding the choice of tourism destination (business and professional tourism, medical spa tourism, cultural tourism, leisure tourism, visiting friends and relatives and other forms of tourism), respondents were able to select the main form of tourism prevailing in that region.

The following figures resulted: 40.3% of the respondents considered *the leisure tourism* as being specific for this region, 23.9% chose for such form of tourism *visiting friends and relatives*, 15.9% selected *the cultural tourism*, 11.0% chose *business and professional tourism*, 5.2% opted for *other forms of tourism*, while as little as 3.7% considered *medical spa tourism* to be representative (Figure 5).

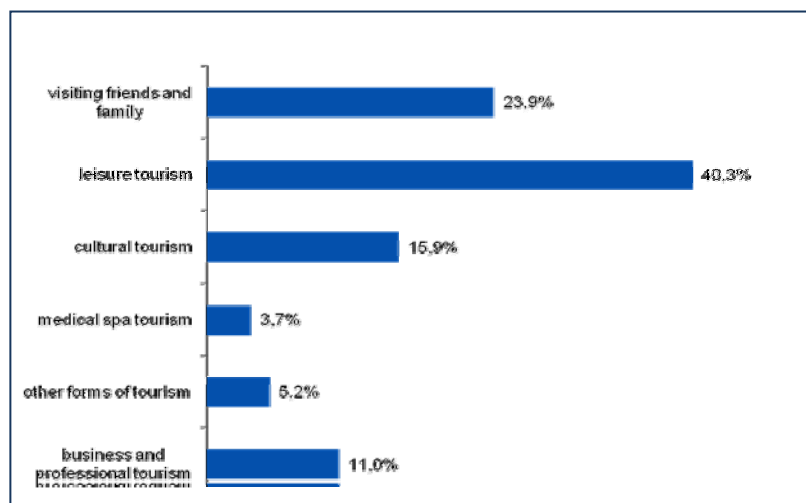


Figure 5. The distribution of the forms of tourism for the micro-destination Muntenia

Taking into consideration the regions of origin of the respondents, it may be noticed that *leisure tourism* is constantly top-ranked as the main form of tourism in this historical region, being often followed by cultural tourism and visiting friends and relatives (Figure 5). The last place belongs in general to the medical spa tourism. Given the regional structure above, things look as follows (Table 1):

- 1) Muntenia as region of origin:
 - 38.1% of the respondents considered as the representative form of tourism for their region of origin *the leisure tourism*;
 - 27.1% opted *visiting friends and relatives*;
 - 15.5% selected cultural tourism;
 - 11.7% chose business and professional tourism;
 - 3.9% of the respondents – other forms of tourism;
 - 3.7% opted for medical spa tourism.
- 2) Oltenia as region of origin:
 - 44.4% of the respondents considered as the representative form of tourism for Muntenia region *the leisure tourism*;
 - 15.3% opted for *cultural tourism*;
 - 13.9% chose business and professional tourism;
 - 12.5% selected other forms of tourism;
 - 11.1% of respondents – visiting friends and relatives;
 - 2.8% opted for medical spa tourism.
- 3) Banat-Crișana as region of origin:
 - 42.8% of the respondents considered as the representative form of tourism for Muntenia region *the leisure tourism*;
 - 22.0% opted for *cultural tourism*;
 - 19.8% chose visiting friends and relatives;
 - 7.7% selected the business and professional tourism;
 - 4.4% of respondents – other forms of tourism;
 - 3.3% opted for medical spa tourism.
- 4) Transylvania as region of origin:
 - 46.4% of the respondents considered as the representative form of tourism for Muntenia region *the leisure tourism*;
 - 19.7% selected *visiting friends and relatives*;
 - 11.9% chose business and professional tourism;
 - 8.1% chose medical spa tourism;
 - 7.7% of the respondents – cultural tourism;
 - 6.2% opted for other forms of tourism.
- 5) Bucovina as region of origin:
 - 39.1% of the respondents considered as the representative form of tourism for Muntenia region *the leisure tourism*;
 - 21.8% opted for *cultural tourism*;
 - 14.7% chose visiting friends and relatives;
 - 11.2% of the respondents chose other forms of tourism;
 - 8.8% selected business and professional tourism;
 - 4.4% opted for medical spa tourism.

- 6) Moldavia and Maramureș as region of origin:
- 42.5% of the respondents considered as the representative form of tourism for Muntenia region *the leisure tourism*;
 - 23.9% selected *visiting friends and relatives*;
 - 14.2% chose the cultural tourism;
 - 9.7% of the respondents chose other forms of tourism;
 - 6.7% opted for business and professional tourism;
 - 3.0% of the respondents chose the medical spa tourism;
- 7) Dobrogea as region of origin:
- 39.5% of the respondents considered as the representative form of tourism for Muntenia region *the leisure tourism*;
 - 23.3% opted for *cultural tourism*;
 - 16.3% chose business and professional tourism;
 - 13.9% selected visiting friends and relatives;
 - 4.7% of the respondents opted for the medical spa tourism;
 - 2.3% of the respondents chose other forms of tourism.

Table 1

**The distribution of the responses by forms of tourism
and by region of origin of the respondents (%)**

Region of origin of the respondents \ Forms of tourism	Business and professional tourism	Other forms of tourism	Medical spa tourism	Cultural tourism	Leisure tourism	Visiting friends and relatives
Muntenia	11.7	3.9	3.7	15.5	38.1	27.1
Oltenia	13.9	12.5	2.8	15.3	44.4	11.1
Banat - Crișana	7.7	4.4	3.3	22.0	42.8	19.8
Transylvania	11.9	6.2	8.1	7.7	46.4	19.7
Bucovina	8.8	11.2	4.4	21.8	39.1	14.7
Moldavia and Maramureș	6.7	9.7	3.0	14.2	42.5	23.9
Dobrogea	16.3	2.3	4.7	23.3	39.5	13.9

The respondents' choice of *leisure tourism* as the representative form of tourism for the micro-destination Muntenia can be mostly explained by the presence of the famous Prahova Valley mountain resorts that provide a natural landscape for relaxation and revigoration.

References made by respondents to the natural and anthropic tourism resources of the tourism micro-destination Muntenia are illustrated by order of relevance in Figure 6.

Natural and anthropic tourism resources above may represent the core of the future tourism product/products, depending on the form of tourism that the tourism destination marketer plans to develop after the identification of the needs and wishes on the target markets.

A. NATURAL POTENTIAL	% of respondents
topography: Bucegi Mountains, Făgăraş Mountains, Muddy Volcanoes, Bărăgan Plain, Ialomicioara Cave, etc.	15.6
climate/climatic elements: cold environment, drought, heat, mountain air, etc.	1.9
hydrography: Danube River, Argeş River, Amara Lake, Salt Lake, Urlătoarea Waterfall, etc.	5.0
flora and fauna: Retezat National Park, Bucegi National Park, etc.	4.0
natural monuments: Sphinx, Babele.	1.1
B. ANTHROPIC POTENTIAL	% of respondents
historical traces and art monuments: Peleş Castle, Peleşor Castle, Chindia Tower, Palace of the Parliament, The Royal Court of Târgovişte, Poienari Fortress, Triumphal Arch, Snagov Palace, etc.	9.7
elements of ethnography and folklore: folk music, sculpture camp from Măgura, gastronomy, customs and traditions, folk dances, Teleormanul Folk Ensemble, etc.	2.8
museums and memorial houses: The Clock Museum, The "Grigore Antipa" National Museum of History, The National Museum of Geology, The Museum of the Romanian Peasant, The Amber Museum (Buzău), The Petroleum Museum from Ploieşti, "George Enescu" Memorial House, "Iulia Haşdeu" Memorial House, "Liviu Rebreanu" Memorial House, etc.	1.9
cultural – artistic institutions: Romanian Athenaeum, Romanian Opera, Odeon Theatre, monasteries (Dealu Monastery, Curtea de Argeş Monastery, Suzana Monastery, Zamfira Monastery, Pasărea Monastery, Ghighiu Monastery), etc.	7.5
events: Tulip Festival, sports contests.	0.1
contemporary constructions: Vidraru Dam, Paltinu Dam, botanical gardens, zoological gardens, recreation lakes, industrial exploitations (natural gas, petroleum), recreation centers, shopping centers (malls), ski slopes, harbors, university and business centers, parks, luxury hotels, etc.	6.3
economic units: Dacia Piteşti, factories, refineries, etc.	0.4
human settlements: Bucharest, Curtea de Argeş, Târgovişte, Buzău, Piteşti, Sinaia, Buşteni, Slănic Prahova, Sărata Monteoru, Alexandria, Ploieşti, Valea Călugărească, Amara, Băile Pucioasa, Videle, Brăila, Călăraşi, Câmpina, Snagov, etc.	32.4
C. MISCELLANEOUS	% of respondents
personalities: historical (Vlad Ţepeş, Mihai Viteazul, Mircea cel Bătrân, Neagoe Basarab), cultural-artistic (I.L. Caragiale, Panait Istrati, Ion Barbu, Fănuş Neagu, Liviu Vasilică), etc.	1.1
other elements/aspects: people (hardworking, bright, hospitable), affiliation (home, grandparents, family), recreation, crowd, agriculture, etc.	10.2

Source: adapted after Minciu, R. (2001). *Economia Turismului*, Uranus Publishing House, p. 161.

Figure 6. Structure of the tourism potential of Muntenia region

In conclusion, the micro-destination Muntenia benefits from a better appreciation in terms of its anthropic potential as respondents often referred to towns/resorts in Prahova Valley such as Sinaia, Câmpina, Bușteni, Breaza, Comarnic, but also to attractive landscapes and emblematic towns in the region for their portfolio of cultural and artistic attraction points: Bucharest, Buzău, Curtea de Argeș, Pitești, Ploiești, Târgoviște.

Correlating the results concerning the form of tourism that is most specific to the micro-destination Muntenia (leisure tourism) with the results concerning the perception of the respondents regarding the anthropic tourism potential that is often attributed to Prahova Valley and taking into consideration factors such as age and education of respondents and lifestyle of the Romanian people in general, one may conclude that the marketer's task is quite difficult as he/she has to balance the artistic impression that is conveyed by such tangible features as the pleasant environment, relaxing atmosphere and infrastructure with the highly-psychological image characterized by such intangible elements as local culture, sports activities, in other words, "many other things to do" (activities, participation to events, manifestations, etc.), all giving the tourist the feeling of belonging and therefore prompting his/her dynamic involvement in the life of the visited community.

Research limitations

The research addresses only a particular category of the population, i.e. the young people with ongoing studies, aged between 20 and 24 years, and more precisely the current and prospective tourists who may feel like exploring the huge diversity of Romania's landscapes during holidays.

Respondents could select from a range of six forms of tourism (business and professional tourism, spa tourism, cultural tourism, leisure tourism, visiting friends and relatives and other forms of tourism). Apart from these, other forms of tourism may be in place, even a combination of the forms mentioned above (e.g. scientific and cultural tourism, business and cultural tourism and so on); some of them are likely to be considered as umbrella tourism (e.g., the medical spa tourism and cultural tourism).

Another limitation of this research is the fact that, in order to be conclusive, such research should be conducted on a constant/regular basis since the trends in the customer expectation and demand are increasingly higher and complex due to environmental changes and evolutions and to the competitive scramble between tourism destinations.

Conclusions and proposals

After the analysis of the main form of tourism specific to the micro-destination Muntenia (leisure tourism) and of the most frequent associated word, the image perceived by Romanian inhabitants' mind is rather artistic (natural landscape) than psychological. The destination marketer should therefore pay greater attention to those "close to heart" images urging involvement and "hearted" images in which one could interact and not only to the artistic impression.

Similar researches are recommended among other categories of public of various age and educational background that all represent one large segment of the population – the inhabitants – as it was for the appraisal of Muntenia's image as tourism micro-destination, all the more for the assessment of Romania's image of tourism destination (considered in the meanwhile to be a "puzzle of micro-destinations"). Furthermore, to build a "solid" tourism brand for Romania, further surveys among other types of public, namely among strangers (whether tourists or visitors, i.e. temporary users), non-visitors (those that do not wish to visit the destination in the next period due to emotional and rational reasons), return visitors (those who keep in mind particular images and further compare them to existing image) and professionals who record, analyze and then convey technical or humanitarian impressions and assumptions (adapted after Stăncioiu et al., 2009, p. 285) are needed. All such studies should be conducted for each micro-destination of Romania.

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