

# The perception of tourists regarding the cultural identity of Bacau Municipality, Romania

Raluca Andreea STERIAN, Gabriela Daniela VĂDANU, Andreea VÎNTU

Faculty of Geography, University of Bucharest, Romania

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## The perception of tourists regarding the cultural identity of Bacau Municipality, Romania

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**The perception of tourists regarding the cultural identity of Bacau Municipality.** Tourist destinations are the main supporter of the tourist market which transforms tourism into a real process of knowledge. The culture of Bacau is a tourist attraction and it can be found through the cultural identity of the residents and can compete with other tourist destinations. The present article aims to demonstrate the major importance of cultural identity seen by national and international tourists. The study is compounded by bibliographic research and the survey method, the tool of the semi-structured interview. The results of the study demonstrate the existence of a specific cultural resources that give his own identity to the municipality of Bacau. However, without an attractive organization of the historic centre and a careful and correct promotion, this destination remains a transit area, of those who visit their relatives and friends. This micro-research can be useful for local authorities, whose mission is to develop the economic sector and also tourism.

**Keywords:** identity, culture, the perception of tourists, the city of Bacau

**Percepția turiștilor asupra identității culturale a Municipiului Bacău.** Destinațiile turistice sunt protagonistele pieței turistice ce transformă turismul într-un adevărat proces de cunoaștere. Cultura municipiului Bacău, care se regăsește prin intermediul identității culturale a rezidenților, reprezintă o atracție turistică și poate intra în competiție cu alte destinații turistice. Lucrarea de față își propune să demonstreze importanța majoră a identității culturale văzută din partea turiștilor naționali și internaționali. Studiul se bazează pe cercetarea bibliografică și metoda anchetei, instrumentul interviului semi-structurat. Rezultatele studiului demonstrează existența unor resurse culturale specifice care dau identitate municipiului Bacău. În același timp, fără o organizare atractivă a centrului istoric și o promovare atentă și corectă, această destinație rămâne una consumată de turiștii în tranzit, care preferă consumarea serviciilor prin vizitarea rudelor și prietenilor. Micro-cercetarea poate fi utilă autorităților locale, care au în misiunea lor dezvoltarea economică, inclusiv prin turism.

**Cuvinte cheie:** identitate, cultură, percepția turiștilor, municipiul Bacău

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of identity is equivalent to building a common history that defines a community and separates it from the others. This differentiation is fundamental for the representation of city identity (Graham, Howard, 2008 cited by Morales Cortes, 2013). Each city is unique by its cultural heritage that imprints particular features in every urban area (urban morphology), as well as a specific atmosphere created by the elements of intangible heritage, history, outstanding personalities of the city and the interactions that take place in the urban area. The heritage and the diversity are both strong elements that cities rely on to build their specific culture. The architectural and historical heritage as well as the diversity of the neighbourhoods contribute to the creation of a unique urban identity. The built space is an expression of culture in material form (United Nations, 2012). Museums, palaces, temples, opera houses or simple streets and neighbourhoods are elements that can become symbols of cultural identity.

Symbols are used in religion, nationalism, social ideologies and ethnicity (Cohen, 2008 cited by LeBlanc, 2015). The symbols are so important to an identity of a cultural group because they are so different from other symbols that they are becoming emblems of the cultural identity of that group.

The tourism activity from a city is just one function among many others, where tourists share and/or compete with residents for services, spaces and facilities. The multifunctional nature of cities and the diversity of tourism consumers make it more difficult to identify and measure urban tourism and urban tourists. Blank and Petkovich claim that "it is almost a certainty that urban tourism is one of the most misunderstood and underestimated of all types of tourism. He suffers from underestimation - sometimes even non-recognition. Saw and Williams (2002) suggested that the urban environment itself, with all its attributes, "is a leisure product".

In order to understand the urban reality, it is necessary to study the cultural context, which is an essential element in the analysis of the urban space and which can be extrapolated from the perspective of tourist capitalization. Cultural identity and tourism are inevitably linked. Modern tourists are looking for authentic cultural experiences and unique local products (Urošević, 2012).

The conception of the author Harsha Munasinghe presents the interpretation of the living urban space as a deposit of the cultural identity that allows the establishment of links between the protection of the urban space and the continuity of culture (Munasinghe, 2005). The same author, in her paper "Heritage Protection and Cultural Identity: The Case of Urban Space" considers that the city represents a concentration of the cultural productions of civilizations, evolves as a living entity, accumulating layers of the life experience of individuals as members of a group.

The identity of the city is conferred by the history and the tangible and intangible heritage of the urban centres. This identity is generating a strong image among the visitors and the local population. By consolidating the image of the city and its physiognomy defined by distinctive features in the morphology of the urban space, the built heritage has supported the economic development of cities as entrepreneurial centres and / or tourist places (Gospodini, 2002).

The morphological models characteristic of cities are conferred by the elements of architectural heritage and by the specific architectural style / styles, the geometry of the street system, the block system, the way of organizing of green spaces.

The term of "place identity" has a duality in its meaning. In spatial planning and design, the identity of the place is generally linked to the place itself and refers to the uniqueness of a place that is the result of the interaction between physical characteristics and users. For example, Stobbelaar and Pedroli (2011) quoted by Kaymaz (2013) use the term "landscape identity" which they define it as the perceived uniqueness of a place. The same authors consider that perception is based on a personal and a social dimension and the uniqueness is reflected by the interaction between the physical environment and social factors. In contrast, in psychology the concept of "place identity" is a "personal" aspect of its own identity.

Cultural heritage is a selection of elements from the past that are preserved. They are related to society values and they are represented by those elements that have a meaning for that society and they must be preserved and valued (Tweed, Sutherland, 2007). Through culture, a society expressed its own experience, codifies and hoards it, transmits it, and new generations learn from this experience, they take it over and expand it (Georgiu, 2004). Also, any manifestation of culture, in different forms like music, dance, theatre, painting, and sculpture take the place of authentic culture, determining a new lifestyle and a new identity (Spînu, 2013).

Awareness of the space in which a person lives is also associated with the degree of attachment of that particular place. A person can be connected to an emotional or functional place. Altman and Low (1992) quoted by Kaymaz (2013) tried to define the theoretical typologies of place attachment. These are: genealogical attachment (formed by ancestors, family inheritance), economic connection (property rights, job), attachment by losing or destroying a place, the cosmological connection (through the spiritual and mythological relationship), connection through religion or cultural activities, narratives (stories, legends).

Attachment to place is influenced by several factors such as socio-demographic characteristics, environmental factors (familiarity with a place, activities in certain places), past experiences, culture, psychological factors, biological factors and the place itself. Attachment to a place is related to environmentally behaviours. Various studies

have shown that people who develop positive meanings and emotions about a place tend to protect that particular place (Kaymaz, 2013).

The relationship between attachment to a place and the identity of a place is considered a controversial topic among researchers. Some researchers believe that the identity of the place is a dimension of attachment to place, while other researchers suggest that the identity of the place is necessary for the formation of place attachment (Lewicka, 2008).

In contrast, in psychology, the concept of "the identity of the place" is a "personal" aspect of one's own identity. This term is defined as "those dimensions of the self that define an individual's personal identity in relation to the physical environment through a complex pattern of ideas, beliefs, preferences, feelings, values, goals and behavioural tendencies, conscious and unconscious skills relevant to that environment" (Proshansky, 1978 quoted by Kaymaz Isil, 2013). Simplifying Proshansky's definition, he believes that the physical environment influences personal identity as a result of the interaction between a person and a place.

The city of Bacau has its own history, enough elements of interest that are still waiting to be received, analysed, assimilated and promoted. The identity of the city is not limited by the architectures of the present and it has the memory of the places, being able to give the space consistency and coherence (Serban, 2013).

The purpose of the paper is to determine the perception of tourists in Bacau about their own cultural identity, while demonstrating the mixt between the way of life of the locals and the energy of the tourist flow. The objectives are represented by the motivation of tourists to visit the city and by the type of tourism mainly performed.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1. Study area**

The Municipality of Bacau is located in the central-western part of Moldova, 9.6 km upstream of the confluence of Bistrita and Siret (Figure 1). Regarding the mathematical arrangement, it is at the interference of the meridian of 26°55' longitude E, with the parallel of 46°34' N latitude.

From an administrative point of view, it borders Hemeiusi and Saucesti communes to the north, Letea Veche commune to the east, Nicolae Balcescu commune to the south, and Luizi Calugăra, Magura and Margineni communes to the west.

From the accessibility point of view, Bacau Municipality enjoys a privileged location, at the intersection of several land and air communication routes. The city is 302 km away from the capital Bucharest, 130 km from the Iasi growth pole and 400 km from the Port of Constanta. The road infrastructure of Bacau is formed by the European Road 85 which

connects the capital Bucharest and the north of the country, by the National Road 2F which connects with Vaslui to the East and by the National Road 11 (E577).

The city of Bacau is an important urban centre and a development pole that contributes to the balanced development of the North-East Region. Locally, the attractiveness of the municipality started from its high accessibility as an intersection point of several routes of national interest, but this also had the disadvantage of transforming Bacau into a transit city, where visitors do not spend so much time.

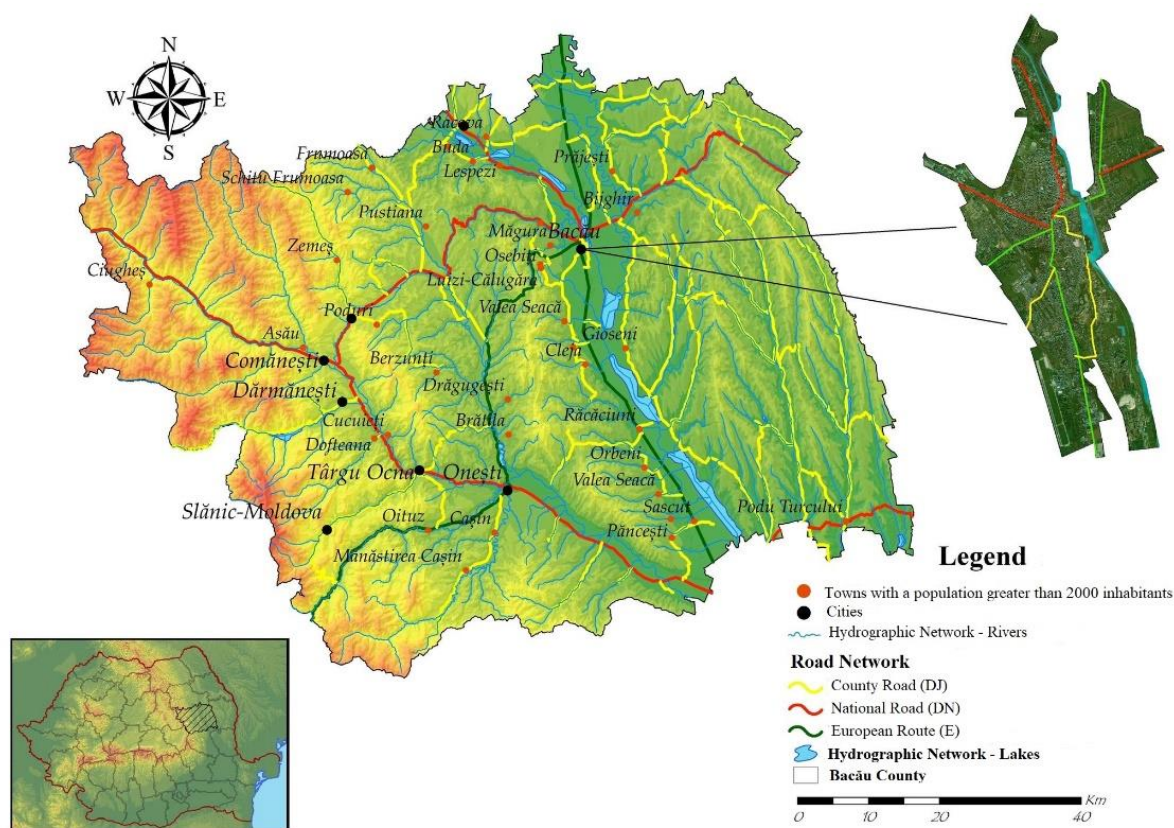


Figure 1. Geographical Location of Bacau Municipality

The city of Bacau has a big valuable of the anthropic potential, with historical, cultural, architectural and religious values. The status of a commercial and military centre, followed by that of royal residence during the reign of Stephen the Great and his son Alexander, the role of Catholic religious centre - one of the most important in Moldova, and many personalities of cultural and scientific life who are originally from Bacau, have left their mark on the historical, architectural, cultural and religious heritage of the city.

The most important historical monuments are concentrated in the central part of the city, among the most visited tourist attractions are: Precista Church - built in the second half of the fifteenth century, George Bacovia Memorial House, the Theatre of the same name and the Nicu Enea Memorial House (Figure 2).

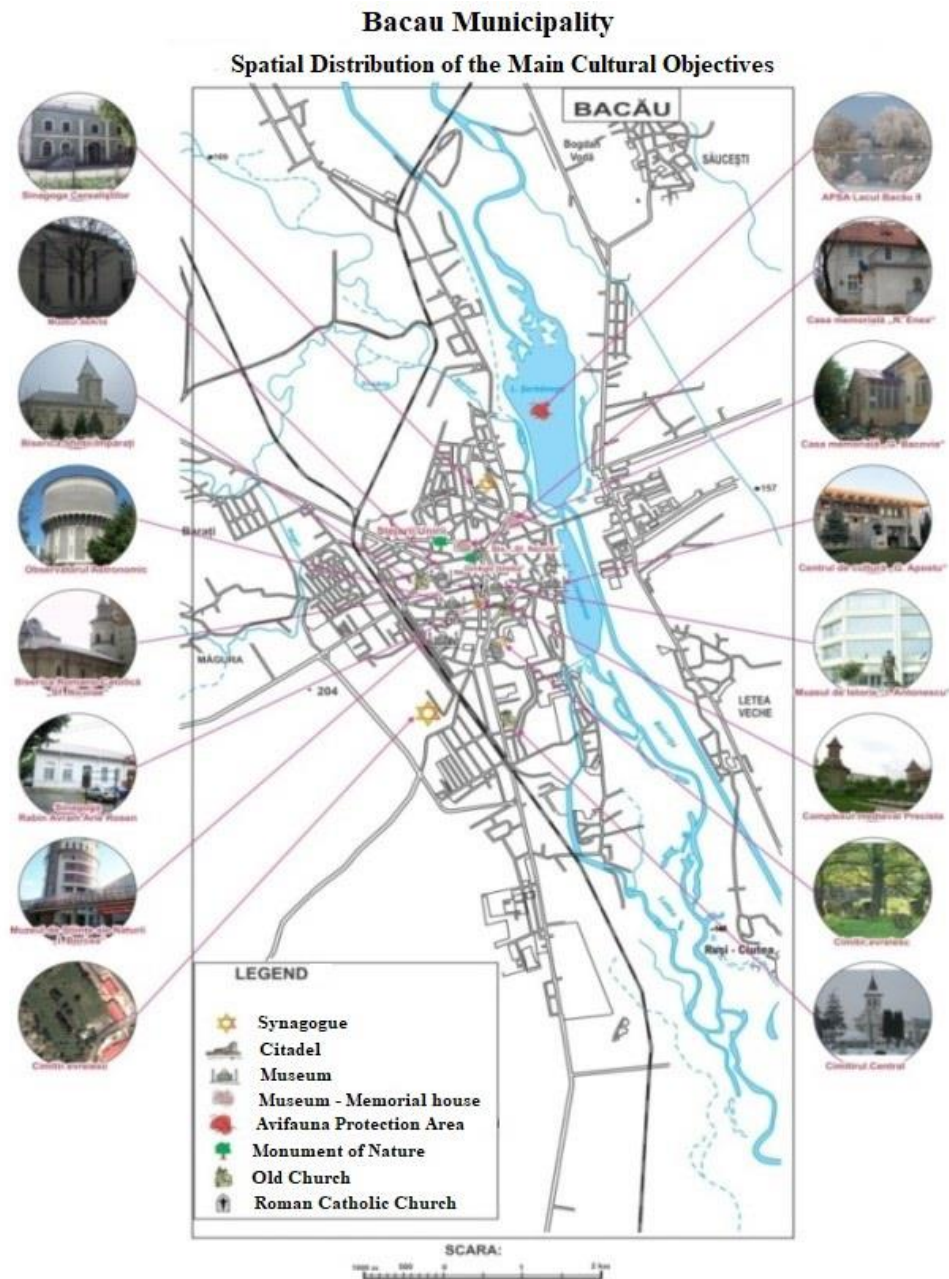


Figure 2. Cultural-historical objectives in Bacău

Source: Antohi (2012)

## 2.2. Tourist perception assessment

This paper compounded by the following stages: data processing and field study (application of interviews).

The structure of the interview was designed to identify the profile of tourists whose main motivation is to know and visit cultural objectives. The application of this questionnaire has been completed especially in the areas of the city with a high concentration of cultural objectives (museums, historic centre, etc.). The interview

includes questions about how tourists plan their trip, the period of their stay, the aim was also to highlight the behaviour of tourists at the cultural destination, what cultural objectives they visited or the impact of the offer on tourists: did they enjoy their tourist experience?

The application of the “face-to-face” interview took place between November 22-24, 2019. Sampling was a difficult process because the tourists were randomly selected.

The interview was applied to a number of 130 people, it consists of 20 items distributed in such a way as to provide information both about their opinions and about their concrete actions they take on the proposed topic. The interview contains 7 open-ended questions - giving tourists the opportunity to express their opinion in freely way, the remaining 12 questions are closed, with several answer options.

This paper contains cartographic methods of land mapping, in which the objective was to inventory the elements of cultural identity within the boundaries of the study area.

Data processing was performed by using: the 2016 office suite (Microsoft Excel, Microsoft Word); ArcMap 10.3, QGIS 2.18.3 Las Palmas, in which we used data obtained from various sources, such as: National Institute of Statistics, Corine Land Cover (2006, 2008), European Environment Agency (EEA) and from own data obtained in following field trips.

### **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

For the tourists in Bacau, the main reason for visiting the city (Figure 3) was the need of escaping from their place of residence (34%). Due to the fact that the city of Bacau is at the intersection of roads being an important customs and transit point, it made 23% of the related population to solve their service problems. Restoring physical and mental comfort is preferred by 16%. Given that 14% of people go to Bacau for recreation, a motivation that is more and more sought nowadays. This reveals the fact that 13% go to Bacau out of the desire to know, to discover new things. At the same time, more than half of the interviewees suggested that this is only a part of the holiday, they want to visit other nearby cities, and the remaining 40% came only in Bacau.

Although the city of Bacau has one of the oldest churches from the time of Stephen the Great, the lack of promotion makes the number of tourists to stagnate. Over 30% of the interviewees prefer Bacau during the holidays for purposes other than visiting and recreation (Table 1). Most tourists do transit tourism. Visiting relatives and friends brings a plus to the city, because it ensures repeated visits, occupying the second place with 22%.



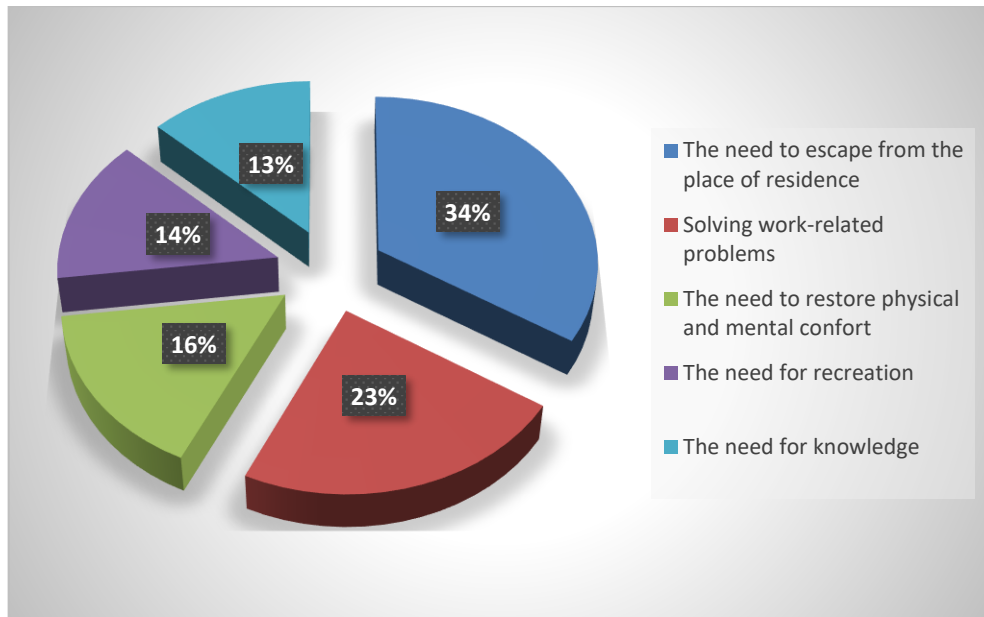


Figure 3. Motivations of tourists to visit Bacau Municipality

Table 1. Purposes of visiting Bacau Municipality

Answer options	Percentage Value
Visiting cultural objectives	11%
Participation in cultural activities	3%
Practicing sports activities	7%
Visiting friends or relatives	22%
Attends conferences	7%
Shopping tourism	18%
Business tourism	7%
Other-mentioned	30%

Shopping tourism is in the top of three preferences of tourists with a percentage of 18%, this fact is explained by the emergence of shopping tourism: destination, price, products / goods. Shopping tourism is appreciated by young tourists who come from the space adjacent to Bacau.

Visiting tourist attractions is not in the first places of the choice of tourists due to the fact that they want to visit unique and spectacular monuments. For tourists, the city

of Bacau does not offer much opportunities, or the local attractions are not promoting correctly.

The promotion of Precista Church can be done verbally or virtually by residents, through advertising spots, the creation and promotion of specific cultural events.

Regarding the types of cultural resources visited in Bacau by tourists, 33% of them choose the historic centre of the city, an option that can be correlated with the character of transitional tourism that predominates in this destination (Table 2).

Table 2. Types of cultural resources visited in Bacau Municipality

Answer options	Percentage Value
Museums	14%
Archaeological sites	5%
Religious objectives	14%
Art galleries	5%
Theatre	10%
Cinema	19%
Historical centre	33%
Objectives of industrial heritage	0%

The advantages offered by Arena Mall, rank the cinema on the second place with 19% taking into account the diversity, the price level, in fact, the cinema is a factor of dispersion of the clients, polarizing especially categories of the young population.

Most of the middle-income people are focus on visiting museums and religious sites. The George Bacovia Theatre is a choice for 10% of the interviewed people, fact explained by the absence of major manifestations that would significantly influence the evolution of the consumption of cultural services during a year. Archaeological sites are less visited by tourists, with a share of only 5%, while the objectives of industrial heritage are not among the preferences of tourists.

The level of satisfaction of the respondents reveals that 40% of tourists are partially satisfied, as many are satisfied with the city of Bacau offer (Figure 4). There are also very satisfied and neutral people - 10%. No one considered that the city of Bacau is totally unsatisfactory, but rather that it is not exploited well enough.

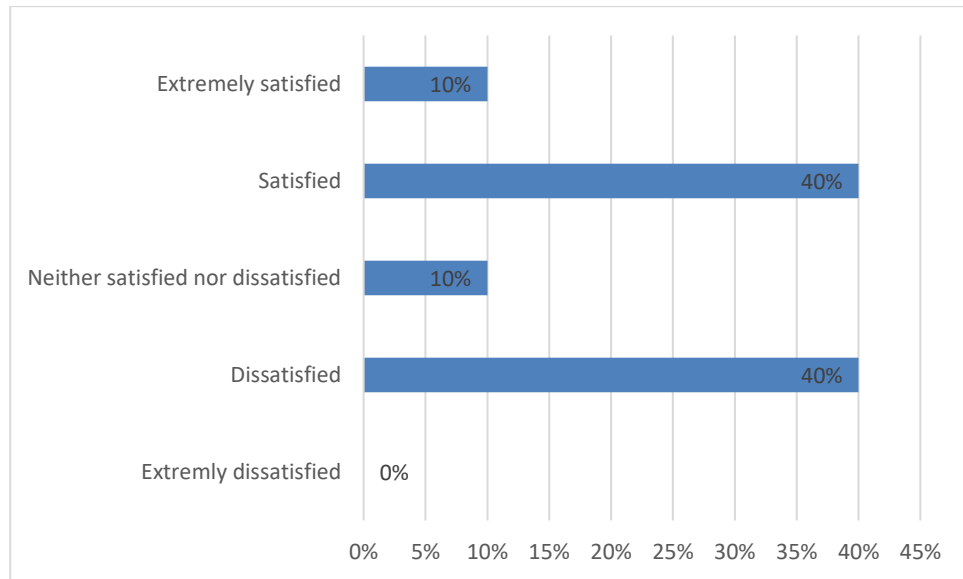


Figure 4. The level of tourist satisfaction

The involvement of the authorities in the renovation and preservation of tourist objectives, cleaning green spaces, diversifying tourist offers and providing more information about volunteers from abroad, accompanied by a local guide, a better promotion of historical monuments can make the cultural offer of Bacau to be improved.

Almost 50% of tourists benefit during their stay at parents, grandparents, relatives or friends house, because the main goal is to visit them (Figure 5). 20% stay in rented private homes and 20% spend the night in hotels, while only 10% stay in hostels.

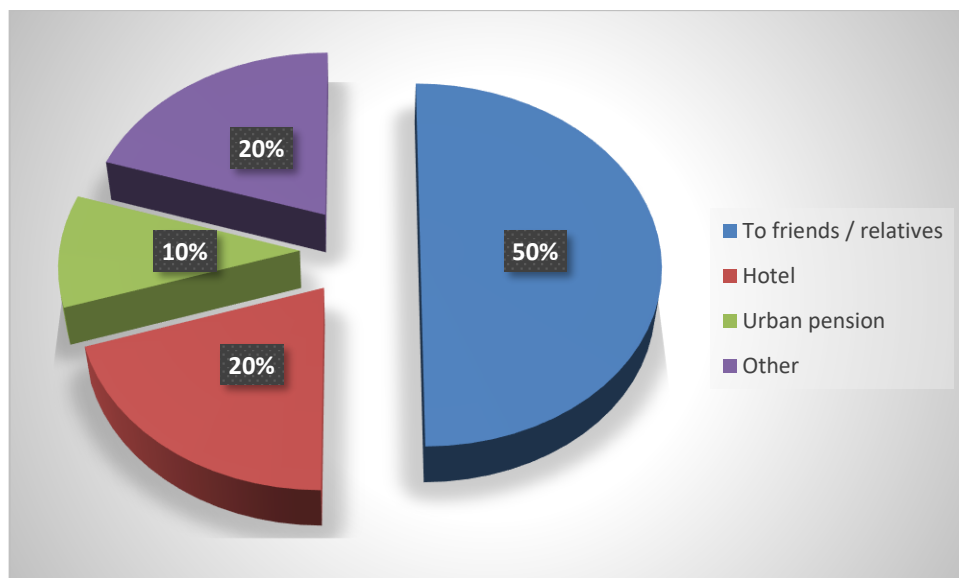


Figure 5. The type of accommodation used by tourists during their stay

The reservation of tourist services was made in proportion of 70% by phone, because it is a simpler method, does not require much time and can clear tourists from any doubts. The desire to choose the essential facilities means that 20% of bookings are made on the internet, and only 10% through a travel agency (Figure 6).

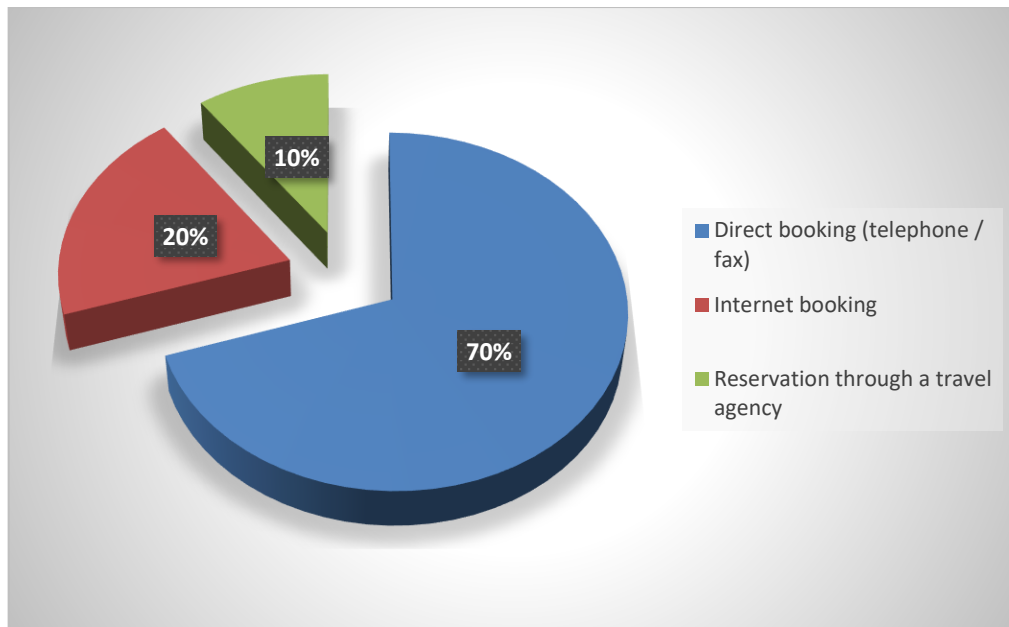


Figure 6. Ways to book tourist services

Over 45% of respondents said that friends and relatives were the main source of information, and the safest, compared to 37% who made a previous visit to the city (Figure 7). Although the Internet is by far the most popular source of information, only 18% said they used it to inform about the city as a tourist destination.

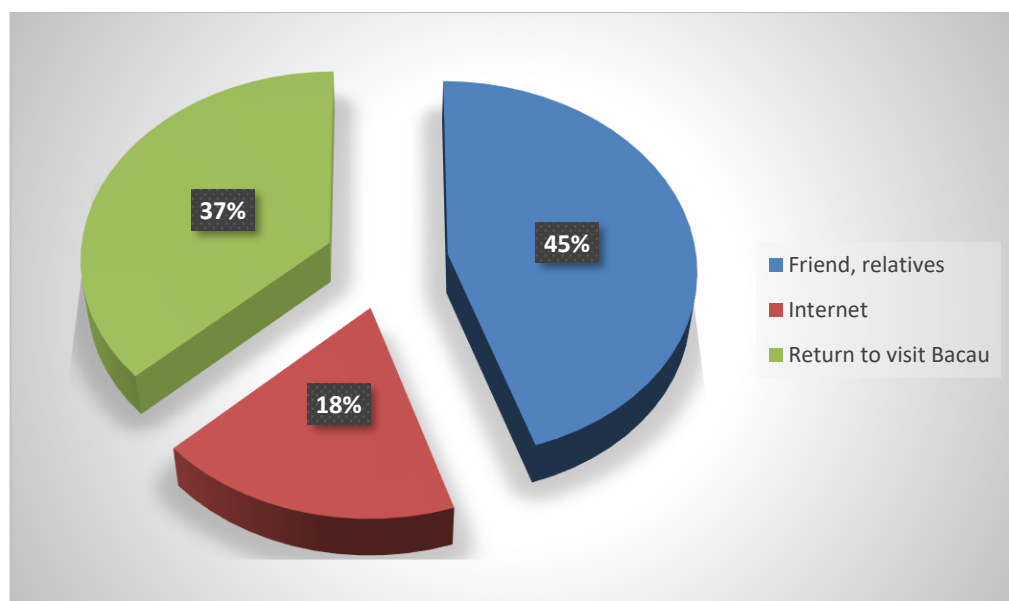


Figure 7. Sources of information for tourists

The duration of the stay highlights the fact that 40% of the tourists spent the night in Bacau 10 nights, 30% of the tourists had a stay of 5-7 days, 20% spent 3 nights. Only 10% of people suggested that they have a stay of 20-30 nights, and the largest stay was for a month.

The tourists spent their money during their stay were for: transport (prices vary from 0 Ron, in the case of people whose costs are fully covered by the company, up to 27 million in case a family with 4 members who came from Spain to Bacau by bus), for accommodation tourists are willing to pay for a month in a rented apartment, 18 million, but most of the tourists are sleeping with friends. For dining, prices vary depending on how much a tourist is willing to spend.

Among the places of residence of the mentioned tourists are: Onesti, Cluj, Izvoarele (Giurgiu County), Hotarele (Giurgiu County), Buzau, Fetesti-Ialomita, Scarisoara Village - Corbeanca Commune, Bucharest, Beckum-Germany, Barcelona-Spain.

The tourists who completed the questionnaire, 60% are male and 40% female.

40% of people is aged 18-29, followed by 40% of tourists is aged 30-39, and 20% of people is aged 40-49.

The level of education shows that 30% of tourists have higher education, 50% of respondents have high school education, and 20% have primary and secondary education. The statistics of employment indicate considerable differences according to sex, age and level of education attained.

The percentage of employed people of the total of population who responded to this interview is 70%. 20% of people are students, and only 10% are unemployed and they are looking for a job.

Among the income-generating activities are: military foreman, manager, courier, hairstylist, bartender, driver, teacher. Respondents included students and the unemployed.

The economic importance of tourism in the city of Bacau can be measured by analysing the proportion of income generated by travel, which contributes to GDP growth. Therefore, 40% of the persons have incomes below 1,500 RON, 30% of the persons are in the category of 1,500-3,000 Ron, 20% over 3,000 Ron, and 10% of the persons did not have an income.

Therefore, most tourists prefer to travel for because they want to visit their relatives and friends. For incoming tourism, the preferred forms of tourism are business tourism and transit tourism.

Although most of the tourists made the trip for personal purposes, there are also foreigners who have assimilated knowledge about the city, exchanged experience by getting directly involved in community activities.

Residents believe that tourism has the potential to promote the feeling of place, the pride of their own culture and self-esteem. This can improve the quality of life through a job and income opportunities from tourism activities.

The promotion of the city can be achieved through billboards, with the help of promotion sites, and through festivals that play an important role in transforming a multicultural society into an intercultural society.

From an economic, social and cultural point of view, the impacts caused during the festivals can be both positive and negative. These are a social and a cultural phenomenon that represents the way of life of a local community.

#### **4. CONCLUSIONS**

The city of Bacau has kept its mark of a working-class city since the communist period. Tourists are not interested in Bacau, because the elements of cultural heritage are not promoted. The main forms of tourism practiced in the city are: nostalgic tourism and transit tourism. Due to transit tourism and due to preference of the tourist to stay at friends and relative's houses, a large amount of money that could come from tourist services is lost. The city of Bacau is considered a city without identity, it still keeps clear traces of its antiques and cultural heritage, although it is far from finding its dynamic and functional balance.

In this regard, it is necessary for local authorities to focus their development strategies on restoring the historic centre and finding appropriate channels for the city promotion.

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