

THE TOURIST IMAGE OF HUNEDOARA COUNTY: AN ASSESSMENT OF TOURISTS' PERCEPTIONS

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Abstract

With a high tourist potential due to the numerous tourist attractions it holds, Hunedoara County has stood out in recent years among the attractive tourist destinations at national and even international level. Using the survey as a research method, based on the responses of 203 people, the study evaluates the tourists' perceptions regarding the image of Hunedoara County as a tourist destination and highlights differences in perception between generations.

Keywords: destination, tourism attraction, tourism, Hunedoara.

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INTRODUCTION

At the mental level, individuals develop constructions and representations regarding the image of a destination, focusing on different aspects that are closely related to their beliefs, ideas, attitudes, perceptions and impressions (Stăncioiu et al, 2011a). Considered an important component of the tourist destination, the image of a tourist destination influences and is influenced by the thoughts and feelings of the destination, shaping consumer behavior by stimulating creative activities and experiences. The specialized literature highlights the role of creating and managing the image as a fundamental element in developing positioning strategies (Stăncioiu et al, 2011b; Teodorescu et al, 2014). The concept of image is based on unique characteristics, events, feelings associated with the destination. The destination image has two components, one based on the attributes of the destination, and the other is holistic in nature, both having both a functional and a psychological side. (Luca, 2021; Teodorescu et al, 2014).

Located in the central-western part of Romania, Hunedoara County is placed at the interface between the Southern Carpathians and the Western Carpathians, in a geomorphologically complex area, characterized by the alternation of mountain massifs with depressions and intramontane aisles. The relief of Hunedoara County is a mosaic of varied shapes, marked by the presence of varied mountain massifs (Retezat Mountains, Sureanu Mountains, Parâng Mountains, Apuseni Mountains, Poiana Ruscăi

Mountains, Orăștiei Mountains), depressions (Hațeg, Petroșani, Brad) and valleys carved by rivers, offering support for mountain tourism, hiking tourism, scientific tourism, adventure tourism, cycle tourism, ecotourism, speleotourism and mountaineering. The hydrography, through rivers, lakes (Bucura Lake, Cinciș Lake, Custura Mare Lake), waterfalls (Clocota Waterfall, Lolaia Waterfall, Șipot Waterfall), mineral and thermal springs, in turn supports the practice of some forms of tourism, such as: aquatic tourism, spa tourism, adventure tourism, scientific tourism, recreational tourism. Also, the flora, fauna and the 46 protected areas (Retezat National Park, Grădiștea Muncelului - Cioclovina Natural Park, "Țara Hațegului" Dinosaur Geopark, Jiu Gorge National Park) support the practice of scientific tourism, hunting tourism, aquatic tourism and ecotourism (The list of tourist attractions in the Retezat National Park area and the adjacent localities; Tourist attractions from Hunedoara County).

Seen from the point of view of the components of the anthropic tourism heritage, Hunedoara county stands out for its numerous archaeological sites and art monuments (Sarmizegetusa Archaeological Site, Dacian Citadel of Bănița, Germisara Roman Fort, Deva Citadel, Mălăiești Citadel, Colț Citadel, Corvinilor Castle, Kenderfy Castle), technical and economic objectives (Gura Apelor Dam, Transalpina Pădurenilor), objectives socio-demographic, ecumenical objectives (Prislop Monastery, Church in Denuș, wooden Church "Cuvioasa Paraschiva" in Boiu de Sus, wooden Church "Adormirea Maicii Domnului" in Lăpugiu de Jos), ethnography and folklore (Museum of the

Traditional Village in Orăștie), but also institutions and cultural-artistic events (Brad Gold Museum, Dacian and Roman Civilization Museum Deva, Petroșani Mining Museum, House memorial Drăgan Muntean Poienita Voinii, Music of the Hațeg Mountains, Dacia Felix Roman Festival, Hațeg Dinosaur Festival, Running in the Deva Fortress at Night) (The list of historical monuments 2015. Hunedoara County; Tourist attractions from Hunedoara County). Marked by diversity and authenticity, anthropogenic resources constitute the basis for the development of cultural tourism, industrial tourism, ethnographic tourism, gastronomic tourism, religious tourism, event tourism (Toader et al, 2022).

Hunedoara County proves to be an ideal destination for those tourists who want to relax, explore nature, history and enjoy local traditions.

The purpose of the article is to evaluate the tourists' perceptions regarding to the image of Hunedoara County as a tourist destination and highlight differences in perception between generations.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

To pursue the purpose of the article, the authors developed and followed a research design (Figure 1).

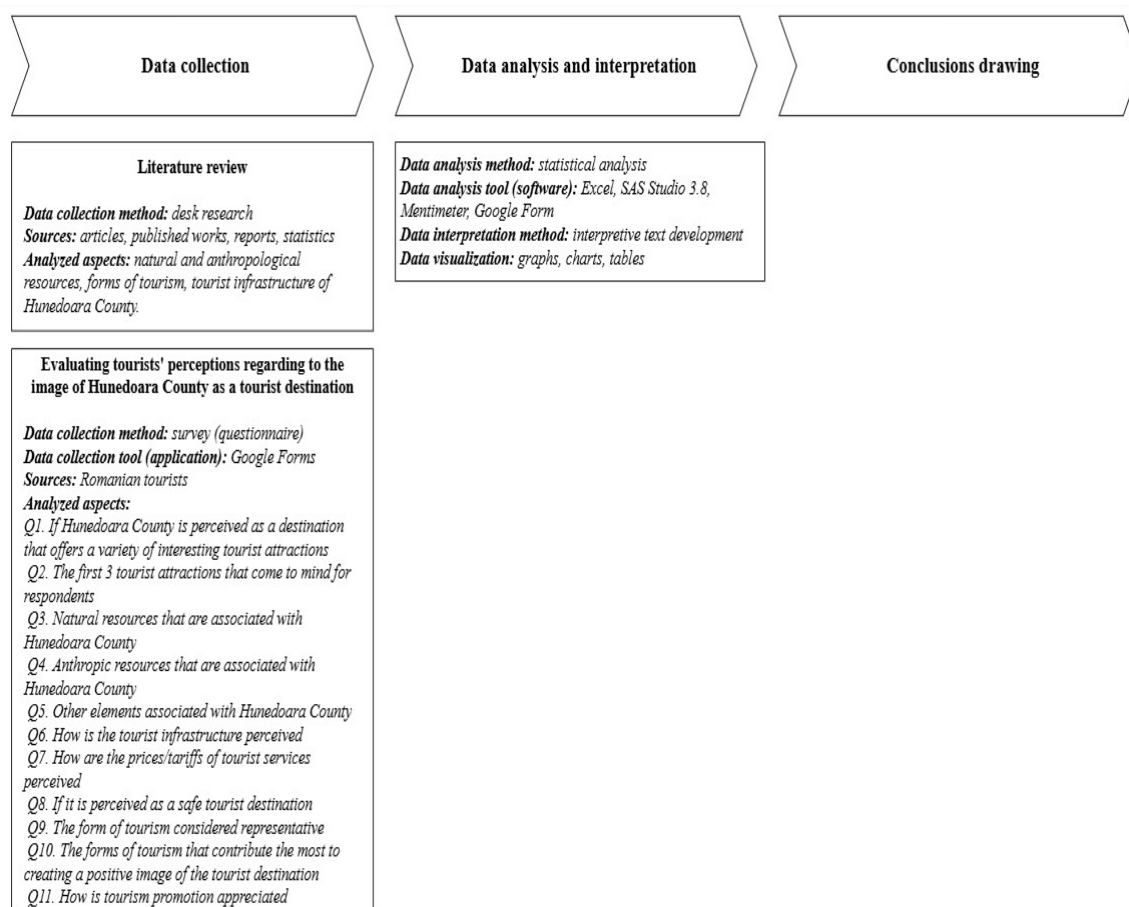


Figure 1. Research design

The questionnaire, designed to evaluate tourists' perceptions regarding to the image of Hunedoara County as a tourist destination, was developed using Google Forms application. Due to the lack of costs, speed and the possibility of easy organization and statistical processing, the questionnaire was administrated online. Before application, the questionnaire was pre-tested. In this regard, the questionnaire was completed

by 25 people to identify uncertainties and provide suggestions. Base on their feedback, the questionnaire was made simpler and more accessible. A QR code and a link was used to distribute the questionnaire to various groups via social networks between March 1-10 2025. The questionnaire contains 3 sections, its design is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Questionnaire design		
Section	Question	
Respondents' consent	I have read the introduction and I agree to take part in the survey	
Image and perception of Hunedoara County as a tourist destination	Q1	Hunedoara County offers a variety of interesting tourist attractions
	Q2	Write the first 3 tourist attractions in Hunedoara County that come to your mind
	Q3	What are the natural resources that you associate with Hunedoara County?
	Q4	What are the anthropogenic resources that you associate with Hunedoara County?
	Q5	Other elements that you associate with Hunedoara County
	Q6	The tourist infrastructure (accommodation, public catering, tourist information centers, etc.) of Hunedoara County is developed
	Q7	The prices/tariffs of tourist services in Hunedoara County are affordable
	Q8	Hunedoara County is a safe tourist destination
	Q9	Choose the form of tourism that you consider representative for Hunedoara County
	Q10	Which forms of tourism contribute the most to creating a positive image of Hunedoara County as a tourist destination?
	Q11	How do you assess the tourist promotion of Hunedoara County?
General information	Gender / Period that corresponds to the respondents' year of birth/ Educational level / Place of residence	

The questionnaire begins by asking respondents for consent to participate in the survey. The questionnaire includes 11 questions as follows: two open-ended questions (Q2,Q5), three single-choice questions (Q3,Q4,Q9), one multiple choice question (Q10) and five rating scale questions (Q1,Q6,Q7,Q8,Q11). The evaluation of 5 items was done using an internal scale from 1 to 5. For Q1,Q6,Q7,Q8 the interval scale was: 1 - totally disagree; 2 - disagree; 3 - neutral; 4 - agree; 5 - totally agree and for Q11

was: 1 - very weak; 2 - weak; 3 - neutral; 4 - good; 5 - very good.

The questionnaire concludes by requesting information about gender, the period that corresponds to the respondents' year of birth, educational level and place of residence.

The sample consists of 203 respondents. In this regard, the table 2 presents the socio-demographic profile of the respondents.

Table 2

Respondents' socio-demographic profile		
	No	%
Consent responses	203	100
<i>Gender</i>		
Female	115	56.7
Male	83	40.9
No answer	5	2.5
<i>The period corresponding to year of birth</i>		
1946-1964 (Generation Baby Boomers BB)	4	2.0
1965-1980 (Generation X)	37	18.2
1981-1996 (Generation Y)	40	19.7
1997-2012 (Generation Z)	122	60.1
<i>Educational level</i>		
Primary education	1	0.5
Secondary education	4	2.0
High school education	108	53.2
Post-secondary education	3	1.5
Short-term higher education (university college)	3	1.5
Bachelor's degree	61	30.0
Master's degree	8	3.9
Doctorate	15	7.4
<i>Place of residence</i>		
Urban	120	59.1
Rural	83	40.9

All data obtained by applying the questionnaire were organized in a database in order to analyze and interpret the results. Excel was used as a tool for data analysis and graphic representations.

For the data resulting from the answers to questions which contain integer values from 1 to 5 (Q1,Q6,Q7,Q8), a statistical summary was created, boxplot diagrams for comparisons between groups of statistical indicators (median, quartile, mean, minimum and

maximum). To perform these calculations, SAS Studio and the related graphic representations were used.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

According to the answers given by the 203 people who participated in the study to question Q1, the age group that indicated the highest answers is that of people born in the

period 1965-1980, with an average value of 4.54. At the opposite pole is the group of people born in the period 1946-1964, with an average value of 4.25 (Figure 2). However, it is observed that an average score higher than 4 was given to all age groups, which shows that all groups appreciate that Hunedoara County offers a variety of interesting tourist attractions.

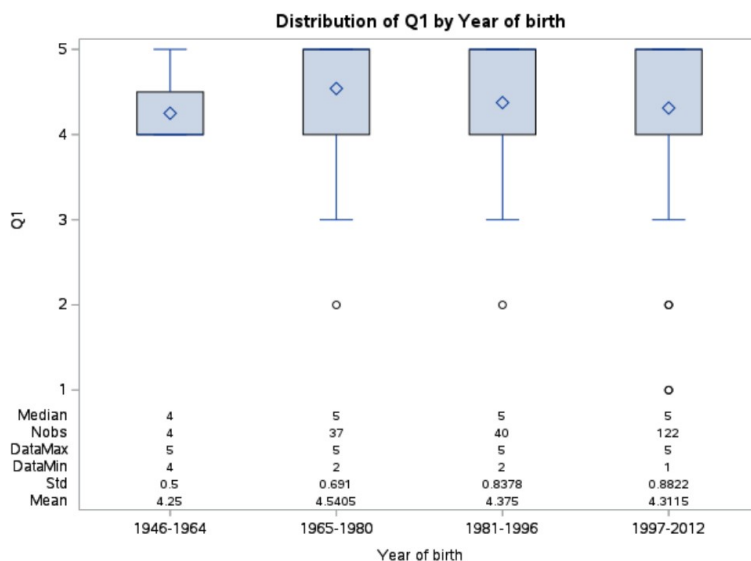


Figure 2. **Boxplot diagrams for answers to Q1**
Source: Authors' own statistical processing using SAS Studio

The answers given to question Q2 highlighted the most well-known tourist attractions by the respondents. As can be seen in Figure 3, Corvin Castle, Deva Fortress, Prislop

Monastery, Sarmisegetuza Regia and Retezat National Park are the most frequently mentioned tourist attractions in Hunedoara County.



Figure 3. **The most popular tourist attractions known by respondents**
Source: Developed by the authors based on responses processed with the application provided by mentimeter.com

As can be seen in Figure 4, most study participants associate Hunedoara County with

natural resources, such as relief (47%) and protected areas (39%).

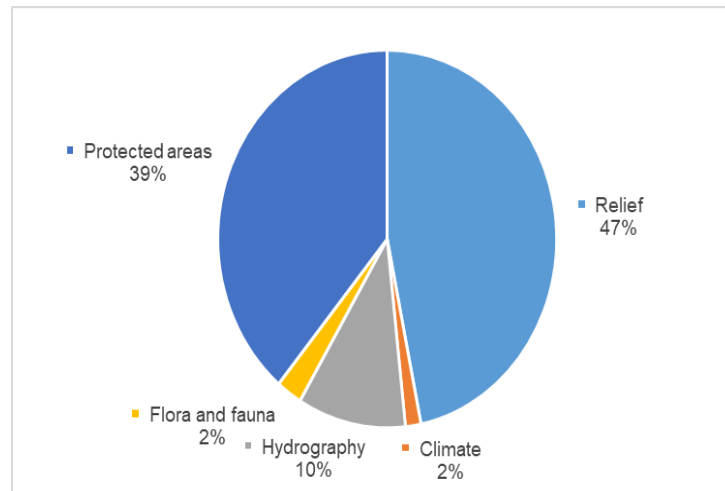


Figure 4. Natural resources associated with Hunedoara County

Regarding anthropogenic tourist resources, most respondents associate Hunedoara County with archaeological sites and art monuments (73%) (Figure 5). It is noted that this answer is closely related to the answers given to question Q2 which highlights

the most famous tourist attractions in Hunedoara County, most of the tourist attractions named being anthropogenic resources, more precisely archaeological sites and art monuments (Corvin Castle, Deva Fortress, Sarmisegetuza).

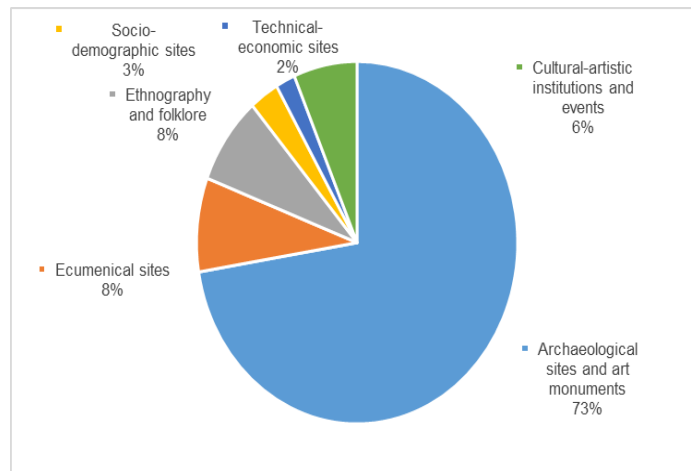


Figure 5. Anthropogenic resources associated with Hunedoara County

When invited to mention other elements they associate with Hunedoara County, study participants mention numerous elements, but

the most common words are nature, history, Dacian civilization, gastronomic culture, the Bison Reserve, and fauna (Figure 6).



Figure 6. **Elements associated with Hunedoara County**

Source: Developed by the authors based on responses processed with the application provided by mentimeter.com

Regarding the way they appreciate the development of tourist infrastructure (accommodation, public catering, tourist information centers, etc.), Figure 7 shows that the respondents who indicated the highest

answers (3.70) are part of the group of people born in the period 1997-2012, and those who appreciated it the most are the respondents from the group of people born in the period 1946-1964 (3.5).

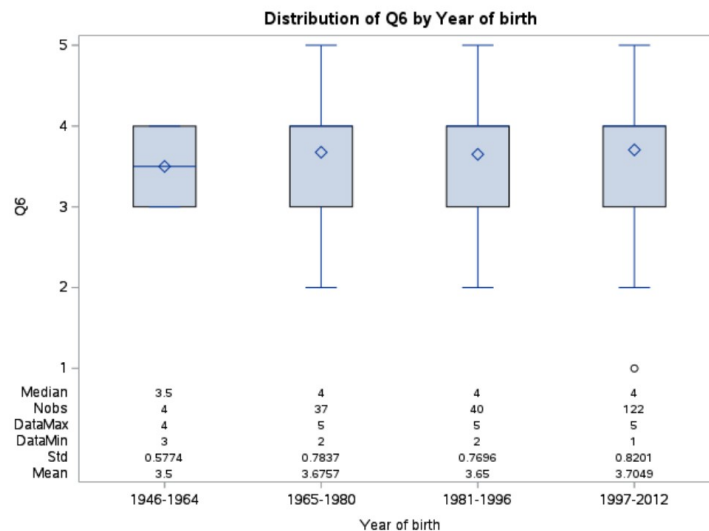


Figure 7. **Boxplot diagrams for answers to Q6**
Source: Authors' own statistical processing using SAS Studio

The affordability of tourism services is an aspect that was assessed differently by the groups of respondents (Figure 8). The respondents who indicated the highest answers

(3.81) are part of the group of people born in the period 1965-1980, and those who assessed it the lowest are the respondents in the group of people born in the period 1946-1964 (3.5).

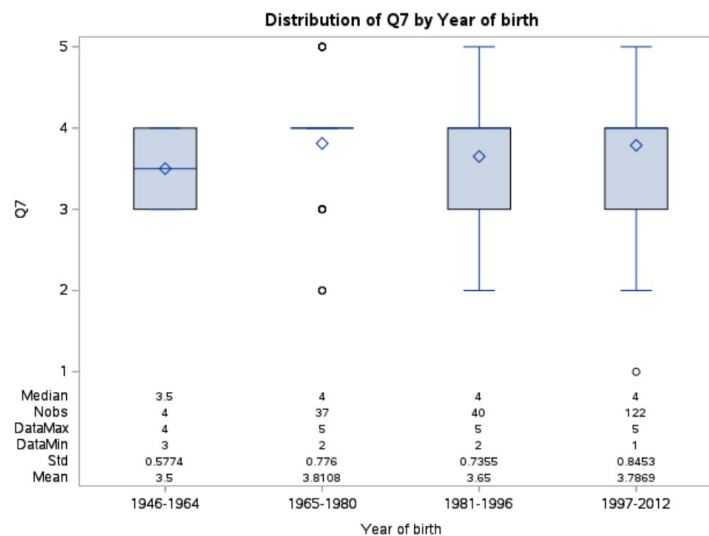


Figure 8. **Boxplot diagrams for answers to Q7**
Source: Authors' own statistical processing using SAS Studio

In general, respondents agree that Hunedoara County is a safe tourist destination. In Figure 9, it can be seen that the respondents who indicated the highest answers belong to the group of people born in the period 1965-1980

(4.54) and 1981-1996 (4.52), and the respondents from the group of people born in the period 1946-1964 indicated the lowest answers (4.25).

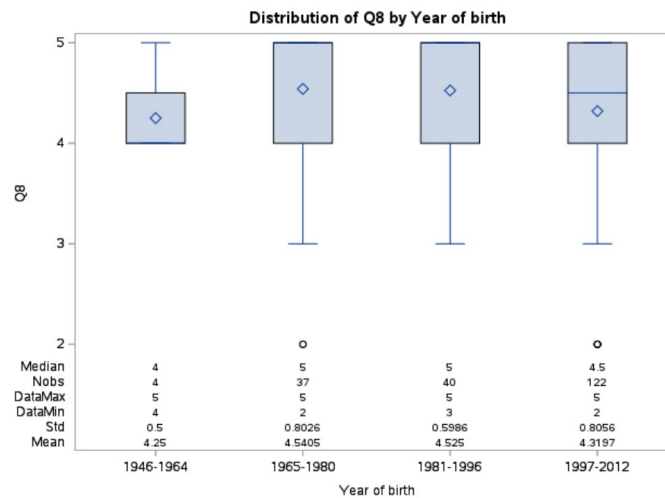


Figure 9. **Boxplot diagrams for answers to Q8**
Source: Authors' own statistical processing using SAS Studio

According to the answers given, the most representative forms of tourism for Hunedoara

County are cultural tourism, hiking tourism and leisure tourism (Figure 10).

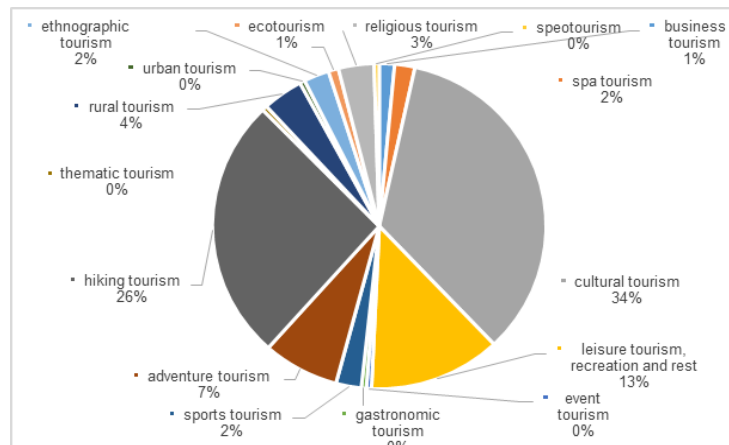


Figure 10. **The forms of tourism considered representative for Hunedoara County**

The forms of tourism considered important for creating a positive image for Hunedoara County as a tourist destination are

cultural tourism, hiking tourism, leisure tourism, rural tourism and religious tourism (Figure 11).

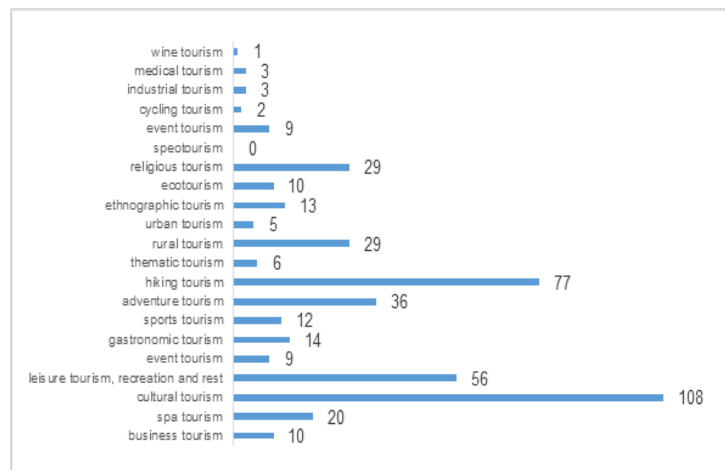


Figure 11. **Forms of tourism contribute to creating a positive image of Hunedoara County as a tourist destination**

The promotion of Hunedoara County as a tourist destination was also appreciated differently by the groups of respondents (Figure 12). The respondents who indicated the highest

answers (3.65) are those born in the period 1997-2012, and those who appreciated it the least are the respondents born in the period 1981-1996 (3.07).



Figure 12. Boxplot diagrams for answers to Q1
Source: Authors' own statistical processing using SAS Studio

CONCLUSIONS

Along with the image of the tourist destination, the identity of the destination represents the starting points in building the brand strategy, but also the desired image as the objective of the strategy. The image of a destination is the determining factor in the success of the destination development, being necessary the existence of a destination brand that gives it an identity.

The study highlights the fact that Hunedoara County is perceived as a safe and attractive tourist destination, not a variety of natural and anthropogenic resources.

The most well-known and appreciated tourist attractions are Corvin Castle, Deva Fortress, Prislop Monastery, Sarmisegetuza Regia and Retezat National Park.

Cultural, hiking and leisure tourism are considered the most representative forms of tourism for Hunedoara County, but also the most important for creating a positive image of the destination, along with rural and religious tourism.

Young people are the most satisfied with the development of the tourist infrastructure and the way in which Hunedoara County is promoted. People in the 1981-1996 age group are the least satisfied with the promotion of the destination.

The 1965-1980 group considers the prices of tourist services to be the most affordable and expresses the highest

appreciation for the tourist attractions of Hunedoara County

People in the 1946-1964 age group are the least satisfied with the tourist infrastructure and consider the prices of tourist services to be the least affordable.

Our findings suggest that younger respondents tend to have a more favorable perception of Hunedoara's tourism promotion and infrastructure, indicating that social-media-based campaigns are effectively engaging these age groups. In contrast, older participants reported lower satisfaction with both promotion and pricing, highlighting the need for more traditional marketing channels and affordable packages. Future efforts could involve in-person surveys to better capture the perspectives of Baby Boomers, thereby improving overall representativeness.

We believe that it is necessary to continue promoting the main tourist attractions, with an emphasis on cultural, hiking and leisure tourism. Investments in the development and modernization of the tourist infrastructure must be made paying special attention to the needs of older age groups. To attract a diverse "audience", marketing strategies must target age groups. It is necessary to improve the online promotion of Hunedoara County, as the younger generations have the highest rate of appreciation for it.

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