

STRUCTURAL ASPECTS REGARDING TO THE IMAGE OF ICE HOTEL BALEA LAC BREND

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Abstract

Applying a poll-based survey provides important information regarding the tourist offer particulars in Bâlea Lac area. On the day the survey is performed its main advantage is also outlined: the fact that this information display a good accuracy, are obtained in a short time span and involving relatively low expenses.

Data collection and centralization of the answers provided by interviewed tourists regarding tourism practice in the Bâlea Lac area have led to drawing up distributions that are presented in the paper. Based on the respective information, statistics methods adequate to the study of tourist opinion on the Bâlea Lac Ice Hotel brand image.

Several issues have been outlined, regarding the types of respondents based on their category, Romanian or foreigners, from Romania and based on destination countries, function of: the type of stay; the means of information; their answers referring to their first arrival at Bâlea Lac; the degree of destination assessment; their opinion on host reception; their preference for Bâlea Lac; appreciating value for money; age groups; gender; social and professional standing.

The image created through the attractions and services provided in the Bâlea Lac tourist area by tourism activities closely related to the Ice Hotel is well appreciated, so that they have opened up a rather favourable expectancy for those willing to come back and for those tempted to try and spend their holidays in the presented hotel.

Key words: tourist opinion, branding, methodology.

JEL classification: C42, C13, L83.

A group of students from the Romanian-American University has participated in accomplishing the Project Ice Hotel – Bâlea Lac, the action being recorded in the sphere of the manifestations organized by the Faculty of Internal

and International Economy of Tourism with the goal of extending the students' practical activity.

Based on the collection and centralization information, there were applied statistic methods, adequate for the study of the tourists' opinion regarding the image of the Ice Hotel at Bâlea Lake.

The information registered as answers at the first question in the questionnaire have emphasized that 90,30% of the 134 interviewed tourists are Romanian (table 1, graphic 1).

Table 1 Tourists' structure according to the category Romanians or foreigners

Category of tourists	Tourists' answers	Tourists' structure
Romanian (R.)	121	90,30
Foreigners (F.)	12	9,7
Total	134	100

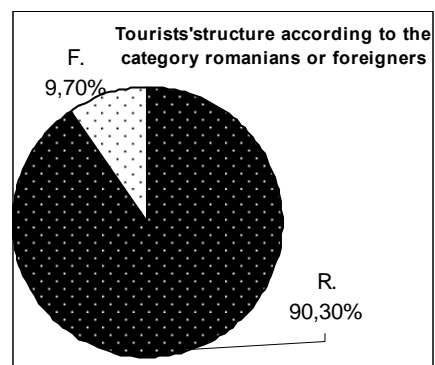


Figure 1. Tourists' structure according to the category Romanians or foreigners

The other 12 foreign tourists are coming from countries like Germany (4,48%), Austria (1,49%), France (0,75%) and other non-nominated ones, in proportion of 2,98% (table 2 graphic 2).

Table 2. Tourists' structure according to the residence country

The residence country	Tourists' answers	Tourists' structure
<i>Romania</i>	121	90,30
<i>Germany</i>	6	4,48
<i>Austria</i>	2	1,49
<i>France</i>	1	0,75
<i>Another country</i>	4	2,98
Total	134	100

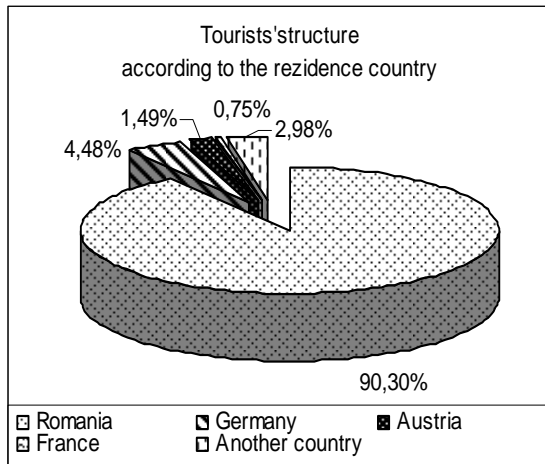


Figure 2. Tourists' structure according to the residence country

In the analysis of the structure established for all the interviewed tourists regarding the performance of the *staying degree*, it is remarked the group of the ones to have been accommodated in the Ice Hotel, for practicing tourism at Bâlea Lake, to them being due 91,04% (table 3, graphic 3). It is a percentage which indicates us the increasing importance given by the tourists to this form of accommodation, the curiosity urging them to practice it and to try its temptations.

Table 3. Tourists' structure according to the staying degree

Staying degree	Tourists' answers	Tourists' structure
<i>Accommodated</i>	12	91,04
<i>Visiting</i>	122	8,96
Total	134	100

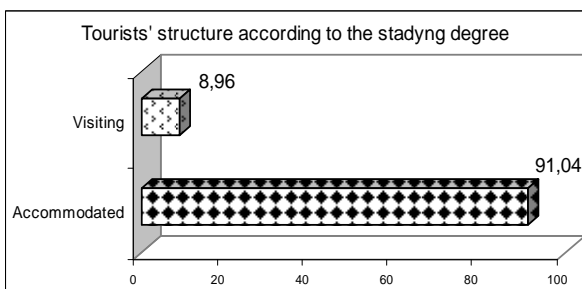


Figure 3. Tourists' structure according to the staying degree

As concerns *the information sources* used by the tourists arrived in the area, it has been achieved their grouping in 4 types: the tourism agency, Television (documentaries, advertising) friends, other sources (table 4, graphic 4).

Table 4. Tourists' structure according to the information means

Types of information means	Tourists answers	Tourists' structure
<i>Tourism agency</i>	0	0,00
<i>Television</i>	71	52,99
<i>Friends</i>	25	18,66
<i>Other sources</i>	38	28,36
Total	134	100

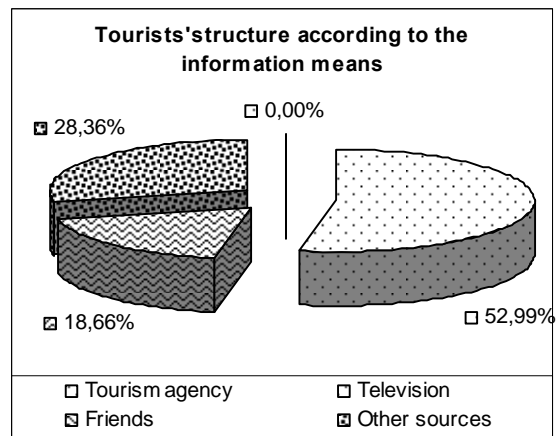


Figure 4. Tourists' structure according to the information means

The television represents the main information source used by the tourists, a fact highlighted by the highest percentage, of 52,99% which it is due in the established structure. Only at a rather significant difference there are placed other sources, which represented another important information source (28,36%). Friends are information means whose weight is placed at the level of 18,66%, intervening in the structure presented in the previous table.

The majority of the interviewed tourists have arrived for the first time at Bâlea Lake (62,69%), as it is presented the situation of the tourists' structure in table 6, highlighted by the graphic 5.

Table 5. Tourists' structure according to the answers concerning the arrival for the first time at Bâlea Lake

Variant of answer	Tourists' answers	Tourists' structure
<i>Yes</i>	50	37,31
<i>No</i>	84	62,69
Total	134	100

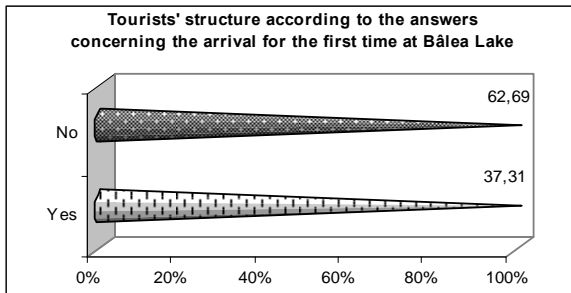


Figure 5. Tourists' structure according to the answers concerning the arrival for the first time at Bâlea Lake

The rest of 84 tourists among the 134 interviewed ones have come before in this zone, they representing just 37,31% of the total.

The structure of the tourists according to their preferences for Bâlea Lake includes the interviewed persons who completely agree with this choice in proportion of 67,16%.

Table 6. Tourists' structure according to their preferences for Bâlea Lake

Attributes	Tourists' answers	Tourists' structure
<i>Total agreement</i>	90	67,16
<i>Agreement</i>	36	26,87
<i>Indifferent</i>	1	0,75
<i>Disagreement</i>	7	5,22
<i>Total disagreement</i>	0	0
Total	134	100

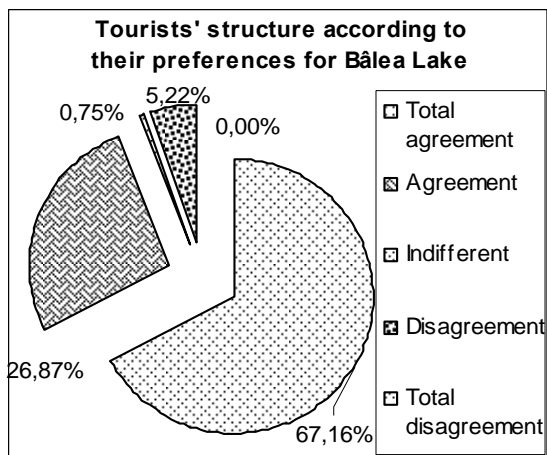


Figure 6. Tourists' structure according to their preferences for Bâlea Lake

The agreement and the disagreement represent another two attributes which are due with significant weights of 26,87%, respectively 5,22%, while only 0,75% are represented for the indifferent persons as regards the preference for this destination.

A high degree of relevance for the performed research is represented by the tourists' appreciation as regards the relationship price-quality.

Table 7. Tourists' structure according to the appreciation of the relationship price-quality

Types of appreciations	Tourists' answers	Tourists' structure
<i>Satisfactory</i>	100	74,63
<i>Partially satisfactory</i>	30	22,38
<i>Unsatisfactory</i>	4	2,98
Total	134	100

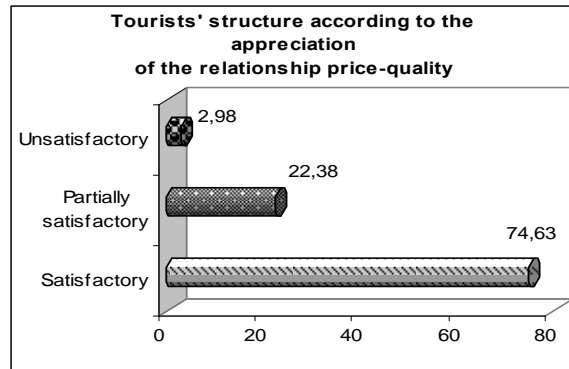


Figure 7 Tourists' structure according to the appreciation of the relationship price-quality

The majority of the tourists (100 people) consider satisfactory the relationship price-quality, they representing 74,63% of the total of the interviewed ones. At a far distance there are the partially satisfactory answers of the interviewed ones, which are due 22,38%, whilst to the ones who are unsatisfied by the mentioned relationship it corresponds just 2,98%, what means that a very small number of the questioned ones consider that there are still certain problems with the correlation that establishes between price and quality.

The interviewed persons have been distributed according to six age categories, as they are presented in table 8:

Table 8 Tourists' structure according to the age groups

Age groups (years old)	Tourists' answers	Tourists' structure
<i>Under 18</i>	10	7,46
<i>18 - 36</i>	38	28,37
<i>36 - 54</i>	78	58,20
<i>Over 54</i>	8	5,97
Total	134	100

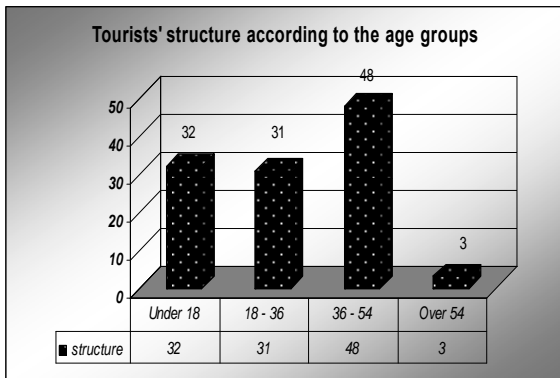


Figure 8. Tourists' structure according to the age groups

The graphic 8 highlights that between the age categories appear rather significant percentage differences. The smallest of 7,46% and 5,97% being signalled, as it was natural, for the categories under 18 years old and over 54 years old, to which correspond the smallest percentages; for the age category of 18-36 years old and under 36-54 years old appear the biggest percentages of 28,37% , respectively the maximum as percentage, of 58,20%.

The tourists' research also includes a question of identifying the monthly average incomes of the people who came to practice tourism at Bălea Lake, the answers being divided on six categories of incomes, presented in table 9.

Among the persons questioned, the biggest part (36,56%) is represented by those who have monthly average incomes of over 3000 RON. The categories of tourists with incomes comprised between 2000 RON and 3000 RON, respectively the ones under 1000 RON, are due with 24,63%, and respectively 20,90%. Just 17,91% have remained to the group with monthly average incomes comprised between 1000 RON and 2000 RON. It is noticed a rather balanced distribution of the tourists on the categories established for the analysis.

Table 9 Tourists' structure on groups according to the incomes

Groups according to the income (RON)	Tourists' answers	Tourists' structure
Under 1000	28	20,90
1000 - 2000	24	17,91
2000 - 3000	33	24,63
Over 3000	49	36,56
Total	134	100

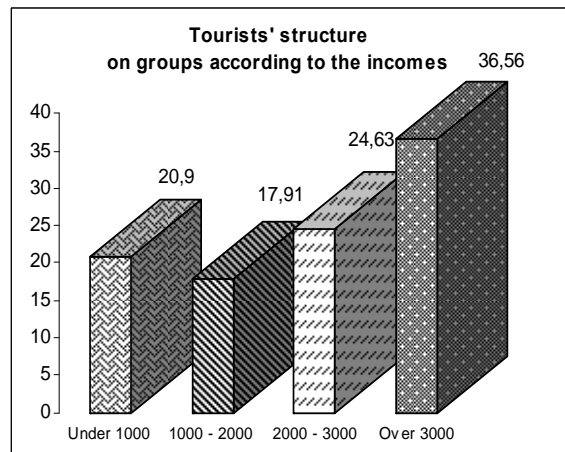


Figure 9. Tourists' structure on groups according to the incomes

The study of the structure of the tourists who come at Bălea Lac, according to the sex, has led to the result that places on the first place the men with about 55%, as it is natural, women being due the rest, about 45%.

Table 10. Tourists' structure according to their sex

Groups according to sex	Tourists' answers	Tourists' structure
Masculine	74	55,22
Feminine	60	44,78
Total	134	100

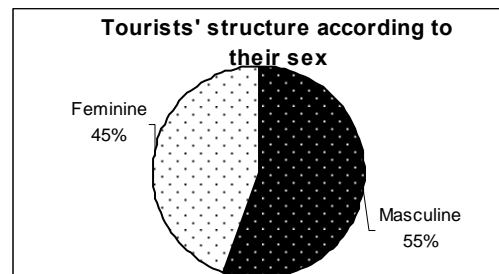


Figure 10. Tourists' structure according to their sex

From the point of view of the socio-professional status, the majority of the questioned ones are employees, the maximum percentage being of 47,96%. The employers, the workers on their own, the pupils, or the students, as well as the retired, are due with percentages comprised between 9,27% and 17,02%, whilst the not remunerated family workers who arrived at Bălea Lac have been in a small number, so that they represented only 4,96% of the total of the interviewed ones (table 11, graphic 11).

Table 11. Tourists' structure according to their socio-professional status

Tourists' status	Tourists' answers	Tourists' structure
<i>Pupil, student</i>	14	10,05
<i>Employee</i>	64	47,96
<i>Employer</i>	23	17,02
<i>Worker on his/her own</i>	14	10,74
<i>Not remunerated family worker</i>	7	4,96
<i>Retired</i>	12	9,27
Total	134	100

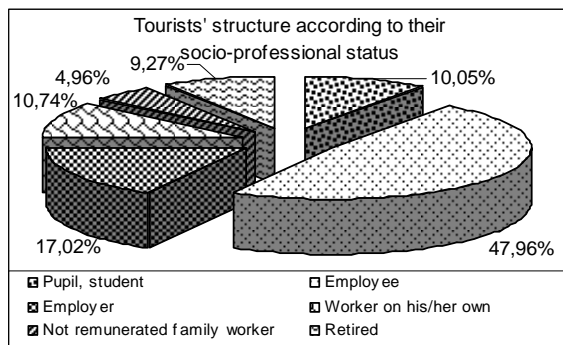


Figure 11. Tourists' structure according to their socio-professional status

The penultimate question being open, the qualitative analysis cannot be emphasized but basing on the presentation of the recorded effective answers, which are rendered further on:

- ✓ The hotel presents a qualitative increase compared to last year, it's much more imposing;
- ✓ Originality. The combination between the various types of ice, the design is fascinating;
- ✓ Original building;
- ✓ Very beautiful;
- ✓ Something unique in Romania;
- ✓ Something unforgettable;
- ✓ The construction of the beds, of the rooms and of the hotel is original;
- ✓ A daring idea;
- ✓ The uniqueness of every room;
- ✓ Everything is impressive, I have never seen anything like this before;
- ✓ Taking into account that in the city there is no snow, coming at Bălea represents quite a holiday;
- ✓ Originally, the sculptures are original (especially Eminescu room);
- ✓ The location has really impressed me;
- ✓ Original, something that drew my attention in a special way;
- ✓ Unique, the 4-th in the world;
- ✓ By comparison with last year, much more spacious, wider;
- ✓ A very good impression, but I wouldn't sleep here;

- ✓ Everything is incredible, but I couldn't live in these conditions;
- ✓ Curiosity for spending a night in the Ice Hotel;
- ✓ Great. This is something new for the Romanians;
- ✓ On the local scale is wonderful, but at the international scale, is far under the standard level;
- ✓ Special.

As regards the wish of returning of the tourists interviewed at Bălea Lake, we can mention that the answers' proportions comprise close values for the last two types of answers (no and don't know), insignificantly reduced, of 0,75%, respectively of 1,49%. It stands out the type of answer "yes", with 97,76%, because the originality and the provided services contribute to the decision of returning in the region (table 12, graphic 12).

Table 12. Tourists' structure according to their wish of return at Bălea Lac

Types of answers	Tourists' answers	Tourists' structure
<i>Yes</i>	131	97,76
<i>No</i>	1	0,75
<i>Don't know</i>	2	1,49
Total	134	100

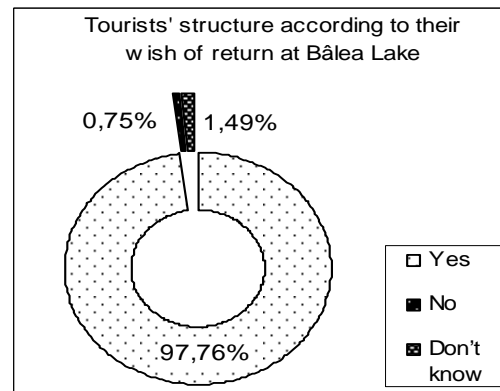


Figure 12. Tourists' structure according to their wish of return at Bălea Lac

To conclude, the overall recorded answers are optimistic.

In relation to the above, in order to get acquainted with the motivations, tourist satisfaction, and their constructive proposals and suggestions, permanent contact is necessary, as well as a lively and open dialogue with tourists, a contact that takes place by launching opinion raising issues.

Given the current background of surging competition between domestic and foreign tourist product providers, setting up a constant clientele is of outmost importance, which would also promote the local tourist product among potential tourists on different markets. The main requirement in order to accomplish this major goal is providing higher quality tourist service provision, as well as setting up the

necessary elements to trigger a positive and lasting impression among visitors.

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Annexes 1

ROMANIAN AMERICAN UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL TOURISM ECONOMICS

Poll no

Date

Place

Time

QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear tourist,

We would like to kindly ask you to answer the questions comprised in the present survey, drawn up in order to perform a study on *Branding Bălea Lac Ice Hotel*. Please be aware your answers will be confidential.

1. What category of tourists do you belong to?

Romanian tourist (skip to question # 3)

Foreign tourist

2. Please state your country of residence:

Germany

Austria

France

Other.....

3. Are you accommodated here or are you only visiting Bălea Lac?

.....

4. What is the information means employed?

Tourism agency

Television: documentaries, commercials

Friends

Other sources

5. Is it your first trip to?

Yes

No

6. How would you rate this destination? (Please circle the figure that best expresses your opinion.)

<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>Very satisfactory</i>	<i>Satisfactory</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Unsatisfactory</i>	<i>Highly unsatisfactory</i>
<i>- uniqueness</i>	5	4	3	2	1
<i>- price</i>	5	4	3	2	1
<i>- provided services</i>	5	4	3	2	1

7. Are you satisfied with the hospitality of your host?

Very much A lot Little Not at all So and so

8. Does Bălea Lac comply with your preferences?

- Completely agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Completely disagree

9. How would you rate the value per money?

- Satisfactory
- Partly satisfactory
- Unsatisfactory

10. What age group are you?

- Under 18
- 18 - 25
- 25 - 35
- 35 - 60
- Over 60

11. Your average monthly income is:

- Under RON 1000
- RON 1000 – 2000
- RON 2000 – 3000
- Over RON 3000

12. Your gender:

- male
- female

13. What is your occupation?

- student
- employed
- company owner
- self-employed
- remuneration-free family worker
- member of a farming company or association

14. What is your final opinion after visiting Bălea Lac Hotel?

-

15. Would you like to return to Bălea Lac?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

Thank you