

OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPING NEW FORMS OF ACCOMMODATION IN THE BRASOV TOURIST DESTINATION

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Abstract: *The accommodation units are a necessary component of tourist destination development, and the quality and diversification of the accommodation services offered will influence the type of tourists who want to visit the destination. The main purpose of the qualitative research presented in this paper was to study the possibility of introducing a new form of accommodation in Brasov as tourist destination and, more precisely, the extent to which "hotel apartments" are among the tourists' present and future options. The paper also analyses aspects regarding the typology of the accommodation units, classification possibilities and the advantages that the introduction and development of these forms of accommodation in the tourist destination of Brasov could bring.*

Key words: *tourists, forms of accommodation, tourist destination, hotel apartments.*

1. Introduction

Accommodation units represent (<http://statistici.insse.ro/shop/>) any building or settlement which provides accommodation and other specific services for tourists permanently or seasonally. The main accommodation structures existing in the tourist infrastructure of our country are the hotel, the youth hostel, the hostel, the hotel apartment, the motel, the inn, the tourist villa, the tourist cottage, the hunting and fishing hut, the bungalow, the holiday village, the tourist stopping, the agritourist boarding houses, the accommodation on sea and river vessels etc. (<http://statistici.insse.ro/shop/>).

In Europe, 2016 registered over 608 thousand tourist accommodation establishments with more than 31 million bed places (http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Tourism_statistics). Figure no.1 presents the EU countries with the highest number of accommodation establishments (http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=tour_cap_nat&lang=en).

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The first position is occupied by Italy, with a total of 178,449 accommodation units, while Romania occupies the last position, with a total of 7028 accommodation units.

Among the types of accommodation structures in Europe, we can mention: the hostel, the motel, the cottage – chalet, the boutique hotel, the mansion, the lodge, the apartment etc.

An apartment hotel (also known as residential hotel or extended-stay hotel) is a serviced apartment complex that uses a hotel-style booking system. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apartment_hotel)

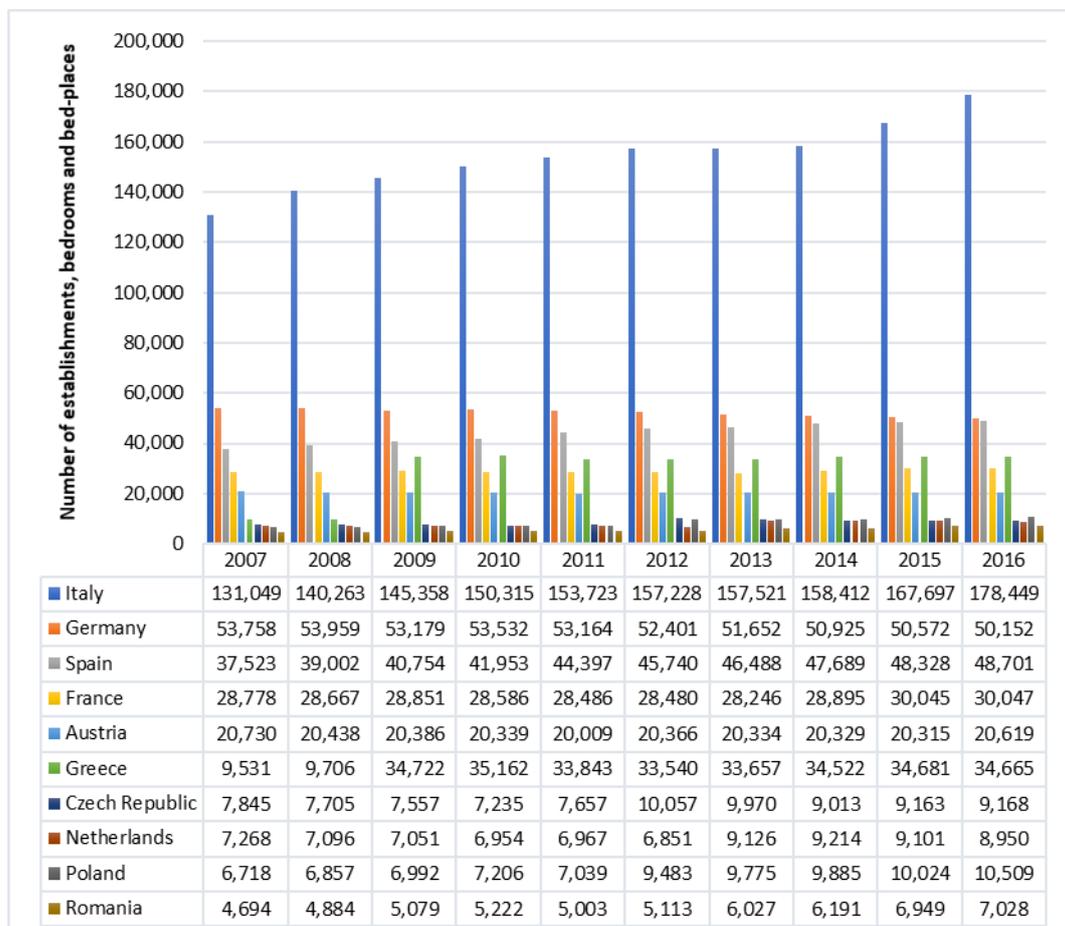


Fig.1. EU countries with the highest number of accommodation establishments

(Source: Author's processing based on data from

http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=tour_cap_nat&lang=en)

We believe that in the accommodation offer of Brasov as tourist destination, it is appropriate to introduce and develop accommodation alternatives that satisfy the various needs of different categories of tourists. An important advantage offered by the apartment hotel is the possibility to have much more space available and a greater number of facilities. The price of such an apartment is another advantage, as this form

of accommodation often has a lower price than that of a hotel room (in the apartment there is more space, an equipped kitchen and more freedom. (<https://veesko.com/post/114961446726/different-types-accommodation-tourism>)

“Providing a secure, comfortable environment, serviced apartments offer a home-from-home comfort. Apartments often include separate living and sleeping spaces as well as all the entertainment equipment: TVs, DVDs, music systems, free WiFi and a private telephone line.” (<https://www.johansens.com/inspiration/10-reasons-to-stay-in-serviced-apartments/>)

This type of accommodation was used especially in developed countries such as Germany, Spain, France, England, the U.S.A. In Romania, in Bucharest, this form of accommodation has grown over the past 10 years and, at the beginning, the demand was created by foreign tourists who were familiar with this system (<http://www.eastcomfort.com/blog/post/cazare-bucuresti-regim-hotelier>). Today we can notice a growing demand for this form of accommodation that addresses those categories of tourists who have understood the characteristics of the service offered and its advantages compared to other forms of accommodation available on the market.

2. Presentation of Brasov Destination

The destination can be considered as a "pillar of tourism construction" due to the fact that most of the tourism related activities take place in tourist destinations (Ispas 2008, p. 91).

Few regions in Romania reunite such a large diversity of landscapes, geological formations, valuable elements of flora and fauna as the county of Brasov. Here, there are 32 protected areas and also an impressive number of natural monuments, 82 species of plants and numerous species of animals protected by law. The anthropic potential includes various attractions of tourist interest and the monuments and other cultural attractions are characterized by richness, diversity and continuity (Brătucu et al., pp. 67-73).

Due to the typological variety of the accommodation units, Brasov County is able to address all categories of tourists. Analysing the evolution of the number of units depending on the main types of tourism accommodation in the county of Braşov between 2008 and 2017, it could be noticed that the total number of accommodation units increased from 493 to 955 (with 94%). By type of structure, the number of hotels increased by 117%, and agritourist boarding houses increased by 85.5%. Before 2011, there were no "hotel apartments" in the county of Brasov. In 2016, the number of apartment hotels only reached 2 units (<http://statistici.insse.ro/shop/>).

3. Presentation of Brasov Holiday Apartments

Braşov Holiday Apartments currently offers tourists six hotel-based apartments and one studio apartment, all spacious and comfortable. It will be extended this year with

another three-room apartment and another four apartments with two rooms each. These are classified by the NTS with three stars. All apartments are located in the residential district Avantgarden3 in Braşov, in new flats. Here the tourists can enjoy a quiet and relaxing holiday. In order to ensure a pleasant stay, all accommodation spaces have been modernly furnished and decorated. Such accommodation structure has a small number of staff (the owner and two maids).

In the first year of activity, the unit has increased sales, according to the statistics provided by Booking.com, plus those registered by telephone or other sites. The accommodation unit registered a sales fluctuation from January 2017 to November 2017. The total number of booking nights in January 2017 was 28, the lowest being recorded in March 2017. There was also a decrease between January (winter season) and March (off season) in terms of the average daily price, from 61.61 EUR to 33.3 EUR (<https://www.booking.com/hotel/ro/brasov-holiday-apartments.en-gb.html>).

4. Tourists' Reviews regarding the Introduction of new Accommodation in Braşov

The tourism and hospitality sector represent a catalyst for the development of the economy as far as Braşov is concerned, being a key factor for the socio-economic progress, through the jobs it creates, the generated revenues, the business development, the innovation potential and the emergence of new start-ups, as well as through the development of the tourism infrastructure.

The survey carried out between February 2017 and April 2017 analyzed tourists' and potential tourists' views regarding the choice of the type of accommodation structure at the time of holiday planning.

In order to highlight the researched problem from the perspective of the two categories of subjects, a qualitative research study based on in-depth interviews was carried out. The sample consisted of 6 tourists accommodated in Braşov Holiday Apartments and 9 potential tourists, women and men, aged between 20 and 40, who had not had the "accommodation apartments" form until that moment.

4.1. Reviews of Tourists Staying in Braşov Holiday Apartments

The first part of the research focused on the opinions of the tourists who benefited from the accommodation services in the reception facilities of Braşov Holiday Apartments.

The hypotheses of the qualitative research for holidaymakers were: generally, tourists are open to trying a new type of accommodation; tourists are motivated to choose "hotel apartments" by the facilities they offer; tourists are motivated to choose "hotel apartments" for their privacy; tourists are generally satisfied with the conditions offered by the hotel apartments and their facilities; for the planning of future holidays, tourists will opt for the same type of accommodation requested so far.

The objectives of the qualitative research focused on the following aspects: measuring the attitudes, habits and perceptions of tourists over the last journeys they made outside their home town in the last 12 months; identifying the types of favorite accommodation units, the motivation of their choice and satisfaction with the services received; knowledge of the reasons for choosing the type of unit "hotel apartment"; determining the degree of satisfaction with the conditions offered in the new types of accommodation; finding out about the future choice of the same accommodation.

The analysis and interpretation of the data obtained was done using the content analysis method.

S1 said that in the last 12 months, he had left more than 10 times the place of residence for the trips. The main reasons for his travels were relaxation, recreation and also the solving of professional situations. In his last trips, the interviewed tourist chose hotel and hotel apartments, as type of accommodation, noting that it was not the first experience with the new accommodation option. He also indicated that the first reason for choosing the above-mentioned accommodation was the night accommodation rate. The respondent's opinion was that the factors that prompted him to choose the new type of accommodation, both then and in the previous days, were: the accommodation rate, the facilities offered and included in this tariff. In his opinion, "the strengths of this type of accommodation are: the arrangement, the facilities and the price". The only weak point mentioned was related to the location, namely the distance between the residential district and the city center. In the future, the respondent was of the opinion that "hotel apartments could go up because they are ideal for low budget travelers".

Another respondent, S2, had chosen until then, as the type of accommodation, the unit "guesthouse", having as its main reason the accommodation rate. The factors that determined the respondent's decision to choose the new type of accommodation were those related to the tariff, but especially the intimacy and freedom that the apartment offers him throughout his stay. The respondent mentioned that what satisfied him most was the comfort offered, namely the separate rooms, with the individual door, thus being able to have children under supervision more easily. He identified as strong points: privacy, accommodation rates in relation to the quality of the services offered and the clean and quiet area. The only weak point mentioned was the distance to the tourist attractions and other important areas of the city. The tourist said that "this kind of accommodation unit could grow as it is a good alternative to hotel rooms or hostels".

The reason for travelling for another tourist, S3, was relaxation, recreation and rehearsal. Initially he chose the hotel as a type of accommodation, then on the other trips he opted for the guesthouse. The tourist pointed out that the facilities offered by the hotel apartments and the privacy were the main factors that led him to choose the new type of accommodation. He believed that the main strength of the apartments is that you can go on vacation in a place where you feel at home because you have the same conditions. The respondent believes Braşov is a tourist area that has a very high potential, and such an alternative to accommodation could grow in the coming years.

As a result of the analysis of both the vertical and the horizontal information received by using the "pencil and paper" method among the tourists accommodated in Braşov Holiday Apartments, we could also test the established hypotheses. Firstly, the hypothesis was confirmed that tourists are generally open to trying a new type of hotel unit because all the interviewed tourists were open when they chose to opt for the apartments of the present hotel unit. Secondly, the hypothesis that tourists are motivated to choose "hotel apartments" because of the facilities they offer has come true. Almost all interviewed tourists mentioned as the main factor in choosing this type of hotel unit the facilities they offered. Moreover, the third hypothesis was accepted, as most of the subjects claimed that they were motivated to choose "hotel apartments" for their intimacy. Besides, the price of this kind of hotel unit and the freedom offered were factors in the choice of the new kind of accommodation. Also, all interviewed tourists declared themselves loyal to future hotel apartments.

4.2. Potential Tourists' Reviews regarding Accommodation in Hotel Apartments

The main purpose of this component of the qualitative research carried out was to determine the views of potential tourists regarding the new "hotel apartments" reception facilities.

The hypotheses of the qualitative research among potential tourists were: tourists are generally willing to try new forms of accommodation; hotel apartments offer tourists more privacy than classical forms; hotel apartments offer more facilities; in general, tourists requesting hotel apartments practice traditional forms of tourism.

The objectives pursued in the framework of the qualitative research were: identifying the main forms of tourism practiced by tourists who could request apartments in the hotel regime; assessing the main complaints experienced by potential tourists in other forms of accommodation; determining the extent to which new types of accommodation are known; determining the main strengths considered by potential tourists for hotel apartments; determining the intentions to request the new type of accommodation in the future.

The analysis and interpretation of the data obtained was done using the content analysis method.

The first interviewee, S1, said that the only accommodation option chosen until then was the hotel, the reason for his travels being relaxation, rest. The respondent mentioned that "the main discontent among accommodation structures is the lack of well-trained staff who are able to respond promptly to any problems that may arise". The interviewed tourist was of the opinion that new forms of accommodation could develop in Brasov. He also said he had heard about the type of accommodation unit "hotel apartments" among friends and family. What the subject under consideration considered as an advantage of accommodation in such units was the price / quality / facilities ratio. The respondent's intention to request the new accommodation option in the future was closely related to the reason for the trip and the participants. More

specifically, the respondent reports that, if they travelled with their family for a longer period of time (one week or more), they would opt for a hotel apartment because of the possibility of cooking in the kitchen at their disposal.

Up to the date of the interview, S2 had chosen, besides the hotel, guesthouses and cottage units, he had traveled during holidays, but also during weekends and legal holidays. A weak point that he disliked in the chosen accommodation structure and that could be turned into a strong point for hotel apartments is the lack of privacy. He believes that Brasov "is a growing city with a great tourist potential and that the development of new accommodation would be welcome by attracting many more tourists". The characteristics of the new type of accommodation was brought to the respondent's knowledge by friends and colleagues, and then, in the desire to better document it, he searched the various information on the Internet. The subject asserted that "accommodation in hotel apartments could bring various benefits to tourists, especially those related to fares and facilities". He also convincingly argued that his option for the next holiday together with his family will be a hotel apartment.

Based on the information gathered using the pencil and paper method, we could also test the hypotheses set at the beginning. Thus, it could be noticed that all four general assumptions were confirmed (more than half of the analyzed respondents stated that in the future they intend to choose the new form of accommodation, most of the respondents stated that in the hotel units chosen until then they had not had the desired intimacy. Considering that this point could turn in an advantage for the hotel-based apartments, the potential tourists pointed out first of all, the fully equipped kitchen, which is available to the tourists throughout the whole stay. The analysis of the answers showed that the most frequent travel reasons for potential tourists were those related to rest and relaxation, followed by departures on business trips.

5. Conclusions and Proposals

After performing the qualitative "pencil and paper" research, the comparison of the obtained results could lead to the conclusion that both categories of respondents were attracted and are attracted to the same advantages that " hotel-based apartments" bring. Thus, it has been found that this new type of hotel accommodation offers tourists and potential tourists the privacy they want at the place of accommodation, along with the "home" feeling of "dwelling". More than half of the respondents surveyed in the second qualitative research were of the opinion that the introduction of new accommodation in the Brasov tourist destination would be welcome, especially considering the tourist fluctuation that this city has.

Regarding the reasons for travelling that the guests of the new accommodation have, they especially refer to relaxation, leisure, health care and professional reasons. Although the new concept of "hotel apartment" is known among the population, the characteristics of such accommodation require better understanding and promotion.

After analyzing the answers to the recruitment questionnaires, for the two types of respondents, it has been concluded that the age range of the tourists opting for the new accommodation form is between 20 and 40. Also, their income ranges from 2000 RON to 3000 RON. This aspect is an important point in the analysis, as it determines the tariffs that "hotel apartments" could apply.

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