

# LEISURE OPPORTUNITIES IN URBAN AREAS. A CASE STUDY: THE CITY OF BRAŞOV

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**Abstract:** *This paper contains a research study about the leisure opportunities in urban areas. The study targets a clear objective: developing a business idea in line with the leisure needs of the population from Braşov. The tools used to perform the research were: population analysis from an economic and social perspective, study about current leisure opportunities in Braşov, marketing research and business plan. The research seeks to be the starting point of the business plan which will have as a primary characteristic the purpose to fulfil the needs and requirements of the studied population.*

**Key words:** *leisure opportunities, business idea, population leisure needs, marketing research, business plan.*

## 1. Introduction

Leisure or free time is time spent away from business, work, and domestic chores. It also excludes time spent on necessary activities such as sleeping and, where it is compulsory, education [4].

Beyond its value as a form of sociability, recreation also provides major personal benefits in terms of meeting physical, emotional, philosophical, and other important health-related needs of participants. In a broad sense, the leisure life of a nation reflects its fundamental values and character. The very popular games and sports, entertainment media, and group affiliations that people enjoy in their leisure time contribute to shaping the character and well-being of families, communities, and society at large [5].

The new century is already experiencing new challenges, opportunities, and approaches of the leisure activity. The

former traditional models are changing in many communities and commercial enterprises are engaging in new leisure opportunities [3].

The prototype of the modern human being tends to have the following characteristics: work-oriented, superficial, stressed, tired, timeless, patience less, rushed, agitated and so on. We are becoming more and more alienated from our nature, in other words, from ourselves. We prefer chatting on Facebook or Y!Messenger rather than meeting each other face-to-face and socializing in the real world; or, if we do meet, we hardly choose an open place: to walk, to do an open-air activity etc.

Quoting Timothy Ferris, “to escape 9 A.M. - 5 P.M. schedule, live anywhere and join the new rich” we should have “4-hour workweek” [2] and so, the rest of the time, we can do whatever we want. Ferris offers readers a new way to solve a very old

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problem: how can we work to live and prevent our lives from being all about work. Taking into consideration the importance of free time and relaxing activities for maximum efficiency and satisfaction at work and in our personal lives, the research focuses on the wide range of leisure offerings and activities available for the Romanian urban population. The research seeks to be the starting point of a business plan which will have as a primary characteristic the purpose to fulfil the needs and requirements of the studied population.

## **2. Hospitality offers in the city of Braşov and the surroundings**

The city of Braşov has a wide range of hospitality possibilities offered to its population. The analysis of this extended offer is structurally presented, being divided into three main categories: food service, lodging offer and other leisure opportunities.

### **2.1. Food service**

The word restaurant covers a broad range of food service operations. Today, any public place that specializes in the sale of prepared food for consumption can be described as a restaurant. Considering Maslow's Pyramid (i.e. Maslow's hierarchy of needs), food industry and more precisely, food service is undoubtedly a basic part for the Braşov population. Food away from home may be purchased in a variety of locations. There is a variety in size and scope of food service industry units that includes cafeterias, convenience stores, bistros, traditional restaurants, quick service-restaurants, full-service restaurants and others.

#### **2.1.1. Dining market**

People dine out for a variety of reasons, including escaping from boring activities, socializing, having a different type of food than the one eaten at home, for convenience etc. (Examples: Restaurant Cetate Braşov, Restaurant Poarta Scheii, Ambassador). The

casual-dining restaurant is another category comprised in the dining market. Some examples can be: specialty restaurants (Sergiana, Casa padurarului), ethnic restaurants (Casa Romaneasca, Taverna Sarbului), bars and cafeterias (Ceai et caetera, Cafeteca, Café de Paris, Captain Nemo) [6].

#### **2.1.2. Eating market**

The eating market comprises quick-service restaurants (QSRs) and mid-priced restaurants. The quick-service segment is dominated by McDonalds' and KFC. Other restaurants of this type are: Panini, Ando's, La Fontanella etc. The two most common mid-priced restaurant types within this category are family restaurants (Restaurant la Bucatarul Vesel) and pizza restaurants.

### **2.2. Lodging**

It is important to note the fact that accommodation is mostly for those who come in Braşov as visitors or tourists. The inhabitants of this city still can enjoy facilities offered by hotels and guest houses: conference rooms, teambuilding activities and others. High-standard hotels from Braşov are: Aro Palace, Hotel Gott, Hotel Bella Muzica [6].

### **2.3. Other leisure activities**

#### **a) Art and culture attractions**

- **Museums:** Museum of History, Urban Civilization Museum, Mureşenilor's House, Museum of Ethnography, Museum of Art, White Tower, Black Tower;
- **Theatres, opera:** Sică Alexandrescu Theatre, Cultural Center Reduta, Opera Braşov;
- **Churches:** Black Church, Reformed Church, Lutheran Church, Holy Trinity Church

#### **b) Indoor recreational activities**

- **Clubs:** Tequila, Oldies, Studio '80, Xen Club, Sofa.
- **Indoor sport:** WePlay, Paradisul Acvatic, Fitness Gyms (Black Gym, Energym etc), Dance Clubs (Fan Dance

Club, Active Dance etc.).

### c) Outdoor recreational activities

- **Natural reserves** are Tâmpa Mountain and Pietrele lui Solomon (Solomon's Rocks) where people can walk, climb trek and they can try the cableway which lifts them up on the top of Tampa Mountain; surrounding locations are: Piatra Mare Mountain, Postavarului Mountain, Piatra Craiului Mountain.
- **Theme park:** Parc Aventura (Adventure Park) [7].

### 3. The Braşov population opinions related to their leisure possibilities

The researched population is the whole group of people that live in Braşov.

Identifying the proper sample size was based on statistical theory. The determination of the sample size was made according to the population parameters. As the binomial (dichotomous) variables are the most used in surveys, the sample size is computed in accordance with the following formula (1):

$$n = \frac{z_{\alpha/2}^2 \cdot \pi \cdot (100 - \pi)}{E^2} \quad (1)$$

where n is the sample size,  $z_{\alpha/2}^2$  equals 1.96 [1] and E is the error.

For an error of 3% (for pretty sure marketing results), the sample dimension is

1067 questioned persons, but in this case it was not possible to question out so many persons. For this research, the sample dimension was reduced to 60 persons (using the previous formula, the estimated error reaches a value of 9.03%). In the future, the research will be continued using a larger sample.

The reasons for choosing probability sampling are mainly connected with the possibilities to give a representative sample, which allows statistical inferences about the target population. Each person from the target population has an equal chance to be included in the sample if we perform a random selection.

The **stratified sampling** fits this research best because it is the best sampling method for a heterogeneous population as the studied one. The target population was divided into strata according to one characteristic that can lead to different behaviours. There are several characteristics that can be used here, but in this research age was chosen. For each stratum (i.e. age group) a sampling frame was used and the selection of the sample members was made using a simple random sampling or systematic sampling.

The stable population of Braşov was around 276,914 persons as at the 1<sup>st</sup> of July 2010. Classified by age groups, the Braşov population had the following structure [8]:

*Population structure by age group in the city of Braşov (2010)*

Table 1

Age group	Stable population
0–4 years	11419
5–14 years	17852
15–19 years	12651
20–24 years	24037
25–59 years	158588
over 60 years	52367
<b>Total</b>	<b>276914</b>

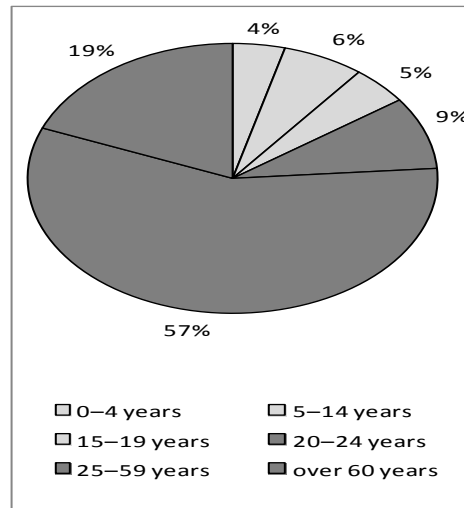


Fig. 2. Population structure by age group in the city of Braşov in October 2011

The objectives of this research were derived from the marketing issue, i.e. to create a business plan that accomplishes the population's needs and desire. These objectives explain the purpose of the research in measurable terms and define standards for what the research should accomplish. The objectives specify the information needed to take decisions.

These kinds of hypotheses give the main directions of this current research and are not directly measurable. Their validation was based on a researcher's logical evaluation. Examples: general hypotheses – "Generally, the population considers that sports as a leisure activity should be improved or more developed", statistical hypotheses – „More than 70% of the Braşov population would pay a substantial amount of money on sports activities”.

Regarding the questionnaire, some different types of questions have been used: closed questions; filter questions; dichotomous questions; determinant-choice questions; checklist questions; identification questions.

For the data analysis, the SPSS software was used. A test of the statistical hypotheses (stated at the beginning of the research) was

made and, also, a Chi-Square Test for testing if there is any relationship between the variables (income and sports leisure preferences, age and income percentage spent on leisure activities).

Considering all data analysis results, there are several conclusions that are important to be noted. A business plan will be set-up on survey's results and conclusions.

Most people from Braşov believe that their city has enough leisure opportunities but, still, they think there are huge perspectives of expanding some of the leisure activities. Even if they desire more leisure diversity, they have plenty of time to enjoy it during week-ends (91.67% of the researched population has more than 8 hours/day) and vacations (45% of them have between 21-40 days off-to-work). During workdays (33.3% of the population) has an average spare time of 4 to 6 hours. These facts lead to a short conclusion. People need a place that offers leisure activities that take few hours. Also, these activities need to be effectively satisfactory for them in order to choose them instead of something else. The price they have to pay is also important. Even if people may choose other offers, savings are always

appreciated. Moreover, from question number 21 (*"Please mark with an X the activity field(s) for which you are willing to pay a substantial amount of money: Sports and health, Concert, Culture, Restaurant, Clubs and discos"*) we can note the very important fact that 81.5% of the population would pay a substantial amount of money on 'sports and health' activities. At the same time, half of the population desires free-of-charge sports activities. We think that here, the key is placed on cost effective, quality and health-oriented services offered. If people find a place where they can shape and keep fit their body, a place where the sports area is really diversified and there are also some free-of-charge facilities, we can speak about loyal customers to that place. Better than this, the possibilities of spending free time with all the family, having at the same time some specific approaches for young people can transform a business into a successful one. In Braşov, there is a high need of pools. People need diversity and accessibility.

Passing from sports and trips to culture, we can mention that a possible business idea can also include cultural activities; especially if this can bring popularity to our business, we are more motivated to include them in our work area. The questionnaire reveals that the Braşov population features a high need of more cinema and opera events. Then, a proper location (small chamber, hall or something of the sort) for this kind of activities and maybe, an open air facility will solve this matter.

People from Braşov give special attention to volunteering; especially, teenagers, students, but also adults who would like to be volunteers can be a possible source of labour force. Knowing how to motivate them will certainly attract volunteers eager to serve the purposes of our business.

For business, the issue of an eating place can be simply solved. Considering the population's relative low interest in eating

or dining out (53.33% of them place their eating-out choices in "less than two times/week" category), we can rely on a place dedicated to this matter with some important specifications. Among these specifications, there could be mentioned the presence of mid-priced food services (most of the respondents, 78.33% chose "mid-priced restaurant" as answer to question number 17 *"Which is the most frequent type of eating place that you choose? (one choice, only) Quick Service Restaurant (fast-foods, shaorma etc), Mid-priced restaurants, Fine restaurants)* with a quick serving opportunity, facilities for families, large open air space and friendly environment.

Considering the hypotheses tests results, less than 80% of the people from Braşov spend between 21-40% of their income on leisure activities. More than 70% of the Braşov population would pay a substantial amount of money on sports activities and, this is, fortunately, good news. The next hypotheses test result is that at least 70% of the Braşov population expects or desires that cultural activities should be free-of-charge; this matter has to be given special attention. For a future business plan, it is important to know that there is no relationship between people's income and sports leisure preferences that should make us address different kinds of customers; also, this is also the case of the last test between the variables. Its result is that there is no relationship between the population's age and the income percentage spent on leisure activities.

#### **4. Business Plan**

The proposed business plan will fulfil the needs of the population from Braşov and its requirements. It relies on a sports base which provides facilities for children, teenagers and adults, incorporating activities for families and professional sportsmen.

The targeted market is the sports market comprising leisure sports activities and professional sport activities. The targeted customers are ordinary people who practise sports as a leisure activity and also professional sports people. The majority of the customers are teenagers and adults (including their families) and few retired people.

The peak hours during workdays are in the afternoon and at noon. During weekends, we will face a large number of participants in our activities. So, we will have a differentiated price strategy during peak hours and during weekends. Another important aspect is the discounts strategy which will be subscription-oriented and loyal customers-oriented (more than 3 months of subscription).

Here are the most important competitors in the city of Braşov: Baza Sportivă Olimpia, Baza Sportivă Noua, Baza Sportivă TENIS DE CAMP Bartolomeu. The proposed sports base will comprise: sportsgrounds (tennis, football, volleyball, basketball), indoor sports facilities (pool, fitness and aerobic gyms), accommodation facility, a small restaurant, three halls for social events and conferences or cultural activities and other small complementary facilities.

## 5. Conclusions

Taking into account the most important factors that could influence the proposed business idea (economic and social factors), we consider that Braşov registers an upward trend, the labour source offers plenty of possibilities, the environment (natural and anthropic) also provides good conditions for a developing business. The hospitality industry is well represented in Braşov, a future business with hospitable character will face high competition and it is really hard to penetrate the existing market. The

key resides in the low cost of the services offered and their superior quality. According to the applied survey, the Braşov population needs leisure activities with social character. People appreciate sports and health, but they would also like more cultural facilities, like cinema and opera. The proposed business plan tries to accomplish the population's needs and requirements, offering professional sports facilities, open-air locations and halls for socio-cultural manifestations. The strategy of the company relies mostly on a people-oriented basis. In order to fulfill customers', employees' and partners' expectations as well as possible, the future business has maximum chances to succeed by using the results of the above study.

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