

## THE PROFILE OF THE TOURISTS WHO CHOOSE ALBA COUNTY AS A TOURIST DESTINATION

Andreea Muntean<sup>1</sup>,  
Claudia Moisă<sup>2</sup>

**ABSTRACT:** *The tourism demand and the choice of destinations are strongly influenced by a number of factors among which: the destination's accessibility, the natural and anthropic environment, the forms of entertainment and animation provided by each area, the local hospitality etc.*

*In order to outline the profile of the tourists who choose to spend their holiday in Alba County, we have conducted a survey among people who were tourists during September 2013 - December 2013 in the 10 micro-regions of the county.*

*Knowing the potential clients' expectations, one can create tourism products tailored to the needs and wants of individual travellers or groups of tourists interested in Alba. Or, Alba is placed to become a major tourist destination on the domestic and international market.*

*Keywords: the tourist profile, Alba County, touristic destination*

*JEL Codes: M31, L83*

### 1. Introduction

In recent years, more and more tourism specialists pay more attention to consumers' purchasing motivations. Regarding the reasons for the trip, they are admitted to be needed in order to assess consumption behaviour and the visitors' expenditure. For Alba County, the specific motivations for the tourist who would choose to visit it would be the following:

- *Leisure, recreation and holidays (rest)*, considered as the main reason for tourism, comprising in turn, visiting cities, participating in cultural and sports events, recreation, practicing sports (as amateur), wedding trips, etc;
- *Return to nature*, motivation which applies to all categories of tourists, the result of the need for physical and spiritual comfort demonstrating that modern man cannot be kept apart from the native life, and his contact with the countryside has wide echoes in the functional balance;
- *Visiting relatives and friends*: visiting parents and other relatives, visiting friends, vacations at home (with the family), attending funerals or other happy events of life, etc;
- *Business and professional reasons*: attending meetings, conferences, fairs and exhibitions; installing and insecting equipment; sales and purchases on behalf of a company; studies, foreign language courses or trainings; participating in professional sports, etc.
- *Religious reasons and pilgrimages*: attending religious events, pilgrimages and other religious events;
- *Knowing the rural heritage*, namely the ethnography and the folklore, the traditional occupations and popular habits, the specific architecture, gastronomy and crafts etc. which make

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<sup>1</sup> "1 Decembrie 1918" University of Alba Iulia, Faculty of Ecomic Science, Gabriel Bethlen Street, no.5, Alba Iulia, [claudiapatrut@yahoo.com](mailto:claudiapatrut@yahoo.com)

<sup>2</sup> "1 Decembrie 1918" University of Alba Iulia, Faculty of Economic Science, Gabriel Bethlen Street, no.5, Alba Iulia, [munteanandreea2009@yahoo.com](mailto:munteanandreea2009@yahoo.com)

rustic holidays a genuine assimilation of new knowledge and acquisition of skills that give tourists personal satisfaction and the feeling of utility;

- *Hunting and fishing* - activities practiced by the enthusiasts in the field, like organizing hunting/fishing parties, photo shooting, trophies expatriation, contests and competitions .

Associated to these reasons for travel, the forms of tourism in Alba County are: leisure tourism, movement tourism (Borza A, 2014) which includes transit tourism and the traffic for sightseeing, mountaineering (sports and hiking), rural tourism, business tourism, religious tourism, hunting and fishing, etc.

## **2. The research methodology**

The present paper is part of a larger study on the tourism activity, namely tourism market evaluation of Alba County.

The general objectives of the survey that was made among tourists and which are subject of this paper are:

1. The analysis of notoriety of tourist destinations in Alba County
2. The measurement and evaluation of the information sources
3. The measurement and evaluation of the forms of tourism
4. The analysis of tourist motivation
5. The analysis of level of satisfaction of tourists towards the tourist destinations of the County
6. The measurement and evaluation of loyalty that tourists have towards the tourist destinations in Alba County
7. Making the sociodemographic profile of tourists visiting tourism destinations in Alba County

In order to achieve the objectives we set, it has been used the survey as a research selective type, which is one of the most used methods in market research, in general and for the tourism market, in particular. The survey gives the possibility to identify solutions for the development of tourism in Alba County and to value the existing opportunities. The survey provides a high level of accuracy, relevance and representativeness of the data.

The research was made based on a questionnaire given by the interviewers on a representative sample of respondents.

The sampling frame – the base of the survey was established by the research team through the analysis of the existing accommodation, touristic products, the tourism potential, tourist flows, and existing statistical data about tourism in Alba County.

The observation unit consists of persons who were at the time of the research in the tourist destinations that were under investigation at the time, according to the sharing in the 11 macroregions presented in the contents of the study.

The survey unit was represented by people who answered to the given questionnaire, respectively:

- Persons located in that locality
- Persons in different tourist accommodation structures
- Persons participating in events in those localities
- Persons who visit different tourist attractions

The research made is a quantitative research.

The communication mode with the investigated unit it is based on interviews with a questionnaire-based given by the operators, and the technique used was the structured interview. The questionnaire was presented to all subjects, the questions being in the same order and with the same wording.

The type of survey used is probabilistic. The sampling method is fixed, with restrictions.

### 3. Analysis and his interpretation of the primary data collected among tourists

Data on tourists were collected between September 2013 and December 2013. The sample was made of tourists who, during the period under review, were in the tourist micro-regions of Alba County. The questionnaires were administrated by face to face interviews (personal classic survey). The questionnaires were translated into English and Hungarian for the foreign tourists.

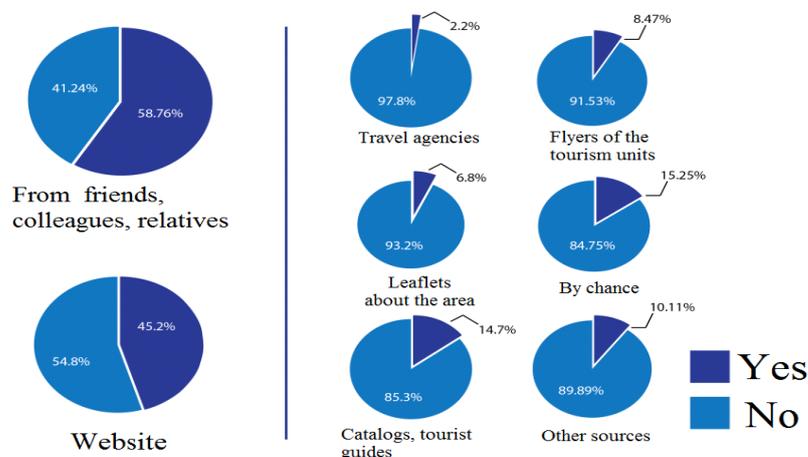
In terms of the **geographical profile of tourists** visiting Alba County, they come mainly from the county with the same name and from the surrounding ones: Cluj, Hunedoara, Sibiu, Mures and Bihor. Also, many demands come from Maramures County, the city of Bucharest and Ilfov County, followed by the counties of Brasov, Arad, Satu Mare, Prahova, Arges, Botosani, Iasi, Constanta, Olt, Dolj, Giurgiu and Vrancea.

The foreign tourists who visited Alba and were included in the sample originated mainly from the Central and Eastern Europe, but also from the Western Europe, namely: Austria, Germany, Belgium, France, Hungary, the UK and the Czech Republic.

**The sources of information that influenced the choice of destinations.** The tourists who visited the destinations in Alba County in 2013 rest their choice especially on personal sources of information (friends, colleagues, acquaintances, relatives) and on the information available on- line (web pages, blogs, social networking).

Unfortunately, relatively few tourists got informed from promotional materials or from the travel agencies' offer (see fig. no.1). This can be explained by the lack of customized promotional materials for the sights, micro- regions or tourism products in Alba County.

#### Information sources used



**Figure no. 1 The sources of information used**

Regarding the **frequency of visiting** the Alba County, almost half of the investigated tourists had been in there as tourists at least 4 times. Also, more than 20 % of the respondents chose their own county as the destination to spend vacation (see fig. No. 2).



**Figure no. 2 The frequency of visiting the Alba County**

This result indicates a relatively high degree of fidelity for Alba County, as a tourist destination, which has a huge positive impact on the local economy.

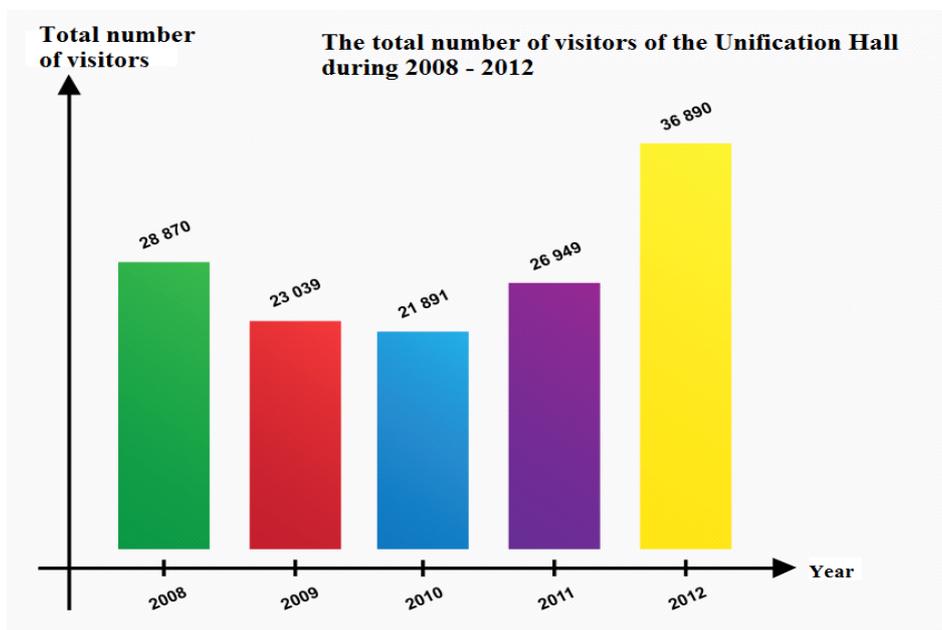
The most popular **tourist destinations** in Alba are from the micro-regions of Alba Iulia, Rimetea, Arieseni-Cîmpeni, Frumoasei Valley, the most often referred to ones are: the city of Alba Iulia with Alba Carolina Citadel, the Apuseni Mountains with Albac and Arieseni resorts, the localities of Rimetea, Şureanu ski area, Scărişoara and Aiud, the areas Dâmbău (Zlatna), Padiş , Heaven’s Gate, Râmeţ Gorge.

Among the **sights** most frequently visited and most often mentioned by the tourists investigated are the Alba Carolina Citadel, the “Scarisoara Glacier” Cave or Patru’s Peak in the Şureanu Mountains.

The top sights visited in the city of Alba Iulia by the tourists investigated, are: the Alba Carolina Fortress, the Roman Catholic Cathedral and the National Museum. Moreover, the data collected from the “Book of Honour” located in the Union Hall, representing the views/opinions/suggestions of tourists who visited the National Museum and the Union Hall were analyzed through an analysis method for qualitative data namely the *content analysis*. From July to September of 2013, the tourists visiting the two sights came from almost all the country’s counties and from abroad. Their geographical distribution is almost over all Romania excepting the counties of Caras-Severin, Harghita, Covasna and Vaslui. Most of the two sights’ visitors come from Cluj, Hunedoara, Gorj, Maramures, Suceava, Virginia, Ialomita, Sibiu, Brasov, Bistrita Nasaud and Buzau County.

The foreign tourists who visited the Union Hall during the period mentioned came from: Netherlands, France, Italy, Poland, Italy (Venice), USA (New York, Arizona), Finland, Canada, Spain, England (London), Germany, Sweden, Austria, Turkey.

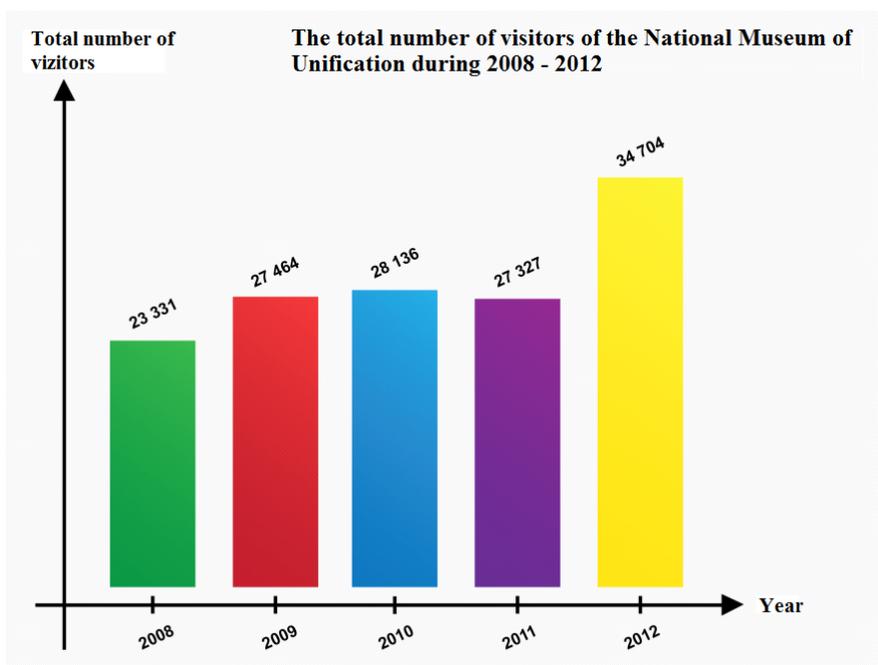
The evolution of the number of tourists who visited the Union Hall showed a slight downward trend in the period 2008-2010, and then an upward trend until the end of 2012 (see fig. no. 3).



**Figure no. 3 The evolution of the number of tourists who visited the Union Hall during 2008-2010**

Source: the Management of the National Museum of Union

Also, the number of tourists visiting the Union Museum in the period 2008 - 2012 has an upward trend, in 2012 being 48.74 % higher than in the reference year 2008 ( see fig. no. 4).



**Figure no. 4 The number of tourists visiting the Union Museum during 2008-2012**

Source: the Management of the National Museum of Union

Their opinions could be grouped into two categories: history and emotions (see table no. 1).

For most of them, visiting the Citadel, the Union Museum and the Union Hall was a real history lesson that had awakened their sense of pride for being Romanians. The tourists were generally impressed by the City's beauty, but also by its historical values.

**Table no. 1 The opinions of the tourists who visited the Union Hall during July-August 2013**

<b>HISTORY</b>	<b>EMOTIONS</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- history lesson , unforgettable history lesson</li> <li>- history of Romania</li> <li>- respect for ancestors</li> <li>- piece of the Romanian people history</li> <li>- page of the history of Romania</li> <li>- preserving the values</li> <li>- place full of history and reality</li> <li>- we are Romanians</li> <li>- place full of history that marked the evolution of the Romanian people</li> <li>- the most beautiful Citadel</li> <li>- I am happy that I am a Romanian and that I live in Romania</li> <li>- impressed by the Citadel</li> <li>- proud to be Romanians</li> <li>- live Romania</li> <li>- very beautifully landscaped</li> <li>- live the Union</li> <li>- places where the ones who forged our history had stepped</li> <li>- a beautiful city, full of history</li> <li>- it is worth visiting it in order to find out the history of your people</li> <li>- tourist attraction worth visiting, it is beautiful and preserved</li> <li>- place that preserves our "roots"</li> <li>- holly place for all Romanians</li> <li>- I found amazing and interesting things about our history</li> <li>- we have an impressive history</li> <li>- the "best museum in Romania"</li> <li>- a bit of history that we take in mind</li> <li>- Alba Iulia deserves to be the spiritual capital of Romanians</li> <li>- we have an impressive history</li> <li>- the Union Hall retains the great emotions of the Act of Union</li> <li>- the pride of being Romanian is beyond words</li> <li>- admiration for our ancestors</li> <li>- the past in an impressive museum</li> <li>- live the large Romania</li> <li>- impressed by the ethnographic exhibition</li> <li>- the Alba Iulia Citadel is one of the most beautiful in Europe</li> <li>- something super, it is worth visiting it, honour to</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- preserving traditions</li> <li>- great , respect to our people</li> <li>- there are no cities and people in this world like in Transylvania</li> <li>- we liked it very much</li> <li>- interesting, beautiful, very beautiful</li> <li>- deeply impressed</li> <li>- very beautiful, speechless</li> <li>- very emotional</li> <li>- extraordinary</li> <li>- moved to tears</li> <li>- very beautiful, something special</li> <li>- superb</li> <li>- love Romania because it loves you</li> <li>- the most beautiful treasures</li> <li>- incredibly beautiful</li> <li>- source of inspiration for the present generations</li> <li>- colossal</li> <li>- a place where you feel and relive the scent of old times; archaic and inspirational place</li> <li>- unforgettable place and memories</li> <li>- thank you for taking care of this and for reminding us too</li> <li>- bravo, bravo, bravo</li> <li>- pride, joy and urge to union of good thoughts, in gratitude for past</li> <li>- we must not forget who we are</li> <li>- respect for those who keep the true values of the country</li> <li>- touched to tears, excited</li> <li>- it was beyond my expectations</li> <li>- we are glad that we got in this city</li> <li>- experience that made me think to the old times</li> <li>- all I saw was phenomenal</li> <li>- it is worth being Romanian</li> <li>- I love Romania</li> <li>- happy that we are part of this city</li> <li>- eternal gratitude to our ancestors</li> <li>- Miracle! I love Romania!</li> <li>- the most beautiful city and Museum</li> <li>- with everything you have here, we have had several moments in the time</li> <li>- proud to be Romanians</li> </ul>

<p><i>the city of Alba Iulia</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>this is Romania</i></li> <li>- <i>Union Hall - wonderful place with extraordinary emotional importance</i></li> <li>- <i>impressed by the these places' historical load</i></li> <li>- <i>a very nice museum that breathes history through every pore</i></li> <li>- <i>too much history together, it's too good</i></li> <li>- <i>valuables</i></li> <li>- <i>a beautiful lesson in patriotism</i></li> </ul>	
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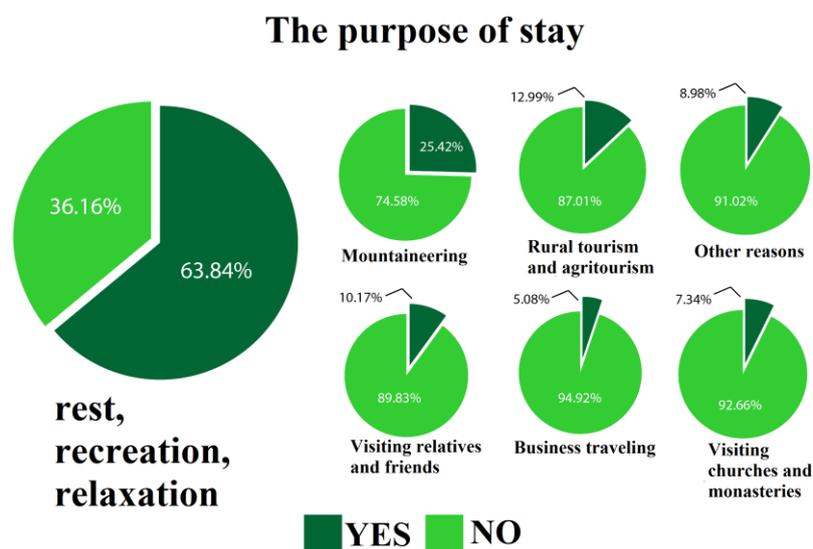
The second top destination in Alba is the micro-region Arieșeni - Gârda, located in the “heart” of the Apuseni Mountains. Among the sights visited by tourists, the most often mentioned were the “Ghețarul” Cave in Scărișoara, Ruginoasa Abyss and the Roșia Montană Mining Museum with Roman galleries.

The top sights visited in the Rimetea micro-region are: the Szekler’s Stone, the ruins of Colțești and Aiud Gorge.

On the Frumoasei Valley, the tourists were directed mainly towards the Șureanu ski area, Oașa Monastery and Pătru’s Peak.

Regarding the indicator of **average length of stay**, for more than 65% of the tourists investigated, the time spent at a tourist destination in Alba was of 1 to 3 days. The indicator for Alba was 4.02 days per tourist and **the average expenditure per tourist** recorded during the stay was 449 Ron.

In terms of **the purpose of stay in Alba County**, more than half of the tourists (63.84 %) chose Alba as destination for rest, recreation and relaxation. Also, a significant percentage have the tourists who practice mountaineering, rural tourism and agro-tourism, as well as other forms of tourism such as visiting relatives and friends, religion, pilgrimages and so forth (see fig. no. 5).



**Figure no. 5 The purpose of stay in Alba County**

Among **the reasons for choosing the destinations** in Alba County are: the natural environment (40.41 % of the respondents), the hosts’ hospitality (15.07 %), the region’s customs and traditions (12.33 % of the respondents) and the cultural- historical potential (8.22 % of the respondents) (see figure no. 6).

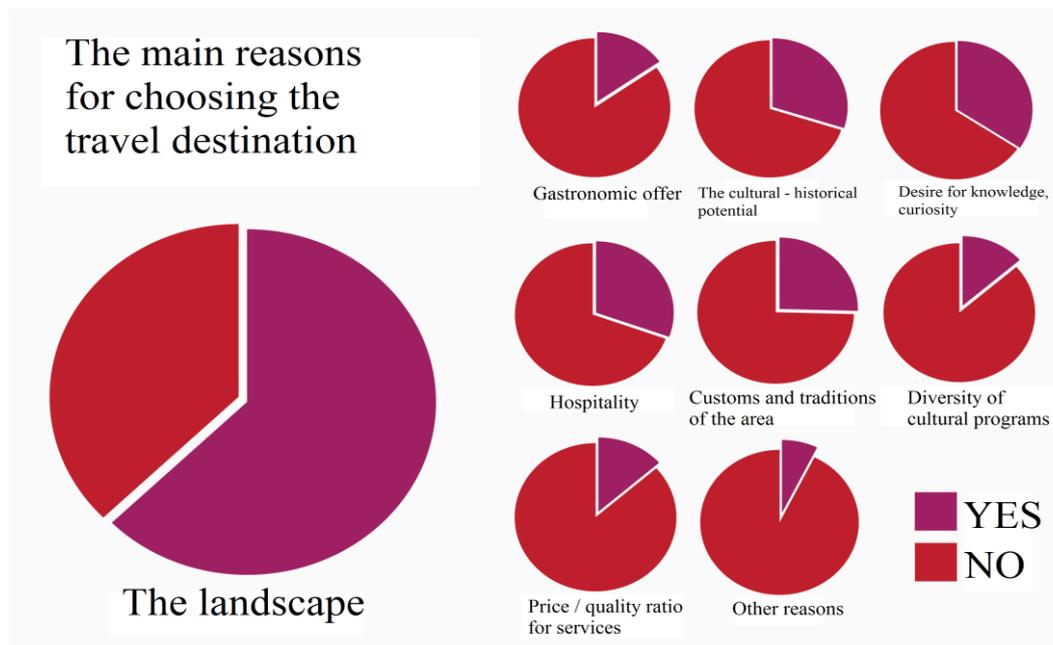


Figure no. 6 The reasons for choosing the destinations

Most tourists chose to spend their stay by visiting sights (30.14 %), relaxation and seclusion (26.03 %), leisure and adventure (13.01 %) and playing sports (8.22 %).

In terms of **types of travel**, most tourists travel in group (24.7 %), either with the family or friends (75.3 %), or in organized groups. The average number of a group is up to 9 persons.

As a **means of transport** when travelling to/from the destination, most of the investigated tourists travel by their personal vehicle (76 %) or by bus (14 %). Very few travel by train or by other means of transport (see fig. no. 7).

### Means of transport used

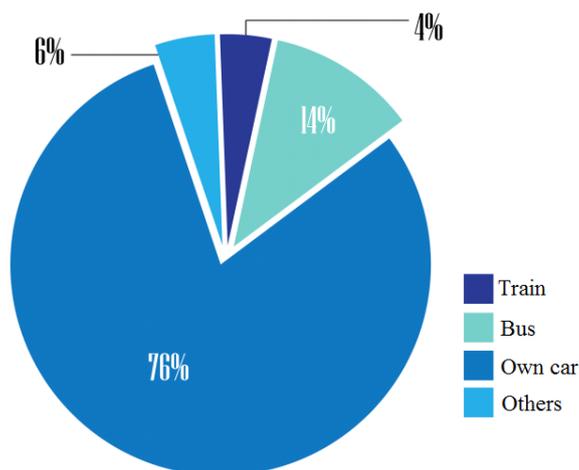


Figure nr. 7 Means of transport used

Regarding the **main governing factor in choosing the destination**, in most cases (47 %) the decision was made jointly by all the groups' members, while the wives had a greater influence than the husbands in choosing the destination (13 %, respectively 8%) . In 4% of the cases, children have imposed their opinions of practicing tourism with the family.

Following the analysis of **the way of making the reservation**, it was showed that 40 % of the holidaymakers under investigation have not opted for a previous reservation. Of those who

decided to make a reservation before arriving at the destination (60 %), 50 % made it directly at the housing unit and only 7% have used the services of a travel agency. Although most tourists prefer to book in advance, only few do it through travel agencies because they either do not find the destinations and the tourist facilities among the agencies' portfolio, or it is more favourable to do it directly with the providers.

By means of an ordinal scale, there was measured **the importance tourists attach to the different criteria used in choosing the accommodation unit** in Alba. Their importance order is shown in the figure below (figure no.8).



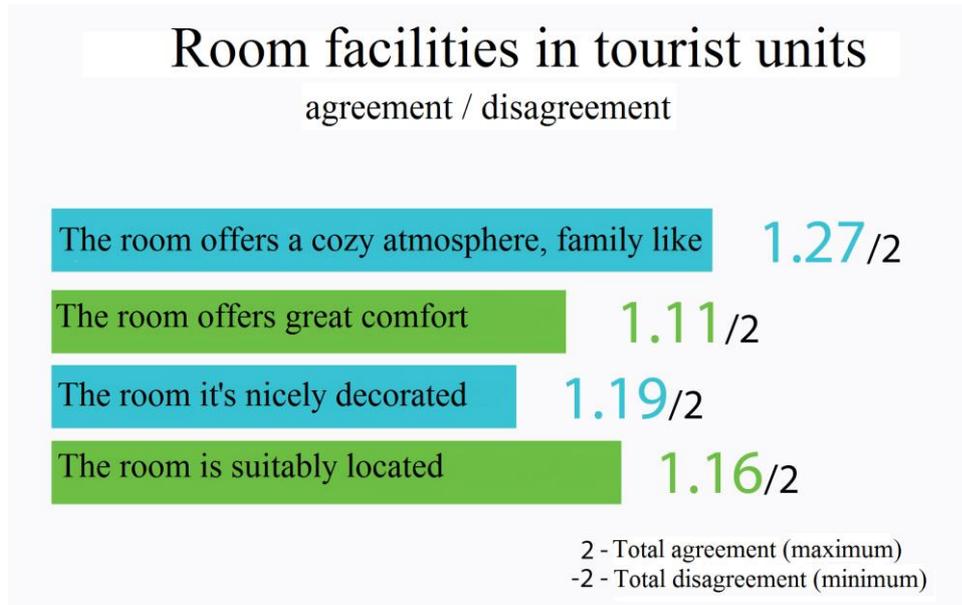
**Figure no. 8 The importance tourists attach to the different criteria used in choosing the accommodation unit**

These results may be relevant in selecting the information that the housing units use in the content of their promotional materials (brochures, web sites, portals for services sales, etc.).

With regard to **assessing the importance of tourism services' quality**, most tourists appreciate it as an important and very important aspect. The significance was evaluated with a 5-level scale range from 1 - Very important to 5 - Not important. The average score of importance is 1.64, which indicates a very high level of importance of the quality of services for tourists.

**The staff's kindness and professionalism** were measured with a 3-level scale, where 1 means minimal appreciation and 3 is maximum appreciation. More than half of the respondents rated the staff's friendliness with 3, finally getting an average score of 2.47. The staff's professionalism was rated less favourably than kindness (39 % of the respondents gave the maximum score), getting an average score of 1.92.

The tourists' opinion towards **the various attributes of the accommodation units' arrangement** was measured by using the Likert scale. They were asked to express their agreement or disagreement with the statements shown in figure no. 9.



**Figure no. 9 The attributes of the accommodation units' arrangement**

As it can be seen from the figure above, the most appreciated was the attribute – *pleasant, homely environment* (average score 1.27), followed by the attributes – *nice decoration of the room and its location*. The least appreciated was the degree of comfort offered meaning that the accommodation units do not provide outstanding comfort conditions.

Regarding the **tourists' appreciation on serving** in catering establishments, most of them consider it's fully appropriate. The average score obtained for this attribute is 4.06 (5 - totally appropriate and 1 - totally inappropriate).

The dishes served by tourists were appreciated against four criteria, namely the variety of meals and drinks offered (variety of menu), the food's novelty, the quality and the specific, traditional offer. Each criterion was evaluated by using a scale from 1 – very dissatisfied to 5 – very satisfied. The best rated criterion was the quality of the food served (average score 4.25), followed by the menu variety and the food's specific, traditional offer (average score 4.14, respectively 4.13). Culinary novelty was assessed with an average score of 3.76.

Another attribute evaluated in relation to accommodation and catering units was **the cleanliness** within them. Cleanliness was assessed on a scale from 1 – very dirty to 5 – very clean, with an average score of 4.12, which shows that tourism facilities are maintained clean.

In relation to assessing **the staff's kindness**, tourists were asked to express their agreement to the following statement: "Staff's courtesy can turn this hotel/hostel into one of the tourists' favourite places". The measuring scale used included 5 levels ranging from -2 (Strongly disagree) to +2 (Totally Agree) and the result shows that this attribute is positively rated by respondents, yielding an average score of 1.26.

In terms of **the ways of spending leisure in the tourism destination**, the tourists surveyed appreciate the current possibilities as slightly favourable. The measurement of this variable was performed by using a 5-level interval scale (semantic differential), obtaining an average score of 3.97.

The respondents who participated in **organized tours for visiting certain sights** appreciate as favourable the way they are organized (average score 2.08 out of a maximum of 3), the variety of tours (2.05) and especially their attractiveness (2.31) (see figure no. 10).

ASSESSMENT OF TRIPS FOR SIGHTSEEING  
TOURS AS A TOURISTIC SERVICE



3 - MAXIMUM -3 - MINIMUM

Figure no. 10 The tourists' opinion on organized tours

The tourists' opinion on **the importance of a tourist information point's location** was assessed by means of a scale range from 1 – Not important at all, to 5 – Very important, and the average score resulted was 4.74. Also, over 71% of the surveyed tourists consider as very important the location of tourist information points in the destinations visited in Alba County.

Regarding **the use of other types of leisure-entertainment services**, half of the respondents had participated during their stay in Alba County in cultural events like “folk evening”, and think that through the quality of the programs offered, this was one of the holidays' attractions (score average of 1.29 out of a maximum 2).

In regards to **the intention of returning to Alba County for holiday**, a significant share (91 %) of the investigated are determined to return to Alba as tourists, while 8.4 % are undecided.

Only 0.6 % say they will not return to Alba in the future. Also, almost 96 % **are willing to recommend the accommodation unit to other tourists**, and 87.9 % of the tourists surveyed are **willing to recommend Alba County as a tourist destination** (see fig. no. 11).

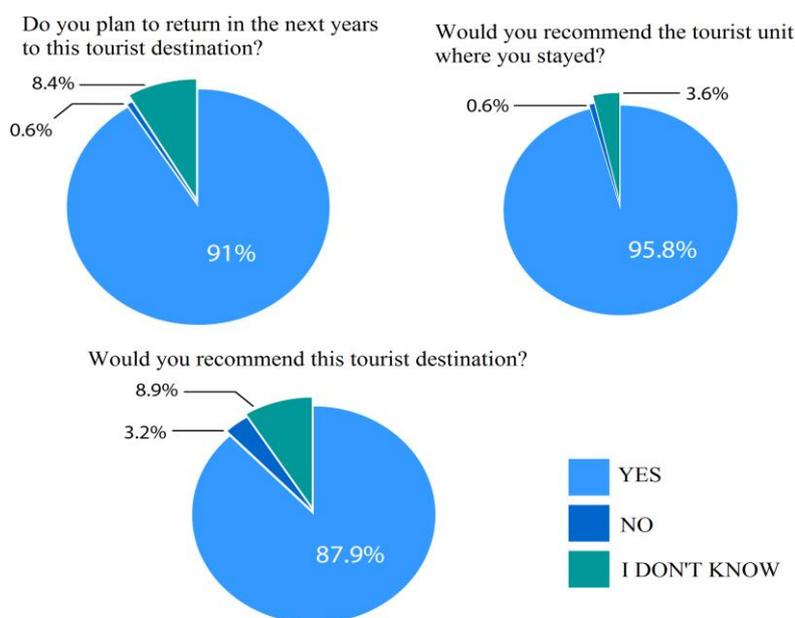
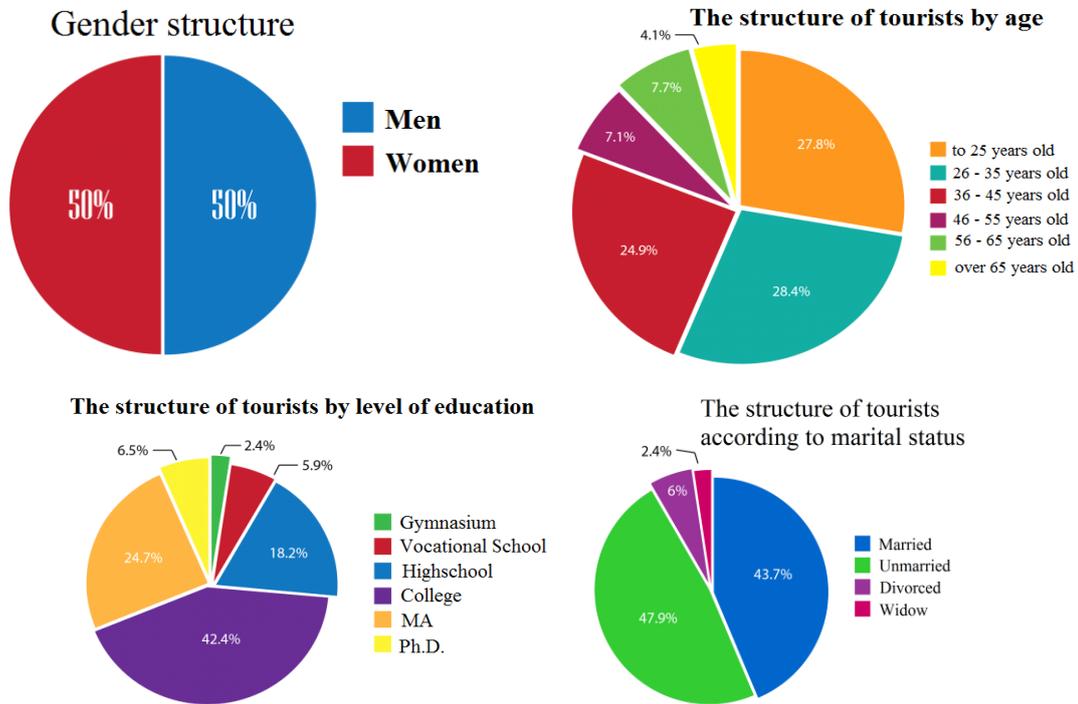


Figure no. 11 The intention of returning to Alba County for holiday

In terms of **the sample's structure**, it was made in equal proportions of men and women, single tourists (47.9 %) and married (43.7 %), generally young people (up to 35 years old),

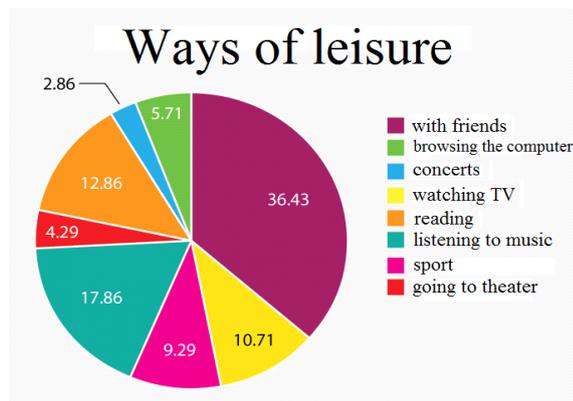
followed by those aged between 36 and 55 years, persons who have graduated college and master studies (see fig. no.12).



**Figure no.12 The sample's structure**

The average monthly income per family/household for the tourists under survey is 2714.93 Ron.

The sample's structure depending on how people spend their leisure - one third of the tourists included in the sampled choose to spend their free time with friends. More than 17 % of the respondents spend it listening to music, and 12.86 % of them use to read. The percentage of those who spend their spare time watching television is 10.71 %, and of those who practice sports is 9.29 % (see fig. no. 13).



**Figure no. 13 The sample's structure depending on how people spend their leisure**

In order to outline the diagnosis of the current situation of tourism in Alba County, it was seen as appropriate conducting studies on participants' opinions regarding the main cultural events organized in Alba. In 2013, the events that occurred and which have been the subject of our research were: ALBA JAZZ Festival 2013, "DACIAN FORTRESSES" Festival, "DILEMA VECHÉ" Festival 2013, "ZIUA DE MÂINE" Competition Festival of Folk Music.

Looking at the events' attendees (figure no. 14) one may notice that the types of consumers each event is addressed to are very different. The largest number of tourists had participated in the Dacian Fortresses Festival, namely 75% of all participants. It is one of the events that enjoyed great appreciation among the tourists coming from different parts of the country. It is also the longest running festival which had an upward trend over time.

The Dilema Veche Festival also enjoys a high reputation among the tourists who had chosen to take part in the event in an appreciable percentage of 56.9 %.

The local nature of the Folk Festival is proved by the relatively small percentage of tourists (9 %) who came to participate in this event.

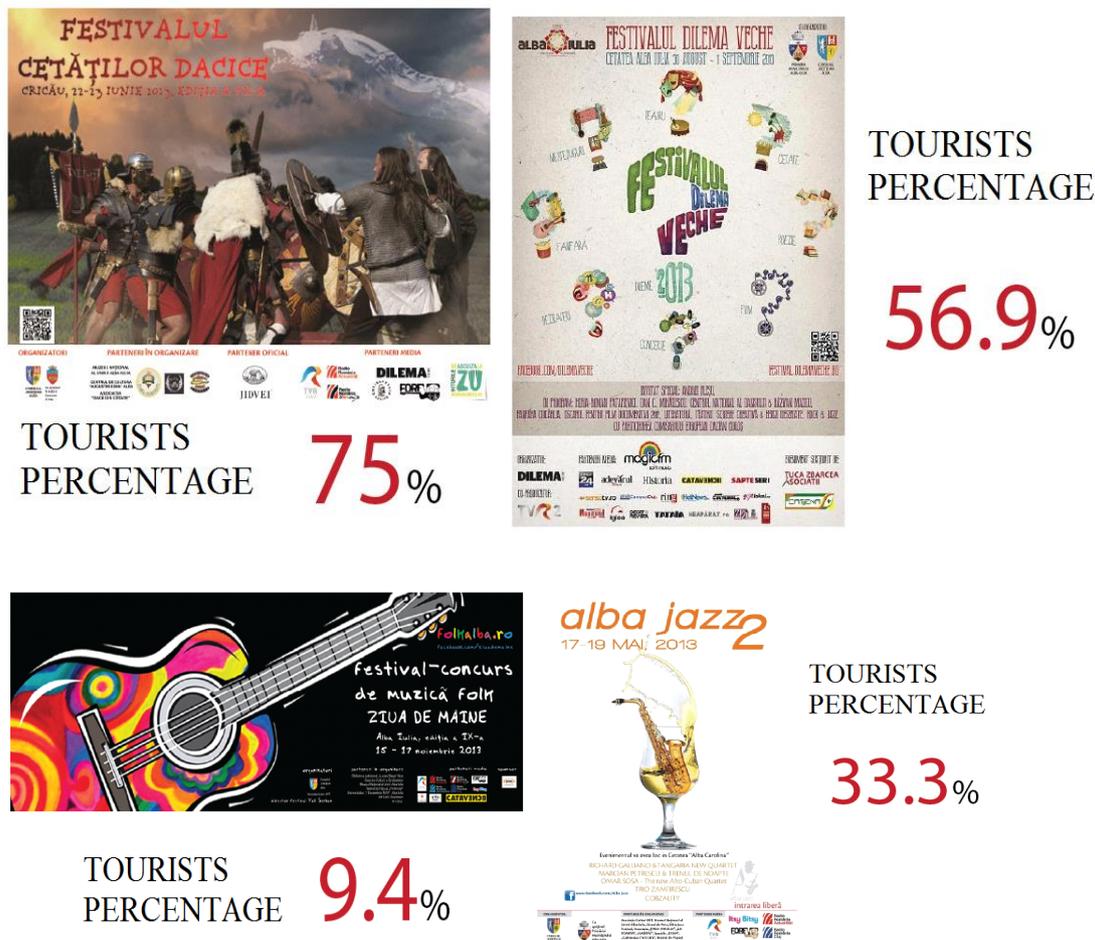


Figure no. 14 Situation of tourists' participation in the events under analysis

#### 4. Conclusions

Running the investigation made it possible to draw a profile of the tourists who take part to the tourist programs offered by Alba County. Thus, the tourists who choose Alba as a holiday destination can be described as persons:

- Who come from the county with the same name, from the neighbouring counties and from those located in central, southern and northern Romania or from other Central and Eastern Europe countries, and less from Western Europe countries;
- Who use personal sources of information (friends, colleagues, acquaintances, relatives) and the online environment (websites, blogs, social networks) to inform on the Alba County as a tourist

destination; Alba County is not sufficiently promoted among tourists through the known promotional techniques (through travel agencies, advertising in media, online advertising, etc.) and does not have a contoured identity in terms of tourism brand;

- Who are relatively loyal to Alba as a tourist destination; most tourists have expressed their willingness to return to Alba County and to recommend it to others;
- Who are attracted to the micro-regions of Alba Iulia, Rimetea, Arieșeni–Cîmpeni, Frumoasei Valley and to sights such as the Alba Carolina Fortress (Alba Iulia), “Scarisoara Glacier” Cave, Patru’s Peak in Șureanu Mountains, the locality of Rimetea, Râmeț Gorge; in the city of Alba Iulia, the most visited attractions are the Alba Carolina Citadel, the Roman Catholic Cathedral and the National Museum; the “pride of being Romanian” was experienced by most tourists who visited the Union Museum and the Union Hall;
- Who spend an average stay of 4.02 days and an average amount of 449 Ron;
- Who choose to practice a tourism of rest, relaxation and recreation, but also mountain, rural and agro-tourism, as well as other forms of tourism such as visiting relatives and friends, religion, pilgrimages, and so forth;
- Whose main reasons for choosing a destination are the natural environment, the desire for knowledge, the hospitality of tourism service providers and the cultural- historical potential, which indicates that they are nature lovers, interested in knowing new things about the environment or about the culture of different areas and likely to take part in unique experiences;
- Who choose to spend their stay sightseeing, making excursions in the surroundings or hiking;
- Who travel with their family or with a group of friends and use their personal car as the main means of transport;
- Who had chosen their destination together with all the group members, wives having more influence than husbands;
- Who prefer to book in advance directly at the tourism units and only few do it through agencies;
- Who use location and the quality of the services offered as main criteria for choosing the accommodation unit;
- Who appreciate the quality of the tourism services offered as an important and very important aspect of providing the service;
- Whose opinion on the various attributes of the accommodation units’ design is that they provide a pleasant, familial environment, and service is appropriate;
- Who had a favourable opinion regarding the staff’s kindness (in accommodation and catering units) and the leisure opportunities;
- Who consider it very important the existence of tourist information points in different tourist regions of the county.
- Who consider that cultural events in the county, important for attracting significant numbers of tourists are the “Dacian Fortresses Festival” and the “Dilema Veche Festival”
- Young people aged up to 35 years;
- Educated over the average, usually with high education;
- Both women and men – 50 % women and 50 % men ;
- With average incomes, taking into account that Alba County is not an expensive tourist destination.

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