

ASPECTS CONCERNING THE TOURISM SECURITY AT BRASOV MUNICIPALITY LEVEL

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Abstract: *When we speak about “safety and security in tourism” a lot of aspects should be taken into considerations. To define and to apply this concept at the regional level involves to know not only the situation in the region, but also the attitudes and the perception of the residents and tourists on safety and security. This article presents some of the conclusions of a complex study, a part of the **Safer Tourist Cities Project**, launched by the European Forum for Urban Security in January 2011, with the co-financing of the European Commission.*

Key words: *tourism, safety, security.*

1. Introduction

The aspects referring to the tourism security at Braşov municipality level were the subject of several researches within the project “Safer Tourist Cities”, which comes to the support of the local authorities involved in the project, with a view to improving the tourism-development policies, by the creation of a safe environment for the tourists and for the residents of those towns.

The project “Safer Tourist Cities” was launched in January 2013 and is coordinated by the European Forum for Urban Security and co-financed by the European Commission, and is aimed at obtaining answers to the major questions on the tourism-destination security: Which are the indicators of a safe tourist destination? Which are the possible solutions in the fight against tourist-

targeted criminality? What support can be provided to the victims of criminal acts? What partnerships can be clinched, with a view to unifying the efforts to combat criminality?

The project includes eight places of interest across the European Union, as well as an association: Alba (Italy), Barcelona (Spain), Braşov (Romania), Brussels (Belgium), Munich (Germany), Rome (Italy), Saint-Denis (France), Sosnowiec (Poland) and the Portuguese Association for Victim Support (APAV). The participation of Braşov municipality in the project “Safer Tourist Cities” is an opportunity to identify and implement a strategy for the prevention and reduction of the criminal phenomenon, in collaboration with several cities involved in the same project and with the support of the European Commission.

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Starting from the main purpose and specific goals of the project “Safer Tourist cities”, the current situation on the level of Braşov municipality was audited, in a national and European context. It is based on five researches, both quantitative and qualitative, as well as on a public debate referring to the results obtained in the framework of the respective researches. In this article, the aforementioned audit results will be synthesized.

2. EU preoccupations in combating criminality

The preoccupations of the European Union, in terms of criminality, materialized, for the period 2007-2013, in the general programme “Security and Safeguarding Liberties” SSL, which was allotted a budget of 745 million Euro, for the considered period. In its framework, a specific programme, entitled “Prevention and Fight against Crime” ISEC was developed, in support of the projects of prevention and fight against terrorism, either organized or not; which programme is provided with a financing of 600 million Euro.

This specific programme was designed to follow four fundamental axes of action, respectively crime prevention and criminology; law enforcement; witness protection and support, as well as victim protection. The main objectives of this framework programme were the development, coordination and cooperation between the law-enforcement agencies, the other national authorities and the European Union bodies; the promotion of good practices in terms of victim and witness protection; encouragement a strategy of prevention and fight against crime and maintenance of security.

The eligible bodies to receive funding, within the programme “Prevention and fight against criminality” were the

authorities responsible for law enforcement, the regional and national authorities, the social partners, as well as universities, statistical institutes, NGOs, and the competent international bodies who could participate as partners. [5]

In 2011, in the publication “Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and Council – as regards the intermediate assessment of the framework programme Security and Safeguarding Liberties (2007-2013)”, the results obtained, as well as the qualitative and quantitative aspects of the programme “Prevention of and Fight against Crime (ISEC)” [6].

The European Union’s Internal Security Strategy dwells on the European security-model, respectively the cooperation between the member States, for the purpose of a safer Europe. This strategy was developed as a result of the conclusions drawn from the conducted studies [2], which have shown that many criminal actions have a cross-border character, and 4 of 5 European citizens consider that the actions against organized crime and terrorism must be intensified [3]. Consequently, in 2010, a Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and Council was published. The European Union’s Internal Security Strategy, in actions: five steps towards a safer Europe, document which, for the period 2011-2014, stipulates five strategic objectives and specific actions, with a view to improving the current situation: the collapse of the international criminal networks; the prevention of terrorism and the fight against radicalisation and recruitment; to increase the security of the citizens and companies in the cyberspace; to strengthen security by border management; to raise Europe’s resilience in case of crises and disasters.

Starting from the aforementioned UE preoccupations, for the period 2014-2020 the experience gained through the financed

projects, both in terms of good practices and in terms of impediments, will be capitalized on, within coherent strategies towards a safety climate for the citizens.

The study on the tourism safety on the level of Braşov municipality falls under this European context, as a basis for a future local strategy to ensure the security of the tourists and residents.

3. Research objectives and methodology

The main objectives of this study were to identify the tourism-security elements on the level of Braşov Municipality, from three perspectives: overall context of the trends in criminality, on a national, regional and local level, stance of the tourists who visited Braşov as a destination and stance of Braşov Municipality's residents.

To this effect, several researches were

conducted: analysis of the secondary data on the crimes in Braşov Municipality; a survey among the tourists who visited Braşov Municipality and three focus-group interviews among the residents of Braşov Municipality

4. General context of the trends in the crime on a local, regional and national level

The general context of the trends in crime, throughout Romania and in Braşov Municipality was analyzed, based on the secondary data published in official statistics, both on the level of the European Union, and on a national, regional or county level, completed with specific data supplied by the Police Inspectorate of Braşov County and by the Local Police of Braşov Municipality.

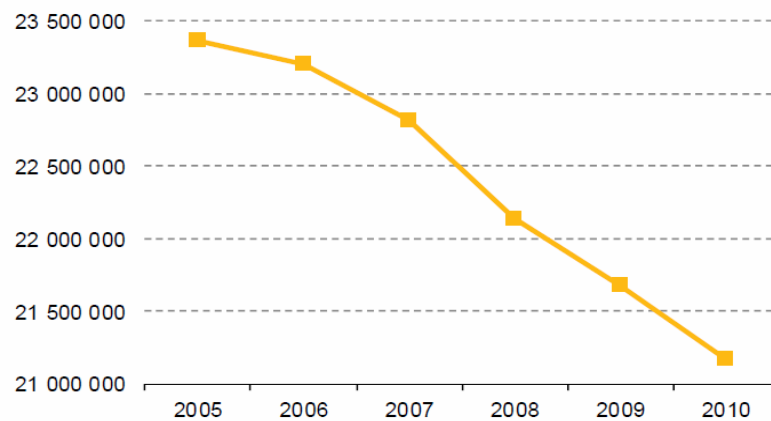


Fig. 1. *Trends in crime, throughout EU, in the period 2005-2010*

(Source: Clarke, S. - Trends in crime and criminal justice, 2010, published in EUROSTAT-Statistics in Focus, nr. 18/2013)

The statistic data submitted in fig.1 reveal a downward trend of the crime rate at European Union level, following the energetic actions to diminish this phenomenon [1].

In the aforementioned context, the trends in crime, across Romania, follow a sinusoidal trajectory, dropping in the period 1999-2005, rising again until 2009 [4]. Since 2010, a new downward trend has

been recorded, amid a slight economic recovery and due to the authorities' efforts to fight against the criminal phenomenon (see fig. 2).

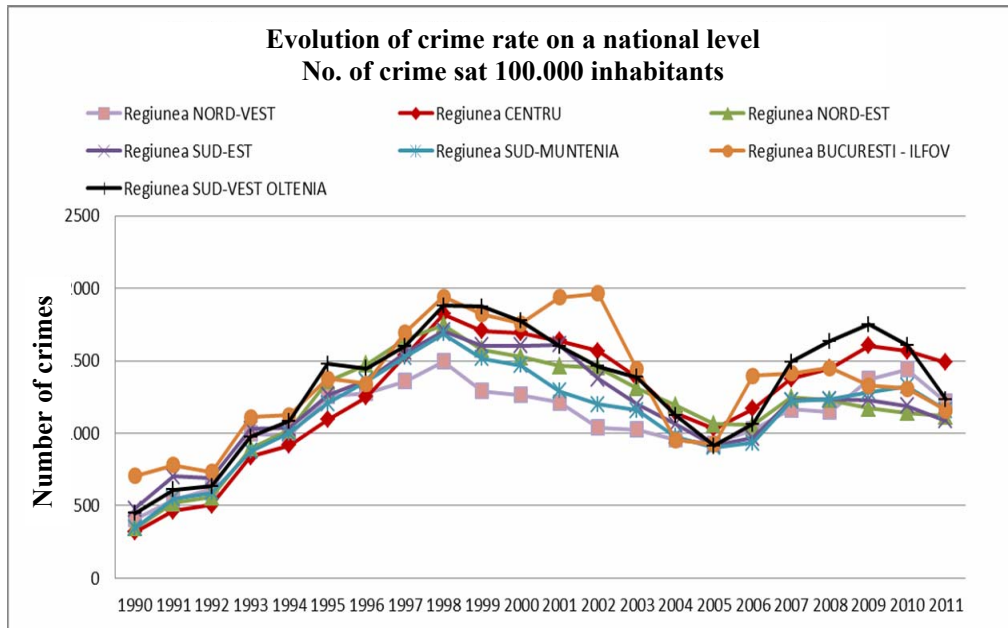


Fig. 2. Trends in crime rate, across Romania, on development regions, in the period 1990-2011

(Source: National Statistical Institute, Database TEMPO online)

The analysis of the criminal phenomenon, on a regional level, highlights the middle position of the Central Region, where Braşov County is situated, in the context of the trends in the crime on the level of Romania's development regions.

At Central Region level, Braşov county significantly contributes to the number of crimes. In this way, in 2011 in Braşov county, most crimes per 1000 people were recorded, as compared to the other counties of the Central Region. On the level of Braşov county and Braşov municipality, the dynamics of the crimes in the period 2009 – 2013 reveals fluctuations, year by year. The report made by the Compartment of Analysis and Prevention of the Criminality, within the

Inspectorate of Police, in Braşov county, shows that, in 2010, as compared to 2009 all crimes solved diminished by 110 facts (- 5,18 %); in 2011, as compared to 2010, an increase was registered, by 3442 facts (+ 63,10%), which is due to the economic crisis (unemployment, severe lack of workplaces, some individuals' impossibility to ensure the livelihood; hence the perpetration of the so-called "subsistence" offences). In 2012, as compared to 2011, the crimes diminished by 1951 facts (- 35,77%); and in 2013, as compared to the previous year, a slight increase was registered, by 78 facts (+ 2,22%).

By categories and types of facts, one can see fluctuations, increases and diminutions, from one period to another; and, as regards

the offences against the person, especially inflicting blows or other forms of violence, they were mainly perpetrated amid spontaneous conflicts between acquaintances and on alcohol consumption. One can also see an upwards trend of the thefts from vehicles, from 2009 until 2013, most of them as a consequence of the vehicle-fleet increase, and also amid the owners' negligence, who leave in their cars, visible tempting objects for the criminals; a proof thereof being that approximately 85% of the goods targeted by criminals are objects forgotten in cars: GPS devices, money, purses, electronic devices laptop, mobile phones etc.

5. Tourist attitudes towards the safety in Braşov municipality

The tourists' image on the security in Braşov municipality was outlined based on the answers offered by the members of a representative group, extracted from the persons who visited the city of Braşov in the period 05-10th of June 2014 and were accommodated in an authorized tourist-reception unit. For the data collection, the sample-survey method was used, based on a survey with 11 questions, both closed and open. The data were collected by the distribution of the surveys in various accommodation units of Braşov municipality; the tourists being invited to fill in the respective forms, by the receptionists. Data were obtained from 444 tourists, both Romanian and foreign.



Fig. 3. *Extent of the tourists' fear for their safety before deciding to visit Braşov municipality*

A first issue, targeted within this opinion poll, was to identify the extent of the tourists' fear for their safety before deciding to visit Braşov municipality; the analysis showing that most respondents had small and very small fears (see fig. 3).

Being asked to assess the security level felt during their stay, given their travel

experience in Braşov municipality, the tourists gave different answers. Most of them, respectively 51,1%, chose the response option no. 4, followed by the response option no. 5, indicated by 22,1% respondents, a fact that illustrates a very high security level.

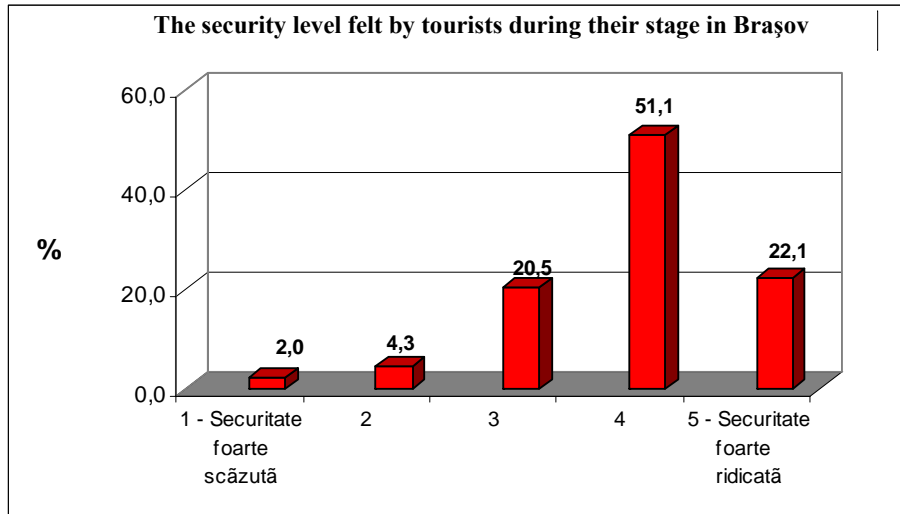


Fig. 4. Attitudes concerning the tourists' safety during their stay in Braşov

One can see that the percentages of the people who expressed a negative attitude, in terms of tourist safety in Braşov, are quite low. In this way, 20,5% of the respondents indicated the response option 3, which represents a neutral attitude, being thereby situated in the middle of the scale; 4,3% of the subjects opted for the response variant 2; whereas the remaining 2% which is an extremely low percentage, considered the security level they had felt to be very low.

6. Residents' attitudes as regards the security in Braşov Municipality

With a view to finding the residents' attitude as regards the tourist safety in Braşov, a qualitative research was made with Focus-Group method. To this effect, three group interviews were organized, whereof experts directly involved in the tourism activity. The group members had various socio-demographic characteristics; so that a variety of opinions and attitudes in terms of age categories, education, gender, social position, should convey an accurate image.

The study results highlight that the residents regard tourism as an activity of the highest importance on the level of Braşov municipality; therefore, they are open towards cooperating with the tourists, with a view to supporting them in orienting towards various objectives and in solving different problems. The fact was mentioned that, in spite of the efforts towards the hygiene of the city and towards the improvement of the public safety, there problems that should be solved: no tourist information centre; no pointers towards the tourist objectives; beggars and unfriendly persons in the areas visited by tourists; insanitary and crowded area; pickpockets and thieves; no police and public-order forces in certain town areas (especially the railway station of Braşov); old and unrestored buildings, which spoil the overall positive image of the city; insufficient parking spots.

It has been noted that the tourist security issues can be mainly solved by increasing the order-enforcement forces (police, gendarmes, security guards) in the key areas of the city; yet, also by means of an efficient communication policy with the

tourists, who should be informed about the area’s tourist attractions, as well as about the risks and modes to manage and avoid them.

In the discussions attended by various experts in tourism, it has been emphasized that one of the solutions for raising the travel safety is to inform the tourists, with a view to their becoming aware of the risks; which information should also contain recommendations as regards the recommended units of accommodation and catering, the sanitary units, the taxi companies, the transportation modes, tourist routes etc. The group members consider it is highly important to create a web page with complete and correct information both for the tourists who visit the area and for the persons who inform themselves, in view of a potential visit. Likewise, it was emphasized that the information should not contain many negative messages and warnings, as they might induce fear in the tourists and might create a high level of discomfort.

Likewise, the experts highlighted that, overall, the tourist destination of Braşov might be regarded as a relatively safe tourist area, that significant progresses were made to this effect and that Braşov ranks better, as compared to other national destinations. Nevertheless, if compared to other European destinations, Braşov must make efforts to improve tourist safety. For the success of these actions, a close collaboration is required between public authorities, economic agents, the residents of Braşov and all entities interested in activity.

7. Conclusions

The main conclusions from the studies reveal some specific issues in the Braşov area.

1. Braşov area follows the European trends and the trends from Romanian

regions regarding criminality. Except 2010-2011 the general trend was decreasing.

2. Regarding the residents opinion on safety and security in tourism the main conclusions show the following:

A. The significance of the „safe touristic destination” concept - Brasov resident’s opinion reveals the main components of this concept:

- a) The possibility to orientate easily;
- b) The functionality of the information centers;
- c) Ensuring the security on the streets;
- d) Safe parking areas, with reasonable prices;
- e) Active implication of the touristic units owners to improve the conditions for safe destinations;
- f) Financial security (the possibility to use the credit cards, for instance);
- g) Medical care for the tourists.

B. The residents’ attitude regarding the tourists (from Romania and from abroad) by using the words association technique

Romanian tourist	Foreign tourist
-friendly	-well informed
-uncivilized	-picky
-in order to have fun	-with high expectations
-with medium financial possibilities	-open minded
	-with high financial possibilities

C. Generating ideas regarding ways of finding the best way to inform the tourists

- a) As main information sources, the residents identified the necessity of creating some printed presentation materials and, also, a web page.

- b) The tourists should get some maps at the receptions in the accommodation units.
- c) Even a mobile phone application was suggested for informing and helping the tourists.
- d) The information should refer to medical care units, ways of contacting the local authorities, potential risks, etc.
- e) A local touristic brand was suggested.

D. Identification of the opinions regarding the comparison between tourism in Brasov and tourism in other European cities

Two categories of answers were identified:

- a) Some of the respondents consider that Brasov might be assimilated to the attractive European cities, clean and safe. Yet, Brasov should be better promoted as a touristic destination
- b) On the other side, Brasov is seen as a very important economic city, and tourism should have a special place in the local strategy (as in the European big cities)

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