

TOURIST IN MY TOWN: HOW ATTRACTIVE IS THE CITY FOR ITS INHABITANTS?

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Abstract

The present study aims at identifying the interest of inhabitants of Bucharest in being tourists in their own city. For this purpose, an online research was carried out between 12 and 24 November 2020. The data was collected from 123 participants through a self-administered online questionnaire. The main idea that the study brings to the fore is the concept of staycation, a form of vacation near the area of residence. Such a holiday proves useful and popular in times of crisis for tourism. The research showed that there are some differences between inhabitants born in Bucharest and those from other places, as well as between women and men, in terms of tourist interest in the city of residence. The main limitation of this study is that the sample was too small and not representative, but nevertheless, some interesting results were obtained. These results could be used, for example, to promote domestic tourism.

Keywords: *Staycation, city tourism, proximity tourism, distance, mobility*

JEL Classification: *Z32, Z38, Z39*

Introduction

This paper focuses on the phenomenon of ‘staycation’, defined as a form of tourism in which the holiday is intended to take place in the vicinity of home (Germann Molz, 2009; de Bloom et al., 2017).

In recent years, more and more inhabitants are exploring their own cities as tourist destinations. This phenomenon generates real academic challenges to (re)define the tourist and what distinguishes them from a resident when both adopt a tourist behavior.

In this context, new terms appear, meant to capture the new trends of the tourist phenomenon. One such term is staycation, first mentioned in 2008 in the show *Good Morning America*, designating a parenting strategy for families during a summer that seemed to be long and difficult (Sharma, 2009). At that time, staycation was more about taking photos and videos just like in a real vacation.

Meanwhile, staycation has become a complex cultural phenomenon and is, essentially, a holiday spent close to home, creating a traditional holiday environment and yet benefiting from the ambiance of home. This suggests the idea that creating a traditional holiday environment is an important element of the vacation. Being a tourist is not a passive attitude. It is the result of a conscious decision, based, in essence, on how individuals establish what they perceive as unknown to them and how they decide to discover that unfamiliar context. In other words, tourists deliberately create a distance from the tourist destination, which allows them to enjoy the tourist experience as something exceptional (Diaz-Soria, 2017).

Recent years have highlighted the emergence of various initiatives (often online), through social networks (especially Instagram), to bring the inhabitants of the suburbs of large urban areas within the city, as resident tourists (Hoogendoorn and Hammett, 2020).

This paper aims to analyze how attractive the city of Bucharest is, from a tourist point of view, for its inhabitants. The succeeding parts of this paper are as follow: the literature review section, the research methodology section, findings and discussions followed by conclusions and suggestions.

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1. Introducing the staycation trend: a literature review

Staycation can be defined as a local travel practice, also called proximity tourism (Jeuring and Haartsen, 2017), but it seems to be different from other types of domestic travel, such as, for example, travel to secondary residences, especially due to the frequency of visits. However, staycation is like a trip, because the traveler can choose to return and spend the night at home during that vacation.

Staycation ultimately proposes a new paradigm of mobility. Thus, the journey becomes more than just moving between different places. Cresswell (2006) presents a simple interpretation of mobility: a movement that makes "sense". In the context of the new paradigm, different types of mobility can be identified: corporal, imaginative, virtual (Urry, 2007). Travel for tourism has the ability to take the person out of the daily routine and surround them with new things and experiences, which can "reset" the body and mind. Only the simple planning of a trip can have a strong effect on the person's physical and mental disposition, providing a mood of well-being and full of satisfaction.

Many studies validate the idea that in tourism activities, travel is the essential element, and usually involves traveling long distances. Moreover, most studies have an international tourism context (Lee et al., 2012; Ahn and McKercher, 2015; McKercher, 2018). From another perspective, the role of distance changes in a proximity tourist context. In tourism, distance is a concept closely related to mobility and can have multiple connotations, such as physical distance, but also (un)familiarity with places (Soria and Llurdés Coit, 2013; de Bloom et al., 2017). In the research of local tourism, Jeuring and Diaz-Soria (2017) also focus on the "unknown" element of tourist experiences in domestic destinations. This adds to the importance of what Larsen and Guiver (2013) called "relative dimensions of distance" (p. 971).

Most people probably dream of traveling the world, but forget to explore their own surroundings. Is it less interesting to explore what is near, rather than longing for distant destinations? Domestic tourism seems to be of less interest compared to international tourism (Mazimhaka, 2007). However, the global economic crisis of 2008 produced some changes that had significant implications for tourism, generating some increase in domestic tourism and new tourism initiatives (Papatheodorou et al., 2010; Pawłowska and Matoga, 2016; Andriotis, 2018). This trend seems to have been further amplified in 2020, in the context of the global health crisis.

Currently, countries are classified, in terms of the risk of coronavirus 2019 infection, in green, yellow or red, depending on their epidemiological situation. This setting changes daily, many tourists encountering many problems, which make travel unattractive and quite stressful. Moreover, fear and uncertainty substantially limit the demand for tourism. In an instant, tourism went from over-tourism to not at all tourism. This is an unprecedented situation, which has led to serious economic losses for economic agents and local communities that depend on tourism. Based on the three UNWTO scenarios published in May 2020, which show decreases from 58% to 78% in international tourist arrivals in 2020, current trends suggest a decrease in international arrivals closer to 70% by 2020 (UNWTO, 2020). Thus, local communities will have to survive without tourism revenue, governments without taxes and the entire economic ecosystem emptied of essential resources. This crisis could be an opportunity to rethink the development of tourism and to look for new methods, sustainable for the natural and social environment. In this context, authorities in some countries have introduced staycation holiday vouchers (Knežević Cvelbar and Ogorevc, 2020).

Staycation, as a way to spend the holidays in times of economic crisis, can become a manner of helping the tourism industry in difficult contexts. People need tourism, and reconsidering the idea of mobility could be in favor of spending holidays in residential areas, as a real strategy from which all parties can benefit: tourism operators, local communities, local budgets and, above all, the tourists themselves.

2. Research methodology

This paper is based on an exploratory research aimed at identifying the interest of the inhabitants of Bucharest for spending holidays in their own city. The respondents were adults living or working in Bucharest. Data was collected between 12 and 24 November 2020. The Likert scale was mainly used.

The total number of respondents was 123 and the sample structure is presented in Table no.1. The main objectives of the research were: a) the role of health issues in choosing the tourist destinations in the future; b) identifying the interest of inhabitants of Bucharest towards this type of vacation; c) identifying the main activities the inhabitants would carry out as tourists in their city.

To achieve these goals an online self-administered questionnaire was used.

Table 1. The sample structure

Age (born:)				
before 1965	between 1966-1979	between 1980-1995	after 1995	
4.88%	49.59%	33.33%	12.20%	
Gender				
Male			Female	
26.83%			73.17%	
Education				
Highschool	Post-highschool (non-university)	Bachelor's degree	Master degree	PhD
11.38%	2.44%	29.27%	44.72%	12.20%
Place of birth				
Bucharest			Outside Bucharest	
51.22%			48.78%	
The average net monthly income (lei)				
Less than 2000	Between 2000-3000	Between 3001-4500	Between 3001-4500	Over 4000
16.26%	17.89%	17.89%	21.14%	26.83%

Source: Authors' own calculations

As can be seen in the table above, the sample is not representative in terms of Bucharest population, the sample being rather small.

3. Findings and Discussions

In this section the main results are going to be presented and analyzed, according to research objectives.

The first thing worth noting is that respondents are generally confident that tourism will return to the level it had before the health crisis. Over 50% of the respondents believe, to a large and very large extent, that this will happen (Table 2).

Table 2. The importance of health issues in choosing the next tourist destinations (%)

Opinion	To an extremely small extent	To a small extent	To a moderate extent	To a large extent	To a very large extent	Mean
To what extent do you think that tourism will return to the level before the health crisis?	2.4	16.3	30.1	37.4	13.8	3.45
After the end of the health crisis, to what extent will you personally prefer holiday destinations closer to the area of residence?	13.8	26.0	35.8	13.0	11.4	2.81
After the end of the health crisis, to what extent will you personally choose the holiday destinations according to the health security it offers?	4.9	13.8	27.6	22.0	31.7	3.64

Source: Authors' own calculations

Although travelling to regions close to the area of residence is not the first choice for travel intentions after the health crisis, 35.8% of the respondents expressed a moderate intention to choose such a

holiday, and almost a quarter of them intend, to a large and very large extent, to practice local tourism. One can thus speak of an interesting niche in terms of tourist behavior, which is worth investigating. Also, almost 54% of the respondents said they would choose the next tourist destination based on the health security it offers. This can be of major importance in future competitive advantage building actions.

Regarding the tourist interest that the inhabitants of Bucharest have shown towards their city, it is observed that people born before 1965 viewed the city as a place with tourist potential worth discovering (Table 3), but did not carry out such activities (Table 4).

Table 3. The extent to which the inhabitants of Bucharest viewed the city as a tourist destination

To what extent did you think, before the health crisis, to look at Bucharest as a tourist destination worth discovering?	Born:				Total
	before 1965	between 1966-1979	between 1980-1995	after 1995	
1 To an extremely small extent	0.00%	11.48%	2.44%	13.33%	8.13%
2 To a small extent	0.00%	8.20%	4.88%	20.00%	8.13%
3 To a moderate extent	33.33%	18.03%	36.59%	40.00%	27.64%
4 To a large extent	50.00%	32.79%	24.39%	13.33%	28.46%
5 To a very large extent	16.67%	29.51%	31.71%	13.33%	27.64%
Total	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

Source: Authors' own calculations

Instead, millennials thought less about this, but they did more. Both segments of tourists are interesting in terms of their potential as tourists. In general, it can be said that the inhabitants of Bucharest thought more than they acted as tourists in their city.

Table 4. The extent to which the inhabitants of Bucharest have carried out tourist activities in their city

To what extent did you carry out tourist activities (discovering new places, visits to museums, etc.) in Bucharest, before the health crisis?	Born:				Total
	before 1965	between 1966-1979	between 1980-1995	after 1995	
1 To an extremely small extent	16.67%	3.28%	2.44%	0.00%	3.25%
2 To a small extent	33.33%	19.67%	9.76%	13.33%	16.26%
3 To a moderate extent	50.00%	36.07%	48.78%	53.33%	43.09%
4 To a large extent	0.00%	26.23%	21.95%	0.00%	20.33%
5 To a very large extent	0.00%	14.75%	17.07%	33.33%	17.07%
Total	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

Source: Authors' own calculations

The research showed that the place of birth, in Bucharest or in another place, influences the perception of the city as a destination, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5. The influence of the place of birth on the perception of the city as a tourist destination

To what extent did you think, before the health crisis, to look at Bucharest as a tourist destination worth discovering?	Place of birth		Total
	Bucharest (1)	Outside Bucharest (2)	
1 To an extremely small extent	14.29%	1.67%	8.13%
2 To a small extent	9.52%	6.67%	8.13%
3 To a moderate extent	25.40%	30.00%	27.64%
4 To a large extent	28.57%	28.33%	28.46%
5 To a very large extent	22.22%	33.33%	27.64%
Total	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

Source: Authors' own calculations

Report

Place of birth	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
1.	3.3492	63	1.32176
2.	3.8500	60	1.02221
Total	3.5935	123	1.20679

ANOVA Table

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	(Combined)	7.707	1	7.707	5.487	.021
Within Groups		169.967	121	1.405		
Total		177.675	122			

The mean obtained by people born in Bucharest $M = 3.35$ is lower than that obtained by people born in another place $M = 3.85$, the difference being significant, as shown by the Fisher test = 5.487, $p < 0.05$.

It is also noted that there is a difference between men and women in terms of reporting to the city of residence as a tourist destination (Table 6).

Table 6. The influence of gender on the perception of the city as a tourist destination

To what extent did you think, before the health crisis, to look at Bucharest as a tourist destination worth discovering?	Gender		
	Male (1)	Female (2)	Total
1 To an extremely small extent	15.15%	5.56%	8.13%
2 To a small extent	12.12%	6.67%	8.13%
3 To a moderate extent	27.27%	27.78%	27.64%
4 To a large extent	30.30%	27.78%	28.46%
5 To a very large extent	15.15%	32.22%	27.64%
Total	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

Source: Authors' own calculations

Report

Gender	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
1.	3.1818	33	1.28585
2.	3.7444	90	1.14716
Total	3.5935	123	1.20679

ANOVA Table

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	(Combined)	7.643	1	7.643	5.439	.021
Within Groups		170.031	121	1.405		
Total		177.675	122			

The mean obtained by women $M = 3.7444$ is higher than that obtained by men $M = 3.1818$, the difference being significant, as shown by the Fisher test = 5.439, $p < 0.05$.

The activities that the inhabitants of Bucharest would carry out as tourists in their city are detailed in table 7.

Table 7. Tourist activities in the city of residence (%)

Possible tourist activities	To an extremely small extent	To a small extent	To a moderate extent	To a large extent	To a very large extent	Mean (on Likert scale)
I will plan a program for visiting Bucharest for tourism purposes.	19.5	27.6	35.0	11.4	6.5	2.6
I will stay at a hotel in Bucharest, to feel on vacation.	74.8	14.6	8.1	0.8	1.6	1.4
I will spend my free days going to amusement parks, cinemas etc.	16.3	21.1	28.5	22.0	12.2	2.9
I will visit museums and memorial houses, I will be interested in the history of the city and buildings.	9.8	17.1	34.1	20.3	18.7	3.2
I will take walks in areas of Bucharest that I have not yet explored.	4.9	17.1	33.3	26.0	18.7	3.4
I will take photos and videos, as in any other holiday destination.	16.3	23.6	27.6	19.5	13.0	2.9
I will discover the most beautiful streets, parks, forested areas, etc. in Bucharest.	5.7	20.3	30.9	19.5	23.6	3.4
I will eat at restaurants frequented by tourists.	19.5	28.5	30.1	17.1	4.9	2.6
I will post on social networks images and recordings from my vacation in Bucharest.	36.6	22.8	17.9	14.6	8.1	2.4
I will travel by public transport, with the Bucharest City Tour line and I will use taxi services.	34.1	22.8	24.4	13.0	5.7	2.3
I will rent a car with which to travel between the targeted tourist objectives.	82.9	8.1	4.9	2.4	1.6	1.3
I will contact a travel agency to which I will request a tourist package to visit Bucharest.	84.6	10.6	2.4	0.8	1.6	1.2
I will call on a guide to help me feel like a tourist in Bucharest.	63.4	14.6	14.6	4.9	2.4	1.7
I will look for special offers to visit or participate in shows and other special events	16.3	19.5	30.1	22.8	11.4	2.9
I will go shopping both in malls and in street trade areas.	16.3	24.4	30.9	17.1	11.4	2.8
I will visit churches and historical monuments, as well as other cultural sites.	7.3	17.9	32.5	22.0	20.3	3.3
I will buy small souvenirs to remind me of the holidays spent in Bucharest.	33.3	30.1	20.3	10.6	5.7	2.3
I will wake up early to have time to visit.	39.0	24.4	16.3	13.0	7.3	2.3
I will look for the highest observation points, which will give me an overview of the city.	17.1	25.2	29.3	16.3	12.2	2.8
I will visit the surroundings of Bucharest.	6.5	21.1	32.5	22.0	17.9	3.2
I will try to identify famous places that appear in movies or on Instagram, etc.	31.7	23.6	23.6	12.2	8.9	2.4
I will write a guide for tourist discovery and visit of Bucharest.	67.5	15.4	10.6	4.1	2.4	1.6

Source: Authors' own calculations

The most attractive activities are related to visiting unexplored areas, museums, historical monuments and the city's surroundings. The least likely actions are those that in a long-distance vacation are the key elements of the tourist offer: accommodation and transport.

Conclusions and suggestions

Staycation is a new word that refers to the adoption of a tourist behavior so that residents can take a vacation staying at home. Although initially aimed at middle-class families in the summer of 2008, in recent years, staycation has become a complex cultural phenomenon that calls into question the definition of the tourist and the role of distance in tourism. In the context of mobility restrictions, as a result of the health crisis triggered in 2020, staycation can be a viable alternative to meet the tourism needs of people and the economic needs of tourism operators and local communities.

Tourists will take into account health safety in choosing future holiday destinations (Țuclea, Vrânceanu and Năstase, 2020). In this context, a proximity destination might seem safer in the eyes of tourists. This aspect could be used in the tourist promotion of the areas near the big cities, contributing to the development of domestic tourism. Some countries have already issued vouchers for staycation, in order to support tour operators in times of crisis.

The inhabitants of Bucharest are interested in knowing the city, but the expenses for the tourist services they are willing to do are quite low. The main attraction seems to be exploring the city and its surroundings, as well as visiting historical monuments, churches and other sights. A sustainable visiting tax policy could bring extra revenue to local budgets. Attractive places for inhabitants could also be used to promote other products and services, generating impulse shopping. Staycation holidays deserve more attention from local authorities, having a significant development potential.

The main limitation of this study is the small sample, the study being rather a pilot survey. The research should be carried out on a representative sample at the level of Bucharest. Other interesting tourist activities for the inhabitants could be identified and a tourist package could be defined that would be interesting for the local tourism operators as well.

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