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## The Perceptions of Hospitality Services of a Tourism Destination

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### Abstract

In the last years the services area has known an important increase becoming one of the most important factors that contribute to the formation of the GDP many countries. The aim of the research was to provide an insight for the local authorities concerning the way the people that have visited the city of Targu-Jiu so that they will manage to create together with the business people a strategy to increase the tourist interest about the city view services. Hospitality services are evaluated different by many persons due to the fact that services are intangible and people rely on physical attributes when they take decisions

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### 1. Introduction

Hospitality services are ranked according to a person's perceptions on the services bought. Due to the fact that people have different needs and wishes, having the tendency to give importance not to the same things, marketers must find a solution to please all of them. The city of Târgu-Jiu is located in the Gorj County, Romania, and it is well known for its natural beauty and for the fact that the works of the famous sculptor Constantin Brâncuși are located there. Constantin Brâncuși is well known worldwide for its unique works, some of them being sold for millions of dollars to people passionate about art.

Tourism services are intangible and that is why many times the service providers find it hard to satisfy all the people that buy hospitality services. The city is visited not only by people from Romania who travel either for pleasure or for business but it is also visited by people all around the world who want to visit Constantin Brâncuși's works. They can find here the Table of Silence, The Kiss Gate and the Endless Column.

The purpose of this article is to identify what are the feelings of the tourists that visited the city Târgu Jiu concerning the hospitality services provided in the city. The results must offer us a view on how the city is perceived by tourists and should help us make a strategy on how to improve these services and attract more tourists to the city.

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## 2. Conceptual framework

Destinations all around the world must provide tourists with high quality services and with unique elements in order to satisfy their needs, as Kandampully, Mok, & Sparks, 2001 stated that the final assessment of tourism service quality does not rely solely on the outcome of service, but also on the service process. Tourists nowadays have the possibility to research as much as possible about a tourism destination and that is why the competition between destinations has become so tough. Having one or more competitive advantages can be useful for destinations, which try to remain in the mind of the consumers.

In order to understand the complexity of services we must start with one of the most known definitions which states that services are deeds, processes and performances provided or coproduced by one entity or person for another entity or person (Zeithaml, Bitner, & Gremler, 2009). One of characteristics of services is intangibility, a characteristic that not only brings unique features to tourism products but it can also have a major impact on the satisfaction and dissatisfaction of tourists. All tourism products have different physical elements. According to Reid & Bojanic, 2010 the hospitality marketing mix should contain a product-service mix, a combination of all the products and services offered by the hospitality operation, including both tangible and intangible elements. According to Middleton & Clarke, 2001, the destination elements include:

- Natural attractions: landscapes, seascapes, beaches, climate, flora and fauna and other geographical features of the destination and its natural resources;
- Built attractions: buildings and tourism infrastructure including historic and modern architecture, monuments, promenades, parks and gardens;
- Cultural attractions: history and folklore, religion and art, theatre, music, dance and other entertainment, and museums;
- Social attractions: way of life and customs of resident or host population, language and opportunities for social encounters.”

Consumers tend to give great importance not only to what they read in magazines, newspapers or what they see in the offers presented by the tourism companies, but also to the reviews or blogs found on the internet. Even if tourists do not know those people writing the reviews, they tend to trust them and act according to what is written there. Some authors state that the image that someone has of a place is influenced by the person's cultural background and social, personal and psychological characteristics; or specifically, his/her identity (Govers & Go, 2009). It can be noticed that the behaviour of a tourist can be influenced not only by elements related to its person but also by other persons. Such issues can only lead us to the idea that it is crucial for a destination to have a unique image that will impress tourists so that they will be able to influence other people with their memories. Along the years, there have been written different studies which showed how important is the image of a destination for the tourist's behaviour. After leaving a destination, tourists remain only with images and so it is important that they are satisfied with the hospitality services provided.

## 3. Case study: Târgu - Jiu

As it has been mentioned earlier, the purpose of this article has been to assess the way in which tourists perceive the hospitality services delivered by the services providers from the city Târgu-Jiu, how they perceive the citizens of the city, its personality and the way in which recreational possibilities are perceived.

The research has taken place between the period January- April 2012 and the results presented in the paper regard the answers of 450 respondents, people who had visited the city and people who had not. We must mention that the sample age has been between 20-25 year- olds and the respondents were attending higher education studies.

The primary objectives taken into consideration were:

- To identify the feelings concerning the hospitality services;
- To discover the way in which tourists perceive the city and the inhabitants;
- To see the importance that Brancusi’s works have in promoting the city and the area;
- To identify the view concerning the recreational possibilities,
- To create the basis for a long-term plan of improving the services provided by the local providers and to promote the city among numerous people from all around the world.

Concerning the method used, it has been used the statistical survey with a written questionnaire, semi-structured, as an instrument.

In order to ensure the creation of a long –term plan for promoting the city it has been necessary to see how tourists perceived the inhabitants. People have an important role in the buying behavior because satisfied tourists tend to influence people around them, either friends or persons that are a part of their families. Living in a world dominated by technology and information creates not only advantages but also disadvantages for destinations because tourists have the possibility to read reviews ,of people they do not know, from the internet, and decide what to visit by using that information. The results highlighted that 32% ,of the people that visited the city, considered the inhabitants as being hospitable, meaning they have been pleased of they way in which they have been treated by the inhabitants, 20% considered them as being exigent which can have different meanings according to each person’s personality and way of thinking. People tend to like when they are surrounded by happy people and this can also be noticed from the answers, 17% of the respondents considered the inhabitants as being happy.Only 1% of the respondents said they considered the inhabitants as being unfriendly which means they liked how they behaved (figure1).

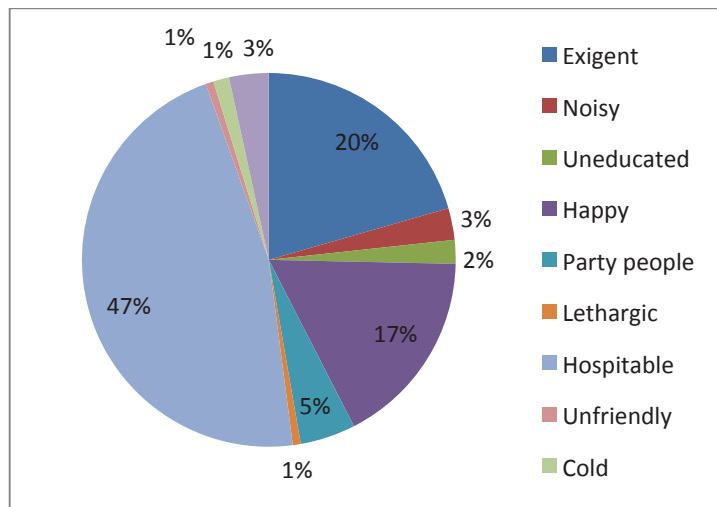


Figure 1. The distribution of answers concerning the opinion regarding the inhabitants  
Source:own processing

In what regards they way in which the tourists have seen the personality of the city we can state that the results are interesting.32% of the respondents considered the city as being traditional while 21% chose the adjective friendly and 16% answered with “clean”. Taking into consideration the fact that a large proportion of the

respondents have had a good opinion about the city we can state that they must have been pleased with the attractions offered by the city of Targu-Jiu. Destinations are different and pleasing tourists is not an easy task so the respondents' answers provide us a starting point for a future plan of promoting the destination.(figure 2)

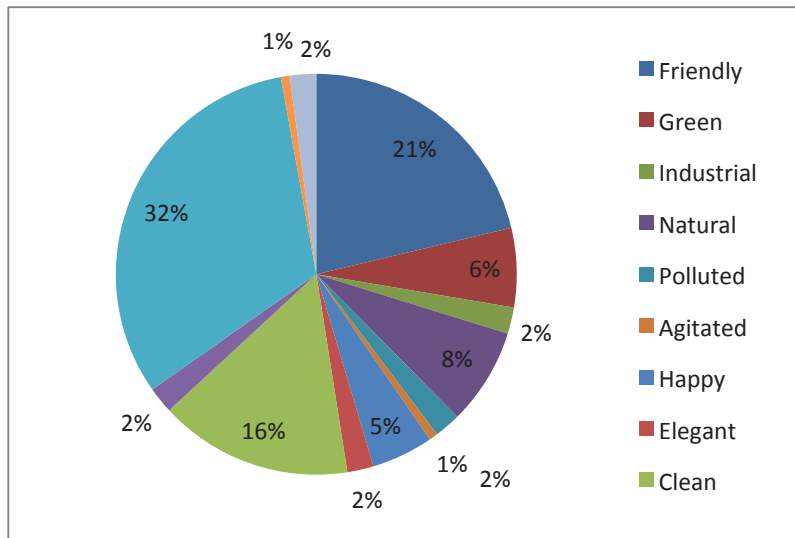


Figure 2. The distribution of the answers concerning the city's personality

Source: own processing

The most important aspect taken into consideration has been the opinion of the respondents concerning the hospitality services provided by the local companies. In Targu-Jiu we find only local companies providing hospitality services, world-known chains from the hospitality area do not have businesses in the city. The results pointed out that 38% of the respondents considered the hospitality services as being monotonous while 22% of them saw the services as being modern. Moving further, 14% of the respondents considered the services as being elegant while other 12% saw them as being clean (figure 3). As we can notice, the opinions are different and depend on the experiences of each tourist. Also, it is important for the local providers to try and understand how tourists feel about their offer and to make the necessary changes so that future tourists to be satisfied with the hospitality services that they offer.

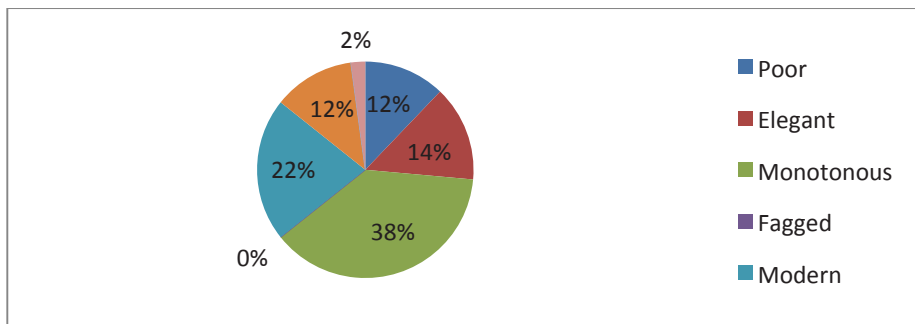


Figure 3. The distribution of the answers concerning the perception of the hospitality services

Source: own processing

The article has had as a base a research regarding the image of the city Targu-Jiu and the importance of the works of the great sculptor Constantin Brancusi in promoting the destination among tourists from all around the world. According to that research the main determinant in establishing the tourist destination image of the destination was Constantin Brancusi( Căruntu,Stăncioiu,& Teodorescu,2012). Starting with that, we considered important to know how tourists saw the local hospitality services and the city so that marketers could be able to create a strategy to promote the destination.

Nowadays, events take an important place in promoting destination. People visit cities only to participate in different events that relate with their hobbies. According to some authors, an event can be transformed into a communication environment only in the proportion in which it is exploited by the organization in promotional purposes (Moise,Șerbănică,Constantinescu,&Filip,2008). The local authorities could take into consideration organing an event to celebrate Constantin Brancusi, event which could regard not only the sculpture area but also anything that could be related to fine arts.

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