

# AN EXAMINATION OF VISITORS' INTEREST IN TOURIST CARDS AND CULTURAL ROUTES IN THE CASE OF A ROMANIAN DESTINATION

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## Abstract

Although tourist cards and cultural routes have been interesting innovations when they were launched on the international tourism market, they are rarely implemented in Romanian tourism destinations, especially in an integrated manner. This paper presents a theoretical model regarding the integration of tourist cards in cultural routes, based on the assumption that tourists who are interested in both products have similar demographic and travel characteristics. The research results outline only the influence of tourists' travel characteristics on their interest to buy cultural routes and tourist cards. Leisure travelers should be the main targeted segment, as their probability to buy such products is higher than in the case of business or VFR (visit friends and relatives) tourists. These results can assist the Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) regarding the choice of marketing strategies aimed at integrating cultural routes in a tourist card.

**Keywords:** tourist card, cultural route, tourism destination, destination management organization, tourists.

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## 1. Introduction

The development of city-based heritage or cultural tourism offerings is a newer trend for East European urban tourism destinations. Cultural tourism's popularity continues to increase as visitor and local value systems collide (Martin, Sirakaya-Turk and Cho, 2013). To achieve competitive advantage for its tourism industry, a cultural destination must ensure that its overall attractiveness and the tourist experience are superior to those in the many alternative destinations available (Dwyer and Forsyth, 2011).

Local public administrations play a key role in the management of tourist destinations as they can strengthen the link between different stakeholders. As representatives of public administrations, Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) can be considered as 'a mirror of the organizational aspects of tourism destinations' which should constantly re-engineer and adapt their tourist offer to changing market conditions (Beritelli and Reinhold, 2010, p. 137).

In areas with significant cultural heritage, DMOs should create cultural routes, aimed at connecting geographically scattered tourism attractions while enhancing collaboration and clustering among tourism stakeholders. Currently, most of the cultural routes and the SMEs involved apply a rather fragmented approach in their product/service information-delivery strategies. There are no established delivery strategies and/or broad-based actions, mapping target audiences are marginal, and investigation of their preferences and motivations is rare (European Commission and Council of Europe, 2010). While these facts can be regarded as drawbacks in cultural routes' product and service marketing, they also indicate an opportunity for innovative low-cost solutions using modern information technology and marketing tools. Tourist cards can be efficient promotional and placement tools for cultural routes and provide an integrated approach in their implementation. Using the latest information technologies (e.g., mobile applications), tourist cards can create more value for visitors by staying ahead of the evolving needs of consumers, and providing innovative solutions.

In the Romanian city Sibiu there is a Resource Center which was founded as an antenna of the European Institute of Cultural Routes (EICR) in Luxembourg. The center is a source of information, advice and exchange of best practices as well as a meeting point which welcomes organizations (associations, federation of associations, public institutions, private operators, etc.), who are interested in the European Cultural Routes and who want to put them into practice in their territory. One of the initiatives of this Romanian Resource Center is the promotion of a cultural route dedicated to the Saxon fortified churches in south-eastern Transylvania. The fortified churches from the south of Transylvania are remarkable and unique, but most of them are situated in rural areas.

The implementation of the cultural route is difficult due to the lack of collaboration between local authorities as the fortified churches are situated in three different counties. We consider that a possible way to solve this problem is to include the cultural route of the Saxon fortified churches in the tourist cards of the main urban des-

tinations in southern Transylvania (Braşov, Sighişoara and Sibiu) in order to retain visitors in the region and increase the average length of stay. Recently, the local DMO in Braşov County has launched the idea of implementing a tourist card. We consider this initiative an excellent opportunity to promote the cultural route of the Saxon fortified churches situated within this region.

As neither the tourist card nor the cultural route have been implemented so far in the studied destination, the results of our study can assist destination managers in the pre-testing phase of these two concepts. Incorporating cultural routes in the tourist card may increase their attractiveness and stimulate regional networking in the tourism industry.

Consequently, the main goal of this study is to find information regarding: tourists' interest to purchase a potential Braşov tourist card, the appropriate distribution channels for the tourist card, the types of services and facilities that should be included in the tourist card as well as tourists' interest in cultural routes.

The paper starts with an overview of the research background focused on the role of cultural routes and tourist cards in destination marketing followed by the methodology used for research. Further on, the main results of the research are presented and discussed, while the final section includes a series of conclusions.

## **2. Background**

Local authorities play an important role in developing policies to promote and shape the development of tourism in their areas. Place marketing has been a defining entrepreneurial feature of urban governance (Kavaratzis, 2004), and it is defined as a management process (Kotler *et al.*, 1999) which encompasses the attempts of place differentiation for competitive advantage over other places. Differentiation occurs with the collaboration of all actors and the enclosure of local activities to meet the demands of targeted consumers (Ashworth and Voogd, 1994). This is a rather new function of public organizations and the public sector is struggling with such tourism-related responsibilities – including city branding and other place-based strategies.

Tourism administration and policy in a region can be substantially influenced by tourism policy with the import of ideas with respect to innovation, especially the experience economy, as well as place promotion and greater emphasis on tourism marketing than policy capacities in public agencies (Hall and Zapata Campos, 2014).

Interest in networks and the role of public-private partnerships in tourism has also reflected the changes in theory and practice of governance and shifts in the nature of government intervention in different states. Interests in networks as well as community-based approaches to intervention are also of significance in tourism public administration (Hall, 2000).

A DMO may best serve to facilitate dialogue among the private sector, public sector, and other stakeholders that may otherwise never collaborate or understand how their decisions reverberate down a destination's long tourism value chain (Stange *et al.*, 2011). DMOs have evolved so that, especially in countries with a high level of

economic activity, their role has changed from that of a public administration model to one based on partnerships involving local authorities and the private sector (Hall, 2000). Ideally, the primary role of a DMO is to act as the coordinating body for many public and private sector organizations with an interest in tourism while other key themes include (Pike, 2008): coordination, strategy, stakeholders, economics, marketing, product development, lobbying, information provision, protection, research, and the host communities.

Flagestad *et al.* (2005) and Zach and Fesenmaier (2009) believed that a destination management organization (DMO) acts as a link between different actors, plays a decisive role and is an essential function for innovation processes. The public administration literature defines innovation within the framework of a public organization as 'an idea, practice, policy (program), structure, method, product or process perceived as new by an individual or other relevant unit of adoption' (Khovanova *apud* European Commission and Council of Europe, 2010, p. 48). Generally, innovations in private and public organizations can take different forms. The configuration of separate products and services into coherent packages and offerings with greater added value for consumers is considered an innovation (European Commission and Council of Europe, 2010). Another form of innovation (according to the European Commission and Council of Europe, 2010) is the joining of forces between separate actors either from the public or the private sector, independent of locality (municipality, region) in view of providing better services or support and development actions in tourism destinations. Consequently, we consider that the inclusion of a regional cultural route in a city tourist card might be considered an innovative approach aimed at inducing visitors to visit cultural tourist attractions in the areas surrounding urban destinations.

Considering these issues, this section of the paper has two purposes: (1) to provide an overview of the main European cultural routes; and (2) to outline the role of tourist cards in destination marketing.

### ***2.1. An overview of the main European cultural routes***

Due to the fragmented nature of the tourism industry, a substantial degree of coordination and collaboration among the variety of different players in destination marketing is required (Hall, 2000; Roberts and Simpson, 1999; Wang and Fesenmaier, 2007). Tourism suppliers need to understand that they should not compete with each other at the destination level; they should join forces and pool resources to develop and implement comprehensive marketing strategies which could enable them to compete with other destinations. This is a key problem in different cultural destinations, where there are scattered providers with limited resources for promotional purposes. We consider that integrating these cultural and services providers (accommodation, restaurants, artists, artisans, cultural attractions) in cultural routes benefits these stakeholders and increases the destination's attractiveness.

In tourism terms, a cultural route can be defined as a path or route of historical significance that can be presented as a whole with a common thematic denominator

(European Commission and Council of Europe, 2010). It can be also a themed route that has a cultural value or an element of cultural heritage as its focus, and that assigns a key role to cultural attractions (Puczko and Ratz, 2007).

The program of cultural routes was launched by the Council of Europe in 1987 aiming to raise awareness of Europeans about their common heritage, interreligious dialog, protection of the minorities through exchanges between people and ideas, and cultural cooperation as a major resource of democracy.

In 1997, the Council of Europe entrusted the EICR to follow up the already elected routes, to co-ordinate and provide technical aid to networks, to initiate new proposals as well as to disseminate information and set up a database that will constitute the memory of the program of the cultural routes. Consequently, there are currently 29 routes which were certified by the EICR, which are presented on a dedicated website ([www.culture-routes.lu](http://www.culture-routes.lu)).

These cultural routes are a complex combination of culture, history, tangible and intangible heritage. Their wealth of themes and places weave a rich tapestry depicting Europe's towns, villages and countryside and crossing its waterways (EICR, 2012).

One of the criteria for certification as a cultural route of the Council of Europe is that routes must offer 'tourist products' to visitors. The aims of this requirement are threefold (EICR, 2012). Firstly, to ensure that visitors have sufficient information, can travel to, from and along the route, that they find local food and a place to stay, and possibly something to bring back with them from their unique trip. Secondly, the route should provide a holistic full immersion in the spirit of the particular cultural experience proposed. And last but not least, sustainable, respectful tourism is a proven way to promote regional economic and social development around lasting values and authentic heritage.

The development of cultural routes starts with creating awareness, visibility and recognition of such routes. Neither the Council of Europe nor the EICR have the capacity to act as fully fledged DMOs, therefore it is important not to forget the role of national, regional and city marketing organizations and their value for cross-linking and referencing (European Commission and Council of Europe, 2010). Certain European best practices have proven that national, regional or local public administrations play a key role in the implementation of cultural routes. A relevant example in this context is the implication of the Spanish public administration in the development of the Routes of the Legacy of al-Andalus. The Legacy of al-Andalus is a foundation created in 1995 by the Government of the Spanish autonomous community of Andalusia (Junta de Andalucía), with special participation from the Andalusian Ministry of Tourism, Commerce and Sport, and the Andalusian Ministry of Culture. The foundation aims to contribute towards the structuring of intercultural co-operation and dialogue in the Mediterranean by means of the concept of transnational cultural itineraries, and by the creation and promotion of the Routes of Al- Andalus in the Iberian Peninsula (European Commission and Council of Europe, 2010). Cultural itineraries and routes are one of its major programs with actions to promote cultural and rural

tourism, traditional arts and the protection and restoration of cultural heritage, articulating a supply of cultural and educational tourism, and creating cultural corridors between major Andalusian tourist destinations to promote small and medium towns.

Despite their increasing popularity, several of the European cultural routes suffer substantially from 'missing links', that are geographically scattered networks, which, in some cases, are a result of uneven development of the routes in different countries (European Commission and Council of Europe, 2010). This can prevent visitors from following the entire path of the route and results in poor SMEs development in the 'missing links' areas.

A possible solution to integrate cultural routes in a destination's marketing approach is to include them in the offer and facilities of a tourist card. The tourist card can be an efficient promotional and placement tool. Including cultural routes as tourism packages in city tourist cards may increase the visibility of surrounding rural areas and assure a sustainable exploitation of their cultural heritage.

As Fuglsang and Sundbo (2006) have suggested, tourist products are mostly behavioral and dependent on user needs and reaction. Prahalad and Santos (2009) state that customers and users can be involved in product and service development in early stages of the innovation processes by tapping tacit knowledge from them, and businesses can also get inspiration in customers' new solutions to problems. Thus, we consider that an examination of tourists' interest in cultural routes is needed before the actual launch of this type of tourism products.

## ***2.2. The role of tourist cards in destination marketing***

The tourist card is a destination marketing tool which integrates a variety of tourism services provided by several operators at a discount inclusive price (Montorsi, 2010). The main offers included in tourist cards are: free admission or discounts at museums, churches, monuments, free use of public transportation, a guidebook with map and in some cases discounts in restaurants, shops, leisure parks, guided tours, events, car rental, bike rental, urban parking, etc.

Tourist cards have proven to be effective marketing instruments in worldwide tourism destinations, although there are still international tourists who are less familiar with this concept or reluctant to this idea. Considering the multitude of tourist services and facilities included in a tourist card, the collaboration between public administrations and different local tourism stakeholders (e.g., museums, theme parks, transport companies, tourism services providers, etc.) is of great importance for the success of such a marketing instrument.

Tourist cards are used to commercialize a territory and its resources by bonding together a series of tourist services, commercializing them under just one product and making it possible to market an attractive and unique local experience. The card gives the holders a series of benefits and advantages in terms of time and cost savings, and it is also a very efficient information medium addressing tourist flows to minor sites and attractions. The combined effect is therefore a better tourist experience, valoriz-

ing the destination and improving the destination's image; for destination management the card ensures, instead, a control over tourist flows, data collection, and the integration of scattered actors (Montorsi, 2010).

The European Cities Marketing Association has created a web portal ([www.europeancitycard.com](http://www.europeancitycard.com)) for the promotion of 36 tourist cards from 24 European countries as well as a free application for iPhone and Android which allows users to explore the visitor attractions available in the selected European Cities.

In order to have a benchmarking vision of the main European tourist cards, we have analyzed the offers of the 36 cities, as well as their validity period, prices, discounts for children or families, and commissions for the travel industry intermediaries.

The main offers included in the analyzed cards are: free admission or discounts at museums, churches, monuments, free use of public transportation (with the exception of Antwerp, Bruges, Dijon, Nice, Prague, Turku), a guidebook with map (an audio guide in Vilnius), and in some cases discounts in restaurants, shops, leisure parks, guided tours, events, car rental, bike rental, urban parking, etc. As the costs of public transportation may increase the price of a tourist card and make it less attractive for low and medium budget tourists, or tourists may prefer their own car when visiting certain city destinations, it has given tourists the possibility to purchase a discounted card which does not include public transportation (London and Vilnius).

Despite the different initiatives in the implementation of tourist cards and cultural routes, there is a lack of interest in the academic literature concerning these tourism marketing tools. According to the authors' knowledge, tourists' interest in cultural routes (TICR) and their interest in tourist cards (TITC) have not been investigated, nor the interdependence between these variables and visitors' demographic and travel characteristics. Thus, the present paper aims to fill this gap and proposes a theoretical model which integrates these variables (TICR and TITC). In addition, the paper aims to assist destination management organizations in their efforts towards the implementation of tourist cards and cultural routes.

### **3. Research framework and hypotheses**

The present study aims to examine the tourists' interest in a city card and a cultural route from a Romanian urban destination Braşov, and to provide the DMO in Braşov with useful information concerning: tourists' interest to purchase a tourist card, the types of services and facilities which should be included in the tourist card, the preferred distribution channels, and tourists' interest in cultural routes.

Consequently, we have conducted a visitor survey, the most usual way of pre-testing tourism marketing tools. We have interviewed 431 tourists visiting the city of Braşov, which were approached in their accommodation location based on a random selection and asked to fill a questionnaire. It contained 23 questions measured with different nominal, ordinal and interval scales, aiming to provide information about the image of Braşov as a tourist destination, and about certain marketing tools that can be used by the public administration and private operators in order to devel-

op local tourism. In this paper we have analyzed the questions concerning tourists' interest in cultural routes and tourist cards, measured with a binary scale and certain questions measured with the nominal scale, including tourists' demographics. Collected data was analyzed using SPSS through various univariate, bivariate and multivariate methods. Using frequency distributions we have analyzed respondents' interest in cultural routes and tourist cards, the types of services and facilities which should be included in the tourist card, as well as the preferred distribution channels. In order to identify and validate various relationships between variables, the cross tabulation and Binary Logistic Regression model were used.

Thus, we have formulated two sets of hypotheses that arise from the main scope of our research: one set concerns tourists' intentions to buy tourist cards and cultural routes, and another one refers to the influence of tourists' demographic and travel characteristics on their interest in tourist cards and cultural routes.

Set 1. Hypotheses regarding tourists' intentions:

H1: The majority of the respondents are interested to buy a potential Braşov tourist card.

H2: The majority of the respondents are interested to buy cultural routes.

H3: Travel agencies are considered the most appropriate distribution channels for the tourist card in the city of Braşov.

H4: The types of services and facilities that tourists prefer to be included in the Braşov tourist card are access/discounts at museums, castles, entertainment parks, spa and wellness facilities, and accommodation.

Set 2. Hypotheses regarding the influence of tourists' demographic and travel characteristics on their interest to buy tourist cards and cultural routes:

H5: Tourists' demographics have a strong influence on tourists' interest to buy both tourist cards and cultural routes.

H6: Travel characteristics have a strong influence on tourists' interest to buy both tourist cards and cultural routes.

In case the same demographic and travel characteristics influence tourists' interest to buy tourist cards and cultural routes, we have formulated a final hypothesis:

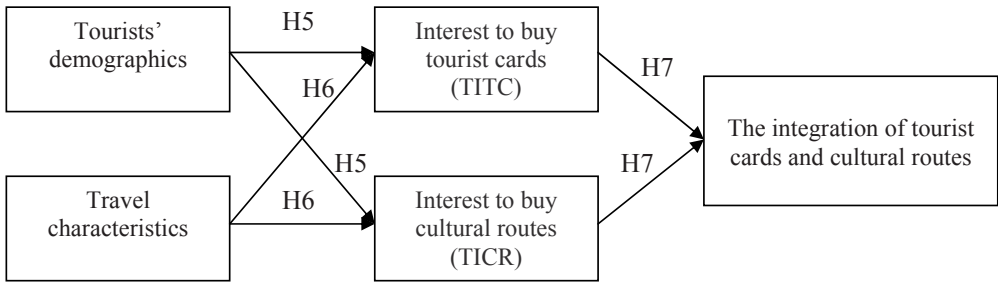
H7: Tourists who are interested in cultural routes are also interested in tourist cards.

The demographic characteristics we have considered were: age, marital status, gender, education, monthly income, and the analyzed travel characteristics were: tourists' visit purpose and their familiarization with tourist cards and cultural routes.

Considering the above mentioned hypotheses we have created a theoretical model, which we have tested using the data collected in the research. The model is presented in Figure 1.

According to this model we assume that tourists who are interested to buy tourist cards have the same demographic and travel characteristics as those who are interested in cultural routes. We consider that it makes suitable an integration of these marketing tools because they address the same tourist segments.





**Figure 1:** The theoretical model regarding the integration of tourist cards and cultural routes

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. Testing the hypotheses regarding the interest to buy TICR and TITC

The results of the present research reveal tourists' poor knowledge of tourist cards as a small percent of the respondents (22.7%) are familiarized with such a concept. In spite of this finding, 66% of the respondents would be interested to purchase a tourist card if it would be available in the city of Braşov. However, 14% of the interviewed respondents were undecided, and 20% were not interested in using a tourist card.

In order to test the statistical significance of the above results according to our first hypothesis, a t-Student test was computed after the transformation of the initial variable into a binary one with the answers 'yes' = 1 and 'the others' = 0. We have considered a test value of 50%. The results of this test are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1:** One-Sample t- test for the percentage of tourist interested to buy a tourist card

	Test Value = 0.5					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Interest to buy a tourist card	6.839	430	.000	.15661	.1116	.2016

The results of the t-Student test ( $p < 0.05$ ) confirms the first hypothesis (H1), which states that the majority of the respondents intend to purchase a potential Braşov tourist card.

We have also investigated tourists' interest in cultural routes. In this respect, the interview operators have explained the cultural route concept to the respondents. In order to measure this variable we have used a binary scale, and the results revealed that 72% of the respondents were interested in cultural routes.

Aiming to verify whether the second hypothesis of the research (H2) is accepted, we have also used the t-Student test (Table 2).

**Table 2:** One-Sample t- test for the percentage of tourist interested in cultural routes

	Test Value = 0.5					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Interest to buy cultural routes	10,385	430	,000	,22390	,1815	,2663

The results show that the percentage of tourists interested in cultural routes is significantly higher than 50%, and the second hypothesis (H2) is accepted. This high percentage of tourists interested in cultural routes allowed us to conclude that such tourism products could be developed. A cultural route could become a strong incentive for local development in southern Transylvania.

Tourists' interest regarding tourist cards should motivate the local DMO to develop such a product, which could have real success in the future. In order to benefit from this opportunity, the local DMO must choose proper marketing strategies meant to promote the card, and place it through the best channels. In this respect, we asked tourists which are the most appropriate distribution channels for a Braşov tourist card, giving them multiple choice answers. The results are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3:** Tourists' preference concerning the main distribution channels of the tourist card

Distribution channels	Responses		
	N	Percent	Percent of Cases
Tourist information centers	143	24.0%	48.0%
Accommodation units	228	38.3%	76.5%
Museums	40	6.7%	13.4%
Travel agencies	165	27.7%	55.4%
Others	19	3.2%	6.4%
Total	595	100.0%	199.7%

These results indicate that accommodation units are considered the most appropriate distribution channel for the Braşov tourist card, as this answer was mentioned by 76.5% of the respondents. Thus, the third hypothesis (H3) is rejected. Travel agencies and tourist information centers have also recorded a high number of answers, being mentioned by about 50% of the respondents.

The fourth hypothesis (H4) is confirmed as tourists' opinions regarding the facilities which should be included in the tourist card (Table 4) are focused on certain price facilities for accommodation and leisure services (museums, castles, entertainment services, spa and wellness). However, certain respondents are interested in discounts for foods and beverages consumed in local units (23.2%) or discounts for public transportation (12.6%).

**Table 4:** The facilities which should be included in the tourist card

Facilities	Responses		
	N	Percent	Percent of Cases
Access/discounts at museums, castles, entertainment parks, spa and wellness	224	30.9%	78.3%
Discounts in accommodation units	224	30.9%	78.3%
Discounts in bars, restaurants, coffee-shops	168	23.2%	58.7%
Access/discounts for public transportation	91	12.6%	31.8%
Others	18	2.5%	6.3%
Total	725	100.0%	253.4%

Further on, we have tested the influence of demographic and travel characteristics on respondents' interest in both tourist cards and cultural routes.

#### 4.2. Testing the influence of demographic and travel characteristics on TITC and TICR

In order to find the most important determinants of respondents' intention to buy tourist cards and cultural routes, we have chosen the binary logistic regression model. This model offers the advantage of using categorical variables as independent factors that influence a binary dependent variable (Constantin, Candrea and Ispas, 2012).

First, we have analyzed tourists' intention to buy a tourist card as a dependent variable in relationship with different characteristics of the respondents as independent variables. These characteristics are: respondents' awareness concerning tourist cards, the main purpose of their visit and certain demographic characteristics (see Table 5).

**Table 5:** Variables included in the binary logistic model

Variables		Frequency
Are you familiarized with the concept of tourist card?	No	333
	Yes	98
Visit purpose	Leisure	259
	Business	94
	Visit friends-relatives	56
	Other	12
Age	16-24 years	107
	25-34 years	144
	35-44 years	107
	45-54 years	52
	55-64 years	9
	Over 64 years	2
Marital status	Single	103
	Married	106
	Married with children	82
	In a partnership	120
	Divorced	10
Education	Below high school	5
	High school	111
	College/Degree	200
	Postgraduate and beyond	105
Monthly income	Low income	96
	Medium income	211
	High income	114
Gender	Male	217
	Female	204

From the total of seven variables (binary and categorical) included in the model only two significant factors have been retained: the familiarization with the tourist card concept (famil) and visit purpose (visit\_purp). We have estimated this model using a stepwise approach (Table 6).

The visit purpose variable (visit\_purp) was transformed into several binary variables according to each response category, and we have obtained the model coefficients (B) presented in Table 6. These new variables have been coded as follows:

familiarization with the tourist card concept (FAMIL), leisure (LEIS), business (BUS), visit friends and relatives (VFR).

**Table 6:** Variables in the model equation for TITC

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1(a)	famil	1.362	.311	19.240	1	.000	3.905
	Constant	.405	.113	12.823	1	.000	1.500
Step 2(b)	visit_purp			13.876	3	.003	
	visit_purp (leisure)	.034	.707	.002	1	.962	1.035
	visit_purp (business)	-.925	.725	1.630	1	.202	.396
	visit_purp (visit friends and relatives)	-.241	.750	.103	1	.748	.786
	famil	1.437	.318	20.466	1	.000	4.209
	Constant	.627	.696	.812	1	.368	1.872

a Variable(s) entered on step 1: familiar.

b Variable(s) entered on step 2: visit\_purp.

Considering the above mentioned variables, the binary logistic model has the following equation:

$$P(y=1/x_1, x_2, x_3, x_4) = \frac{\exp(0.627+1.437 \cdot FAMIL+0.034 \cdot LEIS-0.925 \cdot BUS-0.241 \cdot VFR)}{1+\exp(0.627+1.437 \cdot FAMIL+0.034 \cdot LEIS-0.925 \cdot BUS-0.241 \cdot VFR)} \quad (1)$$

According to the results of equation (1), respondents' familiarization with tourist cards and leisure visit purpose increases significantly the probability to buy such a card. These results support partially the sixth hypothesis (H6) of our research which states that travel characteristics have a strong influence on respondents' interest to buy tourist cards. In this respect, tourists who are travelling for leisure purposes are mostly interested to buy tourist cards. The probability decreases in the case of business travelers or those visiting friends/relatives due to the negative values of the  $\beta$  coefficients estimated for these variables. According to the values of the Odd coefficients mentioned in Table 6, if a tourist is travelling for leisure purposes, the probability to buy a tourist card is increasing with 3.5% (Exp (B)=1.035). However, if a tourist is travelling for business purposes, the probability to buy a tourist card is decreasing with 60.4% (Exp (B)=0.396). Respondents' familiarization with tourist cards has the strongest influence on the probability to buy such a product as its Odd coefficient is 4.209.

Some simulations of tourists' probability to buy a tourist card are presented in Table 7.

**Table 7:** Simulations of the probability to buy a tourist card

Visit purpose	Familiarization with tourist cards	
	Yes	No
Leisure	0.81	0.51
Business	0.62	0.28
Visit friends and relatives	0.77	0.44

Thus, for leisure tourists who are familiarized with tourist cards, the probability to buy such a product is 0.81 while for leisure tourists who are not familiarized with tourist cards, this probability is 0.51 (Table 7).

In order to outline the probability for tourists to buy cultural routes according to their demographic characteristics and visit purpose, we have used a logistic regression model, similar to the one applied in the case of TITC, taking into consideration the same variables used in Table 5. In this case, tourists' familiarization with tourist cards was replaced by their familiarization with cultural routes.

**Table 8:** Variables in the model equation for TICR

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1(a)			49.201	3	.000	
visit_purp						
visit_purp(leisure)	.434	.686	.400	1	.527	1.543
visit_purp(business)	-1.399	.699	4.009	1	.045	.247
visit_purp(visit friends and relatives)	.098	.738	.018	1	.895	1.103
Constant	1.099	.667	2.716	1	.099	3.000

a - Variable(s) entered on step 1: visit\_purp.

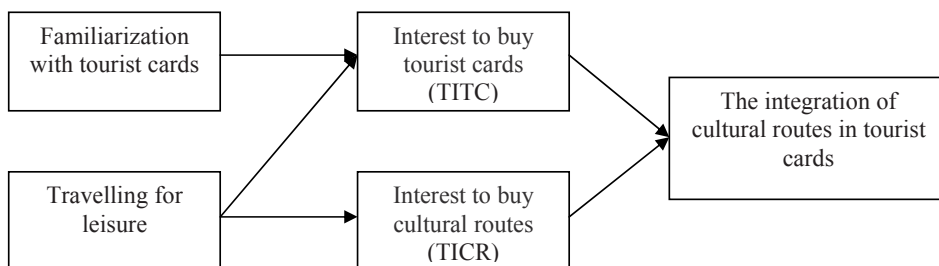
According to the results presented in Table 8 only one significant factor has been retained-visit\_purp: leisure (LEIS); business (BUS); visit friends and relatives (VFR). Considering the above mentioned variables, the binary logistic model has the following equation:

$$P(y=1/x_1, x_2, x_3) = \frac{\exp(1.099 + 0.434 \cdot LEIS - 1.399 \cdot BUS + 0.098 \cdot VFR)}{1 + \exp(1.099 + 0.434 \cdot LEIS - 1.399 \cdot BUS + 0.098 \cdot VFR)} \quad (2)$$

The probability for tourists to buy a cultural route, calculated using equation (2), is higher in the case of leisure travelers (0.61) and lower for business (0.20) or VFR (visit friends and relatives) tourists (0.52). This confirms the sixth hypothesis; tourists who are travelling for leisure purposes are mostly interested to buy tourist cards and cultural routes.

### 4.3. The empirical model

Considering the results of the two logistic regression analyses we have found that only travel characteristics influence TITC and TICR. The influence of demographic characteristics on TITC and TICR is not statistically significant, which means that the fifth hypothesis (H5) is rejected. Thus, the empirical model which resulted from testing the second set of hypotheses is presented in Figure 2.



**Figure 2:** The empirical model regarding the integration of cultural routes in tourist cards

Considering the fact that leisure travelers are mostly interested to buy cultural routes and tourist cards, we can conclude that this is the main market segment that the DMO should focus on when promoting them.

The marketing efforts for the two products (the tourist card and the cultural route) should be based on proper processes meant to inform tourists regarding the existence of tourist cards and their benefits for cultural routes.

## 5. Discussion

The research results reveal the following conclusions regarding respondents' interest in tourist cards (TITC) and cultural routes (TICR):

- Tourists' poor knowledge of tourist cards as a small percentage of respondents (22.7%) are familiarized with such a concept. These results outline the need for a better promotion of tourist cards in Romania as most tourists are not familiar with their characteristics and benefits.
- Considering the fact that 66% of the respondents would be interested to purchase a tourist card if it would be available in the city of Braşov, the local DMO has the opportunity to develop such a product, which can enjoy a real success in the future. As the most likely interest for a tourist card could be shown by well-informed tourists, the main marketing actions should be focused on a proper process meant to inform tourists regarding the existence of tourist cards and their benefits.
- Accommodation units were considered the most appropriate distribution channel by 76.5% of the respondents while about half of the respondents would prefer travel agencies. Tour operators and travel agencies should be motivated to distribute the tourist card in exchange for a commission between 10-15%, negotiable depending on the sales volume. We recommend that the local DMO should consider the distribution using a dedicated webpage or even a tourist card hotline.
- As 78.3% of the respondents have shown their interest in price facilities for accommodation and leisure services (museums, castles, entertainment services, spa and wellness), we consider that including the Saxon heritage cultural route in the tourist card might make it attractive for visitors who want to discover Braşov region.
- Respondents' familiarization with tourist cards and leisure visit purpose increase significantly the probability to buy such a card.
- As 72% of the respondents have shown their interest in cultural routes we recommend that such a cultural route should be included in the tourist card offer of Braşov city.
- The probability for tourists to buy a tourist card and cultural route is higher in the case of leisure travelers.
- Travel characteristics influence TITC and TICR, while the influence of demographic characteristics on TITC and TICR is not statistically significant.

Considering the fact that leisure travelers are mostly interested to buy cultural routes and tourist cards, we can conclude that this is the main market segment that the DMO should focus on when promoting them.

Based on the results of the present research, the major findings have significant managerial implications for the analyzed tourist destination.

We consider that the development of tourism in Braşov should be based on integrated marketing initiatives that promote both existing and new tourism products. However, these initiatives cannot be implemented by the local DMO without the collaboration of local tourism stakeholders. Although the local DMO has organized monthly meetings with tourism stakeholders, their participation and support seems to be limited, causing different problems in the cooperation framework of the destination.

Potential customers' preferences concerning Braşov tourist card give opportunities for an integrated development of local tourism industry, requiring a strong cooperation among service providers, which can assure a fair contribution in sustaining the required facilities and discounts. The coordination of this process by the local DMO is very important as it can assure a proper framework of cooperation focused on equal benefits for all partners that promote these cards.

Fragmentation in the supply chain is a huge problem holding back the cultural routes from packaging an attractive tourism offer. The creation and marketing of networks, comprising stakeholders from different geographical locations, across different sectors and with different business priorities is a real challenge. Consequently, our recommendation concerning the inclusion of the cultural route of the Saxon fortified churches in a potential Braşov tourist card might solve this challenge, as the local DMO would be in charge of their promotion.

In order to assure the success of a cultural route in southern Transylvania, we have formulated several recommendations for the local DMO which should be in charge of their implementation. These recommendations are based on several good practices found in certain European cultural routes and in previous studies:

- The identification of different SMEs from the destinations included in the cultural route, which might be interested in offering different tourism services or local products. As clustering is one way in which SME activity and knowledge exchange can be stimulated, the local DMOs in each of the main urban destinations in the region (Braşov, Sibiu and Sighişoara) should play an important role in stimulating cluster development. Incentives could be provided for the establishment of specific clusters covering cultural, tourism and business operators at key locations along the fortified churches cultural route.
- Raising tourists' awareness of the cultural heritage in the region through different cultural events. In most of the rural communities included in the route there are several traditions and customs especially during the summertime and religious holidays (Easter and Christmas).
- Interpretation of the local cultural heritage in the rural communities included in the route (dramatic art, interpretative panels, etc.) in an integrated manner,

which may outline the inclusion of the fortified churches in a cultural route and motivate tourists to visit the other churches.

- Marketing: A well-defined target market is one of the key elements of a marketing strategy. An efficient communication is also necessary in order to facilitate easy access by all tourists, and thus avoids wasting time and physical effort in searching out that information once they have arrived at the chosen destinations (Ortega and Rodriguez, 2007). Marketing through mobile service offers the possibility to provide information along the central roads (parking lots, rest areas). In this way, through gift package, prizes and interactive marketing campaigns, tourists' attention can be attracted, and they can be interested to visit some of these destinations. This especially applies to the ability to link several smaller destinations, with the purpose of providing substantial benefits to tourists.

The present research has identified a high interest of tourists to buy cultural routes and tourist cards, especially in the case of leisure travelers. We have also found that well-informed tourists are more likely to buy tourist cards. Thus, we have identified the necessity of a good promotional strategy focused on the segment of leisure travelers, using advertising in magazines, guidebooks, leaflets or the creation of cultural events and tourism fairs.

As suggested by Ekinci, Sirakaya-Turk and Preciado (2013), tourism destination marketers should also create travel forums and communities of travelers who visited the destination (in this case, following the cultural route) in order to provide pride for the members, encouraging outside observers to develop and enhance positive images and identity. Ultimately, potential visitors are likely to identify themselves with the groups of travelers who visit the destination (following the cultural route) and create additional positive word-of-mouth communication.

Destination marketing strategies should also focus on raising the Internet visibility of the cultural route. The European experience in developing cultural routes has shown that these routes had developed their own websites. In this sense, besides their own websites, the use of social media (transmitting the information via Facebook, YouTube) as well as a dedicated consumer portal, where both the cultural route and the tourist card can be presented to the potential tourists on a single website, can become powerful marketing instruments for the DMO.

A specificity of Braşov tourism market is the proliferation of small tourism companies, characterized by a strong individual business vision. They are reluctant to establish collaborations and build up an integrated system, making the tourist offer too fragmented to be competitive. In the context of a fragmented offer and less coherent marketing efforts, a tourist card including a cultural route can be a useful marketing tool contributing to an integrated development of Braşov as a tourism destination as different local manufacturers and service providers could benefit from the inclusion in the cards' network. Thus, the local companies can have more information about tourism demand and they can improve short and medium terms planning processes, leading to a successful management for both companies and destination.



Based on the good practices identified in the specific literature and on the results of the survey among the visitors of Braşov, we consider that the best solution for the management and marketing of the destination is a partnership among the local public administration and tourism operators. The implementation of both the tourist card and cultural route depends to a great extent on the existence of such a collaborative approach.

## 6. Limitations and future research

The results and recommendations included in this paper are meant to assist the DMO in the studied destination in implementing a potential city card as well as promoting and improving the cultural route of the fortified churches in southern Transylvania.

The study, however, has several limitations that future researches can address. Our research focuses on effective visitors in the studied destination instead of potential visitors interviewed in their residence location. Future studies should also identify new segments of potential buyers for cultural routes and tourist cards, considering variables such as: geographical location, ethnicity, current occupation, type of traveler, length of stay, etc.

A huge potential for tourism innovation is represented by the dissemination of information about the products and services that cultural routes are offering, further research in this area might consider investigating: different marketing, sales and communication channels, the partnerships which should be created in order to reach out to the target audiences as well as other types of promotional activities (for example, publicity and events) for awareness-raising purposes.

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