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Abstract: Cultural tourism (CT), although considered by some “friendly tourism”, has its impacts, being perceived by more and more people and communities as a force of change through its diversification. This study is aimed at exploring CT in Buzău Carpathians and Subcarpathians (BSC) perception by residents using the interview method, targeting three main objectives: *Identifying the profiles of the interviewed residents on CT* as a driving factor for future development of CT; *Analysing the perceived aspects/elements linked to CT* and *Identifying the roles played by locals for the valorisation of CT sights*. The results show that the residents understood CT as a mix between the natural and cultural dimensions of local reality and its positive impact on local traditions. The study highlights the idea that the residents could and should be active agents for the CT local attractions and for the future development of this type of tourism within the study area.

Keywords: cultural tourism, residents’ perception, Buzău Carpathians and Sub-Carpathians, Romania

Highlights

- We explored cultural tourism perception by residents.
- We identified the roles played by locals for the valorisation of cultural tourism sights.
- We applied interviews in 21 localities.

1. Introduction

Culture (or culture experience, Wickens, 2017), as a product consumed by tourists, is one of the most important aspects of tourism activity (Richards and Munsters, 2010, Vaishar and Šťastná, 2020). The local culture, traditions, lifestyle, art- and historic-related activities and initiatives shaped cultural tourism (CT) growth, thus its impacts become visible and perceived by people and communities. Simultaneously, this trend stimulates the interest of scholars from many fields of research but the studies focused on the relationship between culture and tourism are still unsatisfactory (Hughes, 2002).

As “a type of tourism activity in which the visitor’s essential motivation is to learn, discover, experience and consume the tangible and intangible cultural attractions/products in a tourism destination” (UNWTO, 2017), the CT is considered a key resource for the tourism industry especially in urban areas (Pahos et al., 2010). In this paper, the authors intend to show that rural residents also perceive CT as a potential driving force for their rural settlements and to complete the idea that culture is eminently a city industry (Pahos et al., 2010, pp. 85), addressing the rural CT potential as the rural residents’ perception reflects it. This aim is supported by the idea that tourism is an economic activity that completes the concept of multi-functionality of the rural space, as a way in which the traditional rural functions are multiplied. In the last decades, local culture and history and rural traditions have become valorised opportunities that sustained the multi-functionality of the rural space (Saxena and Ilbery, 2008, Wilson, 2009) through the CT.

Thus, this paper follows three main objectives (OB1) *Identifying the profiles of the interviewed residents*; (OB2) *Analysing the perceived aspects/elements linked to CT*; and (OB3) *Identifying the roles played by residents for the valorisation of CT objectives*.

2. Theoretical background

In the last decades, local culture and history and rural traditions have become valorised opportunities that sustained the multi-functionality of the rural space (Saxena and Ilbery, 2008, Wilson, 2009), which support regional survival (Liang et al., 2021, Šťastná et al., 2022) and the sustainable development (Sánchez-Fernández et al., 2019, Breiby et al., 2020, Marossu and Balvis, 2020, Mureşan et al., 2021, Grilli et al., 2021, Lequeux-Dincă and Preda 2018). The CT is considered a key resource for functional regeneration

(Roberts et al., 2017) and also a tool for fostering tourism in rural areas (Bachleitner and Zins, 1999, Šťastná et al., 2020) through a multi-functional development with various challenges and approaches (Zhang and Zhu, 2020).

The concept of multi-functionality of the rural space relies in the recognition that agriculture, in addition to producing food, also produces non-market goods and services, shapes the environment, affects social and cultural systems, biodiversity conservation and contributes to economic growth (Van Huylenbroek et al., 2007, Wilson, 2010, Aguglia et al., 2008, Tudor, 2009, Mitrică et al, 2021). These new functions of the rural space stemmed from the complex relationships between the agricultural activities, natural environment, peoples, and their own historic and cultural contexts in which the production takes place (Ivona, 2021). The new functions of rural space complement or even replace agricultural production, the mixture between the economic, social, cultural, historical contexts implying the differentiation between territories, thus between their functions and dynamics (Belletti and Berti, 2011). One of these functions is represented by tourist activity, which can play an important role in the development of rural areas and in the increase of living standard of rural population.

For residents, the perception of the CT benefits can be positive or negative, and reflected by the type of tourism's outcomes (Besculides et al., 2002, Šťastná and Vaishar, 2022). For Chiu et al. (2016), the residents' perceptions are very important in understanding and evaluating the positive and the negative impacts of tourism development. The approach of residents' perceptions in research papers involves the study of their attitude face to tourism and their opinions about how tourism is experienced and lived by them (Smith and Spencer 2020). The CT is perceived in different ways by locals who are, in turn, very different in terms of their demographic, social, educational, and cultural features. Locals' perception is shaped not only by their intrinsic characteristics but also according to the way in which CT impacted their local area (Segota et al., 2017, Lequeux-Dincă et al, 2018). The economic and education factors are doubled by the location factor: Adie and Falk (2021) showed that the persons living in the vicinity of cultural sites/attractions, highly educated and socially well positioned, are more likely to believe that the CT represents a threat to heritage. The economic factor is mirrored by other studies, which showed that the residents' perception of CT is influenced by their economic dependency on tourism activities (Haley et al., 2005, Martinez et al., 2017 quoted by Mureşan et al., 2021) and by the economic benefits (Rua, 2020). Studies on different CT attractions linked with food experience (Sthapit et al., 2019, Seyfi et al., 2020, Atsiz et al., 2022) reveal some key factors that influenced the entire CT experiences in a destination (e.g., the prior perceived significance of the experience, its authenticity, the engagement, cultural exchange, the culinary attraction and the quality of service). The residents' perception of local cultural events was a topic approached by Doumi et al. (2020) who developed research in some Greek islands focused on the investigation of the main annual cultural events in relation to their possible impact on the local society, economy, tourism and natural environment. The approach of the residents' perceptions of CT impacts was the research issue for Gannon et al., (2021). They are examining the community attachment, its environmental and cultural attitudes, economic gain, and its involvement directly through the lens of their impact upon the support offered by residents for tourism development. Their results revealed that the role of residents' perceptions is significant for shaping the relations established between community and local tourism development. Liasidou et al., (2021) concluded that residents are "the most important actors, whose views and opinions must be prioritised so that tourism can act for their benefit" (pp. 731). This idea is based on the analysis made in the case of residents' perceptions of rural areas in relation to social and environmental impacts of tourism. The focus on the residents' perceptions of socio-cultural benefits induced by tourism development in a mountain area (Mureşan et al., 2021) indicated that they have a positive attitude despite their variety in terms of demographic and socio-economic characteristics.

3. Study's design

The present paper was conceived in the framework of HORIZON 2020 SPOT project (*Social and innovative Platform on Cultural Tourism and its potential towards deepening Europeanisation*) developed in the study area of the Buzău Carpathians and Subcarpathians (BSC).

In order to fulfil the three objectives mentioned in the introductory part, this study has three main directions that it follows, as they are mentioned in Fig. 1.

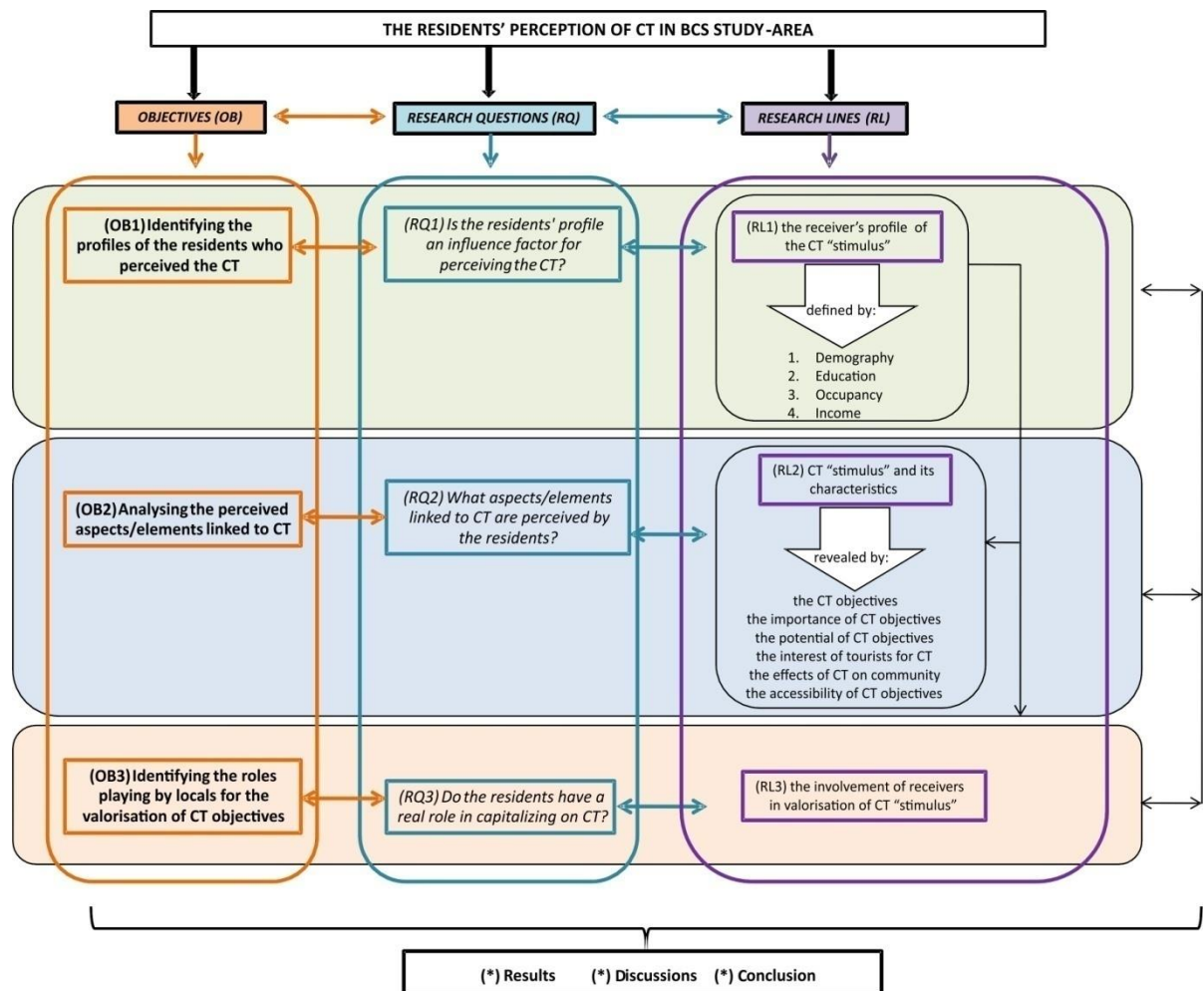


Fig 1. The main directions of the study's design. Source: authors

Three research questions (RQ) were addressed to help define the three objectives: (RQ1) *Is the residents' profile an influencing factor for perceiving the CT?* (RQ2) *What aspects/elements linked to CT are perceived by the residents?*; (RQ3) *Do the residents have a real role in capitalizing on CT?* The three research lines (RL), aiming to answer the research questions, are approached through the idea that perception is stimulus-dependent (Beck, 2018, Cermeño-Aínsa, 2022). Adapting the definition of "stimulus", (i.e., is it something that rouses to activity or it is something that causes a reaction (*Vocabulary.com Dictionary*)), we imagine that CT is a concept or a reality (through the existence of cultural attractions, sites etc) that incite to economic (i.e., touristic) activity, it being the stimulus; and the residents are those who perceived it. CT could change the functional structure of local economies and community development concerns and, in some cases, it actually does. Thus, the paper is designed around three research lines, namely, (RL1) *The receiver's profile in relation to CT "stimulus"*; (RL2) *The CT "stimulus" and its characteristics*; and (RL3) *The involvement of receivers in valorisation of CT "stimulus"* (Fig. 1).

4. Study-area

BSC are located in Buzău County (Fig. 2a) being characterized by a dominant rural economy and facing complex socio-economic and environmental challenges, which are reflected in the intra- and inter-regional disparities, and ultimately in the low quality of life of the rural communities (Mitrică et al 2022). The study area is personalised by the prevalence of rural features in terms of main characteristics:

administrative-territorial (92% of total area of 2,469.8 km² is rural, that is 34 LAUs, out of which, 32 are rural), demographic (84.8% of population is rural, that is 99,600 inhabitants) and economic (according to the last census, in 2011, 53.7% of total employed labour force was occupied in agriculture). The study area has a high tourist potential, both natural and manmade, streaming from the complexity and diversity of natural landscapes and to the local historical background.

The field survey was performed in 21 LAUs of the total of 34 LAUs the study area has (Fig. 2b).

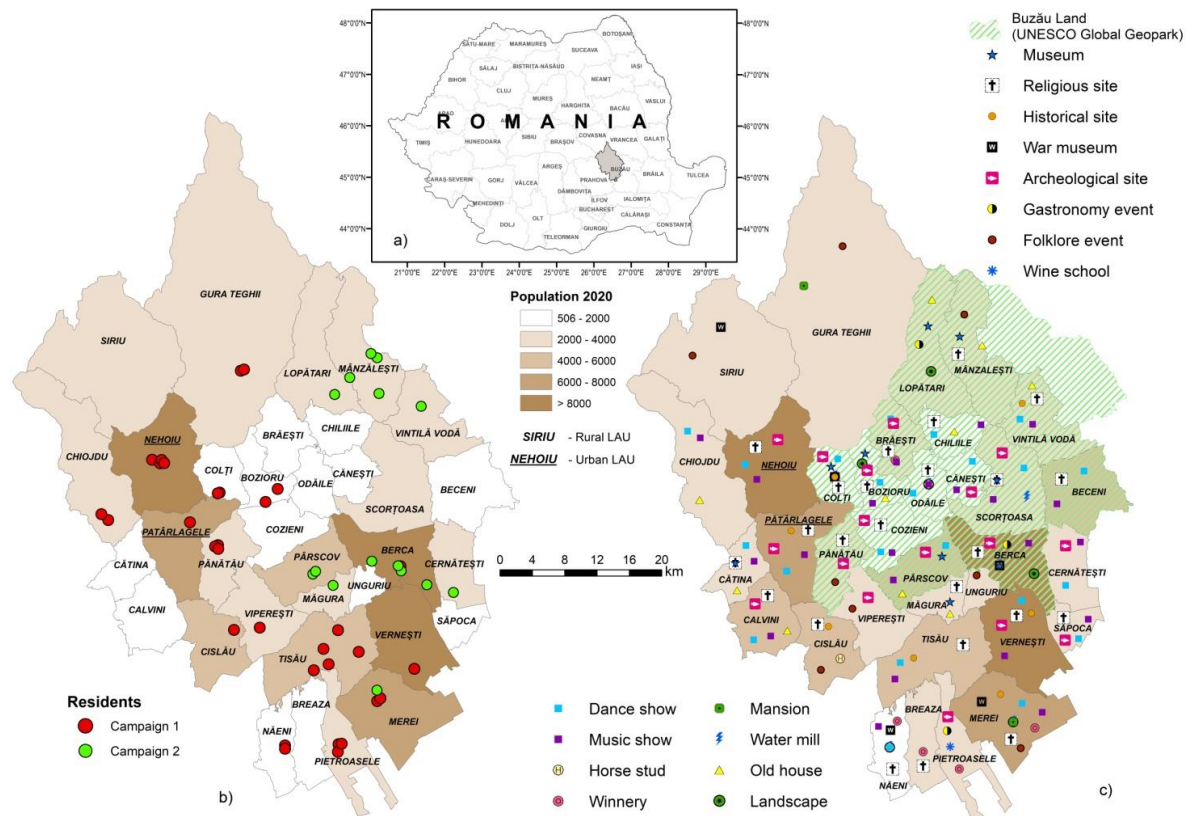


Fig 2. Study area: a) position in Romania; b) spatial coverage by the two field campaigns; c) tourist attractions. Source: authors

The tourism potential and objectives of the study (Fig. 2c) are important to understand the richness and diversity of elements linked to CT, as they were perceived by the residents. In the following lines, the main objectives/sites/activities of the natural and anthropic potential are listed at local administrative units' level. Thus, (*) *the natural tourism potential* is represented by: mud volcanoes (in Berca), Ulmetu trovants (in Bozioru), Live Fires, Mociaru Lake, Salt Mountain and Cave (all in Lopătari), Cașoca Valley and Waterfall (in Siriu), Bottomless Lake, Meledic Salt Plateau, Salt Cave (all in Mânzălești). In the study area, Buzău Valley offers opportunities for rafting and kayaking and the relief favours outdoor activities such as trekking, hiking, climbing, mountain biking, etc. Regarding (*) *the anthropic tourist potential*, the main attractions are grouped in: (i) religious sites (Ciolanu Monastery in Tisău, Rătești and Berca monasteries in Berca), cave religious settlements (in Aluniș village in Colți and in Nucu village from Bozioru commune); (ii) museums (Colți Amber Collection, so called "The Amber Museum Colți", which belongs to the Buzău County Museum, "Vasile Voiculescu" Memorial House in Pârscov, The Museum of Shapes – in Bozioru, Museum "7 story places" – in Lopătari, The Time of Man Museum – in Mânzălești); (iii) festivals (such as the Commune Day Festivals organized by almost each rural and urban administrative units, the Pietroasele "Tămâioasa" Feast, one of the most famous Romanian aromatic wine, produced in Pietroasele village (Merei commune), the Sausage Festival in Pleșcoi village (Berca commune); (iv) sculpture camps in Măgura and Naeni; (iv) others such as the wine tasting, religious activities ("hram", meaning the celebration of the patron saint of a Christian church), Cislău Stud, etc.).

The recently declared (April 2022) UNESCO Geopark "Buzău Land" supports the sustainable development, civic involvement, education, economy and environmental protection through different actions and activities among the promotion of cultural and human patrimonies.

5. Data and Methods

During the last decades, in the tourism field research, the economically oriented studies have declined and those focusing on socio-economic and community issues grew (Xiao and Smith, 2006) in number. However, although the methods employed have changed (Richards and Munsters, 2010), the CT remains more often related to qualitative studies, namely with classic interviews as the main research instrument and with in-depth interviews (Richards et al., 2001).

Data used in this study were obtained by applying interviews with the BSC residents in 21 LAUs with and without CT attractions. The interviewed residents inhabited 19 rural LAUs and 2 urban LAUs (Nehoiu and Pătărlagele which are small-sized, with a population of 10,492 inhabitants and 7,319 inhabitants, respectively) (Fig. 2b).

This study is based on the results of a survey applied to three categories of entities involved directly or indirectly within the tourist activity related to CT, namely, tourists, residents and entrepreneurs/businesses during the fieldwork carried out in the study area in 2020 as part of the framework of the HORIZON 2020 *Social and innovative Platform on Cultural Tourism and its potential towards deepening Europeanisation* SPOT project.

The content and structure of the interview were driven by the researchers' intention to make it as exhaustively possible. Thus, the interview was divided into two parts focused on (1) the general features of respondents (questions 1 to 7) and (2) the CT attractions perceived by residents (questions 8 to 19). The questions were open-ended and closed-ended and they intend to reveal the aspects linked to the CT. At the beginning of the interview, the interviewed residents were informed about the meaning of CT in relation to the SPOT project, in terms of broadening it as a concept by adding the natural landscape, media, gastronomy, etc. The average duration of the interview was 20 minutes.

The authors used the sampling method, sampling being the selection of a subset of the population of interest in a research study (Turner, 2019). Probability (or random) sampling, as a sampling technique, was used to choose the residents who, in the case of this technique, have an equal opportunity to be a part of the sample. For this very reason, it is useful when researchers are interested in associations that would apply to the whole population (Turner, 2019). Considering the idea expressed by Taherdoost (2016) that is important not the share of the research sampled population, but its absolute size, we reflect on sample size in terms of the paper's aim and its demographic and socio-economic complexity. Taking into account all these considerations and following the main steps needed to be pointed in this method (i.e., defining the target population, choosing the sampling technique, collecting data, assessing response rate), the following aspects are worth mentioning:

- the respondents considered for this study were only those who are residents of the rural or urban LAUs of the BSC area and aged over 18 years old;
- the criteria applied for selecting randomly the interviewed residents in BSC area were: (*) the residents to be identified in the localities with CT attractions (objectives/sites/events) and with businesses in tourism; (*) the residents from remote localities, with reduced territorial accessibility, with few or no CT attractions or tourist infrastructure (this criterion was chosen to understand, in comparison, the perceptions of several categories of residents in relation to CT in general). Besides its localisation in these two categories of settlements, the sample residents were built with and completed by (*) several defining elements of residents' socio-economic profile such as the age, gender, professional activity, education and incomes of their households, etc.;
- considering the difficulties imposed by the Corona pandemic, within the framework of EU's Horizon 2020 programme – *Social and Innovative Platform on Cultural Tourism and its potential towards deepening Europeanisation (SPOT)*, the interviews which were applied to the locals were presented to

randomly sample residents selecting members of a population a regular interval (i.e., systematic sampling method), namely 1 person (resident aged over 18 years) out of 1,000 households.

- the data was collected from the 100 residents living in 21 LAUs of the total of 34 LAUs of the BCS, during two field campaigns (in August and September 2021), by teams formed in each period by 8 researchers (organised into groups of 2, one female and one man, considering that gender of interviewers matter in implementation of research (Chattopadhyay and Duflo, 2004, Tannenbaum et al., 2016), each in order to streamline the application of the questionnaires to as many residents as possible in a short time and to provide better coverage of the study area);
- the residents interviewed register a relatively large diversity reflected by their demographic, social and economic profiles. The residents were open and willing to take part in the interview survey, a very small number of them (5 persons) refused to answer (i.e., they argued that they are busy, with a lot of work in their household);
- the survey had a response rate of almost 95% for residents (95 questionnaires out of 100), which is higher than the rates that could be obtained for regular mail or e-mail surveys (Cook *et al.*, 2000, Wu et al., 2022, Daikeler et al., 2022). We assessed that the high response rate is due to the ways in which the interviews were conducted: they were filled in spontaneously and face to face by the researcher; despite the fact that the interview is quite long and some questions difficult to understand, two researchers combined their activities, one asking the questions and discussing with the interviewed resident and the other filling in the interview.

6. Results and Discussions

This section is structured in terms of the logic framework of this paper (Fig. 1), namely achieving the objectives (OB) through the research lines (RL) followed to meet the research questions (RQ).

6.1 The profile of the residents who perceived CT is approached in the light of the first paper's objective (OB 1: *Identifying the profiles of the residents who perceived the CT*) and research questions (RQ 1: *Is the residents' profile an influence factor for the way CT is perceived?*), following the first research line (RL 1: *The receiver's profile of the CT "stimulus"*).

The **rural urban structure** of the interviewed residents in BSC area is imbalanced because of the predominance of rural administrative units, namely 19 (from where 90 residents were interviewed) and only two small towns (Nehoiu and Pătărlagele) where only 5 inhabitants were involved into our survey.

The **gender distribution** of the total number of 95 interviewed residents shows that 32 are males (33.6% of the total), and 63 residents are females (66.3%). This gender imbalance is explained by the fact that females were more willing to give us their free time for the requested answers. Some of these women were retired, unemployed or housewives. Compared to women, the men were more reluctant, or because they were involved in other domestic activities, after the end of the work schedule, they did not have the necessary availability to answer the questions in the interviews. The fact that females are more willing to respond could be evaluated as a way of empowering them as a key actors for local development, women being the drivers to many development initiatives (Chattopadhyay and Duflo, 2004, Duflo, 2012).

The interviewed residents' **age structure** shows that most of them were between 30 and 60 years (72.3%), out of which, the majority of 51.6% had ages between 40 and 60 years and a share of 21.3% represented those with ages between 30 and 40 years.

The youth (under 30 years) and the aged persons (over 60 years) represented 10.6% of the total residents interviewed and 17% respectively (Fig. 3). The aged people were more reticent to answer the interview and to participate less often in social surveys (Wagner et al., 2019), especially that they inhabited in rural areas, traditionally less opened to the outsiders, how the researchers were perceived by them. On the opposite side were the adults, both women and men, who were eager to answer the interview, giving

us a wealth of information and explaining to us different and complex realities met within the BCS area in terms of CT issues.

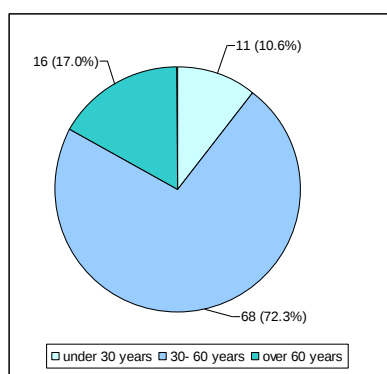


Fig 3. The respondents' structure by age. Source: authors

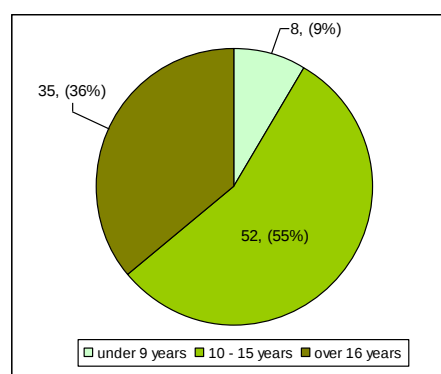


Fig 4. The respondents' structure by educational levels. Source: authors

Education level. Within the BCS, only 48 of the interviewed residents (9%) were graduated on the level of up to 9 years of education (Fig. 4). The most people (i.e., 52 persons, 55% of residents interviewed) graduated high school (between 10 and 15 years of education). In total, 34 people interviewed (36% of total residents involved in this study) graduated over 16 years of education.

Occupation. Among the interviewed persons, only 6% (6 persons) represent the primary sector (e.g., agriculture), being contributing family workers and self-employed. The majority belongs to the tertiary sector (94%, meaning 89 respondents). Within the occupancy in the tertiary sector, the main part (73%, 69 persons) is formed by the labour force occupied in commercial activity (32%, 30 persons, being salesmen at small shops in rural areas) and by different employees in local administration, health and education fields of activity, namely the professionals (Fig. 5). In the category of managers, 10 persons were involved (11%), owning small businesses like small shops and tourist pensions. The secondary sector is not represented within the respondent group but this lack is in line with the general profile of the local economy.

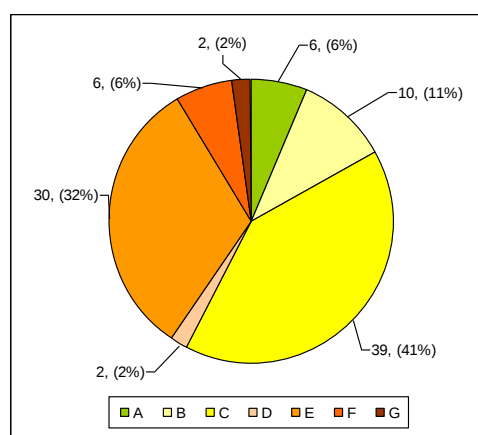


Fig 5. The distribution of the occupational groups. Source: authors

Legend: **Primary sector:** A = Skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers; **Tertiary sector:** B = Managers, C = Professionals, D = Technicians and associate professionals, E = Service and sales workers, F = Elementary occupation (requiring simple and routine tasks), G = Armed forces occupations.

The **household composition** of the respondents shows that most of the households consist of two people (35 respondents, 36.8% of the total). Following the age of these people, we notice that the vast majority are retired families, but also young families, without children. Only one person is alone in the household,

being an elderly or a retired person (Fig. 6). A share of 23.4% (22 respondents) falls into the category of 3 persons/household. After their age, we noticed that the household consists of young people – couples with one child. A comparable share (29.4%, 28 respondents) represents the households formed by 4 persons, representing families with two children. The households with 5 and over 5 persons are formed by all categories of age: children, young, adults and aged persons. They are in small shares (each of them with 4.2%, meaning 4 respondents).

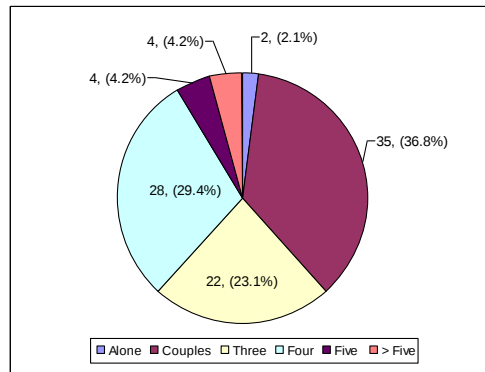


Fig 6. The household composition. Source: authors

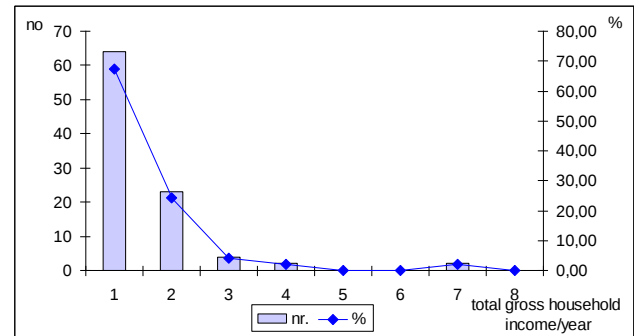


Fig 7. The total gross household income per year. Source: authors

Legend: 1 = Less than €10,000; 2 = €11,000 – €20,000; 3 = €20,000 – €40,000; 4 = €40,000 – €60,000; 5 = €60,000 – €80,000; 6 = €80,000 – €100,000; 7 = €100,000 – €120,000; 8 = More than €120,000.

The total gross household income per year. In the income category, most of the respondents (67.3% of total respondents) have incomes of less than 10,000 €. In the next category, with an income of 11,000 – 20,000 €, 11 respondents were included (24.2% of the total). Each of the categories 20,000–40,000 € and 40,000–60,000 € are represented only by 4 respondents (4.21% of the total). For the 60,000–80,000 and 80,000–100,000 income categories there were no respondents and for 100,000–120,000 €, only 2 persons (Fig. 7).

The fact that most respondents fall into the first two categories in terms of household income is due to the rural environment where economic activities are low and less diversified and the remuneration is not so high according to the aspirations of locals, many of them choosing to work abroad, as happened throughout the country (Sandu, 2005). In addition to all these, the social and economic problems in recent years have led to the loss of jobs for a large part of the population, who had to find other jobs, sometimes underpaid, to support their families. In other cases, we were dealing with families made up only of retirees, who have low incomes.

Through this analysis, we achieve the first paper's objective, concluding that the profiles of the residents who perceived the CT within the BSC look like this: rural life; predominantly 30–60 years age group (with a trend of aging); middle educated (graduated high school and with concern about the financial possibilities to support their own children's education); a total gross household income per year of less than 10,000 €; employment in tertiary sector. This fact is motivated not by the real structure of local economy (which has a dominant rural profile), but by the specific context of the field survey, namely the fact that the salesmen at small shops from the rural areas surveyed and the employees in local administration, health and education represent the two categories most accessible and open to answer the interviews.

6.2 This section focuses on *the residents' perception of CT in BCS* to support the second research question (RQ2) *What aspects/elements linked to CT are perceived by the residents?* (Fig. 1). Thus, the locals' perception of the CT dimensions is targeting the: CT attractions, the importance of these CT attractions, CT objectives accessibility, attracting potential of the CT objectives, interest of tourists for CT and effects of CT on community and on their own person.

The perception of CT attractions

All the 47 respondents were able to mention at least one CT objective and 11 residents interviewed have mentioned more than 3 different CT attractions. The perception of CT activities/sites/objectives shows the level of residents' knowledge in terms of tourism potential owned by their local space: for instance, the residents know (or do not) the tourist sites/landmarks, some details concerning the different stages of their development as a tourist attraction (i.e., stages of improvement project) and even several general information about the owner or the organizer (person or tourist pension) of certain cultural event/attraction. Thus, the CT attractions are a part of place and identity, and they are perceived by residents as a positive element, a force that makes things happen in terms of local initiatives. Also, the fact that the locals know very well the CT attractions means that they are interested in the CT issue.

The natural and man-made tourist potential of the BSC is rich and diversified and the CT activities/sites/objectives mentioned by the respondents are linked with both the natural and the cultural and historic environment. Thus, the residents perceived the CT as a mixture between the natural and cultural dimensions of the local reality and may be that this perception was influenced by the definition of CT under the SPOT project, which was presented to all respondents before the start of interviews. But it is also possible that the residents have the same perception of the dichotomy of CT activities/sites/objectives without knowing this definition of CT under the SPOT project because they do not make a clear distinction between these two dimensions – natural and manmade – of local tourist attraction, both attracting tourists.

Thus, as the Fig. 8 shows, the residents interviewed have answered an item referring to “the cultural activities/sites”, mentioning quite frequently the natural tourist site *Mud Volcanoes*. This place is perceived as being the most attractive within the BCS area (28%).

Also, the word highlights the locals' perception of the so-called *Colți Amber Museum* as being a landmark cultural objective (26.08%, meaning 24 answers of the total of 95 interviewed residents), among the Mud Volcanoes and the religious objectives/sites from Ciolanu, Aluniș and Nucu. This is an amber collection, belonging to *the Buzău County Museum*, based on the existence of amber deposits in Colți area highlighted by locals who, along the history were economically interested in the exploitation and processing of this fossilized resin. This historical fact is unique in Romania fact that is known and mentioned with pride by the residents.



Fig 8. Cultural activities/sites/objectives and natural sites/objectives as CT attraction as they have perceived by residents.
Source: authors

The different religious activities/sites/objectives were mentioned by 34 interviewed residents (some residents have mentioned two or even three religious attractions). Among them, *the cave settlements of Aluniș and Nucșu* were mentioned by 10 persons and *the monasteries* by 18 respondents (i.e., *Ciolanu* – 10, *Rătești* – 4 and *Berca* – 4).

An important observation is that the residents perceived especially the cultural objectives/sites located in the proximity of their settlement. Thus, the residents in Bozioru mentioned only the cave religious

settlements (in Aluniş and Nucu villages located in Colţi and Bozioru communes, respectively), the findings from Ulmet (a village in Bozioru commune) and the residents interviewed in Tisău mentioned only Ciolanu Monastery, located in their village.

Besides the stronger perception of local space, the field research reveals a differentiated perception between the residents of mountain and hilly areas, i.e., the Carpathians and Subcarpathians. So, on the one hand, many of the mountain residents are particularly aware of the local natural attractions such as the Living Fire, the Meledic Salt Plateau and Salt Cave as main elements defining the CT, even though these do not have exclusive cultural dimension, but they constitute a landmark for Buzău County. Also, the interviewers showed that the mountain residents perceived some tourist activities as being cultural, those emerged from the natural mountain landscape, such as the mountain hiking, mentioned by residents from Gura Teghii, and the rafting, which was highlighted as an attractive activity in Nehoiu and Chiojdu due to the local hydrographical characteristics of the Buzău Valley. On the other hand, the residents of the hilly settlements (e.g., Berca, Colţi, Cislău, Pănătău, etc.) mainly perceived the religious sites/activities and local folk/tradition events as being cultural tourist attractions.

The perception of the importance of the CT objectives/attractions/sites/events

The interviewed residents were supposed to assign the CT objectives/attractions/sites/events with 1 (not important) to 5 (very important) score according to their importance (Fig. 9).

According to the answers given by the 95 interviewed residents, the following categories of cultural objectives/attractions/sites/events were perceived as being the most important (with scores of 4 and 5): (*) religious sites/events (65 persons); (*) local traditions/folklore (53 persons); (*) cultural heritage sites and buildings (50 respondents); (*) cultural routes (50 persons); (*) historical sites and buildings (42 residents interviewed).

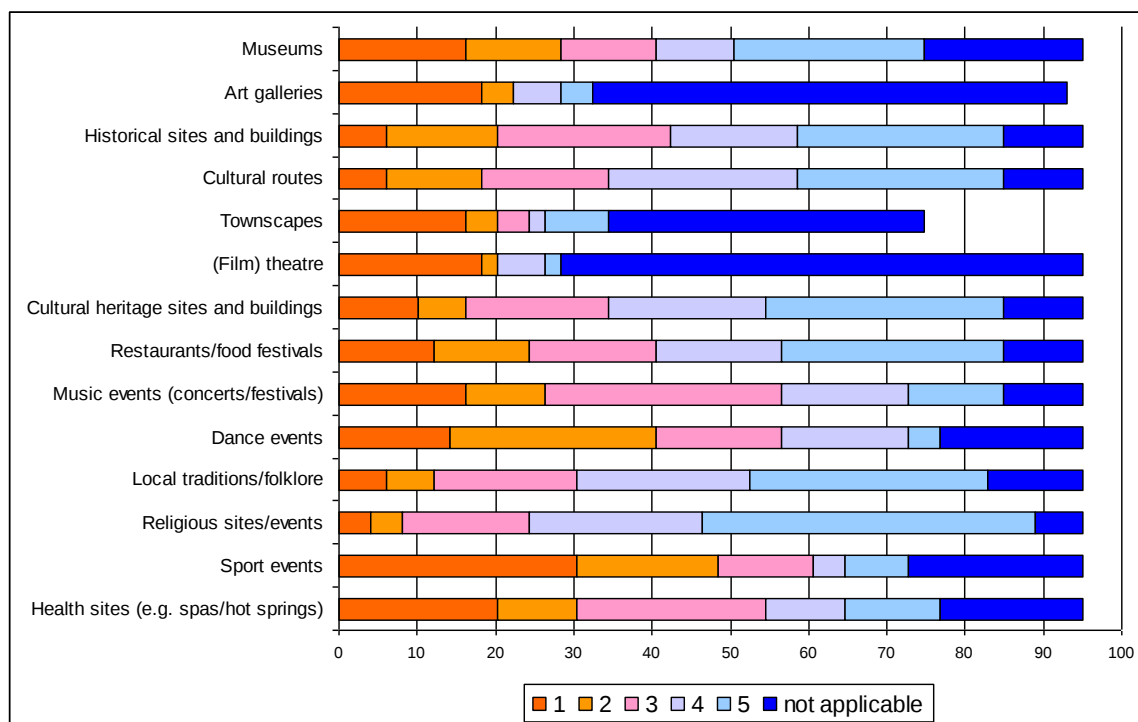


Fig 9. Importance of cultural attractions/sites/events as it is perceived by residents (1 = not important to 5 = very important).
Source: authors

The perception of religious sites/events was by far the most important (42 respondents, 44.2% of total, have assessed it with score 5) showing the closeness of locals to the religious side of their personal and community existence. More than that, religious sites and events are the most accessible, both in terms of

space and time. Also, the gender imbalanced in favour of women influences the perception of this type of CT sites, because the rural woman attend church and perceive all the elements linked with church/religion as being important. In many cases, the religious sites and events were mentioned as being very important by the category of CT objective in connection with the local traditions/folklore. In the area under study, both these categories of CT attractions are often organized simultaneously, the traditions and folklore festivals being deeply linked, in space and time, with the religious events.

The residents perceive the cultural heritage and historical sites and buildings and cultural routes as being important and very important, but they also perceive the factors that prevent the development of these categories of CT attraction, often mentioning the insufficiently developed infrastructure (firstly, the access roads) and the weak promotion of their region in Romania and also abroad. Also, these are the causes of the low importance given to the health sites (e.g., spa/hot springs) (30 persons gave 1 and 2 scores) and to the museums (28 persons mentioned 1 and 2 scores).

The perception on CT objectives accessibility is mirrored by the accessibility from outside and within the area. The respondents should assign ranks of the outside and the inside accessibility of CT with a 1 (very difficult) to 5 (very easy) a scale.

Concerning the accessibility from outside (Fig. 10A), the area is viewed as being an accessible and very accessible one, the 77 residents (81% of total residents questioned) responded to this question with 4 and 5 scores. These persons are residents in rural settlements with good connectivity to the county and national road network or they are residents in a small town, i.e., Nehoiu. Only 12 residents (12.6% of total residents questioned) appreciate that the area is very difficult or difficult to reach. This is the situation of residents living in small villages (e.g., Plavăț village, Mânzălești commune, Bozioru village, Bozioru commune), geographically isolated or located fair away from towns or the main road network, people with low level of education and skills in agricultural activities.

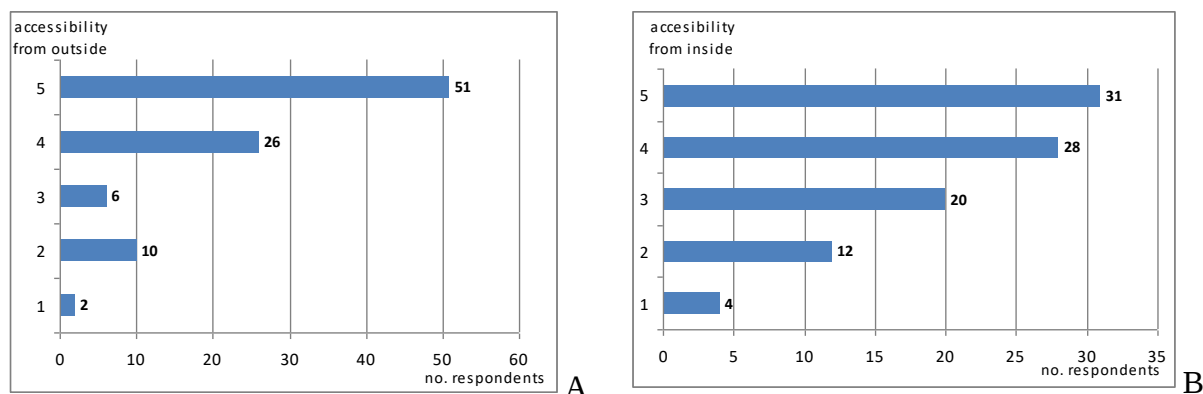


Fig 10. The accessibility from outside (A) and inside (B) perception of the CT objectives from the study area (1 = very difficult to 5 = very easy). Source: authors

The accessibility inside the study area (Fig. 10B) showed that a little more than half of the residents questioned (59 respondents, 62.1% of total residents interviewed) consider that their area is easy and very easily accessible in terms of the interior travels (according the 4 and 5 scores).

The perception on the CT potential in attracting tourists is expressed by the number of tourists assessed by the locals on a scale 1 (very low) to 5 (very high). A number of 22 residents (23.41% of total persons questioned) appreciated that the number of tourists is very high, and a similar number considered that the number of tourists visiting the area is low and very low (Fig. 11).

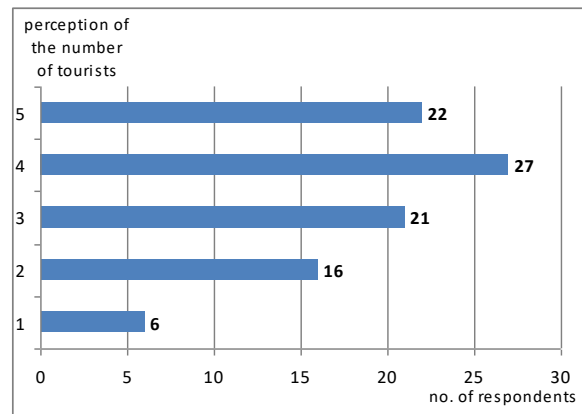


Fig 11. The perception of the CT objectives potential in attracting tourists (1 = very low to 5 = very high). Source: authors

A total number of 48 respondents (50.5% of total residents questioned) perceived that the number of tourists visiting the area is appropriate, in general, these residents being especially with jobs in the tertiary sector of economy and very few being from the primary sector (i.e., agriculture). Also, other common feature of these residents is their gross household income per year: almost a half of them declared a gross household income per year between less than 10,000 € and 20,000 €.

Only a few (6 residents interviewed) have higher household incomes, namely between 20,000 – 40,000 € and between 100,000 – 120,000 €.

The perception of the CT effects at local area/community and personal levels is approached through four types of effects: (*) the type of impact (negative/positive) that an increase of CT has on the area; (*) the impact of CT on local traditions; (*) the impact/inconvenience on daily life and (*) the effects at personal level.

Firstly, analysing the data reflecting (*) *the type of impact (1 = negative to 5 = positive) that an increase of CT has on the area (e.g., infrastructure, jobs, quality of life)*, we observed that the interviewed residents have a positive perception, 81 residents (84.2% of total respondents) perceiving an impact assessed by scores 4 and 5. This category of residents registers very different features in terms of occupancy, income and education as they belong to all occupational groups, declaring a gross household income per year very diverse and inhabited both, the rural and urban environments with a good connection to county and national road network, but and also with a poor accessibility. More than that, most of these residents are persons with 12 years of education, but also there are some cases with 8 and even only 4 years of education and other few persons with 17 or 18 years of education (highly educated people). Thus, perceiving this type of impact as being positive on the area seems to be more linked with the very personal features of the residents than to be dependent by their level of education, place of living, occupation or incomes. This fact is important, being linked with the necessary active support of the rural and urban local communities and their residents, for support and create and successfully manage cultural tourism offer (Đurkin et al. 2017).

The common feature of the residents who perceived this impact as being positive consists in their good knowledge of local CT attractions/sites located in BSC: namely, all these respondents offered more than 2 examples, some of them offering even 7 examples. This means that they know well and very well the local CT attractions/ sites, that they consider the topic of CT an important one and that they could be potential informal active agents for the local CT activities and for the increase of their attractiveness (Fig. 12).

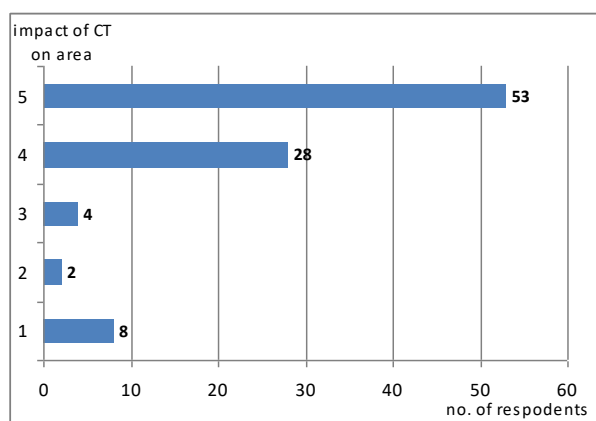


Fig 12. The residents' perception of the type of impact induced by an increase of CT within the local area (1 = negative impact to 5 = positive impact). Source: authors

The negative impact was expressed only by 10 residents and 6 residents appreciate that the impact of the increase of cultural tourism is neutral (score 3). These categories of respondents are formed especially by women, with diverse levels of education, with occupations in service and sales, living both in rural and urban settlements. The commune feature for these residents is their weak perception and low interest regarding the CT activities/sites in the BCS area, reflected by the only one single example of CT attraction, probably because they didn't know others or they are not interested in CT topic, not considering it important.

Secondly, the perception of CT effects at the area/community level is reflected by (*) *the residents' perception of the impact of CT on local traditions*. The research reveals the respondents' perception of the (in)existence of such type of impact: the share of those perceiving that impact exists (answering "Yes") is about 57.8% (55 respondents) and the share of those who do not believe it exists (answering "No") is lower, namely 42.1% (40 respondents) (Fig. 13).

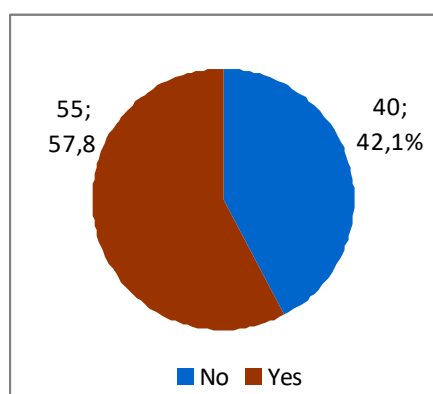


Fig 13. The residents' perception of the (in)existence of the impact of CT on local traditions. Source: authors

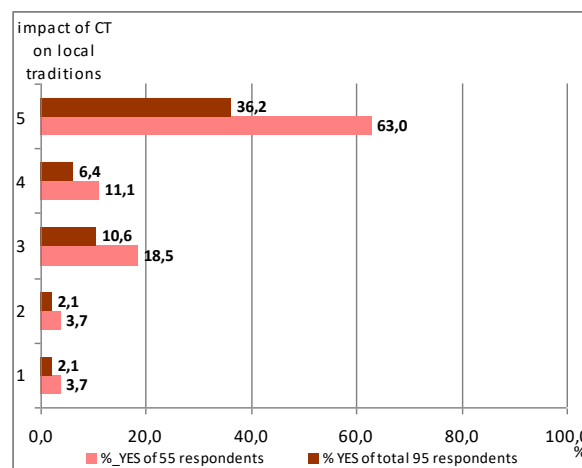


Fig 14. The residents' perception of the positive impacts of CT on local traditions. Source: authors

The analysis of the perception of residents who do believe the existence of the impact of CT on local traditions (answering "Yes") shows that this impact is positive: 63% of 55 residents questioned who answered with "Yes", meaning 36.2% of total 95 residents questioned. Among those who do believe that the impact of CT on local traditions exists, only one perceived that this impact is negative. (Fig. 14).

Thirdly, the residents' perception of CT effects at the area/community level is approached through the aspect related to its (*) *impact/inconvenience on daily life*. The residents appreciated this category of

impact through the following: the inappropriate tourists’ behaviour, the noise and visual pollution caused by them, the garbage they produce and the disrespectfulness for locals or places.

The majority of residents questioned (61 persons and 64.2% of 95 respondents) (Fig. 15) appreciated that there is no impact of CT on daily life. This perception is due to the fact that they live in villages located at a distance from the main CT attractions. On the contrary, 4 residents (4.2%) expressed the opinion that the impact of CT on daily life is major. These are the cases of the interviewed residents who have their households in the vicinity of some tourist attractions or they have relatively frequent interactions with tourists and their activities/actions. A number of 14 interviewed residents (14.7% of total respondents) are neutral.

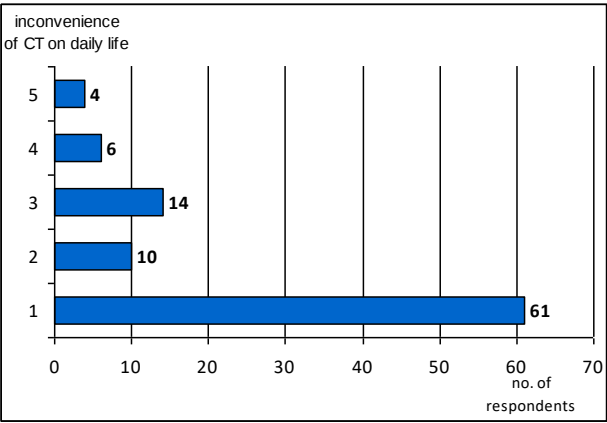


Fig 15. The perception on the impact of CT on daily life (1 = no inconvenience to 5 = a lot of inconvenience). Source: authors

Fourthly, (*) *the locals’ perception of the CT effects at the personal level* was mirrored by two elements reflecting, the profit from CT within the BCS area and used by them and on the one hand, and the discounts received as a local to attend cultural attractions/events/sites, on the other.

Therefore, the residents’ perception of profit resulting from CT and used by them is expressed in a relatively complex way, meaning that the respondents use numerous words/groups of words. These were suggestions represented by a word cloud for a better highlight of the residents' perceptions about cultural activities, sites and objectives. The most frequent words that come up when residents describe their profit from CT is “job”, mentioned by 44 residents interviewed (46.3% of 95 respondents). This word is mentioned once (in 28 cases) and with other words such as “craft workshops”, “guesthouses”, “high standard of living” and “promotion” (Fig. 16).



Fig 16. The locals’ perception on the profit from CT within BCS area and used by themselves. Source: authors

Other words/groups of words used by residents questioned are: “investments”, “development of the region”/“development of the community”, “infrastructure”. All these, through their meanings, are

linked with the level of occupancy in the area, so with the most frequent word mentioned, namely “job”. When mentioning the process of development of the area, some residents have in mind the relation between the general development process and the tourist activities (e.g., the group of words “developed of the region, more accommodation units” is mentioned by 6 residents).

The locals’ perception of the profit from CT is expressed by the groups of words referring to the local traditions: “shops with local and traditional products”, “local products” and “selling local products” are the groups of words mentioned by 10 residents questioned. 6 residents didn’t mention any aspects which could constitute a profit from cultural tourism.

Some of the residents interviewed intended to highlight the landmark of their settlement: the word “gastronomy”, mentioned by the locals from Pleşcoi village, the place of provenience of Sausages Pleşcoi, a geographical indication protected product. Other respondents perceived and expressed their perception through some characteristics of local economy linked with the development of CT. This is the case of crafts which are perceived as an opportunity to valorise the local economic potential: crafts were mentioned by residents from Colţi, Bozioru, Pănătău, Berca where craftsmen and interest in traditional occupation or where pensions and guest houses with shops selling traditional objects exist.

As it was above mentioned, the residents’ perception of the CT effects at the personal level is reflected also by the discounts received as locals to attend cultural attractions/events/sites. Unfortunately, the situation of these discounts is very homogenous in the BSC area in a negative way: a share of 97.8% of respondents answered that they did not receive any discount. For a population with low incomes, any type of discount should be created for being used/facilitated their access to the local cultural events, as a form of integration in the general process of CT development within the BSC area.

6.3 The residents and their roles in valorising the CT attractions

In this section, the authors intend to achieve the third objective of this study, i.e., *OB3 Identifying the roles played by locals for the valorisation of CT objectives* and to answer the third research question – RQ3 *Do the residents have a real role in capitalizing on CT?*

From the field survey, two potential roles of the residents have emerged, i.e., (*) the informal advisers on CT, meaning that they offer tips to visitors about CT attractions/events/sites and (*) the informal advertiser. These roles are based on the residents’ good knowledge of local CT attractions/sites located in the BSC area (according to the answers given to the item focused on the perception of CT attractions), on their availability to offer tips to visitors and to recommend the CT attractions to potential tourists.

The interviews have shown that the residents have often played or are playing (*) the role of informal advisers on CT: 54 respondents (56.8%) are available to offer tips to visitors (scores 4 and 5). These tips point out aspects concerning the condition of access by road to the CT attractions, their location (given that within the study-area deficiencies in signalling/information regarding CT objectives/sites and events). Also, the field research had also revealed some residents who stated that they provided additional information about other CT attractions than those that tourists initially wanted to visit and, thus determined the tourists to visit them.

Only 16 respondents (16.8% of the residents interviewed) said that they offered no advice, not because they did not want to, but because the tourists did not ask (Fig. 17).

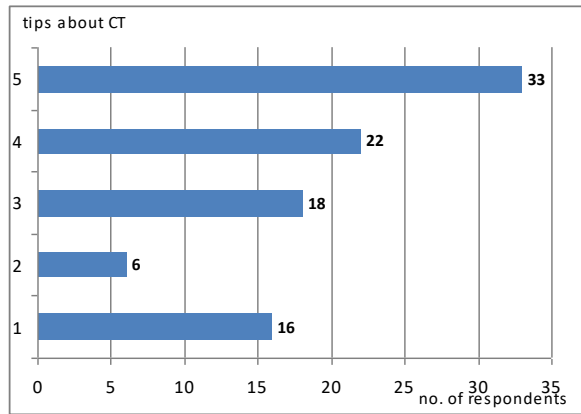


Fig 17. Tips about CT attractions/events/sites offered to the tourists (1 = without tips to 5 = more tips). Source: authors

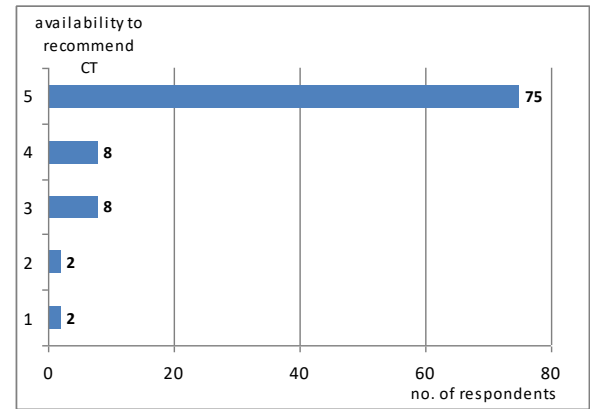


Fig 18. The residents' availability to recommend the CT to potential tourists (1 = very few available to 5 = very much available). Source: authors

Regarding the second role of the locals – (*) informal advertiser, the interviews revealed that the vast majority of the 95 residents interviewed (87.2%) expressed their highest and high levels of availability in terms of recommending to the potential visitors the CT of BSC area (Fig. 18). Few interviewed residents (4 persons, 4.2% of total) declared that they would recommend visiting the BSC case study area. These shares show that the locals are opened to tourist activities as a way for the development of their own living area.

7. Conclusions

Residents' perception of tourism and CT has been a research subject for many years, with diverse results that are difficult to generalise for any tourist destination. (Almeida-Garcia et al. 2015). This detailed analysis of the CT, as it is perceived by the residents of BSC area, offered the possibility to identify: (1) the profile of those who perceive it and (2) the main aspects/features of the CT attractions as "objects" perceived or as "stimulus" of the receivers, represented by locals. Also, the current analysis was an opportunity to identify (3) the residents' potential roles in the improvement of CT valorisation at the local level.

Firstly, regarding the resident's profile, we concluded he/she lives in the countryside, is middle-aged (with a trend of aging), a high school graduate with a low level of income, with tertiary occupation but with agriculture as "a background" activity. This profile influences the residents' perception of CT, due to some reasons: (*) living in a rural area, in the best cases, a regular job completed by agricultural activities (i.e., animal breeding, different garden and/or field cultures). For the locals, these mean little free time for other activities, such as visiting tourist attractions but doesn't mean a "separation" from their local living area, with which they have many and deep connections through their origins, lifestyle, faith; (*) as receivers of the CT stimulus, being at adult/mature age means that they have time during their life within the local area to know the local CT attractions, many visiting them with diverse occasions (especially the outdoor ones, with free access, and less with those with fees such as certain museums); (*) the general middle education level presume (at least theoretically) that they have an average knowledge/information about the place of local area within the county's and country's ensemble in terms of history, culture, economy, etc. Some of the interviewed residents were very well informed about the CT attractions in the area and proud of their knowledge and about the existence itself of the CT objective; (*) the low level of income (and, in certain cases, insecure) means that the residents are very concerned about ensuring their immediate vital needs (in terms of maintaining as close to decent as possible the household and family's life) and they haven't the financial possibilities to travel or to pay visiting tickets to access to CT attractions. Despite this general precarious economic status, the residents perceive the CT objectives as being interesting, useful to see/visit and valuable for their own region, but they envision themselves as being far from them (not necessarily in terms of space, but of accessibility as time

and money); (*) the residents' occupancy mainly in commercial activities as a direct contact with customers (personally knowing the locals and thus, easily identifying tourists as being out-siders), a real possibility and ability to perceive the local context well in terms of CT objectives potential in attracting tourists and a better information about the economic local reality (including the tourism activities). The entire study highlights the fact that the residents' socio-economic and demographic profile is an important factor in the modeling of ways in which the CT attractions within the BSC are perceived by them.

Secondly, the analysis of the cultural tourism "stimulus" and its characteristics, the largest section of the paper, highlighted many aspects. Thus, the residents perceived CT as a mixture of the natural and cultural dimensions of local reality, thus the *Mud Volcanoes* and the so-called *Colți Amber Museum* are seen by the residents being the most attractive sites within the study area. Besides these two landmarks of the BSC area and the religious activities/sites/objectives, most residents mainly referred to the cultural attractions located near their settlement. In the residents' opinion, the religious sites/events, local traditions/folklore, cultural heritage and historical sites and buildings and the cultural routes have the greatest importance. The field survey focused on residents' perceptions shows that they are well connected to the local context and feel their inhabited environment as being a whole, in which the CT objectives are (or should be) integrated within a socio-economic and historic larger background. The interviewed residents have a positive perception of the impact that an increase in CT has on the area (e.g., infrastructure, jobs, quality of life) and they believed that the impact of CT on local traditions is positive. The locals' perception of the CT effects at the personal level shows that the most frequent words which come up when residents describe their own profit from cultural tourism is "job", associated or not with "craft workshops", "guesthouses", "high standard of living" and "promotion". These adjoining words suggest that in the logic of residents having a job (being employed) is a sufficient and necessary condition than the other many economic activities or life aspects to be in a good condition or at least in decent situation.

Thirdly, regarding the potential roles of the residents in valorising the CT attractions, we conclude that both the informal advisers on CT and the informal advertiser are based on their own residents' resources in terms of information and real interest for the cultural tourist attractions in their local area. These two roles of the residents are more important as the lack of signalling/information regarding tourist objectives/sites and events, is great. These roles are important, but they are capitalized only on a personal level and from a kind of debt as a local, who is proud of his own place and he is happy to share its beauty with others, who are interested (as are the tourists).

These are the main conclusions of the first study focused on the residents' perception of CT in the BSC area. Thinking beyond these ideas the authors detect some future research lines, which are not only scientifically attractive, but they could be useful as driving forces for the rooting of CT in BSC area, a unique region in Romania. A study of locals' interest/knowledge in terms of CT attractions, aiming their high answerability for the future capitalization of the local cultural values and richness, could be a new research direction. Other future scientific interests would be linked with the current situation of deficiencies of information about CT within the BSC area, namely on the real potential of residents in terms of their capabilities/abilities to be or to become informal advisers on CT and the informal advertiser.

The inconveniences of this study result from the following aspects: (1) those related to the geographical conditions (e.g., distances between settlements, reduced accessibility, remoteness of some areas all these being passed due to the good organization of the field research in two cars (and two teams of researchers); (2) the complexity or degree of difficulty of some of the questions solved by the researchers' availability to explain for each respondent the meanings of terms, the aspects targeted, etc.; (3) many options from which the residents should have chosen in the cases of several questions, were explained to each respondent who declared he/she was not comfortable with this situation.

* * *

During a round table that involved stakeholders and local/regional authorities organized within the SPOT project, a representative of the Buzău County Council (i.e., the Regional Development Directorate)

defined very suggestive, in his personal opinion, the meaning of CT: “Cultural tourism is supported by a story. This story is told in a certain place, and the story is about that place”. By means of the topic addressed by this study, we consider that the residents could be those who might “tell the story” in and about their own places. “The big story” would be about many other stories, not smaller, but closer to the locals and the places, stories about personal or community histories, about their own cultural heritage and traditions, about legends springing from a history of thousands of years. Most of the residents of the Buzău Carpathians and Subcarpathians, both of mountain and hilly areas, know the local attractions well and they are proud of the cultural load, diversity, and originality of their land. They can tell their “stories” to the tourists, but the voices of an old craftsman in amber or a stonecutter cannot be heard, because they often live in villages far away from the world. Thus, they must be helped to make their voices heard as clearly and as far as possible. To become possible, the organizational networks, social media, special events, etc. should be increasingly more involved and follow the examples of good practice existing in the area.

In a unique landscape, the residents’ culture, their traditions and history are those that attract tourists, so the residents are the ones entitled to share with tourists their own “stories” about local culture, traditions and history.

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