



PERCEPTION, REALITY AND INTENT IN BIHOREAN TOURISM, ROMANIA

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Abstract


Tourism is one of the branches of the economy with a high growth rate, globally, having beneficial effects of a social, economic and ecological nature in the insertion environment, being at the same time a serious alternative in the development of local communities. In this context, the purpose of this study is to assess the perceptions and intentions of local public authorities regarding tourism, in parallel with quantifying the defining reality for tourism in Bihor County, Romania. The necessary information was obtained after consulting the representatives of 100 territorial administrative units, using a thematic questionnaire, consisting of 14 items. The results obtained aimed at identifying and quantifying the perceptions and intentions of the decision-makers of the territorial administrative units regarding tourism, against the background of the tourist situation, starting from the factual reality on the ground. Thus, following the quantification of the indicators studied, at the level of the Bihor Tourist Destination, the touristic perception (with a value of 75%, good) stood out, followed by the touristic intention (with a value of 44%, poor) and the touristic reality (with a value of 30.66%, weak). The results obtained at the level of UATs highlighted the existence of some major differences regarding the existing

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situation at the level of the Bihor Tourist Destination. In conclusion, this study can be a framework support for establishing strategic directions for the development of the tourist destination Bihor.

Key words

tourist perception, tourist services, tourist intention, tourist development.

INTRODUCTION

The way in which local public authorities perceive the importance of tourism in the development of the local economy is an important coordinate in outlining future strategies for the development of local and county tourism (Brokaj, 2014; Matlovič, Matlovičová, 2016). The importance of tourism in the sustainable development of the local economy stems from its ability to create jobs, to diversify the economic structure of a given area and to increase living standards (Ashiralievich, 2022; Khabibulloyevna & Ergashovna, 2022; Klamár et al., 2017; León-Gómez et al., 2021; Matlovič, Matlovičová 2021; Ociepa-Kubicka, 2015; Tokhirovich, 2021).

This was well highlighted in the studied area, in two studies that aimed to establish the relationship between tourism and local development in Băile Felix resort (Herman et al., 2018), respectively in Bihor county (Herman et al., 2017), using a series of indicators (number of companies, number of employees, turnover and profit recorded in the period 2000 - 2014, by activity sectors) and correlations of indices related to tourism, services and total value. In both cases, the conclusions highlighted the existence of an upward trend in the importance of tourism in this area.

Over time, the area of Bihor County has been analyzed in the scientific literature regarding tourism from various points of view, including the role and importance of tourist information and promotion centers (Herman et al., 2019); tourism brand (Wendt et al., 2019; Matlovičová 2015), air quality in various tourist attractions (Ilieș et al., 2021; 2022; Matlovičová, Husárová, 2017); conservation of tourist objectives (Demenchuk et al., 2020; Herman et al., 2020a), the tourism perception (Herman et al., 2020b; Herman et al., 2021).

However, the perception of the decision-makers is not always connected to the territorial realities, it contains in some places, in some cases, a high dose of subjectivism, which derives from a series of defining factors, among which are: socio-economic status, level of education, with implications in knowing the positive or negative aspects regarding tourism and its relation to other fields of activity with which tourism coexists at local level; the experiences and aspirations of the decision-makers, against the background of the aggressive promotion on all media channels of tourism; tourism fashion; and so on (Petrosillo et al., 2007). It should be noted that the way people think is important (Duman & Mattila, 2005; Gao et al., 2022; Ko & Stewart, 2002; Weaver & Lawton, 2001; Suh & McAvoy, 2005), especially since in this case, it is about people making decisions about tourism by



directing the evolution of this economic branch according to their perceptions about tourism.

Against this background of the uncertainty that the perception of the decision-makers can incorporate, and not only, it must be doubled by a careful analysis of the tourist reality viewed through the prism of the competences and capacities of institutional intervention that they have at hand. Thus, the tourist reality is also a relatively relative notion, being the result of a quantum of realities between which the physical and the virtual stand out. The physical, factual reality is defined by all the structural elements (laws, government decisions; local decisions; strategic documents, tourist equipment and endowments, specific arrangements, etc.) from a certain area (territorial administrative unit), while the reality virtual construction involves building in order to duplicate the factual reality and transmitting information about it in the online environment, thus facilitating access to information for potential tourists (Caciara et al., 2021; Desai et al., 2014; Herman et al., 2020b; Loureiro et al., 2020; Zeng et al., 2022).

In this context, the knowledge of the tourist reality generated by the decision-makers was a *sine-qua-non* premise for the present study. Furthermore, the knowledge of the tourist reality automatically claimed the need to know the tourist intentions to substantiate the tourist perception regarding the role and importance of tourism in the development of the local economy.

Representatives of local public authorities in Bihor County, Romania, due to the richness and variety of tourist resources, doubled geostrategic location, in the immediate vicinity of the Romanian-Hungarian state border, are put in position to decide whether tourism is one of the most viable alternatives in development local economy. Therefore, the aim of the present study was to establish the relationships between the perceptions and intentions of local public authorities and the knowledge of the tourist reality in Bihor County, Romania. This was possible by evaluating the perceptions and intentions of the decision-making factors involved in the development of tourism at the level of territorial administrative units, in Bihor County, Romania, in parallel with the evaluation and quantification of the local tourism reality, a reality that is closely conditioned by the perceptions of the decision-making factors, seen as representatives of the local population.

The working hypothesis from which this study was conducted aims at the fact that the perception regarding tourism of the decision-makers, at the level of the territorial administrative units, is reflected in the factual reality and in the intentions of tourism development. The following research questions arise: are there areas where the tourist perception is deficient compared to the tourist reality and vice versa? Does tourist intention complement tourist perception? Can we establish the existence of relationships between perception, reality and intention? This work aims to outline the answers to these questions, by using the applied evaluation methodology. The need for this study stems from the need to



know the tourist perception of local decision makers. The perception of tourism in specialized literature has been a widely debated topic over time, from various perspectives including: that of residents (Brougham & Butler, 1981; García-Buades et al., 2022; González-García et al., 2022; Moreira Gregori et al., 2022; Wall & Ali, 1977); of tourism and non-tourism employees (Brougham & Butler, 1981; Im & Kim, 2022; Prima, 2022); the ability to generate jobs (Liu & Var, 1986; Murphy, 1981; Pizam, 1978), the destination image (Chakrabarty & Sadhukhan, 2020; Herman et al., 2020b; Matlovičová et al., 2019; Tse & Tung, 2022); tourism risk (Cui et al., 2016; Sharpley, 2014) etc. The way people perceive tourism reality is a major coordinate with a decisive impact on the formation of intentions (Lee et al., 2017; Zhu & Deng, 2020) and decision-making (Barros & Assaf, 2012; Kim et al., 2022).

In this context, the approach proposed in the present study complements both the research methodologies applied in the previously mentioned studies and others regarding tourism (Drăghici et al., 2015; Ferreira & Sánchez-Martín, 2022; Gelter & Fuchs, 2022; Grecu et al., 2019; Peptenatu et al., 2015; Pintilii et al., 2016, 2017; Wang et al., 2022; Zekan et al., 2022) bringing as an element of novelty the proposed methodology (the indicators studied, the persons consulted who were the representatives of the local public authorities responsible for the

Tab. 1 Quantification of tourist perception, intention and reality in Bihor, Romania

Cod	Criteria used Very week 0% - 25%	The value				The value
		Very Week 0% - 25%	Week 26% - 50%	Good 51% - 75%	Very good 76% - 100%	
P1	Perception The importance of tourism in the development of the local economy	0	0	75	0	Good 75%
P2				75		
P				150		
R1		150 / 2 = 75		30		Week 30.66%
R2	Reality Accessing non- reimbursable financing	18				
R3			44			
R		18	74			
I1	Intention Total		48			Week 44%
I2		92 / 3 = 30.66		38		
I3			46			
I		132 / 3 = 44		132		



implementation and development of tourism at the local level, the evaluation method) and unexplored research area from this point of view.

To support the perception, intention and reality of tourism at the spatial level, using ArcGis 10.3 software, the specific indicators, provided in table 2, were analyzed at the level of territorial administrative units, thus highlighting typological categories of territorial administrative units. The methodology for quantifying and representing the information obtained by the spatial survey method was as set out in Table 2.

Tab. 2 Quantification of the perception, intention and reality of tourism at the level of territorial administrative units, from the destination Bihor, Romania

Cod	Criteria used		Nominal value / territorial administrative unit
P1	Perception	The importance of tourism in the development of the local economy	1
P2		The tourist potential	1
P		Perception	2
R1	Reality	Accessing non-reimbursable financing	1
R2		Tourist services	1
R3		Existence of picnic areas and those declared as areas for tourism development in urban planning documents	1
R		Reality	3
I1	Intention	Accessing non-reimbursable financing	1
I2		Tourist services	1
I3		Existence of picnic areas and those declared as areas for tourism development in urban planning documents	1
I		Intention	3

DATA AND METHODS

Study Area

Bihor County, located in northwestern Romania, in the river basin of the Crisul Repede River, at the contact between the Carpathian Mountains and the Pannonian Plain, this area is characterized by a series of specific features of geological, orographic, climatological, hydrographic and biogeographical, which led to the emergence and affirmation of the tourist destination Bihor (figure 1). From an administrative point of view, Bihor County is structured from 101 territorial administrative units, of which four municipalities (Oradea, Beiuș, Marghita and Salonta), six cities (Aleșd, Nucet, Săcueni, Ștei, Valea lui Mihai and Vașcău) and 91 communes (figure 1).

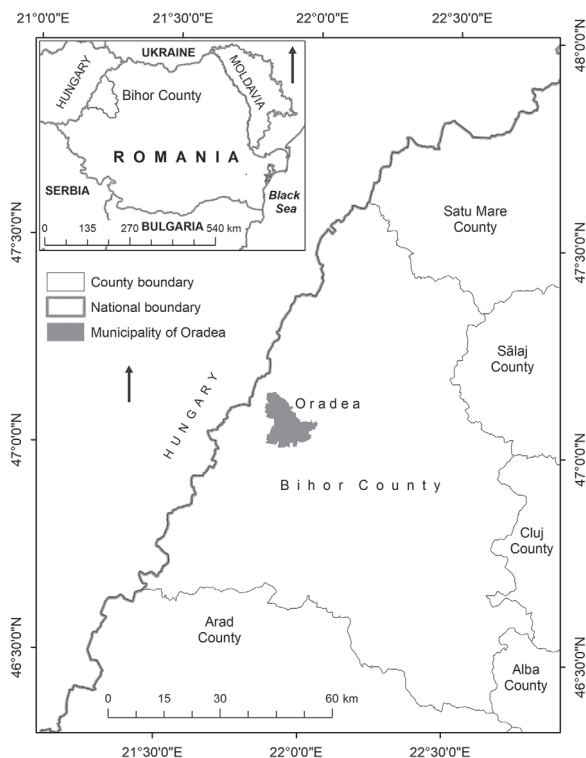


Fig. 1 Study area

Data analysis

The data needed to conduct this study were collected using the questionnaire based sociological survey (Bryman, 2012; Chelcea, 2007). Applied between April and November 2018, to a number of 100 representatives of the territorial administrative units from Bihor County, Romania, the questionnaire used to gather the necessary information was structured in 14 thematic questions on the perception of the importance of tourism in the development of the local economy and tourism potential, the reality and intentions regarding access to grants, tourism services, human resources, the existence of picnic areas and those declared as areas of tourism development in within the urban planning documents. The survey was developed by the research team of the Bihor Destination Management Agency, which operates under the auspices of the Bihor County Council. The information was officially submitted, under signature and registration number. Based on the information thus obtained, a grid was drawn up to evaluate the perception, intention, and reality of the tourist reality at the level of the Bihor tourist destination (Table 1). It is necessary to specify the territorial administrative unit related to the municipality of Oradea, it was not taken into the study, because



the realities of this territorial administrative unit were well known, thus being the main convergence center for tourist flows from the destination of Bihor. Another weakness of the present study was the small number of analyzed indicators, an aspect that was supplemented by the research team's experience in knowing the local and regional tourism reality.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Tourist perception

The tourist perception is a subjective image that is formed at the level of individuals and local communities, in our case, at the level of the representatives of the territorial administrative units as a result of deep experiences and understandings regarding tourism. Perception is the result of the interactions that man as a rational being has with the structural elements of the environment, through the means of sense, on the one hand and reason on the other (Bittarello, 2008; Matlovičová et al., 2019; Mura et al., 2016).

To identify and quantify the institutional perception of tourism in Bihor County, two defining indicators were used: the importance of tourism in the development of the local economy and the tourist potential.

The importance of tourism in the development of the local economy is a particularly debated issue, both in profile studies (Boulhila et al., 2022; Moghal et al., 2022; Pérez-Calderón et al., 2022; Suhel & Bashir, 2018) and in the socio-economic environment. Against this background, the local decision-makers were asked to rate this on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 = Not at all and 10 = to a very large extent. The averages of the values obtained indicate high values, so 75% consider tourism as important in the development of the local economy, while the value of the share of those who do not consider it important is only 25% (Figure 2).

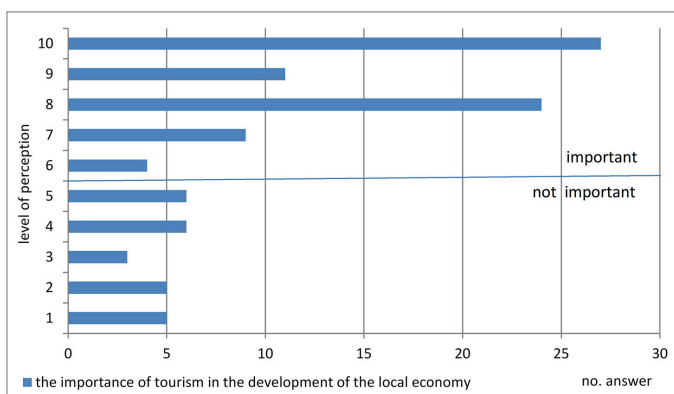


Fig. 2 Perception of the importance of tourism in the development of the local economy



A similar situation emerged from the responses of local public authorities regarding the existence of tourism potential, so 75% of respondents said that the territorial administrative units they manage have tourism potential. The comparative analysis of the perception of local public authorities regarding the existence of tourist potential reveals the fact that this aspect is overestimated by the respondents either from the desire to show off or from ignorance of the meaning of the concept of “tourist potential” as it is treated in the specialized literature (Dehoorne et al., 2019; Raha and Gayen, 2022; Xiao et al., 2018).

The integrated analysis of the answers provided by the decision-makers at the level of the analyzed territorial administrative units (100 units) reveals the existence of a good perception, 75% of the respondents considering tourism a development engine for the local economy (Table 1).

However, the following typological categories of territorial administrative units can be deduced from the spatial analysis of perception at the level of territorial administrative units: unanswered (13%); with an indicator (24%); with two indicators, with a good perception (63%) (figure 3).

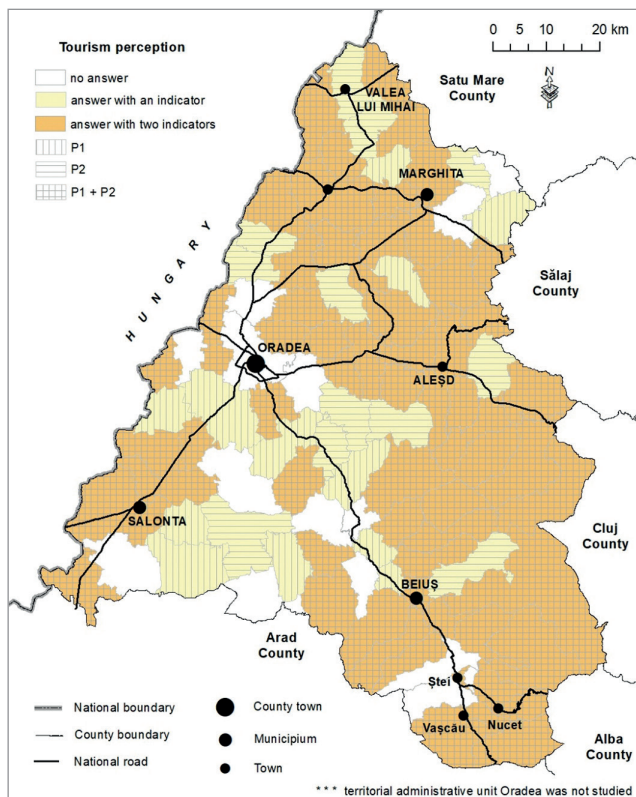


Fig. 3 Tourism perception



Tourist reality

The tourist reality is a defining situation for a certain tourist space that results from the collaboration of a series of factors, among which the natural ones stand out (relief, hydrography, vegetation and fauna), followed by the anthropic ones (tourist and technical infrastructure, management of the tourist destination etc.). Therefore, the tourist reality is a constant of what exists in a given space, being represented by all the structural elements (natural and anthropic tourist resources, technical and specific infrastructure, the human resources involved, management organizations, etc.). Aiming at the economic, social and ecological side, the tourism reality is a reflection of the level of development in time and space under a quantitative and qualitative ratio.

In this context, in quantifying the tourist reality, three indicators were taken into account: access to nonreimbursable financing; tourist services and the existence of picnic areas and those declared as areas for tourism development in urban planning documents. Thus, the tourist reality viewed through the prism of the local public authorities falls into the weak category (30.66%), to this fact bringing

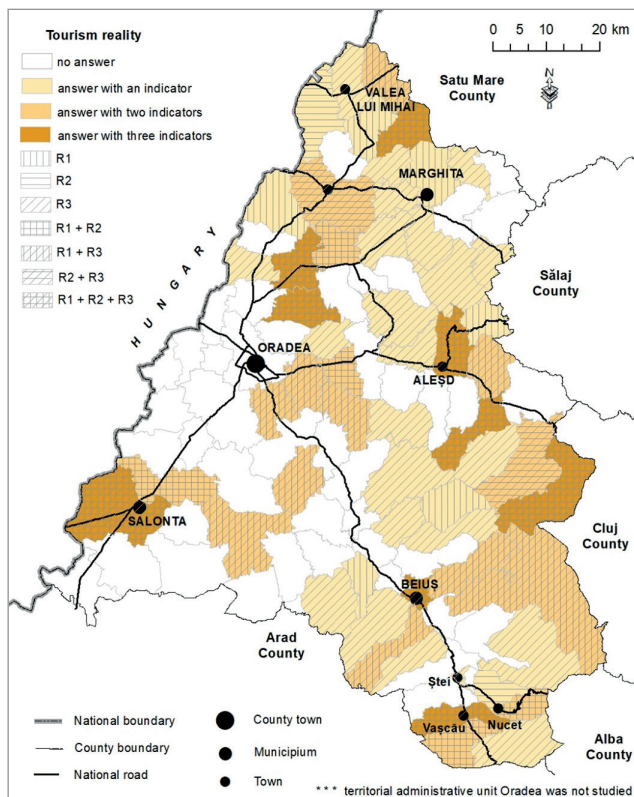


Fig. 4 Tourist reality



the contribution of the following analyzed indicators: accessing nonreimbursable financing for tourism (30%); the existence of tourist services such as tourist offices and tourist information and promotion centers (18%); the existence of picnic areas and those declared as areas for tourism development in urban planning documents (44%) (Table 1).

The analysis of the tourist reality at the level of the analyzed territorial administrative units (100 units) reveals the existence of the following typological categories of territorial administrative units: without answer (43%); with an indicator (31%); with two indicators (17%); with three indicators, with a good tourist reality (9%) (figure 4).

The existence of a tourism reality in the poor value category will have an impact as such on tourist perception and intention, while the existence of a good tourism reality below the value ratio will have positive effects in economic, social and ecological terms, inevitably contributing, over time, to the change in tourist perception and intentions.

Tourist intention

Tourist intention is a very important variable in the development of tourist destinations that are created by perception, depending on the experience and satisfaction gained by tourists (Çizel et al., 2022; Johannes, 2022). In the present case, knowing the tourist intention (result of the way the local public authorities perceive tourism, through the prism of its economic, social and ecological role) is a particularly important aspect in the formation of a forecast regarding the tourist reality in the Bihor destination.

The evaluation of the tourist intention of the local public authorities involved the use of three indicators: access to nonreimbursable financing; tourist services and the existence of picnic areas and those declared as areas for tourism development in urban planning documents (Matlovcova et al. 2016). Thus, the intentions of the representatives of the local public authorities regarding the development of tourism in the immediate near future are weak (44%), they result in the analysis of the answers offered to the indicators regarding access to nonreimbursable financing for tourism (48%), development of tourist services), the establishment of new picnic areas (46%) and the declaration of new tourist development areas within the urban planning documents (0%) (table 1).

The analysis of tourist intentions at the level of the analyzed territorial administrative units reveals the existence of the following typological categories of territorial administrative units: without answer (30%); with an indicator (25%); with two indicators (29%); with three indicators, with good tourist intentions (16%) (figure 5).

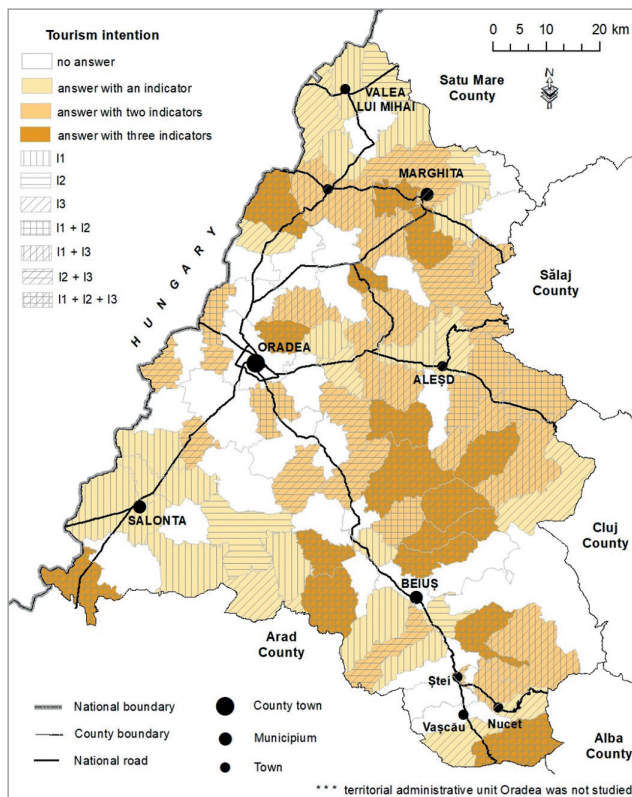


Fig. 5 Tourist intention

CONCLUSIONS

The results obtained in the present study highlighted the existence of some relationships between the perceptions, the intentions of the local public authorities and the tourist reality in the studied area. Thus, the analysis of the perception, reality and intentions regarding tourism in Bihor County, Romania, at the level of local public authorities from 100 territorial administrative units, reveals the existence of a correlation between the value of perception (good, 75%) and the total value of tourism reality. 30.66%) and that of tourism development intentions (weak, 44%) (Table 1, Figure 6).

In other words, we can say that the tourist reality doubled by the intentions regarding the development of tourism rises to the level of perception of the importance of tourism in the development of the local economy, starting from the existence of a significant tourist heritage in terms of quantity and quality.

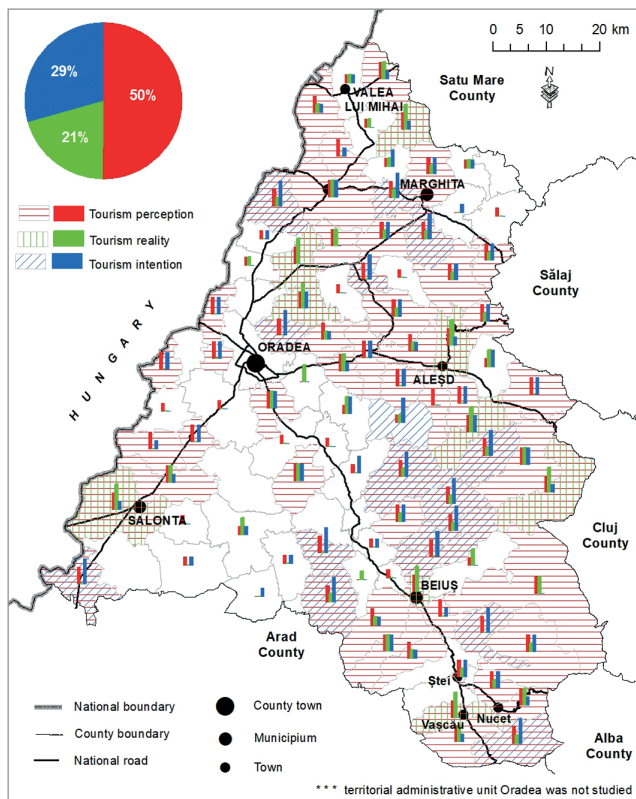


Fig. 6 Perception, Reality and Intent in Bihorean Tourism, Romania

However, the analysis of the perception, reality and tourist intentions at the spatial level can show the existence of deviations from the general rule, stated above, so that there are the following categories of territorial administrative units: with a good perception and reality (9 units, Aleșd, Beiuș, Bulz, Cetariu, Sălacea, Sălard, Salonta, Vadu Crișului and Vașcău); with good perception and good intentions (16 units); only with a good perception (39 units) and only with good intentions (one unit, Vârciorog commune) (Figure 6). The rest of the territorial administrative units (37 units) did not obtain a good value following the assessment of perception, reality and intentions.

From the analysis of figure 5, tourism in Destination Bihor is a discontinuous activity, it being defined and conditioned by a series of particularities, including the degree of diversification of the infrastructure, from a qualitative and quantitative point of view (Chan et al., 2022; Herman et al., 2020b).



The information obtained in the present study can be used further in conducting other specialized studies, as well as in substantiating the strategic directions for tourism development in Bihor, Romania.

Thus, based on the results obtained, the following recommendations can be made regarding the UATs in which the value:

- the existence of a good perception at the level of 63% of the UATs of the Bihor Tourist Destination necessarily requires the intensification of efforts in the direction of accessing non-reimbursable financing, the development of tourist services and the creation of picnic areas and those declared as tourist development areas within the urban planning documents, to create and develop a good tourism reality in close connection with local, regional and global tourism demand and supply.
- the existence of a good tourist reality at the level of 9% of the UATs of the Bihor Tourist Destination is a favorable situation that represents the pinnacle of summing up the results of tourist perception and intentions. In the case of these UATs, it is recommended to preserve and consolidate the current situation.
- the existence of good tourist intentions at the level of 16% of the UATs of the Bihor Tourist Destination requires, at their level, access to non-reimbursable financing, the development of tourist services and the creation of picnic areas and those declared as tourist development areas in the urban planning documents for to achieve a better tourism reality, which in turn will contribute to changing the tourist perception.

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