

## BOTOSANI COUNTY'S TOURIST IMAGE, BETWEEN PERCEPTION AND REALITY

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### Abstract

Tourist image of a territory is the result of a cumulative long-term effort that requires the application of consistent and stable marketing strategies. How an area manages to create a clear tourist image which to communicate will be decisive for its economic prosperity and will play a tremendous role in the dynamics of tourism, which has a considerable influence on the human behavior. Knowing the tourist image of Botosani County can be a milestone in articulating policies and strategies in the field of tourism. In this regard, the article aims to identify tourist image and perception of locals / authorities about this, wanting to highlight the real situation of tourism as an economic activity and development prospects according to their perception. This county should build a tourist image on the basis of attractiveness so as to minimize the risks to promote a image that does not correspond to local realities.

**Key words:** tourist image, Botosani, tourist potential, tourist facilities.

How an area manages to create a clear image that will be transmitted, this will be decisive for its economic prosperity and will play a tremendous role in the dynamics of tourism. Changing an existing image should be done carefully and can be achieved through the efforts of municipalities in order to rehabilitate historical centers, commercial and recreational structures and to develop a general and specific infrastructure that meets tourist requirements.

Since tourism is considered today an important tool for economic revitalization and focuses on overspecialization according to market requirements, it is necessary that tourism studies concentrate on smaller territories and most of the data should be obtained on the spot for a more real image.

In the past 20 years, tourism in Botoșani distinguishes by a low dynamics compared to other counties of the region of Moldova that is due largely to a lack of investment, innovation and promotion. In terms of perception, it is placed in a deeply rural area with a high level of natality facing a number of economic problems. This negative label results in a lack of relevant analysis in the field concerning what really exists on territory. Thus, tourism should be dynamically analyzed and monitored by a system with specific indicators in order to allow the evaluation of the effects that are induced. But leaving aside the negative economic label this territory is recognized

as an important cultural area thanks to simple and hospitable people.

The harnessing and valorisation of tourism in Botoșani must be based on a thorough knowledge of geographical realities of space and what is important to be mainly highlighted are the attractive elements and the perception of residents and people from outside the county.

Counties which create a known tourist image will be able to effectively bring more tourists than other counties that fail through the strategy of creating their own individual image. Creating an attractive image should be based on the quality of the attraction factors of the county without a discrepancy between the transmitted image and the reality on the spot.

The tourist image of a territory has the ability to synthesize the main features of an area producing a considerable influence on human behavior. It is the result of an interaction between emotional (different experiences, impressions, beliefs, feelings) and cognitive elements of tourists after a trip (Tasci A., Gartner W., Cavusgi S., 2007).

Gartner has made a notable contribution to the concept of tourist image; he considers the image as a set of ideas, perceptions, beliefs, ideas and impressions that individuals have regarding the available activities in the destination (Gartner W., 1996). The tourist image represents the total of perceptions and beliefs of people according to

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tourist destination, not involving a previous travel for the same destination where tourist process can be experienced (Bădiță A., 2013). The image is the main factor when tourists have to choose between several destinations (Godal B., 1998).

The process of creating the tourist image consists of a number of tangible and intangible attributes that will influence how tourism actors act or react. For the construction of the urban image all the elements of a city's attractiveness according to the local realities must be included.

How an area manages to create a clear picture on which to communicate will be decisive for its economic prosperity and will play a tremendous role in the dynamics of tourism. Changing an existing image should be done carefully and can be achieved through the efforts of municipalities to set up and develop an infrastructure that meets general and specific tourist requirements.

## MATERIAL AND METHOD

The importance of tourist image in Botoșani was individualized during an on-spot investigation that used the questionnaire as a tool of investigation. There was a simple and concise language in order to be understood by the subjects to whom it is addressed. One hundred questionnaires were applied during April-May 2013. The questionnaire contains two parts: the first part (5 questions) concerns the fact of shaping the image that the county of Botoșani already has. The second part (4 questions) has as main objective the description of the respondent (questions regarding gender, origin, nationality, civil status) which were summarized in the table below.

Table 1

**Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents**

Gender	Male	42%
	Female	58%
Age	<25	17%
	26-35	34%
	36-45	10%
	46-65	35%
	>65	4%
Origin	Localities in Moldova	70%
	Other localities	30%
Studies completed	Middle school	10%
	High school	55%
	Faculty	25%
	Master	10%

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Each territory has its own set of characteristics distinguishing it from others. The environmental and anthropic elements contribute to form its identity and reflect how this area wishes to be perceived by tourists.

The identification concerns a set of associations that management wants to generate or maintain in the consumer's mind; it is a sum of special characteristics that distinguishes it from other places, as a result of the interactions between all the urban elements (Rainisto, S., 2003).

Thus, these cultural elements manage to strengthen the cultural identity of this county. References are made to personalities who have marked the history of the territory (Mihai Eminescu, George Enescu, Ștefan Luchian) and important natural resources that have a positive impact on tourists (Prut Valley, the large number of ponds in the county). The presence of water front creates the optimal conditions for the development of tourist facilities for relaxing weekends.



Figure 1 **Elements which contribute to the tourist image**

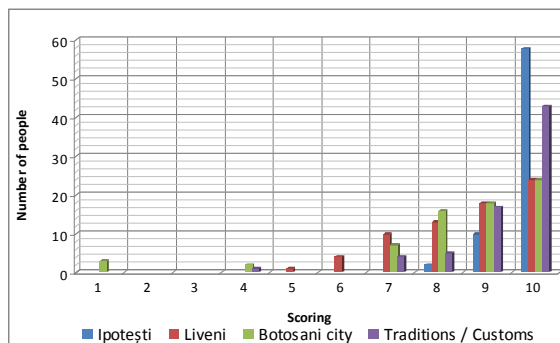
The question "What visual elements should be included / avoided for the publicity of Botoșani county?" is to outline the main elements that must be inserted in order to create the tourist image. If a plan for tourist information and promotion is established, it must include the components of natural and human heritage, specific traditions and customs of the area, references to prominent personalities who made the history of this county. Among the items to be avoided are desolate landscapes, abandoned and degraded buildings, brownfields, peripheral zones, etc.

The responses of the chart are used in order to determine the most important symbols of Botosani County, with a rating from 1 (the less representative) to 10 (very representative). The preference for Ipotești can be observed thanks to Mihai Eminescu Memorial House. Traditions and customs of this county contribute to the local economy and increase the tourist attractiveness of the area.

Table 2

**Elements included and avoided in the tourist image of Botosani**

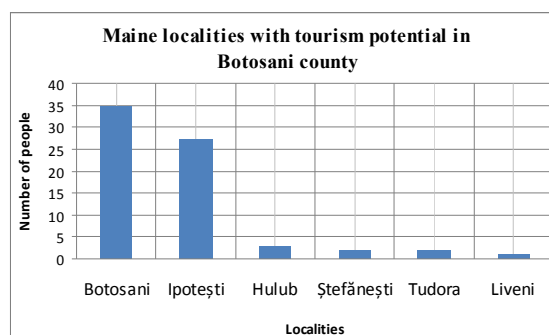
- natural and anthropic components that ensure the authenticity of the county;	- desolate landscapes (fallow land, wasteland etc.) and other abandoned and degraded buildings;
- less visited and known tourist areas;	- brownfields;
- authentic traditions and customs;	- peripheral zones;
- prominent personalities;	- homeless people;
- creating and promoting specialized tours;	

**Figure 2 Main symbols in Botosani county**

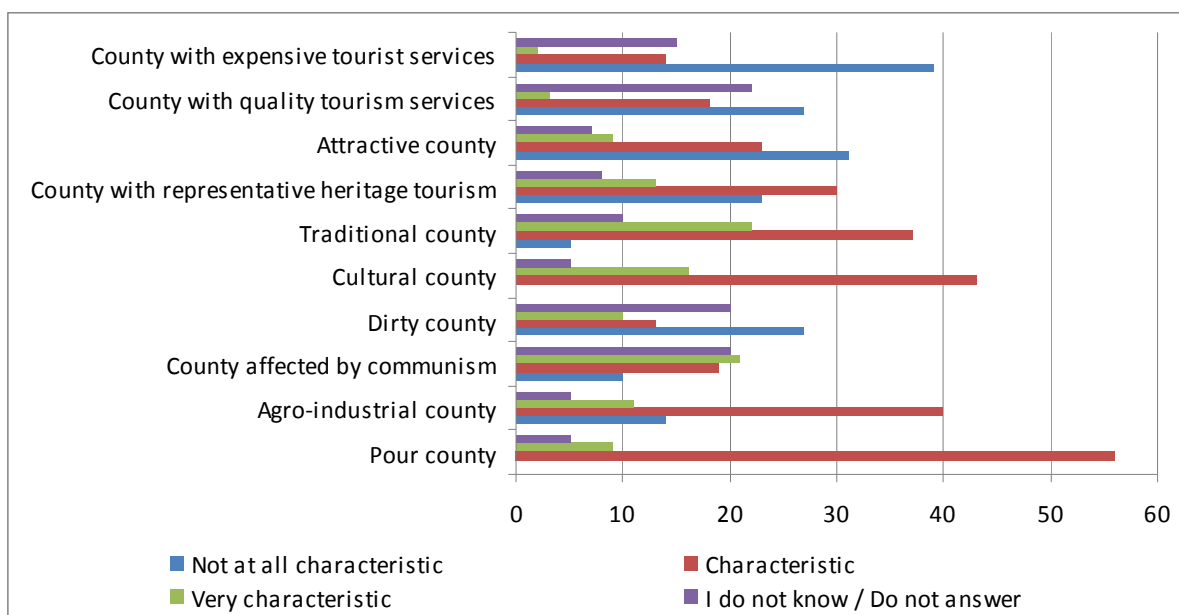
At the county level several locations distinguish with recognized tourist potential. Botoșani county and Ipotești village of Mihai Eminescu commune detach. They are able to develop the tourist phenomenon due to cultural resources and specific infrastructure.

The multiple choice question "To what extent do you think the following statements are characteristic of Botoșani County: poor county; agro-industrial county; county that has suffered so much during the communist and post-communist periods; murder county; cultural county; county where traditions and customs are kept; county with special tourist attractions; attractive county for tourists; county providing quality of tourism

services; too expensive destination compared to the quality of services" proves that this county is poor and cultural. Culture, traditions and tourism heritage remain the elements that support the image of Botoșani county and are able to structure the mental perceptions of subjects.

**Figure 3 Main localities with tourism potential in Botosani county**

Promotion is essential for any tourist destination in terms of informing and persuading prospects of potential tourists. According to respondents, local institutions have an important role in this process of promoting.

**Figure 4 Identify the main characteristics of Botosani county**

The question "In your opinion, promoting the image of the county is the responsibility of: the local municipalities of each locality, County Council, Media, tourist information office, citizens of Botoșani county, national media?" (multiple choice) is designed to determine the people responsible for promoting the local /

tourist image. Promoting the county should be the responsibility of municipalities, local media and Botoșani County Council. The citizens of the county should have a particular responsibility as they are the first to get in touch with tourists and potential investors.

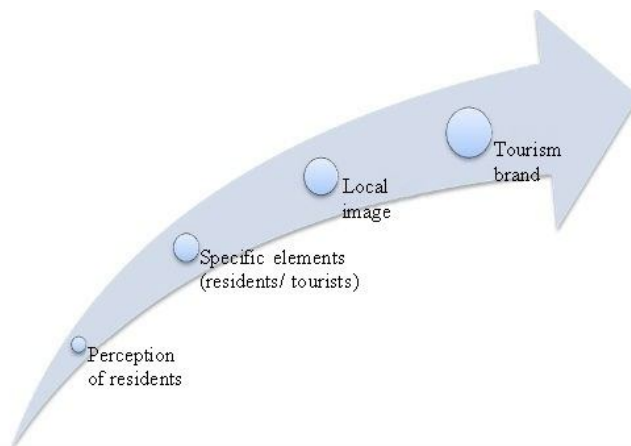


Figure 5 Milestones in the construction of tourism brand

As a result of this study a chronological sequence of steps was identified for creating the tourism brand. Thus, a brand that can be promoted and must be effective should be realized after achieving a market study and encompassing target group of tourists, and then results the perception of residents and future tourists and the following steps are the identification of site-specific elements, creation of local image and realization of tourism brand. The tourism brand concept is complex and involves a series of theoretical and practical steps to ensure effectiveness of brand and transform a complex in a tourist area.

## CONCLUSIONS

Botosani County should create a clear tourist image, personalized and attractive in order to develop and promote a competitive tourism. The research conducted revealed that currently Botosani County holds a picture recognized more at local level, one of the main reasons being the lack of coherent policies and strategies to capitalize on strengths and eliminate weaknesses. Tourist image should focus on identifying the specific components of each settlement, thus facilitating their identification at national and international level. In the case of Botosani county, specific elements and of attractiveness that can be the basis of creating a brand are represented by a number of leading personalities (Mihai Eminescu, Nicolae Iorga, George Enescu, Stefan Luchian)

Ipotesti city, the old city center of Botosani or traditions and customs of the area.

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