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## Article

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## THE DESTINATION EXPERIENCE THROUGH STOPOVER TOURISM – BUCHAREST CASE STUDY

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### Abstract

Over the years, the evolution of the air transport sector has determined important changes in the tourism industry. One of the consequences of the liberalization of air transport has been the development of the “hub-and-spoke” system, used by traditional airlines in order to be more efficient in a highly competitive environment. As air traffic significantly developed worldwide, “hubs” became highly connected places concentrating an increasing number of transit passengers. At the same time, the liberalization of the airline industry has stimulated both airline and airport competition, therefore, vertical partnerships have become an interesting option for airlines, as well as airports. Moreover, considering that transiting traffic represents a potential tourism market, tourism organizations have also started to get involved in the process. “Stopover tourism” is a new type of tourism based on the partnership between airlines, airports and tourism organizations, with the purpose to turn transiting passengers into stayover tourists. This paper focuses on building a better understanding of how “stopover tourism” type programs can enhance tourism development, identifying the characteristics of this form of tourism and the measures that need to be taken by the authorities in order to encourage its development and investigates the possibility of implementing it in Romania. In order to achieve these objectives, the research was conducted using analysis of secondary data included in several scientific journals and publication, as well as primary data collection, through qualitative research, having as interviewees, experts from the airline industry and from tourism organizations in Romania.

**Keywords:** stopover tourism, tourism destination, tourism experience, air transportation, hub.

**JEL Classification:** L83, L93, M16, M31, O18, R40, Z32.

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## **Introduction**

Transport has always been an important part of the tourism industry, connecting the tourism generating regions with tourist destinations. Over the years, the evolution of air travel has had a considerable impact on the tourism industry, supporting the development of international tourism and contributing to the creation of new forms of tourism.

The airline industry developed following two business models: traditional airlines on one side and low-cost airlines on the other. One of the main characteristics of the traditional airlines business model is the use of the hub and spoke system, which consists of directing passenger traffic through a major hub airport and around its network. In this context, over the years, major hub airports have developed worldwide and the competition between airlines and between tourist destinations intensified, making it necessary for airlines, airports and tourism organizations to get creative and find ways to build a competitive advantage. Stopover Programs became the solution which could bring advantages for all stakeholders, making it possible for airlines to attract more passengers, for airports to improve their transiting passengers' experience and for destinations to increase their number of tourists.

This article focuses on identifying the ways to implement a Stopover Program in order to promote tourism and the main objectives of the paper are:

- Determining the role of air travel on tourism development and establishing the advantages of implementing "Stopover programs"
- Understanding how airports can become tourist destinations
- Identifying the necessary measures to be taken within a tourist destination, in order to attract transiting passenger traffic.

For this research, an analysis of secondary data from scientific publications and journals has been conducted, as well as a qualitative research, through interviews with experts from both the airline and the tourism industries.

## **1. The importance of transport in the tourism industry**

The relationship between transport and tourism has been intensively analyzed over the years. Previous research has shown the existence of a bilateral relationship between transport and tourism (Hall, 1999; Lohmann, Duval 2014; Ivanova, 2017; Luis Fernández et al., 2018). First of all, transport facilitates mobility between the tourist generating regions and the tourist destinations (Page et al., 2001; Lohmann, 2006) creating accessibility and improving visibility (Ivanova, 2017). Moreover, transport is considered a component of the tourism product and is therefore influenced by the increase in tourist demand (Prideaux, 2000; Ivanova, 2017). Also, transportation facilitates the internal mobility of visitors between the different components of the tourist destination (tourist attractions, accommodation units, shopping services, etc.) (OECD, 2016), influencing tourists' perception of the destination and of the tourism experience (Thompson and Schofield, 2007; Ivanova, 2017).

In addition, while transport contributes to the development of tourism, offering accessibility, visibility or being part of the tourist destination, the emergence and consolidation of tourist destinations contribute to the development of transportation networks.

Transportation represents a very complex sector, integrating multiple levels of government and agencies responsible for different modes including land, sea and air transport, as well as private companies (OECD, 2016). In this context, the public-private collaboration, the application of new innovative business models and personalized transport services to revolutionize the way people travel are important issues that authorities need to consider in order to create an affordable, efficient, sustainable, safe and competitive integrated transport (OECD, 2016), in line with regional economic development policies (including tourism).

Airlines are in particular closely connected with tourism development, providing vital links especially for long-haul travel (Tang, Weaver and Lawton, 2017), while tourism, in return, is an important driver in the development of air transport (Bieger and Wittmer, 2006; Tang, Weaver and Lawton, 2017).

Both ICAO and UNWTO have been underlining the synergies between aviation development and tourism since the adoption of the “Medellín Statement on Tourism and Air Transport for Development” during the last World Tourism General Assembly (ICAO, 2017).

In this context, it is important to acknowledge the role of air travel in the future evolution of tourism and to find ways to connect these two industries.

## **2. The potential of “hubs” to generate tourism**

In tourism, the place of origin of tourists and the destinations are connected through transport. Different modes of transport can be combined and interconnected, through a set of links (air routes, highways, railways) and nodes which are part of a transport network (Lohmann, 2006).

According to Lohmann (2006), the transport network comprises the following nodes: “place of origin”, “hubs”, “gateways”, “destination” and the higher number of links they have, the more accessible and transited they becomes.

Hubs and gateways are points of the network where routes converge but they can also represent the place of origin or destination, depending on the itinerary of each tourist. Gateways represent “major entry/exit points for travelers into or out of a national or regional system” (Pearce, 2001, p.30 cited in Lohmann, 2006) and places that provide access to a destination place or region (Lew and McKercher, 2002, p.609 cited in Lohmann, 2006). Hubs have been defined as central distribution points where passenger traffic is concentrated in order to connect for a continuing flight (Huang and Wang, 2017), centrally located points that passenger flows are transiting between origin and destination points (O’Kelly and Miller, 1994 cited in Lohmann, 2006) and strategically located places within transportation systems (Fleming and Hayuth, 1994 cited in Lohmann, 2006). Moreover, according to Kasarda and Lindsay (2012) and Tigu and Stoenescu (2017), hubs can be referred to as “world’s most central places”, having access to increased passenger traffic.

Bowen (2000) considers that hub cities hold the advantage of being connected with multiple points of the national and international air transport networks (O’Connor and Scott,

1992 cited in Bowen, 2000) and of being exposed to increased passenger traffic, which can represent a possible tourist market (Bowen, 2000).

These cities have the potential to become tourist destinations for transiting tourists depending on their ability to provide attractions and facilities that could determine them to stop for a few hours or days (Lohmann, 2006).

Usually, major hubs and gateways are developed around international airports, which are considered “the most critical and complex setting for the interaction between the tourism and transport industries” (Page, 2005 cited in Tang, Weaver and Lawton, 2017).

According to O’Connor and Scott (1992) and Bowen (2000), “airports are perhaps the most important single piece of infrastructure in the battle between cities and nations for influence in, and the benefits of, growth and development”. Airports support the development of air travel in a country, contribute to economic growth directly and indirectly and are the first place that tourists have access to within the destination. From this angle, their perception of the airport service quality may influence their image of the destination (Martincejas, 2006; Barros, 2014 in cited in Tang, Weaver and Lawton, 2017) and of their overall stay (Grob and Schroder, 2007, cited in Tang and Weaver, 2013 and Tigu and Stoenescu, 2017). Moreover, their experience while transiting an airport may be a factor in their decision of returning for a stayover in the future (Tang, Weaver and Lawton, 2017; Tigu and Stoenescu, 2017).

### **3. Transiting airports heading for tourist destinations**

While a transport network is enough to develop and maintain a hub airport or a gateway, in order to create a tourist destination, it is necessary to add other attractiveness factors to stimulate the interest of transiting tourists (Lohmann, 2006). The development of tourist destinations highly depends on the capacity and quality of the accommodation provided (Sharpley, 2000; Lohmann, 2006), the presence of shopping activities (Heung and Qu, 1998; Yuksel, 2004; Lohmann, 2006), as well as of tourist attractions available on site.

According to Cho (2000) and Lohmann (2006), a destination can be attractive based on its natural and anthropic attractions, its tourist and general infrastructure (accommodation, catering services, entertainment and shopping facilities), its accessibility, the image of the destination (tourists’ perceptions), as well as the affordability (price of the tourist services).

The image of the destination is an important factor in people’s choice of destination. In the context of an increased competition between tourist destinations, implementing an effective marketing plan and strategy is required (Baloglu and Mangaloglu, 2001; Lohmann, 2006). From this angle, it is important to use the appropriate channels to promote destination information, such as tour operators and travel agents (Baloglu and Mangaloglu, 2001; Lohmann, 2006), friends and relatives’ recommendations or word-of-mouth (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999; Lohmann, 2006), distribution channels, media, films and literature or previous experiences (Lohmann, 2006). During the last years, as airline traffic has intensified worldwide, destinations have started to promote themselves also through their home carriers.

It has been argued that tourism destinations represent complex networks composed by individual co-producing actors delivering a variety of complementary products and

services, perceived as a unit (Haugland et al., 2011) or that they are “amalgams of tourism products, offering an integrated experience to consumers” (Buhalis, 2000), or a “package of tourism facilities and services, which like any other consumer product, is composed of a number of multi-dimensional attributes” (Hu and Ritchie, 1993, cited in Presenza, Sheehan and Ritchie, 2005), a “cluster of products and services, and of activities and experiences along the tourism value chain” incorporating various stakeholders (UNWTO, 2016; Ivanova, 2017) or an “open system including many interdependent stakeholders” (Bonetti, Petrillo and Simoni, 2006).

According to Haugland et al. (2011), nowadays, tourism destinations act as industrial clusters, therefore their development strategies should focus on the following areas:

- Destination capabilities (the destination’s ability to develop and manage the individual resources in the production of tourism products, in order to develop an “image” of the destination)
- Coordination at the destination (destination’s ability to establish cooperation and coordination of activities between the individual actors and to integrate them in the local network structure)
- Inter-destination bridge ties (establishing connections with other destinations, allowing innovation and imitation, as well as being integrated in the strategies of larger geographical areas).

The destination strategy, usually assigned to a DMO (Destination Management Organization) or a similar organization – local authorities, professional tourism associations, corporate companies (Ivanova, 2017), should include an efficient organization of the responsibilities of all actors. Over the years, as their role has changed, DMOs have acquired more “sophisticated” roles including strategic management and planning (Bornhorst et al., 2010; Serra et al., 2017) and are facing new challenges (Gretzel et al., 2006), such as adapting to technological change, acting as leaders among tourism providers and meeting the expectations of the modern tourist, setting up external partnerships for an improved tourist experience, identifying new performance indicators in line with the modern strategies.

Presenza, Sheehan and Ritchie (2005) agree that DMOs have two important roles: external decision marketing and internal destination development, while the core competency performed by the DMO is the coordination of tourism stakeholders in achieving success. According to Heath and Wall (1992) and Volgger and Pechlaner (2014) DMOs have an important role in “formulating strategies, representing stakeholders’ interests, developing products, and marketing” while Prideaux and Cooper (2002) and Serra et al. (2017) consider that marketing remains the main function of DMOs.

There is a bilateral relationship between DMOs and air travel. While DMOs create and support the tourist demand for the destination, airlines provide accessibility and airports, the necessary infrastructure. Adjusting the capacity growth to the tourist demand is an important element, which can only be accomplished through a partnership between airports, airlines and DMOs.

With the liberalization of the airline industry, the rise of low-cost carriers and the decrease of the cost of air travel, there is a greater choice of destination worldwide, increasing

competition between tourist destinations. In this context, tourism authorities have become more and more interested to partner with airlines, in order to build a competitive advantage.

UNWTO mentions in their Global Report on Aviation (2012) the example of the events World Routes and the Regional Routes Events (UNWTO, 2012), which did not gather any tourism authorities until 2000, but one decade later, airports and tourism authorities were already working closely as “destination teams”. In addition, as a result of the liberalization of the air transportation industry, airports started facing several changes such as: adopting a business-oriented development strategy and focusing on revenue from commercial activities; improving the experience of passengers; providing competitive advantages to airlines.

In this context, more and more airports began to focus on implementing strategies to increase income from commercial activities (Del Chiappa et al., 2016; Fasone et al., 2016; Castillo-Manzano et al., 2018).

Furthermore, airports are in the process of becoming an “extension of the core destination” (Ivanova, 2017), offering a variety of services to enhance the passenger experience, even turning into commercial metropolitan business districts (Kasarda, 2006; Ivanova, 2017) or airport cities (Kasarda, 2006).

At this moment, airports have an important role in marketing destinations, considering that they have to address two markets: the airlines and the passengers (Maslen, 2014). Airlines can be attracted with the support of the government, through incentives offered to new and existing airlines and funding for marketing and promotional activities.

On the other side, the way to attract passengers is by offering them tourist attractions and an enhanced experience either at the airport or inside the destination. In addition to shops and restaurants, many major airports have begun to offer facilities such as: swimming pool, karaoke, golf course (Fasone et al., 2016), transforming transportation hubs into tourist attractions. Other modern airports offer their transiting passengers unique experiences, such as: IMAX Movie Theater at Hong Kong Airport, indoor skating ring and ice forest at Seoul Incheon, four-story indoor slide and a butterfly garden with a big water feature inside Singapore Changi Airport. Moreover, airports are starting to work closely with tourism authorities, in order to better promote the destination to both tourists and airlines.

As a “destination team” becomes stronger, it attracts more airlines (as long as an Open Sky policy is adopted) either directly or through partnerships with the home carriers. Having a partnership with the destination and the airport is an advantage for airlines in the context of an increasingly competitive environment, especially between major hubs. Considering this, many airlines, airports and tourism organizations worldwide have started to create “Stopover Tourism Programs”.

In the literature, there is no precise definition of the term “Stopover”, but according to the International Air Transport Association, the term refers to a minimum of 24 hours at an intermediate point of the journey (Pike et al., 2018).

“Stopover” programs are new travel products created by airlines, allowing transiting passengers to have access to different facilities, services and encouraging them to discover the tourist destination where the airport is located.

This type of programs have the potential to bring advantages to all stakeholders involved, creating a competitive advantage for airlines, enhancing the passenger experience in airports and attracting more tourists in the region. (Table no. 1)

**Table no. 1: The advantages obtained by the stakeholders involved in stopover programs**

Airlines		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increasing the number of passengers</li> <li>• Enhancing the passenger experience during the trip</li> <li>• Increasing the revenue</li> </ul>
Destination Team	Airport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhancing the passenger experience at the airport</li> <li>• Increasing the revenue from non aviation related activities</li> <li>• Attracting airlines and passengers</li> </ul>
	Tourism authorities/ companies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Turning transit passengers into tourists</li> <li>• Increasing revenue</li> <li>• Potentially turning stopover tourists into stayover tourists in the future</li> <li>• Attracting new tourists</li> </ul>

Airline Stopover Programs are built following different models but they all involve a carrier operating on a hub airport and partnerships with different stakeholders (airport, hotels, tour operators). Some Stopover programs are addressed to a certain category of long haul passengers (from specific countries and for specific routes) but other programs apply to all passengers being in transit in a certain airport. Moreover, there are stopover programs including free services (accommodation, tours) and discounts but there are also programs where different fees apply depending on the selected package. Basically, Stopover Programs represent packages created by traditional airlines, in partnership with other stakeholders from the tourism industry, allowing transiting passengers to spend a few hours/days as tourists within the hub destination. (Table no. 2)

**Table no. 2: Examples of stopover programs**

Stopover	Iceland	Singapore	Korea	Finland	Portugal
Stakeholders involved	Icelandair Icelandair Holidays Tourism companies	Singapore Airlines Changi Airport Singapore Tourism Board Tour operator	Korean Air Incheon Airport Tourism Companies Medical center	Finnair Tour operator	Tap Portugal Tourism Companies Airports
Marketing channel	icelandair.com	singaporeair.com	koreanair.com	visitfinland.com	portugalstopover.flytap.com
Profile	Nature experience	Shopping, activities	Cultural visit Shopping Health & beauty	Nature experience, cultural visit, activities	Cultural visit, activities, shopping

Therefore, after analyzing the existing Stopover programs, it can be concluded that they include an airport hub, two connecting flights and a successful collaboration between the airline, the airport and tourism representatives.



However, starting from these existing programs and taking into consideration the rise of online booking platforms that give passengers the option to choose „multi-city” itineraries, offering connections between point-to-point flights, the "stopover" concept can be extended, with the possibility of being applied in most of the airports. Websites like kiwi.com, expedia.com, skyscanner.com offer the „multi-city” feature for passengers wanting to have a stop at an „intermediary” destination. Moreover, the website [www.cleverlayover.com](http://www.cleverlayover.com) offers passengers multiple combinations of traditional and low-cost airlines for lower fares, giving them the possibility to choose themselves the length of the layover. In this context, stopover tourism programs could be developed also in non-hub airports.

Stopover tourism may also refer to intermodal transport hubs. As airports started to develop, with business districts or even cities being created around them, they became central points, offering different inter-modal connections (train, subway, buses). Some airlines even established vertical partnerships with train companies, offering packages with both flight and train.

Another type of vertical collaboration is the one between airlines – cruise operators, for the “Fly & Cruise” Programs. In this context, Stopover Programs can also be implemented in destinations where passengers are in transit after debarking from their flight until they board the cruise ship. From this angle, it becomes clear that stopover programs can be extended, with the possibility of being implemented in all major hubs, either connecting two flight, flights and trains, flight and buses or cruises.

In this context, a new question then arises: which are the measures that all destinations should take in order to attract potential transiting traffic? In order to find an answer to this question, Bucharest has been used as case study and a qualitative research has been conducted, having as interviewees professionals from both the airline and the tourism industries.

#### 4. Research methodology

In the socio-human sciences researches, the qualitative methods specific to the fields of sociology and psychology are increasingly being used, due to the variables investigated, which have dimensions that can be studied from different angles (Chelcea, 2004; Greener and Martelli, 2015). These methods are characterized by a greater influence of the participants, compared to the quantitative methods, as well as a direct involvement of the researcher whose fingerprint is more obvious and even more valuable. However, the higher subjectivity of qualitative and quantitative methods cannot be ignored (Cătoi, 2009).

In order to meet the *purpose* of this research - to better understand if a Stopover program could be implemented in Bucharest and to determine which are the challenges and opportunities that tourism in Bucharest is facing - the authors opted for a *qualitative research, exploratory type*. In general, this type of research allows a clarification of concepts, a better understanding of the problem proposed, the generation of new ideas, the identification of some directions of action and of subsequent research axes, etc. (Cătoi, 2009), which responds to the needs of this current research.

The method used was the *in-depth, structured interview*. The advantage of such an approach is the possibility of obtaining information directly from experts involved in the studied topic (Cătoi, 2009), benefiting from their experience in the field of destination management – Bucharest, as well as air transport management.

As instrument, an *interview guide* consisting of 11 questions was used, targeting the following *specific objectives*: defining the markets that generate tourists in Bucharest; establishing the marketing strategy of Bucharest; identifying the opportunities and challenges that tourism in Bucharest is confronted with; understanding the level of collaboration between tourism authorities and companies from the industry; establishing the measures to be taken by Bucharest, in order to develop tourism, taking into consideration also transiting passengers; understanding the development perspectives of Bucharest as a “hub”.

In correlation with these research objectives, the questions in the interview guide were:

1. What are, from your experience, the countries generating incoming tourism for the Romanian market and Bucharest, in particular?
2. Which are, according to you, the main channels that Bucharest is being promoted through?
3. In your opinion, which are the advantages that Bucharest has over other European cities? Please list the positive aspects.
4. In your opinion, which are the weak points of promoting tourism in Bucharest?
5. From your point of view, at which level is the cooperation between the tourism authorities and the private sector (in Bucharest) situated?
6. What measures do you think should be taken to increase tourism development in Bucharest?
7. What do you think are the opportunities for tourism development in Bucharest?
8. What challenges do you think the city of Bucharest is facing in terms of tourism development?
9. Can the fact that Timisoara is the cultural capital in 2021 contribute to tourism development in Bucharest? In what way?
10. Taking into account also the potential transit passengers, what would you recommend for promoting and developing tourism in Bucharest?
11. In your opinion, are there any perspectives of Bucharest developing as a "hub"? (with reference to both air transport and intermodal transportation)

Being an exploratory qualitative research, that the authors want to continue later with a quantitative research, the sample used was small, of 4 people. The requirement was that they have a decision-making function in their organization, a management experience of minimum 3 years, and that the organization, whether public or private, should be involved in the air transport industry or in tourism. Thus, the selected participants are presented in table no. 3.

**Table no. 3: Participants of the in-depth interview**

No.	Company/organization	Position	Code
1	Bucharest Destination Management Organization	President	Respondent 1
2	Federation of Hotel Industry in Romania (FIHR)	President	Respondent 2
3	Tour-operator	General Manager	Respondent 3
4	Romanian Airport Services	President	Respondent 4

The initial intention was to use a larger sample, but a number of the persons which met the established criteria and that we contacted, did not respond. Although we asked for the interview to take place face-to-face, the respondents preferred to have the questions emailed to them for more efficiency, given their busy schedule. The responses were collected between March 19 and April 21, 2018 and the data content analysis was performed in an interpretative-phenomenological way.

## 5. Results and discussion

Despite all the difficulties of establishing the sample size and collecting the data obtained through interviews, the results have revealed some interesting and useful aspects for future studies and the most relevant were chosen to be presented in this article.

According to the respondents, the generating tourism markets for Romania and Bucharest in particular are: the neighboring countries and some countries from the European Union, such as: Germany, France, Italy, Spain. Respondent 4 explains that most of the tourists belong to countries from the European Union, in many cases for business travel but also given the close location and the existence of multiple airline options at attractive fares. Another respondent (2) places Germany on the first place, Israel on the second and afterwards, France, Italy and the UK. He also specifies that although the neighboring countries are official placed on the first places, they represent “transiting tourism” which does not generate high tourism revenue. Israel is also mentioned by respondent 1, as well as Germany, Italy, France, UK, and Ireland.

When asked which are the main channels for promoting Bucharest as a tourist destination (question no. 2), all respondents agreed that there is no coherent official strategy, only initiatives from private actors, especially in the online environment, or as part of the marketing strategy of airlines operating in Bucharest. Moreover, one of the respondents (3) mentioned that Bucharest is sometimes promoted “by chance” through events taking place here. Also, regular participation in national and international fairs is another means of promoting the city of Bucharest, but it is, however, insufficient promoted in the opinion of one of the respondents. (Table no. 4)

**Table no. 4: Marketing channels for promoting Bucharest as a tourism destination**

<b>Bucharest as a tourism destination</b>	<b>Tourists</b>	“Word of mouth”
	<b>Private actors</b>	Internet
		Social Media
		“Influencers”/“Bloggers”
	<b>Airlines</b>	Flights to Bucharest
	<b>International events</b>	Important concerts, sport games

Regarding the advantages that Bucharest has over other tourism destinations (question no. 3), the respondents emphasize the novelty factor, being a new destination compared to other established tourist destinations and also the favorable quality-price ratio and value for money. Among the other indicating aspects are: people friendliness and the fact that they can speak several foreign languages; the modernism and the high quality of the hotel infrastructure; not being overcrowded; the safety factor; the interesting tourist attractions (historical and visually); the animated night life.

Respondent 1 defines Bucharest as Safe, Green and Clean. Concerning the weaknesses of tourism promotion in Bucharest (question no. 4), all of the respondents indicate that the biggest problem is the lack of an organization which could manage Bucharest as a tourist destination and build a coherent marketing strategy.

Another interesting aspect being mentioned was the fact that Bucharest should have a theme defining it („Budapest has spas, Paris is the city of love” – mentions respondent 3) and a web portal to promote it online. One of the respondents (4) argues that a weakness is also the fact that tourism in Bucharest is not properly promoted in its main points of access, such as airports and all respondents mention the lack of collaboration between the public authorities and the private sector or even between the private entities for shared activities. In addition, respondent 2 indicates that there are no proper “convention bureau” type centers, in order to promote Bucharest as a MICE destination. Not using the taxes collected from tourists and not cleaning up the city enough are some other aspects mentioned.

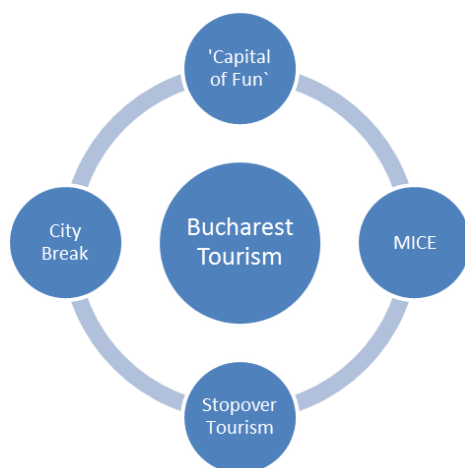
Regarding the collaboration between the public authorities and the private companies (question no. 5), the respondents argue that on a scale from 1 to 10, it wouldn't pass 2-3 and that there are some forms of collaboration but without any results, this being compared with “promises before the elections” (respondent 4). Moreover, one of the respondents even sees this relationship as an almost “antagonistic” one (respondent 3).

Respondents' answers to question no. 6 (table no. 5) indicate three aspects in which Bucharest could be improved as a tourism destination: the development of a coherent tourism development strategy, with the involvement of all stakeholders (authorities, tour operators, airlines, hotels), a marketing strategy in order to promote efficiently through the appropriate channels tourism in Bucharest and also local improvements.

**Table no. 5: Measures to be taken in order to stimulate tourism development in Bucharest**

Local Strategy	Marketing	Local improvements
Proper functioning of the public-private partnership (between the local administration and travel agencies, hotels, airlines..)	Creating a web portal for promoting Bucharest as a tourist destination	Building a convention / events center
Using efficiently the tourist tax	Attending international & national fairs	Becoming an international tourist destination (signs and information in English language, tourist information centers, free maps)
Having a proper budget allocated from the authorities	Organizing an annual calendar with important events that could potentially attract international tourists	Making sure that Bucharest is a clean city
Having an efficient marketing strategy for the 21 <sup>st</sup> century	Having information centers in airports	Properly lighting important buildings at night
		Renovating the Old Town

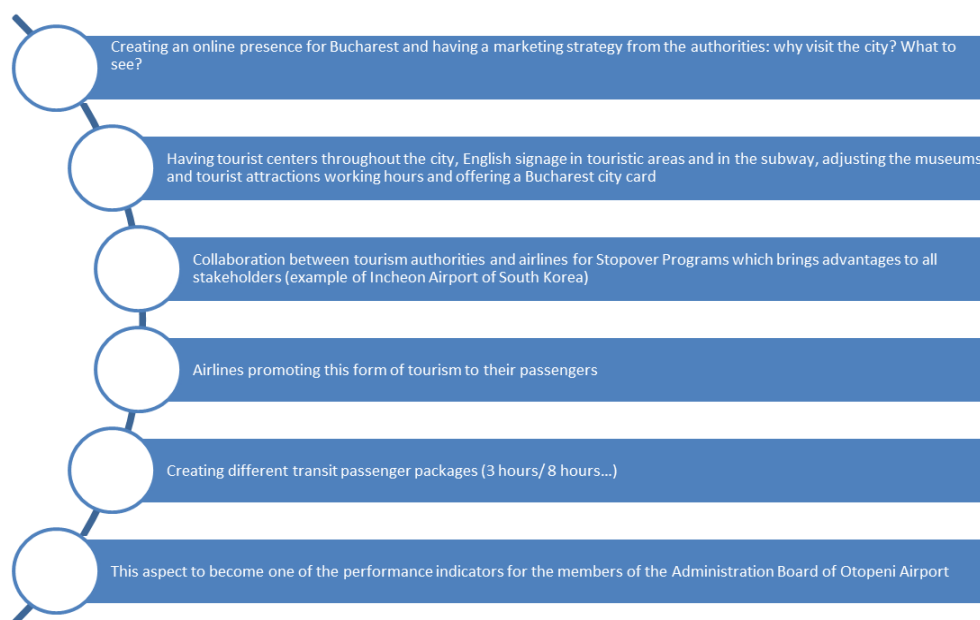
Some of the tourism development opportunities identified by the respondents (question no. 7) were promoting Bucharest as a city break destination and also as a MICE destination, investing in attracting business travelers. Respondent 4 suggested that Bucharest could also be promoted as a tourist destination to transiting passengers from Otopeni Airport. In addition, respondent 3 explains that, given the „entertainment” options available to tourists in Bucharest at affordable prices, as well as the lack of another city being associated with the concept, Bucharest could become “The Capital of Fun” and attract tourists interested by its dynamic day and night life. (Figure no. 1)



**Figure no. 1: Tourism development opportunities in Bucharest**

Another subject tackled in the interview has been whether the fact that Timisoara will be the cultural capital in 2021 could contribute to tourism development in Bucharest (question no. 9). Respondent 2 considered that it would have a positive impact in terms of image, professionalizing the workforce and also if there would be some events organized together or activities for tourists transiting Bucharest. The other respondents agreed that this could potentially generate more transiting passengers, therefore, potential tourists but they emphasized that, given the current situation and the lack of a coherent tourism strategy, there are not many chances that this happens.

All the respondents consider that it is unlikely for Bucharest to become an important hub in the future (question no. 11), whether we refer to an airline hub or an intermodal hub, given the fact that the national airline is inefficient and without vision or strategy, the national train company is also one of the most inefficient companies in Europe and Romania does not have the necessary road infrastructure for developing a hub. Moreover, according to respondent 4, the general transport master plan does not mention any plans of developing the city as a hub, which places Bucharest far behind other European cities. (Figure no. 2)



**Figure no. 2: Promoting Bucharest as a tourism destination for transiting tourists**

## Conclusions

The main result of the research outlines that, although Bucharest has the potential to develop as a tourist destination including to transiting passengers, the lack of a destination management organization to establish a tourism development and marketing strategy or to manage the collaboration between the public sector and the private actors has a negative impact on the way Bucharest positions itself on the tourism map.

The lack of strategy can be seen in the fact that Romania does not have an image on the international tourism map and in some cases, it is promoted “casually”, through major events, “word of mouth” or through the marketing strategies of airlines operating on Henri Coanda Airport. The lack of strategy can be also seen through the limited collaboration between the authorities and the private sector, as well as the absence of investment in making the city an international tourists friendly destinations: shortage of tourist centers throughout the city and in the airport, no English signage, no city cards or free maps.

Stopover Tourism has been acknowledged by the respondents as a type of tourism that Bucharest could benefit of, especially in the context of being exposed to an increased transiting passenger traffic with Timisoara becoming a cultural capital in 2021.

Still, in order for a Stopover Tourism program to develop, there are two requirements:

- It should comprise an important hub, which in the case of Bucharest is hardly likely to happen since the air and ground infrastructure is not properly developed and without a perspective to become a part of an integrated strategy addressing this
- It is necessary to have a solid collaboration between the transport and the tourism companies and authorities (both public and private), which for the moment remains a major weakness for tourism development in Romania.

The results of our research represent a source of inspiration for the decision makers of the tourism policy and strategy for Bucharest, having a strong practical character. The current results can also be a starting point for further in-depth research regarding the interconnections between the factors contributing to the attractiveness of a Stopover destination, in order to identify a theoretical and applicative model for the development of "hubs" for this tourism segment. Current research has its limitations, primarily because of the use of qualitative research only and secondly, because of the small sample of respondents, unrepresentative from a scientific point of view but, in our opinion, with real significance and validation potential for the proposed research.

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