

The Individualization of the Hotel as Tourist Attraction in the Urban Area of Transylvania

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Abstract

The purpose of the present study is to emphasize the importance of the hotels as accommodation establishments within the urban area of Transylvania. The study involves ten counties (Alba, Bistrița-Năsăud, Brașov, Cluj, Covasna, Harghita, Hunedoara, Mureș, Sibiu and Sălaj), focusing on their towns. The geographic distribution of the hotels highlights the differences that can be observed between the studied counties. These dissimilarities started to appear due to the different tourist potential and the economic development. With more than two centuries of tradition in the background, the hotels in Transylvania experienced, along their evolution, a series of transformations that led to changes in the structure of their offer. In the urban context, the hotel stands as a main element when defining the city's tourist role, also taking into account that for the city, the presence of hotels, from different categories and with different levels of comfort, is imperative.

Keywords: *hotel, city, tourism*

Rezumat. Individualizarea hotelului ca sursă de atractivitate turistică în spațiul urban din Transilvania

Lucrarea de față își propune să evidențieze importanța pe care o au hotelurile ca unități de cazare în spațiul urban al Transilvaniei. Arealul de studiu cuprinde zece județe (Alba, Bistrița-Năsăud, Brașov, Cluj, Covasna, Harghita, Hunedoara, Mureș, Sibiu și Sălaj) cu accent pe orașele acestora. Repartiția geografică a acestor unități hoteliere evidențiază diferențele care există la nivelul județelor studiate, aceste diferențe datorându-se dezvoltării economice, a potențialului turistic existent și a gradului de dezvoltare turistică. Cu o tradiție de mai bine de două secole, amenajările hoteliere din Transilvania, în evoluția lor, cunosc o serie de transformări ce conduc la modificări în structura ofertei lor. Imaginea antagonică a orașului include hotelul ca un element important în determinarea funcției sale turistice având în vedere faptul că pentru un oraș turistic existența hotelurilor, variate ca tipologie și implicit ca și grad de confort, este un imperativ.

Cuvinte-cheie: *hotel, oraș, turism*

Introduction

At the same time with the development of the economy and tourism, the city turns into one of the most important tourist destinations. After the researchers having denied the importance of the city as tourist destination, believing that its only purpose is to send out tourists (Law, 2002), the later studies have placed this type of tourism in the center of present investigations.

If at first it had been looked at as a simple accommodation establishment, nowadays the hotel has become itself the destination due to its individualization in the landscape of the cities, tourist resorts, etc. The development of the

transportation infrastructure as well as the economic development has influenced the evolution of tourism. The city has become a real "epicenter of the urban, social, political and business activities" (Rutes, Penner&Adams, 2001, p. 2), it represents the most important centre of goods and service exchange for both urban and surrounding areas.

At an international level, the end of the 18th century brings on the hotel sector the concept of urban hotel with the opening of the *City Hotel* in New York, in 1794 (Rutes et al., 2001). Besides the impressive five floor structure, the accommodation establishment also comes with a different approach of hospitality through its new components of the public areas: the ballroom and the banquet hall. After the appearance of this urban accommodation

symbol, we can observe later on other two remarkable hotels – Tremont Hotel (1828) and Hotel Buffalo Statler (1908) – that diversify the typology of the urban accommodation and contribute at the same time to the expansion of the tourism in the city. It is now the time of the commercial hotels and the 19th century brings on the European hotel sector the *grand hotel* concept defined by “luxury, even social life opulence of a certain privileged social category” (Hariton, 2007, p.10).

The expansion of trade starting with the 19th century will lead to business trips (Law, 2002). The increasing spare time and financial resources and the development of the transportation infrastructure, lead to positive changes in the demand for tourist services. The leisure travel had turned in time into a lifestyle feature. By traveling, the modern tourist aims to satisfy not only physical needs, but also psychological ones. The evidences, dating from the year 130 a.Ch., of using thermal water for bathing, healing but also as recreational means, in the resorts of Dacia Felix, Geoagiu Băi (Germisara), Călan (Acquae) and Băile Herculane (Ad aqua Herculi Sacras-Ad Mediam) proves that since those early times, man used to travel in order to heal various illnesses. The Romans used an ingenious technique to collect water and they used to heat the rooms by their hypocaust system (Ciangă, 2006).

In the **Middle Ages**, in Romania and worldwide, hospitality was understood as an act of good will, a Christian virtue. In the context of the uncertainty of travel, it is improper to refer to tourist flows; it is more appropriate to refer to pilgrimage and to travels made in order to enrich one's knowledge and professional skills. The ones that travelled around could find a place to sleep and to enjoy a hot meal within the monasteries. Here the hosts expected in exchange to know the travelers names, where they came from and their status. Also they were advised by the clerics to make a donation for the church (Pop, Coruțiu, 2006). Thus, the ones that belonged to the lower class were not allowed into the monastery, while the individuals of the middle class had to pay an amount established by the church. Although in the Middle Ages it has been registered a decrease in the material and spiritual culture, the region of Transylvania proudly mentions wealthy towns of that time, such as Cluj-Napoca, Sibiu and Brașov. The most popular Transylvanian inns were “La Sultanul Turcesc” (1555, “At the Turkish Sultan”,

today known as “The Romans' Emperor” hotel), and “Calul Bălan” (“The White Horse”) or “Feher Lo” (1604, nowadays the building became home of the Ethnographic Museum, on 21 Memorandum street, Cluj-Napoca). In the context of a developing economy and trade relations with the Western and Eastern countries, the travelers flow increases and evidently also does the expectation to have better accommodation conditions. In Sibiu, in 1773 it opened – on the same location where the oldest inn in the country (“At the Turkish Sultan”, 1555) used to stand – the first hotel known under the name of “The Romans' Emperor”. The hotel still functions nowadays and the actual building dates from 1895. It is known as hotel meant for the high society as along time it hosted numerous celebrities among which: Mihai Eminescu, Johannes Brahms, Franz Liszt, Johann Strauss, etc. (Bonfert, 2007).

The 19th century reflects the care showed by the inn owners' in an effort to improve the services offered to the guests. Therefore, they extend their properties; they embellish the rooms and they diversify the meals that they used to serve. Showing a special attention to all these aspects they manage to transform the inn in what will become the hotel. In what concerns Cluj-Napoca, there are two remarkable hotels in the central part of the town: *Pannonia* Hotel (1878) and *New York* Hotel (1895). In 1891 “Comitetul oficial de informațiune pentru străini”(The Official Committee of Information for Foreigners) issued “Călăuz al streinului”(Guide for the Foreigners) which stated that: “Brașov has besides restaurants and small inns also six bigger hotels: București Hotel, *Central* Hotel no. 1, *Europa* Hotel, *Pomul verde* Hotel, *Coroana* Hotel, *Union* Hotel, that do their best to fully satisfy the fair expectations of the traveler” (apud Ene, 2004, p. 19). For the same town it was mentioned (Petit, 1922) an accommodation capacity of 297 rooms in a total of thirteen hotels: H. *Coroana*, H. *Continental*, *Vila Kertsch*, H. *Metropol*, H. *Coroana Veche*, H. *Cârciuma Roșie Pister*, H. *Mielul Alb*, H. *Romer*, H. *Kristea*, H. *Pesta*, H. *Calul Alb*, H. *Predeal* and H. *Schneider*. The author (Petit, 1922) mentions these accommodation establishments under the name of “otel” instead of “hotel”. It is worth to say that the *Coroana* Hotel was considered the largest and the most popular hotel in Brașov. Its rooms, cold and hot running water, bathrooms, central heating, elevator, café, restaurant and terrace were meant for the wealthy members of the high class (Cicio-Pop, 1939). At the end of the

19th century, in **Sibiu**, the following hotels were considered to be the most imposing hotels (Bonfert, 2007): *Împăratul Romanilor Hotel*, *Habermann Hotel* (11, Unirii Square), *Melzer Hotel* (that afterwards became *Bonfert Hotel*, on 11 Mitropoliei St.), *Central Hotel* (71, 9th of May St.), *Royal Hotel* (no. 2, Train Station Square), *Schmidt Hotel* (9 Blănarilor St.), *Boulevard Hotel* (10 Unirii Square), *Dacia Hotel* (41 Ocnei St.), *Gundisch Hotel* (11 Tg. Peștelui St.), *Krone Hotel* (11 Turnului St.), *Transilvania Hotel* (37 Constituției St.) and *Neurhrer Hotel*.

According to *Guide de la Roumanie* (1939) written by Cicio-Pop Alexandru, the most important hotels in the urban area of Transylvania, at that time, were: *Covac Hotel*, *Fritsch Hotel*, *Schneider Hotel*, *Dacia Hotel*, *Marcovici Hotel* (Bistrița), *Astoria Hotel*, *Central Hotel*, *New York Hotel*, *Parc Hotel* (Cluj-Napoca), *Splendid Hotel*, *New-York Hotel*, *Transilvania Hotel*, *Central Hotel* (Tg. Mureș), *David Hotel*, *București Hotel*, *Central Hotel*, *Europa Hotel*, *Sanatoriul Dr. Hugi Horsch* (Miercurea Ciuc), *Transilvania Hotel* (Covasna), *Hotelul Orășenesc*, *Central Hotel*, *Teglaș Hotel* (Sf. Gheorghe), *Dacia Hotel*, *Europa Hotel*, *Transilvania Hotel* (Alba-Iulia).

After the Second World War, many hotels were transformed into homes for the war victims, residences for students or even hospitals. *Hotel Central* (*Hotel Pannonia* until 1890) from Cluj-Napoca was nationalized and transformed into residences for students (Lukacs, 2005) and the *New York Hotel* had the same destiny (Cicio-Pop, 1939). Both hotels were re-opened: *Pannonia Hotel* in 1960 and *New York Hotel* in 1975. During the 1945-1948 period, the financial situation of Romania had become very instable, mainly due to the negative influence of the Second WW. In 1948 the tourism infrastructure was nationalized, meaning that the State became its owner and it could and did transfer it to certain social structures, such as the Syndicates or the Ministry of Labor (Ciangă, 2006). In Romania there began a recovery of the hospitality field by reorganizing the entire sector of public nutrition, started by the Ministry of Interior Commerce. The units that no longer corresponded to the needs of the population in those difficult times, or to the new social ambiance, ceased their activity. A series of new restaurants and hotels had opened after few rearrangements that have been done. Everything built in this period shows a total contrast with the previous architecture. The focus is on the vertical

construction and the desire is to build imposing hotels, disregarding of the real need of accommodation places. The offer does not correspond to the demand.

Starting with 1956, the hotels and the resorts are provided with wellness systems and they adopt the "tout service" system that offer to the guests not only accommodation but also wellness and diversion, all in the same establishment. While the wellness resorts adopted this system, in the urban environment the hotels were built on the principle of the separation of different functions in individual buildings (Ciangă, 2006).

The prosperity of the sixth and seventh decades of the 20th century reflects in the most remarkable hotels at that time: *Transilvania Hotel* (Cluj-Napoca), *Dacia Hotel* (Sebeș), *Coroana de Aur Hotel* (Bistrița), *Alpin Hotel* (Poiana Brașov), *Ciucaș Hotel* (Poiana Brașov), *Ursul Hotel* (Poiana Brașov), etc. The period between 1960 and 1975 registered the most dynamic tourism activity in Romania. Great amounts of money were invested in the tourism infrastructure, and at a greater extent in the hotel accommodation. During this time the constructions have neither meaning nor purpose (Curinschi, 1981), as the great number of buildings often prove to be useless. The accommodation buildings become part of the town and their location had to be as central as possible. Some examples in this direction are: *Transilvania Hotel* (nowadays *Belvedere Hotel*, Cluj-Napoca), *Napoca* (Cluj-Napoca), *Sarmis* (Deva), *Dacia* (Deva), *Boulevard* (Deva), *Turist* (Deva), *Ruscă* (Hunedoara), *Diana* and *Geoagiu* (Geoagiu-Băi), *Transilvania*, *Cetate*, *Parc* (Alba-Iulia), *Hebe*, *Someșul* (Sângeorz Băi), *Coroana de Aur* (Bistrita), *Parc*, *Silva*, *Apollo*, *Hermannstad Hotel* (Sibiu) etc. The principles of the tourist arrangements were often disregarded, especially the harmonization with the landscape, the dynamic balance between the tourism infrastructure and the general infrastructure. Starting with 1980, the tourism infrastructure begins to regress because of the social and economical conditions in Romania. This decrease lasts until the beginning of the 21st century. Although it has been given a lot of credit to the economical and respectively to the tourism development, by the privatization process, the consequences proved to be unsuccessful due to the lack in informing people, bureaucracy, inappropriate professional training of the ones that got involved in the hotels' management; in most of the cases it has been registered a regression, not a

progress, as expected. The regression of the Romanian tourism had already started in the 1980 and it became more prominent after 1990, mainly because of:

- the physical deterioration of the accommodation units;
- the poor quality of the services;
- the change of many accommodation establishments' purpose as a consequence of the retrocession to their original owners;
- the defective management of the accommodation units such as the hotels.

The new generation hotels, the construction of which started in 2000, are characterized by a higher level of comfort, by multiple demands, particularly in what concerns business and wellness tourism. The proprietors try their chance with the most unusual mixtures, obtaining as a result an entire complex appealing to the guests. The hotels that were constructed after 2000, have built an entire personalized world that reflects the cultural preferences and the lifestyle of the target customers. Thus, the hotel becomes once again the central element of the social life by the restoration of the old, distinguished accommodation establishments. The focus is on the values of the past, on design, on details and very personalized services. The *Boutique Hotel*, the *Design Hotel*, the *Urban Hotel* and the *Wellness Hotel* are the appreciated hotel types in the 21st century. The town offers a contrasting image. Features such as crowded, dirty, loud, unhealthy, unsafe are counterbalanced by a series of positive images showing that the town is also animated, civilized, cosmopolitan and full of opportunities (Law, 2002).

The development of the tourism sector in a certain region is conditioned by the existence of the structures required in order to receive the guests (Snak, 2003). They also influence the tourist activity flow. The evolution of the transportation infrastructure has increased the safety of traveling and has made it possible to travel on long distances. The modern tourism is not conditioned anymore by the long distances. The town has become the appropriate destination for a *city break* (the activity of visiting a city with a significant tourist value and spending one to three nights in that city).

Though it has not been defined as a physiological need, the desire to take a holiday can be understood as a series of needs that the simple human existence involves. And this is why every tourist product has

to include as many elements as possible in order to satisfy these needs. The hospitality industry started to exist out of the physiological necessities to eat and sleep (Borchgrevink, 1999). Since the 18th century there existed the desire among the wealthiest people to visit Europe's greatest cities, particularly the ones in Italy and France in order to learn about the latest artistic and scientific discoveries. This habit of the Grand Tour so "en vogue" at that time can be considered as the origin of the urban tourism which today represents an important activity within the big cities, which aims to restore their old historical parts, to organize great cultural events and to activate the interest of the tourists for the cultural heritage. "The urban tourism represents an ensemble of tourist resources and activities implanted in the city" (Ilieş, 2008, p. 10). The demand comes as a result of the human need for culture, amusement and relaxation. The target of this type of tourism is: business tourists, weekend tourists, the tourists that come to the city to visit friends or family, the transit tourists and the urban stay tourists. Taking into account that traveling is more a desire than a need, "the motivation must be a strong one" (Law, 2002, p. 15).

If during the 19th century the City Hall used to represent the symbol of the city, situated in the most important part of the city, nowadays it is the hotel that dictates great part of the urban architecture. There is a close relation between the economic growth of a city and the hotels in that city. These two elements depend on each other because without trade there would not be any need to build hotels, just as without these accommodation units the trade would not be profitable (Law, 2002). Once with the globalization, the investors turned towards the developing potential markets. Hence, there appeared the transnational corporations. More and more international corporations locate their headquarters in the main capitals worldwide, and the business travels register an amazing evolution. The business tourist tries to combine useful and pleasure and he will not choose a hotel just because he finds it cheaper or because he wants to spend his holidays; on the contrary, he will stay at that hotel because he has to. This is why the business hotels afford to establish higher rates than the leisure hotels. To overcome these needs and desires of the tourists, the proprietors constantly renew the image of their hotels and improve the services they offer. The competition on this market has influenced the

hoteliers to consider even the tiniest details in the attempt to stand out. Realizing the importance of the cultural and architectural heritage, there begins to appear projects that involve the restoration of old buildings, of palaces, of old bank establishments, and turn all these establishments into hotels that tell their own story, and they are also known as *boutique hotels*. The hotel, as accommodation establishment, can either be part of a tourist sights ensemble, either it can represent itself a tourist sight. Building a real image, but focusing on its positive aspects and making it appealing, can attract a great number of tourists, as well as investors that could bring their contribution to the city's development. The hotels no longer answer only to the need of accommodation; the guest expects nowadays to find besides the accommodation services, also first class restaurants, conference rooms, the chance to spend his spare time, fitness, gyms, spas and wellness services to heal his body and spirit.

"The hotel becomes a combination of a landmark building and a rich man's house, and provides an experience for the visitor" (Law, 2002, p. 161).

There are a lot of trends imposing on the urban hotel sector, (Rutes et. al., 2001) mainly:

- employing non-toxic construction material and sustainable systems for the environment in order to show its care and respect towards the future generations;
- market and services fragmentation so to make it possible to supply a large scale of various services within the same accommodation establishment;
- thanks to the technological development, more and more hotel chains prefer to organize their services on separate regions, saving thus on the back office spaces;
- adopting mixed-use developments;
- adapting the services and facilities to the needs of their guests;
- extended stay hotel;
- super-luxury accommodation;
- urban resort.

Study area

The hotel establishment appears in the urban region of Transylvania since the 18th century and it evolves at the same time with the country's economic development. The hotel stands as an important benchmark for the economical evolution of a given area or region. Among the most visible county towns remarkable for their tourist sites,

history and architecture, there are to be mentioned Alba-Iulia, Brașov, Bistrița, Cluj-Napoca, Sfântu Gheorghe, Deva, Miercurea-Ciuc, Zalău, Sibiu and Tg. Mureș.

Material and methods

The present study follows the history of the individualization of the hotel as a tourist development with accommodation function in the urban area of Transylvania. Inventorying these tourist establishments highlighted their geographical distribution within the county seats of the studied tourist region. The study focuses on the relationship that exists between the tourism development in general and the urban tourism in particular and the development of the tourist establishment with hotels as case study. The map of the settlements of Transylvania with hotel infrastructure has the role to highlight the differences that exist between the urban accommodation capacity of the hotels from the counties of the studied region.

Results

Investing in hotel projects is closely related to the economic situation and to the perspective of its future development, as in the case of a hotel the investment redemption and the profit are uncertain. The map of the settlements of Transylvania showing hotel infrastructure (Fig. 1.) highlights the differences between the accommodation capacity of the counties individually and within them. When referring to the accommodation places that the Transylvanian hotels provide, four towns are notable (Cluj-Napoca, Covasna, Brașov and Poiana Brașov) because they owe the most extended hotel infrastructure and every one provides over 2000 accommodation places. This is a result of the considerable tourist function importance in the town of Brașov and in the mountain climate resort of Poiana Brașov; it is a result of the economic development level and also of the status of academic town in the case of Cluj-Napoca what concerns Covasna, the extended hotel infrastructure is the result of the great capacity that the "mammoth" hotels have since the 6th and 7th decade of the 19th century. The towns of Sibiu, Tg. Mureș, Sângeorz-Băi and Predeal offer between 1001 and 2000 accommodation places per town and in the category

of 501-1000 accommodation places we have the towns of Alba-Iulia, Băile Tuşnad, Sovata and Bistrița. However, most settlements offer less than 100 accommodation places.

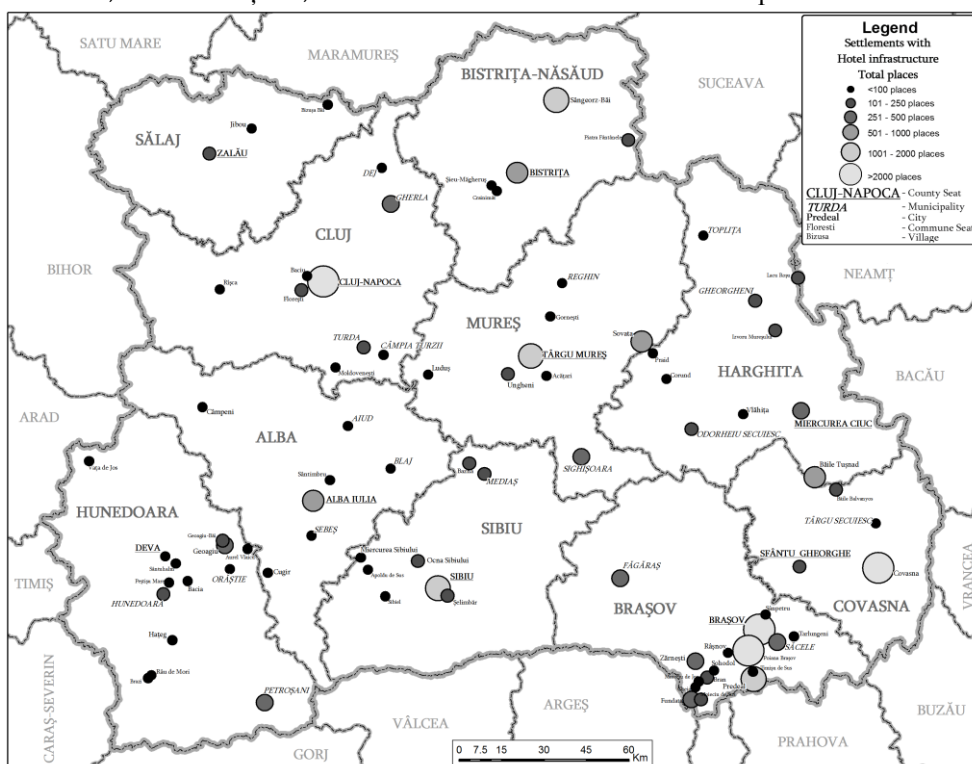


Fig. 1: Settlements of Transylvania with hotel infrastructure in 2011

(Data source: <http://www.mdrt.ro/turism/unitati-clasificate.html>)

Figure 2 represents the distribution of the accommodation establishment such as hotels within the region of Transylvania, according to different destinations. The highest percentage (45%) is registered in ten county seats, the same ones that

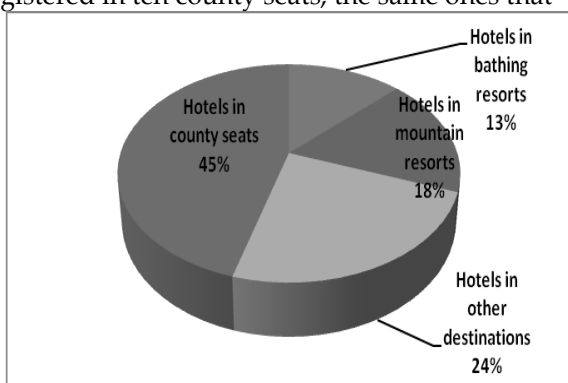


Fig. 2: Distribution of the hotels from Transylvania on destinations, in 2011

(Data source: <http://www.mdrt.ro/turism/unitati-clasificate.html>)

concentrate the most significant number of hotels, followed by the hotels located within other destinations; the latter includes those hotels situated in towns that do not have the status of mountain or bathing resorts, nor county seats (24%), then

followed by the mountain resorts (18%) and bathing resorts (13%).

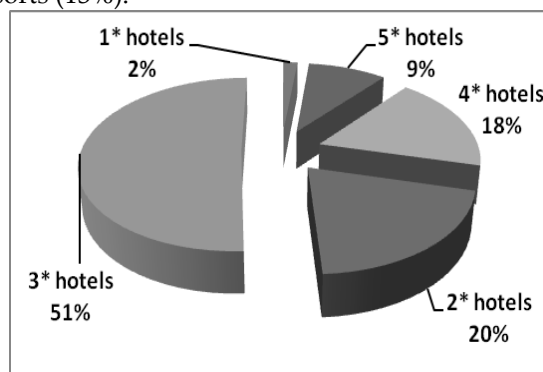


Fig. 3: Distribution of the hotel accommodation places from the cities of Transylvania, depending on degree of comfort

(Data source: <http://www.mdrt.ro/turism/unitati-clasificate.html>)

Figure 3 shows that in the towns of Transylvania the 3 stars hotels account for more than half of the accommodation capacity (51%), followed by the 2 stars hotels (20%), 4 stars hotels (18%), 5 stars hotels (9%) and one star hotels (2%).

Therefore, hotels from the studied region are mainly meant for the economy hotel (2-3 stars)

target, while the 4 stars and the luxury (5 stars) target register lower percentages.

Conclusions

Even though apparently the urban hotel seems to be a basic concept, it has to consider various aspects, most of the times contradictory, as previously mentioned. The hotel establishments in the urban area are frequented by the tourists that are in the city to spend their vacation (stay tourists) and also by the transit tourists. Consequently, the hoteliers must take into account that the two tourist categories will have different needs and expectations. On one hand the hoteliers have to assure the proper infrastructure for leisure – especially in the case of the stay tourists – and on the other hand they will pay attention to the needs of the transit tourists, such as business tourists that need spaces for conferences, business centers, but also the need to relax after a long working day. The hotel, with its defined presence in the urban environment, since the 18th century, becomes a significant part of the city, contributing to its tourist feature.

The geographical repartition of the hotels within the studied region highlights their substantial number (45%) in the county seats. Regarding the structure of offer within the Transylvanian hotels according to the comfort level, the most representative section is the 3 stars hotels (51%), while the 5 stars hotels only represent 9%. It is also obvious (fig.1) that in the case of Transylvania, the majority of settlements have less than 100 accommodation places in hotels per settlement. There are remarkable differences between the counties, the county seats and between the towns with an important tourist function. The 21st century hotels intend to keep up with the technological evolution in order to satisfy the needs of their customers that depend more and more on the technology. The hotel in the urban environment tries to answer to the desire of the guest: to escape the daily routine and at the same time to feel, at a certain extent, like home.

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