

URBAN TOURISM AND UNIVERSITY SPORTS. CASE STUDY ON THE IMPACT OF THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP ON THE DESTINATION OF ORADEA, ROMANIA

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Abstract: Since the second half of the 20th century, major changes have occurred worldwide in the perception of sport and sports tourism. Economic development and technical progress in every field have led to the emergence of new sports, which have become particularly attractive, especially for the young population. Therefore, sports tourism is becoming one of the expanding forms of tourism, which involves a multitude of relationships between tourists engaged in different activities (physical exercise, sports competitions, adventure tourism, sports entertainment and cultural exchange activities), on the one hand, and the tourist destination, on the other. In this study, we propose an analysis of the relationships between the University Football Championship, 2023 Edition, and tourism in the host destination, Oradea Municipality. This was possible after consulting, through the survey method, the members of the football teams from eight university centers in Romania, who participated in the University Football Championship, 2023 Edition, in Oradea. The results obtained were quantified after calculating two synthetic indicators, namely: the value of the sports index, which takes into account four qualitative criteria (quality of the game, quality of interaction, quality of the result and quality of the physical environment), respectively the value of the tourist index, also related to four qualitative criteria (tourist experience, tourist satisfaction, recommendation intention and return intention). In the case of both indicators and following their correlation, high average values were recorded, which can be attributed to the exceptional playing conditions offered by the organizer - the University of Oradea, respectively to the particularly favorable perception and satisfaction gained by the participants, following visits to the tourist attractions in Oradea Municipality, which proves, without a doubt, that the settlement on the banks of the Crișul Repede is one of the favorite tourist destinations in Romania.

Keywords: Oradea tourist destination, university sport, college football championship, tourist perception, tourist experience, tourist satisfaction, tourist intention

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INTRODUCTION

Sport is a social phenomenon that has accompanied humanity throughout time. Then, as now, sport led to the release of energy, the unification of social groups, the strengthening of athletes' health, the representation of the communities they come from, the promotion of peace between human collectivities, a form of social affirmation, etc. Thus, some elements of the sports infrastructure date back to ancient times, confirming the existence of sports competitions recorded in the writings of ancient Greek and Roman historians (Zekioglu & Kalkan, 2019; Morente, 2020). They are an expression of confrontation and cooperation between human communities (Scutti & Wendt, 2016; Herman et al., 2025).

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Within sports, university football championships have become increasingly important with the emergence and affirmation of universities at a spatial level, throughout the world. University football championships are cultural-sports events that have multiple purposes, including promoting sports among students, discovering talents for professional football, strengthening social ties between students, promoting university centers (Seifried, 2025; McCannon, 2025), developing the local economy (Reynolds, 2024; Raso & Cherubini, 2024; Webb et al., 2025), etc.

As in the case of tourism, participants in sports events are in a situation where they exchange their home environment for another host environment for a variable period. Most of the time, the host destination is new, completely unknown to the participants in sports competitions, so that they can explore the host environment also from a tourist point of view. Moreover, some athletes participate in competitions accompanied by various people, thus increasing the number of participants (tourists) in each destination. Before traveling, participants in sports competitions and their companions can study the tourist offer of the host destination, thus familiarizing themselves with the representative objectives in that area (Choi & Fu, 2018; Gibson et al., 2003; Lintumäki et al., 2020).

The growing academic interest in the relationship between university sports, dual careers, the geography of sports and the impact of competitions on the image of tourist destinations is reflected in numerous recent studies (Ilies & Buhaş, 2019; Ilies & Caciara, 2022; Dehoorne et al., 2019; Ilies et al., 2015; Ilies et al., 2012; Oros & Hanțiu, 2018; Chinhanga et al., 2021; Tichaawa & Hemmonsbe, 2019, 2021). Given the links between university championships and tourism (Gholipour et al., 2020; Higham & Hinch, 2002; De Villiers, 2003), related to mobility and the change of domicile space with a host destination space, it was necessary to carry out the present study which aims to highlight the relationships between sport and tourism, in this case between the university football championship and tourism.

The novelty of the study is given by the holding of the University Football Championship, 2023 Edition, in Oradea and the possibility of consulting participants in this event through the questionnaire method regarding the tourist experience and satisfaction gained during the stay in the host destination, the consolidation of the identity of the tourist destination image and the intention to recommend (to acquaintances) and to return to the destination Oradea, Bihor County, Romania.

The research questions are: are there relationships between the university football championship and tourism?; was the image of the tourist destination strengthened following the sporting event?; what are the participants' intentions regarding recommending the destination and the possibility of revisiting it. The research hypotheses of the present study focused on the fact that within the university championship, participants and their companions also acquire tourist status, and the tourist experience generates satisfaction with the role of strengthening the identity of the tourist destination image and the intention to recommend and return to the given destination.

The intensification of relations between sport and tourism in society is a specific current reality (Gammon & Robinson, 2003; Gibson, 1998; Higham & Hinch, 2002; Łuc, 2023), a reality dictated by a series of similar aspects, defining both for sport and for tourism, including: the role of sports events and tourism in shaping and directing massive flows of populations from a sending area to a receiving one (Alshikhy et al., 2025; Aussant, 2024); economic importance (Herman et al., 2021; Rossini et al., 2025; Raso & Cherubini, 2024; Campillo-Sánchez et al., 2025; Sardi et al., 2025; Toychievna & Izzatov, 2022; Buhaş et al., 2017; Kijewski & Wendt, 2019); social importance (Balbaa et al., 2025; Tang et al., 2025); the need to diversify the tourist offer and the way to spend free time as pleasantly as possible (De Knop, 1987, 1990; Kurtzman, 1995; Sudarmanto et al., 2025; Herman et al., 2016; Herman & Blaga, 2022); the intensification of international relations (El-Dabt et al., 2025; Modzelewski, 2025; Mascarenhas et al., 2024; Herrera & Pérez-Tapia, 2024; Bógdał-Brzezińska et al., 2023); etc. From what has been presented, a wide range of studies that have targeted the relationship between sport and tourism can be observed. However, the present research is justified and has particular importance due to the novelty of the studied area (the destination of Oradea is one of the emerging destinations in Romania, known for its spa and urban-cultured tourism focused on the Art Nouveau style), the methodology used (focused on the realities of organizing a university football championship and on the experience, satisfaction and tourist intention of the participants in the sporting event) and the results obtained (which can represent a synthetic form of highlighting the links between sport and tourism, as well as the importance of sporting events in diversifying the tourist offer of a destination with positive implications at a social, economic and cultural level).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The data necessary for this study were obtained between May 18 and 21, 2023, through a questionnaire-based survey method, whose respondents were the participants in the 2023 university football championship, 141 male students, aged between 18 and 31. They were members of the football teams of eight university centers: "1 Decembrie 1918" University of Alba Iulia, West University of Timișoara, Petrol Gaze University of Ploiești, "Constantin Brâncuși" University of Târgul Jiu, "Aurel Vlaicu" University of Arad, University for Life Sciences of Iași, National University of Physical Education and Sport of Bucharest and University of Oradea.

The questionnaire used to investigate the relationship between sport and tourism was the one used (with some modifications) to establish the relationship between the quality of the Night of Museums event, the identity of the Oradea destination, tourists' satisfaction and their behavioral intentions (Elhosiny et al., 2023), being structured from 40 questions, offering the respondent the opportunity to provide answers in the Likert scale format (1 to 5, 1. very dissatisfied; 2. dissatisfied; 3. Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied; 4. Satisfied; 5. Very satisfied).

The establishment of the relationships between sport and tourism was achieved by using the multicriteria analysis method (Kiselakova et al., 2020; Patro et al., 2015; Herman et al., 2022), in which the criteria of sport (20 variables,

regarding the quality of the game, interaction, result and physical environment) and tourism (20 variables, regarding the lived experience, satisfaction, intention to recommend and intention to return) were studied (Figure 1).

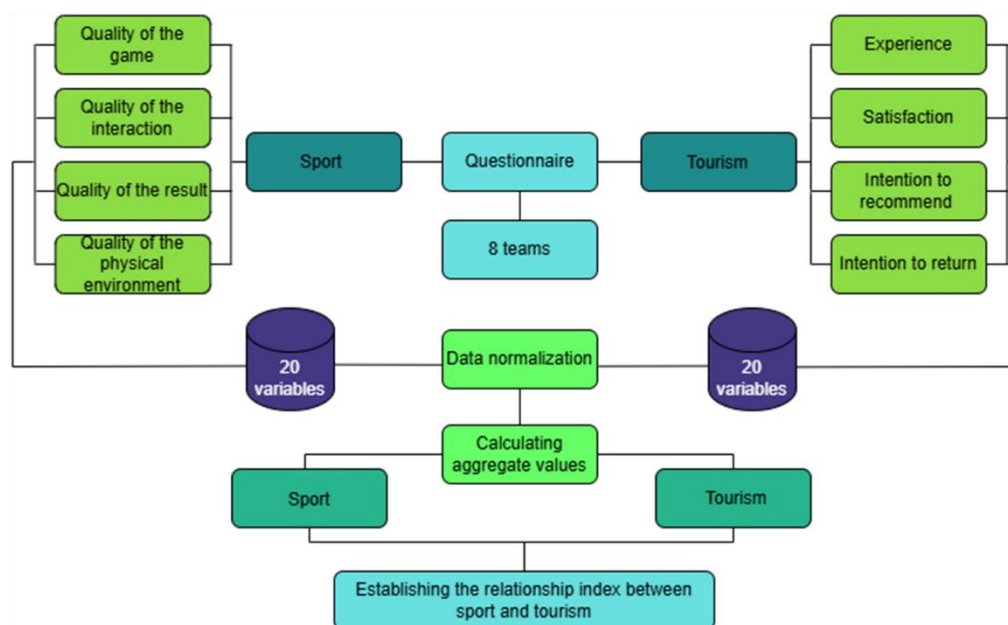


Figure 1. Conceptual model of the methodology used

To obtain aggregate values for sport and tourism, the information obtained through the questionnaire method was normalized to obtain comparable values between 0 and 1 (Boc et al., 2022; Deac et al., 2023). From a methodological point of view, the investigation of the relationships between the 2023 university football championship and tourism involved the following work stages: data normalization for each item (40 variables); calculation of aggregate values for each defining indicator for sport (quality of the game, interaction, result and physical environment) and tourism (experience, satisfaction, intention to recommend and intention to return); calculation of the aggregate index for sport and tourism; classification of respondents according to the value of the aggregate index for sport and tourism; establishment of the relationship index between sport and tourism and classification of respondents according to the relationship index.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

2023 UNIVERSITY FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

The Romanian university environment is represented, according to Government Decision no. 367/2023, with subsequent amendments and completions, by 89 higher education institutions, of which 45 are public higher education institutions, 37 are private higher education institutions (of which 3 are provisionally authorized), 7 higher education institutions with a military profile. In terms of spatial distribution, it is observed that higher education institutions are located in 22 cities, in 20 counties, which denotes an uneven distribution at the level of development regions and the territory of Romania (Figure 2).

The establishment of the National University Football Championship dates back to 2015, as part of the "All of Romania Plays Football" program, contributing to the fulfillment of Specific Objective 2.1 of the Strategic Plan for the Development of Football in Romania 2015-2020 (Strategic Plan for the Development of Football in Romania 2015-2020), "Consistent increase in the number of football practitioners" (Regulations of the National University Football Championship CNUF-Oradea, 2023). According to the statement of the organizing director of this competition, Octavian Stăncioiu, this model was taken over from the Americans who have an exceptional competitive system at the university level in sports such as football, basketball, tennis, etc.

So far, the university football championships have been won by Constantin Brâncuși University Târgu-Jiu (2015), Babeș-Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca (2016, 2018), West University Timișoara (2017, 2019, 2022, 2023) and Aurel Vlaicu University of Arad (2024).

The 2023 edition of the Romanian National University Football Championship (CNUF 2023) was organized in Oradea and had as partner organizers the School and University Sports Federation (FSSU), the University of Oradea (UO), the Politehnica University of Timisoara (UPT), the Romanian Football Federation (FRF). For the final phase of this competition, preliminary games were held in geographical areas between university centers from the same county or from nearby counties in order to reduce the costs of transportation and accommodation of the participating teams' staff. The games were played round-trip, with the possibility, with the mutual agreement of the 2 teams, for the game to be played in a single leg, establishing the venue and communicating in due time to the CNUF 2023 organizing committee.

15 university teams registered for this edition (University of Life Sciences Iași, UNEFS Bucharest, Constantin Brâncuși University Tg-Jiu, Petrol Gaze University Ploiesti, 1 Decembrie 1918 University Alba Iulia, Aurel Vlaicu University of

Arad, West University Timisoara and University of Oradea), of which the University of Oradea was directly qualified due to its status as the organizing institution of the competition (Figure 2).

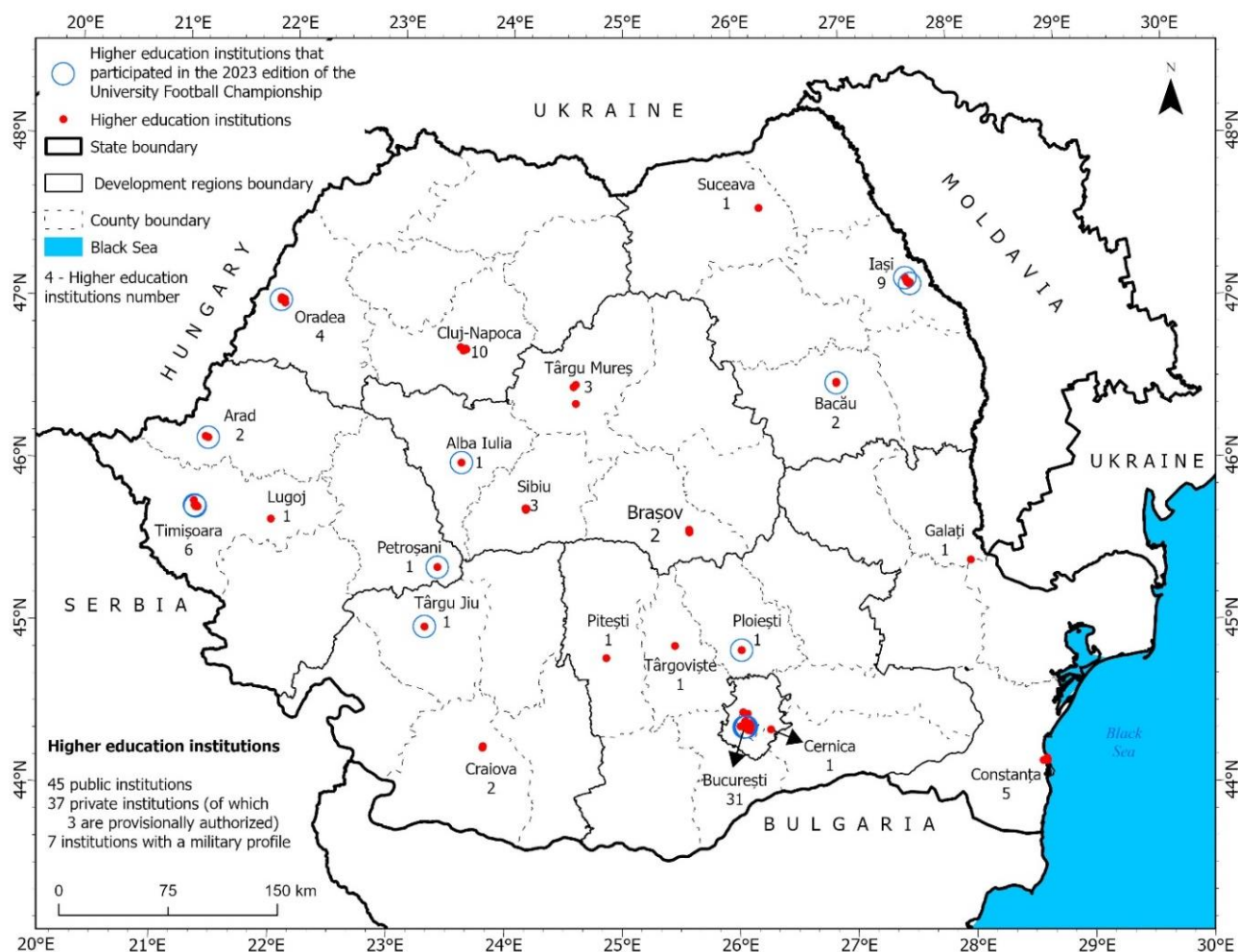


Figure 2. Spatial distribution of higher education institutions in Romania

The teams were formed by students, Romanian or foreign, in bachelor's/master's/doctoral studies at the university registered in the competition. Players may eventually be legitimized in the competitions organized by FRF/AJF/AMFB. The minimum age of the players is 17 years, and the maximum, 30 years, taking into account their age on December 31 in the final year of the competition. A person who is a student at several universities simultaneously may have the right to play at only one (Regulations of the National University Football Championship CNUF-Oradea, 2023).

Through a draw organized online on the ZOOM platform, 2 groups of 4 teams were established. The groups were divided into 2 nearby fields, the grass field of the University of Oradea and the grass field of the Oradea High School with Sports Program, which is located opposite the University. The venue of each group was also established by drawing lots. Each team had to send the squad for the final tournament 15 days before the start.

The competition took place on May 18 – 21, 2023 and ended with the following ranking: 1st place - West University of Timișoara; 2nd place - "Aurel Vlaicu" University of Arad; 3rd place - University of Oradea; 4th place - "1 Decembrie 1918" University of Alba Iulia. Therefore, at the 2023 edition of CNUF, the national university football champion was West University of Timișoara, for the 4th time since the start of this national competition. She represented Romania at the European Championship in Albania, where she achieved an honorable 6th place. It is worth noting that, after the triumph of the West University in the previous year at the same competition, CNUF2022, the team became the European champion (2022), defeating the Kiev university team in the final, representing Romania at the World University Football Championships in China, a unique performance in the history of Romanian university football.

This Final University Football Tournament had as its main objectives fair play, building friendships between students and coordinating professors, promoting the University of Oradea, promoting the city of Oradea through organized visits to the main tourist attractions but also evenings dedicated to students and professors. The opening ceremony took place in the Aula Magna of the University of Oradea where all the professors and students involved in the organization as well as the coordinating professors together with the participating teams and those who wanted to take part in the opening ceremony were invited. In organizing this final tournament, both the professors of the Faculty of Geography, Tourism and Sport of the University of Oradea and students from the geography department (2 students for

each team) were involved. The volunteer students had the task of guiding the coordinated teams to different tourist attractions in the city, facilitating or recommending different places they wanted to see, driving them to the place where they were having lunch, driving them from their accommodation to the stadium and back, etc.

Students coming from other counties were accommodated in several locations that were also determined by drawing lots, with the stipulation that all accommodation points were at a maximum of 1 km from the venue of the games. The accommodation places were distributed in the dormitories of the University of Oradea, the Cosma Partnership Technical College and the Bihor County Directorate of Sports and Youth. The costs related to the accommodation and food of the students for the 3 days of competition were covered for a number of 20 students/team by FSSU to which was added a financial contribution from the University of Oradea and the organizers. The teams that wanted to bring more than 20 players in the team paid their expenses for them from their own funds. The coordinating teachers were accommodated in guesthouses and hotels in Oradea. The meal was served at the University of Oradea canteen and at the County Directorate of Sports and Youth, Oradea. Regarding the educational part, visits to important sites in Oradea were organized, such as the Oradea Citadel, the Darvas-La Roche House, the Vulturul Negru Palace, the Luna Church, the Regina Maria Theater, the Unirii Square, etc. All the students and teacher-coaches were impressed by the architecture and beauty of the buildings, the European air of the city, the development of the infrastructure, the cleanliness and especially the people they met in Oradea. They said that they would return to visit Oradea with their families or friends. These statements were also confirmed by the results obtained from the consultation of the participants in the sporting event analyzed (the synthetic values related to sport and tourism, as well as the index of the relationship between sport and tourism).

The synthetic value of the sports index was obtained following the normalization and quantification of four qualitative criteria: C1 (Quality of the game), C2 (Quality of interaction), C3 (Quality of the result) and C4 (Quality of the physical environment), ranging between 0.1625 (respondent no. 120 in the database) and 1 (respondents no. 41, 43, 61, 75, 81, 91, 94, 111, 112, 113 and 115 in the database). In turn, each of the four criteria studied was structured from five sub-criteria (Figure 1). The synthetic sports index had an average value of 0.783894799 (very good). Based on this index, the respondents consulted were grouped into four value categories: very good (between 0.76 and 1; 68.1% of the people interviewed), good (between 0.51 and 0.75; 27.0% of the people interviewed), poor (between 0.26 and 0.50; 3.5% of the people interviewed) and very poor (between 0 and 0.25; 1.4% of the respondents) (Figure 3).

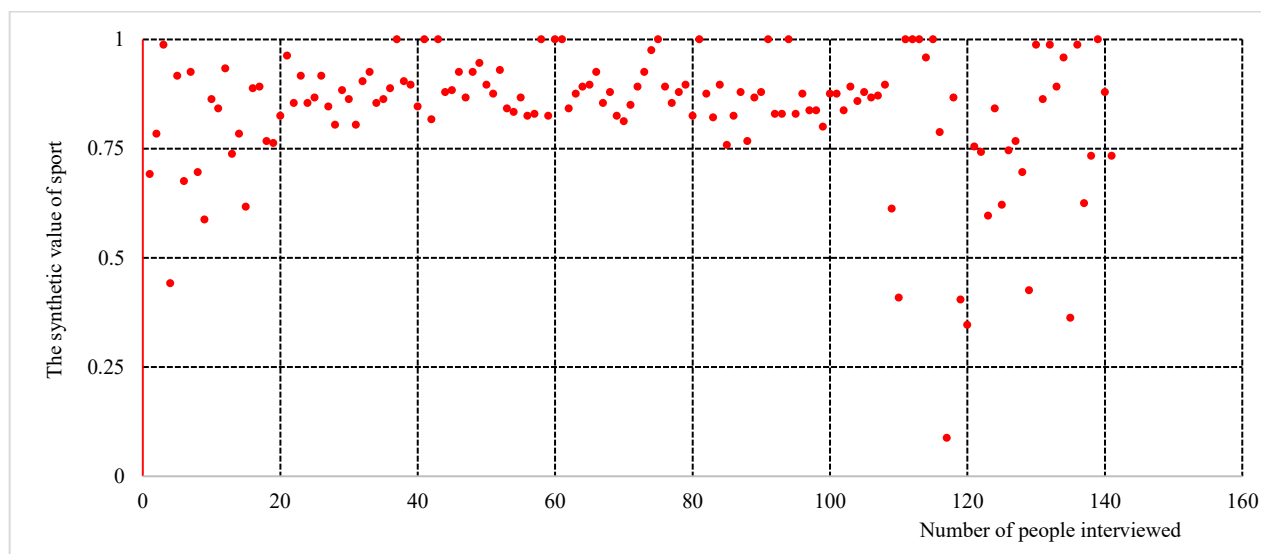


Figure 3. The synthetic value of sport

The high values of the synthetic sports index can be attributed to the exceptional conditions, the physical environment of the University Football Championship, 2023 Edition, made available to the participants by the University of Oradea, as well as the quality of the interaction, the game and the results thus obtained.

TOURISM IN ORADEA DESTINATION

The host city for the 2023 edition of the University Football Championship, Oradea is the most important tourist destination in Bihor County and one of the most important in northwestern Romania. Here, the grandeur and crowning of the centuries-old creative genius of the civilization developed in the city on the banks of the Criș Repede is very well reflected in the large number of architectural jewels, some of them classified as historical monuments, built under the influence of various styles including Byzantine, Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque, Secession and Art Nouveau. In 2020, as a result of the tourist progress recorded, Oradea received the status of a tourist resort of national interest (GD no. 377, 2020), so that in 2023, European Best Destination will award the title of "the most beautiful Art Nouveau destination in Europe" (Caciora et al., 2023). This is mainly due to the exceptional tourist resources (natural and anthropogenic) that this city possesses and the existing tourist infrastructure here.

Among the natural tourist resources, the following stand out: geothermal waters (exploited for tourist purposes within two leisure complexes: Aquapark Nymphaea Oradea and Ștrandul Ioșia Oradea), the course of the Crișul Repede River (developed through a series of facilities such as cycling and walking trails, along which potential tourists can observe the local flora and fauna) and Dealul Ciuperca (designed as a lookout point, from where one can contemplate and observe the city and its objectives, both day and night).

The antiquity and continuity of the city's habitation by a multiethnic population have led to the emergence of a particularly valuable architectural heritage. One of the most representative historical, religious and cultural monuments in the analyzed area is the Oradea Citadel (Herman et al., 2020; Botezat & Tomescu, 2016). Dating back to the 12th century (Borcea et al., 2007), the Oradea Citadel has been rebuilt and consolidated successively over time, so that today this monument represents an element of identity that can provide us with precious information about the past, present and future. Currently, the Oradea City Museum operates within the citadel. Among the architectural styles representative of the destination Oradea is the Art Nouveau style. This style was established at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, so that today, its traces can be seen everywhere, especially in the central area, in the old city center.

In recognition of the importance of the Art Nouveau style for the destination Oradea, the first Art Nouveau Museum in Romania, the Darvas-La Roche House, was opened here in 2020, on Iosif Vulcan Street, in the old city center, on the right bank of the Crișul Repede River (Caciora et al., 2023). Another identity element and an essential tourist resource for the municipality of Oradea is the Jewish identity heritage, namely the synagogues (Neolog Synagogue, Orthodox Synagogue, Poale Cedek Synagogue, Sas Chevra Synagogue, Viznitz Synagogue), Jewish palaces (Black Eagle Palace, Ullmann Palace, Moskovits Palace, Miksa Moskovits Palace, Stern Palace, Sonnenfeld Palace), Darvas House, Gendarme School, Adorjan I House, Adorjan II House, etc. (Herman et al., 2018).

Also, historical sites cannot be omitted (Oradea Fortress, "Centrul istoric Oradea" urban complex, Oradea University Complex (1912–1913); architectural: "Șirul Canonicilor" urban complex (1763–1870), Princely Palace (1618 – 1650), Oradea State Theatre (1900), Oradea City Hall (1902 – 1903), "Vulturul Negru" Palace (1907 – 1909), etc.; religious: "St. Martyrs Constantin Brâncoveanu and his sons" Church (18th century), "Maica Indurerată" Premonstratensian Monastery Church (1741), Roman Catholic Episcopal Palace (1762), "St. Spirit" Roman Catholic Church, Olosig (1905), Roman Catholic Church (1770), Roman Catholic Church - Catholic "St. Brigitta", today the Ruthenian church "St. Trinity" (1692 – 1722), Roman Catholic Chapel "Guardian Angels" (1755), Roman Catholic Cathedral "St. Mary the Great" (1752 – 1780), Orthodox Cathedral of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, today the Church with the Moon (1784–1790), etc.

The specific and technical infrastructure of the city of Oradea is a determining factor in attributing the status of a tourist resort to this destination, consisting of 275 accommodation structures, 53 public catering structures, numerous health and leisure units, road, rail and air infrastructure that ensures the facilitation of the movement of people, including for tourist purposes. The accommodation base is made up of 275 accommodation units, which incorporate a number of rooms, respectively 4028 places. Reported at county level, these represent 30.7% of the number of structures, 20.9% of the total number of rooms for accommodation, respectively 21% of the number of accommodation places. Regarding the level of comfort, the accommodation structures in Oradea are classified at one star/flower (7 units), two stars/flowers (18 units), three stars/flowers (239 units), four stars/flowers (11 units) (LSPTC, 2024).

The public catering base is structured from 53 (24.7% of the total of Bihor County) public catering units classified at two stars (18 units, 34%), three stars (22 units, 41.5%) and four stars (13 units, 24.5%) (LSPTAP, 2024). The treatment infrastructure is well represented in the area of Oradea municipality, at the level of the Continental Forum, Ramada, Doubletree By Hilton Oradea, Nevis, Elite Boutique & Spa and Maxim hotels, which have treatment bases where tourists can benefit from the following services: balneotherapy, hydrotherapy, electrotherapy, inhalations, massage, laser therapy, physiotherapy, mechanotherapy, light baths, thermotherapy, etc. The road infrastructure (European roads DN76/E79, DN1/E60, DN79/E671 and county roads, DJ797, DJ767, DJ79A, etc.), railway (highway 300, 310, 314 and 402) and air (Oradea Airport) infrastructure, as well as the particularly favorable geostrategic geographical position, at the contact between Western and Eastern European civilizations, make the tourist destination Oradea a convergence point for the main regional and even international tourist flows.

From what is briefly presented, the image of the destination emerges that the respondents participating in the University Football Championship, edition 2023, were invited to discover at their own pace, both day and night, in the company and under the guidance of students from the Faculty of Geography, Tourism and Sport of the University of Oradea.

Following the quantification of the information obtained from the participants in the analyzed sporting event according to the research methodology used, the synthetic value of tourism was determined. This was possible following the normalization and quantification of the criteria C1 (Tourist Experience), C2 (Tourist Satisfaction), C3 (Intention to Recommend) and C4 (Intention to Return), which was between 0.0875 (respondent no. 117 in the database) and 1 (respondents no. 37, 41, 43, 58, 60, 61, 75, 81, 91, 94, 111, 112, 113, 115, 139 in the database). Each of the four criteria analyzed was obtained after normalizing and quantifying a number of five sub-criteria that targeted the destination, the human community, the tourist attractions, the tourist services and the prices charged at the level of the tourist destination Oradea (Figure 1). The synthetic tourist index had an average value of 0.836406619 (very good). Thus, the interviewed people were classified based on the synthetic tourist index into four value categories: very good (between 0.76 and 1; 84.4% of the interviewed people), good (between 0.51 and 0.75; 10.6% of the interviewed people), poor (between 0.26 and 0.50; 4.3% of the interviewed people) and very poor (between 0 and 0.25; 0.6% of the respondents) (Figure 4).

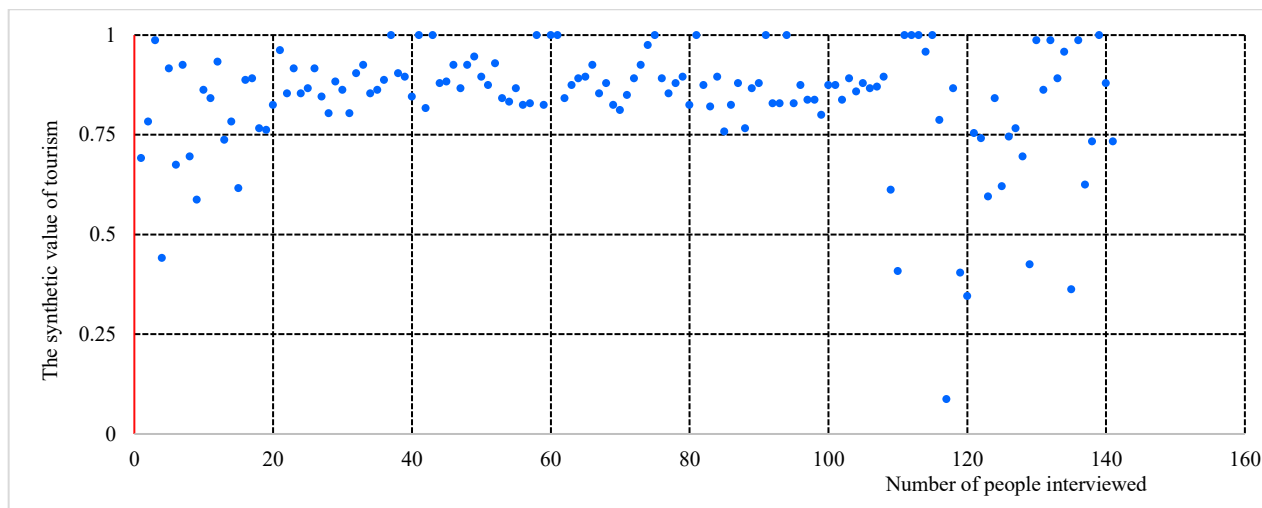


Figure 4. The synthetic value of tourism

As in the case of the synthetic sports index, the synthetic tourism index also recorded high values, which are justified by the tourist perception of the host city by a young and homogeneous target group, aged between 18 and 31, with student status. The main aspects analyzed concerned the experience, the satisfaction gained from the stay in Oradea during the analyzed event and the participants' intentions to recommend the visited destination and to return as tourists. The variables taken into account in the analysis concerned the destination, the locals, the tourist attractions, the tourist services and the prices charged.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SPORT AND TOURISM

To establish the types of relationship between sport and tourism, eight indicators (four for sport and four for tourism) were used, each with five variables, respectively 40 variables. The index of relationship between sport and tourism, thus obtained, was between $[-1; 1]$, being divided into four equal categories (between -1 and -0.5 , weak negative relationships; -0.51 and 0 , strong negative relationships; 0.1 and 0.5 , strong positive relationships; 0.51 and 1 , weak positive relationships) (Figure 5):

- (1) No interviewee belonged to the first category, that of weak negative relationships $[-1; -0.5]$, in which the values of the synthetic index related to sport are lower than those of tourism.
- (2) Regarding the second category, that of strong negative relationships $[-0.5; 0]$ included 100 interviewees (17.7%). This type of relationship is defined by values of the synthetic index of sport lower than those of the synthetic index of tourism.
- (3) Strong positive relationships $[0.1; 0.5]$, defined by values of the synthetic index of sport higher than those specific to the synthetic index of tourism, were identified in 40 interviewees (79.4%).
- (4) Weak positive relationships $[0.51; 1]$, with synthetic sports index values higher than those specific to the synthetic tourism index, were identified in person number 117 in the study database (having a relationship index value of 0.652892561983471).

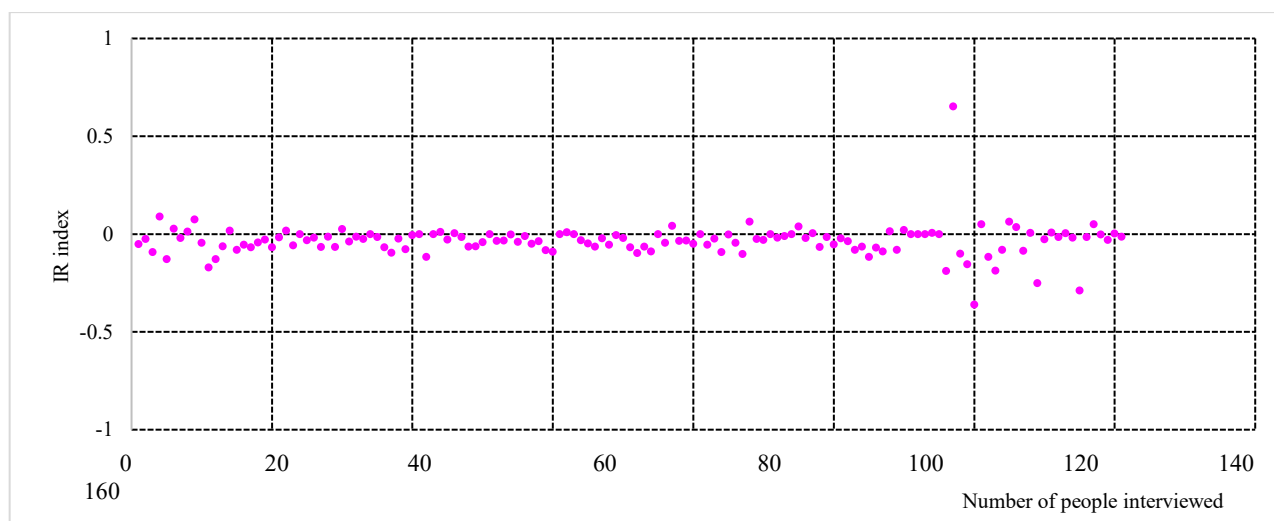


Figure 5. The synthetic value of tourism

Therefore, following this research, it emerged that strong relationships between sport and tourism were identified in the case of 140 people (99.3%), while weak relationships were found in only one person (0.7%).

Thus, the results obtained clearly highlight the role of sporting events in the diversification and development of the local tourism offer and can represent informational support for local decision-makers to optimize and streamline cultural tourism in the destination of Oradea, Romania.

The limitations of the study come from the research methodology used (from the way in which the system of indicators and related variables was built) and from the unilateral approach to the relationship between sport and tourism; in the studies conducted, only invited participants in the university football championship, edition 2023, Romania, were consulted. Thus, for the future, new studies are needed that follow the relationship between sport and tourism through the lens of all factors involved in the organization and conduct of sports and tourism events (event organizers, decision-makers involved in the development of tourism at local and national level - tourist information and promotion centers, the Bihor Destination Management Agency, the Association for the Promotion of Tourism in Oradea and Region, etc. -, tourism service providers, tourists and last but not least the local population.

CONCLUSIONS

Oradea is one of the most representative tourist destinations in Romania focused on spa and cultural tourism (Bădulescu et al., 2024; Stupariu et al., 2022; Tătar et al., 2023). This fact was favored by the existence of natural (thermomineral waters) and anthropogenic resources of great value, as well as by the existing tourist demand in this regard on the market.

Following this study, the research hypothesis was tested, establishing the existence of close relationships between sport and tourism according to the information provided by 99.3% of the respondents. It was also found that the CNUF event, the 2023 edition, contributed to strengthening the destination image of the host city Oradea, a fact confirmed by the intentions of the event participants to recommend the destination Oradea to other people (to a large extent, on a scale from 1 to 5, 80.1% of the people consulted expressed their intention), as well as by their intentions to return as tourists (to a large extent, on a scale from 1 to 5, 83% of the people consulted expressed their intention). Thus, the study confirms that sport can be complementary to tourism, contributing to the diversification of tourist activities, to the increase in the number of tourists, to local economic development and, last but not least, to the consolidation and affirmation of the identity of tourist destinations (Ito & Higham, 2020; Radicchi, 2013; Weed & Jackson, 2009).

Limitation of the study

The study presents several limitations in terms of approach and methodology. First, the research was based exclusively on the opinions of participants in the 2023 National University Football Championship, without including the perspectives of other relevant actors (organizers, local authorities, tourism service providers, residents). Second, the quantitative methodology used, although rigorous, limited the depth of interpretation of tourism experiences. Also, the short period of the event may influence the temporary nature of perceptions.

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