

## IDENTIFYING THE MAIN MOTIVATIONS TO VISIT SALT MINES: DO SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES MATTER?

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**ABSTRACT.** *Identifying the Main Motivations to Visit Salt Mines: Do Socio-Demographic Variables Matter?* Salt has been extracted from mines in Europe for thousands of years. More recently, some of these salt mines reinvented themselves as new tourism objectives attracting hundreds of thousands and even millions of visitors each year. This research aims to investigate the main reasons tourists visit a former salt mine, focusing on Turda Salt Mine, in Romania, as a case study. The study found that the main motivations for visiting the former salt mine were leisure/relaxation, learning, adventure, to try something new and to escape the daily routine whereas participation in various cultural/religious and sport events as well as socialization with like-minded people were considered the least important motivations. The results also show that some socio-demographic factors could influence motivation to visit a salt mine. The findings of this research have a number of practical implications for the marketing and management of salt mines which are outlined at the end of the paper.

**Keywords:** *tourism motivation, salt mines, Turda Salt Mine, Romania, socio-demographic variables.*

### Introduction

Salt has been an important mineral throughout the history of humanity (Sandu et al., 2009). Besides playing a crucial role in maintaining our health, it made it possible to preserve food and/or transport it over long distances. Because

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of these qualities, salt was highly valued in history and, because it was often difficult to obtain, it was expensive and used to pay for other goods or for work (for example Roman soldiers were often paid their monthly allowance in salt; hence the concept of “salarium” or salary).

There are different ways to obtain salt. Most of the salt, at least in Europe had, historically, been extracted from mines; however, more recently, some of these mines which had in the past been operational for hundreds and even thousands of years closed and/or started to serve other purposes (Kimic et al., 2019). Some salt mines have even added new activities and attractions to broaden their appeal (Mandelartz, 2018), a move that led to the commodification of salt mines (Pine & Gilmore, 2013). Some of the former salt mines were very successful in reinventing themselves as new tourism attractions (Smith, 2009; Rybár and Hvizdák, 2010; Sauri-Pujol & Lluïdes i Coit, 1995) which may represent a sustainable model for preserving, conserving and reviving geoheritage and industrial/archaeological/cultural heritage (Torabi Farsani et al., 2019; Wu et al., 2015). Some salt mines have become in the last decades important tourism attractions receiving millions of visitors each year. For example, Wieliczka Salt Mine in Southern Poland received almost 1.3 million visitors in 2014 (Mandelartz, 2018) becoming one of the most popular tourist attractions in Poland (Kruczek & Szromek, 2011).

However, in order to replicate the success of these former industrial sites, we need to understand the motivation of tourists (Wu et al., 2015). Why do tourists visit salt mines? Why are some salt mines more visited than others? What are the main factors that contribute to the overall attractiveness of salt mines? While motivation is one of the most researched concepts in tourism, very little research has been done to understand the motivation of visitors to historical salt mines.

Visits to salt mines have been conceptualized in previous studies as a form of spa or health tourism (Molnár et al., 2023; Wiewiórka et al., 2009; Plaziak & Szymańska, 2014; Schofield, 2004), geotourism (Kim et al., 2009; Hueso-Kortekaas & Iranzo-García, 2022; Wiewiórka et al., 2009; Herrera-Franco et al., 2020), mining (Torabi Farsani et al., 2019; Kazancı et al., 2019; Jelen, 2018) or industrial (Lageard & Drew, 2015; Kimic et al., 2019) heritage tourism or a combination between cultural/heritage and geotourism (Hueso-Kortekaas & Iranzo-García, E., 2022; Kimic et al., 2019).

Attracting more visitors to salt mines is important for the development of alternative tourism (Egresi, 2016). However, it is essential to keep in mind that tourists may be visiting salt mines for a variety of reasons. For example, if we consider the visitation of salt mines to be a form of heritage tourism, there are three main reasons for visiting them: for the heritage experience, for the

learning experience and for the recreational experience (Poria et al., 2004). Vargas-Sanchez et al. (2013) also concluded that tourists generally visit industrial sites driven by a desire for learning, but sometimes learning is combined with entertainment or with an emotional motivation. In the absence of a specific study, it is very difficult to identify the exact reasons people are traveling to any specific location.

This research aims to investigate the main reasons tourists visit a former salt mine that is open for tourism. Are tourists motivated by the search for knowledge? Do they visit to take advantage of the curative properties of the old salt mine (for health and medical tourism)? Do they mainly come for the cultural events or to engage in different sports? Is the need for socialization an important reason for visiting the former mine? If we assume that salt mines are visited for more than one reason, can we identify differences in motivation between different socio-demographic segments?

Knowledge of tourist motivation is very important for tourism destination management and marketing (Hatano et al., 2021; Pesonen and Komppula 2010) because knowing why people travel helps us understand their needs and wants at the destination (Crompton & McKay, 1997; Sancho Esper & Álvarez Rateike, 2010). By knowing what motivates tourists to travel to their destination, tourism destination marketers and planners are able to offer them exactly what they need and want (Murphy et al., 2000), thus, making the destination more attractive and more competitive (Oh et al., 1995). This will, also, have a positive impact on tourists' satisfaction (Caber & Albayrak, 2016) and subsequently on their decision to re-visit and/or to recommend the destination to others (Albayrak & Caber, 2018; Crompton & McKay, 1997; Hosany et al., 2019; Kim & Prideaux, 2005). Moreover, by identifying that different tourists visit salt mines for different reasons our research could make an important contribution to the management and marketing of these salt mines as different groups of consumers could be approached differently and offered different services tailored specifically for their needs and wants (Poria et al., 2004).

Romania boasts a number of salt mines that can be visited by tourists; some of these (Turda, Slănic Prahova, Ocnele Mari, Praid, Cacica) have been modernized after 1990 (Kimic et al., 2019). These salt mines are popular with Romanian and foreign visitors for their specific microclimate and spa facilities that make them ideal for halotherapy (Sandu et al., 2009; Stănciulescu & Molnar, 2016) and for their cultural, religious and recreational facilities.

This research will focus on the former salt mine of Turda as a case study. Turda Salt Mine is situated about 6 km from Turda, a small city situated in Northern Transylvania, Romania. Salt had been extracted at Turda for 2000 years since the Roman occupation of Dacia. First mentioned in official documents

in the 11<sup>th</sup> century<sup>3</sup>, it operated as a salt mine until 1932, after which the Franz Joseph Gallery was used to store ammunition (during the war) and cheese (after 1950<sup>4</sup>). In 1992 the mine was open for tourism<sup>5</sup> but the number of visitors was low. In 2008, the former mine was modernized using European Union funds of almost six million euro<sup>6</sup> and reopened in 2010<sup>7</sup>. After this year, the number of visitors increased dramatically. In 2023, it was visited by more than 601 thousand people, 12% more than in 2022. Of these 15% came from abroad<sup>8</sup>.

## Literature Review

### *Motivation to travel*

Motivation is a concept in psychology that explains a person's behavior (Iso-Ahola, 1980). It refers to the "engine" that propels a person to act in a certain way in order to fulfil a need (Crompton & McKay, 1997). An individual's need creates a state of tension in the body and mind and motivation is what stimulates an attitude or behavior that works towards reducing that state of tension and achieving the satisfaction desired (Kim & Ritchie, 2012).

In tourism studies, motivation has been a central focus for research for several decades (Huang, 2010). According to Dann (1981, p.205) tourism motivation is "a meaningful state of mind which adequately disposes an actor or group of actors to travel, and which is subsequently interpretable by others as a valid explanation for such a decision."

There are two major theories that are trying to explain why people travel and why they select certain destinations:

1. The push and pull theory, elaborated by Graham M.S. Dann (1977; 1981), explained that people are motivated to travel by their emotional needs which act as push factors and select their destination based on what these have to offer (which constitute the pull factors). This theory was strengthened by the work of Crompton (1979) who identified nine motivations to travel: getting away from the routine environment and escaping from monotonous everyday life, exploration, and evaluation of self, relaxation, prestige, nostalgia, developing

<sup>3</sup> <https://historia.ro/sectiune/travel/turda-1000-de-ani-de-bunastare-provenita-din-575390.html>

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.welcometoromania.eu/Turda/Turda\\_Salina\\_Turda\\_e.htm](https://www.welcometoromania.eu/Turda/Turda_Salina_Turda_e.htm)

<sup>5</sup> <https://gazetadecluj.ro/salina-turda-spectacol-pe-bani-europeni/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.mediafax.ro/economic/nou-record-de-turisti-la-salina-turda-anul-trecut-numarul-s-a-apropiat-de-populatia-clujului-17811797>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.europafm.ro/cum-ii-cucereste-salina-turda-pe-vizitatori-galerie-foto/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://turdanews.net/peste-601-000-de-turisti-au-vizitat-salina-turda-in-2023/#:~:text=Salina%20Turda%20a%20fost%20vizitat%C4%83,compania%20turdean%C4%83%20pentru%20Ziarul%20F%C4%83clia.>

kinship relationships, facilitating social interaction, novelty and education. A few years later, Yuan & McDonald (1990) identified five push factors out of 29 motivational items, namely: escape, novelty, enhancement of kinship relationships, prestige, and relaxation/hobbies. Of these the most important were found to be novelty and escape. Push factors are of emotional, internal or socio-psychological nature whereas pull factors are considered to be rather external or situational to the tourist (Yoon & Uysal, 2005). In general, it is believed that pull factors only matter after emotional needs are already present and manifest themselves (Yoon & Uysal, 2005). Pull factors are those that are specific to a certain destination (Wu & Pearce, 2014), such as a pleasant climate, white sandy beaches, hospitable people, good food, attractive culture and traditions, beautiful scenery, shopping, recreation, and entertainment facilities (Dann, 1977, 1981). Destination attributes can be improved and destination image can be enhanced through marketing and promotion in order to make it more attractive (Yoon & Uysal, 2005).

2. The seeking and escaping theory (Iso-Ahola, 1990) was derived from an earlier theory that tried to explain people's pursuit for leisure activities (Iso-Ahola, 1980) and argued that people decide to travel outside their place of residence for two main reasons: to escape their stressful or boring lives and to seek relaxation or personal rewards or a combination of the two. For example, Verbeke & Rekon (1996) identified "escape from the daily routine" as one of the main reasons to visit museums. It may be worth mentioning here that even the most exciting living environment could sometimes become mundane and boring to those living there. Traveling to places with a different physical and social environment could be a good way to temporarily escape this mundane environment (Crompton, 1979).

Later, Park et al. (2008, p. 162) have distinguished two major categories of travel motivators: extrinsic (which emerge outside the person) and intrinsic (which are formed inside the person). The latter is more complex and could be further subdivided into physical, mental (cognitive, affective and conative) and spiritual. Thus, a person has two major categories of needs that motivate them to travel. One is manifested at personal level (for example, the need for cultural enrichment which is a psychological need) and the other one is visible at the interpersonal level (the need for socialization) (Iso-Ahola, 1990).

Literature on motivation to visit a mine is very scarce. To our knowledge, the study by Torabi Farsani et al. (2019) may, in fact, be the only one. Doing research in Iran, they found that the main motivations for visiting a mine are (Torabi Farsani et al., 2019: 686):

- Education in Earth and geosciences
- Discovering new tourist destinations and curiosity

- Escape from repetitive daily activities
- Being in a natural and calm environment
- Being with my friends
- Taking advantage of earth energy and geo-therapy
- Being with others
- Mental relaxation

The authors also discovered that tourists visit mines for new experiences, to stay in specific accommodations, to visit eco-museums and to participate in sports, such as underground hiking or climbing (Torabi Farsani et al., 2019).

### ***Demographic factors and travel motivations***

Previous studies have found that different tourist groups have different motivation attributes (Hall et al., 2016). Indeed, demographic characteristics could influence participation in different tourism activities and destination choices (Moscardo et al., 1996; Collin & Tisdell, 2002, Fan et al., 2015; Aziz et al., 2018). For example, a number of studies have revealed that gender could be an important factor when studying tourism motivation (Chen et al., 2018; Kaufman & Upchurch, 2007; Meng & Uysal, 2008; Vespestad & Mehmetoglu, 2015; Xie et al., 2008). Thus, it has been found that men generally travel more and for longer distances than women (Collin & Tisdell, 2002). Men also exhibit a different travel behavior and have different motivations to travel than women. Previous studies have found that women may be more strongly motivated to travel than men (Andreu et al., 2005). While men are more likely to be motivated by adventure, women are more interested in shopping and cultural activities as well as learning about places and cultures (Xie et al., 2008; McGehee et al., 2007; Vespestad & Mehmetoglu, 2015). Also, whereas men prefer physical activities and having fun while traveling, women are more likely to travel for mental relaxation, escape, socialization and family togetherness (Meng et al., 2008; Meng & Uysal, 2008; Andreu et al., 2005).

Other studies have shown that age may be an important discriminant in tourism motivation studies (Ma et al., 2018; Irimiás et al., 2016; Park & Mok, 1996; Mohsin, 2008; Aziz et al., 2018). Younger travelers are more interested in physically demanding activities (Spence, 2002) whereas older tourists are more likely to look for more relaxing activities and nature exploration (Ma et al., 2018). A study by Jönsson & Devonish. (2008) revealed that older people are more novelty-driven in their travels, although this is contradicted by Luo & Deng (2008). Senior travelers are also more motivated to travel by a desire to learn than younger tourists (Irimiás et al., 2016).

Education level was also found in some studies to influence travel motivation (Chen et al., 2018; Ma et al., 2018; Mohsin, 2008). Tourists with higher education level were generally found to travel farther from home (Zimmer et al., 1995) and to seek relaxation, knowledge and novelty (Sangpikul, 2008).

Finally, a number of studies have highlighted the importance of nationality and place of residence in tourism motivation studies (Hatano et al., 2021; Kim & Prideaux, 2005; Ma et al., 2018; Jönsson & Devonish, 2008; Pizam & Sussman, 1995; Allaberganov & Preko, 2022; Egresi, 2017). For example, a study by Kozak (2002) has demonstrated that motivation to travel could vary across different nationalities and Ma et al. (2018) have shown that there are clear differences between Chinese and Western tourists. Similarly, Egresi & Kara (2014) have reported that there may be differences in motivation to travel even based on the distance traveled, meaning that tourists who traveled longer distances may have different motives to visit an objective than tourists who traveled a shorter distance.

## **Methodology**

### ***Data collection***

The main instrument to collect data for this study was a self-administered questionnaire initially distributed to visitors as they exited the mine in April 2023. A number of 89 usable questionnaires were collected this way. Subsequently, due to the low number of responses in the initial stage, the questionnaire was also distributed online, on different social media platforms. This way, 78 responses were received to a total of 167.

The questionnaire was divided into four parts. In the first section, we asked questions about our respondents' travel behavior when visiting the Turda Salt Mine (whether or not they have visited the former mine in the past, how often, for how long, with whom and how much they usually spend during each visit). The second part included nine statements about their motivation to visit the salt mine. Participants were asked to evaluate these statements on a Lickert scale from 1 to 5, with 1 meaning total disagreement and 5 total agreement. Part three of the questionnaire attempted to measure our respondents' level of satisfaction with their experience visiting the former mine. The findings of this part will be discussed in another paper. Finally, in the last section, we collected socio-demographic data about the participants: gender, age, level of education, occupation and place and country of residence.

### ***Data processing***

We employed SPSS 26 to process the data resulting from the questionnaires collected. We used descriptive statistical methods (frequencies, percentage of total, median and IQR) to understand the socio-demographic make-up of our sample and their visiting behavior, as well as evaluate participants' answers to our statements. We, then, used inferential statistics (Mann-Whitney U Test and Kruskal-Wallis H Test) to test whether or not there were any statistically significant differences between groups based on socio-demographic characteristics.

### **Analysis of findings and discussion**

#### ***Socio-demographic characteristics of our respondents***

Most of our respondents were female, under 40 years of age, residing in Romania, and employees or students, with less than higher education (table 1). Most have visited the Turda salt mine in the past (generally they visit the salt mine once every few years) and have also visited other salt mines in Romania. They prefer to visit the mine with their family, for 2-4 hours each time. Most visitors spend under 100 lei in the mine (approximately 20 euro) (table 2).

**Table 1.** Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

<b>Socio-demographic characteristic</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>% from total</b>	<b>Socio-demographic characteristic</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>% from total</b>
<b><i>Gender</i> (n=166)</b>			<b><i>Education</i> (n=167)</b>		
Male	69	41,6	High School or less	63	37,7
Female	97	58,4	Associate degree and other (less than higher education)	31	18,6
<b><i>Age group</i> (n=167)</b>			<b><i>Occupation</i> (n=167)</b>		
18 - 23 years	67	40,1	Undergraduate studies	60	35,9
24 - 39 years	47	28,1	Postgraduate studies	13	7,8
40 -52 years	33	19,8	Employee	72	43,1
53+ years	20	12,0	Student	57	34,1
<b><i>Residence</i> (n=167)</b>			Entrepreneur	13	7,8
Cluj County	26	15,6	Retiree	10	6,0
Romania (excl. Cluj)	112	67,1	Other	15	9,0
Abroad	29	17,4			



**Table 2.** Traveling characteristics of respondents

Travel characteristics	Freq.	% from total	Travel characteristics	Freq.	% from total
<b><i>Have you visited other salt mines in Romania? (n=167)</i></b>			<b><i>How much money did (do) you spend in the mine? (n=163)</i></b>		
Yes	104	62,3	Under 50 lei	43	26,5
No	63	37,7	50 – 100 lei	69	42,3
<b><i>Have you visited the salt mine in Turda in the past? (n=167)</i></b>			Over 100 lei	51	31,3
Yes	110	65,9	<b><i>On average, how much time do (did) you spend in the mine? (n=161)</i></b>		
No	57	34,1	Under 2 hours	44	27,3
<b><i>If you answered yes, how many times do you visit the mine in a year? (n=108)</i></b>			2-4 hours	102	63,4
Once every few years	73	67,6	Over 4 hours	15	9,3
1 – 3 times a year	27	25,0	<b><i>Who do you prefer to visit the mine with?</i></b>		
3 – 5 times a year	4	3,7	With family	88	54,3
More than 5 times a year	4	3,7	With friends	40	24,7
			With my partner	26	16,0
			Alone	8	4,9

### ***Motivation of tourists visiting the Turda Salt Mine***

Our study shows that tourists visit this salt mine mainly for leisure/relaxation (median= 5) but also for knowledge, adventure, to try something new and to escape the daily routine (median= 4). The least important motivations were to participate in various cultural or religious events or in various sports that take place in the mine (for each of these motivations the median was 1) as well as to socialize with like-minded people (median= 2) (table 3).

**Table 3.** Motivation of tourists visiting the Turda Salt Mine

Tourists' motivation	Totally disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Not sure (%)	Agree (%)	Totally agree (%)	Median	IQR
<b><i>Leisure/relaxation (n=165)</i></b>	1.8	3.6	12.7	22,4	59.4	5.00	1.00
<b><i>Medical treatment (this includes accompanying persons) (n=165)</i></b>	32.1	12.7	20.6	8,5	26.1	3.00	3.00

Tourists' motivation	Totally disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Not sure (%)	Agree (%)	Totally agree (%)	Median	IQR
<i>Knowledge (to learn something new)</i> (n=164)	5.5	9.1	29.3	30,5	25.6	4.00	1.00
<i>Adventure</i> (n=162)	11.1	9.9	26.5	29,6	22.8	4.00	1.00
<i>I wanted to try something new</i> (n=162)	8.6	9.9	21.6	24,7	34.6	4.00	2.00
<i>To escape the daily routine</i> (n=162)	8.00	8.6	23.5	26,5	32.7	4.00	2.00
<i>To participate in various cultural or religious events that take place in the salt mine</i> (n=163)	53.4	14.7	14.7	8,0	9.2	1.00	2.00
<i>To participate in various sports events that take place in the salt mine</i> (n=163)	53.4	19.0	12.9	5,5	9.2	1.00	2.00
<i>To socialize with people like me</i> (n=163)	40.5	16.6	16.0	11,7	15.3	2.00	3.00

What is somewhat surprising in our findings is that there are so few people who visit the former salt mine to participate in various cultural/religious or sporting events although these types of events are not lacking. These events are planned to enhance the experience of the visitor, yet our results show that they do not really matter. This finding confirms the results of a report by del Chiappa & Napolitano (2019) that most people visiting salinas in Italy do not really care about events. Another surprise is that our survey participants were ambiguous (median 3) about visiting the salt mine for medical treatment, although the beneficial effects of speleotherapy have been scientifically documented (Oleksa et al., 2023). Other studies have also noted this issue. For example, Stănculescu & Molnár (2017) have reported that the potential for speleotherapy in Romania is far from being met. There may be several explanations for this failure. Among these, Çilginoğlu & Yazgan (2023) mention the lack of promotion in the social media and the shortage of scientific reports on the effectiveness of salt therapy to human health. Less surprising was to find out that socialization with like-minded people was not an important motive to visit the salt mine. This finding is not difficult to understand as the environment in such a salt mine is not really conducive to socialization.

### ***Differences in motivation among socio-demographic groups***

We found no statistically significant differences in motivation between men and women (table 4) which is consistent with findings of other studies that gender is not an important discriminant in terms of motivation to travel or to visit certain destinations or tourist objectives (Aziz et al., 2018; Allaberganov & Preko, 2022).

**Table 4.** Differences in motivation based on gender

<b>Motivation (The reason(s) I am visiting the salt mine is)</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean ranks</b>	<b>Test statistics</b>	<b>p-value</b>
<b><i>For leisure/relaxation</i></b>	Male	69	77.84	U= 3599.0	.225
	Female	95	85.88	Z= 1.213	
<b><i>Medical treatment (this includes accompanying persons)</i></b>	Male	68	76.85	U= 3648.0	.186
	Female	96	86.50	Z= 1.323	
<b><i>Knowledge (to learn something new)</i></b>	Male	69	84.34	U= 3081.5	.574
	Female	94	80.28	Z= -.563	
<b><i>Adventure</i></b>	Male	68	79.34	U= 3275.0	.690
	Female	93	82.22	Z= .399	
<b><i>I wanted to try something new</i></b>	Male	67	85.65	U= 2837.5	.269
	Female	94	77.69	Z= -1.106	
<b><i>To escape the daily routine</i></b>	Male	69	76.86	U= 3459.5	.312
	Female	92	84.10	Z= 1.010	
<b><i>To participate in various cultural or religious events that take place in the salt mine.</i></b>	Male	68	86.11	U= 2882.5	.245
	Female	94	78.16	Z= -1.163	
<b><i>To participate in various sports events that take place in the salt mine</i></b>	Male	68	86.46	U= 2858.5	.210
	Female	94	77.91	Z= -1.253	
<b><i>To socialize with people like me</i></b>	Male	68	85.73	U= 2908.0	.309
	Female	94	78.44	Z= -1.018	

\* Significant at 95% confidence level

Our study, however, contradicts the findings of a research by Allaberganov & Preko (2022) which concluded that age is not important in differentiating among travel motives. In terms of age groups, we found that tourists aged between 24 and 52 years are more likely to visit the mine to learn something new than both younger (18-23 years) and older (53+ years) tourists ( $\chi^2= 8.699$ ;  $p= .032$ ) (table 5). This was somewhat surprising, especially in light of previous research that argued that older tourists tend to be more interested in travelling for the sake of learning (see, for example, Irimiás et al., 2016). Also, studies by

Jang & Wu (2006), Fleischer & Pizam (2002) and Horneman et al. (2002) have highlighted that knowledge-seeking is an important motivation for senior tourists. However, even among senior travelers, a number of studies (Cleaver Sellick, 2004; Otoo et al., 2020a; b) have determined that those in the younger segment (55-59 years) are more likely than older seniors to travel for learning. This means that the most interested in learning while travelling are not necessarily the oldest tourists. In the same line, we found that tourists younger than 40 were more likely to visit the salt mine for adventure than tourists 40 years of age or older ( $\chi^2= 8.998$ ;  $p= .029$ ). On the other hand, tourists older than 52 are more likely to be motivated by a desire to socialize than younger tourists ( $\chi^2= 9.599$ ;  $p= .022$ ) (table 5). These findings were expected and need no further commenting.

**Table 5.** Differences in motivation based on age

Motivation (The reason(s) I am visiting the salt mine is)	Mean ranks for age groups				Test stat. (DoF= 3)	p value	Pairwise comp **
	18-23 yrs (N)	24-39 yrs (N)	40-52 yrs (N)	53+ yrs (N)			
<i>For leisure/relaxation</i>	84.80 (67)	72.17 (45)	86.35 (33)	95.83 (20)	5.163	.160	
<i>Medical treatment (this includes accompanying persons)</i>	80.98 (67)	77.08 (45)	89.50 (33)	92.38 (20)	2.338	.505	
<i>Knowledge (to learn something new)</i>	73.36 (67)	92.63 (46)	94.30 (32)	69.61 (19)	8.699	<b>.034*</b>	<b>none</b>
<i>Adventure</i>	88.56 (67)	87.28 (45)	72.95 (31)	56.87 (19)	8.998	<b>.029*</b>	53+/18-23 (p= <b>.044</b> )
<i>I wanted to try something new</i>	76.48 (67)	90.95 (44)	81.63 (31)	77.33 (20)	2.912	.405	
<i>To escape the daily routine</i>	84.59 (66)	72.18 (44)	83.88 (32)	88.00 (20)	2.670	.445	
<i>To participate in various cultural or religious events that take place in the salt mine.</i>	80.65 (67)	84.41 (45)	68.61 (31)	101.85 (20)	7.383	.061	
<i>To participate in various sports events that take place in the salt mine</i>	87.60 (67)	82.98 (45)	71.78 (32)	77.16 (19)	3.176	.365	
<i>To socialize with people like me</i>	78.40 (67)	76.78 (45)	78.98 (32)	112.16 (19)	9.599	<b>.022*</b>	14-39/53+ (p= <b>.026</b> ) 18-23/53+ (p= <b>.025</b> )

\* Significant at 95% confidence level

\*\* Dunn's (1964) procedure with a Bonferroni correction

Our study has also shown that those with a postgraduate degree are more likely to visit the salt mine to seek medical treatment than visitors with lesser education ( $\chi^2=8.216$ ;  $p= .042$ ) (table 6). This may be because more educated visitors are more knowledgeable of the medical benefits of salt than less educated visitors.

**Table 6.** Differences in motivation based on education

Motivation (The reason(s) I am visiting the salt mine is)	Mean ranks for education groups				Test stat. (DoF= 3)	p value
	HS or less (N)	Other non- HE ed. (N)	Undergrad. (N)	Postgrad. (N)		
<i>For leisure/relaxation (n= 165)</i>	85.52 (61)	75.79 (31)	86.53 (60)	72.08 (13)	2.423	.489
<i>Medical treatment (this includes accompanying persons) (N=165)</i>	77.07 (63)	72.90 (30)	88.13 (59)	111.77 (13)	8.216	<b>.042*</b>
<i>Knowledge (to learn something new) (N= 164)</i>	76.89 (62)	82.42 (30)	91.51 (59)	68.58 (13)	4.422	.219
<i>Adventure (N=162)</i>	77.90 (62)	77.32 (31)	91.49 (57)	63.42 (12)	5.291	.152
<i>I wanted to try something new (N= 162)</i>	84.59 (61)	77.18 (31)	86.22 (58)	54.13 (12)	5.583	.134
<i>To escape the daily routine (N= 162)</i>	89.40 (61)	75.68 (31)	80.87 (57)	61.08 (13)	5.023	.170
<i>To participate in various cultural or religious events that take place in the salt mine (N= 163)</i>	86.27 (62)	75.29 (31)	83.27 (58)	71.13 (12)	2.159	.540
<i>To participate in various sports events that take place in the salt mine (N= 163)</i>	91.73 (62)	73.06 (31)	76.18 (57)	82.46 (13)	5.505	.138
<i>To socialize with people like me (N= 163)</i>	82.19 (62)	91.73 (31)	80.14 (57)	66.08 (13)	3.137	.371

\* Significant at 95% confidence level; no pairwise comparison was found to be statistically significant

Another finding of our study is that foreign tourists are the least likely to visit the salt mine for medical treatment ( $\chi^2= 14.769$ ;  $p= .001$ ). They are also the least likely to participate in various cultural/ religious events ( $\chi^2= 13.291$ ;  $p=.001$ ) and were less motivated than local people to participate in sport events ( $\chi^2= 13.088$ ;  $p= .001$ ). On the other hand, local visitors were more likely to visit the salt mine motivated by a desire to socialize than visitors arriving from other

parts of Romania or from abroad ( $\chi^2= 8.058$ ;  $p= .018$ ) (table 7). These findings are logical because it is very unlikely to travel long distance to participate in cultural/religious or sport events that are not unique and could be found closer to home. Similarly, tourists originating from other Romanian counties or from abroad have opportunities to socialize in places much closer to home and do not need to travel all the way to the Turda salt mine to satisfy their needs. Finally, there could be several explanations as of why very few foreign tourists visit the former salt mine for speleotherapy or other salt-related medical treatment. Firstly, as mentioned earlier, those who administer the salt mine may do a very poor job in advertising the place as a medical tourism objective. Secondly, there may be salt mines that are better known for their therapeutic effects and are closer to the foreign visitors' homes. These findings support the results of previous research (Egresi & Kara, 2014) which demonstrated the tourists coming from far away may have different reasons to visit a destination or a tourist objective than tourists originating from the nearby area.

**Table 7.** Differences in tourists' motivation based on their place of residence

Motivation (The reason(s) I am visiting the salt mine is)	Mean ranks for places of residence			Test stat. (DoF=2)	p value	Pairwise comparisons **
	Cluj County (N)	Romania (N)	Abroad (N)			
<i>For leisure/ relaxation (n= 165)</i>	90.58 (26)	83.20 (110)	75.45 (29)	1.776	.411	
<i>Medical treatment (this includes accompanying persons) (N=165)</i>	92.54 (26)	88.45 (111)	52.55 (28)	14.769	<b>.001*</b>	Abroad/Rom ( $p= .001^*$ ) Abroad/Cluj ( $p= .005^*$ )
<i>Knowledge (to learn something new) (N= 164)</i>	76.35 (24)	86.40 (111)	72.66 (29)	2.581	.275	
<i>Adventure (N=162)</i>	74.44 (24)	83.64 (109)	79.29 (29)	.888	.642	
<i>I wanted to try something new (N= 162)</i>	74.88 (24)	80.47 (110)	91.23 (28)	1.864	.394	
<i>To escape the daily routine (N= 162)</i>	91.34 (25)	83.66 (108)	64.97 (29)	5.291	.071	
<i>To participate in various cultural or religious events that take place in the salt mine (N= 163)</i>	107.90 (24)	81.02 (110)	64.28 (29)	13.521	<b>.001*</b>	Abroad/Rom ( $p= .001^*$ ) Abroad/Cluj ( $p= .001^*$ )
<i>To participate in various sports events that take place in the salt mine (N= 163)</i>	104.40 (25)	82.25 (109)	61.76 (29)	13.088	<b>.001*</b>	Abroad/Cluj ( $p= .001^*$ )

Motivation (The reason(s) I am visiting the salt mine is)	Mean ranks for places of residence			Test stat. (DoF=2)	p value	Pairwise comparisons **
	Cluj County (N)	Romania (N)	Abroad (N)			
<i>To socialize with people like me (N= 163)</i>	105.40 (25)	78.57 (109)	74.71 (29)	8.058	<b>.018*</b>	Rom/Cluj (p= .023*) Abroad/Cluj (p= .039*)

\* Significant at 95% confidence level

\*\* Dunn's (1964) procedure with a Bonferroni correction

## Conclusion and recommendations

The purpose of this research was two-fold:

1. To identify the main reasons tourists visit a (former) salt mine;
2. To test whether or not there are statistically significant differences in motivation between various socio-demographic segments.

Based on this research we can conclude that most people visit salt mines for leisure/relaxation, knowledge, adventure, to try something new and to escape the daily routine. Our findings, also, show that some socio-demographic factors (age, place of residence, and, less importantly, education level) could influence motivation to visit a salt mine.

The main limitation of this study is the relatively low number of questionnaires collected. Also, fieldwork was done during a short period of time when the first author found a gap in her busy schedule. There was no attempt to stretch the distribution of questionnaires over multiple weeks or even months (during weekdays, weekends, school holidays, mornings, afternoons, etc.) to get a more representative sample of participants. Thus, the results of this study may have been influenced by abnormal events that took place during the few days when the fieldwork was conducted (e.g. school trips). Also, we do not claim that our sample is representative for the population that visits the salt mine. It is not and it could not be since the profile of this population is not known. However, in spite of these limitations, this study is not without merits. To our knowledge, this is the first research that attempted to identify the main motivations to visit a salt mine. For a pioneering study, the results are encouraging. However, more research is needed to better understand what motivates people to visit a salt mine.

The results of this study have a number of practical implications for the marketing and management of salt mines. Firstly, we know that motivation to visit the salt mine may differ based on age, level of education and place of residence. This means that marketing campaigns need to be more targeted. For

example, it is clear that foreigners are not interested in Turda Salt Mine as a venue for events; there is no need to put too much emphasis on these opportunities when advertising the mine to them. On the other hand, these events are attractive to potential visitors living in the proximity of the mine (mainly in Cluj County) so more effort should be put into advertising these events to them.

Secondly, our findings show that Turda Salt Mine is not sufficiently known for its medical and spa tourism potential. This should be better advertised, especially abroad. As mentioned earlier in this paper, it may be difficult to attract people from Western Europe for this purpose as they can access places to practice speleotherapy or halotherapy that are closer to home. Therefore, we need more studies to help us understand what can Turda Salt Mine offer to medical tourists that other places cannot.

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