

## WILLINGNESS TO PAY FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN WESTERN ROMANIA: A CONTINGENT VALUATION ANALYSIS

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**Abstract.** *The main scope of this research paper is to measure residents' willingness to pay towards sustainable tourist accommodations in the West development region. As the method chosen for the survey is contingent valuation, we designed and described three fictional tourist accommodations each exhibiting characteristics from sustainable tourism typologies. The three typologies studied are: high-tech sustainability (using innovative technology such as heat pumps and solar panels for heating), agritourism (in our case a more budget oriented product, with traditional motifs and technology) and enotourism (marketable as a more desirable, deluxe take on sustainable tourism). Besides measuring willingness to pay in itself, the study also deals with the correlation between this variable and net income; interest in ecology and sustainability; age; and education.*

**Key words:** *sustainable tourism, sustainability, willingness to pay, contingent valuation, innovation in tourism*

### INTRODUCTION

Sustainability is a heavily debated topic, both in the scientific literature and in public discourse. [8] This research article examines sustainable tourism from a demand perspective, by determining the maximum price accepted by possible guests (willingness to pay) for several types of accommodation units, each representing a different way to view sustainability, with differences in aesthetic and functional characteristics.

Sustainable tourism can be understood as the type of tourism that take into consideration and reduce the negative effects it generates on the environment, society and economy. [10] Therefore, economic, ecological, social and ethical considerations are taken into account, from both a short-term approach (for example, the needs of the tourists) and a long-term approach (further opportunities for development). From a social and cultural standpoint, the maintenance of heritage integrity is cardinal for sustainable tourism, as authenticity can be seen as a strength. [6]

On the other hand, heritage development can also be viewed as part of a cycle. In this sense and in the context of globalization, cultural heritage undergoes successive steps: territorialization, deterritorialization and reterritorialization [14], as they are understood in anthropology (certain cultural traits are lost, only to be replaced by others imported from another culture or with a synthesis of local and foreign elements) [15]. The very concept of heritage has come under scrutiny in recent research, with narratives proposed being broader and accepting of heterodox points of views, going beyond what could be defined as traditional appraisals (state or academic), underlining a dynamic, albeit more convoluted understanding of heritage. [10] The static and the cyclic views on heritage are at odds with one another, as the former views change as inherently undesirable, while the later views the same change as a normal part of the development of cultural heritage. We will take both into consideration when defining possible types of sustainable tourism.

The main differences between sustainable tourism and conventional tourism, in their respective approach to market (both demand and supply side elements), attractions, accommodation/lodging, economic status (with mention of some macroeconomic implications, such as the multiplicative effect) and state regulations and laws are summarized in the following table (table 1) [13]:

**Table 1.**

**Main differences between conventional tourism and sustainable tourism**

<b>Characteristics/traits</b>	<b>Conventional tourism</b>	<b>Sustainable tourism</b>
<b>Market</b>		
Psychological profile	Moderately psychocentric	Moderately allocentric
Volume and scalability	High, based on packages sold by agencies	Low; self-organised trips
Trip duration	Short	Long
Seasonality	High differences between peak season and off-season	Low to no seasonality
Origins	Several dominant markets	No dominant markets
<b>Attractions</b>		
Main traits	Generic, build on purpose for the sake of attracting tourists	Authentic, pre-existing
Market approach	Highly commercialised and commodified	Moderately commodified
Orientation	Tourists only	Both tourists and hosts
<b>Accommodation</b>		
Size	Large scale	Small scale
Patterns	Concentrated	Dispersed
Density	High	Low
Architecture	International	Local
Ownership	Foreign, corporate	Local, small business
<b>Economic status</b>		
Revenue	High	Low
Links	With foreign sectors	With local sectors
Multiplicative effect	Low	High
Role of tourism	Dominant	Supplementary
<b>Regulations and laws</b>		
Control	Foreign, corporate	Local stakeholders
Amount	Low	High
Ideology	Free market	Interventionism
Emphasis	Profit, economic growth	Common good
Time frame	Short term	Long term

*Source: adapted from Weaver, 2006:41, Sustainable Tourism. Theory and Practice.*

It can be noted that there is a lack of pressure in the tourism industry to adopt sustainable practices, with short-term expenses being used as counterarguments. [8] The industry reacts slowly to theoretical developments, with authors noting that “sustainable tourism research and policy appear to occupy a parallel universe to the practice of tourism”. [9] However, by becoming more sustainable, the long-term viability of natural and anthropic resources is preserved, in turn preserving economic benefits.

At the same time, recent research indicates that consumers are becoming more concerned with the environmental and social implications that derive from their usage of touristic services, with positive relations between sustainable practices in hotels and a willingness of guests to pay a premium price for services provided by the studied hotels. [3]

Another topic addressed in this paper is the customer’s willingness to pay (WTP). This is defined as the maximal price that a customer is willing to pay in order to purchase a given good or service. [12] A related concept is the consumer’s surplus (CS), which can be defined as the difference between the WTP and the actual price of a good or service. [2] As we interpret this concept, we can infer the following: from a demand perspective a positive CS can be correlated with a positive experience (in layman’s terms, the consumer feels they received a good deal), the same cannot be said from a supply perspective, as an exceedingly high CS could mean lost profits for an organization. In this sense, understanding WTP can be vital from a managerial/marketing viewpoint.

While WTP deals with the maximum amount of money that a customer is willing to pay (it examines the demand), willingness to accept (WTA) is the minimum amount of money that a seller is willing to receive in order to part with a good or to provide a service (it examines the supply). WTA can also be seen as the minimum amount of money that is accepted in exchange for “bearing some harm”, such as negative externalities. While both definitions are linguistically accurate, the relation between WTP and WTA is evident when considering the former definition of WTA rather than the later. [6]

Measuring WTP is a topic that has been widely debated in the literature. According to them, contingent valuation (CV) is among the most widely used methods, underlining this method’s main advantages: flexibility and easiness to use. [1]

CV is a survey-based methodology, which asks the respondents whether they would pay a price for a certain good or service. [1] A major disadvantage of CV is the hypothetical bias, which is the tendency of respondents to report behaviours that would be inaccurate in a real-world situation, which in the context of WTP would mean either under or over-estimation. [5] Therefore, WTP can be further divided into hypothetical willingness to pay (HWTP) and real willingness to pay. If the absolute value of difference between HWTP and RWTP is minimal, it can be said that the method chosen to measure WTP is accurate. [12]

Another method, as stated in is the conjoint analysis (CA). [4] CV is a direct method, CA is an indirect one. What this means is that, while in the case of CV the consumers are asked for a price that they would accept, when using the CA method, the customers are asked to rank their preference for certain similar products, to compare them, with the HWTP being derived from their response. [12]

Lastly, among the most accurate means to predict WTP is the usage of experiments, as the resulting data from their analysis is considered the RWTP, when taking into consideration the dichotomy mentioned beforehand. Experimental auctions (EA) are widely used, and they consist of a series of bids made by the participants, for a product that exists. [4] EA are considered by some authors to be a possible baseline for measuring WTP, as they measure RWTP and not HWTP, together with other methods, such as Vickrey auctions, BDM lottery, random n<sup>th</sup> price auctions, English auction and incentive-aligned conjoint analysis. However, they are more expensive to apply and require an existing product to assess, limiting their usability in exploratory research. [12]

When comparing the performance of different methodologies used to measure HWTP, according to the previously cited study, CV and other direct methods are generally less prone to overestimate HWTP in relation to RWTP.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

Considering the theoretical implications highlighted previously, we have decided to use a variation of the CV method. We have designed a questionnaire that measures the following attributes: willingness to travel (as a warm-up question), perceived importance of sustainability, the rate of acceptance (the willingness of respondents to stay at the accommodation unit) the WTP (for a double room, for one night) for a bed and breakfast situated in Gărâna, Caraș-Severin, the rate of acceptance and the WTP for a bed and breakfast in Vețel, Hunedoara, the rate of acceptance and WTP for a villa-like accommodation unit near Recaș, Timiș and lastly the demographic profile of the respondents: gender, age, education and income.

A description was attached to each of the accommodations in the form, summarized below:

- Pensiunea Solaris, Gărâna offers an innovative mix between authentic rural lifestyle and modern technology. Each room comes equipped with a low energy

consumption smart TV that can be hidden away when not in use, to preserve the rustic aesthetics of the room, traditional looking beds fitted with comfortable high-end mattresses, locally sourced region-specific furniture, cutting edge insulation for comfort and sustainability, underfloor heating via heat pumps, with solar panels provide the electricity needed on site. All cleaning agents used are eco-friendly.

- At Gospodăria Bunicii in Vețel guests can experience what it is really like to live in the authentic Romanian countryside. The rooms come equipped with traditional furniture, all bought or produced in the village, rustic beds and shared bathrooms. All cleaning agents are eco-friendly. The fruits and vegetables used to prepare the meals are locally sourced or grown directly at the farm ran by the family owning the B&B. Guests can also take part in the day-to-day life of the homemakers in the village.

- Căsuța dintre vii is the perfect location to relax when you want to get away from the frantic pace of the city and spend some quality time surrounded by nature. It is situated right in the heart of one of the most important wine-growing regions of Romania, Recaș. Facilities include a private pool and access to the vineyard for leisure activities.

The sampling method used is non-probabilistic, the questionnaire was designed using Google Forms and distributed among students and was published on several online groups designed specifically for filling in surveys. The software package used for data processing is SPSS.

## RESEARCH RESULTS

To sum up and describe the findings we have found during our research, we will utilize both descriptive and inferential statistical procedures. Considering this, we will start with descriptive statistics.

**Table 2.**

### Enjoyment derived from traveling.

	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation
Enjoyment derived from traveling	3	2 (I don't really enjoy traveling)	5 (I really like traveling)	4,68	,547

The average value for the enjoyment derived from traveling variable is 4,68. This can be interpreted as being closer to the "I really like traveling" statement than to the "Yes, but not as much" one. The vast majority of the respondents reported they enjoy traveling. (table 2)

**Table 3.**

### Perceived importance of sustainability

	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation
Perceived importance of sustainability	3	2	5	4,57	,670

The average value for perceived importance of sustainability is 4,57. This can be interpreted as being halfway between the "Very important" statement and the "Important" one. This can be interpreted as a high interest in sustainability, however this might also be an example of the hypothetical bias mentioned beforehand in this study. Further research may be needed to fully explore this subject and create a robust methodology for assessing perceived importance of sustainability. (table 3)

**Table 4.**

### Acceptance rates for accommodation units

	Acceptance rate
Acceptance rate for Solaris	87%
Acceptance rate for Gospodăria Bunicii	49%
Acceptance rate for Căsuța dintre vii	83%

The acceptance rate is the percentage of respondents that answered positively to the questions regarding their willingness to accept booking a room at the respective accommodation unit. The highest acceptance rate is associated with Pensiunea Solaris (87%), followed by Căsuța dintre vii (83%) and Gospodăria Bunicii (49%). This would suggest that respondents tend to be more interested in units that propose a high-tech and/or deluxe view on sustainability. (table 4)

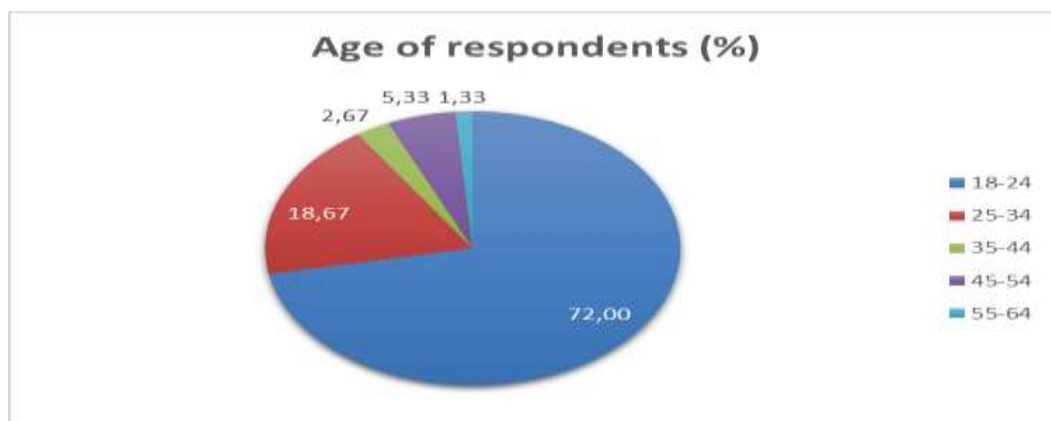
**Table 5.**

**Willingness to pay for accommodation units.**

	Minimum (lei)	Maximum (lei)	Mean (lei)	Standard deviation
WTP for Solaris	120	420	250,85	73,95
WTP for Gospodăria Bunicii	65	300	140,34	40,50
WTP for Căsuța dintre vii	100	450	275,00	81,15

The highest reported mean WTP is for Căsuța dintre Vii (275 lei) followed by

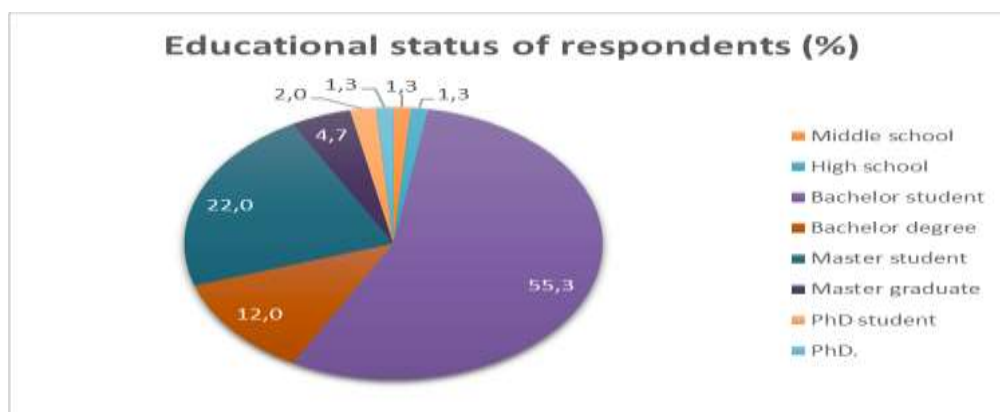
Pensiunea Solaris (250,85 lei). The lowest reported WTP is for Gospodăria Bunicii, at 140,34 lei. On the other hand, the standard deviation suggests that the individual WTP for the first two accommodation units tend to vary more widely around the mean value, while for Gospodăria Bunicii it is more centred around the mean. (table 5) The gender of the respondents is 53% females and 47% males. The educational status of the respondents can be summarized by the following chart: (figure 1)



**Figure 1. Educational status of respondents in percentages**

As a direct consequence of the sampling method used, a significant portion of the respondents are currently students.

The age of the respondents can be summarized by the following chart: (figure 2)



**Figure 2. Age of respondents**

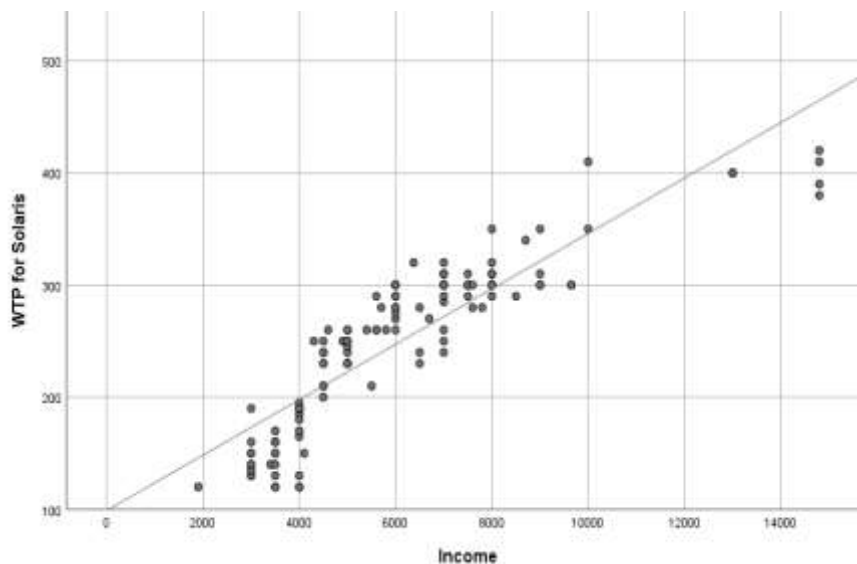
The average age of the respondents is 25,03 years. This is consistent with expected value, considering the educational status of the respondents.

The next section of the findings of our research deals with inferential statistics, such as correlations between examined variables and possible models that can explain the interactions between them. The following research hypotheses have been formulated and were grouped based on the topic explored:

- H1. The relation between income and WTP for the accommodation units studied:
  - H1.1. Income relates positively with WTP for Pensiunea Solaris
  - H1.2. Income relates positively with WTP for Pensiunea Gospodăria Bunicii.
  - H1.3. Income relates positively with WTP for Pensiunea Căsuța dintre Vii.
- H2: The relation between education status and WTP
  - H2.1. Higher educational status relates positively with WTP for Pensiunea Solaris
  - H2.2. Higher educational status relates positively with WTP for Pensiunea Gospodăria Bunicii.
  - H2.3. Higher educational status relates positively with WTP for Pensiunea Căsuța dintre Vii.
- H3: The acceptance rates for the three accommodation units are different in a statistically significant way.

For testing the first batch of hypotheses, we will generate three linear regression models, each for the respective WTP measured, considering income as the independent variable in each case. Then, for the hypotheses belonging to the H2 group, we will use the Pearson correlation coefficient, which ranges from -1 to 1. A negative Pearson coefficient indicates a negative relation between the two variables, while a positive one would suggest that there is a positive one. Lastly, for H3, we will use the t test, which measures if the mean value of the three acceptance rates is different in a statistically significant way.

**H1.1: Income relates positively with WTP for Pensiunea Solaris**



**Figure 3. Linear regression model between WTP for Pensiunea Solaris and reported income**

**Table 6.**

**Model summary for WTP at Pensiunea Solaris and income**

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
,890 <sup>a</sup>	,793	,791	33,793

The R value is 0.89, indicating a strong correlation between income and WTP for Pensiunea Solaris and reported income. The R<sup>2</sup> value is 0,793, which means that 79,3% of the variance in the WTP can be explained by the independent variable income. (table 6)

**Table 7.**

**Analysis of variance**

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	559431,924	1	559431,924	489,874	,000 <sup>b</sup>
Residual	146174,999	128	1141,992		
Total	705606,923	129			

The significance level reported by the ANOVA test is less than 0,05, which signifies that the regression model used is a good fit for the data. (table 7)

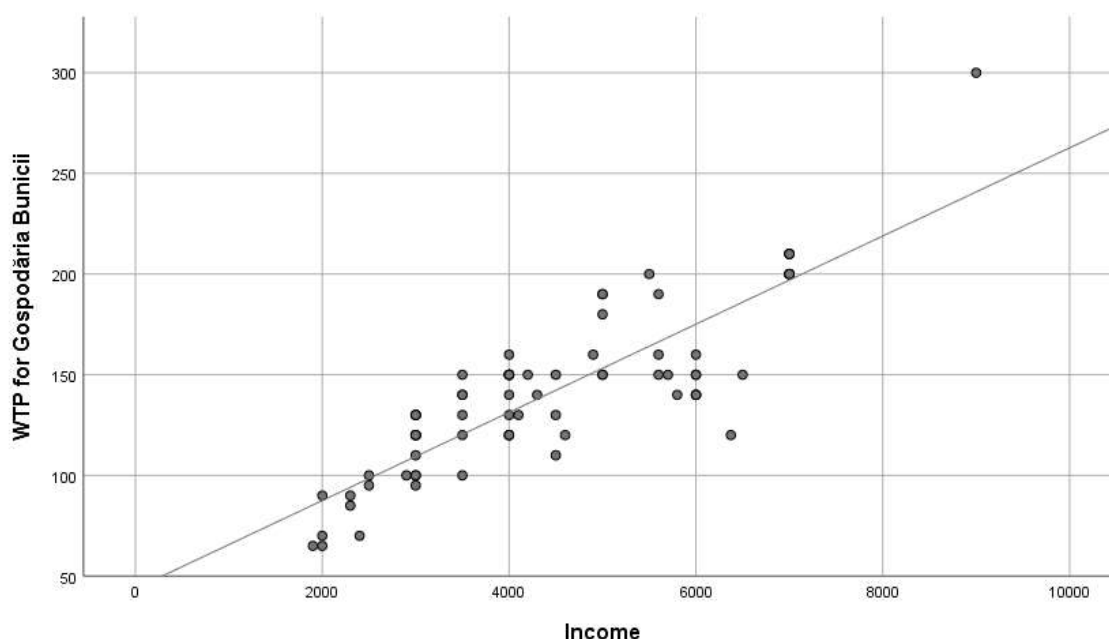
**Table 8.**

**Coefficients**

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	98,929	7,476		13,232	,000
Income	,025	,001	,890	22,133	,000

The regression equation for this model is:  $WTP = 98,929 + 0,025(\text{Income})$ . This means that if the WTP for Pensiunea Solaris increases with one unit (one leu), the reported income increased with 0,025 units (lei). The proposed hypothesis is accepted. (table 8)

**H1.2. Income relates positively with WTP for Gospodăria Bunicii.**



**Figure 4. Linear regression model between WTP for Gospodăria Bunicii and reported income**

**Table 9.**

**Model summary for WTP at Gospodăria Bunicii and income**

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
,849 <sup>a</sup>	,721	,717	21,545

The R value is 0.849, indicating a strong correlation between income and WTP for Gospodăria Bunicii and reported income. The R<sup>2</sup> value is 0,721, which means that 72,1% of the variance in the WTP can be explained by the independent variable income. (table 9)

**Table 10.**

**Analysis of variance**

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	85158,639	1	85158,639	183,455	,000 <sup>b</sup>
Residual	32957,799	71	464,194		
Total	118116,438	72			

The significance level reported by the ANOVA test is less than 0,05, which signifies that the regression model used is a good fit for the data. (table 10)

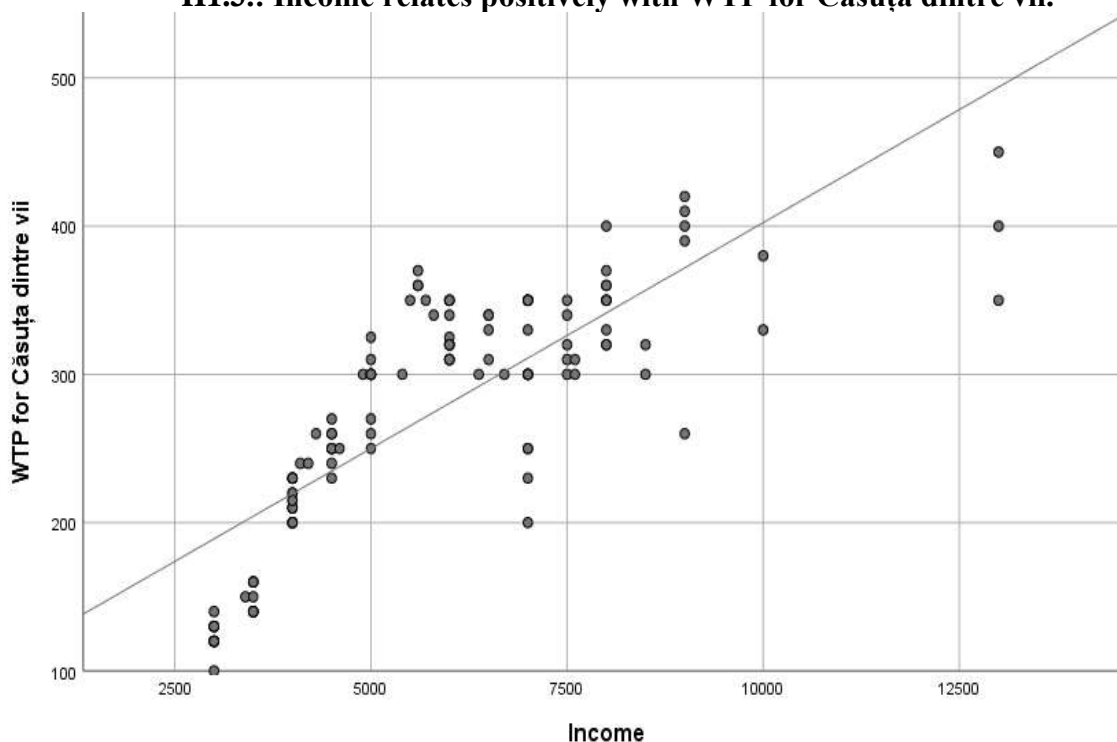
**Table 11.**

**Coefficients**

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	
(Constant)	43,725	7,566		5,779	,000
Income	,022	,002	,849	13,545	,000

The regression equation for this model is:  $WTP = 43,725 + 0,022(\text{Income})$ . This means that if the WTP for Gospodăria Bunicii increases with one unit (one leu), the reported income increased with 0,022 units (lei). The proposed hypothesis is accepted. (table 11)

**H1.3.: Income relates positively with WTP for Căsuța dintre vii.**



**Figure 4. Linear regression model between WTP for Căsuța dintre vii and reported income**

**Table 12.**

**Model summary for WTP at Căsuța dintre Vii and income**

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
,802 <sup>a</sup>	,643	,641	48,655

The R value is 0.802, indicating a strong correlation between income and WTP for Căsuța dintre vii and reported income. The R<sup>2</sup> value is 0,643, which means that 64,3% of the variance in the WTP can be explained by the independent variable income. (table 12)

**Table 13.**

**Analysis of variance**

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	521188,037	1	521188,037	220,160	,000 <sup>b</sup>
Residual	288811,963	122	2367,311		
Total	810000,000	123			

The significance level reported by the ANOVA test is less than 0,05, which signifies that the regression model used is a good fit for the data. (table 13)

**Table 14.**

**Coefficients**

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	97,704	12,723		7,679	,000
Income	,030	,002	,802	14,838	,000

The regression equation for this model is:  $WTP = 97,704 + 0,030(\text{Income})$ . This means that if the WTP for Căsuța dintre vii increases with one unit (one leu), the reported income increased with 0,030 units (lei). The proposed hypothesis is accepted. (table 14)

**H2.1. Higher educational status relates positively with WTP for Pensiunea Solaris**

**Table 15.**

**Pearson correlation coefficient between education and WTP for Pensiunea Solaris**

		WTP for Solaris	Educational status
WTP for Solaris	Pearson Correlation	1	,272**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,002
	N	130	130
Educational status	Pearson Correlation	,272**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,002	
	N	130	150

The Pearson correlation coefficient ranges from -1 to 1. In our case, it is 0,272. This would suggest that there is a weak but statistically significant positive correlation between WTP for Pensiunea Solaris and educational status. (table 15)

**H.2.2 Higher educational status relates positively with WTP for Gospodăria Bunicii**

**Table 16.**

**Pearson correlation coefficient between education and WTP for Gospodăria Bunicii**

		Educational status	WTP for Gospodăria Bunicii
Educational status	Pearson Correlation	1	,182
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,122
	N	150	73
WTP for Gospodăria Bunicii	Pearson Correlation	,182	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,122	
	N	73	73

In this case, while there might be a weak correlation between the two variables, it is not statistically significant, as the significance is higher than 0.01 or 0.05. The proposed hypothesis is rejected, as the evidence that suggests that there is a relation between the two variables is weak. (table 16)

**H.2.3. Higher educational status relates positively with WTP for Căsuța dintre Vii**

**Table 17.**

**Pearson correlation coefficient between education and WTP for Căsuța dintre Vii**

		Educational status	WTP for Căsuța dintre vii
Educational status	Pearson Correlation	1	,189*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,035
	N	150	124
WTP for Căsuța dintre vii	Pearson Correlation	,189*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,035	
	N	124	124

While the significance in this case is higher than 0.01, it is lower than 0.05. Therefore, the certainty for this hypothesis is slightly lower compared to H2.1, but still statistically significant. As was the case for Pensiunea Solaris, the correlation between the two variables is weak, but positive. The proposed hypothesis is accepted. (table 17)

**H3. The acceptance rates for the three accommodation units are different in a statistically significant way**

**Table 18.**

**t test compared to Pensiunea Solaris**

	Test Value = 0.866667			
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Acceptance rate for Solaris	,000	149	1,000	,000
Acceptance rate for Gospodăria Bunicii	-9,280	149	,000	-,380
Acceptance rate for Căsuța dintre vii	-1,290	149	,199	-,040

For the first part of this test, we have compared the mean value of the acceptance rate of Pensiunea Solaris with the other two using the t test. The null hypothesis, coinciding with the research hypothesis, states that the mean value of one variable is equal to the test value. This is accepted in the case of Pensiunea Solaris (as expected, since the t test compares this mean with itself) and for Căsuța dintre vii. The mean value of the acceptance rate of Gospodăria Bunicii and Pensiunea Solaris differ in a statistically significant way. (table 18)

Table 19

**t test compared to Căsuța dintre vii**

	Test Value = 0.826667			
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Acceptance rate for Solaris	1,436	149	,153	,040
Acceptance rate for Gospodăria Bunicii	-8,303	149	,000	-,340
Acceptance rate for Căsuța dintre vii	,000	149	1,000	,000

In the second part of this test, we compared the mean value of the acceptance rate of Căsuța dintre vii with the other two. As expected, the null hypothesis is accepted when comparing Căsuța dintre vii with Pensiuinea Solaris (consistent with previous findings) and with itself. The only statistically significant differences in mean values are between Gospodăria Bunicii and the other two accommodation units. H3 is accepted. (table 19)

**CONCLUSIONS**

The measurement of willingness to pay can derive useful data, from both a management and marketing perspective. However, certain limitations need to be taken into consideration when making choices regarding the methodology used in the research. The hypothetical bias is one such issue, as the measured WTP will tend to be inflated in relation to the real WTP. Experiments may be used to circumvent this inaccuracy, but they also plagued with their own set of problems, with the most significant ones being cost (both monetary and in the time required to organise them), the inability to measure WTP for tourism services that are not on the market at the time of the experiment and lastly the expertise needed to assess the data obtained from the experiment. With this in mind, we suggest using measured WTP as a supplementary set of data that can be taken into consideration and not as an alternative method for calculating and setting prices. Instead, understanding WTP for a given good or service can further refine the marketing mix for it and can improve the financial performance of the organisation.

Another focal point discovered is that the respondents preferred accommodation units that did not compromise comfort for the sake of authenticity. Again, this is a useful piece of information for organisations or entrepreneurs that seek to invest in this sector. A further cost-benefit analysis can be applied before any commitment to a particular concept for a hotel or guest house is made. Further, more comprehensive research can be done to assess the WTP of possible guests from other backgrounds.

The accommodation units that had a higher reported WTP and acceptance rates had in common the usage of innovative concepts, although in different regards. One proposed a high-tech inspired sort of sustainability that manages to blend in with the local heritage, while the other one is focused on elegance, relaxation and the blend between adjacent economic services or production of goods (wine making) and tourism. The same testing procedures can be extended to various types of tourism accommodations, with different concepts. At the same time, we suspect that the acceptance rate and WTP for the more traditional guest house is lower because it can be associated with a more bare-bones approach compared to the other two options, which are more upmarket and provide more amenities. In this case, the concept can be refined for it to resemble the other two.

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