

ANA TEŽAK
ZDRAVKO ŠERGO
AMORINO POROPAT
Institute of Agriculture and Tourism, Poreč, Croatia

INFLUENCE OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION ON SELECTING TOURISM DESTINATION

PRELIMINARY COMMUNICATION

Environmental protection is becoming an important part of our every-day life, so it is logically to assume that it influences the decision making process of tourists when selecting a tourism destination. The main aim of this paper was to determine the differences among the three groups of tourists i.e. low, moderate and high environmental protection importance groups with respect to selecting tourism destination and their personal characteristics. Data was collected from July, through September 2010 as a part of a research on tourists' attitudes related to importance of environmental preservation on a sample of tourists staying in seven seaside tourist resorts in the Istria County. Differences were tested using chi square test and one way ANOVA. Significant differences between three groups were found from the aspect of sample characteristics, travelling with a party and various tourism destination attractions. The results suggest that environmental protection was important in selecting tourism destination, so they can be used in further development of sustainable tourism in Istria County.

Keywords: environmental protection, tourists' characteristics, attractions, tourism destination, Istria County

INTRODUCTION

Core resources and attractions are often the reason for visiting a particular destination, providing activities and experiences and a means of collecting the sins of consumption¹. Attractions motivate tourists to choose one tourism destination over others² and they can be nature based and human made attractions. In recent years environmental protection is becoming an important part of one's everyday life, so it also has an impact on tourism. Environmental protection in this paper was analysed as a pull travel motive as recommended by Luo and Deng³.

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1. LITERATURE REVIEW

There are many different factors that have an effect on selection of tourism destination. Travel motives are just one of those factors. Examining travel motivations it is evident that there are many theories about it e.g. Maslow's hierarchical needs theory⁴. This theory has been accepted and used to explain travel behaviour, but it

¹ Richards, G., Tourism attraction system – Exploring Cultural Behavior, *Annals of Tourism Research*, vol. 29, 2002, no. 4.

² San Martín, H., Rodríguez del Bosque, I. A., Exploring the cognitive-affective nature of destination image and the role of psychological factors in its formulation, *Tourism Management*, vol. 29, 2008, no. 2. 236-277

³ Luo, Y., Deng, J., The New Environmental Paradigm and Nature-Based Tourism Motivation, *Journal of Travel Research*, vol. 46, 2008, No. 4.

⁴ For details see: Awaritefe, O. D., Motivation and Other Considerations in Tourist Destination Choice: A Case Study of Nigeria, *Tourism Geographies*, vol. 6, 2004, no. 3; Maslow, A. H., A Theory of Human Motivation, *Psychological Review*, vol. 50, 1943, available on <http://www.altruists.org/f62>

is not applicable to tourist motivation⁵, so other theories have been proposed in order to better explain factors that influence travel⁶. The most widely applied theory related to travel motivations is the one of push and pull motivators⁷. The concept of this theory distinguishes two important factors: push factors, which refer to internal forces that motivate or create a desire to satisfy a need to travel, and pull factors, which are recognized as destination attributes that respond to and reinforce inherent push motivation factors like beaches, recreation, natural and cultural attractions etc.⁸. "Push and pull factors describe how individuals are pushed by motivation variables into making travel decisions and how they are pulled or attracted by destination attributes"⁹. Usually more than one travel motive induce travel, but when a particular motive is the most important one than that person has a special interest. Taking that into account special interest tourism has emerged.

The main motive of nature-based tourism is nature. Nature is often a very important travel motive e.g. it was found to be one of the most important travel motives for Swiss travellers¹⁰, but the more attractive the destination or the site is, it attracts more visitors and it is more likely that this will result in deterioration of the natural environment. It is vital to establish strategies that will prevent deterioration of the natural environment. Sustainable tourism is an appropriate response to this problem while ecotourism can be seen as a result of combining nature-based tourism and sustainability¹¹.

When considering Croatia, natural beauties are important motive¹² for visiting. Due to abundance of preserved natural sites, nature based tourism offer can be formed and offered to tourists, but it should be noted how this special-interest tourism consists of different market segments. By examining different forms of nature-based tourism, different scholars have identified different consumers segments which differed based on different socio-demographic characteristic¹³, travel motives¹⁴, purpose of the trip¹⁵ and ecological orientation of tourists¹⁶. Each segment placed different importance related to importance of protection of natural environment.

2. METHODOLOGY

A study focused on tourists' attitudes related to importance of environmental preservation and travel motives was conducted from July through September 2010. In this study the target population included those tourists who visited seven seaside tourist resorts in Istria County: Medulin, Pula, Rovinj, Poreč, Vrsar, Funtana and Umag. These sites were selected because they were visited by more than 50% of tourists visiting Istria County in 2009¹⁷. Survey was carried out in 20 hotels through a self-complete questionnaire. Tourists were approached by trained researcher and asked to participate in the survey. Researcher explained the purpose of the survey, said that the survey was anonymous and handed a questionnaire in appropriate language. In that process convenient sample was used. Hotels were preselected based on location and capacity.

⁵ Chang, J. C., Travel motivation of package tour travelers, *Tourism*, vol. 55, 2007, no. 2.

⁶ Awaritefe, O. D., Motivation and Other Considerations in Tourist Destination Choice: A Case Study of Nigeria, *Tourism Geographies*, vol. 6, 2004, no. 3

⁷ Dunn, G., Buckley, J., Flanagan, S., City Break Travel Motivation – The Case of Dublin, *Journal of Travel and Tourism Research*, vol. 22, 2007, no. 3 & 4.

⁸ Heung, V. C. S., Qu, H., Chu, R., The relationship between vacation factors and socio-demographic and travelling characteristics: the case of Japanese leisure travelers, *Tourism Management*, vol. 22, 2001, no. 3; Sangpikul, A., A factor-cluster analysis of tourist motivations: A case of U.S. senior travelers, *Tourism*, vol. 56 2008, no. 1, 23-40

⁹ Yoon, Y., Uysal, M., An examination of the effects of motivation and satisfaction on destination loyalty: a structural model, *Tourism Management*, vol. 26, 2005, no. 1, pp 46

¹⁰ Bieger, T., Laesser, C., Market Segmentation by Motivation: The Case of Switzerland, *Journal of Travel Research*, vol. 41, 2002, no. 1.

¹¹ Uriely, N., Reichel, A., Shani, A., Ecological Orientation of Tourists: An Empirical Investigation, *Tourism and Hospitality Research*, vol. 7, 2001, no. 3-4.

¹² Čorak, S. et. al, Tomas Summer, Institute for Tourism, 2011.

¹³ Mehmetoglu, M., A case study of nature-based tourists: Specialists versus generalists, *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, vol. 11, 2005, no. 4.; Singh, T., Slotkin, M. H., Vamosi, A. R., Attitude towards ecotourism and environmental advocacy: Profiling the dimensions of sustainability, *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, vol. 13, 2007, no. 2.; Uriely, N., Reichel, A., Shani, A., Ecological Orientation of Tourists: An Empirical Investigation, *Tourism and Hospitality Research*, vol. 7, 2001, no. 3-4.

¹⁴ Mehmetoglu, M., A case study of nature-based tourists: Specialists versus generalists, *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, vol. 11, 2005, no. 4.

¹⁵ Wurzing, S., Johansson, M., Environmental Concern and Knowledge of Ecotourism among three Groups of Swedish tourists, *Journal of Travel Research*, vol. 45, 2006, no. 2.

¹⁶ Uriely, N., Reichel, A., Shani, A., Ecological Orientation of Tourists: An Empirical Investigation, *Tourism and Hospitality Research*, vol. 7, 2001, no. 3-4.

¹⁷ Tourist arrivals and nights by tourist offices 2009, Istria Tourists Board, <http://www.istra.hr/hr/pr/statistika>

For the purpose of gathering data, the questionnaire was constructed. It consisted of 22 questions which were divided into five sections. The first section of questions was designed to gather respondents' sociodemographic characteristics (country of origin, age, gender, income level, occupation, size of settlement, travelling party) and trip characteristics (number of visits, length of stay and sources of information). The second section of questions focused on determining extends of current crises on tourists' behavior. The questions in the third section were based on New Environmental Paradigm scale and served to determine tourist's attitudes about the environment. In the fourth section travel motives were examined. The last section focused on determining tourist's satisfaction and intention to revisit Istria County. Questionnaire was originally designed in Croatian and then translated into following languages: English, German, Italian, Russian and Slovenian.

The responders were *a priori* grouped based on the importance they placed on environmental preservation as a factor i.e. travel motive in deciding about the destination which to visit. They were grouped in three groups: low, moderate and high environmental protection importance groups (16%, 37,6% and 46,4% respectively). Responders in high environmental protection importance group stated that environmental preservation of tourism destination is a very important factor they consider when deciding where to travel, tourists in moderate environmental protection importance group said that environmental preservation of tourism destination was important factor while for low environmental protection importance group environmental preservation of tourism destination was not very important factor.

Differences among three groups and variables related to selecting tourism destination and personal characteristics of responders were determined using chi square test and one-way analysis of variance. In order to determine the differences among the three group series of post hoc tests were done. Differences among the groups and variables for chi square test were determined using methodology proposed by Schwab¹⁸. In the case of one-way analysis of variance Games Howell post hoc test was used to determine the significant differences among the groups since the assumption of equal variances was not met¹⁹. Variables related to selecting tourism destination were different attraction of tourism destination that were based on pull and push travel motivation theory. 12 tourism destination attractions i.e. pull factors were selected for the purpose of this analysis: attractive coast and beaches, numerous protected areas, local entertainment events, rich cultural heritage, museums and exhibitions, local traditional cuisine, transport accessibility, entertainment possibilities, sports and recreational activities, diversity of architectural styles, suitable climate and usage of wellness services. Tourists were asked to state the importance of these attractions when deciding where to travel. Personal characteristics of responders taken into the analysis were: country of origin, age, education, number of visitation, profession, gender, personal net monthly income and traveling composition.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A total of 2,139 questionnaires were accepted because they were properly filled.

The proportion of male responders (50.4%) was slightly higher than that of female (49.6%). The mean age of the responders was 41.33 years, and the standard deviation was about 12 years. Most of the responders were between 35 and 44 years of age. The majority of responders obtained some kind of higher education level. The responders had different background and occupation, most of the responders stated that they were employees, while about 16% were managers and about 15% were entrepreneurs/owners. Most of the responders were from Austria (23%), about 17% were from Italy, about 16% from Germany and almost 13% from. Regarding the number of visits to Istria County, most responders (64%) have already visited Istria County.

¹⁸ Schwab J. A., Chi-square Test of Independence - Course Materials - Data Analysis, 2004, available on http://www.utexas.edu/courses/schwab/sw318_spring_2004/SolvingProblems/Class24_ChiSquareTestOfIndependencePostHoc.ppt

¹⁹ Field, A., Discovering Statistics Using SPSS, 2nd edition, Sage Publication, London, 2005

Table 1. **Sample characteristics**

Characteristics	Percent (%)	Characteristics	Percent (%)
Age (mean 41.33.1, S.D. 11.5)		Gender	
16-24	8.4	Female	49.6
25-34	18.8	Male	50.4
35-44	33.7	Land of arrival	
45-54	26.0	Austria	22.9
55+	13.1	Germany	16.1
Education		Italy	16.8
Basic education	10.4	UK	6.5
Secondary education	32.6	Russia	12.6
College	17.5	Slovenia	4.8
University	27.9	The Netherlands	3.9
Masters	8.4	Belgium	2.2
Ph.D.	3.2	Other	14.2
Visitation (mean 2.7, S.D. 4.6)		Personal net monthly income	
First time visitor	35.9	0 – 500 €	3.8
Repeat visitor	64.1	500 – 1,000 €	9.0
Profession		1,000 – 2,000 €	23.9
Owner/Entrepreneur	15.1	2,000 – 3,000 €	18.0
Manager	15.8	3,000 – 4,000 €	8.4
Employee	46.5	Over 4,000 €	13.4
Student	5.0	Private (n/a)	23.5
Other	17.6		

Source: data processed by authors

In order to determine significant differences among the three groups of responders, chi square test (Table 2) and one way analysis of variances (Table 3) were conducted.

Statistically significant relationship was determined between three groups of tourists and four variables related to tourist and traveling characteristics (Table 2). This was done because travel motives are closely related to social and economic determinants of individuals²⁰, so age, income, gender, education and nationality were found to be significantly related to travel motive²¹.

Significant differences among groups were verified for country of origin, traveling with a partner/spouse, gender and profession. There were more tourists grouped as high environmental protection importance group that arrived from Austria (13%) and Russia (9%) than it was expected, while there were fewer tourists that came from Italy, UK, The Netherlands and Belgium (6%, 9%, 1%, 0.2% respectively) than it was expected. On the other hand there were fewer tourists grouped as low and moderate environmental protection importance groups that arrived from Austria (3% and 5% respectively) and Russia (0.4% and 3% respectively) than it was expected. Tourists coming from Germany (2%) that have stated that environmental protection is a not very important part in their decision making process were fewer than expected, while there were more than expected Italian tourists (8%) who stated that environmental protection is important factor in deciding where to travel. There were more responders from UK (2%), The Netherlands (1%) and Belgium (1%) who stated that environmental protection is not very important factor when making decision where to travel. Nationality was also proven to be an important factor in determining the differences for different segments of nature-based tourists by Mehmetoglu²² and Uriely, Reichel and Shani²³. Tourists traveling without a partner/spouse were more

²⁰ Chang, J. C., Travel motivation of package tour travelers, *Tourism*, vol. 55, 2007, no. 2.

²¹ Hsu, T.K., Tsai, Y. F. Wu, H. H., The preference analysis for tourist choice of destination: A case study of Taiwan, *Tourism Management*, vol. 30, 2009, no. 2, 288-297; Heung, V. C. S., Qu, H., Chu, R., The relationship between vacation factors and socio-demographic and travelling characteristics: the case of Japanese leisure travelers, *Tourism Management*, vol. 22, 2001, no. 3, Jönsson, C. and Devonish, D., Does nationality, gender, and age affect travel motivations? A Case of Visitors to the Caribbean Island of Barbados, *Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing*, vol. 25, 2008, no. 3-4; Kozak, M., Comparative analysis of tourist motivations by nationality and destination, *Tourism Management*, vol. 23, 2002, no. 3, 221-232; Sangpikul, A., A factor-cluster analysis of tourist motivations: A case of U.S. senior travelers, *Tourism*, vol. 56 2008, no. 1.

²² Mehmetoglu, M., A case study of nature-based tourists: Specialists versus generalists, *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, vol. 11, 2005, no. 4.

likely to express high (29%) than moderate (27%) importance of environmental protection in selection tourism destination. There were more female (26%) compared to male responders (21%) who stated that environmental protection is a very important factor when deciding where to travel. This finding are similar to the findings of Singh, Slotkin and Vamosi²⁴ who determined gender differences in environmental activism, but it is contrary to the findings of Mehmetoglu²⁵. There were more students than expected that have stated that environmental protection is not an important factor in deciding on travel destination.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and result of chi square test

Variable	Low (%)	Moderate (%)	High (%)	X ²	df
Country of origin				207.192*	16
Austria	2.8	5.3	12.8		
Germany	1.8	6.5	7.8		
Italy	3.0	7.6	6.2		
United Kingdom	1.7	2.8	2.1		
Russia	0.4	3.1	9.1		
Slovenia	0.9	1.9	2.1		
The Netherlands	1.4	1.5	1.0		
Belgium	0.9	1.1	0.2		
Other	3.1	5.9	5.2		
Travelling with a partner				13.302**	2
Yes	10.7	26.7	29.2		
No	5.4	10.8	17.2		
Gender				18.681*	2
Male	9.1	20.3	21.0		
Female	6.7	17.4	25.5		
Profession				22.724**	8
Owner/Entrepreneur	2.6	4.8	7.7		
Manager	3.0	5.9	6.9		
Employee	6.8	18.8	20.9		
Student	1.3	1.9	1.8		
Other	2.3	6.3	9.0		

* α significant at 0.001, ** α significant at 0.05

Source: Data processed by authors.

Three groups of tourists differed significantly with respect to different tourism destination attractions: attractive coast and beaches, numerous protected areas, local entertainment events, rich cultural heritage, museums and exhibitions, local traditional cuisine, transport accessibility, entertainment possibilities, sports and recreational activities, diversity of architectural styles, suitable climate and usage of wellness services (Table 3). The results are partially supported by Mehmetoglu²⁶ who determined significant differences between nature-based tourists segments based on nature and cultural/historical attractions.

Responders in high environmental protection importance group rated every observed attraction of higher importance compared to other two groups, while responders in low environmental importance group rated the attraction the lowest. Considering differences among the three groups, all groups differed statistically based on importance they placed on nine tourism destination attractions: attractive coast and beaches, numerous protected areas, rich cultural heritage, museums and exhibitions, local traditional cuisine, transport accessibility, sports and recreational activities, diversity of architectural styles and suitable climate. High and low importance groups significantly differed based on importance they placed on three tourism destination attraction: local entertainment events, entertainment possibilities, and usage of wellness services.

²³ Uriely, N., Reichel, A., Shani, A., Ecological Orientation of Tourists: An Empirical Investigation, *Tourism and Hospitality Research*, vol. 7, 2001, no. 3-4.

²⁴ Singh, T., Slotkin, M. H., Vamosi, A. R., Attitude towards ecotourism and environmental advocacy: Profiling the dimensions of sustainability, *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, vol. 13, 2007, no. 2.;

²⁵ Mehmetoglu, M., A case study of nature-based tourists: Specialists versus generalists, *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, vol. 11, 2005, no. 4.

²⁶ Mehmetoglu, M., A case study of nature-based tourists: Specialists versus generalists, *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, vol. 11, 2005, no. 4.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics and results of t- test

Variable	Low		Moderate		High		F (2, 2137)
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
Attractive coast and beaches	4.0 _{2,3}	1.1	4.3 _{1,3}	0.7	4.7 _{1,2}	0.6	129.97*
Numerous protected areas	2.9 _{2,3}	1.0	3.4 _{1,3}	0.8	3.7 _{1,2}	1.0	102.46*
Local entertainment events	2.8 ₃	1.0	2.9 ₃	1.0	3.2 _{1,2}	1.1	22.91*
Rich cultural heritage	3.1 _{2,3}	1.0	3.5 _{1,3}	0.9	3.8 _{1,2}	1.0	76.81*
Museums and exhibitions	2.6 _{2,3}	1.0	3.1 _{1,3}	1.0	3.3 _{1,2}	1.2	42.30*
Local traditional cuisine	3.2 _{2,3}	1.0	3.7 _{1,3}	0.9	4.0 _{1,2}	1.0	104.52*
Transport accessibility	3.5 _{2,3}	1.1	3.9 _{1,3}	0.8	4.3 _{1,2}	0.9	108.63*
Entertainment possibilities	3.5 ₃	1.1	3.6 ₃	0.9	3.8 _{1,2}	1.1	16.91*
Sports and recreational activities	3.1 _{2,3}	1.1	3.4 _{1,3}	1.0	3.6 _{1,2}	1.1	27.93*
Diversity of architectural styles	2.8 _{2,3}	1.0	3.3 _{1,3}	0.9	3.5 _{1,2}	1.1	67.84*
Suitable climate	3.9 _{2,3}	1.0	4.3 _{1,3}	0.6	4.6 _{1,2}	0.6	151.54*
Usage of wellness services	2.8 ₃	1.1	3.1 ₁	1.0	3.3 ₁	1.2	22.00*

Note: Mean with subscripts differ at $p < 0.05$, * significant at 0.01

Source: Data processed by authors.

Based on the results certain managerial implications can be drawn. The three segments differed significantly from the aspect of importance that various attractions have in the decision making process of selecting the tourism destination. Environmental protection was important motive for almost half of the responders, so protection of natural environment has to be emphasised in marketing and management of a tourism destination. If tourism offer for nature-based tourists is to be formed, it would be recommendable to combine it with different types of attractions that a particular tourism destination has.

There are some limitations of this study. Since these results are based on convenient sample of tourists who stayed in selected hotels and resorts, the results may not be generalized to the overall Istria County's tourism market. Data were collected during high season and the responders were already in Istria County, so the importance they placed on environmental protection may differ compared to those responders that visit Istria County in other parts of the year. The sample included commercial accommodation users only, so tourists not staying in the commercial accommodation were omitted from the study.

In this analysis a priori segmentation mean was used, so responders were assigned to groups based on the importance they placed on environmental protection as a travel motive. Future research relating to environmental protection can be done by applying a posteriori segmentation mean, by including tourists from other parts of Croatia and those tourists that visit tourism destination in low tourism season.

CONCLUSION

Preservation of natural environment is becoming a very important factor when tourists make decisions where to travel. Natural beauties of a particular tourism destination are an important attraction factor which is used to target nature-based tourist market. But, when creating an offer for this market it is important to have in mind that there is a certain limit in number of tourists that one site or destination can support and that natural beauties are not the only attraction that this market is interested in. Since this market consists of different segments, the above mentioned problems can be solved by focusing on a particular nature-based market segment and by providing a wide range of attraction both nature-based and human made.

Using a priori segmentation mean, three groups of tourists were analyzed based on the importance they placed on environmental preservation when deciding where to travel. Since the protection of natural environment seem to be important factor in this decision making process, it is advisable to emphasize this pull factor in marketing and management of tourism destination.

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