Year 15, No. 3, December 2022, issn 2335-4194

Academica Turistica

Tourism & Innovation Journal
Revija za turizem in inovativnost

Academica Turistica

Tourism & Innovation Journal – Revija za turizem in inovativnost
Year 15, No. 3, December 2022, ISSN 2335-4194
https://doi.org/10.26493/2335-4194.15_3

University of Primorska Press

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Published by University of Primorska Press
University of Primorska
Titov trg 4, SI-6000 Koper
E-mail: zalozba@upr.si
Web: http://www.hippocampus.si

Editorial Office Academica Turistica
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Obala 11a, SI-6320 Portorož, Slovenia
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Web: http://academica.turistica.si

Subscriptions The journal is distributed free of charge. For information about postage and packaging prices, please contact us at academica@turistica.si.

Copy Editor Susan Cook
Cover Design Mateja Oblak
Cover Photo Alen Ježovnik
Printed in Slovenia by Grafika 3000, Dob
Print Run 100 copies

Academica Turistica – Revija za turizem in inovativnost je znanstvena revija, namenjena mednarodni znanstveni in strokovni javnosti; izhaja v angleščini s povzetki v slovenščini. Izid publikacije je finančno podprla Agencija za raziskovalno dejavnost Republike Slovenije iz sredstev državnega proračuna iz naslova razpisa za sofinanciranje domačih znanstvenih periodičnih publikacij.

ISSN 1855-3303 (printed)
ISSN 2335-4194 (online)

Original Scientific Article

Effect of Perception of COVID-19 Crisis Management on Destination Image and Intention to Visit

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Tourism has been one of the most dynamically developing sectors of the world economy in recent years, yet the emergence of the COVID-19 virus crisis has led to a recession in the industry, making managing this crisis essential. Thus, the study was conducted to examine the effect of the perception of COVID-19 crisis management on destination brand image and, ultimately, the intention to select a tourist destination, and carried out by explaining the role of brand personality and tourists' attitudes towards the destination. This research used the descriptive approach and quantitative data collection with applied purpose. Tehran was the spatial domain of the study, with all those (domestic and foreign) visiting Tehran as tourists from July 2020 to April 2021 as the population of the study. The Available Sampling Method was used and the data collection tool was a questionnaire. Finally, 768 complete questionnaires were collected and the hypotheses were analysed using structural equation modelling (SEM) in AMOS and SPSS. The results revealed that although cities and tourist destinations are lifeless elements, tourists often consider them to have personality and human characteristics. The results showed that COVID-19 crisis management positively and significantly affected the destination image and ultimately the intention to visit the destination. Ultimately, some suggestions were made that could be used as a route for tourism destinations to tackle the crisis of tourist attraction in the post-COVID-19 period.

Keywords: perception of COVID-19 crisis management, destination image, destination brand personality, tourist attitude, intention to visit

 https://doi.org/10.26493/2335-4194.15.291-305

Introduction

The outbreak of the COVID-19 virus, a subgroup of the coronavirus, beginning in December 2019 in Wuhan, China, spread around the world in less than two months, endangering the health and lives of millions of people. Moreover, it has led to global changes with a significant effect on the daily lives of citizens as well as the global economy (UNWTO, n.d.). For instance, tourism in many countries has virtually ceased and travel has stopped.

At the same time, after presenting discussions about the COVID-19 crisis, countries should not overlook other critical elements for tourists. The construction of a tourism destination image is primarily important because 'it is impossible for tourists to experience the desired holiday prior to a visitation, leading the way for imagery to become an essential element to inspire and to influence them during the decision-making process,' stated Matos et al. (2015, p. 135). In fact, the destination image positively influences the intention to visit it (Marine-Roig, 2019). As 'potential tourists with limited knowledge of destinations depend on their perceived image of a destination when it comes to making choices' (Blazquez-Resino et al., 2016), the question that taxes the minds of destination marketers is to know why people travel to a particular destination and what comes to mind when a particular destination name is mentioned (in terms of attributes) (Tavares et al., 2020). Thus, creating a good image of the destination for tourists could enhance the destination in many other factors. One of these new topics is the destination's personality, which raises many questions and ambiguities and has not yet been definitively answered. The question that taxes researchers in this regard is 'What are the specific personality traits for the destination?' Although scholars argue that destination personality refers to human traits ascribed to a destination, researchers exhibit many differences in describing these traits. Additionally, it is tough to describe and measure the personality traits of the destination (Zhang et al., 2019, p. 391).

Intense competition between tourist destinations requires the necessary resources to create a competitive advantage. One of the key resources in this field is the destination brand. Branding is the process by which the adoption and use of a brand through different marketing activities is created for customers and businesses and by which the brand provides a competitive advantage for tourist destinations (Frías-Jamilena et al., 2018, p. 26; Aghaei et al., 2021a). In the COVID-19 crisis, one of the factors able to affect branding for these purposes is crisis management, and the perception of COVID-19 crisis management gives the customer a sense of security. It can affect many of psychological and behavioural indicators. Customer knowledge of and positive attitude towards a brand lead to customer purchase behaviour. Positive brand perceptions make organizations stronger and have a consistent advantage over competitors. Hence, many organizations look to shape and maintain a strong brand name among their target audience (Dedeoğlu et al., 2019, p. 221). For instance, 70% of international tourists visit just 10 countries. In other words, the other countries compete for 30% of the total international tourists (Pike, 2009, p. 857; Clark, 2006, p. 15). Thus, the destination must be unique to attract tourists (Murphy et al., 2007, p. 8; Hosany et al., 2006, p. 640). Positive brand perceptions may make customers select a destination they have not experienced previously (Dedeoğlu et al., 2019, p. 218). Thus, the destinations have to make significant efforts to develop effective destination marketing strategies for their target markets (Mansouri Moayyed et al., 2020). Destination personality is a significant element in creating a destination brand. Destination personality is derived from the concept of brand name. In the marketing literature, personality is a set of human characteristics ascribed to a brand (Ghasemian Sahebi et al., 2018). An effective brand increases its brand equity by having a consistent set of traits that a specific consumer segment enjoys. This personality is a qualitative value-add that a brand gains in addition to its functional benefits. As such, a brand personality is something to which the consumer can relate (Zhang et al., 2019, p. 391).

As health is one of the main concerns of many public and private sectors and a key element in selecting a travel destination and the satisfaction of travellers and tourists, so the spread of COVID-19 has led to restrictions on travel and international trade. In other words, this employment-generating industry has stopped and many units and activities in the dependent chain are affected (including accommodation, transportation, food, entertainment complexes and other upstream and downstream intermediaries) and their staff may lose their jobs. This leads to a recession and regression of the developing industry and wider tourism in the market (Agarwal and Helfat, 2009). The strategic modernization of businesses operating in the industry, along with the developments and changes resulting from this disease, is vital in the development and revival of the tourism industry considering its vulnerability to the COVID-19 crisis. Inattention to effective strategies to tackle this crisis in the tourism industry will end in huge issues for companies and lead to the destruction of active companies and severe damage to the economies of countries.

Some studies have been done in this regard; for instance, the study by Perić et al. (2021). This study is among the first to provide a timely discussion within tourism discourse about the impact of the perceived risk to travel intentions during the COVID-19 pandemic and it deepens the understanding of the relationship between the perceived risk and travel intentions during an epidemic outbreak. The PCA identified five categories of perceived risk that affect travel intentions during the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically: health risk, psychological risk, financial risk, destination risk, and travel risk. Also, the aim of research by Ahmad et al. (2020) was to analyse the factors influencing intention to visit and destination image in post-COVID-19 crisis recovery. The findings demonstrated that physical factors are the main factors that influence tourists' intention to visit. Additionally, destination image significantly affects intention to visit and significantly mediates the relationship between the factors and intention to visit.

Overall, previous studies in this regard have focused more on the destination brand image (Stylidis, 2020; Kislali et al., 2020; Afshardoost & Eshaghi, 2020; Woosnam et al., 2020; Dubois et al., 2020; Lee & Xue, 2020; Sahebi et al., 2022) and the effects of COVID-19 prevalence in the tourism industry (Ahmad et al., 2020; Sigala, 2020; Sánchez-Cañizares et al., 2020; Kock et al., 2020; Bakar & Rosbi, 2020; Perić et al., 2021; Fotiadis et al., 2021). However, there is a lack of research on the effects of the perception of COVID-19 crisis management and a need for examining the destination image, the destination personality and the intention to visit in this process. Thus, the study was conducted to examine the effect of the perception of COVID-19 crisis management on the destination image and destination selection for the tourist, considering the important role of destination image components, destination personality and tourist attitudes toward the destination. The important point in the relationship between variables and the conceptual model of research is that in this study, we are not talking about causality, but the different dimensions and criteria of the same concept (destination image). Identifying the factors affecting the tourist relationship with the destination and the results will help destination marketing management employees to differentiate the destination better and guide the destination branding process in a direction that establishes a strong emotional connection and stability between the destination and the tourist. The study findings could be used as a way for tourism officials to overcome the COVID-19 crisis and re-boost the industry.

The rest of the study will consist of the theoretical foundations of the study and the presentation of the study model. Then the results are analysed by explaining the method, and ultimately, conclusions and the discussion are presented, and practical suggestions are given.

Theoretical Background

Perception of COVID-19 Crisis Management

The COVID-19 crisis (declared as a pandemic by WHO, 12 March 2020) has significantly impacted the global economic, political, and socio-cultural systems (Sánchez-Cañizares et al., 2020). The crisis management practices supporting the industry's needs are changing as the pandemic continues (Aghaei et al., 2021b). In the literature, several definitions of crisis have been proposed. For example, Beirman (2011) defined a crisis as an event or a set of circumstances that can damage the reputation and marketability of tourism businesses or the entire destination. The tourism industry is extremely sensitive to crisis situations, as even minor negative events can seriously affect tourism demand and deteriorate tourism firms' financial performance (Kukanja et al., 2020).

The pandemic has created a 'fertile' new context whereby tourism researchers can conduct research with valuable end-user benefits. What is still lacking is knowledge about how crisis can foster industry change, how companies can convert this crisis disruption into transformative innovation and how to conduct research that can enable, inform and shape the rethinking and resetting of a new normal (Sigala, 2020).

Therefore, researchers should examine and understand the stakeholders' lived and perceived COVID-19 experiences as well as their consciousness, mindfulness, capabilities and willingness to understand and act (pro-actively and re-actively) to the pandemic, as all these can equally influence their image, attitudes, behaviours and potential (Sigala, 2020; Aghaei et al., 2021c). Therefore, due to the importance of perception of the destination, in this study, the effect of perception of crisis management on the intention to choose a destination has been investigated.

Destination Image

Since Kim et al.'s (2018) foundational research, the concept of destination image has drawn wide attention in the tourism marketing literature (Akgün et al., 2020). Destination image can be defined as all the cognitive frameworks, perceptions, prejudices, and emotional beliefs that an individual or group expresses regarding a place (Cossío-Silva et al., 2018, p. 3). However, the congruence between the induced image projected by the destination and the organic image held by prospective visitors may vary substantially depending on the destination, previous experiences and the sources that have influenced visitor and prospective visitor perceptions, particularly the Internet (Schofield et al., 2020).

Fazli (2012) argues that destination image is a critical element for the development of successful tourism and destination marketing. Establishing a strong destination image is a way to attract tourists (Fazli, 2012, p. 17). Indeed, destination image has a significant role in predicting the behaviour of tourists (Kim et al., 2018, p. 91). Positive image has a significant effect on tourists' visit to the destination and word of mouth recommendation (Dedeoğlu et al., 2019, p. 217).

Regarding this, Kim et al. (2018) have studied the personality of the destination, the destination image and the purpose of the trip. Their results indicate the essential role of destination personality in image formation. Also, Afshardoost and Eshaghi (2020), in a study on destination image and tourist behavioural intentions, find that destination image plays a significant role in predicting tourists' intentional behaviour, in different magnitudes. Also, overall and affective images significantly impact behavioural intention, followed by the cognitive image. Of the different dimensions of behavioural intentions, destination image significantly impacts the intention to recommend (Séraphin & Butcher, 2018).

Destination (City) Personality

Today, as the key to end-product homogeneity, brand personality has been of wide concern, and its connotation and denotation have been constantly expanded. In this regard, the concept of brand personality has been introduced into destination brand marketing, excavating and refining the core genes that distinguish it from other destinations, as well as finding emotional and cultural elements that meet the needs of tourists. American scholar Aaker (1997) defined brand personality as 'a series of personality characteristics related to a certain brand' based on the theoretical model of 'Five Personalities' in psychology (Shi, 2020).

Tourists prefer to assign human personalities for tourism purposes and attribute human characteristics to cities (Zhang et al., 2019, p. 391). Tourist destinations use a combination of destination image and destination personality as a strategy to differentiate themselves from competitors (Ekinci & Hosany, 2006, p. 130). To Ekinci and Hosany, the destination personality has a key role in shaping the destination brand, identifying tourist perceptions about various destinations and creating a unique brand for the destination. The increase in competition between tourism markets and the destinations' efforts to stand out has led to increasing attention to the destination personality. Rajabi (2018) argues that Spain is known as a friendly and family destination, London as open-minded, lively, and creative, and Paris as a romantic city. Cities with cultural brand personalities are Budapest, Prague, Vienna, Ankara, Cairo, Bangkok, Washington, DC, Delhi, Bucharest, Sydney, and Madrid. Some cities have an artistic city brand; these heritage cities include Venice and Oxford.

Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

In this section, the relationship between variables in this study is explained, and finally the hypotheses are presented.

The Relationship between the Destination Image and the Destination Personality

Hosany et al. (2006) argue that there is a lot of ambiguity in the relationship between brand image and brand personality. According to them, modification of brand image (destination) and brand personality (for destination) has been used extensively in the literature (Ekinci & Hosany, 2006, p. 129). Ekinci and Hosany also concluded that destination image is associated with the destination personality. Chen and Phou's (2013) results confirmed that destination image affects the destination personality, corroborated by Ekinci and Hosani (2006). Souiden et al. (2017) examined the effects of personality and destination image on people's attitudes and opinions. Their results indicate that destination image affects the destination personality. Nonetheless, Kim and Lee (2015) showed that the city personalities (excitement, intimacy and perfection) affect the three dimensions of the city image (dynamic image, special image and stable image). Apostolopoulou and Papadimitriou (2015) argue that the destination personality (excitement and honesty) has a significant effect on destination image. Kim and Lee (2015) and Souiden et al. (2017) showed the effect of destination image on destination personality.

The Attitude and the Effect of the Destination Image and Destination Personality on the Tourists' Attitude

In the tourism literature, the relationship between economic profitability and regular tourists, enhancement of positive tourist attitudes, and repeat visitation has been discussed in many studies (Marinkovic et al., 2014; Kim et al., 2013; Song et al., 2012). There are some studies in the tourism literature (Choo et al., 2016; Song et al., 2012) which have examined attitude as one of the predictors of tourist intention to visit (Hasan et al., 2019).

Tourists' attitudes describe the psychological tendencies expressed by their positive or negative assessments. Indeed, tourist attitude is a predictor variable of the tourist's decision to travel to a specific destination (Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012, p. 593). International trade and marketing literature shows that people's overall perception of a destination image affects people's evaluation of and visits to a tourist destination. The findings of Usakli and Baloglu (2011), Kim and Lee (2015), and Souiden et al. (2017) show the effect of tourism destination personality on tourist attitudes. In other words, destination image can have a significant role in the decision-making process of international tourists and their loyalty (Chaulagain et al., 2019, p. 2). Additionally, recent studies indicate a positive and significant relationship between a positive image of the destination and tourists' willingness to travel. Hence, a positive and valid understanding of the destination is essential to attract tourists to that destination (Chaulagain et al., 2019, p. 1). Regarding this, Souiden et al. (2017) studied the effects of personality and destination image on the attitudes and perspectives of individuals. Their findings indicate that destination image is a precursor to the destination personality and affects it, and has a direct effect on attitudes towards a destination and an indirect effect on behavioural intentions. Also, Sharifsamet et al. (2020), in a study on marketing destinations, researched the impact of destination personality on consumer attitude, finding that destination personality and destination attitude are partially related.

Intention to Visit and the Effect of the Image and Destination Personality on the Intention to Visit of Tourists

Consumers perceive satisfaction according to their personal experiences of cognitive and effective assessments of services/products (An et al., 2021). The behavioural component is usually inherent and committed, as the customer makes a decision and this decision ends in behaviour. Intention to visit is a perception felt by tourists to visit certain destinations in a certain period (Ahn et al., 2013). Intention to visit is also considered a mental process and a transformation from travel motivation into behaviour (Atmaja & Lukito, 2021). Travel intention for tourists can be seen by developing insights into issues such as attitudes or perceptions of goals, with the primary key being to pay attention to constraints and the perceived level of personal control over the resources needed to the achieve targeted behaviour (Sparks & Pan, 2010).

From the consumption process perspective, tourists' behaviour is divided into three stages: before the trip, during and after the trip. Tourist behaviour includes selecting a destination to visit, subsequent evaluations, and the intention to revisit. Overall, subsequent evaluations are perceived travel experience or value and visitor satisfaction, whereas future behavioural intentions go back to the visitor's judgment of the destination, and the tendency to revisit the same destination and recommend it to others (Shahin et al., 2014, p. 89). For success in the tourism industry, one has to examine tourists and their behaviours (Maleki et al., 2015, p. 12).

Tourism literature has acknowledged the model of the relationship between destination brand personality, self-congruity, and tourist behavioural loyalty (e.g. intention to visit) (Yang et al., 2020). To illustrate, several studies confirmed that destination brand personality had a direct influence on tourists' intention to visit (Yang et al., 2020; Apostolopoulou & Papadimitriou, 2015; Chen & Phou, 2013; Eisend & Stokburger-Sauer, 2013; Usakli & Baloglu, 2011).

Several studies centred on the relationship between city image and preference or intention to visit (Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012; Moon et al., 2011). The initial image formation stage before the trip is the most important phase in tourists' city selection processes (Yang et al., 2020).

Given the content expressed and significance of the elements and relations examined in this study, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- H1 *Perception of COVID-19 crisis management has a positive and significant effect on the destination image.*
- H2 *The destination image has a positive and significant effect on the personality of the destination.*
- H3 *The destination personality has a positive and significant effect on the attitude towards the destination.*
- H4 *Attitude towards the destination has a positive and significant effect on the intention to choose the destination.*
- H5 *Perception of COVID-19 crisis management has a positive and significant effect on destination selection.*

The important point in the relationship between

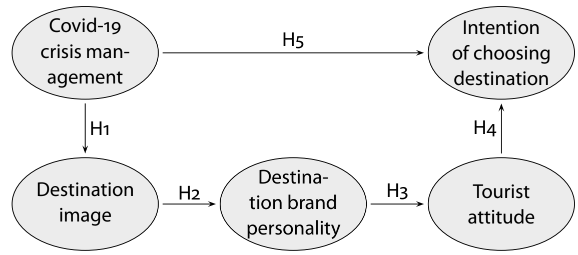

Figure 1 The Study Conceptual Model

variables and the conceptual model of research is that in this study we are not talking about causality, but only about the different dimensions and criteria of the same concept (destination image). In fact, we are talking here about the relationship between a whole and its components and discussing it to determine the factors associated with the destination image that have received less attention in previous research and to determine its impact on destination selection.

Methodology

The study was conducted to examine the effect of the perception of COVID-19 crisis management on destination image and the intention to visit the tourist destination by explaining the role of destination personality and tourists' attitudes towards the destination. This research used the descriptive approach and quantitative data collection with applied purpose. Tehran was examined as the spatial territory of the study and all people (domestic and foreign) visiting Tehran as tourists from July 2020 to April 2021 were the population of the study. The Available Sampling Method was used and the sample size was obtained using Cochran's formula for an infinite population. In this formula, the most important parameter to be estimated is S^2, which is the variance of the prototype. To calculate S^2, 30 pilot questionnaires were distributed and then the variance of the pilot was calculated and the value was 0.0248.

The data collection tool was a questionnaire with closed questions using a Likert scale. The minimum sample size of 381 was determined in the study, assuming a 95% confidence level. Besides face-to-face distribution, the questionnaire was distributed in many sites of natural, historical and man-made tourist attractions in Tehran, such as Golestan Palace, Nature

Park, Botanical Museum Garden, Eram Park, Museum of Ancient Iran, and the National Jewelry Museum in Tehran. To collect the data, the research questionnaire was prepared both online and offline, and the link to the online questionnaire was placed on the tourist destinations sites for tourists to complete them. Also, the printed questionnaires were distributed in person at these destinations, and answers were collected. Ultimately, 768 complete questionnaires were collected to ensure the results, of which 632 were online and 136 samples were collected in person. The hypotheses were analysed using SEM in AMOS and SPSS.

The questionnaire in this research consisted of 6 variables and 25 questions. For questions related to the perception of COVID-19 crisis management, the research of Seyedin et al. (2016) was used with corrections. Also, the destination image variable from Afshardoost and Eshaghi (2020), the destination brand personality from Rutelione et al. (2018), the tourist attitude from Liu et al. (2018), and the intention to select the destination from Hassan and Hemdi (2016) were used.

In this study, 30 questionnaires were distributed among the members of the population. First, the validity of the questionnaires was confirmed with the opinions of experts, and then it was distributed among the population to confirm the validity and initial reliability; they were also asked to express their opinions and suggestions in the field of items. After review, correction and the final approval of experts, a questionnaire was distributed among the sample members. Furthermore, confirmatory factor analysis was used for construct validity. The reliability of the study was calculated by calculating Cronbach's alpha coefficient and combined reliability.

Results

In this section, Table 1 first summarizes the demographic information of the samples. Then the reliability and validity of the tool and the results of model fit analysis and testing of hypotheses are explained.

Based on Table 1, the highest percentage of sample members in each variable were males (62%), age 25 to 45 years (67%), with an undergraduate education (39%) and most people (55%) were domestic tourists from Iran. The key element for selecting a tourist destination in the period after the outbreak of COVID-19 is the health of the destination and control of COVID-19 (50%).

Table 1 Demographic Information of Sample Members

Demographic variable/options		(1)	(2)
Gender	Male	476	62
	Female	292	38
Age	Under 25 years	48	6
	25 to 45 years	516	67
	46 to 60 years	144	19
	Over 60 years	60	8
Education	Less than bachelor's	201	26
	Bachelor's degree	297	39
	Master's degree	174	23
	PhD and above	96	12
Continent	Asia (Iran)	421	55
	Asia (excluding Iran)	139	18
	Europe	92	12
	Africa	69	9
	America	47	6
The most important factor in choosing a tourist destination (after the corona outbreak)	Destination health and COVID-19 control	382	50
	Low cost	101	13
	Variety of tourist places	153	20
	Access and proximity to the destination	43	5
	Other factors	66	9

Notes Column headings are as follows: (1) frequency, (2) percentage.

First, the factor loadings associated with the measured indices in each latent variable (visible variables) is examined. As is seen, the factor loading of all items is greater than 0.7. Two indices are used to evaluate the model reliability: (a) Cronbach's alpha coefficient, and (b) Combined reliability (CR). As Tables 2 and 3 show, all the variables have Cronbach's alpha and CR greater than 0.7, implying the existence of reliability in the main variables of the study.

Two criteria have been used to evaluate the validity of the measurement model. The first criterion is

Table 2 Cronbach's Alpha Results (Prototype Stage)

Research variables	(1)	(2)
COVID-19 crisis management	4	0.812
Destination image	8	0.808
Destination personality	9	0.941
Attitude to the destination	3	0.928
Intention to visit (destination selection)	6	0.896

Notes Column headings are as follows: (1) number of questions, (2) Cronbach's alpha results.

convergent validity and the second is divergent validity. The results of estimating the average variance extracted (AVE) show that all values are higher than 0.5 and the convergence validity of the study is confirmed. The study of the relationship between the squared variance squared with the mean correlation has been used in the study to show the divergent validity, the results of which are shown in Table 3.

After ensuring the acceptability of the measurement model in the developed structural model, the process of path analysis with the latent variables is stated in this section to examine the structural relationships between the variables. As Table 4 shows, the fitting results of the model show that the model has the desired fit. Furthermore, the R^2 value of the dependent variables 'destination image,' 'destination personality,' 'attitude' and 'intention to visit' discussed in this model, is more than 1.0 and desirable. In other words, for the dependent variable 'destination image,' the effect of the independent variable (Perception of COVID-19 Crisis Management) is 0.272 (27.2%) and the effect of other latent variables not visible in this model but affecting the results and 'destination image' is 0.728 (72.8%). Furthermore, the R^2 of 'destination personality,' 'attitude' and 'intention to visit' are 11.6%, 10.2% and 29.6%, respectively. In other words, the power of the study in measuring the variables affecting the dependent variable and the outcomes is desirable.

The results of the path coefficient of 'Perception of COVID-19 crisis management on the destination image' show that the value of P is less than 0.01 and the value of the critical ratio (12.091) for this path is more than 1.96, by which one can state that the effect of perception of COVID-19 crisis management on the destination image is significant at the 99% level. It has to be stated that the standardized factor loading value for this path is 0.509 and positive, showing the positive effect of the prevalence of COVID-19 on the destination image. Table 4 shows that the value of P for the path 'destination image to destination personality' is less than 0.01 and the value of the critical ratio (6.418) confirms the significance of this path. The standardized factor load value for this route is 0.343. Furthermore, the value of P for the path coefficient 'destination personality to the tourist attitude' is less than 0.01 and the value of the critical ratio (5.877) confirms the significance of this path coefficient; The amount of standardized factor load for this route is 0.322. Like the previous three paths, the significance of the attitude path to the destination intention to visit is confirmed by considering the value of P and the value of the critical ratio (9.117). The value of factor loading in this path is 0.496 and, considering the positive standardized factor loading, one can conclude that attitude has a positive effect on behavioural intention. Ultimately, the results of the path coefficient of 'Perception of COVID-19 crisis management on the intention to visit the destination' show that the value of P is less than 0.01 and the value of the critical ratio (14.825) for this path is more than 1.96. It can be said that the effect of the perception of COVID-19 crisis management on the intention to visit is 99% significant. Considering these values, one can state that the standardized factor loading value for this path is 0.532 and positive, showing the positive effect of the perception of COVID-19 crisis management on the intention to visit the destination. The test results of the hypotheses testing and the path coefficient are shown in Table 4 and Figure 2. The results of testing the hypotheses in SEM showed that all 5 hypotheses, as stated in this study, has been confirmed with a 99% confidence level.

Discussion and Conclusions

Attention to the tourism industry as an important source of income has increased in many countries in recent years. Thus, as competition increases, the destination outperforming the others in branding will be more successful. Considering the changing tastes of

Table 3 Results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Main variables	Items	Standard operating load	CR	AVE	α
Perception of COVID-19 crisis management	The COVID-19 crisis makes me feel insecure.	0.806	0.902	0.674	0.916
	I feel safe in Tehran against the COVID-19 virus.	0.769			
	I feel that the COVID-19 virus has been tackled in Tehran.	0.715			
	After this crisis, I only visit cities that are healthy in terms of the virus.	0.825			
	COVID-19 crisis control and management is effective in my visit to Tehran.	0.793			
Destination personality	In Tehran, I feel like I belong to the upper social class.	0.873	0.963	0.749	0.963
	I feel that Tehran is unique.	0.848			
	Tehran has a friendly and intimate feeling for me.	0.870			
	You can have a sense of warm relations with Tehran.	0.838			
	Tehran is up to date (modern).	0.874			
	Tehran is attractive to me.	0.882			
	Tehran is desirable and lovable.	0.887			
	Tehran is a leader in everything.	0.857			
	Tehran is reliable.	0.855			
Destination image	Tehran is a beautiful place.	0.767	0.944	0.682	0.944
	Tehran has good infrastructure (roads, service communications, etc.).	0.813			
	Tehran is a good place for business.	0.842			
	Tehran has a developed industry.	0.815			
	Tehran is a safe place to invest.	0.839			
	Tehran has a high standard of living.	0.810			
	Tehran offers enjoyable recreational activities.	0.874			
	Tehran is socially and culturally diverse.	0.840			
Attitude	I love Tehran.	0.852	0.871	0.693	0.970
	I have a positive opinion about Tehran.	0.832			
	Visiting Tehran is a good decision.	0.811			
Behavioural intention (intention to visit)	I was waiting to see Tehran.	0.890	0.932	0.699	0.931
	I was actively looking for information about Tehran.	0.882			
	I had considered Tehran among my travel destinations.	0.789			
	After visiting Tehran, I will probably visit Tehran again.	0.820			
	I will definitely travel to Tehran.	0.780			
	I will suggest a trip to Tehran to others.	0.845			

Model	χ^2	DF	P	TLI	IFI	CFI	RMSEA	χ^2/DF
Measurement model	617.851	292	0.001	0.959	0.963	0.963	0.053	2.108
Acceptable values	–	–	–	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9	<0.08	1–5

tourists and the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus, the revival of the tourism industry has become an important and critical issue for countries, so that the management of this crisis has become a current topic in

Table 4 Results of the Main Structural Equation Model

Path	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Crisis management of COVID-19 in the destination image	0.568	0.509	0.070	12.091	0.000	0.272
Destination image on the destination personality	0.426	0.343	0.066	6.418	0.000	0.116
Destination personality on attitude towards the destination	0.301	0.322	0.050	5.877	0.001	0.102
Attitude to the destination on the intention to visit	0.539	0.496	0.058	9.117	0.001	0.296
Perception of COVID-19 crisis management on intention to visit	0.590	0.532	0.060	14.825	0.001	0.296

Notes Column headings are as follows: (1) standardized factor load, (2) not standardized factor load, (3) standard error, (4) critical ratio, (5) p, (6) R^2. Model fit values: RMSE = 0.047, CFI = 0.937, IFI = 0.937, TLI = 0.930, $P = 0.001$, DF = 295, $\chi^2 = 856.8$, $\chi^2/\mathrm{DF} = 2.894$.

Table 5 Test Results of Hypotheses in Structural Equation Model

Path	Standardized factor loads results					Result
	(0)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	
Crisis management of COVID-19 in the destination image	0.509**	–	0.466**	–	–	Conf.
Destination image on the destination personality	0.343**	–	–	0.336**	–	Conf.
Destination personality on attitude towards the destination	0.322**	–	0.093*	0.093*	0.093*	Conf.
Attitude to the destination on the intention to visit	0.496**	0.539**	0.542**	0.542**	0.542**	Conf.
Perception of COVID-19 crisis management on intention to visit	0.532**	0.583**	0.591**	0.591**	0.591**	Conf.

Notes Column headings are as follows: (0) the original model, (1) alternative model one, (2) alternative model two, (3) alternative model three, (4) alternative model four.

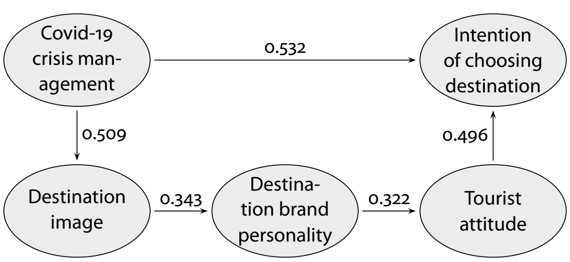

Figure 2 The Results of Hypothesis Testing

most countries. As a country with high tourism potential, Iran has faced this crisis, too. The previous studies in this regard have been carried out more on the brand image of the destination and the effect of the prevalence of COVID-19 in the tourism industry, and the lack of studies on the effects of perception of COVID-19 crisis management and destination image, destination personality and intention to visit in this process is felt. The study tried to fill the gaps expressed. Thus, the study examines the effect of COVID-19 crisis management on the destination image and the intention of the tourist to select a destination within the tourist destination of Iran (Tehran). The data was collected from tourists using a questionnaire and analysed using AMOS and SPSS. The results can enhance the awareness of tourism industry officials of the factors affecting the choice of destination, and the practical suggestions could be used as a way for travel destinations to exit the crisis of tourist attraction in the post-COVID-19 era.

Overall, no previous studies have been carried out that meticulously examine the effect of perception of COVID-19 crisis management on intention to visit by considering the effect of the factors in this study. However, the results of the hypotheses of this study are compared with the most relevant studies in the past.

The results revealed that although tourist destinations and cities are lifeless elements, tourists usually consider them to have personality and human characteristics. According to the first hypothesis, crisis management of COVID-19 has a positive and significant effect on the destination image. In fact, with the prevalence of COVID-19 and the differences between countries regarding their success rate in combating the virus, the mental image of tourists has been negative towards the countries with more infections and more positive towards the ones with fewer infections; a country able to manage this crisis creates a better image of itself. The results of the first hypothesis are in line with those of Ahmad et al. (2020), Yu et al. (2020), and Abbaspour et al. (2020). The results regarding the second hypothesis showed that destination image has a positive and significant effect on the personality of the tourist destination. Tourism industry officials and decision makers must pay special attention to branding for all cities with tourism potential. The results of a study revealed that branding cost a city like Glasgow about 3 million pounds. It generated 42 million pounds in revenue. In other words, for every dollar spent on branding, the city generates $ 12.72 in revenue in the city of Glasgow. This result is in line with those of Kim and Lee (2015), Doosti et al. (2016), Souiden et al. (2017), and Yang et al. (2020). Furthermore, the results on the third hypothesis of this study showed that the personality of the tourist destination has a positive and significant effect on attitudes towards the destination. These are in line with those of Kim and Lee (2015), Souiden et al. (2017), Doosti et al. (2016), Yang et al. (2020) and Sharifsamet et al. (2020). The fourth hypothesis indicates that the attitude of tourists towards the destination has a positive and significant effect on the intention to select and visit the tourist destination. In other words, when the attitudes of tourists towards a tourist destination improves, their intention to visit the destination is strengthened, too. Destination personality attributes human personality traits to a tourist destination. The results of this hypothesis are in line with those of Chung et al. (2015), Doosti et al. (2016), Yang et al. (2020), Afshardoost and Eshaghi (2020), and Nechoud et al. (2021). Ultimately, the results of the fifth hypothesis showed that COVID-19 crisis management has a positive and significant effect on the intention to select and visit a tourist destination. Thus, in the era of COVID-19, the health of the destination can have a key role in creating destination image. A destination with less prevalence of COVID-19 and with crisis management of the virus will be more reliable than the destination with more prevalence of the virus. The results of this hypothesis are in line with those of Sánchez-Cañizares et al. (2020), Ioannides and Gyimothy (2020), Han et al. (2020), Ahmad et al. (2020), and Perić et al. (2021).

Considering the results, city officials should control and manage the COVID-19 crisis and increase the health of their city as the most important factor in choosing tourist destinations in the COVID-19 era, in order to get out of the tourist decline crisis in this period. As a tourism city can be considered as a brand consisting of tangible and intangible characteristics, tourism marketers must use this feature and focus more on informing tourists about the health of the destination and creating a positive mindset about the health of the city and improving the image of the city, to brand and expand their desired tourism destinations. During the COVID-19 crisis, they can capture destination images by providing reliable statistics on the number of cases and government efforts to control and manage the crisis of the virus and vaccinate people, and by showing a healthy image of the city as well as the physical characteristics of the destination (beautiful scenery, beaches, parks, cultural events and festivals, shopping facilities, friendly locals). The destination personality can be characterized by characteristics such as: attractive, modern, reliable, exciting, up to date, friendly, cheerful. Marketers can use of these characteristics to shape the attitude of tourists and, by encouraging them, make their city a destination of choice for tourists. Thus, the organizations in charge of tourism (like Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts, Tourism, and Municipality) can emphasize the historical, recreational, business environment, and safe investment of the city besides creating the city's image in terms of health as the key factor in this period.

The city personality has a significant role in the success of tourism destinations. The studies showed that a unique personality has been designed for all successful tourism cities in the world today. For instance, the city of Paris has a feminine brand, and the personality of this city is different from that of a city like Berlin, which has a masculine personality. The brand personality of cities like Tokyo, Beijing, Kuala Lumpur, and Dubai is unique to them. Hence, it is essential for all cities in a country to design a unique brand personality. The brand personality of the city has to encompass the history, architecture, climate, geography and everything in the city. There is no doubt that creating a brand personality for tourist cities is not a choice but a necessity. The increase in the competition between tourism markets and destinations trying to stand out has led to more attention being paid to the destination personality. The results revealed that the concept of tourism city personality is used to describe the characteristics of the city and differentiate tourist destinations. Tourists are more likely to travel to cities where they can identify themselves. Awareness of the city brand is a key factor in visiting the destination and increases interest in it.

The study identifies the efforts to control and manage the COVID-19 crisis and show a safe and healthy image of the city as the key element in attracting tourists in this period, and encourages tourism marketers to treat the image and destination personality as a key predictor for tourists' attitudes. Managers and tourism marketing experts have to try to enhance the subjective image of tourism destinations for tourists by increasing advertising and promotional activities. As tourists' attitudes have a direct effect on travel intentions, it is recommended that tourism managers emphasize marketing activities and long-term strategies rather than cross-sectional ones in creating a positive tourist attitude. Additionally, it is suggested that the experts and managers of tourism destinations try hard to create a safe image of the city, and to show architecture and tourist attractions in order for tourism cities to improve and develop tourism. It also seems that marketers and managers of recreational and tourism destinations must focus on the key elements in attracting tourists according to the target market segmentations and classify tourists based on characteristics like novelty, diversity and other factors and, based on this, formulate strategies to create a city brand to attract tourists.

For future studies, it is suggested to study the economic dimensions of the effect of COVID-19 on the tourist incomes of countries and identify the key factors for tourists in selecting a tourist destination in the future and after control of the COVID-19 virus. It is suggested that the model and strategy of creating a destination brand value be developed based on the changing tastes of tourists after the COVID-19 era. Additionally, it is recommended that future studies examine the effect of other variables such as satisfaction, loyalty, tourism brand resonance, perceived quality of tourism, tourism destination identity, tourism brand trust and sympathy and various other variables on tourists' attitudes and intention to visit.

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Original Scientific Article

Revisiting Royal Tourism: Tourists' Intention to Revisit the Yogyakarta Palace in Indonesia

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It is well accepted that countries with a monarchy system have the capital to develop royal tourism. Even though Indonesia is a republic, the country was formed by merging small kingdoms and sultanates and some of their palaces are now turned into living museums and attractions for tourists. This study examines the factors influencing the intentions of tourists to return to the Yogyakarta Palace, a palace belonging to a sultanate that still survives and is recognized by the government. The study cohort was 250 and was selected using the convenience sampling method, and data were tested using an exploratory factor analysis and structural equation models. The main finding of the current study is that revisit intention was influenced by service quality, perceived value, tourist satisfaction, and place attachment.

Keywords: royal tourism, palace tourism, royal heritage, place attachment, revisit intention

 https://doi.org/10.26493/2335-4194.15.307-321

Introduction

Currently, several countries have implemented a monarchy system, such as Brunei Darussalam, the United Kingdom, Japan, Jordan, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Morocco, Monaco, Spain, Saudi Arabia, Swaziland, and Thailand. These countries have a great potential to develop and offer royal tourism, which is a tourism product that makes the monarchy an object and subject of tourism. In general, tourists are interested in aspects related to the monarchy, from its history, buildings, and celebrations to its royal members.

Collectively, there are two types of studies that focus on different aspects of royal tourism. First, the studies concerning tourism induced by the travels of royalty, which means royal leaders visit places, which in turn creates a crowd of tourists travelling to sites visited by those royal leaders. According to Zuelow (2006), the visit of King George IV to Scotland in 1822 visit attracted thousands of tourists to also visit this country. Tourism historians noted this event as the beginning of royal tourism in Scotland, and the tradition still exists. In the early 1850s, Butler (2007) mentioned that Queen Victoria and Prince Albert destroyed and rebuilt a castle there, Balmoral, which they visited every summer. The visit of British royalty to Scotland makes this country attractive in the eyes of international tourists and has even become an identity for the country (Palmer, 2007). As depicted by Leiper (2008), a similar incident occurred when King Chulalongkorn of Siam (now Thailand) visited Europe in 1897. The places visited by the King, both in Europe and in Siam after the King's return from Europe, became crowded with tourists, which impacted the local community's economy.

The second type of royal tourism studies concerns the activities carried out in the palaces of royal leaders to attract tourists. Thus, Baxendale (2007) considered palace tourism as a type of heritage tourism. Referring to the Tower of London, Windsor Castle, and Hampton Court in England, she found that visitors were motivated by nationalism and royalism to visit those sites. Other studies with settings in Indonesia concerned how palaces can continue to survive as cultural centres by holding royal dinners or overnight stays (Cahyadi, 2015, 2019; Ruastiti, 2015). Indonesia is a country with thousands of islands and consisted of small kingdoms and sultanates before its independence. At present, despite being a republic, in some areas there are still several kingdoms, especially the sultanates. However, they do not have the authority or power of the kingdoms and empire of previous times and the number of the remaining sultanates that have opened their palaces to be tourist destinations is limited. This current study refers to this second type of royal tourism.

It is axiomatic that different events involving royal families – such as births, anniversaries, birthdays, and funerals – attract remarkable public attention (Raad et al., 2021). Accordingly, Palmer and Long (2019) shed light on the impact of royal family life on travel and tourism patterns through their tourism and leisure activities and experiences. Elsewhere, Maddens and Vanden Berghe (2008) have investigated the context of royal tourism in Spain by focusing on the management of royal destinations as distinctive historical contexts for tourists, whereas Lunchaprasith (2022) has explored the potential of royal tourism in the context of Thailand and found that royal tourism could be a valuable addition to the country's existing cultural tourism attractions or utilized as a tool to enhance the national heritage for local communities. Furthermore, Porananond and King (2016) postulate that to date, the relevant literature on tourism and monarchies is dedicated to the history of the Western Europe, especially the United Kingdom, and they state that there is an urgent need to expand the literature to Asian royalty to fill the gaps in the tourism literature and explore this issue outside of Europe.

Thirumaran (2016) indicates that royal tourism shapes a visible and experimental part of the tourism landscapes in the southeast part of Asian countries such as Nepal, Myanmar, and Vietnam. It is claimed that the relationships between royalty and tourism have received scant attention in the pertinent academic literature (Dowling, 2010). Only minimal research has explored the linkage between monarchies past and present in Asian, Middle Eastern and African contexts (Spellman, 2001). According to Palmer and Long (2019, p. 9), 'The motivations, behaviours and experiences of both casual and dedicated "royal tourist" visitors to royal events and sites and in the presence of royalty would also bear analysis in seeking to understand how monarchy is consumed and interpreted by both domestic and international visitors.' In the same vein, the authors found a lack of studies focusing on tourist behaviour in the context of royal tourism, especially those using a quantitative approach. For this reason, this study aims to examine the factors that influence the intention of tourists to revisit the imperial palace and the authors chose service quality, tourist satisfaction, place attachment, and perceived value as predictors.

Literature Review

Service Quality

According to Park and Jeong (2019), service quality is one of the most common variables used in tourism studies between 2008 and 2019. In the pertinent literature, several methods of tourist service quality assessment are employed, compromising SERVPERF, Critical Incident Technique (CIT), and the SERVQUAL method (Kowalska & Ostrega, 2020). Most research uses SERVQUAL, and the results are in line with the arguments of Parasuraman et al.'s (1988) and Parasuraman et al.'s (1991) arguments. Arguably, several researchers have proposed that a revised measurement scale is required in the context of tourism services (Yu et al., 2005). Liu and Lee (2016) examine an integrated model of service quality that demonstrates the affective mechanisms through which service quality relates to price perception of service, word of mouth (WOM) and intention to revisit; the context of their study was the Asia Pacific region.

Accordingly, service quality is a balance between customer perceptions and their expectations (Bhat, 2012). Dissatisfied tourists have no intention of returning to visit or even have an intention to spread lousy word-of-mouth reviews. Narayan et al. (2009) employed two perspectives to measure service quality in the tourism industry – the customer perspective and the service provider perspective. Customers seek the following ten aspects: 'core-tourism experience, information, hospitality, fairness of price, hygiene, amenities, value for money, logistics, food, and security' (Narayan et al., 2009, p. 62). Liu and Lee (2016) tested the potential relationship between service quality, word of mouth, price perception, and intention to revisit using structural equation models and other statistical methods and examined their proposed method on a sample of 484 respondents. From the perspective of the service providers, they must be customer-oriented, flexible to different customer needs, flexible to changing customer desires, support and provide flexibility for front-liners to act quickly and correctly, and focus on company performance. Furthermore, service quality follows the type of tourism products; for example, rural tourism emphasizes hardware (including equipment and atmosphere), dish quality, catering price, safety and hygiene, service level, and characteristic service (Huang, 2017). On the other hand, culinary tourism considers reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibility (Mulyana & Ayuni, 2019).

Service quality is raised in hospitality, leisure, and tourism studies such as culinary tourism, rural tourism, eco-tourism, sports tourism, halal tourism, heritage tourism, urban tourism, and theme parks (Gumussoy & Koseoglu, 2016; Huang, 2017; Irama & Abror, 2019; Mulyana & Ayuni, 2019; Nian et al., 2019; Shonk & Chelladurai, 2008). However, there is still a dearth of studies that research service quality in the context of royal tourism. Based on reports from previous studies, service quality plays a significant role in shaping tourists' perceived value (Lai & Chen, 2011; Nguyen et al., 2018; Rajic et al., 2013; Kuo et al., 2009), and service quality is also one of the variables chosen by Donighi and Yousefi (2016) to confirm post-purchase intention; they stated that service quality affects perceived value.

Prior studies have documented the significant effect of service quality on tourist satisfaction (Kwenye, 2015; Lai & Chen, 2011; Mohamad et al., 2019; Kuo et al., 2011; Rajic et al., 2013). For example, Kwenye (2015) measured factors influencing destination loyalty in the case of natural heritage tourism in a study that took place at the Victoria Falls heritage site in Zambia and involved domestic tourists. This scholar showed the significant influence of service quality on satisfaction and place attachment. Kwenye (2015) also documented the significant impact of perceived value on satisfaction and place attachment.

Previous studies have shown the influence of service quality on revisit intention (Amalia & Hidayat, 2019; Dedeoğlu, 2019; Herstanti et al., 2014; Timur, 2018). For example, Herstanti et al. (2014) investigated tourists who had visited Sydney in Australia, asking which factors encouraged them to return, and one of their findings is the influence of tour quality on the intention of tourists to visit again.

Service quality is one of the components for building tourists' attachment to the destinations they visit (Cheng et al., 2018; Kwenye, 2015; Mohamad et al., 2019; Nian et al., 2019). For example, Nian et al. (2019) paid attention to heritage conservation intention and recruited tourists who visited World Heritage Sites as participants in their study, and they also mentioned that service quality affects place attachment.

Guided by the previous studies, four hypotheses relating to service quality were formulated as follows:

- H1 *Service quality will have a significant impact on perceived value.*
- H2 *Service quality will have a significant impact on tourist satisfaction.*
- H3 *Service quality will have a significant impact on revisit intention.*
- H4 *Service quality will have a significant impact on place attachment.*

Perceived Value

Tourists pay what they must, and this can be related to tickets for flights, hotel rooms, or vehicle rentals, all to reach a tourism destination and they therefore receive what they (should) receive from their payments. Zeithaml (1988) defined perceived value as the overall value of a product (goods and services) based on the benefits and the sacrifices incurred to get these goods and services, according to customer perceptions. According to Petrick (2002), the concept of perceived value consists of behavioural prices, monetary prices, emotional responses, quality, and reputation, whilst consumers' attainment of products (goods and services) is not just a transfer of ownership, but also the perception of benefits and value for the money involved and the psychological response to the quality and reputation of the products.

Researchers have used perceived value to predict tourist satisfaction (Butler, 2016; Konuk, 2019; Lai & Chen, 2011; Rajic et al., 2013; Wang et al., 2017). For example, Wang et al. (2017) investigated influencing factors of tourist loyalty in the context of car tourism. Participants in the study were visitors to a World Natural Heritage site in Xinjiang, China. They employed destination image, perceived value, and satisfaction to measure loyalty, and one of their findings is that perceived value has a significant impact on tourist satisfaction.

One of the key important factors to predict revisit intention is perceived value (Chen & Chen, 2010; Pilelienė & Grigaliūnaitė, 2014; Suhud & Wibowo, 2016; Ting & Thurasamy, 2016). For instance, Suhud and Wibowo (2016) examined the influencing factors of revisit intention to vintage-concept restaurants, and they postulate that perceived value has a significant impact on revisit intention. Based upon the previous studies, two hypotheses were formulated.

- H5 *Perceived value will have a significant impact on tourist satisfaction.*
- H6 *Perceived value will have a significant impact on revisit intention.*

Place Attachment

Inalhan and Finch (2004) introduced the concept that place attachment is a form of a sense of belonging, and they further suggested three elements that make up this sense of belonging: attachment, familiarity, and identity. Attachment refers to emotional bonding between an individual and a place, whereas familiarity is 'the processes by which people develop detailed cognitive knowledge of their environs' (2004, p. 123) and place identity is an individual's self-representation of the places they have lived in. On a different note, Scannell and Gifford (2010) put forward the idea that place attachment consists of persons, place, and process, and thus, they further summarize those persons cannot be separated from their religious and historical backgrounds, including their experience, realization, and milestones. In addition, the persons' places cannot be separated from social and physical elements, both natural and artificial and the process is cognitive, affective, and conative.

In their lives, tourists may travel to various destinations, and it is not certain that all the destinations they visit will have a particular meaning for them. The creation of this meaning can tie tourists emotionally to the destinations they are visiting (Low & Altman, 1992). Place attachment is often associated with a sense of place, the meaning of a place, and the place's identity, which is a form of interaction between humans and a place and its impact on that person's emotional bond with that place (Hashemnezhad et al., 2013).

Prior studies measure the effect of place attachment on revisit intention (Kil et al., 2012; Neuvonen et al., 2010; Prayag & Ryan, 2012; Su et al., 2018). For example, Kil et al. (2012) conducted a study in the state of Florida, in the United States, involving visitors to a forest for recreation and tourism. They tested the effect of place attachment on future visit intention, and they mention that place attachment influences visitors' future visit intentions.

Thus, this study tests the following hypothesis.

- H7 *Place attachment will have a significant impact on revisit intention.*

Tourist Satisfaction

Tourists are customers who buy and consume a product, and they may be satisfied because the features or attributes of the product match their expectations. It could be argued that satisfaction plays a vital role in the decision-making process about goods and services provided by tourism destinations (Shavanddasht & Allan, 2018). Suchánek et al. (2015, p. 329) defined customer satisfaction as 'satisfaction with a product and business performance as the ability to generate profits,' whilst Ozturk (2015, p. 2817) define it as 'an emotional response to the experiences provided by and associated with particular products or services purchased.' In the context of the tourism industry, tourists buy a tourism product or visit a destination and may be satisfied because of the attributes possessed by a destination, which can be something tangible or intangible, physical or non-physical.

Correia et al. (2013) developed a tourist satisfaction scale based on tourist motivation when visiting a destination. They further tested three concepts, namely tourist motivation related to facilities, knowledge, and novelty, and the level of tourist satisfaction with the three concepts; they believed that tourist satisfaction is a manifested tourist motivation. Furthermore, Ghose and Johann (2018) reported that tourist satisfaction is formed because of the tourist experience related to destination attributes which include climate, attractions, nature, shopping opportunities, safety, opportunity to meet people, and entertainment. They also mentioned tour package features as an aspect that could provide satisfaction to tourists. This feature includes 'attractiveness of the program, organization, hotels, restaurants and meals, standard of the bus, tour escort, and price/quality relationship' (2018, p. 15). Several factors determine tourist satisfaction, including accommodation services, local transport services, hygiene (including cleanliness and sanitation), hospitality and customer care, availability of facilities and activities, levels of prices, language communication, and destination airport services (Kozak, 2010).

A number of studies have proven that there is a significant effect of tourist satisfaction on place attachment (Butler, 2016; Gan et al., 2017; Hosany et al., 2017; Kwenye, 2015; Reitsamer & Brunner-Sperdin, 2021; Su et al., 2018; Xu & Zhang, 2016; Zhou et al., 2020). For example, Xu and Zhang (2016) conducted an urban tourism study and compared the destination loyalty of Chinese and Western tourists who visited Hangzhou, China. They concluded that tourist satisfaction is an

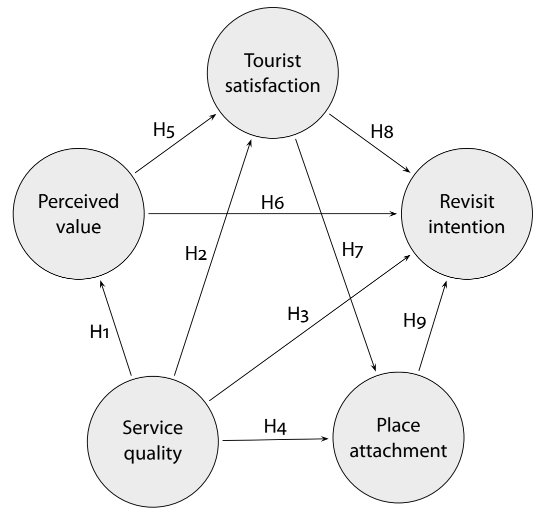

Figure 1 The Proposed Research Model

important key to influence place attachment both for Chinese and Western tourists. Furthermore, according to Butler (2016), perceived value, satisfaction, and place attachment can be employed to examine the loyalty of business club members in North America and satisfaction significantly affects place attachment.

Several past studies provide clues about the influence of tourist satisfaction on revisit intention (Han et al., 2009; He & Luo, 2020; Mannan et al., 2019; Rajput & Gahfoor, 2020). For instance, Suid et al. (2017) conducted a study to examine the effect of tourist satisfaction on revisit intention involving Muslim travellers in Malaysia in which they claimed that tourist satisfaction has a significant impact on revisit intention.

The following two final hypotheses relating to the role of tourist satisfaction were formulated:

H8 *Tourist satisfaction will have a significant impact on place attachment.*

H9 *Tourist satisfaction will have a significant impact on revisit intention.*

Figure 1 shows the proposed research model, based upon the literature discussed above.

Methods

Measures

The researchers employed existing scales and measures and indicators from previous studies, adapted for this current study, and it could be argued that the utilization of existing scales offers better reliability and validity for the survey. There were five variables used in this current study, including service quality, perceived value, tourist satisfaction, place attachment, and revisit intention. Thus, service quality was measured, adapting indicators taken from Liu and Lee (2016), whilst perceived value, tourist satisfaction, and revisit intention were examined, adapting indicators from the study of Herstanti et al. (2014), and place attachment was measured, adapting indicators from Ramkissoon et al. (2013). All indicators were adapted into Indonesian and measured on a six-point Likert-type scale: from 1 for 'strongly disagree' to 6 for 'strongly agree.' We deliberately chose the six-point scale to prevent participants from choosing 'neutral' answers.

Data analysis Methods

As a general protocol before testing the hypothesis, the first phase that the authors completed was measuring the validity of the data using the exploratory factor analysis (EFA) method which aims to see whether each variable has dimensions and to filter which indicators are considered valid. The lowest level of validity for each indicator is 0.4. According to Hair et al. (2016), the minimum number of respondents is 200, and the minimum loading factor required is 0.4, thus, in this case, the study cohort is 250 participants. The next phase after testing data validation was testing the reliability of the data and the authors further calculated each available construct for observing the Cronbach's alpha scores; the construct could be variables or the dimensions of variables. The lowest alpha value we adopted was 0.7 or more significance for any construct tested to be reliable; we did not include constructs with an alpha value below 0.7 for the examination of the hypothesis. We used SPSS version 27 software to calculate the validity and reliability of the data.

The authors used a structural equation model (SEM) with AMOS version 27 software to test the hypothesis and calculate data that will indicate if a model fits with specific criteria. There are four criteria that the authors chose, including probability, the Minimum Sample Discrepancy Function per Degree of Freedom (CMIN/DF), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA). The rule of thumb for each criterion is presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Rules of Thumb for a Fit Measure

Fit measure	Good fit indices	Sources
Probability	$0.05 < p \leq 1.00$	Schermelleh-Engel et al. (2003)
X^2/DF	$0 \leq X^2/\text{DF} \leq 2.00$	Tabachnick et al. (2007)
CFI	$0.95 \leq \text{CFI} \leq 1.00$	Hu and Bentler (1995)
RMSEA	$0 \leq \text{RMSEA} \leq 0.05$	Browne and Cudeck (1992)

Results

Data were collected at the Yogyakarta Palace which is a particular province where the sultanate system is still maintained. The palace complex is still active as a tourist destination and a residence for the Sultan and his family and currently, the Sultan is also serving as a governor in the Special Province of Yogyakarta. Participants were palace visitors, and they were selected using the convenience sampling method: the author distributed a printed questionnaire to the participants, and the participants filled out the questionnaire by themselves. The number of participants in this study was 250, consisting of 133 male participants (53.2%) and 117 female participants (46.8%) who have visited the Yogyakarta Palace at least once. The survey results show that 159 participants (63.6%) have visited once, 52 participants (20.8%) have visited twice, 21 participants (8.4%) have visited three times, and 18 participants (7.2%) have visited more than three times. Furthermore, 169 participants (67.6%) were aged between 18 and 23 years old, and 171 participants (68.4%) completed high school level education. In addition, this survey revealed that 205 participants (82.0%) were single, and 129 participants (61.6%) were not working (Table 2).

Data Validity and Reliability Tests

Table 3 presents the validity and reliability tests results, which consist of nine constructs from six vari-

Table 2 Participants' Profiles

Category	Group	*f*	*f*%
Sex	Male	133	53.2
	Female	117	46.8
	Total	250	100.0
Age	<18	8	3.2
	18–23	169	67.6
	24–29	63	25.2
	30–35	7	2.8
	36–41	3	1.2
Level of education completed	Less than high school	15	6.0
	High school	171	68.4
	Diploma	9	3.6
	Undergraduate	55	22.0
Marital status	Unmarried	205	82.0
	Married	42	16.8
	Separated/divorced	3	1.2
Occupational status	Unemployed	129	51.6
	Employed	96	38.4
	Self-employed	25	10.0

ables. First, place attachment consisted of six indicators, with an alpha score of 0.954, whilst the second variable is perceived value, which contained two dimensions. The first dimension had four indicators, with an alpha value of 0.912, and the second dimension comprised five indicators, with an alpha value of 0.963. Third, tourist satisfaction shaped three dimensions; the first dimension had two indicators, with an alpha score of 0.118, the second dimension had an alpha score of 0.906, and the third dimension had two indicators, with an alpha score of 0.774. Fourth, service quality possessed seven indicators and an alpha score of 0.919. The fifth variable was revisit intention, with two dimensions: the first dimension consisted of two indicators, with an alpha score of 0.827, and the second dimension contained three indicators, with an alpha score of 0.910. Of all the constructs, one of them was considered unreliable because it had an alpha score of 0.118, thus, for this reason, this construct was excluded from further analysis.

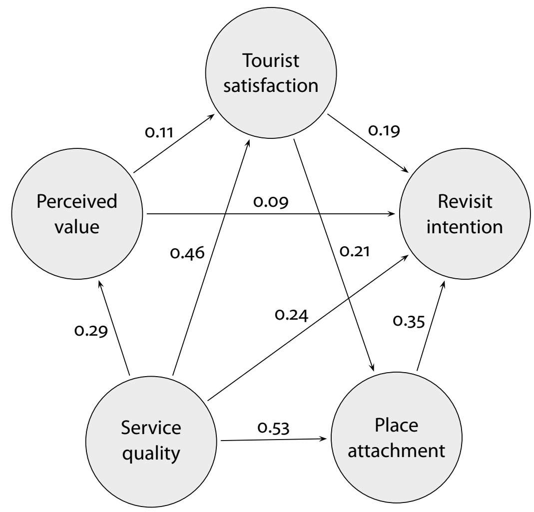

Figure 2 Structural Model of the Hypotheses Testing

Hypotheses Tests

Figure 2 is a structural model of the hypotheses testing model which achieved a fitness with probability, CMIN/DF, CFI, and RMSEA scores of 0.398, 1.048, 0.999, and 0.014, respectively.

Table 4 presents results of the hypotheses testing which reveal that there were 9 hypotheses tested. Based on the structural equation model calculation, eight hypotheses (H1, H2, H3, H4, H6, H7, H8, and H9) gained critical ratio (CR) scores of 2.031 and larger, whereas one hypothesis (H5) obtained a CR score of 1.688.

Discussion

The current study examined nine hypotheses concerning tourist visits to the Yogyakarta Palace in the Special Province of Yogyakarta which is considered unique because it also operates under the sultanate system, apart from being part of the Republic of Indonesia. Of the nine hypotheses tested, eight were accepted, and one hypothesis was rejected.

Nguyen et al. (2018) employed service quality to measure perceived value and examined the effect of service quality on perceived value. In our study, this path obtained a CR score of 4.164, indicating that the first hypothesis was accepted. Forms of palace management services include welcoming guests, providing

Table 3 Results of Data Validity and Reliability Tests

Variables and indicators		(1)	(2)
Place attachment			0.954
PA6	The Yogyakarta Palace is significant to me.	1.000	
PA3	I am very familiar with the Yogyakarta Palace.	0.948	
PA7	My friends/family prefer the Yogyakarta Palace compared to other tourist destinations.	0.890	
PA5	I feel a strong sense of belonging to the Yogyakarta Palace, related to the arrang./facilities available.	0.836	
PA4	I am very attached to the Yogyakarta Palace.	0.703	
PA8	If I don't visit the Yogyakarta Palace, my friends/family will be disappointed.	0.633	
Perceived value 1			0.912
PV11	I felt that I gained additional knowledge through visiting the Yogyakarta Palace.	0.983	
PV14	I gained valuable experience that I can share with others after visiting the Yogyakarta Palace.	0.945	
PV17	I felt the benefits of visiting the Yogyakarta Palace are in line with the price I paid.	0.848	
PV16	The ticket price for the Yogyakarta Palace meets my estimation.	0.696	
Perceived value 2			0.963
PV15	I got services from the Yogyakarta Palace worth what I spent.	−0.963	
PV12	I felt the new experience of an unforgettable trip by visiting the Yogyakarta Palace.	−0.961	
PV9	The art performance at the Yogyakarta Palace made a good impression on me.	−0.903	
PV10	I visited the Yogyakarta Palace because I wanted to.	−0.900	
PV13	I witnessed unique attrac. in the Yogyakarta Palace, which I did not find in other tourist attractions.	−0.886	
Tourist satisfaction 1			0.118
TS33	I am satisfied because access to the Yogyakarta Palace is easy.	0.975	
TS34	I am satisfied because transportation to the Yogyakarta Palace is easy.	0.972	
Tourist satisfaction 2			0.906
TS26	I enjoyed visiting the Yogyakarta Palace.	−0.972	
TS30	I am satisfied to see historical objects in the Yogyakarta Palace.	−0.913	
TS29	I am satisfied to see the paintings in the Yogyakarta Palace.	−0.842	
TS28	I am satisfied watching art performances at the Yogyakarta Palace.	−0.408	
Tourist satisfaction 3			0.774
TS27	I am satisfied visiting the Yogyakarta Palace.	0.943	
TS32	I am satisfied because it's easy to find an ATM.	0.798	

Continued on the next page

tour guides, and performances. Participants consider these services positively, and they strengthened the perceived value of tourist visits to this royal tourism destination. In the same vein, Donighi and Yousefi (2016) stated that service quality has a significant effect on perceived value.

The second hypothesis in the current study investigated the effect of service quality on tourist satisfaction and it obtains a CR score of 5.809, so it can be considered significant. This finding supports previous studies (Kwenye, 2015; Lai & Chen, 2011) which noted that good service is the key element for tourist satisfaction. In this case, the participants described the Yogyakarta palace as visually appealing and the employees as polite. Rajic et al. (2013) claimed that service quality has a significant effect on tourist satisfaction.

Table 3 *Continued from the previous page*

Service quality			0.919
SQ19	When I have a problem, the Yogyakarta Palace employees are responsive in solving it.	0.924	
SQ20	The Yogyakarta Palace employees are willing to take the time to respond to visitor requests.	0.820	
SQ23	The Yogyakarta Palace employees are consistently polite to me.	0.687	
SQ21	The Yogyakarta Palace employees are always willing to help me.	0.676	
SQ18	The facilities at the Yogyakarta Palace are visually appealing.	0.630	
SQ24	The Yogyakarta Palace understood what I needed and tried to accommodate me.	0.607	
SQ25	The Yogyakarta Palace has convenient operating hours for all visitors.	0.564	
Revisit intention (1)			0.827
RI37	I prefer visiting the Yogyakarta Palace compared to other tourist attractions.	−0.885	
WOM	The Yogyakarta Palace is my choice of destination for a future vacation.	−0.747	
RI35	I will revisit the Yogyakarta Palace for a vacation.	−0.648	
Revisit intention (2)			0.910
RI39	I will tell you positive things about my experience during a vacation at the Palace Yogyakarta.	−0.884	
RI40	I would recommend the Yogyakarta Palace to my relatives as a vacation destination.	−0.873	
RI38	I will recommend the Yogyakarta Palace to my friends.	−0.629	

Notes Column headings are as follows: (1) factor loadings, (3) Cronbach's alpha.

Table 4 Results of the Hypotheses Testing

Hypotheses		Paths		CR	*P*	Results
H1	Service quality	⇒	Perceived value	4.144	***	Accepted
H2	Service quality	⇒	Tourist satisfaction	5.813	***	Accepted
H3	Service quality	⇒	Revisit intention	3.168	0.002	Accepted
H4	Service quality	⇒	Place attachment	5.970	***	Accepted
H5	Perceived value	⇒	Tourist satisfaction	1.668	0.095	Rejected
H6	Perceived value	⇒	Revisit intention	2.031	0.042	Accepted
H7	Tourist satisfaction	⇒	Place attachment	2.850	0.004	Accepted
H8	Tourist satisfaction	⇒	Revisit intention	3.303	***	Accepted
H9	Place attachment	⇒	Revisit intention	4.919	***	Accepted

Service quality is often considered as a determining factor for tourists' intention to return in the future to a tourism destination. In this case, the tourists thought the services provided by the Yogyakarta Palace to be good, and because of that, they wanted to return to visit the destination. The third hypothesis examined the effect of service quality on revisit intention and its path had a CR score of 3.168, thus, this third hypothesis was considered significant. Dedeoğlu (2019) demonstrated the considerable impact of service quality on revisit intention.

Tourists' perception of the service quality provided by the Yogyakarta Palace created a bonding to the Yogyakarta Palace, confirming, as was conveyed by previous studies, that service quality can boost place attachment (Donighi & Yousefi, 2016; Lai & Chen, 2011; Rajic et al., 2013). This path acquired a CR score of 5.97 and automatically indicated that the fourth hypothesis was accepted. Kuo et al. (2009) reported that service quality had a significant effect on place attachment.

The fifth hypothesis questions the effect of perceived value on tourist satisfaction. In general, perceived value had a significant effect on tourist satisfaction (Butler, 2016; Konuk, 2019; Lai & Chen, 2011). However, based on the result of SEM calculations, this path obtains a CR score of 1.668 and the calculation results showed that this hypothesis was rejected and that the value perceived by tourists from their visit to Yogyakarta Palace was insufficient to achieve satisfaction.

The sixth hypothesis examined the effect of perceived value on revisit intention and this hypothesis is accepted with a CR score of 2.031. The perceived value of a tourist visit to the Yogyakarta Palace can strengthen the intention of a tourist to visit again: the participants assumed that they had gained additional knowledge and valuable experiences to share with others by visiting this palace. This finding is in line with several previous studies (Pilelienė & Grigaliūnaitė, 2014; Suhud & Wibowo, 2016; Ting & Thurasamy, 2016), which revealed a significant effect of perceived value on revisit intention.

Another hypothesis tested was the effect of tourist satisfaction on place attachment, which generates a CR score of 2.85, indicating that the seventh hypothesis was accepted. Satisfied tourists will easily tie themselves to the destinations they visit and tourists who visited Yogyakarta Palace achieved satisfaction because their expectations matched what they got. Xu and Zhang (2016) said that there was a significant influence of tourist satisfaction on place attachment. This finding corroborates the results of other studies (Butler, 2016; Hosany et al., 2017; Reitsamer & Brunner-Sperdin, 2021; Zhou et al., 2020).

Tourist satisfaction is one of the significant stimuli to encourage tourists to revisit a destination and tourists got what they had hoped for before they visited. The eighth hypothesis is accepted, with a CR score of 3.303, and this finding supports the results of previous studies (Chou, 2014; Mannan et al., 2019; Rajput & Gahfoor, 2020). In this case, the participants were satisfied because they could see the historical objects in the palace complex, including valuable paintings. According to He and Luo (2020), tourist satisfaction is an essential factor in encouraging tourists to visit again.

When the attributes of the Yogyakarta Palace affected the hearts of tourists, there was no other choice for those tourists but to have the intention to visit in the future. In this study, place attachment examined revisit intention, and this path obtained a CR score of 4.919, which indicated that the ninth hypothesis was accepted. This finding also reinforced previous studies (Kil et al., 2012; Neuvonen et al., 2010; Su et al., 2018). In this case, the participants felt a strong sense of belonging, and their friends and family also preferred the Yogyakarta Palace to other destinations, which is in agreement with Prayag and Ryan (2012), who stated that there was a significant effect of place attachment on revisit intention.

Conclusion

This study was conducted at the Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat Sultanate Palace (for marketing purposes, the palace managers have shortened the name of this palace to Yogyakarta Palace, so it is easy for tourists to remember). This study aimed to examine the factors that influence the intention of tourists to return to the Yogyakarta Palace and there were nine hypotheses proposed to be tested; however, only eight hypotheses were accepted. In this study, service quality effectively influences perceived value, tourist satisfaction, revisit intention, and place attachment and also, perceived value affected revisit intention. Another variable that plays a significant role was tourist satisfaction, which could affect place attachment and revisit intention, and place attachment affected revisit intention construct.

The scope of this study was limited in terms of the sample selection technique. Consequently, the authors used the convenience sampling technique, so the findings of this study cannot be generalized to the whole population. Primarily, data collection was carried out on weekdays, even though most tourist visits occur on weekends. In addition, the scope of tourists was restricted to the age category 18–23 years old, high school graduates, single, and unemployed. The authors cannot provide suggestions for the results if the sample groups had different profiles. Another limitation of this research is from the observations of the second author, who collected data on-site. Most of the tourists who filled out the questionnaire seemed to spend little time at the palace: they scanned some spots then went to other spots as they were too busy doing selfies and group selfies, possibly because most visitors are young.

This study expands research on royal tourism, which is still limited, especially on tourist behaviour in Indonesian and Southeast Asian settings. So far, Cahyadi (2015) has raised concerns about the authenticity and commodification of culture at the Puri Anyar Kerambitan, Bali. Cahyadi (2019) and Ruastiti (2015) focused on the efforts made by the Gianyar Palace management in Bali to make the palace a cultural centre through tourism activities, for example, from providing dinner packages with royal members to displaying dances and typical royal wedding processions. Rahmawati (2013) conducted another study on royal tourism and revealed that one of the events held at the Surakarta Hadiningrat Palace was providing a limited-quota package to stay in the palace, which is located in the city of Surakarta (Solo), Central Java Province. Furthermore, this study also expands the scope of cultural tourism, as initiated by Dunbar-Hall (2001), MacLeod (2006), and Schildkrout (1999); all matters relating to the kingdom, for example, activities of the local royal family, treasury, and historic houses, can be a part of cultural tourism.

The Yogyakarta Palace managers can benefit from the findings of this study, particularly regarding the factors that can influence tourists who have visited the palace to have the intention of returning. Factors that directly affect return visits are tourist satisfaction, service quality, and place attachment, thus, tourism sites managers could apply such factors to attract royal palace tourists.

The authors suggest that future studies, especially regarding tourist behaviour in royal tourism, should modify the research model by considering using other predictor variables such as travel motivation and destination image and it is also worth trying variables related to psychographics, for example, lifestyle and personality (novelty-seeking, and sensation-seeking).

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Original Scientific Article

Slow Tourism as an Immersive Travel Experience: A Bibliometric Analysis

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'Slow tourism' is a holistic tourism concept that promotes sustainability in all aspects of a traveller's journey. It is a promising alternative to mass tourism with which tourists, destination managers, and tourism service providers are willing to engage. In academic research, there is little consensus on what 'slow' means and how it is practiced or interpreted in relation to different tourism contexts, cultures, and mobilities. Therefore, this paper aims to explore the concept of slow tourism, its evolution and current scope. Moreover, the paper presents a new insight into scientific production through bibliometric analysis, not previously fully clarified in hospitality and tourism research. Data for the study is generated from English-language journal articles that were produced from a Scopus database search of specific keywords associated with slow tourism. The findings indicate that the research interests on slow tourism is growing remarkably and is related to slow travel and food, sustainability, and an immersive travel experience.

Keywords: slow tourism, sustainability, local food, immersive travel experience, bibliometric analysis

 https://doi.org/10.26493/2335-4194.15.323-333

Introduction

Tourism behaviour has changed during the COVID-19 period, resulting in the bolstering of proximity tourism. There has been an increase in 'staycations' or vacations close to home. Nature, rural tourism, and road trips have emerged as popular travel choices due to travel limitations and a quest for the open air. More and more travellers want to make real connections with local people, the place itself, and the local culture, and they are doing it by slowing down. They stay longer in the destination and prioritize travel quality over quantity (Wen et al., 2020). Therefore, the 'slow travel' experience is gaining increasing interest (UNWTO, 2021).

Slow tourism is perceived as a promising alternative to mass tourism which promotes sustainability, and with which tourists, destination managers, and tourism service providers are willing to engage (Serdane et al., 2020). It respects local cultures, history, and environments, while at the same time valuing social responsibility by celebrating diversity and the connection that a tourist gets from sharing and engaging in a space with other visitors and the host community (Jung et al., 2014).

Despite the proliferation of the relevant literature, research development on slow tourism is still in its infancy (Serdane et al., 2020). There is no consistent understanding of what constitutes slow tourism.

It can be considered as a kind of attitude regarding travel (Lumsdon & McGrath, 2011) which includes use of local transportation to and from the destination and staying at one destination for a longer time to explore local culture and food. These travellers are environmentally friendly. Others see it as an alternative approach to mass tourism (Markwell et al., 2012 in Serdane et al., 2020) which brings social and economic benefits to the destination (Timms & Conway, 2012). Additionally, there are different meanings of slow tourism worldwide. In the USA, slow tourism means taking time at the destination to become familiar with it, to explore it up close. The mode of transport to the destination is not so important, whereas in Europe, slow tourism refers to travelling to closer places and with an environmentally acceptable mode of travel (Robbins & Cho, 2012 in Özdemir & Çelebi, 2018). Therefore, there is no universally accepted global definition of slow tourism.

The aim of this research is to advance previous reviews on slow tourism via a more systematic, objective, and integrated review. The paper uses a bibliometric analytical tool to identify established and emergent research clusters for the typological analysis. Such an approach was undertaken to address three main research questions:

RQ1 *How has research on slow tourism evolved between 2011 and 2021?*

RQ2 *What are the main themes of slow tourism research?*

RQ3 *What are the future directions of the research in this field?*

Therefore, the aim of bibliometric analysis is to:

- Provide bibliometric information on scientific studies which were extracted from the Scopus database.
- Use the software R with bibliometrix codes and the biblioshiny online program to obtain and record the quantitative data in the different articles selected.
- Use the variable of authors per article to understand the leading authors in this research area.
- Use citations analysis and a collaboration map to understand the network of this research stream.
- Study countries to evaluate production, citations, and the network within each country.

According to the aim of the research, this paper is arranged as follows. The first part explores the literature review of slow tourism, following the methodology phases used. The third section subsequently discusses results of the bibliometric analysis via a series of visual and tabulated representations. Based on the research findings the authors elucidated research gaps and set areas for future research. The paper closes with the contribution and implications of this study.

Literature Review

The term 'slow' in the context of sustainability originates from the Slow Food movement which began in Italy in the late 1980s. Carlo Petrini, who is a father of the Slow Food movement, was against the opening of the first McDonald's restaurant in the centre of Rome in 1986 (Myhrvold et al., 2011 in Paul, 2014). He believed that everybody is entitled to tasty, healthy, and local food. Such a philosophy later spread to all aspects of urban living as a Cittaslow (Slow City) movement which aims to increase the quality of life and ensure sustainable development in cities (Nilsson et al., 2011). Today, more than 100, 000 small cities are part of the Cittaslow network. Those cities satisfy major criteria grouped into seven macro-areas ranging from energy and environmental policies, quality-of-urban-life policies, policies for hospitality, awareness and training, and social cohesion. People in those cities respect tradition through the joy of slow and quiet living (Cittaslow International n.d.).

Slowness is an effective concept of slow tourism which offers an alternative to mass tourism with more attention on destination sustainability and tourist experience (Heitmann et al., 2011; Meng & Choi, 2016). In the literature several authors have acknowledged the need to differentiate between slow travel and slow tourism. The term 'slow travel' is more about slowing down the speed (Gardner, 2009 in Caffyn, 2012), taking time to explore the destination. The journey becomes a moment of relaxation, not a predetermined, imposed goal to achieve. Those travellers are seeking greater authenticity in their holidaying and require a different experience while having a moral conscience towards the impact they bring to the destination (Conway & Timms, 2012). They usually use clean modes of transport such as biking (Dickinson et al., 2011) and walking which gives them the possibility to explore the destination slowly and immerse themselves in it (Molz, 2009 in Rabbiosi, 2021; Kato & Progano, 2017). Doing so, travellers make real and meaningful connections with people, places, culture, food, heritage, and environment (Caffyn, 2012; Moskwa et al., 2015; Park & Lee, 2019; Walker & Lee, 2019). Therefore 'slow travel' generally refers to the tourist journey while 'slow tourism' is concerned with all tourism activities at the destination (Conway & Timms, 2012). Such tourism focuses on the full travel experience and encourages travellers to reduce their travel frequency and stay longer in a destination to immerse themselves in a destination, its culture, and people (Dickinson, 2015 in Losado & Mota, 2019) which is a central point for creation and consumption of memorable tourism experiences (Lindberg & Østergaard, 2015). When travellers are encouraged to physically (e.g., touching, smelling, walking) or mentally (i.e., thinking or watching) connect with a given event or performance, they can immerse themselves in a meaningful experience of learning and discovering it. In this sense, Lumsdon, and McGrath (2011) point out that slow tourism creates a chance to slowly explore a destination and enrich the travel experience.

The major reasons for participating in slow tourism are 'self-reflection' and 'discovery' (Oh et al., 2016; Lin, 2018). For instance, self-reflection assists travellers to become reinvigorated and recharged while discovery encourages travellers to get inspired, discover themselves, immerse themselves with their destination more deeply, and restore positive attitudes and mindsets. Time is valuable for them. Such tourism encourages independent rather than group travel. They choose destinations with the aim to stay longer in places with a slower pace, which offers opportunities to walk, cycle and enjoy the countryside (Lumsdon & McGrath, 2011; Sompong et al., 2015; Serdane et al., 2020). They use local trains, local buses, bicycle or walk to explore destinations. Moreover, such transportation represents low carbon means of travel (Conway & Timms, 2012; Kato & Progano, 2017; Chi & Han, 2020). They opt to stay in accommodation with a host family so they can immerse themselves in the local life and learn about the local culture first-hand (Khan, 2015; Meng & Choi, 2016; Losada & Mota, 2019; Ince et al., 2020; Walker et al., 2021). They are looking for a quality over quantity experience, something totally different from trips where travellers just follow the list of all must-sees and after getting home realize that they need a holiday to recover.

Oh et al. (2016) have undertaken very interesting research on the motivation and goals of practicing slow tourism. In their opinion, slow tourism is not a counterbalance to developed mass tourism, but rather a coexisting phenomenon. Both slow and fast ways of travelling are constantly intertwined within the same tourist. They suggest that the tourism industry should not consider slow tourism as an independent, separate, and opposite phenomenon to mass tourism, but should treat it in parallel. The focus should be on a tourist behavioural approach – their motivation to travel, their value and the goals they would like to achieve during the holiday.

According to the literature review, slow tourism research has been mainly focused on the factors that affect the choice of slow tourism destination such as a traveller's sociodemographic, attitudinal and motivational characteristics (Meng & Choi, 2016; Oh et al., 2016; Lin, 2017). This study tries to define major themes, trends, authors, and countries of slow tourism research during the last decade.

Methodology

The methodology of this study includes five main phases involving (1) Study Design, (2) Data Collection, (3) Data Analysis, (4) Data Visualization, and (5) Interpretation (Cobo et al., 2011; Zupic & Čater, 2015; Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017; Campra et al., 2021).

Study Design

The first step was to define the research aim and questions. The second step included selection of a database to develop a data set for bibliometric analysis. The Scopus database was used to search all pertinent articles for this research because it is one of the largest and highest-quality abstract and online citation databases of peer-reviewed literature in the field of management science in general (Aksnes & Sivertsen, 2019). The search criteria were determined by the researchers to extract the collection results. First, the term 'slow' was combined with 'tourism,' and 'travel' and 'sustainable' to formulate keywords such as 'slow tourism,' and 'slow sustainable tourism,' and 'slow travel.' Those keywords were searched in three sections, including the title, abstract, and keywords. In terms of document types, only full-length journal articles in English were collected (Ramos-Rodríguez & Ruiz-Navarro, 2004). Conference papers, reviews, and reports were excluded. The timeline was selected (2011–2021), keeping in mind that the concept was operationalized during the 2010s (Walker et al., 2021). The second-round search was conducted to refine the collection results and check the selected articles.

Data Collection

In the first round, 743 relevant publications were identified. After applying the research criteria such as time frame, publication type, and language, the data set included 304 publications. The authors read the title and the abstract of those publications displayed in the search results. The database was then downloaded in Bibtex format and uploaded in the Bibliometrix R package which is an open-source tool for quantitative research in bibliometrics. After the upload, the R Studio software version 3.0 was used to eliminate duplicates and create a unified file. After deleting all duplicates and selecting relevant publications from the tourism and hospitality field, the final dataset included 168 publications.

Data Analysis and Visualization

In this phase, the software R and biblioshiny web interface for bibliometrix were used to create descriptive bibliometric analysis and explore relationships within the research, such as keywords' co-occurrence and co-citation networks. The results from the analysis are visually presented in the tables and graphs.

Interpretation

Finally, data has been interpreted. The analysis of the results starts with the essential description of the main bibliometrics statistics which present the following details: type of document, annual scientific production, scientific sources, source growth, number of articles per author, author's keywords, articles' citation, country's production, country's citation, country collaboration map, and country collaboration network.

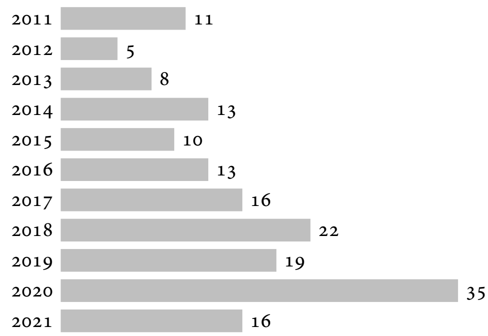

Figure 1 Annual Scientific Production – 'Slow Tourism'

Findings

Screening of available research literature reveals that in the field of slow tourism research, altogether, 368 authors contributed 168 research publications to the literature corpus from 2011–2021. The most significant increase in publication occurred in 2020, with a total of 35 articles (21%) while the lowest productivity was in 2012 (3%) (Figure 1).

Those articles have been published in 71 sources, particularly in scientific journals. The number of 'Keywords Plus' is 320 and represent words or phrases that frequently appear in the titles of an article's references, but do not appear in the title of the article itself. Out of these 168 research publications, single-authored documents constitute about 23%, while the remaining 77% of the articles were multi-authored, indicating the popularity of the collaborative nature of research among authors in the field of slow tourism. Therefore, the collaboration index (CI), which is designed as Total Authors of Multi-Authored Articles, is 2.56 authors per document. Table 1 presents a detailed characterization of the database.

Regarding the journals' productivity, the analysis is based on a ranking of the top ten journals in the economy and business management field from the Scopus

Table 1 Initial Search Results on 'Slow Tourism' Topic for the Period 2011–2021

Main information about data	Search Result (Number)*
Documents (articles)	168
Sources (journals)	71
Period	2011–2021
Average citations per documents	14.77
Keywords Plus (ID)	320
Author's Keywords (DE)	700
Authors	368
Authors of single-authored documents	38
Authors of multi-authored documents	330
Collaboration Index (CI)	2.56

Notes *Search results (number) are from the Scopus database.

Table 2 Top 10 Journals on 'Slow Tourism' Topic in the Scopus Database from 2011–2021

Sources	Articles
Journal of Sustainable Tourism	27
Tourism Geographies	10
African Journal of Hospitality Tourism and Leisure	7
Tourism Management	7
Tourism Recreation Research	7
Tourism Management Perspectives	6
Tourism Planning and Development	6
Current Issues in Tourism	5
Journal of Destination Marketing and Management	4

database. From Table 2 it is evident that one journal stands out in terms of the number of articles: *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* with 27 articles, with *Tourism Geographies* following with 10 articles and others below that number. Furthermore, the table makes visible the fact that all journals deal with either tourism or hospitality services.

The most prominently cited publication on slow tourism is 'Developing a Conceptual Framework for Slow Travel: A Grounded Theory Approach' authored by Lumsdon and McGrath and published in 2011. In their framework they identify four key features

Table 3 The Top 10 Most-Cited Papers in the Journals between 2011 and 2021

Authors, Year	Journal	Total Citations*
Lumsdon and McGrath (2011)	*Journal of Sustainable Tourism*	109
Nilsson et al. (2011)	*Current Issues in Tourism*	33
Ekinci (2014)	*Tourism Management*	32
Timms and Conway (2012)	*Tourism Geographies*	28
Moskwa et al. (2015)	*Journal of Sustainable Tourism*	22
Ho et al. Chen (2015)	*Journal of Sustainable Tourism*	19
Adeyinka-Ojo & Khoo-Lattimore (2013)	*Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes*	16
Lin (2017)	*Journal of Sustainable Tourism*	15
Presenza et al. (2015)	*Tourism Planning and Development*	15
Kato and Progano (2017)	*Tourism Management Perspectives*	14

Notes * Number of citations is based on Scopus database.

that together make up the core components of a slow travel holiday: slowness and the value of time; locality and activities at the destination; mode of transport and travel experience; environmental consciousness, with slowness having a pivotal role. Their concept of slow tourism has received a total of 109 citations. The following most-cited study is 'CittàSlow Eco-gastronomic Heritage as a Tool for Destination Development' with 33 citations, published in *Current Issues in Tourism* (Nilsson et al., 2011). The authors emphasized that slow tourism could assist destinations in quality offerings and that the CittàSlow concept has an indirect potential for tourism development. Additionally, Timms and Conway (2012), with 28 citations, point out that slow tourism is an alternative model to mass tourism since it encompasses the environmental sustainability concerns of ecotourism, addresses the social and cultural sustainability interests of community-based tourism and advances the economic sustainability of a destination. Table 3 presents

Figure 2 World-Cloud Analysis of Research Literature

the top ten most-cited influential publications in the journals from the Scopus database.

According to the analysis from biblioshiny, the main keywords that are used frequently in the field of slow tourism research are 'sustainability,' 'tourism' and 'slow travel,' following 'slow food,' 'tourist experience' and 'slow adventure.' This information is essential to determine the research trends and fields in slow tourism that can be interesting as research areas. To confirm this, a world cloud analysis was adopted (Figure 2). Such analysis visually represents text data, where the size of a particular word can visualize the frequency and its assigned importance by the researchers. The larger the size of a word in the word cloud the greater the number of times that word is used in the corpus. Analysis of the text confirms that 'slow travel' is usually used with 'sustainability' and 'tourist experience.' Moreover, the analysis indicates that 'tourism development 'and 'slow food' are more popular than the word 'Covid-19.'

Furthermore, 'slow tourism,' 'slow travel' and 'slow food' were central keywords in 2011 while the keywords 'sustainability' and 'alternative tourism' have evolved since 2015, which indicates their linkage. The development trend of keywords from 2011 to 2021 is visualized on the map (Table 4).

To present how frequently these keywords words have been used together in the literature, a co-occurrence analysis of keywords is made. The larger the size of the specific frame the greater the repetition of that keyword in the literature. Figure 3 shows the result of the co-occurrence analysis of keywords. A close look at the co-occurrence map suggests that 'slow tourism,' 'sustainable tourism,' and 'slow food,' 'travel experience,' and 'slowness' are some of the keywords of slow tourism literature which have been used most frequently. The distance between two terms is an indication of how commonly they have been used together in a journal article. It can be observed that closely situated terms have been used more regularly in a higher number of research articles than two words which are located relatively farther on the map. 'Tourism marketing' is linked to 'sustainable tourism' and 'small island.' The research findings also indicate that 'travel experience' and 'slowness' are placed side by side, suggesting that they are more frequently used in research papers. On the other hand, 'travel experience' and 'alternative tourism' are located at a relatively greater distance on the map, which suggests that these words have appeared in a research paper less frequently. The appearance of the word 'the Caribbean' is suggestive of the frequency of location of slow tourism research.

To detect relationships between articles, the authors used co-citation network analysis. This type

Table 4 Development Trend of Keywords between 2011 and 2021

Year	Slow tourism	Sustainable tourism	Slow food	Sustainability	Slow travel	Sustainable dev.	Tourism	Alternative tourism	Caribbean	Slow movement
2011	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
2012	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0
2013	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
2014	0	0	1	0	0	1	2	0	0	0
2015	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2016	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2017	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
2018	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
2019	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
2020	4	2	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	1
2021	2	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0

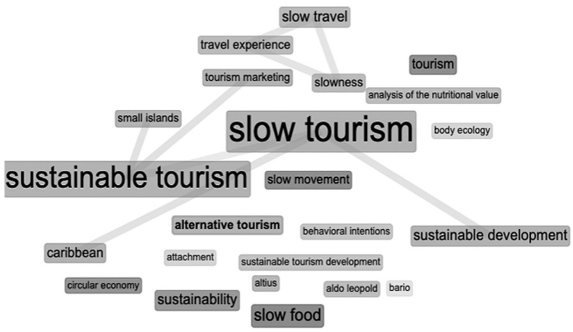

Figure 3 Co-Occurrence of Keywords along with 'Slow Tourism'

of analysis studies the frequency of cases when two (or more) sources have been cited in the third paper, which has a similar timeline of publications. The size of the frame of a node indicates the volume of research work on slow tourism published by that author. Relative distance in the map is an indication of the frequency with which a third common paper has cited these two authors (or journals), so two closely situated authors (or periodicals) have been co-cited more often.

The analysis of this study clustered main topics and their authors in two different colours (red and blue). The first cluster, the red one, emphasizes topics written by Dickinson et al. (2011), Lumsdon, and McGrath (2011), and Fullagar et al. (2012). These authors are focused on similar themes; therefore they are cited together more frequently (Figure 4). Those topics are related to slowness, holiday duration, nearby locations, quality tourism experience and conscious decision-making. Slowness means spending more time at the destination and gaining a quality tourism experience. Special attention is given to people and place engagement. They describe those travellers as environmentally conscious tourists who prefer buses, coaches, and trains as low carbon dioxide vehicles while travelling. In their research they cited earlier research written by Matos (2004) who pointed out that mountain regions should develop slow tourism and offer a wider range of tourist products to protect the natural environment.

The second cluster of this study is the blue one and represents the concept of Slow Food and Slow City movement described by Hall (2012) and Nilsson et al. (2011) who co-cited Mayer and Knox from 2006. Those authors recommend the concept of Slow Cities (Cittaslow) as a perfect model for local sustainable development in small towns. Such places are developed within the framework of a sustainable economic model, provide solutions to infrastructure, pollution, and traffic problems, mobilize the local dynamics of the city, and offer visitors the unique historical context of a town. Furthermore, those places provide an opportunity to each visitor to enjoy local culture, food, and hospitality.

The following section analyses the geographical development of publishing about the 'slow tourism' topic. The bibliometric analysis indicates that the UK

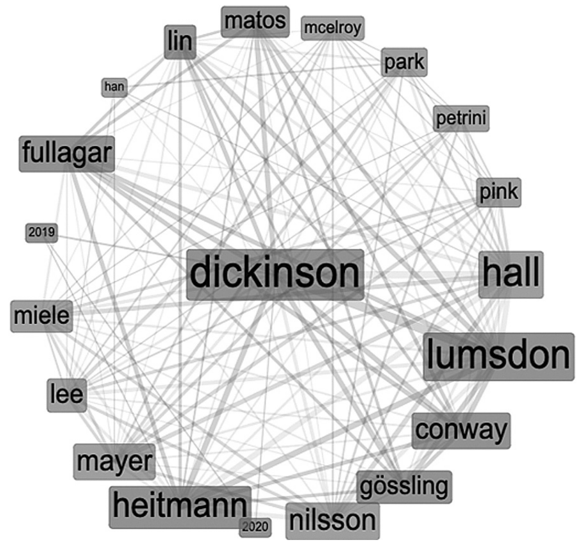

Figure 4 Co-Citation Network Analysis

Table 5 Distribution of Research Regions

Region	*f*	Region	*f*
UK	10	Germany	3
China	8	Poland	3
Australia	7	Romania	3
Italy	7	Thailand	3
Turkey	7	USA	3
Portugal	6	Malaysia	2
South korea	6	Spain	1
Japan	4	Sweden	1

Figure 5 Collaboration of Countries/Regions

(74) and China (41) are some of the highest-contributing countries in slow tourism literature as the highest number of research articles originate from these countries (Table 5). Furthermore, the map (Figure 5) shows that intercountry collaboration exists and the blue colour on the map represents the existence of research networks with other nations. What can be noticed from the map is that the countries with a major number of publications on slow tourism are the ones with higher partnership rates, meaning that they have shared information and helped each other to find scientific, relevant results. The highest intercountry collaboration exists between China and Australia.

Discussion and Conclusion

This research is the first of its kind to use a bibliometric method to analyse research trends on slow tourism topics from the Scopus database. The main contribution of this paper is threefold: to present research trends on slow tourism during the last decade, to identify the most productive journals and most cited authors and, moreover, to emphasize major key words and themes which are currently evolving on slow tourism research. Those themes can be used as a potential area for future research.

According to the analysis of annual scientific production on slow tourism research during the last decade, it is evident that the highest number of publications occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic period, 2020 – 2021 (Figure 1). Slow tourism is described as a promising alternative to mass tourism which promotes sustainability, while tourists, destination managers, and tourism service providers are willing to engage with it (Serdane et al., 2020). Such tourism respects local cultures, history, and environments, while at the same time valuing social responsibility by celebrating diversity and the connection that a tourist gets from sharing and engaging in a space with other visitors and the host community (Jung et al., 2014). In this sense, the most-cited paper written by Lumsdon and McGrath (2011) points that slow tourism is a way in which tourists approach their travel. Those travellers want to enjoy and slowly explore a destination. They want to interact with local people and be part of their daily tasks. Moreover, they wish to taste their food and enjoy the local atmosphere in a typical restaurant. Time, as a slowness, is important for them since they can immerse themselves in different social and cultural aspects of the local lifestyle (Sun & Lin, 2018) which leads to a more fulfilling and memorable holiday (Almeida-Santana & Moreno-Gil, 2018 in Walker et al. 2021).

Furthermore, the research reveals that main themes of slow tourism are related to slow travel and food, sustainability, and the travel experience. Slow tourism activities, such as food experience (local and traditional diet) or slow-mode experience (public transport, walking or cycling) provides a more detailed and in-depth experience. In such ways, tourists have a chance to immerse themselves in a destination and achieve an authentic experience. These results are important for destination managers, policymakers, and other significant stakeholders to design strategies that would create immersive travel experiences and make a positive impact on a destination. Moreover, analysis of co-occurrence of keywords points out that travel experience and tourism marketing are very thinly studied and therefore need the attention of researchers and practitioners to further explore it.

The analysis finds that the journals most involved in the research area are *Journal of Sustainable Tourism, Tourism Geographies, African Journal of Hospitality Tourism and Leisure, Current Issues in Tourism,* and *Tourism Management.* These journals have the highest number of articles related to slow tourism research. In addition, the *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* is the journal which has the article with the most-cited paper, the one written by Lumsdon and McGrath (2011).

Regarding the geographical development of slow tourism research, most of the articles originate from the UK, China, and Australia, and there is a country collaboration between China and Australia. In Europe, Italy and Portugal have the highest number of research papers on the slow tourism topic, while the Third World countries lack in the number of research papers. Future research should explore the concept of slow tourism in South America, India, and New Zealand and compare it with the European concept.

This research paper has several limitations. First, this study attempted to provide a holistic view of slow tourism research between 2011 and 2021; however, research on slow tourism in hospitality and tourism started in the early 2000s (Lumsdon & McGrath, 2011). Thus, future research may compare the contribution of regions and researchers over longitudinal studies; one from 2000–2010 and the second from 2011–2021. Second, the current research is limited to the Scopus database and reviewed only articles in journals in English. Therefore, other databases may be included in future research such as Emerald, ScienceDirect, EBSCOhost, and ProQuest as well as publications from major conferences, books, book chapters, and dissertations to explore slow tourism and the link to sustainability and a tourism immersive experience. Noteworthy is that a qualitative and mixed research methodology should contribute to the advancement of slow tourism research, especially in the Third World countries where there is a lack of such studies. Such research would provide guidelines for development of a slow and sustainable tourism model in their destinations. Third, while researchers usually cite their own work to inform readers about their prior work, the self-citations may affect the quality of the reported results in citation analysis. Hence, this creates an opportunity for future research to analyse self-citations as a metric to evaluate the impact of leading researchers in the field.

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Acknowledgments

This paper is the result of the scientific project 'Tourism Experience Measurement in Physical and Virtual Space,' which is supported by the University of Rijeka (project ZIP-UNIRI-116-1-21).

Original Scientific Article

Developing 'Unused Resources' for Tourism: Cases of Drift Ice in Hokkaido and ICEHOTEL in Lapland

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The characteristics of the North tend to be described negatively, such as sparsely populated, peripheral, and disadvantageous due to coldness, darkness, or heavy snowfall. This is true both for Japan and for the Nordic countries. In northern history, the relationship between humans and nature, snow and ice, has gradually changed as humans began to take advantage of their environment. Nature used to be a place to live; however, it is now used for experiences, especially in snow and ice tourism. This study examines the process of developing unused community resources in the North by using theoretical 'resource studies' through a comparative case study between Drift Ice in Japan and ICEHOTEL in Sweden with the distinct aim of clarifying a mechanism of resource utilisation and its associated issues. Local endeavours seen in both processes are chronologically divided into 4 phases: the periods of Dawn, Establishment, Growth, and Maturity. Then, synchronically, the mechanism of promoting these utilisations can be illustrated in four quadrants, namely 'cultural branding,' 'cultural marketing,' 'scientific branding,' and 'scientific marketing.' Furthermore, it can be considered that the role of snow and ice tourism development is cultivating peoples' awareness of nature preservation during climate change, based on the integrated analysis of both Japanese and Northern European approaches. Thus, this study shows the significance of enhancing the value of snow and ice and the potential of them in the north.

Keywords: resource studies, unused community resources, process of utilisation, snow and ice tourism innovations, Japan and Sweden

 https://doi.org/10.26493/2335-4194.15.335-348

Introduction

The characteristics of an urban, modern, and heavily populated 'south,' compared to a rural, traditional, and sparsely populated 'north,' not only fits Northern Europe or North America, but also, maybe somewhat surprisingly for international audiences, Japan. Japan is an island nation with four main islands and thousands of smaller islands spread out over almost four thousand kilometres from south to north. Being in the middle of two major oceanic currents means that the south of Japan enjoys warm, and even sub-tropical climates, whereas cool, almost arctic conditions prevail in the north.

Since around the 2000s, tourism-based regional

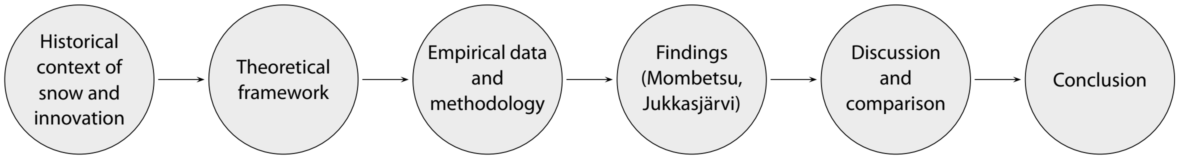

Figure 1 'Road-map' of this article

innovations, which make use of community resources for more than just locals, have been garnering attention (Nishimura, 2009; Shikida et al., 2009; Okoso, 2013; Morishige, 2014). The social background for this is a declining and aging population in both the north and the rural south of Japan. While these movements were already being promoted in the 1990s (Shikida, 2009), regional revitalisation has been gaining momentum as a national policy since around the 2010s, and thus, regional development has become a more serious issue (Fukuyama & Shikida, 2019). However, there are geographic conditions that make such development difficult. Despite its reputation for densely populated urban areas Japan has, for example, several remote islands, mountain villages, and depopulated areas which are classified as conditionally disadvantaged areas. Apart from geographical features, 'heavy snowfall areas' are also designated as conditionally disadvantaged (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 2015).

On the other side of the world, similar characteristics also describe disadvantageous areas in the north of Europe, in Scandinavia. 'Sparsity' is the first characteristic describing regions where low population densities have been causing local challenges for the economy (Gløersen et al., 2006). Then, 'peripherality' is also considered, denoting the distance to major European markets (Gløersen et al., 2006). These regions are so-called 'low-amenity' areas, characterised by economic decline or outmigration (Carson et al., 2018). Indeed, those rural areas in the far north are regarded as being in socio-economic decline, having a sparse population, and suffering from a lack of services and infrastructure (Vuin et al., 2016). Furthermore, the lack of diverse employment opportunities in many peripheral places tend to cause unemployment (Müller & Jansson, 2007), and the cold climate brings an extra challenge for these regions (Gløersen et al., 2006).

Regarding the similarity of the above situation in Japan, there are also few employment opportunities in disadvantageous areas due to problems stemming from its rural past; the populations age or move away. Especially in areas with heavy snowfall these problems overlap, resulting in an increasing disadvantage (Ye et al., 2007). According to the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism in Japan, 'industrial development is stagnant, and the improvement of the living standard of residents is hindered due to heavy snowfall.' Hence, in order to promote industry and improve residents' living, the Act on Special Measures for Heavy Snowfall Areas has been established (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 2015).

In the near past, a disaster called the '38.1 heavy snowfall' struck mainly the Hokuriku region in northern Japan in 1963. The National Police Agency reported about 600 casualties and that more than 11,000 homes were destroyed (Fukui, 1963). Such devastation is called 'snow and ice disasters' in Japan and much engineering research on disaster control has since been undertaken (Takahashi, 1997). In addition, snow and ice disasters are no longer restricted to individual losses, but also encompass economic damages on a societal scale, and even the hindrance of social function (Numano, 2006). In this way, snow and ice in heavy snowfall areas are considered to be negative for communities in northern Japan.

With this geographical context as a base, we will initially give a historic context of snow innovation, followed by our theoretical framework, especially resource studies, and our methodology. This leads us to our two empirical cases, Mombetsu in Japan, and Jukkasjärvi in Sweden, which will be compared and contrasted based on our framework (see Figure 1).

Historically, humans in the north have long been (and are still) suffering from snow and ice disasters caused by Mother Nature (Wakahama, 1995; Fukuya-

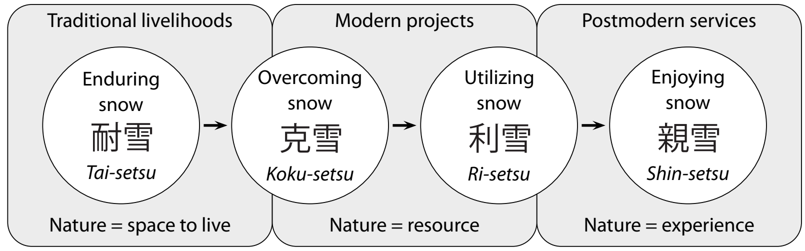

Figure 2
Historical Change in Relationship between Humans and Nature (based upon Oshima, 1987; Numano, 2006; Ranta & Suopajärvi, 2019)

ma, 2015). Unlike other natural disasters, those caused by snow and ice are remarkable because of their closeness to our everyday lives (Numano, 1984). From a human perspective, Numano (2006) describes the initial relationship between humans and snow as '*Tei-setsu* (Giving up with snow)'; Oshima (1987) alternatively explains that humans have long been in a '*Tai-setsu* (Enduring snow)' relationship.

However, we recently observe many cases where snow and ice are innovatively used for tourism both in Europe and Japan, such as by locals in Hokkaido, the northern main island of Japan (Fukuyama, 2015), as well as snow constructions in Lapland (Edelheim, 2014). There is, for example, an outstanding case of a '*Jifubuki* (Blizzard) tour' creation in Aomori prefecture, in northern Japan. *Jifubuki* is in relative terms a negative weather phenomenon that threatens human lives. However, the reversal idea generated by locals to actively promote it, and endeavours performed by local stakeholders, have eventually enhanced the positive value in the negative *Jifubuki* phenomenon. In addition, this has led to regional development (Narumi, 1997). Surprisingly to those who previously feared and shunned the phenomenon, both domestic and international tourists consume an innovative service, simply by experiencing this *Jifubuki*.

Not only the *Jifubuki* tour in Japan, but many other cases globally, show that winter tourism-based regional development has gradually gained momentum by utilising negative community resources, snow and ice, in northern regions (Fukuyama & Shikida, 2019). In this regard, the historical changes in the relationship between humans and snow in Japan has certain phases, continuing from '*Tei-setsu* (Enduring snow)' mentioned above, to '*Koku-setsu* (Overcoming snow),' then '*Ri-setsu* (Utilising snow),' and finally '*Shin-setsu* (Enjoying snow)' (Wakahama, 1995; Numano, 2006).

Relatedly, in Northern European research, there is a remarkable study that suggests the meaning of nature for humans has changed in three phases. Ranta and Suopajärvi (2019) indicate that the first phase, premodern, used to mean a 'Space to live.' This meaning was followed by understanding nature as 'Resources' in modern times and finally it comes to be understood as an 'Experience' in post-modern times. Building on these models, we considered the similar recognitions in Japan and Northern Europe in an integrated fashion (Figure 2).

Although Figure 2 is drawn from a macro perspective, it includes many invisible micro movements back and forth among each phase; humans have gradually and eventually created experience-based tourism by making positive use of something that was previously perceived negatively: snow and ice. In this way, we confirm here the historical changes of the human-nature relationship based on the above integration of both northern regions.

Theoretical Framework for Analysing the Process of Snow and Ice Tourism Creation

In order to examine the actual conditions of promoting snow and ice use, we need firstly to establish the conceptions of snow and ice both at a time 'before' and 'after' tourist utilisation in the regions took place. As for *Jifubuki,* snow and ice are 'after' having been utilised for tourism, logically, a tourism resource. On the other hand, there is significant research in which snow and ice 'before' being utilised is regarded as 'unused community resources.' Mitsui Information Development Research Institute (2003) classified the characteristics of unused community resources into three types from a market perspective, which are 'ordinary,' 'abandoned,' and 'negative.'

Thus, this study notably adopts mainly a theory of resources, including community resource and tourism resource studies, which are common in Japan. Yasumura et al. (2019) pointed out that those resource studies are not well known in the world, therefore, this Japanese analytical approach can contribute to other global research by offering a different perspective. Of course, we recognise that there are several significant Northern European research papers related to this theme, such as about tourism product development through a cultural approach (Garcia-Rosell et al., 2007), creative connections between tourists, entrepreneurs, and destination dynamics (Jóhannesson & Lund, 2017), the value creation in experience-based tourism (Jensen & Prebensen, 2015), and recent 'place-based resources' linked to nature and culture (Fredman & Haukeland, 2021). Hence, we are just focusing on the future possibility of developing more multidimensional analytical methods for the sake of value creation in tourism by exchanging plural ideas in different ways.

While there are many previous studies on community resources in Japan (e.g. Mese, 1990; Shikida, 2012), the Mitsui Information Development Research Institute defines it as 'all tangible and intangible elements that exist in a region and can be used for human activities' (2003, p.3). Regarding its utilisation, Nagata (1988) began a pioneering study on national use of local resources. Taniguchi (2014) also considered these uses in the context of rural development; however, these are only examinations at national policy level. In addition, there are several studies considering development of disadvantageous areas (Yamaguchi et.al., 1996; Sakamoto et al., 2009; Shoji, 2010). Nevertheless, most focus only on analysing the effects and success factors of each case, not attempting to theoretically generalise the idea.

Considering tourism resource theory critically, several researchers have discussed how to classify tourism resources (e.g. Ashiba, 1997; Suda, 2003) and Takahashi (2014) systematically summarises this theme chronologically, but there is still no unified view for tourism resources. Kagawa (2007) relatedly explains that two different perspectives, business theory and behaviour of tourists, complicate the interpretation of the target tourism resources. Teramae (2017) also extensively argues that the evaluation of tourism resources is only a matter of tourist preference. In association with snow and ice, Suda (2003) states that snow and rain are quite intangible resources and have not been direct tourism targets before. However, 'the phenomenon of snow or drift ice has recently created tourism effects similar to tangible resources in cold regions with their long-lasting period' (Suda, 2003, p. 91). Regarding this evaluation change, snow is considered an indispensable regional resource in the era of the above '*Shin-setsu* (Enjoying snow),' and it has changed from something troublesome to the region's identity (Numano, 2006).

Based on prior research, this study basically adopts the above resource studies as its theoretical foundation to analyse a dynamic process of utilising unused community resources. Sato (2008, p. 9) defines resources as a 'bundle of possibilities to be worked on' and Zimmermann (1985, p. 13) defines them as a 'function which a thing or a substance may perform' (p.13) and indicates that the process of resources utilisation contains 'Cultural wants' and 'Scientific abilities' (p. 25). In addition, an underlying theory in marketing is also adopted as a subsidiary in this study concerning value creation. It is important for community-based tourism development to combine both branding and marketing properly (Shikida et al., 2009). Furthermore, this study invokes the usefulness of 'brand building by culture' and 'marketing by cultural idea' suggested by Aoki (2008), and we considered them in an integrated manner with resource studies.

Simply expressed, this study examines the innovation process of turning something valueless into valuable tourism resources that can contribute to regional development. Therefore, the purpose here is to clarify factors and issues that can be successfully promoted to utilise 'unused community resources' for winter tourism development. Moreover, this study discusses the significance of snow and ice tourism development with their value enhancement. This is done through analysing endeavours conducted by locals in northern regions. Here, these local activities are first analysed chronologically, classifying different characteristic phases. Then, the resource utilisation mechanism will be discussed synchronically, using a framework of integrating the above resources studies and underlying theories in marketing. Lastly, this study derives a new concept of humans' recognition of snow and ice based on the integrated analysis of both Japanese and Northern European cases.

Research Sites and Methodological Approach

This study compares two cases of snow and ice tourism creations, drift ice in Mombetsu city in Hokkaido, Japan and ICEHOTEL in Jukkasjärvi in Kiruna city, Sweden. Drift ice was previously called a 'White Devil' (Nakamura, 1992) due to its negative impact, especially on the local fishing industry. Nevertheless, it has become a major tourism resource and it can be observed that local stakeholders now positively evaluate its contribution to the regional economy through tourism (Fukuyama & Shikida, 2019). On the other hand, ICEHOTEL in Jukkasjärvi, Swedish Lapland, is the world's oldest ice hotel (Garcia-Rosell et al., 2019). Before that, snow and ice structures tended to be for private use or used for a limited duration. But ICEHOTEL now attracts many international tourists, and its fame has resulted in other ice or snow hotels being built in different cool climates, including Hokkaido. In both cases, the process of developing unused resources, snow and ice, were intentional endeavours by locals. Therefore, it should be possible to analyse factors and issues for promoting these utilisations.

Mombetsu city is located in the centre of Okhotsk Sea coast, which is a good fishing ground (Figure 3), with the coordinates of 44°21' north and 43°21' east and approximately 21,000 inhabitants. Most of Mombetsu's economy is dedicated to fishing for cold-water species such as crab, and the fishing industry has produced around 270 million euros (2020), including processed products. Regarding weather, the annual snowfall average is over 480 centimetres, and the lowest recorded temperature was –24.7°.

On the other hand, Kiruna city is located at the coordinates of 67°51' north and 20°13' east, which is about 200 km north of the Arctic Circle (Figure 4). Modern Kiruna was founded around 1900, and mining iron ore rapidly became its major industry; today it is the largest mine in northern Europe. Over 2,100 of Kiruna's 18,200 inhabitants are employed by the mining company LKAB and related companies. As for the weather, the annual precipitation is about 59 centimetres, and the lowest temperature recorded was –43.3°.

Figure 3 Map of Sea of Japan with Mombetsu indicated

Figure 4 Map of Northern Europe with Jukkasjärvi indicated

The ICEHOTEL is built each year in Jukkasjärvi (population approximately 600), located 16km away from Kiruna's town centre.

Concerning the methodology, we adopted multiple research methods and triangulation in this study, in order to clarify endogenous endeavours by locals for both chronologically and synchronically sufficient analysis. Our stated aim was to examine a resource-utilising mechanism, and its associated issues, in two empirical cases.

Firstly, we conducted semi-structured interviews with stakeholders and key persons in the target communities, 80 locals in Mombetsu (2013–2022) in a longitudinal survey, and 28 in Kiruna (2019) in a short but concentrated period, including some preliminary surveys in Rovaniemi about snow hotels in Finnish Lapland (2018–2019). The different numbers of respondents at the different locations were based on convenience sampling, but also on achieving saturation of new themes collected in our interviews. Secondly, participant observations were undertaken at both case locations as guests, and as hosts at the backstage of attractions. This included at warehouses, offices, and workshops or in discussions with some important stakeholders and international ice sculptors while actually staying at ICEHOTEL in Jukkasjärvi or boarding *Garinko,* a tourism icebreaker, in Mombetsu. Lastly, searches of local documents and literature at both Mombetsu and Kiruna libraries were carried out, including local newspapers, to obtain information about local evaluations. Hence, this triangulation made it possible to apprehend many deep regional realities subjectively, in an objectively appropriate balance from micro-, meta-, and macro- perspectives. And thus, the diverse collected data from all the above-mentioned methods was carefully analysed both chronologically and synchronically to clarify a resource utilisation mechanism and its issues.

Findings with Chronological Analysis

The Case of Drift Ice Tourism Creation

In Mombetsu, Drift ice was once hated by locals to the extent that it was called 'White Devil' as mentioned above. Especially for fishermen, the long-term stay of drift ice during winter hinders their livelihoods, which directly leads to a decrease in income. Therefore, it had been considered that drift ice was a negative natural phenomenon that could close the region due to this predicament and extreme cold. According to Aota, who was involved in the research of drift ice for many years at Hokkaido University, important reasons why locals hated it were mainly: (a) fishing damage, (b) marine accidents, (c) winter unemployment, and (d) extreme freezing (Aota, 1993). Regarding (a) and (b), for instance, Chishima (1966) reported that the damage to the Hokkaido fishery industry from drift ice in 1956 exceeded 23 million euros, about 80 fishing boats encountered marine accidents, and 14 people perished. In addition, damage has also occurred in aquaculture such as scallops, whelks, and kelp. Thus, drift ice has caused serious damage to society, including fishing and other related local industries (Chishima, 1966).

In consideration of those serious phenomena, therefore, the 'Praying festival for drift ice to leave early' had been held, mainly by fishermen, at a local temple for many years. The beginning of this praying festival, indicating that the region was hostile toward drift ice, is said to be the Ryujin (Dragon God) Festival held at Houon Temple in 1887. This festival was held continuously in Mombetsu until around 1997 (pers. com. Chiel priest, 2 October 2018).

However, drift ice has been dramatically transformed to a positive tourism resource. For example, in 1996, the sound of drift ice was selected as one of the '100 Soundscapes of Japan,' and drift ice was also certified as a Hokkaido heritage site together with *Garinko* in 2004. *Garinko* is the world's first tourism icebreaker, launched in 1987. Passenger numbers of *Garinko* were about 19,000 in 1997 and peaked at 53,300 in 2002.

Another form of tourism utilisation of drift ice is the Mombetsu Drift Ice Festival. While the details of this will be referred to below, the number of visitors to this event reached a peak of about 500,000 in 1985, from about 10,000 when it was first held in 1963. In addition, the Okhotsk Sea Ice Museum of Hokkaido opened in 1991, where visitors can experience and watch exhibitions about the science of drift ice. Since its opening, the annual number of visitors has been about 60,000 (excluding the COVID-19 pandemic pe-

Table 1 Four Phases of Developing Drift Ice

Phase	Period	Characteristic
1 Dawn	1940s–1950s	Attempts to improve negative value started on an individual basis
2 Establishment	1960s	Focused on positive value with collaborations among individuals
3 Growth	1970s	Promotion to share positive value with continuation of local endeavours
4 Maturity	1980s–1990s	Involvement of local residents and the public with socially positive evaluation

Notes Based upon Fukuyama and Shikida (2019).

riod), and remarkably, it is not only used by general tourists, but also by locals for various events, especially for local children and students. Hence, it can be considered that drift ice is now a community resource closely related to this local area. Furthermore, the Okhotsk Drift Ice Praying Festival even began in 1991, now to pray seriously for an 'early arrival' of drift ice.

In the process of changing perceptions of drift ice since the 1940s until the 1990s, there were many voluntary endeavours conducted by various local stakeholders. We have analysed them and classified them into 4 phases (Table 1).

A hallmark of phase 1 (Dawn: 1940s–1950s) was the start of initial efforts to improve the negative reputation of drift ice, or of individual efforts to enhance its value as a result, in a situation where the regional focus was only the actual damage to the community. At this point, collaboration in the region had not yet occurred, but individual attempts were made to utilise the perceived negative drift ice as a resource.

For example, Murase, a painter who was appointed as an art teacher at Mombetsu High School in 1949, was fascinated by the beauty of drift ice, and has been painting it as a motif throughout his whole life since then. Murase also began a Sunday painting class, where local children could learn how to paint. The number of Murase's drift ice paintings is said to be in the thousands, although a local story claims that Murase was at one stage beaten by residents who disliked his painting the regional enemy.

In Phase 2 (Establishment: 1960s), a positive valuation was actively developed for the negatively perceived drift ice in some parts of the region. In addition, the coordinators of individual resource utilisation activities had begun to collaborate within this region, and the effects of such movements strengthened the transmission of the positive value of drift ice and promoted resource utilisation. In 1961, an art enthusiast, Tanaka, who studied painting and Ainu indigenous culture near Lake Toya, returned to his native Mombetsu. Tanaka became the president of a small company and started voluntarily to arrange various kinds of local festivals for children. He and other stakeholders advocated for, and coordinated the Mombetsu Drift Ice Festival, despite some opposition against this idea, and financial difficulties. Notwithstanding this, the first festival in 1963 turned out to attract about 10,000 people. Tanaka also created a storytelling tradition, 'Tale of Drift Ice,' on the theme of Ainu culture, which was announced at the second Drift Ice Festival in 1964.

Since then, Murase has tried to promote the beauty of drift ice both inside and outside Hokkaido by holding the Okhotsk Drift Ice Exhibition, and he started to collaborate with Tanaka, a fellow member of the Mombetsu Cultural Federation. Hokkaido University simultaneously established a research facility in Mombetsu, and the world's first radar observation station operated by Aota and colleagues was founded. Thus, the characteristics of this phase were that individual activities using drift ice were linked together, and such movements gradually led to cultural utilisation in the community while scientific research had begun.

The characteristic of phase 3 (Growth: 1970s) is that the endeavours of stakeholders to create and share the value of drift ice were developed at a sustainable level. These continuous resource utilisation activities have facilitated the sharing of the positive features more widely in region. For example, the data obtained from the above-mentioned radar observation were firstly provided to local fisheries, which consequently led to an obvious decrease in casualties by drift ice. Additionally, Hoshiai, a natural science researcher, discovered in 1977 that 'ice algae,' an occurrence confirmed in the Antarctic before, also adhered under drift ice in Mombetsu. Aota, who accompanied Hoshiai, proved that the food chain originated from ice algae was the very reason for the rich seafood resources in Okhotsk Sea, and continued to explain this mechanism patiently to local fishermen with his own easily understandable words. Eventually, the positive ecological roles of drift ice were elucidated from this natural science field.

Concurrently, the socio-economic situation surrounding Mombetsu changed. The local Kounomae Mine, which once boasted the best coal output in East Asia, closed in 1973. Furthermore, at sea, international regulations restricting fisheries to 200 nautical miles impacted negatively on Mombetsu's fisheries economy, starting in 1977. Under these circumstances of a deteriorating local economy, Mombetsu city started a comprehensive plan to promote the development of drift ice. Thus, it is considered that the use of drift ice as tourism resources gradually began.

Then, in phase 4 (Maturity: 1980s–1990s), more citizen participation was achieved, and positive evaluations of drift ice were widely shared in public. Aota and his colleagues encouraged more locals to participate in the development of resource utilisation, and Mombetsu city supported this movement. For instance, in 1986, Aota and local stakeholders started to host the Northern International Symposium where researchers from other northern countries, jointly with domestic researchers, presented their studies on drift ice or sea ice. An executive committee of local volunteers handled planning and operations. Aota also intentionally set special lectures on cultural themes in order to connect scientists and local residents organically. Furthermore, Aota launched and co-hosted the Children's Drift Ice Symposium, which included quiz events to let children compete for the title of 'Dr. Drift Ice.'

After that, the tourism-related use of drift ice expanded with the launch of the above-mentioned icebreaker *Garinko,* and Mombetsu municipality eventually adopted the 'Declaration of Drift Ice City' in 1982. Finally, the Okhotsk Sea Ice Centre of Hokkaido opened in 1991. In this way, the practice of enhancing the value of drift ice was systematically promoted with the support of the society, including the transmission to the next generation, and this phase was also a time when the significance of the contribution to the regional economy from scientific research was recognised.

The Case of the Creation of ICEHOTEL

According to Selberg, the mayor of Kiruna city, only a few tourists visited Kiruna during the winter months of the frigid polar nights in the past. The number of guests in January 1988, for which statistics exist, was only about 2,900. However, the predecessor of ICEHOTEL was created in 1990, and by 2007, the figure increased to 15,500; in other words, more than five times higher. Tourist numbers in Kiruna have gradually increased during the 1990s–2000s, which was a particularly important period from the creation to the development of ICEHOTEL in Jukkasjärvi.

More recently, according to Schilar and Keskitalo (2017), the number of annual guests to ICEHOTEL alone has reached about 50,000 to 60,000 every year (excluding the term of the COVID-19 pandemic). Furthermore, ICEHOTEL has been contributing to the tourism-based regional development of Kiruna in collaboration with local tour operators that offer a variety of activities such as northern light tours, cultural tourism by Indigenous peoples, snowmobiles and dog sledding experiences. Thus, the severe winter months in Kiruna have dramatically transformed into winter tourism which has made the region famous in the world.

The latent beginning of this ICEHOTEL creation can be seen back in the 1970s. Bergqvist, the representative of the founding members of ICEHOTEL, started a community-based company which provided tourism services in Jukkasjärvi near Torne River, especially outdoor activities in summer. However, in 1986, a serious accident occurred during rafting and the company began to wonder if they could create a new business in winter. From that point, this series of incidents should be considered as a dawn of ICEHOTEL creation, and we analysed the process of developing ICEHOTEL chronologically in a similar manner to the case of drift ice. The local endeavours to enhance the

Table 2 Four Phases of Developing ICEHOTEL

Phase	Period	Characteristic
1 Dawn	1980s	Trial to create new value in unused community resources individually
2 Establishment	1990–1995	Realisation of unused ice utilisation and collaboration system established
3 Growth	1996–2015	Both creating more value and increasing name recognition effectively
4 Maturity	2016–now	Stable management and contribution to winter regional development

Notes Based upon Fukuyama (2021).

value of snow and ice and develop ICEHOTEL can also be classified into four phases (Table 2).

During phase 1 (Dawn: 1980s), the exploration of using snow and ice from Torne River in severe winters was actively started at an individual level, with the pursuit of new business ideas. The connection with Hokkaido showed that the time of realising this possibility was sufficiently ripe.

As mentioned above, although Bergqvist and others were contemplating a winter business creation, it was common for locals to think that winter was nothing but darkness, coldness, and snow. Nevertheless, in 1987 and 1988, Bergqvist made two important journeys, choosing winter destinations like Alaska, Canada, and Japan, to seek new business ideas. When visiting Hokkaido in Japan, he had a chance to experience the 38th Sapporo Snow Festival. There, he was impressed by seeing huge snow sculptures that fascinated many tourists. Inspired by this, he began to pursue the possibility of events that took advantage of Jukkasjärvi's individuality. In 1989, Bergqvist held a symposium back in Kiruna, together with the Society of Snow and Ice Sculptors, inviting two Japanese ice sculptors from Asahikawa, Hokkaido. There, they carved ice and made a beautiful bear and an eagle which impressed the local audience.

In phase 2 (Establishment: 1990–1995), the momentum for the resource utilisation of snow and ice were cultivated, leading to the idea conceiving of the world's first ice hotel. In 1990, a journalist, Granlund, together with Bergqvist and a construction master, Notström, built a big cylinder-shaped igloo called 'Artic Hall,' a wordplay on 'Arctic' and 'art,' as they exhibited some art inside. One day, acquaintances of the company owners attending a conference asked to stay in Jukkasjärvi; however, the accommodations were fully booked. Spontaneously, the company set up a trial lodging at this art exhibition igloo with thick sleeping bags and reindeer skin prepared on the benches inside. All guests spent the night without any problems and eventually, this incident became the birth catalyst for the ICEHOTEL. In 1992, the first ice church was built and in 1994, two key persons joined the company: Bergh, in charge of art and design, and Larsson, responsible for the construction. Soon, the first ABSOLUT ICEBAR was created in the hotel, and since then, ICEHOTEL has been disseminating the style of drinking colourful cocktails in transparent ice glasses at this ice bar to media, aiming to build a brand image.

Thus, in this phase, the new value of 'a hotel where guests can stay in ice rooms' which no one had imagined as commercial hospitality services before, was created. In addition, a personnel system with collaborators was established to improve the value of ICEHOTEL.

The characteristic of phase 3 (Growth: 1996–2015) is that the value creation through expanded hotel functions and tourism services, as well as a wide variety of snow and ice usage, were initiated. The added value was disseminated globally through media and the name recognition of ICEHOTEL was effectively improved. Significant science and technology developments also took place.

Firstly, Bergh and Larsson made a huge glacier ice cave for the movie *Smilla's Sense of Snow,* by discovering a mixed product called 'Snice' with an optimal balance of snow and ice for building material. Then, in 1998, they also invited professor Fransson, colloquially called 'Ice Professor,' from Luleå University of Technology. He visited Jukkasjärvi and demonstrated scientifically a structural strength and safety analysis of ICEHOTEL. This university has a programme of

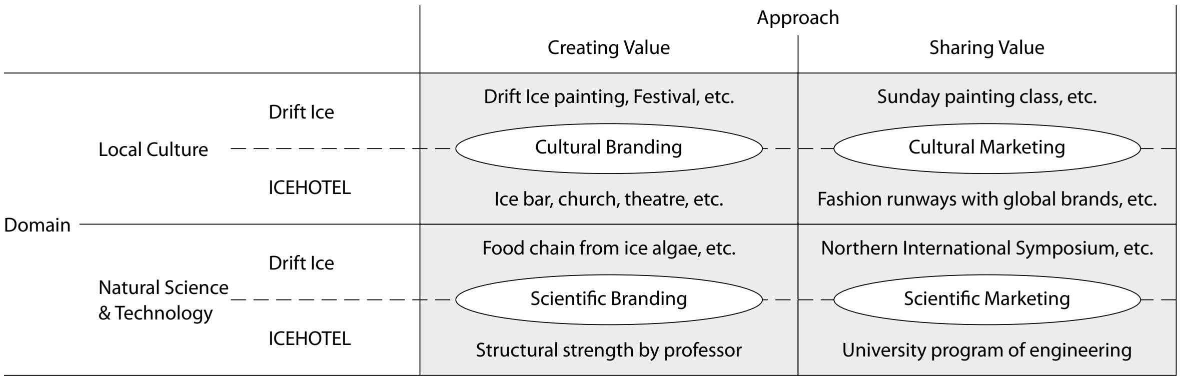

Figure 5 The Mechanism of Promoting Utilisation of Unused Resources

snow and ice architectural engineering, and there are some research papers on ICEHOTEL such as the experimental measurements on compressive strength of snow (e.g. Lintzen, 2012). Further, in 2002, an ice theatre was completed in ICEHOTEL, and a Sami version of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* was performed. ICEHOTEL has, through the years, cooperated with several global brands, for example, Absolut, Vogue, and Chanel. It has extended its brand awareness through publicity stunts, including ice being transported to Africa and Parisian fashion runways, to give some examples. In this way, ICEHOTEL has gradually increased its popularity, and thus, excellent ice sculptors from all over the world began to gather in Jukkasjärvi to design ice rooms.

In phase 4 (Maturity: 2016–current time), 'ICEHOTEL 365' was finally completed in 2016. This new hotel can provide year-round experience services with ice sculpture rooms and an ice bar, and a solar power generation system has also been installed to keep the inside always cold. In addition, in 2018, ICEHOTEL was certified to meet the sustainable ecolabelling standard called 'Nordic Swan Ecolabel.' Here, in the first place, the basic idea of ICEHOTEL is built on the premise of an environmental cycle, borrowing snow and ice from Torne River in winter and returning them in spring as they melt.

Thus, the growth of ICEHOTEL and its maintenance of attracting tourists from all over the world have led to the maturation of winter tourism-based regional development in Kiruna.

Discussions with Synchronic Analysis

Commonalities and Differences of Promoting Resource Utilisation between two Cases

This study firstly examined the process of resource utilisation chronologically in a macro-perspective. This was based on our collected research data: from the analysis of the literature review, on media sources, as well as from extensive fieldwork in both regions, including the empirical analysis of semi-structured interviews and participant observations. Furthermore, from a micro- and meta- perspective, the collected data, especially about local endeavours, can be analysed synchronically to highlight the different fields and functional approaches, and to consider the utilisation process of unused resources. The local endeavours in both regions aimed at enhancing the value of snow and ice can be firstly divided into the domains of 'Local culture' and 'Natural science and technology.' In addition, they can simultaneously be divided into two different approaches, which are 'Creating value' and 'Sharing value.' In this regard, it was found that the mechanism for promoting the utilisation of snow and ice was represented by four quadrants (see Figure 5).

On the one hand, examining endeavours by local stakeholders in each case, such as Murase's paintings and Tanaka's activities on drift ice, or ice sculptures and the ice theatre in ICEHOTEL by Bergh and Larsson, these belong to the domain of 'Local culture' which is unique to the north. The cultural activities such as drawing drift ice, arranging festivals, building an ice church or an ice bar, and making ice glasses, are creating useful value from previously unused snow and ice. Furthermore, the added value of snow and ice was shared first inside communities, then outside the region, by the activities such as painting classes, art exhibitions, or dissemination through media, fashion shows, and as a movie stage.

On the other hand, various research activities on drift ice by Aota, or the structural integrity of 'Snice' developed by Bergh and Larsson, and demonstrated by Fransson, are considered to create value in the domain of 'Natural science and technology.' Similarly, by arranging the Northern International Symposium related to drift ice, or even the snow and ice architectural engineering programme at university, the added useful value of snow and ice has also been shared widely in society through the scientific perspective.

In this way, creating value in the domain of local culture is 'Cultural Branding,' and sharing its value in this domain is 'Cultural Marketing.' Fukuyama and Shikida (2019, p. 71) defined them as 'the attempt to enhance value by creating various opportunities to enjoy human pleasure or well-being through culture,' and 'to share the function, which can satisfy the above cultural desires, and their positive evaluations, widely with society.' Similarly, Aoki (2008) suggested the effectiveness of brand building through culture and culturally inspired marketing, mentioning culture as an 'unconscious forcible power.' In Hirano's (2000) words, the 'ingenuity for people's lives' formed while adapting to each regional condition can be called culture. Furthermore, Zimmermann (1985, p. 241) comprehensively suggested, 'It is culture that permits man [sic] to inhabit every continent, to exist in the tropics and in the frigid zones.' Thus, these ideas related to culture explain that even in disadvantageous regions in the north, local people can make positive use of snow and ice, and hence, they support the usefulness of cultural approaches in the above mechanism of promoting utilisation.

In the same way, creating and sharing value in the domain of natural science and technology are 'Scientific Branding' and 'Scientific Marketing,' which are defined as 'gaining the trust of society through science and trying to justify value,' and 'sharing value justified by scientific proof with society widely' (Fukuyama & Shikida, 2019, p. 71). Regarding these aspects, not only is natural science and technology expected to provide truth, but it is also required to have a role of providing 'legitimacy' in social decision-making (Fujigaki et al., 2020). Zimmermann (1985) stated that scientific methods and principles would realise a 'safe and stable' human society with their 'continuous application.' Hence, it can be indicated that the usefulness of scientific approach involves, for instance, the function of justifying negative objects against community perceptions. Thus, the above mechanism requires a scientific approach, which proves principles that can dispel anxiety and uncertainty. Furthermore, together with the earlier mentioned usefulness of the cultural approach by Aoki (2008), this study suggests that the process of this utilisation also requires the usefulness of scientific approaches such as evaluating positive proof and sharing its scientifically demonstrated value.

Thus, it was verified that the factors which promoted the utilisation of unused snow and ice are the coexistence of both cultural and scientific effects contained in the approach function of value formation. In other words, the two approaches of value creation and value sharing were effective because they were practiced without fail in both domains of culture and science. Consequently, it can be considered that these approaches in two domains have been interacting to create the synergistic effect for promoting resource usage.

On the other hand, there are differences between the two cases. In the mechanism of promoting snow and ice utilisation for ICEHOTEL, it was confirmed that the scientific approach was noticeably less than in the case of drift ice. In Mombetsu, there have been many approaches to create and share the scientific value by local stakeholders, especially by Aota and others. This is potentially because drift ice had more negative properties which were harmful to the region than the snow and ice on Torne River. Hence, it can be hypothesised that ordinary unused resources such as the snow and ice in Jukkasjärvi are promoted in the process of utilisation with a less scientific approach than negative unused resources.

In this way, it should be valid to indicate that the usefulness of the scientific approach is greater where negative properties occur. A scientific approach, con-

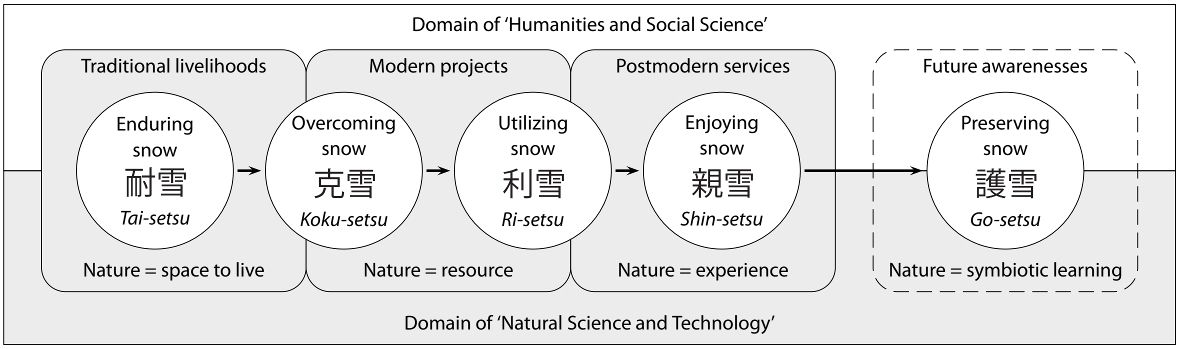

Figure 6 Preferred Future Change in Relationship between Humans and Nature

taining the principles or truths that can dispel anxiety and disadvantages, contributed to the demonstration of something uncertain.

Integrated Considerations toward a New Derived Concept

Our study has examined regional development with resource utilisation at the meso (including micro) level. Additionally, it ultimately considers the significance of value enhancement at the macro level, namely the significance related to global warming countermeasures. We have been discussing the value enhancement of snow and ice by tourism utilisation through the synergistic effect of culture and science. Furthermore, we examine the possibility that the value-enhancing effect of snow and ice can help humans to cultivate the consciousness to preserve snow and ice, and thus contribute to the spread of this recognition.

One source of this expectation is the Okhotsk Drift Ice Trust Movement, which aims environmentally at preventing global warming with a concept of preserving drift ice, which is decreasing in Hokkaido. It certainly seems that such movements have been cultivated to become the regional practice by enhancing the value of drift ice, which was once a negative unused resource, and turning it into a tourism resource. Moreover, in the Arctic region including Kiruna, the thawing and decrease of snow and ice due to climate change are already in a remarkably serious situation in the mid- to long term.

Under these circumstances, the continuous challenge of creating snow and ice tourism will enable more tourists living on this earth to widely recognise the attraction and value of them through their experiences and learning. And it is possible to expect that humans who enjoy the value of snow and ice may develop awareness of mitigation measures to preserve them from climate change gradually and globally. Taking this possibility as the macro level significance of developing unused snow and ice for tourism in the North, this comparative study consequently shows a new concept of '*Go-setsu* (preserving snow),' a new step after '*Shin-setsu* (Enjoying snow),' as a future phase based on all the above considerations of relationship between humans and nature (Figure 6).

In this regard, nature will be, or already is, a space to learn about such serious influence of the climate change in a northern context. Here, snow and ice in nature could be new types of experiences such as 'snow and ice ecotourism' or 'study tourism,' where tourists can learn the serious situation that thaw means to the north. Furthermore, it is considered that nature is no longer a limited place where humans can face this type of symbiotic learning opportunity, but rather, a much wider area on northern Earth, including the Antarctic, as the holistic matter of humans and snow and ice. Thus, it can be considered that the role of snow and ice tourism development is cultivating peoples' awareness of nature preservation, and snow and ice, in the future. In addition, this idea can be proposed only through the value enhancement of snow and ice by the synergistic effect of both regional culture and natural science and technology based on the above resource theories adopted in this study. Hence, this is the derived significance from this study in the combination of both Japanese and Northern European academic approaches.

Conclusion

This study examined the process of utilising unused community resources, snow and ice in northern regions, through the comparative analysis of drift ice in Hokkaido, Japan and ICEHOTEL in Swedish Lapland, based on theoretical frameworks of resources, and underlying marketing principles. For a start, endogenous endeavours by locals in both cases are chronologically divided into 4 phases: the periods of Dawn, Establishment, Growth, and Maturity. Then, synchronically, these are classified into, firstly, two domains of 'Local culture' and 'Natural science & technology,' and also into two different approaches, creating value and sharing its value. Thus, the mechanism of promoting the utilisation of unused resources is shown as four quadrants, named 'Cultural branding,' 'Cultural marketing,' 'Scientific branding,' and 'Scientific marketing.'

In this process of utilising snow and ice, it can be considered that the synergic effect from both usefulness of culture and science is working interactively. And lastly, regarding the historical changes between humans and nature enhancing the value of snow and ice, the synergic effect of Japanese and Northern European approaches derives a new concept of '*Go-setsu* (preserving snow)' with a new type of nature experience in global climate change. Thus, this comparative study shows us the significance of considering one's present situation and future, which are focused on positive possibilities of overcoming challenges in the north.

Finally, as this study has attempted to clarify the resource utilising mechanism and all its associated issues, let us therefore now turn to some limitations and future challenges in this field. Since resource studies are not commonly discussed on a global scale yet, this academic field requires more analytical case studies of utilising snow and ice as tourism resources. Our case studies lay a foundation, but naturally only function as a symbol for other initiatives in different geographical locations, not acting in a generalising way. It would be beneficial if more empirical case studies would be accumulated in both deductive and inductive ways in the future, based on the critical discussions toward our proposed model for the resource utilising mechanism.

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Original Scientific Article

Unique Destination Attributes as a Basis of Tourism Experience

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In today's highly competitive tourism market, tourists are not only interested in new, unique tourism products and services, but also in unique tourism experiences, as experiences represent an important competitive advantage for a destination. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to explore the attributes of a destination's identity that are defined as unique, by analysing unique experiences in three main coastal destinations in Slovenian Istria and defining communication strategies to promote the uniqueness of their tourism experiences. The results of a qualitative research confirm that the uniqueness of tourism experiences results from the attributes of the destination's identity. These attributes primarily relate to nature and natural resources, cultural heritage, and culinary experiences. The unique tourism experiences are conveyed through speciality, innovation, authenticity and various positive emotions such as hedonism, excitement, curiosity, surprise, happiness, and pleasure to ensure memorable value-added experiences and encourage tourists to visit year-round. The study contributes to the knowledge of unique tourism experiences. Finally, theoretical implications, limitations, and recommendations for future research are provided.

Keywords: uniqueness, destination, unique attributes, tourism experience

 https://doi.org/10.26493/2335-4194.15.349-362

Introduction

Regardless of the destination's competitiveness, the tourism providers that constitute its offer must constantly compete with each other to meet the increasing needs of tourists. At the destination level, marketing practises contribute positively to the destination's competitiveness by providing an answer to the question of how to attract tourists. As tourists' behaviour and travel motivation change due to the dynamic environment, tourists have become very demanding and expect more than just a typical offer at the destination (Williams, 2006). Moreover, Ritchie and Crouch (2003) state that the key to a destination's competitiveness lies in its ability to attract more tourists and provide them with satisfying, memorable experiences in a profitable way while improving the well-being of the destination's population and preserving its natural capital for future generations. In the context of creating memorable experiences for tourists, Dwyer and Kim (2003) have pointed out that a competitive destination must be more successful than its competitors in various aspects of the overall tourism experience. Thus, to be competitive in the global tourism market, destinations must be innovative, distinctive, and constantly strive to improve the unique tourism experience. One of the most important sources of competitive advantage in this respect is the uniqueness of a destination.

Destinations need to discover and create their own unique identity and to differentiate themselves from the competition. Presenting the uniqueness of a destination in a competitive tourism industry is a complex process. It requires a lot of ingenuity and creativity to stand out in a saturated field. Generally, the destination as a place has existed for generations and is defined by its history, culture, topography, way of life, built and natural environment, and its people. The aspects that make a destination distinctive and memorable are derived from a variety of attributes that are considered the DNA of a destination (Anholt, 2009), consisting of a unique physical and cultural environment, the products associated with the destination, and the people. However, these factors are no longer a differentiator, but have the potential to reduce substitutability. To achieve this, destination marketers are increasingly focusing on the tourism experience, and creating unique products based on the destination's identity. In addition, success also depends on marketing messages based on unique attributes that appeal to the emotions of potential tourists. As regards the historical, cultural and physical attributes deeply rooted in the development of unique products such as typical local food or souvenirs, these can have emotional attributes or signals that allow tourists to be involved in a personal experience when buying and consuming them (Rachão et al., 2020; Spielmann et al., 2018). In particular, unique products, thanks to their intrinsic and symbolic value, contribute to the creation of the local and cultural identity of destinations and allow tourists to approach culture in a more emotional and participative way (Spielmann et al., 2018).

Today, many tourists most likely perceive experiences as memorable (Gilmore & Pine, 2002) and therefore demand to go beyond the typical forms of tourism (Kim et al., 2012). They are looking for something new, unique or different that will lead to a strong memory of the travel experience (Kim et al., 2012). They desire to have a unique experience at the destination (Brown, 2005; Cetin & Bilgihan, 2016). The unique attributes can be found among the physically tangible attributes as well as among the intangible and affective attributes. In many cases, these attributes are related to the destination experiences (Kim, 2014). For example, Tung and Ritchie (2011) concluded that positive emotions and feelings associated with tourism experiences, such as happiness and excitement, are a critical component of memorable tourism experiences. Therefore, the tourism experience is considered to be diverse and subjective and represented by various symbolic aspects. It is important for destinations to identify unique elements that offer unique travel experiences. Unique experiences at the destination lead tourists to develop a positive image of the destination and thus they are more likely to have an engrossing experience. Experiences and their meanings usually appeal to tourists' overarching needs, such as novelty, excitement, enjoyment, prestige, socialisation and learning, and contribute to the enhancing of wellbeing (Dimanche, 2018).

This study examines the uniqueness of tourism destinations from an internal supply-side perspective. Its main purpose is to explore a theoretical framework for analysing the unique attributes of a destination that derive from the destination's identity. In particular, it aims to identify the fundamental attributes that lead to the creation of the unique destination products that contribute to a memorable tourism experience at the destination, and to apply the results of the study in the context of the tourism destination Slovenian Istria. In this context, the main aim of the paper is to identify attributes of the destination identity that are defined as unique through the analysis of unique experiences at the destination and to discuss communication strategies of the uniqueness of the destination Slovenian Istria on an expressive level of marketing communication. In this context, the main research questions of the paper are (1) *What are the attributes of the unique tourism experiences through the destination identity?* and (2) *What are the communication strategies to promote the uniqueness of tourism experiences in Slovenian Istria?*

The paper is structured as follows. First, the literature on destination uniqueness and the role of unique tourism experiences is reviewed. This is followed by research methodology and interpretation of research results using the Slovenian Istria region as an example. Finally, theoretical implications and recommendations for future research are given.

Literature Review

Destination Uniqueness

A destination is a place that attracts visitors for a temporary stay and is an amalgam of all tourism services and experiences offered to consumers (Buhalis, 2000). Tourism organizations use the unique and distinctive characteristics of a destination as attractors that increase tourists' attention to the destination. Uniqueness is particularly important because it affects the distinction between similar destinations in the minds of target customers (Qu et al., 2011). Destinations with unique characteristics tend to be viewed as attractive, and in fact, the assertion of uniqueness has become an institutionalized practice that is reflected in the destination's brand, tourism products, and marketing communications. Also, asserting the uniqueness of a destination has also become an institutionalized practice to highlight the identity of a place. Prayag (2007) defines a destination identity that can help create a set of unique and positive associations in the minds of consumers. This uniqueness is communicated in brand identity, which often emphasizes the historical, social, and cultural values of places (Richards, 2014). In recent years, it has been recognized that a successful destination brand must convey the expectations or promise of a memorable travel experience that is distinctively associated with that destination (Ritchie & Crouch, 2000; Blain et al., 2005). The uniqueness of the tourist product results from the attributes of the destination's identity. These attributes include not only the tourism product, such as quality accommodation, shopping facilities, or sporting activities, but also other environmentally attractive elements that in many cases are the main attraction associated with potential tourism demand and a source of tourism competitiveness. These primary attributes of the destination offer are climate, natural beauty and cultural heritage, hospitality, safety and more (Dwyer & Kim, 2003). Goeldner et al. (2000) emphasize that successful tourism is not just a matter of better transport and hotels, but of giving a special national flavour to the traditional way of life and providing tourists with a favourable image of the benefits of these goods and services. Basic and general features are not enough for a successful destination. Preference is given to those destinations that recognize features with various unique elements and incorporate them as unique tourism experiences in the destination's offer.

In their three-dimensional model for destination image, Echtner and Ritchie (1993) consider the dimension of commonality versus uniqueness, i.e. the characteristics that are common to many destinations and the characteristics that distinguish one destination from another. Therefore, for effective destination positioning, the attributes that are closely associated with the destination in customers' perception should be considered first, as well as the other attributes that are objectively unique to a destination and can distinguish it from its competitors (Ibrahim & Gill, 2005). It is about identifying the destination's distinctive characteristics and its strongest and most competitive assets in the eyes of its potential visitors and consistently incorporating this into all marketing communications. Accordingly, identifying the unique and distinctive elements of a destination is a necessary first step for a place marketing strategy that can encourage tourists to choose the destination (Qu et al., 2011). In this context, the development of a destination brand has become a powerful strategic tool due to the ever-increasing competition among destinations. The destination's competitive advantages are recognized by potential tourists through the highlighted differences compared to other competing destinations, which are consistently communicated throughout marketing communications. Kotler et al. (2006) emphasize that brands have become one of the most important determinants of a destination's success because they can be used as tools to convey a destination's unique identity. The main objective of this process is to create a desirable and appealing destination product based on distinctive, unique attributes of the destination and to accurately convey this image to potential tourists. The task of destination marketing organizations is to identify the unique assets of their destination in order to evoke certain feelings, values, cultures and general attitudes that people experience when visiting a place. Jorgensen and Stedman (2001) have found that when the identity of a place is strong enough to be felt or experienced, we often speak of a 'sense of place,' which is also often associated with the uniqueness of the destination. Similarly, Anhold (2009) uses the term 'sense of place' to describe the personality of a place, which results from a variety of factors that are considered the 'DNA of a place.' The term 'DNA' is used metaphorically to express the unique characteristics of places: the special attractions or attributes of a place that position it as unique compared to its main competitors. Attributes can range from functional to psychological (Echtner & Ritchie, 1993) or represent unique characteristics of a place. The uniqueness of attributes refers not only to physical tangible characteristics, but also to intangible and affective characteristics such as emotions, atmosphere, stories and legends.

It becomes clear that our understanding of sense of place can help destinations to foster tourists' attachment to a place through unique attributes that are either part of culture, history or nature. Culture, for example, is one of the diverse and rich factors that determine the overall attractiveness of a tourism region. These include social norms and traditions, language, style of dress, architecture, crafts, art, music, gastronomy, etc. In tourism, the exposed or material culture of a destination has the greatest affective power. Goeldner et al. (2000) also point out that history can be one of the most interesting dimensions of a destination and is a rich tool to create a unique tourism experience. History is also what distinguishes a destination from others and is one of the most important motivations for visiting this or that destination. Local historical sites, stories and legends create a romantic and lasting experience for visitors to a destination. Nature, landscape, natural resources and environment are the most fundamental dimension of a destination. In many cases, these attributes are linked to the destination experience (Kim, 2014). Among the myriad features of a destination, the uniqueness of the destination is usually an essential element of the tourist encounter, and destinations with unique features are also more likely to be perceived as beautiful and therefore have a strong pull motivation (Kirillova et al., 2014). Such features can help build a destination's image as unique (Echtner & Ritchie, 1993; Qu et al., 2011), explain tourists' attachment and engagement with the place, and contribute to memorable experiences (Kim, 2014). Due to their uniqueness and distinctiveness, typical attributes offer potential sources of differentiation in positioning the destination brand.

Identifying the distinctive characteristics of a destination is crucial for tourism development in terms of product development, marketing issues and resource conservation. The ultimate goal is to communicate this difference as a potential competitive advantage to visitors (Jarratt et al., 2019). A toolkit can include unique selling propositions, information-based resources that can be shared with visitors, branding guidelines and resources, visitor-based research, recommendations for improving the visitor experience, and various other forms of information (Jarratt et al., 2019).

In the academic sphere and in tourism practise, destination uniqueness is associated and overlaps with the aforementioned meanings of place identity and sense of place, as well as with the notion of local distinctiveness and concepts such as authenticity (Castéran & Roederer, 2013). Local distinctiveness is mentioned as one of the critical factors in developing a distinctive product, especially in the context of souvenirs, local food and beverages, as it ensures that tourists' vision of the destination is maintained through their sensory engagement with the unique, distinctive and original place-based values (Lin & Mao, 2015; Spielmann et al., 2018). The marketing process to develop a unique product for a destination is not always easy and poses particular challenges to the art of marketing. These challenges are related to the complexity of the tourism product and the number of stakeholders involved in destination marketing. Although the facts of a tourist's experience are also not explicitly known, one might assume that a good tailor-made trip must focus on uniqueness.

Tourism Experience

Although tourism experiences have been extensively researched in the field of tourism (Chirakranont & Sakdiyakorn, 2022) and tourism marketing (Prebensen & Foss, 2011), there is still a relative lack of knowledge and academic work addressing stakeholder perspectives on uniqueness in relation to tourism experiences offered at destinations. Moreover, tourism experiences are a serious concept in the field of tourism, especially in the area of destination positioning (Oh et al., 2007).

Due to the changing economy, society and consumer needs, consumers will continue to prefer buying experiences rather than products (Kim et al., 2012). Thus, the focus has shifted from a service-based (tourism product) to an experience-based economy (tourism experience), also referred to as the experience economy (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). As memorable experiences have high value (Pine & Gilmore, 1998), developing and offering memorable experiences is a focus of the service industry (Wang et al., 2020) and destination marketing (Cetin & Bilgihan, 2016).

Li et al. (2022) define tourism experience as 'a process of individual psychological activities, and its degree of memorability depends on whether the tourism experience meets the expectations and demands of tourists, while high arousal often indicates that tourists' expectations are consistent with reality and that satisfaction is high.' Tourism experiences are particularly appealing to target groups who have a desire to experience and see different destinations and the lives of local people at the destination (Ritchie et al., 2011). Therefore, tourists are likely to experience pleasure when consuming tourism experiences (Li et al., 2022).

Furthermore, experiences can be memorable in a unique way (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). Since some tourist segments have distinct experiences with products and services (Wong & Wan, 2013) and eagerly seek unique tourism experiences (Tiberghien et al., 2020), it is argued that the uniqueness of the experience is the main element that leads to memorable experiences (Kim et al., 2012). Therefore, it is an important need for tourists to share their unique experiences with different destinations, interaction with locals and other travel memories. In this sense, destination managers should avoid over-commercializing their offerings and focus on unique and authentic tourism experiences (Yolal, 2016). In recent research, destination-specific attributes are proved as an antecedent of pro-environment tourist behaviour in the context of tourism experience (Jia, 2015). Other results show that individuals who perceive the attributes of the destination very positively also have a positive memorable experience, which leads to a higher intention to visit the destination again (Madhzar et al., 2015).

Methodology

The overall objective of this article is to identify the unique attributes of destination identity and communication strategies. Identifying such unique attributes is very important for marketing planners in destinations as they provide a competitive advantage over the competition. To answer previously defined research questions, a qualitative research was conducted using semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews are the preferred method for data collection when the researcher's goal is to understand the unique perspective of the participant better than a general understanding of a phenomenon (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). Therefore, the supply side was analysed first. The main advantage of semi-structured techniques is their ability to capture the holistic components and unique characteristics of a destination (Govers et al., 2007) and to allow respondents to freely describe in their own words their intentions in creating and communicating products, feelings and perceptions about a destination.

As tourist boards in Slovenia are a central tourism organization for each destination, semi-structured interviews were conducted with representatives of the main tourist boards responsible for marketing communication in the destinations of Slovenian Istria, who are competent for designing unique tourist experiences.

Thus, three key local representatives and experts of the tourist boards for the destinations of Piran/Portorož, Izola and Koper form the sample for this research (Table 1). The interviews were conducted between March 9 and 18, 2022. At the beginning of each interview, the researchers introduced the purpose of the research. As each tourist board is responsible for the development of new tourism products and their promotion, its main objective lately has been the development and promotion of unique tourism experiences.

The questionnaire referred to the *Slovenia Unique Experiences Guidebook* published by the Slovenian

Table 1 List of Interviewees

Respondents	Tourist Organization	Destination
Respondent A	Tourist board Portorož	Portorož/Piran
Respondent B	Izola Tourism Association	Izola
Respondent C	Koper Public Institute for Youth, Culture and Tourism	Koper

Tourist Organization (Slovenska turistična organizacija, 2020). The interview consisted of two main parts, namely unique experiences at the destination and promotion of unique experiences at the destination. The first part of the questionnaire contained six open-ended questions about the main unique experiences, their unique elements/attributes and symbols of destination identity. This part of the interview also includes the criteria for their development, aim, and reasons for developing memorable, unique tourism experiences. The second part of the interview also consisted of three open-ended questions on the promotional efforts of destinations to offer unique tourism experiences. In this context, expressions/words and feelings were identified. At the end, a short question was asked about how to measure tourists' impressions of unique experiences at each destination.

Research Results

The results of the qualitative research are presented and compared. In line with the research objectives, a holistic view of destination uniqueness attributes is of particular importance to this study. In order to obtain a comprehensive view of destination uniqueness, it was crucial to obtain in-depth information on the attributes of destination uniqueness through unique products and their promotion.

This section of the study presents the results of the semi-structured interviews, which are divided into two parts. The first part of the analysis focuses on the importance of developing and offering unique experiences at the destination for its tourists.

In this part, the *first research question* is answered by proposing a method for identifying unique destination attributes. To answer the first question, respondents first listed the most unique tourism products/experiences at each destination. In this way, we were able to identify several unique tourism experiences offered at each destination.

In addition, respondents selected and listed a number of attributes for product uniqueness based on the unique experiences offered by their destination. To provide a comprehensive overview, the responses are summarized in Table 2. For each destination, respondents indicated unique tourism experiences for three different areas, namely nature and natural resources, cultural heritage and culinary experiences. The analysis of tourism experiences shows that the most experiences can be found in the destination Portorož – Piran, which is also the most developed tourist municipality, followed by the destination Izola and then Koper.

In all three destinations, it is evident that experiences of all kinds are the predominant unique attributes of nature and natural resources. These include natural landscapes and protected parks, and salt pans with useful derivatives such as mud, salt, and salt flower, which are an integral part of the experiences that the representatives consider unique. Portorož – Piran has the most unique experiences based on salt and salt pans, such as the unique outdoor spa centre Thalasso Spa Lepa Vida, located on the salt pans. Among the natural attributes, olive groves, vineyards and truffles are often highlighted in all three destinations, which are part of the unique outdoor experiences related to the hinterland and typical Istrian villages. The cultural heritage is based on the unique attributes of Venetian architecture, which can be found in all three coastal towns (Koper, Izola and Piran). Here it is all about arousing curiosity, discovering hidden treasures and learning stories about city life. In the hinterland, cultural heritage is combined with the architecture of Istrian villages, getting to know Istrian life, nature and cuisine. An important source for learning more about the peculiarities of life in Istria are the unique interpretations of virtual boutique museums #butmuz, which allow visitors to experience the past in a unique way and connect with the history of Istria.

When analysing the tourism experience, the local and traditional cuisine of Slovenian Istria is of great importance. The local cuisine is strongly represented with various attributes, both in outdoor activities in nature and cultural heritage. The interweaving of traditional cuisine with other activities and attractions is part of the experience at this destination. In terms of natural resources, there is a strong connection to the sea, where the source of unique experiences is linked to fishing and fish, which are part of the tradition, especially in the destination of Izola, which offers a mix of Istrian and seafood cuisine due to its proximity to the hinterland. Local attributes that create unique experiences are often part of tourist gastronomic events in Izola. Olive oil, wine and fish are typical attributes of various culinary festivals, as well as sustainable culinary campaigns such as Kilometre Zero (kmo) in preparing unique dishes with local ingredients from the sea and the land. In addition, there are various culinary events in all three destinations, outstanding tourist culinary experiences in nature such as the 'Vintage culinary experience,' 'Wine experience with an unforgettable sunset in the hinterland of Slovenian Istria' and 'Truffle hunting and tasting.'

The culinary cultural heritage product in Izola is also well designed. Even today, the Romans are known for their hedonistic lifestyle and fondness for good food, and this is part of the culinary experience when discovering the Roman heritage in the Istrian region as part of the tourist experience called 'Roman tastes under the stars in the archaeological park.' In order to increase tourist satisfaction, it is particularly important to understand what attributes influence travellers' experiences of local cuisine.

In addition, the uniqueness of tourism experiences derives from the *attributes of the destination's identity.* Thus, Table 2 shows a unified experience of three destinations in Slovenian Istria. The identity of Slovenian Istria is primarily determined by the sea, which represents the first contact with the Mediterranean and dominates the local history, natural environment, climate and landscape, and is probably the most distinctive element for tourism experiences. The sea is not only a point of attraction, but also offers specific elements such as beaches, wilderness, protected areas like saltpans, fishing and local products, and allows for a variety of outdoor activities on and by the sea. The basic symbols of identity also come from the sea, such as the salt in the destination Portorož – Piran and the fish in Izola. Another important element is the sun, which is a symbol of Koper. The three destinations are very different in terms of landscape and vitality. They differ in that Koper is a city centre with maritime, nautical, bathing and sports tourism, Izola offers cosiness and authenticity and is based on fishing, and Piran – Portorož is one of the most developed destinations with salt pans and mediaeval Piran. Despite the differences, they have common unifying elements of shared identity, such as the fact that all three cities, Koper, Izola and Piran, were islands. All three representatives pointed out that part of the identity of this region is the meeting of three cultures: Slovenian, Italian and Croatian, which is reflected in the architecture, bilingualism, dialects, and customs, and translated into a sense of place. The attribute of uniqueness also refers to intangible and affective qualities such as emotions, atmosphere, stories, and legends.

Next, respondents were asked to provide *reasons, goals and criteria* for developing memorable, unique tourism experiences. As far the *reasons* for developing memorable experiences, the expert from the Tourist Organization Board Portorož & Piran highlighted the following in particular:

> Each experience is characterized by its offer, which is aimed at a specific audience, by individual elements on which the identity of the destination is based (e.g. local artisanal products such as salt and salt flower, thalassotherapy, olive oil, garlic, Piran sea bass, Malvasia and Refošk wine, tradition, landscape, cultural and natural heritage, sustainable elements). So they cannot be transferred to another environment because they would lose their added value.

The representative of Izola gave reasons for creating memorable experiences, mostly related to cultural heritage, such as place, culture, history, the area inhabited since 4000 BC, and the Romans. For the destination of Koper, the expert emphasized that: 'Since unique tourism experiences are designed for small groups, they offer a memorable and unusual experi-

Table 2 Unique Attributes of Destination and Examples of Unique Tourism Experiences at Destination

Attributes/Destination	Portorož/Piran	Izola	Koper
Nature and natural resources	Landscape and protected parks, footpath, climate, fish, truffles, olives, panoramas, salt pans with useful derivates (e.g. mud, salt, salt flower)	Sea, fish, hinterland, cliffs, nature park, salt pans	Sea
Examples of unique outdoor experiences	• An unforgettable day at the Fonda Fish Farm • Vintage Gourmet Tour • Truffle hunting with cooking workshop and other active cultural and culinary experiences with a touch of Istria • The unique outdoor spa centre Lepa Vida Thalasso Spa on salt pan	• Roman tastes under the stars • The Forgotten Secret of Izola	• Candlelit Dinner Date • Vintage Gourmet Tour • Truffle hunting
Cultural heritage	Saltworks, fishing, the medieval town of Piran, traditional events, Venetian architecture, Istrian customs and traditions, Šavrini, legends and stories of Piran	Paranzana, shipbuilding, fishing, boutique museums, traditional events, Roman culture	Venetian architecture, typical Istrian villages
Examples of unique cultural heritage experiences	• Saltpans Feast • Saltharvester for a day • Discovering the secrets of Piran	• Network of boutique museums #BUTMUZ • The Forgotten Secret of Izola • Roman tastes under the stars	
Culinary	Traditional cuisine – truffle, olive oil, salt, fish, wine	Wine, fish, garlic	Olive, wine, salt, truffle
Examples of unique culinary experiences	• Wine experience with an unforgettable sunset in the hinterland of Slovenian Istria • Truffle hunting and tasting • Persimmon Festival	• Wine experience with an unforgettable sunset in the hinterland of Slovenian Istria • Truffle hunting and tasting • Persimmon Festival	• Vintage Gourmet Tour • Sweet Istria
Attributes of the identity of Slovenian Istria	• Sea • Salt and salt products • Hinterland, customs, Istrians	• Sea • Fish • First contact with the Mediterranean – way of life, climate, contact of cultures	• Sea • Climate, Venetian architecture, green hinterland, delicious local food and drink

ence. To some extent, they allow personalization and meet the high expectations of demanding guests.'

In terms of the *goals* of a memorable experience, respondents agreed that it is critical that tourists experience the uniqueness of a particular place that they cannot experience anywhere else. In addition, they want to highlight new, unique experiences outside of the peak season. In this way, they want to increase the added value of the destination and encourage off-season consumption, as well as extend the average length of stay per destination. In summary, an important common goal of all three destination marketing representatives is to encourage tourists to visit year-round and offer them something new and memorable with added value. Finally, respondents highlighted the *criteria* for developing a memorable, unique tourism experience, which are presented. From the responses, we can conclude that the most prominent criteria are boutique, innovation, authenticity, sustainable focus, individual approach and exclusivity when it comes to designing new, unique, memorable experiences in destinations in Slovenian Istria. Examples of new, unique tourism experiences include, for example, 'Discovering the Secrets of Piran,' the outdoor adventure game 'The Forgotten Secret of Izola,' the #BUTMUZ boutique museums network and 'Romantic Candlelight Dinner Date.'

In the second part of the research, in order to answer the second research question, respondents were also asked about the communication terms they use to describe unique experiences and what emotions they appeal to when communicating unique experiences. The experts describe the uniqueness of the experiences with the following communication terms: pleasure, hedonism, excitement, relaxation, curiosity, surprise, happiness, and joy. Also, when asked what emotions are addressed when communicating unique experiences, the experts mentioned the following emotions: happiness, joy, excitement, pleasure, relaxation, mystery, curiosity and surprise.

It is also interesting to note that impressions about the attractiveness of a unique tourism experience from the tourists' perspective are observed primarily on the basis of comments in social networks and personal contacts with tourists directly on site.

Discussion

Understanding what are unique experiences at a destination is a challenge for destination marketers. This article contributes to the research questions of identifying unique attributes of tourism experiences through the destination identity and their symbolic and expressive level of marketing communication using Slovenian Istria as an example. In order to better understand the essence of unique tourism experiences, it is necessary to analyse their multidimensional structure for different travel experience contexts. The study follows a qualitative approach based on open-ended interviews with professionals from the tourist offices of the three main destinations in Slovenian Istria. This allows us to gain a deeper understanding of the concept of uniqueness of tourism experiences in destinations.

Based on the research results from the qualitative research, we identified important attributes of uniqueness and its symbolic and expressive character in relation to the communication aspect.

To answer the first research question, respondents were asked about the destination attributes of unique tourism experiences through destination identity, followed by goals, reasons and criteria for developing new unique tourism experiences. It turns out that the most frequently represented attributes are those that are associated with nature and natural resources in tourism experiences and which give them uniqueness. This includes a number of unique attributes such as sea, salt, fish, hinterland, olive trees, vines, truffles, views, and natural parks, which are most often associated with outdoor experiences. It should be emphasized that cultural heritage is often highlighted in experiences with unique attributes such as the architecture of towns and villages, Venetian history and the Istrian people or Šavrini, which are associated with the region of Istria and its authentic culture and customs. Unique tourism experiences based on both natural resources and cultural heritage are often complemented by local taste experiences. Cuisine enhances the touch of uniqueness of the experience based on local culinary ingredients such as truffles, salt flower, olive oil, wine, persimmons, asparagus, garlic, and fish, which form the basis of traditional cuisine with a Mediterranean touch. According to Tiberghien et al. (2020), offering unique products, such as the exploration of culinary traditions, has a positive impact on strengthening the tourism experience and creating a USP (unique selling proposition). This is also consistent with Stone et al.'s (2021) view that experiences related to the culinary are associated with memories in terms of various connections (interpersonal, social, emotional, sensory, experimental, novel, etc.). Thus, the authors argue that culinary experiences can have a major impact on creating memories while travelling to create memorable experiences.

The research results in this part confirm that the uniqueness of tourism experiences comes from the identity of the place. The elements that belong to the unique experiences derive from the particular character of the places. The character of the place, which includes special, attractive and recognizable attributes of the destination, is different from others and is reflected in nature and culture, outdoor activities, local products and landscapes and buildings.

Regarding the *reasons* for creating new unique tourism experiences, practitioners expressed that they associate uniqueness with a memorable and outstanding experience that allows a certain level of personalization and meets the high expectations of demanding guests. They also seek to create unique tourism experiences based on the elements/attributes of the destination identity of Slovenian Istria (e.g. local products such as salt, olive oil, wine, etc.) that are not transferable to another environment because as such they lose their added value. In addition, the *goal* of the three main destinations in Slovenian Istria is to offer and promote unique tourism experiences to visitors in order to encourage them to visit outside the peak season. According to the research findings, the most common *criteria* for developing new, unique, memorable tourism experiences in destinations in Slovenian Istria are boutique, innovation, authenticity, sustainable focus, individual approach and exclusivity. This is in line with the view of Li et al. (2022), for example, who claim that innovation can stimulate tourists' emotions such as novelty, pleasure, and freshness, which leads to a better tourism experience. Moreover, tourists looking for unique and authentic tourism experiences are more likely to look for something different from standard tourism products and services (Tiberghien et al., 2020). Criteria for creating uniqueness include enriching the visitor's experience at the destination, which is often enhanced with intangible attributes such as romance, exploration, discovery, and boutique, which aim to provide tourists with exceptional value and remarkable experiences. These sensory experiences, derived from stimuli from nature and culture, stand out and trigger emotion and engagement. In this vein, the first research question has been answered.

In the second part of our findings, we focused on the symbolic and expressive levels of uniqueness associated with tourism experiences at a destination. This is particularly important because they enhance the quality of the experience and contribute to memorable tourism experiences (Kim, 2014). Thus, this paper also addresses the challenges from a marketing communications perspective in order to answer the second research question. Following the research findings, the uniqueness of the experiences at the main tourist destinations in Slovenian Istria is described in terms such as hedonism, pleasure, excitement, relaxation, curiosity, surprise, happiness, and joy. Similarly, the emotions they want to evoke in their communication strategies are: happiness, joy, enthusiasm, pleasure, relaxation, mystery, curiosity, and surprise. Focusing on how specific uniqueness attributes help consumers fulfil their hedonistic travel desires requires a more pragmatic approach that links the notion of uniqueness of tourism experiences to the significant contribution that destination attributes can make to enabling unique experiences. Involvement, hedonism, refreshment, local culture, meaningfulness, knowledge, and novelty are attributes that have the potential to connect with tourists' emotions, leading to increased attention, learning ability and happiness, ultimately resulting in memorability (Larsen & Jenssen, 2004; Tung & Ritchie, 2011). Moreover, this may be consistent with the research findings of Li et al. (2022), who argue that pleasure and excitement moderate the relationship between night tourism atmosphere and memorable tourism experience.

Similarly, research findings point to the following emotions as appealing in the delivery of unique experiences: happiness, joy, enthusiasm, pleasure, relaxation, mystery, curiosity and surprise. In this vein, unique and meaningful travel experiences are often designed to include intangible unique attributes in addition to tangible attributes. Emotions are therefore considered central to memorable tourism experiences (Tung & Ritchie, 2011). We argue that uniqueness through communication begins by focusing on methods by which experiences are advertised, communicated, and remembered through these domains. According to Agapito et al. (2014), most sensory tourism experiences relate to nature, from beach vacations to rural retreats, engaging multiple senses simultaneously. It was found that tasting local food (Stone et al., 2021; Agapito et al., 2014) and smelling fresh air are two of the most important sensory experiences for tourists, suggesting that developing unique experiences goes hand in hand with creating meaningful and memorable sensory experiences (Agapito et al., 2014). This finding is also consistent with the results of our research.

Conclusion

With this in mind, the paper offers some observations that can be considered as recommendations for the future development of unique tourism experiences. This research contributes to a better understanding of the importance of the concept of uniqueness in tourism experiences at the destination, with clear implications for marketing communications that give tourism experiences a unique touch and greater appeal in the tourism market.

The research included holiday experiences related to relaxation and fun at the destination with a more idyllic and unique escape experience, where social and special aesthetic dimensions stand out and trigger emotions and engagement: tourism experiences with a romantic atmosphere, fantasy, dreams, nostalgic moments of interaction and multisensory elements. It would be interesting to associate uniqueness with unconventional tourism experiences, such as adventure or volunteer tourism, where people seek an unusual and attractive experience.

Finally, this study also shows that the unique attributes exhibited reinforce the interest and experience, and to some extent correspond to the identity of the place, which is important for the image of the destination in which they are located, and therefore are important for the destination brand. For example, truffles are very representative of Istria, just as the salt flower is a sign of salt pans in this area of Istria, and in this sense helps to consolidate the image and identity of the destination, which affects the destination brand and loyalty and attachment to the place.

Today's tourists are no longer satisfied with the superficial, all-inclusive, generic, standardized offer, but are looking for a deeper contact with the destination they are visiting (culture, landscape, people). They want a real, original, normal, not artificial, not made-up, not tourist experience. An experience that has been around since time immemorial and is unique. Therefore, practitioners and marketers in tourist destinations look for the fundamental and authentic attributes of the destination, which may be contained in unique points, attractions, places or experiences. In this regard, this study contributes to identifying a set of unique attributes per destination that can serve as a guide for destination managers. Identifying the distinctive, unique characteristics of a destination is necessary for tourism development and management and has important implications for tourism marketing planners and travel suppliers. Our findings can help marketing planners select the target constellation of attributes and develop more efficient unique experience products for destinations and their marketing communication strategies for campaigns. Tourism managers could use them to identify their own local particularities.

The robust results suggest that combining the most distinctive attributes with a strong emotional component is important for a destination's positioning strategy. This paper clearly identifies the natural setting and roles of unique and distinctive attributes, integrating them into the tourism product or experience. Therefore, it is essential that destination management and marketers focus on an image campaign that can further promote destination uniqueness and differentiation from other destinations and sustain effective marketing strategies in this respect. Hence, marketing and advertising campaigns can underline the unique attributes of natural and cultural heritage, which will provoke an emotional experience during tourist visits.

As a research study, some limitations of the current approach are obvious. First, this study investigates the uniqueness of the tourism experience on the supplier side using qualitative research. However, this research method is inherently less objective than quantitative research and therefore more limited in terms of statistical and comparative analyses. It would therefore make sense to further investigate the tourist side and the perception of the uniqueness of the tourism experience with quantitative research, to find out if the attributes belonging to the tourism experience provide the tourist with a unique experience or if there is a gap between the promises of the offer and the actual experience. The aspect of the tourist's satisfaction with the tourism experience is also important, as they have a greater potential to share the experience and memories of the experience with a unique touch. Second, in examining unique tourism experiences, the study rely on interviews with representatives of tourism organizations in destinations that are involved in marketing of tourism experiences. In this sense, some of the criteria used for data collection may not provide a comprehensive basis and those who conduct these experiences may not reflect all possible unique experiences. Third, this study assessed the attributes of tourism experiences' uniqueness for selected tourism experiences in three destinations highlighted by respondents as the most important, and not all that are offered, or even smaller destinations in Slovenian Istria such as Ankaran, which could mean that not all attributes of destination uniqueness are covered in this area. Fourth, the range of unique experiences does not include a comparison between unique and non-unique experiences, which could contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the unique experience. Fifth, other marketing constructs related to destination uniqueness could be explored, such as different market segments (families, young couples, seniors) or destination positioning through USP, brand, and the like. Finally, criteria at the level of symbolic and expressive communication are important to attract and effectively market unique experiences, so the most market-effective communication approaches and web-based marketing channels should be tested in the market. Uniqueness as a distinctive element in tourism experience has recently gained importance and is used increasingly.

Therefore, future studies could explore the above comments from each category over time. Future studies should also consider exploring the relation between tourists' need for uniqueness as a representation of differentiated identity based on several target markets and destination settings.

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Innovation in Smaller Hotels in Argentina before and after the COVID-19 Pandemic

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The study aims to explore the pre-COVID-19 innovative behaviour of smaller hotels located in an urban centre of Argentina and to recognize whether the current pandemic operates as an innovation-inducing factor in these hotels. The contribution and main motivation lies in the lower number of studies on hotel innovation in South American destinations and the need to identify the strategies adopted by smaller hotels in the face of the COVID-19 crisis. The methodology followed is a multiple case study composed of six small and medium-sized hotels located in Bahía Blanca city (Argentina). The primary information was collected by surveys sent to hotel managers. The study shows a pre-COVID-19 innovative profile oriented to the acquisition of embedded technology, staff training and obtaining incremental innovations. Internal factors and external factors influence the innovative profile described. The COVID-19 pandemic is not an inducing factor, but rather an obstacle to innovation.

Keywords: innovation, hotels, small and medium-sized hotel, Argentina, COVID-19 pandemic

 https://doi.org/10.26493/2335-4194.15.363-379

Introduction

Service innovation is a source of competitive advantage for hotels in dealing with the competitive environment that illustrates the tourism industry worldwide (Gomezelj, 2016; Backman et al., 2017; Ambrož & Omerzel, 2018). In addition, innovation emerges as an alternative for the recovery and transformation of the tourism sector given the unprecedented repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic (United Nations, 2020, p. 2; OECD, 2020; UNWTO, 2020; Le & Phi, 2021; Breier et al., 2021).

In the current pandemic scenario, the use of technology is a key element in reducing the real and perceived risk of contagion (Shin & Kang, 2020; Sharma et al., 2021) and in designing new marketing strategies and using digital platforms to improve the competitiveness of small and medium-sized firms (SMES) in the sector (United Nations, 2020).

The international chains Marriott, Hilton, Hyatt and Best Western adopted fully automated check-in systems to ensure social distancing, and cleaning robots, UV technology and electrostatic sprayers to improve cleaning and disinfection (Shin & Kang, 2020; Le & Phi, 2021). Following Lau (2020), 5G and Wi-Fi

6 technology, facial recognition, artificial intelligence and robots are some of the new technologies that are aiding the survival of the sector. It should be noted that the adoption of technological advances in the field of ICT is a specific feature of innovation in the tourism and hospitality sector (see, for example, Fernández et al., 2011; Nieves & Osorio, 2019). Additionally, innovations can be implemented in the hotel business model to confront the COVID-19 crisis through changes in reservation and cancellation policies, adjustments in restaurant services to the take-away modality, and adoption of an annual membership system (Breier et al.; 2021; Le & Phi, 2021).

Given the traditional conception of innovation as a source of competitiveness and its current relevance as an alternative for the recovery of tourism in face of the COVID-19 crisis, this study aims to explore the innovative behaviour of small and medium-sized hotel firms located in an urban centre of Argentina in the pre-COVID-19 stage and examine whether the COVID-19 crisis signifies an opportunity to innovate for these firms.

The research on tourism and hospitality innovation in small and medium-sized firms (SMES) is a topic of particular importance due to the number of these enterprises in the global tourism sector (Pikkemaat, 2008; Thomas et al., 2011; Motta & Sharma, 2020) and the specificities of their innovation process. In Argentina, the tourism sector has a high proportion of SMES compared to other economic sectors. Specifically, the hotel sector comprises 57% of private employees (AHT & IERAL, 2020). Adding to the numerical importance, innovation in tourism and hospitality SMES has particular features such as low economies of scale and scope; low level of qualification of its employees; a propensity to invest in acquisition of hardware and software; difficulties in accessing financing; and little propensity to cooperate with customers, competitors, suppliers, and universities (Pikkemaat & Peters, 2006; Pikkemaat, 2008).

The paper aims to contribute in diverse directions to the empirical knowledge about innovation in the hospitality sector. First, the study addresses the gap related to the lower number of empirical studies on tourism and hospitality innovation in South America compared to other regions. In his review of the state of academic research in the area of hospitality and tourism innovation, Gomezelj (2016) found that most of the studies refer to European and Asian tourist destinations. Thus, for the pre-COVID-19 stage, the study offers empirical evidence on the innovative behaviour of hospitality SMES located in destinations little explored in the literature. Second, this paper aims to contribute to the knowledge about innovation in hospitality SMES in response to the COVID-19 crisis. The crises in the tourism sector have an amplified impact on SMES given their limited business volume and low marginal profitability and, therefore, a low level of savings or own reserves; their restricted access to capital markets; and their internal constraints, such as scant management experience (Kukanja et al., 2022; Dias et al., 2022; United Nations, 2022). Nevertheless, the smaller firms tend to be more flexible and innovative (Kukanja et al., 2022; Tejada & Moreno, 2013; Pikkemaat, 2008). Recent studies on the COVID-19 pandemic suggest the need to deepen the knowledge of the creative strategies implemented by hospitality SMES that are not affiliated with a large international chain (Shin & Kang, 2020; Le & Phi, 2021).

The proposed analysis uses the multiple case study methodology (Yin, 2009, 2018). Six small and medium-sized hotels located in Bahía Blanca city (Argentina) constitute the selected case studies. Based on the distinction between survival strategies and innovation strategies for facing the COVID-19 crisis (Le & Phi, 2021), reports for the national tourism sector reveal that hotels in Argentina adopted savings measures and requested government aid more than innovation strategies. This paper tries to deepen knowledge of this last type of strategies.

From the literature on innovation in tourism and hospitality, some questions raised regarding the stage prior to the COVID-19 crisis are: What type of innovation activities did the hotel firms under study invest in? What type of external sources of information did these hotels use to update themselves on new market trends, new technologies, new management and/or organization models during their innovation process? What kind of innovative results did they obtain? What internal factors, such as size, chain affiliation, and conservative attitude influenced their innovative profile? What external influences on the innovation process emerged in the proposed analysis? Concerning the COVID-19 crisis, the research questions are: How did hotels perceive the COVID-19 crisis? What innovation strategies did hoteliers adopt to face the crisis?

After this introduction, the paper is structured as follows. The next section offers a review of theoretical and empirical aspects of innovation in hospitality. The third section introduces methodological considerations related to the case study, the data collection instrument used in this paper and the type of information collected. The fourth section analyses this information, dividing the analysis into two stages: pre-COVID-19 and the pandemic context. Section five displays a discussion of the results, and section 6 offers a conclusion, indicating limitations and future research guidelines.

Innovation in Hospitality: Review of the Literature

Hospitality is considered a lower innovative performance sector compared to industry and knowledge-intensive services (Gomezelj, 2016; Martín-Rios & Ciobanu, 2019), even though the study of innovation in hospitality generates a growing interest derived from the diversity and specificities of its processes and activities (Gomezelj, 2016; Martín-Rios & Ciobanu, 2019).

Most empirical studies on innovation in hospitality and tourism are based on definitions and categories from the Schumpeterian approach (Hjalager, 2010; de Larrea et al., 2021). Based on the taxonomy proposed by Schumpeter, innovation is defined as the implementation of a new or significantly improved product (good or service), or process, a new marketing method, or a new organizational method in business practices, workplace organization or external relations (OECD, 2018).

Alternative innovation classifications have been suggested in order to capture the particularities of the sector (Orfila-Sintes & Mattsson, 2009; Hjalager, 2010; de Larrea et al., 2021). Following Martín-Rios and Ciobanu (2019), hospitality integrates the taxonomy called *supplier-dominated services* (SDS). The SDS firms are characterized by low levels of formal innovation, and their innovation process relies on the purchase of goods and the interaction with suppliers and users. Unlike other SDS sectors, the hospitality industry is further characterized as a labour-intensive, largely seasonal, cost-driven industry, with less inclination towards R&D and large investments in technological innovation.

Orfila-Sintes and Mattsson (2009) point out that hotel firms show a greater propensity to innovate through the introduction of R&D incorporated in technology (new equipment and/or software) and a lower predisposition to carry out internal activities of R&D. Among hotel firms in Spain, Guisado-González et al. (2013) find that the most common innovation strategy is the acquisition of new technology through the purchase of machinery and equipment, followed by the training of personnel involved in innovation activities, the purchase of intangible technology and marketing activities related to the introduction of new services. Firms are little oriented towards internal generation of knowledge, external R&D and cooperation with other firms and agents.

In summary, innovation in the hospitality sector is illustrated in the adoption of new technologies and translates into competitive advantages, either due to productive efficiency, understood as a reduction in costs, or to the greater capacity for differentiation through improvements in the service and its greater adaptation to the client (Orfila-Sintes & Mattsson, 2009; Nieves et al., 2014). Specifically, innovation in this sector is widely associated with advances in ICT (Orfila-Sintes & Mattsson, 2009; Fernández et al., 2011; Nieves et al., 2014; Nieves & Osorio, 2019).

It should be noted that firms do not innovate alone. Innovation is a process that depends on the acquisition of knowledge and information from outside the firm (see, for example, OECD, 2018; Lundvall, 2010). Nieves et al. (2014), Nieves and Segarra-Ciprés (2015), and Backman et al. (2017) offer empirical evidence in favour of the positive impact that the interactions with external actors (customers, suppliers, competitors, firms of the same group and industry) have on hotel innovation regardless of their location. Kallmuenzer (2018) finds that employees, guests, and competitors are key drivers of innovation.

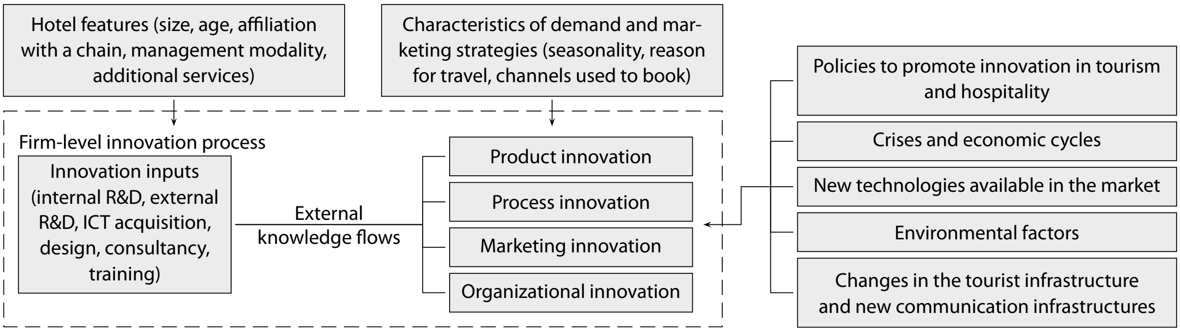

Figure 1 Firm-Level Innovation Process and Its Conditioning Factors Source (based on López-Fernández et al., 2011; Orfila-Sintes & Mattsson, 2009; Fernández et al., 2011)

Several factors condition the innovation process in the hotel industry. These factors can be classified into: (1) internal ones, such as size, belonging to a group of firms, organizational rigidity and lack of qualified personnel, and (2) external ones, such as the availability of financing sources, the lack of information or the scant interest of consumers regarding innovation (Orfila-Sintes & Mattsson, 2009; López-Fernández et al., 2011). Among the internal factors, the knowledge, skills and creativity of employees constitute key sources of innovation for hotels (Nieves et al., 2014; Nieves & Segarra-Ciprés, 2015; Dhar, 2015; Backman et al., 2017) as well as the behaviour of employees and their actions towards innovation (Zopiatis & Theocharous, 2018). Following Backman et al. (2017), innovation is not mainly a function of the intensity of R&D but of the knowledge acquired through the processes of learning by doing, learning by using and learning by interacting. Thus, specific knowledge of the firm derives from the human capital of the employees (education, experience, ability to solve problems, etc.).

Regarding external factors that influence hotel innovation, Fernández et al. (2011) include (1) policies to promote innovation in tourism and hospitality; (2) economic crises and business cycles; (3) sociodemographic conditions such as changes in consumption habits and the rise of new market segments; (4) new technologies translated into product, process, organizational or marketing innovations in the tourism sector; (5) environmental factors exemplified in legislation to regulate pollution and preserve the environment; and (6) changes in tourist infrastructure and new communication infrastructures. Figure 1 illustrates the innovation process at the firm level and the internal and external factors that affect this process.

The academic literature as well as the reports compiled by international organizations suggest that the COVID-19 crisis may be a potential external factor that induces innovation. Hotels, particularly those belonging to large chains, have already implemented innovations in response to the pandemic (Shin & Kang, 2020; Sharma et al., 2021), ranging from procedures that guarantee higher standards of hygiene and social distancing to adjustments in reservation and cancellation policies (Shin & Kang, 2020; Sharma et al., 2021; Breier et al., 2021; Hao et al., 2020).

Le and Phi (2021) identify strategic responses adopted by the hotel sector to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic. In an early phase of the pandemic, hotels chains suspended their investments in new projects or implemented an 'asset-light' policy, while small and medium-sized hotels implemented a savings strategy by freeing up working capital, improving business efficiency and postponing non-essential renovations. In the next phases of emergency and crisis, hoteliers adopted defensive or survival strategies focused on cost reduction, the adoption of health and safety procedures, sales promotions through coupons and discount offers and free accommodation for health workers. For the recovery phase, the authors argue that the pandemic accelerated business innovation through service automation and revenue diversification. In particular, new automated service processes such as contactless check-in/check-out, digital menus, online service ordering, mobile concierge apps, and smart room control have been adopted at a rapid pace.

Breier et al. (2021) show that the incremental innovations carried out by hotels in the context of a pandemic are explained by the time available, the general pressure to change due to the crisis, financial restrictions and the role of frequent guests as implementing partners and early adopters. Hotel size, hotel resources, and government regulations and support policies are additional factors that have a strong influence on hotel sector responses to crises (Hao et al., 2020; Le & Phi, 2021). Large hotel chains are generally better equipped than small and medium-sized hotels in pandemic crisis management (Shin & Kang, 2020; Le & Phi, 2021).

Innovation in Small and Medium-Sized Firms in the Tourism and Hospitality Sector

Several authors agree that innovation in small and medium-sized firms (SMES) in the tourism sector is a relevant research topic (Tejada & Moreno, 2013; Hjalager, 2010; Pikkemaat & Peters, 2006; Thomas et al., 2011). This relevance is based on the numerical importance of SMES in the tourism industry and the specific features assumed by innovation among these firms. Data and studies in several countries show that the tourism industry is dominated by micro and small businesses, and most of them are owned and managed by a single person or family (Pikkemaat, 2008; Thomas et al., 2011; Pikkemaat & Zehrer, 2016).

Although, starting with the seminal work of Schumpeter (1942), there is extensive literature on the influence of firm size on innovation, there is no consensus on such influence (Pikkemaat, 2008; Tejada & Moreno, 2013). Some studies reveal that larger firms have the advantage over economies of scale in innovation activities, while other research indicates that smaller firms have greater flexibility to innovate and adapt to changing environments (see the review of Tejada & Moreno, 2013). In any case, the literature refers to specific features shared by the tourism and hospitality SMES (Pikkemaat & Peters, 2006; Pikkemaat, 2008; Tejada & Moreno, 2013; Thomas et al., 2011; Kallmuenzer, 2018):

- Low economies of scale and scope, and difficulties in increasing profit margins that allow reinvestment in research and development, market research, product development, upskilling or creativity. A lack of time, money and knowledge for a strategic innovation process is identified among SMES.
- Unlike large firms, SMES do not have research and development departments.
- Low professionalism; SMES employ numerous low-cost and semi-skilled labour.
- Lack of cooperation and networking; SMES in the tourism and hospitality industry are reluctant to cooperate or form strategic alliances with other partners (competitors, suppliers, customers and/or universities).
- SMES predominantly focus on acquisition of machinery as well as upgrading of the facilities in general, rather than creating service or management innovations. The most common type of innovation is associated with the adoption of innovations in the field of information technology. Most innovations are adoptions that originate as new technologies suggested by suppliers.
- SMES are risk averse, and, therefore, tend to follow and imitate only after making sure investments are feasible.
- Innovations in SMES are often reactive in nature rather than proactive innovations. The former are changes undertaken to solve an existing problem, while the latter introduce a new capability or experience for tourists.

The stated features limit the innovation capacity of tourism SMES. The reluctance to cooperate with competitors, suppliers, customers and/or universities is a significant limitation. It should be noted that cooperation allows SMES to access the material and cognitive resources necessary to innovate (Kim & Shim, 2018; Kallmuenzer, 2018); at the same time, the cooperation allows for obtaining the necessary economies of scope to increase the variety of products and services offered. In addition, the low qualifications of the workforce and the low cost of labour not only does not allow boosting labour productivity in the sector, but also does not offer the necessary incentives to carry out labour-saving process innovations (Pikkemaat & Peters, 2006).

Moreover, difficulties in access to financing constitute an additional factor that undermines the innovative capacity of tourism SMEs (Dias et al., 2022; Motta & Sharma, 2020). SMEs find it difficult to obtain financing from commercial banks due to the lack of collateral, small cash flow, high-risk premiums or underdeveloped banking relationships, as well as experiencing difficulties in obtaining credit from suppliers and financial institutions (see review of Dias et al., 2022). As a consequence, the SMEs of the sector are financed with their own profits.

Regarding innovation in tourism SMEs during the COVID-19 pandemic, these firms experienced lower levels of training, less digitization of their processes, greater vulnerability to external shocks, and greater dependence on government aid compared to large firms (Dias et al., 2022; Iancu et al., 2022). In any case, recent studies show that the adoption of new technologies, new business models, and employee training were part of the main strategies followed by tourism SMEs in the face of the crisis (Breier et al., 2021; Haqbin et al., 2022; Estiri et al., 2022). Dias et al. (2022) find that the risk-taking attitude of managers and the existence of a cooperation network are factors that positively affected innovation during the COVID-19 crisis. The authors indicate that state financial aid had no impact on innovation during the pandemic, although this may be due to a high degree of correlation with the variable risk. However, Estiri et al. (2022) argue that the development of digital marketing is confirmed as an applicable strategy for tourism SMEs to access new markets. Government support in the provision of infrastructure to implement these strategies leads to the strengthening of organizational innovations that provide a competitive advantage for SMEs.

Methodology and Source of Information

Method

This paper adopts the case study methodology (Yin, 2018). This methodology should be used: (a) to answer the 'how' and 'why' research questions; (b) when the researcher has little or no control over behavioural events; and (c) the focus of the study is contemporary as opposed to an entirely historical event (Yin, 2018). Additionally, a case study would be appropriate when the researcher needs to describe a social phenomenon in depth.

This technique was recently used to understand how hotel firms innovate in their business models in reaction to the COVID-19 crisis (Breier et al., 2021). Following Yin (2009), the case study technique is suitable for analysing complex real-life phenomena for which theory knowledge is scarce. In this way, the technique is appropriate to address the questions raised for smaller hotels, which are little explored given the recent and disruptive nature of the COVID-19 pandemic (Le & Phi, 2021; Shin & Kang, 2020). As a limitation, the case study does not allow generalization in probabilistic or statistical terms. According to Yin (2009 and 2018), the case study admits an analytical generalization, in which a previously developed theory is used as a template to compare the empirical results of the case study. In analytic generalization, the researcher attempts to generalize a particular set of results to a theory.

The proposed qualitative research, with an exploratory and descriptive scope, uses the holistic multiple case research design (Yin, 2009, 2018). The six 3- and 4-star hotels belonging to the small and medium-sized category and located in Bahía Blanca city (Argentina) constitute the selected case studies. The unit of analysis is the hotel.

Bahía Blanca is a medium-sized centre of regional gravitation based on its geographic location, production structure, supply of health services and university education, and transportation and communications infrastructure. Public universities and several science and technology institutes are located in the city. In particular, one of the local universities offers undergraduate courses in the discipline of tourism, as well as in ICT-related areas. From the tourism perspective, Bahía Blanca is a stopover and distribution centre for tourists and visitors to nearby beach and mountain destinations (Pinassi & Ercolani, 2012). Only 33.69% of visitors come to the city for vacations (*Informe anual perfil del visitante 2019,* n.d.).

The hotel business sector in Bahía Blanca is made up of nine small and medium-sized firms (SMEs). Ac-

Table 1 Structure of the Survey

Hotel features	Affiliation to a chain. Business start year. Number of employees, number of employees with technical or university training. Number of rooms. Location in the urban space
Demand and marketing strategies	Main reason for travelling to the city. If the guests are frequent customers. Place of residence of the guests. Reservation channels – promotion policies/rate setting policies
Innovative behaviour and performance pre-COVID-19 pandemic	Investment in innovation activities (internal R&D, external R&D, acquisition of hardware, software, machinery and equipment, consulting, design and marketing, training). Obtaining innovative results (introduction of a new or improved product, processes, marketing method, organizational method). Use of external sources of information to innovate (guests, suppliers, competitors, hotels of the chain, universities). Access to funding sources for innovation. Obstacles to innovate, motives to innovate.
Perceptions and innovation during the COVID-19 pandemic	Opinion of hotel managers on duration and effect of the health control policies. Expectations of hotel managers regarding the recovery period of activity to pre-pandemic levels. Innovations implemented and/or planned by the hotels.

cording to the Ministry of Production and Labour of Argentina (Resolution 19/2021) and following the criterion of the number of employees, micro to medium-sized firms are service companies with more than (or equal to) 7 employees and less than (or equal to) 535 employees. As previously stated, this paper focuses on six selected 3- and 4-star hotels. Among the hotels not selected, two of these firms belong to the 2-star category and the remaining one does not have a categorization. This last hotel, although it had a building, began its activities after the conclusion of this study.

The six highest category hotels are selected considering convenience. Based on contacts prior to this study, the lower category hotels of the city did not show innovative behaviour before the COVID-19 crisis, focusing their attention on daily or current operations. Therefore, the analysis of the six selected hotels makes it possible to compare the pre-pandemic innovative profile with innovative behaviour during the COVID-19 crisis. This allows identification of the effects of the crisis on innovative behaviour when comparing both stages.

It is highlighted that the six hotels under study show differences regarding their size, age and affiliation to a hotel chain. There are two chains of local origin with regional projection. These differences contribute to the robustness of the finding (Guest et al., 2006 in Breier et al., 2021). Conversely, all hotels face a similar demand: frequent national guests who mainly travel for work and use the same booking channels (Online Travel Agencies, website, telephone, Airbnb).

Data Collection and Analysis

The proposed study examines the use of primary and secondary sources of information. The primary information was collected by sending a form to the email address of the managers of the 3- and 4-star hotels of Bahía Blanca city. The form focused on the pre-COVID 19 stage, and on the recovery expectations and innovation strategies adopted by local hotels in the face of the COVID-19 crisis. The process of sending the form and receiving the responses lasted between the months of July and October 2020. The questions that compose the questionnaire (Table 1) followed the guidelines of the Oslo Manual (OECD, 2018). Based on Sharma et al. (2021), the categories of the Oslo Manual are still applicable to many of the measures that hotels have implemented in response to the pandemic, although the unprecedented nature of the crisis forced hotels to innovate without the benefit of the experience.

For the analysis of the primary information collected, this paper follows the scheme proposed by Breier et al. (2021), using a cross-case analysis or comparative analysis between local hotels for the pre-COVID-19 stage and a within-case analysis for each local hotel for the COVID-19 stage. The analysis of the primary information is combined with secondary information from official statistics and reports compiled by national business chambers. Secondary information refers to the strategies or responses adopted by hotels at the national level in the face of the COVID-19 crisis, with the aim of identifying whether innovation is part of this set of strategies. After providing a summary of the strategies adopted by hotels at the national level, the information on innovation in times of pandemic is analysed for the hotels under study in particular.

Results

Pre-Pandemic Innovative Behaviour and Performance

As indicated in the previous section, the comparative analysis on innovative behaviour prior to the COVID-19 crisis requires local hotels to show some variability in their features in order to draw conclusions. According to Table 2, the six hotels under study show differential characteristics. In this sense, the hotels A, B and E belong to a national chain while the three remaining hotels are independent. Similarly, half of the six local hotels are more than 25 years old (Hotels A, C and D) or have a number of rooms equal to or greater than 100 (Hotels A, B and C). The hotels E and F are smaller in age and size. A relevant aspect to highlight for the purposes of analysing the innovative behaviour of hotels refers to the training of their employees. In the six hotels under study, the percentage of professional employees is low, and this attribute is more pronounced in the larger hotels.

Beyond the aforementioned distinctive features, the six hotels under study face a similar demand. In all cases, the demand is seasonal, concentrated in the months of March to November. Guests travel mainly for work and come from nearby towns and other regions of the country. The managers of the six hotels reported using the website, telephone and Booking.com as reservation channels before the COVID-19 pandemic. Some hotels also used Despegar, Facebook, emails and Airbnb. Except for Hotel A, none of the local hotels had a policy of overbooking rooms. Regarding the rate-setting policies, the hotels segmented the market according to the type of clients (individuals/group); sales channel (travel agency, direct sales, online travel agencies); and previous agreements with companies and/or sports clubs. Hotels D and E also discriminated rates according to the type of reservation (refundable, non-refundable, early booking).

Despite the differential characteristics in terms of age, size and belonging to a chain, the comparative analysis shows similarities in behaviour and innovative performance (Table 3). In line with previous studies for destinations in developed countries, all local hoteliers invested in the acquisition of technology embedded in software, hardware or equipment. Hotels A and E, belonging to the same hotel chain, adopted the software Property Management System (PMS). This software addresses reservation management, guest check-in and check-out, room assignment, room rate management, and billing. In addition, Hotel C incorporated an accounting administration software developed by a national firm and used especially by SMEs from different productive sectors. The software purchased by Hotel C allows the firm to manage purchases and stock, create price lists, issue invoices and compile management reports.

Except for Hotel B and the recently founded Hotel F, the local hotels also opted to train their employees. The hotel business chamber of the city (FEHGRA) provided such trainings, which focused on marketing and sales and guest service. Only Hotel C implemented an incentive programme for its staff based on the achievement of objectives. None of the local hotels carried out regular evaluations of their staff. Although human resources constitute a key innovation factor in the hotel sector (Nieves et al., 2014; Nieves & Segarra-Ciprés, 2015; Dhar, 2015), the local large hotels showed a low percentage of professional employees such as accountants, graduates in administration and graduates in tourism (Table 2).

The six hotels under study financed their innovation activities with their own funds. The hotels did not finance their innovation process from external sources, even when they mentioned the high costs of innovation as obstacles to innovate. Hotels A and D, which have been in operation for more than 25 years, indicated that the main obstacles correspond to the conservative organizational culture, the lack of qualified personnel and the high costs of innovation. Hotel F, recently opened and smaller, pointed to the costs of innovation together with the limited availability of

Table 2 Description of Local Hotels

Item	Hotel					
	A	B	C	D	E	F
Category	3 stars	4 stars	3 stars	3 stars	3 stars	3 stars
Chain affiliation	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
Age	>25 years	<25 years	>25 years	>25 years	<25 years	<25 years
N° of rooms	108	108	100	81	42	24
N° of employees	50	50	34	30	9	8
N° of professional employees	4	no data	7	2	3	5
Main reason for travel	Work	Work	Work	Work	Work	Work
Place of residence of the guests	Regional	Regional Foreigner	Regional	Regional	Regional	Regional
Frequent guests	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
Seasonality of demand	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes

Notes Elaboration based on primary information provided by the hotels, web pages of each hotel and the web page of the Municipality of Bahía Blanca.

Table 3 Innovation Behaviour before COVID-19 Crisis by Local Hotel Features

Hotel	Hotel description			Innovation process		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	Innovation activities	Source information	Innovation results
A	Yes	>25 years	108	Acquisition of embodied technology. Training.	Chain. Generally available sources. Market sources. Academic sources.	Product/Service innovations. Process innovations. Marketing innovation.
B	Yes	<25 years	108	Acquisition of embodied technology.	Chain. Market sources.	–
C	No	>25 years	100	Acquisition of embodied technology. Training.	Generally available sources. Market sources.	Product/Service innovations. Process innovations. Marketing innovation
D	No	>25 years	81	Acquisition of embodied technology. Training. Creation new image.	Generally available sources. Market sources.	Product/Service innovations. Marketing innovation
E	Yes	<25 years	42	Acquisition of embodied technology. Training.	Chain. Generally available sources. Market sources.	Process innovations Marketing innovation.
F	No	<25 years	24	Acquisition of embodied technology. Creation new image. Adoption quality management system.	Generally available sources. Market sources.	Marketing innovation.

Notes Column headings are as follows: (1) chain affiliation, (2) age, (3) number of rooms. Elaboration based on primary information provided by the hotels.

financing. It should be noted that investment in innovation activities is not the only input in the innovation process of firms. Since the 1980s, different theoretical approaches have pointed out the relevance of external knowledge as a source of innovation. As in previous studies, employees are the internal source of information used by local hotels. Within each hotel, the information is conducted through regular meetings, emails and use of WhatsApp.

Respondents indicated that they use more than one external source of information to update on innovation and new trends in the sector. Most of the local hotels used generally available information sources (specialized magazines, internet and fairs). Similarly, all the hotels used market sources represented by clients and/or competitors. Only Hotel B indicated that they also used suppliers as a source of information. Except for Hotel A, which is larger and belongs to a chain, none of the establishments used the university as a source of information. The three hotels that belong to a chain (Hotels A, B and E) indicated that they use this organization as a source of information. Nevertheless, the hotel chain can be considered an internal source of information.

It is highlighted that the hotels are located in a city that has a university that offers a degree in tourism, and training in disciplines in the field of economic sciences, and in engineering associated with ICT. These last scientific fields of interest for the promotion of innovation in the sector are aimed at the digitization of firms.

Regarding the innovative results, the local hotels obtained product, process and/or marketing innovations, but not organizational ones:

- *Product/Service innovations.* Hotels A, C and D obtained incremental innovations represented by improvements in Wi-Fi network connectivity (Hotels A and D), incorporation of electronic locks by approach (Hotels A and C) and improvements in heating equipment (Hotel D). The younger hotels B, E and F did not obtain innovations.
- *Process innovations.* Hotels A and E, belonging to the same chain, adopted the Yield Management philosophy (see, for example, Kimes, 1989; Talón Ballestero et al., 2008), an aspect that suggests a greater complexity of management processes and decision-making regarding rate setting and inventory policies. The independent Hotel C also digitized its administrative processes. From the perspective of front-office innovations, Hotel C added the practice of late check-out.
- *Marketing innovation.* Except for Hotel B, the local hotels indicated that they modified their rate setting policies, offering discounts for long stays and through a booking channel (Hotel A and Hotel D), special weekend rates (Hotel C), and discounts for groups of guests who come to the city to participate in specific events and conventions (Hotel E and F). Only Hotels A and F incorporated new sales and promotion channels: online travel agencies and direct web bookings. Hotels A and C have made changes to their website.

Regarding the factors underlying the innovation process described, the study suggests that the affiliation to a chain, the size and the age of the hotel do not seem to influence the innovation process of local hotels. While Hotels A and B, affiliated to the same chain, stand out for the adoption of the YM philosophy, Hotel B, belonging to another chain, did not attain innovations in the pre-COVID-19 period. The internal factors outlined by the hotels surveyed refer to the conservative attitude and the lack of qualified personnel. Among external factors, the high costs of innovation and the lack of financing lines emerge as obstacles to innovation. For the cases studied, the features assumed by demand can serve to explain the similarity in the innovative behaviour evidenced. Local hoteliers indicated that their guests travel for work and stay in the city for a few days, suggesting that the accommodation and additional services offered by local hotels meet their expectations. Figure 2 summarizes the relatively homogeneous innovative profile of local hotels.

Innovation as a Response to the COVID-19 Crisis

Based on Le and Phi (2021), innovation is one of the strategies that hotels can adopt in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although the present paper focuses only on innovation, the strategies adopted by hotels at the national level are shown below with the purpose of providing a general framework of the re-

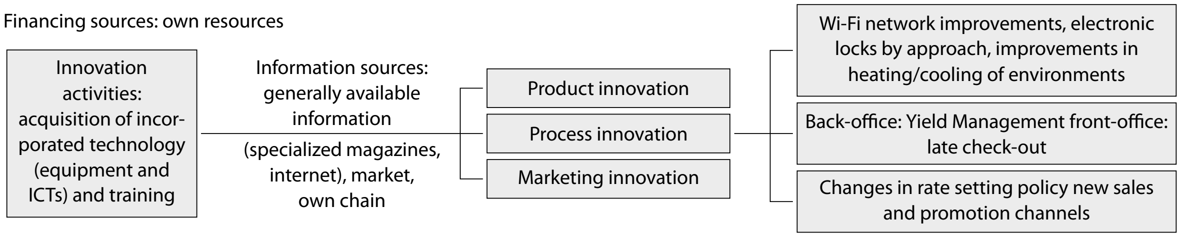

Figure 2 Pre-Pandemic Innovative Profile of Local Hotels Source (based on primary information provided by the hotels)

sponses implemented at the national level and identifying if innovation is part of such strategies. Innovation is analysed for the particular hotels selected after providing this general framework.

Strategies against the COVID-19 Crisis Implemented by Hotels Nationwide

In March 2020, after the recognition by the World Health Organization of the COVID-19 outbreak as a pandemic, Argentina declared a public emergency (Decreto de Necesidad y Urgencia 260/2020, 2020; Ley de solidaridad social y reactivación productiva en el marco de la emergencia pública, 2019) and adopted policies aimed at restricting the arrival of international passenger flights and limiting the internal movement of people (see summary of government measures in Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos (2021)). Thus, international tourist arrivals showed a negative year-on-year variation of 97.7% compared with December 2020. In this scenario, Argentina adopted fiscal and monetary policies to mitigate the effects of the crisis and accelerate recovery and measures to protect jobs and promote training and skills.

Before the gradual resumption of tourist activity recorded at the end of 2020, hotels reported difficulties in operation (Asociación de Hoteles de Turismo de la República Argentina, 2020; Asociación de Hoteles de Turismo de la República Argentina & Instituto de Estudios sobre la Realidad Argentina y Latinoamericana 2020; Observatorio Económico Hotelero, 2020):

- 94% of the hotels surveyed requested state aid for the payment of salaries, 53% carried out personnel suspensions, 52% suspended programmed investments, 47% reduced personnel salaries and took bank loans;
- More than 80% of the surveyed establishments indicated that they have infrastructure and equipment and protocols to operate safely;
- 21% of the hotels indicated that they can convert their establishment to another type of activity. At this point, it stands out that 20% of the hotels continued to offer their restaurant service and 5% of the hotels offered this service under the take-away modality.

Innovation among Local Hotels During the COVID-19 Crisis

At the local level and prior to the reopening of tourism activities, the 3- and 4-star hotels in the city of Bahía Blanca made adjustments to adapt their service to the 'COVID-19 Protocol for Tourist Accommodation' of the Ministry of Tourism and Sports of Argentina. Regarding the possibilities for innovation offered by the COVID-19 crisis, Table 4 summarizes the behaviour and perceptions of the hotel respondents that are detailed below.

Hotel A. The hotel established a maximum capacity in the breakfast room, signalled physical distancing in common spaces, and adopted physical barriers at the reception. Even when the respondent indicated that the pandemic context demands innovative behaviour, he considered that the hotel does not have the capacity to introduce changes. In addition, the respondent expressed that the government policies taken to mitigate the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic were not sufficient in a highly affected sector, stating that: 'Costs are increasing and accumulate with a very poor demand, the hotel that remains open does nothing more than borrow in an abysmal way that will undoubtedly

Table 4 Innovation Behaviour of Local Hotels during COVID-19 Crisis

Hotel	Hotel description			Innovation during COVID-19
	(1)	(2)	(3)	
A	Yes	>25 years	108	Innovation strategies are not verified. Hoteliers do not perceive the crisis as an opportunity to innovate. Minor organizational changes and service changes for compliance with health protocols that are not considered innovative results.
B	Yes	<25 years	108	
C	No	>25 years	100	
D	No	>25 years	81	
E	Yes	<25 years	42	
F	No	<25 years	24	

Notes Column headings are as follows: (1) chain affiliation, (2) age, (3) number of rooms. Elaboration based on primary information provided by the hotels.

affect its future performance, seriously compromising the ability to respond to innovative changes that adapt to the new visitor or tourist.'

Hotel B. Hotel B modified its organization, internalizing the laundry service through the incorporation of its own laundry room. The respondent indicated that 'the current situation for the entire industry is critical, hotels are literally struggling to survive. Many will not be able to do it and will close their doors permanently. The recovery is going to be slow and hard, the costs to maintain the protocols are higher than in the normal situation. All renovation and technological advancement activity is going to be relegated for quite some time. The investments are going to be minimal, just to be able to operate and provide the appropriate quality to each hotel.'

Hotel C. Beyond minor renovations to common spaces to contribute to physical distancing, Hotel C indicated that it does not plan to make any changes. The respondent explicitly pointed to the COVID-19 crisis as a limitation to innovation and revealed that 'The impact of COVID-19 was great in the hotel sector in the city. The hotel had to adapt to the new municipal and provincial protocols. The government policies were correct at the beginning of the pandemic, but later it seems to me that they were contradictory or unclear.'

Hotel D. Like previous accommodations, Hotel D implemented minor renovations in common spaces to contribute to physical distancing between people. The hotel indicated that it plans to adopt off-line card payment, web check-in and express check-out and intensify the use of social networks as an advertising and loyalty strategy for its guests. The respondent stated that the primary strategy is to survive: 'it is working with a minimum staffing, with limited service, the staff is receiving less salary [...]. The government policies were not successful in my opinion. I see everything [as] very improvised.'

Hotel E. Beyond the adaptations of the service to the requirements imposed by the protocol, Hotel E did not consider adopting innovative strategies. The respondent explicitly indicated that the pandemic constitutes a limitation to the development of an innovation strategy and stressed that the implementation of changes 'is going to depend on the region in which we find ourselves and the evolution of the situation.'

Hotel F. The hotel carried out renovations in common spaces to contribute to physical distancing between people. As in the previous accommodation, the respondent explicitly pointed out that the pandemic constitutes a limiting factor for innovation. Likewise, he indicated that the new hygiene protocols meant an increase in his costs and pointed out that 'all the economic measures that are implemented to provide support at this juncture are very useful. The prospects depend a lot on the evolution of the pandemic in the short term, and its effects on the flow of passengers and means of transport.'

Figure 3 sums up the strategies adopted by local and national hoteliers in the face of the pandemic. Un-

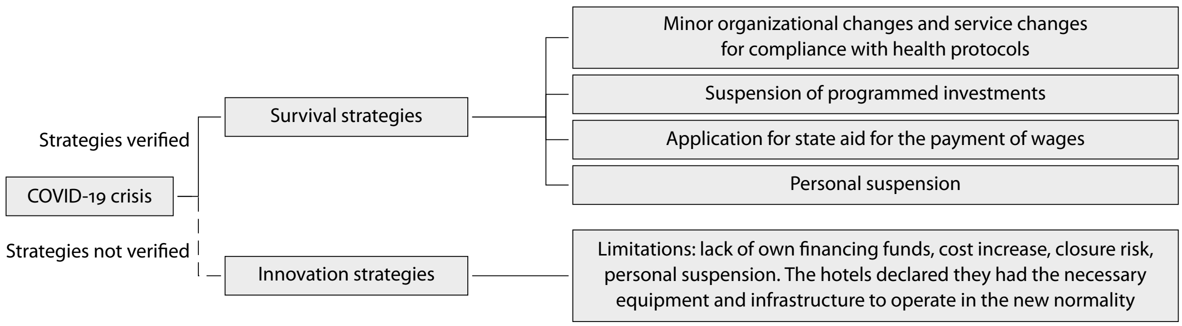

Figure 3 Hotels' Response during the COVID-19 Crisis (based on Asociación de Hoteles de Turismo de la República Argentina, 2020; Asociación de Hoteles de Turismo de la República Argentina & Instituto de Estudios sobre la Realidad Argentina y Latinoamericana, 2020; Observatorio Económico Hotelero, 2020; Breier et al., 2021; Le & Phi, 2021)

like previous empirical studies and reports from international organizations (Sigala, 2020; Breier et al., 2021; UNWTO, 2020; OECD, 2020; Le & Phi, 2021), the COVID-19 crisis is not a triggering event to innovate for the local hotels. Although one of the hotel firms surveyed considers that the COVID-19 crisis demands innovation, enhancing factors such as staff time off, financial pressure due to loss of income and support from frequent guests are not verified among the primary information collected.

Discussion

The information collected for the pre-COVID-19 stage shows an innovative behaviour of local hoteliers oriented to the following innovation activities: acquisition of ICT and staff training. This innovative behaviour is representative of the tourism and hospitality sector, and is more pronounced among small and medium-sized firms (SMEs) in the sector (Pikkemaat & Peters, 2006; Pikkemaat, 2008; Tejada & Moreno, 2013; Kallmuenzer, 2018).

In addition to these innovation activities, the pre-COVID-19 crisis innovation process was based on several external sources of information, except for Hotel B, which stands out for not having obtained innovative results in this stage. Therefore, a relationship could be drawn between obtaining innovative results and openness to information and external knowledge. Although this relationship is in line with previous empirical literature (Nieves et al., 2014; Nieves & Segarra-Ciprés, 2015; Backman et al., 2017; Kim & Shim, 2018; Kallmuenzer, 2018), it is not a conclusive result given the qualitative nature of this study. It should be noted that the university was not an external source of information widely disseminated among local hotels. However, the local university can provide relevant knowledge for the hotel innovative process since this academic unit has degree programmes in fields related to the hotel and tourism sector. Hoteliers turn in the opposite direction, to the local business association, to train their employees.

The results derived from this pre-COVID-19 innovative behaviour were incremental. The application of the Yield Management philosophy stands out. Although it is a technique applied in the hotel sector since the 1980s, it is not very widespread among smaller hotels (Talón Ballestero et al., 2008) and implies a higher degree of digitization. From the differentiation between internal and external factors, the conservative-type attitude and the lack of qualified personnel emerged as internal conditioning factors of the pre-COVID-19 innovative process. The high costs of innovation and the lack of financing lines appeared as external factors. According to previous studies on tourism (Dias et al., 2022; Motta & Sharma, 2020), small and medium-sized local hotels finance their innovation activities with their own resources. In addition, the characteristics of the demand is a key element to inducing innovation in the tourism and hospitality sector (Orfila-Sintes & Mattsson, 2009; López-

Fernández et al., 2011). Before the COVID-19 crisis and today, local hotels face little dynamic demand that does not require the introduction of innovations. This feature of the local demand explains the similarity evidenced in the innovative profile of hotels with dissimilar features.

The COVID-19 pandemic may be an external factor that induces innovation, according to reports from international organizations and recent studies (United Nations, 2020, p. 2; OECD, 2020; UNWTO, 2020; Le & Phi, 2021; Breier et al., 2021; Haqbin et al., 2022; Estiri et al., 2022). However, the primary data collected shows that local hoteliers did not report perceiving the pandemic as an obstacle to innovation rather than an inducing factor. During the lockdown, local hoteliers did not innovate, nor did they plan investments in that direction. The main concern of the hoteliers was focused on surviving, on continuing to operate, rather than on innovating.

Conclusions, Limitations and Future Guidelines

Innovation is a source of competitiveness and growth for hotel firms, and it is recognized as a strategy for survival and adaptation to the current COVID-19 crisis. Following the multiple case study methodology and the analysis scheme used by Breier et al. (2021), the proposed exploratory and descriptive analysis focuses on innovation in small and medium-sized hotels, not belonging to large international chains, located in a medium-sized city of Argentina oriented to business tourism. In this way, the paper aims to contribute to the empirical knowledge about innovation in small and medium-sized firms (SMES) in tourism and hospitality, addressing the research gap in tourism innovation in South America and adding empirical evidence on the innovative behaviour of tourism SMES in times of crisis.

As previously indicated for the pre-COVID-19 stage, the study reveals an innovative behaviour similar to that reported by the literature for the tourism and hospitality sector (Orfila-Sintes & Mattsson, 2009; Nieves et al., 2014; Kallmuenzer, 2018), and, in particular, to that evidenced in the studies for the SMES of the sector (Pikkemaat & Peters, 2006; Pikkemaat, 2008; Tejada & Moreno, 2013; Kallmuenzer, 2018). The need to mitigate the influence of some internal and external factors mentioned by local hoteliers emerges from the findings. In this way, policy recommendations arise aimed at favouring access to financing lines, and training the workforce employed, which is a key innovative factor for the tourism innovative process. In the latter case, a policy recommendation derived from this study involves promoting a more active role for the university both as a training centre and as a potential assistance and innovation centre for local hotels.

After the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and its conception as a window of opportunity to innovate in the tourism and hospitality sector (see, for example, United Nations, 2020; OECD, 2020; UNWTO, 2020; Le & Phi, 2021; Breier et al., 2021), local hoteliers not only did not deploy change and innovation strategies but also contemplated the COVID-19 crisis as an obstacle to innovate. It should be noted that the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on innovative behaviour of the hotels under study must be interpreted with caution, given that the information collected does not account for an outstanding innovative behaviour prior to the pandemic.

Secondary information at the national level consulted shows that, although national support policies were arranged for the sector, the extension of restrictions on the operation of tourist activities, with the consequent loss of income, added to the costs associated with compliance with health protocols, are factors that hinder innovation in times of pandemic. Likewise, the partial or total suspension of employees is an additional factor that undermines the possibilities of innovating due to greater staff time off during a reduction in operational activities (Breier et al., 2021). As indicated by Le & Phi (2021), the study suggests that small and medium-sized hotels opt for a strategy of freeing up working capital and postponing nonessential renovations.

This paper is not exempt from limitations. A first limitation of the proposed analysis is associated with the scope of the case study methodology. This technique does not allow statistical generalization from a single or multiple case studies (Yin, 2009 and 2018). Therefore, deepening of the knowledge of the internal and external factors that influence the behaviour and innovative performance of hotel firms requires the application of an extensive quantitative-type methodology to a greater number of hotels. A second limitation comes from the temporal extension of this paper. It is limited to the first phases of the COVID-19 crisis (Le & Phi, 2021), therefore, it is necessary to collect information on the current recovery phase to obtain a complete understanding of the crisis as a potential window of opportunity to innovate.

A future research line involves examining the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the innovative behaviour of hotels taking into account different sizes, categories, and localities, as well as exploring the strategies carried out by them in the four stages of the crisis indicated by Le and Phi (2021). A complementary study suggests recognizing whether the influence of the obstacles to innovation prior to the COVID-19 crisis becomes more pronounced during the pandemic or, in contrast, their impact is attenuated by state aid or the need to adopt less conservative behaviour facing a disruptive event. Given that knowledge external to the firm is a key factor in its innovation process during the COVID-19 pandemic (Breier et al., 2021; Dias et al., 2022), alternative future research could be oriented to explore the influence of external knowledge from diverse sources (customers, suppliers, competitors, universities) on the SME hotels' innovative performance during the different phases of the COVID-19 crisis.

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Factors Affecting Tourism Activity Selection among Silver Hair Tourists

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Demographic changes are visible in many areas of life, including tourism. Silver hair tourism is on the rise and this target group is becoming an increasingly important segment of the tourism market. The market for silver hair tourists is growing. They have high purchasing power, relatively higher than younger groups. Therefore, tourism needs to respond to new demographic challenges in society, such as population aging and active longevity, with new types and forms of tourism. The travel experience of silver hair tourists also has a significant impact on the quality and satisfaction of life in general. In many ways it adds value in the life of elderly adults, in the field of well-being, gaining new experiences, learning, expanding the social network, improving health and much more. Therefore, knowing the demographic characteristics of silver hair tourists is all the more important and necessary for the creation of good tourist offers. Within this paper we have conducted a survey among silver hair tourists aged between 65 and 75 years inclusive. Data was collected in Multigenerational Centres across Slovenia with a paper-pencil survey. We obtained 405 valid questionnaires. In the analysis of empirical data, we looked for statistically significant differences in five socio-demographic and economic variables. We found statistically significant differences between men and women and between the age groups of silver hair tourists regarding the choice of tourism activities. In terms of demographic factors such as education, income and assessment of health status, we find a connection between tourism activities and demography. Travel raises the quality of life of 'silver hair tourists,' so it is important to offer them programs that will be more tailored to them. This article provides some answers that can help us create programmes like that.

Keywords: silver hair tourists, tourist activities, elderly tourism, demography

 https://doi.org/10.26493/2335-4194.15.381-395

Introduction

Demographic changes that have become our constant (Webster & Ivanov, 2020) are an important social and economic challenge. Active age encompasses the inclusion of elderly adults in tourism, which, among other important factors, affects the health and well-being of elderly adults. On the other hand, the modern phenomenon of tourism for elderly adults represents a new challenge, new opportunities and new products for the tourism industry. The modern world has also brought a new, modern term to the world of tourism for elderly adults – 'silver hair tourists.' This is both the naming of elderly tourists over 65 (Patterson, 2017), as well as a trend that has been strongly perceived in tourism over the last decade, especially due to its many positive effects: sociability and social inclusion, well-being, higher self-confidence, new experiences, health, education and many others (Medarić et al., 2017).

Demographic changes are very pronounced in Europe. The European Commission (Evropska komisija, 2021) estimated that the proportion of people aged 65 and over in Europe will increase from around 20% to 30% by 2070. Thus, European countries are facing the challenges of demographic change in many areas, including tourism. Little attention has been paid to silver hair tourism in the past, as it is a relatively new phenomenon in tourism, but it is increasing from year to year (Bai et al., 2001; Peceny Starc et al., 2019; Schröder & Widmann, 2007). At the same time, we found out that this is an area that has not been significantly researched. Therefore, knowing the characteristics and demographics of silver hair tourists is very important. Especially if we consider that, despite the aging society and silver hair tourists as an increasingly important segment in tourism, in some European countries there is no travel agency dedicated exclusively to silver hair tourists, this is an even more current topic.

However, this opens up new demands in the future for tourism actors regarding to tourism innovation for silver hair tourists. As Hjalager (2002) pointed out, innovation in tourism for silver hair tourists depends not only on research and political aspirations but also on silver hair tourists themselves as customers, on local people and local communities, to which tourism must respond with new solutions – a different innovation in two directions: an attempt to reduce costs and an attempt to create demand for the silver hair tourists through innovation. Therefore, it is necessary to create a unique approach that offers silver hair tourists all the positive points of a particular destination, which requires optimal (pre)research of the destination and preparation and an appropriate methodological approach. In any case, innovation in tourism for silver hair tourists is conditioned by professional and promotional support, financial resources and innovation of all stakeholders who are in any way related to tourism for silver hair tourists. According to Hjalager (2002), there are four types of innovation in tourism for silver hair tourists: (1) innovation at the product level for silver hair tourists, (2) innovation at the process level, (3) innovation on the management side, and (4) logistics innovation with special regard to silver hair tourists, who are a rather heterogeneous group (Schänzel & Yeoman, 2015), with needs and expectations that differ according to age, health status, social and family differences and economic status (Vujović et al. 2015). The travel market for silver hair tourists has now become a global phenomenon (Jang & Wu, 2006).

Demographic Change

The World and European population is growing and aging faster than ever. Due to a long-standing trend of low birth rates and ever-increasing life expectancy, we are facing an accelerated aging process, and associated challenges and opportunities in the developed world (Coale & Hoover, 2015; Samir & Lutz, 2017). In 2001, 16% of people in the European Union were over the age of 65, in 2018 it was 19.7%, of which 5.6% were over the age of 80 (Eurostat, n.d.). The share of adults aged 65 and over in 2019 was already 20.4% of the total population. Population projections show that this share will continue to increase, reaching 24.4% in 2030 and 29.6% in 2050 (Eurostat, 2020). In 2018, young people (under 14) accounted for 15.6% of the EU-28 average, while able-bodied people (aged 15–64) accounted for 64.7% of the population (Eurostat, n.d.). This brings new challenges for silver hair tourists and their families, as well as for tourism for the elderly. However, we must also emphasize that the elderly are a rather heterogeneous group (Zsarnoczky, 2016).

The current aging of the population is already having visible consequences for demographic dynamics (Reynaud & Miccoli, 2019), as the growing number and share of the elderly in society poses a number of economic challenges. Life expectancy began to increase around 1840 at a rate of almost 2.5 years per decade (Vaupel et al., 2021). The main reasons for the extension are the improvement of socio-economic living conditions, higher education, better healthcare and lifestyle (UMAR, 2021). Higo and Khan (2015), on the other hand, presented aging population trends as a cause that is likely to lead to inequality between regions of the world in the coming decades. Such a demographic shift will either create or increase risks in tourism, especially for vulnerable populations such as silver hair tourists.

Aging and an aging population also require societies to adapt their systems and attitudes towards aging and old age (Dimovski, 2011) in the field of tourism (Bai et al., 2001). In recent decades, there has been a revolution in human reproduction that consists of several components, with implications for travel, tourism, and hospitality (Webster, 2019).

Seniors in Tourism

Tourism is the movement and interaction of people outside their everyday environment (Juvan et al., 2021). Tourism shapes the lifestyle of hosts and visitors (Sharpley, 2014). The number of tourists has increased over the years (Peceny Starc et al., 2019), partly because of silver hair tourists, so tourism must respond to new demographic challenges in society, such as aging and active longevity, with new types and forms of tourism and new service technologies (Nikitina & Vorontsova, 2015). We need to understand that this needs to happen although the travel habits of silver hair tourists are quite rigid (Lohmann & Danielsson, 2001). We also need to know the heterogeneity of silver hair tourists (Zsarnoczky, 2016), because the category of older people within themselves is becoming increasingly heterogeneous in their abilities and interests (Goriup & Lahe 2018, 25). Bai et al. (2001) therefore predict that as the proportion of elderly adults increases, so will the proportion of silver hair tourists, which has already reached record numbers in the United States. Silver hair tourists also represent a large market, as they have high purchasing power, relatively higher than younger groups (Alén et al., 2016). Societal change will also affect tourism and travel patterns, so it is crucial that tourism providers have a thorough understanding of this market segment and how it will change consumption patterns in the future (Patterson & Balderas, 2020). Therefore, tourism for silver hair tourists must take into account the characteristics of silver hair tourists, product design, marketing, destinations and aging management, and intergenerational cooperation.

Hsu et al. (2007) found that the main motivation of older people to engage in tourism consists of:

- *external conditions,* which include social progress, personal finances, time and health, of which personal finances and time are shaped according to family obligations and responsibilities; and
- *inner desires,* which include better well-being, escaping routines, socializing, seeking knowledge, pride and patriotism, personal reward, and nostalgia.

Alén et al. (2016) reveal that tourism for the silver hair tourists is particularly, and even more, leisure-oriented than for other generations. Silver hair tourists therefore want and expect quality, suitable and safe offers, with comfortable transport, relaxing activities and the highest possible level of comfort. On the other hand, a smaller number of family members means a higher level of consumption per person. Silver hair tourists today are healthier than in the past, have higher incomes, more time to travel, and a high tendency to travel long distances (Litrell et al., 2004). Silver hair tourism therefore has great potential (Macuh & Raspor, 2020) and at the same time travel is a way for all people to spend their free time. Leisure tourism is an important industry that has been greatly changed by the growing presence of older people around the world (Stončikaitė 2021, 2). After retirement, therefore, most elderly adults devote their free time to various interests and tourism is one of the priorities (Oliveira et al., 2018). For a group of silver hair tourists aged 65 to 79, Möller et al. (2007) argue that they are characterized by many who have recently retired and joined a time-rich group. They used their past savings to cover running costs. The health awareness of this group is high and if they do not have serious health problems, they decide to travel and spend more on quality goods and services. That is why silver hair tourists represent a growing potential, not only in the elderly in good mental and physical condition, but also those who are already in an Elderly home (Macuh, 2020). Silver hair tourists can also be actively involved in tourism with a lower financial base, as there are many activities that are affordable and otherwise very accessible to the elderly, and also through various retirement societies (Macuh & Raspor, 2020).

Demographic Characteristics of Silver Hair Tourists

The number of silver hair tourists is increasing, but at the same time this category is becoming increasingly heterogeneous (Goriup & Lahe, 2018), with needs and expectations differing in age, health, social and family differences and economic status (Birsa et al., 2015). Many travel companies do not consider the characteristics and concerns of silver hair tourists and the different ways in which they enjoy tourism (Patterson & Balderas, 2020). The health of silver hair tourists has a significant impact on the decision to buy a tourism product, but the impact of gender is not negligible. Lehto et al. (2001) found that women focus more on opportunities to socialize and interact with people and their families than men while travelling. In 2018, the share of older men (aged 65+) in the EU-28 who rated their health as good or very good, was 43.1%, which was 6.6 percentage points higher than the corresponding share of older women 36.5% (Eurostat, 2020). This is also why the WTO estimates that by 2050 there will be more than 2 billion international passengers aged 60 +, compared to 593 million in 1999 (World Tourism Organization, 2007). According to Shavanddasht (2018), 'young grandparents' were more eager for novelty and enjoyable vacations, while 'safety' and 'improving knowledge' were the main intentions of older grandparents vacationing with their grandchildren.

Silver hair tourists want to enjoy and are willing to pay a high price for high quality services (Möller et al., 2007). Raspor (2018) argues that elderly adults today generally have higher incomes than previous generations, so they will invest more money in leisure activities, which will only increase the share of silver hair tourists. Fitzpatrick Associates (1998) says that mainly because they often inherit from parents or relatives; their children leave home, which alleviates the financial burden; they have relatively little or no mortgages; their capital can be released and they may have savings, pensions, and may have pension or savings 'pillars' in addition to state pensions.

Špindler (2018) found that the generation of silver hair tourists also differs from other generations in terms of the scale of values, and that they also respond differently in tourism because they live and practice their own values. The change in the values of generations of silver hair tourists is also reflected in the field of tourism, in the direction of regaining the importance of intangible values, which in the past we thought were lost: authenticity, which we perceived as a trend, and regional and quality expectations at all levels, as also noted by Petavs (2011).

Senior tourism is, however, nevertheless included in social tourism, and the term also covers all concepts and phenomena related to the participation of low-income social groups in tourism (Markiewicz-Patkowska et al., 2019). In the study of social tourism for the silver hair tourists, the silver hair tourists were divided into four groups: (1) the silver hair tourists, who have a low socio-economic status and who cannot afford a holiday. These are often involved in some humanitarian programme such as the Red Cross, etc.; (2) the silver hair tourists who need special infrastructure adaptations; (3) the silver hair tourists for whom special programmes have been designed and adapted; and (4) the silver hair tourists who do not need special adaptations or conditions (Medarić et al., 2017).

Tourism Products for Silver Hair Tourists

Tourism for silver hair tourists in many ways adds value in the life of elderly adults. It broadens horizons and offers experimental learning (Minnaert et al., 2009), as tourism activities for silver hair tourists are opportunities to explore new environments and integrate into new activities, meet new people and face unexpected problems that affect their views, attitudes and behaviour (example of self-confidence). Offering silver hair tourists opportunities for social interaction (McCabe et al., 2010; Minnaert et al., 2009) has an impact on their sociability and social inclusion, health and education (Medarić et al., 2017). Through tourism, silver hair tourists travel to explore their identity, learn, socialize and have fun (Osvaldo et al., 2020), they experience new people and new places, change perspectives and broaden mental and psychological horizons (Minnaert & Schapmans, 2009). This is one of the reasons why Weiermair and Mathies (2004) stated that more active leisure activities, more frequent travel and the changing needs of silver hair tourists encourage the development of new products. The offer of tourist activities for silver hair tourists is not optimal given the demographic changes we have detected. Current (social, health and political) problems and problems of tourism for silver hair tourists, given their socio-economic status and general population, can be overcome by increasing motivation and creating formal solutions in the field of access to tourism services for them with the participation of the general population and research experts. In order to play a leading role in the competitive travel industry, tourism activity providers need to monitor motivational changes and trends and improve their understanding and consideration of silver hair tourists. The greater the knowledge of these trends in tourism development in general and the higher market segment of silver hair tourists in particular, the greater the ability of these stakeholders to formulate clear strategies, contribute to new and innovative services and gain a competitive advantage for their organizations and regions (Patterson & Balderas, 2020). Therefore, through this article we wanted to investigate how the selection of tourist activities of silver hair tourists with their grandchildren is influenced by some selected socio-demographic and economic data.

Methodology

Research Question and Hypotheses

Silver tourists differ greatly in lifestyle, income, preferences, health, and age segmentation, which are important in the design of tourism services and the design of marketing plans. As it is important that we know the target group of silver hair tourists well, we were interested in the socio-demographic and economic characteristics of silver hair tourists who are engaged in given tourist activities. Based on this, we set the following research hypotheses, as follows:

- H1 *Among tourism activities, elderly women are statistically significantly more likely to choose those activities that involve less dynamics, than elderly men.*
- H2 *Older silver hair tourists are more likely to opt for leisurely tourist activities, compared to younger silver hair tourists.*
- H3 *Those silver hair tourists with a higher level of education are more likely to choose tourism activities that develop cultural capital compared to those silver tourists who have a lower level of education.*
- H4 *Those silver hair tourists with a lower personal monthly income are more likely to choose affordable tourism activities compared to silver haired tourists with higher levels of monthly personal income.*
- H5 *Silver hair tourists with a higher assessment of their health condition more often choose dynamic tourist activities compared to those that evaluated their own health condition as not so good.*

Sample

According to the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia (Statistični urad Republike Slovenije, n.d.), as of 31 December 2020 there were 250,631 people aged between 65 and 75 living in Slovenia. To ensure the representativeness of the sample of the entire population, we calculated the minimum number of questionnaires needed to achieve representativeness per 384 respondents, opting for a 95% level of confidence and 5% confidence interval. Sampling was occasional and we ensured representativeness in at least three indicators based among socio-demographic and economic indicators. Thus, the characteristics from the sample can be transferred or inferred to the entire population (Hannan & Freeman, 1977).

In the empirical part of the research, in order to control the amount of data and ensure the representativeness of the sample to the entire population, we included silver hair tourists in the age group 65 and up to 75 years, which was divided into two groups: 65 to 69 years and from 70 to 75 years of all statistical regions.

The obtained empirical data, which were collected in Multigenerational Centres in Slovenia, in activities attended by silver hair tourists, were entered into appropriate computer databases and processed using Excel and SPSS for Windows. Respondents voluntarily filled out printed questionnaires, for which they received instructions, as well as any additional explanations. Data collection took place from April to September 2021. During this time, 435 questionnaires were collected, but 30 incompletely completed questionnaires were excluded from further processing.

Validity and Reliability of the Sample

Upon obtaining 405 valid questionnaires, we wanted to check the representativeness of the sample. We first checked this with the kurtosis and skewness. For gender, the skewness is −0.250 and the kurtosis is −1.947. For the age variable, the skewness is 0.122 and the kurtosis is 1.202. For the urbanization variable 'Living environment,' the skewness is 0.791 and the kurtosis is −0.921.

The representativeness of the sample was then calculated in comparison with the population using the chi-square goodness of fit test (χ^2), which showed a value of 2.324 for the variable sex (at the degree of freedom DF = 1) and a significance of $p = 0.127$. For the age level, the chi-square goodness of fit test showed a value of 17.331 (at freedom level DF = 10) and a significance of $p = 0.067$. In urbanization, the chi-square goodness of fit test showed a value of 0.892 (at a degree of freedom DF = 1) and a significance of $p = 0.345$. The value of the chi-square goodness of fit test of the distribution at the significance of 0.05 or 5% is 3.8415 for variables with one (1) degree of freedom (variable gender and urbanization) and for variables with ten (10) degrees of freedom (variable age) 18.307 (Košmelj & Rovan, 1997). Thus, based on the obtained results, we can confirm that the sample obtained during the research is valid and also representative of the entire population.

Table 1 Socio-Demographic and Economic Characteristics of the Sample

Variable	*n*	%
Gender of the respondent		
Male	177	43.7
Female	227	56.0
No answer	1	0.3
Age of the respondent		
From 65 to 69 years inclusive	201	49.6
From 70 to 75 years inclusive	203	50.1
No answer	1	0.3
Living environment		
Urban environment	229	56.5
Rural environment	172	42.5
No answer	4	1.0
Level of education		
Primary school or less	32	7.9
Vocational high school	81	20.0
High school	122	30.1
Higher professional degree	108	26.7
University degree	50	12.3
Master's degree or doctorate	9	2.2
No answer	3	0.8
Personal monthly net income		
Up to 600 €	58	14.3
From 601 € to 900 €	172	42.5
From 901 € to 1200 €	100	24.7
Over 1201 €	68	16.8
No answer	7	1.7
Assessment of health status		
Pretty bad	23	5.7
Good	207	51.1
Pretty good	140	34.6
Very good	33	8.1
No answer	2	0.5

Socio-Demographic and Economic Characteristics of the Sample

The data in Table 1 shows that 405 (100%) surveyed silver hair tourists were included in the sample, of which 177 (43.7%) were men and 227 (56.0%) were women; 1 (0.3%) respondent did not provide an answer to this question. Regarding age, in the age group from 65 to 69 years 201 (49.6%) respondents were included, and in the age group from 70 to 75 years 203 (50.1%) respondents were included. 1 (0.3%) respondent did not give an answer to this question. Regarding the level of

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics of Tourist Activities of Silver Hair Tourists

Tourist activity	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Spending time by shores, lakes or pools	384	3.25	1.11	3.00
Visiting national parks	369	2.67	1.00	3.00
Visiting amusement and theme parks	369	2.57	1.08	3.00
Visiting small towns and villages	381	3.12	1.02	3.00
Tours of big cities	368	2.67	1.09	3.00
Getting to know the locals	386	3.33	1.13	3.00
Visiting friends and relatives	394	3.88	1.00	4.00
Spiritual and religious activities	340	2.28	1.17	2.00
Visiting historical sights	373	2.63	1.12	3.00
Visiting galleries and museums	363	2.34	1.12	2.00
Visiting cultural events	372	2.58	1.12	3.00
Participation in local festivals	366	2.57	1.20	2.00
Photography and recording	370	3.14	1.22	3.00
Sitting in cafes	362	2.24	1.03	2.00
Exploring local cuisine	367	2.61	1.15	3.00
Shopping	382	2.88	1.12	3.00
Experiencing nightlife	273	1.55	0.84	1.00
Casinos	177	1.33	0.85	1.00
Watch selected content on TV	381	3.21	1.09	3.00
Reading books and magazines	387	3.54	1.08	4.00
Playing board games	381	3.38	1.16	3.00
Group sports activities	368	3.07	1.16	3.00
Individual sports activities	366	2.96	1.16	3.00
Attending matches	318	2.25	1.16	2.00
Visiting health resorts	353	2.62	1.20	3.00
Cruises	160	1.38	0.81	1.00

Notes Column headings are as follows: (1) sample, (2) mean value, (3) standard deviation, (4) median.

education, 122 (30.1%) respondents with a high school education predominate. The most common personal monthly income of respondents was between 601 € and 900 €, 172 (42.5%) respondents. When assessing one's own health condition, respondents most often assessed it as good, 207 (51.1%).

Table 3 Statistically Significant Differences of Silver Hair Tourists in the Choice of Tourist Activities According to Gender

Tourist activity	U	p	Mean rank	
			(1)	(2)
Tours of big cities	14416.000	0.016	170.34	196.13
Reading books and magazines	16136.000	0.021	180.21	205.39
Playing board games	15830.000	0.042	178.62	200.98
Individual sports activities	14550.000	0.043	171.31	193.18

Notes Column headings are as follows: (1) male, (2) female.

Descriptive Statistics of Variables

From Table 2 we can see that according to the 26 selected tourist activities of the surveyed silver hair tourists, the highest mean value was reached by the variable 'Visiting friends and relatives' (3.88), followed by the tourist activity 'Reading books and magazines' with the mean value of 3.54 and 'Playing board games (cards, chess ...),' with the mean value of 3.38. The lowest mean values were achieved by the tourist activities 'Experiencing nightlife' with the mean value of 1.55, 'Cruise,' with a mean value of 1.38 and 'Casinos,' with the mean value of 1.33.

Statistically Significant Differences in Activities According to Demographic Parameters

We were first interested in statistically significant differences between the selected tourist activities of the surveyed silver hair tourists according to gender. Due to the uneven distribution of variables, we performed an analysis using the Mann-Whitney test, which found statistically significant differences between respondents by gender according to selected tourism activities of silver hair tourists.

From Table 3 we can see that there are statistically significant differences by gender in four tourist activities, where $p < 0.05$. In 'Tours of big cities,' men rated this tourist activity lower (mean rank = 170.34) than women (mean rank = 196.13). In 'Reading books and magazines,' men also rated this tourist activity lower (mean rank = 180.21) than women (mean rank =

Table 4 Statistically Significant Differences of Silver Hair Tourists in the Choice of Tourist Activities According to Age

Tourist activity	U	p	Mean rank	
			(1)	(2)
Spending time by shores, lakes or pools	16154.000	0.030	204.36	180.64
Photography and recording	14583.500	0.011	199.24	171.91
Playing board games	15444.500	0.009	205.28	176.94

Notes Column headings are as follows: (1) 65–69 years, (2) 70–75 years.

205.39). Also in 'Playing board games (cards, chess . . .),' men rated this tourist activity lower (mean rank = 178.62) than women (mean rank = 200.98). In the last tourist activity 'Individual sports activities,' men rated this tourist activity lower (mean rank = 171.31) than women (mean rank = 193.18).

We found that out of 26 tourist activities, statistically significant differences were detected in only four tourist activities. In all four, men rated the given tourist activities lower than women. Next, we were interested in statistically significant differences of silver hair tourists according to age groups. Here, too, we used the non-parametric Mann-Whitney test due to the uneven distribution of variables.

From Table 4 we can understand that by age groups there are statistically significant differences in the three tourist activities, where $p < 0.05$. Thus, we found that respondents from the first age group (65–69 years) rate all tourist activities higher than respondents from the second age group (70–75 years): 'Spending time by shores, lakes or pools,' 'Photography and recording' and 'Playing board games (cards, chess . . .).'

We were also interested in statistically significant differences of the surveyed silver hair tourists according to education. With the Kruskal Wallis test, we analysed the differences between the level of education and the selection of certain tourist activities.

Based on the obtained empirical data from Table 5, we found statistically significant differences in the level of education of the respondents and selected tourist activities in nine tourist activities ($p < 0.05$). In the tourist activity 'Visiting national parks' we found the highest score among surveyed silver hair tourists with a master's degree and doctorate (mean rank = 297.72), and the lowest score among respondents with completed vocational high school (mean rank = 158.52). In the case of 'Spiritual and religious activities,' we found the highest score among the surveyed silver hair tourists with completed vocational high school (mean rank = 197.95) and the lowest among those with university (mean rank = 150.04) education. In 'Visiting historical sights,' the lowest grade was noted among respondents with primary school education or less (mean rank = 114.57), while the highest grade was found among respondents with university education (mean rank = 212.46). Also, 'Visits to galleries and museums' stands out as the lowest rated activity among respondents with primary education or less (mean rank = 131.62), while the highest score was found among respondents with university education (mean rank = 218.22). 'Visits to cultural events (concerts, theatres)' were rated the lowest among respondents with primary education or less (mean rank = 130.23) and the highest among respondents with university education (mean rank = 208.80). In the tourist activity 'Photography and recording,' we found the lowest score among respondents with primary school or less (mean rank = 124.86) and then the score increased until the highest education of master's degree and doctorate (mean rank = 218.31). In 'Shopping' we found the lowest score among respondents with a university degree (mean rank = 142.81) and the highest score among respondents with a high school education (mean rank = 209.82). 'Reading books and magazines' was rated the lowest by respondents with primary school education or less (mean rank = 139.36) and the highest by those with university education (mean rank = 240.32). 'Individual sports activities' were rated the lowest by respondents with primary school education or less (mean rank = 112.54) and the highest by respondents with a master's degree or doctorate (mean rank = 251.44).

We found that with the increase in the education of the respondents, the assessment of tourist activities

Table 5 Relationship between the Level of Education of Silver Hair Tourists and the Selection of Tourist Activities

Tourist activity	H	p	Mean rank					
			(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Visiting national parks	21.025	0.001	184.10	158.52	202.28	171.55	183.13	297.72
Spiritual and religious activities	12.994	0.023	189.10	197.95	168.90	151.19	150.04	160.81
Visiting historical sights	21.078	0.001	114.57	166.20	200.43	189.44	212.46	192.44
Visiting galleries and museums	18.764	0.002	131.62	154.86	191.00	184.03	218.22	173.28
Visiting cultural events (concerts, theatres)	21.206	0.001	130.23	154.60	203.64	193.50	208.80	154.61
Photography and recording	20.178	0.001	124.86	159.58	181.84	207.05	205.22	218.31
Shopping	16.023	0.007	180.90	204.62	209.82	184.94	142.81	181.39
Reading books and magazines	20.480	0.001	139.36	172.65	200.23	192.02	240.32	190.89
Individual sports activities	18.932	0.002	112.54	170.82	187.19	195.45	190.31	251.44

Notes Column heading are as follows: (1) primary school or less, (2) vocational high school, (3) high school, (4) higher professional degree, (5) university, (6) master's degree or doctorate.

Table 6 Relationship between the Monthly Income of Silver Hair Tourists and Tourist Activities

Tourist activity	H	p	Mean rank			
			(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Spiritual and religious activities	20.398	0.000	184.15	184.46	158.69	121.37
Visiting historical sights	13.886	0.003	138.26	184.21	197.36	201.98
Visiting galleries and museums	10.090	0.018	142.01	178.16	185.29	200.27
Photography and recording	13.901	0.003	171.75	163.24	205.52	204.70
Individual sports activities	11.355	0.010	139.21	182.98	191.49	194.17
Visiting health resorts	11.265	0.010	143.17	172.71	173.47	205.21

Notes Column heading are as follows: (1) up to 600 €, (2) from 601 € to 900 €, (3) from 901 € to 1200 €, (4) over 1201 €.

also increased. Exceptions are 'Spiritual and religious activities,' where the grade decreased with education, and 'Shopping,' with a non-linear distribution of the grade.

We were also interested in statistically significant differences of the surveyed silver hair tourists according to income. With the Kruskal Wallis test, we analysed the differences based on income and the selection of certain tourist activities.

Table 6 shows that between the monthly income of surveyed silver hair tourists and selected tourist activities, there are statistically significant differences within six tourist activities ($p < 0.05$). In the case of 'Spiritual and religious activities,' the increase in monthly income decreased the tourist activity of respondents, with the highest score for silver hair tourists with a monthly income from 601 € to 900 € (mean rank = 184.64) and the lowest score for respondents with a monthly income above 1201 €. 'Visiting historical sights' was rated the lowest by respondents with a monthly income of up to 600 € (mean rank = 138.26) and the highest by respondents with a monthly income above 1201 €. Also, 'Visits to galleries and museums' were rated the lowest by respondents with a monthly income of up to 600 € (mean rank = 142.01) and the highest by those with a monthly income of over 1201 €. 'Photography and recording' was rated the lowest by respondents with a monthly income from 601 € to 900 € (mean rank = 163.24) and the highest by those with a monthly income from 901 € to 1200 €

Table 7 Statistically Significant Differences of Silver Hair Tourists According to Health Status Assessment

Tourist activity	H	p	Mean rank			
			(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Spending time by shores, lakes or pools	14.826	0.002	194.25	171.82	215.38	212.94
Visiting national parks	11.056	0.011	128.03	175.92	197.45	212.85
Visiting amusement and theme parks	12.360	0.006	143.03	171.01	205.96	197.97
Tours of big cities	10.191	0.017	172.63	169.00	200.30	213.50
Visiting historical sights	13.952	0.003	154.18	175.46	194.83	244.29
Exploring local cuisine	11.878	0.008	146.69	169.36	202.04	208.84
Casinos	7.847	0.049	73.00	94.97	81.55	84.43
Reading books and magazines	10.117	0.018	197.35	177.32	209.96	222.27
Group sports activities	18.347	0.000	186.44	163.62	201.40	232.45
Individual sports activities	20.160	0.000	150.92	170.31	188.94	253.19

Notes Column heading are as follows: (1) pretty bad, (2) good, (3) pretty good, (4) very good.

(mean rank = 205.52). Also, 'Individual sports activities' were rated the lowest by respondents with the lowest monthly income, up to 600 € (mean rank = 139.21) and the highest by those with the highest monthly income, over 1201 € (mean rank = 194.17). 'Visits to health resorts' were rated the lowest by respondents with the lowest monthly income, of up to 600 € (mean rank = 143.17) and the highest by respondents with the highest monthly income, above 1201 € (mean rank = 205.21).

We can conclude that with tourist activities, as the income of the respondents increases, their assessment of an individual tourist activity also increases. The only exceptions were 'Spiritual and religious activities,' where the ratings moved in the opposite direction (lower), and 'Photography and recording,' where we observe a non-linear distribution.

We were also interested in statistically significant differences of the surveyed silver hair tourists according to their health status. With the Kruskal Wallis test, we analysed the differences based on health status and the selection of certain tourist activities.

Based on Table 7, we found that there was a statistical significance between (own) assessment of the health status of respondents and selected tourist activities in ten tourist activities ($p < 0.05$). 'Spending time by shores, lakes or pools' was rated highest by respondents with a pretty good assessment of their own health (mean rank = 215.38) and lowest by those giving a grade of good (mean rank = 171.82). 'Visiting national parks' as a tourist activity was rated the highest by respondents who rated their health as very good (mean rank = 212.85), and the lowest by those respondents who rated it as pretty bad (mean rank = 128.03). Also, 'Visiting amusement and theme parks' was rated the highest by respondents with a rating of their own health as pretty good (mean rank = 205.96), and the lowest by those giving a score of pretty bad (mean rank = 143.03). 'Tours of big cities' were rated highest by respondents with a rating of very good (mean rank = 213.50) and lowest by respondents with a rating of good (mean rank = 169.00). 'Visiting historical sites' was also rated highest by respondents with a very good rating of their own health (mean rank = 244.29) and lowest by those who rated their health as pretty bad (mean rank = 154.18). 'Exploring local cuisine' was rated highest by respondents with a very good self-assessment of their health (mean rank = 208.84) and lowest by those who rated their health as pretty bad (mean rank = 146.69). 'Casinos' was rated as highest by respondents with a good health status (mean rank = 94.97) and lowest by respondents with pretty bad health (mean rank = 73.00). Respondents also rated 'Reading books and magazines' as highest among those with a high rating of their health status – very good (mean rank = 222.27), and the lowest rating was attributed to respondents with a health-condition rating as good (mean rank = 177.32). 'Group sports activities' as a tourist activity were rated the highest by respondents with a very good assessment of their health status (mean rank = 232.45), and the lowest by respondents with a good self-assessment of health status (mean rank = 163.62). As expected, 'Individual sports activities' as a tourist activity were rated the highest by the surveyed silver hair tourists with a very good (own) assessment of their health status (mean rank = 253.19) and the lowest by those who assess their health condition as pretty bad (mean rank = 150.92).

We can conclude that the analysis of five socio-demographic and economic factors of the researched tourist activities showed that they increase along with a better assessment of the health status of the respondents, which is expected and logical.

Discussion

In the field of social tourism, Medarić et al. (2017) found that most research focuses solely on young people, while much less focuses on silver hair tourists. The research of Pesonen et al. (2015) also showed that silver hair tourists value comfort, functionality or quality and reliability of online travel services. Alén et al. (2016) summarized various authors who researched the motivational factors of silver hair tourists and found that safety, accessibility, orderliness, economy, and appropriate health facilities in the area are important factors on the basis of which silver hair tourists decide on tourism activities. At the same time, these findings coincide with our results.

We reject the statistically significant differences that we predicted in the research hypotheses based on the obtained results In H1, we assumed that in the set of tourist activities, elderly women are statistically significantly more likely to choose those activities that involve less dynamics. The obtained results show statistically significant differences in the four variables. If we look at less dynamic activities, such as 'Playing board games' and 'Reading books and magazines,' we see that both go in the direction of higher ratings of tourist activities for women. We expected that estimates for less dynamic activities would be higher in women than in men, as also found by Lehto et al. (2001), arguing that women focus more on opportunities to socialize and interact with people and their families than men while travelling. This confirms the hypothesis.

In H2, we hypothesized that older silver hair tourists will be more likely to opt for moderate tourist activities. Statistically significant differences were found in three activities, all in the direction of a higher score in the age group 65–69 years, perhaps a little surprising, as we expected a higher score in the 65–69 age group with more dynamic activities. Shavanddasht (2018) found that silver hair tourists from the first age group are more eager for novelty and pleasant holidays, while silver hair tourists from the second age group place more emphasis on safety and knowledge fulfilment in tourism activities, and Mrčela et al. (2015) argued that silver hair tourists (aged 65+) have special characteristics that affect the distribution of the health tourism market. We thus reject the research hypothesis.

In H3, we predicted that those silver hair tourists with a higher level of education will be more likely to choose tourism activities that develop cultural capital, compared to those with a lower level of education. Statistically significant differences among silver hair tourists were found in nine tourist activities. In seven tourists activities, we recorded more frequent participation in activities that develop cultural capital among silver hair tourists with higher education than among those with a lower education. In the case of 'Spiritual and religious activities,' the frequency of participation decreased with the increase of education, while in the activity 'Shopping' the frequency is nonlinearly distributed according to the level of education. And it is these two activities that would be harder to place than activities that develop cultural capital. Richards (2016) argued that silver hair tourists with higher education and higher social status are more likely to attend cultural tourism activities. The research hypothesis is thus confirmed, as we found a statistically significant difference in tourism activities which can be assumed to raise cultural capital.

In H4, we assumed that those silver hair tourists who had a lower personal monthly income will be more likely to choose affordable tourism activities. Statistically significant differences among silver hair tourists were detected in six activities. Thus, we found that higher rated activities for silver hair tourists who had a lower personal monthly income were only among 'Spiritual and religious activities.' Although Hsu et al. (2007) found that one of the main motivations of elderly adults to become involved in tourism were personal finances, we reject our research hypothesis, as we confirmed it in only one activity.

In the last research hypothesis we hypothesized that silver hair tourists with a higher assessment of their health status will be more likely to choose dynamic tourism activities. Statistically significant differences among silver hair tourists were found in ten tourist activities. In all ten tourist activities, we recorded that silver hair tourists with better health rate the activities higher. Thus, we can conclude that health is an important aspect of tourism. Jang and Wu (2006), stated that healthy silver hair tourists are more intrinsically motivated to travel. However, we cannot confirm the distinction in the direction of dynamic and calm tourist activities. We thus reject the research hypothesis.

Tourism, which is on a steep rise, i.e. tourism for silver hair tourists, is therefore even more important today. Webster (2019) illustrated this with figures when he said that in 1995 there were about 630 million tourist flights of silver hair tourists worldwide, while the same number was almost 1.46 billion in 2016. Medarić et al. (2017), however, add that the fact that the silver hair tourists are engaged in tourism, go on vacation, and experience new things, certainly represents added value in their lives.

Conclusion

In the tourism industry, due to the rapid aging of the population and current demographic changes, it is necessary to include tourism for silver hair tourists in the process of formulating a strategy and model of optimal solutions in the field of tourism activities. This is a fairly new travel trend, and at the same time, the silver hair tourists are becoming an increasingly important and growing market in the tourism industry. Today, the silver hair tourists are entering the third period of life relatively healthy, financially independent and eager for new experiences. They want active and productive aging, as tourism has many positive effects on them (better self-image, greater satisfaction with life, gaining new knowledge, broadening their horizons, less anxiety and health problems, etc.). Older people are a very heterogeneous group, so knowing their characteristics is essential when designing the most optimal or innovative programmes and offers for silver hair tourists.

In this article, we see that silver hair tourists most often visit friends and relatives, as Möller et al. (2007) also establish. Casinos and cruises are the least used by silver hair tourists, which can also be accounted for in the financial situation of most retirees. Elderly women are statistically significantly higher than men in participating in moderate tourism activities, as according to Lehto et al. (2001), during travel, they focus more on opportunities to socialize and interact with people and their families compared to elderly men. Younger silver hair tourists have a statistically significantly higher rating of participation in given tourist activities. From this we conclude that silver hair tourists do not choose more or less dynamic activities depending on their age, but all activities are more attractive to younger silver hair tourists. The level of education plays an important role in the tendency to extend cultural capital, as well as the amount of monthly income in the choice of tourist activities. The only exceptions are spiritual and religious activities, which are more often attended by silver hair tourists with a lower monthly income. However, we stated that the state of health does not affect the choice of more or less dynamic tourist activities, but affects the frequency of the general choice of all tourist activities. Research on the socio-demographic and economic factors of silver hair tourists should help the tourism industry develop effective programmes to attract elderly travellers (Jang & Wu, 2006).

The findings can help us create innovative approaches that will help tourism providers address some of the future trends identified in the article. They may also be an incentive for a travel agency intended exclusively for silver hair tourists, which we do not currently have in Slovenia. Patterson and Balderas (2020) stated the importance of understanding what kinds of choices silver hair tourists want in the future, as well as to match their changing needs and take these changes into account proactively. This will not only provide exciting opportunities for further research with elderly generations, but also identify practical implications for policy makers, industry practitioners and travel marketers, as a whole.

We believe that we need to put our knowledge into practice and start reorganizing tourism; it would also make sense to expand the research and, based on the findings, conduct a new survey in the wider social space on the population of all silver hair tourists. After all, the complexity of the topic, as we see, is very great. Due to the limited scope, we performed an analysis of only individual statistical variables. Certainly it would be interesting to analyse combinations of the demographic variables, so factor-analysis or grouping would give deeper analysis and understanding of the results. At the same time, an open field of research is being offered in other countries.

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Vpliv percepcije kriznega upravljanja s covid-19 na podobo destinacije in namero obiska

Ali Ghasemian Sahebi, Rahil Kordheydari in Mohammad Aghaei

Turizem je bil v zadnjih letih eden najdinamičneje razvijajočih se sektorjev svetovnega gospodarstva, vendar je pojav krize zaradi pandemije virusa covid-19 v industriji povzročil recesijo, zaradi česar je obvladovanje te krize postalo bistveno. Namen raziskave je preučiti učinek percepcije kriznega upravljanja pandemije covida-19 na podobo blagovne znamke destinacije in končno namero izbire turistične destinacije, kar smo izvedli z razlago vloge osebnosti blagovne znamke in odnosa turistov do destinacije. Izvedli smo deskriptivno-raziskovalno raziskavo v smislu metode in zbiranja podatkov s kvantitativnim pristopom. Raziskovalno okolje, ki smo ga izbrali, je mesto Teheran, pri čemer smo vključil tako domače kot tuje turiste, ki so obiskali Teheran med julijem 2020 do aprilom 2021. Raziskavo smo opravili na naključnem vzorcu s pomočjo anketnega vprašalnika. V raziskavi smo obravnavali 768 vprašalnikov, ki so bili celovito izpolnjeni. Hipoteze smo analizirali s pomočjo modeliranja strukturnih enačb (SEM) v AMOS in SPSS. Rezultati so pokazali, da čeprav so mesta in turistične destinacije neživi elementi, turisti pogosto menijo, da imajo osebnostne in človeške lastnosti. Dodatno je bilo ugotovljeno, da krizno upravljanje pandemije covida-19 pozitivno in pomembno vpliva na podobo destinacije ter na koncu tudi na namero obiska destinacije. V zaključku podajamo nekaj predlogov, ki bi jih lahko uporabili kot smernice turističnim destinacijam za spopadanje s krizo turistične privlačnosti v obdobju po pandemiji covida-19.

Ključne besede: percepcija kriznega upravljanja, covid-19, podoba destinacije, osebnost blagovne znamke destinacije, turistični odnosi, namera obiska
Academica Turistica, 15(3), 291–305

Kraljevski turizem: namera turistov, da ponovno obiščejo palačo Yogyakarta v Indoneziji

Usep Suhud, Merry Amelia Dewi in Mamoon Allan

Znano je, da imajo države z monarhičnim sistemom kapital za razvoj kraljevskega turizma. Čeprav je Indonezija republika, je država nastala z združitvijo majhnih kraljestev in sultanatov, nekatere tamkajšnje palače pa so zdaj spremenjene v žive muzeje in znamenitosti za turiste. Ta raziskava preučuje dejavnike, ki vplivajo na namere turistov, da se vrnejo v palačo Yogyakarta, pripadajočo sultanatu, ki je ostal pod sultanom in je priznan s strani vlade. Študijska kohorta je štela 250 udeležencev in bila izbrana z uporabo priročne metode vzorčenja, podatki pa so bili testirani z uporabo raziskovalne faktorske analize in modelov strukturnih enačb. Osrednja ugotovitev trenutne študije je, da so na namero ponovnega obiska vplivali kakovost storitev, prepoznana vrednost, zadovoljstvo turistov in navezanost na kraj.

Ključne besede: kraljevski turizem, palačni turizem, kraljeva dediščina, navezanost na kraj, namera ponovnega obiska
Academica Turistica, 15(3), 307–321

Počasni turizem kot poglobljena potovalna izkušnja: bibliometrična analiza
Damir Krešić in Matina Gjurašić

»Počasni turizem« je celovit koncept turizma, ki spodbuja trajnost v vseh vidikih popotnikovega potovanja. Je obetavna alternativa množičnemu turizmu, za katero so se pripravljeni angažirati turisti, upravljavci destinacij in ponudniki turističnih storitev. V akademskih raziskavah ni soglasja o tem, kaj pomeni »počasen« in kako se izvaja ali razlaga v povezavi z različnimi turističnimi konteksti, kulturami in mobilnostmi. Namen tega prispevka je raziskati koncept »počasnega turizma«, njegov razvoj in trenutni obseg. Poleg tega prispevek predstavlja nov vpogled v znanstveno produkcijo z bibliometrično analizo, ki doslej ni bila povsem razjasnjena v raziskavah gostinstva in turizma. Podatki za študijo so pridobljeni iz člankov v revijah, napisanih v angleškem jeziku in v podatkovni bazi Scopus, po specifičnih ključnih besedah, povezanih s počasnim turizmom. Ugotovitve kažejo, da zanimanje za raziskave počasnega turizma izjemno narašča in je povezano s počasnim potovanjem ter hrano, trajnostjo in poglobljeno potovalno izkušnjo.

Ključne besede: počasni turizem, trajnost, lokalna hrana, poglobljena potovalna izkušnja, bibliometrična analiza
Academica Turistica, 15(3), 323–333

Razvijanje »nevaloriziranih virov« za turizem: Primera Drift Ice na otoku Hokaido in ICEHOTEL na Laponskem
Takafumi Fukuyama in Johan R. Edelheim

Značilnosti severa se običajno opisujejo z negativnimi pridevniki, npr. redko poseljen, obroben in neugoden zaradi mraza, teme ali močnih snežnih padavin. To velja tako za Japonsko kot za nordijske države. V zgodovini severa se je odnos med ljudmi in naravo, snegom in ledom postopoma spreminjal, ko so ljudje začeli izkoriščati svoje okolje. Nekoč je bila narava prostor za življenje, danes pa se uporablja tudi za doživetja, predvsem v snežnem in ledenem turizmu. Pričujoča študija preučuje proces razvoja neizkoriščenih virov, ki jih ima skupnost na voljo na severu, v turistične privlačnosti. Pri tem sta bili uporabljena študij teoretičnih virov in primerjalna študija primera Drift Ice na Japonskem in ICEHOTEL na Švedskem, s ciljem razjasnitve mehanizma uporabe virov in s tem povezanih vprašanj. Prizadevanja lokalne skupnosti, ki jih vidimo v obeh procesih, so kronološko razdeljena v štiri faze, ki so obdobje prebujanja, vzpostavitve, rasti in zrelosti. Mehanizem spodbujanja valorizacije v posamezni fazi lahko ponazorimo s štirimi kvadranti, ki smo jih poimenovali: »kulturna blagovna znamka«, »kulturno trženje«, »znanstvena blagovna znamka« in »znanstveni marketing«. Iz ugotovitev, ki temeljijo na celostni analizi japonskih in severnoevropskih pristopov, lahko rečemo, da je vloga razvoja snežnega in ledenega turizma predvsem v gojenju zavesti ljudi o ohranjanju narave v času podnebnih sprememb. Študija tako kaže na pomen valorizacije snega in ledu ter potenciala le-teh na severu.

Ključne besede: študija virov, nevalorizirani viri, process valorizacije, inovacije v snežnem in ledenem turizmu, Japonska in Švedska
Academica Turistica, 15(3), 335–348

Edinstveni atributi destinacije kot podlaga turističnih doživetij
Petra Zabukovec Baruca in Žana Čivre

Na turističnem trgu danes turistov ne zanimajo le novi, edinstveni turistični produkti in storitve, temveč tudi edinstvena turistična doživetja, saj izkušnje predstavljajo pomembno konkurenčno prednost destinacije. Zato je namen tega prispevka raziskati lastnosti identitete destinacije, ki so opredeljene kot edinstvene, in sicer z analizo edinstvenih doživetij treh glavnih obalnih destinacij v Slovenski Istri. Rezultati kvalitativne raziskave potrjujejo, da edinstvenost turističnih izkušenj izhaja iz atributov identitete destinacije. Ti atributi so povezani predvsem z naravo in naravnimi viri, s kulturno dediščino in kulinaričnimi doživetji. Edinstvena turistična doživetja komunicirajo predvsem skozi butičnost, inovativnost, pristnost in različna pozitivna čustva, kot so npr. hedonizem, navdušenje, radovednost, presenečenje, sreča in užitek, da zagotovijo nepozabno izkušnjo z dodano vrednostjo in spodbudijo turiste k obisku skozi vse leto. Prispevek prispeva k poznavanju edinstvenih turističnih izkušenj, poleg tega pa so podani tudi teoretični prispevki, omejitve raziskave in priporočila za prihodnje raziskave.

Ključne besede: edinstvenost, destinacija, edinstveni atributi, turistična doživetja
Academica Turistica, 15(3), 349–362

Inovacije v manjših hotelih v Argentini pred in med pandemijo covida-19
Carolina Pasciaroni, Viviana Leonardi in Silvina Elias

Namen študije je raziskati inovativno vedenje manjših hotelov v urbanih središčih Argentine pred epidemijo covida-19 in ugotoviti, ali trenutna pandemija deluje kot dejavnik, ki spodbuja inovacije v teh hotelih. Ključni prispevek raziskave in glavna motivacija za izvedbo le-te je v manjšem številu študij o hotelskih inovacijah v južnoameriških destinacijah ter potrebi po prepoznavanju strategij, ki so jih sprejeli manjši hoteli pred krizo covida-19. Uporabljena metodologija je študija več primerov, sestavljena iz šestih majhnih in srednje velikih hotelov v mestu Bahía Blanca v Argentini. Primarne informacije smo zbirali z anketami, ki smo jih poslali hotelskim menedžerjem. Študija prikazuje inovativni profil pred covidom-19, usmerjen v pridobivanje vgrajene tehnologije, usposabljanje osebja in pridobivanje serije manjših inovacij. Na opisani inovativni profil vplivajo notranji in zunanji dejavniki. Ključna ugotovitev raziskave je, da pandemija covida-19 ni spodbujevalni dejavnik, temveč ovira za inovacije.

Ključne besede: inovacije, hoteli, majhni in srednje veliki hoteli, Argentina, pandemija covida-19
Academica Turistica, 15(3), 363–379

Dejavniki, ki vplivajo na izbiro turistične dejavnosti med srebrnolasimi turisti
Mihaela Kežman in Jana Goriup

Demografske spremembe so vidne na številnih področjih življenja, tudi v turizmu. Turizem srebrnolasih turistov je v porastu in ta ciljna skupina postaja vse pomembnejši segment turističnega trga. Imajo visoko kupno moč, relativno višjo kot mlajše skupine. Zato se mora turizem z novimi vrstami in oblikami turizma odzvati na nove demografske izzive v družbi, kot sta staranje prebivalstva in aktivna dolgoživost. Potovalne izkušnje srebrnolasih turistov pomembno vplivajo tudi na kakovost in zadovoljstvo z življenjem nasploh. Zato je poznavanje demografskih značilnosti srebrnolasih turistov še toliko pomembnejše in potrebno za ustvarjanje dobre turistične ponudbe. V okviru tega prispevka smo izvedli raziskavo med srebrnolasimi turisti, starimi od 65 do vključno 75 let. Podatke smo zbirali v večgeneracijskih centrih po Sloveniji z anketo v tiskani obliki. Pridobili smo 405 veljavnih vprašalnikov. Pri analizi empiričnih podatkov smo iskali statistično značilne razlike pri petih sociodemografskih in ekonomskih dejavnikih. Glede izbire turističnih dejavnosti smo ugotovili statistično pomembne razlike med moškimi in ženskami ter med starostnimi skupinami srebrnolasih turistov. Z vidika demografskih dejavnikov, kot so izobrazba, dohodek in ocena zdravstvenega stanja, najdemo povezavo med turističnimi dejavnostmi in demografijo. Potovanja dvignejo kakovost življenja srebrnolasih turistov, zato je pomembno, da jim ponudimo programe, ki so čim bolj prilagojeni njim samim. Ta članek ponuja nekaj odgovorov, ki nam lahko pomagajo ustvariti takšne programe.

Ključne besede: srebrnolasi turisti, turistične dejavnosti, turizem starejših, demografija
Academica Turistica, 15(3), 381–395

Instructions for Authors

Aim and Scope of the Journal

Academica Turistica – Tourism and Innovation Journal (AT-TIJ) is a peer-reviewed journal that provides a forum for the dissemination of knowledge on tourism and innovation from a social sciences perspective. It especially welcomes contributions focusing on innovation in tourism and adaptation of innovations from other fields in tourism settings.

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The title page should include the title of the article (no more than 85 characters, including spaces), full name of the author(s), affiliation (institution name and address) of each author clearly identified; linked to each author by use of superscript numbers, corresponding author's full name, telephone, and e-mail address.

Abstract. The authors are obliged to prepare two abstracts – one in English and one (translated) in Slovene language. For foreign authors translation of the abstract into Slovene will be provided.

The content of the abstract should include the purpose, methods, results, and contribution of the research. It should only contain the information that appears in the text as well. It should contain no reference to figures, tables and citations published in the main text, and should not exceed 250 words.

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The main text should contain a coherent and logical structure preferably following the IMRAD format (Introduction, Methods, Research [and] Discussion). However, other structures are also welcome (e.g. Introduction, Development and Conclusions) as long as the text maintains its logical structure and focus. Acknowledgments are optional.

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Tables. Each table should be submitted on a separate page in a Word document after References. Each table shall have a brief caption; explanatory matter should be in the footnotes below the table. The table shall contain means and the units of variation (SD, SE, etc.) and must be free of nonsignificant decimal places. Abbreviations used in the tables must be consistent with those used in the text and figures. Definition symbols should be listed in the order of appearance, determined by reading horizontally across the table and should be identified by standard symbols. All tables should be numbered consecutively (Table 1, Table 2, etc.).

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Citing References in Text

One author. Tourism innovation specific is mentioned (Brooks, 2010). Thomas (1992) had concluded . . .

Two authors. This result was later contradicted (Swarbrooke & Horner, 2007). Price and Murphy (2000) pointed out . . .

Three or more authors. Wolchik et al. (1999) or (Wolchik et al., 1999).

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List several authors for the same thought or idea with separation by using a semicolon: (Kalthof et al., 1999; Biegern & Roberts, 2005).

Examples of Reference List

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American Psychological Association. (2019). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (7th ed.).

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Web Pages

Croatian Bureau of Statistics. (2001). Census of population, households and dwellings. http://www.dzs.hr/Eng/censuses/Census2001/census.htm

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