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ENVIRONMENTAL SUPPORT FACTORS VERSUS ACTIVITY AVAILABILITY IN SPORTS AND RECREATIONAL TOURISM: EVIDENCE FROM TOURIST BEHAVIOR

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Abstract: Sports and recreational activities, together with tourist animation programs, have become increasingly relevant factors in contemporary destination choice, yet their role is still insufficiently explored from a behavioral and social perspective. This study investigates how tourists' everyday engagement in sports and recreational activities translates into participation during vacations and how these activities influence destination selection. Using a quantitative research design, data were collected through an online survey of 217 respondents and analyzed using non-parametric and parametric statistical methods. The results reveal significant differences between tourists' sports-recreational behaviors at home and during travel, particularly with respect to physical health, emotional well-being, spatial attachment, and environmental support factors. The findings further indicate that supportive environmental factors such as the attractiveness of the natural environment and climatic suitability play a particularly relevant role in destination choice compared to the mere availability of sports facilities. In contrast, interest in animation programs appears more moderate, suggesting differentiated tourist preferences. By distinguishing between opportunities for sports-recreational activities and supporting environmental factors, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of tourist behavior and destination attractiveness. The results offer practical implications for destination managers and policymakers aiming to develop socially and environmentally sustainable tourism products.

Keywords: physical health; sports activities; recreation; animation

1. Introduction

The increasing availability of leisure time and changing lifestyle patterns have significantly influenced contemporary travel behavior and destination choice. Tourists increasingly seek

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experiences that combine physical activity, recreation, and emotional well-being, moving beyond traditional passive forms of tourism. Active vacations, characterized by sports, recreational activities, and organized animation programs, are increasingly perceived as means of maintaining health, reducing stress, and enhancing overall quality of life (Mansfield et al., 2020).

Previous research has extensively documented the positive effects of sports and recreational activities on physical and psychological health in both everyday and tourism contexts (Syrovatko et al., 2021). Studies further suggest that leisure habits developed in daily life often shape tourist behavior, as individuals who regularly engage in physical activity are more likely to seek similar experiences during vacations (Lee et al., 2025; Mozolev et al., 2020). Participation in active tourism is influenced by internal factors, such as enjoyment and health orientation, as well as external factors, including infrastructure, service availability, and environmental characteristics of destinations (Mishra et al., 2022).

Despite the growing literature on sports tourism, wellness tourism, and active travel, these domains are frequently examined in isolation. Research has predominantly focused on the availability of sports and recreational facilities, while broader supporting environmental factors, such as natural attractiveness and climatic suitability, remain insufficiently explored. In addition, limited attention has been paid to the continuity and divergence between tourists' everyday and vacation-related sports-recreational behavior within an integrated analytical framework.

To address these gaps, this study adopts an interdisciplinary approach that integrates tourism, leisure, and social behavior research. It distinguishes between opportunities for sports and recreational activities and broader supporting environmental factors shaping tourist experiences. Furthermore, it examines how everyday sports-recreational habits differ from vacation behavior, contributing to a deeper understanding of contextual changes in leisure practices.

The main objective of this study is to analyze the role of sports and recreational activities and animation programs in tourist destination selection. Specifically, the study aims to: (i) conceptually and empirically differentiate supporting environmental factors from activity availability, (ii) compare tourists' sports-recreational behavior in everyday and vacation contexts, and (iii) reassess the role of animation programs in contemporary tourism. The key theoretical contribution lies in demonstrating that environmental support and activity availability exert distinct yet complementary influences on destination choice.

Based on the identified research gap and the growing importance of sports-recreational activities and animation programs in contemporary tourism, this study addresses the following research questions:

- *RQ₁*: How do tourists' sports and recreational habits differ between everyday life and vacation contexts?
- *RQ₂*: How do tourists evaluate the importance of supporting factors compared to the availability of sports and recreational facilities in the context of participating in sports and recreational activities at a destination?
- *RQ₃*: What is the relative importance of supportive environmental factors (e.g., natural attractiveness, climatic suitability, landscape characteristics) versus the availability of sports-recreational facilities in motivating tourists' engagement at destinations?
- *RQ₄*: What role do animation programs play in shaping tourists' interest and satisfaction with destination offerings?

Based on the reviewed literature and the identified research gaps, the present study adopts a hypothesis-driven empirical approach to examine tourists' sports-recreational behavior, perceived environmental support, and interest in animation programs. To guide the empirical analysis, the following hypotheses are formulated:

- H_1 : Tourists perceive sports and recreational activities as more important during vacations than in their everyday life;
- H_2 : Supporting environmental factors are perceived as more important for engaging in sports and recreational activities at tourist destinations than the mere availability of sports-recreational opportunities;
- H_{2a} : Among supporting environmental factors, the attractiveness and suitability of the natural environment and climatic conditions represent the most influential determinants of perceived sports-recreational opportunities at tourist destinations; and
- H_3 : Tourists demonstrate lower interest in evening animation programs compared to their interest in daily sports and recreational activities at tourist destinations.

The proposed hypotheses are empirically tested using a quantitative research design based on a structured survey and appropriate statistical analyses as described in the following parts of this study. The empirical analysis is based on a sample of 217 respondents who completed a structured survey questionnaire, providing the basis for the statistical testing of the proposed hypotheses. The research focuses on a representative sample of tourists from Serbia and neighboring countries, defined as adults with recent experience of leisure travel and participation in sports or recreational activities. By targeting this population, the research provides insight into the attitudes and behaviors of those tourists for whom sports and recreational activities are a relevant factor in choosing destinations and during their vacations.

2. Literature review

2.1. Sports and recreational activities in tourist behavior

Sports and recreational activities play an important role in leisure behavior by contributing to physical health, psychological well-being, and social interaction. In tourism research, they are increasingly recognized as factors influencing destination choice and tourist satisfaction. Studies show that tourists who are physically active in everyday life tend to seek similar activities while traveling, indicating continuity between daily and vacation behavior (Mansfield et al., 2020; Mozolev et al., 2020; Song et al., 2025).

The tourism context, however, provides specific conditions that can intensify these behaviors. Greater access to natural environments, specialized infrastructure, and increased free time often encourage higher participation during vacations (Auger, 2017). Vacations reduce everyday constraints and allow tourists to prioritize health-oriented and recreational activities (Syrovatko et al., 2021). These findings support the assumption that sports and recreational activities are perceived as more important during vacations, forming the basis for H_1 . Nevertheless, participation levels vary depending on socio-demographic characteristics, motivation, and perceived accessibility (Baker et al., 2023), justifying the empirical testing of H_1 .

2.2. Environmental support factors versus activity availability

In this study, a clear distinction is made between sports and recreational opportunities and supporting environmental factors. Opportunities refer to the availability of activities and facilities, while supporting factors encompass the broader natural and spatial context that enables or encourages participation. This distinction allows for a better understanding of how different elements of a destination influence tourist behavior. Beyond individual motivation, destination environments strongly influence participation in sports and recreational activities. While earlier studies emphasized facility availability as a key determinant (Liu et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2020), recent research suggests that facilities alone are insufficient without supportive environmental conditions.

Natural attractiveness, climatic suitability, landscape diversity, and spatial characteristics are increasingly identified as critical enablers of active tourism (Buckley, 2023; Zeng & Yi Man Li, 2021). Destinations with appealing natural environments encourage engagement in activities such as hiking and cycling, even among tourists who are not regularly active at home (Morfoulaki et al., 2023). Tourists often prioritize environmental quality and experiential authenticity over the number of facilities when selecting destinations. Climatic conditions significantly influence participation by shaping comfort and safety, particularly in summer and mountain tourism (Győri, 2020).

These findings provide the theoretical foundation for H_2 , which assumes that supporting environmental factors are perceived as more important than activity availability. Within this group, natural attractiveness and climatic suitability are especially influential, as confirmed by nature-based tourism research emphasizing their impact on emotional response and motivation (Hossin et al., 2025). This supports H_{2a} .

2.3. Tourist animation programs and experiential value

Tourist animation programs are traditionally viewed as contributors to satisfaction and experiential value, particularly in mass tourism contexts (Sati et al., 2025). However, empirical evidence on tourist interest remains inconsistent. While some studies report positive effects (Uyanik et al., 2025), others indicate declining participation among tourists who prefer autonomy (Hossin et al., 2025), relaxation (Guo et al., 2025) and nature-oriented experiences (Dogru-Dastan, 2022).

Post-pandemic trends further point to a shift toward individualized and health-focused tourism, potentially reducing the relevance of structured animation programs (Xie et al., 2021). These mixed findings question the assumed importance of animation programs and form the basis for H_3 , which examines their role relative to sports and recreational activities.

2.4. Conceptual framework and research contribution

Based on the reviewed literature, this study proposes a conceptual framework that distinguishes between: (i) everyday and vacation-related sports-recreational behavior, (ii) the relative influence of supporting environmental factors and activity availability, and (iii) the role of animation programs in shaping tourist interest and satisfaction. The distinction between environmental support and activity availability contributes to the understanding of destination competitiveness, as it highlights that long-term competitiveness is not determined solely by infrastructure development, but also by the quality, preservation, and experiential value of natural and spatial resources.

By empirically testing H_1 , H_2 , H_{2a} , and H_3 , the study contributes to the literature by clarifying how environmental and experiential factors interact in shaping destination choice from a behavioral and social perspective. Existing research suggests that tourists increasingly prioritize environmental quality, experiential authenticity, and situational comfort over the mere presence of sports facilities. Accordingly, natural attractiveness and climatic suitability are expected to play a decisive role in shaping perceived opportunities for active engagement (Kise, 2025).

In contrast, evidence regarding animation programs remains inconclusive, particularly in light of recent trends toward autonomy-oriented tourism. This uncertainty provides the rationale for examining their contemporary relevance through H_3 . Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework linking research questions and hypotheses. It illustrates the relationship between everyday and vacation behavior (RQ_1 , H_1), the influence of environmental support and activity availability (RQ_3 , H_2 , H_{2a}), and the role of animation programs in shaping tourist interest and satisfaction (RQ_4 , H_3).

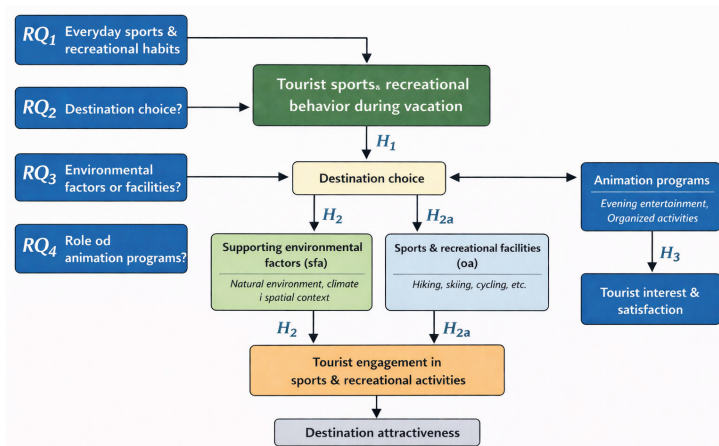


Figure 1. Conceptual framework linking research questions and hypotheses.

3. Methodology

3.1. Sample and data collection

This study employed a quantitative research design to examine the influence of tourists' engagement in sports and recreational activities on destination choice, in accordance with standards in tourism and consumer behavior research (Lőrincz et al., 2020). The quantitative approach allows for measurement and statistical analysis of perceptions and behaviors across a large sample, making it suitable for hypothesis testing. The data was collected through an online survey conducted between March and May 2023, distributed through social networks (Facebook, Instagram) and the email database of the Serbian tourist operator EUROTURS. The sampling strategy aimed to include a representative group of tourists, defined as persons over 18 years of age who, in the last 12 months, participated in leisure travel and engaged in sports or recreational activities. Only respondents who met these criteria were included in the analysis, ensuring that the sample reflected the experiences and behaviors of active travelers rather than the general population.

Of 320 respondents who initiated the survey, 217 completed all the items, resulting in a completion rate of 67.8%. The sample was predominantly female (77.4%), reflecting higher female engagement in leisure and sports-related activities. Respondents' age distribution was: 18–24 (10.6%), 25–34 (23.1%), 35–44 (28.6%), 45–54 (27.2%), 55–64 (8.2%), and 65+ (2.3%). Regarding education and employment, 58% held a university degree, 30% completed secondary education, and 12% had postgraduate qualifications; 62% were employed full-time, 18% part-time, and 20% were students, retirees, or unemployed. Certain limitations should be noted, specifically the sample is not fully balanced in terms of gender, and recruitment via social media may introduce platform bias, which should be considered when generalizing results. Regarding ethical standards, participation in the survey was voluntary and anonymous, and all participants were informed about the purpose of the study before completing the questionnaire.

3.2. Questionnaire design, reliability, and validity

The survey instrument was developed based on previously validated scales in tourism and recreational studies (Ito et al., 2025), with additional context-specific items. The questionnaire comprised three main sections:

1. Socio-demographic variables: age, gender, education, employment status, prior engagement in sports and recreational activities, and frequency of travel for leisure.
2. Perceptions of sports-recreational activities and animation programs: assessed attitudes, motivations, and perceptions of service quality at destinations, using a five-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). Likert scales are widely used psychometric tools for measuring attitudes and perceptions in behavioral research, with item responses reflecting ordinal levels of agreement (Lamm et al., 2020).
3. Impact of activities on destination choice: measured the perceived influence of sports and recreational activities, environmental support factors, and animation programs on travel decisions.

In order to process statistical data, SPSS version 20 software was used. The reliability and validity of the measurement instrument were assessed using standard and widely accepted statistical procedures. The internal consistency of multi-item constructs was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient (α), with obtained values ranging from .78 to .91, indicating a satisfactory to high level of reliability. Construct validity was examined through exploratory factor analysis (EFA). The suitability of the data for factor analysis was confirmed by the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy (.80), as well as a statistically significant Bartlett's test of sphericity ($\chi^2 = 4346.34$; $p < .001$). Factor extraction was performed using the principal component method with Varimax rotation, resulting in the identification of several distinct factors (Tables 2 and 3). The factor structure confirmed that items intended to measure different constructs (e.g., opportunities for sports and recreational activities versus supporting environmental factors) loaded appropriately on separate factors, enabling a clear interpretation of latent dimensions. Finally, content validity was ensured during the instrument development process by adapting items from previously validated scales in tourism and leisure studies and supplementing them with context-specific questions aligned with the conceptual framework.

3.3. Hypotheses and statistical analysis

The hypotheses (H_1 – H_3) were derived from the theoretical framework and previous studies. Appropriate statistical tests were selected for each hypothesis with clear rationale. The hypotheses (H_1 – H_3) were derived from the theoretical framework and relevant previous studies, providing a solid conceptual basis for the empirical analysis. Accordingly, appropriate statistical tests were selected for each hypothesis, with a clearly articulated rationale to ensure consistency between the research objectives, data characteristics, and analytical approach. A detailed overview of the hypotheses and the corresponding statistical procedures is provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Hypotheses, Variables, and Statistical Tests

Hypothesis	Variables	Data Type	Statistical Test	Rationale
H_1	Sports recreational activities at home vs. during vacation	Likert	Paired sample t -test	Compares mean scores within subjects on interval like scales (reliable Likert data)
H_2	Supporting environmental factors (SFA) vs. Opportunities for sports and recreational activities (OA)	Likert	Paired sample t -test	Compares mean importance of supporting factors vs activity opportunities for the same respondents
H_{2a}	Natural environment and climate vs. other support factors	Likert	Multivariate regression	Assesses predictive strength of each supporting factor on opportunities
H_3	Interest in evening animation programs	Likert	Kruskal Wallis H -test	A non-parametric test suitable for ordinal Likert responses when distribution deviates from normality (rank-based method).
Demographic effects	Gender, age, education on motivations & engagement	Ordinal/Likert	Mann Whitney U -test	Non parametric comparison between two independent groups
Daily vs. evening preferences	Participation (yes/no)	Categorical	Z-test for proportions	Compares two proportions of binary outcomes

3.4. Ethical considerations and reproducibility

The methodology, including the sampling approach, survey design, and statistical analysis, is described in sufficient detail so that the study could be repeated in future research. Special attention was given to clearly presenting all steps in the analysis and data processing, so that other researchers can understand and check the results. The study was also conducted in line with general ethical principles in social sciences, including voluntary participation and the protection of respondents' anonymity, which contributes to the reliability and overall quality of the research.

4. Results

4.1. Travel behavior and importance of recreational activities

The descriptive analysis indicates that respondents are frequent travelers, with 46.1% traveling two to three times per year and 31.3% traveling more than three times annually. This travel frequency suggests that the sample consists of experienced tourists capable of evaluating destination attributes and recreational offerings.

Regarding destination choice, entertainment and sports-recreational activities are perceived as important factors. A total of 44.2% of respondents rated these activities as quite or extremely important, while only 2.8% considered them irrelevant. This distribution indicates a clear orientation of tourists toward destinations that offer opportunities for active leisure.

Willingness to pay additional costs for exclusive services further supports this finding. Most respondents (84.1%) expressed readiness to pay a price premium, with 48.1% willing to pay up to 10% more, and 36% willing to pay between 11% and 25% more than the base price. These results indicate that sports-recreational and entertainment content contributes to the perceived value of the tourist offer.

Participation rates reveal that although interest is high, actual engagement is moderate. While 45.8% of respondents reported participating in sports-recreational programs, participation is predominantly occasional or rare. Evening animation programs show even lower participation, with 53.3% of respondents reporting no attendance. Satisfaction with evening programs is mostly rated as average (50.7%), suggesting a gap between tourist expectations and the quality or relevance of current offerings.

Similarly, awareness of available activities is evaluated positively by 48.4% of respondents, but satisfaction with hotel services remains moderate, as only 41.8% reported full satisfaction. These findings indicate that while tourists actively seek information and value recreational content, the existing services do not fully meet their expectations. The results of the survey regarding whether tourists attach greater importance to sports-recreational activities during their vacation compared to the same activities at home (H_1) are shown in Table 2.

4.2. Differences between sports-recreational behavior at home and during vacation (H_1)

The analysis of the obtained results revealed several differences in tourist participation in recreational activities at home versus during their vacation, as well as how socio-demographic factors shape tourist habits and behaviors. Overall, the research results clearly show that tourist habits change depending on the context, and socio-demographic factors, emotional well-being, and connection with the environment play a key role in shaping tourists' behavior toward recreational activities.

To examine whether tourists attach greater importance to sports-recreational activities during vacations compared to everyday life (H_1), a paired sample t -test was conducted. The results are presented in Table 2.

The analysis of the results revealed statistically significant differences across several dimensions of tourists' sports-recreational behavior in everyday versus vacation contexts. The most pronounced differences were observed in the perceived impact of sports and recreational activities on physical health, emotional well-being, and connection with the environment. These findings indicate that the tourism context amplifies the health-related and experiential benefits of recreational activities.

Table 2. The importance of sports-recreational activities during vacation compared to the impact of various influencing factors

Variable	<i>M</i> ± <i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Impact on physical health	4.11 ± .92	9.710	.000**
Motivations for engaging in sports-recreational activities	3.64 ± .94	2.123	.035*
Participation in sports-recreational activities during vacation	3.82 ± .93	5.166	.000**
Impact of socio-demographic factors on preferences	3.59 ± .89	1.481	.140
Emotional well-being of tourists	3.91 ± .91	6.668	.000**
Connection with the environment	3.94 ± .92	7.058	.000**
Differences in social interaction in the context of sports-recreational and tourist activities	3.52 ± .94	.326	.745
Engagement with animation programs	3.28 ± .95	-3.462	.001**
Sustainability of technological advances on types of sports-recreational activities	3.38 ± .93	-1.933	.055
Psychological differences among tourists preferring sports-recreational activities	3.54 ± .96	.600	.549
Changes from urban to tourist destinations	3.63 ± .93	2.071	.040*
Supportive availability and preferences between tourist and sports-recreational activities in relation to place of permanent residence	3.61 ± .93	1.720	.087

Note. *M* = Mean value; *SD* = Standard Deviation; Level of significance: **p* < .05 ***p* < .01

Participation in sports and recreational activities during vacations is significantly higher than in everyday life, confirming that tourist destinations encourage more active engagement. Motivation to participate also shows statistical significance, highlighting the combined influence of internal and external factors in the tourist context. Differences in preferences when transitioning from urban to tourist destinations further support the adaptation of activities to spatial and environmental conditions.

In contrast, interest in animation programs presents average values significantly below the neutral point on the Likert scale, suggesting limited relevance within contemporary tourist experiences. Socio-demographic influences, social interaction, psychological characteristics, and the sustainability of technological advances do not show statistically significant differences between everyday and vacation contexts, indicating that these factors remain relatively stable across environments. The influence of technological sustainability shows marginal significance (*p* = .055), pointing to the need for further research in this area.

Overall, seven out of thirteen analyzed variables show statistically significant differences, leading to the partial confirmation of *H*₁. The results indicate that the tourism context exerts a meaningful influence on health, emotional, and experiential aspects of sports-recreational behavior, while certain structural and personal factors remain unchanged.

4.3. Supporting factors vs. opportunities for sports and recreational activities (*H*₂)

Descriptive statistics for individual items related to OA and SFA are presented in Table 3. The results of the study on the impact of environmental factors, such as the natural resources of the destination, on tourists' decisions to engage in sports activities (*H*₂) are presented in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3. Analysis of attitudes toward the OA and SFA

Group	Variables	N	Min	Max	M	SD
SFA	Beaches, water and representation of summer sports	217	1	5	4.24	.98
SFA	Thermomineral waters and natural treatments	217	1	5	4.20	.98
SFA	Suitability of mountain tourism climate for sports activities	217	1	5	4.14	.95
OA	Possibilities for hiking	217	1	5	3.73	1.08
OA	Cave world	217	1	5	2.24	1.34
OA	Sports tourism activities in deserts	217	1	5	3.08	1.11
OA	The existence of sports and recreational activities of winter tourism	217	1	5	3.48	1.08
OA	Possibilities for skiing in the mountains	217	1	5	3.53	1.15
OA	Possibilities for ski jumping on the mountains	217	1	5	3.07	1.11
OA	Opportunities for speleological sports activities	217	1	5	3.12	1.18
OA	Ice skating activities	217	1	5	3.07	1.19
OA	Opportunities for hunting and fishing	217	1	5	3.02	1.27
OA	Horse riding opportunities	217	1	5	3.28	1.25
SFA	The suitability and attractiveness of the natural environment for sports and recreational activities	217	1	5	4.41	.91
OA	Existence of bicycle routes	217	1	5	3.58	1.14

According to Table 3, during a more detailed analysis of the collected data, two new variables, OA and SFA, were created by averaging the relevant responses. To examine the strength of the potential influence of related factors on the observed opportunities, a multivariate regression analysis was applied, where SFA were used as predictor variables, while the newly created variable OA was treated as the criterion (dependent) variable. In addition, a paired-samples t-test was used to further examine the differences between the observed values. The results of these analyses are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Comparison of differences between OA and SFA

Variables	N	M	SD	t	df	p
OA	217	3.20	.87	-16.232	216	.000
SFA	217	4.04	.75			

The results of the analysis clearly indicate the existence of a statistically significant difference between the two variables: OA and SFA. The difference was tested using the t-test, and it was found that the difference is statistically significant. This suggests that SFA have a greater significance for the participants of the study compared to the OA.

The results from Table 4 show that Supporting factors for sports and recreation activities (convenience and attractiveness of the natural environment, with an average rating of 4.41 and a standard deviation of .91) have a greater impact on engaging in sports activities compared to Opportunities for sport and recreation activities in destinations, such as skiing, hiking, and other activities, where ratings are generally below 4.0. This difference suggests that supporting factors, such as the natural environment, play a key role in motivating for sports activities. Therefore, H_2 is confirmed.

4.4. Decisive supporting factors (H_{2a})

The results testing H_{2a} , which posits that the convenience and attractiveness of the natural environment represent a statistically significant and practically relevant factor of SFA, are presented in Table 5., n model shown in the Table 5 indicates statistically significant predictive power ($p < .001$), suggesting its relevance in explaining the variance of the dependent variable. The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = .175$) indicates that the model explains 17.5% of the variance of the dependent variable, highlighting a significant but partial influence of the selected predictors. This relatively low R^2 suggests that other unmeasured factors may also contribute to tourist satisfaction and interest in sports activities, and the findings should be interpreted with methodological caution.

Table 5. Decisive factors SFA for engaging in sports and recreational activities

Variables	β	t	p
Beaches, water and representation of summer sports	.189	1.987	.048*
Thermomineral waters and natural treatments	-.030	-.290	.772
Suitability of mountain tourism climate for sports activities	.183	2.204	.029*
Convenience and attractiveness of the natural environment for sports activities	.166	2.132	.034*
Model	$R^2 = .175$ $F = 11.244$ $p = .000^{**}$		

Note. β = standardized beta coefficient; R^2 = coefficient of determination; $F \geq 2.37$; Level of significance: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Three factors showed statistically significant predictive power: the suitability of the climate for mountain tourism activities ($\beta = 0.183$, $p = .029$), the suitability and attractiveness of the natural environment for sports activities ($\beta = 0.166$, $p = .034$), and beaches, water, and the prevalence of summer sports ($\beta = 0.189$, $p = .048$). All these factors have a positive impact on tourist satisfaction and interest in sports activities.

In contrast, thermomineral waters and natural treatments did not show a statistically significant effect ($\beta = -0.030$, $p = .772$), suggesting that these specific offerings are not key determinants in tourists' decisions regarding sports-related activities. Among the analyzed supporting environmental factors, the suitability of climatic conditions and the attractiveness of the natural environment exhibit statistically significant and practically meaningful associations with perceived sports-recreational opportunities. This result suggests that climatic characteristics, particularly in the context of mountain tourism, have a significant impact on tourist activities, as well as on tourists' motivation to engage in sports and recreational activities.

In comparison to the previous factors, beaches, water, and the prevalence of summer sports also have a significant impact, although their coefficient is lower than that of the climate conditions of mountain tourism. This may be explained by the fact that destinations with beaches and summer sports are already well-developed and often recognized as attractive to tourists, which may reduce the influence of individual factors. Although this is an important predictor, its relatively lower weight in this model suggests that, in the existing destinations, factors such as climate and natural environment may have a deeper, long-term impact on tourists' motivation. Based on the results obtained, H_{2a} is supported.

Considering the coefficient of determination ($R^2 = .175$), it can be concluded that there is a significant, but not complete, influence of the natural environment and other factors on tourist decisions, indicating that other factors, such as climate, also have a significant impact on tourists' decisions to engage in sports activities.

4.5. Evening activities and daily sports programs (H_3)

The results of the investigation into whether tourists are interested in engaging in evening activities in tourist destinations are shown in Table 6 (H_3). The number of respondents who participated in daily sports activities and how this figure relates to the rest of the sample in terms of statistical significance was verified using the binomial test.

Based on the results, H_3 is not fully confirmed. It can be concluded that the number of respondents who used daily sports and recreational activity programs is equal to the number of respondents who did not (Table 7).

To determine whether tourists find daily sports activities or night activities more attractive, a Z-test for difference in proportions was used.

Out of the 217 respondents who completed the survey, 131 participants provided valid responses to this specific question. For nightlife, 33 respondents (15.2%) considered it of great importance, while for sports activities, significantly more respondents, 98 (45.16%), did. This difference is statistically significant ($p = .004$) in favor of daily sports activities. When water activities are included in sports activities, this difference becomes even larger, with 23.96% for nightlife compared to 92.63% for daily sports and water activities. The remaining respondents either indicated that these activities were of minor or no importance, or did not provide a response to this question, which explains the difference between the total sample (217) and the number of respondents included in this analysis (131).

5. Discussion and conclusion

This study examines contemporary tourist behavior through several key dimensions, including travel frequency, the importance of sports and recreational activities, willingness to invest in exclusive services, and satisfaction with available offerings. In addition, it considers the influence of contextual factors on destination choice, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that shape contemporary tourism decisions. Together, these elements enable a broader analysis of how tourists evaluate and select destinations in relation to personal preferences and external conditions

5.1. Tourist travel frequency and changing demand patterns

The results show that most respondents travel two to three times per year or more frequently, confirming changes in contemporary tourism demand. According to UNWTO (2022), modern tourists increasingly prefer shorter but more frequent trips. Similar trends have been observed

Table 6. Tourist interest in evening activities

How important are evening entertainment and recreational activities to you?	N	%
It doesn't matter at all	6	2.8
Little important	38	17.5
Medium important	77	35.5
Quite important	63	29.0
Extremely important	33	15.2
Total	217	100.0

Table 7. Usage of daily sports and recreational activity programs

Have you used programs for daily sports and recreational activities?	N	Observed Prop.	p (two-tailed)
Yes	98	.46	.245
No	101	.54	
Total	217	1.00	

in Serbia, where a growing popularity of weekend travel is reported, driven by improved transport infrastructure and affordable travel packages. These findings confirm that travel frequency significantly influences tourist expectations and behavior (Blešić, et al., 2024).

Nearly half of the respondents rated sports and recreational activities as very important. Within the framework of geographic theories of tourist movements, these findings can be interpreted as reflecting the fact that the frequency and intensity of travel depend on accessibility, spatial organization, and destination attractiveness, while increased tourist mobility indicates processes of spatial diffusion of tourism and the growing accessibility of destinations due to the development of transport infrastructure. This is consistent with the findings of Chen et al. (2024) who emphasize the positive effects of physical activity on physical and mental health, stress reduction, and overall satisfaction. In the Serbian context, Bratić et al. (2024) highlight sports and recreational content as an important factor in increasing destination competitiveness, particularly in rural areas. In addition, a significant number of respondents expressed willingness to pay more for exclusive offerings, supporting the conclusions regarding the growing demand for personalized services, as well as the findings on the development of luxury tourism in Serbia (Blešić et al., 2024).

5.2. Satisfaction with offerings, information, and infrastructure quality

Despite high travel frequency and interest in active tourism, overall satisfaction with the existing offerings remains moderate. Evening entertainment programs and the availability of information about activities received lower ratings. Although tourists express a strong desire to be well informed about hotel amenities, fewer respondents reported full satisfaction with current facilities. These results are consistent with Baker et al. (2023), who emphasize the need for continuous investment in infrastructure quality and tailored services. Dogru-Dastan (2022) further stresses the importance of digitalization and personalized packages in enhancing tourist experience. From a practical perspective, the findings indicate the need to improve the availability of information through digital channels and to develop flexible recreational programs that allow tourists to choose activities according to their preferences, available time, and physical condition.

5.3. Differences between everyday and vacation sports-recreational behavior (H_1)

The testing of H_1 confirms that participation in sports and recreational activities differs between everyday life and vacation contexts. Tourism environments encourage higher levels of activity, which is consistent with the findings of Baker et al. (2020). Respondents recognize the positive impact of these activities on physical health in both contexts, in line with Dogru-Dastan (2022), while vacations provide greater opportunities to engage in physical activity beyond daily routines. Emotional and psychological motivations, such as stress reduction, play an important role. Recreational activities are more frequently practiced during vacations, particularly hiking and cycling (Mishra et al., 2022). Although socio-demographic factors such as age and education influence tourist behavior, they do not fully explain participation patterns, which is consistent with Xie et al. (2021). A strong connection between tourists and destination space was also observed (Chen et al., 2024), highlighting the need to develop recreational programs focused on health, relaxation, and nature, including outdoor activities and elements of mental well-being, while adapting them to different target groups. Accordingly, destinations should emphasize health and experiential value in their promotion, rather than only infrastructure.

5.4. Supporting environmental factors versus activity opportunities (H_2 and H_{2a})

A key contribution of this study is the distinction between OA and SFA. The results of H_2 and H_{2a} confirm statistically significant differences between these constructs, indicating that environmental supporting factors play a particularly important role in shaping perceptions of destination attractiveness, complementing rather than replacing sports and recreational infrastructure. Regression analysis identified climate suitability, natural environment attractiveness, and the presence of water and summer sports as significant predictors of perceived activity opportunities. Mountain climate suitability emerged as a particularly important factor, while thermal mineral waters and natural treatments were not statistically significant, which is consistent with Mishra et al. (2022). These findings support the importance of nature-based tourism (Mansfield et al., 2022), accessibility (Liu et al., 2021), and changing social values, such as declining interest in hunting (Førsund, 2024). The interpretation of the results aligns with the conclusions of Xie et al. (2021), Zeng et al. (2021), and Zhao (2022). Accordingly, destination managers should focus on preserving and enhancing natural resources, improving access to natural sites, and developing outdoor activities, while emphasizing natural attractiveness in destination promotion.

5.5. The role of animation programs in tourist experience (H_3)

The results related to H_3 indicate relatively low importance assigned to evening animation programs. This suggests that such activities do not occupy a central position in contemporary tourist preferences, which may be explained by the growing demand for personalized and authentic experiences (Pine & Gilmore, 2013). Tourist preferences for evening activities are also shaped by demographic and cultural factors, consistent with the findings of Chen et al. (2024).

Low ratings for evening animations may negatively affect overall satisfaction if programs are perceived as generic or lacking authenticity (Bardukova, 2024). Conversely, destinations that incorporate local culture and interactive elements into evening programs tend to achieve higher satisfaction levels (Baker et al., 2023). Furthermore, contemporary tourists increasingly value participatory and informal experiences, such as interactions with local communities, as highlighted by Liu et al. (2021). Accordingly, H_3 was not fully confirmed. While evening animations can contribute to tourist experience, their current form does not sufficiently meet tourist expectations. These findings support the conclusions of Zeng et al. (2021), who emphasize the need for innovation and technological integration in tourism offers.

5.6. Overall contribution and implications

The findings indicate that supporting environmental factors have a stronger influence on destination choice than the availability of sports and recreational infrastructure. Tourists are more likely to select destinations with favorable climatic conditions and attractive natural environments, even when their everyday surroundings offer better infrastructure. This confirms the main contribution of this study: enhancing existing environmental potential is essential for destination competitiveness, while sports and recreational facilities play a complementary role rather than a primary one. In practice, this implies a focus on preserving natural resources, developing flexible programs, digitalizing services, and continuously adapting the offer, which can increase tourist satisfaction and the competitiveness of the destination.

5.7. Limitations and future research

Future research should consider longitudinal designs to examine how sports-recreational behaviors evolve over time and across different travel contexts. Expanding the sample to include diverse cultural and geographic settings would further enhance the robustness of the findings. Finally, integrating qualitative approaches could provide deeper insights into tourists' subjective experiences and motivations related to environmental support and recreational engagement. Additionally, it should be investigated whether tourists travel alone, in pairs or in a group, as this issue was not included in this research, and it may significantly influence their preferences.

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The authors underline that the study was conducted in accordance with established ethical standards for social science research. Participation in the survey was voluntary and anonymous, and informed consent was obtained electronically from all participants prior to questionnaire completion. No personal or identifiable data were collected. In accordance with institutional and national regulations, formal ethical approval was not required for this type of anonymous online survey research. The study adhered to ethical guidelines for social science research and GDPR regulations.

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