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EXPLORATION OF TOURIST MOTIVATION AND PREFERRED ACTIVITIES IN RURAL AREAS

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Abstract: The aim of this study was to determine the motives that attract tourists to visit rural areas in Vojvodina Province, Northern Serbia. The authors identified the motivation factors that push tourists to rural areas, the activities that tourists prefer on the destination, and the relationship between these two constructs—motivation and activity preferences. The questionnaire was filled in by 476 rural tourists who spent at least one night in rural accommodation facilities in Vojvodina. For data analysis, the authors used the following: descriptive statistics to provide the characteristics of the sample and general information regarding the variables, correlation analysis with reliability test to identify a relationship between individual items, and canonical correlation analysis to analyze the relationship among dependent and independent variables. The results of the research indicated that the rural environment was one of the primary reasons for choosing rural areas for holiday, but the possibility for adventure or taking adventure activities was the lowest between the motivational factors. The study revealed that there are correlations between the push and pull factors, i.e., that motivations and preferred activities are interlinked.

Keywords: rural tourism; motivation; preferred activities; Vojvodina Province; Serbia

Introduction

The importance of understanding tourists' motivation has been recognized in tourism literature (e.g., Chiang & Jogarathnam, 2006; Kim, N.-S., & Chalip, 2004; Rittichainuwat, Qu, & Mongkhonvanit, 2008). In all the mentioned research, the authors agreed that the basic and additional values for tourists can be created only if tourism planners and managers have a good knowledge of them. The analysis of tourists' motivation, i.e., their behavior, can not only help in understanding why tourists

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choose some destination or a particular product, or service, but it can also provide some other very valuable information. For example, tourism and business policyholders can find out who their consumers are (their demographic characteristics, lifestyle, how much they are willing to spend), the size of the market, and, based on those pieces of information, they can create an effective marketing strategy.

According to Park and Yoon (2009), tourists' motivation, delivered value, and the satisfaction of the expressed need will influence the choice of a rural tourism destination. Since a rural tourism product is marked as an important factor in revitalizing rural destinations and increasing economic growth, creating values according to tourists' demand is crucial (Sustainable Tourism for Rural Development joint UN Programme, 2011).

So far, research about rural tourism development in Serbia was taken from the side perspective, dealing with different subjects: competitiveness (Demirović, Košić, Surd, Žunić, & Syromiatnikova, 2017; Pavlović & Čavlin, 2014; Petrović et al., 2018; Vujko, Petrović, Dragosavac, & Gajić, 2016), possible development potentials (Djenadić, Muhi, & Jovanović, 2016; Todorović & Bjeljac, 2009), possible financial sources for development (Radović, 2016), the role of the local population (Košić, Demirović & Dragin, 2017; Vuković, Subić, & Cvijanović, 2014), etc. Little is known about who visits rural areas and what attracts them. Thus, the aim of this study is to determine the motives that attract tourists to visit rural areas in Serbia, especially in Vojvodina. The authors will identify the motivation factors that push tourists to rural areas, the activities that tourists prefer on the destination and the relationship between these two constructs—motivation and activity preferences. The results of this study will increase the understanding of rural tourists, i.e., rural tourism demand and they will provide useful information for tourism managers and planners.

Theoretical framework

Motivation in the tourism sector is a set of factors that explain why people wish to visit some destination, buy a product, pay for a service, or be involved in a preferred activity (Horner & Swarbrooke, 2016; Park & Yoon, 2009). The most common motives used in the literature are divided into two groups (Crompton, 1979; Heitmann, 2011): *push* factors are identified more as psychological motives, i.e., person-specific motivation, and *pull* factors, which are specific attributes of a destination that attract tourists to visit it. Besides these, Jang and Wu (2006) and Pearce and Lee (2005) found that relaxation, family togetherness, and self-development were strong motives that drive tourists to travel. Huang (2010) underlined that although some motivational factors were predominant in research, there is no widely accepted set of factors since people are different and this makes motivation a complex psychological construct. The analysis of tourists' motivation to travel to rural areas is limited, but these researches showed that rural tourism is popular among tourism scholars and they have provided valuable results. The first studies (Countryside Commission, 1995; Federation Nationale des Syndicats d'Exploitants Agricoles [FNSEA], 1989) showed that relaxation, fresh air, tranquility, health, and greenery were the leading factors for visiting the countryside. These motives are present in research done in the 21st century (Molera & Albaladejo, 2007; Park & Yoon, 2009; Tyrväinen, Silvennoinen, Nousiainen, & Tahvanainen, 2001) and some new were added: searching for authenticity and tradition, learning, engaging in social contacts, especially with residents, spending time with the family, novelty, and lower costs of holiday.

Based on the motives that drive tourists to visit rural areas, some researchers tried to segment the rural tourism market. M.-K. Kim (2005) divided tourists into three segments: active tourists that perform rural oriented activities, passive tourists who are more concentrated on visiting cultural sites and relaxing, and those tourists whose primary motive is to visit family and friends. Devesa, Laguna, and Palacios (2010) distinguished four types of rural tourists. The first group seeks tranquility by visiting nature. For the second group, the primary motive is to visit cultural sites. The third group prefers to consume local food and drinks and spend time in natural parks, while the last group tends to visit friends and families or spend a holiday in their own house (weekend cottage). The authors agreed that the various motives make segmentation difficult.

Despite a large number of motives, some authors (Cai, 2002; Frochot, 2005; Pesonen & Komppula, 2010; Royo-Vela, 2009) agreed that rural tourists have several similarities—they are attracted by beautiful and peaceful landscapes, vast possibilities for outdoor activities, hospitality of the local community and the opportunities to be actively involved in their lives, and taste good food and (re)connect with their family. The motives of rural tourists may be an important factor in choosing the destination, a factor that influences tourists' behavior on the destination and their satisfaction with the provided services.

Better knowledge of tourists' motivation and behaviour is valuable for marketing experts when creating an offer that will fulfill tourists' needs and help them in decision-making (Holloway, 2004; March & Woodside, 2005; Papatheodorou, 2006). An adequate tourism strategy and policy can increase the demand for a destination.

Methodology

The research instrument was designed on the basis of the identified motivation factors and activities at a rural destination in the existing travel and tourism literature (Chen & Hsu, 2000; Hyde, 2004; Kim, K., & Jogaratnam, 2003; Kozak, 2002; Littrell, Paige, & Song, 2004). Eight motivation factors were used to measure the perceived importance of push items for tourists who visited rural destinations. Twelve activity items were selected in order to measure the perceived importance of activities realized by tourists who visited rural destinations for pleasure. The responses were measured on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 presented *not at all important* and 5 *very important*. The final research instrument consisted of two parts: in the first part, most of the questions were related to demographic variables of respondents, while the second part focused on the factors that drive tourists to visit rural sites in Vojvodina and that are connected with rural tourists' behavior.

Tourists who visited rural destinations in Vojvodina in autumn 2017 and spent at least one night in the registered accommodation facilities were selected as a representative sample for this study. The owners of the accommodation facilities were asked to distribute questionnaires to their guests. Exactly 500 questionnaires with three parts (demographic characteristic of the respondents, statements related to motivation, and statements related to preferred activities) were distributed and 467 were returned and used in further analysis. The research was carried out from September until the end of November 2017.

For the data analysis, the researchers used the following: descriptive statistics to provide characteristics of the sample and general information regarding the variables, correlation analysis with reliability test to identify the relationship between individual items, and canonical correlation analysis (SAS Institute, 2004) to analyze the relationship between the dependent and independent variables.

Results and discussion

Table 1 summarizes the details related to the respondents' demographic variables and their characteristics. Among 467 respondents, 53.6% were female and 38.8% of the respondents were in the age group of 51–60. More than half of the respondents were married (74.3%), and 37.1% of the respondents had a monthly income between 501 and 750 euros. The majority of the respondents come from Serbia (89%), while foreign tourists come from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Romania, Italy, and Austria. Around 76.2% of the respondents would like to repeat their visit to the same or some other rural areas in Vojvodina.

Table 1
Characteristics of the respondents (%)

Gender	Age		Marital status		Monthly income (€)		Where do you come from?		Would you like to come to Vojvodina again?		
Male	46.4	18–30	7.3	Single	17.5	< 250	24.6	Serbia	89	Yes	76.2
Female	53.6	31–40	14.2	Married	74.3	251–500	27.8	Other	11	No	23.8
		41–50	13.1	Widowed	8.2	501–750	37.1				
		51–60	38.8			> 750	10.5				
		> 60	26.6								

According to Table 2, it can be seen that when respondents were planning a trip to a rural destination, they were highly motivated by the possibility to experience and gain knowledge of different cultures, history, and way of life, and by the possibility to experience something new and different. Also, rural areas were perceived as places where respondents can relax and enjoy a feeling of freedom. On the other hand, respondents were less motivated to travel to rural destinations in order to reconnect with the past.

Table 2
Results for perceived importance of motivations to travel to a rural destination

Motivation items	Rank	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Experiencing and gaining knowledge of different cultures, history, and ways of life.	1	4.3309	0.75085
Experiencing something new and different.	2	4.2721	0.68277
Relaxing.	3	3.9853	0.76966
Enjoying a feeling of freedom while being in the countryside.	4	3.7059	0.93585
Visiting family and/or friends.	5	3.3603	0.89998
Observing natural beauty, pastoral settings, and scenic vistas.	6	2.9706	0.82499
Enjoying a change of pace from everyday life.	7	2.6103	1.05531
Reconnecting with the past (own or general).	8	2.2868	0.96539

Note. *M* = mean; *SD* = standard deviation.

As shown in Table 3, during their stay in rural areas, the respondents were highly interested in experiencing local culture and lifestyle and be actively involved in hosts' everyday life (e.g., visiting farms/orchards, watching harvests, feeding animals, etc.). Other popular activities include tasting local food and/or drinks, viewing beautiful scenery, and activities like hiking or trekking in a nature area. Overall, respondents were the least interested in visiting historical and cultural attractions, being involved in adventure activities, and participating in water sports.

Table 3
Results for perceived importance of activities at a rural destination

Activities at a rural destination	Rank	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Experiencing local culture and lifestyles.	1	4.3132	0.74444
Agricultural experiences (e.g., visiting farms/orchards, watching harvests).	2	4.1662	0.79071
Tasting local food and/or drinks.	3	3.9118	0.88167
Viewing beautiful scenery.	4	3.6103	0.87070
Hiking or trekking in a nature area.	5	3.4559	0.82433
Visiting farmers' markets.	6	3.3456	0.85530
Visiting national/provincial/state parks.	7	3.0294	0.84276
Observing wildlife (including bird watching).	8	2.9191	0.95882
Attending local festivals or events (including concerts, fairs, exhibits).	9	2.8603	0.97504
Visiting historical and cultural attractions (e.g., historic sites, museums, galleries).	10	2.6985	0.79181
Experiencing adventure activities (mountaineering, trekking, mountain biking, rock climbing).	11	2.5956	0.94578
Participating in water sports (kayaking, canoeing, sailing, etc.).	12	2.3235	0.91799

Note. *M* = mean; *SD* = standard deviation.

Table 4 presents four statistically significant canonical functions which show the results of the correlation analysis between motivation (as a criterion set) and activities (as a predictor set). Each function's squared canonical correlation was 41.23%, 24.27%, 10.36%, and 8.11% respectively.

The results from canonical function 1 showed that tourists who were highly motivated by observing natural beauty, pastoral settings, and scenic vistas were more likely to be interested in viewing the beautiful scenery. This group of tourists can be labeled as *Poetic tourists* since they prefer to be surrounded by peace and beautiful natural settings, those that can be found in famous poems or romantic movies. Staying in rural areas can be inspiring for them.

According to the result of canonical function 2, tourists who were highly motivated by reconnecting with the past (their own or general) and visiting friends and relatives, but not strongly motivated by opportunities to experience and gain knowledge of different cultures, history, and ways of life, were more likely to be interested in tasting local food and/or drinks, and hiking or trekking in a nature area. These tourists think that activities like tasting food or hiking will bring their families closer together. However, they were less likely to be interested in observing wildlife (including bird watching). This group of tourists can be labeled as *No-hassle tourists* since they search for relaxation and simplicity during their stay in rural areas. Also, traveling to rural areas is a chance to spend more time with family and friends and they enjoy activities that can gather the whole family.

The results from canonical function 3 showed that tourists who were highly motivated to experience something new and different and to gain knowledge of different cultures, history and ways of life when they planned to travel to a rural destination, were more likely to be interested in tasting local food and/or drinks, to be involved in agricultural experiences, and to experience local culture and lifestyle. These results showed that tourists wanted something totally different from their everyday life. Those tourists want the food their grandmas used to prepare and that is not on their table during family lunch. They want to be actively involved in hosts' life: to prepare food with them, watch and take part in harvesting, feeding animals, etc. However, they were less likely to be interested in experiencing adventure activities, probably because they find them dangerous. This group of rural tourists can be labeled as *Cultural explorers* since they see rural areas as a way to

discover and be a part of the local culture, people, and settings. They like to converse with the host and locals and they like to discover how people live, and to be actively involved in the host's daily routine.

Table 4
Canonical Correlation Analysis between motivation and activities

Variable	Standardized Canonical Coefficients			
	Canonical Function 1	Canonical Function 2	Canonical Function 3	Canonical Function 4
Predictor set (Activities)				
Attending local festivals or events like concerts, exhibitions, etc.	0.0319	0.2640	0.2335	-0.2181
Tasting local food and/or drinks.	0.2133	0.5483 ^a	0.6252 ^a	0.2163
Agricultural experiences.	0.1041	-0.0365	0.5274 ^a	-0.0233
Experiencing local culture and lifestyles.	0.1425	0.2451	0.5282 ^a	-0.0746
Hiking or trekking in a nature area.	-0.0013	0.4524 ^a	0.2667	0.5532 ^a
Viewing beautiful scenery.	0.6005 ^a	-0.0438	-0.0236	-0.1260
Visiting national/provincial/state parks.	0.0869	-0.0136	0.2241	0.6288 ^a
Observing wildlife.	0.2594	-0.3346 ^a	-0.2882	0.5768 ^a
Visiting historical and cultural attractions.	0.1325	0.2712	-0.2332	-0.1551
Experiencing adventure activities.	-0.1284	0.1355	-0.4899 ^a	0.3607
Visiting farmers' markets.	0.0366	-0.0105	-0.1252	-0.4716 ^a
Participating in water sports.	-0.0011	-0.1043	-0.1310	-0.1281
Criterion set (Motivations)				
Enjoying a change of pace from everyday life.	0.1328	0.0741	0.1233	0.5457 ^a
Visiting family and/or friends.	-0.1452	0.6153 ^a	0.3184	0.2823
Relaxing.	-0.1586	0.0441	0.0588	0.6339 ^a
Observing natural beauty, pastoral settings, and scenic vistas.	0.7625 ^a	-0.0623	-0.0625	-0.2485
Experiencing and gaining knowledge of different cultures, history and ways of life.	0.1246	-0.5210 ^a	0.6301 ^a	-0.5562
Enjoying a feeling of freedom while being in the countryside.	0.1152	-0.2384	0.0325	0.5729 ^a
Reconnecting with the past (own or general).	0.2853	0.5420 ^a	-0.2831	0.1302
Experiencing something new and different.	0.2101	-0.0368	0.6581 ^a	0.2246
Canonical Statistics				
Canonical Correlation (Cc)	0.6158	0.4726	0.3326	0.2429
Adjusted Canonical Correlation (Adj. Cc)	0.6273	0.4368	0.2843	0.2247
Squared Canonical Correlation (Cc ²)	0.4123	0.2435	0.1254	0.0547
Eigenvalue	0.6913	0.3243	0.1210	0.0725
Proportion	0.5145	0.2754	0.1104	0.0526
<i>p</i>	.0001	.0001	.0001	.0029

Note. ^aPreferred motives and activities for each group of tourists; **p* < .01.

According to the results of canonical function 4, it is shown that strong interests in activities such as hiking or trekking in a nature area, visiting national/provincial/state parks, observing wildlife (including bird watching) were more likely to be positively related to the following motivations: enjoying a change of pace from everyday life, relaxing and enjoying a feeling of freedom while

being in the countryside. The interest in these activities was, however, negatively related to visiting farmers' markets. In other words, tourists who were interested in the mentioned activities were motivated to travel to rural destinations in order to relax but not to be surrounded by a lot of people. This group of tourists can be labeled as *Nature lovers* since they enjoy spending time outdoors and observing animals, plants, or just beautiful scenery. Nature lovers find rural areas a space where they can disconnect from the stress of daily life and focus on finding peace. The activities which nature lovers can enjoy are camping, cycling, or even gardening with the host of a rural facility.

Conclusion

In this study, the authors examined the motivation and activities that push and pull tourists to rural destinations. The results of this research offer valuable information regarding the characteristics of rural tourists in Vojvodina, their motivation to travel to rural destinations, what activities they prefer during their stay and the differences between segments based on the relationship between motivation and preferred activities.

The results of this research indicated that rural environment was one of the primary reasons for choosing rural areas for holiday, but the possibility for adventure or taking adventure activities was the lowest among motivational factors. Travelers wanted to escape from the city and experience something new and different, and to relax and enjoy a feeling of freedom at the same time. It seemed that tourists wanted the interaction with the nature and their hosts in order to gain knowledge of their way of life and that they were looking forward to seeing and practicing something different from their everyday life. Although push factors play an important role in making the decision to travel, pull factors as a part of destination attributes may have a crucial role in attracting tourists to a specific destination. While tourists are motivated to travel because of the rural setting, the available activities can also create interest for travelling to rural areas. Overall, the respondents were most likely to be motivated by experiencing and gaining knowledge of different cultures, history, and ways of life, i.e., by experiencing something new and different. According to these push factors, tourists were most likely "pulled" by the opportunities to visit rural destinations in order to experience local culture and lifestyles (including agricultural experiences) and taste domestic food and drinks. The respondents were least likely to be motivated by reconnecting with the past (their own or general), while with respect to activities, they were least likely to be interested in participating in water sports and experiencing adventure activities. The study revealed that there is a correlation between the push and pull factors, i.e., that motivation and preferred activities are interlinked.

One of the limitations of this study can be the survey period (September–November) that may affect the composition of the sample and, consequently, the results, since most working/young people travel during holidays (summer, Christmas, etc.), whereas senior citizens have more free time. In future research, it would be useful to cover other seasons in order to see if there are differences in motives and preferences among rural tourists.

A better understanding of the main reasons that drive tourists to visit rural areas can be very helpful in creating a tourist offer that can satisfy the needs and desires of tourists. Analyzing tourists' attitudes toward destination might reveal how much tourists are satisfied with the destination characteristics (natural and built set, the quality of the offered facilities, etc.). The results of this study are some kind of recommendations for decision/policymakers, so they can influence

tourists to repeat their visit to the same or to visit some other rural destinations in Vojvodina. The findings on the motivation and preferred activities of rural tourists are a valuable input for marketing and development strategies of rural destinations, which can lead to the rise of the competitive position of a destination on the tourism market.

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