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THE IMPACT OF ECO-FRIENDLY FEATURES OF A DESTINATION ON TOURIST SATISFACTION – THE CASE OF MONTENEGRO

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Abstract

Green attributes represent a vital aspect of the tourism offer that enhances the postmodern destination product. By integrating green offering potential, destinations raise the level of tourist engagement which in turn initiates higher consumption. Although the importance of the green aspects of tourist offer has been identified, there is a gap in the existing literature on the importance of eco-friendly features of a destination to the tourist satisfaction. The aim of this study is to analyze the effects of experiential dimensions by eco-friendly features of a destination on tourist satisfaction. Using descriptive statistics and Pearson's correlation coefficient on a sample of 80 respondents, the results indicate that there is a statistically significant and positive relationship between tourist experience of eco-friendly destination product and satisfaction. This study can provide a basis for understanding the principles of generating a unique tourist experience through green activities and as such can serve as a premise when planning a green product development strategy at the level of a tourist destination.

Key Words: *green product, quality offer, tourist experience, sensory dimension, social dimension, emotional dimension*

JEL classification: Z32

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Introduction

Postmodern tourists are becoming more aware of the need for sustainable development, therefore destinations use sustainable potentials to attract as many visitors as possible and thereby establish competitive advantages in the global market characterized by a strong evolutionary cycle (Rodríguez-Díaz & Pulido-Fernandez, 2019). In fact, changes in the habits and preferences of postmodern consumers in tourism caused a transformational process in terms of the overall management of the destination, where the concept of green business becomes the dominant backbone of the strategic tourism development (Streimikiene et al., 2021). In this respect, green potentials are recognized as a dominant mechanism for improving the overall satisfaction of tourists and a critical factor in the long-term progress of the destination (Liu et al., 2016). Therefore, a contemporary tourism offer cannot be imagined without sustainable tourism potentials, since they determine tourists' perception of the value through the improvement of the quality of the overall tourist product (Setini et al., 2021). Basically, only tourism that is based on the principles of sustainability through respect for ecological interests may stimulate the preservation of harmony in the natural environment and permanent tourist progress (Ibnou-Laaroussi et al., 2020). However, although previous studies have considered the importance of the concept of sustainability and the tourist experience for behavioral outcomes in tourism (Miller et al., 2019), there is an evident gap in the literature regarding the understanding of the tourist experience of the destination's eco-friendly potential offering as well as the effects it has to the tourist satisfaction. Therefore, in order to overcome this research gap, we examined the relationship between tourists' experience regarding ecological aspects of the offer and their satisfaction. In this context, the current theoretical framework proposes that the satisfaction corresponds to tourists' perception of the achieved experience related to the destination's eco-friendly attributes.

In the next section, we will review the relevant literature on sustainable tourism potential and the tourist experience, taking into account its dimensions and their impact on tourist satisfaction.

Literature overview

Eco-friendly destination attributes

Eco-friendly destination motives provide a wide range of services that ensure the fulfillment of the specific interests of tourists during their stay

at a certain destination; thus, sustainable attractions are becoming an indispensable segment of the modern tourist offer (Moise et al., 2021). According to Dolnicar & Long (2009), eco-friendly features of a destination are defined as contents whose purpose is to satisfy the demands of tourists by providing them with active recreation and participative experience, whereas not neglecting the demands of the environment. These features combine motives related to culture, leisure and natural attractions, and therefore are been increasingly treated as a need of the modern tourist, on the one hand, and a critical mechanism for increasing tourist satisfaction, on the other (Pekovic, 2021)

Tourist experience

Experience represents a specific system that in recent years has become the focus of numerous theorists and practitioners from distinctive scientific disciplines (Jain et al., 2017). Therefore, the circumstance according to which there are differentiated approaches to the conceptualization of this phenomenon is justified. As Mehmetoglu and Engen (2011) stated, experiences ensure personal development since without a permanent process of multifunctional engagement and learning, the possibility of self-knowledge and mental progress remains neglected. Precisely, the experience in tourism is distinguished from everyday life and is treated as a paradoxical phenomenon to the conception of the usual experience (Cohen, 1979). In fact, nowadays the experience of tourists represents a socially determined concept that integrates different conceptions of multiple components of the overall experience of tourists during their stay at a certain destination (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2007). One of the more complete interpretations of the experience was given by Morgan et al. (2010), who emphasize that the tourist experience is a complex cognitive process that includes an intangible component and is based on the ones' personal impression. Accordingly, O'Dell & Billing (2005) conceptualize experience as a phenomenon characterized by a subjective orientation that includes individual experiences on the affective, spiritual and physical levels (Pine & Gilmore, 2011). The results of the study by Schmitt (1999) indicate that the experience in tourism includes five different dimensions including social, cognitive, behavioral, sensory and emotional experiential dimensions.

Effects of tourist experience on satisfaction

Due to the continuous expansion of the tourism market, understanding the factors that can determine tourist satisfaction becomes imperative (Roy et

al., 2016). In the context of modern tourist product, satisfaction is mainly assessed through the characteristics of the tourist offer (Eusebio & Vieira, 2013). Precisely, analyzing the attributes of the destination that may determine tourist satisfaction, Tang et al. (2019) suggest that postmodern consumers in tourism are increasingly seeking sustainable destinations through visiting protected attractiveness that are characterized by an authentic experience and a specific cultural footprint. Accordingly, Albayrak & Caber (2013) indicated that the socio-cultural and environmental attributes of a destination have a significant effect on tourists' overall travel satisfaction. In line with this attitude, some authors (Cheng et al., 2018) pointed out that the experience of staying in sustainable destinations can represent an important predictor of multiple tourists' outcomes. In this regard, Breiby et al. (2020) reveal how the innovative experience of joint engagement in sustainable activities through interaction with other participants in tourism initiates a strong delight of the individual, whereby the gained experience is understood as an essential mechanism for improving one's own personality through the generation of specific values and satisfaction. From the above, it follows that attractions whose development idea supports the concept of sustainability can provide a specific value for tourists whose aspiration gravitates towards the achievement of a quality experience that generates satisfaction (Chia-Jung & Pei-Chun, 2014).

Considering the increasing importance of the concept of destination sustainability for tourist satisfaction, it is necessary to understand the perceptions and satisfaction levels that tourists have regarding their experiences in consuming the destination's green product. Accordingly, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 1a: Sensory tourist experience provoked by eco-friendly attributes of a destination has positive impact on satisfaction

Hypothesis 1b: Social tourist experience provoked by eco-friendly attributes of a destination has positive impact on satisfaction

Hypothesis 1c: Emotional tourist experience provoked by eco-friendly attributes of a destination has positive impact on satisfaction

Methodology

Within this research, we will examine how the tourists' experience provoked by eco-friendly features of a destination affects tourist satisfaction. In order to provide more comprehensive interpretation of results, descriptive statistics was used, whereas Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient (PPMCC) was used as an empirical method. Pearson's correlation coefficient examines the correlation between continuous variables and includes a set of statistical methods that investigate the strength of the relationship between observed phenomena. This method is used to measure the strength and direction of the linear statistical association between two variables and thus, it can provide a new perspective in data analysis and provide potential solutions for improving research.

Results and discussion

Based on the results of descriptive statistics, it is concluded that the overall impression of the respondents regarding their stay in Montenegro is at a high level. One of the possible reasons for this may point to satisfaction with the offer of eco-friendly programs. In fact, the results show that 95% of respondents are satisfied with the offer of green programs in the destination. It is important to point out that satisfaction with the quality of the offer of green programs in Montenegro is extremely valued, and is as high as 100%. In addition to the above, tourists expressed an extremely positive attitude regarding the overall experience with the offer of eco-friendly features in the destination, i.e. 95%. Namely, during their stay at the destination, positive emotions prevailed for the respondents, while their expectations were fully or partially met by up to 85%. Also, competence and professionalism in the context of practicing sustainable principles, as some of the competencies of employees at the destination, are at a satisfactory level. The obtained results indicate that tourists allocated a significant amount of money for eco-friendly activities in the tourist destination of Montenegro.

The presentation of descriptive statistics for all used variables is given in Table 1, together with their description. Table 1 shows basic statistical parameters such as arithmetic mean, standard deviation, minimum and maximum.

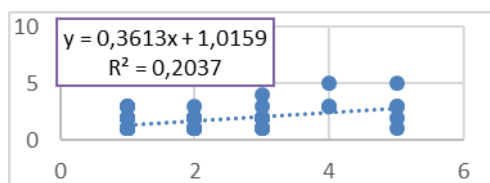
Table 1: *Definition of variables and descriptive statistics (N=80)*

Variables	Definition (continuous variable)	AS*	SD**	Min	Max
Tourist satisfaction	Evaluate satisfaction with green programs offer at the destination.	1.73	0.93	1.00	5.00
Physical environment	Did the physical environment make you want to leave the destination?	1.65	0.99	1.00	5.00
Cleanliness	Is the environment clean?	1.56	0.91	1.00	5.00
Professionalism	Are the employees professional?	2.20	1.44	1.00	5.00
Sustainable practices	Do employees follow sustainable practices at work?	1.66	0.98	1.00	5.00
Pleasure	Did you feel strong pleasure during visiting the destination?	1.71	1.00	1.00	5.00
Fulfillment	Have your expectations been met?	1.59	0.81	1.00	4.00

Source: *Authors' elaboration based on available data*

The correlation between the physical environment and tourists' satisfaction with the offer of green programs at the destination is medium strong and positive. Therefore, we can conclude that the physical environment significantly affects the satisfaction of tourists with the offer of green programs at the destination.

Figure 1: *Scatter diagram and linear regression between the destination's physical environment and tourists' satisfaction with the offer of green programs*

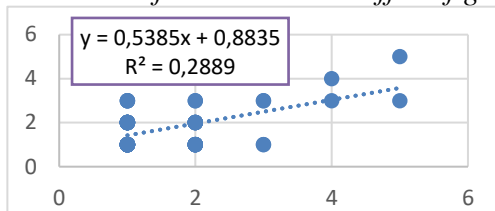


Source: *Authors' elaboration based on available data*

The correlation between cleanliness and tourist satisfaction with the offer of green programs is medium strong and positive. Therefore, cleanliness significantly affects tourists' satisfaction with the offer of green programs at the destination.

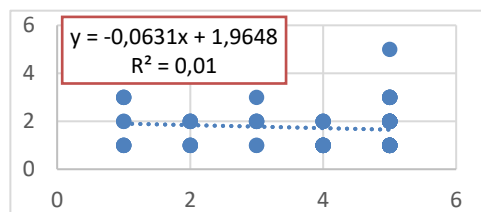
The correlation between the professionalism of employees and the satisfaction of tourists with the offer of green programs at the destination is insignificant and negative. Therefore, the professionalism of employees negatively affects the tourists' satisfaction with the green programs offer.

Figure 2: Scatter diagram and linear regression between the destination's cleanliness and tourists' satisfaction with the offer of green programs



Source: Authors' elaboration based on available data

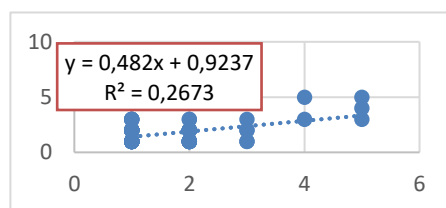
Figure 3: Scatter diagram and linear regression between the professionalism of employees and tourists' satisfaction with the offer of green programs



Source: Authors' elaboration based on available data

The correlation between the sustainable practices of employees and the satisfaction of tourists with the offer of green programs in Montenegro is medium strong and positive. Therefore, we can conclude that sustainable practices employed by employees affect the tourists' satisfaction with the offer of green programs at the destination.

Figure 4: Scatter diagram and linear regression between the sustainable practices of employees and tourists' satisfaction with the offer of green programs

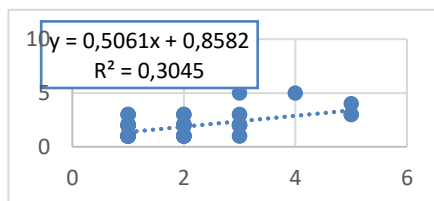


Source: Authors' elaboration based on available data

The correlation between tourists' pleasure with visiting the destination and satisfaction with the offer of green programs in Montenegro is medium strong and positive. Accordingly, it is evident that the pleasure with

visiting the destination significantly affects the tourists' satisfaction with the overall offer of green attributes at the destination.

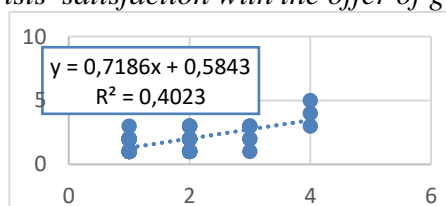
Figure 5: Scatter diagram and linear regression between the tourists' pleasure with visiting destination and tourists' satisfaction with the offer of green programs



Source: Authors' elaboration based on available data

The correlation between the feeling of fulfillment and satisfaction of tourists with the offer of green programs at the destination is relatively strong and positive. It follows from the above that the feeling of fulfillment significantly affects the satisfaction of tourists with the offer of green potential at the destination

Figure 6: Scatter diagram and linear regression between the feeling of fulfillment and tourists' satisfaction with the offer of green programs



Source: Authors' elaboration based on available data

The results from Table 2 indicate that the variables that show stronger statistical significance include physical environment, cleanliness, sustainable practices, satisfaction, and fulfillment, while on the other hand, the variable that shows slight significance refers to professionalism.

Based on the correlation analysis, we conclude that the relationship between the variables related to the physical environment, cleanliness, sustainable practices of employees, satisfaction and fulfillment on the one hand and tourist satisfaction with the offer of green attributes of the destination on the other hand, is positive. Observing the results, it is evident that the variable related to professionalism has a negative correlation with tourists' satisfaction with the offer of green programs.

Table 2: *Pearson correlation coefficient and p-value (N=80)*

Measurement path	Pearson coefficient, r	T-Statistic	Degree of Freedom	p-value
Sensory experience				
□ Physical environment	0.52	5.37	78	9.11E-07
□ Cleanless	0.54	5.63	78	2.74E-07
Social experience				
□ Professionalism	-0.10	-0.89	78	0,38
□ Sustainable practices	0.52	5.33	78	2.65E-05
Emotional experience				
□ Satisfaction	0.55	5.84	78	1.12E-07
□ Fulfillment	0.63	7.25	78	2.67E-10

Source: *Authors' elaboration based on available data*

The obtained results show that a positive experience of consumers in tourism provoked by offering eco-friendly attributes can generate a high level of consumer satisfaction in tourism. Based on the above, it is evident that the design of a quality program of environmental friendly activities in tourism leads to the creation of a context in which, through positive sensory, emotional and social stimuli, the value of the tourism experience is generated, which in turn results in a high level of satisfaction of the consumers of tourist services.

Conclusion

Due to the continuous pressure that the tourism industry reflects on the environment, multiple environmental challenges accompany the postmodern socio-cultural context. Therefore, as a result, an innovative system based on the principles of environmental protection known as green tourism has arisen (Andari & Setiyorini, 2016). Precisely, green tourism, as a logical consequence of modern global tendencies is understood as a positive approach that stimulates long-term well-being for the environment, destination, actors in tourism activities and in general modern society (Newton, 2015). As stated by Kebete and Wondirad (2019), this innovative form of tourism refers to the managing of tourist attractions in a way that initiates the preservation of cultural identity while fulfilling the basic economic, social and ecological interests of a certain community. Therefore, eco-friendly potentials as a dominant aspect of the offer of sustainable tourism are recognized as an important motive for tourist travel and an important catalyst for the overall prosperity of the destination (Pekovic, 2021). The tourism industry has identified the importance of the synergy between the sustainability and

entertainment in the function of raising the level of tourist satisfaction (Chia-Jung, & Pei-Chun, 2014) and encouraging their loyalty to the destination (Kusumah, 2023). However, we are facing a lack of knowledge on the importance of the tourist experience provoked by eco-friendly features of a destination attributes of the destination for the satisfaction of tourists in Montenegro, since the mentioned component has not been sufficiently researched and analyzed in the previous literature.

According to the aforementioned, in this paper we analyzed the importance of offering green programs for the tourist experience and its effect on satisfaction, that is, whether and how the tourist experience related to the mentioned activities affects tourist satisfaction. Based on the results obtained using the Pearson's correlation coefficient method, we conclude that there is a statistically significant correlation between the experience of tourists in the domain sustainable activities, on the one hand, and the satisfaction of tourists on the other. In fact, the obtained results suggest that Hypothesis 1a is confirmed, that is, that the sensory experience of tourists related to eco-friendly activities has a statistically significant and positive effect on tourist satisfaction. Also, both Hypothesis 1b and Hypothesis 1c were confirmed, i.e. the social and emotional experience of tourists with the offer of eco-friendly destination features has a statistically significant and positive effect on the satisfaction of tourists in the destination.

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