

# DOCTORAL DISSERTATION SUMMARY: THE INTERDEPENDENCE OF TOURIST EXPERIENCE AND ENVIRONMENTALLY RESPONSIBLE BEHAVIOUR OF TOURISTS IN CAMPSITES

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# THE INTERDEPENDENCE OF TOURIST EXPERIENCE AND ENVIRONMENTALLY RESPONSIBLE BEHAVIOUR OF TOURISTS IN CAMPSITES

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## SUMMARY

### **Purpose**

Camping tourism is a form of special-interest nature tourism (Mikulić, et al., 2017). It has been recognised as a growing segment of the tourism industry. Camping industry trends have shifted from standard camps, involving only tents and campfires, to new and innovative types of accommodation, i.e., mobile houses and glamping tents of different sizes and designs. As a result, the ecological awareness of camping tourists is on the rise. Camping tourists like to be in nature, socialise and look for new experiences, and be involved in various recreational activities, provided they can enjoy all the comforts of home.

This doctoral dissertation focuses on environmental responsibility from the aspect of tourist behaviour in campsites. When staying in campsites, tourists have various experiences and show either satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their stay. Thus, the issue is whether the tourists' campsite experience can influence their environmentally responsible behaviour in the campsite.

There is insufficient research to prove the relationship between different tourist experience dimensions, such as entertainment, aesthetics, education, and escapism (according to Pine and Gilmore, 1998) acquired in a specific destination and environmentally responsible behaviour. There is even less research on the specific context of camping

tourism, which is defined as a research problem. Thus, this doctoral dissertation investigates the interdependence of the tourist experience, tourists' satisfaction with their stay in campsites, their environmentally responsible behaviour in campsites, and the influence that the tourists' environmental attitudes have on the relationship between the tourist experience and environmentally responsible behaviour. The assumption is that the various dimensions of the tourist experience have a positive impact on tourist satisfaction with the stay in a campsite and the environmentally responsible behaviour of tourists. The relationship between the tourist experience and environmentally responsible behaviour is also affected by the mediatory influence of the tourists' attitudes towards the environment. The research investigates entertainment, aesthetics, education and escapism as the dimensions of the tourist experience and explores specific environmentally responsible behaviour.

The purpose of the research was to investigate the relationship between different tourist experience dimensions of campsite visitors, satisfaction with the stay in a campsite, tourists' environmental attitudes, and their specific environmentally responsible behaviour. To achieve the purposes of this research, the scientific objectives of the research were to: 1) scientifically define the basic concepts: tourist experience, tourist satisfaction with the stay in a campsite, environmental attitude, and environmentally responsible behaviour; 2) develop a conceptual model of the interdependence of the tourist experience, tourist satisfaction with the stay in a campsite, environmental attitude, and tourists' environmentally responsible behaviour; and 3) test a conceptual model and determine the relationship between the basic constructs and the mediatory influence of tourists' environmental attitude. In terms of applying research findings, the dissertation aims to identify the dimensions of the tourist experience that have the most significant effect on tourist satisfaction with the stay in a campsite and on the environmentally responsible behaviour of tourists.

Following the research objectives, the primary scientific hypothesis was defined: Based on theoretical and empirical findings, a positive relationship can be established between the dimensions of the tourist experience of campsite visitors, their satisfaction with their stay in a campsite, and their environmentally responsible behaviour. In addition, four auxiliary hypotheses, incorporated into the conceptual model, were developed to prove the primary hypothesis.

### **Methodology**

In this thesis, several scientific methods were applied: inductive and deductive method, method of analysis and synthesis, method of generalisation and specialisation, methods of description, classification and compilation, method of proof and refutation, method of abstraction and concretisation, comparative method, survey method, and statistical method.

Empirical research was conducted to test the auxiliary hypotheses and the conceptual model. First, a highly structured questionnaire was designed, using scales from relevant and previously published research. A total of 54 variables were used in the questionnaire

to measure the constructs “tourist experience” (14 variables), “tourist satisfaction with the stay in a campsite” (3 variables), “environmental attitude” (9 variables) and “environmentally responsible behaviour” (28 variables). The attitudes of the examinees were measured using a 7-point Likert scale (1 – I completely disagree; 7- I completely agree). The questionnaire also consisted of questions referring to the socio-demographic profile of the respondents, travel characteristics, and characteristics of the stay in the campsite. The developed questionnaire was subjected to content validation by experts and students and adjusted in compliance with their reviews. Upon validation, a second version of the questionnaire was created and tested. The pilot test was conducted using the paper and pencil method on a convenience sample (N=140). Following the pilot test, six variables, which proved less significant for conducting the main research, were eliminated from the construct “environmentally responsible behaviour”. Therefore, the final survey questionnaire comprised 48 variables, which measured the constructs.

The main research was conducted using the paper and pencil method on a sample of campsite tourists. The data were collected in 17 continental campsites and 41 coastal campsites in Croatia from 1 May 2019 to 31 October 2019. A total of 1500 surveys were handed out. After verifying they were filled out with readable data, a total of 932 were retained, making a return rate of 62.13%.

The collected data were analysed using univariate, bivariate and multivariate statistical methods. The reliability of the measuring instrument was analysed using the Cronbach alpha coefficient of internal consistency, and the dimensionality of the measuring scales was analysed using exploratory factor analysis. Structural modelling, using partial least square structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM), was applied to test the conceptual model on empirical data.

## Findings

The conceptual model was tested using the PLS-SEM methodology. The structural model (internal) consists of three exogenous latent variables: “tourist experience”, “environmental attitude”, “tourist satisfaction with the stay in a campsite”, and one endogenous latent variable named “environmentally responsible behaviour”. The measurement model consists of six exogenous reflective variables: “education”, “aesthetics”, “entertainment”, “tourist satisfaction with the stay in a campsite”, “real growth limits”, “natural balance vulnerability”, and two endogenous reflective variables “influence on other tourists in the campsite” and “sustainable behaviour in the campsite”. The reflective variables in the measurement model were designed as linear composites based on previously performed analyses.

The evaluation of the model was performed in two steps: first, the measurement model was evaluated, and then the structural model. Finally, the hypotheses were tested. Evaluation of a measurement model includes external saturation estimation, composite reliability (CR), indicator reliability and average variance extracted (AVE). The Fornell-Larcker criterion, cross-loadings and the Heterotrait-Monotrait correlation ratio (HTMT) are used to assess discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2017). Based on the

conducted analyses, the dimension “escapism” was excluded from the construct “tourist experience” as well as the dimension “responsible behaviour towards flora and fauna”, as the external saturations were below 0.708 (Hair et al., 2017). The external saturations of other constructs range from 0.749 to 1.000. Using the Bootstrapping method, it was assessed that all the constructs in the model are significant at the level of 0.001. Internal composite reliability was confirmed as all values of composite reliability range between 0.820 and 1.000 and are above 0.70, as recommended by Hair et al. (2017). The Cronbach alpha coefficient ranges from 0.575 to 1.000. The AVE index ranges from 0.657 to 1.000. The values of the Fornell-Larcker criteria range from 0.811 to 1.000 and exceed all the correlations with other constructs.

After assessing the measurement model, the structural model was evaluated, and the hypotheses were tested. An analysis of the relationships in the structural model shows that all the models’ relationships are significant and relevant, except for the relationship between the construct “tourist satisfaction with the stay in a campsite” and “environmentally responsible behaviour”. Therefore, three of the four auxiliary hypotheses are confirmed. The determination coefficient ( $R^2$ ) point to a moderate effect for the construct “tourist satisfaction with the stay in a campsite” (0.496) and a weak effect for the constructs “environmentally responsible behaviour” (0.198) and “environmental attitude” (0.030). The  $f^2$  indicator of effect size points to the strong effect of the construct “tourist satisfaction with the stay in a campsite” and the weak effect of other constructs. The model is predictively relevant since all the values are  $Q^2 > 0$ , pointing to a satisfactory level of the predictive meaning of the path model.

The research has certain limitations which should be considered when generalising the results. The limitations refer to the research sample, the period of the empirical research, the questionnaire and the measurement scales, and the partial inability to compare the research results with previous research. Thus, future research will require a more detailed investigation of the relationship between tourist satisfaction and environmentally responsible behaviour in campsites, as this research did not confirm this relationship. Furthermore, other constructs, such as place attachment, tourist involvement in activities, experience co-creation, environmental training, and others, could also be included in the model. Moreover, it would be necessary to investigate why “aesthetics”, as a dimension of the tourist experience, does not influence the environmentally responsible behaviour of tourists in campsites. The research presented in this doctoral dissertation could be a starting point for future research.

### **The originality of the research**

The research conducted has theoretical, methodological and managerial implications. The scientific contribution of the research is the development of theory concerning the relationship between “tourist experience”, “tourist satisfaction with the stay in a campsite”, “environmental attitude”, and “environmentally responsible behaviour”, considering the relatively small number of papers dealing with these relationships. Another contribution is a review and the critical analysis of previous conceptual and empirical research on the research subject and the construction of a conceptual model for

measuring the relationships between the mentioned constructs. A measurement instrument was designed for this research and adapted to a specific context. The adaptation and testing of the metric characteristics of the research instruments can also be considered a scientific contribution in a theoretical sense. Testing the conceptual model and proving the hypothesis confirmed the interdependency of the dimensions “tourist experience” and “environmentally responsible behaviour” of tourists in campsites. Thus, this research represents a starting point for future scientific research. The methodological contribution of the research is the verification of the set hypotheses and the testing of the conceptual model using the empirical data and the partial least square structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM). A notable contribution is that it proves the indirect influence of the mediator variable “environmental attitude”, which mediates the relationship between “tourist experience” and “environmentally responsible behaviour”. In the applicability sense, the contribution is based on the proposals to help managers improve and enhance the tourist experience and the environmentally responsible behaviour of tourists in campsites.

**Keywords** tourist experience, tourist satisfaction, environmental attitude, environmentally responsible behaviour, campsite

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