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THE PERCEPTION OF LOCAL RESIDENTS ON QUALITY OF LEISURE ACTIVITIES IN TOURISM DESTINATION

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Abstract

Purpose – Leisure organization is an important influential factor for the quality of life of local residents as well as for the guest satisfaction in a tourism destination. The aim of this study is to explore the attitudes of the local population on leisure and their perception of the quality of organized leisure activities, through activities, events and facilities. .

Methodology – The research was carried out on the example of the Wild Plants Festival, an event organized in the municipality of Kršan in Istria. Following the analysis of secondary data that defined the theoretical basis, a structured questionnaire for visitors of the Wild Plants Festival was conducted.

Findings – The organization of leisure activities contributes to the quality of life for local residents, who play an important role on the tourism market as they participate in tourism activities providing the accommodation services. The results obtained also point to the importance of leisure activities for enhancing visitor's satisfaction, the attractiveness of tourism destination and as a basis for creating a tourism experience.

Contribution – The paper represents a valuable contribution to the research of the leisure organization. The study of leisure organization and the impact on the satisfaction of visitors to a tourist event extends theoretical knowledge and enriches the scientific literature dealing with the topic mentioned above. The paper can be useful for the destination stakeholders and represents a starting point for the future research in the field of leisure organization.

Keywords leisure organization, tourism events, tourism manifestations, leisure activities

INTRODUCTION

Tourist destination and accommodation offer are one pervasive component of leisure and tourism. Changes on the world market, triggered by globalisation created a demanding tourist with new and special needs, who is familiar with and well informed on new solutions in the tourist offer. Leisure and tourism include encounters with tourist destination and accommodation offer. Encounters with other people and material things, imagination and memory occur in places (Crouch, 2010). Tourism has an effect on local sociocultural characteristics, affecting the habits, customs, social life, beliefs and values of the inhabitants of the tourist destination (Almeida et. al, 2015.).

The paper analyses organized leisure activity, its significance for the local population and tourist development of the destination. Event-based offerings are an important factor in choosing a tourism destination, but also the accommodation facility itself. Many leisure service providers, particularly those in the private sector, have already through

trial and error, developed "theories" or rules of thumb to enhance the experiences of their customers, and insure a clientele willing to return again and again (Mannell and Iso-Ahola, 1987).

In order to prove the importance of the organization of leisure time in tourism, the authors based their research on the analysis of attitudes and perceptions of the quality of organized leisure activities on the example of the Wild Plants Festival in Istria. The authors focus on the following questions: what is the typical pattern of leisure time of local residents in tourism destinations and how they perceive the value of organized leisure activities. Since the majority of the local population in the Municipality of Kršan offers accommodation in holiday rentals (thus it is included in tourism activities) the assessment of perceived value is an important guideline for the design of a complete tourism product and the promotion of a tourism destination. Researching the habits of the local population and the potentials of the leisure organization the authors seek for the solutions applicable in practice that can create a better tourism product.

1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

1.1. Accommodation offer

New trends in tourism demand indicate the need for new and sophisticated tourist accommodations, offering extraordinary experiences (Portolan, 2010). Accommodation facilities, as an integral part of tourist offer, are an important factor which affects tourist experience. On tourist travel, accommodation facilities form a basis from which tourists can take part in different activities, as well as use different services and products in the destination, discuss Heyes et al. (2014), and Floričić and Pavia (2018).

The development of accommodation offer depends on the quality and innovativeness of all elements of the offering. Innovation in tourism and hospitality refers to the designing of new products, services or processes (Mrnjavac et al. 2018). Apart from the primary accommodation services, in choosing an accommodation facility, tourists also purchase an experience. According Camilo et al. (2015) tourists are not interested only accommodation offers, by taking part in numerous activities, they wish to experience the local lifestyle. Accommodation facilities can design their offer in cooperation with the local community, offering various services and products, thus accordingly also thematising their offer related to different events, historical heritage, gastronomic offer, etc. in order to attract tourists. Tourists want to learn about local cultures and traditions, but they also want all the amenities they are used to. Unique, personalised services, capable of providing tourists with a special experience and a high level of satisfaction, will most definitely ensure repeat visits of tourists to the destination and the accommodation facility (Pavia and Floričić, 2017). Accommodation offer has entered the phase when lodging, food and favourable climate, are not crucial to be factors which influence the decision of a contemporary tourist to visit the tourist destination. The providers of accommodation services in synergy with other destination stakeholders, can ensure a high level of satisfaction by organization of leisure activities for tourists through various facilities, activities and events.

1.2. Leisure and tourism experiences

Although there are different interpretations when defining the term “leisure”, most authors consider it a time to use positive social content for activities, education, cultural development and generally personal development (Jaković, 1973; Livazović, 2018; Nahrestedt, 1990). Leisure refers to a state of being, a condition of man, which few desire and fewer achieve (de Grazia, 1962).

Leisure activities provide various opportunities such as: rest and relaxation, but also active participation and activities that focus on personal growth and development. Leisure in tourism is a set of experiences at the destination level and is closely linked to creating a positive experience for tourists.

Tourist trips accelerate life and enrich it by new experiences. Today, more and more people are craving for movement, travel and new experiences, so it can be concluded that the tourism experience is the result of a series of ideas, activities and details. Leisure is based on the needs of tourists to learn, discover, or undergo unique experiences. Increasingly, tourists are seeking innovative alternatives, authentic tourism offerings, and experiences based on authenticity and sustainability (Mrnjavac et al., 2018). Leisure and tourist experiences are often viewed as quite unique or special. When "touristic" or "leisure" experiences are discussed, frequently more is being suggested than simply the experience accompanying the engagement or episode (Mannell and Iso-Ahola, 1987).

One of the ways of motivating guests to visit a tourist destination are leisure activities. (Lia et al., 2016), and Kontošić et al. (2017) and Pavia et al. (2018) highlight the impact of leisure organisation on the creation of innovative tourist and accommodation offer, Rapid urbanization has increased the longing for rural and traditional life (Akgunduz and Coşar, 2018). Changes in consumer behaviour have led tourists to search for novelty and different experience. Events represent an important motivation factor in tourism, and stands within the development schemes of a tourism destination, producing a competitive advantage as compared to other holiday destinations (Ispas and Hertanu, 2011) Events are both animators of destination attractiveness but more fundamentally as key marketing propositions in the promotion of places given the increasingly global competitiveness to attract visitor spending (Getzs and Page, 2016). The events have for a long time been viewed as a tool for tourism development, because visitors increase demand. The growing role of events in tourist offers is the result of the increasing interest in travel related to participation in a specific event (Panfiluk, 2015).

1.3. The characteristics of tourism offer of the Kršan municipality

Accommodation offer in the municipality of Kršan, located in the central part of the eastern coastal region of Istria, is characterized by strong growth and development, which is reflected in the increase of quality and number of beds in holiday rentals. In recent years, more than 50 luxury holiday homes have been put into business, which have significantly influenced the increase in the overall accommodation offer, as well as its quality. At the end of 2018, 148 private renters were registered in the municipality of Kršan, disposing of 780 permanent beds, with the possibility of increasing the accommodation capacity with auxiliary beds to approximately 1,000 beds. Hotel

accommodation in the total number of accommodation units makes up only 2.6% of the share (1 hotel with 20 permanent beds).

The main objective of tourism development in the municipality of Kršan is to increase, integrate and diversify its offer and services, and thus market visibility in terms of shaping innovative tourism offer. The target groups of guests are tourists who use a multi-day stay in a tourist destination, and guests who travel for short breaks and visits, and finally guests staying in the destination: Rabac, Moscenicka Draga, Lovran, Opatija.

The events are one of the innovative factors of tourism and accommodation offer in the Kršan municipality. One of the manifestations is the "Festival of wild herbs", which involves attracting visitors to the destination, especially since they are animated during the pre-season, valorizing the accommodation offer in the Kršan municipality in terms of educating the preparation of autochthonous dishes using native natural ingredients - wild herbs, valorisation of other forms of wildlife related activities as well as the visitor education and animation. The organization of events in the Municipality of Kršan attracts domestic and foreign visitors. During the year 2019 in the Municipality of Kršan there were 70.300 overnights or 8.963 arrivals. Accommodation services are provided by 1 hotel offering 20 rooms, 86 holiday apartments and 62 holiday homes, with a total of 780 main beds. In the whole municipality the average length of stay of tourists is 7 nights.

2. MATERIAL, METHODS AND RESEARCH DESIGN

The basic research method for this paper refers to structured questionnaire. The sample can be considered convenient and the respondents are visitors of the Festival of wild plants held in the Municipality of Kršan. The convenience of the sample is the result of the author's estimation that the cooperativeness of the respondents in the research is more important than the usual sampling strategy, since it is about collecting answers at the time that the respondents set aside for leisure, entertainment or the escape from the usual daily routine. Participation in the survey was voluntary and anonymous and was conducted for two days in a row, during the festival, April 27-28, 2019.

The sample consists of 109 respondents and the questionnaire is divided into two parts. The first part deals with the sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents and general information such as: number of visits to the Festival so far, accompanying visits, the way of gathering information and motives for the visit. The second part analyzes the respondents' perceptions of leisure, the frequency and habits of leisure, and the respondents' satisfaction with the organization, content and offer of the Festival of Wild Plants. The concluding part of the questionnaire examines the intention of re-visits and recommendations to friends and acquaintances. Respondents' perceptions were assessed using the Likert scale from 1 to 5, where 1 meant totally disagree and 5 completely agree. The frequency of participation in leisure activities was rated on a six-point scale (1 - never, and 6 - daily). Satisfaction with quality aspects of the Festival of Wild Plants was also rated by the Likert scale, where 1 refers to being extremely dissatisfied and 5 being extremely satisfied.

3. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The questionnaire included 109 respondents, of whom 69 were women (63%) and 40 (37%) were men. By age structure, 13 (12%) respondents in the 18-24 age group filled in the survey, 41 (38%) in the 25-34 age group, 30 (28%) in the 35-44 age group, 12 (11%) are in the 45-54 age group. A total of 8 respondents in the 55-64 age group (7%) and 5 (5%) respondents over 56 completed the survey. It can be concluded that the majority of stakeholders are in the 25-34 age group.

From the total of 109 respondents, 104 come from Croatia (95%), while 5 from Slovenia (5%).

Regarding the education level 59 respondents have a secondary school diploma (54%), 39 have completed university degree (36%), 9 have a postgraduate degree (8%) and 2 have only completed primary school.

The availability of leisure time during the day is estimated by the following: up to 2 hours there are a total of 30 respondents (28%), 19 (17%) respondents 3 to 4 hours daily and over 4 hours daily there are a total of 60 respondents (55%).

When asked how many times they visited the Festival of Wild Plants 46% of the respondents visited the Festival for the first time, 24% visited the Festival six or more times, 22% from three to five times, and 8% of the respondents visited the Festival for the second time. The majority of visitors to the Festival come with a family member (46%) 38% come with friends 9% of with a partner, 6% with children while only 1% of respondents come alone.

Regarding the way of informing about the Festival of Wild Plants, the respondents are most often informed via the Internet, social networks and through the recommendation of relatives, friends or locals. The smallest number of respondents gets information through brochures, posters and advertisements.

When it comes to motives for arrival, the majority of respondents come for the gastronomic offer, curiosity and quality leisure time. The smallest number of respondents comes to the event to learn about the culture of the destination or for the purposes of rest and relaxation.

Table 1 shows the degrees of agreement with the statements that assess respondents' perceptions of leisure time. Claims were rated on a Likert scale of 1 to 5, with 1 totally disagrees and 5 completely agree.

Tables 1: **The perception of leisure**

Activity	Average grade
Leisure affects the quality of life.	4,63
I'm satisfied by the way I use my leisure time.	4,08
The quality of leisure time depends on its organization	4,18

Source: Authors' research (April 2019)

From Table 1 it can be concluded that all claims are rated high, with respondents completely agreeing that Leisure affects the quality of life. They also show a high degree of agreement (I agree) with the claim that the quality of leisure time depends on their organization and also state that they are satisfied with the way they use their leisure time.

The following is Table 2 in which information about the respondents' habits and frequency of participation in leisure activities is presented.

Tables 2: **The frequency of participation in leisure activities**

Activity	Never	2-3 times a year	Once a month	2-3 times a month	2-3 times a week	Every day
Doing sports	15	8	38	17	28	3
Listening to music	0	1	5	4	19	80
Visiting a cinema or theatre	65	33	37	4	0	0
Visiting the bars and cafes	0	5	30	25	39	10
Watching TV	0	0	4	0	15	90
Reading books	82	15	5	4	3	0
Social networks	1	0	3	0	11	94
Going on excursions	82	19	5	3	0	0
Attending public lectures	89	19	0	1	0	0
Going to church	22	40	35	10	2	0
Political activities	91	11	3	3	1	0
Humanitarian work	74	5	13	14	3	0
Household and / or family responsibilities	0	3	7	8	11	80
Hanging out with friends	0	0	12	5	29	63

Source: Authors' research (April 2019)

Table 2 shows that passive and not organized is the most common form of leisure for respondents, as evidenced by the fact that most respondents listen to music every day (73%), watch TV (83%), visit social networks (86%), hang out with friends (58%) and participate in household and family responsibilities (73%).

A slightly lower frequency (2 to 3 times per week) was expressed in the following activities: doing sports (26%), listening to music (17%), visiting cafes (36%) and hanging out with friends (27%).

Two to three times a month respondents are doing sports 16%, visit cafes 23%, goes to church 9% and engages in humanitarian work 13%.

The frequency of the following activities marked once a month is mostly related to playing sports 35%, visiting cinema or theatre 34%, visiting cafes 28%, going to church 32%.

Only 2 to 3 times a year, 30% of the respondents attend cinemas and theatres, 17% go to excursions or public lectures, and 37% attend church.

There is an extremely high proportion of respondents who never use leisure time in organized activities or for the reading. As many as 75% never go to the excursions, 76% never read books and 60% never visit cinemas or theatres.

Summarizing the data after the conducted survey, it can be concluded that the respondents relatively poorly practice or participate in the activities of educational or cultural character and that the emphasis is on social but passive forms of leisure.

Responses related to the frequency of doing sports were relatively properly distributed. The following is Table 3, which presents the results of the respondents' satisfaction with various aspects of the Festival of wild plants. The responses were graded using the Likert scale where 1 means being extremely dissatisfied and 5 being extremely satisfied.

Tables 3: **Satisfaction with the aspects of quality of the Festival of wild plants**

The aspects of quality	Average grade
Employee service	4,2
Professionalism of employees	4,6
Suitability of the venue	4,5
Cleanliness of the venue	4,8
Atmosphere at manifestation	4,9
The quality of the entertainment program	4,4
Availability of parking places	4,0
Manifestation information system	4,2
Gastronomic offer	4,4

Source: Authors' research (April 2019)

Respondents show an exceptionally high level of satisfaction in almost all aspects of the Festival, with the exception of: courtesy of the staff, quality of the entertainment program, availability of parking spaces, information system and gastronomic offer, which are rated: satisfied.

In the concluding part of the questionnaire, the respondents stated their intention to visit again and recommend the festival to friends and acquaintances.

The intention of recommending the festival shows the following results: 41% of respondents would recommend the Festival of wild plants to friends and acquaintances, while 59% are likely to recommend the Festival.

Regarding the re-visit intention, 54% of respondents would return to the Festival, while 28% of respondents are likely to return, and 18% of respondents are unlikely to return to the Festival.

CONCLUSION

After a detailed theoretical analysis and an empirical research, conclusions are drawn that are important for scientific theory and practice. Although various opportunities for organized leisure are offered in the Kršan area, one of the main obstacles is the lack of awareness of their opportunities and benefits. Traditionally, passive leisure activities are considered to be the most appropriate form of leisure time and there is a very low awareness of the benefits of sports and especially cultural and artistic programs and contents.

The great potential of leisure organization for tourists are authentic experiences that include the experience of local life through gastronomy, cultural and artistic programmes and facilities, traditional crafts and customs, etc. that involve the participation of visitors rather than passive observation. Accordingly, it is necessary to involve the local population to participate more actively in the organization of leisure activities, since they participate in shaping the offer of the destination and creating an authentic experience of visitors by offering the accommodation services (mostly in holiday rentals). Although the local population spends leisure time very passively, it is important to emphasize that the experiential value of the tourism product is realized in major through the leisure organization. The organization of events and manifestations is necessary through visitors' participation, experience, emotions, interpretive guidance, storytelling and other immediate forms that emphasize the value of the local community.

Thus, it is important to continuously educate tourism and hospitality providers and promote and popularize various programs and content, which is why the role of destination managers is crucial. Because the respondents are mostly locals, the conclusions are focused on taking specific corrective (educational) measures for them, in order to raise awareness of the importance of their role as a destination manager, be it renters, hoteliers, restaurateurs and other providing any kind of goods or services that can be valorized in tourism. This is also a major limitation of the study, so future research should focus on DMOs and tourists, so the paper is a starting point for further research.

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