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# EKONOMIKA CESTOVNÉHO RUCHU A PODNIKANIE

**ECONOMY OF TOURISM AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP – SCIENTIFIC JOURNAL**

ŠPECIÁLNE VYDANIE PRI PRÍLEŽITOSTI XIV. MEDZINÁRODNEJ VEDECKEJ KONFERENCIE CURRENT TRENDS IN SPAS, HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM, VYDANÉ S PODPOROU PROJEKTU VEGA 1/0309/26 ODOLNÉ DESTINÁCIE CESTOVNÉHO RUCHU V KONTEXTE SIEŤOVANIA A POSILNENIA LOKÁLNEJ EKONOMIKY V OBDOBÍ GLOBÁLNYCH ZMIEN.

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# Urban development regimes and strategic diversification: the journey of Szolnok from heavy industry centre to the "Capital of River Tisza" brand

Róbert Bagdi[1] – Anita Mondok[2]

***Abstract***

*The paper analyses Szolnok's difficulty to evolve into a spa town within the context of historical growth. Despite the city's exceptional thermal water resources, the aspirations for a spa town in the 20th century encountered multiple setbacks. The optimistic advancements of the 1920s were obstructed by the economic downturn and the instability of the financial environment. In the socialist era, the theory of route dependency dominated: industrial and transportation goals led to the degradation of recreational functions into a social service system rather than fostering market-oriented tourism product growth. In contrast to regional competitors that established successful tourism clusters, developments in Szolnok were disjointed. The absence of financial resources following the regime transition and the considerable delays in the Tiszaliget project perpetuated the deficit. Today, Szolnok no longer seeks a singular identity as a spa town, but rather aims for a multifaceted, experience-oriented regional centre role.*

***Key words***

*Szolnok, spa town, city history, thermal water, settlement development*

**JEL Classification: L83, R11, R58**

## Introduction

Szolnok's geographical position at the junction of the Tisza and Zagyva rivers in the middle of the Hungarian Great Plain in Hungary, coupled with its substantial subterranean thermal water resources, theoretically renders the settlement appropriate for a spa resort of Central European significance (Csapó & Lenner, 2021). Numerous instances in the city's history can be pinpointed where the concept of a spa town was a crucial aspect of urban growth. Nonetheless, Szolnok's current tourist profile is predominantly centred on active tourism, cultural attractions, and transit traffic rather than thermal baths. The objective of the study is to investigate the determinants of unactualized potential.

## 1 Methodology

The research is grounded in a qualitative analysis of the historical development trajectory, which comprehensively investigates the economic, political, and infrastructural aspects affecting the evolution of a spa town. The analytical framework

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is established by established principles of regional science and tourism geography: (i) the theory of path dependency, which emphasises the enduring, constrained trajectory effects of prior political decisions (e.g., socialist industrialisation), (ii) the destination life cycle model, which investigates the absence of a critical mass of tourism supply and the phases of market integration, and (iii) urban competitiveness models, focusing on the coherence of specialised factors and strategic governance. In the paper, the authors conduct a comparative examination of the development trajectories of regional competitors and assess the influence mechanisms of contemporary urban development policies, particularly the Modern Cities Programme, on local spa infrastructure. The data gathering encompassed historical sources, statistical indicators (such as guest night counts and well yields), in addition to the most recent municipal strategic documents.

The paper employs a historical qualitative case study design (Table 1). This approach is uniquely suited for examining complex, long-term urban development trajectories within their real-world, historical contexts, where the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are highly intertwined. Szolnok is an ideal single-case study for this research as the city with exceptional natural thermal resources failed to transition into a spa town due to political-economic constraints (Adeyinka-Ojo et al., 2014).

**Tab 1**: The research pipeline overview

| **Phase / theory** | **Data sources used** | **Analytical objective and/or procedure** |
|---|---|---|
| **Path dependency** | Historical press, statistical releases, and local history papers. | Identifying historical critical junctures and the industrial lock-in mechanisms of the socialist administration. |
| **Destination life cycle** | Guest night volumes, bed capacities, and per capita local tourism tax records. | Mapping Szolnok's market evolution to determine why it stagnated at the inclusion phase while rivals achieved consolidation. |
| **Competitiveness & clusters** | Municipal Strategic Documents (2018, 2022) and Modern Cities Programme data. | Analyzing the institutional fragmentation of Szolnok's assets versus the unified, specialized tourism ecosystems of regional rivals. |

Source: Composed by the authors

The empirical focus of this research is restricted to a single-case study of Szolnok. While this approach facilitates a highly detailed, longitudinal qualitative exploration of the city's distinct historical and institutional trajectory, it limits the immediate generalizability of the findings to other medium-sized post-socialist or industrial transition cities facing similar structural barriers. Moreover, the data configuration for this study draws primarily from historical archival records, localized statistical

parameters (e.g., guest nights and well capacities), and municipal strategic documents. Consequently, the analysis is tethered to the accuracy and potential institutional biases embedded within official planning records and historical municipal reporting which should be considered as a limitation.

Internationally, there are numerous examples that could serve as a model for Szolnok. The spa towns of the former Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, where the transformation of traditional socio-economic frameworks (Steward, 2000; Steward, 2016) has led to the development of tourism based on natural resources (e.g., thermal water). Cultural heritage also has an important role in contemporary spa towns. (Kasagranda et al., 2016) Among other European examples, Montecatini Terme in Italy can be mentioned, which has gone through several developmental stages to reach the level of today's experience-driven urban brand. (Ganguly & Reudenbach, 2025) Kamena in Greece has evolved from traditional therapeutic baths to luxury wellness facilities. (Papageorgiou & Beriatos, 2011). The French town of Vichy had to renew itself several times, as it was one of the health centres of the French elite in the early 20th century, and thus became the seat of the collaborationist government during World War II. Today, Vichy has become a brand, while sports facilities and conference centres have been built in the city. (Gordon, 2012) We can still find positive examples even in the Southern Hemisphere. (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2024)

## 2 History of Szolnok's tourism development

### 2.1 Early recovery and interwar plans

The contemporary civic growth of Szolnok accelerated upon its designation as the county seat in 1876. The initial phase of advancements in tourism and recreation can be traced to the 1910s. In 1912, Móricz Park, now known as Tiszaliget, was inaugurated for public use, featuring a rowing club, boathouse, and tennis courts for tourists.

The genuine aspirations of a spa town materialised in the 1920s and 1930s, facilitated by the Speyer loan. (Fülöp, 2021) During that period, the Tisza Hotel and Spa, a notable edifice in the city, was constructed, designed by the architects of the Gellért Hotel in Budapest: Izidor Sterk, Artúr Sebestyén, and Ármin Hegedűs. (Fülöp, 2019) Upon its inauguration in 1928, the facility offered a multifaceted experience, centred around the thermal water known as "Blessing Water", which emerged from a depth of 948 meters (the capacity of the well was 1 million 300 thousand litres per day; Városok Lapja, 1928), and was founded on the principles of medical, accommodation, and hospitality.

"From April 14, 1928, until the end of the year, a total of 17,848 people used it, which resulted in a revenue of 24,768 pengő and 10 fillér. Discounted tickets were issued to 3,718 adults and 494 students. The services of the 28-room hotel were used by 5,138 people in the year of its opening – in 8 and a half months – which resulted in a revenue of 25,808 pengő 64 fillér" (Fülöp, 2021:6).

Nevertheless, the ambitious goals were already impeded at that time. The initially proposed swimming facility, featuring a two-level standard swimming pool, was never constructed. Despite the modern media designating Szolnok as the "Hungarian Graz", the comprehensive bathing experience – integrating therapeutic water, a swimming pool, and living water – was rendered incomplete due to the lack of a swimming hall.

The progress was hindered by the questionable financial basis and the global economic crisis, for example in 1931, there was a loss of 217,979 pengő 72 fillér (Fülöp, 2021). On the other hand, the number of people employed in the hotel and catering industry in Szolnok reached 264 people at the beginning at the early 1930s. (Fülöp, 2019) Despite all difficulties, 3 hotels with a total of 115 beds operated in Szolnok (Nemzeti Szálló with 60 beds, Tisza Szálló with 38 beds and Korona Szálló with 17 beds) before World War II (Magyar Statisztikai Közlemények, 1938).

## 2.2 The socialist era: industrialization over tourism

Following World War II, the aims of urban development underwent a radical transformation. The socialist municipal administration aimed for Szolnok to serve as an industrial hub, while the bourgeois spa culture was marginalised. The Tisza Hotel was nationalised and, from 1968, functioned as part of the Hungarhotels Corporation. Throughout this era, the hotel's accommodation revenue offset the deficits of the spa and the restaurant. Around 1970 and next year the restaurant prices had been raised due to costs and inflation; on the other hand, the profit margin of the food business was increased by 10 percent since 1968 (Borzák, 1971). Despite restorations, such as the technical reconstruction of the spa in 1985-86, these efforts just preserved the existing comfort level without achieving a qualitative enhancement. The state tried to help, for example by offering train ticket discounts to honeymooners to increase the number of guests (Szolnok Megyei Néplap, 1985).

During the same period, commencing in the 1960s, the Tiszaliget recreational area was established. By 1961, the circular dam was finished, followed by the inauguration of the beach bath in 1964 and the sports complex in 1974. Tiszaliget contained corporate resorts, a campsite, and a motel; yet, the city was mostly a one-day destination, with an average duration of stay of merely 1.7 nights in 1979. In contrast to neighbouring Great Plain cities such as Gyula and Hajdúszoboszló, which effectively enhanced their spa attributes in the 1970s and 1980s, the advancements in Szolnok were dispersed across many sites, including the Tisza Hotel, MÁV Open-air swimming pool, Damjanich swimming pool (Palágyi, 1985), and Tiszaliget (with a simple socialist amusement park) (Kovács & Bíró, 1962).

The strategic governance of the neighbouring settlements emphasised tourism specialisation, whereas Szolnok adhered to an industrial-agricultural model that was multifaceted. The underpinnings of this also appeared to undermine traditional industrial hectivity such as sugar, paper, and detergent production. This prolonged absence finally led to the disadvantage of tardiness in a saturated industry where competitors had already established a decades-long advantage.

## 2.3 Struggle for resources and tourism market competition

The thermal water resources of Szolnok are notably exceptional: data from 1991 indicates that 10 of the 14 operational wells were utilised for bathing purposes. Nevertheless, the exploitation of water resources trailed that of its rivals. The Damjanich swimming pool, constructed to commemorate the centenary of the 1849 battle, permanently closed in 2007 because the municipal owner could not fund the necessary installation of water circulation equipment, mandated by legal compliance following Hungary's accession to the European Union in 2004. The swimming pool was subsequently dismantled, and a rose garden now occupies its location, serving as an extension of the Verseghy English-style Park.

The MÁV open-air swimming pool experienced a comparable fate: it was closed in 2003 and reopened in 2020, as part of the comprehensive sports infrastructure development undertaken within the Modern Cities Programme (MCP). The prolonged mandatory shutdown posed a considerable detriment to the city. As essential facilities in Szolnok were being decommissioned, adjacent Hajdúszoboszló and Gyula strategically developed their contemporary infrastructure. During this period, prosperous spa towns established tourist clusters where medical services, lodging, and attractions functioned in harmony.

## 2.4 Modern development attempts and obstacles

During the period examined from 2000 to 2020, the most important depth proved to be the year of 2009 when the number of guest nights in Szolnok dropped to 70,000, and then slowly increased to only exceed 80,000 in 2017. The number of guests in Szolnok dropped below 25 thousand in 2009, and then only managed to rise to 35 thousand by 2017; about 30% of the guests in Szolnok were foreign. During these years (between 2009 and 2017), the number of available beds in the city ranged between 824 and 1,289 (SZMJVÖ, 2018).

Szolnok remained a one-day visiting settlement since Szolnok faced disadvantages in various dimensions regarding tourism efforts:

- Insufficient financial resources: throughout the regime shift and the subsequent decade, the city's financial capacity precluded substantial investments. The spa development funds from national development plans, reliant on resources accessible upon European Union entry, mostly bypassed the city, thereby maintaining the technological standards of prior decades.
- Regional delimitation: Szolnok was excluded from the 11 designated tourist regions (as established by tourism strategy in 2017 for marketing purposes), resulting in a deficiency of substantial funding resources for development.

This situation proved by the fact that the local tax income from tourism was only 309 HUF per capita while in Hajdúszoboszló it reached 13,385 HUF per capita in 2011. The small village of Berekfürdő the value of the local tax per capita was 393,730 HUF (Bagdi, 2014).

At this juncture, the competition attained a more advanced phase of the destination life cycle, establishing a solid domestic and international visitor demographic. Consumer loyalty was consequently established towards other places in the Great Plain prior to Szolnok's re-entry into the market with its upgraded beaches. The absence of a regional tourism ecosystem hindered the development of a network that could have supported Szolnok as a spa centre.

## 2.5 Urban development regimes and the impact of the Modern Cities Programme

The inaugural purposeful, contemporary brand development commenced in 2010-2011, establishing Szolnok as a city of waters under the motto "Szolnok, the capital of River Tisza". Renovations commenced at RepTár (one of the most significant aviation history exhibition sites and interactive adventure park in Central and Eastern Europe). The RepTár (later with for example a MIG-29 aircraft) opened in September 2016 and had 25 thousand visitors in just 4 months that year (SZMJVÖ, 2018). Agora (multifunctional cultural centre), and Artists' Colony (Hungary's oldest art colony, continuously operating since its founding in 1902) were also a key element of the programme.

The Modern Cities Programme is a significant milestone in the 21st-century developmental history of Szolnok, serving as a distinct, centralised framework for domestic urban development strategy (Gajzágó, 2019). Under the auspices of the MCP, Szolnok acquired resources that transcended conventional operational programs. The programme aimed to enhance quality of life, augment tourism appeal, and stimulate economic revitalisation.

Scientific assessments indicate that, in the instance of Szolnok, the MCP executed a form of "delayed modernisation" of the spa infrastructure. In prior decades, resource scarcity maintained the technological standards of the 1970s; however, the MCP agreement (e.g., the restoration of the MÁV open-air swimming pool and the comprehensive refurbishment of the Tiszaligeti Adventure Bath) sought to enhance international competitiveness. However, the premier spa development, the Tiszaligeti Adventure Bath project, encountered multiple delays. The investment expenditures, initially estimated at 5.3 billion HUF, escalated to 10 billion HUF (Barta, 2026). Despite a commitment to begin operations in 2021, the project remained closed until June 2026 (Rózsa, 2026). The formal opening occurred on 19th June, five years subsequently. With the doubled budget, a completely modern complex with 17 pools was created, which also includes an adventure, wellness and medical department. Nonetheless, these advancements underscored the dangers of a significant escalation in project management and construction expenses, which emerged as a pivotal aspect of the "Szolnok model".

# 3 Regional scientific approaches for understanding urban development

## 3.1 Path dependency

The urban growth trajectory of Szolnok can be elucidated through the fundamental principle of regional science known as path dependency (Jeney & Varga, 2016). The notion of route dependency is a crucial instrument in regional science for comprehending how historical decisions and occurrences constrain a city's future developmental prospects (Brouder & Eriksson, 2013; Ma & Hassink, 2014).

1. The initial trajectory and the pivotal juncture: at the dawn of the 20th century, Szolnok commenced its evolution into a spa town (inauguration of Móricz Park, Speyer loan), culminating in the establishment of the Tisza Hotel and Spa in 1928. This was the era when the city could still

select between the function of a bourgeois spa culture and that of a commercial and transportation hub. Nevertheless, the global economic crisis and the stagnation of investments, such as the unsuccessful swimming hall project, undermined this developmental trajectory.

2. Socialist industrialisation as a coerced trajectory (lock-in): the post-World War II era marked a pivotal juncture. The planned economy designated Szolnok as a heavy industrial centre and a transportation hub.
3. Resource allocation: capital and labour were directed towards the chemical industry (Tiszamenti Vegyiművek) and the mechanical sector, rather than tourism (Sebők, 2015).
4. Functional degradation: The spas forfeited their market identity; recreation transformed into a social provision system for the working class (corporate resorts, campsites in Tiszaliget). This decision-making process established an institutional and infrastructural entrapment that proved very challenging to escape, even following the regime change.
5. Absence of cluster formation and fragmentation: whereas cities like Hajdúszoboszló and Gyula selected tourism as their primary developmental trajectory, Szolnok experienced fragmented development. The spa facilities (Hotel Tisza, MÁV open-air swimming pool, Damjanich swimming pool) functioned independently in both physical layout and management, resulting in a lack of synergy essential for thriving destinations. The city's management, influenced by road dependency, prioritised industrial sustainability for decades, relegating the tourism sector and its skills to the background.
6. The drawback of the late arrival: by the time Szolnok attempted to re-establish the spa city trajectory in alignment with contemporary demands (e.g., MCP), the market had already reached saturation. Rivals had acquired a ten-year head start in brand development and customer allegiance. The challenges and rising expenses associated with the development of the Tiszaligeti Adventure Bath exemplify the complexities and costs involved in addressing the structural deficiencies of prior decades, including obsolete machinery and outdated technical standards.

In summary, Szolnok's development exemplifies path dependence, illustrating that despite possessing superior natural resources (thermal water), historical political-economic regimes can dictate an industrial trajectory, making a return to tourism feasible only through significant additional sacrifices.

### 3.2 Lack of cluster formation and the destination life cycle

In contemporary tourist management, a cluster is defined not merely as a collection of adjacent service providers, but as a synergistic network wherein achieving critical mass renders the entire network more value than the aggregate of its individual components (Weidenfeld et al., 2010; Kachniewska, 2013; Hangodi et al., 2019). Tourism geography studies (Michalkó, 2016) indicate that the foundation of prosperous spa towns, such as Hajdúszoboszló (the most successful regional competitor) or Hévíz, lies in the establishment of tourist clusters, wherein housing, medical services, and supplementary attractions operate synergistically. (Csobán et al., 2022)

Szolnok is an example for absence of horizontal and vertical integration, the supply components (accommodation, medical care, catering) were not amalgamated into a cohesive offering. In prosperous spa towns, a comprehensive vertical was established around the healing water; nevertheless, in Szolnok, these activities remained geographically and institutionally segregated. The Hotel Tisza, Tiszaliget Adventure Bath, and the former Damjanich swimming pool functioned independently, both physically and administratively. The fragmented development heightens the visitor's transaction costs, necessitating separate searches for the spa, hotel, and program. The absence of a cluster resulted in the lack of coordinated marketing, a shared reservation system, and standardised quality certification, all of which are vital for competitiveness. Moreover, the foundation of clusters relies on trust and collaboration among local stakeholders.

The Butler life cycle model (2024) delineates the several stages of tourism destination development. Path dependency in tourism has received scant attention regarding the tourist area life cycle until recently; nevertheless, the work of Brouder et al. (2017) on Tourism Destination Evolution offers a noteworthy contribution to this field (Matlovičová et al., 2026). Szolnok's spa town character stagnated at the conclusion of the inclusion phase; the offerings failed to attain the critical mass necessary to significantly transform the city's tourism profile for the international or predominant domestic market. During this phase, the local population and businesses begin offering services to visitors, although tourism has not yet emerged as a predominant economic sector. Spas emerged in Szolnok; however, the necessary dynamics for the developmental phase, characterised by the influx of external capital and the erosion of the region's original (non-tourist) identity, did not materialise.

The critical mass theory posits that there exists a threshold in tourism, under which a place stays imperceptible in the market. The spa capacity and supplementary services in Szolnok failed to attain the level necessary to establish an independent gravity centre. Consequently, the city could not progress to the consolidation phase, wherein tourism constitutes a significant portion of the local GDP. Due to the inability to refresh and expand the supply, the destination bypassed the remarkable growth phase and entered an early stagnation or dormant state. While competitors such as Hajdúszoboszló saw a high ascent in their development trajectory, Szolnok's trajectory plateaued prior to achieving a significant breakthrough.

Consequently, Szolnok's dilemma pertains to the absence of functional diversification. The city's industrial and transit functions suppressed the tourism function (agglomeration shadow effect). The spas did not evolve into the driving force of the city's economy; they remained only supplementary welfare services. The absence of cluster formation prevented the city from realising economies of scale, resulting in elevated marketing and development expenses compared to specialised spa towns, ultimately causing a decline in market position.

### 3.3 Regional competitiveness and functional urban areas

Lengyel and Rechnitzer's (2004) competitiveness model posits that urban prosperity hinges on the synergy of specialised elements, such as distinctive medicinal water supplies, and effective governance. Szolnok, positioned between the Tisza Lake region and Hajdúság, faced a relative competitive disadvantage. While neighbouring settlements prioritise tourism subsidies, Szolnok's sustainable urban development strategy (SZMJVÖ, 2022) adheres to the principle of standing on many legs: alongside a competitive industry and a modern agricultural city, tourism constitutes merely one of the five strategic objectives. Furthermore, the city's functional area, comprising 13 adjacent settlements, is predominantly agricultural and industrial, resulting in the absence of a regional tourism ecosystem to sustain the city as a spa centre.

The communication of the "Capital of River Tisza" noted since the 2010s, serves as a mechanism for postmodern urban marketing, aiming to offset physical shortcomings with symbolic significance. The success of RepTár and Sörárium demonstrates that Szolnok is more adept at leveraging niche areas of the experience economy than engaging in the capital-intensive and fiercely competitive realm of traditional medical tourism. The challenges of modernising the Tiszaligeti Adventure Bath illustrate the late-comer disadvantage from a scientific standpoint: one must contend with a saturated market where consumer loyalty has already been established towards other places.

## Conclusion

In a scientific setting, Szolnok might be regarded not as a failure, but as an illustration of a diverse urban development strategy. The establishment of a spa town was hindered not by insufficient water resources, but by the inflexible, industry-centric framework of Hungarian urban growth in the 20th century and the capital-scarce, isolated developmental efforts following the regime change. Today, Szolnok aspires not to maintain a solely spa town identity, but to embody a multifaceted, experience-oriented regional hub characterised by water.

The inability of Szolnok to develop into a spa town cannot be attributed to a singular cause, but rather to a series of historical occurrences and strategic choices. The economic crises and financial uncertainties between the two world wars hindered the development of the Tisza Hotel into a complex.

- During the socialist era, the city's industrial nature was prioritised, relegating tourism to a secondary role.
- During the 1970s and 1980s, Szolnok was outperformed by adjacent spa towns on the Great Plain, who were more strategic in developing their infrastructure.

Following the government change, the allocation of tender funding and the absence of involvement in promoted tourism area perpetuated the delay.

Despite Szolnok's potential to be a premier spa resort due to its attributes, its current advancements are still inferior to those of its direct competitors. The inauguration of the Tiszaligeti Adventure Bath could signify a pivotal advancement; yet, to attain the designation of spa town, the locality must surmount the structural impediments of prior decades.

A subsequent research path may involve a comparative case study of Szolnok alongside a city in the Great Plain, such as Gyula or Hajdúszoboszló, where the spa town role has effectively become predominant, particularly focusing on urban development decision-making processes. All towns need to take advantage of EU grant opportunities just like the Polish cities did. (Pawlikowska-Piechotka & Piechotka, 2014)

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# EU hotels sustainability certification based on Booking.com statistics[1]

Radim Dolak[2] – Patrik Kajzar[3]

***Abstract***

*Sustainable hospitality integrates environmental management and third-party certifications to meet the growing demand for transparent, independently verified eco-friendly options. This paper measures the integration of environmental standards across EU member states using early 2026 Booking.com data, calculating the percentage of sustainable hotels relative to the total tourism infrastructure. The analysis reveals a stark regional disparity; Nordic nations lead, with Denmark (15.26%), Sweden (13.52%) and Finland (13.23%) as top performers. In contrast, Bulgaria (0.34%) and Lithuania (0.49%) rank lowest. Geographic anomalies such as the Baltic Contrast (Estonia at 7.69%) and the Balkan Contrast (Slovenia at 8.48%) further highlight sharp subregional differences in adoption. The study compares the progress of the EU toward resource-efficient tourism, revealing a significant divide in green infrastructure that requires ongoing monitoring of future trends.*

***Key words***

*hotel industry, sustainability certification, EU countries, Booking.com*

**JEL Classification: Q56, L83, Z32**

## Introduction

Sustainable hotels integrate environmental management, energy and water efficiency, waste reduction, and socially responsible practices, often complemented by third-party certifications and ecolabels. The European Union has been actively promoting sustainability in the hospitality sector, and various certifications have emerged to recognise hotels that adopt eco-friendly practices.

The literature consistently shows that certifications and green practices influence hotel performance, guest perceptions, and willingness to pay, while presenting managerial and policy challenges. This synthesis draws on various empirical and conceptual studies to map what makes hotels sustainable, how certification shapes the results, and where tensions or gaps remain.

The main goal of this paper is to measure how well various EU member states have incorporated environmental hotels into their tourism infrastructure. The percentage of sustainable hotels relative to all hotels in each EU member state will be analysed

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using data from Booking.com. We will use data from the beginning of year 2026 that reveal significant variations in the percentage of sustainable hotels across the European Union, effectively creating a regional ranking. We will also try to detect the geographic anomalies in the percentage of sustainability hotel certification, which reveal sharp contrasts within specific European subregions.

## 1 Literature overview

Hotels pursue sustainability to reduce operating costs (energy, water, waste) and to differentiate offerings in increasingly eco-conscious markets. Empirical work demonstrates links between green practices and cost savings, perceived value, guest satisfaction, and loyalty, underscoring a business case for sustainability beyond altruism. Sustainable hotels in the EU focus on eco-friendly operations such as using renewable energy, serving organic food, and implementing low-waste practices. Many of these hotels are certified by the EU Ecolabel.

The literature suggests that green certification is a valuable marketing tool, but its economic impact depends on price sensitivity, demand elasticity, and the hotel branding strategy Damigos (2023), (Teruel-Gutiérrez, 2020), Lin et al. (2023). Specifically, studies in various regions find green initiatives correlate with higher guest satisfaction and stronger revisit intentions, often mediated by perceived value Yılmaz et al. (2019), Moise et al. (2020), Damigos (2023), Teruel-Gutiérrez (2020).

The sustainability certification landscape for European hotels is diverse, with multiple third-party schemes (eg, EMAS / ISO, Green Key, Green Globe, Green Tourism, GSTC-aligned programmes) that claim environmental performance or broader sustainable practices. Booking platforms, including Booking.com, increasingly display or signal sustainability attributes (badges, filters, and certification logos) to influence consumer choice. Evidence from European and global contexts shows that sustainability certifications can affect guest perceptions, willingness to book, and premium pricing, but the magnitude of impact varies by certification form, platform presentation, and consumer awareness (Assaker & O'Connor, 2023; Foriş et al., 2020; Godovykh et al., 2024; Nelson et al., 2021; Pesci et al., 2024; Rodríguez-García et al., 2023; Saizarbitoria et al., 2019; Spenceley, 2018; Tan & Wright, 2022; Vinzenz, 2019). EU policy signals – through the Green Deal and related action plans – also shape certification ecosystems and hotel participation rates through incentives, signaling effects, and digital distribution enhancements (Ghisellini & Ulgiati, 2020).

The very important are environmental standards and their implementation. The purpose of the research paper published by Wszendyby-Skulska & Panasiuk (2024) is to indicate how environmental standards are implemented in the European Hotel Categorisation System, Hotelstars Union (HSU) and the one in force in Poland. Taking into account the solutions used by each system, the differences in the categorisation criteria taken into account in the hotel categorisation systems of certifying organisations in the EU in relation to the administrative hotel categorisation system in Poland, with particular emphasis on the criteria related to environmental management in the hotel industry.

# 2 Case study: EU hotels sustainability certification based on Booking.com countries statistics

There is an increasing demand for eco-friendly accommodations, with many travellers actively seeking hotels with sustainability certifications, and we can see that a significant percentage of travellers prioritise sustainability in their booking decisions. Booking.com, one of the leading digital travel platforms, has announced in October 2024 the evolution of the partner-focused facet of its sustainability programme, putting the needs of accommodations front and centre by testing an improved pathway to third-party certification (Booking.com, 2024). Why does sustainability certification matter for responsible tourism now more than ever? Consumer trust is essential. 90% of EU citizens believe that environmental labels need independent verification, and 80% think that companies often make misleading environmental claims (Booking.com, 2025).

## 2.1 Methodology

Booking.com's sustainability certification methodology is based on third-party verification recognised by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC). The platform does not certify the properties itself. Instead, it uses a centralised framework to highlight accommodations that pass independent audits, making them identifiable to environmentally conscious travellers. We have manually collected data on hotel sustainability in EU countries from Booking.com sustainability certification during February 2026. Booking.com allows us to filter for hotels with a sustainability certificate in any country. The procedure for obtaining the data was as follows: we entered all EU countries one by one in the search field and filtered out all hotels. For each country, we record the total number of hotels in that country. We then used the left-hand menu to filter the number of hotels with sustainability certification for each country. Finally, we calculate the percentage of hotels with sustainability certification for each EU country.

## 2.2 Statistics of EU countries

The primary purpose of the following table is to quantify how successfully different EU member states have integrated environmental standards into their tourism infrastructure. Ultimately, these metrics serve as a benchmark to assess which countries are leading the transition toward a more resource-efficient and responsible travel industry.

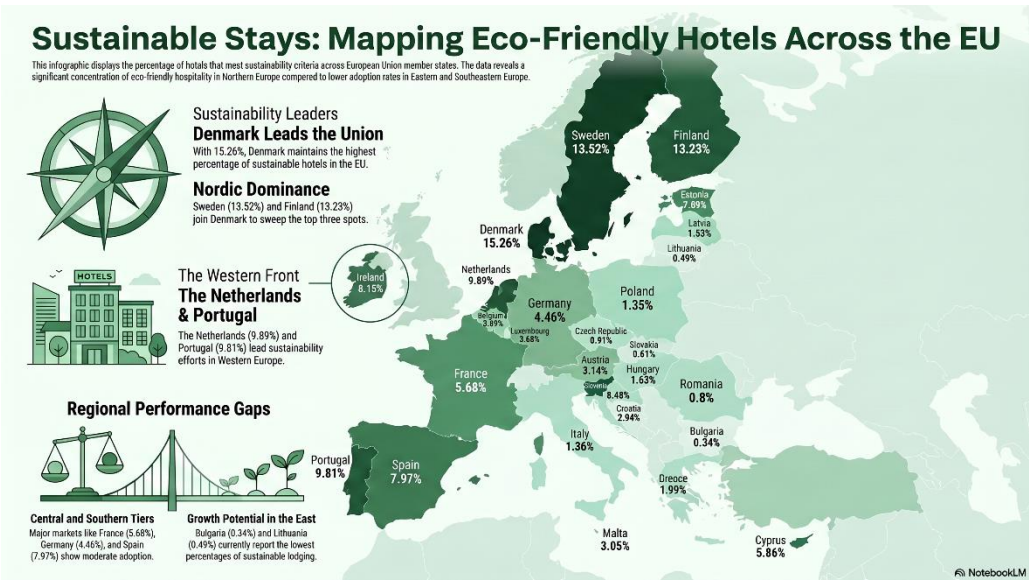
**Tab. 1:** Comparison of Sustainable Hotels in EU Countries

| Country | Sustainable Hotels (%) | Country | Sustainable Hotels (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Austria | 3.14 | Ireland | 8.16 |
| Belgium | 3.89 | Italy | 1.36 |
| Bulgaria | 0.34 | Latvia | 1.53 |
| Croatia | 2.94 | Lithuania | 0.49 |
| Cyprus | 5.86 | Luxembourg | 3.68 |
| Czech Republic | 0.91 | Malta | 3.05 |
| Denmark | 15.26 | Netherlands | 9.89 |
| Estonia | 7.69 | Poland | 1.35 |
| Finland | 13.23 | Portugal | 9.81 |
| France | 5.68 | Romania | 0.80 |
| Germany | 4.46 | Slovakia | 0.61 |
| Greece | 1.99 | Slovenia | 8.48 |
| Hungary | 1.63 | Spain | 7.97 |
| | | Sweden | 13,52 |

Source: Own calculation based on data from Booking.com

This data set provides a comparative snapshot of the ecological landscape within the European hospitality sector, specifically showing the distribution of sustainable hotels by 2026. By organising the information into geographical categories, the source highlights a significant regional disparity in green initiatives, ranging from the high performance of Nordic nations to the lower figures found in eastern Europe.

**Fig. 1** Geographical analysis of sustainable hotels in EU countries




Source: Based on own data, visualization by Google NotebookLM

Data from 2026 reveal significant variations in the percentage of sustainable hotels in the European Union, effectively creating a regional ranking. We can identify the following groups:

- Top Performers: Nordic countries lead the ranking, with Denmark (15.26%), Sweden (13.52%), and Finland (13.23%) having the highest percentages of sustainable establishments.
- Mid-Range: Countries like the Netherlands (9.89%), Portugal (9.81%) and Ireland (8.16%) show strong performance.
- Lower Rankings: Bulgaria (0.34%), Lithuania (0.49%) and Slovakia (0.61%) currently rank at the bottom of the sustainability distribution.

**Fig. 2** Geographical analysis of sustainable hotels in EU countries

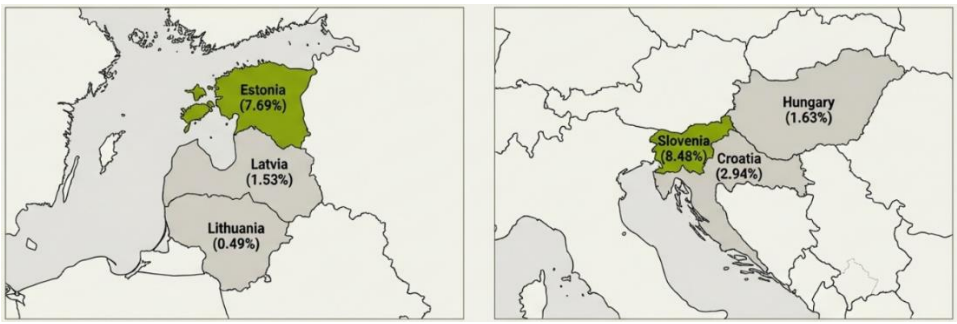
| | The Vanguard | The Accelerators | The Mainstream | The Emerging |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Average Projected Adoption | ~14.0% | ~8.6% | ~4.2% | ~1.2% |
| Number of Nations | 3 | 6 | 7 | 11 |
| Dominant Geography | Nordics | Mixed (West/South) | Western Europe | Eastern & Southern Europe |
| Market Posture | Exporting best practices | Rapidly scaling infrastructure | Navigating bureaucratic transitions | Establishing baseline awareness |

Source: Based on own data calculation, preprocessing Google NotebookLM

## 2.3 Geographic anomalies: The Baltic contrast and the Balkan contrast

Geographic anomalies in the percentage of hotel sustainability certification reveal sharp contrasts within specific European subregions, where neighbouring countries show vastly different levels of hotel sustainability integration.

**Fig. 3** Geographical anomalies of European Subregions




Source: Based on own data, visualization by Google NotebookLM

We will first mention the Baltic Contrast, which is the most striking regional disparity exists among the Baltic states, where Estonia with (7.69%) significantly

outperforms its neighbours. While Estonia sits firmly in the "Moderate Sustainability" category, its southern neighbours fall much lower on the scale. Latvia reports only 1.53% sustainable hotels. Lithuania is at the bottom of the regional and EU rankings with only 0.49%. This contrast is an anomaly because these three countries share similar historical and economic backgrounds, but Estonia has managed to integrate sustainable practices at a rate nearly 15 times higher than Lithuania. This may be attributed to Estonia's closer economic and cultural ties to the Nordic leaders like Finland and Sweden, which have the highest rankings in the EU.

We will secondly mention the Balkan Contrast, which is visible in Southeastern Europe and the Balkans, where Slovenia (8.48%) emerges as a regional "frontrunner" in the "Moderate Sustainability" category. The contrast becomes evident when moving further east and south: Croatia and Greece show lower adoption rates at 2.94% and 1.99%, respectively. The sharpest contrast occurs with Romania (0.80%) and Bulgaria (0.34%), which remain in the "Emerging Sustainability" phase. Slovenia's performance is almost 25 times higher than Bulgaria's, representing a huge gap in a geographically connected area.

## Conclusion

The trend towards sustainability in the hotel industry is growing, supported by various certifications that help consumers identify eco-friendly options. Platforms like Booking.com provide valuable insight into this trend, reflecting changing traveller preferences.

We have detected a significant regional disparity in sustainability. Estonia exhibits a significant regional disparity in sustainability hotels among the Baltic states, with 7.69% of hotels deemed sustainable, vastly outperforming Latvia (1.53%) and Lithuania (0.49%). The anomaly is attributed to Estonia's stronger economic and cultural ties with Nordic countries such as Finland and Sweden. Similarly, in the Balkans, Slovenia leads with 8.48% in sustainable hotel practices, while Croatia (2.94%), Greece (1.99%), Romania (0.80%), and Bulgaria (0.34%) lag behind, marking Slovenia's performance as nearly 25 times better than Bulgaria's, highlighting significant contrasts within a geographically connected region.

Future research could focus on monitoring sustainability indicators in the coming years with the aim of analysing longer-term trends connected with environmental hotels infrastructure in EU countries.

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# Sustainable Cultural Tourism and Regional Disparities: Qualitative Evidence from 27 OMC Case Studies for Disadvantaged Regions of Slovakia[1]

Stanislava Honzová – Martina Hudecová – Kristína Melušová[2]

***Abstract***

*The paper presents a qualitative comparative analysis of 27 case studies compiled by the European Commission Open Method of Coordination (OMC) Working Group on Sustainable Cultural Tourism and links them to the Slovak debate on regional disparities and the absorption of EU Structural and Investment Funds (European Regional Development Fund and Cohesion Fund). The study is part of the research project on the evaluation of regional impacts of public financial instruments and EU investments on tourism in the Slovak Republic. Using thematic analysis the paper derives six transferable best-practice models – community-led development, cross-border and thematic routes, digital tools and smart heritage, adaptive reuse of cultural monuments for creative industries, integrated management of cultural and natural heritage, and revitalisation of post-industrial and depopulating areas. The analysis suggests that the effectiveness of ERDF/CF interventions in cultural tourism is highly conditional on local institutional capacity, multi-source funding and cross-sectoral governance. The paper formulates eight qualitative policy recommendations for Slovak disadvantaged regions and complements the quantitative research agenda of the project.*

***Key words***

*sustainable cultural tourism, OMC, ERDF, Cohesion Fund, regional disparities, Slovakia, qualitative analysis, best practices*

**JEL Classification: R58, Z32, H54**

## Introduction

The European Union's cohesion policy, implemented through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Cohesion Fund (CF), represents one of the most important instruments for reducing regional disparities and supporting sustainable development. In the 2021–2027 programming period, a share of the allocated resources is directly or indirectly linked to cultural heritage and tourism as endogenous development assets, particularly in less developed regions (European Commission, 2021). However, the effectiveness of individual investments remains contested: some

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of the academic literature confirms positive impacts, while other contributions point to heterogeneous results depending on the institutional quality, absorption capacity and economic structure of regions (Percoco, 2017; Di Caro & Fratesi, 2022).

Based on an analysis of NUTS2 regions, Becker, Egger and von Ehrlich (2013) showed that only approximately 30% of regions are able to transform Objective 1 transfers into faster growth of GDP per capita and only 21% into higher investment levels. The key moderating factors are two dimensions of absorption capacity, namely human capital and institutional quality. Rodríguez-Pose (2013) pointed out that institutional arrangements influence not only the effectiveness of public investments, but also the very possibility of endogenous development emerging in less developed regions. Crescenzi and Giua (2020) concluded that cohesion policy does not have a uniform effect across Member States, as differential impacts depend precisely on institutional and sectoral configurations. Almost two decades ago, Ederveen, de Groot and Nahuis (2006) opened this line of research by arguing that structural funds work only in "fertile soil", composed of good institutions and an open economy.

The Slovak Republic finds itself in a specific position: its less developed regions (the self-governing regions of Banská Bystrica, Prešov and Košice) belong to the group of beneficiaries with the highest intensity of support within the Programme Slovakia 2021–2027, in priority axes oriented towards culture, tourism and integrated territorial development (Eurofondy.gov.sk, 2024). At the same time, these are regions with rich tangible and intangible cultural heritage (Banská Štiavnica, Levoča, Bardejov, Spiš Castle, the evangelical articled churches of Gemer and Abov, the mining tradition of Hodruša and Vyhne, the vernacular architecture of Čičmany). On the other hand, they also face persistent structural problems such as depopulation, high unemployment, weak economic diversification and underdeveloped tourism infrastructure (MDV SR, 2020). The question of whether, and under what conditions, ERDF/CF funds can contribute to sustainable cultural tourism in the above-mentioned regions is therefore crucial from the perspective of regional policy.

Through the Working Group of Member States under the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) on sustainable cultural tourism (European Commission, DGEAC, 2019), the European Commission has compiled 27 case studies capturing good practices from EU Member States. The individual cases constitute a heterogeneous sample of initiatives, ranging from cross-border pilgrimage routes and adaptive reuse of mining complexes to community-led projects in peripheral areas. Existing Slovak academic literature has not yet systematically analysed these cases, nor has it linked them to the question of institutional and absorption conditions for successful implementation in Slovak regions.

The literature has shown that EU cohesion policy does not have an automatic positive effect, because outcomes differ according to the absorption capacity and institutional quality of regions. In the field of cultural tourism, however, systematic qualitative evidence is lacking on the concrete mechanisms through which good-practice models operate, what their boundary conditions are, and to what extent they are transferable to less developed regions of Slovakia. The present paper addresses this gap.

The aim of the paper is to systematically analyse 27 case studies of the OMC Working Group on sustainable cultural tourism and to derive a typology of good

practices that can be used in disadvantaged regions of Slovakia in the context of ERDF/CF interventions, with explicit consideration of the institutional and absorption preconditions for their success.

The added value of the paper lies in: (1) a comprehensive systematisation of the 27 OMC cases in the Slovak academic literature; (2) the explicit linking of the typology of models with the theoretical framework of absorption capacity (Becker et al., 2013) and institutional quality (Rodríguez-Pose, 2013); (3) the identification of boundary conditions for the transferability of models, which are only rarely formulated in the best-practice literature; and (4) the qualitative complement to the quantitative research programme of the project evaluating the regional impacts of ERDF/CF on tourism in the Slovak Republic.

## 1. Literature

The paper builds on three interconnected strands of regional economics: (1) absorption capacity as a moderator of the effectiveness of EU funds, (2) institutional quality as a prerequisite for endogenous development, and (3) the literature on cultural heritage as a development resource in peripheral areas.

On a sample of 251 NUTS2 regions and three programming periods (1989–2006), Becker, Egger and von Ehrlich (2013) demonstrated that the effectiveness of Objective 1 transfers is not homogeneous — the variance of effects is significantly greater than their mean. The authors define absorption capacity through two dimensions: human capital (the share of the labour force with ISCED 3–6 education) and quality of governance (indicators of corruption, impartiality and quality of public services). Their key finding is that "a minimum level of institutional quality and education is necessary for recipient regions to be able to absorb transfers effectively" (Becker et al., 2013, p. 32). In regions with low capacity, transfers at best stimulate consumption without long-term growth effects and, at worst, crowd out private investment.

In the field of cultural tourism, this concept has specific extensions. Absorption capacity for cultural heritage projects comprises at least four dimensions:

- technical and administrative capacity (the ability of applicants to prepare and manage a project in line with ESIF rules, knowledge of public procurement, monitoring and indicators),
- professional capacity in the field of heritage (the presence of restorers, curators, experts in monument care, professional staff in museums and regional monument boards),
- organisational capacity of the destination (the existence of functional DMOs/DMOs-type organisations, local action groups, cooperation of municipalities within regions),
- capacity to absorb visitors (accommodation infrastructure, transport accessibility, quality of services).

Rodríguez-Pose (2013) argues that institutional arrangements (formal rules, informal norms, and modes of their enforcement) are a more important determinant of regional development than traditional endowments. In the context of cohesion policy, this means that equally high transfers can lead to radically different outcomes in two

regions with similar GDP levels, depending on the quality of public administration, transparency and participatory decision-making. Crescenzi and Giua (2020) empirically demonstrate that the same cohesion policy instrument generates different economic effects across Member States and regions — the more heterogeneous the institutional contexts, the stronger the differential impact.

Ederveen, de Groot and Nahuis (2006) laid the foundations of this line of research by stating that the effect of the funds is conditioned by the institutional environment of the recipient country — they showed that the funds generate a positive impact only in countries with above-average institutional quality (market openness, control of corruption, quality of regulation).

The place-based approach to regional policy (Barca, 2009; OECD, 2009) views cultural heritage as a non-transferable asset that can serve as a basis for the competitive advantage of peripheral regions, provided that an adequate institutional infrastructure is available to activate it. Smith (2006) warns of the risk of commodification of heritage — reducing it to a tourism product regardless of the values of the local community. Richards (2018) in turn points out that cultural tourism, as the most dynamic segment of the global tourism market (approximately 40% of international arrivals), also carries risks of destination overload, gentrification of historic centres and loss of authenticity.

These three strands of literature give rise to the conceptual framework that guides the empirical analysis. The effectiveness of ERDF/CF interventions in cultural tourism (dependent variable: sustainable development of the destination) is moderated by (1) absorption capacity (administrative + professional + organisational + infrastructural), (2) institutional quality (quality of public administration, partnerships between the public, private and civic sectors, enforceability of rules), and (3) characteristics of heritage (tangible/intangible/mixed; world/national/local).

This framework generates the expectation that the good practices identified in the OMC cases will share specific configurational features of absorption capacity and institutional settings — and that their transferability to Slovak regions will depend on the extent to which these configurations already exist or can be built.

## 2. Methodology

The paper is based on a qualitative comparative analysis of multiple cases (qualitative multi-case study analysis) in the sense of Yin (2018) and Eisenhardt (1989), combined with thematic analysis according to Braun and Clarke (2006). The choice of design is justified as follows:

1. Consistency between the research question and the method. Yin (2018) recommends a case study design for "how" and "why" questions focused on contemporary phenomena in their real-life context, where the researcher has no control over variables. Our research questions (Section 2.2) are precisely of this type, as we ask by which mechanisms good practices generate sustainability outcomes and why they work in given contexts.
2. Reflexive thematic analysis is suitable for exploratory pattern mapping. Unlike coding manuals (e.g. Boyatzis, 1998), the reflexive version of Braun and Clarke places emphasis on the transparent construction of themes by researchers and explicit reflection on their positions. For a sample of good practices emerging in

institutionally heterogeneous contexts, it is important that codes and themes are not predefined, but constructed inductively with theoretical sensitivity.

3. A combination of cross-case and within-case analysis. Eisenhardt (1989) stresses that the comparison of multiple cases makes it possible to identify configurational patterns and boundary conditions that would be invisible in a single case. Our analysis works with all 27 cases simultaneously (cross-case), while also examining in more detail 7 cases selected for their higher transfer relevance for Slovakia (within-case).

**Research questions**

The paper formulates four research questions:

RQ1: What types of cultural heritage (tangible/intangible/mixed) underpin good practices of sustainable tourism in the OMC sample? What is their territorial and thematic distribution?

RQ2: Which specific methods of improving visitor experience and destination management are applied in these cases and what sustainability outcomes do they generate (environmental, social, economic, cultural-identity)?

RQ3: What models of good practice – understood as configurations of features (type of heritage × method × institutional setting × financial instrument) – can be inductively derived from the cases?

RQ4: What boundary conditions must be met to transfer the identified models to disadvantaged regions of Slovakia in the context of ERDF/CF, and what qualitative recommendations does this imply for policymakers and managing authorities?

**Sample selection and characteristics**

We included all 27 cases documented in the final report of the OMC Working Group on sustainable cultural tourism (European Commission, DGEAC, 2019). The sample is therefore total within this reference document, not selective. This approach ensures complete coverage of the official EU policy corpus of good practices and eliminates the risk of selection bias on the part of the researcher.

The 27 cases cover 22 EU Member States and three categories of heritage: tangible (40.7%; 11 cases), intangible (25.9%; 7 cases) and mixed (33.4%; 9 cases). In terms of territorial level, the sample includes national-level projects (5), regional (12), local (8) and cross-border (2). The original data underlying the cases were collected between 2015 and 2018.

Sample limitations: (i) The sample does not include unsuccessful cases, which represents a known selection bias of the OMC process: all cases were pre-selected by national experts as successful, meaning that they cannot be used to infer "what does not work", only "what works and under which conditions". (ii) The time lag since the documentation of the cases (5–7 years) may reduce the up-to-date character of some institutional details, especially in the post-pandemic context. (iii) The data are secondary – they were collected by the case organisations themselves and by the Commission, which may lead to an upward bias in self-assessment of results. These limitations are

addressed methodologically through triangulation with the 55 official OMC recommendations (European Commission, DGEAC, 2019) and secondary literature on the respective destinations (Yin, 2018, pp. 113–134, recommends this combination of sources to increase validity).

## Methodological limitations

In addition to the limitations of the sample, we identify the following methodological limitations: (i) qualitative analysis does not allow generalisation to a statistical population – generalisation is analytical (Yin, 2018), i.e. to theoretical propositions rather than to a population of regions; (ii) the categorisation into six models is interpretive and alternative thematic arrangements are possible; (iii) the transfer of models to the Slovak context is hypothetical and requires empirical validation in subsequent stages of the research project; (iv) the article does not assess the causal impacts of ERDF/CF – these are addressed in the quantitative parts of the project (panel analysis, Difference-in-Differences, Propensity Score Matching).

## Results of the analysis of 27 case studies

The empirical findings are presented in three steps: (1) an overview table of the 27 cases along four analytical dimensions, (2) a quantitative summary of the structure of the sample by type of heritage, and (3) a typology of six models of good practice derived from thematic analysis. Table 1 summarises the 27 case studies according to four analytical dimensions: focus (type of heritage), methods of improving the visitor experience, sustainability outcomes and policy recommendations that can be derived from the case. Given the amount of information, the table is placed on landscape-oriented pages.

**Tab. 1:** Overview of the 27 case studies of the OMC Working Group on sustainable cultural tourism

| | Country / region | Project title | Focus | Methods of improving the visitor experience | Sustainability outcomes | Policy recommendations |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | AT, CZ, HU, IT, SK, SI | European Pilgrimage Routes | Mixed (spiritual, sacred landscape, heritage) | Slow hiking, mobile applications, partnerships between religious and regional actors | Redirection of flows away from "hot spots", average stay of 10–30 days, multi-source funding (LEADER, Interreg, ERDF) | Cross-border cultural routes as a rural development tool |
| 2 | AT, LU, IT, EE, FI | Cult Trips | Intangible (everyday rural culture) | Cross-border cooperation of LAGs, pilot tours, local guides | Gender equality (women's skills), growth of local entrepreneurship | LAGs as drivers of innovation in disadvantaged regions |
| 3 | Austria, Switzerland | Auf der Flucht | Intangible (historical memory across the Alps during the Nazi period) | Interactive theatre combined with a full-day mountain hike | Deeper understanding of history, use of local accommodation facilities | Linking cultural tourism with historical interpretation |
| 4 | Belgium (Bruges) | Residents' attitudes to tourism | Tangible (urban landscape) | Application of the RETS methodology to measure residents' attitudes | Identification that empowering residents reduces negative perceptions of tourism | Monitoring residents' attitudes as an indicator of carrying capacity |
| 5 | Belgium (Oostduinkerke) | Horseback shrimp fishing | Intangible (UNESCO-recognised craft) | Practical workshops, intergenerational transmission within families | Preserved authenticity, strong ties to the local community | UNESCO lists as an instrument of institutional protection for traditional crafts |
| 6 | Croatia (Velebit National Park) | Shepherds' shelters | Tangible (stone shepherd architecture) | Reconstruction of dwellings, year-round stays in an authentic environment | Revitalisation of the park's architectural heritage, protection of traditional ways of life | Linking nature conservation and cultural heritage in national parks |
| 7 | Finland (Lapland) | Culturally responsible Sámi tourism | Intangible (culture of the indigenous population) | Ethical guidelines of the Sámi Parliament for tourism providers | Protection against commodification, social and cultural sustainability | Ethical tourism codes that respect minority communities |
| 8 | Finland (Helsinki) | Suomenlinna Fortress | Tangible (UNESCO fortress from the 18th century) | Strategy with five strategic pillars, networking, communication of UNESCO values | Retention of 800 residents and 400–500 jobs, extended tourist season | Comprehensive sustainability strategies for UNESCO sites |
| 9 | Finland | Cooperation between UNESCO sites and national parks | Mixed (cultural and natural) | Memorandum between Metsähallitus, Parks & Wildlife and UNESCO | Unified management model for 7 UNESCO sites and national parks | Interdepartmental cooperation as a precondition for sustainability |
| 10 | France | Centres Culturels de Rencontre (CCR) | Tangible (historic monuments) | Artistic residencies, exhibitions, symposia, national label | Long-term protection of 24 sites, international partnerships | National label for the creative reuse of heritage sites |
| 11 | Greece | Paths of Culture | Tangible (ancient monuments, Epidaurus) and landscape | Bilingual trail signage, links to cultural festivals | Revival of forgotten routes, environmentally friendly approach | Low-cost infrastructure to open up hidden heritage |
| 12 | Iceland | Thingvellir National Park | Mixed (site of the Althing from 930, natural phenomenon) | Revised management plan, UNESCO World Heritage status | Management of carrying capacity with more than 1 million visitors per year | Regular revision of management plans in response to growing visitor numbers |
| 13 | Ireland (Co. Monaghan) | Tin Church | Tangible (19th-century architectural monument) | Community-based protection through the Laragh Heritage Group, 3 km cultural trail | Transformation of the village, influx of heritage experts | Bottom-up community initiatives supported by local government |

| | Country / region | Project title | Focus | Methods of improving the visitor experience | Sustainability outcomes | Policy recommendations |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 14 | Íreland | Clonmacnoise | Mixed (6th-century Christian site, protected area) | Free admission for local residents, internships for students | Employment of local people (stonemasons, guides, archaeologists) | Integrated management of the heritage site and natural protection |
| 15 | Ireland | Brú na Bóinne | Tangible (UNESCO site, prehistoric burial mounds, 5,000 years old) | Strict visitor limits, shuttle bus system, Boyne Valley network | Protection of outstanding universal value, extension of length of stay in the region | Hard carrying-capacity limits combined with networking of attractions |
| 16 | Italy | Romea Strata | Mixed (medieval pilgrimage routes, 11 UNESCO sites) | 1,300 km of routes in 9 sections, working groups meeting three times a year | Low environmental impact, benefits for small businesses along the route | Pilgrimage routes as a tool for developing less-visited areas |
| 17 | Lithuania (Antaliepte) | Innovator's Valley | Tangible (18th-century Carmelite monastery) | Creative hub: residencies, workshops, traditional crafts, theatre | Social integration, social entrepreneurship, rural development | Adaptive reuse of heritage sites as creative hubs in rural areas |
| 18 | Netherlands (Kinderdijk) | Mill Network | Tangible (UNESCO site, 19 windmills) | Reform of financing, governance and transport infrastructure | Balancing revenues and expenditures (EUR 1 million per year), consultations with residents | Professionalisation of UNESCO site management |
| 19 | Poland (Malbork) | Malbork Castle | Tangible (world's largest castle complex, dating from 1280) | Comprehensive restoration of façades, interiors, stained glass and roofs | Increase in visitor numbers by more than 10% after restoration | Long-term conservation programmes increase sustainable visitation |
| 20 | Poland (Pacanów) | European Fairytale Centre Koziołek Matołek | Intangible (literary heritage) | Museum, bookstore, open-air amphitheater, blacksmith's workshop | Revitalisation of the town, cultural engagement of children | Creative centres inspired by local literary heritage |
| 21 | Poland (Sousa, Douro, Tâmega) | Romanesque Route | Tangible (58 heritage sites) and intangible elements | Public–private partnership, gastronomic and wine tourism | Growth in visitor numbers, employment in 12 municipalities | Supramunicipal partnerships for the development of rural regions |
| 22 | Spain (Ávila) | Smart Heritage City | Tangible (UNESCO historic city) | Network of 230 sensors, 3D urban model, mobile application | More than 1,000 data points per hour, improved decision-making for managers | Digitalisation as a key tool for managing historic city centres |
| 23 | Spain (Sevilla) | Holy Week in Seville | Intangible (processions of 60 brotherhoods)) | Year-round preparation: garments, jewellery, embroidery | 85% hotel occupancy (+35% compared to the norm), multiplier effect | Intangible rituals as a source of sustainable seasonal peaks |
| 24 | Spain (El Hierro) | Heritage Intervention Plan | Mixed (landscape, archaeology, ethnography) | Multi-site "Great Museum of El Hierro" | Diversification of tourism towards the smallest of the Canary Islands | Networked museums as a tool for decentralising tourism |
| 25 | Sweden (Uppsala) | Visir Uplandia | Tangible (Uppsala 1509) and intangible | Place-based 3D application with historical characters | Success among schoolchildren, open-source platform | Open-source digital tools developed in partnership with universities |
| 26 | Sweden (Västra Götaland) | Prisma Västra Götaland | Tangible (industrial heritage) | Digital platform, training courses in marketing and storytelling for managers | Strengthening local businesses, links to the Interreg CHRISTA project | Clustering industrial heritage with regional support |
| 27 | Sweden (Bergslagen) | UNESCO Sustainable Tourism Toolkit | Tangible (mining region) | Application of the UNESCO toolkit in 2014–2016, cooperation with the tourism industry | Strengthening local "ambassadors", long-term strategy | Application of international tools in post-industrial transformation |

Source: own elaboration based on European Commission, DGEAC (2019).

## Structure of the sample by type of heritage

The quantitative summary of the sample by type of heritage reveals a relatively balanced structure of the OMC sample, which corresponds to the official mandate of the working group covering both tangible and intangible heritage.

**Tab. 2:** Structure of the 27 case studies by type of heritage

| Type of heritage | Number of cases | Share | Examples |
|---|---|---|---|
| Tangible (architecture, archaeology, UNESCO sites) | 11 | 40,7 % | Brú na Bóinne, Malbork, Suomenlinna, Kinderdijk, Ávila |
| Intangible (crafts, rituals, oral tradition, minority cultures) | 7 | 25,9 % | Horseback shrimp fishing, Sámi tourism, Holy Week in Seville |
| Intangible (crafts, rituals, oral tradition, minority cultures) | 9 | 33,4 % | European Pilgrimage Routes, Romea Strata, Thingvellir |
| **Total** | **27** | **100,0 %** | **–** |

Source: Own elaboration based on European Commission, DGEAC (2019).

In the dimension of methods for enhancing the visitor experience, four main approaches recur: thematic routes and trails (8 cases), digital tools and smart heritage (5 cases), community-led projects (6 cases), and the adaptive reuse of heritage sites for creative industries (4 cases). The remaining 4 cases represent specific governance models (comprehensive strategies, monitoring of carrying capacity, interdepartmental memoranda).

## Typology of six models of good practice

Thematic analysis made it possible to identify six models of good practice that represent transferable frameworks applicable in disadvantaged regions financed from ERDF/CF. The models are not mutually exclusive – individual cases may combine elements of several models, which underlines the need for an integrated strategic approach when designing regional policies and preparing project applications under ERDF/CF.

Model 1: Community-led development (bottom-up approach). Representative cases: Tin Church (IE), Antaliepte Innovator's Valley (LT), Sámi culturally responsible tourism (FI), Residents' attitudes to tourism in Bruges (BE). A common feature of this model is that initiatives originate within the local community and are subsequently institutionalised through support from local and national authorities. It generates a high level of authenticity, political legitimacy and social cohesion. In the ERDF/CF context, this model is most often linked to the CLLD (Community-Led Local Development) instrument and the LEADER programme.

Model 2: Cross-border and thematic routes. Representative cases: European Pilgrimage Routes (6 countries including Slovakia), Romea Strata (IT), Romanesque

Route (PT), Paths of Culture (GR), CultTrips (5 countries). These routes help to redistribute visitor flows geographically and seasonally, bring income to small municipalities outside "hot spots" and are suitable for combined funding from EU instruments (Interreg, ERDF, LEADER). The model character of such projects gives them high transferability to the Slovak context – especially in the case of pilgrimage routes (Mariánska hora in Levoča, Šaštín) and thematic routes (Iron Route, Tokaj Wine Routes).

Model 3: Digital tools and smart heritage. Representative cases: Ávila Smart Heritage City (ES), Visir Uplandia (SE), Prisma Västra Götaland (SE). In this model, digitalisation fulfils a dual function: on the management side, it enables real-time monitoring of carrying capacity and the state of heritage sites; on the visitor side, it broadens access to lesser-known locations. The model is particularly relevant for Slovak towns with historic centres (Banská Štiavnica, Levoča, Bardejov) and, within ERDF, corresponds to investments in the digital infrastructure of cultural heritage (Priority Axis 1 of the Programme Slovakia 2021–2027).

Model 4: Adaptive reuse of heritage sites for creative industries. Representative cases: Centres Culturels de Rencontre (FR), Antaliepte Innovator's Valley (LT), Koziołek Matołek European Fairytale Centre (PL), Tin Church (IE). In this model, heritage sites become hubs for artists, social enterprises, education and community activities, which ensures year-round use beyond the main tourist season and creates a new economic base. The transferability of this model is high for church buildings, manor houses and industrial complexes that are deteriorating in rural regions of Slovakia; within ERDF, it corresponds to investments in cultural heritage and creative industries (Priority Axis 4.6 of the Programme Slovakia).

Model 5: Integrated management of cultural and natural heritage. Representative cases: Suomenlinna (FI), cooperation between UNESCO sites and Parks & Wildlife (FI), Velebit National Park (HR), Clonmacnoise (IE), Brú na Bóinne (IE). This model is built on interdepartmental memoranda between nature protection authorities and cultural heritage bodies, as well as on strict limits of carrying capacity. It represents a counterweight to the fragmentation of competences that is also typical of Slovak public administration (separate ministries for culture and environment), which complicates the absorption of integrated ERDF projects.

Model 6: Revitalisation of post-industrial and depopulating areas. Representative cases: Bergslagen (SE), Prisma Västra Götaland (SE), El Hierro (ES). In this model, tourism serves as a substitute for declining industrial sectors, with key emphasis on the application of internationally recognised frameworks (UNESCO Toolkit) and systematic work with local "ambassadors". For Slovakia, this model is highly relevant in regions with a mining tradition (Upper Spiš, Gemer, Banská Štiavnica), which are also priority areas of the Just Transition Fund and ERDF in the 2021–2027 period.

## 3. Discussion: Transferability Of The Models To The Slovak ERDF/CF Context

The identification of six models of good practice broadly corresponds to typologies formulated in the international academic literature. Richards (2018) defines three basic approaches to cultural tourism – consumptive, creative and relational – and points to a shift from the passive consumption of heritage towards co-creation of experience,

which aligns with Model 1 (community-led development) and Model 4 (creative hubs in heritage sites). OECD (2009, 2014) emphasises the role of cultural tourism as an instrument of regional development in peripheral areas, distinguishing between "heritage-led", "creative-led" and "event-led" models, which in our typology are reflected in Models 4, 5 and 6.

The empirical findings from the 27 cases confirm the theoretical framework of the three pillars of sustainability according to UNWTO (2005) – environmental, economic and socio-cultural – while the OMC report significantly reinforces a fourth, institutional pillar, which has emerged over the past decade in debates on the governance dimension of sustainable development (UN-DESA, 2020). It is precisely this institutional dimension that appears in the 27 cases as the most frequently underestimated yet decisive condition of success, which directly corresponds to the thesis of Ederveen, de Groot and Nahuis (2006) on the role of institutional quality in the effectiveness of structural funds.

**Transferability of the models and application potencial in Slovakia**

Slovakia possesses an exceptionally rich and structured cultural heritage that fits all typological categories of the OMC sample: eight UNESCO sites (including Banská Štiavnica, Spiš Castle, Vlkolínec, Bardejov and the wooden churches of the Carpathians), more than 30 items on the Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage, and a network of historic mining and craft towns struggling with depopulation and economic decline (Banská Štiavnica, Kremnica, Špania Dolina, Smolník, Rožňava). These regions are priority beneficiaries of ERDF and CF in the 2021–2027 programming period.

Model 1 (community-led development) is highly relevant for smaller municipalities with endangered heritage assets. Slovak analogies include the restoration of traditional wooden folk architecture in Liptov and Orava or the community-led revitalisation of Vlkolínec. A key precondition for success is strengthening the capacity of local actors – civic associations and local action groups (LAGs) under CLLD – whose funding currently depends heavily on short-term project calls, which is one of the reasons for the insufficient absorption capacity of less developed regions in Slovakia.

Model 2 (cross-border and thematic routes) is among the most transferable. Slovakia is integrated into the network of European Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe (e.g. Marian Route, Cyril and Methodius Route, Iron Curtain Trail, Tokaj Wine Route) and into pilgrimage routes leading to Šaštín, Mariánska hora in Levoča and Bardejov Spa. Experience from Romea Strata (IT) and the European Pilgrimage Routes highlights the need for a professional coordination structure – working group meetings three times a year, unified waymarking and multi-source funding via Interreg Central Europe and cross-border Interreg programmes (Slovakia–Hungary, Slovakia–Czech Republic, Slovakia–Poland).

Model 3 (digitalisation and smart heritage) is promising for towns with high visitor numbers in historic centres. Banská Štiavnica faces ad hoc management of visitor flows, while Levoča and Bardejov experience seasonal congestion in narrow historic streets. The Ávila Smart Heritage City example provides an open-source solution that can be adapted at relatively low cost in cooperation with technical universities and financed from ERDF priority axes for digital transformation.

Model 4 (creative hubs in heritage sites) is relevant for deteriorating manor houses, monasteries and industrial sites. Antaliepte Innovator's Valley (LT), which transformed an 18th-century Carmelite monastery into a creative centre, offers a strong reference. Slovakia has dozens of similar sites (manor houses in Slovenský Grob, Topoľčianky, Betliar; former mining complexes in Špania Dolina, Hodruša, Smolník) with high adaptive reuse potential but lacking investment capital and entrepreneurial know-how; ERDF under Priority Axis 4.6 of the Programme Slovakia 2021–2027 provides instruments to address this gap.

Model 5 (integrated management of cultural and natural heritage) poses a challenge for Slovak public administration, which is characterised by strong fragmentation of competences between the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Transport. The Finnish model of memoranda between Metsähallitus, Parks & Wildlife and UNESCO sites illustrates a way towards institutionalised cooperation that could be applied, for example, in the management of the Carpathian beech forests and the wooden churches – two UNESCO sites located in geographical proximity but administered by different sectors.

Model 6 (post-industrial revitalisation) is of exceptional strategic importance for Slovakia. The mining regions of Gemer, Upper Spiš and parts of the Banská Bystrica region have undergone transformations comparable to the Swedish region of Bergslagen, where the UNESCO Sustainable Tourism Toolkit has been successfully applied. This toolkit offers a transferable methodology that could be used in the Banská Štiavnica–Hodruša–Vyhne complex, especially in synergy with the Just Transition Fund, which allocates resources specifically to coal and mining regions.

**Critical reflection on the OMC framework**

A critical academic reception of the OMC framework needs to take into account three limitations: (1) selection bias of the sample (the 27 cases were chosen as representative "best practices", and the sample does not include unsuccessful or problematic projects, which distorts the picture of the real failure rate of individual models), (2) variability in the quality of case descriptions (the depth and methodological rigour of individual cases range from a single paragraph to several pages, which complicates comparative analysis), and (3) the temporal obsolescence of the data (they refer to the period 2015–2018, while the COVID-19 pandemic has fundamentally changed the context of tourism – UNWTO, 2023). These limitations do not undermine the transferability of the models, but they require caution in application and the supplementation of more recent empirical evidence, which will be provided, in quantitative terms, by subsequent research within the present project.

For transferring the identified models to less developed regions of Slovakia, it is essential to confront their boundary conditions with the actual institutional and absorption situation. In the perspective of Becker, Egger and von Ehrlich (2013), Slovakia as a whole is a country on the borderline of successful absorption: Slovak NUTS2 regions have above-average human capital (share of the population with upper-secondary and tertiary education), but below-average quality of governance within the EU-27 (the European Quality of Government Index, Charron et al., 2022, repeatedly ranks Slovakia in the bottom third of the EU). This implies that identical models may

generate different outcomes in Slovakia than in Austria, Germany or the Nordic countries, where many of the reference cases are located.

For Model 1 (CLLD/LEADER), Slovakia has a relatively well-developed network of local action groups (around 110 in the 2021–2027 period), but with generally low capacity to work with cultural heritage. Transfer is realistic on the condition of targeted capacity-building for LAGs in Gemer, Spiš and Abov.

For Model 2 (Interreg), Slovakia participates in four Interreg programmes with priorities in culture and tourism (MIRRI SR, 2022). The institutional framework for transfer is in place; the main challenge lies in thematic concentration (pilgrimage routes, mining heritage, wooden churches) instead of a proliferation of small fragmented projects.

For Model 3 (smart heritage), Slovakia faces a critical deficit in data literacy among destination managers – the model is realistically transferable only in Bratislava, Banská Štiavnica and the High Tatras, where technical university support is available.

For Model 4 (adaptive reuse), Slovakia struggles with unclear ownership structures of heritage assets (churches, manor houses, mills) and with weak links between the Ministry of Culture and local governments. Transfer requires legislative amendments (e.g. to the Act on the Monuments Fund); without them, it will remain limited to a few exceptional projects (Hodruša, Banská Štiavnica).

For Model 5 (integrated management), Slovakia faces a critical deficit: interministerial coordination between the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Environment, the Ministry of Transport and the central coordination authority is weak. This model requires political will at the level of the national government, which is not currently evident.

For Model 6 (post-industrial revitalisation), Slovakia shows the highest degree of relevance: Upper Nitra after the coal phase-out, Gemer and Spiš after the decline of steelmaking, and Hodruša–Vyhne after the end of gold mining. The Just Transition Fund is available in Slovakia with an allocation of approximately EUR 459 million, which makes Model 6 particularly promising in the national context.

Our findings are consistent with Becker et al. (2013) in that the success of interventions depends on a combination of human capital and institutional quality. The six identified models implicitly confirm that effective practices take place in institutionally prepared environments (Austria, Germany, the Nordic countries, parts of France and Italy). For Slovakia, this implies that directly copying the models without parallel investments in absorption capacity will yield only limited results, which is in line with Crescenzi and Giua (2020, p. 16), who show that a "one-size-fits-all" approach to cohesion policy produces heterogeneous and often weak outcomes in institutionally less developed contexts. The difference compared to Percoco (2017) lies in emphasis: while his study highlights the role of local economic structure (sectoral diversification), our analysis identifies institutional arrangements (interministerial coordination, clarity of ownership) as an equally important factor. This shift is not contradictory; rather, it complements quantitative findings with qualitative mechanisms.

We also converge with Di Caro and Fratesi (2022) in finding that different regions benefit from different cohesion policy instruments; our typology of six models provides a qualitative "map" of which model is relevant for which type of region (CLLD for rural

areas with LAGs; Interreg for border regions; smart heritage for urban destinations; adaptive reuse for medium-sized towns with historic centres; integrated management for UNESCO sites; post-industrial revitalisation for transition regions). The divergence from Ederveen et al. (2006) is more nuanced: whereas they argue that funds work only in countries with above-average institutional quality, our analysis shows that even in countries with below-average national quality (such as Slovakia), local "islands of success" may emerge, provided there is a strong local institutional superstructure (robust LAGs, functional DMOs, heritage offices with expertise). This extension is made possible by our project- and destination-level perspective rather than a country-level one.

The Open Method of Coordination is not without its critics. Smith (2006) warns that a politicised heritage discourse can commodify local values. This issue is visible in our sample: the 27 cases are predominantly framed in cohesion-policy terminology (visitor numbers, indicators, outputs), while the voices of local communities are less present. For the Slovak context, this implies that transferring models should be complemented by locally led formative evaluation rather than relying solely on top-down "best practice" import. A second limitation of OMC is self-selection: countries and regions nominate cases they wish to showcase, which can lead to the systematic absence of cases that fail despite formal compliance with the rules. This limitation cannot be resolved within OMC data; it calls for additional research on failures, which is part of the next phase of the project (quantitative analysis of ERDF absorption in Slovakia in 2014–2020 and 2021–2024).

## Conclusion

The paper has provided a qualitative comparative analysis of 27 case studies compiled by the OMC Working Group on sustainable cultural tourism and derived a typology of six models of good practice (community-led development, cross-border thematic routes, smart heritage, adaptive reuse, integrated management, post-industrial revitalisation). Each model was characterised in terms of defining features, mechanisms of action and boundary conditions of effectiveness, which made it possible to confront them explicitly with the Slovak institutional context.

The key theoretical finding is that the effectiveness of ERDF/CF interventions in cultural tourism is not determined by the volume of transfers alone, but by the configuration of absorption capacity and institutional quality at the project and destination levels. This qualitative insight complements the quantitative findings of the literature (Becker et al., 2013; Crescenzi and Giua, 2020; Ederveen et al., 2006) by identifying the concrete mechanisms through which the moderating effects of institutional quality are realised in practice. On the basis of the identified models and institutional conditions, we formulate eight qualitative recommendations for policymakers and ERDF/CF managing authorities at national and regional levels:

(1) update the Tourism Development Strategy of the Slovak Republic to 2030 by explicitly integrating the OMC typology of good practices and a priority map of locations suitable for each model;

(2) establish an interministerial coordination body for cultural tourism, modelled on the Finnish Metsähallitus–Parks & Wildlife–UNESCO memorandum, linking

the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Transport, the Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Investments, Regional Development and Informatization;

(3) introduce a national "Cultural hub in a heritage site" label inspired by the French Centres Culturels de Rencontre, defining quality standards for adaptive reuse and granting priority access to ERDF and Arts Fund support;

(4) systematically support pilgrimage and thematic routes with a cross-border dimension through Interreg Slovakia–Czech Republic, Slovakia–Hungary, Slovakia–Poland and Central Europe programmes;

(5) implement pilot smart heritage projects in Banská Štiavnica, Levoča and Bardejov based on the Ávila Smart Heritage City model, using open-source solutions in cooperation with technical universities;

(6) apply the RETS (Resident Empowerment through Tourism Scale) methodology in Slovak cities with high visitor numbers for standardised collection of residents' attitudes;

(7) adopt the UNESCO Sustainable Tourism Toolkit for the transformation of mining regions, especially in the Banská Štiavnica–Hodruša–Vyhne complex, using Just Transition Fund resources;

(8) strengthen the capacity of local action groups (LAGs) as carriers of the CLLD/CultTrips model by financing long-term coordinators and providing methodological support for preparing ERDF project applications.

The added value of the paper lies in the comprehensive systematisation of the 27 OMC cases in the Slovak academic discourse, the clear distinction between EU policy instruments (OMC vs. EDEN), and the qualitative enrichment of the project's quantitative research programme on the regional impacts of ERDF/CF on tourism in Slovakia. The suggested avenues for further research include the quantification of sustainability impacts in the Slovak context, the differentiation of models by type of disadvantage, the post-pandemic transformation of cultural tourism, climate adaptation of cultural destinations, and the issue of digital inequalities in access to smart heritage – topics that will be addressed through econometric and synthetic analyses in subsequent phases of the project.

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# Consumer Perceptions of Sustainability-Oriented Marketing Communication in Tourism[1]

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***Abstract***

*The expanding relevance of sustainability in tourism has increased the need for effective marketing communication focused on sustainable practices and responsible tourism behaviour. The purpose of the study is to investigate consumers' perceptions of sustainability-oriented marketing communication in tourism. The research uses a quantitative method, conducted through an online questionnaire survey among 240 respondents in Slovakia. The findings indicate that respondents perceived social media and destination websites as the most influential communication channels in the decision-making process. Moreover, the results highlight that respondents perceived digital marketing communication and visual content as more effective than traditional forms of advertising. The study contributes to a better understanding of consumers' perceptions of sustainability-oriented marketing communication in tourism and provides evidence on the communication channels and sustainability-related information that respondents perceive as the most influential.*

***Key words***

*Consumer perception, Marketing communication, Sustainability, Tourism, Travel decision-making*

**JEL Classification: M31, Z32**

## Introduction

There has been growing interest in sustainability in tourism (Wehrli et al., 2014). According to Bramwell et al. (2017), over the last few years, several studies have focused on different perspectives on sustainable tourism development and destination management. Similarly, the research interest has increased in the role of governance as a primary criterion for implementing sustainable tourism (Heslinga et al., 2019; Bramwell & Lane, 2011). In this context, the communication of sustainable tourism products and consumer experiences plays a significant role in growing transparency regarding businesses' sustainability activities (Tölkes, 2018). Effective sustainability communication also fosters dialogue and awareness among tourism stakeholders, particularly among tourism operators and tourists, to achieve sustainable development

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goals. Even though the communication can differ in methods and language, tourism businesses increasingly cooperate with academic institutions to address challenges connected to the implementation of sustainable practices (Budeanu et al., 2016). Moreover, the recent research suggests that sustainability communication has a potential influence on tourists' behaviour during the pre-purchase and travel stages (Font et al., 2017). However, Tölkes (2018) highlights that communication on sustainability still remains a challenging area. Due to the broad sustainability concepts, consumers may find it difficult to recognise the characteristics of sustainable tourism products and understand the additional value they provide (Bilotta et al., 2021; Sharma et al., 2021). According to Tiago et al. (2020), marketing professionals and tourism researchers remain focused on finding effective ways to design sustainability messages that encourage more sustainable consumer behaviour. Finally, Vinzenz et al. (2019) emphasise that, to effectively reach broader consumer segments, it is important to understand diverse communication styles and consumers' value orientations.

Despite the growing importance of sustainability-oriented communication in tourism, the existing research remains limited (Zizka, 2017; Dedeoğlu et al., 2020; Okazaki et al., 2020). Therefore, the primary objective of the presented paper is to identify consumer perceptions of sustainability-oriented marketing communication in tourism. Specifically, the study focuses on identifying the communication channels that most influence travel-related decision-making, evaluating consumers' perceptions of sustainability-oriented marketing communication, and examining the sustainability-related information that consumers expect to be included in tourism marketing campaigns. The paper structure includes the following sections. The first part is the literature review, followed by the data and methodology. In the third chapter, results and discussion are presented. The paper ends with a conclusion of the findings.

## 1 Literature review

Increasing social, economic, and environmental challenges have changed sustainability into a core strategy for businesses (Hult et al., 2018). Therefore, businesses are widely expected to communicate their sustainability practices in a transparent, responsible and authentic way. Consumers are not evaluating companies based on the product and service quality, but they also expect social and environmental responsibility (Schmitt et al., 2021; Vredenburg et al., 2020). As consumers expect companies to embrace sustainability, brands have increasingly focused on building a positive reputation associated with positive environmental, economic and social responsibility (Sun et al., 2020). In this context, Arif (2025) highlights the importance of changing consumer preferences toward sustainability and adjusting marketing strategies. Consequently, marketing communication has become an important tool through which companies shape consumer behaviour and attitudes towards sustainability (Kim et al., 2020; White et al., 2019).

As reported by Genc (2017), marketing communication plays a significant role in promoting sustainability and involving internal and external stakeholders in sustainable development practices. Marketing communications tools are the most effective method of persuading and influencing consumers' actions. These tools are used to raise awareness, provide information and education, stimulate interest, and motivate consumers to purchase products and services. Moreover, Martin & Schouten (2014)

argue that marketing communication focused on sustainability aims to achieve marketing and sustainability objectives. According to the authors, effective sustainable marketing communication should reflect transparency, integrity, and accountability and support the development of communities. Communication plays an important role in shaping consumers' perceptions of sustainable brands by highlighting a brand's values, sustainability practices, and environmental and social initiatives (Eyada, 2024). Because the effectiveness of sustainability-oriented marketing communication depends on how consumers interpret sustainability messages, understanding consumer perception is essential. In this context, consumer perception is the process by which individuals select, organise, and interpret information to form a meaningful understanding of the world (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Understanding consumers' perceptions of sustainable communication requires considering the situational, emotional, and cognitive contexts in which they receive sustainability messages. Values, beliefs and attitudes form how consumers interpret sustainability-related messages. Values influence the roles individuals assume regarding environmental and social issues, beliefs affect how consumers perceive sustainability information, and attitudes arise from the interaction of values, beliefs, and personal experiences. These factors clarify why sustainability messages may create different perceptions among consumers (Belz et al., 2025).

Within the tourism and hospitality industry, marketing communication is a critical factor affecting tourists' decision-making. Nowadays, tourists can obtain information from media such as the Internet and social media, as well as from traditional media, including TV, magazines, newspapers, books, and films. In addition to media sources, social groups and word-of-mouth communication also significantly influence tourists' destination choices (Davies & Cairncross, 2013). The research by Xiang & Gretzel (2010) highlights that online platforms and user-generated content significantly influence tourists' behaviour and destination choices. In this line, Lou & Yuan (2019) emphasise the importance of influencer marketing, as travellers often perceive influencer recommendations as more authentic and trustworthy than traditional advertising. According to Lund et al. (2018) and Su et al. (2015), social media platforms can promote environmental, economic and social practices and foster ongoing user interaction. Moreover, communicating sustainable practices through social media platforms can positively influence young consumers by raising their intention to stay and encouraging positive electronic word-of-mouth (Clark et al., 2023). In this regard, sustainability communication has become significantly important for tourism and hospitality businesses seeking to communicate their environmental practices and engage consumers. Furthermore, the research highlights that travellers who are aware of the positive effects of sustainable practices show stronger support for environmentally responsible services than those with a lower level of awareness (Robin et al., 2016). According to Tanford et al. (2020), social media advertisements presenting hotels' sustainability initiatives increased hotel image and resulted in higher booking intention, willingness to pay more, and word-of-mouth.

Previous research focused on sustainability communication in tourism has dealt with the non-personal communication channels, defined as media that transmit messages without personal contact or feedback (Kotler et al., 2017). The existing literature mainly examines organisations' websites, hotel information, and sustainability certifications as the most researched communication channels. Other communication tools include destination image communication, print information, travel magazines,

online advertising, sustainability reporting, destination brochures, and restaurant information. In contrast, personal communication channels remain unexplored. Existing studies mainly focus on social media communication, which has received increasing attention as well as on the role of sales agents and tour guides in delivering sustainability messages. Previous research also suggests the need for broader investigation of different communication channels and their influence on consumer perceptions and decision-making (Tölkes, 2018).

## 2 Data and Methods

The research is based on a quantitative study. Data were gathered through an online survey via Google Forms shared via social media and email from September to December 2025. The final research sample consists of 240 respondents in Slovakia. The demographic characteristics of the final sample are displayed in Table 1. Male respondents (50.83%) slightly outnumber female respondents (49.17%). In terms of education, the majority of the sample held secondary education (62.5%), followed by a university degree (35.42%). Approximately 2% of the sample had an elementary education. Geographically, more than 62% of the respondents lived in rural areas, and 37.92% lived in urban areas. Regarding economic activity, the largest groups in the sample were employed (34.17%) and students (30%). More than 20% of the sample were retired, followed by the freelancers (5.83%) and respondents on maternity leave (3.75%). Based on the age range, it could be concluded that the majority of the sample were between 18-25 years old and more than 55 years old. The category of 36-45 years had the lowest representation in the sample (12.50%). Finally, the age categories 26-35 years and 46-55 years had the same representation, each accounting for 15% of the final sample.

In terms of data analysis, XLSTAT was employed to process the data. To analyse the statistically significant differences in the evaluation of statements regarding sustainable tourism, the Friedman test was applied and, subsequently, the Nemenyi post hoc method.

**Tab. 1** The final sample characteristics

| Variables | Categories | Frequency | Percent (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | Male | 122 | 50.83% |
| | Female | 118 | 49.17% |
| Economic acitivity | Student | 72 | 30.00% |
| | Employed | 82 | 34.17% |
| | Freelancer | 14 | 5.83% |
| | Pensioner | 50 | 20.83% |
| | Maternity leave | 9 | 3.75% |
| Education | Primary school | 5 | 2.08% |
| | Secondary school | 150 | 62.50% |
| | University degree | 85 | 35.42% |
| Residence | Urban areas | 91 | 37.92% |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Rural areas | 149 | 62.08% |
| Age | 18-25 years | 79 | 32.90% |
| | 26-35 years | 36 | 15.00% |
| | 36-45 years | 30 | 12.50% |
| | 46-55 years | 36 | 15.00% |
| | More than 55 years | 59 | 24.60% |

Source: own processing based on the questionnaire survey (2026)

## 3 Results and Discussion

The first part of the survey examined respondents' perceptions of the marketing communication sources that most influenced their travel-related decision-making. According to the results, the majority of the respondents were influenced by social media (26.70%) when making travel-related decisions. The second most influential source affecting travel decisions was the websites of destinations (21.30%). Approximately 16.70% of the sample indicated that influencers were a significant factor in deciding on the destination. Furthermore, 15.40% of the sample stated that they are influenced by the personal recommendations from family and friends. Traditional media, such as TV spots and radio, were the most important source for 12.1% of respondents. Print media were selected by approximately 8% of the final sample. The results indicate that respondents perceived social media as the most influential source of marketing communication in their travel-related decision-making. On the other hand, the results of Švajdová (2019) demonstrate that word-of-mouth marketing was evaluated as an important source of vacation decision-making. The research by Dębski (2013) shows that 71% of respondents consider a journey to the specific destination when given a friend's recommendation. Additionally, advertisements for the locality and posts on the social portal were identified as significant sources of impulse when choosing a destination. The study of Akin & Şener (2024) confirmed the relationship between the destination preference and the effect of social media marketing.

The next question in the survey asked respondents to evaluate 14 statements on a 7-point Likert scale (1-strongly disagree with the statement; 7-strongly agree with the statement) regarding sustainability-oriented marketing communication. To analyse differences between individual statements, the Friedman test and the post hoc Nemenyi procedure were applied. The results indicate that respondents evaluated the statements differently. Group F represents statements with the highest level of agreement. The results suggest that respondents agreed the most with the statement "Many destinations promote sustainability only as a marketing trick, while in reality they do not take any significant actions" (mean ranks = 8.890). Moreover, a high level of agreement was also identified for the statements "Digital marketing (social media, applications) is a more effective tool for promoting sustainable tourism than traditional advertising" (mean ranks = 8.752) and "Visual materials (photos, videos) have a greater impact on my decision-making than written information about sustainability" (mean ranks = 8.583). These findings suggest that respondents perceived digital communication channels as more influential than traditional forms of advertising in the context of sustainable tourism communication. On the other hand, the lowest agreement with the selected

statements is observed in group A. According to the results, sustainability certificates (such as Green Key or EU Ecolabel) were identified with the lowest mean rank value. The result suggests that respondents did not consider them the most influential factor in their destination decision. Moreover, lower mean rank values were also observed for the statements related to the credibility of the destination providing environmental impact data and the transparency of sustainability information in marketing materials. Overall, it can be concluded that respondents perceived different aspects of sustainability-oriented marketing communication in tourism differently. Higher evaluations were associated with the statements regarding digital marketing, visual presentation and misleading sustainability claims. On the contrary, the lower evaluations were observed for sustainability certifications and transparency-related statements.

**Tab. 2** Consumers' Perceptions of Sustainability-Oriented Marketing Communication Statements – Nemenyi method

| Sample | Sum of ranks | Mean of ranks | Groups | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sustainability certificates (e.g., Green Key, EU Ecolabel) are an important criterion for me when choosing a destination. | 1328.000 | 5.533 | A | | | | | |
| I consider destinations that provide real data about their environmental impact to be more trustworthy. | 1493.500 | 6.223 | A | B | | | | |
| Information about destination sustainability is clear and transparent in marketing materials. | 1512.500 | 6.302 | A | B | C | | | |
| Advertising that highlights the long-term environmental commitments of a destination motivates me more to visit. | 1632.000 | 6.800 | A | B | C | D | | |
| Independent tourist reviews and ratings influence my choice more than official destination advertising | 1699.500 | 7.081 | A | B | C | D | E | |
| Stories of local residents in marketing communication increase my trust in the authenticity of the destination. | 1732.000 | 7.217 | A | B | C | D | E | F |
| Some sustainability certificates are only formal and do not guarantee real ecological measures. | 1771.000 | 7.379 | | B | C | D | E | F |
| Advertisements about sustainable tourism are often unclear or misleading. | 1772.500 | 7.385 | | B | C | D | E | F |

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Many destinations present themselves as environmentally friendly in advertising but do not actually publish real data about their carbon footprint. | 1917.000 | 7.988 | | | C | D | E | F |
| I prefer marketing communication that includes real examples of ecological measures (photos, videos, reports). | 1998.500 | 8.327 | | | | D | E | F |
| Information about the sustainability of destinations is often unavailable or difficult to find. | 2049.500 | 8.540 | | | | | E | F |
| Visual materials (photos, videos) have a greater impact on my decision-making than written information about sustainability. | 2060.000 | 8.583 | | | | | E | F |
| Digital marketing (social media, applications) is a more effective tool for promoting sustainable tourism than traditional advertising. | 2100.500 | 8.752 | | | | | E | F |
| Many destinations promote sustainability only as a marketing trick, while in reality they do not take any significant actions. | 2133.500 | 8.890 | | | | | | F |

Source: own processing based on the questionnaire survey (2026)

The study also examined respondents' expectations regarding the type of information that should be included in tourism marketing campaigns (Tab. 3). To determine which information type was considered most important, the Friedman test and Nemenyi procedure were applied. The results revealed statistically significant differences in respondents' expectations regarding the importance of different types of sustainability-related information. The results suggest that the most important information expected in sustainable tourism marketing campaigns is about educating tourists about sustainable behaviour, followed by information about cooperation with local businesses and producers. Furthermore, high importance was placed on information about reviews and ratings and real examples of the ecological measures. On the other hand, the results indicated that the lowest expectation was recorded for environmental certifications and the use of recycled materials. Overall, the results highlight the importance of educational content and guidance related to responsible and sustainable tourism practices. Previous research revealed the message content that should be involved in tourism advertising. Zanon & Teichmann (2016) and Villarino & Font (2015) suggested that tourists prefer emotional to rational appeals in brochures and on hotel websites regarding sustainability information. The findings of Hardeman et al. (2017) revealed that information about specific sustainability practices is perceived as more persuasive and credible in tourism marketing communication.

**Tab. 3** Respondents' Expectations Regarding Sustainability Communication in Tourism Advertising

| Sample | Sum of ranks | Mean of ranks | Groups | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Official certificates from environmental organizations | 935.500 | 3.898 | A | | | |
| Use of recycled and environmentally friendly materials | 1046.000 | 4.358 | A | B | | |
| Transparent data about environmental impact | 1123.500 | 4.681 | A | B | C | |
| Cooperation with environmental organizations | 1175.500 | 4.898 | A | B | C | D |
| Long-term commitments and sustainability strategies of the destination | 1249.500 | 5.206 | | B | C | D |
| Real examples of ecological measures (photographs, videos, case studies) | 1270.500 | 5.294 | | B | C | D |
| Independent tourist reviews and ratings | 1282.500 | 5.344 | | B | C | D |
| Cooperation with local businesses and producers | 1323.000 | 5.513 | | | C | D |
| Education of tourists about sustainable behaviour | 1394.000 | 5.808 | | | | D |

Source: own processing based on the questionnaire survey (2026)

## Conclusion

The presented study examined the consumer perceptions of sustainability-oriented marketing communication in tourism. The questionnaire survey conducted among respondents in Slovakia indicated that social media and destination websites were perceived as the most influential communication sources in travel-related decision-making. The findings also revealed that visual materials and digital marketing tools were perceived as more influential than traditional forms of communication. Furthermore, the Friedman test confirmed statistically significant differences in respondents' evaluations of sustainability-oriented marketing communication statements and their expectations regarding sustainability-related information in tourism marketing campaigns. Moreover, based on the results, it could be concluded that respondents agreed that many destinations use sustainability mostly as a marketing tool without implementing real environmental action.

The study contributes to the existing literature by extending knowledge about consumer perceptions of sustainability-oriented communication in tourism. Several limitations should be acknowledged. The research was conducted on a relatively limited sample of respondents in Slovakia. Future research could be focused on larger samples.

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# Hodnotenie dostupnosti údajov o cestovnom ruchu princípmi FAIR[1]

Martin Jambrich – Matúš Marciš[2]

***Abstract***

*Accessible data represents a strategic asset for sustainability, resilience and evidence-based decision-making in tourism. This paper evaluates tourism data availability in Slovakia through the lens of FAIR principles: Findability, Accessibility, Interoperability, and Reuse. The methodology involved a comparative analysis of three key public institutions, namely the Statistical Office of the SR, the Ministry of Tourism and Sport of the SR, and Slovakia Travel. Findings revealed that the Statistical Office provided the highest data quality due to structured datasets and API access. Conversely, the Ministry and Slovakia Travel relied heavily on non-machine-readable formats, such as PDFs, which hindered automated processing and analytical use. The study concludes that improving digital infrastructure and adopting standardized protocols are essential for enhancing evidence-based decision-making in tourism.*

***Key words***

*Tourism, data, FAIR principles, data availability*

**JEL Classification:** Z32, Y10

## Úvod

Dostupnosť údajov, správna analýza údajov a ich následné využitie stimulujú rozvoj cestovného ruchu. Aby bol rozvoj cestovného ruchu efektívny, v súlade s princípmi udržateľného rozvoja a v kontexte zlepšovania odolnosti, je nevyhnutné, aby boli údaje kvalitné, aktuálne, relevantné a jednoducho prístupné. Takéto údaje podporujú lepšie rozhodovanie založené na faktoch a stávajú sa strategickým aktívom.

Na posúdenie dostupnosti údajov možno využiť princípy FAIR. Hoci povedomie o princípoch FAIR postupne rastie, ich skutočné zavádzanie do praxe si stále vyžaduje značné úsilie. Relevantné to je obzvlášť v prípade verejných inštitúcií, ktoré disponujú značným objemom údajov a sú často viazané povinnosťami údaje poskytovať. V cestovnom ruchu je uplatňovanie princípov FAIR verejnými inštitúciami kľúčové pre strategické plánovanie, podporu digitálnych inovácií, zefektívnenie využívania verejných financií a zvýšenie medzinárodnej konkurencieschopnosti.

Cieľom príspevku je pomocou princípov FAIR posúdiť dostupnosť údajov o cestovnom ruchu na Slovensku. Zameriame sa na verejné inštitúcie, ktoré poskytujú údaje o cestovnom ruchu, a to Štatistický úrad SR, Ministerstvo cestovného ruchu a športu SR a organizáciu Slovakia Travel.

[11] Príspevok je súčasťou projektu VEGA 1/0114/26 Udržateľné tranzície ekosystému cestovného ruchu.

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# 1 Teoretické východiská

V súčasnom období neistoty a rýchlych zmien je analýza údajov nevyhnutná pre efektívne rozhodovanie a správne reakcie. Platí to aj pre sektor cestovného ruchu, v ktorom môžu podniky a manažérske organizácie vďaka pokroku v informačných technológiách zaznamenávať, uchovávať a spracúvať údaje čoraz efektívnejším spôsobom. Tieto údaje následne poskytujú podklad pre rozhodovanie založené na faktoch, nevyhnutný predpoklad pre udržateľný a odolný cestovný ruch (Gajdošík et al., 2023). Prístupy udržateľného cestovného ruchu sú založené na údajoch, ktoré predstavujú potenciál nového chápania a správania relevantného pre sektor cestovného ruchu (Xu, Nash a Whitmarsh, 2019).

V cestovnom ruchu môže ísť napr. o údaje o dopyte, preferenciách, spotrebiteľskom správaní a turistických prúdoch (Volo, 2020). Z hľadiska ponuky sa najčastejšie posudzujú výkony podnikov a cieľových miest cestovného ruchu. Tieto údaje sú najčastejšie získavané z primárnych a sekundárnych zdrojov (Gáll, Strežo a Özoğlu, 2021).

Ak má byť riadenie cestovného ruchu efektívne, údaje musia byť kvalitné, aktuálne, relevantné a ľahko dostupné (Európska komisia, 2023). Takéto údaje umožňujú lepšie pochopenie správania sa návštevníkov, plánovanie rozvoja a tvorbu stratégií.

Na zber, uchovávanie, spracovanie a prezentáciu údajov o cestovnom ruchu sa využívajú rôzne informačné systémy. Informačné systémy pozostávajú zo súboru informačných technológií, medzi ktoré patria hardvérové a softvérové prostriedky, databázové systémy, komunikačné technológie, internet, mobilné zariadenia a ďalšie nástroje určené na vykonávanie špecifických funkcií (Boell a Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2015). Opodstatnené sú čoraz viac aj dátové priestory cestovného ruchu, ktoré zohrávajú kľúčovú úlohu pri rozhodovaní, spolupráci zainteresovaných strán a podpore udržateľného cestovného ruchu. Dátové priestory zároveň predstavujú dynamické ekosystémy slúžiace na zdieľanie údajov (Gajdošík a Marciš, 2025).

Na posúdenie dostupnosti údajov možno aplikovať princípy FAIR. Skratka FAIR vychádza z anglických *pojmov "Findability, Accessibility, Interoperability a Reuse of digital assets"*, teda usmernenia zaoberajúce sa vyhľadateľnosťou, prístupnosťou, súčinnosťou a opätovným použitím údajov (go-fair.org, 2026). Princípy FAIR formálne rozpracovali Wilkinson et al. (2016), ktorí ako prví demonštrovali, že na to, aby bolo možné v súčasnej dobe množstvo údajov tieto údaje efektívne využívať, musia byť prispôsobované nie leň pre ľudí, ale aj pre automatizované spracovanie. Autori zároveň poukázali na údaje ako na digitálne aktíva. Princípy posudzujú najmä to, aká je vyhľadateľnosť údajov, ich dostupnosť, využitie prostredníctvom rôznych súborových formátov ale aj opätovná použiteľnosť dostupných údajov.

Napriek čoraz lepšiemu povedomiu o princípoch FAIR, ich zakotvení v teórii a strategických dokumentoch, ich reálne uplatňovanie v praxi vyžaduje viac úsilia. Evidentné to je aj vo verejnom sektore, ktorý zohráva podstatnú úlohu v dostupnosti údajov. V kontexte cestovného ruchu je implementácia princípov FAIR verejnými inštitúciami nevyhnutná z dôvodov strategického plánovania, podpory digitálnych inovácií, efektívnosti verejných výdavkov a medzinárodnej konkurencieschopnosti.

Vzhľadom na uvedené vyššie je zámerom tohto článku posúdiť dostupnosť údajov o cestovnom ruchu z verejných inštitúcií princípmi FAIR.

## 2 Metodológia

Cieľom príspevku je pomocou princípov FAIR posúdiť dostupnosť údajov o cestovnom ruchu na Slovensku. Zameriame sa na verejné inštitúcie, ktoré poskytujú údaje o cestovnom ruchu: Štatistický úrad SR (ŠÚ SR), Ministerstvo cestovného ruchu a športu SR (MCR a Š SR) a organizáciu Slovakia Travel. Analýzou webových portálov týchto inštitúcií preskúmame ich verejne dostupnú ponuku údajov o cestovnom ruchu. Na posúdenie dostupnosti údajov o cestovnom ruchu aplikujeme princípy FAIR. Uvedené princípy majú svoje špecifické znaky a náležitosti. Prehľad princípov FAIR poskytuje tabuľka 1.

**Tab. 1** Prehľad princípov FAIR

| Zásady | Vysvetlenie |
|---|---|
| **Vyhľadateľnosť** | • Meta-údaje majú priradený globálne jedinečný a trvalý identifikátor<br>• Údaje sú opísané pomocou bohatých meta-údajov<br>• Meta-údaje jasne a explicitne obsahujú identifikátor údajov, ktoré opisujú<br>• Meta-údaje sú registrované alebo indexované vo vyhľadateľnom zdroji |
| **Prístupnosť** | • Meta-údaje vyhľadateľné podľa identifikátora pomocou štandardizovaného komunikačného protokolu<br>• Protokol je otvorený, bezplatný a univerzálne implementovateľný<br>• Protokol umožňuje v prípade potreby postup autentifikácie a autorizácie<br>• Meta-údaje sú prístupné, aj keď už nie sú k dispozícii |
| **Súčinnosť** | • Meta-údaje používajú formálny, prístupný, zdieľaný a široko použiteľný jazyk na reprezentáciu udalostí<br>• Meta-údaje používajú slovníky, ktoré dodržiavajú princípy FAIR<br>• Meta-údaje zahŕňajú kvalifikované odkazy na iné meta-údaje |
| **Opätovné použitie** | • Meta-údaje sú bohato opísané s množstvom presných a relevantných atribútov<br>• Meta-údaje sú zverejnené s jasnou prístupnou licenciou na používanie údajov<br>• Meta-údaje sú spojené s podrobným pôvodom<br>• Meta-údaje spĺňajú štandardy komunity relevantné pre danú doménu |

Zdroj: vlastné spracovanie podľa go-fair.org, 2026

Vyhľadateľnosť údajov je hlavne v tom, aby údaje mali jedinečný identifikátor (kód, označenie, názov) a aby boli dostupné v systéme. Prístupnosť hovorí o dostupnosti

údajov pomocou štandardizovaného a otvoreného protokolu (HTTPS, API, Open Data). Súčinnosť vyžaduje používanie štandardov a formátov na prepojenie s inými údajmi. Opätovné použitie je podmienené jasnou licenciou, podrobným opisom ale aj uvedením pôvodu, t. j. zdroju údajov.

Pri vyhodnocovaní jednotlivých vlastností údajov budeme vychádzať z nasledujúcich otázok:

- Vyhľadateľnosť: existuje priradený identifikátor, kód a presné názvy?
- Prístupnosť: sú údaje voľne dostupné (open data), a existuje API prístup či protokol HTTPS?
- Súčinnosť: je možné získať údaje vo viacerých súborových formátoch?
- Opakované použitie: spadajú údaje pod licenciu CC BY 4.0?

Jednotlivé zistenia následne porovnáme a ohodnotíme. Pre zjednodušenie postupu pridelíme vybraným inštitúciám skóre na škále 1 až 3, kde 1 znamená slabé hodnotenie, 2 priemerné a 3 dobré hodnotenie dostupnosti údajov o cestovnom ruchu. Jednotlivé škály odrážajú technickú pripravenosť údajov na analytické spracovanie

1. Slabé hodnotenie (nízka miera štruktúrovanosti):
   - Kritériá: Údaje sú dostupné primárne v statických a neštruktúrovaných formátoch (napr. výhradne .pdf);
   - Technické bariéry: Chýbajú jedinečné identifikátory (kódy), neexistuje API rozhranie a údaje majú skôr marketingový/informačný než analytický charakter. Práca s nimi si vyžaduje vysokú mieru manuálneho spracovania.
2. Priemerné hodnotenie (Čiastočná štruktúrovanosť a dostupnosť):
   - Kritériá: Údaje sú vyhľadateľné podľa názvu, ale často absentujú unikátne kódy. Sú zverejňované v štruktúrovaných, no obmedzených formátoch (napr. len .xlsx).
   - Technické bariéry: Prístup je zabezpečený (HTTPS), avšak absentuje systémové API rozhranie pre automatizovaný zber údajov. Licenčné podmienky sú definované inštitúciou, ale nemusia byť v súlade s univerzálnymi štandardmi (napr. CC BY 4.0).
3. Dobré hodnotenie (Vysoká miera integrácie a strojovej čitateľnosti):
   - Kritériá: Údaje sú plne štruktúrované v datasetoch s priradenými jedinečnými a trvalými kódmi.
   - Technická pripravenosť: Podstatným faktorom je prítomnosť funkčného API rozhrania a ponuka údajov v rôznych otvorených formátoch (.csv, .json, .xml, .ods). Údaje sú zverejnené pod jasnou licenciou (CC BY 4.0), čo umožňuje ich bezproblémové opätovné použitie.

# 3 Výsledky

## 3.1 Hodnotenie údajov o cestovnom ruchu zo Štatistického úradu SR

V prvej časti výsledkov posúdime údaje o cestovnom ruchu zo Štatistického úradu SR. Vzhľadom na charakter údajov nie je potrebné porovnávať všetky kategórie údajov, nakoľko ŠÚ SR uplatňuje pri zverejňovaní údajov na svojich hlavných stránkach

homogénny prístup. Prehľad o vlastnostiach údajov pochádzajúcich zo ŠÚ SR poskytuje tabuľka 2.

**Tab. 2** Hodnotenie údajov o cestovnom ruchu zo ŠU SR

| **Kategória údajov** | **Vyhľadateľnosť** | **Prístupnosť** | **Súčinnosť** | **Opätovné použitie** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Štatistiky ubytovacích zariadení | | | | |
| Kapacity a výkony UZ v SR | áno | áno | áno | áno |
| Návštevnosť, tržby a kapacity UZ – SR, kraje | áno | áno | áno | áno |
| Štatistiky organizovaného cestovného ruchu | | | | |
| Aktívny a pasívny cestovný ruch v SR – ročné údaje | áno | áno | áno | áno |
| Domáci cestovný ruch v SR – ročné údaje | áno | áno | áno | áno |
| Tržby cestovného ruchu v SR – ročné údaje | áno | áno | áno | áno |
| Štatistiky domáceho a výjazdového cestovného ruchu | | | | |
| Účasť na cestovnom ruchu s prenocovaním – ročne | áno | áno | áno | áno |
| Počet ciest – ročne | áno | áno | áno | áno |
| Cesty – podľa dĺžky pobytu – ročne | áno | áno | áno | áno |
| Satelitný účet cestovného ruchu | | | | |
| Výdavky na domáci cestovný ruch podľa produktov | áno | áno | áno | áno |
| Priama hrubá pridaná hodnota v cestovnom ruchu | áno | áno | áno | áno |

Zdroj: vlastné spracovanie podľa ŠÚ SR, 2026

Okrem toho ŠÚ SR spravuje webovú stránku s názvom "Otvorené údaje Štatistického úradu SR", kde používateľ môže vyhľadať údaje o cestovnom ruchu v API rozhraní (tabuľka 3). Tieto tabuľky sú dostupné v rôznych súborových formátoch (nie len v .pdf a .xlsx ako pri DATAcube), na všetky údaje sa vzťahujú podmienky licencie CC BY 4.0, a údaje sú aktualizované každý pracovný deň o 10:00 a 22:00 (Otvorené údaje Štatistického úradu SR, 2020).

**Tab. 3** Údaje cestovného ruchu dostupné cez API ŠÚ SR

| **API údaje cestovného ruchu** | **Kód tabuľky** | **Export údajov** |
|---|---|---|
| Návštevníci v ubytovacích zariadeniach podľa hustoty osídlenia-ročné údaje | cr1004rs | JSON, XML, CSV, XLSX, ODS |
| Účasť na cestovnom ruchu s prenocovaním – ročne | cr1801rs | |
| Neúčasť na cestovnom ruchu a dôvody neúčasti – ročne | cr1802rs | |
| Počet ciest – ročne | cr1803rs | |
| Počet prenocovaní – ročne | cr1804rs | |
| Priemerný počet prenocovaní – ročne | cr1805rs | |
| Priemerné výdavky na cestu – ročne | cr1806rs | |
| Cesty – podľa dĺžky pobytu – ročne | cr1807rs | |
| Cesty – podľa veku – ročne | cr1808rs | |
| Cesty – podľa účelu – ročne | cr1809rs | |
| Cesty – podľa cieľového miesta – ročne | cr1810rs | |
| Cesty – podľa hlavného typu ubytovania – ročne | cr1811rs | |
| Cesty – podľa hlavného typu dopravy – ročne | cr1812rs | |
| Cesty v zahraničí – vybrané krajiny – ročne | cr1813rs | |
| Kapacity a výkony ubytovacích zariadení v Slovenskej republike – ročné údaje | cr2001rs | |
| Aktívny a pasívny cestovný ruch v Slovenskej republike – ročné údaje | cr2002rs | Potreba vykonania výberu |
| Návštevnosť a kapacity UZ – okresy | cr3002rr | JSON, XML, CSV, XLSX, ODS |
| Kapacity a výkony ubytovacích zariadení podľa krajov – štvrťročné údaje | cr3003qr | Potreba vykonania výberu |
| Návštevnosť UZ – SR, kraje (6 kategórií UZ) | cr3801mr | |
| Návštevnosť UZ – okresy (3 kategórie UZ) | cr3802mr | |
| Návštevnosť UZ – obce (zahraniční/domáci) | cr3803mr | |
| Návštevnosť UZ – okresy (krajiny) | cr3804mr | |
| Cesty v SR – vybrané okresy – ročne | cr3805rs | JSON, XML, CSV, XLSX, ODS |
| Návštevnosť, tržby a kapacity UZ – SR, kraje (6 kategórií UZ, 9 ukazovateľov) | cr3806qr | Potreba vykonania výberu |
| Návštevnosť, tržby a kapacity UZ – okresy (3 kategórie UZ, 9 ukazovateľov) | cr3807qr | |
| Návštevnosť, tržby a kapacity UZ – SR, kraje, okresy (13 ukazovateľov) | cr3808qr | |
| Návštevnosť, tržby a kapacity UZ – obce (13 ukazovateľov) | cr3809qr | |

Zdroj: vlastné spracovanie podľa ŠÚ SR, 2026.

Vyhľadateľnosť údajov o cestovnom ruchu pomocou ŠÚ SR je na dobrej úrovni. Všetky datasety sú tematicky zaradené v sekcii „Cestovný ruch", názvy jednotlivých štatistík sú presne definované a obsahujú aj svoje jedinečné označenia (napr. cr2001rs). Územná pôsobnosť údajov je taktiež vždy uvedená priamo v názve.

Prístupnosť údajov je taktiež veľmi dobrá. Údaje sú voľne dostupné bez registrácie a bez poplatkov, webové stránky disponujú HTTPS zabezpečením, údaje je možné exportovať do viacerých súborových formátov. Prístup API je podstatným pozitívum, avšak tento prístup nie je možný ku všetkým údajom cestovného ruchu. Súčinnosť údajov je na dobrej úrovni. Údaje v API rozhraní sú dostupné vo viacerých formátoch, využívané sú aj kódy krajov a okresov a územná štruktúra je kompatibilná s klasifikáciou NUTS.

Opätovné použitie údajov spĺňa potrebné náležitosti. Údaje spadajú pod licenciu CC BY 4.0, zdroj údajov je jasne uvedený, dostupné sú aj metodické poznámky a údaje sú sledované za dlhodobé časové rady.

## 3.2 Hodnotenie údajov o cestovnom ruchu z Ministerstva cestovného ruchu a športu SR

V tejto časti poskytneme výsledky hodnotenia údajov o cestovnom ruchu získaných z webovej stránky MCR a Š SR a súvisiacich podstránok. Prehľad o vlastnostiach údajov pochádzajúcich z webovej stránky Ministerstva cestovného ruchu a športu SR je v tabuľke 4.

**Tab. 4** Hodnotenie údajov o cestovnom ruchu z MCR a Š SR

| **Kategória údajov** | **Vyhľadateľnosť** | **Prístupnosť** | **Súčinnosť** | **Opätovné použitie** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Register organizácií cestovného ruchu | | | | |
| Register krajských organizácií cestovného ruchu | čiastočne | čiastočne | čiastočne | áno |
| Register oblastných organizácií cestovného ruchu | čiastočne | čiastočne | nie | áno |
| Poskytovanie dotácií pre organizácie cestovného ruchu | | | | |
| Zoznam žiadateľov o dotácie pre organizácie cestovného ruchu | čiastočne | čiastočne | nie | áno |
| Analýzy z oblasti cestovného ruchu a analýzy zdrojových trhov | | | | |
| Návštevníci v UZ cestovného ruchu na Slovensku za roky 2017 – 2023 | čiastočne | áno | nie | áno |
| Analýzy zdrojových trhov | čiastočne | čiastočne | nie | áno |

Zdroj: vlastné spracovanie podľa MCR a Š SR, 2026

Kritérium vyhľadateľnosti údajov hodnotíme tomto prípade priemerne. Čo však určite treba zmieniť je to, že údaje pochádzajúce z webovej stránky Ministerstva cestovného ruchu a športu nemajú určené kódy, ale iba presne názvy (údaje pochádzajúce zo Štatistického úradu SR kódy mali). Napriek tomu sa však jednotlivé údaje z tabuľky 4 dajú vyhľadať pomocou príslušných názvov, preto udeľujeme priemerné hodnotenie.

Situácia sa mení v prípade prístupnosti. Všetky údaje spĺňajú to, že sú voľne dostupné pre bežného používateľa, a taktiež existuje aj zabezpečenie prostredníctvom protokolu HTTPS. Čo sa týka API prístupu, ten je dostupný len pre údaje o návštevníkoch v UZ cestovného ruchu na Slovensku za roky 2017 – 2023, konkrétny by sme údaje našli v štatistikách popisujúcich Návštevnosť, tržby a kapacity UZ na webovej stránke "Otvorené údaje Štatistického úradu SR" skadiaľ sme čerpali údaje z rozhrania API pre Štatistický úrad SR. Avšak ostatné štatistiky a údaje z tabuľky 3 v tomto rozhraní nenájdeme.

Z hľadiska súčinnosti sme posudzovali to, či je možné údaje získať vo viacerých súborových formátoch. Výsledok je, že všetky spomínané údaje sú dostupné len v súborovom formáte .pdf, čo výrazne sťažuje prácu a analýzu týchto údajov. Register krajských organizácií cestovného ruchu ponúka údaje vo formáte .pdf a .docx, avšak len časť z nich je dostupná vo formáte .pdf, a druhá časť vo formáte .docx.

Keďže sú údaje slovenských ministerstiev zverejňované pod licenciou CC BY 4.0, všetky údaje v tomto prípade spĺňajú podmienku opätovného použitia. Okrem toho Ministerstvo cestovného ruchu a športu SR využíva vo svojich publikáciách údaje zo Štatistického úradu SR, a tieto údaje sú zverejňované pod spomínanou licenciou, čím sme sa zaoberali už v predošlej podkapitole.

Celkové zhodnotenie údajov o cestovnom ruchu získaných prostredníctvom Ministerstva cestovného ruchu a športu SR je priemerné. Údaje majú význam z hľadiska rozvoja cestovného ruchu, avšak na rozdiel od Štatistického úradu SR ministerstvo neposkytuje systematické štatistické datasety údajov. To komplikuje prácu a samotnú analýzu týchto údajov. Údaje pochádzajúce z webovej stránky Ministerstva cestovného ruchu a športu SR podľa nášho pohľadu predstavujú skôr dokumentový zdroj informácií o cestovnom ruchu na Slovensku, ako sú napr. publikácie, registre organizácií, a nie konkrétne datasety údajov.

### 3.3 Hodnotenie údajov o cestovnom ruchu od Slovakia Travel

Organizácia Slovakia Travel poskytuje na svojej webovej stránke informácie o ubytovacej štatistike, kongresovom a kúpeľnom cestovnom ruchu, prevažne zo ŠÚ SR. Niektoré údaje, ako napr. návštevnosť ubytovacích zariadení, sú prezentované pomocou Power BI. Prehľad o údajoch poskytovaných organizáciou Slovakia Travel zachytáva tabuľka 5.

**Tab. 5** Hodnotenie údajov o cestovnom ruchu z organizácie Slovakia Travel

| | Vyhľadateľnosť | Prístupnosť | Súčinnosť | Opätovné použitie |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Databáza softvéru Microsoft Power BI | | | | |
| Domáci a príjazdový cestovný ruch | čiastočne | čiastočne | nie | čiastočne |
| Zdrojové trhy cestovného ruchu na Slovensku | | | | |
| Publikácie k jednotlivým krajinám (52 krajín) | čiastočne | čiastočne | nie | čiastočne |
| Štatistiky cestovného ruchu na Slovensku | | | | |
| Ubytovacia štatistika cestovného ruchu | čiastočne | čiastočne | nie | čiastočne |
| Štatistika kongresového cestovného ruchu | čiastočne | čiastočne | nie | čiastočne |
| Štatistika kúpeľného cestovného ruchu | čiastočne | čiastočne | nie | čiastočne |
| Štatistika organizovaného cestovného ruchu | čiastočne | čiastočne | nie | čiastočne |

Zdroj: vlastné spracovanie podľa organizácie Slovakia Travel, 2026

Údaje organizácie Slovakia Travel a ich vyhľadateľnosť je pomerne obmedzená. Údaje sú rozdelené, avšak tieto údaje nepredstavujú štruktúrované datasety. Údaje síce majú pridelené svoje unikátne názvy ale špecifické kódy u nich absentujú.

Z hľadiska prístupnosti sú údaje obmedzené rovnako. Oficiálna webová stránka organizácie Slovakia Travel a jej ďalšie podstránky sú zabezpečené protokolom HTTPS a údaje sú taktiež voľne dostupné pre bežného používateľa. Chýba systematický prístup k údajom prostredníctvom API rozhrania, teda k otvoreným datasetom.

Súčinnosť údajov je veľmi nízka. Všetky dokumenty o štatistikách cestovného ruchu, a rovnako aj publikácie o zdrojových trhoch sú dostupné vo formáte .pdf. Čo sa týka údajov poskytovaných cez platformu Microsoft Power BI, z nej sa jednotlivé údaje nedajú kopírovať, a slúži len na prezeranie údajov, grafov a máp priamo na webovej stránke. Tieto formy publikovania sú vhodné na prezentáciu informácií, no neumožňujú prepojenie s inými údajovými zdrojmi a ich následné analytické spracovávanie.

Obmedzené je aj opätovné používanie týchto údajov. Organizácia Slovkia Travel neuvádza, že na údaje platí licencia CC BY 4.0, avšak všetky údaje pochádzajú zo Štatistického úradu SR, ktorý touto licenciou disponuje. Na to sa odvoláva aj samotná organizácia Slovakia Travel, ktorá uvádza, že obsah ich internetových stránok je zložený z údajov, ktoré sú považované za spoľahlivé, pričom tento obsah je priebežne aktualizovaný. Za presnosť týchto informácií samotná organizácia nenesie žiadnu právnu zodpovednosť, a to ani za žiadne spôsobené škody a ujmy vzniknuté využitím týchto údajov (Slovakia Travel, 2026).

## Záver

V závere porovnáme princípmi FAIR dostupnosť údajov o cestovnom ruchu z vybraných verejných inštitúcií. Porovnanie poskytuje tabuľka 6. Najvyššiu úroveň údajov podľa princípu FAIR dosahuje Štatistický úrad SR. Vzhľadom na zameranie inštitúcie sú tieto výsledky pochopiteľne. Poskytované údaje sú štruktúrované v datasetoch, existujú licencie na spracovávanie údajov, údaje obsahujú presné názvy a kódy za pomoci ktorých sa dajú jednoducho vyhľadať. Pozitívom je aj existujúce API rozhranie, ktoré umožňuje export údajov do viacerých súborových formátov čo uľahčuje prácu a analýzu údajov o cestovnom ruchu.

**Tab. 6** Porovnanie údajov

| Kategória údajov | Štatistický úrad SR | Ministerstvo cestovného ruchu a športu SR | Slovakia Travel |
|---|---|---|---|
| Vyhľadateľnosť | 3 | 2 | 2 |
| Prístupnosť | 3 | 2 | 2 |
| Súčinnosť | 3 | 1 | 1 |
| Opätovné použitie | 3 | 3 | 2 |
| Priemer | 3 | 2 | 1,75 |

Zdroj: vlastné spracovanie, 2026

Inštitúcie explicitne zamerané na rozvoj cestovného ruchu dosiahli nižšie hodnotenie. Dôvodom je horšia vyhľadateľnosť, keďže údaje disponujú len presnými názvami, nie kódmi. Z hľadiska prístupnosti je potrebné vytknúť chýbajúce API rozhrania. Napriek tomu, údaje sú voľne dostupné a zabezpečené protokolom HTTPS. Súčinnosť údajov dosahuje najnižšiu hodnotu, pretože na výber sú len vo formátoch .pdf, z ktorých je náročné údaje následne analyzovať, a len zopár dokumentov je dostupných vo formáte .docx (MS Word). Organizácia Slovakia Travel dosahuje najnižšie hodnotenie. Vyhľadateľnosť je priemerná, názvy neobsahujú kódy. API rozhranie chýba, preto sa údaje nedajú plnohodnotne využiť v analýzach. Súčinnosť je na najnižšej hodnote, nakoľko dokumenty obsahujúce údaje sú dostupné len v .pdf formáte.

Zhodnotenie dostupnosti údajov o cestovnom ruchu na Slovensku prostredníctvom princípov FAIR preukázalo, že hoci Štatistický úrad SR poskytuje dáta na vysokej úrovni vďaka štruktúrovaným datasetom a API rozhraniu, inštitúcie priamo zamerané na rozvoj cestovného ruchu, ako Ministerstvo cestovného ruchu a športu SR a Slovakia Travel, v tejto oblasti pomerne zaostávajú. Hlavnou prekážkou efektívneho využívania údajov je ich časté publikovanie v strojovo nečitateľných formátoch (najmä PDF) a absencia systémových kódov či otvorených rozhraní, čo znemožňuje ich automatizované spracovanie a hlbšiu analytickú súčinnosť. Pre zlepšenie rozhodovania založeného na faktoch je preto nevyhnutné, aby verejné inštitúcie modernizovali svoju digitálnu infraštruktúru a prijali štandardizované protokoly, ktoré umožnia premenu údajov na skutočné strategické aktívum rozvoja cestovného ruchu.

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# Ecological Features of Accommodation Establishments and their Reflection in Guest Reviews: An Exploratory Comparison of Selected Regions of the Czech Republic

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***Abstract***

*This article examines ecological elements declared by selected accommodation establishments in selected regions of the Czech Republic and their reflection in guest reviews, focusing on the gap between environmental claims and visitor perception. The study applies qualitative content analysis to a dataset of 95 establishments in 10 regions. Ecological elements were coded into seven categories. Three indices were constructed: declared environmental performance, eco-perception in reviews, and alignment between declarations and reviews. Regional differences were tested using the Kruskal–Wallis test and relationships using Spearman's correlation. Certification was less common than practical and experience-oriented measures. Technical measures were less visible to guests, while nature, tranquillity, local food, cycling, car-free stays, and plastic reduction were most often perceived. Greening accommodation has both operational and experiential dimensions. Guests mainly perceive ecological elements directly connected with their stay experience.*

***Key words***

*sustainable accommodation, eco-practices, tourism, guest reviews, Czech regions*

**JEL Classification: Z32, Q56, L83, R58**

## Introduction

The sustainability of accommodation services has increasingly become not only an environmental concern but also a key component of destination competitiveness (Rakický et al., 2024). Accommodation establishments consume energy and water, generate waste, influence visitors' mobility behaviour, and simultaneously shape perceptions of the destination. In the Czech context, however, assessing environmental performance solely through the number of formally certified establishments is problematic, as certification remains the exception rather than a widespread industry standard. From a destination management perspective, it is therefore appropriate to consider a broader set of sustainability-related attributes encompassing not only technical measures but also the experiential and communicative dimensions of sustainability.

The European Union Ecolabel for tourist accommodation is based on principles of environmental management, energy and water efficiency, and waste reduction, combining both mandatory and optional criteria (European Commission, n.d.). In the Czech Republic, however, certified accommodation establishments represent only

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a small segment of the market. According to CENIA (2023), the Best Western Hotel Moráň became the only hotel in Prague and only the second accommodation establishment in the Czech Republic to receive the EU Ecolabel certification. This situation highlights the need for a broader analytical approach that does not equate the absence of certification with the absence of practical environmental measures.

The relevance of this topic is further reinforced by the high visitor numbers recorded in major destinations (Kubíčková, 2024). In addition to metropolitan hotels, sustainability initiatives are increasingly important in spa resorts, mountain guesthouses, farm stays, campsites, glamping facilities, and smaller rural accommodation providers. These types of establishments often pursue sustainability through alternative pathways, relying not necessarily on formal certification but rather on practices such as the promotion of local gastronomy, the reduction of car dependency, environmentally sensitive integration into the landscape, and the minimisation of single-use plastics.

The aim of this article is to identify the principal types of ecological features implemented by a selected sample of accommodation establishments across the regions of the Czech Republic, to compare declared environmental measures with their reflection in guest reviews, and to propose an interpretive framework for understanding regional strategies of accommodation greening.

## 1 Sustainability of Accommodation Services: Theoretical Background

The sustainability of accommodation services can be understood as a combination of operational management, environmental standards, local supply-chain linkages, and communication with guests (Krnáčová et al., 2024). International frameworks such as the GSTC Hotel Standard emphasize sustainable management and an environmental pillar encompassing resource consumption, pollution reduction, biodiversity conservation, and landscape protection. In 2025, the GSTC Hotel Standard was further specified based on the broader GSTC Tourism Standard framework (Global Sustainable Tourism Council, 2026).

Certification schemes such as Green Key operate through regularly updated criteria and periodic recertification. According to Green Key International (2026a,2026b), certification is awarded following verification of compliance with applicable criteria, which for accommodation establishments include management practices, guest engagement, water and energy management, waste reduction, procurement, food and beverage services, and the quality of indoor and outdoor environments. Certification can therefore enhance credibility and reduce the risk of greenwashing; however, within the Czech context, it does not encompass all forms of practical sustainability.

For analytical purposes, it is useful to distinguish between two dimensions of sustainability. The first consists of operational measures that directly reduce the environmental burden of accommodation establishments, such as energy management systems, low-emission heating technologies, photovoltaic installations, heat recovery systems, water-saving fixtures, wastewater treatment, waste separation, and the use of environmentally friendly cleaning products. The second comprises experiential and communicative measures that guests can easily recognize and frequently mention in

reviews, including local breakfasts, organic products, tranquil natural surroundings, car-free stays, cycling opportunities, off-grid experiences, and the reduction of single-use plastics. While both dimensions are important, they differ considerably in their visibility to guests.

In the academic literature, sustainability in accommodation services is generally defined as a set of operational, environmental, social, and communicative practices designed to reduce the negative impacts of tourism while maintaining the quality of the guest experience. Accommodation establishments influence energy and water consumption, waste generation, procurement patterns, the use of local resources, and visitors' mobility behaviour. Hall et al. (2016) argue that sustainability research in the accommodation sector focuses both on consumer behaviour and provider practices, highlighting the sector's significance due to its intensive resource consumption and waste production. These considerations are directly relevant to the present study, which evaluates not only formal environmental certifications but also a broader spectrum of ecological features, including energy and water conservation, waste management, local products, sustainable mobility, nature-based attributes, and low-impact forms of accommodation.

For the purposes of this study, a distinction must be made between declared sustainability and perceived sustainability. Declared sustainability refers to measures that accommodation providers communicate through their promotional materials or operational characteristics, including energy management systems, LED lighting, photovoltaic panels, heat pumps, water-saving technologies, waste separation, reductions in single-use plastics, environmentally friendly cleaning products, certification schemes, organic products, and support for cycling tourism. Within the Czech context, the study by Vrabcová et al. (2024) is particularly relevant, demonstrating that environmentally oriented hotels and guesthouses primarily implement practical measures such as electricity and water conservation and waste sorting, whereas initiatives related to environmental communication and education of guests and employees are less common. These findings support the methodological decision of the present study to examine not only the existence of sustainability measures but also whether they are reflected in guest reviews.

By contrast, perceived sustainability refers to the aspects of sustainability that guests actually notice during their stay and subsequently mention in reviews. Research by Yi, Li, and Jai (2018), based on a content analysis of online reviews of green hotels, shows that guests generally evaluate recognized green practices positively. However, certain measures may also be interpreted as marketing tools if they are not perceived as authentic. This insight is directly relevant to the present study, which investigates the discrepancy between establishments' sustainability claims and guests' perceptions. Previous research suggests that guests respond more readily to experiential and easily observable features, such as natural surroundings, tranquillity, local gastronomy, farm-based authenticity, car-free experiences, cycling opportunities, off-grid accommodation, and plastic reduction. In contrast, technical measures such as ISO standards, energy management systems, or water-saving technologies tend to remain less visible to guests.

Environmental communication plays a crucial role in this process. Acampora et al. (2022) emphasize that hotel environmental communication influences whether guests

recognize green practices and associate them with positive evaluations of their stay. Consequently, a low frequency of references to a particular sustainability measure in guest reviews does not necessarily indicate its absence or limited environmental significance. Rather, it may reflect the fact that the measure remains hidden within operational processes, is insufficiently communicated, or is not directly connected to the guest experience. This perspective is particularly useful for interpreting regional differences, where some establishments declare a broad range of technical measures but receive limited confirmation in reviews, whereas farms, glamping facilities, and smaller nature-oriented accommodation providers may possess fewer formal certifications but achieve stronger recognition of their environmental character among guests.

Guest decision-making is another important consideration. Han, Hsu, and Sheu (2010), applying the Theory of Planned Behavior to green hotel choice, demonstrated that guests' intentions to stay in environmentally friendly hotels are influenced by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived value. Similarly, Verma and Chandra (2018) found that sustainability can serve as an important attribute in hotel selection, particularly when guests can clearly understand specific measures such as energy conservation, recycling, or environmentally friendly surroundings. These findings support the interpretive framework adopted in this study, according to which ecological features function not only as operational tools for reducing environmental impacts but also as components of service value and competitive positioning. Lee, Jai, and Li (2016) further argue that guests respond positively to sustainability practices such as energy and water conservation when they understand their purpose and do not perceive them as reducing comfort. Conversely, a lack of information regarding environmental initiatives may lead to misunderstanding or negative evaluations, particularly when guests interpret conservation measures as reductions in service quality.

From a Czech perspective, the study by Vávrová et al. (2025) is particularly significant, as it identified statistically significant differences in sustainable practices among accommodation establishments across tourism destinations in the Czech Republic. These findings support the regional focus of the present study by suggesting that ecological features vary not only according to accommodation type but also across regions. Mountain, nature-based, spa, wine tourism, urban, and rural accommodation providers pursue sustainability through different approaches: some emphasize technical measures and certifications, while others focus on local food, sustainable mobility, farm authenticity, or minimal environmental intervention.

The present study is based on four key assumptions. First, accommodation establishments represent important sites of environmental consumption due to their use of energy and water, waste generation, guest transportation, and supply chains. Second, environmental performance cannot be evaluated solely through certification, particularly in the Czech context, where formal certification remains relatively uncommon and smaller establishments frequently rely on practical, local, or experiential forms of sustainability. Third, guests do not perceive all ecological features equally. Technical measures may have substantial environmental benefits but often remain less visible in reviews, whereas nature, local gastronomy, tranquillity, farm-based authenticity, car-free experiences, and low-impact accommodation are more readily recognized. Fourth, the discrepancy between sustainability declarations and guest reviews is analytically important because it reflects not only the level of sustainability

achieved but also the effectiveness of communication, transparency, and the credibility of environmental claims.

The theoretical framework of this study is grounded in the assumption that the greening of accommodation establishments comprises two interconnected dimensions. The first is a technological-operational dimension, which focuses on reducing energy consumption, water use, and waste generation. The second is an experiential-communicative dimension**,** which determines whether guests recognize, appreciate, and incorporate ecological features into their evaluations. The degree of alignment between establishments' sustainability declarations and guests' perceptions can therefore be interpreted as an indicator of both credibility and communication effectiveness. If an establishment declares numerous technical measures that are not mentioned in guest reviews, this does not necessarily imply a lack of sustainability; rather, it may indicate limited visibility or inadequate communication. Comparing declared ecological features with guest reviews provides a deeper understanding of whether sustainability remains merely an operational practice, becomes part of the guest experience, or reveals a gap between communication and perception. This framework is central to interpreting the study's findings, particularly in relation to regional differences in declared environmental performance, the visibility of ecological features in reviews, and the degree of alignment between these two dimensions.

Previous studies suggest that green hotel practices can enhance guest satisfaction, loyalty, and repeat visitation intentions, although such effects are not automatic. Berezan, Millar, and Raab (2014) examined which sustainable hotel practices contribute to guest satisfaction and what motivates guests to participate in these initiatives. Their findings support the argument that environmental measures should be designed and communicated as value-adding features rather than as restrictions on service quality. Ecological features therefore represent not only environmental tools but also strategic assets. Positive perceptions of green hotel practices strongly predict guest loyalty and recommendation intentions and may constitute a source of competitive advantage for accommodation establishments (Genç & Zengin, 2025).

## 2 Data analysis

This study is based on an analysis of eco-friendly features at selected accommodation facilities across selected regions of the Czech Republic. A sample of 10 out of the country's 15 regions was selected; the Prague region was excluded due to the high concentration of accommodation establishments claiming eco-friendly features—typical for a capital city—while the remaining regions were chosen to ensure a diverse mix of economic and geographical characteristics. This selection encompassed regions of agricultural or industrial importance; those with significant natural potential (mountainous, foothill, or flat terrain); and areas with a higher spa potential or concentrations of urban and rural agglomerations. Within these regions, a representative sample of 95 accommodation facilities was based on quota criteria. Criteria for inclusion required the declaration of eco-friendly features, eco-certifications, or eco-strategies on websites and social media, as well as a diversity of accommodation categories (hotels, boutique hotels, conference hotels, guesthouses, campsites, glamping, treehouses, agritourism facilities and farms, historic properties, small winery-based accommodations, etc.). The dataset captures the type of accommodation,

declared eco-friendly features, eco-strategies or certifications, and guest reviews related to sustainability published on social media (primarily Facebook and Instagram). The research was conducted between March and May 2026, employing an exploratory method that involved analyzing the websites and social media profiles of the selected regions and accommodation facilities, as well as examining guest reviews. Subsequently, accommodation establishments were classified according to the established criteria for selecting a representative sample. The study does not aim to provide a representative assessment of all accommodation establishments in the Czech Republic; rather, it constitutes an exploratory comparative analysis designed to evaluate the suitability of an index-based and content-analytical approach.

The accommodation establishment served as the unit of analysis, while the region represented the aggregated unit. The analytical procedure consisted of four stages: (1) open coding of declared ecological features and guest reviews, (2) grouping codes into thematic categories, (3) constructing indices of declared environmental performance, eco-perception in guest reviews, and the degree of alignment between declarations and reviews, and (4) interpreting regional profiles and accommodation greening strategies. Declared ecological features were coded as binary variables according to the presence or absence of a thematic category. Certification was coded on an ordinal scale: 0 = no certification, 1 = internal environmental policy or partial environmental award, 2 = national or regional certification, and 3 = international certification or standard, such as ISO, Green Key, or EU Ecolabel. The Declared Environmental Performance Index was calculated as the sum of the certification score and the number of declared thematic categories. The Eco-Perception Index corresponded to the number of sustainability-related themes identified in guest reviews. The Alignment Index was defined as the proportion of declared themes that were simultaneously reflected in review summaries.

Regional comparisons were conducted using descriptive statistics and the non-parametric Kruskal–Wallis test. Relationships among the indices were examined using Spearman's rank correlation coefficient. Given the purposive nature of the sample, the findings should be interpreted as exploratory rather than generalisable to the entire accommodation sector.

**Tab. 1** Analytical Categories of Ecological Features in Accommodation Establishments

| **Category** | **Examples of Indicators** | **Visibility to Guests** |
|---|---|---|
| Energy and Technology | LED lighting, heat pumps, photovoltaic systems, passive or low-energy buildings, energy management systems, ISO 50001 | Generally low to moderate; typically mentioned indirectly by guests |
| Water Management | Water-saving fixtures, flow restrictions, chlorine-free water treatment, rainwater harvesting, constructed wetlands, on-site wastewater treatment facilities | Low; exceptions include visible pools or natural swimming areas |
| Waste and Plastics | Waste separation, composting, refillable cosmetic dispensers, reduction of single-use packaging and plastics | Moderate; more visible when measures are |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | explicitly communicated |
| Local and Organic Products | Local suppliers, farm-based production, organic ingredients, regional gastronomy, local wines | High; frequently reflected in guest reviews |
| Sustainable Mobility | Electric vehicle charging, cycling tourism, walkability, car-free stays, public transport accessibility | Moderate to high |
| Nature-Based / Low-Impact Stay | Glamping, treehouses, yurts, tranquillity, forest settings, protected landscapes, minimal environmental intervention, digital detox | Very high; strongly experience-oriented |
| Certification and Environmental Management | EU Ecolabel, Green Key, ISO 14001, Cyclists Welcome, environmental policy | Variable; higher when certification is actively communicated |

Source: processed according to GSTC Hotel Standard, 2026

## 2.1 Frequency of Declared Ecological Features and Content Analysis of Guest Reviews

The most frequently declared feature within the sample is the nature-based or low-impact character of accommodation establishments (. This category includes, in particular, glamping facilities, treehouses, yurts, farm stays, small-capacity accommodation, the use of natural materials, environmentally sensitive integration into the landscape, locations situated within protected areas, and off-grid or digital-detox concepts. These are followed by local and organic products, energy-related measures, and sustainable mobility initiatives (Tab. 2).

The findings indicate that environmental sustainability within the analysed sample is often associated with the location and character of the accommodation experience rather than solely with formal certification. Although technical measures such as energy and water conservation and waste management are highly relevant in terms of reducing the actual environmental footprint of accommodation establishments, they are less prominently represented in declarations than nature-based and low-impact accommodation concepts.

**Tab. 2** Comparison of Declared Ecological Features and Features Identified in Guest Reviews

| **Declared Feature** | **Share of Sample (%)** | **Theme Identified in Reviews** | **Share of Sample (%)** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Low-impact / Nature-based concept | 71.6 | Nature and tranquillity | 63.2 |
| Local / Organic products | 51.6 | Low-impact experience / simplicity / digital detox | 45.3 |
| Energy-related measures | 35.8 | Local / Organic products | 43.2 |
| Sustainable mobility | 32.6 | Direct appreciation of environmental practices | 30.5 |
| Certification / Awards | 32.6 | Technical ecological features | 25.3 |
| Water-related measures | 30.5 | Sustainable mobility | 22.1 |
| Waste / Plastics management | 24.2 | | |
| Digitalisation | 7.4 | | |

Source: own research

Guest reviews confirm that the most visible sustainability attributes are not technical systems but rather those directly connected with the visitor experience. Guests most frequently appreciate natural surroundings, tranquillity, simplicity, local food, farm-based authenticity, clean air, and stays free from disruptive influences. Technical measures, including energy and water conservation systems, LED lighting, certification schemes, and internal environmental management practices, are mentioned less frequently in reviews.

This finding does not imply that technical measures are less important; rather, it suggests that their visibility to guests is comparatively lower. Visitors tend to remember features that are directly accessible through sensory or practical experience, such as the taste of local food products, silence and tranquillity, walkability, natural swimming opportunities, electric vehicle charging facilities, or the perception that the accommodation establishment blends harmoniously into the surrounding landscape

## 2.2 Regional Indices and Comparison of Regions

The regional comparison demonstrates that the ranking of regions depends on the dimension under consideration (Table 3). When certification scores are taken into account, the Karlovy Vary Region achieves the highest average value of the Declared Environmental Performance Index. Within the analysed sample, this region is characterised by the presence of ISO standards, the Cyclists Welcome certification,

formal environmental policies, and spa-related quality standards. When only the number of declared ecological features is considered, without weighting certification, the Hradec Králové Region emerges as the strongest performer. From the perspective of guest reviews and the degree of alignment between declared sustainability measures and guest experience, the Hradec Králové, Olomouc, and Ústí nad Labem Regions demonstrate the most favourable results.

**Tab. 3** Regional Comparison Based on Sustainability Indices

| Region | No. of Establishments | Mean Declared Sustainability Index | Mean Number of Declared Features (Excluding Certification) | Mean Review Index | Mean Alignment Index |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Karlovy Vary | 6 | 4.50 | 3.00 | 2.50 | 0.62 |
| Hradec Králové | 7 | 4.00 | 3.14 | 3.43 | 0.85 |
| Moravian-Silesian | 9 | 3.44 | 2.89 | 3.00 | 0.80 |
| Zlín | 9 | 3.33 | 2.44 | 1.89 | 0.59 |
| South Moravian | 15 | 3.20 | 2.73 | 1.00 | 0.46 |
| Olomouc | 10 | 3.00 | 2.30 | 2.80 | 0.95 |
| Vysočina | 9 | 3.00 | 2.67 | 2.44 | 0.81 |
| Central Bohemian | 9 | 2.67 | 2.00 | 2.78 | 0.78 |
| Ústí nad Labem | 10 | 2.50 | 2.50 | 2.50 | 0.87 |
| Pardubice | 11 | 2.09 | 2.00 | 1.82 | 0.83 |

Source: own research

## 2.3 Statistical Testing of Regional Differences

Given the nature of the index variables and the unequal sample sizes across regions, the Kruskal–Wallis test was employed to compare regional differences. The results revealed statistically significant differences among regions for all three analysed indices. The most pronounced differences were observed in the Eco-Perception Index derived from guest reviews (Tab. 4).

**Tab. 4** Kruskal–Wallis Test of Regional Differences

| Tested Variable | Result | Interpretation |
|---|---|---|
| Declared Sustainability Index by region | H = 18.75; p = 0.027 | Statistically significant regional differences |
| Eco-Perception Index in reviews by region | H = 35.45; p < 0.001 | Strong regional differences |
| Declaration–Review Alignment Index by region | H = 20.65; p = 0.014 | Statistically significant regional differences |

Source: own research

## 2.4 Correlation Analysis

Spearman's rank correlation analysis indicates a weak but statistically significant positive relationship between the Declared Environmental Performance Index and the Review-Based Eco-Perception Index. This finding suggests that accommodation establishments with higher levels of declared environmental sustainability are more likely to be associated with sustainability-related themes in guest reviews. However, the strength of this relationship remains limited. A more noteworthy finding is the negative correlation between the number of declared ecological features and the Alignment Index. In other words, the greater the number of sustainability-related elements declared by an establishment, the smaller the proportion of those elements that tend to be subsequently mentioned by guests in reviews (Tables 5 and 6).

**Tab. 5** Spearman Correlations Between Indices

| Relationship | Spearman's ρ | p-value | Interpretation |
|---|---|---|---|
| Declared Sustainability Index × Review Index | 0.26 | 0.010 | Weak but statistically significant positive relationship |
| Number of Declared Features × Review Index | 0.19 | 0.066 | Weak, marginally non-significant relationship |
| Certification Score × Review Index | 0.19 | 0.059 | Weak, marginally non-significant relationship |
| Number of Declared Features × Alignment Index | -0.31 | 0.002 | The more features are declared, the smaller the proportion mentioned by guests |
| Certification Score × Alignment Index | 0.06 | 0.586 | Certification alone does not increase alignment with reviews |

Source: own research

**Tab. 6** Relationship Between Declared Categories and Their Occurrence in Reviews

| Relationship | Spearman's ρ | p-value | Interpretation |
|---|---|---|---|
| Local/Organic Products in Declarations × Reviews | 0.84 | <0.001 | Very strong relationship |
| Mobility in Declarations × Reviews | 0.77 | <0.001 | Strong relationship |
| Nature-Based / Low-Impact Features in Declarations × Reviews | 0.74 | <0.001 | Strong relationship |
| Technical Features in Declarations × Reviews | 0.50 | <0.001 | Moderate relationship |
| Certification × Direct Ecological Mentions in Reviews | 0.37 | <0.001 | Weak-to-moderate relationship |

Source: own research

## 2.5 Regional Profiles

Regional differences cannot be adequately explained solely through rankings. Individual regions exhibit distinct patterns of accommodation greening that reflect the characteristics of local tourism, the structure of accommodation establishments, and the types of sustainability-related attributes that guests are able to identify and evaluate in their reviews (Table 7). The regional profiles indicate that accommodation sustainability is implemented through diverse strategies. Some regions place greater emphasis on certification schemes, environmental management systems, and technological solutions, whereas others rely more heavily on nature-based experiences, local gastronomy, sustainable mobility, farm-based authenticity, and low-impact accommodation concepts. Consequently, regional variation reflects not only differing levels of environmental commitment but also different approaches to communicating and integrating sustainability into the visitor experience.

**Tab. 7** Regional Profiles of Declared Ecological Features and Review-Based Confirmation

| Region | Dominant Declared Sustainability Features | Review-Based Confirmation and Interpretation |
|---|---|---|
| Hradec Králové | Energy and water measures, waste management, electric vehicle charging, local ingredients, natural materials, EU Ecolabel | The strongest overall alignment between declarations and reviews. Guests explicitly appreciate ecological details, local breakfasts, natural surroundings, tranquillity, and cycling tourism. |
| South Moravian | Electric vehicle charging, local wines, plastic reduction, water | Strong portfolio of declared measures, but less consistent confirmation in reviews. Guests |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | and waste measures, ISO 50001, cycling tourism | mainly perceive local food, wine, and accessibility. |
| Ústí nad Labem | Nature-based locations, small-capacity accommodation, walkability, local food, low-energy glamping | High experiential alignment. The ecological profile is closely linked to car-free stays, hiking, tranquillity, and natural surroundings. |
| Pardubice | Electric vehicle charging, farm-based ingredients, chlorine-free water, constructed wetland wastewater treatment, photovoltaic systems, glamping | Very strong practical alignment. Guests specifically mention electric vehicle charging, chlorine-free water, waste separation, and local products. |
| Moravian-Silesian | Green Key, Join Pure Stay, plastic reduction, water and energy savings, local ingredients, natural biotopes | Strong and clearly identifiable alignment. Ecological operation is perceived as part of the overall quality of the accommodation experience. |
| Olomouc | Eco-farms, organic production, agritourism, regional gastronomy, nature-based stays | Strong alignment in farm-based and nature-oriented accommodation. Technical measures are less visible in guest reviews. |
| Zlín | Organic certification, passive-house standards, off-grid systems, local wood, glamping | Strong experiential alignment. Guests appreciate tranquillity, simplicity, absence of Wi-Fi, and close contact with nature. |
| Vysočina | Low-energy buildings, brownfield redevelopment, car-free premises, local suppliers, passive-building concepts | Moderate to good alignment. In business-oriented hotels, sustainability is perceived more indirectly by guests. |
| Central Bohemian | Environmentally friendly services, energy-efficient buildings, organic farms, off-grid concepts, natural materials | Good alignment. Guests particularly appreciate nature, tranquillity, and local or organic products. |
| Karlovy Vary | ISO 14001, Cyclists Welcome certification, environmental policy, waste separation, energy savings, spa context | Stronger in formal certification than in review-based perception. Guests mainly mention tranquillity, forest location, clean air, and spa treatments. |

Source: own research

## 3 Discussion

The findings reveal a clear distinction between declared and perceived sustainability. Declared sustainability is primarily associated with technical measures and environmental management practices, whereas perceived sustainability is largely shaped by guest experiences, place-based attributes, and communication. This distinction does not imply that technical measures are of lesser importance. On the contrary, interventions related to energy efficiency, water conservation, waste management, and operational environmental management may have a substantial impact on the environmental footprint of accommodation establishments. However, such measures often remain less visible to guests unless they are effectively communicated through on-site information, websites, in-room materials, or personal interactions.

A second important finding concerns the relatively limited role of formal certification within the Czech context. Certification schemes can reduce the risk of greenwashing and provide comparable sustainability standards; however, among smaller guesthouses, eco-farms, and glamping facilities, certification is frequently substituted by local authenticity and practical environmental measures. This creates a dilemma for destination management. An overly narrow focus on certification may undervalue smaller yet genuinely sustainable establishments, whereas reliance solely on self-declared environmental claims may increase the risk of greenwashing. A potential solution is the development of a simple regional eco-maturity index that combines operational measures, guest visibility, and the degree of external verification.

The third key finding concerns regional differentiation. Spa and wellness destinations possess specific potential in the areas of water and energy conservation, while mountain and nature-based destinations can integrate accommodation services with landscape protection and sustainable mobility. Wine tourism regions can capitalize on local gastronomy and cycling tourism. Smaller and rural destinations may build their sustainability strategies around low-cost environmental measures, local supply chains, and effective communication with guests.

Differences also emerge across accommodation types. Eco-centres, farms, and agritourism establishments exhibit the most readily recognizable ecological character from the guests' perspective. Wellness and spa hotels may achieve high levels of declared environmental sustainability, yet guest reviews tend to focus more on treatments, tranquillity, and comfort. Glamping and treehouse accommodations frequently lack formal certifications and sophisticated technological systems; nevertheless, their ecological character is strongly embedded in the visitor experience.

## 4 Practical Implications

The findings suggest several recommendations for accommodation providers and destination management organizations:

- Introduce a simple five-component Eco-Maturity Index evaluating energy management, water management, waste management, local sourcing, and certification or environmental management practices.

- Distinguish between actual environmental impact and marketing visibility. Technical sustainability measures should be complemented by clear and understandable communication directed toward guests.
- Support regional certification and advisory programmes for small accommodation providers that often lack the resources required for comprehensive international certification schemes.
- In nature-based and mountain destinations, integrate accommodation services with sustainable mobility, visitor management, and landscape conservation initiatives.
- In spa and wellness establishments, prioritize water conservation, heat recovery systems, environmentally friendly cosmetics, and sustainable laundry management.

For farm-based and glamping accommodations, document not only the experiential dimension of sustainability but also specific environmental measures related to energy, water, waste separation, and waste treatment.

## 5 Research Limitations

The principal limitation of this study lies in the nature of the input data. The sample of 95 accommodation establishments across ten regions does not permit generalization to the entire accommodation sector in the Czech Republic. Several regions were not represented in the sample, and in some cases guest reviews were unavailable or ecological features were only indirectly reflected in review content. The assessment is based on publicly available declarations and review summaries rather than on-site environmental audits, measurements of energy and water consumption, or systematic verification of certifications across all establishments. Consequently, the findings should be interpreted as an exploratory investigation and a foundation for future quantitative or mixed-methods research.

Future studies should combine content analysis of accommodation websites, standardized survey research, certification verification, analysis of full-text guest reviews, and operational indicators of energy, water, and waste consumption calculated per guest-night. Such an approach would facilitate more accurate regional benchmarking and enable a clearer distinction between declared, perceived, and measurable sustainability.

An additional methodological limitation concerns the coding process itself. The present study employed thematic coding of textual data; however, future research should involve multiple coders and assess inter-coder reliability, for example through the use of Cohen's kappa coefficient, in order to enhance methodological robustness.

## Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the greening of accommodation services across the regions of the Czech Republic takes multiple forms. The Hradec Králové Region achieved the strongest overall performance within the analysed sample by combining concrete environmental measures, certification schemes, and strong confirmation of these

attributes in guest reviews. The South Moravian Region exhibited the broadest portfolio of declared sustainability measures, although their confirmation in guest reviews was less consistent. The Moravian-Silesian and Pardubice Regions demonstrated a strong connection between practical environmental measures and guest experience. The Ústí nad Labem Region illustrates that a strong sustainable identity can emerge even in the absence of extensive certification, through a combination of natural surroundings, walkability, local gastronomy, and car-free tourism experiences.

The most important theoretical and practical implication of this study is the need to distinguish between technological sustainability and experiential sustainability**.** Technological measures reduce environmental impacts but often remain largely invisible to guests. Experiential sustainability elements, by contrast, are highly visible and appreciated by visitors, yet they do not necessarily guarantee a low environmental footprint. For destination managers and accommodation providers alike, the key challenge is therefore to integrate these two dimensions by implementing measurable operational sustainability measures while simultaneously communicating them in a transparent, credible, and guest-friendly manner.

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# Participatory Destination Management: Involving the Local Community in Strategic Tourism Planning

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***Abstract***

*The main objective of the study is to analyze the level of local residents' involvement in strategic tourism development planning in tourist destinations across Slovakia and to identify further opportunities for their effective participation. Quantitative research is being conducted by collecting primary data from regional tourism organizations operating within the Slovak Republic. Through the analysis of the level of participatory planning in tourist destinations, the approach by Arnstein (1969) will be taken into account. She defined the lowest level of resident participation as manipulation and therapy (non-participation) up to partnership, delegated power, and full citizen control. The findings of the questionnaire survey indicate that the average level of resident participation in tourism development planning across all areas surveyed by the OOCR is 2.73, which represents low participation. Respondents' answers were converted into a scoring scale divided into three categories: no participation (1.00–3.33), symbolic participation (3.34–5.66), and genuine participation (5.67–8.00). The reason for this low value is that most of the surveyed DMOs either utilize the basic legal options for involving the local community (the opportunity to comment on a draft strategic document before it is voted on and adopted by the city council) or inform the public in various ways about planned or completed projects and activities.*

***Key words***

*Strategic planning, Local residents, Participation, Tourism, Destination management organizations.*

**JEL Classification:** R58, Z32

## Introduction

The development of tourism today affects the quality of life of residents in host communities in many ways. Tourism places concentrated pressure on natural and man-made systems that may not be designed to withstand intensive use. Various local tourist attractions may be driven by intensive tourism. Some were created exclusively for tourists, leading to situations where tourism can diminish a place's identity and appeal to its own residents (Arif et al., 2020). Strategic planning is a comprehensive process for determining what a business or tourism destination should become and what steps are necessary to achieve that goal.

Strategic planning has great importance in the tourism sector because it helps the industry continuously adapt to emerging trends and challenges in order to maintain

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tourist satisfaction (Adeyemo and Bada, 2017). One of the central elements in mitigating the negative impacts of tourism on the local community and the identity of the area, within the framework of strategic tourism development planning, is promoting the participation of local residents (Bonzanigo, Giupponi, and Balbi, 2016). Although the literature suggests several roles that local communities could play in tourism development, little attention has been paid to how communities should be involved in tourism development from the perspective of local stakeholders. Similarly, in the Slovak context, we have not yet seen a study focused on eliciting stakeholders' attitudes and analyzing the actual opportunities for resident involvement in tourism development planning provided by destination management organizations (here in after "DMOs").

For this reason, the subject of this study is 39 regional tourism organizations operating in Slovakia (here in after referred to as "OOCRs"). OOCRs carry out their activities within a defined territory, also referred to as tourist destinations. Their goal is to support the development of tourism through the implementation of various activities. These can be outlined in a strategic tourism development document for a specific territory (Čajková and Butoracová Šindleryová, 2022). However, there is no universal procedure for drafting such a document, nor are there standardized guidelines for its content or implementation. For this reason, OOCRs approach its preparation and implementation differently. Similarly, the involvement of residents in the preparation of the document or the planning of the activities themselves is not explicitly defined. This is a voluntary approach by OOCRs to strategic planning for tourism development in their territory.

The main objective of the study is to analyze the level of local residents' involvement in strategic tourism development planning in tourist destinations across Slovakia and to identify further opportunities for their effective participation. Quantitative research is being conducted in the form of collecting primary data from regional tourism organizations operating within the Slovak Republic. A questionnaire survey was used for data collection. The survey primarily targeted the directors of the 39 local destination management organizations under study. To achieve the main objective, the following research question was formulated:

**RQ1**: What level of resident participation do the studied DMOs achieve in strategic tourism destination development planning?

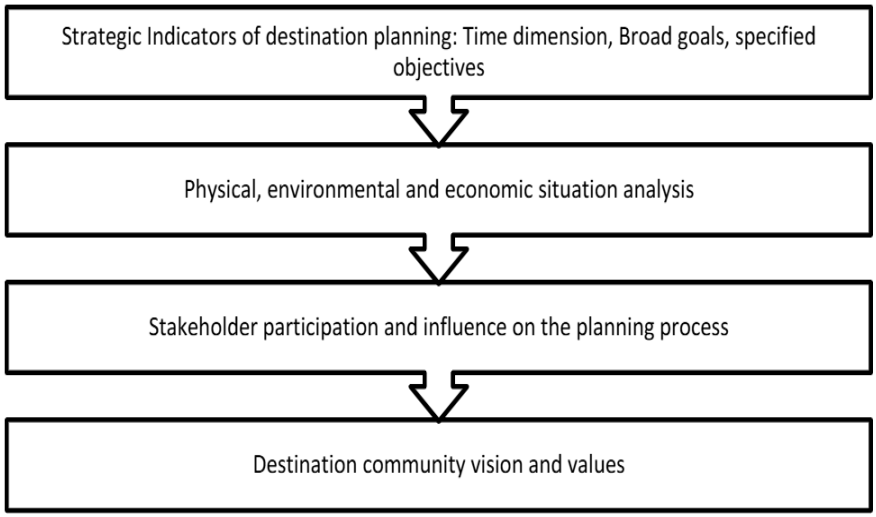
**RQ2**: What is the average level of resident participation in the areas covered by the studied DMOs in strategic tourism destination development planning?

Through the analysis of the level of participatory planning in tourist destinations, the approach by Arnstein (1969) will be taken into account – in her article, she defined the lowest level of resident participation as manipulation and therapy (non-participation) up to partnership, delegated power, and full citizen control. The author (1969) thereby criticized formal yet powerless forms of participation and emphasized the need for a genuine transfer of power toward community residents. The study begins by providing a theoretical overview of the literature on the significance and possibilities of community participation in tourism planning and development. It also presents a descriptive view of the quantitative research conducted on resident participation. Furthermore, it defines the methodology and methodological approach used in conducting quantitative research, interprets the study's findings, and formulates conclusions and recommendations.

## 1. Theoretical Background

In preparing this study and identifying its main objective, it is necessary to define the basic concepts related to the selected topic (strategic planning of tourist destination – involving residents in tourism development and measuring their participation). Kaščák, O'Rourke and Bilić (2019) state that strategic planning for the development of a tourism destination is a process of modeling the effective and efficient functioning of its tourism potential over a specific period. Understanding the factors, parameters and phases of strategic planning with regard to the specific nature of the tourism sector is a fundamental competency required for managing a local tourism destination. Dragouni and Fouseki (2017) concluded that tourism organizations should incorporate the strategic planning process into the structure of their operations. It helps tourism organizations make sound management decisions with better estimates.

**Pic. 1** General process of strategic planning for tourism development



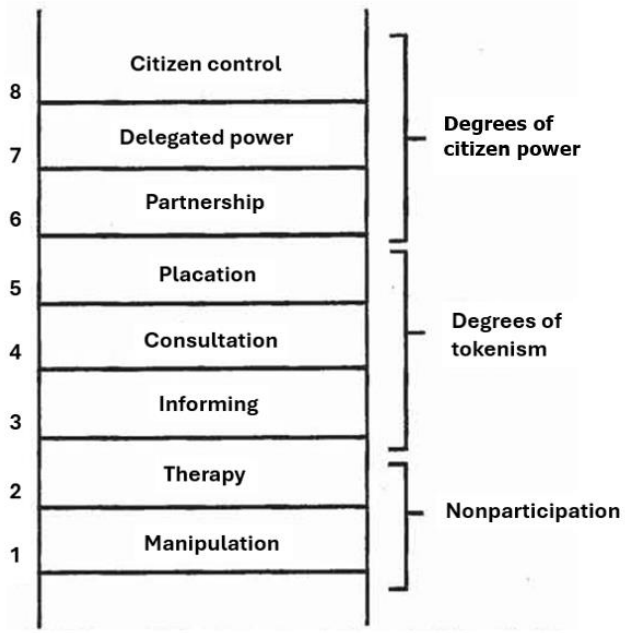

Source: Arif, et al., 2020, p. 98

Thetsane (2019) explained that local self-governments often make decisions aimed at meeting the demands of tourists and tourism service providers, while neglecting the interests of local communities. When local communities are involved in managing tourism strategy, their traditional lifestyles and values are respected to a greater extent, with the goal of achieving regional sustainability. Active participation in planning tourism activities fosters respect, pride, self-confidence and interpersonal skills within the local community (Halmo and Novák, 2021).

The goal of involving residents should be to create a supportive environment needed by stakeholders, particularly local residents, who are sensitive to the negative impacts of tourism in the area. Authors Reyes-Santiago, Méndez-García and Sánchez-Medina (2021) note that involving local communities in decision-making positively strengthens their ability to act independently, through investments in human and social capital, as well as through the necessary sharing of power. Arnstein (1969) noted that community participation consisted of eight levels, such as manipulation, therapy,

information, consultation, appeasement, partnership, delegated authority, and citizen control. Picture 2 shows a ladder depicting Levels of Community Participation by Arnstein (1969).

**Pic. 2** Levels of Community Participation by Arnstein (1969)




Source: Singgalen, et al. (2019)

Figure 1 shows that the level of community participation varies. At Levels 1 and 2, there is no participation by local residents – all programs implemented were fully regulated and carried out by the DMO. Furthermore, at the level of information sharing, consultation and reassurance, the regulations served merely as a means of public outreach. The ideas of local residents were heard, but were not always used or implemented. At the next level (the level of partnership, delegated authority and citizen oversight), there was reciprocity between the DMO and local communities (Singgalen et al., 2019).

Many researchers have agreed that in tourism development and planning, DMOs must examine the perspectives of local communities. By providing opportunities for local community involvement, residents will actively participate in managing their resources and preserving local culture (Gunawijaya, 2019). In general, community involvement in tourism planning consists of four dimensions: community engagement, development, economic empowerment and environmental protection (Singgalen et al., 2019). Teo and Loosemore (2017) add that the effectiveness of community engagement strategies requires trust-building strategies and a thorough understanding of community interests and social structures.

Involving residents and other stakeholders in the processes, activities and planning that affect their quality of life is crucial. Engaging people in decision-making and building networks is often described as building social capital (Chalid and Koesbandrijo, 2019).

Karta (2016) notes that, furthermore, when stakeholders are involved in planning and decision-making processes regarding tourism activities, strategies, projects and policies are likely to receive greater support, acceptance and interest from the residents concerned. The following is a brief description of some key techniques for community engagement.

Information dissemination – informing and reaching a broad audience, utilizing mass media, print media, social media, public policy documents, concepts, action plans, websites, newsletters and similar channels.

Public meetings – short, one-time events that provide stakeholders with an opportunity to learn and offer input. Participants listen to relevant information and then have the opportunity to ask questions and express their views.

Public comment period – a formal call for public comments requesting written feedback on a specific topic by a specified date. Comments are typically submitted by mail, email or online.

Surveys – when DMOs want to gather all perspectives on an issue. A systematic survey to collect data can be conducted by mail, social media, email or in person (Lekaota, 2019; Nsizwazikhona and Nduduzo, 2017).

Focus groups – bring together a small group of stakeholders to discuss problematic issues. They are often used to provide insights into stakeholders' views, with stakeholders exchanging information from their own perspectives.

Workshops – broaden residents' understanding and ensure that the needs and concerns of various stakeholders are fairly considered. Participants improve their understanding of development issues and the concerns of other stakeholders (brainstorming, concept mapping and participatory modeling, emotional map) (Stylidis, 2014; Tanvir, 2019).

Working groups – a group of stakeholders who typically meet several times over the course of weeks or months to complete a task. The task is usually more extensive and complex than those addressed in workshops.

Large-group planning processes – these facilitate direct dialogue and interaction among many different stakeholders, promoting collective knowledge-building, open dialogue and democratic decision-making (Zárate-Altamirano, López and Parra-López, 2022; Tukhliev and Abdukhamidov, 2023).

Evaluating the effectiveness of various participatory methods is challenging, although tools exist to help DMOs identify appropriate participatory methods depending on the context. The following studies by authors who applied Arnstein's theory (1969) in assessing levels of resident participation are listed below. The aim of the study by Amin et al. (2020) was to examine the participation of local residents in tourism growth. The researchers collected primary data through interviews with local self-government representatives, tourism stakeholders and communities. The results show that the local self-government has programs for tourism development, such as empowering local communities, organizing cultural activities and building facilities and infrastructure. Although the local self-government has established programs to promote tourism, the participation of the local community is also a key factor in the sustainability of tourism development.

Matyile and Ramukumba (2025) conducted a study to examine community participation in the development of rural tourism in Mnqesha Great Place, South Africa. A qualitative research approach was used for this study. Data were collected through focus groups and purposive sampling was used to select community leaders involved in tourism in the area. The study's findings highlight the limited role of the community in planning, a lack of resources and internal conflicts that hinder tourism development, which ultimately impede the community's progress. The aim of Thetsane's (2019) research was to contribute to an understanding of the community's role in tourism development by examining community perceptions in the Katse region of Lesotho. A combination of stratified and random sampling was used to select a sample of 500 households. The findings indicated that for effective tourism organization, it is important for the community to organize itself through its local leaders and form groups to share information and experiences.

Many authors refer to an article by Simmons (1994), which describes a research program for Huron County in Ontario (Canada) that sought to implement and evaluate a three-stage program for engaging county residents. Residents' assessments of their own needs and visitors' needs for amenities show a high degree of compatibility with three of the four most important items (shopping, recreational areas and special events) listed for both groups. At every stage of the research, residents were able to identify potential benefits more easily than potential costs. All of the studies cited focused on quantitative research into local residents' attitudes toward their opportunities for involvement in strategic tourism management and planning. Based on the above, we consider it essential, as a first step, to identify the opportunities and attitudes of stakeholders, providing space for the local community to participate in planning activities related to tourism development in their area. For this reason, the study will analyze the attitudes and responses of OOCRs as local actors in the creation of strategic tourism management, which will form the basis for future research into residents' attitudes toward opportunities for their participation in strategic tourism planning.

## 2. Research Methodology

The subject of this study is the 39 OOCRs operating in Slovakia. As organizations established by cities and municipalities, OOCRs carry out their activities within a defined territory, also referred to as tourist destinations. Their goal is to support the development of tourism through the implementation of various activities. The main objective of the study is to analyze the level of local residents' involvement in strategic tourism development planning in tourist destinations within Slovakia and to identify further opportunities for their effective participation. Quantitative research was conducted in the form of collecting primary data from regional tourism organizations operating within the Slovak Republic.

A questionnaire survey was used to collect primary data. The survey primarily targeted the directors of the 39 local destination management organizations surveyed in 2026. To obtain secondary data, a descriptive method was used to identify and examine strategic documents related to tourism development in the areas of the surveyed DMOs. The analysis focused primarily on the methods and opportunities for DMO participation and collaboration with the local community during the strategy preparation and planning phase. The analysis also includes annual reports prepared by

the OOCRs or local governments. It examined the benefits as well as the barriers to community-based tourism planning from the perspective of the DMOs.

Methodological quantitative approach of the study: the assessment of the level of participation in community-based tourism will be based on Arnstein's theory (1969). According to the author, the Ladder of Participation is a method for assessing the quality of public involvement, distinguishing eight levels (from lowest to highest): Manipulation and Therapy (non-participation), Information, Consultation, Appeasement (formal community involvement), Partnership, Delegation of Power and Citizen Control (real participation). To achieve the main objective, the following research questions are formulated:

**RQ1:** What level of resident participation do the studied DMOs achieve in strategic tourism destination development planning?

**RQ2**: What is the average level of resident participation in the areas of the studied DMOs in strategic tourism destination development planning?

To address the research questions and collect primary data, a questionnaire survey will be conducted to assess the attitudes and opinions of DMOs, as well as the opportunities for involving local residents in the planning of tourism development activities offered by DMOs. The questionnaire was distributed electronically and contained closed-ended and scale-based questions. Scores were assigned using a Likert scale from 1 to 5 in order to obtain the most accurate picture possible of the actual level of resident involvement in community-based tourism planning in the destinations under study. Respondents assigned these scores as part of the questionnaire survey. The result was the determination of the final level of local community participation in strategic tourism development planning through the calculation of the following formula:

$$PI = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{8}(L_i \; x \; S_i)}{\sum_{i=1}^{8} L_i}$$

where: PI = participation index; $L_i$ = level according to Arnstein (1969); $S_i$ = average score for a given level.

In the questionnaire, each activity under investigation (opportunity for participation) in the planning process was classified into one of three levels, according to Arnstein (1969). Scores were assigned to the opportunities. The levels of participation were expressed numerically on a scale from 1 to 8. The individual levels and activity scores were averaged, multiplied together, and then divided by the sum of the importance (scores). The types of data used in the study consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained from responses provided by DMOs as part of a questionnaire survey, while secondary data were obtained primarily from professional literature and the results of existing research focused on methods of engaging residents in activities related to planning and decision-making regarding the direction of tourism.

## 3. Results of Research

Through descriptive analysis, the third chapter identified the areas of activity of OOCRs as DMOs in Slovakia. In 2006, a questionnaire survey was conducted among

OOCRs to determine the level of community-based tourism development planning in the surveyed tourist destinations. Of the 39 OOCRs, 31 organizations completed the questionnaire over the course of three months. The response rate was 79.5%. However, to ensure the completeness of the research, secondary data primarily strategic tourism development documents from all OOCRs were also examined.

According to Act No. 91/2010 Coll. on the Promotion of Tourism (2010), the development and implementation of this strategy is a mandatory legal requirement for the organization to exist at all and to receive annual state subsidies from the Ministry of Tourism and Sport of the Slovak Republic. For this reason, the strategic documents will examine surveys conducted to analyze the attitudes and opinions of local residents. A total of seven cases were identified in which the results of questionnaire surveys conducted among local residents were directly included in the tourism development strategy. The goal was to gather their views and attitudes, primarily regarding the positive and negative impacts of tourism, to formulate a vision of the ideal visitor and to obtain information about their relationship with tourists. In three of these cases, the OOCRs, in collaboration with other local stakeholders, organized public discussions and meetings with residents to involve them in the planning of tourism products and activities.

Similarly, a lawful and transparent process is underway, in which the draft strategy is published for public comment prior to its final approval by municipal and city councils or the OOCR general assembly. Citizens can participate by submitting official comments, suggestions for amendments or adding missing locations to tourist maps and plans.

An analysis of local residents' perceptions of tourism development was conducted as part of the external preparation of the document "Tourism Development Strategy 2024–2030" for OOCR Trnava Tourism (Gajdošíková, Gajdošík and Prostinák, 2023). We conducted the survey among local residents in cooperation with OOCR Trnava Tourism, which facilitated the distribution of the questionnaire on the city and municipal websites. Between June 22, 2023, and July 14, 2023, 62 responses were received from respondents. A limiting factor is the number of participating respondents presumably mostly from the city of Trnava whose answers do not represent the majority of residents. In the conclusion, the authors of the strategy briefly proposed, as part of the recommended steps in the action plan, to survey the opinions of local residents and create a platform for their involvement in tourism planning.

The Concept of Sustainable Tourism in Bratislava (2024), prepared for the OOCR Bratislava Tourism Board, does not clearly document the systematic, direct involvement of local residents through public consultations, surveys or participatory workshops. Rather, the document states that tourism development should respect the needs of residents and improve the quality of life in the city. Residents are thus viewed as an important part of the destination, but specific mechanisms for their participation are not described in detail in the concept (Šifra and Jenča, 2024).

The areas of OOCR Region of Liptov and OOCR Region of High Tatras, face the greatest visitor pressure. Therefore, they include surveys focused on the area's carrying capacity in their strategic and planning documents. The goal is to map residents' attitudes toward traffic congestion, overcrowding in towns and environmental pollution, with the aim of finding a compromise between tourism revenue and the comfort of local communities. OOCR Region of Liptov, in its "Concept for the Development of the Liptov

Tourism Destination for 2023–2027," under the specific objective "Development of strategic planning and a conceptual approach to tourism development activities in the Liptov region," defined measures to conduct surveys aimed at determining the local population's attitude toward tourism development in the destination (including interest in working in the tourism sector) (OOCR REGION LIPTOV, 2023).

During the strategy development process in 2022, MAS Dolný Liptov created a Facebook page titled "Liptov2030" as part of the LIPTOV2030 project, where they kept the public informed about the strategy development process. One form of participation was an online questionnaire in which Liptov residents could express their opinions on what investments should be made in Liptov. This is thus the most general way of public participation. It should be noted, however, that since 2023, the organization has not posted any updates on the aforementioned social media page regarding the evaluation and implementation of the strategy (Niňajová, 2023).

In 2022, the OOCR High Tatras Region implemented the "HOME IN THE TATRAS" project, the purpose of which was to conduct a live survey of the opinions and ideas of visitors and local residents on the topic of the development of the High Tatras and the foothills. The goal of the project, carried out in Hrebienok, was to foster connections between residents and the region, support community building and strengthen residents' ties to the area where they live and work, as well as those who merely visit it. It should be emphasized that this activity does not directly stem from planning within the framework of preparing a tourism development strategy but is a response to measures and projects that have already been established (Views of the Tatras..., 2022).

In 2019, OOCR Štúrovo – Parkan conducted a specific "Resident Survey on Perceptions of Tourism Activities in the City." The survey combined online and in-person interviews with the aim of determining the impact of seasonal tourism (Vadaš) on life in the city. Five questions were asked – 82 respondents answered the questionnaire distributed online and subsequently in person. A total of 160 respondents were approached. The survey showed that 58.5% of those surveyed perceive tourism as a development priority. In connection with the presence of tourists in Štúrovo, residents report the following problems in particular: a lack of parking spaces in Štúrovo (62.2%), increased land and real estate prices (58.5%), excessive municipal waste and waste collection issues (36.6%) and overcrowding at the Vadaš Thermal Resort (34.1%) (Michálková, 2019).

As part of international projects (the SPOT project), OOCR in Nitra conducted targeted surveys of residents, visitors and business owners to develop a cultural tourism strategy. Meanwhile, in the "Strategy for Tourism Development in the City of Nitra for 2021–2031," set as their first strategic goal the implementation of measures aimed at conducting a PR campaign targeting the citizens of Nitra with the objective of building a positive perception of tourism development plans and activities within the city. An analysis of the document reveals that all measures concerning local residents and tourism development are formulated as planned PR activities without more active involvement of the local community (Polenčíková, 2020).

The OOCR Region of Banská Štiavnica, in collaboration with the local self-government, held in-person meetings to engage residents in the development of strategic plans, particularly regarding traffic and parking regulations during the

summer season in the vicinity of the reservoirs and the historic center. The OOCR, in cooperation with the city of Banská Štiavnica, developed the "Strategic Document for the Development of Experiential Tourism in Banská Štiavnica and the Surrounding Area," in which the proposal section identified recommended approaches for bringing together individual stakeholders in the geopark to create a comprehensive product. Authors Rybár et al. (2019, p. 55) identify three levels of cooperation, with the third level representing cooperation at the individual level. They state that "*residents are an integral part of the tourism product and should therefore be given sufficient attention. If local residents are involved in managing the geopark, they will likely be less critical of its development and more tolerant of tourists*."

OOCR Central Slovakia, conducted a questionnaire survey as part of the development of destination plans for the cities of Banská Bystrica and Zvolen. OOCR Region of Gemer and OOCR Central Slovakia, also make extensive use of thematic working groups. When developing plans for cultural routes (e.g. the Gothic Route), they involve local activists, church communities that own historical sites and local guides, thereby allowing residents to directly shape the region's offerings. In Slovakia's protected areas, specifically in the Muránska Planina region, community meetings with residents were held during the development of a natural tourism concept. The goal was to identify zones where locals wish to see tourism development and, conversely, where they demand strict protection to preserve their own peace and privacy.

Recommended activities for local stakeholders, as outlined in the document "Concept for the Development of Nature-Based Tourism in the Banská Bystrica Region by 2030," include the introduction of strategic planning based on a cooperative approach in protected areas or the initiation of a discussion on the possibilities/specific needs for tourism development in protected areas among the OOCR, Protected Area Administrations and other organizations involved in regional development. However, the proposed measures do not include, in any of their points, recommendations aimed at any form of active involvement of residents living in protected areas in tourism development planning (Aevis n.o., 2021).

After analyzing the aforementioned strategic documents, it can be concluded that gathering residents' opinions and attitudes through questionnaire surveys represents the most commonly used method of involving them in the process of creating a strategic tourism development document. This is the most widespread form, in which the OOCR distributes questionnaires primarily online directly to the residents of the destination through its member municipalities. The results form separate analytical chapters within the strategies.

In the questionnaire survey, responses to five scaled questions were expressed numerically using a Likert scale (from 1 to 5) and transformed into indicators based on Arnstein's (1969) ladder of participation levels. The questions concerned methods of involving residents in the tourism development planning phase and involving residents in the preparation of the strategic document. Respondents provided answers on the scale ranging from "Very high participation" to "No participation." Furthermore, the study examined perceptions of the importance of community-based tourism planning from the DMO's perspective – the DMO's awareness of opportunities to involve residents in strategic tourism planning and the DMO's future steps regarding resident involvement in tourism development planning. Responses were analyzed and evaluated

on a scale ranging from "Strongly agree" to "Strongly disagree." Table 1 shows the indicators with their assigned final scores and levels of resident participation. The final score represents the average of all the aforementioned responses from the respondents.

**Tab. 1** Indicators with assigned scores and levels of citizen participation

| Indicators | Score/ Average | Level | Level by Arnstein |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Residents only receive information** | 4,57 | 1 | Non-participation |
| **Residents have the opportunity to formally comment on draft documents** | 4,56 | 2 | |
| **Gathering residents' opinions (surveys)** | 4,33 | 3 | Tokenism |
| **Gathering opinions through focus groups and individual interviews** | 2,54 | 4 | |
| **Residents participate in public discussions** | 2,50 | 5 | |
| **Residents are members of working groups** | 2,43 | 6 | Real participation |
| **Residents have a say in tourism development** | 2,24 | 7 | |
| **The community manages tourism itself** | 2,65 | 8 | |

Source: own processing

In this case, the respondents' answers were converted into a systematic scale divided into three groups: non-participation at levels 1.00 –3.33; tokenism at levels 3.34 – 5.66; and citizen power at levels 5.67 – 8.00. Figure 3 presents the classification of the examined DMOs according to the resulting level of community-based tourism destination planning, with the calculated average for each level.

The respondents' answers indicate that the greatest benefits of involving the local community in the strategic planning phase of tourism development activities include greater acceptance and support for decisions related to tourism development – more realistic decisions based on more accurate data and information. Residents help to identify the destination's local identity and create more sustainable tourism development thanks to their input. It also builds trust and strengthening relationships between local self-government representatives/DMOs and residents, promotes local identity and residents' pride and higher-quality (more authentic) tourism products. It can be concluded that involving residents in the planning process supports better implementation and monitoring of the strategy.

In the questionnaire survey, respondents identified several barriers to involving residents in tourism development planning: these include institutional and organizational barriers, such as a lack of in-house personnel (analysts, facilitators, etc.); a lack of time to conduct the questionnaire survey, public discussions and focus groups when implementing projects tied to program deadlines or grant schemes. Furthermore, there is a lack of financial resources for collecting and analyzing large amounts of data. Respondents also identified barriers on the side of residents: low public interest in the tourism sector (especially in areas where tourism is not the dominant economic indicator of residents' income); a negative attitude among residents toward local self-government, DMO stakeholders and other entities or residents' lack of belief that their input will make a difference or be relevant to stakeholders.

After taking into account, in particular, primary data and results of measuring the level of community planning for tourism development and secondary data (strategic documents and annual reports of OOCRs) within the studied OOCRs can be identified according to the level of community involvement in strategic planning for tourism development in their territory. Table 2 lists the DMOs according to the achieved level, thereby answering the first research question.

**Tab. 2** DMOs according to the resulting level of population participation

| **Destination management organizations** | **Level** |
|---|---|
| - | Real participation – Citizen Power (5,67 – 8,00) |
| OOCR Region of Gemer, OOCR Central Slovakia, OOCR Region of Banská Štiavnica, OOCR Region of Liptov, OOCR High Tatras Region, OOCR Štúrovo, OOCR Trnava Tourism. | Tokenism (3,34 – 5,66) |
| OOCR Northern Spiš – Pieniny, OOCR Visit Košice, OOCR Sunny Hont, OOCR REGION of HOREHRONIE, OOCR Šariš – Bardejov, OOCR REGION of GRON, OOCR Trenčianske Teplice, OOCR Upper Považie Region, OOCR Valley of Rajec, OOCR Upper Zemplín, OOCR Turiec, Zemplin OOCR, OOCR Little Fatra, OOCR High Tatras – Podhorie, OOCR Kysuce, OOCR Resort of Piešťany, OOCR Bratislava Tourism Board, OOCR Region of Liptov, OOCR Tourist NOVOHRAD AND PODPOĽANIE, OOCR Claster Orava, OOCR TATRAS – SPIŠ – PIENINY, OOCR Upper Nitra – Bojnice, OOCR Region of Senec, OOCR ZÁHORIE AND KOPANICE, OOCR Podunajsko, OOCR Region of Považie, OOCR Little Carpathians, OOCR Slovak Paradise & Spiš, OOCR Tekov, OOCR Region of Šariš, OOCR Rye Island – Csallóköz, OOCR Matthew's land – Mátyusföld. | Non-participation (1,00 – 3,33) |

Source: own processing

Table 2 shows that none of the subjects studied can be classified as the highest level – real participation. Nine OOCRs, within the framework of tourism development planning, carried out questionnaire surveys or individual interviews, public meetings or discussions with local residents and actively involve them in the destination management process. They are classified at the symbolic level of participation (tokenism). However, it should be emphasized that the numerical calculated values did not reach a value approaching the limit of 5.66 for the studied OOCRs.

However, in most of the analyzed cases, the form of local community involvement prevails in the form of information, primarily on social networks and the website, about planned and implemented activities (projects) related to tourism. Residents also have the opportunity to formally comment on draft documents in writing or electronically in all cases. However, this is directly based on the legislative anchoring of the obligations of municipalities and self-governing regions to publish draft strategic documents before the council meeting. Most OOCRs are classified as having no participation of residents. The calculation of the resulting average level of community tourism planning in all DMOs was calculated as follows:

$$PI = \frac{4{,}27 + 9{,}12 + 13{,}29 + 10{,}16 + 15{,}5 + 14{,}58 + 20{,}58 + 10{,}65}{36} = 2{,}73$$

In response to the second research question, we found the average level of participation of residents in planning tourism development in all territories surveyed by the OOCR. This is a value of 2.73, which represents weak participation. The reason for the resulting low value is the fact that most of the surveyed DMOs either use the basic legal possibilities for involving the local community (the possibility of commenting on the draft strategic document before its voting and adoption by the city council) or inform the public in various ways about the planned or implemented project activity. Only eight of the 39 OOCRs surveyed also mention in their strategies a questionnaire survey to obtain feedback from residents and only four OOCRs carried out public discussions with the local community in planning tourism development. These were mostly protected areas or areas with a higher concentration of tourists during the high season.

## 4. Discussion

Participation of residents in the process of community tourism planning is promoted as a way of implementing sustainable tourism. However, there are few studies that describe in detail tangible and practical ways of supporting or measuring participation, from the perspective of DMOs. The presented article examined and evaluated the average initial level of involvement of local residents in strategic planning and decision-making on activities and projects in the field of tourism. Furthermore, the level of involvement of residents in the development of individual parts of the strategic document for tourism development in the territory of selected DMOs was examined.

Like any model, procedure or index, the Ladder of Civic Participation we use, according to the author Arstein (1969), has several limits. The applied model can only explain a certain number of the indicators examined. A standard criticism of models that can be interpreted as graduated hierarchical scales that rise from lower to higher is that they cannot adequately represent the layered complexity or fluctuating power dynamics that typically manifest themselves in real participatory situations. At the same time, we believe that the tendency to interpret lower levels as universally negative (or worse than higher) and higher levels as universally positive (or better than lower) is not always authoritative and relevant. In fact, lower levels of participation can be more positive in some circumstances and higher levels more negative in other circumstances.

The nature of tourism development presents additional challenges in designing and implementing community participation in planning. Tourism development processes, identified in the work of Doxey, Butler and Keller, suggest that tourism often has a high degree of initial involvement and acceptance by the residents of target areas. Only after significant tourism development in a destination do residents begin to evaluate and take action regarding the negative changes brought about by tourism development. Uncertainties and misunderstandings about tourism are more likely in the absence of adequate resident involvement. Also, finding public representatives (individuals or groups from the DMO, generally recognized by the local community) to engage in tourism planning is often problematic. This is especially true given the wide range of factors that could shape their perceptions and the difficulty in finding generalizable

patterns of resident response. This study is therefore an initial survey to identify the level of local community involvement in the strategic planning of tourism development from the perspective of the DMO in Slovakia.

The authors see a further direction of the researched issue and obtaining a comprehensive view of community tourism planning in researching the attitudes and opinions of residents. The communities studied in the next phase of the research would be divided into the stage of development of the tourism destination according to the product life cycle model. This would make it possible to identify several critical problems that the members of these communities consistently perceive. The list of critical problems would reflect the themes of control and participation in decision-making. Given the complex nature of the industry, visitor groups and the diverse nature of the tourism product, it can be expected that the knowledge of residents about tourism planning and management will be generally weak. The intention would therefore be to examine the knowledge of residents about tourism and their perception of the information that is currently available. Similarly, to examine the requirements for representative participation, it is appropriate to identify the characteristics of residents' attitudes in relation to tourism development. It also seems effective to conduct a post hoc evaluation of the participation process and the results of residents' involvement in community tourism planning.

One of the important types of research is the article by Okazaki (2008), in which he examined the main theories used to discuss community participation, including the "ladder of civic participation", the redistribution of power, the processes of cooperation and the creation of social capital. The article shows how this model can be used to assess the level of participation in the studied location and suggests further necessary steps. The model is applied in a case study in Palawan, Philippines, where an indigenous community had previously initiated a community-based ecotourism project. The project led to a number of problems, including conflicts with non-indigenous stakeholders. We agree with the opinion that the mentioned theories would form the basis for defining a model of community-based tourism in the conditions of the Slovak Republic. A study prepared in this way, in connection with our article, could identify in more detail the overall picture of community-based planning of tourist destinations in Slovakia.

The specific features of the development of community participation in tourism development indicate that it is necessary to set up a general process of citizen participation that is continuous and educational for all parties involved. Moreover, given the potentially poor knowledge of the possibilities of citizen participation in tourism development, significant promotional input and support efforts may be needed by the DMO to convince stakeholders and the public that the involvement of the local community in the process of planning activities and projects to support tourism development is necessary and valuable.

## Conclusion

The main objective of the article was to analyze the level of involvement of local residents in strategic planning of tourism development in tourist destinations in Slovakia and to identify other possibilities for their effective participation. The

assessment of the level of participation in community tourism was based on the theory of the author Arnstein (1969). According to the author, the participation ladder represents a method of assessing the quality of public involvement, where she distinguishes eight levels: Manipulation and Therapy (participation), Information, Consultation, Reassurance (formal community involvement), Partnership, Delegation of power and Citizen control (real participation). The study asked two research questions, and the level of participation of each tourist destination under the jurisdiction of the OOCR was identified. Seven OOCRs out of the 39 studied show a medium level of participation – tokenism (values between 3.34 and 5.66), and the remaining 32 OOCRs show a low level of participation (values between 1.00 and 3.33).

The average level of participation of residents in planning tourism development in all territories surveyed by the OOCR was at the value of 2.73, which represents no (very weak) participation. From the point of view of the reason for the resulting low value is the fact that most of the surveyed DMOs use either basic legal options for involving the local community (the possibility of commenting on the draft strategic document before voting) and informing residents in various ways about the planned or implemented project/activity. It can be stated that the ideal model of community tourism planning is in a situation where communities would decide on the form and function of tourism development and would have full control over any tourism programs in their locality. In most cases, local residents often lack the experience, resources and therefore the interest necessary to implement successful forms of resident participation.

The above facts may be caused by past experiences of residents, where they do not believe in the transparency of decision-making, have experience with ignoring suggestions or perceive the participation process as a formality and planned activities as "pre-decided". The professional language of strategies can also be a barrier, where documents are prepared in a very professional and technical manner, which can discourage ordinary residents from getting involved and interested in planning and decision-making. Communication barriers also appear to be a frequent problem, where there is a lack of a clear explanation of the goals of participation and the need for feedback as well as information about the results of participation. Another frequent problem is the fact that the public is involved in the management process only after the proposal has been created, without their real influence on the planning of activities and projects.

The study thus processed is beneficial in terms of systematically measuring the level of participation of residents, distinguishing symbolic participation from real co-decision-making, comparing individual strategies, OOCR or cities. The study further identified the difference between what the strategies declare and what power residents actually have. The processed research provides the basis for further research into residents' attitudes and the creation of a unified methodology for assessing local community participation in tourism development. Using the participatory model from the author Arstein (1969), the study linked the theory of participation with destination management and created the possibility of adapting the model to the conditions of tourism, expanding its application in the Slovak environment and contributing to interdisciplinary research.

In conclusion, it can be stated that it is the local self-government or destination management organizations responsible for implementing the tourism development

strategy in a certain area that should involve residents from the beginning of the strategic management process, not only at the stage when the strategy is designed. Direct involvement in creating the vision, goals and design of planned activities in the field of tourism seems to be an appropriate way – it can create a sentiment map. It is useful to identify the attitudes and opinions of residents towards tourists, for example by calculating the Doxey irritation model. Systematically and simply explain why residents should be involved in community tourism planning. Use various forms of participation in the planning phase, from questionnaire surveys to the creation of working groups; involve and address different groups of residents; openly communicate conflicts and barriers arising due to tourism. It is essential to present the results of participation and create a long-term relationship with residents, not only in the form of information.

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# Quality of Life and Sustainable Development in Spa Tourism Research: A Scoping Review[1]

Lenka Pekarovičová[2]

***Abstract***

*This paper explores how the relationship between quality of life and sustainability is addressed in the context of spa tourism. The study applies a scoping review approach based on literature retrieved from Web of Science database. The initial search identified 130 records, of which 23 studies were included in the final analysis after screening. The findings show that quality of life and sustainability are both present in the literature, but their integration remains limited. Relevant links are most often addressed indirectly through natural therapeutic resources, tourism impacts, destination management, and tourist satisfaction. At the same time, explicitly spa-focused studies are relatively scarce, as many relevant insights emerge from broader health tourism contexts. The reviewed literature suggests several recurring mechanisms linking sustainability and quality of life, which may serve as a basis for future conceptual modelling.*

***Key words***

*spa tourism, quality of life, sustainability, scoping review*

**JEL Classification: Z32, I31, Q01**

## Introduction

Spa tourism is a specific tourism segment associated with treatment, prevention, regeneration, and the use of natural therapeutic resources (Novacká et al., 2014; Jakubíková et al., 2019). Due to its health-related orientation and dependence on place-specific natural assets, its development cannot be considered only in economic terms, but also in relation to broader destination outcomes.

In this context, the sustainable development of tourism destinations is particularly important. Sustainability is generally understood as development that meets present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, and is based on three pillars – economic, social and environmental – also known as Triple Bottom Line (Elkington, 1997).

In tourism research, it is generally acknowledged that tourism development generates economic and social benefits (Derco – Pavlišinová, 2017; Deery et al., 2012; Icoz – Icoz, 2019). In the context of spa tourism, these benefits extend further into the health domain, as spa-related activities are associated now only with economic and social effects, but also with health-related outcomes and improvements in well-being (Derco et al., 2020; Karagülle – Karagülle, 2015). At the same time, the literature also

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points to potential risks associated with tourism development, including pressure on infrastructure and local resources (Icoz – Icoz, 2019; Shanzalal, 2016).

Attention should be paid to the social dimension of sustainability, which is closely related to non-financial outcomes such as well-being, social cohesion, community conditions, and perceived life satisfaction (Li et al., 2022). These broader societal effects are not limited to a single sector but can also be applied to tourism destinations and development contexts more generally (Vanclay – Esteves, 2024).

One of key components of social dimension is quality of life, which is inherently complex, as it reflects subjective experiences shaped by individual perceptions, expectations, and living conditions (Andereck – Nyaupane, 2011). The World Health Organization (1996) defines quality of life as an individual´s perception of their position in life in relation to their goals, expectations, standards, and concerns, while also linking it to physical health, psychological state, level of independence, social relationships, environmental conditions, and personal beliefs. Such understanding confirms that quality of life is multidimensional and cannot be adequately reduced to economic indicators alone (Land et al., 2012; Land & Michalos, 2018). This is especially relevant in tourism research, where development affects not only economic conditions, but also well-being, health, social conditions, and broader life satisfaction of both residents and visitors (Berbekova et al., 2024). In health-oriented tourism contexts, and especially spa tourism, this discussion also overlaps with the concept of health-related quality of life, which examines how health status influences overall quality of life (Yin et al., 2016; Vega-Vázquez et al., 2020).

Given that quality of life represents an important part of social dimension of sustainability, and that spa tourism may influence both the well-being of visitors and the living conditions of local communities, it is relevant to ask whether the literature addresses these dimensions jointly or separately. The main aim of this paper is to explore how the relationship between quality of life and sustainability is addressed in the context of spa tourism in the existing scientific literature.

To achieve this aim, the study addresses the following research questions:

$RQ_1$: How are the concepts of quality of life and sustainability conceptualized and examined in the context of spa tourism?

$RQ_2$: To what extent are quality of life and sustainability addressed together and integrated within the existing literature on spa tourism?

## 1 Methodology

This study adopts a scoping review approach to systematically map the existing literature on the relationship between quality of life, sustainability, and spa tourism. The scoping review method is particularly suitable for exploring broad and fragmented research areas, enabling the identification of key concepts, research trends, and gaps in the literature.

The literature search was conducted using the Web of Science (WoS) database, which was selected due to its comprehensive coverage of high-quality peer-reviewed publications. A structured search strategy was developed to identify studies addressing spa tourism in relation to quality of life and sustainability.

The search query was defined as follows: ("spa tourism" OR "spa destination" OR "health spa" OR "medical spa") AND ("quality of life" OR "life quality" OR "well-being") AND ("sustainability" OR "sustainable development" OR "sustainable destination" OR "sustainable tourism" OR "resilient tourism" OR "resilient destination").

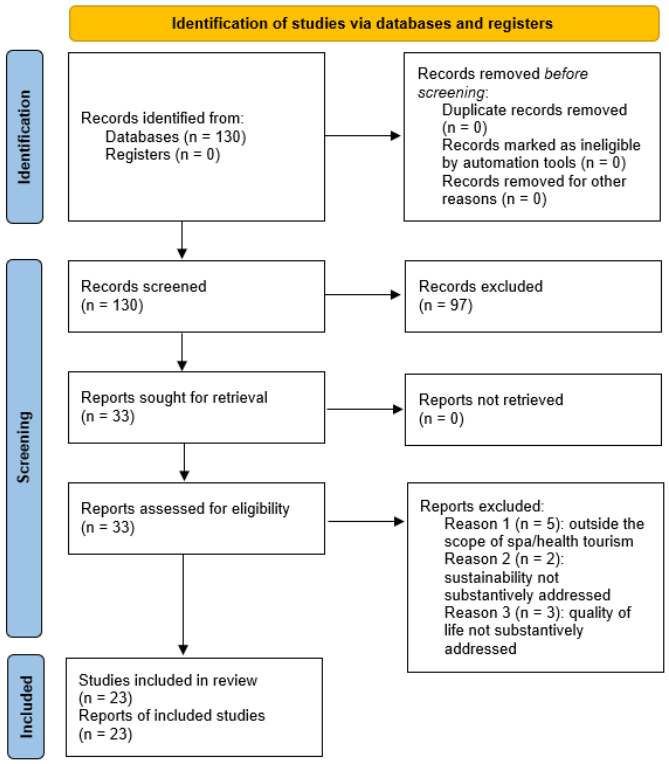
The initial search resulted in 130 records, which were subjected to a multi-stage screening process. In the first stage, titles and abstracts were screened to assess their relevance, leading to the exclusion of 97 records. Subsequently, 33 studies were selected for full-text assessment.

In the second stage, full-text screening was conducted based on predefined inclusion criteria. Studies were included if they explicitly addressed spa tourism in connection with both quality of life and sustainability. Studies that did not meet these criteria were excluded.

Following full-text screening, nine studies were excluded, primarily due to a lack of relevance to spa tourism or the absence of quality of life or sustainability dimensions. As a result, a final sample of 23 studies was included in the analysis.

The study selection process followed the PRISMA 2020 guidelines and is illustrated in Figure 1.

**Fig. 1** PRISMA flow diagram




Source: own processing

The selected studies were analysed using a structured data extraction framework, focusing on their research focus, methodological approach, and key findings. The

analysis aimed to identify how the concepts of quality of life and sustainability are addressed in the context of spa tourism, the extent to which they are integrated, and what gaps can be identified in the existing literature.

## 2 Results

The final set of studies (n = 23) represents a diverse body of literature relevant to spa tourism in relation to quality of life and sustainability. The reviewed publications include empirical studies, conceptual contributions, and review papers. Empirical research predominates and is mostly based on survey designs and quantitative analytical approaches, while a smaller number of studies adopt case study, qualitative, or conceptual perspectives.

In substantive terms, the studies cluster around three broad areas. First, a considerable part of the literature examines quality of life through well-being, health outcomes, life satisfaction, or perceived tourism impacts. Second, another group of studies focuses on sustainability in spa and health tourism, especially in relation to regional development, natural resources, governance, and community participation. Third, a smaller subset of studies addresses the connection between quality of life and sustainability more directly, although usually through partial or mediated relationships rather than through a unified conceptual framework. The main characteristics of the studies included in the analysis are summarized in Table 1.

**Tab. 1** Summary of studies

| Author, year | Focus | Method | Key contribution |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Cico et al. (2025)** | Well-being & spa tourism | Empirical | Subjective well-being supports expenditure, loyalty and sustainable rural development |
| **Dryglas & Smith (2025)** | Health tourism & resilience | Conceptual | Health tourism supports development but requires integrated strategies |
| **Mijatov et al. (2024)** | Community & spa tourism | Empirical | Sustainability depends on community engagement |
| **Islam et al. (2025)** | Medical tourism & QoL | Empirical | Improves QoL but reduces healthcare accessibility |
| **Figueiredo et al. (2024)** | Sustainable health tourism | Review | Literature is fragmented and lacks integrated frameworks |
| **Almasan et al. (2019)** | Spa & natural resources | Case study | Sustainable resource use enhances well-being |
| **González-Slovasevich et al. (2025)** | Wellness tourism management | Empirical | Integrated management improves QoL and sustainability |
| **Tsiftelidou & Christodoulou (2019)** | Thermal spa tourism | Conceptual | Development benefits QoL but requires sustainable management |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Zargham (2007)** | Sustainable tourism development | Conceptual | Sustainability enhances QoL via economic and cultural benefits |
| **Lee & Xue (2020)** | Destination loyalty & sustainability | Empirical | Satisfaction mediates sustainability and loyalty |
| **Gautam & Bhalla (2026)** | Tourism impacts & QoL | Empirical | QoL mediates support for sustainable tourism |
| **Feng et al. (2025)** | Therapeutic landscapes | Empirical | Natural environments improve health and well-being |
| **Rasoolimanesh et al. (2025)** | Sustainability perception | Empirical | Sustainability influences satisfaction and revisit intention |
| **Cucculelli & Goffi (2014)** | Sustainability & competitiveness | Empirical | Sustainability enhances destination competitiveness |
| **Hartwell et al. (2018)** | Tourism & well-being | Review | Tourism contributes to well-being and QoL |
| **Yang et al. (2023)** | Sustainable tourism research | Review | Need for balance across sustainability dimensions |
| **Zhong et al. (2021)** | Health tourism research | Review | Health tourism is increasingly linked to QoL and sustainability |
| **Đorđević & Milićević (2020)** | Residents' impacts | Empirical | Tourism affects QoL positively and negatively |
| **Xia et al. (2024)** | Service quality & QoL | Empirical | Satisfaction mediates service quality and QoL |
| **Liu et al. (2023)** | Wellness experience | Empirical | Experience enhances well-being via satisfaction |
| **Guerra et al. (2022)** | Sustainable spa practices | Empirical | Integrated strategies improve QoL |
| **Pina & Martins (2023)** | Spa tourism & rural development | Qualitative | Spa tourism supports regional development and QoL |
| **Al-Sakkaf et al. (2024)** | Social responsibility & QoL | Empirical | Tourism impacts mediate sustainability and QoL |

Source: own processing

## 2.1 Quality of life in spa tourism

Quality of life is most frequently addressed through the concepts of well-being, health, satisfaction, and life improvement. The reviewed studies consistently indicate that spa-related and broader health-oriented tourism contexts are associated with positive outcomes for tourists, particularly through improvements in physical health, psychological well-being, and overall satisfaction (Hartwell et al., 2018; Liu et al., 2023; Feng et al., 2025).

A recurring finding is the role of tourist satisfaction as an important mediating mechanism. Studies focused on service quality, motivation, and wellness experience show that these factors do not improve quality of life directly, but rather through satisfaction with the spa experience (Xia et al., 2024; Liu et al., 2023). This suggests that quality of life outcomes in spa tourism are largely shaped by how visitors perceive and evaluate the destination, its services, and the overall therapeutic or wellness setting.

Quality of life is not only limited to the tourist perspective. Several studies address residents' quality of life in spa destinations, especially in relation to the socio-economic effects of tourism development. Positive impacts include economic activity, infrastructure improvements, and broader social benefits (Gautam & Bhalla, 2026; Al-Sakkaf et al., 2024). Tourism may also generate negative effects when development is poorly managed. These include overcrowding, socio-cultural tensions, and reduced access to services, which may weaken quality of life for local communities (Đorđević & Milićević, 2020; Islam et al., 2025).

## 2.2 Sustainability in spa tourism

Sustainability in the reviewed literature is approached through environmental, economic, and socio-cultural dimensions. In spa tourism, however, these dimensions are strongly shaped by the specific character of spa destinations, which are fundamentally dependent on natural therapeutic resources and place-based assets (Guerra et al., 2022).

A central theme in the reviewed studies is the responsible use and preservation of natural therapeutic resources, such as mineral waters, thermal landscapes, or other health-related environmental assets. In this sense, sustainability is not treated only as a general development principle, but as a practical condition for the long-term functioning of spa destinations (Feng et al., 2025).

Another major finding is that spa tourism is frequently associated with sustainable regional development, especially in rural or peripheral areas. The literature points to its role in local economic diversification, entrepreneurship, regional revitalization, and destination competitiveness (Cico et al., 2025; Pina & Martins, 2023; Cucculelli & Goffi, 2014). However, this contribution is not presented as automatic. The studies repeatedly stress that sustainability requires integrated management, stakeholder cooperation, strategic planning, and active community involvement (Mijatov Ladičorbić et al., 2024; Guerra et al., 2022; Yang et al., 2023).

Spa tourism is also placed within broader sustainability agendas, including destination governance and alignment with wider sustainable development priorities (Figueiredo et al., 2024). This means that sustainability in spa tourism is framed not only as environmental protection, but also as a governance and development issue involving multiple actors and long-term decision-making.

## 2.3 Integration of quality of life and sustainability in spa tourism

The reviewed studies show that the relationship between quality of life and sustainability is present in the literature, but only a limited part of this discussion is explicitly situated in spa tourism; more often, these links appear within broader health tourism contexts. Rather than being systematically conceptualized, the connection between these two dimensions emerges through specific mechanisms and thematic

overlaps. While some studies acknowledge the interconnections between well-being, destination development, and sustainability, they usually do so within broader tourism or destination-level discussions rather than through a spa-specific conceptual model.

The first mechanism is the role of natural and therapeutic resources. Their preservation supports environmental sustainability, while at the same time enabling the health and well-being benefits that are central to quality of life in health tourism-oriented destinations (Almasan et al., 2019; Feng et al., 2025). In this respect, the same resource base underpins both sustainability and quality of life outcomes.

The second mechanism is found in tourism impacts and destination management. Several studies indicate that positive tourism impacts, such as economic benefits, infrastructure development, and service improvement, can enhance quality of life while also contributing to more sustainable destination development (Gautam & Bhalla, 2026; Al-Sakkaf et al., 2024). Conversely, negative impacts may undermine both local quality of life and the long-term sustainability of destinations (Đorđević & Milićević, 2020; Islam et al., 2025).

The third mechanism concerns satisfaction and experience-related pathways. Several studies suggest that destination attributes associated with sustainability, such as environmental quality, socio-cultural conditions, or overall destination management, influence satisfaction, which subsequently affects tourists' well-being and related outcomes (Lee & Xue, 2020; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2025). In this sense, sustainability contributes to quality of life indirectly through the tourism experience rather than through a direct causal relationship.

## 3 Discussion

The findings of this review indicate that the relationship between quality of life and sustainability is discussed in the literature, but only to a limited extent within spa tourism as a distinct research context. In many cases, relevant insights emerge from broader health tourism-oriented studies rather than from explicitly spa-focused research.

This indicates that spa tourism is still more often treated as part of broader health and destination-oriented discussions than as a distinct analytical context for examining the relationship between quality of life and sustainability.

Spa tourism differs from many other tourism segments in one fundamental respect: it is strongly dependent on natural therapeutic resources. Mineral waters, thermal environments, and therapeutic landscapes are not only part of the tourism product, but also the basis of the destination's therapeutic and health-oriented value. As a result, sustainability in spa tourism is not only a matter of destination competitiveness or general environmental responsibility, but a prerequisite for maintaining the very conditions through which quality of life benefits are generated (Almasan et al., 2019; Feng et al., 2025; Guerra et al., 2022). In this sense, the reviewed studies suggest that spa tourism creates a particularly close connection between sustainability and quality of life.

At the same time, the review shows that the link between these two dimensions is rarely framed as direct. Rather, it tends to emerge through mediating mechanisms. One of the most important is destination management and the broader structure of tourism

impacts. Studies focusing on residents indicate that quality of life improves when tourism development generates positive economic and infrastructural effects, but declines when it produces socio-cultural tensions, overcrowding, or reduced service accessibility (Gautam & Bhalla, 2026; Đorđević & Milićević, 2020; Islam et al., 2025). This suggests that the sustainability of spa tourism cannot be understood separately from the quality-of-life implications it produces for local communities.

A second important mechanism is tourist satisfaction, which appears repeatedly in the reviewed literature as a pathway through which destination attributes affect perceived well-being and quality of life. In studies on spa and wellness experiences, quality of life outcomes are not presented as automatic effects of travel itself, but as consequences of how tourists perceive service quality, environmental conditions, and the overall destination experience (Xia et al., 2024; Liu et al., 2023; Lee & Xue, 2020). This means that sustainability-related conditions, such as preserved environments, socio-cultural integrity, or destination quality, may shape quality of life indirectly through experience and satisfaction rather than through an immediate causal effect.

The main contribution of the present study lies not in claiming that the relationship between quality of life and sustainability has been ignored, but in showing that it remains under-integrated within spa tourism research. The reviewed literature makes it clear that both dimensions matter, and in some cases even directly intersect, but the relationship is still more often implied than systematically conceptualized. This creates space for future research to move beyond fragmented approaches and develop more integrated frameworks that would better capture the systemic nature of spa destinations.

Such future research should pay greater attention to the interaction between resource preservation, governance, destination management, tourists' well-being, and residents' quality of life. This is especially relevant in spa tourism, where the economic, environmental, therapeutic, and social functions of the destination are more tightly interwoven than in many other forms of tourism. A more integrated perspective could therefore contribute not only to academic knowledge, but also to more effective planning and management of spa destinations.

## Conclusion

The study aimed to examine how the relationship between quality of life and sustainability is addressed in the context of spa tourism through a scoping review of the existing literature. The findings indicate that, although both concepts present in the literature, their integration remains limited and is predominantly approached indirectly through specific mechanisms rather than as a unified analytical construct.

The review further shows that explicitly spa-focused studies are relatively limited, while many relevant insights emerge from broader health tourism and destination-oriented contexts. At the same time, there are several recurring mechanisms through which sustainability and quality of life are connected, particularly the preservation of natural therapeutic resources, destination management, tourism impacts, and visitor satisfaction.

The main contribution of this study lies in showing that the relationship between quality of life and sustainability in spa tourism is not absent, but remains fragmented,

under-integrated, and only partially conceptualized within spa-specific research. This points to the need for a more systematic and integrative perspective that would better reflect the specific character of spa destinations as resource-dependent and socially embedded systems.

Future research should focus on developing approaches that capture the interactions between resource preservation, governance, destination management, tourists´ well-being, and residents´ quality of life in a more coherent way.

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# Tri posuny v motivácii slovenského cestovateľa po pandémii a ich implikácie pre kúpeľný cestovný ruch: od zoznamu prianí k pocitu naplnenia

Alena Pirkovská[16]

***Abstract***

*The post-pandemic period brings a shift in the motivation of the Slovak traveller, which is well documented in international literature but remains insufficiently articulated in the Slovak context. Growing visitor numbers across the spa sector are a concrete manifestation of this shift, yet the question remains what drives customers to purchase these services and how the sector can respond to it. The paper is a qualitative reflection from practice, drawing on the author's five years of professional experience and ten years of travel practice, combined with a systematic review of international academic literature. It identifies three shifts in the motivation of the Slovak traveller — from quantity to depth of experience, from external recommendation to inner reflection, and from permanent availability to deliberate disconnection — and on this basis formulates practical implications for spa tourism. Destination managers, spa operators, and external providers can gain a new perspective on strategic communication and customer needs, with the aim of supporting client growth and a long-term positive impact on the health and wellbeing of the population.*

***Key words***

*slow tourism, conscious travel, digital detox tourism, motivácia cestovateľa, slovenský kúpeľný cestovný ruch, destinačný manažment*

**JEL Classification: Z32, Z33, L83**

## Úvod

Slovenský cestovný ruch sa v číslach návštevnosti dostáva na hranicu spred roka 2019 (Slovakia Travel, 2025). Kvantitatívne ukazovatele je ľahké zmapovať. Ťažšie je zachytiť iný typ zmeny: posun v motivácii samotného cestovateľa. Prečo ľudia cestujú, ako si vyberajú destinácie, čo od dovolenky očakávajú a na základe čoho považujú dovolenku za tzv. „úspešnú".

Odborná literatúra tieto „mäkké" zmeny pomenúva napríklad pojmami ako pomalý turizmus (slow tourism) (Dickinson & Lumsdon, 2010; Kostilníková et al., 2022), vedomé cestovanie (conscious travel) a digitálny detox v cestovnom ruchu (digital detox tourism) (Hassan & Saleh, 2024). V slovenskom kontexte sa tieto koncepty objavujú v odbornej literatúre okrajovo. Do istej miery interpretujú to, čo už slovenský kúpeľný cestovný ruch svojou podstatou ponúka, chýba však ich systematické ukotvenie v odbornej literatúre a aplikácia na slovenské kúpeľníctvo – práve túto medzeru sa snaží

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tento príspevok čiastočne zaplniť. Praktické uplatnenie v dennodennej praxi – cestovné kancelárie, destinačné manažmentové organizácie, prevádzkovatelia ubytovacích a kúpeľných zariadení – zatiaľ nereflektuje využitie týchto zmien za účelom rozvoja v kontexte Slovenska a jeho turistických možností v dostatočnej miere.

Cieľom príspevku je pomenovať tri konkrétne posuny v motivácii slovenského cestovateľa, ukotviť ich v aktuálnych konceptuálnych rámcoch vedeckej literatúry sústredenej na turizmus a navrhnúť praktické implikácie pre kúpeľný cestovný ruch. Tieto tri koncepty boli vybrané zo širšieho spektra post-pandemických trendov v cestovnom ruchu, pretože zdieľajú spoločný jadrový princíp – uprednostnenie obnovy a hĺbky zážitku pred rýchlosťou a kvantitou, založené na reflektovaní vlastnej vnútornej potreby spomaliť –, ktorý je štrukturálne blízky jadrovej hodnotovej ponuke kúpeľného cestovného ruchu. Príspevok nepretenduje na výskumnú prácu – ide o reflexiu z praxe doplnenú o ukotvenie v literatúre.

Príspevok je koncipovaný ako podklad pre manažérov destinácií a kúpeľov, ktorí hľadajú spôsob, ako včas reagovať na meniace sa motivácie klientely.

## 1. Aktuálne trendy v cestovnom ruchu: východiská z vedeckej literatúry

Cestovný ruch čelí viacerým zmenám v post-pandemickej spoločenskej atmosfére – zmenám, ktoré sú v medzinárodnej vedeckej diskusii rozsiahlo reflektované, no do dennej praxe sa pretavujú pomalšie. V tejto kapitole sú stručne zhrnuté tri konceptuálne rámce, ktoré tvoria pozadie pre pozorovania uvedené v kapitolách 3 a 4.

Pomalý turizmus (slow tourism) je jedným z najetablovanejších konceptov ostatných rokov. Dickinson a Lumsdon (2010) ho vo svojom zakladateľskom diele Slow Travel and Tourism definujú ako alternatívny model cestovania, ktorý sa stavia do opozície voči mentalite masového cestovného ruchu založenej na čo najväčšom počte odškrtnutých atrakcií. Slow tourism privileguje dlhšie pobyty na menšom počte miest, vedomú voľbu spôsobu dopravy, hĺbku zážitku namiesto kvantity a väzbu na lokálnu komunitu. Dickinson et al. (2011) v Journal of Sustainable Tourism navrhujú konceptuálny rámec slow travel, v ktorom kombinujú environmentálnu, sociologickú a behaviorálnu dimenziu konceptu.

Slovenskú a stredoeurópsku perspektívu na slow tourism prináša systematický prehľad konceptuálnych rámcov publikovaný v GeoJournal of Tourism and Geosites (Kostilníková et al., 2022). Tento medzinárodný kolektív konštatuje, že slow tourism nie je iba alternatívnym formátom dovolenky, ale predovšetkým „mentálnym modelom" cestovateľa – spôsobom premýšľania o tom, ako, prečo a v akom rytme cestovať. Autori systematicky porovnávajú slow tourism s rýchlym tempom cestovateľských zážitkov a identifikujú jeho jadrové atribúty: vedomé spomalenie, kvalitu zážitku, lokálnu väzbu a hĺbku interakcie s prostredím.

Vedomé cestovanie (conscious travel) je menej formálne definovaný, no v ostatnom desaťročí čoraz frekventovanejší pojem. Vychádza zo starších motivačných modelov turizmu – najmä push/pull rámca, ktorý priekopnícky pomenovali Dann (1977) a Crompton (1979) v Annals of Tourism Research. Tieto autori identifikovali, že rozhodovanie cestovateľa o destinácii sa neopiera iba o atribúty miesta (pull faktory), ale primárne o vnútorné psychologické a sociálne motivácie (push faktory) – ego, únik, prestíž, regresiu, sebareflexiu. Yousaf, Amin a Santos (2018) v Tourism and Hospitality

Management tieto klasické rámce systematicky aktualizujú v kontexte súčasného (najmä mladšieho) cestovateľa. Conscious travel ako pojem stojí na rozšírení tejto push/pull logiky o introspektívnu zložku: cestovateľ pred výberom destinácie vedome reflektuje vlastnú motiváciu, namiesto toho aby ju iba intuitívne sledoval.

Digitálny detox v cestovnom ruchu (digital detox tourism) je relatívne najmladší z troch konceptov, no za ostatné roky jeden z najrýchlejšie rastúcich tematických okruhov výskumu v turizme. Hassan a Saleh (2024) v Journal of Tourism Futures realizujú bibliometrickú analýzu literatúry v oblasti a konštatujú, že odpojenie sa od digitálnych zariadení sa stáva primárnou motiváciou cesty, nie iba jej vedľajším produktom. Li, Pearce a Oktadiana (2020) v Annals of Tourism Research dokumentujú, že cestovanie bez digitálnych zariadení (digital-free tourism) u cestovateľa rozvíja konkrétne charakterové črty – sebareguláciu, schopnosť oceniť krásu, sociálnu inteligenciu a otvorenosť mysle. Gong, Schroeder a Plaisance (2023) v Annals of Tourism Research tento koncept rozširujú o kritickú reflexiu vzťahu cestovateľa, technológie a destinácie.

V slovenskej odbornej literatúre sú tieto koncepty zastúpené najmä v práci Kostilníkovej et al. (2022, slow tourism). Potenciál empirických prác, ktoré by digitálny detox v cestovnom ruchu (digital detox tourism) a vedomé cestovanie (conscious travel) overovali v slovenskom prostredí, je zatiaľ nenaplnený.

## 2. Metodika: kvalitatívna reflexia z praxe

Vzhľadom na charakter príspevku ako reflexie z praxe je zvolenou metódou kvalitatívna analýza založená na kombinácii sektorového pozorovania a systematickej rešerše odbornej literatúry, nie štandardizovaný empirický výskum. Pozorovania uvedené v tomto príspevku vychádzajú z troch zdrojov, ktoré sa navzájom dopĺňajú.

Po prvé z desaťročnej cestovateľskej praxe autorky, ktorá zahŕňala sólo cestovateľské projekty v severnej Európe (Nórsko od juhu na sever, Škótsko, Island, Švédsko), pútnickú trasu v Portugalsku (Camino Portugués), off-season cesty v stredomorskej oblasti Európy a aj južnejších častiach Európy (Madeira, Kanárske ostrovy), horské oblasti v Rakúsku, Taliansku a Slovinsku, až po Balkán, a skúmanie hosťovskej skúsenosti v rôznych typoch ubytovacích zariadení a destinačných modelov.

Po druhé z viac ako päťročnej profesijnej skúsenosti v segmente B2B cestovného ruchu – konkrétne v sprostredkovaní prenájmu rekreačných plavidiel v rámci Európy a v partnerských vzťahoch s prevádzkovateľmi turistických služieb. Tento kontext umožnil autorke priebežne pozorovať, ako sa mení správanie klienta pri výbere cestovateľského produktu.

Po tretie zo systematického sledovania zahraničných odborných zdrojov v oblasti výskumu cestovného ruchu a európskych politík cestovného ruchu (UN Tourism, OECD, Európska komisia). Toto sledovanie autorka realizovala aj v rámci publikačnej činnosti pre slovenskú čitateľskú komunitu od januára 2024.

Integrácia troch zdrojov v príspevku ústi do kvalitatívnej reflexie. Autorka si je vedomá obmedzení takéhoto formátu. Nejde o systematický výskum so štandardizovanou metodológiou. Pozorovania nepretendujú na štatistickú

reprezentatívnosť ani na generalizovateľnosť na slovenskú populáciu. Ich hodnota spočíva v sektorovej skúsenosti integrovanej s akademickou diskusiou, ktorá môže pomenovať tendencie, ku ktorým sa kvantitatívny výskum dostáva s časovým odstupom. Konkrétne obmedzenia metódy sú diskutované v záverečnej kapitole.

## 3. Tri posuny v motivácii slovenského cestovateľa

### 3.1 Menej destinácií, viac času: posun v definícii „úspešnej dovolenky"

Pozorovanie. Po pandémii sa v segmente slovenských cestovateľov, ktorí cestujú individuálne (mimo balíčkov cestovných kancelárií), výrazne mení definícia toho, čo je „úspešná dovolenka". Kým obdobie pred pandémiou bolo definované predovšetkým cestovateľským modelom postaveným najmä na maximalizácii – viac krajín, viac fotiek, viac „odškrtnutých" miest – postpandemický individuálny cestovateľ inklinuje k opačnému princípu: menej miest, dlhšie obdobie, hlbšie spoznanie.

Posun je viditeľný aj v praxi. Pri plánovaní multi-destinačných ciest strednou Európou sa z vlastnej skúsenosti autorky itineráre s náročným denným presunom medzi viacerými mestami na papieri javia atraktívne, no v praktickej realizácii môžu byť fyzicky a psychicky vyčerpávajúce. Tento vzorec zodpovedá aj zisteniam Su, Sun, Duan a Zhang (2024), ktorí na základe empirického výskumu dokumentujú, že vyššia frekvencia striedania destinácií zvyšuje psychickú únavu cestovateľa, čo následne znižuje jeho celkovú spokojnosť s cestou – teda nabitejší itinerár nevedie automaticky k lepšiemu zážitku.

Ukotvenie v literatúre. Tento posun odzrkadľuje realitu konceptu slow tourism v podobe, ako ho definujú Dickinson a Lumsdon (2010). Kľúčovými atribútmi sú spomalenie tempa, dlhšie pobyty a zameranie na hĺbku zážitku namiesto kvantity zážitkov. Kostilníková et al. (2022) daný koncept aktualizujú v post-pandemickom kontexte – cestovateľ hľadá okrem fyzického spomalenia aj psychologickú obnovu a vedomé prepojenie s prostredím.

Preklopenie sa do slovenského prostredia ukazuje v jadre podobný vzorec, ako vnímame v zahraničí: kúpeľný pobyt, typicky trvajúci od niekoľkých dní po niekoľko týždňov, je príkladom formy cestovania, ktorá už svojou podstatou zodpovedá logike slow tourism – dlhší pobyt na jednom mieste namiesto striedania destinácií. Ekonomické ukazovatele rastúceho záujmu o kúpeľný pobyt sú podrobnejšie diskutované v kapitole 4.1.

### 3.2 Od odporúčaní iných k vlastnej potrebe: vedomé cestovanie

Pozorovanie. Druhý posun v motivácii rozhodovania jednotlivca je citeľne jemnejší. Z pozorovania autorky vyplýva, že individuálny cestovateľ sa pri výbere destinácie čoraz menej riadi otázkou „kam mi odporúčajú ísť?" alebo „kam idú tento rok ostatní?". Namiesto toho prichádza otázka: „Prečo mňa to sem láka? Čo naozaj ja teraz potrebujem?" Cestovateľ vedome reflektuje, či hľadá ticho, pohyb, zmenu perspektívy, alebo socializáciu – a podľa toho nasleduje voľba destinácie.

Príklad tejto dynamiky je napríklad viditeľný aj pri plánovaní ciest do Nórska. Plánovanie objavovania fjordov sa už netočí len okolo Geirangerfjordu, zaradeného

na zozname UNESCO a bežne odporúčaného ako hlavný cieľ. Z vlastnej cestovateľskej skúsenosti autorky vyplýva, že toto miesto paradoxne stráca atraktivitu pre cestovateľa, ktorý si destináciu vyberá podľa vlastnej potreby, nie podľa všeobecného odporúčania – vedľajšie ramená, napríklad Hjørundfjorden, ponúkajú porovnateľný krajinný zážitok, no bez davov, výletných lodí a turistickej prirážky. Podobné porovnania sa opakovane objavujú aj v diskusiách cestovateľov na online fórach (napr. Tripadvisor); nejde o systematicky overené vedecké zistenie, len o opakovane sa vynárajúcu neformálnu spätnú väzbu, ktorá pozorovanie podporuje.

Tento posun nie je podmienený odmietaním existujúcich produktov (all-inclusive rezortov, balíkových dovoleniek), ale ich prehodnotením v kontexte vlastnej aktuálnej potreby. Úprimná vnútorná sebareflexia vedie cestovateľa k lepšiemu definovaniu potrieb a v konečnom dôsledku ústi vo výber dovolenky napĺňajúcej relevantné potreby. Najdôležitejším faktorom je korelácia vzniknutej potreby s hodnotou pridelenou dovolenkovému zážitku. To, či forma dovolenky zodpovedá pohybu v horách, predĺženému pobytu v kúpeľoch, či all-inclusive pobytu, už netvorí základný pilier rozhodovacieho procesu.

Ukotvenie v literatúre. Conscious travel ako koncept vychádza zo starších push/pull motivačných rámcov (Dann, 1977; Crompton, 1979), ktoré sú v literatúre kanonického charakteru. Yousaf, Amin a Santos (2018) tieto rámce aktualizujú a upozorňujú, že súčasný (najmä mladší) cestovateľ sa rozhoduje skôr podľa hierarchie vlastných potrieb než podľa atribútov destinácie.

### 3.3 Od permanentnej dostupnosti k vedomému odpojeniu

Pozorovanie. Tretí posun sa týka vzťahu cestovateľa k digitálnym zariadeniam počas dovolenky. Pre rastúci segment cestovateľov nedostupnosť signálu prestáva byť nevýhodou destinácie a stáva sa jej popredným atribútom. Tento posun je pozorovateľný naprieč viacerými typmi ciest – napríklad aj pri pútnických a diaľkových trasách (Camino Portugués či Rota Vicentina v Portugalsku), ale aj pri turisticky atraktívnych miestach, ako sú Dolomity, odľahlejšie oblasti nórskych fjordov či destinácie za polárnym kruhom. Spoločným menovateľom je, že cestovateľ destináciu nehľadá napriek slabému signálu, ale práve preto.

Ukotvenie v literatúre. Digitálny detox v cestovnom ruchu (digital detox tourism) je vo vedeckej literatúre od roku 2020 jedným z najrýchlejšie rastúcich tematických okruhov. Hassan a Saleh (2024) v Journal of Tourism Futures na základe analýzy konštatujú, že odpojenie sa od technológií sa stáva primárnou motiváciou cesty, nie iba vedľajším produktom. Li, Pearce a Oktadiana (2020) v Annals of Tourism Research empiricky dokumentujú, že cestovanie bez digitálnych zariadení (digital-free tourism) rozvíja u cestovateľa konkrétne charakterové črty – sebareguláciu, schopnosť oceniť krásu, sociálnu inteligenciu a otvorenosť mysle. Gong, Schroeder a Plaisance (2023) v rovnakom časopise tento koncept rozširujú o kritickú reflexiu, v ktorej upozorňujú aj na obmedzenia jednoduchej rovnice „menej technológie = lepšia skúsenosť".

Slovenské destinácie majú v tomto smere prirodzenú konkurenčnú výhodu. Väčšina slovenského horského a kúpeľného prostredia tomuto profilu vyhovuje geografickou polohou aj krajinným charakterom. Otázka je, či sektor túto výhodu vie komunikovať a využiť.

## 4. Implikácie pre kúpeľný cestovný ruch

### 4.1 Slovenský kúpeľný cestovný ruch: príležitosť, ekonomika a štrukturálny problém

Slovensko má jednu z najhustejších sietí prírodných liečivých kúpeľov v strednej Európe. Asociácia slovenských kúpeľov eviduje vyše 25 zariadení s prírodnými liečivými zdrojmi medzinárodne uznávaného významu. Tradícia kúpeľnej liečby na slovenskom území siaha až do 13. storočia (Peťovský, 2025).

Kúpeľný sektor zároveň zaznamenáva citeľnú zmenu v štruktúre klientely. Národné centrum zdravotníckych informácií (NCZI, 2024, 2025, 2026) eviduje, že podiel domácich klientov, ktorí si kúpeľný pobyt hradia sami, plynulo rastie – z 59 % v roku 2023 na 61 % v roku 2024 a 62,7 % v roku 2025. Súbežne rastie aj hradená zložka kúpeľnej starostlivosti – Úrad pre dohľad nad zdravotnou starostlivosťou (2025) uvádza, že zdravotné poisťovne v roku 2024 posudzovali 77 287 žiadostí o kúpeľnú starostlivosť (2023: 72 245), z ktorých bolo schválených 86 %, v celkovej hodnote 71,3 milióna eur (2023: 62,5 milióna eur). Rastú teda oba segmenty naraz, no podiel samoplatcov sa v štruktúre klientely dlhodobo zväčšuje.

Domáce kúpeľníctvo má dnes dve klientely:

1. klient s indikáciou hradenou zdravotnou poisťovňou (podľa zákona č. 577/2004 Z. z., kategórie A a B, VšZP, 2025),

2. samoplatca (domáci aj zahraničný), ktorý si pobyt hradí v plnej výške ako wellness alebo regeneračný produkt.

Peťovský (2025) v analýze sektora formuluje jadro problému: podiel samoplatcov na tržbách kúpeľov neustále rastie a práve táto skupina dnes tvorí významnú časť príjmov, ktoré čiastočne kompenzujú nízke úhrady od zdravotných poisťovní. Sektor teda paradoxne nedostatočne oslovuje práve tých klientov, ktorí čoraz výraznejšie prispievajú k jeho ekonomickej stabilite.

Dopyt zo strany samoplatcov sa pritom pravdepodobne mení nielen kvantitatívne, ale aj kvalitatívne – rastúci podiel klientov mimo systému verejného poistenia môže odrážať nielen ekonomické faktory (dostupnosť, ochota platiť), ale aj širšie zmeny v motivácii, ktorým sa venuje kapitola 3. Slovenské kúpele majú v tejto chvíli výhodný moment: rastúci podiel klientov mimo systému verejného poistenia (pozri vyššie) sa spája s dostupnou infraštruktúrou, prírodnými zdrojmi a storočnou tradíciou. Otázka je, či sektor tento potenciál naplno využije.

Táto príležitosť má aj hlbší, medzinárodný rozmer. Onsen kultúra v Japonsku (Jimura, 2023; Tanaka, 2025), fínska saunová kultúra – zapísaná v roku 2020 do zoznamu nehmotného kultúrneho dedičstva UNESCO a analyzovaná ako nástroj národného brandingu (Tillotson et al., 2021) – či hammam kultúra v Turecku (Necipoğlu, 2004) ukazujú, že tam, kde je kúpacia prax ukotvená v národnej identite, je dopyt odolnejší voči politickým a ekonomickým výkyvom, na rozdiel od modelu závislého najmä od systému verejného zdravotného poistenia. Otázka, či a v akej forme by sa aj slovenské kúpeľníctvo – s jeho storočnou tradíciou – mohlo v komunikácii

posunúť smerom ku kultúrnej, nie iba zdravotnej naratíve, ostáva otvorená, no ponúka sa ako perspektívny smer pre ďalšiu odbornú diskusiu.

### 4.2 Produktovo-komunikačná rovina: pomenovanie pocitu, nie funkcie

Súčasná logika tvorby balíčkov kúpeľných pobytov je prevažne kategoricko-popisná. Pobyt sa pomenuje podľa funkcie (Liečebný, Relaxačný, Seniorský 60+, Antistresový, Víkendový) a opíše sa počtom nocí, počtom procedúr a typom stravovania.

Táto logika dobre slúži klientovi, ktorý už vie, čo chce. Nehovorí však nič klientovi, ktorý reflektuje na pocit pri predstave pobytu. Segmenty cestovateľov typu slow tourism a vedomé cestovanie (conscious travel) pristupujú k výberu inou cestou – pýtajú sa najprv „Čo teraz potrebujem?" a až potom hľadajú vhodný produkt. V tom okamihu im „Seniorský pobyt od 60 rokov, 5 nocí, 8 procedúr" nehovorí nič relevantné, aj keby svojou podstatou bol pre nich možno vhodný.

Alternatívny prístup nie je založený na zrušení aktuálnych balíčkov, práve naopak. Znamená paralelne vytvoriť produktovú vrstvu, ktorá hovorí jazykom tvorby pocitu a životnej situácie. Príklad takej komunikácie: „Tu ti budík ani hodinky nebudú treba. Jediné rozhodnutie, ktoré u nás musíš urobiť každý deň je, či si dáš na raňajky slané, alebo sladké. Ak si dovolíš v živote spomaliť, radi ti s tým pomôžeme."

Prvé príklady tohto prístupu sa už objavujú aj v praxi. Bardejovské kúpele od roku 2025 ponúkajú pre samoplatcov balíčky Harmónia a Impulz, explicitne pomenované a komunikované okolo zvládania syndrómu vyhorenia namiesto tradičnej indikačnej terminológie (Bardejovské kúpele, 2025). Podobne Kúpele Sliač ponúkajú Pobyt Fénix, symbolicky pomenovaný balíček zameraný na prevenciu a zvládanie syndrómu vyhorenia s psychologickým poradenstvom, dychovými a meditačnými cvičeniami, ako aj Pobyt Lesný kúpeľ – prvý a zatiaľ jediný pobyt svojho druhu na Slovensku, postavený na terapii shinrin yoku pod vedením certifikovaného lesného terapeuta (Kúpele Sliač, 2025). Ide zatiaľ o menšinu ponuky, nie o systematický prístup naprieč celým sektorom – no tieto nezávislé príklady potvrdzujú, že navrhovaný komunikačný posun je nielen realizovateľný, ale už sa začína presadzovať aj v praxi.

Komunikácia má smerovať na naplnenie potreby – nie na zoznam procedúr. Tá istá kúpeľná infraštruktúra, ktorá dnes obsluhuje klienta s indikáciou pohybového aparátu, môže paralelne osloviť mladšieho klienta hľadajúceho pauzu od pracovne vyťažených dní, alebo klienta v procese rekonvalescencie po psychickom vyhorení.

Komunikačná zmena je relatívne lacná. Nepotrebuje rekonštrukciu budov ani nové procedúry – potrebuje iný jazyk, iný uhol pohľadu a paralelnú produktovú linku. Pre samoplatcu, ktorý už dnes financuje rast sektora, je to potenciálny rozdiel medzi rezervovaním si pobytu na Slovensku a odchodom do rakúskeho alebo maďarského termálneho rezortu.

### 4.3 Zákaznícka skúsenosť: holistický pobyt a spolupráca so súkromným sektorom

Z pohľadu autorky cestovateľ – či už pacient z verejného zdravotného poistenia, alebo samoplatca – dnes pravdepodobne očakáva od kúpeľného pobytu viac než kvalitné procedúry, totiž prostredie, ktoré ho bude aktívne podporovať v obnove,

fyzickej aj psychickej. Toto očakávanie autorka odvodzuje z vlastnej sektorovej skúsenosti, nie z reprezentatívneho prieskumu klientely; v tomto bode slovenské kúpeľníctvo z jej pohľadu zaostáva za súčasnou medicínskou a výživovou vedou. K zrýchleniu a zlepšeniu dlhodobého účinku rekonvalescencie patria okrem základných zdravotných procedúr ďalšie tri oblasti, ktoré ukazujú nevyužitý potenciál skvalitnenia služieb a celkovej kvality produktu.

Strava. Na základe opakovaného pozorovania v rámci vlastnej profesijnej praxe a dostupných verejných recenzií hostí sa javí, že stravovacia ponuka v časti slovenských kúpeľných zariadení nie vždy zodpovedá aktuálnym odporúčaniam výživovej vedy – s dôrazom na mäsité jedlá, obmedzenú škálu rastlinných alternatív a sezónne kolísajúcu ponuku čerstvej zeleniny. Ide o nesystematické pozorovanie, nie o reprezentatívny prieskum; malo by však byť podnetom pre budúci systematický výskum stravovacej ponuky v sektore.

Súčasný medicínsky výskum jednoznačne ukazuje, že výživa je integrálnou súčasťou rehabilitácie, nie jej doplnkom. Drover et al. (2022) v Critical Care na základe systematického prehľadu konštatujú, že nutričná rehabilitácia je nedoceňovanou a podhodnotenou oblasťou zotavenia pacientov po kritickom ochorení a že jej kvalita priamo ovplyvňuje fyzické aj psychologické výsledky rehabilitácie. Siotto et al. (2024) v Nutrients na vzorke 109 pacientov po cievnej mozgovej príhode potvrdzujú priamy vzťah medzi malnutričným stavom pri prijatí, kvalitou stravovania počas pobytu a funkčným výsledkom rehabilitácie meraným indexom Barthel. Aktualizácia stravovacieho konceptu – viac rastlinnej stravy, vyvážená makronutrientná štruktúra, edukácia pacienta o úlohe stravy v regenerácii – preto nie je „módnym wellness trendom", ale medicínskou nevyhnutnosťou pre kvalitnejší výsledok liečby.

Mentálne zdravie ako štandard. Aktuálna a stále sa rozvíjajúca literatúra v oblasti rehabilitácie jednoznačne dokumentuje, že psychologické faktory (úzkosť, depresia, posttraumatický stres) môžu významne brzdiť fyzickú rehabilitáciu a zhoršovať dlhodobé výsledky liečby (Drover et al., 2022). Z pozorovania autorky vyplýva, že v slovenskom prostredí psychologická podpora nie je štandardnou súčasťou kúpeľného pobytu hradeného z verejného zdravotného poistenia. Možno predpokladať – ide však o hypotézu autorky, nie o overené zistenie – že pri absencii štruktúrovanej psychologickej podpory môže vznikať priestor pre neformálne, neriadené zdieľanie negatívnych skúseností medzi pacientmi, čo by z psychologického hľadiska nemuselo predstavovať optimálny spôsob spracovania zdravotnej situácie; overenie tejto hypotézy by vyžadovalo samostatný kvalitatívny výskum.

Estetika prostredia a dôstojnosť ubytovania. Kvalita fyzického prostredia sa naprieč jednotlivými kúpeľnými zariadeniami výrazne líši. Keďže samoplatcovia si pobyt vyberajú a hradia sami, možno predpokladať, že porovnávajú ponuku aj so zahraničnými alternatívami, čo by mohlo estetiku prostredia radiť medzi relevantné kritériá výberu; táto súvislosť by si však vyžadovala samostatné overenie. Viaceré zariadenia v posledných rokoch investujú do obnovy budov a infraštruktúry; komplexné porovnateľné dáta o tempe modernizácie naprieč celým sektorom však nie sú verejne dostupné, preto tento aspekt zostáva skôr podnetom na ďalšie sledovanie než podloženým záverom.

Spolupráca so súkromným sektorom ako možná cesta. Riešenie troch vyššie uvedených medzier nemusí vyžadovať zmenu systému verejného zdravotného

poistenia. Prvé kroky týmto smerom už robia niektoré zariadenia – Bardejovské kúpele aj Kúpele Sliač integrujú psychologickú konzultáciu priamo do pobytového balíčka zameraného na syndróm vyhorenia (Bardejovské kúpele, 2025; Kúpele Sliač, 2025), čo naznačuje, že navrhovaný model je realizovateľný a už sa objavuje vo viacerých zariadeniach, aj keď zatiaľ nie je rozšírený naprieč celým sektorom. Autorka navrhuje zvážiť paralelnú vrstvu služieb, financovanú samoplatcami a poskytovanú v spolupráci s externými partnermi, napríklad: hybridné pobyty kombinujúce hradenú procedurálnu časť (poisťovňa) s nadstavbou financovanou súkromne (psychologická konzultácia, výživové poradenstvo, fyzioterapeutický nadštandard); strategické partnerstvá s certifikovanými poskytovateľmi wellness a wellbeing služieb – psychológmi, výživovými poradcami, inštruktormi jogy, fyzioterapeutmi; pobytové balíčky pre samoplatcov v paralelnom režime k hradeným pobytom; a spolupráca so zamestnávateľmi prostredníctvom firemných wellness programov a benefitov na podporu duševného zdravia (mental health benefitov).

Tento návrh naznačuje potenciál dvojakého ekonomického efektu, ktorý by si však vyžadoval ďalšie overenie. Z hľadiska zdravotnej rehabilitácie by lepšia výživová a psychologická intervencia mohla znížiť mieru opakovaných návratov pacientov s rovnakou indikáciou, čo by mohlo predstavovať úsporu na strane verejného zdravotného poistenia. Z hľadiska rastu súkromného sektora by to mohlo znamenať vyšší podiel samoplatcov a vyššie finančné príjmy pre kúpeľné podniky. Tieto dva ciele, ktoré sa na prvý pohľad môžu zdať v rozpore, by tak mohli byť v skutočnosti komplementárne.

## Záver

Tento príspevok pomenoval tri posuny v motivácii slovenského cestovateľa po pandémii: od kvantity k hĺbke zážitku (slow tourism), od odporúčaní iných k vlastnej potrebe (conscious travel) a od permanentnej dostupnosti k vedomému odpojeniu (digital detox tourism). Ide o tendencie, ktoré sú v medzinárodnej literatúre rozsiahlo dokumentované (Dickinson & Lumsdon, 2010; Li, Pearce & Oktadiana, 2020; Kostilníková et al., 2022; Gong, Schroeder & Plaisance, 2023; Hassan & Saleh, 2024) a v slovenskom kontexte zatiaľ nedostatočne pomenované – napriek tomu, že ich prejavy sú v správaní slovenského cestovateľa evidentné.

Pre slovenský kúpeľný cestovný ruch tieto posuny vytvárajú strategicky dôležitý moment. Rastie domáci dopyt po wellbeingu a duševnom zdraví. Sektor zaznamenáva rast a samoplatcovia, ktorí sektor reálne financujú, sú stále výraznejším segmentom (Peťovský, 2025). Súčasne ale dominantná produktová a komunikačná logika kúpeľov stále zodpovedá modelu z minulého storočia – definícii pobytu cez indikáciu a počet procedúr, nie cez pocit a životnú situáciu klienta. Stravovanie a psychologická podpora v slovenských kúpeľoch často zaostávajú za súčasnou medicínskou vedou (Drover et al., 2022; Siotto et al., 2024), čo má nielen kvalitatívne, ale aj dlhodobé ekonomické dôsledky. Príležitosť, ktorá vyplýva z analýzy, je realistická: paralelná produktová linka pre samoplatcu hľadajúceho pocit obnovy, systematická spolupráca so súkromným sektorom (psychológovia, výživoví poradcovia, terapeuti) a komunikačný posun od opisu funkcie balíčka k pomenovaniu pocitu, ktorý balíček prináša.

Obmedzenia tohto príspevku sú trojaké. Po prvé, ide o reflexiu z praxe, nie o empirickú výskumnú štúdiu. Pozorovania uvedené v kapitole 3 nemajú reprezentatívnu vzorku a nie je ich možné generalizovať na slovenskú populáciu cestovateľov. Po druhé, autorka je súčasťou prostredia, ktoré opisuje – ako praktička v sektore aj ako autorka publikačnej činnosti – čo so sebou prináša riziko subjektívneho výberu pozorovaní. Po tretie, niektoré tendencie, ktoré príspevok pomenúva, sa opierajú o zahraničné akademické zdroje aplikované na slovenský kontext; ich empirické overenie na slovenskej vzorke zostáva otvorenou výskumnou otázkou.

Budúci výskum by mal tieto pozorovania overiť kvantitatívne – napríklad reprezentatívnym prieskumom medzi slovenskými cestovateľmi alebo hosťami kúpeľných zariadení – a preskúmať mieru, do akej sú digitálny detox v cestovnom ruchu (digital detox tourism) a vedomé cestovanie (conscious travel) v slovenskom prostredí štatisticky zovšeobecniteľné.

Príspevok preto chápeme ako východiskovú reflexiu pre ďalšiu odbornú diskusiu, nie ako jej záver. Jeho cieľom je ponúknuť slovenskému kúpeľnému a destinačnému manažmentu jazyk a uhol pohľadu, ktoré v sektore zatiaľ formulujú jednotlivci, no chýbajú v systematickej forme.

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# Use of tourism services by active athletes in the local sporting event

Eva Schwartzhoffová[1]

***Abstract***

*Sporting events of a regional character such as running, cycling, swimming or skiing races can contribute significantly to the development of a particular locality. The consumption patterns of sports tourists vary. The goal is to present research concerning consumer behavior, usage of the travel services and preferences of active sport´s tourists during their participation in an outdoor race. The aim of this paper is also to present the "Valachy Tour" series of races as a case study of a regional outdoor sporting event in the Czech Republic. The results confirmed that athletes had used the food services more regularly than the accommodation and overall client satisfaction with the tourism services.*

***Key words***

*Behavior, Consumer, Event, Sport, Tourism*

**JEL Classification: M31, Z29, Z32**

## Introduction

Contemporary lifestyles are quite active and associated with an inclination towards leisure activities and seeking new experiences. Sport tourism has recently become quite popular and sporting events motivate active and passive tourists to travel to the destination – domestic or abroad to participate in them. This article deals with consumption and use of tourism services by active sport tourist in the Czech Republic. The aim is to investigate consumer behavior and preferences. The Valachy Tour series of outdoor races serves as the study case.

## 1 Theoretical background

Standeven and De Knop (1999, p.12) has defined sport tourism as "all forms of active and passive involvement in sporting activity, participated in casually or in an organized way for non- commercial or commercial reasons that necessitate travel away from home. " Within the classification of sports tourism according to Weed and Bull (2009) we are speaking about event sport tourism. Sport tourism is recognized as an important part of the tourism industry. It refers to the experience of travel to engage in or view sport-related activities. Sports events provide an opportunity to show off regions and their attractions and to increase spending directly in the destination. (Melo & Sobry, 2017). Sport tourism plays an important role in the Czech tourism industry. According to the Institute of Tourism of the Czech Tourism Agency, domestic tourists who decide to spend an active holiday in the Czech Republic mainly prefer hiking (38,8 %), followed by cycling (17,3 %) while 7,7 % of tourists preferred skiing (CzechTourism, 2024)

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## 1.1 Consumer behavior

Consumer behavior is subject to a number of external influences and is constantly changing. It is therefore essential to examine current trends in the behavior of tourism participants. Flint et al. (2014) argue that consumer behavior deals with the attitudes, emotions, and behaviors of individuals or groups. They analyse the behavior from the initial thought through purchasing to consumption. Differences between regions and social groups remain significant, and inflation has further accentuated them. Today's customers are shifting toward experiences, a healthy lifestyle, and quality. There is a growing emphasis on factors such as ingredients, origin, emissions, and added value for the customer. For service suppliers, this means covering the broadest possible spectrum of customer needs. The decision-making process is part of consumer behavior and is influenced by a number of factors, such as individual needs, available information and its evaluation, the quality of services provided, appropriate timing, and the way in which tourism services are purchased and used. In order to influence these processes and gain a competitive advantage, individual organizations study the behavior of their current and potential consumers, i.e., they gather information on how they behave when satisfying their needs and how they allocate their resources (time, effort, money) toward consumption. In doing so, they observe why and what products they buy, how, when, where, how often, and how much they spend to satisfy their needs, and how they respond to marketing (Gúčik, 2020).

Understanding consumer behavior can lead to visitor satisfactions, increase demand for travel services, higher sales, and greater competitiveness for entrepreneurs (Pompurová, 2022). Czech consumers are characterized by a number of specific traits, which, according to Koudelka (2013), include price sensitivity, preferences for discounts, low loyalty and conservatism. However, these characteristics do not always apply in the tourism sector. In sports, customers are willing to pay extra for quality services and tend to be loyal. The use of tourism services is a dynamic process. Today, tourists expect not only high quality and availability of services, but also a personalized approach and sustainability. In the structure of domestic tourism spending, purchases of goods (30 %), including fuel, account for the largest share, followed by food services (20 %), transportation services (16 %), and 15 % represents the accommodation (Palatková & Zichová, 2014). Recent studies and theories try to understand tourists´ (Pompurová, 2022) or sports tourists' (Jeong, 2023; Peric et all, 2018) behavior and preferences.

## 1.2 Consumer behavior in sport tourism

Sport consumer behavior represent a sub-discipline within the field of sport tourism management and marketing. As an interdiciplinary topic which draws upon of other disciplines such as psychology, sociology, economics and education to investigate an individual's decision-making proces, sport tourism management and marketing was first mentioned in the early 1980´s (Funk, 2017). Consumer behavior in sports tourism is a dynamic process in which an individual makes decisions, plans, purchases, and experiences a trip involving active or passive sports activities outside their usual environment. This type of tourist has specific needs that differ from those of conventional leisure tourism. Sport tourism consumer behavior is driven by motivations like health improvement, stress relief, and social engagement, it is categorized by trip type, depending on whether the trips are short-term or long-term, domestic, or international.

We recognize two main types of sports tourist: "active" (athletes), who actively participate and compete and "passive" – visitors and fans. Active sports tourists aim to improve mental/physical health and relieve stress. Others are driven by curiosity, adventure, and social interaction. Active sport tourists travel to a location in order to participate in competitive or non-competitive sporting events, engage in recreational sports, or try out a discipline, such as a leisure interest, during a holiday (Mazza, 2022). Active sport tourists prioritize the quality of the sporting experience and emotional value, but they also evaluate service quality at the event including accessibility, safety, and amenities. There are obviously many other dimensions in which sport´s tourists differ and this illustrate the multidimensional nature of sport tourism, to which service providers must respond. It is critical to fostering athletes and visitors loyalty and encouraging repeat attendance.

### 1.3 Valachy Tour as an example of sporting event in the Czech Republic

Valachy Tour is a series of five competitions in various disciplines (running, cycling, duathlon, triathlon, and cross-country skiing), which take place at the Resort Valachy in the Beskydy Mountains in the Czech Republic. These sporting competitions are not only an excellent example of supporting tourism in a given destination through sport, but also an example of sustainable sports tourism in the mountainous environment of this destination. The competitions are aimed at the amateur sporting public and focus on accessible and well-known sports, which have a broad base of participants among recreational athletes. They often arrive with other members of their families who often either participate in the races as well or the athletes as fans. The organizer of this event is the Resort Valachy, which offers the participants several hotels as well as sports, wellness and recreational facilities.

## 2 Methodology

To obtain the data, quantitative research was conducted in the form of an online survey. The survey consisted of three parts: the first part focused on the respondents' sociodemographic data, the second part focused on general tourism aspects (source of information, spending, travel companions, and the attractiveness of the destination), and the last part focused on tourism services such as accommodation and food services (which they were used and their evaluation). The survey was distributed to participants via email by the organizer after the race. Data collection took place throughout the entire race series on the online platform survio.com. The number of respondents was 213 athletes from a total of 1 800 registered participants. The data was processed and analyzed using descriptive statistics in Microsoft Excel.

## 3 Results

60,6% of the research sample consisted of men, which is understandable considering the character of the events. Women made up 39,4 % of respondents.

**Tab. 1** Age structure of respondents

| Age | % |
|---|---|

| | |
|---|---|
| 15 – 29 years | 25,8 |
| 30 – 44 years | 58,2 |
| 45 – 60 years | 14,1 |
| 61 + years | 2,0 |

Source: own research

In terms of age, 58,2 % of the respondents were in the 30-44-year-old age group, while 25,8 % were in the 15-29-year-old age group, 14,1 % of participants fell into the 45-60-year-old age group, while only 2,0 % were older than 61 years.

Most participants were locals, from the region Zlín, from which nearly a full third (32,9 %) of respondents came. A second most numerous group (40,6 %) was made up of competitors from neighboring Moravian regions. Only 20,8 % came from other Czech regions. While 5,7 % competitors did come from abroad, primarily from Slovakia and Poland.

Another variable investigated was the escort with whom the competitors traveled to the destination for the race. In most cases, 42,9 % participate in the races together with a friend or 25,6 % with a partner. Almost a quarter of the competitors are accompanied by their family (24,7 %). These are mainly families with school-age children and youth who also participate in some of the races in the youth age category. Only 6,8 % of respondents stated that they arrived alone.

As to how the competitors learned about the race: 43,4 % of them stated it was from their friends and acquaintances, 23,2 % of the competitors drew information from social networks, 12,5 % from the organizer's website and the remaining 6,0 % of respondents obtained information from radio, television or printed advertisements.

In connection with the use of tourism services, the amount of travel and accommodation expenses were also examined. An overview of the distribution of responses regarding spending is shown in the following table.

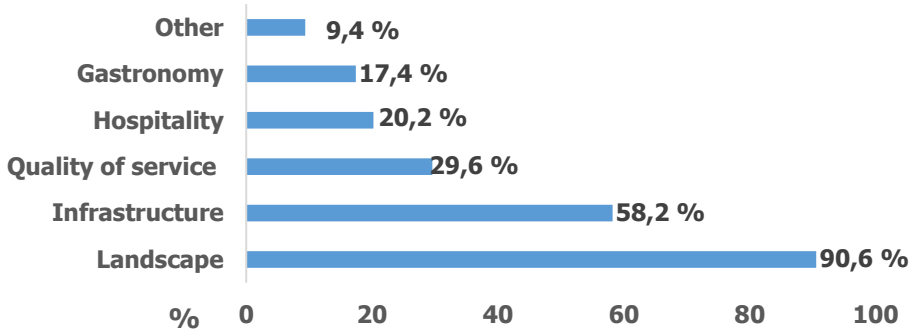
**Tab. 2** Structure of participants´ spendings

| **Spendings** | **Participants** |
|---|---|
| 0 – 25 Eur | 30,7% |
| 26 – 50 Eur | 21,3% |
| 51 – 80 Eur | 20,9% |
| more than 80 Eur | 27,1% |

Source: own research

The research also examined the most attractive feature of the destination which attracts them to come as visitors. Most of the respondents (90,6 %) answered that it is the landscape of the resort, while 58,2 % reported it is the facilities such as trails, paths. 29,6 % athletes said the quality of service attracted them. Hospitality and gastronomy took the next place with a share of 20,2 % and 17,4 % respectively, as can be can seen in Graph 1.

**Graph 1** Most attractive feature of the destination

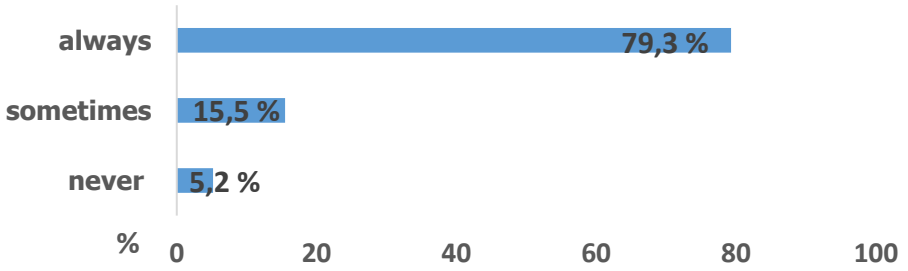



Source: own research

The third section of the survey addressed the usage of tourism services such as food service and accommodation. These variables obtained with the length of stay in the destination. As we could see above, most of the athletes come to participate in the events are locals or at least from the region. Despite that fact, in the following graphs we can see participants' use of hospitality services such as gastronomy and accommodation during their stay in the destination.

Most respondents (79.3 %) reported that they had "always" used the local food services during their stay in the destination and 15,5 % of them only "sometimes" according to their needs.

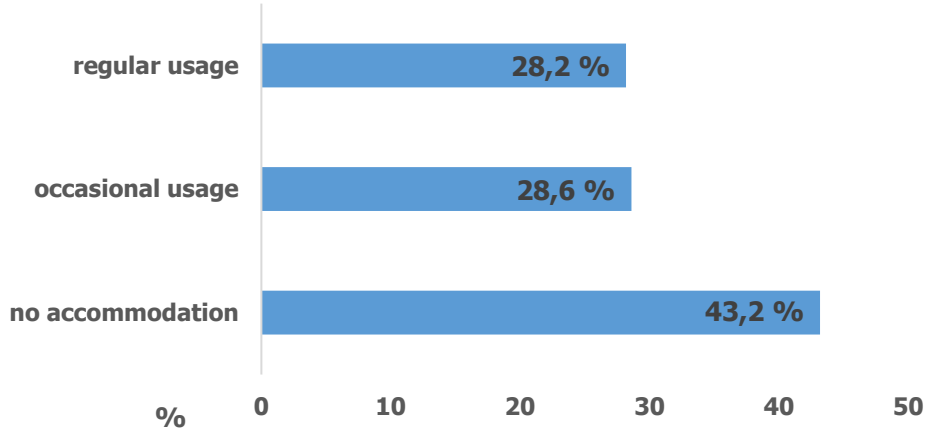
**Graph 2** Usage of food service




Source: own research

From the total number of respondents who stated that they stayed overnight at the destination, a majority (56,8 %) report using local accommodations, and 28,2 % reported they did so repeatedly. 43,2 % of respondents do not use any hospitality service in the destination.

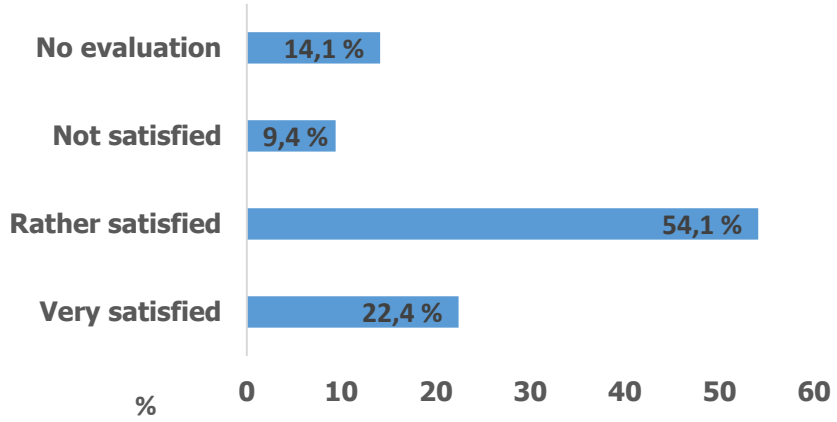
**Graph 3** Usage of accommodation




Source: own research

Respondents also evaluated their level of satisfaction with these two travel services. There is overall client satisfaction with tourism services. Most respondents (54,1 %) were rather satisfied with the tourism services and 22,4 % were even very satisfied.

**Graph 4** Evaluation of the tourism services




Source: own research

## 4 Discussion

From these above-mentioned travel services the majority of respondents used the food services – 79,3 % and 56,8 % spent the night in a hotel, hostel or similar type of accommodation either regularly or occasionally. But, as for accommodation, most of the respondents do not stay overnight at the destination. The result shows that the number of people who use the hotel is reasonable for the local hoteliers, considering the fact that almost 33 % of respondents were local inhabitants.

The findings allow us to distinguish between two types of tourists regarding accommodation: non-residents who spent the night in the host destination, and local participants who did not use any type of accommodation. As for the evaluation of the tourism services, there is satisfaction among the respondents – 54,1 % were rather and 22,4 % very satisfied respondents. The quality of services also ranks among the most attractive factors of the destination for the athletes.

There were also limitations in the work, such as the small sample of respondents compared to the total number of active participants. The formulation of some survey´s questions and the unavailability of all data. This article presents only some of the results of my research. Especially the results related to travel services and the consumer behavior when they use these services and their preferences. The factors influencing the selection and purchase of tourism services were not examined. It would be good to examine the correlations between the variables of accommodation type and place of residence or type of companion as well as the connection between food use and accommodation.

## Conclusion

The research aimed to understand how active sports tourists perceive the meaning of the sporting experience and their consumption of travel services. The events represent a tourism product created by a local resort to attract visitors to this unique tourist destination. These visitors include active participants, their friends, family, and fans who take advantage of the unique features of the destination and of the tourism services of the resort. The results indicate that most often the athletes were between 33 and 44 years old. They learn about the event by word of mouth from other friends or from social media. They usually travel with other competitors, friends or family. For almost 31 % of them the average daily spending on travel services are approximately 25 Eur. The results confirmed that athletes were more likely to have used the food services (80 %) than the accommodation (28 %), but this is obviously due to the fact, that one third of participants are locals. The findings reveal that athletes were attracted more by landscape and infrastructure than hospitality and gastronomy, but we can observe overall client satisfaction with the tourism services.

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# Sieťovanie v cestovnom ruchu: perspektíva organizácií destinačného manažmentu a malých a stredných podnikov[1]

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***Abstract***

*The study examines the importance of networking among small and medium-sized enterprises in the tourism sector for destination management. The aim was to evaluate perceptions of networking and identify its benefits, factors, and barriers. The research was conducted quantitatively using a questionnaire survey of 242 respondents from tourism organizations and small and medium-sized enterprises. The results show that networking is perceived predominantly positively, particularly as a tool for creating attractive products, increasing competitiveness, and providing benefits to visitors. Differences in opinions were also found among the surveyed groups. In conclusion, it can be stated that networking represents an important factor in destination development despite existing barriers in the areas of coordination and cooperation*.

***Key words***

*destination, destination management organization, stakeholders, small & medium-small enterprises, networking*

**JEL Classification: D85, L83, M21**

## Úvod

Rozvoj cestovného ruchu je úzko spätý s efektívnym riadením destinácií a spoluprácou jednotlivých aktérov (stakeholderov), ktorí sa podieľajú na tvorbe turistickej ponuky. Destinačný manažment predstavuje komplexný proces koordinácie verejného a súkromného sektora, pričom významnú úlohu zohrávajú najmä malé a stredné podniky poskytujúce služby v cestovnom ruchu. Tieto subjekty svojimi aktivitami prispievajú k tvorbe autentických produktov, zvyšovaniu atraktivity destinácie a jej celkovej konkurencieschopnosti. Dôležitým nástrojom podpory spolupráce medzi nimi je sieťovanie, ktoré umožňuje efektívnejšie využívanie zdrojov, zdieľanie informácií a tvorbu komplexných turistických produktov.

Príspevok sa zameriava na problematiku sieťovania malých a stredných podnikov v kontexte destinačného manažmentu a ich postavenia ako stakeholderov v rámci

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organizácií cestovného ruchu. Osobitná pozornosť je venovaná vzťahom medzi sieťujúcimi subjektmi (organizáciami cestovného ruchu) a sieťovanými subjektmi (malými a strednými podnikmi), ako aj faktorom, ktoré ovplyvňujú úspešnosť spolupráce.

Cieľom štúdie je vyhodnotiť vnímanie a význam sieťovania malých a stredných podnikov poskytujúcich služby v cestovnom ruchu ako stakeholderov v rámci organizácií cestovného ruchu.

## 1 Destinačný manažment a stakeholderi v cestovnom ruchu

V súčasnosti je destinácia vnímaná ako komplexný systém tvorený geografickým priestorom, infraštruktúrou, službami a aktérmi, ktorí spoločne vytvárajú turistický produkt ako motivátor jej návštevy. Destinácia predstavuje miesto, ktoré je pre návštevníka identifikovateľné ako celok a zároveň poskytuje súbor atrakcií, služieb a zážitkov (Fyall a Garrod, 2020). Destináciu z pohľadu destinačného manažmentu je možné chápať nielen ako fyzický priestor, ale aj ako sieť vzťahov medzi rôznymi subjektmi, ktoré sa podieľajú na tvorbe a riadení atraktívnej a konkurencieschopnej ponuky smerom k návštevníkom (Šambronská, 2023).

Manažment destinácie zahŕňa koordináciu aktivít rôznych aktérov, ktorých cieľom je zabezpečiť konkurencieschopnosť, udržateľnosť a dlhodobý rozvoj cestovného ruchu. Podľa Roxas, Rivera a Gutierrez (2020) destinačný manažment predstavuje strategický proces, ktorý integruje marketing, plánovanie, koordináciu služieb a riadenie vzťahov medzi zainteresovanými stranami. Efektívne riadenie destinácie vyžaduje spoluprácu verejného a súkromného sektora, pričom dôraz sa kladie na koordináciu rôznych podnikateľských a inštitucionálnych subjektov (Dzurov Vargová a Matušíková, 2025).

Dôležitým prvkom destinačného manažmentu sú organizácie, ktoré koordinujú aktivity jednotlivých aktérov v destinácii. V mnohých krajinách túto úlohu plnia destinačné alebo oblastné organizácie cestovného ruchu. Ich hlavnou úlohou je koordinácia marketingových aktivít, tvorba turistických produktov, podpora spolupráce medzi podnikateľskými subjektmi a strategické plánovanie rozvoja cestovného ruchu (Rigielsky a kol., 2025).

Podľa Roïka (Poïк) a kol. (2025) destinačné organizácie zároveň predstavujú platformu pre spoluprácu medzi verejným a súkromným sektorom. Prostredníctvom rôznych iniciatív a projektov podporujú vytváranie partnerstiev medzi podnikateľmi, samosprávou a ďalšími aktérmi. Horváth a Mikus (2016) dodávajú, že efektívne fungovanie organizácií prispieva k lepšej koordinácii aktivít v destinácii a k posilňovaniu jej konkurencieschopnosti.

### 1.1 Malé a stredné podniky v cestovnom ruchu a ich úloha v destinačnom manažmente

V riadení destinácií zohráva významnú úlohu prístup stakeholderov, ktorý zdôrazňuje zapojenie všetkých relevantných aktérov do plánovania (Mikuš, 2021) a riadenia cestovného ruchu. Stakeholderi predstavujú jednotlivcov alebo organizácie, ktoré môžu ovplyvňovať rozvoj destinácie alebo sú týmto rozvojom ovplyvnené (Badoc-Gonzales, Mandigma a Tan, 2022). V kontexte cestovného ruchu ide najmä

o podnikateľské subjekty, verejné inštitúcie, miestne komunity, neziskové organizácie či samotných turistov (Šambronská, 2023).

Osobitné postavenie medzi stakeholdermi majú malé a stredné podniky v cestovnom ruchu, ktoré tvoria významnú časť podnikateľského prostredia destinácií. Podniky cestovného ruchu poskytujú široké spektrum služieb, ako sú ubytovanie, stravovanie, sprievodcovské služby či organizovanie voľnočasových aktivít. Zapojenie do destinačného manažmentu je kľúčové pre tvorbu autentických turistických produktov a rozvoj regionálnej ekonomiky (O'Connor, 2023).

Malé a stredné podniky predstavujú dominantnú formu podnikania v sektore cestovného ruchu. Charakteristické sú najmä menším počtom zamestnancov, obmedzenými finančnými zdrojmi, ale zároveň vysokou mierou flexibility a schopnosťou rýchlo reagovať na zmeny dopytu. V mnohých destináciách tvoria základ turistickej ponuky, keďže zabezpečujú poskytovanie služieb priamo návštevníkom (Prasetiawan, Permana, Harwani a Ramli, 2024).

V destinačnom manažmente zohrávajú malé a stredné podniky významnú úlohu, pretože prispievajú k formovaniu turistického produktu destinácie. Ich aktivity ovplyvňujú kvalitu služieb, autenticitu zážitkov a celkovú atraktivitu destinácie (Kormaníková a Mitríková, 2022). Zároveň predstavujú dôležitý zdroj zamestnanosti a ekonomického rozvoja na regionálnej úrovni. Malé a stredné podniky zohrávajú kľúčovú úlohu pri tvorbe turistických produktov destinácie. Prostredníctvom svojich služieb vytvárajú komplexnú ponuku a vďaka svojej flexibilite dokážu reagovať na špecifické potreby návštevníkov a prispievať k diverzifikácii turistických produktov (Michalková, Gall a Özoğlu, 2023).

Spolupráca medzi jednotlivými podnikmi umožňuje vytvárať komplexné turistické balíky a tematické produkty, ktoré zvyšujú atraktivitu destinácie. Takáto spolupráca však vyžaduje koordináciu a podporu zo strany destinačných organizácií (Roxas a kol., 2020).

Napriek potenciálnym výhodám spolupráce medzi (malými a strednými) podnikmi v cestovnom ruchu existuje viacero bariér, ktoré môžu brániť efektívnej koordinácii aktivít. Jednou z hlavných prekážok je rozdielnosť záujmov jednotlivých stakeholderov, ktorá môže viesť ku konfliktom alebo nedostatku dôvery medzi partnermi alebo nerovnému rozdeleniu (Thraenhart, 2025). Podľa Panfiluka (2023) môžu mať niektorí aktéri dominantné postavenie v rozhodovacích procesoch. To môže obmedzovať participáciu menších podnikateľov, mať až negatívny vplyv na spoluprácu a znižovať efektívnosť destinačného manažmentu (Škerháková, Bednárová a Vašaničová, 2023). Medzi ďalšie bariéry patrí nedostatok finančných a ľudských zdrojov, slabá komunikácia medzi aktérmi či nedostatočné strategické plánovanie na úrovni destinácie. Prekonanie týchto bariér si vyžaduje vytváranie mechanizmov, ktoré podporujú spoluprácu, zdieľanie informácií a participáciu všetkých zainteresovaných strán (Thraenhart, 2025).

## 1.2 Sieťovanie malých a stredných podnikov v cestovnom ruchu

Sieťovanie predstavuje významný nástroj na posilňovanie spolupráce medzi podnikateľmi v cestovnom ruchu. Prostredníctvom sietí môžu malé a stredné podniky zdieľať zdroje, informácie a skúsenosti, čím zvyšujú svoju konkurencieschopnosť a schopnosť reagovať na meniace sa podmienky trhu (Elvekrok, Veflen, Scholderer a Sørensen, 2021).

V kontexte destinačného manažmentu sieťovanie umožňuje koordinovať aktivity jednotlivých podnikov a vytvárať integrované turistické produkty. Partnerstvá môžu prispievať k efektívnejšiemu marketingu destinácie, k lepšiemu využívaniu lokálnych zdrojov a k posilňovaniu identity regiónu (Fyall a Garrod, 2020). Sieťovanie podporuje zapojenie malých a stredných podnikov do širších strategických iniciatív, ktoré sa zameriavajú na udržateľný a inteligentný rozvoj cestovného ruchu (Azinuddin a kol., 2023). Efektívne sieťovanie však vyžaduje existenciu koordinujúcich inštitúcií, ktoré dokážu facilitovať komunikáciu medzi aktérmi a podporovať vznik partnerstiev. Opätovne je nutné zdôrazniť úlohu destinačných organizácií, ktoré môžu vytvárať platformy pre spoluprácu a podporovať spoločné projekty medzi malými a strednými podnikmi v cestovnom ruchu (a ďalšími členmi) (Cehan, Mihail a Iațu, 2021).

## 2 Metódy skúmania

Výskum bol realizovaný kvantitatívnym prístupom prostredníctvom dotazníkového zisťovania zameraného na hodnotenie sieťovania subjektov cestovného ruchu.

Cieľom štúdie je vyhodnotiť vnímanie a význam sieťovania malých a stredných podnikov poskytujúcich služby v cestovnom ruchu ako stakeholderov v rámci organizácií cestovného ruchu. Následne identifikovať hlavné prínosy, faktory a bariéry tohto procesu z pohľadu sieťujúcich a sieťovaných subjektov. Súčasťou výskumu je tiež porovnanie názorov medzi organizáciami cestovného ruchu ako sieťujúcimi aktérmi a malými a strednými podnikmi cestovného ruchu ako sieťovanými subjektmi.

Vzhľadom na uvedené bola formulovaná výskumná otázka.

VO: Aký je názor odbornej verejnosti na vytváranie sietí malých a stredných podnikov cestovného ruchu v destinácii?

Výskumný súbor tvorili dve základné skupiny respondentov. Prvú skupinu predstavovali organizácie cestovného ruchu (OOCR), ktoré vystupujú ako sieťujúce subjekty (n = 22). Celkový počet OOCR na Slovensku je 39. Druhú skupinu tvorili malé a stredné podniky poskytujúce služby v cestovnom ruchu (MaSP CR), ktoré predstavujú sieťované subjekty (n = 220). Výber MaSP CR bol podmienený ich členstvom v OOCR (celkovo cca 1004 MaSP). Konečný počet respondentov zaradených do výskumu bol 242 (N = 242).

Zber údajov bol realizovaný pomocou štruktúrovaného dotazníka, ktorého časť obsahovala otázky zamerané na hodnotenie významu sieťovania subjektov cestovného ruchu, ako aj oblasti, pre ktoré by sieťovanie subjektov, hlavne MaSP CR, malo prínos. Ďalšie otázky boli zamerané na identifikáciu faktorov ovplyvňujúcich proces vytvárania sietí. Odpovede respondentov boli zaznamenávané pomocou päťbodovej Likertovej škály, kde hodnoty predstavovali mieru súhlasu (1 – absolútne súhlasím) až nesúhlasu (5 – absolútne nesúhlasím) s jednotlivými tvrdeniami. Zber údajov bol v období 4 mesiacov v roku 2025.

Získané údaje boli spracované pomocou metód deskriptívnej a inferenčnej štatistiky. V rámci deskriptívnej analýzy boli vypočítané základné štatistické charakteristiky, najmä absolútne a relatívne početnosti odpovedí, aritmetický priemer a smerodajná odchýlka. Na overenie rozdielov medzi skupinami respondentov (sieťujúce vs. sieťované subjekty) bol použitý t-test pri hladine významnosti $\alpha = 0,05$.

Štatistická významnosť bola posudzovaná na základe hodnoty p, pričom rozdiely boli považované za štatisticky významné pri $p < 0,05$.

Limitom predkladanej štúdie je, že zber údajov bol realizovaný prostredníctvom dotazníkového zisťovania, ktoré je založené na subjektívnom hodnotení respondentov a ich individuálnych skúsenostiach so sieťovaním. Výsledky preto odrážajú najmä percepciu spolupráce medzi subjektami cestovného ruchu. V tomto prípade nie vždy ide o objektívnu mieru alebo efektívnosť. Zároveň výskum zachytáva stav v určitom časovom období, pričom intenzita a formy spolupráce medzi aktérmi cestovného ruchu sa môžu v čase meniť. Vzhľadom na charakter výskumu dané údaje nebolo možné inak získať. Časový faktor a zmeny v čase na druhej strane podčiarkujú význam potreby uvedeného výskumného šetrenia.

## 3 Výsledky štúdie

V rámci výskumu názorov na problematiku, v štúdii prezentovanej časti zameranej na sieťovanie zainteresovaných strán ako členov OOCR, boli respondenti rozdelení na dve základné skupiny, a to sieťujúce subjekty (OOCR n=22) a sieťované subjekty (malé a stredné podniky cestovného ruchu – inak aj MaSP CR; n=220).

Tabuľka 1 zachytáva podrobné početnosti odpovedí s rozdelením na sieťujúce (n=22; 10 %) a sieťované subjekty (n=220; 90 %).

Tab. 1 **Vnímanie významu sieťovania podľa typu respondentov**

| vnímanie sieťovania | sieťované (počet) | sieťujúce (počet) | sieťované (priemer) | sieťujúce (priemer) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 – absolútne áno | 0 | 2 | **2,60** | **2,68** |
| 2 – skôr áno | 132 | 11 | | |
| 3 – nie so si vedomí | 44 | 2 | | |
| 4 – skôr nie | 44 | 6 | | |
| 5 – absolútne nie | 0 | 1 | | |
| **spolu** | **220** | **22** | | |

Zdroj: Vlastné spracovanie

Z tabuľky 1 vyplýva, že najčastejšia bola odpoveď možnosť 2 – skôr áno (n=132; 66,66 %) a najmenej respondenti odpovedali možnosť 5 – absolútne nie (n=1; 2,38 %). Túto možnosť označil jeden sieťujúci subjekt. Na margo toho, možnosť 1 – absolútne áno označili opäť iba jeden sieťujúci subjekt, žiaden sieťovaný. Priemerná hodnota odpovedí u sieťovaných subjektov bola 2,60 a u sieťujúcich bola negatívnejšia o 0,08 bodov (2,68).

**Tab. 2** Vnímanie sieťovania MaSP poskytujúcich služby v cestovnom ruchu

| | Min | Max | priemer | STD | p-value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Vnímanie sieťovania | 1 | 5 | 2,64 | 0,98 | 0,79 |

Zdroj: Vlastné spracovanie

Priemerná hodnota odpovedí ohľadom sieťovania malých a stredných podnikov poskytujúcich služby v cestovnom ruchu (tabuľka 2) u všetkých respondentov (N=220)

bola 2,64±0,98 a nedosiahla štatistickú významnosť pri hladine 0,05 (p=0,79, t. j. p>α). Využité boli všetky možnosti odpovede (1 – 5).

**Tab. 3** Hodnotenie prínosov sieťovania MaSP pri tvorbe produktov cestovného ruchu

| vytvorenie produktu vďaka sieti MaSP | početnosť (N) | Min | Max | priemer | STD | sieťované (priemer) | sieťujúce (priemer) | p-hodnota |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| prospešné | 242 | 1 | 2 | 1,21 | 0,42 | 1,35 | 1,09 | 0,04 |
| nevyhnutné | 242 | 1 | 3 | 1,45 | 0,59 | 1,60 | 1,32 | 0,12 |
| výhodné pre subjekty | 242 | 1 | 4 | 1,36 | 0,62 | 1,60 | 1,14 | 0,02 |
| výhodné pre destináciu | 242 | 1 | 2 | 1,19 | 0,40 | 1,40 | 1,00 | 0,00 |
| výhodné pre návštevníka | 242 | 1 | 2 | **1,17** | 0,38 | 1,35 | 1,00 | 0,00 |

Zdroj: Vlastné spracovanie

Z výsledkov uvedených v tabuľke 3 vyplýva, že najlepší celkový priemer (N=242) bol dosiahnutý v rámci „výhodné pre návštevníka" (1,17±0,38). Najhoršie hodnotená bola možnosť „nevyhnutné" s celkovým priemerom (1,45±0,59). Sieťované subjekty (n=220) najviac podporili možnosti „prospešné" a „výhodné pre návštevníka" (1,35). Sieťujúce subjekty (n=22) mali trošku odlišný názor ako sieťované subjekty. Respondenti uviedli, že medzi najdôležitejšie benefity pokladajú „výhodné pre návštevníka" a „výhodné pre cieľové miesto" (1,00). Okrem možnosti „nevyhnutné" sme u všetkých ostatných možností zaznamenali štatistickú významnosť na hladine významnosti (α = 0,05) v závislosti od druhu subjektu (sieťovaný vs. sieťujúci).

Z výsledkov uvedených v tabuľke 4 vyplýva, že najlepší celkový priemer (N=242) bol dosiahnutý v rámci „vytvoriť silný produkt" a „zatraktívniť destináciu" (1,26±0,45). Najhoršie hodnotená bola možnosť „zlepšenie ekonomickej situácie" s celkovým priemerom (N=42; 1,52±0,59).

**Tab. 4** Vnímané prínosy sieťovania MaSP pre rozvoj a konkurencieschopnosť destinácií

| výhody sieťovania MaSP | početnosť (N) | Min | Max | priemer | STD | sieťované (priemer) | sieťujúce (priemer) | p-hodnota |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| silný produkt | 242 | 1 | 2 | **1,26** | 0,45 | 1,40 | 1,14 | 0,06 |
| atraktívny produkt | 242 | 1 | 3 | 1,31 | 0,52 | 1,50 | 1,14 | 0,02 |
| flexibilnosť produktu | 242 | 1 | 3 | 1,36 | 0,53 | 1,45 | 1,27 | 0,28 |
| zlepšenie ekonomickej situácie | 242 | 1 | 3 | 1,52 | 0,59 | 1,55 | 1,50 | 0,79 |
| zlepšenie konkurencieschopnosti | 242 | 1 | 4 | 1,43 | 0,67 | 1,65 | 1,23 | 0,04 |

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| zlepšenie spolupráce | 242 | 1 | 3 | 1,38 | 0,58 | 1,60 | 1,18 | 0,02 |
| zatraktívniť destináciu | 242 | 1 | 2 | **1,26** | 0,45 | 1,40 | 1,14 | 0,06 |

Zdroj: Vlastné spracovanie

V tabuľke 4 Sieťované subjekty (n=220) najviac podporili možnosti „vytvoriť silný produkt" a „zatraktívniť destináciu" (1,40). Sieťujúce subjekty (n=22) mali trošku odlišný názor ako sieťované subjekty. Medzi najdôležitejšie faktory, podľa sieťujúcich subjektov, pre destináciu pokladajú „vytvoriť silný produkt", „vytvoriť atraktívny produkt" a „zatraktívniť destináciu" (1,14). Štatistickú významnosť na hladine významnosti (α = 0,05) v závislosti od druhu subjektu (sieťovaný vs. sieťujúci) bola zaznamenaná u 3 faktorov: „atraktívny produkt" (0,02); „zlepšenie konkurencieschopnosti" (0,04) a „zlepšenie spolupráce" (0,02).

**Tab. 5** Hodnotenie charakteristík a náročnosti procesu vytvárania sietí v cestovnom ruchu

| proces vytvárania sietí subjektov | početnosť (N) | Min | Max | priemer | STD | sieťované (priemer) | sieťujúce (priemer) | p-hodnota |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| dlhodobý | 242 | 1 | 4 | 1,52 | 0,63 | 1,75 | 1,32 | 0,03 |
| náročný po ľudskej stránke | 242 | 1 | 4 | 1,62 | 0,76 | 1,75 | 1,50 | 0,29 |
| náročný po finančnej stránke | 242 | 1 | 5 | 2,52 | 1,11 | 2,25 | 2,77 | 0,13 |
| náročný na koordináciu | 242 | 1 | 4 | **1,60** | 0,70 | 1,75 | 1,45 | 0,17 |
| náročný na dlhodobú udržateľnosť | 242 | 1 | 4 | 1,90 | 0,85 | 1,75 | 2,05 | 0,26 |

Zdroj: Vlastné spracovanie

Z výsledkov uvedených v tabuľke 5 vyplýva, že najlepší celkový priemer (N=242) bol dosiahnutý v rámci odpovede „náročný na koordináciu" (1,60±0,70). Najhoršie hodnotená bola možnosť „náročnosť po finančnej stránke" s celkovým priemerom (N=242; 2,52±1,11). Sieťované subjekty (n=220) najviac podporili možnosti „vytvoriť silný produkt" a „zatraktívniť destináciu" (1,40). Sieťujúce subjekty (n=22) okrem možnosti „náročnosť po finančnej stránke" (2,25) ohodnotili všetky ostatné možnosti rovnako, s priemernou hodnotou 1,75. Štatistickú významnosť na hladine významnosti (α = 0,05) v závislosti od druhu subjektu (sieťovaný vs. sieťujúci) sme zaznamenali iba u jedného faktora, konkrétne, že pre vytváranie sietí subjektov cestovného ruchu ide o „dlhodobý" proces (0,03). V tomto prípade sa názory sieťovaných a sieťujúcich subjektov štatisticky výrazne odlišovali.

## Záver

Vzhľadom na cieľ štúdie získané výsledky naznačujú, že odborná verejnosť vníma vytváranie sietí medzi subjektmi cestovného ruchu prevažne pozitívne a považuje ho za významný nástroj podpory spolupráce v destinácii. Respondenti poukázali najmä na prínosy sieťovania v oblasti tvorby komplexnejších produktov cestovného ruchu, zvyšovania atraktivity destinácie a efektívnejšej koordinácie aktivít medzi jednotlivými poskytovateľmi služieb.

Výsledky zároveň ukázali, že OOCR zohrávajú významnú úlohu pri iniciovaní a koordinácii spolupráce medzi MaSP CR v destinácii. Malé a stredné podniky vnímajú zapojenie do takýchto sietí ako príležitosť na rozvoj partnerstiev, zdieľanie informácií a spoločnú propagáciu destinácie. Zároveň u respondentov boli zaznamenané odpovede, ktoré identifikovali aj určité výzvy a oblasti zlepšovania, najmä v oblasti koordinácie spolupráce, motivácie jednotlivých aktérov a rozdielnych očakávaní medzi partnermi.

Možno konštatovať, že cieľ štúdie bol naplnený. Výskum poskytol prehľad o vnímaní významu sieťovania medzi OOCR a MaSP v sektore cestovného ruchu. Výsledky zároveň poskytujú odpoveď na výskumnú otázku, podľa ktorej odborná verejnosť považuje vytváranie sietí MaSP CR v destinácii za dôležitý predpoklad rozvoja spolupráce a konkurencieschopnosti destinácie.

Praktický význam štúdie je najmä v oblasti riadenia a rozvoja destinácií cestovného ruchu. Zistenia poukazujú na dôležitosť sieťovania MaSP CR ako nástroja na posilnenie spolupráce medzi poskytovateľmi služieb v destinácii. Pre OOCR štúdia predstavuje podklad efektívnejšieho koordinovania partnerstiev, podporu spoločných aktivít a tvorbu integrovaných produktov cestovného ruchu. Zistenia môžu zároveň slúžiť ako podklad pre tvorcov regionálnych a národných politík cestovného ruchu pri podpore spolupráce medzi verejným a súkromným sektorom. Praktickým prínosom štúdie je aj identifikácia faktorov, ktoré môžu podporovať alebo naopak limitovať vytváranie sietí medzi aktérmi cestovného ruchu.

V teoretickej rovine štúdia prispieva k rozšíreniu poznatkov o problematike sieťovania v kontexte destinačného manažmentu, najmä prepojením perspektívy organizácií cestovného ruchu a malých a stredných podnikov ako kľúčových stakeholderov. Prínos spočíva predovšetkým v empirickom overení významu sieťovania ako nástroja zvyšovania konkurencieschopnosti destinácií a v identifikácii rozdielov vo vnímaní procesu medzi sieťujúcimi a sieťovanými subjektmi. Zároveň boli systematicky identifikované hlavné prínosy ako aj bariéry sieťovania, čo umožňuje komplexnejšie pochopenie fungovania spolupráce v rámci destinácií cestovného ruchu.

V štúdii bolo zistené, že efektívne sieťovanie predstavuje kľúčový predpoklad udržateľného rozvoja destinácií. Jeho úspešnosť je podmienená najmä kvalitou koordinácie, úrovňou dôvery medzi aktérmi a schopnosťou zosúladiť rozdielne záujmy jednotlivých subjektov. Napriek prevažne pozitívnemu vnímaniu sieťovania sa ukazuje, že bez aktívnej facilitácie zo strany destinačných organizácií a bez vytvorenia vhodných mechanizmov spolupráce môže byť jeho potenciál len čiastočne využitý.

Tu sa otvára priestor najmä pre realizáciu kvalitatívnych štúdií zameraných na hlbšie pochopenie vzťahov medzi jednotlivými aktérmi a dynamiky ich spolupráce. Vhodné by bolo tiež skúmať sieťovanie v dlhodobejšom časovom horizonte, prípadne realizovať komparatívne výskumy medzi rôznymi krajinami alebo typmi destinácií.

Ďalším smerom výskumu môže byť analýza konkrétnych modelov spolupráce a ich dopadov na výkonnosť destinácie, ako aj využitie inovatívnych prístupov, napríklad digitálnych platforiem, pri podpore sieťovania subjektov cestovného ruchu.

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# Motivations and barriers to participation in sustainable tourism: a generational perspective[1]

Anna Šenková – Erika Kormaníková[2]

***Abstract***

*This paper examines the motivations and barriers to sustainable travel among Generations X, Y and Z, and aims to determine whether there are statistically significant differences in their perceptions of these factors. A questionnaire survey involving 137 respondents was conducted, and the obtained data were analysed using the Kruskal-Wallis test. The most significant motivations were nature conservation, cultural experiences, and a healthy lifestyle, while the most significant barriers were cost, lack of information, and complicated transport. However, statistical analysis showed that there were no significant differences between generations in terms of motivations or barriers. The findings suggest that the factors influencing sustainable travel are largely universal and that generational affiliation does not play a decisive role. Despite the study's limitations, the results offer practical implications for the development of measures and marketing strategies to promote sustainable travel in Slovakia, while also providing a starting point for further research into the factors influencing sustainable travel behaviour among various population groups.*

***Key words***

*Motivations, barriers, sustainable tourism, generational perspective*

**JEL Classification:** Z32

## Introduction

Sustainable tourism is a form of travel that considers the needs of travellers, the tourism industry, the environment, and host communities, while considering the current and future economic, social, and environmental impacts. Unlike mass tourism, which prioritises short-term financial gain primarily, this strategy promotes responsible travel and reduces negative environmental and social impacts (UN, 2026).

Sustainable tourism is a valuable means of addressing current environmental, social, and economic issues. It fosters job creation, supports local communities, and helps preserve cultural heritage. However, it is challenging to assess its benefits due to the lack of standardised indicators and limited data availability (Gopal, 2023).

Significant social benefits of sustainable tourism include job creation, support for the local economy, preservation of cultural heritage and strengthening of social ties. The success of sustainable tourism initiatives depends on the active participation of residents

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and the empowerment of local governments. Community involvement in decision-making and collaboration between public and private actors are key to ensuring the long-term sustainability and equity of these initiatives (Zambiano-Mieles et al., 2025).

Sustainable tourism plays a significant role in environmental protection by seeking to minimise negative impacts on nature and promote the sustainable use of resources. Reducing the sector's carbon footprint is one of the key measures, particularly about transportation and accommodation. This can be achieved by providing low-carbon transportation options, implementing energy-efficient technologies, and constructing smart buildings. Another important aspect is biodiversity conservation: areas with sustainable tourism policies in place tend to have greater species diversity and healthier ecosystems. Water resource management is equally important, with innovations such as low-flow fixtures, rainwater harvesting and wastewater recycling significantly reducing water consumption. These measures demonstrate that environmental practices in tourism protect nature, enhance destination resilience, and contribute to the sector's long-term sustainability (Xing, 2024).

Sustainable tourism also plays a key role in preserving cultural values by encouraging ethical travel, involving local communities, and funding the conservation of cultural and natural treasures. This approach ensures that cultural heritage remains accessible to future generations while raising awareness of its importance. Research shows that sustainable tourism practices, environmental policies and tourism education is intricately linked to the protection of cultural heritage. This finding is confirmed by analyses of structural models based on questionnaires and assessments of community participation. These findings emphasise that coordinated implementation of sustainable measures is essential for the long-term preservation of cultural values and support of local communities (Lamoria et al., 2024).

Sustainable tourism is based on the principle of preserving cultural values, natural resources, and quality of life for future generations. Therefore, it is important to pay attention to generational differences. Different generations have different approaches to travel — they have different values, motivations, consumer behaviour, and levels of environmental responsibility. For example, younger generations, such as Generation Y or Z, often prefer eco-friendly modes of transport, authentic local experiences and supporting local communities, whereas older generations may prioritise comfort, tradition, or affordability (Šenková et al., 2026). Understanding these differences is essential for developing effective, sustainable tourism strategies. It enables offerings and communication to be tailored more effectively to the needs of different age groups. It also helps to promote responsible behaviour among tourists of all ages and ensures that tourism does not generate short-term economic benefits at the expense of the future. Therefore, examining generational differences contributes to creating a tourism model that will be environmentally, socially, and economically sustainable in the long term.

For this reason, this research focuses specifically on analysing the differences in motivations and barriers to sustainable tourism from the perspectives of Generations X, Y and Z, as they currently constitute the largest proportion of tourists.

## 1 Travel behaviour from the perspective of generations X, Y and Z

The travel habits of Generation X are significantly influenced by social and life circumstances. The number of holidays taken alone or with friends is increasing, as many members of this generation are either in the 'empty nest' phase or preparing for retirement. The main motivator is the desire to escape everyday stress, with more than 60% of Generation X citing stress relief as the primary reason for their trip. Financial pressures and life changes, including divorce or children leaving home, also influence destination choices and the types of experiences sought — they prefer flexible and affordable options that offer value for money. This shift creates an opportunity for travel service providers to offer personalised, tailored experiences that consider changing family dynamics and the need for personal well-being (Gaines, 2024). When it comes to global travel, Generation X is characterised by a practical, family-oriented approach. Unlike younger generations, such as Millennials and Generation Z, they rely less on social media and place greater trust in personal recommendations and traditional travel planning methods. They often prefer to rent houses and apartments that can accommodate multiple generations and family groups comfortably, making it easier to spend time with children, parents, and partners. Although they travel less frequently, their trips tend to be longer and more thoroughly planned, with an emphasis on comfort, practicality and experiences that align with their life stage. This blend of traditionalism, technological proficiency, and family-oriented values makes Generation X an attractive target group for the travel industry (Wigmore, 2025).

Millennials (Generation Y) are tech-savvy, digitally oriented travellers. Up to 66% book their trips entirely via mobile devices and 74% use smartphones to search for destination information. Social media plays a key role in the decision-making process, with up to 75% of this generation influenced by content on platforms such as Instagram and TikTok. Millennials prefer authentic, experiential travel that enables them to discover local culture, avoid overcommercialised tourist attractions and support small local businesses. This focus on experiences rather than material possessions, and the flexibility they have when planning trips, creates new opportunities for travel agencies and experience providers (Takahashi, 2025). In addition to being technologically proficient and adept at digital planning, Generation Y (Millennials) are characterised by the diversity of their travel motivations. The most important motivation for this generation is discovering unfamiliar places and environments. However, the importance of relaxation and actively engaging in new experiences varies by region and destination. The results also suggest that this generation is heterogeneous on a global scale, with travel motivations varying according to age and geographic context (Richards & Morrill, 2020). Compared to Generation Z, who are even more dependent on technology and prefer individual activities, millennials are more sociable, emotionally balanced, and open to new experiences. Generation Y prioritises authentic and meaningful experiences, as well as environmental and cultural sustainability. For example, they seek out eco-friendly accommodation, support local businesses and favour tourism that respects nature and cultural heritage. When planning trips, this generation relies heavily on technology and social media, following recommendations from bloggers and reading reviews on platforms such as Instagram and TripAdvisor. They make decisions based on verified information. They prefer a combination of relaxation, adventure, and social experiences, often opting for smaller groups, cycling, ecotourism, or sports activities,

and are willing to invest in experiences that improve their physical and mental health. Millennials plan their trips thoroughly, considering local culture, cuisine, and authentic experiences while keeping an eye on value for money (Jasrotia & Walia, 2021).

Generation Z is known for its mobility and curiosity. They view travel as a means of self-fulfilment and of enriching their lives. They prefer authentic, experience-driven trips that allow them to create and share personal memories on social media. Technology plays a pivotal role in this, with virtual platforms, social media, and mobile apps serving as the primary tools for planning, discovery, and inspiration prior to the trip itself. They expect travel to be personalised, fast and accessible, and use digital tools to help them choose destinations and experiences based on their own preferences (Rakhmatov, 2024). They also prioritise flexibility, innovation and services that are tailored to their individual needs. At the same time, they value sustainability, ethical consumption, and authenticity, motivating them to choose eco-friendly and locally oriented activities and services (Karagiannis, 2024). Compared to previous generations, they are more open to trying new ways of working, travelling, and spending their free time. For them, travel is an opportunity for personal growth and experiences that enrich their lives, not just a break. They crave the freedom and flexibility to combine study, work and leisure, and prefer safe, comfortable modes of travel that minimise stress and restrictions (Szalaiová, 2023).

### 1.1 Motivations for participation in sustainable tourism from the perspective of generations X, Y and Z

Against the backdrop of generational variations in travel motivations, Vašaničová & Melnyk (2025) conducted a significant study examining the travel preferences of Slovak women from Generations X, Y and Z when travelling abroad. The research revealed statistically significant differences in motivational factors, particularly entertainment and education. Generation Z was found to be significantly more motivated to travel for entertainment, experiences, and educational opportunities than Generations X and Y, indicating a stronger inclination among the younger generation towards experiential and developmental forms of travel. Generation Y was characterised by a greater degree of independence when planning trips, whereas Generation X tended to prefer organised travel through travel agencies. These findings confirm that motivational factors for travel differ not only by age group, but also by life stage, value orientation, and leisure activities.

Similarly, Marques et al. (2025) study focused on the travel motivations of Generation Z, examining the influence of age, gender, and place of residence on young people's travel decisions. The study surveyed 303 individuals aged 18–28, who evaluated 14 factors related to personal development, experiences, and social interactions that influence their travel decisions. The results indicated that the most significant motivational factors for this generation are the desire for new experiences, personal development, relaxation, and social interactions. The authors also emphasise that young people perceive travel as a means of not only recreation, but also self-discovery, gaining new experiences, and building identity. These findings suggest that experiential and developmental motivations play a particularly key role for this younger generation and can significantly influence their approach to sustainable travel.

In the study, Kubičková et al. (2024) examines the factors that influence responsible and sustainable travel behaviour and tourist motivation. Most importantly,

the authors explore what is most relevant to tourists in terms of services, resource consumption or interaction with the local community. From their research, the authors identified three main motivations that encourage sustainable behaviour among visitors.

- Environmental motivations: The desire to protect the environment by reducing waste, conserving water and energy, and choosing environmentally certified services.
- Social and ethical motivations: Respecting local culture, helping local people, and acting morally.
- Economic motivations: Supporting the local economy by purchasing local products or using smaller, local businesses, for example.

These motivations demonstrate that sustainable travel depends not only on the availability of services or the offerings of destinations, but also on the values and attitudes of tourists themselves. Therefore, understanding why people travel sustainably is key not only for destination planning, but also for effective education and awareness-raising in responsible travel.

## 1.2 Barriers for participation in sustainable tourism from the perspective of generations X, Y and Z

According to Prasad (2025), there are several types of barriers to sustainable travel. These barriers can be physical, social, psychological, or educational, and can be either temporary or permanent. Physical barriers are visible obstacles in the environment, such as architectural barriers or inaccessible transport infrastructure. Social barriers stem from negative attitudes, prejudices, and societal stereotypes, which can result in the exclusion of individuals. In contrast, psychological barriers arise from an individual's internal experiences, such as low self-esteem, fear, anxiety or negative thinking. Educational barriers relate to the unavailability of information, or information that is inappropriate or incomplete.

Nasrudin, Rostam & Mohd Noor (2014) conducted a study examining the motivations and barriers to sustainable commuting in Shah Alam, Malaysia. The study involved 384 participants from 36 urban districts and aimed to identify what discourages people from walking, cycling, or using public transport, and what would encourage them to use public transport more responsibly. The research identified several key barriers:

- For walking and cycling: excessive heat, perceived danger, insufficient bike lanes and poor pavements.
- For accessing public transport services: inefficiency and high fares.
- Driving less frequently is influenced by habit and convenience, as well as limited availability of public transport.

Effective practices are also lacking in various areas, hindering sustainable tourism development. Major barriers include low awareness of and knowledge about sustainable travel, insufficient stakeholder engagement, inadequate funding, and weak motivation among relevant parties (e.g. businesses and community members). Other factors include bureaucratic barriers, short-term economic interests, a lack of strategic planning, uncoordinated measures, and conflicts among tourism stakeholders. These

obstacles suggest that sustainable tourism requires education, government and community support, and individual barriers (Dias, Viana & Pereira, 2024).

These findings suggest that the barriers to implementing sustainable tourism are not only technical or economic, but also psychological, social, and infrastructural. Overcoming these barriers requires a multifaceted strategy incorporating education, strategic planning, the participation of all relevant stakeholders, and the promotion of sustainable practices among individuals and communities. Therefore, it is crucial to recognise and address these barriers to successfully integrating sustainable tourism into practice and promoting environmentally and socially responsible behaviour among tourists.

## 2 Methodology

The aim of this paper is to present the results of a study focused on identifying and comparing the motivations for and barriers to sustainable travel from the perspective of Generations X, Y, and Z, and to determine whether there are statistically significant differences among them.

For the purposes of the research, we applied Cantrell's (2021) generational classification, which defines the age ranges of each generation based on year of birth as follows:

- Generation X: 1965–1980.
- Generation Y: 1981–1996.
- Generation Z: 1997–2012.

Primary data were collected through a questionnaire survey, with a total of 137 respondents participating. Designed based on a literature review, the questionnaire focused primarily on identifying motivations and barriers to sustainable tourism from the perspective of selected generations. Respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with the motivations and barriers on a 5-point Likert scale. The questionnaire was distributed to selected groups of respondents to ensure the research sample was balanced in terms of both age and generational distribution.

Of the respondents, 76 were women (55.5%) and 61 were men (44.5%). The exact breakdown of the research sample by gender is presented in Table 1 below.

**Tab. 1** Breakdown of respondents by gender and generation

| | **Generation X** | | **Generation Y** | | **Generation Z** | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Gender** | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male |
| Number of respondents | 22 | 19 | 19 | 24 | 35 | 18 |
| Σ | 41 | | 43 | | 53 | |

Source: own processing

Based on the above (Tab. 1), we can conclude that the largest proportion of the research sample was made up of Generation Z respondents, followed by Generation Y respondents, while the smallest proportion was made up of Generation X respondents.

In terms of the highest level of education attained, the largest proportion of the research sample was made up of respondents who had completed high school with a graduation exam. Specifically, 49 respondents (35.8%) had this level of education, which was most prevalent among Generation Z. A total of 33 respondents (24.1%) reported having a bachelor's degree and 30 (21.9%) a master's degree. The smallest groups were those with a doctoral degree (five respondents – 3.6%) and those with a primary education (four respondents – 2.9%).

In terms of country of origin, the survey exclusively included respondents from Slovakia.

Considering the research objective, the study included the following two research questions and their respective hypotheses:

- RQ1: Are there statistically significant differences in motivations for participating in sustainable tourism between Generations X, Y and Z?

$H_0$: There are no statistically significant differences in motivations for participating in sustainable tourism among Generations X, Y and Z.

$H_1$: There are statistically significant differences in motivations for participating in sustainable tourism among Generations X, Y and Z.

- RQ2: Are there statistically significant differences in barriers to participation in sustainable tourism among Generations X, Y and Z?

$H_0$: We hypothesise that there are no statistically significant differences in barriers to participation in sustainable tourism across Generations X, Y and Z.

$H_1$: We hypothesise that there are statistically significant differences in barriers to participation in sustainable tourism among Generations X, Y and Z.

To verify the existence of statistically significant differences in motivations and barriers to participation in sustainable tourism among the selected generations, the Kruskal–Wallis test was used at a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$. This nonparametric test was chosen because the data did not meet the assumption of a normal distribution and were collected using a five-point Likert scale, which yields ordinal data. In addition, the Kruskal–Wallis test is suitable for comparing three or more independent groups in cases where the assumptions required for parametric methods are not met—which is the case with our data. The test also assesses whether the distributions of the variables under study differ significantly among the groups being compared by analysing the ranks of the observations rather than their original values, making it a suitable alternative for analysing the ordinal data from our survey.

Although the prerequisites for conducting the selected test were met, the results are subject to significant limitations due to the analysed data sample, which focuses only on examining the motivations for and barriers to sustainable tourism from the perspective of respondents in Slovakia; this significantly limits the generalizability of the data, therefore the results can only be applied in a national context when developing measures or marketing strategies aimed at sustainable tourism.

## 3 Results and Discussion

Table 2 shows how many respondents there were and how much they agreed with the given motivations for participating in sustainable tourism. Table 2 also shows that positive responses predominate among Generations X, Y and Z when it comes to the main motivations for sustainable tourism. However, the intensity of individual motivations varies across generations.

**Tab. 2** Motivations for participation in sustainable tourism from the respondents' perspective

| Motivation | Level of agreement | Generation X | Generation Y | Generation Z |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Nature protection | Strong agreement | 16 | 20 | 17 |
| | Agreement | 10 | 11 | 17 |
| | Neutral | 9 | 9 | 11 |
| | Disagreement | 5 | 1 | 5 |
| | Strong disagreement | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Support for the local economy | Strong agreement | 12 | 12 | 10 |
| | Agreement | 14 | 17 | 17 |
| | Neutral | 11 | 9 | 16 |
| | Disagreement | 4 | 4 | 6 |
| | Strong disagreement | 0 | 1 | 4 |
| Cultural experience | Strong agreement | 17 | 18 | 19 |
| | Agreement | 13 | 12 | 13 |
| | Neutral | 8 | 7 | 10 |
| | Disagreement | 3 | 5 | 8 |
| | Strong disagreement | 0 | 1 | 3 |
| Healthy Lifestyle / Well-being | Strong agreement | 20 | 20 | 18 |
| | Agreement | 12 | 12 | 16 |
| | Neutral | 7 | 6 | 10 |
| | Disagreement | 2 | 4 | 5 |
| | Strong disagreement | 0 | 1 | 4 |

Source: own processing

Nature protection is the strongest motivation across all generations (Tab. 2). Generation Y most strongly supports it: 46.5% of respondents answered, "strongly agree", with an overall agreement rate of 72.1%. Generation X achieved an agreement

rate of 63.4%, while Generation Z achieved 64.2%. These results suggest that the environmental aspect of sustainable travel is a significant motivating factor for all age groups.

Support for the local economy was positively rated, particularly by Generations X and Y, with affirmative responses reaching 63.4% and 67.4% respectively. Generation Z showed a lower rate of agreement (51.0%) and the highest proportion of undecided respondents (30.2%). This may indicate that younger generations are less aware of the economic importance of supporting local communities and tourism service providers.

When it came to cultural experiences, it emerged that all generations considered authentic cultural exploration to be an important motivation for travel. The highest levels of agreement were recorded among Generation X (73.2%) and Generation Y (69.8%), while Generation Z recorded a lower proportion of positive responses (60.3%). Nevertheless, the cultural aspect remains a significant motivator for sustainable tourism across all generations.

The most significant differences were observed in motivations related to a healthy lifestyle and well-being. Generation X had the highest proportion of affirmative responses (78.1%), followed closely by Generation Y (74.4%). Generation Z also viewed this factor positively, albeit to a lesser extent (64.2%). Therefore, older generations associate sustainable travel more strongly with relaxation, regeneration, and quality of life.

Overall, it can be concluded that Generations X and Y are more motivated and consistent in their commitment to sustainable tourism across all examined areas. While Generation Z also has a cheerful outlook towards sustainability, they more frequently express uncertainty or a lower degree of agreement. These results therefore suggest that generational differences influence tourists' motivations and must be considered when developing sustainable tourism products, services, and marketing strategies.

Table 3 below lists the barriers to participation in sustainable tourism from the perspective of Generations X, Y and Z.

**Tab. 3** Barriers for participation in sustainable tourism from the respondents' perspective

| Barrier | Level of agreement | Generation X | Generation Y | Generation Z |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| High price of sustainable services | Strong agreement | 25 | 27 | 27 |
| | Agreement | 9 | 6 | 11 |
| | Neutral | 5 | 6 | 12 |
| | Disagreement | 0 | 3 | 1 |
| | Strong disagreement | 2 | 1 | 2 |
| Lack of information | Strong agreement | 10 | 9 | 18 |
| | Agreement | 22 | 18 | 23 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Neutral | 7 | 10 | 8 |
| | Disagreement | 0 | 3 | 2 |
| | Strong disagreement | 2 | 3 | 2 |
| Lack of sustainable services | Strong agreement | 7 | 7 | 18 |
| | Agreement | 18 | 15 | 17 |
| | Neutral | 12 | 13 | 12 |
| | Disagreement | 2 | 5 | 4 |
| | Strong disagreement | 2 | 3 | 2 |
| Difficult transportation | Strong agreement | 18 | 14 | 17 |
| | Agreement | 12 | 10 | 14 |
| | Neutral | 8 | 14 | 13 |
| | Disagreement | 1 | 1 | 5 |
| | Strong disagreement | 2 | 4 | 4 |
| Lack of time for sustainable alternatives | Strong agreement | 14 | 10 | 25 |
| | Agreement | 14 | 15 | 10 |
| | Neutral | 8 | 11 | 14 |
| | Disagreement | 2 | 4 | 1 |
| | Strong disagreement | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| Reluctance/lack of interest in sustainable travel | Strong agreement | 9 | 9 | 20 |
| | Agreement | 17 | 14 | 16 |
| | Neutral | 9 | 10 | 14 |
| | Disagreement | 5 | 6 | 2 |
| | Strong disagreement | 1 | 4 | 1 |

Source: own processing

Based on the above (Tab. 3), we can conclude that all generations perceive several barriers to sustainable travel. The most significant of these are high price of sustainable services, a lack of information and difficult transportation.

The most significant of these barriers is the high price of sustainable travel services. Generation Y recorded the highest level of agreement (76.8%), followed closely by Generation X (83.0%, combining full and partial agreement) and Generation Z (71.7%). The results suggest that financial cost is the main obstacle, regardless of respondents' age. However, Generation Z more frequently gave undecided responses,

which may be related to their lack of experience in organising travel or their lower awareness of the prices of sustainable services. A significant barrier is also the lack of information about sustainable travel options. This problem was most strongly perceived by Generation X (78.1%) and Generation Z (77.4%), with a slightly lower proportion of affirmative responses from Generation Y (62.8%). This highlights the need for service providers and destinations to provide better information and communicate more effectively.

When it comes to limited access to sustainable services, Generation Z appears to be the most affected, with 66.1% of respondents agreeing. Generations X and Y recorded lower figures (61.0% and 51.2% respectively). This suggests that the younger generation may be more aware of the lack of eco-friendly transport, accommodation, or services, or may have higher expectations regarding the availability of sustainable alternatives.

Difficult transportation represents a significant barrier, particularly for Generation X, with 73.2% agreeing. Generations Y and Z showed a lower proportion of positive responses (55.9% and 58.5% respectively). Therefore, the older generation is likely to be more sensitive to the complexities of eco-friendly transportation and reduced travel comfort.

Interestingly, differences also emerged regarding the barrier of lack of time. Generation Z perceives this as the most significant barrier (66.1%), with 47.2% of respondents selecting "strongly agree." Generations X and Y achieved similar figures (68.2% and 58.2% respectively), but the younger generation is more likely to consider time constraints a major problem. This may be related to their faster pace of life and preference for flexible travel options.

When it came to reluctance or a lack of interest in sustainable travel, Generation Z showed the highest level of agreement (67.9%), while Generations X and Y reported lower figures (63.5% and 53.5% respectively). These results suggest that, although the younger generation expresses interest in environmental issues, they may be less willing to adapt their travel behaviour to sustainable principles in practice.

Overall, it can be concluded that all generations perceive sustainable travel as being more demanding in terms of finances, organisation, and information. Generation X is particularly sensitive to complicated transportation and a lack of information, Generation Y emphasises high price, and Generation Z points more strongly to a lack of time and service availability, as well as a lower willingness to change travel habits.

As the results suggest differences in perception of barriers and motivations across the studied generations, the next step in the analysis was to verify whether these differences are statistically significant, i.e. whether the motivations and obstacles of the individual generations differ statistically. When assessing whether statistically significant differences existed, we primarily took the p-values presented in Table 4 into account.

**Tab. 4** Kruskal-Wallis p-values for motivations and barriers

| **Motivation** | **P-value** | **Barrier** | **P-value** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Nature protection | 0.3453 | High price of sustainable services | 0.4748 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Support for the local economy | 0.1634 | Lack of information | 0.1735 |
| Cultural experience | 0.4083 | Lack of sustainable services | 0.1263 |
| Healthy Lifestyle/well-being | 0.1514 | Difficult transportation | 0.2179 |
| | | Lack of time for sustainable alternatives | 0.1481 |
| | | Reluctance/lack of interest in sustainable travel | 0.0728 |

Source: own processing

When the motivations and barriers to sustainable travel were compared across Generations X, Y and Z using the Kruskal-Wallis test, no statistically significant differences were found ($p > 0.05$). The lowest p-value was recorded for the barrier 'Lack of interest/willingness to engage in sustainable travel' ($p = 0.0728$), but the level of statistical significance was not reached even in this case (Tab. 4).

The results therefore suggest that the same factors motivate different generations to engage in sustainable tourism. The same is true of the perception of barriers: our respondents face similar obstacles to sustainable travel. Overall, the results suggest that generational affiliation is unlikely to have a significant impact on perceptions of motivations and barriers related to sustainable travel. Based on this, it can be concluded that none of the research questions were confirmed.

One key explanation for this may be the growing trends of globalisation and digitalisation, which are significantly narrowing the information gap between generations. Environmental issues, including sustainable travel, are now widely publicised on social media and other online platforms, as well as through educational campaigns. This has led to similar levels of sustainability awareness across generations. This weakens the traditional generational divide, which was more pronounced in the past about value preferences and consumer behaviour.

Another significant factor may be the homogenisation of travel experiences. The current tourism market offers generations X, Y and Z remarkably related products, price levels and marketing communications, resulting in a convergence of decision-making criteria (Jasrotia & Walia, 2021). The most prominent motivations — nature conservation, cultural experiences, and a healthy lifestyle — are thus becoming universal values that are not significantly tied to age, but rather to broader social discourse.

An interesting finding is that, while no statistical differences were confirmed, the results in Tables 2 and 3 suggest variations in how intensely individual factors are perceived. For example, Generation Z shows a higher proportion of undecided responses to several items, which may be related to a lack of practical experience in organising travel or less well-established preferences. Conversely, Generations X and Y show more consistent ratings, which may result from longer-term travel experience and established behavioural patterns, as also suggested by Gaines's (2024) research.

Regarding barriers, economic and organisational factors such as high price, lack of information and complicated transport emerged as the most significant. As these factors are universal in nature and not strictly tied to age groups, this may explain the

absence of statistically significant differences. These are systemic barriers, determined more by the structure of the tourism market than by the individual characteristics of the respondents.

The results also suggest that generational differences may be more evident in the intensity of perception than in the mere presence of these factors. For instance, Generation Z is more likely to cite a lack of time and a lower willingness to change travel habits, potentially reflecting a faster-paced lifestyle and a greater sensitivity to service flexibility (Dias, Viana & Pereira, 2024). However, these differences were not pronounced enough to be statistically significant.

Overall, it can be concluded that sustainable travel is currently becoming a universally valued topic that transcends generational differences. While the primary data suggest differences in the intensity of perceptions regarding motivations and barriers, statistical analysis confirmed that generational affiliation is not a significant determinant in this area. From a practical standpoint, this means that marketing and management strategies in tourism can be segmented according to criteria such as socioeconomic status, travel experience, or type of travel behaviour, rather than exclusively by age group.

## Conclusion

This paper presents the results of a study that aimed to identify and compare the motivations and barriers to sustainable travel from the perspectives of Generations X, Y and Z, and to verify whether there are any statistically significant differences between them. Based on the survey results and subsequent analysis, it can be concluded that, while there are variations in the perceived intensity of individual factors, the Kruskal–Walli's test did not confirm any statistically significant generational differences in the motivations or barriers to sustainable travel.

The most prominent motivations across all generations were nature conservation, cultural experiences, and a healthy lifestyle. The most significant barriers were high price, a lack of information, and complicated transport. These findings suggest that the key factors influencing sustainable travel are universal and not significantly determined by generational affiliation.

The results also suggest that sustainable travel is becoming a widely accepted value across generations. This trend can be attributed to the influence of globalisation and digitalisation, as well as the increasing availability of information on environmental issues. Nevertheless, certain differences in the perception of individual factors do exist, particularly between Generation Z and older generations. However, these differences are not statistically significant.

From a practical perspective, the results suggest that market segmentation in sustainable tourism should be based on characteristics other than generational ones, such as socio-economic factors, travel experience, or preferred forms of travel. This implies that service providers and tourism policymakers should focus on removing systemic barriers such as high price, insufficient information, and a lack of sustainable alternatives.

Future research should include larger, more diverse samples or combine quantitative and qualitative methods to reveal the subtle differences in attitudes and motivations between generations. Overall, however, it can be concluded that the generational aspect plays a supplementary rather than a decisive role in the context of sustainable travel.

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# Smart Technology as a Tool for Sustainable and Resilient Development of Tourist Destinations: a Comparative Analysis of the Regions of the Moravian-Silesian Region

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***Abstract***

*The aim of the paper is to evaluate the interrelationships between the use of smart technologies, the application of ESG principles, and the level of resilience of tourism destinations. The research is based on a qualitative approach combining comparative analysis and a case study of three tourism regions in the Moravian-Silesian Region: Wallachia, Těšín, and Kravařsko. The analysis draws on secondary data obtained from business websites, booking platforms, and customer reviews. The findings indicate that basic digital tools have become standard across all examined regions; however, differences are evident in the adoption of advanced technologies and the integration of ESG principles. The strongest linkage between digitalization and sustainability was identified in Wallachia. The study confirms that the long-term competitiveness and resilience of tourism destinations depend on the effective integration of technological innovation, sustainable management practices, and the communication of these activities to visitors.*

***Key words***

*smart technologies, ESG, tourism resilience, digital transformation, destination management*

**JEL Classification: L83, O33, Q56**

## Introduction

Tourism has been undergoing a notable transformation in recent years, shaped by a combination of technological progress and increasing demands for sustainable practices. Digitalization, the expansion of smart solutions and the gradual incorporation of artificial intelligence are no longer limited to back-end processes; they increasingly influence how services are delivered and how visitors perceive their overall experience. For tourism enterprises, these shifts are visible in everyday operations, ranging from customer interaction to internal management systems (Buhalis & Leung, 2018).

Within this context, the idea of smart tourism reflects a stronger integration of digital tools, data-driven decision-making and coordinated service management. This integration enables tourism providers to respond more precisely to visitor expectations, yet it simultaneously requires greater efficiency in resource allocation and organizational coordination (Gretzel et al., 2015). As a result, technology is not just an auxiliary component but a factor that actively shapes the competitiveness and development trajectory of destinations.

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At the same time, sustainability has become a central theme in tourism development. Increasingly, this is articulated through the ESG framework, which brings together environmental responsibility, social engagement and governance transparency into a coherent evaluative structure. In this sense, sustainability is not limited to mitigating negative impacts; rather, it can serve as a foundation for long-term stability, resilience and attractiveness of destinations (UNWTO, 2018).

Another dimension that has gained importance is resilience, understood as the ability of destinations to withstand disruptions and adjust to evolving conditions. Recent global events, including economic volatility and health crises, have highlighted the necessity of flexibility and rapid response. In such situations, digital technologies can play a decisive role, for instance by supporting demand management, improving communication or maintaining the continuity of services (Hall et al., 2020).

Against this background, the paper focuses on examining how smart technologies and ESG principles are manifested in selected regions of the Moravian-Silesian Region and how these elements jointly contribute to sustainable and resilient destination development. The analysis does not treat these aspects in isolation but rather explores their mutual interconnections and combined effects.

Based on this objective, the study formulates the following research questions:

**V1:** What is the level of implementation of smart technologies in the analysed regions?

**V2:** How are ESG principles applied within these regions?

**V3:** What differences can be identified among the regions in terms of digitalization and sustainability?

**V4:** What relationship exists between the level of digitalization and the implementation of ESG principles?

**V5:** In what ways do smart technologies and ESG approaches contribute to the resilience of tourism destinations?

## 1 Literature Review

### 1.1 Smart Tourism and Sustainability

The concept of smart tourism can be interpreted as a fundamental shift in how tourism systems are designed, managed and experienced. It builds on the extensive use of information and communication technologies, data-driven processes and interconnected digital platforms, which together enable more efficient destination management, higher service quality and improved visitor experience (Gretzel et al., 2015). At the same time, this approach is closely aligned with the broader framework of smart cities, where emphasis is placed on system connectivity, interoperability and the effective utilization of large-scale data (Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2015). Empirical evidence further suggests that smart technologies significantly shape tourist experiences while simultaneously contributing to more efficient resource use, thereby supporting sustainability objectives (Zhang et al., 2022).

The practical manifestation of this transformation can be observed throughout the entire customer journey. At the operational level, tourism businesses increasingly rely on digital tools such as online reservation systems, mobile applications, contactless payment methods and various forms of digital communication. From the perspective of destination management, information platforms, intelligent navigation systems and visitor flow monitoring tools play a central role (Xiang et al., 2017). These technologies not only streamline service delivery but also enable more advanced planning, capacity management and real-time decision-making.

A key driver of this development is the rapid advancement of artificial intelligence. AI-based systems are already being applied in multiple areas, including service personalization, predictive analytics and process automation. According to Ivanov and Webster (2020), artificial intelligence enables a shift towards highly individualized service provision based on customer behaviour and preferences. In practice, this is reflected in applications such as dynamic pricing, inventory management in hospitality operations or enhanced customer relationship management systems.

Beyond improving operational performance, digitalization also plays a crucial role in strengthening the resilience of tourism destinations. By automating routine activities, reducing administrative workloads and enabling more effective use of data, organizations are better equipped to respond to fluctuating demand and external disturbances (Buhalis & Leung, 2018). The importance of these capabilities became particularly evident during crisis situations, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, when digital tools allowed businesses to maintain operations and sustain communication with customers.

Nevertheless, the level of digital maturity remains uneven across destinations. While larger enterprises and more developed regions often implement advanced technological solutions, smaller businesses typically rely on more basic digital tools. This disparity highlights the need for targeted support mechanisms aimed at fostering digital transformation, particularly within smaller and locally embedded enterprises.

Recent developments further extend the concept of smart tourism towards what is described as "enhanced smart tourism," which integrates technological innovation with sustainability principles and data governance into a comprehensive system supporting adaptability and long-term resilience (Gretzel et al., 2023).

Overall, smart technologies can be regarded as a critical driver of competitiveness in contemporary tourism. However, their impact depends not only on their adoption but also on how effectively they are embedded within strategic management processes, integrated into business operations and aligned with broader sustainability objectives.

## 1.2 Resilience of tourist destinations

In recent academic discourse, the concept of resilience in tourism has gained increasing attention, particularly in relation to the growing volatility of the global environment. Rather than being understood as a single attribute, resilience is typically approached as a complex capacity encompassing the ability of destinations to withstand disruptions, adjust to evolving circumstances and continue fulfilling their core functions while maintaining attractiveness (Hall et al., 2020). Within tourism studies, this notion is inherently multidimensional, as it involves the interplay of economic stability, social cohesion and environmental sustainability.

A critical determinant of resilience lies in the capacity of destinations to respond flexibly to adverse conditions. The experience of the COVID-19 pandemic clearly illustrated that destinations characterized by higher levels of digital maturity and diversified service structures were able to recover more rapidly and adapt to shifting demand patterns (Gössling et al., 2021). Digital solutions, in this regard, facilitate real-time communication with visitors, enable the virtualization of selected services and support more effective capacity management, thereby contributing to operational continuity under uncertain conditions.

The relationship between resilience and sustainability is increasingly emphasized in recent research, particularly in connection with resource efficiency and economic stability. The effective use of resources, together with support for local economies and responsible governance practices, contributes to reducing vulnerability to external shocks and strengthens the long-term resilience of tourism systems (Guo & Liu, 2024; Liu et al., 2025).

Moreover, the diversification of tourism products helps mitigate risks associated with overdependence on specific market segments or seasonal demand fluctuations, thus reinforcing the adaptive capacity of destinations.

Another dimension that should not be overlooked is the role of social capital and institutional cooperation. The ability to mobilize networks of stakeholders—including businesses, public authorities and local communities—significantly influences how effectively destinations can respond to crises. Coordinated action, supported by communication and trust among actors, enables faster recovery and more coherent strategic responses (Hall et al., 2020). In this sense, resilience is not solely a technological or economic issue but also a relational and organizational one.

In parallel, the importance of smart technologies in strengthening resilience has become increasingly evident. Data analytics, visitor monitoring systems and predictive modelling tools contribute to more informed decision-making and proactive risk management (Gretzel et al., 2015). These technologies support not only efficiency improvements but also the ability to anticipate changes, optimize resource allocation and enhance overall system responsiveness.

From a theoretical standpoint, resilience in tourism can be approached as a layered and multifaceted concept that reflects different types of system responses to external pressures. Rather than representing a single capacity, it encompasses several distinct modes of reaction, typically described as absorptive, adaptive and transformative resilience. These forms can be interpreted along a continuum, beginning with short-term stabilization and extending towards more profound structural transformation. Absorptive resilience captures the ability of a system to endure disruptions without altering its core configuration. In contrast, adaptive resilience is associated with gradual modifications in operational practices, service provision or management processes in response to changing conditions. Transformative resilience represents a more advanced stage, involving fundamental shifts in system structure, strategic direction and development pathways (Hall et al., 2023).

Despite the increasing refinement of this conceptual framework, notable differences remain across destinations in terms of their actual resilience capacity. Such variation is not random but results from the interaction of several key determinants,

including the availability of financial resources, the level of technological advancement and the effectiveness of governance arrangements. Recent studies further emphasize that resilience does not operate in isolation; rather, it is closely connected to broader dynamics of efficiency, sustainability and institutional context. Destinations with more robust governance mechanisms and better resource management practices tend to demonstrate higher levels of adaptability and long-term stability (Farsari, 2023; Guo & Liu, 2024).

At the same time, empirical evidence indicates that regional disparities are often intensified by unequal access to innovation and capital. Smaller or less economically developed destinations frequently encounter structural constraints that limit their ability to implement advanced technological or organizational solutions. As a consequence, their capacity to respond effectively to external shocks remains comparatively restricted (Liu et al., 2025).

In summary, the resilience of tourism destinations emerges from the interaction of multiple elements, including technological innovation, sustainable management practices and collaboration among stakeholders. The integration of smart technologies with ESG-oriented approaches can therefore be seen as a crucial condition for enhancing the long-term stability, adaptability and competitiveness of destinations in an increasingly uncertain environment.

## 2 Methodology

The methodological framework of this study is grounded in the objective of exploring how smart technologies and ESG-oriented sustainability practices are implemented within tourism environments and how these factors relate to the resilience of individual destinations. Due to the complexity of the issue, a qualitative research design was adopted, as it enables a more nuanced understanding of contextual differences and underlying patterns across cases.

The research design combines elements of comparative analysis with case study insights. Such an approach makes it possible not only to contrast selected regions, but also to examine in greater detail the operational practices of specific entities within those regions. The empirical focus was placed on three areas of the Moravian-Silesian Region—Wallachia, Těšín and Kravařsko (Poodří)—which were deliberately selected to reflect distinct models of tourism development and varying structural conditions.

The analysed sample included key types of tourism service providers, primarily accommodation facilities and gastronomic establishments, as these represent core components of the tourism value chain. This selection allowed for the identification of differences not only at the regional level but also across service segments, providing a more comprehensive analytical perspective.

Data collection relied predominantly on secondary sources. Information was drawn from publicly available materials, including official websites of businesses, booking platforms such as Booking and TripAdvisor, and customer-generated reviews. These data sources were complemented by available internal documents, which helped to reduce potential bias associated with relying on a single type of data. To enhance the robustness of findings, a triangulation strategy was applied, meaning that information from different sources was systematically cross-checked to ensure consistency.

The analytical process was structured around three principal dimensions: technological development, sustainability performance in terms of ESG, and the resilience capacity of destinations. Through this framework, it was possible to identify recurring behavioural patterns among enterprises as well as distinctions between the analysed regions.

At the same time, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of the research design. One of the main constraints lies in the interpretative nature of the analysis, as the use of secondary data and qualitative methods inherently introduces a degree of subjectivity. The evaluation of individual dimensions is therefore influenced by the analytical perspective of the researcher and the absence of standardized quantitative indicators.

A further limitation stems from the lack of primary data collection. The study does not include direct input from stakeholders, such as interviews with managers or survey-based data from businesses. This absence of firsthand insights may result in a partial understanding of internal processes, strategic decision-making or the actual extent to which technological and sustainability measures are implemented in practice.

## 3 Results of the analysis

To enhance analytical clarity, the key evaluation dimensions were translated into a set of specific and measurable criteria. This operationalization made it possible to structure the analysis more systematically and to ensure greater consistency across the examined cases.

The level of digital development (smart technologies) was assessed across four interconnected areas. These included: (1) the presence of basic digital infrastructure, such as websites, online booking systems and electronic payment options; (2) the degree of digital integration within operational processes, including the use of PMS and CRM systems as well as service automation; (3) the adoption of advanced technologies, particularly artificial intelligence and data analytics tools; and (4) the quality of the digital customer experience, reflected in personalization features, mobile applications or the use of QR-based solutions.

Sustainability was examined through the ESG framework, which provided a structured lens for evaluation. The environmental dimension focused primarily on resource management, energy efficiency and environmentally oriented practices. The social pillar captured relationships with local communities and employees, while the governance dimension addressed management practices, transparency and the digitalization of organizational processes. Importantly, the assessment considered not only the implementation of these measures but also the extent to which they are communicated to customers.

Destination resilience was interpreted through three distinct but related levels: absorptive, adaptive and transformative resilience. The evaluation was based on the ability of enterprises to cope with demand fluctuations, adjust their service offerings and introduce strategic innovations in response to changing conditions.

### 3.1 Use of technology

The analysed data indicate that digitalisation can no longer be viewed as a differentiating factor in tourism, but rather as a baseline requirement. Elements such as online reservation systems, contactless payment options and reliable internet access are already embedded across all observed regions. From the perspective of visitors, these features are perceived as standard components of service delivery rather than added value.

More substantial variation becomes apparent when examining the adoption of more advanced technological solutions. Certain enterprises employ customer relationship management systems or digital ordering platforms, enabling faster and more targeted responses to client needs. In a limited number of cases, elements associated with artificial intelligence can also be observed, particularly in areas such as stock control or demand forecasting.

Regional disparities are most clearly reflected in how systematically these technologies are integrated into operational processes. As illustrated in Table 1 and further supported by the comparison in Figure 1, Kravařsko demonstrates a comparatively higher level of operational digital integration. In contrast, Wallachia and Těšín exhibit a more moderate and evenly distributed level of adoption, without extensive deployment of advanced digital systems.

### 3.2 Sustainability (ESG)

In the context of sustainability, the findings suggest that businesses tend to adopt selected ESG-related practices in a rather pragmatic and fragmented manner, rather than as part of a coherent strategic framework. Environmental initiatives are typically manifested through activities such as sourcing local ingredients or attempting to minimize waste production, which is particularly visible within the gastronomy sector.

The social dimension is primarily reflected in the engagement with the local environment. This includes employment practices, collaboration with regional suppliers, and efforts to preserve local traditions. Such activities are especially characteristic of smaller enterprises, with the most pronounced examples observed in the Kravařsko region, where community-oriented approaches play a central role.

With regard to governance, there is a clear trend towards the digitalization of administrative processes and attempts to increase organizational transparency. Despite these efforts, however, the communication of ESG-related activities towards customers remains relatively limited, which reduces their potential visibility and perceived value.

As illustrated in Table 1 and supported by the comparative overview in Figure 1, regional differences are also evident in the relative emphasis placed on individual ESG pillars. While Wallachia demonstrates a stronger orientation towards environmental practices, Kravařsko stands out in the social dimension.

### 3.3 Resilience

When applying the different forms of resilience to the analysed regions of the Moravian-Silesian Region, notable variations emerge in their ability to respond to disruptions and changing conditions. These differences are closely linked to the structural characteristics of each destination, including the composition of businesses, as well as the levels of digitalization and sustainability implementation.

Těšín can be predominantly associated with absorptive resilience. This is reflected in the capacity of local businesses to cope with short-term fluctuations in demand or crisis situations without making substantial adjustments to their operational model. Such an approach is typical for regions focused on functional, cost-oriented services, where maintaining stability and ensuring immediate responses tend to take precedence over longer-term strategic innovation.

By contrast, Wallachia exhibits characteristics of adaptive resilience. In this case, businesses actively adjust both their service offerings and management approaches in reaction to evolving external conditions. This is evident, for example, in the development of wellness-oriented tourism, the use of local resources, and the gradual integration of modern technological solutions. The region does not merely react passively but continuously modifies its strategies in order to sustain competitiveness.

Kravařsko represents a more nuanced case, which can be described as partially adaptive but structurally constrained. The predominance of smaller, community-based enterprises allows for a certain degree of flexibility and responsiveness, whether in terms of operational digitalization or individualized customer approaches. At the same time, however, limited financial resources and weaker institutional support restrict the scope for more substantial innovation. As a result, adaptive processes tend to remain at the operational level rather than developing into broader strategic transformation.

Overall, it can be argued that the analysed regions occupy different positions along the resilience spectrum. The transition from absorptive to adaptive, and potentially to transformative resilience, depends not only on technological capabilities and economic resources, but also on the presence of strategic management and a clear long-term development vision.

### 3.4 Regional differences

The comparison suggests that the analysed regions operate according to distinct development logics. Wallachia is primarily oriented towards experience-based tourism and higher service standards, which is also reflected in a stronger integration of sustainability-related practices. By contrast, the Těšín region exhibits a more utilitarian profile, with a clear focus on accessibility, practicality and cost-efficient service provision.

Kravařsko, on the other hand, represents a qualitatively different model. The dominance of smaller-scale enterprises, stronger ties to the local community and an emphasis on authenticity distinguish this region from the others and shape its overall tourism offering.

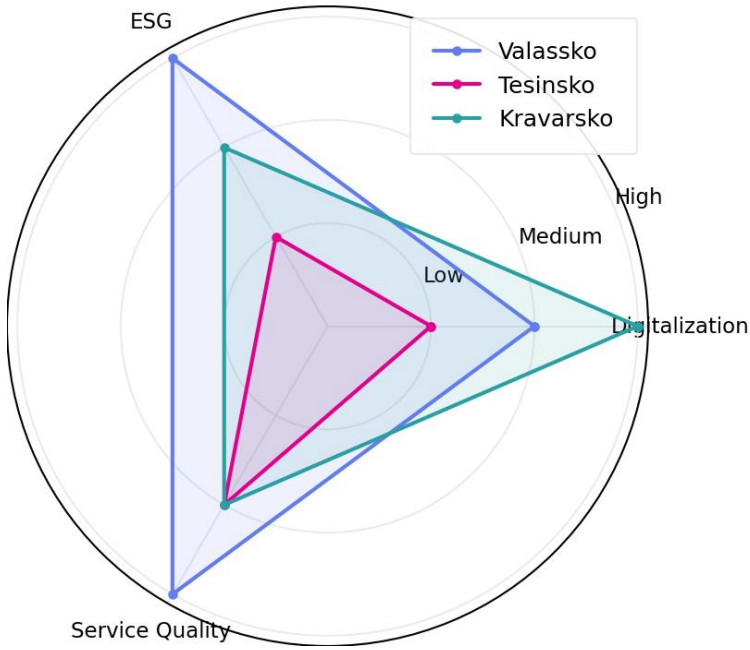
These patterns are further supported by the visual comparison presented in Figure 1, which highlights the differentiated strengths of each region. The radar chart clearly illustrates variation across three core dimensions—digitalisation, ESG performance and service quality. Wallachia achieves comparatively higher levels in ESG and service quality, whereas Kravařsko demonstrates stronger outcomes in terms of operational digitalisation. In contrast, Těšín records consistently lower scores across most indicators, reflecting its more functionally oriented and cost-driven model of tourism development.

Wallachia demonstrates the strongest performance in terms of ESG integration as well as adaptive forms of resilience, which corresponds to its positioning as a destination

focused on experience-oriented tourism and higher service standards. In contrast, the Těšín region is characterized by a more stable but primarily absorptive type of resilience, accompanied by a relatively low level of innovation and limited ESG engagement, reflecting its functional and efficiency-driven profile.

Kravařsko occupies a distinct position: it shows comparatively advanced levels of operational digitalization and a well-developed social dimension, yet its capacity for deeper, transformative change remains constrained by the smaller economic scale and limited resources of local enterprises.

**Fig 1:** Radar Chart – Regional Comparison, Source: own research




Source: own research

The findings see Tab. 1 suggest that the observed regional differences cannot be explained solely by the extent of technological adoption. Instead, they are also shaped by broader economic conditions and behavioural patterns within each destination. The relatively higher level of digitalisation identified in Kravařsko may reflect the necessity for smaller enterprises to streamline operations and compensate for limited resources through technology-driven solutions.

**Tab. 1** Regional comparison

| Criterion | Wallachia | Těšín | Kravařsko |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Digitalization** | 3 / 3 / 2 / 3 | 2 / 2 / 1 / 2 | 3 / 3 / 2 / 2 |
| **ESG (Impl.)** | 3 / 3 / 3 | 1 / 1 / 2 | 2 / 3 / 2 |
| **ESG (Comm.)** | 2 | 1 | 1 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Resilience** | 2 / 3 / 2 | 3 / 1 / 1 | 2 / 2 / 1 |
| **Tourism type** | Experiential | Functional | Authentic |

Source: Own research

The structure of Tab. 1 clearly indicates that the analysed regions do not follow a single, uniform development trajectory. Instead, their profiles diverge across several interconnected dimensions, reflecting the influence of underlying economic conditions, organizational capacities and strategic orientations. A more detailed reading of the results suggests that each region exhibits a specific configuration of strengths and constraints rather than a consistently uniform level of development.

Wallachia, for instance, achieves comparatively higher scores in ESG implementation as well as in adaptive resilience. This outcome is consistent with its positioning as a destination oriented towards experience-based tourism and enhanced service quality. The pattern observed here points to a relatively coherent development model in which sustainability initiatives and service innovation reinforce one another, contributing to a more integrated and forward-looking approach.

In contrast, the Těšín region displays a markedly different configuration. Its performance is characterized by a relatively stable absorptive capacity, yet this stability is accompanied by weaker results in innovation-related indicators and limited engagement with ESG principles. Such a profile corresponds to a more utilitarian model of tourism development, where operational reliability, affordability and accessibility take precedence over long-term transformation or strategic repositioning.

Kravařsko occupies a more nuanced position. On the one hand, it demonstrates relatively strong outcomes in operational digitalisation and in the social dimension of ESG, reflecting its close ties to local communities and flexible small-scale business structures. On the other hand, its ability to move towards deeper, transformative change remains constrained. This limitation can be attributed primarily to the predominance of smaller enterprises and restricted access to financial and institutional resources, which reduces the capacity to implement broader, systemic innovation.

Taken together, the comparative overview suggests that digitalisation, sustainability and resilience should not be interpreted as isolated attributes. Rather, they form a mutually interdependent set of processes whose configuration varies across regions depending on strategic priorities and structural conditions. The differences identified in the table therefore reflect not only variations in technological adoption, but also distinct development logics.

At the same time, the relatively limited extent to which ESG-related practices are explicitly recognized by customers points to the presence of what can be described as "invisible innovation." In many cases, both technological improvements and sustainability initiatives are perceived as implicit elements of service provision rather than as distinct features that add measurable value. Consequently, they tend not to be directly reflected in customer evaluations. This phenomenon reveals a gap between the level of investment made by tourism enterprises and the value that is ultimately perceived by users, particularly in terms of the relationship between service quality and perceived value.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that the role of destination management organizations (DMOs) should not be underestimated in this context. By facilitating coordination among stakeholders, supporting innovation processes and implementing region-specific digital strategies, these organizations have the potential to influence both the pace and direction of regional development. Their involvement can therefore play a critical role in aligning technological advancement with sustainability goals and in strengthening the overall resilience of tourism destinations.

## 4 Discussion

The findings indicate that although both smart technologies and sustainability-oriented practices are widely present across the analysed regions, their application is often fragmented and lacks a clearly defined strategic framework. In many cases, enterprises tend to employ digital tools primarily to support day-to-day operations, rather than leveraging them as instruments for long-term differentiation or competitive positioning. As a result, a substantial portion of their potential remains underutilized.

The visual comparison presented in Figure 1 further suggests that regional disparities are shaped by a combination of economic conditions, social dynamics and cultural context. While financial resources undoubtedly influence the capacity to invest in innovation, equally important is the ability of managerial actors to recognize the strategic value of such investments and integrate them effectively into business processes.

Looking ahead, it becomes increasingly evident that future development will depend on the extent to which technology, sustainability and customer experience can be interconnected within a coherent destination management framework. Such an approach should not treat these elements as separate domains, but rather as mutually reinforcing components that respond to evolving visitor expectations and broader market trends.

At the same time, several limitations identified in the research design point to opportunities for further investigation. Future studies would benefit from complementing qualitative approaches with primary data collection, particularly through structured surveys targeting tourism enterprises. This would allow for a more systematic quantification of digitalisation levels as well as ESG-related practices.

In addition, in-depth interviews with managers could provide valuable insight into decision-making processes, perceived barriers to innovation and the practical understanding of sustainability within organizational settings. Such qualitative evidence would help to uncover mechanisms that are not fully visible through secondary data sources alone.

Another promising direction lies in examining customer behaviour and perception. A more detailed analysis of how visitors interpret and evaluate technological and sustainability-related features could help clarify to what extent these factors influence their experience and satisfaction. Combining these different methodological approaches would significantly enhance the understanding of the relationships between digital transformation, sustainability practices and destination competitiveness.

From a practical perspective, several recommendations can be formulated for key stakeholders. At the enterprise level, greater emphasis should be placed on systematic data utilisation, particularly through the adoption of CRM systems that enable more effective customer relationship management and service personalization. Equally important is the need to move beyond mere implementation of ESG-related measures and ensure that these activities are actively communicated to customers, thereby increasing their perceived value.

At the regional level, stronger support mechanisms are required to facilitate digital transformation among smaller businesses. This may include the development of shared digital platforms, targeted training programmes and initiatives aimed at improving managerial competencies. In this context, destination management organizations can play a pivotal role by coordinating stakeholders, fostering innovation ecosystems and guiding strategic development processes.

From a policy perspective, the creation of a supportive institutional environment remains essential. Public authorities can contribute through targeted funding programmes focused on smart solutions and by promoting comprehensive development strategies for so-called SMART destinations, where technological advancement is closely aligned with sustainability objectives.

## Conclusion

The analysis revealed clear disparities in how digitalization and sustainability are approached across the regions of the Moravian-Silesian Region. While basic technological tools are widely adopted and form a common foundation, the use of more advanced solutions remains uneven and largely selective.

The graphical representation of the findings (Figure 1) further underscores the importance of maintaining balance among key development dimensions. Future competitiveness will depend not on excelling in a single area, but on the ability to align technological advancement with sustainability practices and overall service quality in a coherent manner.

A persistent limitation concerns the insufficient communication of these efforts towards customers. Even where technological or sustainability measures are implemented, their visibility remains low, which reduces their potential influence on visitor perceptions and decision-making processes.

Another noteworthy outcome is the way customers interpret these elements. Technologies and sustainability initiatives tend to be perceived as standard features rather than distinctive attributes, and therefore are rarely included among the primary evaluation criteria. Instead, traditional factors—such as service quality, comfort and staff interaction—continue to dominate customer assessments. This indicates a gap between what businesses invest in and what customers explicitly recognize, highlighting the need for clearer articulation of added value.

In this context, the future competitiveness of the analysed regions will largely depend on their ability to combine innovation with sustainability while maintaining their unique identity. The challenge lies not only in adopting new tools, but in embedding

them strategically within destination management and communicating their relevance in a way that is meaningful to visitors.

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# Human Capital Value Added in the Context of Tourism Development: The Case of Kazakhstan

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***Abstract***

*This study investigates the role of Human Capital Value Added (HCVA) in the sustainable development of tourism destinations in Kazakhstan over the period 1993–2024. The research is motivated by the growing importance of human capital in enhancing tourism competitiveness and long-term sustainability. The methodology is based on a quantitative longitudinal analysis using HCVA as the dependent variable and international tourist arrivals, tourism receipts, and employment in the services sector as independent indicators. A min–max normalization approach is applied to ensure comparability across variables with different scales. The results show that tourism indicators demonstrate stable long-term growth, whereas HCVA is characterized by high volatility and structural breaks. The findings indicate a weak short-term transmission between tourism expansion and human capital value creation, suggesting a lagged relationship. The study concludes that strengthening human capital is essential for converting tourism growth into sustainable economic value in Kazakhstan. Article was prepared within the framework of the grant project of the Committee of Science of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan AP26103857 "Economic assessment of the added value of human capital and its impact on the quality of life".*

***Key words***

*Human Capital Value Added; tourism development; sustainable tourism; tourism destinations; Kazakhstan; tourism arrivals; tourism receipts; service sector employment.*

**JEL Classification: M12; J24; Z32; O15; L83**

## Introduction

The modern tourism and hospitality industry is one of the fastest-growing sectors of the global economy, exerting a significant impact on the socio-economic development of countries and regions. In the context of increasing global competition, tourism destinations are required not only to develop infrastructure and natural-resource potential but also to place greater emphasis on the quality of services provided.

In this regard, human capital is becoming an increasingly important factor in generating added value in the tourism sector. The level of professional training, communication skills, digital literacy, and customer orientation of hospitality employees directly influences the quality of the tourist experience, visitor satisfaction, and the formation of a sustainable destination reputation.

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This issue becomes particularly relevant in the context of the sustainable development concept of tourism destinations, which implies a balanced interaction between economic, social, and environmental factors. In contemporary conditions, the sustainability of tourism systems is largely determined by the ability of human resources to adapt to changes in the external environment, implement innovations, and ensure high service standards.

Kazakhstan, possessing significant natural and cultural potential, is actively developing its tourism industry and striving to strengthen its position in the international market. However, the effective realization of this potential largely depends on the level of human capital development in the tourism and hospitality sector, as well as on the ability to generate added value through improved service quality and professional competencies of personnel. Thus, the study of the role of human capital in generating added value and ensuring the sustainable development of tourism destinations in Kazakhstan is both relevant and practically significant. The aim of this study is to analyze the role of human capital value added in ensuring the sustainable development of tourism destinations in Kazakhstan, as well as to identify its impact on enhancing the competitiveness of the country's tourism industry.

## 1 Literature Review

A significant number of scholars and researchers have examined the impact of human capital value added on the sustainable development of tourism destinations. For instance, R. C. Buckley (2022) emphasizes that tourism should not be viewed merely as a consumption-oriented service sector, but also as a mechanism for the restoration and accumulation of human capital. The author notes that the tourism experience generates additional economic value beyond traditional multiplier effects, as it contributes to the enhancement of human capital as a strategic economic resource. T. H. Elsharnouby and S. Elbanna (2021) argue that human capital is a key determinant of sustainable competitive advantage in the hospitality sector. Their study shows that employees' knowledge, skills, and managerial competencies directly influence the adaptability and efficiency of hospitality enterprises. M. A. Wakil, Y. Sun, and E. H. W. Chan (2021) consider human capital as one of the fundamental components of sustainable tourism destination development. They emphasize that the integration of human, social, and natural capital forms the basis for the resilience of tourism destinations in the face of external shocks. J. Hu and K. Xu (2022), in their bibliometric analysis, demonstrate that research on tourism resilience has significantly intensified following the COVID-19 pandemic. The authors highlight that human capital has become one of the key emerging directions in studies of tourism system resilience. M. Slavković, J. Ognjanović, and M. Bugarčić (2023) examine human capital efficiency in the hospitality industry and conclude that higher levels of human capital contribute to increased value added and organizational resilience under crisis conditions, including the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. K. Jun-ho (2021) shows that human capital strengthens the influence of tourism resources on industry development, acting as an important moderator between natural and cultural resources and the performance of the tourism sector. R. C. Buckley (2023) further emphasizes that the economic value of tourism includes not only direct financial returns but also indirect effects through the formation of human capital, making tourism an important driver of long-term economic

and social development. V. Dzenopoljac et al. (2023), in their review of intellectual capital in the hospitality industry, note that human capital is the central component of intellectual capital and plays a crucial role in fostering innovation, improving service quality, and enhancing the competitiveness of tourism enterprises.

Despite the substantial number of studies addressing the role of human capital in tourism and hospitality development, the existing literature pays insufficient attention to the formation of human capital value added within the context of sustainable tourism destination development at the country level, particularly in developing economies. In particular, the mechanisms through which human capital is transformed into concrete economic and institutional outcomes in tourism destinations remain underexplored.

Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by analyzing the role of human capital in generating value added and ensuring the sustainable development of tourism destinations in Kazakhstan.

## 2 Methodology

The methodological framework of this study is based on an empirical quantitative approach aimed at assessing the relationship between Human Capital Value Added (HCVA) and tourism development indicators in Kazakhstan over the period 1993–2024.

The dependent variable of the model is Human Capital Value Added (HCVA), calculated using the PWC Saratoga Institute methodology, which evaluates the contribution of labor input to economic value creation (Friman & Friman, 2018). HCVA is used as a proxy for the efficiency and productivity of human capital in generating economic outcomes.

The independent variables include three key tourism-related indicators: international tourist arrivals, international tourism receipts, and employment in the services sector. These variables are selected to capture both the demand-side dynamics of tourism activity and the supply-side capacity of the labor market within the tourism economy.

Given the differences in measurement units and magnitude across variables, a min–max normalization technique was applied to ensure comparability and eliminate scale effects. This transformation allows the conversion of all variables into a standardized range between 0 and 1, facilitating comparative analysis of temporal dynamics (Table 3).

The study employs a descriptive statistical and trend analysis approach to examine the long-term evolution of HCVA and tourism indicators. The analysis focuses on structural changes, growth patterns, and the responsiveness of human capital to tourism expansion. Special attention is given to identifying periods of economic shocks and recovery phases, particularly the post-2006 growth period and the COVID-19 shock in 2020. The empirical analysis is based on a longitudinal time-series dataset covering 32 years. The study does not apply a classical econometric regression model due to structural breaks and high volatility in HCVA, instead relying on normalized comparative analysis to evaluate long-term relationships between variables.

## 3 Materials

For calculating a country's Human Capital Value Added, the study applied the formula developed by the PWC Saratoga Institute, which measures the contribution of an organization's workforce to its profitability (Friman & Friman, 2018).

**Table 1** Human Capital Value Added Calculations for Kazakhstan (1993-2024)

| **Indicators/ Years** | **1994** | **1999** | **2004** | **2009** | **2014** | **2019** | **2024** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| GDP, mln tenge | 423 468,8 | 2 016 456,3 | 5 870 134,3 | 17 007 647,0 | 39 675 832,9 | 69 532 626,5 | 136 693 318,3 |
| IC, mln tenge | 498 577,6 | 2 211 672,7 | 6 042 495,0 | 13 981 759,0 | 25 208 557,4 | 46 992 498,2 | 77 857 582,4 |
| AW, tenge | 1 726 | 11 864 | 28 389 | 67 333 | 121 021 | 186 815 | 405 416 |
| EMP, thousand persons | 6 581,8 | 6 105,4 | 7 181,8 | 7 903,4 | 8 510,1 | 8 780,8 | 9 197 046 |
| AW·EMP, tenge | 11 360 186 800 | 72 434 465 600 | 203 884 120 200 | 532 159 632 200 | 1 029 900 812 100 | 1 640 385 152 000 | 3 728 629 601 136 |
| IC – AW·EMP, tenge | 487 217 413 200 | 2 139 238 234 400 | 5 838 610 879 800 | 13 449 599 367 800 | 24 178 656 587 900 | 45 352 113 048 000 | 74 128 952 798 864 |
| HCVA, tenge | - 63 748 613 200 | -122 781 934 400 | 31 523 420 200 | 3 558 047 632 200 | 15 497 176 312 100 | 24 180 513 452 000 | 62 564 365 501 136 |
| Exchange rate (tenge per USD) | 35,64 | 119,52 | 136,04 | 147,50 | 179,19 | 382,75 | 469,44 |
| HCVA, billion USD | -1,8 (-1 788 681 627,4) | -1,02 (-1 027 291 954, 484605) | 0,2 (231 721 700,9703 029) | 24,1 (24 122 356 828, 47458) | 86,4 (86 484 604 677, 15832) | 63,1 63 175 737 301,1 1039 | 133,2 (133 274 466 387, 9005) |
| Notes: Compiled and calculated by the authors for the period 1993-2024; the table shows the results with an interval of five years. | | | | | | | |

Sources: Bureau of National Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan; United Nations Statistics Division

Figure 2 shows the changes in Human Capital Value Added (HCVA) in Kazakhstan's economy from 1993 to 2024. During the period 1993–2005, HCVA remained relatively low, including negative values in the early years (1993–1995). Starting from 2006, a gradual upward trend is observed, with HCVA reaching its highest level in 2013, followed by a downward movement until 2017. From 2017, the indicator began to recover and increased up to 2020, after which a decline occurred in 2021. Subsequently, HCVA demonstrated a steady growth trajectory again through to 2024.

## 4 Results and discussions

In order to examine the relationship between human capital value added and tourism development in Kazakhstan, a longitudinal dataset covering the period 1993–2024 was constructed. The dataset integrates macroeconomic indicators of human capital performance with key tourism development variables, including international tourist arrivals, tourism receipts, and employment in the services sector.

The selected indicators capture both the demand-side dynamics of tourism activity and the supply-side capacity of the economy in terms of human capital utilization. Human Capital Value Added (HCVA) is used as the dependent variable, reflecting the efficiency and productivity of human resources in generating economic value over time. Given the differences in measurement units and scale across variables, a normalization procedure was applied to ensure comparability. This transformation allows for a standardized assessment of relative changes over time and enables meaningful interpretation of trends across heterogeneous indicators.

Table 2 presents the original dataset used in the empirical analysis, while Table 3 reports the normalized values based on the min–max transformation method

**Table 2** The original dataset used in the empirical analysis

| Year | HCVA | Arrivals | Receipts (USD) | Employment (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1993 | -504892343 | 100000 | 50000000 | 1,8 |
| 1994 | -1788681627 | 120000 | 60000000 | 1,9 |
| 1995 | -1757936358 | 150000 | 80000000 | 2,0 |
| 1996 | 1172410028 | 200000 | 150000000 | 2,1 |
| 1997 | 192885927 | 250000 | 180000000 | 2,2 |
| 1998 | 1907077277 | 300000 | 200000000 | 2,3 |
| 1999 | -1027291954 | 350000 | 220000000 | 2,4 |
| 2000 | -2123515275 | 400000 | 250000000 | 2,5 |
| 2001 | -3599954774 | 450000 | 280000000 | 2,6 |
| 2002 | -451707498 | 500000 | 300000000 | 2,7 |
| 2003 | 1423271865 | 600000 | 350000000 | 2,8 |
| 2004 | 231721701 | 700000 | 400000000 | 2,9 |
| 2005 | -418102732 | 800000 | 450000000 | 3,0 |
| 2006 | 2645625862 | 1000000 | 600000000 | 3,2 |
| 2007 | 12716405523 | 1200000 | 800000000 | 3,4 |
| 2008 | 20071223990 | 1500000 | 1100000000 | 3,6 |
| 2009 | 24122356828 | 1800000 | 1300000000 | 3,7 |
| 2010 | 45718267908 | 2100000 | 1600000000 | 3,9 |
| 2011 | 63329662016 | 2500000 | 1900000000 | 4,1 |
| 2012 | 72072582438 | 3000000 | 2200000000 | 4,3 |
| 2013 | 89858329420 | 3500000 | 2500000000 | 4,6 |
| 2014 | 86484604677 | 4000000 | 2700000000 | 4,8 |
| 2015 | 75644796371 | 4500000 | 2800000000 | 4,9 |
| 2016 | 52021511466 | 5000000 | 2850000000 | 5,0 |
| 2017 | 35124936995 | 6000000 | 2900000000 | 5,1 |
| 2018 | 52760601187 | 7000000 | 3000000000 | 5,3 |
| 2019 | 63175737301 | 8500000 | 3100000000 | 5,5 |
| 2020 | 71781991079 | 2030000 | 590000000 | 5,0 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2021 | 56709607920 | 3500000 | 1200000000 | 5,2 |
| 2022 | 69459767012 | 5000000 | 1800000000 | 5,4 |
| 2023 | 109404522880 | 7500000 | 2600000000 | 5,7 |
| 2024 | 133274466388 | 9000000 | 3200000000 | 5,9 |

Source: compiled by the authors based on calculations

The borders (min / max)
HCVA
min = -451707498 (2002)
max = 133274466388 (2024)
Arrivals
min = 100000 (1993)
max = 9000000 (2024)
Receipts
min = 50000000 (1993)
max = 3200000000 (2024)
Employment
min = 1.8
max = 5.9

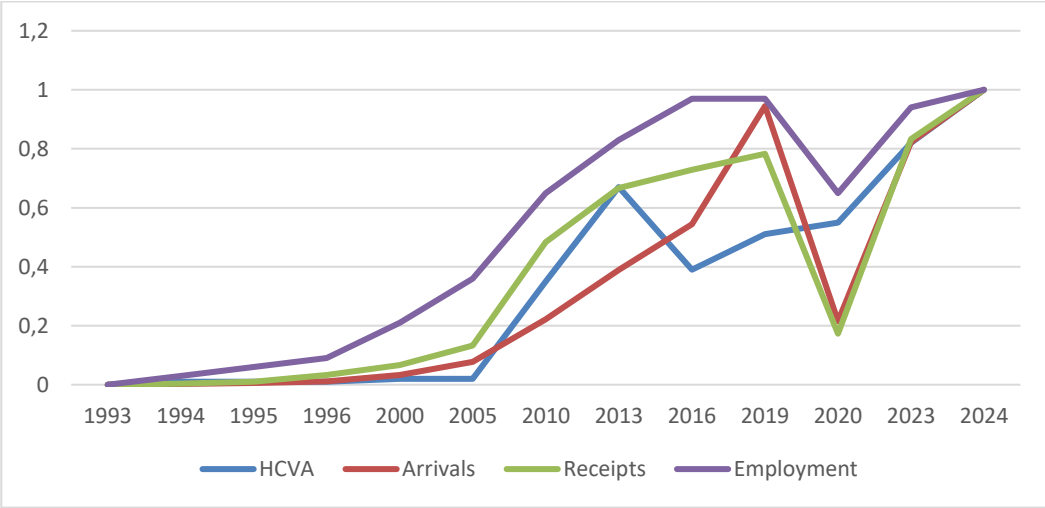
**Table 3** Indexing results

| Year | HCVA | Arrivals | Receipts | Employment |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1993 | 0,00 | 0,00 | 0,00 | 0,00 |
| 1994 | 0,01 | 0,0022 | 0,0033 | 0,03 |
| 1995 | 0,01 | 0,0056 | 0,0100 | 0,06 |
| 1996 | 0,01 | 0,0111 | 0,0333 | 0,09 |
| 2000 | 0,02 | 0,0333 | 0,0667 | 0,21 |
| 2005 | 0,02 | 0,0777 | 0,1333 | 0,36 |
| 2010 | 0,35 | 0,2222 | 0,4833 | 0,65 |
| 2013 | 0,67 | 0,3888 | 0,6667 | 0,83 |
| 2016 | 0,39 | 0,5444 | 0,7292 | 0,97 |
| 2019 | 0,51 | 0,9444 | 0,7833 | 0,97 |
| 2020 | 0,55 | 0,2155 | 0,1729 | 0,65 |
| 2023 | 0,82 | 0,8222 | 0,8333 | 0,94 |
| 2024 | 1,00 | 1,00 | 1,00 | 1,00 |

Source: compiled by the authors based on calculations

To compare the indexing results, we will build the following work schedule (Figure 1).

**Fig. 1:** Compare the indexing results




Source: compiled by the authors based on calculations

## Key Empirical Findings

Tourism demonstrates stable long-term growth:

- international tourist arrivals increased approximately 90 times over the period 1993–2024,
- tourism receipts grew more than 60 times during the same period,
- overall tourism indicators demonstrate a strong and sustained upward trend in Kazakhstan's inbound tourism sector.

Human Capital Value Added (HCVA) exhibits a non-linear pattern:

- HCVA, calculated at the economy-wide level, shows significant structural fluctuations over time,
- substantial increases are observed after 2006, reflecting changes in overall economic conditions and labor productivity,
- pronounced declines occur during periods of economic crisis, indicating the indicator's sensitivity to macroeconomic shocks.

Employment in the services sector grows at a moderate pace:

- employment increases more gradually than tourism indicators,
- this pattern suggests that changes in employment have followed a different trajectory from the rapid expansion of tourism,
- the observed differences may reflect broader structural characteristics of the national economy.

The normalized time-series comparison reveals differences in the dynamics of tourism indicators, Human Capital Value Added (HCVA), and employment in the

services sector. While tourism arrivals and tourism receipts exhibit sustained long-term growth, HCVA demonstrates considerable volatility and several structural shifts, whereas employment in services follows a more gradual upward trend. Since HCVA is measured for the economy as a whole rather than for the tourism sector, these descriptive results should not be interpreted as evidence of a direct relationship or causal effect between tourism development and human capital value added. The graphical comparison is intended to illustrate differences in temporal dynamics and provides a basis for further investigation using statistical methods.

## Conclusion

The study analyzed the role of Human Capital Value Added in the sustainable development of tourism destinations in Kazakhstan over the period 1993–2024. The findings demonstrate a significant structural divergence between the dynamics of tourism growth and the evolution of human capital value creation.

The results indicate that international tourist arrivals and tourism receipts have experienced strong and consistent exponential growth over the analyzed period. In contrast, HCVA shows a highly volatile trajectory characterized by sharp fluctuations, structural breaks, and sensitivity to macroeconomic conditions.

The analysis reveals that growth in tourism activity does not automatically translate into proportional increases in human capital value added. This suggests a lagged transmission mechanism, where improvements in tourism demand require time to affect human capital accumulation and productivity.

Employment in the services sector demonstrates steady but relatively moderate growth, indicating a gradual transformation of the labor market. However, the pace of this transformation remains insufficient to fully capture the rapid expansion of tourism flows in the country.

The COVID-19 pandemic period (2020–2021) highlighted the vulnerability of tourism-dependent indicators, particularly arrivals and receipts, while HCVA exhibited more resilience, reflecting its macroeconomic inertia.

Practical implications and recommendations. Based on the empirical findings, the following recommendations can be proposed:

Strengthening human capital development in tourism. Policymakers should prioritize investment in professional education, vocational training, and digital skills development for employees in the tourism and hospitality sector.

Enhancing productivity in the tourism workforce. The growth of tourism should be accompanied by measures aimed at improving labor productivity, including technology adoption, service quality standards, and managerial efficiency.

Developing resilience-oriented tourism policies. Given the volatility of tourism indicators, Kazakhstan should implement resilience strategies that ensure stability of human capital during external shocks such as pandemics or economic crises.

Bridging the gap between tourism growth and value creation. The study highlights a mismatch between tourism expansion and human capital value added. Policy

interventions should focus on improving the transformation of tourism inflows into sustainable economic value.

Promoting integrated tourism development strategy. A coordinated approach linking tourism development, labor market policy, and human capital investment is essential for achieving long-term sustainability of tourism destinations.

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# Regional Disparities in Cultural Attendance and Cultural Infrastructure in the Czech Republic[1]

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***Abstract***

*This paper examines regional differences in the availability of cultural facilities and cultural attendance in the Czech Republic using official statistical data for 2023. The aim is to assess regional differences in average attendance per cultural facility and to examine the association between the number of cultural facilities and total attendance. The study applies descriptive statistics, average attendance per cultural facility, the Attendance Concentration Quotient (ACQ), Pearson correlation analysis, and a log-linear regression model. The results reveal considerable regional variation, with Prague displaying markedly higher attendance than the other regions and substantially influencing the descriptive characteristics of the complete dataset. After excluding Prague, variability in average attendance per cultural facility decreased considerably. The ACQ results further demonstrate differences in the balance between regions' shares of total attendance and their shares of cultural facilities. The regression model estimated for the remaining 13 regions identified a statistically significant positive association between the number of cultural facilities and total attendance ($\beta=0.893$, $p=0.011$), explaining approximately 45.7% of the cross-sectional variation in logarithmically transformed attendance ($R^2=0.457$). The findings indicate that although the number of cultural facilities is positively associated with attendance, regional differences in cultural attendance cannot be explained by the availability of cultural facilities alone.*

***Key words***

*cultural attendance; cultural infrastructure; location quotient; regional disparities; Czech Republic*

**JEL Classification: Z32**

## Introduction

Cultural infrastructure represents an important component of the public sector and regional socio-economic systems. Museums, galleries, and accessible historical sites fulfil not only cultural and educational functions, but also contribute to regional attractiveness, tourism development, and the formation of local identity (OECD, 2022; European Commission, 2023). From the perspective of regional policy, it is therefore

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important to monitor not only the extent of this infrastructure but also the level of its utilisation.

Attendance at cultural institutions represents a measurable indicator of public interest in cultural services and, at the same time, an indicator of the performance of the cultural sector (Zhang et al., 2022). Research on cultural participation suggests, however, that attendance levels are not determined solely by the number of institutions, but rather result from a combination of supply-side and demand-side factors. Significant determinants include the degree of urbanisation, accessibility, income level, educational attainment, and the intensity of tourism flows (Falk & Katz-Gerro, 2016). Consequently, regions with a similar number of cultural institutions may achieve substantially different levels of attendance.

The Czech Republic belongs among countries with a relatively developed network of cultural institutions. According to official cultural statistics published by the National Information and Consulting Centre for Culture (NIPOS), in 2023 there were 477 museums and galleries and 361 publicly accessible historical monuments in the Czech Republic, recording approximately 12.8 million and 13.9 million visits, respectively (NIPOS, 2024a, 2024b). These figures indicate the substantial scale of both cultural infrastructure and demand for cultural services. The strategic importance of cultural infrastructure is also reflected in the State Cultural Policy of the Czech Republic, which identifies equal access to cultural services, the protection of cultural heritage, and support for regional cultural development among the main priorities of national cultural policy (Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic, 2021).

Cultural infrastructure is increasingly recognised as a strategic resource for regional development, tourism competitiveness, and the sustainable management of cultural heritage (Richards, 2018; Geçikli et al., 2024). Cultural attractions, including museums, galleries, and heritage sites, enhance the attractiveness of destinations, strengthen local identity, and generate economic benefits through tourism-related activities (Richards, 2018). According to OECD/ICOM (2019), cultural institutions contribute to local development not only by preserving cultural heritage but also by supporting community engagement, creative industries, and sustainable tourism. Likewise, the Cultural and Creative Cities Monitor highlights that cities with stronger cultural assets and infrastructure generally demonstrate higher levels of attractiveness, innovation, and socio-economic performance (Alberti et al., 2023).

However, the spatial distribution of cultural institutions is not uniform. Metropolitan regions generally concentrate a higher number of institutions as well as visitors, which is related to historical centralisation, administrative concentration, and the intensity of tourism flows (OECD, 2022). Regional analyses frequently employ the location quotient (LQ) to identify concentration patterns, as it enables comparison between the regional structure and the national average. Contemporary methodological approaches point out that concentration alone does not reflect the efficiency of capacity utilisation or overall regional performance (Pominova et al., 2021). It is therefore appropriate to combine concentration indicators with measures reflecting the utilisation of cultural infrastructure.

The cultural sector has also been significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in the temporary closure of cultural institutions and a substantial decline

in visitor attendance (OECD, 2020; OECD, 2022; Škare et al., 2021; UNESCO, 2022). The pandemic also exposed structural vulnerabilities in the cultural and creative sectors, affecting the economic sustainability of cultural institutions and creative professionals (Comunian & England, 2020). Although visitor numbers have gradually recovered, regional differences in the utilisation of cultural infrastructure remain evident. Existing studies primarily focus on the role of cultural heritage in tourism development or on cultural participation at the national or international level, while less attention has been devoted to comparing the level of cultural infrastructure utilisation across regions within the Czech Republic. This research gap justifies a regional analysis combining measures of infrastructure concentration, utilisation efficiency, and the relationship between infrastructure capacity and attendance.

The aim of this paper is to assess regional disparities in cultural infrastructure and cultural attendance in the Czech Republic using official regional statistical data for 2023. Furthermore, the paper evaluates the level of cultural infrastructure utilisation across regions and examines the relationship between the number of cultural facilities and attendance.

## 1 Methodology

The paper is based on official regional cultural statistics published by the National Information and Consulting Centre for Culture (NIPOS). The analysis uses data for 2023 covering museums, galleries, and publicly accessible historical monuments across all 14 NUTS 3 regions of the Czech Republic. The analysis uses data for the year 2023, which represented the most recent complete and closed reporting period available at the time of processing. The analysis was conducted at the NUTS 3 regional level, covering all 14 administrative regions of the Czech Republic.

The database included the following variables:

- number of museums,
- number of galleries,
- number of accessible castles and châteaux,
- total attendance at selected cultural attractions.

A new indicator representing the number of cultural facilities was subsequently constructed by summing the number of museums, galleries, and accessible castles and châteaux.

The variable "number of cultural facilities" represents the total number of monitored cultural facilities (museums, galleries, castles, and châteaux) within a given region. It serves as an indicator of the scale of cultural infrastructure. Attendance represents the total number of visitors to the monitored cultural facilities during the observed period and is expressed in thousands of visitors.

In the first step, an indicator expressing the average attendance per cultural facility was constructed. It was calculated as the ratio of total attendance to the total number of cultural facilities in each region:

$$E_i = \frac{A_i}{F_i}$$

(1)

**where:**

$E_i$ – average attendance per cultural facility in region $i$, expressed in thousands of visitors per facility,

$A_i$ – total attendance at the monitored cultural facilities in region $i$, expressed in thousands of visitors,

$F_i$ – total number of monitored cultural facilities in region $i$.

The indicator standardises total attendance by the number of cultural facilities and thus enables comparison of average attendance per facility across regions. Accordingly, the resulting values are interpreted as thousands of visitors per cultural facility.

Subsequently, the mean attendance per cultural facility was calculated as:

$$\bar{E} = \frac{1}{n}\sum_{i=1}^{n} E_i$$

**where:**

$\bar{E}$ – mean attendance per cultural facility across the analysed regions,

$E_i$ – average attendance per cultural facility in region,

$n$ – number of regions included in the calculation.

(2)

The standard deviation was calculated as follows:

$$\sigma = \sqrt{\frac{\sum_{i=1}^{n}(E_i - \bar{E})^2}{n}} \qquad (3)$$

**where:**

$\sigma$ – population standard deviation of average attendance per cultural facility,

$E_i$ – average attendance per cultural facility in region $i$, expressed in thousands of visitors per facility,

$E^-$ – mean attendance per cultural facility across the analysed regions,

$n$ – number of regions included in the calculation.

The standard deviation measures the dispersion of average attendance per cultural facility across regions. A higher standard deviation indicates greater variability in average attendance per facility among the analysed regions. Together, the mean and standard deviation provide a descriptive assessment of regional differences in this indicator.

To assess the relative variability of average attendance per cultural facility, the coefficient of variation (CV) was calculated as follows:

$$CV = \frac{\sigma}{\bar{E}} \quad (4)$$

**where:**

$CV$ – coefficient of variation,

$\sigma$ – population standard deviation of average attendance per cultural facility,

$E^{-}$ – mean attendance per cultural facility across the analysed region.

The coefficient of variation expresses the standard deviation relative to the mean and enables the degree of variability to be compared independently of the absolute level of the indicator.

Prior to the regression analysis, the distribution of the variables and their graphical relationship were examined to identify observations with a potentially disproportionate influence on the model. Prague exhibited substantially higher attendance than the other regions and was therefore excluded from the regression analysis. The regression model was consequently estimated using the remaining 13 regions.

To compare the relative concentration of cultural attendance with the distribution of cultural facilities across regions, an Attendance Concentration Quotient (ACQ) was calculated. The indicator compares each region's share of total attendance with its share of the total number of monitored cultural facilities.

The ACQ was calculated as follows:

$$ACQ_i = \frac{\frac{A_i}{\sum_{j=1}^{n} A_j}}{\frac{F_i}{\sum_{j=1}^{n} F_j}} \quad (5)$$

**where:**

$ACQ_i$ – attendance concentration quotient for region $i$,
$A_i$– total attendance at the monitored cultural facilities in region $i$,
$F_i$– total number of monitored cultural facilities in region $i$,
$\sum_{j=1}^{n} A_j$– total attendance at the monitored cultural facilities across all analysed regions,
$\sum_{j=1}^{n} F_j$ – total number of monitored cultural facilities across all analysed regions,
n – number of regions included in the calculation.

An value greater than 1 indicates that the region's share of total attendance exceeds its share of the total number of cultural facilities. Conversely, an value below 1

indicates that the region's share of total attendance is lower than its share of cultural facilities, while a value equal to 1 indicates proportionality between the two shares.

To evaluate the relationship between the number of cultural facilities and total attendance, a log-linear regression model was applied:

$$ln(A_i) = \alpha + \beta\, ln(F_i) + \varepsilon_i \qquad (6)$$

**where:**

$A_i$ – total attendance at the monitored cultural facilities in region $i$,

$F_i$ – total number of monitored cultural facilities in region $i$,

$\alpha$ – regression constant (intercept),

$\beta$ – regression coefficient,

$\varepsilon_i$ – error term for region $i$.

The logarithmic transformation allows the regression coefficient to be interpreted as an elasticity, representing the percentage change in total attendance associated with a 1% change in the number of cultural facilities.

Linear relationships between variables were assessed using Pearson's correlation coefficient:

$$r_{xy} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{n}(x_i-\bar{x})(y_i-\bar{y})}{\sqrt{\sum_{i=1}^{n}(x_i-\bar{x})^2 \sum_{i=1}^{n}(y_i-\bar{y})^2}} \qquad (7)$$

**where:**
$r_{xy}$ – Pearson correlation coefficient between variables $x$ and $y$
$x_i$ and $y_i$ – individual observations of variables $x$ and $y$ for region $i$,
$\bar{x}, \bar{y}$ – arithmetic means of variables $x$ and $y$,
$n$ – number of observations included in the calculation.

The coefficient takes values from −1 to +1 and expresses both the direction and the strength of the linear relationship between variables.

All statistical calculations were performed using Microsoft Excel.

The regression analysis should be interpreted with caution due to several methodological limitations. First, the model is estimated using a relatively small sample of 13 observations after excluding Prague because of its markedly higher attendance compared with the other regions. Second, the model includes only one explanatory variable, namely the number of cultural facilities. Although previous studies identify

additional determinants of cultural attendance, such as income level, urbanisation, accessibility, educational attainment, and tourism intensity (Falk & Katz-Gerro, 2016), these variables were not included because comparable regional data were not consistently available for the analysed period. Consequently, the regression results should be interpreted as indicating the association between the number of cultural facilities and attendance rather than as a comprehensive explanation of regional differences in cultural participation.

## 2 Results and Discussion

The descriptive analysis revealed considerable regional differences in average attendance per cultural facility. The indicator, calculated as the ratio of total attendance to the number of monitored cultural facilities, enables comparison of average attendance per facility across regions. When all 14 regions were included, the mean average attendance per cultural facility reached 29.51 thousand visitors per facility. The population standard deviation was 31.26 thousand visitors per facility, while the coefficient of variation reached 1.06, indicating substantial relative variability among the analysed regions.

A more detailed comparison showed that the overall variability was strongly influenced by Prague. The capital recorded the highest average attendance per cultural facility, reaching 139.10 thousand visitors per facility, substantially exceeding the values observed in the other regions. After excluding Prague, the mean average attendance per cultural facility decreased to 21.08 thousand visitors per facility and the population standard deviation declined to 7.58 thousand visitors per facility. The coefficient of variation decreased to 0.360, indicating substantially lower relative variability among the remaining 13 regions. These results demonstrate the marked influence of Prague on the descriptive characteristics of the complete regional dataset.

The basic descriptive characteristics are presented in Table 1.

**Tab. 1** Basic descriptive characteristics

| Indicator | All regions (n = 14) | Excluding Prague (n = 13) |
|---|---|---|
| Mean average attendance per cultural facility (thousand visitors per facility) | 29.51 | 21.08 |
| Population standard deviation (thousand visitors per facility) | 31.26 | 7.58 |
| Coefficient of variation | 1.06 | 0.360 |

**Source:** Authors' own processing.

**Note:** Average attendance per cultural facility was calculated as total attendance (in thousands of visitors) divided by the total number of monitored cultural facilities. The coefficient of variation is dimensionless.

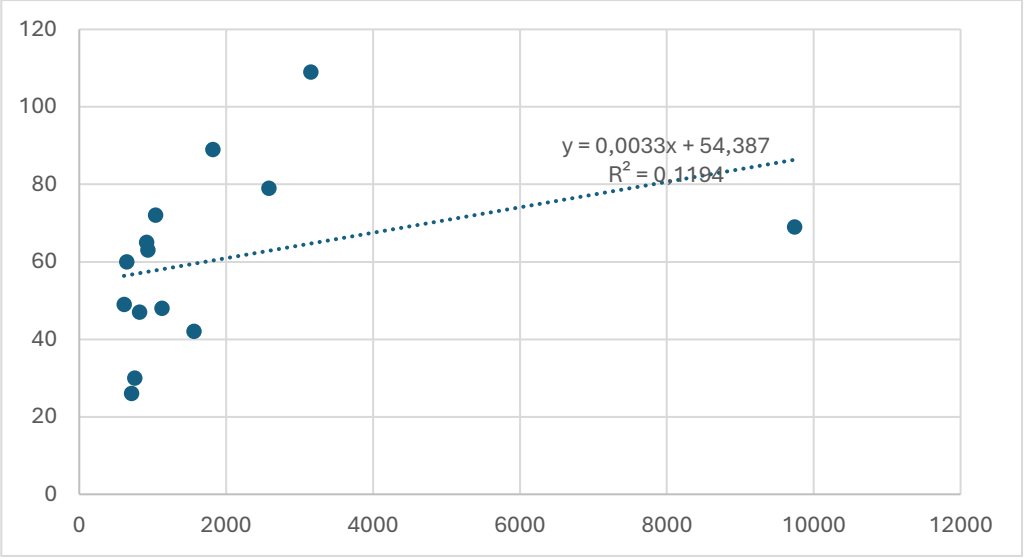
The graphical representation of the relationship between total attendance and the number of cultural facilities provides an additional perspective on the structure of the

dataset. Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of the regions according to these two variables.

Figure 1 shows that Prague is positioned distinctly from the main cluster of regional observations, primarily because of its substantially higher attendance. The remaining regions form a comparatively more compact group, within which a positive relationship between the number of cultural facilities and total attendance can be observed. Prague therefore represents an influential observation in the relationship between the two variables.

Given its markedly different position relative to the remaining observations, Prague was excluded from the subsequent regression analysis in order to examine the relationship between the number of cultural facilities and attendance among the remaining 13 regions.

**Fig. 1** Relationship between total attendance and the number of cultural facilities across Czech regions




**Source:** Authors' own processing.
**Note**: The figure includes all 14 regions; Prague is visually distinguishable from the main cluster of regional observations.

After excluding Prague, the remaining 13 regions were classified according to their average attendance per cultural facility. The mean value of 21.08 thousand visitors per facility was used as the classification threshold. Regions with values above this threshold were classified as above-average, whereas regions with values below the threshold were classified as below-average in terms of average attendance per cultural facility.

Above-average values were recorded in the Zlín, South Moravian, Central Bohemian, Karlovy Vary, Olomouc, and Moravian-Silesian regions. In contrast, the South Bohemian, Pardubice, Plzeň, Hradec Králové, Ústí nad Labem, Liberec, and Vysočina regions recorded values below the mean of the 13-region dataset.

The classification of regions is presented in Table 2.

**Tab. 2** Classification of Czech regions according to average attendance per cultural facility

| Region | Average attendance per cultural facility (thousand visitors per facility) | Classification |
|---|---|---|
| Zlín Region | 36.12 | Above average |
| South Moravian Region | 31.83 | Above average |
| Central Bohemian Region | 27.86 | Above average |
| Karlovy Vary Region | 22.71 | Above average |
| Olomouc Region | 25.14 | Above average |
| Moravian-Silesian Region | 21.66 | Above average |
| South Bohemian Region | 20.39 | Below average |
| Pardubice Region | 17.07 | Below average |
| Plzeň Region | 14.51 | Below average |
| Hradec Králové Region | 12.78 | Below average |
| Ústí nad Labem Region | 13.13 | Below average |
| Liberec Region | 18.21 | Below average |
| Vysočina Region | 9.51 | Below average |

**Source:** Authors' own processing based on official statistical data.
**Note:** The classification threshold corresponds to the mean average attendance per cultural facility calculated for the 13 regions after excluding Prague (21.08 thousand visitors per facility).

In addition to average attendance per cultural facility, the Attendance Concentration Quotient (ACQ) was used to compare each region's share of total attendance with its share of the total number of monitored cultural facilities. An ACQ value greater than 1 indicates that a region accounts for a larger share of total attendance than its corresponding share of cultural facilities, whereas a value below 1 indicates that its share of attendance is lower than its share of cultural facilities.

The highest ACQ value was recorded in Prague (ACQ = 4.49), indicating that its share of total attendance was approximately 4.54 times its share of the total number of monitored cultural facilities. Among the remaining regions, the Zlín Region (ACQ = 1.17) and the South Moravian Region (ACQ = 1.03) also recorded values above 1. In these regions, the share of total attendance therefore exceeded the corresponding share of cultural facilities. The remaining regions recorded ACQ values below 1, indicating that

their shares of total attendance were lower than their respective shares of the total number of cultural facilities.

The ACQ values provide a relative measure of the balance between each region's contribution to total cultural attendance and its share of the monitored cultural facilities. Regions with ACQ values above 1 are characterised by a proportionally higher share of attendance relative to their share of facilities. Table 3 presents the regions with ACQ values above 1.

**Tab. 3** Attendance Concentration Quotient (ACQ) in regions with values above 1

| Region | ACQ | Average attendance per cultural facility (thousand visitors per facility) |
|---|---|---|
| Prague | 4.49 | 139.10 |
| Zlín Region | 1.17 | 36.12 |
| South Moravian Region | 1.03 | 31.83 |

**Source:** Authors' own processing.
**Note**: Only regions with ACQ values above 1 are presented. Prague was retained in the ACQ calculation and in this table but was excluded from the 13-region classification in Table 2 and from the subsequent regression analysis.

To assess the linear relationships among the analysed variables, Pearson's correlation coefficients were calculated. The resulting correlation matrix is presented in Table 4.

A strong positive correlation was identified between the number of museums and galleries and the number of accessible castles and châteaux ($r = 0.77$), indicating that regions with more museums and galleries tended to also have more accessible castles and châteaux. These coefficients indicate positive cross-sectional associations among the different types of cultural facilities across the analysed regions.

As expected, the total number of cultural facilities was strongly positively correlated with the number of museums and galleries ($r = 0.94$) and the number of accessible castles and châteaux ($r = 0.94$), because this variable was constructed as the sum of these two components. These correlations therefore primarily reflect the mathematical construction of the aggregate variable and should not be interpreted as independent empirical relationships.

Correlations involving average attendance per cultural facility should also be interpreted with caution because this indicator is mathematically derived by dividing total attendance by the number of cultural facilities. Its correlations with facility-related variables may therefore partly reflect this mathematical relationship. Accordingly, the correlation analysis is used primarily as a descriptive assessment of cross-sectional associations and should not be interpreted as evidence of causal relationships.

The correlation matrix was calculated for the 13 regions excluding Prague to maintain consistency with the subsequent regression analysis and to limit the influence of Prague's markedly higher attendance on the estimated relationships.

**Tab. 4** Correlation matrix (n = 13)

| | Number of museums and galeries | Number of accessible castles and châteaux | Number of cultural facilities | Average attendance per cultural facility (thousand visitors per facility) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Number of museums and galleries | **1** | | | |
| Number of accessible castles and châteaux | 0.768076 | **1** | | |
| Number of cultural facilities | 0.943677 | 0.936690 | **1** | |
| Average attendance per cultural facility (thousand visitors per facility) | 0.009481 | 0.061676 | 0.037052 | **1** |

**Source:** Authors' own processing.
**Note:** Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated for the 13 regions after excluding Prague. Average attendance per cultural facility is expressed in thousands of visitors per facility.

After assessing the mutual relationships between the variables, the association between the number of cultural facilities and total attendance was examined using a log-linear regression model. Due to the markedly higher attendance recorded in Prague, the model was estimated using the remaining 13 regions.

The regression analysis identified a statistically significant positive association between the number of cultural facilities and total attendance. The estimated elasticity was 0.89 ($\beta$=0.893, p=0.011), indicating that a 1% increase in the number of cultural facilities was associated with an approximately 0.89% increase in total attendance. The coefficient of determination ($R^2$=0.457) indicates that approximately 45.7 % of the cross-sectional variation in logarithmically transformed attendance was explained by the number of cultural facilities.

| Regression Statistics | |
|---|---|
| Multiple R | 0.675663 |
| R Square | 0.456520 |
| Adjusted R Square | 0.407113 |
| Standard Error | 0.406749 |
| Observations | 13 |

**ANOVA**

| | df | SS | MS | F | Significance F |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Regression** | 1 | 1.528700 | 1.528700 | 9.239929 | 0.011252 |
| **Residual** | 11 | 1.819895 | 0.165445 | | |
| **Total** | 12 | 3.348594 | | | |

| | Coefficients | Standard Error | t Stat | P-value |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Intercept** | 3.408631500 | 1.186388700 | 2.873115270 | 0.015156820 |
| **ln(Number of cultural facilities)** | 0.893440620 | 0.293921510 | 3.039725170 | 0.011252119 |

**Source:** Authors' own processing.
**Note:** Dependent variable = ln(Total attendance). The model was estimated using 13 regions after excluding Prague.

The regression results indicate a statistically significant positive cross-sectional association between the number of cultural facilities and total attendance. The estimated elasticity was 0.893 (β=0.893, p=0.011), indicating that a 1% increase in the number of cultural facilities was associated with an approximately 0.89% increase in total attendance. The coefficient of determination ($R^2$=0.457) indicates that approximately 45.7% of the cross-sectional variation in logarithmically transformed attendance was explained by the number of cultural facilities. Although the association is statistically significant, a substantial proportion of the variation in attendance remains unexplained by the model, indicating the potential relevance of additional regional and demand-related factors.

The positive association between the number of cultural facilities and attendance is broadly consistent with previous research emphasising the importance of cultural resources for cultural tourism development. Richards (2018) argues that contemporary cultural tourism depends not only on the availability of cultural resources but also on destination attractiveness, visitor experiences, and the ways in which cultural resources

are developed and consumed. Similarly, OECD/ICOM (2019) emphasise that the contribution of cultural institutions to local development depends on their integration into wider development strategies, accessibility, audience engagement, and effective management.

The results should therefore not be interpreted as implying that increasing the number of cultural facilities alone will necessarily generate a corresponding increase in attendance. Previous research demonstrates that cultural participation is associated with a broader set of socio-economic and contextual determinants. Falk and Katz-Gerro (2016), for example, identify income, education and other individual and contextual characteristics as relevant determinants of cultural participation. From a regional tourism perspective, this suggests that differences in attendance may reflect not only the availability of cultural facilities but also accessibility, destination attractiveness, tourism intensity, visitor profiles, and other characteristics not incorporated into the present model.

This interpretation is also relevant in the context of the post-pandemic development of cultural and heritage organisations. Volanakis et al. (2024) highlight continuing organisational and managerial challenges affecting cultural organisations, reinforcing the argument that the performance of cultural facilities cannot be understood solely through their numerical availability. Taken together, the results indicate that the number of cultural facilities represents one statistically significant correlate of regional attendance, but does not provide a comprehensive explanation of regional differences in cultural participation.

## Conclusion

This study examined regional differences in the availability of cultural facilities and attendance at cultural institutions across the Czech Republic using official statistical data for 2023. The results revealed considerable regional variation in average attendance per cultural facility. Prague displayed a markedly different pattern from the other regions, particularly in terms of attendance, and substantially influenced the descriptive characteristics of the complete 14-region dataset.

The analysis of average attendance per cultural facility showed that regional differences cannot be understood solely in terms of the number of available cultural facilities. After excluding Prague, the remaining 13 regions continued to exhibit differences in average attendance per facility, with the Zlín and South Moravian regions recording the highest values. The Attendance Concentration Quotient (ACQ) further demonstrated differences in the balance between each region's share of total attendance and its share of the total number of monitored cultural facilities. Prague recorded the highest ACQ value (4.49), while the Zlín (1.17) and South Moravian (1.03) regions were the only other regions with values above 1.

The log-linear regression model estimated for the 13 regions excluding Prague identified a statistically significant positive association between the number of cultural facilities and total attendance ($\beta=0.893$, $p=0.011$). The estimated elasticity indicates that a 1% increase in the number of cultural facilities was associated with an approximately 0.89% increase in total attendance. However, the model explained approximately 45.7% of the cross-sectional variation in logarithmically transformed

attendance ($R^2$ =0.457), indicating that the number of cultural facilities alone does not provide a comprehensive explanation of regional differences in attendance. Other socio-economic, tourism-related, accessibility, destination-specific, and demand-side factors may therefore contribute to the observed regional variation (Falk & Katz-Gerro, 2016; Richards, 2018).

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the analysis is based on cross-sectional data for a single year and therefore does not capture temporal changes in cultural attendance or the availability of cultural facilities. Second, the regression model is based on only 13 regional observations after excluding Prague because of its markedly higher attendance and includes only the number of cultural facilities as an explanatory variable. Consequently, the results should be interpreted as evidence of a cross-sectional association rather than a causal relationship. Third, potentially relevant determinants of cultural attendance, including socio-economic characteristics, accessibility, tourism intensity, visitor profiles, and destination attractiveness, were not incorporated into the model because comparable regional data were not consistently available for the analysed period.

Future research should extend the analysis by employing longitudinal or panel data covering multiple years and incorporating additional socio-economic, demographic, tourism-related, and accessibility variables. Such an approach would enable a more comprehensive assessment of the determinants of regional cultural attendance and provide greater insight into changes in regional disparities over time. Future studies could also examine differences among individual types of cultural facilities rather than relying solely on their aggregated number.

From a policy perspective, the findings suggest that regional cultural development should not be assessed exclusively through the number of available cultural facilities. Quantitative availability should be considered alongside attendance patterns, accessibility, visitor demand, destination characteristics, and the ability of cultural institutions to attract and engage audiences. Such a multidimensional perspective can provide a more informative basis for the design of regional cultural and tourism policies and for decisions concerning the development and management of cultural facilities.

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