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Assessment of Geo-Environmental and Ethno-Cultural tourism of Jampui Hill, Tripura (India) through perceptual approach

Saptarshi Mitra^A, Jony Hrangkhawl^A, Stabak Roy^A

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Abstract

Infrastructure is an integral part of tourism. The worldwide tourism economy experienced a massive hike post-COVID period with special reference to Geo-tourism. India is rich in culture and natural resources, and the North-eastern part of India is so enriched that it potentially carries diversified tourism in all eight states of this region. But tourism infrastructure is facing a serious issue in this country, especially in Tripura. The present study illustrates the Geo-tourism infrastructure and assesses the tourists' perceptions at Jampui Hill. The socio-economic class of the tourists has been defined using the modified Kuppuswamy scale, and the Index of Satisfaction (IS) has been measured using the five-point Likert Scale method. SCOT and Qualitative analyses were also done to determine the possible and negative transition of the tourism economy at Jampui Hill. The study reveals that tourists are not satisfied with the available tourist infrastructure and describes very few tourist activity areas at Jampui Hill spot. A sustainable tourism approach should be adopted to decrease the negative impact and stimulate the positive development of the tourism economy at Jampui Hill.

Keywords: Kuppuswamy scale, Satisfaction Index, Geospatial technique, SCOT, Socio-Culture, Infrastructure

Introduction

The tourism industry has developed as cantilevers of the most extensive and fastest-growing economic segments globally (Jain and Chawla, 2017; Mitra et al., 2015) and is considered as an intensely geographic phenomenon since it stimulates large-scale, a global movement of the people and forges a distinctive relationship between people and the places they visit. It shapes processes of physical development and resource exploitation, whilst the presence of visitors extends a wide range of economic, social, cultural, and environmental impacts that often have

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important implications for local geographies (Deepa, 2009). Technological advancements have powerfully influenced the development of the tourism sector over time, permanently updating the way touristic experience is professed, beginning with the development of air transport and continuing with the way hotels and restaurants offer new perspectives of tourism experienced by tourists (Firoiu and Croitoru, 2013). The evolution of recreational facilities is significantly correlated with their overall importance for tourism development since contentment with the state of the development differs considering the stage of the development of the destination (Mandić et al., 2018). Ukrainian and foreign scientists preferred the methodological approach of evaluating tourism infrastructures based on custom-made concepts and formulas for summarising the density indicators that determine the accessibility and availability of infrastructures (Kinash et al., 2018). Jovanović & Ilić, 2016 have discussed in their paper that tourism infrastructure mainly comprises these diverse structures: environmental, social, and Transport infrastructure.

The paper also discusses the Geo-environmental and ethnocultural properties that could be utilised as a prospect for tourism at Jampui Hill. The inclination of tourists to consider the purity of nature education and explore natural sites and landscapes containing fascinating earth-science structures has led to the formation of a new multi-interested kind of tourism known as Geo-tourism (Pralong, 2006). On the other hand, cultural tourism is mainly defined as a means to accelerate cultural and economic development in several countries by preserving the heritage and developing a tourism-based economy (Yang and Wall, 2009). Therefore, the definite socio-environmental structures established as an outcome of the interaction between the ethnic groups of a particular region along with their natural and social environments and are always in a continuous process of transformation are termed Ethnocultural landscapes (Dirin and Fryer, 2020). Hence, ethnocultural as well as environmental analysis is an important section in the study of regional uniqueness, taking into consideration the ethnocultural facet of sustainable development of the territory due to the need to ensure the preservation of the cultural and ethnic diversity of a particular region (Slipenchuk et al., 2016).

India is gifted with an unending array of incredible attractions in the form of religion and mysticism, great monuments, wildlife, ethnic life, colourful fairs, and festivals, all of which are unwrapped in a stunning tapestry of nature's grandeur as no other country in the world (George and Swain, 2005). In 2018, India received 1865 million tourists who travelled all over India, but only 0.2 per cent of tourists arrived in Tripura (Debbarma and Singh, 2020). Jampui Hill, the permanent seat of the eternal spring, is situated at an altitude of 3000 meters above sea level and lies at the northernmost hill range of Tripura adjoining Mizoram; it is one of the most popular eco-tourism spots in the state (Debnath, 2014). Due to its pleasant and pleasant climatic conditions and rich cultural heritage, the area has immense potential for generating high revenue from tourism.

There are still very limited works on the interrelation of the Geo environment and ethnocultural resources since both topics cover vast concepts of two different subjects (Pluckhahn, 2004). In the same manner, Ecological and Ethno-culture-based works aren't available about Jampui Hill, due to which the mentioned subjects have been used to articulate the paper.

The paper tries to evaluate the Ethnocultural and Environmental components of tourism at Jampui Hill, Tripura, also accentuating the prevailing challenges faced by the tourists at the spot. The potentiality of developing the tourism-based resources that are available at Jampui Hill was detailly drafted.

Methods and data

The empirical method has been adopted, where primary data and information collected are the main source of the study. Primary data has been collected from the tourists who visited Jampui Hill last year using a scheduled survey. The Modified Kappusawamy Socio-Economic Scale (2020) has been used to measure tourist status modelling (Saleem, 2020) (Table 1 and 2).

Table 1. *Modified Kuppawamy Socio-Economic Class score*

SL №	Occupation	Education	Score	Updated Monthly family income in Rupees (2020)	Score
1	Legislators, Senior Officials & Managers		10		
2	Professionals		9	≥ 199,862	12
3	Technicians and Associate Professionals		8	99,931–199,861	10
4	Clerks	Profession or Honours	7	74,755 –99,930	6
5	Skilled Workers and Shop & Market Sales Workers	Graduate	6	49,962–74,755	4
6	Skilled Agricultural & Fishery Workers	intermediate or diploma	5	29,973– 49,961	3
7	Craft & Related Trade Workers	High school certificate	4	10,002–29,972	2
8	Plant & Machine Operators and Assemblers	Middle school certificate	3	≤ 10,001	1
9	Elementary Occupation	Primary school certificate	2		
10	Unemployed	Illiterate	1		

Source: Field Data

Table 2. *Modified Kuppawamy Socio-Economic Scale*

SL №	Total score obtained	Kuppawamy Socio-Economic class
1	26–29	Upper (I)
2	16–25	Upper Middle (II)
3	11–15	Lower Middle (III)
4	5–10	Upper Lower (IV)
5	< 5	Lower (I)

The socio-economic class of each tourist is calculated using the above-mentioned score. Synthetic indicators and Index of Satisfaction (IS) after Hall et al. (1974) have been done to understand the nature and components of tourism at Jampui Hill. The Index of Satisfaction (IS) has been calculated using Hall et al. (1974). The formula for the Index of Satisfaction is given below:

$$IS = (fs - fd) / N$$

Where

fs = Number of satisfied tourists

fd = Number of dissatisfied tourists
N = Total numbers of tourists

A Likert Scale (five-point) was also used to verify tourist satisfaction. Personal interview of the local entrepreneurs and stakeholders has been taken to understand the viability of tourism development in the future. Challenges of the tourism industry at Jampui Hill have been measured through SCOT analysis (Roy and Mitra, 2021, Roy et al., 2022).

Study area

Tripura is an integral part of Northeast India, which covers 10486 sq. km. total geographical area is divided into eight administrative districts (Mitra and Roy, 2021). The North Tripura district is situated in the North-eastern part of Tripura, covering an area of 1422.19 sq. km. The district headquarters is at Dharmanagar, 105 km from the state capital Agartala. Bangladesh borders the district on two sides of the Northern and Southern periphery. About 70 per cent of the district area is covered with forest, including the Jampui hill range of Tripura. The terrain in the district is mostly undulating and hilly, with small water streams, rivers, and fertile valleys intervening. The major river which flows through the central part of the district is the Deo River (132 km), while the Longairriver (98 km) and Juri river (79 km) flow transbounda-

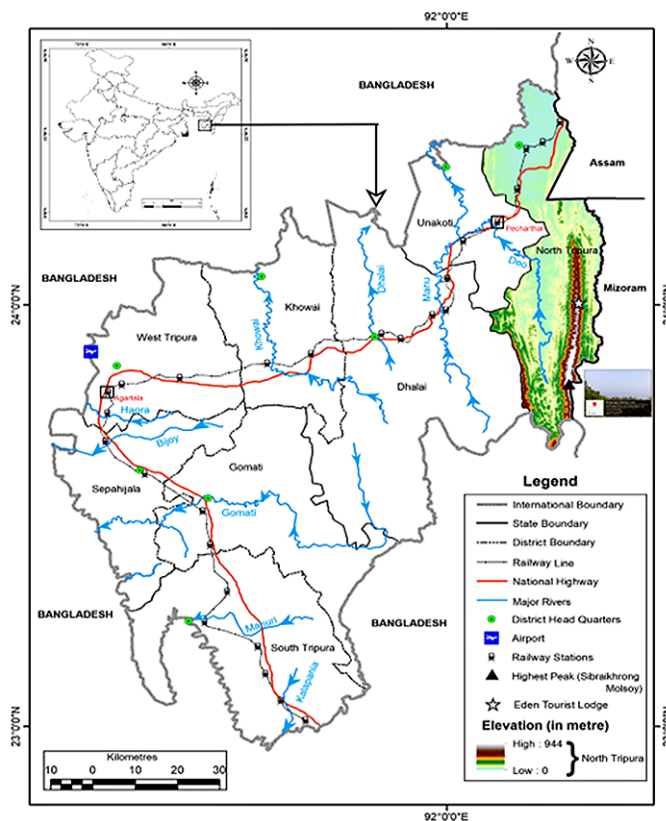


Figure 1. Location Map of the study area

Source: Prepared by the authors, 2011

ry between India and Bangladesh after originating from Jampui Hill, Tripura. Jampui Hill lies in the natural boundary between Tripura and Mizoram at the Vanghmun village, Kanchanpur sub-division of the North Tripura District at the Jampui Hill rural development block. The Eden tourist lodge is the main sojourn area for the tourists of Jampui Hill and is located 27.1 km from Kanchanpur town. The Jampui Hill rural development block comprises seven main villages, namely Kalagang, Kanpui, Longai Valley, Paschim Hmunpui, Sabual, Vanghmun, and Tlangsang. Other villages like Bangla Zion, Behliangchhip, and Phuldungsei also fall within the Jampui hill block. The Eden tourist lodge is situated in the Vanghmun village, and the locational coordinate of the lodge is situated at 24°0'23" North latitudes and 92°16'52" East longitude (Fig.1). The highest peak lies near the village of Phuldungsei. It is called 'Thaidawr Tlang' by the local inhabitants; it is also known by the name 'Sibrai Khrong' because people say there used to be an old Shiv temple at the peak of this hill.

The shortest distance from Agartala to Jampui Hill is 191.3 km. The tourist can plump for more than one option to reach the spot, which is either direct or by break journey. The tourist who takes the direct route from Agartala or maybe from other parts of Tripura travels to Jampui Hill through different routes, mainly through Panisagar, Pecharthal, and Dharmanagar, based on their choices. But the most common path tourists take is through Pecharthal, from where tourists go straight towards Vanghmun via Kanchanpur. Whereas through break journey, tourists have to board the train from the Agartala railway station, which departs the station at 6:30 am and reaches Pecharthal station at around 9 am, after which a shared jeep or other available public transport can be taken to reach Kanchanpur motor stand. The minimum time to reach the Kanchanpur motor stand from Pecharthal is 1 hour and 15 minutes, meaning tourists will reach Kanchanpur by 10:15 to 10:30 a.m., depending on when they board the public vehicle from Pecharthal. From Kanchanpur, public jeeps are available, which sets off for the villages of Vanghmun. During the journey from Kanchanpur, tourists can see the panoramic change in the contoured landscape as they move closer to the Jampui hill range. The tourists will reach the Eden Tourists Lodge at Vanghmun within an hour and 30 minutes if there is no stoppage along the route from Kanchanpur. But in most cases, tourists usually don't like to travel by changing several vehicles, that is by making a break journey. After reaching Pencharthal railway station (Roy and Mitra, 2016a), tourists would pay more money and reserve a vehicle directly to Jampui Hill or Vanghmun. The difference between direct and break journeys is the expenditure and time of the tourists; if tourists want to reach Jampui Hill at a cheaper cost, they usually choose to travel by break journey, whereas those tourists who want to travel in comfort usually hire a private car or travel with their personally owned vehicle. 57.5 per cent of the surveyed tourists at the Eden tourists lodge travelled by making a break journey, while 42 per cent travelled directly from their respective places (Table.3).

Table 3. *Distance covered by break journey*

Route	Distance (km)	Mode
Agartala-Pencharthal	149.70	By train
Pencharthal-Kanchanpur	28.50	By road
Kanchanpur-Vanghmun	27.10	By road
Total distance covered	205.10	

Source: Computed by the authors, 2021

The topographical features affect the climatic conditions of the district. The plains and valleys are very hot and humid, whereas Jampui Hill has a temperate salubrious climatic condition. The four main types of the season are here - (i) winter (December to February) (ii) Pre-monsoon (March to May) (iii) monsoon (June- September), and (iv) Post monsoon (October to November) (Bhatt and Bhargava, 2006). The Jampui hill region relishes higher temperatures in summer and lower temperatures in winter because it, due to its higher altitude, counters greater degrees of cold and hot wind. The highest temperature is recorded in May and the lowest in January, whereas the maximum rainfall recorded was from June-July (36.11 cm- 34.52 cm) (MEFCC, Government of India, 2018). The table 4 below shows the climate data of Jampui Hill for a certain period:

Table 4. *Climate data of Jampui Hills from 01/01/2019 to 02/31/2020*

Months	Temperature (°C)	Precipitation (mm)	Relative Humidity (%)
January	15.93	50.79	80.31
February	18.42	3.32	64
March	23.79	10.75	54.56
April	25.87	233.05	67.06
May	26.37	334.76	82.38
June	26.29	443.59	90.88
July	26.44	386.84	91.69
August	26.64	244.49	91
September	26.33	320.51	91.94
October	25.52	315.32	91.88
November	21.58	23.66	86.44
December	16.18	0	84.56

Source: NASA Power

The above table 4 shows that Jampui Hill has the highest temperature in August at 26.64°C and the lowest in January at 15.93°C (Table 4). Precipitation is the highest in the month of June, with 443.59 mm of rainfall, and there is no rainfall in the month of December at Jampui hill. Jampui hill has the highest percentage of relative humidity in September at 91.94 per cent and the lowest at 54.56 per cent in March.

Demographic ratio

The Jampui Hill Rural Development block was formed on 2nd September 1996 in the Kanchanpur subdivision of the North Tripura district. There are seven villages in this block, namely Paschim Hmunpui, Vanghmun, Tlangsang, Sabual, Kawnpui, Kalagang and Longlai Valley. These villages have 29 small habitats that are scattered within the Jampui hill range. The total geographical area of the Jampui rural development block is 18764.774 hectares, with a total population of 12,311, out of which 6,415 are males and 5,896 are females, as per the 2011 census data. But, according to the block data for 2017-18, the total block population has increased to 15403. In the year 2011, the total number of households residing in the Jampui Hills block was 2,499, with an average sex ratio of 919. The children's population from the age 0-6 at Jampui Hill block is 1894, which comprises 15% of the total population, out of which 986 are male and

908 are female. Therefore, the child sex ratio as per the 2011 census data was 921, larger than the average sex ratio of the Jampui Hill block (Table 5).

Table 5. Demographic attributes of the Jampui Hill block

Attributes	Male	Proportional Percentage	Female	Proportional Percentage	Total
Children (0-6 years)	986	52.05%	908	47.94%	1894
Literate	5232	53.16%	4609	46.83%	9841
Scheduled Tribe	5766	50.61%	5625	49.38%	11391
Scheduled Caste	15	57.69%	11	42.30%	26
Illiterate	1183	47.89%	1287	52.10%	2470

Source: Census, 2011

Cultural tourism resources of Jampui Hill

Socio-Culture

The major indigenous tribes found in this area are Lushai, and a small concentration of the Reang Bru community can also be found. The Mizo-populated villages of Jampui Hill are mainly Hmunpui, Vanghmun, Behliangchhip, Bangla Zion, Tlangsang and Phuldungsei. In the pre-colonial period, the Mizos are said to have migrated and settled in Tripura without any prior consultation between the Mizo chief and the Maharaja of Tripura. At the initial phase of the 20th century, the issue regarding the eastern boundary of Tripura created great controversy, and the area was quite uninhabited; the Mizos (Lushai), under a Sailo chief, Dokhuma-Sailo, migrated to Tripura from the Lushai hills with the permission of the Maharaja of Tripura. It is believed that they did so in search of better Jhum land (Ralte, 2015). In the upper region of Vanghmun, a small monument built in memory of Chief Dukhuma Sailo can be sighted; it was built by his descendants and people of the tribes to honour him. Tourists can visit this monument whenever they visit Jampui Hill. On the other hand, the Brus reached Jampui Hill as a result of displacement from Mizoram, and even though they are a minority in this area, they have learned to assimilate with the Lushais of Jampui Hill. The Lushai of Jampui Hill are all Christians, and all the Lushai villages which fall under the Jampui Hill rural development block have their separate beautiful churches. Jampui Hill is also prominent for its beautiful churches and viewpoints beside orange gardens. The tourists who visit the different villages within the periphery always get mesmerised by the palatial coordination of these churches with the panoramic natural surroundings.



Figure. 2. a. Early Lushai Leaders, b. Lushai Couple in their traditional attire, c. Reang Couple in their traditional attire

The Lushai of Jampui Hill

During the days of Warren Hastings, Governor-General of India (1772-1785), the Chief of Chit-tagong wrote a letter to him asking for the protection of the local inhabitants from the incursion of the Kuki raiders who weren't Kuki but Lushai, a sub-tribe of the Mizo community, who took an active part against the British expedition. The actual spelling of Lushai is Lusei, which was used to describe the Mizo tribe generally, and this change occurred after half of the Lusei population shifted to Jampui Hill and became known as Lushai, one of the tribes of Tripura. (Chakraborty et al. I., 2011) Therefore, the language and traditional lifestyle of the Lushai at Jampui Hill are akin to those in Mizoram. The Lushai tribe is mostly found in the North Tripura District.

Livelihood

The main livelihood of the Lushai residing at Jampui hill is Jhum cultivation, where they used to cultivate various kinds of food grains, fruits, and vegetables like Rice, chillies, sesamum, cotton, turmeric Oranges, and ginger on the hill slopes. Jhum used to be the main source of income, but today, most are educated and hold posts in various government sectors. Orange and Areca nuts, on the other hand, are still grown by the people to generate income. A few

years back, Jampui was popular for the quality and number of oranges they produced, but now there are only a few orange gardens, and more Areca nut trees are found since they generate more income.

Traditional dress

The traditional dress of the Lushai tribe is similar to that of the Mizos. Both men and women wear hand-woven cotton dresses. The main traditional dress worn by this tribe is known as 'Puan', an extended ankle 'wrap around skirt' worn by both men and women. Men wear Puan up to the knee length, while women wear a little shorter than their ankles. The differences between what the male, female, married, and unmarried wore could differ based on the pattern, colour, or design of the 'Puan'. Men usually wear a simple dress, a short knee-length Puan usually black and white on the upper part of the body; they would drape a long traditional shawl along with traditional headgear. Women wear cotton fabric stitched blue skirts and pair them with a white jacket and a piece of cloth wrapped around their bodies. Both men and women wear headgear, which is made of bamboo and cane.

The traditional dress worn by Lushai men is usually red, white, or black, while women have different types of beautifully created traditional dresses with patterns like red, yellow, black, golden, etc. In today's time, with the advancement of weaving technology, more intricate designs are woven and worn by the people. During Chapchar Kut, one of the biggest festivals of the Lushai tribe at Jampui Hill, people can be seen dressed up in their beautiful traditional dresses, which always mesmerises tourists and people from other communities. Women and children still wear this beautiful traditional dress on Sundays while going to church. The tourists who have witnessed this are amazed to see how beautiful the people look in their traditional dresses.

The houses

In ancient times, the Lushais of Jampui Hill lived in Timber houses built on stilts or wooden pillars scattered across the hill range. With time, the house has been developed into beautiful concrete houses. These compact houses are beautifully decorated with flowers and a garden on the portico, making a perfect blend with the beautiful natural landscape of the hill range. The Lushai households have a large fireplace in the kitchen, which is the centre of the household activity. This fireplace is made with three hardened mud clay, which acts as a chulha/dirt stove and a heater for the family. The Lushai of Jampui Hill built clustered houses along the roadside, mainly on the hilltop.

Churches

As all the Lushai are Christians, there are around 15 churches around the Jampui hill range. These churches are from different Christian denominations like Baptist, Seventh Day Adventist, Lutheran, and Catholic. These churches are one of the main attractions at the spot since they intensify the beauty of the spot to a much rapturous degree. The sight of beautifully dressed children and women in their traditional attire is truly a sight one won't want to miss.

Traditional Foods

Rice is the main diet of the Lushai tribes of Jampui Hill, which is taken with different kinds of vegetables or meat curry. These curries are cooked with fewer spices, salts, soups and raw leaves. Some major food ingredients of the tribe are Ching al (Ash filtrate solution) and dried Roselle flowers.

Traditional festivals

The main traditional festival that is celebrated by the Lushai tribe at Jampui Hill is Chapchar Kut. It is held in March. Other celebrations are religious festivals like Christmas and New year.

The Reang of Jampui Hill

The Reang tribe of Jampui Hill is believed to have migrated from the Maiyanithlang area of Lushai Hills, bordering on and stretching into the Arakan in Burma. The Reangs represent 1/5th of the total population of Jampui Hill. Reangs are the second-highest populated tribe of Tripura after Tripuri. They are found in almost every district of Tripura, but they are mostly concentrated in the North and Dhalai districts of Tripura.

Livelihood

The main source of income for the Reangs at Jampui Hill is Agriculture. Some of the Reangs of Jampui Hill own a few hectares of land where they still practice jhum cultivation. The main types of vegetables are Ash gourds, Maise, Rice, Peas, and Areca Nut. Few of them own stalls by the roadsides at Phuldugsei, while some work as daily wagers for the Lushai households at Jampui Hill. The Reang population at Jampui Hill is mostly concentrated in the Phuldungsei village. The Lushai is found at the peak of the valley, while the Reangs mostly build settlements in the valleys and on the side of the hill.

Traditional dress

The traditional dress worn by the Reang is very different from the Lushai but homogenously similar to the rest of the tribes of Tripura. Men wear white Dhotis with a white long-sleeve jacket with a long thin blue pattern at the border of the robe. Men traditionally wear a hand-woven loincloth and a piece of cloth as a wrapper for the upper body. This piece of woven cloth is wrapped around the head by Kamsoi and is known as Kamsoi Maitang. The women wear a long cloth called Mnai, a wrap-around; from the waist to the knees, a Risa covers the chest, and Rikatouh covers the whole upper half of the body.

Houses

The Reang knows how to thrive in all kinds of terrain and convert it into a proper habitat. Reangs traditionally build stilt bamboo houses called “Gairengs” like other indigenous communities of Tripura, but due to cultural fusion, the Reangs of Jampui hill also build houses similar to that of the Lushai’s.

Religion

Most of the Reang population at Jampui Hill has also converted to Christianity due to the influence of the Lushai tribes. Though 98 per cent of the population at Jampui Hill are Christians, the remaining at least 2 per cent are said to be non-Christian or Hindus. These Hindu populations at Jampui Hill are believed to be from the Reang community because all the Lushai have converted to Christianity while most of the Reang population in Tripura hasn’t changed their ancient socio-religious practices, and few families, even at Jampui Hill, still practice the same. The ancient socio-religious practices of the Reang have a very close resemblance to that of Hinduism but aren’t Hinduism. Due to the influence of the royals and outsiders, the culture eventually changed to Hinduism.

Traditional food

The traditional food of the Reang community is similar to the rest of the tribes of Tripura, like the Tripuri, Jamatia, Halam, and others. The main food item of the Reang is also Rice, but there are certain unique ingredients and dishes that the Reang uses and eats that are different from the Lushai. These ingredients and dishes are Berma, Akran, Chakwi, Awandru, Mosodeng, Gudok, etc.

Festival

The main festival of the Reang community in Tripura is Hojagiri. It is celebrated in October at every Reang-populated village both in Tripura and Mizoram. It is one of the unique socio-cultural festivals in Tripura. During the Hojagiri festival, all the Reang gather and give reverence to goddess Mailuma or Laxmi for her blessings and guidance. The Hojagiri dance is performed on this day, along with other traditional performances. The Reang population of Jampui Hill doesn't celebrate Hojagiri in the village due to their less population, but they attend the festival at other places in Tripura. Hojagiri is celebrated as Hodaigiri in Mizoram by the Bru settlers there.

Cultural assimilation and tourism at Jampui Hill

The Reang and the Lushai tribes have rich and unique cultural practices. The Lushai's Bamboo dance 'Cheraw' is well known almost everywhere in Tripura, while the Hojagiri dance of the Reang is internationally famous. These diverse ethnic and cultural resources can be used as a tool to boost tourism at Jampui hill by organising a Tourism fest at Vanghmun once a year, where tourists can witness the culture of different tribes of Tripura being showcased together.

Results and discussion

A tourist survey was done at the Eden tourist lodge of Vanghmunto to understand the status of tourism. The Jampui hill tourists were requested to fill up a structured questionnaire containing questions on socio-economic status to understand the economic and sociological backgrounds of the tourists, the source of information obtained about the spot to examine the popularity of the spot, transport cost efficiency to study the cost of travel and their preferred means of transportation, and evaluation of all-round facilities of the Eden tourist lodge and Jampui Hill spot, where, the tourists were also asked to give suggestions for preferable developments of the tourist's spot. The questionnaire was made to understand the social class of the tourists arriving at Jampui Hill, their interests in visiting the place, and their satisfaction and displeasure.

Socio-economic status (SES) is a measure of the economic and sociological condition of an individual or a family's economic and social position (Saleem, 2018). The socio-economic condition depends on a combination of variables, including occupation, education, income, wealth, and place of residence. (Shaikh and Pathak, 2017). The commonly used scales for measuring socio-economic status are the modified BG Prasad scale, Kuppuswamy scale, and Uday Pareek scale are used for both urban and rural areas. However, social transformation and a fast-growing economy have rendered these scales ineffective in measuring the SES at present. Hence, considering the present factors, they have been revised (Singh et al. l., 2017). The updat-

ed socio-economic Kuppuswamy Scale 2020 (Saleem, 2020) is used to enumerate the education and occupational scores of the tourists, while the income score is enumerated using the Kuppuswamy 2019 income scale. A total of 40 tourists have been surveyed at the Eden tourist lodge, out of which 26 tourists revealed their monthly income, so their socio-economic class has been calculated after summing up their income, occupation, and educational qualification following the Kuppuswamy scale.

Table 6. *Socio-Economic Class of Tourists at Eden Lodge*

Classes	Class character	Percentage of Tourists
I	Upper	19.2
II	Upper Middle	65.4
III	Lower Middle	7.7
IV	Upper Lower	7.7
V	Lower	0

Sources: computed by the authors using Kappuswamy Socio-economic Scale, 2020

The Kuppuswamy socio-economic status scale consists of 5 different classes, namely Upper (I), Upper Middle (II), Lower Middle (III), Upper Lower (IV), and Lower (V). The Upper (I) are the ones with the highest Kuppuswamy total score of 26-29, indicating that they belong to the society's richest and finest socio-economic group. Upper Middle (II), with the second-highest Kuppuswamy total score of 16-25 indicates that they belong to the richer fraction of the middle-class society. Lower Middle (III) with a total Kuppuswamy score of 11-15 are the mediocre fraction of the middle-class population. Upper Lower (IV), with a total Kuppuswamy score of 5-10, refers to the substandard socio-economic groups of the society. Lower (V) with a total Kuppuswamy score > 5 refers to the poorest socio-economic groups of the society.

The above table no.6 shows the Kuppuswamy socio-economic class of the surveyed 26 tourists at the Eden Tourists' Lodge. After the summation of their income, occupation, and education, it is revealed that 19 per cent of the surveyed tourists belong to the Upper Middle (II) socio-economic class of the society, and five per cent of tourists belong to the Upper (I) socio-economic class and only 2 per cent tourists belong to Lower Middle (III) socio-economic class. This indicates that most of the tourists arriving and staying at Eden Tourist Lodge usually belong to the higher socio-economic class in Tripura. The Tripura State Government has

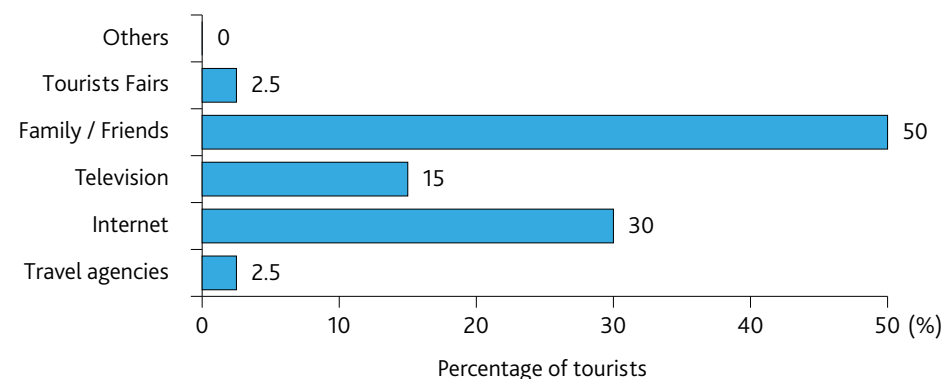


Figure 3. Tourism information sources about Jampui Hill

Source: Prepared by the authors, 2022

promoted Jampui Hill as part of Leisure tourism, where the main tourist target groups are the wealthier sections of the society according to the Kuppaswamy scale.

When a tourist plans to visit a particular tourist attraction, they investigate or seek suggestions from friends or family members. To derive maximum satisfaction from a particular spot, the tourist needs to have comprehensive knowledge about that spot. Jampui is the only hill station in Tripura, and it is one of the most popular tourist spots in the state. Thousands of tourists flock to the place every year to enjoy the serene and calm natural surroundings. To understand and analyse, the tourists were asked about their source of information about the place.

We can see in the above (Fig. 3) that 50 per cent of the surveyed tourists have learned about Jampui from family members or a friend. This indicates that tourists from Tripura tend to choose or discuss Jampui Hill as an ideal destination when planning a holiday or vacation. Thirty percent of the tourists came to know about Jampui Hill from social media or internet sources. The Government should take initiatives to promote Jampui Hills on various online platforms since people nowadays rely on their smartphones for all kinds of information, be it about leisure or facts. While 15 per cent of the surveyed tourists came to know about Jampui Hill from television while watching the local cable networks, only 2.5 per cent of the tourists heard about Jampui Hill from Tourist fairs and Travel agencies. To boost the flow of tourists at some particular attraction, the required steps are proper promotion and advertising of the tourist spot. The Lushai and Reang community residing in the villages of Vangmun and Phuldungsei have their separate festivals, which are observed at different times of the year. The main festival of the Lushai tribe is Chapchar Kut, which is celebrated in the first week of March, while the Reang tribe has the Hojagiri festival, which is usually held during mid-October. The State Government can use these festivals as a tool to boost tourism by promoting these events on various local platforms.

Infrastructural analysis

The number of tourist attractions, number of visitors to festivals, number of conference delegates, and number of hotel rooms indicate that tourism in the area is growing, but, in most cases, it is difficult to quantify this growth in a particular parameter. The total expenditure of the tourists visiting the spot should be justified by creating new tourism developmental projects or implementing new strategies to provide maximum satisfaction to the tourists visiting a particular spot (Deepa, 2009). The Eden tourist lodge has 28 rooms in the new building and 20 rooms in the old building. The tariff of single bedded rooms costs around 700 rupees per night whereas double-bedded rooms cost around 900 rupees per night. Dormitory rooms are also provided for tourists. Since tourists of Jampui Hill usually spend a reasonable amount of money, it is necessary to provide them with maximum satisfaction.

In (Fig. 4A), 37.50 per cent of the tourists said that the spot is very beautiful and, according to them, there is no calm and quiet place like Jampui Hill in Tripura, and it is one of the leading tourist sites in the state. 30.00 per cent of the tourists said that the spot is just good or beautiful for not very satisfied; these tourists came with the expectation of seeing tangerine gardens on this beautiful landscape, but due to the change of these gardens into betel or areca palm, the hilly landscape has lost its characteristics/charm. 25.00 per cent of the tourists think that the Jampui hill station is moderate. These tourists believe that with certain improvements and initiatives by the government and local bodies, the spot could become more beautiful, as some of the viewpoint's areas have already become polluted due to the plastic waste thrown by tourists and

local visitors visiting the place. No proper initiatives are taken to maintain the cleanliness of the surroundings. While 7.50 per cent of the tourists think that the Jampui hill station is not beautiful, these tourists came with the expectation of seeing a hill station as beautiful as Darjeeling or Sikkim.

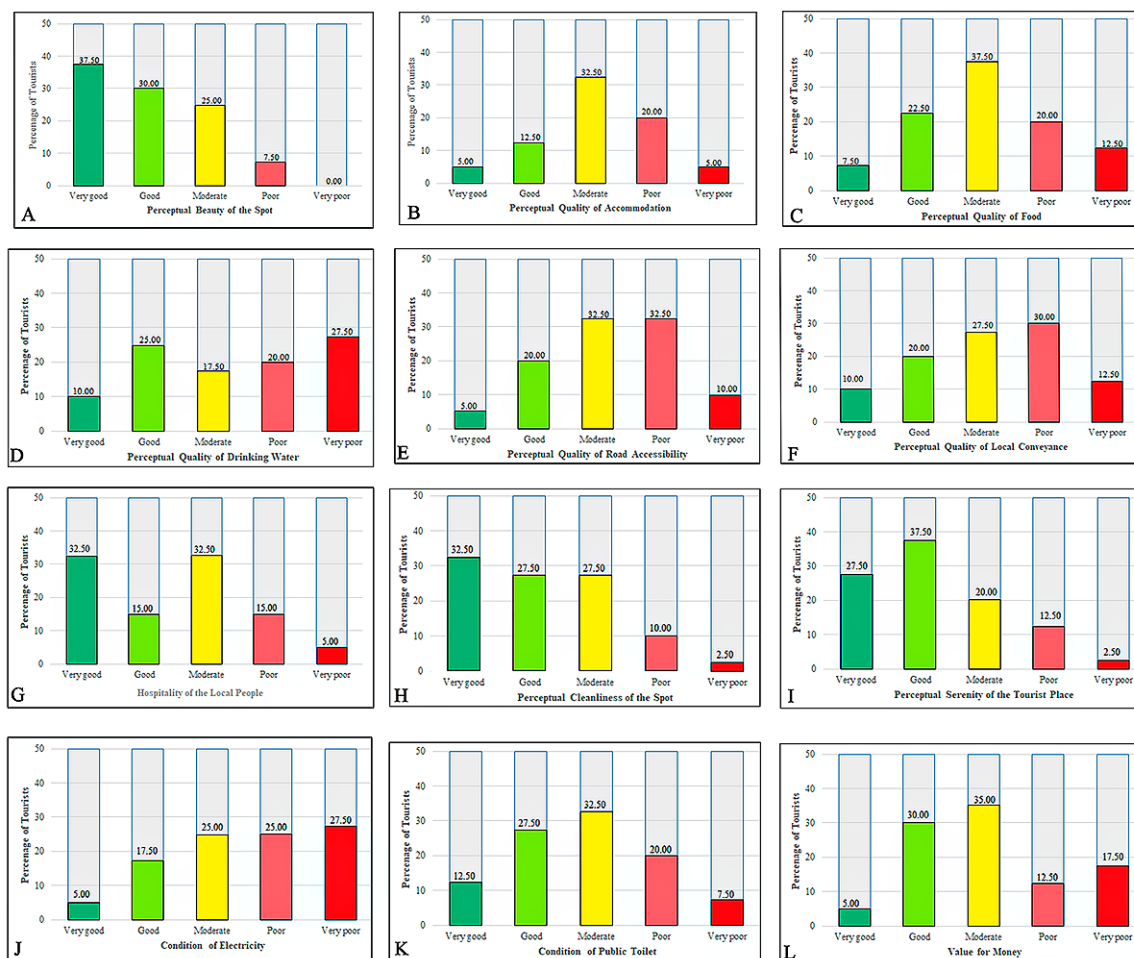


Figure 4. Tourist perceptual analysis of infrastructural facilities(A-L).

Source: Prepared by the authors, 2022

We analysed the tourist's review of the accommodation quality provided at the Eden tourist lodge (Fig.4B). Five per cent of the tourists said that the accommodation quality provided at the Eden tourist lodge is very good or of the best quality because most of these tourists are visiting the spot for the first time and are very satisfied with the room and accommodation facility. 12.50 per cent of the tourists said that the accommodation facility is good. 32.50 per cent of the tourists rated the accommodation facility as moderate. 20.00 per cent of the tourists think that the accommodation facility is poor, while five per cent of tourists describe the accommodation facility provided at Jampui Hill as very poor. There are two separate buildings for tourists at the Eden tourist lodge, one old and one new; the infrastructural facilities of rooms at the new building are spacious with new beds, new bathrooms, and other amenities, while the old build-

ing has small rooms with old beds. So, tourists who were lucky enough to get a room in the new building with better facilities rated the hotel as very good, good, or moderate, while those who stayed in the old building rated the hotel as poor or poor. The main problems described by the tourists in the new building were lack of proper cellular connections, unclean blankets, and lack of drinking water facilities in the rooms, while tourists from the old building complained about broken beds, unhygienic bathrooms, and congested rooms.

About the food facilities provided in the Eden Lodge in (Fig. 4C). 50.00 per cent of the tourists rated it as very good, while 22.50 rated it as well. 37.50 per cent of the tourists rated the food quality at the lodge as moderate. About 20 per cent described the quality of foods as poor, while 12.50 per cent as very poor. The breakfast consists of fried white-flour flatbreads and chicken curry, while the lunch and dinner menu usually includes a normal potato fry, pulse fried lentils, and potato and egg curry. The meals have to be pre-ordered. Some tourists complained about their orders being misplaced and given to someone else. Some tourists complained about missing certain dishes for arriving a bit later at the dining hall. Very few varieties of dishes are available in the lodge for tourists. Dishes other than the usual are not available. Naturally, the tourists rated the food facilities provided at the lodge as moderate. Skilled management is required in the lodge's catering services for better tourist satisfaction.

As in (Fig. 4D), Ten per cent of the tourists described the drinking water facility as very good, while twenty-five per cent described it as only good. 17.50 per cent of the tourists rated the quality of water as moderate. Twenty per cent rated it as poor, and 27.50 per cent of the tourists described the water quality as very poor. Tourists complained about the lack of a filter accessible to tourists for free. Tourists had to buy packaged drinking water at an extra cost from the dining hall, which is one of the negative reasons compelling the tourists to describe the drinking water facilities provided in the lodge as very poor.

In (Fig. 4E), 5.00 per cent of the tourists think that the road connectivity to the lodge is very good, and 20.00 per cent say that the road is good. 32.50 per cent of the tourists said that the road connectivity to Jampui Hill is moderate; on the other hand, another 32.50 per cent of the tourists think that the road connectivity is poor. 10.00 per cent said the road connectivity to the lodge is very poor. The road connection from Kanchanpur to Jampui Hill at that time was under construction, particularly in the hilly area where there were too many sharp curves which were being straightened as far as possible, cutting the hills and clearing the forest which in those areas, the road was bumpy and dusty, and tourists had to make stoppages for hours. Some tourists foreseeing the future road connection of the place described the place to have a very good road quality.

The tourists' perception of the local conveyance of the Jampui Hill tourist spot is represented in (Fig. 4F). Ten per cent of tourists said that the availability of conveyances in the area is very good, and twenty per cent said it's good. 27.50 per cent of tourists think that the conveyances are moderate, while 30.00 per cent think the conveyances are poor. 12.50 per cent of the tourists said that the conditional availability of conveyance is poor. Tourists arriving at the Eden tourist lodge mostly come in hired vehicles direct from Agartala, Pecharthal, Kanchanpur, and Dharmanagar, paying high transport costs. Very few public vehicles are available from Kanchanpur in the Jampui hill region. Getting a public vehicle in the Jampui Hill area for a local tour or journey is nearly impossible. The locals mostly own private vehicles for personal use. Tourists find it very difficult to get a public vehicle for the local tour.

The next diagram describes the hospitality of the locals in the Jampui hill area according to the tourists at the Eden tourist lodge (Fig. 4G). 32.50 per cent of the tourists said that the hospitality of the local people is very good, and 15.00 per cent think that the local hospitality

is good, 32.50 per cent said that the hospitality and perception of the local people are moderate, while 15.00 per cent of the tourists said that the hospitality is poor. 5.00 per cent, in this respect, said that the hospitality of the local people is very poor. The locals of the Jampui hill mostly belong to the Lushai tribe and a small portion of the indigenous Reang tribe. There are only two lodges and one homestay facility at Jampui Hill. The tourist opined that there should be more homestay facilities, tourist attraction points, and restaurants in the region. According to the tourists, since the people of the Jampui Hill area partly depend on tourism for income generation, the Government should take initiatives to promote tourism in the area by training the local people in hospitality management. But some of the local people think that tourism is leading to the exploitation of their natural resources and pollution of the environment.

The tourist perception of the cleanliness of Jampui Hill is briefly explained in (Fig. 4H) 32.59 per cent of the tourists think that the overall cleanliness of the tourist spot is very good, and 27.50 per cent rated the cleanliness of the surroundings as good. 27.50 per cent think that the cleanliness of the Jampui Hill spot is moderate, and the views of 10.00 per cent of tourists are that the cleanliness of the Jampui Hill area is poor. Only 2.50 per cent of tourists rated Jampui hill's cleanliness as very poor. Jampui hill region is known for its natural beauty, hill station and cleanliness. One of the cleanest villages in Asia, the Vanghmun village is also situated here, but some tourists, based on their personal experiences, said that the viewpoint tower and the eco-park have become polluted with unwanted inscriptions and plastic waste due to a lack of proper maintenance by the management these accentuated a negative attitude on the cleanliness of Jampui hill tourists spots.

The following diagram represents the tourist's perceptions of the serenity of the natural surroundings of Jampui Hill (Fig. 4I). 27.50 per cent of the tourists said that the Jampui Hill surroundings are very good or very serene, while 37.50 per cent of tourists said that the serenity of the place is good. 20.00 per cent said the serenity of the place is moderate and 12.50 per cent of the tourists stated that it is poor. 2.50 per cent of tourists expressed that the lodge area has very poor serenity. Jampui Hill is a very serene and peaceful place for tourists to visit. Few tourists who have already visited the spot before shared their past experiences, saying it is one of the most peaceful places for individuals to distract themselves from their busy city lives. During our recent survey, some tourists complained about getting improper sleep at night due to loud music being played by some tourists the whole night, and tourists also complained that a few tourists created a nuisance and partied in front of the lodge throughout the night, disturbing other tourists. The Eden Lodge authorities should impose certain restrictions on such activities so that the rest of the tourists can get proper sleep.

The condition of electricity at the Eden tourist lodge and Jampui hill area is described in (Fig. 4J), 5.00 per cent said that the electricity facility is very good and 17.50 per cent said it is good while 25.00 per cent think that the electricity is moderate in the lodge. Another 25.00 per cent complained that the lodge has a poor electrical connection, while 5 per cent said that the lodge has a very poor electricity facility. Some tourists complained that there was no electricity during the daytime for 2/3 days and power was available only at night, due to which some tourists complained about not being able to charge their devices in the lodge.

In (Fig. 4K), 12.50 per cent of tourists said that the condition of the public toilet at Jampui Hill is very good, while 27.50 per cent of tourists described it as only good. 32.50 think the condition of public toilets is moderate in the area, while 20.00 per cent think that the public toilets in the hill station are of poor quality, and 7.50 per cent said that the hill station has very poor public toilet facilities. To speak about public toilets in Jampui hill, it may be said that there are very few public roadside toilets in the Jampui Hill area, which are built and maintained by the locals.

The last diagram (Fig. 4L) evaluates the overall activities and facilities available to the tourists along with the total money spent. 5.00 per cent of tourists said that the total expenditure was very much worth the experience. While 30.00 per cent of tourists said that the expenses and experience were good. 35.00 per cent of tourists think that their expenditure and experience at the Jampui Hill tourist spot are moderately correlated, while 12.50 per cent of tourists stated that their experience had a poor correlation with their expenditure. And 17.50 per cent of the tourists remarked that their experience was not worth the expenditure. Tourists choose different means of transport to reach Jampui Hill. Some arrive by direct journey while some arrive by break journey, meaning that those arriving directly to Jampui Hill spent more. The accommodation prices at the lodge also differ for the new and old building, the tariff at the old building is comparatively low in comparison to the new building. The new building costs 900 rupees per night for double bedded rooms while those at the old building cost only 600 rupees per night. Tourists also have to pay for food consumed at the lodge. This entirely sums up the tourist's expenditure. But the comfort and surrounding beauty of the place appear to a section of tourists not up to their expectations, so some tourists expressed their dissatisfaction.

Table 7. Levels of tourist satisfaction at Jampui hill

SL №	Quality	Index of Satisfaction	Percentage	Level of satisfaction
1	Beauty of the Spot	0.6	16.66	Highly satisfied
2	Serenity of the Tourist Place	0.5		
3	Cleanliness of the Spot	0.475	41.67	Moderately Satisfied
4	Hospitality of the People	0.275		
5	Quality of Accommodation	0.175		
6	Condition of Public Toilet	0.125		
7	Value for Money	0.05		
8	Quality of Food Available	-0.025	41.67	Dissatisfied
9	Drinking-Water Facility	-0.125		
10	Local Tour Conveyance	-0.125		
11	Road Accessibility	-0.175		
12	Condition of Electricity	-0.3		

Source: computed by the authors (2021) after Hall et al. (1974)

In Table 7, we find that mostly an odd number of tourists are highly satisfied with the beauty of the spot and the serenity, which accounts for 16.66 per cent. While 41.67 per cent of tourists were moderately satisfied with the scenic beauty and cleanliness of the spot, local people's hospitality, and accommodation quality. At the same time, 41.66 per cent of the tourists were found dissatisfied with the limited items and quality of food available in the Eden Lodge, absence of a water filter facility, non-availability of local tour conveyance, road conditions, and electricity.

Tourists suggestions

There are different approaches through which entrepreneurs sustain their business and trades may be by creating value for stakeholders, capital investment, private partnerships, etc., but among all such methods, the most common and simple strategy through which business firm

fills the gap between the customer and their product is by taking feedbacks and implementing it in their next development project. The tourists at Jampui Hill were also asked to fill a column in the schedule where they mentioned the changes they wanted to see in their next visit. The figure no. 5 below shows the suggestions provided by the tourists at Jampui Hill. (Fig. 5)

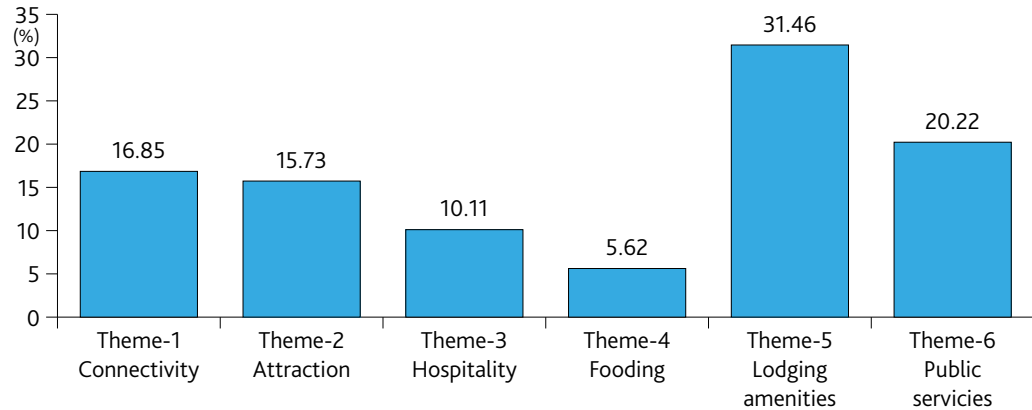


Figure. 5. Showing the field of suggestions provided by tourists for the development of Tourism at Jampui hill, Tripura

Source: Prepared by the authors, 2022

In the above 3D column, it can be seen that 31.46 per cent of the surveyed tourists had suggested developing the tourists' lodging amenities like room services, cleaner blankets and bathrooms, better amenities, etc. While 20.22 per cent stated about building proper public services like ATMs, Petrol pumps, Proper markets, restaurants, and 24x7 electricity (Fig. 5). 16.85 per cent of the surveyed tourists have expressed the need for developing better connectivity to the area by building better roads and making public vehicles available up to Jampui Hill. 15.73 per cent of tourists have mentioned adding a new attraction to the Jampui since the existing spot has become outdated. 10.11 per cent have suggested hiring much more hospitable and well-trained hotel staff and locals. 5.62 has mentioned providing a better food menu and facilities to tourists along with finding a means to regrow oranges for tourists.

Jampui Hill, one of Tripura's most popular tourist spots, has its positive developmental possibilities and negative vantage points. Strength, Challenges, Opportunity and Threat (SCOT) analysis shows the positive and Negative aspects of developing the place into a tourism-based economy (Table 7). The basic strength of the Jampui Hill tourist spot is its abundant and mesmerising natural landscapes, healthy climatic conditions, and orange gardens. The potency of this tourist spot also lies in the fact that it is the only hill station in Tripura.

On the other hand, the present weaknesses or shortcomings of the spot are its bad road conditions, fewer hotels and homestay facilities, lack of public infrastructures like proper market areas, restaurants, petrol pumps, ATMs, etc., and shortage of public transportation facilities (Table 8).

Table 8. *Strength, Challenges, Opportunity, and Threat (SCOT) Analysis of Jampui Hill*

Positive	Strength	Challenges	Negative
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Abundant natural landscape 2. Best Orange Gardens of Tripura 3. Salubrious climatic condition 4. Only hill station of Tripura 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Poor Road condition 2. Poor Electricity 3. Lack of hotels and homestays 4. Lack of associated infrastructures like Markets, Restaurants, Petrol pumps, and Atm 5. Lack of public transportation 	
	Opportunities	Threat	
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cultural assimilation 2. Replantation of orange gardens 3. Introduction of new tourist attractions or tourist activity areas 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Risk of Areca nut plantation being banned due to banning of Gutka industries 2. Interstate territorial tension 3. Degradation of the natural landscape 	

The opportunity here refers to the potential tangible and intangible resources that can help develop Jampui Hill. There is a deep cultural influence of the neighbouring state of Mizoram in Jampui hill area since the major population of the area is the Lushais, who are a sub-clan of the Mizo tribe, and on the other hand, Brus found in Jampui are deeply rooted in Tripura, and have their cultural ethnicity bearing resemblance with the rest of the tribes from Tripura. So, if the state government of Tripura takes the initiative to organise a cultural program or festival at least once a year, where tourists can witness a grand cultural fusion of these two separate ethnic groups, it'll be a once-in-a-lifetime experience for tourists and also a boost to the tourism economy at Jampui hill.

After the dieback disease outbreak, many orange farmers stopped planting orange and permanently shifted to Areca nut (betel) for a better income. This has indirectly affected the flow of tourists at Jampui Hill; since many of the tourists are disappointed due to the disappearances of orange gardens, the replantation of oranges can slowly once again boost the inflow of tourists in Jampui Hill. Tourists, as well as the locals of Jampui Hill, have described that Jampui Hill has very few tourist attraction spots other than the cleanest village at Vanghmun, Eden Lodge, and the highest peak, ThaidawTlang. The tourists opined that the state government should take the initiative to explore new areas for tourist attractions like parks, restaurants, and beautiful spots for more satisfaction for the tourists at Jampui Hill. The threat here refers to the potential danger that could adversely affect the tourism economy at Jampui Hill. The plantation of Areca palm (Betel nut) in the hilly landscape is against the natural landscape's ambience and harms the environment. Many state governments in India have taken a positive step by banning the sale and production of Gutka. This ban is now effective in 20 states and three union territories of India. The huge loss of human lives and finances due to the morbidity and mortality caused by areca nut and Paan masala addiction is greater than the revenue generated by this industry. The Government needs to set up an areca nut control program. Stricter laws must be made to regulate areca nut consumption, and stern instructions are issued to the manufacturers to have pictorial warnings on the products (Garg et al., 2014). A sudden ban on Areca palm could adversely affect the socio-economic condition of the locals at Jampui hill, so it's better for the local farmers to slowly restart farming oranges, to which the state government should provide necessary guidance and adequate financial help. This will attract more tourists and improve the tourism economy in the region.

The territorial tension between the states of Tripura and Mizoram at Jampui Hill could directly affect the flow of tourists at Jampui Hill, So the Government of both states needs to sit together and settle the matter peacefully. Most of the locals at Jampui Hill support the idea of

developing the region on the approach of a tourism-based economy; yet, there are also certain groups of people who think that tourism in the area has led to the degradation and exploitation of the natural landscape resources. So, any kind of tourism-based development should be done only after taking special precautions without causing much damage to the natural landscape of Jampui Hill. Expansion work of the National Highway (44A) is being done from Pencharthal (24°18'42"N. & 92°09'97"E.) To Aizawl (23°72'72"N. & 92°71'74"E.) via Hmunpui (Tripura), Sairang (Mizoram), which will likely play a significant role in the tourism development of Jampui Hill soon, with the provision of better road transport facility, Amenities can be improved at tourist lodge with the increased number of homestay facilities and more natural viewpoints being explored.

The main tourists visiting villages at Jampui Hill's rural development block are the Vangmun and Phuldungsei Gram Panchayat. The Eden tourist lodge at Vangmun village runs under Tripura Tourism Development Corporation Limited (TTDCL) and is situated at a hill-top from where tourists can witness the beautiful sunrise and sunset. The highest peak of Jampui hill lies in an area of territorial conflict between the two states of Mizoram and Tripura due to; the peak being known by various names given by the local inhabitants, who are mainly the Lushai and Bru communities. The highest peak of Tripura at Jampui Hill is known as ThaidawTlang 944 meters above sea level. The ongoing improvement of road connectivity NH-44A can be described as one of the Tripura state Government's major initiatives for the development of tourism in Jampui Hill. The weather at Jampui Hill is moderately hot and pleasant during the day, manifesting a spring-type condition due to which the place is also known as the "land of the eternal spring." at night, the temperature gets chilly due to the cold wind flowing across the high altitude. In the late 1960s, the cultivation of oranges started in Jampui Hills and soon became popular. It gained widespread adoption after the oranges won several awards during fruit exhibitions outside the state, particularly in New Delhi, during the mid-1980s. People living across the hill started adopting orange cultivation on a bigger scale. But after a massive outbreak of dieback, a disease, especially of woody plants, that is characterised by the progressive death of twigs, branches, shoots, or roots, starting at the tips, locals changed their cultivation from orange gardens to areca nuts. When the cultivation of oranges decreased, the state government sought help from the National Research Centre for Citrus (NRCC) to produce disease-free oranges, but no solution was found (Panday, 2019). Saniel Tuikhoti Reang (2019) stated that orange cultivation had been the backbone of the economy at Jampui Hill and the Sakhan region since 1960, but due to the outbreak of plant disease and a decrease in its yield over the last 10 to 16 years, most of the orange trees has been replaced with Areca nut. The orange species found at Jampui Hill is 'Citrus reticulata', commonly known as Mandarin, which is said to have arrived initially from China, hence its name. It is shaped like a slightly flattened sphere with thin, leathery skin; its rinds go from relatively smooth to bumpy as the fruit matures and separates from the interior flesh, giving it its easy-peel reputation. The residents used to rely on these orange gardens for the generation of income, but presently, people have shifted to the plantation of Areca palm (betel nut) to generate higher income with lesser maintenance costs. But the betel nut or areca palm has adverse effects on the environment, making the soil lose all its alluvial content. With the heightened environmental concern of the late 1980s, the term sustainable development became "a theme common to much tourism research in the 1990s" (Pigram, 1995; Ahna et al., 2000). Sustainable tourism development is the common theme among those perspectives that focus on attaining harmony among stakeholder groups to develop a desirable quality of life that lasts (Ahna et al., 2000).

Conclusion

The three important factors of any tourist spot are Attraction, Accommodation, and Accessibility; as the tourists have hitherto mentioned the lack of new attractions at Jampui Hill, the Tripura state government along with the local administrative body of Jampui Hill, should confer and explore new attraction points for tourists. But in developing new attractions, it is necessary for the Government to take all the necessary precautional overhauls so that the region's natural landscape is not exploited in any manner. Accessibility in a broader sense cannot be categorised only in road accessibility, but it can also be based on the accessibility of public infrastructure like petrol pumps, ATMs, restaurants, markets etc. Jampui Hill falls short in public infrastructure accessibility and lacks a proper market, due to which both tourists and locals face several problems. So, to improve the basic tourism infrastructure of Jampui, all the above aspects need to be taken care of for the satisfaction of tourists and local people in order to boost the tourism economy of this area. In most cases, negligence and improper utilisation of resources are the main reasons for an attraction to become obsolete and a decline in the flow of tourists. Therefore, it is necessary to put into check these two factors by maintaining cleanliness and being creative in promoting the spot. In conclusion, it is understood that different types of attraction require a different method of strategic manoeuvre to sustain their economic longevity. Pragmatic approaches sometimes postulate almost precise solutions for a predominant delinquent; therefore, it is necessary to try distinctive methods to counter the obstructions of the tourism economy.

Acknowledgement

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Potentials of Tourism Development in the Lower Neretva Region

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Abstract

Due to its landscape peculiarities the Lower Neretva region stands out as a unique area on the Croatian coast. The main objective of this paper was to investigate what potential forms of tourism are suitable for development and further investment. It also aimed to show applicability of ArcGIS computer software in the function of tourism development. An online survey was conducted, with the main purpose to examine the opinions and attitudes of the local people about the current state and development potential of tourism in this region. The purpose of this research is to create the vision for future tourism development in the Lower Neretva region, as well as the recommendations that can serve in determining existing and future spatial planning documents.

Keywords: Lower Neretva region; tourism; selective forms of tourism; GIS

Introduction

The Lower Neretva region (Figure 1) is an integral part of the Adriatic tourist region and stands out as a one of the most attractive areas on the eastern Adriatic coast due to the physical-geographical and socio-geographical characteristics of the Neretva river delta. This area is administratively part of Dubrovnik-Neretva County, and consists of three towns (Metković, Ploče and Opuzen) and four municipalities (Kula Norinska, Slivno, Zažablje and Pojezerje). It covers the area of 412.56 km², which is 23.15% of the total area of Dubrovnik-Neretva County. According to the 2021 census, 31,249 inhabitants live in this region, i.e. around 30% of the total County population. According to the physiognomic regionalization of the Republic of Croatia, the Lower Neretva region is the northernmost micro-unit within the South Dalmatian coast. Neretva delta represents one of the most important Croatian agricultural regions (Magaš, 2013; Polić et al., 2016).

Appropriate development of selective forms of tourism and investments in the hinterland, create the possibility of mitigating seasonality and prerequisites for revitalization of rural settlements affected by the depopulation and deagrarization processes (Košak, Lugomer, 2015).

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Based on the research in Dalmatinska Zagora region local population perceived rural tourism as one of the generators of future economic development (Ralica, Blaće, 2021). In the recent decade the development of Croatian tourism caused the dispersion of supply and formation of numerous new selective types of tourism (Huška, Luković, 2020). Zaninović (2003) concluded that segmentation and stimulation of selective forms of tourism would create a specialization and necessarily incorporated differentiation. When planning tourism activities much greater attention should be given to ecology, the cultural identity of the destination, active vacations, service quality and selective forms of tourism development (Banožić et al., 2015). The main question is how to restructure the mass tourist supply and make it flexible to market trends and demands by developing selective tourism forms (Bošković, 1999).

The aim of the paper was to show the applicability of GIS in tourism, in particular ArcGIS software, using the example of surface analysis as well as the inventory of tourism resources. Nowadays there is significant emphasizes on the use of new technologies, mainly in the form of management and control of tourism activities, as well as in the decision-making process itself. Today, GIS is often used in tourism planning, i.e. in the segment of tourism resource management (Minić, 2010).



Figure 1. The Lower Neretva region

Source: Šetka et al., 2021, SRPJ, DARH, AppEARS

Research Methods

The methodological basis and main source of the data was an online survey of the local population, in which their opinions and attitudes on the current state of quality of life and economic development, as well as on the state and potentials of tourism development in the Lower Ner-

etva region were examined. The survey was completely anonymous, and the questions were ranked from general to specific. The first group of questions included socio-demographic indicators, such as gender, age, education, employment, etc. The second group of questions included the level of satisfaction with the quality of life and economic development. The last category of questions asked were on tourism, primarily satisfaction with the current situation in tourism (utilization of potentials, local government investment in tourism, etc.) and possible forms of tourism that should be developed further. The survey used a five-point Likert scale, the values of which corresponded to the following expressions: 1 – not at all satisfied, 2 – slightly satisfied, 3 – moderately satisfied, 4 – very satisfied, 5 – extremely satisfied. Furthermore, for questions related to specific activities, i.e. tourist forms, a scale was used with the following expressions: 1 - no, but it would be good for us, 2 - no and there is no need for it, 3 - no, because there are no opportunities, 4 - there are, but it could be better, 5 - there are and it is good. Since the aim of this paper is oriented towards the detection of selective forms of tourism in the Lower Neretva region, the focus will be on the basis of the responses related to forms of tourism, i.e. activities in which further investment should be made. The thematic maps were created using ArcMap, application of ArcGIS 10.5.1. software. Furthermore, vector layers from the Central Register of spatial units (SRPJ) and the Digital Atlas of the Republic of Croatia (DARH), were used to create the maps. The Digital Elevation Model with a spatial resolution of 10m made on the basis of elevation data of the State Geodetic Administration was used to create a slope gradient map and an aspect map of the Lower Neretva region.

The survey results

The survey was conducted completely online. It included 151 residents of the Lower Neretva region and was conducted from 9th to 25th November 2017. Share of female population was 62.3% in relation to 37.7% male. Regarding the age, the survey was completed by 49% of the population between 20 and 25 years old, while 51% of the respondent population was above that age. The youngest respondent was 20 years old, while the oldest was 68 years old. Furthermore, slightly less than two-thirds (64.9%) of the respondent population had higher education (college or university), while 33.1% of the respondents had secondary education. Slightly less than half of the respondents i.e. 43.7% are employed while 15.9% are unemployed. The remaining are retirees and students. Residents of all 7 local administration units of the Lower Neretva region participated in the survey. Slightly more than half of the respondents (54.9%) are from Metković, the largest center in the area, where almost 50% of the total population lives. This is followed by respondents from the towns of Opuzen (11.9%) and Ploče (10.6%). The same percentage of respondents as the town of Ploče is recorded by the municipality of Kula Norinska (10.6%), while from the municipality of Slivno it is 9.3%. The smallest number of respondents comes from the least populated municipalities, Zadržlje (2%) and Pojezerje (1.3%).

The second part of the survey, was related to activities and contents, i.e. potential forms of tourism, for which respondents had to choose if they existed or not in their settlement and at what stage of the development they are (Figure 2 and 3). For nine of the twelve activities, respondents answered that the activity exists but could be better. These include swimming in the sea, walking in nature, cycling, hunting and fishing, bird watching, agri-tourism, sightseeing, cultural events/amenities and manifestations. For the remaining three activities (water sports, wellness/spa amenities, health and recreation amenities), respondents mostly indicated that the mentioned activity does not exist in their area, but it would be good to have

it. The activities that received the highest percentage “yes, but it could be better” responses are cycling (64.9%), hunting and fishing (60.93%), and sightseeing (60.27%). Due to the vertical relief dissection of the Neretva Valley, the respondents appropriately chose cycling and sightseeing as activities to invest in, and owing to the hydrographic characteristics of the Neretva Delta and vegetation, hunting and sport fishing could be activities that will further strengthen the tourist offer of the Lower Neretva region.

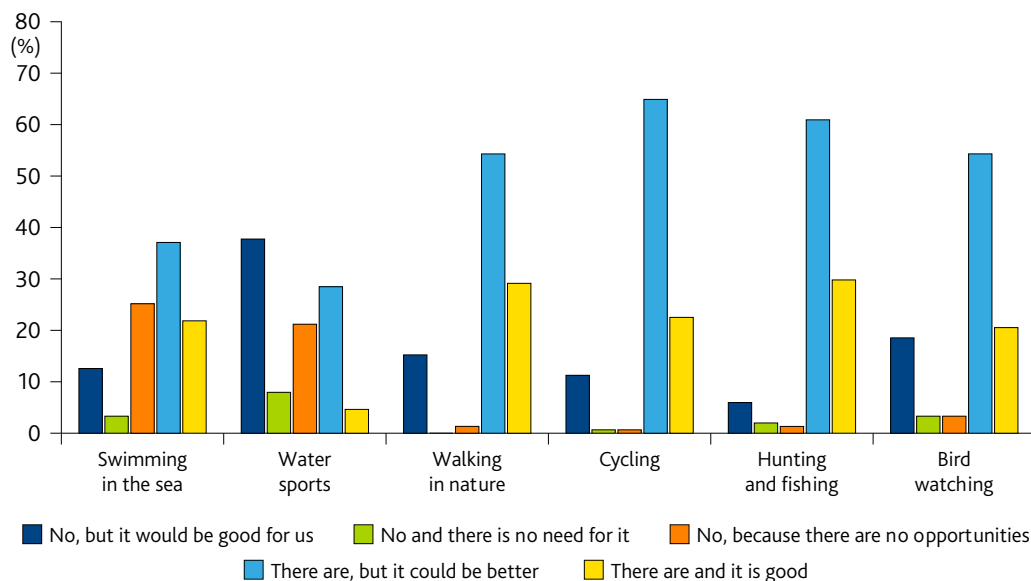


Figure 2. The respondents' opinion on tourist activities

Source: based on the results of the survey

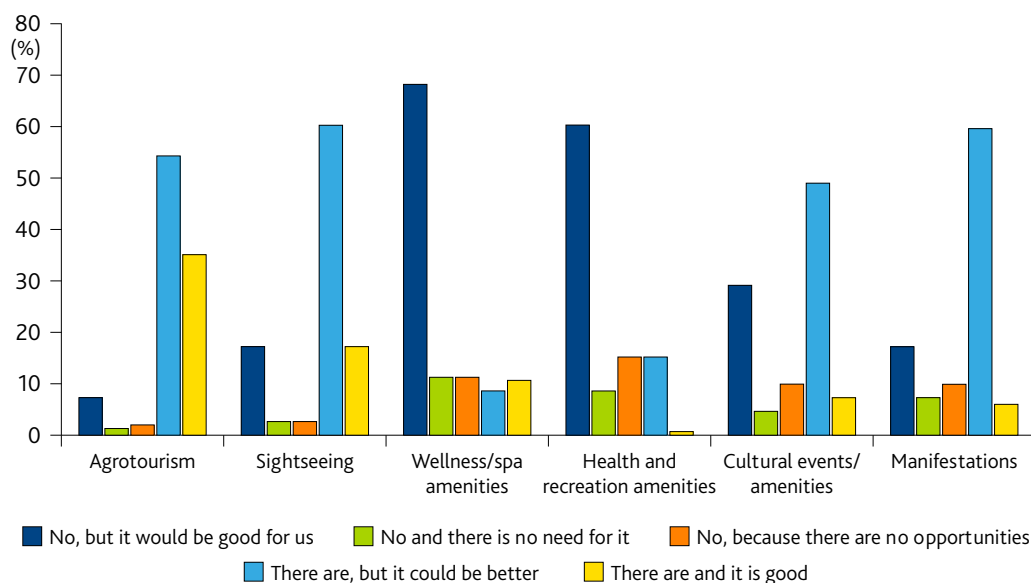


Figure 3. The respondents' opinion on tourist activities and amenities

Source: based on the results of the survey

Identification of potential forms of tourism

Looking at recent history, Lower Neretva region was predominantly agricultural, and the existing tourism (accommodation) resources were not utilized optimally. With the exception of the construction of numerous apartments in the coastal area, there have been no major investments in tourism infrastructure and suprastructure in the last 30 years. Ultimately, all this was reflected in the lagging of this microregion in terms of tourism behind the rest of the county, mainly in terms of tourist arrivals and overnight stays (Krešić et al., 2016).

As an indicator of tourism development, the coefficient of tourist functionality (CTF) was calculated (Fig. 4). CTF is a rate indicating the number of tourist beds in commercial accommodation facilities on the number of inhabitants of a city or municipality. The coefficients obtained are divided into six groups according to Defert's Tourist Operative Indicator (TOI): CTF > 500 - very significant tourist activity (TOI 6), 100-500 - significant tourist activity (TOI 5), 40-100 - predominant tourist activity (TOI 4), 10-40 - tourist activity is important, but not the main one (TOI 3), 4-10 - tourist activity of minor importance (TOI 2) and < 4 - insignificant tourist activity (TOI 1) (Vojnović, 2016).

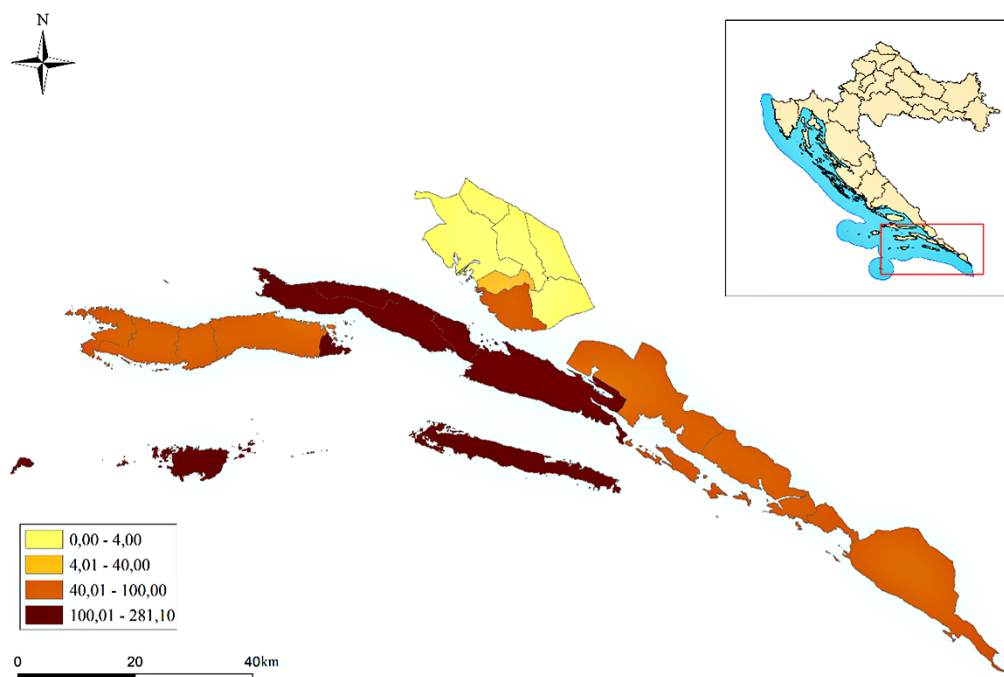


Figure 4. Coefficient of tourist functionality in Dubrovnik-Neretva County at the city/municipal level in 2015

Source: ArcMap, SRPJ, DARH, Krešić et al., 2016, MICRO projekt d.o.o., 2016, DZS, 2016

The towns of Metković and Ploče and the municipalities of Zažablje, Pojezerje, and Kula Norinska belong to the TOI 1 category, i.e. their CTF is less than four. According to that, the mentioned local administration units are the least developed in the county. The town of Opuzen belongs to the TOI 2 category, while the municipality of Slivno is in the TOI 3 category. At the Dubrovnik-Neretva County level, the municipalities of the Pelješac peninsula

and the islands of Mljet and Lastovo have the highest CTF. The reason for the high CTF is the fact that these areas are sparsely populated, but due to the high tourist demand, the number of beds exceeds the number of permanent residents. The supply is generated mainly by middle-aged adults and seniors, with higher purchasing power and higher cultural capital. Despite the above, three units of local self-government of the Lower Neretva region with access to the sea (City of Ploče, City of Opuzen, and Municipality of Slivno) certainly have a permanent interest in strengthening competitiveness in the field of coastal tourism, based on sun and sea (Krešić et al., 2016). Based on the results of the survey, selective forms of tourism that can significantly contribute to the development of this area are analyzed.

The natural-geographical characteristics of a certain area, as well as the socio-economic resources, determine the direction of tourism development. This type of tourism is called Nature-Based tourism. It mainly depends on the use of natural resources, such as landscape, geological and geomorphological features, hydrography, flora and fauna, and cultural heritage (Deng et al., 2002). According to Vidar Haukeland et al. (2023, p. 12) there are five key trend categories that capture the eight underlying trends in the NBT sector: Health and Sustainability, outdoor recreational traditions (Softadventure), and technological (Digitalization) and organizational (Professionalization) developments of modernity. In the Lower Neretva region all this can be achieved during the forthcoming tourism development.

The resource-attraction base of the Lower Neretva region is very suitable for the development of selective forms of tourism. The demand for these forms of tourism is relatively stable even in times of economic crisis or pandemics such as was the case with COVID-19. In many countries, nature-based tourism increased significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic (Sthapit et al., 2022, p. 2).

The concept of agrotourism integrates all the features of the concept of sustainable development, as it includes balanced economic, social and environmental components. Rural tourism implies different tourism activities and types of tourism taking place in rural areas, that is outside urban areas (Demonja, Ružić, 2010, p. 12). It takes place in the rural surroundings where, aside nature, visitors can experience numerous outdoor activities (Vukonić, Čavlek, 2001). Agritourism is the most developed form of rural tourism, which creates a special tourist offer and takes place on a family farms. In addition to accommodation, it includes food, beverages, recreation (participation of tourists in agricultural activities), entertainment and other activities. Due to its specificity, it complements the existing content of a certain area. Croatia in general has all the prerequisites for the development of rural tourism and Dubrovnik-Neretva County, where lower Neretva region is located, had the largest number of registered tourist rural family households (Demonja, 2014).

The end product of agrotourism would be the extension of the tourist season, which strengthens the whole economy. Examples from countries such as Austria and Scotland confirm the assumptions that agrotourism can revitalize rural areas and mitigate the pronounced seasonality in the summer months. In Scotland, an extension of the tourist season and a reduction in depopulation from rural areas has been observed since the 1980s (Grgić et al., 2015, Košak, Lugomer, 2015). The Lower Neretva region is known for the cultivation of mandarins, whose picking season is in autumn, from September to November. The inclusion of sightseeing and fruit picking on plantations would certainly have a positive impact on tourist traffic in the low season. In general, this is an area with significant agricultural production, fragmented farms predominate, the area is traditionally oriented towards agriculture and a large part of the population is looking for additional sources of income. The basic conditions for further development of agrotourism in the Lower Neretva region are investments in the development of prod-

ucts that would meet all the requirements of modern tourist demand, i.e. well-designed and organized promotion is necessary. In addition to marketing activities, the success factors of this form of tourism are the development of specialized services related to fruit, olive and wine growing, such as introducing tourists to the host's lifestyle, involving tourists in agricultural activities, especially harvesting, and learning about local culinary traditions (Krešić et al. 2016).

Ecotourism as a selective form of tourism has emerged as a powerful alternative to forms of mass tourism. It is often associated with the protected parts of nature. It is sustainable, takes into account ethical aspects, raises awareness of the need to conserve natural resources, is carried out in small groups with due regard for the carrying capacity of the local area and brings economic benefits to the local community (Handriana, Ambara, 2016, Miljak et al., 2012).

This area is characterized by exceptional biodiversity as well as extreme ecological sensitivity. That refers mainly to the part of the Neretva Delta where four ornithological reserves have been established - Prud, Orepak, Podgrede and Neretva delta. In addition to visiting protected areas, tourists can consume products from organic farming, learn about the traditional way of life and local customs of the local people. Factors for the development of this form of tourism are the beauty of the Neretva landscape, the preserved natural habitat, the relatively small number of visitors and the possibility of photo safaris. In addition, it is necessary to train a number of professional guides and work on promoting ecotourism through professional journals and the Internet (Krešić et al., 2016).

Birdwatching as an activity with a history of over 200 years involves observing and studying birds with the naked eye or optical aids such as binoculars, a telescope, or professional cameras with powerful lenses. It is particularly popular in western countries. Birdwatchers are predominantly highly educated, middle-aged or elderly people with above-average incomes who have a strong awareness of nature conservation and environmental protection. The main motives for tourists' arrival are reduced to recreation and learning about bird species that are not so common or do not exist in the countries they come from (Krešić et al., 2016, Ma et al., 2012, Udruga za biološka istraživanja – BIOM, 2010).

Birdwatching takes place mainly in the spring months, i.e. May and June, as this is the breeding season for most birds. Tourists may also come in the autumn, during the autumn migration. In order for visitors to observe birds unhindered and for long periods of time, it is necessary to invest in infrastructural elements such as observatories (Udruga za biološka istraživanja – BIOM, 2010). In the Lower Neretva region, there are two observatories, one located at the Neretva delta, the other within the Podgrede Ornithological Reserve (Martinić, 2017).

Cyclotourism is a branch of sports tourism that has become very popular in recent years. It is an activity in which the tourist travels outside his place of residence in order to enjoy cycling and, at the same time, to have the opportunity to get to know the destination in which he is staying. Some of the main motives of cyclists are recreation, spending time in nature, healthy lifestyle, striving for new challenges and mental relaxation (Mrnjavac et al., 2014, Mrnjavac, Slavić, 2018).

The Lower Neretva region is an ideal area for the development of cycling tourism in terms of its physical-geographical characteristics; the flattened part along the coast and the Neretva delta, and the less steep slopes in the hinterland. Some of the measures that should be taken to improve the cyclotourism offer are focusing on the development of shorter and less strenuous cycling routes for recreational cyclists, thematizing routes, providing several routes without motor vehicles, adding facilities to the existing routes such as viewpoints, rest areas, infor-

mation boards and working more actively to promote cyclotourism online, through brochures and professional magazines (Budija, 2016, Krešić et al., 2016).

Hunting and fishing tourism are by their nature controversial activities. They are usually supported by the local population when they contribute to the development of the local community, while on the other hand they are often condemned by environmental associations. Thanks to the landscape characteristics, the Lower Neretva region has a long tradition of hunting and fishing. About 10,000 foreign hunters come to Croatia every year, with Italians and Austrians dominating. Depending on the wildlife species, the hunting season can last throughout the year, and hunters prefer to stay in rural households and hunting lodges (Camară, Munteanu, 2016, Krešić et al., 2016).

One of the biggest problems in these activities is illegal hunting and fishing. In the context of the Lower Neretva region, hunting should be maximally controlled and monitored by the relevant institutions. Hunting and nature protection sectors must cooperate more intensively and make efforts to combat all types of poaching. Bird hunting must be carried out in precisely prescribed zones and only during the hunting season specified in the hunting law (Camară, Munteanu, 2016, *Zaštita prirode Dubrovačko-neretvanske županije*, 2017). Due to similar problems in this area, frogs and eel fish are also endangered.

The Lower Neretva region has an extremely high potential in the development of fishing tourism, mainly thanks to the rich ichthyological marine and freshwater fund. What is missing is adequate fishing infrastructure, specific fishing signals and accompanying services such as boat and equipment rental. In general, targeted online promotion and promotion through specialized hunting and fishing magazines would contribute to the development of this selective form of tourism in this area (Krešić et al., 2016).

Although the terms walking, trekking, and hiking are initially quite similar, there are some subtle differences. For example, trekking is a relatively new term and refers to the adventurous part of walking. Trekking trails are usually divided by difficulty, depending on the terrain, and it also takes place on unmarked trails in nature. Hiking is more associated with longer distances, while walking is used for shorter distances. Due to the increasingly fast-paced life, more and more people are paying attention to their health, so it is expected that the number of tourists in this segment of tourism will grow steadily and continuously (Krešić et al., 2016, Lee et al., 2017, Ralica, Blaće, 2021).

At the level of Croatia, there are no indicators about the size and characteristics of this market segment, partly it can be determined from the records of visitors to national parks and nature parks. They are mainly highly educated middle-aged people who are environmentally aware. Although this is the so-called low yield market segment, an increased focus on these activities in the Lower Neretva region would be fully justified, especially in the initial phase of tourism development, when the beauties of this region have not yet been revealed to the general public (Krešić et al., 2016, Kunst, 2013).

The constant evolution of the concept of culture, as well as its ambiguity, has led to the existence of numerous definitions of cultural tourism today. Cultural tourism can be defined as travel away from one's permanent residence to appreciate some form of artistic, social or intellectual activity, including visits to indigenous communities, historic and religious sites, as well as visits to performing arts, festivals and special events and gastronomic centres (Barbieri, Mahoney, 2010, Kesar, 2017).

This form of tourism can be developed for political or economic reasons that are not related to the local population and the preservation of cultural heritage. This results in negative consequences for historic towns and their inhabitants. However, this selective form of tourism

can be a potential solution for extending the tourist season and mitigating seasonal concentrations (Pančić Kombol, 2006).

In the Lower Neretva region, the cultural offer is not sufficiently implemented in the tourist offer. The Narona Museum in Vid is the most visited facility, and of the events, Neretva Boat Marathon stands out. Many contents of tangible and intangible cultural heritage are not valorized for tourism. This refers mainly to numerous manifestations, but also to tangible heritage, such as fortifications. In order to improve this segment of tourism, it is necessary to design and then organize a series of new, different consumer categories of attractive events related to the customs of the local population, historical events and traditions of life and work of this area (Krešić et al., 2016).

The application of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) in tourism

Today there are numerous definitions of GIS. It is a software platform used to store, manage, manipulate, analyze, and visualize spatial data. The value of this system comes from sophisticated data tables that display attribute data with a spatial component. The data in GIS are in the form of data layers, and their overlap can reveal spatial patterns and trends (Marić, 2015).

Relief is one of the key factors in tourism development. Within ArcGIS, there is a 3D Analyst extension that consists of tools to manage, edit and analyse a digital elevation model (DEM) (Valozić, 2015). With the help of the mentioned extension, i.e. the Slope tool, the slopes of the Lower Neretva region were determined (Fig. 5). Determination of slope is one of the most important elements of relief analysis. The results of the analysis can be used to determine the intensity of denudation, i.e. accumulation, and are an indicator of the stability of the terrain. The correlation of the slope gradient map with morphometric maps (hypsometry, aspect), as well as other maps (geological, soil) is of great practical importance, especially in the selection of the most favorable sites and their optimal use. When it comes to tourism, the slope gradient map should be considered in the context of construction efficiency. Namely, slopes with an angle of inclination of $0 - 2^\circ$ are very favorable for construction, slopes with an inclination of $2 - 5^\circ$ are suitable for construction, the slope category of $5 - 12^\circ$ is favorable for construction, but with proper landscaping, slopes of $12 - 32^\circ$ are unfavorable slopes and they are useful for construction only with significant intervention, and lastly slopes with a greater slope of 32° are slopes unfavorable for the construction of new infrastructure (Lozić, 1996).

According to the slope gradient map, the entire area of the alluvial plain of the Lower Neretva region, including the contact areas between the valley and the hilly areas, is favorable for the construction of tourist infrastructure. Of course, the pedological nature and a number of other features should be taken into account, as large infrastructure investments will certainly not take place in the wetlands of the Neretva Delta. In the area of the Rujnica and Podgradinsko-Slivanjska hills, areas unfavorable for construction prevail, but are attractive due to the heights and slopes, which can be used for the development of certain selective forms of tourism such as cycling, trekking or hiking.

Besides slope, aspect (Figure 6) is the most commonly used variable in morphometric analyses. Aspect is calculated based on the existing DEM according to the azimuth range of cardinal and intercardinal directions, starting from north clockwise (Sabolović et al., 2016). In tourism aimed at certain selective forms, such as wine tourism or agrotourism, this type of data is of great importance. Vineyards and orchards are best planted on hilly terrain with a southern, south-eastern or south-western exposure. They ensure the best sunlight for the plantings and

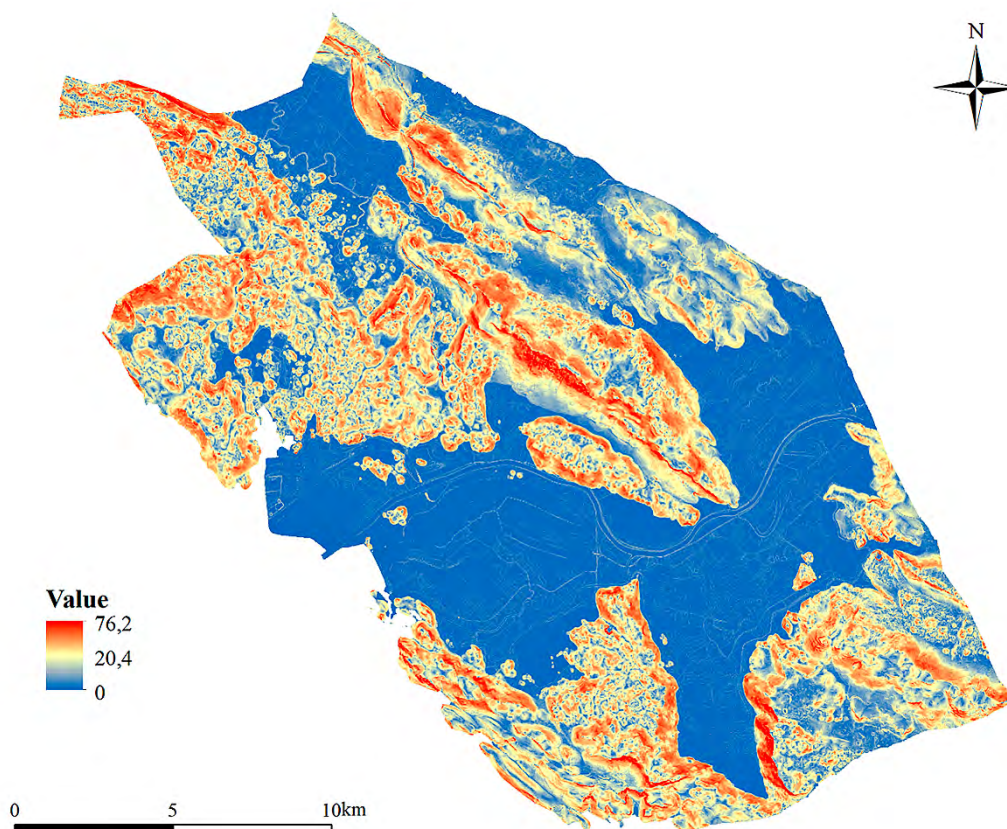


Figure 5. Slope gradient map of the Lower Neretva region
(ArcMap, SRPJ)

thus more sugar in the fruit. Somewhat less suitable for growing new plantations are the western and eastern and least suitable are the northern, north-eastern and north-western aspects. At the northern exposures, cultivation of varieties that are more resistant to low temperatures and have a shorter growing season is suitable (Jug, 2013).

The Rizman, Volarević and Terra Madre wineries grow vines on the south, southwest and southeast exposed hills of the Slivno municipality, near the village of Komarna. From the analysis, it appears that the area around the Baćina lakes is suitable for growing crops, and in Peraćko Blato, not far from the lakes, there is one of the most important family farms in the Lower Neretva region - Family Farm Ostojić, known for growing figs. Family farms can be considered as one of the major pillars of rural tourism (Svržnjak et al., 2014). In addition, the western slopes of Rujnica are also exposed to the south, and in the settlement of Desne, located in the contact area between the alluvial plain and Rujnica, there are numerous olive groves and vineyards.

In planning and tourism marketing, on the other hand, GIS has been common for several decades. GIS is nowadays mainly used for the management of tourism resources. The development of tools that support the tourism decision-making process and allow potential visitors to get an overview of the variety of tourism resources, products and services are the main objectives of the application of GIS in tourism marketing (Albuquerque et al., 2018, Minić,

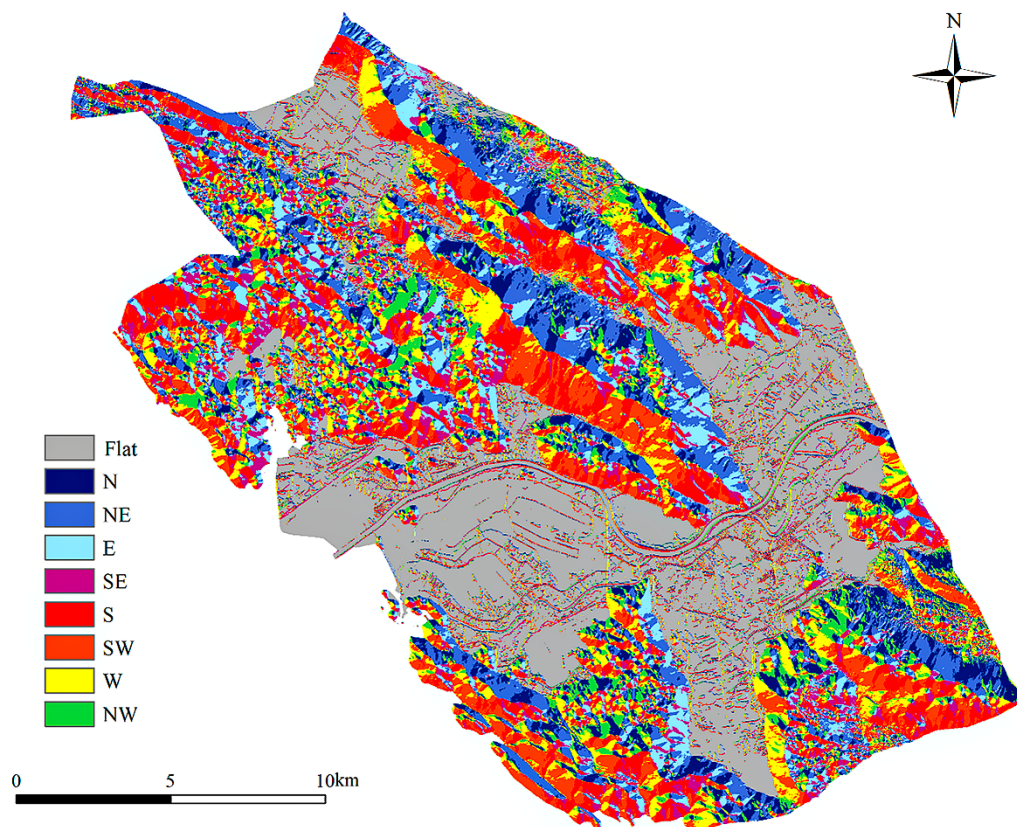


Figure 6. Aspect Map of the Lower Neretva region
(ArcMap, SRPJ)

2010, Šiljeg et al., 2010). In practice, the most common are: digital maps that serve as the basis for printed maps, digital files for internet and mobile mapping, attractions map, website with interactive mapping (Jovanović, Njeguš, 2008). Destination promotion through geo-marketing is based on data collected through market research and statistical data. In order for the promotion of a tourist destination to be successful, it is necessary to create a network portal with a city map, a city transport map, tourist attractions and other interesting places, such as restaurants, cafes, etc. (Minić, 2010).

Spatial analysis in GIS can be a significant help for all units of local self-government of the Lower Neretva region in the context of tourism development. For example, by using a simple spatial analysis of the distribution of tourists, it is possible to determine in which areas more investments would be necessary. A significant step forward would certainly be the development of a web and mobile application with all tourism resources in the region, including, for instance, public facilities, restaurants, hotels, cafes, cultural content, etc., which would need to be updated from time to time, depending on changes.

Conclusion

Considering the richness and diversity of the natural and cultural heritage and the current trends in tourism, mainly the increasing interest for selective forms of tourism, Lower Neretva region has a unique potential. It is to be expected that with the development of the analyzed selective forms of tourism, the tourist season will be extended. As most tourist activity is concentrated in July and August, developing forms of special interest tourism would prolonge tourist season. For example, further investment in the development of agrotourism and bringing tourists to mandarin orchards, whose picking season is from September to November, would reduce the pronounced seasonality during the summer months. In addition, bird-watching is specific for the spring months (May and June), as it is the nesting season for most birds, and tourists can come both in autumn during migration, but also in the winter months.

It is necessary to emphasize the richness of the historical and cultural heritage and a large number of events outside the main tourist season, the promotion of which should be worked on systematically to achieve the vision of tourism development. The advantages of using geo-information technologies, as well as other modern technologies, should certainly be used in the overall promotion of this area. In order to implement concrete and radical changes in this regard, strong cooperation and involvement of all local stakeholders such as tourism associations, small and medium enterprises, local community and municipality authorities is needed.

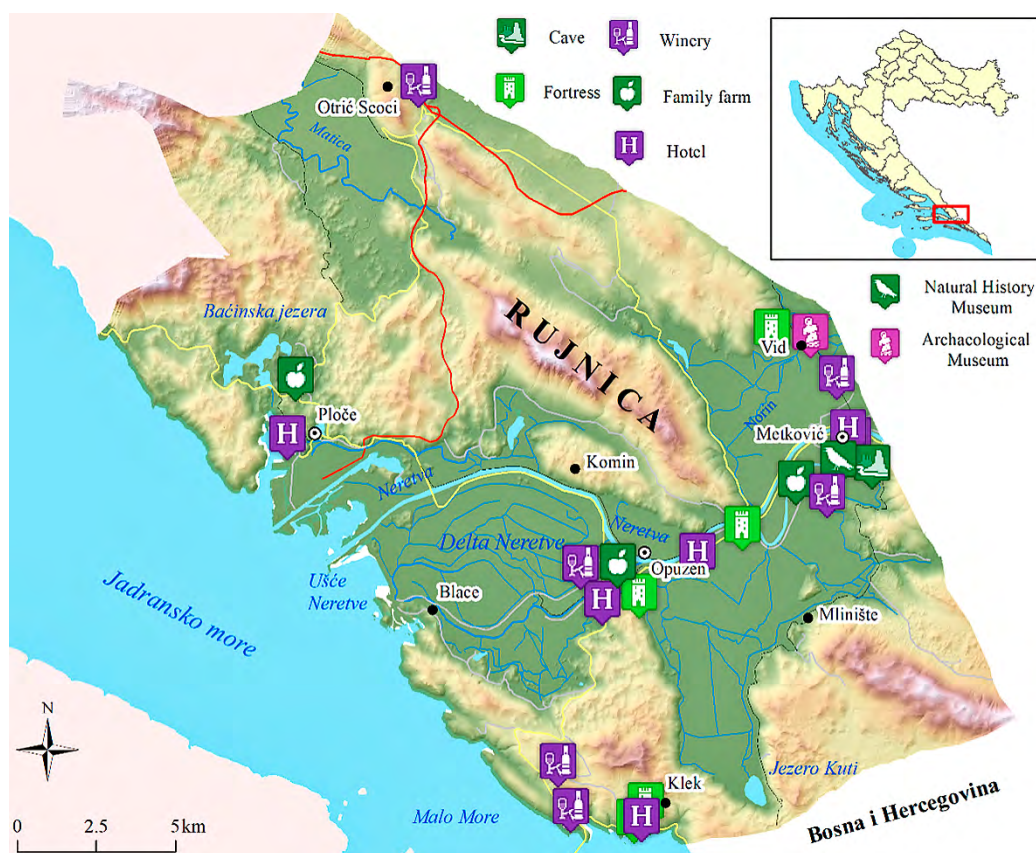


Figure 7. Tourism infrastructure in the Lower Neretva region
(ArcMap, SRPJ)

Based on the he researches it is evident majority of tourist infrastructure and points of tourist's interest is located along the Neretva river and along the coast (Figure 7) so special attention should be given to the redistribution of tourist flows as well as balanced tourism development in the entire region. Taking into account the natural and cultural diversity of Lower Neretva region, a rich resource base of tourist attractions, preserved environment and rural households, region has all prerequisites for the development of all special forms of tourism in the rural areas.

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Exploring Tourist Perceptions of Kerala's Destination Marketing

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Abstract

Kerala has been recognised as one of the top ten paradises in the world. Kerala offers a wide range of tourism items that meet the requirements and expectations of practically every type of traveller, and it stands out for offering a full travel experience. The state of Kerala offers tremendous potential for tourism expansion thanks to its ideal temperature, lush vegetation, natural tourist attractions, vibrant festivals, martial arts, wildlife sanctuaries, and ancient Ayurveda legacy. But Kerala has not been able to fully realise its potential, despite having a variety of resources and opportunities. Kerala's tourism industry has a lot of untapped potential as less than five percent of visitors to India come to the State. Kerala is ranked eighth in terms of foreign visitor arrivals and fifteenth in terms of domestic visitor arrivals. Kerala travel marketing tactics must be updated over time to reflect changes in customers' requirements and tastes if the state is to realise its full potential and pull in an increasing number of tourists, especially from abroad. To assure service quality, it is crucial to understand exactly what the client expects, and marketing research on consumer preferences is required to examine how the customer's needs are evolving. This study aims to comprehend how tourists see the advertising tactics used by the public and commercial sectors at different Kerala tourist attractions. The study also seeks to gauge travellers' expectations and satisfaction levels in regard to Kerala as a tourist destination because the success of marketing depends on consumer happiness.

Keywords: Destination marketing, Tourist perception, Travel behaviour, Marketing strategies, Tourist satisfaction, Kerala tourism, Brand identity.

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Introduction

The development of a distinct brand identity that reflects the key characteristics and personality of its products is necessary in the modern, highly competitive and dynamic global tourism sector. Destination marketing is a significant tactic used by countries to encourage tourism. It seeks to distinguish a destination from its rivals by creating a distinctive character. When travellers are planning their vacations, they will continue to prioritise destinations with a distinct market position and alluring features. Since customers choose how, when, and how they access and acquire their travel and tourism plans, positioning a place in the minds of consumers through evoking their perspective is necessary for a destination to be successful.

Kerala, a small state in the south western tip of India has been successful in gaining widespread reputation on a national and international level as a tourist destination. Kerala has been chosen by National Geographic Traveller as one of the ten world's paradises and one of the fifty places to visit once in a lifetime. In order to meet the demands of visitors arriving in the state, a variety of tourism items are now offered in this God's Own Country. Kerala tourism provides a range of vacation packages including activities like Ayurveda travel, pilgrimage travel, heritage travel, adventure travel, and medical travel. Additionally, the state provides unique assistance for the development of ecotourism.

Objectives of the study

The study aims at the following objectives.

1. To evaluate and compare both domestic and international visitors' travel behaviours.
2. To comprehend how visitors, perceive the advertising and marketing techniques used by public and private parties at various Kerala tourist locations to draw visitors.
3. To comprehend how the characteristics of the place and the services provided there affect the satisfaction of the tourists.

Review of literature

Destination's image has a role in both the creation of a destination brand and its success. Understanding how travellers perceive the place and its image is the first step in creating and maintaining a strong brand image (Tasci, Gartner, 2007). Consumers must create an image of the products and services offered by tourism destinations before making a decision to acquire them. Therefore, it doesn't really matter whether the image really depicts how the particular place actually is; what matters is that the image exists in the minds of potential customers (Govers et al., 2007). Destinations have a variety of attributes that influence tourists' opinions (Mahdzar et al., 2015; Singh, 2020). Quality of destination is the backbone of tourism competitiveness and the biggest loading factor in influencing tourist satisfaction (Mukherjee Adhikari, Datta, 2018; Sumaryadi et al., 2021). Market segmentation, targeting and positioning tactics are very crucial and has a big impact on the state's economy and healthcare system (Kariyil, Mathew, 2022). Destination marketing should be efficient enough to meet the needs of all stakeholders and market groups (Cai, 2002). For the destinations, it is crucial to establish the ideal image and then uphold it through effective use of marketing techniques like promotion strategies. While some elements influencing destination perception are beyond one's control, marketing, promoting attractions, creating

tourist-centric events, and controlling tourism infrastructure services (e.g., hotels, restaurants, visitor centres) are all manageable (Marzieh et al., 2017; Beerli, Martín, 2004). The marketing and promotion initiatives helped the Indian tourism sector perform better (Amitabh, Ojha, 2014). The campaign “Incredible India” can definitely help to attract more foreign visitors to India and would also close the communication gap between centralised and state-wise tourism campaigns (Singh et al., 2012). In the context of an emerging country, the state of Kerala stands out for its unique beauty as a developing tourist destination. Kerala's attractiveness is greatly enhanced by the area's natural beauty, pleasant climate, captivating backwaters, tempting native food, and rich cultural experiences (Edward, George, 2008). Kerala is portrayed as the ideal location for individuals seeking captivating natural beauties, including mesmerizing backwaters, mighty mountains, and exquisite beaches. The tagline “God's own country” lends a profound emotional touch to this portrayal (Ganesh, Jagadeesh, 2014). Tourism development in Kerala is socially, culturally, and environmentally sustainable, assuring the entire sustainability of its tourist sites (Venugopalan, 2021). Ecotourism plays a crucial role in improving sustainable tourism practices in Kerala, India. Various media platforms, including traditional and digital ones, is critical in successfully targeting a range of domestic and foreign customers (Kumavat, Prakashraj Pradipbhai, 2021). Tourism, travel, and hospitality industries greatly benefit from the use of information and communication technologies (ICT). The successful operation of a tourism business depends on ICT integration in the sector (Anand Bethapudi, 2013; Tham et al., 2013; Khan, Abir, 2022). Social media has great impact on marketing tactics, particularly in the travel and tourism industry, and it profoundly influences travelers' information-seeking and trust-building processes (Alizadeh, Isa, 2015; Asha, 2023; Choudhury, Mohanty 2018; Kumar et al., 2015; Buluk, 2015; Mukherjee, Nagabhushanam, 2017; Yang, Wang, 2015). Social media is one of the best instruments for destination marketing and advertising. Social media is incredibly effective at increasing sales, brand loyalty and it can be utilised to introduce a brand to millions of people throughout the world (Neeraj, 2015). Travel behaviour differs across different types of travellers, with preferences impacted by characteristics such as age, money, and travel experience (Subathra et al., 2019). The selection of tourist locations is greatly influenced by the preferences, prior travel experiences, and opinions of other travellers (Gurdogan 2022). Destination competitiveness is influenced by a variety of elements, including infrastructure, management techniques, human resources, environmental considerations, and contextual variables (Chernega, 2021).

Methods and Data

The present study was conducted in selected tourist destinations in Trivandrum District, which is located in Kerala, India. The specific locations analyzed were Kovalam, Sankhmugham, Ponnudi, and Trivandrum City. Kerala is referred to as a tourist destination due to its widespread reputation on a national and international level, with recognition from National Geographic Traveler as one of the world's paradises and one of the fifty places to visit once in a lifetime. A quantitative research approach with a survey technique was primarily used in this study. The survey was conducted in-person through face-to-face interviews. The survey was conducted within a specific time frame, from September 2022 to January 2023. The sample size consisted of 150 domestic and foreign tourists from the four selected locations. The respondents were selected using a convenience sampling approach with a non-proportionate sample technique. The study incorporated both primary and secondary data. Primary data was collected through a structured questionnaire survey administered during the face-to-face interviews. The ques-

tionnaire utilized a 5-point Likert scale for rating. Data analysis was conducted using MS Excel and SPSS software to meet the objectives of the study. In addition to the survey data, necessary information was collected from various sources, including the Department of Tourism, hotels, non-governmental organizations and travel agencies.

Result and discussions

The table provides a detailed analysis of the characteristics and preferences of domestic and foreign tourists. Male domestic visitors account for 62% of the total, while male foreign tourists account for 68% of the total. Similarly, 57% of domestic visitors are single and 43% are married, compared to 62% and 38% among foreign tourists. Domestic and foreign tourists are more evenly distributed across age groups. Nuclear family arrangements are prevalent among both domestic (61%) and foreign tourists (70%). Professionals make up the largest occupational group among both categories of tourists, accounting for 33% and 40% of domestic and foreign tourists, respectively. The income distribution among visitors reveals a significant gap between domestic and international travelers as 86% of international tourists had an average monthly income of more than 60,000 rupees, indicating a greater economic profile within this group. Family members make up the biggest percentage, 40% and 24% respectively, of both domestic and international travelers' preferred travel companions. The choice to travel with spouse is made by a sizable portion of foreign tourists (34%) compared to local travelers (10%). A significant proportion of visitors, domestic (18%) and foreign (14%) prefer to travel alone.

Table 1. Sample Description

Characteristics		Domestic Tourists		Foreign Tourists	
		Frequency	Percentage (%)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	62	62	34	68
	Female	38	38	16	32
	Total	100	100	50	100
Marital Status	Single	57	57	31	62
	Married	43	43	19	38
	Total	100	100	50	100
Age (in years)	Below 20	18	18	5	10
	20-29	25	25	12	24
	30-39	22	22	10	20
	40-49	20	20	16	32
	50-59	10	10	5	10
	More than 60	5	5	2	4
	Total	100	100	50	100
Family Structure	Nuclear	61	60	35	70
	Joint Family	39	39	15	30
	Total	100	100	50	100

Characteristics		Domestic Tourists		Foreign Tourists	
		Frequency	Percentage (%)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Educational Level	Post-Graduation	27	27	15	30
	Graduation	43	43	22	44
	Higher Secondary	22	22	10	20
	Matriculation	8	8	3	6
	Total	100	100	50	100
Occupation	Students	25	25	2	4
	Professionals	33	33	20	40
	Business	16	16	10	20
	Agriculture	14	14	4	8
	Self-employed	12	12	14	28
	Total	100	100	50	100
Average Monthly Income in rupees	No Personal Income	10	10	0	0
	Below 10,000	11	11	0	0
	10,000– 20000	18	18	0	0
	20000 – 40000	22	22	2	4
	40000 – 60000	23	23	5	10
	Above 60000	16	16	43	86
	Total	100	100	50	100
Companion for travelling	Alone	18	18	7	14
	Spouse	10	10	17	34
	Friends	32	32	14	28
	Family	40	40	12	24
	Total	100	100	50	100
Most Preferred type of destinations	General recreations	40	40	4	8
	Religious sites	30	30	5	10
	Beaches	15	15	16	32
	Backwaters	10	10	13	26
	Wildlife and nature reserves	5	5	12	24
	Total	100	100	50	100
Geographic Preference	Southern Kerala	38	38	24	48
	Central Kerala	34	34	20	40
	Northern Kerala	28	28	6	12
	Total	100	100	50	100

Characteristics		Domestic Tourists		Foreign Tourists	
		Frequency	Percentage (%)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Travelling time	October – March	25	25	33	66
	April – September	20	20	10	20
	No specific season	55	55	7	14
	Total	100	100	50	100
Travel mode	Road	57	57	20	40
	Rail	40	40	18	36
	Air	3	3	12	24
	Total	100	100	50	100

Source: primary data

Comparing the travel habits of domestic and foreign tourists, it was observed that foreign visitors arrive more frequently during specific seasons (their arrivals account for 66% of the total annual arrivals during the period from October to March), compared to domestic visitors, whose arrivals are more evenly distributed throughout the year. The southern and central parts of Kerala receive a disproportionately bigger share of the country's international visitors, who arrive by road and rail after entering India through other states. Foreign visitors make up a small portion of visitors to Northern Kerala. While domestic visitors choose general recreation and religious sites, foreign visitors are more drawn to beaches, backwaters, and wildlife.

Descriptive statistics

Tourists generally rated destination branding favorably, with (Mean: 3.88, SD: 1.723): This demonstrates that the “God’s Own Country” branding has successfully built a strong favorable image of Kerala as a desired tourism destination. The continuous use of this brand across marketing materials has resonated effectively with tourists, helping them link Kerala with natural beauty, cultural richness, and friendly hospitality. The internet presence and digital marketing activities were favorably accepted, with (Mean: 3.83, SD: 1.885). This demonstrates that both the government and corporate groups have effectively used online channels to communicate with potential tourists.

Table 2. Perception of Tourists about Marketing Strategies

Nº	Marketing Strategy	5 – Excellent	4 - Good	3 - Fair	2 -Poor	1 - Very Poor	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	Destination Branding	45	55	40	7	3	3.88	1.723
2	Online Presence and Digital Marketing	40	65	30	10	5	3.833	1.885
3	Eco-Tourism and Sustainability	47	50	41	9	3	3.86	1.85075
4	Cultural and Heritage Promotion	48	52	42	5	3	3.913	1.698
5	Wellness and Ayurveda Tourism	45	50	41	10	4	3.813	1.959

Nº	Marketing Strategy	5 – Excellent	4 - Good	3 - Fair	2 -Poor	1 - Very Poor	Mean	Standard Deviation
6	Adventure and Wildlife Tourism	45	47	48	8	2	3.833	1.735
7	Community-Based Tourism	27	37	43	32	11	3.2467	2.648
8	International Collaborations and Roadshows	25	30	42	43	10	3.1133	2.638
9	Seasonal and Event-Based Marketing	27	31	40	37	15	3.12	2.923

Source: primary data

Tourists had a positive attitude toward eco-tourism and sustainability activities, with (Mean: 3.86, SD: 1.851). Kerala's emphasis on responsible and eco-friendly tourist practices has clearly resonated with environmentally conscious guests. Cultural and heritage promotion initiatives received favorable responses with (Mean: 3.91, SD:1.698) showing that initiatives to highlight traditional art forms, festivals and heritage places have well attracted tourists looking for authentic cultural experiences. Wellness and Ayurveda tourism tactics received generally good comments, with (Mean: 3.81, SD: 1.960). The adventure and wildlife tourism initiatives were regarded positively with (Mean: 3.83, SD: 1.735) indicating that activities such as trekking, wildlife safaris, and water sports have excited the curiosity of many tourists seeking adventurous experiences. Community-based tourism strategies had mixed reviews, with (Mean: 3.25, SD:2.648). The international collaborations and roadshows plan obtained a mean score of 3.11, SD 2.63, indicating a modest effectiveness as many do not recognize the direct influence of such collaborations on their overall experience. Tourists had mixed feelings about seasonal and event-based marketing strategies, with (Mean: 3.12, SD: 2.923) indicating that a significant portion do not find them consistently appealing.

The aspects that affect effective tourism marketing techniques in Kerala are discussed in this section. Descriptive statistics about the price, cultural, political, psychological, and environmental factors are provided in this section.

Table 3. Pricing factors

Variables	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Standard Deviation
	1	2	3	4	5		
	%	%	%	%	%		
Reasonable Product Cost	6	14	16	38	26	3.64	1.738
Reasonable Travelling Cost	2	14	28	30	26	3.64	1.438
Reasonable Accommodation	6	14	24	30	26	3.56	1.758
Available Online Payment Option	10	12	22	32	24	3.48	1.962
Accepted Plastic Money	4	18	22	36	20	3.5	1.5625
Brands are able to fulfil expectation	2	14	34	36	14	3.46	1.1605
Brand Values are Superior	4	8	30	36	22	3.64	1.338

Variables	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Standard Deviation
	1	2	3	4	5		
	%	%	%	%	%		
Ability to satisfy needs	2	4	24	46	24	3.86	1.0005
Preferred Service was available	6	14	18	38	24	3.6	1.7
Customised Product matched with market price	6	12	20	38	24	3.62	1.6445
Market leaders charge higher price	2	6	22	40	30	3.9	1.1625
Overall satisfaction on Pricing Factors	4	6	16	44	30	3.9	1.3125

Source: primary data

Tourists are satisfied with all statements made about pricing tactics, as evidenced by the fact that every variable had a mean score of greater than three. A high mean score of 3.86 and 3.9 respectively, was assigned to the statements “Ability to satisfy needs/wants” and “Market leaders charge greater price.” It appears to imply that marketers who can please customers can command a high price and be the market leader. The overall mean values, which range from 3.4 to 3.9 indicate that tourists are content with the factors that can affect the pricing techniques of tourism marketing to demonstrate their efficacy.

Table 4. Cultural factors

Variables	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Standard Deviation
	1	2	3	4	5		
	%	%	%	%	%		
Local People are helpful	10	10	16	40	24	3.58	1.9045
Provide Accurate Information	10	10	15	40	25	3.6	1.925
Trust Worthy	10	10	20	34	26	3.56	1.958
Local People are Polite	2	4	16	44	34	4.04	1.048
Responsive to Tourists needs	4	10	16	48	22	3.74	1.3405
Treated as Guests	2	4	20	40	34	4	1.1
Maintaining historical Monuments	6	8	14	40	32	3.84	1.618
Availability of Museums	4	10	22	36	28	3.74	1.4905
Local People Provides Security	4	10	20	36	30	3.78	1.5145
Overall satisfaction on Cultural Factors	4	8	16	42	30	3.86	1.4005

Source: primary data

All factors had mean scores greater than three, with the local people’s courtesy and attitude towards tourists coming in at greater than four. This finding suggests that Kerala culture is

particularly distinctive and that residents around or close to tourist destinations are extremely polite. However, a considerable amount of visitors were not that happy about the statement "Provide correct information."

Table 5. Political factors

Variables	Strongly Disagree	Dis Agree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Standard Deviation
	1	2	3	4	5		
	%	%	%	%	%		
Conscious about present political status	6	8	16	44	26	3.76	1.528
Destination are free from Political Unrest	4	20	30	24	22	3.4	1.65
Available Police Security	6	12	24	40	18	3.52	1.512
Strictly implement tourism policies	14	16	20	36	14	3.2	2
Political Stability encourages you to travel more	10	10	16	42	22	3.56	1.858
Political Stability attracts more Foreign tourists to the state	4	6	16	38	36	3.96	1.398
Support of Government towards Tourism Development	4	6	16	40	34	3.94	1.3705
Overall satisfaction on Political Factors	6	6	20	40	28	3.78	1.5145

Source: primary data

Most of the respondents agreed with the assertions, such as being aware of the current political climate, choosing a destination free from political unrest, rigorously adhering to tourism regulations, etc. Tourists are satisfied with statements relating to political strategies, where all variables received a mean score of greater than three. It's important to note that the statement "Political stability attract more international tourists" has a mean of 3.96 and is a reliable measure of how political stability influences tourism.

Table 6. Psychological factors

Variables	Strongly Disagree	Dis Agree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Standard Deviation
	1	2	3	4	5		
	%	%	%	%	%		
Destinations are Safer	4	10	20	40	26	3.74	1.4405
Attractive hospitality of Local People	2	10	12	44	32	3.94	1.2705
Enjoyable Atmosphere	6	6	10	50	28	3.88	1.432
Available discount offers	4	6	20	40	30	3.86	1.3505
Attractive Tour Packages	6	6	20	38	30	3.8	1.55

Variables	Strongly Disagree	Dis Agree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Standard Deviation
	1	2	3	4	5		
	%	%	%	%	%		
Adequate provision for entertainment	4	6	20	40	30	3.86	1.3505
Gorgeous and Tourist Friendly Environment	2	6	20	42	30	3.92	1.142
Overall satisfaction on Psychological Factors	6	6	20	40	28	3.78	1.5145

Source: primary data

Travelers are happy with all the factors that can affect their psychology related to travel behaviour, with mean values ranging between 3.74 and 3.94. With a high mean score of 3.94 and 3.92, attractive hospitality and the gorgeous setting and attractive environment clearly meet the expectations of visitors.

Table 7. Environmental factors

VARIABLES	Strongly Disagree	Dis Agree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Standard Deviation
	1	2	3	4	5		
	%	%	%	%	%		
Available Parking facility	2	2	20	48	28	3.98	0.9245
Available Communication Channels	6	8	20	40	26	3.72	1.552
Attractive Landscape	2	2	20	44	32	4.02	0.9745
Good air, water and Sound quality	2	2	20	40	36	4.06	1.0205
Technologically Developed Destinations	4	6	20	42	28	3.84	1.318
Available Information	12	14	16	36	22	3.42	2.1045
Overall satisfaction on Environmental Factors	4	6	16	44	30	3.9	1.3125

Source: primary data

All variables in the table obtained a mean score of greater than three, indicating that tourists are satisfied with all environmental strategy-related aspects. Despite the fact that tourists were satisfied, few criteria, such as available information, available communication channels and technologically advanced destination sites, received a comparatively low mean scores.

Conclusion

The current study with the help of primary data and available literature provides insight into how travellers view Kerala's tourism marketing tactics and the expectations and satisfaction of tourists about Kerala as a tourist destination. According to the survey, the main variables that affect tourists' perceptions are culture, environment, pricing, value, expectations; tech-

nology; environment; and ability to pay. When promoting the businesses to achieve more clients, the service provider must focus on these elements and their sub-factors. The sample profile reveals that the majority of visitors are male, young, and from nuclear families. The tourists were extremely concerned and pleased with the marketing strategies and the ability of the destination's marketers to satiate needs and wants, market leaders' higher pricing demands, distinctive culture, locals, local politics, travel risk technologies, and environment.

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Sustainable Development of Two Geographical Regions in Slovenia: Repercussions for Tourism – Case Study of the Posavje and Dolenjska Regions

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Abstract

The opportunities of participatory democratic communication in the process of innovative, sustainable and socially responsible tourism development & policy creation have never been sufficiently exploited due to constant changes in the area of social communication. In this study, based on theoretical and empirical research and case studies, we offer a concept of a communication model, which enables democratic participatory communication in an optimal way, namely by formation of the regional tourist destination. In paper we present the case of the Posavje and Dolenjska regions of Slovenia, in which each municipality has their own municipal tourism development strategies, but do not have a common, regional strategy that best coincides with the parameters determining optimal tourist destination management. We see this as a problem and obstacle for an efficient tourism development. We use the method of online interviews, by targeting tourism stakeholders from all three sectors in the regions of Posavje and Dolenjska, namely public, private and NGO. Based on the empirical research we offer solutions to this tourism development issue in the form of a new conceptualization of communication functions in these tourist destinations.

Keywords: Communication, Destination Management, Destination Management Organization (DMO), Participatory Communication, Sustainable Development, Tourism;

Introduction

With the development of modern society based on a market economy, all social areas, and especially tourism and with it the tourism industry, face the problem of a reduction of natural resources and environmental pollution. The growing awareness of the limited natural resourc-

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es and the necessity of human social existence represent cognisances, requiring respect for the life principle according to which meeting the needs of present generations does not jeopardize equal opportunities for future generations (OECD, 2021). It is therefore about the principles of sustainable and socially responsible development, which have become a *conditio sine qua non*, a condition without which there is no survival of human society. In this context and with this purpose, the basic document for tourism development in Slovenia is titled “Strategy of Sustainable Growth of Slovenian Tourism 2017–2021”. It should represent the basis for all strategies for tourism development at lower organisational levels. Tourism represents a very important activity for the economy of many countries (Šutalo et al. 2011, 268; Jasprica 2012, 116), including Slovenia’s economy, which is confirmed by the data of the Strategy of Sustainable Growth of Slovenian Tourism. This by 2021 envisaged “3.7 to 4 billion € from export travel and tourism consumption” (The Strategy of Sustainable Growth of Slovenian Tourism, 2017–21, p. 6). It goes without saying that all these projections have been suspended with the onset and duration of the COVID-19 pandemic, but they will again be relevant after the crisis (ETC, 2020).

All activities, which include participation, connection, planning, design, decision-making or management, are only communication processes that achieve stakeholders’ results in the tourist destination. Local people must be consulted in the assessment of landscapes and cultural and natural heritage assets. It is essential to ensure that the local impact of increased heritage tourism is brought within the process of developing and marketing tourism products (Koščak and O’Rourke, 2020; UNEP/UNWTO, 2013; UNWTO, 1998). “Tourism is basically not a consumer of non-renewable resources, both natural and cultural, but it has the ability to generate funds through their use, which significantly contributes to the development and enrichment of these resources (Jegdić 2011, 22).” Similar case studies examined issues i.e. the extent to which the residents of seven significant settlements from the area of the Deliblatska Peščara Special Nature Reserve were satisfied with the state of sustainable tourism development (Trišić et al., 2021). Another study aimed to provide an insight into the attitudes of the experts for nature protection of the Gornje Podunavlje Special Nature Reserve (SNR), in order to emphasize the need for harmonizing the further activities of ecotourism and nature protection within the study area (Stojanović et al., 2021).

Small local tourist destinations, such as our case study regions and their marketing objectives are often a hindrance to each other due to their different and, above all, partial interests. The solution is for small local destinations to connect with each other at the regional level, achieve joint synergy of creative energy, and create a new integrated service through joint communication management. It is also possible, based on the networking of small local destinations into regional destinations, to create a model of organizational communication, which, due to the placement of Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) in these processes, could meet the basic criteria of sustainable development (Koščak and O’Rourke, 2020; Buhalis, 2000; Vodeb, 2014).

A tourist destination as a communication-related term

From the time when tourist travel was observed as a specific and growing phenomenon until today, many authors have tried to define the term tourist destination with a single universal and comprehensive definition. A review of the literature leaves the impression that there are as many definitions as authors. The reason is that each of the authors, defining the term tour-

ist destination, emphasized only one of its many determinants. For example, Čavlek and others emphasize that the term tourist destination refers to a specific tourist area, region, state, several countries, the entire continent, or an area that is interconnected by networks of interdependent relationships related to tourism. The basis of the functioning of this organizational structure is the process of communication between all stakeholders (Čavlek, et al., 2011).

Thus, the term destination is a place that have constructed an amalgam of tourist products and services whose consumption is under the brand name of the destination. The destinations are well defined geographically and understood by the tourists as unique entities and exhibit several core provisions (Mutuku, 2013). These provisions are accessibility, attractions, package activities, and auxiliary services. According to WTO, a destination is a unique place where a visitor spends at least one night and exhibit tourism products such as attractions, support services, and tourism resources complete with defined management, physical and administrative boundaries, and a well-known image. It is interesting that Jegdić and Milošević, contrary to the opinion of most authors who focus on the offer, emphasize that a tourist destination must have a focus on consumers, i.e. tourists (Jegdić & Milošević, 2011, 20). Observed from the aspect of various criteria, destinations are certainly very different from each other, but the demand of tourists is a key factor in the shaping of the offer and thus a factor in the definition of the space of a modern destination. At the tourist destination, various communication processes take place in different contexts, between different communicators who enter into various relationships.

On the other hand, successful performance in destination management requires a new and practical tourism paradigm combining excellence, co-creation and co-operation and high-quality services. Development of innovative tourism products is aimed at increasing competitiveness, facilitating sustainable tourism development, and consequently increasing tourism turnover. A systematic approach is important if you are to achieve organisational synergy, with creation of new jobs, development of new skills, and ecological innovations in tourism. This takes into account the competitive adjustments required for sustainable development (Koščak, O'Rourke, 2023, UNWTO, 2022).

Tourism is one of the many external forces influencing the direction and options for local development. The question of whether tourism can be sustainable – that is, whether it can contribute to local sustainable development – is therefore rightfully addressed. A truly legitimate and practical discussion on sustainable tourism must take place in and with the communities that are being influenced by tourist industry development (UNWTO, 2020). It must create accountability of the tourism industry to locally defined development visions. The true proof of “sustainable tourism” will be the sustainable development of local communities that serve as tourist destinations. In recent surveys on the needs of citizens and their relationship with tourism, several “immediate” or “direct from the heart” responses stand out (Hoffman, 2014; Yazdi, 2012, Dražić, 2020):

- sense of freedom;
- open spaces;
- security;
- health;
- normality;
- hope;
- fragility and a new vision of the world and
- locality.

Tourism generates cultural, economic and social values and it is certain that tourism activity will recover after all different kind of disasters, including the COVID 19 pandemic. However, this depends on professionals in the sector acquiring the capacity to align themselves with this new reality conception of the world and transmitting values of security, freedom, authenticity, locality, trust and respect for life and the planet. Before the pandemic, many researchers and tourism institutions already noted a growing demand for unique and authentic travel experiences, and a desire among tourists to make a positive impact on the places they visit (Goodwin & Francis, 2003). This trend is now in post-pandemic period likely to accelerate. This will and should help drive the sustainable development of rural communities, creating jobs and other opportunities outside of big cities, while at the same time helping protect and promote cultural and natural heritage. It may not always be obvious but the Covid-19 pandemic is giving the travel industry a chance to rebuild itself in a more ethical, considerate and regenerative way for the planet and its people (Euronews, 2020).

Many businesses and destinations have been unable to develop and manage tourism to their full advantage owing to a lack of planning, co-ordination, skills and resources and a failure to make the most of new opportunities offered by digitalisation. The fundamental changes in tourism demand and supply and the responses to them that have occurred since March 2020 point to a need to rethink and reshape tourism policy moving forward. This should be guided by three key requirements and opportunities to:

- restore confidence and enable recovery;
- learn from the experience of the pandemic; and
- prioritise a sustainable development agenda in guiding future tourism (OECD, 2021).

Following a period of lockdowns and isolation, travellers are showing a preference to travel to less crowded and even unfamiliar destinations. Indeed, there has been increased interest in exploring secondary destinations and nature. During this period, travellers have become more committed to sustainability, which in turn is affecting their travel choices. The lockdowns have also shone a brighter light on wellness and overall health, driving more consumers to seek out further wellness experiences. From domestic travel leading the recovery and younger generations being the first to travel again, to an increased demand for longer stays, fee-free cancellations, and enhanced health & hygiene measures, consumers have made their preferences clear, through bookings, enquiries and surveys forecast (WT&TC, 2022). During the COVID-19 pandemic, a re-focus on domestic tourism, when possible, has occurred in many countries. Domestic and nearby markets may play an increasing part in resilient tourism strategies into the future, in the face of increasing restrictions, costs, safety concerns and emissions issues associated with long haul travel. The tourism offer and product base may need to be adapted to meet new market profiles. Irrespective of specific market requirements, innovation and related product diversification can also contribute to resilience in their own right (OECD, 2021).

Case study: Tourist destination and destination management – Slovenian experience – Geographic regions of Posavje and Dolenjska destination

A tourist destination may be defined as a “geographic area”, a territorial-administrative unit or an important attraction; all of these aim to offer visitors experiences, which vary from acceptable to unforgettable. (Bornhorst, Ritchie, Sheehan, 2019) From the conceptual point of view, i.e. if we take into consideration the manageability of the destination, it is far more efficient to

observe the destination as a geographic region that has the necessary critical mass or the critical mass of attractions. Therefore, the destination should offer visitors the tourist experiences that have attracted them to the area. A destination can be considered a combination (or even a brand) of all products, services and experiences provided locally. It enables us to evaluate the influence of regional tourism, as well as to manage the demand and offer in order to maximise the benefit for all stakeholders (Buhalis, 2014). Successful destination management, in addition to a unifying strategy requires an appropriate model of operational management, which will enable close cooperation between the public and private sectors of a particular destination. By bringing together stakeholders around the DMO and the local brand, they are able to synergistically create something greater than the sum of its individual parts, to achieve collaboration to strengthen external promotion as well as internal improvements. To achieve this, a critical mass is required in the geographic area, as well as in the number of quality public, private and NGO stakeholders. Without this critical mass the strength of the destination and its ability to conduct successful management and marketing are much reduced.

DMO's can and should provide packages of common products, be they coastal, rural or urban; this is specially related to the provision of joint services to tourism companies operating in a well-defined geographical area such as Posavje or Dolenjska in SE Slovenia.



Figure 1. Map of Slovenia with geographic regions of Dolenjska and Posavje

Source: Slovenian regions, 2012

For example, a DMO acting as a shared services cooperative is able to provide such benefits as marketing, reservations, travel services, web presence, etc. to a group of local hotels, restaurants, tour operators and guides. These have a special value for connecting tourist opportunities in rural and urban areas of Posavje and Dolenjska, but only if they are satisfactory in terms of geographical size and are connected and cooperating regardless of the administrative boundaries of the individual local self-government units within them. As noted, many small businesses in the tourism sector are struggling to access training, in order to improve skills and processes. DMOs should be able to provide business networks that are a useful source of ideas, support and encouragement. They may also facilitate employee training across a number of companies to create a critical mass of trainees and manage costs for employers. Yet again, this is only if the destination is of a suitable size and has a suitable number of critical stakeholders, which certainly means the entire destination, and not its individual parts in the form of local government organizations.

Challenges of destination management in Slovenia

Despite all the positive results in the field of sustainable tourism development in Slovenia, tourism has faced and continues to face many challenges, especially through the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the biggest challenges in Slovenian tourism, with special importance for comprehensive and interdisciplinary management, are (there were many of them, mostly more or less successful) the attempts to introduce the so-called “destination management” at the local or regional level.

In 1989, the Law on the Promotion of Tourism (ZPO, 1998) was adopted, which in Article 3 prescribed the introduction of the so-called local tourist organisation (LTO). Although the authors of the law primarily had in mind the need for local (without considering administrative municipal boundaries) integration of public, private and non-governmental sectors of stakeholders operating in the local area, stakeholders in the field took it too literally and equated it with a political or a specific administrative area. As a result, quite a few municipal tourism organizations were formed, which actually proved to be a setback for successful and sustainable business and tourism management. The integration of municipalities is surely, given the size of Slovenian municipalities, too small a geographical area, with an insufficient critical mass of key stakeholders to ensure its sustainability, and thus successfully manage the tourist destination in the long term.

This unsuccessful attempt to connect in the field of tourism was followed in 2003 by a further attempt when a new Law on the Promotion of Tourism Development was passed (ZRST, 2003) for this purpose. It stipulated that a tourist destination is a geographical area in which there are individual tourist attractions which are the destinations of tourist trips, but that also contains all that a tourist requires to stay. In Article 4, a tourist destination on the territory of Slovenia was defined as a “tourist area”. It was described as “a geographically rounded area of one or more municipalities that offers a certain set of tourist services or an integral tourist product (from accommodation, food, entertainment, recreation to other leisure services and other services), which is why a tourist can choose it as his or her travel destination”.

This orientation was completed with the document “Development Plan and Guidelines for Slovenian Tourism 2007-2011” (RNUST 2007-2011), which envisaged, as a new organisational form, 14 regional destination organizations (RDO) which were geographically linked to “administrative” statistical regions in Slovenia. This fact, at least in our opinion, was one of the key failures, because in reality the day-to-day operational integration between stakeholders in a geographical area was often completely different to that in the artificially created and administratively defined statistical regions. Here, of course, both politics and narrow individual local interests were involved, resulting in the fact that most RDO’s never actually came to exist in practice, despite the adopted development strategies and the good will of stakeholders in these destinations. Once again, the (non) functioning of the public-private partnership and ensuring its material and other sustainability was critical. On several occasions, the failure was caused by human factors and insufficient knowledge of the rules, principles and requirements of modern destination management.

The last and until recent still valid strategy for the development of tourism in Slovenia, adopted on 5 October 2017, for the period 2017 - 2021 (The Strategy of Sustainable Growth of Slovenian Tourism, 2017 - 21) introduced the so-called macro destinations: Mediterranean Slovenia, Alpine Slovenia, Thermal Pannonian Slovenia and Central Slovenia & Ljubljana, still did not solve this management issue. Since everything is related to the local level (and there are no regional or provincial (county) units in Slovenia), we currently have 60 different DMOs in Slo-

venia, 35 of which cooperate with the National Tourism Organization (STO), in terms of marketing, but not in terms of destination management, which is more than destination marketing itself. The future will show how successful this has been, and the fact remains that the challenges of efficient and successful destination management remain. Therefore, instead of robust DMO's, we have a flood of municipal (rarely inter-municipal) institutions, which do not have adequate and professionally trained professional and financial personnel for the operational implementation of what we call successful destination management.

Why is this important? Because in a way, when we have robust destinations, instead of individual municipal administrative services in charge of tourism development, we are able to increase the number of attractive products. This then happens in not only some destinations, such as Ljubljana, Bled, Bohinj, Postojna Cave, the coast and some others. All these mentioned, in the last “normal” tourist years before 2020 were faced with the problems of excessive tourism or “over-tourism”. Thus, there is a need and challenge in Slovenia to increase tourism growth outside the main season and in less visited tourist destinations.

The example of the Posavje geographic region

Six local communities represent the tourist destination Posavje in spatial terms, namely: Brežice, Krško, Sevnica, Bistrica ob Sotli, Kostanjevica na Krki and Radeče. Viewing the wealth of natural and anthropological resources, the destination has the possibility to form a very diverse offer.



Figure 2. The Posavje region

Source: *Slovenian regions*, 2012

The Posavje region has very rich natural resources, which in themselves represent an attractive primary offer in the form of a rich hydrosphere (rivers, streams, thermal springs...). The region offers a very interesting landscape (forests, hills, mountains, Jovsi (natural biodiversity reserves), Krakovski forest...), exceptional geological peculiarities (in the form of *repnica* (hiding places in the sand) and other underground attractions, e.g. Kostanjevica Cave) and beautiful green landscapes (decorated with vineyards, orchards and meadows). A special tourist attraction in Posavje is a relatively new tourist product – vineyard cottages. Among the primary resources, there is also a mild climate and geostrategic (bordering region and opportunities for development for cross-border tourism products with Croatia) position – the location of Posavje.

Posavje tourism stakeholders, which are the main providers of tourist products and services, are seeking to connect again, although the regional destination Posavje has had no Tourism Development Strategy since 2015. This situation raises many questions about sustainable and responsible development, to which this paper offers certain answers. Based on an understanding of the basic laws and logic of tourist behaviour, we found that their demand is one of the important factors in drawing the “boundaries” of tourist destinations, which tells us that this is by no means the political will of municipal authorities. In short, due to the fact that municipal development strategies are a special aspect of development, related to the “borders” of the political communication community and tourism development strategies that exist in other “borders”, it is necessary to eliminate the possibility of participatory communication of all stakeholder organisational structures.

The example of the Dolenjska geographic region

Tourist destination of Dolenjska consisted of the following municipalities: Novo mesto, Dolenjske Toplice, Mirna Peč, Šentjernej, Šmarješke Toplice, Škocjan, Straža, Žužemberk, Trebnje, Mirna, Mokronog-Trebelno, Šentrupert, Črnomelj, Semič, Metlika, Kočevje, Kostel, Osilnica, Ribnica, Sodražica, Loški Potok.

In the whole of this territory, between 1996 and 2008 - thus for more than ten years, a tourist product called Heritage Trails of Dolenjska and Bela krajina was developed and managed by the Novo mesto Chamber of Commerce. The whole destination, despite occasionally differing views, managed to achieve a joint tourism strategy in the field of sustainable and responsible tourism and joint appearances on key marketing activities, both in domestic and foreign markets. The key development attributes were the natural and cultural heritage as well as the inclusion of the so-called living heritage - events and traditional customs in the destination. In terms of communication, a coordination committee was formed consisting of 32 members from institutions in the public, private and non-governmental sector. The Coordination Committee, led by the Novo mesto Chamber of Commerce, discussed and decided on strategic guidelines for the work and development of the tourist product Heritage Trails in the areas of product development, tourist infrastructure, marketing and human resources development, i.e. interdisciplinary areas important for destination development.

When the 2008 partnership ceased to operate under the auspices of the Chamber of Commerce and with the intention to re-organize for destination management (i.e. RDO, under the auspices of the Novo mesto Development Centre, which unfortunately was not realised due to a cancelled tender by the Ministry of Economy), the partnership began to disintegrate. Bela krajina (Črnomelj, Semič, Metlika) went their own way under the auspices of the Črnomelj

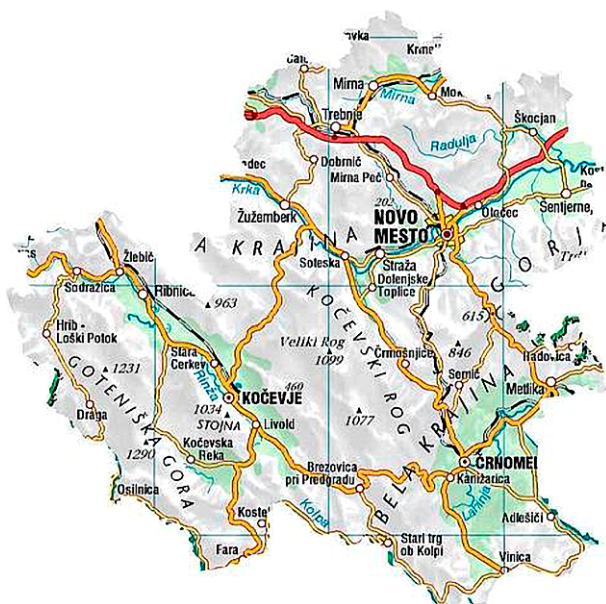


Figure 3. The Dolenjska region

Source: *Slovenian regions*, 2012

Development Centre, as did Kočevje (Kostel, Osilnica) and Ribnica (Sodražica, Loški potok). The municipalities of Dolenjske Toplice, Trebnje and Žužemberk, which had their own development strategy in the field of rural development, also separated themselves from the once unique destination of Dolenjska, which affects the quality of communication and cooperation in the field of tourism. More and more municipalities have recently developed only their own territory and made their own municipal development strategies for tourism, which remain more or less unrealized, because there is no adequate robustness of the destination, as well as insufficient critical mass of stakeholders in them to ensure material and other sustainability.

Communication argument and sustainable tourism development challenges

Communication processes are those that enable not only the organizational structuring of the destination, but that with their intensity and “intimacy” from the status of a geographical concept, thereby create a social concept, which we may refer to as a tourist area. Based on the previously described opportunities and circumstances of development of modern forms of tourism and on previous observation and analysis of the situation in tourist destinations Posavje and Dolenjska, we determined the deficit of quality communication processes and communication connections at the destination. Thus, we analysed the current situation in the destinations Posavje and Dolenjska. The situation in these destinations is as follows: on the one hand, we have individual municipal strategies for tourism development, and on the other, there are no regional strategies for tourism development in both tourist destinations - Posavje and Dolenjska. We have identified this situation as problematic, as in our opinion it is a cause of the fragmentation of management and inadequate management of supply development processes, especially the supply of integrated tourism products (ITP), which are most often in demand in modern tourist destinations.

In short, by researching the existing facts, situation and activities, which arise from the Strategy of the Destination Organization in Posavje - SDOP and Dolenjska - SDOD, we could not determine the strategic plans for tourism development on the principles of sustainable and socially responsible development. Unfortunately, the tourist destination organisations of Posavje and Dolenjska do not have current and valid tourism development strategies. Therefore, our research result is the observation that local tourism development strategies in Posavje and Dolenjska municipalities cannot replace strategies of the Regional destination organizations, which have above all a cohesive role. One of the detected factors of inefficient development of destination tourism in Posavje and Dolenjska (no new projects, no new products, no particularly profiled and recognizable brand) is the undefined status, first of the Regional Development Agency (established by municipalities with state assistance) and then the non-existence of a regional or destination tourism development strategy. Of course, if there were DMOs in Posavje as well as in Dolenjska, they would have the right capacity to develop this necessary and non-existing regional tourism development strategy. Therefore, taking into account the results of the analysis of the available material of Posavje and Dolenjska municipalities, selective and secondary theoretical research of available data sources, as well as the expressed expectations of individual stakeholders, as well as the basic determinants for conceptualizing communication functions, we formed a communication model shown in the following figure:

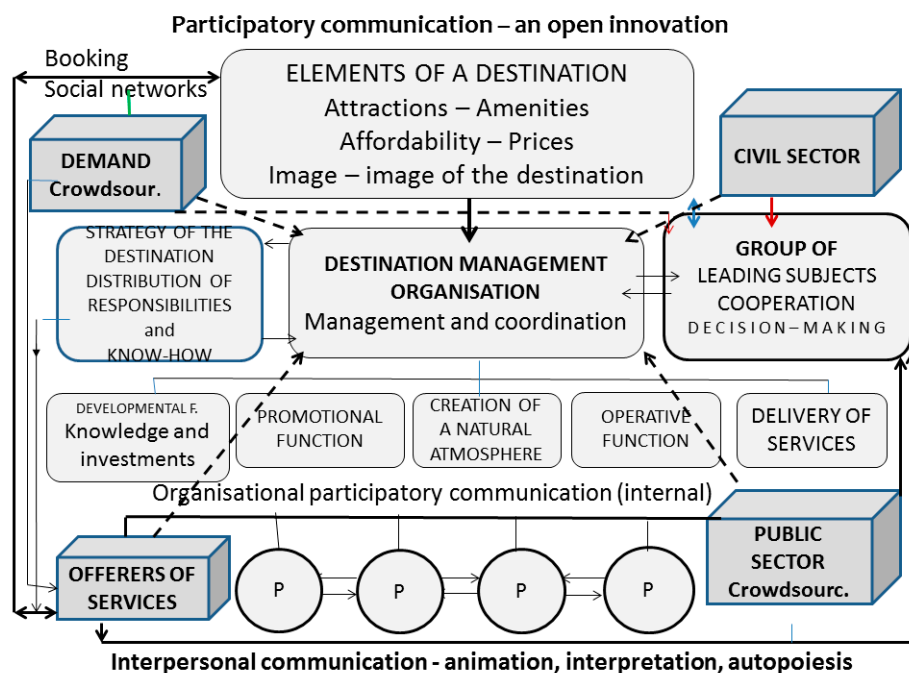


Figure 4. Communication model of a tourist destination with DMO

Source: Veljković (2020), own authorship

The offered model of participatory communication enables adequate involvement in decision-making process involving all stakeholders of the tourist destination. Thus, at the destination, the DMO has the role of communication management. Since the tourist destination has various stakeholders and levels of communication, this will be reflected in corporate commu-

nication in terms of functioning and organisation, since it takes over the central management of the overall communication of the destination. It should be added that the communication processes, which occur between the host and its guests, as well as the forms of internal and external corporate communication together, create the destination as a tourist area.

Data and methods

For the purpose of this paper, we studied & researched two Slovenian geographic regions, namely Posavje and Dolenjska, both located on the SE of Slovenia. Primary research question was posed, namely, if the local tourist stakeholders, which consists of the stakeholders of the tourism offer in both destinations, are satisfied with the existing communication model at the local tourist destinations and with the tourism development strategy?

Some secondary research questions were also accurate, such as:

- Does communication, as a fundamental social and interactive process in the local tourist destination, enable cooperation between stakeholders, exchange of knowledge, experience and other information necessary to improve the offer?
- Are the stakeholders of the offer at the tourist destination satisfied with the existing model of mutual communication?
- Does the existing tourism development strategy at the local destination meet the expectations of the providers of the tourist offer?

Purpose of these questions was to find a respond at a scientific level, or with appropriate scientific methodology, and therefore enable the search for answers to the questions posed in the problem of the role of communication in the conceptualisation and realisation of tourism development strategies. The **general goal** of our research is to increase participatory, collaborative communication and further role & action of tourism offer providers when deciding on the strategy for tourism development in local environments and destinations. The **theoretical goals** are to investigate the achievements of various authors in the field of deliberative communication development as a basis for the appropriate participation of providers in the preparation and decision-making and the adoption of the tourism development strategy. The **practical goal** is to conduct primary, empirical and quantitative research on the actual attitude of providers of tourism products to communication and tourism development strategy.

We organised an online interview (due to Covid pandemic restrictions it was not possible to make interviews in-person at that time) in Autumn 2022 with a research sample, which included a total (Posavje region 74 and Dolenjska region 36) of 110 tourism stakeholders, i.e. those who co-create a tourist space through their communication activities and provision of products, management and organizational structure. The online interview was open for 30 days. The research sample includes the stakeholders from all there sectors, namely public, private and NGO sector. We collected addresses of all registered tourism stakeholders in both regions with the assistance of municipal tourism organisations & their managers and send them interview questions. The research sample includes the following stakeholders: local community, local tourist organizations, tourist associations, tourist information center TIC, vineyard cottages, hotels, hostels, catering establishment, sports facilities, tourist agencies, museums, travel agencies, tourism business companies, small, medium and large tourism companies etc.

The following hypotheses were set for the research purpose:

The main hypothesis was: Existing municipal tourism development strategies in destinations intended for empirical research are not useful for providers of tourism products.

Methods used to check on this was the Selection of theoretical research methods, such as theoretical method of induction and deduction, method of analysis and synthesis, and method of comparison and method of generalization. Then followed the Empirical research methods such as quantitative, survey research technique, data collection on the favour or dislike of providers of tourist products to municipal tourism development strategies. The questionnaire was composed according to the Likert scale.

Results of empirical research and discussions

It should be immediately noted that respondents reacted very similarly at both destinations and accordingly we did not consider it necessary to present the results separately for each region. The concept of this paper was not a comparative relationship of the two destinations, but solely the relationship of stakeholders in destinations according to the role of the destination management organization in the development of the tourist offer. In this paper, we treated DMO from the aspect of the first - class communication factor in destination development.

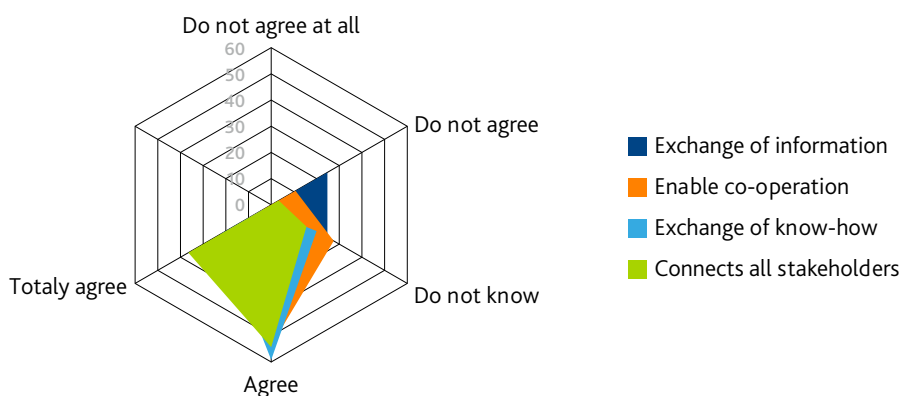


Figure 5. Opinions of stakeholders in the Posavje and Dolenjska regions on the importance of communication functions in a tourist destination

Source: own research, 2022

According to stakeholders, communication with all their communication functions plays an extremely important role in the process of profiling the identity of a tourist destination. As many as 81.1% of all respondents at the Posavje and Dolenjska tourist destinations accept this (agree and very much agree). We calculated the percentage by taking from the number of all respondents only those respondents answering with “very favourable” and “favourable”. This identity function is realised by connecting the actors and their creative energy in the process of conceiving integral tourist products. Communication, according to 74.5% of stakeholders, enables the exchange of knowledge and experiences between stakeholders, who create and offer tourism services and products. Communication at the destination not only connects, but also enables more direct cooperation among all stakeholders (61.8%), both those who directly create the offer, as well as those who indirectly enable the production of services. For a significant

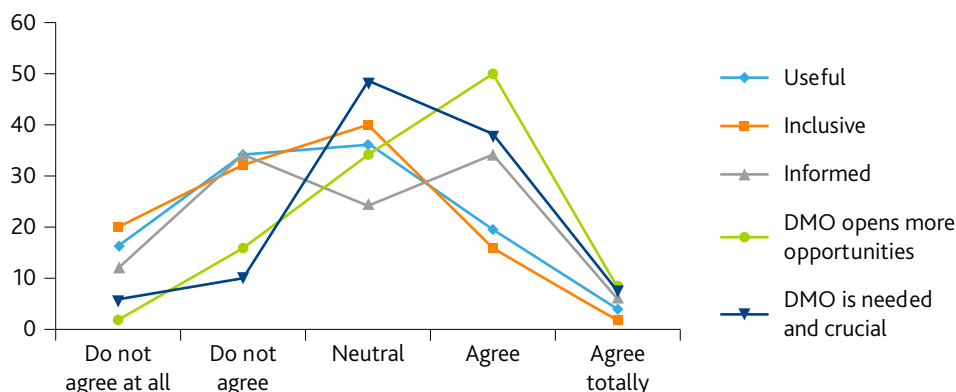


Figure 6. Assessment of satisfaction with the municipal tourism strategy at the local destination and the role of the DMO

Source: own research, 2022

majority of 52% of respondents, information is best exchanged through communication, which is one of the forms of cooperation at a tourist destination.

The survey of stakeholder satisfaction with the municipal strategy at the destination confirms our expectations that in general municipal strategies fail to benefit those creating tourism products. As many as 45% of respondents explicitly disagree with the hypothesis and 33% disagree. So almost three-quarters of all stakeholders believe that these local strategies fail to be beneficial. When questioned as to whether they included recommendations of local strategies in their work, 47% of respondents answered negatively and 36% positively. It should be stated that the same percentage of respondents did not express a position - i.e. they probably failed to understand the question posed. Also when asked if they were familiar with the process of developing a new local tourism strategy, stakeholders were divided into almost the same three thirds. However, an explicit majority support of 53% was given to the claim that a regional destination management organization DMO opens far greater opportunities for development to each stakeholder individually as well as to the entire destination. A qualified majority believes that a destination management organization in a tourist destination is necessary, but almost half of all respondents fail to have an opinion about that organization.

The results of this empirical research showed that in most of the survey questions, the answers provided by respondents were without given values. From informal conversations after the survey, we understood that stakeholders do not have a clear concept of the role and mission of a destination management organization, and therefore provided answers without a clear attitude. Based on the results of the research, we may determine that it is necessary to conduct professional education amongst the creators of the offer, in order to obtain better acceptance of the achievements in the field of communication management development, especially in the context of digitalization. This implies the necessity for immediate and accurate information at the destination. The main measures to be taken on the basis of information will certainly be best developed by a professional body or core institution at the destination - inevitably the Destination Management Organization. Certainly, a DMO is an organization that is neither economical nor functional at the micro level or at the level of the municipal communication community alone. It requires a larger space, area or region, which itself constitutes with the primary supply.

Table 1. *Stakeholders in the destination and most often used institutional communication*

	Growth of co-operation intensity at the destination				
	1	2	3	4	5
With the institute for entrepreneurship and tourism	6	10	36	44	14
With agencies and tour operators	0	10	22	64	14
With partners whom co-create products	0	6	34	52	16
With local self-governance bodies	2	18	40	34	12
With customers, consumers or tourists	0	6	22	52	36
With partners at the destination or via the internet	2	10	28	52	18

Source: own research, 2022

As may be seen, in a tourist destination there are various forms of cooperation between stakeholders, dependent on the types and formats of products and services they create. Due to this, it may be inappropriate to place these relationships, arising between stakeholders at the destination, in a schematic or other form of visual representation.

Conclusion

Based on the synthesis of the results of analyses of the existing and researched information regarding the tourist data for the Posavje and Dolenjska region, we concluded that the communication effort of stakeholders of the public has no effect without a key organizational element in the form of destination management organizations. In the cases we studied, the central organization, which would create new products with its public through communication or management functions, simply does not exist. In this paper, we have emphasized the connection between the communication functions of communication management and the goals and principles of the concept of sustainable development and social responsibility. As an important stakeholder of a specific social public in the modern environment, a tourist destination should act in accordance with the goals and needs of the natural and social environment. Similarly, organizational structures (i.e. their communication management) can no longer act with their public without respecting the new paradigm of communication interaction, which also takes into account the disjunctive as well as the conjunctive approaches. It is therefore regarding the communication management challenges of tourist organisations towards both internal and external (social) public. Local tourism organizations cannot master the use of communication functions in the area of combining asymmetric and symmetric or one-way and two-way communication, and they cannot make the timely choice of the right type of communication. In the field of participatory communication, with the internal public, as well as democratic participation of external (social) public in the development of tourism, there are challenges facing communication management, which can be satisfactorily addressed only by institutions in the form of regional DMO's. The role of a DMO is to constantly evaluate the current model of communication management, so that it knows and is able to communicate according to the following principle: everyone, with everyone, about everything, fully, argumentatively and in personally responsible manner (Plenković, 2020, p. 91-92). Therefore, in this paper we have proposed a new concept of communication functions, which can be used as an adapted model of these destinations, namely Posavje and Dolenjska.

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