

FACTORS AFFECTING CITY DESTINATION CHOICE AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE IN SERBIA

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Abstract

The main goal of this study is to explore factors which influence city destination choice among young people in Serbia. In order to achieve this we conducted a survey consisting of 20 different items influencing the choice of city destination. Afterwards the principal component exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was carried out in order to extract factors. T-test and ANOVA test were also used to determine if there is a difference between different gender and age groups in terms of which factors influence their choice of a city destination. The results indicate four motivating factors extracted by factor analysis, from which Good hospitality and restaurant service seems to be the major motivating factor. The results also show that respondents belonging to the age group of under 25 give more importance to Information and promotion as well as to Good hospitality and restaurant service than those belonging to older age groups. The same two factors are also more important to females than males. The contribution of this study is its indication towards which factors influence city destination choice among young people which will further enable European cities to develop and promote more appropriate and satisfactory tourism products and services for their young visitors.

Key words: *city destination, destination choice, students, urban tourism, youth travel*

JEL Classification: *O15, O18*

I. INTRODUCTION

Urban tourism has an important impact on the income of large European cities. The mass arrival of tourists in cities represents a substantial percentage of the total volume of tourists in tourism countries and a notable contribution to the creation of wealth (Hwang *et al.*, 2006). Furthermore, in recent decades tourism has provided an opportunity for many cities to renew their declining economies (Law, 1996), repositioning their economic structure in service activities, outstanding among which is tourism (Page and Hall, 2003), to attend to a multidimensional demand for urban tourism (Pearce, 2001).

The decision to buy a tourism product is the result of a complex process. Horner and Swarbrooke (2007) describe the process in five phases: travel desire, information collection and evaluation image, travel decision (choice between alternatives), travel preparation and travel experiences and the final phase which is connected to travel satisfaction outcome and evaluation. Tourism development in cities has been seen as a solution for creating income and jobs in the city area since the 1970s (Law, 1993). There are many reasons why people visit cities, and these are: visiting friends and relatives, business, exhibitions, cultural

attractions, sightseeing, entertainment, shopping, evening activities, sports and special events etc. (Law, 1993). In the decision-making process a city can be an alternative for a wide range of tourists' experience expectations. Therefore, it is important for cities to create promotions that communicate the benefits of a visit during the second phase of the decision-making process (Kolb, 2006). The promotion of a city must always focus on the needs and desires of a specific visitor group or segment. There are different means of segmentation:

- demographic (age, income, gender, family status, ethnicity),
- geographic (local, regional, national, international),
- psychographic (relaxation, excitement, nightlife, adventure, romance) and
- usage (traditional tourists, day visitors, business visitors) (Kolb, 2006).

Most young people in Serbia today have very limited possibilities for travelling primarily due to the bad economic situation in the entire country. When choosing their travel destination this is very often the main factor affecting their choice. However, visiting most European cities, or participating in city break tours does not require that much money as some other types of holiday popular among young people in Serbia.

This especially refers to seaside holidays and vacations, destinations with a longer duration of stay, greater travelling distance or expensive transport costs due to bad train or plane connections. Given the fact that most European cities are very well connected with Serbian cities by train and low cost flights, city tours are becoming increasingly accessible and popular among young people in Serbia. Also, many railroad companies, restaurants, hostels and other similar facilities offer student discounts or cheap accommodation services in big cities making this type of holiday even more popular and accessible among young people, especially students. Since this type of holiday nowadays does not require that much money as some of the mentioned types of holiday, there are also other important factors which can have major influence on the choice of a city destination. Those factors can be related to food and drinks, night life, local hospitality, accessibility to destination info or good shopping places. This paper explores these and other factors and their influence on city destination choice among young people in Serbia.

VIII. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to several authors, the tourist consumer decision process is complex and multifaceted and comprises a number of elements: whether to travel, where to travel and what to do, when to travel, with whom to travel, how long to stay, and how much to spend (Dellaert *et al.*, 1998; Hyde, 2008; Seddighi and Theocharous, 2002; Woodside and Lysonski, 1989; Woodside and MacDonald, 1994). These elements are interrelated and evolve in a decision process over time, and most studies of tourists' travel choice address tourist destination choice as the key element in the travel decision-making process. The decision-making process is influenced by a number of psychological (internal) and non-psychological (external) variables, and consists of a number of different stages that are marked by specific actions. Of these various elements, the questions *where* to travel to, and *what* type of holiday experience to seek, concern two particularly important conceptualizations of holiday choice (Oppewal *et al.*, 2015).

The conceptualisation of destination choice in terms of the choice of a geographical location has received significant attention in the tourism literature. Indeed, there is a wealth of research examining specific aspects of why and how a tourist chooses a particular holiday destination location. That research has addressed aspects such as destination image (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999; Hong *et al.*, 2006), destination loyalty and attachment (Alegre and Cladera, 2006; Hong *et al.*, 2009), the role of hedonic experience, novelty and fantasy (Bello and Etzel, 1985; King, 2002), cognitive distance (Nicolau and Más, 2006), behavioural intentions (Lam and Hsu, 2006), and the effects of destination attributes on destination choice

(Ewing and Haider, 1999; Huybers, 2003; Morley, 1994).

In addition to the above, the literature of destination choice is often centered on the direct impact of destination attributes such as prices and distance (Nicolau and Más, 2006), climate (Hamilton and Lau, 2005), quality and pricing (Goossens, 2000). In this study, destination choice can be conceptualized as a tourist's selection of a destination from a set of alternatives; that selection is determined by various motivational factors.

So, despite many studies concentrating on destination choice there have been far fewer focusing on young people and how they choose their travel destinations. One of those studies by Sirakaya and McLellan (1997) examines factors affecting vacation destination choices of college students. The results of this study suggest that college students are mostly concerned with the cost of the vacation and convenience, local hospitality and services, entertainment and drinking opportunities, recreation and sporting activities available, and change in their daily environment. Another study by Thrane (2008) is focused on the determinants of students' destination choice for their summer vacation trip. The findings indicate that general vacation motives and trip-specific motives are very important determinants of destination choice. By contrast, socio-demographic characteristics are not.

Several studies also examined how students choose their education destination (Pimpa, 2003; Shanka *et al.*, 2006; Bodycott, 2009; Bhati and Anderson, 2012; Cai and Kivisto, 2013; Wilkins, 2013; Foster, 2014). Bhati and Anderson (2012) wanted to understand why a group of Indian students studying at an Australian University in Singapore has chosen to study in Singapore rather than at a campus in Australia. The research design employed a qualitative approach using focus group interviews and an online survey. The findings indicated a combination of factors and considerations influencing the choice of university and overseas study destination for students from India, the role of education service agents in India in influencing the decisions of these students and the demographic characteristics of students from India in Singapore. Also, a study by Foster (2014) among Brazilian students' and their decisions to study at universities in the United Kingdom, reveals some particular barriers such as cost, negative past relationships and family ties, and recommends raising awareness and a context-sensitive approach to enhance an interest in studying in the United Kingdom.

Also, very few studies in the past analyzed why and how people (especially young people) choose certain cities as their travel destination. However, several studies about city destination choice have been done in the past but most of them are related to repeat visitation. In one of those studies, by Barros and Assaf (2012), the authors explore the returning preferences of tourists visiting the city of Lisbon, Portugal. The results

show that accommodation characteristics and destination attributes (accommodation range, events, food quality, expected weather beach, overall quality, reputation, and safety) have a positive and significant impact on the probability of returning to the city. Forgas-Coll *et al.* (2012) analyzed the loyalty of tourists to urban tourism destinations, studying the differences existing on the basis of nationality of origin. This study was specifically focused on American and Italian tourists visiting the city of Barcelona. In the study of the data, structural equation models (SEM) were used, by means of a multi-group analysis. The empirical results show that the causal relationships among perceived value, satisfaction and loyalty and the moderating effect of nationality are partially confirmed.

Apart from all of the mentioned studies, a study by Tomić *et al.* (2014) is directly related to urban destination choice of young people. This paper examined the motivation factors which influence Danish and international students when choosing city destinations in Europe and revealed seven major factors: partying and having fun, accessibility to destination info, easy and cheap travel organization, outdoor activities, socializing with the local people, good shopping places and exploring the unknown. Richards and Wilson (2003) also used factor analysis in their research on independent youth and student travel, and they identified four main motivating factors as experience seeking, relaxation seeking, sociability and contributing to the destination. There are similarities between these two factor analyses, because both are dealing with motivation factors for young people. However, the tourist information sources and saving money factors, which are important for Danish students do not fit into any of Richards & Wilson's four factor groups probably due to the fact that the research by Tomić *et al.* (2014) is focused only on urban destinations and students as main visitors.

So, despite many studies concentrating on travel motives, there seems to be a very limited number of studies that directly concentrate on the choice of city destinations among young people. This lack of research is surprising because, as noted, the number of tourist arrivals in cities represents a substantial percentage of the total volume of tourists in tourism countries (Hwang *et al.*, 2006) and young people represent a considerable number of urban tourists.

IX. METHODOLOGY

Sample

As the principal aim of the paper was to analyze the factors influencing destination choice of young people, our sample included people up to 35 years. The sample included a total of 162 respondents whose place of residence was Serbia. There was a pretty higher number of female respondents, and the highest number of respondents belonged to the age group 20-24. In terms of frequency of travelling, majority of respondents travel once and twice a year. Sample characteristics are further described in Table 1.

Table 1. Sample characteristic (N=162)

Gender	
Male	27.8%
Female	72.2%
Age	
<20	8%
20-24	59.3%
25-29	23.5%
30-35	9.3%
Frequency of visiting city destinations	
Never	11.1%
Once a year	49.4%
Twice a year	25.3%
Three times a year	7.4%
More than three time a year	6.8%

Instruments

The questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first part involved questions related to socio-demographic profile of respondents (age and gender) and frequency of visiting city destinations. Frequency of visiting city destinations was measured by using six categories – Never, Once a year, Twice a year, Three times a year, More than three times a year).

The second part of questionnaire consisted of different items influencing a choice of city destination. A total of 20 items were included in the survey: *Local hospitality, Good and cheap food and drinks, Local knowledge of English, Good and cheap accommodation, Railway connection to destination, Availability of travel itineraries, Photos & videos about destination, Information availability, Information on social networks, Weather, E-reservations, Possibility for couch-surfing, Availability of cheap flights, Short travel distance, Cultural heritage, Nature, Possibilities for shopping, Friends recommendation, Visit of new places and Nightlife and events.* These items were measured by using a 4-point Likert scale (1-not important at all, 2-not very important, 3-important, 4-very important). The items were adopted from the work of Tomić *et al.* (2014). Some of the items in their study were derived from the research on travel choice of young people conducted by Kim *et al.* (2006), but they also included some items which are specific for the travel choice of young people: *E-reservations,*

Possibility for couch-surfing, Availability of cheap flights, Photos & videos about destination and Information on social networks.

Procedure

The research was carried out from November 2014 until January 2015. It was conducted by using the online survey (Google Docs) in order to include young people from all around Serbia. The online questionnaire was distributed via email as well as social networks. All questions were marked as obligatory so that respondents could not return an incomplete questionnaire. The respondents were informed of the general purpose of the study and that participation is voluntary and anonymous. Finally, a total of 162 people completed the survey.

X. RESULTS

Analysis of factors affecting city destination choice of young people

In order to extract factors affecting how young people choose their travel destinations, the principal component exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was carried out, with Promax rotation and Kaiser normalization. Bartlett's test confirmed the adequacy of performing factor analysis ($\chi^2 = 866.927$, $df = 136$, $p < .01$) and Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of

sampling adequacy equaled .759. Using eigenvalue criterion (larger than 1), we isolated four significant factors with the total of 54.185 % of variance explained (Table 2).

Table 2. Initial eigenvalues and total variance explained for factors affecting destination choice

Component	Eigenvalue	% of variance
Factor 1	4.710	27.708
Factor 2	1.703	10.017
Factor 3	1.456	8.564
Factor 4	1.342	7.897

Factor 1 (4 items) refers to a high quality of hospitality and restaurant service (**Good hospitality and restaurant service**), Factor 2 (4 items) is related to availability of information about destination and its promotion (**Information and Promotion**), Factor 3 (5 items) is connected with possibilities for easy booking and affordable vacation (**Available and cheap vacation**) and Factor 4 (3 items) refers to **Destination attractiveness**. These 4 factors are further described in table 3. Moreover, four items: *Possibilities for shopping, Friends recommendation, Visit of new places and Nightlife and events* were excluded from the study, as their initial values were smaller than .3.

Table 3. Structure matrix

	Good hospitality and restaurant service (Factor 1)	Information and Promotion (Factor 2)	Easy to book and cheap vacation (Factor 3)	Destination attractiveness (Factor 4)
Local hospitality	.828			
Good and cheap food and drinks	.787			
Local knowledge of English	.661			
Good and cheap accommodation	.598			
Railway connection to destination			.563	
Availability of travel itineraries		.720		
Photos & videos about destination		.702		
Information availability		.667		
Information on social networks		.626		
Weather				.301
E-reservations			.753	
Possibility for couch-surfing			.641	
Availability of cheap flights			.552	
Short travel distance			.481	
Cultural heritage				.784
Nature				.758

When analyzing all the items included in the factors affecting city destination choice, *Weather, Good and cheap accommodation and local hospitality* seem to be the most important factors affecting city destination choice in case of young people, while *Short travel distance and Possibility for couch surfing* are the least important. By using

descriptive statistics the authors obtained Means for all items.

Further analysis of factors affecting young people city destination choice

The results indicate the following ranks of factors affecting city destination choice:

1. Good hospitality and restaurant service (M=3.16; Std.=0.568)
2. Destination attractiveness (M=3.11; Std.=0.547)
3. Information and promotion (M=2.74; Std.=0.642)
4. Available and cheap vacation (M=2.34; Std.=0.540)

Furthermore, the research intended to analyze if there is a difference between different gender and age groups in terms of factors influencing their choice of city destinations.

In order to determine if there is a difference between different gender in terms of how they choose their city destination the authors conducted the *independent sample T-test*. The results show a statistically significant difference between male and female respondents in the following factors: **Good hospitality and restaurant service** ($t=-3.258$, $df=172$, $p<.001$) and **Information and promotion** ($t=-3.072$, $df=172$, $p<.002$). The results indicate that female

respondents give more importance (MD=.154, SD=.885) to **Good hospitality and restaurant service** than males (MD=-.373, SD=1.159) which is also the case with the factor **Information and promotion** - females again give more importance to this factor (MD=-1.464, SD=.943) than males (MD=-.353, SD=1.052).

Moreover, ANOVA test was conducted in order to analyze if there is a significant difference between different age groups in terms of factors influencing their city destination choice. A significant difference was found again in terms of **Good hospitality and restaurant service** ($F=4.630$, $df=3$, $p<.05$) and **Information and promotion** ($F=13.137$, $df=3$, $p<.01$). After that, a post hoc LSD test was done in order to discover which age groups differ on these factors. Results show that respondents bellow 20 and age group 20-24 give more importance to factors **Good hospitality and restaurant service** and **Information and promotion** than those belonging to the age groups 25-29 and 30-35 (Table 4).

**Table 4. The results of ANOVA test (age and factors influencing city destination choice)-
LSD post hoc test**

Dependent Variable	(I) age	(J) age	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
REGR factor score 1 Good hospitality and restaurant service	<20	20-24	.36343658	.27660973	.191
		25-29	.83983043*	.29762327	.005
		30-35	.91665496*	.36043967	.012
	20-24	>20	-.36343658	.27660973	.191
		25-29	.47639384*	.17520246	.007
		30-35	.55321838*	.26838974	.041
REGR factor score 2 Information and promotion	<20	20-24	.18515399	.25920662	.476
		25-29	1.04751785*	.27889807	.000
		30-35	1.13316201*	.33776234	.001
	20-24	>20	-.18515399	.25920662	.476
		25-29	.86236386*	.16417947	.000
		30-35	.94800803*	.25150380	.000

XI. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The main goal of this study was to explore which factors influence young people from Serbia when choosing a city destination in Europe.

The results revealed 4 factors among which *Good hospitality and restaurant service* seem to be the most influential factor. In connection with this, the most dominant item is *Good and cheap accommodation*. This is mostly related to the difficult economic situation in the entire country and especially among students who have a very limited travel budget as it was mentioned before. Accommodation costs

represent a large portion of travel expenses so it is understandable that this item is the most dominant. Along with good and cheap accommodation, the *Hospitality of local people* and their *Knowledge of English* is also very important for young people in Serbia. Since English is by far the most popular foreign language in Serbia and young people begin learning it when they start school (often even before, with their parents), most of them speak it very well and they expect their hosts at the destination to do so also. This is especially the reason because very often it is the only foreign language that they know so it is no surprise that they find this factor so important as it is essential and

very often the only way of communication between them and local people at the destination. One of the most important items is also *Hospitality* which can perhaps in this case be related also to *Good food and drinks*. Hospitality has always been highly valued throughout the history and tradition of the Serbian people as they always treated guest and visitors kindly and with pleasure. Most people in the past and also today, were raised and taught since they were children to be polite and kind to guests and visitors and treat them with the utmost respect and make them feel as comfortable as possible during their stay. This always implied plenty of good food and drinks and pleasant company from the host so there is no wonder that people from Serbia give this so much meaning as they were raised in an environment which values these elements very highly and considers them as normal and expected.

Destination attractiveness is ranked as the second most popular factor for visit. This factor is somewhat related to the city destination ambience and environment as well as its offer of natural and cultural heritage attractions. The most dominant item here is *Weather* meaning that young people prefer visiting cities during spring and summer when it is warmer and with less rain which gives them more possibilities for various activities. This coincides with the fact that most city-break tours are organized during spring and summer months. The other two items, *Nature and Cultural heritage* are related to the city ambience and surrounding environment as well as cultural heritage attractions and such elements as architecture, monuments, museums and similar cultural institutions. Both items have very similar mean values. This can mean that most young people would prefer a more complex city destination with a variety of attractions, both natural and cultural, over a destination with less or only one type of attractions.

The next factor is *Information and promotion* which is related to the availability of information about the destination before and during the visit. The weaker influence of this factor might mean that young people in Serbia do not deem necessary to possess a lot of previous knowledge about the city they visit. This might also mean that they can be regarded as somewhat adventurous with a flair for exploring the unknown. This coincides with the results of a study by Tomić *et al.* (2014) who identified this factor as one of seven which influence young people when choosing city destinations.

The most dominant item here is *Photos and videos about the destination*. This might mean that most young people during their decision process rely mostly on photos and videos which are easily accessible online. A study by Lo *et al.* (2011) indicated that a large majority (79.5%) of people aged 25 or less and 26-35 (63.5%) posted photographs online. This can be related with the results of our research as most young people not only post, but also use photographs posted by others as information sources about destinations. Since the

second item is *Information on social networks* this means that young people primarily use this media as the source of destination info while websites promoting city destinations are not so much popular. The growing importance of social network sites for tourism has also been widely recognized in recent academic tourism publications (Schegg *et al.*, 2008; Chung and Buhalis, 2008; Hsu, 2012; Yoo and Gretzel, 2012) and several studies have confirmed that electronic word of mouth on social network sites has an effect on traveler's decisions (Gretzel *et al.*, 2007; Ricci and Wietsma, 2006).

Finally, the results show that *Available and cheap vacation* is the factor with the smallest influence on the visit of city destinations. This factor is mostly related to transport and the possibility to book everything online. The most dominant items here are the *Availability of cheap flights*, *Being able to book everything online* and *Railway connection to the destination*. As transport costs are usually the second largest travel expense after accommodation it is no surprise that young people see them as an important factor when choosing a city destination. The ability to book everything online is somewhat important because most of young people in Serbia often still prefer travel agents and avoid e-booking. Most young people are a bit passive and do not like to take some time and explore transport and accommodation possibilities by themselves and prefer this to be done by professionals even though it may cost a bit more but it saves them some time and gives them a better sense of security as most of them usually have more trust in travel agencies than themselves. However, this is slowly changing and e-booking is getting increasingly popular in Serbia as it is in the rest of the world. The least dominant items are *Couch surfing* and *Short travel distance*. Couch surfing is a cheap form of accommodation, which is desirable among young people, however since young people value hospitality and good service very highly, this form of accommodation is not so much popular, despite being very cheap, as it does not provide a satisfying level of service. When it comes to *Short travel distance*, it has the least influence among all of the items in this study. Opposed to older people in Serbia who often consider air travel expensive, insecure and usually avoid it and prefer taking the bus, train or car when travelling, young people do not mind travelling larger distances and actually prefer destinations which are farther, especially nowadays when there are a lot of low-cost flights connecting Serbia with European cities and that is why travel distance does not play such an important role for them as it does for older people.

When concerning the gender differences the results reveal a significant difference between male and female respondents in the following factors: *Good hospitality and restaurant service* and *Information and promotion*. The results indicate that females give more importance to both of these factors. It is no surprise that women consider access to *Information and promotion* more important since statistics also confirm that there

is more women using social network sites such as Facebook and previous research showed that females perceive more benefits from using social network sites than do males (Gretzel and Yoo, 2008; O'Connor, 2008). Regarding the hospitality and restaurant service we might say that women are perhaps a bit more picky and need better quality service, more comfort and attention when it comes to accommodation and dining than men.

In terms of respondents belonging to different age groups results show that respondents below 20 and age group 20-24 give more importance to factors *Good hospitality and restaurant service* and *Information and promotion* than those belonging to the age groups 25-29 and 30-35. The reason that young people below 25 years of age give more importance to *Good hospitality and restaurant service* perhaps lies in the fact that members of this age group like to brag and boast more than members of older age groups to their friends and family about the hotel in which they stayed and the restaurants which they visited. They perceive this as a symbol of social status and give it more importance.

Members of the two younger age groups also give more importance to *Information and promotion* compared to the rest of the analyzed sample. This is perhaps because people under 25 years of age are more active on the Internet, due to the fact that they usually have more free time than the members of the two older groups, especially on social networks which, as it was mentioned before have a large impact on traveler's decisions.

Finally, if we look at the four factors extracted in this study, we can find a relation between our study and that of Tomić *et al.* (2014) which identified seven factors. One of those factors is *Accessibility to destination info* which can be related to *Information and promotion* in our case and the second one is *Easy and cheap travel organization* which can be related to our *Available and cheap vacation* apart from the item regarding accommodation. The factor *Good hospitality and restaurant service* includes items such as local hospitality and local knowledge of English, so it can be partially linked to the factor *Socializing with the local people* from the paper by Tomić *et al.* (2014). The item *Good and cheap food and drinks* seems to be much more important to young people in Serbia than it is among Danish and international students included in the study by Tomić *et al.* (2014).

However, this study has some limitations that lie in the fact that conclusions have been drawn based on a sample which includes only young people from Serbia. This indicates that future research should include a sample from more countries, especially those representing major emissive areas.

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