

EXPLORING PREFERENCES AND TOURIST TYPES VISITING OHRID

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ABSTRACT

Tourism policymakers can gain crucial insights and identify innovative strategic approaches by understanding tourists' perceptions. This study, focusing on tourists visiting Ohrid, the most famous tourist destination in North Macedonia, delves into three key factors: (1) Place attachment; (2) Pull motives; and (3) Experiencing. Conducting a survey from June to July 2022 with 250 foreign tourists, we aimed to identify and categorize their tourist images based on the standard classification of tourist typology. The study highlights that tourists predominantly perceive Ohrid as a historic and legendary destination, with cultural heritage emerging as the primary pull factor. Recreational tourists constitute the dominant group visiting Ohrid based on their type of experience. Furthermore, the study identifies gender as the most independent variable, followed closely by education, while variables such as age, marital status, type of visitor, and frequency exhibit complete statistical dependence. In conclusion, the findings offer valuable insights into the segmentation criteria recommended for defining the tourism development strategy for Ohrid.

Keywords: Tourist perceptions, Tourist type, Tourism development, Ohrid

INTRODUCTION

While tourist motivation has been extensively studied, there is a relative scarcity of research exploring the influential factors that shape tourists' perceptions and images. This study aims to address this gap by focusing on understanding tourists' perceptions during their experience in Ohrid, North Macedonia. The primary goal is to uncover prevailing perceptions, shedding light on the intricate world of tourists as they form diverse images of the destination. In contrast to previous research that delved into residents' perspectives on tourism impacts in Ohrid (Petrevska & Mihalič, 2020; Petrevska et al., 2020, 2023), this study is dedicated to unraveling the creation of the tourist image of Ohrid from the viewpoint of tourists themselves. Given the limited existing academic research on tourist perceptions of Ohrid (Petrevska, 2018, 2019; Petrevska & Matlievska, 2018), this paper contributes to expanding the current literature. It aids in recognizing the factors that significantly influence the development of a tourist destination, especially one with historical and religious significance like Ohrid, already established as a cultural center. The practical significance of this paper lies in its potential to serve as a valuable starting point for the development of new strategic approaches supporting the tourism growth of Ohrid.

In terms of organization, the paper proceeds with a literature review on tourist typology and provides essential background information about Ohrid in Section two. Section three outlines the applied methodology, followed by the presentation of findings and their discussion in Section four. The conclusion wraps up the paper, summarizing the key insights derived from the research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature extensively covers the subject of tourist roles, aiming to delineate their significant variations. Primarily, behavioral patterns are linked to specific demographic and background characteristics, with a particular emphasis on the life course as the principal component for examining tourist role preferences. However, it is crucial to consider various social structures and processes, including psychological needs and life-course stages. Cohen (1972) was among the first sociologists to propose a typology, developing a four-fold typology to conceptually clarify the term "tourist." A few years later, he expanded the list to a five-group classification based on the type of experience sought (Cohen, 1979).

Pearce (1982) identified specific behavior that connects the evolutionary nature of tourist role preferences with psychological needs. He went on to develop 15 distinct tourist types, facilitating the creation of several measurement scales. The Tourist Roles Preference Scale (Yiannakis & Gibson, 1992) presents a comprehensive classification of leisure tourists. Additional contributions expanded the tourist categorization by adding two more tourist types (Gibson & Yiannakis, 2002). An earlier work related to the Yiannakis and Gibson (1992) typology is acknowledged by Mo et al. (1992), who designed the International Tourist Role scale. Using this scale, Keng and Cheng (1999) and Jiang et al. (2000) found a correlation between novelty-seeking and the choice of tourist role. Furthermore, Ryan and Glendon (1998) offered a cluster analysis derived from the Leisure Motivation Scale introduced by Beard and Ragheb (1983).

Subsequently, researchers delved into exploring the experiences of tourists and the significance of the tourist experience for them (Yfantidou et al., 2008). Additionally, there was a focus on classifying tourists based on the degree of novelty and familiarity sought (Lepp & Gibson, 2003).

BACKGROUND MATERIAL

Ohrid, located in North Macedonia, has a population over 52,000 residents and stands as the most popular summer tourist destination in the country. Acknowledged as a transboundary mixed world heritage site under UNESCO protection, Ohrid is known for the natural exceptional value of Lake Ohrid (UNESCO, 1979) and its cultural and historical significance (UNESCO, 1980). It possesses numerous historical monuments, natural resources, gastronomy, and numerous cultural events, which generally constitute the basis for attracting tourists. Ohrid is recognized for its remarkably preserved authentic architecture, positioning it as one of the most comprehensive collections of ancient urban architecture in the region (UNESCO, 2019).

With a typical profile of a summer tourism destination characterized by strong seasonality (Petrevska, 2015), Ohrid played a substantial role in the tourism landscape of North Macedonia in 2023. It accounted for nearly one-third of all tourist arrivals (337,138) and overnights

(1,144,000) recorded in the country (State Statistical Office of the Republic of North Macedonia, 2024).

While tourism serves as the primary industry for local growth and development, it often brings about negative impacts and significant degradation of the physical, environmental, and social capacities of the destination (Petrevska & Collins-Kreiner, 2017, 2019). Consequently, UNESCO has raised concerns about the need for responsible and sustainable tourism practices in Ohrid, even considering the inclusion of the site on the List of World Heritage in Danger (UNESCO, 2019). This emphasizes the urgency highlighted by researchers advocating for responsible tourism in Ohrid (Petrevska & Mihalič, 2020; Petrevska et al., 2023).

METHODOLOGY

The research employed both qualitative and quantitative methods. The qualitative aspect involved a literature review. The quantitative aspect included a face-to-face survey on 250 foreign tourists visiting Ohrid from June to July 2022, achieving an impressive response rate of 95.5%. The questionnaire was translated into English, and the survey was conducted in the large surrounding of the St. Naum monastery, a prominent location highly frequented during the summer season, situated 30 km from Ohrid near the border with Albania.

The survey instrument utilized a self-administered fixed-choice questionnaire. Respondents employed a five-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree) to assess the importance of each factor. The questionnaire was organized into four sections as follows:

- Section 1 gathered respondents' data, comprising eight questions related to gender, age, marital status, education, occupational status, type of visitor, type of holiday, and frequency of visit.
- Section 2 encompassed three questions focused on place attachment.
- Section 3 included three questions aimed at identifying 'pull' motives, and
- Section 4 consisted of five questions related to the perception of the tourist experience;

The collected data were then input into a common scorecard database in SPSS 24.0 for statistical evaluation. Descriptive statistics and nonparametric statistical tests were utilized to create an initial tourist typology. To explore potential relationships between variables, the Chi-Square test (χ^2) for independence was calculated.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The discussion of the findings unfolds in two main aspects:

Firstly, we present general and specific data findings related to the demographic attributes of respondents, along with key insights into their perceptions of place attachment, pull motives, and experiencing.

Secondly, we delve into the statistically significant associations between general data variables and specific data variables through cross-tabulations.

In examining the demographic attributes of respondents, a slight gender difference is noticeable, with 54% being female and 45% male. The age distribution reveals that the majority fall within the 30-49 years age group (43%), followed by those aged 50 and over (32%), and the

youngest group (20-29 years) accounting for 25%. Regarding marital status, the majority of respondents are married (63%). A significant proportion of participants hold a university diploma (69%) and are employed (69%).

Given that the survey took place at a very famous tourist location St. Naum, which also serves as a religious site, a question about the type of visitor was included. Notably, 71% identified as tourists, while 10% fell into the category "other" without clarification, and 18% declared themselves as pilgrims. A significant majority (70%) of respondents were individual tourists on self-organized visits, while 30% were on tours arranged by travel agencies. In terms of frequency, most respondents had visited Ohrid more than five times, but approximately one-third were first-time visitors.

The second section of the questionnaire explored place attachment through three questions. The findings indicate that tourists primarily perceive Ohrid as a historic and legendary place, followed by its religious significance. However, a notable divergence arises when considering Ohrid as solely a tourist destination for sightseeing, with 31% of respondents disagreeing.

Section 3 focused on 'pull' motives, identifying cultural heritage, religion, and sightseeing as key factors attracting tourists to Ohrid. Cultural heritage emerged as the primary attraction, with 64% strongly agreeing or agreeing that it brought them to the location. In contrast, 55% strongly disagreed or disagreed with coming for religious reasons, while almost one-third (30%) strongly agreed they came solely for sightseeing.

Section 4, based on Cohen's (1979) classification, addressed the tourist types with five questions. The revealed recreational tourists as the dominant group (38.2%). They are drawn to Ohrid for physical recreation, aligning with the destination's emphasis on sun, lake, and leisure. Following closely are existential tourists (29.8%) who seek cultural immersion, strongly agreeing that they visit Ohrid to delve into its rich cultural heritage. This finding affirms the widely acknowledged notion that Ohrid serves as a cultural cradle, attracting tourists with a penchant for cultural experiences. Experiential tourists trail slightly behind (26.2%), motivated and inspired by the unique qualities of the surveyed location. This aligns with expectations, given that experiential tourists typically seek authentic experiences, and Ohrid and the sampled location, fulfill this criterion. Next in line are experimental tourists (23% strongly agreed, 27.7% agreed), who like interacting with local people. They are drawn to Ohrid's rich history, artistic spirit, and traditional crafts such as woodcarving, jewelry making, pearl crafting, pottery, coppersmithing, and shoemaking. Remarkably, the research identified the absence of diversionary tourists, those seeking an escape from daily life.

The study also conducted cross-tabulations, uncovering sufficient evidence to suggest associations between general data variables (gender, age, marital status, education, occupational status, type of visitor, type of holiday, and frequency of visit) and specific data variables. Statistically significant associations were observed in the following areas:

- Regarding gender, both male and female foreign tourists do not equally favor the same pull motives.
- Age, categorized as 20-29, 30-49, and 50 years and over, revealed differences among three categories of tourists (recreational, experiential, and experimental), with only two exceptions (existential and diversionary types of tourists).

- Marital status, categorized as married, single, divorced, with a partner, and other, showed differences across all investigated issues.
- Types of education, categorized as elementary, high school, and university, were correlated with recreational, diversionary, and experiential types of tourists. Education also had an association only with cultural heritage as a pull motive.
- Occupational status, categorized as student, employed, unemployed, and retired, correlated with all specifically investigated issues.
- Type of visitor was generally related to all specific issues, with no significant difference between respondents declaring themselves as pilgrims, tourists, or 'other'. Visiting Ohrid individually (self-organized) or in a group (by travel agency) was related to almost all questioned issues.
- Frequency of visit, whether it was the first time, second time, 3-5 times, or more than five times, influenced the creation of a tourist image, indicating an association between the variables.

In analyzing the independence of variables, it was observed that gender is the most independent variable, followed by education, type of holiday, and occupational status. On the other hand:

- Gender is significant when it comes to the experiencing aspect.
- The type of education is significant when it comes to place attachment.
- Occupational status and the type of holiday (individual or group) are significant when it comes to all investigated factors, including the perception of place, pull motives, and experiencing.

Moreover, based on established correlation patterns, the research identified that variables such as age, marital status, type of visitor, and frequency are statistically dependent categories. This implies that tourism policymakers should consider these criteria when creating tourism policy and strategy for the development of tourism in Ohrid.

CONCLUSION

Conducting an extensive survey involving 250 foreign tourists, this research aimed to construct a tourist image of Ohrid by exploring tourist typology and three key factors influencing perception: (1) Place attachment; (2) Pull motives; and (3) Experiencing.

Drawing insights from Cohen (1979) on tourist typology, the study revealed that recreational tourists constitute the predominant group visiting Ohrid. This aligns with prior research (Petrevska, 2018, 2019), indicating Ohrid's reputation as a destination primarily offering leisure and the enjoyment of sun and lake. The second-ranked type, existential tourists, visit Ohrid for its cultural heritage, echoing the city's portrayal as a cultural cradle, one of the oldest human settlements in Europe, with 365 churches, often referred to as the "Jerusalem of the Balkans" (Vankovska & Wiberg, 2003; Petrovski & Talevski, 2004). The experiential tourist, the third-ranked type, is drawn to the authenticity, uniqueness, and inspiration of the destination. This preference aligns with the authentic urban architecture of Ohrid (Kuzman et al., 2009; Panevski Nikoljski & Karanakov, 2013) and the exceptional blend of natural and geographic values that create a rare harmony, making the Lake Ohrid region truly unique (UNESCO, 2019).

The fourth-ranked experimental tourist is triggered by the local lifestyle, showing an interest in learning about local people and crafts. Ohrid's renown for traditional handmade products, such as woodcarving, jewelry, pearl making, pottering, coppersmiths, and shoemakers, caters to this type. However, the research found no presence of a diversionary tourist type seeking an escape from everyday life.

Moreover, beyond exploring the experiential factor and identifying tourist types visiting Ohrid, the research delved into place attachment and pull factors as triggers influencing tourists' perception. Regarding place attachment, Ohrid is generally perceived as a historic and legendary destination, transcending mere touristic appeal. In terms of main pull motives, cultural heritage emerged as the primary factor, challenging the perception of Ohrid as a religiously fulfilling destination and positioning it as a sightseeing hotspot.

The study also examined the association between general and specific data variables. Cross-tabulations confirmed statistically significant associations between dependent variables (age, marital status, type of visitor, and frequency) and independent variables (gender, education, occupational status, and type of holiday). Gender emerged as the most significant independent variable influencing the creation of tourist perceptions related to experiencing. Education (categorized as elementary, high school, and university) played a role in place attachment and cultural heritage as pull motives. Occupational status (categorized as student, employed, unemployed, and retired) and the type of holiday (individual or group) influenced all investigated factors, i.e. perceptions of place, pull motives, and experiencing.

Conversely, the research identified strong statistical dependency among dependent variables. This suggests that (categorized as 20-29, 30-49, and 50 years and over), marital status (categorized as married, single, divorced, with partner, and other), type of visitor (traveling individually i.e. self-organized, or in a group by travel agency), and frequency (visiting Ohrid for the first time, second time, 3-5 times, or more than five times), should be considered as robust segmentation criteria when defining the tourism development strategy of Ohrid. In conclusion, this research underscores the importance of aligning tourism supplier expectations with the imaging and perceptions of tourists.

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