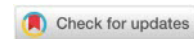


MANAGEMENT OF COUNTRYSIDE WALKING TOURISM THROUGH UNDERSTANDING USERS AND THEIR NEEDS

Danka Milojković^{1}, Katarina Milojković¹, Hristina Milojković¹*

¹Singidunum University, Republic of Serbia,

e-mail: dmlojkovic@singidunum.ac.rs; katarina.milojkovic.21@singimail.rs; hristina.milojkovic.21@singimail.rs



Abstract: Walking tourism, among the most attractive manners to observe a destination and satisfy the growing demand of visitors for outdoor activities, allows tourists to interact closely with local nature, people, tradition, culture, and heritage. Walking tourism needs low investments and can be developed anywhere. The impacts of greenspace on people's physical and mental health contribute to the accelerated development of this form of tourism. By better understanding users, it is more likely to develop a product or service that works for them. Despite the efforts of urban areas to become greener and more attractive (Callaghan et al., 2021), rural areas have unique and pristine natural resources that cannot be created artificially. In addition, life in the village is still traditional, peaceful, and easy, customs are respected, and the cultural heritage has been preserved from the influence of the modern, high-tech age and global market trends (Štetić & Šimičević, 2017). When developing a nature tourism product, the focal question is related to real user needs. Such as the lack of information about user needs accounts for 35% of total reasons for start-ups' failures (CBInsights, 2021), this logic can also easily apply to tourism destinations. To learn about user needs, the starting point is to research users and their motivations, triggers, and context for using the product or service. Considering the impact of greenspace on people's physical and mental health, countryside walking tourism (CWT), with the village as the pivot of tourist activities, is a rapidly developing form of rural tourism. Properly developed and managed, walking tourism brings social-economic benefits to destinations and gains a significant place in regional sustainable development (Milojković et al., 2023a). CWT, with the village as the pivot of tourist activities, is a rapidly developing form of rural tourism (Milojković et al., 2023b). Understanding users and their needs-based CWT management reduces the risk of expensive failures, ensures timely delivery, sets up and manages a team to design, build, and maintain a product or service, and opens space for innovations. The research purpose is to perceive users of the countryside walking tours and their needs during those tours. Among the general scientific methods, the statistical method and the hypothetico-deductive method were used. The research data were collected using the questionnaire-based survey technique and processed by SPSS. The general results indicated that the management of CWT should target meeting user needs for visiting hidden and original places with a local guide, consuming and buying authentic food and drinks, and raising awareness and building communicative capacities of the local population. The research contribution is to improve the management of rural tourism destinations based on understanding users and their needs for countryside walking tours.

Keywords: management, needs, tourism, village, walking

Field: Social Sciences, and Humanities.

1. INTRODUCTION

A study by Yuen and Jenkins (2020) showed that a 20.5-minute park visit improves life satisfaction and accordingly recommends designing parks so that their attractiveness keeps visitors at least 20 minutes in the park. Like the development of urban walking tourism in cities, there was a need to develop CWT in villages. According to the study of Krešić and Gjurašić (2022, p.323), interest in "slow tourism is growing remarkably and is related to slow travel and food, sustainability, and an immersive travel experience". The offer in the village should be shaped according to the needs of visitors into the tourism product and managed (Cole, 2019) using the concept of cluster development in the area of one or more integrated village destinations (Milojković, 2013; Milojković et al., 2021). Destination's attraction elements, such as villages, climate, natural beauty, water, flora, and fauna, create the natural tourism product (Margaret River Region, 2017; Namazov, 2021; Trišić et al., 2023a). Understanding the competitive environment refers to analysis for understanding a group of destinations servicing tourism products that compete directly with each other (Suarez & Olivia, 2005; Brauns, 2015) and researching tourists and their motivations, triggers, and behavior for using the nature tourism product (Yousaf et al., 2018) are prerequisites for initiating the first classical function of management - planning, that determine destination goals and means for achieving them. Then follows the organization, as another function of management,

*Corresponding author: dmlojkovic@singidunum.ac.rs



© 2023 by the authors. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

to organize the rural destination to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage (Bešić et al., 2021), which requires resources that are valuable, rare, and irreplaceable and cannot be perfectly copied namely natural resources. Situational analysis determines the need for strategic changes (Straková et al., 2018). According to Porter (1980), two competitive dimensions are the keys to destination-level strategy: (1) The first dimension is a destination's source of competitive advantage through gaining an edge on rivals by keeping costs down or by offering something unique in the market; and (2) destination's scope of operations through a destination's tries to target visitors in general or just a narrow segment of visitors. Also, innovation can be a destination's strategy to stay competitive. A blue ocean strategy refers to creating a new market rather than competing with rivals in an existing market (Kim & Mauborgne, 2004). Therefore, destinations that choose this strategy need to continuously innovate so that it is difficult to imitate them and thus position themselves ahead of the competition. According to the study of Năstase and Vasile (2019, p.1), a cluster as the association for regional economic development, could be a good strategy for destination management organizations providing "consistency for the development policy and strategy, growth the institutional and companies relationship, improve legislation, touristic product development, and diversification, marketing, tourism infrastructure, rise the economic impact of tourism, attract new investors and enhances the human resource development". Regional or local tourism organizations "can be transformed into the tourism cluster if their members are innovative and entrepreneurial, local authorities display low level of bureaucracy and formalization, and the cooperating institutions represent high knowledge sharing inclination" (Kachniewska, 2013, p.52). Since the strategic leadership approach enhances the competitiveness of the tourism industry, for CWT development is recommended the follows: strategic management training for public authority leaders on all levels; establishing a qualified unit in the public administration to follow up and check tourism development indicators; and continual strategic planning (Milojković et al., 2023b). For the third function of management - leadership, the management of communication is crucial (Dimitrovska et al., 2023). According to the study of Čuić Tanković et al. (2023), the following communication skills in tourism are important: written, oral, listening, digital, and non-verbal communication skills (Borisova & Kostov, 2023). Last but not least function of management – control refers to controlled tourism which should be understood as "eco-friendly, people friendly and culture friendly" and it "should not be victims of short-sighted planner" (Thomaskutt & George, p.9). Destination information and management systems in tourism, as integral parts of control, are used to guide visitors and provide information to both visitors and the management of the destination (Denkovska & Dimitrijovska-Jankulovska, 2023). Sustainable rural development and sustainable tourism are possible through the application of a managerial approach to destination development, and thus the establishment and development of CWT through a better understanding of the tourist needs (Trišić et al., 2023b; Miftari, 2023).

To determine the importance of CWT management per the understanding of users and their needs, a basic hypothesis was to direct the CWT management on raising awareness and building the communicative capacities of the local population (H1). The following working hypotheses were set: participating in local events and customs is greater among the male population (H2); consuming and buying authentic food and drinks are the most meaningful for CWT management (H3); making contact with domestic animals is the most popular among users with children (H4); collecting fruits is the most interesting activity for middle-aged adults (aged 36-59) (H5); young adults (aged 25-35) prefer making objects with techniques old crafts of visited area (H6); participating in the preparation of traditional food more important for females than for males (H7); visit hidden and original places with a local guide is most popular among educated people (H8); and live the way of life of the local population housed in authentic households is the most attractive for the young adults (aged 26-35) (H9).

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The statistical and the hypothetico-deductive methods were used in the research. According to the Simeoni & De Crescenzo (2019) case, the authors developed a comprehensive questionnaire. It was structured from closed-ended multiple-choice questions. Using academic and social networks, the questionnaire was online disseminated to society. In the first quarter of 2022, 467 questionnaires were collected and used for the research. There were no incorrectly filled questionnaires. The gathered inputs were prepared by SPSS. The non-parametric techniques the Mann-Whitney test and the Kruskal-Wallis H test were applied for the exact evidence of statistically meaningful variances between one side of demographic variables and social psychology variables which refer to the attitude and behavior of users from the other side.

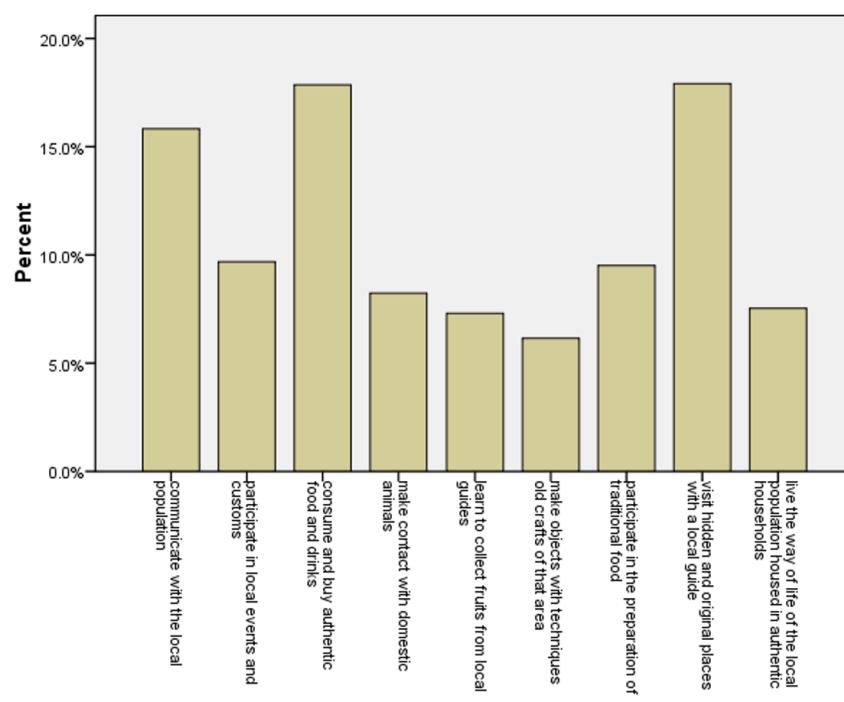
3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A total of 467 respondents participated in the research. Demographic characteristics of the respondents point out that there were more women (66.4%) than men (33.6%). The structure of respondents indicated the following domination: aged from 36 to 55 years (52.9%), married (51.0%), with children (61.0%), university educated (66.4%), employed (69.9%), and respondents who are willing to invest in tourist vacations each year up to EUR 1,000 (72.5%) (Table 1).

Table 1. Demographic Variables of the Respondents

Gender	female (66.4%); male (33.6%)
Age	≤ 25 (17.6%); 26 – 35 (11.6%); 36 – 45 (25.5%); 46 – 55 (27.4%); ≥ 56 (18.0%)
Marital status	single (26.8%); cohabitation (13.1%); married (51.0%); divorced (6.2%); widow/widower (3.0%)
Number of children	0 (39.0%); 1 (21.4%); 2 (30.4%); 3 (8.8%); 4 (0.4%)
Education	without formal education (0.4%); primary education (0.6%); secondary education (19.7%); college (12.8%); university (66.4%)
Work status	student (15.2%); unemployed (6.4%); self-employed (9.9%); employed (60.0%); retired (6.4%); other (2.1%)
Annual personal investment for tourist travel and vacation	<500 EUR (38.5%); 500 – 1,000 EUR (34.0%); >1,000 EUR (27.4%)

Figure 1 The user needs in countryside walking tours



The most frequent need was “visit hidden and original places with a local guide” (N8) supported by 309 (66.2%) respondents followed by needs: “consume and buy authentic food and drinks” (N3) and “communicate with the local population” (N1) supported by 308 (66%) and 273 (58.5%) respondents respecting the order of listing. Furthermore, respondents expressed the following needs: “participate in local events and customs” (N2) 167 (35.8%), “participate in the preparation of traditional food” (N7) 164 (35.1%), “make contact with domestic animals” (N4) 142 (30.4%), “live the way of life of the local population housed in authentic households” (N9) 130 (27.8%), “learn to collect fruits from local guides” (N5) 123 (27%), and “make objects with techniques old crafts of that area” (N6) 106 (22.7%) respondents. The results of descriptive statistics did not confirm hypotheses H1 and H3, but they indicated that the management of CWT should focus first on meeting user needs for visiting hidden and original places with a local guide, as well as on consuming and buying authentic food and drinks, and then on raising awareness and building communicative capacities of the local population.

The research examined the existence of differences in the needs of men and women (Table 2).

Table 2. The results of the Mann-Whitney test statistics by gender

	N1	N2	N3	N4	N5	N6	N7	N8	N9
Mann-Whitney U	23816.5	23134	24207.5	24274	22616.5	22085	21034.5	21560.5	23003
Wilcoxon W	72021.5	35537	36610.5	72479	35019.5	34488	33437.5	33963.5	35406
Z	-.441	-1.05	-.113	-.056	-1.622	-2.251	-2.898	-2.457	-1.245
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.659	.294	.91	.956	.105	.024	.004	.014	.213

Using the Mann-Whitney U test and Cohen's criteria for interpreting differences (Cohen, 1988), results were obtained that confirmed the existence of a small statistically significant difference for user needs: N6 between males (Md=0, n=157) and females (Md=0, n=310), U=22085, z = -2.251, p = 0.024, r = -0.104; N7 between males (Md=0, n=157) and females (Md=0, n=310), U=21034.5, z = -2.898, p = 0.004 r = -0.134; N8 between males (Md=1, n=157) and females (Md=1, n=310), U=21560.5, z = -2,457, p = 0.014 r = 0.114.

The Mann-Whitney U test results indicated certain small statistically significant differences between males and females respecting their needs related to making objects with techniques and old crafts of that area, participating in the preparation of traditional food, and visiting hidden and original places with a local guide. Hypothesis H2 was not confirmed which means that for both females and males, it was equally important to participate in local events and customs, but for females was slightly more important to make objects with local techniques and old crafts, to participate in the preparation of traditional food confirming the hypothesis H7, and to visit hidden and original places with a local guide. Accordingly, for the efficient and effective management of CWT, it is necessary to respect the different needs of men and women, as well as to develop strategies by the needs of user groups. The management of CWT activities should be developed to satisfy the needs of female users who are more interested than males in using old crafts techniques, preparing traditional food, and visiting hidden and unique localities guided by local guides. This research presented the significant differences in user needs per grouping variables such as age, education, the number of children, and annual personal investment for tourist vacations (Table 3).

Table 3. Kruskal – Wallis test results

	N1	N2	N3	N4	N5	N6	N7	N8	N9
grouping variable: age									
Chi-Square	1,747	2,401	4,527	9,677	1,349	,729	2,322	3,217	9,979
df	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Asymp. Sig.	,782	,662	,339	,046	,853	,948	,677	,522	,041
grouping variable: marital status									
Chi-Square	2,355	3,184	8,245	1,630	2,899	6,024	3,262	1,516	3,411
df	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Asymp. Sig.	,671	,528	,083	,803	,575	,197	,515	,824	,491
grouping variable: number of children									
Chi-Square	3,49	6,13	4,97	2,26	7,38	1,93	11,07	,95	6,05
df	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Asymp. Sig.	,479	,190	,290	,687	,117	,749	,026	,917	,196
grouping variable: education									
Chi-Square	3,353	3,989	3,156	7,288	3,067	3,108	3,007	13,078	3,203
df	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Asymp. Sig.	,501	,408	,532	,121	,547	,540	,557	,011	,524
grouping variable: work status									
Chi-Square	2,989	3,437	1,635	8,354	2,513	3,582	6,901	6,375	9,216
df	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
Asymp. Sig.	,702	,633	,897	,138	,775	,611	,228	,271	,101
grouping variable: annual personal investment for tourist travel and vacation									
Chi-Square	1,479	,873	10,720	1,992	,059	5,566	,627	,460	3,582
df	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Asymp. Sig.	,477	,646	,005	,369	,971	,062	,731	,794	,167

The Kruskal-Wallis H Test results indicated statistically significant differences concerning the following activities:

- N9 per the grouping variable "age" (≤ 25 , $n=82$, 26-35 $n=54$, 36-45 $n=119$, 46-55 $n=128$, ≥ 56 $n=84$), $c2(4, n=467)=9.979$, $p=0.041$, $Md=0$; regarding the mean values of group ranks, N9 was at the highest level in the 26-35 age group, and the lowest level in the 36-45 age group. The in-depth analysis indicated that young adults (aged 26-35) prefer to live the way of life of the local population housed in authentic households, which is the complete opposite of middle-aged adults (aged 36-45). Hypothesis H9 was confirmed.

- N7 per the grouping variable "the number of children" (≥ 4 , $n=2$; 3, $n=41$; 2, $n=142$; 1, $n=100$; 0, $n=182$), $c2(4, n=467)=11.07$, $p=0.026$, $Md=1$; concerning the mean values of grouping variable ranks, N7 was at the lowest level in the 0 number of children group, and the highest level in the ≥ 4 number of children group. While people with four or more children are very interested in participating in the preparation of traditional food, people without children are least interested in it.

- N8 per the grouping variable "education" (without formal education, $n=2$; primary education, $n=3$; secondary education, $n=92$; college, $n=60$; university, $n=310$), $c2(4, n=467)=13.078$, $p=0.011$, $Md=1$; concerning the mean values of grouping variable ranks, N8 was at the lowest level in the without formal education group, and at the highest level in the college education group. People who have a college degree like visiting hidden or original places with a local guide, while people without formal education are least interested in the mentioned activity. Hypothesis H8 was confirmed

- N3 per the grouping variable "annual personal investment for tourist vacation" (<500 euros, $n=189$; unemployed, $n=30$; 500-1000 euro, $n=159$; >1000 euro, $n=128$), $c2(2, n=467)=10.720$, $p=0.005$, $Md=1$; concerning the mean values of grouping variable ranks, N3 was at the lowest level in the <500 euros group, and the highest level in the >1000 euro group. Tourists prefer to invest more than 1,000 euros per year in consuming and buying authentic food and drinks, which is not the case with tourists who are willing to invest up to 500 euros annually. Hypotheses H4, H5, and H6 were not confirmed.

There were no particular differences in needs related to making contact with domestic animals among the group per the number of children, as well as in needs related to collecting fruits and making objects with local techniques and old crafts among the age group.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Defined user needs need to be managed strategically to ensure sustainable development and growth. With this research, user needs are defined and form the basis for planning of the management tourism organizations. While the general results of the research indicate that the management of CWT should target on meeting user needs for visiting hidden and original places with a local guide, consuming and buying authentic food and drinks, and raising awareness and building communicative capacities of the local population, the more specific results designate that for females and males are equally important to participate in local events and customs; for females were slightly more important to create objects by local techniques old crafts, to participate in the preparation of traditional food, and to visit hidden and original places with a local guide; the young adults (aged 26-35) most prefer to live the way of life of the local population housed in authentic households, which is the completely opposite with middle-aged adults (aged 36-45); educated people prefer visiting hidden and original places with a local guide, while people without formal education are least interested in it; there were no particular differences in needs related to making contact with domestic animals among the group per the number of children, as well as in needs related to collecting fruits, and making objects with techniques old crafts of visited area among the group per age. A limitation of the research is the general sample and general rural destination. The authors recommend conducting similar research on specific rural destinations and target groups to obtain specific results based on which the development of a specific tourist destination will be planned, organized, managed, and controlled.

REFERENCES

- Bešić, C., Mihalj, B., Đorđević, D., & Čočkalović, D. (2021). Agriculture 4.0 and Improving Competitiveness of the Domestic Agro-Food Sector. *Ekonomika poljoprivrede*, 531-545.
- Borisova, L. & Kostov, I. (2023). The message in communication – why don't we understand each other. *SCIENCE International Journal*, 2(2), 21–27.
- Brauns, M. (2015). The Management of Change in a Changing Environment – To Change or Not To Change? *Corporate Board: role, duties and composition*, 11(3), 37-42.

- Callaghan, A., McCombe, G., Harrold, A., McMeel, C., Mills, G., Moore-Cherry, N. & Cullen, W. (2021). The Impact of Green Spaces on Mental Health in Urban Settings: A Scoping Review. *Journal of Mental Health*, 30(2).179–193.
- CBInsights. (2021). Retrieved from <https://www.cbinsights.com/research/report/startup-failure-reasons-top/>
- Cohen, J. (1988). *Statistical power analysis for the behavioural sciences*, 2nd ed. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, NJ, US, 284-287.
- Cole, D.N. (2019). The Relationship between Amount of Visitor Use and Environmental Impacts. Contributing Paper. Prepared for the Interagency Visitor Use Management Council. Edition One. Retrieved from https://visitorusemanagement.nps.gov/Content/documents/Contributing%20Paper_Environmental%20Impacts_Visitor%20Capacity_Edition%201.pdf
- Denkovska, M. & Dimitrijevska-Jankulovska, A. (2023). The medium travel guide: some aspects of it's strategies and goals. *SCIENCE International Journal*, 2(1), 41–45.
- Dimitrovska, M., Pushova Stamenkova, L., & Stošić L. (2023). Leadership in times of crisis. *SCIENCE International Journal*, 2(1), 19–23.
- Čuić Tanković, A., Kapeš, J. & Benazić, D. (2023). Measuring the Importance of Communication Skills in Tourism. *Economic Research*, 36, 460-479.
- Kachniewska, M. (2013). Towards the definition of a tourism cluster. *Journal of Entrepreneurship, Management and Innovation*, 9(1), 33-56.
- Kim, W. C., & Mauborgne, R. (2004). Blue ocean strategy. *Harvard Business Review*, 76–85.
- Margaret River Region. (2017). Nature Based Tourism Strategy. Retrieved from <https://mrbta.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/MRBTA-Nature-based-Tourism-Strategy-FINAL-1.pdf?x34917&x34917>
- Miftari, F. (2023). Sustainable tourism within the national development strategy of the Republic of Croatia until 2030. *SCIENCE International Journal*, 2(2), 45–48.
- Milojković, D. (2013). The Cluster Concept for Sustainable Development in Transition and Post-Conflict Balkan Countries. In Proceedings of the International Scientific Conference “The global economic crisis and the future of European integration”, University of Nis Faculty of Economics, Nis, Serbia. Retrieved from <http://isc2013.ekonomskifakultet.rs/ISCpdfs/ISC2013-21.pdf>
- Milojković, D., Nikolić, M. & Milojković, H. (2023a). Walking Tourism Management Based on Tourists' Needs for Indoor and Outdoor Activities in the Function of Sustainable Local Economic Development. *RSEP*, 8(2), 1-18.
- Milojković, D., Nikolić, M. & Milojković, K. (2023b). The Development of Countryside Walking Tourism in the Time of the Post-Covid Crisis, *Ekonomika poljoprivrede*, 70(1), 131 – 144.
- Milojković, D., Nikolić, M., Čolović, M., Nešić, M. & Ranković, K. (2021). The Role of a Cluster in Creating the Competitive Spa and Wellness Tourism Products on the Global Market in a Time of Crisis. In Proceedings of the International scientific conference SITCON “Spa & wellness tourism – development, perspectives, and experiences”, Belgrade, Serbia.
- Namazov, R. (2021). The Role of Nature-Based Tourism. The Case of Azerbaijan. Uppsala University, Campus Gotland, Visb 1-43.
- Năstase (Păun), L.A. & Vasile (Ile), F.L. (2019). The Cooperation in Clusters, a Strategy for the Destination Management Organization. *Romanian Economic Business Review*, 14(1), 15-26.
- Porter, M. E. (1980). *Competitive Strategy: Techniques for Analyzing Industries and Competitors*. Free Press.
- Štetić, S. & Šimičević, D. (2017). *Menadžment turističke destinacije*. Beograd, Srbija: Visoka turistička škola strukovnih studija Beograd. (in Serbian)
- Straková, J., Pártlová, P., Dobrovič, J. & Váchal, J. (2018). Situation Analysis and its Role in the Process of Strategic Business Management. *Polish Journal of Management Studies*, 18 (1), 353-364.
- Suarez, F. F., & Oliva, R. (2005). Environmental Change and Organizational Transformation. *Industrial and Corporate Change*, 14(6), 1017-1041.
- Thomaskutt, P.G. & George, M. Controlled Tourism for Economic Development. Retrieved from https://www.academia.edu/4264535/CONTROLLED_TOURISM_FOR_ECONOMIC_DEVELOPMENT
- Trišić, I., Milojković, D., Ristić, V., Nechita, F., Maksin, M., Štetić, S. & Candrea, A.N. (2023a). Sustainable Tourism of Important Plant Areas (IPAs)—A Case of Three Protected Areas of Vojvodina Province. *Land*, 12, 1278.
- Trišić, I., Nechita, F., Milojković, D. & Štetić, S. (2023b). Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas—Application of the Prism of Sustainability Model. *Sustainability*, 15, 5148.
- Yousaf, A., Amin, I. & Santos, J.A.C. (2018). Tourists' Motivations to Travel: a Theoretical Perspective on the Existing Literature. *Tourism and Hospitality Management*, 24(1), 197-211.
- Yuen, H.K. & Jenkins, G.R. (2020). Factors Associated with Changes in Subjective Well-Being Immediately After Urban Park Visit. *International Journal of Environmental Health Research*, 30(2), 134-145.