

Motivational Factors Enticing Young Travelers to Engage in Adventure Tourism Activities

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Abstract

Adventure tourism is one of the relatively new fields of tourism, which has undergone a higher dynamic than the field in general. This study highlights the important factors taken into account by young people when they decide to choose a tourist destination so as to practice one form or another of adventure tourism. The paper completes the previous research done by specialists, synthesizing the factors that characterize adventure tourism. They were identified following a qualitative research, based on in-depth interviews with young people from 32 countries, interested in practicing this form of tourism. The research undertaken determined 16 centralizing factors, which will be used later in a quantitative research, to be validated and to support the design of a statistical-mathematical model for characterizing adventure tourism. Many researchers have described adventure tourism in terms of the unique physical characteristics of the locations where it is practiced. The added value of the current research is the identification of 16 motivational factors that characterize adventure tourism, from the perspective of those who want to practice this relatively new form of tourism. In addition to the motivational factors, the paper also outlines a typical profile of the user of adventure tourism services.

Keywords: Adventure tourism, young travelers, qualitative research, motivational factors, profile.

JEL classification: C35, L83, M31, Z32.

1. Introduction

The purpose of this article is to examine the fascinating niche of Adventure Tourism (AT). The qualitative data analysis outlined the attitude of young people towards AT and led to the identification of the factors that matter in the option for AT (Janowski et al., 2021). Furthermore, when taking into consideration the socio-economic changes (Peacock et al., 2017), starting with the early access to the economic resources of young people in peak physical shape, with the instant communication (Skinner et al., 2018) and sharing of videos on social media as well as the activity of influencers, AT has a development potential well above the

industry average (Gross and Sand, 2020). From this perspective, our study proposes a way to assess the interest for AT, based on the perception of the individual in the cultural context, developed to the level of motivation, and subsequently to manifest behavior. The psychological profile of young people interested in TA is also important to achieve and integrate into a wider cultural context.

Understanding that motivating factors for young travelers to engage in adventure tourism activities are continually changing we must study them with a higher time frequency. Research can be redesigned to better capture the shifting attitudes of young millennials, as we observe facts and confirm their stability in time. The classic method of succeeding a quantitative research after a qualitative one and then resuming the cycle again with a qualitative research, is the best way to update and capture all the changes included in the behavior of the user of tourist services in general and of those enjoying adventure tourism in particular. Through in-depth interviews, we captured those unique elements that will form the basis of further complex quantitative research. We first set the scene by providing an overview of the adventure tourism activities and meanings. Next, we present our research methodology and findings. We conclude with discussion about what we have learned and what we are thinking doing afterwards with the 16 identified motivational factors. We consider and hope that our research will be useful for managers and policy makers, who may apply its findings to various target markets, personalize the services, and stratify the interest for AT and, at the same time, help the marketers focus their relationship marketing efforts.

2. Literature background

Adventure tourism is an opportunity for regional and national economic development due to its great potential of attractiveness (Wengel, 2021). However, a bibliometric study conducted by Cheng, Edwards, Darcy and Redfern in 2016 indicates an academic immaturity of research in the field of adventure tourism, as compared to other types of tourism. The approach to the adventure tourism experience is different in Eastern specialized literature, for example in Chinese literature, where the approach is inclined towards learning by doing (Cheng, 2017).

The specialized literature identifies as essential for the marketing of adventure tourism the development of products and services which focus on the experience of this type of tourism and the use of communication materials that induce the desire for action and originality and the display of impressive natural scenery. There are also geographical areas where adventure tourism can have a predominantly urban dimension, as is the case in South Africa (McKay, 2017) or Zambia (Rogerson, 2004). However, nature appears as the preferred setting of the adventure tourism experience, regardless of the tourist profile (Ponte et al., 2021). An eloquent example of activity focused on the natural environment is forest bathing, which combines the attachment to a specific natural place, social and physical activity, the discovery of unique and wild places or, in some cases, the need for loneliness and silence (Kil et al., 2021, Cloke and Perkins, 1998).

Janowski et al. (2021) identify 22 dimensions of adventure tourism, the ones specifically defining this type of tourism, as compared to other types of tourism, as being: danger, the natural environment, adrenaline, enthusiasm, challenge and physical activity. Diversifying the range of tourist services by including adventure tourism implies the support of bottom-up initiatives, developing the infrastructure needed for this type of tourism, creating dedicated sports clubs and developing safety standards and norms (Wengel, 2021). Another aspect highlighted in the specialized literature is that of excluding minorities and people with modest incomes from this type of tourism (Dietsch et al., 2021).

Tourists who visited, in an adventure tourism experiment, a famous rock formation in Norway, highlighted the desire to live the sublime as perceived in places that are distant, untouched by human activity and difficult to access. Despite the fact that tourists were inexperienced in hiking, the remoteness, inaccessibility and wildness of the place directly attracted the participants in the study. The lack of experience of the group of participants became visible in the fact that, despite their young age and good physical condition, and despite good weather conditions, the hike was perceived as physically difficult, some participants requesting the assistance of companions, and other participants having given up before the end of the activity (Mykletun et al., 2021). Earlier research on the specific case of Norwegian adventure tourism concluded that the commitment and happiness experienced during the activity accurately predicted the intention of the tourists to revisit and recommend the service (Vittersø et al., 2017).

A prerequisite for the success of the adventure tourism industry is met by the existence of safety parameters and rules and codes of good practice meant to avoid accidents. A study conducted since 2007 by Bentley and Page on the adventure tourism market in New Zealand identifies the need for established safety rules, especially for the age group between 18 and 40 years old, favoring a division of activities, depending on the practitioners. Male practitioners are particularly susceptible to accidents in the field of surfing, mountain biking and snowboarding, while female practitioners are susceptible to accidents in the field of equestrian practice.

Adventure tourism can be used as an opportunity to make tourism in general more sustainable and to help the process of building the awareness of the adventure tourism consumers about the ecological and biodiversity issues facing the visited areas (Langseth and Vyff, 2021, Rosenberg et al., 2021, Marcuta et al., 2020, Umarella et al., 2020, Knowles, 2019, Ponte et al., 2018, Peacock et al., 2017, Steynberg and Grundling, 2005, Zurick, 1992). For this purpose, cross-disciplinary exchanges are advisable in this field (Gross and Sand, 2020). The impact on the environment must be taken into account for this type of activity (Ye and Tkaczynski, 2017), in order that it may result in a mutual gain of the tourist and of the locals.

Hung and Wu (2021) identified a number of physical and psychological benefits that increase the overall well-being of adventure tourism practitioners who engage in activities such as gliding, paragliding, rafting and surfing. This is mainly due to the fact that practitioners are looking for challenges rather than risks. Also, the activity proved to be beneficial for removing psychological barriers, such as embarrassment, fear, shame, apathy, etc. of the participants over the age of 50 years old, regardless of whether they had physical constraints or not. Leaving the comfort zone causes countless positive psychological consequences in this industry (Passafaro et al., 2021), the experience of the state of "flow" being especially interesting in the context of today's society (Taylor and Carr, 2021, Liu and Csikszentmihalyi, 2020).

The personality of tourists also plays an important role in choosing this type of tourism, because it determines the psychological constraints in relation to the tourist activity (Vespestad and Mehmetoglu, 2017). In conclusion, an abundance of details must be provided to the clientele in order to address these constraints and persuade them to practice this type of tourism. Zatori and Beardsley (2017) point out that on-site experiences of tourists are as important as reliving the tourist experience from memory, when considering the co-created value and the impact on the quality of life. Adventure tourism has also been interpreted as a game of reality on the border between lived experience, freedom, identity, authenticity and social status (van Nuenen, 2015, Kane, 2012, Kane and Tucker, 2004).

Positioning adventure tourism as a learning, self-development and self-realization experience is preferred by the female audience. They are especially looking for intrinsic values, and a connection buddy-system for women adventurers would prove fruitful (Clarke et al.,

2021). The risk aspect and the playful aspect can be combined in more accessible forms of adventure tourism, such as hiking tourism or walking-holiday, which achieves an implicit process of maturation of the body by walking, by improving body skills, kinesthetics and the development of orientation knowledge in a changing social and spatial context (Rabbiosi, 2021).

In an attempt to differentiate between authentic and mass tourism experience, researchers have established as defining the degree of authenticity and the concern to experience authentic cultural interactions (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2003). The tourist away from the womb perceives what is mundane or common in the place visited as something new and unique that (s)he is attracted to (Jørgensen, 2020). Therefore, observing everyday existence in the places visited, together with the authentic cultural contact, can complete the adventure tourism offers. The way in which the tourist relates to the consumption of food and drink and to the social context of their consumption, is also analyzed as an additional factor of attractiveness and connection (Bezzola and Lugosi, 2018).

Technological development and access to technological applications, as well as to social networks is another potential impact factor on the tourism sector (Garcia et al., 2019, Femenia-Serra et al., 2019, Zatori and Beardsley, 2017, Di Pietro et al., 2012, Peres et al., 2011). A conclusive example is the case of geo-catchers (Skinner et al., 2018, Ihämäki, 2012). Adventure then becomes the central element of online communication tools such as travel blogs, documentaries, and professional travel sites in search of impressiveness and authenticity (Duffy, 2019, Iordanova and Stainton, 2019). Adventure tourism also appears in the debate on re-exoticizing family tourism and including in the family experience a discovery for the whole family of distant lands and continents, including young children joining the learning, development experience, and the discovery of other cultures. The combination of family values with adventure tourism, but also the presence of neo-colonial elements of interaction with the visited societies, are visible in this case (Mattsson, 2021).

Studies conducted on the Romanian adventure tourism market highlight the potential of mountain adventure tourism that combines hiking, caving, fishing, archery and horseback riding (Andreiana et al., 2017). Similar offers for adventure tourism in the natural environment of rivers and streams are explored by researchers for countries that want to develop this market, such as Croatia, Cuba and Portugal etc. (Wang and Yang, 2021, Filipe et al., 2019, Bosnić et al., 2018). Such concrete plans include precise service offerings and logistical considerations may be the subject of research on adventure tourism, when it is put at the service of the regional development of an area (Alfonso Dovale et al., 2021).

3. Research methodology

The qualitative research was performed using in-depth interview technique, to discover the attitude towards AT and to capture the definition and meanings assigned to AT by the interviewees. Using a semi-structured interview guide, the research was made in two stages. The first one was in February 2019, in New York with United Nation Youth Delegates participating in the 75th UNGA. Delegates have been selected in their country of origin to represent young people internationally, so they are relevant to youths in their country. The second stage took place in March 2019, in Washington DC, USA, at a youth conference, where 100 young leaders around the world were selected to discuss about actual issues concerning the sustainable development. A total of 32 subjects were interviewed in both events. The respondents were 20 to 35 years old, and came from the following countries: Australia, Austria, Bolivia, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, China, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Hungary, India, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Kenya, Lebanon, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Nigeria, Poland, Russia, Turkey, Sri Lanka, South Africa, the Netherlands, Uganda, Ukraine, the USA.

All subjects participated in conferences in USA following a trust vote given by colleagues and representatives of the Ministries of Youth and universities from their countries.

The interviews lasted an average of 52 minutes and took place during breaks between conference sessions. Respondents were asked about the development of AT in their countries, about how acquainted they are with this concept, and whether investments in this area have been made. Furthermore, they were asked whether they practice AT. The respondents who answered affirmatively were then asked whether they preferred to practice AT in their country of origin or abroad. The respondents who responded negatively were asked whether they would like to try it in the near future. Finally, the factors influencing the attitude of millennials towards AT were identified by formulating questions such as: What does it matter to you when you think of AT? What other factors can be considered? A list was then presented and a question was asked about which of the factors could be associated with AT? What factors have influenced your decision so far in choosing AT? The interviewees expressed their own views on the practice of AT, as well as the attitude of their community towards it as a component of a cultural dimension (Huang and Crotts, 2019, Williams et al., 2017).

The first research objective was to identify from an open list starting with 64 generic factors to take into consideration when one opts for a tourist destination, those factors that lead to choosing a destination where adventure tourism is practiced. As the interviews progressed, the list grew to 86 factors mentioned by the interviewees. Towards the end of the interviews, the subjects were asked to assign a grade from 5 to 1 (5 = very important, 1 = very unimportant), depending on the importance, to each of the factors that in their opinion are the most likely to be taken into account when booking a holiday in a place where one can practice activities specific to adventure tourism. The second research objective was to outline the psychological profile of the adventure tourism user. The profile was based on the cultural dimensions developed by Geert Hofstede (de Mooij and Hofstede, 2010, Hofstede, 2011, Jackson, 2020). At the end of the interviews, questions were asked about the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants but also of the generic users of adventure tourism services in the country of origin of each interviewee.

4. Findings

Initially, the authors assumed that there would be a correlation between the natural potential of countries for adventure tourism and the desire of the residents to engage in such activities. However, the results showed that the presence of adventure tourism opportunities in a certain location is not directly proportional to the attitude of the inhabitants towards it. One of the reasons why locals are not attracted to local adventure activities is the lack of novelty and surprise. For those accustomed to living in the vicinity of wildlife, it is no longer an attraction to see it constantly, but rather a habit. Respondents in countries with high potential for adventure tourism consider the practice of such activities as common everyday actions and no longer appreciate their special character. Adventure tourism is also more expensive than traditional tourism, as it requires specialized assistance and diversified technical equipment. In the countries where adventure tourism is practiced, which have a lower degree of general development, the interest of the locals will be lower for these activities, due to the high costs. The reciprocal of this phenomenon is also valid. In developed countries, citizens are eager to practice AT even if the area they live in does not facilitate it. So, they are regular customers in abroad areas that offer unprecedented, exciting, and even extreme AT specific experiences.

Going further, the answers given by the respondents supported the idea that activities are to be considered adventurous not because they represented a real physical risk, but rather a perceived risk, such as the viewing of the northern lights, going on a safari in Kenya, sleeping under the stars in the desert, or zip lining. To highlight this issue, respondents were exposed to

images showing several activities and asked whether or not they could be considered adventures. Persons who had already experienced AT and had in-depth experience of a particular sport category, only considered as AT activities that involved physical effort, e.g., diving, climbing, mountain-biking. Respondents, who hadn't practiced a regular sport, classified the physically demanding activities as AT and, in addition, they considered AT to include spectacular actions with no imposed risk, but only with voluntary risk, such as reaching a mountain peak with the cable lift, proximity to a polar bear found in captivity, observation of corals while snorkeling. Taking all aspects into account, we conclude that the voluntary risk has the same personal impact as the real risk.

A place becomes a tourist destination because it entices the interest of a group of people and meets one or more categories of needs, tangible (mountain, seaside) or intangible (cultural, spiritual). The elements conducive to tourism development are gastronomy (Turkey), history (Egypt), art (Florence), culture (Japan), cultural authenticity (Cambodia), nature (Iceland), technology (Shenzhen), smart-city (Singapore), future-city (Masdar). A tourist destination coverage focuses on spectacular and unique items. Again, respondents were exposed to offers of various travel agencies from countries selected at random from all the continents, and have analyzed the different images and activities in order to discover a common feature. Thus, a holiday offer in Kenya will include photos of wild animals and safaris, and a Chinese trip invites travelers to discover the tradition of tea. In Jordan, tourists are invited to 'snowboard' on sand dunes and sleep under the stars in the desert. In California, they are invited to surf, whereas for Australia there are underwater photographs, which motivate people towards diving. In Romania, the dark legend of Dracula incites visits to the Bran castle. Opposed to this, Romania was surnamed the Garden of the Mother of God, being sprinkled with churches and monasteries throughout its territory, some of them at considerable heights, accessible by difficult roads even during the warm season, whereas others are located underground in the mountains, in caves, at considerable depths, and can be reached by difficult access routes. These activities are, in essence, elements of AT and are all connected to national landmarks and national symbols, as perceived by both visitors and local residents alike. Consequently, we conclude that adventure tourism is considered a component of the country brand. Respondents were able to identify the country of each destination presented.

From the list built together with the interviewees, the factors that were identified as having the greatest importance are: *stress decreasing, stress relief, disconnection, extravagance, self-awareness, free from daily routine activities, self-reliance, curiosity, novelty seeking, intellectual stimulation, knowledge, self-discovery, social interaction, cooperation, release of physical energy* and, *socialization*. Out of the total of 86 factors, the first 16 were chosen based on the degree of importance assigned by the interviewees through the grades given. The demarcation limit was established where the first major difference was found between the total score calculated for each factor assessed by the respondents. Thus, having the list of motivational factors for adventure tourism, organized in the order of the importance assigned, after the first 16 factors, between which the differences were somewhat minor, a first major difference was noticed. Thus, from the 17th factor to the last, the scores decreased a lot and, consequently, these factors were considered to have a reduced capacity to influence adventure tourism. Through this separation, only the factors mentioned above that line were retained, about which it is believed that they are essential in choosing adventure tourist services.

From the questions about the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants and of the generic users of adventure tourism services from the respondents' country of origin, the profile of the adventure tourism user was outlined. Therefore, among the young people, those who mainly opt for choosing a destination where adventure tourism activities are practiced, are

those who have primarily a predominantly individualistic behavior. Another specific feature of them is the very good resistance to stress, regardless of the context. These young people also show a high level of disobedience to the authorities, or, in other words, they want to make all the important decisions for themselves, almost ignoring any recommendations from outside their person. These three characteristics are specific to the millennial generation (Benckendorff et al., 2010, Kane, 2019), which means that adventure tourism fits the millennials like a glove (IJspeert and Hernandez-Maskivker, 2020).

5. Discussion

Adventure tourism is a globally expanding phenomenon, which occupies an increasingly important position every year, on the one hand, among research conducted in tourism and, on the other hand, among investments made in tourism objectives. AT represents a potential for economic growth for some developing countries and is an essential source of income for underdeveloped rural areas. AT plays an important role in the activities of protecting natural areas and is an element / factor of personal development increasingly sought after by new generations.

The present research shows that the existence of facilities for the practice of adventure activities in a certain country does not change the preference of the country's inhabitants towards the practice of these activities. There is the situation in which the locals are also the most active practitioners, but also the situation in which the locals are almost not interested in the activities involved in adventure tourism. However, it is worth noting that in most of the destinations recognized for adventure tourism there are tourists who come mainly from the same countries. Americans, residents of New Zealand, the United Kingdom and Germany are always present in large numbers in areas where adventure tourism is practiced.

Another element highlighted by the current study is the shaping of perception of the young people related to adventure tourism. At first glance, adventure tourism is often associated with extreme tourism and is considered very dangerous and difficult to access for a wide range of users. However, at a second glance, we also identify the defining aspects that differentiate adventure tourism from extreme tourism. Adventure tourism does involve a degree of risk. The risk can be real, a risk that endangers the safety, health and integrity of the person, or it can only be perceived, a risk that is actually a psychological obstacle that the practitioner must overcome by carrying out the activity. From the answers obtained from the discussions, it is observed that the perceived risk has a more substantial impact on potential adventure tourism practitioners than the real risk has. For this reason, it is found that adventure tourism is not associated with a real danger or a threat, but respondents associate it more with unique and memorable experiences. Young people also associate adventure with trying to adapt to a certain local culture, discovering new things and interacting with elements of the natural environment. Mountain people believe that it would be an adventure to meet wild, large animals in their natural environment, or to practice aquatic activities. In contrast, people in the tropics find the experience of polar nights, watching the northern lights and crossing mountainous terrains adventurous, without the need to add to these experiences any other elements of risk.

We consider that the 16 motivational factors identified with regard to the involvement of young people in activities specific to adventure tourism can be grouped into four categories, formed on the basis of similar characteristics. Quantitative research is needed in order to confirm the stability of the factors and to quantify the importance of each. Once the importance of these factors is confirmed, tour operators can compile tourist packages based on the characteristics of each destination, where tourists can practice activities specific to adventure tourism. Destinations differ and cannot equally meet the needs of all AT users. Through an

appropriate scientific promotion, based on the 16 factors, tourists can be guided to destinations that fully meet their adventure needs.

6. Conclusions

Studying the field of adventure tourism, we consider that it is advisable to do it with an increased frequency, as the new generations have an increasingly fast pace of life and are constantly looking for new activities that they have not practiced before. Technological development has largely contributed to the creation of this alert lifestyle. At the same time, this type of tourism is required to benefit from a marketing communication, which can clarify and discriminate the content of these activities from other types of tourism, as well as to reduce the perceived risk, with a strong subjective load. The marketing communication process would require the involvement of travel offices, practitioners of this form of tourism - and among them - influencers -, non-governmental organizations involved in environmental protection and even government agencies, responsible for tourism development - in general -. Consequently, the options in choosing a tourist destination will vary greatly from one period to another. The present study manages to capture the opinion of young people belonging to the generation of millennials from 32 countries, about the adventure tourism. The added value of the paper and the original contribution of the authors is given by the identification of 16 motivating factors for young travelers to engage in adventure tourism activities and the shaping of the profile of the typical user of AT services. In view of these factors, economic and political decision-makers may, knowingly, take measures to develop the economic environment in areas prone to this type of tourism.

7. Research limits and further studies

In-depth interviews present the generally accepted limitation consisting in that the results do not directly reflect the experience of the respondents, but provide indirect representations of the perceptions about the experiences lived or imagined by the respondents. A limitation strictly related to the current study is the period of the interviews, in the sense that they took place in the very year of the outbreak of the pandemic, before the imposition of traffic restrictions. The resumption of the study at present would increase the importance of other factors in the decision to choose a destination where adventure tourism can be practiced. Factors such as the need for sanitation or even other new factors related to traffic restrictions could be identified. Regarding the continuation and extension of the study, a main future research direction considered is to deepen the field through a quantitative research that could substantiate a statistical-mathematical model applicable in the field of adventure tourism. A secondary direction of research in the future, starting from the profile of the outlined adventure tourism service user, would be to characterize this profile in the light of the cultural dimensions developed by the Hofstede model.

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