



**INSTITUTE OF AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS, BELGRADE, SERBIA**

# **SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT II**

*Thematic Proceeding*



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## ***SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT II***

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## **PLENARY SECTION**

***Second day, 17<sup>th</sup> December 2021***



# POST-PANDEMIC TRAVEL INTENTIONS OF URBAN AND RURAL POPULATION

*Drago Cvijanović<sup>1</sup>, Danijela Pantović<sup>2</sup>, Nataša Đorđević<sup>3</sup>, Miljan Leković<sup>4</sup>*

## Abstract

*The COVID-19 pandemic brought the whole world into a crisis period that caused sudden changes in the behavior and reactions of the entire world economic system, and the tourism industry was particularly affected. Such changes have especially led to behavioral changes in plans and actions related to travel and tourism. Considering this, the paper aims to investigate issues of perception and planned behavior of urban and rural residents in the Republic of Serbia after the COVID-19 pandemic. A questionnaire was applied and distributed through the Google Questionnaire Application. Data collection and processing was performed in SPSS statistical software package. The results of the research showed that the pandemic only temporarily stopped decisions regarding tourism and travel, and that they will be compensated immediately after the pandemic ends.*

**Key words:** *tourism, COVID-19 pandemic, behavior, plan, Serbia, tourists*

## Introduction

The fast growth and positive economic impacts of the tourism industry are the reasons why many countries have decided to plan and develop tourism. The basic condition for tourism growth is the increase in leisure time and household income of people who want to travel. Besides this, technological innovations have made travel planning easier. The tenth year of consecutive growth was 2019, in

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which 1.5 billion international tourist arrivals were recorded (UNWTO, 2020). This growth was interrupted by one of the biggest health crises, the pandemic of a novel coronavirus, which only in 2020 caused a fall of 74% in international tourist arrivals and a loss of USD 1.3 trillion in export revenues (UNWTO, 2021).

Health crises caused the change in tourist flows by reducing it or redirecting it to safer tourism destinations. The COVID-19 pandemic affects tourism globally, and the restrictive measures have left a small number of travel choices. International tourism flows were particularly halted, and domestic tourism is retained in some countries, but at a lower level than in the years before the pandemics. In Serbia, there were 934,440 reported cases of COVID-19 infected people by the 30th of September 2021 (Ministry of Health of the Republic of Serbia, 2021). The total number of tourist arrivals in the Republic of Serbia in 2020 declined by 50.7%; the number of domestic tourist arrivals decreased by 25.4%, while the foreign tourist arrivals fell by 75.9% (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2020b). According to Cvijanović et al. (2020), residents of Serbia plan to visit domestic tourism destinations, especially rural tourism destinations, during the pandemic.

To understand the real consequences of the current health crisis, changes in tourist behavior and their plans for travel should be investigated. The pandemic has for sure interrupted tourist flow and changed them, but the question is how does the pandemic change the traveling plans and does that affect future travel decisions?

This paper focuses on plans and perceptions about traveling after the pandemic COVID-19 in Serbia. The aim is to investigate how did the pandemic affect the traveling plans of the urban and rural residents and does that affect their plans for traveling after the end of the pandemics.

### **Literature review**

Since the outbreak of the new coronavirus around the world in 2020, researchers have begun to address these issues and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on all sections of society. Tourism is the core industry first and most affected by this virus (Folinas & Metaxas, 2020; Félix et al., 2020).

The pandemic affected both tourism supply and demand (Bakar & Rosbi, 2020). Restrictive measures included lockdowns and this prevents the tourism industry from prosperity. Fear was present even when the situation got better, i.e., when there were fewer people infected with the novel coronavirus, and people delayed and canceled their traveling.



According to research conducted in September 2021 by European Travel Commission (ETC), 35% of respondents plan to travel within the country and also 35% plan to travel to another country in Europe, making 70% of the respondents who plan to travel by January 2022. There are also respondents who hesitate about their traveling (17%), and respondents who are uncertain about short-term traveling. The COVID-19 vaccines encouraged people from Europe to travel during the pandemic (Schengenvisa, 2021). During the pandemic, factors that might be considered before planning a trip are the number of infected in the destination, safety, and hygiene of the tourism destination. Fear may be the main reason why people would not travel. The preference for traveling has changed and people are likely to choose less crowded destinations, and they might travel abroad if they have to visit friends and family (World Economic Forum, 2021).

Tourists from Serbia stated that they perceive as a travel risk COVID-19 pandemic and that safety is a priority during traveling, which is connected to their willingness to respect measures that prevent the virus from spreading (Bratić et al., 2021). Also, according to the study of Perić et al., (2021), the intentions for traveling among Serbian tourists are negatively affected by their risk perception, such as financial, health, and psychological, while a significant indicator for traveling abroad during the pandemic is monthly income.

Health crises are not new for the tourism industry. Like other crises and disasters, they may have huge negative impacts, but also new opportunities and chances for recovery must be found. The pandemic times may be seen as a time for tourism reset (Prayag, 2020). Tourism should be recovered not at previous levels, but to use this time for resetting, and reaching a more sustainable way of tourism development (Brouder & Redux, 2020). The current crisis creates opportunities for rural tourism. Rural areas usually have healthy environments and less population density, which is why domestic tourists opt for rural destinations during pandemics (Cvijanović et al. 2020; Vaishar & Št'astná, 2020).

### **Data and methodology**

This research paper used a quantitative methodology that the authors implemented in the territory of the Republic of Serbia in the period March - October 2021. The aim of this paper is to understand the behavior of tourists after a COVID-19 pandemic. The paper focuses on assessing planned behavioral changes related to travel after a pandemic. The questionnaire was developed

on the basis of previous research into tourist post-pandemic planned behaviors (Li et al., 2020). Measurement items for three independent variables (Subjective Norm, Attitude, and Perceived Behavioral Control) were adapted from other tourism studies such as Chen & Tung (2014) and Wang & Ritchie (2012). Other variables such as Hospitality, Impression, and Post-pandemic Travel Intention were adopted from Li et al. (2020). In addition to specific destination-related questions, the questionnaire also includes socio-demographic issues such as gender, age, region in which the respondent lives, income, education, and area of residence (urban or rural). The results from the questionnaire were processed in the SPSS statistical package commonly used for analyzing the questionnaire. A questionnaire was applied and distributed through the Google Questionnaire Application. The overall profile of survey respondents is shown below (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Survey respondents' profile.

Variable	Total
Gender	
Male	49%
Female	51%
Age	
21-30	31%
31-40	22%
41-50	22%
51-60	20%
60 or more	5%
Area of residence	
Urban	79%
Rural	21%
Education	
primary education	0.5%
High school	7.9%
academic studies (bachelor's degree)	21.8%
master's degree	14.4%
PhD	55.6%

Source: Author's calculation

Descriptive analysis in Table 1 shows that the survey included mostly residents from urban areas (79%). Only 21% are from rural areas of Serbia. In terms of gender, the structure is almost the ideal half, with 49% of men surveyed and 51% of women.

## Results and discussion

The confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to assess the reliability of the model. In our case, the measurement model examines the validity of the theoretical model of tourist behavior after a pandemic.

The Cronbach's coefficient  $\alpha$  (Cronbach, 1951) was used to assess internal consistency. Cronbach's alpha factor for the total sample is 0.737 (Table 2). Nannally (1978) suggests that values  $\geq 0.7$  should be considered a priority, indicating that the internal consistency condition of the observed model is met. Table 2 shows the obtained values of model reliability.

**Table 2.** Reliability Statistics.

N. of Items	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Cronbach's Alpha
11	0.794 <sup>a</sup>	0.630	0.613	0.55396	0.737
a. Predictors: (Constant), PBC2, I2, H1, H2, SN2, A2, I1, PBC1, A1, SN1					

Source: Author's calculation

Table 3 shows the descriptive statistics of the entire observed model. Table 3 illustrates 11 variables and a total of 229 valid responses. The values available to the respondents ranged from 1 (absolutely disagree) to 5 (absolutely agree). The variable *Impression* (I1 and I2) received the worst grades within the entire model. Thus, respondents generally disagree with the statement *My impression of the destination will be affected by its reported coronavirus recovery rate* (I2) and variable I1: *My impression of the destination will be affected by its number of coronavirus cases reported*.

The highest opinion was given to the variable *Attitude* (A1 and A2), where the highest grade expressed the opinion: *Once this epidemic is over, I believe it is still a good idea to go on holiday to the destination and I intended to visit*.

**Table 3.** Descriptive Statistics

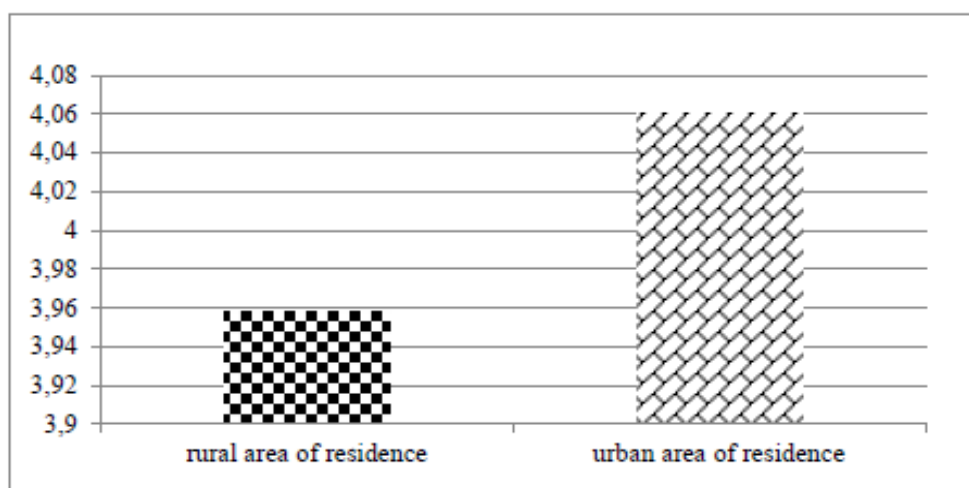
Observed variables	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Deviation
H1	229	1.00	5.00	3.3013	1.29813
H2	229	1.00	5.00	3.1048	1.19481
I1	229	1.00	5.00	3.2620	1.35122
I2	229	1.00	5.00	2.9127	1.27777
A1	229	1.00	5.00	4.4891	0.84090
A2	229	1.00	5.00	4.3275	0.95154
SN1	229	1.00	5.00	4.3624	0.91985
SN2	229	1.00	5.00	4.1266	0.95359
PBC1	229	1.00	5.00	4.0393	1.03586
PBC2	229	1.00	5.00	4.0175	1.07591
PPTI	229	1.00	5.00	4.3581	0.89010

\*\*\* Note: H – Hospitality, I – Impression, A – Attitude, SN – Subjective Norm , PBC - Perceived Behavioural Control , PPTI - Post-pandemic Travel Intention

Source: Author's calculation

In addition to the aggregate sample model, a multigroup analysis illustrating the opinions and behaviors of urban and rural populations during a pandemic is also interesting. In this sense, Figures 1 and 2 show the multigroup behaviors of the urban and rural populations.

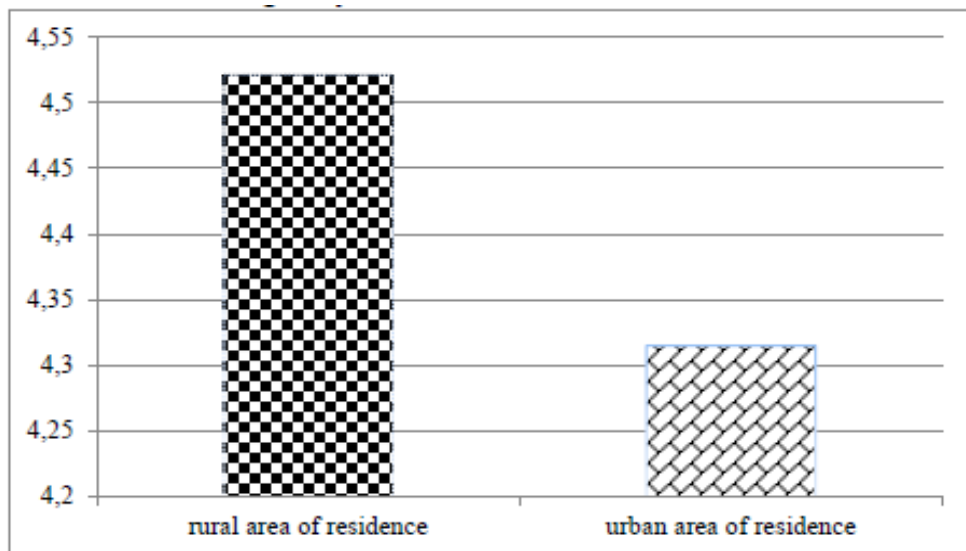
**Figure 1.** Once this epidemic is over, I will remain financially able to go on holiday in the destination I intended to visit.



Source: Author's calculation

If we look at Figure 1, we can conclude that the rural population will be in poorer financial condition after the pandemic. With that in mind, the question is whether they will be able to visit the intended destination after the pandemic.

**Figure 2.** After this epidemic, I will go on holiday to the destination I intended to visit originally.



Source: Author's calculation

Quite contrary to the previous Figure 1, the rural population still believes that they will persevere and visit the desired destination.

## Conclusions

The current health crisis is testing the resilience of the tourism industry. The pandemic might be under control regarding vaccinations, but it seems to be that the fear regarding safe travel will still be present. On the other side, there is an opportunity for rural areas to attract more domestic tourists, as such areas are seen as less crowded destinations. Therefore, strategies for tourism recovery should consider rural tourism for domestic tourists during the pandemic, and for foreign tourists when travel abroad is possible.

Based on the conducted research, it can be concluded that the pandemic only temporarily stopped travel in the Republic of Serbia. Both the urban population and the rural population, to a large extent, intend to travel and compensate for the shortcomings in travel from the previous period.

For further analysis, it would be interesting to explore the behaviors of both urban and rural populations, as well as modeling the results with more advanced modeling techniques and tools.

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