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## **Residents` Perceptions of Socio-Cultural Impacts of Tourism in Vrnjačka Banja, Serbia**

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### **Abstract**

*In order to reach the sustainable development of a tourism destination, it is important to investigate how residents perceive the impacts of tourism development. Tourism may cause improvements in residents' quality of life in many aspects of it. On the other side, with a greater number of tourists of different cultures in a destination, unpleasant crowds can occur, which may lead to community disruption, loss of cultural identity of the local community, and to other negative socio-cultural impacts of tourism. The danger of negative impacts of tourism might be even greater when the destination is small, considering the total number of residents and the size of the territory. This paper analyses the residents` perceptions of the socio-cultural impacts of tourism in Vrnjačka Banja, the leading spa destination in Serbia. The survey method was used to collect primary data and it included 110 respondents. Data were processed by Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Results indicate that residents have more negative perceptions of the socio-cultural impacts of tourism in Vrnjačka Banja than positive.*

**Keywords:** tourism, socio-cultural impacts, residents` perceptions, sustainability, Vrnjačka Banja.

**JEL Classification:** L83, Z30, Z32

### **1. Introduction**

Tourism contributes to meeting different cultures, lifestyles, and consequently better understanding of different people (Podovac et al., 2019). Since traveling is becoming easier, different cultures are mixing more often. The communication between people from different parts of the world and with different cultural background is not always easy. Conflicts can easily arise when cultures mix, but it is important to deal with these problems so they do not escalate (Kostalova, 2017). Socio-cultural impacts are the 'human impacts' of the tourism industry, with an

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emphasis on changes in the quality of residents' daily life in tourism destinations and cultural impacts related to transformations in traditional values, norms, and identities arising from tourism (Glasson et al., 1995; Zhuang et al., 2019).

Balancing the economic, socio-cultural, and environmental impacts of tourism is the basic principle of sustainable development (Đorđević & Kostić, 2019). Therefore, to achieve sustainability, social responsibility and economic profit should not be contradictory, but rather complementary (Zdravković, & Peković, 2020). Also, for successful sustainable tourism development, a crucial factor is residents' participation and cooperation (Yu et al., 2011). To reach this, it is important to observe residents' perception of tourism impacts, because their attitude toward tourism development depends on it (Woo et al., 2018).

The subject of this study is the analysis of the socio-cultural impacts of tourism and the residents' perceptions of them, using the example of one of the most visited tourism destinations in Serbia, Vrnjačka Banja.

## **2. Problem Statement**

Countries with strong economies implement consistent development policies and record performance on all three levels – economic, social, and environmental (Subic et al., 2010; Popescu et al., 2017), which are the three key dimensions of sustainability. Economies of different countries have shown vulnerability to a range of internal and external factors (Andrei et al., 2018). Some studies underline human capital as a factor of importance for different processes that rely on it (Dincă et al., 2019), just like tourism does.

Residents' perceptions of tourism development in destinations have been a lasting study topic of tourism (Brida et al., 2011; Jaafar et al., 2017). For the long-term success of the tourism destination, it is important to understand and assess the residents' perceptions regarding the impacts of tourism development (Ritchie & Inkari, 2006). A clear understanding of the attitudes, perceptions, and opinions of the local residents is a necessary prerequisite to the planning and management of sustainable tourism in a destination (Byrd & Gustke, 2004). Attracting and retaining residents of a particular community are fundamentally dependent on the provision of quality social infrastructure, with a positive impact on both employment levels and local entrepreneurship (Chivu, 2019). Residents' perceptions involve economic, social, cultural, political, and environmental outcomes of tourism development, which play a significant role in residents' overall opinion about the living conditions of the community. Also, residents' perceptions of tourism impact influence not only residents' attitudes toward tourism, but also their overall life satisfaction (Woo et al., 2018).

The majority of empirical and theoretical studies have focused on the socio-cultural impacts of tourism and residents' perceptions towards tourists and tourism development in the given destination, as well as their support for tourism development projects (Andreck et al., 2005; Deery et al., 2012; Sirakaya et al., 2002). The socio-cultural impacts of tourism are created during the stay in the destination when tourists interact with residents and the outcome of their relationship

changes the host individuals` and host community`s quality of life, value systems, labor division, family relationships, attitudes, behavioral patterns, ceremonies and creative expressions (Rátz, 2000).

The impacts of tourism can be classified as negative when they contribute to the disruption of society`s components, and as positive when they upgrade vital attributes (Türker & Öztürk, 2013). On one side, tourism has become a key economic development strategy for many countries because of its potential to generate foreign exchange earnings, to encourage foreign investment, increase tax revenues, more employment opportunities for residents and higher personal income (Pinar & Günlü, 2012; Ramseook-Munhurrin & Naidoo, 2011). Tourism improves residents` quality of life through the development and improvement of local facilities and activities (e.g. more recreational and cultural facilities, more events and cultural activities available for residents) and public infrastructure (roads, airports, water supply, and sewage treatment systems and electricity supply) (Lourenco-Gomes et al., 2019; Sharpley, 2018; Zaei & Zaei 2013). The admiration of tourists for local culture, arts, tradition, or customs can increase the cultural pride of the local community and revive aspects of this culture that have been declining. The positive attention of tourists for local culture can encourage young people in the host community to become actively involved (Inkson & Minnaert, 2018). Tourism also positively affects the quality of community services.

On the other side, tourism can cause communities to suffer from higher living costs (eg. rising prices of goods and services, of property taxes, of land, etc.), crime increase (eg. gambling, drug trafficking, prostitution), negative environmental impacts (eg. increased garbage, air, and water pollution, destruction of natural resources), as well as negative cultural impacts (eg. changes to local arts or customs) (Rasoolimanesh et al. 2017; Yun & Zhang, 2017). One of the major negative socio-cultural impacts of tourism is the demonstration effect. It happens when tourists influence the behavior of the host population. The local population`s aspirations to the material values of tourists lead to the copying with tourists` behavior patterns. The younger local residents are more susceptible to the demonstration effect (Bello et al., 2017; Wall & Mathieson, 2006).

The economic impacts of tourism are seen as positive impacts, while socio-cultural and environmental are more seen as negative (Gill, 2015). The focus of this study is on both positive and negative socio-cultural impacts of tourism in a spa destination, which is a contribution to this field of study considering that there is less research focusing on tourism impacts in spa destinations.

### **3. Research Questions/Aims of the research**

After the capital city of the Republic of Serbia – Belgrade, Vrnjačka Banja is the most visited tourism destination in this country (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2020). It is located in the central part of the Republic of Serbia and it is characterized by great natural resources, like climate, flora, fauna, and thermo-mineral waters, which are the basis for tourism development (Milićević, 2015). According to the 2011 Census, there were 27,527 inhabitants (Statistical Office

of the Republic of Serbia, 2011). In 2019 there were 283,491 tourists and in the last few years, tourism had a growing tendency (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2020). Considering this, the question that arises is how residents of this small spa tourism destination perceive the impacts of tourism. The aim of this study is to investigate how residents perceive the socio-cultural impacts of tourism in Vrnjačka Banja.

#### 4. Research Methods

For data collection, a survey method was used. The questionnaire is divided into two parts. The first part consists of the questions related to the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents. To make sure that the questionnaire is filled in only by residents, the respondents first answered the question of whether they live on the territory of the municipality of Vrnjačka Banja.

The second part consists of statements related to the socio-cultural impacts of tourism in Vrnjačka Banja. Residents provided answers using a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree). The statements were defined on the basis of Kim's (2002) and Zhuang et al., (2019) studies, with small adaptation to conditions of tourism in Vrnjačka Banja. Socio-cultural impacts are divided as positive and negative. The questionnaire was distributed in the form of a Google questionnaire in July 2020. A total of 110 residents filled in the questionnaire.

#### 5. Findings

Out of 110 respondents who took part in this research 64 are male (58.2%) and 46 are female respondents (41.8%) respondents aged 20-30 have the highest participation in the sample (53.6%). The largest number of respondents belongs to the category of respondents that are high school graduates (38.2%) (Table 1).

**Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents**

		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	64	58.2
	Female	46	41.8
Age	20-30	59	53.6
	31-40	30	27.3
	41-50	12	10.9
	51-60	5	4.5
	> 60	4	3.6
Level of education	High school graduate	42	38.2
	Vocational degree	10	9.1
	Bachelor's degree	34	30.9
	Master degree	20	18.2
	Doctoral degree	4	3.6

Source: Authors, based on research

In the second part of the questionnaire, respondents could agree or disagree by using a five-point Likert scale about 7 statements that describe positive and 7 statements that describe negative socio-cultural impacts of tourism in Vrnjačka Banja. The 14 items of the positive and negative socio-cultural impacts of tourism were subjected to Factor analysis using SPSS. Data are suitable for factor analysis considering that the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value is .80, which is higher than recommended value of .6. According to Bartlett's Test of Sphericity, the statistical significance was reached (sig.=.000) (Table 2).

**Table 2. KMO and Bartlett's Test**

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.802
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	871.243
	df	91
	Sig.	.000

Source: Authors, based on research

Factor analysis revealed the presence of four factors eigenvalues exceeding 1 (37.4%, 19.4%, 9.4%, 7.4% of the variance), but according to the Scree plot there is a break after the second factor. Because of this, two factors are used for further analysis, which explain 58.9% of the variance. For the better interpretation of these two factors Oblimin rotation is used. This revealed the presence of simple structure. Both factors showed a strong loading, with positive impacts items loading strongly on Factor 2, and negative impacts items loading strongly on Factor 1. Therefore, the results of the Factor analysis support the use of the positive socio-cultural impacts items and negative socio-cultural impacts items as separate scales (Table 3). Between the Factor 1 and Factor 2 there is a weak positive correlation ( $r=0.234$ ).

**Table 3. Rotated factor loadings and communalities, Oblimin rotation**

Variable	Factor		Communality
	1	2	
More variety in recreational activities and facilities	.344	<b>.430</b>	.372
Improved public infrastructure	.364	<b>.534</b>	.509
Preservation of local services	.070	<b>.664</b>	.468
An amelioration of local image	-.069	<b>.747</b>	.539
Revitalized local cultural practices and maintained cultural identity	-.127	<b>.843</b>	.677
Increased residents' pride of the local culture	-.170	<b>.811</b>	.623
A better quality of life	.088	<b>.694</b>	.518
For peak season it is harder to use local facilities and services	<b>.766</b>	.014	.592

Variable	Factor		Communality
	1	2	
Because of tourism, promenade and streets are unpleasantly overcrowded	<b>.892</b>	-.037	.782
Because of tourism parks are unpleasantly overcrowded	<b>.838</b>	.051	.725
Because of tourism shopping places are unpleasantly overcrowded	<b>.878</b>	.029	.784
Traffic congestion	<b>.803</b>	.110	.698
Tourism encourages residents to imitate the behavior of the tourists and relinquish cultural traditions	<b>.513</b>	-.088	.250
Tourism causes the disruption of traditional cultural behavior patterns in local residents	<b>.666</b>	-.057	.429
<b>% of variance explained</b>	37.4%		19.4%

Source: Authors, based on research

The assessment of the internal consistency and validity of the sample was carried out using the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). For the positive socio-cultural impacts of tourism Cronbach alpha coefficient is 0.825 and for the negative socio-cultural impacts it is 0.886, which indicates that the condition of the internal consistency is achieved (Table 4).

**Table 4. The results of reliability statistics**

	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Positive socio-cultural impacts	0.825	7
Negative socio-cultural impacts	0.886	7
All variables	0.860	14

Source: Authors, based on research

When it comes to positive impacts, the results of the descriptive statistics show that the respondents mostly agree that tourism in Vrnjačka Banja brings *More variety in recreational activities and facilities* (M = 3.8). Respondents expressed a high level of agreement regarding the statements that tourism in Vrnjačka Banja *Improved public infrastructure* (M=3. 5) and creates *A better quality of life* (M=3.3). With a mean score below 3, respondents rated statements that tourism brings *Preservation of local services* (M=2.9), *An amelioration of local image* (M=2.9), *Revitalized local cultural practices and maintained cultural identity* (M=2.7) and even greater disagreement was expressed by respondents towards a statement that tourism *Increased residents` pride of the local culture* (M=2.5) (Table 5).

**Table 5. Positive socio-cultural impacts of tourism in Vrnjačka Banja**

Positive socio-cultural impacts	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
More variety in recreational activities and facilities	110	3. 7727	1. 03746	1. 076
Improved public infrastructure	110	3. 5273	1. 16295	1. 352
Preservation of local services	110	2. 8818	1. 24688	1. 555
An amelioration of local image	110	2. 9455	1. 14808	1. 318
Revitalized local cultural practices and maintained cultural identity	110	2. 7091	1. 15215	1. 327
Increased residents` pride of the local culture	110	2. 5364	1. 05515	1. 113
A better quality of life	110	3. 3455	1. 02659	1. 054

Source: Authors, based on research

On the other side, respondents agreed that *Traffic congestion* is the most negative impact of tourism in Vrnjačka Banja (M=4.3), and secondly it is the statement that *Because of tourism, promenade and streets are unpleasantly overcrowded* (M= 4.1). The other negative sociocultural impacts are also rated with a mean score above 3: *Because of tourism shopping places are unpleasantly overcrowded* (M=3.9), *Because of tourism parks are unpleasantly overcrowded* (M=3.9), *For peak season is harder to use local facilities and services* (M=3.9), *Tourism causes the disruption of traditional cultural behavior patterns in local residents* (M=3.5), and the greatest disagreement from all the negative impacts was expressed by respondents towards the statement that *Tourism encourages residents to imitate the behavior of the tourists and relinquishes cultural traditions* (M=3.1) (Table 6).

**Table 6. Negative socio-cultural impacts of tourism in Vrnjačka Banja**

Negative socio-cultural impacts	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
For peak season is harder to use local facilities and services	110	3. 9000	1. 07473	1. 155
Because of tourism, promenade and streets are unpleasantly overcrowded	110	4. 0909	1. 12963	1. 276
Because of tourism parks are unpleasantly overcrowded	110	3. 9182	1. 07628	1. 158
Because of tourism shopping places are unpleasantly overcrowded	110	3. 9409	1. 12922	1. 275
Traffic congestion	110	4. 3455	1. 05305	1. 109
Tourism encourages residents to imitate the behavior of the tourists and relinquishes cultural traditions	110	3. 1091	1. 23664	1. 529
Tourism causes the disruption of traditional cultural behavior patterns in local residents	110	3. 4727	1. 19409	1. 426

Source: Authors, based on research

Considering that the overall mean rating of positive impacts ( $M=3.1$ ) is lower than the overall mean rating of negative impacts ( $M = 3.8$ ), residents' perceptions towards socio-cultural impacts of tourism in Vrnjačka Banja is rather negative, than positive (Table 7).

**Table 7. Descriptive Statistics of Factors**

	<b>N</b>	<b>Min.</b>	<b>Max.</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Dev.</b>
Positive socio-cultural impacts	110	1.00	4.71	3.1026	.78321
Negative socio-cultural impacts	110	1.00	5.00	3.8325	.87055
Valid N (listwise)	110				

*Source:* Authors, based on research

## **6. Conclusions**

Planning sustainable tourism development would not be complete without reaching a balance between the interest of crucial stakeholders. Although tourism brings positive impacts for residents, negative impacts must be considered in order to reach their support for tourism development.

Results of this study revealed that residents mostly agree that tourism in Vrnjačka Banja creates more variety in recreational activities and facilities, improves public infrastructure and the quality of life, but also that it creates traffic congestion and crowds on the streets, promenade, parks, and shopping places. Overall, residents have rated negative socio-cultural impacts of tourism with slightly higher mean score than positive ones. This indicates that their overall perception of the socio-cultural impacts of tourism in Vrnjačka Banja is more negative, than positive.

The main limitation of this study is the small number of residents included in the research comparing to the total number of population in Vrnjačka Banja. The results of this research may be used for further planning and improving the tourism offer of Vrnjačka Banja according to sustainable development practices. Also, the research can be used for the comparative analysis of the socio-cultural impacts of tourism in spa destinations. Further research should focus on finding if there is a difference in residents' perceptions of tourism impacts in spa destinations, namely economic, environmental, and socio-cultural.

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