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Experiences and Expectations: Drivers of Urban Tourist Destination Competitiveness

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Abstract:

Research Question: This paper investigates into how the relationship between the perceived quality of tourists' experiences and their expectations of the well-reputed urban tourist destinations affect its competitiveness. **Motivation:** Most of the published research in this field focuses on a general approach to the competitiveness, while the effect of the individual dimensions of tourist destination attractiveness, especially in case of urban tourist destinations, is still insufficiently explored. This study provides insights and recommendations for destination management that would result in a more effective management of urban tourist destinations and, consequently, increase competitiveness of the destination. **Idea:** The main idea of this study is to empirically evaluate the relationship between the perceived quality of tourists' experiences and their expectations from urban tourist destinations, and to identify the most important dimensions of tourist destination attractiveness, taking into consideration different motivational factors. Based on the obtained results, it is possible to give recommendations that can contribute to increasing tourists' satisfaction and competitiveness of the urban tourist destination. **Data:** The study was conducted on a sample of 312 respondents from Belgrade, a large outbound tourist centre, who met the pre-established set of criteria. Computer-aided web interviewing (CAWI) was used for data collection. **Tools:** The study was conducted using the Pearson correlation coefficient to determine the relationship between the perceived quality of experiences and expectations, and the SERVQUAL model for measuring quality of dimensions of tourist destination attractiveness by evaluating the differences between perceived quality and expectations, and descriptive statistics. **Findings:** Traditional understanding of tourists' satisfaction that leads to tourist destination competitiveness is that the tourists' expectations must be either met or exceeded. This study showed that tourists' expectations from certain dimensions of tourist destination attractiveness may be higher than the quality of the experience with them, but tourists would still be satisfied if the perceived quality of their experiences was positive. Moreover, the study has identified three social and one physical dimension of tourist destination attractiveness as the most significant, regardless of tourists' travel motivation. **Contribution:** The study contributes to the existing body of literature by introduction of the new data-driven approach to the strategic processes of managing urban tourist destination and its dimensions of tourist destination attractiveness.

Keywords: urban tourist destination, tourist destination attractiveness, competitiveness, tourists' expectations, tourists' experiences

JEL Classification: M31, L83, Z30, Z32, Z33

1. Introduction

Cities attract more and more tourists (Schafer & Just, 2018), thus making urban tourism one of the fastest-growing types of tourism (Postma et al., 2017) and urban areas some of the most significant tourist destinations (Li et al., 2015). An urban tourist destination is a city hosting a number of tourist activities (Griffin & Dimanche, 2017). Tourists' choice of one urban tourist destination over others is based on their needs and motivational factors, ranging from relaxation (Heeley, 2016) to entertainment (Jiang et al., 2016), to cultural and educational activities (Carlisle et al., 2016; Xu & Zhang, 2016), healthcare and business trips (Charterina & Aparicio, 2015) to shopping and visiting relatives and friends (Edwards et al., 2008). Urban tourist destinations should therefore create and manage dimensions of tourist destination attractiveness that have a potential to attract tourists taking into account the diverse factors that motivate them to travel.

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Based on information that tourists receive prior to travelling, they develop certain expectations of the chosen tourist destination. Garin-Munoz and Moral (2017) and Artigas et al. (2015) consider that tourists' satisfaction results from their comparison between expectations and experiences at a certain destination. Thus, the gap between the quality of visitor experiences and expectations concerning urban tourist destinations and their dimensions of attractiveness have a major role in the strategic process of creation of tourists' satisfaction and management of urban tourist destination.

This paper aims to explore the following concepts: urban tourist destinations and the dimensions of tourist destination attractiveness, expectations and the quality of experiences of an urban tourist destination. The primary goal of the study is to determine the correlation and gaps between the quality of tourists' experiences and their expectations of the dimensions of the tourist destination attractiveness prior to visiting. The findings will enable us to identify which dimensions of a tourist destination attractiveness are the most important for the tourists' satisfaction, having the greatest influence on the competitiveness of the urban tourism destination.

The paper is structured into five parts. After the Introduction, Section 2 gives a literature overview regarding the dimensions of tourist destination attractiveness. Section 3 outlines the research methodology and is followed by research findings and discussion in Section 4. Finally, Section 5 presents the conclusions.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Dimensions of tourist destination attractiveness

Tourist destination attractiveness, including that of urban tourism, does not have universal appeal but rather depends on what tourists expect of it and which of its dimensions they consider important. Tourists' needs and motivations are at the core of this approach, so some tourists may classify one experience as a tourist attraction, while others may not.

Numerous authors have explored attributes that enhance a destination's attractiveness and competitiveness including: cultural attributes (Vinyals-Mirabent, 2019; Garcia-Hernandez et al., 2017; Pasquinelli, 2016), accommodation services (Boivin & Tanguay, 2019; Wong & Teoh, 2015), restaurants and bars (Wearing & Foley, 2017), entertainment (Jiang et al., 2016; Carlisle et al., 2016), events and festivals (Wong & Teoh, 2015; Edwards et al., 2008), attributes important when travelling for business reasons (Rogerson, 2002), shopping possibilities (Boivin & Tanguay, 2019; Wearing & Foley, 2017), price, traffic infrastructure, local people's behaviour (Wong & Teoh, 2015) and safety (Vinyals-Mirabent, 2019) among others.

Based on the detailed analysis of research in this field, Pavkovic and Vlastelica (2022) and Pavkovic (2022) have classified all the dimensions of tourist destination attractiveness into two groups: physical and social. Physical dimensions of tourist destination attractiveness are: Parks and green areas, Tourist facilities along the waterfront, Cultural and historical attractions, Hospitality and entertainment facilities, Festivals and events, Shopping facilities, Accommodation facilities, Price affordability, Cleanliness of the city and Convenient transportation and easy access to all tourist facilities in the city. Social dimensions of tourist destination attractiveness are: Safe, Interesting, Authentic and Pleasant ambience.

2.2 The effect of expectations and experiences on tourists' satisfaction

Numerous researchers have found that tourist satisfaction is important for the competitiveness of a tourist destination (Zeng et al., 2021; Teixeira et al., 2019; Chi & Qu, 2008; Vengesai, 2003). The comparison between tourists' experiences at an urban tourist destination and their expectations from it, prior to visiting, affects tourists' satisfaction (Artigas et al., 2015). Chon (1989) proved that the tourists' satisfaction "depends upon the goodness of fit between tourist expectation about the destination and the perceived evaluative outcome of the experience at the destination area, which is simply the result of a comparison between tourist's previous images of the destination and what they actually see, feel and achieve at the destination" (p.5).

Very similarly, Garin-Munoz and Moral (2017) present the findings that tourists' satisfaction arises as a difference between expectations, on the one hand, and the quality of individual destination attributes and overall experiences, on the other hand. According to the authors, during their stay at the destination, tourists experience and separately evaluate different individual products and services, which have a direct impact on overall satisfaction. Therefore, it is cognitive and affective assessment of the differences between

expectations and the quality of the experience concerning the dimensions of tourist destination attractiveness that will form the tourists' satisfaction.

Wisnawa et al. (2019) consider tourists' expectations as their hope that their needs would be satisfied primarily in the context of „Tourism Destination Attributes“, which they define as: attraction, accessibility, amenities, ancillary and community involvement. Referring to the expectation-disconfirmation model by Oliver (1980), Yoon and Uysal (2005) state that consumers develop expectations about a product before purchasing, and after that, subsequently, they compare actual performance with those expectations. Authors give a recommendation that destination managers should establish a higher tourists' satisfaction level to create positive post-visit tourist behaviour, in order to improve and sustain the destination competitiveness.

The theoretical framework that classified all the dimensions of tourist destination attractiveness into physical and social, with a proven importance of the relationship between tourists' general expectations prior to visiting and actual experiences during the visit, brings us to the following research questions:

RQ1: *Is there a correlation between expectations and perceived quality of experience in relation to the physical dimensions of a tourist destination attractiveness?*

RQ2: *Is there a correlation between expectations and perceived quality of experience in relation to the social dimensions of a tourist destination attractiveness?*

At the basis of tourists' expectations are the motivational factors. Rita et al. (2019) assert that the motivations help explain why tourists select trips and look for travel experiences in the first phase of their destination planning. Based on Dann (1977), Vukic et al. (2015) divide motivational factors into: “push factors” (need to escape from everyday life, search for adventure, vacation, prestige, etc.) and “pull factors” that are based on the attractiveness of the destination. Bayih and Singh (2020) state that traditionally „push motives“ have been used for explaining the desire to travel for vacation while the „pull motives“ have been considered significant for explaining the destination choice of travellers. Hence, the concept regarding push and pull motives is that people travel due to the internal forces that push them and the external factors of the destination attributes, expectations, benefits and travellers' perceptions, that pull them. Taking into account research findings about motivational factors, we developed the following research question:

RQ3: *Are there differences in relationship between the perceived quality of the tourists' experiences and their expectations in relation to the dimensions of tourist destination attractiveness, taking into consideration different motivational factors for travelling?*

It can be concluded that the quality of tourists' experience at the tourist destination contributes to its reputation (Foroudi et al., 2016) and consequently increases the competitiveness of an urban tourist destination (Su et al., 2018; Morgan & Huertas, 2011), through an increased number of tourists and length of stay at the destination (Vengesai, 2003), repeated visits and recommendations to others (Garin-Munoz & Moral, 2017). Given the importance of the perceived quality of experience for the competitiveness, we defined the following research question:

RQ4: *Which dimensions of tourist destination attractiveness have the strongest influence on tourists' satisfaction?*

3. Methodology

Based on the literature review and the theoretical conceptualization of dimensions of tourist destination attractiveness, this study was conducted to examine the relationship between expectations and the perceived quality of experience with individual dimensions of tourist destination attractiveness of well-reputed urban tourist destinations. The results of the study should clearly indicate the dimensions of tourist destination attractiveness that have the mayor role in tourists' satisfaction and as such dominantly contribute to the competitiveness of the urban tourist destination.

The proposed research questions were explored using the questionnaire based survey conducted in July 2020. The data collection method was Computer-aided web interviewing – CAWI research on the representative sample of adult citizens of Belgrade, capital of the Republic of Serbia. The selection of e-mail addresses was random, but data analysis included only 312 respondents who met the explicit criteria by which they should have visited at least two cities outside Serbia during the last five years. The respondents

were first asked to name the urban tourist destination that they had visited and that had the best reputation for them. Respondents evaluated items on a 4-point Likert scales ranging from (1) “strongly disagree” to (4) “strongly agree”. According to the recommendation of Kulas et al. (2008) the respondents had an option outside the scale that gave them the opportunity to declare that they had no expectations or experience with certain dimensions of tourist destination attractiveness. Numerous researchers use the even scale (Polishchuk et al., 2023; Hofman et al., 2022; Zarei & Ramkissoon, 2021) in order to avoid the possibility that respondents choose the midpoint even if their true opinion is not neutral, and thus may use it as a fallback when responding to survey items that are unfamiliar to them or items that are ambiguous (Chyung et al., 2017). For the same reasons, many authors in the field of tourism research used a 4-point Likert scale (Lin et al., 2021; Minguéz et al., 2021; Lopez-Sanz et al., 2021; Chrobak et al., 2020; Wijayanti & Damanik, 2019). SPSS v.23 was used for data processing.

The Pearson correlation coefficient was used for the data analysis and the SERVQUAL model developed by Parasuraman et al. (1985) to measure differences between perceived quality and expectations and the consequential effects on customer satisfaction.

A number of authors have used the SERVQUAL model in their research: de Albuquerque et al. (2021), examined customer satisfaction with services in air traffic; Fang et al. (2020) compare customer satisfaction in relation to online and offline services provided by one of the best tourist agencies in North America; Kleisari (2020) provides insights into the Greek and European visitors' perceptions of service quality in the Greek hospitality sector; Duarte et al. (2021) analyze the influence of tourist characteristics on their expectations and perceptions of service quality in Portugal; Chand (2010) uses it for the evaluation of tourist services provided in different Indian tourist destinations often frequented by foreign tourists with the intention of improving the current services and competitiveness of a destination, along with many others.

The indicators used in this study are based on the conceptualization of the term dimensions of tourist destination attractiveness provided by Pavkovic and Vlastelica (2022) and Pavkovic (2022), that are divided into physical and social (Table 1).

Table 1: Physical and social dimensions of tourist destination attractiveness

PHYSICAL DIMENSIONS OF TOURIST DESTINATION ATTRACTIVENESS	LABELS	EXPECTATIONS	PERCEIVED QUALITY OF EXPERIENCES
Parks and green areas	PGA	E-PGA	QE-PGA
Tourist facilities along the waterfront	TW	E-TW	QE-TW
Cultural and historical attractions	CHA	E-CHA	QE-CHA
Hospitality and entertainment facilities	HEF	E-HEF	QE-HEF
Festivals and events	FE	E-FE	QE-FE
Shopping facilities	SF	E-SF	QE-SF
Accommodation facilities	AF	E-AF	QE-AF
Price affordability	PA	E-PA	QE-PA
Cleanliness of the city	CC	E-CC	QE-CC
Convenient transportation and easy access to all tourist facilities in the city	CT	E-CT	QE-CT
SOCIAL DIMENSIONS OF TOURIST DESTINATION ATTRACTIVENESS	LABELS		
Safe	SAF	E-SAF	QE-SAF
Interesting	INT	E-INT	QE-INT
Authentic	AUT	E-AUT	QE-AUT
Pleasant ambience	PAM	E-PAM	QE-PAM

Source: authors

To examine the difference in the results depending on the travel motivation, the respondents were divided into two groups according to the most common motivational factors for tourist travelling: a) the respondents who travelled with the main motivation of engaging in cultural and educational activities (Carlisle et al., 2016; Xu & Zhang, 2016; Brida et al., 2012; Koutoulas et al., 2009) and b) respondents who were motivated by relaxation and entertainment (Charterina & Aparicio, 2015; Heeley, 2016; Jiang et al., 2016; Ben-Dalia et al., 2013).

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Correlation between expectations and perceived quality of experiences

Correlation analysis tested the relationship between expectations and the perceived quality of experiences, in relation to individual dimensions of tourist destination attractiveness of an urban tourist destination with a good reputation, divided into physical (Table 2) and social (Table 3).

Table 2: Correlation between expectations and perceived quality of experiences related to individual physical dimensions of tourist destination attractiveness

		Correlations									
		QE-PGA	QE-TW	QE-CHA	QE-HEF	QE-FE	QE-SF	QE-AF	QE-PA	QE-CC	QE-CT
E-PGA	Pearson Correlation	.333**	.121*	.063	.091	-.001	.099	.120*	.167**	.178**	.269**
E-TW	Pearson Correlation	.148*	.247**	.085	.059	.087	.115*	.110	.211**	.065	.200**
E-CHA	Pearson Correlation	.213**	.128*	.393**	.219**	.193**	.129*	.187**	.007	.047	.213**
E-HEF	Pearson Correlation	.238**	.276**	.179**	.365**	.396**	.311**	.310**	.042	.075	.181**
E-FE	Pearson Correlation	.273**	.203**	.191**	.331**	.423**	.349**	.213**	.049	.097	.257**
E-SF	Pearson Correlation	.271**	.202**	.094	.235**	.307**	.437**	.232**	.199**	.163**	.231**
E-AF	Pearson Correlation	.133*	.031	.067	.083	.085	.119*	.166**	.253**	.121*	.127**
E-PA	Pearson Correlation	.142*	-.111	.034	.020	.038	.034	.060	.302**	.133*	.014
E-CC	Pearson Correlation	.218**	.074	.099	.075	.078	.020	.096	.246**	.262**	.107
E-CT	Pearson Correlation	.235**	.119*	.131*	.143*	.168**	.236**	.233**	.204**	.136*	.350**

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). * . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: The authors' calculation

Table 3: Correlation between expectations and perceived quality of experiences related to individual social dimensions of tourist destination attractiveness

		Correlations			
		QE-SAF	QE-INT	QE-AUT	QE-PAM
E-SAF	Pearson Correlation	.571**	.274**	.190**	.225**
E-INT	Pearson Correlation	.344**	.469**	.341**	.298**
E-AUT	Pearson Correlation	.268**	.387**	.521**	.369**
E-PAM	Pearson Correlation	.372**	.414**	.377**	.445**

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: The authors' calculation

The research results confirm the existence of a positive relationship between the perceived quality of experiences and the expectations regarding tourist destinations (Garin-Munoz & Moral, 2017; Artigas et al., 2015; Yoon & Uysal, 2005), whereby these findings, in the case of well-reputed urban tourist destination, apply to all individual physical and social dimensions of tourist destination attractiveness.

The results showed that the strongest correlation between the expectation and perceived quality of experiences exists for the following dimensions of urban tourist destination attractiveness: Safe, Authentic, Interesting, Pleasant ambience, as social dimensions; Shopping facilities, Festivals and events, Cultural and historical attractions, as physical dimensions. Also, it is noticeable that the correlation between expectations and experiences is stronger in case of the social dimensions of tourist destination attractiveness in comparison with the physical ones.

4.2 Differences between the perceived quality of tourists' experiences and their expectations in relation to the dimensions of tourist destination attractiveness

According to the defined research questions, this part of the analysis examines the differences between the respondents' perceived quality of the experience they had and their expectations they had prior to visiting in relation to the physical and social dimensions of the well-reputed urban tourist destination by using the SERVQUAL model (Table 4).

Table 4: Differences between the perceived quality of the experiences and expectations in relation to the dimensions of tourist destination attractiveness of the well-reputed urban tourist destination

DIMENSIONS OF TOURIST DESTINATION ATTRACTIVENESS	AEQS	AES	DEE
PGA	3.47	3.28	0.19
TW	3.43	3.40	0.03
CHA	3.76	3.78	-0.01
HEF	3.67	3.20	0.47
FE	3.54	3.13	0.41
SF	3.56	2.83	0.74
AF	3.70	3.33	0.36
PA	3.18	3.50	-0.31
CC	3.49	3.44	0.05
CT	3.68	3.57	0.12
SAF	3.60	3.53	0.07
INT	3.82	3.76	0.06
AUT	3.78	3.76	0.01
PAA	3.82	3.77	0.05

Note: AEQS: Average Perceived Quality of Experience Scores; AES: Average Expectation Scores; DEE: Differences Between the Perceived Quality of the Experiences and Expectations.

Source: The authors' calculation

The indicators of expectations and the quality of the experience in relation to the dimensions of tourist destination attractiveness show high average scores. The same conclusion arises in case of both positive and negative results. As regards the cultural and historical attractions where the difference is negative (-0.02), the respondents had very high expectations (3.78) and still very positive experiences (3.76). Even though the indicator of price affordability shows a considerably higher negative difference (-0.31), besides high expectations of this dimension of tourist destination attractiveness (3.50), the perceptions of the quality of the experience are also very positive (3.18). The greatest difference is found for the following dimensions of tourist destination attractiveness: Shopping facilities, Hospitality and entertainment facilities, Festivals and events, Accommodation facilities and Price affordability. The analysis results indicate that the respondents' quality of the experience exceeded their expectations in all social dimensions of tourist destination attractiveness of the well-reputed urban tourist destination.

The obtained results confirm the previous research results of the importance of experiences (Zhang et al., 2018; Ali et al., 2018; Foroudi et al., 2016) and expectations (Jiang et al., 2016; Kladou & Mavragani, 2015) for tourists' satisfaction and consequently for tourist destinations competitiveness. It is evident that the respondents had high expectations and very positive experiences with the dimensions of tourist destination attractiveness. However, it is important to note that tourists might have higher expectations of some dimensions of attractiveness of well-reputed urban tourist destinations than perceptions of the quality of their actual experiences, provided that the experiences are perceived as being of very high quality.

4.3 Motivational factors for travelling as determinants of expectations-experience relationship

The SERVQUAL model was further used to examine the relationship between the perceived quality of tourists' experiences and their expectations with regard to the dimensions of tourist destination attractiveness, determined by the motivational factors for tourists to visit a well-reputed urban tourist destination (Table 5).

Table 5: Differences between the perceived quality of the experiences and expectations regarding the dimensions of tourist destination attractiveness, as reported by the respondents with different motivational factors

DTA	AEQS		AES		DEE	
	R&E	C&E	R&E	C&E	R&E	C&E
PGA	3.45	3.54	3.32	3.16	0.13	0.38
TW	3.37	3.62	3.41	3.38	-0.04	0.23
CHA	3.72	3.91	3.71	3.99	0.01	-0.08
HEF	3.64	3.78	3.14	3.39	0.50	0.39
FE	3.49	3.69	3.01	3.50	0.48	0.19
SF	3.52	3.71	2.84	2.76	0.67	0.95
AF	3.68	3.74	3.40	3.12	0.28	0.62
PA	3.30	2.80	3.59	3.22	-0.29	-0.42
CC	3.52	3.39	3.51	3.22	0.01	0.18
CT	3.64	3.82	3.56	3.60	0.08	0.22
SF	3.55	3.78	3.51	3.62	0.04	0.16
INT	3.80	3.89	3.73	3.88	0.07	0.01
AUT	3.74	3.91	3.74	3.85	0.00	0.05
PAA	3.80	3.89	3.75	3.84	0.05	0.06

Note: DTA: dimensions of tourist destination attractiveness; AEQS: Average Perceived Quality of Experiences Scores; AES: Average Expectation Scores; DEE: Differences Between the Perceived Quality of the Experiences and Expectations; R&E: Relaxation and entertainment; C&E: Culture and education

Source: The authors' calculation

Both groups of respondents show high expectations and a very high perceived quality of experiences regarding each of the dimensions of tourist destination attractiveness. The results indicate very few differences depending on tourists' motivation for visiting the urban tourist destination.

The respondents whose primary motivation was engaging in cultural and educational activities rated the perceived quality of their experience more highly than their expectations for 12 dimensions of tourist destination attractiveness. This can be attributed mainly to the specificity of this type of the motivation and the complexity of culture and education as dimensions of tourist destination attractiveness. Namely, a smaller number of dimensions of tourist destination attractiveness has the potential to fulfill the needs of the tourists primarily motivated by culture and education than in case of those motivated by relaxation and entertainment. In that sense, this category of tourists direct their expectations and attention toward the dimensions of tourist destination attractiveness that have the potential to fulfil their needs for culture and education, while other expectations are secondary to them and, hence, more easily met or exceeded at a destination. The findings presented in Table 5 also prove this point, illustrating that this category of respondents have the highest expectations precisely of the dimensions related to culture and education, while other dimensions show lower average scores.

The respondents whose motivation to travel was primarily relaxation and entertainment also evaluated their perceived quality of experiences as being higher than expected for 11 dimensions of tourist destination attractiveness. The unexpected finding for this group of tourists is that the expectations of cultural and historical attractions were ranked higher than those that are more likely to fulfill the needs of these respondents, such as hospitality and entertainment facilities, festivals and events, tourist facilities alongside the waterfront and others. This finding clearly demonstrates the relevance of cultural and historical attractions as part of what an urban tourist destination has to offer. For that reason, this dimension acts as a powerful "pull factor" for potential tourists, regardless of their primary travel motivations.

A general conclusion of this part of the study can be formed. Tourists might have higher expectations of individual dimensions of tourist destination attractiveness compared to the perceived quality of their experiences, provided that their experiences are still perceived as very positive. The differences in the relationship between the perceived quality of tourists' experiences and their expectations do not change significantly as regards different motivational factors for travelling. Taking into account the respondents' expectations and the perceived quality of their experiences, as well as different motivational factors, it can be concluded that the dimensions of tourist destination attractiveness of the well-reputed urban tourist destination, that affect tourists' satisfaction the most, are: cultural and historical attractions, interesting, authentic and pleasant ambience.

Conclusion

The research results showed that there is a positive correlation between expectations and the perceived quality of experiences related to all dimensions of tourist destination attractiveness, whereby this correlation is stronger for social dimensions. In order to achieve tourists' satisfaction and the desired competitiveness on the tourist market, the management of the destination must pay attention both to the process of forming expectations regarding all dimensions of the tourist destination attractiveness and to the process of creating quality tourists' experiences with them.

The analysis of the findings has showed that the scores of perceived quality of the experiences are higher or considerably higher than the expectation scores for the majority of the dimensions of tourist destination attractiveness. However, the respondents had higher expectations of certain dimensions of tourist destination attractiveness in relation to the perceived quality of their experiences with them, but it is important to note that both the expectations and perceptions of the quality were ranked highly by the respondents. In that regard, tourists' satisfaction will be achieved and an urban tourist destination will be competitive, regardless of whether the expectations have been fully met or not, if tourists' experiences with dimensions of tourist destination attractiveness are perceived as being of very high quality. This conclusion is valid regardless of the different motivational factors for travelling. On the basis of these findings, it can be concluded that tourists attach the greatest level of importance to whether their expectations have been met with regard to those dimensions of tourist destination attractiveness that they find the most important, based on which they form generally positive attitudes about the urban tourist destination. Their attitudes about the dimensions that do not meet their expectations are neglected in favour of the former.

The research also identified the most salient dimensions of tourist destination attractiveness of a well-reputed urban tourist destination: cultural and historical attractions, interesting, authentic and pleasant ambience. Hence, it is necessary to devote special attention precisely to these dimensions of tourist destination attractiveness in the process of creating and maintaining tourists' satisfaction and improving competitiveness of urban tourist destination, without neglecting other dimensions that show high expectation and perceived quality experience scores.

The research implications for the strategic management of the tourist destination are to focus on the protection and promotion of the historical parts of the city, architecture and archaeological sites that are unique for that destination. This is proven to be an appealing aspect of the tourist offer for all types of tourists, regardless of the travel motivation. It is also advisable to incentivise the local population to participate in the creation of the destination's authentic ambience.

The research has some limitations which should be addressed by future research. This survey encompassed two motivational factors that influence travel decisions: relaxation and entertainment and culture and education. Therefore, the scope of further research could be expanded to include some additional motivational factors that might influence the gap between expectations and actual experience. In order to further improve the theoretical understanding of this subject, the authors recommend a replication of the study that would include respondents living in other outbound centres and enable a comparative analysis of results representing different cultural background of respondents.

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