

1-1-2014

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Nataša Slak Valek
Zayed University

Mike Shaw
University of Canberra

Jakob Bednarik
University of Ljubljana

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Recommended Citation

Valek, Nataša Slak; Shaw, Mike; and Bednarik, Jakob, "Socio-demographic characteristics affecting sport tourism choices: A structural model" (2014). *All Works*. 3149.
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Socio-demographic characteristics affecting sport tourism choices: A structural model

Nataša Slak Valek^{1,*}, Mike Shaw², and Jakob Bednarik³

¹College of Communication and Media Science, Zayed University, Abu Dhabi; ²Faculty of Business, Government and Law, University of Canberra, Canberra, Australia; and ³Faculty of Sport, University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, Slovenia

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Background: Effective tourism management in the field of sports tourism requires an understanding of differences in socioeconomic characteristics both within and between different market segments. **Objective:** In the broad tourism market demographic characteristics have been extensively analyzed for differences in destination choices, however little is known about demographic factors affecting sport tourists' decisions. **Methods:** A sample of Slovenian sports tourists was analyzed using data from a comprehensive survey of local and outbound tourist activity conducted by the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia in 2008. After data weighting the information for 353,783 sports related trips were available for analysis. The research model adopted suggests that four socio-demographic characteristics (gender, age, level of education and income) significantly affect a tourist's choice of sports related travel either locally within Slovenia or to a foreign country. Furthermore the destination (local or foreign) has an influence on the choice of the type of accommodation selected and the tourist's total expenditure for the trip. For testing the first part of our model (the socio-demographic characteristics effects) a linear regression was used, and for the final part of the model (the selection of accommodation type and travel expenditure) t-test were applied. **Results:** The result shows the standardized β regression coefficients are all statistically significant at the .001 level for the tested socio-demographic characteristics and also the overall regression model was statistically significant at .001 level. **Conclusions:** With these results the study confirmed that all the selected socio-demographic characteristics have a significant influence on the sport-active tourist when choosing between a domestic and foreign tourism destination which in turn affect the type of accommodation chosen and the level of expenditure while travelling.

Keywords: sport tourism, Slovenia, regression model, tourism expenditure, socio-demographic factors

Introduction

The physical features of destination accommodation such as beautiful rooms, excellent staff and good food in a hotel are not enough to satisfy today's tourists. A range of offers of activities is just as important for the successful sale of a tourism destination. Also, that travel behavior of "old" tourists is very different from "new" tourists has been shown by many research studies (Auger, Fortier, Thibault, Magny, & Gravelle, 2010; Buhalis, 2001;) which indicate the latter to be more adventurous, more flexible and more self-organized, but also more exacting and more difficult to satisfy (Pulido-Fernández & Sánchez-Rivero, 2010; Song, van

der Veen, Li, & Chen, 2012; Yoon & Uysal, 2005). Tourists, above all other consumers, have the largest adaptive capacity to offers within the tourism system because of their ability to substitute the place, timing and type of holiday, even at very short notice (Gössling, Scott, Hall, Ceron, & Dubois, 2012). Tourist's curiosity can be regarded as an active characteristic or passive inspiration taken from the location or scene of the visit (Sheng & Chen, 2013), which has forced tourism destinations to better understand tourism demand. In other words specialization and greater differentiation is needed when selling tourism products in this fast changing world. Chia-Lin, Khamkaew, McAleer, and Tansuchat (2010) found that tourism could be a growth-enhancing factor, at least for small countries where it is likely to grow faster if highly specialized in tourism. This is clearly the case of Slovenia, a country with a population of 2 million, an area of 20,273 km² (SURS, 2013) and high quality mountains, sea and land based

* Address for correspondence: Nataša Slak Valek, College of Communication and Media Science, Zayed University, PO BOX 144534, Abu Dhabi. E-mail: natasa.slakvalek@zu.ac.ae

tourism opportunities (Ministry of Economy, Government of the Republic of Slovenia, 2012).

Many tourism papers have studied and analyzed tourist's socio-demographic characteristics in general (Andereck & Nyaupane, 2011; Nerg, Uusivuori, Mikkola, Neuvonen, & Sievanen, 2012; Oliveira & Pereira, 2010), some of them focused on demographic variables affecting tourist's choices (Lyons, Mayor, & Tol, 2009; Tangeland, Aas, & Odden, 2013), such as tourism destination choices (Hedlund, Marell, & Gärling, 2012; Peypoch, Randriamboarison, Rasoamananjara, & Solonandrasana, 2012) or tourism activities (Alegre, Mateo, & Pou, 2009; Barros & Machado, 2010). Barros, Butler, and Correia (2010) for instance focused on the length of stay of golf tourists using a survival model to analyze which characteristics are associated with the length of stay. Despite this, little research on demographic and economic factors affecting general sport tourists' preferences and travel related to sport and physical activity has been found.

Sport has always been an important part of society, but with the global emergence of sport tourism it has also become an increasingly important part of the economy (Dehnavi, Amiri, DehKordi, & Heidary, 2012). Tourism and sports are two key activities of modern society and highly motivating factors when choosing a holiday destination (Avelini Holjevac, 2003; Gibson, 2003; Weed & Bull, 2004). Merging sport and tourism in sport tourism Hritz and Ross (2010) claimed that sport tourism is one of the largest and fastest-growing segments of the travel and tourism industry and one that is receiving increased attention for its social, environmental, and economic development opportunities. Much more than that, sport tourism is a multi-billion dollar business, one of the fastest growing areas of the \$4.5 trillion global travel and tourism industry (Dehnavi et al., 2012). However, few studies have investigated this specific tourism market segment including the potential for segmentation on socio-demographic characteristics and their impacts on destination choice.

Despite the fact that the connection between sport and tourism has been neglected in academic circles until recently, a demand for sport activities in tourism was observed much earlier (Higham & Hinch, 2001). McIntosh, Goeldner, and Ritchie (1995) mentioned that "people travelled as early as in 766 BC in order to participate in sport competitions in honor of the god Zeus". Recently people began travelling with a sport as their main motive, but they were not treated as a specialized group of tourists. In all the decades of researching sport and tourism it is finally today that sport tourism has been recognized and become more than just a type of tourism; sport tourism has become a vast international business attracting media coverage,

investment, political interest, traveling participants and spectators.

Yet, only a few studies related to sport tourism have been conducted in last thirty years (Avelini Holjevac, 2003; Bartoluci & Čavlek, 1998; Gibson, 1998, 2003; Hudson, 2003; Redmond, Sinclair, & Stabler, 1991; Weiler & Hall, 1992; Standeven & Knop, 1999; Weed, 2001;), producing several definitions of sport tourism (Weed & Bull, 2012; Hinch & Higham, 2011; Bell & Gibson, 2011) and defining different types of sport tourists. However, for the purpose of our research the definition of sport tourism proposed by Gibson (2003) is still preferred; the tourist who practices sports while travelling is the type of tourist in which we are interested in this research. Undoubtedly, sport in many ways is "push motivated" and needs greater attention in analyzing its effects. On the other hand, pull factors also show that the destination image in sporting tourism is another critical factor for sport tourists (Yu, 2010).

In 2005 the differences between the average Slovene tourist and the typical Slovene sport tourist was analyzed by Slak Valek, Mihalič, and Bednarik (2005) who found no significant differences in terms of socio-demographic characteristics (gender and age). However, some differences in their travel behavior were identified. Similar results were revealed by Funk and Bruun (2007) in their survey regarding socio-psychological and culture-education motives in international sport tourism. Their results revealed that socio-psychological motives did not differ based upon cultural background, but cultural-education motives showed significant variations. To extend this research, our paper focuses on understanding how sport tourists choices, and destination choices in particular, are affected by socio-demographic characteristics. This will assist in understanding sport tourism markets in terms of specific segmentation profiles and may contribute to a more targeted approach to marketing and promotional activities.

Methods

A quantitative research methodology was used and applied to the survey data available from the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia (SURS), using the Tourism travels of domestic population survey. Apart from collecting census data, SURS conducts various demographic and economic surveys for use by government and industry. For the present paper the SURS survey on tourism and leisure activities for a target population of Slovenian citizens (aged 15 years and older) was selected. The sampling frame was Central Population Register of Slovenia. This consists of

the directory of private telephone subscribers in the Republic of Slovenia. The sampling procedure as a random stratified sample where the strata were defined by statistical region (12 regions) and type of settlement within the region (6 types) and each stratum independently sampled. The data were collected quarterly with surveys carried out regularly every three months in the year 2008 starting in January of that year. In the first, second and third quarter 3,000 telephone numbers were selected and in the fourth quarter 6,000 were taken to give a total sample frame size of 15,000. The non-response rate was 37.9% leaving a survey sample of 9,315 inclusive of 1,795,535 trips before weighting.

From this statistically representative sample it is found that amongst Slovenian citizens 61% of them went on at least one tourism trip in the year 2008 while 39% made no journeys away overnight in that period. All those who travelled in 2008 were asked to give their main motive for travelling as well as key demographic and economic characteristics. Amongst the motives for traveling one was defined as "sport and recreation". Tourists with other motives for travelling were excluded from the analysis sample leaving 428 trips defined as Slovene sport-active trips for the purpose of the present study. After data weighting to the population we had database of 353,783 sports related trips.

For analysis of the dataset the model presented in Figure 1 was used. This was based on the previous discussion of the theories of the influence of tourist's socio-demographic determinants on the choice of tourist destinations. It proposes that socio-demographic characteristics (gender, age, level of education and income) affect a tourist's choice between domestic location and a foreign country for their tourism destination. In continuing our proposed model it is assumed that the chosen tourism destination has an effect to the choice of the type of accommodation and the level of travel expenditure. In this way all hypothesized

variables are structurally included in the same model of decision choice.

Linear regression by the Enter method has been used to test the first part of the proposed research model (the effects of socio-demographic characteristics on the tourism destination choice), then the t-test is applied to verify the second part of our research model (the effect of tourism destination when deciding the type of accommodation and the level of travel expenditure that will be incurred).

In the first part of the proposed model the aim is to confirm the influences of the socio-demographic characteristics affecting the tourism choices between domestic and foreign tourism destination using regression methods. For the second part using the t-tests, two hypotheses were proposed for testing:

H1: The tourist destination affects the type of accommodation chosen in sport-active travel.

H2: The tourist destination affects the amount of money spent by sport-active tourists.

Results

Our results show sports related trips that were made by Slovenes with the following demographic characteristics: 62.8% were male and 37.2% were female with an average age 37.6 years and with 2 or 3 years of secondary school education completed. The average household income per person for sport-active tourists was 672.51 EUR net per month (with a median of 625.00 EUR) which is relatively low compared to the average monthly income of all Slovenians of 899.80 EUR net in 2008 (SURs, 2009). The mode is 1,000 EUR, which means that most of sport tourists have 1,000 EUR of income per household member per month. The distribution of the variable is asymmetric to the right and less peaked (less kurtotic) than the

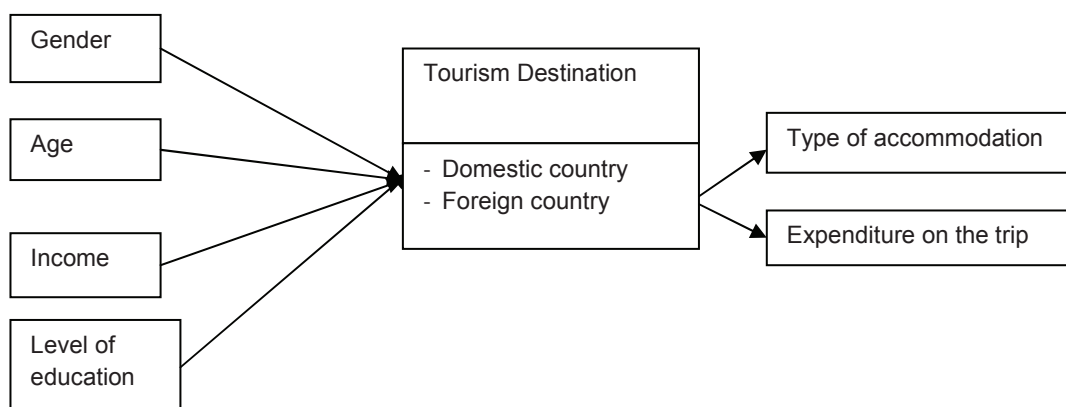


Figure 1. Research model

normal distribution as it includes a small number of very high net income households with few household members.

Table 1
Demographic characteristics of the sample

	Level of education	Age	Income (EUR net per month)
<i>N</i>			
Valid	353,783	353,783	271,949
Missing	0	0	81,836
<i>M</i>	5.500	37.611	672.510
<i>SEM</i>	0.004	0.026	0.642
<i>Mdn</i>	5	36	625
Mode	5	22	1,000
<i>SD</i>	2.100	15.588	334.744
Minimum	2	15	150
Maximum	10	87	3,000

Note. Level of education: no school education 1–3 years of school completed (1); no school education 4–7 years of school completed (2); elementary school (3); 2 years secondary education (4); 3 years secondary education (5); 4 years secondary education (6); 2 years college education (7); 3 years college education (8); university education (9); postgraduate education (10). *SEM* = standard error of the mean.

Expenditure on the trip

Expenditure during sports related vacations is the dependent variable in our research model. Slovene sport tourists spent on average 55.59 EUR per day (SD 37.95 EUR). Skewness and kurtosis indicate a distribution which is more asymmetric to the right and clusters less than in the normal distribution. The minimum amount spent per person per day was 4.17 EUR and the maximum was 216.67 EUR. The median is 48.57 EUR which means that half of sport-active tourists spent more than 48.57 EUR per person per day on their vacation. Data about the type of accommodation shows that 28.5% of sport-active tourists spent their vacation in an apartment or house in a tourist village, 26.2% stayed in a hotel or motel and 45.2% chose to spend their sport vacation in other types of accommodation.

Destination choice

The destinations were divided into two groups: tourism destinations within Slovenia (defined as a “domestic”) and tourist destinations abroad (defined as a “foreign”). It was found that a slight majority of the Slovenian sport-active tourists (56.7%) travel within their own country for sport leisure trips although a significant number (43.3%) chose foreign destinations.

The impact of the four socio-demographic variables (gender, age, income and education) on the choice of a sport tourism destination was tested using a linear regression model. For the second part of the analysis a t-test was used to determine if the choice of accommodation and the levels of expenditure were different for the alternative vacation destinations (local versus foreign).

Table 2 shows the standardized β regression coefficients, which are all statistically significant at the .001 level and the overall regression model was statistically significant at .001 level. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Regression model results

	Standardised regression coefficient	<i>p</i>
Gender	0.056	.001
Age	-0.175	.001
Income	0.131	.001
Level of education	0.015	.001

The analysis shows that men, older tourists, tourists with lower income and those with lower education are significantly more likely to travel within their own country for a sport-active holiday than women, younger tourists, tourists with higher income and those with higher education. The sport-active tourists who travel to domestic destinations are significantly more likely to stay in apartments or in houses in the tourist villages than sport-active tourists who travel abroad and who prefer to stay in hotels or motels ($p < .001$).

The hypothesis that the chosen tourism destination will affect the holiday expenditure of sport active tourist was also examined. Slovene sport-active tourists who holidayed domestically spent 43.55 EUR per person per day on average. In contrast, the Slovene sport-active tourist holidaying in a foreign country spent significantly more with an average expenditure of 71.33 EUR per person per day higher ($t = 231.861$; $p < .001$) than the domestic sport-active tourists.

Discussion

Extensive data and information is available describing tourists involved in sport around the world. For example, in 1999 the US Travel Association published a study on the proportion of trips made by domestic tourists that were connected to sport. They found that in the six years to the end of 1999 75.3 million adult Americans travelled for or because of sport, either as spectators

Table 3
Differences in type of accommodation between domestic and outbound tourists

Variable	Status	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i> -test	<i>p</i>	95% CI
Type of accommodation	Domestic	96,019	1.535	0.499	12.20	.001	0.032-0.023
	Outbound	97,810	1.507	0.499			

Note. CI = confidence interval.

Table 4
Differences in expenditure between domestic and outbound tourists

Variable	Status	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i> -test	<i>p</i>	95% CI
Expenditure	Domestic	200,667	43.549	28.948	231.86	.001	27.584-28.054
	Outbound	153,118	71.369	42.314			

Note. CI = confidence interval

or active participants. In 1998, a Canadian study on travel showed that 37% of domestic tourists travelled with the purpose of sport (Gibson, 2003). The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) in cooperation with the International Olympic Committee (IOC, 2002) published a European study in which it was shown that 55% of Germans participated in sport activities on holidays and that 52% of Dutch and 23% of French were also sport active while travelling. The same research revealed that German sport tourists spent on average 7.5 nights and 580 Euros while travelling and that Dutch sport tourists spent 11.6 nights and 592 Euros (IOC, 2002). In contrast to these, Slak Valek (2008) found that in 2003 the Slovenian sports tourists spent on average 35 Euros per day and stayed away from home for only 4.3 nights.

Gibson (1998) found a typical sport-active tourist to be a man with higher level of education and an above-average income, aged between 25 and 34. Similarly, Slak Valek (2008) confirmed that the typical Slovene sport-active tourist is a man, aged between 25 and 44 who prefers cheaper accommodation in order to save more of the travel budget for sporting activity. Higham and Hinch (2009) claimed that sporting preferences of visitors to a destination are poorly understood even though the demographic characteristics of visitors such as gender, age, education level are known relatively accurately. Consequentially, this raises the question of whether the socio-demographic characteristics of a sport tourist might influence their tourism destination selection and especially the choice between domestic or foreign locations.

Undoubtedly, every tourism destination tries to satisfy tourist demands and encourage them to spend as much as possible, but the sport industry should focus on tourism spending for sport, recreation and other

sports related services (e.g. renting a surfboard or skis). This is why there is a need to understand the influences of a chosen destination on the type of accommodation and level of expenditure of a sport tourist and consequently, gather information to prepare an appropriate sport-tourism offer.

In mass market the tourist's demographic characteristics have been extensively analyzed in the past (Bojanic, 2011; Chi, 2011; Hedlund et al., 2012), on the other hand there is little known about demographic factors affecting sport tourists' choices (Gibson et al., 2011). The way personal characteristics might influence sport tourists decisions on a tourism destination was the main question in this investigation. All tested socio-demographic characteristics (gender, age, level of education and income) have been shown to affect Slovene sport-active tourists in their tourism destination choice in the regression analysis results. In addition it has been found that they will travel within their own country more often than travelling abroad. This confirms Buhalis's (2001) finding that tourists are on average more active in their own country than abroad. The reason for acting in this way consciously or subconsciously is motivated by economics (Thare & Farstad, 2011), but also influenced by safety and security (Massidda & Etzo, 2012; Mutinda & Mayaka, 2012). When thinking about sport and being active and adventurous, personal safety and security has become a priority, even more when talking about most dangerous adrenalin orientated activities (Bentley, 2008). Because the perception of security is a major determinant in a traveler's decision to visit a place, as well as being part of the traveler's activities at the destination, the different dangers can lead to a significant tourism demand (Fuchs & Pizam, 2011). Consequently people feel more secure and safe in a familiar environment

within their own country, even if the sport chosen is particularly dangerous.

More women and young sport-active tourists are traveling abroad for their sport related travel. However, past research (Gibson, 1998; Slak Valek, 2008; Standeven & Knop, 1999) has found a typical sport-active tourist is male. Consequentially, sport-tourism destinations target mostly men, using adrenalin sports opportunities for advertising tourism destinations. According to the results presented in this paper, sport-tourism destinations which focus promotion on foreign tourists as such, should try to target and attract women. Targeting women with “softer sports” could be an advantage for today’s sport tourism destinations. In fact, a study by Holloway (2004) shows that women are mainly responsible for the planning and organizing holidays for the whole family which was confirmed by Doupona Topič (2002) who showed that women play a dominant role in establishing the sports activity pattern for the whole family. Considering this, there is no doubt sport tourism destination promotion should use more marketing tools that catch women’s attention. According to Mieczkowski (1990) the tourist’s age is one of the most important demographics that influence tourism demand. It has also been shown to have a strong effect on a sport tourism destination choice as older sport-active tourists are more likely to stay in their own country for holidays, but younger tourists prefer foreign countries for their sport-active experience. This finding is in strong correlation with the stressed situation which is not confirmed with our research, but is a possible explanation of our findings. One of the main reasons for travelling is to escape from everyday life and the stress of living and working in congested cities (Ryan & Glendon, 1998; Weaver & Lawton, 2007), but traveling to a foreign country is also a stress venture, which older tourists try to avoid. When the activity is casual or is not treated as “serious sport tourism” as defined by Stebbins (2011), it is considered as one of the ways to escape from everyday stress. But people over 60 in a household (and children) have been found to be an important factor when choosing a family tourist destination (Lyons et al., 2009) when for a sport active travel adapting and improvising is needed which means using more energy, when older tourists prefer comfortable and non-stressed travel. If the weaknesses in the age profile of outbound travelers shown in the current study is to be addressed then an offer for a sport-active travel experience which tries to attract mature outbound travelers should be positioned as comfortable, non-stressed travel, even when a sport activity element is included. On the other hand, for younger tourists the organization of sport-active travel can be more challenging and exciting however, it has to

be low budget, as costs are a very important component for them. Also, young people tend to explore different countries and they are willing to travel long distances to play their favorite sport. Young sport-active tourists will also save for a long time (even years) with the aim of experiencing a specific sport. This study confirms the influence of the traveler’s monthly income and the level of education as important factors when choosing a sport tourism destination. Notably, higher educated sport-active tourists and those with a higher income are more likely to travel abroad.

Finally, the results of the study for choice of accommodation type show that sport-active tourists travelling within their domestic country choose to stay in cheaper accommodation, while outbound sport-active tourists usually choose hotels or middle to high accommodation offerings. These seem an appropriate choice for a sport-active tourist not only because of the comfort, service and facilities they offer but also from the integration between accommodation and sports orientated facilities such as swimming pools, golf courses, fitness centers and other sport facilities that help guests feel comfortable while remaining active at the same time.

Saayman M. and Saayman A. (2009) discovered that a combination of socio-demographic and motivational factors will stimulate visitors to spend money. This study confirms that the chosen destination influences the expenditure; that is to say, a tourism destination can encourage sport tourists to spend more using different marketing appeals that highlight the sports orientation. In fact the expenditure of an outbound Slovene sport-active tourist is almost double that of one traveling in their home country (EUR 43.55 for travelling domestically versus EUR 71.33 for outbound tourist). This large differential between tourists with the same underlying motive for traveling requires more investigation, but our findings could be a warning for Slovenian tourism industry. Is it well-known that Slovenes are a “sports obsessed nation”: 52% of Slovenes play sport at least once a week (Eurobarometer, 2010) and 64% of Slovenes adults are regularly sport active (SURS, 2008) which is why Slovene’s tourists devote much of their disposable income to taking themselves on a sport-active vacation.

Slak Valek, Kolar, Jurak, and Bednarik (2008) concluded that Slovenia has a great potential in natural landscape, tourist sights and sports-related attractions that can form the basis for the comprehensive development of sport tourism for the foreign visitors. However, taking into consideration these current findings we would conclude that domestic tourism in Slovenia still has to develop its sport tourism offer and better meet the needs of the sport active tourists at a higher level.

Overall, both hypotheses were confirmed; the selected socio-demographic characteristics have a significant influence on the sport-active tourist when choosing between a domestic and foreign tourism destination which in turn affect the type of accommodation chosen and the level of expenditure while travelling.

Conclusion

The major contribution of this study is in its practical findings about demographic differences between types of tourists which should generate a greater understanding of sport tourism destinations. Effective tourism management in the field of sport tourism requires an understanding of important points of difference within and between niche market segments, as this allow destination managers to match market needs (demand) to the sport tourism resource (supply) based at their destinations (Higham & Hinch, 2009). For good business practice it is important to know the behavioral patterns of each relevant tourism form (Slak Valek et al., 2005). Segmentation and grouping according to travel motivation and behavior patterns form the basis of designing an appropriate and attractive marketing mix that will serve those guests well (Powers, 1997). As sport tourism is one of the fastest growing tourism segments it is our hope that the results of this study provide some suggestions to prepare special and tailor-made marketing strategies for sport tourism destinations or those destination that will develop a sport tourism offer in the future. Slovenia as a potential sport tourism destination has a diverse landscape which could satisfy almost all kinds of sport demands, from summer to winter sports, which means Slovenia could be a whole year round sport tourism destination. However, the question as to why Slovene sport-active tourists prefer to travel abroad, stay in higher quality accommodation and pay more for their vacation is an issue that is still to be resolved. Furthermore, the examination of why one country could be a good enough sport tourism destination for foreign tourists, but at the same time not good enough for domestic tourists is a worthwhile topic for future research.

In conclusion the present research study provides an important contribution to the understanding of sport tourism, showing that socio-demographic variables are very important when choosing a sports oriented tourism destination. It shows that a comprehensive understanding of the differences in socio-demographic and socio-economic factors are critical for good management decisions and the sport tourist's characteristics; gender, age, monthly income and level of education all alter the selection between domestic

activity and outbound travel. Furthermore, once the destination has been chosen there is an effect on the travel expenditure and the type of overnight accommodation selected with local tourists selecting cheaper accommodation and those going to foreign countries willing to spend more on higher quality places.

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