

MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR ENTERING SUSTAINABLE ECOLOGICAL DESTINATIONS AS IMPULSES FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION: A CASE STUDY ON THE EXAMPLE OF NATIONAL PARKS

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Citation: Šambronská, K., Šenková, A., Kolesárová, S., & Kormaníková, E. (2024). MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR ENTERING SUSTAINABLE ECOLOGICAL DESTINATIONS AS IMPULSES FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION: A CASE STUDY ON THE EXAMPLE OF NATIONAL PARKS. *Geojournal of Tourism and Geosites*, 53(2), 480–488. <https://doi.org/10.30892/gtg.53211-1223>

Abstract: The study offers significant findings that illuminate the main motivational factors for tourists to visit sustainable ecological destinations, specifically national parks. The research deals with the issue of sustainable tourism and its connection with environmental factors and the preferences of tourists. The aim of the study is to identify motivational elements encouraging entry into sustainable ecological destinations and participation in sustainable tourism with an accent on environmental protection. The research methodology includes data collection through the author's questionnaire. Based on the data from the author's questionnaire, the four most important motivation factors of the respondents can be identified: the beauty of the landscape, avoiding stress, escaping from crowds and interest in local culture and gastronomy. These results clearly show that tourists interested in sustainable tourism with an emphasis on the ecological pillar are motivated by the opportunity to experience the beauty of nature, local culture, and cuisine, as well as escape from the stress and crowds of traditional tourist destinations. The finding that tourists are willing to pay the entrance fee to national parks under certain conditions (for example, the use of funds for environmental protection, etc.) has important implications for the management policy of national parks.

Keywords: tourism development, sustainability, sustainable tourism, ecotourist, national park, motivational and financial factors, environmental protection, eco destination

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INTRODUCTION

The number of tourism participants increases from year to year. In recent years, not only academics, workers in tourism, but also tourists themselves realize that their behavior and acceptance of the environment as well as its inhabitant's matter, and that every "step" they take leaves an invisible mark. A significant role is played by sustainable destination management. Its role is to plan, coordinate and implement tourism solution strategies to ensure the long-term sustainability of the destination, which help tourists and residents get the most out of the destination while minimizing damage to its natural resources (Algas, 2023). The environmental consequences of mass tourism can be disastrous for a destination. Whether it's the accumulation of garbage, air pollution, noise and light smog can disturb natural habitats.

In some cases, tourists can negatively affect the natural environment of wild animals, causing negative human-animal conflicts (Deb et al., 2023). Both natural and local resources, such as water, will deteriorate as destinations struggle to accommodate visitor numbers for which they were not designed. However, as destinations begin to increase tourism development to maintain their competitiveness, they may begin to use unsustainable practices to create more accommodation facilities and other tourism infrastructure (Gallagher, 2021).

One of the destinations that stimulate the desire for the beauty of nature are attractive mountain areas that are often declared national parks or protected areas. Their environment encourages the development of tourism and recreation. Tourists to natural destinations are mainly attracted by the natural attractiveness and intactness of the territory (Špulerová et

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al., 2016). The development of tourism must fully respect the dominant regulations that result from the regulations and laws related to territorial protection and from the visitor regulations. Tourism itself creates its own favorable development as well as the favorable development of the entire destination, if it is monitored and managed by the destination management and provided that the elements of sustainability are observed. If the development of tourism is unmanaged, negative phenomena such as environmental impacts occur over time (e.g. high noise level, air, and water pollution, changing opinions and the landscape due to the construction of high-rise hotels and large-scale urbanization) (Ivancsóné and Horváth, 2023). The significant expansion of human activities can cause environmental disruption, which threatens the sustainability of ecosystems and the preservation of biodiversity in destinations (national parks). Positive examples of efforts to protect nature and traditional living spaces in support of tourism can be found all over the world (Špulerová et al., 2016). For example, the Stara Planina Nature Park in Serbia has half of its area undisturbed, while the remaining area is grazed by cattle. The intensity of use of the park's territory is adjusted in relation to its area, so that biodiversity benefits, not harms. In Germany, there are subsidies for forest owners that are financed from European sources and support sustainable management in the national park (for example, in the Thuringia Forest Nature Park) (Gális et al., 2022).

The basic principle of sustainable tourism with an emphasis on ecology is respect for the destinations visited, for wild animals, plants and for the people who live there. The idea is to keep popular destinations, such as national parks, intact for future generations to discover and appreciate. Reasons for the solution of the study:

- the basic principle of sustainable tourism with an emphasis on ecology is respect for the destinations visited, for wild animals, plants and for the people who live there.
- To support the fact that popular destinations (for example, national parks) must be developed with an emphasis on sustainable tourism so that future generations can discover and appreciate them,
- stimulus for monitoring the opinions of visitors to national parks and tourist destinations located in them,
- visitors' opinions are the main determinants of motivation when choosing a holiday in a sustainable destination by visitors and tourists
- an important aspect is also the determination of the attitudes of tourists to the entry fees to national parks in the Slovak Republic
- provide important information for the development and management of sustainable tourism and environmental protection in tourism.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Visitors to sustainable destinations with a dominant ecology orientation

According to the international organization The International Ecotourism Society, visitors who prefer sustainable destinations with an emphasis on ecology are referred to as "ecotourists", experienced travelers who are likely to have higher education and higher financial income. Ecotourists expect from their ecotourism experiences discovery, personal growth from an emotional, spiritual, and intellectual point of view (Bricker, 2017). Some of the earliest studies on ecotourism attempted to classify ecotourists based on setting, experience, and group dynamics. The typology of ecotourists and their characteristics as a segment are covered in studies by, for example, Kusler (1991), Lindberg (1991), Weaver and Lawton (2002), Matušiková (2019), Carvache-Franco et al. (2020), Beall and Boley (2021), Ajuhari et al. (2023) and others.

Sustainable and ecological tourism is becoming more and more popular, it can be concluded that it is part of the lifestyle (Zainal, et al., 2024). Eco-friendly hotels, eco-friendly tours, and sustainable travel destinations and options are popping up everywhere. Thanks to tourism, people realize the value of the original natural environment (Uher et al., 2021; Aji et al., 2024).

Sharma and Gupta (2020) focus on understanding the pro-environmental behavior of tourists in protected areas and national parks in India, with the aim of mentioning the negative impacts of tourism on the environment. As a result of their findings, biospheric value has the greatest influence on the new environmental paradigm, as well as awareness of consequences and taking responsibility significantly predict pro-environmental personal norms and behavior of nature-based tourists. Ghazvini et al. (2020) assess the attitudes of domestic and foreign tourists regarding the appropriate use of national parks as well as their environmental concerns regarding the national parks visited. The authors point to the appropriate use of national parks, while emphasizing the role of distiller management. Al Fahmawee et al. (2023) found in a study that tourists' intentions to engage in sustainable ecotourism are negatively affected by subjective norms, while tourists' attitudes are positively affected by these norms (Sutiksno et al., 2024). The environmental behavior of tourists is also addressed by other authors (for example, Gao et al., 2023; Paul and Roy, 2023). Tang et al. (2023) deal with the behavior of tourists in cities and in the countryside with an emphasis on green consumption. Lee et al. (2021) discusses sustainable intelligence by discussing and investigating visitors' knowledge and experience regarding the impact of tourism on the environment as well as their ability to apply this knowledge and experience in demonstrating proactive behavior towards sustainable tourism (Huo et al., 2024).

2. National parks as destinations of sustainable ecological tourism

As part of nature protection, large-scale protected areas have been declared in Slovakia, which include national parks and protected landscape areas (Dzurov Vargová and Matušiková, 2023). A national park is understood as an area with an area of more than 1000 ha, predominantly with ecosystems substantially unchanged by human activity or with a unique and natural landscape structure forming supra-regional biocenters and the most important natural heritage, in which the preservation and protection of nature is superior to other activities (Žoncová et al., 2020). The role of national parks goes beyond the typical understanding of nature conservation. It concerns the protection of species, ecosystems, and landscapes.

They are of great social, cultural, and economic importance and influence the development of the regions in which they are located (Sumarmi et al., 2024). One of the most important and difficult challenges for national park managers is to ensure that the functions of national parks are appropriately and sustainably linked to nature conservation. On the one hand, it is about meeting the needs of those who visit the parks for various reasons, and on the other hand, reducing (or appropriately directing) the pressure on the environment through such an approach (Zygmunt et al., 2023).

In the period of the past years (2022-2023), several national parks considered the introduction of an entrance fee, so far on a voluntary basis. They were inspired by the good practice operating abroad for a long time. In the territory of Slovakia, there is an entrance fee to only one national park, the Slovak Paradise (2.5 euros/person) (Slovak Paradise, 2024). The arguments for this decision are in the effective use of the obtained funds, which would be used for nature protection, support and development of soft tourism, for improving the services of the national parks administration, but also for the modification of tourist trails, the construction of new and reconstruction of existing trails, trail markings, collecting garbage, location of mobile toilets, education of visitors and overall increase in safety and other areas (Gális et al., 2022). The introduction and successful functioning of the entrance fee to the national park can be documented not only by the example of the Slovak Paradise, but also by examples from abroad. In the case of the Tatra National Park, entrance fees make up 37% of total income. Revenues from entrance fees (which most Polish national parks have in place) represent 15% of revenues for Gorczański National Park (Antalová and Široký, 2020).

Australia also has established fees for largely entering the parks, where the amount of the fee is determined by individual states (for example, Tasmania has an entrance fee to all its national parks, while Queensland does not charge fees, only in about five national parks, mainly for interpretation services). National parks are also charged in the USA and Canada, even in some developing countries (Shoji et al., 2023). Research on entry (user) fees has been conducted from various perspectives, including function, use, and fairness (Miller et al., 2018; Schumann et al., 2019; Zou, 2020; and others). Čech et al. (2021) focused on the importance of caves and their attendance in national parks. A preliminary survey by the Gális et al. (2022) revealed that the introduction of entrance fees would bring positive impacts for national parks (on the example of the Tatra National Park), a decrease in the value of recreation associated with a stay and activities in the national park by at least 30% (which means a reduction overtourism in the Tatras) and the regrouping of potential visitors to other natural areas (TANAP, 2024).

This would prevent unwanted development of the national park. Furthermore, as part of the research, tourists (88% of respondents) stated their willingness to pay annually from 23 to 26 euros for the entrance to the national park, which would bring an income of six to eleven million euros per year (Gális et al., 2022). Despite the results of the survey, the introduced entrance fee would range from 3.5 euros to 5 euros per person and day, with the fact that selected groups of the population (children, pensioners, and disabled persons) would be entitled to a discount.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The aim of the study is to identify motivational elements encouraging entry into sustainable ecological destinations and participation in sustainable tourism with an accent on environmental protection. In connection with the goal and based on the literature study, research questions (RQ) were formulated, which the authors asked themselves in a broader scope:

RQ 1: Does permanent residence affect the attitude towards sustainable development of the environment among tourists during their vacation?

RQ 2: Does a sustainable ecological destination encourage ecological behavior in its visitors during the visit?

RQ 3: Are tourists who are interested in sustainable environmental development willing to pay for entry to an ecological destination? Subsequently, hypotheses were established that correspond and more precisely define the issue of the research questions.

H1: There is a statistically significant difference between the place of residence and the relationship to sustainable environmental development in the destination.

H2: There is a statistically significant relationship between tourists' natural ecological behavior and preference for sustainable ecological destinations (national parks).

H3: There is a statistically significant relationship between the attitude towards sustainable environmental development and the willingness to pay for entrance to the national park (as an ecological destination).

The main method of the research was the author's questionnaire. As part of the compilation of the questionnaire and its determination for the respondents, three criteria were established, with which the respondents were familiar, as two were related to the selection of respondents. An age criterion was established, which was also related to the item "education" in the questionnaire. For the question "education", a minimum university education was entered.

The reason for this decision by the researchers was the fact that children in primary and secondary school are led to an ecological mindset and within the taught subjects there is content focused on environmental elements, but a 15-year-old individual does not decide on a vacation. The authors believe that parents should be the primary role model (right after the school education process).

In conclusion, it is the parents who decide and motivate the child's life direction and style. Due to this, a minimum completed high school education and a minimum age of 19 respondents were selected. From the mentioned criteria, the last one logically followed, where in the question regarding social status (employment), choosing the option "student" means a university student. In the case of university students, they are relatively independent individuals, with individual (not just family) participation in tourism, while they can also finance it individually.

The third criterion was determined using the arithmetic mean, which was used to evaluate the factors leading to visiting national parks. Resulting values up to 1.99 were the most important or represented the highest level of agreement. The resulting values of the arithmetic mean from 2.5 represented the least important values, respectively the lowest degree of agreement. A total of 653 visitors to national parks were approached, 582 were willing to participate in the research (N=582 respondents). The research took place in the months of May - August 2023, as it is the most visited period of the national parks.

STUDY AREA

In Slovakia, there are nine national parks (Figure 1). They are visited annually by approximately five million tourists, of which half of the tourists visit the Tatra National Park. The Low Tatras, the Slovak Paradise or the Pieniny Mountains are also very popular. On the other hand, undiscovered destinations with unspoiled nature are, for example, Poloniny (Institute of Environmental Policy, 2022). The questionnaire was distributed among the visitors of the national parks: High Tatras National Park, Low Tatras National Park, and Veľká Fatra National Park. In the figure below, these national parks are marked in red.



Figure 1. National parks in the Slovak Republic Source: Kiska Travel (2022)

When evaluating the questionnaire, quantitative analysis was used, which focuses on numerical and percentage evaluation of data. Descriptive statistics (arithmetic mean, minimum, maximum, median, and standard deviation) were used as part of the quantitative analysis. Next, correlation analysis was used, which determines the existence of a relationship between two (or more) variables. The following methods were used within the correlation analysis, to evaluate the hypotheses:

- H1 - Mann-Whitney U-test - it is a non-parametric test that was used to compare the medians of two independent samples,

$$U = R_1 - \frac{n_1(n_1 + 1)}{2} \quad (1) \quad \text{Mann-Whitney U-test (Source: Vašaničová, 2021:60)}$$

Legend: U = Mann-Whitney U-test; R₁ = Sum of rankings of the first group; n₁ = number of respondents

- H2 – Pearson correlation coefficient – used for quantitative quantities that have an approximate normal distribution. The coefficient always takes values from the interval <-1; 1>

$$r = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n (x_i - \bar{x})(y_i - \bar{y})}{\sqrt{\sum_{i=1}^n (x_i - \bar{x})^2 \sum_{i=1}^n (y_i - \bar{y})^2}} \quad (2) \quad \text{Pearson correlation coefficient (Source: Vašaničová, 2021:58)}$$

Legend: r = Pearson correlation coefficient; n = number of respondents; x_i = independent value; y_i = dependent value; \bar{x} , \bar{y} = arithmetic means of values x_i and y_i

- H3 – Spearman's correlation coefficient - was used to examine the correlation of two ordinal (ordinal) variables.

$$r_s = 1 - \frac{6}{n \cdot (n^2 - 1)} \cdot \sum_{i=1}^n (R_i - Q_i)^2 \quad (3) \quad \text{Spearman's correlation coefficient (Source: Vašaničová, 2021:61)}$$

Legend: r_s = Spearman correlation coefficient; n = number of respondents; R_i = order of values x₁, x₂, ..., x_n; Q_i = order of values y₁, y₂, ..., y_n

Respondent's data

The total number of respondents was 582, of which 52% were women and 48% were men. An overview of the demographic and geographic characteristics of the respondents is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic-geographic characteristics of respondents (Source: authors' processing to the obtained data)

Age						
Variable	Frequency (N)	Arithmetic mean	Median	Minimum	Maximum	Standard deviation
Age	582	33.04	29	19	64	11.37
Residence						
The city			Countryside			
58.5 %			41.5 %			
Education						
High school	University I. degree		University II. degree		University III. degree	
43.90 %	33.50 %		22.00 %		0.69 %	
Social status						
Employee	Entrepreneur	Student	Pensioner	Other		
56.10 %	5.50 %	36 %	1.80 %	0.60 %		
Income (euro)						
Variable	Frequency (N)	Arithmetic mean	Median	Minimum	Maximum	Standard deviation
Monthly income	582	797.31	850	0	4000	637.71

From Table 1 it can be concluded that the average age of the respondents was 33.04±11.37 years. The youngest respondent was 19 years old, and the oldest respondent was 64 years old. The highest number of respondents lives in the city, which constituted 58.5%. 41.5% of the respondents said that they saw Vidiel as their place of residence. 43.9% of the respondents had completed high school education. The second most numerous groups were respondents who achieved a first-level university education, which represented 33.5%. In terms of social status (employment), the largest sample of respondents was employees 56.10%. The second largest group of respondents were students, 36%. The respondents indicated as "Other" option: unemployed or on maternity leave. In relation to income, as can be seen from Table 1, the respondents indicated the minimum amount of income to be reported by students of €0. It was a group of students (35% of the total "student") who subsequently stated that they do not work or have a part-time job. The maximum amount of monthly income stated by the respondents was €4,000. Average monthly income of the sample of respondents was €797.31±637.71. The median value was 850. It represents the amount that divided the monthly income into two equal halves.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The attitude of the respondents towards the sustainable development of the environment in destinations is generally very favorable (Figure 2). Visitors to national parks are aware of their fragility and the possibility of biodiversity disruption and the need to preserve their condition for the preservation of the environment and the national parks themselves as a place of relaxation, healing, education and for future generations.

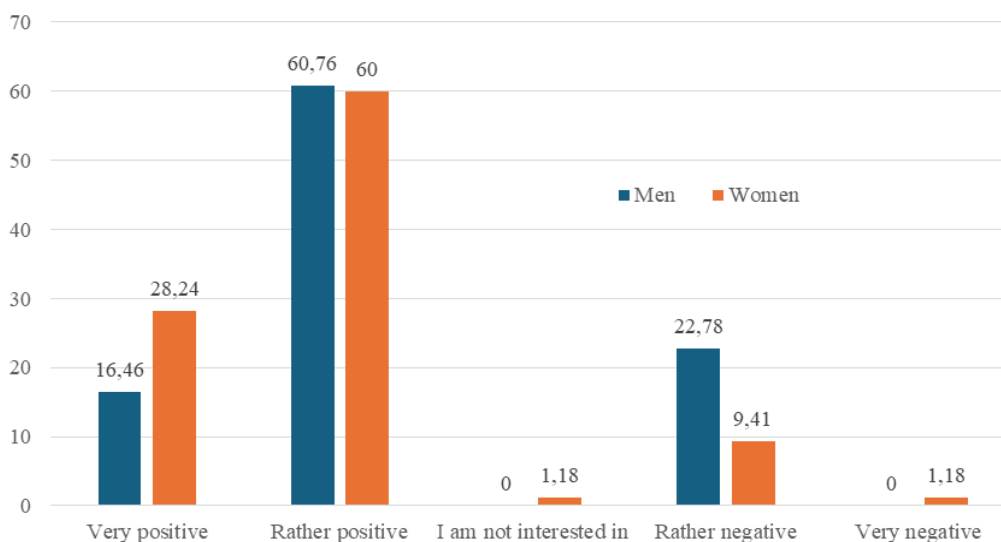


Figure 2. Relationship to sustainable environmental development in destinations from the perspective of gender in % (Source: authors' processing of the obtained data)

A very positive attitude towards the sustainable development of the environment in the destinations was stated by 22.56% of the respondents. Up to 60.37% of respondents characterized their relationship as rather positive. Respondents who are not interested in ecology made up 0.61%. A total of 16.46% of respondents have a cumulative rather negative to very negative relationship to the sustainable development of the environment in destinations. The relationship of the respondents to the sustainable development of the environment in the destinations regarding the gender of the respondents is shown in Figure 2. Women expressed a positive relationship to the sustainable development of the environment in the destinations in general (cumulative) 88.24%, while a positive relationship to the sustainable

development of the environment was found among men in destinations cumulatively 77.22%. The negative relationship to the sustainable development of the environment in destinations among women - as respondents - was cumulatively 10.59%. For men, a negative relationship to the sustainable development of the environment in destinations was found in 22.78%, while none of the male respondents indicated negative relationship.

Respondents prefer destinations that are in line with ecological principles, but not without reservations. Destinations that are in line with ecological principles are preferred by 22.56% and rather preferred by 60.37%. Only 0.61% said that they cannot assess it and do not solve it. Such destinations are rather not preferred by 15.85% and not preferred by 0.61% of respondents. In recent years, the subject of entry fees to national parks has often been raised in the Slovak Republic. The collected money was to be used for nature protection and support of the local population. Willingness to pay for national park entry was another area of study for the study.

Table 2. Willingness to pay for entrance to the national park and the amount of the one-time entrance fee (Source: authors' processing to the obtained data)

Willingness to pay	Relative frequency (% of respondents)	Fee amount €	Relative frequency (% of respondents)
Definitely yes	36.59	0	10
Rather yes	49.39	0.10 – 3	54
I can't judge	10.37	3,1 – 5	18
Rather no	3.05	5.1 - 10	8
Absolutely no	0.61	More than 10	0
Total sum	100		100

As can be seen in table 2, 36.59% of the respondents were willing to pay for the entrance to the national parks without reservations. 49.39% would probably agree with the fee. There were 10.37% of respondents who do not deal with the topic. Rather, 3.05% of respondents saw reluctance to pay, and only 0.61% of respondents were against any fees. From the answers, there is noticeable agreement with the voluntary contribution to the national parks. The amount of the entrance fee that the respondents had to pay ranges from 0.1 to 3 euros, possibly the respondents would consider an entrance fee in the range of 3.10 - 5 euros. As part of an additional, open question, the respondents commented on what motivates them (or would motivate them) to agree to the fee. First of all, they mentioned the reinvestment of selected funds in the protection of national parks (48%), improvement of services for visitors (adjustment and repair of routes, marking of routes, installation of information boards in appropriate places, offer of services in applications - information, etc.) (29 %), making inhabited areas more attractive and harmonizing them with the nature of national parks (10%), supporting the Mountain Service (7%) or educational activities for visitors or schools (6%). On the contrary, those respondents who expressed themselves negatively most often cited as the reason for their answer the uncertainty that the collected funds will go to the intended purpose (i.e. they will be reinvested in national parks) (88%).

Respondents, as visitors to national parks, have selection criteria based on which they choose destinations of this type. On the other hand, each national park presents its own offer and idea. The national park behaves in the same way, as a destination that is in line with sustainability with an emphasis on environmental protection. It is one of the factors that visitors consider when choosing a place for their vacation or stay. Table 3 shows selected factors that respondents consider when choosing a sustainable ecological destination - a national park.

Table 3. Percentage share of motivation factors among respondents (Source: authors' processing to the obtained data) (Evaluation criteria: 1 – very motivating, 2 – rather motivating, 3 – neither motivating nor not motivating, 4 – rather not motivating, 5 – not motivating at all)

Factors / Evaluation criteria	The number of respondents in%				
	1	2	3	4	5
Popularity of the area	31.10	38.41	16.46	11.59	2.44
Beauty of the country	76.22	21.34	2.44	0	0
Plant and animal diversity	34.76	37.80	18.90	7.93	0.61
Know the local culture and gastronomy	34.76	40.85	17.07	5.49	1.83
A lot of activities in nature	23.17	30.49	21.95	16.46	7.93
Ecological nature of the national park	17.68	40.24	29.88	9.76	2.44
Added value (education)	17.07	35.37	27.44	14.63	5.49
Meet people with similar interests	14.63	28.66	19.51	19.51	17.68
To explore the unknown	36.59	30.49	20.73	8.54	3.66
Stress prevention	52.44	32.93	11.59	3.05	0
Avoid the crowds of people	48.78	36.59	12.20	1.83	0.61

The data in Table 3 were processed with an arithmetic mean to evaluate the order of the factors and then find out which are the main factors in deciding on the choice of a national park (Table 4). From Table 4 it is possible to state the following. The most important factor influencing the respondents' decision when choosing a national park was the beauty of the landscape (1.26), followed by avoiding stress (1.65) and avoiding crowds (1.69).

Knowing the local culture and gastronomy (1.99) was the fourth factor, just below 2. The factor meeting people with similar interests (2.97) was close to the value of 3, which means that for the respondents this factor was the least important for their decision. Hypotheses were established within the study (see Methods).

Table 4. Frequency table of individual factors leading to visiting the national park (authors' processing to the obtained data)

Factor	Arithmetic mean	Ranking
Beauty of the country	1.26	1
Stress prevention	1.65	2
Avoid the crowds of people	1.69	3
Know the local culture and gastronomy	1.99	4
Plant and animal diversity	2.02	5
Explore the unknown	2.12	6
To explore the unknown	2.16	7
Ecological nature of the national park	2.39	8
A lot of activities in nature	2.55	9
Added value (education)	2.56	10
Meet people with similar interests	2.97	11

The normality of the data was determined by the Dominik Hansen test (Table 5). Testing took place at the $\alpha = 0.05$ significance level. Due to the nature of the input data, appropriate tests were chosen for the hypotheses and each of the hypotheses was tested with a different mathematical-statistical test (Table 6).

Table 5. Testing the normality of input data hypotheses (Source: authors' processing to the obtained data)

Hypothesis	Dominik Hansen test	P value	Type of data
H1	66.756	$3.19239e^{-015}$	Non-parametric
H2	66.756	$3.19239e^{-015}$	Non-parametric
	3.37131	0.185323	Parametric
H3	66.756	$3.19239e^{-015}$	Non-parametric
	28.917	$5.25717e^{-007}$	Non-parametric

Table 6. Hypothesis testing (Source: authors' processing to the obtained data)

Hypothesis	Test type	Value	p-value	α	Evaluation
H1	Mann-Whitney U-test	$U = 3570.50$	0.30629	0.05	Unconfirmed
H2	Pearson's correlation coefficient	$r = 0.6025$	0.0000	0.05	Confirmed
H3	Spearman's correlation coefficient	$r_s = 0.3032$	0.0001	0.05	Confirmed

By testing the hypothesis H1, p-value = 0.30629 was found, which is more than the significance level $\alpha = 0.05$. Hypothesis H0 cannot be rejected. It can be concluded that there is no statistically significant difference between the place of residence and the relationship to the sustainable development of the environment in the destination. By testing the hypothesis H2, the value of the Pearson correlation coefficient was determined $r = 0.6025$. The corresponding p-value was 0.0000, which is less than the significance level $\alpha = 0.05$. Pearson's correlation coefficient is statistically significant. Hypothesis H0 can be rejected. It can be concluded that there is a statistically significant relationship between the natural ecological behavior of tourists and the preference for sustainable ecological destinations (national parks). It is a direct correlation, as the coefficient takes on a positive value.

The strength of the relationship is great, as the correlation coefficient was in the interval $\langle 0.5; 1 \rangle$. By testing the hypothesis H3, the value of the Spearman correlation coefficient was determined $r_s = 0.3032$. The corresponding p-value was 0.0001, which is less than the significance level α . Spearman's correlation coefficient is statistically significant. Hypothesis H0 could be rejected. It can be concluded that there is a statistically significant connection between the attitude towards sustainable development of the environment and the willingness to pay for entrance to the national park (as an ecological destination). This is a direct correlation, as the coefficient has acquired a positive value. The strength of the relationship was moderate, as the correlation coefficient was in the interval $\langle 0.3; 0.5 \rangle$.

CONCLUSION

Based on the data obtained in the study from the author's questionnaire, it is possible to emphasize the 4 most important motivational factors of the respondents (when visiting an ecological destination - national parks), namely the beauty of the landscape (1.26), avoiding stress (1.65), avoiding crowds of people (1.69) and get to know the local culture and gastronomy (1.99). These findings suggest that tourists interested in sustainable tourism (with an emphasis on the ecological pillar, i.e. environmental protection) are motivated by a desire to experience the beauty of a given country, local culture, and cuisine, as well as to escape the stress and crowds of more traditional tourist destinations (often referred to as mass). These results are important for the development and marketing of sustainable and ecological tourism and its destination. Managers of sustainable destinations should focus on promoting the cultural and culinary aspects of their offers, creating tourism products with these elements as well as emphasizing the peace that can be found in the natural environment. Meeting people with common interests (2.97), the lowest score among the investigated factors (Table 4), indicates that even if socializing and meeting new people can be part of the motivation to participate in sustainable tourism, it is not the main motivation factor for tourists. Even though the current debate on charging for visiting national parks has stopped and the current government is not favorably inclined to the idea, it is possible to

favorably evaluate the finding (H3) that tourists are willing to pay a certain financial amount when entering protected parks. This is so provided that the funds will be used to protect the environment of the national park (i.e. ecological destination), improve services for visitors and education. The willingness to pay was a cumulative 85.98% among the respondents of the presented research, which is a very similar finding to the study presented in the chapter National parks as ecological destinations, where 88% of the respondents were listed.

Probably due to the time delay in the implementation (and various influences such as the energy crisis and rising prices, deterioration of living standards, etc.) of the research compared to the study of the Institute of Environmental Policy (in 2022), where the amount of the fee was 23-26 euros, the respondents of the presented research (in 2023) indicated their willingness to pay entrance fees to national parks in the amount of one-time entry from 0.10 to 3 euros per person per day. Which is a maximum of 9 euros in the case of an average visit to the national park 3 times a year (Tanap 2024). The educational contribution of the study lies in the findings, which are mainly within the framework of the tested hypotheses, the inclusion of the information found in the educational process as well as an incentive to monitor the opinions of visitors to national parks and tourist destinations in their vicinity, which are the main motivation factors when choosing a holiday in a sustainable destination by visitors / tourists.

It is important to find out the attitude of tourists towards charging for entrance to national parks. The practical importance lies, for example, in the documents for competent people who will decide on reopening the discussion of charging and as a document for comparing changes or agreement in the opinion of future respondents.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, K.Š.; methodology, K.Š. and A.Š.; software, E.K. and K.Š.; validation, K.Š. and A.Š.; formal analysis, E.K. and S.K.; investigation, K.Š. and S.K.; data curation, K.Š. and E.K. writing - original draft preparation, E.K. and S.K.; writing - review and editing, K.Š. and A.Š.; visualization, E.Š. and S.K.; supervision, A.Š. and K.Š.; project administration, A.Š. and K.Š. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: Not applicable.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this study may be obtained on request from the corresponding author.

Acknowledgments: The paper is the output of the project KEGA 005PU-4/2022 "Innovation of the study program Tourism, hotel and spa industry in the first degree of study in the field of study Economics and management."

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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