

## WOMEN AS THOUGHTFUL AND RESPONSIBLE CONSUMERS OF TOURISM: GENDER DIFFERENCES IN TOURISM CONSUMPTION PATTERNS AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS TOURISM

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**Abstract:** A particularly important area of research in tourism management is the study of consumer habits and attitudes towards tourism. With this in mind, an online survey was conducted in 2018 to investigate the attitudes and consumption habits of the Hungarian population towards tourism. The survey is representative of the Hungarian population aged 15–74 by gender, age groups (10-year intervals), and region of residence. Five variables were included in the analysis: gender, generations, type of municipality of residence, level of education, and subjective perception of income status. This study focuses on gender differences in. The aim of the study was to call attention to the disparate tourism consumption patterns and attitudes of females and males. Based on the statistical analysis of a representative sample of 1,085 respondents, our hypotheses about statistically verifiable differences between female and male tourism consumption behaviours were confirmed. It was found that women are more open than men to adopting environmentally responsible consumer behaviours when travelling.

**Keywords:** tourism, happiness, security, responsibility, gender

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### INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of today's fastest-growing economic sectors and a social phenomenon affecting a wide spectrum of the population, so it is no coincidence that, as tourism becomes more and more integrated, tourism and marketing researchers are also trying to gain a more comprehensive understanding of all the factors of the system, with particular attention to the study of consumer behaviour (Töröcsik and Szűcs, 2021). One prerequisite of effective tourism management is the need for there to be no conflict between the supply and consumer sides of tourism (Mondok et al., 2023): that is, that these two sides be in harmony. For the vast majority of people living in developed countries, tourism has become almost a basic necessity, one that should be considered a major form of leisure. Quality of life is a key issue facing us today, and there can be little doubt that the study of consumer behaviour within tourism is also increasingly important as it is clear that tourism has a significant impact on the quality of life, satisfaction, and subjective happiness of the population. One of the most important public policy goals in all developed countries is to provide a better quality of life for the population. In the framework of a representative survey on consumer habits presented in this article, we had the opportunity to assess the characteristics of tourism consumption of the Hungarian population as well as their perceptions of various aspects of tourism. The results of the research have been thoroughly analysed, and the detailed and in-depth examination continues to provide the members of the research team with ongoing work. In line with the majority of international studies (Chamboko-Mpotaringa and Tichaawa, 2023), it was primarily the different behaviour patterns across generations that were investigated. However, certain researchers already pointed out that in addition to age, a significant effect on tourism consumption is also exerted by gender (Mura and Khoo-Lattimore, 2012). The post-analysis of the data has revealed to us statistically verifiable and significant differences in the tourism habits of women as opposed to men. By scrutinizing the international literature on the issue, we were able to identify a dearth of research as far as gender-related consumption behaviours were concerned. Thus, the main aim of the present study is to highlight the differences in tourism consumption patterns between men and women.

Our study extends the results of previous research (Nunkoo and Ramkissoon, 2010; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021) and includes in its scope the analysis of gender-based differences in how different emotional dispositions may influence divergent motivations in tourism habits (Perez Gálvez et al., 2023). In light of all these considerations as well as on the basis of the results of our previous research, the following hypotheses were put forward:

- H1: There are significant differences in the tourism consumption habits of men and women.
- H2: Women make more responsible decisions than men about tourism consumption.
- H3: Tourism plays a more important role in the life of women.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### The effect of tourism on quality of life and happiness

As tourism is becoming an overarching social phenomenon, research into its various aspects is also becoming

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increasingly multifaceted and comprehensive. The study of consumption patterns within tourism can be of great professional help in defining future development directions and in establishing effective tourism management and marketing practices. The Hungarian national representative research of 2018 provided a detailed investigation of the consumption habits of those who participate in tourism and those who do not (Csapó et al., 2019). The research also confirmed that the issue of security had become more important for travellers in recent years (Csapó and Törőcsik, 2020; Bátor and Raffay-Danyi, 2022). Confirming well-known trends in tourism (Törőcsik and Csapó, 2018) the study corroborated the claim that tourism activity is no longer merely about sweet idleness, because physical activity and dynamic consumer behaviour are typical of a significant proportion of tourists. Tourism is a key determinant of quality of life today. According to Csikszentmihalyi (1991), we must make our experiences better to make our lives better. There seems little doubt that tourism, as a source of experiences, can contribute to a subjective weighing up of positive factors since more pleasant experiences can make us more satisfied and upbeat, a view shared by Veenhoven (2003), who professes that the experience of travelling leads to a sense of happiness. In that view, subjective quality of life can be measured by an individual's happiness factor, so one would need to ask how satisfied a person is with her or his life. Happiness, then, is nothing more than a general contentment with life, and in Veenhoven's view it is also synonymous with well-being.

Quality of life surveys had started as early as in the 1960s and 70s, but the role and importance of tourism had not yet been considered (Michalkó, 2010). When looking at the relationship between tourism and quality of life and happiness, the starting point needs to be a definition of what we mean by these notions. Of the many approaches and definitions, Veenhoven's (1996) is a proper basis for our topic. According to it, the concept of quality of life has two meanings: on the one hand, the existence of the conditions we consider necessary for a good life, and on the other, the good life as an experience. In terms of content, this model is similar to Michalkó's theory of quality of life, in which quality of life is divided into objective and subjective pillars (Michalkó, 2010). The former is made up of three factors of welfare: standard of living, lifestyle, and living conditions, whereas the latter is constituted by three key factors of well-being: satisfaction, happiness, and contentment. There have also been several internationally known studies on happiness (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991; Veenhoven, 2003), and several definitions of happiness have been posited. Work on the relationship between tourism and subjective quality of life began to appear in the international literature in the 1990s (Jeffres and Dobos, 1993; Richards, 1999).

In Hungarian tourism research, however, apart from one or two cases and research programmes, the relationship between tourism and quality of life received little attention initially. As far as we are aware, the first time that gender differences in this question have been investigated is heralded by the current study. The positive impact of environmental change on regeneration and the satisfaction of various human needs has been studied before, and tourism science has explored it in sufficient depth (Puczkó and Rátz, 1998; Michalkó, 2007). After the turn of the millennium, tourism research in Hungary has focused on tourism and happiness (Michalkó et al., 2009; Kovács, 2007; Kovács et al., 2006). This line of inquiry has attracted international attention, too, including interest from prestigious publishers (Puckó and Smith, 2011; Rátz and Michalkó, 2013). Research in recent years has extended the study to people with disabilities, where the impact of tourism on happiness has been repeatedly verified (Raffay-Danyi and Ernszt, 2021; Farkas et al., 2022). Professionals in the field today recognise the close link between experience and tourism, since the currently held definition of tourism states that it is a change of environment combined with a growth in experiences (Michalkó, 2007). This thought leads us to the direct link between tourism and happiness. In Csikszentmihalyi's work, happy moments are described as an experience of flow, with one of its illustrations being a touristic experience, skiing (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991).

Undoubtedly, all experienced travellers can provide some good examples from their own experiences of happiness, and so it is important to study the extent to which active participation in travel activities, "being a tourist", increases the happiness of the participant: whether it has an impact on their quality of life, and whether there exist any gender differences in this respect. This should not be a matter of indifference for policy makers either, as the continuous improvement of the quality of life of the population is one of the priorities of modern governance (Bianchi, 2007). In international tourism and quality of life studies, the focus is no longer restricted to the traveller – local residents and tourism service providers are also taken into account (Andereck et al., 2007). The work of Mei Pung et al. (2020) revealed that the transformational effect of tourism differs across genders: tourism exerts a stronger effect on women. With impulses from social media and many other consumer drivers, tourism is expected to continue to grow dynamically in the coming years (Krátki et al., 2022). We must therefore be aware of the impact of tourism on our lives. Be that as it may, in recent years the topic has been left out of the mainstream of tourism research in Hungary, even though, as Michalkó states (2010: 108), a society of happy people is more open to the world, more sensitive to environmental issues. This is one of the reasons that the publication of the results of our 2018 research holds potential in revealing the relationship between tourism and quality of life, tourism and happiness, in the context of an attitudinal analysis, and in highlighting significant gender differences.

### **Environmental impact of tourism; Responsible tourism**

Over-tourism is one of today's most topical tourism issues, the study of which is timely because many destinations are already struggling with its negative effects (Herntrei, 2019; Kagermeier and Erdmenger, 2019). Furthermore, Goodwin's view is seen as valid, according to which in the case of over-tourism, hosts and guests, locals and tourists, feel that there are too many visitors and that the quality of life or experience in the host area has deteriorated to an unacceptable degree, which runs afoul of the principles of responsible tourism (Goodwin, 2017). The solution to this situation (or at least a chance to avoid further worsening of the problems) lies in strengthening responsible tourism. In line with aspects of sustainable development, it has been examined whether it is important for domestic consumers that natural assets be adequately protected and that the economic benefits of tourism provide benefit to local residents as well. It is true for all

forms of tourism that uncontrolled development may cause more harm than good and that only in an appropriate framework and with appropriate regulation can its benefits be reaped, and the harmful consequences mitigated or eliminated (Inskeep, 2000). A change is necessary to ensure the popularity and further development of tourism, a change which ought to take place in terms of supply and consumer demand alike. This paper investigates the extent to which the Hungarian population is open to environmentally conscious and responsible consumer behaviour while travelling. Observations attest to significant differences between men and women as regards their perception of this issue. Recent views on sustainable tourism are convergence-based: it is believed that sustainable tourism is achievable for all types of tourism and is independent of the mass nature of tourism (Clarke, 1997; Inskeep, 2000). The definition of and research on sustainable tourism has been addressed by several leading scholars at the international level (Sharpley, 2012; Spinelli, 2021).

The aim of responsible travel is to maximise the potential social, economic, and environmental benefits of tourism on destinations while minimising its negative side effects. Its participants are therefore conscious consumers who, overcoming individual selfishness and avoiding hedonistic behaviours, seek not only to maximise their own experience of tourism, but also to optimise the positive impact of their travel. The special beauty and value of the tourism system is that it is often this behaviour that results in an optimal and long-lasting tourist experience (Gonda, 2017). According to the definition of the founding father of responsible tourism, Professor Harold Goodwin, founder of the Leeds-based International Centre for Responsible Tourism, responsible tourism minimises the negative impact of tourism on the natural, social, and cultural environment (Ashley et al., 2001). In addition, it promotes the conservation of natural and cultural heritage and the overall diversity of the world. Through a deeper engagement with local residents, it has the power to provide a genuine experience, to buttress a better understanding of the cultural and environmental issues related to tourism, and to contribute to the development of mutual respect between tourists and hosts. As the impact of tourism on the environment is tightly linked to sustainability, many organisations have turned their attention to the new research direction of sustainable tourism development. Add to all of this the fact that as tourism has become an increasingly important sector of the economy, contributing to economic growth and employment, the last three decades have seen an increase in research on the impact of tourism (Fodness, 2016). The European Union's tourism policy has become increasingly green, with a focus on the need to move towards carbon-neutral tourism (Conefrey and Hanrahan, 2022).

## METHODS

The present study is based on the results of an online survey involving 1,085 respondents, conducted in April and May 2018, which investigated the attitudes of the Hungarian population towards tourism from a generational perspective. Before finalizing questionnaire items, we tested the questions three times with focus groups of 10–12 people, followed by data collection by a professional enterprise specialized in the field. The survey is representative of the Hungarian population aged 15–74 by gender, age groups (10-year intervals), and residential region. The data were processed in two stages. The demographic data of respondents appear in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of respondents (%) (N=1,085) (Source: Own editing)

Gender	
Male	48.7
Female	51.3
Highest completed education	
Primary school	3.2
Vocational training	12.9
Vocational school diploma	20.4
High school diploma	16.1
Higher technical school	10.9
Bachelor	18.5
Master	17.1
No response	1.0
Age	
Young (15–34 years old)	24.2
Middle-aged (35–65)	51.1
Senior (65+)	24.7
Financial status	
Do well and can save up	6.8
Do well but can save little	37.9
Just above making ends meet, no saving up	37.1
Occasionally cannot make ends meet	8.0
Have regular financial woes	3.4
No response	6.7
Economic status	
Active, blue-collar	22.1
Active, white-collar	28.5
Student	3.9
Retired	29.2
Inactive	13.5
No response	2.8

In the first, primary (frequency) analyses were carried out, whereas, in the second, a demographic background analysis was conducted, statistically investigating with the SPSS package whether there was statistically verifiable variation in the responses of different demographic groups to survey items. Five variables were included in the analysis: gender, generations, type of municipality of residence, level of education, and subjective perception of income status. The present study documents results where a clear significant relationship was revealed between gender and responses to each of the questions examined. Special emphasis is therefore placed on highlighting gender differences in tourism consumption patterns and attitudes, analyzing results that show that in many cases, women’s attitudes to travel (e.g., to its safety) are markedly different from those of men. It is also striking that the impact of tourism on women’s well-being and sense of happiness is stronger than it is for men. The survey invited respondents to read several statements and to decide to what extent they agreed with each, quantifying this on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 meant strong, whereas 2 had slight disagreement; 4 indicated slight, whereas 5 had strong agreement. Posing some issues of interpretation of attitudes was the case of respondents choosing 3 on the scale as this showed neither rejection nor acceptance.

**RESULTS**

**1. Women make responsible and prudent decisions**

With the use of IBM SPSS statistical software, it is possible to test whether respondents’ answers are related to their gender significantly. The first striking difference between women and men is already evident in the choice of their travel destinations, with women clearly shown to choose destinations with caution, seeking safety: there is a 30–50% gender difference in attitudes towards safety (Table 2).

Table 2. Breakdown of responses to items on safety in the target area by gender (%) (Source: Own editing)

Statement \ Scale	Don't know/ prefer not to say	1: strong dis- agreement	2: slight dis- agreement	3: neither rejection nor acceptance	4: slight agreement	5: strong agreement	
Safety is the most important factor in my travel decision	Women	4.7	7.5	8.4	22.8	22.1	34.5
	Men	4.4	8.3	12.1	28.8	19.7	26.6
My travel decision depends on how safe the country is	Women	4.5	5.2	5.7	17.2	26.0	41.4
	Men	4.2	6.1	6.6	24.3	27.9	30.9
I am afraid of places where there has been recent violence, war	Women	5.0	8.8	7.7	17.2	16.8	44.4
	Men	4.9	7.8	11.3	25.1	21.6	29.3

In order to be able to make a decision with certainty and weigh up all the important factors influencing the decision, they need to find out about the place in question beforehand. There is a significant high level of favour of women’s answer to this question, which confirms that they tend to be more careful in their decisions (Figure 1). Making responsible choices also involves making decisions that are within the realistic financial means of the family budget, for example, by not giving in to temptation and choosing an expensive destination. Men are less consistent in this respect (Figure 2).

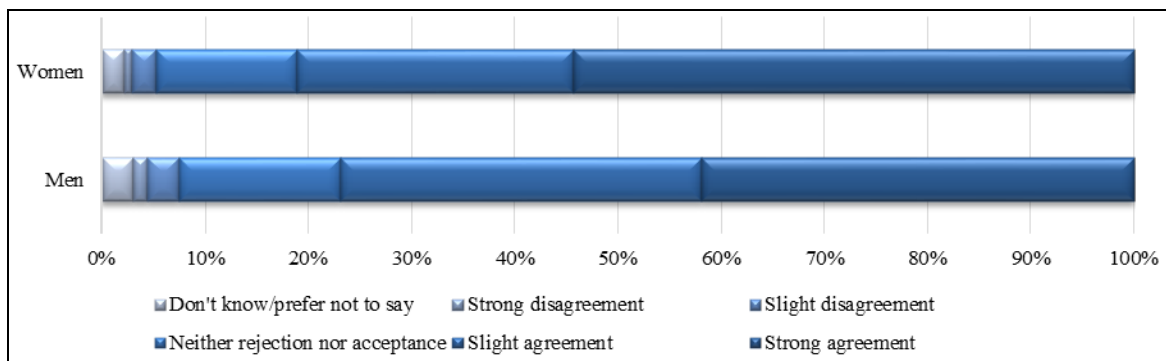


Figure 1. Breakdown of responses to the item about the prior information on the location by gender (Source: Own editing)

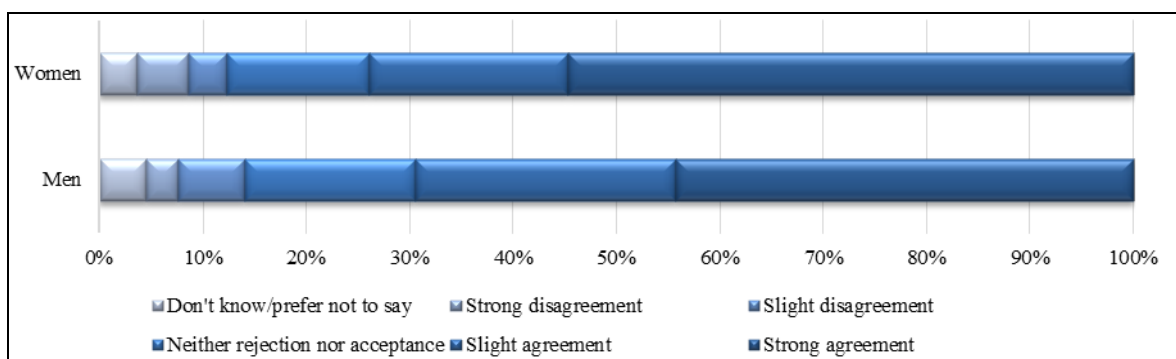


Figure 2. Breakdown of responses to the item “I will not choose a country as a destination that is expensive for me” by gender (Source: Own editing)

Considering the foregoing results, hypothesis H2, stating that women make more responsible decisions about tourism consumption than men, has been confirmed, so it is verified.

**2. Tourism is more important for women**

In examining this set of questions, an interesting and unexpected result surfaced. There were clear differences between male and female respondents in terms of the impact of tourism on quality of life. We can claim that tourism plays a greater role in women’s lives and thus it has a greater impact for them: the need to break out of the treadmill and have a significantly different experience is more pronounced in their case (Figure 3). This is likely also due to the fact that women generally have a heavier burden of housework and child-rearing than do men (Steinmetz et al., 2022). A distinct difference was documented across the genders in the perception that tourism makes life more fulfilling, with 57.7% of women respondents strongly agreeing with this statement, compared with 43.8% of men (Figure 4).

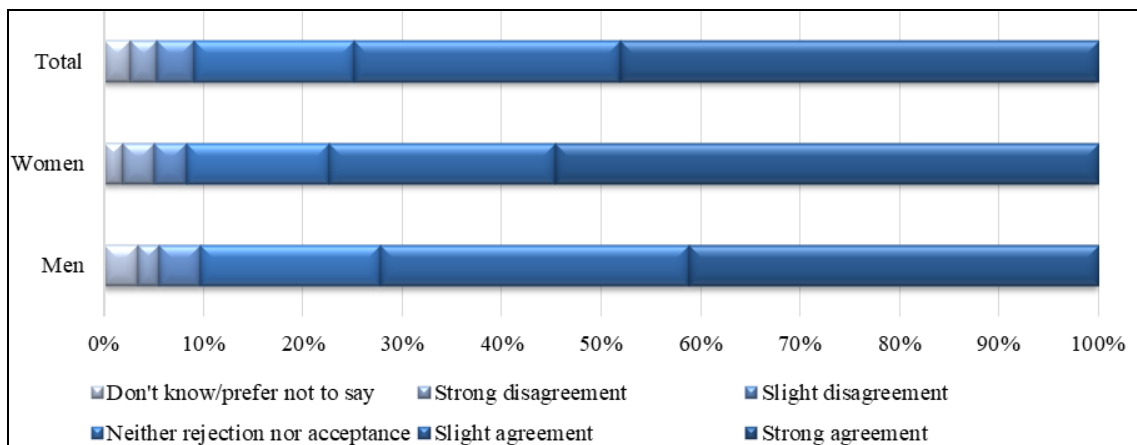


Figure 3. Breakdown of responses to the item “I want a completely different experience from everyday life when travelling” by gender (Source: Own editing)

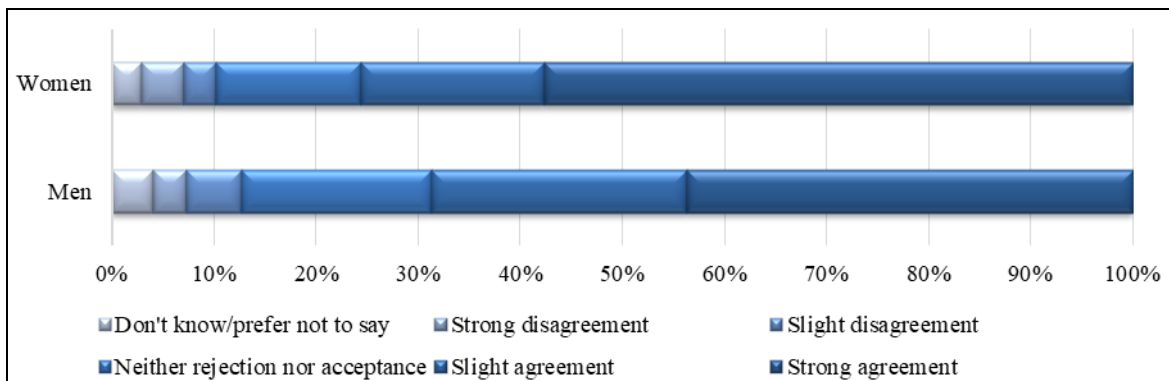


Figure 4. Breakdown of responses to the item “Travels/holidays make my life more fulfilling” by gender (Source: Own editing)

If it makes life more fulfilling, it is reasonable to assume that people will also be happier through travel. The question received a high rate of responses of agreement, with only a limited number of participants indicating disagreement. Still, it is striking that women in particular fully agreed with the statement, of whom 63.7% indicated total agreement, whereas only 47% of men did (Figure 5). This result is in line with that reported by Puny et al. (2020), according to which tourism experiences exert a stronger effect on women.

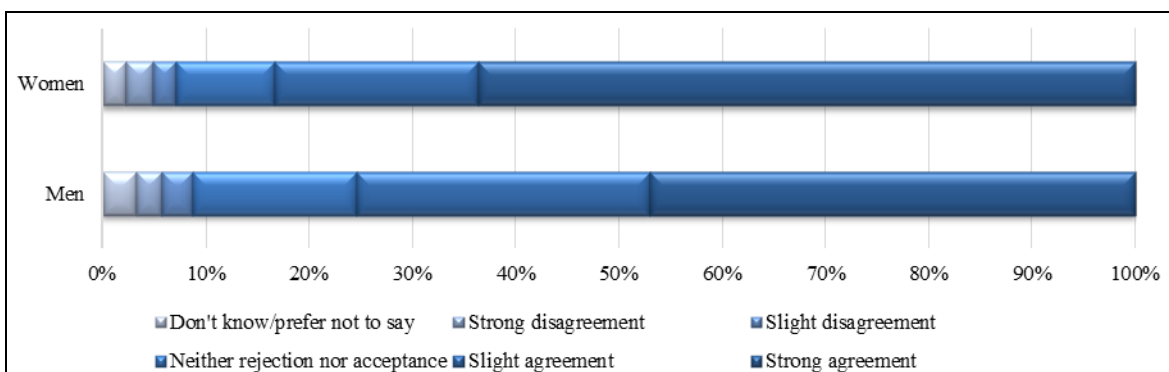


Figure 5. Breakdown of responses to the item “The experience of travelling/holidays makes me happier” by gender (Source: Own editing)

Almost half of women respondents agreed that travel is part of their lives (42.8%). When the rate of respondents who chose 4 on the scale (15%) is added, we find that almost 60% of female respondents agreed with the statement. No significant difference between men and women was revealed in this respect. The difference is rather in the strength of the acceptance of the claim: compared to women, far fewer men chose 5 (total agreement), while more men chose 4 (slight agreement) (Figure 6). The results above provide proof for the claim that women place a premium on leaving behind the everyday treadmill of life – they are eager to collect new experiences that make them happy. Tourism provides superior opportunities for that goal. When contrasting results for men and women, we can state that the statistical test confirms the claim that tourism plays a more important role in women’s lives, and thus hypothesis H3 is verified.

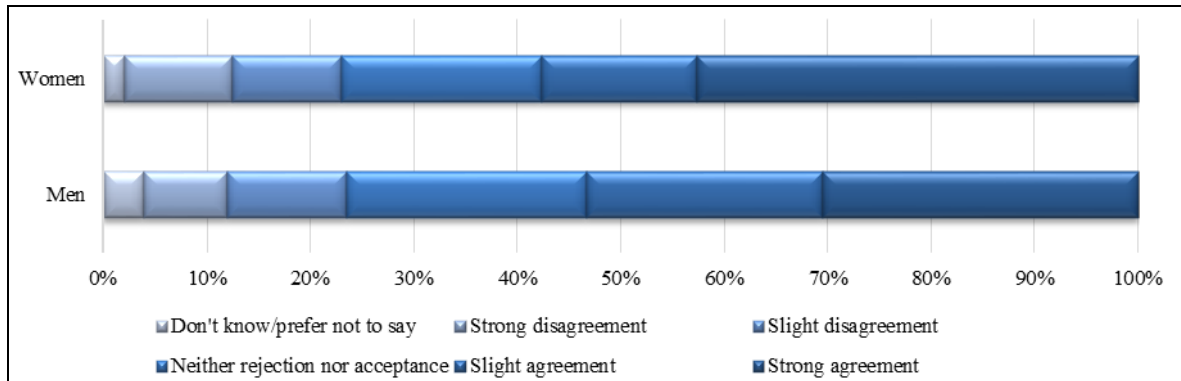


Figure 6. Breakdown of responses to the item “Travel/holidays are part of my life” by gender (Source: Own editing)

### 3. Gender differences in leisure travel consumption patterns

The survey asked several questions related to the Hungarian population’s activities in travel preparation, use of marketing tools, and activities during travel. Without wishing to be exhaustive, we highlighted a few questions where there was a strong statistical relationship between gender and the individual survey items. One of these is the influence of movies on the choice of destination. The growing popularity of film tourism is a widely studied and well-known issue, and the current investigation also shows that the real target group for film tourism is women.

When asked whether there are places that attract them because they saw a good film about them, almost twice as many women as men chose the strong agreement response (25.3% versus 13.4%). It was also revealed that while on holiday, women are less likely to choose sweet idleness and are more interested in visiting natural and cultural attractions, the difference especially marked in terms of cultural involvement (Tables 3 and 4).

Another major difference was found in how much participants were eager to get to know the holiday location: women reported this to be much more important than men. This is borne out by the fact that the number of women choosing the highest value is over 50% higher than the number of men, a very significant variation.

Table 3. Breakdown of responses to items on motivation of visit in the target area by gender (%) (Source: Own editing)

Statement \ Scale	Scale						
	Don't know/ prefer not to say	1: strong dis- agreement	2: slight dis- agreement	3: neither rejection nor acceptance	4: slight agreement	5: strong agreement	
Some places attract me because I have seen a good film about them	Women	3.1	9.2	8.3	25.5	28.7	25.3
	Men	3.4	10.2	10.8	30.7	31.4	13.4
When travelling I aim to get to know the places I visit	Women	5.0	8.8	7.7	17.2	16.8	44.4
	Men	4.9	7.8	11.3	25.1	21.6	29.3

Table 4. Breakdown of responses to items on preference of visit in the target area by gender (%) (Source: Own editing)

Statement \ Scale	Scale				
	Very frequently	Frequently	Seldom	Never	
Visiting nature sights	Women	32.1	44.3	19.0	4.5
	Men	24.7	47.5	22.1	5.7
Visiting cultural attractions	Women	39.6	44.6	11.5	4.3
	Men	28.2	48.7	18.4	4.7

### CONCLUSION

Tourism research has highlighted the importance of considering different aspects of safety when making consumer choices, with the current research also showing evidence that this is due to the different consumer attitudes of women compared to men. Women choose destinations with caution, seeking safety, with a 30–50% gender difference found in attitudes towards safety. To be able to decide on the safety of a destination, taking into account all the important factors influencing the decision, people should be informed about the place in advance, choosing a destination that is in line with the family’s financial means. The beneficial impact of tourism on the quality of life and subjective happiness is clear, as has been highlighted by several previous studies, with women and men alike reporting agreement.

However, our research shows that women are more eager to get away from the routine of everyday life and to benefit from travel/vacation experiences. In addition, there were clear differences between male and female respondents on the impact of tourism on quality of life. We can conclude that tourism plays a greater role in women's lives and has a greater impact on them: they have a stronger desire to gain experiences that are completely different from the everyday and more of them believe that travels/holidays make their lives more fulfilling. In this context, a high number agree with the statement that travel/holidays make them happy. It should be borne in mind, however, that everyone is entitled, as far as possible, to the enjoyment of the positive experiences of tourism. This is not merely an economic issue, but also a social one. The need for this is underlined by the fact that only 57.8% of women and 53.4% of men agreed with the statement "Travel is part of my life", indicating that there is room for improvement in this area.

Looking at tourism today, a note should also be made of the emergence and intensification of socially and environmentally undesirable side effects of tourism. Changes are needed to maintain and further develop the popularity of tourism, including changes in supply as well as in consumer demand. This study has brought to light that women are more open than men to adopt environmentally responsible consumer behaviours when travelling.

#### Limitations and suggestions for future studies

This study has built on the results of a project focusing on the differences in consumer behaviour across generations. The fact that there were additional statistically verifiable differences according to gender was revealed only in the post-analysis phase, which is the reason that the initial research questions did not include this particular phenomenon. However, there is no doubt at all that the study of this issue is justified as effective tourism marketing, product development, and tourism management need to be based on a fuller understanding of the consumption habits on the demand side. We therefore recommend that future research include surveys that directly tap into gender differences in consumer behaviour and attitudes.

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