



ANALYSIS OF TOURIST ATTRACTIVENESS FACTORS OF THE DJERDAP NATIONAL PARK WITH A FOCUS ON THE HOTEL INDUSTRY

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Abstract:

Protected areas are an important component of the tourism offerings for those who want to spend part of their vacation in areas with preserved natural and cultural heritage. Djerdap National Park (DJNP) boasts a rich, diverse, well-conserved environment alongside cultural treasures. DJNP represents a distinctive and well-rounded tourist entity that is, in many respects, unique and unparalleled in Europe and the world. DJNP has always attracted a large number of visitors due to its favorable conditions for various types of tourism throughout the year. The purpose of the paper is to analyze the factors that motivate tourists to visit DJNP, with a focus on the hotel industry. The survey collected data, and content analysis and descriptive statistics methods processed it. The research presented factors that influence the tourist attractiveness of DJNP. The analysis of the research results made it possible to discern the characteristics of tourist visits and the reasons for a visit, as well as to recognize the value of the visited area. The recommendation is to ensure continuous yearly monitoring of the visitor's needs and to plan activities and hotel accommodations that maintain serenity and preserve the natural environment.

Keywords:

cultural heritage, preserved nature, tourist motivation, tourist offer, visitor needs.

INTRODUCTION

One of the modern directions in tourism development is the visit and stay of tourists in protected areas such as national parks and nature parks. This type of active vacation allows tourists to enjoy a unique cultural and historical heritage, an authentic gastronomic experience, relaxation, and mental rehabilitation from the urban lifestyle.

DJNP is the largest national park in Serbia, boasting diverse and rich natural and cultural heritage, with favorable conditions for organizing numerous forms of tourism throughout the year. The purpose of this research is to determine and analyze the factors that motivate tourists to visit DJNP, with a special emphasis on the analysis of the accommodation capacity of this protected area and the participation of the hotel industry in supply and demand.

The survey technique was used to collect data, which were subsequently processed and analyzed using the method of descriptive statistics with the help of the SPSS program.

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Using the content analysis method and the SWOT analysis technique, the authors presented the factors that influence the tourist attractiveness of DJNP. The characteristics of tourist visits, the reasons for a visit, and the value of the visited area were reviewed. Continuous monitoring of visitor needs throughout the year, planning of tourist activities that will contribute to the preservation of peace and the natural environment, the use of modern distribution channels and promotion in the hotel industry, and the synergy of public and private partnership are recommended in order to improve the tourist competitiveness of the national park.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Protected areas form the basis of national and international nature protection strategies due to their role in protecting biodiversity and natural and cultural heritage (Marić *et al.*, 2014; Isabel & Antonio, 2022; Trišić *et al.*, 2023a). Nature is a type of strategic business area within the national strategy for the development of tourism, encompassing national parks and nature parks (Government of the Republic of Serbia, 2016). From a long-term perspective, protected areas represent the obligation of all generations, on the one hand, to prevent excessive exploitation of natural resources and, on the other hand, to enable people to stay in nature giving them a sense of freedom, health, authenticity, and peace (Trišić *et al.*, 2023b; Trišić *et al.* 2023c). Nature parks are created for the preservation and valorization of natural and cultural heritage in rural areas. However, due to their tourist appeal, these parks often include recreational and tourist activities that not infrequently pose threats to sustainability (Javier & Šadeikaitė, 2022) while simultaneously contributing to the local socio-economic development (Milojković, 2023a). To increase the awareness of tourists and the local community (Bookbinder, 1998; Valentine, 1992), environmental education plays a crucial role in preserving nature in its original form (Widawski, 2018) and promoting cultural values for the protection of cultural heritage (Milojković, 2023b). To maintain ecological integrity in protected areas, accommodations must have environmentally dedicated and knowledgeable management. Erdogan and Tosun (2009, p. 406) found “that tourism accommodations have low performance on energy efficiency, water conservation, responsible waste management, communication, environmental training, the environmental awareness, necessary knowledge about and interest in the environmental protection and environmental policy”. According to the research conveyed by Mandić and Petrić (2021), hotels that gravitate to the location of the national park charge premium prices; conversely, as the distance from the national park increases, there is a downward trend in prices. Therefore, protected areas are part of an integrated tourist product that affects the price of complementary tourist services, visitor satisfaction and destination competitiveness.

Half a century ago, precisely in 1974, the DJNP was proclaimed as the largest nature museum in Serbia, covering an area of 63,786.48 ha in the north-eastern part of Serbia, bordering Romania (PLC Djerdap National Park. 2021). It represents a unique natural, cultural-historical and archaeological phenomenon in both Europe and the world with over 50 types of forest communities, 35 of which are relict, with six developmental vegetation series, which is an exceptional case in Europe (PLC Djerdap National Park. 2021; The Parks Dinarides network, 2023). Within the Djerdap area, 62 immovable cultural assets are protected or planned for protection, comprising 9 categorized, 27 registered, 15 recorded, and 11 identified assets (Biosfond, 2017). The following immovable cultural assets are categorized: cultural assets of exceptional importance (7) – Lepenski Vir, Trajanova Tabla, Pontes (Trajan’s Bridge), Golubac Fortress, Diana - Karataš, Kraku Lu Jordan and Rudna Glava; a cultural asset of great importance - Fetislam; and protected cultural heritage - the remains of the Kastel fortification on Miroč (Biosfond, 2017). Research conducted by Brankov *et al.* (2015) showed that the population DJNP recognizes tourism as a driver of development and has a positive attitude towards it, in addition to the fact that approximately 40% of the surveyed residents benefit from tourism. The residents emphasized the need for enriching the tourist offer, greater involvement of the local population and enhancements in the management of the protected area, through a focus on educating young people in the field of sustainable tourism. The researchers Pavlović *et al.* (2020) observed motivational factors for tourists to visit DJNP such as new experiences and events, relaxation, the acquisition of new knowledge related to cultural and educational motivation, and the creation and realization of tourist products. They concluded that local self-government, residents and relevant institutions should be integrated so that the basic principles of sustainability are applied in practice. DJNP provides various forms of tourist activities, ranging from hiking,



organized and marked walking trails through beautiful landscapes and nature reserves ending at viewpoints, to 110 km cycling routes along the Danube river that connect the Atlantic coast with the Black Sea. Additionally, visitors can take a tour of the Djerdap Gorge by boat or ship, engage in bird watching, hunting and fishing tourism (The Parks Dinarides network, 2023). Djerdap is the first area in Serbia nominated to join the UNESCO Global Network of Geoparks, which contributes to the global promotion of DJNP through promotional programs and activities of the national and local tourist organizations, as well as other stakeholders in the country and the surrounding area (Ekolist, 2023). Since 1989, the national park has been managed by the Public Enterprise “Djerdap National Park”, which, in addition to the mission of protecting nature and cultural heritage, also includes activities within the national park, related to tourism, sports, and recreation, as well as the development of educational and scientific research activities (PE “Djerdap National Park”, 2023). From the aspect of cultural heritage promotion, the Public Enterprise “Djerdap National Park” highlights the following sites: Golubac Fortress, Lepenski Vir, Trajan’s Table, Diana Karataš, and National Architecture (PE “Djerdap National Park”, 2023). This company organizes, coordinates, and plans all kinds of visits and tours within the National Park through its guard service or the educated guide service of other organizations, whereas the tourist organizations and tourist centers of three municipalities - Golubac, Majdanpek, and Kladovo - are responsible for the tourist promotion of the DJNP (PE “Djerdap National Park”, 2023).

According to the information from the Tourist Organization of the Golubac municipality, there are various types of accommodation in this area. This includes: 29 apartments (*1 apartment categorized with one star, 12 apartments categorized with two stars, 10 with three stars, and 6 with four stars*) with a total of 116 accommodation units; 1 lodging with 5 accommodation units; 6 vacation homes (*1 with one star, 3 with two stars, 1 each with three and four stars*) with 23 accommodation units; 3 rooms (*2 with one star, 1 with three stars*) with 8 accommodation units; 1 rural tourist household categorized with three stars and 2 accommodation units; 1 camping site with 4 accommodation units; and 1 two-star hotel with 120 accommodation units (Turistička organizacija Golubac, 2023). Based on information from the Tourism Organization of the Municipality of Majdanpek, there are 2 hotels, 1 of which is categorized with two stars and has 465 accommodation units and 1 with three stars and 120 accommodation units. In the municipality of Majdanpek, there are 25 private accommodation facilities, with 8 facilities categorized with two stars and 50 accommodation units, 14 with three stars and 95 accommodation units, and 3 with four stars and 13 accommodation units (Turistička organizacija Majdanpek, 2023). According to data from the Tourism Organization of the Municipality of Kladovo, there are two high-category hotels in the area with a total of 189 rooms, 9 apartments, and 6 suites. In the municipality of Kladovo, there are also 27 private accommodations, including 14 apartments (*1 with one star, 2 with two stars, 3 with three stars, and 8 with four stars*), 4 vacation homes (*one each with two and three stars, and 2 with four stars*), 6 rooms (*one each with one and three stars and 4 with two stars*), and 3 rural tourist households (*one with two stars and 2 with four stars*) (Turistička organizacija Kladovo, 2023).

METHODOLOGY

To assess factors that motivate tourists to visit DJNP, the authors set up four hypotheses:

- H1: The leading reasons for visitors to visit DJNP are visiting natural and cultural attractions in the protected area.
- H2: Hotels are the main choice of tourists during their stay in DJNP.
- H3: The most attractive locality for visitors to DJNP is “Golubački Grad”.
- H4: The preservation of nature protection, cultural heritage, and spreading information about activities and attractions require the most attention.

In pursuit of the research goal, which involves the analysis of factors that motivate tourists to visit DJNP, the authors employed a survey technique and secondary data. A simple random sample was used for the research, ensuring that all members of the population had an equal chance of being selected. One of the advantages of a simple random sample is precisely that it does not require extensive knowledge of the population, while one of the disadvantages is that the sample does not have to be entirely representative of all properties (sample size, population homogeneity, etc.), especially if it is not sufficiently large.



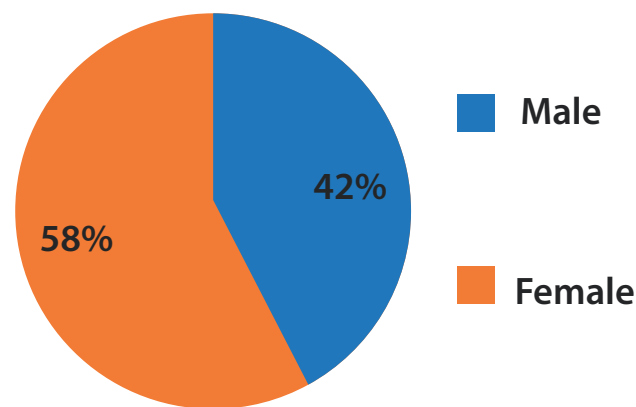
Despite this limitation, the research sample was suitable and used for its intended purposes, providing valuable insights into the current state of mining, and accordingly, the research results hold significance.

An anonymous questionnaire consisting of close-ended questions used for collecting data. The first two questions in the questionnaire were related to demographic attributes such as gender and the level of education. The third, fourth, and fifth questions delved into the reasons for the visit, the localities visited, and the accommodation facilities where the respondents stayed if they came for more than one day. The last question of the questionnaire focused on their opinions regarding the need to improve the DJNP itself. The survey, conducted in August 2022, included 60 respondents. The collected data were processed using the descriptive statistics method. Additionally, the content analysis method was employed to develop a SWOT matrix, outlining the factors that influence the tourist attractiveness of DJNP. The discussion of the research results was enriched with secondary data obtained from relevant tourist organizations in the DJNP area.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Applying the descriptive statistical analysis, the authors observed that the majority of respondents were female 35 (58%), compared to male 25 (42%) (Figure 1).

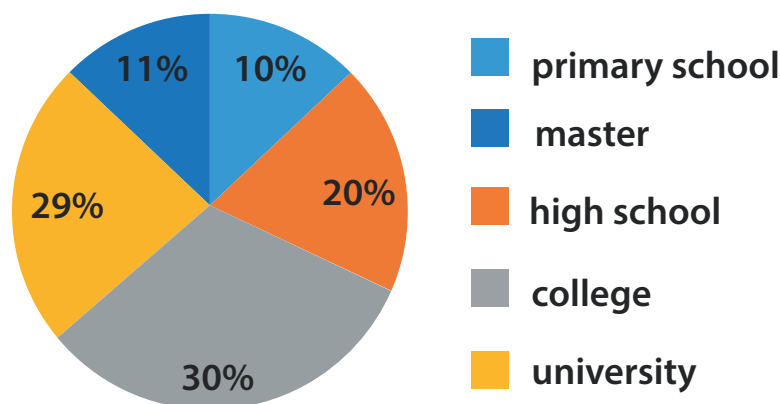
Figure 1. The analysis of respondents according to the grouping variable gender.



Source: Author's calculation.

Figure 2. presents the results of the research that indicate the educational structure of the respondents, 18 (30%) of the respondents completed college, 17 (29%) university, 12 (20%) high school, 7 (11%) master, and 6 (10%) primary school.

Figure 2. The analysis of respondents according to the grouping variable education.



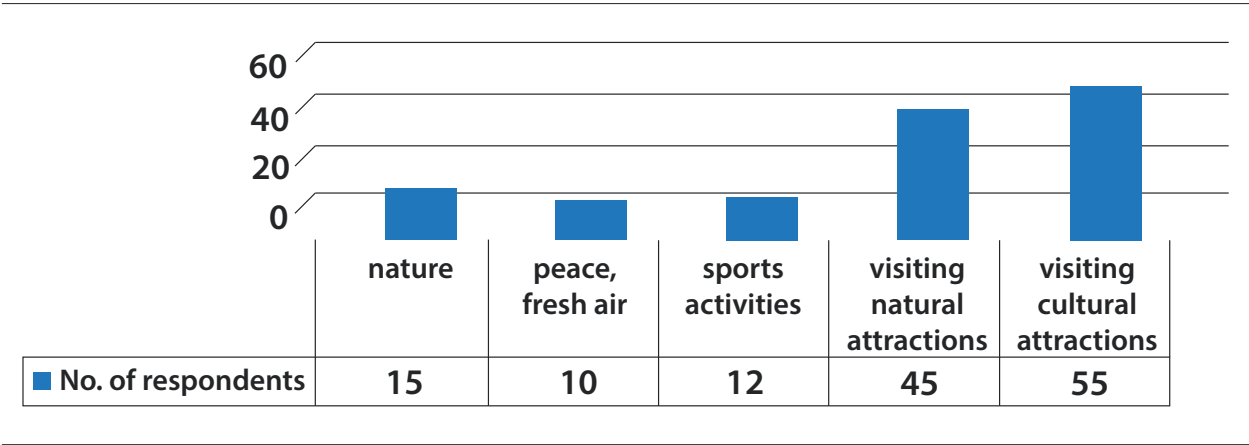
Source: Author's calculation.



Seventy percent of respondents have an education higher than high school level, indicating a prominence of educated individuals in the sample and enhancing the validity of the collected data.

Figure 3. presents the results of the analysis of respondents’ motives for visiting DJNP. Respondents could choose more than one answer to this question. The majority decided to visit DJNP for cultural attractions 55 (92%) and natural attractions 45 (75%). This confirms the H1 hypothesis. Other motives included nature, sports activities, peace, and fresh air, with 15 (25%), 12 (20%), and 10 (17%) respondents respectively. The motives of the visit indicate the level of perception of the different values of the protected area. All recognized values are the potential space for future development, but of course, their development role depends on environmental factors such as political, economic, sociocultural, technological, as well as legal and environmental factors (Botti, 2022). Awareness of the heterogeneity and interconnected values of the natural and social environment of protected areas significantly contributes to their recognition.

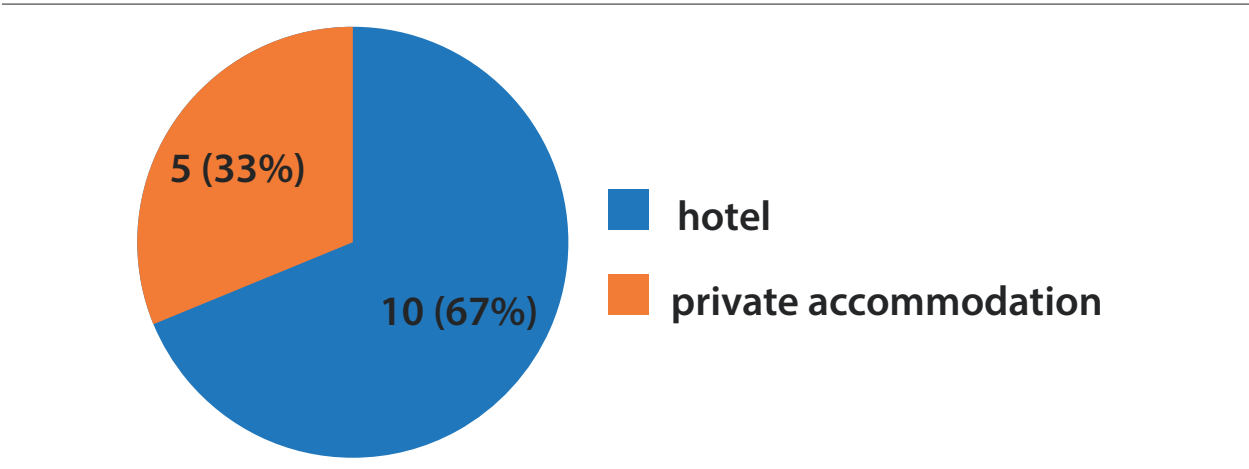
Figure 3. The analysis of respondents according to the grouping variable visitor motives.



Source: Author’s calculation.

Figure 4. presents the analysis of the results regarding the choice of accommodation facilities by tourists in DJNP. Out of 60 respondents, 15 (25%) stayed more than one day in DJNP, where 10 (67%) respondents chose private accommodation, and 5 (33%) opted for a hotel. This did not confirm the H2 hypothesis.

Figure 4. The analysis of respondents according to the grouping variable accommodation.



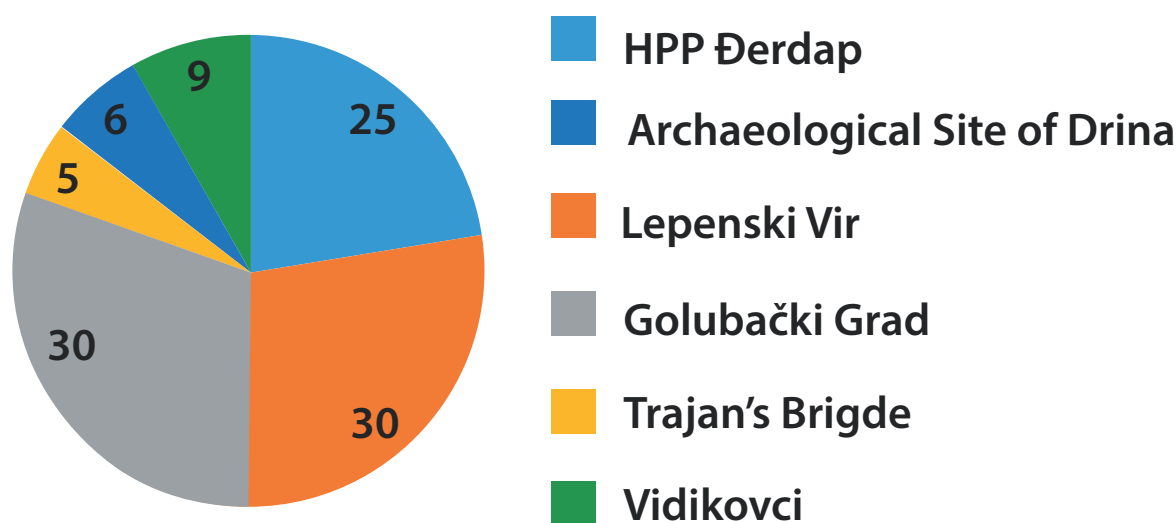
Source: Author’s calculation.



The structure of accommodation in the DJNP area is dominated by private accommodation, with more than 90 facilities (apartments, lodgings, holiday homes, rural tourist households, rooms, and camping) and about 400 accommodation units of the following accommodation categories: 6% with one star, 34% with two stars, 35% with three stars and 24% with four stars.¹ There are 5 hotels in the area of the national park, 2 having two stars, 2 with four stars and 1 with three stars.² Two-star hotels offer 585 accommodation units, three-star hotels provide 120 accommodation units, while high-category hotels boast around 500 accommodation units.³ In total, the hotel industry in the area of the national park offers more than 1,200 accommodation units, which is three times more than the capacity of private accommodation.⁴ Understanding why the respondents favoured private accommodation over hotels requires a more extensive investigation of visitor needs and preferences, on the one hand, and the hotels' business policy, on the other.

Figure 5. indicates that the Lepenski Vir locality, visited by 30 (50%) respondents, Golubački Grad, visited by 30 (50%), and Djerdap Hydroelectric Power Plant (HPP Djerdap), visited by 25 (42%), attracted the greatest attention of respondents. This confirmed the H3 hypothesis. Less frequented were the viewpoints of DJNP, visited by 9 (15%) respondents, the Archaeological Site of Diana by 6 (10%), and Trajan's Bridge by 5 (8%). Respondents could provide multiple answers to this question.

Figure 5. The analysis of respondents according to the grouping variable attractive locality.



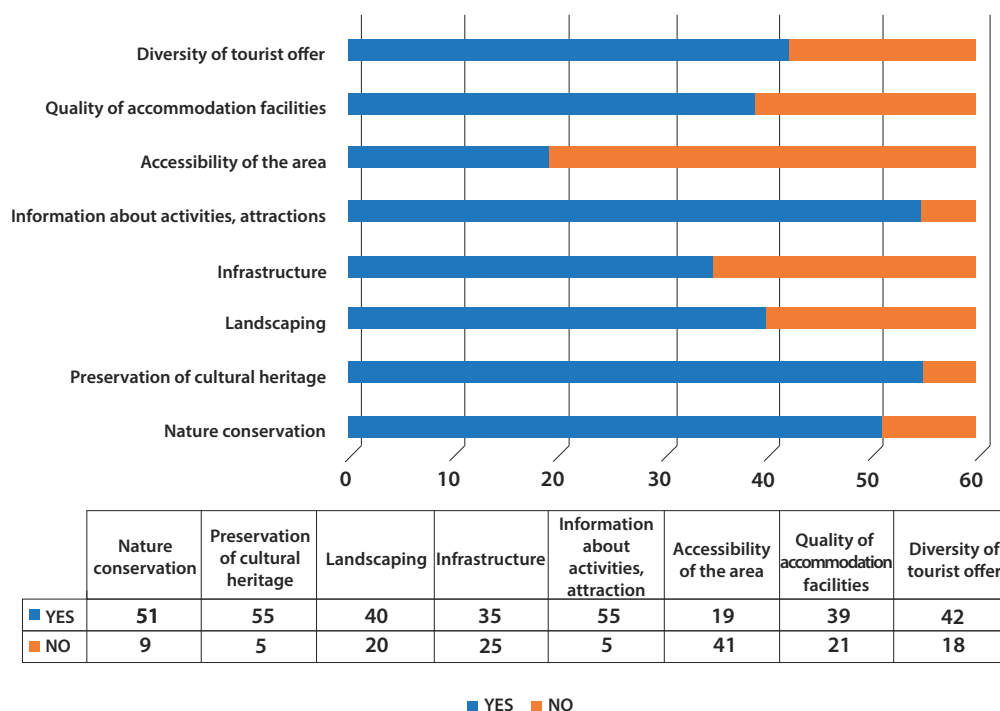
Source: Author's calculation.

An important section of the questionnaire addressed opinions on the improvement of the DJNP area, which would positively contribute to the development of tourism. Responses in Figure 6. showed that, according to the respondents, the highest priority should be given to the preservation of cultural heritage, 55 (92%), information about activities and attractions, 55 (92%), and nature protection, 51 (85%). This confirmed the H4 hypothesis. Following these priorities are the need to enhance the diversity of the tourist offer, 42 (70%), improve the space, 40 (67%), enhance the quality of accommodation facilities, 39 (65%), address infrastructure, 35 (58%), and finally, improve the accessibility of area, 19 (32%).

- 1 Authors' calculation according to (Turistička organizacija Golubac , 2023), (Turistička organizacija Kladovo, 2023) & (Turistička organizacija Majdanpek, 2023).
- 2 Authors' calculation according to (Turistička organizacija Golubac , 2023), (Turistička organizacija Kladovo, 2023) & (Turistička organizacija Majdanpek, 2023).
- 3 Authors' calculation according to (Turistička organizacija Golubac , 2023), (Turistička organizacija Kladovo, 2023) & (Turistička organizacija Majdanpek, 2023).
- 4 Authors' calculation according to (Turistička organizacija Golubac , 2023), (Turistička organizacija Kladovo, 2023) & (Turistička organizacija Majdanpek, 2023).



Figure 6. The analysis of respondents according to the grouping variable DJNP area improvement.



Source: Author's calculation.

Taking into consideration the results of the research and using the content analysis method, the authors prepared the SWOT matrix illustrating the factors that influence the tourist attractiveness of DJNP (Figure 7.).

Figure 7. The SWOT matrix of factors that influence the tourist attractiveness of DJNP.

Strengths	Weaknesses
- Favorable geographical position - Existing tourist facilities - Unique ecosystem - International importance - Protection of bio and geodiversity - Cultural and historical heritage - Sports and recreational content - Favorable conditions for organic production - Untouched nature	- Inadequate treatment of wastewater - Insufficient infrastructure investments - Lack of major manifestations - Weak promotion - Bad demographic situation - Weak cooperation between actors of the tourism industry (between the public and private sectors and within the private sector)
Opportunities	Threats
- Creation of a unique tourist product - Branding of the tourist destination - International cooperation and the possibility of using pre-accession EU funds - The potential of the Danube - Expanding the offer and improving quality - Improved cooperation of the local community, - Products of local character - Development of renewable resources	- Increasing pressure on the environment due to mass tourism - Climate changes - Serbia is not yet a member of the EU - Economy in transition - Competition in the Balkan Region and globally - Failure to comply with environmental protection regulations - Illegal construction - Unplanned use of DJNP resources

Source: Author's calculation.

To enhance the tourist attraction of DJNP, it is necessary to systemically and systematically address the factors that represent weaknesses and threats and turn them into strengths and opportunities. Simultaneously, efforts should be intensified in areas already identified as strengths and opportunities of this tourist destination.



CONCLUSIONS

The rich historical and cultural heritage, along with the traditions and customs of the DJNP area, in synergy with its exceptional natural environment, are leading factors in the attractiveness of visitors and carrying capacity of this protected area. Regarding accommodation preferences in DJNP, tourists predominantly prefer complementary accommodation capacities over less represented basic ones. Taking into consideration that the number of accommodation units in hotels in this area is more dominant than the number of accommodation units in private accommodation, as well as that the respondents opted to stay in private accommodation, there is a need for further research and detailed studies of tourist needs, opportunities and hotel business policies. Given the greater interest of visitors in exploring key localities such as Lepenski Vir, Golubački Grad, and HPP Djerdap, it is imperative for stakeholders in the tourism industry - both at the national park and at the national levels - to prioritize the creation of innovative tourist programs and promotional activities centered on the aforementioned localities. Aligning with the respondents' suggestions for the development of the national park, particular emphasis should be placed on the preservation of cultural heritage, information on activities and attractions, and measures for nature protection. Moreover, considering that more than half of the respondents emphasized the need to work on improving the diversity of the tourist offerings, spatial enhancement, quality upgrades in accommodation facilities, and infrastructure development, these aspects demand focused attention.

Only a quarter of the visitors to DJNP participated in the survey, which represents a notable limitation of the research. Further research, with a larger respondent pool at the DJNP site, is recommended. Furthermore, it was observed that the official websites of the companies that manage the national park and local tourist organizations, which promote the park's tourist offerings, are mostly in the Serbian language. For better promotion of natural and cultural heritage, as well as accommodation, events, recreation, and sports, the authors recommend that the official Internet pages should be available in several foreign languages, featuring up-to-date content. Additionally, they suggest more intensive promotion on social networks, aligning with global trends in tourism and hospitality. Collaboration with key stakeholders for the development of tourism in the area of the national park is also recommended for hotel companies.

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