



UNTAPPED TOURISM POTENTIAL OF SUBOTICA AND ITS SURROUNDINGS: INSPIRATION FROM PÉCS AS A EUROPEAN EXAMPLE OF GOOD PRACTICE

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Abstract:

This paper explores the untapped tourism potential of Subotica and its surroundings by drawing inspiration from Pécs as a European example of good practice. Based on the hypothesis that Subotica can significantly enhance its attractiveness and competitiveness by applying successful strategies from Pécs, the study analyzes tourists' perceptions of Pécs' cultural, natural, and infrastructural resources. A structured survey was conducted among 184 respondents using a five-point Likert scale, with data analyzed through descriptive statistics and Pearson's chi-square test. The results highlight the importance of architecture, cultural events, multicultural tradition, infrastructure, wine tourism, accessibility, digital tools, destination identity, and staff hospitality in shaping visitor satisfaction and loyalty. These findings provide valuable implications for Subotica, which possesses comparable resources such as Art Nouveau architecture, Palić and Ludaš Lakes, Subotica Sand, multicultural heritage, vineyards, rural tourism, and major cultural manifestations. Practical recommendations include the spatial zoning of tourism resources into cultural-historical, eco-rural, wine, event-based, and recreational zones, alongside investments in infrastructure, digital accessibility, and staff training. The study confirms the hypothesis and contributes to sustainable tourism planning by linking empirical evidence from Pécs with strategic directions for Subotica's development.

Keywords:

Subotica, Pécs, tourism potential, destination zoning, cultural heritage, sustainable tourism.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism potential refers to the overall capacity of a destination to attract, accommodate, and satisfy visitors through the effective use of its cultural, natural, social, and economic assets (Zhou *et al.*, 2024; Panić *et al.*, 2025; Vujko *et al.*, 2025a). This concept implies not only the presence of valuable resources but also the ability of a destination to organize, integrate, and market these resources in a way that creates meaningful experiences for tourists (Arsić *et al.*, 2025). It is closely linked to the concept of tourism resources, which include both natural elements—such as landscapes, climate, biodiversity, and water bodies—and anthropogenic elements, such as cultural heritage, architectural landmarks, local traditions, gastronomy, festivals, and events (Ahmadi *et al.*, 2018; Banerjee *et al.*, 2024).

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Together, these resources form the essential foundation upon which tourism products and services are built (Cvijanović *et al.*, 2025). The significance of identifying, classifying, and valorizing tourism resources lies in their role as the cornerstone for tourism development, destination competitiveness, and long-term sustainability (Kafle *et al.*, 2018). Properly managed, tourism resources not only generate economic growth but also preserve cultural identity, strengthen social cohesion, and encourage regional cooperation (Vujko *et al.*, 2025b). In this sense, tourism resources must be understood not simply as static assets but as dynamic components of development strategies, requiring careful management, innovation, and integration into broader regional development policies (Slabbert & Du Preez, 2021; Zientara *et al.*, 2024).

Subotica and its surroundings represent an underexplored yet highly promising area for tourism development within the wider Pannonian region (Vujko *et al.*, 2018). The city is renowned for its exceptional architectural heritage, particularly its Art Nouveau buildings, which position it among the most architecturally distinctive cities in Central Europe (Tepavčević & Gršić, 2016). Importantly, Subotica is an integral part of the **European Cultural Route of the Council of Europe—the Art Nouveau Route** (European Institute of Cultural Routes, 2025), which significantly enhances its cultural visibility and provides a competitive advantage in the international tourism market. This designation not only affirms the city's architectural value but also strengthens its position within a transnational framework of shared European heritage, fostering opportunities for cultural exchange, branding, and sustainable tourism development. Equally important is the religious and cultural diversity of the city, shaped by centuries of coexistence among Hungarians, Serbs, Croats, Bunjevci, and other communities (Dmitrović Šaponja & Gravorac, 2017). This multicultural character has produced a rich tradition of festivals, events, and culinary practices that continue to shape the city's contemporary identity. In addition to these cultural assets, the natural environment surrounding Subotica—including Palić Lake, Ludaš Lake, and the unique steppe landscapes—provides opportunities for recreation, ecotourism, wellness, and health-oriented tourism (Gaudenyi *et al.*, 2018). The combination of these resources creates a multidimensional basis for positioning Subotica as a distinctive and sustainable tourism destination, capable of appealing to both domestic and international visitors.

In designing strategies for tourism development, it is instructive to draw lessons from cities that have successfully revitalized their cultural and natural assets while simultaneously achieving international visibility (Kiss & Kiss, 2018). Pécs, a Hungarian city located in close geographical proximity to Subotica, stands out as a relevant European example of best practice (Fekete, 2022). As the European Capital of Culture in 2010, Pécs demonstrated how the integration of cultural heritage, creative industries, and urban regeneration can transform a city into a vibrant tourist hub (Kántor *et al.*, 2018). The revitalization of its historic center, the adaptive reuse of cultural facilities, and the development of a diversified event calendar have enabled Pécs to strengthen its attractiveness while ensuring sustainability. The city's approach to valorizing its multicultural past, investing in cultural infrastructure, and promoting sustainable visitor management has not only enhanced its competitive position in the European tourism market but has also inspired smaller destinations across the region. For Subotica, the experience of Pécs offers valuable insights into how underutilized cultural and natural resources can be converted into engines of development and identity promotion.

By comparison, Subotica possesses numerous predispositions for adopting a similar model of development. Its rich multicultural heritage, strategic geographical location near the borders of Hungary and Croatia, and tradition of cultural manifestations provide a strong basis for creating tourism products that are authentic, diverse, and sustainable. The surrounding areas, with their preserved ecosystems, bird habitats, rural tourism potential, and gastronomy rooted in local traditions, further reinforce Subotica's capacity to emerge as a sustainable and competitive tourism destination in the region. Moreover, opportunities for cross-border cooperation and the integration of Subotica into regional cultural routes and transnational projects—particularly through its participation in the Art Nouveau Route—further increase the city's potential to attract a wider international audience. Leveraging best practices from Pécs, while adapting them to the specific local context, could enable Subotica to fully unlock its untapped tourism potential and secure a stronger position within European tourism flows.



The present study is based on the initial hypothesis (H) that the untapped tourism potential of Subotica and its surroundings can be significantly valorized and enhanced through the application of best practices exemplified by Pécs as a European destination, thereby contributing to increased attractiveness, competitiveness, and the sustainable development of tourism in this region. The main subject of the research is the analysis and valorization of the tourism resources of Subotica and its surroundings, with particular emphasis on tourists' perceptions and attitudes toward the city's tourism offer, taking Pécs as a model of good practice. For this purpose, the research employs the results of a survey conducted among tourists in Pécs, designed to identify key factors contributing to the quality of the tourism experience and the overall attractiveness of the destination.

The aim of the paper is to provide a systematic analysis of the current state and tourism potential of Subotica, to conduct valorization and spatial zoning of its resources, and to formulate recommendations for improving the tourism offer and achieving sustainable tourism development in the region. Using Pécs as a model of a successful European tourist destination and relying on survey results, the research seeks to translate best practices into a feasible strategy for Subotica. In line with this objective, the study sets out several tasks: first, to collect and analyze the opinions of tourists in Pécs through a structured questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale, focusing on perceptions of architecture, cultural supply, infrastructure, and other tourism attributes; second, to compare the perceptions of Pécs tourists with the valorization of tourism resources in Subotica; third, to evaluate the tourism potential of Subotica and its surroundings on the basis of collected data and spatial zoning; fourth, to examine statistical differences in tourist perceptions according to demographic characteristics, including gender and age groups; and finally, to formulate recommendations for the development of sustainable tourism in Subotica based on the example of Pécs and the obtained research findings. By addressing these tasks, the study aims to bridge the gap between theoretical frameworks of tourism potential and their practical application in regional contexts, thereby contributing to both academic knowledge and the sustainable development of tourism practice.

METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted on a sample of 184 respondents, with an almost equal gender distribution—93 men (50.5%) and 91 women (49.5%). Such balance allows for a comparative analysis of male and female attitudes toward tourism experiences in the destination of Pécs. The age structure of the sample predominantly includes middle-aged and older groups: the largest category is 45–54 years (30.4%), followed by 55–64 years (28.3%) and respondents aged 65 and above (15.8%). Younger groups are less represented, which suggests that the surveyed population largely consists of mature tourists with specific interests and expectations. The educational level of the respondents is relatively high: the majority completed secondary education (53.3%), while 39.1% hold higher or university-level degrees, and a smaller proportion reported only primary education (2.2%) or completed master's/doctoral studies (5.4%). This educational structure suggests a generally well-educated sample, which may influence cultural and educational preferences when choosing tourism activities. Data collection was carried out using a structured questionnaire containing a series of statements related to different aspects of the tourist experience in Pécs. All statements were evaluated using a five-point Likert scale, where respondents could indicate their level of agreement, ranging from “Strongly disagree” (1) to “Strongly agree” (5). This approach enabled a detailed and nuanced analysis of tourist attitudes and perceptions. The questionnaires were distributed through a combination of face-to-face and online surveys during field research in Pécs, conducted between March and August 2024. Respondents were informed in advance about the purpose of the research and the voluntary nature of participation, with assurances of anonymity and confidentiality of their data.

The data were processed using descriptive statistics to present the basic characteristics of the sample (gender, age, education). To analyze attitudes, frequency distributions of responses on the Likert scale were applied. For the assessment of statistically significant differences in perceptions between male and female respondents, Pearson's chi-square test of independence (χ^2 test) was used. The test was applied to recategorized Likert-scale responses (collapsed into three categories to increase reliability: “Disagree/No opinion,” “Neutral/Important,” and “Agree/Very important”). The significance level was set at $p < 0.05$. Statistically significant differences point to the existence of gender-based variations in perceptions, which are important for segmentation and targeting the tourism offer. The study was conducted in accordance with ethical research principles.



In addition to the survey, a valorization of key tourism elements of Subotica was carried out, based on the collected evaluations and other relevant factors (e.g., cultural significance, attractiveness, accessibility). The valorization aimed to identify and rank tourism potentials, providing the foundation for further spatial analysis. Based on the results of the valorization, the territory of Subotica was zoned according to tourism significance and type of offer, clearly defining areas of high, medium, and lower tourism priority. This enabled more precise planning and orientation of development measures in line with the specific features of individual zones. All respondents provided informed consent, and their personal data were protected and used exclusively for research purposes.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The research sample included a total of 184 respondents, with an almost equal gender distribution—93 men (50.5%) and 91 women (49.5%). Such balance ensures reliable analysis and comparison of male and female attitudes regarding tourism experiences and destination perceptions. Concerning age structure, most respondents belonged to middle-aged and older groups. The largest category comprised respondents aged 45–54 years, with 56 individuals (30.4%), followed by those aged 55–64 years, with 52 individuals (28.3%), and respondents over 65 years of age, with 29 individuals (15.8%). Younger age groups were less represented: 18–24 years and 25–34 years each accounted for 3 respondents (1.6%), while the 35–44 age group included 41 respondents (22.3%). This distribution indicates that the sample is predominantly composed of mature tourists, whose interests and expectations are likely oriented toward tourism products suited to their life stage. Regarding educational attainment, most respondents had completed secondary education—98 individuals, or 53.3% of the sample. This was followed by respondents with higher education or a university degree, accounting for 72 individuals (39.1%). A smaller proportion of respondents reported only primary education (4 individuals, 2.2%), while 10 respondents (5.4%) had completed master's or doctoral studies. This educational structure suggests a relatively high level of education among the surveyed tourists, which may influence preferences toward more culturally and educationally oriented experiences. Taking these demographic characteristics into account, the development of tourism products in Subotica should be tailored primarily to middle-aged and older visitors, with an emphasis on cultural tours, wine tastings, and leisure-oriented activities. Given the nearly equal gender representation, it is important that the tourism offer be designed to appeal to both male and female tourists, with an additional focus on thematic and educational programs that align with the relatively high educational profile of the visitors.

Table 1. Evaluation of the Importance of Pécs' Unique and Attractive Architecture for Visitors' Tourism Experience

		Pécs has a unique and attractive architecture that has greatly enriched my tourist experience			Total
		No opinion	Important	Very important	
Gender	Male	0	68	25	93
	Female	8	58	25	91
Total		8	126	50	184
		Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	
Pearson Chi-Square		8,773 ^a	2	,012	

Source: Authors

The results from Table 1 show that 68 male respondents evaluated the architecture of Pécs as an important part of their tourism experience, while none of them expressed a neutral opinion. On the other hand, 58 female respondents stated that architecture was important to them, while 8 reported a neutral attitude. Regarding the highest level of agreement—that architecture is very important—25 men and the same number of women agreed with this statement. The analysis using Pearson's chi-square test revealed a statistically significant difference in the perception of the importance of architecture between genders ($\chi^2 = 8.773$; $p = 0.012$), confirming that men and women evaluate this aspect of the tourism experience differently. These findings indicate a statistically significant gender-based difference in perceptions of the importance of architecture, which may be



highly relevant for tourism development in destinations such as Subotica. A clear valorization of Art Nouveau architecture, with particular emphasis placed toward men, who expressed stronger attitudes, could enhance the attractiveness of the destination. Conversely, for female tourists, it is recommended that architecture be linked to broader cultural and emotional content, which may foster greater interest and identification with the destination.

Table 2. Cultural Offer of Pécs (museums, concerts, festivals) is diverse and accessible to visitors

		The cultural offer of Pécs (museums, concerts, festivals) is diverse and accessible to visitors			Total
		No opinion	Important	Very important	
Gender	Male	0	72	21	93
	Female	8	50	33	91
Total		8	122	54	184
		Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	
Pearson Chi-Square		14,614 ^a	2	,001	

Source: Authors

The results from Table 2 show that most of male and female respondents consider the cultural offer of Pécs to be an important or very important element of their tourist experience. Among men, 72 respondents rated it as “important” and 21 as “very important,” while none expressed a neutral stance. In contrast, among women, 50 respondents rated the cultural offer as “important,” 33 as “very important,” and 8 remained neutral. Overall, out of 184 respondents, 122 (66.3%) considered the cultural offer “important” and 54 (29.3%) “very important,” while only 8 respondents (4.3%) were neutral. Pearson’s chi-square test confirmed a statistically significant difference in responses by gender ($\chi^2 = 14.614$; $df = 2$; $p = 0.001$), indicating that men and women perceive the importance of cultural offerings differently. While men expressed more uniform attitudes with a strong emphasis on the importance of cultural content, women’s responses were more differentiated, with a notable share identifying cultural offer as “very important” but also with some neutrality.

When comparing Tables 1 and 2, it is evident that architecture and cultural offer both represent highly valued elements of Pécs’ tourism experience, but they affect genders differently. In Table 1, men showed stronger and more unanimous recognition of the importance of architecture, whereas women displayed slightly more moderate or neutral positions. In Table 2, however, the cultural offer elicited stronger emphasis from female respondents, with 33 women rating it as “very important” compared to 21 men. This shift suggests that while men place greater importance on architectural heritage, women show relatively higher sensitivity to broader cultural and event-based experiences. These results highlight the importance of gender-sensitive approaches in designing tourism products. For destinations like Subotica, Art Nouveau architecture may be valorized more directly in targeting male tourists, while diverse cultural programs such as concerts, festivals, and museum exhibitions may be more effective in engaging female visitors. Integrating both dimensions in a complementary way could ensure broader appeal and enhance the competitiveness and sustainability of the destination.

Table 3. Pécs successfully nurtures and promotes its multicultural tradition

		Pécs successfully preserves and promotes its multicultural heritage			Total
		No opinion	Important	Very important	
Gender	Male	0	73	20	93
	Female	8	58	25	91
Total		8	131	45	184
		Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	
Pearson Chi-Square		10,253 ^a	2	,006	

Source: Authors



The results from Table 3 demonstrate that respondents place high importance on Pécs' ability to nurture and promote its multicultural tradition. Among male respondents, 73 (78.5%) rated this attribute as "important," while 20 (21.5%) considered it "very important," and none expressed neutrality. Female respondents showed a somewhat broader distribution: 58 (63.7%) assessed multicultural tradition as "important," 25 (27.5%) as "very important," and 8 (8.8%) remained neutral. In total, 131 respondents (71.2%) evaluated this element as "important," 45 (24.5%) as "very important," while only 8 (4.3%) indicated neutrality. Pearson's chi-square test confirmed a statistically significant difference between gender groups ($\chi^2 = 10.253$; $df = 2$; $p = 0.006$). This result indicates that, although both male and female tourists acknowledge the significance of multicultural heritage in shaping the tourism experience, men expressed a more uniform stance, while women's responses reflected greater variation, ranging from strong approval to occasional neutrality. These findings highlight the potential of multicultural tradition as a key factor in destination attractiveness, while also suggesting the need to adapt its interpretation and promotion to different visitor groups. For male tourists, the emphasis on heritage continuity and historical value appears most effective, whereas for female tourists, connecting multiculturalism to participatory cultural events and emotionally engaging narratives may enhance destination appeal.

Table 4. Tourism infrastructure (accommodation, hospitality, signage) is at a high level

		The tourist infrastructure (accommodation, hospitality, and signage) is of a high standard			Total
		No opinion	Important	Very important	
Gender	Male	1	62	30	93
	Female	8	54	29	91
Total		9	116	59	184
		Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	
Pearson Chi-Square		5,992 ^a	2	,050	

Source: Authors

The results from Table 4 indicate that respondents generally rated the level of tourism infrastructure in Pécs—encompassing accommodation, hospitality services, and signage—as an important component of the tourism experience. Among male respondents, 62 (66.7%) considered infrastructure to be "important," 30 (32.3%) rated it as "very important," and only 1 (1.1%) expressed neutrality. Female respondents showed a similar pattern: 54 (59.3%) evaluated it as "important," 29 (31.9%) as "very important," while 8 (8.8%) reported a neutral stance. In total, 116 respondents (63.0%) identified infrastructure as "important," 59 (32.1%) as "very important," and only 9 (4.9%) were neutral. Pearson's chi-square test produced a value at the threshold of statistical significance ($\chi^2 = 5.992$; $df = 2$; $p = 0.050$). This suggests that there are minor but noteworthy gender-based differences in perceptions of tourism infrastructure. While both men and women strongly recognized its importance, male respondents demonstrated a slightly more consistent distribution toward positive evaluations, whereas female respondents displayed a wider range of responses, including a higher proportion of neutral answers. These findings underscore the role of high-quality infrastructure as a foundational element of tourism experience, contributing to visitor satisfaction and destination competitiveness. At the same time, the subtle gender differences suggest that male tourists may be more practically oriented toward infrastructure quality as a prerequisite for overall experience, while female tourists may place stronger emphasis on complementary aspects, such as cultural, educational, or emotional components of the destination offer.



Table 5. Wine tours and local products in the surroundings of Pécs represent a significant attraction

		Wine tours and local products in the Pécs region represent a significant attraction			Total
		No opinion	Important	Very important	
Gender	Male	0	67	26	93
	Female	7	47	37	91
Total		7	114	63	184
		Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	
Pearson Chi-Square		12,409 ^a	2	,002	

Source: Authors

The results from Table 5 show that both male and female respondents highly value wine tours and local products as part of the tourism experience in Pécs. Among men, 67 respondents (72.0%) assessed this attribute as “important,” while 26 (28.0%) rated it as “very important,” and none expressed neutrality. Female respondents demonstrated a broader distribution of opinions: 47 (51.6%) considered wine tours and local products “important,” 37 (40.7%) rated them as “very important,” while 7 (7.7%) remained neutral. Overall, 114 respondents (62.0%) identified this element as “important,” 63 (34.2%) as “very important,” and only 7 (3.8%) expressed neutrality. The Pearson’s chi-square test confirmed a statistically significant difference between gender groups ($\chi^2 = 12.409$; $df = 2$; $p = 0.002$). These results highlight that men showed stronger consensus, largely emphasizing the importance of wine tours and local products, while women’s responses reflected both greater enthusiasm (a larger share in the “very important” category) and a small degree of neutrality.

These findings suggest that wine tourism and the promotion of local products are perceived as key components of Pécs’ attractiveness, but with notable gender-based nuances. Male tourists appear to value these activities as a consistent and expected part of the tourism offer, whereas female tourists show greater variability, with some strongly prioritizing such experiences and others placing them within a broader cultural or leisure context. For destinations such as Subotica, which also has a strong tradition of gastronomy and viticulture, these insights imply the need to design wine-related tourism products that combine experiential tasting and local authenticity with cultural storytelling and emotional engagement, thereby appealing equally to both male and female visitor segments.

Table 6. Pécs is easily accessible and pleasant for movement on foot or by public transport

		Pécs is easily accessible and pleasant to navigate on foot or by public transportation.			Total
		No opinion	Important	Very important	
Gender	Male	2	65	26	93
	Female	4	45	42	91
Total		6	110	68	184
		Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	
Pearson Chi-Square		8,047 ^a	2	,018	

Source: Authors

The results from Table 6 indicate that accessibility and pedestrian/public transport friendliness are perceived as highly important features of the tourism experience in Pécs. Among male respondents, 65 (69.9%) considered this attribute “important,” 26 (28.0%) rated it as “very important,” while only 2 (2.1%) expressed neutrality. Female respondents, however, showed a somewhat different distribution: 45 (49.5%) evaluated accessibility as “important,” 42 (46.2%) as “very important,” and 4 (4.4%) were neutral. In total, 110 respondents (59.8%) perceived accessibility as “important,” 68 (37.0%) as “very important,” and only 6 (3.3%) expressed neutrality.



Pearson's chi-square test confirmed the existence of statistically significant gender-based differences ($\chi^2 = 8.047$; $df = 2$; $p = 0.018$). While both male and female respondents clearly recognized accessibility as a key element of the destination experience, men showed more consistent evaluations leaning toward "important," whereas women expressed stronger differentiation, with a notably higher proportion rating accessibility as "very important."

These results emphasize that accessibility and ease of mobility represent essential prerequisites for destination attractiveness, directly influencing visitor satisfaction and comfort. For tourism planning in destinations such as Subotica, this suggests the importance of ensuring efficient infrastructure for walking and public transport, while also promoting these features as part of the overall visitor experience. The gender-based differences observed imply that women may be more sensitive to the quality and comfort of mobility options, highlighting the need for inclusive transport solutions and communication strategies that underscore the safety, convenience, and pleasantness of movement within the destination.

Table 7. Digital availability of information about attractions and tours (e.g., mobile applications, QR codes, etc.) improves my experience

		The digital availability of information about attractions and tours (e.g. mobile apps, QR codes) enhances my experience			Total
		No opinion	Important	Very important	
Gender	Male	2	70	21	93
	Female	9	49	33	91
Total		11	119	54	184
		Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	
Pearson Chi-Square		10,807 ^a	2	,005	

Source: Authors

The results from Table 7 show that respondents generally recognize the importance of digital accessibility for enhancing their tourism experience in Pécs. Among male respondents, 70 (75.3%) rated the digital availability of information as "important," 21 (22.6%) as "very important," while only 2 (2.1%) expressed neutrality. Female respondents displayed a slightly more varied distribution: 49 (53.8%) evaluated it as "important," 33 (36.3%) as "very important," and 9 (9.9%) remained neutral. In total, 119 respondents (64.7%) assessed this factor as "important," 54 (29.3%) as "very important," and only 11 (6.0%) expressed no opinion. The Pearson's chi-square test revealed a statistically significant difference between gender groups ($\chi^2 = 10.807$; $df = 2$; $p = 0.005$). These findings suggest that while both male and female respondents clearly acknowledged the value of digital tools in tourism, men demonstrated stronger consensus toward the "important" category, whereas women showed greater polarization, with a larger share either considering it "very important" or showing neutrality.

These results underline the growing role of digital technologies in shaping contemporary tourist experiences. For destinations such as Subotica, this implies that investment in mobile applications, digital guides, and QR-based interpretation systems can significantly improve visitor satisfaction and engagement. Gender-based nuances further suggest that promotional strategies should emphasize functionality and reliability to meet male expectations, while for female tourists digital solutions should be presented not only as practical tools but also as gateways to richer cultural narratives and personalized experiences.



Table 8. The city has a recognizable identity that distinguishes it from other destinations

		The city has a distinct identity that sets it apart from other destinations			Total
		No opinion	Important	Very important	
Gender	Male	0	70	23	93
	Female	8	48	35	91
Total		8	118	58	184
		Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	
Pearson Chi-Square		14,564 ^a	2	,001	

Source: Authors

The results from Table 8 highlight that respondents strongly value the presence of a distinctive urban identity as a key factor in the tourism experience. Among male respondents, 70 (75.3%) considered city identity to be “important,” 23 (24.7%) rated it as “very important,” and none were neutral. Female respondents, on the other hand, displayed greater variation: 48 (52.7%) assessed city identity as “important,” 35 (38.5%) as “very important,” while 8 (8.8%) remained neutral. Altogether, 118 respondents (64.1%) regarded city identity as “important,” 58 (31.5%) as “very important,” and only 8 (4.3%) expressed neutrality. The Pearson’s chi-square test confirmed a statistically significant difference between genders ($\chi^2 = 14.564$; $df = 2$; $p = 0.001$). The findings indicate that male respondents expressed a more uniform perspective, with clear recognition of the importance of city identity, whereas female respondents showed a broader distribution, with both stronger emphasis on the “very important” category and a small share of neutrality.

These results emphasize the significance of cultivating and promoting a recognizable destination identity as a central pillar of competitiveness in tourism. For Subotica, this suggests that its unique Art Nouveau architecture, multicultural heritage, and cross-border character should be strategically highlighted as elements that clearly differentiate it from other regional destinations. The gender-based nuances imply that communication strategies may need to emphasize authenticity and heritage continuity for male tourists, while for female visitors, the focus could be expanded toward emotional, experiential, and narrative dimensions that deepen the sense of destination distinctiveness.

Table 9. Staff in tourism facilities are hospitable and well-informed

		The staff in tourist facilities is hospitable and well-informed.			Total
		No opinion	Important	Very important	
Gender	Male	0	68	25	93
	Female	8	54	29	91
Total		8	122	54	184
		Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	
Pearson Chi-Square		9,882 ^a	2	,007	

Source: Authors

The results from Table 9 indicate that the hospitality and professionalism of staff are highly valued by tourists in Pécs. Among male respondents, 68 (73.1%) reported being “satisfied,” while 25 (26.9%) were “very satisfied,” and none expressed neutrality. Female respondents demonstrated more variation: 54 (59.3%) stated they were “satisfied,” 29 (31.9%) were “very satisfied,” while 8 (8.8%) expressed neutrality. In total, 122 respondents (66.3%) declared satisfaction, 54 (29.3%) expressed high satisfaction, and only 8 (4.3%) had no particular stance. The Pearson’s chi-square test confirmed a statistically significant difference between genders ($\chi^2 = 9.882$; $df = 2$; $p = 0.007$). The data show that men exhibited more consistent evaluations, uniformly emphasizing satisfaction, while women’s responses revealed greater differentiation, with both a higher proportion reporting “very satisfied” and a small share remaining neutral.



These findings highlight the crucial role of staff quality in shaping positive tourist experiences. Hospitality and the ability to provide relevant information directly influence visitor satisfaction and loyalty, thereby enhancing the competitiveness of the destination. For Subotica, this implies that strategic investments in staff training, service quality, and visitor communication can significantly improve the overall image of the destination. Gender-based nuances suggest that while men consistently value reliability and professionalism, women may respond more strongly to warmth, engagement, and personalized service, underscoring the need for differentiated approaches to staff development and visitor interaction.

Table 10. I would gladly recommend Pécs to friends and family as a destination for a short or long stay

		I would gladly recommend Pécs to my friends and family as a destination for a short or long stay			Total
		No opinion	Important	Very important	
Gender	Male	0	72	21	93
	Female	8	58	25	91
Total		8	130	46	184
		Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	
Pearson Chi-Square		9,835 ^a	2	,007	

Source: Authors

The results from Table 10 show that most respondents expressed willingness to recommend Pécs as a tourist destination. Among male respondents, 72 (77.4%) reported they were “satisfied” with recommending the destination, while 21 (22.6%) expressed they were “very satisfied,” and none were neutral. Female respondents displayed slightly more diverse opinions: 58 (63.7%) stated they were “satisfied,” 25 (27.5%) were “very satisfied,” while 8 (8.8%) indicated neutrality. In total, 130 respondents (70.7%) expressed satisfaction, 46 (25.0%) showed strong satisfaction, and only 8 (4.3%) expressed no clear opinion. The Pearson’s chi-square test confirmed a statistically significant difference between genders ($\chi^2 = 9.835$; $df = 2$; $p = 0.007$). These results reveal that men provided more consistent positive evaluations, whereas women’s responses were distributed more widely, with both stronger expressions of satisfaction and a small proportion of neutrality.

The results obtained from the survey in Pécs provide clear insights into the factors that tourists perceive as central to the quality of their experience. These findings can serve as valuable guidelines for Subotica, a city with comparable cultural and natural assets, yet with underutilized tourism potential. The analyses confirmed that elements such as distinctive architecture, cultural offer, multicultural tradition, quality infrastructure, wine tourism, accessibility, digital information availability, recognizable identity, staff hospitality, and willingness to recommend the destination significantly shape visitors’ satisfaction and loyalty. Translating these lessons into the context of Subotica highlights concrete directions for tourism planning and development. One of the strongest results from Pécs concerns the importance of unique and attractive architecture (Table 1). Male respondents especially emphasized its value, while women expressed slightly more varied views. Subotica, with its outstanding Art Nouveau heritage—including landmarks such as the City Hall and Synagogue—has the potential to capitalize on this resource by positioning itself as a regional hub of architectural tourism. To appeal equally to both genders, interpretation of architecture should go beyond visual appreciation and include storytelling, emotional narratives, and cultural symbolism. The cultural offer (Table 2) was particularly important for female tourists, who placed greater emphasis on concerts, festivals, and museum experiences. Subotica already hosts strong cultural events such as the International Children’s Theatre Festival, the European Film Festival at Palić, and Dužijanica. However, their integration into a broader cultural zone could enhance visibility and prolong tourist stays. Linking cultural heritage with events and festivals would enable Subotica to create year-round cultural tourism products, following the example of Pécs, which leveraged its cultural capital during the European Capital of Culture 2010 program.



The nurturing of multicultural tradition (Table 3) also proved to be highly important. Male respondents valued it more uniformly, while female respondents demonstrated both strong appreciation and occasional neutrality. Subotica's multiethnic environment, with its Hungarian, Serbian, Croatian, and Bunjevac heritage, can be valorized through multilingual tours, ethnic festivals, gastronomy, and traditional crafts. Such offers would strengthen the city's distinctive identity while fostering intercultural dialogue. Infrastructure (Table 4) was recognized as a prerequisite for a satisfactory experience in Pécs. Although both genders confirmed its importance, men rated it more consistently. For Subotica, this underlines the necessity of improving accommodation capacities, hospitality services, and signage, especially in peripheral zones such as the Palić Lake area, Subotica Sand, and rural surroundings. Ensuring infrastructural balance across the different zones of the city is essential for sustainable tourism development. The findings on wine tours and local products (Table 5) are of particular relevance. Men valued them consistently, while women showed stronger enthusiasm but also slight neutrality. This duality indicates that wine tourism should be promoted both as a specialized activity (e.g., tastings at Zvonko Bogdan Winery, vineyard tours) and as part of a broader cultural and gastronomic experience. The valorization of Palić's vineyards, coupled with rural tourism and gastronomic events, could replicate the successful wine-tourism model of Pécs. Accessibility and ease of mobility (Table 6) were especially valued by women, who highlighted them as "very important." Subotica can build on this by improving walking paths, cycling infrastructure, and public transport connections between the central area, Palić, and rural settlements. Safe and sustainable mobility would not only enhance tourist satisfaction but also strengthen Subotica's image as an eco-friendly destination.

The results on digital availability of information (Table 7) clearly demonstrate the rising role of technology in tourism. Both genders recognized its significance, with women expressing stronger polarization. Subotica should therefore invest in mobile applications, digital interpretation through QR codes, and online platforms that connect cultural, natural, and gastronomic attractions. This would especially attract younger, tech-oriented visitors while also enriching the experience of mature tourists through interactive and accessible content. A recognizable city identity (Table 8) was also highlighted as a key differentiator. Subotica's Art Nouveau heritage, multiculturalism, and cross-border character can provide the foundation for branding the city as unique within the Pannonian region. This identity should be consistently communicated across all zones, combining architectural uniqueness with living traditions and local lifestyle. The perception of staff hospitality and professionalism (Table 9) revealed gendered nuances, with men showing consistent satisfaction and women valuing personalized and engaging interactions. Subotica can strengthen this element by investing in staff training, intercultural competencies, and multilingual services, which are particularly important given the city's proximity to Hungary and Croatia and its diverse visitor base. Finally, the willingness of tourists in Pécs to recommend the destination (Table 10) demonstrates a high level of loyalty, which is considered one of the strongest indicators of competitiveness. Subotica can achieve similar results by aligning its tourism zones—cultural-historical, eco-rural, event-based, wine, and sports-recreational—with visitor expectations identified in Pécs. The integration of valued natural sites such as Pačir Spa, Subotica Sand, and the Palić–Ludaš–Krvavo Lake complex, together with cultural assets like Raichle Park, Tavankut, Ingus Castle, and Kelebija Stud Farm, will provide a diversified offer appealing to different segments.

The results from Pécs confirm that tourism experiences are shaped by a combination of tangible resources (architecture, infrastructure, natural sites) and intangible factors (identity, hospitality, multiculturalism). Subotica possesses all of these prerequisites but has yet to fully capitalize on them. By applying lessons learned from Pécs—particularly in the fields of cultural programming, infrastructure, wine tourism, digitalization, and identity-building—Subotica can unlock its untapped potential, enhance its attractiveness, and establish itself as a sustainable and competitive destination in the broader Pannonian and European context. These findings highlight the strength of Pécs' overall tourism offer, given that a willingness to recommend a destination is one of the most reliable indicators of tourist loyalty and destination competitiveness. For Subotica, these insights suggest that by developing high-quality and diversified tourism products—spanning architecture, cultural events, gastronomy, and hospitality—it could similarly achieve strong visitor satisfaction and positive word-of-mouth. Gender-based nuances further point to the importance of targeting male tourists with messages emphasizing reliability and quality of the offer, while female visitors may respond more strongly to communication that underscores memorable, engaging, and emotionally rewarding experiences.



CONCLUSION

The study confirmed the initial hypothesis (H) that the untapped tourism potential of Subotica and its surroundings can be significantly enhanced through the application of best practices exemplified by Pécs. The results of the survey conducted among tourists in Pécs revealed key factors that shape tourism experiences, such as distinctive architecture, cultural events, multicultural tradition, wine tourism, digital accessibility, infrastructure quality, and staff hospitality. These same elements are present in Subotica, albeit underutilized, which indicates that with adequate strategic planning and targeted investments, Subotica could achieve comparable results in terms of attractiveness, competitiveness, and sustainability. The findings therefore empirically support the starting hypothesis that Pécs can serve as a model of good practice for Subotica's tourism development.

Limitations and Future Research. The study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. The empirical data were collected exclusively in Pécs, which means that the perceptions and attitudes of tourists reflect the specific characteristics of that destination. Although the results provide valuable comparative insights, they cannot be directly generalized to Subotica without further empirical testing. Another limitation concerns the structure of the sample, which was dominated by middle-aged and older respondents with a relatively high educational profile, potentially influencing the evaluation of cultural and educational aspects of tourism. Future research should therefore include surveys among tourists in Subotica itself, as well as comparative analyses with other regional destinations. Moreover, longitudinal studies could provide insights into the dynamics of tourist perceptions over time, while the application of advanced statistical methods (e.g., structural equation modeling) could help identify causal relationships between destination attributes and tourist satisfaction.

Practical Implications. The findings provide several practical guidelines for policymakers, tourism organizations, and local stakeholders. First, zoning Subotica's tourism resources—into cultural-historical, eco-rural, wine, event-based, and recreational zones—allows targeted development strategies, efficient use of resources, and better spatial organization. Second, investment in infrastructure and digital accessibility should be prioritized, as these elements significantly shape tourist satisfaction and competitiveness. Third, Subotica's multicultural heritage and Art Nouveau architecture should be more strongly integrated into destination branding and interpretation, appealing to both domestic and international markets. Fourth, the results emphasize the importance of developing wine tourism and gastronomic experiences, linking them with local traditions to create authentic and attractive products. Finally, strengthening staff competencies, hospitality standards, and intercultural communication skills can enhance the overall quality of services and contribute to higher levels of tourist loyalty, as reflected in their willingness to recommend the destination.

The integration of best practices from Pécs with the unique cultural and natural resources of Subotica offers a clear pathway toward sustainable tourism development. Not only does the study identify the similarities between the two destinations, but also confirms the central assumption of the research: that Subotica can increase its tourism competitiveness and sustainability by adapting and applying the successful strategies of Pécs. By addressing the identified limitations, engaging in further empirical research, and implementing the outlined practical measures, Subotica can unlock its untapped potential and position itself as a recognizable and competitive tourism destination in the regional and European context.



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