



SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT ON THE DRINA RIVER AND MOUNT BOBIJA: INSPIRATION FROM DURMITOR AND THE TARA RIVER AS EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

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Abstract:

This study examines tourism potential of the Drina River and Bobija Mountain through a comparative analysis with the established destinations of Durmitor and the Tara River. Using a mixed-method approach, data were collected during the summer of 2024 via a structured questionnaire (N = 222) and resource valorization conducted with the support of the Tourist Organization of Bajina Basta. Demographic analysis revealed that visitors are predominantly young, educated, and inclined toward active and recreational tourism, with women expressing stronger sensitivity toward cultural and ecological values. Statistical tests confirmed significant gender differences in perceptions of natural surroundings, outdoor activities, and sustainability. Resource evaluation highlighted Bobija's strengths in mountain trails, cycling routes, springs, and heritage paths, while the Drina offers abundant water-based recreation. Findings confirm the hypothesis that sustainable practices from Durmitor and Tara can be adapted to Drina and Bobija, providing a framework for developing authentic, sustainable tourism products.

Keywords:

Drina, recreation, sustainable tourism, valorization, Tara.

INTRODUCTION

The development of tourism in mountain and river regions is strongly determined by the presence, accessibility, and appropriate management of natural and cultural resources (Ahmadi *et al.*, 2018; Arsić *et al.*, 2025; Shams, 2025; Iqbal *et al.*, 2025). Destinations that succeed in valorizing their resources while preserving ecological balance (Panić *et al.*, 2025; Wang & Wang, 2025; Ma *et al.*, 2025) and cultural authenticity (Radović & Vujko, 2025; Yang & Ning, 2025; Wang *et al.*, 2025) gain a competitive advantage in contemporary tourism markets, where visitors increasingly demand experiences that combine recreation, education, and sustainability (Vujko *et al.*, 2025; Suresh *et al.*, 2025; Heidari & Gravelle, 2025). Within this framework, the Drina River and the Bobija Mountain emerge as areas of considerable, yet underutilized, potential. Their pristine landscapes, diverse recreational opportunities, and cultural heritage provide the foundation for positioning them as destinations capable of meeting the expectations of modern tourists while simultaneously fostering regional development.

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Tourism resources of these regions encompass mountain trails, cycling routes, natural springs, and monastic heritage in Bobija, along with water-based activities such as rafting, swimming, and cultural events along the Drina. Such resources are closely aligned with the principles of recreational tourism (Ali, 2023), which emphasize active participation, health, and outdoor engagement (Bojović *et al.*, 2024). Previous studies have shown that recreational tourism is not only a means of attracting younger and more dynamic visitor groups but also an avenue for diversifying rural and peripheral economies through sports, adventure, and nature-based activities (Vučićević *et al.*, 2024). At the same time, the global tourism discourse underscores the necessity of embedding these activities within a sustainable framework, where natural and cultural assets are preserved for future generations, and where local communities remain active participants and beneficiaries of tourism growth (Turčinović *et al.*, 2024).

Examples from Tara and Durmitor illustrate how destinations with similar profiles can achieve significant visibility and attractiveness through carefully planned sustainable tourism development (Srdanović & Pavić, 2013; Li *et al.*, 2023; Mutanga *et al.*, 2025; Ostojić *et al.*, 2025). These cases demonstrate that well-maintained infrastructure, the promotion of cultural and natural heritage, and the involvement of local stakeholders are decisive factors in creating authentic and competitive tourism products (Meleddu *et al.*, 2025; Khuadthong *et al.*, 2025). Drawing from such models, it becomes evident that the Drina and Bobija areas possess comparable conditions that, if adequately valorized, could establish them as prominent destinations in the region. The present research adopts a quantitative–qualitative valorization method, developed in cooperation with the Tourist Organization of Bajina Basta, to evaluate the developmental prospects of these areas. This methodological approach allows for a structured assessment of resources by considering their accessibility, equipment, ambient value, specificity, significance, and artistic dimension. In doing so, the study not only highlights the inherent strengths of Drina and Bobija but also identifies challenges related to infrastructure, awareness, and management that must be addressed in order to ensure long-term competitiveness.

The central hypothesis guiding this research posits that the tourism resources of Drina and Bobija possess a high level of developmental potential which, if managed according to the principles of sustainable and recreational tourism, can result in the creation of a distinctive and competitive tourism offer comparable to that of Tara and Durmitor. Testing this hypothesis requires a comprehensive identification and evaluation of the key resources, an exploration of their alignment with sustainable tourism practices, and an analysis of the extent to which local communities recognize and support tourism as a driver of economic, socio-cultural, and spatial development. The study further aims to situate the findings within the broader theoretical framework of sustainable tourism development, thereby contributing both to academic debates and to the formulation of practical guidelines for destination planning. By addressing these dimensions, the research seeks to enrich the scholarly discourse on the relationship between tourism resources, sustainability, and recreation, while simultaneously offering actionable insights for policymakers, tourism planners, and stakeholders engaged in shaping the future of Drina and Bobija as emerging destinations.

METHODOLOGY

This research, conducted during the summer months of 2024 (June–August) in the area of Mount Durmitor and the Tara River, employed a combined methodological approach with the aim of understanding the key factors influencing the tourist experience and identifying opportunities for applying sustainable tourism practices in other regional destinations, particularly the Drina River and Bobija Mountain. The selected destinations represent exemplary models of sustainable tourism in Montenegro and Serbia, distinguished by their rich natural heritage, diverse tourism offerings, and a clearly recognizable identity rooted in the preservation of both nature and cultural authenticity. The study was based on a quantitative analysis of data collected through a structured questionnaire, distributed among tourists visiting Durmitor and Tara during the research period. The questionnaire included items related to the demographic characteristics of respondents (gender, age, and educational level) as well as their attitudes and preferences regarding various aspects of the tourism offer—such as the importance of natural surroundings, outdoor activities, infrastructure, preservation of local culture, the use of digital technologies, and perceptions of sustainable development.



The survey encompassed a total of 222 respondents, including 113 men and 109 women, indicating an almost equal gender distribution. Younger age groups predominated, with 32.9% of respondents aged 18–24 and 47.7% in the 25–34 category. Together, these two groups represented more than three-quarters of the total sample, suggesting that Durmitor and Tara are particularly attractive to younger, more active tourists. In terms of education, a majority of respondents reported either secondary education (51.4%) or higher education (42.3%), highlighting a generally well-educated tourist population inclined toward learning-oriented, exploratory, and environmentally engaged forms of travel. Statistical analysis was carried out using the chi-square test, enabling the identification of gender-based differences in perceptions of various elements of the tourism offer. The results revealed statistically significant differences across nearly all analyzed dimensions, ranging from the importance attributed to the natural environment and outdoor activities to the evaluation of cultural heritage, infrastructure, and sustainability. Women more frequently expressed highly positive attitudes toward several aspects of the offer, while men more often opted for the more neutral response of being “satisfied,” with less inclination toward extreme evaluations. These findings highlight the nuanced ways in which different tourist groups perceive destinations, carrying important practical implications for developing tourism that aims to be both inclusive and sustainable.

In addition to the quantitative analysis, qualitative assessments were undertaken through field observations and expert valorization of the sites. These evaluations included natural characteristics, infrastructure conditions, the quality and maintenance of trails, availability of signage, and the degree of community involvement in tourism activities. Based on these assessments, preliminary spatial zoning was proposed, identifying zones suitable for the development of recreational and adventure tourism, zones of high ecological value requiring strict conservation, and areas more appropriate for cultural and educational tourism.

The methodology adopted a comparative perspective, drawing lessons from the successful examples of Durmitor and Tara in order to explore the transferability of good practices to the Drina and Bobija. The research encompassed a broad spectrum of factors relevant to sustainable tourism planning, focusing on tourists’ relationship to nature, sustainable practices, and cultural heritage, as well as the role of infrastructure and digital support in shaping an integrated tourism experience. The results serve as a foundation for generating concrete recommendations aimed at improving the tourism offer along the Drina River and Bobija Mountain, while safeguarding natural resources, respecting local communities, and fostering a sustainable tourism model inspired by the achievements of Durmitor and Tara.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the demographic data of the study participants, several key conclusions can be drawn about tourists visiting the Durmitor and Tara areas. First, the gender structure is almost balanced, with a slight predominance of men (50.9%) compared to women (49.1%). This balance suggests that there is no specific gender preference in visiting this region, meaning that the tourism offer should remain comprehensive and inclusive, catering to all visitors regardless of gender. This further highlights the need to develop universal tourism products attractive to both men and women, without favoring one group over the other. When examining age groups, it is evident that younger populations dominate, with 32.9% of tourists in the 18–24 age group and as many as 47.7% in the 25–34 age group. Together, these groups account for nearly 80% of all tourists, indicating that the destination primarily appeals to younger generations. As younger groups are generally more active and inclined toward adventurous and physically demanding activities, it is likely that activities such as hiking, cycling, and rafting attract their greatest interest. In contrast, older groups—particularly those aged 45–54 (5.9%), 55–64 (5%), and over 65 (0.9%)—make up a smaller proportion. This trend may suggest that the current offer does not provide enough activities tailored to the needs of older tourists, such as easier walking trails, cultural tours, or more relaxing experiences.

The educational level of tourists is also relatively high, with 51.4% having completed secondary education and 42.3% holding higher education degrees. Only 1.8% reported primary education, while 4.5% hold master’s or doctoral degrees. This indicates that the majority of tourists are well educated, which may imply a stronger inclination toward deeper exploration of the natural and cultural values of the destination. Such groups are



likely to be interested in educational content and activities that involve learning about the area's history, ecology, and cultural heritage. Overall, the gender, age, and educational structure of tourists in Durmitor and Tara clearly show that the majority are young, educated, and inclined toward active forms of tourism. This means that the tourism offer should primarily cater to this profile, while also considering the needs of older groups who seek lighter activities, as well as educational content that could attract the highly educated segment of visitors.

Table 1. The impact of the natural environment and unspoiled nature on vacation destination choice

		I believe that the natural environment and spoiled nature play a key role in my choice of vacation destination			Total
		No opinion	Important	Very important	
Gender	Male	0	84	29	113
	Female	8	68	33	109
Total		8	152	62	222
		Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	
Pearson Chi-Square		9,873 ^a	2	,007	

Source: Authors

The results presented in Table 1 indicate that the natural environment and unspoiled nature have a significant influence on the choice of holiday destination among tourists visiting Durmitor and Tara. The majority of respondents stated that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the natural characteristics of these destinations, with an interesting gender difference observed. Specifically, none of the male respondents reported a neutral opinion, while eight female respondents selected “no opinion.” At the same time, a higher number of women, compared to men, declared themselves “very satisfied,” whereas men more frequently chose the option “satisfied.” The chi-square test confirmed that this difference in responses between genders is statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 9.873$; $p = 0.007$), which means that gender influences the perception of the importance of the natural environment in destination choice. These results confirm that unspoiled nature represents a key factor in the tourist experience of these areas and that there are differences in how various groups of tourists value these aspects. In the context of planning sustainable tourism development in the Drina River and Bobija Mountain region, these findings can serve as an important guideline for designing tourism offerings that cater to different visitor profiles while preserving natural resources as the central value of the tourism product.

Table 2. Outdoor Activity Preferences by Gender

		It is important to me that the destination offers outdoor activities such as hiking, cycling, and water sports			Total
		No opinion	Important	Very important	
Gender	Male	0	78	35	113
	Female	8	69	32	109
Total		8	147	67	222
		Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	
Pearson Chi-Square		8,616 ^a	2	,013	

Source: Authors

The chi-square test (Table 2) confirmed a statistically significant association between gender and satisfaction with outdoor activities such as hiking, cycling, and water sports ($\chi^2 = 8.616$, $df = 2$, $p = 0.013$). While both men and women generally expressed satisfaction, the main difference arises from the higher proportion of women who reported having no opinion. This suggests that female respondents may have had less direct engagement with such activities or faced barriers such as limited access, perceived risk, or lack of prior experience. Men, on the other hand, were more decisive in their evaluations, more frequently reporting satisfaction or high satisfaction.



These findings indicate that gender plays a role in shaping perceptions of outdoor activities, not necessarily in terms of differing satisfaction once the activity is experienced, but rather in the extent of participation and readiness to evaluate. From a practical perspective, this points to the need for destinations to reduce entry barriers and ensure inclusive promotion, thereby encouraging broader engagement across genders.

Table 3. Preference for Nature Conservation and Sustainable Tourism by Gender

		When travelling, I prefer destinations that promote nature conservation and sustainable tourism			Total
		No opinion	Important	Very important	
Gender	Male	0	76	37	113
	Female	7	68	34	109
Total		7	144	71	222
		Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	
Pearson Chi-Square		7,502 ^a	2	,023	

Source: Authors

The results presented in Table 4 indicate that well-organized and accessible tourist infrastructure (such as trails, signage, and accommodation) significantly contributes to the overall tourist experience. Most respondents expressed satisfaction or high satisfaction, highlighting the importance of infrastructure in shaping positive impressions of a destination. However, gender-based differences are statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 9.903$; $p = 0.007$). Male respondents consistently gave decisive evaluations, with none selecting “no opinion,” and most reporting satisfaction, while female respondents were more frequently represented in the “no opinion” category ($n = 8$). At the same time, women more often than men evaluated infrastructure as “very satisfactory,” whereas men more frequently chose “satisfied.” These findings suggest that men and women engage with destination infrastructure differently. Men appear more consistent in their evaluations, whereas women show greater variation, ranging from neutrality to high satisfaction. From a managerial perspective, these differences underline the importance of designing infrastructure and communication strategies that are inclusive and address diverse expectations. Strengthening clarity of signage, accessibility, and safety features may further reduce uncertainty among female visitors while maintaining high satisfaction levels across all groups.

Table 4. The Role of Tourist Infrastructure in Shaping Positive Destination Experience by Gender

		Well-organized and accessible tourist infrastructure (trails, signage, accommodation) significantly contributes to my positive experience of an destination			Total
		No opinion	Important	Very important	
Gender	Male	0	82	31	113
	Female	8	66	35	109
Total		8	148	66	222
		Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	
Pearson Chi-Square		9,903 ^a	2	,007	

Source: Authors

The results in Table 5 demonstrate that the majority of respondents place high value on the preservation and promotion of local culture, tradition, and gastronomy as an integral part of the tourism offer. Both men and women expressed strong satisfaction, highlighting the relevance of cultural identity in shaping the attractiveness of destinations. However, the chi-square test indicates a statistically significant difference by gender ($\chi^2 = 8.112$; $p = 0.017$). While male respondents were unanimous in giving decisive evaluations, with no neutral responses, female respondents were somewhat more frequently represented in the “no opinion” category ($n = 7$). At the same time, women were more evenly distributed between “satisfied” and “very satisfied,” whereas men tended



to cluster more strongly in the “satisfied” category. These results suggest that women may approach cultural and gastronomic aspects with greater variation in evaluation, while men appear more uniform in their responses. From a managerial perspective, this underlines the importance of tailoring cultural and gastronomic products to appeal broadly, while also offering depth and authenticity that resonates particularly with female visitors who may seek stronger cultural immersion.

Table 5. Preferences for Promotion of Local Culture, Tradition, and Gastronomy by Gender

		I want the destination to foster and promote local culture, tradition and gastronomy as part of the tourism offer			Total
		No opinion	Important	Very important	
Gender	Male	0	82	31	113
	Female	7	69	33	109
Total		7	151	64	222
		Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	
Pearson Chi-Square		8,112 ^a	2	,017	

Source: Authors

As shown in Table 6, events and festivals that showcase local customs and culture significantly enhance tourist interest in a destination. The majority of respondents expressed satisfaction or high satisfaction, confirming the importance of cultural manifestations as an attraction for visitors. However, the chi-square test indicates that the differences between genders are statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 9.316$; $p = 0.009$). Male respondents reported no neutral opinions, while female respondents were more frequently represented in the “no opinion” category ($n = 8$). At the same time, women were slightly more likely than men to rate their satisfaction at the “very satisfied” level, whereas men more often selected “satisfied.” These results suggest that although both genders highly value local cultural events, men tend to provide more consistent evaluations, while women show greater variability in their responses. For destination managers, this highlights the need to design cultural events that appeal broadly, while also ensuring depth, inclusivity, and authenticity that may particularly resonate with female visitors seeking immersive cultural experiences.

Table 6. Influence of Local Events and Festivals on Tourist Interest by Gender

		Events and festivals that showcase local customs and culture increase my interest in the destination			Total
		No opinion	Important	Very important	
Gender	Male	0	81	32	113
	Female	8	67	34	109
Total		8	148	66	222
		Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	
Pearson Chi-Square		9,316 ^a	2	,009	

Source: Authors

Table 7 shows that both men and women recognize the importance of including and supporting the local community in tourism development. The majority of respondents reported being satisfied or very satisfied, which confirms the perception that local community involvement is a key factor in sustainable tourism. The chi-square test indicates statistically significant gender differences ($\chi^2 = 7.805$; $p = 0.020$). Male respondents expressed unanimous agreement, with none choosing a neutral position. In contrast, six female respondents reported no opinion, which demonstrates slightly more hesitation among women in evaluating this aspect. Women also showed a slightly higher proportion of “very satisfied” responses compared to men, while men leaned more toward the “satisfied” category. These findings suggest that although both genders strongly value community inclusion, women may be more sensitive to the quality and visibility of community participation



in tourism development. For destination planners, this underlines the importance of transparent and inclusive decision-making processes that visibly engage local residents, thereby enhancing the authenticity and sustainability of tourism initiatives.

Table 7. Importance of Local Community Involvement in Tourism Development by Gender

		It is import to me that tourism develops with the involvement and support of the local community			Total
		No opinion	Important	Very important	
Gender	Male	0	83	30	113
	Female	6	68	35	109
Total		6	151	65	222
		Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	
Pearson Chi-Square		7,805 ^a	2	,020	

Source: Authors

Table 8 demonstrates that the use of digital technologies (such as applications, guides, and online information) is generally perceived as a significant factor that facilitates the planning and enjoyment of tourism activities. Both men and women expressed predominantly positive attitudes, with the majority reporting satisfaction or high satisfaction. The chi-square test reveals statistically significant differences by gender ($\chi^2 = 8.153$; $p = 0.017$). Male respondents unanimously expressed positive opinions, with none choosing the “no opinion” option. In contrast, seven female respondents selected a neutral stance, indicating a slightly more cautious attitude toward the role of digital tools in tourism. At the same time, women recorded a higher percentage of “very satisfied” answers compared to men, while men tended to choose the “satisfied” category more often. These findings suggest that while both genders acknowledge the usefulness of digital technologies, women appear to show greater variability in their responses. This may reflect different levels of digital literacy, reliance on traditional sources of information, or different expectations in terms of usability and accessibility of digital tools. For destination managers, these results highlight the importance of ensuring user-friendly, accessible, and inclusive digital solutions that address the needs of diverse visitor groups.

Table 8. The Role of Digital Technologies in Facilitating Tourism Planning and Experience by Gender

		The use of digital technologies (applications, guides, online information) facilitates the planning and enjoyment of the tourist activities			Total
		No opinion	Important	Very important	
Gender	Male	0	79	34	113
	Female	7	66	36	109
Total		7	145	70	222
		Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	
Pearson Chi-Square		8,153 ^a	2	,017	

Source: Authors

Table 9 shows stakeholder perceptions regarding whether the development of tourism products and practices similar to those found in Durmitor and Tara could contribute to the success of new destinations in the region. The majority of respondents, both male and female, expressed satisfaction or high satisfaction with this idea, indicating broad agreement that proven models of sustainable and nature-based tourism can serve as benchmarks for regional development. The chi-square test reveals a statistically significant gender-based difference ($\chi^2 = 6.429$; $p = 0.040$). No male respondents selected a neutral stance, whereas six women indicated “no opinion,” suggesting that women may express slightly more caution or uncertainty when evaluating the transferability of successful practices. However, both genders strongly leaned toward positive evaluations, with men somewhat more likely to choose “very satisfied.”



These results suggest that adopting strategies modeled after successful destinations like Durmitor and Tara is widely supported across genders, but women show a greater tendency to remain neutral, possibly reflecting differences in expectations or familiarity with these destinations. For policymakers and destination managers, this underscores the importance of tailoring communication and promotional strategies to address different levels of awareness and engagement among visitor groups, ensuring that new destinations can successfully replicate best practices in sustainable tourism development.

Table 9. Perceptions of the Potential for Replicating Successful Tourism Practices from Durmitor and Tara by Gender

		I believe that the development of similar contents and practices, such as those existing in Durmitor and Tara, could contribute to the success of new destinations in the region			Total
		No opinion	Important	Very important	
Gender	Male	0	71	42	113
	Female	6	66	37	109
Total		6	137	79	222
		Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	
Pearson Chi-Square		6,429 ^a	2	,040	

Source: Authors

Table 10 presents respondents' willingness to visit a new destination if it is known for sustainable tourism and high-quality outdoor activities. The majority of both male and female participants expressed satisfaction or strong satisfaction, demonstrating a generally high level of openness toward sustainable and nature-oriented tourism offers. The chi-square test indicates a statistically significant gender difference ($\chi^2 = 7.511$; $p = 0.023$). Women were more likely than men to choose a neutral response ("no opinion"), with nine female respondents indicating this option compared to only one male respondent. This suggests that men, in general, showed a clearer orientation toward positive evaluations, while women expressed slightly more caution. The overall trend reflects strong support for sustainability-driven destinations across both genders, underlining the increasing importance of environmental awareness and outdoor activities in shaping travel decisions. For destination planners, this highlights the need to emphasize sustainable practices and well-developed outdoor offers as key factors for attracting visitors, while also ensuring that communication strategies address possible uncertainties among certain groups of tourists.

Table 10. Willingness to Visit a New Destination Known for Sustainable Tourism and Outdoor Activities by Gender

		I am willing to visit this destination if it is known for sustainable tourism and high-quality offer of nature-based activities			Total
		No opinion	Important	Very important	
Gender	Male	1	79	33	113
	Female	9	66	34	109
Total		10	145	67	222
		Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	
Pearson Chi-Square		7,511 ^a	2	,023	

Source: Authors

The results obtained from Tara and Durmitor highlight the central role of preserved natural environments, well-developed infrastructure, and authentic cultural practices in shaping positive tourist experiences. Respondents consistently emphasized the importance of intact landscapes, outdoor activities such as hiking, cycling, and water sports, as well as cultural events and traditions, all of which significantly influenced destination choice and visitor satisfaction. Importantly, gender-based differences in perception were observed, with women showing a higher tendency to evaluate natural and cultural resources as very important, while men



were more likely to provide moderately positive evaluations. Statistical tests confirmed these differences to be significant, pointing to the need for tourism planners to recognize diverse visitor profiles when designing development strategies. Building upon these insights, the potentials of the Drina River and Bobija Mountain can be positioned as complementary destinations that follow the successful examples of Tara and Durmitor. The quantitative–qualitative resource valorization, carried out with the support of employees from the Tourist Organization of Bajina Basta, revealed that both localities possess resources of high specificity and importance, with strong artistic and ambient values. Bobija, with average values ranging between 3.66 and 4.5, offers mountain trails, cycling routes, hiking paths with rest areas, monastic routes, and natural springs of drinking water. Drina, with values ranging between 4.33 and 4.83, provides an abundance of water-based activities such as rafting, swimming, and cultural–sport events linked to the river. Together, these resources create a basis for developing an authentic tourism product that aligns with the growing demand for nature-based, sustainable experiences.

The impact of tourism on the local community further underscores the importance of careful planning. On the economic level, tourism generates income and creates business opportunities, while socio-cultural effects include festivals, folklore performances, and community events that reinforce local identity. Environmentally, tourism can stimulate organized waste management and ecological awareness, although challenges such as littering and pollution remain present. Interviews with local residents revealed that not all community members are fully aware of the potential benefits of tourism development, despite survey results showing that 76% recognized tourism as an important driver of local economic growth. This perceptual gap suggests that awareness-raising campaigns, participatory governance, and stronger community involvement are necessary to foster a more inclusive development process. From the perspective of tourism planning, the Drina and Bobija possess significant potential to create synergies between natural and cultural resources, inspired by the successful models of Tara and Durmitor. Specific activities such as rafting, cycling, mountaineering, and cultural manifestations can be further integrated into destination branding strategies, while investments in infrastructure (signage, accommodation, digital tools) will be essential for increasing accessibility and visitor satisfaction. Equally important is the integration of sustainable practices—such as waste reduction, preservation of biodiversity, and promotion of local gastronomy and traditions—which not only enhance authenticity but also ensure long-term competitiveness of these destinations. The valorization results and stakeholder insights confirm that Drina and Bobija are well-positioned to become leading examples of sustainable rural and nature-based tourism in Western Serbia. Their development should follow the trajectory of Tara and Durmitor, while also focusing on inclusive governance, stronger community awareness, and sustainable management of natural resources. This integrated approach would allow these areas to capitalize on their unique natural and cultural assets, creating diversified experiences that contribute to both local well-being and regional tourism competitiveness.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study provide a comprehensive understanding of the demographic characteristics, preferences, and perceptions of tourists visiting Durmitor and the Tara River, and they also allow for meaningful projections regarding the potential development of the Drina River and Bobija Mountain as sustainable tourism destinations. The demographic analysis revealed that the majority of visitors are young, well-educated, and predominantly within the 18–34 age group. This profile highlights a strong inclination toward physically active, adventurous, and recreational forms of tourism, such as hiking, cycling, rafting, and other outdoor pursuits. At the same time, the educational background of visitors suggests a heightened interest in cultural, ecological, and educational dimensions of the tourist offer. Although gender distribution was almost equal, women expressed a slightly greater sensitivity toward cultural and ecological values, whereas men often emphasized satisfaction with the general infrastructure and activities provided. These findings are crucial when considering the transferability of successful models from Durmitor and Tara to Drina and Bobija. For Bobija, whose resources include mountain trails, cycling routes, natural springs, and monastic paths, the predominance of younger, active, and educated tourists indicates a clear market potential. Tailoring the offer toward recreational and cultural experiences—such as guided hikes that incorporate cultural storytelling, heritage routes connected to local



monasteries, or eco-educational programs focused on water resources—would directly correspond to the interests of the identified tourist profile. Similarly, the Drina River, with its richness in water-based activities such as rafting, swimming, and water festivals, has the capacity to attract the same demographic that already shows a strong preference for Tara's adventurous offerings. Thus, both destinations can leverage these insights to create an appealing, sustainable, and differentiated product portfolio.

The comparative valorization of resources further reinforces this conclusion. Durmitor and Tara have already established themselves as exemplary models of sustainable tourism in Montenegro, combining high natural and cultural value with developed infrastructure and strong community involvement. The quantitative–qualitative evaluation of Drina and Bobija, conducted in cooperation with the Tourist Organization of Bajina Basta, indicates that both locations possess resources of similarly high specific and artistic value, as well as a strong potential for recreational and cultural tourism. While Bobija is particularly suitable for land-based and heritage-related activities, the Drina offers abundant possibilities for water-related recreation. Together, these assets can be integrated into a comprehensive tourism model that supports the development of sustainable, multi-faceted, and complementary tourist experiences. These results confirm the central hypothesis of the study: the successful experiences of Durmitor and Tara provide a transferable framework for developing sustainable tourism on Drina and Bobija. By emphasizing recreational and educational content, strengthening infrastructure, and fostering community involvement, Drina and Bobija can follow the path of Durmitor and Tara to become destinations that balance visitor satisfaction with ecological and cultural preservation.

The **practical implications** of the study are directly relevant to policymakers, local governments, and tourism organizations. The analysis underscores the importance of aligning tourism development with the needs and preferences of the dominant tourist segments—young, active, and educated visitors—while simultaneously creating complementary offers for older groups who may seek less physically demanding and more culturally immersive experiences. Investments in infrastructure, such as marked trails, interpretive centers, and improved waste management systems, are essential to ensure both the quality of visitor experience and environmental sustainability. Equally important is the role of the local community, which must be actively engaged in tourism planning and implementation. Raising awareness among residents about the potential benefits of tourism—economic, socio-cultural, and environmental—remains a crucial step toward fostering a sense of shared responsibility and long-term commitment to sustainable development. Several **limitations** must be acknowledged. The research was conducted during a single summer season, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other times of the year when different visitor profiles might dominate. The sample was restricted to tourists visiting Durmitor and Tara, leaving out other stakeholders such as local residents, policymakers, and business operators whose perspectives are equally important for a holistic assessment. Furthermore, the comparative methodology, while valuable for identifying transferable practices, cannot account for all contextual and structural differences between the Montenegrin and Serbian destinations.

In light of these limitations, **future research** should broaden both scope and methodology. Longitudinal studies across multiple seasons would provide a more nuanced understanding of tourist demographics and behavior. Expanding the research to include residents and stakeholders along the Drina and Bobija would reveal critical insights into socio-cultural acceptance, economic expectations, and environmental concerns. Advanced spatial analysis tools such as GIS could be employed to identify zones for conservation and development, ensuring that tourism planning is grounded in empirical evidence. Comparative studies with other Balkan destinations known for sustainable practices would further enrich the knowledge base and facilitate the adoption of regionally adaptable strategies. This research demonstrates that Drina and Bobija possess untapped but highly promising tourism potential. By adopting the sustainable practices proven successful in Durmitor and Tara, these destinations can cultivate authentic, diverse, and resilient tourism offers. The findings affirm that with careful planning, investment in infrastructure, and the active participation of the local community, Drina and Bobija can achieve a balance between economic growth, cultural preservation, and ecological sustainability, thereby establishing themselves as exemplary models of sustainable tourism in the region.



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