

## THE MANAGEMENT OF FACTORS STIMULATING DEMAND FOR WALKING TOURISM IN RURAL AREAS

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### Abstract

Due to its economic, social, environmental, and health significance, walking in rural areas provides plenty of benefits that contribute to the sustainable development and well-being of both visitors and local communities. The aim of this research is to analyse the influence of accommodation, gastronomy, and local guides on stimulating demand for walking tourism in rural areas, and to propose instruments for enhancing the management of these factors. Tourism demand describes the desires or needs of tourists for specific destinations, services, or activities. The geographical focus of the research is global. The survey was disseminated to a broad audience via academic platforms and social media networks. A total of 467 responses were gathered between March and May 2022. Data was processed using descriptive statistics and parametric statistics: the Independent Samples T-test, and the One-factorial Analysis of Variance (One-way ANOVA). Due to their key role in creating an authentic tourist experience, the research focused on three factors stimulating tourist demand for walking in rural areas: accommodation, gastronomy, and guides. The paper indicated that walkers in rural areas prefer to consume traditional meals, stay in traditional households, and get to know nature with the support of local guides. This paper contributes to the understanding of the key elements that attract tourists to rural areas, providing recommendations for the sustainable management of walking tourism and supporting local communities. Future studies will explore natural and cultural resources, walking infrastructure, and environmental awareness as factors.

**Key words:** accommodation, local guides, management instruments, tourist demand factors, traditional gastronomy.

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## УПРАВЉАЊЕ ФАКТОРИМА СТИМУЛИСАЊА ТРАЖЊЕ ЗА ПЕШАЧКИМ ТУРИЗМОМ У РУРАЛНИМ ПОДРУЧЈИМА

### Апстракт

Због економског, социјалног, еколошког и здравственог значаја, пешачење у руралним подручјима пружа бројне користи које доприносе одрживом развоју и благостању истовремено и посетиоцима и локалној заједници. Циљ овог истраживања је да се испита утицај смештаја, гастрономије и локалних водича на стимулисање тражње за пешачким туризмом у руралним подручјима, као и да се предложи средства за унапређење управљања овим факторима. Туристичка тражња описује жеље или потребе туриста за специфичним дестинацијама, услугама или активностима. Географски фокус истраживања је глобалан. Упитник је дистрибуиран широкој публици путем академских платформи и друштвених мрежа. Укупно 467 одговора је прикупљено од марта до маја 2022. године. Подаци су обрађени коришћењем дескриптивне статистике и параметарске статистике: т-тест независних узорака и једнофакторска анализа варијансе (One-way ANOVA). Због кључне улоге у стварању аутентичног туристичког доживљаја, у фокусу истраживања била су три фактора стимулисања туристичке тражње за пешачењем у руралним срединама: смештај, гастрономија и водичи. Рад је указао да шетачи у руралним подручјима преферирају конзумирање традиционалних јела, боравак у традиционалним домаћинствима и упознавање природе уз подршку локалних водича. Рад доприноси разумевању кључних елемената који привлаче туристе у руралне области, пружајући препоруке за одрживо управљање пешачким туризмом и подршку локалним заједницама. Будуће студије ће истраживати факторе као што су природни и културни ресурси, пешачка инфраструктура и еколошка свест.

**Кључне речи:** смештај, локални водичи, менаџмент инструменти, фактори туристичке тражње, традиционална гастрономија.

### INTRODUCTION

Walking tourism in rural areas has emerged as a significant activity due to its multifaceted benefits, encompassing economic, social, environmental, and health dimensions. Besides the promotion of sustainable development, this specific tourism form enhances the well-being of both visitors and local communities. By encouraging low-impact travel and fostering a deeper connection with nature, walking tourism aligns with global efforts to achieve sustainability while supporting rural economies and preserving cultural heritage.

The increasing interest in walking tourism highlights the need to understand and manage the factors that effectively stimulate demand for this specific form of rural tourism. In this context, tourism demand refers to the tourists' preferences, desires, or needs for rural destinations, services, and activities. Identifying and managing these factors is critical to optimising the experience for visitors while maximising the economic and social benefits for rural communities.

This paper examines the key factors influencing the demand for walking tourism in rural areas, focusing on three main elements: accommodation, gastronomy, and tour guides. The selection of these factors is based on previous research highlighting their importance in attracting tourists. According to Antić et al. (2025, p. 17), “the most common reason for staying in rural areas is healthy food.” Additionally, Sharpley (2000) found that tourists expect quality accommodation, food, and additional facilities, emphasising the role of accommodation in attracting visitors. Furthermore, Song et al. (2019, p. 1) report “a 15.4% increase in an attraction’s online popularity after the entry of accommodation sharing.” Finally, Rabotić (2009, p. 17) states that “guides should be considered as tourism players who fulfil a very important mission on behalf of the destination.” Based on these findings, this paper analyses how accommodation, gastronomy, and tour guides contribute to the development and popularity of walking tourism in rural areas.

The study draws on data collected from 467 questionnaires distributed to participants during the post-COVID pandemic period, from March to May 2022. These responses were analysed using descriptive and parametric statistical methods, including the Independent Samples T-test and One-way ANOVA. The findings reveal that walkers in rural areas strongly prefer consuming traditional meals, staying in traditional households, and exploring nature with the assistance of local guides.

The research identifies the core factors that stimulate demand for walking tourism and provides practical recommendations for managing them. By employing direct and indirect management instruments, stakeholders can enhance the appeal of rural walking destinations while ensuring sustainable practices.

Future studies will expand on this work by exploring additional factors such as natural and cultural resources, walking infrastructure, and environmental awareness. These dimensions are crucial for building a comprehensive framework to support the growth of walking tourism in rural areas while addressing sustainability challenges and meeting the evolving expectations of modern tourists. The paper aims to contribute to the understanding and practical application of effective management strategies in walking tourism, providing valuable insights for researchers, policymakers, and practitioners.

### *LITERATURE REVIEW*

Walking in rural areas has multiple levels of importance, which can be divided into ecological, economic, health, and social aspects (Molgo&Etfi, 2021). Walking in rural areas is ecologically important as it preserves the natural environment through an eco-friendly recreation form. It avoids pollution and promotes the awareness of nature by educating people on the importance of conserving natural resources and biodiversity (Isabel, & Antonio, 2022; Zhang, Fisher, & Wang, 2023). The economic importance of walking

in rural areas lies in boosting the local economy by increasing demand for businesses like accommodations, restaurants, guides, and souvenir shops, while also creating jobs in tourism and hospitality (Cai et al., 2019; Bošković, & Maksimović, 2019; Stančić et al., 2022). Walking in nature reduces stress, boosts mood, and improves overall mental health (Buehler, Pucher, & Bauman, 2020; Kotera et al., 2020; Mau et al., 2020). Rural walking tourism strengthens community bonds and fosters interaction between residents and visitors. It also promotes cultural exchange, allowing visitors to learn about and appreciate local customs, which encourages understanding and tolerance (Belligiano, Bindi, & Ievoli, 2021).

Several specific factors directly stimulate tourist demand for walking in rural areas (Mao et al., 2021). The accessibility and attractiveness of natural beauties such as mountains, forests, lakes, rivers, and other natural sights can significantly increase interest in walking. Scenic and photogenic landscapes attract nature and walking enthusiasts (Namazov, 2021). Well-maintained, clearly marked trails with detailed information enhance safety and appeal. Additionally, cultural and natural attractions further stimulate tourist demand. Cultural landmarks, historical sites, traditional villages, and local events can enrich the walking experience and attract tourists (Kusumah, 2023). Natural and cultural harmony is an important incentive for rural walking development (Wolf, Croft, & Green, 2019; Fafurida et al., 2023). Farmhouses, guesthouses, and restaurants with authentic local food add value to the experience (Zhang, Chen, & Hu, 2019). Organised guided tours, which can provide information on local flora, fauna, geology, and history, can increase the appeal of walking (Denkovska, & Dimitrijovska-Jankulovska, 2023). Educational programs and workshops about nature can further motivate visitors (Yousaf, Amin, & Santos, 2018). Safety and accessibility are a factor that includes ensuring safety on trails, including rescue services, first aid, and marked routes, which can increase the tourists' sense of security (Buehler, & Pucher, 2023). Environmental awareness also plays a role, as tourists increasingly prefer destinations that support nature conservation and sustainable practices (Trišić, 2021). Students typically look for affordable housing that supports social activities and adventure experiences, with internet access for communication and learning, and proximity to outdoor activities like hiking or camping (Prial et al., 2023; Haris & Gan, 2021). Factors that stimulate tourist demand for farmhouses, guesthouses, and restaurants with authentic local food add value to the experience (Palacios-Florencio et al., 2021). Tourist reviews, social media, and influencer impressions can directly boost interest in walking in specific rural areas (Idbenssi et al., 2023).

## *METHODS*

The research was conducted using both quantitative empirical methods and qualitative analysis, including analytical-synthetic, hypothetical-

deductive, and statistical methods. The modular questionnaire, based on the “Va’ Sentiero” project model (Simeoni, 2019), covers personal data, indoor and outdoor activities, travel and vacation expectations, and perceptions of financial support for rural walking tourism development. The model was chosen for its relevance to rural walking tourism, addressing key aspects like activity preferences and expectations. Qualitative data was collected through open-ended questions included in the survey.

A total of 467 electronic questionnaires were collected over three months (from March to May 2022) following the easing of COVID-19 movement restrictions. The survey was designed to provide equal selection opportunities for all participants. Distributed through academic platforms and social media, the online survey was available in both Serbian and English, allowing for a geographically diverse sample. The target group consisted of individuals with access to the survey who voluntarily participated, regardless of their country of origin. The key factors defining this group include digital literacy, language proficiency, interest in the topic, and geographic inclusivity. Consequently, the sample is broad and heterogeneous, with participant characteristics influenced by the survey’s promotion and distribution platforms. All collected questionnaires are valid and were included in the analysis.

The study used the Independent Samples T-test and One-way ANOVA to analyse demographic variables. The T-test identified differences between two independent groups (e.g., men and women), while One-way ANOVA examined variations across multiple groups based on factors like age, marital status, children, education, employment, and annual investment in tourism. The Life Orientation Test (LOT) measured dependent variables and the Tukey HSD test identified statistically significant differences. Data was analysed using SPSS software, and the results offer valuable insights for enhancing and promoting rural walking tourism, providing guidance for policymakers and practitioners.

The following hypotheses were defined in the research:

H1 – Walkers in rural areas desire traditional dishes, stay in traditional households, and have nature experiences with local guides;

H2 – Demographic and socioeconomic factors, including gender, age, marital status, number of children, and personal investment opportunities, significantly influence tourists’ preferences for food, accommodation, and nature experiences during active rural vacations; and

H3 – The level of educational and employment status influence differences in tourists’ desires or needs for walking in rural areas.

## RESULTS

Demand stimulators for rural walking tourism were analysed by examining dependent variables related to food and accommodation choices during rural vacations, as well as the manner in which visitors

familiarise themselves with the rural environment. Independent variables included the demographic characteristics of the respondents (Table 1). Women represented over 66% of the sample. The majority of the respondents were between 36 and 55 years old, married, with children, holding a university degree, and employed (52%, 51%, 61%, 66%, and 70% respectively). Additionally, 73% of the respondents were willing to invest up to 1,000 euros annually in their vacation.

*Table 1. Overview and definitions of independent variables*

Independent variable name	Independent variable code	Variable descriptive statistics
Gender	G	
Female	G1	66%
Male	G2	34%
Age	A	
≤25	A1	18%
26–35	A2	12%
36–45	A3	25%
46–55	A4	27%
≥56	A5	18%
Marital status	MS	
Single	MS1	27%
Cohabitation	MS2	13%
Married	MS3	51%
Divorced	MS4	6%
widow/widower	MS5	3%
Number of children	NoC	
0	NoC0	39%
1	NoC1	21%
2	NoC2	30%
3	NoC3	9%
≥4	NoC4	1%
Education	E	
Without formal education	E1	0%
Primary education	E2	1%
Secondary education	E3	20%
College	E4	13%
University	E5	66%
Work status	WS	
Student	WS1	15%
Unemployed	WS2	6%
Self-employed	WS3	10%
Employed	WS4	60%
Retired	WS5	7%
Other	WS6	2%
Yearly personal tourist investment	YPTI	
<500 EUR	YPTI1	39%
500–1000 EUR	YPTI2	34%
>1,000 EUR	YPTI3	27%

*Source:* Author's calculations

Descriptive statistics show that visitors in rural areas prefer traditional regional dishes (55%) or self-prepared food (36%), with fewer opting for restaurants or fast food (9%) (Table 2). For accommodation, traditional local homes are most favoured (51%), followed by hotels and apartments (38%), with minimal interest in tents, recreational vehicles, and hostels (11%). When experiencing nature, 71% prefer a knowledgeable local guide, 24% use maps, and only 5% choose accredited tour guides. Hypothesis H1 was confirmed, as visitors' preferences focus on traditional dishes, staying in traditional homes, and exploring nature with local guides.

*Table 2. Descriptive statistic of dependent variables versus independent variable G*

Dependent Variable	Variable code	N	Mean	Median	Std. deviation	Minimum	Maximum
What kind of food would you eat during your trip and active vacation?	V1	467	2,76	4	1,41	1	4
Valid		Percent		Valid Percent		Cumulative percent	
homemade meals	V11	35.8		35.8		35.8	
restaurant food	V12	7.5		7.5		43.3	
fast food	V13	1.9		1.9		45.2	
traditional regional dishes	V14	54.8		54.8		100.0	
Dependent Variable		N	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
What type of accommodation would you prefer for your active vacation?	V2	467	4,79	6	1,53	1	6
Valid		Percent		Valid Percent		Cumulative percent	
recreational vehicle	V21	3.2		3.2		3.2	
tent	V22	6.0		6.0		9.2	
hotel	V23	19.9		19.9		29.1	
hostel	V24	1.3		1.3		30.4	
apartment	V25	18.4		18.4		48.4	
traditional local house	V26	51.2		51.2		100.0	
Dependent Variable		N	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
How would you like to experience pristine nature?	V3	467	2,47	3	,85	1	3

Valid		Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative percent
navigating with a map	V31	24.0	24.0	24.0
utilizing the services of an accredited tour guide from a professional company	V32	4.9	4.9	28.9
employing a knowledgeable local guide familiar with the region	V33	71.1	71.1	100.0

*Source:* Author's calculations

Using the Independent Samples T-test, the existence of significant differences between the mean values of V1, V2, and V3 in G1 and G2 was analysed (Table 3). The analysis of the results indicates no significant difference in the attitudes of women and men in the choice of accommodation in the rural area, but there is a significant difference in the selection of food and the way in which they get to know untouched nature. Compared to men, women prefer traditional gastronomy and the services of local guides.

*Table 3. Independent Samples T-test*

Dependent Variable	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances				T-test for Equality of Means			
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference
								Lower Upper
V1	,145	,704	,832	465	,406	,11525	,13855	-,15702 ,38751
V2	31,047	,000	3,043	261,407	,003	,48350	,15890	,17062 ,79638
V3	64,556	,000	4,461	258,395	,000	,39303	,08811	,21953 ,56654

*Source:* Author's calculations

The influence of *age* on the dependent variables V1, V2, and V3 measured by the LOT was investigated using the One-way ANOVA of different groups (Table 4). The respondents were divided into five groups – A1, A2, A3, A4, and A5, according to their age. A statistically significant difference at the  $p < 0.05$  level was found in the LOT results of the five age groups per the following dependent variables: V2 and V3. Re-



spondents aged 25 and under are more likely to prefer traditional accommodation compared to those over 36 years of age, while respondents aged 26 to 35 tend to favour accommodation in traditional households more than those over 46. Additionally, respondents aged 25 and under are slightly more inclined to choose a local guide to explore a rural area than those aged 36 to 45.

*Table 4. One-way ANOVA results of dependent variables versus independent variable A*

Dependent Variable		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
V1	Between Groups	7.96	4	1.99	1.00	0.41
	Within Groups	923.70	462	2.00		
	<i>Total</i>	<i>931.66</i>	<i>466</i>			
V2	Between Groups	114.39	4	28.60	13.56	0.00
	Within Groups	974.47	462	2.11		
	<i>Total</i>	<i>1088.852</i>	<i>466</i>			
V3	Between Groups	9.02	4	2.25	3.14	0.01
	Within Groups	331.34	462	0.72		
	<i>Total</i>	<i>340.36</i>	<i>466</i>			

*Source:* Author's calculations

The influence of *marital status* on the dependent variables V1, V2, and V3 measured by the LOT was investigated using the One-way ANOVA of different groups (Table 5). The respondents were divided into five groups – MS1, MS2, MS3, MS4, and, MS5, according to their marital status. A statistically significant difference at the  $p < 0.05$  level was found in the LOT results of the five marital status groups per the following dependent variables: V1, V2, and V3. Respondents who identified as single slightly preferred traditional gastronomy compared to those in cohabiting relationships. Single respondents also moderately favoured accommodation in traditional households over those who were married or divorced. Additionally, single respondents were slightly more likely than divorced individuals to choose a local guide for exploring untouched nature.

The influence of the *number of children* on the dependent variables V1, V2, and V3 measured by the LOT was investigated using the One-way ANOVA of different groups (Table 6). The respondents were divided into five groups – NoC0, NoC1, NoC2, NoC3, and NoC4, according to the number of children. A statistically significant difference at the  $p < 0.05$  level was found in the LOT results of the five children groups per the following dependent variables: V2 and V3. Respondents without children moderately preferred traditional accommodation in rural areas and the services of a local guide for exploring the rural environment, compared to those with two or three children.

*Table 5. One-way ANOVA results of dependent variables versus independent variable MS*

Dependent Variable		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
V1	Between Groups	28.92	4	7.23	3.70	0.01
	Within Groups	902.74	462	1.95		
	<i>Total</i>	<i>931.66</i>	<i>466</i>			
V2	Between Groups	78.43	4	19.61	8.97	0.00
	Within Groups	1010.42	462	2.19		
	<i>Total</i>	<i>1088.85</i>	<i>466</i>			
V3	Between Groups	8.76	4	2.19	3.05	0.02
	Within Groups	331.60	462	,718		
	<i>Total</i>	<i>340,36</i>	<i>466</i>			

Source: Author's calculations

*Table 6. One-way ANOVA results of dependent variables versus independent variable NoC*

Dependent Variable		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
V1	Between Groups	1.78	4	0.45	0.22	0.93
	Within Groups	929.87	462	2.01		
	<i>Total</i>	<i>931.66</i>	<i>466</i>			
V2	Between Groups	73.08	4	18.27	8.31	0.00
	Within Groups	1015.78	462	2.20		
	<i>Total</i>	<i>1088.85</i>	<i>466</i>			
V3	Between Groups	15.54	4	3.88	5.52	0.00
	Within Groups	324.82	462	,703		
	<i>Total</i>	<i>340.36</i>	<i>466</i>			

Source: Author's calculations

The influence of *yearly personal tourist investment* on the dependent variables V1, V2, and V3 measured by the LOT was investigated using the One-way ANOVA of different groups (Table 7). The respondents were divided into YPTI1, YPTI2, and YPTI3 groups according to yearly personal tourist investment. A statistically significant difference at the  $p < 0.05$  level was found in the LOT results of the three yearly personal tourist investment groups per the following dependent variables: V1 and V3. Respondents who invest up to 1,000 EUR annually in tourism are slightly more likely to prefer traditional gastronomy than those who invest more. Additionally, respondents who invest less than 500 EUR per year in tourism are slightly more likely to choose a local guide for exploring untouched nature than those who invest up to 1,000 EUR.

*Table 7. One-way ANOVA results of dependent variables versus independent variable YPTI*

Dependent Variable		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
V1	Between Groups	23.99	2	11.99	6.13	.002
	Within Groups	907.67	464	1.96		
	<i>Total</i>	<i>931.66</i>	<i>466</i>			
V2	Between Groups	6.72	2	3.36	1.44	.238
	Within Groups	1082.13	464	2.33		
	<i>Total</i>	<i>1088.85</i>	<i>466</i>			
V3	Between Groups	4.64	2	2.32	3.21	.041
	Within Groups	335.72	464	.724		
	<i>Total</i>	<i>340.36</i>	<i>466</i>			

*Source:* Author's calculations

Considering the above-mentioned separate analyses of the research results, the overall analysis of the results confirms the validity of hypothesis H2.

The influence of *education* on the dependent variables V1, V2, and V3 measured by the LOT was investigated using the One-way ANOVA of different groups (Table 8). The respondents were divided into five groups – E1, E2, E3, E4, and E5, according to the level of education. A statistically significant difference at the  $p < 0.05$  level was not found in the LOT results of the five education groups. The analysis of the research results indicates that the level of education has no significant impact on differences in visitors' preferences or needs for walking in rural areas.

*Table 8. One-way ANOVA results of dependent variables versus independent variable E*

Dependent Variable		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
V1	Between Groups	8.16	4	2.04	1.02	0.40
	Within Groups	923.49	462	2.00		
	<i>Total</i>	<i>931.66</i>	<i>466</i>			
V2	Between Groups	17.16	4	4.30	1.85	0.12
	Within Groups	1071.69	462	2.32		
	<i>Total</i>	<i>1088.85</i>	<i>466</i>			
V3	Between Groups	4.63	4	1.16	1.59	0.18
	Within Groups	335.73	462	.727		
	<i>Total</i>	<i>340.36</i>	<i>466</i>			

*Source:* Author's calculations

The influence of *work status* on the dependent variables V1, V2, and V3 measured by the LOT was investigated using the One-way ANOVA of different groups (Table 9). The respondents were divided into five groups – WS1, WS2, WS3, WS4, and WS5, according to their employment status. A statistically significant difference at the  $p < 0.05$  level was found in the LOT results of the five work status groups per the dependent variable V2. Respondents who identified as students were moderately more likely to prefer traditional accommodation during travel and active vacations compared to the unemployed, employed, and retired respondents.

*Table 9. One-way ANOVA results of dependent variables versus independent variable WS*

Dependent Variable		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
V1	Between Groups	15.03	5	3.01	1.51	0.18
	Within Groups	916.63	461	1.99		
	<i>Total</i>	<i>931.66</i>	<i>466</i>			
V2	Between Groups	62.31	5	12.46	5.60	0.00
	Within Groups	1026.54	461	2.23		
	<i>Total</i>	<i>1088.85</i>	<i>466</i>			
V3	Between Groups	4.76	5	,952	1.31	0.26
	Within Groups	335.60	461	,728		
	<i>Total</i>	<i>340.36</i>	<i>466</i>			

*Source:* Author's calculations

Considering the above-mentioned separate analyses of the research results, the overall analysis of the results does not confirm the validity of hypothesis H3.

## DISCUSSION

The research focuses on three key factors driving demand for rural walking tourism: accommodation, gastronomy, and guides. It reveals that visitors prefer traditional meals, staying in traditional households, and exploring nature with local guides. The study also compares preferences for rural walking based on various demographic factors.

The research, using a simple random sample, found that women showed more interest in rural walking tourism than men. Gender differences in accommodation and guide preferences in favour of females, along with similar food preferences, are expected to stimulate interest in rural walking tourism.

People under the age of 35 prefer authentic experiences, such as staying in traditional houses, for their cultural value. Informed by digital platforms, they favour sustainable tourism that aligns with their environmental and community-focused values.

Singles show distinct preferences for food, guide services, and accommodation compared to couples and divorced individuals. They are more inclined to explore local culture through traditional gastronomy and guides, seeking authentic experiences and social interactions due to their flexibility and fewer obligations. Childless individuals favour private, authentic accommodations and adventurous activities, while families prefer spacious, child-friendly lodgings and guided tours.

Visitors share a universal interest in rural walking, regardless of education level. However, students prefer affordable, internet-equipped housing, while the unemployed seek peaceful, budget-friendly accommodations. Employed individuals favour comfortable stays near nature, and retirees prioritise comfort and health services. Spending habits show minor differences in food and exploration preferences. Tracking solo and family travel trends is recommended for managing rural walking tourism demand.

Local gastronomy, accommodation, and guides are key to boosting tourist demand. Quality lodging and authentic cuisine enhance the rural experience, while guides offer organised tours highlighting local nature and history. Effective promotion through digital platforms can attract walking enthusiasts. The recommended management instruments include surveys, focus groups, social network analysis, and benchmarking.

## *CONCLUSIONS*

This research provides valuable insights into the factors driving demand for rural walking tourism, emphasising the role of accommodation, gastronomy, and guides. It highlights how demographic variations shape tourism preferences, offering actionable recommendations for stakeholders to develop targeted strategies. The findings contribute to the growing field of sustainable tourism by identifying key preferences and trends.

Despite its contributions, the study faced several limitations. A simple random sample may not fully capture the diversity of rural walking tourists. Additionally, the research focuses on broad demographic categories, which may overlook more specific behavioural patterns or regional differences. The research was conducted in the initial stage of the post-COVID-19 pandemic, so the results may not reflect the same factors in demand for rural tourism in the following period. The limited exploration of external factors such as infrastructure, accessibility, and environmental conditions also constrains the findings.

Future research should address these limitations by incorporating diverse sampling methods and exploring additional factors such as natural and cultural resources, walking infrastructure, and environmental awareness. This will ensure a more comprehensive understanding of rural walking tourism and its potential to contribute to sustainable development.

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## УПРАВЉАЊЕ ФАКТОРИМА СТИМУЛИСАЊА ТРАЖЊЕ ЗА ПЕШАЧКИМ ТУРИЗМОМ У РУРАЛНИМ ПОДРУЧЈИМА

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### Резиме

Шетња у руралним подручјима доноси бројне користи за одрживи развој и добробит посетилаца и локалних заједница. Овај рад истражује управљање факторима који стимулишу тражњу за пешачким туризмом у руралним срединама, користећи податке из 467 упитника. Фокус истраживања су смештај, гастрономија и водичи. због њихове кључне улоге у стварању аутентичног туристичког искуства.

Резултати показују да шетачи преферирају традиционалну храну, боравак у аутентичним домаћинствима и локалне водиче. Анализа је указала на разлике у преференцијама смештаја и водича између жена и мушкараца у корист жена, док су преференције за традиционалну храну сличне. Млађе генерације траже аутентична искуства, а традиционалне куће их привлаче због културно-историјске вредности. Особе без партнера више су заинтересоване за истраживање локалне културе кроз храну и водиче, док људи без деце преферирају приватнији смештај попут традиционалних кућа. Без обзира на степен образовања, испитаници имају сличне жеље за руралним шетњама. Студенти преферирају приступачан смештај с друштвеним активностима и интернетом, док незапослени бирају економичан смештај и мирно окружење. Запослени траже удобан смештај за краће боравке, док пензионери преферирају мирно окружење с приступом здравственим услугама. Разлике у преференцијама исхране и водича су мале између оних који троше до 1.000 евра и оних који троше више.

Препоручује се примена менаџмент инструмената за управљање тражњом, укључујући анкете, фокус групе, анализе друштвених мрежа и бенчмаркинг. Истовремено, ово истраживање може указати на потенцијалне препреке и слабости у тренутним понудама, омогућавајући правовремено прилагођавање стратегија и производа, те може допринети ефикаснијем управљању факторима који стимулишу тражњу за руралним пешачким туризмом. Будућим истраживањима биће обухваћени фактори који се односе на природне и културне ресурсе, инфраструктуру и еколошку свест.