

Article

Tourists' Motivation in Wetland Destinations: Gornje Podunavlje Special Nature Reserve Case Study (Mura-Drava-Danube Transboundary Biosphere Reserve)

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Abstract: The main objectives of this research were twofold: firstly, to evaluate tourists' perception of Gornje Podunavlje Special Nature Reserve, one of the four significant protected areas within the Serbian part of Mura-Drava-Danube Biosphere Reserve, and secondly, to identify the motivations behind tourists' visits to wetlands and their overall satisfaction with the visits. In addition, this study was also focused on the relationships between aforementioned constructs and tourists' socio-demographic characteristics and visit characteristics. Finally, this study attempts to address the relationships between tourists' motives for their visit, their image perception and satisfaction. The research findings showed that each of the three remaining factors had significant relationships with Satisfaction and experience. The research was conducted in the form of the survey in the period between May 2020 and April 2022 on the sample of 216 visitors. The research findings showed that each of three remaining factors had significant relationships with Satisfaction and experience. Relationships are also found between identified improvement requirements, Motivation for spending time particularly in wetlands, and perceived biodiversity image. Finally, there are significant relationships between duration of the visit with Satisfaction and experience and Motivation for spending time in nature and future behavior. Practical implications of the research results might be beneficial for managers of wetland destinations, in order to improve the offer in line with tourists' preferences.

Keywords: Gornje Podunavlje Special Nature Reserve; image; tourists' motivation; satisfaction; experience



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1. Introduction

Around the world, wetlands are still facing the threat of loss or degradation, despite the fact that they can bring many environmental services or functions [1]. Wetlands deliver a wide range of ecosystem services that contribute to human well-being, for example water supply and purification, climate regulation, coastal protection, recreational opportunities, and, increasingly, tourism [2,3]. They represent a popular location for a variety of activities, including freshwater recreation, adventure, cultural tourism, hiking, nature-based tourism and ecotourism [4]. Wetlands and their wildlife play an important role in the global tourism experience because the world's wetlands have much to offer the tourist. The wetland itself can benefit directly when the income from tourism (entry fees, local products, etc.) is used directly for conservation measures at the wetland, thus linking tourism with long-term conservation [5].

Many wetlands are located in protected areas around the world. For example, in the Mura-Drava-Danube Biosphere Reserve, there are four wetland habitats protected at the

same time under the Ramsar Convention [6]. In the context of biosphere reserves, tourism represents an important topic, so ecotourism and nature-based tourism could be promoted here because of their focus on nature protection and community engagement [7].

Destination image is frequently seen as a crucial factor in the decision-making process for whether or not to visit a particular destination, in this case the wetland. Tourists are more prone towards choosing a destination about which they have positive perceptions or impressions [8]. On the other hand, such decisions are often shaped by tourists' motives, preferences and affinities, while all together they might shape tourists' on-site recreation experiences, together with their satisfaction and future behavior [9]. The main research gap is reflected in the fact that tourist motivation and satisfaction in the context of a wetland area in Gornje Podunavlje Special Nature Reserve was not addressed before this research. Furthermore, considering the fact that Mura-Drava-Danube Biosphere Reserve was declared as such in 2021, this research is one of the first studies regarding the visitors' motivation, satisfaction, image perception and future behavioral intentions within its boundaries. In light of this, the main focus of the study was put on:

- Tourists' perception of the Gornje Podunavlje Special Nature Reserve image, as one of four important wetlands, protected under the Ramsar Convention, of the Mura-Drava-Danube Biosphere Reserve, as well as on tourists' motives for visiting wetlands (including their interests and affinities) and satisfaction (including their intentions to return).
- Additionally, this research was also focused on relationships between previously mentioned constructs and tourists' socio-demographic characteristics and visit characteristics.
- Finally, this study attempts to address the relationship between tourists' motives for visiting, their image perception and satisfaction with the visit.

It is important to indicate that Gornje Podunavlje represents the first Special Nature Reserve in Serbia to have a Visitor Management Plan (only Djerdap National Park had a Visitor Management Plan before this time). The writing procedure of the Gornje Podunavlje Visitor Management Plan represents a consequence of gaining the status of the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas awarded by the EUROPARC Federation in 2014, which is actually an external impact from abroad that has affected improving tourism development in the Gornje Podunavlje Special Nature Reserve, as an initiative of the World Wild Fund for Nature (WWF Adria). More specifically, the following facts led to the monitoring of the visitors' attitudes: (1) Gornje Podunavlje attained the status of the EUROPARC Sustainable Tourism Destination; (2) the action plan for gaining the status of the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas required writing of the Visitor Management Plan; (3) the Visitor Management Plan further initiated a visitor monitoring procedure. Therefore, it could be said that various kinds of international status in nature protection could significantly contribute to further tourism development on the basis of international cooperation, by bringing new initiatives and ideas (e.g., visitors' monitoring procedure), which is particularly important in societies/countries, such as Serbia, that are still not sufficiently developed. With globally recognizable status in nature protection and sustainable development, biosphere reserves additionally encourage the popularity of tourist destinations in their territories.

2. Literature Review

Destination image perception of wetland protected areas. Wetlands are often perceived as valuable ecosystems, primarily based on the protection of biodiversity, as well as on the fact that they have a significant role in reducing air pollution and dealing with extreme climate issues [10]. Besides that, wetlands are also providing opportunities for the development of tourism based on nature, such as ecotourism, while additional facilities could be organized in cooperation with the local community situated in surrounding rural areas [11]. Nowadays, wetlands have become important destinations for ecotourism worldwide, especially in developing countries [12,13]. Such circumstances might be beneficial for Serbia, a country in transition, where the Gornje Podunavlje Special Nature Reserve is lo-

cated, particularly considering the fact that this protected area is situated in the framework of the border area.

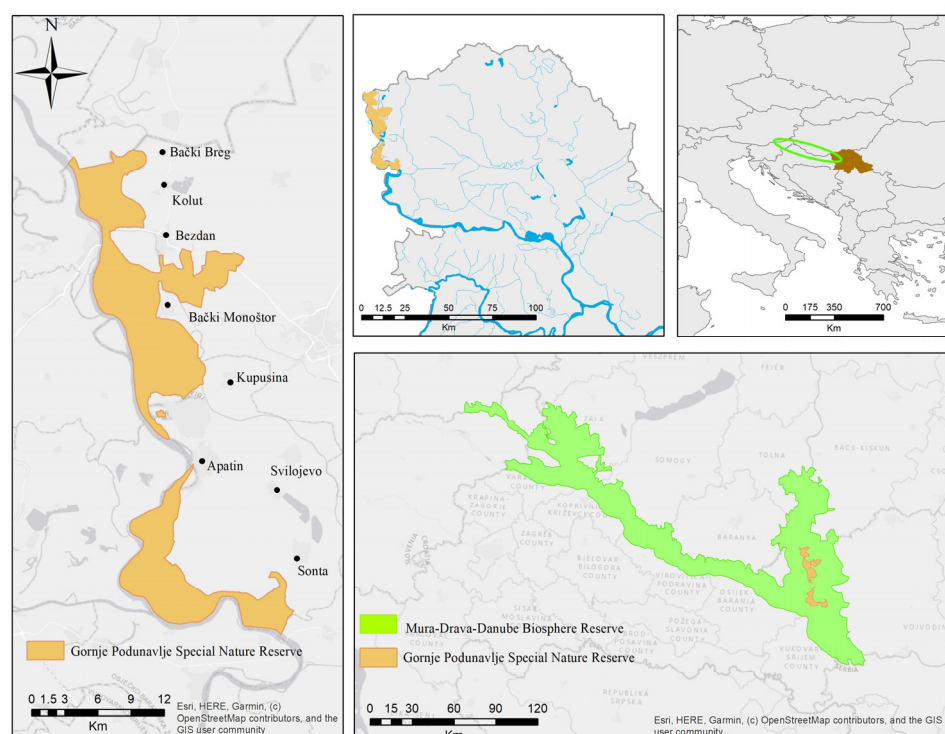
Motives, affinities and interests for visiting wetland areas. Motivation for travelling is considered as an important driver of travel behavior and it usually refers to a psychological need in the pre-visit stage [14–18]. Understanding the motivations, affinities, and interests of tourists may help to explain why they act in a particular way [15,19–23], which might be crucial for various destination stakeholders in the field of developing the management and marketing strategy in protected areas [15,19,20,24–28]. Panin and Mbrica [29] indicated that the main motives in Serbian eco-tourism are related to sports and recreational activities, such as walking in the forest, the awareness of positive impact on health, seeing and enjoying nature. Regardless, research is still necessary on the main motives, affinities and interests of tourists within a specific type of eco-tourism destination, such as wetlands, which was one of the main drivers for conducting such research within the Gornje Podunavlje Special Nature Reserve.

Tourists' satisfaction in the wetland protected areas represents one of the important elements required for enabling sustainable development of the wetland destination and it has received considerable attention in researching its impact on behavioral intention of tourists [30]. On the other hand, managers of protected areas are obtaining increasingly aware of the economic importance of meeting tourists' needs and providing an unforgettable experience for them within the destination [31]. Requirements for a positive tourism experience have gradually increased, in line with the constant development of tourism activities in natural protected areas [13,32,33]. Lee [8] based a research project on tourists' satisfaction within the wetland destination by measuring tourists' satisfaction with natural landscapes, service and recreational equipment, besides overall satisfaction, which was adopted for the purpose of the study conducted in the Gornje Podunavlje Special Nature Reserve.

Managing tourists' satisfaction in wetland destinations. No matter that previous studies have researched relationships between tourists' perception of the destination image, motivation for travelling, satisfaction with the experience and future behavioral intentions, these aspects are still not sufficiently understood in the field of ecotourism, were managing destination image could be more challenging [34]. In terms of protected areas, destination image improvement could increase tourists' satisfaction. On the other hand, with increased satisfaction, tourists might become loyal and more frequent in their visits to ecotourism destinations and they might be more likely to recommend a specific destination to others [35]. Previous findings also indicated motives, affinities and interests of tourists as important predictors of future behavior intentions [16,36–38]. Finally, paying attention to the socio-demographic characteristics of tourists is important in order to adjust activities and services to the main motivations, satisfaction and loyalty of destination visitors [16,36–39]. Besides tourists' socio-demographic characteristics, the research could yield interesting results by analyzing relationships between the main characteristics of the visit to the Gornje Podunavlje Special Nature Reserve and tourists' satisfaction.

Case Study Area

In 2021, UNESCO recognized the unique river landscape along the Mura, Drava and Danube as the world's first 5-country Biosphere Reserve—Transboundary Biosphere Reserve Mura Drava Danube (TBR MDD) [40]. With an area of around 930,000 hectares and a population of almost a million people, it makes up Europe's largest protected riverine area across five countries: Austria, Slovenia, Hungary, Croatia and Serbia (Scheme 1). It is the first Biosphere Reserve in the world which is commonly shared and managed by five countries [41].

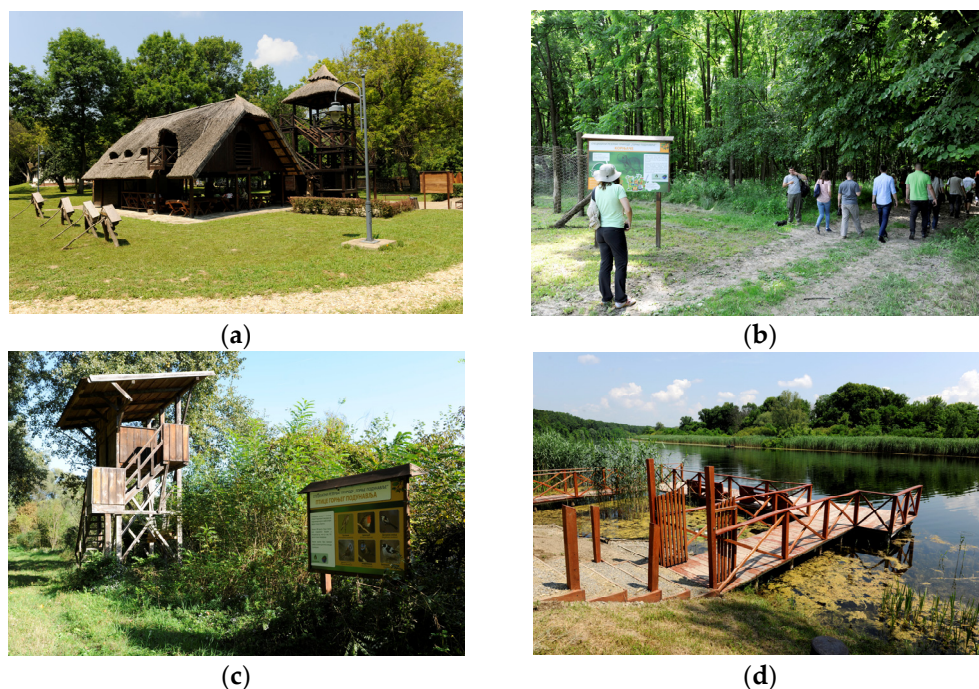


Scheme 1. Map indicating location of Gornje Podunavlje Special Nature Reserve in Vojvodina (the northern part of Serbia) and Mura-Drava-Danube Biosphere Reserve. Author: Vladimir Marković. green circle: With an area of around 930,000 hectares and a population of almost a million people, it makes up Europe’s largest protected riverine area across five countries: Austria, Slovenia, Hungary, Croatia and Serbia.

There are four important protected areas in the Serbian part of the TBR MDD: Gornje Podunavlje and Karadjordjevo Special Nature reserves, Tikvara Nature Park and Junaković Monument of Nature (Scheme 1). These protected areas are the most representative remaining parts of the nature which used to exist in Vojvodina (the northern part of Serbia) [42]. GornjePodunavlje Special Nature Reserve is the most recognizable by its preserved features of the floodplain along the Danube River [43]. It is a very spacious swamp area of Apatin and Monoštorski Rit, shaped by the work and dynamics of the Danube, which is accompanied by the Kozara and Štrbac regions, along the alluvial region of the little river Plazović [42]. The ecosystems of the Gornje Podunavlje Special Nature Reserve are rich, diverse, specific and unique, with a large number of rare plant and animal species. Its vegetation is built of 57 herbaceous, forest, and shrubby plant communities. There are 60 species of diurnal butterflies, 55 species of fish, 11 species of amphibians, 9 species of reptiles, over 230 species of birds and 51 species of mammals. This Special Nature Reserve is a hatchery ground for fish, as well as a nesting place for white-tailed eagle and black storks. The Special Nature Reserve is a habitat of marsh deer and wild boar [44].

The Gornje Podunavlje Special Nature Reserves is also an area of international importance—The Ramsar site, a wetland of international importance [6]. The Special Nature Reserve is part of the Bačko Podunavlje Biosphere Reserve, which was declared as such in 2017 [42], and the Transboundary Biosphere Reserve Mura Drava Danube in 2021.

In 2014 and 2022, the Gornje Podunavlje Special Nature Reserve was awarded the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas—ECST [45]. The development of tourism is carried out according to the principles of sustainable tourism (Scheme 2) that are outlined in the adopted documents *Gornje Podunavlje Special Nature Reserve—Sustainable Tourism Strategy* [46] and *Gornje Podunavlje Special Nature Reserve—Action Plan for Sustainable Tourism (2021–2025)* [47].



Scheme 2. Gornje Podunavlje Special Nature Reserve(Mura-Drava-Danube Transboundary Biosphere Reserve): (a) Karapandža Eco-Centre, (b) Eco-educational path (Karapandža), (c) Birdwatching Tower (eco-educational path, Bestrement), (d) Mooring for boats. Photo: Vladimir Stojanović.

3. Methodology

3.1. Instrument

The survey research was conducted by using a questionnaire with three groups of questions. The first group was related to the respondents' socio-demographic characteristics, including their gender, age, education degree, current working status, professional orientation and place of residence. The second group of questions was related to the main characteristics of the respondents' visit to the Gornje Podunavlje Special Nature Reserve, such as the manner of organizing the visit, voyage companions, duration of the visit and improvement requirements. The third group of questions was related to the respondents' perception of the image of the researched protected area (6 items), their interests and affinities (10 items), motives of the visit (10 items), satisfaction with certain aspects of the visit (11 items) and future behavior intentions (3 items). This set of indicators was developed using the scale applied in the Lee [8] study.

3.2. Data Collecting Procedure

The research was conducted in the form of a survey in the period between May 2020 and April 2022. The respondents filled out the questionnaires with a standard pen-and-paper procedure in the field, but also by using the electronic version of the questionnaire distributed by official e-mail addresses and social media accounts. It is important to indicate that the online and on-site questionnaires were completely the same. Besides, both types were focused on the same target group, those who have visited this Special Nature Reserve. The data collecting procedure was supported by the Manager of the Gornje Podunavlje Special Nature Reserve, as well as by experts employed within surroundings tourism organizations and other interested administrators of social media groups. Their support was reflected in a distribution of questionnaires on site, as well as via official profiles of their business units on social networks. Respondents filled out the questionnaires, by using the Likert scale, ranging their attitudes between 1 (complete disagreement) to 5 (complete agreement). They were informed of the fact that their participation in this study

was voluntarily, as well as that no one would be able to identify their answers and their participation in the study was for scientific purposes only.

3.3. Methods and Main Procedures of the Study

For the purpose of this study, descriptive statistics were used for explanation of the respondents' main characteristics, in order to provide a better insight into the obtained sample. Descriptive statistics were also used with the purpose of providing an explanation of the main characteristics of the respondents' visits. Furthermore, explanatory factor analysis was conducted with the main purpose of sorting the 40 researched items into a smaller number of factors, to provide a clear interpretation of the results. Descriptive statistics were used again, in order to identify the mean values of the recorded factors. Net, Multivariate General Linear Modelling was conducted in order to identify in which manner the identified factors are shaped by the respondents' socio-demographic characteristics, on the one hand, and the main characteristics of their visits, on the other. Finally, the same analysis was used in order to identify the manner in which respondents' satisfaction and experience are shaped by their motivation for spending time in nature, particularly in wetlands, their future behavioral intentions, and their image of the Gornje Podunavlje Special Nature Reserve, based on its biodiversity.

4. Results

4.1. Sample

The sampling obtained 216 respondents, 45.4% male and 54.6% female. An approximate percentage of the respondents were aged between 31 and 40 (27.3%) and 21 and 30 (26.4%) years, while a slightly lower percentage of the respondents were aged between 41 and 50 (18.5%) and 51 and 60 years (18.1%). A minority of the respondents were those younger than 20 (6.5%) and 61 and over (3.2%). According to the respondents' education degree, the majority of them gained a high school (45.4%) or four-year bachelor faculty education degree (33.8%), while those who finished a two-years faculty (9.3%) or master's degree (8.3%) are represented by a significantly lower percentage within the sample. A minority of the respondents finished grammar school (2.8%) or gained a PhD (0.5%). In terms of the respondents' current work status, the majority of them indicated that they are employed (66.7%). A significantly lower percentage are unemployed (18.1%) or are students (13%), while a minority of the respondents are pupils (2.3%). It is interesting to notice that 37% of employed respondents indicated that their professional direction is not in the field of tourism or nature protection, while 20.4% are related to these fields in terms of their professional orientation. The rest of the respondents within the sample did not provide answers, considering their previously marked unemployed working status. The majority of the respondents live in a smaller urban area (45.5%) or within a rural settlement (29.6%), while a slightly lower percentage are from larger cities, those with more than 80,000 inhabitants (24.5%).

4.2. Characteristics of Visits

The majority of the sample, 82.9% of the respondents, indicated that they had independently organized their visit, while 17.1% of organized their visit indirectly, by using the services of travel agencies or various associations in the field of tourism and nature protection. In terms of the respondents' voyage companions, the majority of the respondents visited the Gornje Podunavlje Special Nature Reserve with family members (40.7%) or with friends (36.1%), while a slightly lower percentage of visited this Special Nature Reserve with colleagues (23.1%). Visits to the Gornje Podunavlje Special Nature Reserve usually lasted between 2 or 3 h (41.7%) and 1 or 2 h (21.3%). A Slightly lower percentage of the respondents preferred visits of more than 4 h (17.6%), or between 3 and 4 h (14.8%), while the visit of a minority of the respondents lasted less than 1 h (4.7%). In terms of the offer advancement, an approximate percentage of the respondents believe that the Gornje Podunavlje Special Nature Reserve needs to improve its marketing (41.2%), as well

as activities in terms of the content of the visit and facilities (40.1%). On the other hand, 15.7% of the respondents indicated that the availability of information on-site also requires improvement, while 10.2% stated that the Gornje Podunavlje needs to pay attention to enabling the possibility to visit this Special Nature Reserve without a previous appointment, as well as on equipping other parts for usage. Finally, 1.9% of the respondents believe that improvements are required in all the aforementioned aspects.

4.3. Results of Exploratory Factor Analysis

Analysis of the main components was conducted for 40 items regarding the image of the Gornje Podunavlje Special Nature Reserve, interests and affinities of tourists, motives for their visits, as well as regarding their experience and satisfaction with certain aspects of the visit and their future behavior intentions. The recorded value of the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin's indicator is 0.925, which exceeds the recommended level of 0.6. The Bartlett's test of sphericity reached statistical significance ($p = 0.000$) and justified the application of the principal component analysis for the purpose of this study. The principal component analysis revealed the presence of four components with values over 1, explaining 46.3%, 8.2%, 5.6% and 4.1% of the variance. After the extraction of factors, Promax rotation with Kaiser Normalization was used. Finally, the factor analysis resulted in a model with 40 items grouped into the 4 factors that explained 64.2% of the total variance. Identified factors are represented within Table 1 and are labelled as: Satisfaction and experience (1), Motivation for spending time in nature and future behavior (2), Motivation for spending time particularly in wetlands (3) and Image based on biodiversity (4).

Table 1. Tourists' motivation, interests and affinities, perception of image, satisfaction, experience and future behavior intentions—Factor Analysis.

Items $\alpha = 0.970$	Factors			
	1 $\alpha = 0.949$	2 $\alpha = 0.913$	3 $\alpha = 0.903$	4 $\alpha = 0.899$
Satisfaction with the service quality	0.841			
Satisfaction with the number of encounters with other tourists	0.835			
Satisfaction with the content of ecological tours	0.833			
Satisfaction with the price of tickets	0.812			
Image perception related to the offer of a variety of leisure activities	0.791			
Interests and affinities related to the possibility of contacting the Manager	0.783			
Interests and affinities related to the possibility of meeting the other tourists with the same interests	0.740			
Satisfaction with the safety in the field	0.696			
Interests and affinities related to the historical development	0.658			
Satisfaction with the overall impression	0.615			
Satisfaction with the acquisition of knowledge within the ecosystem revitalization program	0.525			
Interests and affinities related to the possibility to participate in ecological tours	0.513			
Image perception related to the ecological experience, the possibility of learning about nature protection	0.480			
Interests and affinities related to the geographic characteristics	0.459			
Motivation related to relaxation		0.926		
Motivation related to socializing in nature		0.864		
Motivation related to spending time in nature		0.794		
Motivation related to maintaining physical condition and improving health		0.678		
Satisfaction with nature and landscapes		0.589		
Satisfaction with the possibility of recreation		0.571		
Intention to recommend the visit to others		0.554		
Intention to visit the Gornje Podunavlje Special Nature Reserve again		0.535		
Intention to visit the rural settlements in the vicinity (ethno-houses, farms, events)		0.391		

Table 1. Cont.

Items $\alpha = 0.970$	Factors			
	1 $\alpha = 0.949$	2 $\alpha = 0.913$	3 $\alpha = 0.903$	4 $\alpha = 0.899$
Image perception related to the status of protected area		0.376		
Motivation to learn something new about the wetlands			0.885	
Motivation to experience a wetland environment			0.800	
Motivation to participate in the ecological education			0.751	
Interests and affinities related to the presence of a general habit of visiting wetlands			0.610	
Interests and affinities related to the intention to visit a wetland (swamp, lake, canals)			0.495	
Interests and affinities related to the soil and water protection			0.480	
Interests and affinities related to the environmental protection			0.425	
Motivation related to the search for a different experience			0.415	
Image perception related to diversity of plant and animal species				0.837
Image perception related to diversity of landscapes				0.703
Satisfaction with the possibilities of observing the flora and fauna				0.656
Satisfaction with the wetland biodiversity				0.615
Image perception related to the ecosystem revitalization programs				0.564
Motivation related to the observation of the plant world				0.536
Interests and affinities related to the habitats of protected species of flora and fauna				0.489
Motivation related to the observation of the animal world				0.443

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Promax with Kaiser Normalization. Rotation converged in 8 iterations. Note: Satisfaction and experience (1), Motivation for spending time in nature and future behavior (2), Motivation for spending time particularly in wetlands (3) and Image based on biodiversity (4).

The first factor, labeled as Satisfaction and experience, included items regarding tourists' satisfaction and perception of overall experience regarding their visit to the Gornje Podunavlje Special Nature Reserve. Tourists' satisfaction, in this case, is defined by their perception of the service quality, number of encounters with other tourists, the content of ecological tours, acquisition of knowledge within the ecosystem revitalization program, but also by their sense of safety within this Special Nature Reserve, as well as by the price of tickets. Their perception of the overall experience is also defined by the general geographic characteristics and historical development of the Gornje Podunavlje Special Nature Reserve and the concrete offer of a variety of leisure activities and ecological experience, with the possibility to learn about nature protection. Satisfaction and experience of tourists are also determined by the possibility of participating in ecological tours, contacting the Manager, and by meeting tourists with the same interests.

The second factor was termed as Motivation for spending time in nature and future behavior and included items which indicate that important motives for visiting the Gornje Podunavlje Special Nature Reserve are related to the fact that it is a declared protected area. Tourists' motives for spending time in such an environment are also related to socializing in nature, maintaining their physical condition, improving health, recreation and relaxing in exceptional natural landscapes. Besides the previously mentioned aspects, mainly related to tourists' motivation for spending time in nature, the second factor also included items regarding issues of future behavior. More precisely, the second factor also gathered items regarding the tourists' intention to visit the Gornje Podunavlje Special Nature Reserve again, as well as their intention to visit the rural settlements in the vicinity (ethno-houses, farms, events) and to recommend the visit to others.

Besides the previously mentioned motives for spending time in nature, the research a results of this study also identified Motivation for spending time particularly in wetlands as third factor. This factor is primarily defined by the presence of a general habit of visiting wetlands among tourists and their intention to visit a concrete wetland (swamps, lakes,

canals). It is also defined by the tourists' interests and affinities related to environmental protection, primarily in terms of soil and water protection. Orientation of these tourists towards searching for a different experience and characteristic ecological education is mainly determined by their motivation to experience a wetland environment and to learn something new about wetlands.

Finally, the fourth factor identified in this research was labeled as Image based on biodiversity. According to the research results, it could be noted that visitors to the Gornje Podunavlje Special Nature Reserve create their perception of this Special Nature Reserve's image primarily based on a diversity of landscapes, plant and animal species, as well as on implemented programs of ecosystem revitalization. Despite this fact, the results indicate that an overall image of this Special Nature Reserve is also defined on the basis of other aspects related to biodiversity, such as the possibilities of observing the habitats of flora and fauna.

Cronbach's alpha coefficient, measured to determine the entire scale reliability, amounted to 0.970, which points to a satisfactory reliability of the implemented scale for researching tourists' motives for visiting the Gornje Podunavlje Special Nature Reserve, as well as their interests and affinities, perceptions of image, satisfaction and future behavior intentions. The research results also point to high values of the Cronbach's alpha coefficients measured for all identified factors, ranging between 0.949 and 0.899, (see Table 1).

Furthermore, the research results represented in Table 2 indicate the mean values and standard deviations of the previously identified factors. It can be noticed that the highest mean value is recorded for the factor termed Motivation for spending time in nature and future behavior ($M = 4.53$), while slightly lower (but still high) mean values are identified for the factors Image based on biodiversity ($M = 4.23$) and Motivation for spending time particularly in wetlands ($M = 4.09$). The lowest mean value was recorded for the factor termed Satisfaction and experience ($M = 3.89$).

Table 2. Mean values of identified factors.

Factor	Mean Value	Standard Deviation
Satisfaction and experience	3.89	0.87
Motivation for spending time in nature and future behavior	4.53	0.61
Motivation for spending time particularly in wetlands	4.09	0.83
Image based on the biodiversity	4.23	0.71

4.4. Results of Multivariate General Linear Model

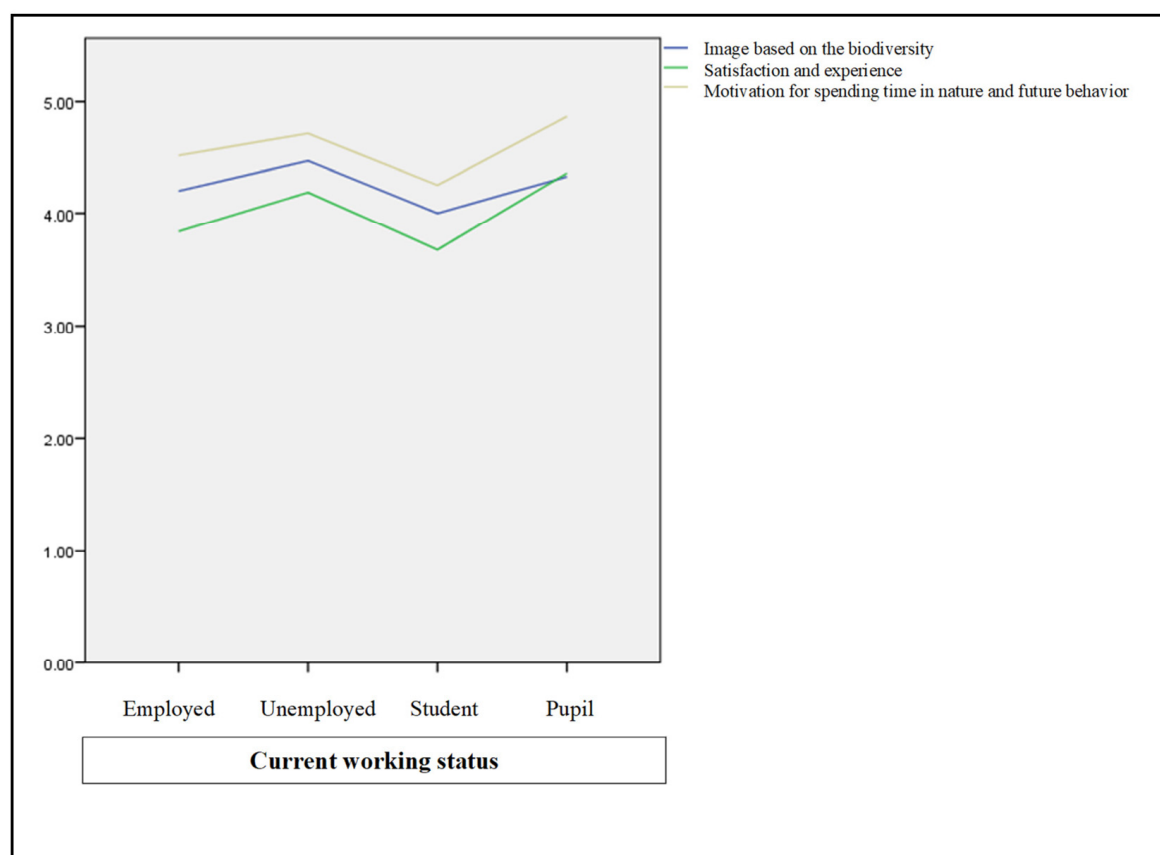
Multivariate General Linear Model analysis was implemented with the main aim of determining the existence of relationships between tourists' socio-demographic characteristics and their perceptions of the previously identified factors. According to the research results represented in Table 3, it can be noticed that there were no significant relationships between the respondents' gender, education degree, place of residence and their perception of the previously identified factors. On the other hand, there are significant relationships between the respondents' current working status and Satisfaction and experience ($F = 2.468$; $p = 0.046$), Motivation for spending time in nature and future behavior ($F = 3.070$; $p = 0.018$) and Image based on biodiversity ($F = 2.837$; $p = 0.026$). Significant relationships are also identified between the respondents' age and Motivation for spending time in nature and future behavior ($F = 8.136$; $p = 0.005$) and Image based on biodiversity ($F = 6.211$; $p = 0.014$).

The research results represented within Figure 1 indicate significant relationships between the respondents' current working status and identified factors in more detail. More precisely, it can be noticed that, in terms of the Image based on biodiversity, Satisfaction and experience and Motivation for spending time in nature and future behavior, perception of all three identified factors is slightly lower among students in comparison with the other working categories (employed, unemployed and pupils).

Table 3. Relationships between the identified factors and the respondents' socio-demographic characteristics—General Linear Model Results.

Source		F	Sig.
Gender	Satisfaction and experience	0.496	0.610
	Motivation for spending time in nature and future behavior	0.964	0.383
	Motivation for spending time particularly in wetlands	0.866	0.422
	Image based on the biodiversity	0.474	0.623
Education Degree	Satisfaction and experience	0.682	0.638
	Motivation for spending time in nature and future behavior	0.475	0.795
	Motivation for spending time particularly in wetlands	0.755	0.583
	Image based on the biodiversity	1.974	0.084
Current working status	Satisfaction and experience	2.468	0.046
	Motivation for spending time in nature and future behavior	3.070	0.018
	Motivation for spending time particularly in wetlands	1.040	0.388
	Image based on the biodiversity	2.837	0.026
Place of the residence	Satisfaction and experience	0.271	0.763
	Motivation for spending time in nature and future behavior	1.587	0.207
	Motivation for spending time particularly in wetlands	0.443	0.643
	Image based on the biodiversity	2.136	0.121
Age	Satisfaction and experience	2.633	0.106
	Motivation for spending time in nature and future behavior	8.136	0.005
	Motivation for spending time particularly in wetlands	3.593	0.060
	Image based on the biodiversity	6.211	0.014

Satisfaction and experience. R Squared = 0.075 (Adjusted R Squared = 0.008). Motivation for spending time in nature and future behavior. R Squared = 0.128 (Adjusted R Squared = 0.065). Motivation for spending time particularly in wetlands. R Squared = 0.073 (Adjusted R Squared = 0.006). Image based on biodiversity. R Squared = 0.123 (Adjusted R Squared = 0.060).

**Figure 1.** Relationships between the respondents' current working categories and the identified factors.

Furthermore, Figure 2 indicates significant relationships between the respondents' age and identified factors. It can be noticed that Motivation for spending time in nature and future behavior, as well as the respondents' perception of Image based on biodiversity, generally increase with age, with the exception of the oldest respondents' group, aged over 61 years, as well as those aged between 21 and 30, where the research results pointed to a significant decrease of perception of the aforementioned factors' among the respondents. In terms of the respondents' Satisfaction and experience, the situation is similar, with a slightly more pronounced decrease among the respondents aged between 21 and 50 years.

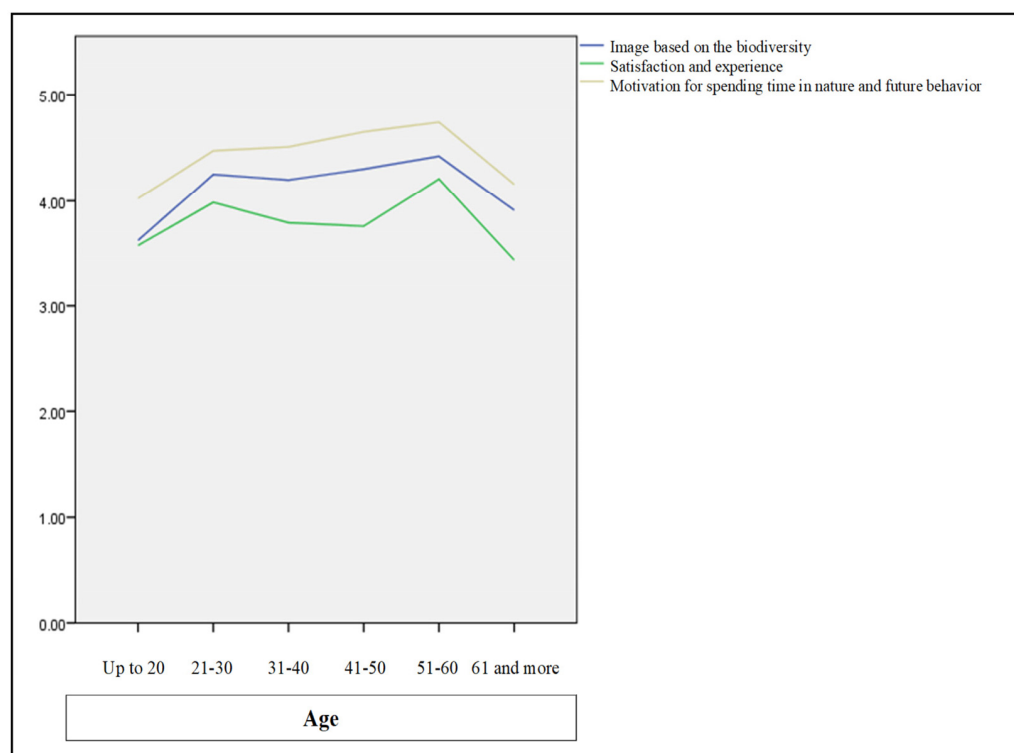


Figure 2. Relationships between the respondents' age and the identified factors.

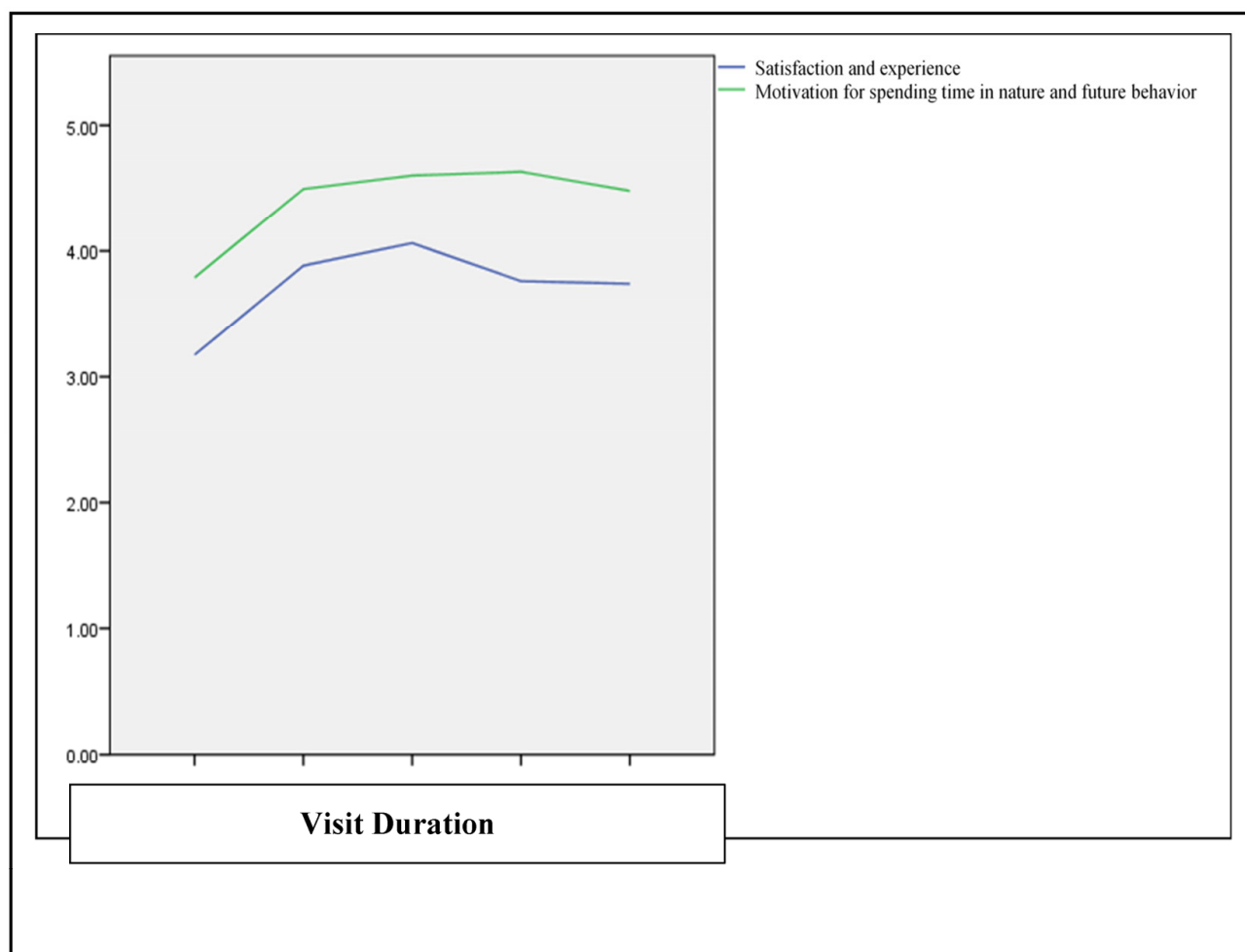
Multivariate General Linear Model analysis was further conducted in order to determine the existence of relationships between the main characteristics of the visit to the Gornje Podunavlje Special Nature Reserve and the respondents' perceptions of previously identified factors. According to the research results represented within Table 4, it can be noticed that there are no significant relationships between identified factors and the manner of organizing the visit and voyage companions. On the other hand, there are significant relationships between duration of the visit and Satisfaction and experience ($F = 2.456$; $p = 0.035$) and Motivation for spending time in nature and future behavior ($F = 2.724$; $p = 0.021$). In addition, significant relationships are also identified between identified improvement requirements and Motivation for spending time particularly in wetlands ($F = 2.891$; $p = 0.015$) and Image based on biodiversity ($F = 2.319$; $p = 0.045$).

The research results represented within Figure 3 additionally highlight the previously identified relationships between the duration of the respondents' visits and their Satisfaction and experience and Motivation for spending time in nature and future behavior. It could be noticed that perception of Motivation for spending time in nature and future behavior generally increases along with time spent in the Gornje Podunavlje Special Nature Reserve. On the other hand, Satisfaction and experience also increases, except in cases in which the visits last for more than 3 h, where the research results point to a slight decrease.

Table 4. Relationships between the identified factors and the main characteristics of the visit—General Linear Model Results.

Source		F	Sig.
The manner of organizing the visit	Satisfaction and experience	3.433	0.065
	Motivation for spending time in nature and future behavior	0.149	0.700
	Motivation for spending time particularly in wetlands	1.110	0.293
	Image based on the biodiversity	3.294	0.071
Companion de voyage	Satisfaction and experience	1.400	0.244
	Motivation for spending time in nature and future behavior	1.759	0.156
	Motivation for spending time particularly in wetlands	1.915	0.128
	Image based on the biodiversity	1.677	0.173
Duration of the visit	Satisfaction and experience	2.456	0.035
	Motivation for spending time in nature and future behavior	2.724	0.021
	Motivation for spending time particularly in wetlands	2.068	0.071
	Image based on the biodiversity	1.687	0.140
Improvement requirements	Satisfaction and experience	1.522	0.185
	Motivation for spending time in nature and future behavior	1.748	0.126
	Motivation for spending time particularly in wetlands	2.891	0.015
	Image based on the biodiversity	2.319	0.045

Satisfaction and experience. R Squared = 0.124 (Adjusted R Squared = 0.061). Motivation for spending time in nature and future behavior. R Squared = 0.141 (Adjusted R Squared = 0.079). Motivation for spending time particularly in wetlands. R Squared = 0.139 (Adjusted R Squared = 0.077). Image based on biodiversity. R Squared = 0.129 (Adjusted R Squared = 0.066).

**Figure 3.** Relationships between the respondents' visit duration and the identified factors.

As already mentioned, the research results also pointed to significant relationships between improvement requirements and Motivation for spending time particularly in wetlands and Image based on biodiversity. It can be noticed that respondents are aware of all the imperfections in the field. However, according to the research results represented within Figure 4, such circumstances are not disturbing their perception of Image based on biodiversity and Motivation for spending time particularly in wetlands.

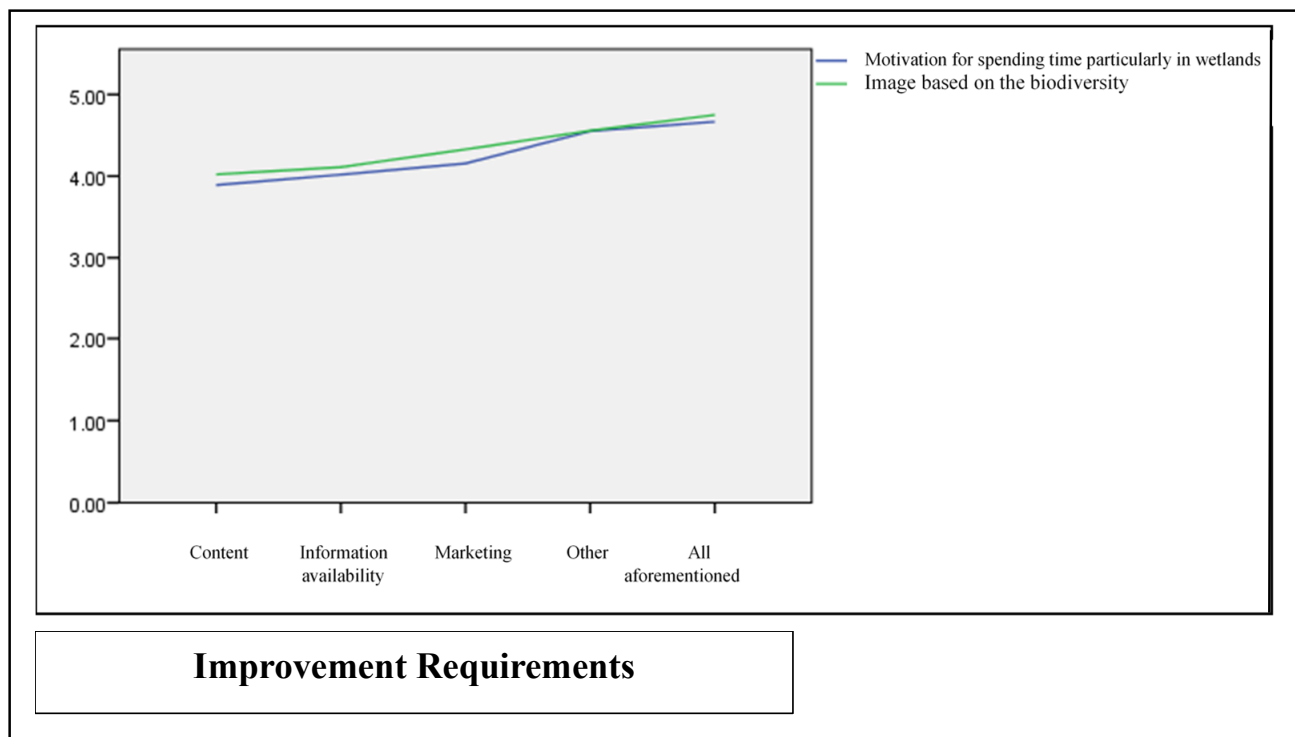


Figure 4. Relationships between the respondents' perception of improvement requirements and the identified factors.

The research results represented within Table 5 indicate that there are significant relationships between Satisfaction and experience, on the one hand, and Motivation for spending time in nature and future behavior ($F = 2.853$; $p = 0.000$), Motivation for spending time particularly in wetlands ($F = 4.174$; $p = 0.000$) and Image based on biodiversity ($F = 2.113$; $p = 0.007$) on the other.

Table 5. Relationships between Satisfaction and Experience and other identified factors—General Linear Model Results.

Source	F	Sig.
Motivation for spending time in nature and future behavior	2.853	0.000
Motivation for spending time particularly in wetlands	4.174	0.000
Image based on the biodiversity	2.113	0.007

Satisfaction and Experience. R Squared = 0.821 (Adjusted R Squared = 0.736).

In more detail, the research results represented within Figure 5 indicate the fact that Satisfaction and experience increase along with an increase in Motivation for spending time in nature and future behavior, Motivation for spending time particularly in wetlands and Image based on biodiversity.

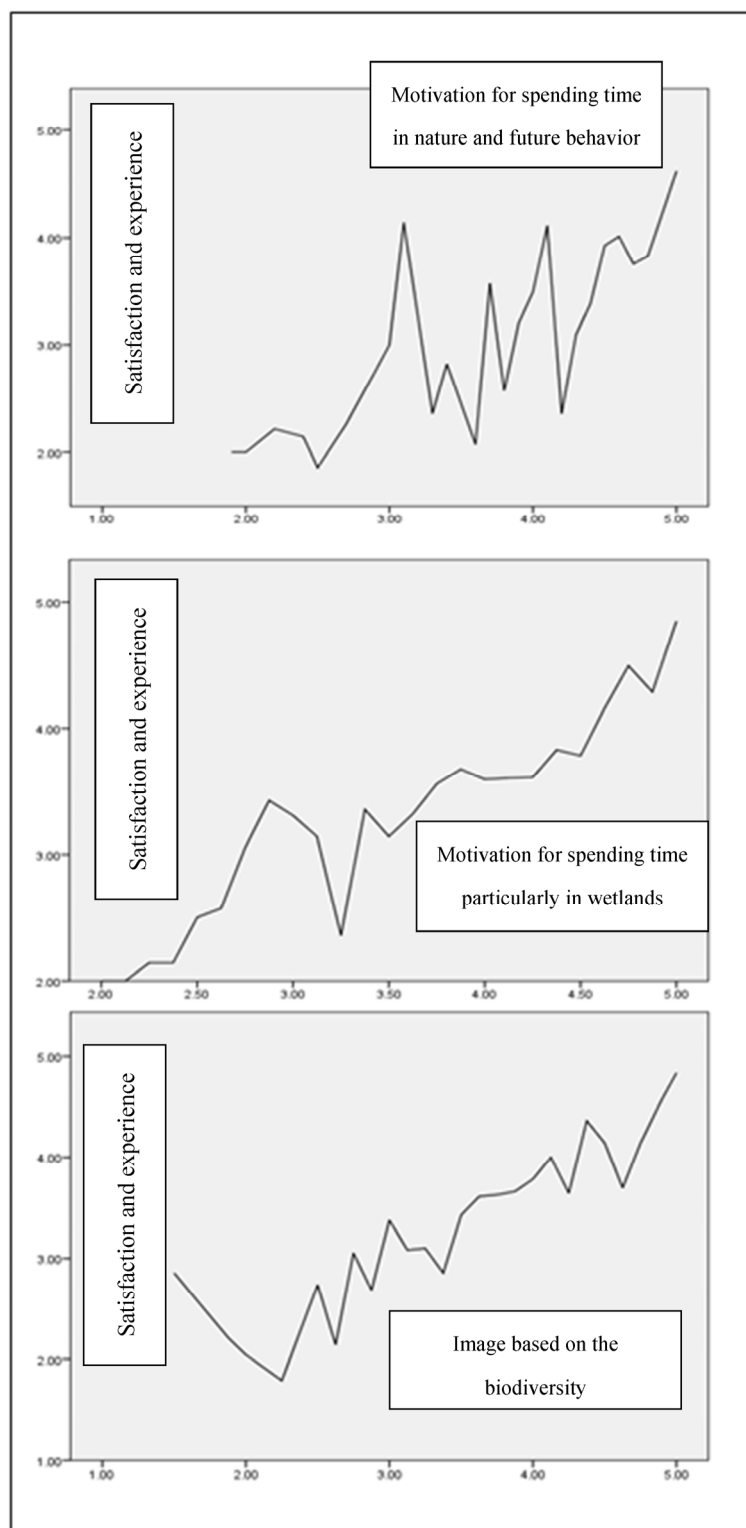


Figure 5. Relationship between Satisfaction and experience and Motivation for spending time in nature and future behavior, Motivation for spending time particularly in wetlands and Image based on biodiversity.

5. Discussion

Monitoring the visitors' attitudes in the Gornje Podunavlje Special Nature Reserve was initiated by the Visitor Management Plan, prescribed in 2019 [48], which was the starting point for conducting the research regarding the tourists' perception of image,

motives for visiting, their satisfaction and experience, as well as their future behavior intentions. Destination policy makers should be able to develop and manage the image of a specific destination in an appropriate manner [35]. In terms of protected areas, the value of wetlands is often perceived on the basis of wildlife and aquatic plant habitats and fundamental environmental quality, including accompanying economic social and cultural welfare. Considering the aforementioned facts, it could be said that the perception of wetland tourist attractiveness is primarily based on its natural exceptionality and biodiversity [49]. Managing a positive destination image in the field of protected areas is additionally challenging, due to the fact that destination image needs to be not only favorable, novel, entertaining, comfortable or engaging, but environmentally friendly in the first place [34]. The scale used in Lee's [8] research was based on earlier studies by Court and Lupton [50], Birgit [51], and Lin et al. [52], which regarded factors including natural scenery, social-cultural aspects, and recreational activities as crucial components of the wetland destination image. The scale was also implemented in this study, with the aim of exploring how tourists perceived Gornje Podunavlje Special Nature Reserve's image, which may have been useful, considering the fact that previous studies [12,13] highlighted the importance of wetlands, especially in developing countries. The research findings are consistent with earlier studies, showing that people's image perception is mainly related to diversity of plant and animal species, landscape diversity, possibilities of observing flora and fauna and initiatives for ecosystem revitalization.

Previous studies of visitors' attitudes indicated that there are various identified drivers for visiting protected areas. For example, Iversen et al. [53] pointed out five important motivational dimensions related to nature, such as state, novelty, relaxation, active nature and social interaction. On the other hand, Xu and Chan [28] indicated personal improvement, relaxation, knowledge, escapism from routine, destination scenario, seeking information and various fun activities as important motivational dimensions related to visiting nature-based tourism destinations. Furthermore, challenge excursions, social trips, nature tours and escape are highlighted as significant drivers for visiting a national park in the study conducted by Kamri and Radam [27]. Lee et al. [36] examined tourists in restored eco-parks in South Korea and found seven motivational factors, including self-development, interpersonal relationships, rewards, personal relationship development, escape defensive ego function and appreciation of nature. Jeong et al. [26] conducted a similar study in the Kuang Si waterfall and Konglor cave in the Lao People's Democratic Republic, where they identified health, nature, cohesion, and escape as the main drivers of tourists' visits. In terms of the Ramsar wetland areas, such a study was carried out by Chow et al. [25] in Hong Kong and identified relaxation, escape from daily life, and physical and mental health as the main motivation drivers in nature tourism.

In terms of Serbia, Panin and Mbrica [29] reported on the most important motivations of eco-tourists, dividing them into social activities, sports and health activities, motivation based on nature and cultural activities and educational purposes. Similar drivers for visiting the Gornje Podunavlje Special Nature Reserve also pointed to the fact that visitors are generally interested in relaxation, recreation, socializing and spending time in nature, maintaining physical condition and improving health. However, the research results additionally pointed to the fact that there are two different groups among the Gornje Podunavlje Special Nature Reserve visitors. More precisely, the factor Motivation for spending time in nature and future behavior indicates a group of tourists who are generally interested in visiting nature, without a special intention to visit a specific protected area, because any such site might be their chosen destination (unlike tourists with Motivation for spending time particularly in wetlands, who are focused on visiting wetlands particularly). These reveal the greatest inclination to return, as well as to visit the surrounding rural settlements and to recommend a visit to others, which is the main reason why it is necessary to pay special attention to them and make them interested in revisiting. They are a particularly interesting category, because the mean value of Motivation for spending time in nature and future behavior factor is the most pronounced. Such findings support the fact highlighted

within the Gornje Podunavlje Special Nature Reserve Visitor Management Plan [48] that the Protected Area Manager should make a brief classification of the visitors during the reservation of the visit, based on their overall knowledge of nature protection. Based on several questions, mainly focused on their knowledge of nature protection in this Special Nature Reserve, the Protected Area Manager might prepare appropriately detailed information, considering the fact that visitors with a better understanding of nature conservation importance are usually seeking for details during their visit. Unlike informed visitors, there is another group of tourists whose awareness is not sufficiently developed and where basic information might be sufficient. In such cases, the Manager might focus attention on education regarding the importance of nature protection [48].

Despite the fact that eco-tourists showed high satisfaction with their ecotourism experiences on average within the previously conducted studies, only some of them covered issues related to tourists' satisfaction with their experiences within wetland destinations [54]. For example, Yuan and Yang [33] determined that tourists' satisfaction in wetland destinations needs to be researched based on elements such as service, landscape, activity, facilities and emotional experience. Sun et al. [13] (2020) analyzed online tourism reviews in order to determine the degree of tourist satisfaction in the wetland destination Zhalong National Nature Reserve. In addition, Wang et al. [32] found that tourists' satisfaction within wetland ecosystems was closely related to environmental protection and they focused their research on the evaluation of tourist satisfaction, considering aspects such as material quality, social quality, management quality, entertainment expectations, perceived value, tourist satisfaction and auxiliary functions. Basic elements of the visitors' satisfaction in the Gornje Podunavlje Special Nature Reserve are in line with previous studies. However, opposite to previous findings, the research results of the study conducted in this Special Nature Reserve pointed to the fact that the lowest mean value among identified factors is recorded for Satisfaction and experience, which indicates that this aspect is not only possible, but also necessary to improve. So far, the practice of ecotourism development policy promoted by the Protected Area Manager highlighted three main zones of ecotourism in the Gornje Podunavlje Special Nature Reserve, termed Karapandža, Štrbac and Bestrement. These localities contain educational trails that are helping the visitors to achieve a quality and creative encounter with nature (education on natural values and nature protection). These trails are raising the awareness of the need to preserve natural values, by highlighting details of their importance and they are equipped with interpretive boards, wooden paths, bridges, and rest and sightseeing areas. In addition, it is important to indicate that the central building of the entire complex is Eco-center Karapandža, which represents an open-air classroom, intended for ecological interpretation and visual presentation of the Special Nature Reserve. The classroom is located in the yard of the 150-year-old building that is converted into modern rooms for meetings and education, while there is also a plan to equip the rooms for eco tourists [48]. All this together indicates current efforts and future plans for tourism development within the Gornje Podunavlje Special Nature Reserve, that might affect a further increase in satisfaction and experience of visitors to the site. Future activities should include marking and introduction of a new path into the offer (for example, along the current forestry roads), from the embankment to the Danube bank or another suitable locality, where visitors could perceive other characteristics of the micro-relief and landscapes.

Several authors have focused their previous research on the motives, interests and affinities of tourists and their relationships with satisfaction during their visit [55–57]. Meng et al. [58] highlighted that nature-based destinations should enable the delivery of positive experiences to tourists according to their motivations that will lead to satisfaction based on specific types of experiences. Several studies also considered motivations as the best predictors of visitor returning intentions and future behavior [16,36–38,59]. The research results obtained for the Gornje Podunavlje Special Nature Reserve showed a general growing trend of Satisfaction and experience, along with an increase in Motivation for spending time in nature and future behavior, Motivation for spending time particularly in

wetlands and Image based on biodiversity. Therefore, on the one hand, there is an obvious importance of motives for visiting nature and wetlands, as well image perception based on biodiversity, in the creation of satisfaction. However, on the other hand, significant oscillations in all three cases indicate that there is enough space for the Protected Area Manager to further shape visitor Satisfaction and experience, based on the formation of content and facilities that would exceed their expectations, primarily built on the perception of the importance of natural assets in this Special Nature Reserve. In addition, it is interesting to notice that Motivation for spending time particularly in wetlands and Image based on biodiversity are also expressed among respondents who realize that it is necessary to improve several aspects of the Gornje Podunavlje Special Nature Reserve, such as marketing, availability of information or content on-site. This is a group of respondents with developed awareness on the importance of the protection status of this Special Reserve, which is the main reason why they decided to visit it, so the lack of additional content is not crucial for forming a negative impression, but they are still aware of the fact that this needs to be improved.

Additionally, previous findings related to visiting the wetlands pointed to several specificities in relationships between tourists' socio-demographic characteristics and their motives for visiting wetland destinations. Younger tourists are often motivated by aspects such as self-development when making decisions on visiting the wetland protected area, which needs to be considered in the case of the Gornje Podunavlje Special Nature Reserve. More precisely, within the research results of this study, students are an interesting category with a slightly lower value for Image based on biodiversity, Satisfaction and experience and Motivation for spending time in nature and future behavior, compared to other categories of working status. This could result from the fact that the younger generation (Gen Z) has trouble maintaining their attention, which is the main reason why it is particularly necessary to emphasize marketing campaigns aimed at this segment, as well as the content of the visit. These results are further supported by the fact that there are significant relationships between these factors and the age of the respondents. Older and lower-income tourists are frequently motivated by the possibility of strengthening interpersonal relationships with members of their family, as well as with their friends [39]. In addition, lower values for all three factors in the study were recorded for the oldest group of respondents, which indicates that it is necessary to align content with their needs and capabilities, due to potentially reduced mobility, which requires adjusting accessibility terrain in these cases. Finally, the research results also indicated that 3 h is the optimal time for visiting the Gornje Podunavlje Special Nature Reserve, which is necessary to fulfill Motivation for spending time in nature and future behavior, without compromising Satisfaction and experience.

6. Conclusions, Limitations and Further Research

The main focus of this study was on researching the motivation of tourists in wetland tourist destinations, with various levels of protection at the national and international level (for example, Biosphere Reserves, Ramsar sites). The most important results of this study pointed out that Satisfaction and experience increase in line with an increase in Motivation for spending time in nature and future behavior; Motivation for spending time particularly in wetlands and Image based on biodiversity, which was also important in other research. In addition, the research results also pointed out that Image based on biodiversity, Satisfaction and experience and Motivation for spending time in nature and future behavior are slightly lower among students in comparison with other working status categories. Motivation for spending time in nature and future behavior, Image based on biodiversity and Satisfaction and experience are generally higher along with an increase in respondent's age. Motivation for spending time in nature and future behavior increases along with time they spent in the Gornje Podunavlje Special Nature Reserve, while Satisfaction and experience also increase, except in cases when the visits last for more than 3 h. According to the research results, it could be said that respondents are aware of all imperfections in the Reserve, but

such circumstances do not disturb their perception of Image based on biodiversity and Motivation for spending time particularly in wetlands.

Constraints related to the collecting procedure were mainly related to the fact that on-site survey research could not be organized during the late autumn and winter months, due to the fact that visits are mainly organized throughout spring, summer and early autumn months with preferable weather conditions. The main limitation of this study is reflected in the fact that it was conducted only within Gornje Podunavlje Special Nature Reserve, one of four important wetlands, protected under the Ramsar Convention, of the Mura-Drava-Danube Biosphere Reserve. In addition, this is the only research of such kind within the territory of the whole Mura-Drava-Danube Biosphere Reserve, declared in 2021. Therefore, future research should focus on the cross-border character of the Mura-Drava-Danube Biosphere Reserve (five countries: Austria, Slovenia, Hungary, Croatia and Serbia), which includes several small wetland destinations. At the same time, it represents a potentially unique ecotourism destination composed of the territory of five countries in the heart of Europe. This research was conducted at the moment of declaring this area as a Biosphere Reserve. It would be beneficial to carry out the same or a comparable type of research in the other countries of this Protected Area, in order to perceive the wider situation regarding the motivation of tourists and the development of ecotourism.

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Institutional Review Board Statement: Based on the article 7 issue 2 of the Codex on the academic integrity of the University of Novi Sad it is determined that researcher is obligated to ask for request of SRO for working with the respondents, before starting: the research with: vulnerable groups/individuals, the research that requires data collecting about the respondents, while data are also collected from third parties that are not direct target group of the project, the research in which respondents are not introduced with the fact that they are part of a concrete research from its start, the research on social and personal sensitive issues, the research that requires invasive and potentially dangerous procedures of any kind, the research that might occur psychological distress, anxiety or negative feeling of any kind or the research that might cause negative effects or instability of physical or psycho integrity of the respondents, the research that requires taking samples of physical liquids or tissues of the respondents, the research in which is not possible to protect the identity, the research that requires (due to methodology) disturbing the attention of the respondents from the real subject of the research. This research doesn't belong to aforementioned groups.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: Collected data are gathered in SPSS data basis matrix.

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Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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