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Psychology and its application in tourism

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to describe the importance of application of psychological and sociologic know-how in tourism practice. Primarily, it is the understanding of clients' motivation to visit particular destination, use available services, clients' needs and satisfaction. The paper describes relations between individual levels of human needs (using Maslow's hierarchy of needs). At the end of the paper the author notes that despite of the all benefits of psychology to tourism, in practice it is used primarily by large companies, or by regional institutions. Entrepreneurs, who make majority of business subjects in tourism, prefer practical information and instructions.

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1. Introduction

Subjects involved in tourism (such as entrepreneurs, agencies, state organizations, public administration, non-profit organizations etc.) tend to perceive tourism purely from the economic (profit maximization) or management (destination management issues) perspectives. Very often they neglect social aspects of tourism, e.g. fact that travelling gives some kind of a picture about the tourist, his/her personality, attitude, values and life style. They also tend to forget that tourism is about meeting other people, which quite naturally may bring along risks of conflicts between tourists themselves, as well as between tourists and local inhabitants (residents). Conflicts usually start between people with different attitudes, customs and traditions. There may be even situations when conflicts overshadow most of tourism benefits.

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2. Psychology of tourism and theory

Psychology studies clients' behaviour, their experience and relationship. Social psychology then deals with an individual influenced by a group of people, while environmental psychology „considers the influences of the physical setting on human behaviour“ (see more at <http://hotelmule.com/wiki/Psychology>).

In tourism, findings of environmental and social psychology are used to understand tourists' behaviour, attitudes and their motivations. But not only that, as more emphasis is laid on “broad topic of cognition which refers to

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human thinking and information processing, that provided important conceptual tools for tourism research and analysis“ (see more at <http://hotelmule.com/wiki/Psychology>). For example socio environmental processes are discussed in the Fridgen research (1984).

Note: Human behaviour is in focus of many tourism researchers. To name just few, it can be found in research on economic psychology of tourism of Crofts and Raaij (1994), modelling of tourism impacts of Dyer et al. (2007), tourists' leisure activities, consumption systems, decision and choice of Crouch et al. (2004), or Jakubíková (2012), tourist motivation of Ross (1994), tourist motivation in relation to the market segmentation of Dolnicar and Leisch (2004), or Pearce and Jafari (2011), and also in residents' attitudes towards tourism impacts of Aref (2010), or Stoeckl et al. (2006), tourism and quality of life of Uysal et al. (2012), etc.

The above indicates that tourism is not only about economic aspects, but also social, psychological and cultural (e.g. Villamira, 2001). Psychology in tourism is based on general psychology, while it looks for answers to these questions: How to define tourism? Who is a tourist? What kind of driver there is that makes a tourist to travel? What are his needs in respect of his age or personal status? How does the decision making process of tourists look like?

As Villamira also stated (2001), psychology in tourism studies individuals who act as tourists. Therefore it is necessary to analyse tourism not only from the economic-geographical point of view, but also analyse behaviour of tourists when exposed to emotional factors to protect their health and well-being. Tourists very often want to escape everyday routine and stress, to find new dimensions of life, new experience, and uniqueness or unconventional situations.

Virdi and Traini (1990) state, that every tourist's action not only reflects personal and social aspects of his free time, but also motivation. Additionally, any such action is not only economic investment, but also personal emotional investment.

Considering the fact that a tourist, in general, spends his free time in the environment which he has chosen, and which is somehow different to which he is used to in everyday life, tourism psychology describes tourist's profile upon an analysis of his behaviour and actions in such “alternative” environment. Tourist's behaviour is based on social, emotional, motivation and cognitive aspects, which opens wide space for psychological monitoring (e.g. Ryglová et al., 2011). Key elements from tourism psychology perspective are motivation (needs), expectation, decision making, satisfaction and experience, including analysis of relations (see Figure 1).

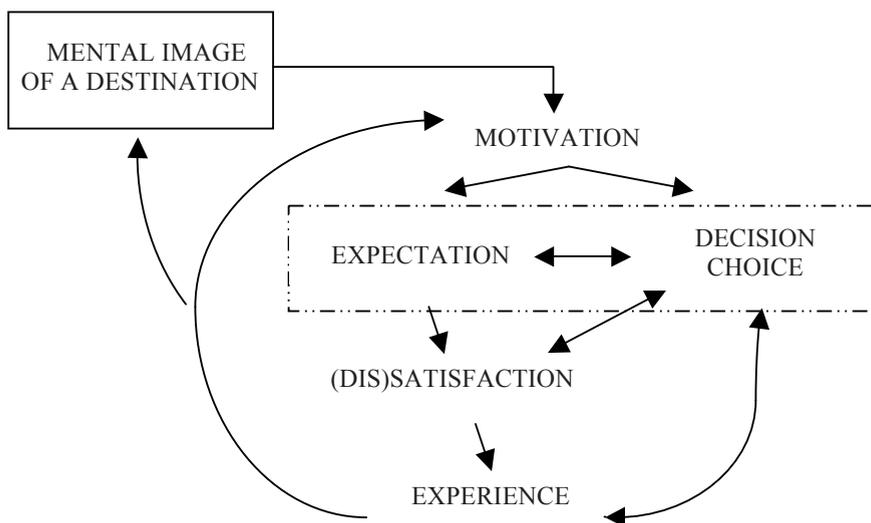


Figure 1: Network of relationships forming a mental image of a tourism destination

Source: Authors' own compilation

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