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Dugandžić, Matej

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COVID-19 Pandemic: A Turning Point for Tourists' Perceptions of Dubrovnik

Matej Dugandžić

RIT Croatia

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Dr. sc. Besim Agušaj

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Abstract

This study aimed to explore the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on tourists' perceptions of Dubrovnik. Prior to the pandemic, Dubrovnik experienced overcrowding issues, prompting concerns about the sustainability of mass tourism in the city. The pandemic offered an unintentional reset, and this research sought to evaluate whether this situation has led to a change in tourists' perceptions during and after the pandemic. A directed content analysis approach was employed to analyze 298 TripAdvisor reviews of Dubrovnik's top five attractions across four tourist seasons. Reviews were categorized according to cognitive and affective image, destination loyalty, and overall satisfaction. The results showed a significant positive shift in tourists' perceptions of Dubrovnik during the pandemic. The study suggests that the COVID-19 pandemic has positively impacted tourists' perceptions of Dubrovnik, highlighting the importance of sustainable tourism practices and the need to balance tourism benefits with potential negative impacts.

Keywords: pandemic impact, Dubrovnik attractions, content analysis, destination image, sustainable development

COVID-19 Pandemic: A Turning Point for Tourists' Perceptions of Dubrovnik

The tourism industry has been greatly impacted by the pandemic, and it is important for destinations to adapt and find new opportunities for growth. One such opportunity is the growing trend of green hospitality, which has become mainstream in recent years (Wang & Wang, 2009). Developing a strategy and action plan for green hospitality can help the Dubrovnik region to attract more environmentally conscious tourists and differentiate itself from other destinations. Additionally, implementing sustainable practices can also have a positive impact on the local community and environment (Budarma et al., 2020). It would be beneficial for the region to act quickly to capitalize on this trend. The tourism industry has played a crucial role in economic growth for the past six decades, with the travel and tourism sector growing at a rate of 3.5% in 2019, outpacing the global economy's growth rate of 2.5% for nine years in a row (World Travel and Tourism Council, WTTC, 2020). However, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the tourism industry, leading to a decline in international travel and a decrease in revenue for the sector. According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2020), international tourist arrivals declined by 74% in 2020 compared to the previous year. This has had a ripple effect on the global economy, as the tourism industry is a major contributor to GDP and employment in many countries. (León-Gómez et al., 2021).

Given the importance of tourism in the global economy, it is crucial for destinations and the industry as a whole to adapt and find new ways to recover and grow in the post-pandemic era (Ioannides and Gyimóthy, 2020). According to Orîndaru et al. (2021), this may include focusing on domestic tourism, promoting sustainable and responsible tourism, and implementing health and safety measures to provide reassurance to travelers. This research

aims to investigate whether the pandemic has had an impact on tourists' perceptions of Dubrovnik as a tourist destination and if it has led to any changes in the destination image. According to León-Gómez et al. (2021) this is an important area of study, as the pandemic has had a significant impact on the tourism industry and destinations need to understand how they are perceived by tourists in order to adapt and recover.

The research will engage in analyzing qualitative data and it will involve tourists' perceptions of Dubrovnik before and after the pandemic (2019 and 2022 tourist seasons). This data will then be compared with the perceptions during the pandemic (2020 and 2021 tourist seasons) when the destination was less crowded. The research may provide further understanding of how tourists' perceptions of Dubrovnik have been impacted by the pandemic and can guide the city's future marketing and development plans. Investigating if these perceptions have improved can give valuable insights on how to use the "forced reset" to benefit the destination, rather than returning to pre-pandemic conditions.

Literature review

Sustainability & Tourism

Sustainability has become a critical issue in the tourism industry, as it addresses the needs of all stakeholders while considering the economic, social and environmental impacts of tourism development (Liu et al., 2018). Ongoing assessments of the sector are carried out to guarantee enduring sustainability while mitigating adverse effects on both the natural surroundings and the forthcoming economic growth of travel destinations (Asmelash & Kumar, 2019).

Researchers have been examining the consequences of incorporating sustainability into tourism, as it is deemed to be a model for the industry's future direction (Pan et al., 2018). According to (Niñerola et al., 2019) governments have been investing in tourism for “economic growth, as it has the potential to distribute wealth, contribute to the development of emerging economies, and generate income through exports”. However, the negative impacts of tourism on the environment and on the future economic development of tourist destinations cannot be ignored. Therefore, sustainable tourism development is essential for economic growth and the preservation of local communities and natural resources (Fletcher, 2011).

Recently, sustainable practices have become an increasingly prominent issue in the hospitality industry, with an emphasis on reducing the environmental footprint of hotels, resorts, and other tourism-related businesses. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the hospitality industry has faced additional challenges, but also an opportunity to reevaluate and improve sustainability practices. To create a more resilient and sustainable future for the hospitality industry, it's imperative to prioritize sustainability as the industry recovers and rebuilds (Ioannides and Gyimóthy, 2020).

According to Wang & Wang (2009), people are becoming increasingly aware of the need for sustainability as natural resources become more and more scarce, however, research shows that there is an attitude–behavior gap even among those who are aware about the negative impacts of tourism on the environment. In a study done on the attitude–behavior gap in sustainable tourism, participants reported “feeling a tension between their attitudes towards the environment and its protection and their vacation behavior” (Juvan & Dolnicar, 2014). Apart from providing evidence “of cognitive dissonance occurring in the context of the environmental sustainability of tourism”, the same study suggests that beliefs about sustainable

tourism can play a significant role in the gap between attitudes and actions towards sustainable tourism. Understanding these beliefs allows public policy makers and tourism destinations to create solutions to address them. It is more effective to target beliefs rather than values, as beliefs can be developed and changed during the course of a person's life, making it easier to modify behavior. Possible interventions might concentrate on precluding visitors from upholding certain convictions in order to prevent cognitive dissonance coping mechanisms and encourage behavior change (Juvan & Dolnicar, 2014).

Sustainability in tourism involves creating a balance between the economic, social and environmental aspects of tourism. It means creating policies that protect local communities, cultures, and natural resources from the negative impacts of tourism, while also ensuring that the industry can continue to grow and provide economic benefits for the region. Sustainable tourism is crucial for the long-term success of the tourism industry. Thus, governments, researchers, and the industry should work together to promote sustainable tourism practices and policies to ensure the preservation of local communities, cultures and natural resources while continuing to drive economic growth (León-Gómez et al., 2021).

Theory of Planned Behavior

The theory of planned behavior (TPB) is a social psychological theory that seeks to explain and predict human behavior. It proposes that an individual's behavior is influenced by their attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. In the context of sustainable tourism, the TPB can be applied to understanding tourists' behavior and their contribution to sustainable tourism practices (Clark et al., 2019). The study by Eichelberger et al. (2021) provides evidence that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a positive impact on tourists' responsible behavior, which is in line with the TPB. The fear of the virus and social pressure

have influenced tourists' attitudes towards responsible behavior, while the desire to support the local community has influenced their subjective norms. Additionally, the increase in environmental-friendly behaviors, such as reducing waste and conserving energy, highlights how the pandemic has increased tourists' perceived behavioral control. The results of this study demonstrate that the TPB is a useful framework for understanding tourists' behavior and their contribution to sustainable tourism practices. In their study, Ashraf et al. (2020) found that by incorporating the TPB into sustainable tourism initiatives, it is possible to design effective strategies for promoting responsible behavior among tourists.

Destination Image

Destination image refers to the perception and mental representation that people hold about a specific tourist destination. It is shaped by various factors such as personal experiences, media exposure, and word of mouth, and can impact a person's decision to visit or not visit a destination. The concept of destination image has been widely studied in tourism literature and is considered a key factor in the development and marketing of tourist destinations. (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999).

The growth of the tourism industry over the past half-century has brought numerous challenges to the field of tourism marketing. With the development of more and more tourist destinations across the world, consumers now have a vast selection of places to choose from for their holidays. The increasing leisure time, higher disposable incomes, and better transportation options available to today's consumers mean that they have access to this broader selection of travel options. Therefore, tourism promoters are required to compete in a complex and highly competitive global market to influence consumer decision making (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991).

A significant obstacle arising from this context is the necessity for a potent positioning approach for travel destinations. To successfully promote a destination in target markets, it must be distinctly set apart from competitors in a favorable manner in the consumer's perception. An essential element of this positioning endeavor involves developing and maintaining a distinct and appealing impression, or representation, of the destination. This representation or image is a key component in the success of the destination's marketing efforts and must be carefully crafted and managed in order to be effective (Calantone et al., 1989).

Cognitive & Affective Image

Gartner (1993) theorized that the perception of a destination is shaped by three primary elements: cognitive, affective, and conative, a concept earlier suggested by scholars such as Boulding (1956). The cognitive aspect pertains to individuals' knowledge and convictions about a location (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999), while the affective element concerns the emotions and sentiments directed towards the destination (Prayag & Ryan, 2012). The conative component, on the other hand, involves people's actions that result from their thoughts and emotions about the location (Pike & Ryan, 2004). Tasci et al. (2007) encapsulated this threefold concept, describing destination image as "a dynamic system encompassing thoughts, beliefs, feelings, visualizations, and intentions towards a destination" (p. 200). Although the tri-component framework is commonly recognized in image research, conative image and destination loyalty often overlap and are used interchangeably in tourism studies (Tasci et al., 2021).

Destination Image Outcomes

Stylidis et al. (2021) investigates the relationship between resident-tourist interaction quality, destination image, and tourist loyalty. The study highlights the importance of resident-tourist

interaction quality in shaping tourists' perceptions of a destination. The authors found that positive interactions between residents and tourists lead to a positive destination image, which in turn leads to increased tourist loyalty. This results in a virtuous cycle in which travelers cultivate a deeper understanding of their destination, thereby fostering environmentally responsible growth. Sustainable tourism development depends on the positive perception of a destination by tourists. A positive destination image not only leads to increased tourist loyalty, but also to increased visitor numbers and a greater willingness to spend money in the local economy. This, in turn, contributes to the economic sustainability of the destination and promotes local livelihoods. This highlights the importance of fostering positive resident-tourist interactions for sustainable tourism development.

Another important destination image outcome is that a person's perception of a destination, regardless of its accuracy, has a strong impact on their travel planning decisions. This highlights the significance of managing and enhancing the image of a destination in order to attract more tourists and be successful in the competitive tourism industry. However, if a destination fails to work on improving their image, the result can be disastrous. Destinations with a negative image may struggle to attract investment and tourists, leading to a decline in the quality of their infrastructure and services, making them less appealing to tourists. This means that the image of a destination is a crucial factor that affects the behavior of tourists towards it (Yoon & Uysal, 2005).

Eichelberger et al. (2021) conducted a research on responsible behavior among participants in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Some major themes were observed by the researchers through interviews. Respondents showed a preference for supporting local economies by purchasing regional products, dining at local establishments, and preferring small-to-medium

family-run lodging establishments over major hotel companies. Additionally, the participants reported a dislike for congested locations and mass tourism, preferring instead leisure activities that reduced the possibility of overcrowding.

These findings suggest that tourists are becoming more aware of the impact of their behavior on the environment and are taking steps to ensure that their behavior is more sustainable. They are choosing to focus on regional options and avoiding mass tourism, which helps to promote sustainable tourism practices. These findings highlight the important role that tourists play in promoting sustainable tourism and the need for tourism destinations to provide options that align with the growing demand for sustainable tourism. While tourists are taking steps to ensure their behavior is more sustainable, business entities may be tempted to present a facade of environmental conscientiousness in response to the growing demand from consumers. However, this approach may lead to greenwashing. Delmas and Burbano (2013) define greenwashing as the act of misleading customers regarding either the environmental policies and practices of an organization (firm-level greenwashing) or the eco-friendly attributes of a product or service (product-level greenwashing). The authors further argue that such deceitful behavior can negatively impact the trust and loyalty of customers towards the organization.

Satisfaction & Tourist Behavior

The connection between satisfaction and behavior is well documented in research, with satisfaction being seen as a key factor in driving intentions to purchase, repeat a purchase, or recommend a product (Oliver, 1999). This link between satisfaction and behavior is also evident in the tourism industry, where satisfaction has been shown to have a strong influence on traveler loyalty (Tasci & Gartner, 2007). Previous studies have investigated the connection between a destination's perceived image and visitor satisfaction, revealing that satisfaction

serves as a mediator between the perceived image of a destination and the loyalty of tourists (Chen & Phou, 2013; Chi & Qu, 2008; Jeong & Kim, 2019; Loi et al., 2017). Taking this into account, it becomes evident that the consideration of these four theoretical concepts, including cognitive and affective image, along with satisfaction and destination loyalty, is crucial in gaining a comprehensive understanding and painting a more accurate picture of tourists' perceptions and subsequent outcomes of their perceptions on their attitude/behavior towards a destination.

Impact of COVID-19 on Dubrovnik

Dubrovnik, a city located in Croatia on the Adriatic Sea, is a popular vacation spot renowned for its beautiful architecture, history, and rich heritage. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought significant changes to the city, including altered travel experiences due to implemented health and safety measures. Before the pandemic, Dubrovnik was a popular destination for mass tourism, attracting thousands of visitors every day. However, the pandemic has caused a significant decrease in the number of tourists visiting the city, leading to a transformation from a bustling city to a more relaxed and less crowded destination. That there has been a significant decrease in the number of tourist arrivals in Croatia is best demonstrated by the statistical data. According to the Croatian Bureau of Statistics (2021), "in 2020, due to the coronavirus pandemic, 64.2% less tourist arrivals and 55.3% less tourist nights were realized than in 2019." This trend was also reflected in Dubrovnik, as evidenced by the numerical data. In 2019, Dubrovnik had the highest number of tourist nights among cities with a total of 4.3 million nights. However, in 2020, the highest number of tourist nights was recorded in cities located in the Istria County: Rovinj-Rovigno had 1.7 million tourist nights, followed by Medulin and Poreč-Parenzo, both with 1.2 million tourist nights. In contrast, Dubrovnik recorded a

significantly lower 776 thousand tourist nights in 2020, representing a decrease of 81.9% compared to the previous year (Croatian Bureau of Statistics, 2021).

Dubrovnik, as a tourist destination, had previously garnered negative publicity on social media due to the unsustainably large influx of visitors to its historical landmarks, which was inadequately managed by the local authorities. This situation prompted a witty resident to quip that Dubrovnik had become Disneyland. The situation changed significantly during the pandemic. While the restriction of large gatherings in enclosed or outdoor spaces due to the pandemic measures can be considered as an unintentional reset, it is important to consider whether it has also resulted in a shift in the perception of tourists who visited Dubrovnik during the 2020 and 2021 tourist seasons, when overcrowding was not a prevalent issue. Have their perceptions improved? Answering this question may give us a clue that we need to use this “forced reset” to our advantage and not allow things to return to 2019 status. The purpose of this research is to contrast and compare data in order to evaluate whether the trajectory of tourist perception has changed. We expect that the reviews i.e. perceptions of visitors during and after the pandemic will be more favorable in terms of Dubrovnik’s sustainability record compared to the pre pandemic reviews. This data will also be correlated with the number of tourist arrivals.

Method

The research will utilize TripAdvisor reviews as the primary source of data. The method applied is content analysis which allows the researchers to interpret and validate textual material. Qualitative content analysis, which is one of the most commonly used methods in qualitative analysis, is a research method for the subjective interpretation of text data (Mayring, 2000). This method involves the systematic coding and categorizing of data, and can provide

rich, detailed insights into the attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of individuals (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). According to Hsieh and Shannon (2005), there are three approaches to content analysis: conventional, directed, and summative. Each approach involves different types of text. The conventional approach codes categories directly from the text, the directed approach uses a theory or research finding as a guide for initial codes, and the summative approach counts and compares keywords or content. This study uses the directed approach to assess tourists' perceptions of Dubrovnik as a destination for the pandemic (2020 and 2021), as well as pre (2019) and after (2020) pandemic tourist seasons. According to Potter and Levine-Donnerstein (1999), one of the major limitations of content analysis is that it can be subjective. The researcher's personal biases and perspectives may influence the interpretation of data. This can lead to inaccuracies in the analysis and can compromise the reliability and validity of the findings. Another drawback of using directed content analysis as a research technique in this particular case is its focus on specific theory that forms the theoretical framework for this study. When a theoretical framework is used (see Table 1) in directed content analysis, it may be difficult to identify themes or categories that fall outside of that framework. This can limit the scope of the analysis and potentially overlook important insights that could have been gained if a more open-ended approach had been used. This can influence the validity of the conclusions drawn from the results (Phils, 2013).

Instrument

Prior to undertaking the investigation, an Excel spreadsheet has been developed to categorize samples for analysis. The instrument displays cognitive and affective image, along with destination loyalty and overall satisfaction. The five attractions observed in this study are the Walls of Dubrovnik, Old Town, Lokrum Island, Dubrovnik Cable Car, and Stradun. These attractions were chosen due to their popularity among tourists and their representation of

Dubrovnik as a destination. Specifically, these locations are by far the most frequently visited by tourists and are therefore likely to provide a representative sample of tourists' perceptions of Dubrovnik. These 5 top ranked attractions in Dubrovnik will be observed on TripAdvisor and evaluated upon 10 dimensions categorically displayed in the table below. For each attraction, 60 random reviews will be read and studied for mentioning some of the elements/dimensions of the four categories. The 60 reviews are further divided into four groups of 15 reviews, each group covering one of the tourist seasons mentioned previously. The four categories containing the 10 dimensions (e.g., natural environment, attractions, social environment etc.) were borrowed from the measurement model used by Styliadis et al., (2021).

Table 1 Theoretical Framework

Cognitive Image	Affective Image
Natural Environment Attractions Social Environment	Pleasant/Unpleasant Exciting/Boring Lively/Sleepy
Destination Loyalty	Overall Satisfaction
Revisit in the next years Spread positive words about it Encourage contacts to visit	TripAdvisor rating

The data collected from 298 reviews will be analyzed using a spreadsheet. Originally, the study aimed to analyze a total of 300 reviews. The reduced number of reviews is attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic. The reason is that in 2020, there were significantly fewer reviews on TripAdvisor written due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which brought tourism to a halt. As a result, the fifth attraction, Stradun, only received 13 reviews in 2020, which is less than the 15 reviews per season initially looked for. Therefore, the number of reviews analyzed for this attraction is 58, rather than 60, which brings the total number of reviews analyzed to 298. A systematic method is employed in which each element mentioned in the reviews is assigned a numerical value. A positive value of (+) is assigned for each element that is described positively in the review, while a value of (0) is assigned for elements that are not mentioned. Conversely, a negative value of (-) is assigned for each element that is described negatively in the review. The numerical values are then tallied, with each (-) value cancelling out two (+) values within the same category. The final result of this process is the overall evaluation of each category, with a positive value of (+) assigned if the positive values of (+) prevail and vice versa. The overall assessment of tourists' perceptions of the destination through the aforementioned tourist seasons based on this instrument will be discussed further in the discussion section of this study.

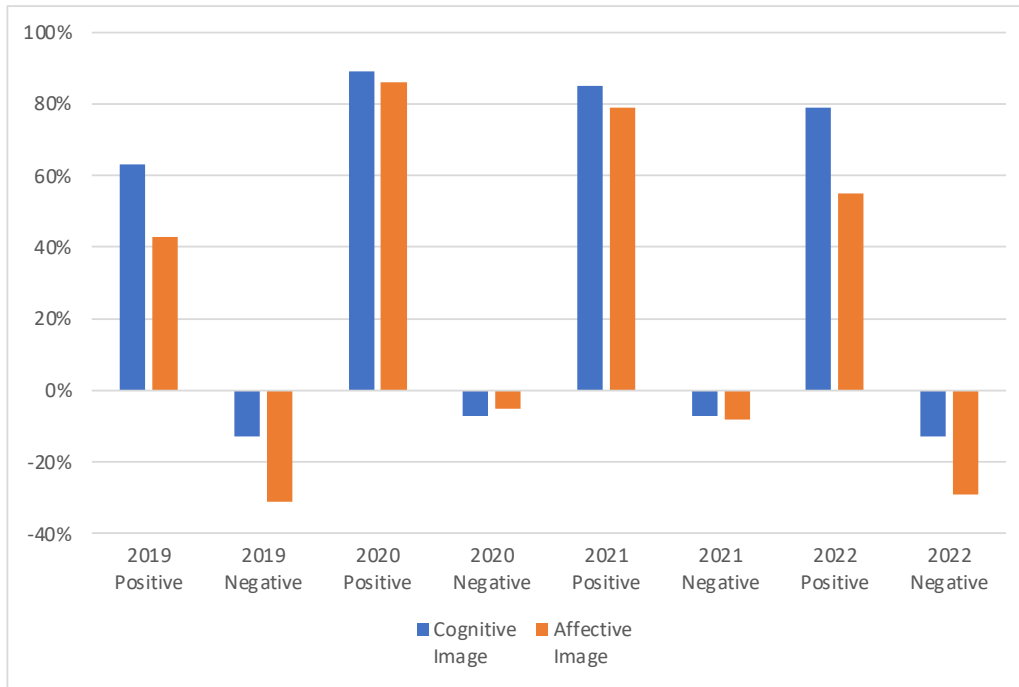
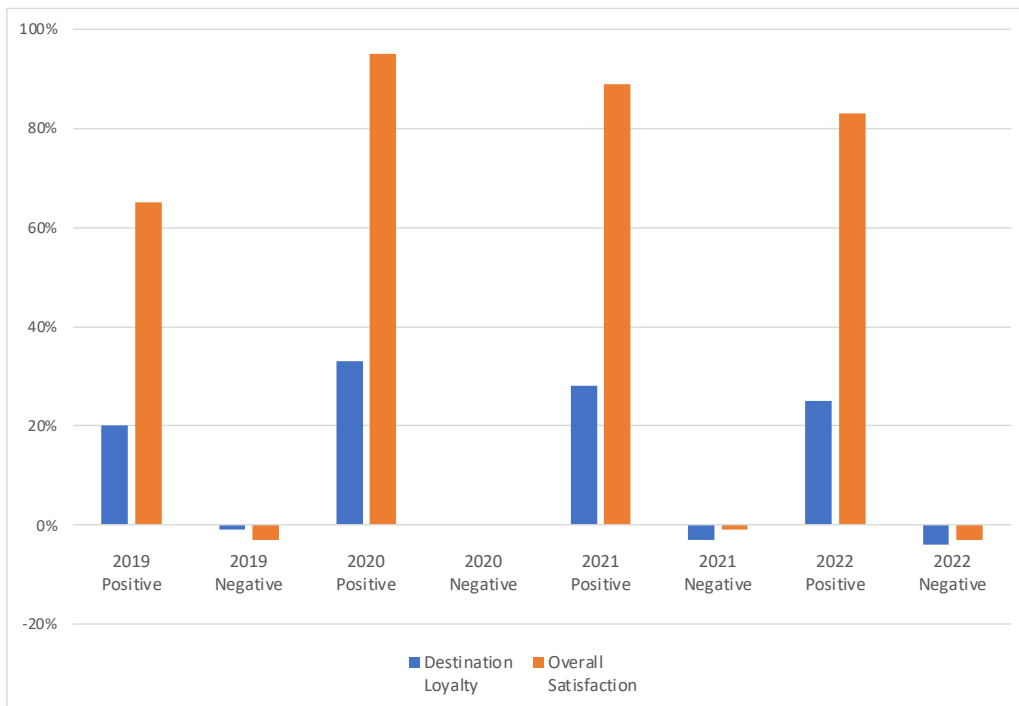
Results

A total of 298 reviews of the top 5 attractions in Dubrovnik were analyzed using an Excel spreadsheet, which categorized samples for analysis according to cognitive and affective image, destination loyalty, and overall satisfaction. The results showed that Covid-19 had a positive impact on tourists' perceptions of Dubrovnik as a destination, with an overall increase in positive to negative ratio. (Figure 1 and Figure 2)

All four categories scored significantly higher within the positive domain (+89%, +86%, +33%, and +95%, respectively) compared to the pre-Covid-19 period (+63%, +43%, +20%, and +65%, respectively). Utilizing the same analogy, the scores in all four categories demonstrated improvement in the negative domain (-7%, -5%, -0%, and -0%, respectively) as compared to their pre-Covid-19 levels (-13%, -31%, -1%, and -3%, respectively).

Moving to the post-pandemic period, all four categories have lower scores in the positive domain (+79%, +55%, +25%, and +83%, respectively) compared to the year before (+85%, +79%, +28%, and +89%, respectively). Using the same approach, scores in all four categories were worse in the negative domain (-13%, -29%, -4%, and -3%, respectively) compared to the prior year (-7%, -8%, -3%, and -1%, respectively).

The results indicate that Covid-19 had a positive impact on tourists' perceptions of Dubrovnik as a destination, with an increase in positive to negative ratio. (Figure 1 and Figure 2)

Figure 1*Destination Image scores***Figure 2***Loyalty & Satisfaction scores*

Discussion

The current study investigated the impact of COVID-19 on tourists' perceptions of Dubrovnik as a destination. The findings suggest that the pandemic had a positive impact on tourists' perceptions of the city, with an overall increase in positive to negative ratio across all dimensions. One of the main impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Dubrovnik was the reduction in the number of tourists, which in turn had a positive impact on the environment and the community. The reduction in tourist numbers led to a decrease in the negative environmental impacts associated with mass tourism, such as pollution, waste, and congestion. Additionally, the reduced number of tourists had a positive impact on the social and cultural environment of Dubrovnik. With fewer tourists, the local community had more opportunities to engage with visitors, fostering a sense of community and cultural exchange (Seraphin et al., 2018). The study highlights the potential for the tourism industry in Dubrovnik to build on this positive trend and further enhance the overall tourist experience in the post-Covid-19 era.

During the pandemic, with the halting of mass tourism, Dubrovnik's top attractions received overwhelmingly positive reviews from tourists, with many mentioning the natural environment, attractions, and social environment as pleasant, exciting, and lively. Destination loyalty and overall satisfaction also significantly increased, with many tourists expressing a desire to revisit the city and spread positive word-of-mouth. Interestingly, even in the post-pandemic period, when tourism started to pick up again, the scores remained better than pre-pandemic, but not as good as during the pandemic. The post-pandemic period was characterized by slightly improved scores in all dimensions except destination loyalty, but still not as high as during the pandemic. This indicates that the pandemic has helped to shift tourists' perceptions of Dubrovnik as a destination, highlighting the importance of sustainable tourism and the need to balance the benefits of tourism with its negative impacts. The decrease in the number of tourists due to the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the tourism

industry in Dubrovnik, as well as on the local economy. To make up for the loss of mass tourism, it is important for the tourism industry in Dubrovnik to focus on promoting sustainable tourism practices and attracting high-value, low-impact tourists.

As tourism begins to pick up again in Dubrovnik, there is a risk of returning to business as usual, with a focus on mass tourism and the negative impacts associated with it. To avoid this, it is important for the tourism industry in Dubrovnik to continue to prioritize sustainable tourism practices and to work towards a more sustainable and responsible tourism model. This can be achieved through collaboration between stakeholders in the tourism industry, including local authorities, tourism operators, and the local community (Milano et al., 2019). The current study contributes to the existing literature on the impact of COVID-19 on tourism, providing evidence of a positive shift in tourists' perceptions of Dubrovnik. The study is also relevant to policymakers and tourism managers in Dubrovnik, as it suggests that the positive trend in tourists' perceptions could be leveraged to further enhance the tourist experience and promote sustainable tourism practices. Other studies have also explored the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the tourism industry. For example, a study by Sigala (2020) found that the COVID-19 pandemic has had both positive and negative impacts on the tourism industry, and its implications for advancing and resetting the industry and research. The study provides an overview of the ways in which the pandemic has affected the tourism industry and highlights some of the positive impacts, such as reduced pressure on overcrowded tourist destinations and the opportunity for destinations to reset and rethink their tourism strategies. The author argues that it is important to consider both the challenges and opportunities presented by the pandemic when planning for the future of tourism.

It's important to mention that although the current study found a positive shift in tourists' perceptions of Dubrovnik during the pandemic, there was also a noticeable downward trend in all categories in the post-pandemic period. This suggests that the positive impact of COVID-

19 on tourists' perceptions of the destination may be temporary, and that urgent action is needed to maintain this positive shift and address the potential negative consequences of mass tourism. This further highlights the timeliness and relevance of the study. Moreover, the study's findings can also be linked to the theory of planned behavior (TPB), which suggests that people's behavior is influenced by their attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. The pandemic may have heightened tourists' sensitivity to sustainable practices, particularly overcrowding and avoiding crowds due to the health risks involved. This supports the need for a sustainable tourism approach that takes into account the attitudes and beliefs of tourists in order to promote sustainable behavior. By addressing the issue of overcrowding and promoting sustainable tourism practices, destinations such as Dubrovnik can attract tourists who are conscious of the impacts of their travel behavior, thus promoting long-term sustainable tourism development.

Overtourism has emerged as a significant concern for several popular tourist destinations worldwide. Cities like Venice and Barcelona have implemented various measures to address the negative impacts of mass tourism on their residents, environment, and cultural heritage (Koens et al., 2018). Limitations are necessary to create a tourist sector that is more sustainable. The protection of cultural assets is one of the main issues. Excessive tourist footfall can lead to the degradation of historical sites and monuments and the commodification of local culture (Koens et al., 2018). By imposing limitations, cities aim to protect their cultural heritage from being eroded by mass tourism. The reduction of environmental concerns is another reason. Mass tourism may have negative effects on the environment, including pollution, waste accumulation, and the loss of precious resources (Milano et al., 2019). Cities impose limitations to mitigate these negative impacts and promote sustainable development. Moreover, the social and economic well-being of residents is also considered. The influx of tourists can lead to overcrowding, noise pollution, and rising costs of living, negatively affecting residents' quality

of life (Koens et al., 2018). Imposing limitations aims to improve the well-being of residents by alleviating these pressures. Lastly, maintaining a balanced tourism industry is essential. Cities strive to maintain a balance between the economic benefits of tourism and the negative effects it may have on their communities and environments (Milano et al., 2019).

The experiences of cities like Venice and Barcelona, as outlined in research by Koens et al. (2018) and Milano et al. (2019), offer valuable insights that Dubrovnik can learn from in addressing the negative consequences of mass tourism. One such lesson involves regulating cruise ships and day visitors. Venice has implemented policies to control the number of cruise ships allowed to dock and manage the influx of daily tourists, mitigating overcrowding and related environmental and social issues. Another lesson is encouraging responsible tourism behavior. Barcelona has launched initiatives that promote mindful conduct among tourists, urging them to honor local traditions, customs, and the environment (Koens et al., 2018). This approach cultivates a more sustainable and considerate form of tourism. Additionally, controlling the expansion of tourist accommodations is a crucial tactic. Venice and Barcelona have both enacted measures to limit the growth of visitor lodgings, particularly in residential zones (Milano et al., 2019), which aids in avoiding displacement of locals and preserving character of neighborhoods.

The positive trend observed during the pandemic suggests an opportunity for the tourism industry in Dubrovnik to build on this positive momentum and enhance the overall tourist experience. However, this requires a proactive approach that prioritizes sustainability and responsible tourism practices. Therefore, it is crucial for the tourism industry in Dubrovnik to prioritize sustainable tourism practices that balance the benefits of tourism with its negative impacts on the environment, local community, and culture. This includes implementing policies that limit over-tourism, promote responsible tourism behavior, and invest in eco-friendly infrastructure and practices. Moreover, the study highlights the need for ongoing

research and monitoring of tourists' perceptions and behaviors, especially in the post-pandemic era, as the situation remains dynamic and constantly evolving. Understanding tourists' preferences, needs, and concerns can help stakeholders in the tourism industry make informed decisions that benefit both visitors and the local community. Despite the valuable insights provided by this study, there are some potential limitations to consider. The study only analyzed reviews of the top 5 attractions in Dubrovnik, which may not be representative of tourists' perceptions of the city as a whole. In addition, the study did not take into account the impact of other factors, such as changes in travel restrictions, which could have influenced tourists' perceptions of Dubrovnik.

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