

The Visitor in Slovak Rural Tourism in Turbulent Times



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Abstract Slovakia underwent a series of fundamental changes in the structure of society in the twentieth century and after the year 2000. The population of Slovakia in 1919 after the establishment of Czechoslovakia was 2.94 million, currently reaching 5.5 million. The social and economic structure of society has changed significantly. A large part of the population has stopped living the original rural lifestyle, and social ties in society also changed significantly. Part of the population has moved from villages to cities. Despite these changes, Slovakia is a rural country from a European perspective. Formally up to 80% of the rural population formally lives in Slovakia. However, there is the potential for the development of rural tourism for both domestic and foreign visitors. Interesting and diverse nature and traditional culture are a prerequisite for the development of tourism in the countryside. In the past, however, there was also a significant impact on the character of rural settlements in Slovakia. There are more than 60 mountains in Slovakia and the country is visually attractive, suitable for the development of rural tourism. The aim of this paper is to analyse the visitor in rural tourism in Slovakia in terms of his views on the quality of services, including the evaluation of statistical data on rural tourism in comparison with the development of tourism in Slovakia.

Keywords Rural tourism · Visitor · Tourism statistics · Sharing economy · Turbulent times

JEL Classification Z30 · Z32 · Z38

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1 Introduction—Rural Tourism in the Conditions of Slovakia

Interesting and diverse nature as well as traditional culture are preconditions for the development of tourism in rural areas of Slovakia. However, the characteristic features of the rural settlement have been significantly impacted because of the significant economic backwardness and poverty of the Slovak population in the past. Only a small number of the original wooden, stone and clay houses have been preserved, and the development of rural areas has been influenced by individual housing construction before the year 1989 and in the past 30 years by the construction of “satellite towns”—which are not typical for rural settlement. As regards architecture, the countryside in Slovakia is not as specific or unique as, e.g. in Austria, Switzerland, Italy or Bavaria. The historical background mentioned above had its impact also on the local communities living in the Slovak countryside which do not always have historical ties with the original region. Many of the traditions have been abandoned and, in comparison with the mentioned countries also, the continuity and connection to agriculture production in local communities have been interrupted. It implies different product features and also partially modified profile of a domestic and foreign visitor in rural tourism in Slovakia. These changes are the result of the indicated significant change of social and economic structure of the Slovak society, at which it is difficult to find a parallel in European conditions. This change is continuous also in the last decades when the priority of economic development is the industry and only to a lesser extent development of the countryside and agriculture. Such economy direction brings quite fast economic growth, however, its consequences in a significant population decline in the regions which are off traffic routes and big centres of economic development.

2 Literature Review—The Visitor in Rural Tourism

The individual rural regions are competing with each other for a higher number of guests and overnight stays as well as for a higher number of same-day visitors. In comparison with the exposed tourist destinations where the visitors are not as welcome as they used to be before, the situation in rural tourism in Slovakia is relatively stable. English terms “overtourism” and “unbalanced tourism” apply to only a small number of rural settlements with extremely high attractivity. Therefore, it is useful to know the profile and typology of the visitors in rural settlements in order to adapt and create offers effectively and thus achieve reasonable costs, revenues and profit (Almeida et al., 2014). Linking these interconnections with economic rules creates a basis for the long-term prosperity of rural regions and business enterprises.

In tourism development, it is necessary, for the visitor’s benefit, to take into account environmental, social, cultural and economic aspects. A set of simple rules is required to satisfy a rural tourism customer (UNWTO, 2004):

- To sleep in comfortable beds for a reasonable price.
- To use clean bathrooms.
- To eat food typical for the country (region)—simple, but well prepared.
- To enjoy the scenery, sights and typical features of the country.
- To learn about the history and culture of the country the guests are visiting.
- To experience an active holiday (golf, walking, fishing, skiing, etc.)
- To buy crafts/souvenirs in the country and general goods.
- To enjoy the music, dancing and theatre of the country.
- To travel without limitations and safety worries.
- To experience a friendly attitude of people employed in tourism.

A rural traveller is usually a highly educated, experienced member of higher socio-economic groups (Arbogast et al., 2017; Eusébio et al., 2017).

There are three main segments of rural travellers. These include older generations, younger generations and families with children (Frochot, 2005; Hjalager et al., 2018).

Older generations. Rural tourism is particularly popular with quite older Europeans aged between 50 and 70. They have more free time and money than other groups. Their children often moved away. They are usually experienced travellers who enjoy calm rural surroundings and they are looking for a new experience. They want high value for the money and they are willing to pay more for the authentic experience. Older travellers in general look for a higher level of comfort than the young ones. Several authors recommend to focus on this group as it is the most numerous segment of rural tourism. At the same time, this segment requires a high standard of comfort. It is recommended to use the Internet and traditional media for advertising (Fong & Lo, 2015; Fotiadis et al., 2014; Frisvoll et al., 2016). The generally available information on the ageing population in Europe and increasing of the share of this segment is also worth mentioning. The situation in Slovakia is even more critical, and compared to other European countries, the ageing of the population is significantly faster due to the low number of children born.

Younger travellers in rural areas are the second-largest segment. They often used to travel as children and they studied abroad. This group wants to discover and explore new destinations. There are two basic groups of young travellers. The first one is characterized by high income but lack of time. They are young professionals, but their time for travelling is limited. Mostly they are aged between 31 and 44, and they often travel as a pair; however, there are also individual travellers. They look for unusual experience (“once in a lifetime”) and they want to make as much of their holiday as possible. Comfort is important for them (Jarábková, 2018, 2019).

The second large group of young travellers includes youths with lower daily budgets and a sufficient amount of free time. They are usually aged between 18 and 30 and they are often not demanding travellers, looking for experience at a reasonable price. Their daily budgets are low but they travel for a longer time. These travellers opt for cheaper accommodation. They want to get engaged with local communities and experience local life. Some of them are interested in voluntary work in community or environmental projects (Rid et al., 2014; Ruiz-Martínez & Esparcia, 2020). In European conditions, local food and typical regional meals are recommended.

The third-largest segment for rural tourism is families with children. Family travel is a big, growing segment. It includes parents, grandparents, children and grandchildren, sometimes also several generations. Tourism in rural areas is popular among families. They are more aware of quality and price. They expect facilities of good quality and they want to balance safety and entertainment. Families travel mostly at holiday time and they combine entertainment and sightseeing. The product is intended to be a set of unforgettable experience, possibly also educational activities and competitive games for children (Lewis & D'Alessandro, 2019; Ruiz-Martínez & Esparcia, 2020). However, these activities must be relatively safe. It is recommended to offer special bonuses and all-inclusive prices for families with children. The family tourism market is quite broad. Within Slovakia, its potential is given by short distances between regions and attractive offers. This creates excellent preconditions for spending leisure time, in addition to the classic main holiday by the sea abroad, for weekend holiday stays, extended weekends or short-term holidays for the Slovak citizens.

In relation to visitors' typology, in rural tourism, we assess and measure their satisfaction. Therefore, it is important to find out when the visitor is satisfied. The visitor is satisfied when the quality he experiences on the spot matches his expectations. Most of all he notices details in the hotel/destination, reliability of service provider, the willingness of the staff, credibility and empathy (Pesonen et al., 2011).

Global efficiency refers to the effort of organizations to use common characteristics for the effective production and promotion of products and services that will exceed national boundaries. Customer convergence expresses the idea that the habits and patterns of buying behaviour of customers from different countries are becoming more and more similar (Polo et al., 2012; Sanagustin-Fons et al., 2018).

Frequent use of new information technologies also reduces the interest in authentic experience connected with staying in the countryside and in the nature. This phenomenon is a serious challenge for all service providers in the region in the future and is directly linked to the motivation in tourism (Kastenholz et al., 2018; Martínez Matiza, 2020).

The basic incentive of the participant's decision-making is the impulse based on needs. The need is a subjectively perceived lack of something that is important or necessary for human life. Needs are socially conditioned.

Motives are incentives leading to action to satisfy the need. The motives are positive (encouraging) and negative (repulsive), so they are often contradictory. Positive motives prevail in rural tourism (Chin, & Lo, 2017; Ilbery et al., 2007).

Tourism drew its attention to motivation in the 1960s, at the time of its rapid development.

Motives for participation in tourism were and still are very diverse:

- (a) in the 1970s three basic groups of motives were recognized—health care, prestige and education;
- (b) in the 1980s, the motives included experience, spontaneousness, relaxation, activity and nature;

- (c) in the 1990s, there were holiday (tourist) motives (rest, relaxation, education, health, activity, experience and adventure) and non-tourist motives (business and economy, politics and religion) (Ramkissoon, 2020).

Motivation and classification of visitors according to the types are consequently related to the process of market segmentation, which is based on dividing the market into different segments according to different criteria. Segmentation is a tool for distinguishing the needs of consumers of a particular product or service and thus the means for discovering business opportunities. A frequent reason for segmentation is the premise: It is better to satisfy part of the market than poorly satisfy the whole market (Pina & Delfa, 2005).

The concept of segmentation for the needs of accommodation establishments or destinations in rural tourism involves significant problems emerging from the fact that segmentation is a two-way process: from the market towards the service provider and from the service provider towards the segment. From this point of view, there are several stages that are necessary for defining the segmentation strategy in rural tourism (Jepson & Sharpley, 2015). First of all, it is necessary to define the market where we intend to operate, identify sufficiently large homogenous groups of consumers as regards the level of their needs and desires and determine the profile of the segments—defined in terms of their different attitudes in behaviour, demographic and psychographic characteristics.

For the needs of rural tourism, the criteria of effective segmentation can be defined primarily in terms of segment measurability, productivity, accessibility, sustainability, stability over time and the ability to compete with other service producers (Cahyanto et al., 2013).

3 Methodology

The methodology used in this article includes a critical literature review, work with strategic documents and national statistics. The sources for relevant literary research come from online bibliographic databases, e.g., Science Direct, Emerald and EBSCO, and from academic search engines, such as Google Scholar and others. The bibliographic sources in this research include articles published in scientific magazines, books, scientific journals, corporate publications, on websites and in online magazines. The criteria for this choice of literature were based on the subject importance and on the research. The selection of literature and sources is not exhaustive, given the scope of the article. The methodology of the research included also a questionnaire focused on customers' satisfaction with accommodation establishments services. The respondents answered 17 questions regarding their satisfaction with services in accommodation establishments of rural tourism. The online pilot survey was conducted in August–September 2020 and 892 respondents took part in it. The data obtained were assessed and processed in a summary table. 119 accommodation establishments of rural tourism cooperated on the research.

4 Results—Consumer Buying Behaviour and Changes of Visitor Attendance in Rural Tourism in Slovakia

In the last years, in rural tourism, significant changes have occurred regarding supply as well as demand. For assessment of its evolution, we have taken into account a time sequence of data since the year 2008 (before the global economic crisis) when the peak of economic growth was reached in tourism and also in rural tourism (Table 1).

In 2008, the number of accommodation establishments in rural tourism reached, 194 and during the crisis, it dropped down to 149 in 2011. A significant increase occurred after the quantitative monetary easing of the ECB in 2015 when the number of establishments rose to 289 and in 2020 reached the level of 310 establishments (Table 1). In the reference period, the increase in the number of accommodation facilities in rural tourism is by 59.8%. During the same period, the number of all accommodation establishments in Slovakia increased by only 25.4% (Table 2).

In this period, the number of bedrooms in rural tourism accommodation establishments had a similar evolution, and it rose from 1 706 in 2008 to 2 935 in 2020 (Table 1). This is an increase of 72% due to strong economic development after 2015. The number of bed places in accommodation establishments of rural tourism also fluctuated in the reference period until 2015 and subsequently sharply rose to 8 328 bed places (Table 1). Between 2008 and 2020, the number of bed places in rural tourism increased by 85.3%. In comparison, the total number of bed places in Slovakia increased by only 11.2% by 2020 (Table 2).

The visitor attendance evolution in rural tourism in Slovakia was also interesting (Tables 1 and 2). The assessed period can be considered as extremely successful for rural tourism. The number of guests as well as the number of nights spent in tourist accommodation (overnight stays/guest nights) rose significantly. Between 2008 and 2020, the number of guests grew from 102 to 189 thousand (Table 1). It is a rise by 85.3%, while this increase was higher than 88% until 2019 (Table 2). It was mainly the number of domestic visitors which rose significantly up to number 142 thousand in 2020. The growth of the number of foreign visitors was above average until the pandemic outbreak in 2019—in this year, it reached the number of 57 thousand. Compared to the initial number in 2008 (23 thousand guests), this is an increase by 248%.

The domestic guests in particular significantly contributed to maintaining the performance of rural tourism after the pandemic outbreak. However, the decrease in the number of foreign guests was notably smaller than for aggregated tourism data in Slovakia. Between 2008 and 2019, the total number of guests in Slovakia increased by 57.6%. However, when assessing tourism data in Slovakia, in 2008–2020, there is a drop of -21.4% ; year-on-year 2020/2019 decrease by even -50.1% (Table 2).

The development of overnight stays number in rural tourism was positive. It rose from 251 thousand in 2008 to 435 thousand (Table 1). It is an increase by 73.3%. As regards the number of nights spent in tourist accommodation, the tourism as a whole in Slovakia rose till 2019 by 42%, but it dropped by -44.7% between 2019 and 2020

Table 1 Capacities and performances of accommodation establishments (AE) in rural tourism in Slovakia in 2008–2020

Indicator/Year	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
No. of AE	194	176	161	149	222	215	207	289	277	272	295	305	310
Percentage change	–	–9.3	–8.5	–7.5	49.0	–3.2	–3.7	39.6	–4.2	–1.0	8.5	3.4	1.6
No. of bedrooms	1 706	1 666	1 595	1 522	2 161	2 097	1 986	2 349	2 456	2 649	2 855	2 914	2 935
Percentage change	–	–2.3	–4.3	–4.6	42.0	–3.0	–1.0	–5.3	18.3	4.6	7.9	2.1	1.0
No. of bed places	5 094	4 954	4 647	4 440	6 121	5 905	5 652	6 768	6 995	7 925	8 203	8 305	8 328
Percentage change	–	–2.7	–6.2	–4.5	37.9	–3.5	–4.3	19.7	3.4	13.3	3.5	1.0	1.0
Total No. of guests (thous.)	102	79	80	72	75	79	65	86	114	151	178	192	189
Percentage change	–	–22.8	1.5	–10.2	4.4	4.7	–17.1	32.3	32.5	32.5	17.9	7.9	–1.6
Domestic guests (thous.)	79	63	65	59	59	63	54	71	93	118	128	135	142
Percentage change	–	–20.7	4.7	–10.4	1.3	5.2	–13.8	31.5	32.3	26.9	8.5	5.5	5.2
Foreign guests (thous.)	23	16	15	13	16	16	11	15	21	33	50	57	47
Percentage change	–	–30.0	–10.6	–9.3	18.0	2.6	–29.7	36.5	32.8	57.1	51.2	14.0	–6.0
Total guest nights (thous.)	251	195	195	174	179	181	147	196	268	360	408	431	435
Percentage change	–	–22.5	0.0	–10.8	2.9	1.5	–18.8	33.2	36.6	34.3	13.3	6.9	0.9
Domestic guest nights (thous.)	187	150	154	134	138	140	118	157	215	272	310	335	352
Percentage change	–	–19.6	2.7	–13.1	2.6	2.1	–16.2	33.1	37.1	26.5	14.0	8.1	5.1
Foreign guest nights (thous.)	64	45	41	40	41	41	29	39	33	88	98	96	83
Percentage change	–	–31.2	–9.5	–1.8	3.7	–0.3	–27.7	33.7	34.4	66.0	11.4	–2.0	–3.5

Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, 2021, own processing

Table 2 Comparison of the growth of capacities and performances of rural tourism (RT) and tourism in Slovakia in the years 2008–2020

Indicator/Year	2008	2019	2019/2008 Percentage change	2020	2020/2008 Percentage change	2020/2019 Percentage change
No. of AE in rural tourism	194	305	+57.2	310	+59.8	+1.6
No. of AE in tourism	3 434	4 487	+30.7	4 307	+25.4	−4.0
No. of bed places in RT (thous.)	5 094	8 305	+63.0	8 328	+63.5	+0.3
No. of bed places in tourism (thous.)	188	219	+16.5	209	+11.2	−4.6
No. of guests in RT (thous.)	102	192	+88.2	189	+85.3	−1.6
No. of guests in tourism (thous.)	4 083	6 433	+57.6	3 210	−21.4	−50.1
No. of guest nights in RT (thous.)	251	431	+71.7	435	+73.3	+0.9
No. of guest nights in tourism (thous.)	12 464	17 704	+42.0	9 791	−21.4	−44.7

Source Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, 2021, own processing

(Table 2). In terms of the number of guest nights, the success of rural tourism in Slovakia was mainly due to the domestic guests and their overnight stays.

These data show, as in the capacity indicators evolution, that after 2008 there was a crisis until 2015, similarly to tourism and the economy as a whole. The recovery from the 2008 crisis was relatively long also in rural tourism. The development after 2020 is interesting. The rural tourism proved to be a stable component of tourism in Slovakia. It retained its visitor attendance in terms of the number of guests and overnight stays. The reason for this stability is probably its highly seasonal character during the summer period when anti-pandemic measures were relaxed and the service prices were lower. The family character of business can also play an important role.

The analysis of the shares of domestic and foreign guests in the year sequence 2008–2020 plays also a very important role in the assessment of the development of rural tourism in Slovakia (Table 3). In 2008, there were 525 guests and 1 294 overnight stays per one accommodation establishment of rural tourism in 2008. Till 2015, the evolution was quite fluctuating. In 2015, the number of guests per accommodation establishment in rural tourism dropped to 298 and the number of overnight stays per accommodation establishment to 678. Subsequent development until 2019 was extremely successful. The number of guests per accommodation establishment increased to 630 per year and the number of overnight stays per accommodation establishment to 1 413 per year (Table 3). The daily average per accommodation

Table 3 Share of domestic and foreign guests in rural tourism in Slovakia in the years 2008–2020

Indicator/Year	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
No. of guests per AE per year	525	449	496	483	338	367	314	298	412	555	603	630	610
Share of domestic guests (%)	77.5	79.7	81.3	81.9	78.7	79.7	83.1	82.6	81.6	78.1	71.9	70.3	75.1
Share of foreign guests (%)	22.5	20.3	18.7	18.1	22.3	20.3	16.9	17.4	18.4	21.9	27.1	29.7	24.9
No. of guest nights per AE per year	1 294	1 108	1 211	1 168	806	842	710	678	968	1 324	1 383	1 413	1 403
Share of domestic guest nights (%)	74.5	77.0	79.0	77.0	77.1	77.3	80.3	80.1	80.2	75.6	76.0	77.7	80.9
Share of foreign guest nights (%)	25.5	23.0	21.0	23.0	22.9	22.7	19.7	19.9	19.8	24.4	24.0	22.3	19.1

Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, 2021, own processing

establishment is less than 2 guests and 4 nights. Although this is a relatively small number, it proves that these establishments are mostly small facilities with the family business, and during the pandemic time, they were quite stable compared to the hotel industry in Slovakia.

The share of domestic guests and their overnight stays exceeded 80% only in years 2014–2016 (Table 3). During the 2020 pandemic, the share of domestic guests returned to above 75% and the share of overnight stays above 80%. In the long run, domestic guests are proving to be a significantly more stable market segment in the current turbulent economic and social environment of the globalized world.

With regard to conducted analyses, the share of performances of accommodation establishments of rural tourism in Slovakia in the total performances of tourism evolved logically in a similar way (Table 4). The share of the number of accommodation establishments rose continuously. It increased from 5.6% in 2008 up to 8.1% in 2020. The share of the number of guests also grew significantly. It reached 2.5% in 2008 and then fell to 1.7% in 2014. By 2019, it had risen to 3%. In 2020, the share of guests in rural tourism in Slovakia grew to 5.9%, as tourism as a whole recorded a sharp decline during the pandemic. The share of overnight stays evolved similarly. The recovery after the 2008 crisis was quite lengthy. Before the pandemic outbreak in 2020, the share of overnight stays of rural tourism in the total performances of tourism increased significantly.

Table 5 contains the outcomes of a pilot satisfaction survey with the services of accommodation establishments in rural tourism. The survey was conducted online. The respondents answered 17 questions regarding their satisfaction with service quality in accommodation establishments in rural tourism. There were 892 respondents of the survey—441 of them were Slovak, 262 Czech and 189 came from other European countries. 119 accommodation establishments in rural tourism participated in the research.

The opinions of domestic Slovak guests, Czech guests and guests from other European countries were evaluated separately. The Czech guests represent an important traditional clientele in Slovakia, so it is necessary to pay special attention to them. At the same time, their opinions are partly different from the opinions of domestic guests and from other foreign guests.

Regarding the cleanliness of the accommodation, the Czech guests were the most satisfied (89%) and the Slovak guests were the least satisfied (76%). Similarly, the Czech guests were mostly satisfied with the room equipment (72%). Guests from other European countries had probably higher expectations of room equipment—only 65% expressed satisfaction with this attribute. These guests were the least satisfied also with the room temperature during the accommodation time—only 67% were satisfied. This factor is probably influenced by the concentration of demand in the summer months. The high level of satisfaction (up to 82%) was with the peace in the accommodation facility, which is a similar level of satisfaction as with the cleanliness of the rooms. As regards the comfort, the guests from European countries were also the least satisfied. The level of satisfaction with the quality of the breakfast menu (food and drinks) was significantly high, with guests from Europe being the most satisfied. Similarly, European guests significantly positively rated the

Table 4 The share of the performance of rural tourism accommodation establishments (AE) in the total performance of accommodation establishments in Slovakia in years 2008–2020

Indicator	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Share in the total no. of AE (%)	5.6	5.3	5.2	4.9	6.1	6.2	6.2	7.8	7.9	7.8	7.9	8.0	8.1
Share in no. of guests	2.5	2.3	2.4	2.0	2.0	1.9	1.7	2.0	2.3	2.8	2.8	3.0	5.9
Share in no. of guest nights (%)	2.0	1.9	1.9	1.6	1.6	1.6	1.4	1.6	1.9	2.4	2.4	2.4	4.4

Source Own processing

Table 5 Evaluation of guest satisfaction with the services of accommodation establishments in rural tourism in Slovakia

Factor/Satisfaction (%)	Domestic guests	Czech guests	Foreign guests	Total
Cleanliness—satisfied	76	89	85	83
Cleanliness—unsatisfied	24	11	15	17
Room equipment—satisfied	67	72	65	68
Room equipment—unsatisfied	33	28	35	32
Room temperature—satisfied	72	67	63	67
Room temperature—unsatisfied	28	33	37	33
Peace—satisfied	82	80	85	82
Peace—unsatisfied	18	20	15	18
Comfort—satisfied	71	74	67	71
Comfort—unsatisfied	29	26	33	29
Breakfast—satisfied	82	85	88	85
Breakfast—unsatisfied	18	15	12	15
Building appearance—satisfied	71	77	78	75
Building appearance—unsatisfied	29	23	22	25
Interior—satisfied	75	79	84	79
Interior—unsatisfied	25	21	16	21
Price/performance—satisfied	70	76	80	75
Price/Performance—unsatisfied	30	24	20	25
Parking—satisfied	92	90	94	92
Parking—unsatisfied	8	10	6	8
The internet—satisfied	88	85	82	85
The Internet—unsatisfied	12	15	18	15
Staff—satisfied	76	79	71	75
Staff—unsatisfied	24	21	29	25
Dealing with problems—satisfied	78	82	85	82
Dealing with problems—unsatisfied	22	18	15	18
Attractiveness of nature—satisfied	67	78	86	77
Attractiveness of nature—unsatisfied	33	22	14	23
Complexity of services in the area—satisfied	71	76	79	75
Complexity of services in the area—unsatisfied	29	24	21	25

(continued)

Table 5 (continued)

Factor/Satisfaction (%)	Domestic guests	Czech guests	Foreign guests	Total
Overall experience of the stay—satisfied	73	78	84	78
Overall experience of the stay—unsatisfied	27	22	16	22
Booking via online sharing platforms	47	56	63	55
Direct booking of the stay	53	44	37	45

Source Own processing

building appearance (78%), the interior (84%), the price-performance ratio (80%) and the parking options (94%).

The domestic guests were most satisfied with the Internet connection (88%). The Czech guests expressed the highest level of satisfaction with the willingness and friendly attitude of the staff in accommodation establishments (79%). As regards dealing with problems, the guests from the European countries were most satisfied (85%). The attractiveness of the surrounding nature was also very positively perceived mainly by European (86%) and Czech guests (78%). The European guests were significantly satisfied also with the complexity of services (79%) and with the overall experience of the stay (84%).

For booking the stay, the online platforms of sharing economy are extremely important for the European guests (63%) and for the Czech guests (56%). Based on the successful development of rural tourism in the crisis period of the 2020 pandemic, we can assume that the sharing economy has played an important role in maintaining performance in this sector.

From the overall point of view, Slovak guests were most satisfied with the parking possibilities (92%) and least satisfied with the room equipment (67%). Czech guests also most valued parking options (90%) and room cleanliness (89%). The situation is similar for European guests, where several factors were significantly positively evaluated.

To sum up, guests expressed a high level of satisfaction. Only a few questions were problematic. Accommodation establishments in rural tourism offer a simple standard of services with reasonable quality and price. However, it is necessary to take into account the fact that demands for quality of services in the globalized world will increase.

5 Conclusion

The issue of the visitor in rural tourism is richly dealt with in the available current literature. Not only the characteristics, but also the essential features of buying behaviour

have been changing in the recent years. The reason is the globalizing economy and crises in the political, economic, social, ecological, technological but also health-care fields. For this reason, we describe the present time as turbulent, characterized by significant and rapidly emerging influences of the external environment.

Despite this, the rural tourism in Slovakia has recorded remarkable successful development since 2008. Although the visitor attendance after the 2008 crisis had decreased until 2015, the development was similar in terms of the total performance of tourism. Since 2015, the rural tourism in Slovakia has been significantly and continually growing. This positive trend continued also during the pandemic in 2020. In this period, there was a sharp drop of 50% in the performances of tourism in Slovakia. However, in this turbulent time, the performances of the rural tourism were maintained. The reason is the seasonal nature of performances, especially during the summer season, but also the stability of market segments of domestic, Czech and European visitors. The pilot satisfaction survey proved a remarkably high level of visitors' satisfaction with the services of accommodation establishments in rural tourism. Online booking platforms of the sharing economy and the family nature of business also had a significantly positive impact on the high use of rural tourism establishments during the 2020 pandemic.

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