

STAVOVI TURISTA O KVALITETU PONUDE RURALNOG TURIZMA NA ŠAR PLANINI

Scientific paper
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APSTRAKT: Ruralni turizam predstavlja značajan segment savremenog turističkog razvoja, posebno u područjima koja raspolazu očuvanim prirodnim resursima, autentičnim ambijentom i lokalnom tradicijom. Šar planina, kao prostor izraženih prirodnih vrednosti i turističkih potencijala, poseduje uslove za razvoj kvalitetne ruralne turističke ponude. Predmet ovog rada jeste ispitivanje stavova turista o kvalitetu ponude ruralnog turizma na Šar planini, sa ciljem sagledavanja ključnih prednosti i nedostataka ove destinacije iz ugla posetilaca. Istraživanje je sprovedeno na uzorku od 50 ispitanika primenom strukturisanog anketnog upitnika. Prikupljeni podaci obrađeni su metodom deskriptivne statistike, a rezultati su prikazani u procentima. U fokusu analize bili su stavovi turista o ukupnom kvalitetu ruralne turističke ponude, prirodnom ambijentu i očuvanosti prirode, kvalitetu smeštajnih kapaciteta, ponudi domaće hrane i pića, gostoprimstvu lokalnog stanovništva i domaćina, dostupnosti dodatnih sadržaja, turističkoj infrastrukturi, promociji destinacije i spremnosti na ponovnu posetu. Rezultati istraživanja pokazuju da ispitanici najpozitivnije ocenjuju prirodni ambijent, gostoprimstvo domaćina i ponudu domaće hrane i pića, što ukazuje na značaj autentičnih prirodnih i sociokulturnih vrednosti za atraktivnost destinacije. Sa druge strane, slabije su ocenjeni ukupni kvalitet ponude, smeštajni kapaciteti, dostupnost dodatnih sadržaja i nivo promocije destinacije, što ukazuje na potrebu za unapređenjem ovih elemenata. Takođe, rezultati pokazuju umereno pozitivnu spremnost turista na ponovnu posetu, ali i prisustvo određene neodlučnosti, što potvrđuje da postojeći kvalitet ponude još uvek ne doprinosi u dovoljnoj meri jačanju lojalnosti posetilaca.

Ključne reči: ruralni turizam, Šar planina, turistička ponuda, stavovi turista

TOURISTS' ATTITUDES TOWARD THE QUALITY OF THE RURAL TOURISM OFFER ON ŠAR MOUNTAIN

ABSTRACT: Rural tourism represents an important segment of contemporary tourism development, especially in areas characterized by preserved natural resources, an authentic environment, and local tradition. Šar Mountain, as an area of remarkable natural values and tourism potential, has favorable conditions for the development of a high-quality rural tourism offer. The subject of this paper is the examination of tourists' attitudes toward the quality of the rural tourism offer on Šar Mountain, with the aim of

identifying the key strengths and weaknesses of this destination from the visitors' perspective. The research was conducted on a sample of 50 respondents using a structured questionnaire. The collected data were processed by means of descriptive statistics, and the results were presented in percentages. The analysis focused on tourists' attitudes toward the overall quality of the rural tourism offer, the natural environment and preservation of nature, the quality of accommodation capacities, the offer of local food and beverages, the hospitality of the local population and hosts, the availability of additional activities, tourism infrastructure, destination promotion, and willingness to revisit. The research results show that respondents gave the most positive evaluations to the natural environment, the hospitality of hosts, and the offer of local food and beverages, indicating the importance of authentic natural and socio-cultural values for the attractiveness of the destination. On the other hand, the overall quality of the offer, accommodation capacities, the availability of additional activities, and the level of destination promotion received less favorable evaluations, pointing to the need for improvement in these elements. The results also show a moderately positive willingness of tourists to revisit, but also the presence of a certain degree of indecisiveness, confirming that the existing quality of the offer still does not contribute sufficiently to strengthening visitor loyalty.

Keywords: rural tourism, Šar Mountain, tourism offer, tourists' attitudes

1. INTRODUCTION

Rural tourism is defined in contemporary literature as an important factor linking the economic, social, and environmental components of development, while having a positive impact on employment and the development of rural areas (Dimitrijević, Ristić & Bošković, 2022). Rural tourism can bring many benefits as contribution to a more balanced relationship between agriculture and other rural activities, while also providing households with an additional source of income through the sale of their own products and services (Arandelović & Videnović, 2016). Unfortunately, although Serbia has significant potential, it has not been sufficiently utilized, since, according to Radović (2020), the average occupancy rate of capacities in rural tourism in Serbia is only 4%, whereas in the European Union the average occupancy rate is significantly higher, amounting to 25%.

When it comes to mountain destinations, many authors point out that the tourism potentials of mountain areas in Serbia have not been fully activated (Milijić, Jovanović, & Zeković, 2017). This is also the case with Šar Mountain. Although it possesses significant potential, its contribution to the local economy is negligible. Certainly, the slower development of rural tourism on Šar Mountain was also influenced by the conflict period starting in 1999.

The Brezovica ski center is certainly the best-known tourist center on Šar Mountain, focused primarily on ski tourism, with almost no organized summer offer or activities. In addition, the area of Šar Mountain is home to a large number of plant and animal species, including rare and endemic species, which gives this mountain special importance from the standpoint of nature conservation and tourism attractiveness. From a gastronomic perspective, Šar Mountain has for centuries been well known for Šar cheese. For all these reasons, Šar Mountain can be regarded as an area with significant opportunities for the development of a high-quality and sustainable rural

tourism offer, based on natural resources, an authentic environment, and a greater diversity of tourism contents.

2. METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted on a sample of 50 respondents during March 2026. The sample consisted of a group of tourists who provided answers to a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of 13 questions, with the first question aimed at determining the frequency of visits to rural tourist destinations, while the remaining questions focused on evaluating different elements of the rural tourism offer on Šar Mountain and three questions about demographic details of respondents. For most of the questions, a five-point Likert scale was used, through which respondents expressed their level of agreement with the given statements or assessed the quality of particular elements of the tourism offer. Basic demographic data on the respondents are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Basic demographic data of respondents

	n	%
Age		
20-27	6	12
28-35	25	50
36-43	8	16
44-50	6	12
Over 51	5	10
Gender		
Male	29	58
Female	21	42
Tourists from		
Kosovo and Metohija	25	50
Serbia	5	10
North Macedonia	2	4
Albania	15	30
Other	3	6

The collected data were processed using descriptive statistics, and the results were presented in percentages. The obtained findings were interpreted through the analysis of the distribution of responses to individual questions, with the aim of identifying the basic attitudes of respondents toward the quality of the rural tourism offer at the observed destination. Based on the conducted analysis, conclusions were drawn regarding the key advantages and disadvantages of rural tourism on Šar Mountain, as well as possible directions for improving the tourism offer.

The subject of the research in this paper is the examination of tourists' attitudes toward the quality of the rural tourism offer on Šar Mountain. The focus of the research includes respondents' perceptions of the overall quality of the rural tourism offer, the natural environment and preservation of nature, the quality of accommodation capacities, the offer of local food and beverages, the hospitality of the local population

and hosts, the availability of additional activities, tourism infrastructure, the level of destination promotion, as well as tourists' willingness to revisit.

The aim of the research is to assess, based on tourists' attitudes, the quality of the existing rural tourism offer on Šar Mountain and to identify its main strengths and weaknesses. A specific aim of the research is to determine the elements of the offer that have the most pronounced positive or negative impact on tourists' perceptions, as well as to consider the possibilities for improving rural tourism at the observed destination.

3.RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results presented in Figure 1 indicate that the largest proportion of respondents visit rural tourist destinations occasionally (50%), which suggests that rural tourism holds an important place in their travel preferences, but still does not represent a regular form of travel. At the same time, 24% of respondents are visiting rural tourist destinations for the first time, which may indicate that this form of tourism continues to attract new visitors and has potential for further growth. In addition, 20% of respondents stated that they visit such destinations once a year, pointing to the existence of a group of tourists who include rural tourism in their occasional but stable annual travel habits. On the other hand, only 6% of respondents visit rural destinations several times a year, which shows that the share of highly frequent users of rural tourism offer is relatively small. Taken as a whole, it can be concluded that the sample is dominated by first-time and occasional visitors, which is important for interpreting the subsequent research results, since their attitudes toward the quality of the rural tourism offer on Šar Mountain primarily reflect general impressions, destination attractiveness, and factors that may influence the decision to revisit.

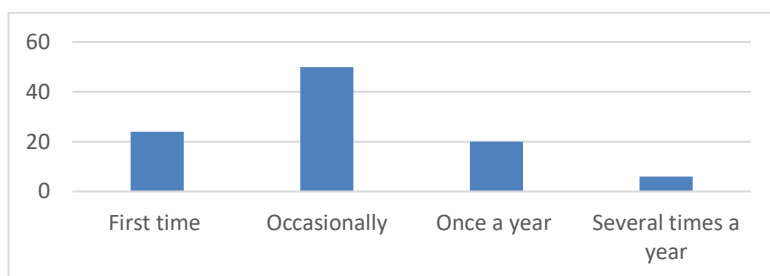


Figure 1: How often do you visit rural tourist destinations (in %)?

The results on question how tourists rate the overall quality of the rural tourism offer on Šar Mountain (Figure 2) indicate that respondents generally have a moderately critical attitude toward the overall quality of the rural tourism offer on Šar Mountain given that the highest percentage of responses is concentrated in the lower ratings. Specifically, 20% of respondents rated the overall quality as very poor, while 30% rated it as poor, which together accounts for half of the sample and points to a pronounced dissatisfaction among a significant share of respondents. On the other hand, 28% of respondents gave an average rating, which may suggest that the offer contains certain positive elements, but that these are not sufficiently developed to generate a higher level of tourist satisfaction. Positive ratings are represented to a

much smaller extent, with 12% of respondents rating the overall quality as good, while only 10% gave a very good rating. Taken as a whole, the results suggest that respondents generally do not perceive the rural tourism offer of this area as being of sufficiently high quality, which may indicate the need to improve key elements of the offer, such as infrastructure, accommodation capacities, additional facilities, the organization of the stay, and the overall tourist attractiveness of the destination. This finding is important because it suggests that the current level of quality does not fully meet tourists' expectations, which may affect their overall satisfaction and willingness to revisit.

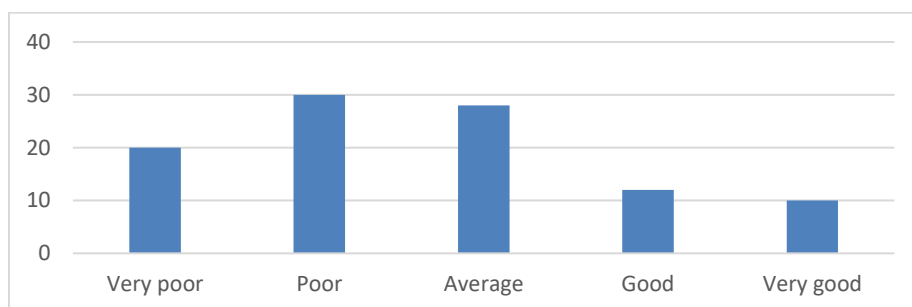


Figure 2: How would you rate the overall quality of the rural tourism offer on Šar Mountain (in %)?

The results (Figure 3) about contribution of natural environment and preservation of nature to its attractiveness indicate a distinctly positive attitude among respondents regarding the importance of the natural environment and nature preservation for the attractiveness of the destination. The largest share of respondents, 50%, stated that they agree with the statement, while an additional 24% selected strongly agree, meaning that a total of 74% of respondents recognize natural values as one of the key factors of the attractiveness of Šar Mountain. In contrast, negative attitudes are represented to a much smaller extent, with 6% of respondents strongly disagreeing and 12% disagreeing with the statement, while 8% remained neutral. This distribution of responses shows that the natural environment and preservation of nature represent one of the most important comparative advantages of this destination and that these elements play a significant role in shaping tourists' positive perceptions. The obtained result may also be interpreted as an indicator that the future development of rural tourism in this area should be based on the principles of sustainability, protection of natural resources, and preservation of the authentic landscape, since these are precisely the characteristics that tourists perceive as particularly valuable and attractive.

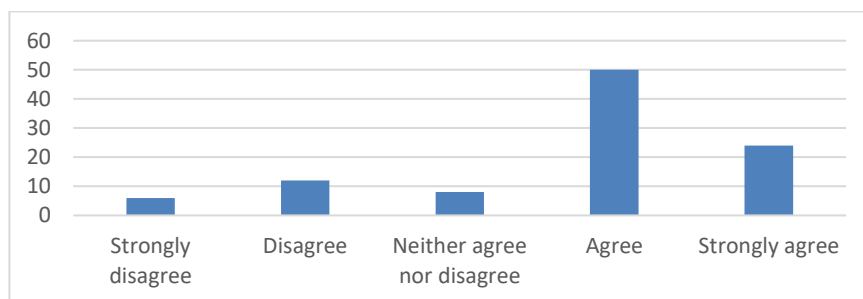


Figure 3: The natural environment and preservation of nature at this destination significantly contribute to its attractiveness (in %).

When is about quality of accommodation capacities (Figure 4) The results indicate a predominantly negative assessment of the quality of accommodation capacities within the rural tourism offer. The largest percentage of respondents rated the accommodation capacities as poor (40%), while an additional 16% gave a very poor rating, which together accounts for 56% of negative responses. This finding shows that more than half of the respondents are not satisfied with the quality of accommodation, which may point to shortcomings in terms of equipment, comfort, hygiene, service, or the general standard of accommodation facilities. On the other hand, 24% of respondents rated the quality of accommodation capacities as average, suggesting that a certain part of the sample recognizes an acceptable level of service, but without a pronounced degree of satisfaction. Positive ratings are represented to a much smaller extent, with 12% of respondents rating the accommodation quality as good, and only 8% as very good. Taken as a whole, the results indicate that accommodation capacities represent one of the weaker components of the rural tourism offer at the observed destination. Such a perception may have a significant impact on the overall satisfaction of tourists, as well as on their willingness to revisit the destination, which is why improving accommodation conditions should be considered an important segment of the future development of rural tourism on Šar Mountain.

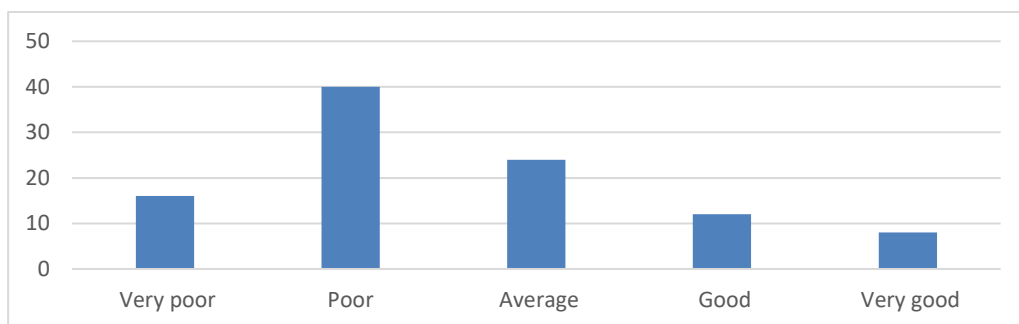


Figure 4: How would you rate the quality of accommodation capacities within the rural tourism offer (in %)?

The offer of local food and beverages also was topic of the survey. The results (Figure 5) indicate a predominantly positive assessment of the offer of local food and beverages at the observed destination. The largest percentage of respondents, 46%, rated this component of the tourism offer as good, while an additional 22% gave it a very good rating, meaning that a total of 68% of respondents hold a positive attitude toward the quality of the local gastronomy. This finding suggests that the offer of food and beverages represents one of the more significant strengths of the rural tourism offer on Šar Mountain and that tourists recognize authentic gastronomy as an important element of the overall tourist experience. On the other hand, 20% of respondents gave an average rating, which may indicate that certain aspects of the offer meet basic expectations but still leave room for improvement. Negative ratings are present to a lesser extent, with 8% of respondents rating the offer as poor, and only 4% as very poor. Taken as a whole, it can be concluded that local food and beverages represent one of the stronger components of the rural tourism offer at this destination, which may positively influence tourist satisfaction and contribute to strengthening the authenticity and competitiveness of rural tourism on Šar Mountain.

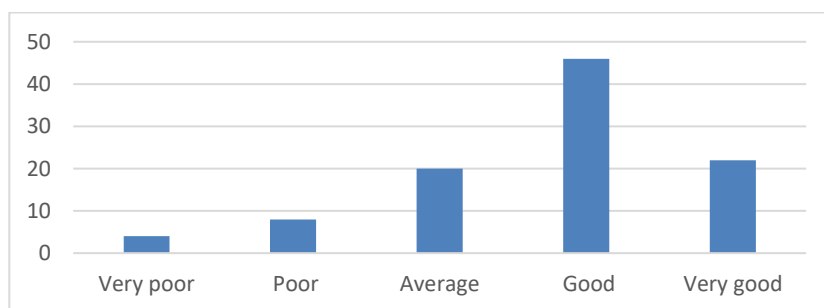


Figure 5: How would you rate the offer of local food and beverages at the destination (in %)?

The results (Figure 6) indicate a highly positive perception among respondents regarding the hospitality of the local population and hosts. The largest percentage of respondents, 60%, stated that they agree with the claim that hospitality is at a satisfactory level, while an additional 22% selected strongly agree, meaning that a total of 82% of respondents hold a positive attitude toward this element of the rural tourism offer. A neutral position was taken by 10% of respondents, which may indicate that some tourists did not have a sufficiently strong experience or were unable to clearly assess this aspect of the offer. Negative responses were represented to a very small extent, with 2% of respondents strongly disagreeing and 6% disagreeing with the given statement. Taken as a whole, the obtained results show that hospitality represents one of the strongest components of the rural tourism offer on Šar Mountain, which is particularly important because the hosts' attitude toward tourists contributes to creating a positive experience, strengthening the authenticity of the destination, and increasing the likelihood of a repeat visit.

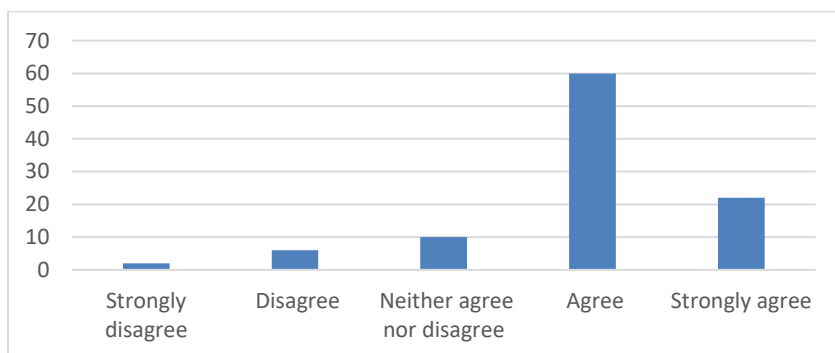


Figure 6: The hospitality of the local population and hosts is at a satisfactory level (in %).

The results (Figure 7) about availability of additional activities show a highly negative assessment of the availability of additional activities within the rural tourism offer on Šar Mountain. The largest percentage of respondents, 46%, rated the availability of additional activities as poor, while an additional 26% gave a very poor rating, which together accounts for 72% of negative responses. This finding clearly shows that the majority of respondents believe that the offer of activities such as walks, excursions, local events, and recreational activities is not sufficiently developed or adequately available to tourists. On the other hand, 16% of respondents gave an average rating, which indicates that certain elements of this offer do exist, but are not sufficiently rich or well organized to generate a higher level of satisfaction. Positive ratings are represented to a very small extent, with only 6% of respondents rating the availability of additional activities as good, while the same percentage, 6%, gave a very good rating. Taken as a whole, it can be concluded that additional activities represent one of the weakest components of the rural tourism offer at the observed destination, which may significantly affect tourists' overall satisfaction, the length of their stay, and their willingness to revisit. These results point to the need for enriching and better organizing supplementary activities in order to improve the attractiveness and competitiveness of rural tourism in this area.

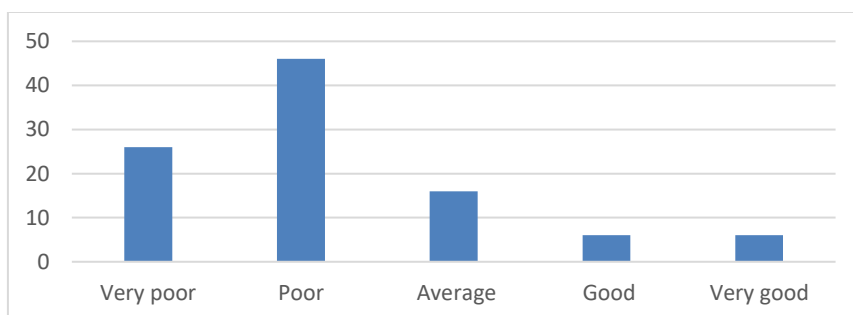


Figure 7: How would you rate the availability of additional activities - walks, excursions, local events, recreational activities (in %)?

When is about tourism infrastructure, the results (Figure 8) indicate a predominantly positive perception among respondents at the observed destination. The largest percentage of respondents, 60%, stated that they agree with the claim that roads, signage, and access to sites meet visitors' needs, while an additional 10% selected strongly agree, meaning that a total of 70% of respondents positively evaluate this aspect of the tourism offer. A neutral position was taken by 26% of respondents, which may indicate that some tourists perceive the infrastructure as satisfactory, but without a distinctly positive impression. Negative responses were represented to a very small extent, with 4% of respondents disagreeing with the given statement, while no respondents selected strongly disagree. Taken as a whole, the obtained results show that tourism infrastructure represents a relatively well-rated element of the rural tourism offer on Šar Mountain, which may have a positive impact on destination accessibility, easier tourist movement, and the overall stay experience. At the same time, the presence of a significant share of neutral responses suggests that there is still room for further improvement, particularly in the areas of signage, the condition of access roads, and better connectivity to attractive sites.

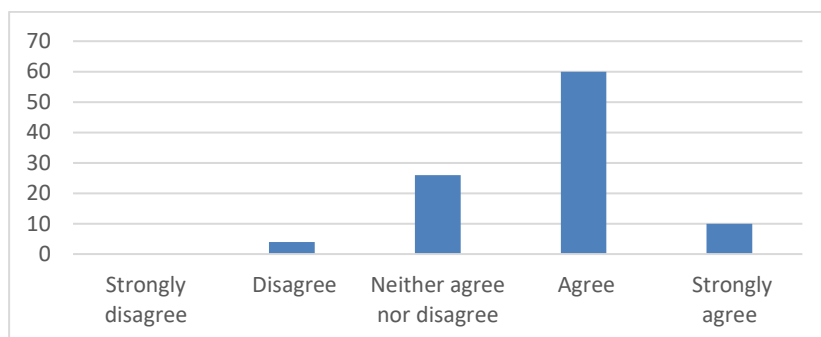


Figure 8: Tourism infrastructure (roads, signage, access to sites) meets visitors' needs (in %).

The results (Figure 9) indicate a highly negative perception among respondents regarding the promotion of the rural tourism offer of Šar Mountain. The largest percentage of respondents, 60%, stated that they disagree with the claim that the rural tourism offer is sufficiently promoted, while an additional 14% selected strongly disagree, which together accounts for 74% of negative responses. This finding clearly shows that the majority of respondents believe that the promotion of the rural tourism offer is not at a satisfactory level and that there is a need for more intensive marketing activities. A neutral position was taken by 14% of respondents, which may indicate indecisiveness or insufficient awareness of the scope of existing promotional activities. On the other hand, a positive attitude was expressed to a much smaller extent, with 8% of respondents agreeing and only 4% strongly agreeing with the given statement. Taken as a whole, the obtained results suggest that insufficient promotion represents one of the significant weaknesses of the rural tourism offer of Šar Mountain, which may negatively affect its visibility, the attraction of new tourists, and the overall competitiveness of the destination in the tourism market.

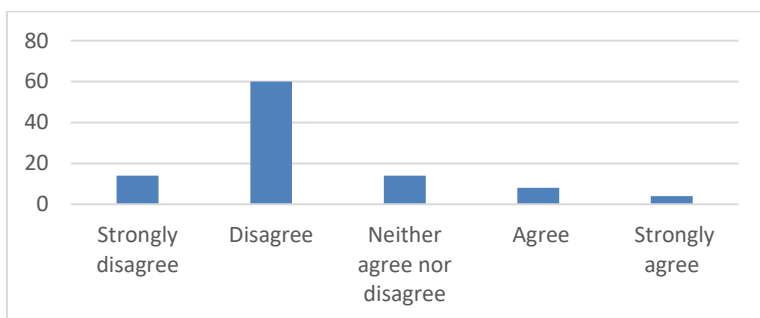


Figure 9: Do you think that the rural tourism offer of Šar Mountain is sufficiently promoted (in %)?

Finally, the results (Figure 10) show a moderately positive attitude among respondents regarding their willingness to revisit Šar Mountain as a rural tourism destination. Specifically, 32% of respondents stated that they would probably visit the destination again, while an additional 18% answered definitely yes, which together accounts for 50% of positive responses. This finding indicates that half of the respondents recognize certain values and attractions of the destination that may encourage a repeat visit. On the other hand, 26% of respondents declared themselves undecided, suggesting that for a significant portion of the sample, impressions of the destination are not strong enough to lead to a clear intention to return. Negative responses are also not negligible, as 14% of respondents stated probably not, and 10% answered definitely not, which together makes up 24% of negative responses. Taken as a whole, the results show that there is a certain level of interest in revisiting the destination, but that tourists' willingness is not sufficiently strong among all respondents. This may indicate the need for further improvement in the quality of the rural tourism offer, especially in the segments that influence overall satisfaction, in order to increase tourist loyalty and the likelihood of a repeat visit.

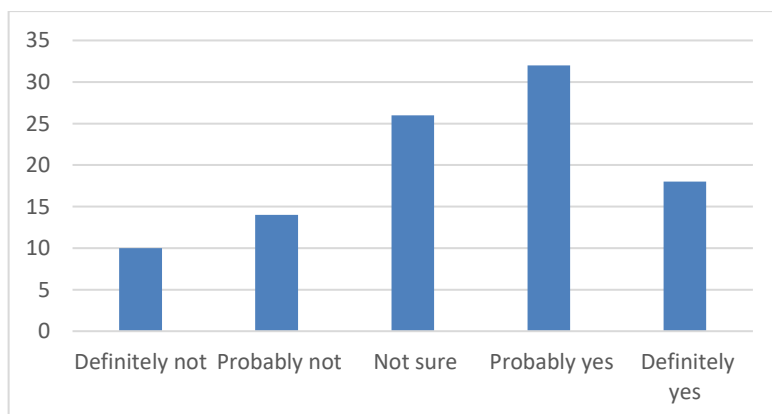


Figure 10: Would you visit Šar Mountain again as a rural tourism destination (in %)?

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the conducted research, it can be concluded that the rural tourism offer of Šar Mountain has certain significant strengths, but also pronounced weaknesses that limit its full development and competitiveness. Respondents gave the most positive evaluations to the natural environment and preservation of nature, the offer of local food and beverages, as well as the hospitality of the local population and hosts, which indicates that authentic natural and socio-cultural resources represent the main advantages of this destination. On the other hand, the results showed that the overall quality of the rural tourism offer, the quality of accommodation capacities, and especially the availability of additional activities were evaluated much less favorably, pointing to the need for serious improvement in certain segments of the tourism offer. A particularly important finding is that the majority of respondents believe that the rural tourism offer of Šar Mountain is not sufficiently promoted, which further indicates the problem of its inadequate visibility in the tourism market. Regarding willingness to revisit, the results show a moderately positive attitude among respondents, but also a certain degree of indecisiveness, confirming that the destination has development potential, but that the quality of some elements of the offer still does not contribute sufficiently to strengthening tourist loyalty. Therefore, it can be concluded that the future development of rural tourism on Šar Mountain should be directed toward improving accommodation capacities, enriching additional activities, intensifying destination promotion, and further preserving natural and authentic values, in order to increase visitor satisfaction and strengthen the market position of this rural tourism destination.

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