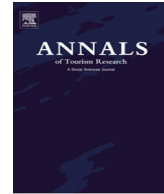




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Reject or select: Mapping destination choice



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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to empirically explore tourists' destination choice processes. Destination choices are investigated using a combination of data on destinations and on tourists' individual destination choices. Data were collected in Munich/Germany in 2013 using personal interviews; 622 interviews were completed. This approach allows detecting reasons for the rejection or selection of certain types of destinations during the destination choice process. Results show that tourists often start the destination choice process with various combinations of destination types but act similarly when choosing the final destination. The investigation of tourist and destination characteristics results in a tourist typology that varies in regard to similarity and type of alternative destinations at different stages of the destination choice process.

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Introduction

Choosing a travel destination is a very complex process with many influencing factors. Understanding the underlying destination choice (DC) processes of tourists is a fundamental issue both from an academic and destination management point of view. Most previous studies analysing travel decisions concentrate either on the outcome of DCs following a microeconomic input–output approach (e.g. Papatheodorou, 2001; Seddighi & Theocharous, 2002) or on internal and external influencing factors. These psychological, behaviouristic approaches (structural models: e.g. Um & Crompton, 1990; Woodside & Lysonski, 1989; process models: e.g. Mathieson & Wall, 1982; Moutinho, 1987; van Raaij & Francken, 1984) focus on the tourist's behaviour during a travel

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decision-making process. While these models identify cognitive, affective and behavioural influencing factors of DC, characteristics of destination alternatives at the different stages of the DC process and why they are rejected before the final choice remain unexplored.

The aim of this study is to investigate the rejection or selection of destinations during the DC process. To enhance the understanding of the process and structure of DC, this study links destination and tourist characteristics and analyses the interaction between these two aspects. Moreover, this research attempts to shed some light upon tourists' individual DC processes. The purpose is to identify whether and in which way tourists differ in their DC in regard to similarity and type of alternative destinations at the stages of the DC process.

With a long planning period and high personal involvement, DCs are core decisions in the travel decision-making process and on the highest hierarchical order of the three kinds of travel decisions (core, secondary and en route decisions (Fesenmaier & Jeng, 2000)). An approach from consumer research to explain the structure and process of DCs is the set theory (Crompton, 1992; Narayana & Markin, 1975; Um & Crompton, 1990; Woodside & Lysonski, 1989). Set theory is most relevant for purchase decisions that entail intensive information search, evaluation of alternatives, a certain level of perceived risk and high personal involvement (Spiggle & Sewall, 1987), criteria met by DC (Crompton & Ankamah, 1993). According to set theory, DCs are multistage processes where numerous alternative destinations are reduced successively in a funnel-like manner (Sirakaya & Woodside, 2005; Um & Crompton, 1990; Woodside & Lysonski, 1989). Theoretical approaches to set theory focus on the creation of a comprehensive model of DC (e.g. Crompton, 1992; Crompton & Ankamah, 1993), while qualitative studies aim at an in-depth investigation of tourists' decision-making process (e.g. Decrop, 2010). Quantitative studies which apply set theory analyse specific sets of the DC structure (e.g. Um & Crompton, 1992; Woodside & Lysonski, 1989; Woodside & Sherrell, 1977) since it is hardly possible to investigate all DC sets in a quantitative survey. Some subsets are very complex, rather unconscious and difficult to measure. Despite many variations and differences in the terminology, the set model concepts are summarised in a process structure model approach (see Fig. 1).

Alternative destinations are allocated into hierarchically structured sets and only a few destinations are part of the final DC (Crompton, 1992). The allocation in the choice sets depends on internal factors such as socio-psychological characteristics of the tourist, travel constraints as well as external factors related to the distinct features of the destination (Ankomah, Crompton, & Baker, 1996). During the initial phase, prior to the decision to go travelling, several destinations from the total set (i.e. all possible destinations) are grouped in an awareness set (i.e. all known destinations) (Howard & Sheth, 1969). The relevant set (i.e. all considered destinations) is formed once the decision process about taking a trip has been initiated (Um & Crompton, 1990). The total set can be split into three sub-categories: unawareness set (i.e. all destinations a tourist is not aware of (Spiggle & Sewall, 1987)); available awareness set (i.e. all destinations a tourist is aware of and has the ability to visit (Woodside & Sherrell, 1977)); unavailable awareness set (i.e. all known but due to different reasons unavailable destinations (Woodside & Lysonski, 1989)). Narayana and Markin (1975) suggest that the (available) awareness set is further divided into an evoked set (equivalent to the relevant set), an inept set (i.e. destinations which are ruled unacceptable) and an inert set (i.e. destinations which

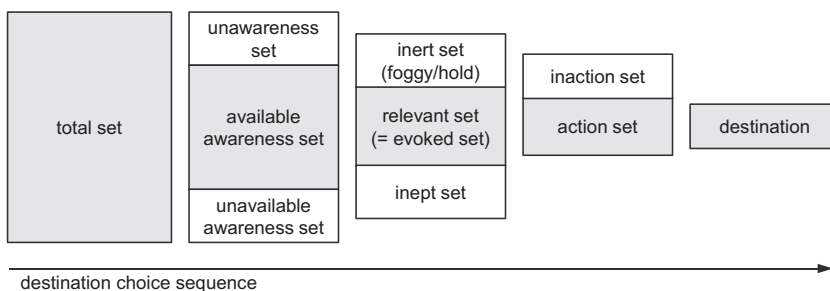


Fig. 1. DC set structure.

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