



Article The Preference Analysis for Hikers' Choice of Hiking Trail

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Abstract: Leisure time and its quality use is becoming increasingly important in society. We can spend it primarily on physical activity, which offer many options, as it provides an entertainment and has a complex effect on our physical and mental health. Walking as a basis for hiking is the most accessible form of physical activity. Hiking is known as a low-level adventure activity, making it popular, and therefore, it presents an important tourism product around the world. The aim of hiking is the improvement of spiritual wealth, physical capabilities, mental resilience, and the general health of a person. An essential activity of hiking is the exploration of natural beauties and monuments. The tourist chooses a certain attractive place based on the route by which he can arrive there. The aim of this study is to provide a better understanding of the motivations of mountain hikers and to discuss the issue in wider contexts. This study examines the individual components comprising the decision-making process when choosing a hiking trail, such as slope of a terrain, relief, hiking trail surface, difficulty level of hiking trail, natural monuments, environmental attractiveness, and hiker's internal motivation. The study contributes to contemporary literature on soft adventure hiking. Definitively, the findings provide important data in the creation of attractive and sustainable tourism products tailored to and planning for sustainable development of the territory in terms of tourism.

Keywords: physical activity; hiking; adventure tourism; hiking trails

1. Introduction

Leisure time is an area in which decisions on its use can be most strongly applied on the basis of one's own needs, interests, and values [1]. Nowadays, people spend their leisure time primarily on physical activity, and it serves as an entertainment [2]. Compared to other activities, it has advantages because it provides a wide variety of possibilities and can have a comprehensive effect.

Sufficient physical activities develop motor skills, thereby being an important prerequisite for the normal development of bodily functions and improvement of one's physical condition, stamina, and health. The positive effect of physical activity on human health lies mainly in preventive measures [3]. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development also speaks of sport as a physical activity that is an important factor for sustainable development. Physical activity contributes to the realization of development and peace through its promotion of tolerance and respect as well as to the empowerment of women and young people, individuals, and communities. Sport makes a significant contribution to health, education, and the goals of social inclusion [4].

According to Marcus and Forsythe, physical activity reduces health risks, improves quality of life, and also increases self-esteem [5].

The World Health Organization defines physical activity as any bodily movement largely associated with weight transfer or the overcoming of a resistance produced by



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Copyright: © 2022 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (https:// creativecommons.org/licenses/by/ 4.0/). skeletal muscles that requires energy expenditure [6]. Physical activity is, in terms of energy expenditure, defined as any bodily movement that is performed by skeletal muscles and that leads to an increase in energy expenditure above the threshold of one's resting metabolism [2]. Sekot expanded the definition of physical activity to include activities that are usually low- to medium-intensity [7] (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Meaning of the concept "physical activity". Source: Adapted from Kalman, M.; Hamřík, Z.; Pavelka, J. [8].

Walking is the most accessible form of physical activity. Research says that for an untrained person, walking represents a sufficient functional load [9]. Hiking is a physical activity suitable for any age group, while each can choose the intensity of the load himself according to his abilities, physical performance, and health conditions.

Hiking is a popular recreational activity that represents the main tourism product worldwide, especially by having a positive impact on health and overall well-being [10,11]. Tourism-related activities such as walking, alpine hiking, or mountaineering are offered by many destinations and organisations [12,13]. Matlovičová distinguished types of tourism (for example hiking tourism, ski tourism, cycling tourism, etc.) according to the requirement for certain experience and knowledge of the behavioural principles in the specific natural environment in which this tourism form takes place [9].

In addition to these types of hiking, other forms can be mentioned, such as karst hiking, horseback riding, etc., [14]. Among hiking forms, author Korvas mentioned water tourism, mountaineering and alpine hiking, ski touring, and ski alpinism [15].

Other criteria for hiking activities classification are level of performed hiking activity, season, and type of hikers' performance [14].

There are several classifications of difficulty level of hiking itself or hiking to climb routes or trails. Currently, the most widely used French scale with three marking elements seeks to express the complexity of difficulty. In the case of the frequently used UIAA scale (Union Internationale des Associations D'Alpinisme, or International Association of Mountaineering Associations), difficulty is determined by the most challenging part of the hike and partly the length of the route. The West Alpine GHM (Groupe Haute Montagne) difficulty scale is based on a set of factors such as length, danger, difficulties, etc. These difficulty scales are based on mountaineering [16].

The Italian and Swiss Tourist Club prepared a difficulty scale for hiking and alpine hiking. The CAI (Club Alpino Italiano) hiking scale is described in Table 1.

The Swiss hiking scale assesses the difficulty mainly on the basis of the essential characteristics of the trail (Table 2).

The benefits of hiking for health in terms of physical and mental balance were revealed in a study by Hansmann et al. [18]. The main elements of hiking offer a network of trails, services, as well as information on trail markings [19].

CAI Hik	ing Scale of Difficulty (Club Alpino Italiano)
T (Turistico) Hiking	Trails with well-evident paths that do not pose uncertainties or problems of orientation—country roads, agricultural roads and easy paths. They generally take place under the 2000 m. They require some knowledge of the mountain environment and a physical preparation to walk.
E (Escursionistico) Mountain hiking	Most common trails, pathless or footpath, can be not so evident. The orientation can be more difficult, but the direction is always clear. Trails are in higher altitudes with steep ascent or descent. Grass and rocky slopes partially with snow cover. Short sections with falling rocks but without the increased danger. There may be short climbing passages equipped with ladders, ropes and chains. They require a certain sense of orientation, some experience and knowledge of the mountainous territory, as well as footwear and adequate equipment (harness, carabiner, etc.).
EE (per Escursionisti Esperti) Challenging mountain hiking	Unmarked trails with a difficult terrain that is physically more demanding. Easy climbing, traverse of snow fields and troughs, exposed, slippery, grassy, or rock passages without climbing holds. Difficult rock sections with technically demanding climbs are not always secured by rope. Trails require good navigation skills; hikers need to follow mountain service warnings and hiking safety rules. Hikers need to be trained and experienced and do not suffer from dizziness. Adequate equipment (harness, carabiner, rope) is also required. Upper limit for hiking.
EEA (per Escursionisti Esperti, con Attrezzature) Alpine equipped trail	Equipped trails or Vie ferrate for which it is necessary to use self-assurance devices or climbing equipment (harness, heatsink, carabiner, lanyards and protective equipment as helmet, gloves). These trails require skills, preparation, experience and all requirements already mention for EE.

Table 1. CAI hiking scale of difficulty.

Source: Adapted from Hiking Club of Košice [17].

Hiking allows for year-round tourism, contributes to rural development, and helps to manage the periods outside the high season [20,21]. As an outdoor activity, according to Thongdejsri and Nitivattananon, hiking shows a less negative environmental impact [22]. Shengxiang highlighted the increasing interest of people in leisure adventures [23]. Hiking is an adventurous activity by which an unknown can be explored with a certain degree of controlled risk.

The adventure tourism is not clearly defined. The definition is based on subjective and personal criteria [24,25]. Authors such as Hesková et al. and Gúčik et al. understand adventure tourism as a form that is part of sports tourism [26,27]. Others also associate it not only with sports tourism but also with adrenaline and experiential tourism [28]. The Adventure Travel Trade Association (ATTA) defines it as a trip that includes physical activity, a natural environment, and a cultural aspect [29].

According to Hill and Millington et al., we distinguish between hard and soft adventure tourism [30,31]. The hard adventure tourism, which includes mountaineering, ice climbing, alpine hiking, and speleology, requires some experience and professionalism, while the soft adventure tourism (surfing, hiking, canoeing, water skis, etc.) does not necessarily require them [32]. Pomfret also understands hiking as a soft adventure activity because it is less physically demanding for participants, with less risk of injury [33]. Some consider tourism to be a purely sport activity, while others see it as a social event associated with natural experience [33–35]. In the research, few studies have focused on soft adventures [36,37]. Hiking, as a soft adventure activity, was explored by Løvoll although only from a narrow glacier hiking context [38]. Bichler and Peterson's study provided a better understanding of mountain hikers' motivation for soft adventure activity, discussed the recreational importance of mountain hiking, and explored the relationship between motivation and hiker's satisfaction [39].

SAC Mountain and Alpine Hiking Scale (Schweizer Alpen Club)						
Level	Path, Marking, Terrain	Requirements				
T1 Hiking	Path: well developed and marked Marking: yellow Terrain: flat or slightly inclined, no danger of falling	No special footing is necessary, can be walked in trainers, navigation without a map is possible.				
T2 Mountain hiking	Path: continuous route Marking: white-red-white Terrain: steep in parts, danger of falling not excluded	Some steady footing, trekking shoes recommended, basic navigation skills.				
T3 Challenging mountain hiking	Path: Path not always visible. Exposed places are secured with ropes and chains or hikers need to use hands for balance. Marking: white-red-white Terrain: Some areas can be exposed with a danger of falling, gravel plains, steep and pathless terrain	Good steady footing, good trekking shoes, average navigation skills, basic alpine experience.				
T4 +/ – Alpine hiking	Path: Path not always available. Sometimes hikers need to use hands to keep going. Marking: white-blue-white Terrain: Mostly exposed, tricky grass heaps, rocky slopes, simple firn fields, glacier passages.	Familiarity with exposed terrain, stable trekking shoes are necessary, terrain assessment, good navigation skills, alpine experience, in a bad weather the way back can be difficult to find.				
T5 +/ – Challenging Alpine hiking	Path: Often pathless, individual simple climbing sections. Marking: white-blue-white Terrain: Exposed, challenging terrain, steep slopes, glaciers and firn field with danger of slipping	Mountaineering boots, very good navigation skills, good alpine experience, secure terrain assessment, basic knowledge in handling a pickaxe and rope.				
T6 +/ – Difficult Alpine hiking	Path: Mostly without a path, climbing sections up to II UIAA. Marking: Usually unmarked. Terrain: Often very exposed and challenging, steep slopes, glacier with a higher danger of slipping.	Excellent navigation skills needed. Proven alpine experience and familiarity with alpine equipment and technique.				

Table 2. SAC hiking scale.

Source: Adapted from Club of Slovakian hiking tourist [16].

The concept of long-term sustainable "soft" or "green" tourism, as the result of growing criticism of the negative impacts of tourism on the environment, is an alternative to today's prevailing mass tourism. The Federation of National Parks and Protected Areas of Europe (FNPPE) considers as sustainable tourism "all forms of tourism development, management and activities that preserve the environmental, social and economic integrity and quality of natural, created and cultural resources on a permanent basis" [40].

The aim of hiking is the development of spiritual wealth, physical capabilities, mental resilience, and improving the health of a person. The risk for hikers may be that, from time to time, there will be accidents that obscure the benefits of hiking [22]. The perception of multiple dimensions of risk relates in particular to the negative consequences that may occur during hiking [41]. Considerable attention to identification, assessment, and evaluation of risk factors associated with tourist destinations was paid by Reisinger, Mavondo, Carballo et al., and Lu [42–44].

An important activity of hiking is the exploration of natural beauties and monuments. Within the framework of nature exploration, we can focus on the nature of the landscape itself, which consists of relief and its forms, its coverage, orography and hydrography, topography, flora and fauna, geological development of the area, special geological formations, and nature protection. Hiking is usually the most important recreational activity in mountainous areas and protected areas [33,45,46]. It has the potential to provide important tourism revenues to the local population [47]. The growing demand of tourists for outdoor destinations has prompted rural destinations to make great efforts to facilitate hiking [34].

There are a number of factors that directly and indirectly affect the preferences for hiking trail. Each region is characterised by its geographical and social–economic specifications [48]. When hikers choose an attractive natural environment, information about the length of the trail, its character and difficulty, as well as the weather forecast is important for them. An essential factor influencing the choice of destination or hiking trail is the motivation of tourists. The motivation of hiking can provide physical activity, relaxation, enjoyment, adventure, or other similar experiences. Kozák, based on the division of the tourists motivation into two groups (dichotomy), namely the push and pull theory of motivations, identified push factors as the need to go outside [49]. Examples of pull factors are, for instance, relaxation and enjoyment. Prebensen et al., in a study on tourism motivation, identified dichotomy in terms of body and soul. Physical motivation is related to fitness and health, while mental motivation is mainly related to escaping from the hustle and bustle of the city into nature [50].

In his work, Chen et al. described the various motivational factors of tourists associated with staying in nature and the resulting physical and mental benefits [51]. Over the years, we have seen a change in tourist preferences, as evidenced by the work of Wall-Reinius and Bäck, which claimed that, compared to the 1980 study, when the most important motivating factors were the beauty of the landscape, flora, fauna, and the availability of marked hiking trails, in a 2003 study, the most important motivating factors were the experience of nature, peace, and quiet [21]. Tourists tend to attach great importance to the motivating factor of experiencing danger and adventure. Push and pull factors influencing tourist decisions were identified in a study by Kim, Lee, and Klenosky [52]. The main push motivation factor was the appreciation for natural resources and health. Other factors were family belonging and study, escape from daily routine, adventure, and friendship. The study's findings listed pull motivation factors as follows: key tourist resources, information and comfort, accessibility, and transportation. It was discovered by a study by Svarstad that many respondents stated factors of happiness and pleasure as an important motivation associated with hiking. Respondents identified important mental attributes related to hiking, which are peace, silence, and an opportunity for reflection and contemplation [53].

In practice, hiking is mainly a network of marked trails with accommodation and catering bases located in attractive places for tourists. Matlovičová, Klamár, and Mika defined hiking trails as:

- Routes making territories with rich natural conditions accessible;
- Areas rich in cultural and historical monuments;
- Routes of a few kilometres to several tens of kilometres, with the exception of several thousand kilometres-long trunk roads [9].

Hiking in a mountainous environment is most attractive, as it offers the possibility of exploring different types of landscapes changing with a different altitude. Marked hiking trails help tourists to orientate themselves in the environment and guide their movement, thus contributing to the protection of nature. In Slovakia, hiking trails are marked with painted waymarks consisting of three horizontal stripes, with the middle stripe determining the leading colour of the marked route:

- Red colour—indicates long-distance and most important trails;
- Blue colour—more significant medium-length trails;
- Green colour—shorter trails of local importance;
- Yellow colour—the shortest sections, connecting trails, or shortcuts; they connect, for example, red with blue [54].

The leading colour of marked route does not mean the difficulty of the trail but its significance and length. The hiker chooses a certain attractive place based on a route by which he can arrive at the destination.

The aim of this study is to provide a better understanding of the motivations of mountain hikers and discuss the issue in a wider context. We also identified the individual components entering the decision-making process when choosing a hiking trails, such as elevation gradient of the terrain, relief, the surface of the hiking trail, obstacles on the route, natural monuments, attractiveness of the environment, and the hiker's internal motivation. We want to highlight other aspects of hiking, such as information about a hiking trip, as well.

The study contributes to contemporary literature on soft adventure tourism. Finally, these findings contribute to providing important information in the creation of tailor-made tourism products.

2. Materials and Methods

The aim of this study was to verify the motivation of tourists when choosing a hiking trail in terms of its difficulty and thus identify key factors in the hikers' decision-making process when choosing a destination.

For the purposes of this study, a public opinion survey was conducted according to the general methodology of the questionnaire development. The advantage of the questionnaire form lies in saved time and funds, addressing a large number of respondents, and simple and clear processing. The data thus obtained are expressed quantitatively, which also enhances potential graphical outputs [55].

Quantitative data were collected using an online questionnaire from March 2021 to October 2021. The survey was based on indirect statistical monitoring, as the questionnaire was anonymous and voluntary. It was accessible online using a QR code to be scanned and, in a printed form, was available to the participants of the survey who did not have a QR code scanning application at various tourist sites and catering and accommodation facilities. Once filled in, the printed questionnaires were collected at individual facilities. Our survey sample consisted of 428 participants living in Slovakia, men and women aged 15–71, students, white-collar and blue-collar workers, and people living in cities and the countryside. All participants were in good health.

2.1. Public Opinion Survey (Questionnaire)

The survey consisted of 3 questions for obtaining general data and 12 questions with a pre-defined range of answer options (Appendix A). The questions were designed according to the aim of this study with a focus on providing basic information about the preferences of survey participants in the choosing of a hiking trail depending on its difficulty. The questions were grouped into the following areas: general data (3 questions), motivation factors (4 questions), the nature of hiking trails (7 questions), and orienting (2 questions): *Range of questions aimed at general data collection:*

• Age, sex, place of residence.

Range of questions aimed at the data concerning the motivation for hiking trail selection:

• Why, in what weather, and how often they go for a hike, also on the basis of what they choose a hiking trail.

Range of questions aimed at the data on key factors in the hikers' decision-making process with regard to the nature of hiking trails:

- Optimality in terms of their physical limits, terrain elevation, attractiveness of the environment, hiking trail surface, trail obstacles, and natural monuments. *Range of questions aimed at navigation data:*
- How hikers orientate themselves in the environment and how familiar they are with hiking trail markings.

To identify and compare individual factors in the decision-making process of individual age categories, we divided four groups according to age:

Group 1—teenagers (19 years and under);

Group 2—younger working people (20–39 years);

Group 3—older working people (40–59 years);

Group 4—pensioners (60 years and older).

Based on the aim of the study to identify key factors in the hikers' decision-making process, we developed the following hypotheses:

H1. We assume that the major motivation of the survey participants to go hiking will be to relax and actively rest in each group.

H2. We assume that Group 3 will focus on hiking the most.

H3. *Groups 1 and 2 depends on the weather—they will not go hiking in bad weather.*

H4. The key factors concerning the types of hiking trails in the hikers' decision-making process will be different for individual age groups.

H5. *Land navigation using mobile applications will be preferred by Group 1, while Group 4 will prefer trail markers and paper tourist maps.*

2.2. Statistical Analysis

The results of the public opinion survey were analysed and processed in SPSS Statistics 19 program and MS Excel 2016. In these programs, the data were displayed using contingency tables. Using the chi-square test, we determined the dependence between categorical variables, specifically between age groups and individual examined factors. Ordinal chi-square was used to measure dependence between ordinal variable (age group) and dichotomous variable [56]. The significance level was set at 5%.

3. Results and Discussion

The study included 428 participants, of whom 211 were women (58%) and 217 men (42%), with a mean age of 36.66 years. The respondents all came from the Slovak Republic, with 71% of them being from cities and 29% from villages. The highest number of 248 respondents was from eastern Slovakia, and the lowest number was from central Slovakia (5%). The range of questions aimed at the data concerning the motivation for hiking trail selection covered the following questions: why, in what weather, and how often they go hiking and, at the same time, were based on what they decide to select a particular hiking trail.

H1. The analysis of the survey results, to a large extent, showed that the major motivation of the participants to go hiking is relaxation and active rest in each group. In all groups, survey participants stated that the most important motivating factors are relaxation and rest (90–98%), while the factor of nature exploration is also important (89–93%). The secondary factor was the development and maintenance of physical fitness in all groups (Table 3). Our findings, in line with previous research, underline that hiking as a soft form of physical activity contributes to tourist satisfaction [57]. Other works emphasized the importance of relaxation and rest as the main motivating factor in the context of hiking. We therefore agree with Rantala et al. and Pomfret that hiking is a balanced and mostly regenerative method of nature exploration [33,37]. Nature exploration was the second strongest motivating factor, confirming the findings of Giddy and Webb, who found that the natural environment plays an important role in adventure tourism [59].

I do hikir	ng because	:									
I want to develop or maintain my phisycal fitness			I like to spend leisure time with family and friends			eisure time I like to explore nature I like to relax/I like action		leisure time and friends I like to explore nature I like to relax/I like active		active rest	
Gro-up	Yes	No	Gro-up	Yes	No	Gro-up	Yes	No	Gro-up	Yes	No
1	76.1%	23.9%	1	87.3%	12.7%	1	90.1%	9.9%	1	90.1%	9.9%
2	80.9%	19.1%	2	82.0%	18.0%	2	88.8%	11.2%	2	91.6%	8.4%
3	77.9%	22.1%	3	88.5%	11.5%	3	91.6%	8.4%	3	96.2%	3.8%
4	89.6%	10.4%	4	89.6%	10.4%	4	93.8%	6.3%	4	97.9%	2.1%

Table 3. Reasons to go hiking.

Among the four age groups, the participants included in Group 4 (pensioners) practise hiking the most, according to the data obtained. This result cannot be generalized because, according to the answers to other questions, we believe that the questionnaire was filled in by pensioners—active hikers of the Hiking Club. We believe that the survey was discussed in their organized hiking active groups, so we can say that the sample of participants is not the general population but an interest group for hiking, and therefore, we cannot generalize the results. Proof of this is that up to 73% of the group go hiking even in bad weather (Table 4). A statistically significant difference (p < 0.001) amongst the age groups can be seen both in the question of devoting one's time to hiking and in the question of whether the participants go hiking in bad weather. Based on the data, we identified Group 4 as pensioners—hikers.

Table 4. Time spent with hiking.

How often do	you go hiking:			
Group	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never/almost never
1	21.1%	25.4%	39.4%	14.1%
2	32.6%	19.1%	37.6%	10.7%
3	42.0%	16.0%	35.9%	6.1%
4	66.7%	2.1%	22.9%	8.3%

H2. From the above, our assumption that older working people will devote most of their time to hiking (Group 3) was proven to be correct, as 42% of the participants in the group tend to do so. Teenagers (Group 1) most of all age groups do not go hiking (14%), and the largest part of survey participants practise hiking only occasionally (40%) (Table 4).

H3. The results indicate that up to 76% of teenagers (Group 1) lose the motivation to go hiking due to bad weather as well as 59% of younger workers (Group 2). For older workers (Group 3), the difference between the answers whether they go (47%) or do not go (53%) hiking in bad weather was very small (Table 5). As many as 73% of retired hikers are not affected by the weather, unlike teenagers and younger workers, who care about it greatly.

Do you go hiking in bad weath	er?	
Group	Yes	No
1	22.5%	77.5%
2	41.6%	58.4%
3	47.3%	52.7%
4	72.9%	27.1%

 Table 5. Hiking—weather.

The hiking trail decision-making process is a complex process that is influenced by various factors. The motivational preferences for decision-making when choosing a hiking trail proved to be similar in all groups. The participants most often decide according to their own wishes (93–96%). The attractions that can be seen on the route (89–94%) and the destination, which reached 95% for older workers and 94% for pensioners—hikers, are also a strong motivation when making decisions. The lowest number of participants in all groups decide according to the media (58–69%). Based on the results, we ranked the order of preferences in the destination-related decision-making process from the most to the least important. In the first place, it is their own desires, then the attractions on the route and the final destination, the wishes of the participants, the length of the hiking trail, the recommendations of acquaintances, and the elevation gradient of the trail, and the least important factor is the media.

The range of questions aimed at gathering data on key factors in hikers' decisionmaking process with respect to hiking trails and their nature provided information about trail difficulty in terms of participants' physical limits, terrain gradient, environmental attractiveness, hiking trail surface, route obstacles, and natural monuments on the route (Tables 6–10.).

Table 6. Hiking trail profile (start—finish).

The ideal hik	king trail profile for you is	5:		
Gro-up	The profile of the hiking trail doesn't matter to me	A flat plain start-finish	Start and Finish on an uphill and a valley in between	Start and finish in a valley and an uphill in between
1	70.40%	5.60%	9.90%	14.10%
2	60.10%	6.20%	6.70%	27.00%
3	66.40%	3.10%	3.80%	26.70%
4	52.10%	6.30%	8.30%	33.30%
	C (

Source: Own processing from own survey (questionnaire).

Table 7. Hiking trail profile (elevation gradient).

You prefer:				
Gro-up	Long but gradual elevation	Short but steep elevation	The profile of the trail (elevation) doesn't matter to me	Trails with minimal elevation
1	31.00%	7.00%	36.60%	25.40%
2	21.90%	11.80%	47.80%	18.50%
3	29.00%	9.20%	51.90%	9.90%
4	33.30%	4.20%	35.40%	27.10%

Source: Own processing from own survey (questionnaire).

Table 8. Type of a hiking trail surface.

What type of	hiking trail surf	ace do you prefer?		
Gro-up	Asphalt	Gravel/Crushed stone	Natural earth surface	The surface doesn't matter to me
1	4.2%	5.6%	46.5%	43.7%
2	2.2%	1.7%	56.2%	39.9%
3	0.8%	0.0%	65.6%	33.6%
4	0.0%	0.0%	81.3%	18.8%

Source: Own processing from own survey (questionnaire).

What typ	es of obsta	cles do yo	u consider a	is a proble	m while hi	iking?					
	Mud		Roots Rocks/Stones Exposed places secure ropes or chains			ıred with ns					
Gro-up	Yes	No	Gro-up	Yes	No	Gro-up	Yes	No	Gro-up	Yes	No
1	46.5%	53.5%	1	9.9%	90.1%	1	18.3%	81.7%	1	31.0%	69.0%
2	54.5%	45.5%	2	6.2%	93.8%	2	11.2%	88.8%	2	37.1%	62.9%
3	43.5%	56.5%	3	6.9%	93.1%	3	9.9%	90.1%	3	32.1%	67.9%
4	62.5%	37.5%	4	25.0%	75.0%	4	25.0%	75.0%	4	37.5%	62.5%

Table 9. Obstacles on the trail.

Source: Own processing from own survey (questionnaire).

Table 10. Land orientation.

How do y	How do you orientate yourself in environment?										
By using trail signs, markers and blazes				By using and other	By using mobile applications (mapy.cz, hiking.sk and others)				By using paper tourist maps		
Gro-up	I never use them	I use them sometimes	I use them al- ways/often	Gro-up	I never use them	I use them sometimes	I use them al- ways/often	Gro-up	I never use them	I use them sometimes	I use them al- ways/often
1	6.7%	34.4%	58.9%	1	10.1%	47.3%	42.6%	1	63.6%	29.5%	6.8%
2	4.5%	32.9%	62.7%	2	8.7%	46.3%	45.0%	2	56.5%	38.3%	5.2%
3	1.9%	38.9%	59.2%	3	10.9%	52.8%	36.2%	3	33.2%	50.7%	16.1%
4	4.2%	27.1%	68.6%	4	27.2%	46.9%	25.9%	4	20.0%	58.8%	21.2%

Source: Own processing from own survey (questionnaire).

Quantitative findings in the case of the difficulty of hiking trail with regard to physical abilities did not show statistical significance between the groups. Based on result survey, we can agree with Bowler et al., who stated that the natural environment can have a direct and positive impact on people's well-being [60]. Our findings suggest that hikers are trying to discover new sites but are less motivated by the challenging environment. Least optimal for pensioners—hikers (Group 4) are steep trails, as 16% of pensioners stated these are never a good fit for them. The type of the trail mentioned above does not meet the criteria of teenagers (Group 1). The undemanding natural environment, such as the hills or the plain, proves to be always satisfactory with regard to the physical abilities of all ages but especially for pensioners—hikers and teenagers. It is interesting to note that young people (teenagers) are more comfortable with slightly undulating terrain. It is essential for hikers to explore a natural environment that corresponds to their level of physical abilities.

Olafsdottir claimed that the positive effects of nature and the environment are the result of correlations arising from personal assumptions and the external environment [61]. In this context, we can confirm that the physical limits of the participants restrict the choice of natural environment in which they want to carry out their hiking activities.

When choosing a hiking trail (Table 6.) from the point of view of its profile, we did not record statistical significance between groups; they do not care about the trail profile (52–70%), and if so, they prefer when the hike starts and ends in the lowlands, and the hill is in the middle of the trail (14–33%) (Table 6). In terms of the elevation gradient, statistical significance between groups was shown (p < 0.027) in the case of short and steep routes, where it is most preferred by younger working people (Group 2). All groups least prefer short and steep hikes. Trails with a minimal elevation gradient are least popular with older working people (Group 3) and in case of pensioners—hikers (27%) are the most popular (Table 7).

The attractiveness of the landscape is another factor in the decision-making process of hikers. The survey participants answered the question of which landscape is attractive to them (wide valleys with hills, gorges, and steep valleys; hilly landscape without distinctive valleys, plains, lowlands around rivers) with yes and no options. Of these options, all participants consider wide valleys with hills (85–98%) to be the most attractive landscape, while any landscape is attractive to retired hikers (Group 4). Teenagers (Group 1) stated that the plains are the least attractive for them (49%), but for younger and older working people (Group 2, 3), these are the lowlands around rivers (34%).

By evaluating the data on the hiking trail surface and conditions, the study points to the importance of these two factors (Table 8). Hiking takes place in a natural environment in which, although not that frequently, roads with an asphalt surface may be found. Therefore, it was also examined if there were any age groups that would prefer an asphalt surface and, if so, in what percentage. We found that older people (Groups 3, 4) place more emphasis on the natural environment and do not prefer this kind of trail surface at all (0%). At the same time, however, older working people and pensioners do not even prefer a gravel surface (0%). Only 4% of teenagers (Group 1) prefer asphalt roads. In the case of the hiking trail surface, we recorded statistical significance between groups (p < 0.006). Retirees—hikers and older working people strongly prefer natural earth surface (81%).

The decision-making process of where participants go for a hike is also influenced by hiking trail conditions. Whether there are stones, rocks, or tree roots on a hiking trail; whether the terrain is soggy and muddy; or whether there are exposed places on the route all affect our choice. Different age groups have difficulty with different conditions of trail, which is also indicated by a statistically significant difference between the groups in the case of roots on the route (p < 0.001) as well as stones and rocks (p < 0.028). It is pensioners—hikers who have the biggest problem with roots and rocks on a route (25%), unlike other age groups, which did not consider it a problem (6–10%). Younger working people identified mud and wet terrain (55%) as the biggest problem. The second most significant problem for them was exposed areas secured by ropes (identified by 37% of participants). Soaked and muddy terrain is more of a problem for teenagers and older working people (54–57%) (Table 9).

H4. Quantitative data focused on key factors in the decision-making process of hikers with regard to the hiking trail and its character indicated that they partially differ between individual age groups. The results of a number of questions focused on the trail difficulty in terms of physical limits of the participants, the elevation gradient, the hiking trail surface, and conditions that limit the choice of hiking trail according to age.

Each type of landscape was attractive to all participants in all ages, but all participants consider wide valleys with hills to be the most attractive. All participants visit the natural monuments on the route, even those that are not part of their plan.

The survey focused on a range of questions aimed at orientating oneself in the terrain, which is necessary for safe movement in mountains and nature and for guaranteeing a stress-free experience full of pleasant feelings. The participants answered the question regarding how they orientate themselves in the terrain (Table 10).

H5. The results show that orientation of oneself in the terrain that is based on mobile applications is preferred by Group 1, while Group 4 prefers hiking trail markers and paper tourist maps.

In the case of orientating oneself in the terrain using tourist maps, a statistically significant difference between the groups was demonstrated (p < 0.001). Tourist maps are always used by up to 81% of retired hikers. Teenagers and younger working people do not use tourist maps (64%/57%), or they use them only occasionally (30%/38%), while 43% always (47% sometimes) use mobile applications. Older working people use tourist maps least (33%), and they always use hiking trail markers when orientating themselves in the terrain. There was also a statistically significant difference between the groups in the case of mobile applications (p < 0.004). Mobile applications are always and sometimes used by a group of teenagers (59%/34%) and a group of younger working people (63%/33%). In contrast, the group of pensioners—hikers (27%) avoids the use of mobile applications the most.

The results, reported in percentage, show that the meaning of colour marking of hiking trails is most known to pensioners—hikers (68%) and older working people (53%), while more than 50% of teenagers and younger working people did not know their meaning.

Statistically significant dependence between age category and answers (yes = 1, no = 0) in the questions: "I go hiking because"; "Do you go hiking in bad weather?"; "Which country is attractive for you?"; and "Do you have a problem with difficult conditions on the route?" is shown in Table 11.

	Question	Chi-Square Linear-by-Linear Association	df	<i>p</i> -Value
	I want to develop or maintain my physical fitness	1.500	1	0.221
T 1. 1.11 1	I like to spend leisure time with family and friends	0.941	1	0.332
I do niking because:	I like to explore nature	0.835	1	0.361
	I like to relax / I like active rest	5.041	1	0.025
Do you go hiking in bad weat	her?	27.530	1	<0.001
	Wide valleys with hills	8.685	1	0.003
	Straits and steep valleys with high mountains	0.246	1	0.620
Which country is attractive for you?	Hill landscape without significant valley	7.700	1	0.006
ior you:	Wold	24.968	1	<0.001
	Lowlands around rivers	0.037	1	0.847
	Mud	0.285	1	0.593
	Roots	4.963	1	0.026
Problems with difficult	Rocks/Stones	0.207	1	0.649
conditions along the foule:	Exposed places secured with ropes or chains	0.055	1	0.814
	Sharp decline	2.527	1	0.112

Table 11. Dependence between age category and answers (yes = 1, no = 0).

Source: Own processing from own survey (questionnaire).

Vidona showed that escape from everyday life is supported by remote and rural areas that promote introspection and mental hygiene [62]. Other studies showed that a number of external attributes related to the landscape scenery are an important pull factor for hiking [34,35,52,63–65]. In this light, the present study reveals the motivating factors related to the landscape and the natural environment that influence the selection of hiking trails: optimality in terms of physical limits, elevation gradient, attractiveness of the environment, hiking trail surface, conditions of the trail, and natural monuments.

The right choice of hiking trail is a motivator for hiking that has a positive impact on mental and physical health and overall well-being.

4. Conclusions

The study examined hikers' motivation and identified similar results among all age groups, where relaxation and rest are considered the most important motivating factor in the context of hiking. An important driving force for all hikers is also to explore the nature and interesting places. The final destination is a strong motivation when making decisions as well.

The results of the study show that the individual components entering the decisionmaking process when choosing a hiking trail, such as the elevation, relief, hiking trail surface, conditions of the trail, natural monuments, and environmental attractiveness, are different between age groups. Our findings suggest that hikers are trying to discover new places, but they are less motivated by the challenging environment. An undemanding natural environment, such as hills or plains, proves to always be aways satisfactory given the physical abilities of all ages, which is also indicated by the fact that participants prefer short and steep hikes the least, and they consider wide valleys with hills to be the most attractive landscape.

In this context, we can confirm that the physical limits of the participants restrict the choice of natural environment in which they want to carry out their hiking activities.

The presented study shows that the survey participants, when it comes to the hiking trail profile, prefer the trailhead and final destination in the lowlands, with the hill in the middle of the route. Short and steep hikes are most preferred by younger participants. Trails with minimal elevation are most preferred by retirees—hikers. The older the hiking group, the more attractive each landscape is. We found that the older hikers put more emphasis on the natural environment. They do not like the asphalt surface, and they strongly prefer natural earth surface. The results also suggest that, compared to young hikers, the elderly have a problem with some obstacles (tree roots, rocks, etc.) on the trail.

Generally speaking, the results of the study show that age influences the choice of hiking trails regarding their overall character and the landscape with its natural attractions. These findings contribute to the provision of important information in the creation of tailor-made tourism products, the optimal use of the potential of hiking trails, and the sustainable development of tourism. These findings contribute to the provision of important information in the creation of tailor-made tourism products, the optimal use of the potential of hiking trails, and the sustainable development of tailor-made tourism products, the optimal use of the potential of hikers, and the sustainable tourism development. Only a satisfied tourist will return and thus contribute to the sustainable tourism and thus contributes to the overall development of the area.

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Appendix A

Please fill in the following questionnaire.
to process data on the difficulty of routes when choosing a destination, respectively. locations or routes.
1. Gender:
3. Residence: (specify - municipality, city):
4. Is your health condition okay?
a) Yes b) No
5. I go hiking because:: (fill in all, A- yes, N-no)
a) I want to develop or maintain my physical liness b) like to concerd using time with family and friends
c) I like to splate nature
d) I like to relax / I like active rest
6. How often do you go hiking? (choose one option)
a) Often (at least once a week)
b) Sometimes (Once a month)
c) Karety (several times a year)
d) ivever / almost never
7. Do you go hiking in bad weather? (choose one option)
a) Yes b) No
8. How do you orientate yourself in anyironment?
(iii) in all rating scale: 1 - I never. 2 - I use them. 3 - I use)
a) By using trail signs, markers and blazes
b) By using mobile applications
c) By using paper tourist maps
9. Rased on your physical fitness, which type of a hiking trail is optimal for you to hike? (fill in everything, rating scale: 1 - occasionally
satisfactory, 2 - often satisfactory, 3 - always satisfactory):
a) Steep elevation changes, mountains (above 601 m)
b) Significant hills (30–600m)
c) Slightly undulating terrain, moderate uphills/downhills (151-300m)
d) Mostly flat plains (30–150m)
10. The ideal hiking trail profile for you is: (choose one option)
a) The profile of the hiking trail doesn't matter to me
b) A flat plain Start - Finish
c) Start and Finish on an uphill and a valley inbetween
d) Start and Finish in a valley and an upnill indetween
11. You prefer profil of trail: (choose one option)
a) Long but gradual elevation
b) Short but steep elevation
c) The profile of the trail (elevation) doesn't matter to me d) Trails with minimal elevation
 Which country is attractive for you? (fill in each variant, A- yes, N- no) a) Wide valleys with hills
b) Strait and steep valleys with high mountains
c) Hilly landscape without significant valleys
d) Planes
e) Lowlands around rivers
13. Do you visit natural monuments as part of hiking? (rock formations, waterfall, springs, gorges, rock needles, caves), (select one option)
a) Yes, even those that are not part of the plan
b) Yes, but only scheduled
d) No.
14. Colours of tourist marked routes: red, blue, green, yellow mean the difficulty of the route? (select one option)
a) 105 D) INO C) I dON T KNOW
15. What type of hiking trail surface you prefer? (choose one option)
a) Asphalt
b) Gravel/Crushed stone
c) Natural earth surface d) The surface describ matter to me
uy the surface doesn't matter to me

Figure A1. Cont.

16, Wha	16. What types of obstacles do you consider as a problem while hiking? (fill in each variant, A- yes, N- no)		
	a) Mud		
	b) Roots		
	c) Rocks / Stones		
	d) Exposed places secured with ropes or chains		
	e) Sharp decline		
17. Whe	17, when declaring on a tourist route, you declar in particular (specify the order from 1-most to 8-least)		
	a) According to known recommendations	e) According to the points of interest on the route	
	b) According to one's own wishes	 According to the goal (castle, peak, viewpoint) 	
	c) By media (1 v, magazine, internet) d) According to the wishes of the persons participating in the tour.	g) by duration b) According to the cont	
	d) According to the wisnes of the persons participating in the tour	in According to the can	

Figure A1. Questionnaire from the public opinion survey (source: authors' research).

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