

# Motivations to Visit Heritage Sites of World and National Significance

Margarita Boeva

Sofia University 'St Kliment Ohridski'

**Abstract:** This paper investigates what motives drive visitors to travel to sites of cultural heritage. It uses a case study on five out of many heritage sites in the Shumen city area, where quantitative questionnaires with visitors were fielded (100 at each site). It traces the motivation of visitors from the channels of awareness about cultural heritage through their visit on site, and repeated visitation to the same site. The study finds out that regardless how important a heritage site is, when history is combined with an experience in attractive nature surroundings a repeated visitation is more probable. The data further indicates that for the first visit to a site, it is the demand for more knowledge about history that is the primary driving force. Knowledge induces personal identity, which is particularly seen in the motives of parents and grandparents who, regardless whether they come for the first or second time, come to get their children acquainted with their heritage. The need for knowledge experience runs through the time people spent at a site, sometimes with a night spent in the city during the trip. Typically, they visit one or two heritage places at a maximum, but leave with the determination to come back again to enjoy the other sites in the area.

**Key words:** Shumen, cultural heritage visits, motivation, repeated visit, information sources

**Ключови думи:** Шумен, посещения на обекти на културното наследство, мотивация, повторни посещения, източници на информация



Margarita Boeva is a member of the research team who conducted an empirical study among visitors in the Shumen cultural heritage area under the lead of Prof. Zhelyu Vladimirov, Sofia University 'St. Kliment Ohridski'. She is a senior researcher in NOEMA marking research company. Her interests are focused on business and brand competitiveness, brand building, consumer segmentation in the fields of tourism, lifestyles, FMCG, financial services and other.

E-mail: margarita.noema@gmail.com

## INTRODUCTION

There are more than 35 recognized sites of cultural heritage in the Shumen city area, amongst which one of the World Heritage Sites registered in UNESCO, three of National culture heritage, as well as many museums, several churches and a mosque, and natural settings. For the purposes of the empirical study conducted, five were chosen in order to cover both different levels of importance and different periods of the Bulgarian history. These include Madara Horseman complex (part of the World Heritage sites), 1300 Years of Bulgaria (site of national importance), the Shumen Fortress (site of national importance), Tombul mosque (site dating from the ottoman period), and the Regional Historical Museum.

The analysis is based on 508 face-to-face interviews conducted on-site across randomly selected visitors of the sites, aged 15 and above.

For the purposes of current article, questions related to information channels, number and type of sites visited, usage of accommodation (hotel or guest house), composition of the traveling groups, number of on-site visits and stated reasons for visitation are analyzed.



In order to differentiate the motives for choice of one of the five selected sites of historical heritage, an index is extrapolated (comparing specific segment results with the total result of all five). Factors driving the visitation are extracted by discriminant analysis that includes all questions on focus, mentioned above. Open-ended questions on the trip experience are used, as well.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Often studies on the heritage motivation refer to reasons of visit and the experience on-site, and do not address the whole journey from the initial information sources through the first trip to returning to the site again. Research mostly focus on a specific site, belonging either to the World or the National heritage, and more rarely deal with areas where sites of both World and National heritage are located together or in one destination. There are two studies related to culture heritage sites in the Bulgarian context (Vladimirov, 2021a, b)<sup>1</sup>.

His paper 'Cultural heritage as a resource for local development'<sup>2</sup>, published in 2021, investigates socio-economic benefits for the local communities from tourist visitation of the historic complex Tsari Mali grad in the village of Belchin. Study is based on empirical questionnaires filled in by visitors and local businesses. Studying the factors that lead to community benefits, the author determined that a key driver for destination choice is the combination between culture and natural setting.

Tourists are seeking 'local flavor' experience – this statement is clearly extrapolated in a study on cruise tourists to Amsterdam city, based on a word frequency analysis of cruise companies narratives

and structured interviews with 228 passengers<sup>3</sup>. The study was first to register disappointment of the tourists when an experience of 'local flavor' lacked.

Generally, majority of the studies insist that socio-demographic structure of the tourists is not enough at all to understand the interest in a destination<sup>4</sup>. The more the visitors' main motivation, interests, expectations, and their perception of the respective historical heritage sites are familiar, the more effective strategies for attracting visitation are. The research on motivation and satisfaction of tourists who visit the monumental ensembles of the World Heritage cities of Ubeda and Baeza (Spain) suggested a high level of satisfaction among tourists with a primary cultural motivation.

Agata Niemezyk<sup>5</sup> investigated the motivation of cultural tourists arriving in Krakow, Poland, to visit monuments and museums through an empirical study among 600 tourists. The aim of her research was to classify these tourists, based on their motivation for the visit. So, five segments are extrapolated, of which the most numerous are the so called 'purposeful' tourists, thereby indicating the importance of cultural motive. The study determined that two major dimensions differentiate the tourist segments – the importance of culture to the tourist and presentation of culture at the destination. The motives do not differentiate between the level of cultural acceptance in the destination.

Another type of segmentation is seen in a study based on fielding 620 visitors to Camel Xiangzi Museum in Qingdao, China<sup>6</sup>, in which three clusters, Literary Motivated, Literary Inspired and Literary Neutral, are grouped as a

<sup>1</sup> Two empirical studies among visitors and local businesses in two different cultural heritage destinations in Bulgaria were conducted under the design and lead of prof. Zhelyu Vladimirov, Sofia University in 2020-2021, both being part of the project Heritage.BG.

<sup>2</sup> Vladimirov 2021: 9-15.

<sup>3</sup> Dai et al. 2019.

<sup>4</sup> Medina-Viruel et al. 2019.

<sup>5</sup> Niemezyk 2013: 28.

<sup>6</sup> Napeng et al. 2021.

result of the extracted motivational factors. It is the Literary Motivated who stayed at the destination longer than the other two other clusters.

Lifestyles of the tourists, including their personality traits, appear to be an appropriate indicator for segmentation, as shown in a study among 329 individuals visiting Valence (Spain)<sup>7</sup>. Ancestry appears to play a crucial role in heritage tourism, as well.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, positive emotions, such as gratitude, joy, pride, love and positive surprise have a positive relationship with place attachment. Self-concept appears to have a significant and positive relationship with tourist motivation, satisfaction and place attachment in heritage tourism context, as suggested in a study among 500 visitors to Su Nuraxi, a UNESCO World Heritage site in Sardinia, Italy<sup>9</sup>.

Recent studies deal with the influence of social media over the decision about destination choice. Nikolaos Koufodontis<sup>10</sup> conducted extensive research with a global sample of 105 World Heritage Sites using generated content from 2.5 million TripAdvisor reviews, and applying a novel theoretical model defining macro and micro levels of analysis. His results demonstrate that macro level attributes do not play substantial role. Instead the micro level factors significantly affect how much tourists and locals are interested in the UNESCO destination. The paper conclusively shows how important are social media in building awareness.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Tablet assisted face-to-face interviews were conducted among visitors aged 15 and above at the places of the five selected sites, the average of 100 per site, the total of 508. A semi-structured questionnaire, consisting of 20 main and 6 demographic questions was fielded. The main questions are the following types: 10 multiple answers, 8 single answer and 2 open-ended questions. Length of interview was the average of 20 minutes. Random selection of week days and tourist groups was applied. Interviews were conducted between August and December 2021. One representative was interviewed in the case of groups. Tourists of only Bulgarian nationality participated in the study.

## BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE SHUMEN AREA VISIT DATA

This study revealed that 28 % of all visitors who traveled to Shumen area during the sample period stayed at least one night in hotel or guest house, while the majority of 72 % made either one-day trip or stayed with friends /relatives. In total, 70 % of all respondents visited the area for the first time, while the rest of 30 % had been in the area before. The repeating visitors went to the same site of historical heritage for an average of 2.4 times.

While about 1 of each 3 visitors (35 %) booked their trip with accommodation at a hotel or guest house, only a small portion of the repeating visitors (15 %) has used hotels or guest houses.

About a half of all (51%) traveled with their family and one in three (34 %) came with friends. 11 % traveled with an organized tourist group. 9 % of visitors were on-site alone.

Interestingly, that data also revealed that the share of visitors decreased with age. The largest share of 39 % was formed by the youngest demographic of 15-35 years old. The age group of 36-55 years old had the next largest share – 36 %. People aged 56 and more constituted 25 % of all visitors.

Over a half of all visitors (56 %) had university degree.

## CHANNELS OF INFORMATION FOR DESTINATION CHOICE

The study results showed that word of mouth vastly exceeded all other information channels among the respondents, being cited by 76 % of all interviewees. Also, it was equally important for both first time and repeat visitors. It is also proven by the traveling company composition of the repeating visitors, as 43 % of all repeating visitors planned the trip with friends compared to 30 % of all people coming to the area for the first time (newcomers).

Also, the data indicated that word of mouth was extended by social media where impressions of both friends and strangers are shared. Facebook postings were an important source of motivation.

Less important sources of motivation included mass media, books and tourist agencies. Place of accommodation, though a low share, delivered awareness of new sites, especially for the newcomers.

<sup>7</sup> Vargas et al. 2021.

<sup>8</sup> Murdy et al. 2018: 17.

<sup>9</sup> Prayag et al. 2022.

<sup>10</sup> Koufodontis 2022.

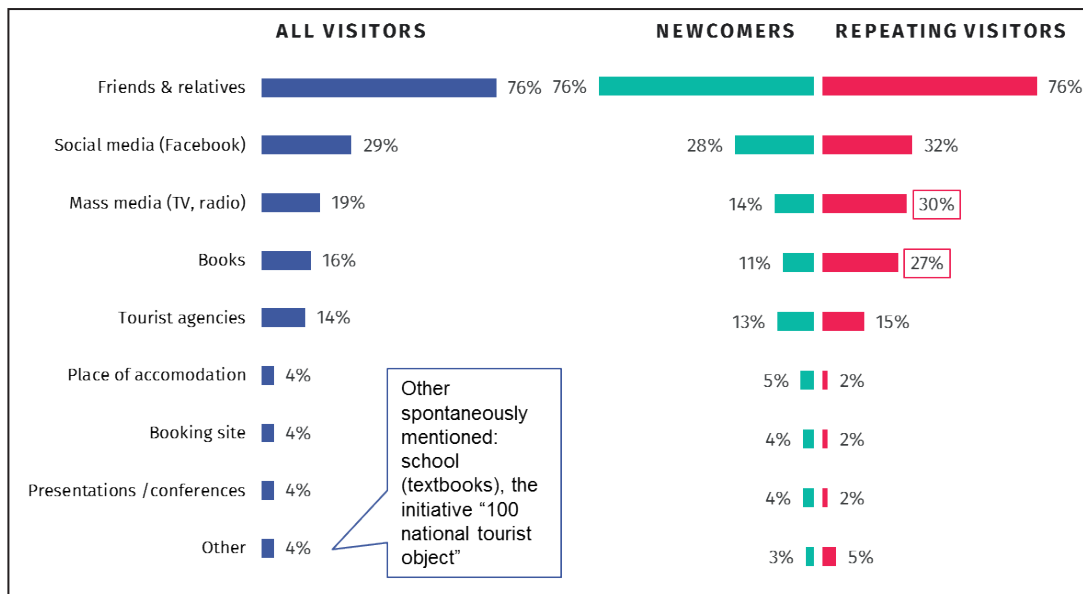


Figure 1. Information sources for the heritage site awareness (source: own survey)

Worth noting is the share of tourist agencies, at fifth place, but serving newcomers and repeat visitors equally. Perhaps surprisingly online booking platforms were significantly less important.

The results further showed that mass media and books played the second most important role in driving repeat visits, behind social media, across the segment of repeat visitors. These may provide a new and interesting viewpoint that made people want to go again and see with their own eyes.

### MOTIVATION FOR THE VISITS

Generally, visitors appeared to be connoisseurs of heritage sites with historical value. Newcomers expected to increase their knowledge of history and culture, regardless the distance and convenience, unlike repeating visitors. Convenience of the location rather referred to people living in neighboring districts as well as residents of the two largest cities in the country, Sofia and Plovdiv, who are mostly mobile amongst all Bulgarians (Fig. 2).

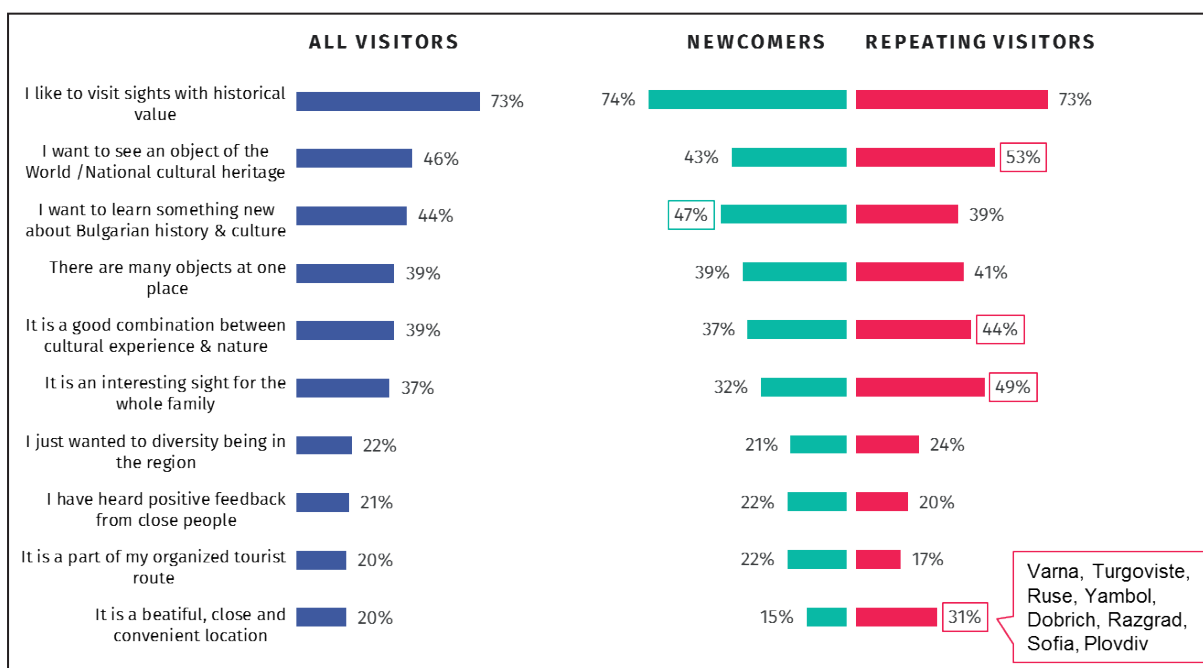


Figure 2. Stated motives for visitation to a heritage site (source: own survey)

Attractions that appealed to the whole family more often motivated repeat visitors than newcomers. It can be seen in the composition of traveling company as well – while the first visit to a site was often done alone or with companions organized by a travel agency, repeating visitors more often traveled with family and friends (85 % in total, of which 42 % were with family, 35 % with friends and 8 % with both).

Motivation also varied mostly by age, and secondly by education. Gender was not an important factor, except that female visitors were more inclined to choose less distant destinations than male visitors.

Similarly, the highest age cohort (people over the age of 56), who also preferred closer

destinations. They were least motivated by learning something new, compared to younger visitors, and more often their visitation was due to organized trip by a tourist agency.

The middle age cohort (36-55 years old) differentiated with 'interesting place for the whole family', while the youngsters (15-35 years old) were more influenced by 'positive feedback from close people'.

While recommendations of friends and relatives increased the sites' awareness to 76 % (as seen in Fig. 1), positive feedback directly motivated the visits of one of 5 visitors.

**FACTORS INFLUENCING THE SIGHT CHOICE**



Newcomers: 62 %  
Repeating visitors: 38 %

Discriminant analysis, confidence of 68,3%

Factors	Correlation coefficient
Mass media	0,40
Recommendation of friends and relatives	0,38
Trip with accommodation	0,35
Expectation for combination between cultural experience and beautiful nature	0,33
Social media	0,32

Madara Horseman, a certified World Heritage Site, is the one that was most often visited in the Shumen city area, as 63 % of all interviewees had been there. It is second behind 1300 Years of Bulgaria complex in repeated visitations, and ties for first with Shumen Fortress in frequency of visit with an average of 2.5 times.

The study shows also that a good combination between history and nature is both a differentiating

motivational attribute (index of 141) and factor that drives the heritage site choice. Such visits require at least one night stay where the site is outside the city, and needs transportation means.

The highest share of Madara visitors were over 56 years old, and conversely it was the site visited by the lowest share of youngsters (15-35 years old) compared to the other four sites of investigation.



Newcomers: 75 %  
Repeating visitors: 25 %

Discriminant analysis, confidence of 66,3 %

Factors	Correlation coefficient
Learning something new about Bulgarian history and culture	0,47
Trip with accommodation	0,45
Many objects at one place	0,42
Recommendation by the place of accommodation	0,34
Books	0,32
Family trip	0,30

Shumen Fortress seems to be not that popular in media. Instead, the primary factors for its visitation are rather books and recommendation by the place of accommodation. It is differentiated by positive feedback of friends and relatives (index of 138).

A very large portion of visitors, 75 %, were coming for the first time. The Fortress visit also requires at least one night stay because of its location outside the city.



Newcomers: 57 %  
Repeating visitors: 43 %

Another important factor for interest in the Fortress is family accompanying the visitor, wishing to learn something new about Bulgarian history and culture.

Unlike the Madara reserve, Shumen Fortress was visited by the youngest cohort predominantly. Nearly a half of all visitors (49 %) were aged 15-35. It is 10 points more than the average for all five sites.

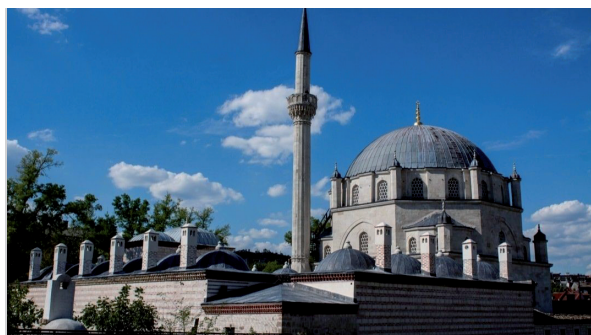
Discriminant analysis, confidence of 69,1%

Factors	Correlation coefficient
Object of the national cultural heritage	0,55
Object with historical value	0,53
Mass media	0,42
Books	0,38
Interesting sight for the whole family	0,34

The 1300 Years of Bulgaria reserve was the site most often visited by the same person and enjoying the largest share of repeating visitors (43 %). Its national scope of importance and historical value drive this high level of interest. Its contribution to the personal identity seems considerable in comparison with the other sites investigated. 'Interesting site for the whole family' differentiates the motivational frame

(index of 146). About 61 % of all travelers with family visited the site, and it is the highest share amongst the five investigated. 'Many interesting facts at one place' is the spontaneous motive communicated by one typical respondent.

The site also attracted more highly educated visitors than the other four locations. Some 68 % of all site visitors had university degree.



Newcomers: 80 %  
Repeating visitors: 20 %

Discriminant analysis, confidence of 68,5 %

Factors	Correlation coefficient
Trip with accommodation	0,55
Mass media	0,42
Recommendation of friends and relatives	0,42
Part of the tourist route	0,37
Learning something new about Bulgarian history and culture	0,33

Tombul mosque is the only one of the five sites, in which the factor 'part of the tourist route' plays a role, although it seems to be present in mass media. Profile of visitors (residents of small towns and villages) shows that its visitation might

be often related with religious considerations, aside from the history interest. However, it still brings new knowledge about history and culture.

High index of differentiation displays

the motive 'I wanted to diversify being in the region' (159), which shows that the object is quite rarely a sole reason for a trip, and appears

rather complimentary site (if time allows). Opens ends add that the mosque recent reconstruction stimulates the interest.



Newcomers: 80 %  
Repeating visitors: 20 %

Discriminant analysis, confidence of 67,5 %	
Factors	Correlation coefficient
Learning something new about Bulgarian history and culture	0,43
Online booking platform	0,42
Books	0,42
Trip with accommodation	0,33
Many objects at one place	0,30

Similar to Tombul mosque, the Regional Historical Museum is the one with lowest share of repeating visitors (20 %). It is the only one amongst the five sites, which awareness is due to online booking platforms as a factor of visitation. Higher probability to be chosen for visitation is also the trip with accommodation.

### DISCUSSION

Combination between cultural experience and nature environment appears to be the leading motivation for visits to Shumen city cultural and historical heritage. Such motivation mostly refers to Madara reserve, but it applies to Shumen Fortress, as well. The mostly differentiated and motivationally charged site appears to be the 1300 Years of Bulgaria complex, likely due to its broad history landscape and identity power.

With many objects at one place (a differentiating motive, index of 121), the museum primary attracted attention as an opportunity to learn something new about Bulgarian history and culture.

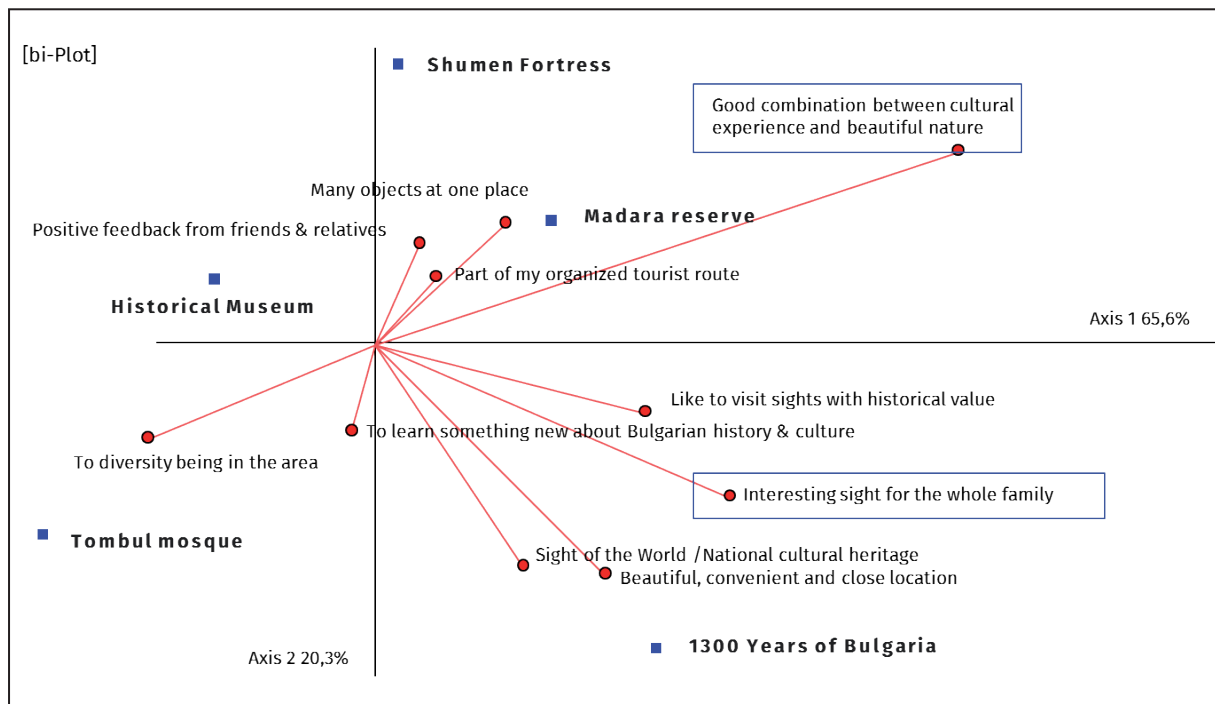


Figure 3. Multivariate relationship between heritage sites and stated motives (source: own survey)

Sites that are seen as interesting for the whole family strongly attract visitation, as well. As an example, one female respondent from Burgas with a secondary education, traveling with an organized trip, declared in an open-ended question: 'I would like to visit these sites again with my family and private passenger car. In such a way, we will be free to dispose of our time, and visit each site as long as we wish'.

Third and not last is importance of the site in national cultural heritage context. The more historical value, the higher interest and higher importance for the (personal) identity.

## CONCLUSION

The paper attempts to fill a research gap in addressing the complexity of factors that motivate people initially to choose and to return to a destination of cultural heritage in the perspective of a whole journey, starting from awareness and

ending at conducting a repeat visit. It demonstrates the role of information channels and family when cultural trip is being considered, concluding that a micro factor such as recommendation, by word of mouth or online, plays the most substantial role. The paper found that the more broadly important to the national history and culture a site is, the more probable is a repeat visit and the more attractive for a visit by the whole family. The combination of culture and nature environment induces preferences as well as repeat visit. Moreover, nature environment increases the probability for a longer trip.

Constraints of the study refer to the relatively small sample size per site and limited number of questions taken into consideration. Nevertheless, it contributes to a better understanding of the linkage between importance of a culture heritage site and the motivational attribution of tourist trip, composed of information sources, accommodation, traveling group and environment.

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## Мотивация за посещения на обекти на културно наследство от световно и национално значение

Маргарита Боева

Настоящата статия изследва мотивацията на хората, пътуващи, за да посетят обекти на културното наследство. Тя ползва емпирични данни, събрани с полу-структуриран количествен въпросник сред посетителите на пет от многото обекти на културно наследство в района на град Шумен. Проследява мотивацията на посетителите от източниците на информация за обектите през посещението на място до повторното посещение на същия обект.

Откритие на изследването е, че независимо колко значим е един обект на културното наследство, то – когато историята се комбинира с привлекателна природа, повторното посещение на същия обект е много по-вероятно. Данните също показват, че когато даден обект се посещава от един турист за първи път, то потребността от познание за историята е основната движеща сила. Познанието надгражда идентичността, което ясно може да се види в мотивите на родителите, които – независимо дали пътуват до даден обект за първи или втори път – пътуват, за да запознаят децата си с тяхното културно наследство. Потребността от познание прозира във времето, което хората прекарват на даден обект – независимо от продължителността на престоя им, с включена или не нощувка, типично те посещават един или два обекта за времето на престоя си и си тръгват с убеждението, че ще се върнат отново за другите обекти в същия район.

Важно заключение на изследването е, че туристическите агенции и уебсайтове играят сравнително малка роля в избора на дестинация. Вместо това, препоръката на приятели и роднини е ключовият канал, следван от социалните медии – и двата, подкрепени от познанията, идващи от училище и от книгите. Масовите медии и книгите често мотивират повторно посещение на даден обект.

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