

# Planning and Development of the Golf Tourism Destination

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The purpose of this paper is to better understand golfers' expectations and experiences in Slovenia and to propose the development of a golf tourism destination strategy. The methods used are a hierarchical cluster analysis with Ward's method, the analysis of variance (ANOVA), comparative method, literature review and case study. Based on 900 golfer surveys, we identified four behavioural market segments, and assessed the country's potential to become known as a golf tourism destination. It has been ascertained that Slovenia has atypical golfers. Having in mind the recent social changes, tourism stakeholders must plan the viability of destination development for decades ahead. As the number of golf courses increases, golfers will be seeking unique experiences. Slovenia is easily accessible, positioned centrally to the majority of European countries, and road connections are excellent, but there is a lack of regular flights to the main airport. Tourism strategy developers will be able to use the findings in their planning phases of determining Slovenia as a tourism destination. This paper will also be of immense interest for planners in other countries and sport disciplines.

*Keywords:* tourism; segmentation; marketing strategy; golf destination; Slovenia

## Introduction

Golf is a global leisure activity and professional sport; nowadays, a great many destinations worldwide are developing golf tourism. Since many countries have begun pushing the construction of golf courses and have been attempting to evolve with golf tourism in recent years, Slovenia has not kept pace. Slovenia is a small country but with decidedly clearly defined aims in tourism, in which golf tourism remain a relative novelty. Today, Slovenia has 15 golf courses on 20,273 km<sup>2</sup> and two million residents. However, the main question is whether these golf courses are sufficient to develop the country in a respected golf destination?

The sport of golf has emerged as a vast tourism

draw and a source of revenue that many tourism destinations have found difficult to resist (Readman, 2003). Molina Huertas, Del Campo Gomis, López Lluch, and Agulló Torres (2010) assessed the economic and social impact of the golf industry in a tourist destination; Sánchez-Medina, Romero-Quintero, and Gutiérrez-Padrón (2008) have studied the environmental management in golf courses. Golf is a well-developed sport in the USA and England both as a recreation sport or sport for all, and as a competitive sport (PGA tours, LPGA tour, European tours) that help the country to become recognised as a golf destination. The golf industry in Asia is quickly expanding with growing incomes and rising numbers of golf tourists (Ken Re-

search, 2012). The same is happening in the UK, Spain, Portugal and other European countries, but Slovenia has a problem with this orientation. Golf began to attract interest as tourist product in Slovenia only in the past 20 years, partly because golf has been perceived as a capitalist/bourgeois sport in socialist countries, but mostly because golf was not a particularly well-known or popular sport. Slovenia does not have many golfers (0.3% of Slovenian residents). The Slovene national sports are skiing, trekking, cycling; golf has long been neglected. However, Slovenian golf tourism has immense potential. Even more, we can affirm that golf tourism would allow Slovenia to become an even more prominent tourist destination that it is considered today.

Firstly, golf in Slovenia needs to be regarded as a sport for everybody; after that, we could begin to think about golf as a tourism product. Although golf in Slovenia is not recognised as an 'important' tourism product and sport category, the development of golf tourism should receive more effort. Finally, Slovenia should understand golf as a competitive or Olympic sport and profit from golf events as an important opportunity to increase its international visibility. Faganel and Trnavčević (2012) report a planned golf course is to be built on the Slovenian seaside and placed on the border of a protected nature park; such a course could offer a winning experience to its visitors.

Golfers in Slovenia have been surveyed, and their behaviour analysed, as well as the perceptions of Slovenia as a tourism destination, with the potential to become a golf tourism destination. The utilisation of behavioural dimensions to segment travel markets can be a powerful tool in managing tourism (Hennessey, Macdonald, & Maceachern, 2008; Oh & Jeong, 2010). To develop new exciting golf courses and to become known for golf tourism destination takes time: years of well-planned actions, in fact. In order to formulate a specific development strategy, data about tourists' opinions must be obtained and their satisfaction measured. Once the country decides to become a golf tourism destination, the decision makers should be informed about which way to position their offer of golf facilities and services. In the study of Martinez Caro and Martinez Garcia (2007), different ways of

introducing such an effect into the cognitive satisfaction model have been presented: satisfaction as a mediator or as an independent factor. They made an empirical analysis of two rival models in order to better understand the consumer satisfaction process within the framework of a sporting event. The study showed that the key affective factor that determines satisfaction is 'arousal,' as opposed to 'pleasure,' which has an insignificant effect. The cognitive element is also crucial for determining satisfaction and future behaviour intentions, and all of the antecedents are independent in the satisfaction process.

With this aim in mind, we surveyed golf tourists in Slovenia, with an emphasis on researching their behaviour, perceptions, expectations and satisfaction. With the increasing competition for attracting patrons to golf destinations, it is becoming increasingly vital for managers to identify the variables that attract or retain golf travellers (Petrick & Backman, 2002a). By constructing a framework for the understanding of golf tourists, golf and tourism industry representatives can better understand the contribution that golfers make to a destination, based on factors such as satisfaction, perceived value received from the golfing experience, trip length, expenditures, travel decisions, and motivations (Hennessey et al., 2008).

Sinclair and Boger (2006) describe four areas that affect the development of a golf destination: the political economy, the environmental domain, the socio-political arena, and the sociological consequences. All these areas affect the growth of golf in Slovenia as well, but only a small number of people in Slovenia acknowledges how much golf can contribute to the country (development of tourism, tourism on a higher level, no seasonality, jobs, etc.). Golfing is a dynamic and growing activity for tourists globally and, if developed and marketed appropriately, it can become a highly successful and profitable niche tourism product (Hinch & Higham, 2001). Moreover, the market of traveling golfers has been steadily increasing. According to a US National Golf Foundation study (National Golf Foundation, 2012), 'demand for golf was stable though slightly down in 2009 versus the previous year.' Further: 'Golf remains the number one individual outdoor sport, with 27.1 million participants, 15.3 million

of whom play frequently (eight or more times a year)' (National Golf Foundation, 2012). They do not predict an increase or drop-off for the foreseeable future among American golfers. This is positive news for the golf industry and an significant potential market for a brand new golf tourism destination, since golfers are known to be frequent travellers. Many golfers around the world are looking for new and not-yet-experienced tourism countries and new golf courses. Based on these statistics, it is clear that golfers are a sizeable niche market that presents a significant opportunity to grow and maintain visitation to a destination, and generate substantial revenues for the tourism industry and government (Hennessey, et al., 2008). The average golfer is male, aged 47 years, classified as adult or senior; his partner and up to two other people of the family also play golf (Louis, 2005). This means that a typical golfer not only is a big spender, but usually is not traveling alone. The compelling question even for Slovenia is whether a golf vacation is a solely devoted to golf or if playing golf is one activity of many, as Gibson and Pennington-Gray (2008) suggest. Destination managers need to understand golf tourists in their country.

One of the most popular travel destinations for golfers is Florida (National Golf Foundation, 2006), and we can also say that it is a typical golf destination. In 2000, Florida was the largest golf travel market in the United States, with 3.12 million golf-playing visitors, at approximately USD 23 billion (Haydu & Hodges, 2002). Furthermore, not only golf tourists are part of the golf tourism industry, but also golf spectators. The biggest market for golf tourism is the USA and Japan, as 44% of the global golf market are US residents and 25% are Japanese (Readman, 2003). Strategic Networks Group (2009) found that golf courses earned gross revenue of \$4.7 billion in 2008, which is more than 'skiing facilities' in Canada (USD 0.9B in 2006), more than 'fitness and recreational sports centres' (USD 1.7B in 2006), more than 'amusement parks and arcades' (USD 0.4B in 2006). The European market of seven million golfers is even more important for Slovenia, as this number is three-and-a-half times that of all Slovene citizens.

However, when developing golf tourism, a country

or a tourism destination also has to look at other benefits deriving from golf. Koh, Yoo, and Boger (2010) identify visitor segments based on benefits they sought. Somewhat predictably, the explosion of golf in global participation has transformed the sport into a multi-billion dollar industry that involves several transnational corporations associated not only with golf itself but also with overlapping businesses such as construction, agriculture, entertainment, hospitality, marketing and advertising (Wheeler & Nauright, 2006). Slovenia also should take into consideration those positive influences, but it must be understood that golf is no longer an 'exclusive' sport for high earners and that it is being played increasingly by people of all ages and all social backgrounds (Shaw & Anderson, 1995). Sinclair and Boger (2006) analysed the golf tourism prospects of Guyana and confirm that the limited golf infrastructure, the abbreviated scale of development plans for the facility, and the absence of golf tourism policy hinder the destination's development. The tourism destinations that have developed golf tourism years ago rely on golfers as high earners and spenders, but a tourism destination such as Slovenia, which began to develop golf tourism only recently, should think about golf as a sport for everybody.

With increasing competition for attracting golf travellers to destinations, it is becoming increasingly urgent for managers to identify variables that attract or retain clientele to their sites (Petrick & Backman, 2002b). Market segmentation is a well-established marketing strategy (Kotler, Armstrong, & Cunningham, 2005). The National Golf Course Owners Association identifies several segments of golfers: occasional, core, avid, junior golfer and range user (<http://www.ngcoa.org/pageview.asp?doc=511>). Utilising behavioural dimensions to segment travel markets can be a powerful tool in managing tourism destinations (Hennessey et al., 2008) and the specialisation of tourism products entails a need for segmentation of tourism markets (Buhalis, 2001). Consequently, we analysed golf players on Slovenian golf courses. The aim of the research was to determine what kind of golf tourists are coming to Slovenia, to discover their golf behaviour and the determinants that influence choosing Slovenia as a golf destination. Since this was the

first research conducted among golf players in Slovenia, the aim was also to determine what the consumption of the golfer per round is.

### Methodology and Sample Frame

The data were collected with a field questionnaire on Slovenian golf courses in the summer of 2006, between July 2nd and September 7th. The owner of data is the Slovenian Tourist Board. At the time the data was collected, Slovenia had nine golf courses (9 and 18 holes),<sup>4</sup> all of which were included in the survey. The survey was performed by qualified interviewers who attended a preparatory educational seminar and spoke at least one foreign language. The number of questionnaires per golf course was predetermined on the basis of the golf course size: 900 foreign and local golfers were included in the quota sample after finishing a game of golf. The fewest questionnaires were completed at the Castle Otočec golf course<sup>5</sup> (50 questionnaires), and between 100 and 111 questionnaires were completed on the other eight golf courses. All the courses are evenly distributed throughout Slovenia, so the data can be considered representative for the whole of golf tourism.

The sample comprised 72% Slovenian golfers and 28% foreign golfers. Of the latter, 6.3% were from Croatia, 5.7% from Italy, 4.7% from Austria, 2.3% from the Czech Republic, 2.1% from Great Britain, and less than 2.0% from Germany, Slovakia, Bosnia, Switzerland, USA and elsewhere. The most significant presence of foreign golfers has been observed on the courses of Livada and Bled, where they represented more than 50.0% of all interviewees. The average age of Slovene interviewees was 45 years and 48 years for the foreign interviewees. One third (31.1%) of interviewees were women (Slovenian women 31.3% and foreign 30.7%). Most golfers were in the age range of 46–55 years old (31.6%), followed by the age range of 36–45 years old (23.2%); 19.2% were in the age range of 56–65 years old and 3.3% in the age range of 66+.

<sup>4</sup> There are 15 golf courses in Slovenia today.

<sup>5</sup> Castle Otočec Golf Course has 18 holes today, but at the time of survey taken, it was only a 9-hole golf course.

The questionnaire was pre-tested for its understanding on a smaller sample; a multistep process was used to translate and adapt the questionnaire into English language. It was structured into six sections. The first section enquires into the main socio-economic characteristics of the player. The second set of questions is related to the main motive for travelling. The third inquires about the financial spending per person. The fourth is concentrated on the importance of different reasons that led the player choose the course. The fifth set of questions is centred on the influence of determinants that led the player choose Slovenia as his/her golf destination, while the sixth set deals with the impressions of his/her golfing experience in Slovenia, where the same determinants were analysed as in the previous set of questions. Ritchie, Tung, & Ritchie (2011) analysed the existing literature on tourism experience and found out that 'experience-related research remains under-represented in the tourism literature.' The adopted questionnaire used a set of variables most quoted on literature (Iso-Ahola and Mannel, 1987; Lundberg, 1990; Fodness, 1994; Petrick, 2002; Holden, 2003; Mohsin & Ryan, 2003; Correia, Barros, & Silvestre, 2007; Fjelstul & Tesone, 2008).

The measurement of the answers was made with a five-step Likert scale, in which '1' means not important at all and '5' means very important. Expectations and impressions of the lived experience inside the questionnaire involved the same determinants. In this way, it was possible to analyse the gap between the expectations and the effective experience.

For better understanding of golfers' expectations and the experience they received in Slovenia, we used a hierarchical cluster analysis with Ward's (1963) method for sorting the groups, in which groups are clustered using Euclidean distance as the distance metric. This methodology has been proved to be the most reliable method for forming clusters in similar applications (McNeill & Wang, 2005; Fraley & Raftery, 2002; Churchill & Iacobucci, 2005; Malhotra & Birks, 2006; Gibson & Pennington-Gray, 2008) to group individuals based on their revealed outcome priorities or preferences. To define the number of clusters, we charted a hierarchical dendrogram and a Scree diagram, from which it was possible to select the appropriate number

Table 1 Demography of Interviewees

Origin		Age groups						Total	
		<25	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	>66		Didn't say
Foreign	<i>n</i>	3	24	77	67	57	9	14	251
	%	1.2	9.6	30.7	26.7	22.7	3.6	5.6	100
Slovenian	<i>n</i>	50	105	132	217	117	21	7	649
	%	7.7	16.2	20.3	33.4	18.0	3.2	1.1	100
Total	<i>n</i>	53	129	209	284	174	30	21	900
	%	5.9	14.3	23.2	31.6	19.3	3.3	2.3	100

of clusters; in our case we decided that four is the appropriate number. The analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to explore the differences between clusters, which revealed that the four clusters were statistically different from each other in terms of golfing attitudes, and Eta-squared ( $\eta^2$ ) was used to indicate the effect size. Eta-squared represents the percentage of variance in the outcome measure that is explained by group designation, with values less than 0.10 considered to be weak. To test the usefulness of the cluster solution, we performed significance tests comparing the clusters on variables that were not used to generate the cluster solution.

Clusters were constructed around seven reasons comprising the ways of choosing the golf course: interesting course; restaurants and bars near the course; well-groomed course; friendly staff; green fee amount; good name/image of the course; well-known course.

**Results and Main Findings**

Four identified clusters fulfil the basic idea of clustering, i.e. to form groups of similar variables so that the classification objects are homogeneous within groups/clusters and heterogeneous between clusters, and they are substantively interpretable. Internal validity has been tested, and it has been found that the classification fits to the data and that it is possible to explain the variation in the data. External validity has been also proven as the four clusters correlate with external variables that are known to be correlated with the classification and that are not used for clustering. The identified clusters were named according to the recognised characteristics: relaxing travellers, spenders, business

people and only golfers (Table 1). Respondents were asked to evaluate the reasons for choosing Slovenia for their golf activity and to evaluate the impressions of Slovenian experience. The same dimensions were analysed for choosing Slovenia and as determinants of impressions (Table 2).

**Relaxing Travellers (33.7 Percent)**

Most relaxing travellers play golf a few times per month or more often if they get the possibility. For 71.2% of them, golf is the main activity in Slovenia; their spending is EUR 95.45 per day. Relaxing travellers mentioned sport as the main motive for travelling, and the next one rest and relaxation (25.4 percent). They differ from other groups in the extent of sightseeing attractions in the country they visit. The most important factor for all groups regarding the golf course is the good state of course, well groomed and maintained. Relaxing travellers seek an interesting course, and they appreciate friendly staff on and off the course. The reputation of the course is of middle importance for them.

Relaxing travellers are interested in natural qualities of Slovenia, the local population's hospitality and, like all other groups, in personal safety during their stay in Slovenia. They were extremely impressed with the natural beauties of Slovenia, Slovene's hospitality and their feelings of personal safety. The country's manageable size is of relative importance for them.

**Spenders (28.2 Percent)**

The second group are demanding golfers and gourmands; they expressed the highest satisfaction. The

Table 2 Clusters of Golf Players on Slovenian Golf Courses

Habits and factors	Relaxing travelers	Spenders	Businessmen	Only golfers
Playing golf ...				
... few times per week	40.2 %	58.1 %	42.7 %	42.9 %
... few times per months	46.5 %	30.0 %	45.5 %	41.1 %
... few times per year	1.8 %	3.1 %	2.1 %	3.7 %
... don't know	11.4 %	8.8 %	9.8 %	12.3 %
Golf is the main activity in Slovenia	71.2 %	76.9 %	64.3 %	85.1 %
Spending per visit per person (in Euros)	95.45	161.79	66.44	111.08
The main motive of travelling				
Rest and relax	25.4 %	12.0 %	17.9 %	8.3 %
Visiting attractions	6.8 %	5.4 %	3.6 %	2.1 %
Sport	40.7 %	53.3 %	39.3 %	56.3 %
VRF	6.8 %	6.5 %	10.7 %	0.0 %
Business	5.1 %	0.0 %	10.7 %	4.2 %
Educations	0.0 %	1.1 %	0.0 %	0.0 %
Pilgrimage	0.0 %	0.0 %	3.6 %	0.0 %
Trip without overnight stay	1.7 %	3.3 %	0.0 %	0.0 %
Other	5.1 %	8.7 %	3.6 %	0.0 %
Golf	8.5 %	9.8 %	10.7 %	29.2 %
Reasons for choosing a golf course				
Interesting course	4.46	4.85	4.10	4.28
Restaurants and bars near the course	4.03	4.52	3.13	3.39
Well-groomed course	4.66	4.95	4.22	4.29
Friendly staff	4.55	4.85	3.93	4.24
Green fee amount	3.98	4.50	3.43	3.86
Good name/image of the course	3.26	4.66	2.31	3.99
Well-known course	3.03	4.38	2.22	4.08

good will (reputation, image) of the golf course is a very important factor for this group. Demanding golfers are willing to pay more merely to access the best-groomed golf course; if it fulfils their demands and expectations, they will be returning to the same place and spreading word of mouth about the good play at this golf course. Spenders are the most frequent golf players; 58.1% of them play it several times per week. Golf is the main activity in Slovenia for three quarters of them, and they are also big spenders. On average, they spend EUR 161.79 per day. Sport is the most prominent motive for half of them; some

have modest interest for rest and relaxation, and visiting attractions, but with no interest in business. For this group, almost all the indicators have exceptionally high average scores (well over the mark of 4), but the most important are well-groomed courses, interesting courses, friendly staff, and personal safety.

People's hospitality and the natural beauties of the country are the highest scored reasons for choosing Slovenia, followed by local cuisine and affordable overnight accommodation. This group's expectations about local food were fulfilled; they very much like to have organised activities for tourists; they do not like

Table 3 Clusters of Golfers by Reasons for Choosing Slovenia and Country Impressions

Determinants of evaluation	Relaxing travelers	Spenders	Businessmen	Only golfers
<b>Reasons for choosing Slovenia</b>				
Organized activities for tourists	3.75	4.04	3.41	3.72
Natural qualities	4.38	4.51	3.89	4.23
Spa offerings	3.65	3.96	2.83	3.62
Attractive villages and interesting rural life	3.80	3.95	3.19	3.74
Old towns, castles, churches	3.79	3.89	3.46	3.83
Local cuisine	4.09	4.36	3.96	3.87
The native population's hospitality	4.20	4.56	4.11	4.13
Affordable overnight stays	3.72	4.16	3.36	3.77
The country's manageable size	3.43	3.59	2.77	3.63
Mountain environment	3.25	3.78	3.2	3.72
Unspoiled natural beauty and protection of the natural environment	4.15	4.19	3.79	4.19
Personal safety during my stay	4.42	4.64	4.32	4.26
Closeness to home	3.45	3.57	3.26	3.85
<b>Impressions of Slovenia</b>				
Organized activities for tourists	4.02	4.29	3.92	4.02
Natural qualities	4.35	4.48	4.19	4.30
Spa offerings	4.00	4.08	3.76	3.95
Attractive villages and interesting rural life	3.98	4.06	4.04	3.87
Old towns, castles, churches	3.79	4.09	3.67	4.04
Local cuisine	3.89	4.25	3.56	3.91
The native population's hospitality	4.11	4.33	4.19	4.26
Affordable overnight stays	3.91	4.08	3.61	3.87
The country's manageable size	3.80	4.12	4.00	3.95
Mountain environment	3.78	4.09	3.65	3.93
Unspoiled natural beauty and protection of the natural environment	3.98	4.18	4.00	4.16
Personal safety during my stay	4.33	4.46	4.23	4.39
Closeness to home	3.92	3.99	4.08	4.09

to travel on their own, and they do not want to travel much; they prefer close-distance trips.

#### Business People (17.8 Percent)

Business people are an extremely significant group. They play golf only a couple of times per month, sometimes more. Golf is not the main activity for them in Slovenia (one third); they are unusually restrictive

with their budget, spending EUR 66.44 per day. Sport and relaxation are the strongest motives, followed by visiting friends or relatives and business activities. Local cuisine and the manageable size of the country are also highly scored by them. Visiting attractions is not one of their stronger motives for travelling. Well-groomed and engaging courses are essential, while the image and reputation of the course is not important at

all. They do not care much about restaurants and bars near the course. The personal safety and hospitality of the local population are important reasons for coming to Slovenia. Personal safety, hospitality, natural beauties, attractive villages and attractive rural life left the best impressions on business people, but they do not take much time to enjoy such things.

#### Only Golfers (20.3 Percent)

For fanatical golfers, the most important part of their visit in Slovenia is golf. Equal amounts of these respondents play golf several times per week and several times per month. A well-known course is an important factor to them; 85% stated golf as their main activity in Slovenia. Spending per person is EUR 111.08 per day. This group's main motive for travelling is sport (56.3%) and golf (29.2%). They do not visit friends or relatives; only a small number of them does business while travelling, and they scarcely visit other attractions. A well-groomed course, friendly staff, hospitality, an interesting course and a well-known course are very important for this group; restaurants and bars near the course are slightly less important.

Personal safety and natural beauties were among the most influential reasons for them to choose Slovenia as a golf destination; they really like the unspoiled natural beauty and the protection of the natural environment. They pay less attention to the organised activities for tourists. Personal safety and Slovenia's attractiveness convinced most of the only golfers, while the hospitality of the native population surpasses the expectations of the group.

#### The Consumption of Golfers

Brown, Rascher, McEvoy, & Nagel (2006) made an compelling study and determined that golfers treat travel costs as bundled costs, especially those classified as tourists. The strong, positive correlation found between distances travelled and the cost of green fees enables managers to utilise geographic segmentation in choosing to whom to market their course based upon their product's process compared to area competitors. We were interested in the level of consumption of a golfer per visit. The average consumption per

Table 4 The Average Consumption of Golfers per Visit

Group	Euros
Foreign golfers	127.95
Domestic golfers	89.08
All	98.75

visit of golfers in Slovenia has been 98.75 euros; foreign tourists spent more (EUR 127.95) than domestic ones on average (Table 4).

#### Discussion

Relatively little is known about the determinants of, and the best way to measure a golf traveller's satisfaction (Petrick & Backman, 2002a) and his/her intention to revisit the same golf destination. Nevertheless, it is quite likely that a golfer as tourist will not come back to a tourism destination where his/her satisfaction with golf courses was not sufficiently high, and the expectations were not satisfied. It is becoming increasingly vital for destination managers to identify the variables that attract and retain their current and potential clientele (Petrick, 2002). At the same time, it is essential to know the demand side of tourism, i.e. golfers and their socio-economic background; Shaw and Alderson (1995) have found that over the previous 20 years there have been a number of changes in the market for golf. The same researchers also found that golf has traditionally been played by males, but nowadays the numbers of women taking up the game are increasing rapidly. The demand for golf is roughly represented by two groups of golfer: tourists and residents, usually members of the golf club. One market that has been shown to be viable is the travelling golfer (Petrick, 2002). Thus, it has become more urgent than ever for golf destination managers to identify the factors related to golf travellers' repurchase intentions. Since Doupona (2002) determined that women play a dominant role in the formation of sports life of a family, it can be concluded that for the golf tourism market the increasing participation of women in golf is extremely valuable and welcome information. Furthermore, women are much more active in the planning and organising of trips (Holloway & Robinson, 2000), so destination managers should take this information

into consideration when preparing their marketing tools. However, not only socio-demographic characteristics are essential; even more valuable is knowledge of the golf habits of tourists. The results of Brey and Lehto (2007) support the hypothesis that the more that individuals are involved in an activity in a daily setting, the more they tend to participate in the same activity while on vacation. Their results show that golfers are extremely loyal to the activity while travelling; in contrast, bicycling may not be a typical loyalty-based activity.

However, it can also be seen from the results that a golfer on vacation is not necessarily a frequent golf player in their his/her everyday life. The 'Spenders' are the group that most commonly play golf a couple of times per week; in contrast, golf is the main activity in Slovenia and the main motive of travel for the 'Only golfers.' It can be said that 'Only golfers' are typical golf tourists who are interested in a well-groomed and engaging golf course, but in Slovenia this group of golfers is the smallest one. Thus, while there are golfers in Slovenia, they are not particularly typical golf tourists who are traveling to experience different golf destinations. Our data has revealed that in Slovenia the biggest group of golfers is 'Relaxing travellers' whose main motive for travel is sport, rest and relaxation, but golf is the motive only for 8.5% of them. In contrast, golf is the main motive for visiting Slovenia for ca. 70% of 'Relaxing travellers.' The main reasons for choosing Slovenia as a tourism destination were personal safety and natural qualities. To further develop Slovenia as a golf destination, tourists with golf as the main motive of travel should be attracted. The results show that Slovenia has occasional golf travellers or travellers to Slovenia with other motives, but they also play golf, once they are here. Correia, Barros, & Silvestre (2007) found the motives that lead golf players to repeat the same golf destination are mainly the climate and the quality of the courses, but interestingly they found 'safety' as an insignificant factor for repeating tourists. Our results show 'safety' as the highest evaluating factor for choosing Slovenia in all groups, but 'well-groomed course' as a factor for choosing the golf course was given the lowest mark between 'Business people' and 'Only golfers,' i.e. those who are most

similar the typical golf tourists. These findings prove that Slovenia is not a typical golf destination with typical golf tourists.

For 'Business people,' 'business' as the main motive of travel is as strong as the motive of 'play golf,' and an important reason for choosing Slovenia is 'safety' and 'population's hospitality.' This means they choose Slovenia for business, because of its safety and the locals' hospitality, but once they come to Slovenia for business, they discovered that Slovenia is also a good place for golf. If their satisfaction with the golf courses is high, there is a chance they will come back as golf tourists. We hypothesised that foreign golfers do not come in Slovenia specifically for a golf holiday, so we asked them about their impressions of Slovenia. Correia et al. (2007) conclude that intentions to return to play golf have more to do with the destination's attributes rather than a golf course's attributes. Moreover, it has been found that attributes related to the resort experience had more influence on overall satisfaction than attributes related to the information provided and golfing experiences (Petrick & Backman, 2002a) and that golf travellers' satisfaction is highly correlated with repurchase intentions (Petrick & Backman, 2002b). We found that determinants about the impressions of Slovenia were estimated relatively high. Several researchers have contended that an individual's past experiences can mediate their present everyday behaviour (Ouellette & Wood, 1998) and leisure behaviour (Williams, Schreyer, & Knopf, 1990; Oppermann, 2000), so the golfers in Slovenia (domestic and foreign) have a high potential to repeat their golf visit on the Slovenian golf courses. More problematic is that golfers on the Slovene golf courses are not typical golfers; we could name call them as 'by-the-way golfers.'

We have discovered intriguing results while testing the impressions of Slovenia as the groups evaluated them differently. 'Relaxing travellers' lowest evaluated experiences are 'mountain environment' and 'old towns, castles, churches,' but 'Spenders' marked the 'Closeness to home' as the most lowly evaluated factor. This result could be interpreted in two ways: Slovenia is too distant to return to for playing golf or that, while the impression of Slovenia is so good, it is

unfortunately too distant to visit. We can say that the second explanation of the interpretation is likely the closest to reality due to the evaluation of all the other tested determinants; the average evaluation was higher than 4 (5 is the maximum evaluation) in the group of 'Spenders.'

The lowest evaluated impression in the group of 'Business people' goes to 'Local cuisine' which is particularly a matter of concern because 'Local cuisine' as had been well evaluated (3.96) as a reason for choosing Slovenia, but later was evaluated lower (3.56). That means that the expectations of 'Business people' about the local cuisine were higher than the actual experience; this group of golfers will certainly not return to Slovenia because of the food.

The smallest group, 'Only golfers,' evaluated 'Natural qualities' as a very important factor when choosing this destination (4.23). The same factor has been better (4.3) evaluated than the experience. We could conclude that the least numbered group of golfers represents potential golfers as returning Slovenian tourists.

Correia et al. (2006) report that only about 25% of golf spending is actually realised at the golf course. If golf tourists in Slovenia would be typical golf tourists and if we take into account that 25% of spending is on golf, at least EUR 95 per day would be the spending of the typical golf tourist in Slovenia. As the foreign tourists spend even more (EUR 127.95), we can conclude that Slovenia certainly needs to consider further strategies to develop golf tourism and promote Slovenia as a sport tourism destination with an emphasis on golf tourism. However, future research about the golf tourism income in Slovenia needs to be done.

### Conclusion

Five core elements are considered to be vital for the development of a sport tourism destination (Walmsley, 2008): access, climate, prestige, diversity and authenticity. Slovenia can offer easy access as it is positioned centrally to most European countries; road connections are excellent, but there is a lack of regular flights to the main airport. The climate is exceptionally favourable; golf can be played throughout the year on the coast. A prestigious image is difficult to obtain and even more difficult to evaluate, but Slovenia

is not an inexpensive destination. It can offer exceptional diversity, from Alpine beauties and the primal Karst to the mild Mediterranean climate, and tourists can be extremely satisfied with the easy access to these sites within a mere 100 kilometres. All these elements have to be incorporated in the destination development strategy, using innovative approaches. Križaj et al. (2012) developed a tool for the measurement of innovation newness and adoption in tourism, which can be used for determining the effects of introducing innovations in developing the golf destination.

From the research and literature review, we demonstrated that the chosen segment is growing, and thus conclude that the decision to present the country as a golf destination could be highly favourable. The sport tourism strategy can be combined with other differentiation points of the country (Faganel, 2011a). Once the target segment has been identified, the positioning of the country as a golf destination has to be planned and delivered. The product and accompanying services are already there: they have to be improved and differentiated. The combination of excellent golf courses with tourism services, alongside natural beauties, fine cuisine and the sustainable development of the environment are the main advantages of Slovenia as a golf destination. Okumus, Okumus, & McKercher (2007) emphasise the importance of differentiating tourism destinations through the use of their unique cuisines. Despite the current economic crisis, we strongly believe that sustainability is the right way forward for golf tourism. Faganel (2011b, p. 152) asserts that during a financial crisis and recession, consumers' behaviour differs and leads to risk aversion and market anomalies. The number of golfers has to be regulated by offering off-peak discounts, avoiding seasonality, transferring tourists to different, less populated courses and other attractive places, taking care of biodiversity, emissions, waste management etc. The pricing strategy has to be developed carefully; the policy of ongoing discounting is not a viable replacement for a proper price strategy. Regarding the place, decision makers have to think not only of better golf courses, but must take in consideration the fact that tourists and golfers evaluate the whole package of services and product, as well as the promotion of course, which is the most powerful mar-

keting element for brand building. Global TV channels (CNN, the Travel Channel), specialised printed media, attractive and updated websites are only message carriers. An effective communication strategy has to be designed, one that integrates every contact with different sectors of the public. Finally, that the best and cheapest advertising comes from the word-of-mouth communication must be remembered. A satisfied golfer will bring more golfers to the destination through personal communication and/or social media interactions. This is the reason and confirmation that the strategy planning has to start with surveying customers. Of course, existing visitors/golfers are only one segment; there are numerous other potential customers to be analysed.

As for the other marketing mix elements, such as people, processing and physical evidences, let us briefly mention people. Two categories are important: customers and service performers. Employees, tourism staff, managers are friendly (traditional Slavic hospitality), knowledgeable in languages, but they ought to develop their hospitality skills, as cultural differences play a significant role in perceiving the quality of delivered services. Customers are the existing and potential golfers as well as other tourists who might try to take up the challenge of learning golf on vacations, so distinct and differentiated strategies have to be implemented for singular categories.

Yoo, Lee, and Bai (2011) conducted a ten-year hospitality marketing research and forecast that consumer behaviour, customer relationship management, market segmentation, targeting, positioning, and branding subjects will consistently receive attention for further research. Knowing the needs and wants of potential tourists, and understanding the perceived image of golf destination is of the utmost importance for the marketing communication of golfing destination. The financial crisis will probably leave certain consequences on social and situational contexts for golfers; the number of female golfers is slowly increasing; the stereotype of golf as senior and wealthy people's play is disappearing, as is its perception as being an upper class sport etc. Brooker, Joppe, Davidson, and Marles (2012) argue that innovations within outdoor hospitality should be introduced in three- to four-year incre-

ments, providing enough time for the assessment of the market's reaction to the changes, and the experienced increased value.

Having in mind all these changes and the sensed paradigm shift, tourism stakeholders have to plan the viability of destination development for decades ahead. As the number of golf courses increases, golfers will be seeking for unique experiences. Slovenia has truly enormous potential to develop a sustainable golf destination as the country can offer natural and cultural beauties, unspoiled woods, virgin clear waters, excellent cuisine and wines, historical sites etc. Sustainable development with the protection of natural, cultural, social and environmental integrity is needed in order to present memorable experiences for tourists and to realise the expected economic goals. Yasarata, Altinay, Burns, and Okumus (2010) state the importance of understanding the society's political system and power structure, in order to understand the sustainable tourism policy development, planning and implementation. When designing the destination strategy, all the activities must be planned and coordinated in order to pursue the chosen vision. Well-designed and groomed golf courses will not significantly change the perception of tourist golfers. All the accompanying infrastructure and services, from the airport connections, free-time activities, organised trips and culinary events must be taken into account. Moreover, it would be extremely beneficial to organise at least one prominent competitive event of the highest rank per year, as it would boost tourists' awareness of potential tourist and place the golfing destination. Understanding the golfers' segments and managing their expectations could be of valuable help for local politicians, sport managers and tourism stakeholders, willing to turn the country into a well-known golf destination.

Regarding possible future research, we could recommend more deeply assessing differences among domestic and foreign golfers' attitudes; discovering the role of women's rising participation in choosing golf destinations; better understanding what attracts Chinese and Russian *nouveau riche* to golf destinations; analysing the causes that motivate golfers to travel longer distances to play golf, analysing sustainable and

environmental issues of golf tourism etc. Another important issue, which could not be addressed in this paper due to the given data, is that domestic golfers should be divided into two groups: (1) local or one-day players and (2) domestic tourists. The problem is in the basic definition of the 'tourist' so we could not say if members of the first group could be defined as tourists at all. As Janeš and Faganel (2013) also suggest, a quantitative approach in research is useful in combination with a qualitative approach, which is a common practice in determining the causal relations, so further studies might combine different research methods to get a better insight into golfers' motivations.

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