

THE EVALUATION OF THE ROLE AND IMPORTANCE OF SAFETY AND RISKS IN THE TRAVEL ATTITUDES OF THE HUNGARIAN TOURISTS

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Abstract

It is generally known that the aspects and methods of consumer decisions change time to time that is why the decision makers and researchers need to survey and understand these continuously altering aspects in order to better understand the processes of the market. The topic of safety appeared with a more highlighted role only recently, nevertheless it was always present in the destination choosing process. Today this issue is gaining special significance since due to the global travel opportunities tourism reached such regions where the analysis of safety became increasingly relevant, even taking it into consideration as a primary aspect. The participants of mass tourism do not desire risks but much more prefer predictability, so safety by all means turns to be elementary for them. We know that the consumer decisions are complex but after all can be expedient to concentrate on and survey only one component. In our study we survey how much the different dimensions of safety determine the travel decisions of the Hungarian population, in what segments do they play a highlighted role and for what groups do they become only an umpteenth issue. The basis of our work is the database of our representative national survey carried out in 2018 among the adult population between the age 15-74.

Keywords: tourism, safety, travel habits, consumer attitudes, Hungary, representative survey

Absztrakt

Tudjuk, hogy a fogyasztói döntések szempontjai, meghozatalának módjai időről időre változnak, ezért a döntéshozóknak, kutatóknak is új és újabb kérdéseket kell megvizsgálniuk, hogy releváns megállapításokat tehessenek. A biztonság kérdésköre nem túl régen jelent meg fokozottabb fontossággal a döntési szempontok között, bár mindig is jelen volt a desztináció választásban. Abból a szempontból nyert azonban ma más jelentőséget ez a kérdéskör, hogy napjainkban a turizmussal egyre több olyan térség érhető el a szélesebb célközönség számára is, amelyek esetében relevánssá válik a biztonság vizsgálata, akár azt elsődleges szempontként kezelve. A tömegturizmus kedvelői nem vágnak kockázatra, sokkal inkább preferálják a kiszámíthatóságot, így számukra alapvető a biztonság. Tudjuk, hogy a vásárlási döntések komplexek, nem csupán egy tényező határozza meg a kimenetet, mégis célszerű időnként egy összetevőre koncentrálni, az arra vonatkozó kérdéseket feltenni. Tanulmányunkban azt vizsgáljuk, mennyiben határozzák meg a magyar lakosság döntéseit a biztonság különböző területei, milyen szegmensek esetében játszanak ezek kiemelt szerepet, és milyen arányú csoportok számára válnak sokadlagos kérdéssé. Munkánk alapja egy 2018-ban végzett országos, a felnőtt 15-74 éves lakosságra reprezentatív online megkérdezés adatbázisa. Ennek elemzésével jutunk eredményekhez.

Kulcsszavak: turizmus, biztonság, utazási szokások, Magyarország, reprezentatív felmérés

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Introduction, objectives

One of the most important foundations in the complex system of tourism is the presence of safety and security, which concept of course includes an extremely broad range of issues from natural disasters, financial processes and terrorism to the safety of the accommodations or transportation (HALL, C. M. et al 2003). Thus, concerning today's tourism sector, safety and security does not necessarily "only" raise the issues determined by terrorism or different conflict zones but has a role that requires a much more complex approach (BUJDOSÓ, Z. – GYÖRKI, M. 2011, CUI, F. et al 2016, PÉTER, E. et al 2019, SÖNMEZ – GRAEFE 1998). This broad and comprehensive relationship system raises one of the most problematic questions and processes of the tourism sector covering the topics of tourism and risks, tourism and security (DÁVID, L. ET AL 2007, TARLOW, P. E. 2014).

The world market of tourism has become a contiguous and interdependent system by now, in which both demand and supply side have gone through considerable changes both as regards space and time, in quantitative and qualitative components alike (HALL, C. M. 2004, GONDA T. et al 2018, LENGYEL, 2004, MARTON G. et al 2016). Newer and newer areas are integrated into international and domestic tourism as well, and in the intensifying competition only those attractions, destinations or touristic actors can stay alive which, besides meeting the higher and higher expectations of quality, can also offer safety and security and minimise the risks for tourists in the complex system of the travel industry (GSTAETTNER, A. M. et al 2017, SCOTT – LAWS – PRIDEAUX (ed.) 2010).

With digitalisation and with the expansion of digital culture the physically remote consumers can be connected with each other influencing each other's decisions and evaluations as well (CSAPÓ J. et al 2019). The increase of the importance of the sharing economy presupposes the presence of reliance which is the positive interpretation of the issue of safety. The media continuously provides a vast amount of content motivating people to move and on the other hand it mediates the news about different forms of danger as well. Taking all the mentioned aspects into consideration, at present numerous trends promote the continuous increase of international tourism (UNWTO 2019). For the actors of tourism, safety always played an important role among the decision factors, but after all in the earlier decades the majority visited well maintained and closer destinations, so safety was not a real issue since the circumstances were more or less calculable. Among those consumers where safety was even so an important topic, security was replaced by seeking for experiences and curiosity. Today, in the world of endless choices, the individual has to deal deliberately with the topic of safety, so the consumers need to evaluate the aspects of security in the decision making process. On the one hand this evaluation can be carried out in connection with a destination in general, which is frequently supported by stereotypes, and on the other hand the probably anticipatory opportunity and appearance of the risks should be balanced, which is a harder task even so when prices become really attractive in the destinations with a more ambiguous status.

Realising the practical and scientific importance of the topic, the objective of the present study is to reveal the attitudes of the Hungarian population in connection with tourism and safety and introduce the most important primary findings based on a representative survey.

1. Research methods

The authors' representative survey was generally investigating the tourism consumption habits of the Hungarian population covering altogether 8 subtopics such as non-tourism and virtual tourism, place marketing, tourism and safety, tourism, life quality and happiness, consciousness and responsible behavior, beloved activities during the holidays, local products and eco-consciousness during the travel activities. These areas were investigated by using internationally accepted scale values (CSAPÓ ET AL. 2018).

The results were received by using different methods, such as a personal and an online representative national survey and focus group discussions as well. During April and May 2018 the online questionnaires were filled by a 1081 sample in order to survey the behavior and the opinion of the Hungarian population in several topics related to tourism such as aging, healthcare innovations, tourism, eating habits, cultural spare time and consumption, lifestyle.

The representative personal query was elaborated with a 2001-person sample, but its results are not used in the present paper. The research results of the focus group discussions were elaborated with content analysis and were compared with the results of the online survey.

The present study introduces the results received related to complex safety issues during the travel decision and the traveling. As mentioned earlier the personal inquiry was representative among the 15-74-year-old Hungarian citizens based on gender, age group, type of residence, education level, and the subjective adjudication of the level of personal income. The survey was representative for the geographical space of the country as well as considering the type of settlement. The elaboration of the results was carried out in two phases: first, we introduced the primary (frequency) analyses which were followed by the demographic background analyses. During this, the authors surveyed with statistical methods (using SPSS program) whether there were justifiable (significant) alterations in the answers of certain demographic groups or not. The variables involved in the survey were: gender, generations, type of residence, education level, and the subjective adjudication of the level of personal income.

2. Literature survey

In recent decades one of the new centres of gravity in economy has been the spectacular growth of the service sector within the global and national economies, including the strengthening of the role of tourism as well (HALL, C.M. 2004, MEYER, M. 2011, LEW, C.M. – HALL, C.M. – TIMOTHY, D., 2008, MICHALKÓ, G. 2010). We also have to highlight, furthermore, that the regional embeddedness of tourism, the presence of locality is very important, as the overwhelming majority of the attractions of any time is built on the values of a respective place, region or natural landscape (MICHALKÓ, G. 2012).

Additionally, by the construction of an adequate infra- and suprastructure for the tourism supply of a region or place, tourism also becomes the maker of the territorial processes, as these processes affect, among other things, settlement structure, employment, the development of the regional connections, the development of the environment, and they also impact lifestyle and quality of life (HALL, C. M. et al 2003). These socio-economic and environmental features may also bear risks factors in themselves, which of course will clearly influence tourists in their travel decisions (BAYRAMOV E. – AGÁRDI A. 2018, MAWBY 2000, TARLOW, P.E. 2014, WILLIAMS, A. M. – BALÁŽ, V. 2013).

Looking at the issue of safety, security and risks, it should be emphasised that the tourism destinations might be greatly influenced by these aspects, so the spatial movements of tourists can be transformed, new destinations can appear in the maps of travellers and formerly renowned destinations may be skipped from the lists of travellers, which of course significantly impacts socio-economic processes as well (TÖRÓCSIK – CSAPÓ, 2018, WILKS – PENDERGAST – LEGGAT (eds.) (2011). It becomes natural that we have to take it into consideration that due to the different forms of risks the spatial distribution of the tourists could change and destinations can disappear from the possible places to be visited (or of course new destinations can emerge) (PIZAMMANSFELD, 2006, YUZHANIN, S. – FISHER, D. 2016).

The presence of the issue of security and risk, however, strongly influences not only spatial processes but also consumer behaviour. As regards the international and domestic trends influencing the tourism industry of our age, the transition of the behaviour of the consumers, in this case namely the tourists, and the new tendencies of this change have an ever increasing significance in the development and transformation of tourism, which is especially true when we take the factors of safety and security into consideration (BOGÁROMI – MALOTA 2017). The raising of the issue of fears, risks, safety and security is becoming an issue that must not be neglected, and these topics may include terror threats, harassment or simply having unpleasant experiences. There are safety and security issues and travel risks that tourism businesses on their own are unable to handle, but there are also problems that can be eliminated on their own, with an adequate level of empathy. It becomes more and more typical for tourists to plan and often even experience their journeys on their own (solo travel) (BIANCHI, 2016, HEIMTUN – ABELSEN, 2014). For this it is of utmost importance to know certain points and places where they are protected, eliminating their potential fears as soon as in the planning phase of tourism planning and development (TÖRŐCSIK M. – JAKOPÁNECZ E., 2011).

As regards to Hungarian circumstances, it must be stressed that because tourism plays an important role in the socio-economic life, and also in the international image of the country, the authors believe that it is of special importance, experiencing and examining the accelerated economic and social processes of our age, to define the safety and security policy issues impacting the tourism sector. Recognising this trend, the Hungarian state frequently emphasises at different political and professional forums that Hungary has outstandingly good positions as regards to security and risks, which is also a selected issue in the National Tourism Development Strategy 2030 as this is exactly one of the topics analysed in the document among the major global trends and challenges of the future. The strategy mentions the issue of safety and security altogether 26 times, emphasising on the one hand that Hungary is a safe destination, and on the other hand, the fact that security plays an increasing role in the travel decisions, and is/may be given selective attention when making decisions on the venues of world events (MAGYAR TURISZTIKAI ÜGYNÖKSÉG 2017).

3. Results

During the online questionnaire survey, in the first group of questions, we were asking the respondents about what role safety plays during their travel (Figure 1). Based on the answers, the majority of the respondents do not use or download any special applications, which would make their journey easier or safer, at all (43%, 467 respondents). At this question the ratio of the ones less agreeing was rather high (value 2 was given by 16%, value 3 by 18%). Nevertheless 8% of all the respondents totally agree with the statement, so they download special applications during their travel in order to make their holidays easier and safer.

At the same time the respondents, during their travels, orientate themselves at a high extent about the safety issues of the target destination beforehand since most of them (31%, 332 persons) completely agreed with the statement but the ones giving value 3 and 4 were also high in number (23 and 28%). So before their travels only a very few amount of the respondents (6%, 65 persons) will not inform themselves about the safety issues of the target destination.

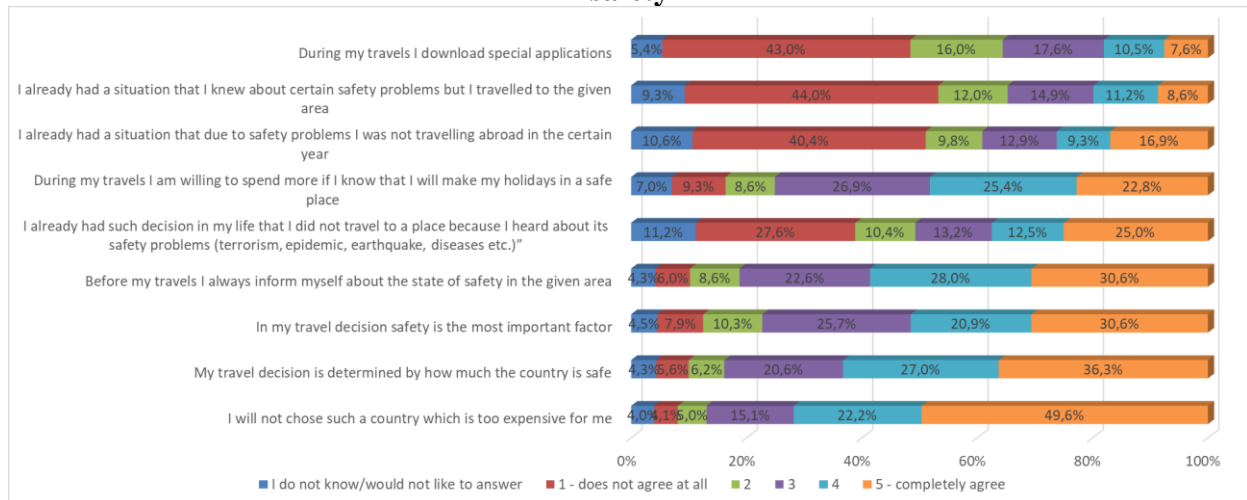
We detected similar ratios taking into consideration the answers related to how the travel decision of the respondents are influenced by the fact whether the country to be visited is safe or not. Most of the respondents (36%, 394 persons) completely agreed with the statement but the ones giving values 3 and 4 was also high (21 and 27%). Only a few of the respondents (6%, 61 persons) are not influenced at all by the safety level of the destination country.

In the followings we were curious whether there were any occasions concerning the respondents when they did not travel to a place because they heard about a safety problem there. Besides the fact that the ratio of the ones who did not want to answer was higher by 4-5%, the greatest group of the respondents (28%, 300 persons) did not agree with the statement at all, so there was no such case or example in their life when their certain travel was postponed because of any safety issues at the target destination. The second greatest group of the respondents was just the opposite, since 25% agreed that it happened in their life that due to a safety issue they did not travel to a certain region. The ones answering rather uncertain was quite low (for value 2 10%, for value 3 and 4 13%).

A little bit inverting the previous question in the followings we asked whether there were any situation for the respondents when they knew about a certain safety problem at the target destination but despite this they did travel there. The ones giving no answer was rather high here as well (9%), but the greatest proportion (44%, 477 persons) did not agree with this statement at all, so if they knew about any safety problems concerning the target region they decided not to travel there. On the contrary, there was 9% of the respondents clearly stating that they travelled to a destination even when they knew that there are some safety problems there.

The next question was asking whether there were any occasions for the respondents when due to safety issues they did not travel to abroad at that certain year. The authors again received a high ratio of non-responders here (11%, 115 persons), and the greatest proportion of the respondents (40%, 439 persons) had no such case experienced. On the contrary we registered 17% (184 person) of the respondents where such action was unequivocally detected.

Figure 1: The results for the different statements including the aspects of tourism and safety



Source: own editing

For the greatest group of the respondents (30%, 332 persons) the topic of safety is the most important concerning their travel decision, and the ones who completely refuse safety are only 8% (86 persons). The ratio of the uncertain respondents was rather high at this topic since 21% (227 persons) rather agreed (value 4) and 26% (279 persons) rather disagreed. At the last question of this topic the medium values became strong as well, since during their travels 23% (247 persons) of the respondents were willing to spend more if they knew that they will have their holidays in a safe place or destination. Only 9% (101 persons) disagreed totally with this statement. The two decisive group was the ones rather agreeing (276 persons, so 25% giving value 4) and giving medium values (27% 292 persons).

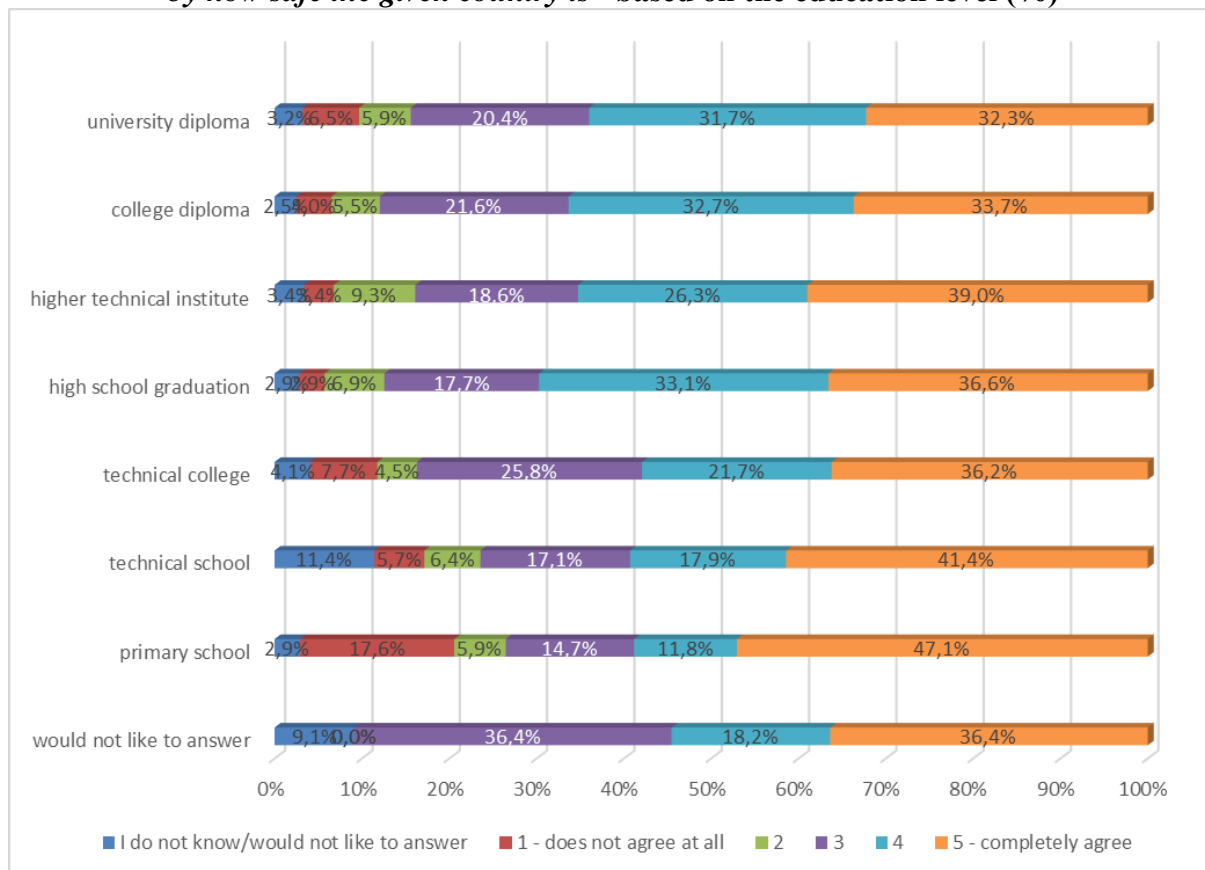
During the demographical background analysis we took into consideration whether there are any significant differences among the different age groups based on the answers of the questions. The background analysis had been carried out based on 5 variables (gender, generations, settlement type of the dwelling place, education level and the subjective evaluation of the income). We only publish those results in this paper which show statistically significant alterations.

The level of concordance for the statement, “in my travel decision the most important factor is safety”, is the highest among the lower educated level group and, with a continuous decrease, the lowest at the most highly educated group of respondents. Such decrease could be demonstrated for the statement “during my travels I am willing to pay more if I know that I will make my holidays in a safe place or destination”. This statement (and also another one “My travel decision is determined by how safe the given country is”) was in concordance again the highest among the least educated group of respondents and, with a continuous decrease, the least accepted by the highly educated respondents (Figure 2).

In the majority of the statements given in the questionnaire no correspondence could be detected between the answers and the differences in income except for the statement “I already had a situation that I knew about safety problems but after all I travelled to the certain destination” where the least accepting group of respondents were the extremely well-off ones and the most agreeing ones were those having the least material essentials.

Parallel with the decrease of the income the respondents more and more agreed with the statement “I already had such situation in my life when I was not travelling abroad due to safety problems”. As a limitation to our results we also have to add that the respondents with lower income might felt some parity pressure as well, that is why their opinion in many cases is contradictory to the answers which one might expect based on their income positions.

Figure 2: The distribution of the answers for the statement “My travel decision is determined by how safe the given country is” based on the education level (%)



Source: own editing

Taking into consideration the gender differences, women agreed with the statement, “My travel decision is determined by how safe the given country is” 10% more than men. Although only with a 5% difference, but women accepted more the statement, “I already had such decision in my life that I did not travel to a place because I heard about its safety problems (terrorism, epidemic, earthquake, diseases etc.)” as well.

The measure of rejection (did not agree) was 13% higher in the case of women for the statement “I already had a situation that I knew about certain safety problems but I travelled to the given area”. On the other hand women agreed more – although only with a 5% difference – with the statement “I already had a situation that due to safety problems I was not travelling abroad in the certain year”. Women also agreed with the statement, “In my travel decision safety is the most important factor” and “During my travels I am willing to spend more if I know that I will make my holidays in a safe place” more than men.

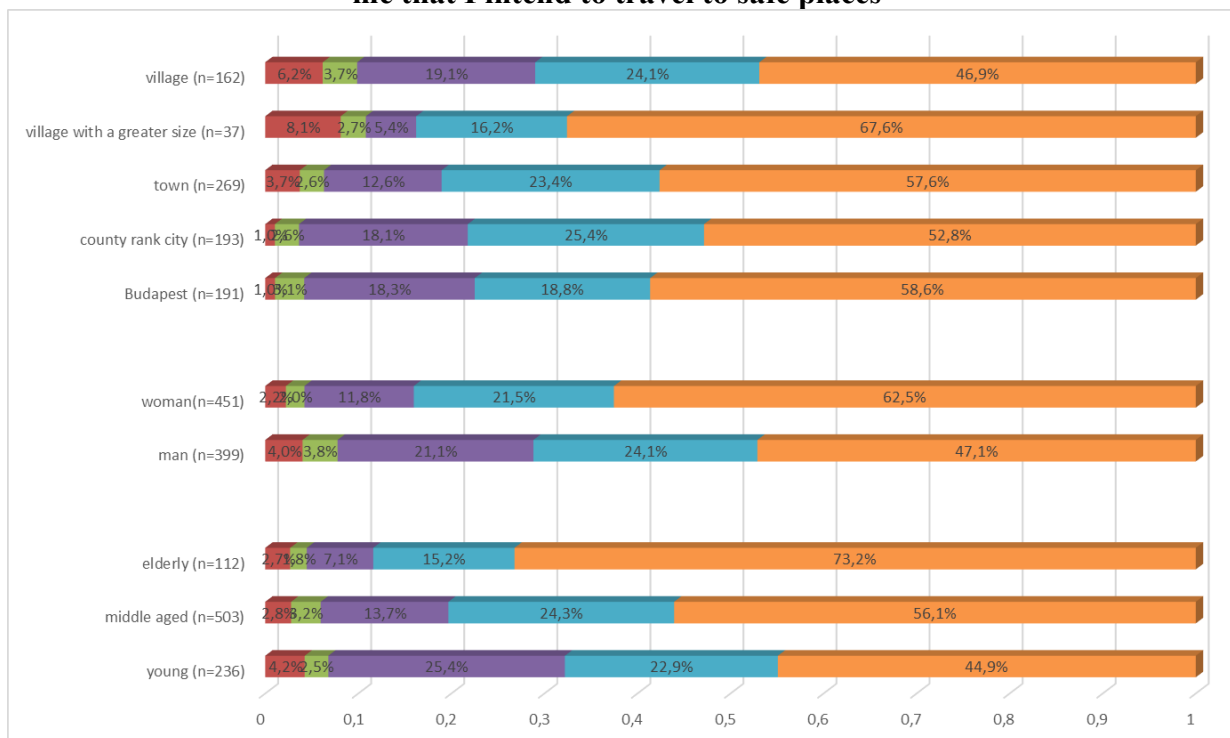
According to the different age groups, special applications are most often downloaded by the younger generations and least often by the elderly generation. The young generation agreed the least with the statement, “I will not chose such a country which is too expensive for me” although with no great difference compared to other generations.

Based on the online questionnaire we can ascertain that preferring the safer target destination is more characteristic to women as long as more than 60% of the women respondents declared that safety is very important during their travels. On the opposite, only 47% of men agreed completely with preferring a safer target destination during their travels.

Based on the different type of settlements mostly the dwellers of the greater sized villages are willing to travel to safer places (68%); this ratio is fewer and nearly the same among the ones living in the capital, greater cities or smaller towns (53-58%) (Figure 3.).

Based on age, according to our preliminary expectations, the older is someone the more they are characterised by the necessity towards safer tourism destinations and vice versa, the younger are the least characterised to travel to safe places (Figure 3.).

Figure 3: The background analysis of the statement “It is more and more characteristic of me that I intend to travel to safe places”



Source: own editing

4. Summary, conclusions

The issue of safety today become more and more important due to numerous recent trends. Globalisation changes the consumers' way of thinking approximating distant places and events and the global processes naturally influence the behaviour of the Hungarian population as well. In case of the target destinations the visiting of remote places becomes more and more real for the travellers, it seems that – due to the development of transport as well – there is no border for satisfying the needs and desires. Nevertheless, in case of the destinations safety becomes increasingly important.

In the present study the authors surveyed the most recent travel attitudes of the Hungarian population with the help of a representative survey related to the complex issue of tourism and safety which was expanded by the research of the differences based on age, gender, income differences, dwelling place and level of education.

Taking into consideration the different motivations in the travel decisions, the topic of safety is the most important for the greatest group of the respondents (30%, 332 persons) and the ones totally refusing the importance of security is only 8% (86 persons). Our research demonstrated that during the decision making process it is important to know for the travellers whether the given country is safe or not. Most of them (36%, 394 persons) completely agreed that they would like to travel to a safe country but the ones giving values 3 and 4 were high as well (21% and 27%). The greatest majority of the respondents do not use or download any specific applications which would help their travels, only 8% answered to do it so. The greatest group of the respondents (28%, 300 persons) declared that there was no such occasion during their travels when they refused to travel somewhere because of safety issues and problems. The second greatest multitude were the ones providing a completely opposite answer, since 25% of them declared that it already happened that they were not travelling to a place due to safety reasons. Of course it would further help us in the understanding of these situations if we knew the exact reasons and settings but in this stage our questionnaire was revealing the attitudes of the travellers.

We also asked if there were occasions in the life of the respondents when they knew about a certain safety issue at the chosen destination but after all they travelled there. In this case 9% (94) said that they travelled to a place nevertheless they knew about some safety problem there. For our next question the greatest group of the respondents (40%, 439 persons) answered that there were no such situation in their life at all when they were not travelling abroad because of hearing about certain safety issues in foreign countries. On the contrary the ones who already definitely experienced such situation was 17% (184 persons).

Besides the above mentioned we also carried out demographic background analyses in terms of the relationship between the travel decisions and safety. It is an unambiguous result that women react to this topic more sensibly than men showing characteristic differences between the genders. We also detected that this topic is a more important aspect for the lower educated respondents than the ones more highly educated.

If we take into consideration the topic of generations and safety then during our investigations it became clear that the younger are braver in their travel decisions, so the need for travelling to safe places was more important for the older respondents.

For the further direction of the research, after getting to know the attitudes of the travellers in their travel decisions towards tourism and safety, it would be important to get to know and understand the exact cases, places and reasons that are connected to the risks of travelling in order to better understand this complex system. This better understanding would help travellers, decision makers, and market actors to improve the overall system of tourism.

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