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## SPORT, LEISURE & TOURISM | RESEARCH ARTICLE

# How important is a bike park visit for the overall tourist destination experience?

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**Abstract:** Tourism has become a highly competitive sector, forcing destinations to reinvent and constantly enhance extraordinary experiences in accordance with their miscellaneous destination characteristics, whilst considering mountain biking as a growing phenomenon. This study, therefore, aims at providing a general profile of bike park visitors and at identifying key success factors for a bike park in the context of a destination. A quantitative survey (n = 325) was conducted in a cross-sectional design. The results suggest differing types of visitors with diversified perceptions of a bike park's key success factors related to the overall perception of sojourn satisfaction. This research extends the literature by (1) shedding light on a booming phenomenon and revealing profiles of bike-park tourists, (2) pointing out key success factors of a bike park and (3) providing information about the perceptions of a bike park related to the overall tourism destination.

**Subjects:** Sports and Leisure; Sport and Exercise Science; Physical Activity and Health; Tourism; Niche Tourism; SportTourism

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

As the tourism industry is of major importance for the State of Tyrol, Austria, the research foci are manifold, however, interconnected by the destination. The main research deals with sports tourism and its distinctive feature in competition to other destination, not necessarily alpine regions, but also beach holidays as the accessibility continuously rises. Furthermore, the development of a sports portfolio in alpine regions is a focus of research, issuing the various effects of physical activity in holiday on subjective well-being and its sustainability, sleeping quality, customer experience, customer satisfaction, etc., compromising the mobility of tourists in a holiday region versus in daily routine and its conjunction to health aspects, determining physical activity as a major driver in holiday decision-making, surveying impacts of sports events and its image on the destination as well as its fit to the overall destination image. Hence, gained data shall not only describe the importance of physical activity in tourism but also constitute a platform for further development of touristic concerns.

### PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Tourism represents a highly competitive economic sector, which also puts alpine tourism destinations under pressure to constantly enhance their offering portfolio to remain present and attractive on the tourism market. Considering mountain biking as a growing phenomenon, especially in alpine tourism, this could constitute a distinctive feature against other tourism destinations, which are not equipped with the same characteristics. This research project, therefore, identified key success factors for a bike park in the context of a destination. The results suggest differing types of visitors with diversified perceptions of a bike park's key success factors related to the overall perception of sojourn satisfaction. This research essentially extends the public interest by (1) shedding light on a booming phenomenon and revealing profiles of bike-park tourists, (2) pointing out key success factors of a bike park and (3) providing information about the perceptions of a bike park related to the overall tourism destination.

**Keywords: sports tourism; tourist satisfaction; destination perception; bikepark; destination marketing**

## 1. Introduction

The general public has been experiencing physical activity and sports in a different way in recent years, tending towards a more informal and lifestyle-orientated way of participation (Gilchrist & Wheaton, 2017), such as riding a bicycle or even mountain biking. Such activities have gained momentum, not only for complex health-related reasons (Hjalager, 2002, 2015; Lamont, 2009) but also as a means of increasing the economic impact of cycling tourism (Freeman & Thomlinson, 2014; MacDermid, 2016).

A destination's degree of reliance on tourism drives its ambition for continuous touristic advancements (Claveria & Poluzzi, 2017), justifying innovations, which have the overall purpose to (re-)position tourist regions for long-term and economic reasons (Chen & Lee, 2017). However, the destination concept needs to be dynamic and underpinned by a borderless approach, supporting the tourists' cross-sectoral experiences in the definition of a tourist destination (Rodriguez-Giron & Vanneste, 2018). For this purpose, a destination's tourist attractions are often communicated as theatrical settings (Edensor, 2001).

As a natural consequence of the brisk upswing in bicycle tourism, destination marketers have been promoting bicycle destinations and implementing various other strategies to substantiate the importance of the bicycle tourism industry (Lee, 2014; Lee, Chen, & Huang, 2014). The bike tourism industry is characterised by a steady upward trend in Austria; hence, one has to differentiate between the different ways in which bicycles are utilised (Probstl-Haider, Lund-Durlacher, Antonschmidt, & Hodl, 2018). Consequently, mountain biking is actively being pushed as a means of promoting rural tourism (Chen & Lee, 2017), opening a new, much broader field of holiday activities—particularly in summer tourism. Implementing mountain theme parks such as bike parks seems to be an effective way of enhancing summer tourism and consequently levelling the difference between winter and summer tourism in the Austrian Alps. According to Taylor (2010), the number of purpose-built mountain biking sites increases participation as well as purpose-specific reasons for travel. However, considerations relating to the provision of innovative and alternative tourist attractions, like mountain-bike parks, raise the demand for key success factors, especially against the background of multifaceted destination offerings and the heterogeneous character of tourists. Although there is an entire body of literature on satisfaction, little attention has so far been paid to the dependence between certain destination characteristics and overall satisfaction levels (Bernini & Cagnone, 2014).

Consequently, the current study aims at (1) building general information on the profile of mountain bike-park tourists, (2) providing information on the satisfaction levels of tourists, (3) proving differences between bike-park tourists and (4) determining the key success factors and the importance of bike-park attributes based on tourists' perceptions of their sojourn.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Phenomenon of bicycle tourism

Bicycle tourism has recently attracted intensified attention as decision-makers increasingly show an awareness of the economic potential of cycling and its supporting infrastructures (Lamont, 2009). In its definition, bicycle tourism is characterised by six features (Lumsdon, 1996; Ritchie, 1998): absence from home, a single day as minimum travel time, a non-competitive orientation, cycling as the main purpose of travel, a focus on active behaviour and finally, a recreational background. These considerations do not, however, include holidays where cycling is perceived as an integral part of the experience, regardless of motivational background, type of cycling interest (road cycling, mountain biking, etc.) or length of stay, etc. (Douglas, Douglas, & Derrett, 2001; Lamont, 2009).

Continued interest in bicycle tourism has persuaded destination marketers, regional governments and other related industries to reflect upon their tourism strategies (Lee, 2014; Lee et al., 2014). Co-production is the main feature of tourism destinations, when referring to strategies and development. This necessitates a large network that involves the supply of a large number of stakeholders (Haugland, Ness, Grønseth, & Aarstad, 2011). Ritchie and Hall (1999) see bicycle tourism as an opportunity to support diversification as well as economies on a regional level.

Though bicycle tourism is seen as a specific part of general tourism, the flipside allows the consideration of tourist destination features (Lamont, 2009; Lee, 2016), such as attractions, access, amenities or ancillary services (Cooper, Fletcher, Gilbert, & Wanhill, 1993). The sum of these attributes constitutes activities and experiences in general tourism and bicycle tourism, respectively (Han, Meng, & Kim, 2017; Lee, 2014). The addressed qualities are crucial for tourism destinations, whereby tourism attractions trigger the most tourist cycling experiences in a particular region in comparison with other tourist destinations (Han et al., 2017). At this point, we have to recall the co-productive character of touristic supply, which thrives on variety (Haugland et al., 2011).

## **2.2. Satisfaction & key success factors in stakeholders' destination perspective**

The quality of a tourism destination's products and services strongly influences overall tourist satisfaction within the destination (Bigovic & Prašnikar, 2015; Chi & Qu, 2009). Satisfaction can be seen as the "judgement of a product/service feature or the product or service itself, [...] providing a pleasurable level of consumption-related fulfillment, including levels of under- or over-fulfillment" (Oliver, 1997, p. 13). Tourist satisfaction with a destination as well as the quality of products and services is constituted by an individual's perspective of the destination (Kotler, Bowen, & Makens, 1996). The perception of a destination is a construct consisting of the beliefs, ideas, and impressions an individual holds about attributes and/or activities available at a specific destination (Lin, Morais, Kerstetter, & Hou, 2007; Wang & Hsu, 2010). The sum of an individual's beliefs, ideas, and impressions comes together within the overall satisfaction with a specific destination. However, a lot of scholarly literature makes a distinction between several different models of customer/tourist satisfaction. According to the expectancy-disconfirmation model (Oliver, 1980, 1997, 1999), tourists are considered as satisfied if their expectations and actual perceptions are met by impressions they gathered during a holiday. This model is accompanied by some cognitive disputes, stating the fact that perceptions are linked to expectations (Huang, Hsu, & Chan, 2010; Huang, Weiler, & Assaker, 2015). Alegre and Garau (2011), on the other hand, applied the attribution model to measure customer satisfaction, primarily with respect to the evaluation of destination building aspects. The model can be criticised for the missing involvement of affective aspects, and for not considering the relative importance of components (Huang et al., 2015). A broader consideration of the evaluation of satisfaction is given by the cognitive-affective model (Del Bosque & Martin, 2008; Yoon & Uysal, 2005), which merges tourists' cognitions with their assigned affective perceptions. Consensus in literature (Alegre & Garau, 2011; de Nisco, Riviezzo, & Napolitano, 2015; Füller & Matzler, 2008; Vavra, 1997; Witell & Löfgren, 2007) exists to a great extent when considering the multidimensional nature of factors influencing satisfaction. These factors are generally grouped into the three-factor satisfaction model, revealing basic factors (mandatory requirements for satisfaction), important and unimportant performance factors (satisfaction contingent on attributed importance) and excitement factors (only cause satisfaction when met). The multi-sector picture of tourism triggered the multidimensional approach of overall tourist satisfaction, including multiple single attributes in the emergence of satisfaction (Bernini & Cagnone, 2014; Chi & Qu, 2009; Hsu, 2003). There are several research examples that take up this theory, supporting the assumption that subjective satisfaction with independent and unique attributes justifies overall satisfaction (Bernini & Cagnone, 2014; Chi & Qu, 2009). Therefore, a differentiated investigation into the effect of certain characteristics on overall satisfaction offers the opportunity to identify a destination's strengths and weaknesses (Kozak & Rimmington, 2000) and to guarantee sustainable development (Newsome, Rodger, Pearce, & Chan, 2017).

The tourists' personal background often does not receive enough attention in touristic considerations (McCabe, 2005), given the fact that several stakeholder groups within a community have different stakes (Easterling, 2005). "A stakeholder in an organization is any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives." (Freeman, 1984, p. 46). When these considerations are applied to tourism, the whole body of participators and their possible effects have to be taken into account. (Shani & Pizam, 2012). Thus, tourists do not necessarily share the same expectations, perceptions and experiences, nor do they attribute the same levels of explicit and implicit importance to certain characteristics. Consequently, information on tourist profiles is essential to (tourism) competitiveness (Preuss, Seguin, & O'Reilly, 2007). A certain scheme has already been established by the sports tourist classification of Dreyer (1995) and Freyer (2000). Commonly, sports tourists are distinguished by active and passive behaviour during a vacation (Hallmann, Kaplanidou, & Breuer, 2010), whereas Dreyer (1995) and Freyer (2000) distinguish sports tourists based on their motives for participating in sport. This classification identifies seven kinds of motivational background (sports tourists, sports-orientated tourists, competition or training tourists, event tourists, mentoring tourists, sports media representatives and sports memorial tourists) for engaging (actively or passively) in activities during a vacation. The typology of customers allows for a better assignment of key success factors based on motivational backgrounds and distinctive characteristics of tourists.

A convenient tool for exemplifying individual customer satisfaction levels and key success factors, based on the acceptance of the three-factor model, is the Importance-Performance Analysis (Martilla & James, 1977; Vavra, 1997), which proposes key success factors of touristic supplies by dividing importance and performance characteristics, emerging in the Dual Importance Grid (Matzler, Pechlaner, & Siller, 2001; Vavra, 1997).

The importance grid (see Figure 1) is a measurement tool, opposing explicit (self-stated and specified by the customer) and implicit (indirectly derived) importance levels attributed to certain characteristics of a product or service. The four quadrants are derived by utilising mean values of implicit and explicit importance levels as separator lines. This approach is mostly used in empirical research to exemplify characteristics of a service or product which are seen as excitement, important or unimportant performance and basic factors.

### 3. Materials and methods

#### 3.1. Contextual background

In 2013, the region of Serfaus-Fiss-Ladis (Tyrol, Austria) diversified its tourism supply portfolio by building a bike park. In doing so, the destination met the growing demand for product and tourism diversification (Benur & Bramwell, 2015) by taking an international approach. Scientific research on mountain bike playgrounds in the context of tourism is still in its infancy (Freeman & Thomlinson, 2014). Furthermore, no information is available on the importance of bike parks in the overall perception of a destination. This information underlines the necessity of the study in hand, which also provides additional value for the tourism industry.

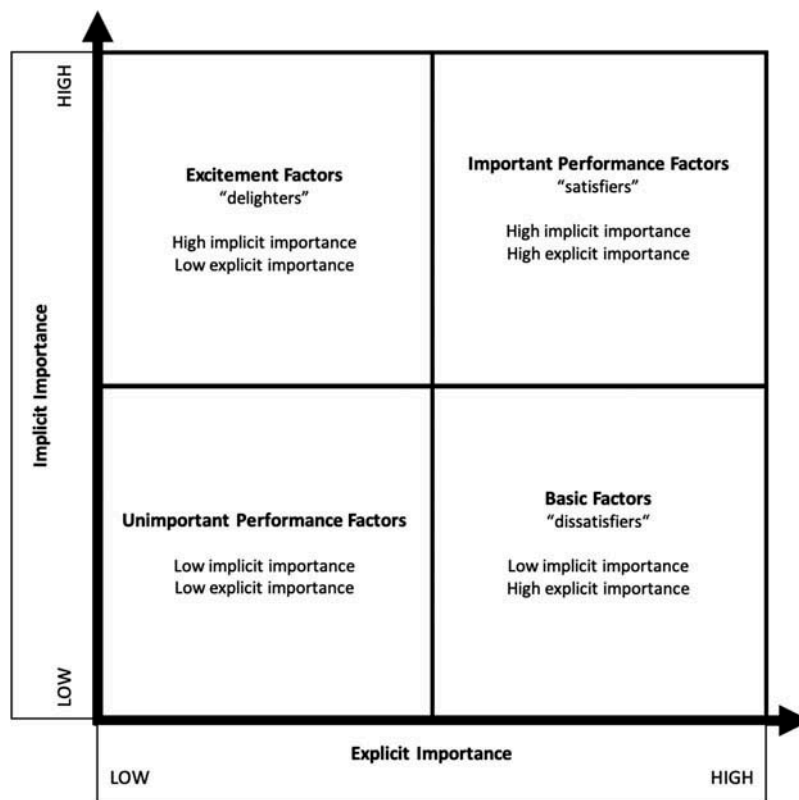
#### 3.2. Study design

The present study utilised a quantitative approach in a bike park setting by surveying bike park tourists at the bike park in the Austrian Alps with a paper-and-pencil questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of five parts, socio-demographic parameters, general information (type of bike tourist, bike skills, bike experience, etc.), information about the sojourn (the length of stay, expenditure, etc.) and subjective satisfaction levels.

#### 3.3. Procedure

The study was carried out during the period from August 2015 until October 2015 at the entrance to a bike park in the Austrian Alps on varying days of the week to secure a preferably heterogenic sample. The respondents were informed about the background and purpose of the study a priori

Figure 1. Importance grid based on Vavra (1997, p.385).



and were guided through the questionnaire to solve possible dubieties during its completion. The study at hand was conducted according to the "ethical guidelines for surveys" approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the Department of Sport Science as well as the Board for Ethical Issues at the University of Innsbruck.

### 3.4. Sample

In total, 325 persons were interviewed throughout the period of the survey; this number comprises visitors with a touristic background and excludes residents. Of these, 80.4% were male ( $n = 250$ ) and 19.6% were female ( $n = 61$ ); in addition, 72.0% were sports tourists ( $n = 234$ ) and 28% were sports-orientated tourists ( $n = 91$ ). The minimum and maximum ages were 11 years and 57 years, resulting in an average age of 29.0 (7.8) years.

### 3.5. Measurements

Sociodemographic data assessed included information about gender, age, level of education, income, occupation, origin and level of physical activity.

General information concerned the type of (sports) tourist (Dreyer, 1995; Freyer, 2000), the type of bike owned or rented, the cycling experience, preferred bike parks in Europe, expenditure (for safety equipment as well as biking gear) and overall spending behaviour during the sojourn.

Information about the sojourn itself focused on the length of stay as well as the type of accommodation.

The study in hand applied 16 given characteristics according to Freeman and Thomlinson (2014), which were further extended by characteristics from Matzler et al. (2001). Those attributes were processed further based on the methodological approach of the importance grid (Martilla & James,

1977; Vavra, 1977). Information on satisfaction levels was assessed by a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from totally satisfied (=5) to totally dissatisfied (=1) for satisfaction levels and from totally important (=5) to totally unimportant (=1) for importance levels of attributes.

### 3.6. Statistical analysis

All statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS v. 24.0 (IBM Statistics, IL, United States). With respect to Research Question 1, a series of descriptive measures was applied to demonstrate the characteristics of bike-park tourists. However, based on the theory of Dreyer (1995) and Freyer (2000), differences could only be displayed for sports tourists and sports-orientated tourists due to the subjective allocation. To show differences between groups, unpaired t-tests or non-parametric tests were applied where the sample showed standard distribution. As regards Research Question 3, implicit importance levels were evaluated by correlating (Spearman-Correlation) single satisfaction levels with the overall satisfaction level of the whole sojourn at the destination, and explicit importance levels were evaluated by providing the mean value of the single importance ratings of the attributes. The level of significance was set at  $p < 0.05$  with additional information about the effect sizes (Eta-squared). Unless otherwise stated, data are presented as mean values (MV) with standard deviation (SD) or relative frequencies (%).

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Demographic profile

An aim of this paper is to describe the profile of the clientele visiting the bike park. The socio-demographic background of the polled bike-park tourists shows that about 90% of them were from Germany (50%) and Austria (40%). Additionally, some guests came from Switzerland, Italy and the Netherlands, totalling about 10% of all entrants.

The majority of visitors (94.2%) arrived by car, followed by other means of transport (2.7%), bus (1.7%) or train (1.4%). Most of the bike-park tourists travelled in groups of two (30.9%); 18.8% of the interviewed visitors travelled in groups of three as well as four, 11.5% in groups of five, 12.8% in groups of more than five and some people arrived on their own (7.5%). Furthermore, the greatest percentage of visitors (90.3%) stated that they had brought their own bike, while 9.7% of them had borrowed or rented a bike on site.

Usually, the respondents bought a day ticket (55.3%), despite 21% of them having the Gravity Card, which allows cyclists to visit 16 bike parks spread all over Europe. Nearly 10% of visitors purchased a half-day ticket to enter the bike park and another 5% had a three- or two-day ticket.

As the high percentage of day tickets already indicates, the majority of bike-park visitors (27.7%) were day tourists, who did not stay overnight. 21.2% of the visitors spent the night in their cars by camping illegally, in contrast to 5.1% of visitors camping legally. Another 15.4% of the questionees stayed in a guest house and 7.7% of them privately rented a flat. The other visitors (17.1%) stayed in a hotel (5.8%  $\leq 3^*$  hotel; 11.3%  $> 3^*$  hotel) or with their families (4.8%).

The visitors to the bike park showed a high level of education with 28.5% having a university degree, 11.5% currently studying, 19.1% having finished their university-entrance diploma, 22.9% having completed more than ten years of school education and 18.1% having done less than ten years of school education.

The overview of the visitors' income revealed a relatively high monthly income after tax, with 8.9% of tourists having more than € 4,500, 11.5% between € 3,000 and € 4,499, 17.4% with € 2,250–€ 2,999, 33.3% with € 1,500–€ 2,249, 5.2% with € 1,000–€ 1,499, 5.2% with € 500–€ 999, and 10.7% of questionees with less than € 500 a month after tax.

#### 4.2. Comparison of tourist groups

A further investigation of the data, based on the stakeholder approach of Dreyer (1995) and Freyer (2000), revealed significant differences between the two tourist groups. For example, sports tourists ( $n = 224$ ;  $28.0 \pm 7.8$  years) and sports-orientated tourists ( $n = 87$ ;  $31.1 \pm 6.9$  years) show a highly significant difference in age ( $p < 0.01$ ).

The separation revealed significant differences in overnight stays as well as the length of the stay in the region. Sports-orientated tourists displayed a significantly higher number of overnight stays ( $2.8 \pm 3.7$  nights) than sports tourists ( $1.7 \pm 2.1$  nights;  $p < 0.05$ ) as well as a significantly higher number of days spent in the region around the bike park (sports-orientated tourists:  $3.8 \pm 3.7$  days; sports tourists:  $2.7 \pm 2.1$  days;  $p < 0.05$ ).

Moreover, these two groups also presented significantly ( $p < 0.05$ ) differing habits during their holidays. Sports-orientated tourists tended to stay in apartments for  $7.6 \pm 4.5$  days, compared to  $4.2 \pm 3.0$  days indicated by sports tourists. The analysis of accommodation costs per night showed significant differences ( $p < 0.05$ ) with respect to accommodation preferences: sports-orientated tourists spent €  $44.3 \pm 60.3$  on accommodation per day compared to €  $25.9 \pm 40.2$  per day spent by sports tourists.

Additionally, the comparison between the total expenses of each group revealed a trend with sports-orientated tourists spending (in total) €  $340.5 \pm 417.2$  and sports tourists spending €  $247.1 \pm 286.5$  on average, representing a non-significant difference ( $p = 0.08$ ) of about € 100. Expenses on equipment also showed a trend ( $p = 0.075$ ) akin to total expenses, with sports tourists spending €  $1,787.8 \pm 1,707.6$  and sports-orientated tourists spending €  $1,433.6 \pm 1,142.4$  on average, implying a general interest in mountain biking.

As far as the perception of their own skills is concerned, the two groups differed in a highly significant way ( $p < 0.05$ ) with sports tourists seeing themselves as better cyclists in the bike-park environment.

In general, sports tourists and sports-orientated tourists do not differ in terms of the bike-park satisfaction level ( $p > 0.05$ ), overall satisfaction level with the destination sojourn ( $p > 0.05$ ) as well as the probability of recommendation ( $p > 0.05$ ). Only the probability of revisiting the bike park differed between tourist groups ( $p < 0.05$ ), with sports tourists being more likely to revisit the bike park.

#### 4.3. Key success factors

Analysis of key success factors according to the importance-grid approach indicates several differences between sports tourists and sports-orientated tourists in their perception of the bike park in relation to their sojourn.

Both groups show rather differing levels of explicit importance and satisfaction, and significantly differing levels of implicit importance, i.e. arrival with a mean of 0.12 (sports tourists) compared to 0.001 (sports-orientated tourists), giving rise to differing quadrant boundaries within the successive dual-importance grid analysis. The detailed results are summarised in Table 1.

The allocation of characteristics in the respective quadrants of the importance grid can be seen in Table 2. Apparently, there are some similarities between the groups of bike-park tourists such as the excitement factor Accommodation, the important performance factors Atmosphere, Condition as well as Terrain, the unimportant performance factors Arrival, Activities and Child/Family-friendly as well as the basic factors Staff and Tracks. The most striking differences can be seen when comparing the implicit and explicit importance ratings of the Price-Performance-Ratio or the Rental/Service characteristics.

Although the attribute Accommodation is the only common excitement factor of both groups, its implicit importance is significantly higher for sports-orientated tourists, while the explicit

**Table 1. Overview of implicit and explicit importance levels as well as explicit satisfaction levels for each bike-park feature**

	Sports tourists (n = 234)				Sports-orientated tourists (n = 91)			
	Implicit importance	Explicit importance	Explicit performance	Implicit importance	Explicit importance	Implicit importance	Explicit performance	Explicit performance
<b>n = 325</b>								
<b>Implicit importance:</b>								
<b>Correlation (0–1)</b>								
<b>Explicit importance:</b>								
<b>1 Very unimportant–5 very important</b>								
<b>Explicit satisfaction:</b>								
<b>1 Very dissatisfied–5 very satisfied</b>								
Arrival	0.12	3.46	3.63	0.00	3.98	0.00	3.63	3.63
Staff	0.15	4.13	4.16	0.03	4.23	0.03	4.23	4.23
Size	0.01	4.41	3.80	0.13	3.98	0.13	3.91	3.91
Tracks	0.16	4.43	3.97	0.17	4.44	0.17	4.02	4.02
Condition	0.29	4.48	3.49	0.34	4.61	0.34	3.83	3.83
Terrain	0.24	4.18	4.01	0.30	4.11	0.30	4.18	4.18
Price–Performance-Ratio	0.22	4.21	3.46	0.03	4.32	0.03	3.61	3.61
Accommodation	0.21	3.74	3.58	0.55	3.85	0.55	3.79	3.79
Gastronomy	0.21	3.64	3.35	0.38	4.24	0.38	3.60	3.60
Bike Shop	0.12	3–98	3.72	0.03	3.90	0.03	3.90	3.90
Infrastructure	0.13	3.71	3.65	0.38	4.16	0.38	3.78	3.78
Activities	0.05	3.42	3.62	0.13	3.43	0.13	3.72	3.72
Amusement	0.14	3.88	3.81	0.27	3.94	0.27	3.89	3.89
Child/Family-friendly	0.08	2.89	3.30	0.06	3.61	0.06	3.79	3.79
Rental/Service	0.22	3.32	3.47	0.02	3.80	0.02	3.79	3.79
Atmosphere	0.38	4.33	4.21	0.25	4.37	0.25	4.24	4.24



**Table 2. Allocation of bike-park features based on importance grid analysis (Vavra, 1977)**

Quadrant	Sports tourists (n = 234)	Sports-orientated tourists (n = 91)
Quadrant I: Excitement factors	Accommodation	Accommodation
	Gastronomy	Amusement
	Rental/Service	
Quadrant II: Important performance factors	Amusement	Atmosphere
	Atmosphere	Condition
	Condition	Gastronomy
	Price-Performance Ratio	Infrastructure
	Terrain	Terrain
Quadrant III: Unimportant performance factors	Arrival	Arrival
	Activities	Activities
	Child/Family-friendly	Bike Shop
	Infrastructure	Child/Family-friendly
		Rental/Service
	Size	
Quadrant VI: Basic factors	Bike Shop	Price-Performance Ratio
	Size	Staff
	Staff	Tracks
	Tracks	

importance is not notably lower. Similar results can also be observed when looking at the important performance factors Atmosphere and Terrain, the unimportant performance factor Arrival as well as the basic factor Bike Shop. These bike-park features show quite similar explicit importance levels, but differ significantly in implicit importance levels.

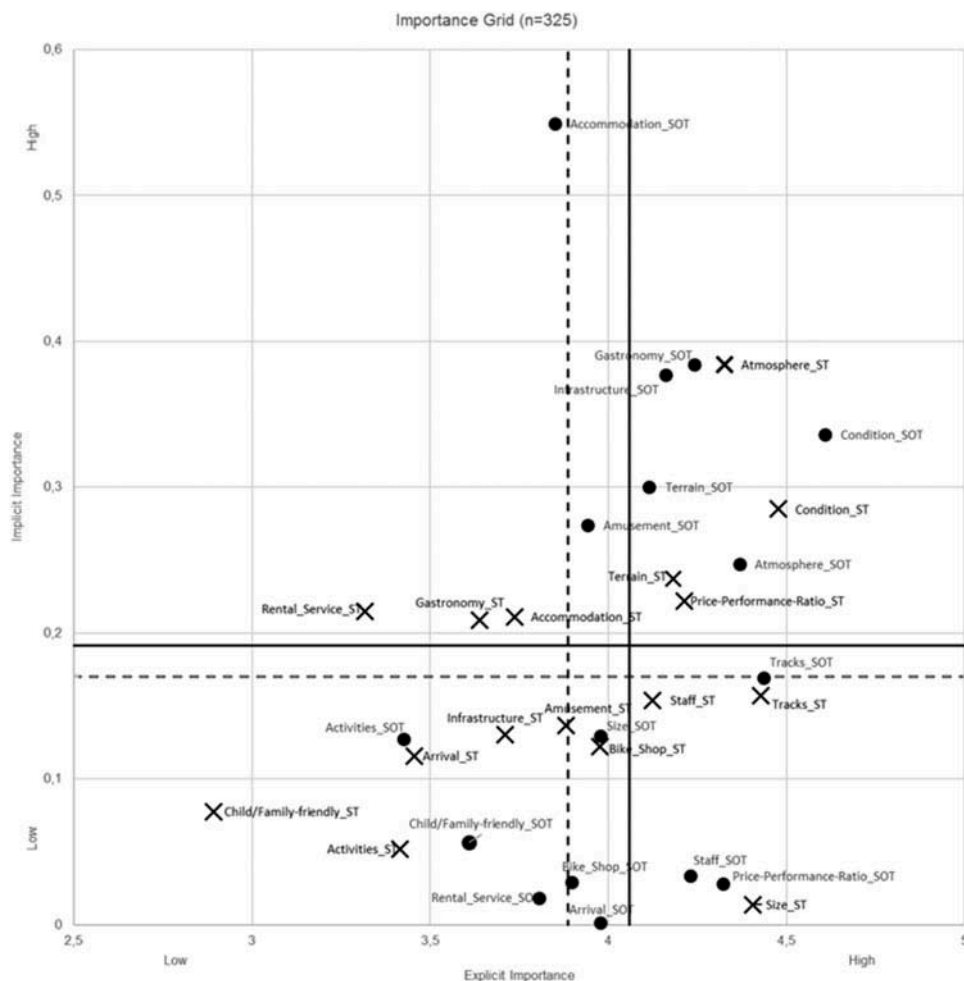
In addition, Table 2 reveals a slightly differing number of features in each quadrant of the importance analysis, whereby the features differ according to their respective allocations between groups on the basis of the group comparison approach. Almost the same situation occurs when considering Amusement, where sports-orientated tourists rate the feature as an excitement factor, whilst sports tourists see it as an important performance factor. Infrastructure seems to be an important performance factor for sports-orientated tourists, however, for sports tourists Infrastructure is an unimportant performance factor. The size of the bike park turns out to be an unimportant performance factor for sports-orientated tourists and in contrast, a basic factor for sports tourists. The Gastronomy feature is seen as an excitement factor among sports tourists, but as an important performance factor among sports-orientated tourists. Rental/Service is also rated as an excitement factor from a sports tourists' point of view; however, sports-orientated tourists do not share this opinion as Figure 2 labels the feature as an unimportant performance factor within this group.

Pursuant to the dynamic character of the underlying model, in the course of time excitement factors are subjectively downgraded to performance factors and ultimately to basic factors. This suggestion indicates a temporal shift in allocations, initially relating to features in the vicinity of the threshold to other factors.

## 5. Discussion

Previous research has mostly concentrated on destinations as a unit, examining the income of the country of origin, total destination prices, total marketing expenditure, etc. (Song, Witt, & Li, 2009), but not considering individual tourism suppliers and their characteristics.

**Figure 2. Importance grid presenting features of sports tourists as X with dashed reference lines and features of sports-orientated tourists as dots with solid lines.**



### 5.1. Demographic profile & comparison of tourist groups

Tourist profiles are essential for destinations and tourism attractions (Preuss et al., 2007) in order to comply with the needs of tourists and to create a sustainable offer leading to economic efficiency in the long term. Therefore, the first research question of the study in hand is dedicated to the analyses of tourist profiles and aimed at examining basic sociodemographic data. To deepen the understanding of tourists, a more precise analysis of the tourist profiles as postulated in Research Question 2 is carried out in order to identify specific characteristics. Sports tourists represent the majority of tourists visiting the bike park as well as a generally younger clientele than the sports-orientated tourists. The number of overnight stays and the total length of stay are two further peculiarities which confirm the significant differences between the two groups. In addition, sports-orientated tourists more often stay in an apartment, which could be a crucial reason for the overall length of stay and the number of overnight stays. Furthermore, spending on accommodation also differs in a significant way, which suggests that sports-orientated tourists see the accommodation as more important for their holiday than sports tourists do. Additionally, total expenditure supports the allocation of the tourist clienteles; a trend shows that sports-orientated tourists spend more money in total. This additional expenditure is composed of several interdependent parameters (Kozak, Gokovali, & Bahar, 2008). However, sports tourists spend more money on equipment. In sum, the two groups represent a financially strong clientele, whereas the sports tourists primarily impact the bike park itself and the tourism destination around it only in an indirect manner whereas sports-orientated tourists directly affect the tourism region and also contribute to the bike park.

According to Pike (2008) as well as Claveria and Poluzzi (2017), a tourism destination first has to understand certain patterns of the tourism market in order to acquire the ability to provide subsequent touristic competitiveness. Individual characteristics are essential to understanding tourism, its development as well as management (Easterling, 2005; McCabe, 2005; Preuss et al., 2007). Therefore, the above-mentioned information is crucial for regional tourism management as part of the knowledge required for further planning and positioning measures. Freeman and Thomlinson (2014) state that the sole act of riding a bike is not the only motivation for going to a place which incorporates the subculture of mountain-biking, whereas mountain bikers travel to make contact with the community and to meet like-minded people. Besides establishing facilities for biking, Freeman and Thomlinson (2014) encourage tourism managers and planners to provide spaces where the biking community has the opportunity to facilitate social interactions such as a camping ground on site.

### 5.2. Key success factors

Literature agrees that overall tourist satisfaction as well as their likeliness to return are determined by their assessment of different destination features (Alegre & Garau, 2011). Moreover, the uniqueness of and satisfaction with a destination's attributes impact overall satisfaction levels (Chi & Qu, 2009). There are several examples in research that take up this theory, supporting the assumption that subjective satisfaction with independent and unique attributes justifies overall satisfaction (Chi & Qu, 2009; Weiermair & Fuchs, 1999). Therefore, a differentiated investigation of the effect of certain characteristics on overall satisfaction offers the opportunity to identify a destination's strengths and weaknesses (Kozak & Rimmington, 2000). For example, Weiermair and Fuchs (1999) show a positive linear relationship between single satisfaction valuations of an alpine ski resort and the winter tourists' overall satisfaction with the sojourn.

With regard to Research Question 3, these findings establish the basis for customer satisfaction, showing that the tourist groups differ in their valuation of key success factors for a bike park. According to Witell and Löfgren (2007), basic factors cause dissatisfaction if prior expectations are not met by actual experiences and commonly do not lead to satisfaction even if expectations are exceeded. However, these basic factors are required core features in the aggregation of satisfaction. Basic factors, seen as obvious, show differences between tourist groups. From a sports tourists' view the features Bike Shop, Size, Staff and Tracks are irrevocable attributes of a bike park. By contrast, sports-orientated tourists consider Price-Performance Ratio, Staff and Tracks as basic factors. These findings suggest that tourists generally presuppose a basic package of attributes (Wilson, Fesenmaier, Fesenmaier, & Van Es, 2001) when envisaging a trip to a bike park. The differing evaluation of the Bike Shop and Price-Performance Ratio could be explained by the fact that sports-orientated tourists stay in the region for a longer period and that the bike park is not the main reason for travelling, constituting solely an additional tourism offer. Furthermore, sports tourists dedicate their sojourn to attending the bike park and, therefore, want to keep up with current trends in the mountain bike sector. Milman (2009) concludes that the price-performance ratio is a crucial attribute of theme parks because tourists are willing to pay for memorable experiences.

The Unimportant Performance Factors also differ slightly between groups, which could possibly be explained by the information processing theory (Tybout, Calder, & Sternthal, 1981). It can be assumed that the groups have different backgrounds and reasons for travelling, influencing their perception of a destination. Sports tourists rate the attributes Arrival, Activities, Child/Family-friendly and Infrastructure and sports-orientated tourists Arrival, Activities, Bike Shop, Child/Family-friendly, Rental/Service and Size as Unimportant Performance Factors. According to this theory, differences in perception occur due to individual differences in the handling, recording and processing of information. However, these features are seen as low priority features (), which are suggested to require no additional effort.

“Keep up the Good Work” covers the quadrant of Important Performance Factors (Martilla & James, 1977), represented by Amusement, Atmosphere, Condition, Price-Performance Ratio and Terrain rated by sports tourists. Sports-orientated tourists rate Atmosphere, Condition, Gastronomy, Infrastructure and Terrain as Important Performance Factors. Irrespective of group, tourists want to visit the bike park in a good condition and be greeted with an exciting terrain, complemented by a pleasant atmosphere. Talk about innovations and techniques also contributes to the “community feeling”. These performance factors trigger a linear increase in satisfaction if they match personal expectations, whilst showing no effects if personal expectations are not met (Witell & Löfgren, 2007). Therefore, these attributes, when separately addressed for different tourist groups, have the ability to reach higher satisfaction levels among tourists with considerable ease. A possible explanation is the attachment theory, prescribing experiences attached to a certain place or a bond between certain people and a certain place. According to Hosany, Ekinci, and Uysal (2006), the place attachment is an important theoretical construct appearing at the end of a tourist trip, when all tourism experiences are available.

The features outlined by “Concentrate Here” constitute the excitement factors, which primarily trigger satisfaction, without necessarily causing dissatisfaction when not met, because excitement factors are not explicitly expected by tourists. Excitement factors cannot, however, be used to balance dissatisfaction caused by missing basic factors (Martilla & James, 1977; Vavra, 1977; Witell & Löfgren, 2007). Excitement factors include Accommodation, Gastronomy and Rental/Service for sports tourists and Accommodation and Amusement for sports-orientated tourists. These features are rated with a high implicit importance but a rather low explicit importance, which indicates that there is a remaining potential for improvement. As an example, the “accommodation problem” reveals a paradigm, which was mentioned by participants in the study and comprised the prohibition of on-site camping at the bike park. If this problem is addressed by the bike park and the local destination, this could lead to higher satisfaction levels, to word-of-mouth recommendations and increased tourist loyalty (Bernini & Cagnone, 2014; Chi & Qu, 2008, 2009; Faizan, Kim, Li, & Jeon, 2016).

In conclusion, contrary to the general non-strategic approaches in tourism (Guiver & Stanford, 2014), these attributes constitute a major asset in the fierce competition with other tourism regions, hence, key success factors represent impressions, imaginations, prejudices or emotions (Lawson & Band-Bovy, 1977). The personality of a destination is an essential component in destination positioning and in tourist decision-making processes (Li, Ali, & Woo, 2015; Liu, Li, & Yang, 2015). Furthermore, knowing the key success factors enables a discussion about a company’s or destination’s marketing expenditure (Kulendran & Dwyer, 2009; Zhang, Kulendran, & Song, 2010). Tourism literature on sports tourism in niche markets and especially in bike tourism destinations is pretty limited; yet, the field could be of great importance for many alpine tourism regions. The bike park not only attracts people primarily interested in biking but also constitutes a form of enrichment for the region, which is crucial for the travel decisions of potential tourists. In the tourism market, precise destination positioning is indispensable to guaranteeing a destination’s competitiveness.

Finally, the study in hand has some limitations. Firstly, the point in time: data collection took place at the end of the peak season, which could have led to changes in tourist perceptions. Secondly, the time period of the survey might impose a limitation, as data were collected only on ten single days during the end of the peak season.

## 6. Implications and future research directions

As a mountain theme park, the bike park generates additional economic revenues for the ski area as well as the destination, which comes with plenty of beneficial managerial effects, enabling the destination to balance the discrepancy between seasonal and all-season approaches. The year-round tourism supply allows the region to maintain the value chain in different ways. Qualified staff can be hired not only on a seasonal basis but permanently, which helps to set up a team “selling” tourism offers, whilst providing job security for employees. Moreover, the utilisation of

available capacities and facilities as well as the advantages of positioning the region as a year-round holiday destination are additional distinguishing features on the holiday destination market.

Other direct implications of alternative tourism supply are the segmentation of certain tourist groups due to specialisation and specific positioning in tourism (Benur & Bramwell, 2015) as well as the opportunity to plan new ideas in tourism supply both sustainably and on a long-term basis. Those implications rely on the assumption that a specific group can be attracted by fulfilling their needs. Subsequently, they enable touristic competitiveness and help local tourism management to plan the destination's touristic orientation further.

With regard to general, non-strategic planning in tourism, a bike park represents a feasible touristic offer, which has the ability to merge the desires of locals and holiday guests as well as to achieve security in planning and operational efficacy. In accordance with the above-mentioned benefits, the region's touristic supply thus becomes more flexible, particularly in the face of climatic changes (Scott, Dawson, & Jones, 2008).

All in all, recent developments and the study in hand show the high potential of using ski area infrastructure in the summer by creating alternative niche markets in tourism strategies, which allow a destination to introduce interesting attractions over and above the traditional seasonal offering. Therefore, the findings of the study in hand provide a new understanding of and perspective on the management of destinations, including alternative tourism supply and niche markets in year-round tourism planning and marketing.

Prospectively, the relevance of the study in hand should be supported by further research. It might be especially interesting to gather further information about impacts on the destination resulting from bike tourism and its importance in the tourism economy. The e-bike trend, the respective usage patterns and reasons why e-bikes could be of interest for further research, present another interesting subject for future studies.

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