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Possibilities for paranormal tourism development in Serbia

Abstract

This paper aims to identify possibilities for paranormal tourism development in Serbia and to determine domestic tourists' interest in participating in paranormal tourism. Paranormal places and bizarre rituals have been defined as potential paranormal tourism localities and events. Paranormal tourism is one of the new forms of special interest tourism. It is evident that paranormal tourism is a result of the expansion of other related types of tourism, such as dark tourism, ghost tourism, spiritual tourism, cultural tourism, ethnological tourism, new age tourism and pilgrimage tourism. It is defined by tourists' interest in topics which challenge realist ontologies and representational epistemologies. The present study examines responses from 405 Serbia residents (potential tourists). After

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using descriptive statistics, Independent Samples T-Test and ANOVA, the study finds that potential tourists are interested in visiting certain paranormal places, and there is a possibility to develop this type of tourism in Serbia. The current work is the first study of paranormal tourism in Serbia and one of the few studies in the world.

Keywords: paranormal tourism, tourism development, possibility for tourism, domestic tourists' perception, tourists' attitudes, Serbia

Highlights of the paper

- Potential domestic tourists have recognised the attractiveness of paranormal places and rituals, which means there is a possibility for the development of this type of tourism in Serbia.
- The main reason for visiting these kinds of places and events is curiosity, which can be related to the fact that people need something more than standard forms of tourism – something authentic and exciting.
- Men are more interested in visiting paranormal places, and especially in participating in bizarre events and rituals.
- It is important to ensure that during the development of this type of tourism, these customs and rituals of the local population are not endangered, but preserved. Therefore, the attitudes of the local population should also be examined.

Introduction

Paranormal tourism can be defined as a form of special interest tourism. This term is relatively new in its modern representation, but has existed since the beginning of humanity in different guises, mainly pilgrimages. As mentioned above, it is distinguished by tourists' interest in subject matters which challenge realist ontologies and representational epistemologies (Pharino et al. 2018; Pharino & Pearce 2019). Paranormal tourism can be defined as visitors taking trips to locations where paranormal phenomena have been identified, as well as attending events of a bizarre nature. Times are changing,

and so are the demands and expectations of the 'new' traveller; the search for different experiences, different adventures, and different lifestyles has paved the way for the concept of 'new age tourism'. Attention is now being turned to exploring new frontiers or daring to go where traditional thought did not previously allow (Staniciulescu et al. 2011; Stankov 2017). It is in this way that paranormal tourism is also a kind of new age tourism. Formed from the public's insatiable appetite for the paranormal, this industry is in a constant state of evolution (Bader et al. 2010; Birnes & Martin 2009). Paranormal tourism is accelerated by the media, formal and informal marketing, word of mouth, historical folklore, and plenty of websites and articles listing allegedly haunted sites, hotels, attractions, and tours that cater to paranormal tourists (Haynes 2016).

To understand exactly what paranormal means with regard to tourism, the term paranormal itself must be understood. It can be defined as something which is not understandable in terms of known scientific laws and phenomena. Paranormal refers to a wide range of beliefs and experiences that include ghosts and spirits, extra-terrestrial life forms, witchcraft, psi (clairvoyance, precognition, telepathy, and psychokinesis), the occult, superstitions, the supernatural, and the extraordinary (Tobacyk & Milford 1983: 1029). Nevertheless, in order to qualify as paranormal, the activity or phenomena must meet three criteria: (1) the phenomena cannot be explained by current science, (2) the phenomena can be explained only by major revisions in basic limiting laws of science, and (3) the phenomena are incompatible with normative perceptions and expectations about reality. The Paranormal Belief Scale (PBS) identifies seven major categories of the paranormal and supernatural: Traditional Religious Belief, Psi (Physic Phenomena), Witchcraft, Superstition, Spiritualism, Extraordinary Life Forms, and Precognition (Tobacyk 2004).

Ghosts and haunted houses are pervasive cultural tales (Bader 2017; Blanco & Peeren 2013; Houran 2020; Lecouteux 2012) that can act as highly captivating memes (Drinkwater et al. 2019; Hill et al. 2018a, 2019b). Some cognitive and evolutionary psychologists have even argued that human beings are neurologically "hard-wired" for anomalous, mystical, or numinous experiences (Evans et al. 2019; McClenon 2004: 2012). Like adventure experiences (Reynolds & Hirtz 2012), paranormal experiences can provide excitement for those in search of stimulation and sensation (Pekela et al. 1992), and, appropriately, some individuals can be highly motivated to look

for haunted estates or destinations to fulfil hedonic needs. Previous research has found that individuals who have a high desire to seek sensation and who are open to experience tend to have a greater belief in the paranormal (Smith et al. 2009). Furthermore, individuals with an external locus of control and sensation-seeking traits are more risk-seeking in order to achieve immediate emotional excitement (Zaleskiewicz 2001). Intuitive individuals, high emotional instability, negative life events, affective attention, and attitudes of peers and parents' opinions towards the paranormal are also all positively related to belief in the paranormal phenomenon (Lindeman & Aarnio 2006). Additionally, this belief in the paranormal can be increased by negative life events, depression, anxiety, and psychological distress (Lindeman & Aarnio 2006), because people often rely on the belief that an external factor, such as a ghost, or another paranormal phenomenon, is influencing such negative life events (Irwin 2000). After the manifestation of a negative life event, individuals could use hedonic motivation and paranormal adventures to create a distraction, to produce optimism, to stimulate self-restoration, and to start personal transformation, as leisure and adventure activities are related to adjustment and coping (Kleiber et al. 2002; Mathe-Soulek et al. 2016).

As mentioned above, it is evident that paranormal tourism is a result of the expansion of other related types of tourism, such as dark tourism (Sharpley & Stone 2009), ghost tourism (Holzhauser 2015), spiritual tourism (Jepson & Sharpley 2011), and pilgrimage tourism (Štefko et al. 2015). This type of tourism can also be linked to cultural and ethnological tourism. To truly experience paranormal activities and phenomena, visiting events or destinations is necessary. Paranormal tourism includes looking for UFOs or mythical animals (e.g. Bigfoot, Loch Ness), taking part in ghost hunting tours, investigative tourism, or travelling to destinations related to spiritual beliefs (Blankshein 2012). Paranormal tourism is linked to visiting places that embody belief systems beyond normal rational views (Pharino et al. 2018).

A case study – paranormal Serbia

Since the beginning of mankind, fascination with the paranormal and supernatural has shaped entire cultures, folklore, and religions, while also influencing everything from architecture and customs to economics and

politics (Blankshein 2012). Belief in the paranormal and otherworldly is nearly universal, with many cultures sharing similar beliefs as well as a completely atypical perspective. Whether one shares in these beliefs or not, the impact they have on societies, cultures, and economics is unquestionable (Haynes 2015).

Nowadays, the paranormal continues to capture people's attention and enchantment. Be it in the media and entertainment, cultural and religious beliefs, urban legends, or local folklore, the paranormal has a strong influence on the public's imagery and beliefs. One such mystery pertains to unusual events or phenomena that cannot be explained by rational or scientific means; what is today referred to as the paranormal.

Serbia is a country full of mysteries and people who tend to believe in paranormal activities. The most unusual places and rituals are used in this research. *Watermill of Vampire Sava Savanovic* is one of the most famous supernatural places in Serbia. It is located in Zarožje Village, Western Serbia. According to the legend, this area is haunted by vampire Sava Savanovic, who killed himself because of love. Guests are welcomed with a clove of garlic. Furthermore, *Rtanj* is a mountain located in Eastern Serbia. It is well-known as a Serbian pyramid (Nesic 2013). There are several paranormal phenomena related to this mountain. Legend says that the castle of a wizard was placed on the top of the mountain, where a great treasure was guarded, but that the castle then disappeared into the mountain, trapping the wizard inside. Since then, treasure hunters have been visiting the mountain looking for the lost gold and gems. The mountain is also known as a UFO location, and is popular among people who believe in the end of the world. The giant stone formations of *Djavalja Varoš* (in English: Devil's Town) are actually a group of petrified wedding guests, or at least that is what legend tells. The mountain was nominated for consideration as one of the New Seven Wonders of Nature. According to one legend, the fairies and the devil fought right in the town, because the unholy one tried to poison the town's residents with devil water and made them marry their brothers and sisters. The fairy asked God to stop this violation and he turned the wedding guests into stone. According to another legend, the rock formations are people who, in an effort to free themselves from the devil, spend the night at St. Peter's Church, which fossilised their demons. This locality is also on the tentative list of UNESCO world heritage sites (Amidzic et al. 2013). Another site of importance is *Mountain Radan*, which attracted attention because of a "magnetic hill"

located on a road near the village of Ivanje. Indeed, people became intrigued by the mountain after articles about “anti-gravity”. In addition to the above, *Kapetanovo Castle* is located in Northeastern Serbia, Vojvodina province, and was included in the national list of monuments of great cultural importance. According to the story, the first owner of the castle, Botka Bel, went bankrupt in 1938, after which his wife poured gasoline over herself and set herself on fire. All that remained of her was a tuft of blonde hair that flew around the castle. Legend says that a shadow of a blonde woman appears on St. Elias in one of the chambers of the castle every year. In terms of other famous parts of Serbia, stretching 2,275 metres, the *Dubocka Cave* is one of the longest caves in the country. It is also called the Great Cave (Lazarevic 2001). According to the ancient legend, on the day of the Pentecost (Holy Trinity), two queens met in this cave. Neither of them wanted to get out of the way of the other, and so they got into a fight, with both of them disappearing at dawn. Another, much more common legend, also says that the two queens met and clashed in the cave, but that one of them fell and was fatally wounded. According to Vlach belief, on death, she cursed the villagers, declaring that, at the same place every year on the day of Pentecost, a girl would be killed. To appease the queen, the Dubachans give her a feast every year called the Feast of the Spirits, and the centrepiece of this event is falling into the trance of Vlach women (Djordjevic 2018). It is also noteworthy to mention the cemetery in the village of Smoljinac near Pozarevac, which, because of the tombs in the form of houses, looks like a *weekend village*. The construction of these tombs pays special tribute to the deceased, with the intention being for the tombs, which are equipped with furniture, televisions and other technical devices, to remind passers-by of those who died. *Najdan's circles* are another interesting phenomenon, and are located in the Vlach-Serbian village of Mala Krsna near Smederevo; alternative medicine supporters claim that these circles represent a healing “energy field”. At the intersections of rural streets there are white marked circles where people in groups stand believing in the healing effect and hoping to cure their diseases. People come to these circles day and night, at any time of the year, whenever they have time; after all, it is open air therapy, which is “therapy” that costs nothing. There is also a place near Valjevo (a city in Western Serbia) called “*Energy fields*” *Drenajic* (Lukic & Andjelkovic 2018; <http://www.serbia.com/six-scary-places-serbia-youll-want-visit/>).

Figure 1. “Energy fields” Drenajic

Source: <https://www.vreme.com/>.

Vlach bizarre events can also be an interesting part of paranormal tourism in Serbia. Vlach mythology is one of the most interesting mythologies in the world because it has the unique feature of the myth being real, and based on plants, animals, natural phenomena and even ordinary people (Miljkovic & Stojanjelovic 2002). According to Vlach beliefs, the devil is not as black as the Christian religion represents. Vlach wizards and witches are often at odds with Devil and ask him for help when evil is done to someone (Paunovic 2001). *The cult of the dead* is the basis for determining, interpreting and exploring the religion of the Vlachs. This cult is still highly developed today and has preserved considerable archaic freshness in the Vlachs of Northeastern Serbia. The cult of the dead involves the return of information from the deceased about whether and how Vlach is satisfied with the services provided by the living. If one of the relatives wishes to get in touch with him, then that person must turn to the services of one of the village sorcerers – in severe cases especially to persons who communicate with the dead via trance (Durlic 1995). The darkest and most morbid ritual in Serbia, and perhaps the world, is *a black wedding*. The black wedding has an extremely long tradition. When a young couple is supposed to get married and one of them dies or is killed, the wedding is still held on the day of the funeral, i.e. the wedding and funeral are performed on the same day. Both the deceased and the spouse are in wedding attire (dress and suit) and the wedding ceremony is performed first. Simply put, the deceased's fiancé usually agrees to remain in a symbolic

marriage with the deceased for one year, which means that during this time he/she cannot marry, and a relationship with a third person would mean adultery (Paunovic 2001). *The excavation of the deceased* is another “event” in Vlach villages. Ethnologists’ research shows that this is a transition from a symbolic service to the deceased’s physicality in a drastically concrete way (Durlić 1995). Specifically, the deceased, usually an early deceased young person, who is extremely saddened by spouses or parents, is excavated from the grave 40 days after the funeral, at which point he/she is washed, bathed, has his/her hair combed, and is changed into a new suit/dress. The deceased is then also offered things that he/she may need in the “other” world, such as cigarettes that the deceased smoked and sweets he/she loved, etc. Following this, the person is carefully buried again. *Priveg* “Fire for the dead” is one of the most archaic and complex customs of the cult of the dead that can be found today on the soil of Europe. There are stages that the villagers themselves identify as the custom’s basic parts, namely rituals in the cemetery, family feasts, collecting firewood and setting fires, ignition and use of fire, dance for the dead, joy and other fire games (Durlic 1996).

Figure 2. Priveg “Fire for the dead”



Source: <https://www.bbc.com/>.

Falling into a trance is a specific phenomenon for many of the world’s famous magicians. In an unconscious state of the future, talking to ghosts or the dead, voodoo witches, druids, shamans and others fall, but ethnologists from around the world have agreed, for 150 years, that the most mysterious trance is that in which women from Eastern Serbia fall (Antonijevic 1990) – more specifically, Vlach sorcerers who are called Rusallias in the professional literature. The most significant of all the *Alms* (*Almsgiving*) on Earth, and

blessed, as the Vlachs have claimed for centuries, is the Alms Alba or the white alms. It is appointed to the deceased only once by choice of families when they have the opportunity to buy everything they need for the occasion. It happens that Alms is given 20-30 years after the death of the deceased. It is given on Pentecost (Holy Trinity), the greatest Vlach holiday. Preparation for Alms starts 52 days before the main event, and consists of many different rituals (Durlic 1996; Djordjevic 2018).

Figure 3. Alms (Almsgiving)



Source: <https://www.vreme.com/>.

Vlach magic is one of the most fascinating and intriguing parts of Eastern Serbia's cultural heritage. The term is widespread, and so it refers to any attempt to influence the outside world, nature and other people through rituals, fairy tales, or the use of various methods for awakening our own powers (Jojic 2000). However, when speaking of witchcraft in the narrow sense of the word in Serbia, ethnologists (who are actively engaged in the mass beliefs of peoples in the superhuman) make a distinction between a multitude of psychics and healers who swoop into places throughout Serbia on a daily basis and those hailing from the Timok region. This is because, as some claim, magic from Eastern Serbia is not a modern superstructure. It is, above all, a penetration into the deep collective consciousness of the Vlach being – a manifestation of the heritage of the millennium-old, which is mainly concerned with women (Jojic 2009).

Methodology

To achieve the aims of the research, a questionnaire was constructed for an online survey. It was used to explore domestic tourists' perception of possibilities for paranormal tourism development.

The aim was to include respondents from different parts of Serbia in order to determine possibilities for paranormal tourism development.

Socio-demographic profile of respondents

The gender ratio was 58.8% women and 41.2% men, while the average age was 36 years (range = 18–78, SD = 13.737). The majority of the respondents were those with a bachelor's degree (47.2%) and secondary school education (34.1%). The highest number of respondents were employed (57%), but in the research were also included unemployed (11.9%), students (24.2%), retirees (4.9%) and housewives (2%). Half of the respondents had an average monthly income of less than 380 € (50.1%) (Table 1).

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents (n = 405)

Gender	Percent (%)	Employment Status	Percent (%)
Male	41.2	Employed	57
Female	58.8	Unemployed	11.9
Age range	Average age	Student	24.2
18–81	36	Retiree	4.9
		Housewife	2
Education	Percent (%)	Income	Percent (%)
Elementary school	3.2	Less than 380 €	50.1
High school	34.1	380 €–760 €	33.8
Bachelor's degree	47.2	760 €–1,150 €	8.9
Master's or Ph.D. degree	15.6	Over 1,150 €	7.2

Type of settlement	Percent (%)		
Village	11.6		
Small town	14.3		
Medium town	31.9		
Big town	42.2		

Source: Created by the authors based on data analysis in SPSS 25.0.

Procedure

Data was obtained during November and December of 2019, through an online questionnaire, which was distributed via e-mail and social media (Facebook and Instagram). The study sample consisted of 405 respondents, all of whom were informed that the survey is anonymous, the participation is voluntary, and the results of the survey will be used only for scientific and research purposes.

Instrument

The questionnaire comprised 20 questions, both open- and closed-ended, which were systematically divided into two sections. The first section was related to the socio-demographic and economic characteristics of the respondents, such as gender, age, education, employment status, income and type of town. In the second section of the survey, respondents were asked to evaluate their interest in visiting paranormal localities (14 places) and attending bizarre Vlach events (6). The answers were measured using a 5-point Likert scale (1 – not important to me at all, 2 – not important to me, 3 – I cannot estimate, 4 – important to me and 5 – very important to me). Also included were questions about different paranormal activities, paranormal phenomena, and their opinions about paranormal tourism development in Serbia.

With regard to the data analysis, the decision was made to use IBM SPSS 25.0 Statistics (Descriptive Statistical Analysis, Independent Samples T-Test and ANOVA test).

Results and discussion

The main goal of the paper was to analyse the perceptions of the potential domestic tourists of paranormal tourism, so as to gauge their interest and possibilities for development of this type of tourism in Serbia.

At the very beginning of the research, one of the objectives was to ascertain how familiar respondents were with this type of tourism and to determine their general apprehension of paranormal phenomena. To the question "What are paranormal phenomena?", 89.90% of the respondents gave the correct answer. Moreover, almost 70% confirmed that they find paranormal phenomena interesting. One of the questions asked respondents to choose which kinds of paranormal activities they would participate in (stay in a haunted hotel/mansion, participate in a paranormal tour, visit a medium, visit a Vlach witch, attend a summoning of the ghosts etc.). The least interesting activities for respondents were "ghost summoning" and "shopping voodoo dolls and other souvenirs". The top reasons for believing/not believing in paranormal phenomena were Education (41.7%), Lack of Evidence (38.8%), Personal Experience (36.3%), Religion and Spirituality (32.8%) and Science (32.6%).

The fact is that more than half of the respondents stated that they had heard about the concept of paranormal tourism. When it came to the question which asked respondents to give an example of a paranormal locality in Serbia, 71.2% responded correctly. To the question "What would be the main reason to visit a paranormal place or to participate in a ritual?", approximately 59.8% responded that the main reason for them participating in paranormal tourism would be curiosity, while 19.8% stated that they would visit those kinds of places for fun, 7.2% because of spirituality, and 13.3% would not visit those kinds of places. The last question was "Do you think that Serbia has potential to develop paranormal tourism?" with 70.1% answering positively; indeed, the fact that potential domestic tourists recognised this potential is a good thing.

Descriptive statistical analysis for paranormal places and bizarre events

The first results were predetermined to show which places of paranormal phenomena were the most and the least interesting to the respondents

(Table 2). For this purpose, the mean value of respondents' agreement and disagreement with each locality was calculated. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of respondents' attitudes towards the paranormal tourism localities and bizarre events

	Mean
Potential paranormal places	3.35
Vampire Sava Savanovic Watermill	3.21
Devil's Town	3.89
Mt. Rtanj	3.79
Disappeared town "Zrnov"	3.59
Kapetanovo Castle	3.36
Mt. Radan	3.44
Povlen's Stone Balls	3.43
Bojana's Tomb	3.01
Fairy's Circle	3.18
Grave of first Serbian vampire	3.17
Dubocka Cave	3.35
Graveyard Weekend Cottages	2.83
Najdan's Circles	3.22
Energy fields	3.37
Potential paranormal/bizarre rituals	2.17
The cult of the dead	2.28
Black wedding	1.97
The excavation of the deceased	1.92
Priveg "Fire for the dead"	2.15
Falling into trance	2.47
Alms (Almsgiving)	2.20

Source: Created by the authors based on data analysis in SPSS 25.0.

Multi-item indices were computed to provide mean scores on a 5-point scale with 3 as a neutral point for each place/locality. The overall mean for the potential paranormal localities was 3.35. The highest mean value was for “Devil’s Town” ($M = 3.89$), followed by “Mount Rtanj” ($M = 3.79$), “Disappeared Town “Zrnov” ($M = 3.59$) and “Energy Fields” ($M = 3.37$). The lowest mean value was for “Weekend Cottages on the Graveyard” ($M = 2.83$). However, it is noticeable that all the mean values in the table are relatively low. Based on these findings, it is necessary to formulate a survey for tourist organisations and tourist agencies in Serbia.

The overall mean for the potential bizarre rituals was 2.17, which is much lower than the overall mean for potential paranormal places, thus indicating that potential tourists would be more interested in visiting places than in participating in rituals. With regard to bizarre rituals, the potential tourists surveyed were most interested in “Falling into trance” ($M = 2.47$) and the least interested in “The excavation of the deceased” ($M = 1.92$) and “Black wedding” ($M = 1.97$). Low mean values for bizarre events were expected because many people are scared of those events, and being part of them can be very bizarre (definitely not for everyone).

Results of Independent Samples T-test

The Independent Samples T-test was applied to identify the possible differences in answers among the male and female respondents and their interest in visiting paranormal destinations or bizarre rituals. As shown in Table III, we can see significant differences when it comes to gender. Males are more interested in visiting paranormal places, especially rituals. For example, the greatest statistical difference was observed for *The excavation of the deceased* ($p = 0.000$, $F = 24.992$). When it came to paranormal localities, the greatest differences were observed for Sava Savanovic Watermill ($p = 0.000$, $F = 16.867$). Given that the largest difference was found in bizarre rituals, it is not surprising that men were more intrigued by them. They are probably more attracted by the mystery and bizarreness of these events, while women are probably afraid of them.

Table 3. Results of T-test by gender of the respondents and in relation to their interest in visiting paranormal places/events

		Male	Female
Sava Savanovic Watermill	Mean	3.56	2.97
	F	16.867	
	P	0.000*	
Devil's Town	Mean	3.99	3.82
	F	12.337	
	P	0.000*	
Mt. Rtanj	Mean	3.95	3.68
	F	12.659	
	P	0.040	
Disappeared town "Zrnov"	Mean	3.78	3.46
	F	11.726	
	P	0.021	
Kapetanovo Castle	Mean	3.60	3.18
	F	8.589	
	P	0.002*	
Mt. Radan	Mean	3.68	3.27
	F	5.848	
	P	0.002*	
Povlen's Stone balls	Mean	3.68	3.26
	F	5.846	
	P	0.002*	
Bojana's Tomb	Mean	3.34	2.77
	F	16.555	
	P	0.000*	

Fairy's Circle	Mean	3.46	2.99
	F	10.269	
	P	0.001*	
Grave of first Serbian vampire	Mean	3.50	2.94
	F	14.292	
	P	0.000*	
Dubocka Cave	Mean	3.59	3.19
	F	7.871	
	P	0.005*	
Graveyard Weekend Cottages	Mean	3.15	2.61
	F	13.391	
	P	0.000*	
Najdan's Circles	Mean	3.51	3.03
	F	11.547	
	P	0.001*	
The Energy Fields	Mean	3.61	3.19
	F	7.953	
	P	0.005*	
The Cult of the Dead	Mean	2.66	2.01
	F	22.738	
	P	0.000*	
Black wedding	Mean	2.29	1.75
	F	18.964	
	P	0.000*	
The excavation of the deceased	Mean	2.27	1.68
	F	24.992	
	P	0.000*	

Priveg "Fire for the dead"	Mean	2.47	1.93
	F	17.007	
	P	0.000*	
Falling into trance	Mean	2.76	2.27
	F	10.870	
	P	0.001*	
Alms (Almsgiving)	Mean	2.51	1.99
	F	15.488	
	P	0.000*	

* $p < 0.01$; $F > 3.32$.

Source: Created by the authors based on data analysis in SPSS 25.0.

Results of one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA)

The ANOVA test was applied to identify the differences between the answers of the respondents from different types of settlements and their interest in visiting paranormal destinations or bizarre rituals (Table 4).

The ANOVA was used to define whether there was a statistically significant correlation between the dependent variables (paranormal places: Vampire Sava Savanovic Watermill, Devils Town, Disappeared Town Zrnov etc. and bizarre events: Black Wedding, Cult of the Dead etc.) and the independent variable (type of settlement). The post-hoc Scheffe test was applied to define significantly different variables.

Therefore, the types of settlements were divided into four categories:

- (1) Village
- (2) Small town (up to 10,000 inhabitants)
- (3) Medium town (10,000–100,000 inhabitants)
- (4) Big town (more than 100,000 inhabitants)

Table 4. Results of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) according to the type of settlement of the respondents and in relation to their interest in visiting paranormal places/events

		Village	Small town	Medium town	Big town
Sava Savanovic Watermill	Mean	3.43	3.74	3.19	2.99
	F	4.372			
	p	0.005*			
Devils Town	Mean	4.06	4.19	3.82	3.80
	F	1.944			
	p	0.122			
Mt. Rtanj	Mean	3.98	4.22	3.75	3.63
	F	3.721			
	p	0.012*			
Disappeared town "Zrnov"	Mean	3.74	4.12	3.60	3.37
	F	4.788			
	p	0.003*			
Kapetanovo Castle	Mean	3.55	3.93	3.22	3.20
	F	5.127			
	p	0.002*			
Mt. Radan	Mean	3.68	3.95	3.37	3.25
	F	4.582			
	p	0.004*			
Povlen's Stone balls	Mean	3.81	3.90	3.44	3.17
	F	5.942			
	p	0.001*			
Bojana's Tomb	Mean	3.17	3.60	2.84	2.89
	F	4.828			
	p	0.003*			

Fairy's Circle	Mean	3.28	3.83	3.09	3.01
	F	5.028			
	p	0.002*			
Grave of first Serbian vampire	Mean	3.34	3.86	2.99	3.02
	F	5.813			
	p	0.001*			
Dubocka Cave	Mean	3.57	3.93	3.23	3.19
	F	4.829			
	p	0.003*			
Graveyard Weekend Cottages	Mean	3.17	3.60	2.58	2.66
	F	8.313			
	p	0.000*			
Najdan's Circles	Mean	3.38	3.90	3.19	2.98
	F	6.384			
	p	0.000*			
The Energy Fields	Mean	3.47	3.91	3.44	3.09
	F	4.912			
	p	0.002*			
The Cult of the Dead	Mean	2.32	2.97	2.10	2.16
	F	6.075			
	p	0.000*			
Black wedding	Mean	2.04	2.50	1.81	1.89
	F	4.523			
	p	0.004*			
The excavation of the deceased	Mean	1.98	2.52	1.79	1.81
	F	6.039			
	p	0.000*			

Privieg "Fire for the dead"	Mean	2.23	2.79	1.97	2.05
	F	5.857			
	p	0.001*			
Falling into trance	Mean	2.68	3.05	2.27	2.37
	F	4.368			
	p	0.005*			
Alms (Almsgiving)	Mean	2.40	2.69	2.01	2.13
	F	4.107			
	p	0.007*			

*p < 0.01; F > 3.32.

Source: Created by the authors based on data analysis in SPSS 25.0.

The results showed statistically significant differences between the groups of different settlements and most paranormal places and events (Table 4). The only parameter which did not exhibit a statistically significant difference was Devil's Town. The above means that, no matter which type of settlement they live in, people are interested in visiting this place.

The ANOVA test was also applied to identify the differences between the answers of the respondents with different types of education and their interest in visiting paranormal destinations or bizarre rituals (Table 5).

Table 5. Results of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) according to the education of the respondents and in relation to their interest in visiting paranormal places/events

		Elementary school	High School	Bachelor's Degree	MSc/Mr/PhD
Sava Savanovic Watermill	Mean	4.00	3.49	3.10	2.78
	F	5.510			
	p	0.001*			
Devil's Town	Mean	4.15	3.89	3.89	3.84
	F	0.231			
	p	0.875			

Mt. Rtanj	Mean	4.38	3.84	3.73	3.75
	F	1.194			
	P	0.312			
Disappeared town "Zrnov"	Mean	4.31	3.80	3.43	3.48
	F	3.444			
	P	0.017*			
Kapetanovo Castle	Mean	4.23	3.55	3.17	3.30
	F	4.083			
	P	0.007*			
Mt. Radan	Mean	4.23	3.57	3.33	3.33
	F	2.466			
	P	0.062			
Povlen's Stone balls	Mean	4.31	3.57	3.33	3.27
	F	5.942			
	P	0.001*			
Bojana's Tomb	Mean	4.23	3.30	2.81	2.73
	F	7.676			
	P	0.000*			
Fairy's Circle	Mean	4.38	3.54	2.93	2.94
	F	8.792			
	P	0.000*			
Grave of first Serbian vampire	Mean	4.00	3.46	2.97	2.95
	F	4.883			
	P	0.002*			
Dubocka Cave	Mean	4.31	3.49	3.23	3.25
	F	3.038			
	P	0.029			

Graveyard Weekend Cottages	Mean	3.69	3.01	2.69	2.68
	F	2.974			
	P	0.032			
Najdan's Circles	Mean	4.08	3.48	3.08	2.94
	F	4.634			
	P	0.003*			
The Energy Fields	Mean	4.38	3.63	3.24	2.97
	F	5.733			
	P	0.001*			
The Cult of the Dead	Mean	2.54	2.70	2.03	2.05
	F	7.494			
	P	0.000*			
Black wedding	Mean	2.62	2.30	1.78	1.70
	F	7.019			
	P	0.000*			
The excavation of the deceased	Mean	2.77	2.25	1.69	1.73
	F	9.066			
	P	0.000*			
Priveg "Fire for the dead"	Mean	2.54	2.46	1.96	1.98
	F	4.681			
	P	0.003*			
Falling into trance	Mean	3.15	2.80	2.27	2.21
	F	5.127			
	P	0.002*			
Alms (Almsgiving)	Mean	3.23	2.51	1.96	2.03
	F	7.834			
	P	0.000*			

*p < 0.01; F > 3.32.

Source: Created by the authors based on data analysis in SPSS 25.0.

Statistically significant differences were observed in the participants' responses regarding their education (Table V). The greatest differences were seen for *The excavation of the deceased* ($p = 0.000$, $F = 9.667$) ritual. It was found here that those with elementary education were more interested in bizarre events and rituals than those with higher education. This is probably related to the opinion that people with a lower level of education believe more in old customs and rituals than those with a higher level of education.

In addition to the above, the ANOVA test was applied to identify the differences between the answers of the respondents of different ages in relation to their interest in visiting paranormal places or events. Therefore, the ages of the respondents were divided into five categories:

- (1) 18–30 years old
- (2) 31–40 years old
- (3) 41–50 years old
- (4) 51–65 years old
- (5) Older than 65 years

Table 6. Results of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) according to age of the respondents and in relation to their interest in visiting paranormal places/events

		18–30 years	31–40 years	41–50 years	51–65 years	older than 65 years
Sava Savanovic Watermill	Mean	3.09	3.00	3.25	3.78	4.06
	F	3.975				
	p	0.004*				
Devil's Town	Mean	3.86	3.78	3.87	4.05	4.53
	F	1.527				
	p	0.193				
Mt. Rtanj	Mean	3.61	3.68	3.96	4.27	4.47
	F	4.327				
	p	0.002*				
Disappeared town "Zrnov"	Mean	3.42	3.48	3.71	4.15	4.18
	F	3.602				
	p	0.007*				

Kapetanovo Castle	Mean	3.23	3.14	3.42	3.90	4.18
	F	4.395				
	p	0.002*				
Mt. Radan	Mean	3.17	3.36	3.58	4.17	4.35
	F	7.517				
	p	0.000*				
Povlen's Stone balls	Mean	3.13	3.32	3.67	4.24	4.35
	F	9.661				
	p	0.000*				
Bojana's Tomb	Mean	2.84	2.82	3.01	3.78	3.94
	F	6.337				
	p	0.000*				
Fairy's Circle	Mean	3.04	3.08	3.08	3.85	4.06
	F	4.533				
	p	0.001*				
Grave of first Serbian vampire	Mean	3.07	3.05	3.11	3.68	3.94
	F	2.831				
	p	0.024				
Dubocka Cave	Mean	3.08	3.17	3.62	4.05	4.35
	F	7.790				
	p	0.000*				
Graveyard Weekend Cottages	Mean	2.70	2.60	2.79	3.68	3.53
	F	5.347				
	p	0.000*				
Najdan's Circles	Mean	2.87	3.17	3.39	4.22	4.18
	F	10.984				
	p	0.000*				

The Energy Fields	Mean	3.11	3.22	3.41	4.29	4.47
	F	8.167				
	p	0.000*				
The Cult of the Dead	Mean	2.17	2.09	2.22	3.17	2.41
	F	5.175				
	p	0.000*				
Black wedding	Mean	1.84	1.83	1.91	2.78	2.47
	F	6.093				
	p	0.000*				
The excavation of the deceased	Mean	1.74	1.89	1.86	2.68	2.59
	F	6.967				
	p	0.000*				
Priveg "Fire for the dead"	Mean	2.04	1.99	2.13	2.95	2.35
	F	4.570				
	p	0.001*				
Falling into trance	Mean	2.36	2.26	2.36	3.44	2.94
	F	5.775				
	p	0.000*				
Alms (Almsgiving)	Mean	2.07	2.05	2.18	2.90	2.82
	F	4.642				
	p	0.001*				

* $p < 0.01$; $F > 3.32$.

Source: Created by the authors based on data analysis in SPSS 25.0.

The results showed statistically significant differences between the groups of different ages in the case of almost every paranormal place and event (Table 6). The study revealed that the older respondents, more so than the younger respondents, wanted to visit those kinds of places. For example, with regard to Najdan's circles ($p = 0.000$, $F = 10.984$), the group which showed the most interest in visiting was the 51–61 years old group. Najdan's circles, with their beneficial effect, represent a special treasure in

the form of medicinal thermo-mineral springs, and so the elderly believe in miracles during healing and cures for potential illnesses. This could explain why older respondents showed more interest than younger respondents in visiting those kinds of places. Other possible reasons could be that the 51–61 years old group earned more than the younger groups of respondents, or they simply had more religious or spiritual beliefs.

In addition, the ANOVA test was conducted to compare the potential differences in the respondents' answers regarding their income. However, the results did not show statistically significant differences, meaning that income had no impact on respondents' attitudes towards their interest in visiting potential paranormal place or events. Moreover, the majority of the respondents (50.1%) belonged to the same income category, and so it is understandable why there were quite uniform attitudes.

Conclusion and further research

In the past few years, increased interest in paranormal tourism has also stemmed from the growing intra-Asian flow of tourists, some of whom are likely to share an interest in these topics (Houran et al. 2020; Pharino et al. 2018; Pharino & Pearce 2019; Winter et al. 2008). Paranormal tourism is very developed in North America (Blankshein 2012; Haynes 2016), as is also the case in some areas of South America and Africa. As part of the global expansion of tourism, sub-groups of Europeans and western tourists may also increasingly be interested in paranormal sites that challenge the realities on which modern life rests.

Paranormal tourism is deeply rooted in the broader concept of cultural tourism, where recreation is not as important as the emotional experience of bizarre culture. This study revealed a surprisingly high level of potential for the development of tourism activities in rural areas, which would be rooted in local culture, in which some paranormal motifs are alive and represented by stories, myths, beings, human characters, buildings and natural elements. This says a lot about a modern society that is hungry for extraordinary experience, bored with the standard forms of tourism on offer, and which has a preference for something exciting and authentic – something that will help them to overcome their desperate struggle against boredom and routine. As such, “paranormal tourism” would be a rather innovative way to develop another niche in the rural economy.

The primary focus of this study was to examine the paranormal places and events in Serbia and to determine possibilities for paranormal tourism development. The study showed that potential domestic tourists are interested in visiting those kinds of places and events, with the main reason for such visits being curiosity. They also recognised potentials for tourism development, which is very important.

The aim was to ascertain whether domestic tourists would show interest in this type of tourism. Tourism marketers can access people with these interests in thoughtful ways, such as travel magazines, online travel information, membership of associations or clubs, or by distributing information at relevant paranormal sites or tourist organisations' sites. Tourist organisations with good promotion could attract a wide range of individuals with different characteristics, which in turn can attract considerable numbers of paranormal tourists in future years.

The present study showed that potential domestic tourists are familiar with paranormal phenomena in Serbia and 70% found it interesting. The main reason for visiting those kinds of places is curiosity. The ANOVA test results showed statistically significant differences between the groups of different settlements and most paranormal places and events. The results also showed that men were more interested in visiting paranormal places, and especially in participating in rituals. Besides gender and type of settlement, statistically significant differences were observed in the respondents' responses regarding their education and age. The study revealed that the older respondents, more than the younger respondents, wanted to visit those kinds of places. Offer can be modified based on age groups or it can be created for different age groups. Potential domestic tourists have recognised the attractiveness of paranormal places and rituals, so there is a possibility for development of this type of tourism in Serbia.

We conclude that not every study can immediately provide powerful industry implications. The present work is only a building block in the construction of a body of literature, which may in time become influential for tourism development.

During the development of any type of tourism, including paranormal, it is necessary to take into account the local population, their culture, customs, and traditions. When developing "paranormal tourism", it is important to be sure that no local habits or heritage elements are hurt in any way. This includes an irresponsible transformation of local myths, legends,

etc. into popular culture stories that would harm the local community and their traditions. Moreover, “dark tourism” may affect the religious beliefs of the locals and interfere with their rituals. Therefore, this type of tourism has a very “thin ice-nature” and must be carefully planned and implemented in order to preserve the beliefs and rituals of the local population, just as it is today, and so it will be in the future.

Potential domestic tourists have recognised the attractiveness of paranormal places and rituals but further research is necessary (such as examining attitudes of tourist organisations, management, and planning). It is especially necessary to determine the attitudes of the local population towards the development of paranormal tourism because, given the very “thin ice-nature” of this type of tourism, their involvement is necessary.

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