

Research Article

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Examining and Forecasting Tourist Arrivals and Speleotourism Development in Resava Cave (Eastern Serbia)

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Abstract: Caves, gorges, canyons, waterfalls and other karst geoheritage sites have been the focus of many tourists who visit Serbia. Caves have been visited and explored by numerous school excursions and scientific expeditions. Thus speleotourism in Serbia possesses great potential for local and regional economic empowerment. Moreover, analyzing the influence of complementary tourist activities for speleotourism can generate more knowledge for future development strategies. This paper aims to forecast tourist arrivals in Resava Cave and thus determine the current and future conditions of speleotourism development. According to the current speleotourist traffic, Resava Cave is the most developed speleotourism destination in Serbia. Therefore, estimating the growth of tourist traffic is crucial for understanding its true potential.

Keywords: Speleotourism; Resava Cave; Eastern Serbia; Medieval festival Just Out

1 Introduction

Travel combines different tourist contents and thus creates unique offers, which can be strong indicators of local or regional development (Ateljević, 2017). Different forms of

tourism lead to different levels of development but with the common goal of establishing tourism significance and providing a wealth of sustainable benefits for locals. The establishment of geotourism is a social reaction to attractive geological features. Geotourists can comprise both independent travelers and group tourists, and they may visit natural areas or urban/built areas wherever there is a geological attraction (Newsome et al., 2012). Geosites can occur in either natural or modified settings such as in rural or urban areas, and visits to geological attractions could be either independent or on guided tours (Dowling & Newsome, 2018).

The attractiveness and tourism potential of karst landscapes have been studied in numerous areas around the world (Williams, 2008; Artugyan, 2017; Powell, 2018; Ruban, 2018; Constantin et al., 2019; Ballesteros et al., 2019; Telbisz et al., 2020). Bearing in mind that caves are the most important link between karst and tourist affirmation, it is necessary to pay attention to cave management and sustainable speleotourism development. While geotourism promotes tourism to geosites and the conservation of geodiversity (Dowling & Newsome, 2006), speleotourism, or cave tourism, refers to visiting caves and promoting cave conservation and speleological science for tourism development. Furthermore, speleotourism and geotourism are a cultural response to the physical landscape. More specifically, they combine geologically based tourism in suitable locations with interpretation, education and awareness raising to foster geoconservation and sustainable economic benefits for local communities (Gordon, 2018). Asanizde et al. (2013) argue that speleotourism can play a significant role in nature protection and forming an ecological consciousness of society. Conservation values are very important, but they are not the only advantages of cave management and speleotourism development. Postojna Cave in Slovenia is one of the best examples of how one speleological object can have an enormous influence on tourism and regional economic development (Tičar et al., 2018).

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Encompassing all the knowledge about the importance of cave management and other geosites, there is an urgent need to approach speleotourism in Serbia strategically in order to gain greater importance in the tourism market. Studies on speleotourism in Serbia (Petrović, 2006; Antić, 2018; Antić et al., 2019; Tomić et al., 2019; Vuković & Antić, 2019) have shown that caves possess an extraordinary tourism potential, which can have an exceptional impact on tourism development at a national level.

Since caves are non-renewable natural resources and their ecosystem is very vulnerable (Mingde, 1998), it is necessary to monitor tourist arrivals in order not to endanger the speleological geoh Heritage (Lobo, 2015). Besides cave monitoring and cave conservation, accurate tourist arrival forecasts are important for policymakers as they can serve as a tool for policy decisions, which aim at boosting economic development, wellbeing and employment (Gounopoulos et al., 2012).

In this paper, we examined the tourist traffic of Resava Cave in Eastern Serbia. Resava Cave is the most developed speleotouristic destination in Serbia (Tomić et al., 2019). However, future conditions and speleotourism development perspectives are uncertain. Thus, the research questions of this study are whether the future will bring more tourists to Resava Cave, how the speleotourism growth will evolve and what measures can be implemented so that all potentials can be turned into significant tourism values. Results have shown the growth of speleotourism, which occurred after 2015 when the medieval festival Just Out was initiated in the vicinity of the cave. Although they have different tourist contents, festivals and caves have a common goal, which is to satisfy the needs of tourists through authentic experiences and quality programs. The popularity of Resava Cave has grown along with the emergence of the medieval festival Just Out, which is shown in the tourist arrival data. Association between festivals and tourism is very strong and codependent (Quinn, 2006). Festivals often relate to the heritage of the places in which they take place, which strongly links festivals to tourism (Ma and Lew, 2012). Prentice and Andersen (2003) argue that the emergence of a large number of festivals is multifaceted in the cause, such as cultural planning and tourism development, through to demand factors such as serious leisure, lifestyle sampling, socialisation needs and the desire for authentic experiences. This is directly connected to complementary tourist values, which can significantly improve the destination image. Furthermore, Cudny (2013) claims that tourist space is a cultural heritage, which implies non-material elements, including cul-

tural events, such as festivals, that generate tourist traffic and affect tourist space.

In the context of social impacts, studies (Woosnam and Aleshinloye, 2015; Bagiran and Kurgan, 2016; Collins and Cooper, 2016; Pavluković et al., 2017) have shown that the festivals have social, cultural, educational and economic benefits for residents. Moreover, cultural festivals are growing each year (Liberato et al., 2020), becoming an effective tool for the development of some touristic destinations. Festivals attract a growing number of tourists since they answer the need to connect with local cultures and to know traditions, music, food and places in their true essence (Rinaldi and Sergio, 2019).

This research is important for the organisational structure of Resava Cave management as it indicates the past, present and future status of tourist arrivals. Based on the results obtained, a specific growth and development strategy can be created and implemented, aimed at establishing the sustainability and protection of this cave. Considering the rich karst environment, isolation from urban space and the current popularity, Resava Cave can become a center of various scientific–educational, social, recreational and tourist sustainable activities. Due to the rich karst sites in this area, it is also possible to establish a karst geopark as a new form of karst protection and geoconservation. This could create new job opportunities and generate regional economic sustainability. Thus, with the promotion of tourism and sustainability, Resava Cave has the potential to become the leading speleotourism destination in the region.

2 Study Area

Resava Cave. Resava Cave represents the most developed speleotourism destination in Serbia (Tomić et al., 2019). The cave is located 20 km from the town of Despotovac (Figures 1 and 2) in the limestone hill of Babina Glava. It is one of the largest and most beautiful caves in Serbia with a length of 4.5 km. It is also considered as one of the oldest (approximately 80 million years old) with several cave ornaments that are over 45 million years old. It was discovered in 1962, and 10 years later, it was opened for visitors. Moreover, Resava Cave is one of the first caves that were opened for tourists in Serbia, and the length of the tourist tracks is 800 m (Petrović, 1971).

Two waterfalls, Veliko Vrelo and Veliki Buk, are located north of Resava Cave. One administration manages both the Lisine hydrological complex and Resava Cave (Figure 3). Preliminary actions for establishing a new national

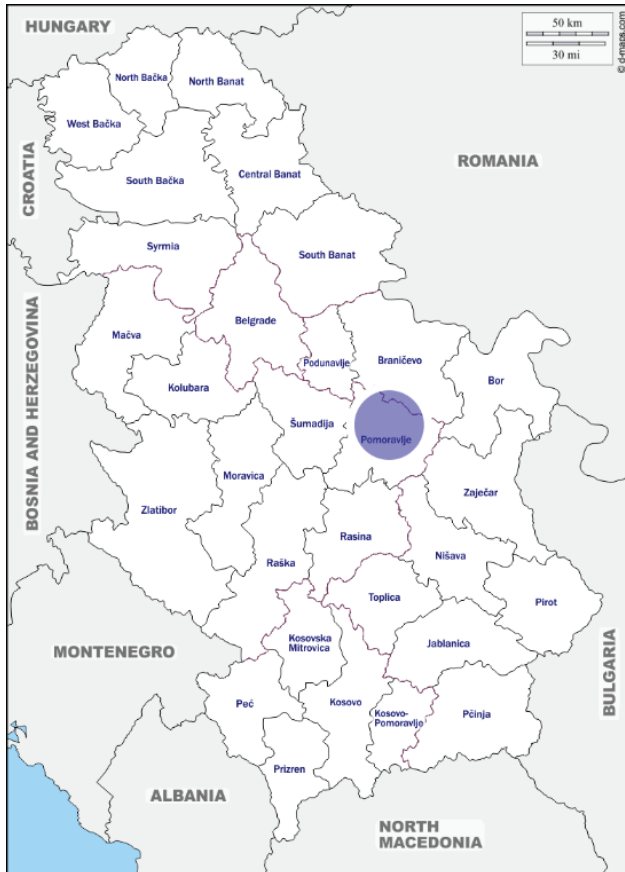


Figure 1: Location of Resava Cave. (Source: d-maps.com)



Figure 2: Location of Manasija Monastery. (Source: googlemaps.com).

park, covering the mountainous region Kučaj-Beljanica, were begun in 2017 by the Government of Serbia and Institute for Nature Protection. It is supposed to be the largest national park in Serbia, encompassing Resava Cave, Lisine complex and some of the oldest intact forests in the country.

Medieval Festival Just Out. Just Out is an annual international medieval festival (Figure 4) that has unique traditional concepts. It is held in the magnificent Manasija



Figure 3: Resava Cave (Source: www.resavskapecina.rs/site/)



Figure 4: Medieval Festival Just Out (Authors own).

Monastery, near the city of Despotovac. The event hosts visitors and organisations from all over the world (www.justout.rs). The event includes a variety of activities, some of which include medieval knights fighting, folk music performances, themed workshops, art exhibitions and other medieval conceptual activities. Unique gastronomic specialities, medieval food, wine and dance are mandatory components of the festival.

3 Methodology

The methodology of this study is based on tourist traffic data obtained from the company Resavska Pećina (Resava Cave). The research methods involved statistical processing of the obtained data and analysis of the results. Data processing involved two main phases. The first refers to the tourist traffic data before the medieval festival Just Out and the second refers to the tourist traffic data after the

festival. The first phase covers the period 2010–2014, while the second phase covers the period 2015–2019. Data before the festival were analyzed on an annual basis, while data after the festival were analyzed on a monthly and annual basis. Furthermore, data from 2014 (one year before the festival) were also analyzed on a monthly basis. This will show significant results that determine the impact of the festival on the tourism development of Resava Cave.

The main methodological approach of this research is the application of linear regression to the processing of tourist traffic data of Resava Cave. In this way, tourist traffic is forecasted in the coming years. Tourism traffic forecasting is an important segment of this research because it indicates potential management results and leads to financial assumptions, which can be a good incentive for quality speleotourism growth and development.

The Winters models use three parameters α , δ , and γ for forecasting. The parameter α is the weighting or smoothing parameter of level, parameter γ is the weighting parameter of trend and parameter δ is the weighting parameter for seasonal components. The Winters model is given as follows (Cho, 2003):

$$\hat{Y}_{t+1}(t) = [a(t) + b(t)] \cdot Sn_{n+1}(t + 1 - L) + \varepsilon_t,$$

where

$\hat{Y}_{t+1}(t)$ is the forecast for the next time period, $t + 1$;

$a(t)$ is the smoothed estimated for the level at time period t ;

$b(t)$ is the smoothed estimate for the slope at time period t ;

$Sn_{n+1}(t + 1 - L)$ is the smoothed estimate for the $(t + 1)$ th season made at time period $t + 1 - L$;

L is the periodicity of the seasonality;

ε_t is the forecast error at period t .

4 Results and Discussion

Tourism planning for cultural events requires careful assessment and the corresponding provision of events that entail appropriate challenges (Marcouiller & Westeren, 2019). Festival managers need to realise that the

success of the festival is to a large degree dependent on how they manage their internal team (Van Niekerk, 2016). Their organisational structure should focus on creative, innovative and unique approaches to the tourism business. Therefore, the integration of festival tourism and speleotourism can bring to the national tourist market of Serbia the possibility of innovative perspectives, which are encouraged by creative ways to promote and modernise tourism planning.

A detailed observation of Resava Cave tourist traffic, before and after the medieval festival Just Out, aims to show the speleotourism potential, its current utilisation and the possibility to convert these potentials to exceptional

tourist values (Table 1). Before the festival, the highest number of visitors occurred in 2010, when 37,192 tourists visited the cave, while the lowest number of visitors occurred in 2014 (the year before the festival) when 32,002 tourists visited the cave. As can be observed in Tables 1 and 2, the number of tourists barely exceeds 37,000 for the period 2010–2014. Considering that Resava Cave is one of the most developed in Serbia, it can be clearly concluded that the data for the period 2010–2014 represent poor management results and that such a downward trend would significantly weaken the tourist development of this cave.

Table 2 indicates monthly data on tourist arrivals for the year 2014. It is evident that in May and June the arrivals had the highest numbers, while in the winter months the arrivals had much lower numbers. These data indicate the seasonal tourist character of Resava Cave, which had an almost continuous decline in tourist traffic. Therefore, there was a clear need to expand the speleotourism season and to establish a clear tourism strategy for further development, bearing in mind cave conservation and protection.

In 2015, a very positive contribution was made to the tourism identity of the Resava region in Eastern Serbia. A social initiative was launched at the state level that resulted in the organisation of the first international knightly medieval festival in Serbia, called “Just Out”.

Table 1: Tourist traffic in Resava Cave before the medieval festival Just Out

Year	Number of Visitors
2010	37,192
2011	36,470
2012	34,674
2013	36,260

The first festival included a rich manifestation program of medieval competitions, art fairs, preparation of gastro-economic specialities from the Middle Ages and a very diverse music program.

In the same year that the festival was first organised, the tourist arrivals of Resava Cave increased by 9,665 tourists, which can be seen in Table 3. This significant data indicates a very positive result achieved by the cave management in 2015. As can be seen in Tables 1 and 2, the arrival of tourists to Resava Cave before the festival has been in a steady decline. Therefore, it can be safely

established that this increase in tourist arrivals is directly related to the festival. Since the festival was a great success for the first year, future organisation plans included much more work on marketing strategies, advertising, Internet promotion and exhibiting at tourism fairs. As the festival received significant results and increased popularity, Resava Cave received more visitors. In 2016, the management of the cave again witnessed an increase in tourist arrivals by 9,024 visitors. For the period of 2 years, 18,689 more tourists visited the cave. The following year, the cave again received more visitors with a total number of 57,209 tourists. In 2018, the increase in tourist arrivals continued but not in large numbers as in previous years, but for 2,732 visitors. Therefore, that year, 59,941 tourists visited the cave, which was the highest number of visitors so far. The observed period of this research is until 2019, when the number of tourists reached 54,981. This data indicates that the upward trend is continuing and that very positive results can be expected in the future.

Looking at the monthly data, a significant difference between the winter and summer months can be noticed. In summer, many visitors visit the cave, especially in May. After May, the number of arrivals begins to decline. It is necessary to make use of the whole summer season and to hold a large number of visits during that period. The festival was held every year in August. Tourist arrivals in August and June are the highest after May. This further confirms that the festival influences the growth of tourists' arrival in the cave.

The results of applied simple seasonal and Winters additive and multiplicative models are shown in Table 4.

Table 2: Tourist traffic in Resava Cave in 2014.

Month	Number of Visitors
January	262
February	158
March	452
April	3,617
May	7,403
June	6,493
July	2,489
August	3,748
September	2,365
October	2,799
November	832
December	1,389
Total	32,002

Table 3: Tourist traffic of Resava Cave after the medieval festival Just Out

Year					
Month	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
January	291	404	171	297	308
February	80	571	259	638	453
March	683	1,796	1,618	1,096	3,933
April	5,029	4,875	7,540	8,583	6,547
May	13,625	16,239	16,324	18,138	16,934
June	4,534	7,077	8,073	6,752	8,213
July	3,158	4,417	5,271	5,259	6,160
August	6,306	6,452	7,433	7,759	8,063
September	2,348	2,867	3,591	4,176	4,370
October	4,353	5,147	5,628	5,895	6,456
November	1,065	616	1,172	1,265	1,425
December	195	230	129	83	389
Total	41,667	50,691	57,209	59,941	63,251

Table 4: Applied simple seasonal and Winters additive and multiplicative models

Model	Simple Seasonal Resava Cave—Model_1	Winters Additive	Winters Multiplicative
Normalised BIC	13.855	13.704	13.731
RMSE	994.718	998.346	952.642

Table 5: Exponential smoothing model parameters

Model		Estimate
Resava Cave—Model_1	α (Level)	0.262
	γ (Trend)	0.004
	δ (Season)	0.448

Table 4 reports the normalised BIC and RMSE results for the Resava Cave model. The Winters multiplicative model outperforms simple seasonal and Winters additive models for Resava Cave. According to the results reported in the previous table, we estimated exponential smoothing model parameters.

In Table 5, we can see values for all three smoothing parameters, α , γ and δ . For Resava Cave, the value of the parameter α is low at 0.262, and it indicates that the observed series is quite stable during the period. The trend value γ is very low, and we can conclude that the slope of the trend line is fairly constant. Seasonal effects are explained by the third parameter δ . Its value of 0.448 indicates that the seasonal effects are more pronounced.

5 Conclusion

The presence of seasonal effects is preconceived for observed data, and we can conclude that the seasonal factors are higher from November to March for all series. But, according to the final results received from the prediction of real correlated time series, we can also conclude that the future of Resava Cave tourism is enthusiastic. With the use of the exponential smoothing model parameters proposed in this paper, it is possible to improve the forecast factuality for Resava Cave; this fact is encouraging.

In the future, it will be shown how and to what extent the festival will develop and whether it will continue to influence the growth and development of speleotourism. Considering the content and the continuous enrichment of tourist offers, everything indicates that speleotourism in this part of Serbia will continue to grow. Nevertheless, numerous improvements are needed so that speleotour-

ism offers of Resava Cave can become competitive in the tourist market outside Serbia. The proposed strategic measures are the result of a quantitative analysis of the tourism traffic forecast. The following measures are necessary in order to achieve competitiveness and sustainable development in the tourism market:

1. Upgrade the official website to attract foreign tourists more easily.
2. Implement marketing strategies (attract tourists with teambuilding programs).
3. Establish business connections with management teams of other show caves in Serbia.
4. Initiate a unique speleotourist route with all show caves in Serbia.
5. Promote regional and national karst protection measures.

By implementing these measures, speleotourism acquires a modernised economic identity, which can influence the position of the caves on the tourist market. Considering the positive data on the future arrivals of tourists to Resava Cave, it is necessary to approach the strategic development of speleotourism and cave management in a multidisciplinary manner to better meet the needs of future tourists.

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