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# **ASSESSMENT OF TOURIST GROUPS VISITING A REMARKABLE INTERNATIONAL SKI TOURISTIC CENTRE**

Review

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### ***Abstract***

*My essay is the third part of the survey which analyses the tourism of Austria and are systematically based on each other. My present survey is the result of the research and market research which was conducted at the beginning of February 2014. Timing and the ski region Obertauern made us possible to study the operation of the sub-branch in weather conditions which are characteristic of the main season in an internationally recognised ski resort. First of all, I wanted to find out the size of the area is that is affected by the demand of the destination, how long tourists stay in Obertauern, which accommodation they choose and what inspires them to opt for this ski centre. In addition, I analysed the basic difference between the possibilities offered to domestic and foreign tourists. As a final conclusion I was interested in the issue if there are any differences between the Austrian destinations which were analysed before and the currently studied destination.*

***Keywords: ski, Austria, destinations***

## **1. INTRODUCTION, HYPOTHESIS**

My essay is the third part of a survey which analyzes the tourism of Austria. The parts are systematically linked to each other. Based on my experience and some secondary data, I compared the development of the tourism in Hungary and Austria as well as the features of demand and supply in both countries in 2011. At the beginning of the winter saison (middle of December 2012), I was given the opportunity to study and analyse the Austrian ski region called Koralpe in person. My present survey shows the findings of this (market) research which was conducted on the spot at the beginning of February 2014.

Timing and the ski region Obertauern enabled us to study the operation of the sub-branch in weather conditions which are characteristic of the internationally recognised ski-resort in the main season. First of all, I wanted to find out the size of the area that is affected by the offer that the destination in question can provide. I analyzed how long tourist stay in Obertauern, which accommodation they choose and what inspires them to opt for Obertauern. In addition, I analysed the basic difference between the possibilities offered to domestic and foreign tourists. I was interested in the issue if regarding supply and demand there are any differences between Austrian destinations analysed before and the destination being subject to the present survey. "In many cases, people take advantage of the natural attractions of the spots that enable to carry out physical activities." says Michalkó Gábor in his essay "Tourismology" (MICHALKÓ Gábor 2012:103).

In my essay, I briefly assess the primary attractions of the province Salzburg and ski-region Obertauern, their special services based on the above-mentioned features of the centre. The assessment is embedded in the corresponding references of the professional literature. In the second part of my essay, I evaluate the primary market research. After conducting the analysis, I focus on the main connections-conclusions and I confirm or deny some hypothesis, which are partly based on the research conducted by BRANDON M.J.Finn.

Related to my primary survey, I made the following hypothesis:

A: This destination is mainly visited by Austrian tourists.

B: Most of the tourists come from a distance of 500-800m km.

C: The vast majority of the tourists spend at least a week in the area of this destination.

D: The interviewees usually ski for pleasure.

E: The majority of the interviewees choose a hotel as accommodation.

F: Expenditures made by Hungarian tourists during their holidays don't reach the average level.

G: 2/3 of the interviewees use other special services.

H: More than 50 % of the ski tourists visit Salzburg. Therefore, Obertauern is a touristic centre that is primarily based on its own attractions. Programs offered by this touristic centre are linked to important cultural elements.

I: Weather and natural features considerably influence the nationality structure and the holiday habits of the tourists.

## 2. ASSESSMENT OF THE SKI-TOURISTIC FEATURES OF THE PROVINCE SALZBURG AND OBERTAUEARN

According to Gyuricza L., the province Salzburg has a complex touristic offer. "In addition to its world famous ski centers (Zell am See, Bischofshofen, Kaprun), sommer natural tourism is also remarkable (Kriml-waterfalls, Upper-Tauern national park, clifvalleys and Europe's largest ice-cave called Eisriesenwelt, etc.)" (GYURICZA László 2008:121). Besides health tourism and lakes located in the province Salzburg, it is an international cultural centre due to Mozart. In addition to German tourists, László Gyuricza mentions target groups from the overseas (American and Japanese tourists) as main market segments of the region. „Winter tourism is of great economic importance for the eastern Alpine regions of Europe”(MATZLER Kurt, FÜLLER Johann, FAULLANT Rita 2007:409).

We can see that there are several attractions on province level alongside with branches based on the height and the mountain climate which can be derived from the above mentioned features. On one hand, these attractions (thermal water, culture, etc.) may principally serve as complementary supply elements. On the other hand, services offered in Obertauern have "to cope with strong rivals". It raises the question if complementary offer constitutes a competitive advantage for a village or another success key should be found. In general, we can raise the question if ski tourists only look for ski-related experience, complementary offer doesn't play an important role in decision-making (Hypothesis H).

Based on Google map and my studies at university, I can say that the province Salzburg borders on Upper-Austria in the north, Tirol in the west, Steiermark in the east and Kärnten (which was analysed in my previous essay) in the south. However, in northwest, it has a common border with Germany. This location implies a considerable potential as far as the offer is concerned. As a part of the Eurasian Mountain system called Eastern-Alps, central areas lie between the Northern-and Southern-Alps which is a young chain mountain compressed from crystal stones. The Low-Tauern with its peak of 2862 meters called "Hochgolling" forms a part of it. The Radstädter-Tauern situated between the upper section Enns and Mur belongs to the large geographical group called Low-Tauern. The holiday resort Obertauern lies at a distance of about 15 457 km from the peak located at a sea-level of 1740 m. The sub river of the Danube called Enns comes north of the destination, in the region Radstadt. Obertauern lies at a distance of 395 km west of Győr. You can easily get there on the highway S6 from Semmering. The ski region called Obertauern Bergbahnen is divided into 2 ski areas: Obertauern and Grosseck which can be visited using 1 ticket. In the next part, I will analyse the touristic features of Obertauern in due consideration of its higher turnover. Obertauern is a ski area situated between the 2 peaks Gamsleitenspitz (2357 m) and Seekarspitz (2350 m). These peaks are 200 m higher than the areas in the Koralps since snow supply is provided from natural sources. It isn't necessary to use snow canones. The 100 km long slope system operated from the end of November until the beginning of May

goes up to a height of 2310 m. There are blue slopes with a length of 61 km, red slopes with a length of 35 km and black slopes in an area of 4 km. The red and green circle-shaped slopes can be considered as specialties of the ski region "Tauernmunde" which was mentioned by the tourists and can be visited in 2 directions: clockwise and counter-clockwise. The slope system called "Superseven" has an infrastructure linking the 7 highest peaks with the central circus valley where 7 elevators are used. On Mondays and Sundays, tourist can ski on illuminated slopes in the evenings. A snowboard park, electrical speed measuring points and 10 restaurants (so called Hütten) such as "Treffpunkt 2000" offer fantastic services to the tourists. In the vicinity of the slopes, there are 7 parking lots marked with signs P1-P7. There are constantly free parking spaces, tourists don't have to wait. They can take buses free of charge that come from the holiday resort Radstadt and are never late. Tourists are informed about the next stop by an electrical display installed on the buses. At the ski elevators, tourists don't have to queue since 6 stick lifts, 18 ski lifts, 1 cabin lift, 1 combined elevator are available to carry 49 208 people every hour. The elevators have fancy names such as "Grünwaldkopfbahn, Panoramabahn". Some of them are suitable for carrying 6-10 persons. Some elevators are equipped with heated seats and protective windows that can be pulled down. Just to compare: 4 elevators are used next to 12 slopes in the Koralps. The daily ticket costs 8000 Ft compared to the corresponding price of 6000 Ft or in special cases 4000 Ft in the Koralps (when prices are reduced due to bad weather). As far as price-value relation is concerned, this difference seems to be reasonable. In Eplény, you have to pay 5000 Ft for a ticket which is valid for 8 hours. This isn't too high in terms of price-value relation. We mustn't forget that slopes in Eplény are shorter, so operators are expected to give a discount of 1000 Ft. Another price reduction granted on weekdays could improve the situation.

### **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

We used questionnaires to get insight into winter holiday habits of tourists coming to Obertauern. The printed questionnaires were drafted in German and Hungarian language. In case of tourists having a good command of English, questions were asked in a translated version. The answers were recorded. The primary research was primarily conducted in elevators, huts and at accommodations. The questionnaires consisted of 20 questions, each question had a certain number. 9 of them were multiple-choice questions, one of them included an assessment scale, 1 question had an open end. I used a Microsoft Professional Plus Excel 2010 software and diagram-wizzard for compiling the answers. The questionnaires have been filled in by 146 tourists. The quantity of the sample is not to big, but well segmented. Besides basic data, questions referred to the motivation of the tourists, the infrastructure which was used, the expenditures made by the tourists, the effects of the economic crisis and the additional offer.

#### 4. EVALUATION OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE MADE ABOUT WINTER HOLIDAY HABITS OF TOURISTS COMING TO OBERTAUERN WHICH IS KNOWN AS AN IMPORTANT INTERNATIONALSKI TOURISTIC CENTRE

The first diagram shows the national diversity of the 146 interviewees. When analysing the answers given to the first question, there is a contrast compared to the survey conducted in the Koralps in 2012 (DARABOS Ferenc. 2014:4). The largest group of tourists amounting to 62 % come from Austria followed by Hungarians. The group of German tourists ranked on the fifth place with 6 %. Basically, the current research brought another result. The number of German tourists ranking first accounted for more than 50 % of the interviewees (56%) they were followed by Austrian tourists with 10,9 %. Hungarian tourists took the third place (8,2 %). In addition, it was interesting to see that tourists coming from the Benelux and Scandinavian countries play a more and more important role in tourism and remote destinations are getting more and more popular. **My hypothesis “A” based on the experiences gained in the Koralps is as follows: “This destination is mainly visited by Austrian tourists. It turned out to be false.”** Based on the questionnaires, we can say that tourists coming from the neighbouring Germany are provided good opportunities due to good traffic conditions and geographical location. German tourists like going to Austria to pursue their favourite sports there. Prices of services exceeding the average level are less reasonable for local tourists living nearby. According to the answers given to the first question of the questionnaire, neighbouring countries with less opportunities have a crucial part among the sending countries.

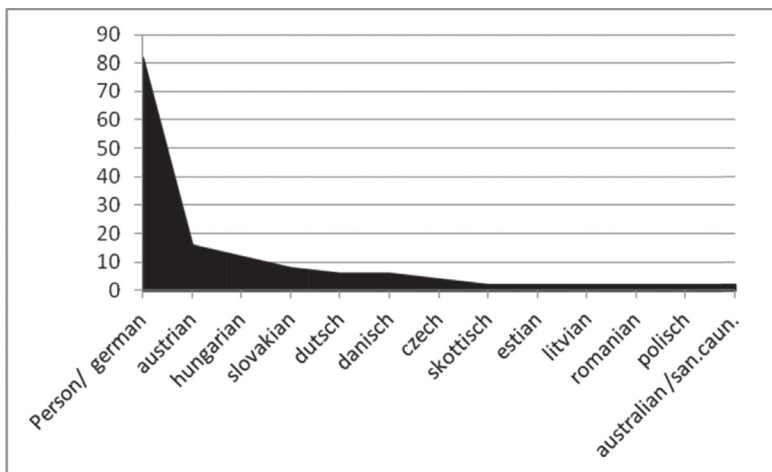


Figure 1 Number of the interviewees according to the sending person / countries

Source: own data collection Obertauern 2014

My second question focussed on the place of living which will be analysed in details together with the travel distance later. The 3rd question referred to the age of the interviewees (Figure 2). They have been divided into 4 age groups. Young (10-20 years), youngsters (20-30 years), middle-aged tourists (30- 50 years), old tourists (50-70 years).

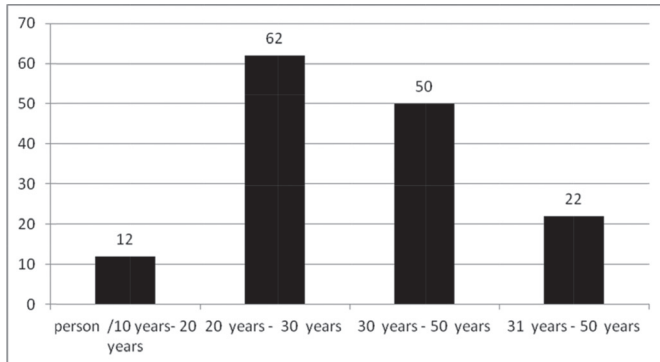


Figure 2 The structure of the interviewees according to the age person/ group  
 Source: own data collection Obertauern 2014

Compared to the survey conducted in the Koralps interviewees were about 10 % younger. According to age distribution, interviewees were similar to those ones analyzed in the previous survey made in the Koralps: 8 % were junior, 42 % young, 32 % middle-aged, and 15 % elderly. The sport is very popular among people between 20 and 30 as well as with middle-aged tourists. My 4th question was about the gender structure of the interviewees: 56,2 % of the interviewees were male and 43,8% female (Figure 3)

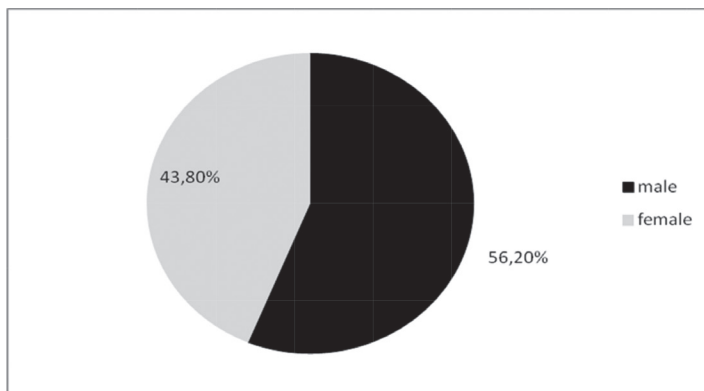


Figure 3 Structure of the interviewees according to their gender / % n=146  
 Source: own data collection Obertauern 2014

Question 4 referred to the travel distance which had to be covered by the interviewees (Figure 4). The second part of the question was about the duration of stay. After compiling the data, I divided the travel distance into 4 categories: 0-200 km, 200-500 km, 500-800 km and more than 800 km.

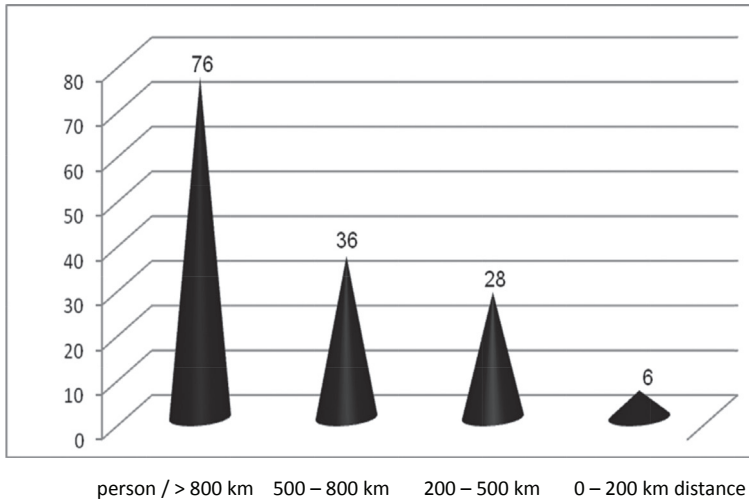


Figure 4 Travel distance covered by the interviewees / person

Source: own data collection Obertauern 2014

The results were very informative. In my hypothesis, I assumed that most of the tourists come from a medium distance (500-800 km). However, there were large groups coming from the region of Berlin and the area north and west of this region (Mönchengladbach). Dutch (Rotterdam), Danish (Copenhagen), Scottish (Scotland), Estonian and Litvanian and Roumanian (Bucharest) spots (even the Australian sending town Perth) were also indicated in the answers.

Therefore, my hypothesis “B” according to which: **“Most of the tourists come from a distance of 500-800 km”** was not confirmed. **More than a half of the interviewees, i. e. 52 % came from regions lying at a distance of more than 800 km from Obertauern.** Ski tourists coming from the areas located south of Berlin or Eastern-Middle Europe and covering a distance of 500-800 km have nearly the same proportion with 24,6 %. The same applies to the tourists coming from a distance of 200-500 km (19 % Munich or Győr). There is only a small number of tourists who came from regions situated nearby (4 %). We can say that Obertauern is a really well-functioning touristic centre. The attractive power of the region reaches the northern and eastern European countries, even overseas. Because of the great distances public roads are irrelevant way of travelling. Flying by plane is the most common option.

Replies given to the second part of the question have confirmed my hypothesis “C” according to which: “The vast majority of the tourists spend at least a week in the area of the chosen destination”. Nearly half of the interviewees spend one week or more in Obertauern (Figure 5). Because of longer travel distances, it is absolutely reasonable that so many tourists opt for a longer duration of stay. There is a tiny group of tourists who spend only 1 day at their destination. This is controversial to the results of the survey where this group prevailed. The difference can be derived from the difference in the quality of the slopes and the corresponding price level as well as from the different time of interviewing tourists in the Koralps.

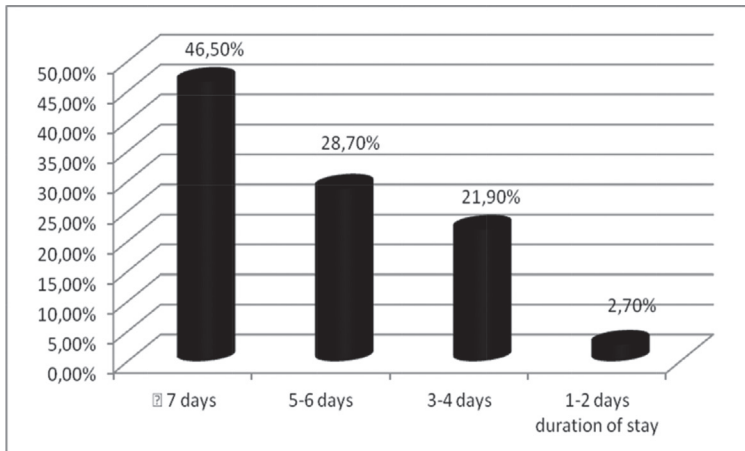


Figure 5 Location of the interviewees / % n=146

Source: own data collection Obertauern 2014

Question 6. was asked about the frequency of sky holidays in the winter season. 65,7 % of the interviewees told to make winter holiday only once a year. After a huge gap, 12,3 % of the interviewees make winter holiday twice or 3 times a year. 9,6% of the interviewees go on ski holiday 4 times in the saison Two thirds of the interviewees make winter holiday only once a year visiting Obertauern what enhances the prestige and reputation of this ski centre.

Question 7. focused on the issue why the interviewees chose this destination. More answers were acceptable at the same time. Altogether 200 votes have been casted. The highest number of the votes (exactly 46 votes) was given for the simple slope system, 34 votes were casted for big variety of slopes and 28 votes have been given for snow supply in the region. 16 votes were given for the recommendation, 12 for good location, and the vicinity of the airport of Salzburg. Many people considered their routine and the natural beauty to be important (10 votes) and the possibility to ski on the slope in a circle (8 votes), 2 votes were given to the origin, to huts, the ranking among the top 5 Austrian resorts, the price value relation, the education and the company. Primarily, the



decision of the tourists to make holiday in Obertauern wasn't only determined by prestige issues, but also by practical aspects and practicability. Many people considered promotion as really important and the rumours have been one of the best ways of promotion until now. Question 8 was about other ski centres which had been chosen by the tourists. Most of them are famous Austrian ski regions such as Schladming, Salbach, Zauchensee, Kittssteinhorn. Koralpe wasn't indicated among the answers, but Eplény was named in the answers 6 times due to the fact that Hungarians were also interviewed.

Question 9 was about the types of motivation determining the decision about ski holiday (Figure 6). The tourists were given the opportunity to choose more answers. About 2/3 of the answerers said that skiing was only hobby and was done just for fun. Active relaxation was only indicated in 15 % of the answers, but it ranked 2. Enhancement of the adrenalin level was the 3rd most important motivation factor with 14 votes. **My hypothesis "D" proved to be true: "The interviewees usually ski for pleasure"**.

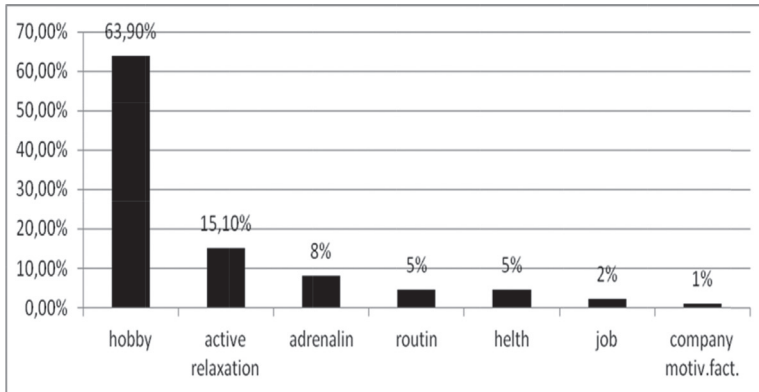


Figure 6 Proportion of the innovation factors of the interviewees according to their type / % n=172

Source: own data collection Obertauern 2014

Question 10.was about the types of accommodation which were chosen by the tourists (Figure 7). Question 11 referred to the distance between the accommodation and the ski slopes (Figure 8). **As a result of the compilation, my hypothesis "E" according to which "The majority of the interviewees choose a hotel as accommodation" proved to be true.**

60 % of the 146 interviewees stayed at a hotel. Nearly 60 % of the interviewees had an accommodation next to the slope. (further 22 % chose an accommodation located at a distance of 10-20 km from the slope, 11 % of the tourists stayed at an accommodation situated at a distance of 10 km). Private apartments ranking on the 2.place were chosen in 22 % of the answers. In case of the Koralps, this proportion was contradictive, because of the reasons

described in question 5. Pensions aren't popular types of accommodation in the ski tourism for 2 seasons: on one hand because of the lack of practical utilisation, on the other hand due to slope quality. The hotel as a high quality type of accommodation can satisfy the needs of well-off tourists coming from further regions.

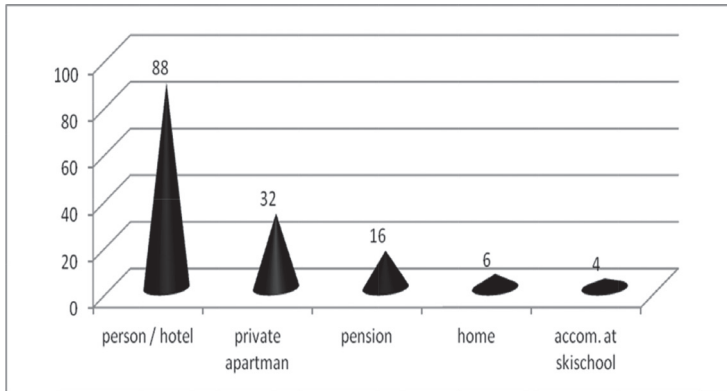


Figure 7 Type of accommodation chosen by the interviewees / person  
 Source: own data collection Obertauern 2014

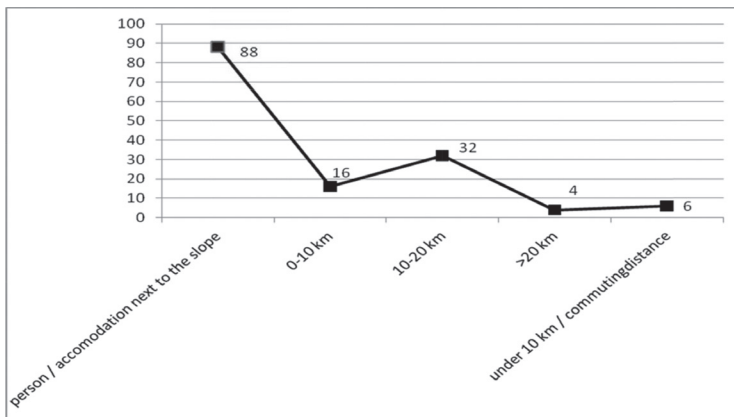


Figure 8 Distance of the accommodation chosen by the interviewees from the slope / person

Source: own data collection Obertauern 2014

By asking question 12, we wanted to enquire about the expenditures made by the tourists during their holiday. Only 100 interviewees gave reasonable answers to this question. Based on Figure 9, a top category can be established where tourists spend 1000-4000 EUR during their holiday. This group accounts for 34 % of the interviewees. After that I made a bottom category including

tourists with an expenditure of 700-800 EUR, 12 % of the interviewees could be divided into this category. At the top of the middle category, there are tourists making an expenditure of 600 EUR and accounting for 28 % of the interviewees. I have established a middle category. Interviewees (6%) making expenditures of 5000 EUR belong to this category. Expenditures less than 500 EUR belong to the lowest category with a proportion of 10 %. Incentive guests sponsored by their company and ski teachers also account for 10 %. Tourists coming from German sending areas, Austrians and guests coming from further located areas belong to the top category. Hungarian tourists represent the same proportion in the under middle and bottom category. On average, interviewees spend 1071 EUR. According to the findings of the survey conducted in the Koralps, the average expenditure was 585 EUR. The nearly double difference confirms the remarkable difference between the living standards of tourists visiting these 2 destinations which was analyzed before and the difference between the price level of the 2 destinations which was described in the introduction. The average expenditures made by Hungarian tourists were 300 EUR. As for the expenditures, we don't reach the average level. The social layer consisting of entrepreneurs approaches the middle category. Tourists working as employees are "condemned" to the lowest category. **My hypothesis "F" according to which "Expenditures made by Hungarian tourists during their holidays don't reach the average level" proved to be absolutely right.**

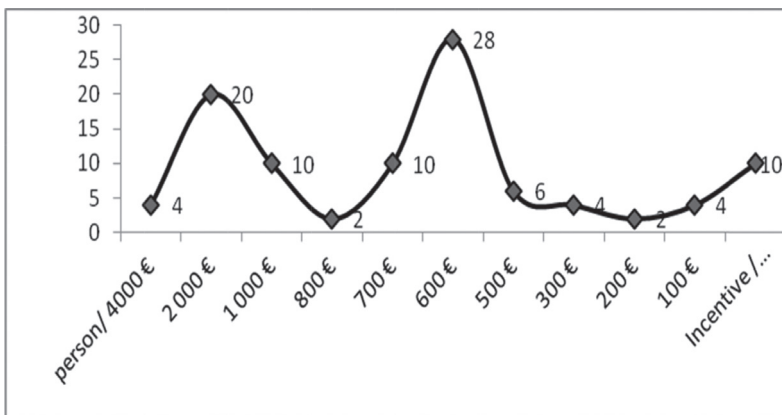


Figure 9 Planned expenditures of interviewees made during their holiday / person

Source: own data collection Obertauern 2014

Question 13-16 referred to the reactions given to the economic crisis such as reduction of expenditures and the number of travels. Figure 10 clearly shows that 90 % of the interviewees making holiday in Obertauern didn't react to the crisis by reducing their expenditures in connection with winter holidays. The group reducing the expenditures and accounting for 10 % consisted of Hungarians and Slovaks. As far as reduction of the number of trips is concerned, the

above-mentioned proportion was 96 %. Austrian, Slovakian and Hungarian interviewees decided to reduce their expenditures by decreasing the duration of stay by 2 days and choosing only one holiday a year. Some German guests told us not to understand the question because they didn't even notice the crisis.

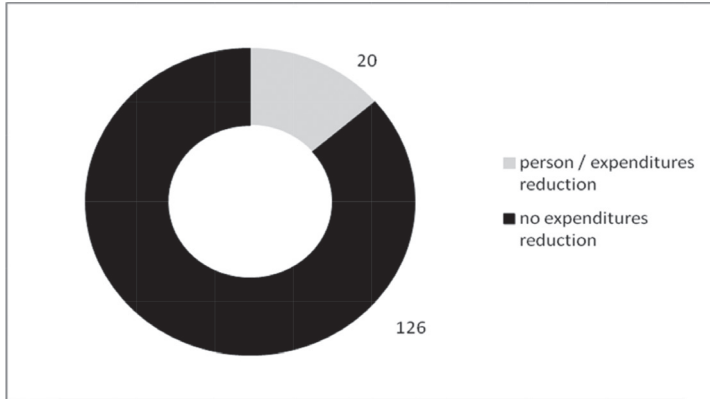


Figure 10 Reactions of the interviewees given to the economic crisis / person  
 Source: own data collection Obertauern 2014

Question 17-18 referred to the intention of tourists to make use of other services as well as to their names.

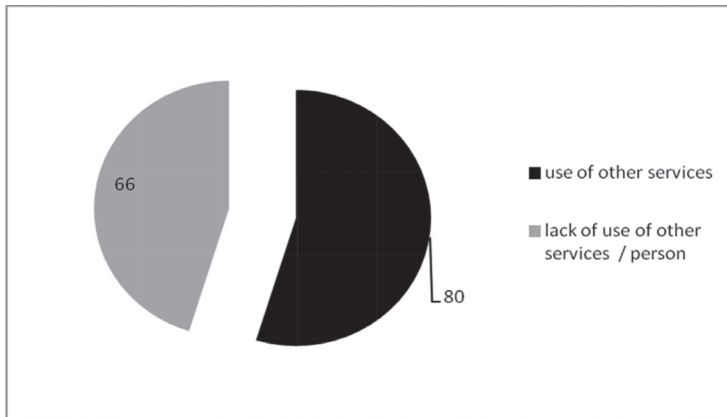


Figure 11 Intention of the interviewees to make use of other services / person  
 Source: own data collection Obertauern 2014

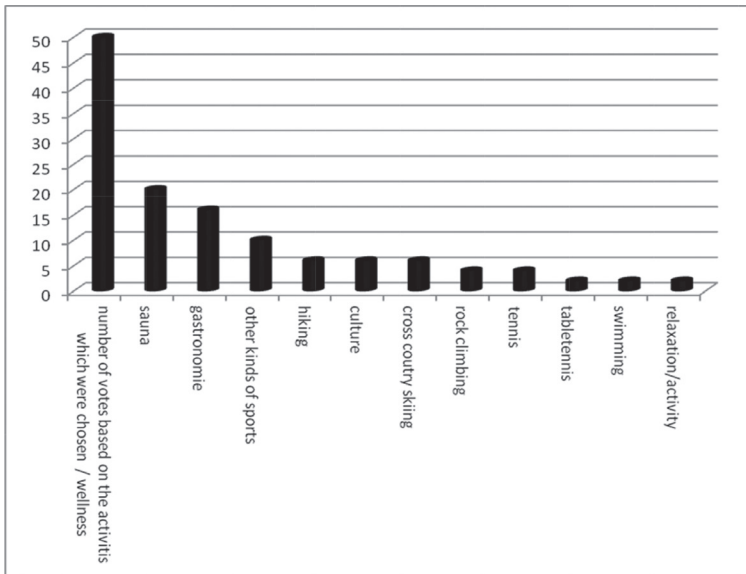


Figure 12 Other leisure activities of the interviewees services / person  
*Source: own data collection Obertauern 2014*

As shown in the figures 11-12, a bit more than the half of the interviewees (54,7 %) made use of other services. The vast majority of the tourists coming to Obertauern chose this destination because of the skiing facilities. **My hypothesis “G” according to which” 2/3 of the interviewees use other special services”** didn’t prove to be right. The question 12 could be answered in several ways. Of the 128 answers, the frequency of wellness was very high (50 answers) due to the weather conditions. In addition, sauna and gastronomy could also be highlighted. As far as sports are concerned, cross country skiing, hiking and rock climbing played an important role. Hungarian tourists showed interest towards the culture as well. Questions 19-20 referred to the visit of Salzburg lying at a distance of 100 km north of Obertauern. With these questions, we also aimed to find out the reasons of a visit in Salzburg. Based on Figure 13, we can say that 80,8 % of the interviewees didn’t visit the hometown of Mozart. 64 % of the interviewees claimed that activities resulting from skiing constituted the main reason for their choice. Lack of time and earlier visits were also indicated among the reasons. Interviewees answering the question with “yes” mentioned the regional attractive power, the central location alongside with the airport, shopping facilities and business relations among the advantages of the ski resort. **My hypothesis “H” according to which“ more than 50 % of the ski tourists visit Salzburg and therefore Obertauern is a touristic centre due to its own attractions, programs and some important cultural elements”** was partly proved to be right (Figure 13.). Particularly, the second part of the hypothesis couldn’t be confirmed. The sortiment is completed by cultural elements which are shown in the Figure 12. But these elements are

only complementary and marginal. Brandon F. also shares this view: There was minimal evidence supporting the influence of culture on the choice of ski destination (BRANDON M.J.Finn 2012:64).

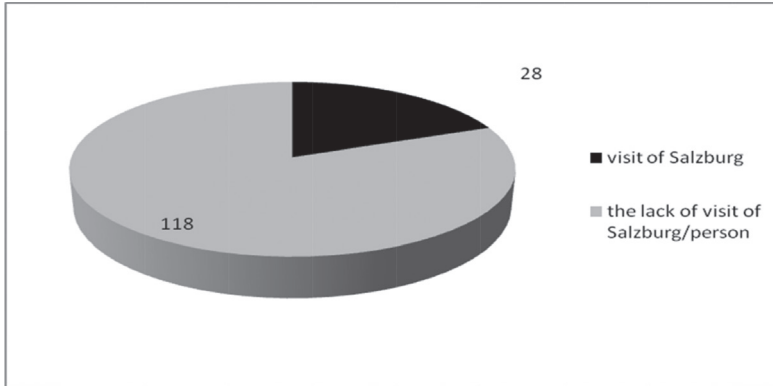


Figure 13 Other leisure activities of the interviewees services / person

Source: own data collection Obertauern 2014

As a result of my survey, I can say that **my hypothesis “I” according to which “weather and natural features considerably influence the nationality structure and holiday habits of the tourists”** has been confirmed. This can be proved by the survey conducted in the Koralps and the experiences of the present research and its above-mentioned differences as well.

## CONCLUSIONS

Figures of the survey made in the Koralps result from the smaller slope size, the poorer variety of infrastructure, the partly stormy weather and the different timing. It is supported by the statement made by Klenosky (1993) which says : “skiers want to be challenged and to have a variety of choices and thus are concerned with the difficulty of the trails. However, it was also found that skiers had a concern for their well-being and safety, which were clustered with grooming and snow conditions” (BRANDON M.J.Finn 2012:16). We can say that Obertauern is an internationally recognized and industrially operated touristic centre with excellent performance. It has a Transeuropean and a global attractive power. The above-mentioned statements can be confirmed by the figures about the travelling habits of tourists, the duration of their stay and their spendings. Prosperity of the destination considerably depends on the intensity of tourism generated by the German sending market and the economic performance of the sending area. As for the Hungarian sending market, we can say that types of accommodation chosen by Hungarian tourists belong to the cheaper categories and spending (expenditures) made by Hungarian tourists fall behind the average.

In general, tourists make reasonable and calculable decisions which are determined by attraction elements called **hard factors** such as followability of the slope system and quality, snow security and accessibility. It is supported by the statement made by Richards (1996) which says: „In terms of factors affecting ski destination choice, snow conditions was the most important.” In addition, tourists put a great emphasis on their accommodation and the opinion of their acquaintances besides their own experiences. Certain amenities of the ski resort that skiers found important also affected their perception of the resort’s economic value (BRANDON M.J.Finn 2012:60). The vast majority of the tourists don’t feel the economy crisis and they constitute tourists groups that are ready to spend much money and primarily focus on skiing. Brandon F. also shares this view: “The participants were willing to pay a little more if they felt it were to be getting a better value for their money” (BRANDON M.J.Finn 2012:60). **In case of the above-mentioned target group, other leisure activities play only a marginal role in terms of demand. According to the sample, tourists visiting ski resorts with a quality like Obertauern can provide are guests who can easily be targeted and have a great spending potential and are ready to travel.**

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