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Domestic Tourism and the Domestic Tourist Experience: Complexities, Idiosyncrasies, and Understandings

Abstract

Domestic tourism is a crucial socioeconomic factor for destinations, regions, and local communities. Its peculiarity creates unique opportunities, as well as challenges and complexities, in the formulation of the tourist experience. Two studies examine the complexity of the factors involved in formulating the tourist experience in the context of domestic tourism. A fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis of data derived from 394 respondents emphasizes first the nexus of quality and social aspects, then the triad of hygiene, cultural, and price issues, and finally the nexus of quality and novelty aspects. The social element, which embraces social interactions with others and quality time with friends, predominates in forming a positive overall domestic experience, according to an additional qualitative study that delves deeper into the investigated phenomenon by analyzing the responses of forty informants. The findings contribute to the academic milieu of the tourist experience and have direct managerial implications for domestic tourism stakeholders.

Keywords: tourist experience, domestic tourism, fsQCA, fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis, qualitative research

1. Introduction

Domestic tourism is viewed as a panacea for local economies afflicted by international crises, such as the recent pandemic, in which destinations adopted, among other initiatives, financial support schemes for domestic travel (Cvelbar & Ogorevc, 2020). People turned to domestic tourism to satisfy their desire for travel and vacations, while tourism and hospitality businesses targeted domestic customers (Christou et al., 2022). This benefited both the economies of small destinations that have traditionally relied on international tourist inflows and the economies of larger nations in which domestic tourism contributes to the economic sustainability of local businesses (Shkurko, 2022).

For decades, domestic tourism has been acknowledged for its socio-economic impacts, particularly at a local level, by acting as a salient contribution to national economies, reducing disparities in less developed areas, sustaining social tourism, and supporting national tourism industries particularly in years of economic turmoil and other exogenous shocks (Falk et al., 2022; Lebrun et al., 2021; Canavan, 2013; Wang et al., 2017). The pandemic posed difficulties for domestic tourism. Destinations and businesses made additional efforts to meet their customers' increasing (such as safety) needs while attempting to provide domestic tourists with innovative, distinctive, high-quality, and satisfying experiences (Christou & Savva, 2021). This is even though domestic tourists are recognized as more demanding than foreign visitors, as they may become less satisfied with the service provided by tourism providers (Steffen et al., 2021). In addition, it is debatable

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whether domestic visitors will revisit the exact location a second time, even if they had positive and memorable experiences there (Ye et al., 2021). Tourism stakeholders struggle to comprehend the nature of tourism experiences (Lebrun et al., 2021). This difficulty is enhanced by considering the complexity of affairs and the pandemic's exacerbated chaos.

This study responds to calls for additional research on domestic tourism, which has been an understudied topic (Canavan, 2013) despite being considered more important than outbound tourism in many countries (Lebrun et al., 2021). Moreover, and perhaps most importantly, it contributes to the academic tourist experience milieu in a manner that is significant for the tourism industry post-pandemic. Thus, the study's overarching aim is to investigate the complexity of factors involved in formulating an overall positive experience within the context of domestic tourism. The paper advances by introducing the conceptual framework of complexity theory (Varnali, 2019) and implementing two studies. The first study employs a complexity perspective and fsQCA-fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (Pappas, 2021) to provide a specific understanding of the complexity and combination of various factors involved in forming the overall visitor experience. The second study is a qualitative investigation (Christou, 2018). This study complements the first by providing additional and comprehensive information on the phenomenon under investigation, namely, how a positive domestic tourist experience may be achieved. Cyprus served as an appropriate location context for both studies due to its developed hospitality and tourism industry, which includes a variety of resorts, venues, museums, leisure activities, and national/theme parks that cater to international and domestic tourists. According to Eurostat (2019), 51.1% of its residents took either a short (1 to 3 nights) or long (4 nights or longer) domestic trip. Like other global destinations, the Deputy Ministry of Tourism announced specific targeted schemes and incentives to support domestic travel and tourism activities during the pandemic crisis (2020 to 2022) to boost the domestic tourism economy of the destination.

2. Literature review

2.1. Complexity in tourism and tourist experience

The current world and its industries (including the tourism industry) are characterized by the complexity of the factors they face and the constant need to address them, particularly if such challenges radically disrupt the status quo, such as wars or the recent pandemic. Complexity science is more of a multidisciplinary science than a single theory. It aims to provide insights into complex adaptive systems. Although there are specific common characteristics of complexity, such as many components, diversity, change, the interrelation between many members, the impossibility of perfect knowledge, and the coexistence of both order and disorder (Olmedo & Mateos, 2015), complexity is characterized by the coexistence of both demand and condition. The origins of complexity theory lie in chaos theory, which emphasizes complex systems (Pappas, 2019). It highlights simple observations emerging from complex systems, as higher-level patterns delivered by simple interactions, as the holistic examination of a complex system and the documentation of recognizable patterns within (Fitzgerald & Eijnatten, 2002).

As a complex system, tourism comprises institutions, organizations, sub-systems of people (visitors and locals), and physical elements (ecosystems, infrastructure, attractions) that are interconnected and mutually influential (Reddy et al., 2020). As these elements interact, they may affect the "experience" of the visitor, which is crucial to the sector's success. Visitors traverse spaces, interact with other individuals (such as locals, hosts, and friends), and develop emotional connections with them (Wearing & Foley, 2017). They receive images, objects, food, and services from hosts and service providers. The visitor is heavily influenced by the experiencescape, which includes the physical setting, products, theme, and other people, such as tourists and employees. Destinations and tourism service providers may attempt to shape the visitor experience while adding value to it positively (Hadjielias et al., 2022). They may target and address the personal needs of their visitors,

provide high-quality services, develop personal relationships with them, offer novel/unexpected features and services, and create authentic, memorable experiences for them (Zatori et al., 2018). Despite destinations and tourism organizations' efforts to meet visitors' needs and positively influence their overall experience, a variety of factors - often beyond their control - may impact the visitors' experience (Christou, 2020). Possibly, this is not news for an industry that operates in a complex and ever-changing environment susceptible to recurrent crises such as terrorist attacks, economic turmoil, and pandemics. Despite these, external and situational factors, such as the weather and the number of visitors, may impact customer experiences and the perception of safety at the destination (Xie et al., 2021).

2.2. Experience within a domestic tourism context

The tourist experience is a complex phenomenon that becomes even more perplexing when it is supported by increasing tourist demands, such as novelty seeking while being hindered by safety concerns, limitations, and restrictions (Pappas, 2019). The domestic tourist experience is crucial to ensuring the viability and success of domestic tourism, with researchers (e.g. Singh & Krakover, 2015) urging destinations to pay special attention to the unique needs and desires of domestic tourists. Other researchers emphasize distinct and niche strategies that can target and address the needs of domestic consumers (Melubo, 2020). Whether stimulated by upcoming crises or not, domestic tourism will likely continue to serve as a crucial socioeconomic mechanism to support or revitalize various nations' national economies and local communities (Nurov et al., 2021).

Domestic travelers engage in travel and tourism for various reasons, including to entertain themselves and their families, explore their country's less well-known sites and landscapes, and take a break from their daily routine (Canavan, 2013). Existing research has highlighted that domestic tourists are sensitive to local cultural and natural carrying capacities due to shared values, resources, and cultural proximity (Canavan, 2013; Ryan, 2002). Identifying the precise factors contributing to a tourist's overall experience is difficult because various complex endo/exogenous conditions influence experiences. Existing literature provides insights into critical factors that may influence the tourist experience. These include quality considerations (Suhartanto et al., 2020), hygiene, safety, and risk issues (Pendergast, 2021; Peng & Xiao, 2018), cultural dynamics (McKercher, 2020), social interaction factors (Zatori, 2018), price considerations (Mahrous & Hassan, 2017), and novelty mechanisms (Mitas & Bastiaansen, 2018). The domestic visitor experience is affected by the same situational factors as the international visitor experience. Expressly, Yuni (2020) referred to the price sensitivity of domestic tourists, particularly concerning lodging costs. Adeloye and Brown (2018) mentioned terrorism incidents that may elicit fear and anxiety in domestic tourists.

Customers may have different experiences with different service interactions, and other tourist segments (such as domestic tourists) may have different interests. Recent studies focused on comparing international and domestic visitors have produced findings that indicate differences in their experiences, albeit in small numbers. For example, Stone and Nyaupane (2019) found that domestic and international visitors have divergent gazes. In addition, destinations and tourism organizations continue to face the challenge of providing novel, unique, and unexpected experiences to a domestic market that may return to the same tourism/hospitality venues.

Understanding how the customer experience unfolds and how experiential episodes combine to form an overall experience is crucial for businesses (Varnali, 2019), and the same holds for domestic travellers. Due to the consequences of the pandemic, its peculiarity, difference in perceptions (Karamelikli et al., 2020), and dissimilarity with international tourists (Steffen et al., 2021; Stone & Nyaupane, 2019), there is a need for additional research on domestic tourism. This is the focus of this study. Amid an intense, hectic, and chaotic period brought on by the pandemic, this paper aims to offer insights into the domestic visitor experience. As previously discussed, the tourist experience is already a complex phenomenon; after a long period of travel restrictions, enormous psychological and physical pressure, safety and hygiene challenges, and complicated procedures and protocols due to the pandemic, it will be even more so. How destinations address the domestic

visitor experience is of the utmost importance for the industry's success and the evolution of domestic tourism. Moreover, domestic tourism has proven vital in times of crisis, when destinations and tourism organizations are forced to look beyond the international traveller (Canavan, 2013).

3. Methods

This paper's overarching aim is to investigate the complexity of factors in formulating an overall positive experience within domestic tourism. Due to this, two studies have been conducted. The first study (from now on referred to as Study 1) incorporated a complexity perspective and fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis. In the context of domestic tourism, the purpose of this study was to present various combinations and permutations of critical factors involved in the formation of experiences. The second study (Study 2 below) used qualitative inquiry principles. As justified and explained in Section 3.2, this supplementary study was undertaken to better understand the phenomenon under investigation (Christou & Farmaki, 2019). Both studies' findings would have provided a comprehensive and comprehensive understanding of the domestic tourist experience.

3.1. Study 1: A complexity-based perspective and fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis

3.1.1. Participants and sample

Participants were reached during three months in Cyprus's public areas (i.e., public squares and parks), while the research sample consisted of domestic tourists. These were randomly selected to be interviewed based on a structured questionnaire with a list-wise deletion being used to handle missing data (Allison, 2001). Given that the population proportions were unknown, we purposely employed a 50-50 conservative response, if 50% of the informants had a negative and the other 50% had a positive perception of their overall domestic experience. With a selection of 95% confidence and the allowance of a 5% sampling error, the sample size was determined at 384.1. In comparison, the data collection process ended once 394 questionnaires were collected (response rate: 87.6%). Table 1 provides information regarding the informants' characteristics.

Table 1
Study 1 respondents' profiles

		Frequency	Quantity
Gender	Male	174	44.2
	Female	220	55.8
	Total	394	100.0
Age	18-35	198	50.3
	36-50	106	26.9
	>50	90	22.8
	Total	394	100.0
Income	≤ €1900	324	59.4
	> €2000	160	40.6
	Total	394	100.0

3.1.2. Measures and algorithms

The questionnaire of the first study included 27 Likert scale statements in which 1 indicated a strong disagreement. On the contrary, 5 showed a firm agreement. There were also two socio-demographic questions. The questions linked to 'price', 'quality', 'hygiene', and 'overall experience' were based on previous studies (Pappas, 2019) examining the tourist experience formulation. The statements linked to 'social', 'novelty' and 'cultural' issues were explicitly formulated from the current research; therefore, we proceeded into an Exploratory Factor Analysis with its results presented in the findings section. The SPSS (version 26) was used to calculate the descriptive statistics of the study, as well as the factor analysis.

A fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis provided that there is a presence of asymmetry (in the examined relationships) and that coefficients' absolute correlated values fall lower than 0.60 (Skarmeas et al., 2014). All correlated values between the examined factors meet this threshold, indicating that different configurations may lead to the same outcome. The 'fsQCA' software was used to analyse and evaluate the complex statements. In more detail, the consistency and coverage were calculated through the following formulae (Hervas-Oliver et al., 2015) where for the domestic tourist i , X_i is the membership score in the X configuration, and Y_i is the membership score for the overall domestic tourist experience (outcome condition):

$$\text{Consistency}(X_i \leq Y_i) = \frac{\sum_i [\min(X_i; Y_i)]}{\sum_i (X_i)}$$

$$\text{Coverage}(X_i \leq Y_i) = \frac{\sum_i [\min(X_i; Y_i)]}{\sum_i (Y_i)}$$

Furthermore, Necessary Condition Analysis (otherwise referred to as NCA) was implemented via 'R Studio' to examine the factors' size effect. That is, whether each factor indeed influences the outcome- overall domestic experience. The rationale and benefits of NCA are justified and evidenced in previous tourism studies (such as Papas & Glyptou, 2021). This study's NCA plots are presented and discussed in the findings section of Study 1.

In regards to algorithm implementation, the calibrated fuzzy sets used for the evaluation of the domestic visitor's overall experience within the context of domestic tourism are indicated as follows (the letter 'f' indicates 'factor'): Age: 'f_a', Income: 'f_i', Hygiene risks: 'f_hr', Cultural issues: 'f_ci', Price issues: 'f_pi', Quality issues: 'f_qi', Social issues: 'f_si', Novelty aspects: 'f_na', and Overall experience: 'f_oe'.

3.2. Study 2: In-depth qualitative inquiry

To address our research aim, qualitative research was conducted parallel to the study mentioned above. This was done firstly to allow a comparison of the results/data obtained through the first study and secondly to deliver further understandings of the world from the perspective of those being studied (Christou & Sharpley, 2019), hence gaining other in-depth insights into the domestic tourist experience. The rationale of this additional study was that qualitative inquiry (mainly through interview techniques) has proven particularly useful and insightful in examining tourist experiential phenomena (Christou & Simillidou, 2020). In more detail, research primarily based on qualitative principles may provide additional and in-depth information that may supplement other (e.g., quantitative based) studies and/or deliver a valuable and different prism of the phenomenon under investigation. Such qualitative studies may provide specific details of peoples' experiences within the context of tourism (Pearce et al., 2013). Additionally, implementing informal interviews as a useful information-gathering tool may put people "at ease" and allow them to express themselves, share their more profound thoughts, opinions and perceptions and elaborate on these (Christou, 2018).

3.2.1. Participants and interviews

A purposive sampling approach was initiated and targeted tourists who have engaged in a domestic tourist experience. That is, tourists who have visited and/or stayed in places outside their place of residence yet within the boundaries of their country (i.e., Cyprus in this case) for a combination of reasons, such as for leisure purposes, to explore fewer known sites and landscapes of their country, break from their routine (Canavan, 2013). The primary rationale of the purposive sampling was to ensure the inclusion of informants who have engaged with one or more domestic travel experiences. Furthermore, the rigour of qualitative research sampling is determined by its ability to represent the salient characteristics of informants (Farmaki et al., 2019). The researchers of this study considered the age, gender, and participation in domestic experiences of informants, ensuring that enough diversity is included. Concerning the number of informants to be included in the study, the researchers followed a saturation of findings principle as explained and used in other

qualitative studies of similar nature (Christou et al., 2019). The regulation states that the researcher ends the gathering of information once newly collected information from informants simply repeats what has already been said by other previous informants. Hence, forty (40) interviews were conducted and retained in total by two researchers in public spaces of two of the country's main towns (that is, Limassol and Larnaca). The profile of each informant is presented in Table 2.

Interviewees were given the option of opting out of the study. At the same time, those who chose to continue were informed about the scope of the research and the meanings of domestic tourism (i.e., involving tourism activity within the country). Each interview lasted not more than 35 minutes and was guided by the following main open-ended and general questions that enabled informants to describe and “elaborate” (Christou & Sharpley, 2019, p.42) on their domestic experiences.

While consulting existing literature on domestic tourist experiences (such as Lebrun et al., 2021), a pilot study was initiated (Hadjielias et al., 2022) involving three pilot interviews with informants to identify the precise questions to be used during the interviews. As in other studies of a qualitative nature (Christou et al., 2023), the pilot study intended to make the study and interview questions clear and understandable to the study participants. For instance, the pilot study encouraged us to explain/elaborate to informants what “domestic” travel and experience means before the study questions are asked. The following questions were finalized to be asked: “*What kind of leisure and/or domestic travel experiences did you engage in the last nine months? - Can you describe these?*” “*For what reasons/purposes did you engage in each leisure/domestic travel experience?*” “*Did you have an overall positive experience while engaging in a domestic tourist experience? - can you elaborate?*” (Informants were encouraged to share different experiences if they had so) “*Which factors, in your opinion, contributed to your overall positive experience?*”, “*Can you please elaborate on these factors?*” As explained below, interview findings were translated (when in Greek) and transcribed carefully to progress into the analysis process.

Table 2
Study 2 informants' profiles

#	Informant	Gender	Age	Residence	Sector	Occupation
1	Aaron	Male	40	Rural area	Private	Manager in a Bakery
2	Amals	Female	40	Urban area	Private	Banker
3	Andy	Male	63	Urban area	n/a	Retiree
4	Angelie	Female	34	Urban area	n/a	Phd Student
5	Ara	Male	33	Urban area	Private	Marketing executive
6	Aris	Male	29	Urban area	Private	Personal trainer
7	Ayshe	Female	26	Rural area	Private	Journalist
8	Chris	Male	39	Urban area	Private	Software designer
9	Crysala	Female	31	Rural area	Private	Librarian
10	Daniel	Male	63	Urban area	Private	Officer
11	Dimi	Female	28	Urban area	n/a	Unemployed
12	Dino	Male	42	Urban area	Public	Educator
13	Eugene	Male	39	Urban area	Private	Consultant
14	Filip	Male	52	Urban area	Private	Trainer
15	Izabelle	Female	45	Urban area	Private	Shop owner
16	Kathy	Female	36	Urban area	Public	Primary teacher
17	Lapa	Female	36	Urban area	Public	Chemist
18	Laz	Male	37	Urban area	Private	Journalist
19	Lia	Female	46	Urban area	Private	Graphic designer
20	Litsa	Female	50	Urban area	Private	High school teacher
21	Liyia	Female	50	Urban area	Private	Dentist
22	Luke	Male	41	Rural area	Private	Accountant
23	Marie	Female	32	Urban area	Private	Receptionist

Table 2 (continued)

24	Mario	Male	22	Rural area	n/a	Student
25	Moses	Male	38	Urban area	Public	Theologist
26	Pier	Male	37	Urban area	Private	Manager
27	Pier	Male	43	Urban area	Public	Policeman
28	Renia	Female	38	Urban area	Public	Statistician
29	Rina	Female	43	Urban area	Private	Compliance officer
30	Ross	Male	43	Urban area	Public	Educator
31	Sav	Male	61	Rural area	Public	Researcher
32	Sifs	Male	38	Urban area	Private	Athletic journalist
33	Silvia	Female	48	Urban area	Private	Secretary
34	Sophie	Female	42	Urban area	Private	Chief accountant
35	Tas	Male	56	Urban area	Private	Entrepreneur
36	Thalia	Female	59	Urban area	Private	Kindergaden teacher
37	Theano	Female	43	Rural area	Public	Administrator
38	Tina	Female	29	Urban area	Private	Researcher
39	Xena	Female	21	Rural area	n/a	Student
40	Yana	Female	38	Rural area	Public	High school teacher

3.2.2. Analysis of findings

The analysis of the interview findings involved a partially grounded approach (Miles et al., 2013), given the presence of a significant body of literature related to the overall tourist experience, yet not much on the night tourist experience. This approach enabled the study to become informed yet not constrained by prior theoretical understanding loosely, thus leading to theory building. Open coding was employed in the first coding round, with the two researchers analysing the transcripts together, assigning conceptual codes and identifying relationships through axial coding. First-order categories included the different kinds of leisure and travel experiences visitors engaged with (such as a stayover at a nearby village and a family trip to the beach). Furthermore, identifying specific factors contributes to someone's positive domestic experience. In the second and third coding rounds, the authors considered how the concepts that emerged from the first and second rounds of axial coding (and relationships between the themes) helped explain the phenomenon under investigation (Gioia et al., 2013). For instance, second-order themes involved separating and categorising different leisure activities and grouping them into stayovers and excursions. Also, the assemblage of factors contributing to someone's overall (domestic) experience. The researchers ensured a back-and-forth process involving examining the interview-derived information and literature to obtain a solid sense of categories and relations between these.

4. Findings

This section presents separately the findings from Study 1 (involving fsQCA) and Study 2 (concerning the qualitative inquiry findings).

4.1. Findings from Study 1

Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics of the first study with all the statements complemented with the results of the rotated matrix loadings and Cronbach's alpha. As previously mentioned, Exploratory Factor Analysis was implemented, resulting in a KMO test score of 0.916, much higher than the minimum requested of 0.6 (Pappas & Papatheodorou, 2017). The rotated component matrix loadings falling lower than the threshold of 0.4 were not included in further fsQCA analysis. These are indicated in Table 3 as LC- Low commonality. Cronbach's alpha was implemented to address reliability issues. The overall alpha was high (0.924), with all cases falling between 0.700 and 0.901.

Table 3
Descriptive statistics and Cronbach's A

Construct and scale items	S.D.	Means						Loadings
		Total	18-35	36-50	>50	≤€1900	> €1900	
CULTURAL ISSUES (Cronbach's A=0.877)								
C1. I enjoy spending my holidays domestically because I like the cultural events and music festivals of the country that I reside in.	1.238	3.06	2.80	3.17	3.48	3.03	3.09	.706
C2. I enjoy spending my holidays domestically because I like having local and traditional gastronomic experiences.	1.256	3.22	2.96	3.32	3.69	3.22	3.23	.627
C3. I like spending my holidays domestically because I like to explore the heritage and history of my country.	1.247	3.37	3.04	3.41	4.03	3.41	3.31	.801
C4. I like exploring the cultural sites of my country (e.g. museums, monasteries and archeological sites).	1.302	3.32	2.96	3.51	3.88	3.27	3.39	.812
PRICE ISSUES (Cronbach's A=0.701)								
PI1. I buy as many of my visitor services as possible at sale prices.	1.036	3.84	3.68	3.92	4.10	3.89	3.76	.716
PI2. The price is the main criterion for my purchase decision.	1.045	3.65	3.50	3.67	3.97	3.74	3.53	.796
PI3. I usually choose lower priced visitor services.	1.149	3.28	3.10	3.38	3.57	3.35	3.18	.761
QUALITY ISSUES (Cronbach's A=0.839)								
QI1. When purchasing visitor services, I consider its quality compared with other relevant service choices.	1.006	4.05	3.91	4.18	4.19	4.03	4.07	.756
QI2. In general, I try to buy the best overall quality.	.981	4.01	3.86	4.13	4.20	4.00	4.03	.862
QI3. When it comes to visitor services, I try to get the very best, or perfect, choice.	1.030	4.08	3.93	4.25	4.20	4.01	4.18	.856
HYGIENE RISKS (Cronbach's A=0.700)								
HS1. Hygiene risks are important to my choice when selecting which place to visit/spend my holidays.	1.080	4.28	4.08	4.51	4.47	4.20	4.41	LC
HS2. Hygiene risks are important to my choice when selecting which services (e.g. hotel, tours and restaurant services) to purchase.	0.956	4.41	4.24	4.56	4.61	4.35	4.49	LC
HS3. Considering hygiene risks, I believe that the country that I reside in is a safe destination.	0.946	3.91	3.84	3.90	4.07	3.85	3.99	.707
HS4. I have less risk of being exposed to Coronavirus by spending my holidays domestically rather than abroad.	1.289	3.44	3.15	3.50	4.01	3.38	3.53	.787
SOCIAL ISSUES (Cronbach's A=0.885)								
SI1. I like having holidays domestically because it is an easy way (compared to international travel) to spend time with family or/and friends.	1.295	3.62	3.47	3.69	3.84	3.55	3.72	LC
SI2. I like having holidays domestically, because it is an enjoyable way to spend time with family or/and friends.	1.183	3.79	3.66	3.80	4.06	3.71	3.91	LC
SI3. I enjoy having holidays domestically, because I like to have meaningful interactions with other travelers and locals.	1.232	3.42	3.19	3.49	3.86	3.38	3.49	.713
SI4. I enjoy spending my holidays in my own country because I like to support local entrepreneurs and the local economy.	1.160	3.71	3.45	3.79	4.18	3.71	3.72	.761
NOVELTY ASPECTS (Cronbach's A=0.870)								
NA1. I like having holidays in other regions of my country because it enables me to have different experiences than the ones that I have at home.	1.185	3.99	3.88	4.08	4.12	3.93	4.08	.734
NA2. I enjoy having holidays in my own country because it enables me to escape from my daily routine.	1.137	3.96	3.67	4.21	4.31	3.94	3.99	.755
NA3. Domestic tourism enables me to disconnect from everyday stress.	1.092	4.02	3.77	4.17	4.38	3.98	4.07	.768
NA4. Domestic tourism enables me to have fresh and rejuvenating experiences.	1.161	3.80	3.59	3.93	4.13	3.77	3.86	.691

Table 3 (continued)

OVERALL EXPERIENCE (Cronbach's A= 0.901)								
OE1. My recent domestic visit/vocation was as expected.	1.090	3.75	3.64	3.87	3.83	3.68	3.84	.718
OE2. The domestic visit/vocation made me happy.	1.065	3.75	3.60	3.87	3.94	3.70	3.82	.690
OE3. My decision to spend my leisure time/holiday domestically, was a wise one.	1.122	3.78	3.59	3.98	3.99	3.74	3.84	.727
OE4. I would recommend domestic visits/holidays to others.	1.115	3.97	3.85	4.04	4.14	3.94	4.01	.668
OE5. I will have domestic vocations in the future.	1.120	3.98	3.77	4.15	4.23	3.92	4.06	.613

4.1.1. Sufficient complex configurations, confirmation of tenets and NCA results

The results of the fsQCA analysis produced three complex solutions (indicated as “models”), as presented in Table 4, leading to the overall domestic experience. The solution consistency of these models is high (0.82). In contrast, the solution coverage (that is, 0.40) extends well beyond the minimum threshold of 0.25 and is regarded as acceptable and informative (Skarmear et al., 2014).

In more detail, the first produced solution (~f_hr*~f_ci*~f_pi*f_qi*f_si*~f_na*f_a*~f_i) has high scores in quality and social factors, as well as the demographic of age. This solution holds the highest consistency of the three generated keys (0.93). This highlights the critical role of quality (such as the quality of visitor services) and social factors (domestic holidays as an enjoyable way to spend qualitative time with family and friends), particularly these two factors combined, in ensuring a positive overall domestic experience.

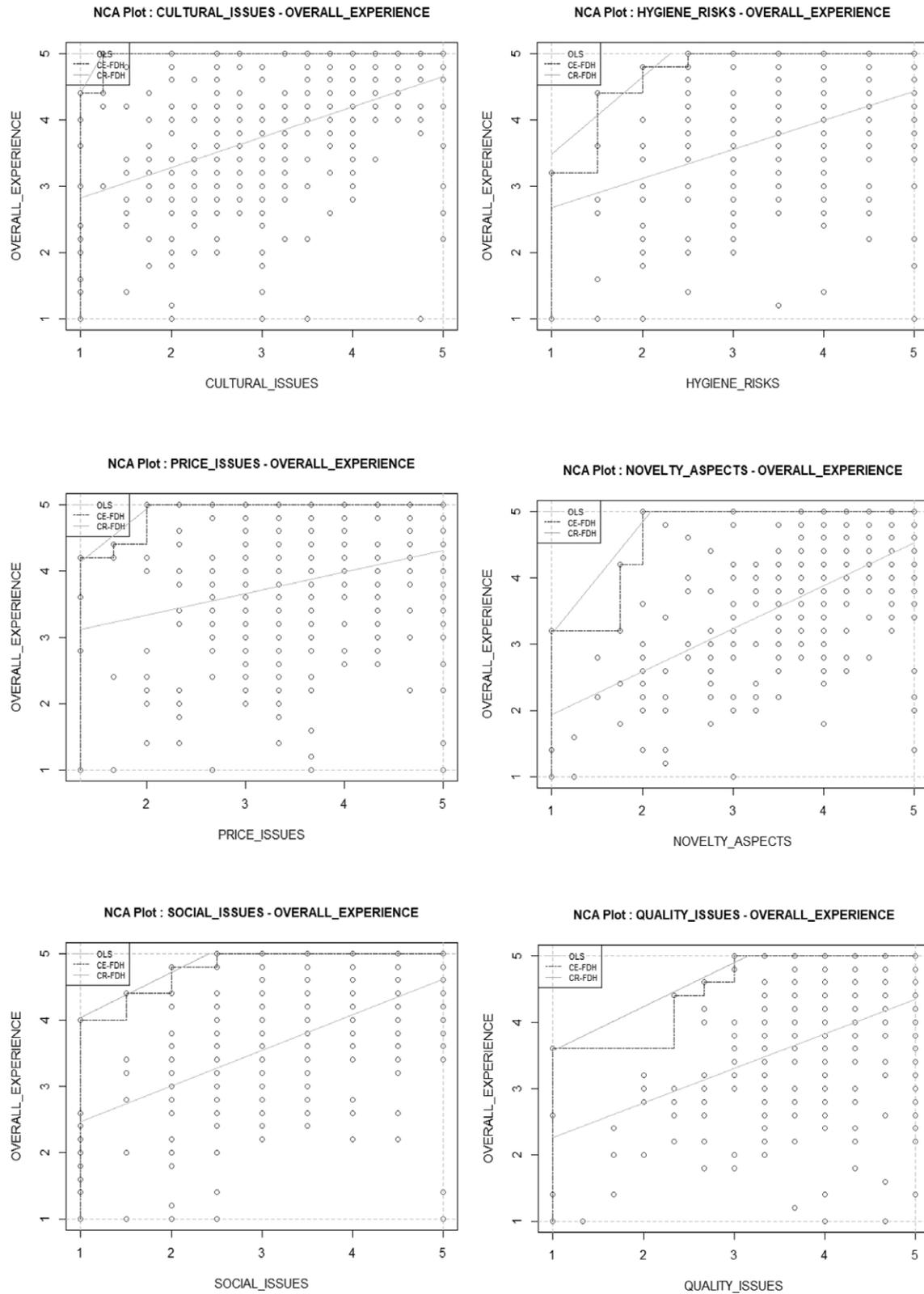
The second produced solution (f_hr*f_ci*f_pi*~f_qi*~f_si*~f_na*f_a*~f_i) has high scores in hygiene, cultural and price issues, with the demographic of age also receiving a high score. This indicates the importance of these three factors (i.e., hygiene, cultural dimensions of the experience and price issues) in ensuring a positive domestic experience for visitors. Finally, the third solution (~f_hr*~f_ci*~f_pi*f_qi*~f_si*f_na*f_a*f_i) reveals that the combination of quality and novelty aspects receive high scores, complemented by high scores in both demographics (that is, age and income). This solution holds the second-highest score in consistency (that is, 0.92). Once more, in this third solution, the ‘quality aspect’ is highlighted (as in the first solution), yet in this solution, it is combined with “novelty aspects”. In this regard, domestic visitors are interested in new and novel experiences offered, particularly those experiences that allow disconnection from everyday stress. The study’s tenets are confirmed based on the guidelines provided in similar studies (such as Pappas, 2021) that have implemented fsQCA to generate complex configurations.

Table 4
Complex solutions

Model for predicting high score of outcomes	Raw coverage	Unique coverage	Consistency
Model f_oe = f(f_ci, f_pi, f_qi, f_hr, f_si, f_na, f_i, f_a)			
Model 1: ~f_ci*~f_pi*f_qi*~f_hr*f_si*~f_na*f_a*~f_i	0.20	0.01	0.93
Model 2: f_ci*f_pi*~f_qi*f_hr*~f_si*~f_na*f_a*~f_i	0.23	0.04	0.91
Model 4: ~f_ci*~f_pi*f_qi*~f_hr*f_si*f_na*f_a*f_i	0.26	0.06	0.92
Solution coverage: 0.40			
Solution consistency: 0.82			
f_ci: Cultural issues	f_hr: Hygiene risks	f_oe: Overall experience	
f_pi: Price issues	f_si: Social issues	f_i: Income	
f_qi: Quality issues	f_na: Novelty aspects	f_a: Age	

As explained in the measures (of Study 1) section, Necessary Condition Analysis was implemented. This was done to evaluate the effect size of the examined conditions through ce_fdh and cr_fdh ceiling zones (Dul, 2020). The results reveal that the examined conditions have an effect. In more detail: Hygiene aspects: ce_fdh: 0.081 and cr_fdh: 0.062, Cultural issues: ce_fdh: 0.009 and cr_fdh: 0.005, Price issues: ce_fdh: 0.032 and cr_fdh: 0.021, Quality issues: ce_fdh: 0.137 and cr_fdh: 0.096, Social issues: ce_fdh: 0.056 and cr_fdh: 0.042, and Novelty aspects: ce_fdh: 0.097 and cr_fdh: 0.063. The NCA results are visually presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1
NCA plots



4.2. Findings from Study 2

As explained previously in the research methods section, additional qualitative research involved informal interviews to gain further and in-depth insights into the domestic tourist experience. Three predominant themes have emerged through the analysis of the findings. The first theme involves personal triggers and engagement in activities and experiences within domestic tourism. The second theme deals with the external influences (precisely the case of the pandemic) shaping the domestic visitor experience. The third theme concerns the various factors that contribute to the overall positive domestic expertise, with the social dimension/aspect being particularly emphasized by informants, as presented, and explained below.

4.2.1. Activities and domestic travel experiences involvement and triggers

Informants communicated various leisure and travel experiences that they engaged in, such as leisure activities at their home settings (e.g., board games, puzzles, and virtual tours), walks (such as in nearby parks), daily excursions involving different activities (e.g., snorkelling and walking) and domestic stayovers in towns, villages, agritourist venues, or camping sites. In the case of visitation at places and sites outside their place of residence, participants communicated that such visitations included various activities and experiences that were triggered by different personal reasons, such as the need to “*escape routine*” (Tas, M/56) “*do something different*” (Ross, M/43), “*mingle with friends*” (Daniel, M/63), and “*relax*” (Marie, F/32). In more detail, all participants were involved in various leisure activities and daily excursions, while 35 (out of the total 40) engaged in at least one stayover (in a hotel, agritourist venue, or a camping site). Preference for overnight stays was given to famous beach resorts/regions of the country, mountainous areas, and picturesque villages. Amongst others, Tas (M/56) mentioned: “*Nearly every weekend of July and August, we [informant and partner] toured the Troodos mountains. It was such a nice experience with the change of scenery and routine escape!*”

Informants referred to such or similar visitations/stayovers to places within a short drive from their residence (ranging from some minutes to less than a two-hour drive). This is due to the relatively short distances involved in a small country/destination such as Cyprus in this study, compared to more significant (geographically referring) countries and destinations. Nonetheless, this outcome reinforces the considerable role of travel and tourism in creating opportunities for people to escape, whether from “*real life*” (Irimiás et al., 2021) or simply from their daily routine, even in places/venues near their residences. Most importantly, it delivers an understanding that this “*escapism*” does not necessarily entail visitations to distant and international destinations (Ponsignon et al., 2021) but may occur near the place of residence, and particularly in combination with a good company (such as friends).

Despite this, social media had an essential role in the awareness and visitation of specific villages and local/domestic attractions, especially when international travel was constrained. For instance, Xena (F/21) expressed the following: “*A lot of villages like “Vouni” and “Lofou” and some other attractions like the “house in Dierona village” became viral on Instagram and very popular, especially for people of our age... I think people liked these places, and I believe that they will continue to visit them...*”

4.2.2. The critical role of COVID-19 in influencing and shaping domestic experiences

Informants referred to a specific external factor that influenced/shaped their domestic visitation and experience. More specifically, COVID-19 was essential to travel constraints and leisure activity decisions. Mario (M/22) admitted that “*youngsters*” would gather at each other’s houses and throw small parties with family and friends. On the one hand, this “*obstacle*” was perceived as unfavourable regarding posing travel restrictions to people. As Silvia (F/48) said: “*We [referring to family] haven’t been or done much over the past year... I went on a boat trip in the summer for a few hours. Does that count?... I’m in desperate need of a holiday!*” (Silvia, F/48).

On the other hand, this constraint enabled people to “discover” with their families and friends close by (to their residence) locations, sites, and venues. Pier (M/37) said amongst others: “... *we weren't allowed to stay or dine at any venue* [due to restrictions posed to unvaccinated], *so we visited different monasteries and had many picnics...*”. This re-enforces claims of peoples’ urge to travel and resilience during crises (Christou, 2022). Likewise, other informants expressed concerns regarding international travel, mainly due to the “fear” of COVID-19. As a result, they opted for domestic holidays and “*lots of road trips*” domestically, as one of the informants (i.e., Mario, M/22) stressed. By doing so, they had the opportunity to “discover” unknown places in their country, such as remote villages, nature paths and beaches. Many of these sites/experiences were within relative proximity (in most cases less than an hour's drive- as informants indicated) to their home settings: “*We [informant and partner] had outings that we were not used to... We went to different nature paths...It was very nice!*” (Marie, F/32). In another instance, Aris (M/29) mentioned: “*We stayed at a small rental house in this village that I knew nothing about... I was surprised how beautiful the village and the whole scenery was!*”

4.2.3. Factors contributing to the overall domestic experience - The importance of the “social aspect”

Participants referred to various factors contributing to their overall positive domestic experience. These factors may be grouped into personal factors (i.e., such as informants engaging in domestic expertise while having a “good mood”), social factors (i.e., having a good company while holidaying), exogenous factors (i.e., good weather conditions), and nature-based factors (i.e., natural setting, surroundings, and scenery). Another factor mentioned by informants is related to the tourism organizations and hospitality establishments (i.e., hygiene/cleanliness and safety issues, value for money-price issues, variety and quality of accommodation, dining, facilities, activities, and services offered). Finally, another factor that informants referred to be the novelty and differentiation element in their domestic experience.

Of note is that particular emphasis was given by informants to the “social” element of their domestic experience. In more detail, more than half of the informants (that is, 25 out of 40) stressed amongst others the importance of (e.g.) “*good company*” (Filip, M/52; Izabelle, F/45; Sav M/61) and “*good friends*” (Yana F/38) while engaging in a domestic travel experience. Representatives are the words of Aaron (M/40), who stressed: “*We had a great time with our friends in Pafos! [town]... I'm not sure whether the other guests staying in the hotel if they had a good time...!*” [while referring to the noise that the company was making].

5. Discussion and conclusions

The significance of domestic travel and tourism has been stressed through the years (Lebrun et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2017; Archer, 1978), particularly during periods of crises (Cvelbar & Ogorevc, 2020) when international travel was put to a standstill. Contributing positively towards the overall experience of domestic tourists remains an essential challenge for global destinations (Steffen et al., 2021; Ye et al., 2021) due to the distinctive, often demanding character of domestic clientele and the challenges caused by the pandemic. Guided by an overall aim to investigate the tourist experience within the context of domestic tourism through a fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (Pappas, 2021) and an in-depth qualitative inquiry (Christou, 2018), the previous section of this paper delivered the findings of both studies. In more detail, study 1 findings provided three dynamic combinations of critical factors that, if combined, may provide increased opportunities leading to the overall experience of domestic tourists. The first complex solution concerns the nexus of quality and social aspects. Experience quality aspects have been heralded for their essential role within tourism (Suhartanto et al., 2020), yet based on the results of our study; they seem to be best combined with social aspects to lead towards a desirable outcome regarding the overall domestic tourist experience. This social dimension as a contributor to the overall positive experience of domestic tourists has been somewhat marginalized by the research academic community that has emphasized exogenous, tangible, somatic and secular elements, such as destination perceived quality, weather conditions, shopping, and physical attributes (Rahmiati et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2017; Turner & Reisinger, 2001). Social issues within the context of

domestic tourism seem to be equally valued by all age groups, with those above 50 rating slightly more on this aspect than other age groups (as presented in the descriptive statistics of study 1). This may reflect the need of the more mature traveller to mingle/socialize with others or the satisfaction derived from a quality social encounter with long-term friendships within the context of tourism.

Social aspects, including spending leisure and quality time with family and friends, have been highlighted by informants in study 2. Restrictions and the fear element due to the chaos and *travel synchysis* (i.e., complication/confusion) created by COVID-19 provided increased opportunities for people to visit and engage in pleasurable domestic experiences with friends and families. Tourism is acknowledged as an essential tool of social connectedness. It may be perceived that the social element (such as the case of vacationing with friends and connectivity) is fostered within the context of domestic tourism given the fact that people (i.e., friends) may find it easier to meet and mingle within proximity to their home settings and/or within a short period. Hence, the increased reference of informants' comments related to *'friends'*, their *'company'* and *'fun'* in study 2 while describing their domestic excursions, stayovers, and overall experiences. This outcome adds to the existing knowledge of “pull” elements and influential (towards a positive overall experience) factors of domestic travellers, not to be limited to exogenous circumstances, such as city-specific attractiveness attributes and service variables (Carteni et al., 2017). Despite this, quality aspects have been highlighted in two of the three generated complex solutions of study 1 (the fsQCA). Quality aspects seem equally crucial for groups with differing monthly incomes yet of more importance for the “oldest” group of respondents (study 1). In an era of varying experiences over different service encounters, the quality of services and experiences seems to be prevailing for forming the overall domestic expertise, particularly when combined with the social or novelty aspect. Following a prolonged lockdown, travel constraints, holiday risks (Pappas, 2021) and strict restrictions, people engage in domestic travel with their family and friends to experience something different, new, and rejuvenating to unwind and *'escape from the daily routine'* (Tas, M/56) in other (than their home setting) regions and sceneries (such as beach areas, mountainous terrains, and picturesque villages). Perhaps most importantly, this study highlights the critical role of “escapism” and its contribution towards the overall domestic experience. Building on the existing knowledge of previous studies (Ponsignon et al., 2021), this study highlights the critical role of “escapism” for domestic tourists, particularly when combined with good company and friends (something that can be easily attained in the context of a domestic excursion).

The hygiene element appears in one solution of study 1, combined with cultural and price issues. It doesn't strike as a surprise that hygiene aspects (e.g., of a venue, cultural attraction, or event) are of utmost importance in a period when COVID-19-related risks are highlighted, especially in the domestic tourism context, that is vulnerable to risks and safety concerns (Adeloye & Brown, 2018). Hygiene risks seem to be important when choosing a venue/place to visit/spend holidays, regardless of age or income group, with its significance increasing as the age of respondents increases. This finding reflects, to some extent, elders' susceptibility to safety issues (Pan et al., 2021). Price issues also appear in only one of the three generated solutions of study 1. This outcome challenges previous results indicating the preference of domestic travellers for cheap holidays/accommodation (Yuni, 2020).

Contrary to the social and 'different'/novelty notions that are highlighted in both studies, price issues, hygiene, and cultural issues are present in only one of the generated solutions of study 1 and instead marginalized in study 2, with informants emphasizing social/company aspects of their experience. Of course, this does not imply that price issues are unimportant in shaping tourist experiences. Besides, these are regarded as more important for the older and lower income groups than younger and higher income respondents. Even so, such factors (i.e., price and hygiene risks) seem to have been marginalized by people keen to socialize, escape from their routines, and experience something different, following the restrictions and travel/leisure constraints due to the pandemic.

5.1. Theoretical implications

As a complex system, tourism comprises organizations, physical spheres and elements, and people, all of which are interconnected (Reddy et al., 2020), with visitors, such as domestic tourists, moving through and interacting with physical spaces and other individuals therein (Wearing & Foley, 2017). Various endogenous and exogenous circumstances (Xie et al., 2021; Adeloje & Brown, 2018), such as the current pandemic, which has affected travel/tourism choices and experiences, make the system even more complex. From a theoretical standpoint, this study contributes to a better understanding of tourism experiences within the domestic tourism context. In addition to other factors, the social dimension is highlighted in greater depth in both studies of this paper, and it is emphasized in the context of domestic tourism; therefore, it should be investigated further. Tourism has been lauded as a mechanism for social connection. Still, in times of complexity and uncertainty and the aftermath of the pandemic, it is fascinating to observe how social interactions between family members and friends trump other seemingly essential factors (such as price and hygiene risks) in the formation of positive domestic tourist experiences.

This paper contributes to the existing body of knowledge regarding social interactions and connectivity in the context of tourism (Christou, 2018; Kim et al., 2016), with domestic tourism embracing and fostering social interactions between family members and friends, leading to positive overall experiences. Based on the tourism-wellbeing dynamics, it is worthwhile to consider whether these bonds and social connections fostered because of the pandemic and in the context of domestic tourism will endure and whether/to what extent they have contributed to people's overall well-being. Despite this, researchers who use complexity theory, fsQCA, and quantitative or qualitative methods to evaluate tourist experience-related phenomena must include social factors/dimensions in their questionnaires and research questions. Longitudinal studies can be used to compare results and determine whether this prevalence of social factors is, in fact, of central importance within the domestic tourist experiencescape or whether it is instead a consequence of the pandemic and its travel/tourism-related consequences.

Importantly, this paper presents the findings of two studies, one based on fsQCA methodological principles and the other on in-depth qualitative investigation. It is recommended that researchers combine fsQCA techniques with different methodological approaches to investigate in-depth perplexing or idiosyncratic phenomena, such as the tourist experience, based on the combination and outcomes of these two distinct approaches.

5.2. Managerial implications

Researchers have highlighted dissimilar domestic versus international tourist perspectives (Stone & Nyaupane, 2019), with destinations and tourism organizations facing the challenge of providing unique and somewhat unexpected experiences to domestic customers. Based on the results presented above, the following recommendations are made to ensure domestic tourists have a positive overall experience. These recommendations begin with the more 'physical/tangible' aspects and progress to the more 'intangible and social' aspects that must be embraced by destinations, hospitality, and tourism organizations to ensure a positive domestic experience overall.

Initially, the physical component must be targeted. This entails creating distinctive and pleasant (e.g., venue) environments that foster unexpectedly positive experiences. In this instance, the local, regional, and potentially cultural elements should be highlighted to create a sense of distinction and exclusivity. In an era in which hygiene attributes are deemed essential for the tourism industry (Yu et al., 2021), hygiene considerations in tangibles and the delivery of services must not be overlooked.

The 'novelty' element or concept must also be embraced. Specifically, people seek out the novel and unusual, and domestic tourism reflects this desire. A unique venue, event, or experience may encourage (re)visits even if a location is near a visitor's permanent residence. Ideally, this novelty factor should be combined with

hygiene and quality aspects, thereby addressing debates over whether visitors will return to the same (local/domestic) destination multiple times (Ye et al., 2021).

Thirdly, the notion of quality deserves consideration. Quality must be fostered by tourism/hospitality organizations in all facets of the visitor experience (e.g., tangibles, service provision, and branding development) because visitors embrace any associations between quality and services and experiences.

Tourism organizations should emphasize and strengthen the social element, thus addressing the "more demanding" domestic traveller compared to the international traveller (Steffen et al., 2021). As previously discussed, the social dimension is highlighted in the findings of both studies in this paper. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance that destinations, event organizers, and hospitality entrepreneurs promote social interactions and connectivity for their guests. For example, hotels and other accommodations may offer special rates for group/bulk bookings to those who wish to spend their vacations with their friends, even if it is just for a weekend. Therefore, take advantage of the distance/time issue that may be an obstacle for (e.g.) friends' international (e.g., air) travel plans. In addition, they can create separate zones/rooms where friends can socialize, interact with one another, and socialize (for example, play board games).

5.3. Limitations and further research

Complexity theory has proven to be a valuable prism for examining tourism-related phenomena during times of crisis. Despite its theorization and structuration (Fitzgerald & Eijnatten, 2002), it should be used with caution due to the chaotic principles upon which it is founded, which may make its implementation and generation of results challenging. Specifically, for the fsQCA analysis, the authors of this paper identified certain vital factors that can potentially shape (domestic) tourist experiences. According to existing literature and the incorporation of specific mechanisms (i.e., NCA), the potential inclusion of other factors could have led to different combinations even though this was done cautiously. Nonetheless, a second qualitative inquiry-based study complemented the fsQCA results produced in this study. Thus, it is recommended that future researchers utilize other/additional methodologies to complete and promote fsQCA-linked approaches. As a result of this study, several research avenues have become apparent. It will be intriguing to determine the extent to which, in the future, people will choose staycation (that is, staying at home) leisure activities, such as virtual tours, over domestic excursions. In addition, the findings of the first study in this paper can serve as a basis for future quantitative and qualitative research. Notably, those aged 50 and older had overall higher scores than the younger population in terms of novelty and domestic experience. The why question remains unanswered and thus may fuel future research questions. Does the older generation value domestic tourism more than the younger generation? If so, what are the reasons? In domestic tourism, the outcomes of such (or comparable) studies may prove especially useful for tourism stakeholders in targeting and satisfying specific age groups.

Domestic tourism has proven to be a panacea for destinations amid various international crises, and it will likely continue to support national and regional economies. This study has provided a deeper understanding of the domestic tourist experience and insights into how domestic tourism can be sustained, promoted, and encouraged.

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