

Investigating Tourists' Destination Choices – An Application of Network Analysis

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Received: 13/06/2016 Accepted: 19/07/2016

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Abstract

A better understanding of the complex destination choice process is highly relevant, both for academia and practice. Tourism research tends to focus either on actually executed or hypothetical destination choices. However, a discrepancy exists between these two types of destination choices which has hardly been investigated. Moreover, past research often studies tourists and their attitudes, needs or perceptions of destinations but not how destinations' attributes affect destination choices. To approach these two research gaps, this study concentrates not only on actual but also on hypothetical destination choices to better understand differences in the evaluation of alternative destinations. This study furthermore examines the role of the destination itself to discover the influence of destination characteristics

on destination choices. Therefore, network analysis and set theory are combined in a new research approach which allows to analyse destination choices with varying closeness to reality whilst preserving destination information. The analysis is based on a quantitative survey of German tourists' travel decision-making behaviour. The results reveal changes in destination choices from multidimensional hypothetical choices to unidimensional actual and past choices. Furthermore, only few destinations have a consistent position whilst most destinations are either more relevant for hypothetical or actual destination choices.

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Keywords: destination choice, travel decision-making, network analysis, set theory, Germany

Citation: Karl, M., C. Reintinger (2017) Investigating Tourists' Destination Choices – An Application of Network Analysis. *European Journal of Tourism Research* 15 pp. 112-130