

The Role and Importance of Private Accommodation Components: Evidence from Urban Mediterranean Tourism Destination

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Doi:10.5901/mjss.2014.v5n13p0531

Abstract

Despite the importance of private tourism accommodation there appears to be little theoretical and empirical research focusing on private accommodation components. The main purpose of this paper, which is carried out through the primary research of tourism supply and demand in the city of Dubrovnik as one of the leading urban tourism destinations in Croatia by using log-linear form of Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression, is to sustain that accommodation occupancy rate, as measure of willingness to stay, and price are not determinate by the same components of the private accommodation units. The results show that the accommodation occupancy rate is the real reflection of the tourists' preferences while the price is formed by owners' intuition. The findings can be used for further conceptual and empirical research into the tourism lodging industry contribution of private accommodation.

Keywords: private accommodation components, bed and breakfast, willingness to stay, OLS regression, urban destination

1. Introduction

Private accommodation is still in the pioneering phase of the serious scientific research, especially when it is compared to other forms of accommodation and in particular with hotel accommodation (Salò and Garriga, 2011). The reasons behind scientific inertia for this rather important aspect of tourist accommodation lie in the fact that there is a lack of information about its key features, functions and the success it has created. Private accommodation appeal to tourists because the properties are small and personal in nature – “home away from home”; have a quiet, private atmosphere, allow guests to become acquainted with new people and communities and typically provide extraordinary personal service (Nuntsu *et al*, 2004). Analysis of private accommodation, in a different context, has been the focus of many scientists' research (Warnick and Klar, 1991; Emerick and Emerick, 1994; Getz and Carlsen, 2000; Vasilevska-Nestoroska, 2001; Getz and Nilsson, 2004; Jeong, 2004; Nuntsu *et al*, 2004; Getz and Petersen, 2005; Lynch, 2005; Hudson and Gilbert, 2006; Di Domenico and Lynch, 2007; Tinsley and Lynch, 2008; Alonso and Ogle, 2009; Cerović *et al*, 2009; Alonso, 2010; Chin and Lin, 2010; McIntosh *et al*, 2011; Petrić i Mimica, 2011; Chen *et al*, 2013; Li *et al*, 2013; Portolan 2012, 2013; Velvin *et al*, 2013) who carried research on terminologically different but from the ownership, structural and functional point of view the similar forms of private tourist accommodation (bed&breakfast, commercial home, family business, small hospitality business, second home). Lynch considers that the B&B sector is often a neglected part of the lodging industry (Lynch, 2005).

Towards the importance of private accommodation it is necessary to define which components determine the accommodation occupancy rate as well as the attributes of the utmost importance in shaping prices. The accommodation occupancy rate is examined from the demand side while prices are results of supply side.

As private tourism unit was observed as bundle of components, which is main hypothesis of hedonic function, hedonic function was used together with log-linear form of Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression.

The main question this research approached was: Is the price in private tourism accommodation unit result of its components which are of the main importance to the tourism demand? This research question has been explored for the case of the city Dubrovnik, one of the leading urban tourism destinations in Croatia.

2. Theoretical Background

The hectic lifestyle and lack of spare time in the place of residence have led to the loss of quiet family life and family atmosphere prompting tourists to seek in the place of their temporary residence i.e. during holidays. As a consequence there is the continued growth in demand for quality, comfortable and fully equipped holiday homes, apartments and studio apartments, capable to offer the feeling of a home, togetherness and pleasure.

The term private accommodation originates from private ownership. Bronzan (2003) states that a much more acceptable term for private accommodation is private hospitality, for the simple reason since accommodation as a neutral word indicates roof over your head while hospitality has a significantly wider meaning and delivers the message that a much more personal approach is being offered.

Private accommodation is defined in the Republic of Croatia as an accommodation type of unit such as rooms, studio apartment, apartment, house for rent for leisure purposes, camping site within certain household area as well as the village type of house used for leisure activities, in which only accommodation is provided with a possibility of additional services such as breakfast, supper and so forth. In theory there is a uniform quality of private accommodation supply because most of the private accommodation units are three star units, while in practice the situation is quite different (Petrić and Mimica, 2011). Accommodation units within a same category are equipped differently which creates the need to carry out a more detailed analysis of the components influencing the overall accommodation price and accommodation occupancy rate.

Petrić & Mimica (2011) advocate the theory of social aspect in the realm of private accommodation, so to speak in its capacity as an extra income earner, the private earned income for an average Croatian household living mainly on the coast. They believe that this has marginalized this type of tourist accommodation. Portolan (2012) has looked at this issue from a diverse angle because this type of accommodation brings not only direct income to the owner of tourist unit but also has indirect implications in meeting indirect cost of some household goods and services in general and it directly influences purchasing power of the local population and improves economic prospects of the destination on the global map.

The joint conclusions of scientists who analyzed private accommodation issues (Warnick and Klar, 1991; Emerick and Emerick, 1994; Getz and Carlsen, 2000; Vasilevska-Nestoroska, 2001; Nuntsu *et al*, 2004; Lynch, 2005; Di Domenico and Lynch, 2007; Cerović *et al*, 2009; McIntosh *et al*, 2011; Petrić i Mimica, 2011; Portolan 2012, 2013) are that private tourist accommodation as an extensive and insufficiently utilized potential represents: a quality foundation for reduction of unemployment and social tensions in a local community through self-employment; utilisation of local resources and parallel protection of autochthonous products; reduction of hotel accommodation monopoly through faster adaptation, flexibility and innovativeness; realisation of new ideas, products and services; stopping population outflow; generating direct revenue for community members and avoiding the leakage of tourism revenue outside the region.

In private accommodation units in Croatia in 2012 a total of 21.2 million overnights were realized, which is 35% of total overnights (Croatian Bureau of Statistics, access on 02.12.2013). This statistical data clearly points out the importance of further research of this type of accommodation.

Authors who analysed the impact of different components on price in tourism industry has followed Rosen's (1974) original advice and mostly used hedonic pricing method with log-linear specification instead of the linear one (Espinet, 2003; Thrane, 2005; Thrane, 2007; Chen and Rothschild, 2010; Kushi and Caca, 2010; Monty i Skidmore, 2003; Juaneda *et al*, 2011; Saló i Garriga, 2011, Portolan 2013). Besides few authors (Monty and Skidmore, 2003; Fleischer and Tchetchik, 2005; Hamilton, 2007; Juaneda *et al*, 2011; Saló and Garriga, 2011; Portolan, 2013) who investigated the impact of components on price in different forms of private accommodation most of them researched hotel accommodation (Hartman, 1989; Carvel and Herrin, 1990; White and Mulligan, 2002; Espinet *et al*, 2003; Thrane, 2007; Hamilton, 2007; Andersson, 2010; Hung *et al*, 2010; Chen and Rothschild, 2010; Kushi and Caca, 2010). There is no author who has researched the impact of components in private accommodation units on occupancy rate.

3. Methodology

Since the tourist cannot create his own bundle of components he has to choose from a by default determinate number of multi-component bundles, i.e. from a number of private accommodation units with different components. This paper analysed private tourism accommodation as tourism product composed of a number of partial components which put together form an entity of products and services (Burkart and Medlik 1974. in Vanhove 2005; Hitrec 1995).

In this article a general model, in which the "product" of a given private accommodation unit F is the embodiment of a set of components, was employed (Espinet *et al*, 2003), so that

$$F_i = (q_{i1}, q_{i2}, q_{i3}, \dots, q_{ik}, \dots, q_{im}) \quad (1)$$

where $i=1, \dots, n$ indexes private accommodation unit and q_{ik} ($k=1, \dots, m$), each of its components.

The private accommodation occupancy rate is assumed to be a function of its components, so the hedonic function for F_i can be considered as follows:

$$PAOR = PAOR(q_{i1}, q_{i2}, q_{i3}, \dots, q_{ik}, \dots, q_{im}) \quad (2)$$

where the functional form of PAOR is assumed to be constant across units, though the contribution of each component may vary from one unit to another.

The overall price is also assumed to be a function of its components, so the hedonic function for F_i can be considered as follows:

$$P_i = (q_{i1}, q_{i2}, q_{i3}, \dots, q_{ik}, \dots, q_{im}) \quad (3)$$

where the functional form of P is assumed to be constant across units, though the contribution of each component may vary from one unit to another. This set of components determines the choices of consumers according to their utility. Therefore, the price of the goods can be broken down into the implicit prices of these components.

As Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression or the related log-linear form have in prior hospitality or tourism applications mostly been used to estimate this type of model log-linear specification for the accommodation occupancy rate function, as well as for the price function was used instead of the linear one.

4. Research

The study was conducted in Dubrovnik city which is situated in southern Dalmatia in Republic of Croatia and is one of the leading urban tourism destinations. It possess a number of key attributes that urban areas possess i.e. it draws tourists to its attractions because these are often much better developed than in other types of destinations; it is easily accessible through airports and scheduled services; it possess a large stock accommodation built to serve the business traveler and finally it appeals to a number of different tourists markets as it offers the communication, transport, services and facilities which meet tourist needs (Law 1996 in Edwards *et al*, 2008). It is the first largest city in Croatia according to the number of tourists' arrivals and third according to the number of tourists' overnights (beyond cities Rovinj and Poreč in northern Dalmatia). In 2011 in the city of Dubrovnik total of 1138 providers of private accommodation were registered. The percentage of accommodation units in the sample corresponds geographically to the percentage in the total number of providers. A stratified sample was used based on geographical criteria and random choice of accommodation units. Total of 122 accommodation units were analysed, making 10.7% of the total number. The data were obtained from two Internet travel agents, Dubrovnik Apartment Source and Croatian Travel Agency and one portal (www.dubrovnik-area.com).

As the study of private accommodation occupancy rate and pricing is complex because of seasonality this research was carried out through the July and August when the largest number of arrivals and overnights in private tourist accommodation is realised, in order to avoid the problem of seasonality.

The assumption of this research was that the price and accommodation occupancy rate are functions of different attributes in private accommodation units. Regression techniques make it possible to estimate the implicit price and occupancy rate for each component.

Since the log-linear form is used in this study to correct heterokedasticity, LNPAOR is the natural logarithm of the number of occupancy days and a total of days ratio in July and August and LNPRICE is the natural logarithm of the monthly average price per person per night in July and August.

In line with the theoretical guidelines for selecting independent variables in hedonic theory (Andersson, 2000) the variable selection was based on the previous studies. Table 1 presents the final list of the explanatory variables considered in this model and their definition. Variable star rating category was excluded from the model since in Croatia assigned category is not reflected by interior design of a private accommodation unit nor price so it is often the case that a three star unit with low quality interior design is more expensive than that with four or five star rating with supreme design.

Table 1: Description of variables used in the log-linear OLS regression

Variable	Description of variable
<i>Dependent variable</i>	
PRIVATE ACCOMMODATION	PAOR per private accommodation facility in
OCCUPANCY RATE	July and August
LOG ACCOMMODATION	PAOR, logged
OCCUPANCY RATE	
PRICE	Price per person in main bed per night in €
LOGPRICE	Price, logged
<i>Explanatory variable</i>	
LOCATION	Accommodation unit is located more than 500 m from the Old Town
PARK	Availability of free parking place
BEACHDIST	Accommodation unit is located more than 500 m from beach
SEAVIEW	Sea view from the accommodation unit
GARD/TERR/BALC	There is a garden, terrace or balcony in the accommodation unit
AIRCON/HEAT	There is air-conditioning and heating in the accommodation unit
SATTV	There is a satellite television in the accommodation unit
SAFE	There is a safe in the accommodation unit
DVD player	There is a video in the accommodation unit
SWIMPOOL	There is a swimming pool in the accommodation unit
Internet	There is Internet connection included in the price
DISHW	There is a dish washer in the accommodation unit
WASHM	There is a washing machine in the accommodation unit
HAIRD	There is a hair drier in the accommodation unit
IRON	There is an iron and ironing board in the accommodation unit

Source: Author

The results of the components impact on the price are taken from the authors' research with the same sample and variables published 2013 in *European Journal of Tourism Research* 6(1) (Table 2).

Table 2: Hedonic price function for private accommodation in Dubrovnik

	Coefficients	Std. Error	t-value
Location	-0.104	0.043	-2.430***
Parking	0.399	0.142	2.811***
Distance to the beach	-0.056	0.034	-1.632*
Sea view	-0.035	0.126	-0.281
Garden/terrace/balcony	0.272	0.135	2.017**
Air-condition/heating	-0.756	0.484	-1.564
SAT TV	-0.274	0.156	-1.756
Safe	0.038	0.216	0.176
DVD player	0.222	0.140	1.592
Swimming pool	-0.700	0.350	-1.998
Internet	-0.384	0.134	-1.865
Dishwasher	-0.063	0.139	-0.452
Washing machine	-0.245	0.130	-1.884
Hair drier	-0.045	0.130	-0.349
Iron/Ironing board	-0.118	0.153	-0.772
F-value	7.083**		
Adj. R ²	0.501		

*p<0.1; ** p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Portolan, A. (2013). The impact of the attributes of the private tourist accommodation facilities onto prices: a hedonic price approach, *European Journal of Tourism Research* 6(1), pp. 79.

Table 3: Accommodation occupancy rate function for private accommodation in Dubrovnik

	Coefficients	Std. Error	t-value	VIF
Location	0.019	0.026	0.746	1.191
Parking	-0.007	0.084	-0.078	1.842
Distance to the beach	0.011	0.020	0.526	1.962
Sea view	0.253	0.075	3.373***	1.452
Garden/terrace/balcony	1.041	0.080	12.974***	1.384
Air-condition/heating	0.327	0.288	1.136	1.379
SAT TV	0.148	0.093	1.600	1.316
Safe	0.032	0.129	0.248	1.402
DVD player	0.147	0.083	1.774*	1.631
Swimming pool	0.224	0.208	1.076	1.422
Internet	0.053	0.080	0.660	1.427
Dishwasher	-0.042	0.083	-0.514	1.646
Washing machine	0.011	0.077	0.137	1.481
Hair drier	0.247	0.077	3.207***	1.524
Iron/Ironing board	0.136	0.091	1.499	1.948
F-value	21.049**			
Adj. R ²	0.713			

*p<0.1; ** p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Multicollinearity is often an issue in hedonic pricing model. Nonetheless, no definitive rules exist for determining whether multicollinearity is a serious problem in a particular hedonic application (Chen and Rothschild, 2010). In collinearity diagnostics VIF (Variance Inflation Factor) was used. VIF value greater than 10 (Chen and Rothschild, 2010) is indicator of the presence of collinearity. In this analysis all VIF values of independent variables are less than 5 suggesting that in this study multicollinearity is not a serious problem (Table 3).

5. Research Findings

Explanatory power of both models is high, explaining 50.1% of the variations in price and 71.3% of the variations in PAOR as measured by the adjusted R². The results indicate that location, parking, distance to the beach and garden/terrace/balcony influence the price while sea view, garden/terrace/balcony and hair dryer influence the PAOR. The prices in accommodation units distant from the Old City are some 10.4% lower than in those situated in the vicinity of the Old City. Overnight prices in accommodation units with parking included are 39.9% higher than those not offering the same service. Prices in the accommodation units in private ownership in the vicinity of a beach are 5.6% higher than those that are more distant from a beach. Offers including garden/terrace/balcony within the accommodation units increase the price by 27.2%. Parking included in the rental price is by far the most influential factor in shaping the price (Portolan, 2013). In the case of PAOR garden/terrace/balcony is by far the most influential factor in achieving the higher capacity occupancy rate. The occupancy rate in accommodation units with hair drier is 24.7% higher than in those without hair drier. Sea view from the unit increases occupancy rate by 25.3%. Offers including garden/terrace/balcony within the accommodation units increase the PAOR by 104.1%. Having that attributes satisfies the original hedonic motive for satisfaction and consequently the existence of these is of the most importance. Comparing results from previous research (Portolan 2013) and this one, it can be concluded that only one component, existence of garden/terrace/balcony within the accommodation unit, increases both dependent variables i.e. price and occupancy rate. Existence of garden/terrace/balcony increases price for 27.2% and PAOR for 104.1%. The most influential component in shaping price is available parking price whereas existence of garden/terrace/balcony is the most influence component in private accommodation occupancy rate.

6. Conclusion

The research in this article combines the supply-demand tourism view with the concept of private accommodation components and attempts to contribute to an actualization of private accommodation importance in lodging industry.

The results indicate that prices in private tourism accommodation units are not result of its components which are of the main importance to the tourism demand. The prices are formed solely by owners' intuition whereas PAOR is the real reflection of the tourists' preferences. The experience of private accommodation units owners, when it comes to parking issues or the lack of it, led them believe that if an accommodation unit has a parking space has an added value and has to be more expensive. On the other hand tourists have more willingness to stay in units that have garden/terrace/balcony than in those with available parking place.

The results will greatly benefit the owners of accommodation units as indicate the components of primary importance to tourists what ensure better occupancy rate, prolong the tourists' season and justify the price of the accommodation unit.

The research has been conducted only in the Dubrovnik city as one of leading urban destination in Croatia and results are limited to this level only. But given the general nature of this results it can be expected that results can be used in different settings. To achieve generalizability, the same research should be conducted in other urban destinations.

Further research in the field of private accommodation should focus on empirical research of tourists' attitudes towards the quality of private accommodation units and owners' hospitality, as well as owners' attitudes towards the impacts of tourists' consumption in private tourism accommodation.

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