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THE LOCAL EMBEDDEDNESS OF ACCOMMODATION SERVICES IN HUNGARIAN TOURISM REGIONS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF HOTEL AND AIRBNB CATEGORIES

Ph.D. Thesis Summary

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1 Aims and importance of the topic

Tourism plays an important role in the economic development of many regions and serves as a driver of employment, income, and business growth (Incera & Fernández, 2015). Tourism is considered a strategic sector in Hungary (OECD, 2018) as it contributes significantly to the national and regional economies in financial terms (Németh & Gyurácz-Németh, 2022). Budapest and Lake Balaton are main tourism regions of the country, welcoming both domestic and international visitors (Smith, et al., 2023). In this regard, the accommodation sector has an essential place as it provides lodging services for the incoming tourists (Chandra & Ranjan, 2022).

Accommodation service providers are not only essential components of tourism filières but also one of the main contributors to local economic development as their procurement practices and the spending behavior of their guests can create considerable economic multiplier effects (Capone & Boix, 2008). Thus, when accommodation establishments source goods and services locally, they support small businesses and suppliers, hence retain a greater portion of tourism revenue within the region and prevent leakages from the destinations (United Nations, 1999). This concept is also referred as local embeddedness, and has gained increasing attention in academic and policy circles considering its potential to reduce economic leakages (Andriotis, 2002; Mitchell, et al., 2014; Thomas-Francois, et al., 2017) as the outflow of money from a local economy occur when businesses purchase supplies from external sources (Mayer & Vogt, 2016).

On the other hand, the rise of short-term rental platforms like Airbnb has brought additional complexity to the accommodation sector (Guttentag, 2019; Smith, et al., 2023). While hotels have traditionally dominated the sector, in recent decades, Airbnb has rapidly expanded by offering tourists alternative lodging options (Mody, et al., 2017). Although such apartments are usually well-integrated into residential neighborhoods, their operations can have both positive and negative consequences (Guttentag, 2015). On the one hand, Airbnb hosts may procure supplies from local markets, and their guests might spend more in neighborhood businesses, therefore contribute to local economic development (Levendis & Dicle, 2016) which can increase their local embeddedness. On the other hand, the rapid growth of short-term rentals may cause shortages in housing supply as well as price increases, hence displacing local residents (von Briel & Dolnicar, 2021).

Despite the increasing importance of local embeddedness in tourism development as well as the tourism establishments (Czernek-Marszałek, 2020), limited empirical research has compared the local economic contributions of hotels and Airbnb apartments (Oskam & Boswijk, 2016), particularly in Central and Eastern European countries like Hungary. Moreover, while various typologies in the hotel industry has been researched extensively (Andriotis, 2002; Mitchell, et al., 2014), much less is known about differences within categories of the Airbnbs in terms of their economic effect on locals (Lee & Kim, 2023), merely between landlord-owned and absentee-owned Airbnbs. Notwithstanding, such distinctions can be particularly important as different ownership types and management models can potentially influence procurement practices (Kamann & Gyurácz-Németh, 2023), hence the extent to which businesses engage with local suppliers.

Understanding aforementioned dynamics can be important for policymakers for increasing the positive economic impacts of tourism as well as mitigating potential negative consequences, such as housing affordability issues or excessive reliance on external supply chains (Nieuwland & van Melik, 2018). In this regard, effective regulation and targeted support policies can assist stronger linkages between accommodation providers and local suppliers, therefore improve the economic self-capability of tourism regions (von Briel & Dolnicar, 2021).

All in all, this dissertation aims to contribute to the ongoing academic debate on economic leakages in tourism and provide evidence-based recommendations for policymakers in order to support regional development. This has been done by quantifying and comparing the local embeddedness of different types of accommodation services in Hungarian tourism regions.

2 Theoretical concepts of the research

2.1 Definition of tourism

The author analyzed several definitions of tourism in the tourism literature. The analysis showed the diversity of perspectives in the field, hence depicting how different scholars and institutions have approached the concept. While some definitions emphasize tourism as an economic sector, others focus on the movement of people and their motivations.

Considering the variety of definitions, this research adopted Smith's (1988, p. 183) perspective, as it balances the economic, social, and relational aspects of tourism. Hence, the definition provides a practical and inclusive foundation for analyzing the economic role of different accommodation categories:

> "*Tourism is the aggregate of all businesses that directly provide goods or services to facilitate business, pleasure, and leisure activities away from the home environment*".

2.2 Tourism filière

The filière concept was introduced by GREMI and it emphasizes the importance of examining the intersection of economic and social factors (Kamann & Strijker, 1991). In this regard, the tourism filière is characterized by the coexistence of economic and social actors (Kamann, 1988; 2015), the specialization of businesses in different stages of the tourism production process, as well as the strong presence of SMEs (Capone, 2006). This approach focuses on the strategic and tactical contents of the relationships rather than merely on their volume (Gilly & Torre, 2000) hence, it is a useful tool when considering the subsequent economic effects, the importance of local embeddedness and integration in tourism development.

2.3 Tourist expenditure

It is strongly accepted that understanding the tourist expenditure and conducting an effective analysis can provide information into the profile of tourists that visit tourism areas and their

consumption tendencies respectively (Wang & Davidson, 2010). Notwithstanding, most research that has been conducted on tourist spending has concentrated on evaluating the overall expenditure per tourist (García-Sánchez, et al., 2013), which may be misleading as the accommodation spending may offset the other categories of expenditure (Wang & Davidson, 2010). To address such limitations, other studies have focused on differentiating between expenditure on accommodation establishments and that spent outside the accommodation (Amir, et al., 2015).

Having stated that, considering that accommodation expenditure usually makes up a significant portion of tourist spending, the role of accommodation service providers becomes particularly important in shaping both visitor experiences and local economic benefits. In this regard, Sthapit et al. (2022) suggests Airbnb accommodations may generate stronger local economic effects compared to traditional lodging options, such as hotels. In the same vein, the findings of the research by McKercher, et al. (2023) also confirmed the connection between accommodation preferences and tourist behavior, hence, destination consumption patterns.

2.4 Accommodation service providers in tourism

It is obvious that, the accommodation sector has an important place in tourism as it provides shelter for the visitors and also forms economic linkages within destinations thanks to supply chain operations (Chandra & Ranjan, 2022). Hotels, whether independent or chain-affiliated, have distinct procurement strategies that influence their local embeddedness respectively (O'Neill & Carlbäck, 2011; Kamann & Gyurácz-Németh, 2023).

Independent hotels, due to their decentralized decision-making can be inclined to source more from local suppliers which can result in stronger connections in the communities (Komlósi & Gyurácz-Németh, 2014). In contrast, chain hotels benefit from centralized procurement systems (Enz, 2009). While this approach helps to ensure consistency in quality as well as cost reduction, it usually relies on non-local suppliers, which may limit their regional economic impact (Pirnar, 2016).

On the other hand, Airbnb has emerged as a disruptive force in recent decades (Guttentag, 2015) which offers unique lodging options (Mody, et al., 2017) that also have potential to encourage guest spending in neighborhood businesses (Levendis & Dicle, 2016). However, its rapid growth raised concerns about housing affordability and resulted in regulatory challenges (Nieuwland & van Melik, 2018; von Briel & Dolnicar, 2021). Thus, understanding such dynamics is important for policymakers which aim to enable a balanced approach.

2.5 Tourism and accommodation sector in Hungary

In Hungary, tourism is an important part of the economy as it contributes significantly to the national GDP and employment (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2023). Nevertheless, several issues, such as seasonal demand fluctuations and mass tourism necessitate better regulation, especially considering recent decades' developments in cities like Budapest show how important proper tourism planning is in terms of overcoming such obstacles.

The government aims to implement plans such as the National Tourism Development Strategy 2030, which focuses on developing tourist destinations while providing proper rules for steady tourism growth (Hungarian Tourism Agency, 2017). The country is increasing its accommodation capacity, however, at the same time, it has introduced tighter rules for short-term rentals in Budapest to address housing concerns (Ministry of National Economy, 2024).

3   Formulating the hypotheses

H1: Independent hotels have a higher percentage of procurement from local sources compared to chain hotels in the studied Hungarian tourism regions.

Above statement is hypothesized because independent hotels usually have stronger ties to the local community due to decentralized decision-making which leads to greater engagement with local suppliers (O'Neill & Carlbäck, 2011; Feinstein, et al., 2017; Kamann & Gyurácz-Németh, 2023).

H2: Landlord-owned Airbnbs have a higher percentage of procurement from local sources compared to absentee-owned Airbnbs in the studied Hungarian tourism regions.

The literature basis for the above hypothesis is that ownership structure influences local embeddedness of Airbnbs (von Briel & Dolnicar, 2021; Lee & Kim, 2023). Hence, landlord-owned Airbnbs can be more prone to engage more with local suppliers and services and contribute more to the local economy, therefore demonstrating greater local economic embeddedness compared to absentee-owned Airbnbs.

H3: Airbnb properties have a higher percentage of procurement from local sources compared to hotels in the studied Hungarian tourism regions.

Above is hypothesized as it has been determined in the literature review that although both hotels and Airbnbs provide accommodation for tourists, their business models are different (Zervas, et al., 2017). Therefore, Airbnb properties, particularly those that are landlord-owned, can have a more flexible and personal approach to sourcing goods and services. Airbnb hosts might be more inclined to support local suppliers because of the decentralized and community-oriented nature of the Airbnb model (Wirtz, 2021). On the other hand, hotels, especially chain hotels, can have standardized procurement practices that favor bulk purchasing from larger, possibly non-local suppliers. Such differences in procurement practices may result in a greater percentage of local sourcing by Airbnb properties, which means being more locally embedded in the local economy compared to hotels.

H4. Airbnb apartment customers spend a larger share of their non-accommodation budget on local goods and services compared to hotel customers in the studied Hungarian tourism regions.

As this hypothesis focuses merely on the non-accommodation spending of tourists, it should firstly be stated that, in order to address limitations due to the accommodation spending offsetting the other categories of tourist expenditure (Wang & Davidson, 2010), several previous studies have also differentiated between accommodation expenditure and the amount that spent outside the accommodation (Amir, et al., 2015). Moreover, in the same vein with the

previous hypothesis **H3**, when hotels and Airbnbs are compared, not only their business models, but also the experiences that they offer for travelers differ (Zervas, et al., 2017; Wirtz, 2021) which can impact their consumption patterns (Sthapit, et al., 2022; McKercher, et al., 2023). Hence, it can be claimed that hotel customers usually have access to on-site amenities and services which reduces their need to rely on local businesses, while Airbnb customers may prioritize more local experience and therefore be more inclined to spend on local goods and services (Yannopoulou, et al., 2013; Oskam & Boswijk, 2016; Sthapit & Björk, 2019; Albaladejo & Díaz-Delfa, 2020).

4   METHODOLOGY

4.1   Primary Data Collection

The necessary data to test the hypotheses was collected through surveys. All answers were anonymized using LimeSurvey to reduce desirability bias.

4.2   The sample

The study employed purposive sampling across Budapest and Lake Balaton to capture representative data from the accommodation categories.

For hotels, the target list comprised 241 member establishments of the Hungarian Hotel and Restaurant Association (HHRA) that are operating in the study areas. This included 163 Budapest properties and 85 Lake Balaton properties. The list of the target hotels was web scraped from the website of HHRA then manually reviewed for accuracy.

The Airbnb sample was web scraped from active listings on Airbnb website during the 2024 high season by systematically selecting the first five pages of search results for each region to provide geographic diversity. The target frame included 247 Budapest and 250 Balaton listings.

Tourist respondents were recruited through random sampling at tourist attractions of the study areas and online platforms to enable comparative analysis.

4.3   The surveys

Hotel Survey

This survey consisted of two sections assessing (1) hotel typology (independent/chain) and (2) local procurement levels across 14 categories.

Administration: Distributed via automated emails to hotel representatives. The 24% response rate (n=58) was in line with tourism industry benchmarks (Buhalis, 2003).

Airbnb Survey

Airbnb survey also had two sections, one for (1) Airbnb typology (landlord-owned/absentee-owned), another for (2) local procurement levels focused on three critical procurement areas (F&B, cleaning, laundry).

Administration: Utilized Airbnb's internal mailing system, resulting in 64 valid responses. After accounting for multi-property owners, an effective response rate can be estimated at around 25%.

Tourist Survey

This survey captured (1) accommodation type and (2) non-accommodation local spending levels.

Administration: Distributed via digital platforms and QR codes at tourist sites. A total of 103 responses were gathered as a result.

4.4 Research Methodology

The research model depicted in *Figure 1*, combines and illustrates the main variables as well as relationships that are analyzed.
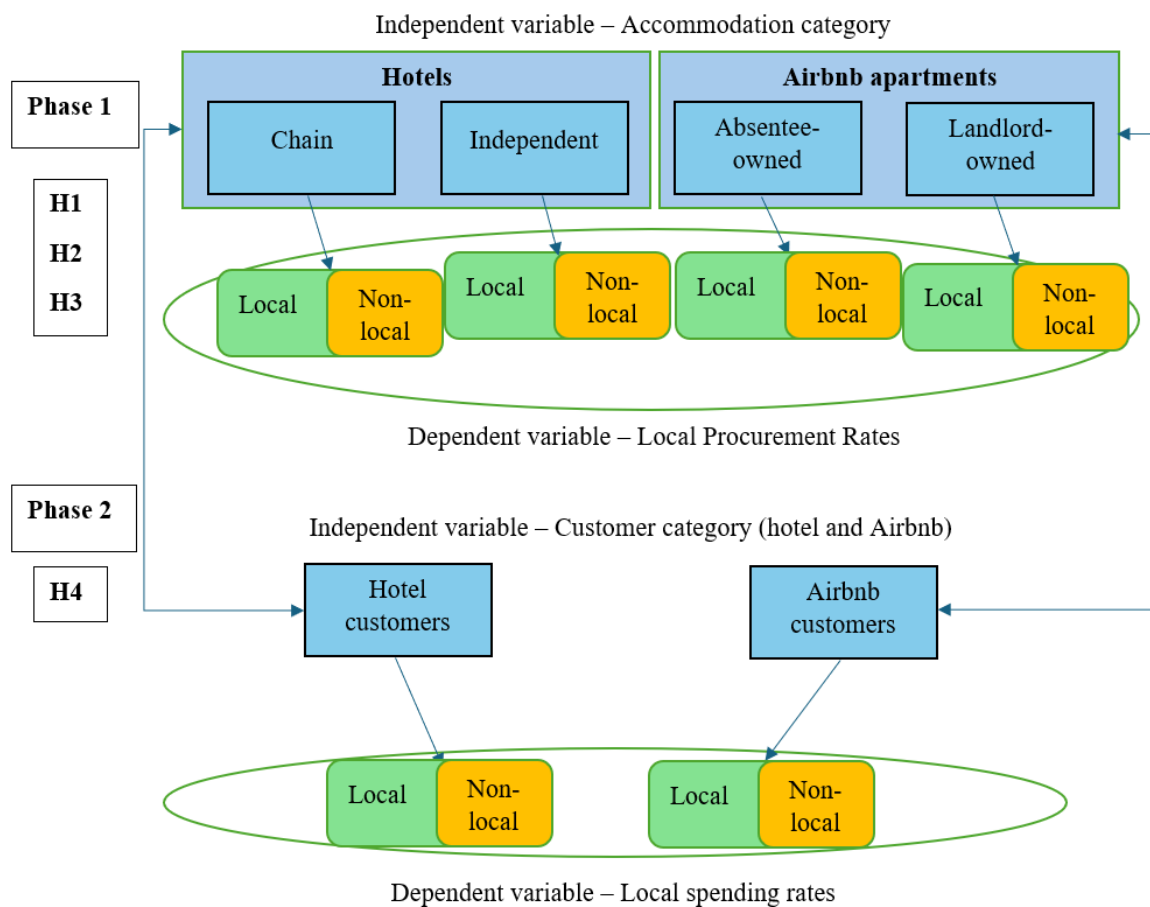

Figure 1. The research model

Source: Own edition

The analytical approach combined descriptive and inferential statistics to test the hypotheses. Initial data screening employed boxplot visualization, followed by winsorization to accommodate outliers without discarding valuable data. For hypothesis testing, appropriate statistical tests (Student's t-test or Mann-Whitney U test) were used depending on the violation of variance equality and normality assumptions. All tests applied a 95% confidence threshold ($\alpha = 0.05$) to determine statistical significance.

5   Testing the hypotheses

Hypothesis 1

Independent hotels have a higher percentage of procurement from local sources compared to chain hotels in the studied Hungarian tourism regions.

To test this hypothesis, procurement data from 35 independent and 23 chain hotels were analyzed. The Student's t-test was employed, with winsorization applied to address outliers in the independent hotel subset (2 cases).

Results confirmed that (t=2.880, p=0.006) independent hotels sourced significantly larger share of supplies locally than chain hotels.
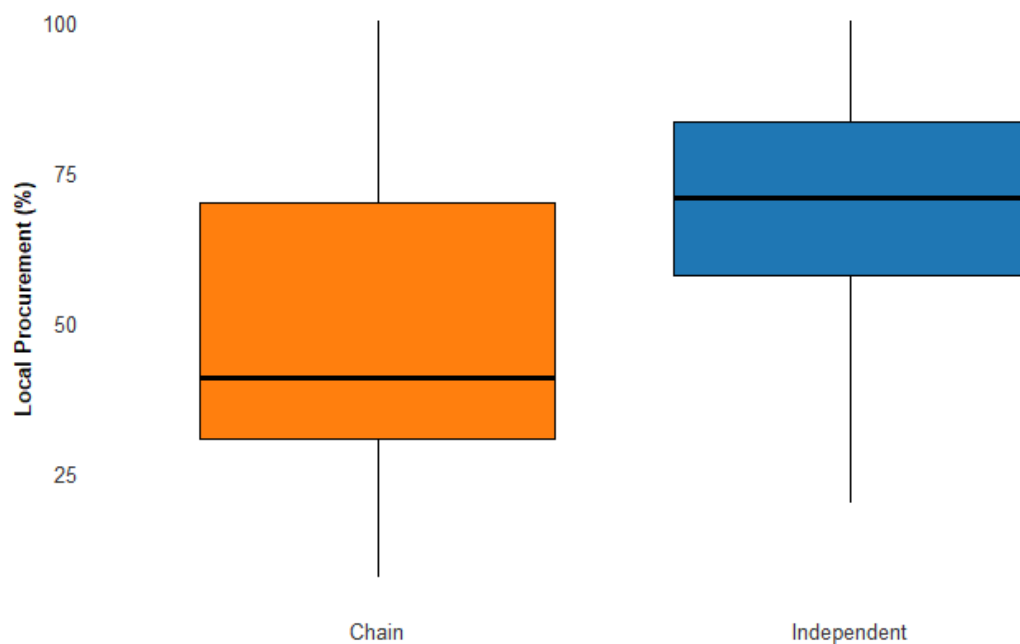

Figure 2. Box plots for hotel categories' local procurement levels

Source: Own edition

Hypothesis 2

Landlord-owned Airbnbs have a higher percentage of procurement from local sources compared to absentee-owned Airbnbs in the studied Hungarian tourism regions.

In order to confirm the above-mentioned hypothesis, data was first winsorized as there were outliers observed (3 in landlord-owned group and 1 in absentee-owned group). Following, the Student's t-test found a significant difference between the landlord-owned and absentee-owned Airbnb groups (t=4.055, p<0.001).

However, the Mann-Whitney U test (Wilcoxon rank sum test) was also applied due to violation of normality (Shapiro-Wilk p<0.001) and homogeneity of variances (Levene's test p=0.003) assumptions in the dataset where analysis of 33 landlord-owned and 31 absentee-owned properties confirmed the statistically significant difference (W=258, p<0.001).
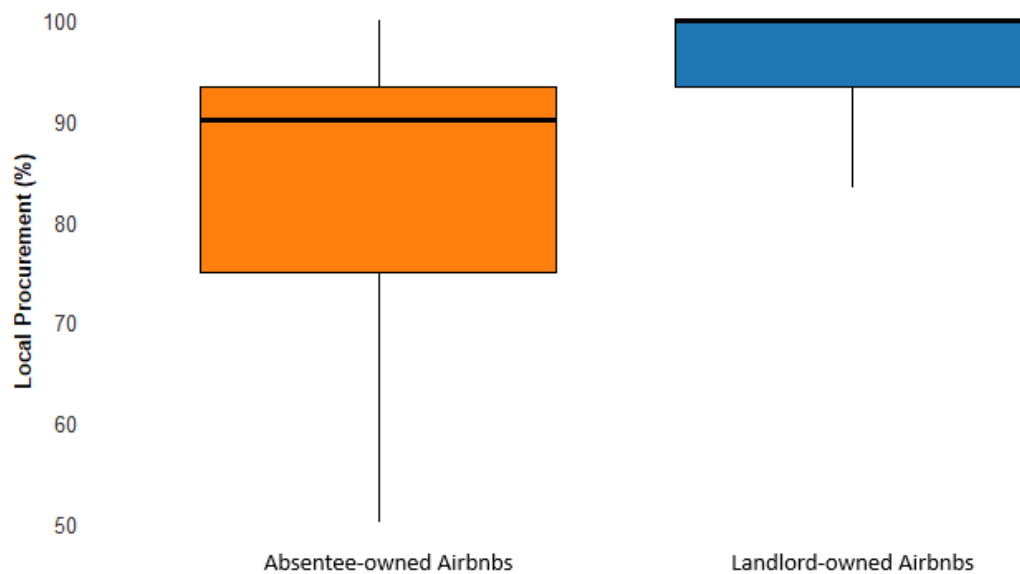

Figure 3. Box plots of Airbnb categories' local procurement levels

Source: Own edition

Hypothesis 3

Airbnb properties have a higher percentage of procurement from local sources compared to hotels in the studied Hungarian tourism regions.

To confirm this hypothesis, the Student's t-test showed a significant difference between Airbnbs and hotels in terms of local procurement levels (t=8.835, p<0.001). However, both Levene's test (p<0.001) and the Shapiro-Wilk test (p<0.001) showed violations of this test's assumptions. To address this, the Wilcoxon rank sum test was conducted as a non-parametric alternative, and it effectively confirmed the significant difference between the two groups (W=3221, p<0.001).
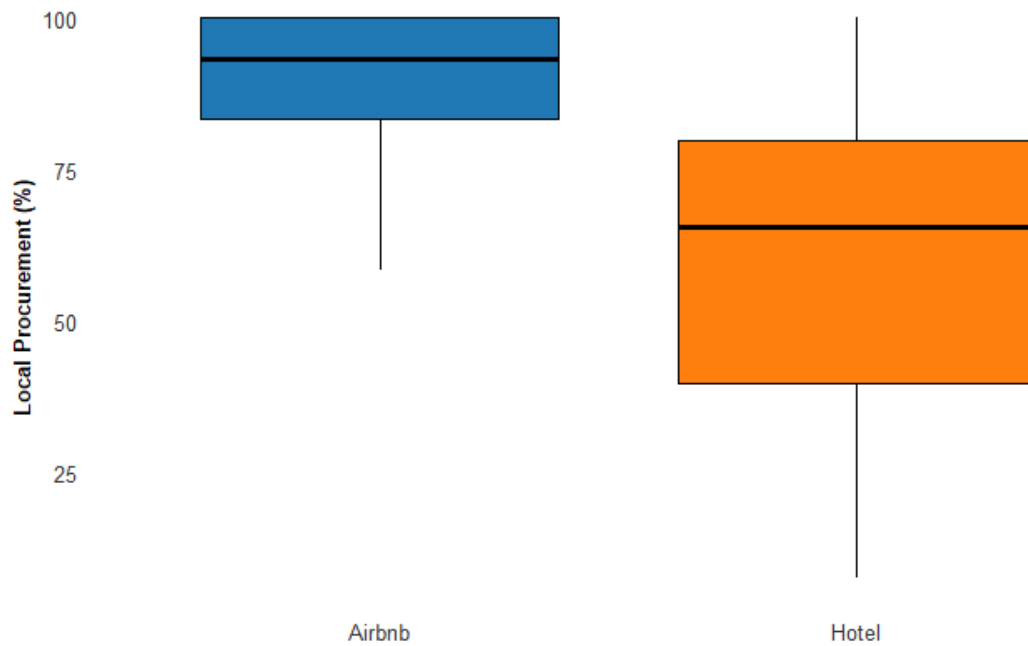
Figure 4. Box plots for the accommodation categories' local procurement levels

Source: Own edition

Hypothesis 4

Airbnb apartment customers spend a larger share of their non-accommodation budget on local goods and services compared to hotel customers in the studied Hungarian tourism regions.

In testing the Hypothesis 4, spending data from 54 hotel and 49 Airbnb customers were analyzed. The Student's t-test was utilized, with winsorization applied to accommodate outliers in the Airbnb customers subset (1 case).

As a result, the Student's t-test robustly confirmed the differences in local spending patterns of tourists (t=-6.775, p<0.001).
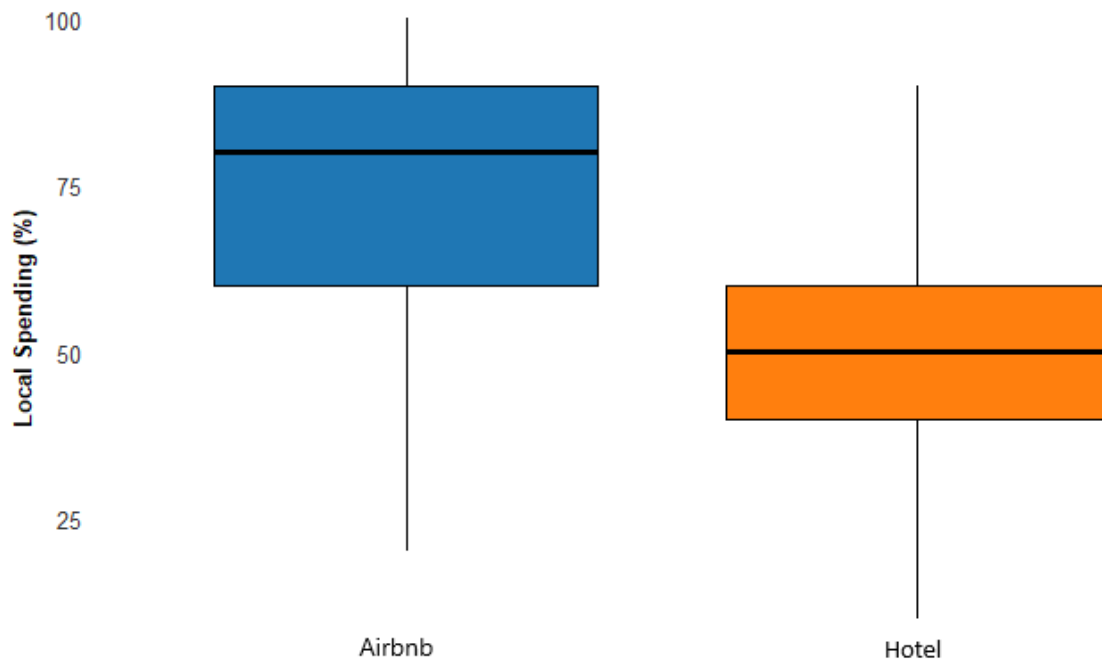
Figure 5. Box plots of responses from tourists grouped by accommodation choices

Source: Own edition

6 Novelty of the research

Based on the findings there are several contributions of this research that can be considered as novelty as listed below:

- This study analyzed both procurement practices of accommodation service providers and the spending behavior of tourists to assess local economic embeddedness, which is an approach not combined in existing tourism research.

- Unlike previous studies, this research empirically compared independent hotels, chain hotels, landlord-owned Airbnbs, and absentee-owned Airbnbs altogether in terms of local procurement.

- While the distinction between landlord-owned and absentee-owned Airbnbs has been discussed theoretically, this study is the first to empirically prove that landlord-owned Airbnbs are significantly different from absentee-owned ones in terms of sourcing from local suppliers.

- The finding that Airbnb properties, on average, procure a larger share of supplies locally than hotels is a novel contribution not addressed in prior literature.

7   Collection of theses

Thesis 1

It has been confirmed that independent hotels source a significantly larger share locally than chain hotels in the studied Hungarian tourism regions.

This thesis depicts that ownership category is an important factor in terms of local embeddedness of hotels.

Thesis 2

It has been empirically validated that landlord-owned Airbnbs procure larger share of their supplies from local suppliers than absentee-owned properties in the studied Hungarian tourism regions.

This thesis supports the theoretical distinction between host types while showing the role of host presence in local economic embeddedness.

Thesis 3

Results proved that Airbnb properties source a larger percentage of supplies locally compared to hotels in the studied Hungarian tourism regions.

This thesis indicates accommodation type is an important factor for local embeddedness. However, absolute monetary impacts may also depend on operational scales.

Thesis 4

It has been found that Airbnb guests allocate a greater proportion of their non-accommodation spending to local businesses than hotel customers in the studied Hungarian tourism regions.

This thesis shows accommodation type is a significant factor for local spending propensity of tourists. Notwithstanding, total monetary contributions may also depend on the amounts spent by tourists.

8   Further research

Future studies could incorporate a longitudinal approach and track changes in procurement patterns as well as tourist spending over periods. This would help to assess how economic conditions, regulatory changes or shifts in consumer behavior impact local embeddedness in the accommodation sector. In addition, the actual monetary flows generated by different accommodation types can also be analyzed by comparing total local expenditures such as annual supplier contracts and guest spending volumes. This would be further helpful if higher procurement rates were translated proportionally to greater economic contributions in absolute terms.

Moreover, by integrating qualitative research methods, such as in-depth interviews with accommodation providers or tourists, local suppliers, and policymakers can complement the quantitative research findings. Thus, such additional information can potentially be fruitful to better understand the motivations behind procurement choices, barriers to local sourcing, as well as strategies for improving economic linkages within the tourism industry.

9   Conclusion

In this research, the local economic embeddedness of different accommodation types in two Hungarian tourism regions have been investigated by analyzing their procurement practices as well as the spending behavior of their guests. Therefore, by comparing independent and chain hotels, landlord-owned and absentee-owned Airbnbs, as well as hotels and Airbnb accommodations in general, the research provided important results about how various accommodation service providers are embedded in the regional economy. The findings confirm that accommodation type plays a significant role in both local procurement levels and tourist spending patterns which provides important implications for policymakers and industry stakeholders.

The results demonstrated that independent hotels source a greater percentage of their supplies locally compared to chain hotels, which means that independent hotel establishments possess stronger connections with local suppliers. In the same vein, landlord-owned Airbnbs are inclined to procure more locally than absentee-owned Airbnbs, which suggests that the physical presence of owners increases economic engagement with the region. Furthermore, when comparing hotels and Airbnb accommodations as broad categories, Airbnb properties were found to have higher local procurement rates than hotels, which reflects their flexible sourcing strategies.

Apart from procurement patterns, it has also been tested that how accommodation choice influences tourist spending behavior. The findings indicated that Airbnb guests allocate a larger share of their non-accommodation budget to local businesses compared to hotel guests. However, this does not necessarily imply that Airbnb customers contribute more in absolute monetary terms than hotel visitors, as hotel guests may have higher total spending budgets.

From a practical perspective, the findings offer insights for policymakers and industry stakeholders. Hence, encouraging hotels, particularly chain hotels, to improve their connection with local suppliers could reduce economic leakages and increase the resilience of the tourism sector. Similarly, policymakers could consider regulatory incentives to support local Airbnb hosts, which can be helpful in terms of short-term rentals providing greater benefits to regional economies. Additionally, DMOs could implement strategies to encourage all tourists, whether hotel or Airbnb guests, to engage more with local businesses, thereby raising tourism's positive economic impact.

In addition, the results are of importance in regards with broader discussions on tourism development and economic resilience. Thus, as tourism continues to grow in Hungary, ensuring that local communities benefit from visitor spending should be a priority. Balancing the expansion of Airbnb accommodations while mitigating potential negative effects such as rising housing costs or excessive tourism concentration requires careful regulatory administration.

Tourism policies should focus on creating a well-balanced accommodation sector that increases local economic benefits. Hence, integrating local suppliers into hotel procurement networks, supporting small-scale accommodation providers, and promoting authentic, locally driven tourism experiences can all contribute to a more inclusive and resilient tourism economy.

To recapitulate, a balanced policy approach is necessary to encourage all accommodation providers to strengthen their local economic connections. By addressing the limitations stated in the previous chapter and expanding future research into areas such as absolute spending contributions and supply chain mapping, even better understanding of tourism's economic impact can be developed. Finally, making sure that tourism growth turns into resilient and inclusive local development indeed requires a proper long-term collaboration between policymakers, businesses, and communities.

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11 List of Publications

Journal article published in English

Karimov, A., Gyurácz-Németh, P. & Kamann, D.-J., 2023. Economic impact of hotels and similar establishments in Veszprém District. *Region : The Journal of ERSA*, 10(1), pp. 133 - 145. DOI: 10.18335/region.v10i1.418.

Journal article accepted for publication in English

Karimov, A., Kamann, D.-J., & Gyurácz-Németh, P. 2025. Local spending patterns of tourists: Analyzing the non-accommodation budget across Airbnb and hotel guests in Hungary. *Turizmus Bulletin* (under publishing).

Journal article submitted for publication in English

Karimov, A. 2025. Sustainability issues in modern accommodation industry: Local embeddedness in focus. *The Euro Asia Tourism Studies Journal (EATSJ)* (under review).

Abstract published in conference proceedings in English

Karimov, A., Gharehdaghi, M. 2022. Opportunities for increasing the economic impact of hotels and similar establishments in Veszprem through the use of blockchain. In: Fehérvölgyi, Beáta; Obermayer, Nóra (eds.) „*A Tűztorony lépcsőin – Továbblépési lehetőségek az innovációban" - absztrakt kötet*. Veszprém, Hungary: University of Pannonia. 40 p. p. 36.

International conference presentations

8th Global Conference on Business Management and Social Sciences

Year: 2022

Conference date: 17th – 18th March

Location: Online

Mode: Online

Participation: participated and presented

8th International Conference of the Euro-Asia Tourism Studies Association

Year: 2022

Conference date: 4th-8th July

Location: Veszprém, Hungary

Mode: In-person

Participation: participated and presented

VI. BGE Sustainability Conference 2023

Year: 2023

Conference date: 28th of April

Location: Online

Mode: Online

Participation: participated and presented

Tourism and recreation in the 21st century: problems and prospects

Year: 2023

Conference date: 5th-6th May

Location: Baku, Azerbaijan

Mode: Online

Participation: participated and presented

VII. BGE Sustainability Conference 2024

Year: 2023

Conference date: 26th of April

Location: Online

Mode: Online

Participation: participated and presented

UNeECC annual conference: Impact and Legacy of the European Capitals of Culture Programme

Year: 2024

Conference date: 9th-11th October

Location: Timisoara, Romania

Mode: In-Person

Participation: participated and presented