Specialties of Climbing Tourism: An Investigation of Risk Perception, Travel Behaviour and Destination Attribute Preferences

Climbing is an activity with a growing number of participants (Deutscher Alpenverein, 2018). As it relies on very specific natural conditions, travelling to suitable destinations is vital (Stettler, 2000). Hence, rock climbing is closely connected with tourism and can be defined as its own tourism segment (Woratschek et al., 2007). A very specific community and requirements among climbers (Rickly, 2017) point out the importance of gaining knowledge in this field.

Theoretical Background

Researchers have found that risk perception can significantly differ between people (Visschers & Meertens, 2010), not just generally but specifically in rock climbing (Heywood, 2006). It has been shown that heterogeneous risk perceptions influence travel behaviour (Seabra et al., 2013), further research is needed to apply these findings to more specific tourism contexts and risk factors. In addition to that, tourist behaviour, destination attribute preferences, as well as motivations for destination choice were found to differ between climbers (Woratschek et al., 2007; Albayrak & Caber, 2016; Scarpa & Thiene, 2005; Vespestad et al., 2019).

Research Questions

1. In what way are risk perception in rock climbing and preferences for destination attributes connected?

2. In how far is travel behaviour among rock climbers connected to their risk perception of the activity?
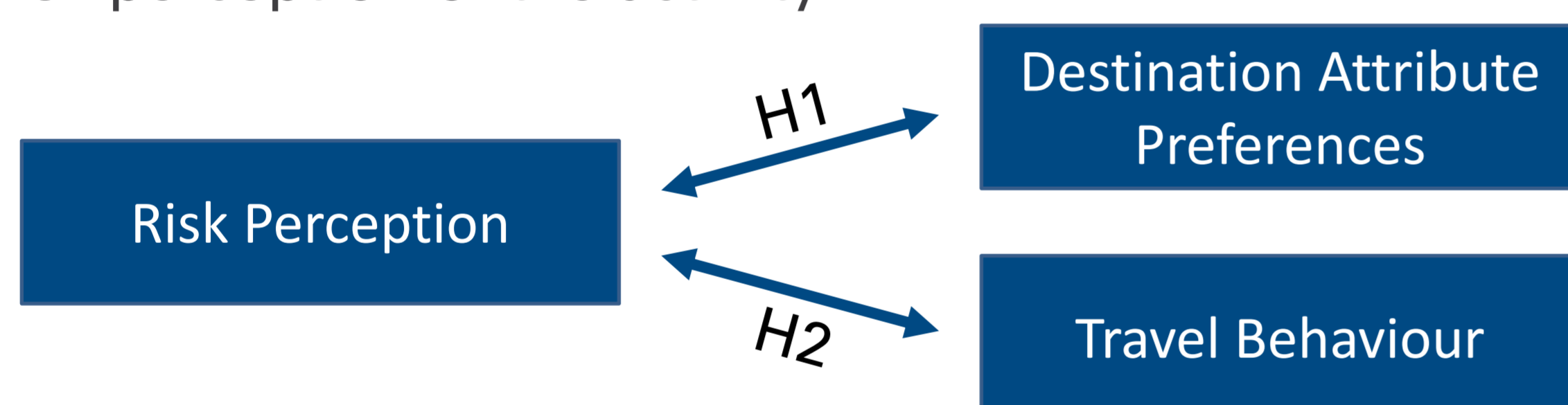

research design.

An empirical study has been conducted with the help of quantitative methods. A standardized online-survey was distributed among climbers in the area of southern Germany and Tyrol. The survey consists of two parts, the first one includes questions about risk perception and destination attribute preferences, which are conducted using a 6-point Likert-scale design. The second part about travel behaviour and demographic information uses multiple-choice and dichotomous questions.
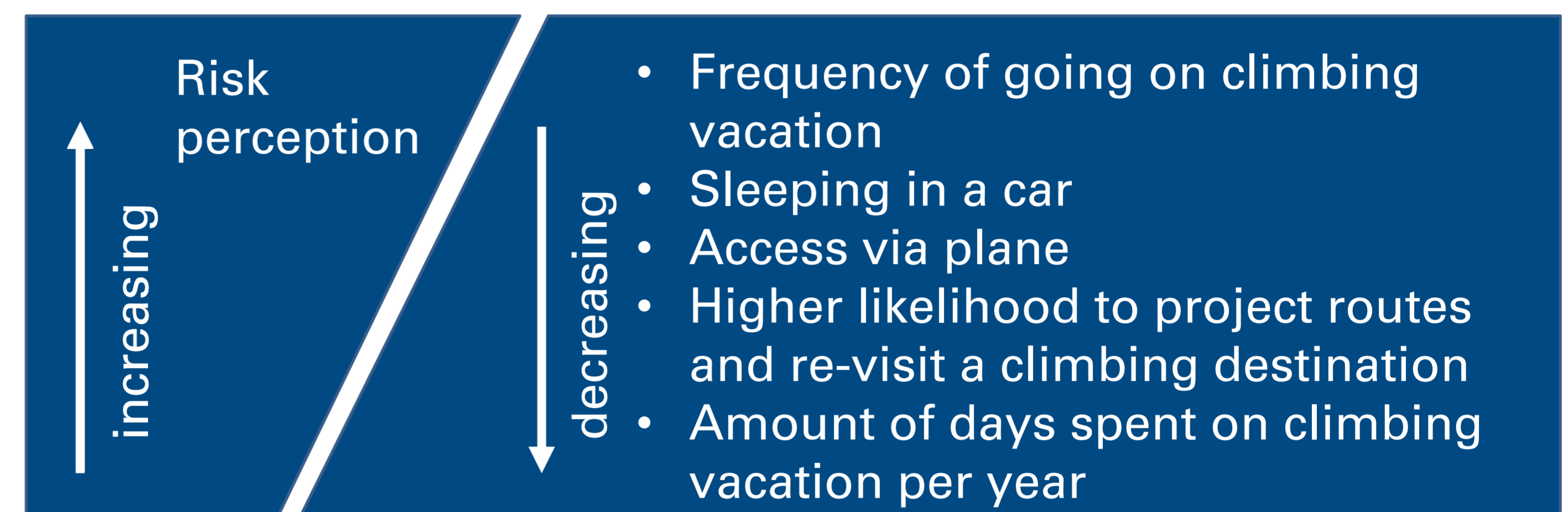
The collected data was analysed using SPSS Statistics 26 for hypothesis testing, primarily by multivariate methods of analysis, which are complemented by descriptive methods.
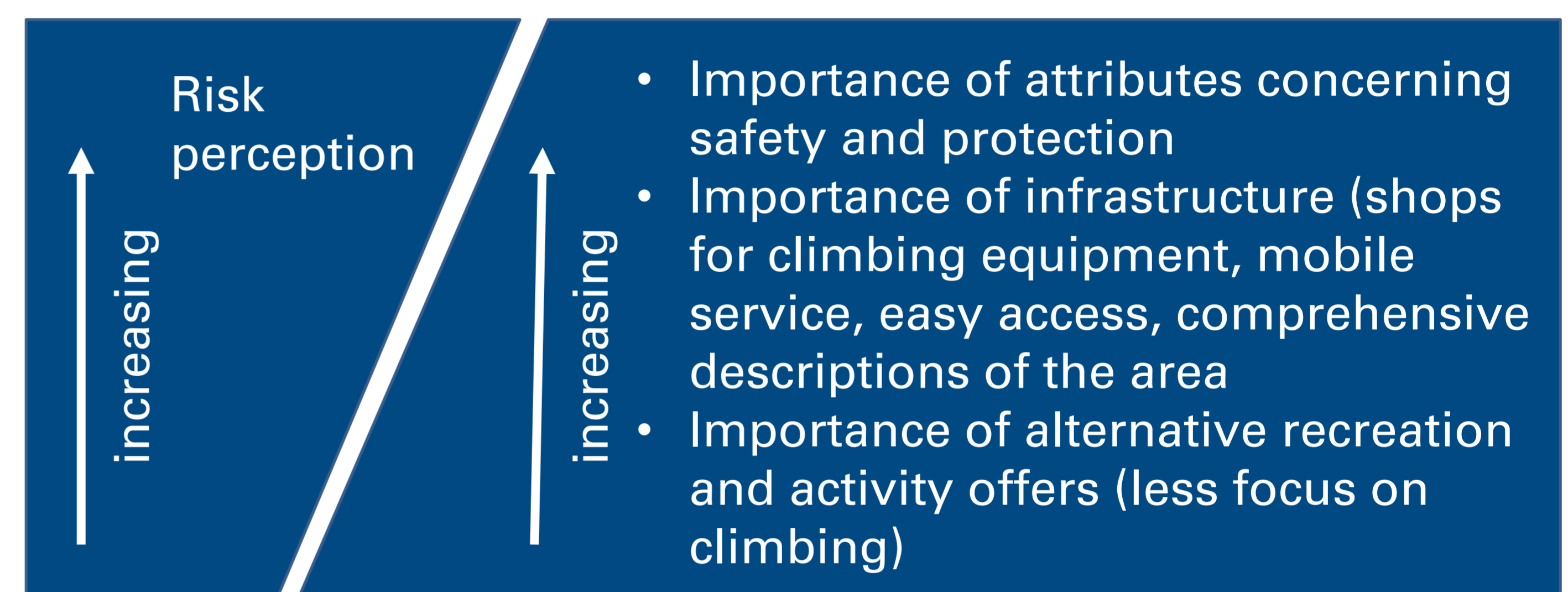
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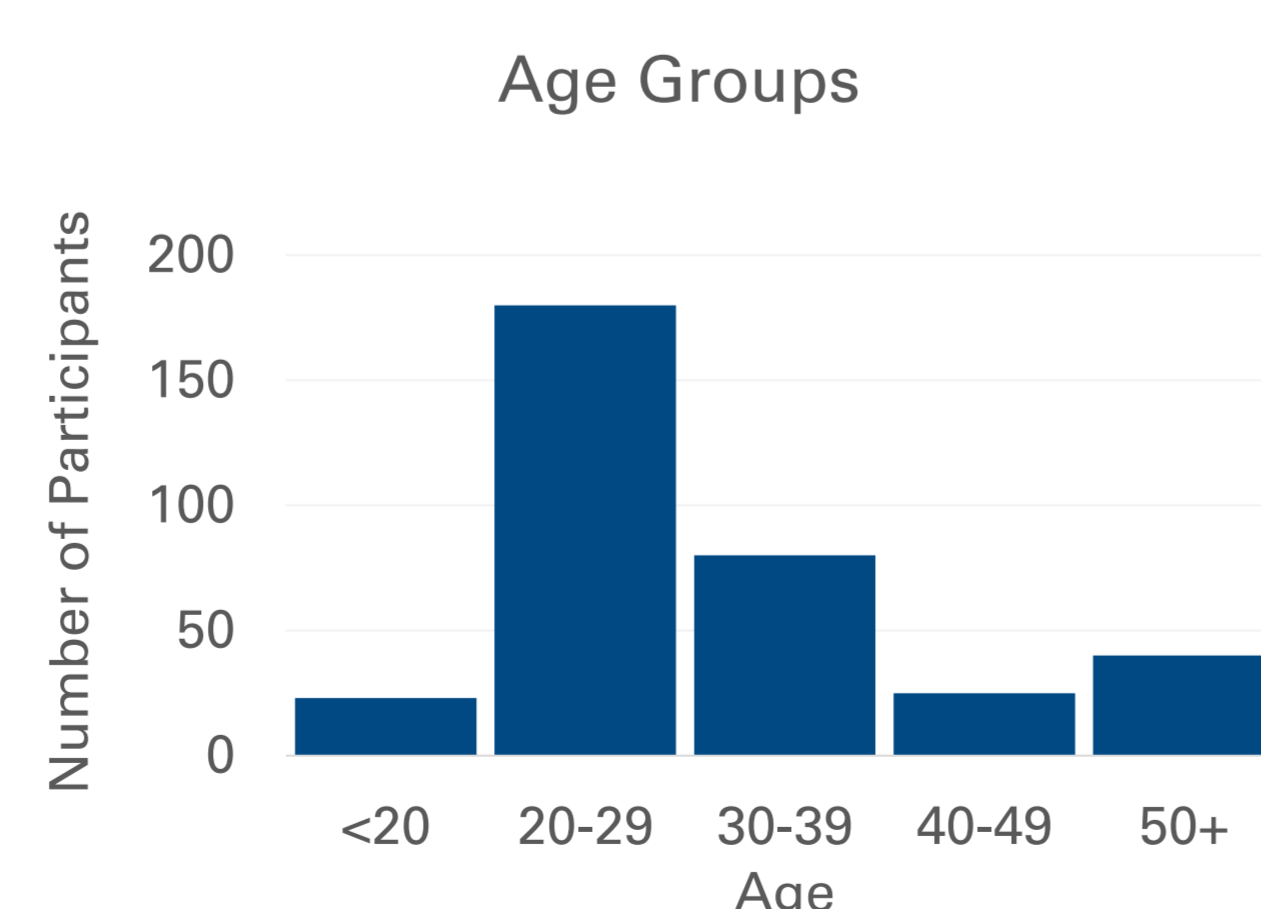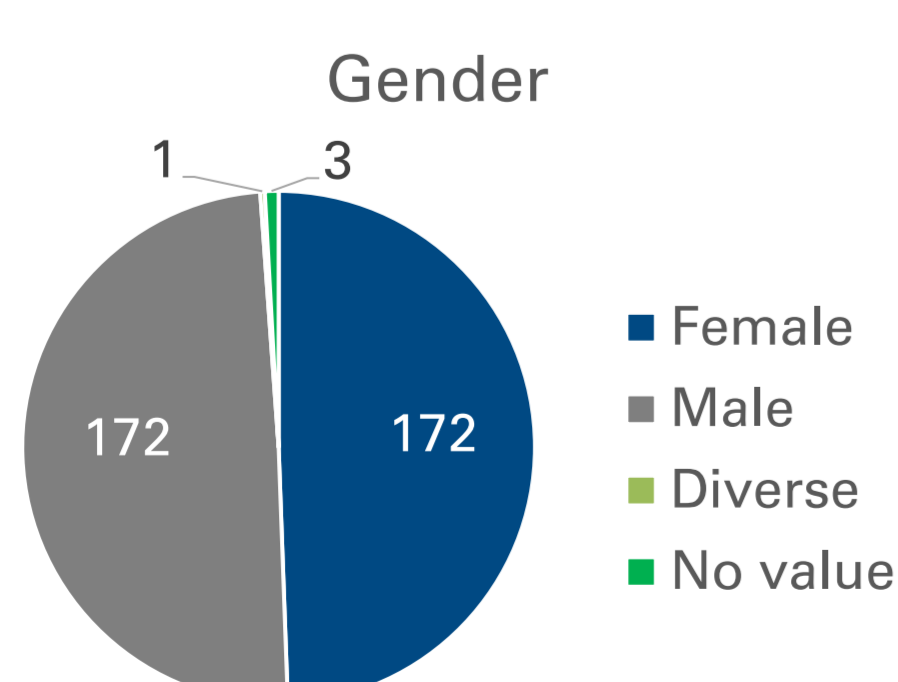
Results

Travel Behaviour

Destination Attribute Preferences

Implications for climbing destinations

Climbing destinations need to take into account that **climbers are a diverse type of tourist**. A look into destination specific clientele is helpful to find suitable options for management interventions.
Depending on the level of risk perception of their clientele, destinations can either put more weight on improving **protection and infrastructure** as well as profit from **additional activity offers** or for a clientele with a lower risk perception it makes more sense to focus on **income sources like restaurants or groceries**, as almost all climbers try the local gastronomy and buy food.
In order to use this economic potential, it is recommended to allow sleeping in a car, as part of a climbing lifestyle that adds to the climbing image of a destination (Rickly, 2017) and invites climbers who spend significantly more time on climbing vacation.
A high demand among all climbers implies that **accommodation on campsites** should be available in all climbing destinations.

Overall, this study supports scientific and practical approaches of **customer segmentation in tourism** and underlines the importance of the application in the area of climbing tourism.

Ideas for Future Research

More information about the economic potential of a climbing destination can be found by analysing spending patterns. It might also be interesting to look further into differences among climbing tourists, for instance by evaluating their beliefs and lifestyle.

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