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TOURIST ASSESSMENT OF NIGHTLIFE IN ZAGREB THROUGH TRIPADVISOR REVIEWS

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ABSTRACT


The night-time economy (NTE) refers to urban activities occurring between 6:00 PM and 6:00 AM, mainly focusing on activities related to nightlife venues (bars, clubs and coffee shops), creative industries (concerts and other musical events, theaters, festivals, cinema screenings, museums and galleries) and supporting activities such as hospitality, health services, transportation, delivery services, telecommunications, etc. It is very powerful in the context of tourism development, but precise statistics on the night-time economy are not readily available due to methodological challenges in its assessment. Still, its contribution to urban development is undoubted. Nightlife is an important aspect of the broader concept of the NTE and may have an important impact on the destination image. It is not easy to examine how tourists perceive nightlife experiences, but TripAdvisor offers significant insights into it, however, not many studies have analyzed tourists' TripAdvisor reviews on nightlife experiences. Croatia has a prominent tourist industry and its capital, Zagreb, is the national center of creative industries. The aim of this study is to analyze how tourists evaluate their nightlife experiences there. So far its nightlife has not been systematically researched so this study has the goal of understanding which environment-related factors influence such experiences, and which nightlife images tourists assign to this city. Based on this, recommendations for policy makers and NTE professionals can be drawn. The methodology applied was aspect-based sentiment analysis (ABSA) of TripAdvisor reviews of the city's clubs and bars in the three-year period (2022–2024), which was conducted in Python. Findings are classified into the following categories: social, sensory, cultural, safety and economic and the results show that the aspects of Zagreb nightlife mentioned most often are social- and sensory-related, being the factors that most strongly influence it. Safety-related reviews are not often considered while the economic-related dimension recorded the highest share of positive sentiment. Overall, the image that tourists assign to Zagreb's nightlife is related to friendliness, affordability and vibrancy. The contribution of the study is seen in findings which may be used for the improvement of Zagreb nightlife and NTE as well as in tourism policy making.

KEYWORDS

nightlife, night-time economy, tourism, TripAdvisor review analysis, aspect-based sentiment analysis, Zagreb

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1. INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Although important for the urban economy, the concept of the night-time economy (NTE) has not been extensively researched. The existing literature offers several definitions of the concept but with differences. In general, it covers a wide range of activities occurring between 6:00 PM and 6:00 AM (Beer, 2011) but its scope is not precisely defined. Thus, Rowe and Lynch (2012) offer examples of NTE activities: shopping, restaurants, clubs, museums, theatres, art exhibitions and different events. Tišma et al. (2025, p. 177) write more generally about “the consumption of offerings from the hospitality and entertainment sectors, including transportation activities, retail activities, and other services such as food and beverage consumption”, while Rowe and Bavinton (2011, p. 812) offer an even broader definition in “the expanded provision, interaction and consumption of leisure activities and experiences”. With less precision, they speak about activities such as bars, clubs, pubs, music venues, leisure cities, entertainment zones and night markets. The type of activity is often dependent on the context (e.g. night markets are typical for Taiwan, entertainment zones for the US, leisure cities for Australia). There are also other activities taking place during the night (e.g. 24-hour gyms) and it is not easy to provide a definition which would fit all the contexts.

Zmysłony and Pawlusinski (2020, p. 194) write about “a range of activities, venues and consumer service providers clustered upon their nocturnal agenda” offering, to our knowledge, the most systematic coverage of the term dividing the activities that NTE entails into:

- NTE core activities (operating only or intensifying their performance from the late evening into the early hours of the morning – concert halls, music clubs, party precincts, cabarets, night clubs, pubs, bars, coffee shops, night-guided tourist tours, night markets, gaming centers, virtual reality arcades, book-making races, massage parlors, casinos, sex clubs);
- NTE complementary activities (extending their daytime performance into late evening hours – hotels, hostels, shops, tourist information centers, wellness and beauty spots, sports arenas, sport and fitness centers, waterfront leisure areas, gathering and socializing spots, fast-food and street-food spots, restaurants, cafes, festivals and outdoor events, theaters, cinemas, museums, galleries); and
- NTE supporting activities (the multi-sectoral performance of a city – public and private transport, hospitals, health care, goods delivery, shared services centers, cleaning services, police and public security, repair and maintenance, creative industries, building illumination).

While it is not always easy to differentiate between some of these activities (e.g. creative industries as NTE supporting and music-related as NTE core, etc.), in this study, we refer to nightlife as a component of NTE which Zmysłony and Pawlusinski (2020) identify as NTE core activities. Nightlife is seen as comprising “social activities and forms of entertainment that are available at night in bars, nightclubs, etc.” (Encyclopædia Britannica, n.d.).

Existing studies both report on the positive and negative effects of NTE on local economic development and sustainability. Thus, for example, its expansion introduces financial, social and infrastructural burdens, creating a dilemma regarding urban sustainability, rising rental prices etc. (Chen et al., 2019; Nofre, 2020; Roberts & Gornostaeva, 2007; Son et al., 2023). Further studies also note the negative impact of NTE such as noise pollution, waste generation, increased CO₂ emissions, traffic congestion, violence etc. (Holmes et al., 2015; Koleczko & Garcia Hansen, 2011; Nghiê-m-Phú et al., 2024; Webster et al., 2018). Positive ones can be measured through its direct impact (employment opportunities and the economic output of nightlife establishments), indirect impact (supply to nightlife establishments), induced impact (nightlife employees’ spending within the city), ancillary impacts (additional spending associated with nightlife activities, e.g. transportation), and fiscal impacts (tax revenues generated by NTE). The annual economic study performed by UK Music (2021) reports on the spill-over effect of concerts (additional value for the UK economy) held in different venues which in small ones amounted to £48,349 GVA in medium ones £252,521 GVA, and in large venues £425,000 GVA, with over 60% remaining locally. Similarly, the city of New York has more than 25,000 nightlife establishments, supporting 299,000 jobs and generating \$35.1 billion in total economic output, alongside around \$697 million in tax revenue annually (Haptas & Martinez, 2023). Besides its positive economic impact, studies show that NTE, specifically music, has positive impacts on health and the quality of life (Bygren et al., 1996; Fancourt et al., 2014).

Although there are a number of challenges related to research on NTE (e.g. harmonization of the NTE contribution measurement), existing studies offer a strong theoretical background demonstrating the importance of the field. The topic, although self-evident, has only recently entered academic and professional research more extensively (e.g. Eldridge, 2019; Eldridge & Smith, 2019; Goldmedia Gruppe, 2019; Nofre et al., 2020), while only a few studies evaluate tourist TripAdvisor reviews of nightlife (e.g. Bi et al., 2024; Chu et al., 2022; İnan, 2024; Nghiem et al. 2025; Nghiê-m-Phú, 2020; Pinke-Sziva et al., 2019; Seočanac & Dimitrovski, 2022; Soltani-Nejad et al., 2024).

Night-time economy is powerful in creating (tourist) experiences, and eventually also influencing the city's image. The increasing number of studies in the experience economy accentuate the importance of cultural activities in design, since experiences are inherent to culture which has the necessary tools (e.g. color, form, melody, rhythm, harmony, etc.) for eliciting emotional responses (Jelinčić & Šveb, 2021). Already Pine and Gilmore (2011), the fathers of the experience economy, have written about the need for multisensory stimuli for emotional elicitation, which make up the positive evaluation of experiences. Due to the growth of user-generated content like TripAdvisor, specific methods have been introduced into academic research, one of them being aspect-based sentiment analysis (ABSA) which enables a deeper understanding of how visitors articulate their experiences. Hua et al. (2024) identified two decades of ABSA trends and research development while the work of Marrese-Taylor et al. (2013) applied ABSA to identify specific experiential aspects in tourism services. Taecharungroj and Mathayomchan (2019) analysed TripAdvisor reviews of attractions in Phuket and demonstrated that reviews can effectively reveal key sentiments expressed by visitors. Similarly, Marine-Roig (2017) showed that TripAdvisor reviews provide a valuable source for assessing destination image as user-generated content captures visitors' perceptions of atmosphere, authenticity and overall satisfaction. This is particularly evident in the context of nightlife or "nightlife-scape" as defined by Nghiêm-Phú (2020) and further explored by Seočanac and Dimitrovski (2022).

The study by Seočanac and Dimitrovski (2022) detected the physical layout, presence of other tourists, atmosphere, staff and music as environmental factors influencing the tourist experience, researched both before and after the COVID pandemic. In the context of tourism recovery after the pandemic, a valuable study is that of Leelawat et al. (2022) which analyzed Twitter comments to identify tourist sentiments in Bangkok, Chiang Mai and Phuket in Thailand. This work did not focus specifically on nightlife but emphasized that in the recovery of Thai tourism, in addition to promoting food, nature and destinations, it is also necessary to promote urban nightlife. Their study also used sentiment analysis in the research of tourist experiences (positive, negative, neutral). Our study has applied a similar approach but we conducted further analysis assessing sentiments of nightlife divided into five aspects, and in that way it is more thorough. Another work researching Budapest, implicitly also speaks about the physical layout and atmosphere when researching the mainly negative experiences in the context of overtourism, such as dirt and litter, public urination, street crime and homelessness (Pinke-Sziva et al., 2019), as having important impact on tourists' nightlife experience.

As said, nightlife is a crucial aspect of the night-time economy. The aim of this article is to offer the tourist assessment of the Zagreb nightlife experience by analyzing their reviews to see how they perceive the atmosphere which may offer a deeper understanding of the factors impacting on nightlife experience. Therefore, the first research question is: which environment-related factors influence the experience of Zagreb nightlife? Nightlife experience is certainly one of the aspects influencing the destination image, which can quite possibly be different from the day-time image. Additionally, the study compares the findings to offer a general view of Zagreb nightlife as part of its destination image. The second research question is: what image do Zagreb tourists assign to the city based on nightlife? This temporal determinant is seen as a significant theoretical contribution to the field of tourism, while the implications of the study are seen for policy makers in terms of strategic NTE and tourism planning as well as for industry professionals. We selected the 2022–2024 timespan for our analysis as it represents the recovery and normalization of tourism after the COVID-19 pandemic, allowing for the examination of tourist perceptions and behaviours in a context where travel activity had largely been resumed.

2. STUDY CONTEXT

Zagreb is the capital of Croatia, the national social, economic and cultural center as well as the hub of creative industries. Although precise statistics on cultural and creative industries are not available due to methodological challenges in their measurement, the estimate is that over 90% of creative companies are registered in Zagreb with music being the most relevant sector in terms of profit and branding (Grad Zagreb. Institut za razvoj i međunarodne odnose, 2013). The city of Zagreb is the founder of 40 public cultural institutions (Grad Zagreb. Institut za razvoj i međunarodne odnose, 2023) this being the largest number in Croatia with 2,153 civil society organizations have been registered as of July 2025 (Republika Hrvatska. Ministarstvo pravosuđa, uprave i digitalne transformacije, n.d.), while in the same period, 748 private companies were registered in the fields of art, entertainment and recreation (according to the national classification of such activities). Apart from art- and culture-related companies, these also include casinos, sports clubs, fitness centers, entertainment and theme parks, along with other recreational activities which are part of the NTE. The search for companies registered in the narrower classification of art- and culture-related activities resulted in 233 being found (Hrvatska gospodarska komora, n.d.).

When it comes to concert venues, the city houses 37 of them and they offer music performances in various musical genres: four of them are concert halls, nine are mixed-use facilities, and 24 are nightclubs/bars (Tišma et al., 2025). As of July 2025, there were 2,069 companies in Zagreb registered as food and beverage services (Hrvatska gospodarska komora, n.d.). It is not easy to quantify all the establishments operating during late-night hours (e.g. gastronomic ones), since the owners hold the sole responsibility in determining their working hours and a complete list is not available. In the context of Croatia, night is defined in Article 5 of the *Noise Protection Act (Zakon o zaštiti od buke, 2021)*, which states that it lasts from 23:00 to 7:00. The only available list in the city of Zagreb is the one related to the so-called tourist zones. Namely, the working hours of hospitality venues in those zones may operate for extended hours, but must obtain compliance with noise protection requirements for night-time operations. According to the city of Zagreb list there are 217 such establishments that meet the requirements for night work (City Office for Economy, Environmental Sustainability and Strategic Planning, personal communication, October 22, 2025). However, the statistics on how many of them operate in the NTE outside tourist zones are not available.

The only research on Zagreb NTE (Tišma et al., 2025) focused on an analysis from the perspective of industry professionals on the needs of some night-club owners. This research called for a systematic approach to managing and developing Zagreb's NTE connecting all relevant stakeholders to improve the quality of life of its citizens, public safety, strengthening creative industries and creating a perception of Zagreb as a center of cultural tourism. Moreover, the research estimates the share of tourists in Zagreb NTE, which is between 20–30% from the perspective of club-owners, while the SWOT analysis performed sees the continually increasing number of tourists as an opportunity for NTE development.

Table 1. Tourist arrivals and overnight stays in Zagreb 2023–2024

| Season | 2023 | Index 2023/2022 | 2024 | Index 2024/2023 |
|-----------------|-----------|-----------------|-----------|-----------------|
| Arrivals | 1,307,153 | +21% | 1,428,750 | +9% |
| Overnight stays | 2,541,030 | +13% | 2,690,085 | +6% |

Source: authors, based on the Croatian Bureau of Statistics (2025).

Tourism is of great importance for the development of the city, and Zagreb's contribution is also significant in the national context. Namely, Zagreb is the

only Croatian continental area with a significant number of tourist arrivals, and according to this indicator it out-performs some coastal areas. Tourism data in the period 2023–2024 show an increase both in the number of tourist arrivals as well as in overnight stays (Croatian Bureau of Statistics, 2025), however the average length is short (around two nights per arrival). This leaves little time for a thorough consumption of the NTE economy. Table 1 presents statistics for tourist arrivals and overnight stays in Zagreb in the period 2023–2024.

There are no specific research studies and statistics related to tourists' perception of nightlife in Zagreb but some generic data can be drawn from the regular TOMAS research performed by the Institute for Tourism on tourist attitudes and spending in Croatia. This research (Marušić et al., 2023) shows that 61.7% of Zagreb tourists in the summer season claim to be traveling for leisure, and 18.7% of them participate in clubs/dancing/nightlife activities while staying in the destination. The number of those traveling outside of the summer season for leisure is lower (43.9%) but more of them participate in nightlife (20.5%) than in the summer season.

The satisfaction level of Zagreb tourists both in the summer season and out of it, along with personal safety in the city, is rated very highly (91% and 93% respectively), while satisfaction level with nightlife is rated highly (75.1% and 76.8% respectively). Other elements of tourism destination supply, possibly related to NTE are rated in the following way:

- arts and culture – very highly (91.9% summer season and 72.1% out of it);
- gastronomic offer – very highly (87.4% summer season and 84% out of it);
- atmosphere – very highly (85.8% summer season and 94.5% out of it); and
- local public transport – highly or very highly (79.9% summer season and 88.7% out of it).

Summarized results on the attitudes of Zagreb tourists to these individual elements related to NTE are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Summarized results on attitudes of Zagreb tourists on individual elements related to the night-time economy (NTE)

| Season | Reason for travel (%) | | Satisfaction level (%) | |
|------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|------------------------|-----------|
| | Leisure | Participation in nightlife | Personal safety | Nightlife |
| Summer season | 61.7 | 18.7 | 91.0 | 75.1 |
| Out of the main season | 43.9 | 20.5 | 93.0 | 76.8 |

Source: authors, based on the Marušić et al. (2023).

Improperly disposed garbage is rated as the highest disturbance in the perception of 8.1% of Zagreb tourists in the summer season, while for those coming out of this season it is the second highest disturbance with 4.1% (Marušić et al., 2023).

Further research which has grasped some topics related to NTE as perceived by tourists is the Zagreb Visitor Survey 2017/2018. According to this research, these tourists show high satisfaction levels with the gastronomic offer and the compactness of the city, as it is easy to visit and navigate on foot, while the results of this research confirm the high rates for personal safety. The most common source of information for visitors both before and during their visit to Zagreb is TripAdvisor (Donnell & Anderson, 2018) but no research on the 'nightlife-scape' (the environment in which the tourists experience nightlife) has been performed.

When it comes to Zagreb's city image, no comprehensive research exists, to the best of our knowledge. One small-scale study, however shows that young tourists perceive the city as appropriate for the younger population with the Zagreb Advent as their most visited event; their disinterest in visiting museums and galleries during day-time is noted but, on the other hand they show interest in visiting them within the framework of night-time events such as *The Night of Museums* (Trojan, 2025). Another small-scale study (Draganić, 2021) confirms that visitors consider Zagreb to be a historical and cultural city, known for its various museums and the events that take place there.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. DATA COLLECTION

The source of the data collected in this study are the reviews found on TripAdvisor, which examine tourists' experience. This platform has been selected for research for three reasons: (a) it is a common platform used for studying tourism-related topics (Wang & Kirilenko, 2021), (b) previous research (Donnell & Anderson, 2018) demonstrated that it is the most common source of information for visitors, and (c) the platform has a dedicated section for nightlife. Nightlife has not been commonly researched using TripAdvisor until recently (Nghiem-Phú, 2020; Seočanac & Dimitrovski, 2022), so this study adds it to the existing academic corpus. Although in the category "things to do in Zagreb" there is no mention of nightlife, the free search in TripAdvisor using the keywords "Zagreb nightlife" finds this category within the "types of attractions" menu, with 138 places sorted by traveler favorites including bars and clubs. Although the NTE concept covers more activities than bars and clubs, this study is

limited to these since they are categorized in this way by TripAdvisor. Other categories (e.g. museums), although offered as an attraction, were not researched as it would be impossible to differentiate the reviews related to daytime and night-time. Further on, a separate category "concerts & shows" has been left out of the research as well since it relates to one-time events which are not in the regular Zagreb tourist offer, or shows which are not necessarily performed in Zagreb but rather in its vicinity or even in nearby countries. Reviews were collected in July 2025 while the analysis encompassed reviews published between 2022 and 2024.

The reviews were distributed across a total of 49 venues out of the 138 listed under the "Zagreb nightlife" section on TripAdvisor. Of the 89 excluded venues, some did not have reviews falling within the targeted time frame, others had no reviews at all, while a few venues were not associated with nightlife-related activities. It is important to note that several venues in the "Zagreb nightlife" section were categorized as "Pub Crawls" – guided tours through multiple venues in a single session. As a result, the analysis includes experiences from more than 49 venues, but these could not be identified through the review content.

Within this time frame, a total of 750 reviews were recorded and of this number, 138 were excluded resulting in 612 reviews in total. The exclusions were made on the basis of several criteria: if the reviewer's profile indicated residence in Zagreb or in its immediate vicinity; if the content of the review clearly suggested that the writer was a frequent visitor to the nightlife venue (e.g. "I come here every weekend" or "This is my usual spot"); or, in cases where it was not possible to determine from the review itself, the language in which it was written, or the stated place of origin to judge whether the reviewer was a tourist, the criterion applied was the exclusion of writers whose names strongly suggested that they were locals.

Out of 612 included reviews, 402 (65.69%) did not provide information on the tourists' country of origin. Among the reviews where the origin was specified, the United Kingdom accounted for the largest proportion with 6.7%, followed by Italy (3.27%), Germany (2.29%), and the US (2%). Besides these countries, reviews originated from an additional 40 countries worldwide, though each of them represented less than 2% of the total.

In terms of language, a total of 16 were identified. English is dominant, accounting for 511 reviews or 83.5% of the total, followed by Italian with 3.27%, Spanish with 2.78% and German with 2.61%. Reviews written in other languages each account for less than 2%.

When looking at the type of visit, the data reveal that the most common form of travel was with "friends", recorded in 291 reviews (47.55%), followed by "solo" visitors, who contributed 187 reviews (30.56%), underscoring the appeal of Zagreb's nightlife and urban

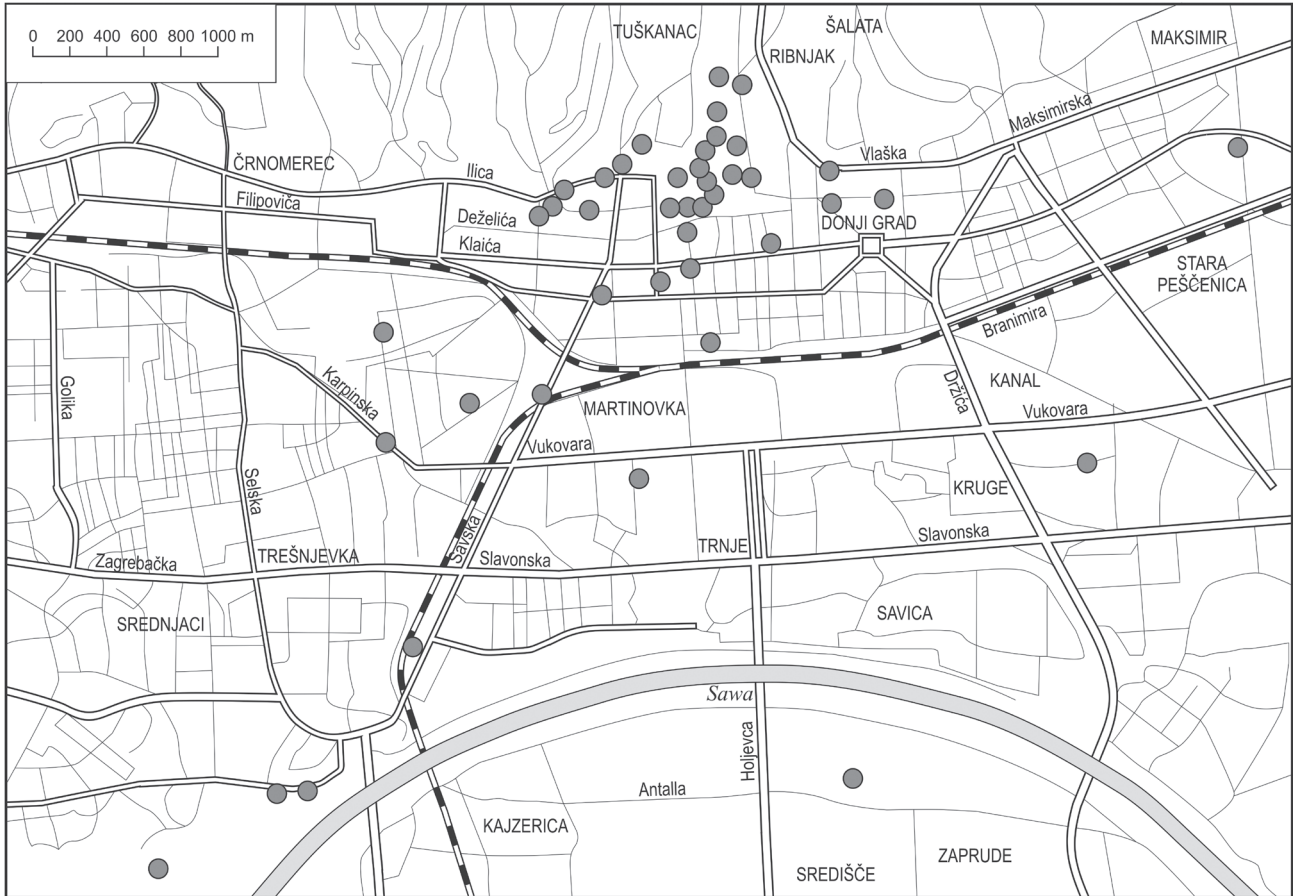


Figure 1. Spatial distribution of the nightlife attractions offered on TripAdvisor
Source: authors

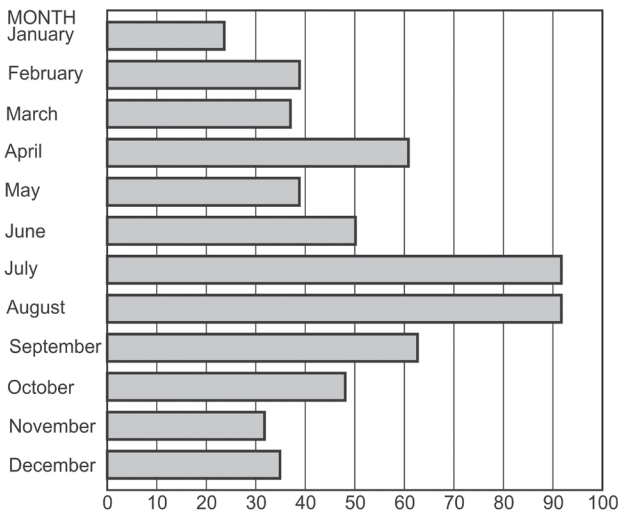


Figure 2. Number of TripAdvisor reviews by month (all years combined 2022–2024)
Source: authors

When it comes to spatial distribution of the nightlife attractions available on TripAdvisor, most venues are concentrated in the city center, while seven are in the wider central area. Five nightlife venues are situated outside the city center, and one is positioned on the Medvednica mountain, north of the city. They are presented on Figure 1.

The monthly distribution of reviews in Figure 2 shows notable variation in visitor activity. A significant rise is observed in April corresponding with Easter holidays but the highest concentration occurs during the summer months, indicating that Zagreb is an attractive tourist destination. The low share of reviews in November and December, particularly in comparison with the first quarter, was unexpected given that Zagreb is an exceptionally popular destination during the Advent season (Sredanović & Šulc, 2022).

3.2. METHOD

culture for individual travelers as well. “Couples”, as a type of visit accounted for 69 reviews (11.27%), but “family” visits were only 23 (3.76%). Business travel was the least common category with 10 (1.63%). In addition, 32 (5.23%) did not specify the type of visit.

The aspect-based sentiment analysis (ABSA) (Hua et al., 2024) was conducted in a Python (version 3.11) environment using a combination of libraries (pandas, re, scikit-learn, TextBlob, matplotlib and openpyxl). After the initial preparation the reviews column in

Excel was standardized through a text preprocessing procedure which included transforming all characters into lowercase, removing numbers, punctuation and special symbols, and with the tokenization and elimination of frequent stopwords. To identify the main thematic groups term frequency-inverse document frequency (TF-IDF) was used. The *k*-means clustering algorithm was applied, which identified thematic clusters and the most frequent words in each one were then interpreted as dimensions of nightlife experience. Based on these clusters, keyword dictionaries were constructed for five aspects: social, sensory, economic, cultural and safety. Each review was mapped onto one or more aspects depending on the occurrence of these keywords. For sentiment analysis within each aspect, TextBlob was implemented. The results were aggregated for each aspect. Figure 3 presents the whole process of the analysis workflow.

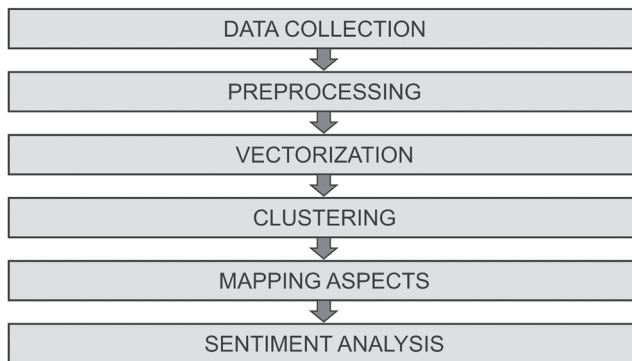


Figure 3. Analysis workflow
Source: authors

4. RESULTS

Figure 4 presents the results of the ABSA analysis. In the 612 reviews, a total of 1042 results were recorded. Some reviews contained multiple aspects, which were aggregated into the following categories: social (442), sensory (368), cultural (107), safety (17) and economic (108).

The social aspect was the most prevalent, accounting for 42.42% of the total, followed by the sensory aspect at 35.32%, while the economic makes up 10.36%. The cultural (10.27%) and safety (1.63%) aspects together represent less than 12%. The results show a strong predominance of positive evaluations, with an overall average sentiment across all aspects of 90.2% positive, 2.9% negative, and 7.4% neutral.

Pizam and Tasci (2019) see the sensory aspect as a core element of the 'experience-scape', emphasizing how sound, smell, taste etc. shape evaluation of a place. Nghiêm-Phú (2020) demonstrated that visitors interpret

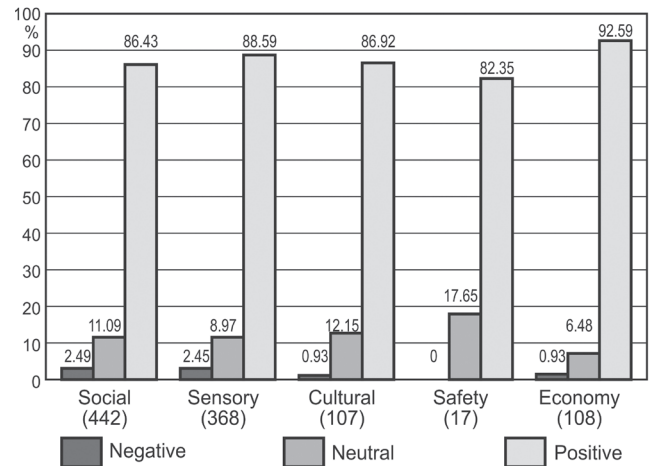


Figure 4. Distribution of tourist sentiment aspects
Source: authors

the environment through a multisensory lens where music, design, lighting, smell, taste etc. represent key drivers. Social dimensions refer to staff, service quality, hospitality behavior and social interaction within the environment (Hanks & Line, 2018). Cultural aspects reflect symbolic and identity-based experience shaped by local customs and values and the degree to which visitors feel welcomed (Pizam & Tasci, 2019). In our research, taste is mostly linked to beverages (and then subsequently categorized in the sensory aspect) but sometimes it is also linked to experience related to the authenticity of Croatian wines and dishes (in that case categorized in the cultural aspect). Safety is recognised as an essential environmental dimension particularly in leisure and night-time settings (Siguaw et al., 2019). Keywords associated with comfort, security and safe atmosphere are justified as belonging to the safety dimension. Economic considerations like price and value-for-money are well-established components of consumer experience. Keywords referring to price, value and affordability represent an economic aspect supported by the influence of price on visitor satisfaction (Prum et al., 2024; Ye et al., 2014).

When examining the keywords present within the aspects, the most frequently mentioned elements in the social aspect refer to staff (staff, service, waiter), appearing in 31.78% of the reviews. These are followed by references to the broader social environment (people 19.55%, friends 18.38%, and friendly 13.07%). In the sensory aspect, beverages were by far the most represented (drink, beer, wine, cocktail, etc.), accounting for as much as 60.06%. This is followed by references to the atmosphere of nightlife locations (atmosphere, vibe, etc.) with 18.82%, and music (music, sound, etc.) with 11.53%. In the economic aspect, the most dominant keywords were price (48.82%) and cheap (22.83%). The cultural aspect, which conveys identity, most frequently included keywords such as taste (42.28%), local (25.79%) and authentic (22.64%). Finally, the safety aspect was

predominantly associated with comfort (50%) and safety (44.44%).

The results in Table 3 show that environment-related factors, which have the most relevant influence on the experience of Zagreb nightlife relate to the staff service, beverages offered, tasty products, comfort and good prices. While no particular review directly mentioned the image of Zagreb nightlife, the results of the analysis imply an image of a city with a friendly and vibrant atmosphere at affordable prices.

Table 3. Frequency of keywords present within individual aspects of the aspect-based sentiment analysis (ABSA) analysis

| Category | Keywords | Percent (%) |
|-----------------|--------------------------------|-------------|
| Social aspect | Staff (staff, service, waiter) | 31.78 |
| | People | 19.55 |
| | Friend | 18.38 |
| | Friendly | 13.07 |
| Sensory aspect | Beverages | 60.06 |
| | Atmosphere | 18.82 |
| | Music | 11.53 |
| Economic aspect | Price | 48.82 |
| | Cheap | 22.83 |
| Cultural aspect | Taste | 42.28 |
| | Local | 25.79 |
| | Authentic | 22.64 |
| Safety aspect | Comfort | 50.00 |
| | Safe | 44.44 |

Source: authors.

Analysis of possible differences between sentiments towards Zagreb NTE during the summer season and out of season showed that the reviews are more positive in summer when it comes to social, sensory and economic-related dimensions. The reverse situation is found for the cultural and safety-related dimensions whose positive reviews prevail out of season. Concretely, the summer months of July and August contain 184 reviews, and the remaining months of the year 428. In the social aspect, during July and August, 90.44% of comments are positive, 7.35% are neutral, and only 2.21% are negative. In contrast, for the other months, 84.57% of comments are positive, 12.54% are neutral, and 2.98% are negative. This shows that the social aspect is rated more favorably in the summer months. Regarding the sensory aspect, in July and August the share of positive comments is 90.32%, compared to 88% in the remaining months while the economic aspect is also rated more positively

in July and August (96.3%) than in the other months (91.36%). The situation is different when looking at cultural and safety: in July and August, the share of positive comments related to safety is 72.73%, compared to 85.71% in the remaining months. The cultural aspect is also rated lower in July and August (84.21%) than in the other months (87.5%).

5. DISCUSSION

The results show that Zagreb's nightlife is perceived very positively by tourists, with high levels of satisfaction across the observed aspects. In particular, the social and sensory dimensions were rated more frequently than cultural, safety and economic ones. The social dimension is the most prominent, accounting for 42.42% of all mentions, which underlines the importance of staff–visitor interaction and inclusiveness. The sensory dimension accounts for 35.32% and emphasizes the significance of music, drinks, entertainment and atmosphere. Interestingly, it was rated even more positively than the social dimension. The cultural and economic-related dimensions, although represented less (108 and 107 mentions respectively), still achieved a high positive sentiment. Safety was mentioned less often but nevertheless revealed high levels of satisfaction. The economic dimension recorded the highest share of positive sentiment (92.59%).

As shown in comparable studies of nightlife, sentiment-based approach allows access to naturally occurring visitor feedback and to identify patterns that are often difficult to capture through traditional survey methods. Our findings are in line with those of Seočanac and Dimitrovski (2022) whose review analysis similarly identified the social and sensory aspects as the most influential components. In their study, interaction, atmosphere and music emerged as dominant factors shaping visitor satisfaction, which corresponds closely to our results. However, their analysis did not incorporate the economic aspect of nightlife evaluation. By including it and demonstrating that affordability plays a substantial role in shaping tourists' perceptions of Zagreb's nightlife, our study offers a more comprehensive framework for understanding the nightlife 'experience-scape'.

Research conducted by Nghiê-m-Phú (2020) on the sensory aspects of nightlife in Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur and Singapore shows that drinks (or beverages in our case) appear, on average (across all three locations), with a frequency of 77.67%, whereas in Zagreb this proportion is 60.06%. Conversely, in the Indonesian study, "hear" as a sensory aspect is present on average with 23.22% (17% in Singapore), while in our study this

could correlate to music, which accounts for 11.53% of the sensory aspect. This comparison suggests that beverages play a somewhat less dominant role in the sensory experience of nightlife in Zagreb than in the Southeast Asian contexts examined by Nghiêm-Phú, although they still represent a key element of visitor perception. However, this may be due to the fact that part of the beverage-related keywords were categorized in the cultural aspect as explained before. At the same time, auditory stimuli appear to be less prominent in Zagreb's nightlife reviews compared with Nghiêm-Phú's cases. Scent and tactility within the sensory aspect show a correlation both in the Zagreb case and in the study conducted by Nghiêm-Phú.

When compared to the broader tourist experience of Zagreb the nightlife findings display a strong degree of alignment regarding satisfaction levels with Zagreb NTE, which is rated highly (75.1% in the summer season and 76.8% out of it) (Marušić et al., 2023). Tourists often describe Zagreb as affordable, friendly and culturally rich, and these attributes are clearly mirrored in the nightlife sector.

Although our research did not reveal many reviews on the safety dimension, it has still been rated positively, which also aligns with the Marušić et al. (2023) research in the city and is rated very highly (91% in the summer season and 93% out of it). When compared to the research, however, it is important to stress that only around 20% of Zagreb tourists participate in its nightlife. Interestingly, more tourists participate in the nightlife (20.5%) out of season than in the summer months (Marušić et al., 2023). This contradicts our research, which showed that the majority of reviews are recorded during the summer months (July and August). Along the same line, ratings of the Zagreb atmosphere in general are higher in the out-of-season period (Marušić et al., 2023), which may be connected to the Zagreb Advent (Christmas market offerings throughout the city), which thrives on NTE. Our research showed, however, that social, sensory and economy-related dimensions of the environmental factors influencing NTE have been somewhat more positively evaluated in summer, but those related to cultural and safety-related dimensions were somewhat better evaluated in the out of season period.

The reviews analyzed in our research focused exclusively on the bars and clubs, since TripAdvisor categorized them in that way, while excluding other possible NTE venues. However, it is essential to note that, according to the results of previous research (Marušić et al., 2023), possible enhancements in the satisfaction with the Zagreb's art and culture offerings in the out-of-season period are sought since tourists' satisfaction levels are lower than in the summer season (72.1% and 91.9% respectively).

6. CONCLUSION

Our study aimed to analyze how tourists evaluate their nightlife experiences in Zagreb. This served to understand which environment-related factors influence Zagreb nightlife experiences, and which nightlife image tourists assign to this city. We analyzed TripAdvisor tourist reviews applying sentiment-based analysis (ABSA). The findings respond to the research questions as follows: first, the factors that most strongly influence Zagreb's nightlife experience are social (people, staff, interactions), sensory stimulation (music, beverages, atmosphere) and affordability. The cultural aspect and safety also play a role, but to a lesser extent. Second, the images that tourists assign to Zagreb on the basis of nightlife are friendliness, affordability and a vibrant atmosphere. The night 'experience-scape' captures the combined sensory, social, cultural, economic and safety aspects that shape how tourists experience cities after dark, which helps explain the complexity of night-time environments and provides a basis for analysing how tourists interpret and assess the nightlife.

The results of our study regarding the first research question, therefore, are in line with the existing studies focusing on the factors influencing the experience of the nightlife (Pinke-Sziva et al., 2019; Seočanac & Dimitrovski, 2022). Thus, sensory and social elements are detected as the most important, corresponding to physical layout, presence of other tourists, atmosphere, staff and music detected by Seočanac and Dimitrovski (2022). In the same way, physical layout and atmosphere in the study of the Budapest NTE (Pinke-Sziva et al., 2019) correspond to our research while it is also in line with the previous research (Pine & Gilmore, 2011) stressing the importance of multisensory stimuli for a positive evaluation of experience with the importance of music, drinks, entertainment and atmosphere. Although individual factors related to each of the senses (such as color, melody, form, rhythm, scents, aromas etc.) were not analyzed, since the TripAdvisor reviews do not necessarily provide this type of information, it is evident that factors related to the senses (in this case the senses of hearing, taste and smell, but highly probably also sight and touch) are important in evaluating the experience. This is in line with the previous research of Jelinčić and Šveb (2021).

Regarding the second research question on the city's night-time image, the results of our study are generally in line with this image, which is positive. Concretely, it is in line with Trojan's study (2025) confirming young visitors' satisfaction with nightlife and the appropriateness of the events for younger generations. Thus, friendliness, affordability and a vibrant atmosphere go hand-in-hand with this research. The day-time image of the city known for

its various museums and events (Draganić, 2021) is difficult to be compared with the results of our research, though, since the NTE-aspect of the museums' work has not been taken into account, while such events are not mentioned in the TripAdvisor Night-life category. The fact that Zagreb is seen as a cultural and historical city for its museums (Draganić, 2021) is not in line with young visitors' interests (Trojan, 2025) but if packaged in the NTE concept, it can be of interest.

While this research has limitations, it is, to the best of our knowledge, the first one to offer a view on the tourists' assessment of Zagreb nightlife, from which recommendations to be used for industry professionals and policy makers can be drawn. The most relevant ones can be summarized as follows:

- industry professionals should carefully plan environment-related factors influencing the nightlife experience – music, drinks, entertainment and atmosphere (sensory aspect) since they are the “core” factors for a positive evaluation of NTE;
- multisensory factors should be used in designing NTE attractions for their positive assessment and overall image of the city;
- cozy and friendly interaction in the night-time venues with staff is the essential environment-related factor influencing the nightlife experience, which informs industry professionals of the type of staff they should be looking for when hiring;
- prices of the night-time venues should be determined carefully since affordability plays one of the major roles in the NTE and Zagreb night-time image;
- further promotion of the NTE is to target visitors with friends as well as solo visitors as they make up the largest share of Zagreb NTE visitors;
- day-time attractions should be packaged in the NTE attractions to be of attraction to young visitors.

The findings present valuable guidelines, which may have practical implications in the NTE industry, as well as theoretical ones, informing future research as well as policy makers. However, this study is not without limitations. First, the reviews were unevenly distributed across the venues in Zagreb which may have biased the representation of the overall nightlife experience. Some venues were overrepresented, while others had only a few reviews, reducing the ability to generalize findings across the entire city. Also, it was not always possible to determine with high precision whether the reviewers were tourists or locals. Although specific criteria were applied to filter out reviews from locals, there remains a degree of uncertainty regarding the actual profile of some reviewers. The reviews did not provide information on the exact time of the visit, so it was not possible to determine whether the experience occurred during the hours of the night-time economy or not. This issue is significant for venues that function both as daytime hospitality

establishments and as nightlife locations. This lack of time-specific information limits the study's ability to fully capture the dynamics of nightlife. Finally, some well-known nightlife venues in Zagreb were not listed on TripAdvisor, which means that the dataset may not fully reflect the city's nightlife offer. However, the study offers the only assessment of the Zagreb's nightlife by its tourists so far. Future research may want to look into other methodologies for capturing more precise data in that respect. Besides, the sole research process employed in this study revealed a number of existing gaps related to NTE statistics in Zagreb (and Croatia), which are either non-existent or incomplete; this is the same for legal regulations which fail to recognize the concept of NTE which is why this study can be seen as a starting point, which may lead to enhancements in that respect as well.

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