

“Good neighbours are worth their weight in gold” – The role of familiarity on the revisit intention to neighbouring countries

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to narrow down the research gap identified while uncovering the impact mechanism of destination familiarity on the revisit intention to the neighbouring countries. The research, justifies the hypothesis established based on the literature review by placing the analysis in the context of Hungary, located in the heart of East-Central Europe, and its relations with the seven neighbouring countries. In addition to the database of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office on the outbound travels of the Hungarian population, we build on the database of a survey conducted in 2023, with representative sampling, under which 400 Hungarian citizens with outbound travel experience were interviewed. The analysis was executed using simple and multivariate statistical methods. It was concluded that travellers of a non-neighbouring country perceive higher familiarity with the given destination, but it is not affecting more the revisit frequency than it is in a neighbouring country. The results will help to understand the tourist mobility between countries in a particular geopolitical situation due to the storms of history. The study highlights management implication and limitations; moreover, proposes directions for future research.

Keywords: tourism, destination familiarity, revisit intention, neighbourhood, East-Central Europe, Hungary

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Introduction

The establishment and the maintenance of good relations with neighbours is a universal value. Dozens of proverbs, all around the world, highlight that the coexistence with the neighbours affects the quality of life. Social experiences based on visiting neighbours positively influence well-being (TSAI, M.C. 2021). These get-togethers bring significant mental health benefits with relatively little efforts (BREEDVELT, J.J. *et al.* 2022). Among the impacts of a change of environment related to tourism, the improvement of the quality of life holds a prominent place (SMITH, M.K. and DIEKMANN, A. 2017). The proximity of the

tourist destination and the familiarity associated with it often play a decisive role in travel decisions, and domestic tourism, among other things, is also built on this (JEURING, J. and HAARTSEN, T. 2018). National border crossing can strengthen the travellers' awareness of involvement in tourism (TIMOTHY, D.J. 2020). Visiting neighbouring countries often simultaneously provides proximity and familiarity, however, is consciously perceived as international tourism (VERMA, T. *et al.* 2019). Just as proximity and familiarity can play a role in maintaining strong relations with the neighbouring residents, these factors may also influence travel to neighbouring countries and the revisit intentions.

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Although distance has played a decisive role in travel decisions since the dawn of tourism, continuous advances in transportation infrastructure have significantly reduced the importance of mere geographical distance in destination choice (McKERCHER, B. *et al.* 2008). This shift is driven, on the one hand, by technological and technical innovations that have shortened the time required to cover the same physical distance, and on the other hand, by social and economic convergence, which has contributed to a decline in perceived distance (McKERCHER, B. and MAK, B. 2019). Although proximity in tourism can be interpreted as a rather relative, therefore, a subjective concept, neighbourhood, in the global perspective, covers the countries with common national border that are relatively easy to reach (of course, there are cases where a neighbouring country may be harder to access than a more distant one due to geopolitical and/or infrastructural reasons) (KOZAK, M. and BUHALIS, D. 2019). The tourism between two neighbouring countries is often characterized by cross-border shopping (TIMOTHY, D.J. 1999), the use of healthcare services (ÖSTERLE, A. 2009), business-motivated travels (CARVALHO, P. *et al.* 2016), gambling (HAUCAP, J. *et al.* 2023), prostitution (MARTILA, A.M. 2008), and visiting friends and relatives (ROGERSON, C.M. and ROGERSON, J.M. 2019). However, if the countries involved possess attractions that are highly marketable within the international tourism (such as waterfronts, mountains, thermal baths, or World Heritage Sites), proximity can further stimulate mutual tourist flows. Neighbourhood ties, common historical background, cultural (language, religion) similarities can be accompanied by familiarity because of the previous travel experiences gained while visiting each other, which then can catalyse the benefits of proximity and strengthen revisit intention (BRUMEN, M. *et al.* 2014; XU, F. *et al.* 2024). At the same time, regional tensions and conflicts, present in many parts of the world, stemming exactly from the poor neighbouring relations, can hinder the development of familiarity and the unfolding of fruitful tourism relations (ȚUCLEA, C.E. *et al.* 2024).

The impact of familiarity on revisit intention to neighbouring countries is a surprisingly under-researched topic in the tourism literature. It is not easy to explain why this important issue has escaped the attention of tourism scholars, especially since the relationship between revisit intention and neighbourhood (ESQUIVIAS, M.A. *et al.* 2021; HELAL, E.A. *et al.* 2023), as well as between revisit intention and familiarity (WEN, J. and HUANG, S. 2019; SHI, H. *et al.* 2022) are examined in relevant studies separately. The topic gains a special context, if it is being examined in a geographical area like East-Central Europe, which, due to the Paris Peace Treaties concluded after World War I and World War II, remains burdened with latent, ethnically rooted tensions up until this day (TESSER, L.M. 2003).

The aim of the present study is to narrow down the research gap, identified while uncovering the impact mechanisms of familiarity on the revisit intention to neighbouring countries sharing a common national border. The study seeks to answer research questions emerging from the literature by placing the analysis in the context of Hungary as the sending country and its neighbouring countries as receiving destinations. In addition to the Hungarian Central Statistical Office's database on the outbound travels of the Hungarian population in 2023, the study is also based on the database of a sampling survey, representative of age, gender, and residence, conducted in late autumn 2023. Within the survey, 400 Hungarian citizens, living in Hungary, having previous international travel experience, and having spent at least one night in a preferred foreign country for tourism purposes during the summer of the given year were interviewed. The primary objective of the research was to answer, how neighbourhood affects familiarity-driven revisit intentions.

Theoretical background

One of the greatest challenges of tourism destination management is to create a tour-

ism product that encourages visitors to return, as beyond the different motivations, personal experience is the main driving force behind revisits (HUANG, S. and HSU, C.H. 2009; MAGHRIFANI, D. *et al.* 2022; WANG, X. *et al.* 2022; RAMOS, K. and CUAMEA, O. 2023). Consequently, the multifaceted exploration of factors influencing revisit intention carries significant practical value. Satisfaction with the offers of the destination plays a key role not only in the revisits but also in recommending the destination to others (XU, Y. *et al.* 2010). The revisit intention associated with the satisfaction cannot be considered static, it is dynamically influenced by the travellers' personality traits and sociodemographic characteristics (AGRUSA, J. *et al.* 2011; PARK, J.Y. and JANG, S. 2014). While KIM, H. *et al.* (2015) highlight that leisure life satisfaction and quality of life can be effective predictors of revisit intention, according to the model of LUNA-CORTÉS, G. *et al.* (2019) perceived social value leads to satisfaction, and satisfaction, in turn, leads to revisit intention and positive word-of-mouth. While destination branding positively and directly affects revisit intention, the mediating role of tourist satisfaction has an indirect effect on returning (SHI, H. *et al.* 2022). In their study on the impact of image on revisit intention, PARK, S. and NICOLAU, J.L. (2019) found that prior attitudes influence the level of tolerance, thus, also affecting satisfaction and revisit intention. Several studies emphasize that technological innovations (digitalization, smart destinations, etc.) stimulate revisit intention by intensifying visitor experiences (PAI, C.K. *et al.* 2020). Photographs taken and stored on smartphones promote the desire to return to the given destination, through autobiographical memory based on nostalgia (ZHANG, X. *et al.* 2021). Studies related to the COVID-19 pandemic have confirmed the importance of risk perception and the pursuit of the security in the traveller's decision to return (FAIRUZ, R.M. *et al.* 2021; AHMAD, N. *et al.* 2022). Digital nomads represent the transition between the frequent returnees and the second-home buyers (MIOCEVIC, D. 2025).

Familiarity plays a key role in the development of bonding to a destination. Numerous factors contribute to generating familiarity, including influential movies and TV series (THE, P.Y. and GOH, H.C. 2016; KIM, S. *et al.* 2009, 2019), social media (MOHD SALIM, M.N.H. *et al.* 2024), travel blogs (TAN, W.K. and CHANG, Y.G. 2016), the usage of VR technology (WEI, W. *et al.* 2019), behaviours associated with religious practices (SILVA, C. *et al.* 2023), storytelling, and tourist narration (YUAN, X. *et al.* 2024). Nevertheless, the factor having the strongest impact is undoubtedly personal experiences (MILMAN, A. and PIZAM, A. 1995; ALAM, S.S. 2025). SEO, S. *et al.* (2013) distinguishes the role of experiential and informational familiarity in tourism, with the former being more influential in improving, for example, the image of local food. The connection between bonding and familiarity can also be moderated by factors such as image (STYLIDIS, D. *et al.* 2020) and authenticity (SCARPI, D. *et al.* 2019). MARINAO-ARTIGAS, E. *et al.* (2015) found a link between the mediating role of familiarity in the relationship between cognitive perception, affective evaluation, and destination reputation. TAN, W.K. and CHANG, Y.G. (2016) also pointed out that past experience with the destination is necessary for travel blog readers to use their credibility assessment of the article to recommend the destination to others, with place familiarity acting as a moderator. The topic of the link between bonding and familiarity also faces several paradoxes. PHILLIPS, J. *et al.* (2011) showed that even in an unfamiliar environment, older people can develop a sense of place through the aesthetics and usability of the environment as well as through shared memories. WILDISH, B. *et al.*'s study (2016) conducted in a youth hostel revealed that even first-time visitors developed a sense of familiarity, likely due to the intense social interactions characteristic of the junior generation (IRIMIÁS, A. 2023).

The study of the role of neighbourhood in tourism has a long history and is approached from multiple perspectives, in which supranational relations receive a prominent role with-

in Europe encompassing through borders, covering a multitude of nations (GRIMMEAU, J.P. 1980; LEIPER, N. 1989; TIMOTHY, D.J. and SAARINEN, J. 2013). The exploration of tourism opportunities arising from border connections is also extensive (STOFFELEN, A. and TIMOTHY, D.J. 2023). TIMOTHY, D.J. (1995) even interprets the border itself as a tourist attraction. Neighbourhood, especially by using healthcare services and smaller retail offerings (MICHALKÓ, G. *et al.* 2014), stimulates tourism in regions along borders, while VFR tourism, aimed at maintaining social ties based on ethnic connections, also has an impact on it (PROVENZANO, D. and BAGGIO, R. 2017).

Tourist flows between neighbouring countries within the European Schengen Area occur without border controls, making cross-border road and rail traffic almost imperceptible (WIĘCKOWSKI, M. and TIMOTHY, D.J. 2021). In the context of inbound tourism to Bulgaria, KOROL, O. and SKUTAR, T. (2019) found that the length of shared borders with neighbouring countries correlates with the number of arrivals from the sending countries. Neighbourhood can also stimulate travel through both geographical (PARK, C. *et al.* 2023) and cultural proximity (IREWATI, A. and NUFUS, H. 2024); moreover, it can be effectively utilized in destination marketing as well (KOZAK, M. and BUHALIS, 2019). The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted that, as travel restrictions eased, neighbouring countries were prioritized, creating the so-called tourist corridors (MICHALKÓ, G. *et al.* 2022), although, those destinations that were hosts of mass events, were not able to apply this opportunity, even in relation to neighbouring countries (FARIS, H. and GRIFFIN, K.A. 2020).

While the relationship between the triad of revisit intention, familiarity, and neighbourhood remains largely unexplored in the tourism literature, there are substantial precedents examining the link between revisit intention and familiarity. JANG, S.S. and FENG, R. (2008) typologized tourists across the novelty–familiarity continuum and developed the concept of Temporal Destination Revisit Behaviour (TDRB), distinguishing three types

of tourists: Continuous repeaters, deferred repeaters (tourists whose visits to a destination are occasionally repeated over time), and continuous switchers. SOLIMAN, M. (2021), by extending the model of the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), aimed to predict tourists' revisit intention to Egypt and found that destination familiarity also played a role in returning. RAMESH, V. and JAUNKY, V.C. (2021), building on their concept of Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation, emphasize that pre-visit behaviour stimulates post-visit behaviour, which influences revisit intention, further moderated by familiarity and satisfaction experienced during the visit. XU, F. *et al.* (2024), using the Stimulus-Organism-Response and Construal Level theories, distinguish between culturally homologous and non-homologous destinations, finding that travelling to culturally different and immersive experiences is more likely to result in revisits and recommendations. WEN, J. and HUANG, S. (2019), studying Chinese cigar tourists travelling to Cuba, found that socialistic nostalgia acts as a pull factor among travel motivations and influences revisit intention, which is also affected by destination familiarity. KUHZADY, S. *et al.* (2020), based on their study among couch surfers travelling to Turkey, concluded that couch surfing improves destination familiarity and revisit intention.

When discussing the triad of revisit intention, familiarity, and neighbourhood, it is essential to evaluate the transformation of distance and its role in tourism. Despite the fact that advances in transport infrastructure have redefined the relationship between travel and distance, the majority of travellers still tend to visit destinations located closer to their residence, while only a smaller share venture to more distant locations (McKERCHER, B. and MAK, B. 2019). The role of distance in tourism has become highly heterogeneous (LARSEN, G.R. 2017), as the traditional physical interpretation has been complemented by institutional (LI, C. *et al.* 2024), psychological (VERMA, T. *et al.* 2019), social (THYNE, M. *et al.* 2022), health-related (DÉDELÉ, A. *et al.* 2020), climatic (MASOUDI, M. 2021), and cultural di-

mensions (YANG, Y. *et al.* 2019). The gradual weakening of the classical distance-demand relationship (CROUCH, G.I. 1994) has brought renewed attention to the importance of tourist revisit behaviour, as the increasingly accessible and expanding global supply intensifies competition among destinations (ZULFIQAR, U. *et al.* 2024). In this context, familiarity grounded in neighbourhood can become a key factor in destination success (GONZÁLEZ-RODRÍGUEZ, M.R. *et al.* 2023).

Hungary provides an extremely appropriate context for investigating the role of familiarity in revisit intention to neighbouring countries, due to its central geographical position and stormy historical background (LIEBICH, A. 2021; ANDRÁS, E. 2024). For many years, the Hungarian government have been supporting the unique “Without Borders” travel program, aimed for seventh-graders (12–13-year-olds) with nation-building purposes, clearly illustrating the educational and socialization opportunities embedded in cross-border relations, which can serve as catalysts for both familiarity and return (RÁTZ, T. *et al.* 2020; MOLNÁR, V. 2023). The purchase of real estate in Hungary by foreign citizens living in neighbouring countries may also contribute to strengthening mutual trust based on cross-border connections (ILLÉS, S. and MICHALKÓ, G. 2008). Since trust is partly built on risk reduction, the sense of security plays a key role in encouraging return visits to countries neighbouring Hungary (KÖKÉNY, L. *et al.* 2024).

Research methodology

The scientific mission of this paper is to highlight the difference between tourists based on their international travel direction is either a neighbouring country to Hungary or not in case of the relationship between familiarity with a destination and the revisit frequency of the given country. The aim of the research is to measure the positive impact of familiarity on revisit frequency controlling the given country territorial aspect (neighbouring country or not to Hungary). This possible

relationship has only been hinted at by a few researchers (KUHZADY, S. *et al.* 2020; SOLIMAN, M. 2021; IREWATI, A. and NUFUS, H. 2024), but in the context of this study we would like to verify the legitimacy of this approach. With this approach, we hypothesise that those who travel into a neighbouring country to Hungary has higher positive impact of familiarity on revisit frequency than travelling into a non-neighbouring country (H_2). We measured this hypothesized relationship in general for any given country (H_1) without separated it into the two groups (neighbouring and non-neighbouring country). Based on the literature, we also assumed that for those who do not travel from the capital city, familiarity with a destination factor has a greater impact on revisit frequency (H_3). We also assumed a positive correlation in that people who don't live in the capital are more likely to travel to neighbouring countries (H_4). Furthermore, we created a control hypothesis to determine whether it is possible to create a familiarity with a destination factor (H_5). Based on this, the following hypotheses were formulated following the literature review (Figure 1):

- H_1 : There is a positive impact of familiarity with that destination on revisit frequency to the given country.
- H_2 : Those who travel into a neighbouring country of Hungary has higher positive impact of familiarity on revisit frequency to there than travelling into a non-neighbouring country.
- H_3 : Those who travel from non-capital city has higher positive impact of familiarity on revisit frequency to there than travelling from the capital city.
- H_4 : Those who travel from a non-capital city has a positive relationship with who travel into a neighbouring country, thus, a traveller from a non-capital city has higher probability for travelling into a neighbouring country.
- H_5 : Familiarity with a destination factor can be created.

To test our hypotheses, we conducted a survey using the CATI (Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing) method, interviewing a representative sample of 400 individuals in

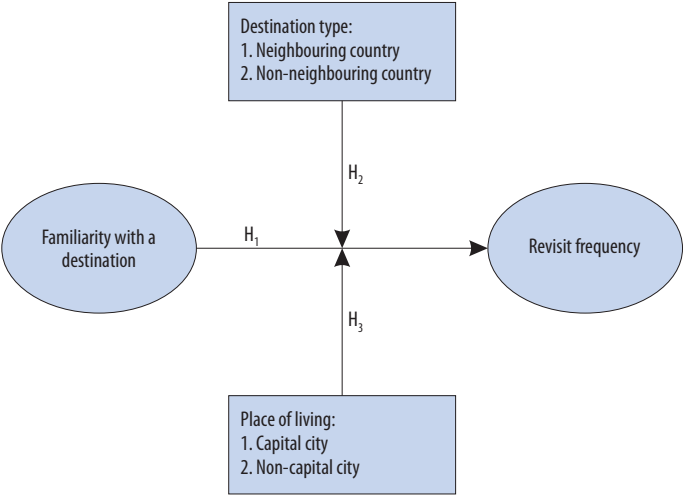


Fig. 1. Hypothesized model used in research methodology. Source: Authors’ own elaboration.

Hungary. After data cleaning, the final sample consisted of 387 respondents. The survey targeted Hungarian citizens residing in Hungary who had spent at least one night abroad between 2019 and 2023. The key selection criterion was that respondents must have travelled abroad for tourism purpose at least once during the summer of 2023 (between 1 May and 30 September). The survey was conducted in late autumn 2023 and concentrated on this summer travel destination and tourists’ behaviour.

For hypothesis testing, we employed quantitative research methods, including Pearson correlation and regression analysis, alongside

descriptive statistics. To assess familiarity, we used four validated items from DAYOUR, F. et al. (2019), and mainly MARINAO-ARTIGAS, E. et al. (2015), which were combined into a single factor through Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) using the Maximum Likelihood method with Promax rotation. Revisit frequency were measured on a continuous scale, and all included variables were standardized for analysis.

We first constructed the Familiarity with a destination factor based on CFA results (Table 1), and we could accept H_5 . After standardizing all variables, we performed linear regression analyses to test the hypotheses (Figure 2). The analy-

Table 1. Demographic characteristic of the sample

Variables	Values	Details
Age	Average age, years	46.1 (std. 15.5)
Gender	Female, %	51.7
	Male, %	48.3
Residence type	Capital city, %	26.6
	County capital city, %	19.1
	City, %	29.7
	Village, %	24.5
Travel frequency between 2019–2023	Average travels quantity	4.6 (std. 1.6)
Revisit frequency between 2019–2023	Average revisits quantity	2.2 (std. 1.3)
Destination type in 2023	Neighbouring country, %	35.9
	Non-neighbouring country, %	64.1

Source. Compiled by the authors.

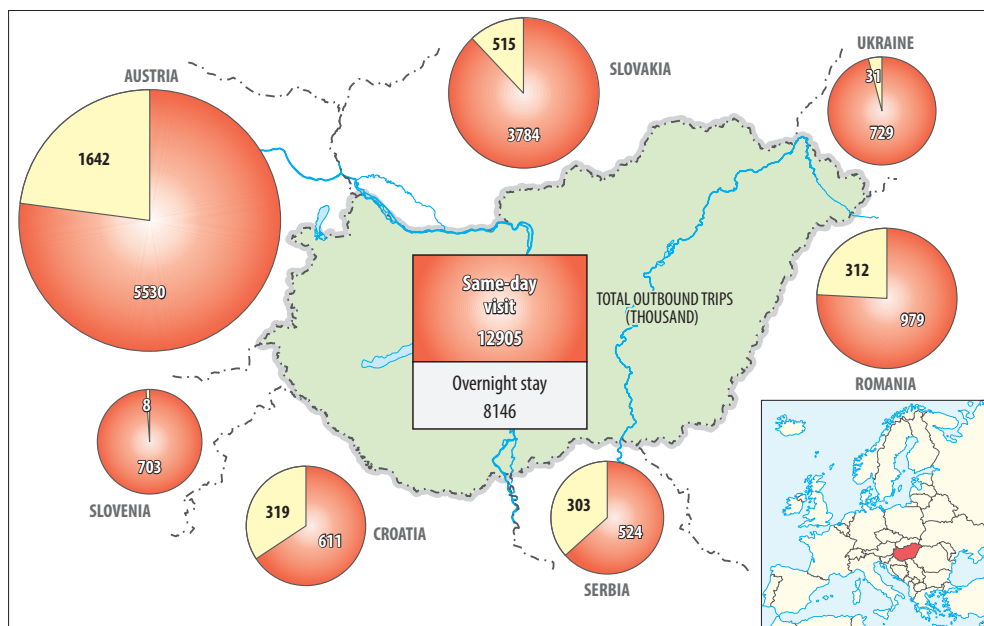


Fig. 2. Features of Hungarian travellers to neighbouring countries, 2023. Source: Authors based on the database of Hungarian Central Statistics Office.

sis focused on three key variables: Familiarity with a destination factor, standardized Revisit frequency, and categorical control variables of destination type as it is a neighbouring country of Hungary or not the given country (1 = Yes; 2 = No) and of residence of the respondents, where “1” means the capital city and “2” means a non-capital city.

To obtain a comprehensive understanding of the travel habits of Hungarian society, we utilized data from the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (HCSO). The HCSO conducts a representative quarterly survey on the domestic and international travel patterns of the Hungarian population, providing a reliable dataset for scientific analysis. For the purposes of this study, we focused on international travel undertaken by Hungarian residents in 2023. Specifically, we analysed data on the volume of same-day trips and overnight stays, the main motivations, as well as the distribution of visits to neighbouring versus non-neighbouring countries.

Results

Hungarians' travel to neighbouring countries and beyond

Hungary is among the European states with the highest number of bordering nations. Formerly part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy until the Treaty of Trianon in 1920 (a result of the Paris Peace Conference), it now shares frontiers with seven countries in East-Central Europe. Positioned at the crossroads of eastern and western, as well as northern and southern Europe, Hungary maintains good ties with its surrounding states, shaped by significant historical developments in the 20th century. Prior to the redrawing of borders in 1920, its territory encompassed different sized areas of what are now neighbouring nations (Kovács, Z. 1989; Kocsis, K. and VÁRADI, M.M. 2016). The collective memory of territorial loss following the post-war agreements remains deeply rooted in na-

tional identity (ILG, B. 2021). Although often subtle, ethnic tensions continue to influence Hungary’s interactions with neighbouring countries which may affects also tourism (Csapó, J. et al. 2019; RÁTZ, T. et al. 2020).

According to database of HCSO in 2023, Hungary’s population of approximately 10 million undertook a total of 21.05 million international trips, indicating that, on average, each resident crossed the national border twice. Of these journeys, 61.3 percent were completed within a one day, with travellers returning to Hungary within 24 hours. The same-day excursions were directed toward neighbouring states (99.6%). Notably, 80.4 percent of visits to adjacent countries fell into the same-day travel category. Among those who travelled to bordering nations less than 24 hours, 45 percent chose Austria and 27 percent visited Slovakia. These two destinations accounted for 72 percent of all short-term outbound travel (see Figure 2). Day trips to neighbouring countries were predominantly motivated by cross-border shopping (35.8%), employment-related purposes (24.5%) and visiting friends and relatives (14.4%). A 24.0 percent of all outbound travels by Hungarians were beyond neighbouring countries, 99.1 percent of which were overnight stay. Surprisingly, 49.9 percent of trips with a stay of more than 24 hours in Austria are employment-related. VFR motivation during trips with an over-

night stay is very strong in Serbia (65.3%), Slovakia (46.4%) and Romania (32.1%).

The final representative sample was 387 people. Table 1 summarizes the details of the final sample.

Factor analysis

Familiarity with a destination factor was measured using the validated scale of DAYOUR, F. et al. (2019) and MARINAO-ARTIGAS, E. et al. (2015) with four statements on a Likert scale of 1–7 (Table 2), where a value of „1” meant strongly disagree and a value of „7” meant strongly agree. The KMO indicator then took the correct value of 0.706 and the Bartlett test for sphericity and significance yielded significant results. The explained coefficient of variance of the four variables was 53.9 percent, Cronbach’s alpha was 0.711, while each factor weight exceeded the minimum value of 0.6 as it is required (HAIR, J.F. et al. 2019).

Hypothesis testing

First, we checked the basic differences between revisit frequency and familiarity with a destination factor values based on control variable (destination type and residence) with ANOVA-test (Table 3). Here it can be seen that a neigh-

Table 2. Familiarity with a destination factor

Items by DAYOUR, F. et al. (2019), and MARINAO ARTIGAS, E. et al. (2015)	Factor weights	Means	Std. dev.	Explained variance, %	KMO value	Cronbach’s alpha
This travel destination is very familiar to me.	0.675	6.0	1.1	53.9	0.706	0.711
I know this travel destination very well, because I follow the events there all year round.	0.809	4.5	1.7			
I also follow the events, developments and happenings at the travel destination outside of my stay there.	0.752	4.5	1.7			
My friends and family tell me that this travel location suits me well.	0.693	5.4	1.3			

Source. Compiled by the authors.

Table 3. ANOVA-test results

Country, city	Revisit frequency	Familiar factor
Neighbouring country	2.53 (std. 1.43)	-0.192
Non-neighbouring country	2.07 (std. 1.26)	0.108
p-value	0.001	0.004
Capital city	2.13 (std. 1.43)	0.041
Non-capital city	2.27 (std. 1.30)	-0.015
p-value	0.335	0.626

Source. Compiled by the authors.

bouring travel destination country has significantly higher average of revisit frequency (2.53 vs. 2.07) with moderate eta square explanation value (η^2 value is 0.167). After it can be stated that the familiarity with a destination is significantly higher in a non-neighbouring country of Hungary with a moderate eta square explanation value (η^2 value is 0.144). These differences are moderate but significant, which it could be counted for the regression model. Although, the residence does not have any significant difference neither in revisit frequency nor the familiarity factor.

Finally, we created a regression model with four different variables (Figure 3). The model has no multi-collinearity ($VIF = 1.14$), adjusted R-square of the model is 0.51, Durbin-Watson test is well operated with 1.631 value, the model is significant (F-test is significant with 0.001 p-value and 17.482 test value), there is normality based on residuals, and the variance of the errors are constant, which means homoscedasticity.

We can accept first, second and third hypotheses too. In the first hypothesis, there is a significant relationship between familiarity with a destination and revisit frequency, which means that if a traveller feels higher familiarity with a destination it increases the revisit frequency (0.201***). In the second hypothesis, there is a significant difference in the relationships between familiarity with a destination and revisit frequency based on the control variable, destination type (1st group: 0.283***; 2nd group: 0.189***). We could accept the second hypothesis because there is a significantly higher positive relationship between the two measured items in case of neighbouring country. Which means that in case of neighbouring country it could count more the familiarity with the destination to increase the revisit frequency than in a non-neighbouring country.

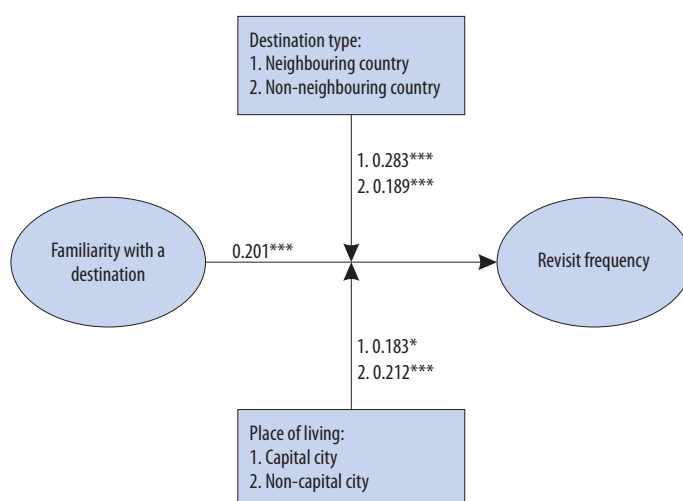


Fig. 3. Hypothesis testing results. *p-value < 0.05; ***p-value < 0.001. Source: Authors' own elaboration.

Although this result causes that there is also an increasing effect of familiarity on revisit frequency in case of non-neighbouring country, but lower than in a neighbouring country. Meanwhile, travellers of non-neighbouring countries perceive higher familiarity with the destination. Since, it can be stated that travellers of a non-neighbouring country perceive higher familiarity with the given destination but it is not affecting more the revisit frequency than it is in a neighbouring country. In other words, familiarity is a stronger determinant for a revisit to a neighbouring country than for a non-neighbouring one. In a non-neighbouring country other factors besides familiarity may be even stronger.

In the third hypothesis, there is a significant difference in the relationships between familiarity with a destination and revisit frequency based on the control variable, residence, but in case of the capital city it is slightly significant (1st group: 0.183*; 2nd group: 0.212***). This means that those who travel from a non-capital city familiarity with a destination has a higher positive impact on revisit frequency than in case of a traveller from the capital city. Although it does not mean that those travelling to neighbouring countries are those who do not live in the capital city. Furthermore, it cannot be said that residents outside the capital city revisit the same destination more often, as these results were not significant.

Finally, we cannot accept the fourth hypothesis, because with a chi-square test we cannot find any significant relationship between the two control variables (neighbouring or non-neighbouring country type and capital city or not) (p -value is 0.094, chi-square value is 2.812).

Discussion and conclusions

The present study, by recognizing five hypotheses based on the literature is the first to prove, that neighbourhood plays an influential role in familiarity-related revisit intention. The factors building the relationship between

familiarity and revisit intention have already been explored in previous research including the identification of infrastructural and technological (PAI, C.K. *et al.* 2020), linguistic and cultural (BRUMEN, M. *et al.* 2014; XU, F. *et al.* 2024), and perceived similarities within the service environment (TIMOTHY, D.J. 1999; FRISCHHUT, M. and LEVAGGI, R. 2024) – all of which can be moderated by various elements, including social media (LUNA-CORTÉS, G. *et al.* 2019). Earlier studies have also pointed out that, the increasingly differentiated tourism demand, the relationship between familiarity and revisit intention are not linear (ØGAARD, T. *et al.* 2019; MATHUR, G. *et al.* 2023).

Although being plausible, the role of neighbourhood-related familiarity in shaping international travel decisions – specifically revisit intention – has largely escaped scholarly attention. This is particularly surprising given that the role of neighbourhood, often interpreted by researchers as geographical proximity, has been recognized in domestic tourism. SCARPI, D. *et al.* (2019), for instance, emphasized the mediating role of place attachment by studying the visitors to Rome vicinity. Similarity derived from neighbourhood can influence return visits both positively and negatively, as it may evoke attraction as well as aversion (BAR-KOELIS, D. and WENDT, J.A. 2018; KAZAKOVA, A. and KIM, I. 2021). Along artificially drawn borders, it is common to find communities with shared historical backgrounds, linguistic and cultural roots, and even familial ties. In such cases, that familiarity can foster the trust and sense of security essential for travel – while at the same time it offers little novelty (STOFFELEN, A. and TIMOTHY, D.J. 2023). Politics can also alter perceptions of familiarity between neighbouring countries, transforming it into stereotype-based hostility that inhibits travel (GELBMAN, A. and TIMOTHY, D.J. 2010; NARBUT, N.P. and TROTSUK, I.V. 2017).

The cross-border travel patterns of the Hungarian population confirm that familiarity driven revisit intention, beyond the previously identified control variables, can also be influenced by neighbourhood. Analysing

the source market, it can be stated that the Hungarian capital, Budapest's central location appears to play a less significant role in repeat visits driven by familiarity than the mobility patterns observed among tourists from rural areas of Hungary. Although the role of familiarity is higher in the case of travel to non-neighbouring countries, it has a stronger effect on revisit intention in relation to neighbouring countries. This apparent paradox can be explained, on the one hand, by Hungary's historical past and territorial changes being carried out in the 20th century (all seven neighbouring countries are home to Hungarian-speaking minorities of varying size, which explains VFR tourism), and on the other hand, by European integration process, materialized in the 21st century (Hungary's accession to the EU and the Schengen Area, which facilitates shopping tourism and cross-border commuting for work). Naturally, the influence of the so-called 'post-socialist mindset' cannot be overlooked (HOLLERAN, M. 2015). While it may be most apparent in the travel decisions of the older generation, processes of socialization suggest that its effects may also surface among middle-class and younger cohorts (IRIMIÁS, A. 2023).

Risk perception receives a special attention within the narrow intersection of studies contextualizing tourism and its geopolitical relations (COHEN, S.B. 2020; SEYFI, S. et al. 2023). Neighbourhood-related familiarity accordingly could positively influence this safety and security factor (KAZAKOVA, A. and KIM, I. 2021). It is the task of scholars examining tourism from a transdisciplinary perspective to recognize the challenges generated by the symbiosis of space and time (geography and history) affecting travel and to identify best practices in geopolitical model regions like East-Central Europe, which may offer solutions applicable to different regions (GILLEN, J. 2024). Should the effect of neighbourhood-induced familiarity on revisit intention gain recognition in international tourism practice, it could contribute to reducing tourism's negative impacts on sustainability (DOMÍNGUEZ, J.A. et al. 2015; DORNIER, R. and MAURI, C. 2018).

The main theoretical contribution of the present study lies in expanding the existing scientific discourse on the impact mechanisms of familiarity on revisit intention by introducing the neighbourhood factor as a control variable. In addition, it contributes to the broader discussion on the interpretation of distance in tourism by drawing attention to a previously underexplored component of the mechanisms shaping perceived distance (McKERCHER, B. and MAK, B. 2019). The research findings are highly applicable for national and regional destination management organizations: the former can build on similarities and geographical proximity, while the latter can leverage synergies arising from borderland locations. The validity of the results is supported by the representativeness of the sample emerging from the survey and the reliability of the HCSO database. However, the study also has several limitations, most notably its focus on the relation of Hungary and its neighbouring countries, and the lack of broader international comparison. Future research directions include, first, exploring the expanding functions of travel to neighbouring countries in the context of the changing nature of tourism (e.g. strengthening competitiveness, integrating peaceful coexistence into value propositions); and second, further refining the historical context mentioned in several studies (KOZAK, M. and BUHALIS, D. 2019; PARK, C. et al. 2023).

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