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**TOURISM
IN FUNCTION OF DEVELOPMENT
OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA**

Tourism product as a factor of competitiveness of
the Serbian economy and experiences of other countries



**THEMATIC
PROCEEDINGS**

I



**UNIVERSITY OF KRAGUJEVAC
FACULTY OF HOTEL MANAGEMENT
AND TOURISM IN VRNJAČKA BANJA**



INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND TOURISM IN SERBIA

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Abstract

Information technologies are playing important role in tourism today. Research in this field contributes to the continuous development of strategies to support the tourism and the satisfaction of tourists. This study, through qualitative research gives some important facts how Serbian's tourists "think" and "look" about using information technology in the sense of searching and reservation of the touristic destinations in Serbia with the aim to give a tourist workers some useful information in order to improve their offer. Also, this paper provides a realistic analysis of the potential benefits of ICT applications to the tourism industry. Travel agencies and their partners, as well as independent tourist product suppliers can then plan their business strategies for ICT development at their destinations. At the end, the paper advocates the importance of ICT in the tourism industry and stresses the need for travel agency managers to be ICT competent in order to take full advantage of technology. Data were collected by interviewing people of different ages and with different levels of computer literacy.

Keywords: *Tourism, Serbia, Information technology*

JEL classification: Z30, C63

Introduction

The impacts of tourism can be sorted into several general categories: economic, environmental, social and cultural, services, taxes, community attitude. In this paper, we will address the two aspects: economy and social and cultural. We started from the first one. Based on this, it is a fact that the tourism is an important economic activity in most countries

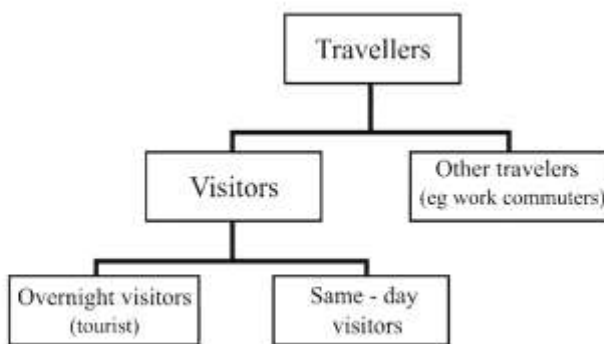
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around the world. At the same time, it is one of the fastest growing industries worldwide. For many developing countries tourism is important for economic progress because of material profits it brings and because it generates employment opportunities and provides employment for a wide range of qualifications i.e. to unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled manpower. It is important to mention that the tourism industry is the source of income for both public as well as private sector.

On the other hand, tourism can serve for recreational, leisure or business purposes, but also a social, cultural and economic phenomenon which has implications on the economy, on the natural environment, on the local population at the destination and on the tourists themselves. The World Tourism Organization³ defines tourists as people "travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes" (UNWTO, World Tourism Organization, 2009). All travelers can be divided into groups on different way. One is based on the length and nature of stay. Figure 1 illustrates this (on very general form).

Figure 1: *Types of travelers*⁴



Nowadays Commination Information Technologies have been transforming tourism globally (Buhalis & Law, 2008). Information and communication(s) technology or information, usually abbreviated as ICT, is often used as an extended synonym for information technology (IT),

3 The World Tourism Organization(UNWTO)is the United Nations agency responsible for the promotion of responsible, sustainable and universally accessible tourism.

4 A visitor is classified as a tourist if his/her trip includes an overnight stay.

but is usually a more general term that stresses the role of unified communications and the integration of telecommunications (telephone lines and wireless signals), computers, middleware as well as necessary software, storage and audio-visual systems, which enable users to create, access, store, transmit, and manipulate information. The marriage between tourism and ICT is now firmly recognized by the new term “e-tourism”, the “e” standing for “electronic”. Some of the tools of ICT, such as the internet, reduce the entry barrier to the tourist industry and therefore can potentially bring developing economies at par with the developed counter parts.

Closely related with e-tourism are e-travelers which tend to have higher levels of education, to be from higher socio-economic groups, and to earn more money. Living in a big town or city does not appear to influence use of the internet for travel planning or booking purposes but, as might be expected, e travelers tend to be younger than travelers in general. More than 30% of them are between the ages of 25 and 34.

The ICT increases the supply of information. Information is shared and disseminated to larger audience. Also, it reduces the cost of production and overcomes the constraints of distance and geography (Shanker, 2008). Because of this, today, more than earlier, information is a crucial factor in the planning, booking and during the travel.

The different ICT tools are used, such as (Buhalis, 2003):

- Information search: by category, geography, keyword
- Itinerary planning for customers
- Reservations
- Weather, transport timetables, etc.

Also it can be found and (Henry, 2016):

- Booking systems - Latest research suggests that more than half those who travel book online when they have the option so it pays to have a real-time system for sales and reservations.
- Delivery of visitor experiences - Tourism operators are using technology to:
 - provide an initial experience on-line, for example, experience-driven web content or tasters delivered pre-trip by online audio podcast or video clips
 - deliver audio tours for use on-site via MP3 players

- provide interpretation via mobile phones or handheld devices
- link customers to other experiences in your region, such as recommending other things to see or do on your website or as part of your tour or experience. In this way, you can help your customers understand how they can be part of a bigger visitor experience.

Closely related with information is the *internet* which is a useful tool for finding *information*.

Internet and tourism

The *Internet*, sometimes called simply "the Net" is generally *defined* as a global network connecting millions of computers. More scientific definition of the internet is an interconnected system of networks that connects computers around the world via the TCP/IP protocol. No matter how we defined it, the fact is that today, the internet is a global "people's network" for communicating and sharing information. But, the quality of the information is a mixture of the good and bad, and finding important information relevant to the target needs has become increasingly significant. (Hatton, 2004 & Vinod, 2011).

The *Internet* has a dramatic effect on the distribution of *tourism* products (Sahut, 2009) and has changed forever the *tourism* environment. Number of the internet users on the world constantly grows and reaches 1.7 billion [Internet World Stats, 2010]. It is evident that the use of the Internet has been growing rapidly in the worldwide tourism industry. The internet can be used in many different ways such as making online reservation, checking availability and obtaining detailed information about some travel arrangements, finding and reading experience of other. As a result, there has been rapid increase in the online booking of hotel/motel rooms, airline tickets etc. (Christodoulidou et al., 2010; Gronflaten, 2009; Smith, 2007). Additionally, travel planning can be considered as a fundamental component of the trip experience in that a traveler often needs to obtain a substantial amount of information in order to develop a travel plan (Sigala, & Sakellaris, 2004; Zeithaml et al., 2002, Bai et al., 2008). Here available information, obtained from internet, can be crucial in the traveler's decision, especially when choosing a destination to visit (Bieger & Laesser, 2004; Fodness & Murray, 1997; Gursoy & McCleary, 2004; Jeng & Fesenmaier, 2002).

How internet is important tourism tool it can be seen from the fact that more than 148.3 million people use the Internet to make reservations for their accommodations, tours and activities (Statistics on Travel and Tourism You Need to Take Note Of—Part 1, 2016; Trends and factors, 2015). This is more than 57% of all travel reservations. Internet travel booking revenue has grown by more than 73% over the past 5 years.

Tourism in Serbia

Tourism has a long history in Serbia which provides diverse opportunities for travel and recreation. All year around, numerous cultural, entertainment, traditional and sporting events are held, demonstrating the creative power and spiritual vitality of Serbia.

A great touristic potential is reflected in numerous mountains, lakes, rivers as well as historical heritage - monasteries and churches, and numerous monuments which belong to different periods. The monasteries represent an important historical and cultural inheritance of Serbia [Monasteries and churches]. Built between the XII and the XVII century, they have shaped not only the landscape of the orthodox Serbia, but they represent the reliable medieval architectural and painting witnesses. Today, these monasteries attract the tourists from all over the world who come to admire their extraordinary architecture, frescos, icons and manuscripts. Orthodox religious painting represents one of the most valuable heritage richness of Serbia.

Also in Serbia there are over 300 different thermal springs, called “spa” (Vrnjačka Banja is one of most known and popular⁵) with a great number of persons going for health reason.

In the last decade, new “ethno villages”⁶ sprung outaround the country and they represent an actual strength and capacity that is important in the development of tourism in Serbia, especially in its development based on consulting and cooperation with the community. It has opened doors for the locals, as well as visitors from abroad. Some of them are Drvengrad or Kustendorf on Zlatibor district, village of Sirogojno.

5 Some popular are Banja Koviljača, Bukovička Banja, Sokobanja and Niška Banja.

6 The “ethnic village” is a place that preserves the national heritage, which is reflected in their architecture, national cuisine and the content of activities.

In the following table, we give some interesting data about the tourism in Serbia related with the number of domestic and foreign tourists in Serbia during the period 2003-2016.

From Table 1 significant increase of the contribution (amount) of the foreign tourists in the total tourist number can be seen. So in 2016, in Serbia 55% are Serbian tourists and approximately 45% are foreign, while in 2003, 85% were domestic tourists and approximately 15% foreign. This has many implications. One important is that, in 2014, the total contribution of travel and tourism to employment, including jobs indirectly supported by the industry, was 6.4% of total employment (87,500 jobs). This is expected to rise by 0.7% in 2015 to 88,000 jobs and rise by 1.3% pa to 100,000 jobs in 2025 (7.5% of total) (*The World Travel & Tourism Council, 2017*).

Table 1: *Domestic vs. Foreign tourist arrivals in Serbia in the period 2003-2016 year*⁷.

Year	Total tourist arrivals	Domestic	Foreign
2003	1 997 947	1 658 664	339 283
2004	1 971 683	1 579 857	391 826
2005	1 988 469	1 535 790	452 679
2006	2 006 488	1 537 646	468 842
2007	2 306 558	1 610 513	696 045
2008	2 226 166	1 619 672	646 494
2009	2 021 166	1 375 865	645 301
2010	2 000 597	1 317 9161	682 681
2011	2 068 610	1 304 443	764 167
2012	2 079 643	1 269 676	809 967
2013	2 192 435	1 270 667	921 768
2014	2 194 268	1 165 536	1 028 732
2015	2 437 165	1 304 944	1 132 221
2016	2 753 591	1 472 165	1 281 426

7 Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tourism_in_Serbia and World Tourism Organization, Yearbook of Tourism Statistics, Compendium of Tourism Statistics and data files (<http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/ST.INT.ARVL?end=2015&locations=RS&start=2002&view=chart>) (26 April 2017)

Discussion

Although tourism has a long history in Serbia research on tourism has a relatively short tradition. But for long-term goals, which include the development of Serbian tourism, and establishing basic guidelines for future development, identifying potential users and potential tourist regions require the necessary research.

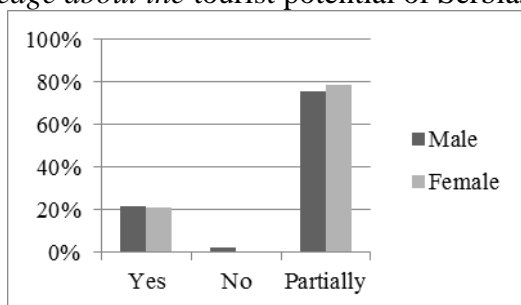
Here, we are especially interesting to show how much travelers in Serbia use the Internet, i.e. ICT, for travel information and/or booking. Generally speaking, researches about the use of ICT tools for tourism in developing economies is scanty or non-existence, so there isn't exact information how ICT affects a tourism. This study is an attempt to overcome this by giving an examination of the application of ICT in Serbia. Understanding how ICT impacts tourist behavior can be useful for travel agency to identify and develop effective and sustainable marketing communication strategies. Nowadays, it becomes more and more difficult for traditional travel agents to compete with web sites which offer many opportunities to tourists, such as online booking, virtual experience, online payment, experience exchange, online reservations.

For this purpose we made a questionnaire that is a method used in the quantitative research for data collection. We used a paper form. The research was conducted in the central Serbia. The target group were domestic tourists. The range of ages reported is wide, as well as a spectrum of interests and working experience.

We prepared 26 questions, divided into a few categories: general (gender, birth year-age, living place), multiple choice questions and comment question. Based on the obtained information, we'll try to generalize some trends in using ICT and make suggestions on future research directions in this field. Additionally, through this research we bring the gender aspect of using ICT.

First of all we were interested whether our responders are familiar with the touristic potential of Serbia. The Graph 1 illustrates obtained results:

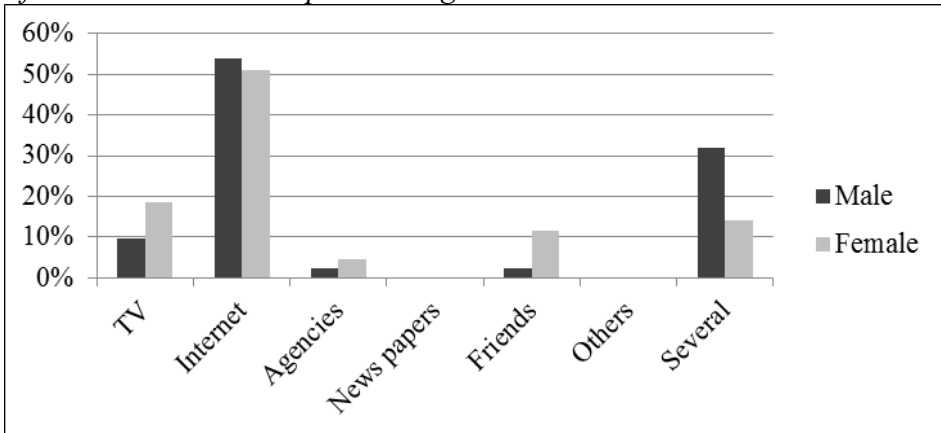
Graph 1: *Knowledge about the tourist potential of Serbia.*



To acknowledge the potential of certain countries (in this case Serbia) to generate touristic flows is essential for their tourism's and also economic development. Our results show that there is a huge opportunity for improvement in this domain. Only 20% respondents is informed of tourist potential of Serbia, while 70-80% of Themis partially informed. There isn't significant deviation between male and female responds. The majority of the respondents (86%) about the tourism potential of Serbia coming through the Internet. 78% of male and 67% female respondents use computer rather than the phone to make an Internet access.

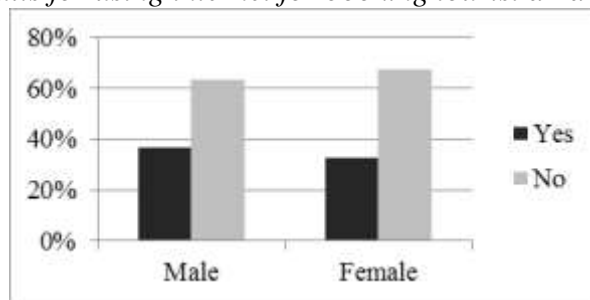
Next we asked which are the most frequently used sources of information about the touristic arrangements in Serbia. As presented in the Graph 2, the most frequently used sources of information about the touristic arrangements in Serbia include the following (M/F): Internet (53,8%/51,2%), friends/relatives (2,4%/11,6%), classical media (TV) (9,6%/18,6%), touristic agencies (2,4%/4,6%) and several sources at the same time (31,8%/14%). It is interesting that no one mentioned newspaper as a source of information. Our results show that the Internet has become the primary media used as a source of information regarding Serbian tourism destinations. Namely more than 50% of tourists use the Internet in general to obtain information, while only few percentages use touristic agencies. Friends and relatives remain the primary source of information with 2,4% male and 11,6% female which shows that the power of the reference groups is very important factor in the process of getting information about destinations for the female population.

Graph 2: *The results of comparing the frequency of used sources of information with the respondent's gender.*



It can be found that the Internet's easy accessibility has changed the way people plan their travel. So, we asked: Do you use the Internet to book tourist arrangements? Obtained answers are presented in the Graph 3.

Graph 3: *Results for using internet for booking tourist arrangements.*

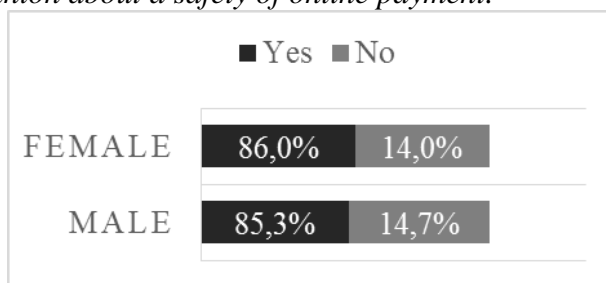


Between 30% and 40% of respondents prefer to do their travel booking online. Otherwise, it can be found that there is a big difference across the European Union with accommodation booked online - Netherlands (69%), France (68%) and Luxembourg (67%), while accommodation was booked online for fewer than 10% of the trips made by residents from Romania (7%) and Bulgaria (9%) (ICT use in tourism, Two thirds of air passengers bought their tickets online in the EU, 2016). It is obvious that our tourists have comparable results with those in developed EU economy. This can be treated as surprising, but certainly a positive result.

The question closely related with the online concerning the safety of reservation. Even 70% of respondents consider their online reservation safe.

Using the internet to make payments for trip saves considerable time and effort. There are, however, risks associated with online payments and you need to take care when making them. So, we asked respondents what they think about it?

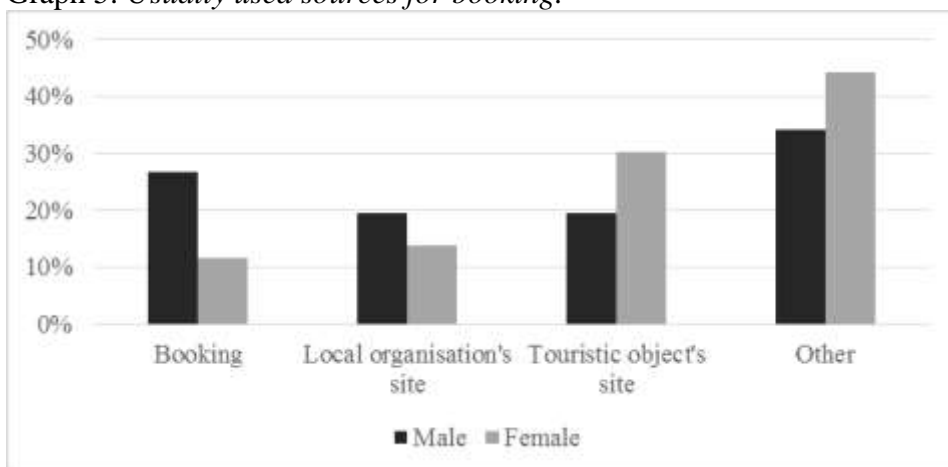
Graph 4: *Opinion about a safety of online payment.*



Almost 90% of all respondents consider online payment as safe. But, our results show that only 23% of them really use online payment. For this contradictory situation many reasons can be found.

For booking accommodation you usually use? This was our next question. According the usually organized offer of the touristic contents, we offered four categories: Booking, Local organization site, Touristic object's site and something else. Result shows that there isn't predominate used source. The contribution of the each particular offer is presented through the following result (M/F): Booking (26,8%/11,7%), local organization's site (19,5%/13,9%), touristic object's site (19,5%/30,2%) and something else (34,2%/44,2%).

Graph 5: *Usually used sources for booking.*

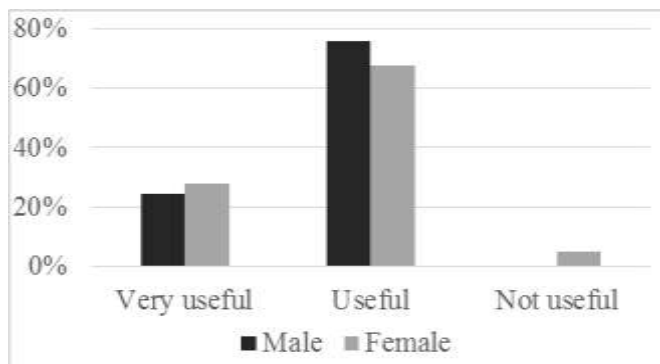


Some research showed that in 2016, rented tourist accommodation was booked online for 55 % of the trips made by residents of the Serbia (Tourism in Serbia, 2016;International tourism, number of arrivals, 2015).One particular limitation, according to industry observers, is the country's weakness in terms of online booking facilities. Serbia's hotel sector has been very slow to adapt to new technology, largely because of the predominance of small, independent hotels. A priority is to upgrade current internet banking systems to ensure that small business owners can sell their products freely online. The share of online booking decreased slightly for older age groups. However, online booking of rented accommodation tend to be a bit less important for the youngest age group, possibly because youngsters may be more inclined to book their rented accommodation on arrival instead of making pre-booked arrangements.

Tourists may have varying motivations for visiting particular destinations, and also may have different satisfaction levels and standards. Because of that it seems logical that some researches show that hotel guests read 6-12 reviews before booking (Hotel guests read 6-12 reviews before booking, says new TripAdvisor survey, 2014). Also, some studies reveal that less experienced respondents trust more the travel agencies for information. When they decide to book their travel details the study finds that most of young people use travel agents to book their travel (65%). As they start to get more experienced, travelers tend to prefer making their own travel arrangements using the Internet, instead of contacting travel agencies. We asked our responders do they read the comments (forums) of tourist before the booking and do they find obtained information useful?

Even 86% of all responders read the some online comment before booking. Obtained information they consider as useful. Graf 6 illustrates these results.

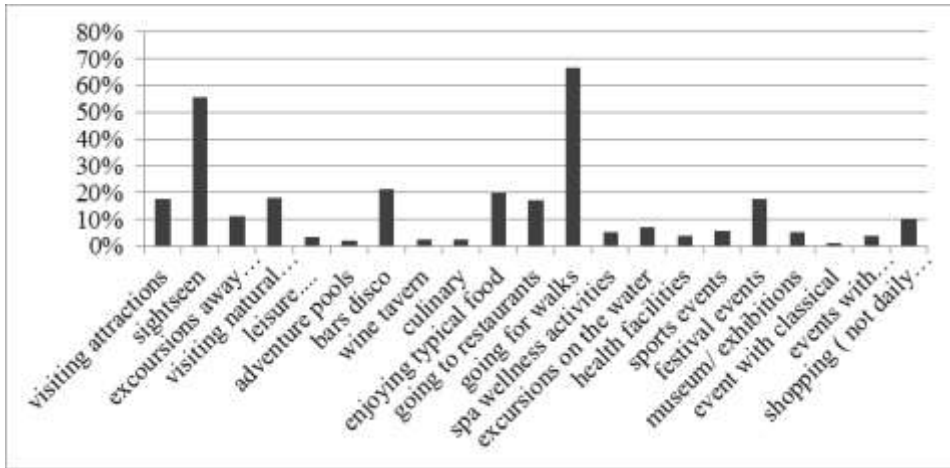
Graph 6: *Opinion on the usefulness of information obtained from the internet.*



According our data 67% consider online date as useful, 28% as very useful and only few percentages consider it as not useful. There isn't significant deviation between male and female responds.

According the data derived from the Statistical yearbooks of Republic Serbia can be seen that the more Serbians travel to foreign destinations than the resident country. Reason can be found in the lack of affirmed tourist resources, as well as the affinity of Serbian tourists that during the summer go to seaside (the most visited destination is the Greece). Winter holyday have relatively small number of Serbian tourist and as such, it's affect is not significant on the general touristic flow(Stanojlović, G. et al., 2010).Our results confirm this. Namely, even 72% Serbian tourists chose foreign destinations, while at the same time, only 23% domestic. The remaining 5% consider booth destinations are equally interesting. Additionally, we gave the comparative review of tourist activities in Serbia during the summer (Paunović, 2013):

Table 2: *The comparative review of tourist activities in Serbia during the summer*



For touristic destination with the best internet presentation the responders marked two main competitors in the Serbian mountain tourism Zlatibor and Western Serbia region and Kopaonik. For authors it was surprising that younger responders did not recognize Exit’s internet presentation as one of the most representative (the best) considering that it is acknowledged on a worldwide scale.

Conclusion

The importance of information technology in tourism has increased significantly over the past year and this trend will certainly continue. Today the ICT is spread throughout almost all aspects of tourism and related industry. Our results show that the ICT has a significant impact on the Serbian’s tourists. Generally speaking, they use online reservation and consider the internet as an important source of information about touristic destination. Also, it is obvious that the touristic presentation of Serbian touristic potential must be improved. There are many different potential without appropriate internet “support”. There isn’t other choice for touristic workers but to understand and manage change, and implement the innovation that comes as a result of informational changes. This can help them to build a better, more accessible, more inclusive, more creative, more ambitious tourism.

Acknowledgements

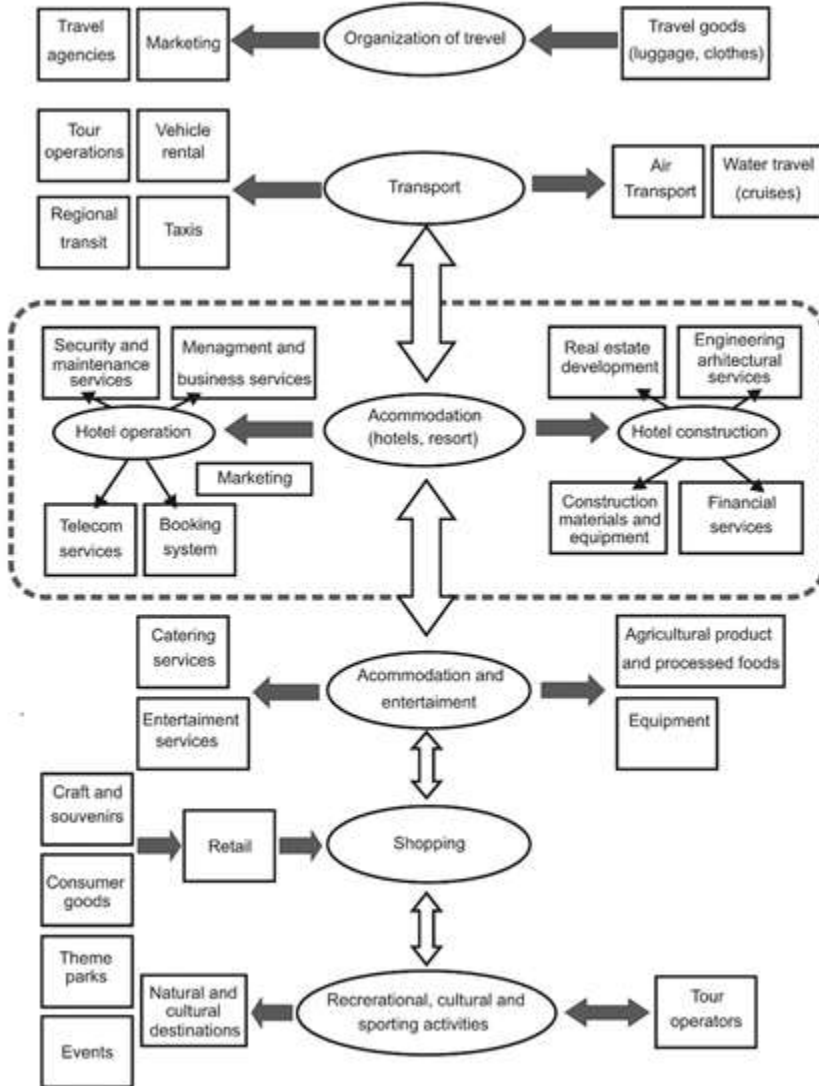
We are grateful to the Serbian Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development for financial support through Projects 171020 and the Technical College of applied studies Kragujevac

Appendix 1

Gender	
Age	
Living place	
Are you familiar with touristic potentials of Serbia?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes. <input type="checkbox"/> No. <input type="checkbox"/> Partial.
Do you use the internet as a source of information about tourist arrangements?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes. <input type="checkbox"/> No.
If you do use the internet as a source of information about touristic content you access the internet with:	<input type="checkbox"/> Computer. <input type="checkbox"/> Cell phone.
You learn about the touristic potential of Serbia usually through the:	<input type="checkbox"/> TV. <input type="checkbox"/> Internet – Web sites <input type="checkbox"/> Tourist agencies. <input type="checkbox"/> Newspaper. <input type="checkbox"/> Friends. <input type="checkbox"/> Other.
Do you use the internet for booking (making a reservation) arrangements?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes. <input type="checkbox"/> No.
You prefer internet or phone for reservation (in the case when the on-line reservation is possible):	<input type="checkbox"/> Internet <input type="checkbox"/> Phone
Do you consider booking arrangements safe on line?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes. <input type="checkbox"/> No.
Do you use the internet for paying for tourist arrangements?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes. <input type="checkbox"/> No.
Do you think that paying for tourist arrangements is online safe?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes. <input type="checkbox"/> No.
For booking accommodation you usually use:	<input type="checkbox"/> Booking. <input type="checkbox"/> Sites of local tourist organizations. <input type="checkbox"/> Sites of tourist.

	<input type="checkbox"/> Other
Do you read the comments (forums) of tourist before the booking?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes. <input type="checkbox"/> No
Which tourist destination in Serbia has the best on line presentation?	_____
Do you find information you get online about the tourist arrangement useful?	<input type="checkbox"/> Very useful. <input type="checkbox"/> Useful. <input type="checkbox"/> No.
When was the last time you booked any tourist arrangement in Serbia?	_____
How many times in last three years have you booked a tourist arrangement over the internet? Serbia/Abroad	_____ / _____
How many times in the last three years have you booked a tourist arrangements with a tourist agency? Serbia/Abroad	_____ / _____
If you have to choose between tourist arrangements in Serbia and abroad, you would choose:	<input type="checkbox"/> Serbia. <input type="checkbox"/> Abroad.
Do you know you can reserve tickets for transport online?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes. <input type="checkbox"/> No.
How would you describe representation of tourist content of Serbia online:	_____ _____
Where do you see space for improvement of online presentation of tourist content of Serbia:	_____ _____

Appendix 2 - Tourism value chain, 2013.⁸



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