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HOTELS INVOLVEMENT IN PROMOTIONAL ACTIVITIES OF BELGRADE AS A TOURIST DESTINATION

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Abstract

The involvement of hotels in promotional activities of the tourist destination of Belgrade is analysed based on the questionnaire adressed to 44 hotels. They confirmed cooperation with Tourist Organisation of Belgrade (TOB), but that cooperation is not satisfactory for them. Only 37% of respondents have help from TOB in promotional activities of hotel, while hotels involved in promotional activities organised by TOB only sometimes do. Rrelatively small percent (22%) have received free promotional materials from TOB. Also, 50 and 40% of respondents consider that Tourist Organization of Serbia and the relevant ministry, respectively, promote Belgrade as a tourist destination in an inadequate way. Nevertheless, all respondents expressed their readiness to participate in the joint promotion of Belgrade tourist offer, but so far only some of them have been involved occasionally in the preparation of promotional material or the development of programs, and that only 12% of the hotels were contacted for participation on fairs.

Key Words: *Belgrade, hotel, promotional activities, tourist destination.*

JEL classification: L83

Introduction

The expansion and growth of tourism after the Second World War have taught this business branch one of the fastest growing ones. At the transition between the 19th and 20th centuries, tourism has progressed rapidly thanks to the development of transport, tourist infrastructure and various service activities. The rapid development of tourism is especially noticeable after the year 1950. At that time, only 25.28 million tourists

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took part in international travelling, which generated a turnover of \$ 2.1 billion (Šimičević, 2005). From that period, touristic activities increased and reach nearly 700 million tourists in 2000, with a turnover of about 500 billion dollars (Šimičević, 2005). It is expected that by 2020, the number of tourists in international tourism will reach 1.6 billion tourists annually (Šimičević, 2005). Along with the increase in quantity in terms of an enormous increase in the number of tourists in a relatively short period, there has been a geographical expansion of tourism. Namely, according to the World Tourism Organization (WTO), in 1950, only 15 leading tourist destinations were the place of travel for 97% of foreign tourist arrivals (Kazachka, 2005). Since then, a large number of new tourist destinations have been developed around the world. In mean time tourism developed as highly complex, multisectoral industry where no single organization provides or has control over the entire tourism activities. Due to that successful delivery of the wider tourism product is dependent on close working relationship, interdependencies and interactions between numerous stakeholders, enabling the tourism organization to provide a seamless experience for its customers (Fyall & Garrod, 2005). With tourism being increasingly recognized as a key economic opportunity around the world competition among countries and regions for a share of global tourism expenditure is increasing by the day. Potential tourists are faced with a wide range of holiday and business travel choices. Therefore, promotional activities on different levels are necessary in order to attract tourist to target destination.

Promotion of the tourist destination in the right and best possible way is one of the major marketing activities, because only successful promotion can attract potential travelers to visit the destination. Therefore, promotional activities play a big role in the marketing of a destination and represent important part of the marketing mix (Jakovljević, 2009). Promotion can be defined in different ways. For example, Novak (2011) defined promotion as the process of communication between the company and the environment (consumers) in order to create positive attitudes about products and services that lead to their favor in the process of buying the market. Also, Pereira and Almeida (2014) defined marketing and promotion in hotel industry as a set of actions for internal and external communication that can be put into practice by allowing hotel companies diversified forward messages with the aim of showing and raising awareness of the company, its products and services with ultimate goal of causing consumers desire.

Meler (1999) divided promotional activities into two large groups: (1) primary (basic) promotional activities and (2) secondary (borderline) promotional activities. The first group include advertising, sales promotion, personal selling, public relations and publicity, while second group include design, packaging, consumer services, “word of mouth” advertising. Various promotional activities such as personal sales, direct marketing, propaganda, sales promotion, organization of business exhibitions, events and visits to acquaintances, services of a collegiate and tourist information points can be used to promote the destination (Jegdić & Marković, 2011). However, internet marketing is becoming one of the most important components of destination marketing, where websites have the following roles: 1) general propaganda, 2) promotion of products / services, 3) promotion of products with information on prices, 4) mail notifications, 5) e-mail bookings, 6) direct sales and billing, 7) giving information, etc. (Jegdić, 2010). Very popular internet portal is Tripadvisor which designed only for tourism (Božić & Janičević, 2016, Mašić & Kosar, 2016) and which have all characteristics of social networks (Stojković, 2013). Except that, social networks have an increasingly important role in promotional activities (Buhalis & Law, 2008, Litvin et al., 2008, Mišković et al., 2015). For example, different information about restaurants could be finding on social networks like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Forskver, Linkedin and Trip Advisor (Božić & Zubanov, 2018).

Tourist destination Belgrade is one of the most popular tourist destinations in Serbia. It is capital city of Serbia, which area is 3,234 km² and number of citizen is 1,679,895 (based on latest census) (Republički zavod za statistiku, 2016). The largest number of foreign tourists have arrived from Croatia, Greece and Slovenia (36%), then from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Italy, Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania and Montenegro, but also from overseas countries, the USA and Indonesia, while other countries had less than 3% (Canada, Holland, Norway, The United Kingdom, France, Taiwan, South Korea, Cuba, Australia, Spain, Germany, Austria, Armenia, Sweden, Belgium, Poland, Macedonia, Algeria and Turkey) (Marković, 2016). Authors Armenski et al. (2009) investigated the image of Serbia in the perception of foreign visitors. Based on their answers to question what they liked the best during their stay in Belgrade as the best estimated are: the hospitality of the local population (40.5%), historical monuments (29.5%), nightlife (12.5%), national specialties (6.5%) and natural beauty (6%). As the main imperfections of the tourist offer of Belgrade mentioned: inability to pay

in foreign currencies, lack of currency exchange offices and a small number of souvenir shops.

The planning, research and promotion of a specific destination are usually resolved by national tourism organisations at the national level or by smaller organisations at local and regional levels (Moutinho, 2005). In Serbia, the tourist organizations of different levels of the organization (the Tourist Organization of Serbia, the Tourist Organization of the Autonomous Province Vojvodina and the tourist organizations of the local self-government unit) responsible for managing and developing tourism destinations as indicated by the Law on Tourism (Službeni glasnik RS, br. 36/2009, 88/2010, 99/2011- dr. zakon, 93/2012 I 84/2015). However, these organizations are not committed to these activities as Destination Management Organization (DMO) and do not deal with the harmonization of often conflicting interests between the public and the private sector (Popesku, 2009). Due to that representatives of the tourist industry from Belgrade consider that there are numerous indicators and a real need to create a DMO (Đurović, 2010, Stajčić et al., 2016). Therefore, they emphasize that it is necessary to balance the interests of all economic entities to the end and to reach agreement on the vision of tourism at the level of all stakeholders in order to facilitate the way of tourism management in Belgrade. Also, Đurović (2010) points out that some of the basic preconditions that would be necessary to fulfill for potential transformation of the Tourist Organization of Belgrade into DMO, raising awareness as well as understanding the public sector and spreading the social and economic significance of tourism for Belgrade as an already affirmed destination. In accordance with this idea is also a draft of the Development Strategy of the city of Belgrade, where as one of the priority projects mentioned creation of DMO, which in this draft entitled as "Organization for the management of a tourist destination " (Stajčić et al., 2016). However, the lack of a regulatory framework is what is currently the main obstacle to undertaking actions in terms of potential cooperation with state organizations in the sphere of tourism, despite the interest of the private sector. In that sense, it is necessary to emphasize that the public sector should be the driver of this idea and, in this connection, the provision of a legal framework that would enable it should be in the first place.

In the development and management of tourism, all interested actors should be involved: local and state administration, non-governmental organizations, tourist organizations, tourist facilities and all other actors.

Although the tourist does not come to the destination because of the hotel, the hotel is an important element of the tourist service, as well as an important factor in creating a quality experience and experience during the trip (Pijevac & Đurović, 2017). Therefore, hotels as the main facilities for accommodation of tourists should actively participate in promotion of destination. Due to that, the aim of this paper was to analyze involvement of hotels in these activities of tourist destination Belgrade.

Methodology of research

Data about hotels involvement in promotional activities of tourist destination Belgrade were collected by distributing questionnaires to the selected sample of hotels. Questionnaires were sent to hotel managers in 44 randomly selected hotels located in Belgrade. Hotels were selected from website of web portal TripAdvisor, whereby categories from one to five stars were included (4 five star hotels and 10 hotels per category for other categories). Printed questionnaires delivered in printed version directly to the hotels address during autumn 2017 and spring of 2018. Questionnaires were filled by responsible managers of 30 hotels (1 from five star hotels, 8 from four star hotels, 9 from three star hotels, 8 from two star hotels and 4 from one star hotel). Eleven questions were designed and all participants were asked the same questions in the same order and in the same manner.

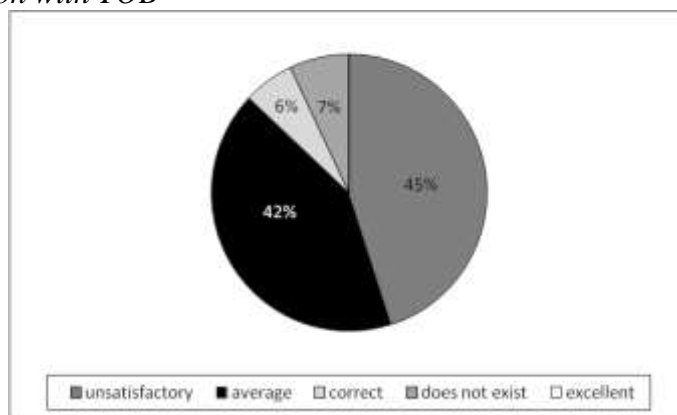
Manager's perceptions for each question were measured according to feedback received from survey questionnaire. Questionnaire included questions to estimate 1) cooperation between hotel and Tourist Organisation of Belgrade (TOB), 2) involvement of TOB in promotional activities of hotels, 3) involvement of hotels in promotional activities organised by TOB, 4) availability of free promotional materials from TOB to hotels, 5) involvement of Tourist Organization of Serbia (TOS) and the relevant ministry in promotion of Belgrade as a tourist destination and 6) readiness of hotels to participate in the promotion of Belgrade tourist offer, preparation of promotional materials or the development of promotional programs. The results are presented descriptively.

Results of research and discussion

The competition among the destinations and all tourism enterprises in those destinations increases more and more. Due to that promotional activities gain prominent importance for all participants in tourism.

Although hotels use various promotional activities to attract visitors, many studies shown that a small number of large-scale hotels have an independent public relations department, whereby responsibilities and duties of the public relations departments are carried out by the front office department instead of having a separate body (Acar et al., 2012). In Belgrade, the main organizations engaged in promotional activities in tourism are Tourist Organisation of Belgrade (TOB) and Tourist Organization of Serbia (TOS). But, investigation presented in this paper indicates that cooperation between hotels which fulfill questionnaire and those organizations is not satisfactory. Namely, views of respondents about coopeartion with TOB were very different indicating existence of some kind of cooperation, while even 7% argue that cooperation does not exist. Generally, it seems that quality of cooperation is not satisfactory. No one respondent choose category "excellent", 45% of respondents said that cooperation is unsatisfactory and the same percent (42%) estimate cooperation as average cooperation, while only 6% think that cooperation is correct (Figure 1). Similar, representatives of tourism industry were interviewed by Stajčić et al. (2016) and results were shown that 35% of respondent did not have any kind of cooperation with TOB, 25% had unsatisfactory cooperation, while 40% had positive comments about cooperation with TOB.

Figure 1: *Respondents' viewpoints on the existence and quality of cooperation with TOB*



Source: *Authors' research*

As indicated previously the tourist organizations of different levels of the organization are responsible for promotional activities of tourist destination. Also, it was pointed out that all interested actors should be

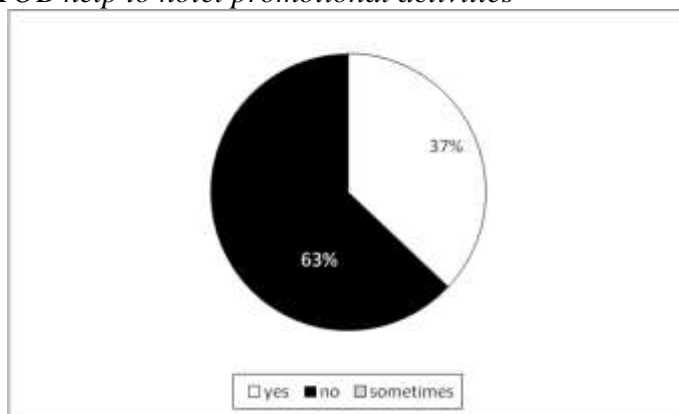
involved in promotional activities. Therefore, hotels should be involved in promotional activities to attract visitors and should have communication strategy with potential clients. Jakovljević (2012) considers that the most important role in promotion is advertising (as one-way communication) and public relations (as a two-way communication). Ma & Mohsen (2016) grouped promotional activities into two groups: monetary promotions and non-monetary promotions. But, traditional promotional activities are: personal sales, direct marketing, advertising, sales promotion, organization of business exhibitions, manifestations and events, visits, call centers activities and tourist information points (Jegdić & Marković, 2011). Although today, the use of the Internet and, in particular, social networks has an increasingly important role in promotional activities (Buhalis & Law, 2008, Litvin et al., 2008, Mišković et al., 2015) printing, radio, TV, specialized advertising magazines and magazines are still widely used tools for promotion.

However, internet marketing is becoming one of the most important components in modern hotel industry. The most powerful and most effective Internet marketing activities (internet marketing through the hotel website, internet marketing via e-mail and internet marketing through social networks) can improve sales and attract new customers (Batinić, 2015).

In marketing designed based on use social networks consumers lose a passive role and can choose the place, time, and content they are interested in (Zubanov & Radenković Šošić, 2015). Although the use of social networks for marketing purposes seems to work for free, for the successful conduct of marketing campaigns it is necessary to engage experts who are qualified to perform this job in a satisfactory way, which is not free (Božić & Zubanov, 2017).

Also, due to dynamic and rapid two-way communication, negative business approaches quickly reach the public, which can jeopardize the long-standing positive reputation of the hotel (Skoko & Mihovilović, 2014). Regarding that hotels have no the same level of knowledge and experience in promotional activities, cooperation with tourist organization and their help in own promotional activities of hotels could be very useful. But, although 93% respondents indicated existence of cooperation with TOB (Figure 1), only 37% confirmed they had help from this organisation in realisation of their own promotional activities, while 63% did not (Figure 2).

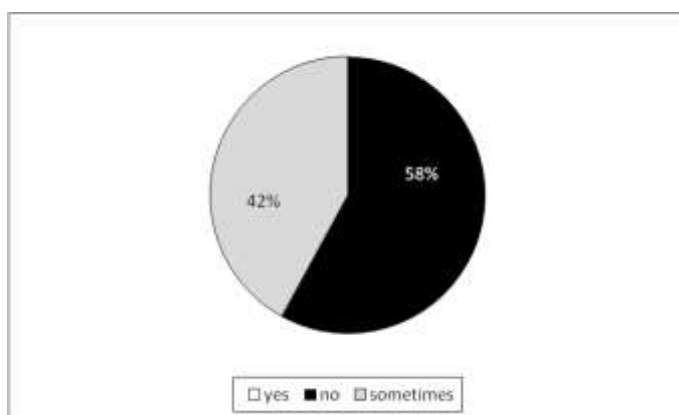
Figure 2: *TOB help to hotel promotional activities*



Source: *Authors' research*

Different manifestations and events gather participants who in a limited space exhibit their offer and those who are interested in getting acquainted with this offer. That events organised by tourist organisation can be good chance for hotels to promote their offer. Also, hotels included in that events could give special offers for participants on event. Some hotels (42%) included in this research were only sometimes participated in organisation of city manifestations and events, while 58% respondents claim that there is no cooperation in that area (Figure 3).

Figure 3: *Inclusion of hotels in organisation of city manifestations and events*

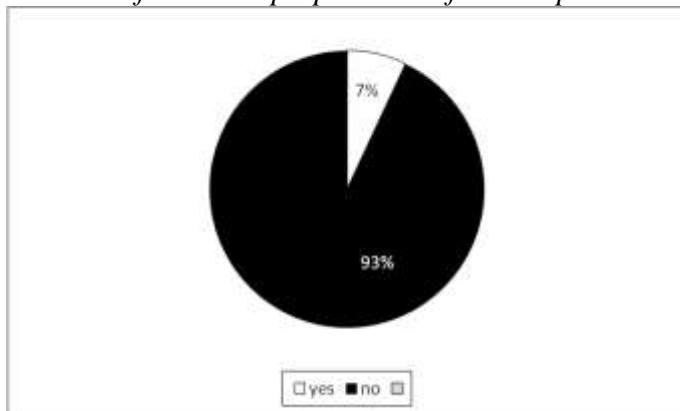


Source: *Authors' research*

Except other promotional tools, promotional literature (posters, travel brochure) could have important role in attraction of tourists. It is common

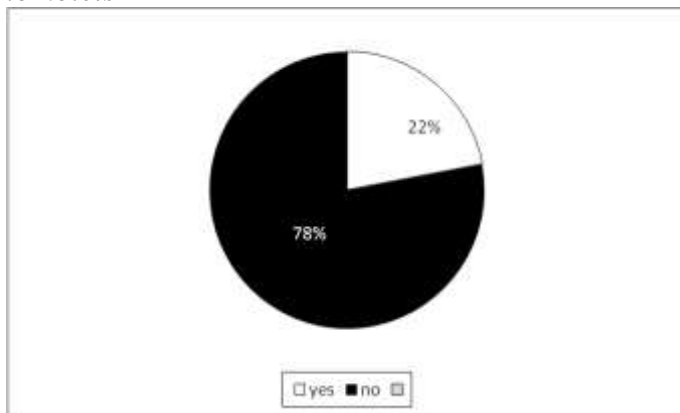
practice that promotional publications are being prepared by tourism organizations, but these activities may include hotels in order to improve their own promotion. Similarly like in other activities, analysed hotels were very few (only 7%) involved in preparation of tourist publications by TOB, while 93% respondents gave negative answer on that question (Figure 4).

Figure 4: *Inclusion of hotels in preparation of tourist publications by TOB*



Source: *Authors' research*

Figure 5: *Delivering of free promotional printed and electronic material from TOB to hotels*



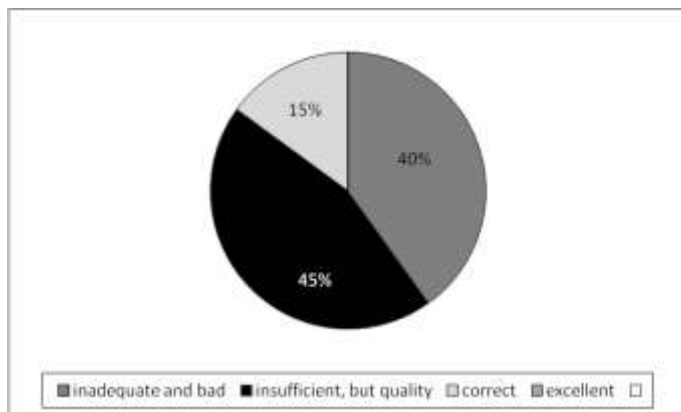
Source: *Authors' research*

The survey showed that TOB delivers own free promotional printed and electronic material to only a small number of surveyed hotels (22%), while 78% does not get promotional materials (Figure 5). This is in accordance with results obtained by Stajčić et al. (2016) who analysed

views of representatives of tourism industry about development of DMO in Belgrade. One respondent pointed out that free maps for tourists are the only material that TOB delivered to accommodation sector.

Jegdić (2010) consider that TOS carries out the tasks of promotion of tourism in the Republic Serbia, coordination of activities of tourist organizations, business and other entities in tourism, market research in the field of congress, fair, sports and cultural events, provision of information-propaganda material, development a unique tourist information system, the establishment of tourist offices abroad and information centers in the country, as well as other jobs that they are ensures successful implementation of tourism promotion. The money for work of Tourism Promotion Organizations are provided from the revenues generated by the performance activities and other own revenues, donations, contributions and sponsorships, funds of the budget of the Republic of Serbia or lower levels of territorial organization and others sources in accordance with the law. Compared to the earlier period, where it dominated budget financing, gradually increasing the share of income from performing activities and from other non-budgetary sources. Although TOS responsible for tourism on the country level, it has important role in touristic activities in capital city Belgrade. Generally, interviewed representatives of analyzed hotels estimated adequacy of presentation of tourist potential of Belgrade by TOS as inadequate and bad (40%) or insufficient, but high quality (45%), while only 15% of respondents think that presentation is correct (Figure 6).

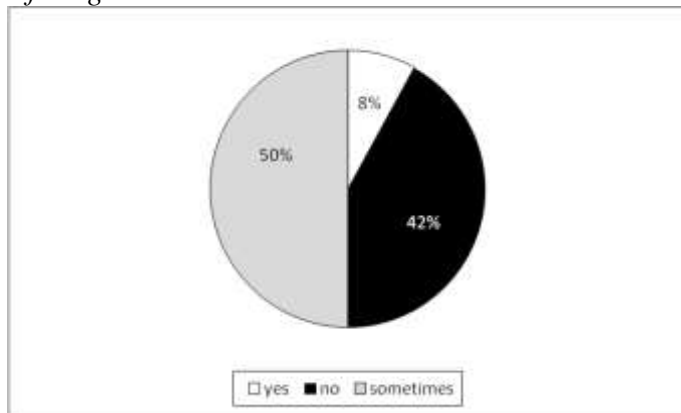
Figure 6: *Adequacy of presentation of tourist potential of Belgrade by TOS*



Source: *Authors' research*

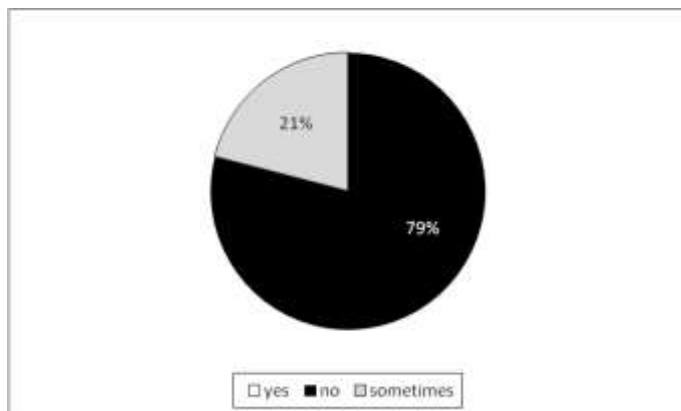
Except tourist organisations, the relevant ministry (at this moment it is Ministry of Trade, Tourism and Telecommunications) could give significant contribution to the development of tourism and support promotion of tourist destinations. Promotional activities of Serbian tourist destinations are mainly financed from country budget but that fund is insufficient for high-quality promotion (Ubavić, 2016). According to the representatives of the hotels, this ministry is supporting the activities for the promotion of Belgrade occasionally (50%), while only 8% think that this support is permanent, and even 42% think that such support does not exist (Figure 7).

Figure 7: *The support of the relevant Ministry to activities for the promotion of Belgrade*



Source: *Authors' research*

Figure 8: *Inclusion of hotels in promotion of tourist product- city Belgrade*

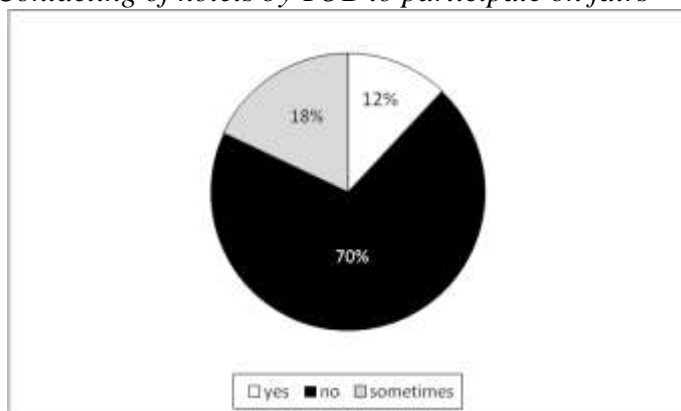


Source: *Authors' research*

Primary role of hotels on tourist destination is accommodation, but as other participants in tourism, they also can participate in promotion of tourist product- city Belgrade. Popesku (2004) points out that the shaping of adequate approaches to the use of marketing by hotel houses is very important. Although representatives of hotels express interest to participate in those activities, only 21% were included sometimes, while 79% has never been involved in these activities (Figure 8).

The first step for cooperation is contact between interested entities. But, when we are talking about contact of analyzed hotels by TOB in order to invite them to participate on fairs only 12% confirmed that they were contacted ordinarily, 18% were contacted sometimes, while 70% have never been contacted with that purpose (Figure 9).

Figure 9: *Contacting of hotels by TOB to participate on fairs*



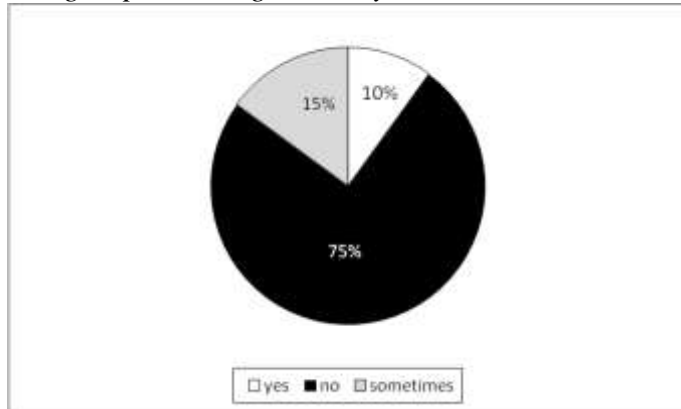
Source: *Authors' research*

Participation of hotels in development of programmes for individual and group visits organised by TOB were almost negligible. Namely, 75% of respondents have never been included in development of that programs (Figure 10). Significantly less number confirmed participation (10%) or occasional participation (15%).

Although, cooperation between hotels included in investigation and TOB, TOS and the relevant ministry were estimated as unsatisfactory, all interviewed respondents expressed interest to participate in common promotional activities of tourist destination Belgrade. Therefore, it is very important to establish a dynamic promotional mix for hotel enterprises

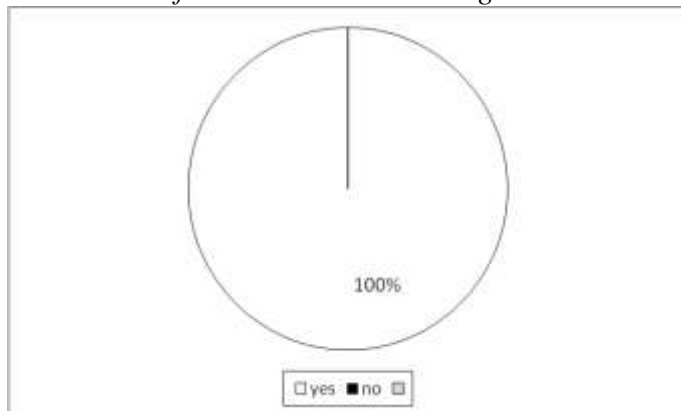
and cooperation with tourist organization can give significant contribution to successful promotion.

Figure 10: *Participation of hotels in development of programmes for individual and group visits organised by TOB*



Source: *Authors' research*

Figure11: *Interest of respondents for participation in common promotional activities of tourist destination Belgrade*



Source: *Authors' research*

Conclusion

Based on the research carried out in this paper, it can be concluded that the involvement of the surveyed hotels in the promotional activities of the tourist destination Belgrade is unsatisfactory. Namely, most of these hotels indicated unsatisfactory cooperation with TOB, TOS and the relevant ministry. On the other hand, all interviewed hotel representatives

expressed interest to participate in common promotional activities of tourist destination Belgrade. Therefore, improvement of cooperation between hotels and TOB, TOS and the relevant ministry is necessary in order to improve the promotional activities of the tourist destination Belgrade.

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