

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS OF TOURIST TRAFFIC IN MOUNTAIN RESORTS IN THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

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Abstract

Besides positive effects, tourist traffic creates a number of negative impacts on the environment, especially in the domain of natural resources and biodiversity, and it is therefore interesting to see the impact the tourism has on the environment in mountain resorts as one of five categories of tourist places in Serbia. It is precisely the non-compliance with the protection measures in protected natural areas, and, among other things, the insufficient coordination of tourism development and environmental protection, are recognizable weaknesses of tourism in Serbia in the SWOT analysis presented in the Tourism Development Strategy for the period from 2016 to 2025. In the research part of the paper, the total tourist traffic in Serbia, in the period from 2016 to 2018, the intensity of tourism in mountain regions and its impact on the environment, was analyzed, taking into account the sensitivity and large exposure of ecologically significant areas. The paper uses normative, analytical and deductive methods as well as basic quantitative data analysis.

Key Words: *tourism, environment, mountain towns, protected natural areas*

JEL classification: *F64, O13, Q56, Z32*

Introduction

General technical and technological progress, availability of vacations for all social classes, and accordingly the statutory maximum workload of an individual in modern society (which directly impacts free time during the working week), and gradual, but continuous development of awareness of

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the need for more expedient and better organization of life during free time and holidays, over time, has led to tourism becoming an indispensable and extremely important need of a modern man. Therefore, it can be said that tourism is "one of the most complex economic and sociological phenomena of the modern world" (Pocuca & Matijasevic-Obradovic, 2019, p. 554), and also "a very important segment of the economy in most countries of the world" (Milosevic, 2016, p. 12).

According to Jovicic (2000), tourism is "an activity that valorizes those elements of space which are of marginal interest to a range of other activities" (p. 17). In this context, it should be emphasized that "a tourist destination is certainly of great importance for the development of tourism" (Petrovic et al., 2016, p. 62), which is, both in theory and in practice, recognized as geographical region, but also as major attractions whose primary goal is to provide extensive visitor experiences (Bornhorst et al., 2010). A number of factors influence the popularity and intensification of a visit to a particular destination. Certainly, the determining factor is the attitude and opinion of tourists about the quality of the tourist destination offer. In this regard, tourist traffic is a significant indicator of visiting a tourist destination. According to Stetic (2003), "locating and qualifying tourist traffic by tourist destinations and countries of origin of tourists staying there, is extremely important for one country" (p. 5).

The development of mountain tourism, according to Todorovic and Maksimovic Rubezanovic (2014), "began in the 1950s of the last century and reached its greatest momentum in the period from 1955 to 1965 in Europe and from 1965 to 1975 in the United States", when actually, "all major mountain tourist centers were established" (p. 184). Mountain tourism certainly represents an environmentally friendly type of tourism, bearing in mind that the majority of mountain transportation means in winter is actually cable cars, regardless of whether we view the mountain tourist place as a destination whose priority is recreation, or as a destination exclusively profiled as a tourist center.

It is indisputable that the human right to a healthy environment is one of the basic human rights. It is also indisputable that during his activities man changes the natural environment, often by damaging it. Considering that tourism is "in its way, a user of space, without being an irreversible consumer of natural elements, development of a certain area can be achieved with controlled tourism development" (Jovicic, 2000, p. 17). Bearing in mind the main conclusion that "only the development of tourism

has shown what kind of wealth and in what quantity is hidden in the mountains" (Gligorijevic & Novovic, 2014, p. 515), it is certainly important to consider the environmental impact of tourism traffic in mountain regions in the Republic of Serbia. At the same time, the review will be made of ecologically important areas in Serbia.

In the research part of the paper, the total tourist traffic in Serbia, the intensity of tourism in mountain resorts, and its impact on the environment are analyzed, taking into account the sensitivity and high exposure of ecologically significant areas. The paper uses normative, analytical and deductive methods as well as basic quantitative data analysis. The research in this paper is based on the official data of the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia and the Serbian Environmental Protection Agency.

Literature review

Tourism is primarily planned and motivated behavior of users of tourism services, where the most important role in making travel decisions also includes the expectations of the persons traveling. Therefore, it is stated that tourists' needs, attitudes and motives are crucial (Vall & Mathison, 2006). Jovicic (1999) has defined tourism as "a set of relationships and occurrences related to the movement and consumption outside the place of permanent residence, with the aim of meeting recreational and cultural needs" (p. 17). Tourism is an industry that has a significant share in the world economy. Aiming at the concrete valorisation of a global tourism performance, Bote Gómez (1993) said that tourism revenues played a key role in financing industrialization in many countries. In a word, tourism has gradually become recognized not only as a result of the economic development but also as a factor of economic development (Stanic & Vujic, 2016). On the other hand, the preservation and protection of the environment is an imperative in modern society. The environment at its core is one of the pillars of sustainable development, and in this context, it can be emphasized that sustainable development involves finding a balance between social development, economic progress and environmental protection (Matijasevic Obradovic, 2017).

According to the established criteria, tourist sites in the Republic of Serbia are classified into five categories: administrative centers, spas, mountain resorts, other tourist sites and other places (Veljkovic & Lekic, 2019). According to Todorovic and Maksimovic Rubezanovic (2014), "mountain centers, since their emergence to the present day, have been developing in

two directions, either as sports and recreational areas to meet the needs for physical activity, or as mountain-tourist centers with accommodation capacities, which complete the tourist product. At the beginning of their development, the centers generated most of their tourist income in the winter. Today, the situation is that traditional mountain-tourist centers make 60 percent, or even higher percentage of their tourist inflow in the summer, thus becoming practically year-round destinations (p. 184)". A special attraction in a relation between the environment and tourist destinations, especially mountain resorts, is that "protected natural areas are assets of great importance for tourism development. Bearing in mind that the negative impacts of tourism on the environment are reflected, above all, on natural resources and biodiversity, sustainable management of protected areas is an essential condition for increasing tourism traffic" (Veljkovic & Lekic, 2019, p. 27).

Primarily due to its preserved nature and other aspects of a healthy environment, Serbia has significant advantages and numerous opportunities for the continued development of tourism, especially in the domain of rural tourism. Namely, as Cvijanovic et al. (2017) state, significant potentials for tourism development in Serbia lie precisely in rural areas. The fact that tourism has a great influence on the development of rural areas is pointed out by Ciric et al. (2014). Thus, the positive effects of tourism are numerous, not only locally but globally. Specifically, tourism has encompassed four essential aspects of sustainable development with its primary concept: ecological, social, cultural and economic (Pocuca et al., 2017). In the domain of ecological aspect, global trends such as the demand for ecological resources, greater social and individual environmental awareness, better and more organized international cooperation in the field of environmental protection can certainly be singled out.

In addition to the positive consequences, it is obvious that the negative effects of tourism on the environment are very pronounced, manifesting primarily in the form of pollution of the elements of the environment (air, water, land), reduction of natural agricultural areas, destruction of flora and fauna, degradation of cultural and historical monuments, blocking of space, spatial redistribution of the population, as well as the banalization of space (Lazarevic, 2017). That being said, the relationship between tourism and the environment can be viewed from two aspects. First, this relationship can be viewed in terms of the impact of tourism on the conservation and promotion of the environment. Second, the relationship between tourism

and the environment can be viewed from the aspect of environmental impact on tourism development. In theory, there are numerous points of view which study the first mentioned relation.

Namely, under the influence of tourism, there is a transformation of space which can be positive and negative. Positive effects of tourism in space are certainly: refurbishment and restoration of existing historical sites, buildings and monuments, transformation of existing old buildings and places into tourist facilities, protection of natural resources, etc. (Boskovic, 2008). As Stefanovic and Azemovic (2012) state, "tourism, as a phenomenon of global proportions, influences the transformation of geographical space. It transforms the original space by equipping, organizing, remodeling, and restructuring it. Under its influence, the receptive space changes more and more intensively, gaining a gradually specific tourist physiognomy" (p. 40). The negative effects of the impact of tourism on the environment include: pollution of space due to construction of tourist facilities and equipment, pollution of air, water, soil, sound pollution, reduction of natural and agricultural areas, destruction of flora and fauna, etc. (Boskovic, 2008).

On the other hand, the environment has a significant impact on tourism development. Namely, the development of tourism is significantly more conditioned by the quality of the environment, its natural and cultural values and characteristics, than in other business activities. The degree of conservation and attractiveness of the environment is directly reflected in the opportunities for tourism development in a given area, especially when it comes to recreational tourism (Stefanovic & Azemovic, 2012). Also, bearing in mind that "tourism represents a set of relationships and phenomena arising from the travel of visitors to a place and their stay, if that stay does not establish a permanent residence, and if no economic activity is associated with such a stay" (Radovic & Krnjajic, 2009, p. 59), the characteristics of space, the range of natural amenities, the state of biodiversity, flora, fauna, climate, including cultural and historical heritage, have an extremely large impact on the development of tourism in a particular area.

The importance of ecological component for the sustainable development of tourism is also indicated by the fact that non-compliance with the measures in the protected areas of nature, the neglect of state-protected buildings and monuments, numerous examples of neglect and pollution of the environment and the degradation of space and insufficient coordination

of tourism development and the environmental protection, is one of the recognized weaknesses of tourism in Serbia in the SWOT analysis presented in the Tourism Development Strategy for the period 2016-2025 (Tourism Development Strategy, 2016). Particular attention in the Tourism Development Strategy is directed towards cultural heritage and natural resources. Namely, "the primary tourist attractions are most often landscape areas - lakes, shores, rivers, peaks and slopes of mountains, forests, etc. They are most commonly characterized by rich ecosystems. The direct impact of tourism development is reflected in the degradation of such ecosystems. The physical impact of tourism development on the degradation of natural and cultural heritage is reflected in inadequate infrastructure development and excessive construction, forest destruction and intensive and unsustainable land use, but also in the destruction of vegetation, land and monuments by increased physical traffic (unsustainable number) of tourists" (Tourism Development Strategy, 2016, p. 74).

Taking all the above into account, it is necessary to specifically analyze the impact of tourist traffic on the environment in tourist places in general, and especially in mountain towns, which will be done in the research part through the analysis of the value of tourist arrivals and overnight stays in the Republic of Serbia, and the analysis of tourist traffic according to the types of tourist places, as well as the intensity of tourism in mountain towns.

Methodology and data sources

For the purpose of the specific analysis of the impact of tourist traffic on the environment in tourist places in general, and especially in mountain towns as a special category in the nomenclature of tourist destinations, the research part of the paper will analyze the total values, as well as the values by regions of tourist arrivals and overnight stays in the Republic of Serbia, for the three-year period, from 2015 to 2017, bearing in mind that the official statistics data for values in 2018 have not yet been officially published. The balance of tourist traffic will then be analyzed according to the types of tourist sites, and special attention will be paid to the intensity of tourism in mountain towns. Tourist traffic by types of tourist sites, and tourism intensity in mountain towns will be analyzed for the three-year period, from 2016 to 2018. Special attention will be paid to the need for monitoring of protected natural areas, bearing in mind that sustainable management of these areas is an essential condition for the continued

development of tourist traffic. The analytical method in a theoretical content analysis, deductive method in drawing conclusions, and a basic quantitative data analysis are applied in the research part of the paper. The research in this paper is based on the official data of the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia and the Serbian Environmental Protection Agency.

Research results and discussion

According to the definitions given in the Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Serbia (2018), a tourist is any visitor who spends at least one night in a tourist accommodation. The Environmental Protection Agency's Environmental Status Report defines the terms of tourists' arrivals and overnight stays. Thus, "arrivals imply the number of tourists staying at the accommodation facility, and overnight stays include the number of overnight stays made by tourists at the accommodation facility during the calendar year" (Lekic & Perunovic Culic, 2019, p. 157).

Article 3 of the Law on Tourism ("Official Gazette of the RS", No. 17/2019) also defines certain terms. According to these provisions, a tourist destination is destination of a tourist travel which, by being equipped, enables the reception and stay of passengers (item 31), while the tourist product is a set of interdependent elements organized in practice as a separate value chain consisting of material products and services, natural values and cultural goods, tourist attractions, tourist supra-structure and tourist infrastructure (point 39). The following tables will present and analyze total values, as well as values by regions of tourist arrivals and overnight stays in the Republic of Serbia, for the three-year period, from 2015 to 2017.

According to official statistics, "the total number of tourists in 2017 was 3 086 thousand. Out of that number, local tourists were 1 589 thousand, which is 7.9% more than in 2016, while the number of foreign tourists who visited our country amounted to 1 497 thousand which was 16.8% higher than in 2016." (Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Serbia, 2018, p. 341). Also, "the number of overnight stays of all tourists who used accommodation facilities amounted to 8325 thousand and was 10.5% higher in comparison with the previous year. Of the total number of tourist nights (8 325 thousand), 26.8% (2 228 thousand) were spent in spa resorts and 25.0% (2 079 thousand) nights in mountain resorts" (Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Serbia, 2018, p 341).

Table 1: Total values and values by regions of tourist arrivals for the period from 2015 to 2017 in the Republic of Serbia

Year	Total values	Tourist overnight stays per regions				
		Belgrade region	Region of Vojvodina	Region of Šumadija and Western Serbia	Region of Southern and Eastern Serbia	Region of Kosovo and Metohija
2015	2,437,165	807,607	413,332	854,448	361,778	-
		33.1%	16.9%	35.1%	14.8%	
2016	2,753,591	913,150	446,492	996,565	397,384	-
		33.2%	16.2%	36.2%	14.3%	
2017	3,085,866	1,035,205	496,625	1,086,264	467,772	-
		33.5%	16%	35.2%	15.2%	

* Values given in percentages were calculated by authors

Source: Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Serbia, 2018, p. 373; Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Serbia, 2017, p. 377; Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Serbia, 2016, p. 347.

Table 2: Total values and values by regions of tourist overnight stays for the period from 2015 to 2017 in the Republic of Serbia

Year	Total values	Tourist overnight stays per regions				
		Belgrade region	Region of Vojvodina	Region of Šumadija and Western Serbia	Region of Southern and Eastern Serbia	Region of Kosovo and Metohija
2015	6,651,852	1,686,017	994,314	2,904,523	1,066,998	-
		25.3%	14.9%	43.7%	16%	
2016	7,533,739	1,867,150	1,123,923	3,414,123	1,128,543	-
		24.8%	14.9%	45.3%	15%	
2017	8,325,144	2,190,474	1,159,845	3,664,283	1,310,542	-
		26.3%	13.9%	44%	15.7%	

* Values given in percentages were calculated by authors

Source: Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Serbia, 2018, p. 373; Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Serbia, 2017, p. 377; Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Serbia, 2016, p. 347.

From the data in Table 1, it can be perceived that the highest values of the number of tourist arrivals in all three observed years are in the Region of

Sumadija and Western Serbia (in 2015 - 35.1% compared to the total values, in 2016 - 36.2% compared to the total values, in 2017 - 35.2% compared to the total values). The region of Southern and Eastern Serbia has the lowest value of tourist arrivals in the observed period (in 2015 - 14.8% compared to the total values, in 2016 - 14.3% compared to the total values, in 2017 - 15.2% compared to the total values).

The largest number of tourist arrivals in the observed period was recorded in 2016. From the data in Table 2, it can be seen that the highest values of tourist overnight stays in all three observed years are also in the Region of Šumadija and Western Serbia (in 2015 - 43.7% compared to the total values, in 2016 - 45.3 % compared to the total values, in 2017 - 44% compared to the total values).

The region of Vojvodina has the lowest value of the number of tourist overnight stays in the observed period (in 2015 - 14.9% compared to the total values, in 2016 - 14.9% compared to the total values, in 2017 - 13.9 % over total values). The largest number of tourist nights in the observed period was also recorded in 2016.

The key message of the research conducted within the Environmental Protection Agency is that "tourist activity in the Republic of Serbia does not significantly compromise the quality of the environment, and that by monitoring the indicator - number of arrivals and number of tourist overnight stays, tourist traffic in the Republic of Serbia, and thus potential environmental pressures are monitored" (Lekic, 2018, p. 133; Lekic & Jovanovic, 2017, p. 131).

According to official data, "although the Republic of Serbia is not a destination for "mass tourism", tourist arrivals increased by 56.5% in 2014, as well as overnight stays by 53.4%. In 2018, there was a total of 3.43 million tourist arrivals, which makes an increase of 11.2% compared to the previous year, and 9.34 million overnight stays were recorded, that is 12.1% more than in 2017. The number of beds and the number of overnight stays show that in comparison to 2001, in 2018 the capacities of the beds increased by 25% and the overnight stays increased by 29.8%. Such data on the capacity increase indicate increased pressure from infrastructure and construction facilities" (Lekic & Perunovic Culic, 2019, p. 157).

As it was mentioned above, tourist places are classified into five categories: administrative centers, spas, mountain resorts, other tourist sites and other

places. The following tables show the percentages of tourist arrivals and overnight stays in the period from 2016 to 2018, by types of tourist places in the Republic of Serbia, in order to monitor potential environmental pressures.

Table 3: *Tourist arrivals by types of tourist places in the Republic of Serbia, for the period from 2016 to 2018*

Year	Tourist arrivals				
	Administrative centers	Spas	Mountain resorts	Other tourist sites	Other places
2016	38%	17%	19%	22%	4%
2017	38%	17%	18%	23%	4%
2018	38%	17%	17%	23%	5%

Source: *Lekic & Perunovic Culic, 2019, p. 158; Lekic, 2018, p. 134; Lekic, 2017, p. 132*

Table 4: *Tourist overnight stays by types of tourist places in the Republic of Serbia, for the period from 2016 to 2018*

Year	Tourist places				
	Administrative centers	Spas	Mountain resorts	Other tourist sites	Other places
2016	27%	28%	26%	16%	3%
2017	27%	27%	25%	16%	4%
2018	29%	27%	23%	17%	4%

Source: *Lekic & Perunovic Culic, 2019, p. 158; Lekic, 2018, p. 134; Lekic, 2017, p. 133*

From the data presented in Table 3, it can be concluded that the percentages of tourist arrivals in mountain resorts in 2016 were 19%, in 2017 - 18%, and in 2018 - 17%. From the data presented in Table 4, it can be concluded that the percentage of tourist overnight stays in mountain resorts/towns in 2016 was 26%, in 2017 - 25%, and in 2018 - 23%. Out of five categories of tourist resorts, mountain resorts, on average, occupy the third place both in tourist arrivals and tourist overnight stays.

According to official data, "measured by the number of arrivals, tourists were the most numerous in the main administrative centers with 1,308,638 arrivals, while the arrivals in mountain and spa resorts were 596,313 and 596,884 respectively. Measured by the number of overnight stays, administrative centers had the highest traffic (2,707,776 overnight stays),

spa and mountain resorts/towns (respectively 2,542,391 and 2,172,906 nights)" (Lekic & Perunovic Culic, 2019, p. 158).

It should also be emphasized that "the protected natural regions represent the goods of great significance for tourism development. Bearing in mind that the negative impact of tourism on the environment is reflected, above all, on natural resources and biodiversity, sustainable management of protected natural regions is an essential condition for the increase of the tourist traffic" (Lekic, 2018, p. 134). Article 3 of the Law on Environmental Protection ("Official Gazette of the RS", No. 135/2004, ... 95/2018 - state law) stipulates that the environment is a set of natural and man-made values whose complex mutual relations make up the environment, i.e. area and conditions for life, while protected natural good is a well-preserved part of nature with special values and characteristics (geodiversity, biodiversity, scenery, landscape, etc.), due to which they have permanent ecological, scientific, cultural, educational, health-recreational, tourist and other significance, and therefore as a public good it enjoys special protection.

In 2017, a total of 101 ecologically significant areas were recorded in the Republic of Serbia, in accordance with the Regulation on the Ecological Network of the Government of the Republic of Serbia ("RS Official Gazette", No. 102/10). According to the Indicator Review of Economic Potentials and Activities of Importance for the Environment of the Republic of Serbia for 2017, it is stated that "monthly analysis of tourist arrivals and overnight stays indicates that in the summer months the highest traffic is present, which means that during this period there is the greatest pressure on biodiversity and water resources. Bearing in mind that the negative impacts of tourism are reflected, first of all, on biodiversity and protected natural areas, monitoring of protected areas in the segment of tourist activity is introduced "(Economic Potentials and Activities of Importance for the Environment of the Republic of Serbia for 2017 – Indicator Review, 2018, p.37).

According to the official data of the Environmental Protection Agency, "measured by the number of arrivals and overnight stays, in the period from 2010 to 2018., the most attractive regions for tourists are Zlatibor (Nature Park) and Kopaonik (National Park), then Tara (National Park) and Divčebare. Tourists were less likely to visit other mountains that are covered by some form of nature protection, such as Goč (Special Nature Reserve), Stara Planina and Mokra Gora which are Nature Parks. The analysis of arrivals and overnight stays by months indicates that Zlatibor is

evenly visited throughout the year. Kopaonik, as the largest ski center in the Republic of Serbia, has significantly more visitors in the winter, and Tara is the most visited during the spring and summer" (Lekic & Perunovic Culic, 2019, p. 159).

Conclusion

It is particularly important to consider the environmental impact of tourism, especially in recent decades when tourism has flourished globally. If one considers the relationship between tourism and the environment, besides the positive ones, there are numerous negative effects of the impact of tourism, which manifest primarily in the form of pollution of environmental elements, the destruction of flora and fauna, the degradation of cultural and historical monuments, and the banalization of space, etc. Bearing in mind the topic of the paper, the research was based on the analysis of the value of tourist arrivals and overnight stays in the Republic of Serbia for the three-year period from 2015 to 2017, then on the analysis of the balance of tourist traffic by types of tourist places (for the three-year period from 2016 to 2018), and a special focus was on the intensity of tourism in mountain towns. Of the five categories of tourist resorts, mountain resorts/towns occupy the third place in terms of tourist arrivals and tourist overnight stays. The key message so far is that tourism activity in the Republic of Serbia does not significantly threaten the quality of the environment, however, given that the negative impacts of tourism are reflected primarily on biodiversity and protected natural areas, it is necessary to introduce monitoring of protected areas in the tourist segment activity, especially in mountain towns, as a special category of tourist places in the Republic of Serbia.

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