

THE IMPACT OF THE COVID 19 PANDEMIC ON THE TOURIST ECONOMIES OF THE BALKAN COUNTRIES

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Abstract

The task of this paper is to investigate the extent to which the tourism industry of the Balkan countries is affected by the pandemic crisis. Available statistical data, historical method and method of analysis and comparison were used in measuring and estimating the economic losses suffered by this group of countries due to the pandemic. The paper will also analyze the perspectives of tourism development in these countries in the post-COVID period, having in mind their specifics, the structure of the offer of tourist services, and the positions they previously had in the international tourism economy.

Keywords: Balkan countries, economy, pandemic COVID 19, tourism

JEL Classification: Z3, L8, F2

COVID 19 PANDEMİSİNİN BALKAN ÜLKELERİNİN TURİST EKONOMİSİNE ETKİSİ

Öz

Bu makalenin görevi, Balkan ülkelerinin turizm endüstrisinin pandemi krizinden ne ölçüde etkilendiğini araştırmaktır. Bu grup ülkelerin pandemi nedeniyle uğradıkları ekonomik kayıpların ölçülmesinde ve tahmin edilmesinde mevcut istatistiksel veriler, tarihsel yöntem ve analiz ve karşılaştırma yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Makale ayrıca, bu ülkelerin özelliklerini, turizm hizmetlerinin sunum yapısını ve uluslararası turizm ekonomisinde daha önce sahip oldukları konumları göz önünde bulundurarak, COVID sonrası dönemde bu ülkelerde turizmin gelişme perspektiflerini analiz edecektir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Balkan ülkeleri, ekonomi, pandemi COVID 19, Turizm.

JEL Sınıflaması: Z3, L8, F2

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1. Introduction

From an economic and historical point of view, all Balkan countries except Turkey and Greece belong to the group of countries in transition. This group can be further divided into EU member states (Slovenia, Romania, Bulgaria, and Croatia) and non-member countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, and Northern Macedonia). This division is extremely important from the aspect of analyzing the dynamics of development of the service sector in these countries, increasing the share of that sector in the structure of their economies, and increasing the share of services in their exports. Starting from the 1980s until today, the Balkan countries have followed the trends of the global economy in their economic development and paid a lot of attention to inclusion in international economic flows. The structure of their foreign trade is in line with the trends of modern international trade that apply generally in the global economy and also in the European Union. The main feature of the structure of that trade is that the services sector has a dominant share in it, within which, in the last two decades, the rapid growth of the share of tourist services has been noticeable. That growth was interrupted in early 2020 due to the global pandemic of the COVID 19 virus. As an industry that shows a high degree of sensitivity to crises, tourism has suffered enormous economic damage. The crisis caused by the pandemic differs in its characteristics from other crises that have an economic cause. The unpredictable transformation of the virus and the possibility of easy transmission completely stopped tourist travel on a global level in the first months of the pandemic, and in that period, almost all tourist and catering companies suspended their activities.

The discovery of the vaccine gave a new chance to continue the active development of tourism where it left off at the end of 2019. Today, tourist trips are possible everywhere in the world, even in the Balkans, with certain restrictions and respect for measures against the pandemic. However, the nature of the virus and the tendency towards mutations and increasingly contagious strains, the unavailability of the vaccine in all parts of the world, as well as the resistance of the world's population to the vaccine, are determinants of the future of tourism globally, in the Balkans. In the economic sense, the previous year left deep consequences on tourism, and these negative effects will remain present in the long run. In the period after the pandemic, a strategy should be found for the recovery and further development of tourism in the Balkans, which will be based on the comparative advantages of each country separately. The tourist offer will be of high quality if it is tailored to meet the needs of tourists and at the same time 1 feature of countries in transition (McKinsey Global Institute). The turn towards the development of the services sector and the dynamics of the development of that sector in the countries in transition can be seen primarily as their strategy for a more efficient transition to the concept of market economy and faster integration into the international market (Božić Miljković, 2018: 89). When it comes to changing the economic structure of the Balkan countries in favor of greater participation of services, it should be noted that at the beginning of this process, not all Balkan countries had equal starting positions, but in some of them, the process was faster, in others slower, with incentives branches and activities for the development of which they have comparative advantages. For example, Turkey, Greece, Croatia, and Albania, thanks to their geographical location and potential for the development of coastal tourism, already had a traditionally developed tourism and hospitality sector. During the transition period, they continued to develop and strengthen these sectors by introducing new service branches and activities in the field of banking, insurance, telecommunications, transport, and the like.

In other Balkan countries, in the pre-transition period, the industrial sector was recognized as a carrier of economic development (Uvalić and Cvijanović, 2018: 21). Entering the transition process and changing the economic system in favor of greater participation of services in the creation of GDP, was a great challenge for them. The applied measures and results of economic policies pursued during the first two decades of the transition process are still the subject of numerous analyzes and criticisms. The application of the concept of deindustrialization, the results of which were significantly contrary to expectations and which caused great damage to countries in transition, is especially criticized. The shift of the focus of development policy from industry to other activities and branches, especially those in the services sector, was conditioned, among other things, by the need to compensate for the negative effects of deindustrialization (Przywara, 2017: 431). The service sector has developed and strengthened with the privatization and opening of the markets of these countries to foreign companies in the field of telecommunications, finance, insurance, logistics and transport of passengers and goods, and the like. Liberalization of capital, goods, and services in transition countries had, in addition to economic and political aspects, that is determined by the need for progress of this group of countries in the process of approaching the European Union and other international integrations.

Table 1. Trade in services in the Balkan countries (%GDP)

	1990.	2000.	2005.	2010.	2015.	2019.
Albania	3.0	25.5	32.9	38.5	34.4	40.6
Bosnia and Herzegovina	-	13.0	12.7	13.1	13.9	15.4
Bulgaria	7.0	29.0	26.0	19.8	25.8	25.4
Croatia	-	29.7	28.0	24.9	30.9	36.5
N. Macedonia	-	19.0	19.7	19.2	26.5	26.0
Greece	9.8	23.6	19.8	19.4	26.4	31.5
Romania	3.6	9.5	15.4	11.3	17.2	20.3
Serbia	-	-	-	16.9	21.9	27.9
Montenegro	-	-	-	35.8	44.9	47.9
Slovenia	-	16.4	19.1	23.0	26.4	29.5
Turkey	7.4	10.1	7.9	7.2	9.4	12.0

Source: <https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-indicators>; Accessed on August/2021

At the beginning of the observed period, almost all Balkan countries recorded a rapid growth of the share of services in GDP. In the group of countries in transition, such a trend can be explained by the application of the postulates of this process, which, following the example of Western European economies, initiated faster development of the services sector. In the period between 2005 and 2010, due to the negative effects of the global economic crisis, most countries recorded a decrease in the share of trade in services in GDP compared to that in the previous period. The recovery took place in the period between 2010 and 2015, and stable growth of the observed parameter was observed in all countries except Albania.

In some of them, lower values of that growth were recorded during the world economic crisis, but those reduced values did not last in the long run, ie the recovery in this sector of the economy was fast with stable parameters. Taken as a whole, we can say that the Balkans today, in European relations, is a respectable area of export of services with a realized value of exports of close to 197 billion dollars in 2019 (UNCTAD). Also, in the same year, this region was promoted as a significant importer of services with a value of 100 billion dollars (UNCTAD). Some countries in this region are considered to be important exporters of services on a global scale and are characterized by the fact that their exports of services are many times higher in value than exports of goods. That group of countries includes Albania, which in 2019 exported goods worth 1,015 million dollars, and services worth 3,808 million dollars, then Croatia, whose value of exports of goods in the same year amounted to 14,371 million dollars, and the value of exports of services 16,702 million dollars, Greece, with exports of goods worth \$ 36,308 million and services worth \$ 44,876 million, and Montenegro with a realized value of exports of goods of \$ 520 million and a value of exports of services of \$ 1,895 million (<https://data.worldbank.org>). Regarding the sectoral structure of trade in services, there are large differences between the Balkan countries, and they are presented in Table 2 through the percentage share of certain categories of services in the total values of imports and exports of services.

Table 2: Sectoral structure of trade in services in the Balkan countries in 2019 (in %)

	Import				Export			
	Goods-related-services	Transport	Tourism	Others	Goods-related-services	Transport	Tourism	Others
Albania	0.2	16.8	60.0	22.9	21.2	8.9	44.0	25.9
Bosnia and Herzegovina	1.6	39.3	20.3	38.7	20.5	27.3	26.8	25.4
Bulgaria	2.3	26.8	23.2	47.7	5.9	20.9	20.4	52.7
Croatia	3.2	16.5	18.4	61.8	5.5	10.0	54.2	30.3
Greece	2.1	64.9	5.0	28.0	0.7	60.9	19.3	19.1
Montenegro	0.9	46.6	5.5	47.1	0.7	39.4	21.8	38.1
N. Macedonia	0.4	30.6	13.0	56.0	19.4	24.3	15.2	41.0
Romania	2.8	18.9	19.1	59.3	12.4	29.1	5.3	53.2
Serbia	2.1	24.1	19.4	54.4	4.9	16.1	17.7	61.3
Slovenia	2.1	23.5	12.8	61.6	4.3	33.9	15.7	46.0
Turkey	3.1	35.5	4.3	57.1	4.6	41.5	29.8	24.1

Source: <https://data.wto.org> Accessed on August/2021

The data presented in the table refer to those sectors that have a dominant share in the structure of services. These are goods-related services which include manufacturing services, maintenance, and repair services, and freight transport and insurance as a subcomponent of transport (UN stats); then, transport services and tourist services.

Based on the data, it can be concluded that the expansion of the development of the services sector over the last two decades, especially in the group of countries in transition, has led to an increasing share of services in the structure of their trade. In addition to traditional service sectors such as transport and tourism, there has been a development of trade and other services such as financial, educational, health, business and professional services, communication services, environmental services, etc. (WTO). In most of the observed countries, transport services have a dominant share in the structure of imports of services. The exceptions are Albania, Croatia, and Romania, in whose structure of services imports, tourism services have the largest share. The situation is similar on the side of exports of services, where the share of tourist services in the structure is Albania, where exports of this type of services account for more than a third of total exports, and Croatia, where exports of tourist services account for more than half of total exports.

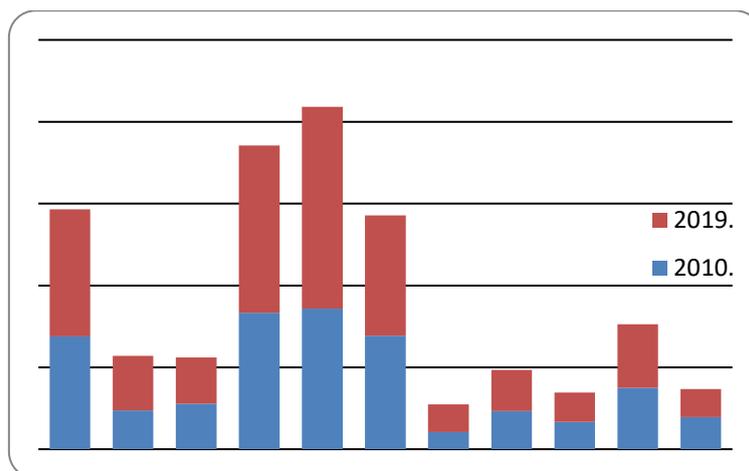
2. Tourism as a generator of economic development in the Balkans

In addition to the economic aspect of tourist services, their political, cultural and social aspect is also important. These aspects of non-economic nature are especially important in parts of the world that have had a negative image due to political instability and where trade in tourist services has the function to improve that image and at the same time contribute to achieving positive economic effects. Such an area in the Balkans, especially the part of it that consists of countries in transition, in which the last decade of the last century was marked by sanctions from the international community, war conflicts, and NATO aggression. In that period, they were marked as a particularly risky zone for tourist trips, and that, even long after the situation calmed down, hurt their export of tourist services. Thanks to the turbulent past of the Balkan peoples and historical events that have left a deep mark in this geographical area, the Balkans have not been recognized as an attractive tourist destination for a long time, nor have the potentials for tourism development been used. The development of the tourist economy in this area came only in the 70s of the last century when the Balkan countries identified their comparative advantages, cultural features, and natural beauties and needed their tourist and economic valorization. The fusion of different nations, cultures, and religions in this area, which took place in earlier historical periods, due to frequent conflicts between them, was often an obstacle to the development of tourism, but on the other hand, had a great impact on cultural heritage and ethnogenesis. Today, the Balkans is an area that has the characteristics of Balkan-Slavic, Islamic-Oriental, Central European, and Western European culture, which makes it specific in the tourist valorization of space and mapping of Balkan countries as tourist destinations. The development of the tourism economy in the Balkans has not been smooth. Tourism, as an economic branch, first developed in Greece, the former Yugoslavia, Turkey, and Romania. At the end of the last century, Bulgaria also promoted its tourist offer and became recognizable by its summer and winter tourist centers, while Albania developed its tourist economy only in the first decade of this century. The Balkans, as a geographical area, has numerous features that make it an attractive tourist destination in Europe and the world. Temperate-continental and partly Mediterranean climate, a large number of hours of sunshine per year, access to the Adriatic, Ionian, Aegean, Mediterranean, and Black Seas, mountain ranges of the Dinarides, Shar-Pind Mountains, and the Balkan Mountains along the southeastern part of the peninsula, thermal springs provide an opportunity for the development of summer, winter and spa tourism. Untouched nature, especially in the hilly and mountainous part of the region, affects the development of adventure tourism and some types of ecological and health tourism. In recent years, rural tourism has been increasingly promoted as a Balkan brand among tourist services (Metodijeski and Temelkov, 2014: 231).

The basis of this type of tourist offer is family farms arranged in such a way as to provide the opportunity for a peaceful holiday filled with various facilities such as picking herbs, mushrooms, or wild fruits, learning old crafts, and learning about cultural and historical sights in the area. Contrary to this form of tourism, city break tourism has been developing rapidly in the Balkans in recent years. Unlike rural tourism, which bears the epithet Balkan brand, city break tourism is one of the European brands. As in Europe, this type of tourism takes place in metropolises and large cities, so Athens, Thessaloniki, Belgrade, Istanbul, Skopje, Ljubljana, Zagreb, and other larger cities are especially interesting in the Balkans, providing opportunities for rich nightlife and accompanying urban areas. contents such as catering facilities, shopping malls, cultural and entertainment facilities, etc. From the 1970s until today, the tourism economy in the Balkans has developed significantly, and in some of them, it has become the engine of economic development. In the last two decades, the development of tourism in the Balkan countries has been faster, the tourist offers more substantial, and tourist services have an increasing share in the structure of exports of services. When we talk about the positive economic effects of the growing share of services in general, and within them the tourist services in the structure of exports of the Balkan countries, it should be noted that they are most visible in improving their balance of payments positions. Many Balkan countries face a high and chronic trade deficit, while on the other hand, they have a surplus in the export of tourist services. In that way, the balance of payments is corrected and balanced, and services become a generator of the economic growth of exporting countries. Also, the development of tourism in the Balkans has effects on reducing unemployment, due to the constant need to employ permanent and seasonal workers. Based on the data from Graph 2, we can conclude that in all balanced countries in the previous ten years the share of employees in tourism in total employment has increased.

The largest increases were recorded in Albania, Croatia, Greece and Bosnia and Herzegovina, while other countries also recorded growth but much more moderate than the mentioned countries.

Graph 2: Travel and tourism direct contribution to employment – share of total employment in %



Source:

https://tcdata360.worldbank.org/indicators/tot.direct.emp?country=TUR&indicator=24644&viz=line_chart&years=1995,2028 Accessed on August/2021

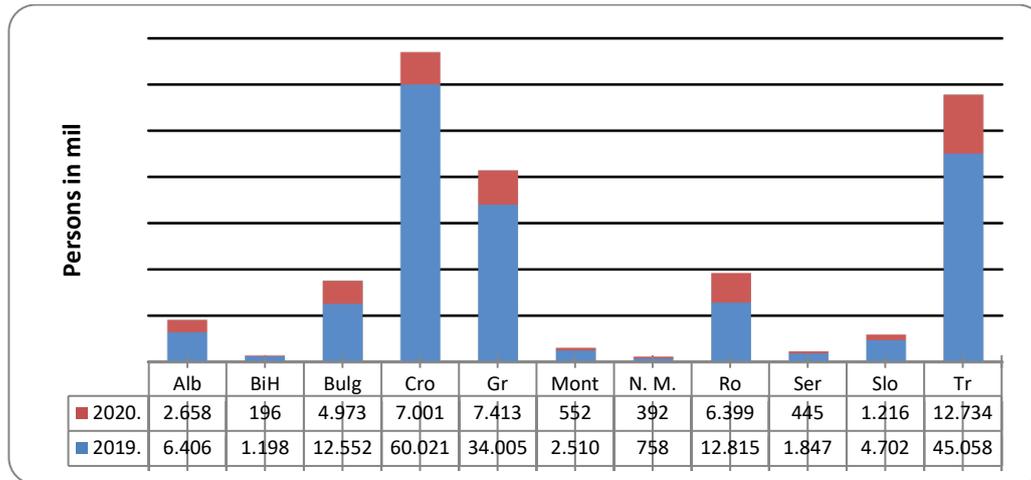
Certain types of occupations in tourism are suitable for the employment of women, which in some developed tourist countries amounts to up to 70% of the total number of employees. (Unković and Zečević, 2016: 221). As part of the positive implications that the development of the tourism economy has on the economies of the Balkan countries, we should also mention those related to investments in the development of tourism. Due to foreign direct investments, many Balkan countries can boast of modern accommodation facilities built on the reputation of those that exist in well-known European tourist centers, as well as ancillary facilities that complement the tourist offer and make it better.

These positive trends in the development of tourism in the Balkans were interrupted at the end of 2019 by the appearance of the COVID 19 virus and the pandemic that soon followed, partially or completely limiting economic, social, and cultural-entertainment activities. In the year of the pandemic, tourism in each of the Balkan countries suffered huge economic losses, and recovery from the negative consequences will have a long-term perspective.

3. Consequences of the COVID-19 virus pandemic on the development of tourism in the Balkans

The first case of infection with the COVID 19 virus was recorded at the end of 2019 in the Chinese city of Wuhan. Transmission of the virus from China across Asia, the United States, and Europe occurred just two months after the first case was isolated, and the speed with which the infection spread and the dynamics with which its negative impact spread to all segments of the economy marked a prelude to a global crisis (Ceylan et al, 2020: 820). The negative effects of the pandemic, already in the first weeks after its outbreak, mostly affected those sectors of the economy in which there is a large fluctuation of people and direct contact between people that cannot be reduced to epidemiologically controlled frameworks. Such sectors are tourism and catering, creative industry, transport, storage, processing industry, etc. (Chamber of Commerce of Serbia). Tourism is one of those activities that show high sensitivity when it comes to crisis events that bring into question any aspect of tourist safety or the environment (Abbas et al, 2021: 4). In this context, the impact of the pandemic on tourism trends should be observed and the result of that impact should be expressed by measuring the economic effects caused by the absence of tourism industry activities. The negative effects of the pandemic on tourism are more pronounced in those countries where tourism has a large share in the creation of GDP, ie those that generate significant revenues from the export of tourist services. Among the Balkan countries are Montenegro, Croatia, Turkey, and Greece. During the years of the pandemic crisis, the economies of these countries suffered great damage due to the travel ban, and tourism, in most of them, temporarily lost the role of the leading economic activity and generator of economic development.

Graph 2: Arrivals of foreign citizens in Balkan countries 2019/2020



Source:

https://tcdata360.worldbank.org/indicators/ST.INT.ARVL?country=BRA&indicator=1841&viz=line_chart&years=1995,2019 Accessed at August/2021

Comparative analysis of data from Graph 1, based on the author's budget, we can conclude that, due to the pandemic, tourism suffered the most negative consequences in Croatia, where there were 88.3% fewer arrivals of foreign tourists in 2020 compared to 2019, Bosnia And Herzegovina 83.6%, Greece 78.2% and Montenegro where the number of foreign tourists in the observed period decreased by 78%. The common feature of these four countries is that they are recognized for the export of tourist services and popular destinations for winter and summer tourism. In other words, tourist services are a very important export brand in these countries. In such countries, exports of services can to some extent compensate for the deficit on the export side of goods, but this is usually not enough to ensure stable and sustainable economic growth. If a country exports tourist services but imports durable consumer goods partly to make its offer better, it will significantly limit the development opportunities of that economy (Gligorov, V, 2012). For countries like Greece, Croatia, or Montenegro to ensure sustainable consumption growth, it is necessary to develop industrial production (Gligorov, V, 2012). This is necessary to, on the one hand, reduce the import of industrial products and support the development of tourism by domestic industry, and on the other hand, to increase revenues and contribute to macroeconomic stability by exporting goods. In other observed countries, calculated based on the data from Graph 1, a significant decrease in the number of foreign tourists was recorded by Serbia (75.9%) Slovenia (74.1%), Turkey (71.7%), Bulgaria (60.4%), Albania (58.5%) and Romania (50.1%). Northern Macedonia is the only Balkan country in which the decline in the number of foreign tourists in 2020 compared to 2019 was lower than 50%. The analysis of these data should take into account the fact that the Balkan countries during the summer tourist season had milder travel restrictions than most Western European countries. In that way, the tourist traffic was realized to a certain extent, and foreign tourists were travelers from the neighboring countries of the region. With a negative PCR test, in 2020, in one part of the summer tourist season, it was possible to spend the summer in Turkey, Albania, Montenegro, and Bulgaria. Thus, in these countries, the damage that would have occurred in the tourism economy if the policy of complete closure of border crossings had been applied has been minimally mitigated.

In addition to the fact that the decline in business activities in the tourism sector is reflected in the turnover of goods, it certainly has implications for the turnover of ancillary services that make the tourist offer meaningful and complete. Reducing the export of tourist services reduces the need to perform business activities in other services such as restaurant services, entertainment, transport, wellness and spa, and various other services that complement the tourist offer. Considering that the pandemic crisis started just at the beginning of the preparations for the summer tourist season and continued during the winter months, a significant part of investments in tourism was lost in that period, which will have long-term consequences for the economies of all Balkan countries. The negative effects of the pandemic on the tourism economies of the Balkan countries can be expressed in other indicators, such as the number of employees in tourism. The voluntary suspension of business activities that occurred at the beginning of 2020, which was initially believed to be short-lived, took a chronic course and covered every tourist season.

Many catering and tourism companies have suffered huge financial losses, some of them have gone bankrupt and workers have lost their jobs. Tourism sector, which is a sector based entirely on human workforce and mass gathering of people, is one of the first sectors that was banned suddenly with Covid-19 and lost its importance instantly (Ozen, 2020: 110). For example: in Croatia in 2019, 41,000 workers were employed in tourism and catering, and in 2020 that number dropped to 34,800; In Greece, in 2019 the number of employees in tourism and catering was 824,700, and in 2020 759,300; Turkey had 2.62 million employed tourist workers in 2019 and 2.19 million in 2020. The decrease in the number of employees in tourism and catering was also recorded in Slovenia from 98,700 workers in 2019 to 94,100 in 2020 (Chamber Investment Forum WB 6). The decrease in employment in tourism was recorded in all Balkan countries, but the ones most affected were those in which tourism has the status of a leading or one of the most important economic activities, such as Croatia, Greece, and Turkey. The decline in demand for tourist travel and catering services indicates a decline in demand for industrial, agricultural, and other products, as well as for many activities that monitor and support the work of the tourism industry (transport, insurance, finance, etc.) (Riestyaningrum et al, 2020: 240). These activities also had a reduction in the number of employees during the pandemic year. In addition to the drastic reduction in the number of tourist arrivals in the Balkans and based on that, the reduction in tourism revenues and the number of employees, another in a series of negative consequences of the pandemic is stopping or postponing investments in tourist facilities. Most Balkan countries, especially non-EU transition countries, do not have their accumulation but show a high degree of development dependence on foreign capital inflows. The method of attracting investors is similar in all of them and is based on simple administrative procedures, subsidies to the investor, reduction of corporate income tax, allowing the investor to repatriate profits, and equal treatment of domestic and foreign investors. Investments in the tourism industry are higher in volume and value in those Balkan countries that are recognized as important tourist destinations: Turkey, Greece, Montenegro, Albania. According to the data of the Investment Agency of Montenegro, there are about 400 business entities in that country, whose owners are citizens of Turkey. The largest investors in the tourism industry of Greece come from the countries of the European Union: Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and France (www.mfa.gr), while the development of tourism in Albania is mostly supported by Italian companies, but also Turkey and Arab countries. Numerous investment projects in all of these countries have been halted at the start of the pandemic and postponed for a period when business activities in tourism will return to normal.

4. Perspectives of tourism development in the Balkans in the period after the pandemic crisis – concluding remarks

Tourism is a very important factor in the economic development of most Balkan countries and its survival is a regional issue. In the period after the pandemic, the development of tourism in the Balkan countries will be led by the same factors that will apply to all other countries in the global tourism economy. Tourism is the industry that is most sensitive to emergencies in the world; pandemics, terrorist attacks, war conflicts, but it is also a branch that shows a high degree of resilience and recovers quickly after a crisis period (Nientied and Shutina, 2020: 8). The peculiarity of this pandemic crisis is that it cannot be compared to any previous world crisis in terms of the uncertainty it brings in terms of the development course and duration. All the more so for the tourist economy to survive, survive and adapt to the new conditions in the circumstances of the "new normality". This involves building systems that can withstand shocks and stressors and quickly regain balance (Calgaro et al, 2014: 351). A very important element of this system would be crisis management composed of experts trained in crisis management in tourism. Then, the concept of supply diversity: There are countries whose tourist offer is based on only one landmark or only one type of tourism. For example, many Balkan countries are narrowly oriented in their tourist offer to beach tourism or mountain tourism, so they are recognized in the region and beyond, and cannot change their offer in a short time to, for example, nature or rural tourism as a dominant product. A diversified tourist offer consisted of one dominant tourist product, but also other sights that are attractive to tourists can prevent or reduce the losses that the tourist economy suffers as a result of the influence of exogenous negative factors in times of crisis. Finally, innovation in tourism can be a reliable tool in combating the crisis and limiting the effects of its negative effects. Productivity in the field of innovation or their adoption and rapid implementation in modern tourism means that there is a possibility for constant contact between tourists and tourism service providers, conducting sales without personal contact, and maintaining a continuous exchange of information.

When it comes to the introduction and application of innovations in tourism, digitalization stands out as an ongoing process of recent date that has several manifestations, and from the aspect of tourism companies means a comparative advantage. Thanks to digitalization in the provision of tourist services, time and money are saved by the tourist service provider and tourists as end-users: it is possible to buy a tourist arrangement online, make accommodation reservations, buy plane tickets or tickets for museums, and shows. Also, tourists have at their disposal numerous mobile applications designed according to their needs and type of travel (Nikolskaya et al, 2019: 1198).

The benefits of the introduction of digitalization in the field of tourist services became visible during the pandemic, especially at the beginning of this year, when tourist trips started again under rigorous conditions and with obligatory respect for protection measures. Providing services electronically before and during travel without direct personal contact means less possibility of transmitting the infection during travel, which is of great importance in times of new virus strains and new pandemic waves.

The pandemic crisis is still going on and, although tourist trips have been possible this year, the performance of the tourist economy from 2019 is difficult to achieve. This is true both globally and for all Balkan countries. The revival of tourism this year has been guided by a short-term perspective, and based on this year's tourist trends, it cannot be concluded with certainty what the dynamics of tourist travel will be after the pandemic or how it will be realized.

What can be predicted with certainty is that tourist trips will be conditioned by the behavior of tourists, ie their decisions whether to travel, in what way and to which destinations. In services research in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, risk management has been identified as a significant factor influencing an individual's belief that the threat of a pandemic is under control (Rahman et al, 2021). The behavior of tourists and their decision-making in extraordinary circumstances and the period immediately after the danger depends on numerous subjective and emotional factors such as the psychological sense of security and safety. The cognitive image of tourists about previous trips provides an opportunity for intentions regarding future trips to be motivated by previous positive experiences (Rasoolimanesh et al, 2021: 3). As for the Balkan countries, the question is how much potential they have to attract tourists from Europe who are reluctant to go to various European and world popular destinations. The potential of the Balkan tourist offer is certainly not strong to that extent. Also, the answer to the question still cannot be found: will tourists look for urban resorts or will they prefer to choose quieter areas (Lew et al, 2020: 460). From the aspect of the tourist offer of the Balkan countries, it is also unknown whether popular cities with high tourist density such as Kotor in Montenegro or Mostar in Bosnia and Herzegovina will continue to attract many tourists or visitors will look for places with more opportunities for physical distance.

Researchers in the travel and tourism industries have a very important task to rethink and reshape revival strategies to bring back the following normal economic activities (Aliperti et al., 2019). Accordingly, the COVID-19 tourism impacts and related research will increase awareness by educating the masses, nurturing, reshaping, and handling such an economic crisis by implanting innovation and change to revive the industry (Abbas et al., 2021). The pandemic crisis has left numerous negative consequences that will limit the full economic valorization of tourist destinations around the world for many years to come. However, the crisis has another positive side that will be expressed in the behavior of tourists in the future, and that is that ethics will be as important as the aesthetics or beauty of the destination (Santos Del Valle, 2020: 25). Due to increased environmental and social awareness, tourists will give priority to those destinations that take care of sustainable development, use renewable energy sources, have developed waste recycling systems and healthy drinking water. That may be an advantage of the Balkan countries. Even before the pandemic, most of them based their tourist offer on the principles of sustainable development and promoted natural beauty and a healthy environment.

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