attendance. With adequate investments, at the state level, in present tourist facilities, accommodation options should be expanded and enrich the tourist offer. Natural resources presented by rare biocenosis are certainly very interesting for tourists but all measures should be taken to ensure their protection and sustainability. Archaeological site of Lepenski Vir is important and should be preserved and used as a special tourist attraction. Together with ethno-tourism, it is possible to develop branded products that are authentic such as Homolje honey, Wines of Negotinska Krajina and other products specific to the Lower Danube.

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STATE OF TOURISM IN REPUBLIC OF SERBIA DURING THE PERIOD OF ECONOMIC SLOWDOWN[5]

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Abstract

Serbia has on its disposal various natural resources, rich cultural and historical heritage, relatively developed physical and social infrastructure, as well as good accommodation and catering facilities.

Registered increase in arrivals of foreign tourists (mostly from EU), along with the impact of global economic crisis, could be a great chance for Serbian tourism, having in mind that the cost of desired tourist services in Serbia is relatively lower compared with some traditional destinations in surrounding. The guests had started identifying Serbia, during the period of crisis, as an alternative tourist destination.

The aim of this paper is to analyse current state of tourist industry in Republic of Serbia, and to show that, during the recession period, it can be assigned more significant

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[5] This paper is a part of research in the projects: III 46006 – *Sustainable agriculture and rural development in the function of accomplishing strategic objectives of the Republic of Serbia in the Danube region*, 179015 and 179001,financed by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia.

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role to it than it currently has in the economy. Moreover we suggest that larger investments in tourism are economically feasible, as it is proved that developed tourism successfully can repay all debts to national economy.

Key words: tourism, Republic of Serbia, recession

Introduction

Republic of Serbia is located in the centre of Balkan Peninsula. Its surface is 88,361 km^2 and has around 7.5 million inhabitants. It is situated on the route of two major European traffic corridors – VII and X. The shortest distance between Europe and Near East leads across Serbia. At the time, it can be described as relatively underdeveloped country that struggles to become an EU member state, by taking all necessary measures in that direction (Katić et al, 2009).

For Serbia, tourism is one of the vital sectors of the economy, which has a significant participation in the creation of GDP. It employs a large section of the working population and it greatly affects economic, infrastructural and social development of many local communities.

The crisis emerged in the second half of 2008 and quickly grew into a deep global economic recession. It spread from the USA, over developed western countries to almost every country in the world, simultaneously affecting many innocent countries that did not cause it. Crisis was characterized by the collapse of global finances, followed by the slowdown in economic activity and trade at first, and then by the global world recession. It did not avoid Serbia, leaving a deep impact on all sectors of the economy and society. Unfortunately the crisis did not spare national tourism, which was hit by the weak demand for services it provides, along with slowdown in its development and decreased potential contribution to creation of total GDP.

Methodology and data sources

In the research we have used wide range of available secondary data sources including statistical data of the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia and the National Bank of Serbia. In the theoretical section we have reviewed current scientific and professional literature related to the paper topic. The research was conducted on data focusing on the period of 2005-2012 and it was mostly based on the *desktop study* method. The data collected are presented in several tables in accordance to standard mathematical-statistical methods.

Results with discussion

According to widely accepted economic concept, that two key factors for the tourism development are availability of time and surplus of assets, there is no sustainable development of tourism in the sense of «existence of good tourist offer» without adequate economic development. This indicates to unbreakable relation between tourism and economy, considering that developed tourism later successfully repays all debts to national economy (Vujovic et al, 2011). Petković et al (2011) claim that the impact of tourism on economic development initiated the creation of the concept named *Development driven by tourism*, as tourism in the modern economies has a growing role in achieving certain macroeconomic objectives: high level of employment, growth of less developed and marginal territories, strengthening of the country's balance of payment through export and foreign direct investments.

Tourism as an activity, besides factors that initiate tourist demands, depends primarily on the strength, quality, innovation and exclusivity of the offer of certain destination. That usually includes natural resources, rich cultural and historical heritage and anthropogenic resources, certain level of development of physical (roads, energy network, water supply, telecommunications, etc.) and social infrastructure (availability of health centres, cultural, sports and recreation facilities, etc.), and above all capacity and quality of available accommodation and catering facilities. The cumulate value of all those factors drives tourist demand, which in other words means that it triggers tourist migration to specific localities at different territorial levels.

Current *Strategy of Development of Tourism in the Republic of Serbia* (2006) has determined the strategic potentials for development of tourism, among which the most important are:

- positive attitude of the local population towards understanding the idea of tourism (cordiality and hospitality);
- geostrategic position which interlaces several historical and cultural complexes;
- reliance on unused potential of ground and surface water (many thermal wellsprings and spas, rivers and lakes);
- unique landscapes of untouched nature of many mountain and forest complexes, agricultural areas, vineyard regions and hunting-fishing zones;
- rich archaeological and architectural heritage as a testimony to

the civilization contribution of Serbia (medieval monasteries and archaeological sites).

Additionally, competitiveness and image of national tourist offer must be based on the available human capital; good position within traffic network of Europe; spiritual creativity; tendencies to organization of thematically different festivals and events; specificities of local gastronomy; etc.

On the other hand, successful national tourism offer largely depends on the capability to adjust and overcome the impact of noticed weaknesses which include:

- in general Serbia is not recognized as a touristic destination (non-existence of a national tourism brand, level of commercialization of recognizable tourist products is to low, promotional activities are reduced because of limited budget);
- lack of national and regional tourism visions;
- inadequate coordination and communication between public sector and relevant stakeholders in this sector of economy;
- often unclear spatial and urban planning legislation in certain tourist destinations;
- insufficient protection and no sanctions for damages made to main natural and cultural resources;
- low level of awareness about importance of the system of experience in tourism and establishment of entire value chain at domestic tourism products;
- limited accessibility to tourist destinations in Serbia (small number of functional airports and ports – passenger terminals, modern highways, as well as general disrepair of road, rail and river infrastructure);
- lack of internationally qualified tourist managers and staff;
- low labour mobility; etc.

In accordance with perceived strengths and weaknesses, the national tourism should recognize its developmental opportunities in: initiating economic growth and internal employment; strengthening of the achieved level of life quality of local population by attracting foreign tour operators; establishment of worldwide recognizable image; establishment of sustainable system of protection and integral management under natural and cultural resources; adjustment of quality of provided services to current international standards in protection of tourist consumers; etc.

According to *World Travel and Tourism Council* (WTTC) during the period of 2005-2012, range of tourism direct contribution to total GDP in Serbia was from 1.2% in 2005 to 1.6% in 2012, with a forecast of small further growth in 2013. Unfortunately, such a share is quite below the world average of 5.2% in 2012, or achieved contributions in neighbouring countries (Croatia 11.9%, Montenegro 9.9%, Greece 6.5%, Bulgaria 3.8%, Bosnia and Herzegovina 2.5%, etc.).

Leisure travel spending (including both international and domestic guests) generated the major part of the tourism GDP with 98.2% in 2012, and dominated over business travel spending. At the same time, foreign visitors have had stronger contribution with 55.2%. During the previous year tourism directly created 24,500 jobs, with expectations of small increase to 26,000 in 2013.

Direct comparison of nominal and relative results achieved in tourism with other countries is not giving precise information, primarily due to the heterogeneity of tourist offer, with many natural, cultural, historical, economic and other specificities that characterize each destination. However, it still can be a good benchmark for overviewing current state of this sector of national economy, or a guide for evaluation of achieved results. It is not reasonable to expect that Serbia with its available number of tourist workers and achieved direct contribution of tourism to GDP with 500 million EUR in 2012, without direct access to seacoast, larger lakes, Alps mountain range, longer tradition in hospitality, larger investments in tourism capacities, physical and social infrastructure, can compete with countries like Austria (tourism revenue of 14.3 billion EUR and direct employees 210,500 persons), Switzerland (11.2 billion EUR and 144,000 employees) or Greece (12 billion EUR and 330.500 employees). However, according to available resources and its competitive advantages, it certainly should strive in long-term to achieve results like Croatia (4 billion EUR and 138,500 directly employed persons in tourism), Hungary (4 billion EUR and 226,500 employees), Bulgaria (1.5 billion EUR and 103,000 workers in tourism) or Slovenia (1.3 billion EUR and 31,500 employed persons).

According to data from Ministry of Finance and Economy of the Republic of Serbia (Sector for Tourism), during the last three years there was recorded considerable increase of number of operational tourist facilities from 267 in 2010 to 317 in 2012. Capacities in tourism imply to hotels, garni hotels (B&B), apartments and touristic resorts, hotel pavilions, motels and guest houses[9]. Total number of free beds in those capacities during the observed period has increased from 24,186 to 28,296.

Dominant participation with 66% is in accommodation facilities categorized with 2 and 3 stars, while available beds in the highest category facilities are scarce with only 3.7% of total capacities.

In Table 1 there are presented results, during the period 2005-2012, for numbers of domestic and international tourists.

Table 1 – **Number of arrivals[10] and nights of stay of tourists in Serbia (period 2005-2012)**

Year	Republic of Serbia					
	Arrivals of tourists			Nights of stay of tourists		
	Total	Domestic	Interna-tional	Total	Domestic	Interna-tional
2005	1,988,469	1,535,790	452,679	6,499,352	5,295,051	1,204,301
2006	1,889,771	1,420,929	468,842	6,407,225	5,391,913	1,015,312
2007	2,306,558	1,610,513	696,045	7,328,692	5,853,017	1,475,675
2008	2,266,166	1,619,672	646,494	7,334,106	5,935,219	1,398,887
2009	2,018,466	1,373,444	645,022	6,761,715	5,292,613	1,469,102
2010	2,000,597	1,317,916	682,681	6,413,515	4,961,359	1,452,156
2011	2,068,610	1,304,443	764,167	6,644,738	5,001,684	1,643,054
2012	2,079,643	1,269,676	809,967	6,484,702	4,688,485	1,796,217

Source: the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, Belgrade.

Impacts of the global economic crisis was verified with reduced total number of arrivals in 2009 by over 13%, which was stabilized in last few years on the level of around 2 million per year, with small but persistent increase of arrivals. If we take into consideration trends within

[9] Not negligible capacities (free beds) in private accommodation were not considered. According to data from *Touristic informatory of Serbia* in 2010 in private accommodation in Serbia were offered exactly 29,403 categorized beds.

[10] Written should be interpreted with caution, because in reality presented sum of arrivals and overnight stays are for certain percentage higher, considering that it contains only officially registered guests. In fact, many visitors (usually domestic) who directly negotiate tourist services with the owners of touristic facilities in private accommodation (it is not rare that owners of free beds in private housing are not registered for providing of services in tourism), because of avoiding the payment of touristic taxes and taxes on provided services, are not reported to local tourist organizations.

the subcategories of total arrivals, it can be noticed that sum of arrivals of domestic and foreign visitors have inverse trends[11]. Similar trend to aforementioned can be noticed in the total number of overnight stays in Serbia, where domestic visitors are dominant, while foreign guests have constant upward trend in number of overnight stays.

Table 2 – **Average length of stay of tourists in Serbia (in days, period 2005-2012)**

Year	Total	Domestic	International
2005	3,27	3,45	2,66
2006	3,39	3,79	2,17
2007	3,18	3,63	2,12
2008	3,24	3,66	2,16
2009	3,35	3,86	2,28
2010	3,20	3,76	2,13
2011	3,21	3,83	2,15
2012	3,12	3,69	2,22

Source: authors' calculation according to the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, Belgrade.

Average length of stay of guests during each visit to certain tourist destination in Serbia (Table 2), during the observed period for domestic guests was above 3.5 days, while for foreigners was slightly above 2 days. Since in tourism everyone is devoted to meeting of guests' needs, which in other word means that each guest is priceless, there is a need for persistent improvement in tourist offer and its contents which would extend their average length of stay even in conditions of general shortage of disposable income. Nonetheless, in a time of recession, the focus has to be on attracting foreign visitors, since they have higher purchasing power.

Recorded foreign exchange inflow from tourism in 2012 was 2.7 times higher than achieved in the initial observed year (Table 3). Positive trend in foreign exchange inflow was briefly interrupted in 2009 and 2010, what coincides with the brunt of the economic crisis in most EU countries, whose citizens represented the majority of foreign visitors to touristic destinations in Serbia (Table 4). Besides that they possess

[11] It is pointed out that the number of arrivals of foreign visitors in 2012 compared to 2005 was almost doubled.

relatively large reserves of disposable financial assets that could be spent for travelling and tourism.

Table 3 – **Foreign exchange inflow of tourism in Republic of Serbia (period 2005-2012)**[12]

Year	Foreign exchange inflow of tourism (in mil EUR)	Average foreign exchange inflow per one arrival of int-tourist (in EUR)	Average foreign exchange inflow per one day of int-tourist in Serbia (in EUR)
2005	261.4	577	216.9
2006	315.4	673	310.1
2007	629.5	904	426.4
2008	639.9	990	458.3
2009	617.2	957	419.7
2010	604.9	886	416.0
2011	710.1	929	432.1
2012	707.8	874	393.7

Source: the National Bank of Serbia

In average, every foreign visitor, during they stay in Serbia in 2012, had spent the amount of money equal to nearly 2.2 average net wages paid in Serbia in February 2013[13], meaning that they spent one average national net wage per each day of stay. Compared to 2005, the average foreign exchange inflow per foreign tourist in 2012 was higher for over than 50%. It is interesting to note that maximum was reached in 2008, the year in which global financial and economic shakes begun.

[12] National Bank of Serbia is getting data about foreign exchange inflow of tourism from the commercial banks (by country of payment, not the country of origin of tourists). Later, data are processed in accordance to 5th edition of IMFs instructions for balance of payments. Shown data also include estimated value of additional spending of tourists.

[13] According to official statistics, average net salary paid in February 2013 in the Republic of Serbia was 43,371 RSD (around 390 EUR), http://webrzs.stat.gov.rs/WebSite/public/PublicationView.aspx?pKey=41&pLevel=1&pubType=2&pubKey=1641

Table 4 – **Top ten countries by number of tourists' arrivals in Serbia (number of arrivals, period 2005-2012)**

Year / rank	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
1.	SL – 56,128	SL – 54,440	MN – 111,817	MN – 93,220	BH – 63,981	SL – 66,686	SL – 74,674	SL – 65,723
2.	BH – 49,202	BH – 53,973	SL – 64,838	BH – 64,729	MN – 61,761	BH – 63,560	MN – 66,636	MN – 64,703
3.	MC – 29,634	CR – 33,617	BH – 62,568	SL – 45,661	SL – 54,829	MN – 56,888	BH – 65,960	BH – 62,227
4.	D – 29,021	D – 27,970	CR – 39,389	I – 39,919	CR – 40,243	CR – 46,367	CR – 50,625	D – 50,896
5.	CR – 28,685	I – 27,738	I – 36,757	CR – 38,073	D – 39,497	D – 42,672	D – 48,159	I – 50,580
6.	I – 28,122	GR – 26,618	D – 36, 356	D – 37,194	I – 37,321	I – 34,221	I – 38,105	CR – 47,229
7.	GR – 24,975	MC – 25,946	MC – 28,486	MC – 27,626	MC – 29,579	MC – 31,581	MC – 33,619	BL – 35,243
8.	BL – 16,330	BL – 18,071	GR – 23,692	GR – 23,618	BL – 24,602	GR – 24,726	R – 30,628	MC – 35,083
9.	A – 15,531	A – 17,936	BL – 23,624	BL – 22,727	GR – 24,155	BL – 24,582	BL – 28,054	R – 32,042
10.	UK – 14,474	UK – 15,731	UK – 21,966	R – 20,701	R – 22,957	A – 24,075	GR – 26,400	RF – 31,628
RF	(15) 11,249	(15) 11,711	(15) 15,863	(15) 16,092	(13) 17,312	(12) 21,636	(12) 25,236	***
Total	452,679	468,842	696,045	646,494	645,301	682,681	764,167	809,967

Source: Hospitality and Tourism Statistics, Communication for observed years, Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, Belgrade, Republic of Serbia.

Note: SL – Slovenia, BH – Bosnia and Herzegovina, MC – Macedonia, D – Germany, CR – Croatia, I – Italy, GR – Greece, BL – Bulgaria, A – Austria, UK – United Kingdom, RF – Russian Federation, MN – Montenegro, R – Romania.

Among international visitors, as it was mentioned before, dominant are EU citizens (primarily Slovenians, Germans and Italians) and citizens from former Yugoslav republics (Montenegrins, residents of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatians). Growth of total number of visitors from EU, along with the start of global economic crisis, could be explained by fact that desired level of services is relatively cheaper in Serbia compared to traditional neighbouring destinations where they used to go prior to recession (Greece, Slovenia and Croatia). We can conclude that they recognized Serbia, in period of crisis, as an adequate touristic alternative that also offers certain level of orientalism.

It is important to note that there is constant increase in number of visitors from the Russian Federation over the observed period (in 2012 was recorded 3 times more arrivals compared to 2005), so today Russia is in top ten countries, with participation of almost 4% in total number of arrivals of international visitors in Serbia.

Regarding the structure of total arrivals from the aspect of location of touristic destinations that are mostly visited, in accordance to data for 2012, it is notable that tourists mostly visit regional administrative centres, with around 35.6% of total arrivals (primarily Belgrade[14], and to some extent Novi Sad, Niš, Subotica, etc.).

In volume of arrivals mountain resorts follow, with around 19.1% of total arrivals. Most often destination are Zlatibor (27.9% of all arrivals in mountain resorts), then Kopaonik, Tara, etc. Around 16.7% of all arrivals are to the spa centres, where dominant destination is Vrnjačka Banja with 40.2% of all arrivals in spa resorts. It is followed by Soko Banja, Aranđelovačka Banja, Niška Banja, Banja Koviljača, etc. Other touristic destinations in Serbia account for remaining 28.6% of all arrivals of visitors in 2012.

Most of the destinations in Serbia, by international tourist operators, are considered as small (weak) destinations. For that reason, there is a need for constant emphasis of competitive and strategic advantages, based on which certain tourist destinations are building their image and vision for future development. Since it is much easier to copy tourism products in today's economy as a result of quick access to global information, it is recommended that any strategic tourism planning and development has to be based on the elements of visitor's personal experience, in other words on establishing and maintaining of own tourism potential that will offer a wider range of services and products, which cannot be easily replicated.

[14] For example, within the period 2005-2012, Belgrade was attracted the tourists like a magnet, participating in the structure of total sum of arrivals in Serbia from 28,5% (in 2009 and 2011) to 33,3% in 2006. It is interesting that during 2012 Belgrade was recorded 632,512 visitors' arrivals, or 30.4% of total number of arrivals in Serbia, where almost 75% were arrivals of international visitors.

In accordance with available natural, cultural, historical and touristic potentials, as well as with certain competitive advantages compared to closer surrounding (Vuković et al, 2009), Serbia has to develop its own touristic offer in numerous forms of touristic products, such as: thematic historically-cultural excursions and city tourism (visits to monuments, monasteries, castles, etc.), music festivals and sports manifestations, fair and conference tourism, hunting and fishing, rafting, hiking and climbing, rural and wine tourism, manifestations dedicated to food, photo safari (national parks and resorts), vacation tourism (mountain, wellness-spa and tourism related to Danube river), transit and nautical tourism, ecotourism, health tourism, etc., which will meet all requirements of potential touristic demand, and attract both domestic and international guests.

Conclusions

In accordance to legislation and previously established national macroeconomic policy, in upcoming period focus in overcoming the effects of recession will be primarily directed to macroeconomic stability, dynamic and stable economic growth and increase in employment and living standard. Therefore, additional adjustments and changes of the official economic policy have to assign adequate role to tourist industry in Serbia, as it has what to offer, as well as to whom to offer it (according to its export and developmental importance and potential).

There is not a small number of countries from the surrounding whose business model Serbia can imitate, having in mind that each feasibly planned investment in tourism industry timely services its debts to national economy by several items: reduces the overall unemployment rate, supports the integral development of local communities, improves image of the country, contributes to development of sectors of economy that rely on it, encourages export of domestic products[15] and services

[15] For long time it is known that the sweetest (relatively high) earning in agriculture is not in direct export of agricultural products, but it is through the touristic offer to international tourists (*invisible export*).

(when users of services are international guests), attracts foreign direct investments, etc.

Current level of development of tourism in Serbia is in collision with the real opportunities offered by available natural resources, cultural and historical heritage, levels of development of physical and social infrastructure and disposable accommodation and catering facilities. Pursuant to its competitive advantage compared to neighbouring countries, Serbia has to adequately and rationally develop and segment its own touristic offer, and on that way meet the requirements of touristic demand and attract potential visitors. Analysing the data from the previous period, it could be noticed that foreign guest (mainly resident of some of the EU countries), despite the exhausting effects of the global economic crisis, are still willing to spend certain amount of disposable income (from their personal assets) for travel and vacation. They gladly accept to explore new tourist destination, if they are timely attracted by lower prices and specific touristic products (of course the level of provided service should not deviate much from the level they used to receive in other countries). As they possesses stronger financial potential than the average domestic guest, in current moment of economic slowdown, when the touristic service in developed countries are overrated, leaders in tourist industry in Serbia, as well as all relevant stakeholders have to respond quickly into two directions – to increase the number of arrivals and to extend guests' length of stay in Serbia.

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