

PRELIMINARY REPORT

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POTENTIAL OF CONGRESS TOURISM IN THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA IN COMPARISON TO NEIGHBORING DESTINATIONS

ABSTRACT: The phenomenon of globalization has led to the development of various selective forms of tourism. One of them is MICE tourism known in Croatia as a business form of tourism. Business tourism is still a relatively new concept and covers all aspects of business travel. The development of business travel has led to the development of congress tourism as a separate form of business tourism which is the focus of this paper. Congress tourism is a lucrative segment of the tourist offer that often takes place out of the tourist season. It requires quality congress facilities which can meet the needs of the participants and organizers of the congress. The main role of congress tourism is to gather participants from different countries and promote different products, services, training, education and many other fields of business while at the same time it promotes the hosting destination and its tourism attractions. The aim of this paper is to research and determine the current situation, supply and demand of the Croatian meetings and congress industry in comparison with the neighbouring destinations, the Republic of Slovenia and the Republic of

Serbia. The study and comparison between three destinations imply changes that need to take place to improve the congress offer, to detect what the competitive position of the Republic of Croatia is, which marketing activities to improve so that the Republic of Croatia can become a competitive destination in the region and Europe. Congress tourism as a form of business tourism in Croatia is growing. The most prominent cities in this form of tourism are Zagreb, Dubrovnik and Opatija. The objectives pursued in Croatian congress offer are: the number of participants in congresses, strengthening the quality of congress offer and infrastructure, ensuring coordinated actions of stakeholders and increasing the recognition and awareness of Croatia as a congress destination. Since joining the EU, Slovenia has become an interesting destination for other members of the EU. Congress activity in Slovenia is booming, with a growing number of modern equipped convention venues with modern facilities for implementation of convention events. Slovenia has three major congress destinations; Ljubljana, Portorož and Bled that meet the conditions for

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organizing congresses. The Republic of Serbia with its tourism development strategy, presented business tourism as a potential selective form of tourism that can contribute to increasing tourist traffic of local and foreign tourists. Congress destinations that represent an ideal destination for congresses are: Belgrade, Novi Sad and Zlatibor. The application of sustainable development in the area of congress tourism plays an important role in form of preservation of resources and environmental protection. Therefore, congress tourism should be managed in a way to meet economic, social, ecological and aesthetic needs of a destination. Methodology used in this research paper consists of desk research, descriptive method, historical method,

method of analysis, synthesis and comparative method. Beside secondary data analysis through literature review data are induced from Central Bureau of Statistics, the Institute for Tourism, Zagreb Tourist Board, Tourist Board of Opatija, The Dubrovnik Tourist Board, Serbian Convention Bureau and Research as well as from available published articles, books and internet data related to Slovenian business tourism. This research paper contributes to further scientific research and improvements needed in order to continuously develop and increase the size and quality of business tourism.

KEY WORDS: congress, business tourism, destination, sustainable development

INTRODUCTION

The business and travel industry take up a big proportion of tourism industry. It employs millions of people and is the main niche in tourism market of destinations. Business tourism as a relatively new term form of tourism is difficult to put in a certain limit and not compare it with some similar forms of selective tourism. The development of this form of tourism has been carried out under the forms of business tourism, and one of them is congress tourism. Congress tourism is a lucrative segment of the tourist offer that most often takes place outside of the tourist season. Participants in congresses are demanding guests, with high purchasing power; therefore, they need the provision of all necessary conditions for quality work, but also for quality leisure time. Congress tourism is also one of the specific forms of tourism activities that Croatia is increasingly spreading. The most prominent cities in this sector of congress tourism are Zagreb, Dubrovnik and Opatija. In addition to congress tourism, this form of tourism represents an excellent way of promoting a destination, because 40 percent of guests return to the destination in a private arrangement with their families or friends. The exceptional advantage of this form of tourism lies in the increased average consumption of guests that is 150 to 200 percent more than other guests. Zagreb, Dubrovnik and Opatija have been identified as the main centres of Croatian congress tourism. There is a need for the development of the entire supporting industries that are part of congress tourism: gastronomy, entertainment, tours, nightlife, shopping, sports, etc.

Congress activity in Slovenia is booming. Due to its geographical location, economic, transport and cultural integration, Slovenia is an interesting destination for the organization of meetings, congresses, conferences and trade fairs. There is a growing number of modern equipped capacity for the implementation of convention or business events. Currently, there are several large conference centres, which can accommodate

up to 1,500 guests and a number of conference rooms for up to 500 people. All congress centres are relatively easily accessible by road and air connections from the major European cities. Slovenia has three destinations that can boast and meet the basic requirements for the organization of congresses: Ljubljana, Bled and Portorož.

According to the tourism development strategy of the Republic of Serbia (2005th-2015th), business tourism and MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, Exhibitions), represent a product with great potential for development relying on a strategy of low cost investment in infrastructure, accommodation and packages that include additional attractions and facilities, which can contribute to the creation of competitive congress products, as well as an increase in tourist traffic of local and foreign tourists. Congress destinations in Serbia can be an ideal choice for the organization of congresses. Conferences and business event destinations are Belgrade, Subotica and Palić and Novi Sad, as well as mountain resorts Kopaonik and Zlatibor.

The research topic is the current state of congress tourism in Croatia in comparison with neighbouring countries Slovenia and the Republic of Serbia. The goal of the research paper is to describe and analyse the current state of congress tourism in the three destinations, with emphasis on the situation in the Republic of Croatia. The objectives of the research paper are as follows:

- ☞ To define business and congress tourism;
- ☞ To describe historical, current and future desired state of congress tourism;
- ☞ To find out the trends in the segment of business meetings;
- ☞ To describe the economic effects of congress tourism;
- ☞ To describe the marketing aspect in congress tourism;
- ☞ To compare the status of Croatian, Slovenian and Serbian congress tourism;

- ☞ To analyse destination and convention facilities of three observed countries;
- ☞ To find out the level of application of sustainable development in congress tourism.

The following methodology is used in this research paper:

- ☞ Descriptive method that clarifies the concept of congress tourism and shows the current status;
- ☞ The historical method as a secondary literature review;
- ☞ A comparative method was used based on the data of the Central Bureau of Statistics, the Institute for Tourism, Zagreb Tourist Board, the Dubrovnik Tourist Board, Tourist Board of Opatija, Serbia Convention Bureau;
- ☞ Desk research based on the published and available data from the articles, books and the Internet sources.

BUSINESS TOURISM

The phenomenon of globalization has led to the development of different forms of special interest tourism, thus increasing the need for research and observation of the newly emerging forms of tourism. Over time, the development of business tourism was developed as well as the subtypes of business tourism, one of which is the topic of this paper, congress tourism. Business tourism is concerned with people travelling for purposes related to their work. As such it represents one of the oldest forms of tourism, as man has been travelling for trade purposes since very early times (Davidson, 1994).

The concept of business tourism is a broader term that encompasses all aspects of business travel. Using standard terms such as “tourism” or “tourist” with business travellers, we can say that business travellers and tourists are those who stay at a destination at least overnight. Business travellers are focused on the journey from point A to point B.

Business travellers whose purpose of travel is just work, they are not tourists in the usual sense of the word (Swarbrooke and Honer, 2001).

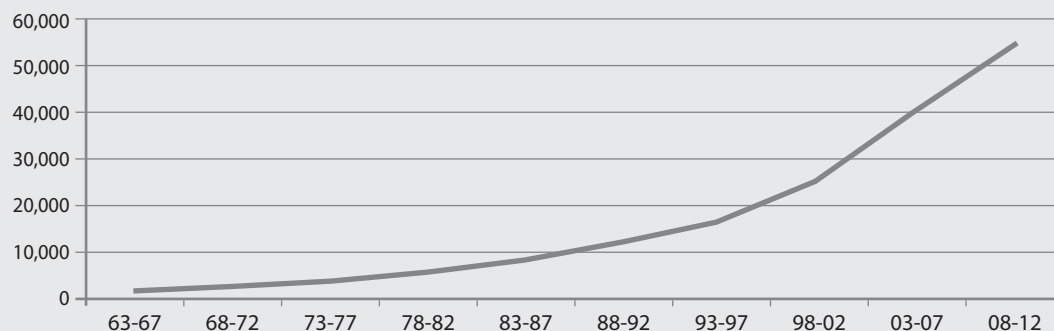
CONGRESS TOURISM

Although people have always had the need to meet and exchange opinions and ideas, congress tourism, as a combination of business, tourism and science, is a recent phenomenon, a little more than five decades old. Until recently, this type of tourist movement attracted little attention of researchers, academics, and government of tourist destinations. Therefore, the lack of defined and accepted terminology in the branch of congress tourism, which is reflected in the reliability of statistical data on the size and value of the market business travel is obvious (Swarbrooke and Honer, 2001).

Congress tourism is a lucrative segment of the tourist offer that most often takes place outside of the tourist season. The development of congress tourism requires a quality congress - tourist offer, which will satisfy the needs of the participants and organizers of the Congress. Participants in congresses are demanding guests, with high purchasing power; therefore, they need the provisions of all the necessary conditions for quality work, but also for quality leisure time. The main role of congress tourism is to promote tourism with a well-organized system of promotional activities, continuing education of personnel, market research, application of quality standards (Šušić and Mojić, 2015).

ICCA (International Congress and Convention Association) is the leading international association that monitors and publishes annual reports on the number of congresses held in countries that are members of this organization. ICCA was founded in 1963 by a group of travel agencies. ICCA is one of the most important international organization in the market of the congress industry. It is an association of professionals who deal with the organization of international congresses and events.

GRAPH 1. NUMBER OF HELD BUSINESS MEETINGS FROM 1963–2012



Source: <http://www.iccaworld.com/npps/>

It includes about 800 member organizations from 80 countries (<http://www.poslovniturizam.com/rjecnik/icca/27/>).

In 2012, ICCA issued a report that tracks the number of business meetings held in 1963 (the founding of ICCA) by 2012. Graph 1 shows constant growth of opportunities, 10% each year, which indicates that the number is doubling every ten years. By 2012, the ICCA has recorded a total of 173.432 business meetings. Statistics show that the sector of tourism also increased in the years of recession.

Congress tourism destination is often in practice a tourist holiday destination, which means that business tourists are using the same services of transportation, accommodation, food, visiting the tourist attractions of the destination as tourists who are staying in the area for vacation, meeting their cultural, recreational and other needs. However, in order to become known as a congress destination, except attractive, receptive and communicative elements, the destination must feature a specific group factors. The specific groups of factors are material and technological resources and personnel specialized for congress services. There is a steadily increasing demand in

the regions, countries and cities for all forms of business tourism as the most profitable forms of tourism. By comparing spending between business travellers and leisure tourists at a destination, it is clear that business tourists spend two to four times more. Business tourism can achieve significant economic benefits for destinations and suppliers. It is estimated that in 1998 Congress of the United Kingdom industry contributed to total revenues of GDP in the amount of five billion pounds. In the same year in Canada business tourists accounted for consumption in the amount of 1.7 billion Canadian dollars. The participants of congress and trade fairs in the US in 1998 on average spent \$ 696 to participate. Unfortunately, statistics on the total value of industry and business spending are not gathered in succession to give an overall picture of the value of business tourism (Swarbrooke and Honer, 2001).

Today, tourism is one of the most important economic activities in the world that brings with it many positive and negative consequences for the environment and the local community. The application of sustainable development in the economy means business in a socially responsible manner. Guidelines and management practices

of sustainable development can be applied to all forms of tourism and in all types of destinations (Golja, 2009).

CONGRESS TOURISM IN THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA

Congress tourism is also one of the forms of special interest tourism activities that Croatia is increasingly spreading. The most prominent cities in this sector of tourism are certainly Zagreb and Dubrovnik, while among the regions, the most notable is Istria. Congress tourism represents an excellent way of promoting a destination, because 40 percent of guests return to the destination in a private arrangement with their families or friends.

The exceptional advantage of this form of tourism lies in the increased average consumption of guests that is 150 to 200 percent more than other guests (<http://www.proconventa.hr/hr/news/kongresni-turizam/>). At the time of conducting this research summarized data for tourism in the Republic of Croatia in 2015 were not disclosed. The tradition of keeping statistics of business meetings was discontinued in 2014, with the closing of the national congress office in Zagreb. The following statistics relate to statistics by 2014.

Basic indicators of tourism development from 1980 to 2010 show a steady growth of tourist arrivals in Croatia until the war years when significant decline occurred in the arrival of tourists. From 2000, the trend of tourist arrivals began resuming growth, but due to the recessionary impact of the 2005-2010 period, there was a stagnation in the number of overnights and arrivals of tourists. In 2014, there were approximately 66.5 million overnight stays or 2.6% more than in 2013. Overnight stays of foreign guests increased by approximately 2.8%, while the total number of overnight stays of domestic tourists remained at the level of the previous year. Foreign tourists accounted for around 92% of overnights, 73% of which came from ten countries: Germany, Slovenia, Austria, the Czech Republic, Italy, Poland,

Netherlands, Slovakia, United Kingdom, Hungary. Overnights from the first five listed countries accounted for more than 50% of total overnight stays. The average number of overnight stays of foreign guests is 5.3 and of domestic ones is 3.4 overnights. The longest stay was by guests from Germany (7.4 days), and the shortest by guests from Italy (4.2 nights). In 2014, the highest number of overnight stays was in the capacity of private accommodation (36%). The share of overnight stays in hotels, hotel-heritage, apart-hotels and integrated hotels was close to 25%, which is the share of overnight stays in camps. The highest growth rate was recorded for accommodation (nearly 8%).

Statistics of business meetings was collected until 2014. The research covered all businesses (restaurants, universities, concert and congress halls, fairs, cultural facilities) performing business meetings, incentive arrangements and team building events. Statistics included all business meetings in which the participants realised at least one overnight and all business meetings without overnight stays with 20 or more participants. According to data published by the Institute of Tourism in 2014 there was a total of 8,301 business meetings, 6,271 of which were national and 1,760 international. When we add up all days of duration of each meeting, some of which were one-day, and some lasted for several days, there was a total of 16,546 days of meetings. The number of participants in the meetings was more than half a million, namely 551,055. In 2014, there was a monthly average of 669 conferences and other business meetings, which lasted an average of 1.9 days and where the average number of participants was 69. Croatian National Tourist Board in its statistics for 2014 showed business meetings by type. In the last observed year, there were 4,074 business meetings, a total of 3,449 congresses, 252 incentive travels and 283 team building events. Although several business meetings were held, participants in congresses were almost twice as many – 331,147. National business meetings counted with 403,194 participants, and international meetings with three times less - 147,861 participants.

According to ICCA statistical report for 2014 on the number of business meetings Croatia was in the 40th place in the worldwide ranking with a total of 81 business meetings held. In the Europe ranking, ICCA reported Croatia was in 21st place. Position of Croatia in the Europe ranking shows that Croatia is the industry leader in business meetings in the region, because neighbouring destinations Slovenia, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina were left out.

Zagreb, Dubrovnik and Opatija have been identified as the main centres of Croatian congress tourism. There is a need for the development of the entire supporting industries that are part of this branch of tourism: gastronomy, entertainment, tours, nightlife, shopping, sports. To enter the competition with a strong convention cities such as, for example, Barcelona in Spain, it is necessary to build a new conference centre equipped according to European standards with seating capacities of several thousand per property (<http://www.idkongres.hr/potencijali-kongresnog-tourism-in-Croatian-42.aspx>). The requirements of the business world are always the same and come down to the flawless organization of: personnel, technical support, congress service, overall content arrangements and professional host.

With monitoring statistics of business meetings discontinued, it is impossible to follow the development and work of this tourism segment to improve the current situation. Business tourism is a selective form of tourism represented in all major development strategies of Croatian tourism; however, there is no central management of this segment of tourism and systematic work on monitoring the development of statistics, tourist arrivals and construction of convention facilities for the needs of the development of business tourism.

Congress destination Zagreb

Zagreb is a business, economic, diplomatic and cultural centre of Croatia, with almost a million inhabitants. The rich offer of Zagreb

accommodation and space for conferences and business meetings of any kind as well as the old town, rich historical heritage, lively cultural offer, relaxed atmosphere, cuisine and stunning surroundings, make Zagreb an ideal destination for congresses, conferences, business meetings and incentive events. Hotels Zagreb that offer conferences are: Westin Hotel 5*, Esplanade Zagreb Hotel 5* Sheraton Hotel 5*, Doubletree by Hilton Hotel 4*, Hotel Antunović 4*, Dubrovnik Hotel 4*, Hotel International 4*, Panorama Zagreb hotel 4*, the Palace hotel 4*. Congress halls in Zagreb include: musical convention centre Lisinski, Zagreb Fair Convention Centre, Hypo Expo XXI conference centre, conference centre Forum Zagreb. The spaces offer an environment that highlights the importance of events that take place in them and the attention that we want to offer the participants. There are Zagreb's historical sites, theatres, museums and galleries located in historical buildings which are: Golden Hall, Revival Hall, Croatian National Theatre, Mimara Museum, Klovićevi castles, Croatian Association of artists, Art Pavilion, the Museum of the City of Zagreb, Croatian State Archives, Museum of Arts and Crafts (<http://www.poslovniturizam.com/destinacije/zagreb/17/>).

According to data, the city of Zagreb in 2014 held a total of 3,997 business meetings, 2,950 of which lasted one day, while 1,047 business meetings lasted several days. Of the total number of business meetings, 2,216 were business meetings, 1,655 congresses / conferences, 17 incentives and 109 team building events. Business meetings in Zagreb counted with a total of 303,262 participants, 185,799 of which is the number of participants in congresses / conferences, and 105,574 participants attended business meetings. Statistics according to the type of facility shows that out of the total number of business meetings held (3,997), 3,425 were held in hotels where the total number of participants was 223,136. The other 572 business meetings were held at a fair, cultural institution

or conference facility with a total of 80,126 participants.

Congress destination Dubrovnik

The uniqueness of Dubrovnik lies in its history and cultural heritage, while modern lifestyle reflects a strong spiritual identity, historic seal and presence in European culture. Congress has been developing from the very beginning of tourism in Dubrovnik, which is thought to be in 1887, with the opening of the Hotel Imperial. Data show that the first international conference was held in Dubrovnik that year. Since then tourism has been developing at a faster pace, and since the early 1970s it has been developing in an increasingly organized way. Hotels with congress potentials were built in prominent positions, and today there are 45 hotels in Dubrovnik, among them 12 with the five-stars. Dubrovnik as a congress tourism destination offers many opportunities for those who choose it as a destination for business combined with leisure. The conference facilities offer more than 8,000 places in Dubrovnik hotels and other conference venues. Dubrovnik offers many opportunities for those who choose it as a business destination with five or four star hotels or hotels with three stars, which can be excellent hosts to large or small meetings. Thanks to its unique setting, facilities such as Revelina, Marin Držić Theatre, Sponza Palace, the Rector's Palace, International Centre of Croatian universities, the former convent of St. Clare and others offer special meetings and events for many business opportunities (http://www.tzdubrovnik.hr/sp/ku/lang/en/index_ku.html). In hotels such as Dubrovnik Palace, Excelsior, Bellevue, Grand Villa Argentina, Grand Hotel Park, Importanne Resort, Dubrovnik President, Valamar Resort and Radisson Blu Resort & Spa there will be a series of conferences, seminars and annual meetings. It is known that Dubrovnik is known as a top centre for congresses for 150 to 700 participants, as it is one of the most popular congress cities in Europe (<http://www.poslovniturizam.com/destinacije/dubrovnik/2/kongresna-ponuda/>).

Data from Dubrovnik Tourist Board for 2014 indicate that there was a total of 419 meetings with a total of 31,321 participants. Of the 419 business meetings, there were 195 congresses / conferences, 131 business meetings, 85 incentives and 8 team building events. Congresses / conferences were attended by 19,581 participants, 5,864 participants were in business meetings, just under 4,785 participated in incentive travel, while 1,091 participants took part in team building. Of the total number of business meetings (419), 330 meetings were of international character which were attended by 25,335 participants. The number of national business meetings held in Dubrovnik was 89 with 4,986 participants.

Dubrovnik is one of the cities that exhibits most progress in congress tourism. In 2014 it was ranked among the best congress cities in Southeast Europe. Among smaller cities, those up to 150 thousand inhabitants, Dubrovnik was the best, and is located next to many major cities, such as Prague and Budapest. From NATO's Andreas Fogh Rasmussen to Michel Platini and Jean Todt, Dubrovnik hosted the largest and most important conferences for global associations and demonstrated that with the sun and the sea it can be an attractive destination for a variety of selective forms of tourism.

Congress destination Opatija

To organizers of business meetings, Opatija offers all the advantages of a major convention destination with an irresistible charm on the other hand. The combination of experience and tradition in organizing conventions, modern quality accommodation is an excellent foundation for organizing meetings and events of various types and sizes. Opatija hosts more than 500 different meetings. A wide range of convention facilities allows multiple sets at the same time. Many of today's congresses in Opatija are traditional, and each year there is a greater and greater number of congresses of international importance (<http://www.opatija-convention.com/Home.aspx?PageID=5>).

Opatija has the most conference halls, 26 of which with 10 to 50 seats in the hall with a total of 856 seats in the aggregate. It offers 5 halls with 300 to 500 seats which can accommodate a total of 2,765 participants. The largest hotel for business meetings is Hotel Admiral 4* with nine halls and a total of 1,200 seats, the Adriatic Hotel 4* / 3* has eight halls with 1,100 seats and right behind it is the Milenij Grand Hotel 4 Opatija Flowers, with 7 halls and a total of 1000 seats. In 2014, Opatija hosted a total of 369 business meetings, of which the most were congresses – 180 with 16,749 participants. Business meetings are usually organized by corporations / businesses; 204 of them with 12,995 participants. There is little difference between national and international conferences. In 2014, 189 meetings were organised and they were of the national character, with 19,152 participants, while there were 180 international congresses with 16,102 participants.

CONGRESS TOURISM OF THE REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA

As part of the former Yugoslavia, Slovenia hosted from 30 to 40 international congresses a year. With the establishment of the independent Republic of Slovenia it lost 20 international conventions, including the European Congress of Pathologists with 1,500 participants, the world congress of the International Astronautical Federation with 2,000 participants and European Marketing Congress with 1,000 participants. For the revival of congress activities, Slovenia had to create the basic conditions required for congress tourism. Among them are: the creation of their own identity, membership in international organizations of professional associations, the establishment of economic, political and social stability, good relations with neighbouring countries and the recognition of Slovenia as a meetings destination. Today's congress activity in Slovenia flourishes. The geographical location, economic, transport and cultural integration of Slovenia is interesting for Europe as a destination

for the organization of meetings, congresses, conferences and exhibitions (Zidanski, 2005).

In 2014, Slovenia recorded 3,438,279 tourist arrivals (3.6% more than in 2013) and 9,343,574 overnight stays (0.5% less than in 2013). 63% were foreign tourists and their number increased to 6.1% in 2014 compared to 2013. On average, tourists stayed in Slovenia for 2.7 days, and 39.76% of hotel capacity was booked.

Slovenia has a total of 154 convention facilities. There are different size halls, many of them can be divided into smaller rooms for holding small conferences, but you will also find the hall that holds up to 2,500 thousand people. Meetings are mostly held in hotels, as can be seen from the table. Hotels have the largest number of halls and provide services for organization of congresses, accommodation and additional services.

Table 1 shows a list of spaces for conferences, with St. Bernardin Resort having the largest capacity to receive people. It is largest congress hotel in Slovenia, which has 16 multi-functional halls. The largest number of halls have the capacity to maintain medium-sized business meetings.

Research by ICCA (International Congress and Convention Association) for 2014 shows that Slovenia was the 49th with 47 business meetings in the worldwide ranking. Europe ranking of countries according to the number of business meetings held under the ICCA report shows that Slovenia held the 27th place with a total of 47 business meetings. It is located below Croatia who is in 21st place with a total of 87 business meetings held in 2014 which is almost half more than Slovenia. The largest competitors in the congress activities are Germany, which was in 1st place with 659 congresses and Austria in the 7th place with 287 congresses. In the Europe ranking, Ljubljana was the 38th with 32 held business meetings (<http://www.iccaworld.com/npps/>).

Slovenia has three destinations that can boast that they meet the basic requirements for the organization of congresses: Ljubljana, Bled and Portorož.

TABLE 1. CONFERENCE VENUES IN SLOVENIA – ADMA- ADMINISTRATION IN MANAGEMENT

HOTELS-HALLS-CENTRES	SEATING CAPACITY	NUMBER OF HALLS
Sava Hotel Bled	1,835	26
Lambergh, Chateau & Hotel	190	4
Hotel Kompas Bled	200	7
Hotel Azul	380	6
Best Western Premier Hotel Lovec	140	4
Hotel Bor in Grad Hrib	280	5
Best Western Premier Hotel Slon	200	5
Btc D.D Kristalna palača	200	1
Grand Hotel Union d.d.	850	29
Lesar Hotel Angel d.o.o.	25	1
Slovenski etnografski muzej	70	1
Terme Olimia	800	
City Hotel Ljubljana	200	1
Antiq Palace, Small Luxury Hotels of the World	100	2
Adria turistično podjetje d.o.o.	400	4
St. Bernardin Resort	2,600	16
Thermana Laško, Thermana d.d.	490	14
Metropol Resort	325	5
Lifeclass Hotel & Spa Portorož Kongresni center Portus	1,178	10
Posestvo Pule	50	1
Sava Turizem d.d. Terme Ptuj	400	5
Terme Maribor – Hotel Habakuk	830	7
TOTAL	11,743	154

Source: http://www.adma.si/uploads/files/KatalogVPS2014_VsiVpisi.pdf

Congress destination Ljubljana

Development of congress activities in Ljubljana helped the scientific potential of experts from the scientific – educational institutions, which have been active in international associations. Today Ljubljana is recognized as the place where international congresses are held with the participation of 100 to 500 people, which is associated with of small to

medium-sized meetings. Competitive advantage of Ljubljana is its good congress offer, its geographical position, good transport connections, railway station in the city centre, and good roads connected to all parts of Slovenia. Ljubljana is ahead of other cities because it has 70 conference rooms, over 5,000 seats in the halls, and over 19,000 square feet of total space (Matejčić, 2004).

The International Congress and Convention Association ICCA report for 2014 placed Ljubljana in the 74th place in the worldwide ranking, with a total of 32 held business meetings. Ljubljana is on par with Bucharest and Moscow, which also each held a total of 32 business meetings. According to the ICCA ranking of cities according to the number of business meetings held, Ljubljana is ranked 38th (<http://www.iccaworld.com/npps/>).

Congress destination Bled

Bled, with its congress capabilities and natural environment is the right place for all kinds of meetings. Bled offers over 1,700 rooms. Congress tourism requires hotels with 4 or 5 stars, because the participants of the congress elect hotels of higher category. Bled offers a total of 36 conference halls with 1,600 seats, conference centres and a total of 1,294 square meters of congress space area (Janez, 2004).

Congress destination Portorož

Portorož features four main facilities for providing the organization of congress activities: Grand Hotel St. Bernardin, Metropol Group – Congress Centre, Convention Centre Hotels Sea and Portorož Auditorium. Portorož offers 39 halls with about 3,500 seats, and over 2,270 m² of total space. Congress season on the coast lasts from late summer until the beginning of November and starts again at the end of February to early June (Matejčić, 2004).

CONGRESS TOURISM OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

Intensive development of congress tourism in Serbia began in the 19th century, when Belgrade was recognized as an important destination for the organization of this form of tourism. According to the tourism development strategy of the Republic of Serbia (2005-2015), business and MICE tourism represent a product with great potential

for development relying on a strategy of low cost investment in infrastructure, accommodation and packages that include additional attractions and facilities, which can contribute to creating competitive congress products, as well as an increase in tourist traffic of local and foreign visitors (Bučić et al, 2015).

In recent years, Serbia has returned to the international MICE market, emphasizing its dynamic development, so that in 2014 the ICCA list ranked it 46th worldwide in the number of business meetings. As well as other countries in the region, Serbia benefits from the interest for South Europe. One of the categories ICCA research shows is the number of business meetings in the cities. Belgrade is positioned at a high 50th place with a total of 50 business meetings. Belgrade competes with major world cities such as Mexico City and New York City. Zagreb as the Croatian capital is only in the 72nd place and Ljubljana in the 74th for the number of meetings held. ICCA survey was conducted especially with the consideration of the continents of the world. In Europe, Germany leads in the business tourism market with more than 650 business meetings held, five other high-ranking countries are: Spain, United Kingdom, France, Italy and the Netherlands. Serbia is in the 25th place of the forty countries. Serbia has the potential because congress guests seek new destinations, multiculturalism, something that they have not seen or experienced (<http://www.iccaworld.com/npps/>).

Congress destinations in Serbia that can be an ideal choice for the organization of congresses and business events are Belgrade, Subotica and Palić, Novi Sad, as well as mountain resorts Kopaonik and Zlatibor (<http://www.kongresniturizam.com/Drzava/srbija>).

Congress destination Belgrade

Congress tourism is an important segment of the tourist offer of Belgrade because the city has all the necessary resources for this type of

tourism: accommodation, conference rooms, exhibition halls, accompanying tourist programs and experienced conference organizers. Seminars, symposia, congresses, fairs and conferences are organized throughout the year in the convention and trade fair facilities in Belgrade, the most significant being the Sava Centre, Belgrade Fair, Belgrade Arena and Expo XXI. Significant event areas and venues are offered by hotels too. Sava Centre is the largest congress, cultural and business centre in Serbia and one of the largest in Europe. Its activities include the organization of congresses and art conventions and similar events. In its immediate vicinity, there are hotels of deluxe category “Hyatt Regency” and “Belgrade Continental”, which together with Sava Centre consists of a unique architectural space composed of three parts: an office building, a large concert congress hall and hotel “Belgrade Continental”.

Sava Centre has 3,300 m² of exhibition space and 29,000 m² of exhibition space in the open, 15 conference rooms of various capacities from 20 to 4,000 seats. All rooms are equipped with the latest technology and capable of meeting the most demanding client requirements. Sava Centre has a team of professional organizers willing to organize the most complex events in the city and beyond. Sava Centre is a modern centre of national and international reputation, which has successfully hosted the largest international congresses and art events for three decades.

Belgrade Fair is the largest trade fair institution in Serbia. With its capacity, it provides business partners with the widest variety of services. There are 14 exhibition halls with 100,000 m² of exhibition and office space, outdoor exhibition space of 35,363 m² and associated catering and other facilities. As regards conference rooms, it has a hall with 140 seats, a large hall with 300 seats and a small hall with 50 seats. At the Belgrade Fair 30 regular events are held per year and many events are listed in the calendar of reputable international organizations.

Belgrade Arena was opened in 2004 as the largest and most modern complex for all types of mass sports, entertainment and cultural, fair and congress events. Nearby, there are hotels “Hyatt Regency”, Belgrade Continental hotel “Beograd” with a total area of 48,000 m² and a total capacity of 20,000 to 25,000 participants, depending on the type of event.

EXPO XXI offers a high level of service and meets the most demanding requirements of the organizers. The multifunctional space with 2,500 m² can be adapted to the needs of conferences, congresses and seminars, which can accommodate up to 5,000 participants. It features a modern look and the ability to adapt to the needs (<http://documents.tips/documents/kongturskripta-55a931b139612.html>).

Belgrade is home to the most famous hotel chains in the world which feature as part of rooms for business meetings as part of their offer. The “Metropole Palace” hotel has the largest capacity and can receive the largest number of participants (870), followed by the “Crowne Plaza” with 12 rooms for meetings that can accommodate 600 participants and “Best Western M”, which can accommodate up to 500 participants. Belgrade as a destination has good prospects to become one of the most popular destinations for conferences with regard to the infrastructure and ancillary facilities.

Congress destination Novi Sad

Novi Sad is the second largest city in Serbia in terms of population. Congress Centre Master is one of the newest modern conference facilities in Europe, offering 4,000 places and 48,000 m² of exhibition space. Conference halls in the centre are equipped with modern audio-visual equipment. Besides the Master Convention Centre, which has the largest capacity for holding business meetings in Novi Sad, there are many hotels that meet the needs for conferences. In the hotel “Park” there are seven halls that can accommodate up to 600 people, hotel “Fish Island” has a hall that can also host

600 congress participants, other hotels have one or two meeting rooms with a capacity of 100 to 150 participants (<http://kongres-magazine.eu/>).

Congress destination Zlatibor

Zlatibor is a mountain in western Serbia, which in addition to its natural beauty provides opportunities for various types of tourism, such as sports and recreation, health and conference tourism. This destination is a potential destination for the development of congress tourism, but there are not any statistics on tourists visiting the conferences (Bučić et al., 2015).

Zlatibor has several hotels which are suitable for organizing congresses of national and regional type. Hotel "Palidsad" has the largest conference facilities with eight halls for business meetings for a total of 650 participants, hotel "Zlatibor Mona" has five halls for 500 participants that can accommodate up to congress. Medical Centre "Čigota" is located in the centre of Zlatibor. It is a special hospital for providing medical services with adequate conditions and facilities for the organization of conferences, seminars and meetings. There is a congress hall with 360 seats and two small halls with 50 seats. Sports and tourist centre Zlatibor is used in the organization of large gatherings for up to 1,200 participants. It has an area of 14,300 m², used a large sports hall which can be adapted for business meetings (Bučić et al., 2015).

CONCLUSION

Croatian tourism can develop congress tourism owing to the power and interests of foreign markets and the attractiveness of the country. The EU recognized Croatia as a tourist destination with attractive potential; therefore, Croatia must make the maximum use of resources in the interest of its own welfare. Zagreb, Dubrovnik and Opatija as the main centres of Croatian congress tourism, if they want to compete with strong convention

cities must build a new convention centre with European standards and with a capacity of several thousand participants per venue.

According to the latest statistics from 2014, in Croatia there was a total of 8,301 business meetings, where there were 551,055 participants. Of the total number of business meetings held there were 4,047 business meetings, 3,449 congresses, 252,283 incentives and team building events. Of the total number of business meetings, 6,271 of them were national, and only 1,760 of an international character. Research shows that among hotels, business guests represent 10% to 15% of all hotel guests. Zagreb had 3,997 business meetings with a total of 303,262 participants in 2014. In Dubrovnik, in the same year there were 419 meetings with 31,321 participants. In Dubrovnik, of the total number of business meetings held 330 were international, and 89 national. In Opatija in 2014, 369 meetings were held with 28,790 participants. In Opatija there was more or less the same number of international (180) and national (189) meetings.

The Republic of Slovenia, since the foundation of an independent state, has lost many international congresses. For the revival of the activities of Slovenia, the destination had to create the basic conditions this activity requires. With Slovenia's entry into the EU it has become a full member for potential conference activities. Currently, there are several major destinations that can accommodate up to 1,500 guests, and a number of conference rooms for up to 500 participants. Slovenia has three destinations eligible for conferences: Ljubljana, Bled and Portorož. Slovenia has a total of 154 convention facilities with various room sizes for smaller and medium-sized business meetings. Ljubljana is ahead of other cities because there are 70 meeting rooms and over 5,000 seats. Portorož offers a total of 39 halls, around 3,500 seats and over 2,270 m² of total space. Bled, as one of the conference destinations, offers 36 conference halls with 1,600 seats and 1,294 m² of convention space.

The Republic of Serbia is trying to invest in infrastructure, accommodation and additional attractiveness to create a competitive congress product. Serbia seeks to become the leading destination for Southeast Europe congress tourism. Congress destinations that are ideal for the organization of the congress are: Belgrade, Novi Sad and Zlatibor. The number of hotels with one or more congress halls is 75, as well as five event spaces, six convention centres and twelve agencies associated with the organization of congresses in Serbia. Belgrade, the capital city of Serbia has all the necessary resources for this type of tourism: accommodation facilities, conference halls, exhibition halls, accompanying tourist programs. Seminars, symposia, congresses, fairs and conferences are organized throughout the year in the convention and trade fair facilities in Belgrade, among them the most important are: Sava Centre with 15 conference rooms, Belgrade Fair with 14 pavilions, Belgrade Arena with a capacity of up to 25,000 visitors, Expo XXI, which can accommodate up to 5,000 participants. In Novi Sad, Congress Centre Master is one of the most modern conference facilities in Europe with 4,000 places. Zlatibor is renovating the hotels and expanding convention facilities aimed at improving tourism. Hotel "Palisad" in Zlatibor has the largest conference facilities for 650 participants. Sports and tourist centre Zlatibor is used in the organization of large gatherings that can accommodate 1,200 participants.

According to ICCA statistical report, which summarizes information on the number of business meetings of the three observed destinations,

Croatia has the best position occupying the 40th place, followed by Serbia in the 46th and Slovenia in the 49th place. Croatia has the most convention facilities, but there are no dedicated convention centres with high technical equipment, known as SMART congress centres. Serbia annually invests heavily in this type of tourism and is closer to Croatia in the number of business meetings. Slovenia is oriented towards gatherings of small and medium size. Croatia needs to take advantage of the beauty and ecological preservation of the country and enter the EU single market in order to become an attractive destination for conferences of all sizes. Croatia is in the category of countries with a low risk of terrorist attacks, and security is one of the main reasons why tourists return to Croatia.

The tradition of keeping statistics of business meetings in Croatia was discontinued in 2014 with the closing of the national congress office in Zagreb. Due to the interruption of keeping statistics on meetings it is impossible to keep track of this segment of tourism in its development and work to improve the current situation. Business tourism plays an important role in all development strategies of Croatian tourism; however, there is no central management of this segment of tourism nor systematic work on monitoring the development of statistics, tourist arrivals and construction of convention facilities for the needs of the development of business tourism. By removing these obstacles Croatia could find a better market orientation and development of a regional market of higher quality and selected market niches in order to find a larger space for a better step forward in this type of tourism in Croatia.

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