

TOURISM IN FUNCTION OF DEVELOPMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA - Tourism in the Era of Digital Transformation

Conclusions of the Third International Scientific Conference held at the Faculty of Hotel Management and Tourism in Vrnjačka Banja, May 31 – June 2, 2018

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For the third consecutive year, the International Scientific Conference “TOURISM IN FUNCTION OF DEVELOPMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA” took place in Vrnjačka Banja. Conference was held from May 31st to June 2nd, 2018. The emphasis of this year’s Conference was put on Tourism in the Era of Digital Transformation. As in previous years, the Conference was organized by the Faculty of Hotel Management and Tourism in Vrnjačka Banja in co-organization with numerous Serbian and foreign institutions, as well as, with the support of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of Republic of Serbia. This year’s Conference gathered a large number of home and foreign participants (157 authors/co-authors of 84 papers) who took part in this scientific event.

The Conference participants were greeted by the Dean of the Faculty, prof. Drago Cvijanović. The keynote speakers at the event were the distinguished Prof. Arja Lemmetyinen (Turku School of Economics, University of Turku, Finland) and Prof. Gianluca Rossoni (University of Bergamo, Italy). Furthermore, the Conference was also greatly honored by hosting the representative of the Ministry of Trade, Tourism and Telecommunications of the Republic of Serbia, Prof. Renata Pindžo (Assistant Minister for Tourism), the representative of the Rectorate of the University of Kragujevac, Prof. Dragan Bošković, (Vice-Rector for Science of the University of Kragujevac), representative of the local government, Mr. Ivan Džatić (deputy mayor of Vrnjačka Banja) and the representative of the Regional Chamber of Commerce Kragujevac, Mr. Predrag Lučić (Director).

With the aim to establish a stronger cooperation with other institutions of higher education, Dean of the Faculty of Hotel Management and Tourism in Vrnjačka Banja, Prof. Drago Cvijanović, signed agreements with Asst. Prof. Srđan Lalić, Dean of the Faculty of Economics – Brčko, University of East Sarajevo, Prof. Aleksandar Grubor, Dean of the Faculty of Economics in Subotica, University of Novi Sad, Prof. Hasan Hanić, President of the Belgrade Banking Academy - Faculty of Banking, Insurance and Finance, University Union and Prof. Marko Matić, Rector of the University of Modern Sciences - Mostar. In addition, long-term business and technical cooperation agreement was signed with the company "PROSOFT SYSTEM - Professional software", Belgrade.

The main focus of the Conference was associated with the issues and challenges related to the emerging digital transformation and its impact on the tourism development in Serbia, as well as in other countries. The participants of this scientific event had the opportunity to hear theoretical presentations along with practical experiences on tourism and its related fields delivered by the lecturers from Serbia and a number of European countries including

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Finland, Italy, Romania, Republic of Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Croatia, as well as from the USA. The presentation of the Conference participants' contributions was streamed in two sections. The first section addressed issues related to digital branding, online booking, social media, digitizing cultural heritage, millennials, smart tourism, managing tourism resources, and Big Data. The second section focused on topics concerning hospitality sector, sustainable development, cultural/heritage tourism, regulatory frameworks, international and the EU tourism market, MICE tourism, rural tourism, etc. The sections were followed by the presentation of publications issued by the Faculty of Hotel Management and Tourism in Vrnjačka Banja in 2017. The Conference resulted in two volumes of the Thematic Proceedings comprising a total of 84 scientific papers (ISBN 978-86-89949-29-2, ISBN 978-86-89949-30-8) available to the wider scientific community.

Throughout 2017 Serbia experienced one of the largest increases in tourism income in the Southeast Europe proving once again that it is becoming a tourist destination continuing to draw international attention. In spite of the fact that Serbia generated some \$1.2 billion from tourism in 2017, that still represents a relatively modest result. For instance, it levels Serbia with Botswana's tourism receipts and represents only one third of tourism income generated by Iraq. In addition, for two consecutive years, Serbia was unable to make any progress in respect to tourism competitiveness. Namely, according to Tourism Competitiveness Index, Serbia is placed 95th out of 136 countries compared. This clearly suggests that, although there are some encouraging signals, there is still a rather long road ahead. Continual support to tourism education, even tighter twinning and partnerships among relevant institutions at the local, regional and national levels, followed with the flow of ideas between academics and practitioners are certainly some of the most important pathways to be followed in order to secure further growth.

In a highly competitive tourist markets that are rapidly changing due to ongoing ICT and digital evolution, this year's Conference was aimed at generating innovative ideas and constructive discussions on how to embrace technology as the tool that can not only foster tourism growth, but also improve tourist experiences. Presented papers, followed by thoughtful discussion resulted in recommendations that are seeking to improve positioning/branding of tourist destinations, better address issues related to sustainable tourism development and managing service processes more effectively in the hospitality sector, allow for better customer segmentation, more effectively preserve cultural/historical/art heritage through digitization, assist in better management of available tourist resources, and improve the utilization of social media.

Just as in previous years, the Conference once again was successful in attracting a rather diversified group of scientists whose expertise in various disciplines substantially contributed to the quality of discussions and to the overall significance of the Conference. The engaging theme of the Conference provided a fertile ground for the exchange of actual experiences, scientific thinking, knowledge expanding, as well as for strengthening the existing and establishing new liaisons among practitioners and researchers with an end objective - to ensure future tourism growth and development. In addition, the Conference has provided many interesting insights into the immense impact technology has on reshaping hospitality and tourism sectors – a trend that will certainly continue in the future.

Last, but not least important, the Conference participants agree on general conclusion that digital era has already made many shifts-and-shakes in the tourism and hospitality sectors and that in many cases what we see is just a contour of digital transformation. Issues such as artificial intelligence, augmented reality, Internet of Things and Big Data are still surfacing phenomena which are far from being fully utilized by the contemporary tourism/hospitality sector – both by the provider and the user.