

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF HOTEL PROMOTION FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE TOURIST SECTOR IN SERBIA

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Abstract

The service sector has seen exceptional growth in recent decades, especially in the second half of the 20th century. The major turbulence caused by the COVID-19 pandemic had a strong, negative impact on the hotel industry and, therefore, on the tourism sector in Serbia. Due to the cancellation of tourist visits by foreign and domestic tourists during the pandemic, the hotel industry is one of the most severely affected service industries in Serbia. Small commercial hoteliers are in danger of losing their assets precisely because of the ongoing recession and the rising costs of travel companies. The aim of this paper is to point out the importance of promoting the hotel industry, which is one of the key factors for the development of the tourism sector in the Republic of Serbia. In addition to the introduction, this paper is divided into four parts. The first part of the paper indicates the importance of the organizational structure in the hotel industry, while the second part follows the development and evolution of this part of the economic sector. The third part deals with the current structure of hotel facilities in the Republic of Serbia, while the fourth part of the paper indicates the importance of hotel promotion. Finally, concluding remarks are given.

Keywords: *hotel industry, promotion, tourism, Serbia.*

Clasificare JEL : *L83, Z32.*

1. Introduction

The service sector has seen remarkable growth in recent decades, especially in the second half of the 20th century (Geeta, Sivanand, 2021; Popović et al. 2016). Hotel Industry, as part of the service and hospitality industry, consists of the provision of catering services that have contributed to the development of the entire tourism sector. The very term hotel dates back to the Latin words hospital (hospitalis), which means hospitality, hospitari which means to host; hospitium, which means an inn, that is, a shelter for travelers (Vukosav, 2010). There are two phrases in use in English; Hospitality Industry and Hotel Industry. Generally accepted catering is defined as an activity that deals with "the preparation and sale of food and drinks (in a specific

way) and the renting of furnished rooms for the night (Nejkov, 1981). In fact, the hospitality industry includes: the food sector (preparation, production and serving of food, drinks, and beverages) and the accommodation sector (renting purpose-built and equipped rooms, i.e. accommodation units) (Službeni glasnik, 2016).

On the other hand, hotel industry is an economic activity within the hospitality industry that spatially and functionally combines accommodation services with food services, including the accompanying services that gravitate to them (Hotelijerstvo način života, 2022). This is precisely why the hotel industry is of great importance for the development of the tourism sector.

The importance of the tourism sector for the economy of the Republic of Serbia can be seen from the data on employment in this sector, the level of exports, the growth trend in the number of tourists (especially foreign ones), as well as the impact of tourism on other sectors, etc. How much the hotel industry has influenced the development of tourism in the Republic of Serbia is also shown by the fact that in recent years several high-class hotels from well-known world hotel chains - Crowne Plaza, Hyatt Regency, Square Nine, Radisson Blu, Hilton - have been built or renovated in the Serbian capital. On the other hand, Serbia is experiencing the expansion of smaller hotels, also of a high category. In such, mostly family hotels, apart from Belgrade, the hotel industry is also developing in Arandjelovac, Zlatibor, Kopaonik, Novi Sad, Kragujevac, Čačak, Valjevo, Niš, Prokuplje.

However, the great turbulence (Milošević, 2016), caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, had a strong negative impact (on the hotel industry and, therefore, on the tourism sector in Serbia (Kisin et al. 2022). Due to the cancellation of flights and tourist visits by foreign tourists during the pandemic, the hotel industry is one of the hardest hit in Serbia (Republički zavod za statistiku, 2021). Small commercial hoteliers are at risk of losing their assets precisely because of the ongoing recession and the rising costs of tourism companies (Gheorghe Gabriel, 2022).

The aim of this paper is to point out the importance of promoting the hotel industry, which is one of the key factors for the development of the tourism sector in the Republic of Serbia. In addition to the introduction, this paper is divided into four parts. Thus, the first part of the paper indicates the importance of the organizational structure in the hotel industry, while the second part follows the development and evolution of the hotel industry. The third part deals with the current structure of hotel facilities in the Republic of Serbia, while the fourth part points out the importance of promoting the hotel industry. Finally, concluding remarks are given.

2. The importance of the organizational structure of the hotel industry

Hotel industry is defined as an economic activity within the hospitality industry that spatially and functionally combines accommodation services with food services, including accompanying services that gravitate to them (Kosar, 2015). Hotel industry as an economic activity functions within the hospitality industry. As a rule, the hotel has at least 15 accommodation units (10 in Serbia) (Barjaktarović, 2015). Hotels, as the successors of taverns, inns, lodgings and other facilities, in which there were rooms for rent, appeared a little more than two centuries ago, first in shopping centers and next to important road routes. The first forerunners of today's hotels appeared in France as garni hotels or large houses for renting rooms, then in Italy, England, Switzerland and other European countries. Thus, the basic organizational forms of placement of hospitality services in the hotel industry are (Čerović, Knežević, 2019):

1. overnight stay with breakfast (although it is not rare to provide an overnight stay without breakfast);
2. board (bed and breakfast and two main meals (lunch and dinner));
3. half board (bed and breakfast and one main meal (lunch or dinner)).

Accommodation services represent an elementary service in the hotel industry. Hotel industry encourages, enables, but also creates conditions for the development of all forms of

tourism (resort, congress, religious, health, etc.), regardless of whether they are foreign or domestic tourists. With its activities, it encourages and connects all economic branches, especially transport, energy, communications, the food and industrial goods industry, but also people and services. In the hotel industry, services are promoted and realized by selling accommodation and other services to tourists and the local population, which results in the realization of tourist consumption (Kosar, 2015). Certain hotel programs can be the main motive of the visit, but they can also be additional hotel services, in order to encourage the stay to be more pleasant, meaningful and therefore longer. Additional facilities are part of the overall hotel offer. They can be labeled as entertainment, recreation, sports, fitness, games, protection and safety programs, knowledge expansion (congress and work) and other contents. The goal is to increase tourist consumption and stimulate higher profits. However, it must have its own time course, and sometimes the service can be provided without being charged immediately (payment in installments, deferred payment). Rather, it should be charged in another period of time through the achievement of greater guest satisfaction. So, basic catering services include services provided to service users and they include accommodation, food and drinks. However, in the hotel industry, they can also provide additional services in the form of production of various pastries, sweets, ice, beer, wine, as well as other meat products that represent hotel specialties.

Therefore, the basic specificities of the hotel business can be related to the following (Vukosav, 2010):

- hotel industry is in direct correlation with the level of discretionary income, i.e. standard of living, as well as free time. This means that tourism in developed countries is very developed, so increasing the number of free days increases the progress of this activity.
- hotel industry is an activity where the skill of human labor is irreplaceable. For example, the preparation of food by top catering professionals.
- hotel industry is related to rest, recreation, leisure, entertainment, business, sports and other needs.
- modern hotel industry is a very complex activity with a significant multiplier effect and is directly dependent on the level of development of other industries, transport, construction, trade, agriculture, communal infrastructure and other activities.
- in the hotel industry, the process of production and consumption, that is, service provision, takes place simultaneously, which further affects the organization and management.
- in the hotel industry, snobbery (the desire to socialize with people of a higher class) has a greater specific weight compared to other activities. This implies the desire to enter a hotel of a higher rank, category or class, where socializing with people of a higher class is considered an element of prestige.
- in the hotel industry, games of chance, as part of the hotel product, have a specific weight. For example, the world's most famous casinos are located in hotels of the highest categories.
- hotel industry is an activity that is very sensitive to all changes, that is, the demand for hotel products is elastic to economic and non-economic factors. It means weather conditions (winter-lack of snow) and summer (sea-plenty of rainy days).
- services in the hotel industry are very heterogeneous. The diversity and wealth of hotel services, especially additional ones (sports, recreational, entertainment, cultural, health), enriches the hotel product.

3. Development and evolution of hotel industry

Scientific - technological revolution, information technologies, profitability, improvement of living standards with free time, lead to changes in the way of satisfying needs, but also to the creation of new interests (Čerović, 2015, Čerović, 2009). A greater number of passengers,

longer stays and a wide variety of needs directly initiate the expansion of hotel capacities. Connecting hotels with travel agencies, transport companies, restaurants or some other activities directly affects new forms of development within this service activity (Čerović, 2002). The development and evolution of the hotel industry went through different stages (Svorcan, 2007). Since the 1970s, a jump in tourism at the global level is evident. The most developed, as well as less developed countries, directly or with the help of corporate capital, promoted the development of the hotel industry. The immediate initiator was the competitive struggle of large intercontinental airline companies and the appearance of jet-powered aircraft, which directly initiated a new form of connecting the hotel industry on a macro level into hotel chains.

The process of liberalization began in 1980, which initiated the privatization of state-owned enterprises. Private businesses (Popović et al. 2015) were deregulated, and social benefits from the state budget were reduced. Thus, states and their apparatuses removed barriers and obstacles to foreign investments, which created space for the openness of the economy (Ignjatović, Filipović, 2022).

In the eighth and ninth decades of the twentieth century, the economic climate encouraged the development of transnational companies around the world. The opening of the East and the transition of the West accelerated new trends in the world economy and opened a new stage of global corporate capitalism. Corporations imposed on the world market new forms of mergers and acquisitions of various industries (Tošković, Filipović, 2017).

The beginning of the 3rd millennium is characterized by the information revolution (Filipović, Ignjatović, 2022) (hardware, software and the Internet), which influenced:

- application of the latest highly developed technology in all segments of work and business;
- development of traffic (appearance of air-hotels and shuttles, they directly initiated the direction of tourism/hospitality towards space);
- telecommunications aspire to become a leading human activity;
- the appearance of integrated systems caused unexpected changes in the behavior of the population. For example, in the hotel industry, a new guest has been created, who, in addition to basic services, has a long list of completely new requirements;
- virtual reality (use of payment cards, cryptocurrencies, internet shares and dividends, purchase on leasing and credit or timesharing).
- conceptual and substantive changes in marketing and management.
- today's managers in the hotel industry are educated, information-technologically educated, communicative, largely dedicated to online promotion and sales channels and good connoisseurs of new trends, when it comes to digital media and social networks.

However, the evolutionary development of hotel companies from independent hotels to international hotel chains can be presented through four stages (Čerović, Knežević, 2019):

Phase I and the longest phase in terms of time, represents the beginning of the business of a certain hotel company, in which the aspiration to dominate the national market prevails, which is the ultimate range of the hotel's interests. This refers to the effort of each hotel company to achieve growth and establish a monopoly for a long period of time. The ultimate goal of this stage is to take a leadership position on the domestic market, through the introduction of new brands, products or technologies, without ambitions towards international expansion.

Phase II represents the beginning of the internationalization of business, which is reflected in the engagement of intermediaries in the target foreign market - by opening a branch outside the home country. This means that the hotel company is trying to impose the forms of its own business model on the foreign market and implement changes in order to adapt to foreign business conditions. The changes relate to marketing and management with the aim of

internationalizing business, leaving local frameworks and constantly striving to raise the level of service quality (Milisavljević, 1998).

Phase III occurs if success is achieved on the foreign market, where the focus of business is transferred to newly won positions in other countries, thereby absorbing the expanded target market. Only then does the hotel company grow into an international hotel company and tries to adapt to the international market. Also, it uses more available resources, while initiating the necessary changes at the organizational, marketing and business level. Sometimes individual strategies are formulated for each country in which it operates, while going public on the world's stock exchanges shows the international reach within the hotel branch.

The IV phase of development apostrophizes the whole world as the target market. The global orientation of business becomes important, not a single region or country. Business standards of the international hotel chain on the global market are harmonized, alliances are made and different groups and chains are created for the sake of survival and profit. The main means of prestige are the volume and quality (Tošković et al. 2015) of services, market positioning of the brand, hotel standards and categories, which today represent the determinants of identification of all international hotel chains..

According to Čerović and Knežević (2019), the formation of international, specialized hotel chains was influenced by numerous factors, which can be grouped as external and internal. External factors are the expansion of demand for hotel services in the world, as well as the need to accelerate the economic development of certain world regions. Internal factors are a certain brand and guarantee of quality (Hilton, Holiday Inn, Hayatt..), as well as greater efficiency in business (diversification of the offer). Large international hotel chains, with facilities or business activities, can be grouped into three basic forms, i.e. corporate chains, management companies, voluntary chains (consortia) (Čerović, 2015).

4. Structure of hotel facilities in Serbia

The beginning of the 21st century represents a turning point in the development of hotel facilities in Serbia, especially in the capital Belgrade as the leading tourist destination of Serbia (Šimičević, Štetić, 2013). That is why the period 2000-2006. year, is considered the latest stage of the development of Serbia's hotel offer. It is characterized by changes in the structure, number, purpose, or multifunctionality of hotel facilities, as well as the quality of hotel facilities. It is often stated in the literature that the period up to 2006 is considered a pre-phase characterized by the process of privatization, reconstruction and revitalization of existing capacities (Šimičević, Štetić, 2011).

According to data from the Ministry of Trade, Tourism and Telecommunications (2022), the largest number of hotels is located in Belgrade, i.e. 59 of the total number (Table 1). The participation of Garni hotels, of which there are 48 in Belgrade, is particularly large. Thus, the total number of hotels in Belgrade in 2022 is 107, while Novi Sad recorded 24 hotels. The growth and development of ski centers (Kopaonik and Zlatibora), as well as Vrnjačka banja and Sokobanja, is dominant.

Table 1: Scope and structure of hotels categorized in the most visited destinations in Serbia, 2022.

TOURIST DESTINATION	HOTELS	GARNY HOTELS	APARTMENT HOTELS	IN TOTAL	NUMBER OF ACCOMMODATION UNITS	NUMBER OF BEDS
BEOGRAD	59	48	-	107	7.216	13.338

NOVI SAD	10	14	-	24	1.115	2.12
KOPAONIK	10	-	4	14	1.182	2.481
ZLATIBOR	13	2	-	15	1.177	2.617
NIŠ	11	13	-	24	730	1.325
VRNJAČKA BANJA	9	2	-	11	899	1.638
SUBOTICA/ PALIĆ	4	8	-	12	509	941
KRAGUJEVA C	6	9	-	15	437	710
SOKOBANJA	3	-	-	3	235	412

Source: Ministry of Trade, Tourism and Telecommunications (2022).

Observing the volume and structure of categorized hotels in Serbia (Table 2), we conclude that the largest number (out of the total number of hotels) of hotels with four stars (117) is on the territory of Serbia, where there is also the largest number of accommodation units (8,836), while the number of beds is 17,037. Garni hotels with three and four stars each have 56 accommodation units, while the larger number of accommodation units (1657) is at the hotel with four stars. Apartment hotels have the largest number of hotels in the two-star category (2) with the largest number of accommodation units (190) with 360 available beds (Ministry of Trade, Tourism and Telecommunications (2022)).

Table 2: Scope and structure of categorized hotel facilities in Serbia

1	HOTELS	NUMBER OF FACILITIES	NUMBER OF ACCOMMODATION UNITS	NUMBER OF BEDS
	*	6	182	345
	**	43	1.779	3.357
	***	95	4.735	8.705
	****	117	8.836	17.037
	*****	15	1.76	3.506
In total		276	17.292	32.95
2	GARNI HOTELS	NUMBER OF FACILITIES	NUMBER OF ACCOMMODATION UNITS	NUMBER OF BEDS
	*	9	131	259
	**	30	509	953
	***	56	1.275	2.388
	****	56	1.657	3.049
	*****	1	18	36
In total		152	3.59	6.685
2	APARTMENT HOTELS	NUMBER OF FACILITIES	NUMBER OF ACCOMMODATION UNITS	NUMBER OF BEDS
	*	1	13	28
	**	2	190	360
	***	-	-	-
	****	1	113	231
	*****	-	-	-
In total		4	316	619

IN TOTAL L 1+2+3		432	21.198	40.254
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Source: Ministry of Trade, Tourism and Telecommunications (2022).

In the period 2011-2019, there was an increase in tourist visits in the Republic of Serbia (Tabela 3). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a drop in the total number of tourists in 2020. According to data from the Ministry of Trade, Tourism and Telecommunications (2021), in 2020, 68.5% fewer overnight stays by foreign tourists were recorded compared to the previous year in 2019, while 79.6% of the total number of overnight stays were made by domestic tourists. During 2020, all tourist destinations in Serbia recorded a significant decrease in the number of overnight stays compared to the previous period (Čelić et al. 2021). Among them, spa destinations recorded the mildest decline in the number of overnight stays (Radiojević, 2020).

Table 3: Tourist traffic in Serbia in the period 2011 – 2020.

Year	Tourists			Overnights stays of tourists			Average number overnight stays of tourists	
	in total	domestic	foreign	in total	domestic	foreign	domestic	foreign
2011	2.068.610	1.304.443	764.167	6.644.738	5.001.684	1.643.054	3,8	2,2
2012	2.079.643	1.269.676	809.967	6.484.702	4.688.485	1.796.217	3,7	2,2
2013	2.192.435	1.270.667	921.768	6.567.460	4.579.067	1.988.393	3,6	2,2
2014	2.192.268	1.163.536	1.028.732	6.086.275	3.925.221	2.161.054	3,4	2,1
2015	2.437.165	1.304.944	1.132.221	6.651.852	4.242.172	2.409.680	3,3	2,1
2016	2.753.591	1.472.165	1.281.426	7.533.739	4.794.741	2.738.998	3,3	2,1
2017	3.085.866	1.588.693	1.497.173	8.325.144	5.150.017	3.175.127	3,2	2,1
2018	3.430.522	1.720.008	1.710.514	9.336.103	5.678.235	3.657.868	3,3	2,1
2019	3.689.983	1.843.432	1.846.551	10.073.299	6.062.921	4.010.378	3,3	2,2
2020	1.820.021	1.374.310	445.711	6.201.290	4.936.732	1.264.558	3,6	2,8

Source: Republic Institute of Statistics (2022).

5. The importance of promoting the hotel industry in Serbia

Searching for adequate hotel accommodation at the desired tourist destination usually requires a lot of time and effort. In order to draw attention to a particular hotel and make it as attractive as possible to potential guests, hotel companies in Serbia must continuously invest efforts in the field of promotion. Given that the process of choosing a specific hotel and its reservation takes place long before the hotel services start to be used, hoteliers must use appropriate promotional activities and techniques to present their offer in order to encourage, inform, interest and, ultimately, attract potential guests.

The exchange of information in the tourism and hotel sector is inevitable in order to provide the bearers of tourism needs both in the world and in Serbia with adequate information on numerous elements of the offer. Therefore, the application of modern information and communication technology is imposed. The Internet with all the possibilities it offers is an indispensable promotional channel in the hotel industry in the Republic of Serbia (Vladimirović et al. 2022).

One of the primary forms of hotel promotion on the Internet is via a website. Creating a

hotel's web presentation requires the involvement of both hotel marketing personnel and personnel with specific knowledge in the field of information technology and web design.

It is necessary to market the site to search engines in order to increase its rating. Also, the navigation of the site must be simple, and the content must be in accordance with the goals to be achieved after visiting the site. A significant step forward in the creation of a website is based on the application of GIS (geographic information system) technology. In this way, interactive maps are available to website visitors, which provide visualization of the hotel through maps and digital images. Information is also provided about the hotel's distance from various companies that provide transportation services. A step further in raising the level of hotel promotion on the Internet would certainly be a website where accommodation reservations can be made. This is achieved by inserting the hotel's offer on already existing websites that deal with bookings, or by upgrading the hotel's official website in the direction of the possibility of online reservations. We should not forget that it is always necessary to provide a special place on the site where visitors will share their impressions, suggestions and observations, experiences and possible remarks (Kotler et al., 2010).

Although the use of social networks for promotional purposes is a secondary form of hotel promotion, it can be safely argued that networks and communities on the Internet (especially Facebook and Instagram) are an imperative of online marketing. By frequently posting attractive photos, content and videos on profiles and accounts on networks, they try to attract curious tourists and present the design of the exterior, interior, hotel location, food or ambience. The hotel's promotion team should continuously engage in providing a virtual experience through various internet services (popular Vlog, YouTube channel). In this way, potential guests are provided with an insight into the appearance of the rooms, the food and drink menu, recordings of daily activities in the hotel, and unmissable visits to the most beautiful places and sights in the vicinity of Serbian hotels.

In addition to modern forms of hotel promotion that mainly rely on the use of the Internet, hotel companies in Serbia should also use traditional forms of promotion to a lesser or greater extent. This primarily refers to leaflets, brochures and other printed materials. Depending on the target group or the hotel's target market, printed materials can be placed or distributed in places where the target group of potential guests move, or sent to a home or e-mail address as a form of direct marketing. The use of adequate television channels and radio stations for the promotion of hotels in Serbia is essential, as well as advertising in newspapers and specialized magazines. All of the above can be accompanied by the installation of billboards, illuminated advertisements and LED panels. Hotels that invest considerable resources in the development of a positive image in the environment often sponsor various cultural, artistic, sports and humanitarian events (Kotler, Keler, 2017).

The basic task and goal of promotion in the hotel industry in Serbia is the realization of the process of two-way communication between potential guests and holders of the hotel offer. At the same time, actors on the demand side try to motivate and convince themselves of the quality of the hotel and its services. On the other hand, hotel management through promotion always has feedback from the market about the wishes, intentions, motives and needs of demand holders. Special attention must be paid to the creation of the promotional message and its content, so that it causes positive reactions among the target audience and leads them to book a hotel. Which promotional forms and techniques will be used by the hotel depends, first of all, on the goal that is to be achieved with the promotion, as well as on the characteristics and characteristics of potential tourists or guests. It goes without saying that hotels should also take into account the available promotional budget, more specifically the possibility of allocating financial resources for promotional purposes. The ultimate goal of applying various promotional techniques, as an important instrument of the marketing mix, is to increase the number of hotel guests and capacity occupancy, which leads to

the growth of hotel profits in Serbia.

6. Conclusions

The importance of the tourism sector for the economy of the Republic of Serbia can be seen from the data on employment in this sector, the level of exports, the growing trend in the number of tourists (especially foreign ones), the impact of tourism on other sectors, etc. How much the hotel industry has influenced the development of tourism in the Republic of Serbia is also shown by the fact that in recent years several high-class hotels have been built or renovated in the Serbian capital. The importance of promoting the hotel industry was also demonstrated by the period of the COVID-19 crisis, when hotels were more or less closed and with large losses. Providers of tourist services should use the period of reduction in the number of guests and operational activities to analyze the market and modern trends in tourism in order to eliminate shortcomings at the city and country level, which have been recognized for many years as factors limiting the development of this sector.

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