



TRANSIT TOURISM IN SERBIA - PREDISPOSITION AND DEVELOPMENT

Branko Vranešević^{1*},
Miroslav Knežević²

¹Ph.D. Student,
Singidunum University,
Belgrade, Serbia

²Singidunum University,
Belgrade, Serbia

Abstract:

Transit tourism, as a specific form of tourism, refers to the passage of tourists through a country without a longer stay, but with the potential to significantly contribute to revenue. The Republic of Serbia, thanks to its favorable geographic location on key European transport corridors, possesses significant potential for the development of transit tourism. This paper explores the possibilities for developing transit tourism in Serbia, focusing on the cities of Belgrade, Užice, and Vranje, which are situated on Corridors X and XI. Using the Analytical Hierarchy Process (AHP), the preferences of transit tourists were examined based on cultural, natural, and gastronomic tours, with surveys conducted among four demographic groups. The results show that Belgrade has the highest potential, while Užice and Vranje have similar opportunities but face challenges such as insufficient promotion and a lack of accommodation capacity. The paper highlights the untapped potential of transit tourism in Serbia and provides a basis for further development strategies that could enhance its attractiveness.

Keywords:

transit tourism, international traffic, Serbia, Belgrade, Užice, Vranje.

INTRODUCTION

In the past few years, changes in consumer behavior in the tourism sector have been notable, mainly due to increasing feelings of uncertainty and fear. Tourists are now considering uncertainties such as health risks, political instability, and environmental changes when choosing to travel. Uncertainty in tourism involves unforeseeable and unmanageable elements that may have adverse effects on a journey, leading to discomfort, financial setback, or potential harm (Zenker & Kock, 2020). Tourists' travel choices are heavily influenced by how they perceive risk, which is closely connected to the consequences of uncertainties.

Transit tourism, as a specific form of tourism, refers to traveling through a certain territory or country without a prolonged stay. Although it is not the primary goal of travel, transit tourism can significantly contribute to the revenue of countries located at major transportation hubs (McKercher and Tang, 2004). Tourists in transit often use services such as accommodation, catering and other content designed for short-term stays. The Republic of Serbia, owing to its favorable geographic position at the crossroads of European routes, possesses significant potential for the development of transit tourism, primarily due to its well-developed road networks and key transit corridors.

Correspondence:
Branko Vranešević

e-mail:
branko.vranesovic.23@singimail.rs



Several major European transport corridors, such as Corridor X, which connects Central Europe with Greece and Turkey, and Corridor XI, which links Romania with Montenegro, pass through Serbia. These routes make Serbia an attractive transit point for millions of tourists who pass through the country each year. This paper explores the predispositions and opportunities for developing transit tourism in Serbia, with a particular focus on three cities situated on major corridors: Belgrade, Užice, and Vranje. Each of these cities has a specific role in transit tourism, and by analyzing their characteristics, the main advantages and challenges of this type of tourism will be identified.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Serbia's main advantage in transit tourism is its well-developed road network. Ristova and Dimitrov (2019) defining the concept of transit tourism, means a set of terms and phenomena which appear as a complex reflection of all relevant factors related to the movement of tourists through certain places, regions or countries towards their particular tourist destination, where their retention with a certain goal ranges from a few minutes to one or more nights. Studies like those of Timothy and Saarinen (2013) suggest that countries located at key transportation hubs can significantly benefit from this type of tourism, but it is crucial to develop appropriate services and facilities. Research by Kanwal *et al.* (2020) emphasizes the importance of improving infrastructure and services along highways—such as gas stations, restaurants, and accommodation facilities. Cities like Belgrade offer opportunities for brief stopovers, while Vranje and Užice attract travelers due to local gastronomy and natural beauty. Although often seen as less profitable compared to destination tourism, transit tourism can make a significant economic contribution to local communities (Radović, 2015). According to Slak Valek (2015), transit tourists spend on basic needs such as fuel, food, and accommodation, and by properly developing the offer, it is possible to increase their spending and length of stay. Insufficient promotion of local attractions, lack of service standardization, and occasional traffic congestion are the main challenges. Jovanović & Dragičević (2016) highlight the need for greater investment in tourism along highways to increase visitor numbers and revenues from transit tourists. Increasing the economic benefits of transit tourism can be achieved through better promotion, the development of specialized tourism packages for passing travelers, and investments in sustainable infrastructure. Ristova and Angelkova (2015) research makes an attempt for acquaint with the importance of the tourist need and wishes of transit tourists and their contribution for the development of hotel industry. Hospitality is one of the principal sectors in the tourism industry, it is important to show that the hotel offer is made exactly from the potentials of the certain area for developing selective types of tourism which the research Ristova and Angelkova (2015) showed. The research of Iliev, D. (2019) questions: Whether the pan-European transport corridors have an adequate transport infrastructure and a quality hospitality service that satisfies the needs of transit tourists and can they be considered as axes for tourism development? Are there potential transit destinations along the pan-European transport corridors that could affect the development of tourism and the dynamics of the tourism system?

Works like that of Vujić (2017) point to the importance of marketing and better informing tourists at key transit points. Additionally, there is potential for further growth of transit tourism through better targeting of travelers, improving the offer along highways, and developing sustainable tourism practices. Pavlović (2020) suggests investing in green infrastructure and improving services for passing tourists to increase their spending and retention. Recent research has applied the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) method to evaluate key factors influencing the development of transit tourism in Serbia. The AHP model was applied to gather expert opinions and create a structured decision-making framework for improving transit tourism offerings. This method has been praised for its ability to integrate multiple criteria and provide a clear ranking of factors (Saaty, 1980).

From all the previously mentioned literature, we come to the conclusion that transit tourism of the Republic of Serbia needs to meet several key points, goals, in order to be economically profitable for all destinations that want to join transit tourism and improve it, and these are: accessibility, diversity of offer, accommodation capacities, orientation to this type of tourism.



So we come to the main hypothesis that, thanks to the strategy of the Republic of Serbia to develop road infrastructure in this regard, transit tourism has an excellent predisposition and perspective, whether we look at it macro at the level of the state of Serbia, or if we look at it micro at the level of a destination located on one of the road routes, corridors, that with minimal effort and investment, excellent economic effects can be achieved.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Serbia's geographic position in Europe makes it a transit country between Eastern and Western, as well as Northern and Southern Europe. The main travel routes, such as Corridors X and XI, as well as local express roads passing near major city centers, play a key role in the development of transit tourism. The improvement of transportation infrastructure represents a prerequisite for the development of other specific characteristics of each city, highlighting all the advantages that may be of interest to potential tourists.

Belgrade, as the capital of Serbia, serves as the main hub for all types of transportation (Nikola Tesla Airport, the main railway and road hub, as well as the rivers Danube and Sava). The capital city can always offer a variety of attractions, such as cultural, religious, adventure, sports, and other types of tours.

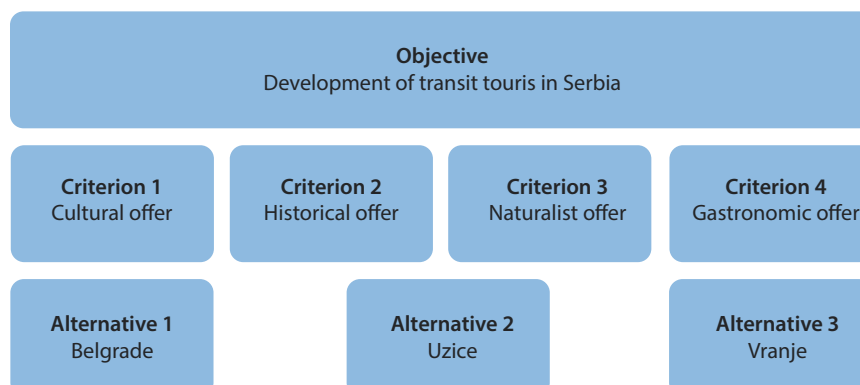
The city of Užice, located in the Zlatibor District, along with mountain centers such as Tara and Zlatibor, can also offer a wide range of activities for all age groups, as well as for tourists with different preferences. Tourists traveling to Montenegro often stop in Užice for a short break.

Vranje, situated in the Pčinja District in southeastern Serbia, is a transit point where tourists make a stop on their way to Greece and Turkey. The proximity of Vranjska Banja and Vlasina Lake makes this destination one of the more important ones in Serbia.

The use of the Analytical Hierarchy Process (AHP), a structured method for organizing and analyzing complex decisions, can be applied to achieve the objective presented to the respondents, providing information on the preferences of transit tourists and thus guiding strategic decisions in each city (Crouch and Ritchie, 2005; Lai and Vinh, 2013). Developed by T.C. Saaty in the 1970s, AHP has become popular in various fields, including management, economics, engineering, and ecology. AHP method, as a multi-criteria decision analysis (MCDA), can provide an adequate evaluation of data based on a large number of experts opinions and offer a reliable source to verify a new model (Velasquez and Hester 2013). To apply the AHP technique, a Delphi questionnaire was designed based on a list of the most effective criteria, sub-criteria, and indices of ecotourism development collected through data gathering, articles and documents.

For a detailed analysis, it is necessary to define the objective, then the criteria based on which the objective will be achieved, and finally, rank the alternatives offered to transit tourists, as shown in Figure 1.:

Figure 1. Development of transit tourism Criteria and Alternatives





RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Survey was conducted one season across three alternative cities, focusing on gathering insights from diverse respondent groups. The respondents evaluated various elements in pairs, first in relation to the overall goal and subsequently in comparison to the specific criteria established for the alternatives.

The survey of four respondent groups was conducted during the summer season in each of the alternative cities. Respondents evaluated elements in pairs at a given level concerning elements at a higher level. In the three-level hierarchy presented in this paper, criteria were first compared relative to the goal, and then the alternatives were evaluated against the criteria. In applying the AHP method, elements are compared semantically or numerically as defined by Saaty's rating scale, shown in Table 1. This scale ranges from 1 to 9, where 1 indicates equal importance and 9 signifies extreme importance of one element over another (Saaty, 1980). The comparisons made by respondents were essential for establishing priority rankings among the alternatives.

Table 1. Saaty's rating scale for pairwise element comparison

Ratings	Significance of element i compared to j
1	Equal importance of element i and j
3	Moderate dominance of element i over j
5	Strong dominance of element i over j
7	Very strong dominance of element i over j
9	Absolute dominance of element i over j
2,4,6,8	Intermediate values

Source: Saaty (1980)

Variations among respondent groups highlighted differing preferences. For example, younger respondents prioritized entertainment and social activities, while older respondents placed more emphasis on safety and health services. These insights reflect the research of McKercher & Du Cros (2002), which suggests that demographic factors significantly influence travel preferences and behavior, necessitating a segmented approach to tourism marketing.

According to the summarized results, Belgrade emerged as the city that would attract the most respondents, followed by Užice and lastly, Vranje. It should be noted that while there are slight differences between Belgrade and Užice, the differences between Užice and Vranje are almost negligible.

Moreover, analyses like this must consider all the advantages and challenges each of these three destinations face. Advantages can be reflected not only through the strategic geographical location and developed transportation infrastructure but also through the potential for short-term stays and the diversity of offerings. Challenges primarily include insufficient promotion, which is a major drawback for destinations such as Užice and Vranje, as well as underdeveloped tourism infrastructure and an inadequate number of accommodation options for short-term stays.

The findings suggest that while the the general goal of improving tourism in these cities is shared among the respondent groups, individual preferences significantly influence their evaluations. The prioritization of criteria such as accessibility aligns with trends in modern tourism, where convenience plays a critical role in destination choice (Dwyer & Kim, 2003). Moreover, the differentiation among respondent groups indicates that tailored marketing strategies may be necessary to effectively engage diverse demographics (Chang and Katrichis, 2016).



CONCLUSION

The template is designed so that author affiliations are not repeated each time for multiple authors of the same affiliation. Please keep your affiliations as succinct as possible (for example, do not differentiate among departments of the same organization). The use of the AHP method in this research provides valuable insights into the factors that attract transit tourists to Belgrade, Užice, and Vranje. Through this structured approach, it is clear that transit tourism in Serbia holds significant untapped potential for growth. A more detailed analysis reveals that transit tourism could play a crucial role in diversifying Serbia's tourism offerings, particularly by appealing to travelers seeking brief yet memorable experiences while in transit.

This research highlights that strategic development of specific tourism products tailored to transit tourists—such as quick-access attractions, comfortable and affordable accommodations, and efficient transportation links—could increase Serbia's appeal as a transit destination. As past studies have shown, such targeted offerings increase the probability of tourists passing through will extend their stay or return in the future. For instance, short cultural excursions, dining experiences featuring local cuisine, or scenic viewpoints conveniently located along transit routes could be key in transforming transient stops into impactful experiences.

The analysis underscores the importance of addressing the promotional and infrastructural challenges faced by destinations like Užice and Vranje. By investing in targeted marketing and improving accommodations tailored to short-stay visitors, these cities could strengthen their competitive position in the transit tourism sector. Improving accessibility and visibility through promotional efforts would enable these cities to attract more transit visitors, thereby stimulating local economies.

The findings from this research serve as a foundation for developing future strategies aimed at fostering sustainable growth in Serbia's transit tourism sector. Sustainable practices, such as promoting eco-friendly transport options and preserving cultural sites, should be central to these strategies, ensuring that tourism growth benefits local communities without compromising natural and cultural resources (Ritchie and Crouch, 2003).

In summary, this research demonstrates that a focused and strategic approach to transit tourism in Serbia could not only increase the country's attractiveness to transit tourists but also contribute to sustainable tourism growth, ultimately positioning Serbia as a prominent transit destination in the region.

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