

*Bernardica Milićević**

**Religious Tourism in the Balkans
from the Perspective of Međugorje Marian Shrine**

Introduction

Religious tourism is one of the oldest forms of tourism, which as a specific form of tourism (along with health tourism) began to appear in the earliest history when people visited certain places for this purpose –shrines–, and at the same time traveled greater distances. Since it is economically a very useful form of tourism for a particular destination, throughout history such destinations have regularly become centers of religious, commercial, cultural, and other events in certain regions. Pilgrims in such places are provided with various infrastructural, gastronomic, cultural, and other facilities and, therefore, there is increased investment in a particular place. When we think of a tourist destination, we cannot help but wonder what is it that sets it apart from others and makes it recognizable and sustainable. Each tourist product is characterized by specific geographical, cultural or historical features but today this is insufficient for it to be able to survive in a strong market. Throughout history, each shrine has its own story. The small Herzegovinian village of Međugorje is characterized by a spiritual factor and makes up most of the overall tourist potential of this area. Its news was spread all over the world. Opinions are divided from enthusiastic supporters to opponents. The Vatican has not yet officially recognized Međugorje as a Marian shrine, but it has been recognized by millions of pilgrims who come. However, no one has yet testified that the apparitions are not true, but only that there has been no real evidence of the supernatural nature of the apparitions, although numerous healings have been recorded, information about which is in the Parish Archives in Međugorje.

* PhD in Strategic marketing of Bijaković-Međugorje as a tourist destination. She teaches at the Faculty of Social Sciences dr. Milenko Brkić in Međugorje and at the College of Tourism and Management in Konjic.

Only a few terms have such a high frequency of use, while still not needing to be defined precisely. It could be said that there are as many definitions of tourism as there are people working in it. For many, tourism only represents travel, vacations, and relaxation. For others though, those that work in it, tourism represents quite the opposite, associating it with hard work, profits, and professionalism. One side focuses on the many positive contributions of tourism, such as health, cultural, and educational tourism, while the other side focuses on labor productivity, area development, and monetary gain. It's undeniable that tourism represents an extremely complex and heterogeneous phenomenon, hence its different approaches and conclusions represent its heterogeneous nature. Even theories about the origin of the definitions for these terms point to a diversity of views towards this phenomenon. The basic conditions that have to be met for the emergence of tourism are as follows.

First, there needs to be an interested populace that has the needed free time and financial resources to commit to a trip. The second condition is the availability of an appropriate system of transportation followed by a relatively secure system of accommodation. The last condition is the availability of enough information to spark the interest of potential tourists. This represents a voluntary and occasional form of migration, while every other type of migration is forced. Temporary stay in tourist areas is surely the most significant characteristic of tourism. The guest has direct contact with the environment he is visiting, i.e., its culture, the staff that forms his first impressions, and the feeling formed by visiting a new environment. Guests bring their culture, habits, and customs with them. We distinguish specific forms of tourism based on natural resources (health tourism, sports tourism, nautical tourism, ecotourism, rural tourism, hunting tourism, naturism, Robinson tourism etc.) and specific forms of tourism based on social resources (congressional, cultural, gastronomic, enophile, event, and religious tourism, tourism created via artificial attractions, casino tourism etc.)

Every day we encounter terms (forms of tourism) that are used to fulfill very specific needs of tourists (niche markets) or that can be part of many other forms of tourism, i.e., shopping tourism, cruises, historical tourism, sex tourism, dark tourism etc.

One of the oldest motives for travel since the times of ancient Greece were religious motives. Religious travels refer to the visitation of religious sites and attractions with the purpose of strengthening one's faith and satisfying cultural and spiritual needs. It should be mentioned that religious destinations do not only attract believers, but they also attract many curious tourists who seek a cultural or adventurous experience. This is also one of the main reasons for the inability to separate religious and non-religious visitors, as it may lead to possible conflicts in managing these locations.

Pilgrimage and its Importance

Religious tourism most often appears in three forms:

1. As a pilgrimage (collective or individual shrine visitations).
2. As mass gatherings on occasions of significant religious dates and anniversaries.
3. As a tour and visitation to significant religious locations and facilities all within the tourist itinerary.

Pilgrimage represents a trip to a religious shrine, regularly on foot, which takes precedence over all other forms of transport. Pilgrimage locations are usually native places or places where saints or religious founders are laid to rest. Locations of Our Lady's apparitions are also among the more visited pilgrimage destinations. Believers of many large religions participate in pilgrimages. A believer that goes on such a journey is referred to as a "pilgrim." Pilgrimages are numerous even outside of Christianity. In India, for example, many pilgrims traverse long trails and expose themselves to danger in order to reach the calm waters of the holy river Ganges. Wise people and common ones, the wealthy and the poor, all of them seek divine liberation and peace. Mecca is also a location to which millions of pilgrims travel annually. Every Muslim wishes to undertake the hajj and visit the Kaaba (Home of God), through his own means or the means of his deputy (bedel?). Many places of pilgrimage are mentioned in the Old Testament. After returning from Exile, the Jerusalem temple became a special place for the Israelites. Pilgrims from all over Palestine came to celebrate grand annual holidays there. An Old Testament man lives from pilgrimages. Even today, Jews perform a pilgrimage to the Wailing Wall. Over six

million believers perform the pilgrimage. Places as goals for pilgrimages, but also pilgrimages as certain travel routes attract other tourists too. El Camino—The way of St. James, a pilgrimage route to Santiago de Compostela and the shrine of St. James in Spain are one of the most popular religious tourism destinations today in Europe. The 800-kilometers-long pilgrimage attracts many pilgrims but also other travelers motivated by different goals (recreation, challenge, cultural-historical value, attraction, etc.) What makes a pilgrim different from an ordinary tourist is his inner motivation—the pilgrim wishes to meet with God, while a tourist is looking for unusual experiences, not for enlightenment but for distancing from himself, from his daily life. The most visited shrine, the most attractive destination in the field of religious tourism in Southeast Europe is Međugorje.

Marian Pilgrimage in Međugorje

The Marian shrine is a shrine dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Marian shrines are part of the culture and practice of some Christian churches—mostly the Roman Catholic Church. Shrines dedicated to Our Lady usually mark the apparition, which is attributed to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Sometimes a Marian shrine was created due to a strong Marian devotion throughout the history of an area. Such places are often destinations for pilgrimages. Some of the largest shrines were created due to Mary's apparitions on distant hills, which were almost unknown before the apparitions (Lourdes etc.) On several occasions, Our Lady personally asked those to whom she appeared to build a church on the site of the apparition. The number of pilgrims who visit some of these shrines every year is very large. For example, Lourdes, with a population of about 15,000 people, receives about 5,000,000 pilgrims each year, and, within France, Paris alone has more hotel rooms than Lourdes. More than a million pilgrims visit the shrine of the Black Madonna at the Chapel of Mercy in Altötting, Germany, every year, where miracles have been attributed for more than 500 years to the intercession of the Virgin Mary in that shrine.¹ Međugorje is one of the Marian shrines and it is not a traditional

¹ https://hr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marijanska_sveti%C5%A1ta (accessed 11-4-2021).

shrine but a Marian shrine of the apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Pilgrimage and other forms of religious tourism have not yet been scientifically researched or presented to the public with a measure of justification if we observe it (as far as it is allowed) from an economic point of view. For this reason, there is a need to analyze the impact of a visit to Medjugorje through this special form of expression of something that is Holy throughout time. In Medjugorje, the domicile population and pilgrims are connected by religion. What makes a travel religious is the fulfillment of certain religious customs and rites during the day: obligatory prayer, attendance at Masses and other church rites. Looking through history at a religious destination, they have regularly existed as centers of religious, commercial, cultural, and other events in particular regions. Pilgrims in such places are provided with various infrastructure, gastronomic, cultural, and other facilities, so there is increased investment in a particular place. All that are a prerequisite for the development and presence of tourism as an economic activity.

History of Međugorje

Međugorje Parish is located in Herzegovina, twenty-five kilometres southwest of Mostar. Međugorje (the name is of Slavic origin and it means the area between the two mountains), with the villages of Bijakovići, Vionica, Miletina, and Šurmanci, is a Roman Catholic parish, in which today (2021) live about 5,000 inhabitants. It is pastorally cared for by the priests of the Herzegovinian Franciscan Province of the Assumption of Mary.

The whole area is inhabited by Croats who converted to Christianity thirteen centuries ago. The village is first mentioned in historical sources in 1599. The present parish was founded in 1892 and dedicated to St. James the Apostle, protector of pilgrims. Until June 24, 1981, Međugorje lived like other villages in this area: people cultivated the land, planted tobacco and vines, produced wine, and grew vegetables to provide for the humble life of their families. Because of social circumstances, many of its inhabitants went overseas, be it other coun-

tries like Croatia or bigger cities in Bosnia and Herzegovina.² The people of the Parish of Medjugorje, encouraged by Our Lady's apparitions, are slowly returning to their homeland. There are three privileged places of pilgrimage in Medjugorje:

1. Apparition Hill – that is the name of the place above the hamlet of Podbrdo in Bijakovići where the visionaries saw Our Lady in the first days. It was the end of June 1981. Since then, pilgrims have gathered at this place to pray the rosary. During both day and night, groups of pilgrims can be found ascending to the site of the first apparition. Only this place is marked by a pile of stones with an inconspicuous cross planted. Reliefs of joyful and sad mysteries of the rosary were placed on the ascending path in 1989, which was a work of the professor Carmela Puzzolo from Florence.

2. Križevac – a hill above Medjugorje. In 1934, the inhabitants of the village of Međugorje erected an eight-meter-high concrete cross to commemorate the 1,900th anniversary of Jesus' death. Groups of believers and individuals in that place perform the devotion of the Way of the Cross going from station to station. In the early years, the stations were marked with wooden crosses. In 1988, bronze reliefs were placed next to these crosses –the Way of the Cross station–, which was a work of the Italian sculptor Carmelo Puzzolo. Križevac developed into a privileged place of worship of Christ's Passion and became the Calvary of the Međugorje sanctuary.

3. The Parish Church and the area around the church – is a place of celebration of the Eucharist and sacramental life. The old Parish Church, built at the end of the last century, was destroyed by an earthquake. The new church was completed in 1969. The church, like the Parish, was dedicated to St. James the Elder, apostle and protector of pilgrims. In 1991, an altar for outdoor celebrations and twenty confessionals were erected next to the church. A chapel for Eucharistic Adoration with rooms for lectures and spiritual talks was also built. Two tents were set up for the occasion as well. There is a great need for new sacral spaces.³ The period of war conflicts from 1991 until 1995 in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Covid-19 pandemic, which first

² <http://www.medjugorje.hr/hr/medjugorski-fenomen/vodic/> (accessed 12-5-2021).

³ <http://www.medjugorje.hr/hr/medjugorski-fenomen/hodocasca/> (accessed 19-6-2021).

appeared in late December 2019 in the megacity of Wuhan in the Chinese province of Hube and spread around the world, reduced the number of pilgrims to Međugorje. However, a daily prayer program is held in the church, followed by hundreds of thousands of believers via the internet and social media networks.

Međugorje as a Tourist Destination

The word “destination” is used in all appropriate forms of Roman-based languages but is also widespread in Anglo-Saxon countries. It entered tourism under the means of transport, especially that of air which uses English terminology. The concept of destination began to spread to research in tourism in the early 1970s and it became more and more synonymous with a tourist locality, zone, region, set of countries, and even a continent.⁴ Destination is a significant element of the holiday decision-making process. The choice of destination can follow different levels: national level, regional level, municipal level, or tourist resort level. Different benefits arise for the guest from each level. The place of “Crystallization” of production and consumption of services is a kind of destination, where a variety of services are provided to tourists. In addition to creating an evaluation of each individual consumed service (accommodation, gastronomic part, sports, entertainment, culture, etc.), the guest experiences his vacation as a whole, and builds his decision on it. However, a significant part of guests of a certain spatial level consumes the essential elements of their vacation outside the boundaries of that level. How important certain components of travel are for a competitive guest is very difficult to determine a priori. Although each person is guided by their own pattern of preferences, it is possible to “filter” typical patterns of satisfaction within large guest populations.⁵ Each destination is individual for its unique features such as: geographical location, history, culture, and the like. From a management point of view, it is important to combine its various components into a separate tourism

⁴ Dragan Magaš–Ksenija Vodeb–Zrinka Zadel, *Menadžment turističke organizacije i destinacije* (Opatija: Fakultet za menadžment u turizmu i ugostiteljstvu, 2018), 9.

⁵ Magaš–Vodeb–Zadel, *op.cit.*, 84.

product. The geographical aspects of the study of tourism place emphasis on its spatial component, as space is the main resource of tourism in which tourism activity leaves visible traces. This feedback between tourism and space leaves effects of equal intensity on all parts of the Earth's surface. In addition, tourism development is not of equal intensity in all parts of the world and is characterized by significant differences and specifics. Cultural heritage, tangible and intangible, is the common wealth of humanity in its diversity and uniqueness, and its protection is one of the important factors for recognizing, defining, and affirming cultural identity. The Ministry of Culture and Media develops mechanisms and establishes measures for the protection of cultural heritage in order to ensure its sustainability, which includes the identification, documentation, research, maintenance, protection, use and promotion of its values. In terms of its religious and cultural heritage, Bosnia and Herzegovina is one of the richest countries in Europe.⁶ It has three large religious communities, each with its own significant shrines. In this area, the most visited sanctuary of this form of tourism is Međugorje. In the period of 40 years that the apparitions lasted in Međugorje, one whole life was created. Numerous contradictions have never prevented millions of pilgrims from coming to this small place. Due to great interest and the constant arrival of pilgrims in increasing numbers, this little village, until 1981, turned into one of the most important pilgrimage destinations not only in Europe but also the whole world. From a small unknown village, it develops to not only a world-famous Marian shrine but also a world-famous tourist destination, which began to develop rapidly by providing pilgrims with all the necessary facilities during their visit to this world-famous shrine. Boarding houses the size of one guest's bus are being built while restaurants, souvenir shops, post offices, banks and hospitals are opening. It takes on the outlines of a tourist village, a holy place of pilgrimage. Thus, Međugorje was included in the world's largest Marian shrines such as Fatima, Lourdes, Santiago de Compostela and the largest and most visited shrine of Guadalupe in Mexico. Marian shrines, as religious tourist destinations, arise suddenly and spontaneously, without the influence or will of either ecclesias-

⁶ Zoran Curić–Nikola Glamuzina–Vuk Tvrтко Opačić, *Geografija turizma*, 27.

tical or civil authorities. Also, natural features, economic development or geopolitical environment are not decisive for the development of such a religious tourist destination.

Tourism Product

A tourism product can be defined as the overall experience of tourists that meet their expectations, including experiences with accommodation, natural and cultural attractions, entertainment, transportation, catering, hosts, etc. It is, therefore, a complex and connected set of individual physical products and services from different commercial and non-commercial domains that the visitor “consumes” during the tourist trip. Tourism products can be of different levels of complexity and it is a question of the strategy of the business entity what kind of product it will develop:

1. Basic product –at the level of the basic product, only the basic needs of visitors are met (e.g., accommodation and food).
2. Expected product –includes additions to the basic product (additional services or physical products) that the guest expects in accordance with some prescribed form of product differentiation (e.g., in a four-star hotel, the guest expects a swimming pool).
3. Supporting product –these are further added elements that provide some extra value for the guest or that are used to differentiate the product from the competitors in order to gain an advantage (e.g., in a four-star hotel the guest does not expect a wellness center, but such a center can further distinguish one hotel from another and create an advantage in the eyes of the guests).
4. Extended product –the intention is to further differentiate from the competitors, whereby an attempt is made to influence the feelings of customers through the atmosphere and services (e.g., decoration, atmosphere in the hotel).

Tourism products and services are the largest “export product” in the world, ahead of pharmaceutical, automotive, chemical, and food products.⁷

⁷ Radmila Živković, *Ponašanje i zaštita potrošača u turizmu* (Beograd: Univerzitet Singidunum, Fakultet za turistički i hotelijerski menadžment, 2007), 5.

While defining the tourism product and its levels, it is necessary to take into account several other important aspects:

- atmosphere (physical environment),
- customer interaction with the service system,
- mutual customer interaction
- customer participation in production,
- creating a brand.

The atmosphere is one of the key elements of the tourist service and often the reason why the client does, or actually doesn't do, business with a particular service provider. The client experiences the atmosphere through his senses, which can affect the consumption of the tourist services. It can serve as a medium to attract attention, send a message to a potential consumer and create an atmosphere.

Customer interaction with the service system consists of three phases: joining, spending, and unbundling. The first stage is to start contact with the initial query. This phase can be improved by giving a sample (if this is possible, depending on the specific storage of a particular tourist service). The consumption phase represents the consumption of the service. Since most tourist services are consumed on the spot, it is necessary to enrich the environment, add specific physical characteristics and signs that will help the client interact with the product. The separation phase represents the time when the client is finished using the service and leaves.

Mutual interaction of clients is one of the tasks of tourism and hospitality organizations. The care of every guest in the hotel is always the same. However, guests from different cultures come to the hotel, speak different languages, have different age groups and different habits, so the hotel must ensure that the interaction between customers does not negatively affect their experiences during their stay at the hotel. A brand represents a name, term, sign, symbol, or a combination thereof, intended to identify a service or goods and differentiate them from the competitors. It is generally legally protected, by recognizing the exclusive rights of the seller or service provider to use the name or brand. From a marketing point of view, a brand represents the most valuable part of a company's assets. The brand represents everything the company does and everything the company is. Brand development in tourism differs in many elements from consumer products.

Loyalty to the product is difficult to achieve because many guests want to see some new destinations, feel some new experiences, but this feature is important. Research on hotel brands shows that apart from the name, in no case is there a complete copy of the “basic specification of the hotel brand,” which is determined by the basic design of the hotel as a product.⁸

Tourist Destination Cycle of Life

According to the theory of the tourist product, the problem of connecting interests in the joint action of various stakeholders in the tourist destination was noticed early on. Namely, during the elaboration of the process of creating a complex tourist product in the destination, the issue of strategic planning for such products arose. For a complex tourist product, a common planning carrier cannot be sought, because planning can be realized only at different levels. One of these levels is the tourist destination.⁹ Its importance is reflected in the fact that it creates the conditions for receptive tourism, which leads the economic development of the area. A tourist destination transitions, from a single point of view, different states of exploitation and development. This phenomenon occurs due to the influence of direct and indirect factors of instability, regardless of whether these factors affect the environment or the destination itself. By marking these conditions with the help of growth indicators, which are usually quantitative–economic, the life cycle (life curve) of a tourist destination is obtained in relation to time. The evolution of tourism was strongly connected with the development of the destination, and especially with individual localities that developed more significantly with the development of communicative factors. These factors have produced a mass of tourist groups, very often of different preferences. The changing market has developed in parallel, and some localities have had to respond in terms of creating a new product.¹⁰

⁸ Paul Slattery, “Hotel Branding in 1990s,” *Travel and Tourism Analyst* 1 (1991): 26.

⁹ Antun Kobašić–Josip Senečić, *Marketing u turizmu* (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 1989), 35.

¹⁰ Kobašić–Senečić, *op.cit.*, 35.

In other words, we can say that a tourist destination, like any other product, has its own life cycle. This means that it goes through stages of research, inclusion, development, consolidation, stagnation, decline, or rejuvenation. Therefore, the concept of product life cycle is one of the dynamic strategies available to the economic entity in the significantly changing conditions of its environment and business decision-making. In theory, it is still said today that the concept of product life cycle, specifically the current position of the product on the product life cycle curve, is a very solid basis for conducting the overall business policy of the economic entity. There are also some criticisms of the product life cycle concept, especially regarding its practical application. As one of the alternative concepts, therefore, the concept of the evolutionary cycle of the product, which is not based on the beginning and death of the product, but on its continuous growth, appeared as a sequence of gradual and alternating changes.¹¹ The research phase is characterized by a small number of visitors who discover the destination through individual (non-institutional) arrangements –without the participation of travel agencies or other intermediaries. There are no tourist facilities or infrastructure and the number of visitors is limited due to that, as well as due to obstacles in the accessibility of the destination (poor traffic connections). A visitor's contact with the local population is strong, while the overall impact of tourism on the destination is small.¹² Since 1981, the first guests who came to Međugorje were motivated by religious and some other motives. The locals received these guests in their homes and did not charge them for accommodation. Guests–pilgrims sat at a table with the family and had lunch. They were told what was in the house. No one ever objected it was a special time, a special event. The water was exclusively from cisterns. Witnesses to these events today claim that no luxury hotel could provide what was provided to them then by the parishioners. On July 13, 1981, the government banned the ascent to the Apparition Hill and Križevac.¹³ Guards and shifts were introduced to intimidate

¹¹ Marcel Meller, *Osnove marketinga* (Osijek: Ekonomski fakultet u Osijeku, 2005), 194.

¹² Jovan Popesku, *Menadžment turističke destinacije* (Beograd: Univerzitet Singidunum, 2016), 49. 5 izmjenjeno i dopunjeno izdanje.

¹³ Žarko Ivković, *Međugorje: Tajna Gospinih ukazanja* (Zagreb: Večernji list, 2006).

the people. In this first phase, the goal of the guests' arrival was to come on a pilgrimage. Engagement is a phase that implies the existence of an initiative to enrich the tourist offer of the destination. It primarily refers to the catering part of the offer. It is a reaction to the frequency and gradual increase in the number of destination visitors that characterize this stage of the life cycle. There are seasonal fluctuations in visits, as well as the first initiatives towards infrastructure investments. At the beginning of Our Lady's apparitions, the state wanted to put out the news about Međugorje. The media wrote only what was allowed through the sieve, and that was a negative statement about the "Međugorje case." However, as time went on and more and more people from all over the world flocked to Međugorje, the media mostly started to deal with tourism problems. In the reviews, the journalists even called out the then ruling structures for not using the Međugorje miracle for social gain and good earnings, because money knows no borders. This was covered by the media in the late 1980s. The development phase involves the arrival of a large number of tourists. At the peak of the season, there are often more visitors than the domicile population. The control of further development of tourism goes beyond the local framework. At this stage of growth, oscillations in quality are possible.¹⁴ It is necessary to fit into the system of regional and national development planning. Tourism development planning at a local level means planning with associated attractions, and tourism development plans at a local level are based on the following principles:

- tourism development is based on general development goals and priorities determined by the local, resident population,
- the impulses from the tourist market, i.e., the results of studies on tourist demand in the area, should be taken into account,
- development should be harmonized with the development plans of other, non-tourist, activities, physical and visual should be taken into account, i.e., the aesthetic appearance of the site by not building inappropriate facilities and/or carrying out unacceptable activities; in other

¹⁴ Ratko Dobre–Pave Župan Rusković–Mikel Čivljak, *Menadžment turističke destinacije* (Šibenik: 2004), 13.

words, an assessment of the site's reception capacity must be made in regard to its physical, social, and economic capabilities.

This phase in Međugorje can be said that it began in the late 1980s and lasted until the 1992 War. From a small unknown village were developed not only a world-famous Marian shrine but also a world-famous tourist destination, which began to develop rapidly, providing pilgrims with all the necessary facilities during their visit to it. Međugorje takes on the outlines of a tourist village, a holy place of pilgrimage. In order to enable the sustainable development of tourism in the present and the future, it is necessary to ensure a quality development strategy, but also funds for tourism management. The three most important principles of sustainable development should be applied: ecological, socio-cultural, and economic sustainability.¹⁵ In the analysis of the development of the tourism industry, many explore the view of the local population on the tourism industry and their contribution to this activity. Because, apart from the benefits of it, tourism also has some "hidden costs" for the local population, which are certainly inevitably paid by someone and the local population is the only factor that pays those costs.¹⁶ Some examples are the organized reception of guests, usually in groups, the program according to which the guests stayed, meetings with one of the visionaries etc. Although the state did nothing to support Međugorje and its development, it no longer interfered. Međugorje turned its back on the state and the state on Međugorje, respecting each other's unwritten rules of conduct. During this period, Međugorje became a world-famous destination, unstoppable in the arrival of guests. A small village with barely 3,500-4,000 inhabitants received about a million pilgrims a year. In terms of tourism, the offer has already been crystallized according to individual markets and periods when they came and the length of their stay. Međugorje has a high season and an off-season, it is difficult to talk

¹⁵ Mato Bartoluci, *Upravljanje razvojem turizma i poduzetništva* (Školska knjiga, 2013), 17.

¹⁶ Salvatore Bimonte–Valeria Faralla, "Does Residents' Perceived Life Satisfaction vary with Tourist Season? A Two-step Survey in a Mediterranean Destination," *Tourism Management* 55 (August 2016): 199-208.

about before and under the season. During peak season there are dates of high interest, such as Easter, Apparition Anniversary, Pentecost, Assumption, the first Sunday after the Assumption for the Mass on the hill Križevac, and Christmas. Receiving such a large number of guests certainly had its shortcomings in the provision of services. Međugorje is developing at an alarming rate without an urban plan on a private initiative and has not been accompanied by adequate investment in the infrastructure of the place. The regulatory (spatial and urban) plan, made before the war in 1985, was never adopted, and even today it is one of the significant problems and obstacles hindering the further development of the place. Therefore, there are problems today and, unfortunately, they are the same as in 1990. Consolidation means reducing the still present growth rate of arrivals. During the consolidation phase, the rate of increase in the number of visitors decreases, although their absolute number continues to increase and significantly exceeds the number of inhabitants. Tourist business centers are being developed as separate units within the destination. Various companies, both tourist and other ones, are intensively involved in the development. Local efforts to extend the high season and expand the market are noticeable. Most of the local economy is related to tourism. At this stage we can look at the war period and especially the beginning of the war. Pilgrims came but their number was significantly smaller. This was due to the war that broke out in Croatia in 1991. Although in Bosnia and Herzegovina it had not yet begun, the number of pilgrims had decreased significantly. We do not have relevant monitoring of the arrival or overnight stay of pilgrims in Međugorje, while the only relevant number monitored was the number of communions. There are also locals in this number, so a deviation from this number must be taken for the number of domicile population who received communion during the year. In 1990, a record number of 1,304,850 believers received communion, which means that slightly more than a million pilgrims visited Međugorje, while in 1991 the number of communions was 582,300, which is significantly less, leading to this phase being considered a phase of consolidation because of its significantly reduced number of visitors following the start of the war. All major agencies of the former Yugoslavia withdrew from Međugorje. Stagnation is a reflection of the nadir point. The destination loses its attrac-

tiveness. It requires more effort to keep the number of visitors. The presence of significant environmental, social, and economic problems is very often manifested.¹⁷ The stagnation of the arrival of guests can be seen in 1992, when the number of communicants was 245,600 believers. But it must not be forgotten that this number of communion believers also includes the number of the domicile population. Some facilities, like the boarding house and the Pax hotel that originated from the MMM motel, were filled with western European police. The Internacional Hotel was filled with the temporary war government, and the Anamarija Hotel housed journalists covering the state of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. From the aspect of accommodation capacities that were left without guests, one economic positivity was in front of them. As they were not entitled to incentives and loans, all investments were exclusively from personal funds free from borrowing, so they had no debts in that sense. Travel agencies have shut down, there is an initiative of private travel agencies, but the market is so narrow that they are waiting for better times. Eucharistic celebrations and devotion continued to be performed in Međugorje as it continued to live its religious life. Decay is the stage when visitors are lost forever and the destination becomes dependent on smaller localities, day trippers, and weekend visitors. Large ownership changes often occur and capacities are earmarked for other purposes. The alternative is for the competent authorities to recognize this phase and decide to rejuvenate. During the war, the number of pilgrims was insignificant compared to the number of pilgrims who once visited this place, but this was not reflected to the capacity of accommodation facilities, because in that period some hotels were filled with the Western European Commission, the new government and journalists. Rejuvenation includes new attractions, new quality, new markets, new distribution channels. More often, these are newly produced attractions, the introduction of new natural resources, alternative forms of tourism, etc. From this we can see that the destination is being renewed and rejuvenated. However, again, in an unusual way. While in tourist places the rejuvenation of the destination is done exclusively by strategy, the organizing process of Međugorje as a tourist destination has been re-

¹⁷ Bimonte–Faralla, *op.cit.*, 14.

generated without a strategy of reviving, managing, and directing the development of the destination. It is during the phase of rejuvenation of the tourist destination of Međugorje that the corona virus appears, which in all countries of the world led to a different kind of war. The global panic has led to the entire tourism industry being affected. Travels not only to Međugorje and Bosnia and Herzegovina but also all over the world were canceled.

Crisis Management in Tourism

Management is, above all, a social function. It includes several aspects and forms of social life and work. Management is “needed by organizations of all types and sizes, at all organizational levels and in all sectors of the organization, worldwide, regardless of the local affiliation of the organization.”¹⁸ The importance of management stems from the fact that only with the help of management can people define and realize the set goals. On the other hand, setting goals allows you to direct all the efforts of the organization towards their achievement. The role of management is to balance and unite the interests of different entities inside and outside the organization. In the absence of management, there is a waste and irrational use of resources, so the importance of management lies in the need to ensure the efficient functioning of organizations, especially economic (profit) organizations.¹⁹ Crisis management is one of the subdisciplines and categories of management.

If problems are ignored and not solved successfully and quickly enough, they will get bigger and eventually turn into crises. In doing so, one should look for reasons why one avoids this word and why it has negative characteristics. It should also be borne in mind that crisis situations do not arise by themselves, and this is one of the reasons why it is extremely important to rise above the causes of the crisis.²⁰ The very word crisis leads us to the first thought that we must be care-

¹⁸ Branislav Mašić, *Menadžment* (Beograd: Univerzitet Singidunum, 2010), 30.

¹⁹ Sloboda S. Župljanin, *Menadžment* (Nezavisni Univerzitet Banja Luka, 2016), 41.

²⁰ Vesna Ivanović, “Pojam krize: konceptualni I metodologijski aspekti,” *Međunarodne studije* 14, no. 2 (2014): 13.

ful, so every tourist or traveler when planning a trip wants that trip to be safe and risk-free. Every country plays a crucial role in eliminating risks through policies and care measures eliminating the threat to the tourists' life, health, property and economic interests within its activities and should develop a national strategy on tourism safety, including all risk prevention that may involve tourists staying in its territory. The crisis has far-reaching consequences for the global socio-economic environment and, consequently, many business entities, the causes of which can be found in factors outside the organizations themselves. On the other hand, there are business crises that arise as a result of internal causes, which relate to the manner and quality of the business and are directly related to the management and implementation of its processes. In any case, a business crisis, caused by external or internal factors, is an unexpected event or series of related events that cause significant disruption to various aspects of the business (e.g., security of people and property, financial stability, reputation) and consequently disrupt the stability and sustainability of the organization. Unless he is in the company of a handful of visionaries, it is extremely difficult for the average manager to predict the onset of a business crisis in a timely manner, especially those caused by external factors.²¹ What he can do is respect the fact that his organization operates in a complex and insecure environment and establish a system that will allow him flexibility and resilience in unusual crisis situations – a crisis management system.

The specificity of crisis management is that the problem (crisis situation) arises unexpectedly. When it appears, he assigns tasks to the management system that do not correspond to the standard mode of operation of the organization and its previous experience. Countermeasures must be taken urgently, but common experience prevents such action for a number of reasons. Existing work plans do not correspond to the new situation, new tasks appear, and at the same time large amounts of information need to be processed and analyzed. In such conditions there is a danger of general panic. If managers at lower levels of management find themselves in an unexpected situation

²¹ <https://apsolon.com/krizni-menadzment-kako-upravljati-u-vrijeme-krize/> (accessed 26-6-2021).

and if they do not have clear guidelines for action from higher levels of management and the whole picture of the situation, they may succumb to this panic and contribute to general confusion with ill-considered decisions. It should also be noted that many executives cannot change their way of thinking and working in the face of abrupt, unexpected changes.²² For the local people, the pandemic caused a great loss. Tourism is perhaps the most sensitive industry; any risky change has consequences either on a larger or a smaller scale; their safety from possible risks, such as fire protection, food safety, sanitary and health requirements, measures against natural disasters, etc. With the advent of the crisis caused by the coronavirus pandemic, crisis management has once again come into the spotlight. Međugorje is an exclusively tourist place and everyone depends on tourists. According to estimates by tourism workers and hoteliers, due to the coronavirus pandemic last year, only ten percent of overnight stays and income were achieved compared to previous years. It is estimated that until the coronavirus pandemic, this world-famous pilgrimage center was visited by about 1.5 million tourists.²³ After-sales services also play a very important role in the process of retaining consumers. Therefore, it is very important for the organization to understand that in addition to the sale of products, it is perhaps more important to take care of consumers after the sale. In addition to measuring the level of customer satisfaction, it is especially important for the organization to measure the rate of customer retention. Measurement of consumer loyalty can also be performed by the test method, but this type of measurement is not able to provide high accuracy results. The organization will retain customers in the best way if it ensures that it is not worthwhile for them to go to another organization. If it is assumed that the virus will subside in the popular months, the sales service field will play an important role in retaining guests because they will have to prove themselves and fight for every guest, even for those guests who

²² Želimir Kešetović–Ivan Toth, *Problemi kriznog menadžmenta* (Velika Gorica: Veleučilište Velika Gorica, Visoka škola za sigurnost s pravom javnosti, Centar za međunarodne i sigurnosne studije, Fakulteta političkih znanosti u Zagrebu, 2012), 64.

²³ <https://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/svijet/medugorje-od-vlasti-trazi-priznavanje-antigens-kog-testa-i-cijepljenja-za-ulazak-turista-u-bih-15063801> (accessed 21-6-2021).

were extremely loyal to certain destinations before the crisis. Because of all the above, managers must work on educating themselves and their employees.

Education of Employees

Since labor, in addition to natural conditions, is a key factor (resource) in the process of production of tourist goods, it is quite certain that tourism is a labor-intensive activity and, as such, is one of the main sources of employment in many (especially receptive tourist) countries. People are a key success factor in tourism. The overall satisfaction of guests with the tourist offer directly depends on the quality of the service provided by the tourist staff, and the success of the business depends on how the business is managed. Without the people and their potentials, there is no success in the hotel industry. Although all resources are important, human resources are the most important ones. The quality of human resources, their ability, motivation and commitment to perform assigned tasks directly affects the success of the organization. Without trained human resources, it is impossible to define the vision of the organization, determine the mission, set goals, choose the appropriate strategy, define business policy, or realize the goals.²⁴ This problem must be approached at all levels. The system of training tourism workers must be planned and coordinated at state level, but without the support of educational and scientific institutions, local authorities, and the investment in staff education in the companies themselves, the effect will be absent. Education should be carefully planned and adapted to each tourism and hospitality industry. It is extremely important to design the structure of education so that it includes modern disciplines, knowledge, and skills, as well as the share of practical training that tourism professionals must undergo. "Learning is a complex and continuous process that arises from experience and cognitive elements of the individual in order to acquire new knowledge, and to strengthen or change his existing behavior."²⁵

²⁴ Lidija Petrić, "Osnove turizma," *Ekonomski fakultet, Split* (2003): 153.

²⁵ Slobodan Čerović, *Upravljanje ljudskim resursima u hotelijerstvu* (Univerzitet Singidunum, 2012), 23.

Training of staff in the tourism sector should be based on a variety of knowledge that will allow them to provide answers to complex questions posed to them by increasingly sophisticated tourists. In a tourism business, the quality of information exchanged and directly provided affects the competitiveness not only of tourism companies, but also of tourist destinations. The process of globalization, characteristic of the modern phase of tourism development, has led to a significant expansion of the geography of tourist flows. The competition is increasing not only between individual tourism companies, but also between individual countries and regions (tourism destinations). Under these conditions, each destination is interested in providing the most comprehensive information about its unique and attractive tourist resources, the level of development of tourist infrastructure, the specifics of culture and customs, etc. Moreover, it is important that this information must be coming from both professional business professionals and end users but also advertising. Internet has become one of the most effective tools for tourists. Traditional printed advertising tools have a limit to both the amount of information contained in them and their importance, so the most effective source of information in this case is the internet. Most foreign tourist destinations create and maintain their own websites that provide comprehensive information in several languages.²⁶ Međugorje has the potential to become one of the leading tourist destinations in the field of religious tourism. The Covid-19 pandemic has shown that confidence between tourism supply and demand can easily be lost due to emergencies. Caring for their health is an expected reactions from the tourists. Therefore, tourism will again have to show resourcefulness, creativity, adaptation, and cooperation. This can be achieved only through amenities of high quality, including constant education of staff at all levels of business so that the tourist destination can keep pace with modern trends in the world market.

²⁶ <https://passportbdd.ru/hr/rabota-s-pk/napravleniya-primeneniya-informacionnyh-tehnologii-v-turizme/> (accessed 16-6-2021).

Conclusions

Tourism as a mass economic and social phenomenon has emerged over the last few decades. Today, it represents a global economic phenomenon, an economic branch that, after the oil and chemical industry, contributes the most to the growth and development of the world economy. It improves foreign exchange inflows, enables the improvement of the balance of payments and influences the increase of the country's total employment. The emergence of new destinations and the way of choosing and consuming a tourist product influenced the change in the understanding and orientation of tourism, which included only one-time trips for vacation. In the summer of 1981, when, according to the testimony of six children, the Queen of Peace appeared in the small Herzegovinian town of Međugorje, the poor village received world fame as a gift. Until the appearance of the corona virus, this tourist destination was visited annually by more than a million people from all over the world. Given the specifics of tourism (intangibility of services, demand orientation, characteristics of the tourist product, high risk when buying a tourist product), investing in the education of tourism workers is a prerequisite for a successful tourism and business policy. Tourism companies should be encouraged to improve education, including investing in further educating their own employees, employ young, professionally educated staff, which will then be educated through practice, organize practical classes for high schools and colleges, and introduce tourism as a compulsory subject in the upper grades of primary school. Local education of tourism workers should be organized and financed jointly by local authorities, tourism companies, and professional associations, with maximum coordination of tourism companies in order to make optimal use of the available resources. "For many individuals, accepting changes in their personal and professional lives is a very difficult task. Still, change is inevitable. People are usually unwilling to step out of a familiar space, out of their comfort zone. Turn to old habits and established customs. Because of such an attitude, it is difficult to achieve your goals."²⁷ Given the rapid development of technology and the

²⁷ Marijana Šećibović, *Akaderske vještine* (Beograd: Hesperiaedu, 2015), 114.

growing importance of the creative economy, it is logical that there is a growing need for employees who are able to create new solutions and accelerate business processes.²⁸ Such hard-working and talented people are recognized as a strategic advantage, on the basis of which both companies and entire communities gain a competitive advantage. Medjugorje definitely has something to offer to a modern tourist; it just has to include in its activities all levels of government, population, and the entire staff of the tourist sector in order for the tourist destination to be recognizable, attractive, different, and able to compete with the demanding market.

²⁸ "Jestivo voće i orašasti plodovi," *Infokom 77* (February 2022): 52.