



**ISCTBL 2021**  
INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE

Универзитет „Гоце Делчев“ –  
Штип

**Goce Delchev University  
Shtip**

Факултет за туризам и бизнис  
логистика

**Faculty of Tourism and  
Business Logistics**

**Четврта Меѓународна Научна Конференција  
Fourth International Scientific Conference**

**ПРЕДИЗВИЦИТЕ ВО ТУРИЗМОТ И БИЗНИС  
ЛОГИСТИКАТА ВО 21 ВЕК  
CHALLENGES OF TOURISM AND BUSINESS  
LOGISTICS IN THE 21ST CENTURY**

**ЗБОРНИК НА ТРУДОВИ  
CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS**



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**Социо-економски импликации на КОВИД-19: намалување на**  
**разликите и справување со дистрибутивните влијанија во различни**  
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**Прва сесија: Бизнис логистика и бизнис администрација**

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**Panel session**

**Socio-economic implications of COVID-19: reducing disparities and addressing distributional impacts in different sectors**

Session chair: Tatjana Boshkov, Assoc.professor and Dean at Faculty of tourism and business logistics, „Goce Delcev University – Stip, N. Macedonia

Panelists

1. Gligor Bishev, University professor and Management Board Chairman, Sparkasse Bank, N. Macedonia
2. Zarko Radjenovic, PhD, Research Associate, Innovation Center, University of Nis, Serbia
3. Natasha Miteva, PhD, Vice-Dean for Education, Faculty of Tourism and Business Logistics, Goce Delcev University – Stip, N. Macedonia

**Moderators**

**First session: Business logistics and business administration**

Tatjana Boshkov, PhD, Dean at Faculty of Tourism and Business Logistics, Goce Delcev University – Stip, N. Macedonia

**Second session: Tourism, hospitality and gastronomy**

Natasha Miteva, PhD, Vice-Dean for Education, Faculty of Tourism and Business Logistics, Goce Delcev University – Stip, N. Macedonia





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**ФАКУЛТЕТ ЗА ТУРИЗАМ И БИЗНИС ЛОГИСТИКА**  
**FACULTY OF TOURISM AND BUSINESS LOGISTICS**

**ЧЕТВРТА МЕЃУНАРОДНА**  
**НАУЧНА КОНФЕРЕНЦИЈА**

**FOURTH INTERNATIONAL**  
**SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE**

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## INNOVATION STRATEGIES FOR YOUTH TOURISM AS A CONTRIBUTION TO THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE WESTERN BALKAN COUNTRIES

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### Abstract

Tourism is the fastest growing industry that contributes for the production of new jobs, generate huge revenue for the country and become important part of the economic foundation of many countries. Tourism is an industry, with large growth rates and important influence on economic development, but in the past year as the consequences of the global corona virus pandemic suffered major damage. There are different types of tourism, in recent years innovative types of tourism have become current, such as eco, rural, youth, etc. Youth tourism is a new, fast growing sector in the tourism industry. Young travellers can influence the development of the tourism industry and intercultural communications. Youth tourism occurs in different forms and has its own characteristics. This paper focuses on identifying the challenges of tourism in the Western Balkans, with a special focus on the concept of youth tourism, in order to identify the key strategies and motivational factors for youth tourism, experiences and challenges of young people in this sector. For the purposes of this paper, desk and field research was conducted, i.e. the use of electronic questionnaires to identify the characteristics of youth tourism in the Western Balkans.

***Key words:*** Tourism, Tourism strategy, Western Balkan development, Young people, Innovation

### Introduction

Over the decades, tourism has experienced continued growth and deepening diversification to become one of the fastest growing economic sectors in the world. Modern tourism is closely linked to development and encompasses a growing number of destinations.<sup>1</sup> In the last twenty years, it also grew rapidly in the Balkan region, growing from less than 4 million foreigner visitors in 1999 to more than 27 million in 2018.<sup>2</sup>

People travel to get to know the landscapes, the cultures, the people who live in those landscapes and cultures. Therefore, the opportunities for fulfilling this type of needs and desires of tourists are inevitably an integral segment of the tourist offer. The most common motive of any tourist trip is the opportunity to meet something that will be a new experience, something that has not been met before or the meetings

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<sup>1</sup> Lew, A. A., Hall, M. C., & Williams, A. M. (Eds.). A Companion to Tourism. Blackwell publishing Ltd, 2004

<sup>2</sup> Porfiro E. Tourism Development in the Western Balkans: Towards a Common Policy Annual Review of Territorial Governance in the Western Balkans, II, 2020, 24-45, p. 25

and experiences that have been experienced once, put "pressure" on the person to face such an opportunity again.

When choosing a tourist destination, modern tourists, will choose the tourist destination that will offer them enough challenging motives.

In the past decades, tourism has undergone significant quantitative, qualitative, economic and other transformations both in the sphere of demand and in the sphere of tourist supply. Such changes are still present in tourism today, with a tendency to continue. The volume of demand in the tourism market is permanently increasing, followed by a wide range of motives, desires and needs of tourists, which increases the need for development of integrated marketing communications that enable easier, direct and more efficient communications with regular and potential tourists.

Innovation is one of the important topics in modern studies of tourism. They have been actively studied with increasing the role of tourism in the regional economy, proven by performance of multiplier effect from tourism related industries.<sup>3</sup>

Technological development and pandemic changing environment will force the future of tourism strongly rely on digital and technological discoveries (chatbots to make reservations, mobility patterns to manage visitor flows, artificial intelligence, service-oriented robotic, etc.).

Tourism, which is vibrant and fastest growing industry, contributes a huge amount of revenue to a considerable extent, creating value on more jobs, as well as economic development of the countries. Today, are developed more than 150 different types of tourism. Some of them are the following: mass tourism, alternative tourism, business tourism, youth tourism, pleasure tourism, nature tourism, marine tourism, culture tourism, social tourism, urban tourism etc.<sup>4</sup>

The youth tourism is a new, fast growing sector in the tourism industry and it is very popular and very widespread type of tourism in many countries and between many youth people around the world with innovative offers for youth people. Young travelers can influence the development of the tourism industry and intercultural communications.

The concept of youth tourism is defined as all tourism activities that are realized by young whose age are between 15 and 29 years.<sup>5</sup> The growing interest in youth tourism is becoming increasingly important and it is also considered to be the most dynamic markets of the global tourism industry. The international significance and recognition of youth tourism gained remarkable attention for both policy makers and tourism governments.

Youth tourism occurs in different forms and has its own characteristics, these are the following: volunteering, backpacking, training, youth exchange, working holiday programs, education, cultural exchange, language courses, students exchange etc. Some characteristics of young people as travelers are that they: spend more than other tourists, give more value to the destination over their lifetime, discover new destinations, gain cultural benefits from their travels and use new technologies.

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<sup>3</sup> Belova, Anna & Kropinova, Elena. (2015). New Forms of Innovative Tourism Products as a Result of the Interaction of History, Culture and Tourism. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*. 6. 10.5901/mjss.2015.v6n6s7p41.p.41

<sup>4</sup>Stainton H., Types of tourism: A Glossary, 2021. Retrieved from <https://tourismteacher.com/types-of-tourism-glossary/>. Accessed on 20.08.2021

<sup>5</sup> Horak, S., and Weber, S., Youth Tourism in Europe: Problems and Prospects, *Tourism Recreation Research*, 25(3), 2000, pp. 37-44; Çakar, Kadir & Seyitoğlu, Faruk, Youth Tourism: Understanding the Youth Travellers' Motivations, 2016, p.1

### **Tourism in Western Balkan Countries and their influence on national economy development**

Tourism as an economic activity has a certain impact on society, causing various social, cultural and economic changes. Such changes are manifested on a smaller or larger scale, covering several areas such as: regional development, employment, education, environment, consumption, security, new technologies, traffic, finance, taxes, culture, etc. Most countries are relying on it for their economic growth, including Western Balkan countries, which are investing in tourism and considering it as key-sector for their development. For the Western Balkan countries, the economic importance of tourism for future development and employment is especially important.

The immense cultural, historical, natural and anthropological riches and the specifics which the region has is a potential which will enable the Balkan region to become a recognizable and desired tourist destination. People who reside in the Balkans have a deeply rooted sense of belonging to their own traditions and country, which is evident even in the dynamic of modern life. Balkan is a future tourist destination based on all the potential it has and the needs of the tourists worldwide. For that reason, an integrated and regional action is needed for a much faster and more efficient development and creation of regional tourist products. Promoting the region, beyond the country-specific promotional activities that are typically undertaken by tourism programmes, further enhances the attractiveness of Balkan countries for tourists all over the world. Such regional integration broadens and deepens the economic development impact of individual countries and associated communities and revives cross-border relationships that suffered or were severed following the breakup of the former Yugoslavia.<sup>6</sup>

Youth traveler's ages from 15 to 29 are an important market for many destinations around the world. The economic value of youth travel lies in the unique character of this market. Young people are more adventurous, looking for social contact with other young people and to discover new cultures and to develop their knowledge. Because young people are motivated and inspired to travel as often as they possibility can for longer periods of time and have an interest in visiting areas not frequented by traditional tourists, young travelers are of particular value to destination around the world. Six key factors are very important about the increasing of the value of youth travel:<sup>7</sup>

- Youth travel is high value
- Youth markets are resilient
- Young travelers spend their money directly with local communities
- Purposeful travel
- Young people make an important contribution to other industries
- Young people attract others to the destination.

These factors suggest that it is important to take a broader view of the economic impact of youth travel. That impact is not just about daily spend levels of the price category of youth travel accommodation, but the combination of longer stays, more extensive travel, a desire to consume local services and the likelihood that young people will attract other travelers and return to destinations themselves in the future.

### **Innovation Aspect of Tourism**

Today's turbulent and unpredictable environment changes the pace of work and the behavior of enterprises. They need to be prepared for change and adaptable if they want to survive in their dynamic

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<sup>6</sup> Balkan Forum, "Research on the tourism in Western Balkans", Publication by the Balkan forum, Briefing 2017, p.37-39

<sup>7</sup> UNWTO: Global report on the power of youth travel, Affiliate members report, Volume 13-The power of youth travel, March 2016, p.10-13

and competitive environment. Therefore, the acceptance of innovations and thinking about the same is increasingly present in business activities.<sup>8</sup>

The OECD's Towards Green Growth recognizes that innovation is at the core of transforming an economy, and that innovation contributes to the establishment of new markets and the creation of new jobs. Innovation can occur in any sector of the economy, and differs widely across sectors.<sup>9</sup>

Unexpected changes in the business environment of travel companies, the pressure, restrictions and damage caused by the pandemic Covid-19 in the tourism sector, hence the changed requirements and behaviors of customers, immediately imposes the need to review existing strategies and focus more on innovative elements in business strategies.

Today's highly competitive, economic and political instability in many regions require constant tourism organizations adapt to rapidly changing environmental conditions. Constantly growing needs and demands of tourists, as well as the saturation of the tourist market pose tourism organizations need to continuously search for new types of tourism products, opening new directions, etc.<sup>10</sup>

The emergence of COVID-19, the restrictions and measures imposed by this pandemic, the reduced volume of activities especially for the tourism sector during the lockdown period, drastically changed the business environment and the way the tourism sector operates. Therefore, the need for introduce innovative ways of development of the tourism industry is obvious. Tourist companies need to review existing strategies and focus more on innovative elements in business strategies.

Innovations in tourism can be observed as:<sup>11</sup> technological and non-technological innovations, product or service innovation; process innovation; marketing innovation; organizational innovation; green innovation, social innovation, radical, incremental or architectural innovation.

The restrictions and barriers caused by COVID-19 have contributed to the faster spread of the digital revolution, deep penetration into all spheres of society, accelerating digital business transformation and participation in e-commerce. In this (pandemic) turbulent and dynamic period, technological (and digital) innovations are gaining a central place in the business activities in each sector, and digital innovations are evident in the tourism sector as well.

Digital technologies have important implications for tourism businesses of all sizes, for the structure and operation of tourism value chains and for the sector as a whole. Facilitating and enabling digitalisation in tourism is therefore a key policy challenge.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Angeloska Dichovska M. & Boskoska M., Innovation and Financial Support in Function of Improving the Competitiveness of SMEs, Horizons International Scientific Journal, Year XII, Volume 22, 2018, 117-131

<sup>9</sup> OECD, Green Innovation in Tourism Services, OECD Tourism Papers 2013/01, OECD Publishing, Paris, p.13. Retrieved from: <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/5k4bxkt1cjd2-en.pdf?expires=1631489429&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=4565BFB2AA316258FF794B17E7C591E3>. Accessed on 10.09.2021

<sup>10</sup>Sandybayev A., Strategic Innovation in Tourism. A Conceptual and Review Approach, International Journal of Research in Tourism and Hospitality (IJRTH) Volume 2, Issue 4, 2016, p.7; Shihata Elzek Y., Ali Gafaar H., Abdelsamie H., Practices of Tourism Innovation in Tourism Industry: The Case Study of Egypt, June 2020. Retrieved from: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/343022438\\_Practices\\_of\\_Tourism\\_Innovation\\_in\\_Tourism\\_Industry\\_The\\_Case\\_Study\\_of\\_Egypt](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/343022438_Practices_of_Tourism_Innovation_in_Tourism_Industry_The_Case_Study_of_Egypt). Accessed on 12.09.2021

<sup>11</sup> Decelle X., A CONCEPTUAL AND DYNAMIC APPROACH TO INNOVATION IN TOURISM, OECD 2004, Retrieved from <https://www.oecd.org/cfe/tourism/34267921.pdf>. Accessed on 30.08.2021

<sup>12</sup> OECD Tourism Trends and Policies 2020. Retrieve from <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/f528d444-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/f528d444-en>. Accessed on 05.09.2021



Innovative technologies and business models have revolutionized the hospitality and tourism industries. Examples of such innovations are phone-as-key-cards, mobile self-check-in, mobile booking, self-service check-in kiosks, lobby media panels, electronic luggage tags, bring your own device, bring your own content platforms, smartphone boarding passes, hotel service optimization systems, guest device connectivity tools, voice over internet protocol phones that are interconnected with the hotel's ecosystem, wearable devices to identify guests, tablet menus and table reservation systems to name a few.<sup>13</sup> These innovations range from business management technologies (e.g. mobile technologies/cloud computing, automation and advanced robotics, block chain, data analytics, cloud computing), to technologies that produce innovative tourism products, services and experiences (e.g. virtual/augmented reality, Internet-of-Things), and technologies that assist, understand and connect with markets (e.g. data analytics, cloud computing, and artificial intelligence).<sup>14</sup>

As a result of the COVID-19 restrictions, as well as other current problems, most creative travel and tourism innovations emerged, such as:<sup>15</sup> a virtual tour with remote-controlled guides, hotel introduces contactless stay via free app, "origami" airplane seat design that can help make flying safe from Covid-19, an app for making sustainable choices when travelling, VR technology that allows elderly and nursing home patients to travel to places in the world they once visited or wish to see etc. The World Economic Forum has estimated that in the decade to 2025, digitalization will create up to USD 305 billion of additional value for the tourism sector alone through increased profitability, while around USD 100 billion of value generated in the sector will transfer from traditional players to new digital competitors with innovative business models and value-producing capabilities.<sup>16</sup> In addition to the economic impact, innovation in the tourism sector also has social significance which can be viewed from two perspectives. On the one hand, innovation for individual tourism organizations contribute to the improvement of working conditions (organizational innovation), a full use of the intellectual and material resources (technological innovation), implementation of commercial potential (product innovation). On the other hand, in the tourism sector, innovations have a high public importance, namely contribute to overcoming the seasonality factor, sustainable tourism development, the improvement of employment and other.<sup>17</sup>

Main areas of innovation in the tourism sector can be extracted: - introduction of new tourist routes, release of a new tourism or restaurant product, providing new hotel services; - the use of new techniques and technologies; - use of new tourist resources; - application of new techniques and methods of organization of the business process; - opening of new direction and new markets.<sup>18</sup> Khan and Khan (2009) showed that service innovation is adding a range of new ideas, procedures, processes, and products to the offered services to achieve the benefits and meet the wishes of individuals, organizations, or destinations, considering the characteristics of those services and customer satisfaction. Innovation in services also can be a multi-stage process where tourism organizations or destinations turn ideas into new or improved services to differentiate themselves from competitors in the market (Kjos, 2013).<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Bilgihan, A. and Nejad, M., "Innovation in hospitality and tourism industries", Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Technology, Vol. 6 No. 3, 2015. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JHTT-08-2015-0033>

<sup>14</sup> OECD Tourism Trends and Policies 2020. Retrieve from <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/f528d444-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/f528d444-en>. Accessed on 05.09.2021

<sup>15</sup> Hamilton H. , Top 7 travel and tourism innovation from 2020, November 2020, Retrieve from: <https://www.springwise.com/innovation-snapshot/travel-tourism-business-ideas-2020>. Accessed on 20.08.2021

<sup>16</sup> OECD Tourism Trends and Policies 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/f528d444-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/f528d444-en>. Accessed on 05.09.2021

<sup>17</sup> Sandybayev A., Strategic Innovation in Tourism. A Conceptual and Review Approach, International Journal of Research in Tourism and Hospitality (IJRTH) Volume 2, Issue 4, 2016, p.7

<sup>18</sup> *ibid*, p.8

<sup>19</sup> Shihata Elzek Y., Ali Gafaar H., Abdelsamie H., Practices of Tourism Innovation in Tourism Industry: The Case Study of Egypt, June 2020, Retrieved from: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/343022438\\_Practices\\_of\\_Tourism\\_Innovation\\_in\\_Tourism\\_Industry\\_The\\_Case\\_Study\\_of\\_Egypt](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/343022438_Practices_of_Tourism_Innovation_in_Tourism_Industry_The_Case_Study_of_Egypt). Accessed on 12.09.2021

Youth travel has become one of the fastest growing segments of international tourism, representing more than 23% of the over one billion tourists travelling internationally each year. This growth represents tremendous socioeconomic opportunities for local communities as youth travelers stimulate local tourism businesses, foster closer social interaction with host populations and champion environmental protection. Young people, recognized by the United Nations as a major force for development and social change, have the potential to drive sustainable development in the tourism sector.<sup>20</sup>

Youth tourism is one of the most important sectors of the tourism industry. The studies carried out by UNWTO show that:<sup>21</sup>

- Young people travel more often than other tourists;
- Young people rarely refrain from traveling because of political unrest, diseases and natural disasters and natural disasters;
- Young people are pioneers who open new interesting territories;
- Young travelers not only receive cultural benefits from travel, but also contribute to the development of places they visit;

More than any other market segment, youth and student travelers are leading with innovation and paving the way for responsible tourism as they take responsibility for the impact of their travel ambitions on climate change. Young people are invariably at the leading edge of change and innovation – and the travel industry is no exception. Young people think outside the box, push boundaries and experiment with the new. In an era of unprecedented challenge for the travel industry, youth travel represents not just an important market segment, but also a vital resource for innovation and change.<sup>22</sup>

### **Research and methodology**

Primary and secondary research was conducted for the preparation of this paper. The secondary research is based on the most relevant research and papers, conference papers, open-access materials, study reports related to the research topic and other relevant publications. The primary research on topic "Young People Perception for Western Balkan Youth Tourism Possibilities" was conducted in the six countries of the Western Balkans –WB (Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia). For the purpose of the primary research a questionnaire was prepared for young people aged 15 to 30 in the Western Balkans. The questionnaire consists of 15 questions, of which 4 are related to the basic characteristics of the target group in the research, while the other 11 questions were designed with the purpose of obtaining information on the perception of the young people for the Western Balkan Youth Tourism Possibilities. Several publications, papers, reports, models and methodologies related to the assigned field were used as reference and analyzed in the preparation of the questionnaire.

The survey was conducted from 1<sup>st</sup> August to 10<sup>th</sup> September 2021 and included 652 young people from the six countries of the Western Balkan (Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia). Even though this is a relatively small sample, nevertheless, the responses from the survey can be considered as sufficiently indicative and can present information useful in creating innovative strategies for tourist companies and responsible institutions from the sector in order to increase possibility and interest for Western Balkan Youth Tourism. The authors of the paper have conducted the research electronically with the support of NGOs and educational institutions from the Western Balkans.

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<sup>20</sup>World Tourism Organization (2016), Affiliate Members Global Reports, Volume thirteen – The Power of Youth Travel, UNWTO, Madrid, 2016, p.5

<sup>21</sup> Salimov Yunusovich S., Youth Tourism as a Scientific Research Object, Journal of Tourism & Hospitality, Volume 7 Issue 5 , 2018

<sup>22</sup> UNWTO, The power of youth travel, AM report, Volume two, 2014, pp.4-5

### Discussion and results: Survey of young people perception for Western Balkan Youth Tourism possibilities

The survey included 652 respondents from the six countries of the Western Balkans, ie 212 respondents from Northern Macedonia, 128 from Bosnia and Herzegovina, 92 from Serbia, 80 from Albania, 72 from Montenegro and 68 respondents from Kosovo. The characteristics in terms of age, gender and employment status are given in Table 1. From Table 1 can be seen almost approximate participation of females and males, the research was mostly attended by students and employed young people, with almost 40% in the survey are the respondents aged 27 to 29, followed by those aged 23-26 (31.9%).

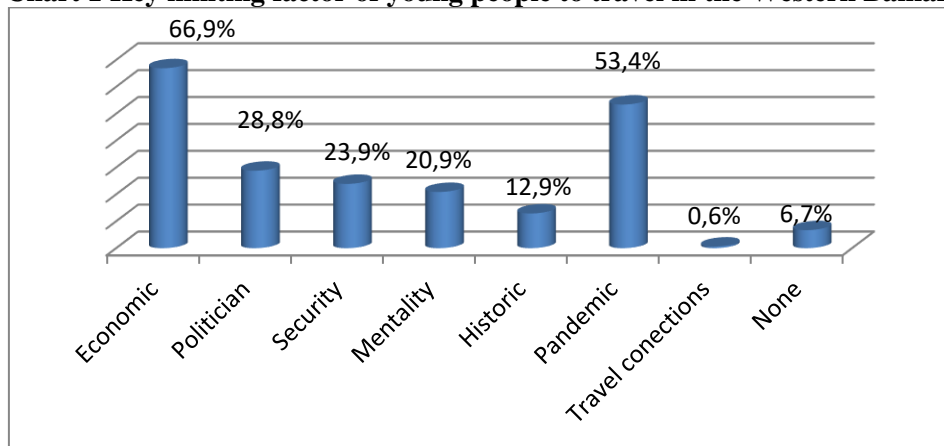
**Table 1 Characteristics of the respondents in terms of age, gender and employment status**

Characteristics of respondents	Number of respondents	%
<b>Age</b>		
15-22	184	28.2
23-26	208	31.9
27-29	260	39.9
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	304	46.6
Female	348	53.4
Non binary	-	-
<b>Employment status</b>		
Pupil	16	2.5
Student	288	44.2
Employee	284	43.5
Unemployed	64	9.8

Source: own research

The analysis of the research confirms that almost 97% of the respondents have traveled to one of the six countries in the Western Balkans, and want to visit them again (100%), while the most visited countries are Montenegro, Serbia and Albania. Respondents who visited one of the countries in the Western Balkans state that they mostly travel to them for private reasons (61%), such as winter and summer vacations, visiting relatives, visiting friends, etc., while 38% stated that they travel for both, private and professional purposes (education, business, seminar, training, etc.). Key factors that limit the travel of young people in the Western Balkans (Chart 1), ie have an impact on youth tourism are: economic, especially financial reasons (66.9%) and pandemic restrictions and measures (53.4%), followed by political (28.8%), insecurity (23.9%), mentality (20.9%), historic (12.9%), travel connections (0.6%) and others (6.7%).

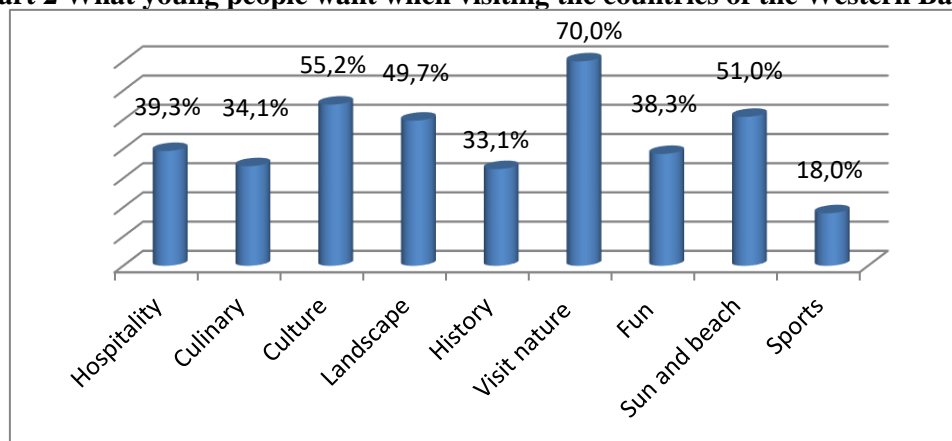
**Chart 1 Key limiting factor of young people to travel in the Western Balkans**



Source: own research

When young people visit the countries of the Western Balkans, they most want (Chart 2) to visit nature (70%), to get acquainted with the culture of the country (55.2%), to use the time for sun and beach (51%), to see the beauties of the country/ place of visit (49.7%), respect hospitality (39.3%), want good opportunities for fun (38.3%), and also want to taste the culinary skills of the country (34.1%).

**Chart 2 What young people want when visiting the countries of the Western Balkans**



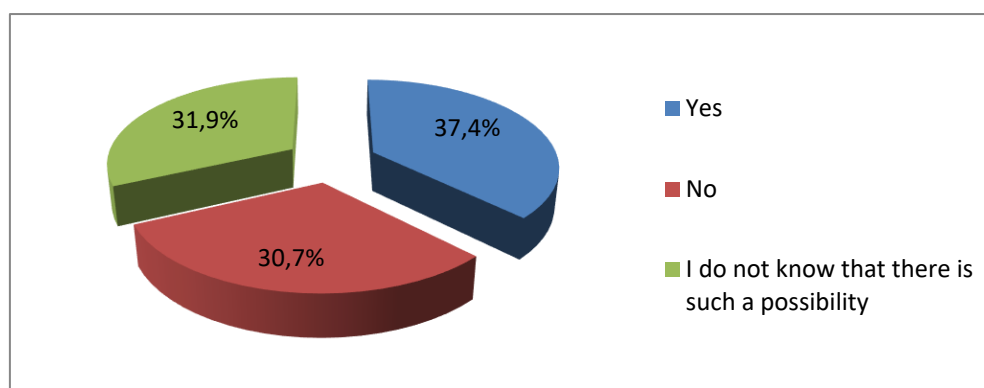
Source: own research

The youth tourism is based on various aspects on youth lifestyle and includes:<sup>23</sup>

- different forms of training;
- a way to find new acquaintances;
- the opportunity to come into contact with other cultures;
- a source of career development;
- a means of self- development.

Various European programs finance young people in their travel and stay in a particular country, which support education, training, youth exchange, etc., but at the same time the tourist opportunities from the stay in the country can be used. The research done in this paper confirms that almost 1/3 of the respondents (31.9%) are not familiar with the possibilities of the European mobility programs, ie 37.4% of the respondents have used the opportunity to travel to any of these WB countries as a result of European Union funded programs (Chart 3).

**Chart 3 Youth travel to Western Balkan countries as a result of European Union funded programs**



Source: own research

<sup>23</sup>Salimov Yunusovich S., Youth Tourism as a Scientific Research Object, Journal of Tourism & Hospitality, Volume 7 Issue 5 , 2018

Namely, there are numerous international programs for travel and training of young people. Taking advantage of the opportunities offered by these programs doesn't only mean traveling to another country, but more than that, ie a complete change in the lifestyle of young people and changing their horizons of vision. Such youth programs contribute to the development of youth tourism, but they also have great benefits in the development of the youth, as follows:<sup>24</sup> broaden their horizon of view, become more employable, learn a new language, gain travel experience, gain confidence, make new friends and network, become curious, life-long learners etc. The social, cultural and economic value of youth, student and educational travel is increasingly recognized by employers, educational institutions, official tourism organizations and governments worldwide.<sup>25</sup>

Young people see travel as an essential part of their everyday lives, rather than just a brief escape from reality. This has far reaching consequences for the places they visit. Because of the way they travel, the social and cultural consequences of hosting young people are becoming even more important than the economic effects. The added value to be extracted from youth travel lies in innovation, positioning, cultural links, international trade and exchange, social support, education, learning support for local communities, and so on.<sup>26</sup>

According to the analysis of the research results, 86.5% of young people believe that countries of the Western Balkans have good opportunities for the development of youth tourism. The experiences of young people confirm that the most innovative youth tourism is offered by Montenegro (56.4%) and Serbia (40.5%), and then followed by Albania (28%), North Macedonia (27%), Bosnia and Herzegovina (23%) and Kosovo (18%). When asked in the questionnaire about their impressions and example of innovative youth tourism (places, events, offers etc.) in one of the six countries in the Western Balkans, the most frequently mentioned answers are the following: Exit festival in Serbia, Bear Festival Prilep, Una -Štrbački buk, SFF-Sarajevo Film Festival, "Studentski pohodi" in Bosnia and Herzegovina, night clubs in Belgrade, Petrovarin fortress, Rafting on Tara in BiH, Festivals in Ulcinj, parties in Budva, and Seadance in Buljarica, Rugova canyon, Shar planina, Dihovo, Matka, Lake Ohrid, Korce, Mrizi i Zenave Agroturizam - Albania, Cetinje rejlavna karta, Arsenal fest, Krusevo Palgladarism, Neum seaside and night life in Montenegro, Exchange youth program, Western Balkans alumni association projects, Youth camps in all six countries in the Western Balkans, Music or nature festivals, Speleological tourism, Snowboarding etc.

In order to increase, accelerate and promote youth tourism in the Western Balkans, the five key activities that need to be done are:

1. Social media promotion (66.3%)
2. Create travel tours for young people (53.8%)
3. Mutual Western Balkan events music, education, etc. (49.7%)
4. Creating opportunity for free movement of youth (46.6%)
5. Promotion of youth exchange (42.9%)

Also, in the process of develop od innovation strategies, key tourism institutions and companies should take into account the following elements: create a guide of youth tourism; mutual web sites; Western Balkan countries youth competition; camping, scouting and mounting tourism for young people; activitties for more cooperation between educational institution; fun activities etc.

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<sup>24</sup>Sutera M., 15 Ways International Travel Changes Teens for the Better, September 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.goabroad.com/articles/highschool-study-abroad/15-ways-international-travel-will-change-high-school-students-forever>. Accessed 08.09.2021

<sup>25</sup> UNWTO, The power of youth travel, AM report, Volume two, 2014, p.4

<sup>26</sup> UNWTO, The power of youth travel, AM report, Volume two, 2014, p.6

## Conclusion

Youth tourism is a key segment of the tourism sector that is growing significantly. Young people travel for different reasons, such as: educational, social, economic, cultural, etc. There are various programs and funds that support youth travel, but many young people are not familiar enough with them. Given the contribution of the tourism sector to the national economy and economic development, its support is necessary.

Innovation is becoming an inevitable part of the development strategies of tourism companies and relevant institutions, and even more so as a result of the digital transformation and the pressures and changing circumstances caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Numerous innovative applications are emerging in the tourism sector in order to respond to customer requirements.

Young people are becoming key clients of the tourism sector, and their behavior needs to be monitored. Young people are the most frequent travelers, for whom, apart from financial reasons, other factors (political, historical, mentality, etc.) become irrelevant to them, they contribute to the development of the environment in which they travel and in which they live, and they are mostly looking for innovative tourist offers.

Research on youth perceptions of youth tourism in the Western Balkans confirms that most young people travel and visit all six countries in the Western Balkans, while the most visited countries are Montenegro, Serbia and Albania. Young people from these countries usually travel for private reasons, such as winter and summer vacations, visiting relatives, visiting friends, etc. The biggest limiting factors for the development of youth tourism in the Western Balkans are economic and pandemic constraints. During their travels in the Western Balkans, young people mostly visit nature, beaches, enjoy sightseeing, want to hear about the culture and tradition of the country, but also want fun. Although there are certain opportunities for young people from the Western Balkans to use European funds that indirectly help youth tourism, more than half of the respondents haven't used this opportunity or don't even know that it exists. Young people that travel to the countries of the Western Balkans are informed about certain innovative places, events which these countries offer, but they are also looking for newer ones and that attracts them the most.

Hence, tourism companies and other relevant institutions need to work on strategies that will incorporate a number of innovative elements according to the needs of young people. Namely, the use of social media becomes necessary in order to better promote tourism offers for young people in the Western Balkans, there is a need for developing a new platform to enhance youth empowerment and engagement in tourism, there is a need to create exclusively youth tours, guides for youth tourism, joint youth manifestations (or series of Western Balkan events) etc. Innovative strategies for youth tourism in the Western Balkans are necessary to integrate the needs, changes and experiences of young people in order to further develop this type of tourism and generate higher incomes for them and for the economy as a whole.

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