

DEVELOPMENT OF TOUR OPERATOR SPECIALISTS IN THE CROATIAN TOURISM

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Abstract: Traveling is one of the oldest phenomena of human life and is part of the human history. Development has significantly contributed to the travel effects of travel agencies and tour operators. Development of tour operators, specialists in the UK, is an example of the expected development of tour operators in Croatia, with emphasis on organizing trips for singles. The problem of research in this paper is as follows: the concept of organizing trips for singles is insufficiently presented and promoted on the Croatian tourism market. The basic working hypothesis is: tour operators have an important role in the qualitative and quantitative improvement of the travel and tourism development. The purpose of the research is to show the fundamental characteristics of travel agencies and tour operators with an emphasis on organized trips for "single" as a possible future trend in the tourism market. The aim of the research is to investigate and compare the development of Croatian operators with examples of operators in the UK.

JEL classification: O19, O31, R11

Key words: Specialist tour operators, singles, tourism offer, attractions, Croatia

1. INTRODUCTION

Development agency's operations in Croatia has flowed more slowly than in Western Europe. The initiative for the establishment of the first travel agency launched in the year 1911, however, because of the war failed. The first travel agency begins operating on the territory of the government under the name "Voyager" AD in Belgrade. Shortly after that period, "The Traveler" opens branch office in Zagreb. Second World War halted further development agencies. After the war, travel agency again revived and restored their pre-war branches.

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In Croatia, Zagreb "Centroturist" created "Generalturist" in the Year 1963. After that time "Voyager" Dubrovnik was changed to "Atlas". «Atlas» travel agency first began to offer package arrangements intended for the mass domestic market and created the idea of the first domestic tour operators, "Atlas Airtours".

Croatia as a tourist receptive country has long intension to create their own tour operator at leading emitive tourist markets. By mid-1960s the tourist agency in Croatia have been developed as retailers, as well as local operators, transfers, excursions and multi-day tours. Swiss bank "Banca della Svizzera Italiana" and "Ina Commerce" formed the Bemextours - specialist tour operator for the ex Yugoslavia. Special role of tour operators have "Yugotours" and "Bemextours", who have stopped work, and operated as a specialist for Croatia.

The first catalog to market appears during the eighties in Great Britain, the Netherlands and Belgium. "Bemextours" is spreading on the other most important tourist market in Europe and in Austria, Switzerland, France, Italy and Germany.

The main aim of "Bemextours" was to achieve greater market share package arrangements for Croatia and get as many foreign-exchange inflows. The war in Croatia stops its further success.

2. FUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF SPECIALIZED TOUR OPERATORS

Specialist tour operators are focused on a narrower segment of demand with respect to the homogeneous special interest clients for whom a specialist tour operator creating their packages.

The last time these tour operators are increasingly wider, and the reason for this is increasing the mutual competition in the market. Specialist tour operators can also be divided into at least three groups:³

- 1) Tour operator specialized to offer activities on vacation ("Club Mediterranee", "Studiosus", "Seetours");
- 2) Tour operators according to the sociodemographic criteria – (a specialist for a specific tourist destination);
- 3) Tour operator - the specialists for specific age groups, singles ("The Club", "Saga Holidays").

The largest number of tour operators in Europe, is oriented to foreign markets, which means to organize travel packages for the local population and holidays abroad. Tour operators who operate in the domestic market mostly owned "bus transportation" and usually offer better packages for age groups older clientele.

"Incoming" tour operators are those tour operators who operate on the domicile market and create packages for foreign clientele them through a network of travel agencies abroad for sale in these markets.

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3. TOUR OPERATORS IN CROATIA

Croatia has many advantages and opportunities that should be used for further development of tourism, but also the weaknesses and threats. (cf.. table 1.).

Croatia has also many qualities for tourism development and all forms of selective tourism. However, the tourist offer should be formatted according to tourist demand. On the Croatian market, there is no excessive interest of potential tourists for trips organized for the "single".

Table 1.: SWOT analysis of Croatian as a country that introduces "organized trips for singles"

<p>STRENGTHS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Transport - Climate benefits - Close to the sea - Quality of infrastructure - Close to the emitive market - Recognition in the market - Environmental preservation - Rich natural and cultural resources - The existence of a successful tour operators and travel agencies 	<p>WEAKNESSES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Predominant product of the traditional "sun and sea" - Expressed sesonality - Insufficiently differentiated offer - Unfavorable structure of the accommodation - Under-developed infrastructure - Low level of educated personnel in tourism - Under-developed information technology - Lack of human resources
<p>OPPORTUNITIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Potential business after the season period - Development of selective forms of tourism - Better positioning in the market - The introduction of new forms of supply-"organized trips for singles" - No competition - chance to win the market and rapid development - Meeting the needs of tourists who like this type of holiday 	<p>THREATS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increasing number of destinations in the world market - Croatian conservative view on something different - Failure to comply with "single" group of the society - Fear of gaining a bad brand - Fear of the weak interest of tourists for organized trips for singles - Abandonment of such interventions in the very beginning

Source: author's conclusions

The following table shows the advantages and disadvantages of the company Brilliant Weekends in the UK⁴. Benefits arising from the mass and the developed markets, while most of the disadvantages of the Internet as a medium through which personal contact is ignored.

Table 2.: Advantages and disadvantages of the company Brilliant Weekends in the UK

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Internet usage (less costs for potential passengers, Using the Internet reduces the dependence related to counseling). - Location is not important (less costs to rent space for the owner). - Employing only graduates people – (greater business efficiency). - conducted surveys of customer (satisfaction services provided). - High demand – (in the UK 300 up 500 million pounds spend on entertainment for the single). - No competition - (all of the same size in the form of the company Brilliant Weekends in the UK are engaged in such work). - Introduction of new destinations. - "People are investing in further development of destinations". 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No personal contact (the employee can not influence on the decision of the buyer as the personal touch). - Internet or telephone as a form of communication channel (there is a greater possibility of misunderstandings between customers and employees). - "Singles" groups are sometimes not welcome in hotels. - Such a form of friendship is sometimes not accepted by society (negative ads). - No advertising or promotion through advertising may reduce company results.

Source: author's conclusions according to Holloway, J.C. & N. Taylor (2006). The Business of Tourism, Seventh edition, Prentice Hall.

The company «Brilliant Weekends» uses the Internet as the primary means of advertising and attracting tourists. However, as such, it can have positive and negative characteristics.

Some positive features are low cost for both, tourists and for tour operators. Negative characteristics are the lack of personal contact and inability to influence the decisions of potential employees tourists.

4. SUBSTRATE DEVELOPMENT SPECIALIST TOUR OPERATORS

4.1. TOURIST ATTRACTIONS AND ATTRACTIVENESS CROATIAN

Many tourist destinations around the world and their tourist attractions are the reason for the visit, including Croatia. Tourist attractions are attractions that are available to tourists but some tourist attractiveness are not yet available to tourists. In that case we are talking about potential attractions. The basic division of the attraction are to "natural" and "artificial" that man created.

Croatia has many "natural" and "artificial" attractions that can be exploited for tourism development. However, more attention should be paid to the preservation of natural attractions such as the sea, islands, landscape and maintenance of cultural and historical

value, cultural and historical heritage, historical monuments and buildings. Some cultural sites that have international recognition, are only partially used, such as Dubrovnik (Old Town), Pula (Arena), Split (Diocletian's Palace). They give the Croatian tourist industry identity according to the other Mediterranean competitors. The interior of the Croatian tourism is still insufficient or poorly used, although there are many potential attractions.

There are a handful of interesting cities with a rich history and architecture, shrines, sources of thermal waters have medicinal properties, rivers, ski resorts of regional significance; stare monumental and panoramic road; wine roads, national parks and other protected areas. For the dynamic development of tourism in continental areas is required adequate tourist infrastructure.

In modern analysis of preferences for market demand several types of present tourism forms are mentioned: ecotourism, cultural tourism, thematic tourism, adventure tourism, as well as cruises and nautical tourism.

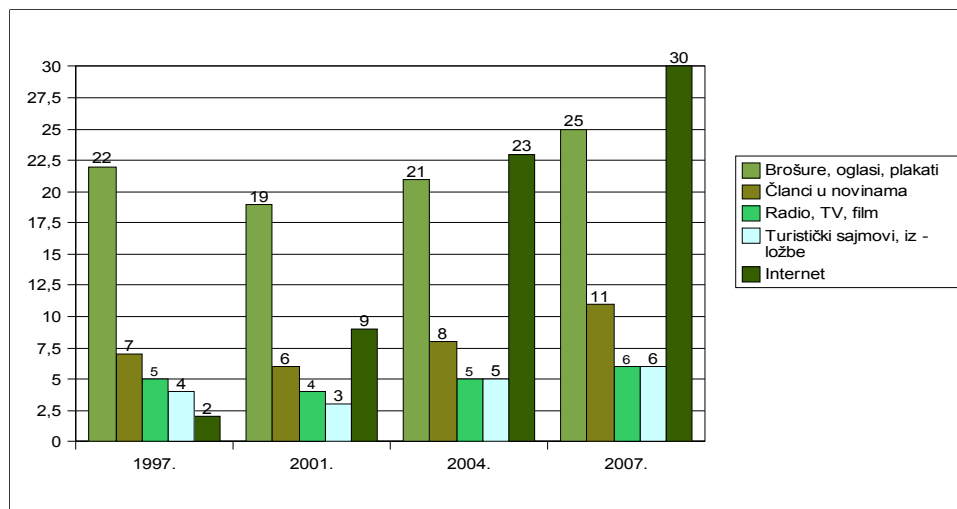
Ecotourism is the beginning of "environmentally and socially responsible ways to travel," developed in economically important product, traveling with the natural component. Ecotourism creates opportunities for tourism development in poorly developed regions and for maintenance and financing of protected areas.

Cultural tourism is becoming an increasingly important part of the offer. In the area of cultural tourism it is necessary to identify market niches with special cultural interests. It is very often the case that the guests during the holiday visit a monument or some event. Cultural tourism can also be developed in many cities because of the Croatian interesting history.

Theme tourism has become one of the most important development factor. Mainly based on the principle of 3-E: fun, excitement and education ("Entertainment, Excitement, Education"), and includes the tourist offer and the facilities that combine these three elements. Adventure tourism constitutes a small niche with a tendency of growth.

Croatian natural resources offers adventure tourism such as rafting, canuing, kayaking, paragliding, balloon flight, free climbing, off-road tours and many more. Croatia also has the potential for religious tourism.

Graph 1.: Sources of information – TOMAS 2007.



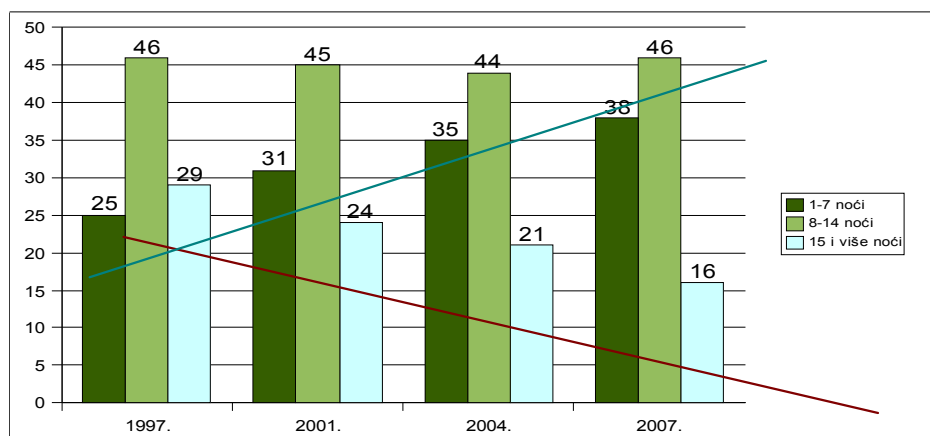
Source: http://www.iztsg.hr/UserFiles/Pdf/Tomas/2007_Tomas

Health tourism, one of the major trends in today's tourism, may also find its place in the Croatian tourist industry. Marine air, thalassotherapy and many sources of healing thermal waters in the interior should be adequate infrastructure to be positioned in the market as a quality tourist offer. One of the great benefits of such tourism is a business opportunity throughout the year. Graph 1. shows the relationships between different sources of information as a basis to attract visitors to Croatia. The chart shows the importance of individual sources of information through the changes. We can notice that there is a constant decline in longer holidays from 15 nights and more to the growth of short trips up to seven nights. The reason for reducing the length of stay is characterized by financial nature but also the fact that the problems and stress in everyday life rise.

Some of the attractiveness of Croatia could offer its guests are:

- organized a visit to the best winemakers accompanied by a small sampling, including the accompanying content - an explanation of the production of wine with meals,
- organized a visit to the best olive producers in the region;
- enable the tourists involved in various activities during the holidays that are specific to a place that is visited; organized a visit to the castles of Slavonia; possibility of observing birds Brijuni, etc.

Graph 2: Length of stay of tourists in Croatia - TOMAS



Source: http://www.iztsg.hr/UserFiles/Pdf/Tomas/2007_Tomas-Ljeto_2007.pdf

In 2008, year 30% of the Italians decided to travel. 84% travel is achieved in the country, while 16% of Italians traveled abroad. Most popular destinations are France, Spain and Germany. These are mainly organized individual journeys even 41%, 10% of passengers organized a trip through travel agencies while 42% of them were without a booking. Almost 34% of Italians regularly use the Internet (in organizing individual trips it was represented by 49% and in a traditional form with 51%). More than 67% of the Italian

tourist offer is in the hands of the three main operators: Alpitour, Gruppo Ventaglio and theorems.

It is important to predict and follow those trends because of the significance of Italian tourists to the Croatian tourism.

4.2. PACKAGE ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE "SINGLE" IN CROATIA

Several Croatian travel organizer tried to prepare packages for "singles". Some of them are:

a) Atlas Airtours, which in September and October prepared a short bus trip to "singles." For all those who own or want to spend the holiday alone Atlas Airtours has prepared a two-day bus trip - Pearls of Styria and Budapest. Price package arrangements to visit the pearl of Styria is 1050 kn for accommodation in single room and 940 kn for accommodation in a double room and includes bus transportation, bed and breakfast in a 3* hotel, tour of Graz, Styria typical dinner with music and dancing, visit mill, tasting pumpkins oil and wine with cold snacks, a ticket for the museum of wine.

Atlas Airtours has recently offered organized trips for singles, in the form of a package arrangement - Europe by plane or bus and a distant journey. However, due to low interest, the program has been discontinued.

- a) Planet Travel is a travel agency from Pula, which offers organized trips for singles and gays. Pula is the first break the ice in Istria with such tourist offer. The owners of travel agencies Planet Travel point noticed from their working experience that foreign gay couples like Istria because people are very tolerant. One problem which emphasize in the development of this type of tourism is that hotels and private accommodation are not indicated whether they are friendly to this population. When such indications existed for hoteliers would be less misunderstandings.
- b) Generalturist is a travel agency that has made such a program, tried to animate the people, but unfortunately nothing of the journey. Pula is closed for this aspect of the program, people still feel a kind of discomfort or even shame for themselves, said Daniel Buršić, head of the branch Generalturist in Pula. Interest in such a form of travel in large areas is definitely there, but in a small environment such as Pula, difficult.

Although attempts to introduce a package of arrangements for "singles" were, it is not taken hold for the weak interest of Croatian citizens. Although the aim of such social programs, the creation of new acquaintances, many "singles" trips, sent distorted signals about his conception. Many people travel just because it suits them or not with anyone, but do not like to label as "singles". Abroad, it is already very well developed. For example, Costa Crociere, boat cruise, where cruises are organized exclusively for "singles". Over time these cruises are organized in cooperation with the agencies to enter into relationships or in cooperation with the marriage agency.

5. DEVELOPMENT GUIDELINES TOUR OPERATORS IN CROATIA

In this part of article author elaborate the development of guidelines for tour operators through a few questions: 1) Can we predict the future, 2) How will society change, 3) How will technology change, and 4) What trends appear in the tourist market?⁵

5.1. CAN WE PREDICT THE FUTURE?

The future of tourism is very difficult to predict due to various economic, financial, social reasons but also because of changes in personal preferences of tourists. Tourism has changed significantly over time, while in the very beginning of its development a few people traveled, but 60-years of the twentieth century comes to the mass and to the development of selective forms of tourism. The tourist was then frozen, withdrawn and slightly interested, but today is becoming more sophisticated, curious, to experience the culture and customs of the people in destinations. According to more demanding demand, tourist agencies and tour operators need to detect and satisfy different desires and needs. Precisely for that reason and sustainable development, tourism selective forms are a priority.

A new form of tourism that are certainly more popular abroad than in Croatian tourism are forms for different groups, singles, gays and others. This form of tourism is not positively accepted in all countries, which because of conservatism or legal norms of the country. In Italy today, there are tour operators and travel agencies that are specialized in organizing trips for singles only. Some of them are «Viaggi per single» and «Vita da single». Single trips are designed in order to meet new people, made new friends, hung out and so forth. Travel agencies and tour operators should follow the requirements of tourists and the changes that occur in the tourist market and adapt its offer these requirements.

5.2. HOW WILL SOCIETY CHANGE?

Tourists and even the whole society is changing significantly over time. With the development of humanity's needs, every day becoming more and more demanding. Today's tourist is educated person, knows what he wants, no longer shy, stands firmly behind our own desires and arguments. Changes in society have imposed the need to change tour operators and travel agencies. Tourism eventually becomes massive and occurs at saturation of potential tourists. Tourists becomes more accountable about the impact of tourism on the environment. Tour operators and travel agencies in their programs introduce sustainable development into all forms of selective tourism. Sustainable development implies responsible behavior towards the environment by tourists, travel organizer, the local population and other subjects related to tourism. Traveler wants to remove from work, problems, stress and other elements that give him discomfort. Precisely, there is a growing number of small trips per year by reducing length of stay (weekends trips).

5.3. HOW WILL TECHNOLOGY CHANGE?

Technology in the past few centuries has progressed significantly. At the beginning of the development of tourism the main means of transport were coaches, then comes to the development of rail, road and air transport as a prerequisite for the development of mass tourism and the possibility of residence in the most remote destinations. Historically speaking all the important milestones in tourism were related to technical discoveries in the field of transport.

Today, when the Internet is an important source of information on travel and some sort of first point of contact tourists and destinations, the role of tour operators is reduced. Declining trend in use of personal contact with travel agencies in the purchase of travel points to the need to strengthen the Internet.

In today's world where the Internet is part of everyday life, every traveler is potentially easier to enter a destination on the Internet and explore it, than to go to the travel agency and thus spend more time. Internet is the medium that the tourism industry must simply use for the promotion. For example, in Italy it is used by about 40 percent of the population. It is often the first point of contact the customer with the tourist destination. Well internet presentation is something that every successful organization must have. When guests book their accommodation through the website, and via e-mail, it is very important to quickly obtain feedback on the reservation.

Research indicate the importance of using website and booking system. They should be designed to allow easy orientation, to prevent "wandering" the page, to find a place where you can make reservations, and to the guests with every "click" clearly what is happening on the site. Website must contain accurate information and be regularly updated. Given that the phone book favorites and more frequently used - employees receiving a phone book to be very friendly, easily accessible and very well informed.

5.4. TRENDS THAT APPEAR IN THE TOURIST MARKET?

Trends in the tourist market are created in accordance with the wishes and needs of the tourists. Here are some trends regarding tourism:

- Individual behavior leads to increased tourist interest in the custom home clients;
- More short trips during the year;
- Trend of reserving the tourist trip (last minute) at the last moment create problems if the tour operators must lease capacity;
- Emphasis on sustainable development;
- Security as a crucial factor in selecting a tourist destination;
- Introduction of recreation trips;
- Tourist wants to organize the trip, etc.

All the potential tourist with a higher educational level are increasingly difficult to satisfy, while trends are increasingly changing and becoming more "surprising". Once the trend was to go by train to see a horse race, while the newest trend is to visit the Moon.

6. CONCLUSION

Croatia as a tourist destination, with a relatively long history of tourism, should significantly invest in its successful tourism development and attracting tourists. Today, when global competition is extremely high successful tourism development is possible only with cooperation of all subjects related to tourism. In Croatia activities are focused on Ministry of Tourism, the Institute for Tourism, various non-profit environmental organizations, organizations for the protection of cultural heritage, private employers, hoteliers, local communities, tour operators and travel agencies.

Tour operators have a very important role in attracting foreign tourists to Croatia. Their task is to help other tourist operators and make an interesting story about Croatia packed in different packages. Division operators need to facilitate the different segments of their business, as every tour operator oriented on the tourism market and different types of tourists.

Tour operators that offer organized trips for singles are «still alive» in Croatia. The reason for this is in the personality and beliefs of individuals. On the other hand, people still feel a kind of discomfort or even shame for themselves. Such travel is not seen as an opportunity of socializing, meeting new people and places, but as the process of their «singles» labeling.

Croatia is a country which should force such a program, since it is a conservative country with a low interest for the same topic. But Croatia can be interesting as a tourist destination for foreign "singles" groups in which these programs are very widespread. Croatia has attractive environment, Istria, Dalmatia and Slavonia, where the group could spend your time having fun, learning, singing, tasty gastronomy and ethnology.

Croatia needs to develop various forms of selective tourism because it has a predisposition for, but in line with sustainable development. Only in this way fail to preserve their wealth and quality for future generations. But pictures in Croatia today is not like that. From tourism is expected "the salvation of the crisis," and it is actually very little invested. Problem which should also be solved is the high seasonality.

The problem is how to attract tourists out of season and reduce dependence on only the sun and sea. A prerequisite for quality development of tourism is certainly qualified and educated, precise and well prepared development strategy that Croatia lacks.

ENDNOTES

³ Čavlek, N., Turooperatori i svjetski turizam, Golden marketing, Zagreb, 1998., str. 43.

⁴ Ibid, str. 115.

⁵ According to Holloway, J.C. & N. Taylor (2006). The Business of Tourism, Seventh edition, Prentice Hall.

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