

Tourism Development and Safe Travel Stamp Protocols Application in WB6 on Post Pandemic Period

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ABSTRACT

Our aim in conducting this study was to show the performance of the tourism sector in the Western Balkans during and after the pandemic period, in order to provide some ideas for strengthening this sector as an important part of the economy of each country of the Western Balkans and for the economy of the region as a whole.

The methodology and methods used and followed for the realization of this study was the creation of the idea for the field of study for which the research would be performed, the collection based on the desk research level of data, figures, facts and information as well as the literature that would be used for the realization of the study. The literature, data, figures, facts and information were then read, selected and selected in order to determine the materials to be used in this study. Subsequently, the study methodology has been the processing of data through comparative analysis, to create other reliable data, combining by means of descriptive statistics method data, figures, information from various sources and research previously, and a SWOT analysis was built to identify key tourism development trends in WB6 countries and to support its long-term evolution in relation to the application of the Safe Travel Seal as an important standards' package for this sector. Further, the first draft of the research was written, which was then reviewed several times until the final version we present in this scientific activity was reached. After writing the final text, we constructed the abstract and the introduction of the paper and then drew the relevant conclusions and recommendations.

The main recommendation is that the countries of the Western Balkans should cooperate together in the development of the hotel and tourism sector to offer joint tourism packages to the international market and to apply as a region the seal of safe travel of the World Tourism Organization, as a package of significant standards for the post-pandemic period Covid - 19.

Keywords: Tourism, hospitality, WB6, safe travel stamp, etc.,

Introduction

As the coronavirus during 2019 – 2022 spread globally, authorities all around the world have acted firmly to limit its spread through social isolation policies, such as shutting educational institutions, limiting work and restricting the mobility of people, causing an immediate and significant impact on local, regional and world economy, tourism sector included.

Only after six – seven months after it's detection, COVID-19 affected almost all countries of the world, with more than half of the world's population experiencing lockdown measures. The world economy started to operate in a context of uncertainty, rising challenges on trade-offs on health, economic and social life. The global economic activity felt down as the waves of infections hits population. As of 30th November 2020, more than 170 million jobs and livelihoods in the Travel and Tourism sector have been impacted globally creating the worst economic and social crisis.

Besides prior pandemic crisis, tourism sector growth in the WB6 economies was above the global average, regional economies have been hit hardly, tourism sector included, with around 72 - 74% decrease of international visitors during the first half of 2020 compared to the same period of 2019.

An unprecedented crisis requires unprecedented action and collaboration, and most of countries and international organizations coordinated actions and steps towards achieving recovery. Within the current situation of a promising future, economies are committed to recover and working together on guiding the travel and tourism sectors to reopen under the new normality. The tourism sector in the world and especially in Western Balkans is fully committed to putting people and their well-being first and cooperation between Western Balkan economies is vital for the sector. For this, WTTC (World Travel and Tourism Council) Safe Travel Stamp protocols, guidelines and general advice has been prepared and published, to allow travel to be safely resumed.

Literature Review

The tourism and hospitality industry is the largest and fastest growing industry in the world. According to statistics, about 70% of GDP in developed countries consists of the services sector and this trend is also for developing countries. Within the service sector, the share held by tourism is always growing. Tourism in recent years has contributed to about 10 - 20% of GDP. This requires that the service provided be of the highest quality and most complete, in accordance with the payment made by customers, aiming to achieve loyalty to the service, as the key to success. The hotel and tourism industry is the largest and fastest growing industry in the world (Ceko. 2021).

The hotel and tourism sector is constantly changing and constantly improving, and this is because the customers in this sector are also looking for excellence for the price they pay for services and products, and because the managers, managers and employees of this sector themselves seek to continually improve and innovate. This mutual tendency for innovation seems to be faster in this sector than in other sectors, and this is because in this sector it is often enough to change the menu, the way of setting the table or the provision of a tourist guide, so that customers can perceive change, when in other industries change may require more time and investment in technology and equipment (Walker. 2017).

This approach has made the organizations operating in this sector have an even more positive and even more acceptable approach to Total Quality Management, through which a greater inclusion among staff and a communication and cooperation is possible. more facilitated, which affects the improvement of productivity of entities that are involved in this sector. TQM works well when managers are quality too. Now in the hotel and tourism sector, the aim is not simply quality control (Quality Control), which focuses only on error detection, but Total Quality Management (Total Quality Management) that focuses on error prevention (Ceko. 2021).

Main tendencies on tourism sector word wide

Main tendencies on the tourism and hospitality sector on post modern times are:

- Growth of globalization.
- Improvement of health and safety standards
- Acceptance of diversity and demography changes
- Growth and extension of services sector
- Quick technological changes
- Increase the importance of sustainability and green travel
- Sophistication of legal aspects.
- Increase of demand for travel with only one aim
- Social and mobile media inclusion (Ceko. 2021).

The period 2016 - 2018 is the period that has had the largest number of tourists worldwide, with over 1.2 billion international tourists, making this sector considered as an export, as foreigners consume in the country that visits those services and products as to consume them in their country of origin, but to have been exported from the country to which they go to visit. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) defines hotel tourism as a social, cultural and economic phenomenon, involving the movement of people to places outside their usual environment, for personal or business / professional purposes. These people are called visitors (who can be either tourists or excursionists, residents or non-residents) and tourism is about some specific activities, including hotel tourism costs. This activity includes many different types of activities and public and private entities, which provide services and products for tourists, which can be local residents, local and private public administration employees and foreigners and foreigners who come as visitors, who become part of tourist destinations, built environment and natural environment. All of these actors and environments come together to create processes, activities, and outcomes (Ceko. 2021).

Tourism sector globally during pandemics

Globally, International tourist arrivals (overnight visitors) in the first seven months of 2021 were 40% below the levels of 2020, and still 80% down when compared to the same period of pre-pandemic year 2019, while after a weak start of the year, international tourism saw a modest improvement during the months of June and July 2021 and the same trend looks to happen during the beginning of 2022, while looking ahead, most experts continue to expect a rebound in 2022, driven by unleashed pent-up demand, mostly during the second and third quarter of that year. Nearly one-third of respondents expect a potential rebound in 2023. Almost half of all experts continue to see a return of international arrivals to 2019 levels in 2024 or later.

European tourism sector during pandemics

European tourism recovery seems to be underway, however there is still a long road ahead. Overall, improving vaccination rates across Europe and the EU Digital COVID certificate have facilitated cross-border travel over the peak summer months. More relaxed entry measures seemed to be in place in destinations where tourism comprises a significant share of the economy. Due to the gradual easing of restrictions within the European Union, the fast vaccination rate, and the reopening of borders for more third countries and fully vaccinated travelers from abroad, it is expected that European tourism will rebound for the summer months.

WB6 tourism sector during pandemics

Assessing recent tourism data and industry performance is a useful way of directly monitoring the key trends for travel demand across Western Balkans. This can be complemented by looking at key trends and relationships in macroeconomic performance which can provide further insight into likely tourism developments in WB6 throughout the short term, medium term and long term.

In 2021, the Western Balkans region is seeing a faster-than-expected recovery from the COVID-19-induced recession that all six economies experienced in 2020. GDP growth for the region for 2021 was accounted around 6%, after a 3.1% contraction in 2020. Growth in the region is projected at 4.1% in 2022 and 3.8% in 2023, and expected to resume its pre-crisis path. This rebound is due to a combination of domestic reopening and favorable external conditions for the region's exports. Falling infection rates and loosened mobility restrictions allowed for a sharp rebound in domestic consumption and tourism arrivals. A strong recovery in advanced economies also provided a boost to demand for the region's exports (World Bank. 2021).

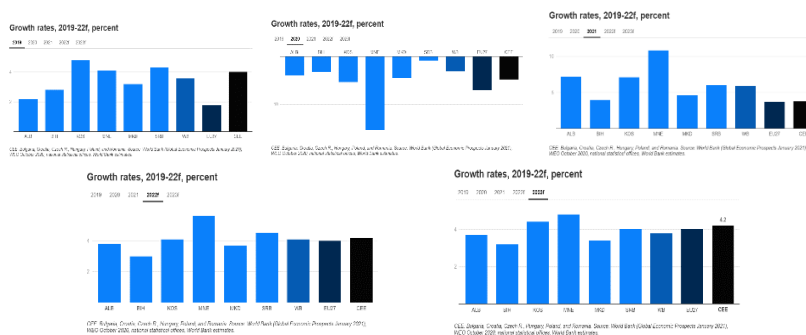
Table 1: Economic policy comparator for Western Balkan

Western Balkan countries		AL B	Bi H	KSV	MNG	NRM	SRB
Financial Sector	Policy rate reduced	X				X	X
	Liquidity increased	X					X
	Prudential req. loosened				X	X	
Direct support to firms	Wage subsidies	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Tax/social contr. deferred/reduced	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Loan subsidies				X	X	X
	Guarantees	X	X	X			X
	Inspections/ audits suspended						
Payment holidays	Loans	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Rent	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Utilities	X		X		X	X
Temporar ycontrols	Prices		X	X		X	X
	Exports						X

Support to individuals	Universal transfers						
	Self-employed	X		X		X	X
	Pensioners		X	X	X		X
	Low income households	X	X	X	X	X	X
Increased social benefits	Enhanced sick leave		X		X		
	Enhanced unemp. benefits	X	X	X	X	X	
	Public works						
Health	Additional spending	X	X	X	X		X
External Assistance	(available or negotiated)	X	X	X	X	X	X

Source: EBRD – Policy comparator (EBRD. 2019).

Graph 1. Growth rate of WB6 economies 2019 – 2022*



Source: Tourism around the world (Knoema. 2022)

Besides the prior pandemic crisis, tourism growth in the WB6 economies was above the global average, regional economies have been hit hardly, tourism sector included, with around 72 - 74% decrease of international visitors during the first half of 2020 compared to the same period of 2019 with an improvement during Summer 2021, expecting a better situation during Summer 2022 and a full recovery beyond. WB6 economies are specific and distinguished for the seasonal tourism. Layoff level generally is about 30%, while in normal situations the layoff level for tourism sector is about 15-20% for full time employees, while for seasonal employees is about 30-40%. To maintain the level of tourism sector in full time operation as well as the seasonal employees, WB6 economies have introduced several measures to support tourism and hospitality, combined with managerial decisions of private entities on cutting costs, for the same purpose too. Enhanced international and regional coordination to remove barriers and gain traveler's confidence are critical to the sector's survival and recovery. To achieve recovery, it is essential to provide certainty for the travelers in regard to travel restrictions and policies to facilitate domestic and international travel (WTTC. G20. 2020). Cooperation between Western Balkan economies is vital for the sector and can effectively contribute to the control of COVID-19, working in close consultation and with other partners to assist the sector in ensuring that health measures are implemented in ways that minimize unnecessary interference with international traffic, trade and life quality of tourists.

WTTC Safe Travel Stamp protocols

During the course of pandemic situation WTTC (World Tourism and Travel Council) introduced Safe Travel Stamp protocols, as the world's first ever global safety and hygiene stamp for Travel & Tourism, designed specifically to

address COVID-19 and similar outbreaks. The stamp allows travelers and other Travel & Tourism stakeholders to recognize destination authorities and companies around the world that have implemented health and hygiene protocols that are aligned with WTTC's Safe Travels Protocols. All economies, destination authorities and companies operating in Travel & Tourism will be able to use the stamp, provided they comply with the Safe Travels protocols. The stamp is free to use. The Safe Travels stamp is based on self-assessment and it is not a certification. Recovery protocols to optimize sector-wide recovery efforts are in place. These protocols include providing the public & private sectors with the insights & toolkits for interaction & implementation to ensure that people are and feel safe however they can't guarantee 100% safety. It is paramount to have common rules. Ultimately, we envision a future of travel which is safe, secure, seamless and provides an authentic and meaningful experience to the traveler along the journey; one which supports the livelihoods of millions and contributes to sustainable economic growth. Protocols for twelve industries, include:

1. Hospitality;
2. Attractions;
3. Outdoor Retail;
4. Aviation;
5. Airports;
6. Short Term Rentals;
7. Cruise;
8. Tour Operators;
9. Convention Centers and MICE;
10. Car Rental;
11. Insurance;
12. Adventure tourism;

The protocols align the private sector behind common standards to ensure the safety of its workforce and travelers as the sector shifts to a new normality. They are living documents which will be updated as new information becomes available about COVID-19. The global protocols are designed to help to rebuild confidence among travelers, and within the sector, so safe travel can resume once restrictions are eased. They provide consistency to destination authorities as well as guidance to travel providers, operators, & travelers, about the new approach to health & hygiene in the post COVID-19 world. The global protocols were developed in collaboration with WTTC Members, leading industry associations & international organizations. They take into account the current guidelines of the WHO and CDC. The protocols are living documents which will be updated as new information becomes available about COVID-19. WTTC recommends the private sector and destination authorities alike, to adopt a risk-based approach based on high & low risk contexts and adapt their measures accordingly, as subjects in charge for these issues (WTTC. 2019).

Methodology

The methodology followed for the realization of this study was the creation of the idea for the field of study for which the research would be performed, the collection of data, figures, facts and information as well as the literature that would be used for the realization of the study, based on a desk research.

The desk research was done through:

1. Gathering information on WB6 economies.
2. Gathering information about tourism industry worldwide, European and WB6.
3. Gathering information about WB6 Covid – 19 situation.
4. Gathering information about Safe Travel Stamp application in WB6.

The literature, data, figures, facts and information were then read, selected and selected in order to determine the materials to be used in this study. Subsequently, the study methodology has been the processing of data through comparative analysis of tourism activities services and products in WB6 in order to provide reliable data, and by using

a combination of sources like surveys, relevant reporting units from the WB6 countries with accurate and complete data, and other appropriate sources, including key stakeholders in each of the Western Balkan economies, to create other reliable data, combining by means of descriptive statistics method data, figures, information from various sources and research previously, and a SWOT analysis was built to identify key tourism development trends in WB6 countries, defining the current situation in region's tourism industry and to support its long-term evolution in relation to the application of the Safe Travel Seal as an important standards package for this sector. All information, data and facts gathered and processed helped to identify, quantify, and visually display the main research results and to propose solutions that will facilitate the sector's short-term recovery and support its long-term evolution.

Through this process we have investigated and analysed the tourism industry's state of play, through research, data collection and analysis of findings. Analyzing primary and secondary data & information collected during the course of the paper research on the state of WB6 tourism industry, identify, quantify, and visually display the main research results, analysing the status of digital communication's role in the WB6 related to tourism sector, proposing improvements, the current status of communication between tourism public and private sector subjects in WB6 countries, between WB6 countries and between them and the rest of tourism world community and a wider audience, investigate the current state of the joint tourism product's narrative in the region and worldwide and propose communication solutions that will facilitate the sector's short-term recovery and support its long-term evolution, etc. Further, the first draft of the research was written, which was then reviewed several times until the final version we present in this article was reached. Writing the paper, the focus was to (1) asses the post COVID 19 situation in the tourism industry in the WB6 economies, (2) define how to improve communication on tourism sector between WB6 economies and (3) propose scenarios about the sustainable future of the industry in WB6:

After writing the final text, we constructed the abstract and the introduction of the paper and then drew the relevant conclusions and recommendations and later we have prepared all information and data in a user friendly, visual manner understandable for wider audience in case of publication of this paper research and in case of presenting findings on scientific occasions related to the issue.

Data Analysis

As previously mentioned, data, facts, information gathered from different trusted sources, are processed and presented in a visual manner understandable, in tables and graphs below.

Table 2: 2020 Outlook for Western Balkan countries

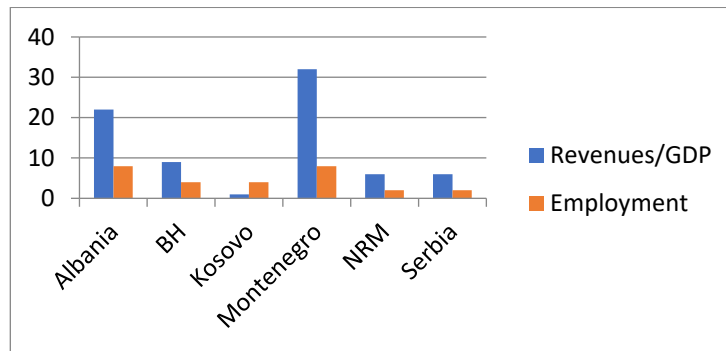
	MONTENEGRO			SERBIA			KOSOVO			BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA			ALBANIA			NORTH MACEDONIA		
	Pre Covid-19	Baseline scenario	Downsize scenario	Original Deviations	New Base Case	Low Case	Pre Covid-19	Baseline scenario	Downsize scenario	Pre Covid-19	Baseline scenario	Downsize scenario	Pre Covid-19	Baseline scenario	Downsize scenario	Pre Covid-19	Baseline scenario	Downsize scenario
Real GDP growth	3,2	-5,6	-8,9	3,9	-2,5	-5,3	4,1	-	-	4,2	-3,2	-4,2	3,3	-5,0	-6,9	3,6	-	-3,2
							4,5	11,3								1,4		
Consumption	2,9	-3,6	-4,8	5,7	-2,3	-3,5	3,2	1,1	-0,6	5,0	-2,7	-3,8	3,1	-1,6	-2,2	4,3	0,6	-0,3
Investment	0,0	-8,8	-	5,3	-5,2	-7,7	3,8	-	-	2,1	-6,2	-7,1	7,7	1,0	0,8	8,0	-	-2,6
			13,7				21,5	28,5								0,1		
Exports	4,1	-	-	4,9	-	-	4,0	-	-	1,1	-8,8	-	2,7	-	-	7,4	-	-2,9
		18,5	27,8		10,2	18,5	12,2	25,5				10,0		25,0	30,0	0,1		

Imports	1,9	-	-	7,6	-9,7	-	2,2	-	-8,0	2,5	-6,5	-7,5	4,6	-9,5	-	9,4	1,7	0,1
	12,4	17,7			15,1		6,8							10,6				

Source: Table based on Western Balkans regular economic report no. 17 -The Economic and Social Impact of COVID-19 – The country notes (Studies on obstacles and opportunities for doing business in the region. Study no.1. Prospects for Travelling and Tourism Sector in the Western Balkans in 2020-impact of the coronavirus pandemic) (World Bank. 2021)

In table 2 there is a prediction about trends of real GDP, consumption, investments, exports and imports for WB6 economies.



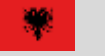

Graphic 1. Tourism revenues (as part of GDP) & tourism employment / total between WB6



Source: World Bank (2021)

In graph 1, there is a comparative analysis of tourism revenues as per the total of GDP and contribution of tourism sector on employment, where we see that Albania and Montenegro have the highest level of revenues and employment related to tourism sector.

Table 3: Common table for key tourism indicators for WB6 for 2019




Countries / Key indicators for 2019	 MNG	 SRB	 BiH	 ALB	 RNM
International tourist arrivals	2,5 million	1,8 million	1,2 million	5,9 million	0,8 million
International tourism receipts	\$ 1.200 million	\$ 1.600 million	\$ 1.100 million	\$ 2.300 million	\$ 400 million
Average receipts per arrival	\$ 490	\$ 870	\$ 950	\$ 390	\$ 520
International tourism exports	\$ 1.300 million	\$ 2.000 million	\$ 1.200 million	\$ 2.500 million	\$ 400 million
Share of tourism of total export	Tourism as 54 % of Exports	Tourism as 7 % of Exports	Tourism as 13 % of Exports	Tourism as 38 % of Exports	Tourism as 4 % of Exports
Average annual growth for last 10 years (for tourist arrivals)	9 %	11 %	14 %	13 %	11 %
Total contribution of T&T to GDP (% of total economy)	\$ 1.762,8 million (32,1 %)	\$ 2.994,9 million (5,85 %)	\$ 1.820,0 million (9,3 %)	\$ 3.264,5 million (21,2 %)	\$965,3 million (7,4 %)

Total contribution of T&T to GDP growth	6,5 %	4,2 %	6,85 %	8,3 %	5,9 %
Total contribution of T&T to employment (% total employment)	66,9 jobs (000's) (32,8 %)	134,8 jobs (000's) (6,2 %)	79,1 jobs (000's) (9,6 %)	254,3 jobs (000's) (22,2 %)	51,4 jobs (000's) (6,8 %)
Total contribution of T&T to employment - % growth	6,7 %	2,9 %	6,65 %	5,9 %	3,5 %

Source: The table is based on the individual data for each country, taken from the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC).

As per the information provided at table 3, there is a significative contribution of tourism sector in WB6 economies individually and as a region.

Table 4: Common table for performance overviews by WB6

Countries	MNG	SRB	BiH	ALB	NRM	KSV
Business environment	4,6	4,4	3,4	4,0	4,3	-
Safety & security	5,6	5,5	5,4	5,8	5,2	-
Health & hygiene	5,8	6,3	5,6	5,3	6,0	-
Human resources & labour market	4,8	4,7	4,1	5,1	4,1	-
ICT readiness	5,2	5,1	4,5	4,7	4,7	-
Prioritization of Travel & Tourism	5,0	3,9	4,1	5,0	3,7	-
International Openness	2,4	3,2	2,4	2,4	2,3	-
Price competitiveness	5,6	5,5	5,5	5,3	5,8	-
Environmental sustainability	4,7	4,5	4,3	4,3	3,6	-
Air transport infrastructure	3,2	2,6	2,0	2,1	2,4	-
Ground & port infrastructure	3,3	3,0	2,4	3,1	2,6	-
Tourist service infrastructure	5,5	3,9	3,9	4,0	3,9	-
Natural resources	2,7	2,1	1,9	2,9	2,2	-
Cultural resources & business travel	1,1	1,7	1,5	1,2	1,4	-
Overall Score (Rank)	3,9 / 67th	3,6 / 83rd	3,3 / 105th	3,6 / 86th	3,4 / 101st	-
Past overall score (Rank) - for 2017	3,7 / 72nd	3,4 / 95th	3,1 / 113rd	3,4 / 98th	3,5 / 89th	-
Overall Change (Rank change)	+0,2 (+5) 	+0,2 (+12)	+0,2 (+8) 	+0,2 (+12)	-0,1 (-12) 	-

Source: World Economic Forum. 2019

In table 4, there is a comparative analysis on doing business climate on WB6 economies, where Montenegro is on top of the region.

**Table 5. Western Balkans COVID – 19 cases, recoveries and fatalities
(29th November 2020 – 26th December 2021).**

No	Country	Population	Cases		Recoveries		Fatalities	
			2020	2021	2020	2021	2020	2021
1	Albania	2.800.000	38.182	207.542	18.849	199.133	810	3.189
2	Bosnia & Herzegovina	3.500.000	87.901	287.276	52.769	192.298	2.681	13.269
3	Kosovo*	1.800.000	38.902	161.327	23.405	158.125	988	3.073
4	Montenegro	630.000	34.881	163.373	23.484	157.979	487	2.394
5	N. R. Macedonia	2.100.000	61.543	223.211	38.400	210.475	1.731	7.904
6	Serbia	7.000.000	175.438	1.290.469	31.534	1.256.219	1.604	12.594
8	TOTAL	17.830.000	436.847	2.333.198	188.441	2.174.229	8.301	42.423

Source: Worldometer. 2022 (Calculations from authors of the paper research).

In table 5 there is an information about the Covid – 19 cases, recoveries and fatalities, during November 2020 – December 2021.

Table 6. Comparison of WTTC Safe Travel Stamp protocols and measures taken by WB6 economies

No	WTTC Safe Travel Stamp Protocols	ALB	BiH	XKX	MNG	NRM	SRB
1	Hospitality	Protocol	STS	Protocol	STS	STS	Protocol
2	Attractions	Guideline	STS	Guideline	STS	STS	Guideline
3	Outdoor Retail	General rules	STS	General rules	STS	STS	General rules
4	Aviation	Guideline	STS	Guideline	STS	STS	Guideline
5	Airports	Guideline	STS	Guideline	STS	STS	Guideline
6	Short Term Rentals	General rules	STS	General rules	STS	STS	General rules
7	Cruise	Guideline	STS	Guideline	STS	STS	Guideline
8	Tour Operators	Protocol	STS	Protocol	STS	STS	Protocol
9	Con. Centers, MICE	Guideline	STS	Guideline	STS	STS	Guideline
10	Car Rental	Guideline	STS	Guideline	STS	STS	Guideline
11	Insurance	General rules	STS	General rules	STS	STS	General rules
12	Adventure tourism	Guideline	STS	-	STS	STS	-

Source: WTTC. 2022

In table 6 there is an updated information about application of Safe Travel Stamp protocols in WB6, where only Bosnia & Herzegovina, Montenegro and Northern Republic of Macedonia have applied and use STS protocols.

Results

Based on a Comparative analysis of tables and graphs contributing to this paper research, it is possible to draw some important results:

Albania is the leading country in terms of the number of tourists arriving during 2019–2021, and Montenegro the second. The largest percentage increase in the number of tourists arrivals compared to 2020 is hold by Montenegro, followed by Albania, while North Republic of Macedonia ranks last by this criterion.

Albania is also a leader in value of international tourist receipts, while Serbia is second. The largest percentage increase in this area is in Bosnia and Herzegovina, while North Macedonia is ranked at last place by this criterion also.

Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia are leaders in terms of average receipt per arrival, while Albania has the lowest average receipt per arrival;

Like expected, share of tourism of total export is highest in Montenegro (54%) and Albania (38%), while share in other countries is quite lower (In Bosnia and Herzegovina 13%, in Serbia 7%, and the lowest in North Macedonia – 4%);

Montenegro has the largest total contribution of T&T to GDP with 32,1%, Albania is second with 21,2% , while other countries have a much lower contribution rate of T&T to GDP. The highest % growth of total contribution of T&T to GDP is hold by Albania –8,3 % and the same situation is with total contribution of T&T to employment.

The fields in which all states together have poor grades are: International Openness, Price competitiveness, Environmental sustainability, Air transport infrastructure, Ground & port infrastructure, Tourist service infrastructure, Natural resources and Cultural resources & business travel. This fields should be worked on, improved, in order to take better places in the next ranking.

There is a lack of communication between WB6 governments and WB6 National Tourism Authorities about tourism issues, and there is no any communication between public and private sector in WB6 in a organized form, since there is no any common authority in charge for tourism and hospitality in WB6, while WB6 is in an important position of the list of the tourism industry. Improving business climate and investment climate on tourism sector, promoting specific tourism segments like culture and adventure routes, virtual tourism, virtual tours, virtual museums, scientific tourism, flora and fauna tourism, historical tourism, etc., helps on developing the sector, in parallel with a promising economic growth and progress generally in WB6

Discussions

Besides the prior pandemic crisis, tourism growth in the WB6 economies was above the global average, regional economies have been hit hardly, tourism sector included, with around 72 - 74% decrease of international visitors during the first half of 2020 compared to the same period of 2019. Especially during the 2nd quarter economies of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and North Macedonia have experienced more than 95% recession, especially because of negative influence on the international arrivals, reducing foreign expenditures too.

WB6 economies are specific and are distinguished for the seasonal tourism, generally in their economies, including tourism sector. Layoff level generally is about 30%, while in normal situations the layoff level for tourism sector is about 15-20% for full time employees, while for seasonal employees is about 30-40%. To maintain the level of tourism sector in full time operation as well as the seasonal employees, WB6 economies have introduced several measures to support tourism and hospitality, combined with managerial decisions of private entities on cutting costs, for the same purpose too.

Enhanced international and regional coordination to remove barriers and gain traveler's confidence are critical to the sector's survival and recovery. To achieve recovery, it is essential to provide certainty for the travelers in regard to travel restrictions and policies to facilitate domestic and international travel (WTTC. G20. 2020).

Besides there is a lack of cooperation between WB6 economies generally and on tourism sector specifically, this cooperation is considered to be vital for the sector and can effectively contribute to the control of COVID-19, working in close consultation and with other partners to assist the sector in ensuring that health measures are implemented in ways that minimize unnecessary interference with international traffic, trade and life quality of tourists.

Currently, WTTC introduction of Safe Travel Stamp protocols took place only in three WB6 countries, while it is a promising tool for increasing number of tourists, arrivals and flights towards WB6, which should focus their effort on six main areas:

1. Adapt operations, modify employee practices and/or redesign public spaces to help protect employees and customers.
2. Consider implementing touch-less solutions, practical, to limit the opportunity for virus transmission while also enabling a positive travel experience.
3. Adopt and implement enhanced sanitation procedures specifically designed to combat the transmission of COVID-19.
4. Promote health screening measures for employees and isolate workers with possible symptoms and provide health resources to customers.
5. Establish a set of procedures aligned with official guidance should an employee results positive.
6. Follow best practices in food and beverage service to promote employee and customer health.
7. Establish a common tourism strategy, a tourism communication strategy, a communication system and communication tools.
8. Applying as a region for WTTC Safe Travel Stamp and protocols, guidelines related to them
9. Support financially the sector in parallel with reviewing of regulatory and tax system
10. Promote tourism internally, especially the rural/natural areas, spa, mountain, river areas;
11. Involving new technologies and applications to address health and safety issues related to tourists, visitors, travelers
12. Etc.;

Year after year, tourism is increasingly crystallizing as one of the main engines of the WB6 economic development. According to the Economic Impact Report of 2018 of the World Travel and Tourism Council¹ (WTTC), along 2017, the tourism sector recorded an important direct contribution to WB6 GDP, including indirect multiplier effects too (WTTC. 2018).

Meanwhile, the sector's contribution to the economy is projected to grow significantly over the next 10 years with about 10% of the WB6 GDP, while taking into account this upward trend, with direct and indirect effect of the tourism sector will reach approximately 1/3 of Albania's and Montenegrin total GDP (Tourism Report Alb. Gov. 2019).

Also, in terms of employment, currently the tourism sector employs about 3% of the total labor force in WB6, while by 2031 this number is projected to grow to 4 - 6%. Referring to the same report of the World Council on Travel and Tourism (WTTC), investments in this sector in 2031 are accounted for about 5% of all investments in the WB6.

However, compared to other Mediterranean countries, the development of tourism in WB6 is still far from the potential represented by the region's natural, historical and cultural assets. Infrastructure, accommodation capacities, quality of services, the tourism offer and product are all factors that have somewhat inhibited the sustainable and consistent development of tourism in Albania, leaving room for uncontrolled and chaotic development that has actually kept this industry in operation, but endangering its sustainability in the long run.

According to The World Tourism Organization (WTO), sustainable tourism should:

- 1) Make optimal use of environmental resources that constitute a key element in tourism development, maintaining essential ecological processes and helping to conserve natural heritage and biodiversity.
- 2) Respect the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities, conserve their built and living cultural heritage and traditional values, and contribute to inter-cultural understanding and tolerance.
- 3) Ensure viable, long-term economic operations, providing socio-economic benefits to all stakeholders that are fairly distributed including stable employment and income-earning opportunities and social services to host communities, and contributing to poverty alleviation.

The tourism industry's state of play on the state of WB6 is going to expand during next 10 years more than in the last century (World Bank. 2021), which requires a common tourism strategy, a common tourism communication strategy, infrastructure and tools too.

SWOT analysis for tourism sector of WB6

Strength	Weakness
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The beauty of diverse cultures • General convenient transportation • Economic progress • Produce quality products • Comfortable accommodation • Safe & secure environment • Festival & fairs • Cultural heritage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outdated marketing strategies • Seasonal workforce • Turnover rate and low salaries at the sector • Not quality service • No innovation & creativity • No proper management skill • Lack of communication between stakeholders.
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online & social media marketing • Economical prices • Eco-friendly approach • New items in menu • Unusual places • Personalized service approach • Development of communication between stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visa restriction • Competitive market • No institute for tourism • Financial limitations • Environmental concerns • Pandemic of covid-19

Based on this SWOT analysis, a strong support to Western Balkan region in sustainable tourism development is needed, followed by (1) developing a common communication strategy for the WB6 joint tourism products, namely the culture and adventure routes of the region and spa, rural and mountain destination too, (2) supporting the development of a comprehensive and consistent data collection and statistics strategy for the WB6 tourism industry with a holistic approach to tourism development, management and monitoring, (3) measuring the economic contribution and impact of tourism requires reliable approaches to the collection and analysis of data collection and it is supported by the WB6's resolve for an efficient use of analysis, publication and dissemination of statistical information.

Quality in tourism hotel and Safe travel stamp

Peter Drucker, Deming's successor and one of the people who has contributed the most to the marketing discipline, said: "Quality is not what manufacturers put into a product or service, but what customers get and are willing to pay" (Ceko. Meçalla. 2017).

Quality is the foundation of success in the 21st Century. No entity, public, private or non-governmental organization can do without quality, because that's what the client really wants and no entity has a reason to exist if it does not have clients (Ceko). 2021).

Quality management - a set of tools, techniques, ways, certain methods applied by people in an organization, that, using certain resources, manage to produce quality certain products and services, which have embodied in themselves characteristics certain which in fact constitute the very quality of the product or service. According to the ISO definition, Quality Management are "all activities of the overall management function that define quality policy, objectives and responsibilities and implement them through quality planning, quality control, quality assurance and quality improvement with the management system of quality." (Ceko. Meçalla. 2017).

Quality management system - "organizational structure, procedures, processes and resources needed to implement quality management. In an organization, the quality management system affects all aspects of the business, because every system, process, activity and / or task has the potential to create mistakes and flaws," said Harrington, one of the masters of modern quality times (Harrington. 1997). The quality management system includes the system of personnel,

safety at work, environment, human safety, production, financial, information, development, procurement, etc. For the quality management system to move towards Total Quality Management, the organization must have:

- Customer focus
- Leadership involved by setting an example
- Involvement of people
- Qualitative decision making
- Benefits and partnership with suppliers
- Application of best practices
- Electronic documentation
- Total productive maintenance
- Etj

Standards advance change, facilitate quality achievement, provide assurance, unify test methods and procedures, and generally facilitate communication, defining what is a "standard" for products and services. Standards are prepared by those who apply them in practice and who know exactly what they are for. Standards contribute significantly to the country's economic growth. They encourage economic growth, are a tool in the hands of producers to enforce legislation, encourage increased competition, facilitate trade, eliminate technical barriers to trade and ensure the right ecological level, sustainability and preservation of the environment (Ceko. Meçalla. 2017).

Currently, related to Covid – 19, several protocols, guidelines and general advice has been issued in all Western Balkan economies, following the initial actions of Albania and Montenegro, while Montenegro, Northern Republic of Macedonia and Bosnia & Herzegovina enjoy safe travel stamp attribute too. The government of Northern Republic of Macedonia in the early September 2020 has taken the initiative to communicate with other governments of the region on how to act regionally on opening-up the borders, undertaken in regards to the EU integration process too, which need further promotion.

Conclusions & Recommendations

1. As the current outbreak of the COVID-19 is diminishing, economies and international organizations all around the world are committed to cooperating together in guiding the travel and tourism sectors' respond to pandemic.
2. Besides tourism sector must keep doing the basics: physical distancing, hand washing, mask wearing, coughing and sneezing safely away from others, avoiding crowds and keeping windows and doors opened, removing barriers and build traveler confidence are critical to the sector's survival and recovery, providing certainty for the travelers in regard to travel restrictions and policies to facilitate domestic and international travel.
3. Employing national plans to recover WB6 economies and especially the tourism sector, spreading of good practices, ensuring tourism system and workers are protected, lives are saved and the business will go on, are key messages to deliver to the public and business operators.
4. Cooperation between WB6 governments, WB6 National Tourism Authorities, business operators and other stakeholders is vital to protect and develop the tourism sector, ensuring health measures are implemented in ways that could minimize the unnecessary interference with international traffic, trade and life quality of tourists.
5. The local national and regional authorities in WB6 must apply for and adopt the WTTC Safe Travels protocols so that they can be implemented regionally, to restore the much-needed confidence in the travelers, since a common protocols framework is useful rather than using individual protocols.
6. Unifying protocols in accordance with Safe Travel Stamp WTO and recommendations of UNWTO is the most important step forward, Western Balkan economies should undertake quickly, as the new tourism season is taking place.

7. The tourism industry's state of play on the state of WB6 is going to expand during next 10 years more than in the last century, which requires a common tourism strategy, a common tourism communication strategy, infrastructure and tools too.
8. Joint tourism product specifically: culture and adventure routes, virtual tourism, virtual tours, virtual museums, scientific tourism, flora and fauna tourism, historical tourism, etc.), will be the main tourism demand services in the new normal, which requires reshaping tourism strategy for WB6.

Limitations and Future Studies

This study was conducted in the conditions of a reliable information collected from secondary sources. The processing of information is done by the authors of this study and this is a delicate issue as it is necessary that the data obtained from the processing of information to be compared with studies conducted by other authors for the same purpose, to draw fair and focused conclusions to be used for the long-term development of WB6 tourism sector.

The methodology and methods used for this study, especially comparative analysis used to gather, process and compare data, open a path for other researchers conducting studies on tourism sector generally and for WB6 specifically.

There is a lack of data, facts and information about tourism sector in Kosovo.

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