Neven Šerić

Faculty of Economics,
University of Split,
Croatia

✉ nseric@efst.hr

Anđela Jakšić Stojanović

University of Donja Gorica,
Podgorica,
Montenegro

✉ andjela.jaksic@udg.edu.me

Lidija Bagarić

Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality Management,
University of Rijeka,
Croatia

✉ lidija.bagaric@fthm.hr

THE INFLUENCE OF THE SECURITY PERCEPTION OF A TOURIST DESTINATION ON ITS COMPETITIVENESS AND ATTRACTIVENESS

UTJECAJ PERCEPCIJE SIGURNOSTI TURISTIČKE DESTINACIJE NA NJENU KONKURENTNOST I PRIVLAČNOST

Summary: *Visitors' impressions of a destination's security have an increasing impact on their visit. It is also evident in the negative trends in visiting destinations where terrorist attacks take place, where the consequences of the migrant crisis are pronounced, including areas where natural disasters occur sporadically due to climate change or where local crime is on the rise, etc. The minds and subconsciousness of tourists naturally influence the choice of the destination they travel to, when they travel, and how long they will stay there. In addition to establishing and maintaining an adequate security system for the tourist destination, it is necessary to continuously monitor visitors' impressions of how safe they feel or what security threats are bothering them. Based on these findings, it is possible to prevent the negative trend in tourist visits due to fears related to personal safety. Raising the security standards of the destination and more effective management of security features in the destination image and brand are just some of the activities employed for this purpose. But the complexity and cost of these activities require rational tactical and strategic decisions in destination security management. The prerequisite for rationality in decision making is information. Therefore, relevant knowledge about visitors' impressions of a destination's security is incredibly crucial for managing destination tourism development. Based on the thus defined subject of the research, the authors aim to analyse the influence of perceptions of safety on the unexpectedly successful tourist season of the city of Split and its surroundings. The focus of the research problem is the impact of destination security impressions when choosing where to travel and how long to stay there.* **Keywords:** *tourism, destination, security, competitiveness, attractiveness*
JEL Classification: *Z3, L83*

Rezime: *Percepcija dojma sigurnosti posjetitelja destinacije ima sve intenzivnije reperkusije na njenu posjećenost. Na isto ukazuju negativni trendovi posjete turističkim destinacijama u kojima su se dogodili teroristički napadi, u onima u kojima su očite posljedice migrantske krize, na područjima gdje se slijedom klimatskih promjena sporadično događaju prirodne katastrofe, u destinacijama koje bilježe porast lokalnog kriminaliteta i sl. Dojam sigurnosti u svijesti i podsvijesti turista evidentno utječe na odabir destinacije u koju i kada će putovati, te na opredjeljenje koliko će dugo tamo boraviti. Pored uspostave i održavanja primjerenog sustava sigurnosti turističke destinacije važno je i kontinuirano pratiti dojmove posjetitelja koliko se osjećaju sigurnima, odnosno koje ugroze sigurnosti ih opterećuju. Temeljem tih spoznaja moguće je prevenirati negativan trend turističke posjete slijedom strahova vezanih uz osobnu sigurnost kod turista. Podizanje sigurnosnih standarda destinacije, efektivnije upravljanje obilježjima sigurnosti u imidžu i marki destinacije tek su neke od aktivnosti koje se u tu svrhu poduzimaju. No kompleksnost i troškovi ovih aktivnosti sugeriraju racionalne taktičke i strateške odluke u upravljanju sigurnošću destinacije. Pretpostavka racionalnosti u donošenju odluka su informacije. Zbog toga su relevantne spoznaje o dojmovima sigurnosti destinacije kod posjetitelja od iznimne važnosti u upravljanju turističkim razvojem destinacije. Polazeći od tako definiranog predmeta istraživanja autori su kao cilj istraživanja postavili analizu utjecaja percepcije sigurnosti na neočekivano uspješnu ovogodišnju turističku sezonu grada Splita s okruženjem. U fokusu problema istraživanja je utjecaj dojmova sigurnosti destinacije pri odabiru kamo će se putovati i koliko će se dugo tamo boraviti.*
Ključne riječi: *turizam, destinacija, sigurnost, konkurentnost, privlačnost*
JEL kasifikacija: *Z3, L83*

1. INTRODUCTION, SUBJECT AND RESEARCH PROBLEM

Nowadays, significant changes in the global tourism market are evident in the marketing communication of supply and demand, but also in the behaviour of tourists (Buhalis et al. 2019). High growth trends in tourist travel in the period leading up to the global COVID 19 pandemic are a consequence of greater population mobility and lower transport fees (Prorok et al. 2019; Boes et

al. 2016). Once remote destinations people never considered visiting have become accessible to the broader tourist population thanks to low-cost airlines. The continuity of intensive growth of tourist trips has resulted in bringing closer different nations and different cultures. Thus, multiculturalism becomes a feature of democratic receptive tourist countries, especially those where tourism is a strategic economic commitment (Baggio 2020). However, multiculturalism is not widely accepted, and our present reality is characterized by inter-ethnic war conflicts and the growth of terrorist attacks. Local wars and rising religious intolerance in some areas have resulted in the migration of the poor to economically developed countries. These migrations generated migrant crises, both in the countries where they occur and in the countries where migrants come legally or illegally. Global warming rendered climate change, causing various natural disasters in some areas. Ultimately, the COVID 19 pandemic also negatively affected tourist migration to certain parts of the world, to certain countries and destinations. All negative phenomena generate fears about personal safety during tourist travel and stay. When studying places where negative trends of tourist visits are evident concerning security aspects that have occurred and which are associated with such destinations, it is apparent that the perception and personal impression of security of a tourist destination today is a competitive feature.

The dilemma that prompted this research is the possibility of using high security standards of the tourist destination and valid visitors' impressions on this issue to strengthen its attractiveness and competitiveness. Can this fact be analysed as one of the causes of the unexpectedly good tourist season of 2021 in the Republic of Croatia? Tourists often comment that they feel safe in Croatia, but generalizing such consideration presupposes primary research. The authors did the same in the city of Split and its surroundings during the peak tourist season of 2021. The Split Tourist Board encouraged research due to its strategic role in the security system of Split and its tourism and economy. Due to various threats at the global level, the impression of insecurity among tourists in the subconscious often outweighs the actual perils in many destinations, which requires proactive action (Larsen et al. 2009). However, before undertaking additional and new security activities, it is necessary to understand the general impression of the destination security in the visitors' perception. It is helpful in communication with visitors to a specific destination to compare their impressions of the safety of competing tourist countries (Cooper 2021). Such insights are additionally valuable in marketing activities of managing the brand and image of the tourist destination and the receptive country as a whole (Šerić and Batalić 2018; Seabra et al. 2014; Sirakaya et al. 1997).

The research subject focuses on the repercussions of the perception of the safety of the destination of existing and potential visitors from various threats to its attractiveness and competitiveness. Given the fears of several security hazards today, tourists often perceive them as higher than they actually are. In order to proactively communicate with targeted emitting tourism markets, it is essential to analyse and determine the actual state of the security system of the tourist destination. The same is achievable by comparative analysis of key stakeholders in this system and how tourists experience this system. Starting from the thus defined research subject, the authors analysed the impact of the impression of security perception on the tourists' loyalty to the destination. Specifically, the research will analyse the feelings and attitudes of Split visitors on the safety of the city, i.e. their perception of the safety situation in Split and its surroundings. It will compare the impression of safeness of the Republic of Croatia with competing countries.

The main goal of the research is to scientifically support the importance of implementing safety features in promoting and re-positioning destinations in the global tourism market.

The research subject, the impression of the safety of the destination in the context of tourist attraction, was analysed primarily from the tourist aspect, i.e. how visitors perceive security threats. The research problem is also defined - to determine the actual perception of the safety of tourists staying in Split and Croatia given the prevailing fears of tourists - COVID 19, the consequences of the migrant crisis, political instability in the destination and receptive country, natural disasters and terrorist attacks.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Nowadays, tourists' subconscious fears emanated from many new security threats discussed globally. The presence of hidden fears in the human subconscious does not mean that it is necessary to monitor and analyse how visitors feel about such dangers during their stay in a specific tourist destination. It is primarily so because a lot of news social networks and media broadcast mainly

highlight negative examples (Borovac et al. 2011). The perception of the safety of a tourist destination and the receptive tourist country as a whole is a feature of growing importance in deciding where tourists will travel and how long they will stay there (Artuger 2015). Positive impressions of visitors about the destination safety can be helpful in strengthening competitiveness and attractiveness and redefining the current market position of the destination and national tourist offer in the global tourism market.

The security construct was first scientifically elaborated by Abraham Maslow in 1954, emphasizing the importance of security needs after meeting the basic physiological needs of the individual (Bagarić et al. 2019). Caring for safety today is one of the three priorities when a tourist decides where to travel (along with Internet access and environmental standards, UNWTO 2017-2020). Back in 1997, Sirakaya noticed changes in the behaviour of tourists concerning the impression of safety, given that in previous decades, tourists were less worried about the safety of the destination. To take certain risks while travelling was usual at the time. The expansion of international tourist travel has prompted the implementation of higher safety standards. Although the growth of tourism at the global level has contributed to calming global political tensions, war affairs, terrorist attacks, crime, and interethnic and civil conflicts are still present and have long-term negative repercussions on tourist travel (Bagarić et al. 2019). This fact is a relevant impetus for new research on tourism security.

The perception of potential risks during the trip and tourist stay creates an impression of insecurity in visitors. The tourist perceives insecurity as a possible threat, which results in changing their decision where to travel and stay. Today, the media striving for sensationalism also significantly contributes to the perception of security threats (Adeloye and Brown 2018). Regarding the security threat notion, there should be a distinction between subjective and actual (absolute) risk. The real risk is the anticipated probability of an adverse event having possible negative consequences for an individual - tourist. Subjective (perceived) risk represents an intuitive perception of the potential adverse event (Larsen et al. 2009). Findings from recent research have shown that the subjective risk of tourists today is often higher than the real one (Girish 2020; Gossling et al. 2020). In order to act proactively in tourism promotion to reduce the subjective risk of tourists, it is necessary to recognize the prevailing fears and then take action to reduce the identified potential risks to an acceptable level and inform the tourist public about everything.

Reisinger and Mavondo (2006) define risk during a tourist stay as a specific concern perceived or experienced while consuming tourist services. In their research (2006), they highlighted the fundamental risks that influence the choice of tourist destination in the third millennium: terrorism, war and political instability, health risks, crime, and cultural differences between tourists and locals.

Terrorism is today the primary threat to undermining the attractiveness and competitiveness of a tourist destination (Hall 2010). Therefore, such potential threats are studied somewhat more often than others. Findings from recent research indicate that the fear of terrorism is the greatest threat to tourism and the tourism industry. In the subconscious of tourists, the fear of a terrorist attack causes greater insecurity than the fear of natural disasters or adverse events caused by human negligence (Reisinger and Mavondo 2006). During the twentieth century, people perceived terrorism as targeted attacks on politicians. However, today it is perceived as deliberate attacks on randomly selected masses of people for the sake of a large number of random victims (Korstanje and Clayton 2012). According to the Global Peace Index Report, terrorist attack probability indices for more than 160 countries are calculated today using 23 qualitative and quantitative indicators. Following the findings of this research, the deterioration, i.e. increase in the risk of terrorist attacks by 2.38%, compared to the previous decade, is evident. When compared to the previous decade, the indices have deteriorated for 85 countries and improved for 75 countries. In the case of the Republic of Croatia, this index has improved.

In principle, the destination security impression contributes to its global recognisability, attractiveness and impression of exclusivity (Jakšić Stojanović et al. 2019A; Jakšić Stojanović et al. 2019B; Jakšić Stojanović et al. 2019C; Jakšić Stojanović and Šerić 2018; Šerić and Batalić 2018). Destination security also contributes to the extension of the tourist season (Prorok et al. 2019), so this is a feature and assumption of the vision of long-term competitiveness (Bagarić 2018; Ling Yang and Nair 2014; Larsen et al. 2009).

These findings indicate that the destination safety features should be emphasized in the promotion because the perception of risk during travel and stay is a subjective feature of an individual's mental system, so it is possible and necessary to influence it. Such activities should be planned and based on safety standards. The same presupposes continuous research on the tourists'

impressions about the safety of the destination. It is also vital to maintain the acquired image of security.

Nowadays, many fears are the consequences of events that followed due to the migrant crisis. In some European Union destinations that were considered entirely safe, despite the experience and equipment of the security services, the security of the local population is currently threatened. The number of physical attacks, kidnappings, rapes, and destruction of property has increased, and the number of sporadic terrorist attacks is growing (Weber 2021). These experiences emphasise the need to intensify research to define the proactive action of destination security system stakeholders during periods of threat growth.

Tourists base their subjective risk on the impression of maximum possible negative consequences of an adverse event. The perception of subjective risks has markedly negative implications for destination attractiveness regardless of available resources and attractions (Kozak and Crotts 2007). Therefore, sharing such impressions through social networks results in a further reduction in destination visits.

In their research, Ribeiro et al. (2018) found that the perception of destination security has significant repercussions on visitor loyalty. Impressions of insecurity encourage previously regular visitors to choose another destination. The findings proved a direct link between perception, satisfaction and intention to revisit the destination. Results from several studies (Sohn et al. 2016; Artuger 2015; Chew and Jahari 2014) have demonstrated the negative effect of the perception of different risks in a destination on the intention to revisit. Due to all the above facts, it is necessary to analyse the fears and perils that burden tourists today, even if they are subjective in the destination. After all, the findings of Bowen et al. (2014) on the perception of risk and safety of tourists on cruise ships indicated that the majority of respondents (81%) consider desirable all activities to further increase guest safety despite the impression of high safety standards.

3. METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted using a questionnaire on the business case of the city of Split. Tourists' perception of the security of this destination, new security risks in the world and selected competitive tourist countries were analysed. Such research is rare because talking about this issue is usually avoided for fear of negative connotations due to visitors misconceptions based on sporadic adverse events and individual experiences of tourists (Bagarić et al. 2019).

Such consideration is understandable because news and posts on social networks about adverse events have negative repercussions on the affirmative impressions of the global tourist population about a destination and receptive tourist country (Šerić et al. 2012A; Šerić et al. 2011B; Mihić and Šerić 2007). For this reason, such research is desirable because findings that assert the appropriate safety standards of the destination and the positive impressions of visitors about it contribute to the protection against potential negative publicity in terms of safety. The findings of such research penetrate the subconscious of tourists and provide valuable insights into hidden, subconscious fears that can be used for proactive action in activities maintaining security and tourism promotion (Larsen et al. 2009). The findings of such research identify factors that significantly influence the perception of safety, and it is possible to determine the impact of this perception on preferences for different destination content (La et al. 2021). Due to these facts, the findings of such research are helpful for optimizing the management of integrated destination products (Šerić et al. 2020A).

The security impression perceived by tourists is also the focus of a fundamental research question: *Has the impression of the safety of a tourist stay in Split and its surroundings significantly contributed to the unexpectedly good tourist season in 2021?* Based on the fundamental research question, the research problem was analyzed through personal respondents' impressions of security threats during their stay in Split and Croatia towards COVID 19, the consequences of the migrant crisis, political instability, natural disasters, and terrorist attacks compared to competing and selected countries of the region.

The research was conducted on a suitable sample of visitors who stayed in Split and the surrounding area during the peak tourist season in 2021. The research framework is defined in accordance with the regulations of the next generation of EU programs and the European Union Development Strategy, which suggests the integration of national tourism development plans with the set strategic commitments of the member in terms of security and safety standards of the Union.

Following these determinants, the study analysed aspects of visitor destination security perceptions with respect to their perception of the risk of COVID 19, the consequences of the migrant crisis, political instability, natural disasters and terrorist attacks.

Respondents were included in the sample based on the answers to the pre-test questions, which confirmed that the safety impression is an important criterion when choosing where to travel.

The research was used to uncover their fears of the same risks in the Republic of Croatia in comparison with selected countries in the region (competitive tourist countries - Spain, France, Italy, Greece and Turkey; country of high national security standards - Germany; and Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina with which the Republic of Croatia has the longest border). For the compilation of the questionnaire, the experiences of previous research related to the motivational factors of tourists in choosing content and attractions, and their shopping behaviours and consumption during travel (Šerić et al. 2021A; Šerić et al. 2021B; Šerić et al. 2020B; Bagarić et al. 2019; Prorok et al. 2019; Jakšić Stojanović and Šerić 2019; Jakšić Stojanović et al. 2019A; Jakšić Stojanović et al. 2019B; Jakšić Stojanović et al. 2019C; Jakšić Stojanović et al. 2019D; Melović et al. 2018; Šerić et al. 2017; Šerić et al. 2012A; Šerić et al. 2012B; Šerić and Luković 2011; Mihić and Šerić 2007).

4. RESEARCH RESULTS AND LIMITATIONS

Slightly more than 240 questionnaires were collected. Two hundred questionnaires included in analysis were fully completed, and it was evident that the respondents completely understood all the questions asked. Questionnaires found to have been filled in by persons temporarily staying in Split for a long time based on regulations for digital nomads or on temporary residence were excluded from the analysis. From their answers, it was evident that they show particular preferences towards life in Split, considering the destination safer than it actually is (from their point of view, there is no crime, 100% safe destination, etc.). Socio-demographic characteristics of 200 respondents whose questionnaires were ultimately selected for analysis are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

FEATURES	CHARACTERISTICS	FREQUENCY	%
Sex	Male	82	41,0
	Female	118	59,0
Age	18-24	8	4,0
	25-29	10	5,0
	30-34	16	8,0
	35-42	21	10,5
	43-49	19	9,5
	50-58	14	7,0
	59-63	7	3,5
	64-69	3	1,5
	70 and more	2	1,0
Level of education	Secondary education or lower	22	11,0
	High school or bachelor	62	31,0
	Faculty or master	88	44,0
	Master of Science or PhD	28	14,0
Status	pupil, student	10	5,0
	employed, entrepreneur	182	91,0
	other	8	4,0
Marital status	single/separated	62	31,0
	married/relationship	136	68,0
	other	2	1,0
Monthly income in EUR	up to 1500	4	2,0
	from 1501 to 2500	9	4,5
	from 2501 to 3500	35	17,5
	from 3501 to 5000	98	49,0
	from 5001 to 9999	47	23,5
	10.000 and more	7	3,5

Source: Author's research, 2021

The higher share of women in the sample (59%) is justified by the fact that they have a growing influence on deciding where their family, couple or group of friends will travel and by their traditionally higher responsibility towards those with whom they travel (Girish, 2020; Gossling et al., 2020). The share advantage (70%) is given to the 30-58 age group because recent scientific findings indicate that this population shows high non-accommodation consumption (Prorok et al., 2019). This assumption was confirmed by the data on the monthly income of the respondents included in the sample (76% earn more than 3,501 euros; 27% earn more than 5001 euros). Given that 58% of respondents stated that they have college, master's degree or doctorate, the same is also an argument for the relevance of the sample in relation to the ratio of age and average monthly income. Regarding the most important criteria for choosing a tourist destination, the responses are in Table 2.

Table 2: The most important criterion for choosing a tourist destination

Destination selection criteria	Influence on selection in per cents (%)
1. Perception of paid/received	14,30 %
2. Perception of the impression of destination security	13,50%
3. Perception of climatic conditions of the destination	12,90%
4. Perception of traffic accessibility of the destination	12,50%
5. Perception of eco-friendly impressions and preservation of the destination	11,50%
6. Perception of the attractiveness of local tourist attractions	11,00%
7. Perception of destination (non-accommodation) content	11,00%
8. Other	6,90%
	100%

Source: Author's research 2021

This research results indicate the exceptional importance of the safety impression when choosing where to travel. This impression is obviously more important to the respondents who decided to go to Split than the impressions of the existing tourist facilities, traffic accessibility, and even climatic conditions. It is also interesting to note that the perception of Split as an eco-friendly destination with a preserved landscape has a more powerful impact on the commitment to come than the perception of existing tourist facilities.

The findings based on the matrix in which the respondents assessed each of the five potential risks/threats as they perceive them in relation to Split are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Perception of potential risks/threats of respondents during their stay in Split

Perception of a particular risk/threat during a stay in Split	Intensity percentage (%)
COVID 19	26%
Consequences of the migrant crisis	31%
Political instability	12%
Natural disasters	19%
Terrorist attacks	12%
	100%

Source: Author's research 2021

The answers show that respondents consider security threats to be a higher risk due to the consequences of the migrant crisis than the risk of COVID 19. Fears related to the terrorist attack in Split are minor, as well as fears of internal political instability. From the answers to open questions related to the argumentation of personal worries, it is evident that dread of the consequences of the migrant crisis is generated by everyday life in their emitting countries and media information about the areas where migrants are concentrated. In addition to this risk, several respondents mentioned the

proximity of the border with Bosnia and Herzegovina. Regarding fears of natural disaster risk in the open question, they referred to global warming and the risk of forest fires. A significant part of the respondents (more than 30%) mentioned the great fire that occurred several years ago in the explanation in the open question about the fears of natural disasters that threaten Split.

A comparative analysis of the perception of the impression of assessed risks in Split and the Republic of Croatia compared to Spain, France, Italy, Greece, Turkey, Germany and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina indicated the following:

- Respondents consider Turkey to be the most risky in the group of analysed countries in all aspects;
- Fears of COVID 19 are strongly related to the impressions of the measures of the analysed receptive countries related to the pandemic. Turkey and Greece are considered the riskiest, followed by the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, then France, and at the end of the list are Germany, Italy, Spain and the Republic of Croatia, with similarly assessed lower risk;
- They perceive Greece similarly to Turkey in terms of the consequences of the migrant crisis, followed by Germany and France, which are close to Italy. They are followed by the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Spain and finally, the Republic of Croatia;
- Turkey stands out significantly from other countries concerning security threats due to national political instability. It is followed by the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, then Greece and France. The respondents do not consider this security threat worthy of attention in other countries;
- Respondents consider the risks of natural disasters to be more pronounced. Turkey and Greece are considered the riskiest in this regard, followed by other countries with a similar risk assessment;
- Concerning the risk of a terrorist attack, Turkey is followed by France and Germany, then by Italy, Greece and Spain. Bosnia and Herzegovina is at the back, and the respondents consider the Republic of Croatia to be the safest.

The findings indicate that tourists subconsciously link different security threats. A negative impression of a single potential threat to a destination may result in the perception of more significant fears than other potential threats. The Republic of Croatia is currently perceived as safer than the countries included in this analysis. Responding to open-ended questions, respondents point to the impact of media coverage on the perception of destination security threats. Given this realization, unverified news and the pursuit of media sensationalism have negative repercussions on the attractiveness of a tourist destination.

Comparing the impressions of security threats to visitors to the Republic of Croatia and Split with the same threats in the competing Mediterranean countries, the current perception indicates that significantly lower fears of adverse events are one of the reasons for the unexpectedly successful tourist season. In open-ended questions, respondents said they believed the Republic of Croatia was not the focus of terrorist groups planning attacks. They also commented on the good impressions of the security services that are above expectations for a small post-transition country (they cite strict protection of the border from the penetration of emigrants and resolving conflicts with fan groups). They also state the impressions of joint action and the public appearance of members of different security services. Concerning natural disasters, forest fires are considered a threat. In explaining why they chose Split and the Republic of Croatia, they state a favourable geographical position with no significant consequences due to climate change.

Responding to open questions, several older respondents stated that the weather in Split and Dalmatia in recent years is more enjoyable in spring and autumn than it was twenty or more years ago (the sea is pleasant for swimming during most of the year, climate change in the coast has extended the tourist season, etc.).

Respondents were unfamiliar with local and national political relations. Some respondents stated that there are such issues in neighbouring Bosnia and Herzegovina, but they pointed out that they felt safe in Split. The political situation in the Republic of Croatia is considered more favourable than in competing tourist countries in the Mediterranean (Spain, Turkey, Greece and Italy).

Their fears of the consequences of the migrant crisis (increase in crime, conflicts due to cultural and other differences between migrants and the domicile population) are most pronounced. In open-ended questions, they discussed the migrant problems in their emitting countries. They

commented that they had not noticed the migrants in Split and that they had obviously assimilated well. They believe that the Croatian security services prevent problems with migrants and implement strict measures at the border, thus protecting the European Union from the uncontrolled entry of migrants. Individuals remarked that the police in their countries should be more stringent towards migrants (highlighting the problems of increasing narcotics and weapons sales, armed confrontations in public, raising the number of rapes, growing underage prostitution, etc.). Most respondents consider that there will be an increase in issues in the European Union due to the migrant crisis. Opinions are that small post-transition countries are more successful in dealing with the consequences of migration because they are less exposed to immigration pressure.

Apparently, the impressions of other security threats have repercussions on the notions about the risk of contracting COVID 19 during their stay in the Republic of Croatia and Split. Respondents are aware of this risk but remark positively on the measures noting that they are moderate. They feel that the disease risk in Croatia is lower due to the sparse population. They believe that the Republic of Croatia is coping well with the consequences of the pandemic, that it has an adequate health care system and that local authorities are doing a satisfactory job (positive experiences with testing - helpful and amiable staff).

Regarding the dilemmas of where to travel, the respondents mostly point out that a safe trip and stay are more important to them than the accommodation price. They have been aware of price lowering in Turkey and Greece but state that there is also false propaganda (i.e. prices are not reduced in well-known Greek and Turkish tourist destinations). They believe these two countries have the highest risks from the consequences of the migrant crisis. Turkey was rated as the riskiest by all respondents in the sample according to all studied security threats. More than 78% of respondents emphasize the personal perception of destination safety as crucial for its selection. 68% of respondents consider the territory of the European Union safe for tourist travel, while more than 90% of respondents consider the Republic of Croatia entirely safe for tourist travel. Almost 60% of respondents classified Split as currently the safest tourist destination in the European Union.

The average rating of respondents about their impression of the safety of Split is 4.20 (out of a maximum of 5.00). The majority of respondents (62%) declared that they would give up travelling to Split if there were comments in the media and social networks about the increased threat from the consequences of the migrant crisis. An even higher percentage of respondents (88%) would give up travelling to Split if the media and social networks reported the increased threat of a terrorist attack. In the case of a growing number of COVID 19 patients in Split, 16% of them (mostly choosing private, more isolated accommodation) would give up travelling. 72% of those who booked hotel accommodation in such a situation would cancel their trip. The majority, i.e. 88% respondents, would give up travelling to Split if migrants caused street violence. 22% would give up travelling to Split if the media and social networks reported an increase in common forms of crime. Based on these findings, the conclusion is that the media and social networks significantly impact decision-making, i.e. giving up the planned tourist trip. In addition to personal beliefs, friends and family have an influence on the decision to cancel a trip to a destination. Following their negative experiences, 86% of respondents would give up travelling to the same destination.

The majority, 86% of respondents, stated that personal perception of destination safety significantly influences the choice of where to travel. Respondents rated the safety in the European Union with an average of 3.80, in the Republic of Croatia with 4.25, and the city of Split with 4.45. Based on the given grades, the Republic of Croatia and the city of Split are above average safe compared to the European Union average. According to the respondents, previous personal experiences, social networks and experiences of family and friends (76%) have the most significant impact on their impression of the safety of the destination they plan to travel to, followed by information from the media about events in the same area (22%) and other sources (2%).

The research findings proved that the safety feature of the destination has significant positive repercussions on the competitiveness and attractiveness of the tourist destination and the same applies in the specific case of Split and the Republic of Croatia affected the unexpectedly good tourist season.

Considering the limitations of the research related to the sample size, short research period and lower share of the elderly population in the sample, a more heterogeneous sample is recommended for future research with additional attention in the analysis regarding the cultural differences of the respondents. The methodology could include different qualitative methods given the specificity of generating fears of security threats. The study of the collected data should take into consideration the indoctrination of respondents through media sensationalism and the impact of social networks on the

impressions of potential security threats. Since such research is primarily an analysis of the feelings and perceptions of an individual, it should be borne in mind that attitudes will depend on the specifics of the current international security situation. Therefore, it is advisable not to conduct such research after adverse events impairing an individual's perception of global security. Remember that there are oscillations in the perception of the destination safety between the local population and visitors, but also among visitors themselves, depending on their lifestyles, personalities, cultural and other characteristics. It should be considered when determining the security system of the destination.

5. CONCLUSION

These research findings are based on a perception that depends on numerous conscious and unconscious processes in human mind. Thus, abstract perception has a strong influence on perceptions of security threats. In the context of the impression of the safety of a tourist destination, personal perception can contribute to preferences and negative impressions, consciously and subconsciously. Consciously in situations of potential security threats, and unconsciously when potential security threats are difficult to quantify and if such impressions are consequence of past personal unpleasant experiences in some other destinations. Comments on social networks and publications in the media additionally contribute to the overall impression of security or security threats.

In the Republic of Croatia and the city of Split, an unexpectedly good tourist season was recorded in 2021. The perception of security, i.e. the impression of security threats, largely influences the choice of the tourist destination nowadays. The timeliness of logistics activities in tourism, including those in the function of destination safety, is one of the most crucial preconditions for a good tourist season. Today, in the times of global growth of terrorism, activities in the function of maintaining the security of a tourist destination represent a particularly essential segment of that logistics. Tourist destinations that have adapted to the changes in the behaviour of tourists following the global pandemic will remember 2021 for a good visit and a good income despite significantly reduced tourist migrations. In the Republic of Croatia, pandemic safety standards are defined at the national level. The concept defined to lower the pandemic risk has evidently been used for a broader elaboration of the foundations of security standards and other potential threats. The national guidelines have been taken seriously and correctly implemented locally in the city of Split. The research results confirm that the security image of Split had significant repercussions on the unexpectedly good tourist visit despite the pandemic.

Relevant and timely information on possible and potential security threats is a prerequisite for destination safety. In addition to information, the visitors' impressions, the knowledge of their prevailing fears and the potential security threats they are considering are also essential for effectively managing the safety and image of a safe tourist destination. The research findings confirmed the slogan *Safe stay in Croatia* at the level of the receptive country and the city of Split. The impression of the insecurity of the destination, i.e. the perception of a specific security threat, is a fundamental barrier to the maintenance and growth of tourist visits. The same is amortized by raising the destination safety standards, thus contributing to its competitiveness and attractiveness. The marketing premise of repositioning the destination in the global tourism market is also helpful.

Terrorist activities are growing globally, and the consequences of migrant crises that are constants are becoming increasingly difficult to predict. The quality of life is degrading, and the once desirable living areas are being devastated. The consequences of climate change are becoming increasingly evident. Lower travel and accommodation costs allow many classes of the global population to travel. Low prices of transport and private accommodation in the post-Covid time, thanks to online platforms, will encourage new segments of tourists to travel. The number of new receptive destinations is growing more slowly than the growth of the global population participating in tourist migrations. The problem of seasonality in tourism generates mass during the peak tourist season. All this has and will have even more drastic consequences on the impressions of security threats to tourists. Solving the problem of seasonality contributes to reducing security threats in the destination, both subconscious and factual. Destinations burdened with seasonal tourist pressures can also regulate this with higher fiscal levies during the peak season for all tourism stakeholders that generate mass tourism. A differentiated fiscal tariff policy for carriers will isolate those who are not focused solely on their own profit but a specific destination as an essential component of their business image. Particular tax policies can discourage tourism stakeholders who directly or indirectly damage

the tourist image of a destination and, at the same time, generate security threats due to the encouragement of mass tourist visits during the peak tourist season. Spatial plans that would discourage uncontrolled tourist construction can also positively affect the safety and perception of destination safety.

The growing competition in the global tourism market imposes the need to continuously raise the security standards of every tourist destination, especially those in receptive countries that have not experienced a terrorist attack to date. Marketing communication is also crucial, as it keeps the target tourist population aware of the safety of the receptive country, i.e. destination. Tourists are happy to share their impressions of safety through social networks, so the image of a safe destination is maintained regardless of direct promotional activities. A favourable impression of the destination safety is a precondition for more relaxed thinking about other attractive features of the destination, i.e. increased non-accommodation consumption. Safety as a destination feature is not just an appealing quality but a vital component of the overall tourist experience. The image of a safe destination today significantly contributes to the visitors' loyalty.

Despite the respondents' current impressions of a safe destination, their views should not be taken as final. It is necessary to continuously revise the existing security system of the destination and improve it. Tourists often associate the impression of destination security with broader regional security. In this sense, events in neighbouring countries, as well as the marketing potential of the image of a country with a secure, controlled border, must not be neglected. Terrorism is the result of national and religious frustrations. These frustrations are rising globally, and security threats will grow consequently. Therefore, the stakeholders of the security system of each tourist destination should intensify proactive action. The importance of researching all aspects of destination security will increase. Understanding the tourists' notions of insecurity, fears, and threats also implies continuous research. Finally, simulations and predictions of the negative impacts of adverse events on tourism and the tourism economy should also become a regular practice in tourism development management.

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