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A REVIEW OF THE HOSTEL SECTOR IN THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

Definition and historical development of hostels

The hostel can be defined as a facility that provides clean, neat, affordable accommodation for young people who travel in their own country or abroad, individually or in groups, for educational purposes or vacation (Bhatia, 2002). These are places where young people from a different social status and nationality meet, places for recreation and friendship. In the hostel, guests often pay for a single bed rather than a room, share a common bathroom, living room and kitchen. It is intended for particular segments of the tourism market, such as young people (Medlik, 2003). Hostels can offer additional services such as food, information, etc. They are mainly located in city centers or near train stations and public transport facilities (Heyns et.al, 2000).

The hostel industry, as we know it today, began to develop in 1907, when Richard Schirrmann, a teacher from the small town of Altena in Germany, decided to adapt one of the empty classrooms for an accommodation and overnight stay for students. This idea was not entirely unique, as inns and taverns in Austria already offered accommodation at reduced prices for students since 1885. But Schirrmann had even bigger plans; he managed to develop a movement (Karr, 2014). His idea was to attract students from industrial towns to rural areas. Schirrmann was deeply convinced that walking and cycling in the fresh air is of great importance for the development of youth and their learning. But these trips would not be possible without a place in which one can reside. His logic was simple because rural schools were empty on weekends and holidays, he decided to use them as accommodation facilities. For this purpose he chose a school where ground rules for accommodation were set. Students were responsible for displacing the benches and chairs in classrooms and setting up straw mats on the floor, and again early in the morning would return them to the previous position. Male and female students were located in separate rooms but were treated equally. The experiment was successful and Altena became a haven for students' excursions in rural areas, but the accommodation in other places became a problem. Therefore, Schirrmann in 1909 decided it was time to expand his movement outside of Altena. His goal was to create and establish a network of hostels that are not too distant from each other.

After the First World War his movement really began to expand. By 1928 there were already more than 2,000 hostels worldwide. International Hostel Federation (now Hostelling International) was founded in Amsterdam in 1932, by representatives of several countries like Switzerland, Czechoslovakia, Germany, Poland, Netherlands, Norway, Denmark, England, Ireland, France and Belgium. In the period after the Second World War the number of hostels have increased constantly, and today there are over 90 Hostel associations with more than 4,500 hostels in over 80 countries worldwide (Staerman, 2010).

Trends in the hostel sector

There are several trends in the modern hostel work and we will focus on the information systems for reservation, hostel chains and their management, increase in the level of service quality and development of hostel product. Currently there are few effective information systems that specialize in the hostel offer worldwide. These systems provide reviewing, booking and renting overnight stays and additional services in hostels. Of course, these systems work for a particular commission, and most known are to be hostels.com, hostelworld.com, hostelbookers.com and hostelz.com. The success of the operation and the free movement of capital and investment lead to the opening of hostel chains, the biggest of which are presented in Table 1. The ranking is done according to the number of beds in hostels as accommodation in hostels mostly is in rooms with 4, 6, 8 or more beds. The increase in the minimum servicing standards (welcoming, comfort, cleanliness, security and privacy) aimed at young tourists led to trend in hostel opening towards new markets such as family and business travelers. Hostel product offered on the market contains the following elements:

- Collective and animation rooms in a hostel offer a relaxed atmosphere that allows guests (individual or group) to meet and socialize. Organized events, bars and use of social networks and technologies create new types of social interaction;
- Private rooms with toilet and bathroom, separate rooms for women and high quality facilities, rooms, interior and equipment;

- Attractive prices and
- Location in city centers, close to public transport and city attractions.

Table 1. Hostel chains in Europe

No.	Hostel chain	Number of hostels	Total Number of beds
1.	A&O	22	14000
2.	Meininger	17	7000
3.	Generator	11	5000
4.	St Christopher's Inns	17	2000
5.	Wombats	6	1900
6.	Equity Point	9	1800
7.	Plus Hostels	3	1100
8.	Hip Hop Hostels, Paris	12	1000
9.	Euro Hostels, UK	3	900

Source: HVS (2013). The sharing market commercial hostels in Europe.

Profile of tourists staying in hostels

Latest research (HVS, 2013) provide the following information about the profile of tourists staying in hostels: 5% of the guests are business tourists, 12% are couples, 18% are family guests, 20% are individual guests and 45% are groups of young tourists. These groups of young tourists are called backpackers.

Although the meaning of the term backpacker is widespread and well known, there is still no single definition that is accepted by the academic staff and the hospitality industry (Hampton, 2013). Approaches in research related to backpacking tourism can be divided into two basic types: Anthropological and market-oriented (Hannam & Ataljevic, 2008).

Backpacking or backpacker tourists is a form of low budget, individual international travel. It involves use of a backpack or other type of baggage that is easy to carry on long distances and for long periods, use of public transportation, accommodation facilities that are relatively cheap (as hostels are), longer average length of stay compared to other types of tourism (up to 60 days), visit to several countries during travel, interest in learning about the local people and its culture, visit to attractive places in the destination point and a number of activities. These tourists inform themselves intensively (mostly from the Internet and handbooks) before planning and undertaking travel. It is most often associated with young people who have fewer responsibilities and more free time to travel. Also, they have fewer resources to spend on accommodation of higher category and vehicles. Very important to backpacking tourists is the sense of authenticity. This kind of tourism tends more towards educational motives for travel rather than leisure or recreation. Backpackers want to feel the real atmosphere that exists in the destination and therefore they don't participate in the package arrangements intended for mass tourism. This segment of tourists is very important for international tourism and in recent decades it is constantly growing. Studies on backpacking tourists show that although relatively young, these tourists have made an average of six inter-continental travels. Most of the tourists visit Europe, over 50%, followed by North America and other continents (Richards & Wilson, 2004). A survey on backpackers in Europe showed that the majority of the survey participants (52%), travel more than four times a year (Majstorović et. al, 2013). On the other hand, hostels aimed for backpackers represent a rapidly growing segment of the tourism industry with an evident growth in the recent decades (Berger & Paris, 2013).

Table 2. The proportion of backpackers from the total number of tourists for the selected destinations

No.	Destination	Proportion of backpackers from the total number of tourists
1.	Australia	49.5
2.	Canada	26.7
3.	France	35.4
4.	India	66.7
5.	New Zealand	65.0
6.	Thailnad	75.4
7.	Turkey	40.7
8.	Great Britain	30.8

9.	USA	22.8
10.	Vietnam	87.5

Source: Richards, G., Wilson, J. (2004). *The Global Nomad: Backpacker Travel in Theory and Practice*. Channel View Publications.

Considering the table, we can draw the conclusion that backpackers represent a great percentage of the total number of tourists. This percentage is highest in Vietnam 87.5 % , Thailand 75.4 % and India 66.7 % .

One of the key moments in the development of backpacker tourism in recent years has been the introduction of the term "flashpacker". The so-called flashpacker is a new kind of modern travel and reflects demographic changes in western societies such as marrying later, having children later, the development of new technologies, increased revenue and free time for leisure and more. Flashpacker can be defined as twenty or thirty-something-year old backpacker traveling with expensive backpack, accommodating in different types of facilities depending on their location, having higher income available, carrying a laptop and a mobile phone and identifying with the mainstream backpacker culture (Hannam & Diekmann, 2010).

The Hostel sector in the Republic of Macedonia

Accommodation in hostels in the Republic of Macedonia increasingly becomes a first option in the choice of tourists, especially those who can not afford expensive hotel accommodation and have an adventurous spirit. With an increasing number of tourists who visit our country, many saw their chance to make money by establishing hostels. With a simple adjustment of a house or apartments connected into suites with several beds, a larger collective toilet and an open kitchen, the facility may be considered ready for guests. However, accurate data on how many hostels there are in the country can not be obtained neither from the State Market Inspectorate nor the Department of Tourism at the Ministry of Economy, nor the City of Skopje. The reason for this is the legislation itself, i.e. The Law on Catering Services that does not provide a category Hostel.

Therefore, hostels in the country are registered and categorized as private accommodation capacities or "room for rent" with a capacity of up to 20 beds. The official statistical data for 2012, shows the following: total number of tourists who visited the Republic of Macedonia is 663,633, of which 104,537 resided in houses, holiday apartments and rooms for rent, which also include hostels. From the total number of 2,151,692 overnights in 2012, 681,251 were in houses, holiday apartments and room for rent, which also include hostels (Tourism in the Republic of Macedonia 2008-2012, 2013).

Table 3. Review of hostels in the Republic of Macedonia

No.	Name of the hostel	City	Rating by visitors in %
1.	Urban Hostel & Apartments	Skopje	92
2.	Hi Skopje Hostel	Skopje	83
3.	UNITY Hostel Skopje	Skopje	95
4.	Shanti-Hostel	Skopje	96
5.	Royal Hostel Skopje	Skopje	93
6.	City Hostel	Skopje	89
7.	Shanti Hostel 2	Skopje	88
8.	Art-Hostel Riverside	Skopje	81
9.	Hostel Kalonis	Skopje	96
10.	Rekord Hostel	Skopje	95
11.	BSV Hostel	Skopje	81
12.	Hostel Atlantik	Skopje	96
13.	Hostel Backpackers	Skopje	88
14.	Hostel Hostel	Skopje	81
15.	Hostel LD	Skopje	Not ranked
16.	Hostel Villa de Maria	Skopje	70
17.	Hostel Sirma's House	Skopje	Not ranked
18.	Domestika Hostel	Bitola	88
19.	Goldy Hostel	Bitola	Not ranked
20.	Shanti Hostel	Bitola	Not ranked
21.	Di Angolo Hostel	Ohrid	100
22.	Sunny Lake Hostel	Ohrid	98
23.	Valentin Hostel	Ohrid	92

Source: www.hostelworld.com; www.hostelbookers.com; www.hostels.com (accessed 22.04.2014)

Table 3 provides an overview of hostels in the Republic of Macedonia, and according to the data we can conclude that the country has 23 hostels, most of which are located in Skopje 17, three are located in Bitola and three are located in Ohrid. There are hostels missing in other major cities, such as Kumanovo, Prilep, Tetovo, Strumica, Stip and other cities, but we anticipate that such facilities may be opened in these cities in the near future. It is understood that the positioning of most hostels is in the capital Skopje, which is statistically visited by most of the foreign tourists and is located on the backpackers' route (main hostel market). Ratings of visitors (guests who stayed at the hostel) presented in the table in percentage, is determined by several criteria: safety, cost of service, location, staff, atmosphere, cleanliness and facilities in the building. From Table 2 we can observe that the hostels rating ranges from 70 to 100 % and the average rating of hostels is 89.5%.

Recommendations for development of the hostel sector in the Republic of Macedonia

In order to improve the hostel sector in the Republic of Macedonia, it is desirable that the following recommendations are taken into account:

- Introduction of hostel operations in formal education through curricula and teaching practice in secondary hospitality-tourism schools and Faculties of Tourism and Hospitality;
- Change of legislation and categorization of hostels;
- Implementation of international standards for quality in hostel operations;
- Consolidation of the hostels in the Republic of Macedonia into a national association;
- Establishment of service provider for the needs of tourists staying in hostels (networking of taxi companies, transporters, hospitality facilities, tour guides, agencies, museums, galleries, public sector, tourist information centers, artisans etc.);
- Organization and participation in international conferences and representation of best practices from hotel business;
- Development of hostel product;
- Support to environmental campaigns provided by hostels and
- Conduct of research related to hostels as a hostel profile in the Republic of Macedonia and a profile of tourists staying in hostels etc.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to make a review of the hostel sector in the Republic of Macedonia. For the purposes of the paper, an exploratory (qualitative) research was carried out which resulted in an insight into the state of hostel sector at national and international level. Exploratory research is typical of a situation in which researchers have little knowledge of the problem they explore (Budinoski, 2010). Part of the survey was to use secondary data sources by consulting relevant professional literature on the hostel sector and the Internet. Also, several informal and unstructured interviews with owners of hostels in the City of Skopje were conducted, in order to obtain "first-hand" information associated with various aspects of the operation and development of hostels. The paper is divided into several parts that cover the matter related to the definition and historical development of the hostels, trends in hostels operations, and the profile of tourists staying in hostels, hostels sector and recommendations for its development in the Republic of Macedonia. Hostels are defined as facilities that provide clean, neat and mostly cheap accommodation for young people travelling in their own country or abroad for leisure or educational purposes. They are places where young people from different social status and nationalities meet, places for friendship and recreation and social interaction. In the hostel, guests often pay less for a bed and rather than a room, share a common bathroom, living room and kitchen. The hostel business began to develop in 1907, when Richard Schirrmann, a teacher from the small town of Altena in Germany, chose to adapt one of the empty classrooms for accommodation and overnight stay for students. His idea was to attract students from industrial cities to rural areas and considered that walking and cycling in the fresh air is of great importance for the development of youth and learning. By 1928 there were already more than 2,000 hostels worldwide, and International Hostel Federation (now Hostelling International) was founded in Amsterdam in 1932. There are several trends in modern Hostel operation of which the paper draws attention to the information systems for booking, hostel chains, the increase of the level of quality in serving and development of hostel product. Currently there are few effective information systems that specialize in providing hostel offers around the world, and most known among them are hostels.com, hostelworld.com, hostelbookers.com and hostelz.com. The success of the operation and the free movement of capital and investment lead to establishment of hostel chains, the largest of which are A&O, Meininger, Generator etc. The increase in the minimum service standards (welcoming, comfort, cleanliness, security and privacy) aimed at young tourists, lead to a trend of opening hostels to new markets such as family and business tourists. Hostel product, offered to the market, includes the following elements: collective and animation rooms in a hostel offer a relaxed atmosphere that allows guests (individual or group) to meet and socialize; organized events, bars and use of social networks and technologies create new types of social interaction; rooms with private toilet and bathroom, separate rooms for women and high quality facilities, rooms, equipment and interior; attractive price and location in city centers, close to public transport facilities and city attractions. Latest research (HVS, 2013) provide the profile of tourists staying in hostels: 5% of the guests are business tourists, 12% are couples, 18% are family guests, 20% are individual guests and 45% are groups of young tourists. These groups of young tourists are called backpackers - a form of low budget, individual international travel. It involves use of a backpack or other type of baggage that is easy to carry on long distances and for long periods, use of public transportation, accommodation facilities that are relatively cheap (as hostels are), longer average length of stay compared to other types of tourism (up to 60 days), visit to several countries during travel, interest in learning about the local people and its culture, visit to attractive places in the destination point and a number of activities. This paper provides an overview of hostels in the Republic of Macedonia, and according to the data one can conclude that the country has 23 hostels, most of which are located in Skopje (17), three are located in Bitola and three are located in Ohrid. Hostels have an average rating of 89.5 by visitors. In order to improve the hostel sector in the Republic of Macedonia, the following recommendations are given: introduction of hostel operations in formal education through curricula and teaching practice in secondary hospitality-tourism schools and faculties of Tourism and Hospitality; change of legislation and categorization of hostels; implementation of international standards for quality in hostel operations; consolidation of the hostels in the Republic of Macedonia into a national association; establishment of service provider for the needs of tourists staying in hostels (networking of interested parties); organization and participation in international conferences; development of hostel product; support to environmental campaigns and conduct of research related to hostels.