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## Article

# Do tourist percept Croatia as a safe tourist destination? Presentation of the empirical evidence

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*Original scientific paper*  
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## **DO TOURIST PERCEPT CROATIA AS A SAFE TOURIST DESTINATION? PRESENTATION OF THE EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE**

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**Angela Milenkovska Klimoska**  
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### **Abstract:**

As one of the most developed industries in the world, Tourism experienced, and is still experiencing safety issues on daily basis, which left a significant effect on the world economy. This in particular resulted safety becoming one of the main parts of an integral tourist product, considering that it influences significantly the tourist's decision-making process of a potential tourist when choosing a holiday destination, as well as his intention to revisit. Bearing in mind previously mentioned, the importance and role of safety as a part of competitive tourist product is being researched within this paper, respectively tourist's perception of safety of a tourist destination in a decision-making process when choosing Croatia as a holiday destination. The goal of this paper is to provide a theoretical insight into the newest findings in the field of safety in tourism, to present the empirical results of a research conducted in Croatia, and based on these results to propose further improvement activities in order to improve the level of safety for tourists, and achieve further competitive positioning of Croatia as a safe tourist destination on the world tourist market.

Keywords: Safety in tourism, Croatia, safe destination

*JEL Classification:* L83, Z30

### **INTRODUCTION**

Tourism is the most important industry in the world in terms of the numbers of employees and its effect on the social and economical development of a region or country. It is an industry that will help developing countries solve their problems of unemployment and poverty by turning the potentials of these countries-i.e. natural and cultural heritage-into a profit. It is a clean industry, which will coincide with the "green trend" of the future that aims to preserve and conserve nature for future generations. This will be the great return to nature-the "green wave" (Ivanovic, Milenkovski, and Milojska 2015, 293 according to Avelini Holjevac 2003). According to the most recent findings by the UNWTO (2019, quoted in Ivanović, 2020, 85), a total of 1.4 billion of international tourist arrivals was registered on world level (+5% in relation to the

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previous year), as well as 1.7 billion of USD in total international tourism exports (which consist of international tourism receipts and passenger transport). When observing the regional results, it has been registered that in 2018 Europe continued to hold a leading position by participating in tourist arrivals with 710 million tourist arrivals (+5% in relation to previous year), followed by Asia and Pacific 348 million tourist arrivals (+7% in relation to previous year), Americas 216 million (+2% in relation to previous year), Africa 67 million (+7% in relation to previous year), and Middle East 60 million (+5% in relation to the previous year). Similar situation is with achieved international tourism receipts; in 2018 Europe achieved USD 570 billion (+5%), followed by Asia and Pacific (USD 435 billion, +7%), Americas (USD 334 billion, +0%), Middle East (USD 73 billion, +4%) and Africa (USD 38 billion, +2%).

This positive trend of growth was interrupted in the past due to the security threats that occurred on world level (i.e. 9/11 in 2001, attacks in London and Madrid, confrontations in the Middle East, and others.), however, tourism and hospitality industry managed to resist them, and today is registering a steady growth rate as previously presented by UNWTO figures, primarily thanks to continuous efforts for securing tourists and destinations in which they choose to stay. Tourism of Croatia was in the beginning of the 90s under the influence of transition changes and war occurrences which had a significant impact on its tourism flows. Tourism stagnation accompanied by the decrease of overall tourist turnover had a significantly strong negative influence on the overall Croatian tourism and hospitality industry. A slow recovery followed after the finish of the Homeland War in 1995, however, the part of the Croatian territory that was passing a peaceful integration as well as the risk factor in the surroundings influenced its tourism flows, due to which Croatia was perceived as an extremely insecure destination for a very long period of time. Throughout the years Croatia started recuperating which resulted in registering an increase of tourist arrivals and overnights primarily thanks to hard work of the Destination Management on state and county level, and severe marketing efforts. But the question still remained present: how is Croatia perceived as a tourist destination in terms of safety? The paper contains from the following chapters: after the introduction, the authors will within the chapter titled Theoretical Background present the most relevant and most recent theoretical findings which cover the significance of safety within the contemporary tourism flows. The following chapter will present the methodology and the results of the conducted empirical research in Croatia; the main purpose of this research was to determine the level of tourist's perceptions of Croatia as a safe tourist destination. After a short elaboration of the determined results the authors will provide possible developmental directions of further improvement of current state of safety of Croatia as a tourist destination. Within the last chapter the authors will provide the concluding remarks.

## **1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

Terrorism, breakout of various pandemic diseases as well as the occurrence of similar threatening events have strengthened the sense of danger and personal risk for potential tourists who consider undertaking an international journey (Osland, Mackoy, and

McCormick 2017). According to Tarlow (2014), tourism has become a front-line battleground not only for criminals, but also for terrorist attacks which happened in both urban and rural settings, and in countries that were considered both safe or “at war”. All this has a significant impact on world tourism flows. Due to previously mentioned (Kekovic and Markovic 2009) the demand for security and protection in tourism registered a significant growth over the years due to the increasing vulnerability of its infrastructure in a form of various security challenges and threats, which was additionally confirmed by Kovari and Zimanyi (2011) who state that after the occurrence of the tragic terrorist attack of 9/11, and many other safety incidents (see more Ayob and Masron 2014), a significant number of researchers started giving greater attention towards researching safety and security not just in general, but particular emphasis was given to the field of tourism from various aspects, whether is it about the safety of tourists who choose to participate in Mountain tourism and the importance of mountain tour guides in providing a good quality and safe guiding service (see more in Rebelo et al. 2018), or determining the perception of safety of air travelling and determining the tourist’s level of concern in terms of their privacy and trust in the authorities (Beck, Rose, and Merkert 2018), determining the interrelation between formation of a destination image, aggressive behavior on the street (i.e. panhandlers, etc.), and overall tourist safety (Millar, Collins, and Jones 2017), or maybe determining the effect of terrorism risk perception on purchase involvement and safety concern of international travelers (Seabra, Abrantes, and Kasteholz 2014), etc.

Tourism is acutely dependent on safety, considering that safety represents a key element of a travelling process, as well as achieving competitiveness of a tourist destination (Music, Mekinc and Cvikl 2015; Mekinc and Cvikl 2013). Nowadays, people are much more aware of the security issues and their potential risk to their own safety. Even small imbalances will temporarily or permanently change travel flows to endangered areas. The most significant changes are travel postponements or cancellations. Even a slight threat will damage a destination’s image and tourists will develop a negative attitude towards visiting such a destination, which results in a decline in tourism (Dobovsek, Kurez, and Podbregar 2012, 141–142; Richard 2003).

Liu, Pennington-Gray, and Schroeder (2013) stress that ensuring destination’s safety represents not only a crucial factor in the tourists’ decision-making process, but also in the destination’s overall business success. Recent occurrence of crises has endangered the perceptions of safety to tourism. In such cases potential tourists might form a negative opinion about the destination’s image, which in the end will result with a negative decision when deciding about the destination for their holiday.

The list of researches in safety in tourism is endless, and the majority of them indicate that security has over the years undergone significant changes in the sense that it has become an active element of a contemporary tourist product, an imperative necessary to act in order to be able to ensure most possible protection of tourists and their belongings, as well as maximum performances of tourism and hospitality industry. Due to the previously mentioned world governments and service started developing and implementing various types and forms of safety measures. However, what needs to be considered is which of the measures brought have the strongest influence and impact on

the safety of tourists, and aim further efforts towards improving the present measures, or developing new ones that will result in higher level of tourist's safety (Rittichainuwat and Chakraborty, 2012; Cruz-Milan et al. 2016). Security and the sense of being secure represent an important component in choosing a tourist destination, but also the quality of life of domestic population and stay of tourists in a tourist destination. Therefore, in cooperation with participants in tourism, destinations must enable safe and adequate surrounding for its visitors, and encourage the coexistence with the domestic population (Alkier, Radovic Nimac, and Lipovac 2016, 353). As previously mentioned in the introductory part, in the past Croatia experienced difficulties in the period of the Homeland war which resulted in damaging its image as a safe destination, but fortunately this problem have been overcome. However, in order to be able to continue registering further tourist growth, the authors have conducted the empirical research for the purposes of this paper in order to determine in what extent do tourists percept Croatia as safe, and make additional efforts towards improving the level of their safety during their stay in Croatia.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

In order to be able to determine the perception of tourists about the safety during their stay in the coastal part of Croatia, an empirical research was conducted in 2015 and 2016 on a random sample of the respondents who chose to visit in the summer period. A structured questionnaire was distributed to the tourists in restaurant facilities in which tourists stayed (hotels, camps, tourist resorts, and households). 200 questionnaires were distributed in the accommodation facilities each year; in 2015 the response rate was 94.5% respectively 189 correctly answered questionnaires were returned, while in 2016 the response rate was lower, respectively 74% or 148 correctly filled questionnaires were returned. Questions were structured in two groups. The first group aimed towards determining the sociodemographic profile of tourists (their gender, age, the level of education, origin...), while the other questions were aimed towards determining tourist's perception about the safety in Croatia as a tourist destination. For the second group of questions a five point Likert Scale was used (1–I am completely dissatisfied until 5–I am completely satisfied).

## 3. RESULTS

Sociodemographic profile of the respondents is the following:

**Table 1.** Sociodemographic profile of the respondents

Gender	2015		2016	
	Number of respondents	Share in %	Number of respondents	Share in %
Male	104	55.0	83	56.1
Female	85	45.0	65	43.9
Age				
21–30	18	9.5	13	8.9
31–40	55	29.1	44	29.7
41–50	61	32.3	41	27.7

**Table 1.** (continued)

51–60	55	29.1	35	23.6
61 and more	0	0	15	10.1
Education				
Lower qualification	-	-	-	-
High School	104	55.0	81	54.7
Vocational School and Faculty and more	85	45.0	67	45.3
Country of origin				
Germany	52	27.5	44	29.7
Austria	47	24.9	45	30.4
Italy	39	20.6	38	25.7
Slovenia	30	15.9	14	9.5
Czech Republic	14	7.4	-	-
Slovakia	2	1.1	-	-
Others	5	2.6	7	4.7
Total	189	100.0	148	100.0

Source: Vucenovic 2017, 295.

The data in the previous table present the sociodemographic profile of tourists who participated in the research. The data about the gender indicate that in 2016 the majority of the respondents were women (56.1%), while the year before the situation was vice versa, respectively the majority of the respondents were male (55.0%). In 2016 the largest number of respondents belonged to the age group 31–40 (29.7%), while in 2015 the majority belonged to the age group 41–50 (32.3%). When comparing the indicators presenting the respondent's level of education, no significant differences were registered in both years, considering that 54.7% of the respondents had a high school degree in year 2016, a decrease of 0.3% in relation to the previous year. When monitoring the structure of visitors according to the country of origin, it is no surprise that the majority of the respondents were from the neighboring countries Germany, Austria, Italy and Slovenia, from which they have been traditionally visiting for many years now. In 2016 the majority of the respondents were from Austria (30.4%), followed by Germany (29.7%), Italy (25.7%) and Slovenia (9.5%). The situation was a bit different in the previous year when the majority of respondents were from Germany (27.5%), Austria (24.9%), Italy (20.6%), and Slovenia (15.9%).

Following the authors will present the research results with a goal of presenting the tourist's level of satisfaction with the safety of traffic infrastructure, their sense of safety during their time spent on the beach, and the overall sense of safety during their stay in a destination. Following the authors will present the problems that worry tourists during their stay in Croatia, the risk factors that influence their decision-making process when choosing Croatia as a holiday destination, and which are their first associations when mentioning Croatia.

**Table 2.** Level of satisfaction of respondents with the safety of traffic infrastructure

Grade	2015		2016	
	Number of respondents	Share in %	Number of respondents	Share in %
1	5	2.7	-	-
2	19	10.0	17	11.5
3	56	29.6	42	28.4
4	71	37.6	48	32.4
5	38	20.1	41	27.7
Total	189	100.0	148	100.0
Arithmetic Mean		3.62		3.76

Source: Vucenovic 2017, 161, 298.

The data in the previous table present the tourist's satisfaction with the safety of traffic infrastructure in Croatia. The parameters of safety of traffic infrastructure relate on the condition of the railways, safety in airports, state of the roads, traffic signalization, crossroads, parking spaces in a destination, traffic jams, public transportation, etc. The results indicate that the majority of the respondents evaluated this element with a grade 4 (satisfactory), respectively 37.6% in 2015 and a bit lower 32.4% in 2016. The Arithmetic Mean of the attitudes of the respondents about the safety of the Traffic Infrastructure was 3.62 in 2015, while in the following year it grew to 3.76 which indicates the growth of the level of satisfaction. If taken into consideration that the results are somewhat close to 4, it is possible to conclude that tourists were somewhat satisfied. Strategy of Development of Tourism of the Republic of Croatia until 2020 emphasizes that the limiting factors of achieving greater level of satisfaction are identified with the problems related with traffic organization in a destination (in particular public transport, cycling paths, walking areas and the abilities for parking (Ministry of Tourism 2013, 7). Lacks are noticeable in other forms of transport, particularly in railway transport due to the railway network's poor condition. Lacks are also visible in Maritime transport due to the poorer connection of certain islands, as a result of inadequate equipment of island harbors. Positive movements were noticed in the air transport due to the increased establishing of airlines with the emissive markets-low tariff airlines.

The following table presents the tourist's level of satisfaction with the safety during their stay on the beach. The parameters of safety on beaches relate on the presence and the number of lifeguards, fencing of beaches from the seaside, approach to the beach, sea quality for bathing, provision of first aid on the beaches, etc.

**Table 3.** Level of satisfaction of respondents with safety on beaches

Grade	2015		2016	
	Number of respondents	Share in %	Number of respondents	Share in %
1	7	3.8	-	-
2	25	13.2	9	6.1
3	63	33.3	33	22.3
4	53	28.0	61	41.2
5	41	21.7	45	30.4
Total	189	100.0	148	100.0
Arithmetic Mean		3.49		3.96

Source: Vucenovic 2017, 163, 298.

The previous table indicates that in 2015 the highest number of respondents (33.3%) evaluated the level of satisfaction during their stay on a beach as average while 28% of them were satisfied, and 21.7% completely satisfied, respectively 49.7% in total expressed higher level of satisfaction. Results in 2016 register an improvement, respectively 71.6% of respondents expressed higher level of satisfaction. The arithmetic mean of the level of satisfaction in 2016 was 3.96, respectively an increase of 0.47 in relation to 2015 when it was 3.49. It is necessary to emphasize that the majority of respondents stayed in hotels and used hotel beaches, due to which the registered results might be so high. Hotels (those of higher category in particular) have licensed lifeguards which influences the guest's sense of safety. Their number depends on the level of risk of beaches; beaches can be divided on those of negligible risk, moderate, medium and finally high risk. It is necessary to mention that lifeguards do other work in the hotels for the needs of other departments due to the lack of systematic control of lifeguards on beaches.

**Table 4.** Satisfaction of the respondents with the safety during their stay in a destination

Grade	2015		2016	
	Number of respondents	Share in %	Number of respondents	Share in %
1	7	3.7	-	-
2	11	5.8	8	5.4
3	59	31.2	47	31.8
4	94	49.8	56	37.8
5	18	9.5	37	25.0
Total	189	100.0	148	100.0
Arithmetic Mean		3.56		3.82

Source: Vucenovic 2017, 164, 298.

Previous table indicates that in 2015 the greatest number of tourists (49.8%) evaluated their attitude about the safety in the destination as satisfactory. Their share was reduced in 2016 to 37.8% (-12%). 9.5% of the respondents expressed high level of satisfaction in 2015, while in 2016 their share grew to 25%. In 2015 the Arithmetic Mean of the grades of the respondents amounted 3.56 while in 2016 it was 3.82. If taken into consideration that both arithmetic means are approaching to the grade 4, it can be concluded that the respondents were somewhat satisfied with the level of safety in the destination.

**Table 5.** Risk factors that influence the tourist's decision-making process when choosing a holiday destination

Elements	2015		2016	
	Number of respondents	Share in %	Number of respondents	Share in %
Attack risks	149	78.8	112	75.7
Climate conditions	161	85.2	140	94.6
Budget intended for consumption	51	27.0	45	30.4
Health risks	24	12.7	18	12.2
Possibilities for learning and cultural activities	41	21.7	29	19.6
Quality of tourist infrastructure	18	9.5	12	8.1
Risks from social disorders	9	4.8		4.1



**Table 5.** (continued)

Natural hazards risks	31	16.4	25	16.9
Time travel to your holiday destination	40	21.1	36	24.3
Economic situation in a destination	47	24.9	37	25.0
Total	189	-	148	-

Source: Vucenovic 2017, 299.

The data in the previous table present the risk factors that influence the tourist's decision-making process when choosing a holiday destination. The majority of the respondents stated that they are mostly worried about the climate conditions, attack risks, and the budget intended for their consumption. When comparing the results from 2015 and 2016, certain changes were registered. In 2015 climate conditions were the most influencing factor for 85,2% respondents, and their share grew in 2016 to 94.6%. Bearing in mind that for the majority of tourists primary motive of visit is still the traditional Bathing tourist offer, respectively passive rest and relaxation, climate conditions are very important for them during their journey. Unsuitable climate conditions very frequently result in cancellation of guest's reservations, particularly of those tourists from the emissive tourist markets close to Croatia, such as Italy, Slovenia, Austria, etc., while adequate climate conditions reflect on the growth of tourist arrivals. The second most important factor is the risk of experiencing attacks, which influences the respondent's decision-making process. In 2015 this factor was important for 78.8% of tourists, and in 2016 their share decreased to 75.7%. Considering the actual situation of growth of criminal acts and terrorism in the world, this risk factor is becoming more and more important when choosing a holiday destination. The risk factors that had the least influence on tourist's decision-making process were risks from social disorders and the quality of tourist infrastructure. Risk from social disorders was important for low 4.8% of tourists in 2015, and 4.1% in 2016, while the quality of tourist infrastructure effected the decision about the choice of the destination of 9.5% of the respondents in 2015 and 8.1% in 2016. Previously presented indicates that no significant changes were registered when analyzing the attitudes towards the risk factors that influence their decision-making process when choosing a holiday destination.

**Table 6.** Problems that worry the tourists the most during their stay in a destination

Elements	2015		2016	
	Number of respondents	Share in %	Number of respondents	Share in %
Health problems that influence you or the person not travelling with you	78	41.3	63	42.6
Health problems of a family member that does not travel with you	54	28.6	41	27.7
Loss of personal belongings	71	37.6	56	37.8
Traffic accidents	38	20.1	29	19.6
Problems involving your house	91	48.1	82	55.4
Risks from attack	68	36.0	40	27.0
Vehicle defects	41	21.6	32	21.6
Risks from natural hazards	4	2.1	6	4.1
Traffic strikes	-	-	-	-
Total	189	-	148	-

Source: Vucenovic 2017, 300.

When monitoring the problems that concern tourists the most during their stay in a destination, the respondents emphasized the problems concerning their house (48.1% in 2015, and 55.4% in 2016), health problems that influence them or the person not travelling with them (28.6% in 2015 and 27.7% in 2016), and loss of personal belongings (37.6% in 2015 and 37.8% in 2016). The share of the respondents with the stated problems that are concerning them registered growth in 2016 in relation to the year 2015. The respondents were worried the least about the strikes in traffic, risks from natural hazards, and traffic accidents. Results of the research conducted in 2016 show changes in relation to the previous year. I.e., in 2016, 7.3% more of tourists were concerned for the problems related to their house in relation to the previous year. Tourist's concern for health issues that affect them or the person not travelling with them also registered a 0.9% decrease in 2016 in relation to the previous year, as well as risk of natural hazards (+2.0%). Croatia is a destination with a low risk of attacks on tourists, which significantly influences their perception of importance of this risk in a decision-making process when choosing Croatia as a holiday destination. Tourist's health concern is mostly connected with health problems as a result of problem of nutrition in the accommodation and other restaurant facilities in the Republic of Croatia. Increase of complaints concerning food poisoning also had influence on their increasing concern for their state of health during their journey. The regulation of implementation of standards of food safety in the Croatian restaurant facilities should result in reduction of their level of concern for health safety. Another thing that needs to be emphasized is the provision of medical services through Tourist infirmaries which also influences on a positive perception of (health) safety. Tourists are provided with services, charged and provided with a bill. Upon their return home, they are in the possibility to ask for a refund from the insurance companies. Concern about the vehicle defects remained the same in both years. Croatia disposes with the developed network of road assistance which should reduce tourist's concerns regarding possible car failures on roads. Road rushes on roads across Europe represent a sufficient reason of concern about road accidents, and the influence of this factor when choosing a holiday destination. This factor influences 20% of the respondents. A small decrease of this factor has been registered in 2016 (19.6%) in relation to the year 2015 (20.1%), which is positively correlated with the reduction of car accidents each year, as a consequence of improvement of safety on roads, across Europe. It is clearly visible that tourists are primarily affected by health concerns, followed by risk of losing things, and direct attacks on them, while they are less affected by problems related with traffic safety and natural hazards.

**Table 7.** The first association of tourists when mentioning Croatia

Elements	2015		2016	
	Number of respondents	Share in %	Number of respondents	Share in %
Tourist country, new, country for a visit	61	32.2	51	34.5
Beautiful coast, sea, islands	57	30.2	39	26.4
Beaches	54	28.6	30	20.3
Beautiful nature, greenery, mountains/forests	49	25.9	17	11.5
Warmth, sun	47	24.9	15	10.1
Preserved space	44	23.3	19	12.8

**Table 7. (continued)**

History and culture, city cores	41	21.7	27	18.2
Recognizable cities	38	20.1	29	19.6
Beautiful country	36	19.0	26	17.6
War	30	15.9	16	10.8
Balkan, East-European country	28	14.8	24	16.2
Mediterranean	26	13.8	11	7.4
Sports (Football, Basketball, Tennis...)	26	13.8	28	18.9
Gastronomy	18	9.5	14	9.5
Cheap	16	8.5	10	6.8
Poor and in development	15	7.9	17	11.5
Hospitable people	10	5.3	9	6.1
The rest	18	12.2	12	9.5
Total	189	-	148	-

Source: Vucenovic 2017, 300 according to the Ministry of Tourism 2013 and Institute for Tourism 2015.

In 2016 when asked what is their first association when mentioning Croatia, respondents chose tourist country, new, country for a visit (34.5%), followed by beautiful coast, sea, islands (26.4%), beaches (20.3%), recognizability of cities (19.6%), sports (18.9%), cultural-historical heritage and city cores (18.2%), overall beauty of Croatia as a tourist destination (17.6%), Balkan. East-European country (16.2%), preservation of space 12.8%), preservation of natural beauties and poor and in development (11.5%), war (10.8%), warmth and sun (10.1%), gastronomy (9.5%), Mediterranean (7.4%), Cheap (6.8%) and hospitality of the domestic population (6.1%). When comparing the results with the previous year, the growth was registered for four elements registered a growth in relation to the previous year: sports (Football, Basketball, tennis...) (+5.1%), tourist country, a new country for visit (+2.3%), followed by Balkan, East-European country (+1.4%), and poor and in development (+3.6%). Comparison the of the results registered in 2016 in comparison with 2015 indicate that the highest decrease was registered for the following elements: warmth and sun (-14.8%), beautiful nature, greenery, mountains/ forests (-14.4%), space preservation (-10.5%), beaches (-8.3%), Mediterranean (-6.4%), war (-5.1%, which can be interpreted as a “positive” decrease considering that a smaller share of respondents connect Croatia with the war which reflects positively on their perception of Croatia as a safe destination), beautiful coast, sea and islands (-3.8%), history and culture and city cores (-3.5%), etc.

Previously presented results in this chapter indicate the need for improvements with a goal of further increasing of tourist’s (sense of) safety during their stay in Croatia. Tourist’s perception of safety of traffic infrastructure is registering small growth, which could be increased through further improvements of traffic infrastructure (parking in the destination, public transport, better maritime connection of islands with the mainland, etc.). Satisfaction with the sense of safety during their stay on the beach also registered a positive trend of growth. This is something that needs to be maintained and improved as much as possible, especially because bathing tourism still represents the most developed part of the Croatian integral tourist product. Recently published TOMAS 2017 results emphasize the fact that the majority of tourist turnover is still achieved in the summer period, and the bathing tourist offer still represents the primary motive and activity during tourist’s stay in a destination (see more in Institute for

Tourism 2017). Risk factors also have a significant influence on the decision-making process, and need to be managed adequately in the sense of trying to reduce their negative implications on tourism flows to the minimum, or completely remove them. As the most influencing factors the respondents pointed out climate conditions and risks from terrorist and criminal attacks. Despite this, Croatia is perceived as a safe tourist destination, which is visible from the increased Arithmetic Mean. The results presenting the tourist's first association when Croatia is mentioned implicate on the necessity of the improvement of marketing activities, considering that the results of the tourist's attitudes registered in 2016 and compared with the results from the previous year indicate a decrease in the sense that tourists connect Croatia less with some of its basic elements which presents the very essence of its tourist offer (beautiful nature and preserved green areas, beaches, Mediterranean, history and culture, etc.). Overall situation could be improved through undertaking adequate developmental and marketing activities. Following the authors will propose possible measures of improvement of safety in Croatian tourism.

#### **4. SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER IMPROVEMENT OF SAFETY IN CROATIAN TOURISM**

In order to improve the level of safety of Croatia as a tourist destination, and increase tourist's sense of safety, it is necessary to ensure the following (UNWTO 1991; Vucenovic 2017):

- Cooperation and preventive acts of all subjects within the tourist product (from tourist employees, local self-government, police forces, state agencies and management);
- Establishing advisory offices that provide advices to all interested on how to behave and take care from the criminals, in particular in the area of property crimes;
- Establishing the committee for prevention (representative of the economy, insurance houses, tourist board, local government, police, etc.) and establishing coordination due to the prevention of seasonal criminality;
- Identifying potential risks of tourists according to the categories (safety in traffic, information safety, safety on beach....);
- Adoption of safety standards and practice in all tourist activities;
- Increasing the safety measures during the tourist season in the destination (use of undercover police officers, use of foreign police employees);
- Make the possibility of participation of tourists in a crime procedure more easier (language barrier);
- Adjustment to the new safety challenges by using new information-communication technologies;
- Development of information safety with the accent on personal data protection;
- Use of safety as a strategic advantage during the promotion of Croatia as a tourist destination;

- Permanent education of tourism employees with a goal of timely recognition of safety risks;
- Formation of a Strategy of Development of Safety of Croatia as a tourist destination.

Conducting of previously proposed activities will contribute towards achieving higher level of safety of Croatia as a tourist destination, which will reflect positively on its achieving higher level of competitiveness on the tourist market.

## CONCLUSION

Tourism has been effected over the years by many safety threats, which left significant trace not just on the economy of a tourist destination, but also on its overall perception in the eyes of a potential tourist interested to visit and spend a holiday there. The empirical results presented in this paper indicate that tourists perceive Croatia as a relatively safe destination. However, average results indicate the need for improvements, in order to improve tourist's satisfaction with the safety element. Croatia needs to apply good practices from the competitive destinations in the sense of safety, and form its own Strategy of Development of Safety. All this, along with the application of the previously proposed activities will enable profiling of Croatia as a safe tourist destination worth visiting, it will make the decision making process easier for potential visitors, and it will contribute towards achieving competitiveness on the tourist market.

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