

IMPORTANCE OF MILITARY VACATION FACILITIES FOR THE QUALITY OF LIFE OF THE DEFENSE SYSTEM MEMBERS

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Personal standard of the defense system members is a socio-economic category, which influences motivation to execute the most complex tasks. In addition to the primary existential motivators such as salary and status, the secondary, not less important motivators that significantly affect the quality of life can be identified, as well. They are expressed in the form of privileged leisure and recreation, subsidized and organized procurement of official uniforms and other garments, general procurement opportunities for consumer goods at lower prices and ensuring decent bachelor accommodation in garrison service in the course of an official trip. Analyses of the operation of military hotel facilities in the last decade indicate the downward trend in the number of users from the defense system, which has a negative impact on the quality of life and it is directly correlated to the quality of task execution. The focus of discussion in this paper is aimed at identifying the key parameters in the use of military hotel capacities of the Military Institution "Tara" (MI "Tara") and the possibilities of their improvement in order to be better used by members of the defense system.

Key Words: *Tara, hotels, vacation facilities, defense system, quality of life*

Introduction

The Military Institution "Tara" was formed on 7th June 1977 according to the order of the Federal Secretary for National Defence like a complex of hotels, tourist, catering, sports and recreational facilities situated on Kaluđerske Bare, one of the most attractive parts of the national park –Tara mountain¹, which is located at only a few hour drive from Belgrade (about 180 km).

During almost four decades long work, in addition to its core business in providing hotel, catering and tourist services in the hotels "Omorika", "Beli Bor", annexe "Javor"

¹ Mountain Tara is the largest natural park in Serbia with the total area of about 30,000 ha. In 1981 an area of 21,000 ha was declared a National park of the first category.

and restaurants "Javor", "National house", "Jeremičak" and "Radmilovac", the institutions have been intensively engaged in agricultural production at "Ponikve" and recognized for its production of seed potatoes. After the NATO aggression on our country, the production was reduced to its own security needs and partly to the needs of the Serbian Armed Forces until the military economy "Ponikve" was eventually handed over to the city of Užice. In early 2010, the composition of the MI "Tara" – Bajina Bašta attached parts are dismantled MI "Vrnjačka Banja" – Vrnjačka Banja, except for mess halls and the restaurant "Lađevci" in Kraljevo, which now operates within the institution as the hotel "Breza" – Vrnjačka Banja.

In its previous main work of the institutions the MI "Tara" has proven the quality of service, creativity, diversity of offer, care for the guests, development of material bases and proper attitude to nature and it is listed at the top in relation to other legal entities engaged in the same activity.

In order to protect the environment, bearing in mind the fact that mountain Tara does not have sewage infrastructure, the institution's hotel complex "Omorika" and "Beli Bor" built in 2004 two biodiscs² for processing sewage and other waste water. The capacities, overall attitude towards guests and nature of the MI "Tara" has greatly contributed to promotion and development of tourism and the total tourist offer on Tara mountain.

For its work in the sphere of development and promotion of tourism the foundation has won many accolades so far from the Ministry of Defence (MoD), commands, units and institutions of the Serbian Armed Forces (SAF), travel agencies, associations and suppliers including the distinguished "Silver snowflake", three "Tourist flowers", two "Golden tourist hearts", "Tourist Prism for quality", "Plaque of the Regional Chamber of Commerce Užice for achievements in economy" for 2007 and others. The confirmation of quality of service of the institution was the overall first place in Serbian championship in production and labor competition of catering and tourist professionals at the 26th Assembly, which was held in Vrnjačka Banja from 25th until 27th October 2007 (14 gold medals, 1 silver medal and 4 cups).

For the action "We choose the most successful in the hospitality and tourism of the Republic of Serbia, Montenegro and the Republic of Srpska", his work and the achieved results, the director of the hotel "Omorika" was declared "the manager of the year in the hotel industry and tourism for 2006" by the International Centre for Tourism and Hospitality Development SACEN.

Hospitality and tourist offers by hotel facilities of the MI "Tara"

The current production program of the institution is defined by the Decision on the establishment No. 366-3 issued on 23rd April 1979 by the Federal Secretary for National Defence at that time.

Among 11 tourist products from the Tourism Development Strategy of the Republic of Serbia, the MI "Tara" has anticipated opportunities in the products related to the use of

² The technological process and operation of those devices for protection of water quality "A" or rank water quality of the river Drina. The total investment amounts to around 500,000 euros.

nature and ecotourism, health, activities of special interest, rural and cultural tourism, as well as business tourism and tourism related to special interests (meetings, conferences, exhibitions).

Favourable climatic conditions with a large number of sunny days, a remarkable landscape, the healthy environment, beneficial air and pleasant elevation of Tara, which enables easy conditioning of visitors, makes this mountain very much suitable for sports, recreation and rehabilitation of the MoD and SAF members and their families, citizens of the Republic of Serbia and foreign ones .

In addition to its natural environment painted in the logo of the National Park Tara "a place where beauty begins...", comfortable hotel facilities, culinary specialties and kindness of the staff, guests of the hotels in the MI "Tara" have 549 categorized beds in modern rooms and suites, contemporary restaurants, cocktail bars, café-disco bars, discos, national restaurants, pastry shops, banquet halls, movie theaters, TV and other rooms that are equipped and designed for various professional conferences, an Internet cafe, a hairdresser, a beauty salon, rooms for children up to the age of 8 , souvenir shops, supermarkets, post offices. Sports capacities include trim hall, bowling, table tennis, indoor swimming pool, sauna, room for darts and pool, trails for recreational skiing, two ski lifts of 200 and 400 meters length, walking and running in the length of 10 km, volleyball, handball, basketball, football, football fields and tennis courts. Within the institution there are also auto camping and children's wooden town with a grass football pitch, which is suitable for multipurpose use.

Table 1 – Number of beds in the MI "Tara" on Tara Mountain

No	Resort title	Number of beds
1.	Hotel „Omorika“	294
2.	Hotel „Beli Bor“	206
3.	Depadance „Javor“	49
TOTAL		549

In addition to good food and comfortable accommodation the tourist offer also encompasses the organized content of active holidays including descentrafting down the Drina River, walking tours and excursions to the nearby viewpoint and other interesting sites such as the monastery Dobrun, Rača Monastery, Mokra Gora, Mečavnik, Mitrovac, Perućac Lake, Zaovine, Zlatibor, Sirogojno and Višegrad. The capacities are adapted to all categories of guests: families, pre-school or school-age children, sports teams³, business users with possibilities to organize seminars, conferences and sports events.

In the past four decades, all tasks have been performed in a timely and high-quality manner. Challenges in business establishment did not have a negative impact on hospitality and tourist offer, which is constantly enriched with new content and quality so that a customer is satisfied and comes again.

³ Hotel complex is positioned at an altitude of about 1000 meters, which is ideal for high altitude sports training. During a year about 50 different sports teams and teams of all ranks use facilities of the MI "Tara" for this purpose.

Analysis of the structure of the MI "Tara" user

All facilities within the military institutions are designed and built with the aim to improve the quality of life of the defense system members and their families as primary beneficiaries in the aspects of recreation, health, sports and business tourism. The period from its inception to the present time can be divided into four phases:

- I. from establishment to 1990,
- II. from 1990 to 2000,
- III. from 2000 to 2010,
- IV. from 2010 until today.

During construction of its buildings the MI "Tara" was represented by the symbol of "prestige and security", especially bearing in mind the fact that they were unavailable to wide users outside the defense system. In fact, about 90% of users accounted for active military personnel, civilians serving in the military, retired military and civilian personnel and their families.

With the disappearance of Yugoslavia and the war in the early 90-ies of the last century there was a sharp decline in the number of users from the defense system, which resulted in the orientation of military institutions to civilian market. Thus they become "open for all" authorities and tourist services are offered to all potential users (members of the defense system, national and foreign guests). Service users have generally become citizens of the Republic of Serbia and foreign guests while few members of the defense system participated in the period from 1990 to 2000⁴.

The third and fourth phase of the life cycle of the MI "Tara" correspond to the period of transition in the Republic of Serbia and transformation of the defense system. They were analyzed through three five-year periods: 2000 to 2004, 2005 to 2009 and 2010 to 2014. The goal of the analysis is to process statistical data about the MI "Tara" according to the set criteria in order to emphasise certain trends in filling capacity and relative participation of certain categories of users.

At the beginning of the period Table 2 shows the highest percentage share of value of the SAF and MoD in the total number of users to the annual fluctuations of 2% to 3% of the share in 2004, which was the lowest.

Table 2 – The structure of beneficiaries of military hotel capacities of the MI "Tara" in the period 2000-2004

Year	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	Average 2000-2004
Number of users	41,620	52,311	51,923	46,850	45,218	47,584
Number of half-board	162,012	194,546	185,209	174,532	155,503	174,393
average number of days	3.89	3.71	3.56	3.72	3.43	3.66
% SAF and MoD	17	13	15	12	10	13.40

⁴ In 1995 there was the relative share of 36% and in 1998 it was 21%. The primary reasons for drastic reduction in the number of members of the defense system as users of military hotel facilities are related to social status and existential problems of the time, which was characterized by a sharp decline in living standard and inadequate housing.

During the period 2005-2009 negative trends in the total number of users and participation of the defense system that culminated⁵ in 2009 may be observed.

Table 3 – *The structure of beneficiaries of military hotel capacities of the MI "Tara" in the period 2005-2009*

Year	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	Average 2005-2009
Number of users	42,621	43,801	48,404	45,725	39,256	43,961
Number of half-board	166,788	145,489	171,905	160,473	140,129	156,957
average number of days	3.91	3.32	3.55	3.5	3.57	3.57
% SAF and MoD	12	11	11	9	9	10.4

Since 2010 until today a negative trend in the total number of users and half-board continues whereas the percentage share of the defense system has stabilized at 12%, which is 5% (relative to 34%) lower than in 2000.

Table 4 – *The structure of beneficiaries of military hotel capacities of the MI "Tara" in the period 2010-2014*

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	Average 2009-2014
Number of users	42,393	44,934	40,473	36,951	34,857	39,922
Number of half-board	139,386	138,325	139,604	133,966	118,856	134,027
average number of days	3.29	3.08	3.45	3.63	3.41	3.37
% SAF and MoD	15	13	13	12	12	13

On the basis of the analysis of the observed period 2000-2014 the most declining trends in the relative share of beneficiaries from the defense system can be seen .

⁵ The participation of the defense system of 9% despite significant improvement in personal financial and social reporting in the five-year period was at a level lower than before 2000. The examination of the reasons for this situation should take into account the fact that in the reporting period 2005-2009 there has been a significant reduction in the number of people employed in the defense system.

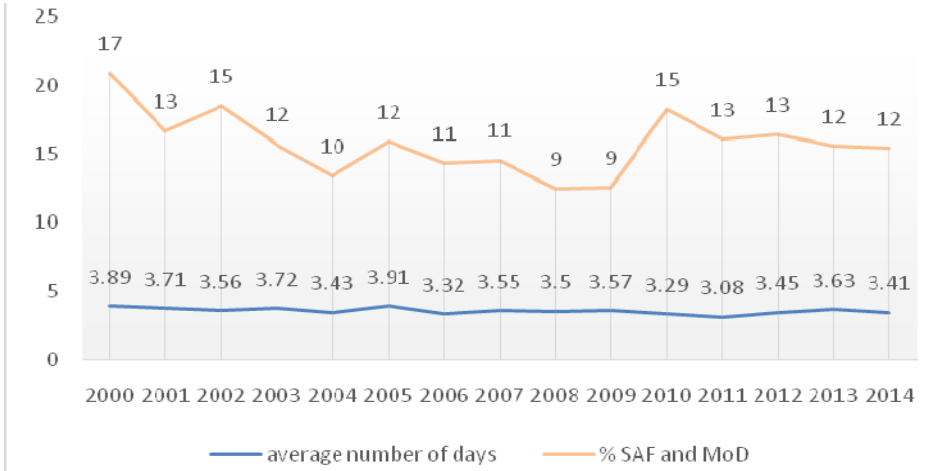


Figure 1 – Participation of the SAF and MoD in the total number of the MI "Tara" hotels in the period 2000–2014

Bearing in mind the fact that the capacity of institutions was built primarily for members of the defense system and that their learning relative until 1990, amounted to about 90%, on average, it can be stated that the assertion in the analyzed period, the average relative share of primary categories of users in the total number of half - board from 12% to an extremely low level.⁶

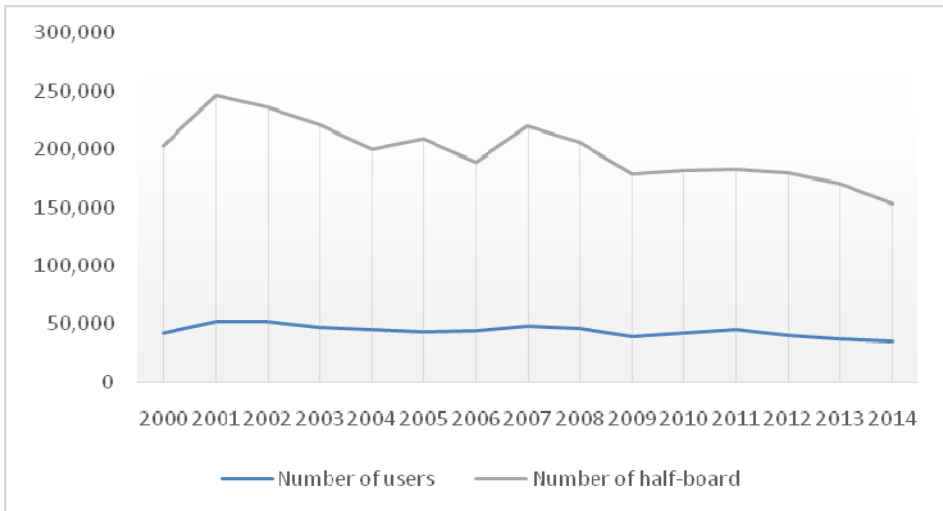


Figure 2 – Trend in number of users and half-board in the military capacity of the MI "Tara" in the period 2000–2014

⁶ The average total occupancy rate in the analyzed period was 83%.

The reasons for this situation are associated primarily with substantive standards of the defense system and the following regulatory military frameworks:

- Rules on military establishments operating on the principle of generating and distributing profit; (Official Military Gazette 05/1986 No. 5, p.177),
- Rules on changes and amendments to the Rules on military establishments operating on the principle of generating and distributing profit; (Official Military Gazette 31/1991, p. 974),
- Decision on changes and amendments to the Decision on utilizing part of the capacities of the military establishments subordinated to the Directorate for Tourism and Production in providing services required by the Ministry of Defence and the Serbian Armed Forces; (Official Military Gazette 11/2007, p. 157),
- Regulation on the transformation of the military establishments that provide production and services on the principle of generating and distributing profit and the rights and obligations of the civilian personnel of the Serbian Armed Forces employed in those establishments; (Official Military Gazette 25/2008, p.285),
- Decision on appointing the expert personnel responsible for drafting regulations and acts for the implementation of the Law on Defence; (Official Military Gazette 38/2009, p.831),
- Rules on the General Logistics Requirements in the Ministry of Defence and the Serbian Armed Forces - consolidated text; (Official Military Gazette 31/2011, p.505),
- Regulation on changes and amendments to the Regulation on transformation of the military establishments that provide production and services on the principle of generating and distributing profit and the rights and obligations of the civilian personnel of the Serbian Armed Forces employed in those establishments; (Official Military Gazette 02/2013, p. 13),
- and regulatory national frameworks determined by the Law on Tourism of the Republic of Serbia (Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia , 14/2016) and the Law on National Parks (Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia 84/2015), which determine business management skills of the MI "Tara" in the use of various management tools to increase the effectiveness and productivity of operations, cash flow, routing, agile promotion and pricing policy.

Case study "Military vacation facilities of the Republic of Bulgaria"

The Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Bulgaria (MoD RB) has received the standards in the field of social welfare from NATO that have to be met for admission to this organization. One of the first steps in the implementation of standards was the establishment of the Agency for Social Welfare as the executive authority of MoD RB. Capacities for recreation were upgraded to the required level and then integrated into the Association for Recreation States ("CLIMS"), whose task is to network the use of natural resources and build the capacity of members for the purpose of reciprocal exchange of its members with the aim of raising the living standard of individuals and creating additional motivation for the execution of military tasks.

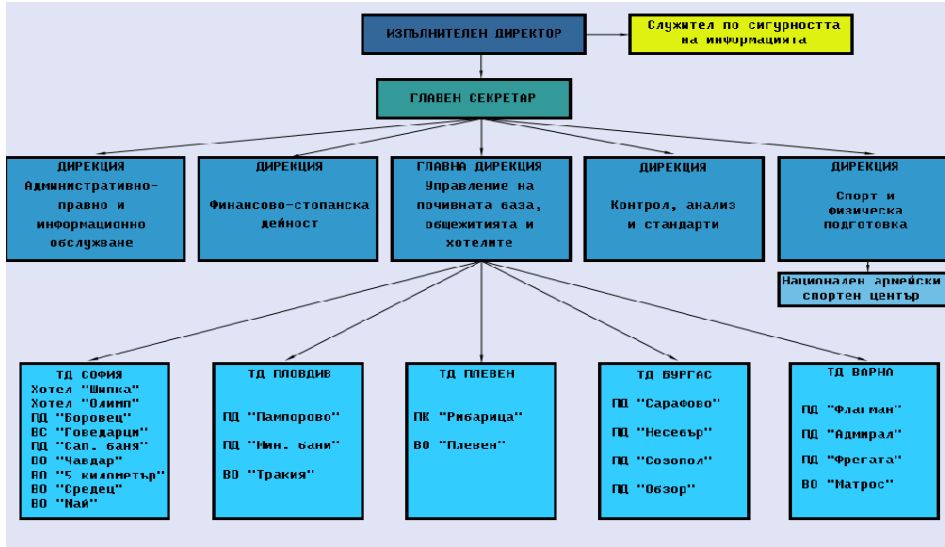


Figure 3 – Structure of the Agency for Social Welfare MoD RB

A number of missing units have been solved by adaptation of nonpurposive administrative buildings and abandoned warehouses.



Figure 4 – The exterior of the converted warehouse space



Figure 5 – *The interior of the converted warehouse space*

After the reforms MoD RB has, inter alia, 20 most modern hotel complexes and regulatory documents, which create the legal framework for subsidizing annual leave in the national budget.

A professional soldier with their families is entitled once a year to a ten-day holiday in one of the recreation facilities of MoD RB. This right is supported by grants from the budget of the Republic of Bulgaria in the amount of 70%, so the price per one day of capacity utilization by military staff family of four is only 12 euros.

For example, the price of full board/day in the hotel "Omorika" for military staff family of four is about 4.5 times higher and is equivalent to 53 euros.

Conclusion

During 39 years of its existence the MI "Tara" has made over 6,500,000 board days, and in September 2007 it welcomed the millionth visitor. Good organization and high-quality catering and tourist services participate about 30% on average in total revenues of the institution's consumption. The highest hotel spending at the level of the institution was achieved in 2007 and it amounted to 38% (in the segment of the hotel "Omorika" it was 44%), which represents the level of the high standard. Hotel capacities were used by a large number of guests in the previous period from the world of politics, science, public and cultural life. However, the relative share of the category of primary users was at an extremely low level⁷ in the total number of half-board.

⁷ Interest for the tourist resorts of military service among the primary beneficiaries is related mainly to cyclical periods (January, July and August).

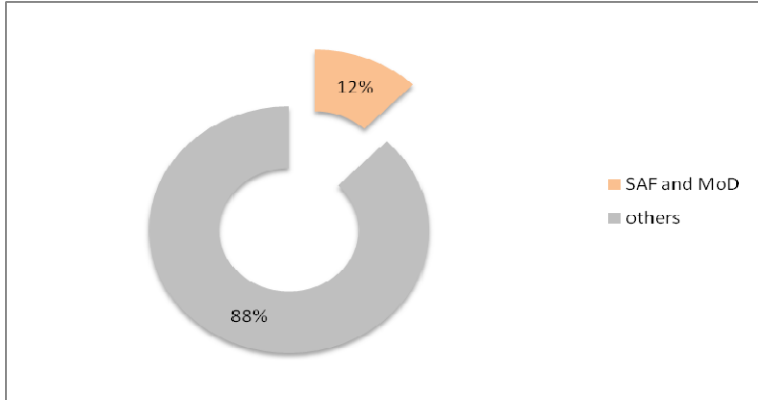


Figure 6 – Average relative share of the SAF and MoD in the period 2000-2014

This negative trend was caused by the economic situation and consequently purchasing power, reduction of wages in the public sector and the competitive offer in the private sector.

The decision of the Minister of Defence that professional members after returning from peacekeeping missions have to recover using capacities of the MI "TARA" had positive financial effects.⁸

Attempts of the management of the MI "Tara" to stimulate the terms of payment for services (deferred payment in monthly installments) and thus increase the demand of primary users in 2015 had no effect. It is necessary to find a sustainable systematic solution, which will make the MoD and SAF members become the primary guests in military resorts .



Figure 7 – Hotel "Omorika"

⁸ After returning from peacekeeping missions the service was used by 154 persons (1.075 boarding houses, which were financed from the budget).

In terms of raising the standard of the MoD and SAF, relevant institutions are currently working on defining the proposal for appropriate standards of belonging to the price that will allow members of the MoD and SAF to become the primary users of service in military resorts. It is estimated that if the Ministry of Defense has committed to refunding the price of board days with 40%, the daily board for a family of four would be equivalent to 32 euros and the number of the nightly board primary users would reach the level of 65%. At this level, the aim of military hotel capacities was again to improve the quality of life of members of the defense system who dedicated in the past some of their assets (vacation bonus) withdrawn for the construction of these facilities.

Financial effects produced in this way would enable the introduction of new facilities, expansion of the existing supplies and increase of the quality of all types of services for current and future generations of primary users based on the new program in order to ensure productive sustainable development with a wide range of services:

a) Provision of rest, recreation and other catering services, shopping and tourist excursions to professional military personnel and civilians serving in the Armed Forces and MoD and members of their families;

b) Provision of services in organizing and carrying out all aspects of training of the special forces – composition pursuant to the requirements;

c) Provision of rest, recreation and rehabilitation after participation in peacekeeping missions and inter-army exchanges;

d) Preparation of the Serbian Armed Forces and the Ministry of Defense sports teams for participation in the military, state, inter-state competitions and sports meetings;

e) Provision of the aforementioned services to other citizens of the Republic of Serbia and foreign nationals if there are free capacities;

f) Provision of all kinds of services in the organization and conduct of congresses, seminars and other scientific meetings in order to meet the needs of the Serbian Armed Forces, the Ministry of Defense and other structures;

g) Provision of all kinds of services in the organization and conduct of sports games, camps and preparation of all types of athletes and sports teams of all ages and ranks of the competition;

h) Provision of services in all aspects of the organization and conduct, schools in nature, recreational classes and school and other excursions;

i) Organization and conduct of one-day excursions for all hotel guests at Mount Tara in the national park and the canyon of the Drina river, "Šarganska osmica" ride with a visit to Mokra Gora "Mećavnik", Rača Monastery and other religious sites, lookout and organization of hunting, fishing and other excursions and picnics in nature pursuant to the requirements of guests;

j) Organization and implementation of the ski school in winter for guests of all ages and organization of transport to the ski slopes on Zlatibor (Tornik) and Mokra Gora, which are 32 to 40 km away from the hotel complex and

k) Development of health tourism and above all the treatment of bronchial asthma, chronic bronchitis and other lung diseases, asthenia, anemia and others.

Effects of implementation of new production programs will improve the quality of life of members of the defense system, the quality of professional performance of the set tasks and will contribute to raise the overall performance of the defense system.

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