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THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON TOURIST MOVEMENTS IN THE AREA OF EXCEPTIONAL CHARACTERISTICS “GREAT WAR ISLAND”

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Abstract: Due to the global pandemic caused by the covid-19 virus, tourism as an activity has experienced a sharp decline worldwide over the past three years. The impact of the pandemic was felt in all activities and sectors, and the consequences for tourism in Serbia are only now being remedied. In 2020, most countries in the world have taken measures in the form of entry bans and border closures to prevent the spread of infection. The measures taken in 2020 and the following two years had a very negative impact on the hospitality industry and tourism. During this period, the development of many forms of tourism slowed down or came to a complete halt. The area of exceptional features (hereinafter PIO) “Great War Island” represents a significant tourist resource of Serbia and a preserved natural space within the urban area, so it is suitable for the development of urban ecotourism, as a special form of ecotourism. Ecotourism, which attaches importance to the people, environment and culture in this area, was already in development before the pandemic. The main objective of the work is to assess whether and to what extent the pandemic has influenced the tourist movements towards the PIO “Great War Island”. For this purpose, a questionnaire was formulated and surveys were conducted. It is important to point out, based on the research results obtained, as well as the data collected in the years preceding the pandemic, the implementation of specific activities aimed at continuing the development, especially the harvested ecotourism, in the area. The results obtained through the advantages and disadvantages presented can be used by those working in the tourism sector and receptive travel agencies to overcome the crisis more easily and to design a better tourist offer.

Keywords: tourist movements, urban ecotourism, Great War Island, Covid-19 pandemic, Belgrade

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Introduction

Nature conservation is both an organized and a social activity aimed at preventing the increasing destruction and endangerment of the human environment. Tourism, as an activity based on the movement of people, depends largely on the quality of the environment in which it takes place. For tourism, the issue of conservation of nature is very important, so on the one hand, tourism is treated as a complementary activity, but on the other hand, it can act as a factor that affects the protection of the natural environment (Nikolić, 1998). The quality of the environment and natural and cultural values condition the positive development of tourism more than any other long-term activity (Jovicic, 2010).

The predominant form of tourism movements today is leisure tourism, which mostly occurs as a need in urbanized and polluted urban areas, while the places where these needs are satisfied are mostly natural environments with diverse ecosystems and landscapes. Such landscapes are often protected and should be preserved and improved rather than destroyed, which would have a positive impact on both the environment and tourism. Besides recreational tourism, such landscapes are very important for the development of urban ecotourism, as a special form of tourism in urban, urbanized areas (Nikolić, 1998).

Hector Ceballos-Lascurian, an international ecotourism consultant and Mexican ecologist, first defined the term ecotourism. His definition was improved by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and adopted at the World Congress in Montreal in 1966. The definition of ecotourism adopted by the IUCN is as follows: "Ecotourism is an ecologically responsible excursion and visit to relatively protected areas to enjoy nature, with the enhancement of conservation, low negative visitor impacts, and a positive active influence on local communities" (www.ecotourism.org; <https://www.iucn.org>). From this definition, we can conclude that ecotourism can be considered as a phenomenon opposed to mass tourism, in which the responsible behavior of visitors towards the natural environment in which it takes place plays an important role. Certain specific activities related to this form of tourism take place in the form of organized hikes, bicycle tours, photo safaris and many others that involve the active participation of tourists in the idea of respect and protection of the natural environment.

One of the areas that meets the conditions for the development of urban ecotourism in the urbanized area of the City of Belgrade is the PIO "Great War Island". At the confluence of the Sava and Danube rivers, between Belgrade and Zemun, there are two Danube islands, Malo and Veliko Ratno, which are natural pristine oases separated from the urban part of Belgrade by the Danube (Amidzić, Krasulja, Belij, 2007). Today, the protected natural asset "Great War Island" in

Belgrade consists of two river islands, it was placed under protection to protect the nature that makes it up and represents an area with exceptional characteristics, covering an area of 211.38 ha, which depends on the water level of the Sava River and the variable Danube (Malinić, 2016). In summer, the Area of Exceptional Qualities “Great War Island” becomes a real oasis for Belgrade citizens who, in addition to ecotourism, come to this area for recreation and swimming, which is connected to the famous Lido beach on the northeast side of the island. The protection regulations in this area define the boundaries and delimit the recreation and tourism zone as well as the nature protection zone (Figure 1).



Figure 2. Protection zones on the AEQ “Great War Island”

The nature protection zone, which has the character of a special nature reserve, includes part of the forest complex AEQ “Great War Island”, wetlands and water bodies. The recreational zone on the territory of the AEQ “Great War Island” is limited to the inner part of the island and is connected with the tourist zone of the island. In this way, visitors are offered more opportunities to spend time in this area without endangering the nature protection zone. However, even in this protected area there are several illegally constructed buildings that threaten the environment of protected species as well as further development according to the principles and ideas of ecotourism (<https://www.zzps.rs/>).

One of the biggest problems facing the AEQ “Great War Island” is the lack of an adequate material base for the development of all forms of tourism. Only in the summer season is the AEQ “Great War Island” connected to the city center by a pontoon bridge, through which citizens and tourists can reach the Lido beach and the island, which is not the case during the rest of the year. In 2005, the area we are talking about was declared an Area of Outstanding Character, when certain measures were taken to protect nature and develop tourism. Within the island there is an unpaved road that citizens and tourists can use to explore the island on foot or by bicycle, and information boards have been set up to familiarize people with the island’s characteristics and the rules of conduct for staying on the island. Beyond that, there is no further investment or building of a material base for the development of tourism on the island. There are no legal facilities built on the island in line with sustainable development and nature conservation, but mostly illegal facilities that operate only during the summer season, without sanitary facilities and access to electricity and water throughout the year (Malinić, 2016). It is often heard that the tourism sector can adapt to all situations and phenomena and that it has great resilience and can recover quickly from unexpected events, which unfortunately was not the case in the fight against the global pandemic (Romagosa, 2020). The increase in economic and social progress and the rise in living standards at the global level in the years leading up to the Covid 19 virus global pandemic led to a greater awareness of tourism trends (Page & Connell, 2020). However, in recent years, the entire world was hit by a global pandemic that negatively impacted all industries. During this time, measures were taken in more than 200 countries around the world to contain and prevent the spread of infection in the form of border closures, protective equipment, and travel bans. While these measures had a positive impact on preventing the spread of infection caused by the pandemic, the negative impact was felt in activities aimed at the free movement of people, such as tourism. The World Tourism Organization (hereafter WTO) noted in its report that “international travel has never been so extremely restricted in history” (www.unwto.org). In May 2020, the WTO published a World Tourism Barometer showing the impact of the global Covid 19 virus pandemic on the tourism industry (Chart 1). Numerous scholars (Goessling, Scott & Hall, 2020) have highlighted the significant impact of the pandemic, including the transformation of tourism and hospitality, as well as the drastic changes in people’s behavior during the global pandemic, and predicted a completely new and different situation after the pandemic (Choe, Kim & Choi, 2022).

In the past three years, the authorities of all countries affected by the virus have lifted protective measures several times, and people have been advised to stay outdoors and in nature for prevention. Unable to travel to meet their tourism and recreation needs, residents of urban areas have been forced to move to protected natural areas within urban centers, such as the AEQ “Great War Island”. This paper

will examine whether and to what extent the global pandemic of Covid-19 influenced the movement of people to the AEQ “Great War Island”.

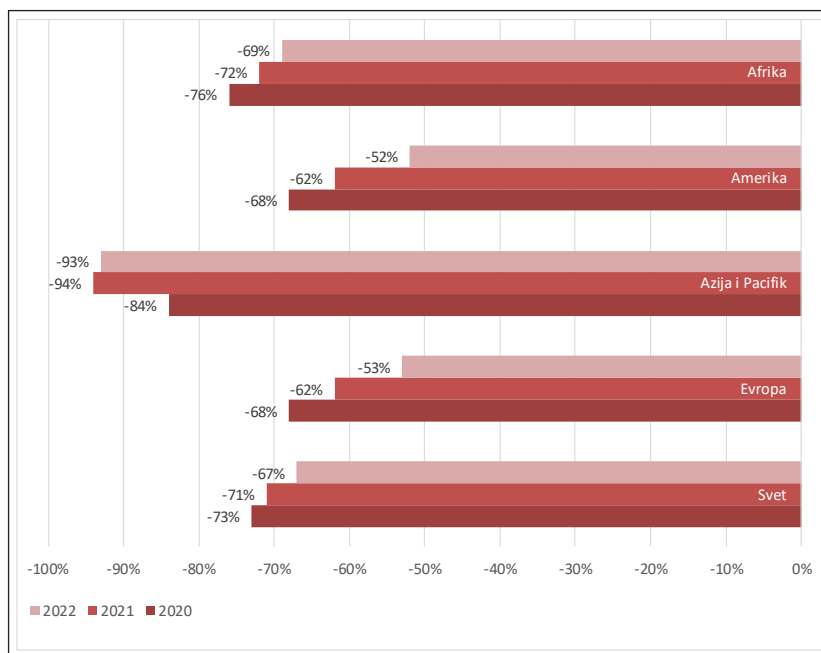


Figure 2. International tourism rate in numbers 2020-2022
Source: WTO (2022), World Tourism Barometer

Literature review

In the last two years, numerous studies have been conducted around the world to address the impact of the global pandemic caused by the Covid-19 virus on tourism. Through these studies and researches conducted in different parts of the world, we can see how and to what extent the global pandemic has affected the forms of tourism and what consequences it has left in different parts of our planet.

We know that the development of mass tourism and the presence of a large number of tourists in destinations with a vulnerable natural environment is not conducive to the development of ecotourism. In line with this statement, Lecchini et al. (2021) showed in their study the impact of human activities on tourist areas in French Polynesia. They estimated that the number of fish increased significantly in the absence of tourists during the Covid 19 pandemic. Their research therefore focused on the impact of tourists on natural communities in tourist destinations and showed the negative impact of mass tourism on nature. Jovanović et al. (2021)

believe that the outbreak of the global pandemic caused by the Covid-19 virus has severely threatened the tourism sector, especially ecotourism, due to the decrease in income and employment, which are crucial for community development and wildlife conservation. They believe that the positive effects of the pandemic on ecotourism are more numerous than the negative ones, since the restriction of contact with humans and industrial activities had positive effects on the environment. However, other researchers believe that the pandemic caused by the Covid-19 virus has had a negative impact on the development of ecotourism, especially on the conservation of wildlife habitats, as incomes have decreased and unemployment has increased. Taking into account the different studies that have been carried out, dealing with the impact of the global pandemic on ecotourism and wildlife habitats, we can state that a large number of researchers have presented the negative consequences of this pandemic. Cherkaoui et al. (2020) note that ecotourism in Morocco has been severely damaged by the global pandemic. As a result of the global pandemic of the Covid 19 virus, there was a large loss of income from illegal hunting, wildlife smuggling, and deforestation in rural areas of Morocco. Local organizations that rely on ecotourism to fund projects for endangered species and critical habitats may be forced to close, according to environmental groups in Morocco, after conservation measures and travel restrictions around the world drastically reduced revenues in the country. In another study, Buckley (2021) notes that the ecological impact of reduced tourism varies by countries' level of development, as visitor numbers and environmental impacts have largely declined in developed countries. This refers to wildlife and plants in particular, although public budgets and park conservation have continuously helped endangered species to successfully reproduce. However, the pandemic caused by the Covid 19 virus has led to detrimental environmental effects such as poaching on endangered species, lower environmental costs, deforestation, and the like in developing countries where the costs of conservation are covered by revenues from tourism and nongovernmental organizations. In addition, Goretti et al. (2021) highlighted some solutions to improve the status of tourism in Asia and the Pacific during the Covid 19 pandemic, the most important of which are strengthening health systems, changing sustainable tourism models, investing in new technologies, diversifying economic investments to avoid dependence on one sector such as tourism, and the like. Vesić et al. (2021) concluded in their research on rural tourism in the tourism region of Western Serbia that although rural areas and natural environments were expected to be more visited than before the global pandemic, there was no increase in tourist movements. Their research also showed that service providers in rural areas were prepared to work in such conditions and took all possible health protection measures to ensure the safety of tourists. Vasić and Radović (2021) believe that ecotourism is a growing market within the industry and has the potential to be one of the most important means for sustainable

development. The goals of ecotourism are not only to generate economic profits, but also to preserve the environment and achieve sustainable growth and development. Although Serbia has resources, in their opinion, ecotourism is still in its infancy and is very weakly represented in the tourist offer of our country. The insufficient existence of ecotourism products and services, as well as the lack of motivation of tourism operators to create such products, are only part of the reasons for the low participation and development of the mentioned type of tourism in the Republic of Serbia. Therefore, it can be said that the pandemic of the new virus is a systemic crisis, which is a great warning to humanity that the lack of care and endangerment of the environment can put in question the survival of the entire human race. One of the few positive effects of the pandemic, perhaps the only one, is the recovery of nature after a long time.

Methods and materials

In this work, the method of analysis of the results collected on the basis of research through a questionnaire was used. The questionnaire included questions about the views of the tourist population on the development of ecotourism and the movements of people directed to the territory of the AEQ "Great War Island" during the period of the global pandemic with the Covid-19 virus. The questionnaire consisted of three groups of questions, and respondents were asked to express their views and thoughts about the movements directed at the AEQ "Great War Island", as well as about the risks to which said area may be exposed.

The first group of questions refers to the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents themselves, and in this group the respondents provided information about themselves.

In the second group of questions, respondents were expected to select one of the five answers offered. This group of questions used a Likert scale where the respondent could indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the written statement on a linear scale of one to five. In this section, respondents were able to express their opinion on eight written statements related to the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic on tourism development in the AEQ "Great War Island" area, as well as their opinion on the risks the area may face.

The third group of questions provides us with data on respondents' habits related to movements towards the AEQ "Great War Island", as well as respondents' habits of spending time in and preserving nature. For four questions about habits, respondents had the option of choosing only one of the three answers offered in the form of "yes" or "sometimes not".

In formulating the questions and collecting data, we were guided by the basic principles of ecotourism. We mentioned in the introduction that ecotourism is an ecologically responsible trip and a visit to relatively protected areas, and accordingly there are principles that tourists and organizations must adhere to. The principles state that physical, social and psychological impacts on the environment must be minimized and that ecological and cultural awareness must be built and implemented among people and respect for the environment. Through the principles and principles on the basis of which tourism is developed, positive experiences must be offered to visitors and hosts of a given area, but also direct financial support must be provided for the preservation of the environment, as well as for the local population and the private sector. In the development of tourism and in accordance with the principles of ecotourism, it is necessary to design, build and manage facilities that have a low impact on the environment and do not threaten the natural habitats in which they are located. Ecotourism development should recognize the rights and spiritual beliefs of indigenous people and work in partnership with them to create a self-reliant community that acts in pursuit of common goals.

The survey was conducted in July and August 2022. Respondents were randomly selected and asked to answer three sets of questions, for a total of seventeen questions within the online questionnaire. In the continuation of the work, the analysis of the obtained results of this survey is presented.

Results and discussion

With the first set of questions, related to the sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents, we obtained information about the respondents' place of residence, gender, and age, as well as their level of education and employment (Tables 1 and 2). A total of 55 respondents participated in the survey.

Table 1. Sociodemographic data of respondents

| Sociodemographic data | | Percent of respondents (%) |
|-----------------------|-----------|----------------------------|
| Place of residence | Bavanište | 5 |
| | Beograd | 66 |
| | Ćičevac | 3 |
| | Kruševac | 20 |
| | Negotin | 3 |
| | Subotica | 3 |
| Sociodemographic data | | Percent of respondents (%) |
| Sex | Male | 26 |
| | Female | 74 |

Source: Auhtor's survey

From the comments received on the question about place of residence, we can conclude that respondents from different parts of Serbia participated in the survey, as well as respondents of both genders. The majority of respondents who participated in the survey indicated Belgrade as their place of residence, while the city of Kruševac was second in terms of the number of respondents. Almost three times as many respondents were female, while only 26 percent were male.

Table 2. Sociodemographic data of respondents

| Sociodemographic data | | Percent of respondents (%) |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| Age profile | Less than 20 year old | 14 |
| | 21- 30 | 66 |
| | 31 - 40 | 14 |
| | 41 - 50 | 0 |
| | 51 - 60 | 6 |
| Education profile | Primary school | 0 |
| | High school | 34 |
| | College – Higher school | 20 |
| | College – Faculty | 40 |
| | College – Postgraduate | 6 |
| Employment status | Employed | 34 |
| | Non-employed | 66 |

Status: Author's survey

Responses to the question about the age of respondents indicate that the majority of respondents are between 21 and 30 years old, and that most of them have completed higher education, undergraduate academic studies. The respondents who have only primary education were not included in the research.

The results, based on which the respondents gave their answers in the form of a Likert scale, give us an insight into their views on the subject of the impact of the global pandemic with the Covid-19 virus on the tourist movements towards the AEQ "Great War Island".

The first observation is related to the development of ecotourism and the protection and conservation of the natural environment in urban areas (Table 3). From the responses of the respondents, it can be concluded that most of them believe that ecotourism and its development in urban areas are very important for the protection and conservation of the natural environment. The results of the responses of the surveyed population show a highly developed awareness of the importance of nature conservation and its significance for urban areas. Based on research conducted by other authors, we were able to determine the importance of protecting the natural environment and the extent to which it recovered during the global pandemic due to the absence of tourists in mass tourism destinations.

Table 3. The importance of the development of ecotourism for the protection and preservation of the natural environment in urban areas

| | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|
| Conclusion: The development of ecotourism is important for the protection and preservation of the natural environment in urban areas. | |
| I agree | 0 % |
| Don't agree | 0 % |
| Conclusion: The development of ecotourism is important for the protection and preservation of the natural environment in urban areas. | |
| I don't have opinion | 0 % |
| I agree | 11 % |
| I agree completely | 86 % |

Status: Author's survey

The following statement refers to the impact of the global pandemic caused by the Covid 19 virus on the development of ecotourism in the Belgrade region (Table 4). From the answers of the respondents who participated in the survey, we can conclude that 43 percent of the respondents have no opinion and do not think about this statement, while the rest agree with the opinion that the global pandemic of Covid-19 has affected the further development of ecotourism in the area of urban units, such as the city of Belgrade. In urban areas and large cities, the protection of natural habitats and the environment should be the main focus in the organization and planning of tourism.

Table 4. The impact of the global pandemic caused by the Covid-19 virus on the development of ecotourism in the area of Belgrade

| | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Conclusion: The global pandemic of COVID-19 has greatly affected the development of ecotourism in the area of Belgrade. | |
| I disagree at all | 0% |
| I disagree | 0% |
| I don't have opinion | 43% |
| I agree | 23% |
| I agree completely | 34% |

Status: Author's survey

The third statement concerns the development of ecotourism in the AEQ "Great War Island" before the Covid 19 pandemic (Table 5). From the respondents' answers to this statement, it can be concluded that not all respondents think in the same or similar way as the previous two statements. Most of the respondents have no opinion on this statement, while 20% of the respondents do not think that ecotourism has been developed enough in the area. The problem with this statement

and the reason why 60% of respondents have no opinion on this statement is the lack of information about tourism in the Belgrade region, as well as the insufficient promotion of such areas in the city area. Besides the reasons mentioned above, the biggest problem with these results, as we have already noted, is that tourism in the area was not sufficiently developed even before the global pandemic. As we could see from the research of other authors, ecotourism was already developing in most countries before the global pandemic and had both positive and negative impacts on it. The basis for ecotourism development, the natural environment and wildlife habitats in some destinations, recovered during the pandemic due to the reduced number of tourists, but the further development of ecotourism was halted due to the economic losses caused by the pandemic.

Table 5. Development of ecotourism in the area of AEQ “Great War Island” before the Covid-19 pandemic

| | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Conclusion: Ecotourism, as a form of tourism in the AEQ “Great War Island” area, was sufficiently developed before the global pandemic of COVID-19. | |
| I disagree at all | 6% |
| I disagree | 14% |
| I don’t have opinion | 60% |
| I agree | 9% |
| I agree completely | 11% |

Status: Author’s survey

The following statement relates to opinions about the extent to which the global pandemic caused by the Covid 19 virus has slowed further development of all forms of tourism in the Great War Island area (Table 6). From the responses of respondents to this statement, we can conclude that most of them agree that the global pandemic has had a very negative impact on the development of tourism in the last three years. Regarding the Great War Island, we have already mentioned that even before the global pandemic there was no material basis for the development of ecotourism, except for a well-developed pedestrian and bicycle path and a pontoon bridge used exclusively in the summer season. In this area, there were and are no legally established facilities, information desks for tourists or various organized tours, neither before the global pandemic nor today. We can say that the global pandemic has slowed down the development of ecotourism on the AEQ “Great War Island”. This is mainly reflected in the economic resources required to invest in this type of tourism in a given area, as was the case in other destinations in the world, where the development of ecotourism is still in its infancy.

Table 6. The impact of the global pandemic caused by the Covid-19 virus on the further development of all forms of tourism

| | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Conclusion: The global pandemic of COVID-19 has slowed down the further development of all forms of tourism in the area of AEQ “Great War Island”. | |
| I disagree at all | 3% |
| I disagree | 3% |
| I don’t have opinion | 26% |
| I agree | 42% |
| I agree completely | 26% |

Status: Author’s survey

The fifth result of this group of questions refers to the importance of the AEQ “Great War Island” for the development of bathing and recreational tourism in the area of the City of Belgrade (Table 7). Respondents gave their opinion on how important the AEQ “Great War Island”, which includes Lido Beach, is for the development of other forms of tourism in the area of the City of Belgrade. Most of the respondents agree that the two mentioned areas are very important for the development of beach and leisure tourism in this area of the city. From the previous sentence, it can also be concluded that regular maintenance and preservation of the natural environment in these areas is very important for further successful development and other forms of tourism. Considering the fact that a large number of respondents live in Belgrade, we cannot say that they visit these areas in the context of bathing or recreational tourism, but rather for swimming or to spend their free time in nature.

Table 7. Importance of AEQ “Great War Island” in the development of bathing and recreational tourism

| | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Conclusion: AEQ “Great War Island” and Lido beach are important areas for the development of bathing and recreational tourism in the area of Belgrade. | |
| I disagree at all | 0% |
| I disagree | 3% |
| I don’t have opinion | 3% |
| I agree | 34% |
| I agree completely | 60% |

Status: Author’s survey

The next statement from this group of questions was about the risks faced by the development of ecotourism in the area of the AEQ “Great War Island” in addition to the pandemic caused by the Covid 19 virus (Table 8). In the previous statement, we saw that the majority of respondents believe that this area is very important for the development of bathing and recreational tourism, as well as it is

an area that Belgraders visit during the summer season, but we were interested in whether these forms of tourism could pose a risk to the development of ecotourism in protected areas. The opinion of the respondents on this statement is divided and most of them have no opinion on this issue or joins the position that other forms of tourism may pose a threat to the development of ecotourism in the area. Accordingly, we have concluded that the development of other forms of tourism in areas where ecotourism is also developing at the same time may pose a risk if they are not developed in accordance with the principles and ideas of conservation of nature and the environment. The researches of other authors in the chapter “Literature Review” have shown that mass tourism, as well as tourism that is not in accordance with the principles of ecotourism and sustainable development, can greatly affect the natural environment and destroy it through its actions. We observe that the natural environment and biodiversity recovered during and after the global pandemic because such areas were less visited. This shows us the extent to which mass tourism and unscrupulous tourists can affect the natural environment and irrevocably destroy it through their actions.

Table 8. Risks faced by the development of ecotourism in the AEQ “Great War Island” area

| | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Conclusion: In addition to the COVID-19 pandemic, the growing development of bathing and recreational tourism is also a risk for the development of ecotourism in the area of AEQ “Veliko ratno ostrvo”. | |
| I disagree at all | 3% |
| I disagree | 9% |
| I don't have opinion | 31% |
| I agree | 26% |
| I agree completely | 31% |

Status: Author's survey

In the seventh statement, the respondents were asked about their attitude to the way and conditions for the development of other forms of tourism in the area of the AEQ “Great War Island” in relation to the principles and ideas for the development of ecotourism in the same area (Table 9). In the previous statement, we concluded that other forms of tourism may pose a risk if the ideas and principles followed by ecotourism are not taken into account in planning. Based on the responses to this statement, we can see that the majority of respondents agree with the view that other forms of tourism must be developed in connection with the development of ecotourism. Therefore, we can conclude that in such protected areas, the preservation of the natural environment is a priority in the planning and development of tourism.

Table 9. Ways and conditions of development of other forms of tourism in the area of AEQ "Great War Island"

| | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Conclusion: Other types of tourism in the area of the AEQ "Great War Island" should be developed in accordance with the principles of eco-tourism. | |
| I disagree at all | 0% |
| I disagree | 3% |
| I don't have opinion | 8% |
| I agree | 20% |
| I agree completely | 69% |

Status: Author's survey

The last statement from this set of questions and the answers to it confirm our previous opinion that other forms of tourism must develop in connection with the development of ecotourism (Table 10). The majority of respondents affirmed the statement that other forms of tourism should be developed in the area of the AEQ "Great War Island" in accordance with the principles of ecotourism. In the further recovery from the pandemic caused by the Covid-19 virus, as well as in the planning and development of tourism in this area in Belgrade, all sectors should take into account these results, so that other forms of tourism develop sufficiently and do not have a negative impact on the development of ecotourism in the area of the AEQ "Great War Island". In this way, the authenticity and diversity of the space, as well as the quality of time spent with each type of tourism included in the tourist offer of the place, will be ensured.

Table 10. Method of development of other forms of tourism in the area of AEQ "Veliko ratno ostrvo"

| | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Conclusion: Ecotourism should have an advantage in the development of the urban area compared to other forms of tourism in the form of preservation of the natural environment. | |
| I disagree at all | 3% |
| I disagree | 3% |
| I don't have opinion | 3% |
| I agree | 20% |
| I agree completely | 71% |

Status: Author's survey

The last group of questions of the questionnaire refers to the habits of the respondents themselves. Through four questions from this group we obtained information about their stay in nature, but also about their movements towards the AEQ "Great War Island" (Table 11). The first question was related to the

respondents’ habit of spending time in nature. From the answers, it appears that half of the respondents usually spend their free time in nature, while the other half sometimes do so. From the research conducted by Vesić et al. (2021), we can see that the number of visitors to rural, natural environments was not higher than before the global pandemic. Thus, we can conclude that the global pandemic, as well as the recommendation to spend time in nature and outdoors during these years, did not significantly change the profile of tourists visiting natural, rural environments, but that they were tourists who practiced this type of tourism even before the global pandemic. .

Table 11. Habits of respondents regarding spending leisure time in nature

| Question: Do you have a habit of spending your free time in nature? | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Yes | 52% |
| No | 0% |
| Sometimes | 48% |

Status: Author’s survey

The second question refers to the visit and movements to the Lido beach in the area of the AEQ “Great War Island” as part of bathing tourism (Table 12). Half of the respondents indicated that they do not visit the Lido beach and do not practice bathing tourism in this area. These data are consistent with what we have already noted in the introduction of this paper. The insufficient material base for the development of any kind of tourism, the pronounced seasonality and the lack of organized tours lead to the fact that this area is very little visited.

Table 12. Visit to Lido beach on AEQ “Great War Island” as part of bathing tourism

| Question: Do you visit Lido beach and AEQ “Great War Island” for swimming? | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Yes | 14% |
| No | 52% |
| Sometimes | 34% |

Status: Author’s survey

The next question from this set of questions follows on from the previous one. Respondents were asked to answer whether they visited the beach Lido on AEQ “Great War Island” to a lesser extent during the pandemic caused by the Covid-19 virus. Since the majority of respondents did not have the habit of visiting this area before the Covid-19 pandemic, it can be expected that they did not have such a need during the pandemic either. On the territory of the City of Belgrade there are several other areas where bathing and recreational tourism is more developed compared to the AEQ “Great War Island” (e.g. Ada Ciganlija, Avala, etc.). It is assumed that the

reason for this result is the insufficient presentation of this area in the promotional materials for tourism in the city of Belgrade, as well as a better and more diverse tourist offer of other attractions.

Table 13. Visit to the Lido beaches on the AEQ "Great War Island"

| Question: During the COVID-19 pandemic, did you visit the Lido beach and AEQ "Great War Island" to a lesser extent for swimming? | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Yes | 34% |
| No | 55% |
| Sometimes | 11% |

Status: Author's survey

The last question of the questionnaire refers to compliance with the rules and principles of ecotourism in the area of the AEQ "Great War Island". Respondents were expected to give an answer related to their habits of staying on the AEQ "Great War Island", as well as compliance with the rules that constitute ecotourism. The majority of respondents answered this question in the affirmative, which leads us to the conclusion that they respect or would respect the rules and principles of ecotourism during their stay in the AEQ "Great War Island". This information should be taken into account in the further development of ecotourism in protected urban areas, as it shows the awareness of the population about the natural environment and its importance in urban centers, which would have a positive impact on its preservation in the development of other types of tourism.

Table 14. Respect for the rules and principles of ecotourism in the AEQ "Great War Island"

| Question: Do you respect the rules and principles of ecotourism in accordance with the preservation of the natural environment in the area of AEQ "Great War Island"? | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Yes | 94% |
| No | 3% |
| Sometimes | 3% |

Status: Author's survey

Conclusion

Tourism as an activity is a very important part of the development and progress of any country. In order for tourism to have a positive impact, especially in economic terms, it must be carefully and strategically planned, guided by the principles it represents and, above all, it must not endanger nature and the environment.

We observe an increasing destruction of the natural environment through the construction of illegal gastronomic establishments in areas that can offer pristine nature, preserved ecosystems or protected species. By degrading and exploiting these areas in this way, we can only achieve short-term results and irrevocably destroy the natural environment. Ecotourism, with its ideas and principles, protects protected areas by putting nature and people first. The development of ecotourism in the area of the AEQ "Great War Island" was very weak until 2020. In most cases, visitors to the island stayed in the area to swim at Lido Beach, while only a very small number visited the AEQ "Great War Island" to participate in the development of ecotourism. Most of the visits to the nature reserve are of a research nature or are collective scientific visits in the form of one-day excursions. One of the main reasons for this result is the very low number of propaganda materials, as well as the low participation in the promotion of these areas. However, the pandemic caused by the Covid-19 virus stopped the development of all forms of tourism for some time. When the restrictions on movement were lifted as a protective measure by the state, residents of the city of Belgrade were advised to spend time outdoors and in nature to prevent the spread of the infection. In this situation, ecotourism in the area of AEQ "Great War Island" was able to develop further, while other places in Belgrade continued and supplemented their tourist offer adapted to the new situation. This year, at the beginning of the summer season, a pontoon bridge was installed connecting AEQ "Great War Island" with the city center, making it easier for visitors to cross the Danube and access the Lido beach. In addition to the pontoon bridge, this year the Zemun Municipality Tourism Organization organized free walking tours to the AEQ "Great War Island", which attracted visitors to see the nature in this area and actively participate in the development of ecotourism. Unfortunately, the scale of these visits was not even close to what it could be when it comes to the AEQ "Great War Island".

The conclusion and answer to the question whether and to what extent the pandemic caused by the Covid-19 virus has influenced the development of ecotourism in the area of the AEQ "Great War Island" is not easy. There is no doubt that the global pandemic had an impact not only on the development of ecotourism, but also on other types of tourism practiced in the area in the years before the situation. However, based on the questionnaire and the responses of the interviewees, we got the impression and concluded that the development of ecotourism in this area in the last three years was not only and exclusively affected by the pandemic caused by the Covid 19 virus. Insufficient involvement of scientific staff, lack of strategic planning and respect for the ideas and principles of ecotourism, low number of organized events and propaganda materials, and lack of material base on this island in Belgrade lead to poorly developed tourism and too few visitors throughout the year.

The AEQ “Great War Island” has a number of features that are crucial for planning tourism in such protected areas. With good organization and strategically planned approach in such protected areas, different types of tourism can be developed without endangering each other.

As mentioned earlier, the global pandemic has had a negative impact on tourism, leading to a decrease in the number of tourists and trips, as well as economic revenues. In addition, the virus has impacted the environment, resulting in less monitoring by environmental organizations during the pandemic and creating more opportunities for illegal hunting and logging in areas where ecotourism is developing. However, not all of the effects of this pandemic were negative; there were also a number of positive effects on the environment, as fewer tourists were in vacation areas during the pandemic and nature that had been destroyed by tourists could be restored.

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