

## **Development potential of tourism for seniors in Serbia**

Andrea Katić, Jasmina Stanković, Neda Raspopović

*Educons University - Sremska Kamenica, Republic of Serbia*

---

### **Abstract**

Serbia has great opportunities in the field of senior tourism and medical tourism, particularly in the area of dental services, rehabilitation, and cosmetic surgery, which are among the most medical services in the world. The aim of this paper is to show the development potential of Serbia in the light of market positioning when senior tourism is concerned.

**Keywords:** *senior tourism, medical tourism, economic growth, Serbia.*

---

### **Introduction**

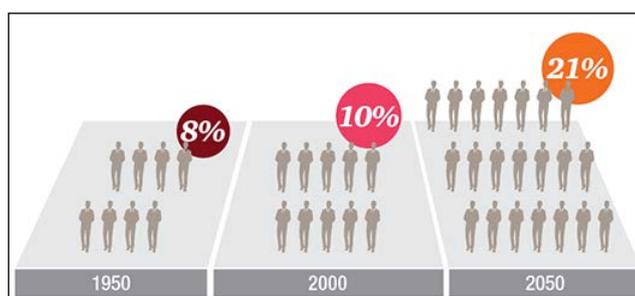
As it mentioned in reports of European Commission, the contribution of senior citizens to the European tourism industry is significant, especially for challenge of seasonality, stimulating economic growth and jobs in Europe. On the special importance is fostering transnational tourism activities by developing tourism off-season for seniors in Europe. Senior citizens are people with 55 years old and they represent 25% of the European population (<http://ec.europa.eu>, 2014). They are very important population group, because it includes individuals with both leisure time and purchasing power, so this group represents significant economic market potential. Serbia could easily be positioned when it comes to tourism of senior group, and especially could be required country in the field of medical tourism and could build a national brand at this level.

### **Current tourism trends**

According to the World Tourism Organisation (WTO) one of the 2020 future market trends is an increase in the number of senior tourists. In Europe, there are already more elderly people (over 65 years old) than children. The elderly population (75.4

---

million) exceeded the younger population (less than 14 years of age) (74 million) in 2004. The *Baby Boom* generation is reaching the oldest age bands and the share of the elderly is significantly increasing. Currently more than 128 million citizens in the European Union are aged between 55 and 80 years, representing about 25% of the total population. By year of 2050 it will be more than 21% of the world population aged 60 years or more (Figure 1). When we add the significant decrease in mortality and fertility to this, we observe a remarkable transformation of the population pyramid, setting the European stage for a situation in 2025 in which the maximum width of the pyramid will be comprised of the group between 40 and 60 years old, thus causing the pyramid to rupture (Alén E. *et al.*, 2012). This demographic development is having a considerable impact on the tourism demand.

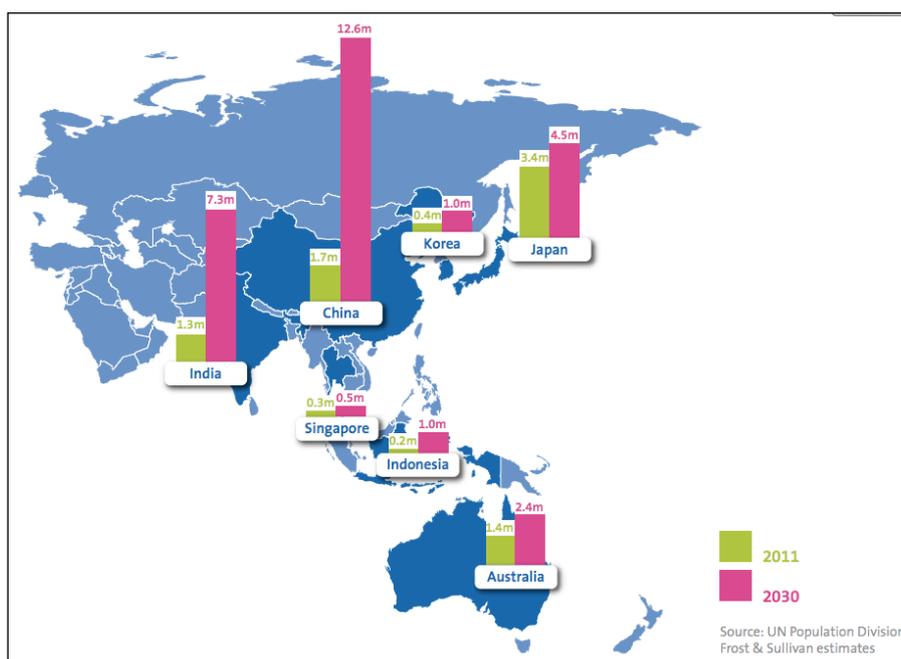


**Figure 1. Proportion of the world population aged 60 years or more**

Source: UN report *World Population Ageing 1950-2050*

### Senior tourism

Senior tourism is a segment that has not held great importance in the tourism industry, although this trend is changing (Alén E. *et al.*, 2012). However, approximately 41% of European citizens in the 28 Member States have never travelled outside their national borders while 7 out of 10 seniors undertake exclusively domestic trips (European Commission, 2014). The similar situation is in Asian countries. However, today's researches show the expected increase, in millions, of older travellers from Asian countries (Figure 2). Therefore there is clearly a high potential for increasing the number of travels undertaken by this segment of the market.



**Figure 2. Senior travellers from Asian countries**

*Source: UN Population Division, Frost and Sullivan estimates*

Seniors have time and are willing to spend it on traveling. It is commonly accepted that they are often healthier and wealthier than in previous generations. Nevertheless, there are also seniors with less purchasing power and seniors with health problems. In fact, seniors are rather a heterogeneous group of individuals with different needs and motivations. More significantly, seniors are more flexible in travel patterns and off-peak seasons offer advantages that appeal senior travellers, such as less congested facilities and lower prices (European Commission, 2014). The initiative “*Europe, the best destination for seniors*” proposes that senior tourism (European Commission, 2014):

- Encourage economic growth;
- Stimulate the creation of longer-lasting employment opportunities in the tourism sector, by making it possible to extend jobs beyond the respective peak seasons;
- Capitalise Europe as a safe and secure destination, where riskless free movement is a very important asset for seniors;
- Increase seniors’ wellbeing and quality of life;
- Enhance the European citizenship and common identity;
- Extend the tourism season in European countries.

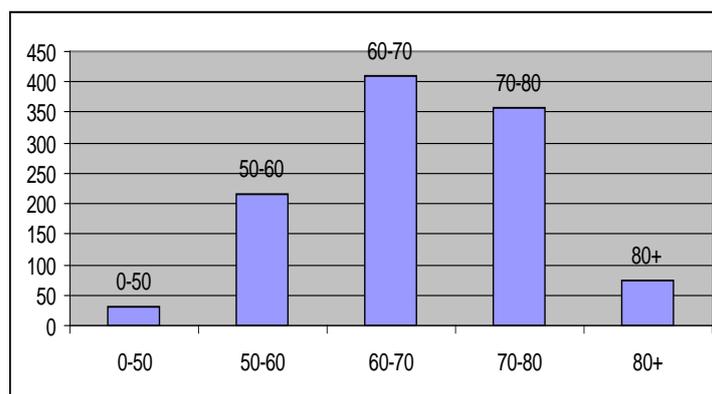
Europe shows the highest potential as source of senior travellers, due to the volume of its elderly population and the increasing penetration of travel among them. Hence, senior tourism offers a great opportunity to overcome the negative impacts of seasonality, so it is important to design measures for all different segments of senior tourists who compose this very heterogeneous market segment (European Commission, 2014).

The initiative “*Europe, the best destination for seniors*” is in line with the Communication “*Europe, the world's No 1 tourist destination a new political framework for tourism in Europe*” and *Europe Strategy 2020*. The senior initiative is a follow up of the *Calypso initiative* which clearly highlighted how senior tourism can contribute to combat seasonality, strengthening the notion of European citizenship and promoting a regional development.

### **Development potential of tourism for seniors in Serbia**

Among Serbian senior population there is a myth about them staying at home, having traditional lifestyle, usually sitting in front of their houses, watching the passers-by and taking care of their grandchildren, carefully spending what little money they have. Those seniors in Serbia who travel mostly take part in medical tourism choosing medical treatments in spa centres in Serbia. One of the main motives is health improvement or maintenance. Also, various associations for seniors organize trips throughout Serbia and mostly throughout Europe at an affordable price.

On the other hand, Serbia gained popularity in the past few years among senior foreign tourists. By far the most dominant form of tourism is river cruises that tend to fall into the category of “third age tourism” because the majority of travellers are senior citizens (Chart 1). This form of tourism is seasonal in nature, reaching its peak during the three warmest months but European river cruises have been the most-frequently booked luxury trip so far for 2013 according to a study by Travel Leaders Group, a consortium of travel agents.



**Chart 1. Average age on the Danube River cruises in 2013**

*Source: Quality Tours ApS*

The other form of tourism that has become very popular in Serbia among senior tourists is medical tourism. The reputation of quality physicians in top notch medical services brings to Serbia patients from overseas who seek a relaxed vacation plus surgery. The cost of living in Serbia is lower than in comparison to other countries, even neighbouring countries, the medical senior traveller can choose a five star vacation with a tight budget. Attractive prices of medical treatments in Serbia are also a factor of the medical traveller. Patients benefit from five star treatments at affordable prices. There are many cheap flights to Belgrade from neighbouring countries, UK, Canada and the US. Doctors and nurses are of a high standard and proficient in their field.

### **Conclusion**

It can be concluded that is necessary, for both the public authorities and the private sector, to design medium and long-term strategies to anticipate and react upon in the most competitive way. They should promote senior tourists' travels between European countries and Serbia and also from third countries to Europe and Serbia, in particular during the low and medium seasons. "Third age" tourists have both time and purchasing power so they hold a significant potential for the market of the tourist services during the whole year round.

### **Acknowledgement**

The publication of this scientific work was developed within the project "Improving the Competitiveness of Serbia in the Light of EU Accession Process", Ministry of

Science, Education and Technological Development, no. 47028, for the period year 2011-2014.

### **Reference**

1. Alén E., Domínguez T. & Losada N, New Opportunities for the Tourism Market: Senior Tourism and Accessible Tourism, 2012, New Opportunities for the Tourism Market: Senior Tourism and Accessible Tourism, Visions for Global Tourism Industry - Creating and Sustaining Competitive Strategies, Kasimoglu M. (Ed.), ISBN: 978-953-51-0520-6, pp. 140-166.
2. Regional Senior Tourism Marketing Strategy Research Qi Zhang and Lu Cui, Research Journal of Applied Sciences, Engineering and Technology 5(11): 3087-3091, 2013 ISSN: 2040-7459; e-ISSN: 2040-7467.
3. European Commission Enterprise and Industry Directorate - General Service Industries Tourism Policy “Europe, The Best Destination for Seniors”, “Facilitating Cooperation Mechanisms to Increase Senior Tourists’ Travels Within Europe and From Third Countries in The Low and Medium Seasons”, European Commission, 2014.
4. <http://www.europeseniortourism.es>, Europe senior tourism, 2014.
5. <http://ec.europa.eu>, European Commission, 2014.