

## THE FUTURE OF TOURISM REQUIRES AN ORIGIN: TRACES OF AN OLD CULTURAL POLICY IN VRNJAČKA BANJA

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### Abstract

*The future of tourism is seen today as a key force in the process of globalization. When learning about culture, the origin of the destination is also very important, and the story of the destination is interesting if it has the history of a given culture. This paper generates short-term indicators of the development of the municipality of Vrnjačka Banja as a spa town in the Republic of Serbia with the largest market share. Apart from the fact that tourism is characterized by a highly global character and mass, it also creates knowledge about culture by connecting different parts of the world. The findings indicate that the existing tourist attractiveness does not exceed the potential possibilities, and in that sense it would be necessary to develop future tourist flows for the development and valorization of cultural heritage in Vrnjacka Banja. The results offer important implications for the implementation of tourism policy in the future, both for policy makers and for all stakeholders.*

Key Words: *tourism, future, cultural tourism*

JEL classification: *Z10, Z32*

### Introduction

Vrnjačka Banja has valuable tourist resources characterized by the diversity and beauty of relief forms, a large number of healing springs with rich mineral waters, but also cultural and folklore wealth, as well as a favorable geographical position. Although it possesses all these values,

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cultural resources are not given a high value in relation to the standard it possesses. Data on the number of tourists in Vrnjačka Banja rank it among the first tourist destinations in the Republic of Serbia, and its attractiveness is only one of the elements that positively affects tourist destinations evaluation.

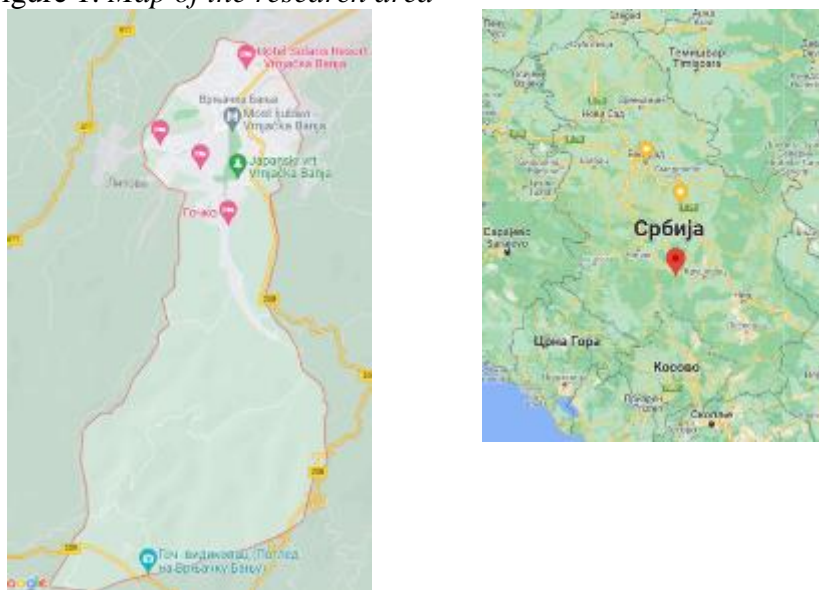
In order to increase its attendance, and especially to increase the number of days of tourists staying in the destination, it is necessary to constantly improve and diversify the tourist form, improve the quality of services and promote history and origin. Having that in mind, the tourist resource with high economic potential in this destination is precisely cultural tourism.

In view of the above considerations, the study in this paper shows the indicators of economic development of Vrnjačka Banja as a spa place with the highest number of overnight stays in the Republic of Serbia. The final part of the paper will emphasize the importance of cultural resources and cultural facilities that Vrnjačka Banja owns, all in the function of valorization of cultural tourism.

### **Study area**

The territory of Vrnjačka Banja covers a relatively small area that has been significantly anthropogenized throughout history. Vrnjačka Banja is one of the largest and most famous spas in Serbia and a tourist center for rest and recreation over 150 years old. It is located in Central Serbia, in the Raška district. It is 200 km away from the capital of the Republic of Serbia. It is connected with all parts of Serbia, good local roads, but also by road and rail road in the Balkans: Belgrade - Sofia and Belgrade - Athens (USAID, 2011).

In economic terms, the municipality can be classified as a relatively developed one in the Republic of Serbia. Spatially, the municipality of Vrnjačka Banja is classified in the group of smaller municipalities in Serbia. As for its territorial environment, it is in the immediate vicinity of the municipalities of Kraljevo, Trstenik, Kruševac and Aleksandrovac, with which it is very well connected in terms of infrastructure. It has its own bus station, and two airports are relatively close: Niš Airport is 83.32 km away (Airport Niš Constantine the Great) and Morava Airport is 35.59 km away ("Morava" Airport, Čačak City) (European Commission, 2021). The airport of the capital Belgrade is 250 km away from Vrnjačka Banja.

Figure 1: *Map of the research area*

Source: *Google maps, 2021, Vrnjačka Banja, modified by authors*

The basis of the economic development of the municipality of Vrnjačka Banja is tourism, the backbone of the past, present and future economic development of this municipality, on the basis of which other economic branches are developing. Today, the municipality operates in the field of agriculture, industry, manufacturing, construction, transport, trade, banking, education, health and other economic activities. Vrnjačka Banja participates in the creation of the national income of the Raška District with about 15% (Brčeski et al., 2010).

The relief of the municipality of Vrnjačka Banja is of a mixed plain and hilly-mountainous character. All settlements are located at an altitude of between 200 and 1100 meters. Among the high villages are Stanišinci and Goč, which stretch at an altitude of 450–1150 meters. The villages of medium height are Vukušica, Lipova, Rsavci and Otroci, which stretch on the northern slopes of the Goč mountain between 250 and 450 meters. Most settlements are low, below 350 meters. In addition to Vrnjačka Banja as the central part of the municipality, there are also villages of the broken type which are: Vraneši, Vrnjci, Novo Selo, Podunavci, Ruđinci and Štulac (Municipality of Vrnjačka Banja, 2012).

Due to the specifics of lush vegetation and terrain composition, the municipality has the characteristics of continental and temperate

continental climate (temperature amplitudes are not high, the dry period is short, and the rainy period is long on average). The average temperature during the year is 10.6 °C. The coldest month is January with an average temperature of 0.7°C, and the warmest month is August with an average temperature of 20.2°C. (Republic of Serbia, 2014, Meteorological Yearbook).

### Basic demographic characteristics of the research area

Investing in a country's population policy is crucial for the economic growth and development that provides more opportunities for both employment and improving employment policy. Investments in the tourism industry are important both for the development of tourism itself and for the development of other activities that are directly or indirectly affected by tourism. (Pantić & Milojević, 2019). Adequate capital investment in tourism has a multiplier effect on employment and the economy as a whole. Having in mind that Vrnjačka Banja as a municipality that is very dependent and related to tourism, the aspect of the population structure and the entire demographic policy of this place is also very important.

Table 1: *Comparative overview of the basic characteristics of the Municipality, Raška District and the Republic of Serbia, 2018*

	<b>Area (km<sup>2</sup>)</b>	<b>Percentage share</b>	<b>Number of inhabitants</b>	<b>Share (%)</b>	<b>Population density</b>
Vrnjačka Banja	239	0,27%	26 141	0,37%	109 ct/km <sup>2</sup>
Raška district	3923	4,43%	305 147	4,37%	78 ct/km <sup>2</sup>
Republic of Serbia	88.499	-	6 982 604	-	-

Source: *Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, (2020), Municipalities and regions - Publications, 2020.*, <https://www.stat.gov.rs/sr-cyrl/publikacije/publication/?p=12234>

The population structure of the municipality of Vrnjačka Banja has grown significantly in recent years, so that, according to estimates of population movements, Vrnjačka Banja has 26,141 inhabitants. (Republic of Serbia, 2011). However, if we look at the trend of population movement after 2011, according to the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia estimates, the number of inhabitants decreased from 27,535 in 2011, to 26,141 in 2018, or 5.1%. The question of the population decline in the entire Republic of

Serbia is raised, which was also reflected in Vrnjačka Banja. Bearing in mind that the population in the entire Republic of Serbia has fallen by nearly 4% since 2011, the problem of population decline should be seen as a national problem of the entire Republic of Serbia. It is necessary to find new institutional, systemic solutions for the decade-long problem of population decline.

Table 2: *Population in Vrnjačka Banja, Raška District and the Republic of Serbia*

	<b>Republic of Serbia</b>	<b>Raška district</b>	<b>Vrnjačka Banja</b>
2011	7236519	308927	27535
2012	7201497	308717	27329
2013	7166552	308386	27141
2014	7131787	308003	26948
2015	7095383	307408	26751
2016	7058322	306725	26544
2017	7020858	305954	26322
2018	6982604	305147	26141

Source: *Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, (2020), Municipalities and regions - Publications, 2020., <https://www.stat.gov.rs/sr-cyrl/publikacije/publication/?p=12234>*

The educational structure of the population in Vrnjačka Banja indicates that it is equally distributed, both within the participation in the Republic of Serbia and in the Raška District. Namely, all the mentioned structures of education in Vrnjačka Banja participate with about 0.40% of education in the entire Republic of Serbia. On the other hand, 13.6% is the largest share of education in the Raška district, which is occupied by the municipality of Vrnjačka Banja. Then follows the share in education of the Raška district of 10.7% which belongs to higher education and the share of 10.3% which

belongs to secondary education. However, the share of 7.3% of the population of Vrnjačka Banja in the Raška district is without schooling.

Table 3: *Population aged 15 and over, according to education, 2018*

	<b>Republic of Serbia</b>	<b>Raška district</b>	<b>Vrnjačka Banja</b>
Total	6161584	250198	23705
No schooling	164884	8971	654
Incomplete primary education	677499	25507	2525
Primary Education	1279116	67092	4831
High school	3015092	116842	12052
Higher education	348335	11258	1526
Faculty education	652234	18811	2004
Unknown	24424	1717	113

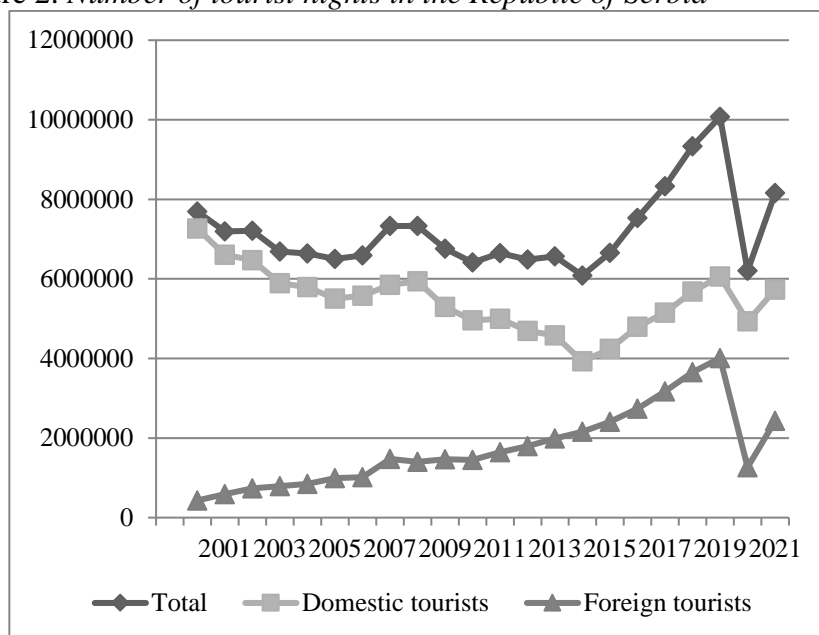
Source: *Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, (2020), Municipalities and regions - Publications, 2020., <https://www.stat.gov.rs/sr-cyrl/publikacije/publication/?p=12234>*

### **Tourists' visits in Vrnjačka Banja**

Figure 2 shows the number of overnight stays in the Republic of Serbia in the period from 2000 to 2021. It is evident that the number of overnight stays grew at an exponential rate until 2020, when overnight stays were declining everywhere in the world. Figure 2 shows the number of overnight stays in the Republic of Serbia in the total amount, the number of overnight stays of domestic tourists and the number of overnight stays of foreign tourists.

Vrnjačka Banja is a spa destination in Serbia that hosts the largest number of tourists, bearing in mind the development of tourism over 150 years old. In addition to natural beauty, this destination is popular for various aspects of tourism of special interest: health tourism, sports and recreational tourism, as well as event tourism.

Figure 2: *Number of tourist nights in the Republic of Serbia*



Source: *Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, (2022), <https://data.stat.gov.rs/?caller=2202&languageCode=sr-Latn>*

Table 4: *Tourist trends in Vrnjačka Banja*

Year	Number of visitors		Number of nights		No.beds
	total	foreign	total	foreign	
2019	283491	52604	907892	133686	5829
2018	247709	47366	818045	122874	4615
2017	213194	36992	701622	98343	4395
2016	202820	38823	677690	104296	4342

Source: *Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, (2020, 2019, 2018, 2017), Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Serbia, p. 358, p.350, p.352, p.386.*

Tourist trends in Vrnjačka Banja have been increasing at an exponential rate from year to year. If we compare only four years ago, from 2016-2019, there is an enormous growth in the number of tourists and the number of

overnight stays in Vrnjačka Banja. All observed numerical performances of tourist trends indicate the constant growth and development of the tourism sector. In addition, according to the structure of tourists, the share of foreign tourists has increased, as well as the number of beds.

Table 5: *Tourist trends in Vrnjačka Banja, Raška District and the Republic of Serbia, 2018*

		<b>Republic of Serbia</b>	<b>Raška district</b>	<b>Kraljevo city</b>	<b>Vrnjačka Banja</b>
Number of visitors	total	3430522	407857	25355	250621
	domestic	1720008	323881	18100	203255
	foreign	1710514	83976	7255	47366
Number of nights	total	9336103	1393515	79214	837486
	domestic	5678235	1152864	65103	714612
	foreign	3657868	240651	14111	122874
Average number of tourist nights	domestic	3.3	3.6	3.6	3.5
	foreign	2.1	2.9	1.9	2.6

Source: *Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, (2019), Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Serbia, p.350.*

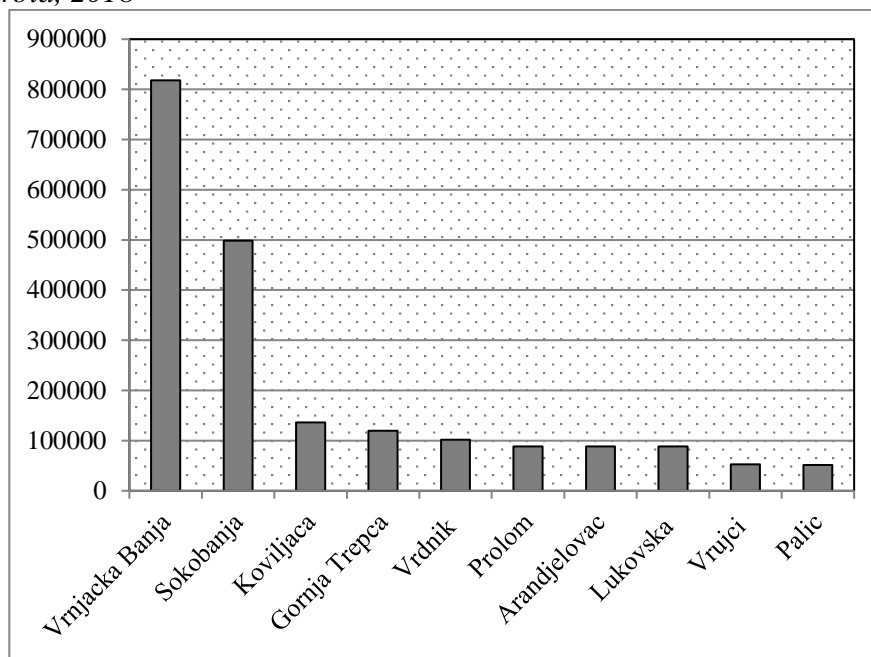
Even in the period of the pandemic, in 2020, Vrnjačka Banja recorded a total of 211,496 tourist arrivals, which puts it in second place in terms of the number of tourists, just behind Belgrade. Compared to 2019, which has been the most favorable for tourist movements so far, Vrnjačka Banja had only 283491 tourist arrivals. When it comes to the number of overnight stays, in 2019 the total number of tourist nights was 907892, while in the crisis of 2020 it was 698238.

Despite the pandemic, and thanks to domestic tourism, Vrnjačka Banja had a slight decline in tourist movements of 23%, when it comes to the number of tourist nights compared to other tourist destinations. It should be emphasized that the tourism sector is the most vulnerable in crisis situations and the negative consequences of any crisis are first manifested in the tertiary sector (Obradović et al., 2013). According to the data of the Republic Bureau of Statistics, the average number of nights spent by domestic tourists in Vrnjačka Banja is slightly declining: in 2017 it was



3.4, in 2018 it was 3.5, while in 2019 it was 3.4 and in 2020 3.3. The economic consequences of the decline in tourist traffic are multiplied, especially when it comes to foreign tourists (Pantić, 2017).

Figure 3: *Tourist nights in the first 10 spa tourist places in the Republic of Serbia, 2018*



Source: *Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, (2020), Municipalities and regions - Publications, 2020.*

### **Cultural and historic facilities of the Vrnjačka Banja**

In addition to natural resources (7 sources of mineral water) and natural resources such as climate, flora and fauna, Vrnjačka Banja is rich in cultural resources and cultural heritage resources. Cultural tourism is a part of the tourism industry where tourists learn about the local culture in the destination. Cultural tourism and the historical heritage of local culture have the potential both in the economic benefit of the hosts and in providing motivation to take care of their cultural heritage and to preserve and maintain it (Đorđević & Pantović, 2020).

Since the middle of the 19th century, Vrnjačka Banja has been working on the constant improvement of its central park. Vrnjačka Banja Park is decorated with various natural beauties, such as flowers, plants, narrow

winding paths, coniferous labyrinths, chestnut trees, plane trees, ponds, places for refreshment. In addition, this park is rich in sports fields, children's playgrounds, but also sculptures placed in the part of deserving personalities in the economic development of Vrnjačka Banja. The park also has an artificial rock and an adventure park as part of the adventure tourism offer.

In the central park of Vrnjačka Banja there is a park of Japanese culture, known as the Japanese Garden, which is a significant example of garden art in Serbia. The Japanese Garden was built in 2011 as a combination of natural and anthropogenic resources whose ultimate goal is to bring the culture of the two nations closer.

On the territory of the municipality of Vrnjačka Banja there are protected cultural and historical buildings, entities and localities, such as: Belimarković Castle, a cultural value of great importance for the Republic of Serbia; spatial cultural-historical whole of great importance Čajka hill (*Čajkino brdo*) with 49 buildings of protected old villas; in addition, 100 individually protected buildings; archeological sites from the prehistoric period, the Roman period, the Middle Ages to the Ottoman authorities (about 30 sites) (Milićević & Đorđević, 2020).

Figure 4: *Old villa Simić, Vrnjačka Banja*



Source: *Author's research*

Vrnjačka Banja also has its own Cultural Center, which includes a cinema, the Castle of Culture with a gallery and museum space and an open-air amphitheater with 1,500 seats. The Castle of Culture is known as the Belimarković Castle, which houses the Homeland Museum. Literary

evenings, exhibitions and permanent exhibitions of archeological material are organized in this castle.

Figure 5: *Belimarković Castle*



Source: *Author's research*

In the vicinity of Vrnjačka Banja, there are sites of cultural and historical heritage that are important for the history of the Serbian people. One of the most famous is the Neolithic immovable cultural heritage *Lađarište*. The site is located on a high river terrace on the right bank of the West Morava river in the village of Vrnjci (Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments, 2022). There are also famous historical and sacral buildings in the area in two directions (Jovanović-Tončev & Podovac, 2014):

- the first, from Vrnjačka Banja, Kraljevo and Novi Pazar known as the Ibar Royal Valley (monasteries Žiča, Studenica, Gradac, Sopoćani, Đurđevi stupovi, remains of medieval towns: Ras and Maglič) and
- others: through Goč, Župa and Kruševac known as sub-Kosovo Serbia (monasteries Lazarica, Veluča, Rudenica, Kalenić, Ljubostinja, as well as the remains of medieval towns of Prince Lazar Hrebeljanović, Koznik and Jerina's town).

In addition to the above, since 2015, Vrnjačka Banja has owned the Museum of Spa Treatment. As a contribution to the cultural and tourist offer of Vrnjačka Banja, a permanent exhibition of treatment has been opened in Vrnjačka Banja for 150 years. The museum has over 180

exhibits, photographs, documents and postcards with the continuous addition of museum material.

### Attractiveness of the cultural and tourist offer in Vrnjačka Banja

In order to assess the regional development of Vrnjačka Banja, the elements for measuring the tourist offer should be taken into account as the main factor, and that is most often the attractiveness index. The attractiveness index determines the factors on the basis of which the tourist offer of an area is defined and indicates the degree of attractiveness of the observed area. The mentioned index can be expressed by the following equation (Popescu & Grigorescu, 2007):

$$I = \sum_{i=1}^n q_i \times c_i(1)$$

where I = attractiveness index,

$q_i$  - participation of a specific component of the offer,

$c_i$  - quality of tourist offer,

$N$  - number of components of the tourist offer

The attractiveness index is shown in the table below.

Table 6: *Attractiveness index for Vrnjačka Banja*

		Share (q)	Resource quality (c)	q*c
Natural resources	Total 28%	28%	-	-
	<b>landscape</b>	5	1.67	0.08
	<b>climate</b>	5	2	0.1
	<b>therapeutical mineral waters</b>	16	2.67	0.43
	<b>forests</b>	2	2.33	0.05
Anthropic resources	Total 14%	14%	-	-
	<b>archaeological monuments</b>	2	1.33	0.03
	<b>history and art monuments, folk architecture monuments</b>	7	2.00	0.14

	<b>ethnography and folklore</b>	5	1.33	0.07
Economic and social environment		10%	2	0.2
Access ways		10%	3	0.3
Technical and material basis		20%	2	0.4
Tourism forms:	Total 18%	18%	-	-
	<b>spa tourism</b>	10	2.67	0.27
	<b>relaxation and rest</b>	4	3.00	0.12
	<b>cultural</b>	2	1.67	0.03
	<b>weekend</b>	2	3.00	0.06
<b>TOTAL</b>				2.28

Source: *Author's research*

According to the subjective assessment of the authors and several experts, the index of attractiveness in Vrnjačka Banja is 1.92. In assessing the quality of given resources, a scale from 1 to 3 was used. The value of resource quality  $c = 1$  indicates a low level of supply; the value of the parameter  $c = 2$  indicates the middle level of the offer while  $c = 3$  - indicates the high level of the offer.

### **Discussion and conclusion**

Cultural tourism is becoming an increasingly talked about industry. Cultural tourism is a process inherited from the past, a psychological experience and a process of learning and curiosity. Not only is it one of the leading branches of tourism of special interest, but cultural tourism also plays an important role in building and reconstructing identity for the sake of tourism spending. As the author Mousavi (2016) pointed out, Cultural tourism is not just consuming cultural products of the past; it also deals with the modern way of life and culture of the people.

Having in mind the importance of cultural tourism, it is clear that the strategy of further development of tourism in the Republic of Serbia should be based on cultural tourism. In addition to the above, the strategy for tourism development of the Republic of Serbia can be formed based on competitive advantage, sustainable tourism and knowledge-based tourism (Lakićević & Durkalić, 2018).

The market attractiveness and cultural features of Vrnjačka Banja have a high wealth; however, it is insufficiently used. Observing six features of attractiveness, such as: natural resources, anthropological resources, economic and social environment, access roads, technical and material bases and tourist forms, the authors come to the conclusion that it is necessary to act anthropologically and financially to strengthen tourist attractiveness. In addition to high potential and high natural and cultural wealth, further investments are needed in the reconstruction and revival of the offer of cultural tourism. It is also necessary to have a consistent tourist development plan for the municipality of Vrnjačka Banja for the next decade, where cultural tourism should be on a special ladder of development.

For the future development of tourism and research in this area, the importance of cultural tourism and the historical heritage of local culture is suggested, which has a high potential both in the economic benefit of the host and in providing motivation to preserve and maintain its cultural heritage. However, the key success for the future development of tourism is the cooperation of all stakeholders in the local community, from tour operators, property owners to policy makers.

Crises are expected in modern mass tourism in the future, as they have been in the past, but the fact is that tourism will not lose its value and that the population will travel more and more. It only takes some time to recover from the crisis. In the future, apart from mass crises, environmental, economic, political or health, the population will travel on an ever-increasing scale.

### **Acknowledgements**

This paper is a part of research project “Vrnjačka Banja villas as cultural heritage keepers”, financed and supported by the Center for Scientific Research of Serbian Academy of Science and Arts and the University of Kragujevac and within the research program of the Faculty of Hotel Management and Tourism in Vrnjačka Banja, University of Kragujevac, which is funded by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia.

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