

**ATTITUDES ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF USING STATE  
TOURIST VOUCHERS: A CASE STUDY OF VOJVODINA  
(NORTH SERBIAN PROVINCE)**

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**ABSTRACT**

Since 2014, the Serbian Government has been implementing the policy of issuing tourist vouchers as a form of incentive for the social tourism and increasing domestic tourism demand development, which has been in constant decline over the past decade. As a form of domestic tourism incentive, vouchers are used in many countries of the world, but also in countries in neighborhood (Romania, Hungary, Croatia, etc.). When it comes to the Republic of Serbia, clear criteria are provided for determining the part of the population in the total structure of the population, which has the right to use the given funds. In general, we are talking about pensioners, students, unemployed, employees with lower personal income and other sensitive social categories. The aim of the paper is to find out to what extent the inhabitants of Vojvodina are interested in using these funds for the tourist trips' realization in the country. The task is to identify the demographic parameters of potential tourist vouchers' users, as well as the place and method of their realization. The survey method was used for data collection, and t-test and ANOVA for determining respondents' attitudes towards travelling around Vojvodina depending on their sociodemographic characteristics.

**Keywords:** social tourism, vouchers, user structure, Republic of Serbia, Vojvodina.

**INTRODUCTION**

The idea of social tourism has its roots in the social democratic ideal of a just and fair society, where equality of access to leisure travel is promoted due to its advantages for both individuals and families [1]. Social tourism is defined as travel with a higher moral standard [2]. In developed societies, social tourism can be an effective tool for policymakers to work toward greater equality in fair access to full citizenship rights and social inclusion. It also offers the possibility of cost savings, as a happier and more equal society requires less social support, healthcare services, and other services. Last but not least, social tourism can be a highly effective growth driver for the domestic tourism industry, fostering greater sustainability and resilience in the industry. This is crucial in light of the current pandemic, which poses a serious threat to the tourism and hospitality sectors in many countries around the world [3]. The term "social tourism" has many definitions [2], but the most recent definitions emphasize that it refers to "all activities, relationships and phenomena in the field of tourism resulting from the inclusion of otherwise disadvantaged and excluded groups in participation in tourism. The inclusion

of these groups in tourism is made possible through financial or other interventions of a well-defined and social nature” [4]. In spite of the fact that there are three main social tourism implementation schemes that can be found across Europe, each nation frequently uses two or more combinations, illustrating the difficulties in comparing social tourism-related concerns. Holiday vouchers can be used to choose commercially operated tourist accommodations in some countries (such as Hungary and Romania), while in other countries (such as France), they can be used to gain access to socially operated tourist facilities [1]. Employees are given valuable tickets known as tourist vouchers to help them pay for their domestic travel-related expenses while on vacation [5]. Most frequently, a "voucher" is a piece of paper that entitles the owner to receive discounts [6]. It can also be redeemed for a good or service offered by a representative [7]. In general, social vouchers make it easier for some social groups to access specific services or goods [8]. The primary attributes of social vouchers include being governed by a legal framework, having a constrained geographic scope, being offered at the request of a private or public entity, providing access to specific service providers, being simple to use, and not being convertible into cash [9]. The purpose of the study is to determine the level of interest in using these funds to encourage tourism vacations in Vojvodina (Serbia) among locals. The assignment is to determine the demographic characteristics of possible tourist voucher users, as well as the location and mode of realization.

### **THE USE OF TOURIST VOUCHERS IN THE WORLD, IN THE EUROPEAN UNION AND IN THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA**

According to the Social Vouchers International Association [10], which was established in Belgium in 2017, social vouchers have been developed in 40 countries, 19 of which are EU countries, over the past 50 years and include the following categories: (1) food and meal vouchers, (2) personal and household services vouchers, (3) transport vouchers, (4) leisure vouchers, (5) childcare vouchers, (6) culture vouchers and (7) eco vouchers [9]. Four goals were pursued with this action: (1) promoting domestic tourism; (2) reducing seasonality; (3) addressing the high level of informality in this sector; and (4) lowering emigration to Western nations. In a nutshell, the goal of this legislation was to provide employers a choice that would enable them to improve the real income and welfare of their workers at a minimal additional financial expense. By providing these incentives, employers may be able to decrease employee churn, a significant issue for many businesses, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and boost employee enthusiasm and productivity [5]. The goal of leisure vouchers is to make it easier for citizens to use sporting and wellness facilities, as well as healthy living options [9]. In France, the "cheque vacances," a tool designed to make it easier for workers to use vacation days, and the founding of a national agency for chèques-vacances introduced the idea of vacation vouchers in 1982. The Czech Republic, France, Greece, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia are currently EU members that use vacation vouchers. More recently, the governments expanded the use of vouchers in response to the rapidly rising costs of essentials and energy by providing social vouchers to poor households so they could purchase staple foods, as well as to students so they could purchase food, school materials, and clothing [11]. As for the Republic of Serbia, vouchers have been in use since 2014 and their value is €45, while last year 2022 the value of vouchers was €120. About 200.000 citizens used this opportunity last year. And in the current year 2023, the Government of the Republic of Serbia, i.e. the Ministry of Tourism and Youth, continues

to support the development of domestic tourists and the inclusion of wider social strata in tourist trips, by subsidizing through vouchers the following social groups: pensioners, unemployed, beneficiaries of the right to allowance for assistance and care of others persons, employees with incomes that do not exceed 70,000 dinars per month (about €600), military invalids, holders of agricultural holdings, students and (for the first time) persons over 65 years of age who do not exercise the right to a pension [12]. Table 1. shows the tourist vouchers programs in some countries of Europe and the World during the pandemic year 2020.

**Table 1.** Tourism voucher schemes around the globe

Country/ city	Measure	Source
Shaoxing (China)	Distribution of coupons to over 1 million Alipay users.	[13]
Taiwan	Tourism vouchers for domestic tourists worth €100 at a cost of €33.3, the rest is subsidized	[14]
Ireland	“Stay and Spend” initiative: a government subsidy of €125 for €625 spent on accommodation, food and (non-alcoholic) beverages	[15]
Iceland	€34 for Icelandic residents aged over 18 years in order to spend it on domestic accommodations, travel related entertainment and food	[16]
Italy	“Holiday Bonus” worth up to €500 for lower-income households.	[16]
Poland	Tourism voucher worth €112 for children under the age of 18.	[17]
Slovenia	A €200 staycation voucher for residents aged over 18 years and a €50 voucher for residents younger than 18 years	[18]
Lithuania	Vouchers of up to €200 for domestic health workers	[16]
Vienna (Austria)	A €50 voucher for every family in Vienna to spend in local Viennese restaurants.	[19]
South Korea	Employees of small companies receive vacation bonuses from the government worth 25% of the total cost of stay	[16]
Thailand	A 50% subsidy for accommodation services for domestic travelers.	[20]

Source: created by the authors based on a literature review

## METHODOLOGY

This research was focused on exploring the attitudes of respondents of Republic of Serbia towards the use of touristic vouchers given by the Government of Serbia. The special focus was on their attitudes towards the use of vouchers for traveling in Vojvodina. For the purpose of the research, the questionnaire was created. The first part of the questionnaire consisted of questions related to sociodemographic characteristics of respondents and their travel habits. The questions from the second part of the questionnaire were dedicated to familiarization with social tourism and the use of tourist vouchers for traveling in AP Vojvodina. The respondents use five-point Likert scale for expressing their level of agreement with items towards traveling around Vojvodina (1 – totally disagree, 5 - totally agree).

## RESULTS

### Sample description

The research was conducted from October 2022 to January 2023 and it was carried out on the territory of the Republic of Serbia. The target group consisted of respondents who have the right to use the voucher, namely: pensioners, pupils, students, unemployed people, beneficiaries of special cash benefits and temporary benefits, beneficiaries of the right to an allowance for assistance and care for another person, and all workers whose salary does not exceed 70,000 RSD. The total number of respondents was 252 and 143 (56,7%) were females. The most of respondents belong to age category up to 25 (104, 41,3%) and have completed high school (152, 60,3%). The most of them are married (99, 39,3%), followed by single respondents (72, 28,6%). When it comes to employment status, the most of respondents are employed (117, 46,4%), followed by students (75, 29,8%). Since most of the respondents are under 25 years of age, and a large number of them are still students, it is not surprising that the majority of respondents have low incomes, i.e., up to 38,000 RSD (111, 44%). By using crosstabulation analysis it was determined that the most of respondents who earn less than 38.000 RSD are students (55%) followed by unemployed (17,1%) and pensioners (14,4%).

**Table 2.** Characteristics of respondents

Characteristics of respondents	Frequency	Characteristics of respondents	Frequency
<b>Gender</b>		<b>Employment status</b>	
Male	109	Student	75
Female	143	Employed	117
<b>Age</b>		Unemployed	29
Up to 25	104	Retired	31
25 – 35	44	<b>Income</b>	
36 – 45	33	Less than 38.000 RSD	111
46 – 55	34	38.001 – 50.000 RSD	83
Over 55	37	50.001 – 70.000 RSD	58
<b>Education level</b>		<b>Frequency of traveling</b>	
Primary school	7	Never	7
High school	152	Rare	71
College	28	Sometimes	125
Bachelor's degree	54	Often	49
Master's degree	8	<b>Are you familiar with social tourism?</b>	
PhD	3	Yes	90
<b>Marital status</b>		No	81
Single	72	I am not sure	81
In a relationship	56	<b>Are you familiar with the offer of social tourism?</b>	
Married	99	Yes	55
Divorced	15	No	124
Widowed	10	I am not sure	73

Source: results of research

Students' sources of funding are scholarships and loans, while some unemployed people have a certain compensation from the state, which explains the low incomes. Regarding the frequency of traveling, most of them answered that they travel sometimes (125,

49,6%). Respondents were also asked about their familiarity with social tourism and the offer of social tourism. The majority of respondents are not familiar with social tourism (81, 32,1%) or are not sure what it is (81, 32,1%). Regarding offer of social tourism, the most of them are not familiar with offer of social tourism (124, 49,2%). Characteristics of respondents are shown in Table 2. Table 3. shows the results of descriptive statistical analysis. The item that got the highest score is “I will use vouchers for traveling around AP Vojvodina in the future” (3.39), while the item with the lowest score is “I am familiar with the offer of accommodation in AP Vojvodina that accepts vouchers” (1.75). Low scores of first two items indicate that people are not very familiar with the offer and variety of accommodation in AP Vojvodina, which is an aspect that needs to be improved.

**Table 3.** Results of descriptive statistical analysis

Item	Arithmetic mean	Std. Deviation
I am familiar with the offer of accommodation in AP Vojvodina that accepts vouchers.	1.75	1.04433
I believe that the offer of accommodation in AP Vojvodina that accept vouchers is diverse.	2.30	1.21590
I am interested in using vouchers for traveling around Vojvodina.	3.29	1.48333
I will use vouchers for traveling around AP Vojvodina in the future.	3.39	1.26765

Source: Authors' research

### T-test according to gender

In Table 4. are presented results of t-test according to gender. The findings showed that women express statistically significant higher intention to use vouchers for traveling around Vojvodina than men ( $t=-3.326$ ,  $p=0.001$ ).

**Table 4.** T-test according to gender

Items	Male	Female	t	p
I am familiar with the offer of accommodation in AP Vojvodina that accepts vouchers.	1.71	1.78	-0.525	0.600
I believe that the offer of accommodation in AP Vojvodina that accept vouchers is diverse.	2.22	2.36	-0.928	0.354
I am interested in using vouchers for traveling around Vojvodina.	3.03	3.49	0.190	0.016
I will use vouchers for traveling around AP Vojvodina in the future.	3.09	3.62	-3.326	0.001*

Source: results of research, \* $p<0.005$

### ANOVA according to age, education level, marital status, income level and frequency of traveling

Analysis of variance ANOVA was conducted to determine if characteristics of respondents (such as gender, age, education level, marital status, income level and frequency of traveling) have effects on their attitudes towards traveling around Vojvodina. Age of respondents was the first tester parameter. The results mainly showed that there are no differences in attitudes of respondents according to their age. Differences in attitudes were found only for the item “I am interested in using vouchers for traveling around Vojvodina”. In order to determine between which groups the answers differ, LSD post-hoc was applied. The results showed that respondents from age group “26-35” expressed statistically significant higher interest for traveling around Vojvodina than respondents from age group “Over 55”.

**Table 5.** ANOVA according to age

Items	Age groups					F	P	LSD
	Up to 25	26-35	36-45	46-55	Over 55			
I am familiar with the offer of accommodation in AP Vojvodina that accepts vouchers.	1.75	1.82	1.94	1.47	1.73	0.928	0.448	-
I believe that the offer of accommodation in AP Vojvodina that accept vouchers is diverse.	2.37	2.23	2.30	2.15	2.35	0.262	0.902	-
I am interested in using vouchers for traveling around Vojvodina.	3.46	3.23	2.91	3.74	2.84	2.601	0.037*	1>5
I will use vouchers for traveling around AP Vojvodina in the future.	3.51	3.33	3.52	3.21	3.19	.0748	0.560	-

Source: results of research, \*p>0.05

When it comes to educational level, it was found that there are statistically significant differences in attitudes towards item “I am familiar with the offer of accommodation in AP Vojvodina that accepts vouchers”. LSD-post hoc test showed that respondents with completed only high school express lower knowledge about accommodation offer in Vojvodina than respondents with college and master diploma. The results of analysis are presented in Table 6.

**Table 6.** ANOVA according to educational level

Items	Educational level						F	P	LSD
	Primary school	High school	College	Bachelor	Master	PhD			
I am familiar with the offer of accommodation in AP Vojvodina that accepts vouchers.	1.86	1.65	2.11	1.63	2.88	2.00	3.099	0.010*	2<3,5
I believe that the offer of accommodation in AP Vojvodina that accept vouchers is diverse.	2.29	2.20	2.29	3.12	3.00	2.30	1.248	0.287	-
I am interested in using vouchers for traveling around Vojvodina.	3.00	3.35	3.04	3.17	4.00	4.00	0.841	0.521	-
I will use vouchers for traveling around AP Vojvodina in the future.	3.43	3.55	2.81	3.22	3.63	3.00	1.909	0.093	-

Source: results of research, \*p>0.05

The results of analysis of variance ANOVA showed that there are no statistically notable differences in attitudes of respondents towards travelling around AP Vojvodina according

to their marital status, income level and frequency of travelling, therefore, the results are not shown in a table.

## CONCLUSION

Social tourism is a very important concept for the reason that it enables various social groups to get involved in tourist trips. According to research, socially excluded people benefit significantly from tourism involvement, and social tourism can result in a variety of positive effects for social tourists, social and welfare policies, and society. For example, for low-income families, social tourism provides opportunities for repairing and building relationships [21]. For older people, social tourism can improve their social opportunities. Children can benefit from learning and experiences [22], while people with disabilities can get opportunities to improve their health and get access to opportunities [23]. That is why social tourism is tied to the concept of “Tourism for all”.

This study was focused on examining the attitudes towards using vouchers for traveling around Vojvodina. The results of this study showed the level of the familiarity of the population of Serbia with the concept of social tourism, that is, the use of tourist vouchers. What can be concluded from the obtained results is that the respondents are not sufficiently familiar with the concept of vouchers for traveling around Serbia. Given that the emphasis of this research was on trips around Vojvodina using vouchers, the respondents' attitudes were investigated depending on their socio-demographic characteristics. Descriptive statistical analysis showed that there is interest in traveling around Vojvodina to a certain extent, while the t-test indicated that women expressed a higher degree of interest than men. It can be explained by the fact that literature recognized gender disparities when it comes to traveling. In previous research it was determined that women travel short distances compared to men (e.g. [24]; [25]). Since trips in Vojvodina involve a shorter stay, this can determine the fact that women are more interested than men in this type of travel. Also, it was determined that women generally travel differently than men do in terms of destinations visited, travel objectives, travel distance and method of transportation ([26]; [27]; [28]; [24]). The roles that men and women play in society, which result in differing activity patterns, have been a major factor in explaining these discrepancies. In particular, the division of home responsibilities and labor market dynamics, as males typically travel farther to their jobs than women. Women are more likely to have local part-time jobs near to their homes and tend to have paid employment opportunities that are geographically limited ([29]; [30]). Since traveling around Vojvodina does not require a lot of time, a potential explanation for the obtained results can be found in this, i.e. greater interest of women in traveling around Vojvodina. Age itself, as well as variations in socioeconomic and demographic traits, are the main factors that differentiate older people from younger [31]. This study showed higher interest among young people (up to 25) to travel around Vojvodina compared to older people. The great number of respondents from the age group “up to 25” are students, and due to their low income, they are often limited in choosing the destination for travel. Vouchers are a good opportunity for them to travel a little, which makes them more interested in traveling than others. When it comes to educational level, it was found that respondents with completed high school are less familiar with the offer of accommodation of social tourism than those who have a higher education level.

The results obtained in this research gave an insight into the awareness of citizens of Serbia about the concept of travel using vouchers. Due to the small sample, it is not possible to draw general conclusions about the sociodemographic characteristics of the

respondents who would travel to Vojvodina. Thanks to the obtained results, it can be seen that the opportunities for travel and accommodation in Vojvodina are insufficiently promoted, so this is an aspect that should be worked on in the future. A recommendation for future research is to expand the sample, in order to better understand who are the potential users of vouchers for travel in Vojvodina, their gender, age, work status, and the like. Based on this, special offers could be made that would correspond to each market segment, and in this way travel around Vojvodina would be promoted.

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