



## Analysis of the labour force composition on cruisers: The Danube through Central and Southeast Europe



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### ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to contribute to the knowledge of the river cruise labour structure. It presents the crew demographics and structure on-board the cruisers along Danube throughout Central and South Eastern Europe. Its goal is to answer the following questions: What are the gender and ages of the ships' crews? Are they structured according to the country of origin? Is there interdependence between the employment rank of the crew members and the degree of the economic development of the country they come from?

The data has been collected from the manifests of the cruise vessels which docked in Serbia over the 9 month research period during the 2007 cruise season. Firstly, data from the 2218 employees on-board the 54 cruisers was collected. Secondly, in-depth interviews with a small sample of cruisers officers, staff and crews (2007–2010) were conducted. The findings of the study have several theoretical and practical implications. Namely, previous related studies have been mainly focused on the ocean cruisers and neglect the rising importance of the river cruisers, especially for the European region. The study also discusses the possibilities for improvement of the human resources management and strategic development management of the European countries, which already have and those which have not yet positioned themselves on the river cruising market.

Finally, key demographic employment data and characteristics (e.g. gender, average age, occupational groups, etc.) are important factors to consider when conducting a comprehensive labour force analysis, for they provide the organization a chance to build on its strengths and to minimize challenges and risks.

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### 1. Introduction

Ocean cruises are one of the leading areas of international tourism, regarding the speed of development and the increase in demand – tourist turnover (CLIA, 1992, 1995; Hobson and Perry, 1993). In 2000, there were about 9.6 million tourists cruising the world (Dowling, 2006), in 2004 about 14.3 million, and in 2006 about 16 million registered tourists. In 2013, the worldwide cruise market is estimated at \$36.2 billion, up 4.8% from 2012; cruise passengers carried worldwide in 2013 is predicted to come at 20.9

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million, a 3.3% increase over 2012; the top two cruise companies are Carnival Corporation and Royal Caribbean Cruises Ltd. Co. (they account for 71.7% of worldwide share of revenue); total worldwide cruise capacity at the end of 2013 will be 438,595 passengers (3% increase over 2012) and 283 ships (Cruise Market Watch, 2013).

However, as it is estimated that the Caribbean region is becoming saturated, cruise companies are looking for new opportunities – relocation of their ships to the European market. Such trend is expected in the Asian market as well (CLIA, 2006). In 2003, river cruisers reached an overall number of 1.3 million tourists. The Danube became a significant tourist spot, which is evident from the fact that in 2003, 392,766 tourists were cruising along that river (MHCEF, 2005). This tendency is the result of the high standard of living of the population in the certain countries (Northern, Western and Central Europe and the USA), greater competition between the ships with lower prices of tourist services (e.g. ships from Russia, Ukraine, and Bulgaria), greater segmentation of the tourist demand and supply aiming to discover new tourist

activities, tourists' feeling that this is a safer way of travelling, etc. (Dragin et al., 2006). Over the past 5 years (starting from 2008), river cruises recorded 10% of annual increase in the number of passengers while the cruise industry as a whole experienced an average growth of about 7% per year. According to the company Cruise Travel Outlet (2012), river cruise lines currently face a problem to keep up with the demand. Namely, the majority of the companies had already booked in advance all the available river cruising places for the next 2014 cruising season (Cruise Travel Outlet, 2012).

The affirmation of this topic was encouraged by numerous facts that refer to unquestionably multi-effective impact that international cruises have upon receptive countries. It consists of the following: activation of tourist offer in receptive areas and spreading of the positive image, development of different economic activities, employment possibilities in different sectors, creation of favourable atmosphere for domestic and foreign investors, effects of regional tourist integration along Danube, cultural integration of nations, etc. This means that cruise tourism can function as a strong impetus for reviving Danube regions, which went through the process of social, political and economic transition in the last two decades.

Despite the rising popularity and the importance of the river cruises for the European tourism market, insufficient academic attention is given to the research of specific organizational structure and composition of the labour force employed on the river cruisers in the European region. Additionally, there is also a lack of official European statistical reports of the structure and demographic composition of the labour employed on the river cruisers which presents the core information for human resource management and strategic development of the river cruisers in the region. Key demographic employment data and characteristics (e.g. gender, average age, occupational groups, etc.) are important factors to consider when conducting a comprehensive labour force analysis for the organization, to build on its strengths and to minimize challenges and risks (for example systematizing and controlling the cost of transactional work). Moreover, a structural demographic analysis of the labour force would enable identifying more homogenous groups of labour force for the analytical purposes and comparison of demographic statistics over time and between countries.

Therefore, the main aim of the research is to answer the following questions: what is the gender and age structure of the ship crew and their structure according to the country of origin and is there interdependence between the employment rank of the crew members and the degree of the economic development of the country they come from? During the course of the first phase of research, three hypotheses appeared. One was that the ship crew originates mainly from the Danube countries (which are the countries of the itinerary) and from countries of the cruise company headquarters (USA, Germany, France, Denmark). The second hypothesis was that the lower positions in the job hierarchy are mostly held by the workforce from the countries with a lower life standard, while higher positions (which usually mean higher salary) are occupied by employees from developed countries, mainly from Western Europe and the USA. Finally, the third hypothesis was that employees will be mostly men with the average age between 20 and 40.

Central and Southeast European region was selected for the analysis because it is affected by the current cruising trends. Namely, Danube is a waterway characterized by an impressive tourist interest of global extent and it is the most visited river in the world as a cruise destination. Due to this, Serbia, as well as the other countries along Danube river, has become more significant tourist destination for the river cruisers in the last few years.

## 2. Literature review

Previous publications that deal with the ocean cruises put a focus on the economically and sociologically related problems. Foster (1986) wrote first sociological papers on ocean cruises. He was interested in the phenomenon of "short-lived society" of passengers, but was equally interested in long-term society of the workers. More recently, publications focus on the investigation of different factors that influence decision making process and choice of cruising company such as loyalty (Li and Petrick, 2008; Petrick and Sirakaya, 2004), price sensitivity (Petrick, 2005), service quality, value and satisfaction of cruisers (e.g. Armenski et al., 2009; Duman and Mattila, 2005; Gabe et al., 2006; Jaakson, 2004; Petrick, 2003, 2004) or segmentation of the cruise passengers based on their perceptions of a cruise line's reputation (Petrick, 2011). The economic impact and benefits of the cruising tourism have been researched by a large number of authors (Braun et al., 2002; Brida and Aguire, 2008; Chase and Alon, 2002; Dragin et al., 2006, 2007, 2008, 2010; Dwyer and Forsyth, 1996, 1998; Mescon and Vosikis, 1985; Foster, 1986; Hall and Braithwaite, 1990; Hobson and Perry, 1993; Henthorne, 2000; Ivkov et al., 2007; Larsen et al., 2013; Veronneau and Roy, 2009). Dwyer and Forsyth (1998) developed a framework for assessing the economic impacts of cruise tourism for a nation and its sub-regions (impacts and net benefits). Other group of authors investigated the cruise passengers' expenditures while visiting the harbours (Larsen et al., 2013).

However, there are no available studies that cover the cruises along European receptive areas, especially on a river. Moreover, almost all published researches that deal with the cruising treat tourists as their main object of interest (Armenski et al., 2009; Chase and Alon, 2002; Dowling, 2006; Dragin et al., 2008, 2009; Field et al., 1985; Gabe et al., 2006; Hung and Petrick, 2010, 2011; Li, 2006; Petrick, 2004; Petrick and Sirakaya, 2004), while little academic attention is given to the crew (Chin, 2008; Dragin, 2008, 2010; Dragin et al., 2009; Gibson, 2006, 2008; Hwanga and Hanb, 2014; Prager, 1997; Robbins, 2009; Weaver, 2005a; Wood, 2000).

Considering the demographic profile of tourists on cruises, most of the participants are married couples, especially generations born after World War II (*baby boomers*) (CLIA, 2004), with stable and permanently established travel habits and are more experienced, wealthier and more educated clientele (CLIA, 2007; Li, 2006; Hung and Petrick, 2010). Their tourist needs need to be fulfilled in every qualitative sense, i.e. employees must possess socio-cultural skills that underpin customer service relationships or interpersonal communications (Gibson, 2008). Also, the level of employee motivation is a critical factor of companies' success (Sehkar and Sevcikova, 2011). This is very important, considering the fact that the levels of contact between guest and servers are more prolonged on cruises and the opportunity for interaction can be considerably greater than in a hotel or some other on shore resorts. More than in any other form of tourism, cruising makes tourists identify their temporary accommodation – ship cabin as their home and other passengers as their neighbours.

### 2.1. The structure of the employees in the tourism sector

The Eurostat (2008) discusses the contribution made by the tourism industry to the labour market in the European Union and studies the pattern of employment in the hotels, restaurants and catering sector (HORECA) and tourist accommodation in particular. It is reported that these sectors employ a large number of female workers and young workers under 35 years of age and offer mainly temporary jobs. In 2007, more than 9 million persons were

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