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## The Importance of Congress Tourism for Regional Development

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### Anotace

Kongresová turistika je jedním z nejrychleji se rozvíjejícím a nejvíce ziskovým odvětvím cestovního ruchu v dnešní době. Tento dokument vytvoří kvalitativní a kvantitativní analýzu tohoto odvětví v Bulharsku a v České republice na základě provedeného pozorování a získaných dat ze spolehlivých zdrojů na národní a mezinárodní úrovni. Obecně lze konstatovat, že tendence rostoucího počtu setkání - kongresy, konference – lze získat v obou zemích a mnohem vyšší hodnoty jsou pro Českou republiku, v porovnání s Bulharskem. Vyrovnání se v obou zemích pro následujících 5-10 let neočekává. Při současné ekonomické situaci lze očekávat v obou zemích stagnaci na současném stavu. Rozvoj kongresové turistiky významně ovlivňuje také kvalita website ve sledovaných zemích. Stav kongresové turistiky v České republice je ovlivněn také poskytovanými informacemi na website.

### Klíčová slova

Kongresová turistika, porovnání, Bulharsko, Česká republika, počet setkání, kvalita website.

### Abstract

Congress tourism is one of the fastest developing and most profitable industries in the tourism sector nowadays. This document creates a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the sector in Bulgaria and the Czech Republic on the basis of observations and data obtained from reliable sources at national and international level. In general, the tendency of increasing the number of meetings - congresses, conferences - can be obtained in both countries and much higher values for the Czech Republic in comparison with Bulgaria. Equalization in both countries for the next 5-10 years is not expected. Under the current economic situation it can be expected to remain in the state of stagnation in both countries. Development of congress tourism significantly affects the quality of website in the countries. Status of congress tourism in the Czech Republic is also influenced by the information provided on the website.

### Key words

Congress tourism, comparison, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, number of meetings, quality website.

### Introduction

Congress tourism is one of the fastest developing and most profitable industries in the tourism sector nowadays. According to the statistics of the World Tourism Organization (WTO) the share of congress tourism represents 10-12% of the overall number of business trips, whilst the research on behalf of the Meetings and Conventions Magazine 2003 states that congress industry only generates about 16 billion dollars attracting 12.5 million people (Ford, Pepeer, 2007). For the last few years a tendency of increasing the intensity of congress tourism

within member countries of the European Union (EU) has also been observed. The considerably higher revenues attracted by this sector determines its priority on national and international scale. This is mainly due to the high budgets which corporate and other well-off clients spend on business meeting attendances. This paper focuses on the particular development of the sector in Bulgaria and the Czech Republic as two comparable examples following the same rising trend. The aim of this work is to present comparative characteristics for both countries based on analysis of data from national and global sources, to compare the websites of both countries

presenting congress tourism, to assess their quality and possibilities for expanding the influence of congress tourism in regional development in both countries.

Tracing back the process of congress tourism development as far as 2007, when Bulgaria became a member of the EU, the data for both countries show similar characteristics. The approaches used in this study are the qualitative and quantitative approaches. The analysis is based on thorough observations and statistics taken from reliable sources such as the Institute of Analysis and Assessment in Tourism (Bulgaria), the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA), the Czech Statistical Office (CZSO). Additional data are obtained via information bulletins, revues of relevant papers, articles and web sites. It will also compare the quality of the websites that attract congress tourism in both countries. Social program will be used for conferences with a view to intensifying the region's competitiveness, improve its image, increase tourism and more. The development of congress tourism and its impact on regional development mainly describes Oppermann.

„Web interface, transaction services, security, administration and personalisation - tools of his kind belong to the so-called portal core services. The aim of which is to ensure correct access to other services in the required quality and according to these of individual users“ writes Havlíček. Štědroň characterized by then for disclosure of information for the development of individual regions also associated with the development of tourism. Problems connected with congress tourism, congress tourism website evaluation and rural development are also discussed in the works of Hennyeyová, Brožová, Zalatev. „The creation, operation and mainten and information system destination depends primarily on formation needs and demands of users who use the system. The creation and mainten and CEO use information strategy that represents a functional strategy destination“ writes Palatková.

## **Material and methods**

The methods of deduction and comparative analysis have been used aiming at the formulation of models appraising congress tourism competitiveness. To assess the quality of a website will be used indicators of search sites, web accessibility and user interface (intuitiveness, graphics).

The main objective of the present paper is to analyze congress tourism potential in the targeted countries. The integration of common problems and their solving will lead to improving the present state of the sector in question. On the other hand, this study will spread already existing information and insure its wider circulation among stakeholders.

The geographical situation of Bulgaria being the only European Balkan country bordering the Black sea to the east and the Danube River to the North, defines its strategic position in the region and contributes to the development of tourism as a whole. Moreover, the financial aspect for both conference events organizers and attendees is quite appealing because of the lower package rates compared to those of West European countries.

The congress tourism in Bulgaria has been developing in modern venues which foster its successful realization on the Bulgarian market. The great number of expo and congress centers adds a lot to this issue, so do the conference halls, expo initiatives and festivals.

Exhibitions and events with international participation take place annually. Among these the following can be mentioned: “Banks, Investments and Money”, “Agriculture and Everything about It”, “Protection and Security”, The “Eneco” Energy and Ecology Expo, “World of Furniture”, the Plovdiv International Technical Fair, “Aquatex” – Technology and Water Management Expo, “Eltex” – Electronics and Electro-technology, “Infotex” – Informational Technology, “Web Expo”, etc.

At the same time the Czech Republic enjoys the major advantage of its ideal position in the heart of Europe. The country is aware of the importance of congress industry; it is one of the most dynamically developing economic activities worldwide. Dozens of international flights are scheduled to Prague every day, and the capital city has also become a major destination for budget airlines. Coming to the Czech Republic is fast, inexpensive and convenient. Modern hotels have been built, offering a wide range of conference facilities and modern service facilities. The Prague Congress Centre has been extensively modernized, and the international airport has also been expanded and has extended its services.

Compared to the annual events taking place in Bulgaria, the most significant events defining the Czech Republic as one of the top congress destinations in Europe are: the Annual Meeting

of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank in September 2000, the NATO Summit held in autumn 2002, the meeting of the International Olympic Committee in June and July 2003, the Microsoft Security Summit in 2004, the 16<sup>th</sup> Annual Euro Meeting of the Drug Information Association held in March 2004, or the 14<sup>th</sup> European Congress of Clinical Microbiology and Infectious Diseases.

## Results and discussion

### Analysis based on national databases

As presented in Table 1, a total number of 11850 events related to congress and conference tourism were held in 2011 in Bulgaria, which forms a growth of 13% compared to 2010. It is expected that the number of events for 2012 should be 11604 which makes a decrease of about 2% compared to 2011. Table 1 reveals that the number of events was highest for 2009. This was due to the fact that parliament elections took place in Bulgaria in that year. The data for 2009 and 2010 presenting the number of conferences have a striking difference – while the number of events for 2009 was 2340, that for 2010 was 105. Another reason for the peak figures for 2009 was the sustenance of the PHARE Program for Bulgaria along with 12 other EU Programs related to regional conferences on competitiveness, etc.

Table 2 presents the number of meetings and participants in conferences held in the Czech Republic for the same period of time. The data has

been taken from the Czech Statistical Office. There is an obvious tendency of increasing the number of conferences – from 2831/2008 to 10601/2011. The numbers show an approximate 3,7-fold increase.

After comparing the data from tables 1 and 2 a conclusion has been drawn that for the past 4 years there has been a strong tendency for increasing the number of conferences. At the same time it has to be considered that the figures for 2008 and 2009 for Bulgaria do not represent the realistic situation for reasons mentioned before.

The analysis of the number of conferences for both countries for 2010 and 2011 shows a similar up-growing trend. For Bulgaria the figure for 2011 is 70,5% higher than that for 2010. While for the Czech Republic the increase for the same period equals to 4,5%. The great difference of the level in the development of congress tourism in the Czech Republic and Bulgaria is due to the fact that the Czech sector is already highly developed while Bulgarian congress tourism is still paving its way and it is done at a higher speed.

Table 3 refers to the number of participants for Bulgaria in 2011. Their number varies according to the nature of the event. The table represents the total number of participants in the presented events along with detailed average number of participants in each event.

The comparison of figures in tables 2 and 3 referring to the average number of participants in conferences for 2011 shows that for the Czech Republic it is

Event	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012*
Congresses	158	296	147	195	148
Conferences	1,230	2,340	105	179	128
Forums	26	34	29	41	39
Seminars	3,240	3,508	3,720	4201	4,232
Panels	33	42	124	232	252
Institutions	317	347	402	433	524
Exhibitions	2,240	1,890	2,145	2750	2,340
Halls	9	12	15	15	15
Fairs	17	11	14	16	17
Exchange	12	10	7	7	12
Meetings	3,860	3,440	3,560	3780	3,897
Total	11,142	11,930	10,268	11,850	11,604

Source: Data from Institute of Analysis and Assessment in Tourism

\* Expected

Table 1: Number of congress and conferment events in Bulgaria 2008-2012.

Year	Number of conferences	Number of participants
2008	2831	761,901
2009	9411	1,192,909
2010	10,146	1,295,287
2011	10,601	1,350,459

Source: Data from the Czech Statistical Office

Table 2: Number of meetings and participants in the Czech Republic 2008-2011.

Event	Total Number of participants	Avarage number of participants
Congresses	17,750	119
Conferences	8,448	66
Forums	1,755	45
Seminars	50,784	12
Panels	14,112	56
Institutions	39,824	76
Exhibitions	84,240	36
Halls	480	32
Fairs	1,717	101
Exchange	276	23
Meetings	300,069	77
Total	519,455	-

Source: Data from Institute of Analysis and Assessment in Tourism

Table 3: Number of participants in 2011.

127 while for Bulgaria it amounts to 66. Some of the main reasons for these results are the following:

- Conferences in the Czech Republic are on grater scale (more participants per event);
- The Czech conference centers as a whole have had a longer tradition and are more popular among organizers and participants;
- Fewer Bulgarian conference centers may host a great number of participants.

#### Analysis based on the International Congress and Convention Association

In accordance with ICCA's data base for the period 2000-2009, Bulgaria occupies the 70<sup>th</sup> position in the World Ranking for number of meetings. Fluctuation of meetings number is observed through the years whilst the number of participants for 2009 decreases sharply. This tendency is not surprising for the fact that most European countries also show the same trend (Spain, UK, Belgium, Portugal, the Czech Republic, etc.). According to ICCA, the latter can be partially explained

with a decrease of popularity of European destinations for holding meetings and congresses and increase of interest towards venues in Asia, Africa and South America.

In 2010 and 2011 there is an increase as refers to the number of meetings for Bulgaria although it is ranked 7 positions lower in the World Ranking – from position 60<sup>th</sup> to 67<sup>th</sup>. The European Ranking reports the same tendency for Bulgaria during the last couple of years but this time it is only one position lower – from position 30<sup>th</sup> (2010) to position 31<sup>st</sup> (2011).

The same analysis for the Czech Republic shows that the country occupies 28<sup>th</sup> position in the World Ranking for the period 2000-2009. The year with highest number of meetings held is 2006 – 119<sup>th</sup>. On European level, the Czech Republic ranks 18<sup>th</sup> for 2010 and 30<sup>th</sup> on world level. The situation is slightly changed for 2011 when the country ranks 31<sup>st</sup> on world level and 19<sup>th</sup> according to the European level.

The comparison of the number of meetings for Bulgaria and the Czech Republic

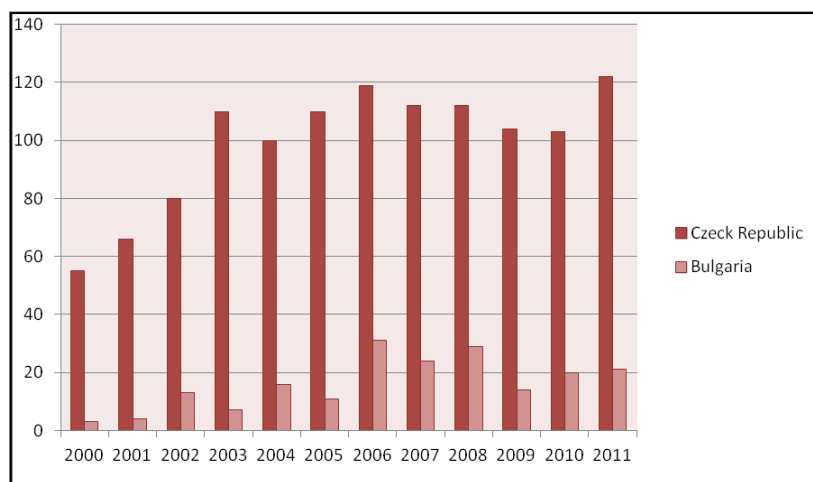
for the period 2000-2011 is clearly displayed on graph 1. In general, the tendency of growing and decreasing the number of meetings is preserved for both countries although the values are much higher for the Czech Republic compared to those for Bulgaria.

### Effect of congress tourism on regional development

Congress tourism has become increasingly important for the development of individual countries and in particular their regions.

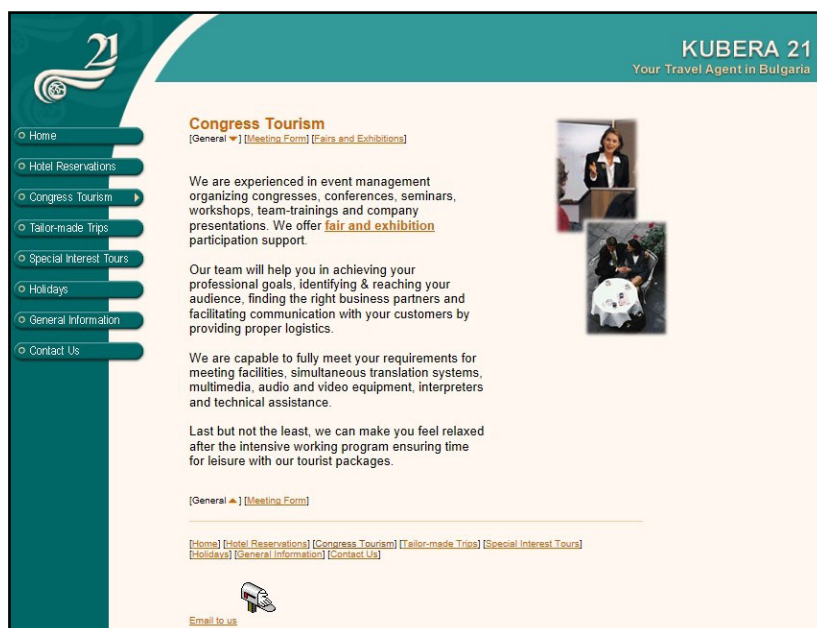
For faster development of congress tourism, will be required very sophisticated marketing presentation of the target groups on the Web - regions, cities, organizations and companies. In search of websites focused on congress tourism in both countries have been evaluated by the following indicators:

1. References found in the top ten
2. Created in different regions of the country
3. Topics
4. User Interface - intuitive, graphical interface.



Source: Data from ICC

Graf 1: Number of meetings for Bulgaria and the Czech Republic 2000-2011.



Source: [http://www.kuberatravel.com/bulgaria\\_congress\\_tourism.htm](http://www.kuberatravel.com/bulgaria_congress_tourism.htm)

Figure 1: Congress tourism in Bulgaria.



Source: <http://www.czech.cz/cz/Podnikani/Ekonomicka-fakta/Kongresova-turistika>

Figure 2: Congress tourism in the Czech Republic.

Monitored country	Location in the search	Presentation of the Regions (number)	Location of regions in search
Bulgaria	2	0	0
Czech Republic	1	4	to 20 <sup>th</sup> place

Source: own survey

Table 4: Web search results.

To search in both countries were used the Google search engine. When entering the same query to find a presentation of congress tourism in the country, the links were almost the same place. In the Czech Republic the link was in the first place, in Bulgaria in second place (tab. 4).

The difference arises when watching the links in each region. The Czech Republic is among the top twenty links appear presentation of congress tourism in four regions - such as North Moravia region, western Bohemia. In Bulgaria, the region does not appear in the slideshow, you can assume that it is not created. Displays only the presentation of objects directly offer congress tourism - hotels, guest houses

Presentation of other regions related to conference tourism is not found even among other references, it can be assumed that there are. Link to conference tourism in the Czech Republic through the creation of a central site [www.czech.cz](http://www.czech.cz) (Fig. 2), in Bulgaria this link via [www.kuberatravel.com](http://www.kuberatravel.com) (Fig. 1).

The content characteristics has been evaluated as the quality of the information provided. Quality of information have been assessed by the following indicators - information about the subject, location information - availability to find the page.

Pages on Bulgaria congress tourism provide general information, links to the organizers of the congress tourism and a list of all events in Sofia and Plovdiv. Link to conference tourism is part of the website, which also offers other tourist activities - general information about Bulgaria, accommodation, attractions in tourism. Presentation of congress tourism in the Czech Republic is part of the transparent provision of all activities - such as tourism, business, education. Information about the given topic are arranged as follows: first provides information about the importance of congress tourism, associated in particular with Prague. The next section provides basic information about Prague Congress Tourism Association, which covers the entire congress

tourism in the Czech Republic. Information about other places suitable for congress tourism are listed on the regional website.

The user interface is so intuitive and relatively well with the published searches.

## **Conclusion**

As a whole, the results from the analysis carried out show a tendency for increasing the number of conference events. However, there is a difference detected in growth rates for both countries which can be explained in the following way:

For Bulgaria:

- This country has just started developing in the area congress tourism;
- Bulgaria has been changing into a desired destination because of its favourable geographic location, modern facilities and competitive prices;
- A tendency has been observed for gradual overcoming the economic crisis and for organizing a larger number of congress and conference events.

For the Czech Republic:

- There is a tendency of increasing the number of conferences but at a lower rate;
- It is a top destination for holding conference events with rich traditions in this particular aspect;
- The country keeps permanent high number of organized congresses and conference events and has an important role on European and global level.

Although Bulgaria has shown a clear progress with respect to the organization and holding of conferences, this country still lacks the capacity

intrinsic to other European countries such as the Czech Republic. The lack of varied data for this tourism sector on Bulgarian part is strongly contrasted to the profuse information on the same issue concerning the Czech Republic. On one hand this shows a not well-structured system for data collecting and processing for statics purposes and tourism analysis, and on the other – lack of motivation among organizers of similar events to present such information to the public.

On global level, both countries are extremely unequal as refers to number of organized meetings per year. Provided the development rate for congress tourism in Bulgaria and the Czech Republic remains the same, equation of values cannot be expected for the next 5-10 years.

The decline of congress tourism in the first half of 2013 in the Czech Republic was about 15%. The causes must be sought in the austerity of companies and public administration, among other things the floods in June and governmental crisis. A similar situation also occurred in Bulgaria. The increase congress tourism development can be expected to ending the financial crisis.

Great influence on the development of congress tourism marketing has conducted a very essential part of the marketing presentation on the Web. The Czech Republic congress tourism ranked among the most important activities that it offers to its official website. Bulgarian tourism presents a travel agency that can affect the quality of the information provided. For further development of congress tourism, which positively affects the economy of both countries are decisive quality website, their intuitiveness, the quantity and quality of published information. For further development of congress tourism, it is necessary to create global solutions to support the development of the whole country.

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