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IMPACT OF THE SHARING ECONOMY PLATFORM AIRBNB ON THE DESTINATION

Vplyv platformy ekonomiky spoločného využívania Airbnb na cieľové miesto

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Annotation

The article focuses on the platform of sharing economy Airbnb and its impact on the destination. It examines the benefits and consequences of the Airbnb platform for the destination. The subject of the article is the platform of sharing economy - Airbnb. The object is a destination. The aim of the paper is to examine the impact of the largest platform of the sharing economy mediating short-term accommodation Airbnb on the destination. The selected destination is Slovakia. Article analyses the use of the platform Airbnb in Slovakia using selected indicators such as the number of offered accommodation facilities, their occupancy rate and average monthly revenue produced. It deals with the regulation of the sharing economy in the accommodation sector abroad and compares the rules for providing private accommodation in Slovakia. It proposes recommendations for the sharing economy in the field of tourism in Slovakia and maximization of positive benefits for the destination.

Key words

Airbnb, destination, sharing economy

Anotácia

Príspevok sa zameriava na platformu ekonomiky spoločného využívania Airbnb a jej vplyv na cieľové miesto. Skúma prínosy a dôsledky platformy Airbnb pre cieľové miesto. Predmetom článku je platforma ekonomiky spoločného využívania Airbnb. Objektom skúmania je cieľové miesto cestovného ruchu. Cieľom príspevku je preskúmanie vplyvu najväčšej platformy sprostredkujúcej krátkodobé ubytovanie na ekonomiku cieľového miesta. Vybraným cieľovým miestom je Slovensko. Analyzujeme využitie platformy Airbnb na Slovensku pomocou vybraných ukazovateľov, ako je počet ponúkaných ubytovacích zariadení, ich percentuálne využitie lôžok a priemerné vyprodukované mesačné tržby. Príspevok sa zaoberá sa reguláciou ekonomiky spoločného využívania v ubytovacom sektore v zahraničí a porovnáva pravidlá poskytovania ubytovania v súkromí na Slovensku. Navrhujeme odporúčania pre ekonomiku spoločného využívania v oblasti cestovného ruchu na Slovensku a maximalizáciu pozitívnych prínosov pre cieľové miesto.

Kľúčové slová

Airbnb, cieľové miesto, ekonomika spoločného využívania

JEL classification: L83, L88, Z32

1. Introduction

In the last few years, the sharing economy has noticed a rapid growth as well as its impact on society and the economy. The sharing economy exists in various forms, for example by sharing cars, homes, services. In recent

years, it has become an important and popular part of tourism with platforms such as Airbnb, Vrbo, Home Away, Uber, Bolt, Couchsurfing, and others. These platforms recorded rapid growth. Still more visitors in the tourism have decided to stay in a private house or room instead of booking the hotel room. Even at the time when traditional accommodation providers are unable to sell their services due to the coronavirus pandemic, accommodation services provided through shared economy platforms still operate. The most famous platform of sharing economy focused on short-term accommodation providing is Airbnb.

The existence of accommodation services is a basic condition for the development of tourism. By accommodation services we mean a set of activities related to the provision of temporary accommodation to visitors outside their place of permanent residence. By material conditions of providing accommodation services, we mean accommodation facilities and their equipment. Non-traditional forms of accommodation are realized through sharing economy. Sharing economy can be defined as the sharing of products and services between people, instead of buying or renting the product, services from the company. The goal is to maximize the use of otherwise unused assets. Providers of non-traditional forms of accommodation are mostly online platforms. They divide into the peer-to-peer providers - Airbnb, HomeAway, TripAdvisor Rentals, Tujia, 9flats.com, Homestay.com, OYO Rooms, Onefinestay, providers based on the exchange of the accommodation (reciprocal accommodation exchanges) - GuestToGuest, Love Home Swap, HomeExchange a non-profit platforms (free) - Couchsurfing, Trustroots, WarmShowers, BeWelcome (Bakker and Twining-Ward, 2018).

The sharing economy is based on sharing. Sharing is an act in which we make available something for other users. The most commonly individuals require various goods and services from other people who provide these goods and services. Internet platforms reduce barriers and transaction costs by removing intermediaries (Frenken and Schor, 2017). Aigrain (2012) emphasizes that anyone can share, and it requires only small input costs. This suggests a positive effect of sharing on the society, since not only people, who have a lot of assets can participate, but also those, who do not own many assets. Especially younger people do not feel the need to own things, but they are happy, when they have access to them (Trivett, 2013). This is in coincidence with the findings of the European Commission (2013), in which is stated that young people are the main target group of sharing economy.

Most authors who are dealing with sharing economy identify three groups of factors, which cause its growth. These are economic factors, technological factors including the Internet and social networks, and social factors including changes in consumer behavior (Aigrain, 2012; Trivett, 2013; Richardson, 2015; Bakker and Twining-Ward, 2018).

Sharing economy has an impact on the destination. The development of the sharing economy in transportation, accommodation and other services has significantly helped destinations in tourism, on the other hand, in addition to benefits, it also brings certain problems. For visitors in tourism, however, it primarily means the possibility of accommodation by local residents in the destinations, which gives them the opportunity to get to know better local customs, traditions, and the area. The attention to the destination in domestic and foreign literature is always paid in relation to a specific issue, while destination is seen as an aim of travel and stay of the visitors, crystallization point of the tourism activities, in which the elements of primary and secondary supply are constituent in varying extent (Gúčík et al., 2012). The visitor chooses a destination as the aim of his stay, which is characterized by the necessary accommodation, catering facilities and leisure time possibilities (Marčeková and Malachovský, 2015).

2. Aim and methodology

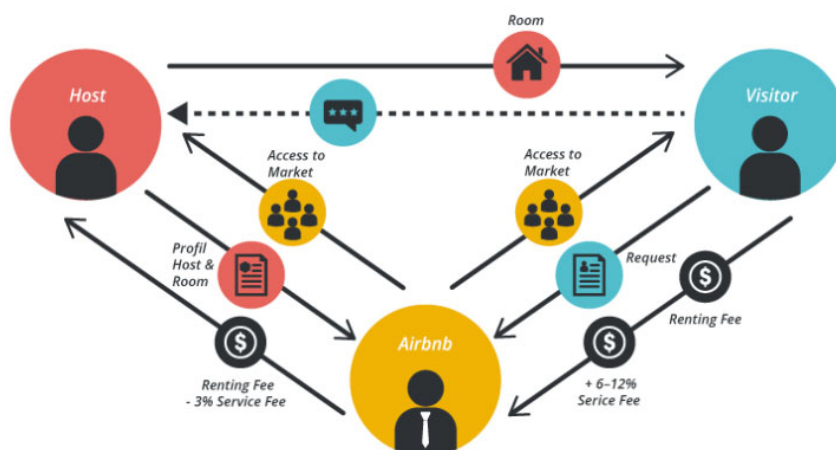
The paper examines the use of the platform of sharing economy Airbnb in the destination. The paper is aimed on the benefits and implications of the Airbnb platform for the destination. The subject of the article is the Airbnb Sharing Economics Platform. The object of research is the tourism destination. The selected destination is Slovakia. The aim of the paper is to examine the impact of the largest sharing economy platform providing short-term accommodation on the destination. We analyze the use of the platform Airbnb in Slovakia by analyzing selected indicators, such as the number of accommodation facilities offered, their percentage utilization of beds and the average monthly sales produced. We deal with the regulations of the sharing economy in the accommodation sector abroad and present the rules for providing accommodation by platforms of sharing economy in Slovakia.

We use primary and secondary sources of information. Secondary sources are provided by the scientific literature dealing with the problems of the sharing economy and destination. We characterize the sharing economy platform Airbnb on the basis of information from the official website www.airbnb.com and the Airdna portal. We analyze the Airbnb platform and its regulation in Slovakia. Primary data is obtained by the method of interview with the representative of the destination management organization. The questions were answered by a representative of Bratislava Tourist Board. Bratislava as a capital city of Slovakia is the city with the largest share in the offer of

short-term accommodation on the Airbnb platform. Due to the pandemic situation, we realized the interview through e-mail communication.

Figure 1 shows a model of the sharing economy with a connection among three subjects - service provider, digital platform and customer.

Fig. 1: Model of the sharing economy platform Airbnb



Source: Airbnb (2021)

The provider offers its service on a digital platform, at the same time the customer is looking for a service. In the case of providing accommodation, the provider charges a rental fee, which is paid through the Airbnb platform. In addition, the platform collects a transaction fee from the provider, the customer, or both. Airbnb charges a flat-rate host fee of 3-5% for booking services. In addition to the amount for accommodation, guests via Airbnb pay a service fee of 6 - 12% per booking. The higher the subtotal, the lower the fee. Airbnb charges are non-refundable unless canceled by the host (Airbnb, 2021). After the end of the service, both the customer and the provider can write a review.

3. Results

Zervas et al. (2021) considers Airbnb to be one of the most popular sharing economy platforms. The platform provides users the opportunity to rent a short-term accommodation in private ownership (shared spaces, rooms, apartments, houses) through the web site or application. The company Airbnb was established in 2008, when two designers accommodated three travelers, who were looking for a place to stay overnight (Airbnb, 2020). According to Adamiak (2018) Central and Eastern Europe, as well as many Mediterranean cities offer service Airbnb more on professional basis, while in German cities it is the closest to the model of sharing economy. Author similarly argues that there are differences between cities and countries in the size and characteristics of Airbnb offer, which cannot be attributed to the differences in the sizes of cities and their positions in the hierarchy of the destinations. As an example, he points on Airbnb, which plays a particularly important role in the countries with a rapidly growing number of incoming visitors, such as Iceland, Georgia, and Israel. It means that the platform fills the gap created by poorly developed tourism infrastructure. Airbnb is a dominant platform in the provision of services in the sharing economy with 7 million facilities and operations in 220 countries. The main competitor for Airbnb is the platform Booking with 5 million facilities and operations in 228 countries. In December 2019, Airbnb value was estimated at \$38 billion USD. The average price per night was 80 USD (Airbnb, 2020). Covid-19 pandemic hit the Airbnb platform, however not in such an extent as it recorded by the classical providers of accommodation services.

In recent years, efforts have been made to regulate sharing economy platforms (including Airbnb), especially in the cities with a high concentration of visitors. Local authorities around the world have begun to introduce a number of regulations that either restrict hosts from renting their homes or limit the number of rental days. One of the reasons for regulating these short-term rental platforms is to ensure sufficient accommodation capacity for local residents (Vazques, 2019). The best experience was achieved by cooperation of the platforms with the municipalities and representatives of the destinations (Pawlicz, 2018). In this paper we deal with the regulations in Slovakia.

As Airbnb is in the early stages of its operation in Slovakia, Slovak legislation focuses mainly on tax policy in the area of services of the sharing economy rather than on its regulation. Airbnb and other platforms of the sharing economy do not create such a large share of accommodation for visitors in tourism. Traditional forms of accommodation still predominate in Slovakia.

Slovakia is one of the first countries to try to tax operators of digital platforms providing accommodation or transport services (Uber, Airbnb, Booking.com). According to the amendment to the Income Tax Act, from January 1, 2018, transactions carried out within the sharing economy in the Slovak Republic are to be taxed in Slovakia. The tax is to be paid directly by foreign digital platforms by registering a permanent establishment in Slovakia for the purposes of income tax and income of a permanent establishment tax through a tax declaration (Financial report, 2018).

For operating business in Slovakia in the accommodation services, the operator must meet several conditions. If someone wants to rent real estate on a regular basis, and in addition to basic services (water, gas, electricity, etc.) they will provide other additional services, such as change of linen, breakfast, cleaning, etc., it is necessary to officially register the property for its use, as the so-called private accommodation.

If the host wants to rent a building that has been previously approved only for private use, it is necessary to ask the Construction Office to change the use of the building in accordance with the Building Act. Changing the purpose of the use of the premises is a relatively difficult process, which changes the purpose of the space specified in the approval decision. The application for a change in the use of the building must be accompanied by a building permit, from which it is clear for which purpose the building was permitted and approved, documentation indicating the original and proposed use of individual buildings, property list, copy of cadastral map, statements of state and public administration bodies and administrative fee in the amount of 30 €. The proceedings also require statements from the Regional Office of Public Health on compliance with hygiene standards and from the District Directorate of the Fire and Rescue Corps on the inspection of the fire extinguishers (50 €). According to the results of the proceedings, the Construction office will issue a statement on the change of the purpose of the use of the premises.

The host must also get acquainted in detail with the Commandment of the Ministry of Economy of the Slovak Republic no. 277/2008 Coll. setting the classification standards for accommodation establishments in their classification into categories and classes. After ensuring all hygienic requirements for the establishment, its environment, spatial layout and functional division, equipment for the operation of accommodation facilities, it must draw up operating rules and submit them to the Regional Office of Public Health for approval (50 €). It is not possible to start operation without the approval of the operating rules. The whole process is quite demanding and can usually take 7 to 10 months, in more demanding cases even longer and cost hundreds of euros (Chovanculiak, 2016).

The host is obliged to verify the identity of the guest by providing him the accommodation and to register his nationality in the book of guests, including date of birth, address of permanent residence, travel document number and period of accommodation. Finally, the host is obliged to report his activity to the tax administrator for accommodation, which is the municipality or city in which the services are provided. They will do so by filling in the form: Notification of the establishment and termination of the accommodation facility. Accommodation tax is payable for each night spent by the guest in the accommodation facility. Settlement takes place once a month, using the form Monthly statement of accommodation tax (Sicher, 2018).

Airbnb has not official representation in Slovakia. However, this does not prevent the provision of services by Slovak hosts through this platform. We can thus assume that a significant proportion of Airbnb hosts do not comply with all the public regulations described above. Airbnb creates its own regulation and ways to ensure quality and safe service. In this way, platforms essentially compete with the state in creating regulations. Public institutions in Slovakia have not yet officially reacted in any way to the presence of Airbnb, if we do not count the tax policy. This will probably be due to the fact that Airbnb does not have a significant share in the provision of accommodation services in Slovakia. In principle, we can say that Airbnb significantly relieves "private accommodation" providers of costly regulation.

In the following section, we will discuss selected Airbnb indicators in Slovakia. The problems of processing data on the Airbnb service include the unavailability of official statistics and public registration of accommodation units, due to the unclear nature of its position in tourism, as a result of which the situation on the market is unclear and confusing. As Airbnb does not provide statistics to individuals, we drew the available information from the public statistical portal Airdna.com. The portal records the last 12 months of Airbnb's activities. We focus on the

number of facilities, the average price per night, the use of beds and the average monthly sales. From the above data, we found several discrepancies between the data provided on the Airbnb website and the Airdna portal. The official Airbnb website also displays accommodation offers in cities where, according to Airdna, not a single short-term rental is represented. Another discrepancy is the display of selected indicators. From the Airbnb website you can find out the number of facilities and the average price for an overnight stay. However, the use of beds and the average monthly sales of Airbnb are not disclosed and therefore cannot be calculated. For this reason, we use the Airdna portal, where selected indicators for the analysis are provided. The table 1 shows chosen indicators of platform Airbnb in Slovakia.

Tab. 1: Selected indicators of Airbnb platform in Slovakia

Region (district)/Indicator	Number of facilities	Average price in €	Occupancy in %	Average monthly sales in €
Bratislava self-governing region	1 771	51.00	71	867
Bratislava and surroundings	1 771	51.00	71	867
Trnava self-governing region	86	45.00	33	352
Piešťany district	86	45.00	33	352
Trenčín self-governing region	76	48.50	42	412
Trenčín district	44	52.00	37	400
Prievidza district	32	45.00	47	424
Nitra self-governing region	72	37.00	48	356
Nitra district	72	37.00	48	356
Žilina self-governing region	170	62.33	45	616
Žilina district	69	43.00	55	547
Martin district	64	60.00	37	540
Čadca district	37	84.00	43	761
Banská Bystrica self-governing region	172	54.00	36	465
Banská Bystrica district	144	63.00	39	621
Zvolen district	28	45.00	33	308
Prešov self-governing region	721	57.25	39	500
Poprad district	625	75.00	52	771
Prešov district	56	43.00	43	391
Levoča district	24	39.00	40	467
Bardejov district	16	72.00	20	371
Košice self-governing region	669	60.00	40	600

Source: own elaboration according to Airdna, (2020)

We registered the presence of a short-term accommodation offer via Airbnb in every region in Slovakia. The Bratislava Region has the most significant share, specifically the capital of the Slovak Republic, Bratislava and its surroundings. There are 1,771 accommodations with an average price of 51 € per night. The average occupancy of accommodation facilities is 71%. By renting in the Bratislava region, the host can improve his income in average by 867 € per month (gross). The Prešov Region with 721 accommodations follows. The largest representation is in the district of Poprad in the High Tatras. In the district of Poprad there are 625 accommodation facilities with an average price of 75 € per night and with 52% occupancy. By renting in this district, the host can improve his income in average by € 771 per month (gross). Overall, the Prešov region has only 39% occupancy. The Košice region is in third place in the number of short-term accommodation offers. A total of 669 rentals can be found here, mainly in the city of Košice and in the area of the National Park Slovak Paradise. Short-term rentals in Slovakia are divided into several types, depending on whether the whole apartment, private room or shared room is rented (Table 2).

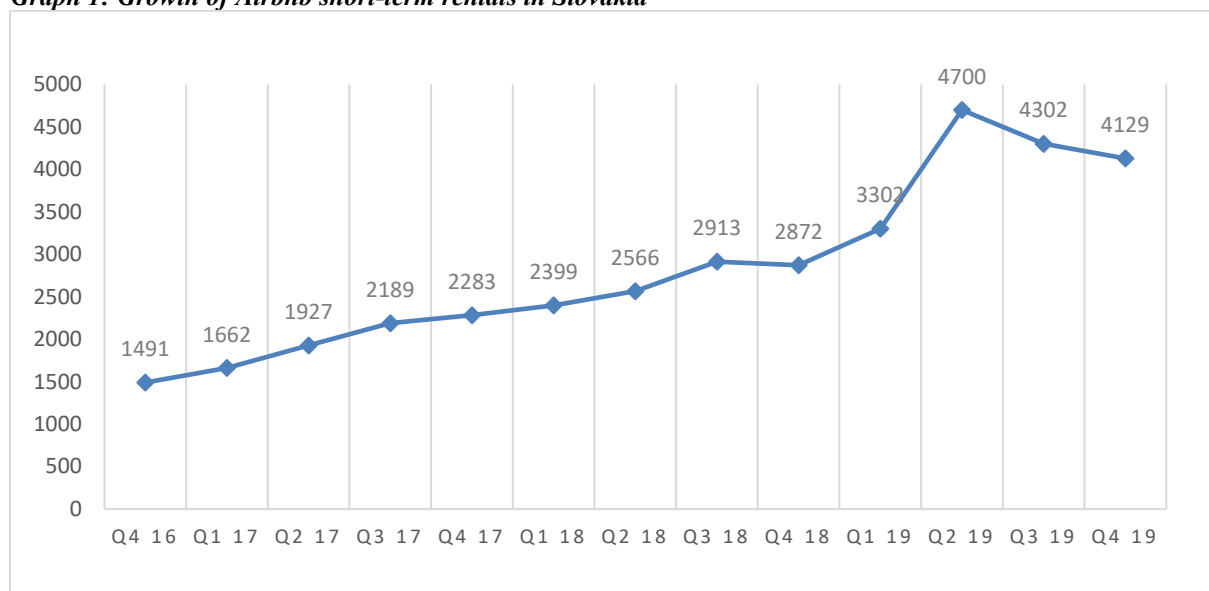
The offer of complete apartments prevails in all districts. The only exception, where the offer of private rooms predominates, is the district of Bardejov, where 69% of hosts offer this option. The least offered type of accommodation is the possibility of staying overnight in a shared room.

Tab. 2: Types of offered short-term rentals in Slovakia

Area/Accommodation type	Whole apartment		Private room		Shared room	
	abs. number	share in %	abs. number	share in %	abs. number	share in %
Bratislava and surroundings	1454	82	292	16	25	1
Košice region	536	80	127	19	6	1
Poprad district	462	74	162	26	1	0.2
Prešov district	32	57	24	43	0	0
Levoča district	18	75	6	25	0	0
Bardejov district	5	31	11	69	0	0
Banská Bystrica district	119	82	25	17	0	0
Martin district	44	69	18	28	2	3
Piešťany district	61	71	25	29	0	0
Nitra district	44	61	26	36	2	3
Žilina district	50	72	18	26	1	1
Trenčín district	35	80	9	20	0	0
Čadca district	33	89	4	11	0	0
Prievidza district	24	75	7	22	1	3

Source: own elaboration according to Airdna, (2020)

Graph 1 is mapping the development of short-term rentals on Airbnb platform in Slovakia from the year 2016 to 2019.

Graph 1: Growth of Airbnb short-term rentals in Slovakia

Source: own elaboration according to Airdna, (2020)

On average, we recorded a constant year-on-year increase of 8% from the year 2016 to the end of 2018. The most significant growth was between first and second quarters of 2019, when the number of short-term rentals increased from 3302 apartments to 4700 apartments, which is a yearly increase of 30%. In the third and fourth quarters we can see a declining trend by an average of 7% per year.

We conducted the primary survey through an interview with a representative of a destination management organization in the capital of the Slovak Republic, Bratislava, which has the largest share in the number of accommodation service providers via Airbnb (Melikant, 2020). We asked the Bratislava Tourist Board eight questions concerning the issues of the sharing economy in accommodation services through the Airbnb platform. We were interested in what data about Airbnb accommodation providers they have (number of registered landlords, number of short-term rentals, number of guests, average length of their stay, visitors' countries, percentage of domestic visitors). Other questions concerned the impact of the Airbnb platform on the destination and its potential for increasing the number of foreign visitors to Slovakia. The aim was to find out to what extent the organization cooperates with Airbnb, what preventive measures they are considering applying to the sharing economy in the accommodation sector and, last but not least, how they perceive the situation of Airbnb abroad. We found the following facts from the answers of the Bratislava Tourist Board.

The destination management organization does not yet cooperate with the Airbnb platform. They register its scope only from a superficial point of view. The information they have is directly from Airbnb. They have only basic statistical information, they do not have access to information about the hosts, their number, occupancy rate or taxes paid. Airbnb refers on the protection of the privacy of its hosts and visitors. According to the organization, Airbnb has a mainly positive economic benefit, as visitors accommodated via Airbnb stay longer in the destination than visitors accommodated in traditional accommodation facilities. Regarding the social impacts on the destination, no significant negative or positive effect was recorded. Airbnb in Slovakia is in the initial stages of its growth, so it does not have much impact on the daily lives of citizens. So far, people have not complained about the noise, the presence of foreigners in the residential areas or some other problems.

Airbnb in Bratislava, but also in Slovakia, records permanent growth to the year 2020, which was marked by the pandemic. In 2019, a total of approximately 167,300 visitors visited Bratislava, spending an average of 2.6 nights in Bratislava, which represents approximately 435,000 overnight stays. Domestic visitors from Slovakia (12%) and foreign visitors from the United Kingdom (11%), Germany (7%), the Czech Republic (7%), France (5%) and the United States of America (5%) had the largest representation. Compared to the previous year, when about 110,000 visitors came to Bratislava via Airbnb, Airbnb records an increase in the number of visitors of more than 52%, which indicates the significant popularity of this platform of the sharing economy and also demonstrates the growth of Bratislava attendance.

Longer overnight stays mean an increase of the revenues in services, but also in cultural institutions and trade. However, the unregulated trend in the use of Airbnb has, in addition to the positive aspects of revenue growth, a loss on the state side. Under Slovak legislation, Airbnb hosts are not yet required to pay accommodation tax. It is thus questionable whether accommodation tax was levied for each visitor. From January 1, 2017 accommodation tax in Bratislava is set at 1,70 € per guest and per night. After recalculation for all overnight stays booked via Airbnb in Bratislava, we will receive the final amount of € 739,500 lost by the city due to outdated legislation.

When we have asked whether the number of foreign visitors increased with the arrival of Airbnb on the Slovak market, the answer was ambiguous. Most of the people accommodated through Airbnb do come from abroad, but the number of visitors to Bratislava increased from year to year, even without taking into account the number of Airbnb stays. It is therefore difficult to determine whether it is also or mainly thanks to Airbnb that more and more foreign visitors visit Bratislava. However, Airbnb's share on accommodation statistics is growing.

So far, Bratislava does not have to solve the problems such as Prague or Vienna, which are related to the overcrowding of the city and the increase in real estate prices thanks to Airbnb. The growth in real estate prices is mainly caused by a small supply of flats, whether urban, private or investment flats, while the demand for Airbnb in Bratislava is not so high as to largely shape the real estate market. Thus, Airbnb is not the main factor for price increases in the destinations in Slovakia. Regarding regulations or measures against the sharing economy, no regulations are planned in the near future. The destination management organization has no intention to participate in the measures or regulation of the Airbnb platform. This obligation should belong to the city government.

The main goal of the Bratislava Tourist Board is to extend the length of overnight stays. The tools by which the extension of overnight stays can be achieved are strengthening the branding of the destination, support for the sale of the Bratislava City & Region tourist card, support for congress and incentive tourism and investments in tourist infrastructure (Bratislava Tourist Board, 2020). Our proposal for the destination management organizations is to become more interested in the sharing economy exploitation in their area of activity and to create a section on the sharing economy platforms on their websites.

4. Conclusion

Overall, the sharing economy offers considerable advantages in terms of labor, environmental protection, and productivity. It provides more efficient use of resources because goods that would otherwise be not used or thrown away, can get to those who want or need them. It provides to individuals the opportunity to benefit from its assets (for example their house) or from their professional skills by their rent. It provides people access to the resources, which need to be used only for a short and specific time period, without having them to buy or own.

The sharing economy in Slovakia is in the early stages of its operation. The use of the Airbnb platform is experiencing a growing trend in Slovakia (Kotuliaková, 2018). When examining offer of the platform Airbnb in Slovakia, we are focusing on selected indicators – number of accommodation facilities, the average rate for

overnight, an occupancy rate and earnings on the platform Airbnb. From our survey, we found that, on average, 71% of hosts in Slovakia prefer to rent the entire building when renting accommodation. The main idea of Airbnb is to accommodate visitors as local guests, who acquire a sense of authenticity from the visited place and contact with the local population. Slovaks rent entire buildings, so they are not so intense in contact with visitors. Destinations in Slovakia in terms of Airbnb offer are still only in the stage of discovery. It is advisable to monitor and regulate the offer of the platform. The most effective tool for regulation is cooperation with the platform itself and the provision of information about their hosts, by means of which the destination has an overview of the number of rented flats and can therefore act in the case of unlicensed apartments. From our survey, we found out that the Airbnb platform in Slovakia is most used in the capital city, in the High Tatras and east part of Slovakia in Kosice. In these areas, we see great growth potential of Airbnb since the favorite destinations are popular for domestic as well as foreign visitors. Visitors, who used accommodation in Slovakia through the platform Airbnb are from 88% foreign visitors. Destination management organizations do not have yet a great interest to deal with the issue of Airbnb. Airbnb is a small player in the accommodation sector in Slovakia, so it does not represent a lot of competition and does not have a negative impact on the areas where it has the largest representation. We found a significant economic benefit of Airbnb for Bratislava, and a loss on the part of the state due to outdated legislation. Airbnb does not implicate the rising prices of real estate such as in world destinations in foreign countries. The increase in real estate prices is mainly due to the insufficient number of residential properties intended for housing. However, it is necessary to monitor the development of the sharing economy also via platform Airbnb that we avoid situations, such as the rise in prices of real estate, dissatisfaction of local residents, disorder and losses of the state in selecting local taxes.

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