

## TRANSFORMATION OF THE TOURIST INFRASTRUCTURE AND TOURIST ARRIVALS IN MARIBOR IN THE LAST TWO DECADES

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### ***Izvešček***

#### **Transformacija turistične infrastrukture in obiska v Mariboru v zadnjih dveh desetletjih**

Avtor v prispevku prikaže razvoj turizma v Mariboru, pri čemer se osredotoči na velike spremembe v turistični ponudbi (zlasti v obsegu in sestavi namestitvenih zmogljivosti) in turističnem obisku po letu 1991. Spremembi poteka turističnih tokov proti Jugovzhodni Evropi ter veliki gospodarski krizi in propadu velikih podjetij v Mariboru je sledilo veliko zmanjšanje turističnega obiska in potreba po transformaciji turistične ponudbe v mestu. V Mariboru so zgradili vrsto različnih hotelskih in drugih turističnih objektov, s katerimi se je po letu 2000 močno povečala pestrost in kvaliteta turistične ponudbe, posledično pa se je postopoma ponovno pričel povečevati tudi turistični obisk. Kljub temu Maribor še vedno kaže vse značilnosti turističnega kraja s prevladujočim mestnim turizmom, za katerega so značilne kratke povprečne dolžine bivanja turistov in prevlada nočitev v hotelih.

#### ***Ključne besede***

turizem, mestni turizem, turistični obisk, turistična infrastruktura, Maribor, Slovenija

### ***Abstract***

#### **Transformation of the tourist infrastructure and tourist arrivals in Maribor in the last two decades**

The paper presents the development of tourism in Maribor, with a focus on major changes in the tourist offer (especially tourist infrastructure and accommodation facilities) and tourist visit since 1991. Changes in tourist flows to South-East Europe, the great economic crises and the collapse of the major industrial companies in Maribor was followed by a large decrease in tourist visit and the need for transformation of the tourist offer in the city. In Maribor was built a range of new hotels and other accommodation facilities, which resulted in the fact that since 2000 increased diversity and quality of the tourist offer and, consequently, has gradually started to increase also the tourist visit. However, Maribor still shows all the characteristics of a tourist destination with the dominant urban tourism, which is characterized by short average length of stay of tourists and the high share of overnight stays in hotels.

#### ***Key words***

Tourism, urban tourism, tourist visit, tourist infrastructure, Maribor, Slovenia

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## **1. Introduction**

Maribor is the second largest town in Slovenia, with around 95 thousand (94,984) inhabitants in 2012. It lies on the terraces along the Drava River, at the intersection of the five distinct landscape units: the Drava Valley (with the traffic and energetic importance), the Pohorje Mountain (once mostly forested, but now renowned for its summer and winter tourism), the forests and farms of the Kozjak Hills, the fertile arable lands of the Drava Plain, and the fruit and vine yarded Slovenske gorice Hills.

The settlement began to grow along the Drava River in 12<sup>th</sup> century and become a town called "Markburg" in 1254 (the Slovene name Maribor did not appear until 1836). Between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, competition from foreign merchants, numerous fires, multiple sieges at the hands of the Hungarians and Ottomans, the so-called "wine wars" with neighboring Ptuj, and the plague, influenced on the development of the city (Gosar et al. 2009). In 1846, there were only 2,200 residents living in Maribor due to a relatively slow growth of the city. Years later, when the railway between Vienna and Trieste were constructed, the development of the industry and trade escalated also in the population growth, so the number of the population in Maribor increased to 31,300 in 1900.

After the WW I, Maribor made a great progress in economic development, and become one of the most industrialized centers in Slovenia. There were 15 major textile factories, and the metal and food industry started to develop rapidly as well.

After the WW II, Maribor developed into one of the biggest industrial city in former Yugoslavia. The metal industry took the leading role, followed by textile and electro technical industry. Also new industrial branches arose: non-ferrous metal industry, building-material industry and production of petroleum products (Lorber 2009). This development has had also a major impact on the development of tourism in the city.

At the end of the 1980s and begging of the 1990s the common Yugoslav market disintegrated and Maribor's industry, which mostly depended on Yugoslav market, encountered a mayor crisis, especially in the sectors of metal and textile industry, which had employed at the time nearly 40% of the city's residents. All major companies were shut down, and unemployment rose to a staggering 25%.

The situation has improved since the mid-1990s with the development of small and medium sized businesses and industry. The tertiary service sector and trade with numerous shopping malls have become most significant for the economic development. Also the financial sector is equally relevant. The Post of Slovenia has its headquarters in the town; therefore Maribor has also become an important logistical centre, situated at the crossing of the 5<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> European transport corridor. Based on the number of employees, today the Clinic Centre of the University of Maribor is the biggest company in the city. Maribor is also an important educational centre with many schools and the University of Maribor, second largest in Slovenia. In addition, tourism is gaining on its importance again, due to the rich history and culture in the town, and a range of business, conference, cultural, entertainment, sports and ethnological events.

The changes of the population in Maribor have always depended on its economic development. From the WW II to the mid-1980s the above average population growth was noted. It was a result of the intensive industrialization and immigration

of population from rural areas. Additional housing areas were built in the east part of the city (Tezno and Pobrežje), but the biggest change in the spatial development of the city was the expansion of housing to the south, to the Pohorje Mountain (Tabor). Next to housing projects with hundreds of apartments, many one-family houses were also built. Between 1948 and 1981 the number of inhabitants increased from 62,700 to 106,100.

In the beginning of the 1980s the stagnation and also depopulation took place in the town. A negative natural increase can be observed in Maribor reaching from 1985 onwards, while a negative migration has been present since 1991. From the mid-1990s, the number of inhabitants annually decreased by about 1,100 or 1.2%. In the process of suburbanization, Maribor's population migrated to the environs of the town, but they moved also to the Slovenia's capital, Ljubljana (especially people with high education). Maribor also has the highest percentage of senior citizens, compared to other larger Slovene cities (Horvat 2009).

## **2. Tourist potential of Maribor**

The main tourist potential of Maribor represents:

- the old town center with cultural and historical monuments;
- developed, varied and high-quality tourist infrastructure;
- internationally recognizable cultural, educational and other institutions;
- a range of business, conference, cultural, entertainment, sports and ethnological events;
- the economic importance of Maribor as the second biggest town in the country;
- significant international traffic situation at the 5<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> European transport corridor;
- picturesque surroundings of the Drava River, wine growing Slovenske gorice Hills and forests on Pohorje, which allow a wide range of sports and recreation (Horvat 1994).

As in many other European cities boasting a medieval tradition, the most interesting part of Maribor is its centre. It was built in the Middle-Ages and was surrounded by the city's fortress which was built in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and expanded in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. With its narrow streets and houses built on small parcels of land, the old town centre still reveals its medieval origins, though much of the time these traits remained veiled, because of the numerous and extensive reconstruction which have occurred over the centuries.

The biggest area of the old centre represents the Glavni trg square (Main Square) with its Town Hall, built in 1515. In the middle of the square there is the Mary's Plague Monument, which was built in memory of plague epidemic in 1680. Close by is the oldest part of Maribor called Lent, which lost its importance when the main bridge over the Drava River was built. Revitalization of this part of the city started in the 1980s. Its biggest tourist attraction is an over 400 year-old vine which is considered to be the oldest vine in the world. Inside of the city centre is a vast Slomšek trg square with the Cathedral. Close by is the Theatre of Maribor and the main building of the University of Maribor with the University Library. The Maribor town Castle, built in 1478, gained its present post-Renaissance look in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The late baroque stairway was built in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Before WW II, the castle was changed into a regional museum with archaeological, ethnographic and

historical artifacts. In the former Jewish Ghetto, a synagogue from the 15<sup>th</sup> century is preserved (Gosar et al. 2009).

The City Park is also an important tourist area. In 1889-1896 it was planted with exotic trees. In northerly direction, the park continues with many walking paths to the Three Ponds. Going west, one can find a sports park Ljudski Vrt, whereas the sports park Tabor is located on the right Drava bank.

In the southern edge of the city is a renewed baroque mansion Betnava's Castle. Moreover, one can find interesting tourist destinations in the close proximity of Maribor. Above the City Park, a hill Piramida is located with a chapel which was built after the first castle was finally demolished in 1784. West from the City Park are another two hills Mestni vrh and Kalvarija with a bigger chapel from 1681. It was built to remember those who died due to plague which occurred in the city on and off from 1386 until 1681. In the close proximity is also a winegrowing area between the Drava River and Pesnica Valley. Wine cellars are a popular tourist gateway for many tourists. These cellars are also intertwined with many wine roads. The tourist farms and wine cellars along the Maribor, Podpohorske and Upper Slovenske gorice wine roads and the trail of Archduke Johann are excellent choices for lovers of exceptional wines and culinary delights (Gosar et al. 2009).

Beside the Drava River's energetic importance, it also possesses a tourist one. After the construction of the Mariborski otok hydro power plant, the dam was built behind it, forming a 10 km long Bresternica Lake which is now used for many water sports. On both banks of the lake, there are a lot of resting places and old boat houses which are a popular destination of local people. Below the dam, the first swimming pool was built in 1930 on Mariborski otok.

On the south side of the town stretches a green Pohorje Mountain, very suitable for hikers, cyclists, adrenaline seekers, as well as lovers of the tranquility of nature in Pohorje's primeval forest, waterfalls and peat moors. The area is crossed by local roads and forest tracks, and there are a number of mountain huts. During the wintertime Mariborsko Pohorje turns into one of the most attractive and the biggest ski centers in Slovenia, with many skiing sectors like Areh and Bolfenk on the top of the mountain. The climax of every winter season is the Golden Fox FIS competition in slalom and giant-slalom for women.

### **3. The development of tourism in Maribor till 1991**

The tourist development in Maribor has always depended on its economic development. The beginning is related with the construction of the railway between Vienna and Trieste, due to which the city became accessible and interesting to a wider range of travelers and tourists. An important role also played establishment of the local tourist association end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Tourist visit began to rise in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1909, in Maribor were registered about 15.600 overnight stays. Tourists stayed in small city hotels (such as Erzhercoh Johann, Meran, Mohr, Schwarzer Adler) and in restaurants. Most of the guests stayed in Maribor up to 3 days (Vuk 2010).

During the interwar period there was no significant tourist development. In the center of the town has been reconstructed hotel Orel and hotel Zamorc, and on the outskirts of town were built summer swimming pool Mariborski otok. In 1938, there

were about 400 tourist beds in Maribor, and were registered around 56,300 overnight stays (Janša Zorn 1996).

After WW II, Maribor was quite destroyed. During this period, began intensive industrial development and construction of the city, while the development in the tourism sector began only in the 1960s. The damming of the Drava River is created accumulation lake, around which began to develop recreational tourism. At the time, Pohorje Mountain has become also a major tourist destination, where they built several mountain huts. In 1959, the Pohorje cable car linked town with the top edge of the Pohorje Mountain. The highlight of the winter season presents FIS competition in skiing that takes place in Maribor from 1964 onwards.

In the town tourist development was not so intense. In 1963 they built a modern city hotel Slavija, in 1966 modernized hotel Turist (nowadays hotel Piramida) and in 1969 the hotel Orel (the oldest hotel in the town). Outside the city is at the foot of Pohorje Mountain located hotel Habakuk, and at the top of Pohorje Mountain is hotel Bellevue.

According to the characteristics of stationary tourist visit in Maribor, the period between 1961 and 1991 could be divided into two developmental stages, which could also be defined as main stages of tourist development.

The period between 1961 and 1973 is considered as a period of the development in which the number of tourist beds gradually increase from less than 500 to about 1,100, the number of tourists from around 50,000 to 110,000 and the number of overnight stays from around 80,000 to 190,000. Tourist visit was mainly focused on the town hotels. Average length of stay of tourists ranged from 1.4 to 1.6 days. Tourists from Slovenia, Serbia, Croatia, Germany and Austria prevailed.



Fig. 1: Number of Tourists and Overnight Stays in Maribor between 1961 and 2011. Source: Letni pregledi turizma, 1961-2002; www.stat.si.

The period between 1974 and 1990 is considered as a period of the peak of tourist visit, and coincides with the peak of the economic development in the city. Number of tourist beds ranged between 900 and 1,200, the number of tourists between 120,000 and 150,000, and the number of overnight stays between 200,000 and 245,000. Maribor is ranked among the top ten tourist destinations in Slovenia.

Average length of stay of tourists ranged from 1.6 to 1.7 days. Most tourists visited Maribor for business reasons. Important were also recreational and transit motives. Prevailed tourists from former Yugoslav republics (especially from Serbia), which accounted 60% of all tourists and 65% of all overnight stays in the city. Among foreigners, tourists from Germany, Italy and Austria prevailed.

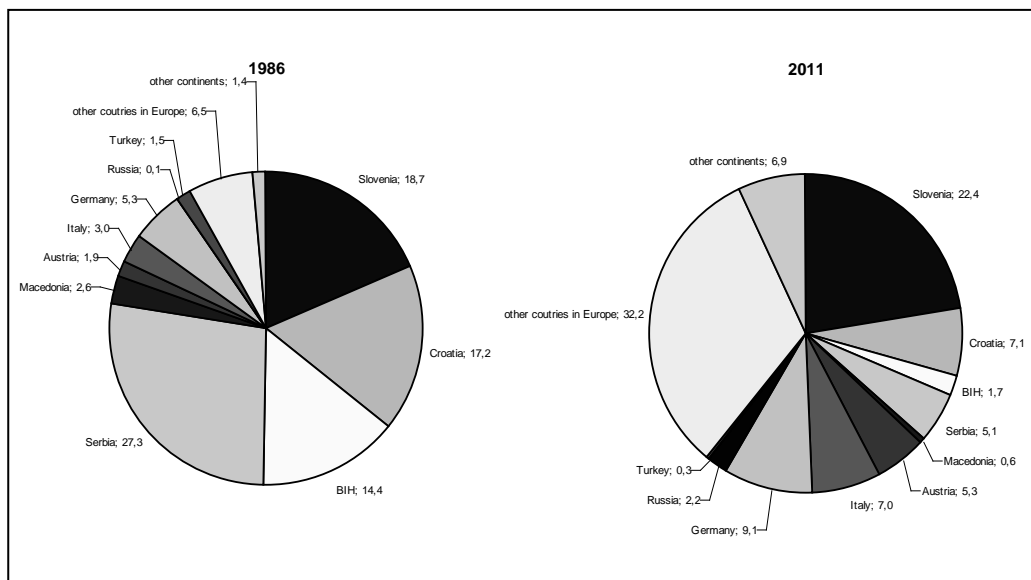


Fig. 2: Share of Overnight Stays in Maribor by Origin of Tourists, 1986 and 2011. Source: Letni pregledi turizma, 1986; www.stat.si.

#### **4. Transformation of the tourist infrastructure and tourist arrivals in Maribor in the last two decades**

The period between 1991 and 2000 is considered as a period of the mayor economic crisis in which, because of the war on the Balkans, changes in transit flows to South-East Europe, the collapse of large industrial enterprises in the city and great decrease of tourist visit from other former Yugoslav republics, in Maribor significantly reduced the accommodation capacity (reduction of 3 times, compared to the previous period) and tourist visit (reduction of 6 times).

In that period the number of tourist beds ranged between 420 and 750, the number of tourists between 23,000 and 40,000, and the number of overnight stays between 40,000 and 75,000. The main reason was the almost complete absence of tourists from other former republics of Yugoslavia (the number of their overnight stays fell from around 140,000 in mid-1980s to around 6.000 in 1995). Average length of stay of tourists ranged from 1.6 to 1.7 days. Among foreigners, tourists from Germany, Italy and Austria prevailed.

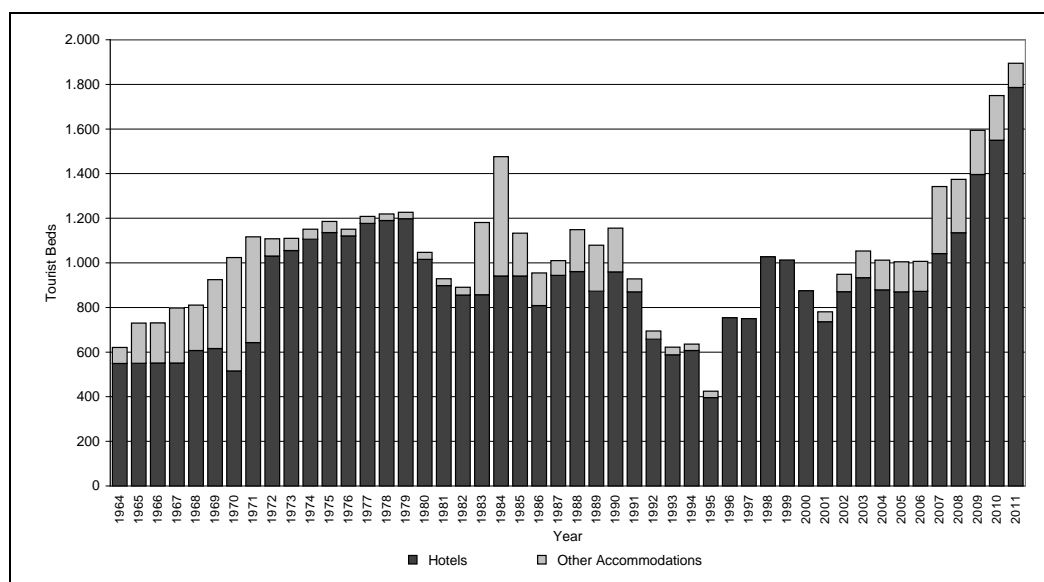


Fig. 3: Number of Tourist Beds in Maribor between 1964 and 2011.

Source: Letni pregledi turizma, 1964-2002; www.stat.si.

Older hotels, most of which were owned by one tourist company, have been closed or have experienced significant transformation. The largest city hotel Slavija was closed in 2001 (and in 2012 was converted into a business center). In 1989, the hotel Orel was connected with neighboring hotel Zamorc, and then in 2006 part of the hotel was closed and converted into a shopping center, part reconstructed and part converted into hostel Uni (Turk 2011). The hotel Piramida was renovated in 1994 into modern business hotel (and then part reconstructed again in 2012). Hotel Habakuk, located outside the city at the foot of Pohorje Mountain, was also reconstructed in late-1990s into 5-star hotel with modern spa and wellness facilities, based on thermal water which was found near Maribor in the beginning of the 1990s.

In the mid-1990s and after 2000 began to emerge in Maribor a variety of new small hotels, which are mostly privately owned. Among them, most work as a family business. Most of them were built on the outskirts (on the edge) of the town, especially at the foot of Pohorje Mountain. There is, in addition to Habakuk (5-stars hotel) and sport Hotel Arena, a variety of small family hotels, guest houses, apartments and private accommodations with tourist beds. The reconstructions of older buildings and new constructions have greatly increased the variety and quality of the tourist offer in the city.

Due to the entry of Slovenia into the European Union, the resumption of transit flows to South-East Europe, the intense development of tertiary sector and the expansion of tourist offer and new reconstruction of tourist infrastructure in Maribor, we could consider a period since 2000 as a period of re-development of tourism in the town. In 2004, the number of stationary tourists after 12 years of crisis again exceeded 50,000, and the number of overnight stays 120,000. The largest increase is the last two years, when in 2011 the number of tourist beds increased to around 1,900, the number of tourists to around 100,000 and the number of overnight stays

at around 220,000. Average length of tourist stays ranged from 2.2 to 2.4 days, which shows a slight increase in the interest of tourists for a longer visit in Maribor. It also increased gravitational radius of tourists, which is marked by increase in the share of tourists from more distant countries (from other European and non European countries). However, still most of the tourists come from Germany, Croatia, Italy, Austria and Serbia. In 2012, growth in tourist visit is even more noticeable, since Maribor has the title of European Capital of Culture.

Tab. 1: List of Main Tourist Accommodation Facilities in Maribor in 2012.

Type of Accommodation - AREA (part of the town)	*	No. of Tourist Beds	Average Price for Room (€)
<b>CITY CENTRE</b>			
hotel Piramida <sup>+</sup>	4*	130	55-200
hotel City <sup>++</sup>	4*	158	60-160
hotel Ocean	4*	51	110-210
hotel Orel <sup>+</sup>	3*	117	50-80
hotel Lent	3*	34	60-100
hotel Tabor	3*	113	40-100
hostel Uni <sup>++</sup>	2*	86	40-70
hostel Pekarna <sup>++</sup>	2*	55	20-50
pension Vila Mira	3*	16	50-80
<b>EDGE OF TOWN</b>			
hotel Betnava <sup>++</sup>	4*	82	75-200
hotel Bajt	3*	50	40-90
hotel Bau <sup>++</sup>	3*	71	40-90
hotel Kačar	3*	36	50-100
hotel Vila Emei	3*	25	50-60
motel Lešnik <sup>+</sup>	3*	48	40-80
pension Budja	3*	27	40-50
pension Janez <sup>+</sup>	3*	26	
pension Kužner	3*	10	
<b>UNDER POHORJE</b>			
hotel Habakuk <sup>+</sup>	5*	205	150-430
hotel Arena	4*	120	55-90
hotel Draš	4*	54	60-110
garni h. Merano	3*	34	50-90
garni h. Milena	3*	36	40-65
pension P. kavarna	3*	28	50-80
pension Mlada lipa <sup>+</sup>	3*	22	40-80
apartment Mari <sup>++</sup>	4*	88	40+

\* established before 1990  
 ++ established after 2005

Source: [www.lodging-world.com/slovenia/cities/maribor](http://www.lodging-world.com/slovenia/cities/maribor).

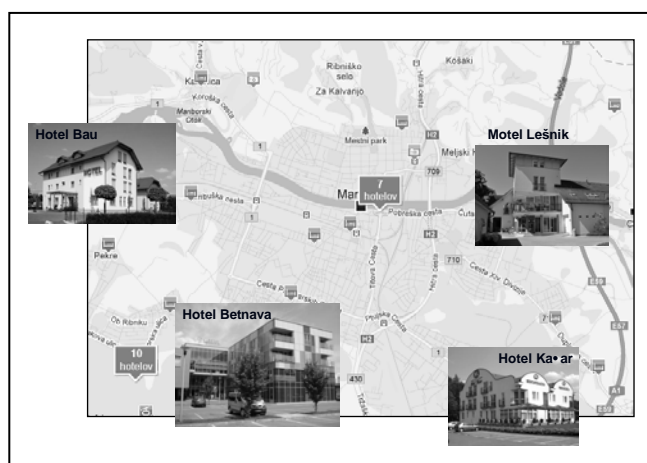


Fig. 4: Main Tourist Accommodation Facilities in (the edge of) Maribor in 2012.  
 Source: [www.hotels.com](http://www.hotels.com); [www.lodging-world.com/slovenia/cities/maribor](http://www.lodging-world.com/slovenia/cities/maribor)



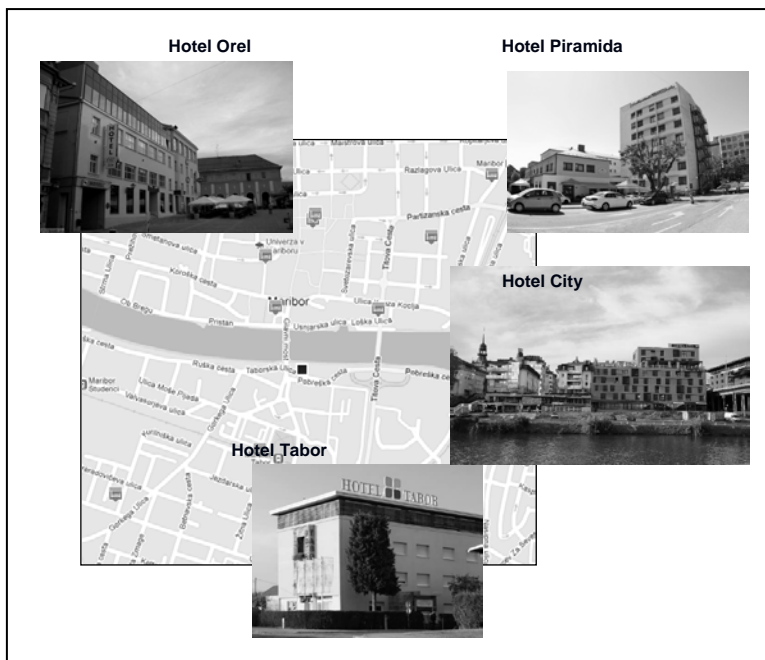


Fig. 5: Main Tourist Accommodation Facilities in the city centre of Maribor in 2012.  
Source: [www.hotels.com](http://www.hotels.com); [www.lodging-world.com/slovenia/cities/maribor](http://www.lodging-world.com/slovenia/cities/maribor).

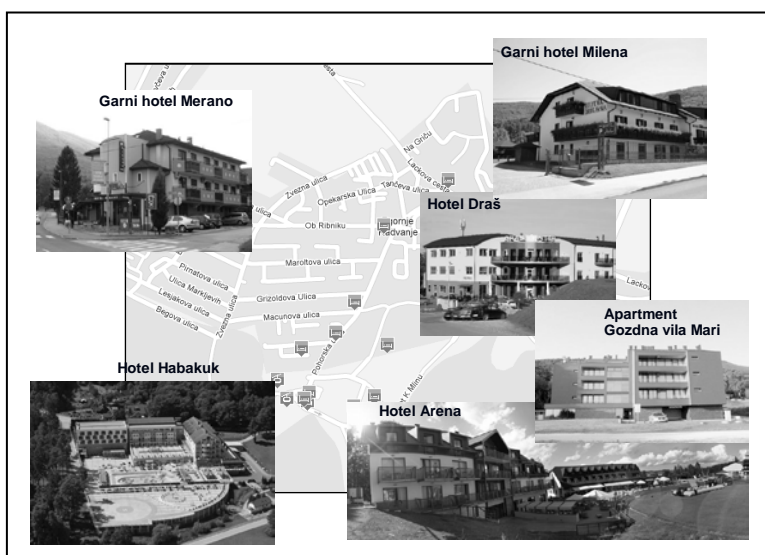


Fig. 6: Main Tourist Accommodation Facilities under the Pohorje Mountain in Maribor, 2012.  
Source: [www.hotels.com](http://www.hotels.com); [www.lodging-world.com/slovenia/cities/maribor](http://www.lodging-world.com/slovenia/cities/maribor).

Constructions of new accommodation facilities have intensified even after 2006, when on the outskirts of the town and also in the city center were open some new hotels. In 2006 was opened hostel Uni, in 2007 hotel Betnava, and in 2011 modern business hotel City (in the city center). Between 2003 and 2011 in Maribor significantly increase the number of tourist beds; from around 1,000 to 1,900 in 2011. The largest increase is among the tourist beds in hotels; their number increased from around 850 to 1,570 in 2011. In the 1990s, tourist beds in hotels represent about 95% of the total accommodation capacity in Maribor, and in them is registered as much as 98% of all overnight stays. In 2011, representing 83% of total accommodation capacity and in them is registered 90% of all overnight stays in Maribor.

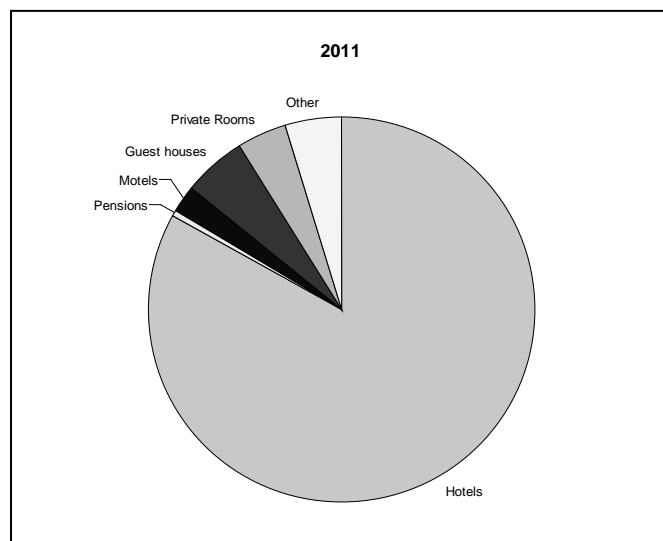


Fig. 7: Structure of Tourist Beds in Maribor in 2011.

Source: [www.stat.si](http://www.stat.si).

## 5. Conclusion

Regarding the existing tourist offer and the characteristics of tourist visit (in particular the short average length of stay of tourists, an equal distribution of tourist visit over the year, majority of overnight stays registered in the hotel facilities), Maribor shows all the characteristics of a tourist destination with a developed urban tourism.

Between 1960 and 1998 the average length of stay of tourists varied between 1.4 to 1.8 days. After 2000, has increased to around 2.2 to 2.5 days; longer in the case of guests from Slovenia and other former Yugoslav republics (2.5 to 3.0 days), while tourists from other countries staying in Maribor on average 2.0 days. In presented statistics of stationary tourists are not included daily visitors. By estimation of Tourist Board of Maribor come yearly to Maribor also about 1.2 million daily visitors. Between them, visitors which come to the town with shopping, recreational, cultural, commercial and other motives prevailed. Annual summer Festival Lent, in particular, attracted the highest number of visitors.

Tourists are attracted to the city especially by the old town center with several cultural and historical monuments, high-quality tourist infrastructure, internationally recognizable educational, cultural and other institutions, many business, conference, cultural, sports and ethnological events, and a wide range of sport and recreation possibilities.

The main disadvantage of tourist offer in Maribor is the lack of major attractions and non-utilization of the potential for development of spa tourism. This would help to get a longer average length of stay of tourist. Maribor is now a destination in which tourists come just for a day or two, but unfortunately it is not destination which could attract tourists for a longer time, and is also not the starting point for excursion tourism in the region. The city has a relatively rich historical heritage, which has unfortunately only of regional importance, and therefore does not represent a major tourist potential. In terms of international recognition is the most important tourist potential Lent with the oldest vine in the world, which should become one of the most important elements of tourist promotion and distinctive identity of the town in the future. Significant tourist potential are also internationally recognizable cultural institutions, events and shows, including the mass cultural events (such as the Lent Festival), on which should based the development of segment of cultural and events tourism in the town in the future.

Since Slovenia joined the European Union is evident remarkable rise of tourism in Maribor. With large investments into tourist infrastructure were completely renovated existing and built a variety of new accommodation facilities, especially in the edge of the town (in particular on the foot of the Pohorje Mountain). This has greatly increased the variety and quality of the tourist offer. Investments in promotion, and many events, are contributed to the increase of tourist activities in the city as well. Especially from the largest project in the last decade, the European Capital of Culture, the city expects changes in the perceptions of the town (from industrial into post industrial town), the recognizability of the site in Europe, and further tourist development.

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## **TRANSFORMATION OF THE TOURIST INFRASTRUCTURE AND TOURIST ARRIVALS IN MARIBOR IN THE LAST TWO DECADES**

### ***Summary***

After WW II, began intensive industrial development and construction of the city, while the development in the tourism sector began in the 1960s. The period between 1974 and 1990 is considered as a period of the peak of tourist visit, and coincides with the peak of the economic development in the city. Number of tourist beds ranged between 900 and 1,200, the number of tourists between 120,000 and 150,000, and the number of overnight stays between 200,000 and 245,000. Maribor was ranked among the top ten tourist destinations in Slovenia.

The period between 1991 and 2000 is considered as a period of the mayor economic crisis in which, because of the war on the Balkans, changes in transit flows to South-East Europe, the collapse of large industrial enterprises in the city and great decrease of tourist visit from other former Yugoslav republics, in Maribor significantly reduced the accommodation capacity (reduction of 3 times, compared to the previous period) and tourist visit (reduction of 6 times). Older hotels, most of which were owned by one tourist enterprise, have been closed or have experienced significant transformation.

In the mid-1990s and after 2000 began to emerge in Maribor a variety of new small hotels, which are mostly privately owned. Among them, most work as a family business. Most of them were built on the outskirts of the town, especially at the foot of Pohorje Mountain. The reconstructions of older buildings and new constructions have greatly increased the variety and quality of the tourist offer in the city.

Due to the entry of Slovenia into the European Union, the resumption of transit flows to South-East Europe, the intense development of tertiary sector and the expansion of tourist offer and new reconstruction of tourist infrastructure in Maribor, a period since 2000 is considered as a period of re-development of tourism in the town. The largest increase is the last two years, when in 2011 the number of tourist beds increased to around 1,900, the number of tourists to around 100,000 and the number of overnight stays to around 220,000. Average length of tourist stays ranged from 2.2 to 2.4 days, which shows a slight increase in the interest of tourists for a longer visit in Maribor. It also increased gravitational radius of tourists, which is marked by increase in the share of tourists from more distant countries (from other European and non European countries). In 2012, growth in tourist visit is even more noticeable, since Maribor has the title of European Capital of Culture.

Regarding the existing tourist offer and the characteristics of tourist visit (in particular the short average length of stay of tourists, an equal distribution of tourist visit over the year, majority of overnight stays registered in the hotel facilities), Maribor shows all the characteristics of a tourist destination with a developed urban tourism. Tourists are attracted to the city especially by the old town center with several cultural and historical monuments, high-quality tourist infrastructure, internationally recognizable educational, cultural and other institutions, many business, conference, cultural, sports and ethnological events, and a wide range of sport and recreation possibilities.