

## **SPECIAL FEATURES IN SUPPLY OF “CITY BREAKS” AS TOURIST PRODUCT IN DESTINATIONS SOFIA AND SKOPJE**

Atanas Kazakov\* and Vera Nikolova

“St.Kliment Ohridski” University,  
Tourism Department, Sofia, Bulgaria

---

**ABSTRACT** — *Short term holidays organized in urban environment, at weekends are known as „City Breaks“. These products are developed quite recently – at the beginning of XX<sup>st</sup> century. Their appearance came as answer to population’s mobility increase. It happened everywhere in the world, mostly in well-developed countries. Important factors which influenced the contemporary development of city breaks are: sharp improvement of transport infrastructure in Europe as a whole, as well as the changing demand oriented towards shorter travel holidays.*

*The development of this product is giving the opportunity for diversification of the tourist supply. It puts an accent on cultural heritage which is concentrated in cities and places for entertainment. Highest popularity „City breaks“ have among young single tourists and seniors from the age group 55+. These are one of the most solvent population groups. People are well educated. They have higher demands towards cultural experience and entertainment. At last they have enough free time.*

*The main purpose of the article is to examine the possibilities of Sofia and Skopje to develop of this tourist product as well individually as in combined tourist packages. Their advantages are defined from their proximity on culture and language and from their common history in certain periods of time. Their function as capital cities and the small distance between them are additional conditions for possible combined supply of “City Breaks”.*

**Keywords:** *City breaks, tourist product, destination, Sofia, Skopje*

---

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

At the beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> century tourism industry is one of the fastest developing industries from the world economy. All specialists working in this field are heading towards continuous increase of the profit. Giving satisfaction to the enormous number of tourists worldwide /from 661 million in 2000 to 1,138 billion in 2014<sup>1</sup> according to United Nations World Tourism Organization – international tourists only/, will happen through offering of new types of tourism, new attractions, new tourist destinations, as well as through open up of some traditional markets. Common trends towards increase of free time and its maximum fragmentation with the idea to break with intensive daily routines are some of the reasons for popularity of short city breaks. The turn towards city cultural heritage and the so called process of reviving and awakening of spaces are the reasons for the increased interest towards city environment and townscape – a compilation between the nature and the city environment.

---

<sup>1</sup> UNWTO: Press Release, PR N15006, Madrid, 27.01.2015

City breaks are short term /usually up to three days/ city excursions, mostly using air transport to the destinations. They are specific type of tourist packages mainly with cognitive aim. Their main characteristics are:

- Group travel /depending on tour organizer they could be larger or smaller/
- Program saturated with visits of cultural, historical, archaeological, natural sites and objects, concerts, amusement parks and other attractions in the city and in the surrounding area
- Shopping possibilities

We count this type of tourist product as special interest travel. Tourists are usually intelligent, well educated cosmopolitans. Their demand for well preserved tourist resources, developed tourism infrastructure, and superstructure, transport infrastructure and high level of service are very high. The price they pay for the product is also high enough. It includes:

- Return flight;
- Transfer airport – hotel - airport;
- Accommodation in chosen type of room at the hotel offered to the tourist;
- Food, when and if it is offered;
- Rent – a – car (choices are in the brochure);
- Services offered by a local travel agent;
- City sightseeing with stops at most visited and interesting sites using mostly, but not always, English speaking guide;
- Entrance fee for all paid attractions;
- Commission for the travel agency

This topic is largely discussed by Sophie Blacksell, Sarah Thorowgood, Ziggy Hanaor, Sarah Woods, as well as by The Cities Book Mini: A Journey Through the Best Cities in the World (Lonely Planet Pictorial). Lately, with the increasing vertical integration in tourism this type of packages is offered more and more often from airlines which have their own hotels in most visited destinations.

Could Bulgaria be included in the list of city break destinations? What would be the price? Can we combine this product between two neighboring destinations if it is more than obvious that there are great cultural similarities and close relations when we look at language and traditions? These topics are interesting and challenging not only as an experiment but also as a new offer on the market.

## **2. THEORETICAL BASIS**

Pearce<sup>2</sup> (1987) described that: “research over tourism structure in urban areas is quite new” and “there are quite a few such research works”.

Ashworth<sup>3</sup> (1988) wrote: “We can observe that these problems are neglected from two sides. The authors dealing with tourism research tend to switch off the urban context where large part of tourism is happening, whereas the authors dealing with town and city development tend to switch off their tourism functions”.

---

<sup>2</sup> Pearce, D., An Integrative Framework for Urban Tourism Research, *Annals of Tourism Research*, 28 (4), 1987: 926 – 946

<sup>3</sup> Ashworth, G.J. and Voogd, H. (1988) 'Marketing the city: concepts, processes and Dutch applications', *Town Planning Review*, 59(1)

After a newer work of Tunbridge and Ashworth<sup>4</sup> (1992): “Urban tourism is existing in a quite defined shape and could be analyzed separately from other tourist aspects of the urban environment. The urban tourism is essential enough as a separate group of tourism activities accomplished in an urban environment or through the effects that it has in a broader aspect on cities”.

After Shaw Williams<sup>5</sup> (1994): “There is an ever growing importance the researchers set on the urban tourism”.

Beside these opinions there is a counter hypothesis - urban tourism does not exist because “it is extremely difficult to set aside the tourist function of cities from other functions”. Stansfield<sup>6</sup>, 1964, and after Ashworth<sup>7</sup>, 1992: “tourism development in an urban environment has not resulted in differentiation of urban tourism, and beside this all research works are concentrated in tourism development in city centers”.

The most recently published review of urban tourism entitled “Urban Tourism research: Developing an Agenda<sup>8</sup> (Edwards, Griffin & Hayllar, 2008) “... is a study of Australia and treads the well-worn path of concepts of urban tourism, defining the urban tourism and methods of analyzing that phenomenon.” “...Prior to the 80s research on urban tourism was fragmented and not recognized as a distinct field” (Edwards et al, 2008)

As a comparison from the review of Ashworth from 1989, in 2008 Edwards et al stated that “Eleven years later there is a growing volume of published work... A current review of Leisuretourism.com using the generic term “Urban Tourism” generates over 800 pieces of literature and Scopus over 1300 references as a sign of its intellectual health.”

Large part of cultural traditions is preserved in old city centers which are counted as their focus. To restore their past, to redefine for themselves the course of ancient and contemporary history – this is only part of tourists visiting cities’ fundamental motives.

In recent years cities are ever stronger identified with the cultural heritage and with its connection to the today’s life. Non material is as important and curious as the tangible, evident and sensuous in the urban environment. UNESCO already defines the landscape as part of world cultural heritage. The landscape is not only nature, it is lively space. „The landscape is part of culture, which is transmitted in time“<sup>9</sup>. In this connection the so called itineraries in historical town are getting ever more popular.

Beside the main purpose of travel in a given country, visit of at least several of its most attractive city centers has always been a separate, well defined purpose.

### **3. WORLDWIDE EXAMPLES**

The offer of city breaks began from United Kingdom. London was the first city which attracted tourist’s attention thanks to its landmarks, way of life, traditions. The exhibitions, concerts, theater productions are among these attractions which draw the interest of its guests

---

<sup>4</sup> J. E. Tunbridge and G. J. Ashworth, "Leisure Resource Development in City Revitalisation: The Tourist-Historic Dimension," in *European Port Cities in Transition*, 1992

<sup>5</sup> Shaw, G. and Williams. A., *Critical Issues in Tourism: A Geographical Perspective*. Basil Blackwell. Oxford. 1994. 37

<sup>6</sup> Stansfield, C.A. (1964) A note on the urban-non-urban imbalance in American recreational research. *Tourist Review* 19 (4)

<sup>7</sup> Ashworth, G. (1992) Is there an urban tourism? *Tourism Recreation Research* 17(2), 3–8.

<sup>8</sup> Edwards, Griffin & Hayllar., *Urban Tourism research: Developing an Agenda.*, 2008

<sup>9</sup> Alexieva, S., I. Bokova. *Towns and cultural landscapes*, In: *Tourism and cultural heritage*, NBU, Sofia, 2013, p.205

every day. After the reunion of Germany this product could be found in many of Eastern European capitals.

New York is a symbol of USA, Boston is the American historical city, Toronto gives possibility for an excursion to Niagara Falls.

Most popular destinations for city breaks are big, old or simply interesting cities all around the world. They are included in specialized brochures of the tour operators. These are for example Paris, Venice, Berlin, Madrid, Amsterdam, Vienna, and many, many more in Europe; Singapore, Tokyo, Hanoi, Mumbai, and many, many more in Asia; Sharm El Sheikh, Accra, Nairobi, Windhoek, Djibouti, and many, many more in Africa; Canberra, Sydney, Adelaide, Melbourne, Perth, and others in Australia; Buenos Aires, Montevideo, Santiago, Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and many more in South America.

If we could summarize with few words: There are plenty of excellent worldwide choices for city breaks packages. And there are still many to come in the near future. Their popularity is growing every single day. In bigger travel companies are existing whole departments dealing with this type of product.

#### **4. RESOURCES FOR DEVELOPMENT**

In order to attract tourist's interest destinations offering city breaks should have at least some of these resources:

- contemporary cultural center with live atmosphere – Both cities have rich cultural traditions, which are kept alive till nowadays. Namely the spirit which we can feel on the streets, squares or in old houses, as well as kept harmony, city legends and even the patriarchal nature are keeping in a way the interest in a particular city.
- unique architecture – These cities draw our attention with their kept architecture, usually an impact of whole historical periods and architectural styles. We could have seen this architecture on many other places around the world, but the combination and complexity in which we could see it on a particular place are of greater importance.
- worldwide known scientific or cultural institutions – Visits to universities and academies of art is a rare habit of very small part of tourists, but they have a very strong motivational attractiveness.
- cultural and way of life contrast – As the way of life, culture, traditions and behavior of the local population are ever more different, as the city center is more interesting. The level of environmental preservation is also of greater importance.
- Informational and communicational technologies – They are necessary in order to advertise a particular place and give possibilities for customer relations on a first place. On the second they give us information and make the connection with the outer world possible.
- Worldwide famous theatres and operas, as well as art galleries – As we have mentioned at the beginning tourists attracted to city breaks have more specific interests, and are more intelligent. An opera with Jose Carreras, Placido Domingo, or Andrea Bocelli would attract attention of million fans. All of them will love to immerse in the host city atmosphere.
- worldwide famous contemporary industrial enterprises – Industrial plants of “Renault” or “Toyota”, “Sony” or “Philips” attract many tourists. In order to follow the idea of the city break the main part of the tourist program should perceive the city as a whole, not in parts /several objects/.

- worldwide famous religious objects – They could definitely be used for such type of tours. In this case we should have an accent on a specific theme.
- Festivals or fairs – Cities which are hosts of similar events could use this type of product whole year round. They create opportunities for business and cultural connections.
- natural attractions and park areas – Today they are a substantial part of each city's landscape.

## 5. FACTORS INFLUENCING THE DEVELOPMENT OF CITY BREAK

After our opinion in order to develop a city break a city needs as much as possible of the following:

- **level of resource's uniqueness** – This is a factor which counts the loom of a city center with its history, architecture, culture against all the others. In such kind of city we always could find something that we missed on other city centers visited. It could be a specific culture, interesting cultural monuments, natural phenomena, or just small streets, food, people...
- **various supply** – In cities with rich supply the tourist would never be exhausted. He will never regret visiting them. All tourist segments, all individual tourists should find service portfolio for themselves in a given city in order to satisfy their needs.
- **traditions** – There are cities, which irrespective of the market conditions, attract constantly the tourist's interest. These are centers like Paris, Amsterdam, Copenhagen, London, Dresden, where tourists can travel every time to reveal the same city but in a new amplota.
- **level of service** – This is a very important factor. It could be crucial for the future development of the particular city destination. If tourists would become loyal or not, if they would come again or not depends on many other factors, but the attitude of staff attendants is among factors of primary importance. It could be said that this factor leads to the identification syndrome or not.
- **interpretation of resources** – This is a factor connected to promotion, advertising and introduction of tourist resources to tourists in clear, understandable language. It is necessary to have plenty of different brochures, which could serve as informational sources for separate objects and whole complexes of objects. They could represent also the city as a whole with its location, history and attractions.
- **fashion** – This is one of the strongest factors influencing the contemporary demand. The changeability of this factor gives us the opportunity for wealth of transitory supply.
- **identification syndrome** – This is the feeling which everybody has when going to a known place. From the very beginning of the visit we perceive the city closer to our hearts, or simply as a home town. The tourist has no problems to identify himself with the local population, culture, traditions and habits. This syndrome comes when we make a city break in a cosmopolitan city. There many different cultures are living together in a melting pot, and the local population looks at tourists positively. People want to stay in such cities and live there forever. He has the feeling that he has grown up there, and identifies him or herself with the city.
- **advertising** – Each city with plenty of tourist resources, influenced from the developmental factors needs an advertising campaign in order to be noticed. In the era of information we cannot rely on the destination's tourist potential alone. If the potential is not clearly declared on the market, if there are not existing tourist products or services on offer against a set and clear price, we cannot hope that tourists will go on and visit a particular destination.
- **product's price** – This factor has always played a determining role of solvent demand. Lower prices usually attract mass tourists and drive back the intelligent tourists. Here we should remind

the rule “value for money”. It is expected that good products will be offered and which is more important they will be demanded on a higher prices.

- **cleanliness** – It is compulsory condition for accommodation premises, food and beverage premises and all the shopping places. In most tourist destination countries cleanliness is included as one of the conditions for issuing of license for tourist activities.

- **Proximity to natural resources, and the landscape** – This factor is always accepted positively from tourists. Relief variety creates a strange feeling for comfort in most of the tourists. Proximity to rivers, lakes, seas or oceans is also evaluated very high from tourists.

- **favorable microclimate** – This factor has limited influence on tourists. Their motivation is very strong and is depending wholly on the travel theme. We should have in mind the distance travelled to the city itself. As greater the distance, as the influence of this factor decreases.

- **economic stability** – If this factor is not present the visit to the destination is under question. Together with lack of war and terrorism this factor is defining if a city would be visited or not irrespective of tourist supply.

- **high class city hotels** – The tourist quota that is taking part in such kind of travel uses high category accommodation. In most cases these are hotels from well-known hotel chains.

- **excellent transport infrastructure and transport organizations** – The transport infrastructure should be developed at a very high level at least because of two reasons:

- the city should be ready to accept the heavier traffic made by tourists – The normal city rhythm of life should not be infringed by city breaks.

- It should ensure an excellent transport accessibility

In case, there is a city that does not have an airport and is offered as a city break destination the effective and fast road or rail connections would be crucial. As a reference this has not happened yet.

- **lack of dangerous diseases in and around the city** – This factor is crucial for undertaking the journey, as well as the political stability in the country concerned and the lack of war or terrorism acts in an around the destination. If the tourist is frightened from the situation in the country in any kind of aspect he will choose the next offered destination in brochure.

- **satisfying level of health care** – If happened to need or use health services, the client will prefer to know that they would be offered in a professional way from specialists. Availability of modern technologies in health care as well as prepared doctors and nurses is of great importance.

- **exotic city /unknown city** – As further the city from the generic area, as unknown it is for tourists. More unknown for tourists, more interested tourists are. Of course we should take into consideration its resources, advertising, etc.

## 6. PROBLEMS

It is natural to expect that more problems would be connected with the greater interest of tourists towards a city, and cultural differences. At the very beginning of a city destination tourism development we see a strong influence of alien people in the cities’ life. The normal pace of everyday life is destroyed from tourists. The traffic gets heavier, the shops are getting “smaller”, and guests of the city are everywhere. This is one of the negative social influences of tourism.<sup>10</sup> In most cases it leads to negative behavioral reactions amongst the local population towards tourists.

---

<sup>10</sup> Marinov, V., M. Vodenska, . Influences of tourism. Sofia, 1995

The prices of everything are rising together with the higher demand. This fact is worsening the situation of the local population additionally.

The environmental pollution is another important aspect of city tourism's negative influences. It could be claimed that it is a complex one, not only on some components. It is more difficult to say what the share of the tourism development's contamination is and what thanks to the other functions of the city. It is also difficult to mark the line between the production for tourists and the one for local population. That is why we will accept that in the best possible case the development of city breaks I additionally loading the city centers.

A very important problem of contemporary cities and especially of bigger ones is the danger of terrorist attacks. It is really pity that we should mention this but it is true. As a result all tourist companies organizing such kind of tours should follow safety and security measures.

## **7. OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPING THE OFFER OF CITY BREAKS IN BULGARIA**

We could not rely on great interest from solvent foreign tourists without answering their requirements, and the requirements for development of city breaks. Even if we agree on the point that Bulgaria has enough resource potential, we should also have in mind the problems with the transport and part of the tourism infrastructure of the country.

For most Europeans Bulgaria is too close to be an exotic destination, and for the Americans and the Japanese we are still far away in order to rely on touristic boom from these countries.

The cleanliness of some of the city centers, as well as the level of service at some food and accommodation premises are still problematic.

Although all uncertainties this time we should leave behind the progress of events and be ready for this alternative for the tourist product in our city centers. More of that, we should keep in mind that city breaks could unlock the interest of tourists with higher education, more solvent, and with specific cultural tastes. They have a lot more contacts, on which we could rely in the near future in order to increase the number of this type of tourists. As a result in a more distant future the active tourist season may grow.

The experience of some bigger Bulgarian cities today – the capital Sofia, Plovdiv, Varna, Rousse, etc. could be used to offer packages for some smaller but also attractive towns like Nessebar /The old part of the town is included in the UNESCO Heritage list since 1983, Veliko Tarnovo – capital of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom which was one of Bulgarian candidates for European cultural capital in 2019. The development of real educational products – “Cultural itineraries in historical city” which authors offer with the active participation of Master students in programs “Tourism” and “Cultural Tourism” at Sofia “St.Kliment Ohridski” and at Plovdiv “Paisii of Hilendar” Universities have given a start of a process. On this basis we expect future real tourist products for city breaks to be on offer on the Bulgarian tourist market and the tourist markets of neighboring Balkan countries, where they are missing.

As a good Bulgarian example we could give the activities of Free Sofia Tour for promotion of city break programs. It is independent non-governmental organization acting in the area of Sofia city. It is financed through donations only. If the participants in the tours are satisfied with the experience they could make a donation immediately after the finish. Donations could be made also on a Bank Account, or Bank Transfer using the PayPal system.

The tour guides working for the company are only local people. They have lived almost all of their life in Sofia and are well connected with its history, culture and temperament. They know the local way of life, traditions and also the problems of the city. Some of them are working in the field of Tourism, but there are also specialists from different life spheres – law, history, archaeology, architecture, etc.

The tour covers the perimeter with the most interesting tourist attractions in the city center. It has duration of about 2 hours. The organization has prepared a map with the itinerary and all the interesting buildings, and sites on it. Everyone could see it on their website.

An interesting fact is that the tours are offered twice daily, every single day of the year, irrespective of the weather. Even if on the set starting place – the Court Palace at 11:00 and 18:00 there is only one tourist the tour is carried out. An advance reservation is not necessary.

**Map and itinerary of the city tour with approximate duration of two hours<sup>11</sup>**

**The map of Free Sofia Tour**



Source: <http://freesofiatour.com/map/>

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1 Sveta Nedelya Church                        | 2 Theology Faculty of Sofia University       |
| 3 Coat of arms of Sofia                       | 4 Saint Sophia Statue                        |
| 5 Saint Joseph Catholic Cathedral             | 6 Church of St Petka of the Saddlers         |
| 7 Central Department Store                    | 8 Banya Bashi Mosque                         |
| 9 Sofia Synagogue                             | 10 Central Sofia Market Hall                 |
| 11 Mineral Water Springs                      | 12 Central Public Bathhouse                  |
| 13 Council of Ministers                       | 14 Communist Party Headquarters              |
| 15 Ancient Serdica Open Museum                | 16 Rotunda of Saint George                   |
| 17 National Archaeological Museum             | 18 Bulgarian National Bank                   |
| 19 National Art Gallery (Former Royal Palace) | 20 Ethnographic Museum (Former Royal Palace) |
| 21 Georgi Dimitrov Mausoleum                  | 22 City Garden                               |
| 23 Ivan Vazov National Theatre                | 24 Bulgarian Broadway                        |

<sup>11</sup> Statistical data supplied by Free Sofia Tour



25 Stefan Stambolov Monument  
27 Russian Church and Military Club  
29 Synod Palace  
31 National Library  
33 Monument to the Tsar Liberator

26 Museum of Natural History  
28 Hagya Sophia Church  
30 St. Alexander Nevsky Cathedral  
32 Sofia University  
34 National Assembly (Parliament)

After the tourist statistics given from Free Sofia Tour, as expected we have most tourists during summertime. The months of July, August and September accounting the highest level of tourist numbers on the Sofia city break. During the coldest winter months of January and February there are fewest tourists – 5 – 6 times less than the summer figures.

**Table 1: Structure of tourists on the tours of Free Sofia Tour in 2013**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Total guests (Numbers)</b>
<b>Jan 2013</b>	<b>555</b>
<b>Feb 2013</b>	<b>643</b>
<b>Mar 2013</b>	<b>1 243</b>
<b>April 2013</b>	<b>1 321</b>
<b>May 2013</b>	<b>1 572</b>
<b>June 2013</b>	<b>1 737</b>
<b>July 2013</b>	<b>2 448</b>
<b>Aug 2013</b>	<b>3 137</b>
<b>Sept 2013</b>	<b>2289</b>
<b>Oct 2013</b>	<b>1744</b>
<b>Nov 2013</b>	<b>1192</b>
<b>Dec 2013</b>	<b>871</b>

*Source: <http://www.freesofiatour.com/>*

The trend for tourist visits in the capital by months is secured also from the data of Sofia Municipality for number of guests in accommodation during the first half of 2014 (Table 2). Bulgarian tourists are predominating – 41,8% of all guests to the capital. Most of the tourists from abroad in Sofia are coming from well-developed tourist markets of Europe - UK, France, Italy and Greece. The Greek tourists are the majority. They account for 10,8% of all foreign

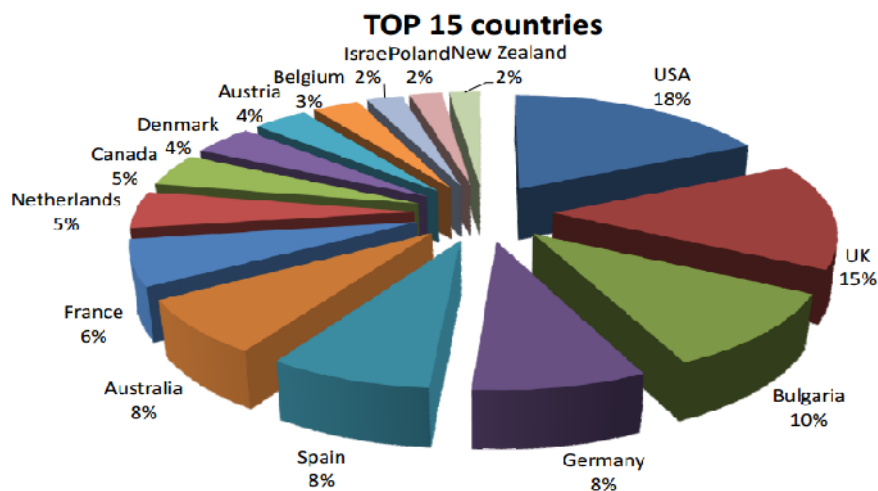
tourists and 6,3% from all the tourists in the city. The approximately shorter duration of stay is obvious. It is seen that the longest duration of stay have the tourists from Spain.

During the summer months we see a sharp increase in the number of tourists – up to twice more in June than in January. In addition the duration of stay in warmer months is decreasing. As a reason for it we could accept the development of other types of tourism during summer holidays like sea recreational tourism, health and spa tourism, mountain tourism, etc.

**Table 2: Number of overnights at accommodation in the Municipality of Sofia by destination countries (01.01.2014 – 30.06.2014)<sup>12</sup>**

Destination	January		February		March		April		May		June	
	Guests	Stay	Guests	Stay	Guests	Stay	Guests	Stay	Guests	Stay	Guests	Stay
Austria	598	1,64	817	1,67	934	1,50	1184	1,68	1608	1,46	1435	1,46
UK	1526	1,89	1781	1,81	2011	1,78	1876	1,83	2405	1,63	2582	1,62
Germany	2308	1,64	2462	1,75	2805	1,80	3328	1,68	3545	1,81	3695	1,55
Greece	2997	2,03	2607	1,73	3952	1,94	4252	1,44	3241	1,46	3715	1,38
Spain	573	2,25	813	2,08	933	2,17	1452	1,53	1037	1,76	1251	1,71
Italy	1589	1,93	1507	1,94	1897	1,94	2506	1,88	3115	1,47	3173	1,57
France	947	1,83	1103	1,97	1202	1,95	1567	1,65	2940	1,43	3489	1,45
Belgium	323	1,81	395	1,72	461	1,72	638	1,73	612	1,67	874	1,37
Turkey	718	2,31	824	2,09	917	2,13	1474	1,11	1768	1,24	1449	1,18
Romania	711	1,78	939	1,80	1193	2,03	1196	1,65	1276	1,86	1541	1,68
Others	10082	2,12	10812	1,99	12187	2,16	13875	1,81	18796	1,87	20944	1,70
Total	22372	21,23	24060	20,55	28492	21,12	33348	17,99	40343	17,66	44148	16,66
Bulgaria	21056	1,63	23350	1,54	23625	1,46	23855	1,34	22640	1,60	24167	1,47
Total	43428	22,86	47410	22,09	52111	22,58	57203	19,33	62983	19,26	68315	18,13

**Fig. 1: Top 15 countries from where the tourists taking part in “Free SofiaTour” originate (first 6 months of 2014 )<sup>13</sup>**



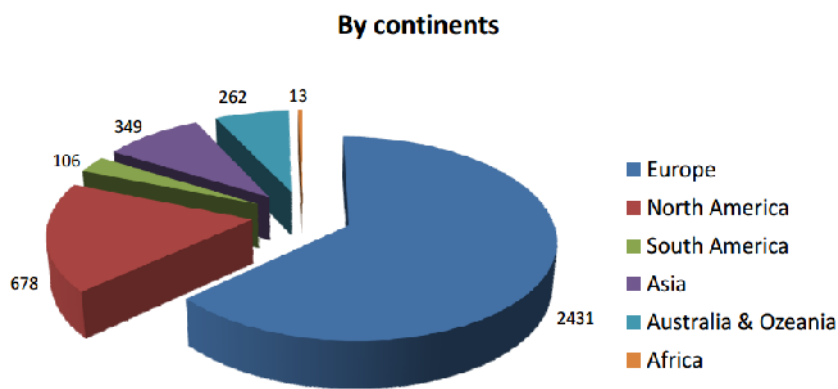
The statistics of Free Sofia Tour is showing a large share of visitors predominantly from developed European tourist destinations like UK, Spain, Germany, France. Leader in this statistic

<sup>12</sup> Data supplied by Ministry of Economy and Energetics in Bulgaria

<sup>13</sup> Statistical data were kindly placed at our disposal for “Free SofiaTour” by „Society 365“

unexpectedly is USA with a share of 18%. On second place are tourists from UK with 15%, and on a third place are Bulgarian tourists, who show a stable interest towards such kind of tours on a domestic market.

The statistic by continents is expressive - 2431 of tourists (2/3), are from Europe.



On second place is North America with about 20% (data from July,2014)

There are free tours also in other cities in Bulgaria – Plovdiv and Varna. Organizer is the same company and the tours are already very popular. For 2013 visitors of Free Plovdiv Tour are 2873, but these numbers are already exceeded in 2014 – a proof for development of the idea and the promotion of this type of city tours in Bulgaria.

In most popular sites for travel planning /For example: [www.tripadvisor.com/](http://www.tripadvisor.com/) with millions of visitors from all around the world, Free Sofia Tour is defined from customers as the company offering one of the most interesting attractions for tourists. It is placed on the first place in many different classifications for the area of Sofia.

Another tour of Sofia, which is attracting tourists and is also interesting is **City Sightseeing Sofia**. It is paid and has a price of 20 - 30 levs per person. City Sightseeing Sofia is accomplished through a tourist double-decker which is running next to most interesting tourist attractions and administrative buildings in Sofia. The tour operator offers 2 itineraries on 3 languages – Bulgarian, English and German. The tours are on offer on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays every hour from 10.00 to 16.00.

The opportunity for offering of combined city tours between neighboring destination countries is defining the interest of the authors towards the capital of FYROM – Skopje.

## 8. CITY TOURS IN MACEDONIA

The study of supply in this sphere is showing that some tour operators (Skopje Walking Tour, Skopje Panoramic Tour etc.) in the capital of Macedonia are also offering city breaks organized around the central parts of the city. At first one could be stressed from high prices of tours. With some companies the prices are as high as \$130 per person (Skopje Walking Tour). Irrespective from the fact that tour operators are different, the itineraries are more or less almost the same. The prices include pick up from the hotel at which they stay. The sightseeing starts from the square with the Museum of contemporary arts. From there we have a view towards the city center. The next stop is the Fortress “Kale”, followed by the Mosque “Mustafa Pasha” and

the Church “St.Kliment Ohridski”. In the Church’s yard one could find the small museum of Gotse Delchev. After the tourist’s preferences the tour could continue in the Macedonian Museum and the Old Market, next to which are situated Turkish baths dated from fifteenth century. The itinerary is crossing Vardar River and the tourists find themselves in the modern part of the city of Skopje. There is situated the main square. We could see newly built statues and monuments – mix of Baroque, antique styles, Arc de Triumph, colored fountains, monuments of Gotse Delchev, Dame Gruev, Alexander the Great etc. The tourists continue their tour along the Macedonia Blvd. which leads to the old railway station. By prior reservation tourists have the possibility to use services of a tour guide in different than English language. The price includes pick up from the hotel and tour guide during the tour. Up to two children under 12 years of age are free of charge. The Tour could be organized every day from 09:00, but only by a prior reservation, which is putting the tourists in a difficult situation.

In Skopje is offered also a product identical to this one of Free Sofia Tour, but it is less advertised and much more difficult to find it. It is prepared by the organization called Free Tours Network. There is almost no information on the internet for this tour.

The bigger advantage of Sofia in the supply of city tours is the free of charge Free Sofia Tour. As the tourists are getting more and more informed, as they have an easier access to information on the Internet, as there are more and more interesting published tour guides it is getting ever more difficult for tour operators to reach better results and higher profits in offering of city tours. Sofia has better opportunities for development of this type of tours and the organizers of the free of charge two hour walking tour in the capital of Bulgaria have found a very good niche with a big potential for development. The project has been realized successfully and it is getting more and more popular amongst the tourists visiting Sofia. It is placed on the first places in different electronic tour guides. Comparing them with the tours offered in Skopje we see that these offered in the Macedonian capital are offered at a very high prices, and are not at all so popular as the city breaks in Sofia, Plovdiv and Varna.

## 9. CONCLUSION

From our personal experience in organizing of similar excursions in different European capitals we could state that at this stage most tourists would not make use of a paid tour at a high price. The tourists inform themselves in advance about the tourist attractions, they know what exactly they want to see, work out own individual itineraries without paying for tour guiding services. The free of charge tour is attracting many customers, who are not able to organize their own tour. When the performance is at a good level, when the tour guides are young and well informed people who know by hearth their own city – the result is satisfied tourists. This fact could be seen from the organization which is organizing the Free Tour of Sofia and is financing itself. For 2013 the average donation from tourist is above 6 levs, which is giving us enough information about the quality of the tours.

There is a possibility for a joint city tour package for both destinations – Sofia and Skopje. The distance between them is 175 km. This is enough for an experience of weekend in both cities with one overnight in each of them. There is also curiosity to travel in two of the closely situated Balkan capitals at once in one package. Integration between both organizations offering free of charge city tours is possible. This fact could raise the tourist’s interest for such kind of experiences. The revenues from this type of organized visits for Sofia and Skopje will come from

accommodation, food and beverage, additional tourist attractions and shopping – elements which are connected to the city breaks' product.

## 10. REFERENCES

- Alexieva, S., Irina Bokova. Towns and cultural landscapes, In: Tourism and cultural heritage, NBU, Sofia, 2013, p.205
- Ashworth, G.J., Voogd, H. Marketing the city – concepts, processes and Dutch applications. In: Town Planning Review, 59(1), 65 - 79. ISSN 0041-0020
- Ashworth, G.J., Page, S.J., Urban Tourism Research – recent progress and current paradoxes. Journal of Tourism Management. 2011 Vol. 32 1 pp 1-15
- Blacksell, S., European city breaks. Footprint Travel Guides, 2007
- Calder, S., 48 Hours In... European Capitals: How to enjoy the perfect short break in 20 great cities, 2014
- Data by Ministry of Economy and Energetics in Bulgaria, 2014
- Edwards, Griffin & Hayllar., Urban Tourism research: Developing an Agenda., 2008
- Fried, J., Peter Lewes., The Middle Ages. 2015
- Hanaor, Z., Graphic Europe – An alternative guide to 31 European cities, Cicada Books Ltd, 2009
- Ireland, B., The New York Times. 36 Hours. 125 Weekends in Europe., 2012
- Knight, P., Strangled: Identity, Status, Structure and The Stranglers. 2015
- Materials by "Society 365" – organizer of Free Sofia Tour
- Marinov, V., M. Batchvarov. Anthropogenic conditions and resources for leisure and Tourism. Sofia, 1990
- Marinov, V., M. Vodenska. Towards the problem of Tourism classification. Sofia, The Yearbook of Sofia University, vol.2, book 87
- Marinov, V., M.Vodenska. Influences of tourism. Sofia, 1995
- Horner, P. Travel agency practice, Addison-Wesley Longman, Essex, 1996
- Page, St. Urban tourism, Massey University Albany, Auckland, 1995
- Pamuk, O., Maureen Freely. Istanbul: Memories of a city, 2006
- Pearce, D. An Integrative Framework for Urban Tourism Research. Annals of Tourism Research, 28 (4), 1987: 926 – 946
- Salisbury, Y., Brandenburg, Beer & Brunch - An Insiders' Guide to a City Break in Berlin (Insider's Guides Book 7), 2014
- Shaw, G. and Williams. A., Critical Issues in Tourism: A Geographical Perspective. Basil Blackwell. Oxford. 1994. 37.
- Shaw, Stephen J. Ethnoscapes as cultural attractions in Canadian world cities. 2007
- Stansfield, C.A. (1964) A note on the urban-non-urban imbalance in American recreational research.
- Statistics supplied by Sofia Free Tour
- Syratt, G. Manual of travel agency practice, Butterworth-Heinemann Ltd., Oxford, 1992
- The Cities Book mini: A Journey through the best cities in the world. Lonely Planet Pictorial Guide., 2013
- Tourist Review 19 (4)
- Thorowgood, S., European City Breaks, 2006

Tunbridge, J.E., and G. J. Ashworth, "Leisure Resource Development in City Revitalisation: The Tourist-Historic Dimension," in *European Port Cities in Transition*, 1992

Woods, S., *101 Adventure weekends in Europe*, New Holland Publishers, Ltd., 2009

<http://www.freesofiatour.com/>

[http://www.citysightseeing.bg/old\\_site/index\\_BG.html](http://www.citysightseeing.bg/old_site/index_BG.html)

[http://www.visitbulgaria.net/bg/sofia/tours/city\\_sightseeing\\_sofia.html](http://www.visitbulgaria.net/bg/sofia/tours/city_sightseeing_sofia.html)

<http://www.travel-macedonia.com.mk/skopje-panoramic-tour/>

<http://www.city-discovery.com/skopje/tour.php?id=10444>

<http://www.freetoursnetwork.com/#!skopje-walking-tour/c18ro>