

Perception of Safety tourism in Colombia

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Abstract. Colombia is notorious for drug cartels and internal armed conflicts that have persisted in the country for more than 50 years. With the peace agreement signed in 2016 Colombia gradually became a country with strong tourism potential in Latin America. Supported by movie tourism and dark tourism, the influx of tourists to Colombia registered considerable increases. Colombia became a popular destination for recreation and beach stays, for adventure and experience tourism; and ecotourism has a dominant role related to the cultivation of coffee. However, Colombia presents natural risks and security risks that support the low level of peace and the low quality of life indicator as a tourism destination. The existence of a greater number of flights and low-cost booking systems, allows to increase interest in new non-traditional places, avoiding mass tourism, which can be an advantage for many travel agencies in the Czech and Portuguese markets that seek authentic and relatively unknown places.

Despite the threat of the pandemic COVID-19, tourist packages to Colombia were analysed. Considering the main objective of the study, to assess the perception of security in Colombia, a questionnaire was carried out to identify the risks associated with this destination. To allow a comparison of the perception of safety with the Global Safety index, the responses of 206 potential tourists, 103 from Portugal and 103 from the Czech Republic, were selected. The results show that the destination Colombia is perceived as more dangerous by potential tourists than by actual tourists who have visited it and perceive it as much safer and more attractive.

Keywords: Safety tourism, tourist destination, Colombia.

1 Colombia as a tourist destination

1.1 General knowledge about Colombia

Tourism aspects and history. Colombia is a South American destination, which is washed by two world oceans - the Atlantic from the north and the Pacific from the west; the country also borders Venezuela, Brazil, Peru, Ecuador, and Panama [28]. The capital is Bogota. Colombia is notorious for drug cartels and internal armed conflicts that

have persisted in the country for more than 50 years [26]. However, with the signing of a peace agreement between the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the Colombian government in 2016, the destination gradually became a relatively strong democratic country in Latin America. Although Colombia is sought after by tourists mainly for recreation and relaxation on the beaches, cultural tourism and the discovery of natural wealth, as well as business, adventure, sports and gastronomic tourism and so-called city breaks are of great importance [1]. In consequence of sustainable tourism, ecotourism or agro-tourism are increasingly emphasized, especially in the areas of coffee growing. Collection of coffee beans on plantations, coffee trails, or tastings of this globally popular drink is also a popular form of adventure tourism. Colombia is the third-largest producer of coffee in the world (after Brazil and Vietnam) [2].

Tourism destination. Movie tourism and dark tourism are considered to be new trends in the field of tourism. While film tourism is associated with visiting attractions that relate to audio-visual works, dark tourism is associated with visiting places or objects that are connected with a certain negative event [3]. It is the combination of these two trends that has gradually developed in Colombia since 2015, when the American streaming platform Netflix launched the crime series *Narcos*, mapping the life of drug addict Pablo Escobar and the emergence of drug cartels in the country in general. The TV series met with great success and positive reception from foreign viewers. In Colombia, so-called narco-tours were gradually created – e.g. tours of places connected mainly with the life and death of Pablo Escobar. The most sought-after places include Escobar's tomb in Medellín, his private prison La Catedral and the country mansion La Manuela in Guatapé [4]. Following the broadcast of the hitherto final third series of *Narcos* in 2017, inbound tourism in Colombia recorded an increase of 38% in the same year compared to 2014 [5]. Colombia has tens of kilometers of coastline, making it a popular destination for recreation and beach stays; The country is also important in terms of cultural, adventure, or experience tourism. An ecotourism also plays a dominant role here, especially in connection with the cultivation of coffee, with Colombia ranking third in the world production of this popular commodity. Through popular culture, Colombia or the mention of it gradually got into the Czech environment over the years, especially through songs or television series, which, however, mostly emphasized negative topics (e.g. the series *Narcos*).

Potential threats and Global evaluations index of security. Colombia's natural hazards include occasional earthquakes, droughts, and volcanic activity. Two primary armed forces often referred to as terrorist organizations, are currently identified on the territory of the state, namely the National Liberation Army (Ejército de Liberación Nacional, ELN) and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, FARC); since 2017 known as the Alternative Revolutionary Power of the People (Fuerza Alternativa Revolucionaria del Común). According to the UL Safety Index, which evaluates measurable safety drivers (institutions and resources, safety frameworks, safety results), Colombia has been rated as the 47th safest

country in the world. According to this index, it can be stated that the safety situation of the destination is currently at a good level [29]. On the other hand, the security situation in Colombia was assessed more negatively by the Global Terrorism Index (19th worst result out of 163 countries surveyed, which represents a medium level of terrorist intervention in the destination) [6]. The Global Peace Index, which assesses the level of social security and protection, the extent of ongoing domestic and international conflicts, and the degree of militarization, ranked the destination 143rd (it means the 143rd best score) out of 163 countries analyzed [7]. This result (2019) points to the low level of peace at the destination, although Colombia has seen an improvement in security compared to 2018. The OECD Better Life Index, which considers safety to be one of the key areas for people's well-being, indicates a lower level of perception of the safety of Colombians when traveling around the destination alone and at night (44% of respondents feel safe, but the OECD average is 68%) [8]. Also, according to the latest figures, the homicide rate per 100,000 populations in Colombia is still higher (25 homicides / 100,000 population) than the OECD average (e.g. 3.7 homicides per 100,000) [5].

Cultural destination and Famous people. Probably the most important figure in the country is the already named Colombian writer and Nobel Prize winner for literature, Gabriel García Márquez [10]. Juan Manuel Santos, a politician and former president of the state, received the 2016 Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts to end more than 50 years of internal armed conflict in the country [9]. The worldwide sculptor and painter, Fernando Botero, is famous for his specific artistic style called *boterismo*, characterized by the depiction of robust statues [11]. The international music scene has been dominated for many years by multiple music awards, singer Shakira. It is certainly worth mentioning the singer Carlos Vives, who in his songs popularized the traditional Colombian musical style - *vallenato* [12], which was inscribed on the UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2015 [13]. Colombia can also be proud of several quality athletes - former Formula 1 driver Juan Pablo Montoya [14] and ex-footballer Carlos Valderrama have had many successes and awards. Other well-known footballers include striker Radamel Falcao (which became famous in FC Porto team) and probably the most successful Colombian footballer today working in the Real Madrid team, James Rodríguez [15]. Other important athletes include the professional road cyclist and winner of the *Giro d'Italia* (2014) and *Vuelta a España* (2016), Nairo Quintana, and Egan Bernal, the 2019 Tour de France winner [16]. Despite a strong Spanish accent, the Colombian actress Sofía Vergara, who is one of the highest-paid television actresses in Hollywood, also achieved success [17].

Tourism offer. The most visited places in Colombia include the metropolis of Bogotá, the port city of Cartagena, which is inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List, or the cities of Medellín, Cali, and Santa Marta. Nowadays, many travel agencies are encountering trends that have spread more and more rapidly in the tourism sector in recent years - customers are more independent, speak foreign languages, can organize trips completely individually, also due to the rise of low-cost airlines or reservation systems such as Booking.com or Airbnb. They are interested in new undiscovered places, non-

traditional experiences, avoid mass tourism, and try to be respectful of the environment at the same time. However, not all customers dare to travel individually anywhere, especially to places that offer many attractions in terms of tourism, but unfortunately do not have a very good reputation. Colombia's offer, as a relatively undiscovered destination, can be an advantage for many travel agencies in the Czech and Portuguese markets. The following Table 1 provides a list of tourist agencies aimed on Colombian tourist destination. Many tourists no longer crave traditional European tourist destinations; as part of the holiday, they increasingly search for relatively unknown places and authenticity. The advantage of offering tours to Colombia on the market of travel agencies in the Czech Republic and Portugal is the fact that they do not currently encounter too much competition. Other South American destinations, such as Peru, Chile, Argentina, and Ecuador, are offered quite abundantly by several Czech and less by travel agencies. However, Colombia does not encounter such interest in this regard, although it is currently a stable destination in terms of security, offering many attractions. Besides, several travel agencies employ or hire qualified guides, specialists in Latin America, who often stay in the destination for a long time and can thus provide a complex experience for Czech or Portuguese tourists.

Table 1. Table captions should be placed above the tables.

Travel agency in the Czech Republic (CR) and Portugal (PT)	Tour package	Term	Price	Sum of days
Adventura (CR)	<i>Colombia comfortably</i>	November 2020	3 341,00 €	14
Alvarez (CR)	<i>Unknown Colombia ; Unknown Colombia and Lost City; The real Amazon</i>	July - November 2020	since 2688 – 5184€	17 - 27
Čedok (CR)	<i>The Great Circuit of Colombia; Colombia - Panama</i>	October - November 2020	since 2971 – 41596€	13 - 15
ESO Travel (CR)	<i>Focus on Colombia</i>	October 2020	3 200,00 €	12
Livingstone (CR)	<i>Colombia - A mysterious land of mountains, jungles and the Caribbean</i>	October - November 2020	3 276,00 €	18
Marco Polo (CR)	<i>The best of Colombia with a Czech guide</i>	March 2020	3 196,00 €	10
Nomád (CR)	<i>Colombia - behind the legend of El Dorado and the Crystal River</i>	August - September 2020	2 556,00 €	11

Orbis Link (CR)	<i>Cruises</i>	November - December 2020	976 - 1982€ + transport to the port of departure	12-17
Pangeo Tours (CR)	<i>Mysterious Colombia</i>	August - September 2020	2620€ + flights	26
Rainbow tours (CR)	<i>Antilles and Southern Caribbean (cruise); Cocalumbia, The Way of Dreams</i>	April - October 2020	since 1909 – 24815€	10-14
Sen (CR)	<i>Colombia - Ecuador (Galapagos); Colombia and Panama all inclusive; Colombia 5 K</i>	April - November 2020	since 2544 – 4408€	12-15
Soleada (CR)	<i>The hidden gems of Colombia</i>	March - October 2020	4 197 €	18

Travel agency in Portugal (PT)	Tour package	Term	Price	Sum of days
Logitravel (PT)	<i>Bogotá e Cartagena das Índias</i>	until December 2020	since 1 395€	9
	<i>Perú, Bogotá e Cartagena das Índias</i>	until December 2020	since 2 195€	12
Agência Abreu (PT)	<i>Colômbia: o País do El Dorado</i>	since June 2020	since 1 723€	9
SolTrópico Pacotesdeferias.com (PT)	<i>Férias em Cartagena das Índias, San Andrés e Bogotá</i>	September - October 2020	since 1 902€	9
Lusanova Tours (PT)	<i>Colômbia - o realismo mágico - Bogotá, Medellin, Cartagena de Las Índias</i>	March - December 2020	since 1 820€	11
	<i>Colômbia - o El Dorado - Zona Cafeeira, Bogotá, Medellin, Guatapé, Peñol, Cartagena de Las Índias</i>	March - December 2020	since 2 195€	11

2 Research findings

2.1 Tourism agencies offering Colombia in Czech Republic and Portugal

A secondary data analysis provides an overview about tourism agencies offers in the Czech Republic and Portugal, which are organizing tours or cruises to Colombia. We observed several tourism packages with specific attention to price, terms and duration of the tours offer.

If the tourism agency decides to expand its portfolio to Colombia, it is necessary to keep in mind that it is a remote destination, the price of the tour is higher and the tourist segment is relatively specific. In this regard it is necessary to target a certain group of customers, e.g. the wealthier, in the middle years, who are open to the knowledge of

new places but are too conservative or who are afraid to visit the destination individually. Colombia's promotion in terms of tourism is thus in the Czech or Portuguese environment only in the hands of the travel agencies themselves, which should try to bring it closer to the local clientele.

The most serious threat from travel agencies offering trips to Colombia is related to the current global pandemic COVID-19 [18], which unfortunately has significantly affected the entire tourism sector and whose future development is hardly predictable for the time being. Following the emergence of a new type of coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 in the world, many countries (including the Czech Republic and Portugal) have declared a state of emergency, which brings with it, for example, restrictions for free movers, closure of borders, interruptions of air connections, as well as the activities of accommodation and catering facilities, travel agencies and other providers of tourism services. In this consequence, we attach a lower degree of interaction from travel agencies. Another threat for them is, for example, political instability, the risk of armed conflicts in the destination or changes in visa conditions, which currently do not constitute an obstacle - citizens of the Czech Republic and Portugal are exempt from the visa requirement and entry and subsequent stay in the destination is allowed (for a period of 90 days) [19].

2.2 Perception of safety tourism in Colombia

Methodology. Quantitative research is based on a questionnaire survey among potential tourists. Risks are divided into four basic groups: health, natural (extreme weather, tectonic activity), anthropogenic (socio-genic, techno-genic), and, last but not least, socioeconomic (security, social and economic). We modified a similar questionnaire used for observing the perception of destination security as a tool for tourism development in Colombia [20]. The questionnaire survey consists of a total of twenty statements. The five-point Likert scale (1 strongly agree - 2 rather agree - 3 rather disagree - 4 strongly disagree) is chosen as the technique of sociological research, on which potential tourists assessed the degree of agreement/disagreement with statements about potential threats of the destination. The questionnaire was distributed electronically in 2020 by Google Forms, firstly in the Czech Republic and then in Portugal. Simultaneously we conducted the same questionnaire for other potential tourists in several countries (Germany, Slovak, Hungary, Italy, Spain, Brazil, Slovenia, Belgium, United States etc.). The Global Safety Index was created from a total of 518 respondents. We selected 103 Portuguese responses and 103 Czech potential tourist responses for closer comparison of security perception with the Global Safety index.

Results. The results of the questionnaire survey marked that Colombian security is generally perceived negatively by potential tourists. The resulting values oscillated around the mean value of 2 (the predominant answer therefore became the possibility *Rather agree*). According to major findings, the least relevant risks were natural (extreme weather and tectonic activity) and socio-economic risks (possibility of terrorist attack,

fear of cultural differences in the destination, hostility of tourists, alleged poverty of Colombia as a factor not to visit, dishonesty of service providers towards tourists). On the contrary, respondents perceived health threats (poor hygiene at the destination, tropical diseases, distrust in visiting local health facilities), anthropogenic (insufficient tourist infrastructure and superstructure) and security as a subgroup of socio-economic threats (frequency of riots, assaults or thefts in the country, the danger of moving around the destination alone, the helplessness of solving problems in case of travel to Colombia without travel agency). Only just travel agencies, that should strive to improve the image of the destination in the Czech or Portuguese environment, whether by presenting the attractions of Colombia through trade fairs and exhibitions, organizing lectures or discussions, or through social networks to promote and subsequently popularize destinations currently considerable influence. The effort of tourism agencies should be to create the best and the most interesting offer, which would attract the attention of potential clients and thus differentiate them from the competition. It should be noted that many tourists are currently able to organize a trip without the help of an intermediary travel agency or advisor. In particular, however, tourists who, for example, do not speak the language or do not dare to travel to distant Colombia on their own, can welcome a pre-arranged package of services (or have it tailored). The question remains whether the segment that would use the services of a travel agent or tour guide on trips to Colombia was really attracted by its turbulent drug past, on which some tours are based.

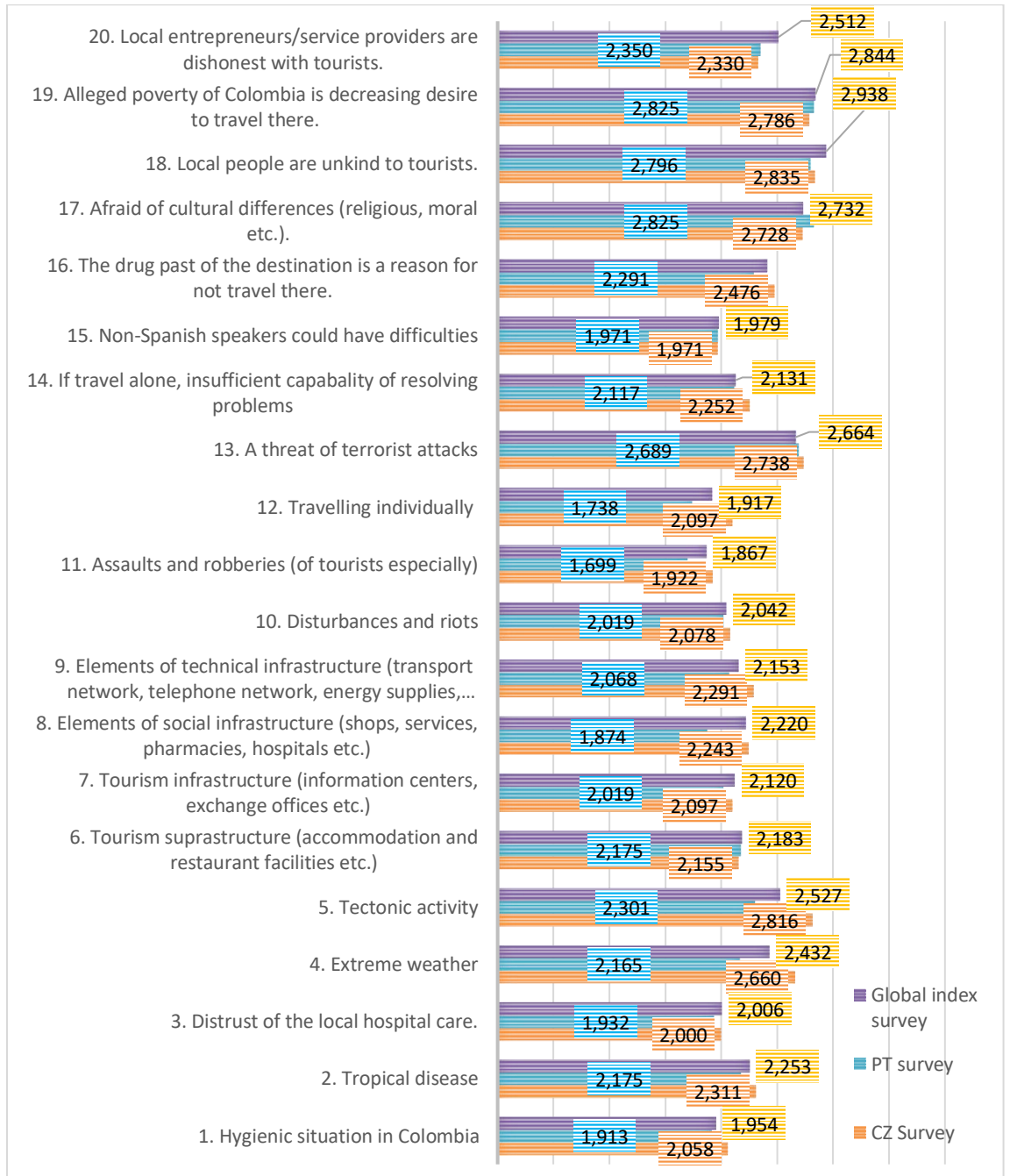


Fig. 1. A perception of safety tourism from Portuguese and Czech potential tourists compared with global index survey. Own elaboration. 2020

We are aware of the fact that Colombia is not considered as a destination affected by mass tourism, it offers travelers practically everything they can desire and it is associated with far more interesting stories than just those related to drugs. Colombia cannot be seen in the commercials of well-known Czech or Portuguese travel agencies. Within Latin America, the Caribbean (Dominican Republic, Cuba) is promoted quite often. Although Colombia is a part of the Caribbean, it has not received any attention. Travel agencies with sufficient financial resources could thus draw attention to the destination also through advertisements in the mass media.

Schools (especially universities) can also promote greater awareness of the destination, especially at a time when foreign students arrive in Europe as part of exchange programs or academic teachers for work, study, or research purposes. In the same way, they can talk to local students about the current situation in the country on the basis of their own experience, not just indirectly by mass media.

However, each individual's critical attitude towards sources of information is very important. Whether it is the news brought by the mass media (especially of the tabloid type), television series, films, or books, it is always necessary to pause and think about their credibility.

3 Recommendations and conclusions

The destination itself under the *Marca País Colombia* brand, which was established in 2012, strives for enlightenment. The brand was created as a joint effort of the national government and the private sector to show the determination, hard work and passion of the locals. The idea of the brand is not only to increase the competitiveness of Colombia's positive image of the world, but also to strengthen the pride of Colombians. It is the locals who are the voice of the country and can help change its image. The destination label is based on attributes such as natural, historical, and cultural richness, gastronomy, geography, and climate diversity [21]. It is one thing that is said about Colombia, another thing is what is going on in the country. For this reason, the brand *Marca País Colombia* strives through *colombia.co* platform to create and share positive content about issues that are happening in the destination. The brand is also presented through social networks (Facebook, Twitter, Google+). The target markets targeted by the brand in 2012 were the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, South Korea, Brazil, Chile, Mexico, Peru, Turkey, the European Union, and Switzerland. The government of the country's former president, Juan Manuel Santos, participated in the creation of the destination brand, whose motto became the statement *La respuesta es Colombia* (The answer is Colombia). This slogan thus replaced the original *Colombia es pasión* (Colombia is a passion), with which the destination was identified in the world until 2012 in successful campaigns such as *El riesgo es que te quieras quedar* (The risk is that you want to stay) [22].

In January 2019, the destination presented a new campaign called Colombia, Feel the Rythm (Colombia, siente el Ritmo) at the FITUR 2019 trade fair in Madrid. The campaign aims to use the musical and cultural heritage of Colombia and, through well-known local artists, to promote the country as an international tourist destination, thus

increasing the number of visitors to foreign tourists. After several months of quantitative and qualitative analysis of the perception of Colombia's international tourism, music has been evaluated as what the world's tourist seeks and is interested in the country [23]. This chapter is seen as an invitation to tourists not to be influenced by the often distorted or untrue news circulating about the country and not to condemn in advance a place that they did not personally check. Scientific studies already confirm that the tourist destination of Colombia is much more perceived as dangerous by potential clients than by tourists who have visited the destination and perceive this destination as much more safe and attractive [24]. These perceptions of potential danger, not real in non-traditional destinations, are also common in other unexplored countries. Changing the image of Colombia is a long-term process, we have seen many positive changes that were happening in Colombia, and the recognition of safety tourism have to be promoted in the future with good experiences of real visitors of this tourist destination [25].

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