

CAMPS FOR CHILDREN AS A SPECIFIC FORM TOURIST ANIMATIONS

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Abstract: Knowing that animation is a significant factor in the development of tourism and increasingly a decisive factor in the selection of tourist destinations, it can be pointed out that it is extremely important when it comes to children. While parents imagine their annual vacation as rest and relaxation from everyday work duties, children as active beings, eager for fun, games, and adventures, need an active type of vacation. The existence of Camps for children is increasingly attracting the attention of parents because they represent an alternative for their child to spend part of their vacation in a safe, meaningful place that allows the child to interact with peers. Which camps exist, what are their specificities, how relevant are Camps for children as a tourist destination and what are the benefits that Camps offer are the questions that this paper deals with. The area of Bačka Palanka was taken as a case study for survey research. Based on a survey of the teaching staff of primary schools from Backa Palanka and parents of children of lower grades of primary schools the paper presents data on how many children of primary school age visit camps and what attitude the parents take.

Key words: *tourist animation, camps, children, active vacation.*

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a very widespread socio-economic phenomenon with the tendency of even greater development. In the past, tourists were exclusively people with higher payment possibilities, while now tourism is available to almost all structures of the population. As the structure of tourists changed over time, so did the motives and needs. In the beginning, the motives for the travel of people with higher paying powers were primarily education, new discoveries or pilgrimage, while the modern tourist has very diverse motives and needs. A modern tourist goes on a trip for vacation, to visit relatives or friends, to participate in conferences, congresses,

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exhibitions, various manifestations, education or some other reason. Animation in tourism occupies a special place in the tourist offer, and its importance is reflected in the creation of a comprehensive system of tourist offer and demand. Tourist animation as part of the tourist offer has an important share and is an essential element in meeting the needs of the modern guest. It is necessary to devise additional ways of animation and activities, which will attract the attention of tourists, fill their free time, make the entire stay more interesting, and of course this is the key to success in attracting new and creating permanent tourists (Ostojić, Vještica, 2014; Ivkov Džigurski, Petronijević, Stamenković, 2022; Gajić, 2009). Tourism plays an important role in the dynamic changes that are taking place in many aspects of contemporary reality; participation in tourist activities has an important influence on the behavior, personality and identity of people. A significant part of our time is dedicated to leisure and tourist activities (Rokicka-Hebel, Ziolkowska, Patyna, 2016).

The emergence and development of modern technology led to a great saving of human energy, but also to a complete change in the way of life. Man is exposed to the ever-increasing demands of modern society and therefore to stress, and the occurrence of hypokinesia and obesity is increasingly present. Unfortunately, children are not spared from all these changes either. Recreation is biologically necessary, and its physiological, pedagogical, psychological and sociological values are great. It has the function of prevention and compensation for harmful external influences. Even in ancient times, people noticed a great connection between physical activity and health status, i.e. the possible impact of certain physical exercises on the quality of life, but also on the course of some diseases and their outcome (Ugrinić, Ivanovski, 2016).

Children's activities in their free time include: sports, reading, recreation, fun with peers, listening to music, watching videos and TV, devoting themselves to hobbies, doing art (playing, painting, writing), additional learning and self-education, homework and other activities. It is noticeable that during their free time, especially in urban areas, children spend time using digital technologies.

If they spend time in nature and activities such as swimming, cycling, spending time in parks and playgrounds, we can notice that it is conditioned by the parents' free time. The purpose of staying in different types of children's camps is for children to improve their health, psycho-social and physical development through their immediate stay in nature and pedagogical activities. It is also very important because children who are involved in a sports activity from an early age develop work habits and self-discipline already at an early age.

Previous research has established that boys are more active than girls, and with age the level of physical activity decreases. Boys are more involved in organized sports and prefer more intense activities, while girls prefer informal or recreational

activities. Boys value their sports competencies more positively, prefer to compete and compare themselves with others in sports and prefer more intense physical activities (Đorđić and Krneta, 2007; Ostojić, Vještica, 2014; Maksić and Tenjović, 2008).

ANIMATION FOR CHILDREN

In order to talk about the importance of animation in tourism, it is necessary to recall the very meaning - the definition of the term, which is the enrichment and revitalization of the tourist offer with different contents. Also, tourist animation implies the encouragement of tourists to be active participants in these contents and is guided by the principles of: freedom, appropriateness and activity (Ivkov Džigurski, 2012).

Knowing that animation is a significant factor in the development of tourism and increasingly a decisive factor in the selection of tourist destinations, it can be pointed out that it is extremely important when it comes to children. While parents imagine their annual vacation as rest and relaxation from everyday work duties, children as active beings, eager for fun, games, and adventures, need an active type of vacation. That is why parents increasingly decide to provide their children with a stay during the holidays in one of the children's camps.

In addition to being an important element in the design of programs intended for tourists, animation contributes to bringing tourists closer together and their mutual communication (Horvat, 2003). This claim does not apply only to the adult population, but also to children, because they too, during their stay in a destination, are in a situation where they get to know each other with children from different backgrounds, cultures and ages.

Animation in tourism for children, as in any other form of tourism, should be well planned and well executed, which is why the existence of teams of quality tourist animators is necessary (Ivkov Džigurski, 2012).

When organizing tourist animation for children, one should take into account the age characteristics of children, prepare and offer many different contents, games, activities that will contribute to the development of the child in all its aspects of development. When a parent analyzes the tourist offers of camps for children, he is guided by the interests and affinities of his child. Accordingly, the parent opts for a camp that offers activities in which his child will be an active participant.

The importance of animation in tourism for children in the following:

- the child develops and strengthens self-confidence and self-esteem,
- the child develops communication skills,

- the child is an active participant in games and activities,
- the child learns through play,
- the child masters new skills,
- the child develops empathy and tolerance,
- team spirit develops in the child,
- the child's need for movement is satisfied,
- the child develops healthy habits,
- the child becomes more independent etc.

Knowing the characteristics of children's development, regardless of their age, it is clear that they learn best and acquire knowledge and skills through play, which is why it is important that the activities and content of the animation program are entertaining. In addition to a well-designed and high-quality animation program, the role of animators in them is also important. An animator is a person who encourages children to actively participate in activities without fear of failure. He is someone who cheers, encourages, trains, provides help and support. A successful animator interacts with children (Nenadić, 2023).

In order to plan and implement any activities with children of primary school age, it is necessary to know the basic characteristics of their development in that period, which is especially important for all those who deal with and work with children, in this case for animators. As this paper talks about the animation of children of primary school age, in order to have an idea of what activities and contents are intended for children of a given age, it is necessary to refer to the characteristics of their development.

The developmental period of 7-10 years is called the "middle childhood" period. During that period, children have a need to be accepted, to fit into a peer group. Children of a given age participate in activities together and enjoy the company of their peers, but only after the age of eight do they begin to develop an awareness of the formation of sustainable friendships. At this age, children take things personally, develop empathy, develop the ability to express their emotions. Also, children are still developing the ability of self-control and self-regulation, as well as the ability to postpone their needs. Children are able to recognize the emotions and needs of others. The period of development from 11-16 years represents the period of early adolescence. Problems that are present in the period of early adolescence are frequent mood changes, excessive sensitivity, increased anxiety, anger, lack of self-esteem, the appearance of shame and guilt, increased possibility of using prohibited substances

(<https://www.decijapsihologija.rs/adolescenti/razvojne-karakteristike-child-by-age/>) which is why animators must be especially careful when working with them.

EDUCATIONAL TOURIST ANIMATION

Educational tourist animation provides participants with the opportunity to acquire new knowledge from various fields (culture, sports, science). It has the task of introducing potential participants of social activities to those activities themselves, their forms, benefits, advantages... Visitors can get acquainted with certain artistic media, but also with some issues of social life: historical events, social issues, etc. Educational programs are those programs in which participants have the opportunity to learn something, to acquire new knowledge that they will be able to apply at home after returning from vacation.

For this purpose, different types of schools and courses are organized, upon completion of which participants may or may not receive a corresponding certificate (Ivkov Džigurski, 2012).

For children, these can be organized activities at the school level that are in accordance with the teaching and learning plan and can be:

- Eco workshops,
- Physical-recreational and sports activities and sports activities,
- Senso-perceptual games and activities,
- Social, entertainment and cultural activities,
- Research activities,
- Health and hygiene activities, etc.

Or organized summer camps with the aim of improving:

- language skills
- giftedness
- sports skills, etc.

Following the example of some of the countries in the world, which use nature in order to acquire knowledge and develop what has already been learned, summer camps for children of various contents are increasingly being organized in our country with the aim of mutual respect, help, respect for diversity and personal development (Đokić, Srećković, Ivanovski, 2021).

CAMPS FOR CHILDREN AND ANIMATION

The first camp in the world, organized as an international labor camp, was created in France in 1920. In the period between 1930 and 1950, France saw the development of animation activities and the organization of scouting camps with the aim of encouraging and developing man's awareness of his needs and his place in society. At the same time, there is also the development of social group work in youth

organizations. In this way, young people wanted to indicate their need to become more actively involved and to participate in all spheres of social life.

With the development of animation as an activity and the development of tourism, ideas about founding different types of clubs, organizations, camps. In the beginning, these were family camps, and today there are more and more children's camps (Ivkov Džigurski, 2012).

The very choice of camp for children primarily depends on the interests of the child. When deciding on a child's stay in one of the camps, great attention is paid to organization, accommodation, nutrition, facilities and activities. Today on the tourist market of Serbia there are several travel agencies that offer camps for children. Some of them are organized in cooperation between tourism agencies and foreign agencies, sports clubs, schools... In addition, there are independent organizations in Serbia, registered as associations or camps for children, which hire competent persons with a certain level of education, and which implement activities with children. .

Although different in their animation programs and content, it can be stated that all camps for children have common goals:

- to develop certain skills in children,
- that children develop the ability to become independent,
- that children develop healthy lifestyle habits,
- to encourage and develop children's creativity,
- to contribute to the mental, spiritual, social and physical development of children,
- that children develop team spirit, a sense of belonging,
- that children develop the ability to communicate with nature (Cerović, 2008).

According to the activities and content that camps for children offer, they can be distinguished: linguistic, sports/linguistic, sports, recreational/adventurous, educational/scientific, volunteer, etc.

In language camps, in addition to learning a foreign language, children are offered other fun and educational activities with the active use of a foreign language. They are most often organized during the summer period (during the school holidays) for a duration of 7-12 days (depending on the offer of the travel agency or the organization that organizes the camp). The aforementioned camps are characterized by teamwork, which contributes to children feeling more free, to reduce their fear of communicating in a foreign language, and to master navigating foreign culture and linguistics (<https://quality.htgetrid.com/sr/rating-of/3603-luchshie-letnie-jazykovye-lagerja.html#name1>). In addition to offering a linguistic program, the language camps also offer recreational and entertainment content and activities, and these camps can also be characterized as language sports.

Besides language camps, sports camps are the most represented in the world. In addition to travel agencies, the organizers of the mentioned camps are sports clubs, renowned manufacturers of sports equipment, high schools for children with a talent for sports. Some camps offer many different sports in their content or are specialized, i.e. intended only for a certain type of sport. In Serbia, the organization of sports camps for children is in accordance with the Law on Sports and the Strategy for the Development of Sports, and the implementation of sports programs is entrusted to national branch sports associations.

Sports camps abroad have, in addition to programs with an emphasis on the training of a specific sport, also adapted a program for language improvement through classes that include terminology related to the chosen sport. Sports that are supplemented with language programs include: golf, tennis, horse riding, football, basketball, volleyball, water polo and many others (<https://egida.rs/skola-kategorija/kursevi-jezika-za-mlade-bez-pratnje/sports-camps/>).

When talking about recreational camps for children, it should be emphasized that they include a number of different activities and contents: educational, sports, fun, adventurous. All the mentioned activities are in accordance with the age of the children staying in the camp. Such camps are most often offered by travel agencies that have established cooperation with primary and secondary schools and preschool institutions. The expected stay in the mentioned camps is 7 to 12 days. This type of camp is organized in accordance with the school holidays, and some are organized both during the summer and winter holidays, while some are organized only during the summer holidays.

The goals of organizing recreational camps are:

- to enable children to spend their free time in a quality way,
- to develop children's creativity, resourcefulness, team spirit,
- for children to acquire work habits,
- that children develop the ability to become independent,
- that children stay in nature as much as possible...

The types of activities and facilities offered in recreational camps can be classified into several categories:

- Artistic-creative: making objects, working with natural and recycled materials, workshops - drama, music, art.
- Adventurous (they differ from camp to camp and depend on the offer of the camp itself): Depending on the offer of the camp: camping (expanding tents, campfire, finding one's way in nature, orientation in nature, adoption of healthy lifestyle habits), landscaping, acquisition of skills depending on the type of camp

(activities and games on the water: sailing, boat activities, kayak training and driving, kayak competition, swimming training, technique improvement, training swimming...), dance activities (Zumba, modern dance...), cycling (polygons), dexterity polygons, overcoming obstacles, climbing an artificial rock, Zip line program, etc.

- Fun activities: chess basics, brainstorming, fencing, bubble football, games without limits, recreational games, Buggy driving on the range, pool games, Zorbing, diving, archery, tactical range, Sup boards, parties, dancing, karaoke, masquerade, evening animations, quizzes, sledding, Nordic skiing, traditional games for children, etc. (Nenadic, 2023).

Educational - scientific camps, as the terms themselves suggest, are camps that aim to enable children to acquire new knowledge and skills, to expand the knowledge they have acquired in the regular education system, to express their potential, talents, skills. These camps include digital astronomy, physics camp, research camp, Archimedes camp..., and the program in them takes place through educational workshops (in order to acquire knowledge and skills in a creative way from various scientific fields), with the following contents:

- Training with digital contents - Minecraft, Roblox, Youtube
- Training in mathematics, chemistry, physics, biology, ecology
- Competitions in scientific fields
- Workshops - creative, practical (application of acquired knowledge in practice)
- Research activities
- Experiments.

Although volunteer camps are in most cases intended for people aged 18-30, there are also those where children older than 13 can apply. The basic condition for applying to the volunteer camp is motivation to participate in the camp, acceptance of the tasks performed in the camp, readiness for cultural exchange, tolerance, empathy. Most programs take place in the summer period for 2-3 weeks. They are of an international character and a maximum of two people from one country can stay in them. Camps have been organized around the world since 1920 and there are over 2,500 camps in the world (<https://www.mis.org.rs/volontiranje/volonterski-kampovi-u-inostranstvu/>).

It should be pointed out that it is necessary and desirable to engage a team of experts in camps for children: tourism experts, economists, pedagogues, doctors, physical education professors, competent and high-quality animators. Every day at the camp

is filled with activities of an educational, recreational, adventurous and fun nature, and children should be worked with by professionals.

Activities and contents in camps for children differ from camp to camp and are conditioned by the time (season) in which they are organized, the infrastructure, the environment and the age of the children who stay there.

CASE STUDY BAČKA PALANKA

Bačka Palanka is a city that offers children the opportunity to play many sports (football, basketball, volleyball, tennis, table tennis, martial arts, water sports...). In addition to sports facilities, clubs, sports schools, there are many open schools and workshops of educational, creative and artistic content in the city. It is known that children of early and primary school age are active in engaging in some of the above activities.

The survey research will try to determine how well the camps for children are known to parents of elementary school-age children and employees - teaching staff in elementary schools at the level of the city of Bačka Palanka. Also, to try to get a realistic picture of how many children of elementary school age and their teachers visit camps for children and what is a factor of crucial importance when it comes to choosing a camp.

The objectives of the research are:

- to gain an insight into how many children of elementary school age at the level of Bačka Palanka and their teachers visit camps for children,
- to gain an insight into how satisfied the parents of the children of the mentioned population are with the provision of services to their children in the camps,
- to gain an insight into which animations are the most attractive to children of primary school age.

The tasks of the research are to indicate:

- the importance of elementary school-aged children staying in the camp,
- the importance of animation and the competence of animators in a children's camp.

The basic hypothesis of the research is: Quality, meaningful, diverse and creative animation contributes to the development of well-being for children and is one of the key factors when choosing a camp for a child. The set variable is: Well-planned and well-realized animation contributes to the development of the child's well-being and

encourages the child to actively participate in all contents and activities, developing their potential.

Quantitative and qualitative research methods were used in this paper. The quantitative research method will provide information on the number of children who visit children's camps, the number of teachers who, in cooperation with the camps, organize children's stay in them, and information on which camps are the most visited by children and teachers from Bačka Palanka. A qualitative research method will allow to gain insight into how important animation is in the choice of camps for children and why.

In order to obtain the necessary data through the research methodology, a survey was used as a research technique, which was distributed through Google questionnaires. The survey questionnaire was created for two groups of respondents - employees in primary schools and parents of children in lower grades of primary schools. As the research concerns children of primary school age from Bačka Palanka, a convenient non-random sample was selected. Also, when it comes to parents as a sample, due to the large number of the population, the research included only parents of children in the lower grades of elementary school. During the processing and analysis of the obtained data, in addition to statistical, descriptive and analytical data processing techniques were used.

When analyzing the results of Questionnaire A, which was intended for employees in elementary schools in Bačka Palanka, it can be seen that the majority of respondents are between 40 and 50 years old, followed by those in their 30s, while the very young and the oldest are very few.

Of the total number of respondents, 74% are classroom teachers, while 26% are subject teachers, with 41% of respondents having been employed at the school for 10-20 years, while 12.8% have been working at the school for less than 10 years.

Out of the total number of respondents, 94.9% implemented some type of extracurricular activities in their practice. These activities are of different forms, but most often they organize one-day excursions (83.8%), while 37.8% of the respondents organized a stay in camps for children.

Employees of primary schools from Bačka Palanka most often stayed with children in summer camps at two destinations: Divčibare (50%) and Tara (40%), while a small share of respondents stayed at camps at destinations: Zlatar, Lepenski Vir, Rudnik, Bukulja, Goč, Gučevo, and as far as foreign countries are concerned, only Greece appears in a small percentage. During the winter, they stayed mostly in Kopaonik and Zlatar. Whether the role and presence of animators in camps for children is important to respondents and why, can be seen based on the answers received. All respondents stated several reasons why, in their opinion, the presence of animators is important, and one of the leading reasons is the organizational ability of animators (71.8%). However, according to the answers received, it can be seen that the other stated

reasons for the presence of animators in the camp also play a major role when choosing a camp (Fig 1).

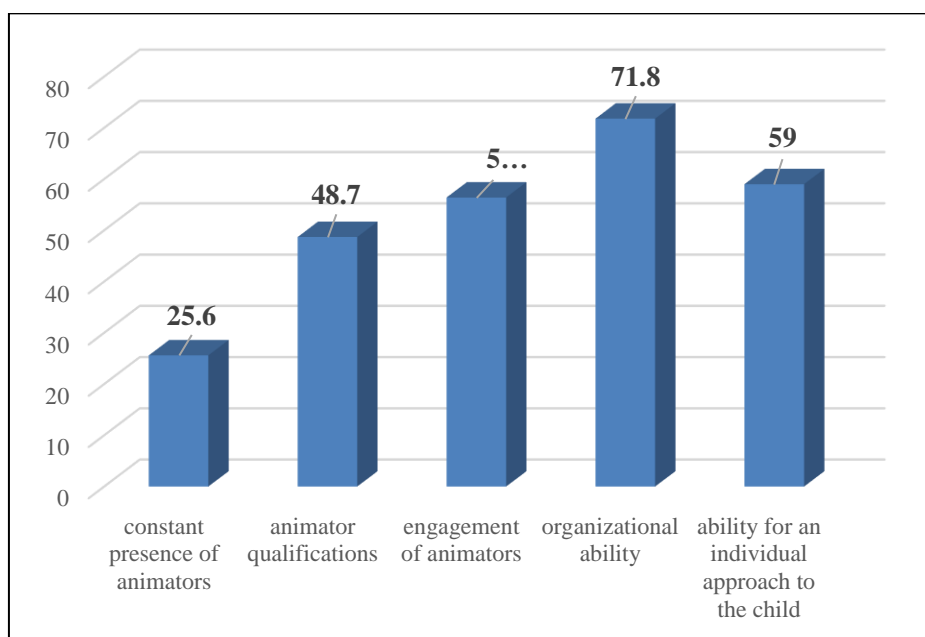


Fig. 1. Characteristics of animators by importance for teachers
Source: Authors based on survey research

The reason why school employees would recommend children to go to a certain camp is first of all quality educational and entertainment content, but also the presence of professional animators to help in the organization and implementation of the mentioned content.

When talking about the benefits for children during their stay in the camps, 87.2% of respondents believe that the greatest benefit is the possibility of their independence, 82.1% of respondents believe that the benefits for children are socialization and interaction with children of different ages, while for visiting 46.2% of respondents chose the new destination as a benefit.

The survey intended for parents did not give the expected results. The assumption is that a small number of parents responded to the survey (only 58) because the majority do not know about camps for children and their specifics, or because most parents are not able to financially support everything necessary to afford their child a stay in a camp. Nevertheless, based on a small number of respondents, the following will present how parents are interested and what, according to them, is important for choosing one of the camps to which they are or would send their child.

Of the total number of parents surveyed, 53% of families are families with two children, 25% are families with three children, 16% are families with one child and

6% are families with four children, of which 22% are children aged 1-7 years. , 48% are children aged 7-10 and 30% are children aged 10-14.

Based on the data obtained about the types of extracurricular activities that the children went to, it can be seen that 92.9% of the children went on a one-day excursion, while only 16.1% of the children stayed on a multi-day excursion and the same number of children in one of the camps for children. The most visited camp by children from Bačka Palanka is the summer camp on Tara, while the Lepenski vir and Divčibare summer camps are slightly less visited. Only a few children stayed at the mine, Zlatar and Gučevo, while the largest number of children had never been to a children's camp.

When choosing a camp, the content of activities that the camp offers is very important to parents. Given that 45.5% of parents answered that the choice of camp is influenced by reasons that were not offered among the answers, it can be assumed that they are of a personal nature, where from previous research there is an assumption that the personal recommendation of other parents whose children are already stayed at one of the camps. Several factors influence the parents' decision to have their child stay in one of the camps. In the parents' opinion, the leading factors for children's stay in the camp are being in nature and spending time with children, and as the most significant benefit that a child can have from the camp, as many as 87.5% of surveyed parents cite independence.

The role of the animator in the camp where their child is staying is very important to parents, in terms of engagement. According to the answers, it can be concluded that it is important for parents that the animator knows how to organize activities with children, that he is ready to devote himself individually to the child, that he is constantly present in activities with children. Among the answers offered, only 21.3% of parents stated that it is important for them that the animator has certain qualifications (*Fig. 2*).

Looking at the analysis of all the obtained data, it can be seen that a small number of respondents participated in the surveys. It can be assumed that the reason is insufficient interest of teachers to organize groups of children to stay in a camp during their annual vacation. Also, it can be assumed that this type of organization of children during the school holidays is avoided because of the great responsibility that teachers would have to assume.

When it comes to parents of children from Backa Palanka, it can be assumed that the response to the survey is low due to insufficient experience and knowledge about children's camps. One of the key factors why parents do not send their children to camps is of an economic nature, because parents with several children in the family do not have the financial means to provide their children with a stay in one of the

camps. Also, from the obtained data, it can be seen that the role of animators in children's camps is less important for parents than some other factors, and it is assumed that parents are not sufficiently aware of the important role of animators in camps.

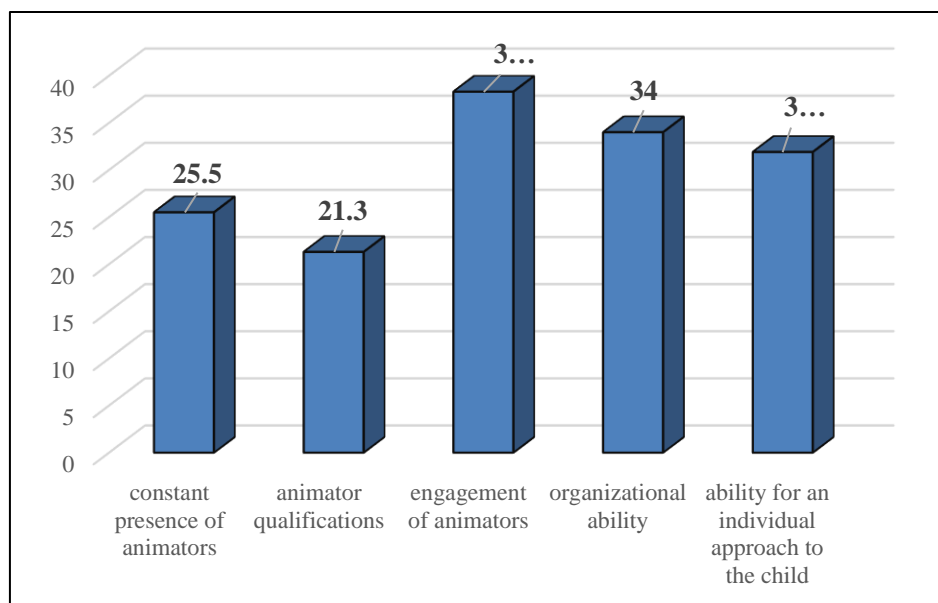


Fig. 2. Traits of animators by importance for parents
Source: Authors based on survey research

CONCLUSION

A well-designed and implemented animation program contributes to filling the free time of tourists (in this case, it refers to children), but also to increasing board and non-pension spending.

Children's camps are designed to satisfy the child's needs for movement, creative expression, acquisition of new knowledge and skills, socialization, etc. with their many contents and activities. As such, it is meaningful and innovative and represents a specific form of tourist animation for children. The stay of children in one of the existing camps contributes to their all-round development and encourages children to actively participate in all activities and contents without fear that they will not be successful enough in something.

On many forums, where you can find the opinions of psychologists, the exchange of experiences of parents (whose children stayed in a camp), comments and experiences of teaching staff (who stayed with children in camps), you can find out about the benefits for a child whose development is contributed to the stay in the camp. The

greatest benefit is reflected in the fact that the camps offer a large number of contents and activities through which various processes take place, which are not available to children in everyday life. During the stay at the camp, the child learns communication skills (not only with adults, but also with peers), problem solving, managing and overcoming conflict situations, managing his own and understanding and appreciating other people's emotions. At the same time, the child develops: the ability to fulfill his obligations to the end and on time, the ability to recognize, appreciate and accept diversity, as well as the ability to tolerate and cooperate with each other. In children's camps, as in all types of tourist animation, it is based on joint participation in activities, constant interaction among all participants, discovery and development of one's own possibilities. After staying in the camps, children express happiness and satisfaction, which is the main purpose of animation in tourism. Also, we should emphasize once again the very important role of animators in the camps who, with their competences, contribute to the quality realization of content and activities with children. Children's camps as a specific form of tourist animation for children are in constant development and strive to improve their contents, introduce innovations and expand their capacities.

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