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# **Journal of Tourism, Policy and Business**



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**BRAND BULGARIA – FOUR-SEASON DESTINATION -  
through the public communications**

*[Mariana Ianeva](#), [Ralitsa Georgieva](#), [Veselina Portarska](#), [Stiliyana Basmadzhieva](#)*

**Abstract**

*This paper is in line with Bulgaria's National Research Strategy 2020 and the recent Executive's governance agenda for tourism development from June 2023 to December 2024. It intends to promote 'brand Bulgaria' as a four-season destination, focusing on health, MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, Exhibitions) and entertainment tourism, as well as cultural tours. The research emphasizes new marketing approaches, regional tourism development and promotion of tourism all year round. It seeks to identify and communicate the competitive advantages of Bulgaria's nine tourism regions by improving their marketing management by destination marketing organizations (DMOs). Using a variety of scientific methods, the paper highlights the creation of a unified and sustainable tourism brand that integrates regional sub-brands, attracting high-end tourists and positioning Bulgaria as an excellent four-season destination.*

**Key words:** destination, Brand Bulgaria, hospitality, tourism, four season tourism

**JEL:** Z3, Z320

**Key words:** destination, Brand Bulgaria, hospitality, tourism, four-season tourism

**1. Introduction**

**The relevance and importance** of the topic in this paper corresponds with the National Strategy for Scientific Research 2020 and is associated with the issued new management program of the Executive Power in Republic of Bulgaria (adopted at a meeting of the Council of Ministers on July 27, 2023 with major tasks in tourism for the period June 2023 to December 2024), corresponding on a high level with the tasks set in the current study. Corresponding highlights of the article are some of the following measures, also included in the management program. The *sixth measure* of the program, namely implementation of new marketing approaches and formats for



advertising and marketing of destination Bulgaria. The scientific team will explore and seek for opportunities to present appropriate marketing approaches and formats specifically for brand Bulgaria. *Measure seven* corresponds to providing support for the development of tourism regions and assisting marketing managers of the Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) to create an integrated brand with sub-brands of Bulgaria and the respective region. *Measure eleven* of the programme also corresponds with the study idea, as its focus is to expand the wings of active summer and winter season and position Bulgaria as a year-round destination by implementing systematic approach to popularize specialized forms of tourism – health (balneo, spa, wellness and medical), cultural, wine-culinary, business/MICE (meetings, incentives, conferences, exhibitions), mountain, eco, adventure, cycling and hiking, etc.

**The main idea of the study** is to develop a model for communicating brand Bulgaria as a four-season destination for health, MICE and entertainment tourism, with cultural tours.

**Object** of study are the nine tourism regions in destination Bulgaria.

**Subject** of study is the identification and promotion of the competitive advantages (such as resource availability and supply offering), as well as the marketing management of tourism in the nine regions of destination Bulgaria on the priority, according to the authors, types of tourism, providing year-round tourism, more solvent tourists and possibility of creating brand Bulgaria as a four-season destination for Health&MICE&Entertainment tourism.

**The aim** of the paper is to bring out, establish and communicate tourism destination Bulgaria with recognition for four-season tourism on the priority, according to the researchers, specialized types of tourism – Health&MICE&Entertainment tourism, with cultural tours and emphasis on hospitality.

**The thesis** states that it is necessary to communicate Brand Bulgaria as a four-season destination with priority types of tourism – Health&MICE&Entertainment, with cultural tours, attractions and emphasis on hospitality. For this purpose, it is necessary to prove its competitive advantages and promote them through the means of the external activities performed in the management of the destinations. Thus, the proposed idea corresponds to the updated version of the National Strategy for Sustainable Development of Tourism in the Republic of Bulgaria, 2014-2030<sup>1</sup> and also to some of the specific measures, issued by the Government.

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<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Tourism. (2024). *National Strategy for Sustainable Development of Tourism in the Republic of Bulgaria, 2014-2030*. Retrieved from: [https://www.tourism.government.bg/sites/tourism.government.bg/files/documents/2018-01/nsurtb\\_2014-2030.pdf](https://www.tourism.government.bg/sites/tourism.government.bg/files/documents/2018-01/nsurtb_2014-2030.pdf)

**The hypothesis** is based on the statement that communicating Bulgaria as a four-season destination for specialized types of tourism Health&MICE&Entertainment, with cultural tours and emphasis on hospitality, will help the Executive Power to accept and create identical brand of Bulgaria, synchronized with several other sub-brands of the individual tourism regions, which will attract tourists of a high-end product.

**The approaches to achieve the research objective** can be applied by involving basic activities, such as formulating the main tasks, the solution of which will lead to concrete scientific and practical-applied results and contributions.

**The main tasks** are related to:

1. Literature review of brand and hospitality, identification of best practices of direct competitors, identification and promotion of best practices in Bulgaria, focus on personalized service, in order to raise discussions about “hospitality” in the public space in Bulgaria.
2. Proofing the direction of the research in line with the objectives of the National Research Strategy and social challenges.
3. Forming a business identification of destination Bulgaria by the nine tourism regions, highlighting its competitive advantages as a destination for Health&MICE&Entertainment tourism with a variety of cultural tours and attractions – fundamental for brand Bulgaria as a four-season destination.
4. Proposing business identification of the marketing management of the nine tourism regions, performed by the DMOs.

A number of common **scientific methods**, such as observation, analysis, synthesis, analogy and comparison, etc. will be applied in the specific research and in forming the results. They represent tools of the dialectical, historical, inductive-deductive and systematic approaches, as well as comparative analysis.

It can be state that tourism brand Bulgaria is unique in the minds of the foreign visitors (German, Polish, Romanian and others), but it is not identical in all countries. In some countries this brand brings positive and pleasant emotions, while for others – negative. In the first case, brand must be **developed and enriched**, in the second – repositioned. In early 2021 the Executive Power announced the need to develop and enrich the content of brand Bulgaria as a four-season tourism destination. In this regard, the idea of the study is to develop and enrich the content with a focus on four-season tourism, targeting more solvent customers on offering health and MICE tourism product. In this regard, it is necessary to identify the emotional and rational reactions of the specific sub-



brands of the tourism regions in Bulgaria to be synchronized with the general brand of our country as a tourism destination.

**Originality** of the present work follows on priority specialized types of tourism, also possibilities for developing and enriching brand Bulgaria as a four-season destination for Health&MICE&Entertainment tourism, with cultural tours and emphasis on hospitality. It is the combination of all the components that is connected with the product innovation, which is the basis of the idea for **Brand Bulgaria – hospitality in four seasons**.

The scientific problem in the current paper will lead to an increase in the competitiveness of the Bulgarian science internationally, as it will contribute with real scientific proposals for a model on developing and enriching the brand of the destinations, as well as the programs and activities for their promotion in the priority areas for destination types of tourism.

## 2. Literature review

The topic related to **branding** Bulgaria by priority year-round tourism types (Health&MICE&Entertainment), offering a higher-end product and hospitality management in different tourism destinations have not yet been studied in depth, which is a prerequisite for the emergence of the proposed current study. This is also conditioned by the need to assist the tourism business, the Ministry of Tourism and DMOs, municipalities, tourists, journalists, bloggers, vloggers and all entities, promoting Bulgarian tourism.

As a result of the systematization, authors are gathered around the idea of communicating “Brand Bulgaria – hospitality in four seasons”, due to the need to help the tourism business, the Ministry of Tourism and DMOs, respectively the municipalities, to position and rebrand Bulgaria in the direction of:

- its resource potential;
- its existing competitive advantages in terms of the offered tourism product;
- the need to create a higher-class tourism product, providing higher revenues, respectively with more solvent tourists in the four seasons;
- the need to develop and impose hospitality in the theoretical terminological apparatus in the tourism literature, to promote it in the Bulgarian tourism business and to journalistically impose it among all audiences.

A mandatory condition in the research related to the external marketing of the destination is first to make studies and their basis to be argued the containing identification of the characteristics, such as tourism supply and demand resources. These characteristics are usually related to natural,

anthropogenic resources, competitive advantages and emotional influence and impact of the destination, resp. products on potential and actual tourists. Influenced by modernist or specific styles of urban planning, architecture, places for entertainment and specific attractions – extremely important for the modern tourist. Similar characteristics need to be set when creating a business identification of a tourism destination, by means of various marketing, including PR tools.<sup>2</sup> Management theory defines business identification of the object/destination as a set of material, textual and visual means applied in tourism policy, in the presentation of the destination to public with a clearly defined marketing strategy /note: by business strategy we mean a competitive marketing strategy according to Porter/.<sup>3</sup>

According to other researchers, one of the main advantages of business identification is the possibility to present the destination as different from its competitors. In this regard, the scientific team will aim to identify, with the assistance of business experts, the competitive advantages of brand Bulgaria, in order to establish it as a four-season destination. The goal is to make brand Bulgaria visible and distinguishable from other brands on the tourism market.

As a sub-objective it is necessary to form an identity and differentiation of the tourism offer on the priority product specializations, imposing brand Bulgaria as a health, business and entertainment destination in four seasons.

Philip Kotler defines the means of imposing the identity that are accepted by his followers, namely names, signs, symbols, atmosphere, events.<sup>4</sup>

According to various authors, business identification as a set of ways, means and programs, lead to the formation of business differentiation – the distinctiveness of the destination in the competitive environment, through significant differences that make it recognizable and preferred by consumers. In this regard, the sub-objective of the researchers is to recognize and promote destination Bulgaria as a year-round destination, and differentiation will be sought through its competitive advantages – specific resources; balneo, spa, business accommodation facilities; attractions, etc.

*Fins kud analogizes **business identification** of the destination/tourism region with the **brand**. The authors adopt a similar state, which will be the basis of the research processes.*<sup>5</sup> The business identification/branding of a tourism destination should be managed by the Executive Power/Ministry

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<sup>2</sup> Ianeva, M. (2019). *Establishing business identification of regions for sustainability in tourism*. Journal of Balkan Ecology 22 (1), 81-87. Sofia

<sup>3</sup> Porter, M. (2008). *Competitive advantage: Creating and sustaining superior performance*, Simon and Schuster

<sup>4</sup> Kotler, P. (2002). *Country as Brand, Product, and Beyond: A Place Marketing and Brand Management Perspective*. Journal of Brand Management 9(4):249-261

<sup>5</sup> Fins kud, L. (2009). *Developing Winning Brand Strategies*. Business Expert Press. ebook

of Tourism or the DMOs through a business identification/branding program. The importance of building a business identification/branding program and its implementation by the Executive Power or the DMOs and the municipalities is part of the corporate social responsibility strategy of the tourism organisations operating within the tourism region and aims at creating sustainability of the tourism business in Bulgaria.

The World Tourism Organisation is committed to promoting sustainable, responsible and globally acceptable tourism development. As a member of the organisation, Bulgaria is also bound by its objectives and must contribute to achieving them, while also being able to benefit from the positive impact they have on the country's development and the opportunities they provide for solving existing problems.

Business identification/branding, as one of the tools of external marketing of tourism destinations can facilitate the successful implementation, management and promotion of brand Bulgaria – hospitality in four seasons.<sup>6</sup>

The result of the complex process of brand formation is that consumers begin to attribute symbolic meanings to the product and/or services, often having nothing to do with the characteristics of the specific offering.<sup>7</sup> This creates a “product myth”, a consumer value for which the customer is willing to pay a certain price. If the brand is relatively immutable, the myth of the brand is constantly changing as a result of the owner's efforts in the competitive struggle and adaptation to the environment. Therefore, for a brand to fulfil its positive role, it must be purposefully created, adapted and managed, which is done through branding, also named brand management. Brand management is also interpreted by the authors in a narrow and broad sense.<sup>8</sup> After forming the brand of the destination or tourism region, it is necessary to create a slogan. For example, slogans developed by the three DMOs (Trakia, Rhodopes and Stara Planina) are a good example of branding/rebranding of a tourism destination and will be presented in the current study. A slogan is a short phrase used by an organisation, easy to remember, designed to advertise an idea or product.

When analyzing the marketing management of the tourism regions, it is found that only 3 out of 9 regions have their own slogan, namely the Rhodope, Trakia and Stara Planina regions. As part of the creation of Brand Bulgaria with sub-brands of the individual tourism regions, it is necessary to

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<sup>6</sup> Kaleychev, S (2022) *How to Change Customer Mind. The Difference Between Brand and Trademark in Tourism Industry*, UNWE Yearbook, 157-164. Sofia

<sup>7</sup> Shocker, A. D., Srivastava, R. K., & Ruekert, R. W. (1994). *Challenges and opportunities facing brand management: An introduction to the special issue*. Journal of marketing research, 31(2), 149-158. Chicago

<sup>8</sup> Ministry of Tourism. (2024). *National Strategy for Sustainable Development of Tourism in the Republic of Bulgaria, 2014-2030*. Retrieved from: <http://www.tourism.government.bg/bg/kategorii/strategicheski-dokumenti/nacionalna-strategiya-za-ustoychivo-razvitie-na-turizma-v>

seek for opportunities for slogans of the remaining 6 tourism regions, as well as a **common slogan for Bulgaria**, and the author's proposal is to go in the direction of “Brand Bulgaria – hospitality in four seasons”.

One of the tasks is to develop the theory of hospitality, to identify best practices by the direct competitors, to identify and promote best practices in Bulgaria, to focus on personalized services, in order to raise discussions about “hospitality” in Bulgaria in the public space.

The hospitality industry is associated with welcoming and entertaining guests/tourists at the destination or tourism site in a way that makes them feel good and cared for. The tools of this industry are the atmosphere that is created, the care in service and the products or amenities to provide guests/tourists with the best possible experience. The hospitality industry encompasses five different sectors of the hospitality industry. These sectors include food and beverage, lodging, leisure, travel and tourism, and meetings and events.

The presented highlights, connected to the set topic, bring out the general aspects of the state of the studied issues.

**3. Orientation of the research in accordance with the objectives of the National Strategy for Scientific Research, with social challenges defined in it and with regional and European priorities**

**The National Strategy for Research in the Republic of Bulgaria** reflects the policy of the Government as part of its responsibilities for the strategic development of the country. In this regard, in the study we indicate which specific measures of the Government's Programme correspond to the main aspects of the current paper.

According to the new **Programme for management of Bulgaria for the period from June 2023 to December 2024**, the main tasks in tourism until December 2024 are related to specific priorities, deadlines for implementation and legislative measures. In the context of the measures to be taken by the Executive Power, out of 16 distinct ones, the first and fundamental one is related to the improvement of the current concept of promoting Bulgaria and establishing it as a preferred and safe tourism destination offering a sustainable, diverse and high-quality tourism product during the four seasons of the year. In this respect, we believe that this study corresponds with the measures of the Executive Power and will help to further develop the current Concept, in terms of a diverse, high quality tourism product in four seasons. By high-quality product we mean that it can be highlighted and differentiated by imposing a new model of offering a tourism product based on hospitality in four seasons. Hospitality theory should also be brought to the forefront of the Bulgarian literature and business to help improve service quality and business vision.

The sixth proposed measure also corresponds to the paper idea, namely – the application of new marketing approaches and formats for advertising and marketing of destination Bulgaria. In this direction team will explore and seek for opportunities to present as appropriate marketing approaches and formats, specifically for brand Bulgaria.

The eleventh measure also corresponds with the idea of the study – in order to expand the wings of the active summer and winter seasons and to position Bulgaria as a year-round destination, a systematic approach to promoting specialized forms of tourism – health (spa, wellness and medical), cultural, wine and culinary, business/MICE, mountain, eco, adventure, cycling and hiking tourism, etc. In this article, the focus is on creating brand Bulgaria on health, business and entertainment tourism.

The National Research Strategy aims to support the development of science in Bulgaria to become a factor in the development of a knowledge-based economy and innovation activities. The target group of the Strategy is scientific organisations – universities, scientific institutes and other organisations engaged in scientific research.

Bulgaria has established and implemented a **Sustainable Tourism Development Strategy 2014-2030**<sup>9</sup>, updated in 2017, which is also related to sustainable destination development, quality of the tourism product, business identification and brand recognition in the respective tourism market.

**European priorities** have also been addressed in the development of the current study.

Priority of the European Union's policy is to maintain its position as a leading tourism destination in the world. Sustainability policy is ensured through the creation of the European Tourism Scoreboard (a set of tools for sustainable destinations)<sup>10</sup>. In recent years, various international tourism forums, including the Conference on Education and Skills in Medical and Wellness Tourism, held in Bulgaria in June 2023 as part of the 68TH MEETING OF THE UNWTO COMMISSION FOR EUROPE (CEU), have been discussing European tourism policy priorities. Highlights are placed on the economic impact on spa destinations; wellbeing; life balance; healthy lifestyle; disease prevention and rehabilitation; training and skills in wellbeing tourism; environmental regulations; the advantages of European cities in health tourism; the concept of health tourism and Europe as a global provider of health tourism services (European spas in green

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<sup>9</sup> Ministry of Tourism. (2024). *National Strategy for Sustainable Development of Tourism in the Republic of Bulgaria, 2014-2030*. Retrieved from: <http://www.tourism.government.bg/bg/kategorii/strategicheski-dokumenti/nacionalna-strategiya-za-ustoychivo-razvitie-na-turizma-v>

<sup>10</sup> European Commission. (2018). *European Tourism Scoreboard*, 5. Retrieved from: [http://www.fpdd.bg/userfiles/files/ETIS\\_BG.pdf](http://www.fpdd.bg/userfiles/files/ETIS_BG.pdf)

destinations). Spa and cultural experiences will be based on the traditions of several generations; the aim of European destinations is to make spa capitals, health resorts and spa facilities and services recognisable by governments.

Initiated by the President of BUBSPA, Europe is communicated as a year-round destination for health tourism, based on the multitude of resorts. In this regard, we believe that the timeliness and relevance of this study is highly appropriate at the current stage of tourism market development in Europe and worldwide.

Regarding tourism policy in Bulgaria in recent years, as a result of the health crisis and not only, but the focus on Bulgarian health tourism has also been intensified and emphasized by various leading experts, including the previous Minister of Tourism of Bulgaria saying that Bulgaria is putting its spa and balneo tourism on the map, and all visiting ministers will see the hottest geyser in Sapareva Banya. Talks are also underway to train staff in medial and spa tourism.<sup>11</sup>

The development of this paper will assist the Executive Power (Ministry of Tourism) to ensure sustainable tourism that is synchronized in terms of the overall brand Bulgaria, as well as the sub-brands of the individual tourism regions. The results of the study aim to support the management of resources and products at destination and tourism regions level, in order to build an image on the priority tourism types for Bulgaria, according to the authors, providing hospitality in four seasons. In this context, the aim is to create a sustainable brand Bulgaria for communicating the tourism products that are priorities for the development of Bulgarian tourism.

Practicing four-season tourism in destination Bulgaria is associated with the possibility to practice the four types of specialised tourism in all four seasons. This possibility is conditioned by the natural and anthropogenic resources available in the tourism regions for these types of tourism, as well as in the tourist offer in this direction, which has become prominent in recent years and, last but not least, by the recognition of these products in domestic tourism. The idea is to translate this recognition to Bulgaria's external inbound markets.

The National Research Strategy reflects the Government's view that education, research, technological development and innovation are the basis for achieving dynamic and sustainable economic growth. In this regard, we believe that the research study “Brand Bulgaria - hospitality in four seasons” reflects the Government's vision of the priorities in Bulgarian tourism in terms of communicating Bulgaria as a destination for Health&MICE&Entertainment tourism.

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<sup>11</sup> Dimitrov, I. (2023). *Bulgaria is again at the top of world tourism*, Retrieved from: <https://bnt.bg/news/ilin-dimitrov-bulgariya-e-otnovo-vav-varhovete-na-svetovniya-turizam-v346031-318625news.html>

The proposed research has an interdisciplinary character, since tourism itself is an interdisciplinary field, covering a number of scientific areas – geography, history, economics, management, sociology, marketing and others. Tourism is established as a dynamic, complex, multifaceted and integral phenomenon and this necessitates the interdisciplinary approach in its study. Many authors consider tourism as a universal science which is served by many auxiliary sciences.

In some publications, the interdisciplinary approach is concretized in the use of methods of already developed scientific fields. The achievements of intermediate scientific fields are increasingly applied. An example of this is medicine (healthcare) and related climatology, balneology, thalassotherapy and various healing preventive and restorative methods as a basis for the development of medical tourism (a subtype of health tourism, which is one of the main types of tourism embedded in this study).

The creation of a brand of a tourism destination is among the trendiest problems of contemporary marketing, which requires an interdisciplinary approach that links several scientific fields – tourism, psychology, communication, literature, political science and cinema – and represents a sequence of approaches that allow the creation and management of a brand and brand personality of a tourism destination.

#### **4. Results of the business identification of destination Bulgaria in the nine tourism regions with recognition of its competitive advantages. Results of the business identification of the marketing management of the nine regions by DMOs.**

The management of tourism organizations<sup>12</sup> is based on the implementation and application of principles closely tied to marketing, strategic management, and also through the use of various models and techniques. Significant attention must be paid to their management and especially the possibility of covering all elements of the overall tourism experience especially based on aspects related to added tourism value and the principles of integrated quality management.

For this purpose, nine DMOs<sup>13</sup> (in Bulgaria named Organizations for Management of the Tourism Regions) are established, aiming at a better promotion of the tourism destinations in each region, according to the Concept of Tourism Regionalisation in Bulgaria, which came into force in March 2015 and divided the country into nine tourism regions, each with its main and extended specialization. The main specialization is a combination of two types of tourism, which in

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<sup>12</sup> Buhalis, D. (2000). "Marketing the Competitive Destination of the Future." *Tourism Management*, 21(1), 97-116.

<sup>13</sup> Ivanova, E. (2021). "Tourism Development and DMO Performance in Bulgaria: An Analysis."

combination define the uniqueness of the regions. The extended specialisation includes up to 4 complementary types of tourism in addition to the basic ones.

In the world practice, two main models of marketing management are observed concerning destination marketing organizations – descriptive and conceptual. We believe that the descriptive model is the more adaptive of the two, as the weight of the elements in it varies according to the current market situation. Organizations register their activities mainly on the basis of the external activities covered in the models, which are related to various events, advertising, etc. This is because the law on public-private partnership in Bulgaria adopted in 2013 is being repealed as of January 2018, which also coincides with the time of registration of all nine tourism organizations, based on which the position is taken that they work mainly on external activities, which does not require a common budget of the regions. Such a budget could be formed on the basis of tourism fees and other types of revenue collected by the local government of these 28 districts. It should be noted here that a region territorially includes more than 1 municipality, which in turn makes synchronisation difficult.

#### **4.1. Analysis and opportunities for development of Stara Planina tourism region. Analysis of resource potential.**

- The main specialization of Stara Planina tourism region according to the “Concept for Tourism Zoning of Bulgaria” is mountain and cultural tourism.
- The region covers the territory of the longest mountain in the country – Stara planina, and its center is the city of Veliko Tarnovo, with a total of 32 municipalities located on its territory.
- The main attractions are: Ledenika cave, in the Vratsa area; in the region Stara Planina there is also a large part of the Central Balkan National Park – one of the three national parks of the country. Its importance for the development of tourism is extremely great, since 9 reserves are also located on its territory – because of which the park is included in the UNESCO World Heritage List. Undoubtedly, the most important object of cultural and historical significance in the region is the Tsarevets fortress, visited annually by a large number of Bulgarian and foreign tourists. Other significant tourism sites of national importance are the Etar Architectural Ethnographic Complex and the Architectural and Historical Reserve Village of Zheravna. The most preferred tourism destinations are: Tsarevets, Troyan Monastery, Eye of God Cave, Saeva Dupka Cave, Krushun Waterfalls, Devetashka Cave, Lovech, Etara, Zheravna, Arbanasi, Kotel, Ledenika Cave and Veliko Tarnovo.



**Table 4.1.1. Bed base of the main tourism centers in the region by 2023**

City	Bed base
Gabrovo	3 590
Veliko Tarnovo	5 314
Lovech	4 880
Varshets	1 078

Source: National Statistical Institute<sup>14</sup>

**Analysis of the activity of the DMO of Stara Planina region**

- There are 14 activities included in the statute of the organization.
- From the website of the municipality of Veliko Tarnovo it is clear that a general meeting of the organization was held and a marketing strategy of the region for the period 2021-2024 was adopted.
- Leading in the implementation of the activities are the Rhodope, Trakia, Sofia and Rila-Pirin regions.
- This is the only organization that has announced that uses Instagram, which is bilingual - in English and Bulgarian.

**Table 4.1.2. Activity of DMO of Stara Planina region**

<b>Strategy</b>	It is clear from the website of the municipality of Veliko Tarnovo that there is a marketing strategy prepared for the region, but it is not publicly available.
<b>Facebook profile</b>	- Facebook profile is created. -It is visible the participation in international exhibitions. -Regular posts and diverse authored content are observed. - There is high activity in interaction with other institutions.
<b>Website</b>	No website
<b>Number of administrative municipalities</b>	32 municipalities from 5 administrative areas

<sup>14</sup> National Statistical Institute. (2024). *Annual data*. Retrieved from: <https://www.nsi.bg/bg/content/1978/%D0%B3%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%B8%D1%88%D0%BD%D0%B8-%D0%B4%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%BD%D0%B8>

**in the region**

*Source: Author's systematization*

#### **4.2. Analysis and opportunities for development of Sofia tourism region.**

##### **Analysis of resource potential.**

The main specialization of region Sofia according to the “Concept of tourism zoning of Bulgaria” is business and cultural tourism.

- The region covers the territory of the Sofia-Pernik agglomeration with centre – the capital of Bulgaria – Sofia, with 23 municipalities.
- The region has a rich variety of natural resources that favour the development of the tourism industry in all its forms. Most famous are Doukhlata Cave; Vitosha, Lyulin, Lozenska Mountain, Ihtimanska Sredna Gora, Osogovo, Konyavska mountains, etc.; Iskar Dam; Vitosha Nature Park, Bistrishko Branishte and Torfeno Branishte reserves, which preserve and protect the plant and animal diversity of the region.
- There is a wide variety of anthropogenic resources based on the rich cultural and historical heritage. The capital Sofia is the main centre accumulating a large part of the anthropogenic resource capacity of the region. The resources are diverse in nature and are of interest to both Bulgarian and foreign tourists. Sofia has a base of business centres attracting a large number of business tourists, most famous of which is the National Palace of Culture.

**Table 4.2.1. Bed base of the main tourism centers in the region by 2023**

<b>City</b>	<b>Bed base</b>
<b>Sofia City</b>	15 481
<b>Sofia district</b>	8 095
<b>Pernik</b>	565
<b>Kyustendil</b>	4 142

*Source: National Statistical Institute<sup>15</sup>*

#### **Analysis of the activities of the DMO of Sofia region**

<sup>15</sup> National Statistical Institute. (2024). *Annual data*. Retrieved from: <https://www.nsi.bg/bg/content/1978/%D0%B3%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%B8%D1%88%D0%BD%D0%B8-%D0%B4%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%BD%D0%B8>

- In the statutes of the organization are written 13 activities, which are also the minimum number for each of the tourism regions in Bulgaria.
- The budget amounts to BGN 3.2 million, but since tourism region Sofia is the largest in terms of population, this justifies the higher budget compared to the Trakia Tourism Region, for example.
- Although region Sofia is the largest in terms of population, its activity is one of the opaquest compared to the other regions analysed.

**Table 4.2.2. Activity of DMO of Sofia region**

<b>Strategy</b>	Region’s marketing strategy is published on the website of the Ministry of Tourism.
<b>Facebook profile</b>	- There is a Facebook page, the activity of which is regular and periodic, but it is dominated by sharing other users. - There are photos, videos and various event invitations are available.
<b>Website</b>	There is no website and no information on the activities implemented by the organization.
<b>Number of administrative municipalities in the region</b>	23 municipalities from Sofia, Kyustendilka and Pernishka regions, as well as the city of Sofia with the capital municipality.

*Source: Authors’ systematization*

### **4.3. Analysis and opportunities for development of Rhodope tourism region.**

#### **Analysis of resource potential.**

The main specialization of the Rhodope region according to the “Concept for tourism zoning of Bulgaria” is mountain and rural tourism. The area covers the territory of the Rhodope Mountains.

- Its center is the city of Smolyan and 27 municipalities from the administrative division of the country are located on its territory.
- The region has an extremely wide variety of natural resources, which are the basis of the development of tourism in all its forms, which in turn determine its national and world significance.

- Among the main sights are the wonderful bridges, which realize more than 100,000 visits per year; the Yagodina Cave; the Devil's Throat; Snezhanka Peak; the Planetarium with the town of Smolyan. There are 7 nature reserves, 5 protected areas and 24 natural attractions in the region.
- Shiroka Laka Architectural Reserve is important for the development of tourism in the region, as the Zgurovsky Konak, Kalaidzhii House, Grigorovska House and Vladishka House located in it have been declared monuments of national importance. The nearby village of Gela, together with Shiroka Laka, attract the interest of a large part of the tourists visiting the region.
- Here are also some of the largest Bulgarian dams, which are also the object of increased tourist interest. Here are located Dospat, Shiroka Polyana, Batak, Vacha, Krichim, Tsankov Kamak, Studen Kladenets, Ivaylovgrad, etc.
- There are also large deposits of mineral waters in the region, which are the basis of the development of health tourism there and the transformation of tourist places in the Rhodope region into four-season visited ones. The most significant are the mineral pools in Velingrad – main basis for the development of tourism. Due to the mineral water, from the beginning of 2023 until July of the same year, the city welcomed more than 250 thousand tourists.

**Table 4.3.1. Bed base of the main tourism centers in the region by 2023**

<b>City</b>	<b>Bed base</b>
<b>Devin</b>	1 634
<b>Velingrad</b>	7 014
<b>Pamporovo</b>	5 413
<b>Smolyan</b>	12 081

Source: *National Statistical Institute*<sup>16</sup>

### **Analysis of the activities of the DMO of Rhodope region**

<sup>16</sup> National Statistical Institute. (2024). *Annual data*. Retrieved from:

<https://www.nsi.bg/bg/content/1978/%D0%B3%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%B8%D1%88%D0%BD%D0%B8-%D0%B4%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%BD%D0%B8>

- Organization for management of the tourism region (DMO) Rhodope is the first such organization, registered in Bulgaria on June 5 2017. It is noteworthy that not all municipalities on the territory of the region are members of the organization – 18 out of a total of 27.
- 18 internal and external activities for marketing management of a tourism region are registered in the statutes of DMO “Rhodope”, which are the most in terms of number of internal and external activities compared to other regions.
- One of the two organizations (Rhodope and Rila-Pirin), which, along with the creation of a logo and slogan, also included developing a website. However, this activity has not been completed. Setting too many activities, on the one hand, shows the ambition and motivation of the members of the volunteer organization DMO “Rhodope”, but on the other hand, it can lead to difficulties in the implementation of these activities, as it is related to the involvement of more members and participants, as well as the provision of a greater resource.

**Table 4.3.2. Activity of DMO of Rhodope region**

<b>Strategy</b>	Region’s strategy is mentioned on the Ministry of Tourism’s website, but it is not visible.
<b>Facebook profile</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- There is an Facebook profile, but the publication presence is weak, probably due to a lack of funds and administrative capacity.</li> <li>- Author publications related to participation in tourist exhibitions are available.</li> <li>- The profile does not emphasize their own activities, but publishes and gives publicity to others' activities.</li> <li>- They participated in a cultural tourism exhibition in Veliko Tarnovo, but no further information is provided.</li> </ul>
<b>Website</b>	No website.
<b>Number of administrative municipalities in the region</b>	18 municipalities

*Source: Author’s systematization*

**4.4. Analysis and opportunities for development of Rila-Pirin tourism region.**

**Analysis of resource potential.**

- 75% of the region is covered by mountains.
- Its centre is the city of Blagoevgrad, with 23 municipalities located on its territory.
- At the tourism exhibition in France in 2023 on high-end tourism products, the greatest interest of all presented by Bulgaria was aroused by the UNESCO sites in Rila-Pirin region.
- There are 63 mineral water deposits in the territory and the hottest mineral spring in the country with a temperature of 103.6°C, named Sapareva Banya. Even before the pandemic the town was gaining popularity being visited by over 50 000 tourists and the reported tourist tax revenue was 43 000 BGN. It is still a tourism attraction, with Five Elements Hotel being the most notable.
- The main tourism centres in the region are the spa resorts of Borovets, Bansko, Razlog, Sandanski, Banya village, Dobrinishte and Sapareva Banya. One of the newest trends is Hotel Terme in Banya village. As already mentioned, the main types of tourism are mountain and religious tourism, but cultural and historical tourism, wine tourism, festival tourism and event tourism are developing in parallel. However, the main focus for making this region a centre of attraction for tourists throughout the year falls on spa and balneo tourism, which, combined with various events and festivals, would make the winter resorts attractive enough for the rest of the year.

**Table 4.4.1. Bed base of the main tourism centers in the region by 2023**

<b>City</b>	<b>Bed base</b>
<b>Bansko</b>	10 000
<b>Borovets</b>	4 398
<b>Sandanski</b>	6 000
<b>Blagoevgrad</b>	20 397

Source: *National Statistical Institute*<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> National Statistical Institute. (2024). *Annual data*. Retrieved from: <https://www.nsi.bg/bg/content/1978/%D0%B3%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%B8%D1%88%D0%BD%D0%B8-%D0%B4%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%BD%D0%B8>

**Analysis of the activity of the DMO of Rila-Pirin region**

- The organization was registered in 2015 with 15 activities in its charter.
- Different activities from those of other regions are related to the possibility of creating partnerships.
- The territory of the region includes municipalities from 4 districts – Blagoevgradska, Kyustendilska, Pazardzhiska and Sofiyska.
- The composition of the region includes municipalities from areas that do not border each other, but have common tourism products and can develop them together.
- All 23 municipalities on the territory of the region are members of the DMO, which shows high commitment of all and priority of tourism for the local economy.
- In addition to winter and spa resorts, smaller municipalities are also given the opportunity to develop their tourist potential.

**Table 4.4.2. Activity of DMO of Rila-Pirin region**

<b>Strategy</b>	According to the website of Ministry of Tourism, there is a strategy, but it is not publicly available.
<b>Facebook profile</b>	- There is a Facebook page where a lot of posts, photos and videos could be found. - There is an email address for contacting the organization, which is a plus.
<b>Website</b>	It has a website.
<b>Number of administrative municipalities in the region</b>	23 municipalities

*Source: Author's systematization*

**4.5. Analysis and opportunities for development of Danube tourism region.**

**Analysis of resource potential.**

- The main specialization of Danube region according to the “Concept for Tourism Zoning of Bulgaria” is cultural and cruise tourism.
- It is characterized by the largest territory and most municipalities within its borders – 67. Its center is the city of Ruse.

- The region has significant capacity of natural resources, the main ones being Magurata cave and Belogradchik rocks, Srebarna biosphere reserve and others, attracting the interest of both Bulgarian and foreign tourists.
- In terms of anthropogenic resources, the region is characterized by a long historical development, determining the presence of a rich cultural and historical heritage. The main centers are Baba Vida fortress, Abritus Archaeological Reserve and the Interactive Museum in the city of Razgrad, the Thracian tomb near the village of Sveshtari, which is under the UNESCO protection; The architectural-archaeological reserve Durostorum - Druster - Silistra; Ivanovo rock churches near Ruse, etc.

**Table 4.5.1. Bed base of the main tourism centers in the region by 2023**

<b>City</b>	<b>Bed base</b>
<b>Silistra</b>	736
<b>Ruse</b>	2 447
<b>Razgrad</b>	732
<b>Vidin</b>	1 061

Source: National Statistical Institute<sup>18</sup>

### **Analysis of the activity of the DMO of Danube region**

- This is the largest region in Bulgaria, covering 21% of the country's territory along the Danube River.
- There is a lack of good infrastructure between the municipalities, which is an obstacle to the development of tourism. The distance between the municipality of Bregovo and the center of the Ruse region, for example, is 375 km, taking more than 5 hours by car.
- Currently, the only publicly accessible transport on the Danube River are ferry connections and river cruises, which are aimed at foreign tourists. An example of a negative public practice is that during the docking of a cruise ship on a Sunday, all restaurants along the coast are closed because of the public holiday.

<sup>18</sup> National Statistical Institute. (2024). *Annual data*. Retrieved from: <https://www.nsi.bg/bg/content/1978/%D0%B3%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%B8%D1%88%D0%BD%D0%B8-%D0%B4%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%BD%D0%B8>



- In the statute of the organization, 13 activities are recorded, which are also typical for other regions.

**Table 4.5.2. Activity of DMO of Danube region**

<b>Strategy</b>	According to the website of the Ministry of Tourism, there is an issued strategy, but it is not publicly available.
<b>Facebook profile</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- There is a Facebook page with no regular posts.</li> <li>- Various live inclusions, diverse and different information, as well as data on upcoming and past events are observed.</li> <li>- All this can be seen as good publicity practice.</li> </ul>
<b>Website</b>	No website
<b>Number of administrative municipalities in the region</b>	14 municipalities

*Source: Author's systematization*

#### **4.6. Analysis and opportunities for development of Rose Valley tourism region.**

##### **Analysis of resource potential.**

- Main specialization Rose Valley region according to the “Concept for Tourism Zoning of Bulgaria” is health and cultural tourism.

- Its territory includes the southern slopes of Stara Planina, part of the Trans-Balkan valleys, as well as the northern slopes of Sredna Gora and Sarnena Gora. Its center is the city of Kazanlak and 19 municipalities are located on its territory.
- The region has a wide variety of natural resources. For example, Mount Botev is located here, which is the highest peak of Stara Planina. The main center of attraction for tourists visiting the region are the southern parts of the Central Balkan National Park with its 9 biosphere reserves, attracting many eco-tourism enthusiasts. The deposits of mineral waters supporting the development of spa tourism are extremely important for the region. A center for health tourism, for example, is the town of Pavel Banya, which is classified as a balneological center of national importance. Also popular destinations in this regard are the Karlov mineral baths and the five deposits in the town of Kazanlak. One of the largest dams in the country, Koprinka, on the Tundzha River, is also located here, which is an object of increased tourist interest.
- In terms of anthropogenic resources, the region has an extremely rich cultural and historical heritage. Here are located the Kazanlak Tomb, included in the list of UNESCO World Cultural Heritage; the Thracian mounds; the tomb of Golyama Kosmatka; The megalithic complex near Buzovgrad and the burial mounds Ostrusha and Svetitsa.
- Main centers for tourism are: Kazanlak, Karlovo, Kalofer, Koprinka Dam, Hisarya, Pavel Banya, etc.

**Analysis of the activity of the DMO of Rose Valley region**

- Unlike the Danube region, Rose Valley has the smallest territory.
- There is a high level of activity from the local government in the region.
- It is located around a main thoroughfare – Republic Road (the so-called "Sub-Balkan"), which is a prerequisite for good connectivity.
- The minimum 13 activities are recorded in the statute of the organization, but there is no information about them on social networks.

**Table 4.6.1. Activity of DMO of Rose Valley region**

<b>Strategy</b>	According to the website of the Ministry of Tourism, there is a strategy, adopted in November 2021.
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<b>Facebook profile</b>	<p>-There is a Facebook page, but the posts on it are not regular.</p> <p>-Event invitations, photos and various publications can be found on the page.</p> <p>-There is information about participation in various exhibitions.</p>
<b>Website</b>	- There is information about an agreement for creating a website, but no such is live yet.
<b>Number of administrative municipalities in the region</b>	19 municipalities

*Source: Author's systematization*

#### **4.7. Analysis and opportunities for development of Varna (North Black Sea) tourism region.**

##### **Analysis of resource potential.**

- Main specialization of Varna region according to the „Concept for Tourism Zoning of Bulgaria” is sea and sports tourism.
- The region covers territory of the northern Black Sea coast with the city of Varna as its center and 25 municipalities are located on its territory.
- Among the main sights are Shablen Lake and Durankulash Lake; Broken stones; Golden Sands Nature Park; The rock phenomenon Chudnite skali, Kara dere beach, Goat cave, Seal cave. In terms of anthropogenic resources, the area has a rich cultural and historical heritage, the most important site being the Madar Horseman, which is on the UNESCO list; Aladzha monastery; Great Roman Baths; Cultural center “Dvoretsa” located in the town of Balchik is also interesting for tourists visiting the region; Varna Dolphinarium also attracts tourist interest.
- The most preferred destinations are Albena, Shumen, Madara, Aladzha Monastery, Botanical Garden and Palace in Balchik, Varna, St. St. Constantine and Elena, etc.

**Table 4.7.1. Bed base of the main tourism centers in the region by 2023**

<b>City</b>	<b>Bed base</b>
<b>Albena</b>	13 247
<b>Varna</b>	64 324
<b>St. Constantine and Elena</b>	7 084
<b>Golden sands</b>	41 520
<b>Dobrich</b>	28 344
<b>Shumen</b>	1 810

Source: *National Statistical Institute*<sup>19</sup>

### **Analysis of the activity of the DMO of Varna region**

- This is the second registered organization in 2018, with 10 municipalities as members in the charter of the founders, which is far from the total number of 24 located in Varna region.
- The statute of the organization stipulates 16 activities, 3 of which are related to internal activities for implementation of economic activity, but they are practically unfeasible, since the organizations do not have legal status, nor administrative capacity due to the lack of funding.
- Territories from 3 regions are included – Varna, Shumen and Dobrich, which in turn complicates coordination and communication.

**Table 4.7.2. Activity of DMO of Varna region**

<b>Strategy</b>	The strategy has been implemented, but it is not available as a document either on the website of the Ministry of Tourism or on the Facebook page of the region.
<b>Facebook profile</b>	-There is a Facebook profile. -There are only a few posts available, with information shared from other sites as well.

<sup>19</sup> National Statistical Institute. (2024). *Annual data*. Retrieved from:

<https://www.nsi.bg/bg/content/1978/%D0%B3%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%B8%D1%88%D0%BD%D0%B8-%D0%B4%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%BD%D0%B8>

<b>Website</b>	No website
<b>Number of administrative municipalities in the region</b>	10 municipalities

*Source: Author's systematization*

#### **4.8. Analysis and opportunities for development of Bourgas (South Black Sea) tourism region.**

##### **Analysis of resource potential.**

- Main specialization of the Bourgas region according to the “Concept for Tourism Zoning of Bulgaria” is sea and cultural tourism.
- The region covers the territory of the southern Black Sea coast, with the city of Bourgas as its center, and 13 municipalities from the administrative division of the country are located on its territory.
- Main sights are Atanasovo, Bourgas, Mandren, Pomorie Lake, Poda area; the longnose forests near the mouths of the Ropotamo and Veleka rivers; Strandzha Nature Park, which is the largest protected area in Bulgaria; in this region there are also 7 islands, most of which have been declared protected areas and are the object of interest for tourists; The architectural-historical reserve of Nessebar, like the Old Town of Nessebar, is included in the UNESCO World Heritage List. A great tourist interest is also being formed towards the island of St. Anastasia.
- Most preferred tourism destinations are Sunny Beach, Pomorie, Bourgas, the island of St. Anastasia, Beglik tash, Sozopol, Primorsko, Tsarevo, Nessebar, Strandzha Nature Park, Ropotamo Reserve, Kiten, Sinemorets, Ravadinovo Castle, etc.

**Table 4.8.1. Bed base of the main tourism centers in the region by 2023**

<b>City</b>	<b>Bed base</b>
<b>Primorsko</b>	1 547
<b>Bourgas</b>	145 621
<b>Sunny Beach</b>	64 462
<b>Dunes</b>	3 190

Source: *National Statistical Institute*<sup>20</sup>

**Analysis of the activity of the DMO of Bourgas region**

- 12 out of 14 municipalities are members of the DMO Bourgas, which shows good coordination and interaction on the territory of the region;
- Better developed infrastructure compared to Varna region;
- DMO includes the entire Bourgas region and another municipality of Yambol – Bolyarovo;
- Municipalities such as Bourgas, Sozopol and Nessebar generate significantly higher revenues from tourist tax, but part of the funds are not distributed in the tourism region.

**Table 4.8.2. Activity of DMO of Bourgas region**

<b>Strategy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- There is a strategy, but it is not publicly available.</li> <li>- From the website of the Ministry of Tourism, it is clear that it has been fulfilled.</li> </ul>
<b>Facebook profile</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- There is a Facebook profile.</li> <li>-It is visible that the region participates in international exhibitions.</li> <li>-There is no information about activities that are visible on other sites, but not on the DMO’s own social media.</li> </ul>
<b>Website</b>	No website
<b>Number of administrative municipalities in the region</b>	12 municipalities

Source: *Author’s systematization*

**4.9. Analysis and opportunities for development of Trakia tourism region.**

**Analysis of resource potential.**

<sup>20</sup> National Statistical Institute. (2024). *Annual data*. Retrieved from: <https://www.nsi.bg/bg/content/1978/%D0%B3%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%B8%D1%88%D0%BD%D0%B8-%D0%B4%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%BD%D0%B8>

- Main specialization of Trakia region according to the “Concept for Tourism Zoning of Bulgaria” is cultural and wine tourism.
- The region mainly covers the territory of the Upper Thracian lowland, with the city of Plovdiv as its center and 35 municipalities.
- There is not a very rich diversity of natural resources. The main natural resource is the deposits of mineral waters, used as a basis for the development of spa tourism – Starozagorski mineral baths, Haskovo, Septemvri and Nova Zagora. Another popular natural resource in the area are the Plovdiv Hills.
- Regarding anthropogenic resources, Trakia tourism region has a rich cultural and historical heritage. Undoubtedly, firstly must be recognized the importance of the city of Plovdiv, which is older than Rome and Athens. In 2019, the city was chosen as the European Capital of Culture, and nearly 2 200 000 tourists visited it that year. The area of the town of Haskovo is also attractive in terms of tourism – mainly with the Regional History Museum and the Museum Center “Thracian Art in the Eastern Rhodopes”.
- Other main sights are Castra Rubra fortress near Harmanli; Peristera fortress near Peshtera; The fortress; Saint Spirit Fortress near the village of Mineralni Bani; Ancient forum complex Augusta Traiana and others, which successfully attract the interest of tourists on a national and international scale/

**Table 4.9.1. Bed base of the main tourism centers in the region by 2023**

<b>City</b>	<b>Bed base</b>
<b>Haskovo</b>	2 734
<b>Plovdiv</b>	13 478
<b>Pazardzhik</b>	8 409

Source: *National Statistical Institute*<sup>21</sup>

### **Analysis of the activity of the DMO of Trakia region**

- DMO of this region is the last registered organization out of all nine in Bulgaria.
- In the statute of the organization there are 16 activities listed, identical to those of Varna region.

<sup>21</sup> National Statistical Institute. (2024). *Annual data*. Retrieved from:

<https://www.nsi.bg/bg/content/1978/%D0%B3%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%B8%D1%88%D0%BD%D0%B8-%D0%B4%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%BD%D0%B8>

- This is the only DMO that has created a website, even without this activity being set as in the statute.
- Ten proposals for logo, slogan and marketing analyzes were made for the tourism development of the region.
- Everything was created through funding under a project to increase the capacity of SMEs in the tourism sector.
- On the basis of this project, the maximum volume of the activities set out in the statute have been implemented, with the funding being within BGN 2.2 million for activities such as advertising, PR and the holding of various types of events.
- Among the members of the region are 8 municipalities, which is a rather low share compared to the total number of municipalities on the territory of the region – 35, within the boundaries of 6 regions.

**Table 4.9.2. Activity of DMO of Trakia region**

<b>Strategy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- There is an available strategy, which is uploaded on the region's website.</li> <li>- It covers all 35 municipalities.</li> <li>- This is the only publicly available strategy of a region, which is an indicator of transparency.</li> </ul>
<b>Facebook profile</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- There is a Facebook page where users can find quite a few posts, including photos and videos.</li> </ul>
<b>Website</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A website has been prepared: Trakia.tour.com</li> <li>- There could be seen a budget for participation in events and exhibitions based on a three-year period from 2021 onwards.</li> <li>- Proofs of membership are uploaded.</li> <li>- There is also an option for the website to be read in Greek, since the area borders Greece.</li> <li>- The management of the page has a professional approach, an example of which is the use of hashtags.</li> </ul>



<b>Number of administrative municipalities in the region</b>	8 municipalities
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*Source: Author's systematization*

In summary, the following table is presenting the created logos and slogans of the analysed nine regions.

**Table 4.10. Logo and slogan of the regions**

Region	Page	Slogan	Logo
"Rhodope" Tourism region	Facebook	<i>HOSPITALITY IN FOUR SEASONS</i>	
"Varna" (North Black Sea) Tourism region	Facebook Domain	No data	No data
"Bourgas" (South Black Sea) Tourism region.	Facebook	No data	No data
"Trakia" Tourism region	Website Facebook	<i>FEAST OF THE SENSES</i>	
"Danube" Tourism region	Facebook	No data	No data
"Rose Valley" Tourism region	Facebook	No data	No data
"Sofia" Tourism region	Facebook	No data	No data
"Stara Planina" Tourism region	Facebook Instagram	<i>DISCOVER THE SECRETS OF THE BALKANS</i>	
"Rila-Pirin" Tourism region	Website Facebook	No data	No data



*Source: Author's systematization*

Presented results of the analysis prove the possibility of communicating a common Brand Bulgaria – hospitality in four seasons with a focus on health, business and entertainment tourism and additional cultural tours, tasting culinary and wine tours in the nine destinations/regions.

## 5. Conclusion

A serious social challenge in recent years, corresponding to the specifics of tourism, is the need to create healthy environment, ensuring both physical health and psychosomatic resilience of people. It is in this context that tourism, recreation and, in particular, health tourism in all its forms, are attracting a high level of public interest, while opportunities are being sought to promote destinations, resorts and tourism destinations offering health tourism products that meet these needs. In this regard, not only in Bulgaria, but also worldwide, health tourism is prioritising its place. As a

result of the above, it appears that in Bulgaria we have leading destinations for health tourism, such as Velingrad and others that provide a year-round high-quality product and generate revenue for the economy. These destinations are also of interest to scientists and occur various studies. It is visible that both the legislative and executive authorities in tourism in Bulgaria have prioritized the sector in recent years. As an example we can point out the separation of the Tourism Commission in the National Assembly; projects in health tourism created in the Parliament by the Commission on Health Tourism, regarding changes to the Tourism Act; giving prevalence to industry organizations as BUBSPA to promote Bulgaria as a health destination at global tourism forums and so on.

As a result of all the above, the public challenge for the authors is to assist all stakeholders in creating, building and enforcing brand Bulgaria as a four-season destination, with a priority on Health&MICE&Entertainment tourism. We believe that the research, findings, analyses and discussions in this study make a significant contribution to solving such a social challenge.

Another serious challenge is the need to continuously send positive messages to the public about Bulgaria as a tourism destination and its leading tourism products and sites.

Thus, the proposed thesis and the achieved results of the analysis, related to the possibility of combination of tourism products in the regions in Bulgaria on all components of the Health&MICE&Entertainment tourism, as well as additional cultural tours in the context of hospitality in four seasons, is associated with product innovation, which is the basis of the originality of the research.

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## **TOURISM POLICY AND BUSINESS IN BULGARIA: AN IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS**

*[Violeta Doneva-Yankulova](#)*

### **Abstract**

*This article provides a comprehensive review of tourism policy and business in Bulgaria, emphasizing the critical aspects of regulatory frameworks, business needs, destination development, management levels, tax policies, and the return on infrastructure investments. By employing both qualitative and quantitative research methods, the study offers an in-depth analysis of the current state and future prospects of the tourism sector in Bulgaria. The findings highlight the significance of strategic policy-making, sustainable practices, and targeted investments in infrastructure as key drivers for growth and competitiveness in the Bulgarian tourism industry. Furthermore, the article addresses the persistent challenges posed by seasonality, emphasizing the need for diversification in tourism offerings to ensure year-round engagement and economic stability. The research also explores the impact of global challenges, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, on the sector and evaluates the effectiveness of strategic responses implemented to mitigate these impacts. Detailed recommendations are provided to enhance the sustainability and resilience of the tourism sector, aiming to contribute to both economic development and cultural enrichment while ensuring the preservation of Bulgaria's natural and cultural resources.*

**Key words:** Tourism policy, Sustainable tourism, Health tourism, Bulgaria, Infrastructure investment, Environmental standards

**JEL:** Z320, L83, O52

### **Introduction**

Tourism is a key component of the Bulgarian economy, significantly contributing to GDP, employment, and cultural exchange. The sector not only provides substantial economic benefits but also plays a crucial role in promoting Bulgaria's cultural heritage and natural beauty on the global stage. The aim of this article is to explore the main aspects of tourism policy and business in Bulgaria and to provide recommendations for sustainable sector development. By examining the regulatory frameworks, business needs, destination development, management levels, tax policies, and infrastructure investments, this study aims to present a holistic view of the Bulgarian tourism landscape. The analysis considers the impacts of recent global challenges, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, and the strategic responses implemented to mitigate these impacts. This article seeks to inform policymakers, stakeholders, and researchers about the current state and future prospects of the Bulgarian tourism sector, providing insights that can guide future strategies and initiatives.

Tourism plays a crucial role in the economic development of Bulgaria, contributing significantly to its GDP and employment. However, the growth of the tourism sector must be managed sustainably to ensure that it does not compromise the country's natural and cultural resources. Bulgaria, with its rich heritage and abundant natural resources, particularly its numerous mineral springs, has immense

potential for health tourism. This form of tourism not only attracts international visitors seeking wellness and therapeutic benefits but also fosters local economic growth.

To harness this potential, it is essential to integrate comprehensive tourism policies that encompass sustainable practices. This involves establishing robust legislative frameworks that regulate water use, waste management, and environmental protection. Additionally, infrastructure investments must prioritize sustainability, focusing on renewable energy, energy-efficient buildings, and effective waste management systems. Community involvement and education are also vital, as they ensure that local populations are engaged in and benefit from tourism development. Moreover, implementing strict environmental standards is necessary to protect Bulgaria's ecological integrity.

Despite these efforts, several challenges remain, including securing adequate funding, effective coordination among stakeholders, and continuous monitoring and evaluation of tourism projects. Addressing these challenges through innovative financing mechanisms and integrated planning approaches can enhance the sustainability and resilience of Bulgaria's tourism sector. This article explores the integrated framework for sustainable tourism development in Bulgaria, focusing on policy and legislation, infrastructure investment, community involvement, and environmental standards.

## 1. Regulatory frameworks and business needs

The Tourism Act in Bulgaria is a cornerstone of the regulatory framework governing the tourism sector. This act aims to ensure the provision of high-quality services, consumer protection, and the sustainable development of tourism activities. The key objectives of the Tourism Act include protecting consumers, standardizing tourism services, and promoting sustainable development (Ministry of Tourism of the Republic of Bulgaria, 2023).

The Tourism Act's primary objectives are to protect consumers by ensuring the safety and quality of tourism services, to standardize the services offered by tour operators, travel agencies, and tourist sites, and to foster sustainable tourism development (Ministry of Tourism of the Republic of Bulgaria, 2023).

To ensure compliance, the Act establishes stringent licensing requirements for operators and mandates insurance to cover potential risks. It also maintains a national register of tourist sites, which includes detailed records of licensed operators and their compliance status.

The categorization of hotels and restaurants under the Tourism Act is a significant measure to ensure quality and competitiveness. Establishments are categorized from 1 to 5 stars based on criteria such as room size, amenities, service quality, hygiene standards, and additional facilities. This system encourages tourism businesses to enhance their offerings to achieve higher star ratings, thereby improving overall service quality and consumer satisfaction.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, amendments to the Tourism Act in 2021 introduced new safety and hygiene requirements. These include mandatory health protocols for accommodation and dining establishments, the promotion of digital check-ins, and online bookings to minimize physical contact, all of which were crucial in restoring traveler confidence and ensuring safety (European Commission, 2022).

Tourism is a critical sector for Bulgaria, contributing significantly to its GDP and employment. To sustain and enhance the tourism industry's growth, it is essential to understand the regulatory framework and address the business needs within the sector. This analysis examines the current state of the Bulgarian tourism industry, identifies regulatory challenges, and explores the business needs for sustainable development.

**Current State and Challenges:** The Bulgarian tourism industry plays a crucial role in the national economy, accounting for more than 10% of the GDP. The Ministry of Tourism has implemented several strategies to improve the sector's performance, focusing on marketing and infrastructural development. However, global challenges and internal inefficiencies persist, necessitating continuous reforms (Gorbunova, 2018).

**Key Challenges:** Effective marketing and management strategies are required to address global competition and changing tourist preferences. Continued investment in infrastructure is needed to enhance the quality of tourist services and facilities. Increased collaboration among tourism entities is vital for the sector's overall improvement (Kostadinova & Mancheva-Ali, 2023).

The regulatory framework governing the Bulgarian tourism industry includes laws and regulations that ensure quality standards and operational efficiency. This framework covers accommodation categorization, quality assurance, and compliance with EU directives.

- The categorization of accommodation establishments is a critical aspect of the regulatory framework, ensuring that facilities meet defined standards.
- Voluntary certification and quality management systems play a significant role in enhancing service quality and business competitiveness (Ilieva, 2019).

**Influence of International Standards:** The entry of international hotel chains has introduced best practices and advanced technologies, contributing to the overall quality and competitiveness of the Bulgarian hospitality industry. Regulatory frameworks must continuously evolve to incorporate international standards and practices to maintain a competitive edge (Kadieva, 2016).

## **Business needs and innovations**

Innovation is essential for the sustainable growth of the tourism sector. Bulgarian tourism businesses must adopt innovative practices to remain competitive in the global market.

**Key areas for innovation:** Developing new and diverse tourism products tailored to modern consumer preferences is crucial. This includes leveraging the sharing economy and collaborative consumption models (Ianeva, 2018). **Health Tourism:** Utilizing Bulgaria's abundant mineral springs for health tourism can attract year-round visitors and contribute to economic growth. Integrating digitalization in marketing and management can further enhance this sector (Ianeva et al., 2023). Competitiveness in the tourism industry relies on continuous innovation and the development of unique capabilities. This includes adopting new technologies and enhancing service delivery through training and quality management (Boycheva, 2017).

The integration of new technologies and innovations in hotel management can significantly enhance their efficiency. This analysis explores the impact of technological advancements on the hotel industry, emphasizing the benefits of online reservations, digital keys, intelligent energy management systems, and other technological solutions. Additionally, it examines demographic

changes and their implications for hotel services, focusing on the aging population and the preferences of Millennials.

Technological innovations have revolutionized the hospitality industry, improving operational efficiency and customer satisfaction. Hotels that adopt these technologies can optimize costs and offer superior service to their guests.

Online reservation systems have streamlined the booking process, making it more convenient for customers and efficient for hotels. Digital keys allow guests to unlock their rooms using smartphones, reducing wait times and enhancing the overall guest experience. For instance, Hilton hotels have implemented mobile keys, which significantly increase guest satisfaction by allowing them to bypass the front desk and go directly to their rooms.

Intelligent energy management systems help hotels reduce operational costs and enhance sustainability. These systems control lighting, heating, and cooling based on occupancy and guest preferences, leading to significant energy savings. Marriott hotels, for example, use Internet of Things (IoT) devices to manage energy consumption, thereby reducing costs and their carbon footprint.

AI and machine learning provide hotels with the ability to analyze data and predict customer behavior. This includes personalized recommendations, dynamic pricing, and optimized marketing strategies. Booking.com uses AI to offer personalized deals and promotions based on previous bookings and user preferences, enhancing the booking experience and increasing conversion rates.

Digitalization and automation through integrated property management systems (PMS), automatic check-in and check-out systems, and mobile apps for reservations and communication with guests significantly improve operational efficiency. These technologies also enhance convenience and satisfaction for guests. For example, automated check-in kiosks and mobile apps allow guests to manage their bookings and access hotel services seamlessly.

Demographic changes are reshaping the hospitality industry, with significant implications for service offerings and customer expectations.

The aging population in Europe requires hotels to adapt their services to cater to older guests. This includes offering more accessible rooms, specialized programs, and amenities tailored to their needs. Many European hotels now provide lower beds, grab bars in bathrooms, and health-focused programs to accommodate senior guests.

Millennials have distinct expectations and preferences that influence the hospitality industry. They seek unique experiences, advanced technologies, and sustainable practices. Hotels like Marriott's Moxy brand cater to Millennials by offering modern, socially-oriented spaces with a strong emphasis on technology and experiences.

The rise in international travel and the diverse needs of global travelers demand that hotels offer multicultural services and amenities. This includes multilingual staff, international menus, and global payment systems. Many international hotel chains in Europe provide these services to meet the needs of international tourists and business travelers.

Technological innovations, environmental practices, and demographic changes are key drivers of transformation in the hospitality industry in Europe. Hotels that successfully adapt to these trends not only improve their operations but also attract and retain customers who value quality, sustainability, and innovation. These factors will continue to play a crucial role in the development of the industry in the future.

Implementing technological innovations, ecological practices, and adapting to demographic changes is essential for the hospitality industry in the European Union (EU). This requires strategic investments and adaptations that vary across member states depending on local conditions and priorities. The hospitality industry in the EU is actively embracing these initiatives to enhance operational efficiency and sustainability while attracting diverse customer segments. Ongoing investments in these areas will be key to maintaining competitiveness and sustainable development in the European hospitality industry.

Bulgaria has the potential to develop specialized forms of tourism that cater to specific demographics and interests, enhancing the sector's diversity and appeal like:

Silver tourism targeting the senior demographic (60+ age group) presents an opportunity for growth. Understanding the preferences and needs of this group can help tailor tourism products to attract more senior tourists (Aleksandrova & Neykova, 2018).

Congress and business tourism developing congress tourism requires new management models, marketing strategies, and collaborations. This specialized form of tourism can bring significant economic benefits if effectively managed (Kostadinova & Mancheva-Ali, 2023).

Bulgaria's tourism sector is a vital part of its economy, necessitating ongoing policy reforms, regulatory adjustments, and innovative business strategies. Addressing the specific needs of various tourism segments and improving quality standards are essential for maximizing the sector's potential. Continuous innovation and adaptation to global trends will ensure sustainable growth and competitiveness.

### **Environmental protection laws**

Bulgaria's environmental protection laws are integral to regulating tourism activities, particularly in protected areas, and ensuring the conservation of natural resources. These laws play a critical role in balancing tourism development with environmental sustainability.

- **Environmental Protection Act:** This act imposes stringent control measures on tourism development in national parks and reserves, requiring mandatory environmental impact assessments (EIA) for new projects. EIAs ensure that potential environmental impacts are thoroughly evaluated and mitigated before project approval (World Bank, 2022).
- **Biodiversity Act:** This act protects endemic species and ecosystems by restricting tourism activities in sensitive zones. It mandates the conservation of habitats and limits construction and visitor numbers in these areas. Additionally, the act offers incentives for businesses that adopt sustainable practices, promoting eco-friendly tourism (European Tourism Association, 2022).

The introduction of eco-certificates for hotels and tourist sites is another significant initiative. These certificates encourage sustainable practices such as energy efficiency, waste management, and



sustainable sourcing of materials. Eco-certified establishments are promoted through national and international tourism channels, enhancing their attractiveness to eco-conscious travelers and boosting their market competitiveness (European Tourism Association, 2022).

## Business needs

Modernizing infrastructure is essential for the development and competitiveness of Bulgaria's tourism sector. Key areas requiring improvement include transportation and access to financing.

- **Airports:** The infrastructure of major airports, such as those in Sofia, Varna, and Burgas, needs significant enhancements to handle increasing passenger volumes and provide high-quality services. Upgraded facilities and expanded capacities are crucial for improving international connectivity and attracting more tourists (European Commission, 2022).
- **Road Networks:** The development of highways and rural roads is critical for connecting remote tourist destinations. Improved road infrastructure enhances accessibility, reduces travel times, and supports regional tourism development, particularly in less-visited areas with significant potential (World Bank, 2022).

Access to financing is a significant challenge for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the tourism sector. To address this, in 2022, 50 million euros were allocated through European programs to support SMEs, supplemented by national funds. These funds provide financial incentives for start-ups and innovation projects in tourism, facilitating business growth and sector diversification (European Commission, 2022).

Training and development programs are also vital for improving service quality in the tourism sector. State and EU-funded programs offer vocational training in hospitality management, language skills, and customer service. Continuous education through online platforms and workshops ensures that employees stay updated with industry trends and best practices, thereby enhancing the overall quality of services offered to tourists (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2021).

Effective marketing and promotion campaigns are crucial for positioning Bulgaria as a leading tourist destination. Participation in international tourism fairs such as ITB Berlin and WTM London, alongside digital marketing strategies involving social media, influencer partnerships, and targeted advertising, plays a vital role in increasing Bulgaria's visibility and attractiveness to potential tourists (Ministry of Tourism of the Republic of Bulgaria, 2023). These campaigns help to highlight Bulgaria's unique cultural and natural attractions, thus drawing more international visitors and boosting the tourism sector.

## 2. Destination development and potential

### Natural and cultural resources

Bulgaria boasts a rich tapestry of natural and cultural resources, making it an attractive destination for a diverse range of tourists. The country is home to 10 UNESCO World Heritage sites, including the Rila Monastery, the ancient city of Nessebar, and the rock-hewn churches of Ivanovo. These cultural landmarks offer a glimpse into Bulgaria's historical and architectural heritage, drawing history enthusiasts and cultural tourists from around the world (UNESCO, 2023).

In addition to its cultural assets, Bulgaria's natural landscapes are equally compelling. The national parks of Rila, Pirin, and Central Balkan are celebrated for their biodiversity and scenic beauty. These parks provide opportunities for various outdoor activities such as hiking, wildlife watching, and eco-tourism and ski. The country's mountains, forests, and rivers create an ideal setting for adventure tourism, attracting nature lovers and outdoor enthusiasts (National Statistical Institute of Bulgaria, 2023).

## Infrastructure investments

The development of infrastructure is a critical component of enhancing Bulgaria's tourism potential. In 2022, over 1 billion euros were invested in infrastructure projects, funded by the state budget, European funds, and private investments. These projects aimed to modernize roads, expand airports, and improve public transportation systems, thereby enhancing connectivity and accessibility to key tourist destinations (European Commission, 2022).

- **Road and Transport Networks:** Significant investments have been directed towards upgrading Bulgaria's road network, particularly the construction and renovation of highways and rural roads. This development is crucial for facilitating easier access to remote and rural tourist areas, thus promoting regional tourism and economic growth (World Bank, 2022).
- **Airport Expansions:** Major airports in Sofia, Varna, and Burgas have undergone expansions to increase their capacity and improve service quality. These enhancements are expected to boost international arrivals and provide a more seamless travel experience for tourists (European Commission, 2022).
- **Public Transport:** Investments in public transportation, including bus and rail services, aim to offer efficient and reliable options for tourists traveling within the country. Improved public transport infrastructure not only supports tourism but also benefits local communities by enhancing mobility and connectivity (National Statistical Institute of Bulgaria, 2023).

## Seasonality

Tourism seasonality remains a significant challenge for Bulgaria, with peak periods in the summer causing overcrowding in coastal areas, while off-season periods see underutilized facilities and lower tourist numbers. To mitigate the effects of seasonality, Bulgaria is developing year-round tourist products that capitalize on the country's diverse attractions.

- **Spa and Wellness Tourism:** Bulgaria's mineral springs and health resorts are being promoted as year-round destinations. Spa and wellness tourism offers relaxation and health benefits, attracting visitors throughout the year. Locations such as Velingrad, known as the "Spa Capital of the Balkans," offer a range of spa treatments and wellness programs (Ministry of Tourism of the Republic of Bulgaria, 2023).
- **Wine Tourism:** Bulgaria's rich winemaking tradition and numerous vineyards are being leveraged to develop wine tourism. Wine tours, tastings, and festivals are organized to attract tourists interested in culinary and cultural experiences. The Thracian Valley and the Struma Valley are key regions known for their wine production (Ministry of Tourism of the Republic of Bulgaria, 2023).
- **Cultural Festivals:** The promotion of cultural festivals and events throughout the year helps to draw visitors during the off-season. Events such as the Rose Festival in Kazanlak, the International Folklore Festival in Burgas, and the Sofia Film Fest celebrate Bulgaria's cultural heritage and attract both domestic and international tourists (European Commission, 2022).

## Development of Sustainable Tourism

Bulgaria is increasingly focusing on sustainable tourism development to ensure long-term growth and environmental conservation. Sustainable tourism practices are being integrated into destination management strategies to balance economic benefits with ecological and social responsibilities.

- **Eco-Certification:** The adoption of eco-certification programs for hotels and tourist sites encourages businesses to implement sustainable practices. Criteria for eco-certification include energy efficiency, waste management, and sustainable sourcing of materials. Eco-certified establishments are promoted through various channels, attracting environmentally conscious travelers (European Tourism Association, 2022).
- **Community Involvement:** Engaging local communities in tourism development is essential for sustainability. Community-based tourism initiatives involve locals in the planning and operation of tourism activities, ensuring that benefits are distributed equitably. This approach also enhances the authenticity of the tourist experience (World Bank, 2022).
- **Conservation Programs:** Conservation programs aim to protect natural resources and biodiversity. These programs include habitat restoration, wildlife protection, and sustainable land use practices. Partnerships between governmental and non-governmental organizations are vital for the success of conservation efforts (National Statistical Institute of Bulgaria, 2023).

Tourism plays a pivotal role in Bulgaria's economy, contributing significantly to GDP, employment, and foreign exchange earnings. This analysis explores the development of tourism destinations in Bulgaria, assesses their potential, and examines the regulatory framework and business needs necessary for sustainable growth. Understanding these factors can help formulate effective policies to enhance the competitiveness and attractiveness of Bulgarian tourism destinations.

The Bulgarian tourism sector has seen substantial growth, with tourism contributing over 10% to the national GDP. The country's diverse landscapes, cultural heritage, and strategic location offer significant opportunities for tourism development.

Tourism is a major economic driver in Bulgaria, generating revenue and employment. In 2018, the sector accounted for a significant portion of Bulgaria's GDP, highlighting its importance to the national economy (Gorbunova, 2018). The industry supports a wide range of businesses, from hospitality and transportation to retail and entertainment, creating a multiplier effect across the economy.

Bulgaria attracts millions of tourists annually, with the majority coming from the European Union. The country's appeal lies in its coastal resorts, mountain retreats, and historical sites. Tourist zoning, approved in 2015, aims to promote qualitative marketing of Bulgaria's tourism potential in foreign markets (Gorbunova, 2018).

The regulatory framework for tourism in Bulgaria includes policies and regulations designed to ensure the quality and competitiveness of tourism services. These regulations are crucial for maintaining high standards and protecting consumer interests.

The categorization of accommodation establishments ensures that facilities meet specific standards, enhancing the quality of services provided to tourists (Ilieva, 2019). Voluntary certification and quality management systems further support the maintenance of high standards in the tourism sector.

Bulgaria's regulatory framework aligns with EU directives, ensuring that the country meets international standards for tourism services. This alignment helps attract tourists from the EU, who expect high-quality services and facilities.

The development of tourism destinations in Bulgaria focuses on leveraging the country's natural and cultural assets to create attractive and sustainable tourism products. Bulgaria's Black Sea coast and mountain resorts are the primary attractions for tourists. Coastal tourism is particularly popular in the summer, while mountain resorts attract visitors in the winter for skiing and other winter sports (Kadieva, 2016).

Health tourism is a growing sector in Bulgaria, leveraging the country's numerous mineral springs and spa facilities. Developing health tourism can provide year-round tourism opportunities and contribute to economic growth (Ianeva et al., 2023).

Bulgaria's rich cultural heritage, including ancient ruins, historical landmarks, and traditional festivals, offers significant potential for cultural tourism. Promoting these attractions can help diversify the tourism product and attract a broader range of visitors.

Bulgaria has substantial potential for growth in various specialized forms of tourism. By addressing specific market needs and leveraging unique assets, Bulgaria can enhance its competitiveness in the global tourism market.

Bulgaria boasts an impressive array of over 5,200 mineral springs, making it second in the world in terms of mineral water resources. This natural wealth presents a significant opportunity for the development and promotion of health tourism, which can drive economic growth, enhance the competitiveness of the tourism sector, and offer sustainable development for new destinations.

The development and promotion of health tourism based on Bulgaria's extensive mineral springs can substantially contribute to the tourism sector. Health tourism encompasses medical spas, wellness centers, and rehabilitation facilities that utilize mineral waters for therapeutic purposes.

Health tourism can significantly boost Bulgaria's economy by attracting both domestic and international tourists. According to a study, Bulgaria has the potential to develop health tourism destinations beyond the well-known ones, leveraging its mineral springs to create year-round tourist services. This can lead to an overall development of the sector and contribute to GDP growth (Ianeva et al., 2023).

Developing health tourism requires a strategic approach that includes infrastructure investment, human resource development, and effective marketing strategies. An integrated destination management model is essential for creating attractive and competitive health tourism products. This approach aligns with global trends and can position Bulgaria as a leading destination for health and wellness tourism (Staneva, 2019).

The successful implementation of health tourism can be seen in regions like the Stara Zagora area, which has certified SPA and Balneotherapy centers utilizing local mineral waters. These centers offer comprehensive health promotion programs that enhance the region's attractiveness as a health tourism destination (Popova-Dobreva, 2023).

Creating new health tourism destinations involves leveraging local resources and promoting regional development. The combination of mineral springs with other natural and cultural assets can create unique and appealing tourist products.

Regions with mineral springs, such as the Rhodope Mountains and the Varvara area, have the potential to become prime health tourism destinations. These areas offer not only mineral water therapies but also scenic landscapes and cultural heritage sites that can be integrated into the

Health tourism promotes sustainable growth by encouraging the year-round use of tourism resources, reducing seasonal fluctuations in tourist arrivals. The sustainable use of mineral waters and the development of eco-friendly tourism infrastructure are crucial for long-term success (Sadovski, 2023).

To stimulate the development of new health tourism destinations, Bulgaria needs to implement special policies that support investment in infrastructure, marketing, and human resource training. Policies should focus on:

**Incentives for Investment:** Providing financial incentives and grants for developing health tourism facilities.

**Marketing Strategies:** Promoting Bulgaria's health tourism potential through targeted marketing campaigns and international partnerships.

**Quality Standards:** Establishing high standards for health tourism services to ensure a competitive edge in the global market.

**Sustainability Practices:** Encouraging the adoption of sustainable practices to protect natural resources and promote eco-friendly tourism.

The development and promotion of health tourism based on Bulgaria's extensive mineral springs hold significant potential for economic growth and sustainable development. Strategic investment in infrastructure, effective marketing, and the implementation of supportive policies can transform Bulgaria into a leading destination for health and wellness tourism. Leveraging this potential requires a coordinated effort to develop new destinations, enhance service quality, and ensure the sustainable use of natural resources.

Targeting the senior demographic (60+ age group) can expand Bulgaria's tourism market. Understanding the preferences and needs of this group can help develop tailored tourism products to attract more senior tourists (Aleksandrova & Neykova, 2018).

Developing congress tourism involves creating specialized facilities and services for business travelers. This sector has significant potential to generate revenue and attract international events to Bulgaria (Kostadinova & Mancheva-Ali, 2023).

Innovation is critical for maintaining competitiveness in the tourism sector. Adopting digital technologies can enhance marketing, improve service delivery, and create new tourism products. Digital transformation is essential for meeting the changing expectations of modern travelers (Boycheva, 2017).

The development of tourism destinations in Bulgaria holds significant potential for economic growth and sustainable development. By enhancing the regulatory framework, addressing business needs, and leveraging unique assets, Bulgaria can strengthen its position in the global tourism market. Continuous innovation and strategic planning are essential for maximizing the potential of Bulgarian tourism and ensuring its long-term success.

In summary, Bulgaria's destination development strategy focuses on leveraging its rich natural and cultural resources, investing in critical infrastructure, addressing seasonality challenges, and promoting sustainable tourism practices. These efforts aim to enhance the overall tourism experience, attract a diverse range of visitors, and ensure the long-term sustainability and growth of the sector.

### 3. Levels of destination management

#### National level management

At the national level, Bulgaria's tourism management involves setting strategic priorities, developing policies, and allocating resources to maximize the sector's potential. The Ministry of Tourism is the primary authority responsible for formulating and implementing national tourism policies, ensuring compliance with international standards, and promoting Bulgaria as a tourist destination globally (Ministry of Tourism of the Republic of Bulgaria, 2023).

- **Strategic Priorities:** The national tourism strategy focuses on sustainable development, diversification of tourist offerings, and enhancing the competitiveness of Bulgarian tourism. Key areas include cultural and historical tourism, eco-tourism, health and wellness tourism, and adventure tourism. By identifying priority areas, the Ministry of Tourism aims to create a balanced and resilient tourism sector that can withstand seasonal fluctuations and global challenges (European Commission, 2022).
- **Policy Development:** The Ministry of Tourism collaborates with other government agencies, industry stakeholders, and local communities to develop comprehensive policies that address various aspects of tourism management. These policies cover areas such as infrastructure development, environmental protection, quality standards, and marketing strategies. The goal is to create a cohesive framework that supports sustainable tourism growth while preserving Bulgaria's cultural and natural heritage (World Bank, 2022).

#### Regional level management

At the regional level, tourism management involves tailoring strategies to the specific strengths and attractions of different areas. Regional tourism boards and local authorities play a crucial role in implementing national policies and adapting them to regional contexts.

- **Regional Strategies:** Each region in Bulgaria develops its own tourism strategy based on its unique resources and attractions. For example, the Black Sea coast focuses on beach tourism, while the mountainous regions of Rila and Pirin emphasize eco-tourism and adventure activities. By leveraging local assets, regions can create distinct tourism products that appeal to diverse market segments (National Statistical Institute of Bulgaria, 2023).
- **Collaboration and Partnerships:** Effective regional tourism management requires collaboration between local authorities, businesses, and communities. Public-private partnerships are essential for developing and promoting regional tourism initiatives. These

partnerships facilitate investment in infrastructure, marketing, and service quality, ensuring that regional tourism development aligns with national objectives (European Commission, 2022).

## Local level management

Local level management is critical for the day-to-day operation and quality assurance of tourism services. Local governments, community organizations, and businesses work together to enhance the visitor experience and ensure sustainable practices at the ground level.

- **Destination Management Organizations (DMOs):** DMOs are key players in local tourism management. They are responsible for coordinating tourism activities, marketing local attractions, and providing support to tourism businesses. DMOs also play a vital role in visitor information services, ensuring that tourists have access to accurate and helpful information during their stay (Ministry of Tourism of the Republic of Bulgaria, 2023).
- **Community Involvement:** Engaging local communities in tourism planning and development is essential for creating authentic and sustainable tourist experiences. Community-based tourism initiatives enable locals to participate directly in tourism activities, such as guiding, hosting, and cultural performances. This involvement not only enhances the tourist experience but also ensures that tourism benefits are distributed within the community (World Bank, 2022).

## Categorization and quality standards

The categorization of tourist sites and accommodation establishments is a critical component of Bulgaria's destination management strategy. The star-rating system for hotels and restaurants, ranging from 1 to 5 stars, ensures that tourists can make informed choices based on service quality and amenities.

- **Inspection and compliance:** Regular inspections and audits by the Ministry of Tourism ensure that establishments comply with categorization criteria. These inspections assess various aspects, including room size, cleanliness, service quality, and available facilities. Non-compliance can result in penalties or downgrading of ratings, incentivizing businesses to maintain high standards (National Statistical Institute of Bulgaria, 2023).
- **Customer feedback:** Customer feedback mechanisms are integrated into the categorization system to gather insights on tourist satisfaction. This feedback is used to identify areas for improvement and to ensure that the categorization system remains responsive to tourists' needs and expectations (European Tourism Association, 2022).

## Rules for resource use and conservation

Sustainable use of natural and cultural resources is a cornerstone of Bulgaria's tourism management strategy. Strict policies and control mechanisms are in place to monitor and regulate tourism activities in environmentally sensitive areas. These rules ensure the protection of Bulgaria's rich natural heritage while promoting sustainable tourism development.

## Sustainable water management

Efficient and sustainable use of mineral water resources is essential for the longevity of health tourism.

- **Monitoring and regulation:** Regular monitoring of mineral springs to assess water quality and quantity. Establishing regulatory frameworks to control the extraction and use of mineral waters to prevent depletion. Environmental protection agencies work closely with tourism authorities to monitor the impact of tourism activities on natural resources. Regulations limit the number of visitors in protected areas, control construction activities, and enforce environmental impact assessments for new projects (World Bank, 2022).
- **Water-saving technologies:** Implementing advanced water-saving technologies in spas and wellness centers to minimize wastage. Recycling and reusing water where possible to reduce overall consumption.

## Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA)

Conducting comprehensive environmental impact assessments before developing new health tourism projects helps identify potential environmental risks and formulate mitigation strategies.

- **Baseline studies:** Conducting baseline studies to understand the existing environmental conditions, including water quality, biodiversity, and ecosystem health around mineral springs.
- **Mitigation measures:** Developing and implementing measures to mitigate identified environmental impacts, such as creating buffer zones, controlling pollution sources, and rehabilitating disturbed areas.

## Conservation of natural resources

Protecting natural resources that form the basis of health tourism, such as mineral springs, forests, and landscapes, is crucial.

- **Protected areas:** Designating protected areas around mineral springs to prevent overdevelopment and ensure natural habitats are preserved. These areas can also serve as attractions for eco-tourism.
- **Biodiversity conservation:** Implementing conservation programs to protect the biodiversity around health tourism sites, including protecting endemic species and restoring degraded ecosystems.

## Sustainable infrastructure development

Building sustainable infrastructure that minimizes environmental impact and supports long-term conservation goals.

- **Eco-friendly construction:** Using eco-friendly construction materials and techniques to reduce the carbon footprint of new developments. Designing buildings that blend with the natural environment and use renewable energy sources.
- **Green Certifications:** Encouraging health tourism facilities to obtain green certifications, such as LEED or BREEAM, which promote sustainable building practices and operational efficiency.



## Community involvement and education

Engaging local communities in conservation efforts and educating them about the importance of sustainable tourism practices. Involving local communities in decision-making processes related to the development and management of health tourism sites. Providing opportunities for locals to benefit economically from tourism through jobs and business opportunities. Implementing environmental education programs to raise awareness about the importance of conserving natural resources. Educating tourists on responsible behavior and the ecological significance of the sites they visit.

Community involvement and education are crucial components in the sustainable development of tourism destinations. Engaging local communities in the planning, development, and management of tourism ensures that the benefits of tourism are widely shared and that the cultural and environmental integrity of destinations is maintained. This section outlines the strategies for community involvement and education in the development of tourism destinations and the importance of involving communities in policymaking.

**Participatory planning:** engaging local communities in the planning stages of tourism development ensures that their needs, aspirations, and concerns are addressed. This participatory approach fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility among community members. Workshops and forums, as well as stakeholder committees, are effective methods for facilitating community involvement (Byrd, 2007; Reid, Mair, & George, 2004).

**Local employment and entrepreneurship:** Promoting local employment and entrepreneurship opportunities in tourism ensures that the economic benefits of tourism development are retained within the community. Training programs and support for local businesses can enhance the community's capacity to participate in the tourism industry (Bianchi, 2003; Cole, 2006).

**Cultural preservation:** Involving local communities in tourism development helps preserve and promote cultural heritage, traditions, and customs. Supporting cultural heritage projects and establishing community museums and cultural centers are vital for maintaining the cultural integrity of tourism destinations (Blackstock, 2005; Garrod, 2003).

**Environmental stewardship:** Engaging communities in environmental conservation initiatives ensures the sustainable use of natural resources and the protection of ecosystems. Environmental education and community conservation projects are essential components of sustainable tourism development (Bramwell & Lane, 1993; Moscardo, 2008).

**Tourism education:** Providing education and training opportunities related to tourism helps build the capacity of local communities to participate effectively in the tourism industry. School programs and adult education are crucial for raising awareness and developing necessary skills (Dodds & Butler, 2010; Tosun, 2000).

**Skills development:** Developing the skills of local residents ensures that they can take advantage of employment and business opportunities in the tourism sector. Vocational training and language training are essential for enhancing the employability of community members (Cole, 2006; Tosun & Timothy, 2003).

**Leadership and management training:** Building leadership and management capacity within the community helps ensure effective governance and sustainable tourism development. Leadership programs and management training are necessary for preparing community members to take on leadership roles (Bramwell & Lane, 1993; Reid, Mair, & George, 2004).

**Inclusive policy development:** Involving communities in the development of tourism policies ensures that policies are responsive to local needs and conditions. Policy dialogues and consultation sessions are effective methods for incorporating community input into policymaking (Tosun, 2000; Blackstock, 2005).

**Advocacy and representation:** Ensuring that local communities have a voice in tourism policymaking through advocacy and representation. Supporting the formation of community advocacy groups and ensuring representation in tourism bodies are critical for effective community participation (Bianchi, 2003; Tosun & Timothy, 2003).

**Monitoring and Evaluation:** Involving communities in the monitoring and evaluation of tourism projects and policies ensures accountability and continuous improvement. Community monitoring committees and feedback mechanisms are essential for tracking the implementation and impact of tourism initiatives (Byrd, 2007; Moscardo, 2008).

Community involvement and education are essential for the sustainable development of tourism destinations. By engaging local communities in planning, development, and policymaking, and providing education and capacity-building opportunities, Bulgaria can ensure that tourism benefits are widely shared and that cultural and environmental resources are preserved. This inclusive approach fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility among community members, contributing to the long-term success and sustainability of tourism in Bulgaria.

Developing and enforcing policies and legislation that support sustainable resource use and conservation in health tourism is crucial for Bulgaria's long-term tourism strategy. Establishing a robust legislative framework that includes specific regulations for water use, waste management, and environmental protection is essential to ensure that health tourism activities do not compromise the country's natural resources. These regulations should be tailored to address the unique needs and impacts of health tourism, focusing on the sustainable management of mineral springs and the surrounding environments.

To encourage health tourism businesses to adopt sustainable practices, the government can offer various incentives. These might include tax breaks, grants, or recognition programs for eco-friendly operations. Such incentives can motivate businesses to invest in sustainable technologies and practices, reducing their environmental footprint and enhancing their overall sustainability. For example, businesses that implement water-saving technologies, recycle and reuse water, or employ renewable energy sources could receive financial benefits or public recognition. These incentives not only promote environmental stewardship but also enhance the competitiveness of Bulgarian health tourism on the international stage.

In summary, a comprehensive legislative framework combined with effective incentives can foster a culture of sustainability within Bulgaria's health tourism sector. By prioritizing the sustainable use

and conservation of natural resources, Bulgaria can ensure the longevity and success of its health tourism destinations, benefiting both the environment and the economy.

Promoting research and development is essential to advancing sustainable practices and innovative solutions in health tourism in Bulgaria. Supporting scientific research on the sustainable use of mineral springs and the development of new therapeutic applications is a key component. Collaborating with universities and research institutions can provide valuable insights into the environmental impacts of health tourism and help develop strategies to mitigate these effects. This collaboration can lead to the discovery of novel therapeutic uses for mineral waters, enhancing the appeal of Bulgaria's health tourism offerings.

Encouraging innovation in health tourism is equally important. Developing new products and services that are both sustainable and attractive to tourists can set Bulgaria apart as a premier health tourism destination. This includes exploring digital technologies for virtual tourism, which can provide immersive experiences for potential visitors and promote the unique features of Bulgaria's mineral springs. Additionally, advanced treatment options leveraging the latest medical and wellness technologies can be integrated into health tourism services, offering cutting-edge solutions to health-conscious tourists.

By prioritizing research and development, Bulgaria can ensure the continuous improvement and diversification of its health tourism sector. This approach not only supports sustainable tourism practices but also enhances the country's reputation as a leader in health and wellness tourism. Investing in research and fostering innovation will drive the sector forward, ensuring it remains competitive and sustainable in the long term.

The sustainable use and conservation of natural and cultural resources are integral to the successful development of health tourism in Bulgaria. By implementing strict policies, engaging local communities, and promoting research and innovation, Bulgaria can ensure the long-term viability of its tourism industry while preserving its natural heritage. This balanced approach supports economic growth, enhances the tourism experience, and safeguards the environment for future generations.

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Environmental protection agencies work closely with tourism authorities to monitor the impact of tourism activities on natural resources. Regulations limit the number of visitors in protected areas, control construction activities, and enforce environmental impact assessments for new projects (World Bank, 2022). This close monitoring ensures that the environmental impact of tourism is minimized, protecting the natural assets that make health tourism in Bulgaria attractive.

Educational campaigns also play a vital role in promoting sustainable tourism practices. These campaigns aim to raise awareness among tourists and local businesses about the importance of sustainability. By promoting responsible behavior, such as minimizing waste, conserving water and energy, and respecting local wildlife and cultural sites, these campaigns help ensure that both visitors and residents contribute to the conservation of natural resources (European Tourism Association, 2022).

In summary, a comprehensive legislative framework combined with effective incentives, strict monitoring, and educational campaigns can foster a culture of sustainability within Bulgaria's health tourism sector. By prioritizing the sustainable use and conservation of natural resources, Bulgaria can ensure the longevity and success of its health tourism destinations, benefiting both the environment and the economy.

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Bulgaria has implemented strict environmental standards to ensure that tourism development does not compromise the country's ecological integrity. These standards cover various aspects, including waste management, water conservation, and emission controls. Tourism establishments are required to implement effective waste management systems, including recycling and safe disposal of hazardous materials. Policies encourage the reduction of plastic use and promote the adoption of reusable and biodegradable products (National Statistical Institute of Bulgaria, 2023). Water conservation measures include the installation of water-efficient fixtures in hotels and the promotion of water-saving practices among tourists. Establishments are also encouraged to use sustainable water sources, such as rainwater harvesting, to reduce pressure on local water supplies (World Bank, 2022). To reduce the carbon footprint of tourism, policies promote the use of renewable energy sources, energy-efficient appliances, and low-emission transportation options. Tax breaks and subsidies are available to businesses that invest in green technologies and practices (European Commission, 2022).

In summary, a comprehensive legislative framework combined with effective incentives, strict monitoring, educational campaigns, and stringent environmental standards can foster a culture of sustainability within Bulgaria's health tourism sector. By prioritizing the sustainable use and conservation of natural resources, Bulgaria can ensure the longevity and success of its health tourism destinations, benefiting both the environment and the economy. Bulgaria's multi-level destination management approach, encompassing national, regional, and local levels, ensures a comprehensive and coordinated effort towards sustainable tourism development. Through strategic planning, regulatory enforcement, community involvement, and stringent environmental standards, Bulgaria aims to create a resilient and thriving tourism sector that benefits both the economy and the environment.

## 4. Tax Policy in Tourism

Bulgaria's tax policy plays a pivotal role in shaping the competitiveness and growth of its tourism sector. The country offers a preferential value-added tax (VAT) rate for tourism services to stimulate the industry. The current VAT rate for tourism-related services, including accommodation, is set at 9%, which is significantly lower than the standard VAT rate of 20% applied to other goods and services. This reduced rate aims to make Bulgaria an attractive destination for tourists by lowering the cost of travel and accommodation (European Commission, 2022).

Tax policy is a crucial aspect of the regulatory framework that impacts the development and competitiveness of the tourism sector in Bulgaria. This analysis delves into the current state of tax policy as it pertains to tourism, examines its impact on the sector's competitiveness, and discusses the challenges and opportunities for fostering a more favorable environment for tourism businesses.

The Bulgarian tax system includes various taxes that affect the tourism sector, such as value-added tax (VAT), corporate income tax, and property taxes. These taxes influence the cost structure of tourism services and, consequently, their competitiveness in the international market.

VAT is a significant element of the tax structure impacting the tourism industry. High VAT rates can burden tourism businesses, affecting their profitability and pricing strategies. In the context of tourism, there is a clear logic in exempting tourism exports from VAT, as it earns foreign currency and boosts the sector's competitiveness. This approach aligns with the practices in other export-oriented industries (Tonev, 2005).

Corporate income tax in Bulgaria has undergone several reforms, notably the introduction of a flat tax system intended to simplify the tax regime and improve transparency. Despite these reforms, the flat tax system has not fully achieved its intended benefits for tourism businesses. The tax structure needs further refinement to better support the sector's growth (Kalchev, 2014).

Property taxes play a critical role in the fiscal decentralization process in Bulgaria. Effective property taxation supports local governments in providing infrastructure and services essential for the tourism sector. A well-structured property tax system can significantly contribute to the development and maintenance of tourism facilities (Stoilova, 2008).

Tax policies significantly influence the competitiveness of tourism services by affecting costs and investment decisions. Comparative studies reveal that Bulgaria's tax regime may not be as favorable for tourism as those in neighboring countries and EU member states. Countries with lower tax rates or more efficient tax administration tend to attract more tourists and tourism investments (Jovanović & Božilović, 2017).

A comparative analysis of tax policies in neighboring countries and EU member states shows that Bulgaria's tax regime may not be as favorable for tourism as those in other countries. Lower tax rates and more efficient tax administration in other nations often result in higher competitiveness in the tourism sector. For example, countries like Croatia and Hungary have implemented more tourism-friendly tax policies, thereby attracting more tourists and investments (Jovanović & Božilović, 2017).

The overall tax burden, including social insurance contributions, is a critical factor for tourism businesses. In Bulgaria, the tax structure emphasizes indirect taxes, which can be regressive and less favorable for low-margin businesses like those in the tourism sector. A heavy reliance on indirect taxes can disproportionately affect small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), making it difficult for them to compete effectively (Nikolov, 2005).

Bulgaria has experimented with presumptive taxation methods, such as the patent tax for small businesses. These methods aim to simplify tax compliance and reduce administrative burdens, which can be beneficial for small tourism enterprises. However, presumptive taxes must be carefully designed to balance simplicity with fairness. Overloading presumptive taxes with equity objectives can diminish their efficiency and effectiveness (Pashev, 2006).

The current tax policy framework in Bulgaria presents both challenges and opportunities for the tourism sector. Addressing these challenges can help create a more supportive environment for tourism development.

High VAT rates and complex tax regulations can deter investment and increase operating costs for tourism businesses. The emphasis on indirect taxes can disproportionately affect SMEs in the tourism sector. Inconsistent application of tax policies can lead to uncertainty and hinder long-term planning and investment. The high and unfair taxation in tourism is a cause of serious concern, creating disadvantages for businesses and making it challenging to compete on an equal footing with non-EU destinations (Tonev, 2005).

Reforming VAT policies to exempt tourism exports can enhance Bulgaria's attractiveness as a tourist destination. Simplifying tax compliance procedures and reducing the tax burden on small businesses can stimulate growth and innovation in the tourism sector. Leveraging property taxes to improve

local infrastructure and services can support sustainable tourism development. By enhancing the tax policy framework, Bulgaria can create a more favorable environment for tourism businesses and attract more investments.

Tax policy plays a critical role in shaping the tourism landscape in Bulgaria. By addressing the challenges posed by high tax rates and complex regulations, Bulgaria can enhance the competitiveness of its tourism sector. Strategic reforms aimed at simplifying tax compliance, reducing the overall tax burden, and leveraging tax revenues for infrastructure development can foster a more favorable environment for tourism businesses and contribute to sustainable economic growth. Effective tax policies are essential for maintaining a competitive edge in the global tourism market and ensuring long-term success for Bulgaria's tourism industry.

- **VAT reduction impact:** The reduced VAT rate helps to enhance the price competitiveness of Bulgarian tourism services in the international market. It attracts a larger number of tourists, particularly from price-sensitive markets, and supports the growth of domestic tourism. Additionally, this tax incentive encourages tourism businesses to invest in improving their facilities and services, thus raising the overall quality and appeal of Bulgaria's tourism offerings (European Commission, 2022).
- **Tourist fees:** Some municipalities in Bulgaria have introduced tourist fees to fund infrastructure and services that benefit visitors. These fees are typically modest and vary depending on the type and location of accommodation. The revenue generated from tourist fees is reinvested in local tourism infrastructure, maintenance of cultural and natural sites, and the enhancement of public services, ensuring a high-quality experience for tourists (Ministry of Tourism of the Republic of Bulgaria, 2023).

## Investment incentives

Bulgaria offers various investment incentives to attract both domestic and foreign investments in the tourism sector. These incentives aim to stimulate the development of new tourism projects, enhance existing facilities, and promote innovation and sustainability within the industry.

- **Corporate tax exemptions:** New investments in tourism can benefit from corporate tax exemptions, which provide significant financial relief during the initial years of operation. This policy is designed to reduce the financial burden on new projects and encourage more entrepreneurs to invest in the tourism sector (Ministry of Tourism of the Republic of Bulgaria, 2023).
- **European funds:** Bulgaria leverages European Structural and Investment Funds to support tourism infrastructure projects. Specific grant programs target the development of tourism-related infrastructure, such as roads, airports, and public transport, as well as initiatives focused on innovation and sustainability. In 2022, Bulgaria received over 500 million euros from European funds for tourism projects, which have been instrumental in modernizing facilities, increasing capacity, and enhancing tourist experiences (European Commission, 2022).

## Tax policy context in the European Union

In the European Union, taxation in the tourism sector encompasses a wide range of taxes, fees, and charges that affect different aspects of the industry. This includes general taxes such as corporate income tax (CIT) and personal income tax (PIT), as well as tourism-specific taxes like VAT on tourism goods and services, accommodation taxes, and other specific levies aimed at the tourism sector.

- **CIT rates:** CIT rates in the EU vary significantly, ranging from as low as 9% in Hungary to as high as 35.53% in Belgium, with an average rate around 21%. Eastern European countries generally have lower CIT rates, between 9% and 21%, while rates tend to be higher in Southern and Western Europe. The applied rate can depend on factors such as income thresholds, types of income, company size, business duration, and location (European Commission, 2022).
- **VAT on tourism:** VAT is a major indirect tax relevant to the tourism industry and is largely harmonized across the EU. VAT rates on tourism goods and services can be reduced in many EU countries, affecting the cost of hotel accommodation, cultural services, and more. Luxembourg, for example, applies the lowest VAT rate of 17%, while Hungary has the highest at 27%. Various exemptions and zero rates can apply, particularly for international travel and some domestic transportation services (European Commission, 2022).

## Examples of Tax Rates in European Countries

Understanding the tax rates in different European countries provides valuable context for evaluating the competitiveness and attractiveness of Bulgaria's tax regime, especially in the tourism sector.

### Italy

In Italy, annual income tax rates range from 23% for incomes up to €15,000 to 43% for incomes over €75,000. This progressive tax system ensures that higher income earners contribute more significantly to public revenues.

### Netherlands

The Netherlands has a tiered income tax system for 2023, with rates varying from 36.93% for incomes up to €73,031 to 49.50% for incomes above this amount. The relatively high upper rate reflects the country's extensive social welfare programs.

### Portugal

In Portugal, income tax rates range from 14.5% for incomes up to €7,091 to 48% for incomes over €80,640. This progressive tax structure is designed to distribute the tax burden fairly across different income levels (European Commission, 2022).

### Germany

Germany's income tax rates are also progressive, ranging from 0% for incomes up to €9,744 to 45% for incomes over €274,612. This system aims to balance fiscal responsibility with social equity.

### France

France applies a progressive tax system with rates from 0% for incomes up to €10,777 to 45% for incomes over €160,336. The French system includes various deductions and credits to support families and lower-income households.

### Spain

In Spain, income tax rates range from 19% for incomes up to €12,450 to 45% for incomes over €60,000. Spain also has regional income taxes, which can affect the total tax burden.

### Bulgaria

Bulgaria has a flat income tax rate of 10%, one of the lowest in the European Union. This flat tax system is designed to simplify the tax code and attract foreign investment by providing a predictable



tax environment. However, this lower tax rate means that Bulgaria relies more on indirect taxes, such as VAT, to fund public services.

The varying tax rates across European countries reflect different approaches to fiscal policy and social welfare. While countries like Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Germany, France, and Spain use progressive tax systems to ensure equity and fund extensive social programs, Bulgaria's flat tax rate of 10% offers simplicity and aims to attract investment. This comparative perspective highlights the diversity in tax policies and their implications for economic competitiveness and social equity within the European Union.

## Accommodation Taxes

Accommodation taxes, charged for short-term stays in lodging establishments, vary widely across the EU in both rate and application method. These taxes are typically imposed at the local or municipal level and can range significantly, from about €0.10 per night in Bulgaria to €7.50 per night in Belgium. Specifics of these taxes, including exemptions and rate variations depending on the type of accommodation or location, are determined locally (Ministry of Tourism of the Republic of Bulgaria, 2023).

## Public-private partnerships (PPPs)

Public-private partnerships are a cornerstone of Bulgaria's strategy to finance and develop key tourism infrastructure projects. These partnerships combine the strengths and resources of both the public and private sectors to achieve mutual benefits.

- **Models of PPPs:** Common models of PPPs in Bulgaria include Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT) agreements, joint ventures, and lease agreements. These models facilitate risk-sharing and ensure that both parties have a vested interest in the success of the project. For instance, the development of Sofia and Varna airports through PPPs has led to increased capacity, improved services, and significant economic benefits (World Bank, 2022).
- **Benefits of PPPs:** PPPs enable the government to leverage private sector expertise, efficiency, and investment capital to accelerate the development of tourism infrastructure. This collaborative approach helps to ensure that projects are completed on time and within budget, while also providing high-quality services to tourists. Additionally, PPPs can drive innovation and improve the overall competitiveness of the tourism sector (World Bank, 2022).

## Transparency and accountability

Ensuring transparency and accountability in the use of tax revenues and investment funds is crucial for the sustainable development of the tourism sector. The Bulgarian government has implemented several measures to enhance transparency and build trust among stakeholders.

- **Public Reporting:** Municipalities and government agencies are required to publicly report on the collection and use of tourist fees and investment funds. This practice ensures that funds are used effectively and for their intended purposes, such as improving infrastructure, maintaining tourist sites, and supporting local communities (European Commission, 2022).
- **Audit and Oversight:** Regular audits and oversight mechanisms are in place to monitor the financial management of tourism projects. These audits help to identify any mismanagement or inefficiencies and ensure that corrective actions are taken promptly. By maintaining high

standards of financial integrity, the government can attract more investments and foster a positive business environment (Ministry of Tourism of the Republic of Bulgaria, 2023).

## Support for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)

Supporting SMEs in the tourism sector is a key aspect of Bulgaria's tax policy. SMEs are crucial for the growth and diversification of the tourism industry, providing unique and personalized services that enhance the tourist experience.

- **Financial Support Programs:** The government, in collaboration with the European Union, offers financial support programs specifically designed for SMEs. These programs provide grants, low-interest loans, and other financial incentives to help SMEs expand their operations, invest in new technologies, and adopt sustainable practices (European Commission, 2022).
- **Tax Reliefs and Incentives:** SMEs in tourism benefit from various tax reliefs and incentives, including reduced corporate tax rates and exemptions on certain types of income. These measures help to reduce the financial burden on small businesses and enable them to reinvest in their operations, thereby improving their competitiveness and sustainability (Ministry of Tourism of the Republic of Bulgaria, 2023).

## Balancing taxation and competitiveness

The complexity and diversity of tax regulations in the EU mean that taxation can significantly impact the competitiveness and profitability of tourism businesses. Effective, fair, and efficient tax systems are essential, and it is crucial to strike a careful balance to ensure that taxes do not overly burden the sector or deter tourism. Higher tourism taxes or the introduction of new levies can affect competitiveness, making it important to design tax policies that support growth and sustainability (European Commission, 2022).

In summary, Bulgaria's tax policy in tourism is designed to foster a competitive and sustainable industry. Through reduced VAT rates, investment incentives, public-private partnerships, and support for SMEs, the government aims to attract more tourists, encourage investments, and ensure the long-term growth of the tourism sector. Transparency and accountability measures further strengthen the effectiveness of these policies, building trust among stakeholders and promoting responsible tourism development.

## 5. Return on infrastructure investments

### Public-private partnerships (PPPs)

Public-private partnerships (PPPs) are instrumental in financing and developing critical tourism infrastructure projects in Bulgaria. These partnerships combine the strengths and resources of both the public and private sectors, facilitating the development of high-quality infrastructure that meets the needs of tourists and supports the growth of the tourism industry.

- **Success stories:** Notable PPP projects include the development and expansion of Sofia and Varna airports. These projects have led to increased capacity, improved facilities, and enhanced service quality, resulting in a significant rise in tourist arrivals and economic

benefits for the regions (World Bank, 2022). The success of these projects demonstrates the effectiveness of PPPs in delivering large-scale infrastructure improvements.

- **Risk sharing:** PPPs involve shared risks and rewards between the public and private sectors. This model ensures that both parties have a vested interest in the successful completion and operation of the project. By distributing risks, such as financial uncertainties and project delays, PPPs create a more stable and attractive investment environment (World Bank, 2022).
- **Innovation and efficiency:** Private sector involvement in PPPs brings innovation and efficiency to infrastructure projects. Private companies often introduce advanced technologies, streamlined processes, and effective management practices that enhance project outcomes. This leads to the development of state-of-the-art facilities that can compete with international standards (European Commission, 2022).

## European funds and programs

European Structural and Investment Funds play a crucial role in supporting tourism infrastructure projects in Bulgaria. These funds provide significant financial resources for the development and modernization of infrastructure, aiming to boost regional growth and enhance the country's attractiveness as a tourist destination.

- **Regional development:** European funds are targeted towards regions with high tourism potential and development needs. In 2022, Bulgaria received over 500 million euros from European funds for tourism projects. These investments have been pivotal in improving transportation networks, upgrading accommodation facilities, and developing cultural and recreational sites (European Commission, 2022).
- **Grant programs:** Specific grant programs focus on sustainable tourism development, innovation, and infrastructure improvements. These programs support projects that enhance the tourist experience, promote environmental sustainability, and create new job opportunities. By fostering regional development, these funds help to reduce economic disparities and promote inclusive growth (Ministry of Tourism of the Republic of Bulgaria, 2023).

## Economic impact

The return on infrastructure investments in tourism is measured not only in terms of direct financial returns but also in broader economic benefits. These include job creation, increased tourist spending, and regional development.

- **Job creation:** Infrastructure investments generate employment opportunities during both the construction and operational phases of tourism projects. This includes jobs in construction, hospitality, transportation, and various service sectors. By creating a significant number of jobs, these investments contribute to reducing unemployment and improving living standards (National Statistical Institute of Bulgaria, 2023).
- **Tourist spending:** Improved infrastructure enhances the overall tourist experience, leading to increased tourist spending. Visitors are more likely to spend on accommodation, dining, entertainment, and local products when they have access to high-quality facilities and services. This increased spending boosts local economies and supports small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the tourism sector (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2021).
- **Regional development:** Infrastructure projects promote regional development by improving connectivity and accessibility. This is particularly important for rural and remote areas, where

enhanced infrastructure can attract tourists and stimulate economic activities. By promoting balanced regional development, infrastructure investments help to reduce disparities and support sustainable growth (European Commission, 2022).

Investments in tourism infrastructure also yield significant social and environmental benefits, contributing to the overall sustainability and resilience of the tourism sector. Infrastructure improvements enhance the quality of life for local communities by providing better transportation, public services, and recreational facilities. Projects such as the development of parks, cultural centers, and public transport systems benefit both tourists and residents, fostering community well-being and social cohesion (World Bank, 2022). These infrastructure projects make everyday life more convenient and enjoyable for local residents while enhancing the tourist experience.

Moreover, infrastructure investments increasingly incorporate sustainable practices and technologies. This includes the use of renewable energy sources, energy-efficient buildings, and waste management systems. By promoting environmental sustainability, these investments help to preserve natural resources and reduce the ecological footprint of tourism activities (European Tourism Association, 2022). Sustainable practices ensure that tourism development does not degrade the environment, supporting long-term ecological balance.

Additionally, investments in cultural infrastructure, such as museums, heritage sites, and cultural festivals, support the preservation and promotion of Bulgaria's rich cultural heritage. These projects not only attract tourists but also educate and engage local communities, ensuring that cultural traditions and histories are maintained for future generations (Ministry of Tourism of the Republic of Bulgaria, 2023). By celebrating and preserving cultural heritage, these initiatives foster a sense of identity and pride among local residents and provide authentic cultural experiences for visitors.

### **Challenges and Future Directions**

While the return on infrastructure investments in tourism is generally positive, several challenges need to be addressed to maximize their impact. Ensuring sustainable and inclusive growth in Bulgaria's tourism sector requires a comprehensive approach to tackling these challenges.

Securing adequate funding and financing for large-scale infrastructure projects can be challenging. Traditional funding sources may not be sufficient to meet the needs of ambitious tourism development plans. Innovative financing mechanisms, such as blended finance and green bonds, can help attract more investment and ensure the sustainability of funding sources. Blended finance combines public and private investment to mitigate risks and leverage additional capital, while green bonds specifically raise funds for environmentally friendly projects (World Bank, 2022).

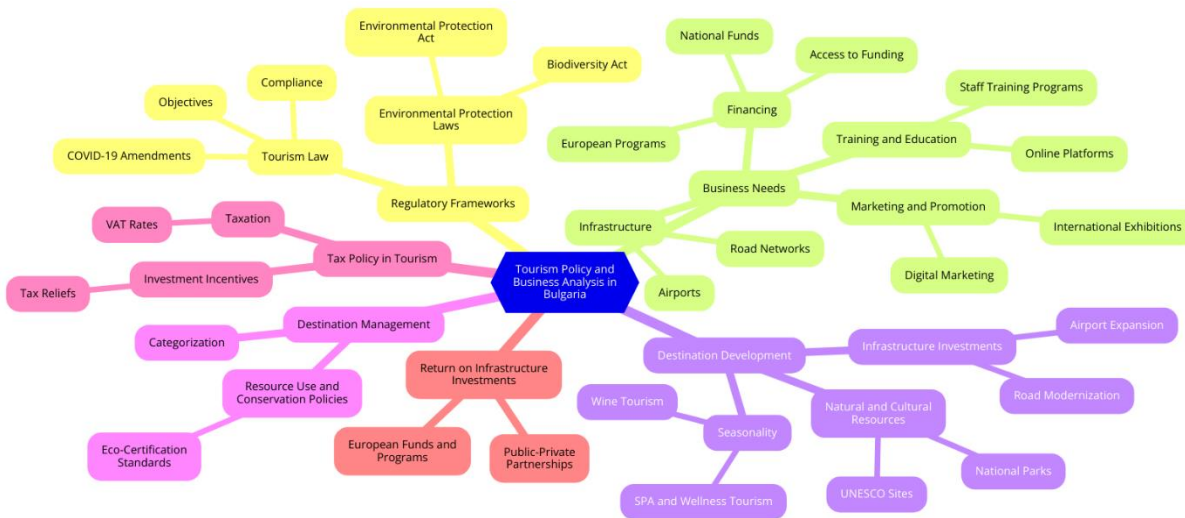
Effective coordination and planning between different levels of government, private sector stakeholders, and local communities are essential for successful project implementation. Integrated planning approaches that consider long-term sustainability and community needs can enhance project outcomes and ensure that benefits are widely distributed. This includes engaging local communities in the planning process to align projects with their needs and expectations, thereby fostering community support and ownership (European Commission, 2022).

Continuous monitoring and evaluation of infrastructure projects are crucial for assessing their impact and identifying areas for improvement. This process involves tracking economic, social, and environmental indicators to ensure that projects deliver the intended benefits and contribute to sustainable tourism development. Effective monitoring allows for timely adjustments and improvements, ensuring that projects remain on track and achieve their goals. The Ministry of

Tourism of the Republic of Bulgaria emphasizes the importance of a robust monitoring and evaluation framework to guide infrastructure investments and policy decisions (Ministry of Tourism of the Republic of Bulgaria, 2023).

In summary, while infrastructure investments in tourism provide significant benefits, addressing funding and financing challenges, enhancing coordination and planning, and implementing robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are critical to maximizing their impact. By focusing on these areas, Bulgaria can ensure that its tourism infrastructure supports sustainable and inclusive growth, benefiting both the economy and local communities.

The model will include key elements such as policy and legislation, infrastructure investment, community involvement, environmental standards, and challenges and future directions.



**Fig. 1.** Model for the elements that need to be involved for tourism policy and business analysis and development in Bulgaria, created by the author

The model for for tourism policy and business analysis and development in Bulgaria integrates various critical components to ensure the sector's growth while maintaining ecological and social balance. This framework aligns policy and legislation with infrastructure investments, community involvement, environmental standards, and future challenges and directions.

At the heart of the model is "Tourism Policy and Business," representing the primary goal of harmonizing economic growth in tourism with environmental sustainability and social equity.

Policy and legislation form the foundation of sustainable tourism development, connecting to all other components. The legislative framework includes regulations for water use, waste management, and environmental protection. Incentives for sustainability, such as tax breaks, grants, and recognition programs for eco-friendly operations, are crucial for encouraging best practices in the tourism sector.

Infrastructure investments are essential for enhancing the tourism sector and can be divided into three key areas: community benefits, sustainable practices, and cultural preservation.

Community benefits include infrastructure improvements that enhance the quality of life for local communities by providing better transportation, public services, and recreational facilities. Projects such as parks, cultural centers, and public transport systems benefit both tourists and residents, fostering community well-being and social cohesion (World Bank, 2022).

Sustainable practices involve incorporating renewable energy sources, energy-efficient buildings, and effective waste management systems into infrastructure projects. These measures help preserve

natural resources and reduce the ecological footprint of tourism activities (European Tourism Association, 2022).

Cultural preservation involves investing in cultural infrastructure, such as museums, heritage sites, and cultural festivals. These projects attract tourists and engage local communities, ensuring that cultural traditions and histories are maintained for future generations (Ministry of Tourism of the Republic of Bulgaria, 2023).

Community involvement and education are critical for ensuring that tourism development is sustainable and inclusive. This involves four main areas: participatory planning, local employment and entrepreneurship, cultural preservation, and environmental stewardship.

Participatory planning engages local communities in the planning stages of tourism development, ensuring their needs and concerns are addressed, fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility.

Promoting local employment and entrepreneurship ensures that the economic benefits of tourism development are retained within the community.

Involving local communities in maintaining cultural heritage helps preserve and promote local traditions and customs.

Educating and involving communities in conservation efforts ensures the sustainable use of natural resources and the protection of ecosystems.

Environmental standards are crucial for ensuring that tourism development does not compromise Bulgaria's ecological integrity. These standards cover waste management, water conservation, and emission controls.

Waste management involves implementing effective systems for recycling and safe disposal of hazardous materials. Policies encourage reducing plastic use and adopting reusable and biodegradable products (National Statistical Institute of Bulgaria, 2023).

Water conservation measures include installing water-efficient fixtures in hotels and promoting water-saving practices among tourists. Establishments are also encouraged to use sustainable water sources, such as rainwater harvesting, to reduce pressure on local water supplies (World Bank, 2022).

To reduce the carbon footprint of tourism, policies promote using renewable energy sources, energy-efficient appliances, and low-emission transportation options. Tax breaks and subsidies are available to businesses that invest in green technologies and practices (European Commission, 2022).

Several challenges need to be addressed to maximize the impact of tourism infrastructure investments. These challenges include funding and financing, coordination and planning, and monitoring and evaluation.

Securing adequate funding and financing for large-scale infrastructure projects can be challenging. Innovative financing mechanisms, such as blended finance and green bonds, can help attract more investment and ensure the sustainability of funding sources (World Bank, 2022).

Effective coordination and planning between different levels of government, private sector stakeholders, and local communities are essential for successful project implementation. Integrated planning approaches that consider long-term sustainability and community needs can enhance project outcomes and ensure that benefits are widely distributed (European Commission, 2022).

Continuous monitoring and evaluation of infrastructure projects are crucial for assessing their impact and identifying areas for improvement. This includes tracking economic, social, and environmental indicators to ensure that projects deliver the intended benefits and contribute to sustainable tourism development (Ministry of Tourism of the Republic of Bulgaria, 2023).

A comprehensive legislative framework combined with effective incentives, strict monitoring, educational campaigns, and stringent environmental standards can foster a culture of sustainability within Bulgaria's health tourism sector. By prioritizing the sustainable use and conservation of natural resources, Bulgaria can ensure the longevity and success of its health tourism destinations, benefiting both the environment and the economy. Bulgaria's multi-level destination management approach, encompassing national, regional, and local levels, ensures a comprehensive and

coordinated effort towards sustainable tourism development. Through strategic planning, regulatory enforcement, community involvement, and stringent environmental standards, Bulgaria aims to create a resilient and thriving tourism sector that benefits both the economy and the environment.

**In conclusion**, infrastructure investments in Bulgaria's tourism sector generate substantial economic, social, and environmental returns. By leveraging public-private partnerships, European funds, and innovative financing mechanisms, Bulgaria can continue to enhance its tourism infrastructure, attract more visitors, and promote sustainable and inclusive growth. Effective planning, coordination, and monitoring are key to maximizing the benefits of these investments and ensuring the long-term resilience and competitiveness of the tourism industry.

Bulgaria's tourism policy is characterized by a strong regulatory framework, significant investments in infrastructure, and a focus on sustainable practices. Compared to other European countries, Bulgaria offers several competitive advantages. For instance, the country has a lower VAT rate for tourism services at 9%, compared to the standard rate of 20% seen in many other European nations, which enhances its price competitiveness in the international market (European Commission, 2022). Additionally, Bulgaria implements strict environmental standards and eco-certification programs similar to those found in Western Europe, reflecting its commitment to sustainable tourism (World Bank, 2022). The country also provides robust financial support and incentives for tourism SMEs, aligning with policies in countries like Spain and Italy, further fostering sectoral growth and innovation (European Commission, 2022). Substantial investments in infrastructure, supported by European programs, ensure that Bulgaria's tourism facilities and services meet high standards, comparable to other EU countries (European Commission, 2022).

The future prospects for sustainable tourism in Bulgaria are promising, driven by several key factors. Ongoing investments in infrastructure, particularly in transport and eco-friendly facilities, are expected to significantly improve accessibility and sustainability (European Commission, 2022). Continuous updates to the regulatory framework, such as amendments to the Tourism Act, ensure that the sector maintains high standards and adapts effectively to new challenges (Ministry of Tourism of the Republic of Bulgaria, 2023). The increasing adoption of eco-certification and sustainable practices among tourism businesses is likely to attract more eco-conscious tourists, contributing to the sector's growth (European Tourism Association, 2022). Additionally, the development of diverse tourist products, such as spa and wellness tourism, wine tourism, and cultural festivals, aims to mitigate the effects of seasonality and promote year-round tourism (Ministry of Tourism of the Republic of Bulgaria, 2023). Enhanced international marketing efforts and participation in global tourism fairs will further improve Bulgaria's visibility as a sustainable tourist destination, attracting a broader range of visitors (European Commission, 2022).

Several factors influence tourism development in Bulgaria. The country's regulatory frameworks, including the Tourism Act and environmental protection laws, provide a structured and sustainable approach to tourism development (Ministry of Tourism of the Republic of Bulgaria, 2023). Significant investments in airport and road infrastructure have improved connectivity and accessibility to tourist destinations, making it easier for tourists to travel within the country (European Commission, 2022). Financial support and incentives for small and medium-sized enterprises in tourism drive innovation and enhance service quality, ensuring that businesses remain competitive and responsive to market demands (European Commission, 2022). Effective marketing strategies and participation in international tourism fairs play a crucial role in enhancing Bulgaria's global visibility and attracting a diverse range of tourists (Ministry of Tourism of the Republic of Bulgaria, 2023). Moreover, the adoption of sustainable tourism practices and eco-certification

standards promotes environmental conservation, which is increasingly important for attracting eco-conscious tourists and ensuring the long-term viability of the tourism sector (European Tourism Association, 2022).

In summary, Bulgaria's tourism policy and infrastructure investments have created a strong foundation for sustainable tourism development. By maintaining competitive tax rates, supporting SMEs, and focusing on environmental protection and sustainable practices, Bulgaria is well-positioned to enhance its tourism sector and achieve long-term growth and sustainability.

The Bulgarian tourism sector holds significant potential for growth and development, underpinned by robust regulatory frameworks, strategic investments, and a commitment to sustainable practices. The comprehensive analysis presented in this article underscores the critical role of the Tourism Act and environmental protection laws in shaping a structured and sustainable tourism environment. Modernizing infrastructure, enhancing accessibility, and promoting diverse tourism products are essential for overcoming challenges such as seasonality and attracting a broader range of visitors. The integration of eco-certification and sustainable business practices further strengthens Bulgaria's position as a competitive and environmentally responsible destination.

Future prospects for sustainable tourism in Bulgaria appear promising, driven by ongoing investments in infrastructure, continuous improvements in regulatory frameworks, and innovative marketing strategies. The development of year-round tourist products, such as spa and wellness tourism, wine tourism, and cultural festivals, will enhance Bulgaria's appeal and mitigate the effects of seasonal fluctuations. Enhanced international marketing efforts and participation in global tourism fairs will improve Bulgaria's visibility as a leading tourist destination.

In conclusion, the successful implementation of strategic policies and targeted investments will be crucial in realizing the full potential of the Bulgarian tourism sector. By fostering collaboration between public and private sectors, enhancing service quality through continuous training, and promoting sustainable practices, Bulgaria can achieve a resilient and thriving tourism industry that contributes significantly to the nation's economic and cultural development. The insights and recommendations provided in this article aim to support stakeholders in their efforts to enhance the sustainability, competitiveness, and overall impact of tourism in Bulgaria.

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**TERMINOLOGICAL CLARIFICATIONS AND ECONOMIC VALUATION IN SPA AND WELLNESS TOURISM**

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**Abstract**

*This paper provides a comprehensive analysis of the terminological distinctions and historical development of spa and wellness tourism. The study differentiates between spa and wellness tourism, emphasizing wellness as a holistic lifestyle approach involving physical, mental, and spiritual well-being, while spa focuses on water-based therapies. Various types of spas, including day spas, destination spas, medical spas, and spa hotels, are discussed in relation to their services and economic impact. The paper also explores the economic value of thermal mineral waters, considering their multifaceted applications in energy production, biofuels, and cosmetics. Finally, it addresses the integration of modern technology and sustainable practices in wellness tourism, predicting trends such as digital detox and personalized wellness experiences. The study underscores the increasing significance of spa and wellness amenities in tourism and their potential to enhance health and well-being.*

**Keywords:** Spa, wellness, tourism, mineral waters, balneology

**JEL:** Z3, Z320

**Introduction**

Spa tourism and wellness tourism are modern phenomena, but they are not always given the correct meaning, which requires some clarification of their characteristics and scope. Spa and wellness are relatively new concepts, but their roots can be found in ancient times. For example, balneology and health (medical) tourism date back several centuries BC, and wellness in modern times has become a way of life for millions of people. However, not everyone knows exactly what the two types of tourism represent. In the current publication we give terminological clarifications in the study of spa and wellness tourism and discuss the topic of the economic value of thermal mineral water used in spa and wellness tourism.

**Characteristics of spa and wellness tourism**

Spa and wellness resorts are usually a place of rest and recovery with a holistic approach to the harmony of mind, body and spirit. Although serious health problems can sometimes be treated at these resorts, in most cases they focus their services on pleasure and relaxation and provide a wide range of therapies.

To begin with, we must clarify that wellness differs from spa. Wellness is a *harmony between body, spirit and mind* and nowadays it is being developed as a whole philosophy for the way of life and represents a multitude of opportunities to improve who we are, how we take care of our health, our inner peace and the way we present ourselves in society. All this leads to different methods for achieving inner comfort, which are part of the complex wellness concept (Великова, 2011).

Spa is *one of the methods* to achieve wellness. The concept has ancient roots, but in most cases, it combines a state of well-being and a state of fitness, thus the term wellness. From the combination of the two concepts well-being and fitness, the concept of wellness itself was obtained. Therefore, we accept that wellness is the harmony between body, spirit, consciousness, physical activity, way of eating and way of life. Wellness includes, in addition to spa, the pursuit of relaxation, beauty, activity, proper nutrition and the quality of the provided services. Spa, on the other hand, includes various therapies with water or water-based products. The spa tradition also dates back to ancient times.

### **Origin of spa and wellness procedures**

Hydrotherapy and water therapy also have ancient origins - as early as 5000 BC. Ayurveda began to be practiced in India around 3000 BC. Water therapy and herbal medicine were developed by the Egyptians, later became popular in other parts of the world and entered Europe. Water was a driving force for Egyptian society, with many of the views we hold today about water originating in ancient Egypt. One of the first Greek baths emerged in the city of Knossos in Crete, where the queen's bath is particularly impressive. The first preserved bathtub is also located in the ancient city. Around 5000 BC the ancient Greeks began to offer bathing procedures to the armies for therapeutic purposes, as they found that after bathing, wounds healed faster and the morale of the troops improved. The Spartans began to use the first primitive steam bath, applying an invention that became popular in the Roman Empire, called the hypocaust - a double floor under which wood was ignited, that led to high temperatures in the room and evaporation of water.

In 380 BC Hippocrates claimed that hot and cold baths are useful for healing the human body. In fact, the first healing theories around water are related to the belief that some diseases come

from the hot, others from the cold, and by counteracting the different temperatures of the water, people can heal themselves. In 300 BC hydrotherapy was introduced by the ancient Greeks to the Roman Empire. The Romans surpassed the Greeks in size and complexity of the baths. Aqueducts are the main reason water could be used for pleasure as well, because they brought large quantities of water to cities. In ancient times, spa procedures were introduced in places with natural springs of thermal mineral water. Around 100 BC Buddhism became established in Thailand, and with it, massages and various healing systems began to develop. In the 1st century AD, the Romans were in their heyday and built a public bath in every city. Some cities built solely for the purpose of water treatment. For example, the city of Hisarya was built precisely for this - it was a medical base where the army was treated and army men went to relax. Many other cities around Bulgaria were developed around thermal mineral springs to treat and heal the army.

In 180 AD, Galen discovered that arteries are filled with blood, not air. He developed massages and treatments using hot and cold baths and advocated the use of water for treatment of a variety of diseases (Tubergen, A., Van der Linden, S., 2002). In 211 AD, the Romans actively built baths in the periphery of the empire, and to this day the largest baths - of Caracalla and Docletian, are located in Rome, but the next largest baths are located in Trier (Germany) and in Varna (Bulgaria). The bath in Varna is the largest private Roman bath in the world, all others were built by emperors.

Shiatsu massage was discovered in Japan when Buddhism entered the country. In Japan, the use of thermal mineral waters is also very popular. In 800 AD the hammams were developed by example of the Roman baths in the territory of today's Arab countries. Europe at that time abandoned the use of baths, but this tradition was preserved in Arab countries, and years later it would inspire a renaissance in the use of baths. There is a theory that baths and their use are the basis of the longevity of people and the development of philosophy and other sciences. Around 800 AD, the Arab world experienced a renaissance, with the development of sciences, arts and mathematics.

In 1200 AD, the British discovered hammams during the Crusades, which probably led to the development of the so-called sweat houses. They are far smaller than hammams, but provide spa treatments that are inspired by those in the Arab world. These procedures were developed much later in Europe. In 1326 in Spa (Belgium) the Salus Per Aqua spring was reopened for use after a local blacksmith was cured by drinking from the spring's water. This leads to a tradition to travel to Spa and the so-called "taking the waters" procedure, i.e. drinking water for treatment. What is the exact *origin of the term spa* is debatable, perhaps precisely because of the town Spa in Belgium, but there are also theories that it comes from the Latin expression "Sanus per aquam" or "Sanitas per aquas"

(health through water), but the fact is that the concept of spa remains in our culture and in literature as water treatment (Croutier AL, 1992).

In 1336, the first shower was used in the baths of Bormio in Italy. This reemergence of water treatment also corresponds with the Renaissance. The return of Aristotle's books from the Arab world, as well as the tradition of bathing, created a boom that subsequently spawned a vast amount of art and revived the culture of using thermal mineral springs. In 1350, hot springs were developed in Europe, including those in Buda and Karlsbad, which became interesting spa destinations. In 1360, in England, hot springs gained a bad reputation for nudity and the spread of disease. This was also the main problem and the reason for the decline of the baths to a large extent in the Roman Empire. In many other countries, however, this decline did not occur and the development of balneology and spa procedures continued. Around 1500-1550 bathing increased in popularity as a medical treatment during the Renaissance in Europe. Many people began to understand the healing function of spa treatments and baths.

In 1553, the first guide to European spas was published in Venice, listing over 200 spas in Europe. In 1571, English Catholics traveled to Spa in Belgium to drink the water there. Drinking water for medicinal purposes was now becoming popular outside Belgium and even people from England were crossing The English Channel and travelling to Spa to drink from the magic water. In 1669, the work *Natural Baths* by Thomas Guidott listed for the first time the minerals contained in water. A relatively simple procedure, evaporating a certain amount of water, began to measure the amount of minerals in the water, and scientists found that certain combinations of minerals aided in the healing of various diseases.

In the 1750s, the therapeutic benefits of the sea and bathing began to become increasingly established. Per Henrik Ling (1776-1839) became famous for popularising what we now call Swedish massage. He discovered that massages were very popular with the Chinese and seeing the different massages they used, he developed his own techniques - today these are the classic massages. In 1826, the first European-style spa in America opened at High Rock Spring in Saratoga. People going from Europe to live in the United States brought the culture of using mineral waters with them, and the same spas that were in Europe were established in America. In 1829, the first hydrotherapy spa was established in Grafenberg, Germany, including diet, exercise, bathing, fresh air and health treatments. In 1882, the "Regulations for the Operation of the Hisar Baths" was issued, which is considered the beginning of spa treatment in Bulgaria. It is interesting to note that this regulation was the first practical regulation to be issued in Eastern Rumelia. It was also largely the beginning of legislation in this part of Bulgaria.

In 1886, Sebastian Kneipp published the book *My Water Cure* where he classified many different treatments and different foods. Interestingly, Kneippbrod or Kneipp's bread is still the most popular bread in Norway. In 1935-39 there were over 2000 health resorts in the USA using cold and hot water. There has also been a great development in Bulgaria. Sebastian Kneipp's teachings became very popular and led to the development of various spa facilities and balneology became very popular among Bulgarians.

After World War II, the use of thermal waters and spas declined. The reason for this was that more and more large facilities were built to make water accessible in all major places and towns, and households began to use electric and gas boilers. In 1993 the first spa on board a cruise ship was popularised. In 1993 Thailand began to developed as a spa destination. In fact, the old European resorts were declining, but a new light was being shed on the spa - as a holiday in an exotic location, as a place you could experience the local culture, specifics and the focus was shifting from medical and health reasons to relaxation.

In 1995 the European Spas Association (ESPA) was founded and in 1998 the British International Spa Association (BISA) was established. At the beginning of the new century, hydrotherapy was already accepted as a treatment worldwide. In 2006, the spa resort Bath in England reopened after a 28-year ban. Little by little, spas all over the world are beginning to see a restoration to their classic form, with new, more modern spa practices being added. European culture is also beginning to recover. In 2008-2009, the Bulgarian Union of Balneology and Spa Tourism and the Bulgarian Association of Spa Tourism were founded.

*Wellness is a more contemporary movement and concept*, but the original roots for the origin of the term and its use date back to 1634 AD. However, in the early years the term was not well established. The founder of wellness and its concept is considered to be the physician and medical practitioner Halbert L. Dunn. In 1956 he began to impose the term wellness, which is a combination of wellbeing and fitness. At the end of the 20th century in America, medical doctors were seriously concerned about the health of the inhabitants and found that stress, smoking and hectic lifestyles were affecting Americans very adversely. Medics began to look for methodologies and techniques to deal with these negative phenomena. According to Dunn, wellness is an integrated method of functioning that is oriented toward maximizing the potential of which the individual is capable. This requires the individual to maintain balance and meaningful direction in their environment. Once Americans realized that they could not continue the lifestyle to which they were accustomed, celebrities such as Deepak Chopra and Mehmet Oz (Dr. Oz) began to actively proclaim the application of wellness, which is geared towards maximizing the well-being of the individual. The

concept of wellness is focused on selfcare and keeping the mind and body in good condition. This in turn requires the imposition of many healthy and good practices in one's live. Gradually, these practices are being absorbed by tourism, which in turn is beginning to offer services and procedures to achieve well-being.

*Wellness tourism* represents the holidays and trips that are aimed at improving the public health and well-being of travellers. Wellness tourism includes activities that are aimed at improving and maintaining good physical health and mental balance (Великова, 2011). Over the years, the wellness concept has undergone many metamorphoses and many elements have been added to it, but the main ones that we can pay attention to and are important in our opinion are:

- Physical health - to be in a state of well-being we need to be in good physical shape, which implies embarking on activities to maintain this good physical health.
- The other set of activities involved in wellness are those for maintaining mental health.
- Equally important is healthy eating, as lifestyle and diet prove to be one of the essential concepts that maintain good physical health.
- Spirituality practices, which are different from yoga practices, and balance practices, which come from the East, are also becoming more established.
- Relaxation and sleep are essential for achieving well-being, as well as education and personal development. It is no coincidence that concepts of lifelong learning are gaining ground.

All of these elements *must work together* to create the well-being and the harmony in the holistic approach to an individual's wellness.

In terms of wellness tourism, we can say that spa and health centers, fitness and sports centers and the activities and services they offer are aimed at maintaining good physical shape. Healthy diets, healthy food and so-called slow tourism are also widespread, linked to slow lifestyles as opposed to the fast food and fast tourism trends that have emerged in previous years. In wellness tourism natural sites and outdoor activities are starting to be offered that help achieve wellbeing. Spiritual activities continue to dominate wellness tourism as well, with much of it being carried over from the East. It is no coincidence that people in Eastern cultures are said to be happier because of their spiritual practices.

### **Trends in wellness tourism**

At the moment, there are more and more targeted trips for health maintenance and well-being that are saturated with the mentioned elements and practices typical of wellness. *Digital wellness apps* are being used to monitor different indicators of our physical health and show in real time what



health condition we are in (Anev, 2020). *Environmental sustainability* is also very important, as the modern wellness tourist is focused on being healthy, being in tune with nature, not causing any harm to the nature, so that it can be enjoyed by future generations. It is also important to maintain immunity and rely on health prevention. Wellness tourism sometimes deals with serious health problems, but *one of its greatest advantages is the emphasis on prevention*. This advantage of wellness is one of the reasons it became very popular in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. The so-called *digital detox* is also becoming more and more interesting, with tourists looking for destinations and experiences where they can escape from the digital environment that surround them constantly. These are the kind of resorts and accommodations that completely disconnect the tourists from the digital environment and take them back to the years when they couldn't use mobiles and other digital devices. *Alternative therapies* are also prevalent in wellness and will continue to dominate the offering, as are family-friendly travel products, with services aimed at all ages. Wellness is a combination of therapies that are not only targeted at a specific age group, but increasingly include experiences for all age groups that have realized the need for a healthy lifestyle.

### **What lies ahead?**

*Smart technology and virtual wellness* may be one of the current challenges that the sector will take on. With the help of intelligent technologies, we will have the opportunity to feel exactly what the wellness experience could be. By adding virtual headsets or other type of technology the tourists will be able to feel exactly what the wellness experience is, using virtual reality. With this type of technology, one can see what the massage looks like and what the environment in the wellness center is. Wellness vacations will increasingly integrate *eco-travel practices*. Green travel will dominate supply. Wellness and health tourism offer a number of opportunities to address the global health crises we have witnessed in recent years. More and more people are *paying attention to their health* and will look for opportunities to improve it. The *social connectivity* that wellness offers is also important – it will continue to connect people to the rest of the world, offering opportunities that are in tune with the inner sense of self and the way one perceives the world. *Personalized wellness experiences* will be a leading priority (Velikova, 2008). Individual services will be offered according to the personal preferences of the tourist, because tourism as a whole is a sector that satisfies needs, desires, fulfills dreams and provides a wide range of experiences, which in our case are related precisely to improving the state of health, improving self-esteem and physical form, with proper experiences related to our spiritual world, with satisfaction with our professional path and social environment, and many other components.

### **Increasing the economic value of spas through the use of mineral waters**

Bulgarian legislation defines 4 types of spas - spa center, the wellness center, the medical-spa and the thalasso-therapy center. However, a much wider variety of spa types is known in practice. First of all, we will pay attention to the so-called *day-spas or city spas*. They offer services in the same way that spa services can be offered in a beauty salon or a beauty center. Usually located in larger cities, these complexes allow clients to relax with a massage or facial after a long and tiring day at work. The forerunners of the day spa were public baths in large cities. In the late 20th century, these were skin care locations, mostly beauty centers. And by the late 1980s and early 1990s, with the growing popularity of destination spas and skin care professionals, massages and even nutritional programs began to be offered at these centers. Thus, was born the day spa, which in its current form is an American invention.

Today many beauty centers, purely as a fashion trend, add spa to their name, precisely to attract customers, which does not always mean that they offer the whole complex of spa-services. Day spas target busy people, professionals who want access to spa services on a daily basis. Their basic amenities should be related to the clean and relaxing environment, with the provision of robes, slippers, changing cabinets for storing clients' personal belongings, with private treatment rooms for each client, with professional qualified therapists, facial and body treatments. Another type of spa or rather a larger complex of spa treatments are offered by the so-called *destination spas*. They are entirely focused on spa treatments, with the visitor following a complete program for a longer period of time. This program usually includes a number of physical activities, many spa treatments and a special diet. In the past, destination spas were focused on weight loss and sometimes detoxication. These were the places where wealthy people went to get fit, healthy and in some cases to heal. Some of these spas offer relaxation and behavior modification programs, and some even offer beauty treatments.

These centers offer low-calorie foods on their menu, substantial exercise programs, lifestyle lectures, even medical evaluations and tests. Usually outsiders cannot visit the centers. Amenities offered at destination spas include accommodations, healthy meals, physical fitness programs, outdoor activities and a variety of spa-style spa treatments. It is interesting to note that depending on where destination spas are located, they may offer purely national services, purely national therapies that are specific to the particular country that is visited. Medical control, educational programs, conversations, lectures on health topics are also carried out to improve the general condition; they are served by professional and well-qualified staff, with a large emphasis on physical activities.

Other types of spas are the *spa hotels*. They offer spa treatments and special care during the tourist's stay at the hotel. They also allow the practice of various sports and activities on site, and are considered places for recreation and relaxation. Many hotels and vacation complexes add spa centers to their offer, since the spa is already an extremely fashionable phenomenon that has become a necessity, and when a certain location in the tourism sector wants to increase its categorization, it must provide on spa services. Gradually, this became part of the Bulgarian legislation, and in fact, 4 and 5-star hotels must now have one of the four certified centers in their sites, i.e. they must have a spa or some of the others we have already mentioned.

*The tourism industry is quick to pick up on all the changes in people's lifestyles* and over the years this has happened quite recognisably and visibly, for example in the 1960s hotels added swimming pools to their offerings, in the 1970s they added tennis courts; golf courses and health clubs were added in the 1980s and by the 1990s the spa had fully entered the tourism offering. Since the 1990s, in spa hotels, the spa has been defined as a place of relaxation. It can be located in a hotel or resort. It is usually an extended place for sports and exercise. All services are offered a la carte, i.e. on the menu and can be chosen by customers according to their preferences. The more opportunities to practice spa services offered by a hotel, the better. They are not closed to outside guests, they can usually be used by both hotel guests and outside visitors. A hotel spa may be owned by the hotel or resort in which it is located or leased to a subcontractor by franchise model, management agreement, or otherwise. They can be located both inside the hotel or resort complex, and outside it. With regard to spa resorts and spa hotels, the range of services offered to consumers can be diversified even more. Spa hotels tend to be high-end, offering mostly preventative services rather than curative ones, although there are also spas that focus entirely on medical care for clients. Moreover, cosmetic and medical services are also entering the spa sphere to a very large extent.

The *resort spa* is also interesting. It is a mix between a resort spa and a spa complex. Programs and special additional days are available to continue the program and the resort spa is also sometimes used to extend the stay at the tourist resorts. The disadvantage is the temptation to give up the diet program, as there are other guests in the resorts who do not follow this regime, so sometimes one can not strictly follow the program that is offered from the resort spa.

Another form of spa is the *club spa*. The health club industry is also benefiting from the spa concept. Health club customers strongly believe in a healthy lifestyle and therefore the tourism industry is taking advantage of this and offers spa facilities to the clubs to diversify and extend the stay of their customers. The services offered at these locations are both for health club members as well as for external visitors who come specifically for procedures.

The *medical spa* is also a rather interesting form of spa location in tourism. With the rise in popularity of spa products among men and women of all age groups and backgrounds, the field of estheticians has become more popular and more intriguing. i.e. in the medical spa centers, such medical cosmetic services are offered to a very large extent. And with the boom in cosmetic surgery, this setting allows the client to receive spa treatments that are recommended by a doctor and are intended to enhance the recovery process after surgery or to experience the benefits of the therapies. The basic amenities are the same as a resort or hotel spa, but with the addition of other programs such as weight loss, a hydrotherapy pool, medical treatments that may include acupuncture, botox, laser therapy, liposuction, plastic surgery, etc. In recent years, the *cruise ship spas* become very popular. The desire to enrich the services that are offered in cruise ships leads to the creation of spa centers on board. So, they have similar amenities to a resort or hotel spa.

Another contemporary form are the so-called *spa towns*. For centuries spa towns were the only sources for spa therapies and are now undergoing a resurgence and promotion. They were built next to natural mineral water sources for bathing and offered various forms of therapies. Traditional spa towns should include a natural mineral, thermal or marine water source, a wide variety of hydrotherapy treatments, bathing facilities, historic buildings, cultural activities, outdoor healthy surroundings such as parks, places to walk, and more. The spa center with a mineral spring, in turn, can be an independent setting or combined with a spa complex or a medical spa. There is usually a natural source of mineral, thermal or sea water. Mud therapies can also be added to the offerings of this type of center.

*Rehabilitation centers and hospital spas* are also an interesting category. Progressive health care providers began to incorporate spa therapies into their patient care, and that's how these centers emerged. Rehabilitation centers use such methods as lasso, Trager approach, pilates to help their clients or patients on the road to recovery. Hospitals are also increasingly turning to spa therapies to reduce the discomfort of their patients, especially when they are terminally ill, spa therapy has the potential to aid in spiritual healing as well.

*Sanatoriums* also usually offer these services. Initially, they offered medical procedures, using mineral waters, mud and other therapies to improve the health of their patients. Later they added additional treatments such as swimming pools, bathtubs, jacuzzis, Turkish hammam, baths, beauty treatments, massages and many others. They are quite similar to most centers; the only difference is in the breadth and depth of the services offered. Most of the companies are wellness and medical spa oriented, with providers typically offering hydrotherapy, massage,

electrophysiological treatments, balneological therapies, health wellness and health spa. Additional services usually attract visitors, tourists or local residents.

All this variety of spas, in fact, makes it difficult for investors to choose exactly which form is best for them, so *the economic value* that can be generated by the mineral waters used in spas and in the variety of sites that we have looked also needs to be addressed. ***Thermal mineral waters*** are of particular interest because they have, in addition to the value of water, the value of thermal energy. This is what makes them more economically viable to use for a spa. There are two ways in which the waters are isolated. One way is by means of a drip, which is the isolation of a mineral spring. The other way is by drilling. Many of the mineral deposits in Bulgaria were discovered by drilling in the 1950s and 1960s (Velikova, Anev, 2019).

The different elements that mineral water has and that have an economic value are three. The first is water, the second is the thermal component and the third is the chemical and biological composition. *The economic value of water* is difficult to assess because water is owned by all citizens, i.e. it has no value in itself. For example, when we buy water from the mains, we are not paying for the water itself, we are paying for transmission, treatment and sanitation, whereas water should be free. Much the same applies to thermal mineral waters. In the case of these, the ownership belongs to all citizens in the first place, which is why, whenever such thermal water is discovered, a part of it is set aside for public use. When we want to calculate what the value of this water is, we have to go by either its market value or the cost of supplying it through alternative sources.

*The economic value of thermal energy* is easier to calculate. Inside the thermal mineral water is the thermal energy, which can be measured in joules, calories or kilowatts per year. And this value can also be equivalent based on the artificial heating of this same water. *The economic value of the chemical and biological content* is most complex, since the elements are not valuable in the quantities found in the water. But they can be used for many other things, for example for cosmetics, and this would greatly increase the value of the water. The different applications that we look at when we have a thermal water source are spa and wellness treatments, heating, electricity generation, biofuel production and cosmetics production. We should point out that electricity production is a very rare case and something that, based on the thermal mineral springs in Bulgaria, is not feasible except for the construction of a special facility related to this.

We will start with the spa and balneotherapy. The good thing about them is that there could be *100% use of every element of the thermal mineral water* (Velikova et al., 2018). This means that both the water and the thermal component can be used, as well as the different chemical elements that are contained in it to the fullest. This means that the use for the spa makes sure that the water is

consumed sensibly and ecologically. Heating, on the other hand, is also sensible, but it loses the water element, even though it uses the thermal element, and on the other hand it loses the mineral element of water completely. The generation of electricity is a special case. It applies where special efforts have been made to build geothermal power stations. But it can also provide very interesting examples of how the water from the geothermal plants is also used. The sensible use is at temperatures above 200 degrees Celsius, and some special technologies are needed for this purpose. The production of biofuels is also linked to the operation of geothermal plants with very high temperatures. The production of cosmetics is a very interesting example, especially from springs that are popular and used for spas. Very often, even just by putting normal thermal water in a bottle, it can be sold for a very high price. The reason for this is that most popular thermal mineral waters contain an element called metasilicic acid. This element has a very beneficial effect on the skin. So, although the water is very often poured out by the millions of liters a year, this does not mean that a half-liter bottle of it does not have a very good value, especially for the consumer.

We can give a specific example with the *Blue Lagoon in Iceland*, where one can observe the most complete use of thermal mineral waters. The Blue Lagoon itself is formed from the waste water from the geothermal plant. Practically the water comes out at temperatures that cannot be used in a spa - temperatures above 200 degrees Celsius. But through heat exchangers this temperature is reduced considerably, and the water is used first to generate electricity, then to heat the nearby town, and the gases that come out are processed into biomethane. Iceland, thanks to this plant, not only serves the local biofuels market, but exports biofuels to Germany. Also, from the lye that comes out through these hyperheated waters, various cosmetics are produced. There are also *examples from Bulgaria*. Unfortunately, there are places in Bulgaria that are quite rich in thermal mineral water, which is not fully utilized. There are also places, of course, where water is 100% used such as Sandanski, Pavel Banya and, to a large extent, Hisarya. But in other places, such as Varna and Sofia, thermal mineral water is hardly used. And this leads to very large direct and indirect losses both for the municipality and for tourism in general.

Specifically, if we look at the most central deposit in the capital - *Sofia Center deposit*, we can see that the use of thermal mineral water can lead to a significant reduction even in carbon dioxide emissions. This is done by saving fuel for heating water. This can best be visualized by saying that emissions can be saved for over 2,600 cars per year. Also, the water itself, which is poured into the canal nowadays, has quite significant volumes, and its price, even only from the network, would cost nearly BGN 700,000. The energy that is locked in, and that would result in carbon dioxide savings, is estimated at nearly 60,000 gigajoules.

This natural wealth also creates the opportunity to create wonderful spa centers. Of course, we must keep in mind that water can be used very efficiently and economically for many other things. For example, bottling, where the thermal element is actually lost, may be used for cosmetics. And the reason there are many hidden losses of water is that the water is often pumped out. This is also the case with the water in the Sofia Center deposit, where quite large sums are paid every year for the pumping of the water, which then ends up in the canal.

Of course, this is subject to change. Even the available 12-13 liters per second is quite enough to build a thermal center. In the basement of the Central bath there is also a geothermal plant with a heat exchanger, which is used to heat the current museum building. This means that the water has some significant potential that needs to be developed. For example, almost 13 liters per second of water, if compared to the flow rate of a single shower, which is 0.12 liters per second, gives you the opportunity to imagine how many showers can be fed with this source alone - *over 100*. That being said, one should not be led to think that there is an endless abundance of thermal mineral waters. On the contrary, they are limited in volume. According to the latest research, the thermal mineral waters in Bulgaria are about 6500 liters per second. Over half of them are already in use, which shows their demand, and their use mainly in spas. It should be borne in mind that in order to be able to properly develop spa tourism from here on, we need to set a clear subordination, or we need to prioritize very clearly, to which sites thermal mineral water will be supplied and where it can be used in the most effective way.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, we could say that if the spa has not yet become an element that influences the choice of tourism destinations, it increasingly represents a decisive element when choosing a hotel. For some tourists, it is even unacceptable to visit a hotel that does not offer this type of service. The number of people discovering spa therapy in the process of searching for a way to protect their health, beauty, youth, and vitality is growing rapidly. The variety of salons, spa treatments, spa cosmetics, spa centers, spa hotels and resorts, as well as the books and articles about this phenomenon could characterize the spa as a simple fashion trend, although in its essence it is a whole culture of water procedures and rituals, born in ancient times and passed down from generation to generation. The issue of terminological clarifications regarding spas and whether to use mineral water in them will continue. But regardless of the type of spa that is visited, the presence of mineral water is an additional advantage that will always be well received by customers.



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## ТУРИСТИЧЕСКА ПОЛИТИКА НА ОБЩИНА ПЛЕВЕН

*Светослав Калейчев*

**Абстракт:** През последните няколко години, на преден план в туристическото развитие на голяма част от общините в България се позиционира нуждата от разработване и прилагане на пълноценна и съвременна туристическа политика. Безспорен е факта, че туристическите дестинации в България имат необходимост от прилагане и внедряване на политики, които да имат за цел тяхното ефективно развитие и съответно утвърждаване на местния и международен туристически пазар. В тази връзка в настоящият доклад се представя туристическата политика на община Плевен през последните 2 години с цел да се формират изводи и препоръки, които да послужат, като възможност за бъдещо ефективно развитие на общината в областта на туризма. За да се постигнат по-ефективно целите на община Плевен в областта на туризма, които са свързани основно със създаване на благоприятна среда за развитието на туристическия бизнес и насърчаване на сътрудничеството между държавата-общината и бизнеса, трябва да се създаде, въведе и приложи обща политика в областта на туризма. Тъй като само в този случай може да се повиши развитието на местната туристическа индустрия и същевременно се повиши конкурентоспособността на община Плевен като една от основните туристически дестинации на България.

**Ключови думи:** туризъм, туристическа политика, община Плевен

### ВЪВЕДЕНИЕ

Разработването и прилагането на определена туристическа политика, намира израз в създаването на работна програма, която да гарантира ефективността на използваните процеси и ресурси за нейното реализиране. Програмата има за цел да координира съвместните действия на всички заинтересовани страни, за да се постигне оптимално развитие на Община Плевен в областта на туризма. Същевременно тя е съобразена със съвременните тенденции в развитието на туристическата индустрия, със социално-икономическо развитие на България, както и с възможностите определени от различните европейски приоритети и свързани с развитието на туризма по отношение на проекти с европейско финансиране. Програмата за развитие на туризма, трябва да бъде реализирана с активното участие на всички заинтересовани институции в общината – общинска администрация, общински съвет, бизнес, НПО, държавни структури, специализирани училища, специализирани професионални сдружения др.

Управленската администрация на гр. Плевен залага в програма реализираща туристическата политика на общината следните цели:

- Повишаване на разпознаваемостта на Община Плевен като туристическа дестинация
- Увеличаване обема на туристопотока
- Организация на информационното обслужване на туристите

- Създаване на устойчив имидж
- Икономически растеж чрез ревитализиране на секторната конкурентоспособност и заетост
- Съхраняване на природното и културно наследство на Общината за бъдещите поколения
- Повишаване привлекателността на общия туристически продукт на Общината чрез благоустрояване на инфраструктурата обслужваща туризма, обогатяване на културния живот в общината и изграждане и поддържане на туристически обекти.

От друга страна трябва да се отбележи, че реализирането на туристическата политика на Община Плевен се осъществява, чрез финансови средства, които да реализират заложените приоритетни дейности. В тази връзка финансовите средства се набират от:

- Средства, предоставени за изпълнение на целеви програми и проекти;
- Средства, събирани от туристически данък;
- Дарения и помощи, средства по международни програми и споразумения, когато не е предвидено те да постъпват в държавния бюджет
- Приходите от туристически данък

Най-голямо количество финансови средства постъпват в бюджета на общината от туристически данък, приходите от него за първото полугодие на 2023г. възлизат на 64 533лв.<sup>22</sup> Постъпилите средства се разходват само за мероприятията по:

1. Изграждане и поддържане на инфраструктурата, обслужваща туризма на територията на общината, включително местните пътища до туристически обекти;
2. Изграждане и функциониране на туристически информационни центрове и организация на информационното обслужване на туристите;
3. Изграждане и поддържане на туристически обекти, които са общинска собственост или за които правото за ползване и управление е предоставено на общината;
4. Организиране на събития и мероприятия с местно и национално значение, които допринасят за развитието на туризма;
5. Провеждане на проучвания, анализи и прогнози за развитието на туризма в общината;
6. Реклама на туристическия продукт на общината, включително участие на туристически борси и изложения;
7. Взаимодействие и членство на общината в туристически сдружения и в съответната организация за управление на туристическия район;
8. Подобряване качеството на услугите, предлагани в общинските туристически обекти.

Също така като разходи за държавни дейности по отношение на туризма се отчитат средствата за Регионалния исторически музей, Регионалния военноисторически музей,

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<sup>22</sup> <https://plevenzapleven.bg/blog/2023/08/31/%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%B8%D1%85%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%B8-%D0%B2-%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B7%D0%BC%D0%B5%D1%80-%D0%BD%D0%B0-78-322-462-%D0%BB%D0%B2-%D0%B7%D0%B0-%D0%BF%D1%8A%D1%80%D0%B2%D0%BE%D1%82%D0%BE-%D0%BF%D0%BE%D0%BB-301905/>

Регионалната библиотека „Христо Смирненски“, ХГ „Илия Бешков“ и читалищата в общината. Разходите се отчитат и за следните организации пряко и непряко свързани с туристическата индустрия на местно ниво: „Оркестри и ансамбли“ – 646 222 лв.; „Читалища“ – 655 357 лв.; „Музеи, художествени галерии, паметници на културата и етнографски комплекси с национален и регионален характер“ – с изпълнение за периода 1 412 258 лв., в това число са до финансирани делегирани от държавата дейност „Зоопаркове“ с отчетени разходи на стойност 88 998 лв.

Представената до тук информация с основание дава възможност да се приеме становището, че Община Плевен е насочила вниманието си към развитие на съвременна и устойчива туристическа политика, чрез която да модернизира и популяризира туристическите ресурси в общината, като ги превърне в желани туристически обекти на национално ниво.

### МЕТОДОЛОГИЯ

Съвременната туристическа политика е изключително динамичен процес, който се определя от голямо количество икономически и социални фактори. Поради това за целите на настоящия доклад се използва подход със смесени методи, който позволява комплексно и всеобхватно разглеждане на проблематиката за постигане на ефективно разбиране по отношение на целите и задачите поставени за реализиране в туристическата политика на Община Плевен. Също така за представяне на актуална информация се събират и анализират данни с помощта на индуктивни методи като Web Mining по отношение на анализа на уеб съдържанието, както и синтез и обобщение на информация, сравнителни и аналитични методи и експертна оценка.

### АНАЛИЗ НА ЛИТЕРАТУРАТА

Безспорен е факта, че разработването и внедряването на ефективна и съвременна туристическа политика е основен елемент от управлението на всяка една туристическа дестинация. Именно за това трябва да се представят част от достиженията на българската наука в областта, които добавят както теоретична стойност, така и ползи за бизнес развитието на туристическата индустрия. В тази връзка впечатление правят разработките на (Божинова, М., Личев, Т., Тодорова, Л., Павлов, П., & Георгиева, К., 2019) насочена към „Съвременни измерения на управлението на туристическа дестинация България“. В нея авторите поставят изследователска цел, която е насочена към установяване състоянието на туристическа дестинация България, чрез използването на емпирично проучване. Имащо за цел очертаването на съществуващите проблеми и многообразието от стратегически управленски решения, стоящи пред България и утвърждаването ѝ като целогодишна туристическа дестинация, подходяща за развитието на различни видове туризъм. Също така трябва да се отбележи разработката на Маринов, В & Дограмаджиева, Е., (2012), които насочват усилията си към очертаване на съвременният профил на националния туристически пазар, основавайки се на различни източници на информация и въздействието на различни вътрешни и външни влияния върху пътувания на български граждани. Kraucheva, N. (2017) също разглежда проблематиката на туристическата политика. В своята статия „Националната туристическа политика – ключов фактор за икономически растеж в сферата на туризма“ тя обобщава основните принципи на концепцията за „политика в туризма“, като ги определя като

неразделна част от държавната и глобалната политическа система. Също така Крайчева разглежда и представя конкурентните предимства на България в туристическия сектор, като извежда на преден план най-проблемните области за развитие на туризма в страната (на базата на 90 индивидуални показателя на ТТСИ). Авторът завършва своя труд с обобщение за текущите промени в глобалния туристически сектор, които биха могли да повлияят на бъдещето на туризма. Друг автор, който трябва да бъде отбелязан е Nedelchev, D. (2016), който в разработката си „Ефективност на инструментите на туристическата политика за икономически въздействия върху туризма на България“, насочва вниманието към ефективността на въздействието на различните инструменти за туристическата политика, превръщащи се в предпоставка за реализиране на определени стратегически цели. Според автора определянето на отделните инструменти на туристическата политика е свързано с конкретни цели. Впечатление прави и разработката на Neshkov, M. (2011), а именно „Науката за туризма и мястото на туристическата политика в нейния обект и предмет“. В нея авторът насочва вниманието към посветен някои недостатъчно изследвани в специализираната литература проблеми, свързани с туристическата политиката. Също така неговата цел е да проучи постиженията науката за туризма, характеризирайки, чрез тях ролята на туристическата политика, както и нейното настоящо и бъдещо развитие. Основен акцент авторът поставя върху интегрирането на политическите измерения на туризма в обекта и предмета на науката за това явление. Също така сериозен принос към разбирането за същността и проявленията на туристическата политика има монографията на Ribov, M., & Mileva, S. (2013), със заглавие „Туристическа политика“. В нея авторите представят комплексно теоретико-методологическото изследване на авторски колектив на туристическата политика, стопанските субекти и структурите на управление на туризма, стратегическото и тактическо осигуряване и управленско консултиране.

### ИЗЛОЖЕНИЕ

Безспорно Община Плевен може да бъде определена, като една от най-важните туристически дестинации на България. Градът Плевен е един от най-старите градове в страната. Възникнал е като тракийско селище /в местността Кайлъка/ и е бил известен под името Сторгозия (Traval-tourism.info, 2024). През 6-7 век градът е разрушен. По-късно на негово място възниква селището Каменица. В Община Плевен се намират 3 обекта от 100-те национални туристически обекта- Мавзолея-параклис „Св. Георги Победоносец“, Панорама „Плевенска епопея- 1877г.“ и Регионалният исторически музей. Привлекателни за туристите са и парковете Кайлъка и Скобелев парк, които имат местно и регионално значение. Със своята многовековна история град Плевен е запазил и до днес богатото си културно-историческо наследство. По-голяма част от историческите забележителности на града се свързват с Руско-турската освободителна война. “Близо 200 са паметниците, които напомнят на поколенията за най-кървавите битки, които са се водили по тези места” (Pleven.bg, 2017). Внимание заслужават и останките от римската крепост “Сторгозия”, която се намира в парк “Кайлъка”, храм “Свети Николай Мирликийски Чудотворец” - паметник от Възраждането с национално значение, драматичният театър “Иван Радоев” основан през 1919 г. и др. Най-интересните забележителности от туристически характер, които представя град Плевен са:

- Панорама "Плевенска епопея-1877г."
- Парк-музей "Ген. М. Д. Скобелев"
- Параклис-мавзолей "Св. Георги Победоносец"
- Къща-музей "Цар Освободител Александър II "
- Регионален исторически музей
- Старият мост на р. Вит при Плевен
- Късноантична крепост "Сторгозия"
- Драматично-куклен театър "Иван Радоев"
- Художествена галерия Дарение "Колекция Светлин Русев"
- Художествена галерия "Илия Бешков"
- Храм "Свети Николай Мирликийски Чудотворец"
- Храм "Св. Троица"
- Храм "Св. Параскева"
- Парк "Кайлъка"
- Пещерен музей на виното

От друга страна както бе посочено вече Община Плевен е богата на културно -исторически забележителности, като най-важни за вътрешния и международен туризъм са:

- Старият мост на река Вит при Плевен
- Румънски мавзолей, с. Гривица
- Къща музей „Негово Кралско Величество Карол I”, гр. Пордим
- Къща музей „Велик княз Николай Николаевич”, гр. Пордим
- Античен град „ Улпия Ескус“

Представено разнообразие от туристически ресурси определя основите за изграждането на устойчива и съвременна туристическа политика на Община Плевен, която да определя туристическият облик на общината и съответно да я представя и налага на българската и европейска туристическа карта. Именно поради това общината отбелязва 14% повече туристи през 2023 г. спрямо 2022 г. (Plevenutre.bg, 2023).

В тази връзка и в интерес на настоящия доклад ще се представи политиката за развитие на Община Плевен за 2019г., която се осъществява посредством разработена програма (Pleven.bg, 2019). Представя се именно тази политика, защото тя е последната разработена преди пандемията от COVID 19, в период в който туризма се развиваше с най-устойчиви темпове.

## ПРОГРАМА ЗА РАЗВИТИЕ НА ТУРИЗМА В ОБЩИНА ПЛЕВЕН ЗА 2019 г.

### ОБЩИ ПОЛОЖЕНИЯ

На основание чл. 12 ал. 1 от Закона за туризма кмета на Община Плевен, разработва Програмата за развитие на туризма съгласно чл.11, ал.1 и отчета за нейното изпълнение и след одобрението им от консултативния съвет по чл.13, ал.1, ги внася за приемане от общинския съвет. Програмата е една платформа за координирани съвместни действия на всички заинтересовани от туризма страни, за усвояване на туристическия потенциал, в съответствие с плана за развитие на Община Плевен. Същевременно тя е съобразена с настоящите тенденции в развитието на туризма, условията на икономическо развитие на страната и



възможностите за кандидатстване с проекти за европейско финансиране. Програмата за развитие на туризма, следва да бъде изпълнена с активното участие на всички заинтересовани от развитието на туризма институции в общината – общинска администрация, общински съвет, бизнес, НПО, държавни структури, специализирани училища и др. Основната роля при реализирането и мониторинга на програмата, ще е на Общинския туристически информационен център, Отдел „МДСТ“- Община Плевен, Консултативния съвет по туризъм с участието на всички заинтересовани страни и доброволци.

### ЦЕЛИ НА ПРОГРАМАТА ЗА РАЗВИТИЕ НА ТУРИЗМА

- Повишаване на разпознаваемостта на Община Плевен като туристическа дестинация
- Увеличаване обема на туристопотока
- Организация на информационното обслужване на туристите
- Създаване на устойчив имидж
- Икономически растеж чрез ревитализиране на секторната конкурентоспособност и заетост
- Съхраняване на природното и културно наследство на Общината за бъдещите поколения
- Повишаване привлекателността на общия туристически продукт на Общината чрез благоустрояване на инфраструктурата обслужваща туризма, обогатяване на културния живот в общината и изграждане и поддържане на туристически обекти.

Дейност	Срок	Отговорна организация	Прогнозна финансова стойност /лв./
<b>ПРИОРИТЕТ 1. Организиране на събития и мероприятия с местно и национално значение, които допринасят за развитието на туризма.</b>			
<b>1.1 Пешеходни обиколки</b> <i>Пешеходни обиколки свързани с културното и архитектурно наследство на Плевен. Ще бъдат свързани с познавателна цел на подрастващото поколение в гр. Плевен, като ще се ползват екскурзоводи от ПГТ „Алеко Константинов“.</i>	Целогодишно	Община Плевен, ПГТ „Алеко Константинов“	500 лв.
<b>1.2 Фестивал- „Магията на българските народни традиции“</b> <i>Целта на фестивала е да съхрани, развие и представи традиционните форми на вековното българско фолклорно наследство – музика, танци, песни, обичаи и ритуали. В програмата на фестивала ще бъдат поканени за участие танцови състави, ансамбли, певчески групи и хорове, за представяне на български обреди и обичаи. Ще бъдат поканени и занаятчийски ателиета. Фестивалът няма конкурсен характер.</i>	Юни	Община Плевен, ПГТ „Алеко Константинов“, Регионална занаятчийска камара	5 000 лв.
<b>1.3 Поклоннически поход</b> <i>Отбелязване 550 години от връщане мощите на Св. Йоан Рилски от Търново в Рилския манастир и провеждане поклоннически пешеходен поход „Светият път“ преминаващ през територията на Община Плевен.</i>	10 Юли	Туристическо дружество (Академик-ВТУ) Велико Търново, РИМ	До 1 000 лв.
<b>1.4 Празник на гроздето</b> <i>Целта на празника е да се пресъздаде обичая гроздобер и да се запази, като традиция за поколенията. Програмата на празника включва посещение на лозовите масиви на Лозаро винарския институт- гр. Плевен и богата фолклорна програма.</i>	Септември	Община Плевен, Институт по лозарство и винарство	5 000 лв.

<p><b>1.5 Празник на туризма</b>  <i>Тържествено отбелязване на Международния ден на туризма съпътстващ с конкурс по фотография</i></p>	<p>27 Септември</p>	<p>Община Плевен, ПГТ „Алеко Константинов”</p>	<p>1 500 лв.</p>
<p><b>1.6 Кръгла маса с представителите на туристическия брани в гр. Плевен, съвместно с представителите на консултативния съвет за решаването на възникнали проблеми свързани с туризма и даване на нови предложения и идеи за развитие на туризма в Община Плевен през 2020 г.</b></p>	<p>Ноември</p>	<p>Община Плевен</p>	<p>1 000 лв.</p>
<p><b>ПРИОРИТЕТ 2. Промотиране на туристическа дестинация „Плевен”</b></p>			
<p><b>2.1 Преиздаване, отпечатване и тиражиране на рекламни материали ( брошури, флаери и каталози )</b></p>	<p>Май</p>	<p>Община Плевен, РИМ-Плевен</p>	<p>8 000 лв.</p>
<p><b>2.2 Проектиране и изработване на сувенири с цел продажба в ТИЦ</b></p>	<p>Ноември</p>	<p>Община Плевен, Регионална занаятчийска камара</p>	<p>3 000 лв.</p>
<p><b>2.3 Участие в туристически изложения, бизнес срещи с туристическия брани, форуми и други събития в страната</b></p>	<p>Целогодишно</p>	<p>Община Плевен</p>	<p>4 000 лв.</p>
<p><b>ПРИОРИТЕТ 3: Организиране на ефективно информационно обслужване</b></p>			
<p><b>3.1 Сертифициране на туристически информационен център (ТИЦ)</b>  <i>Преместване на ТИЦ в подходяща сграда, брандиране, сертифициране и други.</i></p>	<p>До края на 2019 г.</p>	<p>Община Плевен</p>	<p>15 000 лв.          Инвестиционна програма на Община Плевен за 2019 г.</p>
<p><b>3.2 Изработка на интернет сайт</b>  <i>Поддържане на интернет сайт в областта на туризма и отразяване на актуални събития, състоящи се на територията на Община Плевен</i></p>	<p>До края на 2019 г.</p>	<p>Община Плевен</p>	<p>До 5 000 лв.</p>



<b>3.3 Поддържане на актуална информация в интернет страницата на Община Плевен</b> <i>Поддържане на интернет линк в областта на туризма в интернет страницата на Община Плевен</i>	целогодишно	Туристически информационен център	Средства не се изискват
<b>3.4 Провеждане на проучвания, анализи и прогнози за развитието на туризма в Община Плевен</b> <i>Ежемесечно се проследяват индикаторите на изпълнението в туризма за отчитане на тенденциите на база получени данни</i>	целогодишно	Туристически информационен център	Средства не се изискват
<b>Приоритет 4: Изграждане на нова и поддържане на съществуващата техническа и туристическа инфраструктура</b>			
<b>4.1 Поддръжка на съществуващата екопътека „Чернелка” и нейната информационна и указателна инфраструктура</b>	Май	Община Плевен	3 000 лв.
<b>4.2 Почистване и поддържане, поставяне на указателни табели по пешеходна пътека до хижа „Среброструй”</b>	Май	Община Плевен, ТД „Кайлъшка долина”	3 000 лв.

**Обща стойност: 40 000 лв.**

**ФИНАНСОВО ОСИГУРЯВАНЕ НА ПРОГРАМАТА ЗА РАЗВИТИЕ НА ТУРИЗМА В ОБЩИНА ПЛЕВЕН ПРЕЗ 2019 г.**

А. Средствата за развитие на туризма и реализирането на приоритетните дейности се набират от:

1. Средства, предоставени за изпълнение на целеви програми и проекти;
2. Средства, събрани от туристически данък;
3. Дарения и помощи, средства по международни програми и споразумения, когато не е предвидено те да постъпват в държавния бюджет Приходите от туристически данък през 2018 г. са в размер 39 850,86 лв. През 2019 г. са предвидени приходи от този данък в размер на 40 000 лв.

Б. Разходната част на Програмата за развитие на туризма е в съответствие с чл.60, ал.2 и чл.11, ал. 2 от Закона за туризма. Приходите от туристически данък се разходват само за мероприятията по:

1. Изграждане и поддържане на инфраструктурата, обслужваща туризма на територията на общината, включително местните пътища до туристически обекти;

2. Изграждане и функциониране на туристически информационни центрове и организация на информационното обслужване на туристите;
3. Изграждане и поддържане на туристически обекти, които са общинска собственост или за които правото за ползване и управление е предоставено на общината;
4. Организиране на събития и мероприятия с местно и национално значение, които допринасят за развитието на туризма;
5. Провеждане на проучвания, анализи и прогнози за развитието на туризма в общината;
6. Реклама на туристическия продукт на общината, включително участие на туристически борси и изложения;
7. Взаимодействие и членство на общината в туристически сдружения и в съответната организация за управление на туристическия район;
8. Подобряване качеството на услугите, предлагани в общинските туристически обекти

### **ЗАКЛЮЧЕНИЕ**

Изпълнението на Програмата за развитие на туризма за 2019 година, ще даде възможност за създаване и развитие на конкурентоспособен туристически продукт, способен в максимална степен да удовлетвори нуждите на туристите и населението на общината и да стимулира изграждането на ползотворни обществено-частни партньорства с организации от туристическия бранш. Основно място заема и рекламата и промотирането на туристическите обекти и предлагане в нашия регион. Очакван резултат от изпълнението на Програмата за развитие на туризма през 2019 година ще е позиционирането на Община Плевен, като атрактивна дестинация със собствен облик и богато културно-историческо наследство. Програмата за развитие на туризма в Община Плевен за 2019 г. е отворен и гъвкав документ, подлежащ на промяна, допълване и усъвършенстване, в отговор на възникнали нови потребности и в съответствие с променящите се условия, нормативна база и икономическа среда.

### **ЗАКЛЮЧЕНИЕ**

Разработването и прилагането на съвременна и устойчива туристическата политика е изключително важно за всяка една туристическа дестинация в частност Община Плевен. В тази връзка в заключение на изложената до тук информация ще се представят някои основни аспекти от програмата за развитие на туризма в община плевен за 2023г. По отношение на Събитията с регионално и национално значение, е планирано провеждането на Винарско изложение „Сторгозия” през м. септември с участието на винопроизводители от Плевенския регион и Северозападна България. В рамките на изложението се предвижда да се проведе Национална среща на сертифицираните туристически центрове в страната на тема „Добри практики и проблеми в работата на туристическите информационни центрове” и Ревю на български национални костюми от фонда на Регионалния исторически музей. Останалите събития са Международният фестивал по маримба и ударни инструменти, Международният ЕСЕН Джаз Фест, отбелязването на Международния ден на туризма – 27 септември.

По отношение на рекламната дейност се предвижда издаване на информационни дипляни, рекламни материали за природните забележителности, рекламни клипове за най-важните плевенски забележителности, изработване на сувенири за магазина на Туристическия център. Членовете на Съвета бяха единодушни, че трябва да се завиши сумата

за участия в туристически борси, изложения и форуми от 2000 на 15 000 лв., както и сумата за разработка и подготовка за печат на Туристически пътеводител на община Плевен (Actualno.com, 2023)

В обобщение на всичко представено с основание може да се твърди, че реализирането и осъществяването на заложената туристическа политика за развитие на Община Плевен има възможността да постигне национална и международна разпознаваемост на община Плевен като туристическа дестинация. Залегналите мерки за изпълнение ще имат възможността за увеличаване на реалните и потенциални туристи, както и професионално популяризиране на природните и антропогенни ресурси с които разполага общината. Също така политиката за туризма има за цел да обслужва информационно туристите, да опазва, съхранява и представя най-ефективно културното-историческото и природното наследство на България и в частност Община Плевен.

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**ROLE AND IMPORTANCE OF MOUNTAIN GUIDES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF  
TOURISM**

*[Margarita Misheva](#)*

***Abstract***

*The article focuses on the important issues regarding the sustainable development of mountain of mountain tourism with the help of mountain guides. Their role and importance in the process of protecting the environment and tourist resources is monitored. Special attention is paid to the mountain guide profession and its importance for the development of mountain tourism. The exploitation of mountain tourism resources has been going on at a rapid pace in recent years, and this is mainly due to the increased interest of tourists in winter sports, which is a reflection of the trends in world tourism. In the European Union, mountain tourism brings between 15 and 30 billion euros and its development is a priority in all regions of the continent, including Bulgaria.*

Mountain guides, mountain tourism, sustainability, development

**JEL:** L83

***Introduction***

Travel to mountain ecosystems is increasing at a rapid pace, as growing numbers of tourists are attracted to the clean air, unique landscapes and wildlife, scenic beauty, culture, history, and recreational opportunities that mountain destinations offer. Yet, while this growth provides important benefits to local communities and national economies, the very popularity of mountain areas also poses a potential threat to the health of their natural and cultural resources. Mountains, which make up nearly a quarter of all land area on Earth and are home to at least 12 percent of the world's human population, contain a wide variety of habitats, many of which have extremely high levels of unique and rich biodiversity. Poorly planned and implemented tours and tourist activities can have a serious impact on these often fragile ecosystems, as well as on the communities that inhabit mountain regions. Mountain-based tour operators can have considerable influence in minimizing negative impacts and promoting positive impacts by adopting good environmental and social practices in their tour operations. Responsible practices can help increase the quality of visitor experiences and maintain the viability of tourism businesses by protecting the biodiversity, preserving the habitats and landscapes and supporting the communities that visitors are coming to see.

Adopting good practices can help operators develop a positive reputation and recognition as a responsible operator among tourists who are increasingly showing a preference for sustainable products and suppliers who demonstrate good social and environmental practices. Good practices can also contribute to positive relationships with suppliers, staff and local communities, who are more likely to support operators that are conserving local environments, contributing to the well-being of local communities and ensuring that mountain ecosystems are conserved for future generations. Mountain guides may significantly impact attracting tourists and developing the tourism sector through the role and characteristics they played and practice during their tours (Charters & Saxon, 2007, p 6).

### ***Development of mountain tourism***

Global sustainable development depends on mountain resources. Mountains cover 27% of the earth's land area. About 1.2 billion people or 17% of the world's population live in mountains or on their fringes. Mountains provide 60–80% of the world's freshwater resources for drinking, for lowland irrigation vital to food security, for industry, and for hydropower, the most important source of green energy, contributing 20% of global electricity generation. In drier areas, such as the Middle East, Central Asia, South Asia, and parts of Western North America, virtually all freshwater – 80–100% – comes from mountains. Mountains also supply important minerals and the genetic resources of major food crops. 17 of the 34 global biodiversity hotspots

are in mountains. One third of all protected areas are in mountains; many of the world's largest cities including New York, Jakarta, Tokyo, Mumbai, Nairobi, Mexico City, and Bogota rely on such areas for their water supply. In an increasingly urbanised world, mountains are major destinations for recreation and tourism. Tourism is also an increasingly important source of growth and employment in many mountain areas of developing countries ((Programme Des Nations Unies Pour L'environnement. Service Economie Et Commerce et al., 2007).

The development of tourism in the various regions and destinations is heterogeneous. The availability of data on the sector in mountain areas is generally scarce, which poses many challenges in benchmarking destinations and opens opportunities for further research on tourism development, demand and impact in mountain regions.

The Alps are among the most frequently visited mountain regions in Europe. The total volume of tourists in the Alpine regions of Europe cannot be accurately measured, mainly due to national differences in the definition of tourist accommodation, but an estimate is that an average of 120 million people visited the region annually before the COVID-19 pandemic. The Alps have more

than 600 ski resorts and 10 000 ski-lifts, with 85 percent of alpine skiing concentrated in France, Switzerland, Austria and Italy. The Rhone-Alps region in France recorded 51.5 million total overnight stays in 2019. In Slovenia, in 2019, the highest number of overnight stays was recorded in mountain resorts – around 4.6 million. Other important European mountain ranges include the Pyrenees (Spain, France and Andorra), the Dinaric Arc (along all the western Balkan countries), and the Caucasus Mountains spanning Europe and Asia (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Iran, the Russian Federation and Turkey). Principal mountain chains and tourist destinations European Alps (Central Europe), Caucasus Mountains, Dinaric Arc, Kjolen Mountain (Norway), Pyrenees Taurus Mountains (Turkey), Ural Mountains (the Russian Federation). Example of a mountain tourism destination Zermatt is one of Europe’s best known mountain resorts. Located in Switzerland, it commands an iconic position at the foot of the mighty Matterhorn, an ever present snowy pyramid on the skyline. Between November 2018 and October 2019 the Zermatt-Matterhorn destination, in Switzerland, attracted 2.3 million overnight bookings (Mountain Tourism – towards a More Sustainable Path, 2021).

Mountain tourism is second in popularity after sea tourism, contributing more than 15% to total tourism revenue worldwide. It is often associated primarily with winter and skiing activities, but it includes a number of other opportunities for activities and recreation.

About 30% of the territory of Bulgaria is occupied by mountains, which are more concentrated in the southwestern part, but practically from any point in the country you can reach a mountain in less than an hour. The longest mountain range (Stara planina - Balkan) and the highest massif of the Balkans (Rila) are located on the territory of Bulgaria. The altitude of the mountains varies from 600 to 2925 m. Gentle slopes alternate with high peaks, deep chasms, picturesque river valleys and majestic gorges. Caves, rock phenomena and waterfalls attract many tourists. The climate is healthy – moderately cool in summer and moderately cold in winter, with plenty of sun and prolonged snow cover on the high mountains. The Rila, Pirin, Rhodope, Vitosha and Stara planina mountains offer comfortable slopes and facilities for ski tourism and winter sports.

The duration of the ski season in mountain resorts is up to 190 days. During the summer season, the mountains offer a variety of opportunities for active tourism and recreation. Tourists can diversify their stay with programs for hiking, cycling and horseback riding, hang-gliding and paragliding, parachuting, water sports, rock climbing, caving, orienteering competitions, scout camps, etc. (Malchev & Sotirov, 2015). Mass mountain resorts attract a large number of foreign tourists, but many Bulgarian guests often prefer a mountain destination not only in winter, but also in summer, as well as for weekend relaxation. Thus, they turn out to be an important segment for

reducing seasonality and stimulating the smaller settlements and resorts located in the Bulgarian mountains.

Mountain tourism in Bulgaria includes several main types of tourism: stationary recreation, hiking, adventure tourism and winter sports, often combined with elements of business, spa, cultural, educational and even hunting tourism. Usually, the emphasis is placed on mass inbound tourism, which is mainly related to skiing and winter sports, and is concentrated in the large mountain resorts of Bansko, Pamporovo, Borovets. But more and more attention is being paid to domestic tourism, as well as to the opportunities for recreation in the mountains outside the ski season. Most mountain towns have designated recreation areas and established eco-paths. All this, combined with the presence of mineral springs and a suitable climate, provides opportunities for diversification and development of mountain tourism away from the usual mass segment. Balneotherapy, climate therapy, adventure tourism, as well as the more unconventional cave tourism, rafting, cycling, horse riding, etc. are gaining more and more popularity (Ivanova & Nacheva, 2020).

Mountain tourism in Bulgaria is currently developed in 5 mountain climate resorts of national importance, in 50 climate sea resorts of local importance, as well as in over 100 settlements without official resort status. The tourist centers are mainly villages and small towns with a population of 500 to 10,000 people, located at an altitude between 400 and 1000 m. Mountain resorts outside the urbanized areas are concentrated in the Rhodopes, Rila and Pirin. Most are at an altitude of 1100 to 1400 m. Only 6 are located at an altitude of over 1600 m. This feature of the spatial distribution of tourist centers, on the one hand, limits the opportunities for the development of winter sports, and on the other - creates prerequisites for the successful combination of mountain tourism with cultural, educational and spa tourism as well as a wider distribution of the possible benefits for the local population through the use of various tourist resources in the mountain villages (National Strategy for Sustainable Development of Tourism in the Republic of Bulgaria, 2014-2030, p. 51).

Bulgaria is the first European country that, with the support of the American Agency for International Development, developed a National Strategy for Sustainable Tourism (2003) and financed pilot projects for the development of nature-based and sustainable tourism in protected areas. In this sense, the sustainable development of mountain tourism represents the organization of a specialized type of tourism that fully complies with the current and future economic, social and ecological impacts on the mountain environment in Bulgaria and is mainly aimed at meeting the needs of tourists and the impact they have and those offering accommodation in mountainous areas, have an impact on the environment and the host communities. The possibilities for the development



of sustainable mountain tourism and successful management practices related to it are applicable to all forms of tourism, and in all types of mountain destinations in Bulgaria (Slavova, 2017).

### *The mountain guide profession and its role in the development of tourism*

The two professions, namely that of mountain guide and that of mountain leader, are both concerned with accompanying tourists in mountainous regions. They are differentiated, however, by their clientele, the different types of terrain that are used and the techniques employed to advance in these terrains, as well as by their history and organization. The prerogatives attributed to mountain guides vary as much as the different terrains where they work. For the persons holding these rights they are able to: 1. Lead and accompany people on mountain excursions or climbs on snowy, rocky, icy or mixed terrains for ski touring, and provide technical instruction; 2. Accompany people in canyons (both vertical and aquatic), where special equipment is required, and instruct them in appropriate techniques. In Switzerland, for example, such guides obtain a Federal Diploma of High Mountain Guide whereas in France this qualification is known as a State Diploma in Mountaineering and High Mountain Guide. Regarding the mountain leaders, they have the role of explaining the mountainous environment and its different milieus. They are professionals whose main aim is to allow the discovery of the natural, human and heritage elements of mountainous areas and to manage the itinerary, the impacts of visitors, the group and their safety. In France, leaders were originally restricted to working below 1500 m, but this is no longer the case, and in both countries, they are not allowed to accompany people on difficult terrains necessitating the use of special equipment such as ice axes or ropes or other mountaineering techniques. In Switzerland this corresponds with the qualification of a Federal Diploma of Mountain Leader and in France with that of a State Diploma as a Leader for mid-altitude mountainous regions.

These two professions “have achieved cross-border recognition of their professional awards” with the creation of international unions or associations (IFMGA, International Federation of Mountain Guides Associations and UILMA (Union of International Mountain Leaders Associations) which maintain professional standards and provide appropriate training and assessments (Clivaz & Langenbach, 2020, p.2).

The activity related to mountain climbing or alpinism is also of interest. In order to ensure environmentally sustainable climbing, it is crucial for climbers to recognize that their form of recreation can have damaging consequences for rock biotopes, and also to be aware of how they can minimise this damage. In order to disseminate this knowledge among climbers, all means of communication should be employed: modern media such as the internet, climbing magazines,

information booklets, and leaflets, but also climbing guidebooks and maps. It is also absolutely essential that alpine environmental education be included in courses for trainers and mountain guides in view of their role in expanding the number of climbers. Another important area is training courses organized by the climbing associations to demonstrate how to climb in a way that does not damage the natural environment (Hanemann, 2000, p. 129). In addition, it is possible that the income from hiring a mountain guide who works for the local government is mainly invested in maintaining the infrastructure on the mountain and building new trails and facilities.

The International Commission for the Protection of the Alpine Regions (CIPRA: since 1990, the International Commission for the Protection of the Alps), was founded in 1952. CIPRA has 80 member associations, including mountaineering, nature conservation and environmental associations. It has observer status in the Council of Europe and at the Alpine Conference, which is responsible for the Alpine Convention. CIPRA considers mountaineers and mountain guides, past and present, as a key group for the preservation of the natural and cultural heritage of the mountain areas, to be included as active partners in Alpine-related nature conservation policy. CIPRA attempts a balanced combination of the following three strategies in order to minimise the effects of recreational sports on nature:

- appeal strategy using information and education;
- convention strategy using voluntary agreements between all parties involved;
- restriction strategy using generally binding regulations.

The World Mountaineering and Climbing Federation (UIAA: Union Internationale des Associations d'Alpinisme) is the international umbrella organisation for all mountaineering organisations. It was founded in 1932 and today includes over 80 member organisations from 60 countries. UIAA sees a solution in a process of integration - where mountaineers actively contribute to the conservation of the mountain areas and support the local population. This includes, for example, supporting agreements for the conservation of the mountain environment, where these take into account the mountaineering interests, as well as the integration of environmental education into training programmes for mountain guides and trainers (UIAA, 1997), (Hanemann, 2000, pp. 91-92).

The first organized tourist trips in Bulgaria date back to 1895. Along with the development of mountaineering and alpinism, courses for mountain guides began to be held in Bulgaria. In 1990, a group of mountaineers founded the first adventure tourism agency, marking the beginning of modern mountain guiding. In 1997, the association of mountain guides in Bulgaria "Mountains and People" was founded ("Mountains and people - association of mountain guides in Bulgaria", <https://planini.eu/>). It is a voluntary association with an ideal purpose, uniting individuals and legal

entities, emotionally and professionally connected to the mountains, with common professional and hobby interests regarding the development of mountain culture, and of knowledge, sensitivity and care for the nature of the mountains and for the local communities that inhabit them.

The main goal of the association is to turn the mountain guide profession into a recognizable, socially useful, respected and desired profession. Through the professional growth of its members and their example, the Association promotes the development of sustainable and responsible mountain and adventure tourism, as well as the practice of sports in nature, as well as helps to increase the environmental culture in the mountains. Assists and participates in working groups for the construction and improvement of infrastructure, marking in the mountains and climbing sites for safety purposes. The association works for public recognition and understanding of mountain guiding as a protected profession. Among the main goals of the Association is to be in favor of mountaineering culture, as part of the culture in tourism, to create adequate expectations among users, as well as to develop active international activity, representing its members and Bulgaria in UIMLA - the International Union of Mountaineering Associations mountain guides (International Mountain Leaders).

The association carries out its activities in cooperation with related institutions and organizations working for the protection of mountains and the development of mountain tourism and specialized infrastructure, such as mountain markings, huts, etc.

In addition, the Association:

- Conducts training seminars on "Maintaining Professional Competence" according to the international standard of UIMLA to update and modernize the knowledge and professional skills of its members;
- Works on the legal framework of the profession and in favor of solving problems before its practice;
- Engages the institutions with events and cases representing illegal practice of the profession;
- Maintains an up-to-date "Ethical Charter of the Mountain Guide", adopted in 2019;
- Supports events related to mountaineering culture in Bulgaria;
- Performs consulting activities;
- Holds meetings with institutions - Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Environment and Water, Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works, etc.

Since 2003, the "Mountain guide" profession has been legally regulated by means of the Ordinance on the education, practical training and professional qualification necessary to acquire the legal capacity to exercise the "Mountain guide" profession (Ministry of Tourism, [https://www.tourism.government.bg/sites/tourism.government.bg/files/documents/2019-06/naredba\\_3\\_2016\\_za\\_planisnki\\_vodachi\\_izm.dop\\_.11.06.2019.pdf](https://www.tourism.government.bg/sites/tourism.government.bg/files/documents/2019-06/naredba_3_2016_za_planisnki_vodachi_izm.dop_.11.06.2019.pdf)).

In Bulgaria, the profession is represented in two levels. The first level is a guide accompanying tourists in the summer on hiking trips, and in the winter on snowshoeing trips, with the option of guiding trips with a mountain bike or ski tours. The second level is for an alpine guide, who has the right to guide tourists and groups on alpine and climbing routes in the mountains of the country using the relevant skis, alpine equipment and equipment according to the acquired specialization. All mountain guides are registered in the National Tourist Register of Tour Guides and Mountain Guides. Terms like "companion" and "leader" are not accepted in Bulgaria. It is important to note that, according to experts in the field, the next big challenge will be the documentation and training training of the professional hut owners - owners who will turn the huts into an attractive place. The idea is to prepare a training program that will stimulate people to adopt the hut as their profession, as a preferred and well-paid one. In this sense, the hut must meet many criteria to be able to react in different situations and, if necessary, even act as a mountain rescuer, because without provided accommodation, mountain tourism cannot be practiced.

In 2018, following the example of the most famous associations of mountain guides in Europe, the Association "Mountains and People" also adopted an Ethical Charter of the mountain guide. Actively working Bulgarian mountain guides are members of the two above-mentioned organizations - IFMGA and UIMLA.

At the moment, there are over 250 mountain guides who have gone through the specialized courses and have graduated. The Association "Mountains and People" has over 120 professional mountain guides as members, ready to professionally guide groups in the mountains throughout the year, bearing the relevant responsibilities for this. According to the members of the Association, the mountain guide is the tour guide in the nature museum. Big part of guiding is based on sharing the mountain, which turns mountain guides into mediators between people and the mountain environment. Mountain guides are the ambassadors of the mountain. They must not only ensure the life and health of tourists, but also provide them with an enriching experience, open their eyes to the beautiful and create culture (Bulgaria, Adventure tourism, <https://bulgariatravel.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/BG-D0%9F%D1%80%D0%B8%D0%BA%D0%BB%D1%8E%D1%87%D0%B5%D0%BD%D1%81>

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In a study Long, Thierry & Bazin, Damien & Massiera, Bernard (2012) analysed mountain guides' representations of environmental responsibility and explored the paradox that these professionals face: using nature as a source of income while trying to preserve it. Until recently, studies of outdoor activities have mainly considered the ecological and socioeconomic impact of these activities, with the goal being to understand tourism and suggest its harmonious development in different parts of the world (Bourdeau, Corneloup & Mao, 2002; Buckley, 2002, cited in Long et al., 2012). They have been conducted by economists for the most part, as have most works on sustainable development. In general, the various professionals are questioned about their organizations and relationships with other entities of the sporting structure (federations, committees, etc) and economic partners (transportation, tourist accommodations, and so on, as shown by Bessy and Naria, 2004, cited in Long et al., 2012).

Most studies (Mounet, 2007, cited in Long et al., 2012) have assumed that outdoor activities contribute to the sustainable development of an area; some, however, have highlighted the negative ecological impact of these activities. Very few have focused on professional outdoor instructors and their ethical problems. Yet these front-line actors are most concerned by the contradictions in outdoor activities and their potential self-destruction. The results of study showed that mountain guides have a very sensitive and contemplative approach to moral aspects of our relationship with nature, which they try to transmit to their clients. They believe that this is a way to educate people about sustainable development, but this term emerged as quite vague for them, and they expressed the opinion that it might hide other concerns, such as to make translating it into moral conduct a difficult matter and to compromise their identity as moral actors (Long et al., 2012).

Mountain guides can play an important role in the development of mountain communities in high mountain areas, by training local forest workers, micro-entrepreneurs and their families on the possibilities of mountain tourism development based on bio-cultural diversity, hospitality and environmental management and protection . In this way, the development of new eco-trails, panoramic, adventure sites and activities can be stimulated in the forest buffer zones in order to attract tourists and provide alternative sources of income. Mountain guides can also actively participate in the development of a national strategy for the development and maintenance of the network of hiking and mountain biking routes in Bulgaria, which will deal with their classification, their inclusion in a public register, part of the National Tourist Register and the placement them on

the forestry maps. Mountain guides can also be involved in the development of a national cycling network with cycle routes from European, national, regional and local level.

Sustainable mountain tourism is important for the behavior of tourists and the tourism business towards the natural and cultural wealth of Bulgaria. It is the main source of income for a large part of the small mountain entrepreneurs offering accommodation and welcoming small tourist groups. That is why its development must be embedded not only in European, but also in national and regional policies.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, we can note a few important points:

- Mountain tourism is attracting increasing interest as a form of recreation among tourists who are looking for a personalized experience and individual treatment. To meet these expectations, the tourism product must be not only high quality and diverse, but also safe and authentic, which can only be provided by mountain professionals.
- The mountain guide profession will be increasingly sought after and valued in the future as an essential component of mountain tourism packages related to accommodation, climbing, orienteering, etc.
- Mountain guides can and should be part of the development of sustainable tourism in the mountains. The use of their knowledge and experience will contribute to proper planning and management of mountain areas and use of their tourist resources.
- The role and importance of professional mountain guides can be found not only in an economic aspect, but also in a socio-cultural one, turning them into mediators between man and the mountain environment.

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**PERSONALIZED SERVICES AS A TOOL OF ACHIEVING LONG-TERM BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT OF TOUR OPERATORS AND TRAVEL AGENCIES**

*[Svetla Tagareva](#)*

**Abstract**

*The topic of this research is dictated to the growing need of personalized services provided to clients of tour operator and travel agency companies. Setting long-term goals is key to improving the tourism business as a whole. Often companies focus on financial, marketing and operational indicators. In recent years, another whole long-term business development with a focus on personalization of services has been discovered among them. Practice shows that the work of tour operator and agency companies is often taken as a consulting activity, clients try to deal with them personally, empathy, understanding and accurate identification of their needs. Successful communication is provided at the heart of each customer's long-term relationship with their chosen travel company. As part of customer relationship management, personalized service is essential for long-term business development.*

**Keywords**

Tour operator, travel agent, tourism, personalization, services

**1. INTRODUCTION**

The object of the research is tour operators and travel companies. The subject is the personalized services provided by them. For the purposes of the present article, a survey was conducted for obtaining main framework for future researches in this field. The main goal is to reveal the main guidelines to the successful implementation of the personalized service and to apply it to the long-term business development of the travel companies. The methodological framework is based on questionnaire survey, an analysis of results, induction and deduction, comparative analysis, theoretical framework. The main thesis of the research is based on the statement that the personalized services have significant impact on business development of travel companies. In the era of digital technologies, more and more professionals from the tourism sector are interested in adaptive models for business development of tour operator and agency companies. The business development vision of each company depends on its size, type, priorities, competitive advantage and other factors, but mostly on the company's customers. The topic of personalized service has been relevant for more than 10 years, and this is most clearly seen in hotels and airlines, but tour operators and agents remain out of focus. Service customization is individual to each organization, but it can be achieved through digitization, personal interaction, or a combination of the two. In this report, the focus will be on the personal employee-customer interaction.

**2. CRM, VCRM AND PERSONALIZATION (literature review)**

In the scientific literature, there are many definitions of what CRM is, such as this given by Dohnal (Dohnal 2002) - customer relationship management includes employees, company processes and IS/ICT technology with the main goal to maximize customer loyalty and thus company profitability. It is a part of company strategy, which makes it a part of company culture. According to some authors (Idzikowski, Kuryło, Cyganiuk, Ryczko 2019), CRM is the entire philosophy that combines a

marketing concept with a business strategy on how to effectively manage customer relationships. The centre and also the object of interest is the client and their needs, including its safety in relationship with a company. Storback and Lehtinen (2002) concluded that the goal of customer relationship management is not to be close to a customer but to live with him. These nuances show how CRM evolves with users, their growing needs and wants, and takes on new meaning with each passing year. It is important to note that as a result of this "growth" of the client, in recent years a new terminology has entered, namely VCRM or Value Customer Relationship Management or CRM that leads to the foreground the communication with key customers. In the publication Customer relationship Management Theory and Principales M.Heczková and M. Stoklasa, explain VCRM very clearly, based on the research of these systems made by Matusšínská. These systems mainly prioritize the swiftness of processing questions (speed), detailed knowledge of the customer (access to data), immediate solution of problems (one-and-done), personalization (customized contacts), no waiting for assistance (direct help), functioning 24 hours a day, 7 days in a week (all time), complex ways of sales (multi-channel-strategy), direct contact with a customer (one-to-one), single contact person (one-touch-point) and other. The author of the present study assumes that it is on these basic principles derived in VCRM that the basis of the personalized service is built.

Moving from theory to practice was seen that different operators in the business personalize their users' experience in different ways. Each hotel can personalize the stay of the guests, starting from compliments in the room, loyalty programs and discounts, author's menus, decoration to personal gifts for regular guests. The customization of services can also be viewed on a global scale, for example at the destination level, since in a publication M. Ianeva explains that the tourist destination is the connection between all components of the industry, their maintenance and operation, is a complex and specific element of the tourist industry and the subject of much research worldwide (Ianeva, Bazmadzhieva 2022). However, this aspect of personalized service at the destination level will not be addressed in the present study.

In the tour operator sector, personalization is mostly related to the human factor and the tour operator/agent-client interaction. In contrast to the hotel business, where the customer receives and evaluates his service at the place of realization of the night, in the tour operator business, the customer primarily evaluates the work of the tour operator/agent serving him according to predefined criteria. The service received by the tour operator is not "static" because travelers wish to visit different places, have different experiences, change the way they express themselves through travel and even change their travel patterns. They value service delivery time, its quality, price, communication method, speed of response, alternative options, etc.

In this context, the personalization of services is at the heart of building loyalty programs, but also in the strategy for the long-term business development of each company. According author's opinion, personalization can be achieved through:

- Digitization and personalization
- Relationships and personalization

Digitization in the travel business is a term that describes the overall process of using digital technologies, such as the Internet, mobile applications, databases to transform, automate and streamline all activities. It includes the integration of other systems, people, processes, and technology to improve customer service, employee efficiency, time management, product and service delivery. For the purpose of personalized service, data analysis is essential. This process helps

analyze the large volumes of data collected from customers, which is then used to identify trends and develop business strategy to improve customer service. The creation of online platforms for selling single travel services or packages is also an important part of business digitalization. On the other side of the digital space sit the real, living interaction and interpersonal relations. An interesting fact is that since the Covid 19 pandemic, digital technologies have gained a lot of popularity, and currently the trend is a return to personal interaction with agents in one way or another. It is important to note here that this interaction does not have to be face-to-face, in the company's office like traditional way. This personal contact can be achieved through digitality such as the use of various communication applications, video calls, etc.

These two main pillars of customer curve customization are distinct but fully compatible. There is no unequivocal opinion as to which is more important, because each user evaluates according to his own understanding of personal treatment.

### 3. DIGITALIZATION, RELATIONSHIPS AND PERSONALIZATION (methodology)

Regarding the tourism industry, the development of technology and the internet have been an asset. The adoption of information and communication technologies has led to changes in the way of communication with the individual or institutional clients and enables the adoption of innovative business models and electronic sales channels of tourism products<sup>23</sup>. (a model adapted by the author, based on those studied, including criteria by which the analysis and evaluation will be carried out, which are detailed in the survey questionnaire. the listed criteria are as follows):

*Web site design* is still key to building a reputation and increasing business recognition. As the number of commercial sites increases, users become increasingly demanding of their appearance and functionality. Online visitors have different interests, desires and motivations. Website customization is the process of changing content in real time. The page is then updated dynamically, selecting appropriate products for the user based on the collected data. Apart from the obvious advantages, the disadvantages of this type of personalized service should not be forgotten, namely the collection of data/cookies, unsolicited commercial messages, etc. Managing service personalization in a digital environment is a topic that will not be covered in depth in this report.

*Artificial intelligence* technology that will be able to analyze vast amounts of data about individual users and enable personalized recommendations and experiences will develop at a rapid pace in the coming decades. Predictions indicate that personalized AI solutions will refer to the development of technologies specifically tailored to the needs of individual tourism businesses. In this regard, the first steps are already in place, through the use of chatbots. Having recognized the incredible efficacy, versatility and potential of chatbots, many major enterprises have found ways to integrate the technology into their own customer experience systems<sup>24</sup>. The word “chatbot” consists of the terms “chat” and “robot”. Originally, the term chatbot was used for a computer program, which simulates human language with the aid of a text-based dialogue system. Chatbots contain a text input and output mask, which allows mobile users to communicate with the software behind them, giving them the feeling of chatting with a real person (Zumstein, Hundertmark 2017). Since a chatbot system (might) knows the journeys, preferences regarding food and beverages and other consumer goods or

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<sup>23</sup> [https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-319-74980-8\\_21](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-319-74980-8_21)

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbestechcouncil/2023/02/02/the-role-of-chatbots-in-the-future-of-the-travel-industry/?sh=7f23aad3df75>

activities of its users, it might offer additional vouchers or special offers from existing or future partners of the public transport company (Zumstein, Hundertmark 2017).

### ***Mobile devices and applications***

Recognizing the penetration of mobile devices and its transformational impact on travel behavior, tourism and hospitality businesses have been investing on various mobile initiatives to connect with travelers, hoping to influence their decision-making behaviors at different stages throughout the trip (Soey.L., Irene C., Jingyi.T., Shun Y., 2022). There are a number of apps that make traveling easier in various ways, such as helping tourists with the fastest route to their chosen destination, with step-by-step instructions. A number of tour operators offer or advise their customers how to use such applications. For those who find packing especially stressful, another one app creates an individualized list for the specific trip. The application takes into account the need after entering the destination, the dates and duration of the stay and the possible activities there - for example swimming or hiking. There is also an app for those who want to get moving, with a huge range of suggestions for hikes, from the very easy to the very serious, for bike routes and running paths. It offers a lot of details - route, length, type and quality of the trail, places with the best views, user reviews and photos. There are also more popular apps that agents use to help their customers track flights. Thus, the user can also monitor for delayed and canceled flights and find out, for example, when to leave for the airport. In serving their customers, companies recommend the use of one or another application for a mobile device or, as in the hotel business, offer their rooms through such applications.

### ***Social media***

Social networks are now accepted as an main part of the marketing activity of the tour operator business. The positive impact of these platforms is that they provide opportunities to reach a very large audience, share attractive content and above all create a relationship with customers. Regular interaction on social media platforms fosters stronger relationships leading to increased loyalty and repeat purchases. Social media is used as a tool to build trust, because it offers valuable information such as travel tips, travel thoughts and sayings, photos of pleasant landscapes and messages, real photos can be posted, real people can making a message to the tour operator's followers on the networks, which is at the core of building the company's image. They encourage direct communication between tour operators and consumers, allowing for faster response times and last but not least, giving customers the opportunity to express their opinion.

Taking into account that new technologies are invariably used in the tourism sector and will play an important role in the future, the personal touch and the human factor cannot currently be completely replaced by technology. Attention to each customer, a correct understanding of their needs and timely provision of an offer are increasingly important in the era of the individual travel experience. Regardless of whether it is a personal or business trip, each customer has their specific preferences - type of accommodation, hotel category, room type/ with balcony, non-smoking/ with disabled access, ground floor and the like. For the customer who regularly uses the services of a tour operator, it is important that the employees are aware of these specific preferences and that they are taken into account for each booking and that they do not have to list them constantly. The worldview of consumers is constantly changing, and this is absolutely normal. In order for the business to always keep up with new trends and demands, it is important to bet on quality and creativity, good communication throughout the chain, speed, enthusiastic engagement with customers on a personal

level, as well as coordinated teamwork. According ManagementStudyGuide.com there are 7 C's of effective communication which are applicable to both written as well as oral communication: Completeness, Conciseness, Consideration, Clarity, Concreteness, Courtesy, Correctness.<sup>25</sup> The way of communication with the travel agent is the most important step in achieving personalized service in the field of tourism. A large part of users highly value the following qualities in the tour operator or agent serving them like:

- correctness of the offered offer, without hidden conditions and unclear explanations
- friendly people - open, honest and sincere
- listening and understanding
- inform their customers about news, advantageous offers or current promotions
- maintain regular contact
- provide practical tips that help boost sales and make customers feel valued without wasting their time
- have knowledge of the services they offer
- are interested in whether users are happy and satisfied, seek and receive feedback from them
- react quickly and have personal responsibility and commitment

Here, we will pay more attention to the competences that travel employees should possess in order to meet the needs of users for personalized service. The definition of competence according to OECD DeSeCo-Project is that a **competence** is defined as the ability to meet individual or social demands successfully, or to carry out an activity or task. While competence refers to behavior a person should be able to demonstrate (e.g. Moore et al., 2002), **competency** is defined as an underlying set of personal characteristics that facilitate superior performance (e.g. Boyatzis, 1982, 2008). In brief, a competence's focus is on the what and the competency's focus is on the how. According to the definition given by Prof. Lalka Borisova in the publication *The Hospitality or How the Persons Solve Everything*, competences are considered to be built by smaller components - competencies. In general, they are defined as personal characteristics determining the individual's behavior in the work process. A distinction must be made in this sense between competence and competency (competence is the whole complex of knowledge, skills and habits, and competencies are the individual components of the complex). Competences can be divided into three groups according to Kolbe who identifies the following characteristics of each domain (Kolbe, 2003):

- Cognitive: thoughts, intelligence, learned behaviours, knowledge, recall, skills;
- Affective: feelings, emotions, personality, preferences, desires, attitudes, beliefs;
- Conative: actions, drives, urges, natural abilities, inclinations, patterns of doing

It could be defined that soft competences are connected to the behavioral side of mind, the hard skills/technical or functional represent the cognitive side of mind. In the other hand we can distinguish conative competences, which are connected with the conative side of mind. Some authors accept that some competences like cognitives and behavioral ones can be learned, but conative still

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<sup>25</sup> [https://managementstudyguide.com/seven-cs-of-effective-communication.htm?utm\\_content=cmp-true](https://managementstudyguide.com/seven-cs-of-effective-communication.htm?utm_content=cmp-true)

unteachable ones. In terms of service personalization, the focus is primarily on soft skills because it assumes that hard skills are already acquired by travel agents. Soft skills are those that do not require direct work with equipment, machines, objects. They are closely related to personal **emotional intelligence**, which is receiving increasing attention. These skills can be acquired through contact with clients and primarily through experience working with clients. These are controlled by the right side of the brain and are therefore often referred to as communication skills, empathy, etc. Years ago, soft skills remained in the background, but the travel industry has undergone significant changes in the past decades, and these skills are now the basis for building a personalized service. Skills are defined as the ability and capacity to carry out processes and use the existing knowledge to achieve results.<sup>26/</sup> 2018 Council Recommendation on Key Competences for Life-long Learning/. Soft skills are not only important for working with clients, but also for the agent's personal development. They help for better communication in the workplace, build work ethic, easily resolve conflicts, build confidence. In the field of tourism, the ability to resolve conflicts involves analyzing the situation, identifying the problem and implementing specific activities to solve it. The ability to analyze customer problems and find solutions is essential when it comes to the employee-customer relationship. Employees with developed soft skills are more adaptable to change and can better deal with challenges, leading to increased productivity and overall company success. Examples of soft skills needed to provide personalized service are grouped in the author's point of view into 3 main groups

## A. Communication skills.

- ✓ Having effective communication skills is vital for any travel agent and can impact a number of workplace experiences.
- ✓ Active listening that helps define the customer's needs
- ✓ Giving clear feedback related to the correct interpretation of customer wishes
- ✓ Negotiation skills in a conflict situation with a client of the company
- ✓ Non-verbal communication in direct sales in the office of the tour operator or agent / reading body language, etc.
- ✓ Persuasion, one of the main qualities for successful sales
- ✓ Good presentation skills, especially important when presenting a specific service, package travel, individual inquiry
- ✓ Oratory / public speaking skills used in product presentations
- ✓ A good speech that leaves a positive impression on the other side
- ✓ Excellent level of written communication

## B. Problem solving skills

They are an important part of the work process in tour operator and agency companies, regardless of the specifics of the company's activity - individual trips, package trips, corporate and business services, etc. Not every customer problem has a clear answer. Therefore, the ability to approach new or particularly difficult problems flexibly is a key soft skill.

To be good at problem solving, they need:

- ✓ Analytical thinking

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<sup>26</sup> [https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/scientific-activities-z/skills-and-competences/defining-skill-and-competence\\_en](https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/scientific-activities-z/skills-and-competences/defining-skill-and-competence_en)

- ✓ Critical thinking
- ✓ Ability to make quick decisions
- ✓ Innovative thinking
- ✓ Resourcefulness
- ✓ Doing research
- ✓ Risk Management

### **C. Workplace ethics**

These soft skills are related to the approach to work. There is no one unified style of working, but rather useful habits when dealing with clients.

- ✓ Ability to work under pressure without compromising your customer service
- ✓ Adaptability to a specific situation
- ✓ Attention to detail, which is especially important to achieve personalized service
- ✓ Conscientiousness in performing tasks
- ✓ Creative thinking
- ✓ Curiosity about new trends, technologies, approaches
- ✓ Enthusiasm
- ✓ Desire to quickly acquire new knowledge and skills
- ✓ Independence
- ✓ Honesty
- ✓ Deadlines
- ✓ Optimism
- ✓ Organization
- ✓ Persistence
- ✓ Reliability
- ✓ Results orientation
- ✓ Self-initiative
- ✓ Time management

The crisis due to the coronavirus pandemic had a serious impact on the tourism business, but it also showed that personal relationships and a good customer experience are a key factor for the development of the sector as a whole. The social isolation effect is reflected in customers wanting to be predisposed to feel in a friendly environment, share more personal stories and receive feedback. The need for communication between people gives rise to certain relationships between them not only in a personal but also in a work aspect. In the structure of social life there are relations, some of which are formal, others informal, interpersonal, but both are based primarily on feelings of sympathy or antipathy. Using the whole range of competences, competencies and skills helps to improve the social interactions between the travel agent and the client.

#### **4. EMPIRICAL RESEARCH (adaptive models for business development of tour operator and agency companies)**

The survey was composed of a questionnaire which is targeting two different groups. The first group includes FIT customers who mainly use a tour operator or agent for their trips. The second group includes corporate clients who use on daily basis tour operator or agent services for their weekly business trips. The questions are the same for both groups. As mentioned above, the author strongly agrees with Matušínková and her concept about VCRM. Based on important elements of VCMR

which directly relate to a personalized service, the author divides the questions according to the following criteria.

Time of processing questions (speed/time), detailed knowledge of the customer (access to data/experience/ customer knowledge), personalization (customized contacts, personal touch and recommendations), no waiting for assistance and immediate solutions of problems (direct help, functioning 24 hours a day, 7 days in a week (all time), complex ways of sales and communication (multi-channel-strategy), single contact person vs chatbot usage.

The questions are listed below will multiple option for answer:

Question 1. If you have used a travel service through a chatbot, your opinion is: multiple choices for answer

Question 2. A chatbot in working with customers in the tourism sector for you is: multiple choices for answer

Question 3. For you, the main task of the employee who serves you is: multiple choices for answer

Question 4. The communication channel you use with your agent should be: multiple choices for answer

Question 5. When choosing a TO/TA, it is of leading importance: multiple choices for answer

Question 6. When communicating with your service agent you prefer: multiple choices for answer

Question 7. Which communication channel do you use to send inquiries to your service provider? multiple choices for answer

Question 8. The time to respond to your inquiry is: multiple choices for answer

Question 9. The price you get for a specific inquiry is: multiple choices for answer

Question 10. The term in which you receive feedback from your travel agent is: multiple choices for answer

Question 11. You prefer to receive an offer by: multiple choices for answer

Question 12. The 24/7 emergency phone line to contact your travel agent is: multiple choices for answer

Question 13. Your TO/TA's recommendations for your personal or business trip are: multiple choices for answer

Question 14. Would you choose to work long-term with a TO/TA who is familiar with your personal travel and business preferences: multiple choices for answer

Question 15. I expect my travel company to understand and achieve my personal preferences

Question 16. I prefer to be served by the same employees: multiple choices for answer

Question 17. I expect personal attention with every inquiry: multiple choices for answer

After analyzing the obtained results, the author can draw the following main conclusions.



- One of the main tasks of a tour operator or travel agent is to find out exactly what the customer needs and offer it to him, followed by to give competent advice to his customer. Basically, a need is a conscious feeling of deprivation in a person. In other words, it is something which a customer requires to experience satisfaction. For example, in the case of business travellers, the punctuality of a service is a good example of what constitutes a need (Camillieri 2018). The results support the statement of The State of the Connected Customer report that reveals that 62% of customers expect businesses to anticipate their needs, and 73% expect companies to understand their unique needs and expectations.<sup>27</sup> Competent advice is highly valued by customers. Good customer service is a revenue generator. It gives customers a complete, cohesive experience that aligns with a travel company purpose. Consumers have identified competency as the element that plays the biggest role in a good customer experience. To be competent, a travel support professional must have a strong knowledge of the company and its products, as well as the power to fix the traveler's problems. The more knowledge they have, the more competent they become. According to the definition given by prof. Lalka Borisova the competence is the ability to excellently perform a certain job according to developed standards for the position, ensuring success in professional development and in the development of the organization. A direct benefit of practicing behaviors of high professional competence is building **trust**. It is not learned intellectually, but is formed over a certain period of joint work and getting to know each other on an emotional basis. (Borisova 2018). The trust remains the most important asset of a company.
- When choosing a TO/TA, it is of leading importance for consumers to know their personal preferences and recommendations for the company from colleagues, friends and acquaintances. Both answers have extremely close percentages, and only in third place is the company's portfolio and the services it offers. **Word of mouth** is a form of social influence that is based on trust and personal relationships. It operates on the principle that people are more likely to believe and act on the advice of someone they know and trust, rather than on advertising or other forms of marketing. Research has shown that word of mouth can have a significant impact on consumer behavior. According to a study by Nielsen, 92% of consumers trust recommendations from friends and family over all forms of advertising. Another study by McKinsey found that word-of-mouth is the primary factor behind 20-50% of all purchasing decisions.<sup>28</sup> Understanding the importance what makes word-of-mouth such a valuable and powerful communication tool is obligatory to travel organizations that intend to build strong personal relationships with their consumers. From the author's point of view, the low percentage of respondents 11.4% who indicated the price conditions and discounts that can be used as a criterion for selecting a tour operator. For a long time, the price was not the leading condition when working with customers. This is due to the following features of the travel business-at the moment, there are no drastic price differences in the services offered by different companies, and whether a service will cost 100 units, 95 or 110 units, it has close values, which automatically provokes tour operators to look for more competitive advantages that are not based on price levels and the modern consumer already values professional

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<sup>27</sup> <https://www.salesforce.com/ap/blog/what-are-customer-needs/>

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.thesocialmediahat.com/blog/the-science-behind-the-effectiveness-of-word-of-mouth/>

service more than the money he will save if he chooses a competing company that can offer a lower price but an unclear level of service.

- In terms of communication with the agent serving them, first of all, users prefer **dialogue** and **sharing of experience- 67,4%**. The dialogue does not necessarily have to be only on the phone, various applications for communication and e-mail are included here. The classic type is the personal dialogue. However, whatever form we choose, the focus is on personal communication and exchange of experience. Users of travel services want to share past experiences, get information about whether what they are looking for can be offered to them, whether it meets their expectations. The whole flow of information is easier and more pleasant when there is a dialogue and the traveler feels involved in the organization of his own journey. In this way, he is not just a customer, but a participant in the process. The dialogue is valuable because the client is not just a "unit", but a person with needs, desires and experiences that require special treatment and attention. The relationships consumers have with brands are dynamic, and in many ways approximate human-to-human relationships (Posavac, Hoeffler 2012). Any long-term business strategy should take into account this specific "human" relationship and analyze the company environment, the employees, their competencies, their relationships with customers, the results they achieve and last but not least invest in employee training, who communicate directly with the company's customers. Personal relationships require a number of **soft skills** that can be acquired either through years of experience or through training. Customer satisfaction is also complemented by the presence of consistently pleasant communication, not only by quality products. On the second stage is the user's desire to be carefully listened to and his opinion to be leading at the choice of service. Although the respondents are only 23.3%, this answer provokes the topic of the values and experience of consumers. Since working with clients is closely related to psychology (a topic that will be detailed in future research by the author), to explain this percentage the author would refer to Branden's definition of what self-esteem is-expresses an attitude of approval or disapproval and indicates the extent to which a person believes that he is capable, significant, successful, and valuable ( Branden 1995 ). It is this definition that helps to understand why the client wants his opinion to be heard and taken into account, because it is a way of self-evaluation that manifests itself in communication with the travel agent. Beyond the field of psychology, consumers have enough travel experience to help them understand what they want with their particular inquiry.
- The phone conversation is still the preferred method of communication with the service company, followed by written communication via e-mail. The **response time** to a specific inquiry is indicated as important, with the same percentage of respondents indicating the time frame for receiving feedback from the tour operator as very important. This trend is not surprising as many customers have busy lifestyles and value their free time more and more. Exceptional customer service is at the heart of improving public perception, reputation and strengthening the brand. How and when it is answered affects the entire business. Right or wrong, when customers rate the service time as good or bad, they assume that products and services are of the same quality. Being late or not responding creates a bad image for the company. There is no way to achieve personalized service if the communication shows "disrespect" for the time the customer "waits" for the attention of the agent serving him.

- A significant percentage of respondents over 80% prefer to be served by the same employee. This in one way or another is related to **customer care**. When an interpersonal relationship is built and the employee-customer relationship is tested over time, the author assumes that it is customer care, ensuring agents to solve customer problems while supporting their emotional needs on time. Customer care is built through four key elements empathy, responsiveness, hearing and solving. In this context, again, over 80% of respondents expect a personal approach with every inquiry. Earlier, customers used to book their travel through their respective travel agents, but now customers are spoiled for choice when finalizing their travel plans. The availability of online platforms at their disposal should not be underestimated. Customers like to explore all the options in the market and choose their travel agent wisely and the personal touch they receive become a **competitive advantage** for a business that does not operate entirely online. In the long term, consumers would choose to work with an agent who knows their personal preferences / more than 50% of those who answered strongly yes, more than 40% answered with "rather" yes/.
- Agent recommendations for personal or business travel were identified as extremely important by over 40% of respondents and rather important, but not mandatory by 50% of consumers. Travel agents' recommendations can strongly influence clientel's satisfaction and the success of touristic businesses, attractions, and destinations. **Recommendations** of where and how to go, what to see, and what to avoid may be critical to the success of various tourism businesses (Klenosky, Gitelson 1998). Personalization increases the value that travel agents provide in a world where self-booking is becoming popular, reinforcing their value among clients who may have previously chosen self-booking. When clients receive recommendations that align with their preferences, they have a more enjoyable and stress-free journey, when compared to those they book themselves. This satisfaction increases the likelihood of them returning for future bookings, as personalized experiences foster loyalty and transform one-time customers into long-term clients.<sup>29</sup>
- Travelers who have used a chatbot cannot judge whether they are satisfied or not. Over 20% were not satisfied with their experience with chatbots, but would try again. The use of a chatbot in the work of tour operators and agents is considered optional, but customers would use it, if it were available. Over 20% said they would not use a chatbot. Customer service chatbots in the tour operator and agency business are designed to help with questions or problems. Chatbots can often be used to answer frequently asked questions, provide customer support, sell products and services. They are assumed to assist employees in their day-to-day tasks.

## 5. GOOD PRACTICES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INTRODUCING PERSONALIZED SERVICES IN TOUR OPERATORS AND TRAVEL AGENCIES BUSINESS

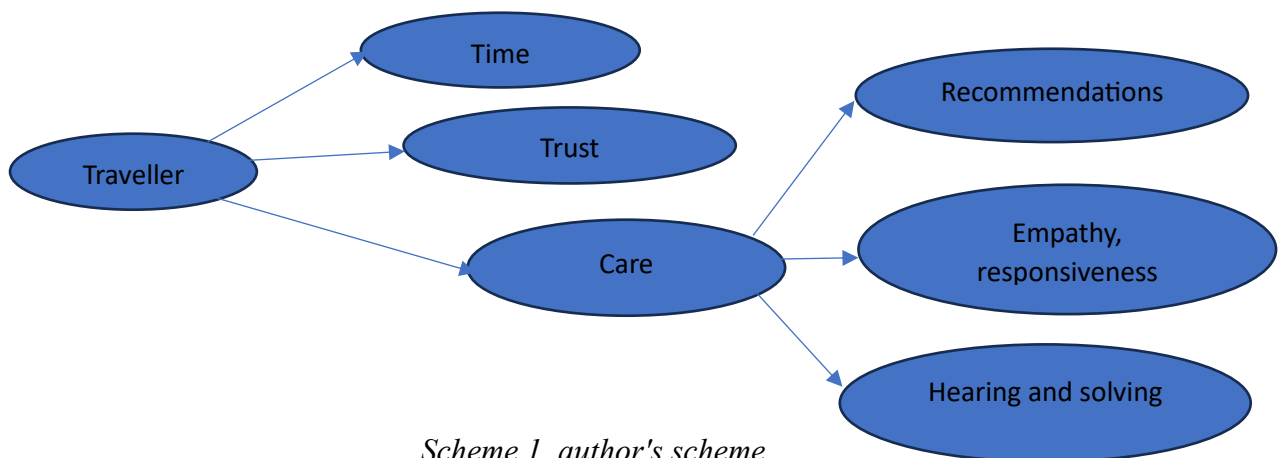
(Scientific and practical contributions)

Based on the key factors that are important to customers according to the research conducted, **we can derive 3 main categories** on which efforts to improve the customer-

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<sup>29</sup> <https://www.tts.com/blog/the-power-of-personalization-how-travel-agents-can-win-more-clients/>

employee relationship can be focused. This is the model that the author proposes based on the research called TTC - time, trust, care. The model can be managed easily in practice and is applicable to any tourism organization



*Scheme 1, author's scheme*

**A. Time, time management and timely response**

In order to improve the service and especially the time to respond or send an offer to the customer, practice shows that the some improvements can be made. Time management is something every employee faces on a daily basis. Effective management allows them to make the most of the day and complete their tasks faster and prioritize them by importance. The 80/20 Rule, officially called the "**Pareto Law**", the "Pareto Principle", and sometimes the "Law of the Elite" states that for many events approximately 80% of the results are due to 20% of the causes. The basic idea of Pareto's Law is that most things (results, rewards, efforts) are not evenly distributed - some matter more than others, or in brief, 20% of the effort produces 80% of the results. The Pareto approach is useful in prioritizing the tasks that are most effective in solving problems, but it is also particularly useful for analyzing the time that is being spent at a given time to determine where it would be better to redirect it. Any organization can put this principle into practice when monitoring its employees and their efforts. It can be applied to time- 20% of the time leads to 80% of the results, 20% of the employees create 80% of the results or 20% of the customers create 80% of the revenue, 20% of the customers create 80% of the complaints etc. Pareto analysis has a wide application in tour operator and agency activity and will be explored in detail in future author publications.

**The Pomodoro Technique** is a time management method that is based on the principle of focusing attention on a specific task for a specific period of time, called a "tomato." The important part of this technique is that there is a short break after each working hour (Cirillo 2007). The benefits of the technique are that it increases productivity: periods of focused work time help to increase concentration on tasks, thus completing them more quickly and efficiently.

**The Eisenhower matrix** can be widely used in the tour operator and agency business because it is quick and easy to apply. Following Eisenhower's example, it is necessary to divide the tasks into 4 squares:

- Tasks that are important and urgent;
- Tasks that are important but not urgent;
- Unimportant but urgent tasks;
- Unimportant and non-urgent tasks.

Urgent tasks are those that the agent needs to do immediately. The second group contribute to long-term goals. Ideally, one agent should work with the first two groups, but the practice in tourism shows that sometimes the third group should also be taken into account, but the 3rd group can be delegated and the 4th can be removed. There are a number of other methods that can be put into practice, but they are the subject of future publications.

## **B. Trust and trust building**

The successful travel brand recreates the trust of the customer. Therefore, building that trust is an important part from building the overall image of the brand. It is a long-term business investment that strengthens customer loyalty, and consequently the company's revenue. Here it is important to note that trust builds over time, but it is fragile and can easily be lost, so it is constantly being worked on. Trust is built on three things: persistence, responsiveness and honesty. Practical tips how to build customer trust are: personal relationship. It can be built either if the client likes the agent or if they have common interests with the client. The problem is that not every travel agent or consultant can be charming and charismatic in order to be liked by clients, and even if they are, liking is a mutual process and is very subjective. When the customer is given useful information that they didn't know or given tips to improve their trip, the agent automatically builds trust with the customer. This is due to the principle that people tend to trust those who are competent and who give them useful information without asking for anything in return. Even if a client is not attracted from the first sale, the agent is already positioned as a person with skills that he can trust. In the future, if this client decides to ever work with a tour operator or agent again, the chances are high that he will look for the agent who has created trust. The information must be genuinely useful – one that would help them achieve something for themselves as consumers. It is important to know what we can teach clients, based on professional experience.

## **C. Customer care**

According to Sarah Cook and her book *Customer care excellence how to create an effective customer focus* (2008), there are six key highlights of the "Customer Care" concept: Customer behavior; Customer Retention; Perfect service; Diamond of perfect service; Implementation of the strategy; Internal customer. At the heart of the concept lies the proposition that customer behavior is dynamic and changing, not static. Customer retention cannot be a sporadic action, but requires constant and sustainable management behavior. The ways to achieve this are keeping promises, benefiting from the consumption of the service, being courteous, providing help and assistance, solving a pressing problem, building loyalty programs, engaging the customer to recommend the company to their acquaintances and friends. We talk about perfect service when the customer receives from the service provider more than his own expectations. This depends largely on the competence of the travel agent. The concept implies the breaking of strict boundaries between departments and units, awareness of the need for close cooperation, coordination, common actions.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Travel service personalization is a complex process that encompasses multiple components. In it, the most important unit is the people, the employees, their talents, their belonging to the organization, their identification with the company, their desire to develop their personal talents. We cannot talk about personalized service without looking at the personnel directly responsible for achieving it. Every organization faces the problem of finding the right employees, but not all understand the need to train them. The vision and strategy of tour operators and agents can differ from each other, but they all have one thing in common - the people involved. It is because of people that a business is built, and because of them it can fail. It is a well-known rule that one satisfied customer can bring several new customers, but one dissatisfied customer can harm the overall image of the company. The ability to generate satisfied customers is not acquired in a short time. Apart from all the competences that the agents must possess, such as language skills, technical skills, etc., they must be "modeled" to be implemented in the company culture that relies on personalized service. The topic of personalized service can be analyzed through the lens of employee-customer interaction, as in this report. On the other hand, it can also be considered through management-employee relations, training-employees, talent management and others.

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## КАК СЕ РЕШАВАТ ПРОБЛЕМИТЕ НА ЕДНА КОМПЛЕКСНА СТРУКТУРА КАКВАТО Е ТУРИЗМА

*[Екатерина Христова](#)*

**За автора:** *“Екатерина Христова е дългогодишен посланик на гостоприемството и бранд мениджър на IB Park Hotels, мениджър проекти за Uva Nestum Wine & SPA и инициатор на платформата за винен туризъм Winetrips.eu. Платформата Winetrips.eu е замислена като пространство, където избите, туристическите обекти и организаторите на туристически дейности могат да разкажат своите автентични истории. Със съвременните дигитални инструменти, платформата подкрепя туристическите обекти, генерира и насочва внимание, насърчава потребление и работи за добрата репутация на винените дестинации и местата за целогодишен туризъм.”*

**Теза.** В качеството ми на изпълнителен секретар на Българската асоциация на винените професионалисти, представям градска винена карта на София, която е направена по идея на г-н Антон Пенев и асоциацията с помощта на Столична община преди 3 години. В нея са посочени магазини и места в София, където може да се пие българско вино, свързвайки виното и винения туризъм със сензорния маркетинг и автентичните преживявания. Част от туризма и това, което искат да изпитат туристите на дадено място, са вкусовете и ароматите на мястото. Ето защо можем да обобщим, че в София може да се развива и винено-кулинарен туризъм.

**Аргументи.** Защо го давам като добър пример?

Всъщност проблемите на една комплексна структура, каквато е туризъмът се решават със системен подход. Дискусиите организирани от университетите са ядрото, защото всъщност туризмът на София е работа на общината, на Министерството на туризма, на бизнеса, на науката и на всички големи и малки обекти, които се намират на територията на общината. Резултат от един такъв системен подход, говорейки за визия, е примерно "Топлоцентрала" в София, защото тя е добрият пример за това как един туристически обект, който дълго време не е бил поддържан, променя облика си като става с една прекрасна инфраструктура, която е оживена и изпълнена с мисъл на едно много модерно европейско и световно ниво. Мястото е много харесвано от хората, ако някой иска да организира събитие, го заявява поне година предварително и често няма места. Цялото пространство около "Топлоцентрала" заживя нов живот, включително реката, поляните и всичко останало.”

За мен един от основните големи проблеми през последните години е липсата на приемственост. Защото ето тази комуникационна стратегия, която наистина отговаря на голяма част от въпросите, всъщност е анализирала точно това - какви са ни проблемите, какви са ресурсите, каква част от проблемите могат да се решат



с тези ресурси и накъде може да тръгнем не само устойчиво да се развиваме, но и да надграждаме.

**В заключение.** Най-хубавото послание към хората с политически инструменти е да не се започва всеки път отначало, защото за съжаление това се наблюдава в общините и в министерствата – “започва да се открива топлата вода”. В тези структури има и много добри специалисти, които имат историята, познанията и много добра основа, на която да се стъпи. Така че, когато имаме такива изработени механизми, е добре те да бъдат използвани.

**Предизвикателства и решения.** И всъщност конкретният ми въпрос е: Понеже част от стратегията за развитието на София беше точно това - бяха посочени проблемите на консултативния съвет, колко е работещ и неработещ, включително имаше описани проблемите на ОП Туризм, трябва ли да продължи да функционира по този начин? Защото там има страшно много административни пречки – има дублиране на структури, звено в общината с ОП Туризм. “Давам пример: по едно време имаше 2-3 сайта, където имаше информация за София, вместо да бъде цялата информация само на едно място.”

**Научно оформление: проф. д-р Мариана Янева**

**Източник: "Туризм, политика и бизнес", дискусийна кръгла маса,  
12.04.2024 г.**

**[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q2t0I8NMpIw&t=3360s&ab\\_channel=%D0%A3%D0%9D%D0%A1%D0%A1%D0%A2%D0%A3%D0%A0%D0%98%D0%97%D0%AA%D0%9CUNWEEconomicsofTourism](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q2t0I8NMpIw&t=3360s&ab_channel=%D0%A3%D0%9D%D0%A1%D0%A1%D0%A2%D0%A3%D0%A0%D0%98%D0%97%D0%AA%D0%9CUNWEEconomicsofTourism), 1:10:10 – 1:14:46**

## РОЛЯТА И МЯСТОТО НА ТУРОПЕРАТОРИТЕ. ТУРОПЕРАТОРИТЕ И БРАНД БЪЛГАРИЯ - Район Южно Черноморие.

*Румен Диканчев*

*За автора: “Румен Диканчев работи в сферата на туризма вече тридесет години, седемнадесет, от които е работил за TUI Англия. Управлявал е дейността на компанията в осем дестинации. Също така е управлявал един от най-големите туристически холдинги в България. През последните десет години се занимава усилено с дигитален туризъм, въвеждане на технологии и изкуствен интелект, като се стреми да установи неговото ефективно приложение в сферата на туризма. През последните години заема позицията revenue director за група хотели.”*

**Бизнес теза с аргументи:** Туроператорството е добре да продължава да играе своята роля, особено за дестинации като България. С огромната леглова база, която в момента имаме, просто без намесата на туроператорите на голяма част от хотелите би им било трудно да оперират, с акцент върху туроператорите, които създават чартърните програми. Без да се визират тези, които оперират на близки до нас или на т.нар. self-drive пазари, а тези, които са чартъри. Най-големият риск за тези туроператори всъщност е наемането на чартърен полет.. Ако туроператор наистина тръгне да фалира, то е защото някъде чартърната програма не е сработила както трябва. Те се плащат предварително. Преди години TUI, за България е стартирал първи сезон с двадесет и два чартъра. Чартърът какво означава за хотелиерите? Чартърът означава сигурност. За дестинацията означава, че туроператорът се обвързва с тази дестинация, защото чартърите се плащат напред и когато аз съм инвестирал 50-100 милиона в нещо, аз ще гледам да си го изкарам. Не съм тук за да губя. Какво означава за хотелиерите туроператорът в този вид? Означава предсказуемост, планиране, back arrivals. За мен лично ролята на туроператора, с който хотелът работи, е по-скоро да го изкара до break-even point. Ако се стигне до break-even point, всичко става по-лесно и нормално за хотела, няма го напрежението. Цените за туроператора са с 20-25% от rackrate-а по-надолу, но достигането до този break-even point е съществено важно за хотела. Другото нещо за чартърните туроператори, пак ще визирам TUI в случая, те не работят с всички хотели, те работят с определени. Например, ние сме работили с пет-шест хотела в курорт и толкова. Така че туроператорът играе своята роля от гледна точка даване на сигурност и своята обвързаност към дестинацията, на която иска да оперира. Туроператорът до голяма степен позиционира и дестинацията на пазара, на който оперира. Считам, че комуникацията между дестинацията по създаване и комуникиране на бранда и туроператорите наистина трябва да бъде много близка. Нещо, което, аз нямам наблюдение за съжаление да се случва.

**Възможности:** Туроператорът сам за себе си решава как да позиционира дадена дестинация, дали да я позиционира в долния край на пазарния сегмент или на повисок. Ще ви дам един скорошен пример, искаха ми стаи за един от нашите хотели за отваряне на нов пазар и това, което българският туроператор ми каза, е: „Дай ми ги максимално евтино, защото това са само три стаи. Ти няма да спечелиш от тези три стаи“. Аз няма да спечеля от тези три стаи финансово, но тези три стаи позиционирани неправилно на пазара, това вече е съвсем негативен имиджов ефект. И тук не става дума за моите три стаи и тяхната печалба, въпросът е как моят обект като бранд ще бъде позициониран – в горния край на пазара или в долния. И на пръв поглед един такъв наивно зададен въпрос: „Какво толкова ще се случи, това са три стаи?“, много неща могат да се случат от тези точно три стаи. Та до голяма степен туроператорът решава и тук пак ще спомена за TUI, говорим за пазар България, зима. TUI решава, че иска България да бъде позиционирана като learn to ski дестинация. И вече дали ние имаме 300 хил. км или имаме 30, TUI го продава като learn to ski, защото там така е позиционирано. Защото ние знаем, че българското ски училище е страшно добро, това съответно дава много добра основа на нашите гости, цените преди години бяха по-поносими и съответно фокусът се слага там. Защото ние имаме Courchevel и Алпите, просто това е мястото, където България е поставена. Същото важи и за летния туризъм, за масовия туризъм и за всичко останало. Самият туроператор в крайна сметка решава. Негативното е, че комуникацията бранд-туроператор не се получава, поради което туроператорът сам за себе си решава къде и как да се позиционира съответната дестинация.

**Предизвикателства:** Понастоящем за самите туроператори става все по-трудно да оперират. Много често се поставя темата „Какво ще бъде бъдещето на туроператорите като цяло?“. Моята хипотеза е, че те ще останат. Малко по-различно изглеждат, малко по-различно оперират, но със сигурност ще продължат да съществуват. Защо е важно? Пазарите се променят, клиентското поведение се променя. Baby boom-ърите и x-овете, ние по един начин пазарувахме и мислихме за почивките. В момента поколението у и z мислят съвсем различно. Те вече търсят динамичните пакетирания. Не, че не се говори за това при туроператорския бизнес още отпреди петнадесет години, но те искат нещо друго вече, тези идващите, новите поколения. Те всъщност искат по-персонализирано изживяване, те искат нещо за тях си. Не са толкова склонни да бъдат качени в един самолет, в един автобус, в един хотел и обратно. Те искат сами да опитат всичките тези неща и туроператорите със сигурност трябва да се дигитализират. Това е задължително. Те трябва да могат динамично да предлагат пакетирания на самите клиенти. Тук идва големият въпрос, как това ще се отрази на чартърните програми, защото едно такова пакетирание и Load фактора към самите чартъри, става вече малко специфично и още непрогнозируемо. Понастоящем вече съществуват много различни опции за пътуване с нискотарифните авиокомпани „Аз дори си спомням, когато за първи път се появи Ryan Air и ние от TUI бяхме на един workshop в

Италия, тогавашното СЕО Матю Прайър излезе и каза: „Днес тези хора предлагат евтини седалки. Утре ще предлагат евтини легла.“. Аз не знам дали по това време Ryan Air си го бяха помисляли, но един такъв гигант в туризма, какъвто е TUI, той затова е и такъв, защото там нищо не се оставя на шанса. Още тогава се разглеждаше, че това ще бъде тяхната заплаха и как това нещо ще промени начина, по който действа туристическата индустрия, от туроператорска гледна точка.”

Друг аргумент в подкрепа на тезата относно тяхното съществуване както вече бе отбелязано, представителя на туроператора в дестинацията или по време на пътуването дава сигурност на гостите. На тези гости, които пътуват. Те знаят, че когато има някакъв проблем, те могат да се обърнат към някой и този някой ще вземе отношение.

**Трансформация и иновации:** Относно дигитализацията и идеите на младите, е необходимо да се проучва мнението на хора, които не са от сферата на туризма. Защото тези, които са работили много време в сектора, си имат както казват англичаните “chip on the shoulder”, имат професионални изкривявания и е много интересно, когато някой подаде крайно нетрадиционна идея, тя да не се отхвърли, защото така е оперирала системата. Да, така е оперирала преди, но сега може и да стане, и е хубаво да се чуват точно едни такива гласове, които не са обременени със специфичната професионална експертиза и начин на мислене през годините. И е необходими бизнеса да се опитва да се надгражда към тях. Възможно е да отпаднат представителите на туроператорите един ден в курортите, и всичко това да се замени от технологиите, по примера на TUI, който вече го е реализирал. “Както всяко нещо иска време, така ние трябва да разберем, че в света, в който живеем, на постоянна промяна, информационен век, в който всичко се променя, ние в момента като дестинация, като хотели индивидуални, ние не се конкурираме вече със съседния хотел или със съседния курорт, ние се конкурираме с цял свят”. Големите компании не вземат решения така леко, те за да променят нещо, то е не непременно, за да се съкрати даден разход, а защото просто имаш представител, който казва, че него никой не го вижда повече, съответно неговото представяне започва да губи самия смисъл. Това клиентът го е решил. Вече всеки клиент може да седне, да си отвори телефона, да си намери каквато иска информация. От тук произтича необходимостта и за промяна на самия бизнес. *По мнение на автора, едно от основните неща при традиционния туроператор е сигурността, да се помогне на място, на самия човек. Всичко друго може да бъде заменено, но човешката персонализация като отношение, не може, която в по-малка или в по-голяма степен за туриста означава много.*

**В заключение за бранда:** Що се касае до самия бранд? Има много неща, които са изготвени като документация. При ретроспективен обзор, във времето назад е имало документация изготвена в подкрепа на създаване на бранд Южно Черноморие като климатична дестинация, за хората с белодробни проблеми, алергии и други. Необходимо е те да бъдат възстановени, т.к.. както се казва,



всичко ново измислено е добре забравено старо. “Ако успеем да стигнем до тях, наистина България може много да предлага. И всичко това е в крайна сметка в нашите ръце.”

**Научно оформление: проф. д-р Мариана Янева**

**Източник:** ТУРОПЕРАТОРИТЕ И БРАНД БЪЛГАРИЯ -Район Южно

Черноморие - слънчевото здраве!, 6-8 юни 2024

г., [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JHLyuIxGdSA&ab\\_channel=%D0%A3%D0%9D%D0%A1%D0%A1%D0%A2%D0%A3%D0%A0%D0%98%D0%97%D0%AA%D0%9CUNWEEconomicsofTourism](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JHLyuIxGdSA&ab_channel=%D0%A3%D0%9D%D0%A1%D0%A1%D0%A2%D0%A3%D0%A0%D0%98%D0%97%D0%AA%D0%9CUNWEEconomicsofTourism), 51:22-1:05:56

## УСТОЙЧИВ ТУРИЗЪМ И ОТГОВОРНО ХОТЕЛИЕРСТВО

[Ася Панджерова](#)

*За автора: “Доц. д-р Ася Панджерова е преподавател в катедра „Икономика на туризма“ в УНСС, с интереси в областта на Дигитализацията в туризма, Управлението на човешките ресурси и Управлението на проекти в туризма. Успоредно с академичната си кариера, е консултант и Управляващ Директор в хотелиерския бизнес. В момента менажира водещи пет звездни хотелски комплекси в страната и чужбина. Специализира в области, като увеличаване на приходите, управление на разходите, оптимизиране на операциите и подобряване на клиентското изживяване”.*

### **1. Концепция за устойчив туризъм и отговорно хотелиерство. Дефиниции за устойчив туризъм и устойчивост**

Устойчивият туризъм е концепция, която се фокусира върху минимизирането на отрицателното въздействие върху околната среда, обществото и икономиката, като същевременно осигурява положителни икономически и социални ползи за местните общности и туристическата индустрия. Основната идея е да се постигне баланс между нуждите на туристите, околната среда и местното население.

Световната организация по туризъм (UNWTO) дефинира устойчивия туризъм като „туризъм, който отчита настоящото и бъдещото икономическо, социално и екологично въздействие, като адресира нуждите на посетителите, индустрията, околната среда и местните общности“. Това включва:

- Екологична устойчивост: Намалване на негативното въздействие върху природата чрез устойчиви практики и опазване на природните ресурси.
- Социална устойчивост: Подкрепа за културното наследство и традициите на местните общности, както и осигуряване на справедливи условия на труд.
- Икономическа устойчивост: Насърчаване на икономически ползи за местните общности и устойчиво развитие на туристическата индустрия.

Bramwell and Lane<sup>30</sup> предлагат още една дефиниция на устойчивия туризъм, като го описват като „положителен подход, който има за цел намаляване на напрежението и противоречията, създадени от сложни взаимодействия между туристическата индустрия, посетителите, околната среда и общностите, които приемат туристи“. Те подчертават

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<sup>30</sup> Bramwell, B. and Lane, B. (1993) Sustainable tourism: An evolving global approach. Journal of Sustainable Tourism, 1, 1-5.

значението на дългосрочната жизнеспособност и качеството както на природните, така и на човешките ресурси.

*Примери за успешни устойчиви практики в хотелиерството са:*

- Хилтън Хотели и Ризорти (Hilton Hotels and Resorts)

оПрограма LightStay: Hilton създаде система за измерване и управление на въздействието върху околната среда, наречена LightStay. Тази програма следи и анализира консумацията на енергия и вода, както и генерирането на отпадъци, като идентифицира области за подобрене. В резултат на програмата, хотелите успяват да намалят своя въглероден отпечатък и да подобрят енергийната ефективност.

- InterContinental Hotels Group (IHG)

оПрограма Green Engage: IHG разработи онлайн система за управление на устойчивостта, която помага на хотелите да намалят своето въздействие върху околната среда. Програмата включва над 200 устойчиви инициативи, като използване на енергийно ефективни осветителни тела, повторно използване на вода и намаляване на отпадъците. Пример за успех е IHG хотел в Лондон, който успя да намали потреблението на вода с 25% и консумацията на енергия с 15% в рамките на една година.

- Marriott International

оИнициатива Serve 360: Marriott стартира програмата Serve 360, която включва амбициозни цели за устойчивост. Сред тях са намаляване на въглеродните емисии с 30% до 2025 г., премахване на пластмасовите сламки от всички техни имоти и увеличаване на използването на възобновяеми енергийни източници. Например, Marriott в Сан Франциско е инсталирал соларни панели, които генерират значителна част от необходимата енергия за хотела.

- Six Senses Hotels Resorts Spas

оФокус върху местните общности и екологичното съзнание: Six Senses поставят устойчивостта в центъра на своя бизнес модел. Те използват местни материали и работна ръка, инвестират в проекти за опазване на околната среда и насърчават гостите да участват в устойчиви практики, като например засаждане на дървета и участие в програми за рециклиране. В резултат на тези усилия, хотелите на Six Senses успяват значително да намалят своя въглероден отпечатък и да подобрят условията на живот в местните общности.

- The Ritz-Carlton, Bali

оОпазване на морската среда: The Ritz-Carlton в Бали има специална програма за опазване на морската среда, която включва поддръжка на кораловите рифове и организиране

на образователни дейности за гостите относно значимостта на опазването на морската флора и фауна. Хотелът работи в тясно сътрудничество с местните рибари и морски биолози, за да осигури устойчиво развитие на туризма в региона.

- AccorHotels

о Програма Planet 21: AccorHotels стартира програмата Planet 21, която има за цел да подобри устойчивостта на всичките им имоти по света. Програмата включва намаляване на потреблението на вода и енергия, минимизиране на отпадъците и насърчаване на здравословното хранене чрез използване на органични и местни продукти. Например, Sofitel So Bangkok е един от хотелите, които успешно внедряват инициативите на Planet 21, като инсталира система за събиране на дъждовна вода и използване на енергийно ефективни уреди.

- Scandic Hotels

о Фокус върху социалната устойчивост: Scandic Hotels са известни със своята политика на социална устойчивост. Те активно наемат хора с увреждания и осигуряват равни възможности за развитие на своите служители. Освен това, хотелите от веригата внедряват енергоспестяващи технологии и програми за рециклиране, като целта им е да намалят отпадъците и да повишат енергийната ефективност.

Устойчивият туризъм и отговорното хотелиерство представляват интегрален подход, който цели да създаде баланс между икономическото развитие, социалното благополучие и опазването на околната среда. Примери като Hilton, IHG, Marriott, Six Senses, The Ritz-Carlton и AccorHotels показват, че е възможно да се постигне устойчивост чрез иновативни практики и стратегии. Тези компании служат като модел за подражание, доказвайки, че устойчивият туризъм не само опазва околната среда, но и подобрява икономическата ефективност и социалното благополучие.

*Интегрирането на принципите на устойчивия туризъм и отговорното хотелиерство в ежедневието на работата на хотелиерските предприятия е ключов елемент за създаване на дълготрайна стойност и позитивен имидж. Това изисква ангажимент и сътрудничество на всички нива – от управлението на хотелите до техните гости и местните общности. Въпреки предизвикателствата, които кръговата икономика може да постави, ползите от нея са значителни и многообразни.*

## 2. Кръгова икономика в хотелиерството



Кръговата икономика е модел на производство и потребление, който се стреми да удължи жизнения цикъл на продуктите, като ги използва повторно, ремонтира, рециклира и възстановява колкото се може по-дълго. Тази концепция е в контраст с традиционния линеен модел на икономика, който се базира на модела „вземи, направи, изхвърли“. В контекста на хотелиерството и ресторантьорството, кръговата икономика включва различни стратегии и практики, които могат да помогнат за минимизиране на отпадъците и увеличаване на ефективността на ресурсите.

## *2.1. Основни принципи на кръговата икономика*

Кръговата икономика се основава на няколко ключови принципа, които включват:

- Използване на устойчиви материали: Това означава избягване на материали, които не могат да бъдат рециклирани или които са вредни за околната среда.
- Проектиране за дълговечност и ремонт: Продуктите трябва да бъдат проектирани така, че да могат лесно да бъдат ремонтирани и обновени.
- Рециклиране и повторна употреба: Материалите трябва да бъдат рециклирани и използвани повторно, когато е възможно.
- Намаляване на отпадъците: Целта е да се минимизира генерирането на отпадъци на всеки етап от производствения и потребителския цикъл.

## *2.2. Приложение на кръговата икономика в хотелиерството*

- Устойчиви доставки:

Локални и устойчиви продукти: Хотелите могат да закупуват храни и други продукти от местни производители, което не само намалява въглеродния отпечатък, но и подкрепя местната икономика.

Екологично чисти материали: Използването на материали, които са устойчиви и рециклируеми, като бамбук или рециклирана пластмаса.

- Управление на отпадъците:

- Компостиране: Органичните отпадъци от кухнята могат да бъдат компостирани и използвани за поддръжка на градините в хотела.

- Разделно събиране на отпадъци: Хотелите трябва да осигуряват възможности за гостите да сортират отпадъците си, като предоставят отделни кошове за рециклиране на пластмаса, стъкло и хартия.

- Намаляване на хранителните отпадъци: Чрез точно планиране на менюто и използване на софтуер за управление на инвентара, хотелите могат да минимизират хранителните отпадъци.

- **Енергийна ефективност:**

- Използване на възобновяеми източници на енергия: Соларни панели, вятърни турбини и геотермални системи могат да осигурят чиста енергия за хотелите.

- Енергоспестяващи уреди и осветление: Инсталирането на LED осветление и енергоспестяващи уреди намалява енергийното потребление.

- **Водна ефективност:**

- Повторно използване на вода: Системи за сива вода могат да използват водата от душовите и мивките за поливане на градините.

- Спестяване на вода: Инсталиране на водоспестяващи душове и тоалетни, както и използването на автоматични кранове, които намаляват излишната консумация на вода.

- **Ремонт и обновление:**

- Мебели и обзавеждане: Вместо да се изхвърлят стари мебели, те могат да бъдат ремонтирани и обновени. Това не само спестява пари, но и намалява отпадъците.

- Текстил: Хотелите могат да използват програми за ремонт и повторна употреба на спално бельо и кърпи, вместо да ги заменят при първите признаци на износване.

### *2.3. Устойчиви практики в хотелиерството*

- **Хилтън Хотели:**

LightStay: Хилтън разработи собствена система за измерване на въздействието върху околната среда, наречена LightStay, която следи използването на ресурси и отпадъците в реално време. Това позволява на хотелите от веригата да идентифицират области, където могат да се постигнат значителни спестявания.

- **InterContinental Hotels Group (IHG):**

Green Engage: Програмата Green Engage помага на хотелите от веригата да намаляват своите въглеродни емисии и водни ресурси, като предлагат над 200 устойчиви решения.

- **Marriott International:**

Serve 360: Marriott стартира инициативата Serve 360, която включва амбициозни цели за устойчивост, като намаляване на въглеродните емисии с 30% до 2025 г. и премахване на пластмасовите сламки от всички техни имоти.

### *2.4. Бариери и предизвикателства пред кръговата икономика в хотелиерството*

- **Финансови пречки:**

Внедряването на устойчиви практики и технологии често изисква значителни първоначални инвестиции. Малките и средни хотели могат да срещнат трудности при намирането на финансиране за тези проекти.

- Липса на знания и умения:

Много хотели все още не са наясно с възможностите, които предлага кръговата икономика, и липсват умения и знания за прилагането на тези практики на практика.

- Регулаторни предизвикателства:

Регулациите и стандартите за устойчивост често варират в различните региони и държави, което може да затрудни внедряването на единни практики в глобален мащаб.

- Промяна на културата и поведението:

Промяната на навиците и поведението на персонала и гостите може да бъде трудна задача. Необходима е културна трансформация и постоянни усилия за обучение и мотивация на всички заинтересовани страни.

Кръговата икономика предлага иновативен подход за справяне с екологичните предизвикателства в хотелиерството. Прилагането на принципите на кръговата икономика в хотелиерския сектор не само помага за опазване на околната среда, но и създава икономически ползи и подобрява имиджа на хотелите. Въпреки бариерите и предизвикателствата, съществуват множество успешни примери за прилагане на устойчиви практики, които могат да служат като модел за подражание. Хотелиерите трябва да продължат да търсят нови възможности за устойчиво развитие и да работят в посока на създаване на по-зелено и отговорно бъдеще за туристическата индустрия.

## *2.5. Практически стъпки за прилагане на кръговата икономика*

- Анализ на текущото състояние:

- Провеждане на енергиен и воден одит, за да се идентифицират основните източници на разходи и загуби.

- Оценка на текущото управление на отпадъците и възможностите за подобрене.

- Изготвяне на стратегия за устойчивост:

- Разработване на дългосрочен план за внедряване на устойчиви практики.

- Определяне на конкретни цели и индикатори за успех.

- Обучение на персонала:

- Провеждане на регулярни обучителни сесии за запознаване с принципите на кръговата икономика и устойчивите практики.

- Мотивация на персонала да предлага и внедрява нови идеи за устойчивост.

- Инвестиране в технологии:

- Инсталиране на енергоспестяващи уреди и системи за управление на водите.

- Инвестиране в системи за рециклиране и компостиране.

- Партньорства и сътрудничество:
  - Сътрудничество с местни доставчици и производители за доставка на устойчиви продукти.
  - Партньорство с екологични организации и участие в инициативи за устойчивост.
- Комуникация и маркетинг:
  - Информирание на гостите за устойчивите практики и ползите от тях.
  - Промотиране на усилията за устойчивост чрез маркетингови кампании и социални медии.

*Прилагането на принципите на кръговата икономика в хотелиерството изисква систематичен подход и ангажираност от страна на всички заинтересовани страни. Съчетаването на устойчиви практики с иновации и обучение може да помогне на хотелите не само да намалят своя екологичен отпечатък, но и да подобрят своята конкурентоспособност и репутация. В крайна сметка, кръговата икономика представлява не само необходимост, но и възможност за изграждане на по-устойчива и справедлива туристическа индустрия.*

### **3. Управление на водите и енергията в хотелиерството**

Управлението на водите и енергията в хотелиерството е критично за постигането на устойчивост и намаляване на въглеродния отпечатък. Тези два ресурса са основни за функционирането на хотелите, но същевременно представляват значителен разход и източник на екологично въздействие. Ефективното управление на водите и енергията може да доведе до значителни икономически ползи и да подобри екологичната репутация на хотелите.

#### *3.1. Управление на водите*

- Значение на управлението на водите

Водата е жизненоважен ресурс за хотелиерството, използван за различни нужди, включително готвене, почистване, пране, поливане на градини и за санитарни нужди. Недостатъчното управление на водите може да доведе до значителни финансови разходи и негативно въздействие върху околната среда.

- Методи за спестяване на вода

#### A. Инсталиране на водоспестяващи устройства

- Душове с нисък дебит: Те намаляват количеството вода, използвано по време на душ, без да компрометират качеството на услугата.

- Водоспестяващи тоалетни: Тоалетните с двоен бутон и нисък дебит значително намаляват консумацията на вода.

- Аератори за кранове: Те смесват вода с въздух, намалявайки водния поток, без да намаляват налягането.

#### Б. Повторно използване на сива вода

Сивата вода е отпадна вода от мивки, душеве и перални, която може да бъде третирана и използвана повторно за поливане на градини или за промиване на тоалетни. Това значително намалява общото потребление на вода.

#### В. Системи за събиране на дъждовна вода

Събирането на дъждовна вода и нейното използване за поливане на зелени площи или за други нехранителни нужди е още един ефективен начин за спестяване на вода.

- Управление на водите в пране и почистване

Хотелите могат да внедрят технологии и процедури за намаляване на консумацията на вода в пералните и почистването. Например, използването на перални машини с висока ефективност, които използват по-малко вода и енергия.

- Обучение на персонала

Обучението на персонала относно важността на спестяването на вода и прилагането на добри практики е ключов елемент за успешното управление на водните ресурси.

### 3.2. *Управление на енергията*

- Значение на управлението на енергията

Енергията е друг важен ресурс, който оказва значително въздействие върху околната среда и финансовите резултати на хотелите. Управлението на енергията включва внедряване на технологии и практики, които намаляват потреблението на енергия и повишават ефективността.

- Методи за спестяване на енергия

#### А. Използване на възобновяеми енергийни източници

- Соларни панели: Инсталирането на соларни панели за генериране на електричество или за подгряване на вода.

- Вятърни турбини: Използване на вятърна енергия, когато условията позволяват.

- Геотермална енергия: Използване на топлината от земята за отопление и охлаждане на сградите.

#### Б. Енергоспестяващи технологии

- LED осветление: Замяната на традиционните крушки с LED осветление, което е по-енергийно ефективно и има по-дълъг живот.

- Умни термостати: Инсталиране на интелигентни термостати, които автоматично регулират температурата в зависимост от заетостта на стаите.

- Енергийно ефективни уреди: Използване на уреди и оборудване с висок енергиен клас.

**В. Изолация и оптимизация на сградите**

- Теплоизолация: Подобряването на изолацията на сградите намалява загубите на топлина през зимата и поддържа по-хладна вътрешна среда през лятото.

- Двойни и тройни стъкла: Инсталиране на енергийно ефективни прозорци за намаляване на загубите на топлина.

- Мониторинг и управление на енергопотреблението

Редовният мониторинг на енергопотреблението и анализът на данните помагат за идентифициране на области с висок разход и възможности за оптимизация. Интегрирането на системи за управление на енергията (EMS) позволява автоматично управление и контрол на потреблението.

- Обучение на персонала

Обучението на персонала за важността на енергийната ефективност и внедряването на добри практики е също толкова важно, колкото и внедряването на технологиите.

*Примери за успешни практики са:*

- InterContinental Hotels Group (IHG) - Green Engage

IHG внедрява програмата Green Engage, която включва различни инициативи за намаляване на консумацията на вода и енергия. Програмата предлага над 200 решения, включително инсталиране на енергоспестяващо осветление, използване на водоспестяващи устройства и внедряване на системи за събиране на дъждовна вода. Хотелът InterContinental New York Barclay успя да намали консумацията на енергия с 30% и на вода с 20% след внедряване на тези мерки.

- Marriott International - Serve 360

Програмата Serve 360 на Marriott включва амбициозни цели за устойчивост, включително намаляване на въглеродните емисии и подобряване на енергийната ефективност. Например, Marriott в Сан Франциско използва соларни панели, които генерират значителна част от необходимата енергия за хотела. Освен това, хотелът е инсталирал системи за повторно използване на сива вода за поливане на градините.

- Hilton Hotels - LightStay

Hilton разработи система за измерване и управление на въздействието върху околната среда, наречена LightStay. Тази система следи и анализира консумацията на енергия и вода, както и генерирането на отпадъци. В резултат на програмата, Hilton успява да намали своя въглероден отпечатък и да подобри енергийната ефективност в своите хотели. Например, Hilton Hawaiian Village е инсталирал соларни панели и система за събиране на дъждовна вода, което е довело до значително намаляване на енергийните и водните разходи.

### *3.3. Барieri и предизвикателства пред управлението на водите и енергията*

#### Финансови бариери

Внедряването на нови технологии и системи за управление на водите и енергията често изисква значителни първоначални инвестиции. Малките и средни хотели могат да срещнат трудности при намирането на финансиране за тези проекти.

#### Липса на знания и умения

Хотелиерският персонал може да не разполага с необходимите знания и умения за ефективно управление на водите и енергията. Необходимостта от обучение и повишаване на информираността е критична за успешното внедряване на устойчиви практики.

#### Регулаторни предизвикателства

Регулациите и стандартите за енергийна ефективност и управление на водите варират в различните региони и държави, което може да затрудни внедряването на единни практики в глобален мащаб.

#### Промяна на културата и поведението

Промяната на навиците и поведението на персонала и гостите може да бъде трудна задача. Необходима е културна трансформация и постоянни усилия за обучение и мотивация на всички заинтересовани страни.

*Ефективното управление на водите и енергията в хотелиерството е ключов елемент за постигането на устойчивост и намаляване на въглеродния отпечатък. Хотелите, които инвестират в устойчиви технологии и обучения, могат да постигнат значителни икономически ползи и да подобрят своята екологична репутация. Примери като IHG, Marriott и Hilton показват, че е възможно да се постигне устойчивост чрез иновативни практики и стратегии. Въпреки бариерите и предизвикателствата, ползите от управлението на водите и енергията са значителни и многообразни. Хотелиерите трябва да продължат да търсят нови възможности за устойчиво развитие и да работят в посока на създаване на по-зелено и отговорно бъдеще за туристическата индустрия.*

#### **4. Управление на отпадъците в хотела с акцент върху хранителните отпадъци в ресторантите**

Управлението на отпадъците е съществен аспект от устойчивото управление на хотели и ресторанти. Особено внимание трябва да се обърне на хранителните отпадъци, които представляват значителна част от общите отпадъци, генерирани в хотелиерската индустрия. Ефективното управление на хранителните отпадъци не само намалява негативното въздействие върху околната среда, но и подобрява икономическата ефективност и удовлетвореността на гостите.

##### *4.1. Значение на управлението на отпадъците*

Отпадъците, генерирани от хотели и ресторанти, включват различни материали, като хартия, пластмаса, стъкло, метал и органични отпадъци. Сред тях, хранителните отпадъци представляват значителна част и имат сериозни екологични и икономически последици, ако не бъдат правилно управлявани. Неправилното управление на хранителните отпадъци води до:

- Повишени разходи за депониране и транспорт на отпадъци.
- Генериране на парникови газове, като метан, при разлагане на органичните отпадъци на депата.
- Загуба на ресурси и потенциални икономически ползи от компостиране и повторна употреба.

##### *4.2. Методи за управление на отпадъците*

###### *• Намаляване на отпадъците*

###### **А. Планиране на менюто**

Един от най-ефективните начини за намаляване на хранителните отпадъци е чрез оптимизиране на планирането на менюто. Това включва:

- Анализ на предпочитанията на гостите и тенденциите в потреблението.
- Създаване на менюта с използване на съставки, които могат да бъдат използвани в множество ястия.
- Предлагане на гъвкави порции и опции за избор на размера на порцията, което намалява излишното количество храна, което се приготвя и не се консумира.

###### **Б. Управление на инвентара**

Ефективното управление на инвентара може да предотврати разхищаването на храна.

Това включва:

- Редовна проверка на наличностите и сроковете на годност.



- Прилагане на принципа "първо влезло, първо излязло" (FIFO), за да се гарантира, че по-старите продукти се използват първи.
- Използване на софтуер за управление на инвентара, който дава възможност за проследяване на наличностите в реално време.

• *Повторна употреба и рециклиране*

A. Повторна употреба на храна

Хотелите и ресторантите могат да въведат практики за повторна употреба на хранителни остатъци, като например:

- Преработка на остатъци в нови ястия, когато е възможно и безопасно.
- Дарение на излишната храна на местни благотворителни организации и приюти.

B. Компостиране

Компостирането на органични отпадъци е ефективен метод за управление на хранителните отпадъци. Това включва:

- Инсталиране на компостни системи на място или договоряне с външни компании за компостиране.
- Използване на компост за поддръжка на градини и зелени площи в хотела.

B. Рециклиране

Разделното събиране на отпадъци и рециклирането на материали като стъкло, метал, пластмаса и хартия е основен аспект на управлението на отпадъците. Това включва:

- Осигуряване на подходящи контейнери за разделно събиране.
- Обучение на персонала и гостите относно правилното разделно събиране на отпадъци.

• *Управление на хранителните отпадъци в ресторантите*

1. Анализ на източниците на хранителни отпадъци

За да се разработи ефективна стратегия за управление на хранителните отпадъци, е важно да се анализират основните източници на отпадъци. Те включват:

- Отпадъци от приготвяне на храна: Обелки, остатъци от почистване и подрязване на съставки.
- Отпадъци от сервиране: Храна, която не е използвана или не е сервирана.
- Отпадъци от клиентите: Храна, която е сервирана, но не е консумирана.

2. Стратегии за намаляване на хранителните отпадъци

A. Обучение на персонала

Обучението на персонала относно важността на намаляването на хранителните отпадъци и добрите практики е ключов елемент за успешното управление на отпадъците. Това включва:

- Провеждане на редовни обучителни сесии и работилници.
- Разработване на ръководства и процедури за намаляване на отпадъците.

Б. Оптимизиране на процесите на приготвяне на храна

Оптимизирането на процесите на приготвяне на храна може да намали количеството отпадъци, генерирани в кухнята. Това включва:

- Използване на техники за максимално използване на съставките, като например използване на стеблата и обелките на зеленчуците.
- Прилагане на точни мерки и порциониране, за да се избегне излишното количество храна.

В. Управление на порциите

Управлението на порциите може значително да намали отпадъците от клиентите. Това включва:

- Предлагане на различни размери на порциите, които да отговарят на предпочитанията на клиентите.
- Насърчаване на гостите да изберат по-малки порции, ако не са сигурни, че могат да консумират големи количества храна.

• *Технологии за управление на хранителните отпадъци*

А. Софтуер за управление на отпадъците

Използването на специализиран софтуер за управление на отпадъците може да помогне на хотелите и ресторантите да проследяват и анализират генерираните отпадъци. Тези системи предоставят данни и аналитични инструменти, които позволяват идентифициране на проблемни области и оптимизиране на процесите.

Б. Устройства за намаляване на обема на отпадъците

Инсталирането на устройства за намаляване на обема на отпадъците, като компактори и смилатели на хранителни отпадъци, може да намали обема на отпадъците, които трябва да бъдат транспортирани и депонирани.

В. Компостни системи

Автоматизираните компостни системи могат да преобразуват хранителните отпадъци в полезен компост, който може да бъде използван за поддръжка на градините и зелените площи на хотела.

*Примери за успешни практики са:*

- Hilton Hotels - Програма за компостиране

Hilton Hotels е внедрила програма за компостиране в своите имоти, което включва събиране на органични отпадъци от кухните и ресторантите и тяхното компостиране на място или чрез външни партньори. Това намалява количеството отпадъци, които отиват на депото, и същевременно предоставя компост за поддръжка на градините и озеленяване.

- InterContinental Hotels Group (IHG) - Намаляване на хранителните отпадъци

IHG е разработила стратегия за намаляване на хранителните отпадъци, която включва обучение на персонала, оптимизиране на менюто и даряване на излишната храна. Например, InterContinental New York Barclay успя да намали своите хранителни отпадъци с 25% чрез тези мерки.

- Marriott International - Програма за управление на отпадъците

Marriott International стартира програма за управление на отпадъците, която включва разделно събиране и рециклиране, както и компостиране на органични отпадъци. Програмата Serve 360 на Marriott включва и даряване на излишната храна на местни благотворителни организации.

- AccorHotels - Програма Planet 21

Програмата Planet 21 на AccorHotels има за цел да подобри управлението на отпадъците във всичките им имоти по света. Това включва разделно събиране на отпадъци, компостиране на органични отпадъци и даряване на излишната храна. Например, Sofitel So Bangkok използва компостни системи за управление на органичните отпадъци и използва компоста за поддръжка на градините.

- Scandic Hotels - Фокус върху социалната устойчивост

Scandic Hotels са известни със своята политика на социална устойчивост, включително управлението на отпадъците. Те активно насърчават своите гости да участват в разделното събиране на отпадъци и предоставят информация за устойчивите практики, които прилагат.

*Ефективното управление на отпадъците, особено на хранителните отпадъци в ресторантите, е от съществено значение за постигането на устойчивост в хотелиерството. Чрез прилагането на добри практики и технологии, хотелите могат да намалят своя екологичен отпечатък, да подобрят икономическата си ефективност и да създадат положителен имидж. Примери като Hilton, IHG, Marriott и AccorHotels показват, че е възможно да се постигне устойчивост чрез иновативни стратегии и решения. Независимо от барьерите и предизвикателствата, ползите от управлението на*



*отпадъците са значителни и многообразни. Хотелиерите трябва да продължат да търсят нови възможности за устойчиво развитие и да работят в посока на създаване на по-зелено и отговорно бъдеще за туристическата индустрия.*



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