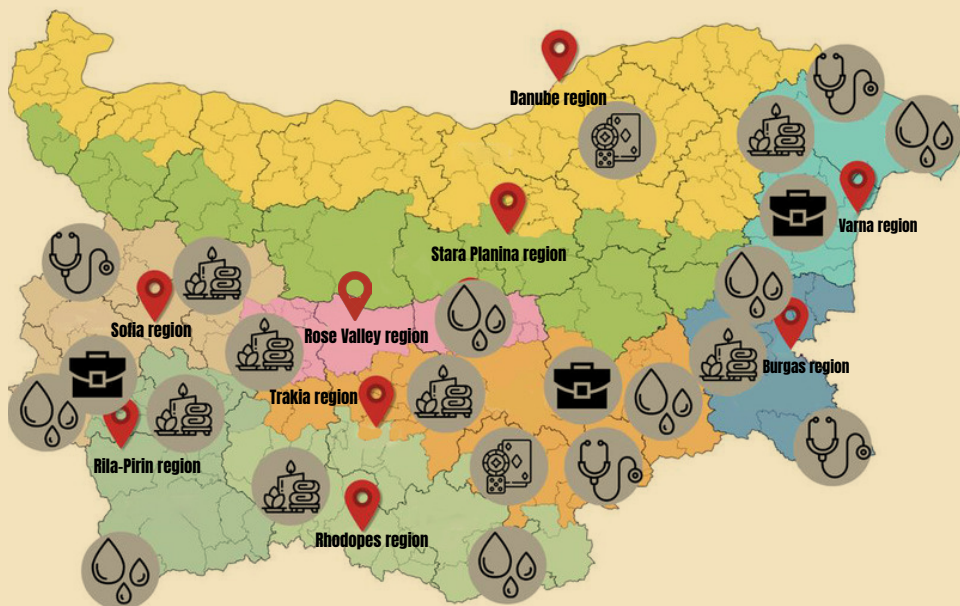


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MARKETING MANAGEMENT OF THE TOURISM REGIONS IN BULGARIA – INNOVATIVE APPROACH



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INTRODUCTION

The **object** of study in the current paper are the tourism regions in Bulgaria, registered according to the Concept for Tourism Zoning with a specialized product profile (main and extended). The **subject** of study is the management of these regions of the registered and functioning 9 Destination management organizations (DMOs) in Bulgaria. The **aim** of the present paper is related to the thesis that the marketing management of the tourism regions in Bulgaria can be improved by creating an innovative approach to managing the regions, developed by an analysis from a study of existing activities currently carried out by the organizations. The thesis aims to prove that the creation of an innovative approach to the management of a tourism regions by the DMOs includes a process of research, analysis, matrices, algorithms and technological prescriptions – a basis for the future development of the tourism regions in Bulgaria, also of the priority specialized types of tourism. The set scientific **tasks** contribute to proving the goal. They concentrate on the following:

1. Business identification of the tourism regions in Bulgaria and their marketing management.
2. Analysis of the activities carried out by the DMOs of the 9 tourism regions, according to the registered ones.
3. Introduction of an innovative approach for management of the tourism regions in Bulgaria.
4. Differentiating basic activities in the model for marketing management.

1. Destination management organizations (DMOs) in Bulgaria

The management of tourism destinations in different countries is carried out by different authorities, such as ministries, agencies, industry organizations, boards, etc. In Bulgaria, the Ministry of Tourism is the executive authority. According to the Act of tourism, the meso management of the tourism destinations is carried out by the mayors in the specific municipality, with the respective commission boards. The regional division of the country does not correspond to the tourist division and the administrative boundaries of the municipalities do not correspond to the administrative boundaries of the nine tourism regions, established in Bulgaria, as described in the Concept of Tourism Zoning.

These prerequisites determine the necessity of studying the best practices for the management of tourism destinations in the developed European countries and their corresponding modified application in Bulgaria.

For the purpose of successful tourism destination management, Destination Marketing Organisations (DMOs) have been established in some emittive and receptive tourism countries in Europe, which have a number of rights and obligations in terms of the successful and sustainable development as well as promotion of the respective tourism region.¹

Building sustainable business identification by the DMO in the minds of consumers, contractors and society in general is extremely important in a globally competitive market. The dynamic evolution of global economic markets, as well as the rapid development of information and communication technologies, make business identification a

¹ Ianeva, M., et. al. Upravljenie na turisticheskite destinacii i razvitie na specializirani vidove turizum, UNSS, Sofia, 2021.

basis for implementing a successful competitive strategy for any business organization or tourism destination.²

When developing a marketing management program³ related to its external marketing, it is essential to conduct a study and bring out the main features of the tourism destinations. These characteristics may relate to the available natural and anthropogenic resources, as well as the super- and infrastructure of the destination.

From the point of view of management theory, business identification of the object of study is a set of material, text and visual means applied by a given DMO, when presented to the various audiences in a clearly defined marketing strategy (note: by business strategy means a competitive market strategy by Porter).⁴ All nine registered DMOs have a marketing strategy activities.

According to the business identification researcher M. Rhoden, one of the main advantages of the business identification is the possibility to present the tourism region as different from its competitors. The goal that results from this process and will be sought by the consultants after the implementation of the project is to make the tourism region visible and separable from other ones in the tourism market. Based on this basic concept, it can be concluded that the strategic objectives of the marketing program related to the business identification of the region are the formation of identity and differentiation of the tourism region.

Philip Kotler explores means of imposing an identity such as names, signs, symbols, atmosphere, events.⁵ Such tools are used both in the operation of the DMOs and in the operation of the tourist districts organizing various events and other activities.

² Yaneva, M. Establishing Business Identification of Regions for Sustainability in Tourism, *Journal of Balkan Ecology*, vol. 22, № 1, 2019, p. 81 – 90.

³ Dore, L., Crouch, I. Promoting destinations: An exploratory study of publicity programmes used by national tourism organisations. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 9(2), 2003, 137-151. doi: 10.1177/135676670300900203

⁴ Markova, M. Management of company innovations as intellectual property, „Economic alternatives“, 2013.

⁵ Kotler, Ph. *B2B Brand Management*, Springer, Germany, 2006.

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 tourist region, compared to other similar in Bulgaria, based on basic and extended specialization – through significant differences that make it recognizable and preferred by consumers.⁶

According to Finskud, business identification of a company or tourism region is nothing more than „branding“.⁷ Branding is part of the external activities carried out by marketing managers in the management of the tourism regions. According to the authors, business identification is a broader concept and includes the identification of resources – natural and anthropogenic, super- and infrastructure, highlighting differentiated, innovative tourism products, as a result of which the individual region stands out through symbols and signs, thus forming the brand through which the individual region is imposed in the image of certain groups of consumers.

It can be argued that the tourism brand 'Bulgaria' is unique in the minds of foreign visitors (German, Polish or Romanian), but it is not identical in all countries. In some countries this brand brings positive and pleasant emotions, while for others it is filled with negativity and denial. In the first case, the brand must be developed and enriched, in the second – repositioned.⁸ Further, in case of a positive reaction to the tourist brand „Bulgaria“, it is necessary to identify the emotional and rational reactions⁹ of the specific sub-brands – tourism regions. In the Bulgarian tourism business, the most applicable is the „law of promotion“ – building the brand should be done with the promotion.¹⁰

⁶ Markova, M., Management of company innovations as intellectual property, “Economic alternatives” 2013.

⁷ Finskud, L. Developing Winning Brand Strategies, Business Expert Press

⁸ Aaker, D.A. Brand portfolio management strategy. Publishing house „Exmo“. M., 2008.

⁹ Lindstrom, M., Brand Feeling. Publishing house „Exmo“. M., 2006 Markova, M., „Business identification of the company“, international scientific seminar of UNIBIT „Success, creativity, innovations“, 2015.

¹⁰ Tsonev, N. Branding of tourist services, Third International Scientific Conference, Proceedings: „Marketing – reality and projections in the future“, IU –Varna, 2012, 316-320.

The business identification of the destination, formed and managed by the DMOs, should integrate a location in its environment and at the same time help to highlight its characteristics, in relation to other tourism regions, in order to achieve competitiveness. This is the task of marketing managers in writing a strategy for shaping the appearance and highlighting the tourism region, according to its main and extended specialization, currently enshrined in the Concept of Tourism Zoning of Bulgaria.

When compiling the marketing program with events, from the marketing organizations of the destinations, it is necessary to set as a priority the highlighting of the tourist location and creating a look and style, which are unique and unique to it. In this regard, the so-called thematic tourism products in the various tourism regions in Bulgaria, which are a variant of the extended specialization of the same. For example, for the Danube region such products are urban leisure and shopping tourism, for the Rozova dolina area are balneal, SPA and wellness tourism and for the Trakia region are business tourism (MICE), urban leisure and shopping tourism and health tourism (all types).

The business identification of the tourism regions needs to be managed by the DMO, following the example of good world practices.

The marketing concept has long been transformed into a business philosophy, defining the strategic directions in its development. One of them is related to the effectiveness of market behaviour, which is based on the creation and provision of a wide range of values for consumers. Such value in the new market conditions of the current environment in the last year appears to be sensory marketing, which provides additional value as sensory stimuli that, during a visit to a specific site, stimulate the sensations of tourists and create lasting memories of the destination.

In order to identify the most effective opportunities for marketing management of tourism regions, it is necessary to refer to its essence, approaches and possibilities. Marketing management allows to reach the objectives of the organization, through a complete orientation towards the consumer and satisfaction of their desires and needs. For this reason, it is necessary to regularly identify the needs of potential tourists in terms of their expectations related to the tourist offer of individual tourism regions.

According to the American Marketing Association¹¹ marketing management is the process of planning and implementing the pricing policy, promotion and implementation of ideas, products and services aimed at the implementation of the exchange, satisfying not only the economic, but also all other needs, both of the individual in the person of the consumer, and of the organizations implementing the marketing management, including the Marketing Organizations of the Destinations. It is important to note, however, that organisations carry out marketing management in a particular environment, whose elements interact with each other.

Marketing management is considered in three strands:

- Operational management – implies that the organisation is seen as an open system and decision making takes into account both the internal capabilities of the organisation and the requirements of the external environment, i.e. the organisation is market oriented and is prepared to constantly meet its requirements. This corresponds with the models for the management of the DMO – the descriptive and the conceptual and the internal and external management activities described in the first part of the study.

- Management of functions – formed as a result of changes in the views of the governing authorities, the basis of which is based on the principle „from the needs of production to the needs of the market“. Marketing participates in the decision of production issues, stimulates the introduction of innovative ideas and technologies, ensures the supply of a competitive product. Together with finance, marketing ensures optimal allocation of the organisation's resources to obtain the desired profit. The optimal allocation of resources has found a place in the Concept of Tourism Zoning, where they are the basis for the delineation of the main and extended specialization of the nine tourism regions in Bulgaria. Marketing also addresses issues related to the modern distribution of the product in order to satisfy needs and obtain profit. It is necessary to assist the tourist enterprises (hotels and travel agencies) in establishing an optimal distribution policy corresponding to the needs

¹¹ <https://www.ama.org/>

related to the respective specialisation of a region. The mechanism for performing the functions of marketing is based on the development of a marketing system, as part of the management system of the organization, which includes:

1. organization;
2. planning (development of plans);
3. information;
4. control.

- Demand management – provided through strategic and operational decisions for specific target market segments, formed on the basis of the use of a complex of tools: product, price, distribution and promotion. It is necessary for the marketing managers of the DMOs to support a general policy on demand identification with the respective tourist area, as well as a policy on external activities to create an image of the region.

The advantages of marketing management¹² lie in the possibility to synchronize the structure of demand with the structure of supply, by forming the necessary assortment of tourist products, conducting a flexible pricing policy and creating an effective sales promotion system. From the point of view of the management of tourist areas, according to the Concept of Tourism Zoning, marketing management is necessary to concentrate on the formation of the necessary assortment for specialised tourist assortments, as well as in the correct ratio between quality and price.

The management of tourism organizations 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 is paid to their management and especially the possibility of covering all elements of the overall tourist experience, especially based on aspects related to added tourist value and the principles of integrated quality management.

¹² Lapshin, V.Yu., Lapshina, I. M. Marketing management in ensuring the sustainable and safe development of local tourist destinations, *Journal of Social-Economic Phenomena and Processes*, Issue No. 2 (060) / 2014.

It can reasonably be argued that a significant proportion of modern tourism organisations operate within the boundaries of a particular tourist destination. In order to establish the principles defining and shaping their management it is necessary to present the essence of the concept of tourist destination, since tourist destinations themselves have a significant impact through their specificities on the tourist organizations operating in them.

Based on the existing geographic areas and the available administrative zoning of Bulgaria, a „Concept for Tourism Zoning of Bulgaria“ was created by a team of the National Centre for Territorial Development (NCTD), in implementation of a public order from the Ministry of Tourism. The proposed concept focuses on the development of a new tourism zoning of Bulgaria, in accordance with the requirements of the new Tourism Act of 26.03.2013.¹³ According to Art. 15 (1) of this Law, the demarcation of tourism regions in the country is linked to the achievement of an objective aimed at creating regional tourism products and carrying out regional marketing and advertising. The Act includes the establishment of existing and functioning Organizations for Management of the Tourism Regions or also known as Destination Marketing Organizations, while also defining their functions.

The existing Concept of Tourism Zoning was approved on the basis of Art. 1 of the Tourism Act (TA). Tourism zoning (see diagram 1) is based on:

- Compliance with the theoretical and methodological principles of tourism zoning;
- In-depth analysis of previous zoning in Bulgaria from the early 1960s to the present;
- Analysis of the experience of other countries in tourist zoning;

¹³ Ministry of Tourism, Law on Tourism of 26.02.2013, art. 15, paragraph 1, p. 12.

Available at:

[h#p://bulgariatravel.org/data/doc/ZAKON_za_turizma_ID_2_5175.pdf](http://bulgariatravel.org/data/doc/ZAKON_za_turizma_ID_2_5175.pdf) [Visited on 02.03.2023].

As can be seen from the above scheme, 9 tourism regions.¹⁴ They are large enough to be clearly recognizable on the tourist map and small enough to be managed effectively.

Scheme 2. Scheme of the tourism regions in Bulgaria



Source: <https://bulgariatravel.org/destinations/tourist-regions/>

¹⁴ Министерство на туризма, Концепция за туристическо райониране, С., 2016: <http://www.tourism.government.bg/bg/kategorii/strategicheski-dokumenti/konceptsiya-za-turistichsko-rayonirane-na-bulgariya> [Проверено на 01.02.2018].

The Concept for Tourism Zoning of Bulgaria contains geographical names of the separate tourism regions. Organizations for the management of tourism regions have been established in their territorial scope, which in the literature on marketing in tourism, as well as in the practice of developed tourism countries, are known as Marketing Organizations of Destinations. For the purposes of this study, we assume that the two formulations for the designation of organizations – Organizations for the management of tourism regions and Marketing organizations of destinations (DMOs) will be used as synonyms.

Tourism regions in Bulgaria

The idea of zoning Bulgaria is associated with business identification, which was theoretically presented. From this position, each region receives a basic specialization in two specific types of tourism, as well as an extended one in other specific (*see table. 1*).

Table 1. Main and expanded specialization of the tourism regions in Bulgaria

Tourism region	Main specialization	Extended specialization
Region Dunav /Danube river/	Culture and cruise tourism	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cultural tourism 2. River cruise tourism 3. Adventure and ecotourism 4. Urban leisure and shopping tourism 5. Wine and culinary tourism 6. Religious and pilgrimage tourism
Region Stara Planina	Mountain and ecotour- ism	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mountain hiking and recreational tourism 2. Adventure and ecotourism 3. Cultural, festival and creative tourism 4. Rural tourism 5. Religious and pilgrimage tourism 6. Mountain ski Tourism
Region Rozova dolina /Rose valley/	Health and cultural tourism	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Balneo, SPA and wellness tourism 2. Cultural and festival tourism 3. Adventure and ecotourism 4. Mountain hiking and recreational tourism 5. Wine tourism
Region Trakia	Cultural and wine tourism	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cultural tourism (all types) 2. Wine tourism 3. Business tourism (MICE) 4. Urban leisure and shopping tourism 5. Health tourism (all types) 6. Adventure and ecotourism
Region Rhodope	Mountain and rural tourism	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mountain tourism (all types – skiing, hiking, recreational) 2. Rural tourism 3. Balneotourism, SPA and wellness tourism 4. Adventure and ecotourism 5. Cultural and festival tourism 6. Religious and pilgrimage tourism
Region Rila-Pirin	Mountain and religious tourism	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mountain tourism (all types – skiing, hiking, recreational) 2. Religious and pilgrimage tourism 3. Adventure and ecotourism 4. Balneo-tourism, SPA&Wellness 5. Cultural and festival tourism 6. Wine tourism
Region Sofia	Business and cultural tourism	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Business tourism (MICE) 2. Cultural tourism (all types) 3. Mountain tourism (all types) 4. Health tourism (all types) 5. Religious and pilgrimage tourism 6. Adventure and ecotourism
Region Varna (North Black Sea)	Sea and sport tourism	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sea recreational tourism 2. Sports tourism 3. Cultural and festival tourism 4. Business tourism (MICE) 5. Health tourism (all types) 6. Ecotourism
Region Burgas (South Black Sea)	Sea and sport tourism	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sea recreational tourism 2. Cultural tourism (all types) 3. Adventure and ecotourism 4. Health tourism (all types) 5. Rural tourism 6. Religious and pilgrimage tourism

Source: authors' systematization.

From the information presented so far, it can be argued with justification that the existing legal framework is a prerequisite for the development of specialized tourism products, as well as for the successful functioning of destination marketing organizations that contribute to the successful management and branding of the respective tourism region.

As already noted, in relation to the Concept of Tourism Regionalisation and Resource Provisioning, each tourism region has main and extended specialisation. The *main* specialisation is a combination of two types of tourism which combine to define the uniqueness of the regions. *Extended* specialisation includes the main and other complementary types of tourism. These specialisations can be seen as a starting point for the development of innovative marketing ploys for the development of tourist areas, as well as for tour operators offering products on specialised types of tourism distinct to the area concerned. Combined tourism products can also be identified in each tourist area, formed both on the basis of core and complementary specialisation and on the basis of new consumer expectations of products.

From a tourism point of view, the thematic nature of specialised products is linked to the growing trend of modern tourists' interests in different forms of thematic consumption, as a response to the tendency towards uniformity in consumer lifestyles brought about by globalisation.

Destination marketing organisations (DMOs) are the most successful and effective organisations operating in the tourism market. Practice shows that „a large number of destinations have established a destination management organisation (DMO) to provide leadership in tourism management for the destination“.¹⁵

Their primary role is to create a successful marketing strategy for a city, region or country in order to maximise the number of visitors and tourists. They also support the development and promotion of a destination by focusing on conventional sales as well as on tourism marketing and the products and services offered through it.

¹⁵ Bornhorst, T., Ritchie, B. J. R. & Sheehan, L. Determinants of tourism success for DMOs & destinations: An empirical examination of stakeholders' perspectives. *Tourism Management*, Volume 31, Issue 5, October 2010, pp. 572-589, ISSN: 0261-5177.

When clarifying the nature and characteristics of destination marketing organizations, it is noteworthy that in Bulgaria the issues related to their management are at a relatively early stage, and have been studied by Portarska, Ianeva, Bozhinova, Stankova.

A number of foreign authors have also worked on this issue, the main ones being Presenca & Crouch, as well as Lundtorp & Wanhill¹⁶, Kozak¹⁷, Barron¹⁸, Ruiz-Real & Uribe-Toril¹⁹, Hara²⁰, Howie²¹ and others, proposing various scientific developments in this respect that have been put into practice by many European countries. One of the first authors to have described destination marketing organisations in detail in terms of their function was Gartrell²², who presented them broadly as selling cities. He also believes that destination marketing

¹⁶ Lundtorp V., Wanhill, S. The resort lifecycle theory: Generating Processes and Estimation, *Annals of Tourism Research*, Volume 28, Issue 4, 2001, 947-964, ISSN 0160-7383, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0160-7383\(00\)00080-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0160-7383(00)00080-3).

Available at: https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S01607383_00000803 <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0160738300000803> [Visited on 07.07.2023].

¹⁷ Kozak, M., Volgger, M., Destination leadership: Leadership for territorial development, *Tourism Review* 69 (3), August 2014, Available at:

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/265858274_Destination_leadership_Leadership_for_territorial_development [Visited on 09.09.2021].

¹⁸ Barron, P., Greenwood, A., Issues Determining the Development of Cruise Itineraries: A Focus on the Luxury Market, *Tourism in Marine Environments*, Volume 3, Number 2, 2006, pp. 89-99(11). Available at: <https://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/cog/tme/2006/00000003/00000002/art00003> [Visited on 11.11.2022].

¹⁹ Ruiz-Real, J., Uribe-Toril, J., Gazquez-Abad, J., Destination branding: Opportunities and new challenges, *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management* 17 (2020). Available at: <https://fardapaper.ir/mohavaha/uploads/2020/08/Fardapaper-Destination-branding-Opportunities-and-newchallenges.pdf> [Visited on 11.11.2022].

²⁰ Hara, T., Reviewing Tourism Funding Model for Public Infrastructure and Destination Marketing Organizations: A Case of Orlando, *Journal of Tourism Economics, Policy and Hospitality Management*, Volume 1, Issue 1. Available at:

https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Tadayuki-Hara/publication/258222539_Reviewing_Tourism_Funding_Model_for_Public_Infrastructure_and_Destination_Marketing_Organizations_A_Case_of_Orlando/links/5640f36508aeba1f6ca9a/Reviewing-Tourism-Funding-Model-for-Public-Infrastructure-and-Destination-Marketing-Organizations-A-Case-of-Orlando.pdf [Visited on 11.11.2022].

²¹ <https://www.cabdirect.org/cabdirect/abstract/20033102971>

²² Gartrell, R., Convention and Visitor Bureau, *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, Volume 1, 1993 - Issue 2. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1300/>

organisations have the task of creating an image that makes cities the best possible destinations for visits and tourism.

Attention should also be drawn to the definition given by the World Tourism Organisation²³, which defines destination marketing organisations as organisations responsible for the management and/or marketing of destinations and generally belonging to one of the following categories:

- Regional, district or state marketing organisations responsible for the management and/or marketing of tourism in a geographical area defined for this purpose, such as administrative districts or local government areas such as counties, states or provinces;
- Local destination marketing organisations dealing with the management and/or marketing of tourism in a smaller geographical region or city;
- National Tourism Authorities or Organisations responsible for the management and marketing of tourism at a national level.

Examining the nature of destination marketing organizations, it can be reasonably argued that they promote the economic development of the destination through revenue generated from activities such as lodging and overnight stays, restaurant visits, commercial revenues, increased visitation, etc. It could be outlined that tourist information centres and local tourist agencies are the main partners of marketing organisations working in certain tourist destinations, as they represent the destination's marketing policy, transforming it into a unique brand. Also, through their marketing activities, these types of organisations manage to generate direct and indirect revenues and taxes for the destination economies.

Destination marketing organisations can be established in different forms. Regardless of their form of operation, organisations can offer a wide variety of services to tourists and also provide a feedback loop to businesses aimed at offering a large number of combined services that, in addition to promoting a destination, satisfy a large number of specific consumer expectations.

The nine DMOs established in Bulgaria are registered in the Register of Registered Tourist Associations, Tourism Region Management

²³ World Tourism Organization, Destination management organizations, 2016. Available at: <http://www2.unwto.org/en/category/technical-product-target/destination-management-organizations> [Visited on 01.02.2019] J073v01n02_06?journalCode =wttm20 [Visited on 01.04.2023].

Organisations and Tourism Information Centres, as a result of which it is possible to identify the activities they plan to carry out and also to make an in-depth analysis of the activities carried out by them, in terms of their stated activities in relation to the marketing management of the area for which they were established.

2. Analysis of the activities implemented by the DMOs in Bulgaria

In order to identify and analyze the registered activities as well as to improve the marketing management, an **expert survey** was conducted. It aims to improve the management of tourism regions integrated with the activities of municipalities.

The present expert study was conducted in the period 01.04.2022-31.05.2022.

By preparing this analysis of the currently registered and implemented activities of the DMOs in Bulgaria, expert information on the implementation of the planned activities and related expectations and results is gathered.

This analysis includes a study of the nine tourism regions, according to various factors:

- the describer external and internal activities;
- the created websites or social network profiles;
- the activities carried out since the registration of the organizations.

The comparative analysis includes an analysis of:

- implemented, non-implemented and newly developed activities;
- analysis of the theoretical models of tourism region management by external and internal activities;
- analysis of the possibilities of applying smart innovations to the development of tourism regions, by modelling innovative approaches.

The idea of the analysis is to describe recommendations by individual regions, as well as general ones concerning the modeling of innovative approaches in the management of Organizations for Tourism Region Management.

Research, based on the registration of the nine tourism regions of their external and internal activities

The nine tourism regions were registered between June 2017 and October 2019 as Organizations for Tourism Region Management – legal entities under the Tourism Act (TA). The organisations manage the tourism regions through mutual assistance and cooperation in the interest of their members and carry out activities related to the formation of regional tourism products and the implementation of regional marketing and advertising in the public interest.

The registration procedures of the different regions are similar, as are the activities described in their statutes. The study below identifies both the similar activities and the differences for all the tourist regions together and separately.

The number of listed activities varies in each region, but does not exceed 18, and the following 13 activities can be identified which are listed as activities according to the statutes of all registered organisations:

1. Development and implementation of a marketing strategy for the tourist region in line with the national marketing strategy;
2. Development of the logo and slogan of the tourism region;
3. Organizing marketing research and studies of tourist flow in the tourist region and analyses and forecasts of tourist development;
4. Implementation of branding, public relations and advertising activities of the tourist region;
5. Organising and supporting the activities of tourist information centres in the tourist region;
6. Developing and implementing a tourism development strategy, product strategies and annual tourism development plans for the tourist region in accordance with the National Strategy for Sustainable Tourism Development;
7. Supporting the activities of regional governors and mayors of municipalities in the implementation of tourism development strategies and programmes through opinions and proposals;
8. Assisting the mayors of municipalities in fulfilling their obligations under the Tourism Act;

9. Implementation of projects under European Union programmes;
10. Creation and maintenance of a database on tourism in the tourist region – part of the Unified Tourist Information System;
11. Exchange of information, standards and good practices;
12. Conducting training activities and improving the quality of tourism services;
13. Supporting the development, introduction and implementation of voluntary systems for assessing the quality of tourism services and the sustainable development of the tourist area.

Four Organizations have recorded the above number of activities without including additional activities – the Danube, the Rose Valley, Sofia and Burgas tourism regions. Below in the text is an overview of the additional activities that are included in some of the regions.

Two thirds of all organisations – 6 – were registered within 12 months, in the period 30.03.2018 – 27.03.2019. One of the organisations was registered significantly earlier – „Rhodope“ – in 2017, and two were registered later – in Sofia Tourism Region and Stara Planina Tourism Region.

All organisations have established profiles on Facebook.com. Only one organisation has a website (Trakia Tourism Region) and only the Stara Planina Tourism Region maintains an account on Instagram.com.

Before proceeding to a comparative analysis, it is necessary to identify the main characteristics related to the activities of the tourist regions – Rhodopes, Varna Region, Burgas Region, Rila-Pirin Region, Trakia Region, Dunav Region, Rozova dolina Region, Sofia Region and Stara Planina Tourism Region.

2.1. Analysis of the nine DMOs by main characteristics

1. Management Organisation of Rhodope Tourism Region

Rhodope Tourism Region Management Organisation is the first such organisation registered in Bulgaria as early as 5 June 2017. This is much earlier than the registration of the other organizations and shows good preliminary preparation of the participating municipalities and

tourist associations from the Smolyan, Kardzhali, Plovdiv, Pazardzhik and Haskovo regions. It is noteworthy that not all municipalities in the region are members of the organization – 18 out of 27.

The statutes of the Rhodope Organization include 18 internal and external activities for marketing management of the tourist region. It is noteworthy that apart from pioneering in terms of registration, Organization Rhodope has provided for the largest number of internal and external activities. All the other tourism regions have set between 13 and 16 activities, with the highest number of activities set at 13, mentioned above as minimum and present in all regions. In addition to these, the Rhodope Organization has set out 3 additional activities, and two of these are split.

Rhodope Organization is one of the two organizations (together with the Rila-Pirin Tourism Region) that in item 2, together with the development of a logo and slogan, have included the development of a website – an activity that is absent in 7 of the other 9 organizations. However, this activity has not been implemented.

The inclusion of too many activities on the one hand shows the ambition and motivation of the members of the volunteer in the Organisation. In describing the activities, an attempt was made to cover as much as possible the marketing management activities that would be applicable in the area.

On the other hand, this may lead to difficulties in the implementation of these activities, as it involves the involvement of more members and participants, as well as the provision of more resources. The reduction in tourism employment during the health pandemic will slow down this process and the lack of capacity and funding may result in the inability to implement some of the activities.

The available public information gives reason to believe that in the case of the Rhodopes, the inclusion of too many activities has led to the impossibility of implementing some of them. Examples are:

- According to the public information on the website of the Ministry of Tourism, section „OPIC 2014-2020", it is understood that the development of the marketing strategy (point 1 of the activities) has been implemented. However, the document cannot be found on the website of the Ministry of Tourism, and no website has been developed

for the Rhodopes region (point 2 of the actions) and no further information on the strategy can be found. There is only a Facebook page (reviewed below in section 4.1), from which information on the strategy and other activities cannot be found either.

- From a post on the Facebook page of the Stara Planina Tourism Region, it can be seen that they participated together with the Rhodope Tourism Region at the 17th edition of the International Cultural Tourism Exhibition in Rhodope. The event was held at the 17th International Tourism Fair in Veliko Tarnovo in the period 14-16 April 2022. However, the Organization of Rhodope region does not publish this information on its website, nor does it share the publication of the Stara Planina Tourism Region. A review of the page in this period shows high activity, mostly from sharing posts from other Facebook pages. It can be assumed that the administrators of the Facebook pages of the tourist regions do not follow the Facebook pages of the other regions, i.e. there is a lack of mutual communication through social networks.

- The weak web presence almost 5 years after the registration of the Organization is most likely related to the lack of funding and administrative capacity. Setting up activities that are not provided with the necessary resources leads to their partial or total non-implementation. For other activities, there are objective reasons for delays, such as the health pandemic.

2. Management organization of Varna Black Sea Tourism Region

Although the Varna Tourism Region Management Organisation is the second registered DMO, this happens almost 10 months after the first registration – on 30 March 2018.

There are 10 municipalities that are members of the Varna Tourism Region Management Organization, which is far from the total number of 24 municipalities on the territory of the Varna Tourism Region. In addition to the traditional tourist destinations along the Black Sea coast, the municipalities of Novi Pazar, Vetrino, Valchi dol and Provadia are also present in the organization. Increasing tourist arrivals in these municipalities could boost the other 14 municipalities to join in, together

creating more opportunities and year-round forms of tourism in the area.

In the statutes of the organization are written 16 activities, and in addition to the activities mentioned above in paragraph 3, there are 3 additional activities, which are intended to establish the carrying out of business and any other activity by the organization, to carry out the object and purpose. The inclusion of this activity is not practically feasible as the organizations have neither legal personality nor administrative capacity to offer services due to lack of funding.

According to the public information on the website of the Ministry of Tourism, OPIC 2014-2020 section, it is understood that the development of the marketing strategy (point 1 of the activities) has been implemented. However, the document has not been published on the Ministry of Tourism's website and no information on the strategy and other activities can be found on the Facebook page (reviewed below in section 4.2).

3. Management Organization of Burgas Black Sea Tourism Region

The next registered management organization is Burgas Black Sea Tourism Region – on 05.07.2018, more than 3 months after the organization for the management of Varna Black Sea tourism region. Unlike Varna region, Burgas region has almost all municipalities in the tourist area – 12 out of 14 for Burgas district. This is more than the nominal number of member municipalities in the Varna region and significantly more as a share of those involved in the total number – more than 85% (compared to only 42% in the Varna tourism region).

This shows that there is better coordination and interaction in this region. In one hand, the tourist infrastructure is better developed, and the municipalities without access to the Black Sea coast are actively developing various forms of tourism.

It should be noted that unlike the Varna Tourism Region, which includes a territory of three districts – Varna, Shumen and Dobrich, in Burgas this is limited to the whole Burgas region and one municipality from

the neighbouring district of Yambol-Bolyarovo. This can also affect the improvement of interaction and coordination between the members of the organization.

Information on the website of the Ministry of Tourism, section „OPIK 2014-2020“ it is understood only that the development of the marketing strategy has been implemented. However, the document cannot be found either on the website of the Ministry of Tourism or on the Facebook page (review below in p. 4.3) of the region.

The Burgas tourism region is leading in terms of summer sea tourism in Bulgaria, but there is no data on the implemented marketing activities. Municipalities such as Burgas, Sozopol and Nessebar generate significantly higher revenues from tourist tax, but the funds are not distributed in the budget of the tourist area. Various news sites have published information about visiting tourist exhibitions and presenting the area abroad in order to attract more tourists. It is stated that the main funding for these activities is expected to be from the Municipality of Burgas. No more information is found about the implementation of this type of marketing activity.

4. Management Organization of the Rila-Pirin Tourism Region

The registration of the Management Organization of the Rila-Pirin Tourism Region was also in 2018 – on September 27, 2018.

The management organization of the Rila-Pirin tourism region has set for implementation of 15 activities in its statutes, in addition to the minimum 13 common to all, has also included activities to establish partnerships.

Impressive is the plan for creation of a website along with the making of a logo and a slogan. Rila-Pirin tourist district is one of two organizations (together with Management organization of tourism region „Rhodope“), which has included a website – an activity that is absent in 7 of the other 9 organizations. As with (Management organization of tourism region „Rhodope“), this activity has not yet been completed.

On the territory of this tourism region are municipalities of 4 administrative districts – Blagoevgrad, Kyustendil and Pazardzhik and Sofia.

Thus, the composition of the tourism region includes municipalities from districts that do not border each other but have common tourist products and can develop them together.

However, the organization has all 23 municipalities in the area – 14 from Blagoevgrad district, 5 from Kyustendil, 3 from Sofia district and 1 from Pazardzhik. This shows a high commitment of everyone in the area and the priority of tourism for local economies. Along with winter and / or spa resorts, smaller municipalities are also allowed to develop their tourist potential.

The inclusion of municipalities from different administrative districts creates the potential for development of common tourism products with other neighbour tourism regions. However, the marketing strategy of the Rila-Pirin tourism region is not publicly available. The development has been completed, according to the website of the Ministry of Tourism, but the document cannot be found either on the website of the Ministry of Tourism or on the Facebook page of the region.

5. Management Organization of Trakia Tourism Region

The management organization of the Thracian tourism region is the last registered in 2018 – on November 2, 2018. Among the members of the region are 8 municipalities, which is a low share compared to the total number of municipalities in the area – 35, within 6 districts. Municipalities – centers of regional administrations, such as Pazardzhik, Haskovo and Yambol, are not present among the members.

Trakia tourism region has set in its statutes 16 activities completely identical to those of the Varna tourism region. However, their implementation can be traced much more deeply, unlike the implementation of activities in all other areas.

The implementation of the first activity – development of the marketing strategy, can be reviewed in depth. The strategy is uploaded to the site of the tourism region – trakiatour.com (review below), and this is the only organization that has created an website, without having presented it explicitly as an activity.

The developed marketing strategy covers all 35 municipalities in the area, not just the active members of the organization. 10 proposals for logo and slogan have been made and marketing analyzes and forecasts for tourism development have been made. The implementation of these and other activities shows that with the provided funding under the project BG16RFOP002-2.010-0002 „Increasing the capacity of MSP in the tourism sector, by supporting the establishment and operation of the Management Organizations of Tourism Regions, the maximum volume of activities set out in the statutes has been completed.

For the other set activities, the marketing strategy proposes an Action Plan with an indicative budget of BGN 2.2 million, which will cover advertising activities, behavior monitoring, participation and holding of events and PR.

6. Management Organization of the Dunav Tourism Region

Management Organization of Dunav Tourism Region is the first registered in 2019 – on February 25, 2019. The geographical location of the area is along the Danube River, as well as neighbouring areas in Northern Bulgaria such as Razgrad and Targovishte. Among the members are representatives of 14 municipalities.

The Dunav tourism region is the largest in Bulgaria, covering 21% of the country's territory. The specific location along the Danube River, the larger region, make the connections between the individual municipalities difficult. For example, the distance between the municipality of Bregovo and the center of the region – Ruse is 375 km, taking more than 5 hours by car. The distance is shorter by 50 km if you travel through Romania and this would be a faster way to move (below 5 hours).

This example shows, on the one hand, a lack of good infrastructure between the individual municipalities in the Dunav region, which is an obstacle in general to the development of tourism. The connection between the individual tourist sites is especially important, and the lack of such does not imply the visit of a large number of tourists at all. On the other hand, it is an indicator that the river transport need to be developed much better. Unlike other European countries, where river

transport on navigable rivers, include Dunav, is part of the public transport network, currently along the river. The Danube's only publicly available transport is ferry connections, as well as river cruise ships, which, however, are aimed at foreign tourists.

The statutes of the organization include 13 activities mentioned above, as minimal and common to all. Like most other organizations, the developed marketing strategy is not publicly available. From different internet sites, including Ministry of Tourism, it is understood that the strategy is ready, but also that proposals have been made to change its project. However, the document cannot be found either on the website of the Ministry of Tourism or on the Facebook page (review below) of the region.

The area borders the Republic of Serbia and the Republic of Romania, which should be reflected in the marketing strategy and follow-up to the Action Plan.

7. Management Organization of Rozova Dolina (Rose Valley) Tourism Region

The next registered organization in 2019 is the Management organization of Rozova dolina tourism region – on March 27, 2019. Unlike the Dunav region, this is the organization with the smallest territorial area.

However, there is exceptional activity on the part of the local government towards membership in the organization -19 municipalities. Its geographical location is located around the main road in the area – Republican Road I-6 (the so-called „Sub-Balkan“), which is a prerequisite for good connectivity between different areas.

From the published official information in the Ministry of Tourism, it is clear that the marketing strategy was adopted at a general meeting in November 2021, and was visited by the Minister of Tourism. During the general meeting, another member (Nikolaevo municipality) was adopted. State engagement in the face of the ministry encourages and further motivates municipalities to join organizations.

The statutes of the organization include 13 activities mentioned above, as minimal and common to all. Although information on the general meeting held on 11.11.2021 and the accepted marketing strate-

gy is found in several places, it is not found on the Facebook page (review below) of the region or other internet sites.

8. Management Organization of Sofia Tourism Region

The Management Organization of Sofia Tourism Region is one of the last two registered organizations – on October 7, 2019 and includes 23 municipalities in Sofia, Kyustendil and Pernik regions, as well as Sofia-city with Sofia Municipality.

The statutes of the organization also include 13 activities mentioned above, as minimal and common to all. In a publication of „Sofia View“²⁴ it becomes clear that the marketing strategy was published at the following address on the website of the Ministry of Tourism:

https://www.tourism.government.bg/sites/tourism.government.bg/files/documents/2021-06/06._sofiyski_turisticheski_rayon.pdf, as the same was not active for the period of the present study. According to the available public information, the budget amounts to BGN 3.2 million. The Sofia tourism region is the largest in population, which justifies the higher budget (compared to BGN 2.2 million for „Trakia“ Organization).

The Sofia Tourism Region also does not have an internet page, so the implementation of the set activities cannot be traced.

9. Management Organization of Stara Planina Tourism Region

The last registered management organization is for Stara Planina Tourism Region, on October 18, 2019. This concludes the almost two-year process of registering.

The organization includes 32 municipalities from 5 different administrative districts.

²⁴ „Tourism Development in Sofia Tourist District (STR)“, Nagledno Team, 21.06.2021. Available at: <https://www.tourism.government.bg/bg/pages/destinacii> [Visited on 02.01.2019]

The statutes of the organization include 14 activities – 13 of those mentioned above, as minimal and general for all, and one additional activity related to the implementation of economic activity.

The Stara Planina tourism region also does not have an internet page, so the implementation of the set activities cannot be traced. From the published information on the website of the Municipality of Veliko Tarnovo it is understood that on 24.01.2022 a General Meeting of the Organization was held and „Adoption of a marketing strategy of Stara Planina tourist area 2021 – 2024“ was accepted.

Confirmation that the strategy has been drawn up shows that this activity has been carried out and that part of the other set activities are included in its scope. However, overall implementation cannot be traced due to the lack of a publicly available strategy.

From the analysis of internal and external activities of the DMOs it can be noted that most of the schedules for all tourist areas have not yet been completed. Leading in the implementation of the activities are Rhodope, Trakia, Sofia and Rilo-Pirin tourism regions.

2.2. Analysis of the nine Management Organizations of the Tourism Regions, according to the created sites or profiles on social networks

The study includes the created internet sites and/or profiles in social networks regarding the activities realized from the period of registration of organizations of tourism region. Most organizations are only present on the social network Facebook, with only one having a working website.

1. Management Organization of Rhodope tourism region

The first registered Management organization of tourism region – Rhodope has no internet page created, only a page in Facebook with name Tourist region „Rhodopes“, in the category „Center for Tourist

Information“. The page was created on March 13, 2019, which is almost 2 years since the registration of the organization.

Published page information is incomplete. There is just a telephone number and e-mail for feedback. Predominantly shared audiovisual content from other pages related to Rhodope tourism.

The last author publication, relative to the research period (01.04 – 31.05.22) is from February 24, 2022, in connection with the organization's participation in the 38th edition of the International Tourist Exhibition Vacation & SPA. It is understood from the publication that this is the second participation in the exhibition.

The information published on the Facebook page of the Rhodope tourism region shows that in some of the regions there are already public results from the planned marketing activities for participation in exhibitions laid out in the strategy.

2. Management Organization of Varna Tourism Region

The Varna Black Sea Tourism Region also does not have an established website, but is present only on Facebook with the Varna Black Sea Tourist Region page, in the „Sports and Recreation“ category. The page was created on April 27, 2020 – more than 2 years after the registration of the tourist area.

Several publications were uploaded on the day of creation, including presentation of the organization. After that, the page is dominated by shared posts from other pages and sites, and no additional information about the organization's activities is found.

In the National Tourist Portal of Bulgaria – bulgariatravel.org, there is a contact e-mail for the Varna tourist region with the domain varnatouristregion.org. The name indicates that steps have been taken to develop a website. The domain varnatouristregion.org was registered a few days before the official registration of the organization – on March 21, 2018, which confirms that it is reserved for the purpose of developing a website of the tourist region.

3. Management Organization of Burgas Tourism Region

Burgas Region also does not have a website, but is present only on Facebook with the page Bourgas Black Sea Tourist Region, in the category „Local Travel Website“. The page was created on November 18, 2020, which is again more than 2 years after the registration of the tourist area.

The information on the Facebook page is scarce and does not give an idea of the activities carried out since the registration in 2018 until now. It is noteworthy that the contact email is of the individual who registered the page. This indicates a delay in the implementation of branding and identification marketing activities.

The website of the Ministry of Tourism is listed as the contact website, which confirms the lack of a ready site. It can be seen that the information entered is provisional and should be updated after the completion of the logo and tagline development activities.

4. Management Organization of the Rila-Pirin Tourism Region

The Rila-Pirin Tourism Region is another organization that does not have a website, but is present only on Facebook with the page Rila-Pirin Tourism Region, in the category „Tourist Information Center“. The page was created on March 27, 2020, which is about 1 and a half years after the registration of the tourist area.

There are quite a few author publications, including photographic material, texts with descriptions of various tourist destinations, as well as a video clip about a ski resort. The content is varied, but the description is not enough. An organization contact email is listed.

A publication dated October 19, 2021 contains an invitation to hold a General Meeting, item 4 of the agenda being „Adoption of the Marketing Strategy of the Rilo-Pirinsky Tourist Region for the period 2021-2024 and the attached Communication Plan“.

5. Management Organization of the Trakia Tourism Region

Trakia tourism region is the only one that has a developed website with the domain *trakiatour.com*, registered as early as June 6, 2012.

The domain registration data show that it is reserved by the „Tourism Council – Plovdiv“ association – a non-profit association in whose management the Municipality of Plovdiv participates.

The fact that it is the only organization with a website created, and that the resources of the association have been used, show that its development is the result of the active participation and self-initiative that individual members of the organization have shown.

The developed website contains detailed information about the organization, its members, the types of tourism in the area, as well as the marketing strategy. At the moment, this is the only publicly available marketing strategy of a tourism region, which is an indicator of transparency at work. The strategy shows that participation in events and exhibitions is included in the marketing strategy of the Trakia tourism region, and a three-year budget starting from 2021 is provided for them.

The site has detailed information on membership in the organization, and even a package of membership documents has been prepared.

The developed website is bilingual, and the English version also contains informational materials in Greek. The tourist area borders the Republic of Greece and the Republic of Turkey, therefore targeting tourists from these countries is undoubtedly a good approach, due to the accessibility of the area and the similar natural and cultural-historical attractions to the border areas of the neighboring countries.

In addition to the website, the Trakia Tourism Region has a registered Facebook page *Thracian Tourist Region*, in the „Reference website“ category. The page was created on June 4, 2019, which is less than 1 year after the registration of the tourism region.

The Facebook page is dominated by author posts, photos and 8 videos. From the examined pages in the social networks of tourist organizations, the content on the page of the Trakia region is the most diverse.

In some publications, an English translation of the text is also visible, e.g. invitations to events so that messages reach foreign tourists as well.

The management of the page is in a professional approach, various hashtags, emoticons and marking of different institutions are used, which shows an approach of interaction with other tourist organizations through social networks. Posts are regular.

6. Management Organization of Dunav Tourism Region

The Dunav Tourism Region also does not have a website, but is present only on Facebook with the page Dunav Tourism Region, in the „Community“ category. The page was created on April 12, 2019, which is only a month and a half after the registration of the tourist area.

However, the posts are not regular, e.g. for more than a year (period November 10, 2020 – November 15, 2021) there is not a single post. This can partly be explained by the reduced volume of tourists due to the pandemic.

The content of the publications is different, including live feeds, photos and videos, and information about holding general meetings. This is a good practice for additional publicity, especially when the organization does not yet have a website ready.

In the last two publications regarding general meetings – on December 15, 2020 and December 17, 2021, the agenda of the meetings to adopt plans and reports for 2019, 2020 and 2021 was published. In neither published one day no information is found about the adoption of the marketing strategy. It is possible that the same to be content of another agenda that has not been published.

7. Management Organization of Rozova dolina Tourism Region

The management organization of Rozova dolina tourism region, like almost all other organizations, does not have a website, but is only pre-

sent on Facebook with the Rozova dolina Tourist Area page in the Landmark and Historic Place category. The page was created on May 19, 2019, less than 2 months after the registration of the tourism region.

The publications are also not regular, significantly decreasing after September 2020 and for almost a year – until August 2021 there is not a single publication. The content is varied, uploading photos, posts, invitations to events.

In a publication dated January 16, 2020, information is found about the first meeting of the General Assembly for 2020. At the same time, it was agreed that the development of a website would be part of the next meeting. No additional information is available regarding the future development of the website, as well as the stage of readiness.

The website of the Ministry of Tourism has published information from the meeting of the General Assembly from 11.11.2021, at which the marketing strategy was adopted. It is clear from the publication that a decision has been made to participate in the International Tourist Exhibition Vacation & SPA. Unlike the Rhodope tourism region, photos and subsequent information from the exhibition are not published on the Facebook page.

8. Management Organization of Sofia Tourism Region

The organization for the management of the Sofia Tourism Region also does not have a website, but is present only on Facebook with the page Sofia Tourism Region, in the category „Tourist Information Center“. The page was created on March 24, 2020 – almost half a year after the registration of the tourism region.

Page posts are regular, with periodic sharing of content from other pages predominating. Content includes photos, video, event invitations, and electronic media posts.

No information can be found about the general meetings held, therefore it cannot be established when the marketing strategy was adopted. Partial information can be found on the website of Operation program

„Tourism“ of the Sofia Municipality, but it only concerns the establishment.

Although the Sofia tourism region is the largest in terms of population, the activity of the organization is one of the opaquet, compared to the rest of the reviewed tourist regions.

9. Management Organization of Stara Planina Tourism Region

The management organization of the Stara Planina Tourism Region also does not have a website, but is present only on Facebook with the page Stara Planina Tourist Region, in the category „Local Travel Website“. The page was created on March 24, 2020 – almost half a year after the registration of the tourism region.

Posts on the page are regular and include a variety of content, including and copyright. A high level of activity is observed when interacting with other institutions, which can also be seen in the „Mentions“ section. This shows a professional attitude to the management of the page and active use of social network functions in order to reach a wider range of users.

Stara Planina tourism region is the only organization that has announced that it also uses the social network Instagram. The profile is named Stara planina tourist region and is found with the following search@stara_planina_tourist_region. The presentation on Instagram is in English, the published photos and their descriptions are in Bulgarian.

It is understood from the publications on social networks that the tourist area participated in the 17th edition of the International Exhibition „Cultural Tourism“ in the city of Veliko Tarnovo, and from the photos it can be seen that other tourist areas also participated in the exhibition, such as DMO Rhodope.

After the analysis of the external activities of DMO, regarding the presence and activity in social networks, it is necessary to make a comparative analysis of the activities registered and carried out, as well as

to consider the application of the leading theoretical models for the management of tourism regions, considered in the first chapter.

2.3. Comparative analysis of the marketing management of the DMOs

The analysis is made on the basis of the implemented, unimplemented and rescheduled new activities by the Management Organizations of the 9 tourism regions.

It can be noted that all Management Organizations have a total of 13 activities, defined above as minimum. In addition to these, individual organizations add other activities that are relevant to the fulfilment of their goals. Applying M. Rowden's business identification, we can note that scheduled activities other than the main tourist activities are an advantage for the tourist area. In this way, the respective areas stand out from their competitors.

In the analysis, it can be concluded that all the organizations have carried out the first activity laid down in Article 5, paragraph 2, point 1 of the adopted statute, namely development of *a marketing strategy for the tourism regions*.

From the collected public information, it is clear that the strategies have been drawn up, and for individual tourist areas the decisions of the general meetings which adopt the strategies are found, i.e. the same should now be implemented.

The implementation of the marketing strategies is the second part of the activity, and the research found a lack of transparency and information on the implementation of the strategies for most tourist areas.

The creation of a website can be defined as a non-implemented activity, since only one tourist organization (Trakia Tourism Region) has developed one. Although this activity is not always included in the statute, its implementation is important in order to ensure publicity and implement the marketing policy for the tourism region.

In two of the organizations – DMO Rhodope and DMO Rila-Pirin Tourism Regions, the creation of an internet site is explicitly included in the statute, but despite this, no data can be found that this has been fulfilled.

Regarding social networks, it was found that all organizations have created pages for the respective tourist area on Facebook. One of the organizations has also created a page on Instagram. The management of these pages has a different approach, but in most cases the published information is up-to-date, with the differences being in the shares of shared and authored content.

In connection with the planned activity of creating a logo and slogan and after familiarizing yourself with the only publicly available marketing strategy, it can be assumed that the same are proposed in the strategy. Some of them are already actively used and can be seen on social network pages, while others lack any information. Information about the created logo and slogan is found only for 3 organizations:

- Tourism region „**Rhodope**“ – does not have a published logo and slogan on its Facebook page. In published photos from tourism expos, it is seen that the logo and slogan „**Hospitality in Four Seasons**“ has been chosen. *The schedule slogan is also applicable to Bulgaria, as a tourist destination. On the other hand, it covers the four-season mountain, rural, health, adventure, cultural and religious tourism. The emphasis is on hospitality management, which in recent years has not been emphasized in the marketing management of most tourist destinations.*

- **Trakia** tourism region – in the marketing strategy there are 10 proposals for a logo and a slogan. From the Facebook page, it is seen that one of the suggestions has been uploaded, which may mean that the same has been approved. The tagline for this logo is „**A Feast for the Senses**“. *The slogan authentically speaks to the potential consumer about one of the main specializations of the region – wine tourism. Cultural, business, urban-entertainment and health, however, remain out-*

side the focus of the slogan. We can point out that the innovations proposed in the scientific research aimed at wine and spa and wine and business tourism are relevant in the implementation of the strategy of the tourism region. It would be appropriate to expand the slogan by including elements of business and city-entertainment tourism.

• **Stara Planina** tourism region – has a published logo and slogan „**Reveal the secrets of the Balkans**“ on its Facebook and Instagram pages. *This slogan exactly corresponds to the main specialization – mountain and eco tourism – and it is possible to lead us to adventure, rural and religious.*

The created logo and slogan of the three tourist areas contribute to the creation of a brand, which is an extremely important component of the business identification of tourist destinations, from ch.t. of area-specific hospitality products, four-season product, sensory marketing, and adventure tourism opportunities.

The remaining 6 organizations have not published information about the proposed and/or selected logo and slogan of the tourism organization.

The implementation of the other marketing activities laid down in the statute cannot be analyzed due to the lack of publicity regarding the marketing strategy.

*A review of **draft laws** shows that changes are proposed to the Tourism Law, according to which the creation of a website would be included in the activities of the DMO. This means that all Management organizations of tourism regions, with the exception of DMO „Rhodope“ and DMO Rila-Pirin, will have to undertake amendments to their statutes so that they correspond to the change in the law.*

However, as seen from the review, this formality should not be an obstacle to the development of a website. DMO Trakia tourism region has already developed a website, and DMO Varna Black Sea tourism region have reserved a domain to use for their future website.

A more detailed review of the draft law shows that there are changes to be made to address some of the problems identified in the current

analysis. It is planned that DMO will acquire legal independence, which will be an opportunity to build administrative capacity and receive funding through various projects, including European. The review found that some of the organizations have included this activity in their statutes, but it is practically unenforceable due to the lack of an DMO statute. The changes to the Tourism Law will solve this problem while also enabling financial support from the Ministry of Tourism.

According to the analysis of the scheduled activities and the theoretical models of destination management presented by Prezenza, Ricci and Crouch, we can summarize that currently DMO implements activities related to external marketing, mainly related to Web marketing and partly with participation in exhibitions and festivals, which are part of their developed plans and strategies.

It is recommended that the sites created link to the Ministry of Tourism sub-site named „Destinations“²⁵, thus destination development and visit management will support visitor access. This can be applied mainly to tourist areas developing health and spa tourism, wine-culinary tourism and cultural-historical tourism.

On the website of the tourism region „Trakia“ references can be placed to the same sub-site related to the routes for wine-culinary tourism, cultural-historical and health.

The last analysis concerning the development of the regions in terms of the internal activities related to the modeling of innovative approaches, through the application of smart innovations, is extremely important for the general objectives of the scientific research.

Opportunities for applying smart innovations

The introduction of smart innovations requires the construction of an infrastructure to be used by the various tools of smart tourism. This implies a strong commitment of the state through the central and territorial

²⁵ <https://www.tourism.government.bg/bg/pages/destinacii>

administrations of the executive power. In the marketing strategies of DMO, there are no funds for the introduction of innovative tourism products.

In transitional studies of the members of the collective on the subject, it was established that for the construction of intelligent infrastructure to be used for the development of smart destinations, an important role is played by **coordinated actions** at the level of a municipality or region. This coordination is at the heart of the Ritchie and Crouch model of destination external development activities, in which important units of coordination are crisis management, human resource development, financing and sustainable development activities, which should provide a quality product offering and consumer information.

This makes tourism region management organizations suitable units to coordinate the introduction of smart innovations on the territory of the region.

The participation of DMO in the process of building an intelligent infrastructure will enable the lesser-known and visited tourist sites to receive a tourist flow directed to the main and most recognizable destinations.

Some of the tourist areas have achieved a high share of the participating municipalities as members in the organization, which is a prerequisite for the successful application of the tools of intelligent tourism. The general commitment of the members of the organizations from the municipalities to these processes is a fundamental step for the development of smart tourism.

Bulgaria lags behind significantly in the processes of building intelligent infrastructure, which requires serious investments, including and building a 5G network. The pace of construction suggests that the introduction of smart services based on fifth generation wireless communication, as can be seen, begins first in large cities and leading tourist ones, including the best developed resort complexes. The cities selected as centers of the tourist areas can start with a pilot implementation of various services at the local level in the individual tourist sites. Currently, there are already leading smart cities and resorts – such as Sozopol, de-

clared a smart city and Sunny Beach with the numerous introduced similar services.

As the construction of the network progresses, the same will be able to be transferred to more remote locations.

As a result of the expert comparative analysis of the marketing management of the existing DMO, the following conclusions and recommendations can be made.

• Transparency of the activities of the organizations

Not all tourist organizations have the same degree of publicity of their activity on the Internet. Only the Trakia tourism region has publicity of all its activities through its website – marketing strategy, statutes, board of directors, etc.

Dunav, Rila-Pirin and Rozova dolina tourism regions do not have websites, but use their Facebook pages to inform the public about the agenda of the general meetings of the Board. DMO Stara Planina tourism regions has also published all the documents from the registration through Facebook. With other organizations, there is no such publicity, and with some there is also a reduction in the level of publicity, e.g. the file with the developed marketing strategy of the Sofia tourism region has been deleted.

It is recommended to increase the level of publicity as a prerequisite for wider public involvement in the implementation of the marketing strategy.

• Commitment of the country

From the studied data on the initial registration, it can be seen that not all municipalities on the territory of the tourism regions have expressed their desire to participate in the organizations as members. In places, this share is close to a 1/3 of all municipalities in the tourism regions. It is noticed that during a general meeting of an organization in the presence of the Minister of Tourism, membership applications are received from new municipalities. By increasing the involvement of the state through the Ministry of Tourism or regional administrations, a higher number of

municipalities are encouraged and motivated to become members of the organizations.

The participation of the maximum number of municipalities in the management organizations will enable the development of common products at the regional level, which will help the implementation of the state policy for tourist zoning. The country should ensure greater presence in the implementation of marketing strategies.

- **Marketing of border areas**

All tourism regions, except for the DMO Rozova dolina, have a border zone with Bulgaria's neighbouring country/s. In some of the regions, it is noticeable that, in addition to materials in English, they also provide materials in Greek, as there are different forms of tourism in the border regions. In the Dunav region, for example, remote border cultural-tourism sites are more than 3 hours away by car from the nearest international airport and it is more rational to advertise them to tourists from neighbouring countries who arrive by car. It is recommended to develop alternative transport links, including navigable, with neighbouring countries.

- **Development of economic activity**

Two of the Management organizations of tourism regions – Varna and Stara Planina – have included additional activities, outside of the 13 general activities, aimed at the development of economic activity not prohibited by law. Explicit desire shows that organizations have a vision to offer value-added services.

At the moment, however, they cannot carry out such, despite the explicit provision in the statute. *With a draft Law on Amendments and Supplements to the Law on Tourism, included in the legislative/operational program of the Council of Ministers for the period January 1 – June 30, 2022, Art. 19, para. 1, giving the possibility to DMO to carry out economic activity.*

It is recommended that the other Organizations, apart from the Varna and Stara Planina regions, start preparations and talks with partner organizations for the development of economic activity.

- **Presence in different channels**

Only one organization – DMO Stara Planina tourism region maintains a profile on the Instagram social network, which is more popular for sharing photos and video content. A presence in various channels will help the marketing strategy to reach a larger number of potential visitors to the tourist area. In the course of the implementation of the marketing strategy, the online presence will significantly increase, including and in social networks. However, it is recommended to start sharing content now so that the same can be built upon and achieve sustainability that continues beyond the marketing campaign.

- **Unification of domains and websites**

The only developed website is that of the Trakia tourism region, but its domain *trakiatour.com* was reserved as early as 2012. In practice, only one organization – Varna, registered a new domain with the address *varnatouristregion.org*, in March 2018. The domain with the extension. *org* is suitable for use by organizations, and with this extension is also the National Tourist Portal *bulgariatravel.org*. *In order to unify and build a complete branding of the concept of tourist zoning, the domain names for the remaining areas are recommended to be similar.*

- **Unification of performance on social networks**

In a similar way, the presentation on Facebook should be unified. The registered pages of the management organizations of the 9 tourism regions are in 6 different categories on Facebook – Tourist Information Center; Sports and recreation; Landmark and historical place; Local travel website; Reference Web Site and Community. The most regions chose the category „Tourist Information Center“ – 3 organizations, as well as the category „Local Travel Website” – 2 organizations. *It is necessary to clarify the status of the DMOs according to the categories on Facebook,*

as well as to include the common elements of tourism zoning in their presentation.

- **Improving communication through social networks**

One tourism region shared photos with another tourism region from an exhibition on Facebook, but no information about the exhibition is found on the second district's Facebook profile, nor is the post shared. Mutual communication and interaction of tourism regions through social networks is especially important in the beginning. Thus, common progress is made at a pace in building and interacting with similar followers. Subsequently, there can be serious discrepancies in the presentation of individual tourist areas on the Internet. There is a lack of communication between tourism regions in social networks. *Improvement is needed in this process, by sharing joint publications to build a comprehensive view of tourism zoning.*

- **Simplification of administrative procedures**

The organizations are represented by management boards that have an elected chairman, in general the mayor of a municipality from the region. The Chairman of the Board was changed after holding local elections or resignation in two of the examined organizations. This puts an administrative burden on the organizations, requiring the holding of a new general meeting to elect a new chairman. The lack of legal personality of the organizations requires municipalities and other members to participate with their representatives, which is related to an additional procedure, for example. for the municipalities, it is necessary to submit a decision to a municipal council, which is subsequently discussed by the management board of the DMO, this mean that the change must pass through two collective bodies. This takes a long time, during which the organization may be without a chairman, for example the mayor of Blagoevgrad was elected in July 2021, and it was only in November 2021 that a general meeting of the Rila-Pirin Tourism Region was held, at which he was elected chairman. *It is recommended to*

work in the direction of simplifying the administrative procedures and shortening the deadlines for changes in the chairman's positions.

• Inclusion of DMO in the construction of digital infrastructure for smart tourism

DMOs have the conditions to successfully coordinate the introduction of smart innovations on the territory of the region, since the construction of the infrastructure should not be only in a specific tourism region and this is confirmed by good European practices. In this way, even in less visited tourism regions, it will be possible to apply the tools of smart tourism, which will also increase the tourist flow to them. *It is recommended that the management organizations of tourism regions follow the European initiative „European Capital of Smart Tourism“, informing their members – municipalities, about the good practices and the possibilities of their application in the specific region.*

The research and comparative analysis made contribute to the creation of a model for an innovative approach to improve the marketing management of existing tourist areas, as well as to create their business identification.

3. Model for innovative approach for management of the tourism regions in Bulgaria

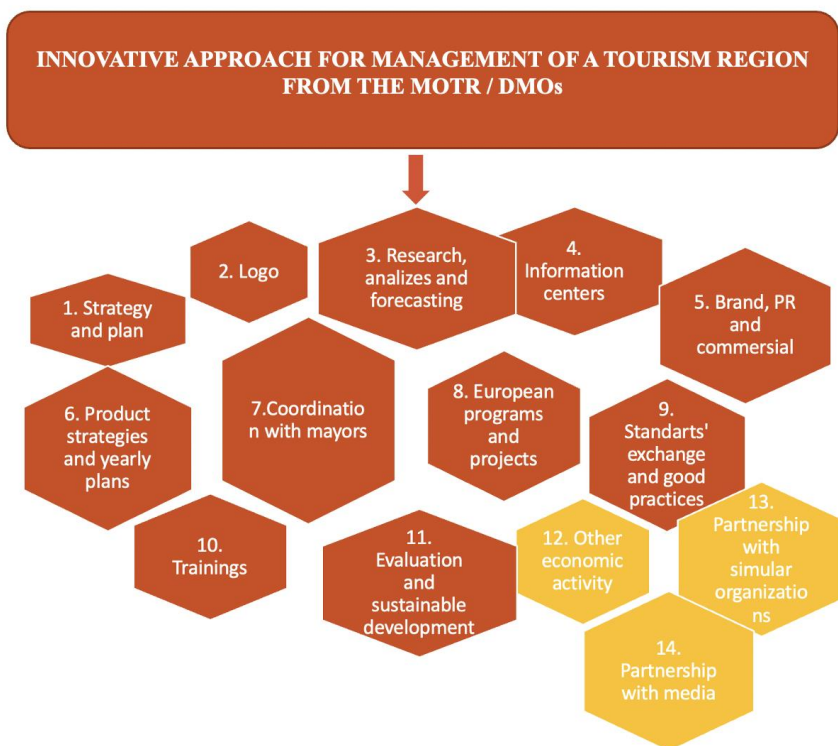
Based on a study carried out to evaluate the marketing management of the Management organizations of tourism regions in Bulgaria, through an *expert analysis* of the registered, implemented and supplemented activities of the Organizations of the existing 9 tourism regions, **an innovative approach to marketing management is modelled**. It is based on the theoretical concepts of the conceptual and the descriptive model of destination management, the founders of which are A. Prezenza and Ritchie & Crouch, and includes the components of the most important activities carried out in the management of regions. These models are applied modified in the practice of developed tourist countries, as already indicated. In the

practical part of the research and the current model, we believe that it is advisable to apply the descriptive model by the Organizations themselves, because it prioritizes some elements over others for a specific time period. In this case some elements are considered more important and are emphasized, while others, not so problematic, are considered secondary in importance when defining the organization's tasks. In this regard, in fig. 1 the display size of the different indicators is different. This aims to show that Organizations can give different priorities in the management of the regions, according to the stage they are at. In Fig. 1. we have not set ourselves such a task, since it is an example of the management of all regions. In contrast to the descriptive model, the conceptual model considers all elements of these two pillars as equally important in the management of the destination and therefore in the operation of the DMO.

The implementation of an innovative management model of tourism regions will have an impact on the activities carried out by DMO and listed in their statutes and their registration. For its part, the implementation of all scheduled activities contributes to the sustainable management of both tourist areas and municipalities, as well as the complex approach to managing destination Bulgaria.

In order to clarify the following figure, it is necessary to note that some of the activities involved in the registration of all the DMOs are combined in two, according to their functional feature, as well as for the purpose of better presentation and visualization, as a result of which in 11 main activities are systematized in the model, which are valid and scheduled for all DMOs. *In this way, the mandatory activities for all DMOs become a total of 11 in number and are marked in dark color in the figure. In a lighter color in the figure, the additional 3 activities are marked, which are not present in the statutes of all DMOs, but which represent an opportunity for the development of the destination and, in our opinion, should be included in the management model of the tourism region.*

Figure 1. Indicators for managing a tourism region from the DMOs



Source: Authors' systematization

These indicators are included in various management and marketing analyzes, on the basis of which a model for an innovative management approach is created to be applied by the DMOs modified.

The construction of an innovative model for marketing management of tourism regions in Bulgaria goes through several stages, including a series of analyses, ending with the development of a technological prescription of internal and external activities in the management of destinations, the implementation of which would improve both

the management of the regions and of the tourism business. The stages include:

- Analysis of Bulgaria as a receptive market – in the current model we apply the matrix of the Boston Consulting Group to derive the market share and growth of the 9 tourism regions according to the number of realized visits.
- Analysis of the activity of the 9 Management organizations of tourism regions in Bulgaria (identification of the life cycle in the management of the 9 regions).
- Formulation of priorities for the overall management of tourism regions and according to the business identification of the regions (according to their priority types of specialized tourism).

The last stage, which is based on a SWOT analysis, is recommended to be carried out by the DMO. It includes the formulation of priorities for the overall management of tourism regions and according to the business identification of the regions – their specialization by types of tourism. In the present study, it is not subject to application.

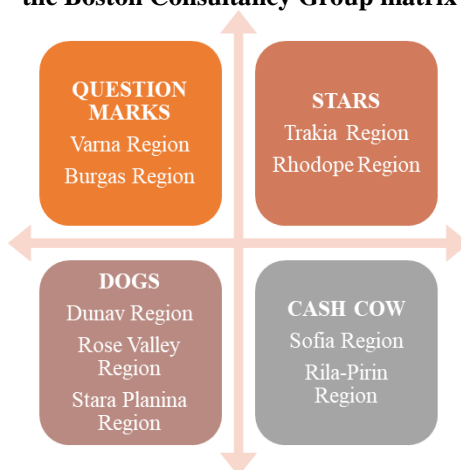
After listing the stages of the innovative approach for marketing management of tourism regions in Bulgaria, we move on to each one of them, with the aim of forming the model.

Analysis of the areas, according to the Boston Consultation Group matrix

This analysis is based on the application of the Matrix of the Boston Consulting Group, based on a systematization of activities based on leadership practices and achieved good results in the management of some of the areas.

Matrix of the Boston Consultancy Group

Figure 2. Analysis of the nine tourism regions along the Boston Consultancy Group matrix



Source: Authors' systematization

In order to identify the available tourist products, the demands and expectations of tourists related to innovative opportunities for the development of tourist destinations, regional data are analyzed, on the basis of which the analysis of the Matrix of the Boston Consulting Group is based.

Looking at the **number of visits** to the various sites and settlements, based on regional data, the following characteristics can be deduced in all tourist areas:²⁶

- The Cash Cows, in the analysis of tourist areas, include the Sofia tourist area, as well as the Rila-Pirin area, as they are well developed and known among international and Bulgarian tourists, which is why a low market growth has been observed in recent years.

²⁶ Tsonev, N., Ianeva, M. et. al. Development of the tourism regions in Bulgaria by modeling innovative approaches in specialized types of tourism. (Tourism regions. Defining destination characteristics. Specificity and resources), UNWE Publishing Complex, Sofia, 2023, p. 19 – 61.

- In Stars we would define Trakia Region and Rhodope Region, as the former has seen a large increase in visits in recent years, especially after the announcement of Plovdiv as the European Capital of Culture in 2019, and the Rhodope Region has seen a large increase in visits, especially in the Spa capital of The Balkans – Velingrad, due to the mineral water sources and the development of health tourism.

- In the area of Question Marks, we represent Varna Region and Burgas Region. They are widely popular in the field of sea tourism, but they have not yet gained much popularity among tourists as far as specialized types of tourism are concerned, and despite the increased number of visits, they have not gained wide fame and a developed market share in Bulgaria, compared to other tourist areas.

- In the group of Dogs – with a low market growth and market share, we could place the Dunav Region, the Stara Planina Region and the Rose Valley Region, as they have experienced lower market growth in recent years and do not yet have an established high market share.

*Based on this analysis, it is found that it is appropriate to choose **Sofia, Burgas and Rhodope regions** as a basis for creating a model with an innovative management approach, due to their place in the current analysis.*

After clarifying the market share and the market growth of the tourist areas, we move on to an analysis of the life cycle of the 9 DMOs, in relation to their management and the planned and completed activities so far.

Life cycle in the management of the 9 tourism regions

The product life cycle is a marketing concept that takes into account the stages a product/destination goes through over time. The classic product life cycle has four stages: market introduction stage, growth stage, maturity stage, saturation stage and decline stage. The author's collective believes that for a comprehensive analysis of the management of tourism regions, the use of this marketing approach is appropriate to establish what stage the Organizations are at and what are the next steps

that need to be taken for their future development and successful management.

From the comparative analysis made above of the activities implemented by the Management organizations of the 9 tourism regions, it became clear that all the Organizations have a total of 13 activities set as minimum, which for the purposes of the study are summarized in 11. Thus, it is concluded that all organizations have carried out the first activity, namely developing a *marketing strategy*. From the collected public information, it is clear that two of the activities have been implemented – prepared strategies and Facebook, which helps to form a brand, PR and advertising of the area, but it is not enough. In connection with the planned activity of creating a logo and slogan, it can be assumed that they are proposed in the strategy, and some of them are already actively used and can be seen on the Internet.

Regarding the management of tourism regions, they are all in a growth stage, because according to marketing theory, at this stage, society gains awareness of the organizations themselves, and potential tourists of the areas understand their benefits and accept them.

We believe that all DMOs have managed to inform the public and other interested parties about their establishment, plan, strategy and planned activities. This is the stage where Organizations can work on improving their activities and improving their management by applying an innovative model and specialized approaches.

Taking into account everything stated so far, we move to the **final stage of the preparation of a model for an innovative approach to the management of a tourism region**, namely the formulation of the specific activities that **Management Organizations of Tourism Regions (DMOs) could undertake** and/or coordinate, in order to develop tourist areas, as well as the development and implementation of specialized tourist products.

In the present study, we present only **some basic activities**, which may be expanded according to subsequent analyses. The stated main activities are grouped, based on the principles of destination marketing

management, and more specifically – their grouping into internal and external activities, according to the mentioned model of A. Prezenza²⁷.

The position of the authors is that *four main recommendations can be derived, which are relevant for each of the nine regions, and their implementation would lead to the improvement of their management, accordingly to innovations in their product offering, and also to the formation of general brand Bulgaria with separate sub-brands. The recommendations are as follows:*

- Improving the informational presentation and tourist opportunities of the regions in terms of the offered products and services on electronic sites and social networks.

- Creation and maintenance of an up-to-date database of sights/attractions in the region, with priority given to natural ones, based on the Register of Tourist Attractions.

- Implementation of innovative approaches in the presentation and promotion of the tourist opportunities of the region, through virtual platforms with selected sites and tourist routes, video clips of different formats, interactive approaches for presenting images and information, and others.

- Linking the approaches to presentation and promotion of the regions in a common brand and sub-brands in the management and promotion of destination Bulgaria.

²⁷ Ianeva, M., Portarska, V., Management aspects of the product specialization of a tourist region, *Revue européenne du droit sociale* 45 (4), 57, 2019, p. 60 – 61. Available at: <http://www.revueeuropeenne-du-droitsocial.ro/reviste/nr45/nr45.pdf#page=49>

Table. 2. Activities in the innovative model for the management of tourism regions from DMOs

INTERNAL	Expansion of the set criteria in the regulation, in order to effectively manage the destinations. Ensuring transparency of the organizations' activities. Business development. Creating innovative themed.
EXTERNAL	Implementation and use of innovative approaches to tourist information. Promotion of interstate partnerships. Strengthening partner relationships. Implementation of innovative approaches in offering specialized products typical of the region.

In conclusion, we can summarize that a change is needed in the regulatory framework – the Tourism Law – in order for the Organizations to work effectively. Already at the end of 2021, such proposals were submitted, which went through public consultations and were supposed to be submitted to the parliament by June 2022. In this regard, the Statutes of the DMO need to be updated, and it is best to become effective upon entry into force of changes in the Tourism Law.

The budget of the organizations does not include funds for the development of innovative products. Regions must rely on other organizations to build the necessary technological infrastructure, incl. 5G which still has poor coverage outside cities.

As a result of all these, the following **general recommendations** can be made:

1. More publicity and transparency

It is recommended to increase the level of publicity as a prerequisite for wider public involvement in the implementation of the marketing

strategy. Internet presence and sharing of information with the general public is taken into account.

2. Participation of more municipalities

In some areas, a low level of activity from the municipalities that are members of the DMO is noticeable, and in some places it is below 50%. The participation of the maximum number of municipalities in the management organizations will enable the development of common products at the regional level. The commitment of the state to encourage and motivate a higher number of municipalities to become members of the organizations can be increased.

3. Marketing in border areas

All regions, except Rozova dolina, border at least 1 country. In some regions, such as Dunav, the nearest international airport is abroad, much closer than the Bulgarian airports, and tourists from neighbouring countries arriving by car should be as important as those arriving at Sofia, Varna or Burgas airport. There should be more advertising materials in Greek, Romanian or Serbian.

4. Economic activity

Organizations have a desire to develop economic activity and some have explicitly indicated this in the statute. Given the proposed changes in the law on tourism, it is good for the other organizations that have not provided for such activities in their statutes to think about what economic activity they can develop.

5. More internet channels

6. Unified vision and branding

7. Administrative burden

The procedures for changes in the chairmanships should be simplified and the deadlines should be shorter. They take a long time, during

which the organization can be left without a chairman. Such an example is the mayor of Blagoevgrad, who was elected as such in July 2021, but became the chairman of the Rila-Pirin tourism region after 5 months, when a general meeting was held.

The innovative approaches modeled in this way, including studies, analyses, algorithms and technological prescriptions, are the basis for the future development of the tourist regions in Bulgaria, as well as the priority specialized types of tourism.

The created innovative model aims to support the improvement of the marketing management of tourism regions in Bulgaria by DMO.

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UNIVERSITY OF NATIONAL AND WORLD ECONOMY**

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