

PROMOTION OF THE OHRID REGION AS A TOURIST DESTINATION

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***Abstract:** Thanks to its lake, natural beauty and rarities, mountains, national park, and, above all, rich historical and cultural heritage complemented by many small details that could be incorporated into alternative forms of tourism, which are currently a global trend, the Ohrid region has the potential to become a recognizable tourist destination and a successful player in the global tourism market. To develop the Ohrid region into an attractive tourist destination, its development should be based on its own strategic advantages, which need to be made recognizable and adapted to the needs of target tourist markets. The strategic advantages for the development of the Ohrid region are its cultural-historical and natural values, Lake Ohrid, and Galichica National Park, with a diverse and ecologically high-quality environment, whose value will provide long-term competitive advantage. For this purpose, this paper emphasizes the importance of the need to explore all important individual natural and anthropogenic resources that make the region unique and different from other destinations and to offer such a range of tourist products that will meet the needs of modern tourists. An essential part of the development of an established tourist destination, and thus the Ohrid region, is promotion, which enables the destination to enter the international tourism market. Promotion of the Ohrid region outside the country, but also within its borders, is one of the most significant measures that have significantly increased the number of domestic and foreign tourists in recent years. Past experiences indicate that there is insufficient knowledge about the Ohrid region among foreign clients. Therefore, this paper emphasizes the importance of taking steps to develop and promote the Ohrid region as an attractive tourist destination.*

***Keywords:** tourism, region, alternative forms of tourism, tourist destination, Ohrid region, promotion.*

Introduction

The general meaning of promotion is described as "the process of mass communication between producers and consumers, where the subject of communication is the exchange of information which can encourage the sale of products and services¹. This definitions emphasize the fundamental role of promotion, which is to persuade potential consumers about the benefits they will receive if they purchase or use the products and services being promoted.

The promotion involves a series of activities aimed at raising awareness among potential tourists about the existence of a particular tourist destination and the products and services it offers. The primary goal of promotion is communication between providers of tourist offerings and potential tourists, where the subject of communication is the exchange of information that should encourage and simultaneously increase the sales of tourist products and services. Modern tourists want to know in advance what a tourist trip entails because they, even in the initial phase of decision-making about their trip, choose destinations that can satisfy their specific tourism needs. Tourist destination promotion has the objective of motivating potential tourists to visit and stay in a particular destination, which could be a tourist place, region, or country². (Bakić ,1995).

Effective promotion will stimulate potential tourists to visit this region and provide them with relevant information about the geographical, cultural-historical, natural, and other characteristics of the Ohrid region as a tourist destination. By promoting Ohrid and the region, one of the main goals will be achieved, which is attracting a larger number of foreign tourists.

For this purpose, a series of activities are being undertaken to promote the region and position it in the European and global tourism market. The local and economic development sector is announcing targeted promotions in countries they consider potential areas for attracting new tourists but are not sufficiently familiar with the beauty of this destination and the tourist offerings it provides. Promoting the Ohrid region outside the country is one of the most significant measures that have significantly increased the number of foreign tourists in recent years. To carry out a successful promotion of tourism in this tourist destination, several basic questions need to be

¹ Попеску, Ј. (2011): Менаџмент туристичке дестинације, Универзитет Сингидунум, Београд

² Бакић, О., Матић Љ. (1995). Стратегија Туристичке организације Београда у наступу на међународно и (домаће) туристичко тржиште, Туристичка организација Београда, Београд.

addressed, and appropriate answers need to be found. Based on this, activities related to the promotion of the Ohrid region can be created.

Who is the target audience for the promotional activities?

To answer this question, we can use the segmentation of the region, which will help us determine the specific target audience for the promotional activities. As mentioned earlier, for the segmentation of the tourism market in the Ohrid region, foreign tourists can be considered as a criterion. These are often profiles of tourists who seek new, unfamiliar, distant, and attractive destinations that are preserved, unpolluted, safe, creative, and rich in culture and tradition. To properly shape the promotional activities, excellent guidelines are provided by the target groups, or tourists to whom the focus will be directed.

The markets to which promotional activities should be directed primarily include neighboring countries such as Serbia, Greece, Bulgaria, and Albania, as well as countries like the Netherlands, Germany, Austria, Croatia, Montenegro, the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia, Romania, and Italy. Additionally, in recent times, markets such as China, Portugal, Australia, Canada, and Russia have gained importance.

The goals for promoting the Ohrid region are closely linked and align with the goals for the development of this region as an attractive destination. The goals should be clear, specific, and measurable. The goals for promoting the Ohrid region include 1. Creating a recognizable identity. 2. Positioning the Ohrid region as an attractive and desirable tourist destination on the international market. 3. Raising awareness among tourists from distant countries such as China, Russia, and Australia about the existence of the Ohrid region as an attractive tourist destination 4. Restoring trust among Western European tourists, especially from the Netherlands, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Germany, and Scandinavian countries. 5. Increasing the number of foreign tourists in the Ohrid region. 6. Rekindling interest among domestic tourists to visit Ohrid. 7. Developing selective forms of tourism

It is of great importance to choose the media or channels that will convey the message because the success of the promotion often depends on this choice. When promoting the Ohrid region, various communication channels can be used, including participation in tourism fairs, advertising in print, radio, and television, creating tourist films and thematic spots, and shooting reports about the natural and cultural attractions. One of the most successful ways to promote the

region is through a significant presence in tourism magazines, which, through videos, photos, and information, effectively showcase all the values it offers. Therefore, according to the portal "Earth traveling," the city of Ohrid and Ohrid Lake are among the ten most beautiful places on the Balkan Peninsula. In the list of the most beautiful places are Lake Bled in Slovenia, Plitvice Lakes in Croatia, Sveti Stefan in Montenegro, Meteora in Greece, Mostar in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Nessebar in Bulgaria, Dracula's Castle in Romania, Saranda in Albania, and Nis in Serbia. The presence of the city and Ohrid Lake in such prestigious tourism magazines has a significant impact on promoting the region worldwide.

Forms of Promotion for the Ohrid Region

One of the main characteristics of tourism products and services is their intangibility. This means that the tourism market, when promoting its products, cannot physically showcase them. Due to this unique specificity, there is a need to find various alternatives for "tasting" the tourism product and service. One way to achieve successful promotion of the Ohrid region is to intensify promotional activities, such as implementing intensive PR activities, promoting sales at fairs, exhibitions, and study trips, utilizing various forms of advertising on both domestic and foreign markets, employing E-marketing, and emphasizing the constant updating of websites, among other strategies.

This is a continuous process that requires consistency and the successful transmission of the promotional message to potential tourists, who, through various forms and content, will influence their awareness.

Promotional Tools as a Form of Promotion

The most important activities and forms of promotion that can be implemented to promote the Ohrid region as an attractive tourist destination include:

Creation and Use of Graphic Promotional Materials:

Catalogs: Developing catalogs that serve as comprehensive guides to the entire range of offerings in the region, including detailed descriptions of accommodation facilities and other hospitality establishments. These catalogs should be creatively designed and printed in multiple languages to cater to the needs of various tourists.

Brochures: Designing brochures that showcase essential information about the Ohrid region as a tourist destination. The focus of brochure design should be on images highlighting natural

beauty, cultural and historical landmarks, and all that is attractive about the region from a tourist perspective.

Leaflets: Producing leaflets, considering their cost-effectiveness in terms of printing and distribution, to play a significant role in promoting the region.

Thematic Brochures: Creating brochures with diverse information related to the characteristics of the tourist product in the destination. These brochures can be general in nature or specific to various types of tourist products, such as recreation, cuisine, experiences, or specific offers like churches, monasteries, landmarks, hiking trails, traditional crafts, natural wonders, etc. The tourism promotion agency plans to develop six brochures with different thematic content (nature and adventure, tradition and events, rural beauty, hunting and fishing, archaeological history and culture, wine and food) in 11 foreign languages, including English, German, French, Italian, Spanish, Turkish, Bulgarian, Serbian, Albanian, Japanese, and Russian³.

E-Brochures: Utilizing e-brochures (electronic brochures) that can be electronically transmitted to potential tourists.

Mobile Applications: Developing mobile applications for tourist electronic guides and distributing them through appropriate application markets, as well as hosting them.

Postcards: Printing postcards featuring images of the most attractive places in the Ohrid region, such as Lake Ohrid, beautiful beaches, significant archaeological sites, religious sites, or scenes from cultural events.

Tourist Map: Printing a tourist map, also available in CD format, covering the main attractions, cultural and historical monuments, hospitality establishments, and/or a map of all attractions in the region with detailed descriptions.

Event Calendar: Creating an event calendar for the region, providing detailed descriptions of all significant events characteristic of the region, including their traditions and dates.

Gastronomic Map: Developing a gastronomic map of local specialties and a guide to ethnic and eco-food. Each region has its own cuisine through which a large part of its products can be promoted, while simultaneously encouraging the production of local homemade products. The Ohrid region is recognizable for authentic local homemade products such as "gjomleze" or stuffed pastry, Ohrid trout, Ohrid-style "comlek" (a dish), traditional sweet "shekerpare," boiled "jevrek"

³ Agency for Promotion and Support of Tourism in the Republic of North Macedonia 2016, Program for Promotion and Support of Tourism for the Year 2016, Page 1

(a type of bread), Ohrid homemade wine, and homemade brandy. All these specialties should be included in the gastronomic map for the region, along with information on their preparation, tradition, and more.

Other Materials: Developing other promotional materials, such as PowerPoint presentations about the Ohrid region as a tourist destination.

Design and Redesign: Designing and redesigning existing promotional materials in line with new tourism trends.

These promotional activities aim to attract tourists and showcase the Ohrid region's natural beauty, cultural heritage, and unique offerings on a global scale.

Development of representative items that somehow remind people of something characteristic of the Ohrid region. It is also recommended that these representative items bear the name of our country. These items include keychains, badges, flags, plaques, souvenirs, magnets, sculptures, folk handicrafts, travel bags, handbags, caps, office decorations, etc., which should encapsulate the spirit of this region. It is recommended that they be designed in red, a color used to promote the Republic of Macedonia.

Utilization of external means that will be placed in visible locations in open spaces. These activities include:

Designing and placing billboards and City Lights with tourist motifs of Ohrid and Galichica National Park.

Creating posters to promote various cultural and sports events in the region.

Crafting fair banners, materials used at tourism fairs.

Installing tourist signage, i.e., identifying the most important tourist attractions on all traffic routes and tourist locations, in collaboration with the municipalities.

Setting up tourist information centers (points) that will inform and orient tourists. In order to meet the minimum needs of tourists and provide them with relevant travel-related information, it is necessary to establish an integrated system of tourist information centers, strategically located at frequent points such as bus stations, city centers, etc. These information points or centers serve as places for informing and orienting travelers, but also as places where they can obtain various data about the values of the Ohrid region. A key factor for the success of these centers is that they must provide information about the entire region and all the municipalities that make up the region, regardless of the center's location. Tourist information centers are standardized facilities, typically

with an area of 40 m², where the logo or slogan must be clearly displayed. They should have sufficient space to showcase the full range of local authentic products. In Ohrid, there is the Tourist Information Center (TIC) in Lihnidos, where visitors can find souvenirs, maps, guide services, and make accommodation reservations.

Use of media presentation means

Continuous participation in tourism fairs (domestic and regional fairs) where representatives of the tourist destination and relevant authorities for promoting tourism in the country and the region have the opportunity to present the tourism product. For this purpose, in early June, Ohrid will participate in the mixed summit with Southeast European countries and China, where it will have a stand in Ningbo to present all the development potentials in tourism. On the other hand, the company "TAV" promotes Ohrid and "St. Paul the Apostle" Airport at the world's largest tourism fair - ITB Berlin (International Tourism Fair - Berlin), attended by around 180,000 visitors. The marketing activities they undertake have a significant impact on promoting the Ohrid region, given that it is promoted by a renowned company with years of experience. The Agency for Promotion and Support of Tourism (APST) is a government organization whose primary function is to promote tourism, i.e., the tourism resources and capacities of the Republic of Macedonia. The agency vigorously promotes our country, and consequently, the Ohrid region, at international fairs, as one of the most useful methods of promotion. Among the most significant appearances, the following tourism fairs should be mentioned⁴:

The International Fair Event for the Promotion of Tourism Offer in Sofia, Bulgaria (HOLIDAY&SPA EXPO 2016). Bulgaria's tourism market is one of the target markets for Macedonia in terms of the number of tourists and overnight stays.

APST promotes Macedonia to Belgian tourists at the tourism fair in Brussels. The tour operator Thomas Cook-Belgium strengthens its cooperation with Macedonian tour operators, with Macedonia being included in their sales catalog for 2016. APST presented itself for the first time at the tourism fair in Ljubljana, Slovenia (NatourAlpeAdria), where Macedonia generated significant interest from local tour operators and potential tourists.

⁴ Agency for Promotion and Support of Tourism in the Republic of North Macedonia 2016, Program for Promotion and Support of Tourism for the Year 2016, Page 1

The tourism fair in Utrecht, the Netherlands, where the Agency promotes the beauties of Macedonia for the 6th time. The Dutch market is considered one of the tried-and-true tourism markets, showing significant interest in Macedonian culture, history, and nature.

The Agency for Promotion and Support of Tourism of the Republic of Macedonia presents the tourism offer of Macedonia at the largest tourism fair in London, England (WTM). International fairs to be attended in Germany and Russia are also planned.

Continuous education and training of tourist guides. According to the Registry of Tourist Guides in the city of Ohrid, there are a total of 127 tourist guides registered, with the largest number of individuals speaking English. Among the other languages spoken are German, Bulgarian, Serbian, French, Italian, Polish, Russian, Greek, French, Spanish, and Turkish. According to the Registry for Tourist Escorts, there are a total of 18 individuals registered, who also most commonly speak English⁵. For the accurate portrayal of the region, its history, and heritage, continuous education and training of tourist guides, who contribute to the promotion of the region through their work, are necessary.

Organizing presentations and meetings with foreign tour operators abroad and arranging familiarization trips to the Republic of Macedonia for foreign tour operators and journalists

Reports as a Significant Activity for Promoting the Region

In developed tourist destinations worldwide, there are numerous government and non-government organizations directly involved in promoting tourism. In the Republic of Macedonia, the main bodies responsible for tourism development are the Tourism and Hospitality Sector within the Ministry of Economy and the Agency for Promotion and Support of Tourism. The activities undertaken by the Agency for Promotion and Support of Tourism are directly related to creating an adequate advertising and marketing policy for tourism in the Republic of Macedonia. In this context, the most current method of promoting destinations in our country is the "Explore Macedonia" project, which focuses on promoting the Republic of Macedonia as a tourist destination. This project involves recorded reports on various destinations that are broadcasted on many television channels.

⁵ Tourism Department, Municipality of Ohrid, Register of Tourist Guides, 2010

These reports often encompass both the natural and anthropogenic values of the destinations. The reports for the Southwest region cover Ohrid, Struga, Debar, Kosovrasti, Rajchica and Skrebatno, Vevchani, Pelister, and Cher. This means that for the Ohrid region, there is currently only one recorded report for Ohrid and the village of Skrebatno, which falls under the Municipality of Ohrid. Skrebatno is known for its celebration of August 28th (the Feast of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary), which is a grand spectacle with the potential to become a well-known event that could leave a mark on the region. The report on Ohrid covers the lake as a natural attraction with all its basic tourist elements, the ancient city of Lychnidos and Samuel's Fortress as cultural and historical attractions, the figure of Petar Chaule, a fighter and revolutionary for freedom, authentic local cuisine, wellness opportunities by the lake, the Island of St. Naum, the monastery of the same name, the monastery of St. Zaum as religious attractions, and more. Despite the abundance of literature related to the natural and cultural beauties of the Ohrid region, recording such reports is of exceptional importance as they are a highly successful way of popularizing destinations in Macedonia. These reports can be domestic or foreign. We will provide examples of several successful reports that significantly contribute to the development of this region.

Media as a Form of Promotion

As mentioned earlier, another way to promote tourism is through media, which has a significant influence on raising awareness among potential tourists about a specific destination. In the context of using media as a means of promoting the Ohrid region, the internet plays the most crucial role, as it is used for mass communication and should be leveraged as a powerful tool for promotion. To promote the Ohrid region effectively using the internet, the following steps should be taken:

Creating and developing websites for the region: These websites should contain textual and photo material covering the most important natural and anthropogenic values relevant to tourism in the region. The website should include a virtual brochure for the region, a calendar of all events and festivals happening in the region for the current year, a database of accommodation options (hotels, apartments, camps), news updates about the destination, weather forecasts, transportation information (airport, bus stations, taxis, and shuttles), and more. The website should be bilingual, written not only in Macedonian but also in other languages such as English, German, and Albanian. Ohrid already has several websites, including "Ohridnews" (www.ohridnews.com) and "Ohridon"

(www.ohridon.com), which cover various topics related to tourism, sports, entertainment, cultural events, and other aspects of this region. Among these websites, "travel2ohrid" (www.travel2ohrid.com) stands out, offering useful information about Ohrid, including detailed descriptions of places to visit, accommodation options such as apartments and private lodgings, as well as hotels, with location and pricing information, and the ability to make reservations. This website is available in three languages: Macedonian, English, and Serbian. All municipalities in the region that have their websites must regularly update their information to ensure that potential tourists can stay informed about the latest developments.

Using electronic newsletters: These newsletters should be sent out monthly to domestic and foreign journalists, PR agencies, tour operators, travel agencies, hotels, airlines, consulates, and other representatives of the Republic of Macedonia abroad, as well as to tourism organizations, partners, and more. The newsletter should contain information about various events, festivals, and other news related to tourism and the tourism industry in the region.

Creating promotional videos for various segments of the tourism offering, such as nightlife, culture, adventure tourism, entertainment, gastronomy, and other characteristics specific to the region.

Organizing familiarization (FAM) trips for journalists: These trips allow journalists to become familiar with the destination and its products and services. Journalists can then write about their experiences and promote the region in their newspapers, magazines, or television programs. In addition to journalist trips, similar trips can be organized for tour operators and travel agencies.

Advertising on radio and television: Radio and television advertisements remain highly effective ways to promote the region.

Producing tourist films and thematic videos: These videos should showcase the natural and cultural beauty of the region, highlighting its unique attractions and experiences.

Networking the tourism offering: Creating a comprehensive website for the region with accurate information, feedback and suggestion options for visitors, information about travel agencies in the region, both within the country and internationally, organizing seminars and workshops, and more.

Reviving the "Spirit of Ohrid" project: This project aims to develop alternative forms of tourism and enhance cultural resources. It includes the creation of a documentary film about Ohrid's cultural and natural heritage, the development of a website called "Spirit of Ohrid," and the

production of DVDs and CDs. Despite the significant financial investment in this project, the website is currently not operational. To achieve the expected outcomes of this project, efforts are needed to revive and activate it.

These activities and strategies will help effectively promote the Ohrid region to a wider audience, both domestically and internationally, using various media platforms and online resources.

Conclusion

The Ohrid region, thanks to its lake, natural beauty and rarities, national park, and rich cultural and historical heritage, complemented by many small details that could be incorporated into alternative forms of tourism, has the potential to grow into a recognizable and attractive tourist destination with the potential for a successful presence in the global tourism market. For successful promotion of the Ohrid region, it is necessary to intensify promotional activities, including taking intensive PR activities, promoting sales at fairs, exhibitions, and study tours, various forms of advertising, both domestically and in emitting markets, developing high-quality promotional materials, and a strong focus on continuously updating websites, among other efforts. Therefore, this work encompasses various forms of promotion that, through diverse activities, will successfully convey the image of the region to the wider public. The research primarily aims to identify the potential opportunities that the Ohrid region possesses, enabling it to become an established tourist destination, and to raise awareness of the need for utilizing promotion for the same purpose.

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