



MARKETING STRATEGY FOR PROMOTION OF "HIDDEN" HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL SITES AMONG YOUNG TOURISTS – GEOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT AND TRENDS AMONG YOUNG TOURISTS

Project CB006.2.21.150 Sustainable Utilization of Cultural Heritage in Dupnitsa and Kriva Palanka

Lead Partner: Municipality of Dupnitsa

Project Partner: Municipality of Kriva Palanka

The project is co-funded by EU through the Interreg-IPA CBC Bulgaria–North Macedonia Programme

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INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM

- Tourism has a lot potential to be one of the key branches for economic development connecting Bulgaria and the Republic of North Macedonia, which are countries with many backward and underdeveloped sectors and regions.
- The condition of one of the biggest landmarks in the region – the monastery "St. Joachim Osogovski " in the town of Kriva Palanka and the Clock Tower in the town of Dupnitsa - is neglected and unmaintained .
- A new tourist infrastructure should be built and /or the existing tourist infrastructure should be renewed , supported by new tourist services. It will promote employment , economic growth and reduce the strong socio-economic pressure in the region.

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By developing joint investments in tourism infrastructure, the project will increase the competitiveness of the region and the developing tourist market, introducing Kriva Palanka and Dupnitsa as leaders of joint tourism measures for the cross-border region and will strengthen the economic development of the two settlements and the "hidden" historical and cultural sites on the road between Kriva Palanka and Dupnitsa.

Besides this, it will encourage the popularization and raising of awareness of local tourism products, as at the moment they are not enough popular among tourists of different ages and especially among young tourists.

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Vision of the strategy

The vision of the Strategy is to consolidate and strengthen the measures and approaches that would have the capacity to deal with the specific issues (depending from the specific economic, cultural and socio-political factors and rates of development of each territory), as well as the problems of general or cross-border nature .

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Mission of the Strategy

The mission of the current Strategy is to popularize "hidden" historical and cultural sites among young tourists, covering the territory of the entire cross-border region Bulgaria-North Macedonia, placing a specific emphasis on the area of Kriva Palanka and Dupnitsa.

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Objectives of the Strategy

- To present the existing situation in the cross -border region Bulgaria-North Macedonia by relation to the development of tourist activities ;
- To present the specifics of the "hidden" historical and cultural objects in the area of Kriva Palanka and Dupnitsa;
- To present the specifics and important trends in tourism among young tourists;
- To make an offer what should be changed and what measures should be taken with a view to the popularization of the "hidden" historical and cultural objects among young tourists.

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Tourist infrastructure in Dupnitsa and Kriva Palanka

- The tourist infrastructure is well developed, with 16 tour operators developing and operating on the territory of the city.
- With the growing popularity of online booking platforms, many local people in both regions invest in offering accommodation to tourists, but in most cases these activities are not properly registered and therefore not included in the available statistics.
- It should be noted that access to some more distant "hidden" historical and cultural sites on the territory of Kriva Palanka and Dupnitsa is seriously complicated or the bad condition of the road network, which lead to them.
- There are no sufficiently clear signs , and there are none at all in English, which is accessible to most foreign tourists .

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- As a natural consequence of this is the tendency for tourists to visit only the more famous and big ones attractions, until the smaller and remote ones remain **hidden** from tourists and popular unique among the local population.
- At that situation Internet is of little help in the direction of the growth of tourism, as the information can be accessed in advance on the part of the tourist in a purposeful search for interesting places and routes.

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- Regarding the tourist attractions, it is unfortunately not enough , on the contrary , it is even scarce. Most internet sites are in the local language, such as they rarely have an English language version, which additionally makes the situation worse.
- Differences in the alphabet and the transcription of names in different languages make their search even more and more difficult and confusing for tourists.
- Although both regions are known for their mountains , information about the roads that lead it is so unclear to them that tourists are forced to visit organized excursions, tours with a local guide or to search for information from acquaintances and friends so they can reach to someone the "hidden" historical and cultural sites in both regions .
- At last place, the tourist infrastructure has not been modernized and is no longer easily accessible for people with disabilities - the provided information is not accessible to blind or deaf people , and many of the objects can not be visited by people in wheelchairs .

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- The cultural monuments in Dupnitsa are communication accessible and are included in the *Concept for sustainable development of cultural tourism in Kyustendil region*.
- It is necessary to update the list of historical and cultural objects and monuments in the location and improve the transport network, with a view to including these objects in the cross-border cultural routes.
- The effective development of the tourist industry in Dupnitsa does not correspond to the potential with which available to the city and the surrounding area.

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The main reasons for lagging in tourism development can be mentioned:

- Insufficient the well-developed tourist infrastructure;
- Weak variety and low quality of offered tourist products ;
- The region is weak known in the tourist market, i.e. there is no adequate form of advertising and information ensuring tourism;
- Lack of good coordination between individual tourist facilities.

Given the rich potential of the region, efforts should be directed towards promoting *cultural and educational; festival tourism; sports tourism; ecotourism; and rural tourism in Dupnitsa.*

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Cultural Calendar

- In addition to the modern and well-known holidays, we should also note some traditional manifestations that are celebrated everywhere, but in some places - in a more specific way.
- **January:**
 - **Voditsi** in the town of Kriva Palanka, municipality . Crooked palanquin. The Piftiyada culinary festival is held , dedicated to the local dish Piftia (small bread " boats " filled with meat and various spices).
 - In Bulgaria, **Epiphany** is celebrated on January 6, and the holiday is better known under the name "Epiphany". It is associated with the belief in the purifying, healing and magical power of water.

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- **March:**

- At the beginning of March – Adoration of brides, Konopnitsa village. ***Crooked palanquin***. It is held on the Sunday after Todorica, called Todor's Sunday (the first Sunday of Easter Lent). The center of events is the church "St. Theodore Tiron ", the patron saint of the young and the family. The tradition is dedicated to the next generations and was interrupted for 33 years before it was restored again. All the young women who got married between the previous Todorica and the current one are participating. They dress in folk clothes wear and form procession together with their in- laws to bow before the saint and be blessed by the local priests for health and well- being .

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- **May:**

- ***May cultural holidays in the town of Dupnitsa***. In 2022, their 44th edition was held. They include literary events, a tournament on sports dances, cycling tours, concerts, theater productions , etc.
- ***Southwest international "Peace in the Balkans" folklore festival, Dupnitsa***. The festival is regional and inclusive the cities of Dupnitsa, Sapareva Banya, Bobov dol , Kocherinovo and Kyustendil.

- **July:**

- ***National folklore festival of the processed " Rila is watching us" people, Dupnitsa***.

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- August:

- **16.08 – Saint Joachim 's Day Osogovski, Day of Crooked Palanka. Crooked palanquin.** The fact that the two holidays are on the same date shows the deep connection that exists between the city and the monastery (saint). The holiday includes many cultural and religious ones manifested.
- **20.08.- 21.08 – Off - road rally "Kalin Kamen", community Crooked palanquin.** Off-road marches participate not only jeeps, but also cross-motorcycles and other suitable vehicles. The tradition began in 2009, when the event took place on 24.05. The route starts in the town of Kriva Palanka and reaches to Tsarev vrah, from where there is a return to the monastery "St. Joachim Osogovski", with the possibility of camping in the town of Kalin Kamen.
- **International folklore festival "St. Joakim Osogovski ", Kriva Palanka town, Kriva Palanka municipality.** The biggest folklore festival in the region of Osogovo . It attracts participants from North Macedonia , Bulgaria, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina , Slovakia , Poland and other countries.
- **End of August – Joy Fest in the town of Kriva Palanka.** Crooked palanquin. Rock music festival popularizing both established and new performers of this style of music.

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- September:

- **Theater Festival "St. Joachim Osogovski ", Kriva Palanka.** Crooked palanquin. The program includes both established positions and avant-garde theatrically art.

- October:

- **International Festival of Male Choirs "St. Ivan Rilski", town of Dupnitsa.** It is connected with the city holiday on October 19.

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A platform should be created where visitors and tourists can find information about cultural monuments, events and other attractions in the two municipalities. In addition to the actual presentation of the two monuments, detailed information about it will be created and entered into the site - how it was discovered, what is the story behind it, etc.

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Specificity of "hidden" historical and cultural objects

- According to modern studies, tourism is the fastest growing industry in the world, and the objects of cultural and historical inheritance are the main ones preferred from tourist attractions. The objects of cultural-historical legacies have become a major resource for attracting large number visitors, which unfortunately led to the deterioration of the development and tourist activities in terms of infrastructure. In recent times, the relationship between tourism and historical and cultural sites has gained significant importance.
- Hidden historical and cultural sites are very important assets for cities that want to diversify own tourist offer, as well as those who want to offer new products attracting more specific groups of tourists. The same applies to destinations that were not good before placed on the tourism map, but in reality they have historical and cultural sites which however, until now they remain hidden from tourists.

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The challenge is *how to reconstruct and recreate the past in the present through an interpretation that is special important for communicating with young tourists* who may not be personally interested or familiar with past historical events. This activity is not a simple presentation of some kind of information but rather represents a *specific communication strategy*, which is used to translate this information into easily accessible and understandable language. Interpretation not only describes historical facts, but creates understanding, increases appreciation, awareness and enjoyment of the experience for the tourist.

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- Efforts should be made to develop and introduce new communication tools and channels, including the big variety of opportunities provided - informational technologies and social media.
- The use of an oral translation allows attracting more tourists as well as improving the experience on the part of the tourist. This creates a feeling of satisfaction among tourists as customers of the tourist product, as they would share about their positive experience with other friends and acquaintances, which in his country creates prerequisites for providing additional visits from new tourists.
- The spectrum of interpretive models is endless, varying from simple panels from printed text to 3D virtual experiences: passive methods providing visitors one-way communication (e.g. self-directing paths) to active methods with bi-directional communication (e.g. guided paths, sensory models).

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Trends in tourism among young people

- The concept of youth tourism includes tourist activities carried out by young people between the ages of 15 and 29. The following characteristics of "youth" tourism can be indicated:
- ✓ Young people, although they are not particularly solvent, **have enough free time that they can invest in longer trips compared to tourists from other age groups.** This leads up to over 2/3 higher average spending of young visitors compared to others. One of the reasons for the higher expenditure of young people is the use of financial means provided to them by their parents. Very often young people return to already visited destinations again;
- ✓ **Flexibility of the youth tourism market.** Young tourists are impulsive, not particularly cautious, and their travel plans do not tolerate changes due to economic problems. In fact, long-distance travel for young people increases when the national economies are less developed. Research shows that the youth sector is less affected by the crisis, declining less and recovering faster from the general tourist market, from which it can be concluded that the youth tourism market is significantly more stable;

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- ✓ Young tourists travel longer and spend the greater part of their budget in the destination where they are. They look for local suppliers of goods and services, which reduces the loss of funds;
- ✓ An established trend is that instead of trips for entertainment and condensing free time, young tourists take trips for work and training abroad, volunteer activity, acquisition of language skills, etc.;
- ✓ Young people they often travel on work or for training, i.e. have an important contribution to the national economy of the visited country. Student travel is recognized as serious an economic stimulus with a growing role and importance, and expectations are for an increase in the educational market. The mobility and flexibility of young people in the labor market is a constant trend in some parts of the world. Besides this the expenses of the young travelers support employment in the field of tourism, as well as in the corresponding related activities , because it is not rare young tourists to work during their travels .
- ✓ Young people attract other visitors to the destination. Young people create a specific atmosphere in the destination, attracting other visitors and businesses

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- The whole assessment of the role and importance of tourism among young people shows that it is important to know and analyze more deeply **its economic consequences**.
- The technological innovations in tourism are an extremely dynamic and decisive factor and their impact on young tourists is decisive.
- In strategic terms, the neglect of mobile devices in the distribution of tourist services will be a source of risks for the competitiveness of the destinations. The development of youth tourism assumes the provision of various online options for organizing and planning the trip or trips to multiple destinations.

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- *The most effective approach to popularizing historical and cultural tourism among young tourists is the use of digital marketing practices.* Digital marketing is a process of promoting products and services using electronic media, and especially the Internet. He helps establish a closer relationship with customers, and targets namely to individual customer groups.
- The Internet page (website) is one of the keys communication platforms between tourist products and services and tourists. The website should provide such information about the product and services that the tourist feels sufficiently informed. Tourists draw accurate and detailed information from internet pages. *Especially concerning the "hidden" historical and cultural sites, tourists expect the information to be extremely comprehensive and detailed .*

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- Another powerful tool for engaging the attention of young tourists is social media. At the moment, **Meta (Facebook)** still has the strongest influence among young people. This social network is particularly strong when it comes to audio and video content, as well as finding information about upcoming events. Organizations/museums/individual websites can create their own Facebook pages or to create interest groups around a specific tourist product , service or destination, thus becoming opinion leaders and stimulating discussions among peers, followers, potential and existing customers.
- **TikTok mobile app** allows users to create short videos that often include music. A number of effects can be applied to the clip - be sped up, slowed down or edited with a filter. The users of this platform are mostly young people between the ages of 16 and 30, with more and more products being promoted through the platform directly by recreating certain "trends", allowing to reach a wider audience.

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- **Instagram** - the greater part of the users of this platform are between 20 and 30 years old. Many brands actively participate in the platform through the use of hashtags and locations. Any user who enters a given hashtag in the platform or in the Google search engine , for example, will find many images related to the specific search. Creating a profile and filling it with content will help the information to reach to a lot more visitors and young tourists, such as by this way will attract them to visit the corresponding place.
- **YouTube, Vimeo** and other radio and video broadcasting platforms are designed for uploading and sharing your own videos like. The content has been proven as an important digital marketing trend to the portfolio from presenting organizations and sites online . The user can easily embed YouTube or Vimeo videos into your website and integrate them with the entirety of your Social media and web activities .

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- **Google**, on the other hand, offers a wide range of services that can add significant value to product promotion on social media. To get an overview of what it can work for a specific institution, product or destination, the consumer can join one of Google 's free seminars held across Europe .
- **Blogs and vlogs** are another strong platform that can help engage young tourists with stories, narratives and detailed information. People between the ages of 20 and 30 are the main force among bloggers and vloggers. Compared to the short and terse information on social media, blogs offer a space to provide more specific and detailed information. This is benefit for many tourists who are keen on finding more " hidden " historical and cultural objects inheritance .

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An effective marketing practice is to work together with other organizations that share the same priorities and most importantly – customers.

Within the tourist destination, different organizations can cooperate, despite the competition between them in order to attract customers/tourists.

Practically, ***this means digital sharing*** - marketing space between them - through joint work in the preparation of the content of the Internet pages, publications in social media, as well as in the promotion of the product by providing specific discounts etc. These efforts can also be invested in building a comprehensive platform where visitors and tourists can find information about cultural monuments, events and other attractions.

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Another aspect in the promotion of tourism in the "hidden" cultural and historical objects among young tourists, is the ***joint creation of innovative experiences for visitors***.

Telling stories, conducting workshops, open debates and simulations activities can enhance the effect of tourists' experiences. In many ways to a large extent this applies to the intangible culturally heritage and for poorly developed objects, that we undoubtedly have in Dupnitsa and Kriva Palanka.

Use of ***events as a tool for popularization*** is a further step towards attracting and engaging young tourists in order to promote the visitation of the destination. Events offer a unique opportunity for consumers to interact with local communities and local products , as well as to experience and feel the look of the destination. Using an event in marketing effectively can firstly to contribute to popularization of the objects of cultural and historical heritage .

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Conclusion

- The advantage of social media is the ability to reach to a wider range of customers/users in different parts of the world , while at the same time to receive feedback in real time with minimal resources in terms of pay and personnel. ***Young tourists rely exclusively on a lot of information provided from the so-called "influencers"*** who travel around the world and show different destinations that they themselves visit.
- In view of this, ***efforts could be directed towards attracting such "influencers"*** who would promote the "hidden" cultural and historical sites among their followers. This will increase the number of visitors, since nowadays the influence of "influencers" on the opinion of young people is significant , and in some situations even decisive for them.

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