

PUBLIC RELATIONS MANAGEMENT IN THE TOURISM INDUSTRY: NEEDS AND PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT

This research analyzes the meaning of Public Relations for the tourism industry of each country in the process of transforming into a profitable branch of economy, which is particularly significant for the economic growth of each country.

The emphasis of the scientific approach is put on the PR as characteristic management function allowing bidirectional communication between the organization and its target public.

The aim of this research is offering a method of development of a PR model in the tourism industry. In the direction of realizing the goal, the subject to this research is PR and their specifications on tourism, generally, than PR forms, the meaning of the strategic management of PR in tourism as well as the importance of developing a model of strategic management of PR in the tourism industry of a country. PR modeling, conceived, organized and realized according to the modernistic practices on PR in tourism, adapted on the conditions and tendencies of the tourism industry of the country, allowing the tourism of the country to become a productive, profitable culture and socially beneficial activity.

KEYWORDS: *Public Relations, Tourism, Image, Model, Management, Strategy*

Jel Classification: Z32; Z33; M31; M38.

INTRODUCTION

In an exceptionally fertile literature regarding PR, the number of guidebooks of articles elaborating the topic on public relations in tourism is relatively low while there's is none scientific edition and literature focused particularly on this subject. On the other hand, publications concerning marketing in tourism, PR are treated as part of marketing and promotion. Marketing and public relations theoreticians confront in their works. Some of them, threat PR as part of marketing while the others threat PR as a special function of management due to its large coverage. American theoreticians pay special attention to PR, which means that they classify many marketing tools and promotional means and vice versa. This research presents the thesis in which PR is significant and primary pillars for building, developing and sustaining the country's image of attractive touristic destination and plays the crucial role in the promotion and affirmation of tourism and touristic destinations of the country. Thereby emerges the necessity of new model regarding PR in tourism. The application of PR forms should point out the place, role and employment and promotion of a touristic destination in a touristic market.

IDENTIFY, RESEARCH AND COLLECT IDEA

In modern social-economic context, public relations are considered to be an important factor in the process of development and growth of tourism. They transfer the consumer's messages about attractiveness, traffic infrastructure and accommodation capacities of a touristic destination, at the same time following the pulse and needs of the target group and surrounding so that the touristic economy can adapt to the changes and needs of the public.

Public relations are an interactive form of communication through which organization, product or service build their strategies of getting close to their target by using special methods of research and poll of public opinion. Also, PR forms offer wide opportunities and techniques that the organization, product or service need to build, maintain or improve their image (Broom, 2010).

Tourism and touristic industry have an important influence on the economic life of a country. For that reason, tourism development of a country and its growing into the attractive touristic destination is directly connected to quality standards of touristic product, accommodation capacities, tourism, on one hand, and prestige, public legitimacy, image, informing, promotion and lobbying on the other. Henceforth derives the important place and role of PR in tourism development of one country. The most significant factor for the successful realization of this process is communication with the public and usage of appropriate means of communication. The main goal of the use of PR in tourism as in any other industry is continuous transfer of messages and information for certain touristic offer, touristic attraction, and opportunities; building, and image of attractive touristic destination (image based on identity); as well as providing feedback- when public information reach the doors of touristic economy and in that way providing further evaluation.

In the content, this research is guided by Renate Fox's perspective who defines public relations as:

"Two-way communication between the organization and public, in which organization informs the social community (customers, suppliers, parties involved, shareholders, government, media, and citizens) for their intents, deeds and views contributing the creation and sustaining the positive image. Also, public relations follow relations and processes in the social community and in that way facilitate the adaptation of organization to social conditions and surroundings" (Fox, 2006, p.200)

Therefore, this study tries to answer the following question: How can touristic economy identify the need for building and establishing public relations? What is the practice of public relations in the tourism industry? What are the forms of public relations in tourism? What should the applicable model of PR in tourism industry consist?

Originalities of public relations are based on originalities of touristic product. During the creation, projection, planning and establishment of PR in tourism, generally it's important to take account for economic functions of tourism (employment, profit advantage of the economy, international economic relations, investments, regional development, not-economic flow) and social functions (health-recreational, entertainment, cultural, scientific, teaching, sports, technical, social, and political function). Since public relations deal with real conditions and processes and their representations is based on those facts, but also the segment that stresses the social benefits and stimulates adaptation to work according to the society demands and development imperatives of the tourism.

In other words, on one hand, is tourism, as an exceptionally complex phenomenon of the 21 Century and industry that was predicted as top economic growth in the future and, on the other hand, is public relations as a relatively new discipline.

Characteristics of Public Relations in Certain Segments of Tourism

Due to the largeness of tourism and traveling industry, public relations in tourism need to be focused on accommodation, transport, fun, and recreation. Activities of public relations in hotels are oriented towards shaping relations between the hotel and environment in order to create a beneficial image in public where new possibilities emerge and greater sales effect achieve. ¹Well-known hotel brands have emphasized the need for professional PR since development and expansion of a chain of hotels includes intensive support by the immediate public, the sophisticated group concentrated around media and public in general. Taking into account the dependence of hotels on local services and the tax deduction, it's exceptionally important for them to take care of the relations with the environment for which PR have a crucial role. Some of the tool often used by PR practitioners in hotels are: announcements on local media, "open house for community" program, visits, meetings. ²That's why public relations in restaurants ask for more specialized knowledge. Various classes of restaurants have the different public which implies the use of different tools and messages. Some of the crucial used tools are: web-pages, B-form materials, menus, press announcements, press materials as well as participation in particular events like dinner linked to a certain event, wine degustation, cooking contest and food festivals. ³Transport is one of the most expensive PR sectors in tourism and traveling due to many integral parts. This includes railway, rent-a-car companies, recreation vehicles, bus transport, sea and lake traffic and airplane transport. A most dominant element is the airplane traffic, while of all the transport and touristic sectors, PR practices in airplane industry are highly complicated. Bearing in mind the need for daily information delivery, it's no wonder that the number of people engaged in public relations in aircraft companies is from 3 to 10. Typical tools used by these companies are daily electronic news articles, weekly or two-week report on employees, intranet, daily distribution of press-clipping etc. The role of PR in aircraft companies during the crisis, aircraft accident or when the aircraft company functions as the main source of media information until the official state security organ comes to the place of the accident. ⁴Public relations in sea and lake traffic companies are similar to those in hotels since cruise ships nowadays are called "floating hotels, restaurants, and vacation centers" due to the offered variety of services in the form of package to the tourists. ⁵Forms that PR used in sea traffic are: information package for guests before the traveling, web-pages, passengers' publications, printed reports with info on staff members, future trips and destinations, daily offer on the restaurant menu, parties, daily international news and etc. One of the most efficient PR tools in an industry is popular traveling intended for writers that would promote the visit like the journalist and touristic agents. ⁶

Public relations in railway traffic are focused on communication with internal and external targeted public that is an immense number of passengers- railway users and a large number of employees. Passengers get the information through the web-page made for the clients and through monthly passengers-oriented magazines. Employees get the information from monthly magazines, electronic communication and other forms of internal communication. PR in railway companies

¹Senčić, J.(1998): *Promocija u turizmu*, Mikrorad, Zagreb, str. 176.

²Deutschl, D.E. (2006): *Travel and Tourism Public relations*, Elsevier Butterworth – Henemann, Burlington, pp. 23.

³Ibid., pp. 23.

⁴Ibid., pp. 88.

⁵Ibid., pp. 77.

⁶Ibid., pp. 88-100.

have a special role during a crisis, railway accident, insufficient electrical energy, terroristic attack and so on.⁷

R Forms in Two-Way Symmetrical Model of PR in Tourism

According to the view of Renate Fox (Fox, 2006) public relations, as a two-way communication between the organization (product or service) and public have their goals (attracting attention, building social prestige and credibility, enlargement of placements, lowering promotion costs), achieved with the help of PR instruments (events, news drawing attention promoted by media, public individual performances) through several stages (research, defining the goal, defining the target, defining the media in accordance with target, defining interest area, creating events, creating message, communication, action and result marks). The forms of public relations contain the wider view (Fox, 2006). More precisely, tourism of each country could practice the following PR forms:

- Relations with media;
- Identity and image building of touristic destination;
- Developing publishing;
- Lobbying;
- Maintaining PR crisis situation;
- Relations in touristic organizations;
- Relations with potential and real investors, financiers, and donors;
- Paid advertising.

Thesis Determining Public Relations Model in the Tourism

The etymological meaning of the term model with Latin root and meaning form/measure and implies material and mental reproduction of an original that can be an object, process, phenomenon or opinion. The main characteristic of the modeling method consists of a thin union between theory and scientific practice (Šešić, 1982).

In the attempt to model public relations in the tourism industry, the study is guided by past practice and information about public relations in tourism, the theoretical basis of public relations and opportunities for application and efficiency PR forms in the tourism.

The process of building PR model is determined by the following thesis:

- Identification and valorization of the touristic product of a country with the purpose of gaining quality touristic products, attractive-motivational factors and offer. They're the point of reference for building an image of an attractive touristic destination that is crucial for placing the country at the world touristic market.
- Appropriate institutional hierarchy and tourism organization through forming special ministry responsible for the entire conditions, development opportunities, perspectives, activities, and strategies for the tourism and touristic economy, including separate bodies and organs for enforcement for strengthening public relations in the field of tourism.

⁷Ibid., pp. 101-103.

- Two-way symmetrical model of public relations, applicable for tourism, through concrete forms and instruments with the purpose of drawing attention, building social profile and credibility, increasing the placements and lowering promotion costs.
- Identification of strategic elements of managing PR model determined by strategic development lines of tourism with the special strategy of PR (by using complete project cycle) as an integral part of the National strategy of touristic development of tourism of a country.
- Strategic managing of PR in the tourism industry with clearly identified and projected steps (research, planning, taking action and communication, assessment) for building, developing, sustaining of PR in a touristic economy.
- Implementing strategic and sub-strategic documents as integral part of PR modeling in tourism industry and implementation of crucial (financial, material, organizational, professional, personnel) issues regarding public relations in the tourism as basic for touristic development of a country.
- Changes in tourism as a determinant of changes in PR are the results of products and services development,
- Road infrastructure, human resources, and protection of the environment, investments, an organization of touristic economy and awareness of tourism.

STUDIES AND FINDINGS

Managing public relations tourism of a country implies a strategic managing that unites the stages: (1) defining the issue through research, (2) planning and creating the plan and program, (3) taking action and communication and (4) estimation of the program (Tomic, 2008).

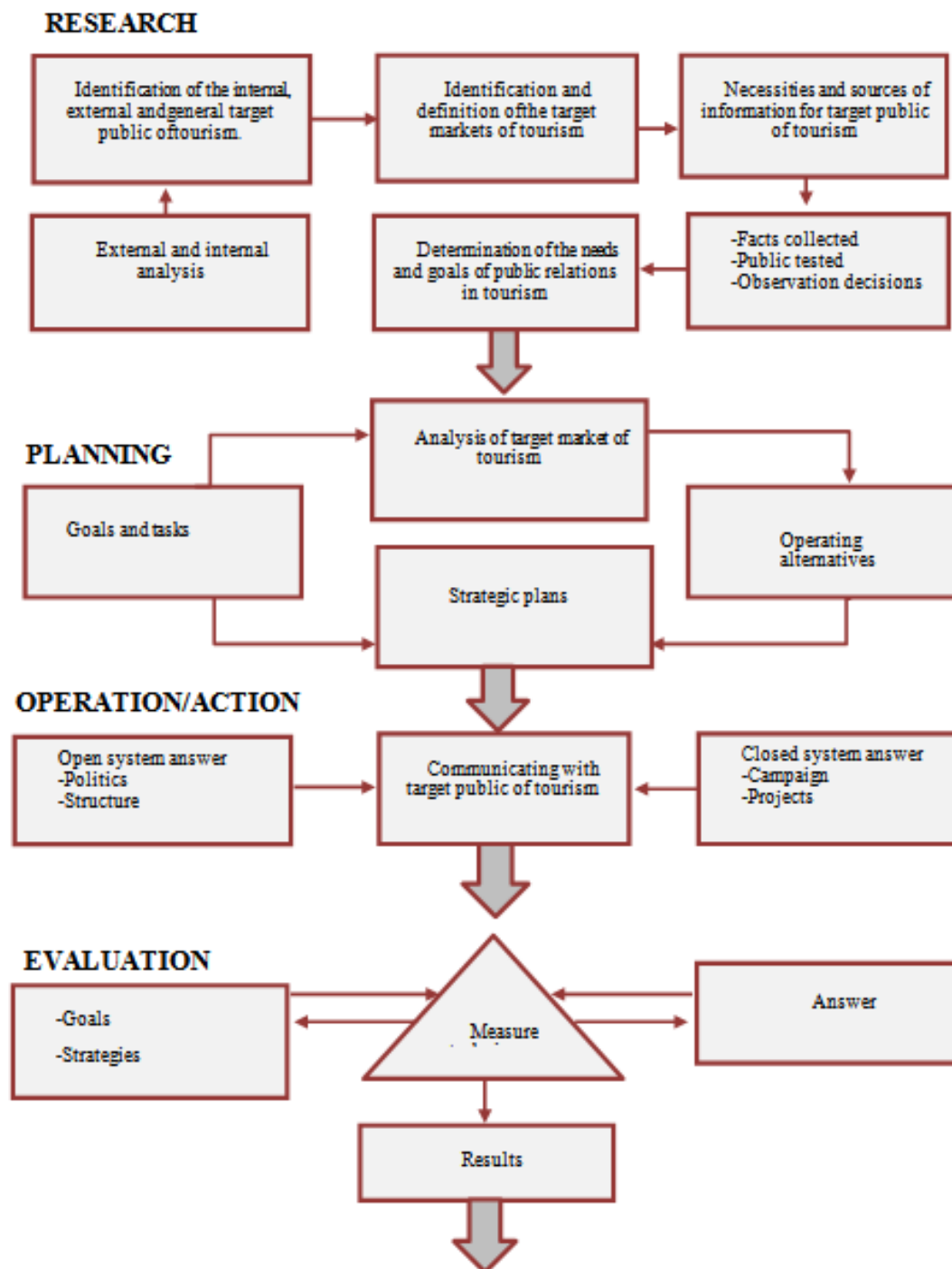


Figure 1

Illustration 1: Tomić, Z.(2008): Odnosi s javnošću – teorija i praksa, Synopsis, Zagreb – Sarajevo.

The first stage of PR managing process (research) starts with an *internal and external analysis* of micro and macro surrounding and collecting useful data and information about the identification of tourism target public, target markets, the need of information as well as the information source. Based on the collected data and information, the issues, needs, and goals of PR are being identified. The goal of the objective and systematic research is detailed describing the issue and the causes. The analysis consists of: analysis of the actual condition of destination; description of target public-

internal; description of the target market; determining the goals of public relations (long and short term); marketing communications for each target market (economic propaganda, marketing); defining the role of economic propaganda in promotional mix.

The second stage of PR managing process is the *planning and preparation of concrete programs and strategic plans* with solutions for facing and defining the needs and issues regarding public relations in the tourism industry. The planning has to be thorough and to include the definition of the general and specific objectives of PR in tourism program, carrying out strategic goals and plans in the terms of what should be done and in what order the solutions would be offered for surpassing the needs and issues.⁸ The communication program is a support of action strategy with several basic principles. Forming the messages at this stage is an important activity because of which PR experts have to know the complete condition, strategy, and attitudes for certain issues and the entire process of planning. Besides forming the message for the targeted public, what is quite necessary is the process of transferring the messages to the media in form of news in order to attract media's attention.⁹ Since the message is formed, the communication plan provides ways to spread the message to the target public. During the choice media which would spread the message, knowledge, ascertain and way in which decisions of target public are made, the applicability of touristic service being offered and confirmation that they'll get the best touristic offer for the price paid, are also taken into account.

The third stage of action (*communication*) requires adjustment between the action and communication since it doesn't only matter the way something is said but also what should be done about that certain issue. Helped by the stage of action, a new open system of the so-called two-way symmetric model is introduced, on which is based the offered PR model in the tourism industry. This approach is founded on the assumption that changes are equally probable for both external and internal public and that those changes will contribute for both parties to end up like winners so that touristic economy and public will make use of it and it also should work on improving the image. Public relations in tourism industry effect on the forming mutually beneficial relations between targeted public and tourism, necessary for survival and success of touristic economy of each country and at the same time creating a strategy of action and its adjustment with the following communication efforts.¹⁰

The fourth stage of PR managing process in the tourism industry is an estimation of the program. The research for estimating the program could be implemented during the stage of implementation of the program (formative research) or after it to ascertain the progress and document the action of the program (summation research). This stage shouldn't be avoided because the research, measure or estimation of the program has the purpose of investigating what happened and why but not to prove or justify. If the research is implemented during the planning and implementation of the program then

⁸This stage implies: mission and role determination (nature and surrounding of work) in the area where crucial results are expected (demanding time, energy and capability), identification and specification of indicators (with measurable factors for placing the goals), choice and placing the goals (determining the result that tourism should accomplish) preparation of action plan (ways to achieve certain objectives, program-determination of action agenda realized due to accomplishing the goal, preparation for implementing action plan, budget-determining the necessary means of accomplishing the goal, delegating obligations, revising and harmonization- testing the plan before action implementation), strategy of action and implementation (necessary to provide accordance by all the crucial people regarding the important issues, the choice which approach functions best, who should take part in action and which actions come first) and communication program (planning and forming the targeted public and market messages, naming people responsible for determining internal communication due to better understanding and engaging).

⁹In the process of forming the communication program, it's necessary to take into account the preparedness of the public to receive the message appropriately, bearing in mind the semantics, meaning of symbols, possible obstacles and stereotypes. Therefore, the message needs to be formed so that the receiver can understand it as relevant for its interests to encourage the receiver in the action (that's the feedback that makes two-way communication). In order for the communication to be effective, words and symbols of the sender should give the same meaning both to the sender and receiver.)

¹⁰Modified according to Broom, M.G. (2010): *Cutlip&Center's Učinkoviti odnosi s javnošću*, Mate, Zagreb, pp.3

it's possible to realize and solve the eventual problems and use the new chances. If the process of estimation is done by the end of the implementation, the chances for error are lower, which may jeopardize the efficient goal achievement.

The estimation of the program, except the complete program and process, could refer to separate stages that make up the process of PR managing in the tourism industry: preparation, implementation and effects.

Model of Strategic Management of Public Relations in Tourism

The offered premises leading the process of PR in tourism modeling, determine the model of strategic management of public relations in the tourism industry which is the main goal of this research and at the same time is a platform for possible researchers in this area. This model integrates the role of PR in tourism managing so that public relation gain exceptionally important role in the process of strategic management, identification of the parties involved, target public and issues about the possible crisis situations and consequences in tourism with stressed need of following the external surrounding and the intensive changes of touristic market with constant adaptation to its mission and vision.

The model offered consists of eight basic levels: management, communication programs, parties involved, public, issues, crisis communication, image and prestige and development of tourism industry of each country. Its structure is presented in the following illustration:

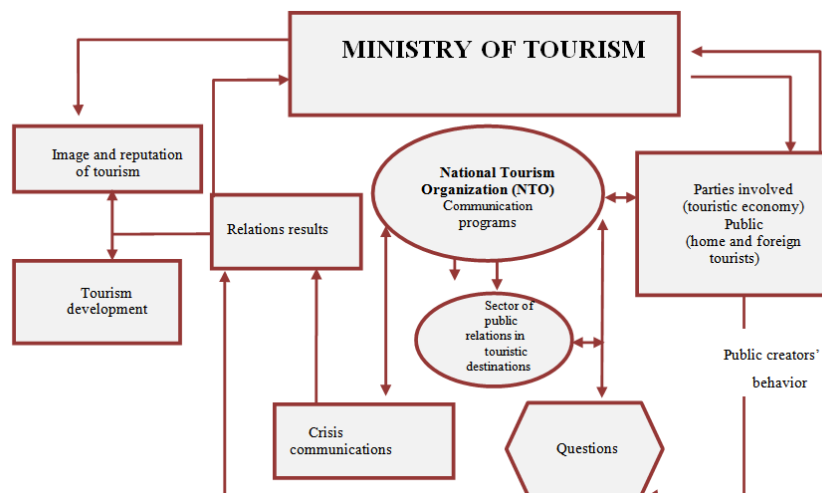


Figure 2

Illustration 2: Graphic chart of the Model of strategic management of public relations in the Tourism industry

According to the model, National touristic organization and Sector of PR management of touristic destination should be in a functional level, with programs focused on the target public, precisely planned, implemented and evaluated. In the level of the parties involved, greatest value goes to the continual communicational policy between Tourism industry (presented through Ministry of tourism, National Touristic Organization (NTO) and Sector of public relations in touristic destinations) and subjects of touristic economy, in order to build good and long-term relations and moderate the possible conflict potentials. The behavior of the Ministry and parties involved (touristic economy) affect each other. That's why it's necessary that public relations implement formative research (during the implementation of communication programs for implementation of certain touristic destination on the world or home touristic map, then during program development implementation of priority types of tourism, or programs of attractive-motivational factors development of a certain

segment of touristic offer of the country and so on) in order to identify the possible consequences made by the decisions of tourism industry (Ministry of tourism) and decisions of parties involved, that is touristic economy. The next step of the model is the public stage where different interest may come as “potential” conflict between the Ministry and target public (home and foreign tourists/external and internal public). At this stage, the goal of the research of public relations is the identification of the target public and facilitation of the conflicts. The Ministry should include the public in the process of making the decision through communication while NTO in cooperation with the Sector of PR management of touristic destinations, should develop communication campaign with the purpose of convincing the public for using tourism services of a country. At the next level, public relations organizations and produce questions in order to foresee the issues and develop corresponding programs for crisis communication. At this stage, communication programs often include mass media but also provide interpersonal communication with the public which is directly or indirectly connected to the crisis, as to be solved the open questions through dialogue or negotiations. It’s crucial that public relations design communication programs for the various parties involved and different targeted public for each of the projected levels but also this includes developing the goals, tasks, and vision of tourism of a country, to suggest and prepare programs and campaigns as to achieve those goals, tasks and vision, their implementation and evaluation. The model of strategic management of public relations provides a two-way symmetrical channel of communication among the Ministry and management decisions, parties involved and the public, questions and results of the relations. All of them are mutually dependable. Hence, the cooperation between the makers of strategic decisions in the tourism industry of a country and the public due to decisions’ effect on the public are crucial. The offered model of strategic management of public relations in the tourism industry of each country is liable to further research and additions, according to the demands of tourism development of each country.

CONCLUSIONS

Strategic representation and promotion of global touristic markets are crucial for achieving competitor’s comparison advantage in tourism and touristic product in each country. That is systematic approach including many different instruments coordinated in a unique system of integral communication: strategic planning, building and practicing PR in tourism industry because the process of creating an image of a touristic destination is irreplaceable without the strategically created and implemented public relations.

The application of modern PR concept demands PR modeling in the tourism industry, as a manner, form and formula which would help to the concept, materialize and develop the applicable program and PR practice in tourism, adapted to the conditions and tendencies of a touristic economy of each country. Therefore, the tourism of each country can become really productive and profitable culture and socially beneficial profession.

The offered PR modeling in this research is a platform for building developed model of strategic management of PR in tourism industry of each country. Hence, one shouldn’t conclude that the modeling of PR in the tourism is once and for all and thus unchangeable. The opposite, it’s necessary that the model follows and keeps up with the changes, trends, and oscillations both in national and international level. But in that case, the model is able to respond to the touristic challenges of the new era and successfully avoid the trap-being its own target.

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