

# MANAGING THE RECOGNITION OF BULGARIA AS A SPA AND WELLNESS DESTINATION

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**Abstract:** *Developing the country image as a tourist destination should be reviewed carefully so the positions on the competitive markets can be developed successfully. The process of organizing, management and monitoring the image of a tourist destination is way more complex compared to that of individual companies of the market. That way the building of a brand of the tourist destination cannot be compared with branding strategies of traditional goods and services. That's why the managers of Bulgaria as a spa and wellness tourist destination should be aware of the situation inside the country – of the strengths and the weaknesses, as well as of the situation outside, including possible opportunities and threats. The whole strategy for developing the destination and the image strategy should be harmonized with the vision of the government, the local people and of all stakeholders in the first of spa and wellness tourism. The aim in this chapter is to outline some key steps for building a unique image and brand of the destination by using the chosen tools for interaction and methods for developing spa and wellness products in order to achieve an identical distinctive image.*

**Keywords:** *Bulgaria, Spa and Wellness Destination, Distinctive Image, Planning, Monitoring, Improving.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Destinations most commonly have two channels that work simultaneously to develop their image and brand. On one hand, there are the oral recommendations „word of mouth” and the opinions of people who have already visited the destination. This channel is getting more and more influential because of the huge role of social media. On the other hand, there are the official advertisements that include different advertisement channels, marketing campaigns, direct promotional activities, internet presence, printed informational materials and PR campaigns, as the requirement is the strategies of the destinations to be harmonized during the delivering.

Each culture is different and so the advertisement and the marketing of the tourist destination on an international scale are influenced by it. The tourist managers of the destination should be aware of the already existing image of the country that is in the mind of every tourist and also in companies all over the world. This is an important base for developing a strong brand of the destination and this itself will make it into an attractive and successful destination. These days managers have a large variety of marketing instruments for generating a distinctive image. In spite of that, the pride of the people that work for a certain organization and of the local people as well are some of the most valuable means for taking an outstanding position on the competitive markets, especially through employees that directly communicate with tourists and are involved in satisfying the needs and the expectations of the spa and wellness tourists. Therefore, being proud of the country one lives in, of the organization where they work for or of one's own cultural history is not only a strong emotional expression, but also a part of everyday motivation. Besides pride, the team work and also increasing the engagement of every single person can also be strengthened.

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Developing a positive distinctive image of the destination should start with the people who live and work there. Local culture, traditions and beliefs, the organic image, should be a base for development and advertisement of the tourist destination. In addition to that, the managers of the destination should be aware that the models of intercultural communication can totally differ from each other and in some cases, they might not be understood in terms of contents or appearance (facial expressions, body language) which is owed to the lack of intercultural knowledge. That way the branding of the destination in reality leads to developing a brand by people who live or work in the said destination. These people are responsible for creating the image of the tourist destination and symbolize that. It is not about where the destination is geographically located but is more about the local people who make the difference and highlight the uniqueness of their own country and the tourist place. That way the cultural environment of the country plays a vital role in developing a branding strategy and creating an image of the destination.

A poorly developed strategy as well as using an inconsistent image can influence the choice of the tourists in a negative way. After the image of the country as a tourist destination has received a negative overtone, the managers of the destination should present the negative image in a more positive light which includes the development of innovative, powerful and positive associations with it instead of wasting effort defending the negative image. The cause of the problem should be analyzed in order to move forward with a successful transfer of the image of the destination in the long term.

In the contemporary conditions the managers of a tourist destination should take action at the earliest stage possible especially if the tourist destination and its image and brand require an innovative approach. However, it should be kept in mind that the managers of a tourist destination don't have full control over the existing information, communication and publicity about the image of their own destination. The reason for that is the exceptionally various and accessible information sources all over the world, including the experience of relatives, friends, colleagues, the public media and printed campaigns (tourist leaflets, books), as well as the entertainment fields that include movies and celebrities. In spite of that, tourist managers should be able to control the media in the range of their competence, including using independently developed advertisement and marketing campaigns. It's necessary for these messages to appear on the market in a consistent way and to guide to the right image of the destination and the services it provides. If the transferred image is not realistic, the expectations of the clients cannot be fulfilled.

The advertisement of a certain destination is meant to create a space of positive images and ideas which will attract tourists. It naturally uses USP (unique selling proposition) – the unique sights of the destination that represent the tourist interest and that allow them to be connected in a united complex. Images of “unknown places at the destination”, “a mysterious world”, “other cultures” and so on that are formed as a result of individual or collective representations, symbolically wrapped and presented to the tourist as a kind of “warranty card” that is issued for the local sights and expected experiences that await the tourists there. In other words, this is an image strategy which from the point of view of the communication system includes messages for the image that were created with a certain goal.

## 2. PLANNING AND ORGANIZING THE ACTIVITIES FOR BUILDING AND MAINTAINING A DISTINCTIVE IMAGE

Bulgaria as a tourist destination and its promotional values often do not succeed to uniquely represent its strengths, for example, mineral springs, rich culture or positive lifestyle. Therefore, the coordinated advertisement and marketing activities that include materials and additional advertisement activities for the destination are important for developing and maintaining not only for the attractive image but also for reaching stronger positions of the tourist market.

Four strategies can be offered for building a positive attitude towards the Bulgarian spa and wellness destination depending on two factors (level of involvement and motives that drive the decision for a purchase).

- Strategies for decisions with a low degree of involvement and informational motives – the highlighting of one single profit that is clearly presented and easy to remember is enough and is aimed at creating trust. That's why traditional advertisement communications with the addition of PR techniques and demonstrations of spa and wellness products can be used;
- Strategies for decisions with a low degree of involvement and transformational motives – the goal is to get a positive emotional response. We can bet on a unique vision and feelings as well as on the attractiveness of the message so it can be liked right away and for it to be able to create positive emotions, even though it might not assure in the truthfulness of the statements;
- Strategies for decisions with a high degree of involvement and informational motives – it should be taken in account that here it's not enough to only attract attention and to give knowledge through the message but it's necessary for the message to be received. That's why it's important to be familiar with the attitudes on the target markets towards the spa and wellness tourist product and towards Bulgaria as a destination. Ensuring enough time for receiving and processing the message and creating trust in the source are key factors here. That's why it's suitable to use printed ads instead of electronic media and the authority of celebrities as a PR tool. The goal is to convince the public in the benefits and the advantages of the offered spa and wellness product and to accept it as a whole with the destination.
- Strategies for decisions with a high degree of involvement and transformational motives – the message should accentuate on the emotional authenticity, on creating a personal experience which will be strictly individual and appropriate to the wishes and the needs of every spa and wellness tourist. The goal is to achieve identification with the advertised image.

When choosing the tools for the realization of the different strategies it should have in mind that one tool or media can be suitable for informing but not suitable for creating an attitude.

Another important aspect that should be kept in mind is the financial one. Different resources are needed to create and maintain the different strategies of the destination. These means can be split into financial and organizational and also include the time factor. Accentuating only on the financial component by comparing the annual budget of the destination with those of other tourist destinations would be an obstacle. It's true that tourist destinations that have a larger amount of financial means are more likely to be successful when an attractive positive image and brand are being developed. But elements such as historical heritage, local people, celebrities

from the said country, the condition of the country as a whole, or worldwide known celebrities can have a positive impact.

Except for being troubled by limited financial resources, there can be additional challenges which destination managers should face, for example political conditions inside and outside the destinations, economic crisis and terrorist attacks as well as natural catastrophes. Some more special challenges are those that have to do with terrorism, political conditions and possible negative announcement in the media which can be the reasons for the negative image of the destination and can damage it beyond repair.

Different strategies can be used for *strengthening the recognition of the image*:

- Theming – a thematic accent from the field of the worldwide image of the spa and wellness products is put or it's accentuated on the regional and the local specifications and traditions;
- Regionalizing – it's accentuated on the unique image of the spa and wellness products by a clear relation with the regional specifications;
- Personalizing – the huge popularity of celebrities is used for getting to know the individual characteristics of the destination;
- Connecting – building networks on a regional, national and international level between spa and wellness centers with the goal of mutual advertisement at specialized fairs and markets as well as for increasing the activity of the products offered;
- Limiting – in the contemporary heavily competitive environment, spa and wellness tourists can choose a destination depending on their needs and financial means. That's why specialized products should be offered for a limited time and to a limited number of tourists so they can become even more attractive to them;
- Finalizing – using already standardized brands (for example Turkish baths, Finish sauna, Thai massage and etc.) with the goal of tourists to receive the needed security for the quality;

Quality strategy – ensuring quality spa and wellness services depends on the availability of the necessary natural resources, the good specialized infrastructure, the well-trained personnel, the good research of the penetrated and the potential markets. The successful use of this strategy leads to creating satisfaction from the products and loyalty towards the destination.

*The development of a successful and attractive distinctive image* of the destination has three stages:

- Image of the destination as a whole – it's a construction which consists of subjective and personal information about it, which is different for each person;
- Branding of the destination – it plays a vital role in the building of the emotional side of the image of the destination and can be categorized as unavoidable;
- Individuality of the brand – the human part of the process. This step is the main drive of the created image of the destination as different characteristics such as uniqueness or excitement are being used or the destination being positioned as a family-friendly destination.
- Based on this procedure and on the results from the analysis and the assessment of the image of Bulgaria as a spa and wellness destination *a plan for organizing the activities for building and maintaining its distinctive image* has been developed. This includes:

1. **Carrying out an active campaign for introducing the unique natural resources and specialized infrastructure for spa a wellness tourism through:**
  - Realizing advertisement campaigns that accentuate on the riches and the diversity of the mineral springs and the qualities of mineral waters for specialized therapies which makes it stand out among the other competitors;
  - Organizing introductory trips for representatives of foreign travel agencies with the goal of getting to know the conditions that the spa and wellness centers the medical spa centers and the thalassotherapeutic centers offer;
  - Organizing training courses for specialization and additional qualifications of the people working in the field of spa and wellness tourism.
  
2. **Coordination between the stakeholders in spa and wellness tourism and improving the communication policies for popularizing Bulgaria as a destination with a distinctive image for spa and wellness tourism through:**
  - Coordinating the actions of all stakeholders for the production and the offering of those specialized products;
  - An opportunity for carrying out collaborative events such as conferences, round tables, attracting Bulgarian and foreign experts for popularizing spa and wellness tourism;
  - Participation of stakeholders of all levels at international tourist markets and specialized fairs for spa and wellness tourism;
  - Carrying out advertisement campaigns for Bulgarian spa and wellness tourism at a local, regional, national and international level;
  - Synchronizing the efforts for preserving traditional and culinary practices that are included in Bulgarian spa and wellness tourism.
  
3. **Expansion of tourist supply by introducing cultural events that influence the choice of Bulgarian spa and wellness tourist product by creating destination networks with thematically connected:**
  - Annual festivals, concerts and so on;
  - Annual trade exhibitions, fairs, tourist markets;
  - Annual events that have to do with the local lifestyle and ethnic groups;
  - Annual international cultural events;
  - Annual events that have to do with traditional production (production of rose oil, wine and so on).
  
4. **Building and maintaining a distinctive image of Bulgaria through launching PR campaigns:**
  - Popularizing it as a secure, calm and safe destination;
  - Perceiving the destination as well-known and prestigious for spa and wellness tourism by celebrities;
  - Advertising it as an exotic and authentic destination for spa and wellness tourism;
  - Carrying out regular surveys among the producers and the consumers of those specialized tourist products.

### 3. MONITORING THE STABILITY OF THE IMAGE

The image of the spa and wellness destination Bulgaria is a result of an endless thought process in which two different main forces function – a controllable and an uncontrollable force and that's why it is different at different times.

- The first one is about the efforts spent on promoting, the ways of access and the tourist infrastructure that were build and prepared by the stakeholders and the traders for stimulating tourists to visit their destination.
- The second one is about those forces which are out of the control of the stakeholders or of the marketing that derive from the social and the psychological characteristics of tourists such as an experience from a previous trip, motivation, the local people and the attitudes of the providers of services towards tourist activities and the interaction between tourists at a foreign destination.

Both forces influence the sources of information, which influence tourists to build a construction in their minds that leads to the formation of an induced and limited image and they let tourists to create and structure the perception of the stimulus. After that, the image of the destination is formed as a result of the tourist's knowledge that was obtained for the occasion (cognitive component), the feelings and the attraction towards the destination (affectional component) and their intentions or behaviors in future (conative component). After that the functional and the psychological characteristics of the general image of the destination are created by tourists.

The creation of a full image of the destination allows the tourists to narrow down the potential vacation options to one or more previously selected destinations so that in some moment in the future the process of making a decision is made based on a precursory image that can go through future changes depending on time and distance.

The image of the destination also affects the expectations of tourists before the experience and of the generated expectations during the experience at the destination (image of the place). A new image of the destination can be created after the tourist comes home and revises and assesses everything (follow-up image). Also, if the assessment is positive (satisfaction) it can lead to an intention for another visit of the destination or it can be recommended to friends and family. But if the assessment is negative (dissatisfaction), this can lead to a negative word-of-mouth advertisement and to no intentions for a following visit.

Regardless of the fact that managers cannot have full control over all communication channels, they should undertake all measures possible to guarantee a consistent and positive image. It is also important for them to react immediately to a negative image or communication in order to avoid the destruction of the brand. The key to success is constant monitoring and control of the messages transferred, as well as always being prepared for changes in the brand of the tourist destination if they are necessary. However, any change that needs to be made, should be done in a coordinated way.

Therefore, in order to be a successful spa and wellness destination, Bulgaria should know what exactly to offer on the market and should be clear with the expectations and the requirements of the individual tourists. The successful image of the destination should not only be liked as truthful but also to be suitable for the local conditions in the country. That's why there is a need from carrying out a monitoring, the main goals of which is to ensure the synchronization and

the mutual help during realizing the activities. The goal is to set up management results that affect the promotion and the positioning of the tourist destination. One of the most important challenges of promoting is to recognize their strengths and weaknesses. The structured technique that is used in the work (the multi-attributive approach for assessing the nature of the image of the destination) is a very useful tool for getting information on both aspects. Later on, promoters should use various activities to maintain the strengths and to improve the qualities where weaknesses are found. That can be done through the mass media or by improving strategies for the natural and the cultural resources. In addition, structured methodology allows us to understand whether the image perceived coincides with the planned or the promoted image. If they differ, it means that the destination is not well-positioned. In this case it's needed to redefine the communication for the destination in order to improve the perceived image on the target markets.

As tourists use cognitive and affective dimensions to form an image of the destination, in the positioning promoters should not only highlight the physical characteristics but also the mix of emotions or feelings that the destination will wake in the tourists' minds. In the first case the individual beliefs should be strengthened and in the second – the tourist advertisement should be aimed at the emotional or sentimental component. If the ad (the promotion) is done right, the tourist destination will have a privileged position for the individuals in the process of making a decision.

It should be kept in mind that individuals with different motivations and cultural values perceive a tourist destination in different ways. Based on the positioning of the destination as a whole, promoters should segment the market and find a specific way of communication with each group of tourists. It is necessary to find a way of communication that does not wake all emotions but just the ones that are related to the psychological motives of each group of tourists. A better affective image will be achieved as a result. At the same time, more effort should be put into increasing the trust in the destination in tourists with different cultural values. One of the most important goals of the advertisement is to decrease the distrust in the destination before it being visited. If this is achieved, it will be perceived as more familiar and attractive for the target markets compared to its competitors.

In terms of monitoring the stability of the image build in the context of branding, the brand can be viewed as the most powerful element in the advertisement of the tourist destination and the most valuable element for a brand is uniqueness. While monitoring strategies for imposing the brand, four aspects should be kept in mind.

- Recognizability – the general presentation or the slogan of the destination should be strong, unique, clearly defined and differentiable. Even if the name of the destination isn't included, it should be recognizable for potential consumers.
- Uniqueness – if the destination is trying to attract every target group, this will not only cause confusion in the minds of the potential tourists but will also lead to a complicated process of image development. That's why the tourist destination should clearly define its target groups to position itself properly on the market.
- Acceptance is the third element and it's about the level of approval not only from the tourists but also from the local people. Local people should support and be in harmony with the basic strategies of the destination. Otherwise, there can be a difference between the prior ideas and reality and so the image of the destination will differ.
- Translatability – the positioning as a whole should be coordinated with the values of the parties which should be clearly understood and applied from the stakeholders in spa and wellness tourism.

In the process of monitoring the stability of the image we should keep track if the requirements for the created innovative tourist product are being followed in terms of:

- Standardization – whether the requirements of Regulation № 2 from 29 January 2016 (in force since 9 February 2016) for the conditions and the procedure of certification of balneo-healing (medical spa) center, spa center, wellness center and thalassotherapeutic center“ are observed and if the services offered live up to the compulsory standards. The goal is to create a unified tourist register. 128 centres have been certified until this moment;
- Specialization – whether the requirements for it are observed based on the quality of the available natural factors (mineral waters, healing mud, sea water and so on), the qualifications of the personnel and the therapeutic programs in the specially equipped rooms;
- Authenticity – whether the offered spa and wellness products are appropriate to the place and the region in terms of Bulgarian culinary traditions, the use of wines of authentic Bulgarian types, the influence of the enological and gourmet culture, the use of local bio products and superfoods. The introduction of a certificate for a guaranteed origin for a certain specialized product become attractive on its own by presenting the identity, the cultural and historical traditions that are typical for the region and has a positive effect on the tourists’ perception as it coincides with the image of tourism in the destination.
- Simulation – whether the requirements for including programs and scenarios from the cultural heritage in the spa and wellness therapies that date back from the Roman Empire, for including tourists in characteristic customs and rituals during therapies and for the possibilities for participation of tourists in production that is traditional for Bulgaria (rose oil, wine, milk, honey and others) as a part of the spa and wellness experience;
- Complexity – whether spa and wellness tourism is included in “destination networks” with other types of tourism for receiving a more complex product and fullness of the experience during the vacation;
- Richness - whether the requirements for competence, fullness and fantasy in the spa and wellness tourist products are observed so they can offer original, captivating and attractive offers;
- Whether the spa and tourist products create the necessary conditions for the orientation of the spa and wellness products towards the local people;
- Whether the requirements for moderation of the usage of the tourist potential are observed for its preservation. Whether the measures for managing tourists are observed (measures for managing the access, measures for optimizing the access to the specialized infrastructure) for their spatial and quality distribution in order to ensure their safety, reduce the negative influences in the busiest spa and wellness centers and re-directing some of the tourist flow to other centers so all capacities of the specialized facilities are in use.
- Coordinating and synchronizing the efforts of the stakeholders – whether optimal coordination is realized through harmonizing the actions of all stakeholders for the production and the supply of those specialized products, carrying out mutual events such as conferences, round tables, attracting Bulgarian and foreign experts for popularization of spa and wellness tourism, whether the participation of the stakeholders on all levers in tourist markets and specialized fairs for spa and wellness tourism are effective, as well as control over the efficiency of the carried advertisement campaigns of Bulgarian spa and wellness tourism on local, national and international level.
- Monitoring the stability of the competitive strengths of Bulgaria as a spa and wellness destination from the point of view of the USP through regular research on the tourists for overlapping the expectations with the results in terms of gaining a feeling of unique-

ness, of receiving a specific profit from practicing spa and wellness tourism in Bulgaria and in terms of the degree of conviction of the supply.

- A possibility for formulating USP is the highlighted “democratism” which exists in Bulgarian spa and wellness hotel complexes in terms of guaranteeing a certain minimal access of tourists and visitors to use mineral waters and the spa and wellness services that are related to them. Such distinguishing trait cannot be found in most spa and wellness centers that are municipal or state property in France, Spain or Portugal.

A main task of monitoring is observing and measuring the achievement of the set goals and of their efficiency in the process of their realization. As a result of its realization, corrections and updates can be made in the way of execution. The current monitoring has a particularly important role in long-term planning which is realized in a few phases. This requires coming up with a system for current monitoring and periodic assessment of the state and the dynamics of the development of spa and wellness tourism. This approach allows to assess the results from the undertaken measures and the set goals and tasks for the development of Bulgaria, to identify the main problems and to make recommendations for change and development of policies, programs and initiatives from the strategy. As getting an assessment based on the expected and the achieved results is an important moment from the realization of the strategy, the influence and the satisfaction in the current study, this assessment for the Bulgaria spa and wellness destination was made based on specially collected and analyzed information that was executed based on explicitly defined criteria and standards for adequacy, efficiency, stability, justice.

Sticking with the chosen strategy for spa and wellness tourism will lead to increasing the competitiveness of Bulgaria as a tourist destination. This means not only increasing the number of tourists in limited number of resorts but balancing the visits in all spa and wellness centers in the country and throughout the whole year, increasing the average stay of tourists and increasing the revenues from tourist visits in the country. Bulgaria will become more competitive on the tourist market not by offering the lowest prices for a part of the tourist industry but through using suitable prices in terms of the quality of spa and wellness tourism which include smart profit and allow investment in the development of tourism in the country. The increasing of the competitiveness of Bulgaria as a tourist destination means achieving economic growth through tourism aimed towards improving the quality of life in the country, preserving the natural and cultural diversity for the future generations.

#### **4. THE DISTINCTIVE IMAGE OF BULGARIA AS A SPA AND WELLNESS DESTINATION - RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

Building a distinctive image of the destination usually starts with a precise positioning and defining the target groups, the recipients towards who the advertisement impact or propaganda will be aimed at. The image is not a constant, it should be always maintained, corrected and renewed. Constructing the image should match the stereotypes of social views and behaviors and should take in account the expectations of the community, the national and cultural specifications and the level of education.

Positioning is also about the competitors as consumers often compare how the destination is similar to or different from other competitors. That’s why the goal is to come up with a position that takes in account not only our own strengths and weaknesses but also the weaknesses of the competitors.

Product positioning starts with the tourist product – the image of the product is positioned in the minds of the consumers. It isn't of great importance whether this image will express its essential aspects or some insignificant characteristics. According to Wind (1980) the important part is the selected target group to perceive the product with a clearly distinguishable image and disposition compared to its competitors.

So, positioning should not only depend on the image but it can also create an emotional connection between the destination and the potential visitor. The process of positioning includes not only the products and the services but also the way they are announced at the target market. It's also important to maintain a narrow focus and to not create a diluted image of the destination while aiming at broader markets.

The important in the communication activity is not the image of the destination but the emotions which it triggers. If they are strong, then the audience will assess the image well. People get a feeling of surprise and joy when they experience something new. Therefore, the attention in communication programs is concentrated on what's non-standard, the unusual, the original and the unique or whatever can conquer the soul and evoke feelings. The image isn't just the face of a destination, it's also connected to those cognitive processes in the minds of the audience with the help of which it recognized the destination as one-of-a-kind and unique.

In other words, real positioning is with a market oriented and inspired differentiation compared to the technologically oriented and inspired. According to Zhelev (2010) with the first one, the idea of positioning stands at the beginning of the project while with the second one – at its end: what should be suggested as an advantage to the consumers for the already created and introduced image on the market.

That's why the process of positioning includes different approaches which are needed to come up with an effective strategy. Efficient positioning is based on the market principles which products and services use for solving the problems of the clients – to satisfy their needs and to give the profits promised. At the best circumstances the decision should be different and better than what is offered by the competitors.

Positioning on the market is a process of defining and choosing marked segments. Those should be the existing visitors of the destination or new ones. It's based on the knowledge about the needs, the wishes and the perceptions of the target market as well as the advantages the destination has to offer.

Psychological positioning uses communication to recreate the identity and the image of Bulgaria as a destination on the target markets. It converts the needs of the clients into images and positions of the destination in the mind of the visitor. Psychological positioning is a strategy that aims to create a unique image of the tourist product with the goal of sparking interest and attracting visitors. Positioning can be objective and subjective. The objective one has the goal of creating an image of the destination that reflects its physical characteristics, what actually is the destination and what's in there. If the destination has some unique function, it can be used for objective positioning to create an image which will make it stand out from the competitors. Positioning is less successful if this function isn't exceptional. Uniqueness is one of the first rules of objective positioning. Subjective positioning reflects not the image of the physical aspects but what is perceived by the tourists based on their experience.

The first step needed for a successful change of the image of the destination is a careful study of the existing image among the target audience as this is the image that ensures the base on which the campaign will be built. Destinations with a positive image should create campaigns that strengthen this image while destinations with a negative image should create campaigns that improve and contradict the existing image. Destinations with a weak image should focus their campaign first on increasing the awareness for them and to construct the image desired only after that.

The change of the symbols and the signs for destinations like Bulgaria is an important component of marketing campaigns. Logos and slogans are effective methods for delivering messages. That's why Bulgaria should take measures to change its logos which will give off a contemporary spirit that will encourage tourism and will improve the overall image of the country.

The change of the target audience is an additional strategy that can be used by the ones who make decisions for changes in the image of the destination. The image of the destination among a certain target audience can be so problematic (for example with the so-called "alcohol or party tourism") that overcoming it is almost impossible at that part. The campaign for creating a distinctive positive image is particularly hard when the destination is often presented negatively in international media (for example Bulgaria in British media). It's important how widely the negative image has spread among the target audience and if it's actually possible to change that image. If the image is not exceptionally unfavorable, isn't very wide-spread and it can be easily changed, the best strategy is to ignore it.

Another solution for this situation is to partially change the target audience or the type of tourism offered. We should start concentrating on a different market segment which is less affected by the problems depicted in the negative announcements. As a result, from the damage caused by the mass youth summer tourism, advertisement campaigns should focus on spa and wellness tourists from Western Europe with the suggestion that this type of tourists will be less sensitive to the problems with the youngsters.

Communication campaigns are a limited tool that can have a short-term success but absolutely can't replace a long-term and consistent government policies. Even if it's correctly done, the work on the media aspects is important, but just one advertisement campaign isn't enough to lead to a significant change the activities should be realized in different channels that complete each other. For example, members of the Ministry of Tourism should use media advertisement but at the same time they should have also started a broad campaign for sales at tourist fairs all over the world and constantly meet with tourist agents and tour operators. In other words, a few techniques should be used in harmony with the goal of achieving the desired final result: advertisement, public relations, promotions, direct mailing and marketing. In addition to the need to use all techniques, it is important that all players, all stakeholders: the locals, the tourist sector, the local authorities, the national government, local media, public relations as well as advertisers.

The image of Bulgaria abroad, falls behind and the world often doesn't know what's going on here or learns the details late. The film about Bulgaria with popular Hollywood celebrities was prepared and is shown during international forums and is also accessible on online; we're looking for lobbies around the world that will stand up for our cause; there are webpages about the country on the internet. Or in other words, all the projects are in the field of advertisement and informational activity. They are not only doubtful but they most likely won't have any lasting

effect if we have in mind the complicated situation and the complexity of the problem. The effect will be temporary but after all, this is a beginning. Marinov (2010, p. 10) affirms that endless efforts are needed to change the attitudes of outsider audiences and at the same time, changing the context and modifying the communication field inside the country itself. There isn't a more convincing advertisement for a country than the joy and the enthusiasm with which its citizens speak about it. Because the image of a country depends very much on its population.

Without the motivation of the insider audiences which have a key role in the positioning of Bulgaria as a really interesting, hospitable and changing destination and without the informed and benevolent outsider audiences, the country won't have a visible and successful brand. Advertisement campaigns with no exact recipients, multidirectional informational messages and unrepresentable participation on prestigious tourist fairs aren't a sufficient condition for presence and recognition on the international market that is becoming more and more complex (Alexieva & Temelkova, 2013).

Among the choices that set the need for a new understanding of positioning of Bulgaria as a distinctive spa and wellness tourist destination are positioning that is based on strategical management of the messages that are appropriate for a certain target group of consumers; creating an overall strategy for the image of Bulgaria that is coordinated and realized mutually with all stakeholders (government institutions, civil, cultural and educational organizations, society, private organizations and others); as well as effective control and public assessment about the results. According to Alexieva & Temelkova (2013) the image of the country is not static but it rather changes all the time under the influence of numerous inner and outer factors which have a direct or indirect influence on the created and the imposed image.

The building of all images needs active construction that is done by the PRs, as well as taking in account the expectations and the preferences of the audiences. Because of the dynamic nature of the target audiences, the maintenance of the image and enriching it with new desired elements is an intensive process which shouldn't stop. According to Popova (2012, p. 2) building the image of country is realized on different levels. Its PRs are the state authorities, business organizations and companies as well as every single person that is connected with this country no matter if it's their birth land or not.

Specialists also use *the theory of balance* according to which when the perceptions are balanced, it's likely for the attitudes to be stable. It's useful for explaining the large use of celebrities for advertising products as marketers hope that the popularity of the star will be transferred to the product. In contemporary conditions, in the era of personalization, celebrities are very often used for improving the reputation, for creating and introducing a distinctive image of the destination but they shouldn't be ones the target markets are impressed by and are trying to imitate. People who are sensitive to social acceptance and the opinions of others, for example, are more convinced by an attractive source, while those who are strongly oriented inwards are captivated by a reliable expert source. At the same time, the perception for deserving trust even from a reliable source can diminish if it advertises too many products.

Propaganda campaigns of different types have been a part of the historical development of nations from the very beginning. Their success is owed not only to the quality of the campaigns but to many other factors. There are many studies how advertisement campaigns convince people, especially when people don't fight against established stereotypes. They are as well much more likely to believe media messages when they don't have alternative sources of information.

Petrova (1999) found that “*the effect of trust*” is very important and in advertisement it has the meaning of trust towards the ad as a whole. The recipient perceives the nature of the advertisement as a way of influence because of which the perceived information is defined more as an unreliable source. The conclusion that should be made is that the positive effect of getting informed from the advertisement will come right after its airing and its perceiving by the recipient – later, after the second or the third week. The “unwillingness” of recipients to be manipulated and perceiving the advertisement as something with exactly such goals can give the advertisement specialist additional hardships. That’s why it’s important how the opinion will be presented – straight-forwardly or indirectly. The direct presentation of the opinion is seen as more aggressive, as an aspiration to force someone else’s opinion and this can lead to the opposite effect (the boomerang effect).

The reliability of the source is about perceiving the expert knowledge, the objectivity or whether the source is trustworthy. This dimension is related to the convictions of the consumers that the communicator is competitive and is ready to ensure the needed information so competing products can be assessed adequately. A reliable source can be especially convincing when the consumer hasn’t learned a lot about the product yet and hasn’t formed an opinion about it. Statistically, the influence on the returns of advertisement by celebrities or experts is so positive that it compensates the expenditures for hiring them.

Even though usually positive sources strengthen the change of attitudes, “the rule of the sleeping effect” has its exceptions. Sometimes the source can be unpleasant and not liked and in spite of that, it might manage to be effective in passing on the message of the product. In some cases, the differences in the changes of the attitudes between the positive and the not-so-positive sources are erased with time and it seems like people forget the negative source and change their attitudes.

Different methods can be used for improving the image of the destination. Choosing them depends on the goals of the campaign and the time, on the economic situation at the destination and its competitors, on the budget available and so on.

There are three categories of tools for image communication:

- Slogans, themes, positions – The choice of the slogan “Bulgaria. A Discovery to Share” shows that Bulgaria is an unknown destination and its discovery is a challenge that needs to be shared. “Bulgaria is a personal discovery that needs to be shared.” The discovery has no value if it is not shared with someone. The theme is to encourage tourists to think over and tell about their personal discoveries that are important to them (Temelkova, 2013). Another tool is positioning the image of the destination in regional, national and inner-regional conditions as a place for a specific type of activities or where it has an important role (for example, Varna – European Youth Capital 2017).
- Visual symbols – many destinations have signature iconic places but it’s a must that the visual image coincides with the slogan, the theme of the place and so on. There are four main visual strategies – diversity (Sofia: not just a business center), humor (Gabrovo is presented as the capital of humor of Bulgaria), disproving, denying (for example, the lack of ethnic tolerance by presenting a video in which there are tourists of different ethnic groups and nationalities) and compatibility (to connect different elements of a certain destination).
- Events and activities – the use of celebrities and important events (sports, cultural, political) to help creating and introducing a positive image of the destination.

The institutions and the organizations that are responsible for the development of tourist products at a certain destination, have a rich arsenal of instruments for creating a positive image. Forming a vision and introducing it to the tourists happens in the process of communication between the ones creating the image and the recipients of the information. Promotion is a form of communication. According to Stavrev (2008, p. 100) it is a form of investment in confirming the positive idea about a certain tourist destination. Promoting a destination includes the re-assessment and the representation of the destination by creating and introducing a new image on the market for improving its competitiveness that is aimed at attracting and keeping certain resources.

## 5. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The “image” category is closely related to another term from the field of psychology - position. The nature and the development of the process of a person’s actions that lead to satisfying one’s needs, is also determined by one’s hierarchy of values as well as by one’s expressed emotional positions which are a durable structure of the cognitive processes of the behavioral tendencies. Positions that are formed based on generalized opinions of the consumers that stem from previous experiences, acquired knowledge and received information lead to relatively consistent behaviors of people towards similar objects and phenomena. They can be defined as a thought shortening that saves up time and energy for “unnecessary” thinking. From this point of view, changing them is hard. However, when there is a need of change in the position, it would be a must to reach to the opinions and the beliefs about that certain object and preformatting them, or changing the ideas about a certain topic.

We should distinguish the attempts for changing the image of the destination while its reality is actually changing and the attempts for changing image without making any changes. The change should happen at stages:

- The first stage is diagnosis;
- Building a strategic vision;
- Planning the steps that are needed for creating a certain vision.

The effect of redefinition happens when the information is interpreted as different from the one that has defined the existing image of the destination, as not matching the destination which the recipient had built in their own world before. If the recipient interprets a certain message in a way that shows them a certain aspect of his view of reality is incomplete, invalid or incorrectly defined, then they will define the image of their reality again.

Kennet Bowlding outlines three ways by which a certain message can cause a new definition of the image for the recipient: when they add, reorganize and fully clarify (Robert, 1992, pp. 98-99). For Bulgaria as a spa and wellness destination *these certain actions can be applied to improve the recognition of its image*:

- First, new elements can be added to the image. This happens when the recipient interprets information about certain aspects of their surroundings which they haven’t organized before or new information for a previously organized aspect of the surroundings which is in conflict with the existing organization. When something new is learnt about a certain destination, it’s not needed to make any general changes in the existing structures, the image is just defined anew by adding new information.
- Second, the structure of the existing aspects of the image can be organized again. This type of redefinition is for when a certain message is interpreted as if it shows that some

part of the surroundings has changed or that some part of the surroundings is organized incorrectly. The effect on the image of the recipient is an effect of reorganization, of creating new relations and new meanings.

- Third, the message might help clarify some of the dimensions of the image. Communications which neither add something new to the image, nor lead to reorganization but which in all cases start off some changes by reducing uncertainty can be received.

The message can strengthen its credibility if the recipients perceive the qualification of the source as relevant to the product which is advertised. The attractiveness of the source is about its perceived social value. That's why those suggestions are aimed at all stakeholders that have to do with creating and imposing a stable distinctive image of Bulgaria as a spa and wellness destination.

The distinctive image is in fact specifying the strategic behavior that is harmonized with the business philosophy. According to some authors, it should also contain the goals of the marketing policies such as the desired market share, the popularity of the brand and the image in relation with the chosen target groups and deadlines for achieving the said goals.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The results of measuring the image of Bulgaria as a spa and wellness destination show that there are 5 main criteria that should be taken in account during its development as a whole. First, the available, accessible and suitable natural resources, the local population and the specialized infrastructure should be used for creating tourist attractions. The next step is to create communicational policies to make the destination popular. The third element is the availability of a well-functioning communication network between the stakeholders. The fourth criterion is matching the cultural events in Bulgaria that can influence the choice of the Bulgarian tourist product. The fifth element includes the whole development of the spa and wellness tourist destination in a full view, including the durability factor and performance that is appropriate to the changing market conditions in the long term. These elements are closely related to each other and to the image of every single tourist, including the individual basic needs with their emotional foundation.

The development of the successful spa and wellness tourist destination, of its brand and of the transferred image and reputation is a prolonged and long-term process. If the brand of the tourist destination is well-managed and maintained, it can lead to enormous success and profits. One of the most important aspects for the image of the destination is to show not only the possibilities for receiving a spa and wellness tourist product but also the tourist experience as a whole. The brand of a successful tourist destination usually consists of a constant, meaningful and attractive advertisement campaign that contains the main values and has potential to develop an exceptionally innovative and pioneering brand. As an instrument, branding not only gives the possibility to create a brand that is fully loaded with emotions but can also be viewed as a tool for developing the loyalty of clients towards the destination and to influence its individual image among potential tourists. This once again proves that the general strategy for branding Bulgaria as a spa and wellness tourist destination should be according to the requirements of the stakeholders.

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