



Tourism in Slovakia in the Times of COVID-19 Pandemic – Communication of the Municipalities with Tourists

Denisa Jánošová¹ 
Renáta Sádecká² 
Lenka Labudová³ 

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Abstract: *In this chapter, we deal with the importance of marketing communication in tourism, especially when it comes to the COVID-19 pandemic and the recovery of Slovak municipalities after it. According to revised OECD estimates, the decline in international tourism will be in the range of 60% to 80%. This chapter aims to deal with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on tourism, while we also present the results of our research, which deals with marketing communication in Slovakian regions. We use the comparison on the occasion of comparing the number of visitors in Slovakia and the number of overnight stays in January, February and March in the 2017 – 2021 years. We also present results from the correlation, which evaluate the relationship between chosen variables.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The outbreak of the pandemic, which is related to a worldwide spread of a COVID-19 and its direct shock to the area of tourism has caused that in the present this industry is reaching a significant loss. Based on the revised OECD estimates (2020), the decrease in international tourism will range from 60% to 80%, depending on the length of the recovery. The World Tourism Council (WTTC, 2020) stated that in the recent period, the direct and significant decrease in tourism was due to the financial and economic crisis of 2009, with the current situation caused by the COVID-19 virus estimated to have a much more serious impact on the industry. The current situation in the industry, on the other side, is perceived as an opportunity for the modernization of tourism in the European Union, which would be in accordance with environmental and social responsibility (Sigela, 2020, Vigliarolo, 2020). On the other side, a significant drop in sales in the sector is perceived. From the point of view of the accommodation sector in the territory of the SR, for example, there was the most significant drop in revenues in April 2020 (by 84.7% year-on-year). In May of the same year, revenues from own services and goods in the accommodation sector fell by 81.6%, and due to the gradual release, a decrease in revenues by 61.2% was registered in June. In July, sales fell by only 29% (OECD, 2020). Based on the data, even the timely introduction of anti-pandemic measures did not help to revive the restrictions imposed until then at the time of the release. A restart of the tourism industry calls for taking immediate short-term and long-term support measures (Kumudumali, 2020). From this point of view, attention is currently on eliminating the economic effects on the entire tourism industry. In some countries, measures to revive tourism had already been undertaken.

¹ University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius, Faculty of Mass Media Communication, Nám. J. Herdu 2, 917 01 Trnava, Slovakia

² University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius, Faculty of Mass Media Communication, Nám. J. Herdu 2, 917 01 Trnava, Slovakia

³ University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius, Faculty of Mass Media Communication, Nám. J. Herdu 2, 917 01 Trnava, Slovakia

A significant role in the development of tourism infrastructure is played by regions (Hrout & Mouhamed, 2014). The development of tourism infrastructure by the local government mainly includes the construction of cycle paths (which is a financial and time-consuming task, and therefore concrete results are manifested over time), marking of tourist routes and the development of other supporting infrastructure (examples are lookout towers). Regions also support OOCR, implement marketing or create their own agencies to support the local economy and products.

In recent years, more and more emphasis has been placed on the quality of services provided and their marketing communication in tourism. Tourists in domestic tourism often compare the destinations of tourism and their primary and secondary offer. It is therefore important to how the aim spots are presented, what marketing communication tools they use, but also how the aim spots are perceived by visitors (Bramwell & Lane, 2011). This perception can be influenced by marketing communication tools. Marketing communication tools are constantly evolving. This emphasizes the two-way communication between the creators of marketing communication and visitors.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Marketing of tourism and its specifics

Tourism is an important factor in any national economy. In the countries of the European Union, it plays an important role, especially in terms of economic and social indicators of the EU economy. In terms of the primary definition of tourism, the Ministry of Transport and Construction of the Slovak Republic (2020) defines tourism as “a set of activities aimed to meet the needs related to travel and residence of persons outside their place of residence and usually in leisure time. Their aim is rest, cognition, health, entertainment, cultural and sports activities, business trips, it means gaining a comprehensive experience” (Ministry of Transport and Construction of the Slovak Republic, 2020). An important concept connected to the tourism sector is also the tourism product, which is a type of service offered by the destination, tourism operators, including tourism institutions (in this case, the so-called secondary offer). The main essence of the tourism product specification is to know the needs of customers (Albalate & Bel, 2010), as well as how to use communication tools.

The specifics of marketing in tourism can be stated as follows (Butoracová Šindleryová & Hoghová, 2020):

1. Dependence on the political and legislative terms of a country - the situation in the markets is often directly related to the legal system of a given country.
2. Intangibility of tourism products - the final tourism products are intangible, these are services. We cannot produce or store services for the future.
3. Local connection and direct connection of the destination with the surrounding area, place and environment - the final destination is a mirrored picture of the surrounding nature, environment and thus directly affects the offered services or the feelings of visitors.
4. Seasonal nature of tourism - the market and its conditions are significantly influenced by weather and other natural factors, which are often unpredictable.
5. Tourism uses mainly human capital – when it comes to offering quality services, there is a supportive and non-conflicting approach of staff, through which guests come into direct contact.
6. Close interconnection of demand and an offer - even small fluctuations in the needs of customers or offers of individual regions will be immediately demonstrated on the market.

7. Demand - depends to a large extent on the pensions of the population, the amount of leisure time, the prestige of the products and the overall standard of living of the country. These ultimately create overall consumer preferences, desires and individual needs that create demand.
8. Technological impact on the industry - the development of modern technologies is a relatively important factor in the composition of the tourism market. This factor has the greatest impact on the transport component of travel but is also reflected in the provision of specific services. These can be administered better, effectively, easily and largely adjust the overall nature of the specific experiences that are expected by consumers from the offer.

Tourism as an industry has its specifics as well as marketing in it (Jánošová, 2017). These are associated with the specific characteristics of the market for goods and services. However, it has several characteristics that can only be found within it. The result can be found from the nature of the needs satisfied by tourism as well as the nature of the individual goods offered to tourism. The specificities of this sector are mainly reflected in the signs of supply and demand. When it comes to the creation of new markets or market segments it is always a long-term process (Gössling et al., 2020). Large investments are needed to build the infrastructure as well as high costs for advertising and promotion. Aim groups must know about the destination, and have enough information about it as well as good recommendations from well-known persons or service providers.

2.2. Marketing communication in tourism

Marketing communication of the regions as destinations for tourism has become the main topic of several authors in recent years. On the one side, this is due to the development of tourism, which affects regional development, on the other side, due to the personal approach to the marketing of destinations. The creation of marketing communication in tourism regions in Slovakia should be based on the fact that these regions are characterized by regional disparities that affect their competitiveness (Gregorová, et al., 2015, Šoltés & Repková Štofková, 2016). Besides that, it is necessary to emphasize in the marketing communication the uniqueness of these regions and the tourism services that are provided in them. Marketing communication is allowing visitors in tourism regions to make the services provided available, which reduces their uncertainty and allows them to make better use of these services. In the marketing communication of services, as well as in the marketing communication of regions, higher demands are placed on choosing the right tool. It is necessary to take into account that the regions are constantly changing organisms and respond to changes in society, but also in the economy and politics.

We can state that the success of marketing regions in domestic tourism is depending mainly on the effectiveness of marketing activities (Bichler, 2019). Therefore, emphasis is placed on their motivation, choice and characteristics. Success also determines how regions can communicate these activities with visitors in domestic tourism.

When it comes to a geographical point of view, we distinguish between domestic and foreign tourism. Domestic tourism is according to Gretzel and Scarpino-Johns (2018) “travel and stay of the domestic population in their own country in order to use their free time for rest, exploration, entertainment, cultural and sports use, etc., if it does not exceed 6 months.” Domestic tourism is a form of tourism in which the visitor in travel does not exceed the territory of the state. We understand domestic tourism as tourism involving the local inhabitants of the country, who travel only within the country.

The development of domestic tourism is conditioned by effective marketing communication and properly chosen tools for the creation and promotion of products of tourism regions according to the aim of visitor groups. As a product of tourism regions, we understand the comprehensive range of services, which the region offers. Therefore, it serves to meet collective and individual needs, and thus for the needs of local people, visitors, potential investors and entrepreneurs. The main aim of marketing communication is to influence the decisions of visitors to tourism regions in order to support the sale of tourism services. Gretzel (2020) agrees with this principle of marketing communication. Szymanska (2018) specifies that marketing communication includes all types and forms of communication that can influence the attitudes, knowledge and behavior of visitors when choosing and buying tourism services. According to Deuz (2020), marketing communication in the field of tourism is “the creation of an effective system, informing consumers and other market participants about products, their price and properties, the place and time in which they can be gained and other important facts.”

2.3. Tourism and its benefits for the region

Tourism involves the movement of people to countries or places outside the usual environment for various purposes, which is mainly linked to the spot (destination) in which the primary and secondary supply of tourism is concentrated. Even though the term of the destination is not precisely defined, it can be approached from several perspectives (Andrades & Dimanche, 2019). From the geographical point of view, it is an area that has the potential to attract customers and can be created traditionally or artificially (for example, amusement parks). Given that the offer of a given location is important for the destination, the destination can also be defined as a “naturally defined whole, which has unique features different from other destinations in terms of tourism development conditions; these unique features include attractions that offer services and infrastructure” (Gregorová, 2015).

The OECD in 2020 found two trends in tourism, which are described quite extensively and include the previous more specified trends in tourism:

1. Preparing tourism businesses for the digital future. The standard for tourism businesses is to have website design and social media communication. In this way, companies are adapting not only to the current but especially to the upcoming Z generation and the Millennium, which will form a decisive component of tourism participants by 2040. The task of companies in the field of tourism, which want to succeed in the market in the coming years, is to use digital technologies as much as possible so that they adapt to the emerging clientele. The government plays an important role in preparing the offer of tourism products. Its role should be to secure the area with high-speed internet, support innovation, develop smart destination tourism, create and support travel-tech incubators.
2. Rethink tourism from a sustainability perspective. The availability of individual travel enabled its mass. Some localities have thus become overcrowded, which can have negative consequences for nature, cultural and historical monuments, monuments, but also for the local population. In tourism, it is important not only the number of visitors and the number of tourists who visit the site but also the contribution of tourists to the destination itself. The ability to maintain a balance between the three pillars of tourism - economic, social and environmental - is now becoming even more important. An important element is the cooperation of all stakeholders. In addition to businesses in the field of tourism, they are also voluntary, non-profit organizations, strategic visions of the city, the region and the entire state. The role of the government is to develop a future vision, based on which tourism entities know where and how to direct their activities.

When it comes to the development of tourism, it is primarily dependent on the development of a specific destination. In order to be able to develop tourism in the long term while respecting the three basic pillars of sustainable tourism - economical, environmental and social, it is necessary to set a strategy for tourism development, which is then concretized by individual tourism companies in the destination (Dwyer et al., 2016). When it comes to the case of traditional destination cities, the strategy for the development of the destination site is set by the city or the relevant Higher Territorial Unit. In addition to tourism companies, tourism organizations also operate in Slovakia (at the regional level) (Pauhofová & Stehlíková 2018, Tamásy, 2006). They aim to support and develop tourism at the national level, i.e. associations, unions, clusters and networks of tourism enterprises. Their work ultimately brings the region funds in the form of an influx of tourists.

2.4. Tourists as consumers of tourism

Consumer behavior has a dynamic character, which means that with the growth of needs and desires and opportunities to satisfy them, the consumer's orientation visibly changes towards quantitative and qualitative consumption. The meaning of the word consumer must be distinguished from the meaning of the word customer. The consumer as a marketing concept represents only one of the possible types of customers (Jánošová, 2017). Customers (subscribers) can be divided into the following groups:

- Consumers - people and households. Consumers buy products for their own use.
- Manufacturers - companies. They buy products for their further use (processing and production).
- Traders - individuals and organizations. They buy products to resell them.
- State - state institutions, authorities and non-profit organizations. They buy products to perform public services.
- Foreign customers - any of the above groups whose residence, registered office or place of business is located in a foreign state.

The basic indicator of the analysis of consumer behavior in tourism is consumer satisfaction itself (Grillitsch & Sotarauta, 2020), which depends on his feelings, his pleasure or disappointment, and his expectations, which are compared with the comparison of consumer utility with usefulness expected. The consumer in tourism is of interest due to the dynamic nature of consumer behavior. The consumer in tourism is currently characterized by (Bakar & Rosbi, 2020):

- high demands and insight into the procurement and consumption of services, which can be attributed to previous positive or negative experiences with traveling to domestic or foreign destinations,
- higher availability of information thanks to new and constantly improving technological advances,
- begins to abandon the preferences of material consumption of goods and focuses its attention on the area of quality of life, where the need for self-realization with efficient use of free time dominates,
- consumer segments are gradually emerging, which are characterized by a high degree of individualization in the consumption of services; groups of consumers are emerging who have special needs and interests in the field of leisure, gastronomy or social activities,
- consumer is in tourism now understood as a “challenger” - a person who determines which service he is interested in and which service he does not accept. Entrepreneurs doing business in the tourism sector must respond adequately and flexibly and adapt the offer to meet the requirements of the consumer and also exceed his expectations. In the past, the offer was made by the service provider and the consumer was a passive recipient of the service.

3. METHODOLOGY

Within the European Union, in 2019 the average share of tourism was 9.5% of GDP and employed on average 11.2% of the total number of employed persons. An above-average share of tourism within the EU-2810 countries was registered in Spain (14.3%) and Italy (13%). Compared to the average values of the EU 28 countries, the representation of tourism in the V4 countries is lower (OECD, 2019, WTTC, 2019). In 2019, Poland had the lowest share of tourism in GDP (only 4.7%), employing 5% of the total number of employed persons.

Table 1. Tourism in V4 countries and EU in 2019

Country	Tourism/GDP	Employees in tourism	Employees in tourism %
Slovak republic	6,3%	162 000	6,3%
Czech republic	6,5%	414 400	8%
Hungary	8,3%	449 200	10%
Poland	4,7%	811 800	5%
EU	9,5%	22 600 000	11,2%

Source: World Travel and Tourism Council, 2021

The second country with the lowest share of tourism in the group is Slovakia, where tourism accounts for 6.3% of GDP and accounts for the same percentage of employment. In the Czech Republic, tourism accounts for 6.5% of gross domestic product and 8% of employment. The highest share of tourism is in Hungary, where it accounts for 8.3% of GDP and 10% of total employment (OECD, 2020). From the point of view of evaluating the performance of tourism, an important indicator is the number of overnight stays of tourists in a given country (Bakar & Rosbi, 2020). Overnight stays express the performance and popularity of a given country.

The restrictions resulting from the spread of COVID-19 in 2020 have hit the tourism industry the hardest. Services offered by companies and businesses in the field of tourism, such as accommodation, catering, transport services, arts and entertainment, fell by tens of percent year on year (Farzanegan et al., 2020). In the first wave of the pandemic that hit Europe in the spring of this year, in some cases, there could have been a 100% drop in sales across the industry for several weeks (Gössling et al., 2020). Such a development was significantly reflected in the development of GDP in countries where tourism is one of the main industries of the economy. From the available Eurostat data for the first three quarters of 2020, we can find all popular tourist destinations at the top of the EU countries with the largest economic downturn, such as Spain, France, Italy, etc. Within Slovakia, the GDP fell by -6% per 1 to Q3 2020.

In the country, the size of tourism can be very well expressed by the number of nights spent in hotels and other tourist accommodations. In this respect, Slovakia turned out relatively favorably, with a decrease of 37% year-on-year in the first nine months of 2020. Foreign tourists make up more than a third of all guests in Slovak hotels and accommodation facilities. In 2020, their number fell by half, while the number of overnight stays of Slovak tourists fell by 30% compared to 2019 (Eurostat, 2019).

When it comes to the situation in tourism before the corona crisis in 2019, the greatest demand within Slovakia was for accommodation in the Žilina region. Paradoxically, however, it did not dominate the popularity of domestic or foreign travelers. Among the domestic, the Prešov region with the Tatras was the most popular, and among the foreigners, the Bratislava region with the capital of Slovakia was the most interesting. However, restrictions on travel have brought

significant changes in the number of visitors to Slovak regions. Urban destinations, which are attracting a mix of typical travelers and tourists, but also workers, took it the most (Butoracová Šindlerová & Hoghová, 2020). Žilina region thanks to this, in 2020 became the most visited by both domestic and foreign travelers.

In this contribution, we present the results of our marketing research in 2020, which deals with marketing communication between specific regions of Slovakia and the public, while also taking into account their tourists. In the contribution, we use a comparison the occasion of comparing the number of visitors to Slovakia and the number of overnight stays in January, February, and March in the years 2017 - 2021. In the contribution we present the results of correlation to express the dependence between the specified variables. We also deal with the analysis of our selected items from the questionnaire, which we determined based on their relevance to our presented issues. For overall clarity and comprehensibility, we present the results of the research graphically processed.

4. RESULTS

In our contribution's practical part, we present graphically processed results of research carried out in the form of a questionnaire in July, and August 2020, in which 12 cities and 203 municipalities of the Slovak Republic participated. These results focus on the communication of the regions with the public, taking into account visitors/tourists. In the practical part, we also included a comparison of the number of visitors to Slovakia and the number of overnight stays (number of nights) in January, February, and March (total) in the years 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021.

In the following graph, we present a comparison of visitors to our country with visitors who stayed for the night, taking into account the foreigner and our citizens. The graph is divided into 5 blocks/years - from 2017 to 2021. The data are valid for January, February, and March (total). These specific months are chosen, as the statistics on attendance and overnight stays for 2021 and the remaining months are not yet known.

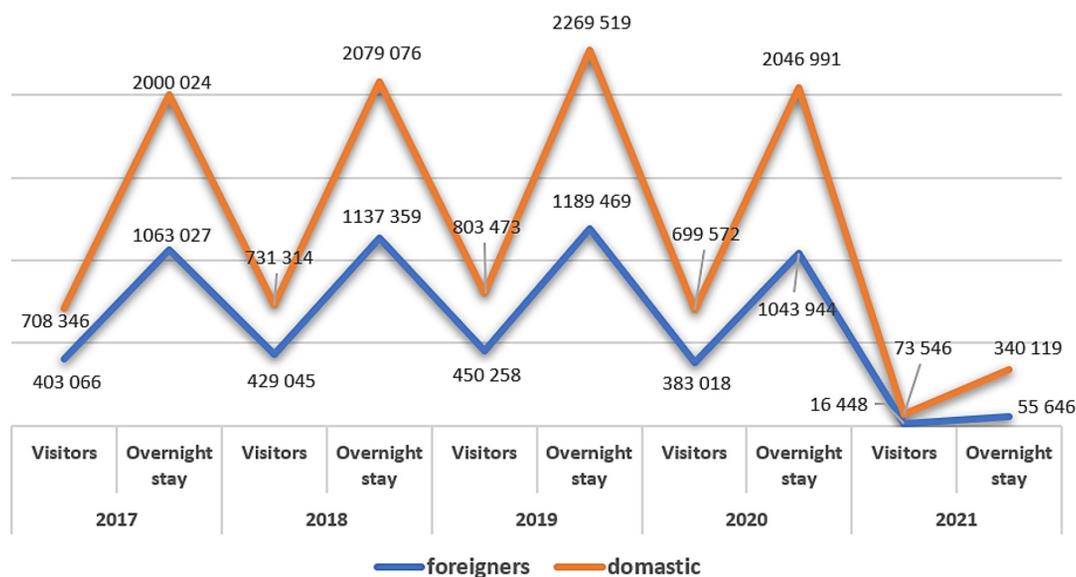


Figure 1. Visitors/Overnight stays

Source: Own processing based on Slovak Statistics - Development of tourism in accommodation facilities in the Slovak Republic

A slight decrease in visitors and the number of overnight stays (for January, February, March) can be seen in 2020 when the number of foreign visitors falls below 400,000 and the number of domestic visitors below 700,000. However, the number of overnight stays (number of nights) for both foreigners and visitors did not show significant differences compared to previous years. A significant decrease did not occur until 2021, when due to measures and the unfavorable pandemic situation, Slovakia registered only 16,448 foreign visitors and 17,546 domestic visitors. The number of overnight stays of domestic visitors decreased from 2 million (2020) to 340,119 thousand, which represents a decrease of 83%, and the number of foreign visitors who decided to spend the night decreases from 1,043,944 to 55,646, which is a decrease of 95%.

If we look at March 2021 from the point of view of individual regions, in the context of visitors and the number of overnight stays, the following data were obtained.

Table 2. Visitors/Number of overnight stays

Region	Visitors	Overnight stays
Bratislava region	9957	24435
Žilina region	5489	24848
Prešov region	4045	21719
Trnava region	4043	26270
Banska Bystrica region	3627	22891
Košice region	3491	8270
Trenčín region	1748	15572
Nitra region	1603	4455

Source: Own processing

Table 3. Correlation Visitors/Overnight stays

	Visitors	Overnight stays
Visitors	1	
Overnight stays	0.586233056	1

Source: Own processing

Table 4. Cohen's interpretation of the correlation model

Cohen's interpretation of the correlation model	
Pxy	Interpretation
0,0 - 0,1	trivial correlation
0,1 - 0,3	low
0,3 - 0,5	medium
0,5 - 0,7	high
0,7 - 0,9	very high
0,9 - 1,0	almost perfect

Source: Own Processing

In the Bratislava region in March 2021, it was recorded that there was the highest number of visitors; the lowest number of visitors in the mentioned month was reported in the Nitra region. The number of overnight stays was the highest in the Trnava region and the lowest again in the Nitra region.

In the context of the statistical dependence between the number of visitors to Slovakia and the number of overnight stays in March 2021, we obtained the following data. After substituting the variables into the correlation calculation, we got a result of **0.586**. The independent variable X

represented the *Number of visitors*, the dependent variable Y represented the *Number of overnight stays*. The relationship between these 2 variables is expressed by the already mentioned result of 0.586. The closer the result is to $k + 1.0$ or $k - 1.0$, the more dependent the relationship between the examined variables. Our result expresses a dependence that is large/high according to the interpretation of the Cohen correlation coefficient, as it is in the range of 0.5 - 0.7.

Twelve cities and 203 municipalities participated in the questionnaire survey, which we carried out in August and September 2020. The respondents were employees of the city and municipal authorities; within the cities, we primarily addressed the departments of regional/strategic development and marketing, and within the municipalities, we targeted the questionnaire directly to the mayor or deputy. The questions in the individual sections are aimed at finding out the current situation and progress in the implementation of marketing communication at the regional level in the areas of internal communication, communication with citizens, entrepreneurs and visitors. For the needs of the article, we selected and graphically processed several questions with answers from respondents.

Do you carry out an analysis/survey of the traffic of your municipality/city, or another survey focused on tourism/tourists?

A well-functioning organization is acting based on the information it receives. The information obtained, both internal and external, is used to decide on the future direction. This method of obtaining information at the level of regions, and local governments can also be used. Data obtained from the field can serve as a powerful tool for changing decision-making models and ways to meet the set goal not only for the organization but also for the municipality and its bodies. We were therefore interested in whether the surveyed authorities carried out surveys within their region in order to find out certain facts.

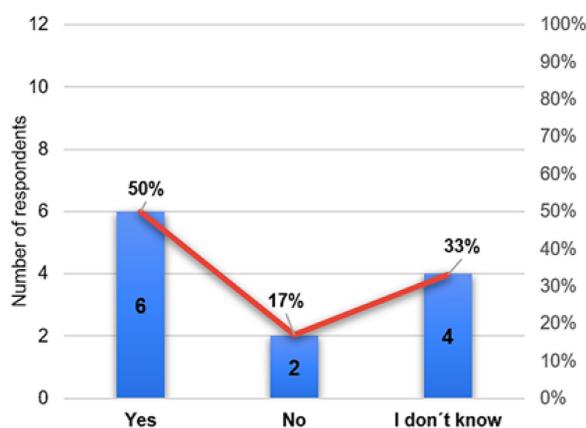


Figure 2. City - survey of the traffic or another research

Source: Own processing

This survey is carried out in 6 cities, thus equal to 50% of the respondents. Respondents who marked Yes work in the Department of Territorial and Strategic Development. Two respondents indicated the option No, so the survey did not have to be carried out during their work at the office, but it is necessary to take into account the possibility that it was carried out in previous periods and also does not exclude its possible future implementation. Four respondents were in favor of the answer I don't know; the knowledge of internal employees about the surveys carried out is a great advantage in the progress of the city. There are various possibilities to use the collected data.

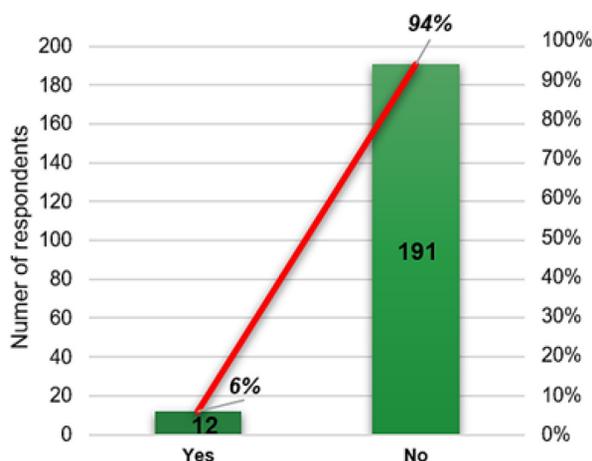


Figure 3. Municipality - survey of the traffic or another research

Source: Own processing

In the case of municipalities questionnaires, we can see the predominance of negative answers. Most respondents answered “No” to the question of conducting surveys. “Yes” was indicated by 12 respondents and the option “No” by the remaining 191 respondents. The implementation of surveys in municipalities has the advantage of a simpler direct address, again we assumed a significantly lower number of choices of option No.

Does your municipality/city have a tourist office/tourist center?

The tourist office or center serves primarily to provide information about the region, leisure opportunities, providing guide services with qualified guides, organizing themed trips, and programs. They also offer promotional materials linked to the region and inform about the possibilities for visitors.

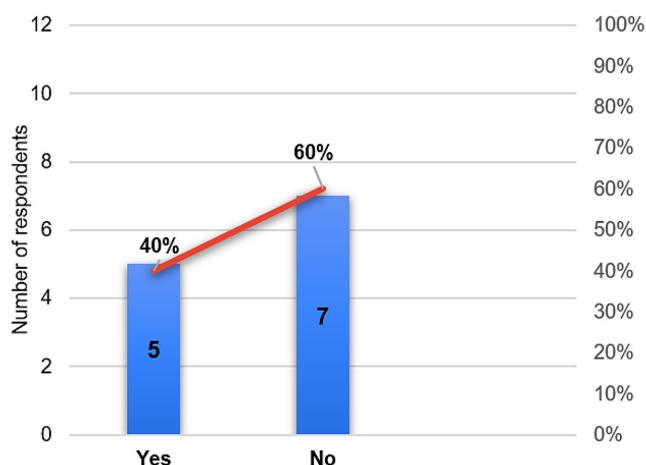


Figure 4. City – tourist office/tourist center

Source: Own processing

More than half of the surveyed cities have a tourist office, which tourists can use if interested. The operation of these offices is most regular primarily during the period of the highest attendance in the region and during the so-called “deaf” months, their operation is limited. From the point of view of visitors, however, it is desirable to have at least a seasonal tourist office, which is available for them if necessary.

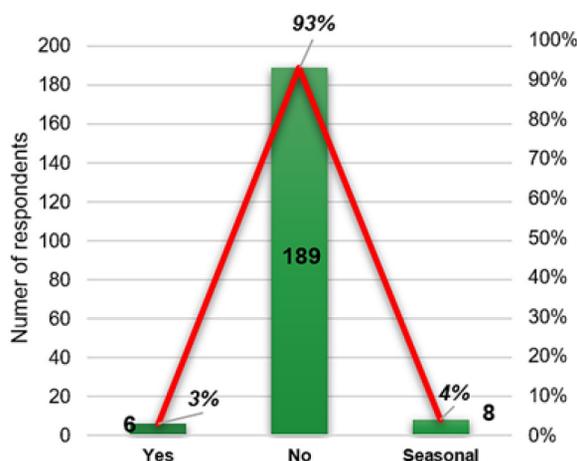


Figure 5. Municipalities - tourist office/tourist center

Source: Own processing

The tourist office is created mainly in those villages that are located near attractions of various kinds and are an attraction from the visitor’s point of view. In addition to the tourist office, these municipalities also have other services/businesses that have a chance to “survive” outside the city bustle precisely because of the nearby tourist attraction.

Does your municipality/city have the marketing department or the person(s) entrusted with these activities?

In the sphere of regions and local governments, cities and municipalities have an important function, and that is the concentration and direction of the development of the relevant territorial units. The application of marketing management to the decision-making process has a direct influence on this function. However, this cannot be done without the relevant experts in the field of marketing cities and municipalities.

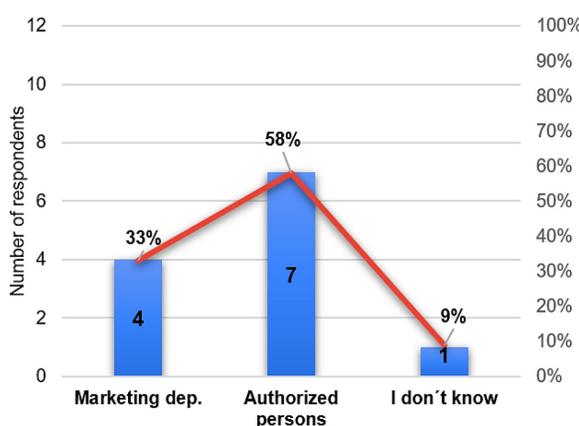


Figure 6. Cities - Marketing department

Source: Own processing

The specific section dedicated to marketing activities has four cities out of 12. The authorized persons, who are responsible for the management and implementation of these activities, have 7 seats and to the given question 1 answered “I don’t know”. The four cities that identified the first option (established Marketing Department / Section) are the largest in terms of population within the cities involved in the research.

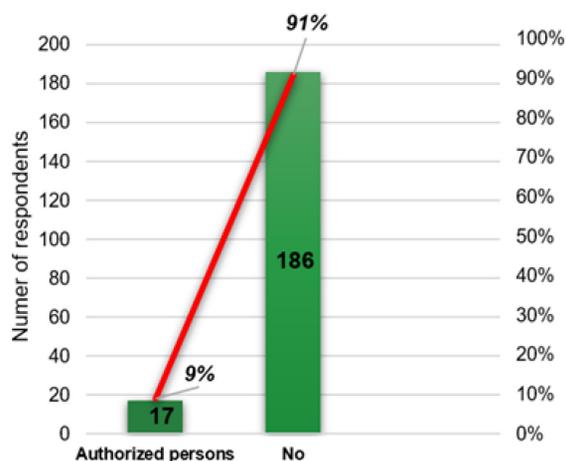


Figure 7. Municipalities – Marketing department

Source: Own processing

The marketing department does not have any of the municipalities established. Given the structure of municipal offices, sizes and budget, we did not even expect an answer of this type. What surprised us, however, was the finding that the authorized persons who would be in charge of marketing activities are not represented in larger numbers. Only 17 municipalities out of 203 stated that they have such a person.

At present, in addition to their primary tasks of consolidating their economic, political and social position in an increasingly competitive environment, cities and municipalities must also meet the wishes and needs of those interacting with the territory. Marketing and its tools are inextricably linked to this. By using them synergistically, it is possible to influence target groups and create a positive image of the city or village. The most visible tool of the marketing mix is marketing communication and its communication mix. The specificity of marketing communication at the regional level lies primarily in its objectives, which, even if they are set for any purpose, the result is always reflected in increasing the well-being of citizens in various areas.

5. DISCUSSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The future of tourism in Slovakia is going to be marked by increasing pressure on competitiveness. As a consequence, changing aims, trends, new possibilities for fast and cheap travel and other facts can be marked. The solution to success can be described as marketing elements implemented in the field of tourism; for example, the media represent an ever-increasing opportunity to increase the awareness of the given locality among the target group. However, this requires a thoughtful approach and strategy, which should be developed under a collective vision of specified categories of tourism. The resulting cooperation and communication at the regional and local levels lead to strong partnerships between tourism marketing stakeholders /stakeholders.

When it comes to the case of creating a concept of tourism support, it is important to realize that the diversity of tourism in Slovakia can also be a significant obstacle in determining further development. In determining the strategy of tourism development, it is crucial to consider the specific needs of individual types of tourism, in the sense of which, for example, urban type of tourism needs other incentives such as rural type of tourism or tourism in emerging destinations. In this respect, there should be a specification of the categorization of tourism and the subsequent prioritization of objectives. The tourism industry is also associated with the general

shortage of skilled labor in Slovakia. Given the seasonal nature of tourism and the labor intensity of the industry (both skilled and unskilled labor), it is problematic to ensure sufficient manpower to maintain the scope and quality of products and services provided in the industry. Representatives of entrepreneurs in the industry point out that in recent years this shortcoming has become an increasing obstacle to further development and increasing competitiveness.

6. CONCLUSION

Besides the national concept of tourism, it is important to focus on the local character and its management, which would take into account the imbalance of traffic in individual regions. The goal should be to link destinations with lower / insufficient traffic and destinations whose visitor capacity is exceeded. Taking into account the specificity of tourism, primarily in terms of seasonality and workforce, it is necessary to think about the possibility of employing a workforce outside Slovakia, so of course, there is no obligation to motivate the people of Slovakia to be interested in working in tourism. The business community would welcome new compensation schemes and instruments, whether in the form of a state contribution for them or consumers themselves. The sectoral recovery calls for the completion of the infrastructure as such, especially the lack of missing bike paths, rest areas, insufficient parking in tourist centers and the like. From a marketing point of view, it is mainly about supporting a collective vision of the strategic direction of regions and countries as such, recruiting marketing specialists, creating strong partnerships between stakeholders at all levels and more effective use of marketing communication tools. Within the specific barriers associated with COVID-19, which have arisen in the tourism industry, there is a need to accept and address potential threats arising with regard to the impact on employment, sales, as well as the existence of tourism offer in destinations. The recovery of the industry will depend to a large extent on the development of the epidemiological situation, stimulation of demand for products, i.e. tourism services, as well as the ability to take support measures and the rate of drawing financial assistance intended for businesses in the sector in which economic activity has been completely stopped, respectively, limited by the impact of measures to alleviate the COVID-19 pandemic in Slovakia. According to everything above, addressing the consequences of COVID-19 will be a priority in order to restart it and develop in the future.

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