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TOURISM AS AN OPEN COMMUNICATION SYSTEM

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Abstract

Considering tourism as an open communication system is justified and necessary in the conditions of revolutionary transformations in processes, products, relationships, technologies and strategies. The Tourism system acts as an open and complex structure, consisting of many and functionally dissimilar subsystems. These are independent, relatively separate parts with their own structures, their own mission and field of activity. However, the building blocks of this system cannot be considered as autonomous, internally homogeneous parts, united around a single goal. They are opposing subsystems with deeply different interests, often leading to conflicts in terms of goals. Nevertheless, the foundations of the Tourism system are the unity that represents and objectifies it through a fundamental social law - the law of synergy, requiring integration of efforts and one-sidedness of actions (with a direct impact on the final result). The application of this law is possible only through communication.

To achieve the effect of synergy in a communication system, it is necessary to direct, distribute and coordinate (unite) the energy, actions and behavior of people in its constituent units. Since all subsystems are interconnected and dependent on each other, the malfunctioning of even the smallest component in any of them can affect the system as a whole. Therefore, the communication performance of each of its units, of each collaborator, is important for the overall success of the organic whole.

Kew words: *tourism, communication, tourism system*

In the contemporary context, tourism is interpreted as a broad socio-economic and spatially organized whole with multiple components that are in dynamic interaction with each other and with other systems. The systems approach is a balanced and comprehensive method for studying tourism, which considers it as “a heterogeneous spatial socio-economic system whose elements are perfectly balanced and which can be analyzed, planned and managed in a highly integrated manner.”[1]. All internal components in this system are "interconnected, mutually reinforcing and jointly building the socio-economic and cultural phenomenon called Tourism".[2]

As early as the 1970[s], a number of scholars approached tourism based on the general systems theory and attempted to derive its main components, taking into account social, political, economic, technological, ecological and other factors of the external environment. One of the most widely accepted and best-known models is that of Neil Leiper. According to him, the elements of the system, arranged in spatial and functional relationships, are: (1) tourists, (2) generating regions, (3) transit routes, (4) destination regions and (5) a tourist industry.)[3] (Figure 1.)

[1] Попова, Н., М. Воденска, С. Милева. (2017) Висшето образование по туризъм в България – традиции и иновации. – В: Международна конференция на МВБУ „Развитие на висшите училища в контекста на европейските изисквания за качество на образователните услуги”, стр.393-402, Ботевград: IBS-Press.
[2] Василева, В., С. Сабриева. (2019) Туристическа инфраструктура и суперструктура. Шумен: Химера.
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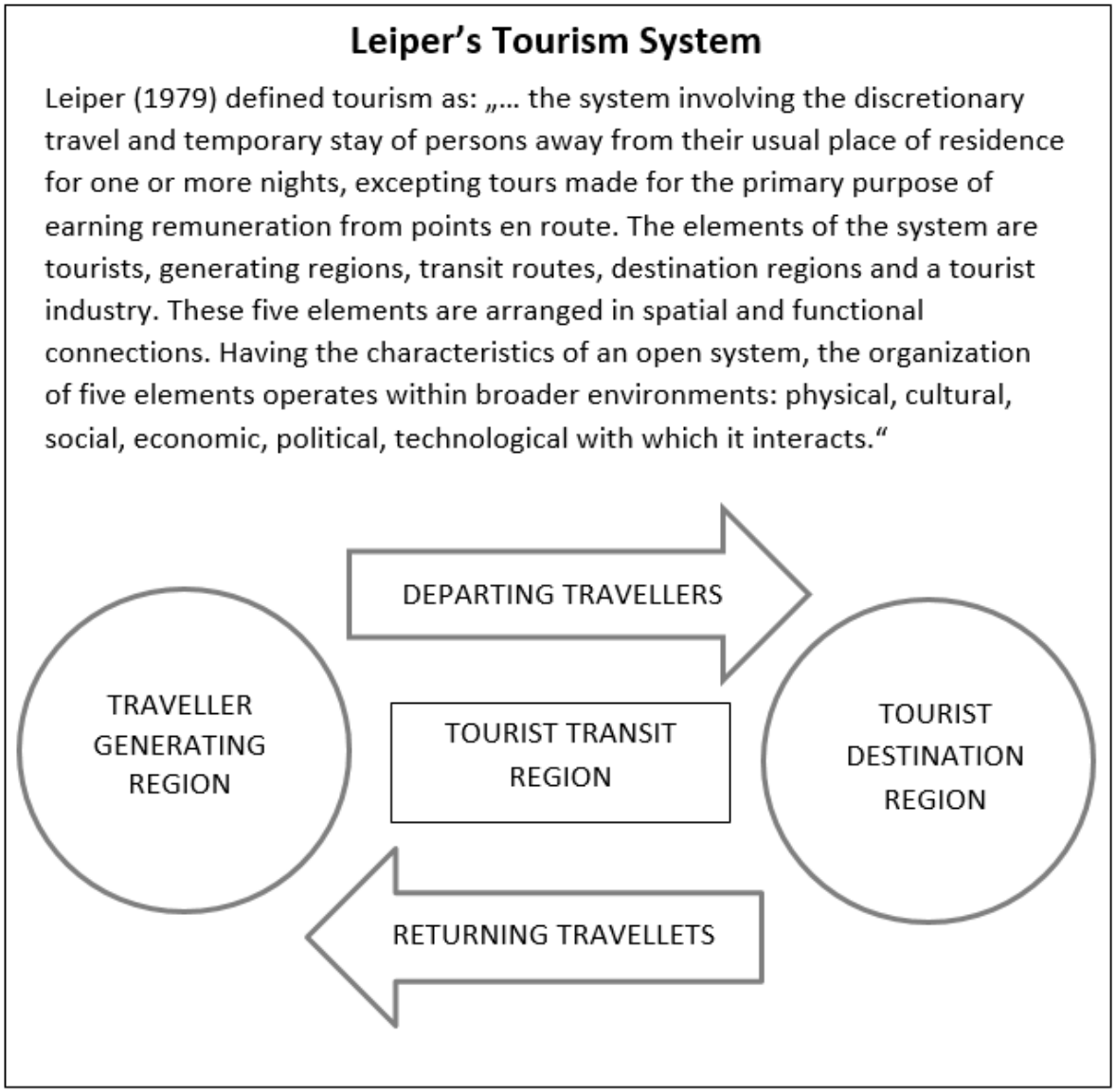

Figure 1. The Tourism System according to Neil Leiper's model

In general, three key internal components (subsystems) of the Tourism system can be considered as constituting, conditionally designated as:

1. **The tourist** (including excursionist, visitor, traveler) as the main actor and all other interested groups in the role of consumers or potential consumers of tourism services, on the one hand, and in the role of producers of tourism services, on the other. This includes, with a special function, local communities that interact directly or indirectly, strongly or limitedly with tourists and tourism as a whole.
2. **The territory** (tourist place) as the most important "geographical characteristic" - the environment for tourism development, possessing tourist resources, tourist infrastructure and superstructure and various in type and scale tourist attractions and locations, which are the basis for the formation of the tourist product.
3. **The Tourism industry** or tourism as an economic system operating for profit. The Tourism industry is an important driving force of the Tourism system, "because it is it that makes it possible for tourism demand to meet tourism supply through the "production" and sale of the tourism product".

The classification of systems in terms of their interaction with their environment divides them into two types: open and closed. *Closed systems* are isolated from the external environment and their constituent elements are in contact only with each other. *Open systems* interact with the external environment in two ways - they adapt to it or change it. They are not self-sufficient - they depend on information, energy and resources coming from outside.

The Tourism system operates as an open, complex and interconnected structure consisting of many and functionally dissimilar subsystems (independent, relatively separate parts with their own subsystems, their own mission and field of activity, which support the realization of the common goal). *However, the building blocks of this system cannot be considered as internally homogeneous parts.* "They do not represent a set of autonomous units united around a single goal, since individual groups and individuals are opposing subsystems with deeply different interests, often leading to conflicts regarding goals."[4] Nevertheless, the foundation of the Tourism system is unity, which represents and objectifies it through a fundamental social law - the *law of synergy*, requiring integration of efforts and one-way action (with a direct impact on the final result). The application of this law is possible only through communication. *Therefore, considering tourism as an open communication system is justified and necessary in the conditions of revolutionary transformations in processes, products, relationships, technologies and strategies.*[5]

In order to achieve the effect of synergy in a **communication system**, it is necessary to direct, distribute and coordinate (unite) the energy, actions and behavior of people in its constituent units. Since all subsystems are interconnected and dependent on each other, the malfunctioning of even the smallest component in any of them can affect the system as a whole. Therefore, the communication performance of each of its units, of each collaborator, is important for the overall success of the organic whole.

The subjects entering into communication (even the "confronting subsystems", regardless of their other divergent interests and motives) are unconditionally united in three initial and fundamental, common goals depending on the roles they play in the communication act:

1. The communicator seeks to convey to the recipient certain meanings that act differently on his behavior (inform, educate, please, suggest or persuade).
2. The recipient, on the other hand, aims to extract meanings that are significant for them from the sender subject (to understand, learn, get pleasure, judge or decide).
3. Both the communicator and the recipient are interested in cooperation for the purpose of exchanging diverse knowledge, skills, stimuli and emotions.

Communication flows in open systems occur in an established order, crossing the permeable boundaries of the system in different directions. (Figure 2.)

In any open communication system, there are flows of outgoing, incoming and internal information. Separately, others flow – between all other people and organizations in the general environment. Modern management is faced with the need to cope with all information flows (and especially with those of them on which it has direct power to influence), and the circumstances force it to realize that communication flexibility and adaptation to external factors are extremely important indicators of viability and progress. An organized and controlled network of internal and external communications allows maintaining harmony with the environment, makes the system manageable and competitive, and guarantees the positive sustainability of its reputation.

The open communication model is an ultimate necessity for today's realities. Its characteristics are determined by the specifics of *globalism and integration*. In it, the communication process takes place in a horizontal plane, and the generator and recipient of information are charged with active, communication-forming functions. Any information directed only outward is manipulative and one-sided - the desire to achieve a reverse communication flow implies: an honest and open policy oriented towards interested parties; improving the flow of information and the exchange of messages in order to increase the influence of people in individual units of the system; creating conditions for exchanging opinions on the decisions made; ensuring a better understanding of the roles necessary for the implementation of common goals. In order to overcome the imbalance and ensure symmetry of the

[4] Рибов, М. и кол. (2007) Основи на туризма. Втора част. София: УИ Стопанство, УНСС.
[5] Кабакчиева, Д. (2019) Туризъм. Комуникация. Репутация. Шумен: УИ Епископ Константин Преславски

process - to the extent that the opinions, views and attitudes of external groups are expected to be changed, the attitudes, knowledge, aspirations of internal ones should also change.

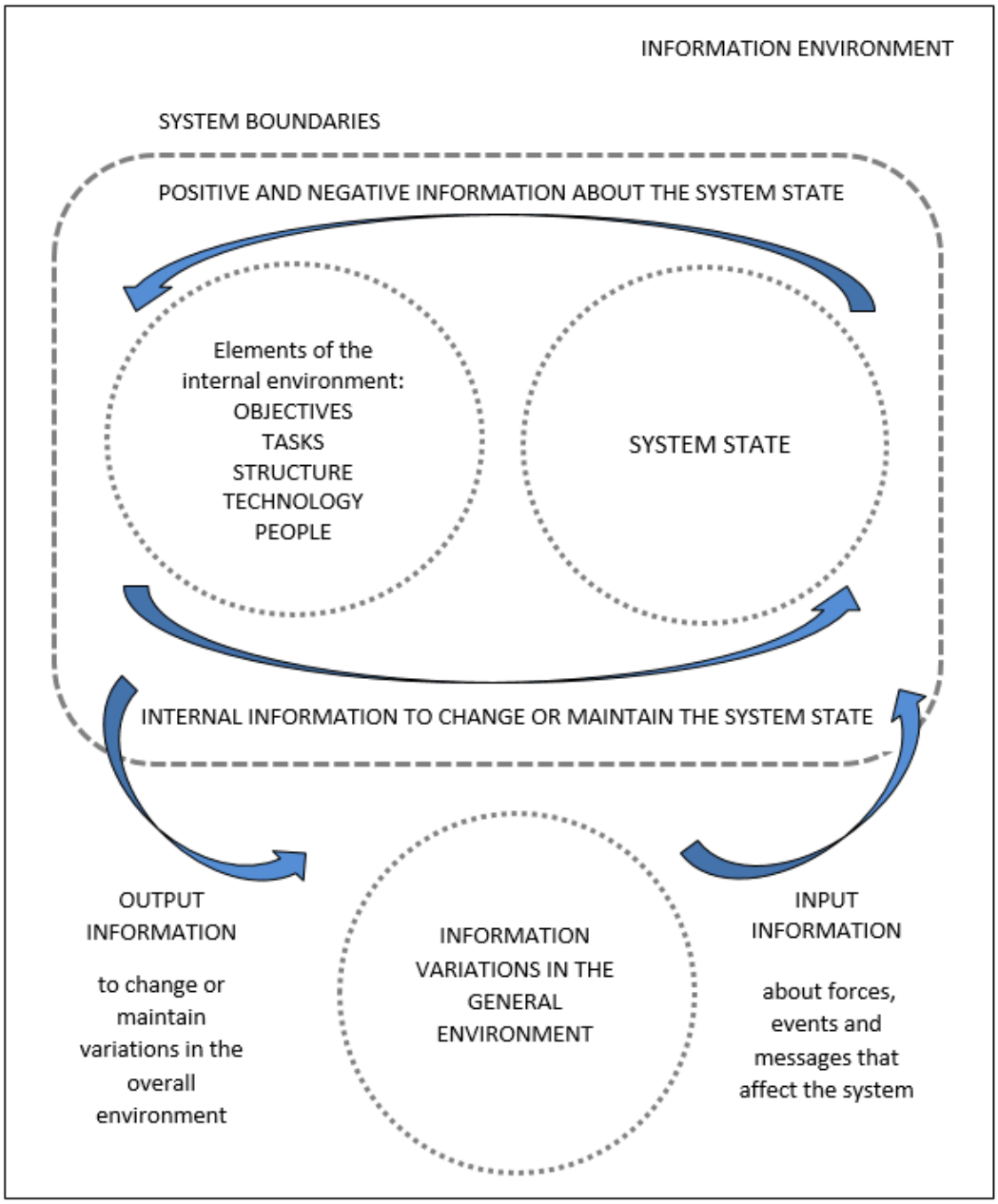

Figure 2. Model of an open communication system[6]

The growth and development of the tourism system depends on its ability to properly use the information at its disposal. Improvement is possible when the system uses communication accurately and precisely to:

- become more open;
- interact more effectively with its environment;
- increase the scope and diversity of the goals it has set for itself.

[6] Ibid.

Of utmost importance is the so-called **feedback** – the ability of the system to monitor the reactions to its activity (economic decisions) and to use these reactions in its next actions. "Feedback is one of the main control mechanisms through which a balance between order and chaos is maintained in the organization."[7] It is loaded with various qualities that cause specific consequences:

- negativity – forces, events and messages that force the system to change its original goals;
- carrying capacity – the amount of information that the system can absorb;
- delay – the time between receiving certain information and the specific actions that this information triggers;
- reflection – the way in which the system reacts to newly acquired information
- lead – the ability of the system to react to predictions about future consequences of given actions/decisions.

Communication provides the intangible and most convertible capital for the construction and maintenance of the relationships that ensure the existence of any system – **INFORMATION**. The Tourism system also continuously and arbitrarily produces information that has a potential impact on its positioning in the surrounding world. It is impossible to calculate how many dependencies are born from a single unit of information exchange put into circulation. As a carrier of practical benefit for the tourism system, it has a completely real value: any information that allows for a timely response to changes in the environment and adaptation to ongoing external or internal changes has material value. Parties interested in tourism need information (and in increasing volumes) to build their own opinions and attitudes, to orient themselves in the surrounding reality. It is important to emphasize, however, that communication effects can very easily be compromised and destroyed if there is no proper approach to the processes that give rise to them, if basic rules are ignored, inappropriate channels are used, or if the information is incomplete and inaccurate.

Information loses its meaning if it does not fit adequately into a created **INFORMATION ENVIRONMENT** and then is not interpreted and multiplied in the information space. The information environment is "a dynamic set of characteristics and conditions that guarantee the reliability of the transmitted and received information, the adequacy and efficiency of communication channels, modeled by the methods and means of modern corporate communications." Among the most important of these characteristics and conditions (mandatory for its creation and existence) are:

- free movement of information;
- ensuring the possibility of transferring information arrays;
- cultivating communicative adequacy of the audience;
- ensuring a feedback communication link, etc.

Despite the burden of modern public communications (more than ever) with the weight of strategic goals and tasks, the classical communication formula remains valid. The communication process does not cease to be understood as *the movement of meanings in social time and space – a mediated interconnection, carried out through the exchange of information between individual social groups within a common information environment.* This process connects all components of a system with each other, as well as the system itself with the external environment. (Figure 3.) Intensive communications also take place inside each component of the system.

The correct positioning of the Tourism system in this environment allows for the establishment of adequate relationships and interactions with all stakeholders. This includes:

- communication modeling of common goals and ideas and their transformation into reality;
- overcoming communication distortions;
- overcoming crisis situations;

[7] Димитрова, Я. (2013) Организационната идентичност – „невидимата ценност" на съвременната организация, София: АИ Проф. М. Дринов.

- forming conditions for the sustainability of the information environment; creating and promoting generally valid values.

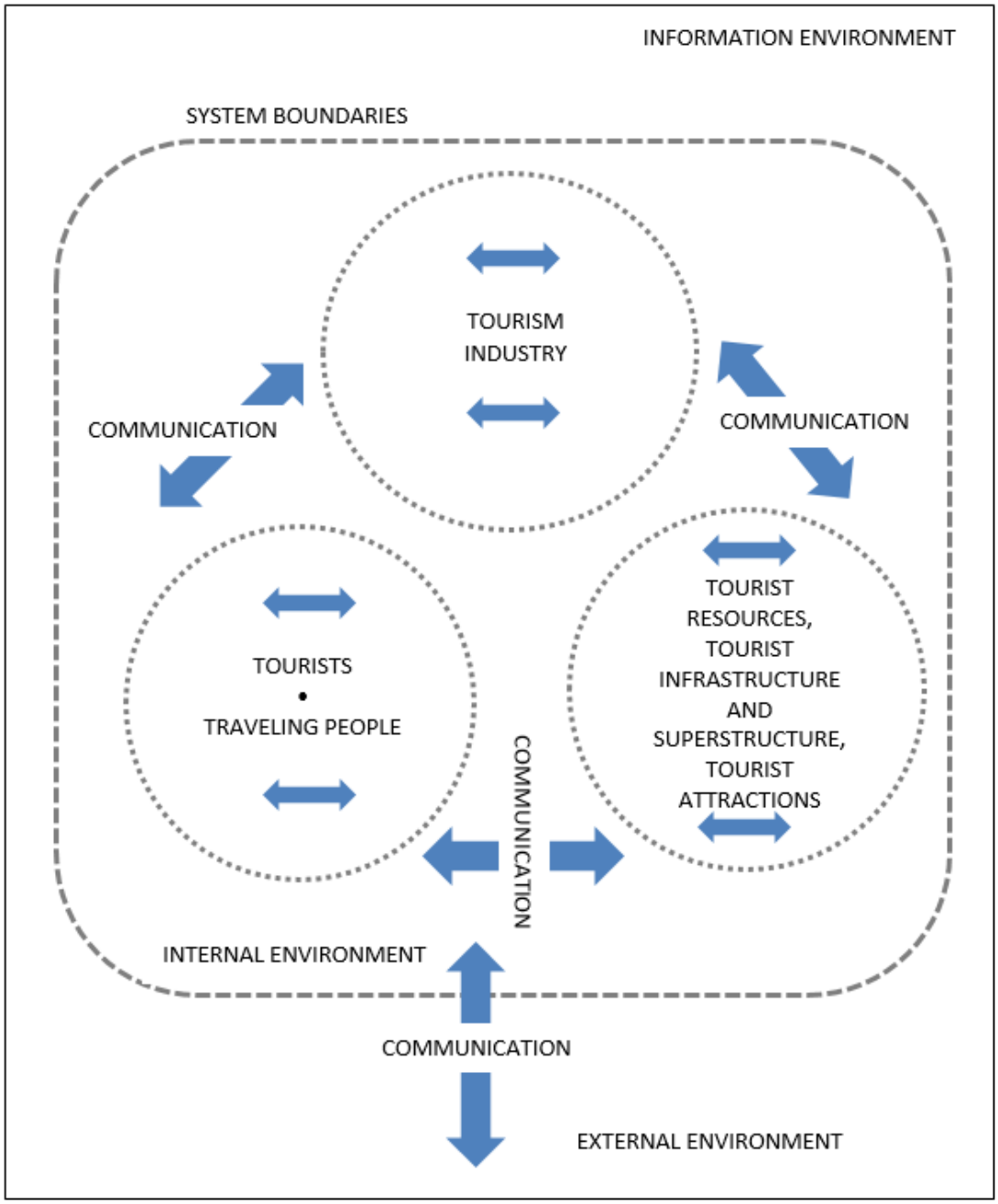

Figure 3. Tourism as an open communication system[8]

The strategic location in the field of emerging interconnections and the exchange of meanings (knowledge about the industry and its products, experience, training, incentives and emotions related to its activity and existence) are crucial for the progress of the tourism system, and its authority and good name depend primarily on the development and quality of its communication links and information activity. The presence of each of its subsystems in the communication space can be both accidental and

[8] Кабакчиева, Д. (2019) Туризъм. Комуникация. Репутация. Шумен: УИ Епископ Константин Преславски

completely controllable; can be built in accordance with the natural processes of growth, and vice versa - be exposed to the arbitrariness of unpredictable twists and changes. In the information world, one does not rely on chance, therefore it is necessary to constantly and conceptually build contacts and interactions, to create one's own communication models and to take into account the existing ones.

Each system resides in a common information environment with an infinite number of other legal and physical entities (internal and external) and the relationships between them are different. In a hostile environment, for example, there are competitors, in a friendly environment – consumers who are satisfied with the products and services offered to them, in a neutral environment there are potential partners and clients who have not yet made their decision to cooperate. Effective communication has the power to attract objects from a neutral environment to a favorable one, but it is possible, of course, for objects to move from a neutral environment to a hostile one. Professionally managed communications gradually shrink the negatively disposed part of the spectrum of relations with the aim of making it tend to zero (as far as this is possible in an ideal option) in favor of neutral and, to the greatest extent, positive attitudes. Of course, there is no doubt that powerful sources of information such as the media are best located in the sector of favorable relations. All this depends on the management of communication flows and the existing communication competencies. The facts show that communication is becoming an increasingly important factor in the development of the tourism system and its success requires solid knowledge and skills. In order to become a tool for implementing strategic policies, it is expected to be coprehencible and direct.

- Communicators who express themselves clearly and precisely have a greater chance of being understood and leave the impression that they say what they think and mean what they say;
- be based on facts and emphasize the essential rather than the details, be limited in terms of superlatives and adjectives, follow the line between reality and imagination;
- be directly related to people's interests; seek agreements and avoid exaggerating achievements;
- directly affect the auditory and visual perceptions of the recipients. What people see, hear and understand for themselves is much more important than what is presented to them through the efforts of marketing or advertising.[9]

The past, present and future actions of a (tourism) organization are of interest to many different people or social groups, but not all of them necessarily seek the same type of information. The complexity of information signal management stems from the fact that different stakeholders need different information and the same information signal cannot be equally valuable to everyone. For example, customers need relevant information about the product (quality, safety, price), employees need information related to their work (salary, occupational safety, professional development), investors need financial information (net profit, return on investment), etc.

An information signal cannot be understood uniformly by different people, as they possess different competencies, knowledge and interests. In addition, their preferences often differ in terms of the information requirements they need to make a decision. It is necessary for the organization not only to adequately reflect its history, but also to develop a targeted strategy for working with information. For example, a possible strategy is to send only one (the same) information signal to all stakeholders. However, such behavior carries the risk of ignoring specific elements that will not be detected by the recipients who need them. Therefore, from the point of view of efficiency, it is advisable to choose the alternative strategy, which consists in sending specifically “tuned” information signals for each of the different stakeholder groups. Some researchers identify two types of communication relations, which they call “collective” and “exchange”:[10]

- in the first – each party is willing to provide benefits to the other in good faith, even when it knows that it may not receive anything in return. Each of the participants in the process is interested in the well-being of the other and the system as a whole;
- in the second – each of the parties acts, guided by the consciousness of something that it expects in return.

[9] Маринов, Р. (2004) Комуникационни стратегии. София: УИ-НБУ.

[10] Grunig, L. A., J. E. Grunig, D. Dozier, M. (2002) Excellent public relations and effective organizations: A study of communication management in three countries. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Such interest is not reprehensible from the position of professional relationships and interactions. However, the degree of development of the first type of relationship is a critical indicator of the social responsibility of the organization and its success in managing public relations. Useful long-term relationships are reduced to:[11]

- trust (the degree of confidence that the organization and its stakeholders are open to each other);
- mutual control (the degree of satisfaction of both parties with the ability to control the relationship between them);
- responsibility for the relationship;
- satisfaction with the relationship.

A typical mistake in building these relationships (respectively, in managing communication) is working only with external groups and the absence of an internal communication policy. The discrepancy between what an organization states in its official messages and what its employees and collaborators say is unacceptable. The common thing in interaction with all internal groups is the contradiction in their interests (the desire of managers for greater autonomy and the requirement of shareholders for greater control, the desire of staff for higher salaries and the needs of managers to cut costs, etc.). These contradictions are successfully resolved when the interests of the different parties are taken into account simultaneously.

In tourism, stakeholder groups are constantly intersecting in arbitrary proportions. Their participants are usually members of more than one group and have enormous potential for influence. The investor can be a consumer, the partner - an investor, the consumer - a future employee, etc. However, all of them are representatives of society as a whole. In this sense, each specific person can be the target of various communication measures and programs.

For convenience, it is customary to divide the set of stakeholders of an organization into four main groups: normative, functional, diffuse and consumer.[12]

Normative groups include: government, municipal, regulatory bodies, industry associations, professional associations. Having established the general legal and regulatory framework, these groups give the authority to carry out the relevant tourism activity. They also evaluate this activity and in some cases may impose restrictions. Caring for the reaction of regulatory groups is actually caring for the climate in which the tourism system has to operate. A negative reputation, for example (as a result of uncontrolled communications) in the eyes of these groups can lead to the emergence of a number of obstacles in work - closure of enterprises or individual tourism activities, termination of contracts and others due to violation of the requirements of the regulatory framework, etc.

Functional groups include: employees, associates, suppliers, investors, distributors, service departments, service providers, etc. These groups have the strongest influence on the functioning of tourism structures, assisting in the work and service of customers and at the same time reflecting the degree of trust in the system. In general, they are also the most easily distinguishable.

It is understandable that the most important community among them is the employees. For most people, work is the center of their cultural and economic life, and the salary provides the income to maintain a certain standard and quality of it. This is where personal self-awareness comes from, which is important for self-esteem and social confidence. Many employers ignore the importance of these psychological aspects despite the fact that they could affect the development and results of the activity. According to an estimate by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, organizations massively lose 2/3 of working time (and therefore the resources used for this time) exclusively due to inefficiently working staff, which is a consequence of disrupted communications in the internal environment due to distrust or fear. Where employees are interested in the common success and believe in the goodwill of their managers, such losses of resources are minimal.

Creating trust between employers and hired labor in tourism is unattainable without ensuring people's satisfaction with their own status and their participation in the common cause, by creating a good working atmosphere, by recognizing everyone's successes and achievements, and by interpersonal

[11] Ibid.

[12] Доулинг, Г. (2005) Създаване на корпоративна репутация. Идентичност, имидж и представяне. София: Рой Комюникейшън.

communication. If those working in a business structure sincerely believe in the meaningfulness and success of its activities, they will be motivated to ensure prosperity - for themselves and for it. On the other hand, the attitude of employees towards the company has a direct impact on the attitude of external groups towards it. A number of studies show that if people know and like someone who works for a given organization, they tend to respect and trust it more.

Diffuse groups are journalists, local society, special interest groups. They usually become active either when there is a failure in the management of communications, or when they are motivated by the tourism system itself to translate the necessary information into the outside world. The assessment of the reaction of diffuse groups is an assessment of the security of the "buffer" between the system and its environment. Diffuse groups most often gain interest in the organization when it is necessary to protect the rights of other people. Reasons for attracting their interest are access to information, protection of information, environmental protection, minority interests, equality between employees, care for children, etc.[13] In general, the most important part of this group are journalists. Their influence on the formation of public opinion priorities and the dissemination of certain perceptions is well known. Depending on how well the corporate communications department understands the media and how well the people in it are able to work with them, journalists can become friends or enemies. Business entities are particularly vulnerable in their relations with the media in extreme conditions. Neglecting journalists can turn an incident into a crisis and destroy the image, and often the reputation, of the organization.

There are many **consumer groups**. Caring for their reactions is actually caring for loyalty, for the quality of tourist products and services, for trust in the system, for social responsibility, etc. Different consumers expect from tourism and its offers different advantages and/or ways to satisfy their needs for rest, relaxation, adventure, entertainment, etc. That is, to meet expectations, the tourism sector should offer a separate marketing mix (product, price, advertising, distribution, level of service, etc.) for each consumer segment. Marketing specialists call this strategy "strategic (target) marketing". In the context of communication management, this means that the organization presents itself distinctively and has an ambiguous impact among diverse types of consumers.

The information existing in the general communication space assists stakeholders in making decisions on such issues as: the presence of risk from interaction with a specific tourism organization, the benefit of contacts with it, support for others (friends, relatives, society), recommendations, etc. Representatives of normative and diffuse groups are oriented primarily towards information, and functional groups – towards relationships. Consumer groups (as the most diverse) are influenced by both. Therefore, specific communication tasks are formulated for each of the groups, detailing and specifying the goals set. *The aim is to achieve an answer to the question of what reaction is expected from the respective group as a result of communication with it*. The implementation of a flexible and adequate communication policy, attention to external and internal stakeholders and communities, and taking into account their interests and values are today ultimately necessary strategic tasks for every business entity.

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[13] Ibid.

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