

## COMPARISON OF WEBSITES OF DESTINATION MANAGEMENT ORGANIZATIONS: A STUDY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF WEBSITE USERS – TOURISTS

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### Abstract

The region has natural and cultural potential for the development of tourism. Tourism destinations are created in the most attractive places of the region, with the most significant potential. Practice shows that destinations in which destination management operates are develop faster and have a higher quality, more comprehensive offer for visitors. Websites are one of the means available to the destination management for presenting the destination's offer. The task of websites is to attract the attention of visitors so that they get to know the offer of products and activities, which should motivate them to visit the destination. The main topic of the study was to find out the opinions of visitors to the website of the destination managed by Territorial Tourism Organizations in the Prešov Self-governing Region. The results of the study show that visitors rate the websites of regional tourism organizations in the Prešov self-governing region at a very good level. A difference was found in the respondents' opinions on the selected website criterias and which website motivates them the most to visit the destination. The theoretical significance of the study consists in the use of knowledge for students of the tourism study program. The practical significance of the study is in the fulfillment of the assignment from Territorial Tourism Organizations in Prešov Self-governing Region.

**Key words:** *Destination management. Destination. Tourism. Web page. Tourists.*

**JEL Classification:** M21, Z32, Z33

### INTRODUCTION

Tourism takes place in a certain territory. The definition of the term territory can be understood differently, from a tourism business to the vast territory for example, a state. Therefore, it is important to know not only the essence of the 20th century, as tourism is called, but also the territory in which tourism is realized (Kormaníková & Šenková, 2023).

According to the Austrian economist Hermann Schullard, tourism is "a sum of operations, mainly of an economic nature, which directly relate to the entry, movement and stay of foreigners outside or inside a certain country, city or region" (Jarábková, 2007, p. 20). Goeldner and Ritchie (2014, p. 36) characterize tourism as "the concept of tourism, which includes a collection of activities, a way of traveling to a place outside the usual environment or residence for a period of less than one continuous year, for the purpose of spending leisure time, business or other purposes". As mentioned above, tourism takes place in space. In professional literature, we encounter the terms destination, region, destination.

By defining a destination, it is possible to understand a defined territory, which represents for a participant in tourism the space in which tourism enterprises are located, which will provide their products and services they offer in the destination (Dzurov Vargová et al., 2021). The basic prerequisite for the functioning of the destination is its good accessibility within the transport infrastructure. This then depends on how many nights a tourist stays in one destination in destination management (UNWTO, 2019).

The region is defined from another point of view such as expediency and is used in administration, support in regional development and also in planning. All the mentioned fields of action are governed by certain criteria (Matiova et al. 2023). The region can also be

perceived as an economic region, where its core is the area of the country controlled by subsystems (Šenková, 2020). A tourism region represents a territory that is suitable for mediation and the subsequent repeated process of tourism, where at the same time activities such as culture, economy, socialization, where a human person is present, who provides a financial basis, are also involved. From the tourist's point of view, the perception of the region as a place where he can support the local population by buying souvenirs, providing food, rest for recreation, and possibly a short overnight stay from day to day (Calero & Turner, 2020). Terms such as region, regionalization, regional development or regional policy have become very frequent terms in recent years. Those terms were entered the dictionaries of politicians, officials, journalists, but also ordinary people. They are in the considerable attention of several scientific disciplines, among them geography. They appear mainly in connection with the processes of long-term and effective planning with the tendency to achieve harmonious development of the territory in order to eliminate contradictions between the potential of the territory and its optimal use in the application of the principles of sustainable development (Matušiková, 2019).

### Regions as destinations

Regionalization includes support within the tourism industry in terms of its development on three basic levels, which we know at the local, regional, but also national and finally at the international level. On the territory of the Slovak Republic (hereinafter referred to as "SR") there are 8 regions that manage 79 districts and these are made up of 21 tourism regions (Šenková, 2020), see Figure 1. The division is defined according to Act no. 221/1996 Act of the National Council of the Slovak Republic on territorial and administrative organization of the Slovak Republic.



Figure 1. Tourism regions (21) in SR and districts in the Prešov Self-governing Region  
Source: Kasagranda, 2014, p. 109

Act no. 359/2008 defines regional development "as social, economic, cultural and environmental processes and relations that take place in the region, contribute to increasing its competitiveness, permanent economic development, social development and territorial development of balancing economic differences and social differences." Also from the definition of tourism, it can be concluded that the region or destination represents a territory in which tourism can be developed and, in essence, therefore, these are synonyms. Based on the findings from the study, it can be argued that the development of tourism must be

coordinated and also in accordance with the development plans of the territory (Švedová & Matušiková, 2021).

### **Destination management and its importance in the conditions of the Slovak Republic**

With the development of mass tourism, destination management organizations (further than "DMO") are gradually emerging. Their beginnings date back to the 1990s. Although their initial role was to support visitors in the destination, they are currently focusing on applying elements of sustainability in the destination (Dzurov Vargová, 2023). For the proper functioning of the regions, it is necessary to ensure that they contain the organization, flawless performance of the internal structure, which results in various associations, since their functioning is divided into local, regional and sometimes sub-regional levels of activity. The result are joint activities, projects, campaigns, goals, promotion, establishment of organizations, tourist centers, support of tourism and its development, including in the framework of creating programs and events. All activities are also connected financially (Orságová, 2020).

In the Slovak Republic, the DMOs hierarchy consists of:

- Territorial Tourism Organization (further than "TTO") (in Slovak language Oblastná organizácia cestovného ruchu), whose members are cities and municipalities, tourism enterprises and enterprises of related industries. TTO carries out its activities on the territory of the place and the municipalities that are its members. TTO supports and creates conditions for the development of tourism in its territory and protects the interests of its members.
- Regional Tourism Organization (further than "RTO") (In Slovak language: Krajská organizácia cestovného ruchu), whose founders and members are TTOs, while their scope and activities include the territory of the TTO defined within the Region - administratively the "Higher Territorial Unit". Higher territorial units (also Regions) were created in the past as a result of political-administrative division (not based on visitor flows or natural cultural division). Since there are 8 "Higher Territorial Units" in the Slovak Republic, it can also be max. 8 RTO. The goal of RTO is the promotion of individual destinations (located in the "Region") and what thematically connects the destinations (e.g. the theme of staying by the water, wine offer, gastronomy, mining...). In cooperation with the national level (SlovakiaTravel), the role of RTO should also be to set trends, new impulses and motivate all TTOs operating in the territory of the region to develop activities.
- SlovakiaTravel - National agency, presents Slovakia as a destination at national and international level
- Ministry of Sports and Tourism (established from 1.1.2024).

The positive development of tourism in the region is through DMOs. In addition to this task, together with other members in the given territory, they define the borders of the region (Act no. 91/2010). Regionalization of SR tourism also defines the term region in the sense of a defined part of the territory that has certain homogeneous elements (Kasgranda, 2014). The aforementioned Act no. 91/2010 for the merger of public and private entities for the purpose of establishing DMOs (in the opinion of the Slovak Republic, it is TTO). By joining the DMOs, stakeholders also set aside a territory - a region in which a specific DMO will develop its activities and perceive it as a destination. Support in the development of tourism in the destination is a form of activities through the DMO. The task is to increase attendance in the region by domestic and foreign tourists, whose presence will also support accommodation, catering and recreational facilities with an emphasis on sustainability in tourism (Dzurov Vargová, 2023).

### **Website as a multi-purpose tool for destination management**

While in the past, information was sought in book sources, newspapers, in the current, fast well with the demand for a certain comfort, the search for information is concentrated in the online space, i.e. on the web. This is where we move to individualized marketing (Štefko et al. 2013). It significantly changed the communication between the sender (for example TTO) and the receiver (tourist, visitor to the destination). The Internet is predominantly used, where the first communication is by visiting websites (or popular social networks) to search for information by keywords, later through emails, which helped speed up communication or in chats (Orban, 2020).

The visitor chooses a destination based on its offer of attractions and interests (Seneg, 2015). Therefore, requirements are placed on the management of the destination, such as knowing the region well, local organizations, domestic producers, cooperation with entities in order to guarantee the support of tourism in the given region of the destination (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2014). The basic requirements for a destination website should be OOCR (RTO):

- high-quality, attractive and up-to-date content,
- attractive design with the use of multimedia,
- multilingualism (number of language mutations depending on the target markets of the destination),
- high position of the website in search engines,
- link to the KOOR and SlovakiaTravel website,
- accommodation reservation system,
- linking the website with social networks.

### **MATERIAL AND METHODS**

The aim of the study was to find out the opinions of visitors to the website of the destination managed by Territorial Tourism Organizations in the Prešov Self-governing Region.

The study was commissioned at the initiative of seven TTOs in the Prešov Self-governing Region (further than "PSGR") in a strictly practical manner. The outputs were intended to determine the opinions of potential visitors and visitors to the website of TTOs in PSGR, based on the evaluation of selected criteria. This is monitoring in the form of feedback, based on the questionnaire method, for which the contractors themselves did not have the personnel capacity. The main method of primary data collection was a questionnaire survey. The questionnaire also contains pictures, through which the respondents were able to answer the questions. Respondents were visitors to destinations managed by TTOs (as DMOs) under the PSGR. 537 respondents were approached directly in the destinations, of which 484 (N=484) were interested in participating in the study. The condition for participation was over 18 years of age, due to the relevance of the opinion.

#### *Determination of website evaluation areas:*

- Color matching - perception of colors, whether the colors are connected to each other, in one palette,
- Font type – sharpness, expressiveness, legibility of the font,
- Pictures - clarity, sharpness - resolution, timeliness, size of images
- Thematicity – thematic connection of articles with pictures, topicality of the program and discounts for the time of year,
- Symbols - symbols are not distracting, attract attention and subsequent memorization,
- Logo design – each TTO in PSGR has its own logo, which is unique; the attractiveness of the logo, the ability to remember it,
- Modernity – style (design) also changes with the new era,

- Authenticity – the impact of TTO websites on respondents;
- Relevance of the logo – the connection of the TTO website with the given locality of the region.

The websites of TTOs were examined with the help of attitude tests, which determine what the respondents like as well as their subjective impression of the design of the site. Since it is appropriate to use a questionnaire for this type of test, it was used as the main method in the study. Respondents in the questionnaire (in open and closed questions) expressed their attitude and opinion on the website presented by TTOs in several ways. Subsequently, it is possible to evaluate the overall attractiveness of the page on a scale (Murár, 2017).

The questionnaire used a rating scale (choice of one value) from 1 to 5, where 1 means excellent, 2 praiseworthy, 3 good, 4 sufficient, 5 insufficient. The value of the results is given in the arithmetic mean (further than AM) for each criterion. Better results, based on the respondents' opinions, were achieved by TTO, which has the smallest AM value. The best and worst selected evaluated criteria of TTOs websites are marked in color in Table 2. The best rated criterion (marked in the text as "excellent") in green, the worst rated criterion (marked in the text as "deficient") in red.

The monitored period was one year, and it was the period from April 2023 to October 2023 (that is, from the submission of the research request).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Out of the total number of 484 respondents, there were 213 men and 271 women. The minimum age of the respondents was 19 years, the maximum age was 72 years. The average age of the respondents was 35.5 years  $\pm$  10.3 (which represents the standard deviation). The median that divided the group into two equal parts was 30 years.

Table 1. Gender and age of respondents

	<b>N</b>	<b>N - man</b>	<b>N - woman</b>	
<b>Gender</b>	484	44 %	56%	
	<b>Arithmetic Mean</b>	<b>Minimal</b>	<b>Maximal</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
<b>Age</b>	35.5	19	72	$\pm$ 10.3

Source: The author

Subsequently, the respondents evaluated how the website of a specific TTO affects them, according to the criteria (listed in Materials and Methods).

The findings are shown in Table 2. It is important to note once again that the respondents had an image of the current TTO main page embedded in the questionnaire, which they evaluated (as well as those who visited the given destination could also determine whether the website appealed to them, how they they searched the web for information, etc.). Based on the mentioned results, it was possible to state the following findings for individual TTOs.

Table 2. Evaluations of selected criteria of websites of TTOs in PSGR

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Territorial Tourism Organization</b>						
	<i>Šariš</i>	<i>Šariš, Bardejov</i>	<i>Tatry, Spiš, Pieniny</i>	<i>Vysoké Tatry región</i>	<i>Severný Spiš, Pieniny</i>	<i>Tatry - Podhorie</i>	<i>Horný Zemplín</i>
<i>Color matching</i>	2.37	2.27	2.17	2.28	2.26	2.31	2.44
<i>Font type</i>	2.35	2.39	2.05	2.22	2.32	2.37	2.38

<i>Picture</i>	2.34	2.20	2.08	2.25	2.31	2.31	2.22
<i>Thematicity</i>	2.22	2.21	2.16	2.22	2.33	2.28	2.23
<i>Symbols</i>	2.26	2.34	2.20	2.31	2.42	2.38	2.26
<i>Logo design</i>	2.34	2.42	2.21	2.28	2.31	2.48	2.30
<i>Modernity</i>	2.31	2.30	2.22	2.17	2.31	2.39	2.28
<i>Authenticity</i>	2.33	2.15	2.17	2.22	2.31	2.31	2.17
<i>Logo relevance</i>	2.34	2.17	2.13	2.27	2.26	2.28	2.21

Source: The Author

#### "TTO Šariš"

Table 2 shows that the respondents rate the website based on the mentioned criteria as very good (after rounding the AMs to a whole number). For the value "excellent", the respondents agreed on the criterion "thematicity" (2.22), which means that the website is thematically connected, photos, articles and the offer of programs/experiences match the theme and the season. For the value "deficient", the respondents agreed on the criterion "color matching" (2.37), which means that the colors do not stand out on the page, they flow with the background, the text and images disappear.

#### "TTO Šariš, Bardejov"

Table 2 shows that the respondents rate the website as very good based on the mentioned criteria (after rounding the AM to a whole number). For the value "excellent", the respondents agreed on the criterion "authenticity" (2.15), which means that the website has a believable and motivating effect on them, inspires trust in them, and that is why they would return to the website again (resulted from the open questions). For the value "deficient", the respondents agreed on the criterion "logo design" (2.42), which means that the colors of the logo are not distinctive, the logo looks blueish, has an inappropriate size, bad location on the page, difficult to remember.

#### "TTO Tatry, Spiš, Pieniny"

Table 2 shows that the respondents rate the website as very good based on the mentioned criteria (after rounding the AMs to a whole number). For the value "excellent", the respondents agreed on the criterion "font type" (2.05), which means that the website has a distinctive font and does not blend into the background. The site can capture the visitor's attention. Information is easily accessible and its layout is logical. For the value "deficient", the respondents agreed on the criterion "modernity" (2.22), which means that the font, images, logo, design are in an older style and thus the page looks out of date.

#### "TTO Vysoké Tary región"

Table 2 shows that the respondents rate the website as very good based on the mentioned criteria (after rounding the AMs to a whole number). For the value "excellent", the respondents agreed on the criterion "modernity" (2.17), which means that the website has a font, logo, tuning in a modern style, and therefore can interest the respondent. For the value "deficient", the respondents agreed on the criterion "symbols" (2.31), which means that the elements on the page are of little interest to the respondents, or the TTO logo is smaller than the logo of the partner with whom they cooperate.

#### "TTO Severný Spiš, Pieniny"

Table 2 shows that the respondents rate the website as very good based on the mentioned criteria (after rounding the AMs to a whole number). For the value "excellent" the respondents agreed on the criterion "color matching" (2.26), which means that the web page is able to attract attention based on the difference between the font and the background of the page, and therefore the text and background do not merge. For the value "deficient", the respondents agreed on the criterion "symbols" (2.42), which means that the website contains

distracting symbols that are of little interest to the respondents, or the TTO logo is smaller than the logo of the partner with whom they cooperate.

"TTO Tatry - Podhorie "

Table 2 shows that the respondents rate the website as very good based on the mentioned criteria (after rounding the arithmetic averages to a whole number). For the value "excellent", the respondents agreed on the criterion "authenticity" (2.28), which means that the website seems trustworthy, and the respondents would visit the website again. For the value "deficient", the respondents agreed on the criterion "logo design" (2.48), which means that the colors on the logo do not stand out, they flow with the background, the text and images disappear.

"TTO Horný Zemplín"

Table 2 shows that the respondents rate the website as very good based on the mentioned criteria (after rounding the AMs to a whole number). For the value "excellent" the respondents agreed on the criterion "Authenticity" (2.17), which means that the website is in line with what the given region offers and thus with its potential. The site visitor (respondent) rated the published information (offer) as trustworthy. The font size is sufficient and appropriate. For the value "deficient", the respondents agreed on the criterion "modernity" (2.44), which means that the background program, pictures and articles are not related to the season or holidays. However, it emerged from the open question that the respondents consider the region itself "undiscovered", i.e. with a lot of traditional elements that are not affected by commerce. So they basically don't ask for the website to be modernized

In the end, the respondents were asked which of the listed TTOs websites in the PSGR would motivate them to visit the destination (please note that images of the main websites were in the questionnaire). Respondents had to sort the answers to the first three places (out of the seven destinations offered). The results after the evaluation of the websites by the respondents were as follows Tab.3.

Table 3. Order of motivation to visit the destination

Motivation	TTO	%
<i>I would visit as the first</i>	Šariš, Bardejov	26.21
<i>I would visit as the second</i>	Vysoké Tatry región	23.45
<i>I would visit as the third</i>	Severný Spiš, Pieniny	20.69

Source: The Author

As can be seen from table 3, after looking at the main websites of TTOs, the website of TTO Šariš, Bardejov would motivate the respondents to visit the destination the most (it is a city on the list of UNESCO cultural monuments). Consequently, the respondents would be motivated to visit the destination TTO Vysoké Tatry region (this is the destination of the High Tatras mountains) and TTO Severný Spiš, Pieniny (this is the most famous destination with the oldest offer of rafting and rafting in Slovakia, including the Ľubovniansky zámok, which has long been one of the first three the most visited in Slovakia).

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Overall, the evaluation of the study showed that the websites of TTOs in PSGT are evaluated very well by the visitors - on average from 2.14 to 2.36 within the indicated rating level from 1 to 5 (see Material and Methods). This is a very positive result, as currently the inhabitants of Slovakia are used to following (organized and mainly individually) and searching for offers of destinations on their websites. Ratings and perceptions of TTO websites from the point of view of visitors within the PSGT are very important and good.

Based on the findings presented in table 2, it is possible to state the results of the best and worst rated TTOs within the set criteria (see table 4) according to the respondents.

Table 4. The best and the worst rating TTOs

Criteria	Territorial Tourism Organization	
	The best rating (excellent)	The worst rating (deficient)
Color matching	Tatry, Spiš, Pieniny	Šariš
Font type	Tatry, Spiš, Pieniny	Šariš, Bardejov
Picture	Tatry, Spiš, Pieniny	Šariš
Thematicity	Tatry, Spiš, Pieniny	Tatry - Podhorie
Symbols	Tatry, Spiš, Pieniny	Severný Spiš, Pieniny
Logo design	Tatry, Spiš, Pieniny	Tatry - Podhorie
Modernity	Vysoké Tatry región	Tatry - Podhorie
Authenticity	Tatry, Spiš, Pieniny	Šariš
Logo relevance	Tatry, Spiš, Pieniny	Šariš

Source: The Author

Figure 2 shows the results based on the arithmetic average of the observed ratings for sufficiently (seven) observed TTOs in PSGT. Respondents rated the website of TTO Tatry, Spiš, Pieniny the best (2.14). Despite the mentioned fact, it was only the third in order that motivated them to travel and visit the given destination. TTO Šariš, Bardejov, whose separate website was rated the third (2.28) based on selected criteria, but from an overall point of view, it caused a great action among respondents to motivate them to visit the destination. TTO Vysoké Tatry region finished in the fifth place (out of seven TTOs) in terms of the assessed criteria of its website. However, in terms of the motivation leading to visiting the destination, the respondents named it the second.

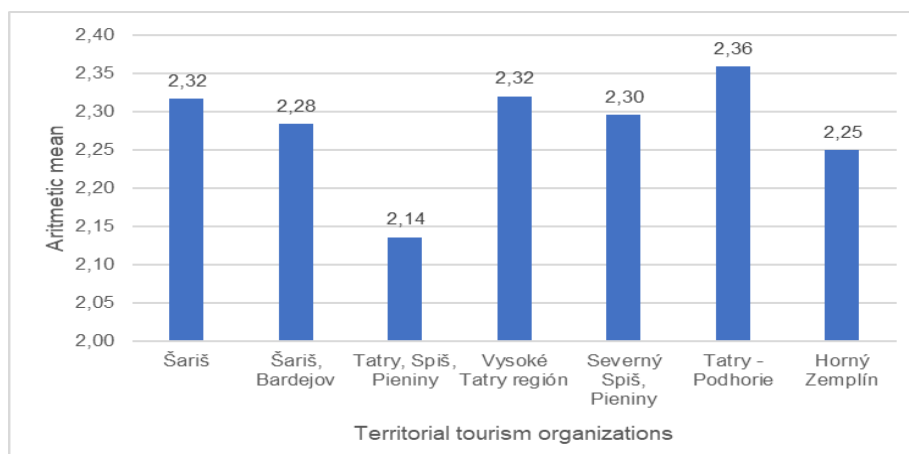


Figure 2. Arithmetic mean of the point evaluations of the monitored criteria

Source: The Author

As part of the findings of the study, TTOs were recommended the following changes within the website:

- TTO Šariš - symbols, pictures, authenticity, modernity - change the background of the page to a darker one, which would highlight the symbols and images more. Eliminate merging of text and sections. The logo is orange-red. The font on the bar is also tuned in that spirit, but due to its size and thickness, it disappears. The orange color of the font would sound better, for example, on a dark background, or a change



in the thickness of the font would be sufficient. This would give the website a modern design,

- TTO Šariš, Bardejov - font type, color matching, logo design, pictures, symbols - increase the size of the logo on the main website (currently the font is lost, it is difficult to read). The theme of the logo describes the typicality of the region and at the same time the support of the spa town and the UNESCO city. It is appropriate to unify the font to match the main title. The difference in title was identified e.g. in the "Events" section, which seems inconsistent (page designer error). Headings would work better if they were all in uppercase or lowercase. The images, especially the evening city, are of lower quality,
- TTO Tatry, Spiš, Pieniny - symbols, color matching, authenticity, pictures, modernity - in the area of color match, it would be advisable to consider changing the background or changing the font. Despite the fact that the colors match, they also blend. This can be seen on the logo, in the "The culture, museums" section, where the letters are barely visible, because the background is also the same color as the font itself,
- TTO Vysoké Tatry, region - color matching, authenticity, modernity - images have a darker impression (they have low brightness). The top bar (there are sections: weather, web cameras, cable cars, news and information from the region, tourist information, map and magnifying glass) should be considered changing the background, as it does not match the colors of the website. In the same way, it is advisable to consider enlarging the logo of TTO Vysoké Tatry, region and removing the SlovakiaTravel logo. The logos are confusing for the visitor, they give the impression that we are on their SlovakiaTravel website and not on the TTO website. Important - it was done after the first results were provided,
- TTO Severný Spiš, Pieniny – font type, pictures, modernity, symbols - the website is well set up, transparent. In the font type in the upper bar, we lean towards the answers from the respondents. It is advisable to increase the thickness of the font or just change its color,
- TTO Tatry - Podhorie – color matching, font type, modernity and symbols - the website looks modest at first glance, because there is a snowy image of the Tatra Mountains in the background. After clicking on the page window, the design of the web page will change, it is more modern. Recommendations are a bluer look, theme and more images, because a page that represents the destination Tatra - Podhorie can have more images on the web and not just one. It is advisable to consider a design change in the case of symbols,
- TTO Horný Zemplín - symbols, modernity - the site has an older style. In the evaluation of the criteria, however, it received the best rating for authenticity. This creates a paradox where, despite the initial impression of non-modernity, in the end the site appealed to the visitors and they recognized its high degree of authenticity to the destination itself. The destination presents itself as natural with minimal human intervention. The use of symbols that the respondents were used to from other assessed websites of TTOs is absent. Their necessity is questionable, as the font of parts of the page is sufficiently pronounced. The "Services" section deserves attention for correction, where there is no offer for the visitor in the case of wellness or accommodation (town Svidník). That is the task of destination management - to acquire partners.

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