

PUBLIC SECTOR ALLIANCES IN MARKETING URBAN HERITAGE TOURISM: A POST-COMMUNIST PERSPECTIVE

Deyan Hristov

University of Bedfordshire

Petia Petrova

University of Bedfordshire

This paper investigates the current degree of collaboration and partnerships in marketing and promotion bounded by municipal bodies and other public organisations, involved in urban heritage tourism. As the majority of published research projects accentuate on private and mixed stakeholder alliances, this study is important in order to uncover the scope of collaborative activity among public sector organisations. The research approach adopted in this project includes the application of a case study in the heritage town of Plovdiv, Bulgaria. The findings provide evidence that public organisations need to realise the benefits of mutual marketing and promotion activities created in a local, regional and Internet-based context. The roles of the local airport, urban events, as well as the Internet should be recognised and used as a catalyst of tourism demand.

Keywords: *Destination marketing, Public sector, Post-Communist, Co-operation, Heritage, Plovdiv.*

JEL Classification: L83, M1, O1

THE DYNAMIC NATURE OF URBAN HERITAGE TOURISM

The contemporary phenomenon of globalisation is considered a key catalyst and influencer of urbanisation dynamics. As international travel has reached significant levels, the number of tourists visiting a city in a given year often surpasses the volume of those destinations' host communities (AlSayyad, 2001). Accordingly, tourism markets have become increasingly competitive in order to attract the progressively selective and discriminating post - tourist (Urry, 2002). One way to distinguish often standardised products and services is by providing a



unique cultural and heritage experiences (AlSayyad, 2001). The growth of heritage tourism in recent times represents a transformation of the concept of heritage towards commercialisation, commodification of the past in novel forms (Smith *et al.*, 2010; Urry, 2002; Daher, 2000; Timothy, 2011).

Present tourism and travel growth is luring many government agencies and other groups into marketing their heritage tourism destinations (Timothy, 2011; Morrison, 2010; Misiura, 2006). One of the main activities of the state then is the promotion of tourism through tourism marketing applied strategies to create international or domestic tourism demand (Hall, 2005). Marketing has been recognised to play a crucial role in enhancing promotion effectiveness of destinations among potential tourists and visitors (Cooper and Hall, 2008). Many cities with limited marketing budgets thus advocate the application of partnerships as a way of boosting their marketing and promotion effectiveness (Richards and Palmer, 2010).

Destination governments, ministries of tourism and other public management organisations have turned heritage into competitive advantage in terms of promoting their places (Timothy, 2011). By clustering fixed attractions and events, joint marketing can link together physical areas of interest and events of local character (Richards and Palmer, 2010). Hence, individual attractions and events could achieve more in terms of promotion when pooling marketing resources and the role of the public sector in this process should be further explored (Richards and Palmer, 2010). The focus of this paper then is on examining collaborative marketing and promotion activities among public stakeholders as their role in terms of destination marketing is vital for prospective heritage tourism development (Timothy, 2011). Involvement of all key heritage tourism actors representing the public sector is imperative.

The role of the public sector may vary based on the political and economic characteristics of a given state (Hall, 2005). Most communities around the world with a resident population of more than 50, 000 now have some form of local Destination Marketing Organisations (DMO) (Morrison, 2010). DMOs in developed countries are not likely to achieve more than important, however, marginal influence over the total tourism volume and expenditure (Middleton, 2002). In contrast, DMOs in developing tourism destinations have a far greater influence over their tourism sectors (Middleton, 2002) due to the relatively low maturity of the market and limited presence of private sector entrants. They are then

potentially better able to evaluate the success of their marketing efforts (Middleton, 2002).

In some Post-Communist states, the role of the public sector may be stronger still (Mosedale and Albrecht, 2011; Toonen, 1993). In such countries there may be a unique mixture of marketisation and growth in the private sector, combined with a historically strong and bureaucratic public sector with influence over tourism development and marketing (Webster, Ivanov and Illum, 2011; Hristov, 2013). Harrill (2009) argues that there is a serious gap between destination marketing and planning, including urban planning - not only in Eastern European countries, but worldwide. It is within such context that this paper looks at tourism management of marketing and planning and how it varies in Post-Communist countries in general. The transition process in former communist states towards market-oriented economy needs to deal with some major obstacles – mostly political (Webster, Ivanov and Illum, 2011). Reason for it is that the tourism sector has been strongly influenced by the state over the past few decades (Hall, 2005). The state is the key player, which appears to be slowing down and restricting this shift to a significant extent.

PLOVDIV AS A HERITAGE DESTINATION

Plovdiv is one of the oldest cities in Europe and the beginning of its history dates back to 4,000 years BC (Detev, 2012). Situated on Maritsa River, Plovdiv is beautiful town with extensive physical heritage that reflects on different layers of history. The unique location of Plovdiv, which is at some of the significant ancient crossroads, has stimulated strong political, religious and cultural influences from the West and the East (Genchev, 2007). The town is place of ancient civilisations, such as the Thracian, Hellenic, Roman and Byzantine before becoming part of Bulgaria (Plovdiv Municipality Tourist Centre, 2011). Older than some of the most ancient towns like Carthage, Athens, Constantinople and Rome, the place has managed to maintain its unique cultural and historical identity (Genchev, 2007). The town has a variety of museums, such as the Ethnographic Museum, the Historical Museum, the Museum of Natural Science and the Archaeological Museum. Churches, mosques and temples are functioning as a home of faith and reflection of the peaceful coexistence of different religions (Genchev, 2007).

More recent cultural and architectural heritage dates back to the Bulgarian Revival in the 18th Century when Plovdiv used to be an

important economic centre (Genchev, 2007). The town was home to many wealthy and educated people who travelled across Europe and brought new cultural trends. The rich traders from Plovdiv showed their wealth through the construction of beautiful and richly ornamented houses (Genchev, 2007). One of the most famous landmarks is the architectural complex of the Ancient Plovdiv, where many beautiful houses from the times of the Bulgarian Revival had been preserved and restored (Pizhev, 2003). The combination of unique ancient and recent history provides opportunities here to drive tourism development and regeneration, by promoting local heritage.

The purpose of this article is:

- A. To examine the willingness of public sector bodies to form marketing and promotion alliances in the field of urban heritage tourism.
- B. To explore the existing level of collaborative marketing and promotion initiatives (including Internet-based marketing initiatives).

METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative study with an emphasis on semi-structured interviews, observation of municipal discussions on tourism development, and analysis of documentary samples. The project was then carried out on the basis of both, primary and secondary data.

Primary data collection included semi-structured expert interviews. Face-to-face interviews offered the possibility of modifying interviewee enquiry when experiencing engaging responses, as well as investigating underlying issues in a way that other data collection tools, such as postal or electronic Delphi questionnaires are less-efficient (Robson, 2011). Thus, the researcher had the opportunity to be selective, as well as to reshape and adjust the flow of an interviewee's speech in pursuance of specific issues regarding stakeholder co – actions and alliances in the field of marketing. Within the context of research, semi-structured interviews assessed key-professional points of view of experts (David and Sutton, 2011). The interviews were supplemented by the use of probes in order to get an interviewee to expand on response to a particular research objective when there is a feeling that the participant has more to give (Jennings, 2010; Robson, 2011).

The pre-study work aimed to capture the development of questionnaires and ethical forms, explore the stakeholder network, and establish contacts with local authorities took two months. The actual

study commenced in January 2012 and took six months to be completed as data collection and data analysis stages required considerable amount of time.

A sample of seven professionals and experts representing all public organisations involved in urban heritage tourism was identified and subsequently used for interview data collection purposes (see *Table 1* below). The sample included representatives of the local Municipality of Plovdiv, such as the Deputy Mayor responsible for tourism and culture development within the area, the Deputy Chairman of the Tourism Council, as well as marketing experts from the Municipal Enterprise for Tourism. The interviews took place in the Old Plovdiv, as well as in the contemporary urban area of Plovdiv, Bulgaria during the first two weeks of March, 2012.

Table 1. Heritage tourism actors in Plovdiv.

Key Actors	Source of Funding	Project Participant
Plovdiv Municipality	EU/State/Public	<i>[Deputy Mayor responsible for Culture, Education, Tourism, Innovations, Development, and European Politics]</i>
Municipal Enterprise for Tourism (DMO)	EU/Municipal	<i>[Municipal Enterprise for Tourism: Executive Director]</i>
The Tourism Council	Public/Private	<i>[Tourism Council: Deputy Chairman];</i>
Ancient Plovdiv Municipal Institute	State/Municipal	<i>[Ancient Plovdiv Municipal Institute: Executive Director]</i>
Plovdiv 2019	State/Municipal	<i>[Plovdiv 2019: Executive Director]</i>
Plovdiv Airport	Municipal	<i>[Plovdiv Airport: Executive Director]</i>
University of Agriculture and Regional Development	State/Private	<i>[UARD: Head of Tourism Department]</i>

During the two weeks of carrying out interviews, the researcher was invited to attend a Round Table for Local Heritage Tourism Development in Plovdiv Municipality - attended by the key tourism public bodies and hosted by the Tourism Deputy Mayor. The researcher had the opportunity to record five discussions that contributed to the primary data sample. Discussions provided valuable insights of issues concerning partnerships of local tourism bodies in Plovdiv.

Secondary data sources included the Strategy and Plan for Tourism Development in Plovdiv Area 2009-2013, as well as the Concept for Tourism Development in the Old Plovdiv. Both strategies are publicly available through the web-based information system of the Tourism Council in Plovdiv and formed the basis of the secondary data sample. As previously outlined, the study was conducted in a Post-Communist setting where the presence of the public sector is dominant due to the relatively slow shift towards market economy. Private sector market entrants have not been considered as leading figures - their voice in the decision-making process is limited.

DATA ANALYSIS

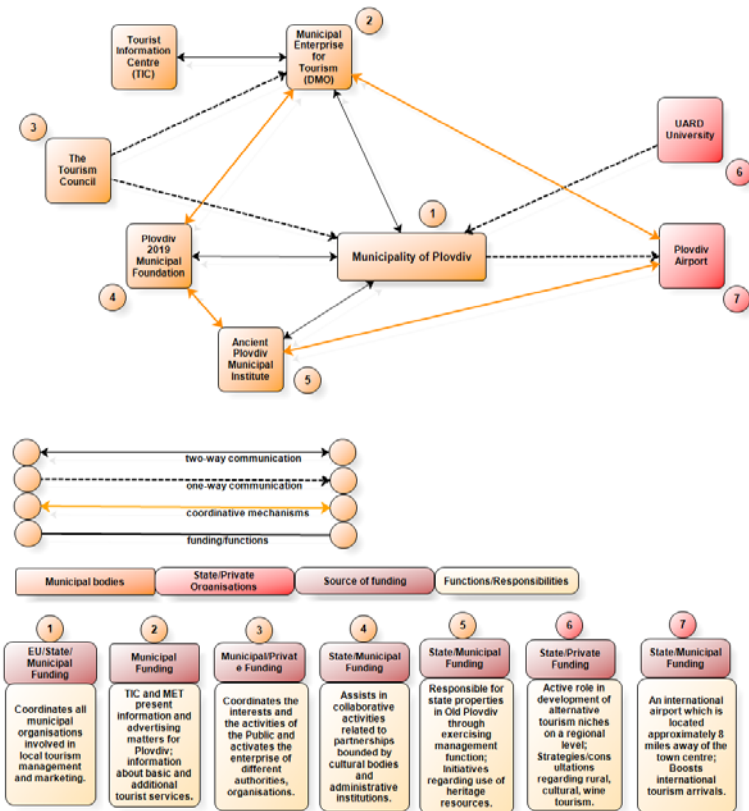
The interviews were transcribed, with the exceptions of segments of text where the respondents veered off topic. In such cases, as suggested by Gibbs (2007), these fragments of text were ignored as they were irrelevant to the aim and objectives of research. Secondly, in most cases when a project looks at policies, organisations and evaluation, the salient factual content of what respondents have said is sufficient for analysis of collected qualitative data (Gibbs, 2007). Voice data files were transcribed. During the pre-interview arrangements participants were happy to avail themselves of the confidentiality arrangements of this research. As a result the name of the city involved (Plovdiv) and their actual job roles are indicated in this paper.

The NVivo9 (QSR International, 2013) software package for qualitative data analysis was applied to facilitate the process of qualitative analysis of the large amounts of data involved and in the development of consistent coding schemes. A coding scheme through the use of thematic coding nodes being part of the NVivo9 software package has been created (Edhlund, 2011). Two parent nodes which reflect objectives A and B were created. Following a hierarchical order, a set of sub-nodes under each of the parent nodes was generated. The first set of sub-nodes (part of objective A) included all public sector heritage organisations and contributed to assessing the willingness of bodies to apply collaborative marketing and promotional initiatives. Existing alliance marketing practices reflected the second set of sub-nodes (part of objective B). Additional sets of nodes related to the Municipal discussions, as well as the strategy papers were created accordingly. These were subsequently put against the objectives of this study.

RESULTS

This paper is not a representation of all existing heritage tourism stakeholders in Plovdiv. Scope of study was therefore limited by all public bodies and organisations, which are either, involved in or affected by heritage tourism development in Plovdiv. The number, influences and interest of the different public organisations is considerable. The secondary data and interviews suggested the following stakeholders and areas of interest (*see Figure 1*).

Figure 1. Public stakeholder network of Plovdiv



Apart from best practices in collaboration with the airline company Ryanair outlined below, private sector intervention in urban heritage is not explored, as its role in shaping heritage marketing and promotion in Old Plovdiv is minor at this stage of local tourism development.

Outcomes of the applied methodology emphasised on several key directions of marketing and promotion partnerships – those were intended to develop alliances locally, regionally, as well as virtually (on the Internet).

LOCAL PERSPECTIVE

Airport Alliances and the Local Airport

The results suggested that public purse support for marketing the destination is limited. In such cases, co-operative marketing and promotion of Plovdiv through public-private partnerships could be viable strategy if the Municipality's resources regarding such activities are scarce. Then Plovdiv Airport and Ryanair promotional collaboration works towards advertising Plovdiv through the web site of the air carrier. Through marketing and price promotions, Ryanair aims to inspire web site visitors explore Plovdiv, as the Airport Director emphasised. Such public-private alliance initiatives tend to be less resource-dependent and hence, being feasible promotional and advertising tool in the context of Plovdiv.

“The economically-efficient option to market Plovdiv through web-based portals, such as the Ryanair one is an opportunity, by which we can promote our heritage while using relatively small marketing budgets.”

(Plovdiv Airport, Executive Director)

Plovdiv Airport is a state-owned airport which provides air transport services for the South-Central region of Bulgaria. It is 8 miles away from the town centre of Plovdiv. The main traffic of the Airport is charter flights from and to the United Kingdom, Ireland and Russia. Plovdiv Airport collaborates with Ryanair and services scheduled flights to London Stansted Airport. The active season for the airport is during the winter due to its proximity to the most popular ski resorts in Bulgaria – Bansko and Pamporovo. Many cities with highly restricted advertising budgets advocate the application of collaborative marketing and promotion activities in order to increase their marketing effectiveness

(Richards and Palmer, 2010) and the Airport can serve as a marketing and promotional tool for regional attractions.

Although there is a current proposal for establishing Tourist Information Centre (TIC) on the Airport, the Strategy for Development of Tourism in Plovdiv 2009-2013 and the discussion with Plovdiv Airport Director suggest that the level of alliance promotional practices and marketing in Plovdiv is relatively low. Interview respondents highlighted that Municipality of Plovdiv and Plovdiv Airport could be successful partners in terms of local tourism promotion and marketing. Alliance marketing initiatives, which are bounded by Plovdiv Airport and Municipality of Plovdiv (through its various municipal organisations, such as the Tourist Information Centre, Plovdiv 2019 Municipal Foundation and the Ancient Plovdiv Municipal Institute) could be an example of a sound practice (see *Figure 1*). The local airport was seen as a key stop point for many visitors providing opportunities to market Plovdiv and the region.

“The airport administration is planning to open a Tourist Information Centre in collaboration with Plovdiv Municipality. Once tourists arrive in Plovdiv, they will be serviced by the local tourist information centres which we plan to further develop this year.”

(Municipality of Plovdiv, Deputy Mayor)

Similarly, the Director of Plovdiv 2019 Municipal Foundation highlighted that Plovdiv Municipality should put a greater emphasis on promotion and provide a more ‘aggressive’ type of marketing, as the opening of a Tourist Information Centre may not be sufficient enough to attract visitors to Old Plovdiv. In the same degree,

“We should not just wait for those tourists to come and find us (...) we have to create an interest on any potential tourist (...) we can put sculptures, art expositions etc. In fact, when people land on Plovdiv Airport they should be able to spot something more than contemporary urbanistic elements, which can be noticed anywhere nowadays. Instead, they should be able to explore and appreciate our culture and heritage straight from the Airport.”

(Plovdiv 2019, Executive Director)

Cultural Events and Venues

Results revealed that, key tourist attractions and cultural events of Plovdiv are connected with the Old Plovdiv, being a host area of various cultural venues of local character. The majority of network actors asserted that Old Plovdiv and the contemporary urban area interact with each other - the symbiosis between the two places is prominent. The proposition is strongly supported by the Tourist Information Centre and the Ancient Plovdiv Municipal Institute. They argued that the architectural heritage of Plovdiv in the old town could be the place where major cultural events take place – festivals, art exhibitions, theatre and opera. Thus physical heritage can be marketed through cultural events and vice versa.

A further relationship of Old Plovdiv with art and cultural events, even if those not directly linked to heritage is the success story, highlighted by the Tourism Deputy Mayor: “The Roman Amphitheatre and the Ancient Roman stadium, dating back to the 2nd Century A.D. which are unique places not only in Bulgaria, but in Europe can host different cultural events during the summer months.”

Marketing and promotional co-actions between Old Plovdiv and cultural events in the contemporary town were supported by other municipal bodies as well. Key events and attractions in the new town are often delivered in collaboration with Old Plovdiv. The key attractions and events of Plovdiv are connected with the Old Plovdiv as the town is host of numerous cultural venues of local character. Some interviewees saw a strong potential of cultural events to drive tourist activity. The Tourism Council Deputy Chairman assumed that cultural events could be a major pull factor for tourism activity. Others suggested enhancing the offering of the town by further integrating the physical heritage (Old Plovdiv) with cultural and other events, or creating events that directly link to the cultural heritage of the contemporary area. The Executive Director within the Tourist Information Centre proposed development of tourist routes in the old town, which are associated with art and cultural events:

“If we manage to complete a tourism product about the Old Plovdiv and include elements such as art events, heritage exploration and all of the resources we have, the old town will become a very popular tourist spot.”

(Municipal Enterprise for Tourism: TIC, Executive Director)

The Online Presence of Plovdiv

As previously emphasised, promoting tourism online is seen as an important area for development. The electronic distribution of heritage tourism products needs further work as shown in the Strategy for Tourism Development in Plovdiv 2009-2013. Web-based marketing and promotion are of high importance when it comes to improving the image of Plovdiv and market it as a tourist destination. As the Executive in the Tourist Information Centre stressed, “all resources we have, such as physical heritage, archaeology, events, art venues could be accessible through the Internet.” In this sense, Old Plovdiv public bodies and the Tourist Information Centre in Plovdiv work collaboratively towards the application of web-based marketing.

“I have to say that the Tourist Information Centre works well, as Old Plovdiv public agencies can find viable partner in the face of our organisation when it comes to presenting venues, events, attractions and projects to tourists. Hence, we maintain the first electronic event calendar in Bulgaria - eventsplovdiv.info. Our aim is to target internationally through this web based event information portal.”

(Municipal Enterprise for Tourism: TIC, Executive Director)

It is evident that Plovdiv Municipality has implemented some innovative practices, compared to other regions of the country. Nevertheless, as Plovdiv 2019 Director emphasised “we should further develop our Internet presence and display all key venues and events in the Old Plovdiv.” Web-based marketing initiatives are practical solution for destinations with limited economic resources and could be a key driver of change when it comes to development of the whole marketing strategy for Plovdiv. Hence, still much more is needed to catch up with cutting edge practice and fully maximise the benefits of using it – save resource, effectiveness of operations, enhanced marketing and promotion.

REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Beyond Municipality Borders

The heritage of Old Plovdiv does not stand alone, the region is rich in Thracian heritage in particular. Interviewees supported co-

operative promotional initiatives between Municipality of Plovdiv and other municipalities within the South-Central region of Bulgaria. The Round Table discussions suggested that Plovdiv Municipality can benefit from tourism through collaborating in developing the cultural heritage tourism in a regional context. Among Municipality's priorities should be the establishment of partnerships with peripheral regions, and this can be beneficial to Plovdiv as some respondents outlined. Thus, "when we observe Plovdiv we unarguably say that it is the most important urban agglomeration in the area, but we should be looking at the whole South-Central region of Bulgaria", as the Tourism Deputy Mayor highlighted. Emphasising on the fact that the South-Central region is a rich source of Thracian heritage:

"Old Plovdiv could be related to some cultural and heritage sites from peripheral areas. Plovdiv can collaborate with other town and village areas being part of the South-Central region of Bulgaria."

(UARD University, Professor)

In the light of regional alliance marketing and building on the mediating role of Plovdiv Airport as discussed earlier, it becomes clear that the Airport could be major actor in regional frameworks as well. As the Executive Director of Plovdiv Airport pointed out, "the Tourism Deputy Mayor of Plovdiv supports the idea that Plovdiv Airport is of great importance to the whole region as it is the 'Southern Gate of Bulgaria'". This demonstrates agreement of the key direction of development linked to the local heritage tourism.

"Although Plovdiv area is nearest to the Airport, neighbouring municipalities are also part of the fund programme for airport development. In fact, all six districts within the South-Central region of Bulgaria are interested in the development of this airport."

(Plovdiv Airport, Executive Director)

Plovdiv Airport may be able to go beyond promoting the local tourism product. Instead, it can potentially contribute to municipalities within the South-Central region as will increase tourism flows and boost tourism activity in key heritage spots, such as the Valley of Perpericon and the Thracian Temples in Starosel.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This paper discussed the willingness of public sector bodies to form marketing and promotion alliances in the field of urban heritage tourism. The study also explored the current level of applied collaborative marketing initiatives of heritage stakeholders in the context of Plovdiv. In contrast to other published studies in the area and having in mind the setting of investigation, it builds on emerging partnership developments taking an Eastern-European angle. In contrast to the West, most of the countries in Eastern Europe still struggle to fully develop their Post-Communist economies and the relatively slow process of shifting towards market economy can be noticed (Webster, Ivanov, and Illum, 2011; Hristov, 2013). Partnerships and particularly mixed alliances need to be explored further in the context of Plovdiv. Tourism development is inevitably being affected by the current situation as public sector bodies still have major impact over decision-making. As Timothy (2011) outlined earlier, tourism growth is driving governments to market their heritage tourism destinations and the trend of continued involvement of government agencies is even stronger in the Post-Communist context of Plovdiv. Although the private sector does not fall within the scope of study, it has to be emphasised on the increasing role of public-private partnerships in developing destinations (as in the case of Plovdiv). Municipalities experiencing shortages in marketing and promotional budgeting should work towards exploring the benefits of mixed alliances (Hristov, 2013), as the current practice of advertising Plovdiv through mutual promotion initiatives between Ryanair and Plovdiv Airport suggests.

Alliances in the Old Plovdiv are currently present, although not fully explored. Urban heritage partnerships are mainly focused on cultural events, physical and online airport promotion. In local perspective, marketing and promotional co-operation between Plovdiv Airport and Municipality of Plovdiv is to be established through the opening of an Airport Tourist Information Centre, serving as a mediator between the two parties and capturing marketing initiatives and heritage promotion campaigns on the Airport. Attention should also be given to emerging alliances featuring architectural heritage within the Old Plovdiv and cultural events and festivals hosted in either the old town or the contemporary Plovdiv. Richards and Palmer (2010) recognised the role of the public sector in creating joint marketing initiatives. Those may have major implications in terms of marketing and promotion of physical

heritage located in the old town. Municipal organisations are advised collaborate in developing a series of festivals and cultural events related to all historical epochs part of Old Plovdiv. Such concept could be beneficial to the town in terms of promoting the variety of historic layers. Identically, an emphasis should be given to the emerging web-based marketing and promotion in Plovdiv, as the Internet advertising tools tend to be budget-friendly when applied to destinations in developing countries. Collaborative marketing and promotion in developing destinations is seen as a driver of marketing effectiveness (Richards and Palmer, 2010). Collaboration is then of key importance in view of the budget constraints on marketing. The Municipality should recognise the essential role of web-based marketing and promotion, as part of local tourism development strategies. As argued above, Internet advertising campaigns tend to be cost-efficient way of marketing the local heritage. They are able to reach wider audience and target not only local and regional, but even national and foreign markets. Public sector resources should be used for building an effective marketing and promotional online strategy of Plovdiv through collaboration among key heritage network actors.

In regional perspective, alliances among municipalities selling heritage tourism products within the South-Central region of Bulgaria could be further explored and tend to be of high importance to Plovdiv. The role of Plovdiv Airport in this process is also crucial as already argued.

The number of stakeholders involved and their overlapping areas of interest and responsibility suggest a need of coming together in an ongoing formal agreement. The presence of the historically strong and bureaucratic public sector is common in Post-Communist states as Webster, Ivanov and Illum (2011) argued earlier and this was covered on *Figure 1* above. Political barriers are also present in former Communist countries with economies in transition (Webster, Ivanov and Illum, 2011), and in this case the emphasis is on structural factors slowing down the work and responsiveness of the various bodies (Hristov, 2013). The private sector represented by the Tourism Council is excluded of the decision-making process (see *Figure 1*). It is then clear that Plovdiv needs a body, which efforts will be concentrated on enhancing the local tourism through involving stakeholders representing both, the public and the private sector. The Municipal Enterprise for Tourism through its Tourist Information Centre body is the current form of Destination Marketing Organisation (DMO) in Plovdiv. Responsibilities and functions of other public organisations also fall within the scope of a typical DMO as in the

case of the Tourism Council coordinating partnerships between tourism businesses and municipal structures. Hence, the establishment of an independent DMO is recommended at this stage if the heritage tourism product is to be fully developed. A DMO in Plovdiv could serve as a platform for active collaboration and discussions between bodies, organisations and businesses representing the public and private sector (Hristov, 2013). There is a need for close collaboration with the accommodation and transport providers so heritage tourism products are further promoted, and included in holiday packages. A local DMO body will be working towards intensifying the public-private Partnerships and bring authorities and businesses which share common objectives together. As previously argued by Urry (2002), it is imperative that competitive destinations should be able to attract the emerging, increasingly selective post-tourist and the above recommendation is a key step towards it.

IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Outcomes of this investigation can be applicable to tourism destinations in emerging economies with limited marketing and promotion budgeting. The study advocates and supports collaborative initiatives and partnerships among the public sector as a way of implementing effective marketing strategies in developing tourism markets as it is in the case of Old Plovdiv. Neighbouring urban heritage tourism destinations may then implement sound practices explored in the context of Old Plovdiv.

Active public sector working towards adopting open-door policy for private sector inclusion can provide an alternative platform for tourism destination managers to effectively market and promote areas of tourism activity. This is to be done by pooling resources with private parties – a survival approach in times of austerity and limited public funding for tourism. In this sense, tourism businesses are to play vital role in contemporary destination management as a provider of economic resources.

Future research regarding marketing planning of urban heritage tourism destinations should capture the role of web-based campaigns in collaborative marketing and promotion. Ways of developing active electronic distribution channels with limited budgeting through co-efforts, bounded by public tourism parties in Post-Communist settings should also be uncovered.

This study proves to be of practical value to destination practitioners as it captures practices that emphasise on the importance of

actively engaging with private parties in times, when economic resources are scarce (e.g. airline companies, as in the case of Plovdiv). Similarly, it calls for an increased understanding from the public sector of the benefits that inter-organisational collaboration (within the Municipality) and alliances with other public bodies (e.g. Plovdiv Airport) can bring. Thus, the prospective role of local airports in terms of marketing and promotion in urban heritage tourism destinations should be addressed. Directions of collaborative marketing and promotion in the light of the advances and increased accessibility of the air transport and thus, providing destination development opportunities through airports in localities should also be brought to attention.

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REFEREED ANONYMOUSLY

Deyan Hristov (deyan.hristov@beds.ac.uk) is a Graduate Academic Assistant and Senior Fellow of the junior Research Institute for Tourism (jRIT) at the University of Bedfordshire, University of Bedfordshire Business School, United Kingdom

Dr Petia Petrova (petia.petrova@beds.ac.uk) is a Lecturer in Tourism Management and Course leader for International Tourism Management, Department of Marketing, Tourism and Hospitality, University of Bedfordshire, United Kingdom.