

STRATEGIC IMPACT OF THE TOURIST OFFER ON THE IMAGE OF THE CITY OF TREBINJE

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Abstract: *This paper analyzes the strategic impact of the tourism offer on the image of the city of Trebinje. In modern tourism, creating a recognizable and positive city image is essential for attracting visitors and achieving sustainable development. The main objective of the research is to identify key elements of the tourism offer that influence the perception of Trebinje as a tourist destination. The research combines theoretical and empirical approaches. The theoretical part is based on a review of relevant literature on tourism development and city branding. The empirical research was conducted using a survey method, with data collected from representatives of leading hotels in Trebinje. The results were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods. The findings show that the tourism offer has a significant and dominant impact on the city's image. Natural attractions, cultural and historical heritage, and tourism infrastructure are identified as the most important factors influencing tourists' perceptions. The results confirm the main hypothesis that a strategic approach to tourism development positively affects the image of the city. It can be concluded that Trebinje has strong tourism potential and a well-developed image, but further strategic improvements are necessary to enhance its competitiveness and long-term positioning in the tourism market.*

Key words: *tourism offer, city image, Trebinje, tourism development, strategic management..*

JEL classification: L38, M31, R58

1. INTRODUCTION

The research area of this paper encompasses the strategic impact of the tourism offer on the image of the city of Trebinje.

In order to examine the given topic as thoroughly and adequately as possible, the structure of the paper consists of three important and interconnected parts: a literature review based on previous research, the methodological part of the paper, and the analysis and interpretation of the research results.

In the theoretical part of the paper, the focus will be placed on the literature review through previous studies. Following the literature review, the methodological part of the paper will highlight the most significant segments of Trebinje's tourism offer and the city's image.

When processing the tourism offer of the city, the focus will be on the most important natural and cultural-historical attractions, as well as the manifestations and events for which Trebinje is well known. The paper will also address the concept and importance of the city's image, with reference to the influence of the tourism offer on the image of Trebinje. Namely, Trebinje is a small town in the south characterized by a favorable geographical position and climate, as well as numerous natural beauties. In addition to a large number of sunny days and its proximity to the sea, Trebinje attracts visitors with its beautiful natural landscapes, the most prominent of which is the Trebišnjica River, which flows through the very center of the city. The greenery in the city center, the park covered with lush vegetation, and the Vjetrenica Cave near Trebinje represent the essence of its natural resources. The surrounding fields planted with vineyards also give this city a special charm.

In addition to its natural beauties, Trebinje is recognized for its rich cultural and historical heritage, evidenced by numerous monuments, bridges, fortifications, the Museum, and

monasteries. Tourism infrastructure represents only one segment of the overall tourism offer, which also includes natural attractions, cultural-historical heritage, gastronomy, events and other destination-specific elements. Furthermore, the many cultural manifestations and celebrations that have been organized in this city for many years have rightly earned it the epithet "city of culture." There is much that Trebinje offers its visitors, and all of this will be described and presented in detail in this paper. The research problem in this paper refers to the question of what strategic impact the tourism offer has on the image of the city of Trebinje.

The subject of the research in this paper is the strategic impact of the tourism offer on the image of the city of Trebinje. It is indisputable that the tourism offer has a strategic influence on the formation of a city's image, because the tourism offer long-term shapes the way a city is perceived in the minds of tourists. Thus, it is not about a temporary attitude, but a long-term one, which as such builds the city's image and encourages tourists to return as visitors to the city.

Every research has its own goal and purpose. The aim of the research in this case is to identify the strategic elements of the tourism offer that will influence the formation of the image of the city of Trebinje. In the case of Trebinje, the strategic elements are natural attractions, cultural-historical attractions, and the numerous events and manifestations that have been held in this city for a long time.

The main hypothesis of the paper is: A strategic approach to the tourism offer has a positive impact on the image of the city of Trebinje.

Supporting hypotheses: H1: Natural attractions have a positive impact on the image of the city of Trebinje. H2: Cultural-historical attractions have a positive impact on the image of the city of Trebinje. H3: Tourism infrastructure has a positive impact on the image of the city of Trebinje.

During the research conducted for the purpose of writing this paper, the data collection technique used was a survey questionnaire. The respondents were four hotels in Trebinje with the largest number of guests: Platani, SL Industry, Central Park, and Leotar. The hotels were contacted via their official email addresses.

The third part of the paper refers to the content analysis and interpretation of the research results, where the results of the survey will be examined and all relevant segments will be highlighted, indicating how the tourism offer influences the image of the city of Trebinje based on the conducted survey.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW THROUGH PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Starting from the set hypothesis that a strategic approach to the tourism offer has a positive impact on the image of the city of Trebinje, it is necessary to examine all segments of Trebinje's tourism offer. The most prominent among them are the natural potentials, cultural-historical heritage, and cultural manifestations that have been taking place in Trebinje for many years and which make this city recognizable. In this context, the results of previous research on this topic will be highlighted.

Despite all the values it possesses as a city, Trebinje has always been represented merely as a stopover on the way to Dubrovnik, without significant tourism development. In recent years, there has been growing interest from the local community in the development of the tourism economy, which has led to the first positive results. The number of visits increases slowly every year.

Religious tourism plays a major role in this, as does the proximity to Dubrovnik, which should certainly be utilized. For the further development of this tourism-potential city, a clearly defined strategy is essential. This strategy should include the creation of a recognizable brand for Trebinje, as well as a comprehensive national tourism development strategy that would complement this city with other tourist attractions that undoubtedly exist throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina. (Guzijan, Cvijić, 2009).

When it comes to the natural resources and beauties of the city of Trebinje, the Trebišnjica River takes first place.

The Trebišnjica River is 98 km long, with underground flows totaling 187 km. It is the largest sinking river (ponornica) in the Balkans and one of the largest in the world. This area in Herzegovina is protected under various forms of protection and represents an exceptional tourist value for the region. (Geić, 2009).

The Global Environment Facility project (GEF) represents a program of strategic cooperation in the Mediterranean, implemented by UNEP and the World Bank, focusing on programs for the protection of space from pollution and the preservation of biological diversity along the Mediterranean coasts and waters. For the purposes of this paper, the issues of spatial management in the Trebišnjica River basin are particularly significant.

The Trebišnjica Management Project supports interventions aimed at improving the integrated management of surface and underground cross-border water resources, which is of exceptional

importance for the water supply of the regions of Southern Dalmatia, Herzegovina, and the Montenegrin coast. (Geić, Ćorluka, Geić, 2012).

Local tourism workers believe that it is necessary to develop a positioning strategy for Herzegovina with a focus on its excellent geographical location, favorable prices, and authenticity in the sense of active tourism that allows guests to experience Herzegovina the way the locals live it. According to them, it is important to highlight well-known tourist destinations such as Trebinje and Vjetrenica. They recommend networking tourism workers with producers of local products — wine, cheese, prosciutto, honey, vegetables, and fruit — and offering the experience of healthy nutrition along with education on the cultivation and production of all autochthonous Herzegovinian varieties. The tourist product must be a package of services that enables guests to have a top-quality experience of the region. In order for this to be possible, all quality providers of tourism products and services need to join forces and jointly create package arrangements. (Šutić, 2012).

When it comes to the cultural aspects of tourism, Trebinje's exceptional potential lies in its religious sites: Hercegovačka Gračanica, Tvrdoš Monastery, Zavala, Petro Pavlov Monastery, Duži, and Dobrićevo. It is impossible not to mention Jovan Dučić, the poet, diplomat, and visionary, who made the greatest contribution to the urbanism of Trebinje and dedicated most of his intellectual, cultural, and artistic work to his "dear Trebinje," as he often called it. This is evidenced by the large number of cultural landmarks he donated and bequeathed to his hometown. According to data from the Tourist Organization of Trebinje, the most frequent tourist visits are to cultural-historical monuments such as the Perovića Bridge, the Museum of Herzegovina (which records around 12,000 visitors per year), the Old Town, monasteries, and wine cellars. A large number of visits have also been recorded in the "City of the Sun," which, by enriching the tourism offer, has contributed to increased visitation to Trebinje. (Čović-Popadić, 2020).

3. METHODOLOGICAL PART OF THE THESIS

3.1. TOURIST OFFER OF THE CITY OF TREBINJE

According to the modern understanding, as stated by Stojkov B. (2006), a city is defined as "an incubator of culture and innovation, a repository of scientific and artistic achievements, a center of strategic decision-making, and the engine of economic development."

Trebinje is a city in the south of Bosnia and Herzegovina that exudes a Mediterranean climate due to its proximity to the sea. On one side, it borders the Montenegrin coast, and on the other, the Croatian coast. In addition to its favorable geographical position and climate, it is known for its rich cultural and historical heritage, monasteries, vineyards, and local products such as Herzegovinian cheese, olive oil, honey, and wine, as well as the warmth of its local population.

First and foremost, when speaking about Trebinje, it is necessary to highlight its favorable geographical position and climate. As the southernmost city in our country, it enjoys a Mediterranean climate with approximately 260 sunny days per year, which is why it is called the "City of the Sun." The closeness of the sea can be felt in the air, and tourists staying in Trebinje are recommended to take day trips to Dubrovnik or Herceg Novi due to their proximity and good connections with these cities. The city lies in the valley of the Trebišnjica River, at the tripoint of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Croatia.

Its favorable geographical position and Mediterranean climate are the most significant factors for branding this small city on the Trebišnjica River. There is also great potential for investment in renewable energy sources, such as solar and wind power, which could position this area as one of the regional leaders in renewable energy production.

When observing the natural beauties of Trebinje, we must begin with the Trebišnjica River. The Trebišnjica is the longest sinking river in Europe and represents one of the city's greatest natural attractions, flowing through its very center. The famous Arslanagića Bridge, one of the city's main landmarks, is also located on the river. The city of Trebinje is among the few places in the world where hydrological conditions have a dominant influence on the formation of the natural structure and overall development of the city. The Trebišnjica River basin offers the possibility of constructing several hydropower plants. To date, a total of four hydroelectric power plants have been built.

A tributary of the Trebišnjica, the Sušica River, is located approximately 15 km east of Trebinje. With its exceptionally clean, emerald-colored water rich in fish, it represents an excellent location for fishing enthusiasts and swimmers. The river also features the historic site of the mysterious Roman Bridge Vučija, as well as bathing areas and a campsite for nature lovers.

Also worthy of mention and certainly unavoidable when talking about Trebinje are the Plane Trees –

one of the most recognizable symbols of the city. For many visitors, the summer garden “Platani” represents an oasis on hot days where one can refresh in the shade of trees that are over 120 years old. With the natural shade of 16 giant plane trees and more than 500 seats in the heart of the city, this garden is unique and serves as a favorite meeting place for all generations of Trebinje residents, as well as guests passing through the city on their way to the Adriatic Sea.

Approximately 40 km from Trebinje lies Vjetrenica, the most famous cave in Bosnia and Herzegovina, a protected natural monument and a major tourist destination in the southeastern part of Herzegovina.

The speleological features of this unique cave include its beauty, spacious corridors and halls, numerous sinter deposits, and a rich hydrographic world with many lakes, several waterfalls, several permanent streams, and dozens of smaller periodic water flows moving in various directions. It has been a protected natural monument since 1950 and was declared a geomorphological nature reserve in 1981. The cave is also known as one of the largest habitats of the famous amphibian known as the “human fish” (olm).

Cultural and historical heritage is an important part of the identity of the city of Trebinje.

Within the city area, there are numerous historical monuments, religious buildings, and archaeological sites. In addition to the old city core built in the Mediterranean style, tourists are particularly drawn to Jovan Dučić Park and the distinctive botanical and hospitality complex consisting of sixteen century-old plane trees – the summer garden. There is also the military fortification from the early 18th century, the Old Town or Kastel, with its narrow streets, vaults, gates, and stone buildings, the Osman-Pasha Mosque, the Sultan Ahmed Mosque, the Herzegovina Museum, numerous cafés, restaurants, and boutiques. In addition, the monument to the fallen fighters of the National Liberation Struggle (NOR), the Njegoš Monument, the Arslanagića Bridge, Branković Tower, and Strač Fortress are located somewhat further from the city center.

These monuments and landmarks testify to the different historical periods the city has gone through. The historical retrospective of Trebinje shows that the city has always been an important cultural center in the area of present-day eastern Herzegovina.

When speaking about Trebinje, one personality worth mentioning and closely associated with the city is Jovan Dučić, one of the most important

Serbian poets. A park in the city center is dedicated to him, and his endowment, the widely known Herzegovina Gračanica, is one of the city’s most significant landmarks.

Trebinje is today a modern cultural community with numerous cultural preferences, including folk tradition, music, theater, film, literature, and other forms of artistic creation.

Cultural affinities are based on the synthesis of traditional and contemporary artistic expressions, where both the cultural flows we have inherited and the new ones we strive for are respected and valued through the increasing diversification of monocultural tradition and the appreciation of the multicultural heritage entrusted to us in the past. Every year, numerous cultural events and celebrations are held in Trebinje, which is why this southern town also carries the epithet “City of Culture.”

In today’s time, culture is one of the most important values, where museums, various events and manifestations, as well as famous people born in the city, become a significant tool for promoting the city. When it comes to culture and cultural events in Trebinje, the Herzegovina Museum is also worth mentioning.

The museum was created as the result of an idea by the most famous citizen of Trebinje – the poet and diplomat Jovan Dučić. It was founded in 1952.

The museum carried out its first archaeological excavation in 1957 at the Church of St. Peter in Zavala. Its first publication, *Trebinje I* by Vasilije Korać, was issued in 1966. In 1975, it launched the journal *Tribunija*. The museum has approximately 1,500 m² of usable space, of which about 800 m² is exhibition space.

The museum houses numerous permanent exhibitions and legacies, a large number of artworks, graphics, sculptures, and other objects. Occasional exhibitions of paintings, music concerts, and book promotions are also held here, which is why it is highly recommended to visit during any stay in Trebinje.

It is often said that the city of Trebinje is a brand in itself, and the reasons for this will be presented and described as clearly as possible in this paper. More precisely, the focus will be placed on the image of the city of Trebinje.

3.2. IMAGE OF THE CITY OF TREBINJE

An important segment of a city’s brand is its image. The image is defined as a set of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that people hold about a city — a configuration of meanings, feelings, and expectations that accompany their perception of the city (Kotler et al., 1999).

When referring to the beliefs and impressions of people, this includes both the residents of the city and its visitors, i.e., tourists. The image of a city, which is shaped through branding, should preserve the city's identity for a sufficiently long period or even strengthen it (Petrović & Toković, 2018). From the above, the importance of a city's image is clearly evident.

The tourist offer has great significance and a strategic influence on the image of the city. As already mentioned, the tourist offer of Trebinje is very rich and diverse, which undoubtedly affects its image.

The development vision of the city stipulates that Trebinje, "building upon the previously created image of a place that produces the cheapest clean energy, becomes recognized as an environment that provides the highest quality of life, offers the most interesting vacation, produces the best wine, and the healthiest food in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Balkans" (UNDP, 2009).

This vision was set a long time ago, and when viewed from the perspective of today's Trebinje, it is clear that the city has achieved the image of a true tourist gem of our country. This is due to the large number of tourists it attracts year after year, as Trebinje now offers numerous tourist attractions.

A large number of accommodation capacities, including hotels and private accommodation, the "Grad Sunca" complex — the largest water park in the Balkans — the bathing area on the Trebišnjica River in the city center, parks and monuments also in the center of Trebinje, rich cultural and historical heritage, as well as the proximity of monasteries and wine cellars, greatly contribute to the image that the city of Trebinje has today.

Namely, the image of the city of Trebinje, as we can see from the above, consists of natural and cultural-historical attractions, as well as numerous events and manifestations that take place every year in this Mediterranean town.

In recent years, Trebinje has become known for its many features mentioned earlier. A large number of tourists return year after year or at least stop by on their way to the sea to rest in this charming town.

They rarely miss the opportunity to visit the summer garden Platani, Herzegovina Gračanica, and the beautiful park in the city center. Many also come with a specific purpose, especially on the days when various manifestations are held in Trebinje, such as Dučić's Day, Dučić Poetry Evenings, the Festival of Festivals, the

Mediterranean and European Film Festival, numerous exhibitions, art colonies, and literary evenings. In addition, numerous monuments, monasteries, beautiful vineyards, and wine cellars have become must-visit stops. People increasingly visit these places to refresh both their body and soul. The rich gastronomic offer, alongside local wines, includes recognizable Herzegovinian honey, cheese, olives and olive oil, domestic fruit, as well as other local products and traditional food.

Recognizability and attractiveness are important indicators of a city's image. In the case of Trebinje, these are achieved through a combination of natural, cultural, and social attractions and events that this interesting town offers its visitors. When it comes to recognizability, the Trebišnjica River and the distinctive stone bridges on it — each "telling its own story" — remain deeply etched in the memory of visitors. The same applies to the old part of the city, the unique century-old plane trees, and the large park in the very center.

There is a great deal on the list of what Trebinje offers its visitors and what makes it a recognizable and attractive destination.

Therefore, it is not surprising that the number of tourists grows year after year.

Everyone who has visited this city at least once gladly returns and willingly recommends it to others, enchanted by the unique combination of natural beauties, rich cultural and historical heritage, and the various manifestations and events.

4. ANALYSIS OF CONTENT AND INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

The research was conducted in the period from January 17 to January 19, 2026. In geographical terms, the area covered by this research is the city of Trebinje. The sample used in the research included 4 hotels with the largest number of guests in Trebinje:

1. Hotel Platani;
2. SL Industry Hotel;
3. Hotel Central-Park;
4. Hotel Leotar.

The respondents were domestic citizens, two of whom were female and two male, all in the capacity of hotel directors. The survey was sent electronically via e-mail.

Based on the conducted survey, the following results were obtained, presented in Table 1

Table 1: Results of the Survey

Date	Hotel Name	Does the tourist offer of the city of Trebinje influence the city's image	To what extent do natural attractions positively influence the image of the city of Trebinje	Do cultural-historical attractions influence the image of the city of Trebinje	To what extent does the overall tourist infrastructure positively influence the image of the city of Trebinje?
19.01.2026	Platani	Yes, they dominantly influence.	They have a dominantly influence.	Yes, they dominantly influence.	It has a dominantly influences.
18.01.2026	SL Industry Hotel	Yes, they dominantly influence.	They partially influence.	Yes, they dominantly influence.	It has a dominantly influences.
18.01.2026	Central-Park	Yes, they dominantly influence.	They partially influence.	They partially influence.	It has a dominantly influences.
17.01.2026	Leotar	Yes, they dominantly influence.	They dominantly influence.	Yes, they dominantly influence.	It has a dominantly influences.

When asked whether the tourist offerings of the city of Trebinje influence the city's image, all four respondents answered that the tourist offerings of the city of Trebinje predominantly influence the formation of the city's image. The obtained results indicate a positive relationship between the tourism offer and the image of the city of Trebinje. When asked whether natural attractions influence the image of the city, two respondents (Hotel Platani and Hotel Leotar) answered that natural attractions have a dominant influence on the formation of the city's image, while the remaining two respondents (Hotel SL Industry and Central-Park) answered that they have a partial influence. These results suggest that natural attractions influence the formation of the image of the city of Trebinje. IIWhen asked whether cultural-historical attractions influence the image of the city, three respondents answered that natural attractions predominantly influence the formation of the city's image, while one respondent (Hotel Central-Park) answered that they have a partial influence. The obtained results confirm the auxiliary hypothesis set in this paper.

When asked whether the overall tourist infrastructure has a positive impact on the image of the city of Trebinje, all four respondents answered that the overall tourist infrastructure has a dominant influence on the formation of the city's image. The findings indicate that tourism infrastructure positively influences the image of the city of Trebinje. When summarizing the responses obtained from the questions that were part of the questionnaire, the following results were derived:

- The tourist offerings of the city of Trebinje, viewed as a whole (i.e., the

overall tourist infrastructure), have a dominant influence on the formation of the city's image.

- Natural attractions of the city of Trebinje, according to the opinion of 50% of the respondents, have a partial influence on the image of the city of Trebinje, while the remaining half consider that they have a dominant influence on the image of the city.

Cultural-historical attractions influence the image of the city, with 75% of the respondents stating that they predominantly influence the formation of the city's image, while 25% believe they have a partial influence

CONCLUSION

This paper discussed the strategic impact of the tourist offering on the image of the city of Trebinje.

As previously described in more detail, the tourist offering of the city of Trebinje is extremely rich, with its natural potentials being particularly significant, along with its favorable geographical position, cultural-historical heritage, and numerous cultural manifestations and events that have been held in this city for many years. These are, in fact, the key segments of the tourist offering of this town on the basis of which the image of the city of Trebinje is formed and strengthened.

Namely, the favorable geographical position, rich hydropower potential, proximity to the sea, and a large number of sunny days are the main characteristics of Trebinje when observing its natural potentials.

The Trebišnjica River with its tributary Sušica is widely known for its potential, cleanliness, and beauty, which is further enhanced by the bridges spanning it. The Vjetrenica Cave, a protected natural monument of unique beauty with spacious corridors, declared a geomorphological nature reserve and known as one of the largest habitats of the famous amphibian called the “human fish” (olm), is an indispensable natural jewel. The cultural-historical heritage is an important part of the identity of the city of Trebinje. It consists of numerous historical monuments, religious buildings, and archaeological sites.

In addition to the old town core built in the Mediterranean style, special attention from numerous tourists is attracted by the Jovan Dučić Park and the specific botanical and hospitality complex consisting of sixteen century-old plane trees – the summer garden.

There is also the military fortification from the beginning of the 18th century, the Old Town or Kastel, with its narrow streets, vaults, gates, and stone buildings, the Osman Pasha Mosque and Sultan Ahmed Mosque, the Herzegovina Museum, numerous cafes, restaurants, and boutiques. The Njegoš Monument, the Arslanagić Bridge, Branković Tower, and Strač Fortress are located somewhat further from the city center.

Various cultural manifestations take place in Trebinje, such as Dučić’s Day, Dučić Poetry Evenings, the Festival of Festivals, the Mediterranean and European Film Festival, numerous exhibitions, art colonies, and literary evenings. Museums, various events and manifestations, as well as famous personalities born in the city, have become a significant tool for promoting the city.

When it comes to culture and cultural events in Trebinje, the Herzegovina Museum is also worth mentioning. It houses numerous exhibitions and legacies, a large number of artworks, graphics, sculptures, and other objects, and occasionally hosts painting exhibitions, musical concerts, and book promotions.

In this paper, a total of four hypotheses were formulated: the main hypothesis — *The strategic impact of the tourist offering on the image of the city of Trebinje*, and three auxiliary hypotheses: *Natural attractions positively influence the image of the city of Trebinje*; *Cultural-historical attractions positively influence the image of the city of Trebinje*; and *Tourist infrastructure positively influences the image of the city of Trebinje*.

After conducting the research using a questionnaire, the obtained results suggest a

significant relationship between the tourism offer and the image of the city of Trebinje. In other words, the natural and cultural-historical attractions, as well as the manifestations that have been taking place in Trebinje for a long time, significantly influence the image of this city, making it an attractive and recognizable destination for tourists. A limitation of this research is the relatively small sample consisting of representatives of four hotels in Trebinje. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted as indicative and exploratory rather than fully generalizable.

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