

Title of the story: Less is more - Billboard removal results of Tivat

Destination name: Municipality of Tivat

Country: Montenegro

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Submission category:

X Nature and scenery

Issues faced:

Urban visual pollution from billboards is a widespread and poorly managed problem all across Montenegro. The environmental impacts have increased exponentially in the past 10 years, as Montenegro has been rapidly developing and urbanizing. Billboards negative environmental and societal impacts are multiple and vary, landscape devastation, visual pollution, air and vehicle traffic safety. from energy and wildlife impacts to light pollution.

Specifically in the municipality of Tivat, the smallest of all municipalities in Montenegro with only 46 km<sup>2</sup> of territory, on the main road going through the municipality's almost 100 billboards have been erected on a stretch of 4 km. Besides the ecological and urban aesthetics issue, the situation was very well noted by anyone visiting Tivat for the first time. The municipality faced an issue of a non-regulated industry and non-specific urban planning laws, leading to lots of illegal signs, non-maintenance – all in all a “jungle law” situation.

Several studies have found that digital billboards can be a distraction for drivers and increase the risk of accidents:

2012, a Swedish study found that drivers looked at digital billboards significantly longer than other signs, taking their eyes off the road for more than 2 seconds. A 2022 Texas study showed that the number of crashes increases when drivers are confronted with displays indicating traffic safety messages. In 2006, a National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, U.S. Department of Transportation (NHTSA) study found that any driver distraction over 2 seconds is a potential cause of crashes and near-crashes.<sup>1</sup>

Last not least, in today's digital era this kind of advertising is old, reaches a very limited number of people in a very short time when passing by, gets damaged fast by rain, wind, sunshine, storms - and therefore does not even do the job for image or sales of a company. Also for a municipality and its tourism organization it would be way better to invest in a good web presence and smart e-marketing, including sponsored advertising if necessary.

#### Methods, steps and tools applied:

To get the initiative off the ground the Director of the Tourism Organization Tivat, together with the City Manager brought up the issue at various council meetings and internal municipality meetings, approaching the issue from a number of angles: the environmental impact, landscape/visual pollution, light pollution, traffic safety aspects, as well as legality of inappropriate use of municipality land without any financial gain to the municipality or its people – to mention a few. There simply was no cost-benefit in the billboard placement to the community, along the main road through the municipality that was at the same time the first ugly impression for travelers coming from the Tivat airport.

The following steps was the Secretariat for urban planning researching the current legislation and laws with regards to permissions for placement of billboards and temporary structure placement which resulted in a clear course of what should be done in order to comply with current legislation. Furthermore, the Secretariat of communal services had to identify the owners, contact them and offer that they remove their own billboards or face removal by the municipality, which would come at a cost. This Secretariat then announced a tender for a removal company and the mayor approved funding for this activity.

#### Key success factors:

The initial push for this activity came from the Tourism organization of Tivat and the City Manager of Tivat, having listened to and reacting on the feedback of visitors and citizens alike. Therefore, the basic understanding the fact that “good places to live are good places to visit” and cooperation out of the “daily silos” is one key.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.scenic.org/take-action/resources/digital-billboard-studies/>

Furthermore, it was an imperative to get the Secretariat of Urban Planning on the local level and the Secretariat for Communal Services on board. All of these groups were further supported by the President of the municipality, who allocated enough funding for the realization of the billboard removal.

With such cooperation, marketing companies – that are used to “getting their way” and pressing local and federal government officials for billboard placement – had no option than to comply and remove their billboards, or to let the municipality remove them.

In general, a common vision by all levels, from national to local is necessary, in order to change the course of many years of bad practices.

Last not least, public awareness raising about the activity and its immediate benefits to the landscapes, people and economy is important, also as a good and easily transferrable example in other destinations in Montenegro and the Balkans.

#### Lessons learned:

Anti-billboard movements e.g. in France and in Hawaii that have done much in terms of motivation were helpful to get this initiative off the ground in the municipality of Tivat. In these countries, residence and officials are on the same page to preserve the iconic scenic beauty of their countries, and we have learned this lesson in Tivat as well. The level of damage billboards make to the natural landscapes of the municipality have only become truly evident following the removal of the many billboards. Tivat’s breathtaking landscape with the [Orjen mountain Nature Park](#) as its backdrop came to view, and it remains the priority to preserve its identity. Additionally, it is evident how much their removal has done for the environment, as well as for the traffic safety in the main road area of the municipality.

#### Results, achievement and recognitions:

In a matter of months, 87 billboards have been removed from the territory of Tivat. Local urban authorities i.e. the Secretariat for Spatial Planning have taken control over the improvement of urban aesthetics and have done much to upkeep the newly established situation.

The "sense of place" of Tivat has improved – as the lens through which local people and visitors experience and make meaning of their relationships with and perceptions of this particular environment that aims to be a visibly green destination, not an unloved, random advertising board landscape.

The process can be replicated in other municipalities across Montenegro and in other countries irrespective of spatial boundaries by incorporating jurisdictional rules and regulations.

As a picture is worth a thousand words, the actual results can be visually better shown in the following photographs.

### PHOTOS

Additional references:

<https://www.vijesti.me/vijesti/drustvo/694911/ni-u-narednih-pet-godina-nema-reklamnih-bilborda-uz-puteve-u-tivtu>

<https://www.vijesti.me/vijesti/drustvo/617337/opstina-tivat-uklanja-bilborde-prijetnje-prijavljene-policiji>

<https://radiotivat.com/2022/08/12/privodi-se-kraju-uklanjanje-reklamnih-bilborda-sa-teritorije-tivta/>

<https://radiotivat.com/2023/05/02/scekic-tivat-je-jedina-opstina-koja-je-sa-svoje-teritorije-uklonila-bilborde/>

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<https://opstinativat.me/uklanjanje-privremenih-objekata-bilborda-sa-teritorije-opstine-tivat/>

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More inputs:

**Here are 5 key reasons why removing billboards from the landscape is beneficial:**

1. Billboards are a form of visual pollution that degrade the natural and built environment. They "commercialize, homogenize, and degrade our natural landscape" and "destroy distinctiveness" of communities.[1][2]

2. Billboards undermine community character and livability. They are "a disturbing alien intrusion" that "obliterate architectural character and ruin natural beauty." [1][2] This can have negative economic consequences by making a place less attractive to live, invest, or visit.

3. Billboards force advertising on people whether they want it or not, unlike other media where people can choose to view ads.[2] This infringes on individual and community freedom.

4. Billboards are a cause and symptom of urban blight, as they "degrade the urban environment, lower property values, and foster contempt for the public realm." [1] Removing them can help address broader issues of blight.

5. Many successful communities, such as Vermont, Maine, Alaska, and Hawaii, have banned billboards and found that "beauty and placemaking are good for business; ugliness and excessive commercialism are not." [2] This suggests billboard removal can have positive economic benefits.

In summary, removing billboards can improve the visual environment, strengthen community character, protect individual and collective freedoms, address urban blight, and even provide economic benefits. The evidence suggests that the advantages of billboard removal outweigh any potential drawbacks. [1][2]

Citations:

[1] <https://www.scenic.org/2023/06/20/billboards-the-case-for-control/>

[2] <https://www.pps.org/article/billboards-the-case-for-control>

[3] <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/advantages-disadvantages-billboard-advertising-roberto-fulgham>

[4] <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2015/aug/11/can-cities-kick-ads-ban-urban-billboards>

[5] <https://dot.ca.gov/-/media/dot-media/programs/design/documents/class-ls-fwy-and-outdoor-advertising-displays-a11y.pdf>

