

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF TOURIST DESTINATION ON EXAMPLE OF BOTEVGRAD MUNICIPALITY

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***Abstract:** The survey includes a study of the potential for sustainable tourist development of Botevgrad Municipality and the opportunities for destination planning and management. The main accents are focused on theoretical formulations as system methods for territorial development of tourist destination, implementation of European indicators and criteria for sustainable tourist development in local level and practical researches which includes proposals for tourist micro-regionalization of Botevgrad Municipality, tourist brand creation, improvement of administrative capacity and infrastructure, sustainable tourism products supply. The proposals are on the basis of the sustainable tourism potential of Botevgrad Municipality. Their aim is to contribute to the transformation an industrial municipality into an attractive tourist destination.*

***Keywords:** sustainable development, tourist resources, regional development, branding, tourist micro-regionalization, destination management*

INTRODUCTION

Botevgrad municipality administratively belongs to the Sofia region and consists of 13 settlements - the municipal center Botevgrad and 12 villages. According to the National Spatial Development Concept, the municipal center - Botevgrad has a key position in the development of the main meridian axes in the north-south direction and plays an important role in the development of the western axis (Vidin - Sofia - Kulata), part of the European transport corridor № 4. The municipality is still a developing tourist destination, whose tourist resources are not used effectively, and most tourist sites are not sufficiently developed, which requires the implementation of a comprehensive product policy of a local level. In view of this, an in-depth scientific research has been undertaken on the opportunities for sustainable development of tourism in the municipality including applying well-established methodologies and European practices.

The research objective of the present work is the development and implementation of mechanisms for sustainable tourism development at a

local level based on the analysis and assessment of the resource potential in Botevgrad Municipality

The objective of the study is the sustainable development of tourism in the municipality of Botevgrad and its positioning as an attractive tourist destination. Conserved nature, plant and animal diversity, as well as protected areas are a basic prerequisite for the development of mountain, adventure and eco-tourism. Historical and religious monuments are the basis for a comprehensive offering of cultural and religious tourism. The resources of Botevgrad Municipality are not yet rationally used for the sustainable development of alternative types of tourism, despite the crossroads position of the region and good transport accessibility with the capital.

The subject of this work is the study, analysis and definition of opportunities for sustainable tourism development at a local level as a model that can be multiplied to be used in other developing tourist destinations.

To achieve the research goal, a set of general and private methods corresponding to the interdisciplinary and heterogeneous nature of the study are used: methods of analysis and synthesis, cameral method (literary review, official information sources, etc.), cartographic method (for spatial analysis of the surveyed objects and phenomena within the studied municipality), geographic methods of research: spatial analysis of the resource potential, localization of the surveyed sites.

The main approaches are the systemic, related to the systemic character of the territorial system for recreation and tourism at the local level and the empirical, used for gathering the necessary, in volume and character, primary quantitative and qualitative information. The research methods used are based on a deductive approach. An approach of studies and systematization of information on literary sources and planning documents has also been used; collecting, processing, systematizing and interpreting statistical data and documents; critical analysis method and expert assessment; comparative analysis method; scientific analysis and synthesis; field observation.

The stated research argument is that the achievement of a sustainable development of a tourist destination at a local level is possible only by systematically using and applying the criteria and indicators for analysis and evaluation of tourism potential, clearly defining and following the strategic objectives and priorities for sustainable development for the development of the tourist destination of Botevgrad.

The main limiting factors of the study are the lack of previous systematic research studies, the lack of traditions in the field of tourism and the

fact that the municipality has never worked proactively for the development of the sector, as there are no updated registers of the categorized tourist sites. There is no monitoring of tourist visits and sufficient statistical information, and the available data is partial and shows that an important part of the tourist sites in the municipality are still in the gray sector.

I. ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION OF THE TOURIST POTENTIAL OF BOTEVGRAD MUNICIPALITY

The analysis and evaluation of the tourism potential for sustainable tourism development of Botevgrad Municipality includes a study of the external and internal factors of the environment, which influence the development of tourism, as well as analysis and assessment of its potential (tourist, material, human, financial resources). The positive and negative political, economic, socio-cultural and environmental impacts of tourism, as well as technological factors related to the modern development of tourism. Some trends in the sector's development and consumer behaviour have also been studied. The survey outlines the opportunities and constraints for sustainable tourism development and its place in the macroeconomic framework. As a result of the study of the internal factors of the environment, the interaction of tourism with the other economic sectors in the municipality, its integration and its role in the overall microeconomic framework has been defined.

1. Analysis and evaluation of tourism resources in the municipality of Botevgrad

The tourism resources are generally identifiable with the conditions and factors that determine the tourist development and influence the tourist process. They are an essential part of the recreational factors of tourism. Recognized as an important quality of tourism resources in the context of sustainable development is that after their use by tourists, their qualities are preserved, not lost or destroyed and their utilization should add to the conditions of resource use in general: technical feasibility, economic necessity, social need and sufficient research. (Vodenska, Asenova, 2011)

The analysis of natural resources shows that the Botevgrad municipality has a predominantly favourable geographic location, mild climate and good transport accessibility, which implies the successful development of various forms of tourism, but there are also limiting factors that have a negative influence: temperature inversions and the typical for the Botevgrad valley fog. Water resources are not particularly rich, but there

are opportunities for fishing tourism. Botevgrad Municipality has a rich biodiversity, but this is not well studied and hinders ecotourism affordability. The protected areas of the soils included in the European Natura 2000 network are also of limited importance for tourism.

Anthropogenic tourist resources are man-made and have the qualities of satisfying healing, recreational, cognitive, business or entertainment needs, which attract tourists. Botevgrad Municipality has a variety of objects of the metropolitan cultural heritage: archaeological, historical and religious. However, a small number of them are attractive and accessible to tourists, which necessitates the municipal leadership to take measures to improve their functioning.

Attractive cultural and historical monuments from Botevgrad are: The Botevgrad Historical Museum, The Clock Tower, Monument-Ossuary of the Botev's Chetniks, the three monasteries, the fortress "Bojenishki Urvich". Potential for the sustainable development of cultural tourism after restoration, improvement of accessibility and tourist interpretation have archaeological sites such as medieval churches and monasteries on the territory of the municipality, remains of fortresses, etc. Potential for development is the offering of attractions related to the crafts as well as the construction of technological reception spaces in the Historical Museum Botevgrad, the Chitalishte, the town library and some sports facilities.

The events of the municipal calendar are of key importance for the promotion of the region as a tourist destination and can be used as a tool for popularizing and imposing the tourist brand of Botevgrad.

The methodology for assessing tourism resources is closely linked to the Europe 2020 strategy's main priorities for sustainable growth, through more resource-efficient promotion of a greener and more competitive economy and inclusive growth - achieving social and territorial cohesion, cohesion through effective integration territorial governance, based on the disclosure and assessment of the resource potential of Botevgrad municipality. At the basis of the methodological framework is a methodology for assessing the cultural and historical potential of Bulgaria (Popova, 2011), for the development of which are widely used theoretical and methodological productions from the theory of rest and recreation. Typical criteria for resource analysis and evaluation are related to some basic quantitative and qualitative parameters of resources: attractiveness, diversity, volume, territorial character, a need for conservation.

The need for effective monitoring of the development of specialized types of tourism requires the use of modern GIS methods that create databases to serve as a basis for a comparative analysis of future dynamic

changes as well as clustering (typology) of local administrative-territorial units (municipalities) and territorial units (settlements, tourist complexes, etc.) to reveal spatial inconsistencies in the existing development of different types of tourism.

2. Analysis and evaluation of the material and technical base of Botevgrad municipality

The material and technical base of tourism is a basic unit in the process of creation, realization and consumption of the tourist product. The total number of accommodation places is 10. Their number is limited and not evenly distributed. Categorized eating and entertainment establishments (HHDs) are enough in number and characterized by variety. Most of them are with categories of one and two stars, but the offered conditions and services exceed the legal requirements for the respective category.

The municipality has a good number of sports facilities, which are among the main reasons for attracting foreign visitors mostly to the city. This factor could be used to keep visitors and larger tourist flows if their use is combined during their stay with other attractions and events.

There are no eco-paths and other thematic routes on the territory of the municipality. There is potential for the development of bicycle routes, but at present the municipality does not have purpose-built ones. The possibilities are in the configuration of road and mountain routes, as well as a combination of them. The municipality is part of the Kom-Emine route, which can also be promoted by popularizing a mountain bike track, starting from the town of Svoge to the village of Novachene.

The statistical information available has been systematized and analyzed, taking into account the inconsistencies between the data obtained during the interviews, workshops and focus group meetings, the information provided by the accommodation and the available data in the municipal administration. As restrictive factors that have been taken into account are the complete lack of statistical information before 2017 and the lack of control functions on the part of the institutions concerned.

3. Conditions for development of specialized types of tourism in the municipality of Botevgrad

There are conditions for sustainable development of specialized types of tourism on the territory of the municipality of Botevgrad, which will be prioritized as follows. These are: 1) adventure and extreme, 2) sports, 3) ecotourism, 4) rural tourism, 5) mountain hiking. The specialized types of tourism, which are outlined as accompanying the sustainable

tourism development of Botevgrad Municipality, are: 1) cultural and festivals; 2) hunting and fishing; 3) volunteer tourism.

The opportunities for development of **adventure and extreme tourism** on the territory of Botevgrad Municipality are significant and do not require large investments, most notable of which are horse and bicycle tourism. The level of development of local entrepreneurs in the provision of different types of tourism products and services (types of tourism) as well as the integration between them in the provision of joint products for the new entrants will be crucial for the realization of the initiative "Botevgrad – adventure at a crossroad ". Offering tourist packages for adventurous experiences: Traditions combined with natural resources are a prerequisite for the successful promotion of tourist products for training and practicing rock climbing, equestrian tourism, hang gliding, cycling, off-road opportunities and more. The creation of a rope park and climbing wall combined with a rock-climbing area in the area of Bozhenitsa, where there are traditions and prerequisites for initial training and adventure tourism, as well as an adventure park with a rope garden in traditional suburban recreation areas would attract, both domestic and foreign visitors.

Horse tourism is seen as part of adventure tourism. The potential for its development on the territory of the municipality of Botevgrad is determined by the presence of the "Zdravets" horse-riding center near the village of Skravena and the horse farm "Pagane" located above the village of Bozhenitsa. The territory of the Municipality of Botevgrad has the potential for the development of many hiking trails. In order to achieve synergy, it is necessary for local entrepreneurs and the municipality to cooperate closely, both in their selection and marking, and in their maintenance; building a tourist infrastructure, digitizing it with GPS traces; filming attractive photo / video material for publishing in the municipal web-based tourism platform to promote them to potential users - guests and tourists.

The sustainable development of cycling tourism is related to the creation of a complete bicycle system on the territory of the municipality with the aim of positioning and determining Botevgrad as a national and European destination, as well as the creation of specialized routes for professionals and amateurs practicing mountain biking.

Sport tourism has a potential for development thanks to the modern outdoor and indoor sports infrastructure. The strong point of the territory is the opportunity for alternative and varied forms of sport, which are less dependent on local sports infrastructure: archery; healthy outdoor practices - yoga, chi-gun etc. With an opportunity for external funding, a strong

visitor interest will attract the construction of a multifunctional sports area, which may include a basketball and / or volleyball court, small-scale football, a table tennis facility and a tennis court.

The diverse nature of Botevgrad Municipality, a combination of semi-mountainous, mountainous and plain-hilly terrain, gives it many advantages for **the development of ecotourism** compared to competitive tourist areas. The Natura 2000 protected areas, which fall within the territory of Botevgrad Municipality, provide opportunities for observation of birds and other animal species as well as botanical tours. The area of the villages of Lipnitsa and Bozhenitsa provides opportunities for a combination with speleo-tourism and mountaineering, including wild caves and climbing cliffs where interesting birds nest.

Rural tourism may appear as a passing one, i.e. stay in at a tour or weekend or even a week stay and has potential for development in the twenty villages in the municipality and the villa zone of Botevgrad.

The mountain landscape of the region is a determining factor for the development of **mountain hiking tourism**. Proximity to the capital and good transport accessibility are a prerequisite for interest in the mountains in the region but information is difficult to find and the tourist routes and paths published on the Internet are based on personal discoveries of people who make their own routes themselves and discover the most interesting places in the mountains by themselves, for some of which information is even lacking. Botevgrad Municipality has a great potential for developing interesting tourist routes for cycling, horse and hiking tours.

Potential for the sustainable development of **cultural tourism** after restoration, accessibility and tourist interpretation possess archaeological sites such as medieval churches and monasteries on the territory of the municipality, remains of fortresses etc., as well as offering attractions related to handicrafts: "On the way of the barrel" offers a demonstration of barrel production and involvement of tourists in the overall production process; "Pottery and carving in the village of Bozhenitsa" – the conducting of artisans' workshops; "Honey bee secrets and the path of honey" - turning a suitable bee hive into a tourist attraction, getting acquainted with honey production, bee life and tasting bee products; creation of a demonstration area for an icon production workshop and connecting it with organized visits to the Vratchesh Monastery; familiarization with the organic process of production of organic fruit and tasting at the ethno corner of the "Apple nature" bio-farm.

Festival tourism has the potential to develop in several directions: traditional festivals and festivities; sports-adventure events; ecotourism

events with a natural focus; events with a variety of themes attracting certain targeted tourists on the territory of Botevgrad Municipality (auto fairs, honey fests, exhibition of retro cars etc.).

A quality product of **hunting tourism** is offered on the territory of the State Hunting Farm "Vitinya", but the capacity for hunting is small and this limits its prospect for development. Organized photo-safaris are an additional attraction offered on the farm. The most suitable for fishing (including sport fishing) in the municipality of Botevgrad are the "Bebresh" dam and the river of the same name in the region of the village of Bozhenitsa. For sport fishing, fishponds can be adapted on the territory of the municipality, as well as the Gurkovo reservoir, if it is cleaned, managed and filled with fish.

Voluntary tourism is related to traditions in volunteering, which are not yet present on the territory of Botevgrad Municipality, but during the survey there were found local initiatives that could participate in its development. Voluntary tourism has the potential to raise awareness, as it involves a significant change in the individual's perceptions of society, addressing social problems, and has the potential to change participants' perceptions of society at a global and local level.

II. PROPOSAL FOR TOURIST MICRO-REGIONALIZATION IN BOTEVGRAD MUNICIPALITY

Tourist micro-regionalization of the municipality of Botevgrad includes the development of a tourist micro-planning scheme of the municipality which is motivated by the necessity for the development of sustainable and competitive tourism, conducting a local tourism policy, taking into account the territorial specificities and specifics of the different parts of the municipality and effective marketing. In this way the tourist areas on the territory of the municipality can become recognizable for the potential tourists and can be successfully promoted on the domestic as well as the international market.

1. Basic principles and approaches of tourist regionalization

Various classifications of approaches to mapping out tourist areas are available in the scientific literature. For example, according to Groters (2002, Fridgen, 1992), approaches can be: determining areas based on similar geographic features and climatic conditions; delineating areas with administrative or policy boundaries for planning purposes; formation of areas based on common historical development and traditions.

Based on an analysis of a number of sources Marinov (1988) classifies approaches to tourism zoning as: *resource approach* - the tourist region is considered as a territory with the presence of tourism resources (used or potential); *sectoral approach* - the tourist region is considered to be a sector of economic importance and special attention is paid to specialization in tourist services. A tourist region is only an area in which tourism has become a specialized sector with which it participates in the territorial division of labour. *Socio-geographical approach* - in this case, tourism is seen not as an economic sector, but as a human activity, as one of the forms of recreation. The forming of such socio-geographical areas is based primarily on the movement of tourist flows or the distribution of needs.

According to Smith (1989), the main approaches and areas of implementation are:

- *Priory* - outlined by researchers, designers or public authorities, often randomly and intuitively, without pre-formulated criteria and methodology. Very often these are existing political or administrative units that are marketed on the tourist market with an imposed or new name.

- *Homogeneous* - based on similarities, which are objectively established, according to predefined set of criteria. Most often such areas are tourist adapted sea coasts, mountains, etc.

- *Functional* - established on the basis of the links between the different territorial elements, common activities, imposed forms of interaction and exchange or patterns of tourist behaviour.

Given the main objective of creating tourist micro-regionalization – the development and marketing of the regional tourist product, the chosen approach implies the creation of homogeneous regions for achieving the uniqueness and identity which determines the choice of tourists, taking into account the geographic environment and the peculiarities in the historical development, as well as the territorial range of naturally formed spatial tourist formations and administrative boundaries of the lands. The starting point for identifying the marketing tourist regions at local level and their scope and specialization are the existing tourism zoning schemes from the past, scientific publications on the issue of tourism zoning. The basic requirements and criteria applied in the delineation of the tourist regions, in fulfilment of the current task, are limited to: the territorial coverage of the proposed areas corresponds to *the real dimensions of tourism development* (including existing organizational structures) and / or *uncovered tourism potential*; *Attractiveness* - the presence of significant attractions (exposed or potential) providing a sufficiently rich "menu" of tourist supply, which makes it possible to create a complex tourist product (product mix) and can

keep visitors for at least a few days; *infrastructure provision* - the regions offer or have the potential to develop a complex of tourist services and related infrastructure for the needs of tourists and tourist business; *homogeneity* - relative similarity of natural and socio-economic conditions, resource potential and product structure, on the basis of which the outlined regions have a regional identity (to be perceived as whole units of large market segments, local authorities, tourist and tourism associations and associations); *territorial integrity (compactness)* - territorial fragmentation of the area and / or overlap with other areas is not allowed; *Tolerance* - striving to preserve the territorial integrity of existing regional associations and other voluntary formations between municipalities where this does not contradict the above criteria.

2. Scheme for tourist micro-regionalization of Botevgrad municipality

Based on the detailed study of scientific literature and planning documents, the author has developed a tourism microregion scheme including the following taxonomic units: tourist area, tourist core, tourist spot and tourist point. The proposed scheme for micro-regionalization of Botevgrad municipality corresponds to the basic principles of tourism zoning, analyzed in the first chapter.

The defining of the borders is based on an administrative principle, thus micro-regionalization is goal-orientated and facilitates its use for planning and management purposes. It is resource-oriented and aims to map out homogeneous areas based on similarities between natural and anthropogenic tourism resources, taking into account cultural identity.

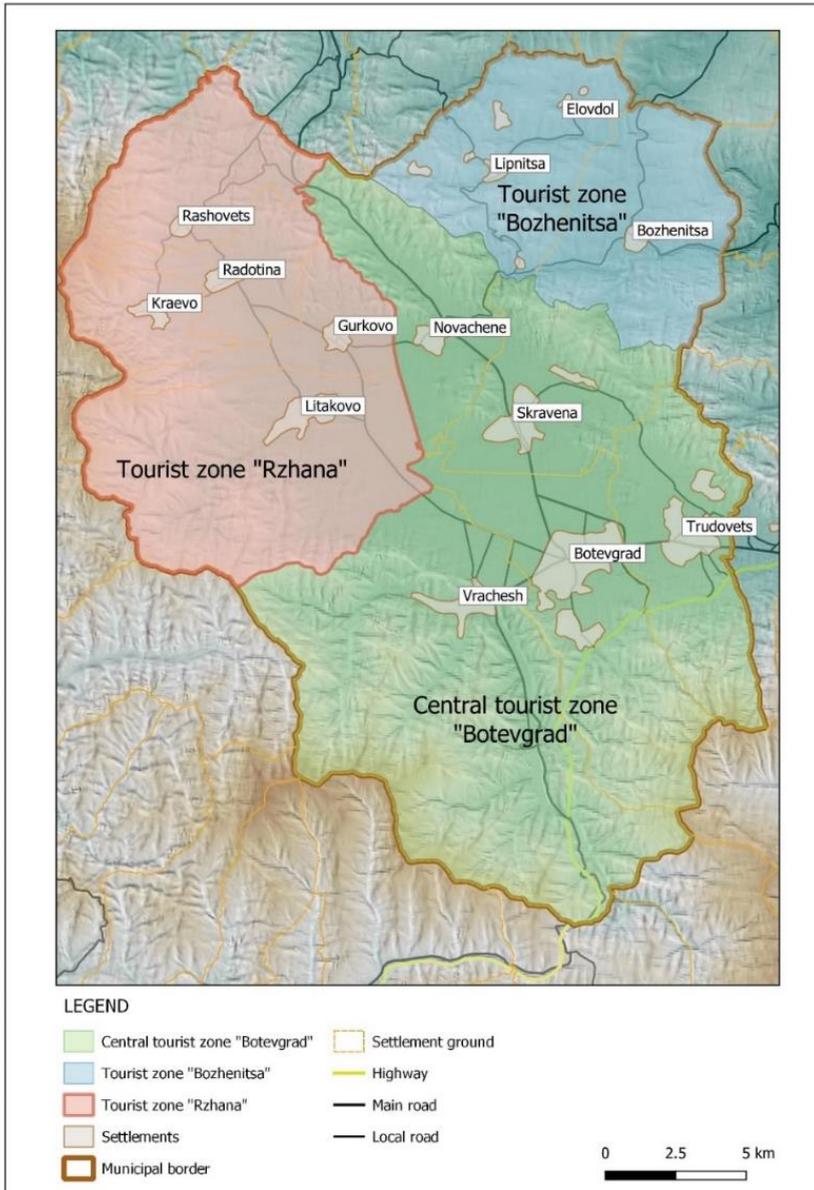
A tourist zone is a territory which possesses borders and certain rules. It may cover a territory of two or more municipalities but may also be within only one municipality. Typical of the area's management regimes is that activities threatening tourism are not allowed on its territory. The management is mainly concerned with the traffic safety of tourists and providing emergency assistance if needed.

Within a tourist area, where touristic resources are concentrated according to similarity and conditions for tourism development, **tourist core areas** can be formed.

A tourist location is a specific site with historical, cultural, natural or cultural heritage tourist importance. It consists of a *core part* or a *core* (the specific monument / natural or tourist site), a *buffer zone* (landscaping, a park, a sanitary security zone) and a *commercial-service area* (meals, souvenirs, sanitary facilities, parking, etc.)

The vista point covers the view. In this case, it is the view, not the specific object, which is placed in the security regime. Accordingly, there is a ban on putting in place facilities that hide the view, diminish its scope or spoil the mystery of the place when we are talking about a sanctuary.

Fig. 1. Tourist Micro-regionalization of Botevgrad Municipality



Three tourist areas can be formed on the territory of Botevgrad Municipality. *The tourist centre Botevgrad*, which occupies the central area, is located in the centre of the town and consists of three tourist cores covering: 1) Botevgrad, 2) Vratchesh, 3) Trudovets and Skravena. In each zone or tourist core, individual settlement formations and territories with concentrated tourist sites or resources are identified as tourist places. Each tourist destination, depending on the attractiveness and the uniqueness of the views it holds, may contain one or more tourist points.

The tourist zone "Botevgrad" has a broader scope and includes the three tourist cores. It is fundamental and occupies a central place both territorially and functionally in terms of content. During the development of the individual tourist zones and tourist cores the transport accessibility has been taken into account and the connecting transport links are indicated. In addition, parameters are set regarding the remoteness of natural and cultural-historical sites from existing roads.

The formed tourist cores are introduced as an additional taxonomic unit, as they do not have a distinct self-image to define them as separate zones. The Botevgrad Central Tourist Zone is one of the largest villages in the municipality with direct communication from the Republican and European road network with the other two tourist areas, as well as with the municipalities Pravets and Mezdra. The area is collectively based on its historical content. The tourist zones "Bozhenitsa" and "Rzana" have their own character and integrity and appear as accompanying the central one.

Sustainable tourism development of the three zones in the Botevgrad municipality comprises of several basic steps: differentiation and marketing positioning; Emphasis on the specific characteristics of the three tourist cores in the Botevgrad Central Tourist Zone; exploration of tourist areas and tourist cores, digitalization of tourist spots, covering the view and giving out foreclosures for the placement of facilities to conceal the view, reduce its scope or spoil the mystery of the site.

III. PROPOSALS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF TOURIST DESTINATION BOTEVGRAD

The concept of sustainable development provides for economic growth capable of satisfying the needs of modern society in the long-term for well-being (with all its socio-demographic and health attributes) without depriving future generations of the opportunity to meet their needs. In particular, sustainable development implies choosing and promoting local economic development strategies tailored to the conservation and

improvement of the environment and the biological balance of Earth. Sustainable development has different aspects - managerial, economic, environmental, and social. Accordingly, three sustainable development objectives are often mentioned: environmental integrity, eco-efficiency and ecojustice. Without a fair distribution of resources and opportunities among all members of a community, sustainable development is impossible.

As a result of the surveys, *the author has drawn criteria and indicators for analysis and assessment of tourism potential at the local level based on the European Sustainable Development Indicators of Tourism (ETIS)*. The system has been developed as an instrument that any destination can use and implement without any special training. It can be useful in tracking the development of the destination and to ensure better management decisions and to influence the implementation of adequate policies. The implementation of Sustainable Development Indicators of ETIS at a local level has a wide range of benefits: helping local self-government to monitor, manage and increase the sustainability of a tourist destination; a useful tool for tracking the effectiveness of the destination and making better management decisions as well as impacting on relevant local policies; the system consists of a set of indicators (27 basic and 40 additional), a set of tools and a data set; a flexible system with the possibility of integration with already existing destination monitoring systems, the basic principle of the system being good ownership and ownership sharing, ownership and decision-making of the destination. The development of criteria and indicators for sustainable development is enshrined in the Strategy for Sustainable Development of Tourism in the Municipality. It is related to the main objective of the local tourism policies in Botevgrad municipality for sustainable tourism development and realization of the five strategic priorities.

The proposals for sustainable tourism development of Botevgrad municipality cover the main strategic priorities aimed at 1) the creation of the image of a tourist destination, 2) the institutional development and improvement of the administrative capacity, 3) improving the accessibility of the tourist sites and routes, including infrastructure measures, and 4) sustainable development of priority and additional specialized tourism types, including a regional tourist product.

1. Creation and validation of the image of tourist destination Botevgrad

The sustainable development of tourism in the municipality of Botevgrad is related to the intentional efforts of the municipal administration and the other stakeholders to develop and strengthen a quality tourism

product in line with the current trends in tourism development and consumer demand for a unique positioning and development of the municipality as a tourist destination. The proposal for creating and establishing an image of the Botevgrad Municipality as a tourist destination has taken into account the limiting factors of the external and internal environment and the relatively limited resources available to the municipality.

To achieve uniqueness in the context of sustainable tourism development in the Strategy for Sustainable Development of the Botevgrad Municipality 2019-2025 it is proposed to create a *brand* of the destination. The goal is to create a unique identity with product names, designs, signs, symbols or combinations of them, based on differentiation compared to other competing products. The main task is to bring out a common vision and to structure the basis for building a sustainable brand of the tourist destination Botevgrad Municipality. The proposed concept of creating a common tourist brand and its popularization and reaching the focused target groups, as well as being recognized and accepted by local communities.

The development and implementation of voluntary certification and trademark "Botevgrad" is part of the brand and another tool for building an image, unique positioning and development of the municipality as a tourist destination that will be part of the tourist brand Botevgrad. Its introduction will be an effective marketing tool to make Botevgrad and the region more competitively available on the market.

2. Institutional development and improvement of the administrative capacity of Botevgrad Municipality

The proposal defines institutional development, coordination and partnership with stakeholders and their joint responsibility as a strategic priority and underlines their importance for the realization of sustainable tourism development in the municipality of Botevgrad. This priority shapes the institutional and peer-to-peer framework in which local tourism policies for the sustainable development of tourism should be implemented. Its tasks are: to contribute to the shaping of a favourable tourism development environment - institutional, administrative, legislative etc.; to propose appropriate models, mechanisms and coordination and partnership solutions between stakeholders. The fulfilment of these tasks is related to overcoming certain deficits and tackling important challenges.

3. Improving the overall infrastructure and accessibility of the environment

The proposal is aimed at developing the general infrastructure and the physical environment related to tourism, focusing on the role of

Botevgrad Municipality as an investor, initiator and organizer of the processes aimed at improving and developing the material environment in qualitative and quantitative terms, for maximum use of the potential of the region, stimulating year-round, sustainable tourism development.

It is considered that the main constrictions for the sustainable development of tourism are related to poor accessibility, insufficient information provision and undeveloped environment. They constitute an obstacle to the development of a competitive tourism product and must be overcome by targeted measures, including: improving accessibility to and between tourist attractions in the surrounding area during all seasons; providing easy-to-access and ever-richer information on a continuously-evolving single internet platform with a smartphone application, including advanced "smart" language services; improving the urban environment and the green system of the municipality; improving accessibility to tourist sites and routes in the separate tourist areas, their functioning and increasing their attractiveness.

4. Sustainable development of specialized types of tourism on the territory of Botevgrad municipality

The proposal for **sustainable development of specialized types of tourism** on the territory of the municipality of Botevgrad includes realization of the project "*Heterotopias. Botevgrad-Leskovac*", creation of cultural-information cores and development of the museum work in the municipality of Botevgrad; creating tourist attraction "Chavdar" retro-bus; thematic routes for horse and hiking tourism; the development of adventure parks in the areas of Bozhenitsa, Lipnitsa and Trudovets and the holding of adventure events; building a bicycle system and creating specialized routes for professional and amateur mountain biking; building thematic attractions related to the Botev's chetniks; building of thematic tourist routes with cultural, historical, archaeological and religious orientation; hosting events with cultural and artistic-creative orientation; building ecotourism attractions; promoting volunteering and developing volunteer tourism.

5. Development of a regional tourist product

The proposal for the creation of a regional tourist product includes the creation of a biosphere park under the UNESCO Program "Man and the Biosphere", including the territory of Botevgrad Municipality and part of the municipalities of Mezdra, Roman and Pravets, as well as differentiation of tourist routes with different thematic direction on the territory of Botevgrad and two or more neighbouring municipalities. The creation of a regional tourist product is related to the results of the workshops and

surveys conducted among the bordering municipalities of Botevgrad. Specific measures have been developed to identify common thematic touristic routes in the region to be implemented in a seven-year period, opportunities to offer joint specialized tourism products from several municipalities, creation of a regional web portal etc.

CONCLUSION

Sustainable development of tourism in Botevgrad municipality requires targeted and sustained efforts by the municipal leadership in partnership with other stakeholders to position it as a unique and competitive tourist destination, including building and consolidating a tourist brand. The emphasis on local traditions and natural resources, as well as different types of events - traditional and innovative to highlight and enforce a Botevgrad brand - is key to the sustainable development of tourism in the municipality.

Successful sustainable tourism development in Botevgrad municipality is related to conducting systematic marketing researches; the assessment of the proposed criteria and indicators for analysis and assessment of tourism potential at local level; building of thematic routes and specialized tourist infrastructure; introducing uniform standards for serving tourists; categorization and voluntary certification of tourist sites, introduction of Botevgrad trademark; diversification of the tourist product through the provision of additional services, use of opportunities for a common regional tourist product with the neighbouring municipalities; creating public-private partnerships and cooperation between stakeholders.

It is essential to develop the Botevgrad municipality's product policy in relation to the possibilities of offering specialized types of tourism, according to the specific features and the tourist potential of the separate tourist zones. This will help recognize Botevgrad not only as an industrial but also as a tourist destination, and the integration of tourism with the rest of the economic sectors will have an image effect and can be used as a lever for additional stimulus for the prosperity of the municipality. This requires systematic and purposeful local policies in the sector, based on the adaptation and implementation of methodologies for the sustainable development of a tourist destination.

Achieving a sustainable development of a tourist destination at a local level is only possible through the systematic use and application of the criteria and indicators for analysis and assessment of tourism potential, following the defined strategic objectives and priorities for the sustainable development of a tourist destination.

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