

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN RURAL AREAS OF BULGARIA

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***Abstract:** The report examines opportunities for sustainable tourism development in rural areas of Bulgaria. In times of demographic crisis Bulgarian villages significantly reduce their tourism potential. Depopulation deprives the country from important ethnographic, folkloric and household characteristics. The report considers the possibility to improve some of these processes, as well as opportunities for eco- certification within rural tourism in the country. Sustainable tourism can be developed only after a series of measures, which is involved our whole society.*

***Key words:** sustainable tourism, rural, development, strategy*

Leading principles for sustainable development of tourism

The principles of sustainable tourism are refer in particular to rural territories. In a big grade these territories are affected by uncontrolled exploitation of the available resources. The sustainable development and added value in the field of rural tourism as and different types touristic activities in rural regions give an explanation for examined in these article main problems and opportunities for its achieving. The tendered for consideration “Charter for sustainable tourism in Bulgaria “marks the following important principles:

- **Principle of assuring a growth**

The parties declare their will to work encourage and support the growth and development of local communities in the potential and already developed touristic regions with an aim – prosperity of local communities and with attention on encourage the small and middle grade companies. The development must be nation - wide systematically and environmentally considerate. The sustainable tourism has tusk to provide sustainable development of this environment and to enrich it as and to prolong its life.

- **Principle of preservation of protected areas**

The protected areas are one of the greatest natural resources of Bulgaria. Participants in the Charter have engaged to obey the principle of avoiding work in protected areas where a development of tourism could endanger its habitats and the species in them. The participants will

work for their preservation and make profit in such way so to preserve and enrich them.

- **Principle of initiation active management systems for the main elements of the environment**

In respect to guarantee every case of planning, building and exploitation of the touristic infrastructure the parties have engaged to invent ahead active management systems for main elements of the environment- soils, water, air and waste which provide preconditions for adoption to climate changes.

- **Principle of the high added value**

The parties declare their engagement to work toward encourage economic growth based on decisions with a high added value for the local economy , nature and society and do not implement politics and practices attended with a low added value based on over- exploitation of the resources.

Lead features

The development of sustainable rural tourism passes through the following important features/ Fadjioli, 2009/:

- to be a step before , to outrun the trends before they are in fashion
- to analyze and understand customer perceptions
- respect and preservation of the environment without depriving guests from their comfort;

In rural tourism the execution of ecological principles as this is main characteristic of sustainable tourism and is connected with so called “touristic architecture“. According this author it is characterized with next features:

- type of the house and its exposition, regional micro- climate, predominated winds etc.
- use of “natural“ building materials and traditional plasters. The building has given accommodation but to not isolate the guests as it happened in concrete buildings.
- The finishing materials have to be with biological origin /or example wood/. Electrical installation has to be equipped in switch breakers for lowering voltage during the night. It has to avoid use of plastic things.
- During the last years has increased the market niche- “rural eco- tourism“. Its role is in saved energy, waste collecting, water recycling etc.

Rural territories in context of sustainable development

When the touristic branch in rural territories is analyzed, in point of view its sustainability and foresight is important to determine their range because for Bulgaria it isn't small.

Definitions

Here we use definition determined by EU, proposed by Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development- OECD, because it is determined as clear and simple even for regions with dense settled. In 1994 OECD determined as local level /municipalities – NUTS 5/as rural type those ones with density of population under 150 people/ sq .km. On regional level / regions- NUTS 3 and NUTS 2 / are collected: predominated rural / under 15% of population in rural municipalities/: medial / mainly rural – 50% - 15% in rural municipalities/; predominated urban / under 15 from population of rural municipalities/. In 2005 OECD invented change in definition of regional level – if there is center with population more then 200 000 people, represented not less than in 25% from the population of predominated rural region- it is termed as **medial** If there is urban center with population more then 500 000 people, represented in 25% from medial population region it is termed as **predominated urban** /3.4/.

National definition in Bulgaria is concerned to rural regions on Level 1 – municipalities. They are defined as **rural** when it isn't town with population over 30 000 people/ Program for development of rural regions- PDRR, 2007- 2013/. According this national definition rural regions / municipalities/ are 231 from 264 municipalities in Bulgaria /Penerliev, Shefka, 201 /. Based on definition of OECD for rural region on regional level in Bulgaria have 20 predominated rural regions/ level NUTS 3 /, 7 medial regions and only one predominated urban region – capital Sofia.

Worse demographic situation in villages

In this context we can point that in 2013 in villages live more than 1.9 million people from 7.3 million population in Bulgaria. This is 27% from it. This part could increase if the point of view is the regions determined as rural. In this connection we couldn't miss the fact this is the population which is real carrier of authenticity, eternal and attractiveness of the rural being, culture and customs. And this is the main immaterial recourse for rural tourism. Even more – in grate grade it is the contingent which preserve, maintain and teaches generations of its material wealth: architecture, culture monuments, subjects and peasant dresses. It is necessary in context of sustainable development of tourism to make a short demographic characteristics for this part of Bulgarian population.

In this article we make this onto example in Shumen region. The choice has made on it because it is center of a touristic region “Old capitals” and it is with big concentration of resources for rural and cultural tourism. There are situated two ancient capital of Bulgaria: Pliska and Veliki Preslav /both in rural municipalities/. The main demographic index which influences on sustainability of touristic branch is the age structure of the population. It is aging with fast temps /Shefka, Penerliev 2013/. The age structure of population is the classification in age groups. Sex - age structure is the most important demographic structure which influences on natural reproduction, labor force, marriage forming of family relations etc. It is influenced by characteristic of the reproduction and by migrations. The sex and age structures of population are close connected and mutual depended.

The individuals under 15 years in Shumen in 1992 are 20,6%, in 2001 – 17% and in 2011 – 14%. These values show sharp decreasing for under - labor population for a 20 years period with 6 points. The population in age group 16- 60 years in Showmen region in 1992 are 60.4%, in 2001 – 62.4 and in 2011 – 61%. This shows a relative stability in this age group. The individuals over 60 years in 1992 are 19%, in 2001 – 20.6% and on 2011 - 25% . This is the worst index for the age structure in the region – increasing over – labor population. This occurrence is typical for all country. The index of age structure in analysis on municipality level is with more negative trends. For example in rural municipality Hitrino the population in over- labor age is 33%.

In fact we can define this trend as main thread for sustainable development of tourism. The over - aged people couldn't preserve, creative and give necessary attractiveness of the resources for rural tourism. Even more in many villages with decreasing of population have got lost valued folklore customs.

Lost villages

In context of aforesaid, we give another fact. In the beginning of 2014 in Bulgaria more than 170 villages were struck off the registers. This mean they are unpopulated and their territories are given to neighbor villages. Public centers, buildings, churches and other objects are ruined without care. Many of the public centers funds and libraries are not preserved and thus are lost valued material and immaterial cultural heritage. This is we consider as main thread for sustainability of tourism in rural regions. This is a trend which affects most of European villages. Perhaps this is irreversible trend. How do we can preserve this wealth in disappeared villages? In the last years it has occurred that rural tourism are practiced by more educated tourists with

higher financial profile and higher requirements to the ecology in destination region . It has increased the quota of so called – expedition tourism. To it we can classify with some convention ornitho – tourism and botanical tours. Why not the exploration of lost villages to be a new attraction and possibility for preservation of their cultural heritage?

The authors of this report are engaged professionally with this problem. We submit her only /Appendix 1/ short questionnaire with description and exploration of disappeared villages. In fact this problem has been elaborated during 30 ties of XX century by the founder of settlement geography in Bulgaria: Prof. Dr. Guncho Gunchev.

We consider this is an innovative and real opportunity for increasing sustainability of rural touristic product.

Eco certifications and certifications for authenticity

Implementation of the principles of sustainable tourism in rural environment in combination with the strive increasing the added value of touristic product is connected with determined eco- limits. They give competitive advantage of the destinations. Here we show some of possibilities for implementation of the certifying procedures in Bulgaria.

According Penerliev and Donchev /2009/ additional assessment for the quality of the touristic service is licensing with certificate “Authentic Bulgaria”. The owners of family hotels in peasant environment can apply for it if:

1. They have got 3 to 50 rooms
2. Provide food
3. They are categorized and have at least – one star category
4. They are open at least 6 months in a year for visitors.

Solid process of assessment as and interrupted feedback from customers include all aspects of the business; from services to the base and the equipment, from the design and atmosphere to marketing and business planning. They will guarantee the object response to all requirements of the visitors regarding professionalism, safety, cleanness and comfort. There have received bronze, silver and gold marks. This is a very good marketing approach as after such certification is well seen growth in the attendance in the objects.

Additional advantage for village houses, their planning, functioning of the each systems in them and the growth of visitors gives their certification as family eco- hotels.

According to Dencheva /2009/ after certification with eco- mark is understandable that the hotel has taken care of healthy stay of customers and for the environment. Even more with this eco- mark is declared that the hotel has fulfilled very high criteria for this marking. These criteria

are so high that only 30% from the existed hotels can response to them. The aim is when the customer see the mark - "daisy" to assure himself that this place of accommodation / hotel , chalet , guest's house etc./ is the best for him as for his health as and for the Nature.

What is the "daisy" mark?

European daisy - this is the mark of European scheme for eco-marking.

1. "Daisy" awarded for a product / good or service/ is mark for high quality as and for care to environment.
2. "Daisy" is a medal which is awarded for the best touristic products /goods or service/.

Certification "Eco Hotel"

Certified program "Eco Hotel" has started in 1993 by consulting group HVS International Eco Services in collaboration with ecological experts such as Rocky Mountain Institute and United States EPA, engineers and other consultants. System "Eco Hotel" covers 14 elements and it is based on ISO 14001 and excludes some requirements adapted to the aspects of the environment in touristic branch. The certification includes: management of energy resources, security and safety, motivation of the personnel, waste management etc.

Ecological certification in touristic branch according "GREEN GLOBE" standard

Environment certification for touristic objects could be done on model "GREEN GLOBE 21" which is especially for tourism. It has created by international organization Green Globe together with WTTC / World Travel and Tourism Council / and SGS. The standard "GREEN GLOBE 21" is based onto the principles in Agenda 21 passed in June 1992 at Earth Summit by 182 government's members of UNCED which were united by the idea to provide sustainable future of the planet.

"GREEN GLOBE 21" is implacable to hotels, touristic resorts, touristic villages and tour operators which wish to be engaged in environment and sustainable development. It has estimated:

Planned use of land for tourism and development; local social – economical acquisitions from touristic branch; preservation of air quality and noise control; waste waters management, sewerage and streams; waste minimization; recycling and second use etc.

Instead conclusion we can mark the most important benefits coming from aforesaid opportunities certifications. They are expressed in:

- Decreasing of water consumption, electricity and less emissions in air / caused by paints and chemicals /

- Use of renewable energy resources and of energy saving ecological products
- Decreasing of the waste and less contamination of the environment /without use of fertilizers and pesticides/
- Ecological pure food from local bio-manufacturers

Conclusion

If the eco- architecture combines itself with contemporary technologies which save water and energy as and waste recycle system. Its building have to be conformed with decreasing emissions of carbon dioxide /main causer to Greenhouse effect/ regulated under agreement from Kioto.

These ecological trends and their implementation in rural tourism give more qualitative and more sustainable touristic product. Certainly it is more expensive but more competitive and with longer life cycle.

From other side depopulation is process without alternative in some rural regions. In this article /with help of the enclosed questionnaire for research settlements/ is shown how to take maximum benefit from this. Research the being and the culture of local people and study their cultural heritage they left us. Preserve it for the next generations through offering of specific touristic product in the range of expedition researches in rural areas.

Third point is old aged population in rural regions which is main threat against sustainability of the rural touristic product. Where is possible there have to elaborate strategies to overcome this negative demographic process.

For the authors is clear that they only mark little part from “problem points“ in analysis of sustainable tourism in rural territories. Other its aspects and opportunities will be subject to examine in other issue.

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Appendix 1

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR RESEARCH OF ERASED SETTLEMENTS IN BULGARIA

1. Name. Give proper name /or names/ of the researched settlement. Do an investigation into the name of this village with neighbor villages. If it is said in other sources take the name from them.

2. Geographical position. Determine the position of the village toward some important orographical units /river, valley, upland, plateau etc. Also its position toward neighbor villages and roads. If this village is joined to another neighbor one- which village land belongs now.

3. Literary sources. Find and describe all literary sources about the village. Show when for first time it is mentioned also when its last time is in literary sources. When and what kind of document is erased off? There are investigating maps, travel notes and studies. Make geographical inquiry.

4. Buildings and other objects. Shape and size of the village. Description of existed still buildings as – church, school, old houses or their ruins, yards. Take picture and make field map /plan/ of the village with important objects on it. If it is possible describe the names from street signs/often they give information for the history of village and the names of outstanding persons/. Classify which type belongs to; /hamlet, cottager's huts and it is on heap or scattered village etc./. According the number houses indirectly could be counted the number families lived in the village.

5. Population. Study from possible large number sources the count and social structure of the population /from magazines, civil county services etc./ Interviewing people from neighbor villages for the social structure, the being and life of the people in disappeared village. Finding descendants of the people who were lived in village or old residents who haven't lived there anymore /migrated to relatives/. Write their memories. Give short information about which settlements they migrate to.

6. Material and immaterial heritage. Find and describe authentic folklore songs, customs and folklore costumes from the village with memories or archive of descendants. Visit public centers in neighbor villages or regional administrative center where could be saved funds of the already closed public center in the erased village.

Notes on the authors

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