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Role and Place of Alternative Tourism Development in Mountain Areas

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ABSTRACT

Tourism, the first global industry, is undergoing a major development. As a result of using only traditional forms of such activities and resources for them in many areas including the mountains shall be imposed major changes to tourism development. The aim is sustainability of socio-cultural and economic processes, as well protecting the natural environment and the identity of any territory, which is subject to active economic exploitation through tourism, for future generations. Tourism, as a major sector of the local economy of the mountain regions of Bulgaria, should be viewed as a complex activity, which involves additional production, services, transportation and specialized education. In this sense, the development of alternative tourism as a priority for these areas should be considered in its all complexities and opportunities, which it provides to solve problems, such as unemployment, low income, narrow specialization of the economy in the mountain areas and general backwardness compared with the lowland areas and the larger urban centres.

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism, the first global industry, is undergoing a major development. However, the contribution to the economies of the visited regions is insufficient, being often not affordable for the majority of their population, because of the frequent neglect of most of the local actors in the process of creating and offering various services in the industry. As a result of using only traditional forms of such activities and resources for them in many areas including the mountains shall be imposed major changes to tourism development.

The aim is sustainability of socio-cultural and economic processes, as well as protecting the natural environment and the identity of any territory, which is subject to active economic exploitation through tourism, for future generations. In the recent years it has come a turning point in the mindset of people and

yet most of them have avoided mass tourism, targeting more frequently than before to the mountain and rural areas with beautiful scenery and preserved cultural environment, seeking for peace and comfort. According to a survey conducted by the WTO (World Tourism Organization) until 2025 about 140 million people will have visited rural areas with preserved nature, mainly in mountain areas for tourism.

According to the European Union, sustainable tourism development is what meets present needs without preventing future generations from meeting their needs. It must be environmentally friendly, economically profitable and socially equitable for the local community.

The active participation of tourism requires cooperative actions and participation of all public and private institutions, an effective coordination of the mechanisms at all levels, too (local, regional, national, etc.). Special types of tourism do not replace the mass

one, but they add value to tourism product, enrich, expand and differentiate it. Special types of tourism are influenced by the political environment that creates new demand tendencies and makes factors of the tourism supply adapt to new consumer standards.

Special types of tourism are strongly influenced by the geographical area, which turns mountain areas in natural spatial focus for their implementation and permanent enrichment of the offered services in synchrony with the diversity of conditions and resources of them.

Fierce consumerist approach in the classic tourism contributes only to the enrichment of the large foreign investors at the expense of the local population, which undergoes partial or even complete economic and mostly cultural collapse, social problems and conflicts.

In order to reduce these problems, it is required an application of new practices in the industry that have emerged in recent years as new - alternative types of tourism. The main features of alternative tourism are:

- small scaled with controlled and regulated development;
- wide variety of activities on an individual or independent basis;
- gaining experience for the local cultural heritage and preservation of traditional values.

The need for an alternative tourism is predetermined by many factors that are related to leisure time, people's desire for active recreation, concern for the environment and biodiversity, the natural curiosity to explore different cultures and customs, development of regional economy, revival mostly of the rural areas in the mountains, creating new workplaces for local communities, etc.

The aim of this study, which is based on analysis of the essential characteristics of alternative tourism, the conditions and factors that determine its development, is to focus on the its role and place in the sustainable development of the socio-economic and natural environment of mountain areas.

2. THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

The study is based on classical methodology, which is applied widely in geographical studies. There are also implemented general science, research methods of analysis and synthesis in clarifying the role and place of alternative tourism in contemporary mountain economy.

Comparative analyses are used for clarifying the possibilities of alternative types of tourism and their particular importance in the spatial development of mountain areas. Geographic analysis and statistical methods are applied for the identification and spatial location of some mountain areas, which are actively

developing specialized tourism and in association with them tourism resources and products.

SWOT analysis as a modern and actively applied exploratory method is used to outline the main features of environment for the development of specialized tourism activities in mountain areas and the risks and benefits of their implementation.

The results of the analysis as balls evaluations are presented in graphical model on the basis of which are defined the possible strategies for sector development in these areas.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Substantial features of alternative tourism

Alternative types of tourism combine tourism packages or individual services that are defined as alternatives to mass tourism product by way of supply, conduct and the busy human resource. Alternative tourism is established in order to avoid unilateral enrichment and to try to create new opportunities for local economic development with more protagonists. Another important role is that through it are being made persistent efforts in preventing, reducing and, if possible, deleting the deep traces of mass tourism left in many geographic areas.

Fans of this type of tourism are people who travel actively and while travelling they want to learn more, want to interact with culture and learn more about the country itself.

Studies worldwide show that tourists who seek for a holiday in preserved natural and / or cultural area are mostly highly educated (about 82%) and over 70% of them live in large and medium cities. On the whole they are wealthier than the mass tourists, their typical age is around 40 years and they are willing to pay more for specialized tourism products. Therefore they want to sleep in guest houses of local residents, because they can more easily feel the local atmosphere, to taste the traditional food and to indulge in complete lifestyle and culture of this mountain region.

Definitely, people who choose alternative tourism are consumers with higher culture and lore. These are the people who are interested in geography and history of the relevant mountain or rural area, they are not those who come to consume an inexpensive vacation in another destination.

Recent trends in tourism development, particularly of alternative tourism, highlight the requirement for sustainable development, i.e. for such development that the most meets the needs and demands of tourists, while the highest grade reserves and maintain the balance in the ecological and social systems.

To achieve this goal it is necessary to make appropriate division of the tourist product. This in most

regards to poorly utilized mountainous areas and the small villages in them, which before heading to the intensive development of tourism, must clarify their purpose: what resources do they have, the development of those kinds of tourism which promote these resources and what is the capacity of the equipment that must be constructed and maintained, in order to achieve sustainable tourism development.

An important element of the analysis is the evaluation of the effectiveness of alternative tourism, which largely corresponds to the allocation of resources in different activities and their relationship with their sustainable functioning.

Opportunities for growth of the profitability as a synthesis of the effectiveness are various, but each of the types of alternative tourism is pointed in two directions. One of them concerns the level and the dynamics of the cost of individual tourism products and the other regards the prices of the same. Natural and logical is the price for the various types of alternative tourism to be multifactorial function, which is consistent with the possibility of returning on the investment cost, location, seasonality, unique of the tourist product, etc.

3.2. The alternative tourism in mountain regions in Bulgaria - present state, problems and perspectives

Tendencies in tourism development in general, the increased interest in new forms of tourism and the rich tourism potential of the mountains in Bulgaria, give reasons to expect a more intensive development of specialized tourism in these areas. The idea of alternative tourism in Bulgaria has appeared since 1990's.

Bulgaria has a significant tourist resource, which justifies the increasing interest and opportunities for development in recent years of the alternative forms of tourism. It is proved by a number of studies. Nine sites are included in The World Heritage List of UNESCO, more than 600 mineral water sources, thousands of local traditional and cultural attractions; more than 5% of the country's territory has a status of protected area (including 3 national and 11 natural parks) 40 000 historic monuments, 160 monasteries, more than 330 museums and galleries, rich traditions in conducting festivals and holidays, reserved ethnographic heritage, national cuisine, quality wines, etc.

Despite the positive attitude to the specialized types of tourism, governmental, professional and public institutions - their development is insufficiently, although the possibilities are much greater. Statistics, of which objectivity we know that is difficult to achieve (many of the offered specialized travel services, are evading nights, activities and taxes), have suggested that alternative tourism covers about 5% of the sector at

the moment. Annually about 5,000 foreigners visit our country by practicing alternative tourism.

Due to the specific characteristics in different mountain areas with resources for the development of relevant alternative forms of tourism, it is required an increase of the activity at the regional level, for better coordination of all interested in the industry parties, for the fuller utilization of tourism potential of each region.

Researches related to the alternative types of tourism in our country show an increasing interest in cultural, ecological, spa, religious, rural, and recently in the wine tourism. Moreover firmly certain destinations are asserted for the different specialized types of tourism. For their development and affirmation basic premises are the available tourist - natural and anthropogenic resources of each specific mountain area, complete mountain ranges or complex tourist regions.

Tourism resources and development potential of tourism in Bulgaria are subjects of many studies and analyzes in the recent years (Dinev, 1974 [8]; Evrev, 1988, 1999 [4], [9]; Marinov, 1997, 1998, 2000 [9], [10]; Tishkov 1985; Hristov-Stankov, 1982; Bachvarov, 1985 [1], [2], [3], [5], [6]; Dardanova, 1992 [7]; Kazachka, 1986; Popova, 1989, 2008 [12]; Petrov, etc., 1994, 1998; Kostov, 1996, 1998; Stamov, 2009 [13] Patarchanov, 2011 [11] and many others).

Despite the differences in approaches, criteria and evaluations, all studies reaffirm the fact that Bulgaria has an exclusively rich and diverse reactionary and tourism potential.

In terms of spatial concentration of the resources for tourism development, studies establish the following:

- about half of the country has significant resource potential for development of traditional and alternative tourism activities;
- practically, there is no more significant natural or administrative area (district and even municipality) that has not more or less favorable recreational resources.

Virtually, almost every municipality in the mountain areas has resource opportunities to develop some kind of recreation and tourism in which leading can be the alternative forms. However this does not mean that there are conditions for offering integrated tourism products, which attract visitors in all municipalities of the country.

There are many problems and weaknesses that are detaining the development of alternative tourism in the majority of municipalities in Bulgaria, including those, which are situated in mountainous areas. To them are related the following:

- marked disproportion in the construction and concentration of tourist facilities and resources;
- delays in infrastructure development - national, regional and especially local, and the use of modern information technologies, like reservation systems;

- still underdeveloped activities related to marketing and advertising of destinations and especially those in the backward mountain areas;
- insufficient coordination of national, regional and local level, between public and private tourism sector, branch associations, partnerships and nongovernmental organizations in tourism;
- not effectively use of the possibilities of establishing regional and local networks of tourist packages, routes and activities with a view to exposure and utilization of different potentials;
- price advantages of Bulgarian sea and winter destinations are suppressed by others, mostly alternative segments on the market, keeping at large the prices low at the expense of quality and mainly the diversity of additional and specialized tourism products.
- dominance of relatively few large tour operators and hotels, offering mass product, discourages innovations and risky investments in specialized sectors of the Bulgarian tourist industry in the mountains, and other backward areas;

- lack of sufficiently developed and effective, supporting seasonal strategies in mountain tourist destinations, does not contribute to the stimulation of the alternative tourism types;
- inadequate management skills and lack of coordination and cooperation between local contractors (owners of hotels, travel companies and agencies), and representatives of various local attractions. Individual entrepreneurs are forced to provide independently the entire business cycle - marketing, transfer of hotel guests to the attractions, etc.;
- the reinforcing difficulties associated with finding and retaining of motivated and qualified staff in the areas of alternative tourism, which has the necessary professional background - animation skills, linguistic knowledge, etc.

The SWOT analysis of the industry was made in collaboration with BATA (Bulgarian Association for Alternative Tourism) at the beginning of 2012.

Table 1. SWOT analysis of alternative tourism in mountain areas in Bulgaria, 2011.

Internal factors			
Strengths	Score	Weaknesses	Score
1). Market-oriented alternative tourism, which is based on natural and cultural-historical heritage with European and world importance.	7	1). Lack of national strategy aimed at sustainable tourism development.	6
Culinary tradition in the mountain areas, which is based on the quality of local agricultural products.	8	2). Lack of national legislation, governing the overall policy and specific socio-economic priorities and activities in the mountain areas.	10
2). Evolving Internet presentation of products and services for alternative tourism.	4	3). Lack of adequate marketing strategy for promoting our country as a destination for alternative tourism on foreign market.	6
3). Sustainable practices of local entrepreneurs: tour operators, accommodations, facilities and services.	6	4). Lack of working communication, consistency and synergy between the subjects in tourism - a private business, public and state structures.	4
4). Formed clientele and traditions of the Bulgarian market for a part of the alternative tourism products - primarily for rural and adventure tourism.	7	5). Local authorities are often trapped in lobbyist interests and even tolerate the violation of the law.	5
5). Existing criteria for voluntary certification of national and regional level in the field of accommodation and cuisine – i.e. Green house, Authentic Bulgaria, Pan Parks.	5	6). Poor condition of public and specialized infrastructure and difficult accessibility to a number of sights, as an obstacle to offering a quality product for alternative tourism.	7
6). The positive attitude in many of the mountain municipalities to alternative tourism as an engine for local development.	6	7). Lack of product diversity and as a result of limited seasonally and territorially tourist product in most mountain areas.	6
7). Interest in starting a small business in the tourist industry.	6	8). Practically nonexistent network of Tourist Information Centers in mountain areas developing various forms of alternative tourism.	6
8). Availability of university programs focusing on specialized types of tourism and interest in the professional development of students in this field.	4		4
9). Experience (professionalization) in serving in the majority of hosts, in accommodations and food, and additional attractions.	7		
Total score	60	Total score	48

External factors			
Opportunities	Score	Threats	Score
1). Special attention within European programs and financial instruments for industry development in mountain regions.	10	1). Unconvincing defense of the Bulgarian administration of natural and cultural heritage, the foundation of tourism.	5
Regaining the trust of Bulgarian consumers through support from business and the government.	7	2). Continuous expiry of young specialists from the mountain areas to urban centers or outside Bulgaria.	6
2). Aggressive information campaign by adapted for industry products matching the modern technologies and the consumption patterns.	6	3). High cost of financial resource in Bulgaria and the difficult access to it, especially in the risk areas like mountain and in activities such as alternative ones.	8
3). Improving the condition and transport accessibility to the tourist sights.	9	4). Longstanding commitment with the chains of mass tourism and their withdrawal due to the overdevelopment in some mountain areas.	9
Targeting transit visitors and mass tourists in mountain resorts to special activities and themed tours to attractive sights with preserved cultural and historical environment.	8	5). Deterioration of the business environment and the risk of mass failures in the services sector.	7
4). Derivation of authenticity (nature culture, cuisine, etc.) as a key element in the sale of Bulgaria as a European destination.	9	6). Bad service combined with low prices as a major marketing tool makes the change of our image of a tourist destination particularly difficult.	9
5). Improving the access to funds and programs of national, European and global scale. Creating cluster groupings for cooperative marketing and product positioning of alternative tourism in mountain regions.	5	7). Impaired age structure of the population and as a result the degraded performance of the labor force in the mountain areas.	8
6). Development of cross-border tourism products, which are built on attractive natural and cultural resources.	6	8). Low qualification and lack of basic knowledge and skills of the employees in the industry and of those who <u>now</u> starts their own alternative tourism business.	8
7). Competitive support of centers for professional education and qualification of local participants in specialized activities in the mountain areas.	7	9). Loss of many of the traditional crafts and skills create a risk of rapid waste of local identity and authenticity of the sights with potential for development of alternative tourism.	7
8). Easing the administrative requirements associated with the product "home hospitality "and other services in the field of alternative tourism.	6	10). The unwise planning of the mass tourism products and activities and as a result, a decrease and even leakage of attractive natural and cultural landscapes, which will discourage truly the solvent clientele.	7
9). Reducing the distance between current understanding of alternative tourism and tourism business and the educational programs in high schools and universities.	5	11). The new recessionary environment may lead to refraining from non-alternative holiday and travels in the mountain areas.	7
	6		6
Total score	84	Total score	80

The analysis of the graphic model (fig. 1) shows that the major part of the influence of external and internal factors on the development of alternative tourism in the mountain areas is concentrated between the capabilities and strong sides.

This means that the most appropriate at this stage is an aggressive strategy, in which can be used all the internal forces for the development of the sector, by taking full advantage of the good conditions of the external environment.

3.3. Spatial organization of alternative tourism in mountain regions.

Regionalization of tourism resources and activities reveals several major tourist regions [14] in the mountain areas - Rhodopski, Staroplaninki, Rilo-Pirinski and Srednogorski, which have significant opportunities for development based on the alternative tourism (table 2). In these areas can be developed specialized tourism activities, spatially structured in

sectoral and inter-sectoral clusters, organized in various micro regions with their specialization. In the Rhodopean area, for example, they are - Dubrashki, Chepinski, Dobrostanski, Mursalishki, Chernatishki, Perelisko-Prespanski, Gorno and Doalnoardenski. More restricted are the opportunities for development

of the specialized forms in Osogovo-Belasishki, Kraishtenski and Strandzhanski regions, which however have not few resources for ecological and rural tourism, which they practice increasingly active in the recent years.

Table 2. Specialization of alternative tourism in the mountain areas in Bulgaria.

Region	Specialization of the products
Rodopski	Main: rural tourism; Additional: ecotourism, cultural, culinary, religious, spa and wellness tourism, cycling, adventure, extreme, festival, hunting and fishing.
Rilo-Pirinski	Main: ecotourism; Additional: cultural, religious, wine, culinary, spa and wellness tourism, rural tourism, adventure, extreme, festival.
Staroplaninski	Main: ecotourism; Additional: rural, spa and wellness tourism, cultural, adventure, extreme.
Srednogorski	Main: cultural tourism; Additional: spa and wellness tourism, wine, festival, ecological.
Osogovo-Belasishki	Main: ecological tourism; Additional: agrarian tourism.
Kraishtenski	Main: rural tourism; Additional: ecological, cultural.
Strandzhanski	Main: ecological tourism; Additional: rural tourism, festival, cultural, culinary.

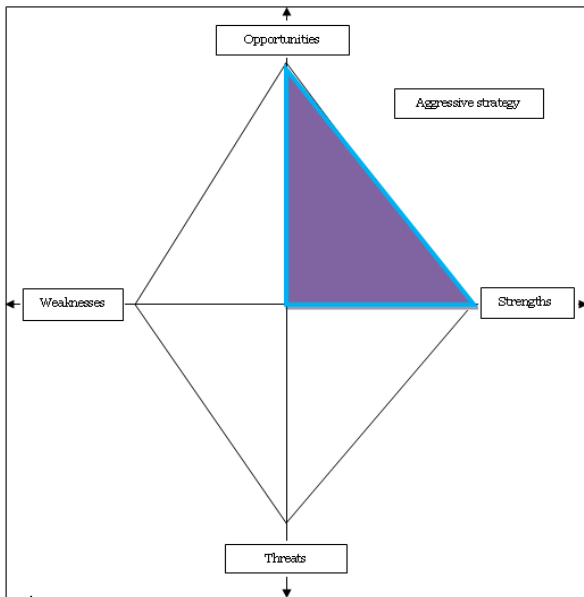


Fig. 1. Graphic model of a SWOT analysis.

4. CONCLUSION

Analysis of the role and place of alternative tourist activities in the mountain regions of Bulgaria shows considerable potential for sustainable local and regional development.

The diversity and the authenticity of anthropogenic and natural resources have enabled largely their turning into attractive tourist destinations, which increases the possibilities for economisation.

The main challenges for the industry development in the mountain areas is legislation, which must clearly and specifically authorize in one law all elements concerning the role and place of such activity.

There are many regional differences both in terms of resources and the housing conditions, which prevents the full utilization of the different mountain areas.

Regional imbalances are formed in the development of alternative forms of tourism in different mountain areas and of themselves on the whole. This limits their opportunities to divert to themselves some of the consumption of tourist products from the leading destinations.

Public-private partnership in the industry is very slightly developed, though there are significant capabilities for application in a number of economic and social activities in the mountain areas.

It is necessary to be defined appropriate policies supporting the development of the mountain areas and focusing primary on specialized tourist activities, effectively using and developing sustainable local resources.

Tourism as a major sector of the local economy of the mountain regions of Bulgaria should be viewed as a complex activity, which involves additional production, services, transportation and specialized education. In this sense, the development of alternative tourism as a priority for these areas should be considered in its all complexities and opportunities,

which it provides to solve problems, such as unemployment, low income, narrow specialization of the economy in the mountain areas and general backwardness compared with the lowland areas and the larger urban centres.

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