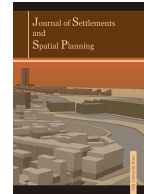




Centre for Research on Settlements and Urbanism

Journal of Settlements and Spatial Planning

Journal homepage: <http://jssp.reviste.ubbcluj.ro>



The Alternative Tourism and Development of the Regions for Purposeful Support in Bulgaria. Impact of Financial Crisis

Milen PENERLIEV¹

¹ Shumen University "Bishop K. Preslavski", Department of Geography, Shumen, BULGARIA

E-mail: penerliev@yahoo.com

Keywords: *alternative tourism, rural region, depressive region, development, crisis*

ABSTRACT

The subjects of the research are mostly the country and those which are in the border area territories of Bulgaria, which are undeveloped compared to the rest of the region. Their natural resources and preserved country life and culture are premise for accelerated development of the alternative tourism. Which the help of the different projects financed by the found of the EU, added to the personal initiative of the population in some parts of these regions the alternative tourism max influence beneficial economic effect. Through analyzing the statistical and demographical pieces of information some of the undeveloped regions of Bulgaria are outlined. Their natural and anthropogenic resources are being analyzed in order to develop the alternative tourism. The negative aspects of the undeveloped regions are being discovered (aggravated age structure, bad MTB and infrastructure etc.). Having in mind all that information me are able to render an account of the positive economic influence of the development of the alternative tourism in the examined regions.

1. INTRODUCTION

The development of the tourism in Bulgaria is one of the economic sectors that are developing very rapidly. For a 2nd year in a row the increase of the amount of incoming tourists is above 18%. The income from this economic sector is approximately 1 billion euro. The largest increase of investments is the traditional tourism such as the sea, winter and to some extend in the curative tourism. In 2007 in the country there were 3300 state and private sources for accommodation with over 30 beds. In the sphere of the hotel services and the restaurant services are employed approximately 85 thousand people. In the country there are over 5000 private and joint-stock firms which offer sources for accommodation. On this background the alternate tourism also is in an increase, although it is not that rapid. It is connected with one unusual link between the tourist and the nature or until now to the

cultural inheritance of the accepting country. It is developing mainly outside the highly urbanized city zones, in places which are less economically developed and the population there has some financial difficulties. That is why the social effect of the development of the alternative tourism is much bigger for the local population rather than the other regions.

The object of research of the current material is territories not so economically developed, and the main goal is to be increased the life standard of the local population.

2. MATERIAL AND METHOD

Definitions for the alternate tourism are given by different authors. All of them pay attention on the circumstance that the alternate tourism is the one in which small, but significant group of services is pointed at the suburbanized territories, predetermined to serve

people with specific interests, with higher than the average educational level and higher income [1]. According too the pointed authors these are to be the cultural, educational, scientific, adventure, rural (including the agro tourism) and least but not last the eco tourism. From the stated above definition is clear that in this kind of tourism the tourists seek purposefully low urbanized and developed areas with the idea of being closer to the nature and the authenticity of the local customs and culture. In Bulgaria such places are in abundance. Their economic development is rather low.

The classification of such areas is put up in the "Law for regional development" from 2008. It defines Regions for purposeful support. These regions:

- net revenue from sales of a resident under 70 percent of the average country in the last three years;
- level of the average wage lower than the average for the country for the past three years;
- average unemployment rate over 105 percent of average for the country for the past three years;
- age dependency ratio over 120 percent of average for the country for the past three years;
- population density less than 70 per one square kilometer and etc.

These regions are the place of development of alternative tourism in Bulgaria.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In part of the villages there are conditions and resources for organizing and developing a profitable alternate tourism.

Usually towards alternate tourism are headed families (60%) or small groups (8 to 10 people). More significant economic result for the local people has the rural or eco tourism and less – the extreme, cave and other sorts of tourism. In many cases there is coverage in the accommodations base in the first two types. For their development Bulgaria has many and different tourist resources. For example for the development of the eco tourism in Bulgaria there is a system of three national parks, 35 supporting reserves, 11 nature parks, 142 protected areas and 479 natural landmarks. On several different projects there were established a couple of Tourist Information Centers and Nature preserving visitor centers. These are: "Poda" (near Burgas), "Karlovo" – for preserving, observation and examination of the bats; Tourist Information Centers - in Shiroka Luka, Ribaritsa, Malko Turnovo, etc. On the National Program "Bulgarian eco paths" has been marked over 37 thousand kilometers paths in different areas and most visited and famous are the eco paths: "Negovanska" (near Veliko Turnovo), Vrachanska (in the national park "Vratchanski Balkan"), Drianovska (near The Drianovo monastery), Trunska and etc. Most of the eco tourists in our country start tours up to 3 days

(300 thousand people) and a vacation with longitude over 6 days is preferred by 180 thousand people. From 4 to 6 days are the tours for 170 thousand tourists. It is considered that the income for 2002 from this sector of the tourism is about 550 thousand euro.

In the rural territories, where is possible the combination of rural, cultural and religious tourism, the country has very good anthropogenic resources – over 200 museums, 164 orthodox monasteries, 70 catholic temples, 19 Gregorian temples, 18 synagogues, 960 mosques, many architectural reserves. In the local villages in the Rodopi Mountain, the Balkan, Pirin and the border areas has preserved authentic customs. In many of them there could be seen crafts and customs for the relevant area. The recreation areas in Bulgaria are approximately 40 thousand square kilometers (36% of the territory of the country). There live about 2.4mln people.

Some of the most popular villages for rural tourism are: Leshten, Kovachevitsa, Momchilovci, Gela, Shiroka Luka in the Rodopi Mountain, Jeravna, Shipkovo and Ribaritsa in the Balkan Mountain, Dobursko in Rila, Bania in the Razlog valley, the border village Brushlian (near Malko Turnovo), Prilep and Chukurovo in Dobrudja, as well as the villages with original wine-production factories with numerous white and red wines – Osmar, Slaviantsi, Damianitsa, Karabunar, Stambolovo, Novo Selo, etc.. They all have preserved architecture, different for the separate areas. In most of them are organized tours for eco tourism in the nearby natural parks and landmarks. For example in the Rodopi Mountain to the caves Diavolsko gurlo, Snejanika and others, a well as the bike tours on eco paths or towards centers for observation of birds (Madjarovo – the East part of the Rodopi). As a whole the existing natural and anthropogenic resources are enough for development of the different forms of the alternate tourism in Bulgaria.

The amount of foreign investments in the field of tourism constitutes 3.5% of all the investments in the country, i.e. 5th place in amount of the investments. To this issue tourist chains like Sheraton, Radisson, Hilton, Princess etc. as well as German travel agencies Heckerman, TUI, ITS etc. What is positive, is that Austria, Tasmania, USA, Great Britain, Switzerland etc. are leading investors. The comparative economic backwardness of the above mentioned rural areas may be overcome by development of a small family hotel business. Small tourist groups and family tourism gives local people reason for developing their own small accommodation basis, which demands comparatively less capital investments. The program SAPARD, the non government organizations as UNDP, ARD, Peace corpus, Beautiful Bulgaria, British Know Haw Found, the French organization Tetraktys etc. work in this direction by developing projects for financing this kind of activities.

What prevents rural areas in the field of alternative tourism from a higher development? In first place this is the aggravation of the demographic situation in the villages. 43% of the inhabitants of the country live there and every fourth inhabitant there is over the age of 65. In the year 2007 the average age of the inhabitants of the towns is 39.3 and that in the villages – 45.0.

The rate of diversification of local economy is very slight. The few people in working age, are occupied by agriculture, others are unemployed. This is where the lack of business initiative and high degree of education in the fields of tourism, computer education and philology streams. This is understandable as most of the inhabitants are in retirement age. Most of the owners of small family hotels in rural areas are people from the big cities who have left unemployed and who have returned to their roots, smartly using the possibilities of financial funds. For this reason among the local people there should be organized a announcing campaign about the advantages of the development of alternative tourism. As young people can very flexibly take advantage of the favorable tendencies in tourism for returning tourists in ecologically clean destinations, they should be stimulated to return to the attractive villages.

The need of specific education in the field of tourism is in the first place. An example for this may be the developed and offered by the university “George Washington”, USA program for education in “*Running of the destinations for ecotourism*”. Some of the disciplines of the types of alternative tourism are successfully applied and taught by the subject “Tourism” of the University of Shumen “Bishop K. Preslavski”.

The enlargement of the additional kinds of services or new tourist products is an essential problem. Festival tourism is successfully developed in some villages. For example in the village Gela in the mountain Rodopi a festival for playing with pipes is organized every year and the greatest local attraction is the local folklore group with prizes from worldwide forums. In the village Trigrad (also in the mountain Rodopi) every year is organized a festival of ethno-music.

Very easy to organize are the so-called “work shop” (manufactures of art objects, related to local trades). For example in the village Ilindenci (on the flow of the river Struma) the local marble quarry is turned into an attraction, as camp for marble sculptures is implemented annually. During this time of the year an occupation of the material basis is observed in the villages of the west slopes of the mountain Pirin too.

Recently the disadvantage of informative insurance and presentation of the settlements for alternative tourism is overcome. There are information centers built and advertising web sites about many settlements, as well as a system for making on-line

reservations. A disadvantage is the lack of guiding signs (especially written in Roman alphabet) and good (detailed) maps of the visited places. We should not forget that most of the tourists are families using private transport and the accessibility of information is in first place. Another disadvantage is the lack of common Internet portal for advertisement of the entire alternative tourism in Bulgaria.

A definite difficulty is the bad transport access to the small villages, which offer tourist products. They are situated mainly round second and third class roads of the national road net, which is not well maintained. Local owners do not show any initiative for developing a profitable tourist itinerary. It is well known that bad access repels tourists.

The maintaining of the common infrastructure round tourist centers is a duty of the local authorities. It is necessary that these authorities and the local hotel keepers or travel agencies work together in order to create a common and quality tourist product. A positive example is the small village-reserve Brushlian, near to the Bulgarian-Turkish frontier. There the local inhabitants are 62 people, all in retirement age. The local mayor organizes the people on her own, applies with projects for restoration of the remarkable old houses and repairs of the infrastructure. She regenerates the local folklore ensemble, organizes additional attractions, such as rides on donkeys etc. The visitors are mostly foreigners who are resting in the summer on the south of the Bulgarian coast of Black Sea. These are tourists of the upper financial segment. There is also a positive influence over the slight lengthening of the summer tourist season in this area. As a common result, there may be expected an increase of the incomes of the local population. Up to now 40% of the incomes of the people are obtained from pensions. In many of the development of agriculture has been a major branch. From approximately 20% in 1998 it decreases to 12.5% of the Gross added value. Many of the people with a specific means of living in the field of the production of tobacco or pasture stock farming should get orientated towards other activities due to change of the market situation of the mentioned branches. Alternative tourism may be the only way of economic development of the low-developed areas. In the presence of small family hotels with nearly 15 beds at the price of 10-15 dollars each and nearly 40% occupation (for 2004 – 36.9%), a family should have incomes of approximately 4500 dollars per month. These are higher incomes than those in the big city are! Additional incomes are received by the registered burst during the last year of buying old houses in small authentic villages mostly by English people. This, however, is not a guarantee for development of this type of tourism, although there is a positive attitude towards improving the common infrastructure of the settlements.

4. CONCLUSION

The economic benefit of the organizing of alternative tourism in the low developed areas is brought to:

- increasing the price of the land;
- improvement of the area's technical and social infrastructure;
- diversifying the work of the labor power;
- additional incomes for the local population;
- protection and reproduction of the local environment;
- encouraging the local trades;
- increasing the interest of the local population towards improvement of the housing premises and rural land shafts;
- creating normal conditions for the stay of the tourists;
- minimizing the negative impact on the rural environment.

In order to achieve an economic effect it is necessary to improve the tourist infrastructure in direction of:

- means accommodation of the tourists;
- engineering infrastructure (lighting, heating, means of communication, transport net, water supply, etc.);

- improvement of the social infrastructure.

What is more to be done is:

- developing strategies of development of the alternative tourism to the municipal strategies for development of every municipality;
- total evaluation of the possibilities for development of this type of tourism for every settlement corresponding to the steady development of the areas;
- education of young cadres in the management of the alternative tourism as well as explanatory campaigns among the local population;
- constructing a common advertising strategy for popularizing the alternative tourism, including the Internet;

- major role of the local authorities in improvement the infrastructure;

- developing a catalogue about the connection between the folklore areas, the local areas, the architectural styles, the major trades, the natural factors and the development of a determined type of alternative tourism for every area;

- the initiative of the mayors – participation with programs on SAPARD, UNDP, ARD, operational programs of EU etc;

These regions are always in crisis. during the financial crisis should be implemented quickly all the measures. Even faster than other regions in the country, to be more competitive after the crisis and development

REFERENCES

- [1] **Alexieva, S.** (2003), *Specializirani vidove turizam*, St. Zagora.
- [2] **Alexieva, S.** (2005), *Specializirani vidove turizam*. Selski turizam, Kota, St. Zagora.
- [3] **Djanabetska, K.** (2003), *Predizvikatelstva pred balgarskia ekoturizam*//Balgarski prehod, VTU, Veliko Tarnovo.
- [4] **Dogramajieva, E.** (2003), *Koncepcia za ustoychivo turistichsko razvitie v obshtinite Teteven, Trojan i Aprilici* (avtoreferat).
- [5] **Donchev, D., Penerliev, M.** (2009). *Geografia na turizma na Balgaria*, VTU, Veliko Tarnovo.
- [6] **Penerliev, M.** (2004), *Ekoturizmat – sashtnost, osobenosti i razvitie*//Prirodni nauki, 2004, Shumenski universitet;
- [7] **Popjordanov, L., Stojanov, L. Genova** (2003), *Narachnik – alternative turizam v Balgaria – perspektiven semen biznes*, Sofia.
- [8] *** (2010), *Statisticheski spravochnik*, NSI, Sofia.
- [9] *** (2009), *Selski turizam* (sbornik statii pod red. na Milen Penerliev), Faber, V. Tarnovo.
- [10] *** (2003), *Balgaria i ekoturizmat – obsht pregled* Proekt za Nacionalna strategija za ekoturizam.