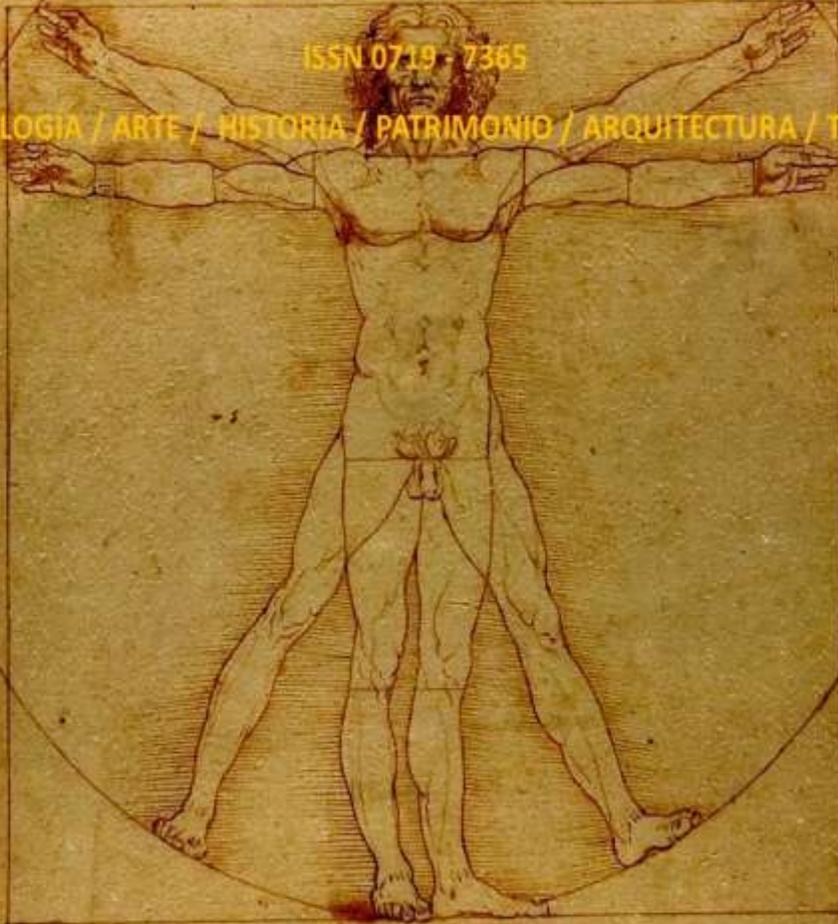


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ECOTOURISM: A GOLDEN MINE FOR BULGARIAN TOURISM

ECOTURISMO: UNA MINA DE ORO PARA EL TURISMO BÚLGARO

Ph. D. Lyubov Ivanova

South-West University “Neofit Rilski”, Bulgaria
lubovivanov@abv.bg

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Abstract

The ecological tourism helps not only to solve the environmental problems typical of a given area or region, but also requires the necessary social activities to preserve the natural environment and everything it offers the people. That is why this kind of tourism reveals new opportunities for the tourist development of the regions. The idea of this report is to prove, on the basis of a number of definitions for ecotourism and the conditions available in Bulgaria, that in our country, this type of tourism can be maximized and as a result to get a product of high quality and minimal harmful effects on the environment. One of the tools for its development is the ecotour and its planning and development. Ecotourism can bring many benefits to municipalities that have the conditions for its development if the skillful exploitation of the natural resources is used properly, as well as the local resources, the costs are properly controlled and the revenue is appropriately distributed.

Keywords

Ecological tourism – Destination – Ecotourist – Ecotour

Resumen

El turismo ecológico ayuda no solo a resolver los problemas ambientales típicos de un área o región determinada, sino que también requiere las actividades sociales necesarias para preservar el entorno natural y todo lo que ofrece a las personas. Es por eso que éste tipo de turismo revela nuevas oportunidades para el desarrollo turístico de las regiones. La idea de éste informe es probar, sobre la base de una serie de definiciones para el ecoturismo y las condiciones disponibles en Bulgaria, que en nuestro país se puede maximizar este tipo de turismo y, como resultado, obtener un producto de alta calidad. Efectos nocivos mínimos sobre el medio ambiente. Una de las herramientas para su desarrollo es el ecotur y su planificación y desarrollo.

Palabras Claves

Ecoturismo – Destino – Ecoturista – Ecotur

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The ecotourism is a form of natural tourism that has emerged as an alternative to traditional tourism or is also referred to as "mass tourism", often having a predatory impact on the communities in which it develops. It plays an important role being at the heart of the sustainable development of nations. The aim of this type of tourism is the desire to preserve the natural resources in the present so that future generations have the opportunity to benefit from them while promoting the social, cultural and economic growth of the local population.¹ With its recent entry into the new century, humanity has plunged into the active process of scientific and technological development in an effort to improve its quality of life. This, among other things, has allowed to reduce distances, reducing the time required to move from one place to another, establishing norms for communication, regardless of distance and location, treatment of old and new diseases, improving the production and the quality of food, and providing a number of other tourist services. As a consequence of the gradual process of environmental education and awareness, the environmental issue is set as one of the issues that poses greater concern to the modern man, influencing the creation of new forms of contact and communication with the environment and greater awareness of the individual responsibility to public problems.

Man realizes that he is who exploits and pollutes the natural resources, causes deforestation, devastation, loss of the ice cover, the animal and the plant species. It is precisely the man with his actions that damages the very biodiversity that leads to climate change, global warming, destruction of the ozone layer, and must realize that this would change its attitude towards nature².

The ecotourism is a form of nature-friendly travel and visits to relatively natural landscapes in order to achieve pleasure and aesthetic enjoyment by nature (as well as any associated cultural heritage created in the present or in the past) that helps preserve the natural wealth. It has a low human or visitor impact and contributes to an active and beneficial socio-economic engagement of the local population.³

Ceballos-Lasscurain is cited by most authors and researchers involved in tourism as the first author to use the term "ecotourism". In 1988, he defined it as "a journey to relatively undisturbed or unpolluted places to study, inspiration and enjoyment of nature and its wild plants and animals, and of existing cultural events (past and present)".

According to the American Ecotourism Society, "Ecotourism is tourism in areas undisturbed by human beings that contribute to preserving nature and the well-being of the local population".⁴ The International Ecotourism Association (IES) is one of the first, which states: "Ecotourism is a responsible trip to nature, which protects the environment and contributes to the well-being of local people"⁵. At the same time attempt to refine the content of the term ecotourism is the definition given by the Canadian Environmental Observatory (CEAS): " Ecotourism is an educational journey and recreation in a natural environment that helps protect ecosystems, as well as a responsible attitude to social and cultural integrity of the local community"⁶.

¹ ¿Qué es el Ecoturismo y qué tipos de actividades de Ecoturismo se pueden realizar?

<https://www.entornoturistico.com> › Escuela de Turismo

² <https://www.entornoturistico.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Turismo-Alternativo-una-nueva-forma-de-hacer-turismo.pdf>

³ IUCN definition, 2008, <https://www.iucn.org/theme/protected-areas/about>

⁴ American Ecotourism Society. 1985, <https://search.informit.com.au/documentSummary;dn>

⁵ The International Ecotourism Association (IES) is one of the first. 1991, <https://ecotourism.org/>

⁶ Canadian Environmental Observatory (CEAS). 1991.

The ecotourism is a relatively young sector. On the issue of the ecotourism there has been written a lot in the last 15 years, since the Bulgarians realized that the country is a blessing ground for development in every branch of tourism. There are wonderful opportunities for its development because of the natural natural features of the country. The fundamentals for development is present, but what are the roots and the quality of the tourist product. There are beautiful national parks and other types of protected areas that have been functioning for more than half a century, a rich and varied nature, water reserves, mountains still rich in game and healing vegetation, areas with well preserved crafts and traditions.

The International /currently the World Union/ for Conservation of Nature formulated the ecotourism as: "travel and visitation, environmentally responsible, to relatively intact / unknown natural areas, with the aim of pleasure and perception of nature / and any accompanying cultural features - both past and present / that supports conservation, the visitors have low negative impact and which provides for beneficially active socio-economic development of the local population / society"⁷.

The Bulgarian Association for Rural and Ecological Tourism, offers the following definition of ecotourism: "a two-way trip to places and areas with preserved and attractive nature, and visits to objects in them for emotional, informational and cultural enrichment, and strengthening of health, observing measures, and actively participation in conservation activities and, eventually, cultural heritage, and in ensuring socio-economic well-being, and strengthening the identity of local communities"⁸.

The Bulgarian Association for Rural and Ecological Tourism, offers the following definition of ecotourism: "a two-way trip to places and areas with preserved and attractive nature, and visits to objects in them for emotional, informational and cultural enrichment, and strengthening of health, observing measures, and actively participation in conservation activities and, eventually, cultural heritage, and in ensuring socio-economic well-being, and strengthening the identity of local communities"⁹. The motto of this organization is:

Figure 1: The motto of BASET

Biodiversity – Bioraznoobrazie
Authenticity - Avtentichnost
Calm - Spokoistvie
Ethnography – Etnografia
Tradition - Tradicia¹⁰

It is clear from the different definitions given for ecotourism that its development is based mainly on natural assets, but its constituent elements are the culture and the history of the individual regions or settlements. The third element is the nature, which with its beauty and purity is the main attraction for tourists.

⁷ IUCN, today WUCN, 1996, https://www.iucn.org/.../en_iucn__glossary_definitions

⁸ BASET, Tseli i zadachi, <http://www.baret-bg.org/>

⁹ BASET, Tseli i zadachi...

¹⁰ The English translation of the missions in the motto coincides with the Bulgarian one, <http://www.baret-bg.org/>

According to the Ordinance N 14 of 2003, the Ministry of Agriculture and Food and the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works, as rural areas, there have been defined the territories of 232 out of 265 municipalities in the country¹¹. The criteria according to which they were awarded are the following:

- Population number (in absolute value or relative share);
- Population density;
- Intensity of daily work trips;
- Share of agriculture (employed or as added value).¹²

The preservation and development of local crafts, traditions and culture is directly related to the development of visitor flow and the ecotourism in Bulgaria. On one hand, they are part of the complex ecotourism product and contribute to raising the interest in the region. On the other hand, the increased visitor flow and especially the realized additional income in the conditions of high unemployment, motivate and stimulate the local people. Direct and indirect benefits for local communities have been identified by the preservation and development of local crafts, traditions and culture in the following areas: revival and preservation of local life and cultural identity, creation of alternative livelihood and additional income, initiation and support of new local cultural forms. Good examples in terms of supporting the restoration and preservation of local traditional customs and festivals are the ritual of the fire-dancing preserved in an authentic Bulgarian style and the traditional annual meeting of the Karakachans in the "Karandila" area; Revival of the customs of Palikos, Zagoveznii, Babin day, Kukeri, Lazarovden, Enyovden¹³, etc.; recreation of local legends and myths – the village of Cherven, Aladzha monastery, Sliven (a town in South Bulgaria). In this way, it contributes to the restoration of the local amateur art, as well as the revival, preservation and development of some local crafts - coopership, weaving, basketry, cutlery, etc. This, in turn, leads to the creation of alternative livelihoods and the generation of additional income for the directly employed people in their realization - masters, participants in folklore groups, etc. Souvenir centers, which, despite the still insufficient tourist flow, are a factor in gaining support and involving local people. A popular form over the past few years has been the celebration of various holidays related to nature and its conservation - Forest Week¹⁴, Water and Earth Days, Challenge Week, etc. In Bulgaria this type of tourism has been developed as a family business. This advantage affects the demographic image of the small settlements as it gives the local population a chance to prevent depopulation and to improve the economic situation of the populated population. In recent years, the term ecotourism has widespread in our daily life, and is well-suited when it comes to tourist activity in a very slightly altered or almost unchanging nature¹⁵. The 2013 tourist map of Bulgaria includes 9 tourist areas, each of which has its own city center of management: /See fig.1 /. Danube area (with Ruse city center), Rila-Pirin area (Blagoevgrad), Rose Valley area (Rose Valley) (Kazanlak), Rodopi (Smolyan), Northern Black Sea Coast (Varna), Sofia Region (Sofia), Stara Planina (Veliko Tarnovo), Thrace region (Plovdiv), Southern Black Sea Coast (Bourgas). The areas are not large in size but are visible on the map of Bulgaria. The aim of this zoning is to form a regional tourist product, respectively in those of the regions, in which there are conditions to

¹¹ Naredba N 14 na Ministerstvoto na zemedeliето I hranite, 2003, http://geoproblems.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/2018_12/3_georgieva.pdf

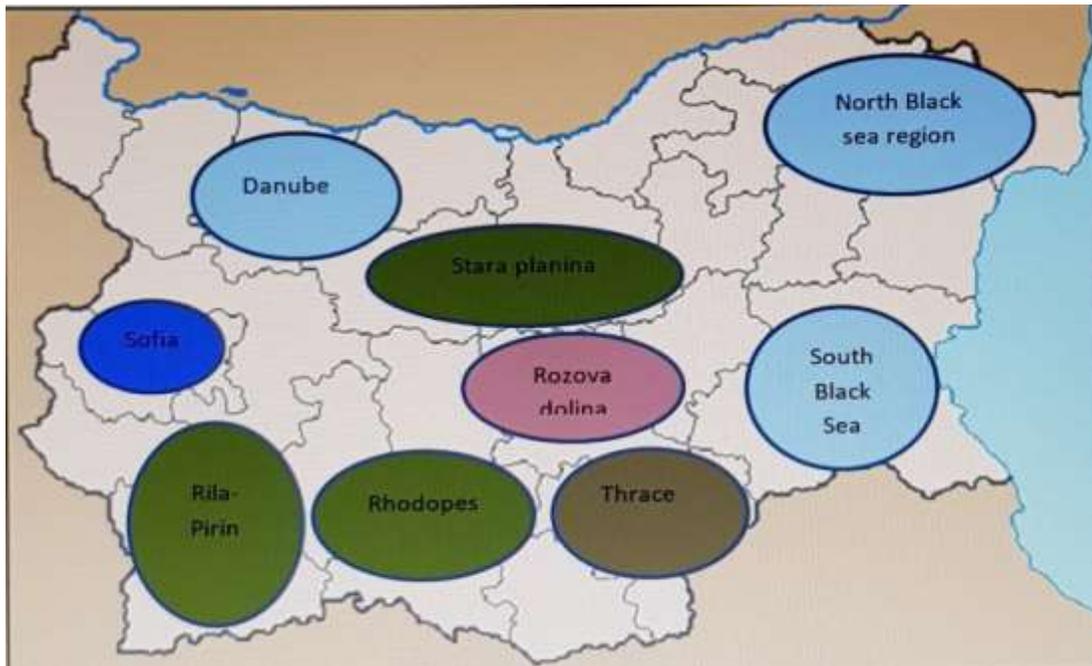
¹² S. Georgieva, Problems of Geography, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. Sofia 2018. p.38

¹³ <https://www.justlanded.com/english/Bulgaria/Bulgaria-Guide/Culture/Curious-Bulgarian-traditions>

¹⁴ Ninety time to celebrate Bulgarian Forest Week, http://aog-bg.org/?page_id

¹⁵ P. Petrov, Tipologiya na selskiya turizum v Bulgaria spored haraktera na turisticheskite produkti. Konferenciya. Veliko Turnovo. 2009.

develop mountain and ecotourism, to form a regional product of ecotourism. Better interaction with local authorities and better advertising would make it easier for these areas their exit to the external tourism market¹⁶. The regions are differentiated according to the services they will offer, being divided into basic and extended specialization.¹⁷ In each of them there are opportunities for development of eco, adventure, health and rural tourism, due to the climatic and relief features and, according to the characteristics of the natural environment. An extremely rich biodiversity. By biodiversity, Bulgaria ranks second in Europe. Plants count over 12,360 species. There are 27,000 species of invertebrate fauna in Bulgaria, and more than 750 species of vertebrates. There are European, Euro-Siberian and Mediterranean species in the country, and many relic species are found in the Mediterranean climate. In addition, on the territory of Bulgaria there are 1767 natural protected sites and facilities of a total of 2234 natural sites - caves, lakes, dams, waterfalls, parks, reserves, panoramic playgrounds, protected trees, bays, eco-villages, canyons, lifts. A total of 221 routes and eco paths operate on its` territory.¹⁸



Source: Author`s product

Legend:

- Sea region
- Mountain region
- Valley region
- Low lands
- Urban region

Figure 1
The nine tourism regions in Bulgaria

¹⁶ Parvomainet, Разделят България на 9 туристически региона. 20.07.2014, <http://www.parvomai.net/index.php/news/162554/Razdelyat-Balgariya-na-9-turisticheski-regiona>

¹⁷ Parvomainet, Разделят България на 9 туристически региона, 20.07.2014, <http://www.parvomai.net/index.php/news/162554/Razdelyat-Balgariya-na-9-turisticheski-regiona>

¹⁸ Оpozнай.bg, Маршрути и екопътеки в цяла България, https://opoznai.bg/sort:popular_month/marshruti-i-ekopateki

Bulgaria has developed a National Ecotourism Development Action Plan (NEAP). It stems from the National Ecotourism Development Strategy. The plan is an operational document for a five-year period and defines the groups of recommended actions within the four strategic objectives. The NEAP is based on the ecotourism development action plans in 12 potential ecotourism destinations in Bulgaria. On this basis the following 12 ecotourist destinations are defined: Southwest; Western Rhodopes; Eastern Rhodopes; Strandja, Eastern Thrace and Southern Black Sea coast; Eastern Stara Planina; Central Balkan National Park, South; Ecotourism destination Vitosha, North Rila; Western border; Western Old Mountain; Central Balkan National Park, north; Northern Black Sea coast and Dobrudja; the Danube wetlands.¹⁹ For each ecotourism destination an action plan was created based on the priorities of the national ecological network, but tailored to reflect local vision, needs and resources.

Unfortunately, the misuse of ecotourism exists, but the validity of a destination can be assessed from the point of view of the tourists. The assessment can be influenced by several factors, considered to be the of the ecotourism features:

- to preserve the local cultural and biodiversity,
- to promote sustainable use of resources, and support the local economies through employment and local services.
- empowering the local community through shared participation in the government,
- the cultural and the environmental awareness and the minimal impact of the tourism activities on the local natural resources.

Ecotour

The ecological tourism helps not only to solve environmental problems typical of a given area or region, but requires the necessary social activities to preserve the natural environment and all that it offers us. That is why it reveals new opportunities for the tourist development of the regions. The idea of this report is to prove, on the basis of the number of definitions and the conditions available to our country, that in Bulgaria this type of tourism can be maximized and result into a product of high quality and minimal environmental impact.

One of the tools for its development and conservation is the development of *ecotours*. It can bring many benefits for the municipalities that have the conditions for its development, if the natural resources are skillfully exploited, the resources are properly used, and the costs are properly controlled and the revenue appropriately distributed.

Ecotours are distinct from the ordinary tours, mostly due to the specifics of the trip. Tourists should pay attention to appropriate clothing, to the behavior in the natural environment, as well as to the environment of the local population. As in the ordinary tour, a guide is needed, but this guide, apart from providing information on local culture during the trip, must be experienced, to warn and advise tourists in various situations and to be in appropriate equipment. /See fig.2/

¹⁹ Екотуризъм - уникален шанс за България, Екотуризмът – уникален шанс за България. www.gorabg-magazine.info

Characteristics of A Good Ecotour

- Provides information prior to the trip on the culture and environments to be visited.
- Offers guidelines on appropriate dress and behavior in writing before departure and verbally during the tour.
- Offers in-depth briefing upon tourist's arrival of the destination's geographical, social and political characteristics, as well as its environmental, social and political challenges.
- Offers in-depth guiding throughout the trip with well-trained local guides.
- Offers the opportunity to meet and interact with local communities in a setting that is clearly not just a commercial venue for shopping or sales.
- Develops an understanding of both the local people's daily life and traditions, and the types of issues that are appropriate to discuss, well in advance of community interactions.
- Provides opportunity for contributions to local NGOs.
- Ensures that all park entry fees are paid in full.
- Offers site-sensitive accommodations.

Figure 2

Characteristics of the good ecotour.

Source: <http://hummingfish.org/cbet/what-is-an-ecotour/>

The variety of tourist products today is so great that even experienced tourists wonder what to choose for the next holiday. For example, the ecological tours or *ecotours* have become quite popular lately - these are eco-friendly hiking trails. It sounds beautiful, but many people do not understand how these tours differ from the usual routes to the picturesque places of the world. The main difference between eco-tours and the ordinary tourist routes is, that people, united in a tourist group seek not to rest, but to explore the natural and cultural environment and explore the possibilities for its protection. As a rule, the eco-tours objects are all the natural formations (caves, lakes, forests, unique landscapes) and the basic principle of travel is the minimal disturbance to the fragile ecological balance of the chosen ecosystem.

A major factor for these trips is the need for contact with wildlife and stay in a non-urban environment as a counterbalance to the modern urban lifestyles. In addition, the ecotour is not only a study of natural phenomena but also an analysis and respect to the socio-cultural environment of man. For example, studying the ethnic groups in the mountains of China or analyzing the writing of endangered African tribes, carried out directly in their villages, is also eco-tour. In addition, eco-tourism must take into account, as accurately as possible, the principles of respect to the nature. This does not mean that one can only travel on foot, the environmentally friendly means of transport such as bicycles, paragliders and non-powered boats are often used. The ecotours offer educational visits to various places on the planet at a high level. The attitude to ecotourism is a matter of human psychology. Accustomed to live in dust and turmoil in the large cities, tired of constant mobile conversations and computer work, people enjoy simple physical labor and give themselves a rest. And no business, successful companies, big bank accounts and villas on exotic islands can give the feeling of the unity with nature. Only the natural and pure world of nature can give the peace of the human soul and allow the person to feel the ecotourism within a few days²⁰. For the successful development of ecotourism, it is necessary to create appropriate conditions. It is necessary to improve the transport accessibility of the regions, to more actively promote the tourist sites and destinations and, most importantly, to change the attitudes of the tourists towards the

²⁰ Что такое экотур, http://mosintour.ru/chto_takoe_ekotur

nature. However, many experts are concerned that the development of the tourism is incompatible with the protection of the nature. But if reasonable approaches are found, this problem can be solved.

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