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ADVENTURE AS POTENTIAL FOR ENRICHED TOURIST OFFER IN PELAGONIJA REGION

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ABSTRACT

Tourism development depends on the use of the available attractors, factors and values they have. Therefore, it is especially important to use the natural and cultural values that in combination with other content and services are the basic elements for creation of different tourist products. Pelagonija region has good conditions for creation of attractive tourist products that can contribute to enriched tourist offer. Although some of them are already included, yet there is insufficient inclusion in the region's tourist offer.

The purpose of this paper is to present findings from conducted analysis of adventure and cultural potentials in Pelagonija related to the creation of competitive tourist products as important factors for increased tourism development. The design of the research is created to present the advantages of inclusion of adventure and culture in tourist products for the competitive tourist offer of the region as destination.

KEY WORDS: Adventure; Culture; Tourist offer, Tourist potentials; Pelagonija Region.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism development in specific region depends on attractive and receptive characteristics that possess the region, and particularly its natural and cultural values. Pelagonija region is characterized not only as the largest valley in N. Macedonia, but it is also a region that is positioned on the south part of the country extending towards the territory of Greece, as good basis for creation of combined tourism products with different elements. This region has significant urban and rural configuration which is in favor of tourism development. Dispersion of rural areas within the region is comprised of significant natural heritage abundant with recreational and attractive factors, which are comprised of different components that are high potential for creative tourist opportunities. Such complexity is basis for the development of active tourism with different adventure elements. In addition, the cultural heritage plays also important role for the region's tourism development as an attractive component through various forms of material and spiritual heritage.

Different studies that deal with analysis of the potentials for tourism in Pelagonija Region on regional and local level are consulted for the purpose of this research (Program for development of Pelagonija Planning Region 2015-2019 (2014); Study for developing Pelagonija Planning Region as destination for adventure tourism (2015); Register of the potentials for development of rural tourism in Pelagonija Planning Region (2017); Strategy for cultural development of Pelagonija Planning Region 2013-2016 (2013); LAG strategy for rural development –Pelagonija (2015-2020) (2015); Strategy for Local development of Municipality Bitola 2014-2018 (2014); Strategy for local economic development of Municipality Prilep 2014-2018 (2014); Local strategy for tourism development in Resen 2019-2024 (2018); Study for networking and promotion of monastery tourism on Baba Mountain (2011)). Within the Program for development of Pelagonija Planning Region 2015-2019 (2019) tourism is identified as potential for creation of attractive tourist offer of the region. The analysis of natural and cultural heritage in this programme includes systematization of the values with the potential for development of different types of tourism. The conducted research in the listed studies indicate that Pelagonija region has solid basis for development of tourism products that can be created and promoted on national and international tourist market.

Therefore the aim of this paper is to draw attention on Pelagonija Region as destination with high potential for sustainable development of adventure and

culture tourism. For that purpose, there is research on adventure and cultural potentials in the region conducted in relation to the creation of competitive tourist products for increased tourism development of Pelagonija.

ANALYSIS OF THE POTENTIALS FOR ADVENTURE TOURISM

Creating competitive tourist offer demands careful selection of potentials and their combination in attractive tourism products. Therefore tourism products should be based on proper selection of authentic natural and cultural values that will contribute to improve the content of tourist stay. In this way, diversity of offer that includes such values opens possibilities to valorize different adventure and cultural potentials for tourism.

Over the last period, tourism has seen continuous growth and increased diversification proving to be one of the most dynamic and fastest growing sectors in world economy, thus contributing to increased tourism consumption, diverse tourist offer and enriched tourist products. These trends indicate on the increasing of scope of activities and services in the tourist offer, that are related to the increased need for new experiences. Therefore, development of alternative forms of tourism with interesting and attractive contents is possibility for many destinations to promote their tourism potentials for which Pelagonija Region has excellent development opportunities. Adventure and cultural tourism are undoubtedly among those types of tourism.

The UN General Assembly declared 2017 as the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development recalling the potential of tourism and underlining the importance of the various alternative forms of tourism in the sustainability of this sector (UNWTO, 2017). Within the last years there is growing interest in adventure tourism not only by tourists, but also by the researchers. Yet, Adventure tourism is a large but little-studied sector (Buckley 2004). Although it is defined by various authors (Weaver, 1998; Fennell, 1999; Manning, 1999; Bentley et al., 2000, 2001a,b,c; Buckley, 2000, 2004a; Bentley and Page, 2001; Newsome et al., 2001; Page and Dowling, 2002) it understands tourist offer with products that include outdoor activities with guides and use of different sporting-recreational equipment, providing tourists with adventure and excitement. According to Nestoroska, (2012), with the presence of different natural and cultural values, tourism development should be base for the creation of competitive

tourist offer of Pelagonija region. Adventure tourism and cultural tourism are undoubtedly among those types of tourism

Tourism in Pelagonija region is on low level, presenting just around 7% of total number of tourist arrivals in N. Macedonia (State statistical office, 2020) with a total of 63549 arrivals. The region is on the third place in the country after the leading regions of South-West and Skopje. During last decade the region didn't mark any increase in the number of tourist arrivals which were the highest in 2011 with a total of 76.469 arrivals (63.549 tourist arrivals were achieved in 2017). But, Pelagonija Region, as the largest region of the country has visible potentials for tourism development, and in this context adventure tourism. In addition to this, the conducted Study for developing Pelagonija Planning Region as destination for adventure tourism (2015) identifies the potentials of the region, places and resources for adventure tourism that can be included in the offer. Additional advantage of Pelagonija is its position as cross-border region with Greece and Albania and contact region with the Southwest and Vardar Planning Region. That is very good basis for developing international cross-border tourism products for adventure tourism, and opportunity for creation of enriched offer for adventure tourism within this wider area of the territory of N. Macedonia. Currently, there is an ongoing project financed by the IPA Cross-Border Cooperation Program between Greece and N. Macedonia, led by the Center for Development of Pelagonija region with main activity to increase tourism opportunity through utilization of resources (CN1 – SO1.3 – SC026) and to develop cross-border tourism products with active adventure tourism content.

The analysis of potentials is upon the assessment of current situation of the characteristics and relations relevant for tourism development and have influence to the socio-economic development of the region. It encompasses the perception of the development through the parameters used as values.

In the last decade there has been a rapid increase in adventure tourism based on activities that are directly related to sports and adventure content, and are carried out in areas that have the potentials for active recreation of tourists.

Location	Activity
DemirHisar	Hiking, Sightseeing, Cycling
Krushevo	Balloon Flying, Hiking, Mountain Biking, paragliding and hang-gliding, Rock Climbing, Skiing & Snowboarding, Tandem Paragliding, Zip-line
Pelister; Baba, Nidze,	Mountain biking, Mountain Hiking, Jeep Safari, Rock-climbing, Skiing, Snowboarding, Snowmobile Ride, Zip Line
Prilep	Bouldering, Hiking
Galichica,	Mountain biking, Mountain Hiking, Jeep Safari, Mountain-

	climbing
Skochivir Gorge	Rock climbing - alpinism
Vitolishte	Rock climbing - alpinism, Caving
Prespa Lake (Ezerani; Golem Grad)	Bird-watching

Table 1. Potentials for adventure tourism

According to the identified potentials for active tourism in the Sub-strategy for development of active tourism in the Republic of N. Macedonia (2019), this region in relation to the other regions is a leader in adventure tourism, especially through paragliding, bouldering and kite activities in Krushevo and Prilep. On the other hand, the in-depth analysis of the aforementioned resources of documents implies that Pelagonija region has identified locations with potential for adventure tourism (Table 1). The identified locations have existing adventure tourism activities that are part of the tourist offer in this region, but still on the very beginning. The availability and potential of presented resources is crucial not only for the development of adventure tourism but also for the overall economic and social development in the future period. The role of this tourism has an important promotional function of the region as a tourist destination, especially internationally.

Since adventure tourism usually involves outdoor activities such as hiking, walking, bungee jumping, rock climbing, rafting, bouldering, canoeing, kayaking, canyons, mountain biking, diving, and more, the adventure potentials of Pelagonija should be used for creation of adventure tourist products.

POSSIBILITIES FOR ENRICHED TOURIST OFFER WITH ADVENTURE TOURIST PRODUCTS

Creation of tourist products is an important part of the tourist offer of Pelagonija region. They are the backbone of the region's tourism interaction and promotion. In essence, they contain a number of elements and components that constitute the products. The conducted analysis of current offer with adventure tourist products indicates that there is a lack of such products. Very few existing travel agencies in Pelagonija (2019), mostly "new on the market" offer tourist products that are specially designed as adventure tourist products, and those who offer are just adventure activities. Usually adventure

activities are in combination within cultural tourist products whose primary characteristic is cultural offer.

Accompanying elements to cultural tourism are always added, which enriches the content and manifestation of the tourist programs. As example can be listed a number of hybrid cultural tourist programs that are realized in the Pelagonija region, and which contain additional activities of different types of tourism, such as:

- a) adventure tourism, represented through activities as paragliding, hiking, walking and picnicking in nature, mountaineering, skiing, etc. Visits to national parks and nature parks are among the most popular tourist destinations.
- b) hunting and speleo-tourism, represented by hunting in hunting areas under concession (Mariovo), etc.
- c) other types of tourism according to the range of primary or secondary motives of the tourists, accordingly according to the content elements of the tour.

The Pelagonija region has good opportunities for enriching the tourist offer based on the combination of cultural-ethnological, natural and tourist predispositions which, combined with the relatively good price-to-service ratio, can be a successful way of tourist profiling and operation of the region. Opportunities will be used if investment is made in the tourist infrastructure (in the broadest sense, but mostly in the construction of accommodation and catering facilities, construction of highways), in connection with the other more developed tourist regions in the country and cross-border regions. From the sublimated observations and analysis during the research of the potentials for tourism of the Pelagonija region through the creation of tourism products for active tourism it can be concluded that the region lacks with diversity of such offer. This is the basis for a further research that may illustrate the identified zones for the development of adventure tourism in Pelagonija in an illustrative way.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of the potentials and possible tourist products in Pelagonija region was done on the basis of the selection of available sources that deal the issue of tourism development of the region. The availability of such potentials should be used in function of the development of tourism products for adventure tourism. The conclusion is that not only the natural resources form the basis for creating tourist products for adventure tourism, but also cultural ones are combined. In this way, a heterogeneous content of activities

and stay will be created, which will be a skillfully created compilation of attractions, activities and support services for the satisfaction of tourists.

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