



Original Contribution

TOURISM POLICY AND THE ROLE OF BRANCH REGIONAL AND LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS FOR DEVELOPING ALTERNATIVE TOURISM IN BULGARIA

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ABSTRACT

The role of branch, regional and local organization for developing alternative tourism in Bulgaria has been discussed and proved through the method of descriptive analysis of the objects under study. The aim of the article is each of the interviewed to identify the role, function and mission of the branch organization for expanding the tourist business in the respective area.

Reasons for positive impressions about the effects on environment are sustainable approach to tourism development and measures, taken for preservation of local heritage. The perceptions about the impact on culture are due to encouraging the preservation of cultural attractions, the positive effects in general, increase of the awareness about culture and use of local products. Explanatory reasons for effects on society are educational influence over the society, promotion of local commitment and diversification of farmer economy. The positive impressions about the effects on economy are result of rise in employment, financial investments and tourist flow has been increased. The effects on tourism are perceived as being positive because of sustainable development of tourism infrastructures, positive effects in general, rise in employment and improvement of areas' promotion.

Key words: Rural tourism, regional, local tourist organizations, facilitators and evaluation.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism was recognised as a priority sector in the Program of the Bulgarian Government of 1997 – 2001 and the National Economic Development Plan 2000 – 2006 (NEDP), (1). Tourism has also been defined as a priority sector in most of the District and Regional Development Plans elaborated in 1999 in reference to the Regional Development Law (RDL 1999) and the National Regional Development Plan (NRDP 1999), (2).

The Government Program 1997-2001, aimed at ensuring conditions for privatisation by introducing equate planning and management on regional and local levels. NEDP 2000-2006 expanded policy targets towards promoting specialised tourism (rural, cultural, Eco-, adventure, hunting, spa tourism, etc.), along with improving the quality of tourism products and infrastructures, supported by

better marketing campaigns and new communication technologies (3). Tourism legislation requirements were developed in compliance with the European.

The policy of tourism is towards:

- Increase of tourism share in GDP and state budget; encourage development of tourism-related branches and regions; improve distribution of labour resources.
- Preservation and recreation of natural resources, protection and promotion of historic and cultural heritage, development of high responsibility to the management and utilisation of tourist resources of Bulgaria.
- Development of destination tourist information centres and set up of councils of tourism to help tourism initiatives.
- Integration with the European tourist structures, participation in European tourist information centres and international computer networks.

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- To offer a variety of tourist products via motivating the agencies involved with cultural, ecological, rural, hunting, touring and other types of tourism.
- To modify the offered tourist products according to the actual potential and location of resources.
- To offer new tourist services and attractions associated with the Bulgarian traditions and lifestyle.
- To introduce mandatory classification and licenses for tourist activities and tourist sites in order to raise the standard of the tourist products and bring it closer to the international standards.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Representatives of all the studied areas (28 altogether) were interviewed, most of them operating on a regional and local level and with a public designation (4,7). They have been involved in tourism in the last five - seven years.

Through the questionnaire each of the interviewed identifies the role of the organization, so that it becomes clear in which tourism area it's acting, what are it's basic functions and missions and what is their involvement with tourism in rural areas.

The organisations got involved in tourism in the rural areas due to different reasons and probably had various expectations in respect of eventual results. Each of them made an assessment of collaboration outcomes according to the level of importance. As they had different aims, normally their perceptions of the results are different as obvious from the way they rank them.

PRESENTATION OF THE RESULTS

3.1. Establishment and functions of the branch, regional and local tourist organizations

Bulgarian Association of Tourist Agencies /BATA/

Branch Tourist Organizations

BATA was established in 1992. Members in it are over 200 companies of proven professional experience in tour-operation activities, tourist agency and other activities relating directly or indirectly to tourism. A non-profit association, which represents, assists, and protects the interests of its members. It takes part in the work of international tourist organisations, co-

ordinates and encourages the participation by its members in national and international events. BATA is a member of UFTAA - the World Federation of the Associations of Tourist Agents, of the Russian RATA, of the American ASTA, of the Portuguese APAVT, of the Japanese JATA, of the Black Sea Tourism Co-operation (BSTC).

Bulgarian Tourist Chamber (BTC)

A non-profit Association established in 1990. The Chamber has commissions set up for consultations in hotelier ship, restaurateur ship, staff training, and economic problems of tourist companies.

Bulgarian Hotel and Restaurant Association

A non-profit Association, which organises, co-ordinates, and encourages the development of private hotelier ship and restaurateur ship in this country. It works out programmes on developing the activities of its members and popularises their achievements and capacities in Bulgaria and abroad. It monitors the observing of professional ethics, the principles of loyal competition between its members, and assists for raising their qualifications.

Bulgarian Association for Alternative Tourism (BAAT)

A non-profit Association, which assists the development of alternative types of tourism - rural, agrarian, Eco-, and mountain tourism; ornithology, religious, etc.

Bulgarian Association for Rural and Ecological Tourism (BARET)

A non-profit Association, whose tasks relate to the promotion of rural and ecological tourism, developing the tourist supplies in towns and regions of preserved natural-and-ecological fund, etc.

The National Tourism Board occupies the central position within the institutional framework of Bulgarian tourism policy. It is a consultative body to the Ministry of Economics in which national government, local authorities, tourism organisations of destinations as well as branch organisations participate. Its functions could be grouped in three distinct spheres of activity: concordance of public and private interests and visions for tourism development; co-ordination among tourism and other sector policies; responsibilities concerning marketing of tourism product in a wide sense (through

development of grading criteria, distribution of financial funds for national marketing and advertising, etc.).

The new institutional framework of Bulgarian tourism policy is an important instrument for implementation of policy for sustainable tourism development in Bulgaria. Still there are serious shortages in mechanisms for applying sustainable tourism development principles. It should be considered not as a constant structure.

Local and Regional Tourist Organisations

Regional Tourist Organisations - Pirin Tourism Forum, Bourgas Regional Tourist Association, "Stara Planina" Association, Varna Tourist Chamber.

Local Tourist Organisations - Tourism Board - Smolyan, Tourism Board - Veliko Turnovo, Tourism Board - Kazanlak, Tourism Board - Plovdiv.

Tourism information and reservation centers

- provide reservation assistance and information about the town and region where they are located. They can also organize trips and training in crafts, folk dancing, riding, and show you maps of the hiking tracks.

The non-profit organisations in Bulgaria working in tourism area, uniting companies and organisations of the respective levels interested in the development of rural tourism. Their activities are focused on marketing and advertising, IT servicing of tourists (through tourist information centres), development and implementation of programmes on the development of tourism, monitoring of demand and supply, development of tourist products and training in tourism.

Municipal Administrations

The Tourism Law envisages that municipal administrations have the status of the basic institutions for the development of tourism on a local level.

Developments of tourism initiatives in rural areas are connected with environmental projects or programs. There are some examples of development of rural areas on the basis of tourism, implementing sustainability (municipality of Ivanovo – Rouse district 1999, activities in the Balkan region, etc.). In the strategy of these municipalities tourism is shaped under the umbrella of Agenda 21 for Travel and Tourism. This should be viewed however more as an attempt since it is to a

certain extent in the sphere of intentions than of real actions. The strategy was elaborated with the traditional expert approach without broader participation of local community and therefore, as a later study has shown, remained unknown to local actors. The specific actions foreseen were not oriented towards the local business, including its participation in implementation.

Main activities are dissemination of information, experience incl. seminars and conferences, elaboration of manuals for sustainable development planning and recently – the inclusion of Bulgaria (national level and four cities and towns) in the Global Urban Observatory. Although not oriented towards tourism the latter gives insights and information about specific features of urban development and problems in Bulgaria (5,6). The Capacity 21 programme promotes sustainable development both on national and local level and is quite successful (UNDP 2000 Partnership, participate planning and implementation of demonstration projects. From the year 2000 the programme emphasises on dissemination of results achieved and on partnerships between municipalities using 2 approaches – twinning agreements between the 2 pilot municipalities (Velingrad and Assenovgrad) and 2 other municipalities (Teteven and Svishtov) and establishment of a broader network for Local Agenda 21 initiatives. It also tries to work on regional level (elaboration of regional strategies for sustainable development in V. Turnovo and Lovech districts, which will be followed by demonstration projects). The work is also not tourism orientated but in many of the included municipalities tourism became main issue due to the existing conditions (e.g.Velingrad, Teteven, Veliko Turnovo).

Some local initiatives like Sustainable Cities, Cities of Health or Sustainable Communities, Beautiful Bulgaria (Veliko Turnovo, Plovdiv, Burgas, Kurdjali, Pazardjik, Belogradchik, Ruse etc.) contribute or are laying the base for initiatives related to tourism ensuring partnership between local authorities, NGOs, associations of the municipalities, business organisations and international programmes. Establishment of public forums as local community meetings at which representatives of various NGOs, civil groups, business, academic circles and media discuss local problems and make suggestions for their solution to local authorities contribute to development of individual

democratic practices and civil culture (Gabrovo, Sevlievo, Trojan, Teteven, Tryavna, Apriltsi, Svishtov). Separate sessions were devoted to tourism and different initiatives were discussed. In a broader aspect the main results of these initiatives are related to consolidation of civil society, change in people's way of thinking and encouragement of partnerships at all levels. Media campaigns raise community information and motivate social and business support to community beneficial activities.

Several success stories, such as the "Pirin Tourism Forum" (which involves various actors to promote successful tourism in the Pirin mountain region) and the Twinning of Municipalities initiative developed in the framework of establishing a broader network for Agenda 21 between the communities (such as the one between the pilot municipalities of Velingrad and Asenovgrad and two other municipalities – Teteven and Svishtov where tourism plays a key role in the local economies), or the new "Public Forums" used in the cities of Gabrovo, Sevlievo, Trojan, Teteven, Tryavna, Apriltsi, Svishtov where tourism initiatives are being discussed on a broad community scale involving various concerned parties.

National seminars and on-site training have been carried out in the sphere of cultural, ecological and country tourism for the representatives of the tourist industry, the executive authorities, the non-governmental organizations etc. with lecturers from the

World Organization of Tourism, the British know-how Fund, Israel, Spain, etc.

3.2. General view of facilitators

The respondent organizations are characterized by type of rural area on study, role in policy development and initiatives. There are representatives of all the studied areas lowland near and far, upland near and far. Most of the respondents (32%) are from lowland rural area. Up- and lowland near areas are represented by 21% each; the least is the upland far area (just 7%). About 18% stand for general level.

Half of the interviewed organizations are representatives of the local authorities, 32.1% - of the regional authority and only 3.6% are centers of tourism initiatives. Government policy in rural tourism development is presented by 14% of the questioned (**Table 1**).

Table 1 Level of organisation activity

Level of activity	Frequency	Valid %
Local authority	14	50.0
Regional authority	9	32.1
Center of Tourism initiatives	1	3.6
Other	4	14.3
Total	28	100.0

As the facilitators differ, it was important to identify the sphere of their work and their basic functions. The organizations listed their main activities, ranking the three considered as most important (**Table 2**).

Table 2 Mission statement

Mission	1 st		2 nd		3 rd	
	Frequency	Valid %	Frequency	Valid %	Frequency	Valid %
Education, training, entrepreneurial advice	1	3.6	-	-	1	3.6
Utilities supply/ infrastructures	8	28.6	1	3.6	-	-
Information	3	10.7	2	7.1	-	-
Develop sustainable tourism sector	6	21.4	8	28.6	-	-
Environmental protection	2	7.1	1	3.6	-	-
New businesses/ business growth	3	10.7	2	7.1	-	-
Prosperity of rural/ local community	3	10.7	4	14.3	-	-
Quality in tourism offer	1	3.6	2	7.1	3	10.7
Implement national policy	1	3.6	-	-	-	-
Environmental protection	-	-	-	-	2	7.1
Strategy development / planning / regulation	-	-	-	-	3	10.7
Answered	28	100.0	20	71.5	9	32.2
Total	28	100.0	28	100.0	28	100.0

Most of the respondents (28.6%) have stated the utility supply and infrastructure as their first mission, followed by development of sustainable tourism (21.4%). Quality in tourism offer, education and implementation of national policy are missions, declared equally by 3.6% of the respondents.

71.5% of the questioned have stated a second mission. The development of sustainable tourism sector has been mentioned as a second mission by most of the respondents (28.5%), followed by prosperity of rural communities as stated by (14.3%) of the questioned. Only few interviewed (32.8%) pointed out a third mission. The quality of tourism offer, the strategy development and planning are mentioned each in 10.7% of the cases and 7.1% state environmental protection

as their third mission.

The largest part of the organizations that have been examined are operating on a local level (46.4%), 35.7% act on regional and the smallest percentage are those on national level of operation (21.4%).

About 47% of the interviewed organizations have only one source of financing, mainly the national (78.6%) and regional (10.7%) budget (Table 3). 53% of the surveyed Organizations State second financing source most of which regional and local budgets (21.4 % each). Just 18% of the respondents have third financial resource, which come from EU funding, local budget or privatization deals.

Table 3 Funding sources

Type of funding	1 st funding resource		2 nd funding resource		3 rd funding resource	
	Frequency	Valid %	Frequency	Valid %	Frequency	Valid %
National budget	22	78.6	-	-	-	-
Regional budget	3	10.7	6	21.4	-	-
Local budget	2	7.1	6	21.4	1	3.6
EU funding	-	-	1	3.6	1	3.6
Privatization	-	-	-	-	1	3.6
Other	1	3.6	2	7.1	2	7.1
Answered	28	100.0	15	53.6	5	17.8
Total	28	100.0	28	100.0	28	100.0

Table 4 First main problem, the organizations face

Problem	1 st concept		2 nd concept	
	Frequency	Valid Percent	Frequency	Valid Percent
Unsteady/ low occupancy	3	10.7	-	-
Lack/ quality of infrastructures	4	14.3	2	7.1
Lack/ quality/ layout of tourism infrastructures	1	3.6	3	10.7
Lack of promotion & information	2	7.1	1	3.6
Size/ profitability of businesses	4	14.3	-	-
Awareness of area as tourist destination	1	3.6	-	-
Competence	1	3.6	-	-
Isolation/ remoteness	1	3.6	-	-
Lack of investment/ initiatives	2	7.1	-	-
Financial support	7	25.0	3	10.7
Lack of quality	1	3.6	-	-
Depopulation/ unfavourable conditions	1	3.6	-	-
Lack of association/ coordination & planning	-	-	1	3.6
Competence	-	-	1	3.6
Isolation/ remoteness	-	-	1	3.6
Lack/ quality of staff & professionalism	-	-	2	7.1
Answered	28	100.00	14	50.0
Total	28	100.0	14	100.0

As the organizations' activities differ, so do the results (Table 4). According to the respondents the main effects of their missions are business support (14.3%), prosperity, tourism sustainability and human resources

improvement (10.7% each). About 64% of the questioned access second effect of their mission and 29% point out three outcomes. Most of the respondents describe the effects as positive in general (42.8%). The interviewed

mentioned also the provision of legal framework (21.4%), improvement of human resources' skills and strategic planning actions (7.1% each) amongst the second group of results.

The lack of financial support has been mentioned as the first main problem by a quarter of the interviewed. Other problems are the lack of infrastructure and insufficient business profitability (each 14.3%). Problems related with the lack of association, coordination & planning, competence, isolation/ remoteness as well as lack of staff or its professionalism are ranked second.

The reaction of the organizations to the opportunities for tourism business in the areas

is given on Table 6. Most of the questioned. (21.4%) stated to take advantage through promotion of destinations and attractions within, 14.3% by preserving heritage and 10.7% by business planning. Specific programs are second, perceived as being a good way to take advantage of the main opportunities by 7.1% of all asked.

The organizations that have recognized that there exists an opportunity for tourism business which could be considered as crucial have different attitude towards it. Most of them (74.1%) take advantage of this opportunity, 14.8% state not to take advantage and 11.1% take advantage just partly.

Table 6 Ways to address main opportunity

Ways	1st concept		2nd concept	
	Frequency	Valid Percent	Frequency	Valid Percent
Access facilitation	1	3.6	-	-
Business planning	3	10.7	1	3.6
Promotion of destination/ attractions	6	21.4	-	-
Develop strategies	2	7.1	-	-
Promote local products	2	7.1	-	-
Increase awareness/ visits to the area	1	3.6	-	-
Develop quality promotional material	2	7.1	-	-
Promote joint marketing initiatives	2	7.1	-	-
Representation of area/ policy formulation	2	7.1	1	3.6
Preserve heritage	4	14.3	-	-
Advice on targeting and promotion	-	-	1	3.6
Funding facilitation	-	-	1	3.6
Specific program	-	-	2	7.1
Others	2	7.1	-	-
Answered	27	96.4	6	21.4
Total	28	100	28	100.0

Table 7 Actions taken to best profit the opportunity

Action taken	1st concept		2nd concept	
	Frequency	Valid Percent	Frequency	Valid Percent
Being proactive/ get involved in initiatives	1	3.6	1	3.6
Information management	3	10.7	-	-
Advertise local themes/ festivals/ events	3	10.7	-	-
Diversification	4	14.3	1	3.6
Taking advantage from facilitation	3	10.7	-	-
Offer supply	1	3.6	-	-
Packaging/ trails/ complete offer	1	3.6	-	-
Environmental preservation /Foot and mouth recovery plans	1	3.6	-	-
Selling products	3	10.7	-	-
Organization of business	1	3.6	-	-
Use promotional material	-	-	1	
Answered	21	75.0	3	10.7
Total	28	100	28	100

Various are the ways of the organisations to best profit the opportunities (Table7). Diversification (14.3%), information management and advertising, sale of local

3.3. Overall evaluation of activity in connection with tourism

The development of tourism and the resulting effects have been examined by questions concerning the various aspects of tourism influences. The respondents had to rank their perceptions on a seven-point scale, which would help the identification whether the impressions they have about the statements are positive or negative ones.

Regarding the impact on the environment, the highest percentage of the respondents considers the activities of their organisation rather positive since (70.4%) support the statement. Only (7.4%) turn to be unsure. Similar results have been obtained in respect of influences on culture. (63.0%) of the questioned denote positive attitude towards the statement, (18.5%) even quite positive, and (14.8%) don't have a well-define opinion about the case.

When examining the perceptions about

products and taking advantage of facilitation (10.7%) were mentioned as main ways of the organisation to profit best opportunity.

the effect on the society slightly more respondents denote doubtfulness and (26.9%) pointed out to be unsure. Yet the percentage of those who have positive impressions about these effects dominate and are equal to about (73%) on average. General impressions about influence on economy follow the same pattern of the results. The highest percentage stated to be quite positive (34.6%) while (19.2%) are not sure whether the organisation's activity are favourable. As tourism is in the scope of the research it was important to study respondents' opinion about how do the specific activities influence it. This influence is also viewed as rather agreeable since all the answers match the positive part of the scale and only (3.7%) seem unable to give opinion about the case. The last question concerns the effects on employment. The replies demonstrate positive attitude but (19.2%) answered not to be completely aware if organisation's activity are influencing the employment and in what way (**Table 8**).

Table 8 Effect of organization's activity

EFFECTS	1		2		3		4	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Effect on the environment	3	11.1	3	11.1	19	70.4	2	7.4
Effect on culture	1	3.7	5	18.5	17	63.0	4	14.8
Effect on society	2	7.7	6	23.1	11	42.3	7	26.9
Effect on economy	4	15.4	9	34.6	8	30.8	5	19.2
Effect on tourism	6	22.2	11	40.7	9	33.3	1	3.7
Effect on employment	5	19.2	4	15.4	12	46.2	5	19.2

Different reasons have been provided to back up respondents' opinions about the various effects of organizations' activities on different spheres related to tourism.

The respondents explain that their positive impressions about the effects on environment are due to the fact that a sustainable approach was established in respect to tourism development (16.7%) and measures were taken for preservation of local heritage (16.7%). But most of the respondents state that the agreeable impressions are consequence to the positive results of these effects (38.9%).

The perceptions about the impact on culture are due to various reasons that have been grouped. Most of the respondents stated

that they mostly appreciate that these activities are encouraging the preservation of cultural attractions and the positive effects in general. Others consider that after the organisations' practices there was an increase of the awareness about culture and think it led to the use of local products.

Only one respondent has mentioned "Development of respectful tourism" as a second reason for effect on culture.

Explanatory reasons for effects on society are various, too. High percentage of all questioned denote to estimate the educational influence over the society (15.8%), followed by those who think it enhances the promotion of local commitment and helps diversification of farmer economy,

stated equally by (10.5%). Yet most of the questioned (26.3%) are unable to provide reasons.

According to the respondents' answers, the positive impressions about the effects on economy are result of rise in employment, stated by more interviewed (36.4%), together with overall positive effects (22.7%). (18.2%) of the questioned stated that thanks to the specific activities financial investments have been done in the local areas and tourist flow

has been increased (13.6%).

The effects on tourism are perceived as being positive because the respondents think that the activities resulted in sustainable development of tourism infrastructures (26.3%), positive effects in general (21%), rise in employment (15.8%) and improvement of areas' promotion (15.8%). Other denoted reasons are money investments, increase in tourist flow, business effects and others.

Table 9 Reasons for effect on tourism

Reason	Frequency	Valid %
Employment	3	15.8
Bring people to the area	1	5.3
Bring money to the area	1	5.3
Business support	1	5.3
Promotion of area	3	15.8
Sustainable development	5	26.3
Positive effect	4	21.0
Other effects	1	5.3
Total:	19	100.0

Effects in employment resulted in increase in jobs offer (44.4%), other positive effects (27.8%). Business support was mentioned

hardly by (5.6%) of the questioned. Only one respondent has mentioned "Business support" as a second reason for effect on employment.

Table 10 Reasons for effect on employment

Reason	Frequency	Valid %
Create small number of jobs	3	16.7
Offer jobs	8	44.4
Business support	1	5.6
Positive effect	5	27.8
Minimal effects	1	5.6
Total:	18	100.0

CONCLUSION

Most of the organizations stated the utility supply and infrastructure, development of sustainable tourism, quality in tourism offer and education and implementation of national policy as their first mission. As second mission they stated prosperity of rural communities, the strategy development and planning and environmental protection.

Half of the interviewed organizations have sources of financing, mainly the national and regional/local budget. EU funding and privatization deals are the other finance sources.

Main problems for the organizations are lack of finances, lack of infrastructure and insufficient business profitability. Other problems are lack of association, coordination & planning, competence, isolation/remoteness as well as lack of staff or its

professionalism, as well as low occupancy rate and lack of investments.

The development of tourism and the resulting effects have been examined. Regarding the impact on the environment, 70% of the organizations consider the activities of their organizations rather positive. Similar are the results in respect of influences on culture. When examining the perceptions about the effect on the society, 73% of the respondents have positive impressions about it. General impressions about influence on economy follow the same pattern of the results. The last question concerns the effects on employment. The replies demonstrate positive attitude but (19.2%) answered not to be completely aware if organization's activity are influencing the employment and in what way.

Reasons for positive impressions about the effects on environment are sustainable

approach to tourism development and measures, taken for preservation of local heritage. The perceptions about the impact on culture are due to encouraging the preservation of cultural attractions, the positive effects in general, increase of the awareness about culture and use of local products. Explanatory reasons for effects on society are educational influence over the society, promotion of local commitment and diversification of farmer economy. The positive impressions about the effects on economy are result of rise in employment, financial investments and tourist flow has been increased. The effects on tourism are perceived as being positive because of sustainable development of tourism infrastructures, positive effects in general, rise in employment and improvement of areas' promotion. Others are money investments, increase in tourist flow, business effects and others. Effects in employment resulted in increase in jobs offer, other positive effects and business support.

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