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НЯКОИ ПРОБЛЕМИ И ОСОБЕНОСТИ В РАЗВИТИЕТО НА ЕКОЛОГИЧНИЯ ТУРИЗЪМ В БЪЛГАРИЯ

SOME PROBLEMS AND CHARACTERISTICS CONCERNING ECOTOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN BULGARIA

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Abstract: Bulgaria is one of the countries on the European continent, possessing rich biodiversity, including plant and animal species. Together with the existing network of protected and protection areas the biodiversity constitute a significant basis for ecotourism development. This paper ecotourism is treated as nature-based form of tourism. The emphasis is laid upon the fact that for the last several years the professionals working in this field interpret it as a tool for sustainable development. As a result the term "ecotourism" is used on the one hand as a definition, concerning the principle of sustainable development, while on the other hand it describes an individual tourism market segment. A comprehensive analysis is made investigating the evolution of the term ecotourism at global and local scale. Under observation are some of the existing problems concerning its development in Bulgaria.

Key words: ecotourism, sustainable development, biodiversity, protected areas, protection areas

Bulgaria is one of the countries on the European continent, possessing rich biodiversity, including plant and animal species. The character of the vegetation cover, its content, age, and level of anthropogenic impact represents an important prerequisite for tourism development. In morphobiological aspect the contemporary natural plants in Bulgaria constitute combination of tree, shrub-like, semi-shrubby and herbaceous biocoenosis (Velchev, 1997).¹

Tree forest biocoenosis are dominating, encompassing 3 348 000 ha which account for 86,5 % from the overall forest fund and

30,16 % of the territory of the country. Natural plants cover 2 295 000 ha, which is 59,3% of the forest fund. As a result from the mass forestation in the past forests of artificial origin are 1 032 100ha (26,7%).

Pinus mugo (tree or shrubby species) are subject to individual statistical reporting due to their conservation importance. They encompass 29 000 ha (0,5%) (Bozhinov, 1994)². According to the same author coniferous forests cover 1 070 000 ha, accounting for 33,33% of the timberland (without taking into consideration the species of *Pinus mugo*). The broad-leaved forest trees cover 710 500 ha (21,4%). There are a lot of low-productive and minor

¹ Velchev V.1997.Main characteristics and trends in the dissemination of contemporary vegetation In Geography of Bulgaria. Physical and Socio-economic geography Academic publishing house "Professor Marin Drinov", Sofia, p.264

² Bozhinov H.1994. Forest resources and their ecological functions At National strategy for biodiversity protection, Basic collection of papers Volume 2, Ministry of Environment and Water of Bulgaria, Sofia,p.264

plantations which have to be replaced by tree species of high productivity and quality wood. Their coverage is 608 100 ha (18,3%). Tiller plantations, that could become high-stem by the means of stored coppice cover an areas of 388 400 ha (11,9%). Low-stem plants, on the other hand, represented mainly by *Robinia pseudoacacia* occupy 3.5% of the timberland (without *Pinus mugo*), accounting for 117 000 ha.

The average age of forests is 42 years. The majority of plants belong to second age category (21-40 years) accounting for 31,9 % while the ones of first age category (up to 20 years) account for 30,6 %.

The largest share of forest tree biocoenosis is represented by *Fagus sylvatica*, *Quercus cerris*, *Quercus frainetto*, *Quercus dalechampii*, *Pinus silvestris*, *Picea abies*, *Abies alba*, *Pinus nigra* and etc. The evergreen sclerophyll species are limited, disseminated mainly along the rivers of Struma and Mesta.

Second most frequently met are herbaceous biocoenosis. The majority of them are represented by the species of *Dichanthium ischaemum*, *Crysopogon gryllus*, *Poa bulbosa*, *Nardus stricta* and etc. Typically met are also shrubby biocoenosis of *Paliurus spina-christi*, *Cotinus coggygia*, *Syringa vulgaris*, *Juniperus oxycedrus*, *Juniperus sibirica* and etc. Large areas are covered by the semi-shrubby species of *Satureja montana*, *Artemisia absinthum* and others.

Bulgarian higher plants are divided into 130 families and 872 genera comprising of approximately 3550 to 3750 species, 847 sub-species and 2000 varieties. Large number of them cover the areas up to the upper limit of vegetation zone (600 – 700 meters above the sea level), as well as the oak and yoke-elm subzone (from 700 to 1000 – 1300 m above the sea level) within the mesophyll deciduous forests. The most diverse vegetation is spread over the mountain region of Stara planina, followed by Rodophes, Ririn and Rila mountains, the karst regions in Kraishte, Osogovo mountain, Strandza mountain, along the

Struma valley, Thracian lowlands, Tundja hill region, the Black Sea coastline, Dobrudza and Danube valley. Up to 500m above the sea level in vertical direction are spread 2 246 species, from 500 to 1000m above sea-level – 2137 species; from 1000 up to 2 500m - 780 species and above 2500 m – only 144 permanent species. In terms of their biological groups plant species in the country are divided the following way:

- perennial species – 2 264;
- biennial species – 353;
- annual plants – 515.

The presence of a great number of perennials, the variety of ecological niches and phytoclimatic influence as well as the discrepancy in altitude represent prerequisites for the existence of diverse evolution mechanisms and natural selection. (Peev and others, 2004).

A distinctive characteristic of the Bulgarian biota, including contemporary natural vegetation represents their endemic and relict character.

Endemic plants comprise of **170 Bulgarian endemic species and 100 sub-species**, as well as **200 Balkan endemic species and sub-species**. Bulgarian endemits account for 4,9 % of the flora of the country, which in turn makes it a unique country within the European continent. If endemic sub-species are taken into consideration the above percentage increases significantly, reaching 8 %. According to Peev (2004) it would increase even more, if Balkan endemic species are added. Some of them have been formed within the territory of our country, in particular in the Rhodopes, Pirin and Slavianka mountain. During the quaternary period they have also been disseminated to other regions of the Balkan peninsula.

The spreading of Bulgarian endemic species and sub-species has been very irregular, related mainly with mountains. **Stara Planina mountain** is ranked first, reporting for over 90 Bulgarian endemic species and sub-species. Twenty of them represent local endemits. The next in the rank is **the Rhodopes mountains** where 80 species and sub-species are found and

16 of them are locals. **Pirin mountain** reports for over 70 species and subspecies, 30 of which are locals or **Pirin** endemits. 50 species and sub-species are found in **Rila mountain** and 10 of are not found anywhere else. **Vitosha mountain** reports for 25 species and subspecies; **Strandza** counts 12 species; **Sredna gora mountain** – 12 species; **Belasitza mountain** – 8 species; **Osogovo mountain** – 6 species and etc. Currently Bulgarian endemic species and sub-species living in the valleys and lowerland as well as in the foothills are relatively few. They occupy limited regions of lush shrubby and herbaceous vegetation. Probably, the latter have been widespread in the past, but due to the human activities their areas have been decreased dramatically.

Another essential feature of the contemporary natural vegetation in Bulgaria represents the presence of a great number of plants and plant biocoenosis of ancient origin, or the so-called relict species (tertiary as well as glacial species). A lot of higher plants belong to relict elements. Special attention is paid to species of tertiary age, which represent the oldest ones within the territory of our country. Relict species and biocoenosis are very important for the determination of the origin and development of the natural vegetation as well as for the strategy of their conservation (Velchev, 1997).¹

A typical characteristic of Bulgarian vegetation represents the wide-spreading of secondary (derivative) plant biocoenosis of diverse kind. Their formation is influenced at a large degree by the negative anthropogenic impact. Proofs, supporting that statement can be given with the deforestation of large areas in the country, especially in the foothill and low-mountain regions together with the wide

spread of derivative herbaceous and shrubby biocoenosis. This trend is evident mainly for sub-alpine area of the highest mountains in Bulgaria. At the same time the content and structure of large number of plant biocoenosis is seriously deteriorated. This process is very often accompanied by penetration of natural biocoenosis of ruderal and anthropophyte plants.

Bulgarian flora diversity represents important source for tourism development especially in terms of some alternative forms of tourism, including ecotourism, hunting and fishing tourism.

Despite the fact that Bulgarian fauna has not been subject to elaborate investigation and exploration work, there have been found about 29 000 animal species. It is believed that their real number counts to 56 000 species. Vertebrate animals account for 2,5 % of the Bulgarian fauna, comprising of 736 species. (Hubenov, 1996).

The fish fauna comprises of 207 species and sub-species. They belong to *Craniata* class, divided into *Agnatha* and *Cyclostomata* classes. The latter occupy the Bulgarian side of Danube river and some other rivers together with *Gnathostomata*, which consists of two classes.

The first class – sharks and devil-fish is represented by four species along the Bulgarian Black sea. The second class Bone fish is represented by the remaining fishes, including those that are in process of acclimatization. Bulgarian ichthyofauna is divided into two categories – ichthyocomplex of inland water basins (freshwater ichthyocomplex) and ichthyocomplex of the Bulgarian Black sea. The first one is represented by 122 species, living in the fresh- and brakish waters – rivers, lakes, swamps and artificial water basins, including the Bulgarian side of Danube river. The list of Bulgarian Black sea ichthyofauna is relevantly accurate, represented by species inhabiting temporarily, seasonally or throughout the year the Bulgarian seacoast. Here could be found 126 species, belonging to 46 families. Some of them are single representatives,

¹ Velchev V. 1997 Main characteristics and spread trends of the natural vegetation At "Geography of Bulgaria Physical and social-economic geography Academic publishing house "Professor Marin Drinov", Sofia, p.266

which in turn poses the problem of their real presence in our aquatory.

The geographic location of Bulgaria and the diverse relief are the main reasons for the large variety of its herpetofauna. Together with Greece, Turkey, Macedonia, Albania, France, Italy and Spain it takes one of the first places in Europe. At the same time due to natural fear, collection interests and lack of ecological awareness some of the amphibians are subject to extermination, including by large number of tourists, visiting the country. Until now within the territory of Bulgaria and its water basins there have been found 52 amphybians and reptiles, 48 of them being permanent inhabitants whereas two species of poisonous snakes are considered as being extincted. Other two species – sea and green turtles have been noticed episodically quite a long time ago. It is considered that the number of Bulgarian taxa together with the sub-species of herpetofauna reach 70.

For its Mediterranean location in the Western Palearctic region and the Balkan peninsula, Bulgaria has very interesting ornithofauna. It could be said that it has one of the richest biodiversity on the European continent in terms if its ornithofauna. The reasons for that could be found in the fact that it encompasses territories of four different biogeographical regions. It could happen rarely, taking into consideration the relevantly small territory of the country. (Michev, Iankov, 1994).

It is necessary to point out that the territory of Bulgaria accounts for only 1,06% of the whole European continent. The number of the bird species, found within the country is over 404 or 78% of the overall number of species, living on the continent, whose absolute number is 514. Other 12 species are not included in the European list. (Kostadinova, 1997). According to the same author about 5,1 % of the overall number of the bird species living on the planet could be found on the European continent. At the same time their percentage in Bulgaria is 3,8%, which makes the country very

important for the bird protection in Europe and on the planet. Furthermore, we could not ignore the fact, that Bulgaria is one of the six countries in Europe, where could be found the largest numbers of bird species of European importance (210 out of 287 species for the whole continent). The analysis, conducted so far reveals that 142 species (36%) of the Bulgarian ornithofauna are species of deteriorated nature scientific status, or 21 world endangered species. Two of the basic European migratory routes pass through the country – Via Pontika and Via Aristotelis.

Thanks to its geographic location and extraordinary natural conditions Bulgaria has a very rich fauna of mammals. Until now 97 species have been found in the country, including 32 bat species, 42 small mammals and 23 large mammals. Some of them include three synanthropic species – two rat species together with the domestic mouse, two allopartic species of “wild” domestic mouse – including the steppe mouse. Some of the species were introduced or self-spread over the country – such as *Ondatra zibethicus*, *Ovis aries ssp*, *Dama dama*, *Nyctereutes*, *Bison bonasus*.

The most valuable species of the Bulgarian biodiversity are subject to managed protection established through the network of protected areas and special protection areas under NATURA 2000. The protected areas in Bulgaria are proclaimed under the Law on protected areas (1998). They represent the most important sites in our country with a view to their biogeographical value.

In Bulgaria are proclaimed 3 National Parks with total area of 193 047,9 ha, including 42 270,7 ha reserve areas; 55 Reserves comprising of 77 124,05 ha; 11 Nature Parks encompassing 275 447,8 ha, 35 Managed reserves with area of 4 571,9 ha; 449 Protected localities comprising of 72 884,05 ha and 349 Natural landmarks which area is 18 175,41 ha. In total the protected areas in

Bulgaria encompass 641 251 ha, accounting for 0,57 % of the territory of the country.

NATURA 2000 represents an ecological network of protection areas. It represents an instrument of the European Community aimed at conservation of the habitats and animal species of Community importance. The elaboration of this ecological network is an obligation for each member-state of the European Union implemented in accordance with the **Bird Directive** and **Habitat Directive**.

The contribution of NATURA 2000 for the overall process of biodiversity conservation comprises the efforts of the latter to prevent the degradation, fragmentation and destruction of natural and semi-natural habitats, as well as habitats of rare and endangered animal species. The ecological network ensures a free geographical dissemination of species, genetic interchange and migration. Through NATURA 2000, the European Union participates in the establishment of EMERALD network, in conformity with the Bern convention, which encompasses the overall territory of Europe and some countries in Northern Africa.

The Bird directive was adopted on 02.04.1979 and came into force in 1981. It is intended to preserve the populations of the wild birds within the territory of the European Union together with the variety of habitats suitable for their conservation. For that reason special protection areas are established and the habitats within or outside their territory are managed. The other measures include creation of new biotopes and revival of violated ones. The rare, vulnerable and endangered species (the ones enlisted in Appendix 1 of this directive) and all migratory birds are subject to special natural scientific activities in terms of their habitats. This in turn requires the establishment of Special Protection Areas and undertaking measures, with the aim to prevent habitat pollution and deterioration.

Measures aimed at preservation of the nesting bets, wintering sites and migratory routes are needed for the protection of the migratory birds. Special attention has to be paid at the wetlands of international importance (**the Ramsar sites**). Similar actions are intended also for the migratory birds, which are not enlisted in Appendix 1. Special Protection Areas have to be established for the periods of their nesting and migration.

Directive 92/43 of the European Union for the Conservation of natural habitats and of wild flora and fauna was adopted on 25.05.1992. The member-states have the obligation to implement all necessary activities with the aim to transpose the directive requisites in their national legislations.. The main purpose of this international initiative is to assist for the conservation of the biodiversity recognizing the local economic, cultural and regional characteristics. It is considered that this directive contributes to the implementation of the concept for sustainable development.

The essence of the directive represents its part, concerning conservation of natural habitats of species. There are six supplementary appendices to the directive. The first one contains information on all natural habitats of Community interest, whose conservation requires an establishment of Special Conservation Areas.

Appendix 2 and Appendix 4 include lists of plant and animal species, whose protection requires creation of territories under special regime of protection.

Appendix 3 includes the selection criteria of these areas, which meet the requirements for special regime of protection. They are united in two sections – of national and of Community importance.

Appendix 6 contains information on the methods and tools for wild bird hunting and killing as well as the prohibited means of transportation.

Subject of protection in the scope of both directives are over 140 natural habitats and over 600 plant and animal species important for the Community. The member-

states, as well as the acceding countries have the obligation to determine the locations of their natural habitats together with the species subject to protection.

Bulgaria has adopted 114 zones for the protection of wild birds, covering 20.3 % of the country as well as 228 zones for the protection of natural habitats, which account for 29.5 % of the country. Their proclamation as protection zones is done with a decision of the Council of ministers. The total number of the protection zones under NATURA 2000 in the country up to date is 332, covering an area of 33.89% of its territory. Ten of all zones have common boundaries.

It must be taken into consideration that there is a big discrepancy between the existing protected areas in the country (1998) and the protection zones, designated under the Law on the protection of biodiversity (2002).

Despite the directive regulation on the establishment of the European ecological network NATURA 2000, designation of such zones (protection zones according to the national legislation of Bulgaria) in member-states is to be done on the basis of relevant scientific data as well as the information, included in Appendix 3 of the directive. (article 7 of the Law on the protection of biodiversity). The purpose of the network NATURA 2000 is not to create strict natural reserves, where any forms of human activities are prohibited. The emphasis is laid upon the ecological, economic and socially sustainable future management of these territories which complies with the conservation purposes of the protection zones. In lots of cases the existence or revival of traditional activities and ones, having positive influence is of essential importance for the preservation of the biodiversity, especially in agricultural regions and forestry enterprises.

It is obvious that the Bulgarian biodiversity together with the existing network of protected and protection

areas constitute a solid basis for ecotourism development.

Ecotourism is considered as nature - based tourism. For the last several years the professionals working in this field reckon it as a tool for sustainable development. As a result the term "ecotourism" is used on the one hand as a definition related to the principles of sustainable development, while on the other hand it describes a market segment.

Ceballos-Lasscurian (1988) is the first author, who has tried to define the term ecotourism. According to him it constitutes a tourism form "that involves traveling to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated areas with the specific objective of studying, admiring, and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals, as well as any existing cultural manifestations (both past and present) found in these areas." (Ceballos-Lasscurian, 1996)¹.

Since that time the term ecotourism has been subject to lots of scientific debates related to its meaning, extent and use. Despite the existing disagreements among authors there is a consensus about the basic structural elements of this tourism form, which include:

- Ecotourism is nature-oriented;
- It is educational;
- It is implemented within the scope of sustainable development;

The International Ecotourism Society has given the following definition several years later – ecotourism is "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people" (TIES, 1990).

Ecotourism combines the care of nature, local communities and integrates the concept for sustainable development. It means that this tourism form requires the following principles to be fulfilled:

- To minimize the negative impact upon nature;

¹ Ceballos-Lasscurian H., Tourism, Ekotourism and Protected Areas, IUCN, Gland, Sitzerland, 1996.p.20.

- To create eco-friendly awareness of people;
- To ensure positive experience for visitors and the host community alike;
- To generate revenues and increase employment rates for the local community;
- To create an attitude toward political, ecological and social climate at the host country;

Ecotourism is “a form of tourism inspired primarily by the natural history of an area, including its indigenous cultures. The ecotourist visits relatively undeveloped areas in the spirit of appreciation, participation and sensitivity. The ecotourist practices a non-consumptive use of wildlife and natural resources and contributes to the visited area through labour or financial means aimed at directly benefiting the conservation of the site and the economic well-being of the local residents. The visit should strengthen the ecotourist’s appreciation and dedication to conservation issues in general, and to the specific needs of the locals. **Ecotourism also implies a managed approach by the host country or region which commits itself to establishing and maintaining the sites with the participation of local residents, marketing them appropriately, enforcing regulations, and using the proceeds of the enterprise to fund the area’s land management as well as community development.** (Ziffer, 1989, cited by Fennell, 2003)¹.

Wallace and Pierce (1996, cited by Fennell, 2003)² consider that „ecotourism is travel to relatively undisturbed natural areas for study, enjoyment, or volunteer assistance. It is travel that concerns itself with the flora, fauna, geology, and ecosystems of an area, as well as the people (caretakers) who live nearby, their needs, their culture, and their relationship to the land. It views natural areas both as “home to all of us” in a global

sense (“eco” meaning home) but “home to nearby residents” specifically. It is envisioned as a tool for both conservation and sustainable development – especially in areas where local people are asked to forgo the consumptive use of resources for others.”

Goodwin (1996) defines it as “low impact nature tourism which contributes to the maintenance of species and habitats either directly through a contribution to conservation and/or indirectly by providing revenue to the local community sufficient for local people to value, and therefore protect, their wildlife heritage area as a source of income.”

The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN, 1996) also has tried to describe this tourism form. It defines ecotourism as “environmentally responsible travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas, in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features – both past and present) that promotes conservation, has low negative visitor impact, and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local populations.”

At the First National Forum “Ecotourism, Mountains and Protected areas – Partners in Prosperity” the Ministry of Environment and Waters and the Ministry of Economics, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry signed a summit report, which defines ecotourism the following way “The ministries accept the common understanding that ecotourism is travel to relatively undisturbed natural areas with the aim for visitors to see and enjoy the nature and all accompanying cultural landmarks. At the same time it enhances nature conservation and allows minimum level of human impact. They consider that ecotourism is an opportunity for development of all business-related services, implemented preliminary in local entrepreneurial initiatives, ensuring social and economic

¹ Fennell D., Ecotourism an introduction. Education 2. Oxon, UK., 2003, p.23

² Fennell D., Ecotourism an introduction. Education 2. Oxon, UK., 2003 p.23

activity of the local community and equal distribution of responsibilities and benefits. Ecotourism consists of important elements for the natural scientific education, interpretation of the natural and cultural heritage and moreover it complies with all forms of sustainable tourism.”

The accurate organization of ecotourism in terms of the principles, management directives and certification based on the sustainability standards set a special place within the tourism framework. It represents an integral part of a fast-developing market niche of the tourism industry. This means that there is a tendency toward dynamic growth of the prospective market of ecotourism products. Moreover, there exists an opportunity for Bulgaria to become a regional and European leader in this developing market as well as in rural tourism market niche (National strategy for ecotourism, 2004)¹.

Some attempts with the aim to define the term ecotourism have been done by the Directorate of Rila National Park, the Bulgarian Association for Alternative Tourism, The Bulgarian Association for Rural and Ecotourism, as well as a number of other authors.

The World Tourism Organization determines the activities in the scope of ecotourism in two levels:

I Nature based tourism. It is used in order to reveal “tourism forms, where the basic tourist motivation is the observation and aesthetic perceiving of nature”.

II Ecotourism is a term, used to describe a tourism form with the following characteristics:

1. All nature-based tourism forms, where the basic tourist motivation is the observation and aesthetic perceiving of nature, together with traditional cultural and natural territories.

2. It has an educational and interpretative character (concerning concrete perceiving and understanding).

3. It is usually organized (but not always) by specialized touroperators for small groups. The establishments, supplying services on site are usually small in scale.

4. It minimizes the negative impact upon the nature and socio-cultural environment;

5. It supports the maintenance of the natural areas, used as attractive ecotourism sites, through the means of:

- economic benefits for the accepting communities, specialized organizations and the authorities, managing the natural areas for the purposes of nature conservation;

- alternative employment and income-generating opportunities for the local communities; awareness for the conservation of the natural and cultural values among the local populations and tourists alike (Veretzi, 2002)².

According to Veretzi (2002) the preliminary investigation of the World Tourism Organization reveals that the use of the term “ecotourism” is still limited. Most tour operators avoid using the word “ecotourism” in their advertising brochures and specialized literature. Instead other terms are preferred such as sustainable, responsible, ethic tourism, although they do not have the same meaning and do not cover the same aspects. Travel, emphasizing on the sustainability and responsibility concerns the overall tourist industry, while ecotourism covers mainly excursions to natural areas possessing strong cultural characteristics.

Despite that fact, they do not use the term “ecotourism”. A number of tour operators include some of their elements and adopt them within their policy

¹ National strategy and Action plan for Ecotourism development in Bulgaria,. Sofia, Ministry of Environment and Waters, 2004, p.8

² Veretzi G, Resume of a research programme under the World Tourism Organization, investigating the ecotourism emitive market. First National Ecotourism Forum and Fair “Ecotourism, mountains and protected areas – Partners in Prosperity”, Sofia, Bulgaria, 2-5 October 2002., 2002 p.2-3

frameworks. Furthermore, their commitment differs throughout the world. Their activities vary from distribution of behavioral regulations to ecotourism manuals for travelers, grants, support for nature conservation and support intended for the local communities, joint programmes and partnerships (Veretzi, 2002).

It is obvious that ecotourism is one of the most preferable forms of alternative tourism. The latter is recognized as a reliable management tool for development in the world practice, which could be applied to national and local scale. It follows the recommendations, adopted during the International year of Ecotourism as well as the Quebec declaration 2000, the latter representing the main document of the high level world forum in the field of ecotourism.

This framework consists of four basic components:

- ecotourism and national policy planning;
- legislation and regulations;
- product development, marketing and advertising;
- monitoring costs and benefits of ecotourism

The assessment of the role and importance of this tourism form shows that it should hold a strong position in the Bulgarian national policy and planning in the future. The main strategic directions include environment, regional and local authorities, culture and agriculture. Furthermore this tourism form needs coordination and collaboration between the state institutions at national level and regional and local authorities. The implementation of strategic collaboration and partnership is of key importance that ensures integrative activities in the field of ecotourism, cultural tourism and other specialized tourism forms. They are all aimed at achieving synergetic tourist effects within the territories possessing cultural and nature heritage (**National programme and action plan for ecotourism development in Bulgaria 2009 – 2013**).

The same document points out that local authority involvement is of key

importance for the successful implementation of this tourism form. Except for that measures should be undertaken with the aim to strengthen its role as an income generator, influencing investments, taxation, infrastructure planning and development. The national investment policy also plays an important role as well as the financial support for the local authorities and rural residents.

Attention should be paid to the engagement of the urban sector in the overall management of ecotourism and the creation of favourable conditions for its development.

In order to ensure its further development there is a need of undertaking legislative measures, which in turn will lead to introduction and application of common standards for the establishment of specialized infrastructure necessary for the needs of ecotourism, common monitoring system of tourist flows and statistical accounting of tourists, who visit the regions for ecotourism purposes. Other measures include introduction and application of capacity rates of exploitation, permitted interference rate on the resources and the areas designated for ecotourism development, partnership among stakeholders, cultural and other specialized tourism forms. Ecotourism should supplement other tourist activities implemented within rural areas. It has to be an integral part of the responsibilities of the local authorities.

The most important tools for the successful implementation of ecotourism in Bulgaria represent the product development, marketing and advertising. These activities have to be implemented simultaneously by all stakeholders using the newest methods, including multimedia systems and Internet for dissemination of information and popularization of the Bulgarian natural and cultural heritage.

The basic approach ensuring the quality of tourist products and their marketing represents the process of certification. Certification systems, their standards and the scale of their application have to be

based on recognized European and international models, some of which could be applied to the Bulgarian reality (National programme and action plan for ecotourism development in Bulgaria 2009 – 2013). An emphasis is also laid upon the collaboration between the public and private sectors, supplementing the ecotourism strategy and policy. What is more, efforts should also be made with the aim to establish partnerships with public and private sectors, other mass tourism markets and entrepreneurs working for small market niches. This in turn requires coordination among the regional tourist markets and utilization of the resources within the framework of the local and national budget, in order for the country to consolidate its position and become a leading ecotourism destination on the global market.

Ecotourism development, on the other hand is related with different risks for the nature resources and especially for the biodiversity. Constraints for its further development represent megalomaniacal

ambitions of some tourism businesses aiming at establishment of new large-scale ski resorts in Pirin, Rila, Vitosha mountains as well as in Western and Central Rhodopes.

Unfortunately the deterioration of the natural resources, located along the Bulgarian Black sea coast has not stopped yet. Serious damages have been caused to a number of the protected and protection areas. This in turn has a negative impact on the opportunities for ecotourism development. For that reason there is a need of a permanent monitoring and assessment, providing information about the implementation of the target purposes, the level of impact on the natural, cultural and social settings, including the biodiversity conservation within and outside the territories of the protected and protection areas.

The vocational training of human resources in the field of alternative forms of tourism is also a question of key importance.

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