

EVALUATION OF RESOURCES FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN THE REGION OF TETEVEN MOUNTAINS THROUGH THE EXAMPLE OF RIBARITSA RESORT IN BULGARIA

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Abstract

The paper presents the results of an evaluation of tourist resources and opportunities of tourism development in the central region of the mountain of Stara planina which is among the most interesting places in Bulgaria providing excellent climate, remarkable nature and trained and motivated human resources for development of tourism and recreation activities in the region. Bearing in mind the importance of nature conservation activities in the region, development of sustainable forms of tourism will preserve environment (soil, water, biodiversity and landscape) but at the same time by offering specific tourist products and using market opportunities these will assure economic and social development of the region.

Key Words: Tourism, Resort, Tourism Potential, Factor Determining Tourism Potential

BULGARİSTAN'DA RIBARITSA RESORT ÖRNEĞİ DOĞRULTUSUNDA TETEVEN DAĞLARI BÖLGESİNDE SÜRDÜRÜLEBİLİR TURİZM KALKINMASI İÇİN KAYNAKLARIN DEĞERLENDİRİLMESİ

Özet

Bu çalışma; mükemmel iklimi, olağanüstü doğası, eğitilmiş ve motive insan kaynaklarıyla Bulgaristan'da en ilginç yerler arasında bulunan Stara planina dağı merkez bölgesinde turizmin ve dinlenme alanlarının gelişmesi için turizm kaynaklarının ve turizm gelişim fırsatlarının değerlendirilmesi sonuçlarını sunmaktadır. Bölgedeki doğa koruma faaliyetlerinin önemi göz önüne alınacak olursa sürdürülebilir turizm formlarının gelişimi çevreyi koruyacak (toprak, su, biyolojik çeşitlilik ve manzara) fakat aynı zamanda spesifik turistik ürünler ve pazar imkanlarını da sunarak bölgenin ekonomik ve sosyal kalkınmasını da sağlayacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Turizm, Tatil, Turizm Potansiyeli, Turizm Potansiyelini Belirleyen Faktörler

1. Introduction

Development of national economy in a sustainable way is a main goal in many strategic documents in the Republic of Bulgaria made on different levels, incl. some regional [7, 8] which are of specific importance for the investigation presented in this paper. Preliminary assessments of available resources are the key point in making strategies for the years ahead. All branches in national economy are a subject of seeking ways to develop sustainably but in last few years special attention is being paid to agriculture and tourism as the most appropriate to develop in the country and in relation to the opportunities they provide for overcoming uneven development of urban and rural regions.

Even though the relative economic importance of agriculture, fisheries, and forestry is declining in industrial countries, the importance of other ecosystem services such as aesthetic enjoyment and recreational options is growing (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2005).

Tourism impacts are influences that development and practicing of different types of tourism and tourist activities consciously or not exercise on environment – natural, economic or social. Tourism is a product of that environment but in its development tourism definitely exerts influence on it (Vodenska, 2002).

The essence of alternative types of tourism is above all presented by the clear demarcation of mass tourism. The “alternative” tourist strives after the closest contact with accepting environment (Velikov, 2003).

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Rural tourism could be an alternative form for development of economy in rural regions (Madjarova, 1998, Aleksieva and Stamov, 2003, Aleksieva and Stamov, 2005).

It provides unique opportunities for villages situated in mountain regions having traditions in agriculture and crafts (Malamova, 1999).

This paper presents an evaluation of resources for sustainable tourism development (the method used is described below) in the region of Teteven mountains through the example of Ribaritsa resort.

The village of Ribaritsa is the most southern and picturesque among the 13 settlements in the municipality of Teteven located at 600 meters altitude. The champion of Teteven Balkan stands above the village - the giant Vejen Peak (2198 meters) – the third highest in the mountain of Stara Planina. Ribaritsa is located 12 km southeast of Teteven Municipal Center, 91 km southwest of the district town of Lovech and 138 km northeast of the capital, and only 35 km separate it from the main transport artery for North Bulgaria – Hemus Highway. Ribaritsa village is in the proximity of the Central Balkan National Park [5].

Ribaritsa dates from 1920 as an independent village (information provided by the Municipality administration Teteven). Thracian and Roman settlers in the past have left many traces in the region of the village which in combination with the richness of historical events, monuments, monasteries, churches, etc. and cultural traditions make the region an interesting place to visit.

The climate is temperate – continental. Winters are relatively mild and the summer – cool. The average annual temperature is 8-10 degrees. The average annual rain fall is 700-800 mm. The village is located in a valley and it is surrounded by two mountains with peaks that keep it from bad weather. The highest concentration of oxygen in the country is reported here. Local people say that Ribaritsa is a factory of oxygen.

Summer vacations in Ribaritsa are highly recommended by medicine providing the positive influence of climate, vegetation, surrounding hills and mountains. Climate characteristics of the region – mild winter and cool summer, define it as a place suitable for recreation, particularly for lung diseases. In the Teteven mountains snow stays over 120 days per year which is a prerequisite for the development of skiing too.

Ribaritsa has abundant natural resources: 230 plant species found in the vast oak forests, fields of oak, hornbeam, acacia, wild cherry, lime, ash and sycamore in natural pastures.

31 of these species are listed in the Red Book of Bulgaria, among them is the yew (*Taxus*) habitat near Krastets. The region is generally characterized by enormous wealth of natural resources, conserved biodiversity, preserved old forests (over 170 years), endemic and relict species, many natural objects available. Among the most interesting places in the region caves and waterfalls should be mentioned too. Nature in the region of Ribaritsa is diverse, with unique flora and fauna. There are two objects of National ecological network of protected areas and buffer zones in the region. At the territory of municipality of Teteven two of the reserves of the Central Balkan National park - Boatin and Tsarichina are situated. Boatin is a mysterious kingdom of the beech (*Fagus*) – huge trees of venerable age, 170-200, and in Tsarichina one can enjoy a vast range of over 600 plant species, some of them listed in the Red Book of Bulgaria (information presented at the Biodiversity in the Central Balkans National Park Conference, 1999).

In 1936, when the population numbered 1722 inhabitants, the village was visited by 650 tourists. Thanks to the government policies Ribaritsa remained a resort rather than a municipal centre. Over 300 new houses and neat cottages were built between the years 1950 and 1960. Beautiful scenery helped Ribaritsa to become a top Balkan resort as it was declared in 1963 (Aleksieva, 2008).

Then the situation has changed. The great potential of the region was not used which on one hand has stopped its economic and social development but on the other – that preserved the nature. Now these resources can be used for sustainable tourism development as is shown through the investigation made and presented below.

2. Materials and Methods

Evaluation of resources for sustainable tourism development in the region of Teteven mountains through the example of Ribaritsa resort was made as follows using rating assessment methods (presented by Vodenska, 2002) widely used in the country for making quantitative assessments of a tourism potential of the regions:

-Study of the tourism potential of the region: the method recognizes 8 factors in tourism development: 1.1. Nature resources; 1.2. Cultural and social environment; 1.3. Terms of sport and recreation; 1.4. Terms of shopping and tourist sites; 1.5. Public infrastructure; 1.6. Attitude towards tourists; 1.7. Accessibility; 1.8. Existing tourism activities. The assessment is made according to the following scale: 0 –do not completely agree, 1 – do not agree, 2 – rather do not agree, 3 - rather agree, 4 – agree, 5 – completely agree.

That way each factor has a maximum value of 25 and a minimum of 5.

The coefficient that determines the tourist potential is the sum of all divided by 20. The coefficient has a maximum value of 10 and a minimum of 2. Nearer the coefficient to 10, bigger the tourist potential of the region. Characteristics of rural home and farm: 1. Natural characteristics of rural homes and property; 2. Anthropogenic and cultural attractions; 3. Infrastructure; 4. Human Resources. The scale is the same as above-described. Coefficient determining the tourist potential of the rural home and farm is calculated as the sum divided by 10.

The coefficient has a maximum value of 10 and a minimum of 2. Nearer the coefficient to 10, bigger the tourist potential of the region.

The results of both coefficients are put into a matrix characterising the tourism potential of a region.

- Assessment of tourist attractions – natural, historical and cultural, indoor and outdoor activities, and other – assessed in a table by availability and evaluation of state, opportunities and additional notes
- Assessment of tourist activities – state of 19 possible activities is evaluated.
The assessment scale is the same – from 1 to 5, for the last two.
- Assessment of human resources – personal, special and other skills – qualitative rather than quantitative (being a part of the calculated indicators)
- SWOT- analysis of tourism development in the Central Stara Planina – Ribaritsa

3. Results and Discussion

Based on the above-described methods, a survey of the region was conducted results of which are presented below.

Natural resources of the region under investigation are assessed as very good – 22 points, 25 being the maximum (table 1). Cultural and social environment is not so good – 17 points (table 2) which could be explained by the above-described characteristics of the region. Terms of sports and recreation are good enough – 20 points (table 3), as well as the terms of shopping and tourism sites (table 4). Public infrastructure has 22 points – a very good result for such a type of area (table 5). Attitude towards tourists has the maximum value of 25 (table 6). Accessibility is not so good – 19 points (table 7) because of the mountain type of the studied region. So are existing tourist activities 17 points (table 8) which is to be a field of future improvement.

In conclusion, among all 8 indicators used ‘attitude towards tourists’ is the best indicator, ‘existing tourism activities’ – the worst (fig. 1).

3.1. Study of the Tourism Potential of the Region

Table 1: Nature Resources

Statements	Level of consensus
The region is characterized by diverse natural resources such as rocks, dunes, gorges, waterfalls, rivers, springs, soil, etc.	5
The region is characterized by various representatives of the wildlife that can be easily seen	4
The vegetation is varied, there are many interesting shrubs, trees and plants	4
There are water resources in the region. Natural and artificial lakes, offering various opportunities for recreation and sport	4
The landscape in the region is stimulating experience	5
Points:	22
Statements	Level of consensus
The region has a rich history that is represented by many historical monuments, buildings, places	3
The region has a strong link with the past. There are historical monuments, centres, old markets, etc.	3
Local archaeological and historical resources - old roads, farm buildings, prehistoric artefacts, fossils, etc.	3
The region is rich in religious monuments, churches, chapels, monasteries, holy places, tombs, etc.	4
Local celebrations, festivals, village festivals, exhibitions and other	4
Points	17

Table 2: Cultural and Social Environment

Table 3: Terms of Sport and Recreation

Statements	Level of consensus
The region has various sports facilities (sports facilities, swimming pools, stadiums, sports grounds, etc.)	5
The region has conditions for children's sports (playgrounds, parks, etc.)	4
The region has conditions for various tourist activities (horse riding, walking trails for walking, riding, cycling, climbing opportunities, etc.)	5
The area offers good conditions for water sports (swimming, boating canoeing, water skiing, diving, surfing, fishing, etc.)	4
The area offers opportunities for experimental activities (bungy jumping, parachuting, diving air, flying by delta plan, glider, etc.)	2
Points	20

Table 4: Terms of Shopping and Tourist Sites

Statements	Level of consensus
The region has a variety of shops, both general and specialized	3
In the region there are banks, ATMs, offering fixed and mobile telephony and Internet services that meet the needs of both local people and tourists	4
The region has oil and gas stations, repair cars and recreational equipment	4
The area has clubs, hotels, restaurants, cinemas, theatres and other dining and entertainment places	4
Visitors can accommodate in a variety of places hotels, motels, camping sites, farms, farm houses, chalets, etc.)	5
Points	20

Table 5: Public Infrastructure

Statements	Level of consensus
The region has well developed transport structure, including road, air transport	4
Health and safety of residents and tourists are provided with well-developed medical services and medical emergencies (doctor, dentist and other specialized services)	5
Safety and security of the tourists and local people are provided by the authorized bodies	4
Public places (parks, streets, sidewalks, etc.) are maintained in a good state and clean	4
Tourists information centres, maps, brochures, interpretation of local attractions and other indication services	5
Points	22

Table 6: Attitude Towards Tourists

Statements	Level of consensus
Many resources are invested to attract tourists in the area	5
Tourist infrastructure (public and private) is well developed and it meets the needs of visitors	5
Representatives of local business share the concern of good image and hospitality to meet the needs of tourists	5
All in the tourism business is based on tolerance and understanding to visitors from other nationalities	5
When one travels around the area, he/she always feels 'Welcome' although unfamiliar	5
Points	25

Table 7: Accessibility

Statements	Level of consensus
The roads in the region are well developed and maintained	4
For visitors it is easy to navigate to and through the area. The roads are well signposted and with the tourist tables	4
The area is close to attractive destinations. Tourists visit them with pleasure	4
No seasonal factors that affect the accessibility of the region such as snow, heavy rains, sand storms, etc.	3
Traffic on main roads is available throughout the day	4
Points	19

Table 8: Existing Tourism Activities

Statements	Level of consensus
Several small family or corporate travel agencies doing business in the region	5
Local or international airport or highway to allow easy access	1
Tourism in the region is seasonal due to: change or special events, activities, festivals	1
Existing tourist market in the region is large enough for the business and the existence of competition	5
Conditions for establishment of alliances with existing travel companies (tour operators, hoteliers, offering accommodation and attractions)	5
Points	17

Table 9: Study of the Tourism Potential of the Region

Statements	Level of consensus
1. Natural Resources	22
2. Cultural and social environment	17
3. Terms of sport and recreation	20
4. Terms of shopping and commercial facilities	20
5. Public infrastructure	22
6. Attitude towards tourists	25
7. Accessibility	19

8. Existing tourist activities	17
Sum – points :	162

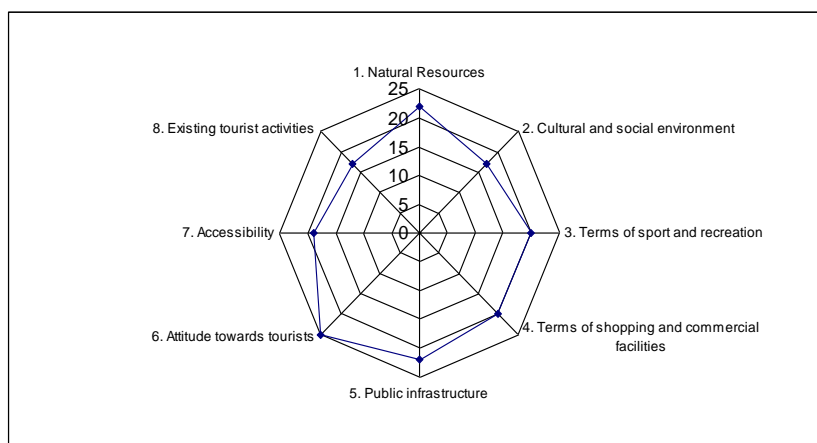


Figure 1: Study of the Tourism Potential of the Region

Coefficient determining the tourism potential of the region: $162 / 20 = 8.1$
 This ratio is the tourism potential of the region which shows very good results.

3. 2. Characteristics of Rural Home and Farm

The first indicator ‘natural characteristics of rural homes and property’ shows no very good results – 18 points (table 10). So does the second one – ‘anthropogenic and cultural attractions – 17 points (table 11). Infrastructure has 19 points (table 12), as well human resources (table 13). Among all this anthropogenic and cultural attractions have the slowest value (fig. 2).

Table 10: Natural Characteristics of Rural Homes and Property

Statements	Level of consensus
Within the property or in the vicinity there are interesting natural forms with extraordinary landscape	5
Within the property there are various representatives of local fauna and flora	3
Within the property there are various representatives of wildlife that can be easily seen	3
Within the property there are water resources (lakes, rivers, streams, etc.) which are suitable for water activities (boating, swimming, fishing, water skiing and more)	4
Within the property there are many attractions that are easily accessible	3
Points	18

Table 11: Anthropogenic and cultural attractions

Statements	Level of consensus
Important historical, cultural monuments (buildings, sites, fossils, museums, etc.) are on the territory of the rural property or near it	4
Objects of recreation (swimming, hiking trails, riding trails, parks, playgrounds)	4
Farmers have interesting means of transportation (carts, sledges, cabs, etc.) which can be used by the tourists Within the rural property there are interesting programs and husbandry practices, processing and trade (cultivation and harvesting, milking, shear, making cheese, butter, etc.)	5
Rural property has other features that represent potential interest to visitors	4
Points	17

Table 12: Infrastructure

Statements	Level of consensus
There is electricity and networking	5
There is enough drinking water to meet growing consumption in developing tourism venture or opportunities to expand water supply networks	5
Roads, trails and parks are sufficient or can be upgraded to meet the needs of the tourist site	4
There is space for barbeque and picnic or opportunities for those	5
Points	19

Table 13: Characterization of Human Resources

Statements	Level of consensus
Owners can hire well-trained personnel for purposes of tourism	3
The owner and the proposed staff have the necessary skills to meet guests and to communicate with them	4
The owner and the proposed staff have the necessary skills for effective interpretation and description of natural, cultural and historical resources in the rural property or close to it and are aware of and can describe all activities that occur in it	4
Owner has or may acquire business management skills necessary for functioning of the tourism	4
Agricultural or other activities will not impede the effective operation of the proposed tourist site	4
Points	19

Table 14: Characteristics of Rural Home and Farm

Statements	Level of consensus
1. Natural characteristics of rural homes and property	18
2. Anthropogenic and cultural attractions	17
3. Infrastructure	19
4. Human Resources	19
Amount – points :	73

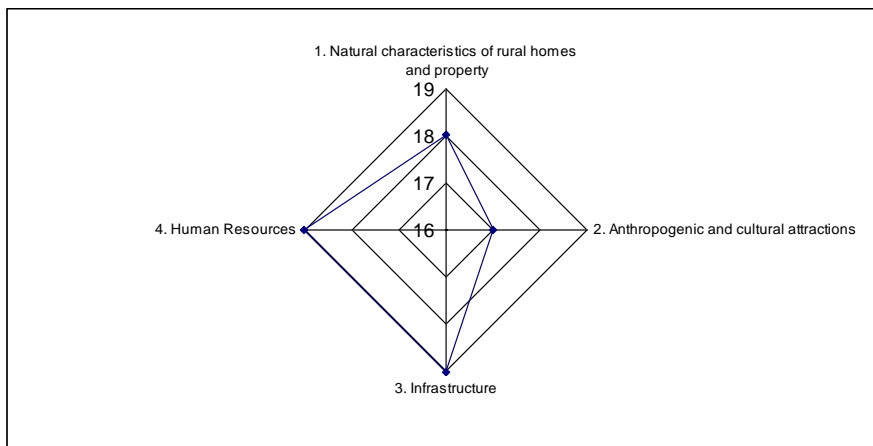


Figure 2: . Characteristics of Rural Home and Farm

Coefficient determining the tourism potential of the rural home and farm: $73 / 10 = 7.3$

This is the ratio of the tourism potential of rural home and farm which is very good providing specific characteristics of the mountain region studied.

The tourist potential characterization is made using a matrix (fig. 3).

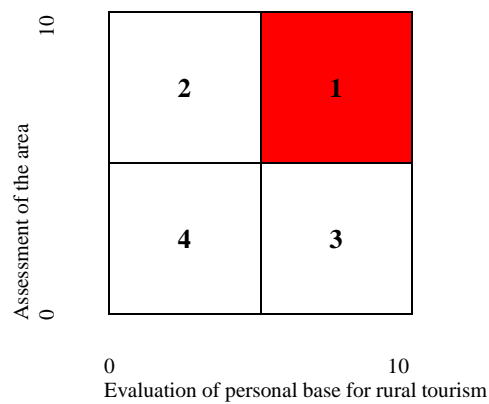


Figure 3: Characterization of the tourism potential

The Matrix potential is in box 1. Balanced tourist structure has a high tourism potential. Rural property and home have a significant opportunity for development of tourist activity. The region already offers or has the potential to attract tourists. Rural property is also suitable and attractive for tourists.

Assessment of tourist attractions shows very good results for farms, climate, rivers, mountains, forests, parks and wild animals amongst natural attractions, folklore in historical and cultural attractions, racing and drawing in indoor and outdoor activities and other attractions (table Many of those need financing or are not enough but the conditions in farms and mountains are excellent (table 15)

Table 15: Assessment of Tourist Attractions

Types of attractions	Availability and evaluation of state	Opportunities	Notes
Natural attractions			
Farms	5	Yes	Excellent
Dams	1	No	-
Lakes	1	No	-
Beaches	1	No	-
Climate	5	-	Good
Rivers	5	Yes	Deep
Mountains	5	Yes	Wonderful
Forests	5	Yes	Dense
Waterfalls	1	No	-
Referrals	4	Yes	Poorly markings
Parks	5	Yes	Nice
Wild animals	5	Yes	Galore
Historical and cultural attractions			
Churches	3	Yes	Not enough
Monasteries	2	Yes	Not enough
Museums	3	Yes	Few
Historic buildings	2	-	-
Town hall	2	-	-
Excavation	1	-	-
Folklore	5	Yes	Poorly financed
Galleries	1	Yes	Possible to be made
Excavations	1	-	-
Indoor and outdoor activities			
Racing	5	Yes	Need of financing
Excursions	4	Yes	Need of financing
Parades	1	Yes	Need of financing
Competitions	4	Yes	Need of financing
Crafts	3	Yes	Need of financing
Singing competitions	4	Yes	Need of financing
Cycling	3	Yes	Need of financing
Embroiding	4	Yes	Need of financing
Drawing	5	Yes	Need of financing
Other attractions			
Bridge	3	Yes	Unsupported
Ferry	1	No	-
Government	1	No	-

buildings			
Murals	3	Yes	Need of restoration
Universities	1	No	-

The assessment of tourist activities shows very good results for feeding animals, milking, sightseeing, riding horses / donkeys, folklore parties, bed and breakfast, educational tours / eco routes, hunting, fishing, cheese making (table 16, fig. 4).

Table 16: Assessment of Tourist Activities

Types of activities	Evaluation of state
Agricultural fairs	4
Flowers festivals	1
Feeding animals	5
Milking	5
Bowing	1
Herbs collecting	3
Photographing animals	5
Sightseeing	5
Riding horses / donkeys	5
Folklore parties	5
Bed and breakfast	5
Camping / picnic	3
Green schools	1
Educational tours / eco routes	5
Folklore schools	1
Hunting	5
Fishing	5
Culinary	4
Cheese making	5

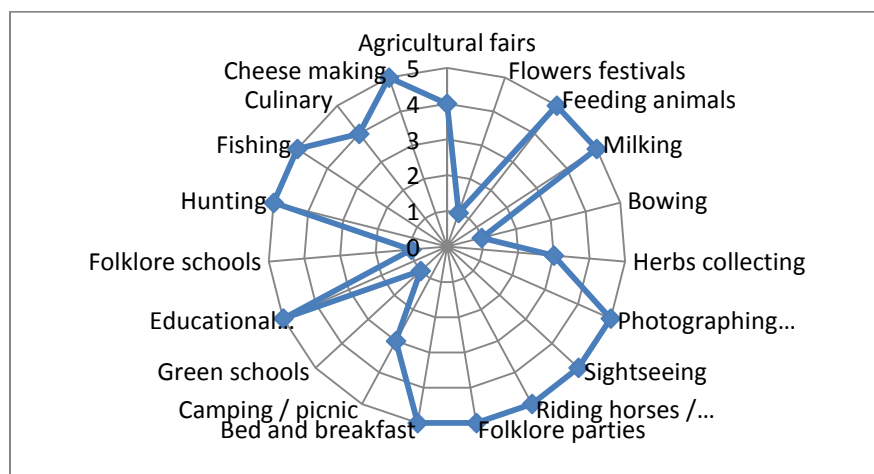


Figure 4: Assessment of Tourist Activities

Assessment of human resources

- Personal skills - outstanding leadership skills, teamwork, loyalty, communication, endurance, decision making in a dynamic environment.
- Some special skills: animal breeding, horse riding, cooking typical Bulgarian food, knowledge of herbs in the mountains, knowledge of the area and a good orientation in the mountains.

- *Others* - training in tourism, good communication with guests and neighbours which helps to attract more tourists; foreign languages, good animation work, good reception and presentation, knowledge of various crafts, tour guiding, etc.

Table 17: SWOT- Analysis of Tourism Development in the Central Stara Planina - Ribaritsa

Strengths	Weaknesses
<p>Central geographical position – a relatively easy and quick access from the main (resource) centres of the tourism demand, from Sofia and other cities in Central and North-eastern Bulgaria.</p> <p>Rich combination of natural resources – preserved nature and attractiveness of mountain scenery; available skiing – sports, several hunting huts.</p> <p>Stored lifestyle and traditions, accompanied by a significant and attractive periodic events and holidays.</p> <p>Diverse capacity and type of shelter – cosy and authentic and personalized service houses.</p> <p>Investments to improve the quality of existing facilities and new construction, meeting the higher standards.</p> <p>Availability of tourist attractions and entertainment options.</p> <p>Forming positive attitude towards tourism development in the local community, hospitality and entrepreneurship; opportunities for tourists to interact with the local population.</p> <p>Moderate prices</p> <p>Existence of organizations involved in local tourism policy – local tourist associations and regional tourism associations;</p> <p>Constructed image of a tourist destination, offering products shaping of tourism – hiking and biking; eco and rural tourism;</p> <p>Advertise on Bulgarian and international markets through participation in tourist fairs and by sending promotional materials to international tourism fairs;</p> <p>Created and maintained good contacts with tour operators and travel agencies.</p>	<p>Distance from international airport, limited access from southern Bulgaria (especially in winter), pure condition of country roads and difficult accessibility by public transport, particularly from the Black Sea in winter.</p> <p>Inadequate or poorly maintained technical and social infrastructure: roads and parking lots, street lighting, garbage collection, snow removal, long distance transport.</p> <p>Overloading the environment, noise and disturbed psychological comfort.</p> <p>Poor transport links from and to the means of shelter.</p> <p>Part of the accommodation facilities are obsolete, depreciated and with low comfort; lack of motivation among some owners to improve in.</p> <p>Limited supply and poor organization of additional services.</p> <p>Low level of self-criticism by those employed in tourism.</p> <p>Presence of unfair competition.</p> <p>Chaotic price policy in the accommodation and lack of skills for pricing</p> <p>Unfavourable proportion: price-quality of tourism product in some accommodation facilities.</p> <p>Insufficiently effective activities of tourism organizations in the coordination between all stakeholders, lack of cooperation, etc.</p> <p>Uniform tourist product</p> <p>Seasonality</p> <p>Relies exclusively on the domestic tourism market.</p> <p>Poor relationships with tour operators.</p>
Opportunities	Threats
<p>Increased demand of places with conserved nature and social and cultural medium</p> <p>Tourist products diversification</p> <p>Good contacts with tour operators and tourist agencies, particularly with such working on the external market</p> <p>Market expansion and attraction of foreign tourists</p> <p>More qualitative than quantitative development of the accommodation base, increase in food houses and tourist attractions</p> <p>Use of modern information technology</p> <p>Motivation and human resources training</p> <p>Regional collaboration in tourism development</p> <p>Financing of tourism development projects by international programs</p> <p>Improving the policy in the field of tourism</p> <p>Creation of conditions for supporting tourism development</p>	<p>Global climate change and seasons shift, clearing the forests</p> <p>Insufficient care of nature conservation</p> <p>Excessive development of much capital needing types of tourism with doubtful chances of success</p> <p>Limited or unbalanced interest by the tour operators</p> <p>Decrease in Bulgarian tourist market and limited access to international markets</p> <p>Strengthened competition of new Bulgarian resorts and regions with similar offering but with more qualitative and various services</p> <p>Low competitiveness, inadequate guest servicing</p> <p>Unwillingness of the owners to train the personnel</p> <p>Unwillingness of undertaking joint activities on local and regional level</p> <p>Lack of viability in the projects following the cease of external financing</p> <p>Unfavorable business medium</p> <p>Unfavorable state policy for development</p>

4. Conclusion

Successful practices in the tourism industry are built on several basic principles:

- professionalism and qualification in providing products and services;
- knowledge of clients' needs;
- putting tourism demand and supply into the uniform criteria for the quality of the products and services as a result of markets globalization;
- trust and professional commitment to the customers' happiness and continuation in using the respective products and services in the future.

The most important principle for successful business is the hospitality. The second principle is that if individual hotel and restaurant's managers want to win in the global competition, they should unite to create the image of the entire region.

Through the years of its development and preservation from the negative influences of economic activities and incoming visitors, the region has kept its nature and identity by observing good practices in agriculture and tourism sustainable development.

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