

AGRO-TOURISM - IMPACT ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT - CASE STUDY OF THE PRESPA REGION, REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

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ABSTRACT

The pattern of development of agro-tourism in the Prespa Region in Macedonia, provides modernization of traditional and introducing of new features such as the valorization of tourists offer of comprehended and affirmative resources, valorization of new discovered and potential resources, including of natural and cultural heritage into tourist offer, inclusion and promotion of local food products, traditional cuisine and tradition in general. In the paper is presented case study for the Prespa Region in Macedonia.

In paper are used multiple methods of research which is conducted during the year 2009/2010 and in the Prespa Region in the villages: Brajchino, Stenje, D.Dupeni, Pretor, Ljubojno, Slivnica.

The results show that there is a great capacity for development of agro-tourism in Prespa.

Key words: agro tourism; sustainable development; local traditional products; local standards for quality.

GENERAL PART

Introduction

The rapid development of the technique and technology, modern communication, process of globalization create conditions for faster development of tourism in general.

In such conditions, agro-tourism, with all possible kinds of activities, receives significant place in local and national economy. Agro-tourism is one of the forms of sustainable tourism development. This activity is conducted in rural areas in which tourists are allowed to get acquainted with agricultural areas and occupations, local products, traditional cuisine and culture and traditions of the local community. This activity brings visitors with nature and agricultural activities in which they can participate.

With this they back in time, produce see how are produced products which previously were found only on shelves of major supermarkets, and maybe for the first time in life have chance to try a really fresh vegetables, fruits, eggs, meat, milk and dairy products.

The development of agro-tourism is based on basic principles and knowledge which are derived from the model of sustainable development, which implies mutual harmonization of environment and economic development in order to preserve the natural wealth of the planet Earth for future generations. Sustainable development is directed towards creating a better world in which exist agreement of three spheres of influence and action: economical social and ecological.

The application of the provisions on sustainable development is achieved and with specific measures, according to the legislation in the area of preventing of pollution and using national resources. Today, in the Republic of Macedonia in range of environmental protection is achieved great progress in the harmonization of macedonian legislation with that of the EU about environmental protection.

Theoretical review

Agro-tourism is one of the forms of sustainable tourism development. This activity is conducted in rural areas, where tourists will be allowed to become familiar with agricultural areas and occupations, local products, traditional cuisine and culture and traditions of the local community. For guests who usually come from highly industrialized areas, rural activities are things they can see on TV, to see animals in zoos in the place of their residence or via internet. With this tourists back in time, and see how products are produced which they previously bought in supermarkets.

Hosts, which most of the basic income allows agriculture, this represents an additional source of funds that make them less dependent on the movements of market prices of agricultural products, through communication with tourists it opens a window into events and trends in the world and provides confirmation of the importance of local culture and its preservation in the processes of globalization (1).

Agro-tourism in the Prespa Region

In Prespa region growing apples imposes as a dominant culture of interest to agro-tourism. Visitors-tourists can follow blooming of apple trees in April, planting gardens in spring or in autumn, when they can be godfathers of seedlings that will be planted by themselves, and of course picking apples, the famous "Prespa apple picking" that happens on September 27, the religious holiday of Holy Cross - acquaintance with tradition with start of the picking, blessing of fruit, purchasing of apples which are picked by themselves. For this occasion it is necessary to produce the typical packaging for apples in which will be printed season when they are picked, the type which is represented and sign of the quality of the region.

Besides apples, small vegetable gardens which almost every family has, play essential part of the offer. Guests can see where and how to grow vegetables which are served with cooked meals, and they can take an active part in processing and settling of plants. They have an opportunity to pick vegetables and fruit for its meal and participate in the preparation and cooking, and they can have knowledge of traditional cuisine of the hosts. Villages of Prespa, which gravitate toward Lake Prespa, should have a traditional fishing of fishes from Lake Prespa, the famous carp and cironki, traditional fish preservation - salting and drying, and prepare local specialties from them.

Agro-tourism in general and in Prespa, contributes to the increasing presence of livestock and poultry in yards of the hosts: chickens, turkeys, cows, calves, goats, pigs, donkeys, horses, sheeps. That enriches the offer for tourists, as well as household who would reduce its dependence on buying meat, meat products, milk and dairy products, eggs.

Picture 1
Photo of village near Lake of Prespa



Crucial for the development of agro-tourism is the existence of the farm yard. Farm yard is a fundamental element of the rural structure of villages in Macedonia. In farmyard social life of family is runned, economic activities are carried out by owners who are dealing, and in most cases livestock and poultry are kept. Farm yard can have different size and shape depending on the area in which it is located, and with activities and the financial power of household.

In analyzed villages of the Prespa region there are observed two types of yards: mountainous and plain, which can be traditional and contemporary. Lake villages have larger yards with a more regular form. In addition to the house in the yard there are other facilities such little summer kitchen, homemade oven, fold, barn, well, coop, sty, and there is one part planted with flowers besides the house, and plaint with vegetables. Fences of yards – avlii, are high walls made of stone, in the upper part covered with shingles. Doors are usually high and wide. To develop agro-tourism, it is needed the aesthetics of the yard to be well expressed and functional and ambiantal well-organized (2).

Picture 2
Photo of characteristically Prespa house



Besides farm yard also and the interior of the house should be arranged. in Prespa farm yard guests should see how it is prepared and stored zimnica – winter food – conservation of vegetable, meat, fish, sausage-lukajnci, sauerkraut- rasol and brine. The development of agro-tourism in Prespa requires transformation of agricultural production of ecological, organic food (3).

With this transformation, agricultural products primarily Prespa apple, will become more competitive on markets in Europe and world, and will achieve higher price, plant will be cleaned of chemical additives used to protect trees, and that would protect the wider environment, flora and fauna in the region on land and in the Prespa Lake. During the stay, it is necessary to organize the diverse animation of guests with aim to continue its stay. That is visiting of cultural and historical monuments, natural monuments, outdoor picnics, sports and recreational activities.

Development of agro-tourism in Europe and in the Republic of Macedonia

In difference from towns and settlements in coastal tourism, rural areas are quite scattered. Most local governments have limited financial resources and lack of human resources for agro-tourism management. Therefore, agro-tourism in Europe is differently determined and defined from destination to destination (4).

Review the status of agro-tourism regulative is given in Table 1 as follows:

Table 1
Regulative for agro-tourism in some European countries and in Macedonia

| Country | Agro-tourism |
|---------|--|
| Italy | Italy is one of the few countries who has a clear law in the state level for agro-tourism (Legge nazionale sull, agroturizmo 730/95), but despite that there are regional laws that established norms, interventions, promotion, aimed at better development of agro-tourism |
| Austria | Tourism organized on farms-organized with a share of 1/6 of the total number of tourists per year 170,000 nights spent. Organized in association called Farm Holidays. The association serves as the European model, and its members - 34,000 are divided to 8 parts in 8 regional |

| | |
|-----------|---|
| | units that interact at national level. The Association has its own legislation as an association of citizens. |
| France | Rrural tourism in France is organized by the National Association Gites de France-with a diverse suite offer; resolved by appropriate legislation. There Union, Federation Nationale des Gites de France with 146 units that are joined. |
| UK | Property of farm has organization Farm Stay UK, which is owned by a consortium of farmers. It is a leading company in the area of rural tourism, and for the service quality are competent inspection and classification of the National tourism community. |
| Cyprus | There is a special agency for agro-tourism, Cyprus Agro-tourist Company, which operates with support from the Cypriot tourism Agency. |
| Romania | Has association called National Association for Rural, Ecological and Cultural Tourism. |
| Macedonia | In Macedonia there is no single model of agro-tourism. Rural tourism is regulated by some aspects of the Law on hospitality activity (Official Gazette 62/04, 89/08, 115/10) and Law on Tourist Activity (Official Gazette 62/04, 89/08, 12.09. Organizationally laws do not regulate agro-tourism, so there is particular model of Macedonian agro-tourism |

It is obvious organizational differences for agro-tourism in Europe, which prevents by somewhat powerful and systematic growth of agro-tourism.

Impact of agro-tourism on sustainable development

Agro-tourism is a kind of tourism where healthy food is offered to tourists and staying in healthy environment through integrated agricultural development, placing emphasis on sustainability. Agro-tourism directs the overall agro-complex to sustainable development, the production of healthy, organic food, its marketing and offering to market.

Economic aspects of agro-tourism

Through the indirect economic impacts of agriculture, tourism indirectly affects other industries as well as the economic system on a wider level (5).

Agro-tourism from economical aspect affects on: higher food production, creating new jobs, developing if non-developed and weak-developed areas, reducing emigration from certain regions and municipalities due to lack of employment, impact of natural population growth, protection and valorization of cultural and historical values - monuments, monasteries, museums, galleries. Economical effects for the area of Prespa Region are very important and numerous: development of rural communities through the valorization of neglected properties, village houses, farms, cottages, mechanizations, and revival of many forgotten traditional activities.

Agro-tourism and tourist mediation activity

Besides of factors for tourism demand and tourism offer, as a third group of factors come intermediary factors i.e. travel agencies. Mediating function of the travel agencies is reflected in the approach to the demands of users and services offered by service providers (6,7). Travel agencies perform: mediation related to travel, mediation related to stay, and other mediations.

Agro-tourism as a separate type of tourism product must has an organized market of supply and demand, thus providing with a good marketing (8). It is very important the role of the local tourist office, which is the catalyst of all activities related to sustainable tourism development, within the tourist destination. Tourist bureau performs: mediation, promotion, coordination, networking, sales, training of staff in bureau for preparing development programs and projects. For Prespa Region, Tourist Bureau has in the municipality of Resen.

Primary reasons for selection of agro-tourism to the tourist offer

As primary reasons tourists to choose the form of agro- tourism as a specific type of tourism are: strengthening family relationships - isolation from everyday life with family; improving of health state – stay in nature and physical activity; recreation and leisure – peace; adventure - need for new experiences; escape from everyday life; learning the local rural culture, particularly food and nutrition; special events, celebrations; saving time and money compared to other forms of recreation and tourism; nostalgia - frequent users of agro-tourism are people originating from rural areas but who have no family connections and contacts with them.

SPECIAL PART

Subject of studying

Subject of studying in this paper is finding and identifying opportunities for development of agro-tourism as an activity on sustainable basis in rural villages of Prespa region. Its for remarkable interest for the Prespa region, and wider for the Republic of Macedonia.

Methods of research

Several methods are used in this paper such as: historical method, method of survey, comparative method, method of analysis, method of synthesis.

Tourist - geographical position of the Prespa region as a tourist value

Prepa region, one of the most picturesque areas in Macedonia, is located in south-western part of Republic of Macedonia, where it is intersected 21⁰ east geographical longitude and 41⁰ north geographical width.

Picture 3
Map of the Prespa Region



Picture 4
Map of the Republic of Macedonia



Prespa valley, with Lake Prespa, is a natural geographic entity in the southwestern part of Macedonia. Valley is shared of smaller parts, also Greece and Albania. To the east it is surrounded by mountains Bigla and Baba Mountain, and south by mountains Gorbec and Ivan mountain. To the west it is

surrounded by Suva mountain, Galichica, Istok, and Petrino mountain. Prespa valley is far from Adriatic Sea about 140 km (9).

The climate in villages and the entire Prespa region is temperate-oriental with Mediterranean influence. It is characterized by hot summers where nights are cool and winters are soft. Average annual air humidity is 64% and average annual temperature is 10.2⁰C, and the warmest month is July, with an average temperature of 21⁰C and the coolest month is January with an average minimal temperature of 0.3⁰C. Agricultural land is a resource not only for the existence of the population of the Prespa region, which is mainly engaged in fruit growing – mainly with apples, but also the base for starting specific types of tourism such as agro-tourism.

Macedonian green-belt that includes forest, mountain, dry, overgrown with grass and water ecosystems, is part of the Balkan green-belt and stretches due to the southern border of the Republic of Macedonia with neighboring countries - Albania, Greece and Bulgaria. The biggest depth of the green-belt in the territory of Macedonia is 42 km and covers Prespa border region. This status which gets Prespa region with the European green-belt initiative, which includes village settlements, will allow further valorization in supply and demand of services in this region, especially the European tourism market.

Obtained results and discussion

In this research were included 180 participants from 6 larger, more important villages in the Prespa region as: Ljubojno, Pretor, Slivnica, Dolno Dupeni, Brajchino, Stenje. The survey was conducted in the period 2009/10 with main focus in the summer. The method of survey was applied. The aim was to consider some facts of the status of agro-tourism in this region, what respondents want and propose to allow continuous sustainable development of agro-tourism, which in Macedonia is still in the starting stage and there is a need to work a lot for its development. It is examined the status of the number of beds by type of accommodation facilities and individually in villages in the Prespa region - Table 2.

Table 2
The number of beds by type of accommodation facilities and individually in villages in the Prespa region for period 2009/10

| Name of village | Rooms for rent | Hotels | Motels | Monastery capacities | Total number of beds |
|-----------------|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Brajchino | 44 | - | - | 1 with 24 rooms | 68 |
| Stenje | 189 | 1 with 29 rooms | - | | 218 |
| Dolno Dupeni | 35 | - | 1 with 28 rooms | | 63 |
| Pretor | 19 | - | - | | 19 |
| Ljubojno | 18 | - | - | | 18 |
| Slivnica | 9 | - | - | 1 with 72 rooms | 81 |

It is obvious that most rooms renters are interested in Stenje, then comes Brajchino and Dolno Dupeni. There is a hotel only in Stenje and motel only in Dupeni which shows necessity of expanding the number of beds for the development of agro-tourism.

Table 3
Basic characteristics of respondents, from 6 villages in the Prespa region

| Number of respondents | Age in years | % | Female | % Male | Degree of education | % | Employment status | | Desires of agro tourism development | |
|-----------------------|--------------|----|--------|--------|---------------------|----|-------------------|------------|-------------------------------------|------------|
| | | | | | | | Employed | Unemployed | Male | Female |
| 180 | Under 26 | 0% | 33 | 67 | Primary school. | 12 | 35% | 65% | 50% male | 20% female |
| | 26-35 | | | | High school | 62 | | | | |
| | 36-45 | | | | College | 5 | | | | |

| | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|----------------|--|--|--|------------|----|--|--|--------------------------|--------------------|
| | | | | | | | | | respond, no knowledge | without respond |
| | 46-55 | | | | University | 21 | | | | |
| | 55 and more | | | | | | | | | |

General characteristics indicate that the largest percentage of respondents are over 55 years of age, suggesting that the younger have low interest to stay in villages. Larger percentage of respondents - 65% are unemployed, and the greatest percentages are with secondary education - 62%. Wishes for the development of agro-tourism are evident and more pronounced among men - 50% and 20% among women, and there is particularly percentage of responses of the population with I don't know, because people are need to be more connected to agro-tourism.

Results of survey of respondents about the state of tourism, agro-tourism in Prespa are given in Table 4. as follows:

Table 4
Typical questions and answers of respondents of the Prespa region

| Type of questions | Respond | % |
|---|---|---------------------------|
| How many members have your family? | Up to 4 members From 4 to 6 Over 6 | 27 22 51 |
| Do you rent rooms for accommodation? | No No, but in the future I'll rent Yes | 0 15 85 |
| What motivates you to rent rooms? | Development and promotion of the region Financial reasons Self-employment | 7 64 29 |
| Do you cooperate with domestic tourist Agencies? | Yes No | 25 75 |
| Do you cooperate with foreign tourist Agencies? | Yes No | 23 77 |
| How come most of the guests? | Organized in groups by agency Individually | 6 94 |
| Whether the guests are offered to participate. In preparing of food on village Household? | Yes No | 92 8 |
| What specialties from traditional macedonian cuisine you offer? | Cironki (dry fishes), gjomleze, homemade pies - zelnici, pituli, carp a la prespa, mlechnik, musaka, matejnca | 100 |
| What is the average length of stay? | 3 days 5 till 7 days More than 7 days | 18 44 38 |
| How guests receive information that you offered rooms? | Tourist Bureau Tourist Agency Through friends who stay here. Advertising in print and e-media Coincidentally, through the pass in the village | 4 15 37 10 34 |
| When is the greatest number of guests? | Weekend Working week | 48 52 |
| Do you offer additional services? | Yes No | 100 0 |
| What additional services do you offer? | Hiking, walking, | 100 |

| | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|--|
| | riding on donkeys, picnics, fishing | |
|--|-------------------------------------|--|

From the table it is evident that 51% of respondents are with a bigger number of family members - more than 6 members. 85% of respondents rent rooms for accommodation which is a good indicator. The motivation for renting rooms is mostly for financial reasons, which shows that the population has financial problems. Over 70% of respondents said they cooperate with domestic and foreign travel agencies and it is also a good indicator. Most visitors, 94% come individually and not organized. 92% of respondents answered that are offered the opportunity to participate in the process of preparing of the food offered, all respondents confirmed that they offer all specialties of Prespa region.

The length of stay of 5-7 days is represented by the largest percentage - 44%. 37% responded that the guests visited destination on the basis of information received from friends which already were there. The majority 52% of guests come during the working week and a smaller percentage for the weekend. All respondents said that they offer the additional services such as hiking, walking, riding on donkeys, picnics, fishing, visiting churches during religious holidays.

In the provision of services of this type hosts in the Prespa region encountered certain problems are shown in Table 5.

Table 5
Problems arising during the provision of services in the Prespa region

| Type of problem | Remarking of problem |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| Infrastructure | Unsatisfactory |
| Waste Management | Unsatisfactory (Trash is taken once weekly) |
| Wastewater Treatment | There are septic tanks, and that is not an appropriate solution |
| Water supply and electricity | Satisfactory |
| Standards for quality of services | There is a lack of standardization in the quality of services offered |
| General standards | -architectural standards -standards for furniture and equipment -standards for traditional local cuisine -standards for quality of service |

From the analysis of the results it is obvious a lack of proper infrastructure and various kinds of standards for the proper provision of services to meet tourist needs.

There is an information-technology structure for development of agro-tourism in a large percentage - Internet, web pages, GIS technology for the 6 villages in the Prespa region.

Action plans are made up for development of agro-tourism in the Prespa region with priorities and general recommendations, but still there is no concrete implementation.

CONCLUSIONS

From the full analysis of the problem of agro-tourism in the Prespa region of Macedonia and researches, the gained results, it can be came to these conclusions:

1. There are great potentials for development of agro-tourism as a selective form of tourism in this region but there is insufficient knowledge about the economic justification which should be deepened.

2. There is interest among local population to deal with agro-tourist activities. Nearly every village has an association that works on projects directly or indirectly associated with tourism, especially agro-tourism.

3. It is necessary to increase awareness of the importance of agro-tourism, bearing in mind the fact that the EU as part of broader development agricultural policies treats agro-tourism as a serious factor for the development of rural regions.

4. Rural tourism in the Prespa region as a special kind of tourist product related to agro-tourism should have organized market, supply and demand.

5. During performing of the tourist activity of this kind, from particular importance is education of householders who are tasked to meet the immediate requirements of the guests.

6. Establishing local standards for quality of tourism and hospitality offer is an excellent basis for sustainable tourism development of Prespa, but in this case reality is different. There is a lack of standardization of quality of offered services, and specialized tour-operators are only interested in a standardized offer that meets certain criteria for categorization of quality.

7. Local Self government – Municipality of Resen, through its departments manifests a growing interest in being a leader and holder of main activities which should result with sustainable development of the Prespa region destination and creating a recognizable brand that will be good ranged on the international tourism market. Also, cooperation between public and private sectors is necessary.

8. The local tourist bureau is a catalyst for all activities related to sustainable development of agro-tourism in Prespa.

9. The development of agro-tourism will contribute to the protection and promotion of local environmental resources, which is one of the priorities of sustainable development.

10. It is recommended the implementation of action plans for developing of this type of tourism in the Prespa region. It is needed full action on infrastructure, marketing, environmental protection and cultural heritage, local traditions.

11. Also in Macedonia it should be worked on making the legislation, particular Law for agro-tourism which will regulate all the problems associated with it and will be set frames of europeisation of agro-tourism in Macedonia and in the Prespa region.

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