BULGARIAN TOURISM AND THE NICHES OF CUSTOMIZATION

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Abstract

The tendencies of the international tourist market through the last few years shows some changes in the behaviour of the real and potential tourists. These changes are significant and reflect on all participants of the process of forming and realizing the tourist product – the suppliers of the tourist package, its manufacturers and distributors. In this new situation, new, higher requirements are brought up to the indicators for steadiness, diversity and quality, ensured from the tourism industry.

For Bulgaria as tourism destination it is important to identify those changes. The country is believed to be a little known, secure and stable tourist place situated near West Europe. At the same time its setting as a destination for alternative tourism – in general – eco, cultural, rural – in separate and complex tourist product, is a condition for steady economic and social development in caring for the environment decisions.

Keywords: globalisation, sustainability and development.

Introduction

Today, tourism is one of the largest and dynamically developing sectors of external economic activities. Its high growth and development rates, considerable volumes of foreign currency inflows, infrastructure development, and introduction of new management and educational experience actively affect various sectors of economy, which positively contribute to the social and economic development of the country as a whole. Most highly developed countries have accumulated a big deal of their social and economic welfare on profits from tourism. According to recent statistics, tourism provides about 10% of the world’s income and employs almost one tenth of the world’s workforce. All considered, tourism’s actual and potential economic impact is astounding. Many people emphasize the positive aspects of tourism as a source of foreign exchange, a way to balance foreign trade. The analyses of the international organizations, exploring the development of tourism industry underline the positive contribution of the tourism for the economic growth and employment in regional and international scale.

Reconsider the conception of the tourism’ signification discloses new dimensions and directs the specialists to different social impact. Meanwhile, the tourism, with the diversity of forms, hands on in contact with a key domains like employment, regional development, finances, taxation, education, defence of the consumers, healthcare, new technologies, transport, culture, ext. The stage of their mutually penetration was demonstrated of incontestable way on the 11 of September 2001 and by the events in Spain during the current year, in March.

The tendencies of the international tourist market through the last few years shows some changes in the behaviour of the real and potential tourists. These changes are significant and reflect on all participants of the process of forming and realizing the tourist product – the suppliers of the tourist package, its manufacturers and distributors. In this new situation, new, higher requirements are brought up to the indicators for steadiness, diversity and quality, ensured from the tourism industry. The initiated surveys on the international tourist market show the appearance of new customer’s segments. Their forming had begun in the middle of 90’s of the XX – the century, and till now under the influence of the world processes of transformation, globalization, and commercialization and last but not least – antiterrorism got exact and distinct characteristics.

As people travel more, they also become more aware of the culture and environment of the places they travel to, they reflect more on their own experience and lifestyle. As tourism develops, so there seems to be a shift away form purely external travel determinants (such as demography and climate) towards internal determinants, such as the desire for self-development and creative expression. As travel experience become richer, so travel experience feed the desire for more travel. People are therefore becoming career travellers, demanding an endless flow of new experiences, and looking for deeper experiences within the communities they visit. This is also changing the relationship between host and guest. People are seeking genuine experience rather that staged ones. Tourists try and achieve deeper and more meaningful experiences by changing their role – engaging in “volunteer tourism” or in “creative tourism”. The more people travel, the more cultural respect, tolerance and understanding of cultural differences there should be (www.etag-euro.org).
Travel is stimulated by the increasing discontentment of the liberated individual, who will always think that life is better elsewhere. For many people, travel is no longer a luxury and has become an accepted part of life. In other hands, the search for a better life is likely to be frustrated by the erosion of uniqueness of places – the level of difference to be found whilst travelling is diminishing.

The changes in consumers’ behaviour show a growing awareness of the finite nature of most natural products and the need to conserve them. That is the reason that places a premium on the “unspoilt” destinations. The rising demand for eco, rural and nature-based holidays increase the number and sophistication of products in this sector of tourism market. As a parallel trend, cultural tourism is growing all over the world. The major driver of increased consumption is likely to be rising education levels. This suggests that new consumers will come from areas where education and personal wealth are improving1. Cultural tourism motivations are shifting slowly towards a more general interest in culture and especially to a combined cultural, ecological, leisure and entertainment tourism products. And that is the main objective of this paper - to identify those changes with connection to Bulgarian tourism industry.

The Bulgarian tourism has more ten one century history. Its beginning is put with the establishment of “BalkanTourist” (mentioned for the first time in guidebooks of 1939) , which official establishment was in 1946 and the big Black sea and mountain resorts, build in the end of 50-ties of 20-the century. At the same time in the country work The Bureau for Teenage Tourism – “Orbita”, Enterprise for co-operative Tourism – “Kooptourist”, Bureau for tourism “Pirin”, Agency for Car and Tourism “Shipka”. In the 80-ties Bulgaria was successfully developed as tourism destination and makes successes on the international tourism market, selling standard products on sea-summer and winter-mountain recreational tourism. On the East European market Bulgaria is tourism destination without competition. There are also successes on the West European markets. The purposeful market policy in Tourism helps the country in 1980 to make big achievements on the international tourism market2. Since 1987 there is regressive tendency, which is very definable for the next stage of Bulgarian tourism development.

In the period of transition from central planning to market economy there is also crisis in tourism. The realization of tourist activities was limited by the strong restrictive marketing conditions. International political changes, disintegration of the socialist market and military strives in neighbour countries bend the number of tourists to our country and explain the discrepancy in Bulgarian tourism development with tendencies of the international tourism market.

Since 1999, a reviving and stage after stage movement of the Bulgarian tourist markets, is observed. With the general hard effort of the specialists in private and public branch at present time, the position of the country at most of the traditional markets is restored and registers incomes. A general index appear to be the amount of genuine currency – year 1999 – 931,7 million dollars; 2000 – 1 billion and 74 million dollars; 2001 – 1 118.6 million Euros; 2002 – 1 241. 5 million Euros; 2003 – 1 499.5 million Euros; 2004 – 1 788.6 million Euros; 2005 – 1 955.7 million Euros; 2006 – 2 062.9 million Euros; 2007 – 2 284.8 million Euros (data by the National Statistic Institute, Ministry of economy and Bulgarian National Bank - National Statistic Year Revue, 2008). Also significant is the number of the tourists, which visited Bulgaria for the period – figure 1. The number of foreign tourists who had visited Bulgaria with tourist purpose – from European Union and on the whole defines the importance and the role of European Union upon the economic development of Bulgaria as well as the flow of tourists towards our country.

Regarding the changes in the consumers’ behaviour it is important to be mentioned that experts pay special attention to theirs interest for some forms of tourism such as rural, eco and cultural tourism. In the different regions of the world their development has reached different stages of vivacity, depending on the degree of commercializing the destination and saturation the consumer’s interest. In Bulgaria the mentioned above forms of tourism are subject of special attention as a significant aspect of the process of rehabilitation of our country as a tourism destination. When, in connection with the establishing the new tendencies in the tourism searching process – complicated and multilayered, demanding unifying the efforts of the governmental, branch and non-economical structures on national, regional and local level. Roles performed by the individual participants are specific despite the fact that in their generality they are routed to capturing the needs of the market and its satisfaction at a highest level.

1 Such as central and Eastern Europe and Asia
2 the destination reaches 1,92 % market share of the world volume of international tourism and 0,28 % of the world incomes of tourism
Figure 1. Number of tourist for the period 2000 – 2007 – as all and from EU

Bulgaria is determined as dynamically developing destination for rural, eco and cultural tourism based on the multiple choices of partly explored and absorbed natural and cultural resources with national, regional and international importance. The possibilities for the country to take a leader position in regional and European aspect are great, moreover on the background of the world stagnation in the tourism industry in Bulgaria it rises.

Bulgaria is believed to be a little known, secure and stable tourist place situated near West Europe. At the same time its setting as a destination for alternative tourism – in general – eco, cultural, rural – in separate and combined tourist product, is a condition for steady economic and social development in caring for the environment decisions (Stankova, Munteanu, 2008).

In connection with the previous it should be mentioned that the clear realizing and satisfying the concrete and supposed needs of the potential consumers have a key role for the effectiveness of the process of forming the searched version of the tourism travelling, which to maximum extend can satisfy tourists’ interests (Thomas, 1996:125). That is why for the Bulgarian tourist companies serving the segment of the rural, eco or cultural tourism as an important aspect of activity must be the care for the consumers. It is the main moment in the market approach towards the business. Accepting it in connection with the rural, eco or cultural tourism allows being determined and anticipated the demands of the tourists in an objective way to create additional advantages and unique products and services differing from the competitive ones with the care for the clients – tourists. As a result the product is planned according to the needs, wishes and expectations of the consumers.

It could be said that forming and implementing the rural, eco or cultural tourism product is obeyed on the general principle – the successful sale in the different objective tourist groups is reached with the optimal correlation of a product, advertising, price, kind and hospitable people “on the right place in the right time”. It should be mentioned, however, that the analysis of the rural, eco or cultural tourism consumers show lack of clearly determined objective groups. In fact, there can be outlined groups and individuals who, in spite of consuming one and the same superstructure and infrastructure, have different needs and demands. Their successful satisfaction requires knowing different cultural perceptions. For example, routing the attention to the European market shows that the potential tourists may have a number of differences in their behaviour respectively to achieve different level of satisfaction, depending on their natural features (Nevet, B., Hobson, J.,1996:26). The tourists coming in Bulgaria from Germany are open – minded but absolutely official. The Belgians appreciate the individual attitude, punctuality and discretion. Italians are emotional; prefer tourist packages which satisfy the interests of the whole family. The tourists from Great Britain want to be determined according to their regional belonging as English, Welsh, Scottish, and Irish. As a whole they prefer the official attitude, appreciate punctuality, security and hygiene.

To the potential consumers of the rural, eco or cultural tourism product and their needs the Bulgarian tourist companies should point various market researches. The results will help them to understand the
different types of tourists, consuming those types of products, their origin, sums they are ready to spend, the future tendencies in the tourism, competitors’ market positions, price levels, etc. In general, they could analyze inner and outer sources of information as long as investigate the competitors on the market, the types of consumers and their attitude towards the offered product / products (Marinova, 1993:96; Doganov, 1994:58; Doganov, Durankev, 1995:238). To achieve impartial and measurable data could be used methods such as observing, inquiry investigations, discussion groups, personal interviews, correspondence with regular consumers. An important element in investigating the consumers of the rural, eco or cultural tourism product is the feed-back.

At the moment of buying the client is influenced mainly by the location, design and layout, the outer and inner space, presenting the product and before all the appearance and attitude of the serving staff. Arriving at the tourism place the tourists already have concrete expectations and inevitably evaluate the real condition of the area of living as far as it concerned its quality.

The potential tourist make preliminary imagine for the offered product while researching and choosing the desired destination. This imagine is built by the information in brochures, tourist guides or Internet, presented by tourist information centres, shared with other tourists or tour operators / tourists agents and to a big extend may be “ manipulated “. The first impression which they can get, concern mostly the tactile qualities of the tourist product. Good impression is created with the easy accessibility, opened area near the building / for example family hotel with garden or open – aired areas /, cleanness, order and enough light in the rooms, enough – lighted and cozy, lack of working materials in the common dwellings, nice odor, neat and tidy dressed staff, suggesting calmness and trust, well – arranged and qualified advertising materials, understandable marking leading the tourists and inspiring security, presence of signs, connected with safety, anti – fire procedures, local attractions, outside signs with the company’s logo, information for some products such as food or drinks. Non – tactile qualities of the tourist product like atmosphere and situation are created by pleasant music, good attitude and incorporating the tourists to the local culture and traditions.

Tourists complete their image during the whole stay, looking possibilities for satisfying exact needs. This is true especially for the tourists coming from West Europe and USA, whose culture and apperception of the world are different; moreover this is their first visit to Bulgaria. The confidence in the guests can be seen when the rural area, in which they live, answers to their expectations: premises are clean and tidy, for the preparation of the food are used ecological products, consummation of the water hides no health risks, and safe keeping of valuable things and the security of the tourists are guaranteed. An important role has the document, certifying the hotel category, also the presence of certificates for anti – fire safety, hygiene, etc. Positive effect has theirs exposure to an easy visible place together with other documents, presenting received certificate, award or prize, if there are such. The maximum satisfaction of the clients is linked with figuring out a plan for working with clients including the activities of researching and analyze of the present situation/estimating the level of satisfaction of the existing and potential clients from the five elements of the marketing – product, staff, advertising, price, place/ and defining the marketing aims /segment which is orientated the activity to, providing for the selling/.

Conclusion

The territory of Bulgaria contains many and diverse rural, eco and cultural potentials which present myriad opportunities for small-scale, high income, locally controlled tourism generation. But with spatially and structurally dynamic mix of mass and specialist markets to target, there are increasing opportunities for creating “sustainable” attractions to act as a basic resource for tourism, organized and sustained through customization of tourism product. The possibilities for the country to take a leader position in regional and European aspect are great, moreover on the background of the world stagnation in the tourism industry in Bulgaria it rises.

In the context of these problems, we can bring out some general problems and needs, as well as the possible incomes for their overcoming. Under the new conditions in the sphere of competition it is normal to be doubled the specifics in the approach of caring for the client, because it provides positive results for the tourists company when it distinguishes it from the competitors. In its bottom stays the estimation for the activity from the potential consumer’s point of view that has to receive constant level of excellent quality. If orientated to the tourist Bulgarian tourism shell “win” as it outstrip its expectations – the satisfaction and the surprise from the unexpected leave solid impression which shall be shared with others, shell lead to repetitiveness of the visits and as a result shell raise the incomes. The consequences from the accepting of a
special attitude towards the client help and ensure long lasting success for the tourism business. Achieving a high level of accordance of the elements of the marketing and the individual requirements of the potential tourists ensures the growth of the sales, respectively the realized profit which is enough condition for achieving satisfaction of the tourists, but also of the Bulgarian tourism in connection with the global tourism trends.

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