

## RURAL AND ECOTOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN SCOPE OF BULGARIAN TOURISM

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### Abstract

*The search for specific opportunities which could solve the existing problems and contribute to overcome the conflicts related to the development of contemporary tourism, requires creation of two concepts which to be adopted and applied to the tourism reality and practice. The first concept concerns the development of sustainable tourism and the second one is aimed at development of alternative forms of tourism. The latter could also be referred as supplemental to the concept for development of alternative forms of tourism.*

*This paper makes a historical review of the creation and development of the rural and ecotourism at global and regional scale. Under observation is also the chronological order of both definitions together with the contemporary understanding of the content of these forms of tourism. Some of the basic problems in their development are concerned. An attempt for assessment of the place and importance of protected areas and protected sites in terms of rural and ecotourism is made.*

**Keywords:** sustainable tourism, alternative tourism, rural tourism, ecotourism, protected areas and protected sites.

**JEL classification:** Q56

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The search for specific opportunities which could solve the existing problems and contribute to overcome the conflicts related to the development of contemporary tourism, requires creation of two concepts which to be adopted and applied to the tourism reality and practice. The first concept concerns the development of sustainable tourism and the second one is aimed at development of alternative forms of tourism (Rakadziyska, 1997).

The concept for development of alternative forms of tourism supplements the concept for sustainable tourism. Furthermore, it reveals some approaches leading to the desired final results (Rakadziyska, 2007).

According to the same author, citing Wackermann (1988), the alternative tourism is defined as “transformation of the three dominant models of tourism development at the following levels of extent – socio-cultural and tourist ethics, economic realism and environmental protection” (Wackermann, 1988). The author thinks that alternative tourism could not exist without alternative forms of hospitality, services and appropriate staff qualifications. That way alternative form of tourism is considered as a dynamic system,

determined not only for its structural elements, but for its stable, mandatory and simultaneously existing “living” relations among these elements which contribute to the demolition of the disadvantages of contemporary tourism, including concentration of tourist flows, improvisation of tourism processes, mass “take-over” of great areas, dissemination of advertisement and product cliché.

The existing similar forms of tourist products as well as the arising “gigantism” could not meet the requirements of tourists, whose travel choice is based on specific motivation. Alternative tourist products are expected to offer original combinations of the elements of the nature and the anthropogenic environment, which in turn ensure safety, tranquillity and comfort together with specific effects such as regulation of the tourist visitation on specific sites. That way alternative forms of tourism are opposing to the massive tourism.

Very often in literature alternative form of tourism is determined as “soft”, “mild”, “local” differing from the definition “tough” which is used to describe mass tourism (Radziyska, 2007).

The most popular forms of alternative tourism are ecotourism, rural, cultural and hobby tourism, yachting and many more<sup>1</sup>.

## 2. RURAL TOURIST PRODUCTS

Rural tourism originates as a result from the popularization of agricultural activities with tourism purposes as well as from the integration of tourist products in rural environment. The basic features of this form of tourism represents the tourist stay (active or passive) in rural environment, the contact with the hosting family as well as the access to farms and farm stays. Tourists are offered opportunities for active involvement in everyday activities of the hosting family, engagement in local crafts, folklore, traditions and etc. (Mileva, 2004). According to the same author the specific nature of this tourism form is predetermined by the place and the type of tourist products on offer. Usually rural tourist products are combined with or supplemented by other specialized tourism forms such as cultural, ecotourism and etc. This makes rural tourist products very attractive for tourists, who want to combine their stay in rural ambience with proximity to nature and involvement in agricultural activities.

The existing definitions of the rural tourist product mark a contrast with city tourism and urban ways of life. The key consumer of this type of product are urban people (Mileva, 2004).

France is considered as the leading destination for quite a long time in terms of demand and supply of rural tourist products. A specialized organization offering countryside accommodation was established in the country in 1951. The National Federation of Rural tourism was established several years later. Over time such type of organizations have been found in the remaining Western European countries. High importance on joining efforts and establishing collaboration in rural tourism marked the foundation of the European Federation of Rural Tourism in 1990. The member states were Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, Island, Italy, Luxemburg, Portugal and Hungary. The Union of Green rural tourism in Central and Eastern Europe was established in Hungary in 1992.

Today, Western and Middle European countries consider the important role of rural environment in terms of tourism and leisure. Approximately one fifth from all tourist trips in the European Union are implemented in the countryside.

They account for 39% from the overall number of tourist trips in Holland, 35% - in Denmark, 34% in Germany, 29 % in the Great Britain, France and Portugal and 27 % in Spain and Ireland.

In scope of the European Union 25% of all tourist holidays link with rural tourism practices. Approximately 30% of all types of trips in the United Kingdom, France and Portugal concern the rural tourism. At the same time sea tourism dominates in Bulgaria with an emphasis placed upon sea resorts in the coastal municipalities, limited number of recognized international resorts (3), Spa destinations (4) as well as in the cities – Sofia and Plovdiv, where business and cultural tourism are developed. Approximately 90% of tourism activity is concentrated there. Furthermore around 44% of the overall number of nights are registered within two months -July and August and 73% in the period June – September. This seasonality has a stronger impact in terms of international tourism.

Tourism development in the last several years reveal that tourists' needs and behavior goes beyond the limits of the traditional mass sea and mountain holidays, practiced in tourist enclaves. For the majority of this new tourist category the key motivation represents the desire to have something new and different leading to psychological and physical relaxation. This in turn creates a need of direct contact with nature and lack of large tourist groups and evokes feelings of enjoyment and love for peaceful and natural living in rural ambience. Moreover this tourism form keeps the existing traditions for spending leisure time in the countryside which in turn is a motivation for further rural tourism development. (Marinov, 2002). The same author thinks that except for the tourist demand, factors of great importance for rural tourism development represent the opportunities for its practice. Rural tourism supply is implemented in variable ways in different countries depending on the agricultural structure and organization, existing customs and traditions in villages, relations between urban settlements and the countryside and etc. The global crisis of agricultural oversupply results in intensive attempts by rural households and municipalities in Europe and North America to diversify their labor activities through the means of rural tourism, which in turn has a catalyzing effect for this tourism form (Маринов, 2002).

We have to emphasize that due to the complex motivation of this phenomenon and the specifics related to its development in different countries, there is not a single, common definition and terminology related to rural tourism. Very often the rural tourism is defined as "provincial", "local", "agro", "recreational", "alternative" or any other type of tourism, differing from mass tourism. In some cases it is limited only to "agrotourism", while in other its meaning is wider encompassing "green", "holiday", "local", "outdoors" and etc. One of the basic advantage of this tourism form is that It differs from the "industrial" (mass) tourism and it has nothing in common with the overcrowded resorts.

At the very same time, a series of publications support the thesis that the definition "provincial", "rural" and "agrotourism" cover in meaning and moreover it constitutes a provincial tourism form that comprises of the other two.

### 3. RURAL TOURISM vs. AGRICULTURAL TOURISM

Agrotourism is also often used as a synonym of rural tourism, but it has much narrow sense. It is related to variable activities, directly linked with agricultural labour such as fruit and vegetable growing, animal breeding as well as with buildings needed for the implementation of the agricultural activities.

For that reason this tourism form is undertaken by farmers for whom tourism activities represent supplementary revenue generator after the main agricultural activities (Popova, 1997). In contrast with agricultural tourism, the rural tourism has a complex character, as it encompasses agricultural, sporting, healing, eco- and entertaining activities.

Wide popularity for the last several years gained the term "farm tourism". It emphasizes on the use of farm houses as places for tourist accommodation, as well as their conversion into health clubs. Another trend marks the disconnection with the owners of agricultural activity.

Tourism for the latter becomes a main revenue generator. They specialize in supplying tourism accommodation and food. The popularity of this form of rural tourism in lots of European countries has led to establishment of a large network specialized accommodation establishments representing authentic rural houses.

Despite the lost connection with agricultural sector, the latter plays an important role for local economies and it is considered as one of the most important tourism forms (Попова, 1997).

Other authors make attempts to describe these tourism forms on the basis of their structural components. According to them rural tourism is "built on" the rural culture. And depending on the main activities terms such as "agro", "green", "gastronomical", "hunting", "water", "house-riding", "historical", "cultural" and others are used. Tourism activities related to big hotels, ski-tracks, golf playgrounds and etc. are difficult to integrate and imply into the term "rural tourism".

Georgiev (1982) calls rural tourism "tourism in the countryside" and defines it as "tourism travel of citizens whose basic motivation is staying in the countryside in proximity with nature with the aim to avoid urban noise and polluted environment". Tourists stay in houses of the local people or in tents and caravans. They often take part in the agricultural activities.

Gilbert (1989) considers that rural tourism represents a planned use of the resources of the rural environment, leading to improvement of the status and wellbeing of the overall area of the local residents and the tourists, who visit it.

The European Community (1987) gives the following definition of rural tourism: "The Rural Tourism represents a complex, wide in scale activity. It is much more than agrotourism, although it does not include elements typical for agricultural activities. It encompasses, though vocational activities by interests, ecotourism, walking tours, climbing and biking, adventure, sport and health tourism, hunting and fishing, educational trips, heritage tourism and in some cases ethnic tourism".

According to Medlik (1966) cited by Marinov (2002) „alternative tourism”, „responsible tourism”, „appropriate tourism”, „soft tourism”, „ecotourism”, „green tourism” are all synonyms.

These terms have wide sense and relate to such tourism forms, which generate positive social, cultural and ecological impact on the tourist place and for that reason they are considered as an alternative of mass tourism.

The author also considers rural tourism as a form of alternative tourism. He defines it as vocational tourism, focusing on rural environment. He also emphasizes that rural tourism which is often determined as farm and agrotourism has a wider sense, because it covers a series of other activities, related to natural routes (the so called ecotineraries), picnics, agricultural and folklore museums together with agricultural production (Marinov, 2002).

Marinov (2002), summarizing the interpretations of the term “rural tourism” acknowledges its bilateral character. On the one hand this tourism form comprises of tourist stay in rural environment and include tourists’ active or passive involvement through implementation of various activities and consumption of local products and services. On the other hand it represents a combination of facilities, activities, processes and products, provided by farmers and rural residents made with the aim to attract and keep tourists within their region as well as to generate additional revenues of their business. Furthermore, the author emphasizes that the essence of rural tourism is due to its characteristics, including complex motivation, short-haul travel, preferences of personal car use as means of transport, lack of necessity to build extensively specialized infrastructure and accommodation establishments. For the purposes of rural tourism the available infrastructure is used, there is a low tourism seasonality, the demand and consumption concentrates at weekends, especially in terms of villa holidays, there is a lack of great concentration of tourists on sites at the same time, tolerance toward local culture, customs and traditions are encouraged. Moreover, the majority of the host families are small agricultural owners, there is no isolation between the host family and their guests, which is a prerequisite for customization of servicing; rural tourism opposing to mass vocational tourism is unorganized and partially organized.

Similar definition of rural tourism is given by Aleksieva and Stamov (2005). According to them rural tourism is defined as tourism in the countryside, which meets the tourism interests toward customs and traditions, cultural, agricultural and other specific activities as well as toward natural, historical and cultural resources of the region. Rural tourism is one of the opportunities for people to run out of the problems typical for urban settlements, letting them to integrate to nature at the same time, to live in smaller dwelling places, closer to environment and turn back to their roots thanks to their engagement in various events, organized by the host family.

The above mentioned authors consider that special feature of the rural tourist product represents the personal contact with visitors, the opportunities for the latter to feel the surrounding environment and to participate actively in the activities, customs and traditions as well as the overall way of life of the host families. This tourism form has also very strong cultural and educational impact.

Rural tourism is a local form of tourism, developed in small settlements, which is created, controlled and developed by the local residents. It ensures contact with nature as well as sharing of experience among tourists and host families. As a result from the local initiatives and management, rural tourism is built upon the local landscape and culture. (Aleksiev, Stamov, 2005).

#### **4. RURAL TOURISM IN TERMS OF NATURE PRESERVATION AND SUSTAINABILITY**

According to the same authors rural tourism should also be considered as means for preservation of the Earth and way of living. Its development could contribute to the revival of low-developed regions through generating new jobs and opportunities for extra revenues. It enhances the building and improvement of infrastructure and has a multiplication effect on investments. Its role could enlarge through improvement in service quality, and supply of products and services, which to meet the increasing demand. At the same time we have to emphasize that it is not a universal tool for problem solving in the economic and social aspects of the agricultural activity. Moreover, tourism needs to develop in a balanced manner

together with all other spheres of the economic life. That way they represent essential part of the integral development which is a subject to supply and servicing at the very same time. It is necessary to point out, that in the Western European countries rural tourism is accessible and provided by a large number of organizations (companies), coming under any of the following categories:

Hotel establishments, bedrooms in farm houses; private homes for rent; campsites; food establishments; involvement in agricultural activities.

A specific characteristic of rural tourism is the fact that it could be supplemented by other specialized tourism forms which in turn enrich its product portfolio. This refers mainly to hunting and cultural tourism, ecotourism, wine tourism and etc.

Together with the positive impact there exists a threat from negative effects to occur if this form of tourism is over-developed. Any large concentration of tourists demolishes the specific features, typical for agricultural regions. Along with that the strong level of commercialization could lead to deterioration of services and their qualities as well as to unify of their characteristics. On the other hand there are contradictions related to the necessity to preserve the authenticity of the place of visitation and ensure the required comfort at the same time.

Development of a strategy for rural tourism requires creation of profiles of the target tourist groups. Implemented research reveals a necessity to create social and demographic characteristics and behavioral model.

Depending on the tourist motivation rural tourism could be (Mileva, 2004; Marinov, 2002): recreational, sport, cultural, health and event tourism.

In fact individual types of rural tourism do not contradict to one another, on the contrary they usually supplement each other during tourist travel.

Rural tourism could be implemented in various forms. According to Marinov (2002) the majority of them consist of:

- Depending on the state territories– international and domestic;
- Depending on the means of transport – motor transport, railway, water and air transport;
- With a view to the place of stay – in farms, at “green” holiday establishment, vocational nature park, round rural trip;
- Depending on the means of stay – tourism in provincial aristocratic dwelling houses; hotel tourism, tourism in rural family-run houses; tourism in parahotel establishments, tourism in personal villas;
- With a view to the way of food servicing – tourism in self-servicing establishments, tourism in establishments with waiters;
- Depending on the duration of stay – excursion, short-haul, long-haul rural tourism;
- On the basis of organizational model – unorganized and organized rural tourism;
- Depending on the number of participants – individual, group and youth rural tourism.

Rural tourism development in certain countries, including Bulgaria, would be impossible without appropriate organization (set of purposes, strategies, programmes, subjects, structures, functions), implemented on national, regional, local and establishment (company) scale. The latter also refers to the governmental and the non-governmental sectors alike.

Rural tourism in Bulgaria is regulated by the common tourism and legislative framework put into force in Bulgaria. It is determined by the Law on tourism. The latter together with legislative acts have established common criteria and requirements on tourism activi-

ties implementation. The regulation is aimed to improve the quality of tourist services and to ensure consumer protection of tourist products (Marinov, 2002).

## 5. ECOTOURISM

The combination of Bulgarian biodiversity, the existing protected and protection areas, the cultural heritage 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).

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 gave 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 unites the cares about nature, local community together with the concept for sustainable development which means that this tourism form requires the following principles to be fulfilled:

- Minimizing the negative impact upon nature;
- Creating eco-friendly awareness of people;
- Ensuring positive experience for visitors and the host community alike;
- Generating revenues and increasing employment rates for the local community;
- Creating 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 visit 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 side 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).

Wallace and Pierce (1996, cited by Fennell, 2003) consider that „ecotourism is travel to relatively undisturbed natural areas for study, enjoyment, or volunteer assistance. It is tra-

vel 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 as “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 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 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).

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 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. Partners, supplying services on tourist sites are usually small businesses.
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, organizations and the authorities, managing the natural areas for the purposes of nature conservation;
  - alternative employment and opportunities for incomes of the local communities; increasing the information awareness for the conservation of the natural and cultural values among the local populations and tourists alike (Veretsi, 2002).

According to Veretsi (2002) the preliminary investigation of the World Tourism Organization reveals that the use of the term “ecotourism” is still limited. Touroperators in most of the cases 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 the fact, they do not use the term “ecotourism”. A number of touroperators include some of their elements and adopt them within their policy frameworks. Furthermore, their commitment is different throughout the world. Their activities vary from distribution of behavioral regulations to ecotourism manuals for travellers, grants, support for nature conservation and support of the local communities, offering tourist packages with the participation of local suppliers and develop joint programmes and partnerships (Veretsi, 2002).

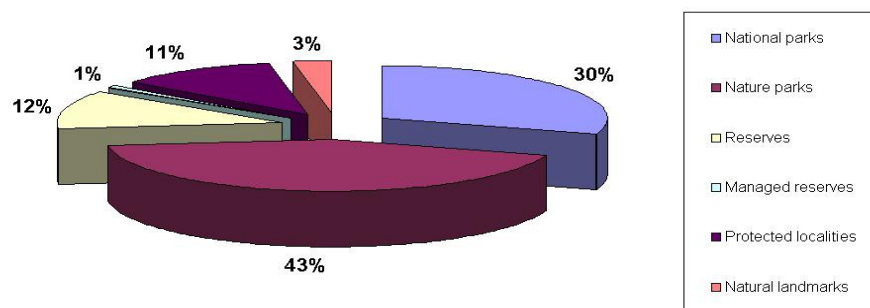
## 6. NATURA 2000 IN THE REALM OF ECOTOURISM DEVELOPMENT

Bulgarian ecotourism is mainly oriented towards protected areas and protection areas under NATURA 2000.

Protected areas in Bulgaria are proclaimed under the Law on protected areas (1998). These are the most valuable sites for their biogeographical nature in the country.

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.

**Distribution of the protected areas  
in Bulgaria in terms of their territory**



**Figure no. 1 Distribution of the Bulgarian protected areas by categories**

*Table no. 1 - National Parks in Bulgaria*

Name of the National Park	Area in ha	Region/ District	Name of the reserve	Reserve area in ha
Rila National Park	81 046	Pazardzik, Sofia, Kyustendil, Blagoevgrad	Parangalitza	1509
			Ibar	2248.6
			Central Rila reserve	12 393.7
			Skakavitza	70.8
Pirin National Park	40 332.4	Blagoevgrad	Bayuvi dupki – Dzindzeritza	2248.6
			Yulen	3156
Central Balkan National Park	71 669.5	Lovech, Gabrovo, Sofia, Plovdiv, Stara Zagora	Boatin	1597.2
			Tzarichina	3418.7
			Kozyata stena	904.3
			Steneto	3578.8
			Sokolna	1250
			Peeshitite skali	1465.7
			Severen Dzhndem	1610
			Dzhendema	4220.2
			Stara reka	1974.7

Table no. 2 - Nature Parks in Bulgaria

Name of the Nature Park	Area in ha	Reserve	Area in ha	Managed reserve	Area of the Managed reserve in ha
<b>Vitosha</b>	26 606.6	Bistrishko branishte	1060.6	-	-
		Torfeno branishte	785.3		
<b>Rusenski Lom</b>	3408	-	-	-	-
<b>Sinite kamani</b>	11 380.8	Kutelka	645.1	-	-
<b>Shumensko Plato</b>	3895.8	Bokaka	62.6	-	-
<b>Zlatni pyasatsi</b>	1320.7	-	-	-	-
<b>Vrachanski Balkan</b>	30129.9	Vrachanski Karst	1438.9	-	-
<b>Strandja</b>	116 068.5	Silkosia	389.6		
		Uzunbodzak – Lopushna	2529.6		
		Vitanovo	1112.4		
		Sredoka	607.8		
		Tisovitsa	749.3		
<b>Rila Monastery</b>	27 370.7	Rila Monastery Reserve	3676.5		
<b>Persina</b>	21 762.2	Kitka	25.4	Persinski blata	385.2
		Milka	30		
<b>Bulgarka</b>	21 772.2	-	-	-	-
<b>Belasitsa</b>	11 732.4	Kongura	1320	-	-

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 importance for the Community. The elaboration of this ecological network is an obligation for each member-state of the European Union 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 for preserving 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 protected areas are established and the habitats within or outside their territory are managed and new biotopes are created and violated ones are revived. The rare, vulnerable and endangered species (the ones enlisted in Appendix 1 of this directive) and all regularly migratory birds are under special natural scientific activities in terms of their habitats. This in turn requires the establishment of Special Protection Areas) and to be undertaken measures, preventing pollution and deterioration of the habitats.

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. For their protection are established Special Protected Areas for the periods of nesting and migration along the migratory routes.

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 require creation of territories of special protection regime.

Appendix 3 comprises of 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 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.

In Bulgaria are 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, which cover 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 placed on 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.

## **7. SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF TOURISM ACTIVITIES WITHIN BULGARIAN TOURIST REGIONS**

In terms of tourism sector the idea of sustainable ecological, economic and social development of the protection zones, included in NATURA 2000 could be achieved through a balanced management of different tourist activities, implemented within the boundaries of these zones. The latter implies strategic planning and management of these activities in the eight tourist regions in Bulgaria.

Within their territories are established subregions, microregions and tourism centres. The latter will represent the main structural units for tourism planning and management of the regions.

Despite their product profile each tourism region including the protected areas on their territory and conservation activities implemented within them there exists a requirement to measure the level of tourism activity with a view to ecological standards and their long-term sustainability. In a narrow sense this means that the design and establishment of tourism centers of the regions together with the key tourism destinations and places of visitation within their boundaries which have to be located outside the territory of the protected areas and spas. The latter is of key importance with a view to the fact that tourism centres and destinations are subject to massive building activities of tourism complexes and specialized super – and infrastructure. Furthermore they are usually points of highest concentration of tourist flows and feature intensified level of tourism activity. The intensity of recreational exploitation has to be in designated limits within the SPAs.

Together with the above mentioned initiatives, the political framework aimed at Bulgarian ecotourism development include national strategies and plans in the field of tourism, biodiversity, forestry policy, environment, entrepreneurship initiatives, regional development, national legislation and international conventions for where Bulgaria is a signatory. An essential place within the political framework has the National Strategy for sustainable tourism in Bulgaria in the period 2009 – 2013, which determines the development framework in the field of tourism together with the priorities for sustainable development of the sector.

The ecotourism stakeholders are represented by certain state institutions, regional and local authorities, non-government organizations, tourism businesses and investors, local communities, international and national granting parties and tourists.

It is obvious that both tourism types, subject to this paper – in particular – rural and ecotourism have potential to further develop in terms of tourism sector in Bulgaria.

In number of the country regions have been laid the foundations for rural tourism development. The latter is considered as a form of economic activity, which could contribute to nature conservation, rural culture and to enhance the well-being of the local population. It is also reckoned as a form of sustainable tourism. At national scale it represents an opportu-

nity of the local economies to grow in partnership and through integration with other forms of economic activities in the rural regions.

The Bulgarian rural tourism experience is still limited. It lacks a co-ordinated policy in the field leaving the majority activities and products relatively unfamiliar, having low inefficient support from the local and central authorities. Moreover, the encouragement of marketing development of rural tourism is relatively low. International projects are very often the only means used for this purpose (Aleksieva, Stamov).

It is obvious that Bulgaria should benefit from effective rural tourism activities in the future with a view to the natural, socio-cultural and human resources, increase the quality and quantity of tourist resources, decrease of negative tourism impact upon environment within the territory of tourist destinations.

The latter is relevant to a large extent to ecotourism. Unfortunately, for the last decade, the emphasis in tourism industry especially in terms of sea and mountain tourism in our country reveals a overexploitation of the natural resources. In such conditions an essential part of Bulgarian biodiversity is threatened from disappearance. This in turn could cause serious damages in ecotourism and other alternative tourism forms. In order to ensure the successful implementation of the marketing plan called „Ecotourism – naturally Bulgaria” we need to guarantee the nature conservation of our country.

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<sup>i</sup> These tourism forms are relatively new. For that reason an emphasis should be laid upon the fact that they are alternative only in terms of the problems, arising from the mass tourism, which in turn links better the diverse tourist needs with the nature, culture, customs and traditions, historical heritage. (Rakadziyska, 2007).