

PROJECT
TOUR GUIDES FOR PROTECTED AREAS IN BULGARIA

SCHUTZGEBIETSGUIDES FÜR BULGARIEN – PILOTPROJEKT GENERATIONSÜBERGREIFENDE
TANDEM – TEAMS
(DEUTSCHE BUNDESSTIFTUNG UMWELT AZ 33203/01)



Final Report/ Abschlussbericht/

12.12.2019

Project Partner:

	Leadpartner: Terolog GmbH Environmental Communication and Regional Development Dr. Dorothe Lütkemöller Dipl.Geogr. Carmen Jorzik
	BTE Tourism and Regional Consulting Prof. Dr. Hartmut Rein Juliane Koch
	Pirin Tourism Forum Simana Markovska
	Rila Monastir Nature Park Rayna Pashova

sponsored by



Deutsche
Bundesstiftung Umwelt

www.dbu.de

PROJECT
TOUR GUIDES FOR PROTECTED AREAS IN BULGARIA

Final Report (DBU AZ 33203/01)

CONTENT

1) Zusammenfassung	4
2) Summary	5
3) Background and Problem Statement.....	6
4) Aims and Approach.....	7
4.1) Stakeholder Identification and Integration	7
4.2) Development and Testing of Qualification Measures	8
4.3) Development and Testing of Marketing Activities.....	10
4.4) Project Evaluation and Accompanying Research.....	10
5) Results.....	11
5.1) Stakeholder Identification and Integration	11
5.2) Development and Testing of Qualification Measures	14
5.2.1) Evaluation of Workshops	14
5.2.2) Evaluation of Tour Descriptions	16
5.2.3) Final Examination and Certification.....	16
5.2.4) Evaluation of Guided Tours on the Ground	16
5.3) Development and Testing of Marketing Activities.....	20
5.3.1 New Internet Platform for International Marketing	20
5.3.2 Measures for National Marketing In Germany	23
5.3.3 Measures for National Marketing in Bulgaria.....	23
5.4) Project Evaluation and Accompanying Research.....	24
6 Discussion and Conclusions.....	29
7 Appendix.....	31

1) ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Das Projekt „Schutzgebietsguides für Bulgarien - Pilotprojekt generationsübergreifende Tandem - Teams“ wurde von der DBU am 17.1.2018 bewilligt und wurde am 31.11.2019 abgeschlossen.

Hauptziel des Pilotvorhabens ist die Förderung des Naturschutzes und nachhaltiger Naturnutzung in Schutzgebieten Bulgariens durch verbesserte Besucherlenkungskonzepte und die Schaffung neuer Wertschöpfungsmöglichkeiten für die Bevölkerung vor Ort. Durch die Etablierung eines spezialisierten Naturtourismussegmentes, speziell durch und für Mitarbeiter von Schutzgebieten, soll lokale Wertschöpfung durch die Entwicklung und Etablierung spezieller Angebote des Ökotourismus gefördert werden.

Dies soll erreicht werden, durch die Nutzung und Inwertsetzung des bei Schutzgebietsmitarbeitern vorhandenen naturschutzfachlichen Know-hows in Form spezialisierter Angebote für Wandertouren mit Umweltbildungscharakter.

Ein speziell entwickeltes Weiterbildungskonzept für Mitarbeiter bulgarischer Schutzgebiete wurde erfolgreich erprobt und eine neu entwickelte Internetplattform etabliert, die über die teilnehmenden Schutzgebiete, sowie die vorhandenen Tourangebote informiert. Die Plattform ermöglicht eine direkte Kontaktaufnahme zwischen Tourguide und Gast. Ein solches Angebot existierte bisher für bulgarische Schutzgebiet nicht. Die Plattform, deren Host in Deutschland angesiedelt ist, präsentiert sechs neue Tourangebote von 12 beteiligten Tourguides sowie Hintergrundinformationen zu den teilnehmenden Schutzgebieten unter:

<https://www.naturerlebnis-bulgarien.de> bzw: <https://www.nature-experience-bulgaria.com>

Durch eine wissenschaftlich fundierte Begleitforschung konnten eine Reihe von Erfolgsfaktoren für die weitere Entwicklung des Ökotourismus in bulgarischen Schutzgebieten im Allgemeinen und die Tourangebote im Besonderen identifiziert werden. Hinsichtlich der touristischen Entwicklung in der Region kann angenommen werden, dass die neuen geführten Wanderungen einen Zusatznutzen für internationale Touristen darstellen. Die Touren sind individualisierte, neue Angebote in den Schutzgebieten und haben eine Unique Selling Proposition (USP), dank der persönlichen Einbeziehung von Experten der Schutzgebiete.

Der generelle impact, den das Pilotprojekt bisher entfalten konnte, ist eindeutig positiv und eine klare Demonstration innovativer Ansätze und Methoden zur Lösung der aufgezeigten Probleme und zur Unterstützung des Naturschutzes und nachhaltiger Naturnutzung in Schutzgebieten Bulgariens. Da es sich um ein Pilotprojekt mit begrenzter Laufzeit und Demonstrationscharakter handelt, hängt die Nachhaltigkeit des Projektansatzes davon ab, inwieweit die begonnenen Aktivitäten weiter unterstützt werden können und ob ggf. Möglichkeiten und Mittel zur Ausweitung des Projektansatzes auf andere Schutzgebiete in Bulgarien oder Mitteleuropa bestehen bzw. verfügbar gemacht werden können.

2) SUMMARY

The project “Tour Guides for Protected Areas in Bulgaria” (Schutzgebietsguides für Bulgarien – Pilotprojekt generationsübergreifende Tandem – Teams) was approved by the DBU at 17.1.2018 and was finished on 31.11.2019.

General aims of the pilot project are the promotion of sustainable use of natural resources by putting ecosystem services into value and the support of nature protection in protected areas in Bulgaria. The second main goal is the facilitation and creation of added value for local population, by introduction of a specialized ecotourism-offer in protected areas. In order to realize this, the nature-know-how of staff members of protected areas should be put into effect and make usable for educational touristic offers with a focus on hiking activities. One of the main project purposes is to establish direct, individual contacts between Bulgarian tour guides in protected areas and their potential guests via a new internet based platform.

A new concept of a further education program for nature guides, specialized on staff members of protected areas, was tested positively. A newly developed internet platform was launched, that is intended to work as a brokerage instrument in order to provide a) information about the protected areas involved in the project and b) the tour guides and the tours they offer for nature interested guests and hikers.

The newly developed platform, hosted in Germany, presents six new hiking tours offered by 12 certified guides and informs about the five protected areas that participated in the project:

<https://www.naturerlebnis-bulgarien.de> or: <https://www.nature-experience-bulgaria.com>

Accompanying scientific research identified several success factors for the further successful development of ecotourism in the protected areas in general and the new tour offers especially. Regarding the tourism development in the region, it can be assumed, that the guided tours present an added value to the offer for international tourists. The tours are a new offer for individual tourists in the protected areas and have a unique selling proposition (USP), thanks to the personal involvement of expert guides.

The impact the entire project has so far is very positive and a clear demonstration of possible and manageable innovative methods and procedures to overcome the problems stated and to support sustainable use of natural resources in protected areas in Bulgaria. Because of the pilot character of the project, with a limited runtime, the sustainability of the project`s approach depends on possibilities and fundings to additionally implement the tested approach in other protected areas in Bulgaria or other eastern European countries and to furthermore support the activities that have been kicked off so far.

3) BACKGROUND AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

The project "Tour Guides for Protected Areas in Bulgaria" (Schutzgebietsguides für Bulgarien – Pilotprojekt generationsübergreifende Tandem – Teams, DBU AZ 33202/01) was approved by the DBU at 17.1.2018 and was finished on 31.11.2019.

This paragraph informs about the background and intentions of the DBU - funded pilot project, that was implemented by Terolog GmbH, BTE Tourism and Regional Consulting, the Pirin Tourism Forum and the Directorate of the Rila Monastery Nature Park.

General aims of the pilot project, according to DBU terms of reference, are the promotion of sustainable use of natural resources by putting ecosystem services into value and the support of nature protection in protected areas in Bulgaria. The second main goal is the facilitation and creation of added value for local population, by introduction of a specialised ecotourism-offer in protected areas. In order to realise this, the nature-know-how of staff members of protected areas shall be put into effect and make usable for educational touristic offers with a focus on hiking activities.

Protected areas in Bulgaria are the backbone for the protection of unique European landscapes and are of increasing importance for expanding nature tourism, especially hiking activities. The current situation is characterized by the facts, that nature tourism in Bulgaria is of rising importance and protected areas serve as attractive destinations for tour operators, whereas tourists themselves often don't realize that they are hiking, biking or residing in a protected area. Additionally, the protected areas themselves do not participate very much in the monetary benefit (added value) tourism may create in a certain region. On the other hand protected areas staff members do have a lot of expert's knowledge, useful for informal education activities in the context of ecotourism, especially hiking tours. Thus the generation of local touristic added value by appreciation and utilization of local nature-protection - expertise and the general promotion of protected areas in Bulgaria for the target group of (German) hiking tourists are in the focus of the pilot project.

4) AIMS AND APPROACH

The main operational project objective is to improve the situation described above, for both, tourists and protected areas, by the implementation of enhanced visitor guiding systems and the generation of local touristic added value on the ground, by using and qualifying the specialized nature-know-how of experts and staff members of protected areas, who are willing and able to work as hiking tour guides besides their regular duties. Thus main measures and project-milestones are:

- Analysis of existing visitor management concepts in Bulgarian protected areas;
- Development and testing of a further education programme for protected areas guides, including the development of bilingual tandem-teams;
- Development and testing of a specialized internet-platform, working as an intermediate agency and marketing instrument between tour guides and (esp. German) hiking tourists;
- Development and testing of specialised marketing instruments in Bulgaria;
- Evaluation of and accompanying research on all relevant project aspects.

4.1) STAKEHOLDER IDENTIFICATION AND INTEGRATION

This paragraph presents a short overview on the general organisational situation of protected areas in Bulgaria and the relevant administrative structures.

PROTECTED AREAS

Currently three categories of protected areas are existing in Bulgaria:

A) National Parks: Rila, Pirin and Central Balkan National Parks are primarily managed for biodiversity conservation under a very strict regime regarding the use of natural resources.

B) Biosphere Reserves: according to the Ministry of Environment and Water four biosphere reserves are actually acknowledged by UNESCO`s MAB: Srebarna, Chervenata Stena, Central Balkan, Strandzha.

C) Nature Parks

There are 11 Nature Parks in Bulgaria: Belasitsa, Balgarka, Vitosha, Vrachanski Balkan, Zlatni Pyasatsi, Persina, Rila Monastery, Rusenski Lom, Sini Kamani, Strandzha and Shumen Plateau. They have a relatively liberal regime regarding the use of natural resources, as long as it does not affect the biological and landscape diversity. They cover areas of various ownership - state, municipal, private, religious.

All park types encourage the development of sustainable and environmentally friendly tourism, educational activities and traditional livelihood of the local people.

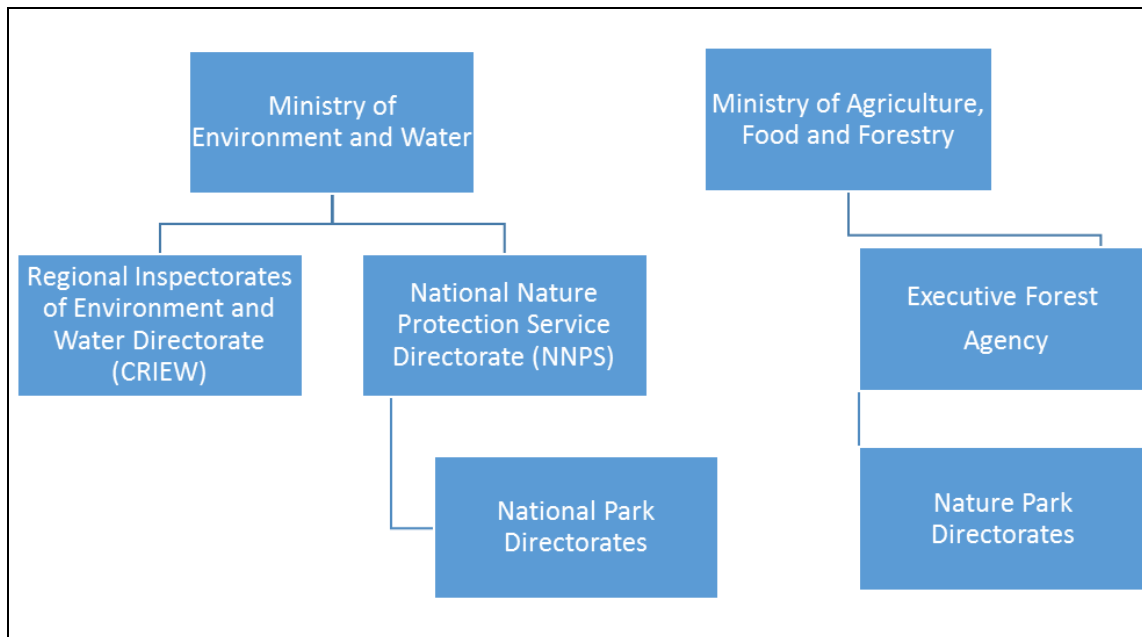
ADMINISTRATIVE BODIES

The Ministry of Environment and Water is in charge of the national parks and biosphere reserves. Two directorates of specialised administration are dealing with the protected areas: The Regional Inspectorates of Environment and Water Directorate (CRIEW) and the National Nature Protection Service Directorate (NNPS) (see picture 1). According to the Protected Areas Act, three directorates of national parks - Rila, Pirin and Central Balkan - are established as

specialized regional bodies of the Ministry of Environment and Water, which carry out local management and control.

The nature parks are administrated by the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Forestry through the Executive Forest Agency and its regional authorities. The Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Forestry ensures the management and security of the forests, lands and aquatic areas in protected areas other than those which are exclusively owned by the state – the nature parks. Ownership over the land tracts and forests located on the territory of the nature parks is mixed: state, municipal, private, etc.

Main activities of the Nature Park Directorates are to: plan, organize, coordinate, control and participate in the implementation of activities and projects related to research; maintaining and restoring biodiversity; conservation and restoration of natural habitats and of populations of plant and animal species or the conditions in their habitats; conservation and management of landscape components; rebuilding forests and protection against erosion, building and maintaining architectural elements for recreation and tourism; facilities ensuring the protection of cultural assets and monitoring stations; production and publishing of information, advertising, educational and other popular materials; develop, organize and coordinate the implementation of educational programs for the local population and visitors to the park;



Picture 1: Structures of Protected Areas Administrations in Bulgaria

4.2) DEVELOPMENT AND TESTING OF QUALIFICATION MEASURES

The qualification programme to be tested had to take into account, that the participants are full time employees of the protected areas, so the periods for presence time for workshops was organised during the autumn and winter season in two one week- workshops and one three-day`s workshop, summing up to 85 hours of lectures.

Table 1 presents the frame curriculum to be implemented and tested

Table 1: Frame Curriculum to be Tested in the Course of the Project

Topic
1) Nature Tourism and Hiking in Europe (Trends, role of protected areas, examples)
2) Guided Educational Hiking Tours in Protected Areas (State of the art, development strategies for new touristic products, concepts, marketing, legal frame)
3) Nature – Culture – Men and Landscape (Nature protection, visitors and nature experience, educational hiking tours, target groups, cultural differences,)
4) Tour Guiding and Communication (Rhetorics, cultural differences, self concept of tour guides, conflict management)
5) Tour Planning (Target groups and settings, safety and first aid in the field)
6) Marketing and Law (Economic aspects, management, liabilities, insurances)
7) Topics of special interest according to participants needs or wishes
8) Environmental English

In comparison to existing further education programmes for nature oriented tour guides (for example German “Zertifizierte Natur- und Landschaftsführer”, certified according to BANU (Bundesweiter Arbeitskreis der staatlich getragenen Umweltbildungsstätten im Natur und Umweltschutz)), the curriculum developed for the project`s target group didn`t have a need to integrate lectures on Flora, Fauna, Nature Protection etc, because each participant already has expert`s knowledge on university level in these fields. On the other hand aspects concerning tourism have been integrated into the curriculum.

During the one-week workshops basic methods of the concept of heritage interpretation were used, especially the use of local phenomena, available on the spot, the integration of visitors in a participatory way and the possibility of giving visitors immediate experiences of sites and their natural values. On the other hand the concept of interpretation was handled flexible, in order to offer participants enough space to develop their own skills. The development and planning of a half- to one-day tour for visitors was part of the participant`s homework. A specialised training on environmental English was conducted during an extra three-day`s workshop.

The further education programme is finalized with a theoretical and practical examination. The successful candidates receive a certificate, stating the successful attendance and examination, according to the frame curriculum explained above.

4.3) DEVELOPMENT AND TESTING OF MARKETING ACTIVITIES

One of the main project purposes is to establish direct contacts between Bulgarian tour guides in protected areas and their potential guests, without intermediate bodies like tour operators etc. Thus a newly developed internet platform is intended to work as a brokerage instrument, in order to provide a) informations about the protected areas involved in the project and b) the tour guides and the tours they offer for nature interested guests and hikers.

4.3.1 NEW INTERNET PLATFORM FOR INTERNATIONAL MARKETING

An in depth market research on existing internet platforms was conducted and gave evidence, that there are some internet-based offers for hiking activities in Bulgaria, but that these are more general touristically oriented offers, where protected areas don't play any role.

The official Bulgarian Tourism Portal gives hints on "ecotourism" or "adventurous tourism" but doesn't present hints on hiking-offers. This site is not up to date concerning technical standards and can't be used on mobile devices. The website of the Associations of Parks in Bulgaria presents several members, of which only some show sub-pages on "tourism". Four parks are mentioning the existence of guides, but without any information about the offer itself, qualification of the guides or contact details. Details of the conducted market research on existing internet based offers for guided hiking tours in Bulgaria are presented in appendix 2.

Up to the finalisation of this project, there was no offer existing, that is specialized on hiking tours in protected areas explicitly and tour offers guided by protected areas specialist's (staff).

4.3.1 MEASURES FOR NATIONAL MARKETING

An expert's interview with the project partner PTF revealed, that marketing activities for specialised hiking tours in Bulgarian protected areas, guided by experts, haven't been existing so far.

4.4) PROJECT EVALUATION AND ACCOMPANYING RESEARCH

EVALUATION SCHEME

The following steps of self-evaluation have been defined for the different operational elements of the pilot project:

- Evaluation of programme curriculum and workshops: Adequacy for participants and quality of workshops. Method: feedback – sheets and participating observation.
- Evaluation of participant's tour guiding concept's quality in terms of informal environmental education and interpretation standards; Method: examination of written tour descriptions and practical examn.
- Feedback instruments for tourists after guided tours, via the internet platform "naturerlebnis-bulgarien.de" and "nature-experience-bulgaria.com" (to be tested on efficiency).
- In depth evaluations of each guided tour on offer on the ground during the summer and autumn hiking – season 2019 via participating observations.

ACCOMPYING RESEARCH

An accompanying research was implemented, in order to highlight overarching aspects of the project. This was conducted by on-site observation and desk research.

5) RESULTS

This chapter presents the central results and findings of the project.

5.1) STAKEHOLDER IDENTIFICATION AND INTEGRATION

DIRECT PROJECT PARTNERS

During a first project meeting in March 2018 in Blagoevgrad and Rila (Bulgaria) the project partners (Terolog GmbH, Pirin Tourism Forum and Rila Monastir Nature Park Directorate) reconciled the planning details for the project activities. This step was useful, because the initial project proposal had undergone a two – years qualification and adaptation procedure before approval. The main project elements and procedures were agreed on and additionally the Rila Park Directorate offered the rooms of the Rila Monastir visitor information center to be used as venue for the further education workshops in the course of the project.

MINISTRIES

In order to inform and integrate the responsible ministries the project was introduced to the Executive Forestry Agency (Ministry of Agriculture), that welcomed the project targets and activities and stated their backing by a letter of support and recommendation. The Executive Forestry Agency also actively informed the Nature Parks in their area of accountability about the upcoming project activities and possibilities for applications.

The Ministry of Environment and Water, in charge of the national parks and biosphere reserves in Bulgaria (National Nature Protection Service Directorate (NNPS); head of Protected Areas Department), was informed about the project during a meeting at the 16.5.18 in the ministry (Sofia) and also welcomed and appreciated the project activities and documented it's backing by a letter of support.

DIRECTORATES OF PROTECTED AREAS

On the basis of a pre-selection procedure, where the administrative capacities of potentially interested protected areas had been evaluated and discussed with the Bulgarian partners and stakeholders, the directors of five protected areas were invited to a meeting at the directorate of the Vitosha Nature Park (Sofia) on 17.5.2018, in order to discuss the project's aims and procedures.

The project was introduced by the project team and discussed intensively and with interest by all meeting – participants. The project's intention, to invite staff members for training workshops in October 2018 and February 2019 was generally appreciated. The meeting participants agreed on an application procedure, where the park directors suggested staff members for participation. This top down procedure was chosen to make sure, that applicants are sure to have the backing of their employer and will be exempted from their daily work for the workshops.

In conclusion of intensive discussions with the management of the participating protected areas it could be stated, that currently protected areas in Bulgaria (nature parks, national parks, biosphere reserves) offer different kinds of environmental education activities as part of their obligations, according to valid management plans. These activities, with an impressive variety of didactical and organizational approaches, usually have a focus on the public educational sector

(school - classes, cooperation with universities etc.) and the general public. Existing marked hiking trails, equipped with different informations concerning flora and fauna (information panels etc.), are a part of these educational activities, meant to be used by visitors on their own. Guided hiking tours for adult nature oriented participants are offered relatively seldom, due to limitations of staff – capacities. During discussions with park directors and staff the impression came up, that guided hiking tours are seen basically as *touristically* oriented activities, and not as part of *environmental education*.

This pre - occupation concerning the function of guided tours in protected areas by park administrations was taken up as an important hint for the design and content of the further education curriculum and workshops, in order to highlight the role of touristic activities in the context of informal environmental education.

PARTICIPATING PROTECTED AREAS

The following section presents some basic information on the protected areas which were invited to take part in the pilot project. Selection criteria for invitation were the expected administrative capacities and the wish to include nature parks and at least one biosphere reserve as well.

VITOSHA NATURE PARK

Vitosha is the first park in Bulgaria and on the Balkan Peninsula. The park preserves precious plant and animal species - pine trees, yews, marsh vegetation, red deer, roe deer, wild boar, bear, nutcracker, pine tit, eared lark, etc. There are two reserves on its territory – Bistrishko Branishte biosphere reserve and Torfeno Branishte reserve.

The staff of Vitosha Nature park consists of 20 persons:

Management: Director and deputy director

General administration: 5 specialists such as accountant, PR, HR, etc.

Specialized administration: 13 specialists – Flora, Founa, Tourism, Forest inspectors, etc.

The headquarter of the park is located in Sofia.

BELASITSA NATURE PARK

Belasitsa Nature Park is located in the southwestern part of Bulgaria and covers the northern slopes of Belasitsa Mountain. It's territory is bordered to the west by Macedonia and to the south by Greece.

Belasitsa Nature Park Directorate consists of four employees:

Director

Chief expert "Biodiversity, international activities and projects"

Chief specialist "Infrastructure and Public Relations"

Accountant

The headquarter of the park is located in the village of Kolarovo.

VRACHANSKI BALKAN NATURE PARK

Administration of Nature Park Vrachanski Balkan was established in 1996.

The basic priorities for the department are the protection and study of biological diversity, construction of the infrastructure of the park, to assist in the development of recreation, tourism and to work with children and conduct educational programs.

The staff of Vrachanski Balkan Nature Park consists of 10 persons:

Director, Chief Specialist "Structure and management of the park", "Tourist infrastructure" specialist,

"PR and development of educational programs" specialist, "Scientific and preserving works" Expert, Coordinator Information Center, Chief accountant, Secretary and Driver

The headquarter of the park is located in the town of Vratsa.

RILA MONASTERY NATURE PARK

The Nature Park of Rila Monastery is situated on the territory of Rila Municipality and covers an area of 25,253.2 ha. It is one of the largest nature parks in Bulgaria.

The Nature Park's directorate has 10 permanent employees: Experts for Flora, Fauna, Tourism, Forest inspectors, etc.

The headquarter of the park is located in the town of Rila.

NATIONAL PARK CENTRAL BALKAN/BIOSPHERE RESERVE

The National Park Central Balkan is located in the heart of Bulgaria, in the central and highest parts of the Balkan Mountain. It preserves a unique diversity of plant and animal. The park includes 9 natural reserves - Boatin, Tsarichina, Kozya Stena, Steneto, Severen Dzhendem, Peeshti Skali, Sokolna, Dzhendema and Stara Reka. The reserve covers an area of 20,019.6 hectares.

The staff of National Park Central Balkan consists of 69 persons. Following specialists work with the park directorate:

Management – Director and deputy director

Control and security – 45 persons

General administration – 8 specialists

Department Biodiversity, plans, programs and projects – 16 specialists

The headquarter of the park is located in Gabrovo.



Picture 2: Map of Protected Areas Involved in the Project “Tour Guides for Protected Areas in Bulgaria”

5.2) DEVELOPMENT AND TESTING OF QUALIFICATION MEASURES

5.2.1) EVALUATION OF WORKSHOPS

This paragraph presents an executive summary of the three workshops conducted in October 2018, February 2019 (5 days each) and April 2019 (3 days). Details of the evaluation results and the workshop programmes are to be found in appendix 3.

The main goals of the first and second workshop on guide training for educational hiking tours in protected areas, were:

- to introduce to the participants the concept of educational nature oriented hiking tours in protected areas, like it is already realized by certified nature- and landscape guides in protected area in Germany for example;

- to inform about the German tourist market, especially nature oriented tourism;
- to introduce and practice didactical aspects of nature oriented guided tours in the context of informal education settings;
- to show and discuss practical examples from Bulgaria, Austria and Germany;
- to plan guided target group oriented tours, including educational aspects;
- to present tour offers professionally;

The third workshop focused on environmental English in the context of tour guiding and environmental interpretation.

The evaluation of the workshop's content and results, gave evidence, that the 12 participants appreciate the general idea of the project very much. More than 90% of the participants stated, that they assess the overall project's approach as efficient or very efficient and found the seminar's content interesting or very interesting. In summary it can be stated that the workshops were very successful and the expectations of the participants have been fulfilled well to very well. Looking on their own perspectives as future tour guides in protected areas, a majority (55%) of participants stated, that they estimate their chances as good or very good after the first workshop. This rate raised up to 80% after the second workshop.

Most of the information which was presented during the lecturers was estimated as new or completely new by participants, some of the content was already known. The seminar contents itself was rated as interesting or very interesting by the majority of the participants.

Highlights of the workshops have been presentations and practical tour guiding exercises, presented by Mr. Manfred Rosenberger from the Danube National Park in Austria, which the participants rated as very interesting (91%) and new (73%). The same positive assessment was given to the presentations concerning aspects of the design of touristic products by the project partner BTE. The practical experiences Mr. Wladimir Milushev presented to the audience have been appreciated also very much by the participants. In general it can be stated that the mixture of lecturers from western Europe (Germany, Austria) and local experts from Bulgaria turned out very positive.

Some concerns about working as a tour guide in the future expressed by participants, were related to organisational aspects, like the cooperation with partners (accommodation, transport etc.) and the legal frame.

The evaluation results presented above are based on a formal method of data collection. These findings can be completed by observations made during the workshops. Ms Koch (BTE) noticed during the first workshop, that participants mentioned, that especially the education of tour guides in general and the time capacities of the rangers were challenges for them. Additionally even in the main field of educational offers, the national/ nature parks do not possess sufficient financial means to work with updated material. The development of marketing activities and the insecurities about earning money as a guide were seen as additional problems. After the second workshop most of these concerns seemed to be of lesser importance, as Ms Lütkemöller recognized during individual talks with participants.

5.2.2) EVALUATION OF TOUR DESCRIPTIONS

To develop a well grounded tour description as a basis for professionally planned tour guiding and educational activities during a tour, was one of the main homework tasks for participants. An important evaluation criteria was the adequacy of didactical environmental education (interpretation) elements, linked to the respective protected areas characteristics and the tour description in terms of an attractive tour offer, to be presented to the public.

All participants met these criteria successfully. The public part of the tour descriptions and offers are presented on www.naturerlebnis-bulgarien or www.nature-experience-bulgaria.com .

5.2.3) FINAL EXAMINATION AND CERTIFICATION

After passing a final examination on the ground the participant`s received a nature guide certificate, proving their ability to guide educational environmental tours in their respective protected area. This certificate states, that the candidate has successfully attended the programme and examination on “Nature Guides for Protected Areas” and is specialized on educational excursions in the respective protected area. All 12 participants that had applied for and attended the programme passed the final examination.

Summing up, it can be stated, that the frame curriculum of the further education programme for nature guides was tested positively, because it met the needs of the participants and it`s implementation lead to successful final examinations of participants.

5.2.4) EVALUATION OF GUIDED TOURS ON THE GROUND

From 23.8. – 6.9. 2019 an evaluational testtour with a team of three touristic participants took place, in order to conduct an in depth evaluation of each guided tour on offer on the ground via participating observations. Beneath the aim of checking, whether the tours of the certified guides take place to the standards agreed on, another aim was to find out, whether it is managable to organize a two weeks hiking tour, connecting the five Nature Parks Vitosha, Vrachanski Balkan, Belasitsa, Rila, and the National Park Central Balkan by using public transport only.

It turned out, that all the tours were conducted very professionally, with a high commitment to the visitor`s well-being and on high standards concerning environmental education and interpretation elements during the tours. The results of an evaluational feedback, based on daily questionnaires, are presented in appendix 3.

The use of public transport was no problem, because the system of interregional buses in Bulgaria is very well organized and easy to access. This positive result concerning bus connections wasn`t expected beforehand and might be used as a hint, that the offer of a “hiking tour connecting five Bulgarian parks” might be useful in future.



Picture 7: Workshop Participants



Picture 8: Demonstration in the Field



Picture 9: Gathering a Group



Picture 10: Workshop Impression



Picture 11: Successful Participants with Certificates

(All Photos: Rayna Pashova)

5.3) DEVELOPMENT AND TESTING OF MARKETING ACTIVITIES

The professional marketing of a newly established product in the field of nature tourism in general needs a lot of time and resources. This pilot project intended to find out and test which kind of marketing a) can be adopted during the runtime of the project and b) which kind of activities are necessary in the long run.

5.3.1 NEW INTERNET PLATFORM FOR INTERNATIONAL MARKETING

One of the main project purposes is to establish direct contacts between Bulgarian tour guides in protected areas and their potential guests, Thus a newly developed internet platform is intended to work as a brokerage instrument, in order to provide a) informations about the protected areas involved in the project and b) the tour guides and the tours they offer for nature interested guests and hikers. It is important to notice, that this platform is not intended to act as a booking platform yet, because this would overcharge this pilot project and it`s limited resources concerning time and personal power.

Based on the market research on existing internet based offers for nature oriented tourism and especially hiking – offers (see chapter 4.3.1) a specialized new internet platform was developed, according to the following criteria:

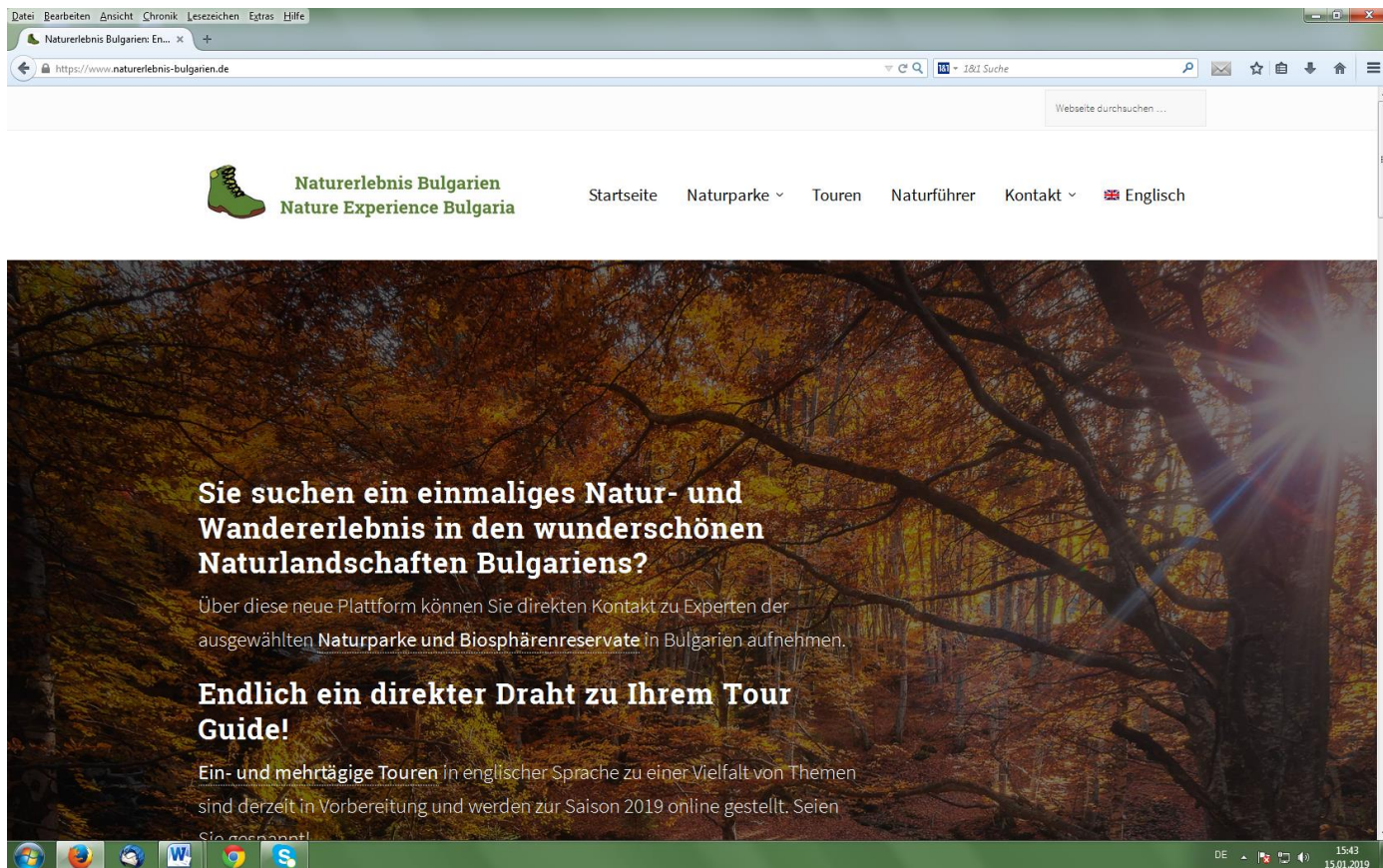
- Specialized offer for high – quality guided nature tours in protected areas;
- Attractive, modern presentation of tour offers and guides;
- Bilingual (German, English);
- Quick loading times, optimized for mobile devices, search engine optimized;
- Pleasant to look at, interesting texts and differing from existing sites;
- Presentation of thematic tours, including detailed tour descriptions;
- Contact details of the tour guide;
- Including videos, blog, social media offer;

Concerning the individual presentation of each tour-guide a special confirmation letter of each directorate assured, that the presentation of the guide and it`s tour had the backing of the respective park administration.

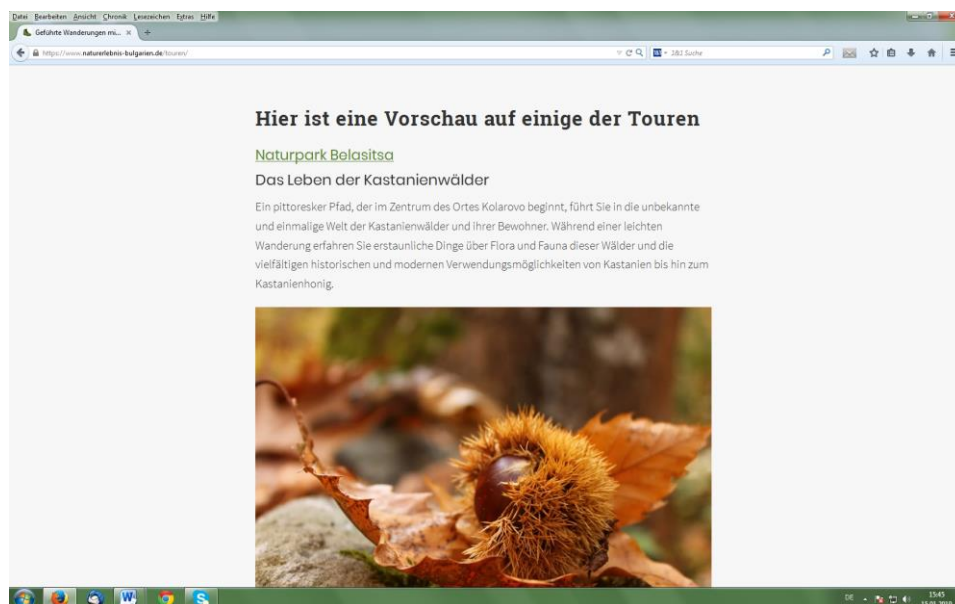
The newly developed platform, that is hosted in Germany, was presented to the public by the 1st of March 2019, thus enabling direct personal tour bookings with each guide:

<https://www.naturerlebnis-bulgarien.de>

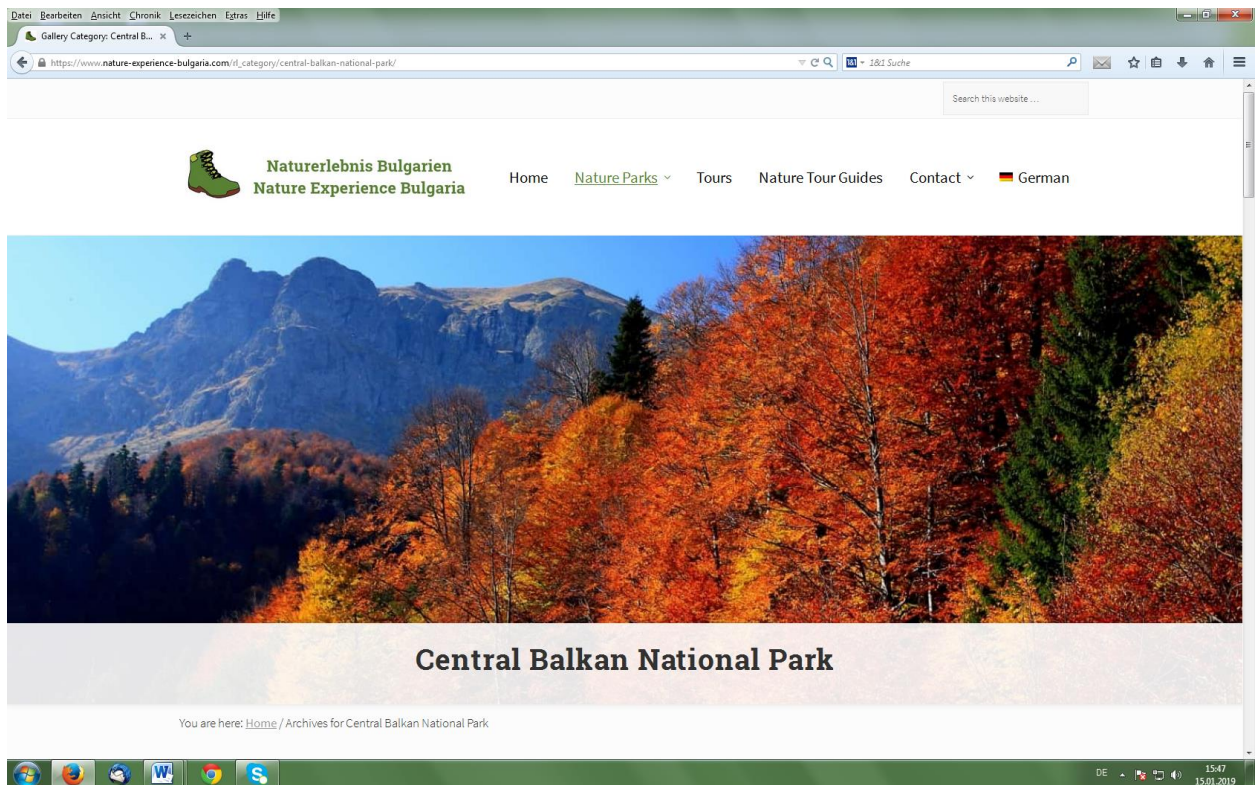
<https://www.nature-experience-bulgaria.com>



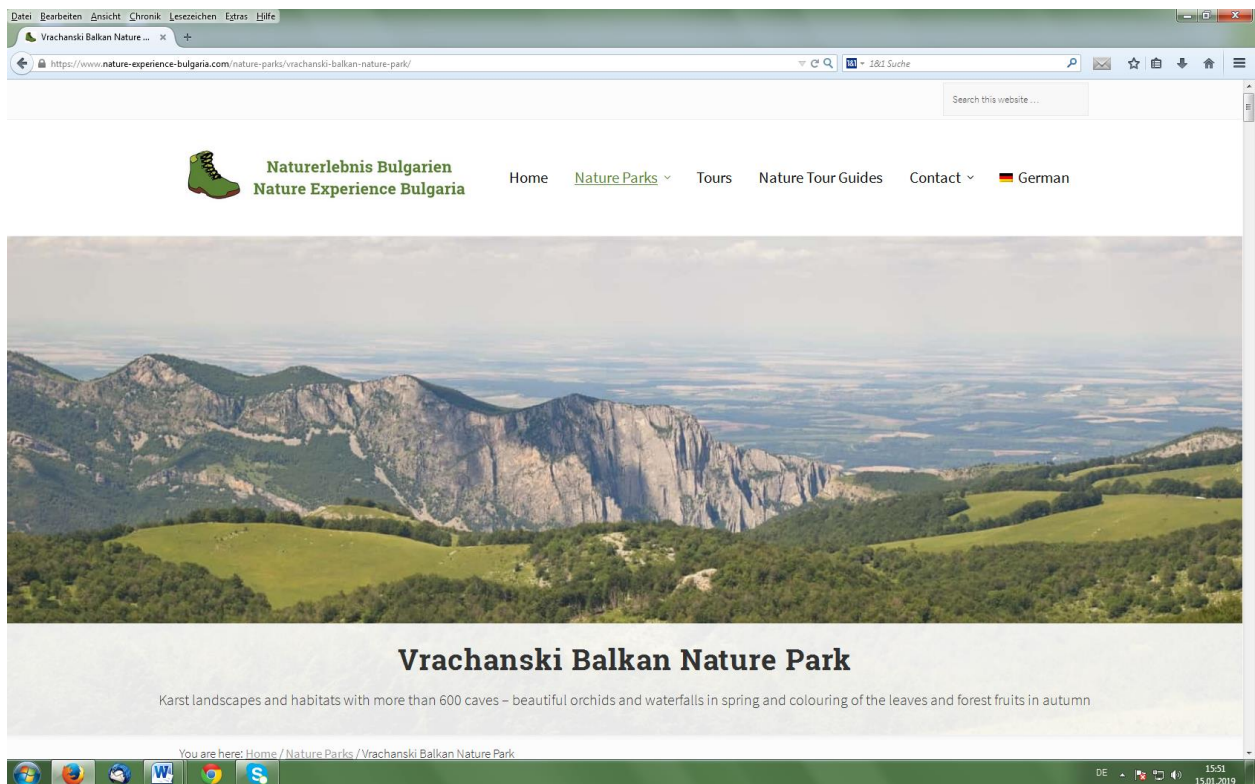
Picture 3: Impressions of <https://www.naturerlebnis-bulgarien.de> <https://www.nature-experience-bulgaria.com>



Picture 4: Impressions of <https://www.naturerlebnis-bulgarien.de> <https://www.nature-experience-bulgaria.com>



Picture 5: Impressions of <https://www.naturerlebnis-bulgarien.de> <https://www.nature-experience-bulgaria.com>



Picture 6: Impressions of <https://www.naturerlebnis-bulgarien.de> <https://www.nature-experience-bulgaria.com>

On the website 12 nature tour guides from the five protected areas participating in the project are offering six different individual tours.

Since the website was launched it has reached 3.500 persons until 1.12.19. On facebook the video with the largest coverage was seen by 7.400 persons, the posting with the largest coverage was seen by 3.225 persons. The facebook site has permanent 295 subscribers.

5.3.2 MEASURES FOR NATIONAL MARKETING IN GERMANY

In order to reach special interest groups in Germany and inform them about the new internet platform and its offers, since January 2019 several informations by e-mail - and after finalization of the evaluational testtour in September 2019 press releases - were delivered to hiking clubs, nature protection organisations, travel- and hiking magazines, online-travel-platforms and specialised tour operators. (About 60 institutions and contacts have been reached, see appendix 5.)

5.3.3 MEASURES FOR NATIONAL MARKETING IN BULGARIA

The following marketing activities have been implemented during the projects runtime in Bulgaria, in order to support the new tour guides and their offers as soon and effective as possible:

A) TRAVEL GUIDE BOOK

Target: Present the pilot protected areas from the project as tourist sites in general; present the new tour offers and the opportunities to combine them with other services (mostly accommodation and catering but also some information centers or sustainable farms or very important places such as the Rila Monastery). Presentation must be done in a user-friendly way, taking into account the characteristics of foreign (German in particular) tourists.

Target groups: Foreign tourists, in particular German ones, who have already come to Bulgaria. This includes business tourists who might have some free time between flights.

(For details of the guide book see appendix 4)

B) ADVERTISEMENT CLIPS FOR THE NEW TOURS

Target: Present the new tour offers in the five pilot protected areas, with focus on the new, the different and the most interesting from each of them. Visualize the attractiveness of the new tourism supply, in addition to the textual information presented in the travel guide.

Target groups: Foreign tourists, in particular German ones, who have already come to Bulgaria and who are planning to come.

C) DEVELOPMENT AND MAINTENANCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA PROFILES OF THE PORTAL

Target: Maximize the effect of the Portal and generate additional visitor flow to it.

Target groups: Same target groups as for the Portal; general public as a whole.

(See facebook and Instagram profiles via nature-experience-bulgaria.com.)

4. PRODUCTION OF SOUVENIRS FOR THE NEW TRAILS

Target: Provide the guides with small and easily-handled souvenirs which they can give to visitors as a memory token or as prizes in some games and competitions during the trails.

Target groups: Visitors of the new tours.

5.4) PROJECT EVALUATION AND ACCOMPANYING RESEARCH

EVALUATION OF OPERATIONAL PROJECT ELEMENTS

The self-evaluation scheme described in chapter 4.4 and focusing on the main practical elements of the project has been conducted during the project runtime as planned. Detailed results are presented in the chapters 5.2.1 – 4. The main findings are summarized here:

The testing of the project's qualification measures revealed, that the three workshops conducted met the needs of the participants and that the frame curriculum was adequate to ensure a target group oriented further education programme on a professional level.

The participants, who passed the final exam and are certified as nature guides for their respective protected area, are able to develop ambitious tour concepts, guide professional educational nature oriented tours and use interpretation methods on a good standard. This was evaluated during a test - tour on the ground, that gave further hints on possible extensions of the existing single tours to a two-weeks-journey, based on public transport only. In terms of sustainable tourism offers this is an interesting extra result.

ACCOMPANYING RESEARCH

The scientific research accompanying the project had the task of questioning and classifying the practical, action-oriented project approaches from an overarching international perspective against the background of theoretical findings and (scientific) experience. The most important questions in the project were:

1. What are the general planning backgrounds for tourist activities in the Bulgarian protected areas?
2. What contribution can the income from nature guide activities make to the total income of the individual protected area employees?
3. Can concessions be awarded by the protected areas? (Which other organisational and financing models can be considered?)
4. How high may a concession, tour tax etc. to the protected area administration be without making the tours financially unattractive for the guides?
5. How can the protected area administrations (financially) benefit from the tourist offers outlined above without (compensatory) cuts in state funds in the medium term?
6. Testing the "Tandem Teams" as a sustainable form of know-how transfer linking generations: What are the success factors?
7. Testing the Internet mediation platform: What are the success factors?

5.4.1 GENERAL PLANNING LAW BACKGROUND FOR TOURIST ACTIVITIES IN THE BULGARIAN LARGE PROTECTED AREAS

In order to identify the surrounding conditions for the development of the nature guide model, the first step of the project was to clarify the scope of action for potential nature guides in the individual large protected areas in Bulgaria. For this purpose, all management and development plans of the individual nature and national parks were analysed with regard to their statements on leisure uses and tourism. These were also documented in a report (see appendix 1). In principle, the use of suitable areas of the respective protected areas through leisure uses (including winter sports) and tourism is anchored in all plans – generally in the context of visitor flow management. The implementation of guided tours by personnel of the respective protected area is therefore not questioned in any of the areas. In addition, the protected area personnel are best familiar with the ecological conditions in the respective protected areas and can therefore guarantee guided tours in accordance with the objectives of the protected area.

5.4.2 CONTRIBUTION OF THE INCOME FROM NATURE GUIDE ACTIVITIES FOR THE INDIVIDUAL EMPLOYEES OF THE PROTECTED AREA TO THE TOTAL INCOME

Nature tourism offers that avoid negative impacts on nature and the environment and contribute to the financing of protected areas are called "ecotourism" in German-speaking countries.

Ecotourism is defined as a form of responsible travel to near-natural areas that seeks to minimise negative environmental impacts and socio-cultural change, to finance protected areas and creates income opportunities for the local population (AG ÖKOTOURISMUS 1995, p. 37 f.).

Therefore, the tour offers of this project are ecotourism offers. The contribution that the income from the tour guide activity can make to the total income of the individual tour guides depends on a number of factors, which can be very different. These include

- Attractiveness of the protected area
- Attractiveness, speciality, exclusiveness of the offered tours
- Target group of the tour offers
- Price and length of the tours
- Available time of the tour guide(s)
- Length of the season
- Number of participants per tour
- Tours conducted per year
- Amount of possible concession fees
- Other income or total income amount
- ...

Generally valid statements cannot be drawn from this. In the international context, there are tour guides who can generate their main income from the tours; in most cases, however, the tours offer only an additional income and the main income is derived from another occupation.

5.4.3 ALLOCATION OF CONCESSIONS BY THE PROTECTED AREAS AND TOUR TAX TO THE PROTECTED AREA ADMINISTRATIONS

The granting of concessions by the protected areas to guides or travel or safari organisers is a source of income that is used primarily in the national parks in Africa. There, this income opportunity is used to finance the conservation of the protected areas (and often for the fight against poaching). The large protected areas in Bulgaria are financed from the national budget or the budget of the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Forestry.

5.4.4 REVENUES OF THE PROTECTED AREAS AND POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES FOR THEIR FINANCIAL ALLOCATION

The administrations of the large protected areas of Bulgaria receive funds from the national budget of the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Forestry. These funds are then allocated to the managing forestry authority, which is responsible for the 11 nature parks. All revenues of the nature park directorates flow back into the budget of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food (cf. VDN 2017, p. 7). Whether income from guide tours would lead to possible budget cuts could not be clarified during the course of the project. Although it was stated that revenues would then be paid back to the park by the ministry, this could not be interpreted as a secure statement. There was also a statement that nature parks could issue licenses for tour guides and take money for them. This is permissible, since it concerns smaller incomes.

According to the Bulgarian project partners, national parks are not allowed to offer commercial offers.

Therefore, the project does not provide any income for the protected areas from the nature guide tours offered. Since the guides conduct the tours in their free time, there is no direct claim to such fees. In this sense only the tours of part-time employees of the protected areas can be offered. Otherwise the tours must be offered in their spare time. In any case, they require the consent or acquiescence of the protected area administration/ direction as employer.

In order to perform the various tasks of the protected area administrations, better financial resources for the protected areas by the state or the Ministry of Agriculture would be desirable in the first place. However, if this is not expectable in the near future, it would be desirable if the tours were also officially offered via the protected area administrations/directorates. In this context, revenues would be generated for nature conservation. It would also be conceivable to set up support association structures for the individual protected areas, similar to those in Germany. With these structures, offers could be made and tour taxes could be used to finance nature conservation projects. Whether this would be a potential way for Bulgaria would have to be examined juridically and financially in a separate project.

5.4.5 SUCCESS FACTORS OF "TANDEM-TEAMS" AS A SUSTAINABLE AND CROSS-GENERATIONAL MEANS OF MEDIATION

According to the initial project proposal, the character of the tandem-team was defined to be cross-generational and bilingual with the possible integration of persons from outside the administration. In the application process of the teams for the workshops, tandem-teams were supposed to be preferred. It was planned to integrate e.g. young (unemployed) people with

excellent English skills (as “translator”) and to team them up with established staff members having expertise in nature protection (as “guide expert”).

In practice, the protected areas administrations didn’t concede a high priority to this selection criteria and selected only staff members to make sure that the applicants have the backing of their employer and will be exempted from their daily work for the workshops. (See also “Information and integration of stakeholders” of the mid-term-report).

Whereas this approach has proven to be successful as well (English workshops for two instead of one staff member, mutual replacement in case one guide is not available, exchange of experiences between the staff members about needs of tourists etc.), the following success factors will provide possible approaches for the success of tandem-teams.

The success factors address the project responsible and the team itself:

- Success factors for project managers:
 - Providing a clear vision of the planned constitution of the team to local / regional stakeholders
 - Communicating clearly the innovative and sustainable character of cross-generational tandem-teams
 - Assuring that the local partners (protected areas administrations) are made aware of their own benefits, e.g. preventing a future lack of staff members by making youth familiar with the protected area administration, offering high-quality products and thereby improving the recommendations for the tour etc.
- Success factors for the team itself:
 - Both team members share the same vision and a sense of purpose, they are reliable and constructive.
 - Both team members should respect their mutual competencies and characters.
 - Roles in the team should be clearly defined.
 - The expert guide can present his/her knowledge of the protected area without any language restraints.
 - The translator can learn expert knowledge about the protected area, get familiar with the staff and generate additional income by employment.

5.4.6 SUCCESS FACTORS OF THE BOOKING PLATFORM

The website is supposed to raise awareness of the guided tours, to present the guides and their protected area as well as to provide booking details.

Main success factors in the future are:

- Continuous maintenance (updates) of the website and the search engine optimization (SEO)
- Finding a responsible institution for the maintenance of the website and the covering of its costs
- Integration of the website address in all communication means of partners, especially in the tools of the National Tourism Board of Bulgaria (online in www.bulgariatravel.org and thematic brochures) and specialised nature / bird watching magazines

- Raising awareness in social media channels for travelling to Bulgaria and/or hiking, e.g. facebook groups like “Wandern & Fernwandern”, “Wir lieben Wandern”, “Outdoor & Wandern Ideenportal”, blogs like www.blog-bulgarien.de, www.viel-unterwegs.de, www.unterwegs-reiseblog.de, Instagram channels as #Wanderlust, #bulgarien, #hiking etc.
- Presenting the website to tour operators that are specialized in hiking and/or travels to Bulgaria to promote the qualified guides, e.g. Wikinger Reisen, Hauser Exkursionen, Natours, Take a Chance to Travel etc.
- Presenting the website to tour operators that are specialized in nature and sustainable travels to Bulgaria to promote the qualified guides, e.g. companies listed in forumandersreisen.de and BUND Reisen
- In case new guides add to the website, the structure of the existing portal needs to be respected.

6 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The implementation of the pilot project gave evidence, that the approach chosen is able to contribute in an innovative way to problem solutions in the context of sustainable use of nature in protected areas in Bulgaria.

THE PROJECT ELEMENTS

The analysis of existing visitor management concepts in Bulgarian protected areas, documented in the management and development plans of the individual nature and national parks, made clear, that the implementation of guided tours by personnel of the respective protected area is not questioned in any of the areas and thus a good opportunity to create added value in a certain protected area.

The new concept of the further education programme for nature guides was tested positively, with smaller adaptations concerning the function of teams in a certain protected area. It turned out, that the initial idea of intergenerational bilingual teams had to be slightly adapted, following the preferences of park administrations. The result of this adaptation is a fortune, because the teams in action now are very well balanced, according to language skills and nature-know how. The early integration of relevant stakeholders of the pilot project, like the park directorates, had very positive effects in this respect.

In the long run it seems to be recommendable to ensure ongoing support and backing of the tourguides, in order not to “let them alone” with questions coming up during day-to-day work. An ongoing exchange of experience, especially with guides from other countries, would be very useful and highly welcomed by the participants. Experiences from Germany reveal, that regular support and networking of and with nature guides has strong impact on the performance of each of them. To facilitate this, a responsible organisation committed to this task is needed.

The development of a specialized internet-platform, working as an intermediate agency and marketing instrument between tour guides and (esp. German) hiking tourists could be realized without any problems, thanks to the very positive backing and support of the tour guides themselves. The testing of this new marketing instrument as well as of all other conventional marketing activities, is on it`s way and first results give reason for optimism. A side effect of the individualized presentation of the newly developed tour offers is to be seen in the enhanced international visibility of persons working for nature protection on the ground day by day. Informing a wider audience about staff members of protected area`s administrations in Bulgaria has the potential to raise awareness on them.

Regarding the tourism development in the region, it can be assumed that the guided tours present an added value to the offer for international tourists. The tours are a new offer for individual tourists in the protected areas and have a unique selling proposition (USP) thanks to the personal involvement of expert guides.

Nevertheless, the guided tours will need time to establish from the offer as well as from the demand side: The guides will need to get used to react on short-term to the guest requests, to be available beside their normal working hours when guests arrive (e.g. during the weekend) and to plan the tours within their “daily” work within the parc administration. A future project could involve an additional workshop on how to react to guest requests.

The demand side will be challenged as the guide platform requires initiative from the guests: instead of the today common booking-function on websites, the guest has to write an e-mail or make telephone contact to the guide. Once the offer is well established, a solution could be to create one central multilingual “booking hotline” (can be a person or digital) to answer on short term and to allocate staff resources in the parcs. Another challenge is to keep the visibility for

the platform high so that guests that are interested in the parcs / hiking will actually find the website.

Concerning the chances for guides, the guided tours present an opportunity to individually create additional income. The latter keeps expert personnel in the region, contributes to regional development and acceptance in the protected areas. Direct income for nature conservation can only be achieved if new organizational structures are created alongside the state agencies, which are allowed to take in money and receive subsidies and invest this money in nature conservation. In Germany, this is done by the "Fördervereine" of the large protected areas.

THE ENTIRE PROJECT

Looking on the entire pilot project in terms of OECD – DAC criteria for the evaluation of projects of international cooperation, the following statements seem to be appropriate from the project partner`s point of view:

The relevance of the project`s focus and aims has been proofed very clearly. The problems identified beforehand by the applicant have been confirmed by all relevant stakeholders during the project`s runtime. As all project targets were met with only slight curtailments, the effectiveness seems to be adequate as well. The efficiency during the project`s implementation, in terms of accomplishment of milestone`s and flexibility with reference to necessary adaptations (function of tandem teams, for example) is satisfying. The impact the project has so far is a clear demonstration of possible and manageable innovative methods and procedures to overcome the problems stated and to support sustainable use of natural resources in protected areas in Bulgaria. Because of the pilot character of the project, with a limited runtime, the sustainability of the project can`t be assessed terminatory. This depends on possibilities and fundings to implement the tested approach to other protected ares and to furthermore support the activites that have been kicked off so far.

7 APPENDIX

See CD attached:

Appendix 1: Analysis of Bulgarian Management Plans

Appendix 2: Market Research on Existing Internet Based Offers for Guided Hiking Tours in Bulgaria

Appendix 3: Evaluation Results Workshops I – III and Evaluation - Testtour

Appendix 4: Guide Book for New Tours

Appendix 5: List of Institutions Contacted for PR in Germany