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TO BUY “SOCIAL TOURISM”

Abstract: The tourism business makes a significant effort to “sell more happiness” at a “higher price”. It succeeds, but nevertheless a certain group of tourists feel nostalgic for the authentic “social” experience from the “good old days” of a centrally planned economy in Bulgaria, and this is realized as a market niche in tourism. Different solutions are being sought, how both to profit from the “social” and to preserve its authenticity, and to have a modern touch. Happiness is given, it is not bought or sold, it is the result of the social health of a society, which, depending on how “steeped in the pursuit of profit”, makes people more or less satisfied with life. Two good practices in this segment in Bulgaria are considered.

Keywords: social tourism, added value in tourism, centralized and market economic systems, good practices

Introduction

Preferences for entrepreneurial activity in tourism are proverbial. Usually, in the minds of those who wish to become a part of it, it is associated with quick and big profits. However, future entrepreneurs rarely have an idea of the potential for the deployment of added value in the segment they intend to enter. A basic economic assumption is that the greater the possibilities for its deployment, the more realistic the initial expectations of realized profits would be. However, the tourism segments themselves do not always provide sufficient opportunities for the development of economic activities that allow tourism products with high added value. Another widespread economic assumption is that where there are no large opportunities for the realization of entrepreneurial activity with high added value, the advantages of realizing a low level of added value in combination with economies of scale / reduction in the relative share of fixed costs are used, related to the progressive increase of such variables/. Bearing in mind that it is precisely this economic effect that is responsible for today’s rapid development of tourism as a mass need, it can be assumed that investments in technological tourism products will be less attractive and characteristic of precisely defined and too limited segments of tourism activity. The main focus of entrepreneurs in tourism is to be directed in the search for more and more new niches, in which the effect of economies of scale is to be triggered and allow the realization of a successful entrepreneurial activity, despite the low level of added value in them. In this regard, the purpose of this publication is to analyze good practices in tourism in Bulgaria, which are bordering two scientific fields in the group of social sciences, namely economics and sociology. The subject of research is the possibilities for offering tourist products, which are rather characteristic of social tourism, but are offered with minimal added value in both types (e.g. eco-) and forms (e.g. bicycle-) of economic tourism. The object of research are two

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tourist sites, namely: tourist complex *Albena* and *Kapinovski Monastery* camping. In this paper, author's analysis is the main method used, based on information published on the official websites of the two tourist sites and the author's field observations.

Capital ownership and personal income as possible distinguishing factors between the social and the economic

At the time of the centrally planned economy in Bulgaria in the period 1944–1989, at the basis of the economic paradigm, indirectly, but with an imperative character, stood the human factor with its needs and wants /i.e. so-called “Political Economy”. Both “Political Economy” and “General Economic Theory” /GET/ /known in the English-speaking scientific world as “Economics”/ as economic knowledge consider man “in a narrow sense”, i.e. as a necessary ingredient /production factor/ for the production process to proceed. Another science, spread mainly in the “East”, emphasizes the “needs” of the two factors and considers them in a “broad sense”, namely the science of “Regional Economy”. As for GET, not a few of the economic schools dating back to the beginning of the 19-th century /behaviourists for example/ make attempts to consider man as a biological machine that should work equally with the mechanical one /the integration of assembly lines into the production process/. Most likely, if their attempts had yielded positive results, i.e. if adequate reflexes had been invented in man to make him “behave like a machine” in the long term, two centuries later there would not have been so much noise about the advisability of implementing artificial intelligence in the production process, which would successfully usurp the functions of the production factor labor of biological origin. Most likely, in another two centuries /or much earlier/, the active intervention of man himself in his own “engineering”, together with the autonomous achievements of artificial intelligence as an identity, will create hybrids between biology, hardware and software. Such hybrids would be used in the production process of a number of economic sectors, and the most likely priority would be those that have direct contact with humans as end consumer /for example, the restaurant industry/. But while at its core the production factor “work” is a “biological” element, until then the question of its full recovery – unity between physical and mental health and an adequate opportunity for social communication – will remain irrevocable.

As it was already said, under the centrally planned economy, human recovery was a top priority. Tourism, as an economic sector /according to the old GDP measurement system called by the concept of industry/, can be defined as a bearer of a double effect – the first is related to the recovery of biological labor resources such as sleep /for this contributes the hotel industry/, and the second is related to ensuring a high-quality energy balance of the human body through high-quality food and drinks /for this contributes the restaurant industry/. Under the centrally-planned economic system in Bulgaria, the main emphasis was placed on the consumption value of food products and beverages. By comparison today the emphasis is on their exchange value – the focus has shifted from quality as food to quality as appearance – a basic marketing postulate is that appearance is what sells– it doesn't matter how nutritious it is – what matters is that it is aesthetically pleasing appearance. The application of the products of the chemical industry to grow not only plant products, but also animal species for the nutrition of mankind is indisputable, but it is also characterized by lack of control in its application. Some authors would defend this lack of control as a way to solve the concern expressed by Thomas Malthus in the 18th century about a possible demographic catastrophe due to the inability of mankind to produce enough food to sustain itself. However, the desire of the centrally planned economy to produce food with consumer value seriously limits the possibilities of using chemical products in its production and limits the periods for its extraction, i.e. it is grown in a natural soil environment and a limited time of year. This is precisely the reason for encouraging the Bulgarian population in those distant years with a special government document /decree/ for “self-gratification” /i.e. personal production/ with certain food products /incl. fruits and vegetables/. For the Bulgarian tourist, the concept of so-called “self-satisfaction” with tourist products was in full force during the period of central planning /although there is no specific government document for its regulation/. The famous Bulgarian resort complexes /“Sunny Beach”, “Golden Sands”,

“Albena”, etc./, created after the 1950s, were mainly intended for foreign tourists – this was the way in which the then state budget provided the possibility of receiving foreign currencies from countries of the then active Council for Mutual Economic Assistance /then – Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, German Democratic Republic, Poland, Hungary, Romania, etc./ and countries outside it /to ensure the so-called second direction currency – German marks, British pounds, American dollars, etc./.

The material and technical base for Bulgarians was mainly departmental rest stations /single massive building or “bungalow” type/. A feature of the centrally planned economic system is that “capital” is not considered a direct production factor – according to the “Balance of the National Economy”, the production factors are: living labor, means of labor and objects of labor. The means of labor and the objects of labor can be considered as an analogue of the production factor “capital”, but in material terms. Of the two main types of property, namely public and private, in the centralized economic system the types of public property were mainly operated. The corporate type of ownership known in its present dimensions was not implemented in practice. Cooperative private ownership /often in a modified form/ mainly functioned in housing construction /housing cooperatives/ and agriculture /labor cooperative farms/. Personal private property in entrepreneurial activity was not stimulated and seriously restricted, which was also the reason for tourist accommodation in populated areas /near the sea or mountain resorts/ to be carried out in the so-called “apartments” – rooms of the personal residence of the owner, which are rented out to tourists for a relatively minimal fee. The hotels /mainly state property/, although few in number, were an unaffordable luxury for a large part of Bulgarian tourists. This economic reality in practice did not allow for the realization of any economies of scale, nor for the effective search for ways to increase, even if on a small scale, the added value of the tourism offered in the places of accommodation and meals in those times. But it also had its advantages, more of a social tone than an economic /entrepreneurial one, and they can be systematized in the following way:

- relatively poor as an assortment, but healthy foods and drinks /results in improving physical health/ were consumed - today a reference to those times is the concept of “organic products”, but their quality is significantly inferior;

- the difference in disposable income was not as great as it is today, which was a prerequisite for people to “feel in one income / social / group”. This fact in itself did not create material complexes between people, which is a prerequisite for more effective communication between them, based more on their personal qualities than on material well-being and vision – a person is maximally satisfied with himself, from his own development and improvement, as well as from his occupation, with which he is socially useful /results in improving mental health/;

- people’s social contacts were “live” and not through social networks and telephony, which gave a greater opportunity to unfold the emotional essence of a person – at that time there was more “happiness” than today, despite an increase in the general level of well-being of the mass Bulgarian. Today we are talking about the economy of experiences¹ and its impact on tourism, the purpose of which is to “sell happiness” during the tourist act /results in improving social health/;

- special attention was paid to the social communication of children /chavdar and pioneer movements/. A significant base for children’s recreation was built. so-called “pioneer camps”.

From the above, the following can be summarized:

- the ownership of capital can be considered as a prerequisite for giving precedence to the “social” over the “economic/entrepreneurial” respectively, in the case of dominant public ownership of the production process /for example, a centrally planned economic system/ and vice versa – the “economic/entrepreneurial/” over the “social” in the dominance of private property in its varieties /for example, a market-oriented economic system/;

- for the tourism sector, the predominance of the “social” is expressed in the absence of any payment for practicing tourist activity / for example, for crossing a tourist path or route – marked and ennobled by specialized tourist societies on public support, no tourist tax is paid fee/ or in the prices of tourist

¹ **Kostova, P.** Economy of experiences and its impact on tourism. In: *National student competition for the best student development on tourism topics*, Veliko Tarnovo, 2019.

services in the tourist object, not only is no surcharge calculated, but it is also sold below the delivery prices /for example, a departmental rest station/;

- the equalization of incomes and the practically complete lack of private entrepreneurial activity, including in tourism, still part of the inherent characteristics of the centrally planned economic system in Bulgaria, has developed a whole segment of tourist sites throughout the country / for example, shelters , tourist huts, tourist bedrooms, campsites, so-called “Horemag” – short for hotel, restaurant and shop, etc. /, the use of which was either free or the prices were rather low from the point of view of the disposable income of the mass Bulgarian tourist.

From the highlights, comparisons and analyzes made in the presentation above, it can be assumed that the direct costs of financing tourist trips of Bulgarians during the centrally planned economy were extremely small. It should also be taken into account the fact that food during the tourist stays was exclusively food and drink brought and prepared by the tourists themselves. This fact significantly reduces the income from tourism from Bulgarians in the GDP of our country. That’s why attention was mainly paid to the tourist offer oriented to foreign tourists /with the mediation mainly of the state company “Balkan-turist”/, than to Bulgarian ones /with the mediation mainly of the Bureau for youth tourism “Orbita”/. In short, the relatively low incomes of Bulgarian citizens, their equalization, the impossibility of realizing any entrepreneurial initiative, incl. in tourism, has forced them to rely on tourism products with no or minimal added value, which from the point of view of the market economy can be defined with the term “social” tourism. In view of the systematized above, from a methodological point of view, the indicators for the selection of good practices on the subject of this publication are the following:

- tourist products must be clearly recognizable as widely practiced in the times of a centrally planned economy in Bulgaria;
- that the offered tourist products are at prices acceptable to target groups of low-income tourists;
- during the tourist stay, the tourist product should be developed more as a result of the personal work and social communication of the tourists themselves /economic demand/ and less as a result of entrepreneurial activity /economic supply/.

Such a practice may be basic for the tourist product offering or appear as a diversifying one.

The ability to create added value in low-income segments of tourism.

Good practices

A characteristic feature of mass tourism is that it is clichéd, unified, even monotonous, it lacks emotion or, in the context of the exposition of this publication, it lacks the advantages of the “social” systematized above in the exposition. In a market economy, economic incentives for the exercise of entrepreneurial activity must always be present. The lack of the typical “social” experience is recognized as a market niche in tourism. Various solutions are being sought, how both to profit from the “social” and to preserve its authenticity from the “good old days”, which manifests itself most strongly precisely as a result of the absence of Adam Smith’s “selfish interest” - the core of the “survivor” over time and permanently imposed a paradigm of the Classical School of Economics.

In this context of thoughts, the resort complex “Albena” was built precisely in the times of a centrally planned economic system in Bulgaria. Its characteristic feature is that unlike its analogues / for example k.k. “Sunny Beach”, k.k. “Golden Sands” etc./ is that there is a great diversification of the accommodation base categorization – starting with high-category five-star hotels /kh-1 “Dobrudzha” – the pearl of the complex in the past – currently not functioning/, yes reach a one-star accommodation base – bungalow /see image 1/.



Figure 1. Bungalow-type accommodation in Albena tourist resort /red line/

The bungalows marked in image 1 function as a separate unit in *Albena* tourist complex with the name *Vili Zelena Albena* /see image 2/.



Figure 2. Signposts *Vili Zelena Albena*

The change of ownership of *Albena* resort from a public-state to a joint-stock company on the one hand and the change of a centrally planned economic system to a market-oriented one in Bulgaria on the other, has faced the management of the resort complex with making a number of unconventional decisions about what long-term strategy for the development of the complex to undertake. As we already clarified at the beginning of the report, in order to maximize the profits from economic activity in a market-oriented economy, opportunities are sought to invest greater added value in the offered tourism product. Results of management decisions taken at a previous stage are visible today with the functioning of five-star sophisticated hotels such as *Flamingo Grand Hotel and Spa*, *Maritime* and other centrally located hotels in *Albena*.

In this line, the possibilities for increasing the added value in the many separate price segments and for the many different target groups of tourists that the resort accommodates seem to be limitless. This is

mainly due to the possibility of access to the material and technical base and tourist services created for one target group of tourists by other target groups of tourists /for example, catering at a buffet in a hotel complex or a separate restaurant from the complex for those staying in the bungalows of *Vili Zelena Albena*. A huge advantage of the complex is that, in addition to the accommodation base, numerous auxiliary facilities function on its territory, which successfully answer the question “What should I do when I’m not at the beach?”. The complex has a stadium, tennis courts, equestrian center, assembly hall, go-kart tracks, numerous amusement facilities, facilities operating in the evening, etc./.. It also has a “time machine”, which few visitors to the complex believe exists. *Vili Zelena Albena* are even not offered on the official website of the resort. Despite the fact that the bungalow complex is located next to a huge parking lot at the complex’s bus station and next to a large sports center, when entering the interior of the perimeter where the bungalows are located, the visitor feels as if he has penetrated deep into a wooded area / practice on the outskirts of the *Baltata* reserve/. Even with the renovation of part of the building fund of *Vili Zelena Albena*, the feeling of another, dead in time, but remaining with the label “happy” socio-economic formation is clearly palpable. The offer of such a holiday in the resort “Albena” can be defined as a kind of “social policy” of the resort complex and of good practice in this tourist segment, not too “entrepreneurially” attractive, due to the extremely slow and weak return on capital investment. The prices for the use of the bungalows, on the other hand, are acceptable even for the lowest income groups of tourists. In this part of the complex, time does not flow as quickly, “competitively” and tensely, as in the rest of the complex, all prerequisites, a certain target group of tourists /Bulgarian and foreign/, who are looking for the “pluses”, created as a result of the “minuses” of the developed centrally planned economic system and its tourist policy towards the Bulgarian tourist, to find them. An opportunity has also been created /the necessary infrastructure has been built/ in *Vili Zelena Albena* to park campers and caravans /see image 3/.



Figure 3. Motorhome and caravan parking sign

Another huge “social” advantage of *Albena* tourist resort is the maintenance of children’s camps / see image 4/.



Figure 4. Activities offered by organizers of a children’s camp in Albena tourist resort

The second good practice, which is the subject of analysis in this paper, is the *Kapinovski Monastery* camping site /see image 5/.

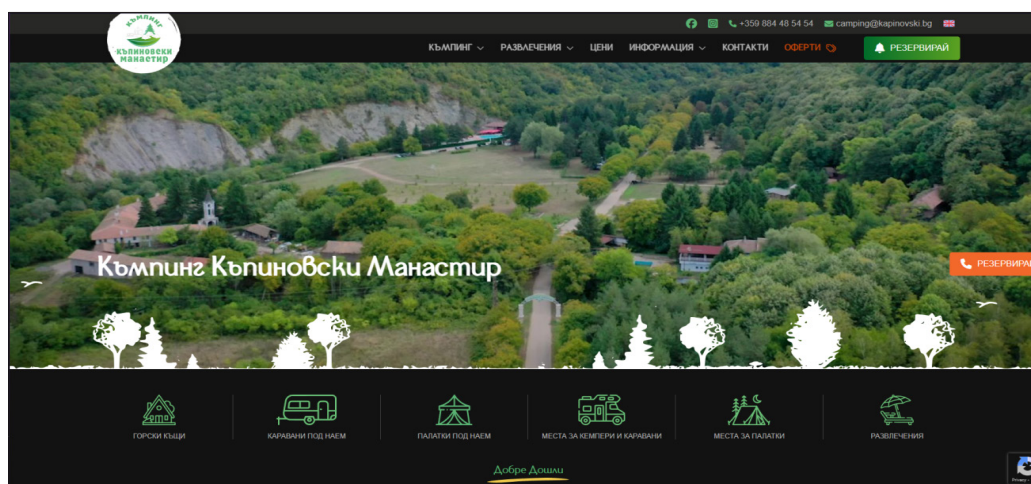


Figure 5. View of the official website of the Kapinovski Monastery campsite

The campsite is located in close proximity to the old capital of Bulgaria – the town of Veliko Tarnovo. It is located at the foot of the central part of Stara Planina near two other cultural and historical tourist sites, namely: Kapinovski Monastery *St. Nicholas the Wonderworker* and Plakovski Monastery *St. Prophet Elijah*. The key attraction of this tourist site is the waterfall. *Kapinovski Waterfall* on the *Veselina* river, which passes through it. *Kapinovski Waterfall* is located almost at the end of the heights of Elena town, and it is reached by an asphalted road /built during the operation of the centrally planned economy in Bulgaria/. Building access to natural attractions was an essential part of Bulgaria's tourism policy at the time. Tourist sites such as *Albena*, which offered tourist products with both high and low added value, were accessible only to foreigners – for the mass Bulgarian tourist, access to tourist sites was mainly provided with low added value and scarce attractions. To compensate for this, tourists were able to afford them with scarce or no financial resources. This is also the reason why most of the tourist offers during the centrally planned economy in Bulgaria were defined as socially oriented / i.e. to be categorized as “social tourism” using an updated conceptual apparatus/.

Access to the *Kapinovo Waterfall* is made via the asphalt road from the village of Kapinovo:

- on foot or by a personal bicycle – from a modern point of view this way of access can be recognized as walking and cycling tourism – in practice today we consider such types of tourism more exotic and diverse, but for those times these were the main ways of movement of people in Bulgaria;

- by bus - during the centrally planned economy in Bulgaria, there was no private public transport. For modern generations, living in a radically different economic and social reality compared to then, it would be interesting to learn that there was a regular state bus line several times a day to the *Kapinovski Waterfall*, which transported those who wanted to at symbolic ticket prices to visit the site. By itself, the fact that a bus reached the *Kupinovski Waterfall* meant that this object was significant from the point of view of the tourism policy of Bulgaria at the time.

- with a personal car – under the centrally planned economic system in Bulgaria, the number of cars sold was extremely small compared to the scale with which the car industry sells today on the Bulgarian market. Owning a personal car in those days was more of a luxury and few households had the privilege of owning one, therefore public transport (mainly buses and trains) was relied upon for transport.

At the *Kapinovski Waterfall*, the tourist could spend a day /an analogy can be made with the modern understanding of passing a one-day tourist route /eco-trail/ with the ultimate goal of the waterfall/ or several days' stay – the nights were spent in tents /personal property/ – there was no state accommodation facility. Eating was mainly with products that tourists brought with them, and visiting the available places to eat /in those days a state restaurant and tavern, which product offering and price level is difficult to assimilate from the point of view of today's abundance of food and drinks/ was seen more as an attraction /for example, consumption of a cold beer with freshly fried potatoes or a mixed grill – then and now classics in the daily life of Bulgarians... but of different quality/, than to be relied on for the complete nutrition of the tourist time of his stay there. The organization of the entire tourist trip was carried out according to the tastes, financial possibilities and preferences of the tourists themselves – tourist mediation was a relatively unknown activity for the mass tourist in Bulgaria in those years. This description of a tourist trip completely fits into the modern content of “social tourism” /an analogy with self-satisfaction with fruits and vegetables/, with which the state during that period created conditions for mass tourism. Although for the needs of social tourism an apparently low-value tourist product is generated, according to the “income effect” an increase in the amount of disposable income allocated to tourism by Bulgarian households would result in a tourist offer typical of “poorer times” should diminish and disappear. But from the reference on the official page of the *Kapinovski Monastery camping* site, it is clear that, in addition to paid places for placing personal tents and caravans /used by Bulgarian tourists only after the end of the centrally planned economy in Bulgaria/, such ones can also be rented as an additional possibility – accommodation can also be found in the so-called “forest houses” /similar to the bungalows of the time/. The prices can be defined as “social” – for example, the price for renting a two-person, three-person or four-person tent varies from 25 to 40 euros, and for caravans with the same number of places – between 35 and 90 euros. There is not even a minimum stay for a tent, which is a plus for the tourist. Offering tents, caravans and bungalows for rent from the point of view of tourism product providers is another

opportunity to diversify income from tourism activity, albeit with little opportunities to deploy the added value of the activity. This is a completely natural economic process in the market-oriented economy, based on the use of private property in entrepreneurial activity and developed since 1989 in Bulgaria. However, three decades after the collapse of the central planar economy in Bulgaria and its inherent paradigm for tourist activity, today we can once again settle in a tent /and for a fee/ and cook food over a fire - conditions for which the tourist site offers. This suggests that the experiences created by the practice of “social tourism” in past times are attractive and relevant even today, and the “income effect” does not apply to their choice.

Conclusion

Modern concepts in tourism today are “experience”, “animation” etc., which refer to the intangible feeling that a tourist “records” as an emotional memory of a given tourist trip. Frequently, the opportunities to increase the added value of a given tourist product are precisely in this direction. The tourism business makes significant efforts to “sell more happiness” at a “higher price” and in most cases these efforts are successful, and the result of them is visible most tangibly when it has also passed through the “filters” of social networks. And although today the “small” things are not in fashion, human nature has not yet turned to the real and unadulterated, which most often becomes a fact without a monetary /egoistic/ intermediary and a part of people look for it not only in everyday life, but and during your tourist trip. Happiness is given, it is not bought or sold, it is the result of the social health of a society, which, depending on how “steeped in the pursuit of profit” it is, makes people more or less satisfied with life. This is perhaps the informal reason why a person from a low-income target tourist group spends money to rent a basic tent or a basic bungalow, and another from a high-income group buys an ultra-modern camper or caravan and thus stops the action of “the economic”, giving priority to the “social”. The “social” becomes a fact of a tourist place where the society /people/ value the real and unadulterated “little” things of life, which even with the greatest desire cannot be created and “sold” by and in the tourist segment. Apparently “social” will not soon go out of “use”.

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