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ECOTOURISM – AN ALTERNATIVE TO MASS TOURISM IN NATURE PARK "STARA PLANINA"

Uglješa Stankov^{*1}, *Vladimir Stojanović*^{*}, *Vanja Dragičević*^{*}, *Daniela Arsenović*^{**}

^{*} Faculty of Sciences, Novi Sad

^{**} Center for Spatial Information of Vojvodina, Novi Sad

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Abstract: Stara planina has great natural and anthropogenic potentials for tourism development that have not been recognized by tourism experts. Intensive state interest for tourism development started in 2006, when started building of the master plan for winter tourism development at Babin zub area. However, most of the central part of the mountain is part of Nature Park "Stara planina" that can be endangered by mass tourism development. Within this context, this paper researches potentials for ecotourism, as an alternative to future mass tourism development. Started projects of mass tourism development cannot be stopped, but also they do not have negative impacts to natural surroundings. The aim of this paper is to represent ecotourism as a "conscience", a correction factor of mass tourism development.

Key words: Ecotourism, mass tourism, Nature Park, Stara planina.

Introduction

Stara planina is situated in the border part of Serbia with Bulgaria (where most of the mountain stretches) and is a part of the Carpatho-Balkan mountain arc (D. Gavrilović & Lj. Gavrilović, 1998). Stara planina has long been out of the main tourist flows in Serbia, mostly because of its isolated bordering position. This fact has made it possible to largely preserve its natural and social characteristics. Nature Park "Stara planina" occupies parts of the Stara planina Mountain in municipalities of Zaječar (9 958 ha), Knjaževac (57 968 ha), Pirot (63 194 ha) and Dimitrovgrad (11 099 ha). The total area of the Nature Park is 142 219 ha (Mijović, 2006).

Significant limiting factors for tourism development (inadequate transport connections to many parts of the mountain, lack of tourist tradition, emphasized emigration of rural population and general backwardness of the mountain area)

¹ Correspondence to: ugljesa.stankov@dgt.uns.ac.rs

still did not prevent Stara planina to be rated as a potential tourist region in all important tourist and geographical regionalizations of Serbia (Stanković, 1999).

Nikolić (1982) distinguished Stara planina Mountain tourist zone with piedmont, within the tourist region of Niš and Sokobanja. The Spatial Plan of the Republic of Serbia (1995) distinguished Stara planina as a special tourist region in the Eastern tourist zone. Stara planina region, that is Babin zub area, is classified in the second group of priorities among the new tourist areas. Čomić (1997) also distinguishes Stara planina as a separate region, together with the smaller integral areas of Zaglavak, Visok and Vidlič. Stanković (1998) counts Stara planina as one of the 10 priority regions of Serbia. He ranks Stara planina as a potential region, emphasizing its peripheral position. The authors of Tourism development strategy of the Republic of Serbia (2005) also emphasize the importance of Stara planina. They even go further, ranking this mountain as one of the main destinations of the south-eastern Serbia tourism cluster, and as one of the major tourist centres of tourism product "Mountains and lakes".

Centres of ecotourism demand for Stara planina are, in most cases, located in the urban centres of developed areas. Apart Niš, other major urban centres are quite far away and there is a natural (competitive) border in the form of mountains of eastern Serbia.

Despite the above stated facts, the feasibility study for building the tourist centre "Babin zub" has shown that there is a potential demand for this mountainous area (albeit, for different forms of tourism) in the following outbound centres: close neighbourly areas, Belgrade, Niš and Vojvodina and especially from the area of the Danube and Central-European countries, which are large outbound areas of tourists for Serbia (Miljković & Bujagić, 2003). Generally, this relatively unfavourable tourist position of Stara planina will be significantly improved because of the investment in winter tourism development.

At the state level, over the past few years tourism policy makers have intensified tourism development on the mountain. In 2006, began significant investments from the National Investment Plan. The concept of development is aimed at creating a modern winter tourist centre of mass tourism. Tourism development, in addition to beneficial effects, also can significantly affect the natural and social environment. Therefore, tourism development must be carefully planned (Stankov, 2007).

Increased interest for Stara planina will inevitably contribute to the development of selective forms of tourism and ecotourism (along with rural tourism), and it

can play an important role in the functioning of the Nature Park. Viewpoints that advocate for tourism that enhances the life of the population in tourist areas, regions and countries, protect the environment and form the basis for a better future, will be of great importance (Stanković, 2001a).

In tourism literature, there are more than 80 different definitions of ecotourism (Dowling & Fennell, 2003). The first formal definition of ecotourism was given by Héctor Ceballos-Lascuráin in 1987. He defines ecotourism as a term that involves travelling to relatively well-preserved and not degraded natural areas in order to study, admire and enjoy the landscape, plants, wildlife, and cultural events (past and present) (as cited in Blamey, 2001). The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) defines ecotourism as responsible travel to natural areas that preserve the environment and support the well-being of local populations (McLaren, 2003).

This paper describes firstly the history of protection and protected nature at the Stara Planina Mountain. In the second part, paper deals with development aspects of ecotourism and analyse complementarities of ecotourism and other forms of tourism in this area.

History of protection and protected nature

The first protected area in Stara planina is the group of trees "Stabla sitne granice", protected in 1966, on the proposal and the grounds of the Institute for Nature Protection of Serbia. In the 80s, the Institute started activities for the protection of the seven strict nature reserves and one Nature monument.

Ten years later, on the "Ecological Summit on Stara planina", held in Bulgaria in Chiprovci, the Declarations of the proclamation of a Bilateral park of peace "Stara planina" between Serbia and Bulgaria were adopted. The first step in achieving this Declaration was the proposal of the Institute for Nature Protection of Serbia based on which The Serbian Government adopted the Decree on the Protection of Nature Park "Stara Planina" in 1997. According to this Degree, "Stara Planina" is protected as a natural asset of great importance, and it is classified in the First category of protection. Public Enterprise "Srbijašume" takes care of Nature Park "Stara planina".

The study of the Park protection was created in 2003. Simultaneously, with these activities, the preparation of planning documents was initiated and, in 2005, spatial plans of the Nature Park and the tourist region of Stara Planina were finished. Harmonization of these documents formed the current proposed zone

of protection regimes - I, II and III level - which provides optimum protection for future reserve "Man and Biosphere (UNESCO - MAB)" (Mijović, 2006).



Figure 1. Photo of the Babin zub peek (Svetozarević, 2006)

Stara planina Nature Park includes the following Strict nature reserves: "Draganište", "Bratkova strana", "Kopren", "Vražja glava", "Tri čuke", "Smrče (Arabinje)" and "Golema reka". In addition to these seven Strict nature reserves, four Monuments of nature are located within the Nature Park: "Stabla sitne granice", "Crni bor", "Hrast lužnjak" and "Babin zub" (Mijović, 2006; Ostojić, 2001).

Stara planina has status of a significant international region. Parts of the Nature Park and the whole mountain are on the list of important international bird areas (IBA - Bird Life International, since 1997, "Stara planina – Vidlič" area), on the international list of important plant area (IPA - PlantaEuropa, since 2005), on the list of primary areas for butterflies in Europe (PBA), on the preliminary list of border areas under UNESCO (Man and Biosphere), on the list of priority habitats for protection under the Ramsar Convention (peat land), on the Emerald list (area important for the preservation of European ecological network), on the list of a border protected areas within the programme Green Belt (IUCN) and on

the list of geological treasures of important places, within the European association for the conservation of geological heritage "ProGEO" (since 2000) (Anonymous, 2008; Mijović, 2001).

In realization is the project of "Cross-border cooperation through joint management of natural resources – Promoting of networking and cooperation among the countries of Southeast Europe" with Bulgaria. Cross-border cooperation model is recommended as a solution to the general protection of biodiversity, but at the same time as the concept of "Peace Park" in order to participate in the European initiative "Parks for Life" and in the Pan-European strategy for biological and landscape diversity (Anonymous, 2008).

Nature conservation should not be reduced just to the protection of certain natural objects of smaller or larger landscape units, but it must protect nature as a whole. Modern tourism must strive for consistency of application of this principle (Stanković, 2003).

Planning and material basis for tourism development

Protected natural areas justify their existence by bringing its values closer to the people, and one of the most successful aspects of that use can be achieved through tourism (Ćurčić, 2003). So far, in this area a lot has been done in preparing for construction of tourism infrastructure designed primarily for mass tourism.

In 1995, the Government of the Republic of Serbia adopted the Master plan of tourist resort in the Stara planina. Then, the initial feasibility study of the tourist centre "Babin Zub" was carried out. This study showed the spatial, programmatic, and economic feasibility of building a tourist resort at Stara planina. Spatial Plan of Republic of Serbia until 2010 listed Stara planina in I category of tourist centres to be built. This is particularly related to Babin Zub area (Ministry of Urban Planning and Construction, 1996).

Based on the Spatial Plan until 2010, and on the needs of Knjaževac municipality for tourism development in the area of the Stara planina, a series of planning documents have been created so far (Development plan for the tourism industry of Knjaževac, Tourism development program of Stara planina in the Knjaževac municipality, Spatial plan of special purpose area of Babin zub, Detailed urban plan for the sports center "Jabučko ravnište", Feasibility study of the project Babin zub and others) (Miljković & Bugajić, 2003).

In August 2006, the Ministry of Trade, Tourism and Services of the Republic of Serbia entered into contract with the company "Ecosign" from Canada and "Horwath Consulting" from Zagreb for the preparation of the Tourism plan for Stara planina with pre-investment study and study of the physical and technical characteristics of ski resorts. The next year plan has been drafted and implementation has started.

Material basis for the development of ecotourism is specific, unlike a material basis that is necessary for the development of mass tourism. Previous tourism development Stara planina had no great significance. However, built tourism material basis was designed primarily for mass tourism. Developed material base of mass tourism could threaten the environment and could constraint the development of ecotourism. Currently, in the Nature Park there are the following accommodation and catering facilities: Hotel "Babin zub", mountain lodge on Besarski kamen, memorial home on Vrelo, mountain lodge in the village of Dojkinci and resort of the company "Šumarsko gazdinstvo" – "Široke luke".

Ski centre "Babin zub" has ski trails at "Konjarnik", "Sunčana dolina" and "Markove livade". The last one is lighted for night skiing. Ski resort "Babin zub" has: newly built four-seated chairlift "Konjarnik", with conveyor for loading skiers and the capacity of 1 500 skiers per hour; ski lift "Sunčana dolina" with the capacity of 1 200 skiers per hour, and ski lift "Markova livada" (Anonymous, 2009).

Planned construction of trails for alpine skiing will meet the needs of 14 000 skiers of different categories. Total length of cable cars will be 40 km and of ski trails 100 km. Ski resort on the mountain should be linked and complement with accommodation centres and facilities of the following capacity: 9 000 beds, 12 000 skiers, 6 500 daily visitors and 3 100 employees (Anonymous, 2005).

With the construction of the system of lifts and ski trails, as well as with the accommodation facilities and other infrastructure, Stara planina will soon become one of the largest and most important ski centres in Serbia. This construction works should be linked to the environmental impacts that they may cause. The tourism development in protected areas entails a high degree of responsibility by all stakeholders involved. Wrong steps in the planning and implementation of plans, can lead to permanent degradation of the areas where tourism activities occur (Stojanović, 2005). Just one look over winter tourism development plans can show that sites that are planned for ski infrastructure are mainly along the main mountain ridge, from Babin zub to Srebrna glava above the Senokos village. This raises the question of their environmental impacts,

especially having in mind the fact that most of the planned facilities should be located in II level zone of protection of the Nature Park.



Figure 2. Photo of the degradation of the terrain caused by construction of lifts within ski centre “Babin zub” (Rubinjoni, 2008²)

Ecotourism development aspects

There are many problems related to environmental pollution in Serbia (Besermenji, 2007). In this sense, Stara planina, as one of the best-preserved natural areas in Serbia, represents an ideal area for ecotourism development. Attractive geological structures, variety of landscapes, beautiful natural landscapes, cultural monuments, and ethnological objects and their environments, high quality environment and large number of biological species and ecosystems are invaluable potential for sustainable development of this area. A large number of modern tourists are looking for experiences that provide them with a sense of closeness with the nature and with local communities. Each

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destination that wants to attract such visitors must protect its resources, with emphasis on a sense of integration with the local community.

The concept of ecotourism destinations is relatively new and there are no specific guidelines, although the concept of ecotourism has emerged in 60's (Bjork, 2007), and the term of "ecotourism" in late 70's of 20th century (Fennell, 1990). Stojanović (2006) stated that according to the definition of ecotourism, as well as to its basic principles, eco-tourism destination is composed of more segments that are equally important.

Ecotourism destination represents *protected natural area (mainly national parks) or a landscape with perceived natural characteristics and rich biodiversity, where the intensity of developed and urbanized is at a very low level, and where tourism is not developed at the expense of fundamental natural resources*. In this sense, the Stara planina has the characteristics of ecotourism destinations, especially Nature Park as protected part of nature with natural features and biodiversity. On a territory of Natural Park, there is no large urban centres and significant travel infrastructure. Most of the villages are small mountain villages, and since this is an extremely depopulation area, they are not threatened by rapid urbanization.

The other important aspects of ecotourism destination are *recreation areas and facilities that are in accordance with the natural capacity*. The area of Stara planina has several recreational units. The largest number of resorts is located in the municipality of Pirot. Picnic spot "Vrelo" is located 33 km away from Pirot, in an area dominated by Dojkinačka and Jelovička rivers. Another important picnic spots are Temac, located 20 km away from Pirot, and picnic area near Zavoj reservoir. For holiday makers particularly interesting areas are situated near the former village of Male Lukanje and Zavoj. Local population and tourists use all of these picnic areas, and they can be part of the offer of distinctive types of tourism, and part of ecotourism as well. However, ecotourists are looking for "less crowded" places that have direct links with a natural surroundings. For that purpose, they can use mountain trails.

In the municipality of Pirot, mountain tourist trails are divided into three categories according to severity, length, type of terrain and altitude difference. There are "Junior", "Senior 1 and 2" and "Professional 1 and 2" trails. Total length of trails is 50 km (Božović-Denis & Argakijev, 2006). In 2006, labelling of hiking and biking trails started and constructing of trail for off-road vehicles and riding that will link all the attractive points of the region. Labels for horse

riding that are installed are made of wood and are incorporated into the landscape (by colour and size).

The third aspect of ecotourism destination make *companies that provide travel services that must be owned by local communities and by their architecture and environment they have to emphasize the local heritage and culture*. In the Nature Park, there are several companies that provide accommodation, but they are not locally owned. Those are the small objects that are, in the architectural sense, partly in accordance with local architectural tradition. However, those objects are far from the criteria that apply to the ideal type of accommodation in terms of ecotourism – eco lodgings, both in architectural terms, and in the organization of business that should be in harmony with ecological principles. Future accommodation facilities that will be built at Stara planina, regardless of whether they will be intended for ecotourists or mass tourists, have to be "healthy buildings". "Healthy buildings" are structures built of natural materials and constructed using local materials and technologies. They take care of limited physical space and use new technologies and products that are less polluting (Blagojević, 2002; G. Reckoska, R. Reckoski, & Mickovski, 2002).

Another important aspect of ecotourism destination are *local residents aware of their cultural identity and willing to participate in the promotion of local heritage through the creation of tourist events, as well as in other original ways*. Stara planina is a depopulation region with a large number of aged populations. However, some people are trying to engage in activities primarily within rural tourism. Some families have arranged their homes for accommodation of tourists, and there are activities of the renovation of old houses, primarily for the use by their owner (for example, in Slavinj village). Bearing in mind the close relationship between rural tourism and ecotourism, this represents a positive sign for development of ecotourism.

The role of local non-profit and non-governmental organizations is especially important. They organize projects for development of rural tourism and ecotourism aimed at the inclusion of the local rural population in these types of activities. The most active non-governmental organizations in the areas are "Natura balkanika" and "Logos" from Pirot.

Essential aspect of ecotourism destination makes *a friendly relationship between ecotourists and local residents*. It is generally known that hospitality of the rural population is strong in mountainous areas. This aspect could be a significant factor in the future ecotourism development.

The design of programs for tourists during their stay at Stara planina and offer of appropriate contents that would not lead to distortion of the natural features of the area is the first and basic prerequisite for the development of eco-tourism. International network "Natura 2000", in cooperation with the NGO "Society for the Improvement of Education – Duo" from Belgrade and the Association of Teachers "Logos" from Pirot, included Stara planina in the project for the establishment of mechanisms for the protection of biodiversity in the Balkan region. Project's aim is to achieve sustainable development through ecotourism and environmental education in protected areas. Project for implementation of educational elements in ecotourism offer has a clear character of sustainable development because it deals with development and creation of eco-educational products that can be offered in the tourism market of protected areas. Until now, local people saw protected areas as goods that have little economic value. Generally, these areas have been seen as areas with numerous limitations for use. Based on recognition of potential profit from natural resources, it is necessary to encourage local people to get involved in the protection process (Butcher, 2007).

The area of Stara planine in Pirot municipality was chosen for the pilot area for the implementation of the previously mentioned project. With the help and suggestions of teachers from Pirot, the programs for 10 eco-tours for different ecotourism destinations in the Nature Park were designed. Designed eco-tours include educational, recreational and research elements. Within thematic workshops, people can become familiar with a world of nature through the game and leisure activities. Sites that are part of the eco-tours are thematically related. Themes of eco-tours are: high-mountain ecosystems; panoramas and view points; water, forest and meadow ecosystems; traditions; geo heritage; art; life in harmony with nature and the wilderness survival skills (Anonymous, 2010).

Complementarities of ecotourism with other forms of tourism

Complementarily is an important characteristic of ecotourism. Ecotourism activities can exist within the tourism offer of other types of tourism (spa, recreational, agricultural and others form of tourism). The importance of complementarily of ecotourism is especially important in Serbia where there are no "real" ecotourism destinations and programs. In this sense, ecotourism activities, programs and facilities can be a supplement to other forms of tourism. In this way, some useful effects of ecotourism, in the sphere of nature protection, education of visitors and benefits to local people, can be achieved, despite a lack of an overall ecotourism offer.

Stara planina is a heterogeneous potential high-mountainous tourist region (Stanković, 1997) and have opportunities for the development of several types of tourism: recreational tourism, excursions, rural tourism, event tourism, fishing and hunting tourism, transit tourism, geo tourism and others. Further, we will analyze the relationship of certain forms of tourism and ecotourism in this area.

Recreational tourism can be represented in the form of winter and summer tourism. Recreational tourism in the winter has little possibility for the inclusion into ecotourism. Winter sports are part of mass tourist offer, which is (in the content of meanings, its effects and overall sense of quality) very different from ecotourism. There are also practical limitations (difficult mobility because of snow cover, short duration of the daytime, low air temperatures, etc.) that prevent ecotourism activities in the winter.

Summer recreational tourism has good grounds based on series of natural resources, such as gentle slopes, complexes of old forests, grasslands under flowers, canyons, caves, artificial reservoirs, waterfalls, landscape values, and more. Among summer recreational activities, mountain climbing and hiking have a long tradition, although there is no good material base in form of high quality mountain homes and places for rest. Generally, summer recreational activities can be closely related to ecotourism because of the utilization of the same attractive bases.

Rural tourism has a good basis for development, particularly in terms of preserved authenticity. Higher degree of authenticity of rural areas increases their tourist value (Stanković, 2001b). One of the clusters of rural tourism in Serbia is geographically linked to this area (Todorović & Bjeljac, 2007). Although some villages started to develop this type of tourism, numerous difficulties may be a problem in the implementation of this commitment. Some of them are located at altitudes below 500 meters, with inadequate access roads and houses which are not well equipped, etc. In order to develop rural tourism the following measures must be taken: creation of good water system management; construction of good roads and telephone lines; organizing health care services; improving of hygiene in houses; decoration of yards, streets, park areas and cultural and historical monuments; better presentation of folklore; selling of well-designed souvenirs, opening stores with better offer and training of interested residents to perform these activities (Romelić & Ćurčić, 2000).

The connection between rural and ecotourism is generally well-known. Symbiosis of these two types of tourism in the area of Stara planina cannot be avoided. In the Nature Park there are villages, whose residents are an important

part of the social basis for the ecotourism development. Ecotourism programs and activities can be a significant competitive advantage of rural tourism of the mountain, comparing to other areas in Serbia. In particular, it can be an interesting combination of rural and ethnic tourism. As an example of this can be carpet production. This area is well known by carpet production. Potential tourists could be included in the whole process of carpet-making, from sheep shearing, washing and cleaning, spinning and dyeing to carpet weaving (Gligorijević & Deverdžić, 2006).

Until now, most of the *excursions* were conducted from places in nearby contractive zone, like Pirot, Knjaževac, Dimitrovgrad and Zaječar. Excursionists usually visit Vrelo, Besarski kamen, Gradipanska reka, Babin zub, Široka luka and Midžor tourist site. Ecotourism visits are generally characterized by longer stay in nature. Still, short excursion visits can be organized to satisfy ecotouristic principles, especially those ones referring to nature protection and environmental education of excursionists.

Event tourism has a good base for development in the form of existing manifestations: State ski cup competition "Kup Midžora", Serbian orientation ski championship, Pre-elections for Serbian championship, Niš ski federation championship, Ski double match of Pirot and Niš, etc. In Serbia, there are a large number of traditional manifestations, festivals and celebrations (Bjeljac & Ćurčić, 2010). In underdeveloped regions, tourism events are mostly (by its motive or location) based on attractive natural tourist sites and cultural heritage (Bjeljac, 2006). Therefore, the presentation of local heritage, culture, traditions and customs would be an appropriate additional component of ecotourism for this area.

Hunting tourism has great opportunities for development. In tourism offer, the most important role plays lumber camp from Pirot, which has its own hunting grounds. Besides that, rich hunting resources have hunting lodges "Midžor" from Knjaževac and "Ponišavlje" from Pirot, as well as smaller hunting associations from Dimitrovgrad and Zaječar.

Although hunting and ecotourism, as nature-based forms of tourism, have the same attractive base, there are big differences in the way they use that base. Hunting tourism, as an "aggressive" form of enjoying the nature has direct impacts. In its core, hunting tourism is not ecological activity (Milošević & Markićević, 2004), and in spite of some believes, the authors are strongly against of inclusion of hunting activities into ecotourism programs.

Different interaction of limestone and waterproof rocks at Stara planina causes water richness (Stanković, 1985). *Fishing tourism* at Stara planina is based on the use of a fish fund in streams, rivers and lakes, where there are 16 species of fish from six families. In contrast to hunting tourism, fish tourism has greater possibilities for integration with ecotourism. Sport anglers enjoy in close contact with the nature, and with returning the fish to water, they show understanding the need not to affect the nature that gives them that pleasure.

The development of *transit tourism* has a good base for development because of developed road network in southeastern part of the mountain. Adequate promotion and regulation could attract visitors to the following transit sites: Besarski kamen, Kalna and Temac (Romelić & Čurčić, 2000). Transit tourism has many differences compare to ecotourism. Transit tourism is primarily focused to short stays of tourists. That prevents inclusion of tourist to local life and local environment. The spatial separation of roads and protected nature is also one of the limiting factors of complementarities of these two types of tourism. However, in Serbia, it is not uncommon for major roads to pass through a protected countryside. That makes transit tourism an undesirable partner with ecotourism. Bearing in mind the negative experiences in other protected areas (National Park "Fruška Gora", National Park "Đerdap", etc.), future roads should be carefully planned, in order to prevent the degrading impacts of transport on the environment of Nature Park.

Geotourism is a relatively new phenomenon, which still has the necessity to define clearly its key concepts. Geotourism is in close relation to ecotourism. It is even possible to say that geotourism is a new form of ecotourism focusing on geoheritage (Newsome & Dowling, 2006). Tourism based on geological heritage, and wider, based on geodiversity - geotourism, should not be seen outside of ecotourism, as it emphasizes the educational function, and it serves to better understanding of the protection of natural heritage. Such features of geotourism should be in close connection with sustainable development and sustainable tourism (Stojanović & Stamenković, 2008). According to Mijović (2006), the most important geological sites at Stara planina are: area between Rsovcı and Jelovica, profile of Jurassic sediments in Rosomača and Baranica cave. As geomorphologic heritage sites there are: valley of Bigar stream, Babin Zub, forced meanders of Temštica River and Vladikine ploče gorge at Visočica River. At the same time, these sites represent significant ecotourism sites of Stara planina.

Conclusion

Stara planina, as the most important mountain in the eastern part of Serbia, is an area where it is possible to develop ecotourism. Preserved natural values of these mountains form a significant part of a potential ecotourism offer. Apart from the natural, social characteristics of this area also represent an attractive basis for the development of ecotourism. The construction of one of the largest winter tourism centre in the Balkan should not endanger the environment and disrupt traditional ways of life. With the implementation of these plans, the development of ecotourism and other sustainable forms of tourism must be accelerated. Raising environmental awareness of local people, local authorities and entrepreneurs, as well as visitors, should create a positive practice that will affect contractors of mass tourism projects.

If proposed projects are implemented, it will come to the inevitable spatial mingling of mass and selective forms of tourism. In addition to isolated protected areas within the Nature Park, it is necessary to determine the areas for ecotourism, rural tourism and other sustainable forms of tourism.

In the area of Stara planina it is impossible to implement all the principles of ecotourism, which is partly conditioned with the plans for the development of winter tourism. Still, this should not be an obstacle to the projects and programs that will introduce environmental principles in all spheres of local life, including tourism.

The image that is created on a destination affects visitors who will visit that area. In this sense, the image that is created on Stara Planina must be carefully planned. If the image of this mountain is created as the center of mass winter tourism, the development of ecotourism will be restricted or even completely stopped.

It should be mentioned that ecotourism has to be adjusted to the current situation. The "hard" approach to ecotourism in this area is very difficult to apply, not only because of different visions of this area, but also because of the proximity of urbanized centres. Ecotourism activities should not only be seen as "something very different" from mass tourism. In this regard, the development of ecotourism should be seen as a means of diversifying the overall tourism product and tourism expansion.

In a situation of inability to achieve the ideal ecotourism scenario, ecotourism must adapt the situation in the field. This is particularly important because the

practice of ecotourism can have a positive influence to other tourism development approaches in this area.

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