

PROMOTING EDEN DESTINATIONS IN BULGARIA – THE WAY FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM.

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The European Destinations of Excellence (EDEN) initiative provides the opportunity to enhance the visibility and recognition of emerging European tourist destinations, to create a platform for exchanging good practices at European level and to promote a network between award-winning destinations that could lead other destinations to adopt the model for sustainable development of tourism.

The EDEN project is an excellent option for destinations that do not have the necessary financial funds but want to develop tourism. It provides a chance for every tourist product to be advertised free of charge in the other EU Member States.

Keywords: *Sustainable tourism; tourist destination; EDEN destinations; promoting EDEN destination; Bulgaria.*

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, tourism has established itself as one of the fastest growing sectors of the world's economy. A developed tourism

sector means revenue and job opportunities. At the same time, however, tourism development also produces negative effects such as irreversible destruction of resources and values, pollution of the environment, reduction of biodiversity, destruction of the local landscape through overbuilding, social conflicts, etc.

This is an extremely significant problem, both in Bulgaria and globally. The quality of tourist destinations is strongly influenced by the balance of economic, socio-cultural and environmental factors. The high concentration of tourists and the uncontrolled overbuilding leads to loss of competitiveness of destinations. This determines the need for sustainable tourism development.

Bulgaria is a country with many competitive advantages as a tourist destination, offering a wide range of different types of mass tourism and specialized tourism. The country has enormous potential to establish itself as a year-round tourist destination. It has beautiful and varied nature, natural phenomena, excellent climatic conditions, mineral springs, rich cultural and historical heritage, authentic crafts and customs, delicious food and excellent wines.

Based on the above, it can be noted that Bulgaria is a country with a rich tourist potential in the non-traditional and little-known destinations, which can be presented with the EDEN project. This outlines the direction for the sustainable development of tourism in the country as a condition for increasing the competitiveness of Bulgarian tourism.

The aim of this article is to analyse the EDEN destinations in Bulgaria and to present methods for their promotion and development as a step towards outlining the road to sustainable development of tourism in the country.

The aim is achieved by solving the following specific research tasks:

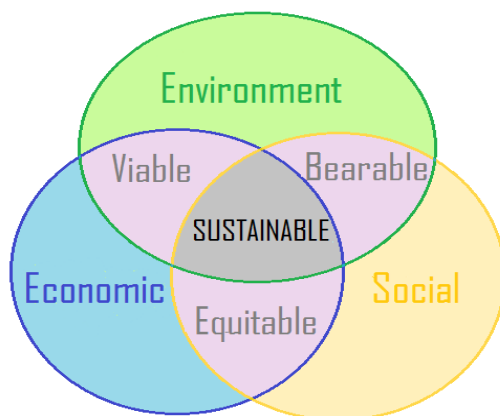
- ✓ Analysis of the essence and peculiarities of the sustainable development of tourism;
- ✓ Analysis of the nature and characteristics of EDEN destinations;
- ✓ Collection, processing and systematization of a database for EDEN destinations in Bulgaria;
- ✓ Summary analysis of EDEN destinations in Bulgaria;
- ✓ Analysis of opportunities and ways to promote and development of EDEN destinations in Bulgaria.

The methodology used in the article includes statistical methods for analysis and sociological methods for analysis - a partial standardized questionnaire and interview.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sustainable tourism is a part of the broader concept of sustainable development that arises in times of serious global problems related to the destruction of the environment and the increase of poverty. The term "sustainable development" was used for the first time in 1987 after releasing the report "Our Common Future", also known as the Brundtland Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development. In the Commission's report, sustainable development is defined as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Marinov, 2011). The concept of sustainable development is officially enforced and widely promoted after the Second Earth Summit in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro. Later the Brundtland Commission's sustainable development definition is complemented by the definition of the "three pillars" of sustainability - environmental friendliness, social tolerance and economic efficiency (Evrev, 2016).

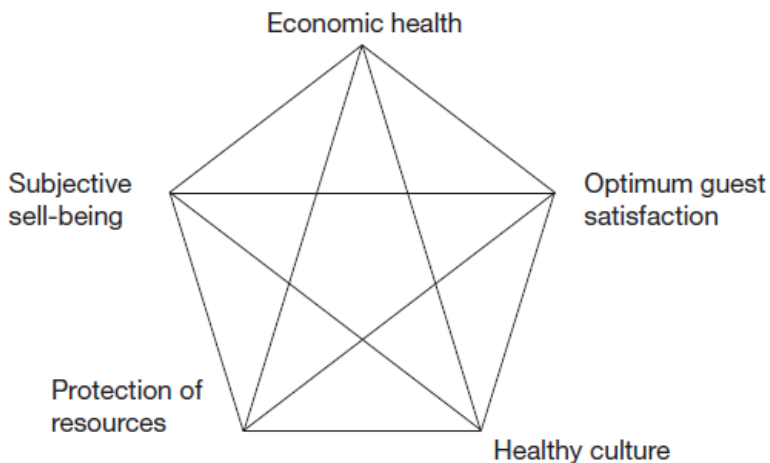
Figure 1. Scheme of Sustainable Development



Based on the three dimensions of sustainable development, Butler (1993) defines the concept of "sustainable tourism" as "tourism which is developed and maintained in an area (community, environment) in such a manner and at such a scale that it remains viable over an infinite period of time and does not degrade or alter the environment (human and physical) in which it exists to such a degree that it prohibits the successful development and wellbeing of other activities and processes."

According to Müller (1994), the sustainable development of tourism can be conceptualized as a "magical pentagon", within which the five goals are balanced so that none of them prevails. Each side of the pentagon refers respectively to: economic health, optimum guest satisfaction, healthy culture, protection of resources and subjective self-being (Sharpley, 2009).

Figure 2. Müller's 'magic pentagon'



The Countryside Commission (1995) defines the concept of sustainable tourism as: "tourism which can sustain local economies without damaging the environment on which it depends". Coccossis (1996) has suggested that there are at least four ways to interpret tourism in the context of sustainable development: a sectoral viewpoint such as the economic sustainability of tourism; an ecological viewpoint emphasizing the need for ecologically sustainable tourism; a viewpoint of the long-term viability of tourism, recognizing the competitiveness of destinations; and a viewpoint accepting tourism as part of a strategy for sustainable development throughout the physical and human environments. Bramwell (1996) notes seven dimensions of sustainability: environmental, cultural, political, economic, social, managerial and governmental (Butler, 1999).

One of the most commonly used definitions of "sustainable tourism" is that of the World Tourism Organization (1993). The WTO has given the full definition of sustainable tourism emphasizing the need to make all tourism sustainable. Expressed simply, sustainable tourism is defined as: "Tourism that takes full account of its current

and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities" (WTO, 2005).

Over the years, countries and regions where the economy is driven by the tourism industry have become increasingly concerned with the environmental, as well as the socio-cultural problems associated with the unsustainable tourism. As a result, there is now widespread agreement on the need to promote sustainable tourism development to minimize its environmental impact and to maximize socio-economic benefits at tourist destinations (Frederico, 2003).

Gradually, the development trends of mass tourism, which underlies the negative consequences of tourism, are replaced by the development of alternative tourism types and the concept of sustainable tourism development. Insufficient result of this link is the automatic assumption that mass tourism is not sustainable and therefore has nothing to do with sustainable development. In fact, some of the most ardent critics of mass tourism are the most ardent supporters of sustainable development and alternative forms of tourism, in the obvious belief that their support will lead to the disappearance of the problems of the previous one (Croall, 1995). According to the WTO, sustainable tourism development is applicable to all forms of tourism and all kinds of destinations, including mass tourism and various segments of tourist niches.

Europe is a continent full of wonderful destinations, but the truth is that many of them have lost their attractiveness due to the expansion of tourism and lack of attention to the environment. No tourist product and tourist destination can be successful for long-term period if they do not create conditions for preserving the environment in which tourism develops. As a result, the European Commission has devoted many efforts and resources to embark on the idea of sustainable tourism.

There are many cities, towns, villages that are unknown and unexploited among tourists, but have many opportunities and potential for development. In this case, through effective marketing these destinations may become part of the new tourist offer. This is an ideal opportunity for sustainable development of new tourist destinations that are not burdened by the negative consequences of mass demand and supply.

The European Commission aims to attract all these fantastic destinations into the focus of all people through the EDEN Sustainable Tourism Project. EDEN is an acronym for European Destinations of Excellence - a project that promotes sustainable tourism development across the European Union. Destinations awarded by the EDEN project are these unconventional, unique places that preserve their charm but which are often overlooked due to the popularity of other tourist sites.

The idea of the European Destinations of Excellence started in 2006 when the European Commission launched a pilot project named EDEN in an effort to rediscover the unknown paradise of new emerging destinations in different parts of the continent, remarkable by their picturesque sites, protected natural areas, traditions and cultural life (European Commission, 2008).

The project is based on national competitions that are held annually and within which a "best destination" is chosen for each participating country. By selecting destinations, the EDEN project effectively achieves the objective of drawing attention to the values, diversity and common characteristics of European tourist destinations. The project raises the popularity of the upcoming European destinations, creates a platform for exchange of best practices across Europe and promotes networking among the winning destinations. The main feature of the chosen destinations is their commitment to social, cultural and environmental sustainability.

The general objectives of the EDEN project are:

- ✓ Overcoming the seasonality of the tourist destinations at national level and presenting non-traditional and unpopular alternative forms of tourism;
- ✓ Creation of conditions for reducing the congestion of the main tourist deserts by spreading the tourist flows towards tourism by interest;
- ✓ Creation of sustainable tourism development based on the unique features of the destination in terms of culture, lifestyle, etc.;
- ✓ Increasing the opportunities for economic development of the regions, based on tourism entrepreneurship;
- ✓ Creation of conditions for protection of the environment in accordance with the European ecology norms;

- ✓ Awareness and advertising at the European level of the new opportunities for recreation and tourism.

The principle of the competition for EDEN destinations is very simple: every year a specific topic is selected by the European Commission in close cooperation with national tourism authorities. Each theme aims to show the whole diversity of Europe, including its natural resources, historical heritage, traditional holidays and local cuisine. The themes are always related to the sustainable development of tourism, whether in terms of cultural, economic or ecological focus. So far, the main themes of the initiative over the years have been:

Table 1. Main themes of the initiative over the years

2007	Rural tourism
2008	Intangible heritage
2009	Protected areas
2010	Aqua tourism
2011	Regeneration of physical objects
2013	Accessible tourism
2015	Local gastronomy
2017	Cultural tourism

Source: EDEN Themes. The principles of EDEN.

The topics proposed by the European Commission are much diversified. This allows each country to make the most of its tourist potential. Emphasis is placed on various types of specialized tourism, which satisfy the more individually expressed interests of the tourists.

In 2011, the European Commission launched a second type of EDEN call for proposals, which is a continuation of the "European Destinations of Excellence" initiative launched in 2006. The new proposals focus on awareness-raising campaigns of EDEN destinations, already selected by the first type of invitations (winners and runners-up of previous editions). The overall objective of the EDEN initiative is to draw attention to the value and diversity of European tourist destinations and to promote destinations where the objective of economic growth is pursued in such a way as to ensure social, cultural and environmental sustainability of tourism.

Bulgaria has held four national competitions for an excellent tourist destination:

- ❖ 2008 - "The Thracian spirit" on the theme of "Tourism and cultural heritage"
- ❖ 2009 - "952: Nature welcomes you!" on the theme of "Tourism and Protected Areas"
- ❖ 2010 - "Water - a source of life and prosperity" on the theme "Aqua Tourism"
- ❖ 2017 - "Cultural and Tourist EDEN Destinations in Bulgaria" on the theme of "Cultural Tourism"

As a result, in Bulgaria there are 17 EDEN destinations: Belogradchik, Lukovit, Vratsa, Silistra, Kavarna, Strandja NP, Kardzhali, Kazanlak, Belitsa, Sandanski, Sapareva Banya, Kyustendil, Yambol, Mezdra, Dragoman, Chavdar and Ardino. The EDEN destinations from Bulgaria include 19 municipalities, 1 district, cultural, historical and educational institutions, nature parks and others (Table 2)

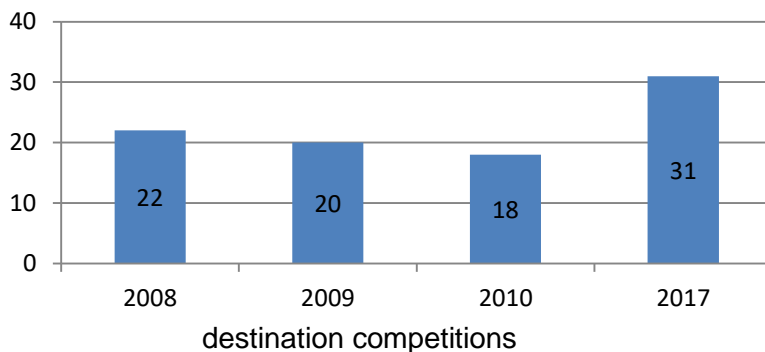
Table 2. EDEN destinations in Bulgaria

Themes:	2017 "Cultural and Tourist EDEN Destinations in Bulgaria" (Cultural Tourism)	2010 "Water - a source of life and prosperity" (Aqua Tourism)	2009 "952: Nature welcomes you!" (Protected Areas)	2008 The "Thracian spirit" (Cultural Heritage)
Destinations and projects:	Yambol	Silistra "Seven states of water: spirit, health, faith, history, beauty, tradition and customs"	Belitsa "The Natural Phenomenon in Rila National Park"	Belogradchik Folklore Feasts "from Timok to Iskar - in the footsteps of the Thracians"
	Mezdra	Lukovit "Panaca magic: water ... rock"	Sapareva banya "Waterfalls of Rila - a source of health and beauty"	Silistra "The Eternal Living Spirit of Thracian God Zalmoxis"
	Dragoman	Sandanski "Land-kissed by God"	Kavarna "Yailata Preserved Nature and Rich Heritage"	Kazanlak "Kazanlak - festival of the Thracian spirit in the valley of the Thracian kings"
	Chavdar	Kyustendil "The Life Water of Pautalia - Velbuzhd - Kyustendil"	Vratsa "The Gate to the Preserved Nature - Vratsa and the Valley of the Leva River"	Kardzhali "Dazdovnitsa - Crossroad of Cults"

The awarded EDED destinations have unique natural and cultural heritage. They all have enormous potential for developing alternative types of tourism and the opportunity to become popular to the tourists thanks to EDEN projects.

In the first edition of EDEN destinations on the topic "Thracian spirit" 22 organizations, companies and associations from all over the country took part. The following year the topic was "952: Nature welcomes you!" and the number of participants was 20. In 2010 the theme of the competition is "Water - a source of life and prosperity", and 18 municipalities and non-governmental organizations participated in it. In 2017 the total number of applications grew to 31. Applications for participating in the competition were from the municipalities Ardino, Sapareva Banya, Mezdra, Belene, Lovech, Brezovo, Samokov, Stara Zagora, Bourgas (2 offers), Dragoman, Petrich, Dryanovo, Radnevo, Devnya, Kostenets, Chavdar, Maritsa, Haskovo, Mogili, Kardzhali, Yambol, Elena, Botevgrad, Varna, Sliven, Malko Tarnovo, Bansko, Smolyan and the regional administrations Lovech and Dobrich. This shows that interest in EDEN destinations has increased significantly in 2017 (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Number of application forms for EDEN



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The statistical methods used in the present study are a graphic method, descriptive analysis and nonparametric methods for the analysis of dependencies, incl. Fisher's Exact test and Kruskal-Wallis test. The data is measured by weak measurement scales - nominal, ordinal and dichotomous. This necessitates the search for and use of analytical methods that do not require, do not necessarily imply a normal distribution of the units of the aggregate by the meanings of the respective signs. To assess the impact of advertising on the chance of visiting tourist destinations, we used Logistic regression.

The level of significance $\alpha = 0.05$ is used throughout the study where necessary. In order to establish the awareness of the EDEN projects and the impact of the advertising campaigns which aim is to promote the EDEN destinations among the tourists, a survey was conducted with two separate groups of participants.

With the first group of respondents, the survey was conducted in Bulgarian, with tourists answering 20 structured questions.

With the second group of respondents, the survey was conducted in English, with tourists also responding to 20 questions. The surveyed foreign tourists are from Germany, Russia, Romania, Czech Republic, Finland, Denmark, France, Spain, Japan, Greece, Sweden, Poland, Vietnam, Israel, Slovenia, Turkey and the United States.

The surveys were designed by the authors personally. In total 42 persons were being interviewed by the first group and 36 by the second group. The two surveys were conducted anonymously via publications on the Internet, in the period 03.02.2018-10.03.2018.

Link to the survey in English:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/HG9XHHD>

Link to the survey in Bulgarian:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/H3FQBRY>

Structurally, the surveys may be provisionally divided into four parts. The first part includes questions about the gender, age and nationality of the respondents. The second part examines EDEN awareness and visits to EDEN destinations. The third part evaluates the EDEN destinations by different criteria. The last part represents personal opinions and recommendations of tourists on the development of tourism in the EDEN destinations.

The surveys include both open-ended questions and closed-ended questions. It has questions that measure knowledge: familiarity with the EDEN initiative and EDEN destinations, questions that analyze EDEN destinations and a question that measures proposals on developing the EDEN destinations.

The questions are covering different research topics as:

- Awareness of the EDEN among respondents;
- Visits to the EDEN destinations by the respondents;

Personal opinion and image of the EDEN destinations among the respondents.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study are presented in tabular and graphical form in order to simplify systematization of the received information for a better visualization.

The number of men participating in the survey is predominant (Table 3).

Table 3. Number of respondents by gender

Gender	Bulgarian	Foreigner
Man	23	21
Woman	19	15

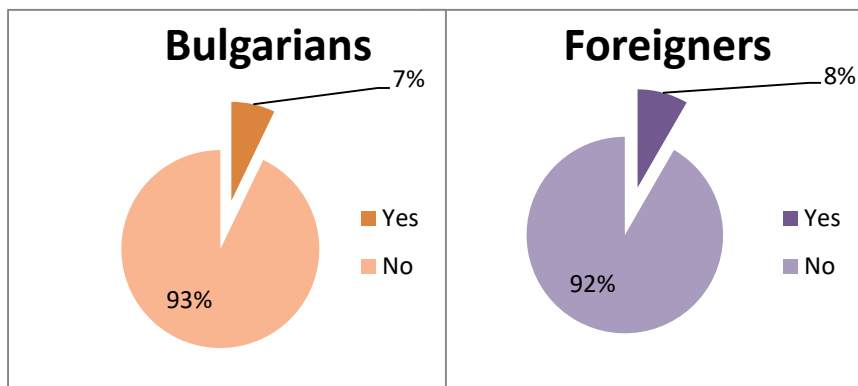
The age distribution of survey respondents is shown in the table below. The percentage of respondents between 18-28 years is the highest (Table 4).

Table 4. Number of respondents by age

Age	Bulgarian	Foreigner
10-17 years	2	0
18-28 years	28	21
29-39 years	8	10
40-49 years	3	2
Over 50 years	1	3

On the question "are you familiar with the EDEN project?" Only 7% of the Bulgarians and 8% of the foreigners have answered yes. (Figure 4)

Figure 4. Awareness of tourists about EDEN



Two of the surveyed Bulgarian citizens received information about the EDEN destinations via the Internet (publication on the official site of the Municipality of Vratsa), and one in the seminar "Management of a Tourist Destination" (discipline from the

curriculum of the specialty "International Tourism Business in Varna University of Economics). Of the surveyed foreign citizens, three are also familiar with the EDEN project. The first one received information about the project from visiting representatives of the Czech Tourism Organization at the University of Economics in Prague, Czech Republic, the second from the lecture course at the Tourist faculty of the University of Portoroz, Slovenia, and the third due to the professional realization - lecturer at the Faculty of Tourism at the Saint Petersburg State University of Economics, Russia.

For the total of 42 Bulgarians and 36 foreigners surveyed, it was found that the percentage of people who know EDEN destinations in Bulgaria is extremely low. We checked whether there is a significant difference in the relative share of individuals in both sets using the Fisher's Exact test.

We made the statement (hypothesis):

To test the null hypothesis (H_0) that there is no difference between the two population proportions. $H_0: \pi_1 = \pi_2$

Alternative hypothesis (H_1) - against the alternative that the two population proportions are not the same. $H_1: \pi_1 \neq \pi_2$

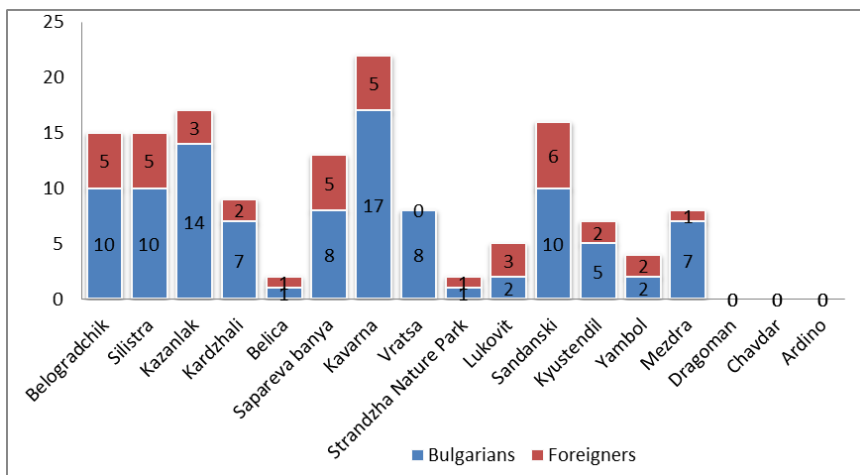
The calculations are made from a 2 x 2 contingency table. A null hypothesis is assumed, provided that $\chi_{STAT}^2 < \chi_{\alpha,df}^2$, where χ_{STAT}^2 is the value of the empirical implementation of the test, $\chi_{\alpha,df}^2$ - the critical values of χ^2 - distribution at the selected level of significance and degrees of freedom $df = 1$.

As a result of the calculations, we confirmed the initial assumption that EDEN destinations in Bulgaria are equally unknown for both Bulgarians and foreigners, there is no significant difference in the relative share of Bulgarians and foreigners who know EDEN destinations.

$$\chi_{STAT}^2 = 0,0058 < \chi_{0,05,df=1}^2 = 3,842$$

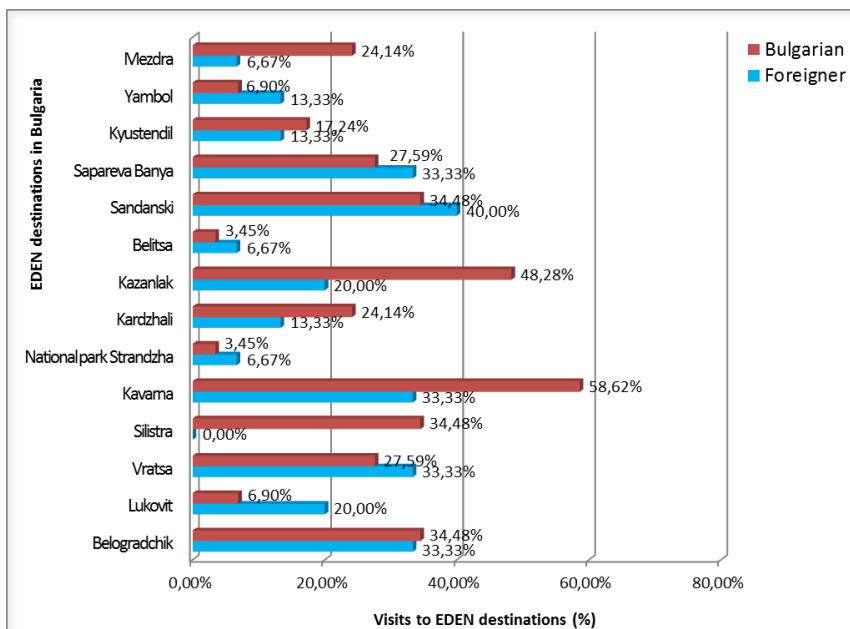
The following diagram (Figure 5) shows how visited by tourists are the EDEN destinations in Bulgaria. The blue part of each column shows the number of visits of Bulgarian tourists for each destination and the red part of each column shows the number of visits of foreign tourists for each destination.

Figure 5. Visits to EDEN destinations in Bulgaria



The diagram (Figure 5.1.) shows how visited by tourists are the EDEN destinations in Bulgaria in percent. The red part of each column shows the percent of visits of Bulgarian tourists for each destination and the blue part of each column shows the percent of visits of foreign tourists for each destination

Figure 5.1. Visits to EDEN destinations in Bulgaria in %



According to the survey, the most visited EDEN destinations are Kavarna, Kazanlak, Sandanski, Belogradchik, Silistra and Sapareva Banya. The leader among foreign tourists is Sandanski. An interesting result of the survey shows that the municipalities of Dragoman, Chavdar and Ardino, which are EDEN destinations from 2017, are not visited by any Bulgarian or foreign tourist.

As main reasons for visiting the destinations, tourists have indicated a trip with friends and family for recreation and visits to certain tourist sites. Visits to Belogradchik are related to the famous Belogradchik Rocks and Belogradchik Fortress. Silistra attracts tourists with the "Srebarna" reserve and the Danube River. As reasons to visit Kazanlak tourists have marked the Thracian tomb, the Rose Museum, the Rose Festival, the Chudomir Feasts and the Hobby Radio Expo. Kardzhali is famous among tourists due to the Kardjali Dam, the Stone Wedding, the Monyak Fortress, the Devil's Bridge

and Perperikon. Sapareva Banya attracts tourists with its Seven Rila Lakes, open geyser and warm mineral baths. Kavarna is visited because of the beach, rock concerts, cape Kaliakra and Mussel Festival. The main reasons for visiting Vratsa include the Ledenika cave, Botev's feat celebrations, the Skaklya waterfall and the Vratsa Balkan. Kyustendil attracts tourists thanks to the fortress of Hissarluka, the church "St. George" and the gallery of Vladimir Dimitrov - The Master. Sandanski is visited because of the archeological museum in the town, the nice climate and the place called "Rupite". Lukovit was visited due to a volleyball event. The reasons for visiting Mezdra are the Kaletto fortress and the near presence of the main railway station.

Most visited destinations, which are not part of EDEN, among the surveyed foreign tourists are Sofia, Burgas, Varna, Sunny Beach, Golden Sands, Balchik, Nessebar, Bansko, Borovets. Other destinations mentioned are Albena, Obzor, St. Constantine and Helena, Sozopol, Kamchia, Veliko Tarnovo, Plovdiv, Vidin, Rousse, Ivanovo, Stara Zagora, Shumen, Lovech, Asenovgrad, Bachkovo, Petrich, Blagoevgrad, Samokov, Chiprovtsi, Koprivshtitsa, Tryavna, Gabrovo, Montana and others. The most visited destinations are famous resorts on the Bulgarian Black Sea coast and winter resorts. However, other destinations are mentioned, which correspond to the more individualized interests of tourists, mainly related to cultural, rural and ecotourism.

According to the survey, among the EDEN destinations in other countries, the most visited are Saimaa (2010, Finland), Hiiumaa (2015, Estonia), Idrija (2011, Slovenia), Brda (2015, Slovenia), WaterReijk Weerribben Wieden Stykkishólmur (2011, Iceland), Jurmala (2010, Latvia), Gharb (2011, Malta), Gaziantep (2015, Turkey), Gornje Medimurje (2015, Croatia), Lipno (2013, Czech Republic) Ath (2008, Belgium) and Alba Iulia (2011, Romania).

As a conclusion, we can summarize that, despite the reported visits to different EDEN destinations in Bulgaria and abroad, the majority of tourists are not familiar with the EDEN destination project.

The survey conducted also gives an opportunity to assess the ecological status of EDEN destinations in Bulgaria. They are rated by the Bulgarian tourists with a score of 1 (Poor) to 4 (Excellent) depending on the level of satisfaction. Taking the scores from 1 to 4

of all respondents, an average score was calculated for each destination using the following formula:

$$D_x = S_x / R$$

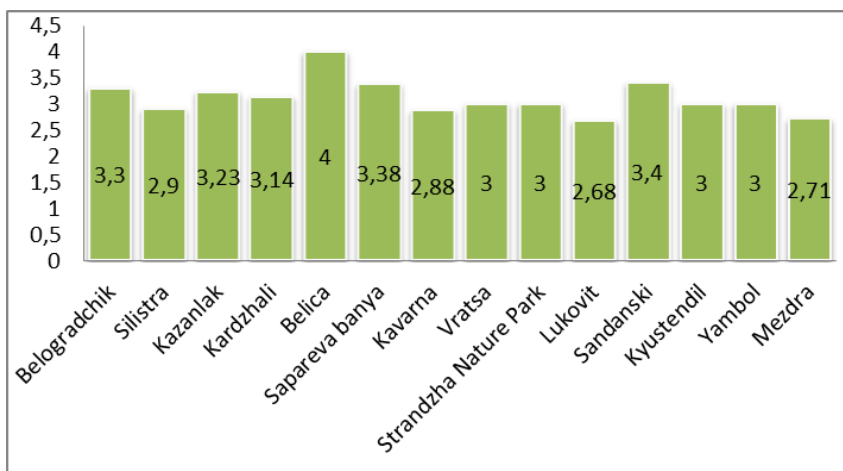
D_x = Average score of destination_x

S_x = Sum of the scores of each respondent for destination_x

R = Number of all respondents

The following diagram shows the average assessment of the ecological status of the destinations. The lowest is the assessment of Silistra, Kavarna, Lukovit and Mezdra. However, their result is higher than the average.

Figure 6. Evaluation of the ecological status of EDEN destinations in Bulgaria

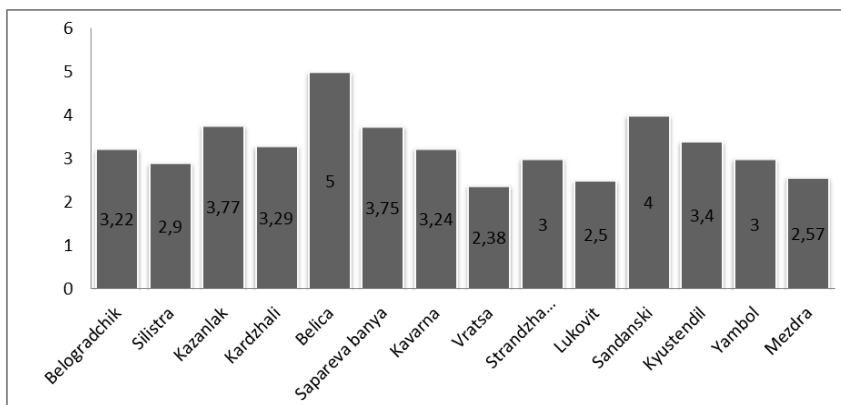


The highest % of respondents rated score of 3, which means the ecological status is satisfactory. The responses to this issue outline a positive overall assessment of the environmental status of the destinations.

With the help of the survey, the Bulgarian tourists also assess the infrastructure and superstructure in the EDEN destinations. The rating is between 1 (Low) and 5 (Excellent). Taking the scores from 1 to 5 for all respondents, again an average score was calculated for

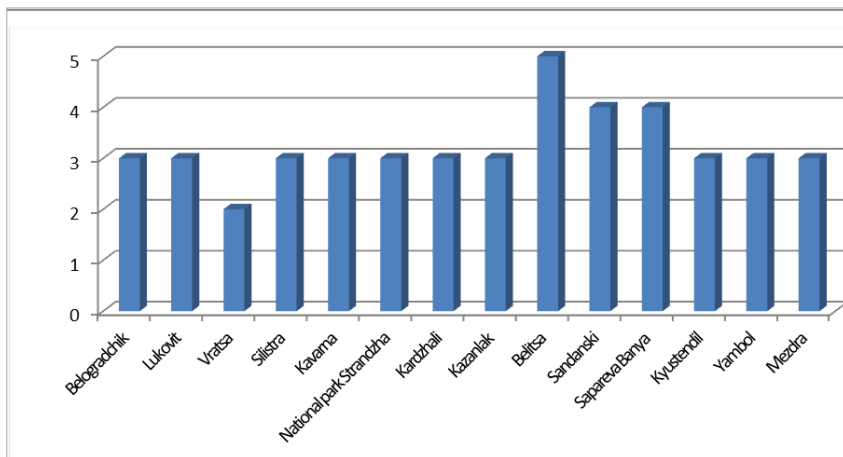
each destination using the formula: $D_x = S_x / R$. Figure 7 shows the average tourists' assessment of the infrastructure and superstructure of the tourist destinations.

Figure 7. Evaluation of the Infrastructure and Superstructure of EDEN Destinations in Bulgaria



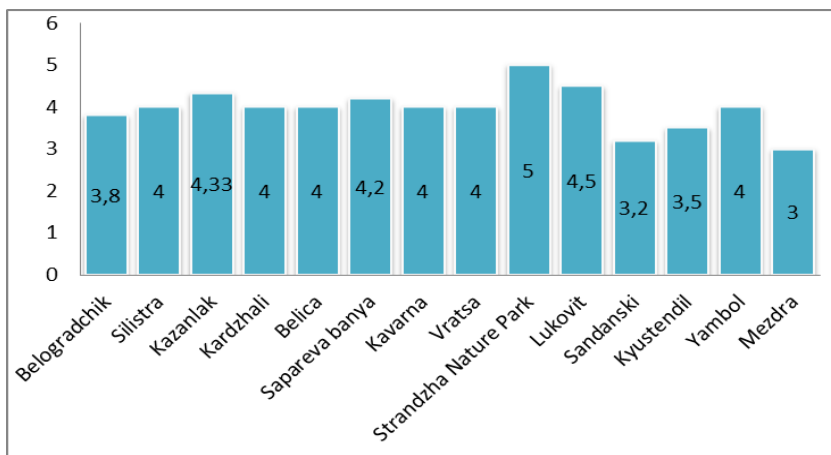
The lowest ratings are received by Silistra, Vratsa, Lukovi and Mezdra. The value below the average is that of Vratsa. The largest percentage of respondents rated 2 (Poor) and 3 (Average). The results of Kazanlak are positive - 53.85% of the respondents give a score of 4 (Very good), Sapareva Banya - 37.50% of the respondents give a score of 4, Sandanski - 40% of the respondents give a score of 5 and Belitsa, which receives an assessment 5. The conclusion is that the current level of infrastructure and superstructure in most destinations is not well perceived by the tourists.

Figure 7.1. Evaluation of the Infrastructure and Superstructure – Median used



The ratings of foreign visitors for EDEN destinations in Bulgaria range from 1 (Very Poor) to 5 (Excellent) depending on their satisfaction after their visit. The highest scores are received by Strandzha Nature Park, Lukovit, Kazanlak and Sapareva Banya, while the lowest is Mezdra. The predominant destination rating is 4 (Very Good) (Figure 8).

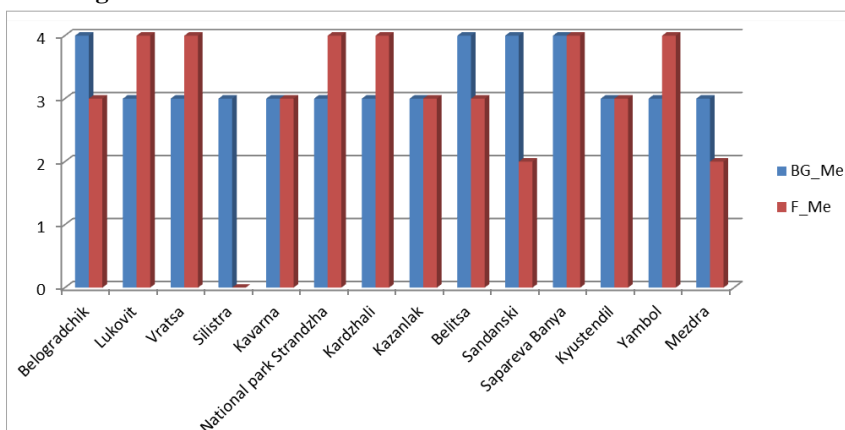
Figure 8. Evaluation of foreign tourists for EDEN destinations in Bulgaria



Assessments on this question show a relatively high level of satisfaction among foreign tourists visiting EDEN destinations.

Overall, the results show that the assessments of the EDEN destinations given by the two groups of respondents do not differ significantly (Figure 8.1.).

Figure 8.1. Evaluation of the EDEN destinations – Median used



Further, we used the Kruskal-Wallis test. This test is a type of non-parametric test, which means it does not impose as a condition a normal distribution of the sample on the sample. It is the so called nonparametric ANOVA method.

The zero hypothesis here consists of the assumption of the equality of the medians in two or more compared groups. We used the test to verify that there is a difference in the median values of the assessments regarding the ecological status of the EDEN destinations in Bulgaria. The test was carried out by first comparing the estimates of Bulgarians and foreigners.

Formally register the null hypothesis is: $H_0: Me_1 = Me_2 = \dots = Me_j$

The alternative hypothesis is the assumption that at least one of the median values in the different groups is different: $H_0: Me_1 \neq Me_2 \neq \dots \neq Me_j$. The test has Chi-square distribution with (j-1) degrees of freedom. The null hypothesis can not be rejected provided that $\chi_{STAT}^2 < \chi_{\alpha,df}^2$. The verification here also occurs at a level of significance $\alpha = 0,05$.

The results of the test showed that between the responses of Bulgarians and foreigners regarding the ecological status of the destinations differ significantly.

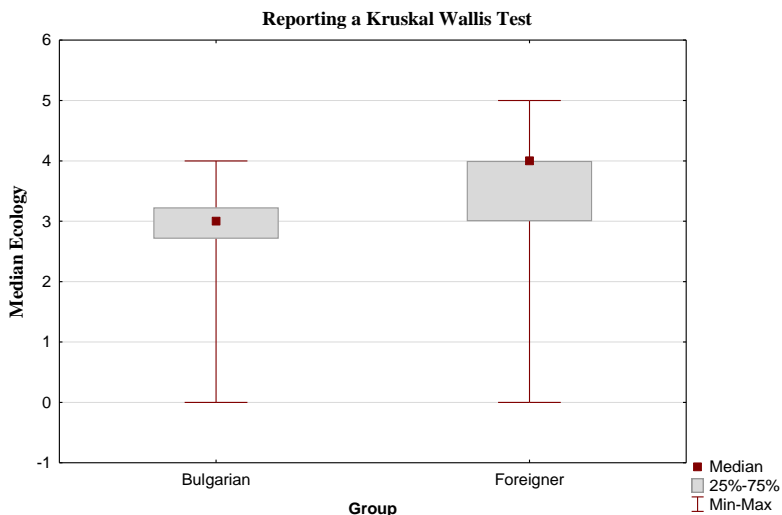
$$\chi_{STAT}^2 = 5,0124 > \chi_{0,05,df=1}^2 = 3,842$$

Table 5. Calculation of the ecological status

Data	Q6_ecology	
Factor codes	Group_BG_Foreig	
Sample size	34	
Test statistic	5.0124	
Corrected for ties Ht	5.0988	
Degrees of Freedom (DF)	1	
Significance level	P = 0.023942	
Factor	n	Average Rank
(1) BG	17	13.68
(2) F	17	21.32

As a conclusion, foreigners who visited the Bulgarian EDEN destinations rated the ecological status higher than the Bulgarians (Figure.9).

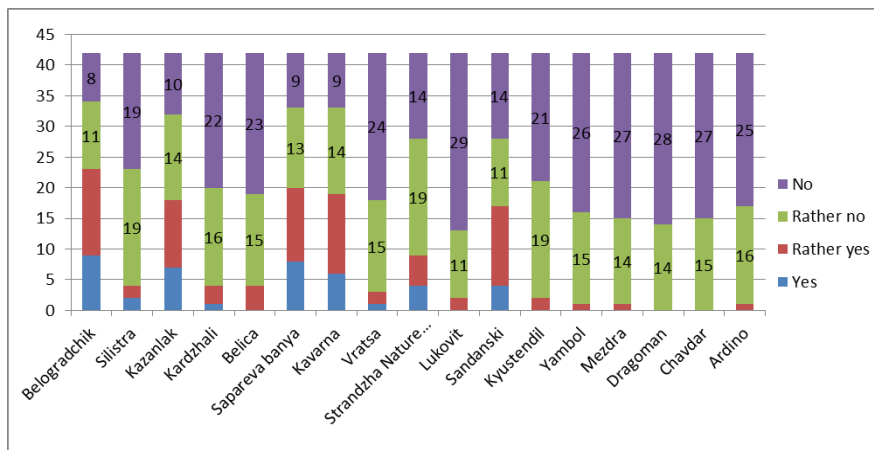
Figure 9. Kruskal Wallis test report



In all other indicators we have not established a significant difference in the estimates, including estimates of destination by destination.

Another point of our research relates to the opinion of tourists about the level of advertising of EDEN destinations (Figure 10).

Figure 10. Evaluation of the tourists for the level of advertising of EDEN destinations



Sapareva Banya, Kavarna, Kazanlak and Sandanski. For the least advertised destinations, tourists mention Dragoman and Chavdar, followed by Yambol, Mezdra and Ardino, which were not yet part of a communication campaign for promotion. Overall, the view of tourists, which assesses that destinations are not sufficiently advertised prevails.

Impact of the advertising on visits

We assessed how the impact of advertising activities aimed at each of the EDEN destination affects the attendance of sites. The possibilities of Logistic regression were used to evaluate this impact. We divided the Bulgarian EDEN destinations into two groups - visited and non-visited destinations. The values we assigned to the dependent variable are as follows: $Y = 1$ - visited objects; $Y = 0$ - non-visited destinations. In the quality of an independent variable we used the recognition (presence), resp. the absence of advertising for the relevant sites. We conducted logistic regression separately for the two groups of respondents - Bulgarians and foreigners. In the study we used the following presentation of Logistic regression

$$\left(\frac{\pi}{1 - \pi}\right) = e^{(\beta_0 + \beta_1 x_1 + \beta_2 x_2 + \dots + \beta_j x_j)}$$

In this way of presenting Logistic regression the exponential values of the $\exp^{(\beta_j)}$ parameters measure the private relative change of the dependent variable in the model. The e^{β_j} variables measure how

many times the probability $\left(\frac{\pi}{1-\pi} \right)$ of occurrence of the resultant phenomenon Y will change for the unit of variation of the corresponding j-factor in the model. Dimensions $(e^{\beta_j} - 1) \cdot 100\%$ indicate how many percent will change the chance of Y - visiting tourists on the relevant destinations when there is an advertising for them. The availability of a destination advertising is also a dichotomous scaled variable. For evaluation, we used additional coding, using as basis the answers "NO" to the respondents.

Logistic regression results are as follows:

Table 6. Results of the Logistic regression

Variable	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% C.I. for EXP(B)	
							Lower	Upper
<i>Bulgarians</i>								
Advertising (1)	2,485	1,443	2,964	1	0,085	12,000	0,709	203,135
Constant	-0,693	1,224	0,571					
<i>Foreigners</i>								
Variable	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% C.I. for EXP(B)	
							Lower	Upper
Advertising (1)	1,569	0,288	5,451	1	0,019	4,800	0,385	59,895
Constant	0,511	0,730	0,489	1	0,484	1,667		

The calculations show that the presence of advertising activity for certain destinations increases the chance of visiting sites multiple times.

For the Bulgarian population this increase is 12 times, while for foreigners it is almost 5 times. Estimated parameters of the equations are statistically significant and valid in terms of statistical theory.

The last question is related to the tourist's recommendations for the development of tourism in the EDEN destinations. The most important recommendations are:

Improving the advertising of the EDEN project itself and EDEN destinations;

- ✓ Improving the infrastructure and superstructure in the EDEN destinations;
- ✓ Preservation and maintenance of the environment;
- ✓ Creating groups on social networks with constant and up-to-date information on tourist sites and cultural events;
- ✓ Organizing cultural events to better advertise little-known landmarks;
- ✓ Innovative way of presenting sights;
- ✓ More information signs;
- ✓ Investing for successful preservation and restoration of Bulgarian landmarks;
- ✓ Building artificial landmarks - a practice that is being applied in other countries, with great success, for example, in Cyprus;
- ✓ Increasing the qualification of the tourist staff and improving the service.

On the basis of the analysis, the following three main conclusions can be drawn:

- Interest in EDEN projects is increasing;
- EDEN projects contribute to the development of tourism and the increase in the number of tourists in EDEN destinations in Bulgaria;
- The awareness of the tourists about the project and the destinations is still very small.

After summarizing the results of the survey, it is imperative to note the absolute opinion among the respondents about the improvement of advertising activities for the promotion of EDEN destinations. More than 90% of the respondents said the improvement of advertising to promote destinations was recommended.

In the opinion of the authors, Bulgaria should continue the activities on the promotion of EDEN destinations. Their realization significantly contributes to their direct promotion as well as to the overall presentation of Bulgaria as a destination for specialized tourism, focusing tourists' attention on lesser known destinations and products mainly in cultural, spa and ecotourism.

Despite the good results, the marketing communication system can be improved and complemented by several activities:

- ✓ Not allowing mistakes of any kind

During the analysis, misprints and factual errors were found in various printed and on-line materials related to the promotion of EDEN destinations.

For example, on the official sites <http://edenbulgaria.eu/bg/node/21> and [https://ec.europa.eu/growth/tools-](https://ec.europa.eu/growth/tools-databases/eden/destinations/bulgaria_en#belitsa)

[databases/eden/destinations/bulgaria_en#belitsa](https://ec.europa.eu/growth/tools-databases/eden/destinations/bulgaria_en#belitsa) the Semkovo mountain resort is declared at a height of 600 meters above sea level, and in EDEN Catalog "Journey Through Bulgaria", p. 22 the resort rises at an altitude of 1550-1600 m above sea level. An extremely important mistake is made in the news broadcast on Vratsa, where the municipality of Sliven was declared a winner destination for the project "Cultural and Tourist EDEN Destinations in Bulgaria" in 2017 instead of Yambol Municipality. To prevent mistakes of any kind, we recommend re-checking the information and materials for publication and printing.

- ✓ Television advertising

The proposal includes the production of additional advertising videos and a general movie about the EDEN destinations to be broadcast on TV. The information that can be presented to the viewers can be about the EDEN project itself, the tourist attractions and the different events taking place in the EDEN destinations, urban legends and stories from local residents, stories from tourists about their impressions and experiences in destinations and more.

- ✓ Internet advertising

The proposal includes mostly social media advertising - Facebook, Youtube, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, VKontakte. The ad consists of sharing photos, links, videos, professional information, etc. about the EDEN destinations on specially designed pages.

- ✓ Out-of-home advertising

The proposal includes transport advertising and billboards. Destination transport advertising consists of advertising on buses, cars, stops and stations. Both types of advertising are based on creatively created ad images related to EDEN destinations.

✓ Organizing events

The proposal includes the organization of sport events, cultural events, festivals, exhibitions and more at the EDEN destinations to attract the attention of the public and journalists and be reflected in the media.

✓ Organization of photo competition of EDEN destinations

The proposal includes organizing a competition for the best photo showing the most exciting and entertaining moments of the tourists during their holiday in one of the EDEN destinations in Bulgaria. The goal is to promote the opportunities and attractions of the destinations by publishing all the received photos on specially created social networking webpages. For the best photo can be a prize: free weekend for two in a country house, hut or hotel in a EDEN destination. The top photos at the competition can be used to make a calendar that can be purchased by anyone willing to acquire it and / or to be printed and to organize an exhibition to attract the attention of tourists and the media.

✓ Conducting lectures in schools and universities

The proposal is related to conducting lectures on tourism sustainability topics and the EDEN initiative for students who are studying Tourism. The proposal can be complemented by organizing excursions to EDEN destinations, where students will have the opportunity to learn about the opportunities for tourism in the destinations in an interesting way.

✓ Issue a book about the EDEN destinations in Bulgaria

In the recent years, various travel guides such as "50 places to visit in Bulgaria in 2015", "50 places to visit in Bulgaria in 2016", "101 byways", "New 101 byways" and "101 byways for advanced " are gaining great popularity. Their idea is to travel to little known places in Bulgaria. Many sites in the EDEN destinations are included and described in these books - Prohodna Cave (Lukovit), Meanders of Arda River and Devil's Bridge (Ardino), Topolnitsa Archeological Park (Chavdar), Perperikon, Stone Mushrooms, Stone Wedding, The

Womb Cave (Kardzhali), Pautalia Fortress (Kyustendil), Rock phenomenon Ritlite (Mezdra) and others.

The proposal includes the publication of a book as a travel guide to the EDEN destinations that includes information on the EDEN initiative and projects that have won the EDEN Award, information on the sights and events taking place in the destinations and information on the accessibility of destinations. The book should be published in two versions - in English and in Bulgarian.

✓ Mobile application

The proposal includes creating a special mobile application related to the EDEN destinations. It should include up-to-date information about tourist sites, attractions and events in the destinations, accommodation and transport, and especially in and around the destinations. An interesting addition to the application will be interactive outdoor quiz games related to the discovery of mysteries about the destinations. The app should be available to all Android smartphones and require access to the location of the tourists. In order to solve the puzzles, there will be a certain places marked on a special online card. When a spot is reached, a question will be shown. Each puzzle will contain a number of questions, and answering all the questions will help solve the mystery. For the successful solving of each mystery a prize reward will be provided, related to the theme of the mystery.

✓ Making souvenir coins

The proposal includes the production of special EDEN coins. A typical symbol for each EDEN destination shall be chosen for the obverse of the coins. The reverse of the coins should be common to all the destinations and present the EDEN logo. Coins can be used both for the quiz game in the mobile application and for souvenirs. A special coin album can also be made in addition to them.

CONCLUSION

The main effect of the project implementation in Bulgaria is the achievement of permanent recognition and confirmation of the image of the EDEN destinations in the country as an alternative, non-traditional and ecologically appropriate form of tourism.

In the present study, there were made: an analysis of the essence and characteristics of the sustainable development of tourism and EDEN destinations, an analysis of the EDEN destinations in Bulgaria and an analysis of the opportunities and directions for popularization and development of the EDEN destinations in Bulgaria.

The results of the complete analysis show:

- Efforts are being made to promote the sustainable development of tourism in a global perspective;
- EDEN destinations are striving to promote sustainable tourism in Europe;
- EDEN projects in Bulgaria contribute to the development of tourism and the increase in the number of tourists in the EDEN destinations;
- The interest in the EDEN projects in Bulgaria is increasing, but tourists' awareness of the project and the destinations is still very small.

Competitiveness of the world, including the Bulgarian tourism industry is closely related to its sustainability as the quality of tourist destinations is strongly influenced by the respective natural and cultural environment and their integration into the local community. In the long term, sustainability and economic growth can only be achieved by balancing economic, socio-cultural and environmental factors.

Raising awareness of the EDEN projects and promoting the EDEN destinations would contribute to adopting the model of sustainable tourism development and the development of alternative forms of tourism. This in turn would help to overcome the territorial and seasonal concentration of tourism flows and reduce the negative effects of uncontrolled tourism development.

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