

Svetislav Milenkovic<sup>1</sup>, Nikola Boskovic<sup>2</sup>

## ECOTOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN THE DANUBE REGION OF SERBIA

*The paper determines the basic factors of ecotourism development in the Danube region and the forms of possible ecotourism business. The paper presents major tourist attractions for ecotourism development in the present forms of ecotourism, and the perspective funding sources for its further development. It is argued that if the Danube Region is suitable for ecotourism, then it has to be completely environmentally sustainable.*

*Keywords:* ecotourism; Danube region; environmentally sustainable.

Светіслав Міленкович, Нікола Боскович

## РОЗВИТОК ЕКОТУРИЗМУ У ПРИДУНАЙСЬКОМУ РЕГІОНІ СЕРБІЇ

*У статті визначено ключові чинники розвитку екотуризму у Придунайському регіоні, представлено можливі форми розвитку екотуризму як бізнесу. Описано основні туристичні місця регіону, існуючі форми екотуризму, а також методи можливого фінансування подальшого розвитку екотуризму у регіоні. Придунайський регіон – територія, потенційно здатна до розвитку екотуризму, однак цей розвиток має бути екологічно стійким.*

*Ключові слова:* екотуризм; Придуйський регіон; екологічно стійкий.

*Табл. 4. Літ. 11.*

Светислав Миленкович, Никола Боскович

## РАЗВИТИЕ ЭКОТУРИЗМА В ПРИДУНАЙСКОМ РЕГИОНЕ СЕРБИИ

*В статье определены ключевые факторы развития экотуризма в Придунайском регионе, представлены возможные формы развития экотуризма как бизнеса. Описаны основные туристические места региона, существующие формы экотуризма, а также методы возможного финансирования дальнейшего развития экотуризма в регионе. Придунайский регион – территория, подходящая для развития экотуризма, однако это развитие должно быть экологически устойчивым.*

*Ключевые слова:* экотуризм; Придунайский регион; экологически устойчивый.

### 1. Introduction

Initially ecotourism was just an idea, not a discipline, and it was developed by many companies and governments without even understanding its basic principles. Establishment of nationally and internationally accepted principles, guidelines and certification procedures, began in the 1990's, but at a modest pace, because the process involves participants from many regions and professions (Milenkovic, 2009).

Every region under the influence of ecotourism should develop its own principles, guidelines and certification procedures basing on the already available international materials.

In the contemporary context of development in the Danube region the ecotourism must:

– strictly spatially locate itself, or, in other words, deliver a spatial planning in detail;

<sup>1</sup> Full Professor, Faculty of Economics, University of Kragujevac, Republic of Serbia.

<sup>2</sup> Teaching Assistant, Faculty of Economics, University of Kragujevac, Republic of Serbia.

- optimally valorize the landscape of the Danube area;
- ecologically preserve and sustainably exploit all the ecosystems in the area of Danube;
- accurately determine the endurance limit of ecotourism;
- establish the unity of man and nature and open new possibilities of using the offer the nature provides;
- fit into the gastronomic values of the region through the production of high-valuable food;
- achieve the symbiosis of social, economic and ecological systems with all the achievements of modern science and technology, on the one hand, and the characteristics of the ecological system of the Danube Region, on the other hand, for the complex development of ecotourism.

If we achieve all of the above requirements, then there is a real opportunity to develop ecotourism in the entire Danube area, which can become one of the leading tourist cluster development in Europe.

## **2. Development of ecotourism in the Danube region as a theoretical and practical initiative**

Looking at the development of theoretical and practical trends in ecotourism, we found out that it appeared, in the true sense of the word, in 1989. Ecotourism is one of the special forms of alternative tourism which can be defined as a form of tourism inspired primarily by natural history of regions, including the culture (Pajvancic, Markov, 2011). Ecotourism is a part of a larger form of tourism activities (such as, for example, rural), which means that it is an alternative to those specific features of modern tourism, which have the most serious shortcomings. Therefore, ecotourism represents natural history of a certain region and it can be raised to the highest quality level in the Danube region, in particular.

Ecotourism is a form of responsible travelling which keeps the environment safe and supports the welfare of local population. The rapid development of the world economy and new forms of tourism demand have turned ecotourism into a unique industry, which means that ecotourism is the segment of tourism industry which appeals to those who are environmentally aware people and those who want to contribute to local economy (Freedman, 1995).

Ecotourism is described as the perfect tour for small groups, and socially responsible tourism that includes soft adventure, which requires that tourists walk slowly, they just take pictures and leave only footprints (Ayala, 1996).

Ecotourism could not be mass tourism, but strictly intended, post-modern, which means that the slightest sign of harmful effect on the environment does not provide a good combination of nature, mind and body of man, which means that ecotourism is the most complex form of wellness tourism.

Apart from being a concept of protection and conservation of natural and cultural resources, ecotourism can be interpreted as a market niche within the growing tourism sector (Galli, Notarianni, 2002). Sustainability must dominate in ecotourism, and its economy could not do without a well conceived marketing, which should study ecotourism and promote it on clearly defined niche markets. The marketing concept for the Danube Region must be kept within the complex mix marketing when represents ecotourism, because all 7 factors (product, price, promotion,

place, people, physical evidence and process) should be rescaled so that they indeed indicate a new tourism product, with new quality, new contents and new perception at the market.

Ecotourism self-consciously and responsibly protects HS destinations, and also includes fully functional and ecologically healthy products (Meler, 2004). Having developed the ecotourism concept, it is necessary to determine where ecotourism can take its root. As we can see from the previous definition, ecotourism is possible on any destination that provides an eco-durable tourist capacity. The Danube Region is a durable and suitable destination, as a whole, in all Danube countries. They, therefore, in all development plans should be treated as a comparative advantage in relation to other tourism areas.

Transport and tourism are inseparable categories and therefore should be considered in ecotourism. But under "transport" we often mean environmental pollution, while the term "journey" may also involve walking. Walking and use of animals on roads in ecotourism is actually a union of man and nature. In that way we can avoid technical and technological involvement and preserve the natural characteristics. Ecotourism is a responsible travel which includes a visit to relatively undisturbed natural areas in order to enjoy nature and give it respect, a visit which promotes conservation, while its performers have little impact on nature provide active and productive social and economic participation in the local population development.

In Serbia ecotourism still has not much attention paid. It is treated either in the framework of sustainable tourism and environmental protection (Stojanovic, Leposavic, 2007), or as an integral part of the relationship between tourism and environment, where ecotourism is a legitimate representation of the best preserved spatial units (Milenkovic, 2006). It should also be noted that ecotourism is often considered as a selective form, or, as "tourism of special demands". We believe that the best definition is given by the World Tourism Organization (UN WTO), because it is most specific and it determines that ecotourism connects everything that is sustainable, preserved, and natural, as anthropogenic attractiveness, with high environmental awareness of all participants in the development of ecotourism. Ecotourism includes all forms of nature tourism in which the main tourists' motivation of watching and appreciating nature and traditional cultures dominate the natural areas (Ecotourism, 2012).

### **3. Basic tenets of ecotourism in the region of Danube**

In order to determine the development of ecotourism in its fundamentals, we will use the classification of Kusen (2002), which, if applied to the Danube Region, looks like this:

- geological features of the Danube region in the ecotourism development through various forms of rock, natural monuments and pedological soil composition, allowing various manifestations of activity in the area: sports and recreation, education, i.e. teaching environmental workshops for the purpose of tourist satisfaction, not-leisure-activity; especially highlighted are curative mud, sand and rocks in the observed region;
- peculiarities of climate, which in the Danube region belongs to the continental type, with little rainfalls, temperature and length of sunshine within normal amounts, refreshing wind and ecologically clean strong wind "kosava" (East wind).

Since all the features of the climate at this part of the Danube throughout the country belong to environmentally sustainable elements, with no major impact of the global warming, that means that the conditions for the development of ecotourism on the Danube shores are very affordable;

- water resources of the Danube region are the absolute foundation of ecotourism. Danube water surface itself is an eco-resource for photo safari, sports activities with use of sports equipment with no engine, observing the underwater flora and fauna, diverse eco-events on the water;

- flora and fauna, as a development foundation in the Danube region does not have too much weight, but are satisfying. Lack of complex ecological plant and animal oasis can slow the rapid development of ecotourism. However, the objective is the development of ecotourism step by step, and for this wildlife volume is adequate;

- protected areas in the Danube region are: National Park Fruska Gora, National Park Derdap, Special Nature Reserve Obedska swamp, Special Nature Reserve Deliblatska san pit, Special Nature Reserve Koviljsko-petrovaradinski Rit, Special Nature Reserve Upper Danube. Protected natural areas within the Danube region, as a carrier of ecotourism development are the subject of strict protection;

- eco-environmental entities of Danube region allow all forms of tourism in eco-sense, but with certain environmental restrictions. Ecotourism units are of special emphasis in the areas of the old town of Bac, Sombor's message, Spa Junakovic, Slankamen and Vrdnik, Fruska Gora's monasteries, Viminacium, Golubac town, Lepenski vir, Sremski Karlovac (as a town-museum with preserved natural environment and wine road), and other anthropogenic-ecological units. These locations provide an opportunity for different educational workshops, a dedicated colony for ecotourism, construction of ethno-ecological lodging, promotion, tasting and distribution of unique food, fine wines and excellent hunting specialties, various festivals, traditional ecotourism fairs etc.

Closer determination of attractiveness for the development of ecotourism and its valorization, which can be applied to the Danube region in Serbia, was performed by the authors along with the students at Faculty of Economics in Kragujevac in 2011 and 2012. In the research on ecotourism, 144 participants took part.

**Table 1. The most important resources necessary for the ecotourism development**

The most important resources necessary for the development of ecotourism	
Water	89
Forest	83
Rare plants and animals	48
Other (eco-villages, clean environment etc.)	3

*Source:* Compiled by the Faculty of Economics, University of Kragujevac.

As we can see, as a fundamental resource for the development of ecotourism, the respondents put water on the first place. Since Danube water is the most important resource, it is the core for ecotourism development, thus it needs the greatest protection and preservation measures, and a special Danube strategy in all its countries.

Exploring the possible forms of ecotourism in Serbia, we came up with the following options.

**Table 2. Forms of ecotourism to be developed in the Danube region and in Serbia in particular**

Suggested forms of ecotourism	
Walking through protected landscapes	77
Experiencing authentic landscapes	56
Ecotourism in protected areas	53
Eco-rafting on wooden rafts	43
Sightseeing of rare plants and animals	37
Walking at mountain's river rapids in the eco-field	29
Life in wilder ness	27
Birdwatching	11
Photo safari	8
Other (mountain biking)	1

*Source:* Compiled by the Faculty of Economics, University of Kragujevac.

The majority of the respondents expressed a desire to develop walking tours in ecotourism destinations, which means fully incorporating human and nature, but only one participant wanted mountain biking. Cycling tourism in many countries is a very attractive form of ecotourism, so it could be developed along the Danube River, and we think it should be called "Danube cycling itinerary".

In order to develop contemporary ecotourism, it has to grow into ecotourism business. In the Danube region, ecotourism has economic, political, cultural and social grounds for becoming a business.

**Table 3. Investing in ecotourism business**

Possible investment directions in case of starting an ecotourism business	
Walking through protected landscapes	74
Ecotourism in protected areas	59
Experiencing authentic landscapes	43
Sightseeing of rare plants and animals	40
Eco-rafting on wooden rafts	40
Walking at mountain's river rapids in the eco-field	26
Birdwatching	12
Photo safari	11
Other (life in wilderness)	1

*Source:* Compiled by the Faculty of Economics, University of Kragujevac.

The presented data emphasize the following observations on the prospective investment funds accumulation for ecotourism in the Danube region, that is the possible directions to invest are:

- 1) in the development of walking tours through protected landscapes of the Upper Danube, Derdap, Fruska Gora and the areas around Bela Crkva's lakes;
- 2) in ecotourism in the protected areas of the Danube, because for most of its development the guarantees were given by the state;
- 3) in the creation of brand landscapes for the Danube region as a known ecotourism destination in future;
- 4) in the preservation, development and use of biodiversity and zoo-diversity of the Danube region, where in ecotourism can participate all segmented consumer groups (mono-centric, oligo-centric, psycho-centric and groups of people with disabilities (blind, deaf, paraplegics etc.));
- 5) in a special form of eco-rafting on wooden rafts, down the Danubian rapids and against water currents on the Danube and on others water areas;

6) in walking at river rapids and lower water surfaces, as is the case with ecotourism in New Zealand;

7) in a specific form of ecotourism is birds observation and listening;

8) in photo safari, which includes typical "Robinson" tourism in completely uninhabited crags of Derdap National Park.

Ecotourism development requires constant work to preserve eco-destinations. Also, the respondents were asked about additional business in ecotourism, and we got the following results:

**Table 4. Possible forms of additional business in ecotourism**

Possible ecotourism-related activities:	
Production of eco-food	81
Horticulture, dendro-culture	55
Recycling	46
Raising capacity to obtain alternative sources of energy	44
Communal services	30
Other (Botanic Garden)	1

*Source:* Compiled by the Faculty of Economics, University of Kragujevac.

Production of eco-food is the most interesting issue for the development of additional business in ecotourism. It shows the necessary relationship between tourism and agribusiness, for which there are special conditions in the Danube region. Intriguing responses are those related to alternative energy sources. In the Danube region the greatest opportunities for energy production are based on wind (the region of Banat), biomass (Danube region in Backa, Banat), solar energy (Ramska, Golubacka and Deliblatska sand pit) etc. This might reduce pollution and also energy costs because conventional sources are very expensive and not renewable. Also, a good option is the recycling of all waste materials in ecotourism destinations of the Danube region allowing thorough cleaning of these destinations, but also raising benefits from ecotourism activities.

The region under study is a good development platform for all forms of tourism, including ecotourism. However, for ecotourism it is not attractive to such an extent that it may become identifiable, but the development of ecotourism can always be supplemented by other forms and, above all, by urban, rural and transit. If we highlight the poles for ecotourism development in the region, these are:

a) the area of Sombor, with its places which are typical tourist facilities in lowland hunting areas, with its European deers, rural inns and active residence in the field Sombor's message, eco-recreational activities in the Danube waters and canal. Sombor as the greenest city in Serbia has huge potential for ecotourism;

b) Backa eco-area on the Danube, from the Upper Danube and eco-forestry and grass areas, to Novi Sad and the slopes of Fruska Gore. Ecotourism in this area can have many forms: eco-pedestrian, eco-landscape, eco-environmental, eco-rural, eco-wine, eco-fishing and eco-hunting;

c) Novi Sad ecotourism with its Koviljsko-Petrovaradin rit;

d) spatial entity of the Belgrade Danube area has no good conditions for the development of ecotourism because it is predominantly urbanized and has rather disturbed environment;

e) South Banat space has the potential for ecotourism development in the areas of Bela Crkva's Lakes, Deliblatska sand pit and the banks of the Danube itself;

f) Part of Branicevo district, i.e. Pozarevacki Danube region allows for the development of ecotourism on the Viminacium territory related to the festivals and traditions using equestrian sports and walking tours;

g) Derdap National Park, with the best conditions for ecotourism as: adventure, rural, eco-ethnographic, eco-manifestation, hunting, fishing, sports and recreation on the Danube.

From all of the above, we can determine that the development of ecotourism in the region of Danube in Serbia must be accompanied by the following statement: Sustainable business means moving towards the goal of sustainability, living and working in such a way that human society provides more certain future for the generations to come, translating that into changes required for each company and organization – changes that include the ability of organizations and companies to produce goods, including profit-making, necessary for survival, while simultaneously achieving the balance with the environment (Crosbie, Knight, 1995).

#### **4. Conclusion**

The Danube region in Serbia, as a set of natural and anthropogenic characteristics, allows the development of ecotourism, but with certain limitations:

- the development of ecotourism, as an integral part of overall economic activity development, must be slowed down by the restrictive conditions on the use of environmental elements in more profitable sectors (industry, agriculture, transport etc.);

- there shouldn't be any interests' conflict in the development of ecotourism in Serbia and in others Danube countries, because the scope of available ecotourism resources and the level of economic systems development are different in all these countries;

- since all of the projections of the past development of ecotourism in the Danube region of Serbia was just a framework, it needs an urgent revision, on all the goals, and the results already achieved in the development of ecotourism;

- uneven technical and technological progress and different living standards of population warn that we can not simply rely on the achieved level of ecotourism development in others Danube countries, but rather we must formulate our own vision as an initial indicator of future trends in the development of ecotourism with minimum economic risks and without permanent losses for the environment;

- although the idea of tourism development in the Danube region of Serbia was conceived already in the 1960-s, it has not yet developed into a National strategy, which means that the Danube region of Serbia represents a future challenge in ecotourism development.

Future trends in ecotourism development in the Danube region must be analyzed by means SWOT and PESTL analyse, in order to achieve the complete unity of interests and responsibilities of individuals, local governments in the region, state and international interest groups (clusters, UNEP, WTO, EU etc.). If this can be achieved, then we can claim that ecotourism in the Danube region shall realize the following benefits:

- direct incomes from ecotourism are drawn from tourists payments, various donations, selling handmade products, souvenirs;

- indirect incomes from ecotourism are related to government subsidies and investments from different sources.

The development of ecotourism, in all its future projections in the Danube region of Serbia, must provide full funding for the following costs:

- organizing all activities on ecotourism;
- all the costs caused by competitive ecotourism destinations in other Danube countries;
- costs that are the result of competitive activity, i.e. expenditures on social, cultural, ethnographic, political and technical and technological environments.

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