

With the support of the Lifelong Learning Program of the European Union



AcTour: Active Tourism for Sustainable Development

Leonardo da Vinci Transfer of Innovation
Project no: 2011-1-BG1-LEO05-05043

PILOT ACTIVITIES REPORT

25-26 March 2013, Tryavna (Bulgaria)



AIMS

- ❖ Test some parts of the Training program and Guide;
- ❖ Provide job-related and practice-focused training to representatives of the targets;
- ❖ Use ICT-based materials.

ACTIVITIES

- ❖ Contact guest house and family hotel owners and managers, unemployed people and other interested parties, promote the course online;
- ❖ Process training documentation and materials;
- ❖ Provide the training to 35 people in Tryavna in March 2013.

TRAINEES PROFILE



- ❖ young and senior guest-house owners and managers;
- ❖ young and senior family-hotel owners and managers;
- ❖ young unemployed;
- ❖ disabled people and their representatives;
- ❖ potential entrepreneurs in tourism (representatives of a social enterprise funded by the HRDP in Bulgaria);
- ❖ interested individuals.

METHODOLOGY

- ❖ Gender issue: equal access to the course for men and women provided - 7 men and 28 women participated;
- ❖ Experts in tourist animation, alternative and accessible tourism involved;
- ❖ Theoretical and practically-oriented sessions;
- ❖ Approaches: group discussions, problem solving, video and internet materials used, good practices from BG and other countries shared and discussed, Power Point presentations;
- ❖ Evaluation.

Emphasis was given to the following 4 topics:

- 1) Tourist animation. Provide for the guests' free time.
- 2) Accessible tourism.
- 3) Tourist products – basic and additional services.
- 4) „Green tourism“.

The first topic was quite challenging as most of the trainees represented small guest-houses and family hotels with average capacity of 4 or 6 rooms. On the one hand, normally such houses do not have the facilities to provide additional animation services within their premises or gardens. On the other hand, the usual tourists visiting them are couples or families with children



who look for short low-budget holidays. A conclusion was made that a tourist coordination center is needed to promote, coordinate, communicate and provide active tourist services and events to guest-house and family-hotel owners and their guests.

The second topic treated the potential and the financial benefits of accessible tourism for both the tourist businesses and the society. Ways to increase accessibility were shared, as well as upcoming tourist events for the disabled in Bulgaria. The situation in Tryavna was discussed and a conclusion was made that only one big hotel and one guest-house are currently accessible for people with special needs. It was recommended by the experts involved that a short description with pictures and contacts of this particular guest-house is included in the Bulgarian version of the AcTour Guide as this will act as a stimulus for the rest of the guest-houses and will further promote the house itself.

The third and fourth topics focused on practical examples of guest-houses and family-hotels in similar mountain regions in Bulgaria, which successfully offer a variety of services, in addition to accommodation. As part of the practical activities participants discussed sustainable tourism practices in other regions (mainly the Rodopi Mountains and the Balkan range), bio and eco hotel services, the “green house” initiative, etc. and tried to identify which of them could be applied locally and how. The two most distinguishing advantages of Tryavna were identified and a slogan was created to promote both natural and cultural attractions of the town – “Breathe in the air of the Tryavna masters”.



The importance of local cuisine was also discussed as a form of active tourism.

The usual groups of tourists/visitors were identified with regards to the active/alternative forms of tourism they look for. It became clear that the usual visitors to the region (couples, families with children, individual tourists mainly from Bulgaria and rarely from other countries) usually come to the territory because of the nature, fresh and healthy air, Renaissance

architecture and culture. With regards to mountain activities as hiking and biking the importance of first aid knowledge for the guides and other tourist providers was pointed out.

Several other projects and events were discussed in relation to AcTour objectives and sustainability:

- 1) **A project under the Competitiveness Operational Program to support clusters in Bulgaria**, namely the Cluster for accessible tourism. The potential for clustering in tourism was discussed, along with additional funding opportunities for the tourist providers in Tryavna to enhance development of sustainable tourism in the region.
- 2) **A project under the Human Resource Development Program supporting a social enterprise which is meant to develop sustainably benefiting from tourism.**
- 3) **The Green Days Festival to be held in April in Sofia, as well as the Green House Initiative.** Ways for the local tourist providers and their guests to benefit from these events were discussed.

RESULTS



Apart from providing training to 35 people from Bulgaria, the testing activity resulted in a number of active tourism activities identified as suitable for the territory. The list of such activities includes mountain biking, mountain hiking with a guide, bird and flower watching, traditional cuisine, activities in protected areas (“Bulgarka” Natural Park), cultural heritage activities, visits to caves and mineral springs, health tourism (a sanatorium of lung disease post

treatment, once built by Tsaritsa Joanna, is still functioning in Tryavna).

Pilot course attendees made a list of suggestions to the Tourism Council to the Municipality of Tryavna on how to improve and enrich the tourist service offer in the region. The list is an attempt for mutual collaboration and support to enhance active tourism services. Some important suggestions are as follows:

- ❖ mutual efforts to provide access to the caves in the region;
- ❖ initiate discussions on how to effectively use the lake of Tryavna, so that tourism can benefit from it;
- ❖ increased interaction between Natural Park officials, Municipality of Tryavna and the tourist providers;
- ❖ improved access to information on protected areas and species, etc.;
- ❖ maintain existing hiking routes in good condition and create new ones;
- ❖ create a network of thematically-linked routes;



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- ❖ create a strategy to promote the routes – maps, descriptions, routes named after famous local facts, etc.;
- ❖ promote local cultural events well in advance so that tourist providers can benefit by making their own promotion strategies;
- ❖ create a Path of Health around the sanatorium of Tryavna;
- ❖ find a mechanism to create a tourist coordination center to promote, coordinate, communicate and provide active tourist services and events to guest-house and family-hotel owners and their guests; tourist coordination centers are considered a way to develop sustainable and responsible tourism;
- ❖ improve communication practices between all interested parties (some trainees supported the idea of creating a local tourist association);
- ❖ create a regional brand of Tryavna to further promote the region;
- ❖ start discussions to agree on a sustainable development strategy for the region.

CONCLUSIONS

STANDPOINTS



Mihail Mihov (Bulgarian Association for Alternative Tourism)

The town of Tryavna, situated in the beautiful and well-preserved nature of the foothills of the Balkan Range, has the potential to offer its guests different types of physical activities according to the level of difficulty. The fact that Tryavna is very close to Bulgarka Natural Park, along with the existing and marked tourist routes and mountain chalets in the higher parts of the mountain make it possible for this small town

to offer the following active tourism activities:

- mountain hiking with a guide;
- horse riding;
- biking of different levels of difficulties;
- wild birds watching and tracking;
- watching protected flowers, typical for the area, etc.

The opportunities to visit unequipped caves are less developed but it is not that the number of attractive caves is small. The reason is that their potential to offer adventures to visitors is not developed.

In addition to the above-mentioned, Tryavna has the potential to attract tourists by presenting local arts and crafts, museums and galleries, as well as by directly involving tourists in wood-carving, icon-painting, weaving on a loom and other activities. Last but not least, the local traditional cuisine can be appealing for tourists.

The good practices shared, with relation to responsible “green” tourism, have been of interest to the tourist providers and they got actively involved in the brainstorming activity on how to apply them in Tryavna and the region.

All the above features, as well as the development potential have been supported and complimented by practical advice, well described good practices and useful information in the Active Tourism Guide under the “Active Tourism for Sustainable Development” Project, funded by the Lifelong Learning Program.

Cluster for Accessible Tourism (CAT)

As a result of the Active Tourism Pilot Training (25-26.03.2013) we can conclude that the tourist businesses in Tryavna and the region are still not aware of the potential and economic benefits of accessible tourism. This is why a clear and purposeful presentation is needed of the benefits which this type of tourism can bring, not only from a social point of view but also economically.



Still, there's a tendency and willingness to increase the accessibility of the tourist services and products offered. For instance, one of the participants shared that the guest house they offer has been reconstructed so that it can accommodate visitors with special needs and they have already met such guests. This initiative could be used as a good practice for the rest of the providers in the area.

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The Guide created under the Active Tourism Project totally meets these strivings, because it focuses on the great market potential of accessible tourism, modern demographic trends, determining its development and the opportunities for the disabled people and seniors, for everybody with special needs to enjoy active tourism services. (Section 1, point 3)

Finally, we can recommend that the only accessible guest-house in Tryavna is described in the Active

Tourism Guide as a good practice. On the one hand, it will act as a stimulus and motivation for the rest of the tourist providers. On the other hand, the guest-house will be promoted as an accessible place in Tryavna for tourists with special needs.