

## **New Tools of Sustainable Tourism Education. Case study of European project: “Boosting development of sustainable entrepreneurial tourism activities in the mountain and border areas in Bulgaria”**

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### **Abstract**

Tourism is one of the driving forces for the economy growth of every territory by giving access to work opportunities and creates a direct income. This economic sector is essential and vital for many regions in Europe, since it offers them possibility for progress and riches. The actions resulting from the different European programs (like Erasmus) have an important impact for the development of many member countries. These programs, widely spread in Bulgaria, offer the opportunities to stimulate sustainable competitive sphere. At the same time these programs, created and developed in Western Europe, import changes and transformations of the local east way of thinking, of the cultural and natural landscape. Bulgaria is one of the European regions, which have touristic potential that is still at an early stage in its development as tourist destinations. One of the reasons for that delay is the demographic problem, (declining and aging population) and the lack of adequate tourism education and training for the tourism specialists and young professionals. The European founding programs have been playing a key role for the last few years and are one of the financial solutions of these problems (Diagram 1).

**Keywords:** *Bulgaria, European Union, funds programs, sustainable tourism, cultural landscape, heritage*

### **Introduction**

Bulgaria is now ready to introduce a number of measures, including education and training for the tourism professionals to meet the challenges of the international new tourism trends. The main actions in the sector are the improvement and the development of the training system for meeting the needs of business skills, promoting youth employment and improving the employability of workers in the sector. In the current context of tourism in Bulgaria, the importance of education is well established. The management of training provision is a key issue, given the priority of the tourism sector and also looks to rising

unemployment (21, 9% in 2015 for 15-24 years. Source: National Statistic Institute of Bulgaria), (Diagram 2).

The current scientific article aims to present one of these projects (entitled "Boosting development of sustainable entrepreneurial tourism activities in the mountain and border areas in Bulgaria", Erasmus+ Key Action 1), financed and achieved entirely with financial help of the European programs, like a case study, implemented by a national Bulgarian consortium "Free element" and realized with the collaboration of "Departmental Committee of Tourism of Gard" and "The League of Trainning for Youth of Gard" in South France. The project demonstrates the ability to affect the ideas for positive change for the employment of a young people in Bulgaria in the tourism sector and helps to reinforce the role of tourism in building a more sustainable future.

This project has been achieved under my thesis that addresses the issue of conditions for the development of sustainable tourism in Bulgaria.

### **Objectives**

- Project objectives: The project aimed to stimulate the entrepreneurial thinking among young people, creating prospects for improving their professional skills in tourism, to provide opportunities for the implementation of best practices and innovative methods for creating a small business in mountainous and border areas in Bulgaria and thus provide an alternative to the local population to create an alternative economy based on sustainable small entrepreneurial initiatives.
- Thesis objectives: The need of fieldwork is essential for the successful implementation of a thesis in the field of geography of tourism. The main purpose of participation in this project was the gathering of information by the direct participants, the observation of explosive and very present phenomena in Bulgaria as the realization of almost all the initiatives with the financial support of the EU, an analysis of results and achievement of conclusions.

### **Hypotheses**

- In one of his books ("A qui profite le développement durable?", éd. Larousse, 2008) the French geographer Sylvie Brunel expresses the hypothesis that the rich countries (such as western EU countries) have a "sustainable" way of thinking and government, while the poorer countries have their "developing" way of management. In this sense, Bulgaria is developing a lot of European learning programs, initially thought as economic development tools for different institutions (including tourism schools), have become a model of uniform learning and are not adapting to the context and the

real necessities of the students and the complexity of the regions where they will exercise what they learned.

- A second hypothesis is committing the process initiated by the Union European like a method for transformation and influence in some regions in Bulgaria.

### **Project Presentation**

The project "Boosting development of sustainable entrepreneurial tourism activities in the mountain and border areas in Bulgaria" was accomplished in March 2015 in south of France and conducted a mobility internship of Bulgarian students in tourism schools located in mountain areas, for training and exchange of best practices, new tools and methods of sustainable tourism.

- The EU recommends the development and the creation of instruments to support tourism SMEs, particularly with regard to the training of the staff. Furthermore, much of the knowledge acquired in the tourism sector should be directly transferable to other economic activities (foreign languages knowledge). The companies in tourism sector are primarily SMEs and micro enterprises that target boosting productivity, competitiveness, training and quality and can play a very important role for the development of some Bulgarian regions.

### **Methods and Tools for the realisation of the project**

Methods used for the accomplishment of the project are: theoretical lectures, observation on the landscape, field practice, interviews with professional tourism actors and local institutions. Creation of program for two weeks: theoretical part in the morning and practical part in the afternoon.

- **The awareness-raising** of the students due to long work in the field and direct contact with the local social, culture and economy landscape, to understand the concept that the cultural and natural landscapes are a representation of the evolution of the local population.
- **The training.** Theoretical lectures every morning by French tourism professionals. The students are trained of the role of tourism and his ecological and sustainability approaches, the conservation and management of the cultural heritage. (Photo 1).
- **The new tools and methods used** during afternoon practice training. The students work directly with the tourism professionals and participate actively in the tourist activities. (Photo 2).
- **The evaluation** of their new knowledge and creation of good future professional's contacts. (Photo 3).

- The quality objectives of the cultural heritage and cultural sustainable landscape.** The students learned that the landscape reflected the process of evolution of the local community and it's important to protect it. The organisers of the project demonstrated and make aware of the fragility of the natural and cultural heritage and to acquired knowledge of the principal idea of the construction of the cultural landscape as a ““combination of work of nature and of man”” designated in Article 1 of the World Heritage Convention”. (Photo 4).

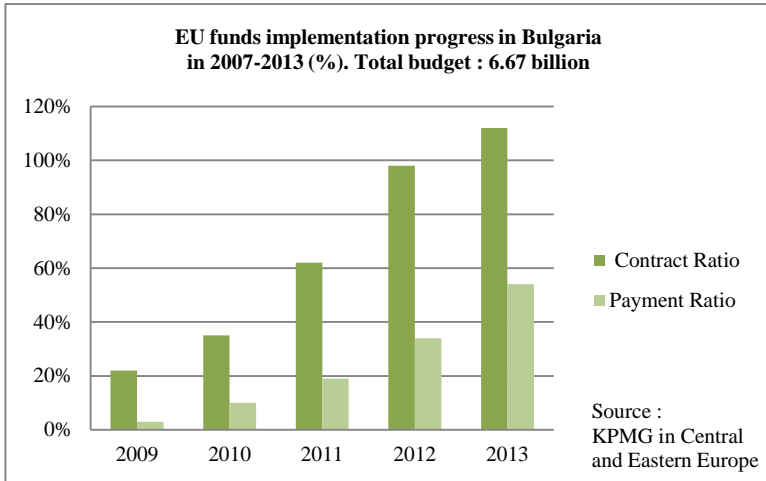


Diagram 1: EU funds implementation progress in Bulgaria

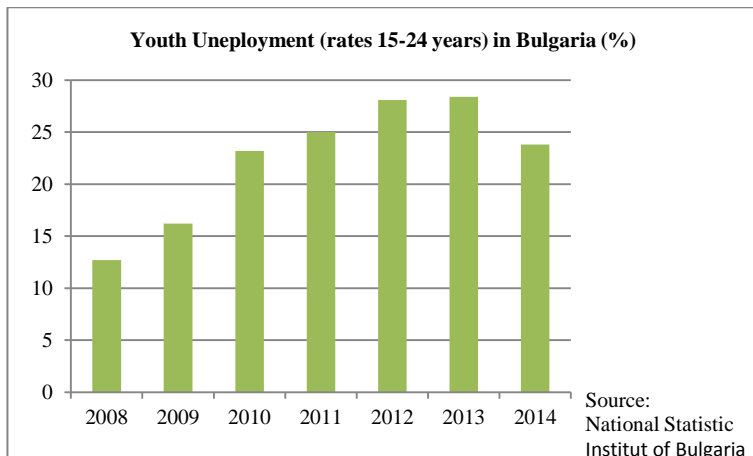


Diagram 2: Youth Unemployment in Bulgaria



**Photo 1:** Photo of the group during the theoretical lecture of the Mme. Marie-Calley, Director of the Hosting Association "Gîtes de France de l'Aude")



**Photo 2:** Photo on the group during a hike in "Gorges du Gardon"



**Photo 3: Photo of the group in the prestigious tourism school "George Frêche" in the city of Montpellier**



**Photo 4: Photo of the group in the city of Nîmes. Visit also "Pond du Gard" – World Heritage Site UNESCO. Understand the relations between people, nature, culture, landscape and architecture**

## Results and Conclusions

- About the project:
  - Implemented activities and strategies were: linguistic and cultural preparation of the participants, training and share of experience in the field of alternative rural, mountain and eco tourism in France, sensitization of the natural, cultural and ethnographic landscapes, organizing a round table for presenting and discussing the experience learned from the students in the both country, reporting, spreading results and evaluation of the impact of the project.
  - Creating long-lasting International professional relationships, opened new opportunities for young Bulgarian students in sustainable tourism. The mobility training finished with an evaluation test and a certificate. These documents validated their training and help them for better realization in their future career development. In the long term, the project would contribute to the creation of an alternative economy of small entrepreneurs in the field of alternative tourism and permanently reduce youth unemployment.
  - Development of human resources in quantity and quality in the tourism sector as a real need by the business demand.
- About the thesis:
  - The tourism exchanges programs and the culture as a possibility for the transformation of some regions, but also to their image. Following directly a process of transformation via education and the training of young Bulgarian in tourism. Analyze the impacts of this work.

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