



CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVE OF TOURISTIC SECTOR IN BULGARIA

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Abstract. *The Bulgarian tourism industry is fast growing and dynamic. It employs approximately 400,000 people, representing 10% of the active population. At the same time, tourism contributed 13% of gross domestic product. In recent years, the number of tourists has been steadily increasing. These data come to say that the Bulgarian state must pay serious attention by adopting a targeted state policy for the development of the industry and promotion of Bulgarian tourist destinations. Major question is what kind of tourists Bulgaria wants according to tourist resources in the state.*

The rise of the tourism industry was halted by the onset of the Kovid-19 crisis, which led to a major global economic transformation. The crisis is an opportunity to analyze the problems and to outline a strategy for solving them. The past two years we observe serious decline at the world level. One of the big challenges for the tourism industry in Bulgaria is the provision of skilled labor for seasonal employment.

The purpose of this report is to analyze the situation and to outline the problems and opportunities for the development of Bulgarian tourism. The author uses a variety of approaches to achieve the goal such as systemic, territorial, and economic.

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the most promising and fast-growing industries in the world in recent decades. Many of the most visited tourist destinations are located on the European continent. Perhaps one of the reasons for this is the fact that people of all ages are aware of the importance of rest and recovery. To afford more vacations and visits to different places, people have enough money.

The connection between man and nature has gone through different periods of its development, but it has always been strong. In fact, many types of tourism maintain this interaction. Due to this connection, new alternative forms of tourism have emerged. We could say that countries and societies have absorbed a very high percentage of tourism resources.

This positive trend in the development of the tourism industry was interrupted by the global pandemic of Kovid-19. Unprecedented measures in different countries have closed borders, isolated them from each other, stopped social life and led to the complete cessation

of passenger transport. According to the theory, the tourism and transport industries are interconnected (Dokova and others, 20). The medical crisis has led to a collapse in both industries. The main reason for the decline in travel and visits for tourism is the fear of the people and the highly restrictive measures of the states.

2. DISCUSSION

2.1. Methodological tools

The purpose of this report is to analyze the state of Bulgarian tourism in the context of the forthcoming economic transformations caused by the Kovid-19 crisis and the creation of a digital economic space. Approaches used by author for achieving this goal are different, but more important of them are systemic, economic, and territorial. These approaches are combined by the author with a set of methods such as comparative, statistical, descriptive, expert opinion and analytical methods.

2.2. State of Bulgarian tourism

Tourism in Bulgaria is one of the most dynamically and rapidly developing sectors of the country's economy. Despite the significant and objective problems that exist in the industry of different nature, in past years before the crisis of Kovid-19 Bulgarian tourism is constantly increasing its share of annual gross domestic product. Because tourism is an industry characterized by a variety of services and its dependence on the seasons, people and the international market and conjuncture, it is logical that it has been strongly affected by the radical world changes.

The Bulgarian tourism industry is fast growing and dynamic. It employs approximately 400,000 people, representing 10% of the active population in Bulgaria. At the same time, tourism contributed 13% of gross domestic product. In recent years, the number of tourists has been steadily increasing. In Table 1 we see the trends in the development of tourism in the Bulgarian state and the serious decline with the onset of the crisis in 2020. We see its dependence on economic fluctuations in the sharp changes in 2009, 2015 and 2019.

**Table 1. Share of touristic sector in GDP of Bulgaria
(Source: National Statistical Institute, Bulgaria).**

Date	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Value	13,7	12,4	11,0	10.8	10.4	11.5	11.6	10.8	11.2	11.5	11.7	11.6
Changes, %		-9.43	- 11.28	-1.81	-3.52	10.37	1.19	-7.27	4.48	2.55	1.51	-1.07

During the period January - December 2012, Bulgaria was visited by a total of 6,540,839 foreign citizens for tourism (excluding those in transit). Their number is 3.4% more compared to the same period of 2011. There was an increase in visits for business purposes, with 1,040,488 visits and an increase of 7.1%, as well as visits, with 156,361 visits and an increase of 8.4%. There were 4,622,710 visits for rest and vacation, which increased by 3.1%. 2,325,713 foreigners transited through the country, which is 2.5% less than in the same period of the previous year.

In 2019, the total number of tourist visits of foreigners in Bulgaria is 9,311,681, as the growth compared to 2018 is 0.4%.

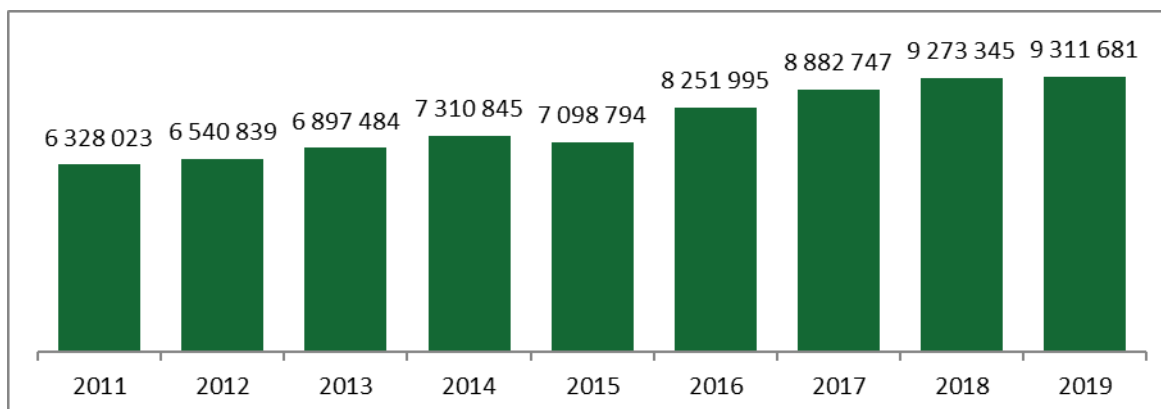


Figure 1. Tourist visits of foreigners in Bulgaria (Source: National Statistical Institute, Bulgaria).

In 2010 there is an increase in the number of visits for the purpose of rest and vacation, as 5 860 447 visits were realized and an increase of 1%. Visits for the purpose of visiting are 625 355, and they decreased by -6.7%. Visits for business tourism are 1,761,190, an increase of 1.9%. Visits for other tourist purposes are 1 064 689. Visits for rest and vacation form 62.9% of all tourist visits.

In the crisis year 2020, the total number of tourist visits of foreigners in Bulgaria is 2,687,709. The decrease compared to the period January - December 2019 is 71.1%.

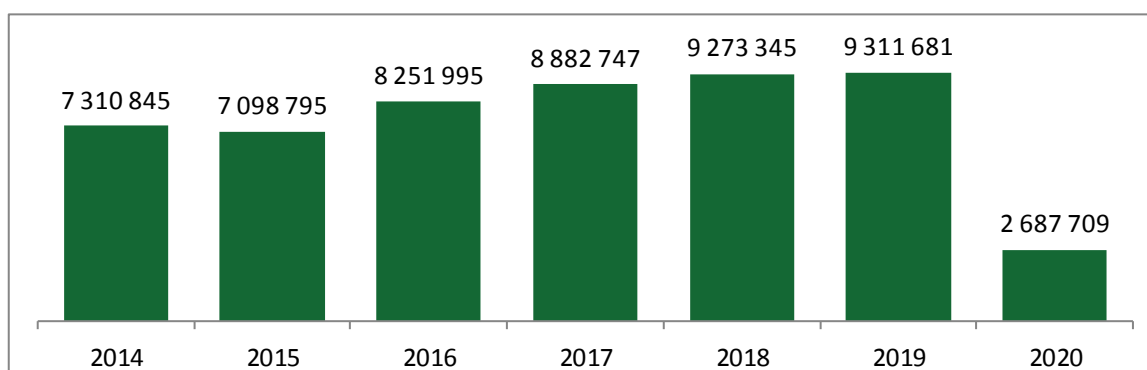


Figure 2. Tourist visits of foreigners in Bulgaria during the period January - December (number), (Source: National Statistical Institute, Bulgaria).

2.3. Perspectives for the development of tourism in Bulgaria

Globally, tourism is growing progressively, with a steadily increasing number of tourists. Given this perspective and the resources available to the Bulgarian state, it is logical for Bulgaria to develop this sector in the long run and to consider tourism as a strategic industry. The industry is characterized by being in a more favorable position than other economic industries since 1990. The analyzes show that the factors that favor the Bulgarian tourism are relatively good material base, natural resources, over the years the industry has accumulated management capacity and traditions, and infrastructure.

During the years of socialism, the Bulgarian state has built and maintained a serious material base, which has been privatized and largely modernized. At the same time, a new one was built in the Black Sea and mountain resorts mainly. The material base has a different focus depending on the type of tourism. The conditions available in Bulgaria can be used to attract different segments of tourists. This presupposes the development of various tourism - route-cognitive, cultural, religious, rural, winter, ecological, recreational, hunting, fishing, yachting, gambling, industrial, wine and others. In all these areas of tourism, our country

offers good conditions and opportunities to meet the specific requirements of specialized groups or individual tourists.

Speaking of the material base in the tourism industry, we must summarize that it is not balanced in terms of quality and conditions that are offered. On the other hand, for example on the Black Sea coast, the lack of state policy and control has led to redevelopment of the coast. This circumstance creates other problems related to the quality of the environment, cleanliness, and difficult segmentation of tourist services.

Over the years the sector has gained experience and traditions that create conditions for a relatively good organization for a variety of tourism activities, including tourist services, recreation, hotel and restaurant services, modern information, and communication technology. Over the last decade, we have seen a downward trend in the level of education and training of tourism staff. It is associated with the elimination of vocational education, low wages, insecurity, and seasonality of this type of employment.

There is a clear trend of shortage of skilled labor. That is why the Bulgarian tourism industry has started a new practice of importing seasonal workers from the Bulgarian communities of the neighboring countries. In 2018, their number reaches 7,700 people, and it is increasing. In my opinion, a long-term solution should be sought in Bulgaria by training staff, and improving of working conditions in tourist sector.

3. CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis we conclude that there are several main problems facing the development of tourism in Bulgaria. First, I can point to ineffective advertising. In this sense, it is necessary to analyze the international market and opportunities, thus targeting the promotion of the country as an interesting and attractive destination. Secondly, the tourist conditions offered in the different regions of the country must be unified, the material base must be modernized and rehabilitated. Of course, this is related to improving the infrastructural connectivity in the country and with the neighboring countries. There is also a need to improve the road network, including secondary and tertiary roads.

And thirdly, a very important factor for improving the tourist service are the human resources in sector. The quality of tourist services depends directly on the training and professionalism of the human factor. That is why it is of paramount importance to pursue a purposeful state policy for raising the qualification and working conditions. As we know the human factor is the main and determining development of tourism in Bulgaria (Ribov, 1994).

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