

# Educational and interpretative value of tourism offer as a prerequisite of sustainable tourism in protected areas in Vojvodina

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## Introduction

Tourism occupies an important position within economic and development plans of both the government of the Republic of Serbia and the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, which is reflected in numerous development strategies for this economic sector. Important segment of tourism offer refers to protected areas and ecotourism. There are 121 protected areas (national parks, special nature reserves, nature parks, landscape of outstanding features, nature monuments...) on the territory of Vojvodina. Protected areas cover 5.96% of the total area of Vojvodina. 25 protected areas out of the total of 121 have the potential of creating a tourism destination or an ecotourism site (Stojanović et al, 2011). The potential is represented through the variety of natural conditions in Vojvodina ranging from geological heritage, relief, to versatile flora and fauna. Tourism and ecotourism in protected areas are frequently discussed as an important topic with regard to their protection and total social and economic development.

In order to achieve mutual benefit from tourism development for the management in protected areas and tourism sector, it is necessary to apply sustainable tourism indicators. Numerous protected areas worldwide use the system of indicators that is linked to the condition of ecosystems and flora and fauna species, the reason for which the areas received protection status. However, it is of crucial importance that the set of indicators of sustainable tourism for a protected area, an ecologically sensitive area or an eco-destination does not refer only to ecology management, but also to tourism management. Educational and interpretative value secures a dominant position in the total tourism value of the protected areas. The paper explores the scope of its presence in protected areas in Vojvodina and its impact on the concept of sustainable tourism.

## Background

Protected areas are becoming increasingly important as tourism venues, in part because the resources they contain are attractive to nature-based tourists and ecotourists particular. They also account for a growing proportion of the world's remaining relatively undisturbed natural habitats (Weaver, 2006). The 2014 UN List contains 209,429 protected areas covering a total area of 32,868,673 km<sup>2</sup>. In total, 3.41% of the world's marine area and 14% of the world's terrestrial areas are currently protected. If Antarctica is excluded from the global statistics coverage, the percent-

age of the total terrestrial area protected is 15.4% (Deguignet et al, 2014). For some of these protected areas status tourism has direct relevance in terms of both benefiting from the protection of the environment from other forms of development and, if planned and managed appropriately, being able to make a positive economic contribution to environmental protection (Holden, 2000).

Management of protected natural values frequently has to cope with quite opposite tasks: (1) protection of natural values that are the main reason for establishing and regulating the protected areas; and (2) offering services to tourists who visit the protected areas. Protected areas are important tourism destinations, thus there is a sequence of indicators of sustainable tourism that aid planners and managers to organise the area according to the principles of sustainable tourism.

## **Methods**

The paper basically aims at inventory and analysis of all tourism services that reflect the nature, history of nature and landscape, natural values, endangerment and preservation levels in protected areas in Vojvodina that are offered to tourists. Those include: visitor information centres, educational trails, thematic spots. Basically, they have educational character which furthermore assigns special role to understanding and respecting the nature, and nature protection issues. Educational and interpretative feature of tourism values frequently occurs as one of significant indicators of sustainable tourism according to World Tourism Organisation (Indicators of Sustainable Development for Tourism Destinations, 2004). In tourism destinations with natural landscapes and ecologically sensitive sites that are usually found in protected areas it is important to recognise the real educational value of the landscape and address to important topics – natural science and local tradition that may warrant greater attention. The value assessment includes the presence to the following segments: tour guides, printed material, information boards, thematic trails, visitor information centres, schools in nature, educational itineraries.

## **Preliminary analysis and discussion**

The quality level of tourism presentation and interpretation of natural values is closely connected to the management model in the protected area and tradition of tourism development in the protected area. Best practice example is Special Nature Reserve Zasavica, managed by non-government organisation “Pokret gorana” (the oldest non-government ecology organisation in Serbia; their activities are linked to education and citizen participation in preservation of natural values; during only several years of management the programme of protection and development of various tourist activities has been created), which has become one of the leading tourism destinations among the protected areas in Serbia in a short period. Moreover, the increased interest in tourism development and introduction of new tourism services is noticeable (visitor information centres, educational trails, tourism and ecology information boards) in protected areas that exchange experience, establish some form of international cooperation or participate in cross-border projects. For instance, Special Nature Reserve Gornje Podunavlje received European Charter for sustainable tourism (Europark) in 2015, parallel to designing new tourism content (ed-

ucational trails), whereas Special Nature Reserve Ludaš lake included in its tourism offer a visitor information centre, funded and built by a cross-border project. Finally, by applying the high quality and professional approach to eco-destination management it is necessary to introduce new tourism services, attract higher numbers of tourists and achieve goals of sustainable tourism development. Otherwise, the early stages of sustainable tourism development in protected areas in Vojvodina would remain just an attempt.



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