ASPECTS OF IMPROVING FESTIVAL TOURISM IN BULGARIA

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Introduction

In the modern social system tourism has an even bigger importance despite the indications of decreasing tourist demand as a result of the processes of crisis in economics. One of the basic tendencies is the development of alternative forms of tourism. The essence of alternative tourism is actually revealed in its name – it is the alternative of mass or traditional tourism and it is exactly what its significance is – by adding to the forms of mass tourist supply alternative tourism contributes for:

- improving the tourist product of the region or destination;
- attracting new target groups of tourist;
- making popular and then keeping natural and anthropogenic tourist resources in the region or destination;
- providing extra employment for locals and others.

Festival tourism is also a type of alternative tourism which requires various resources – both natural and anthropogenic. Nowadays it is preferred because of the unique tourist product it offers; however, its development in Bulgaria needs improvement and perfection. A good example for the way festival events satisfy the demands of more and various target groups is the Festival of folk costume in the village of Zheravna.

The subject of study in this paper is the festival of folk costume in the village of Zheravna.

The topic of study in the research is the positive experience of organizing and holding festival events in Bulgaria.

The aim of this paper is to analyze and assess the festival in Zheravna as a good practice in developing festival tourism in Bulgaria.

The relevance of the topic is a result of the following:

- Bulgaria offers various opportunities for developing festival tourism. It is considered that this type of tourism underpins the improvement of tourist demand and leads to overcoming many economic and social issues in Bulgaria;
- the village of Zheravna is an example for a place that has resources for offering alternative forms of tourism and opportunities for developing festival tourism in particular;
- there exist certain problems in the village for Zheravna – for example, depopulation, infrastructure issues and unemployment decrease competitiveness of the destination and it is considered that improved tourist supply through activating and spreading festival tourism contributes for increasing tourist demand in the region.
The tasks assigned for reaching the aim of this paper are as follows:

- characterize briefly the essence and significance of festival tourism in Bulgaria;
- present the concept of the Festival of folk costume in Zheravna;
- use the good example of Zheravna for developing successfully festival tourism in Bulgaria.

The information basis for this study includes special literature on the topic, personal interviews, as well as a questionnaire concerning the development of festival tourism in the region.

1. Essence and specifics of festival tourism

Festival as a phenomenon encompasses a very broad range of activities in the field of art, cultural heritage and cultural-creative industries. In specialized literature a festival is defined “as an event that is created on a special festive occasion, jubilees, days of remembrance or honor, or through a special selection of performers” (Koutin, 2004). (“Festival” - from the Latin “festum” or “festus” means “holiday” - an event of festive character.) A festival is a program of various performances of artistic character that achieves a level of festivity of the event itself.

A festival achieves an extraordinary festive mood at a particular place. Its unique attractiveness can be maintained only for a specific period of time. This characteristic feature must be underlined by a high quality of the work performed and a strive for perfection in which the landscape, the peculiarity of the city, the involvement of its citizens and the cultural identity of the whole region are contributory factors.”

The Statute of the European Festival Association adds several other peculiarities to the characteristics of festivals, http://www.efa-aef.eu/en/festivals/, 02.07.2014)

- each festival has its specific name and representation;
- festivals guarantee free movement of programs, artists, audience and media;
- each festival should have a solid financial base that is subject to inspection.

Festival tourism is characterized to be mass, various in terms of genre and it offers tourists participation in different forms of traditional and modern cultural holidays. These can be festivals of various types of art, authentic events and others. Festival tourism encompasses also adaptations of famous folk festivities, holidays of specific national symbols. Festival cultural-familiarization tourist trips (festivals and demonstrations of various types of art, folk holidays, celebrations of traditional national crafts) - are those trips that are caused by interest in traditional or modern reenactments of cultural events, as well as taking part in them. Most often these events and festivals are guided by particular types of art. In this group one can include also traditional crafts, visits to fairs, bazars and others.

Festival tourism is one of the most quickly developing types in the whole tourist sector. The trips concerning particular events are exceptionally popular and result from the increased need for experiences. We mean a specially organized events whose
basic characteristics are uniqueness, transiency, rarity so that they can stand out among the remaining natural and constant events in the field of music, theatre, art and religion, as well as traditions, rituals, science, technology and media. More and more regions consider festival tourism as an opportunity to attract attention and interest to themselves through big and large-scale projects, thus attracting more visitors and increasing revenues.

Having in mind the above-listed characteristics, festival tourism is a type of event tourism that is practised by a specific group of users. The target group is ready to make long-distance trips in order to attend the festival occasion. The basic users of this type of tourist product come from a more mature and financially sound part of the society.

Proto festivals were found to exist in ancient times and Middle Ages when at religious and dynastical celebrations many performers presented their art in temples, palaces and at city fairs (Apostolov, 2003). They encompass various genres of culture which affected the place of carrying out the event, the structure and number of participants and audience, the necessary technical facilities, the period of holding the event and so on.

One can use different criteria for classifying the variety of festival events such as topic, frequency of holding the event, space dimensions and others. An exemplary classification is given in Table 1. (See table)

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<th>Criteria</th>
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<td>Main topic of the festival event</td>
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<td>other types of festivals.</td>
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1 The table is made by the author of the article
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The great variety of festivals determines the depth of their social and cultural significance.

1.1. Specifics and characteristics of festival tourism

Festival events vary a lot according to their content and place in social life. What unites them is the similar organization of tourist service and reaching similar effects of entertaining-emotional and cultural-intellectual type.

Modern festival events are an obvious reflection of world and European tendencies for increasing international cultural exchange and the intensity of social contacts. These important modern processes exist and develop through an ongoing information flow of economic-and-financial, technological, political and cultural character.

What is important is the specific atmosphere in which a festival is carried out. This includes the natural-and-geographic factor (landscape), socio-cultural factor (character of the location, the cultural tradition of the whole area) and the socio-psychological factors (involvement of locals, performers and tourists).

The main peculiarities of each festival event boil down to: (Kostov, 2001)

- **Frequency of holding the event** – usually there is an inversely proportional correlation between the length of the time distance and the number of participants, revenues respectively. Those festivals that are held seldom attract more participants and guests. Whereas meetings with monthly or seasonal distance have less audience and their professional, institutional, educational and cultural structure is more homogenous, at that.

- **Location of holding the event** – most suitable turn out to be big cities, simply because they have the necessary infrastructure – halls, palaces of culture, finance for media and other type of communication, as well as various hotel and other types of accommodation for participants. In view of calm

| Frequency of holding the festival event | ⇒ regular; with affirmed repetition every tenth or fifth year; |
|⇒ every 4-5 years; |⇒ every other year; |
|⇒ every year; |⇒ every six months; |
|⇒ seasonal or monthly. | |

| From the point of view of play | ⇒ competition |
|⇒ representative festivals | |

| From the point of view of spatial dimensions | ⇒ regional |
|⇒ national and international | |

| From the point of view of the time (season) of holding the festival | ⇒ spring |
|⇒ summer |⇒ autumn and |
|⇒ winter festivals | |
atmosphere for work and search for an anti-urban environment or authenticity, festivals are held in well-established luxury resorts and colorful small towns or villages with interesting nature, castles and others.

- **Transport accessibility** – in big cities and especially in capitals of countries it is there due to the cities’ various and large-scale functions. Usually in the inner-urban morphology there are regions with better accessibility that turn out to be suitable for business and cultural events such as the central business area, big parks, the spaces in and around railway and bus stations, and lately near airports, in particular.

- **Annual calendar disposition** – Even though they do not depend on seasons and climate, these events, similar to recreation tourism, also have specific seasonal concentration. The end-of-spring and start-of-summer maximum are relatively equal, whereas these events are quite restricted at the peak of summer (July – September) and during typical winter time. For scientific events what matters in their star-of-autumn maximum is that participants are less busy in school or universities. As for time of the week, almost always one observes end-of-the-week (Thursday-Friday-Saturday) concentration. This is due both to the chance of using half of the weekend (Saturday) for holding part of the festival program and travelling, and the fact that people are busier at work at the start of the week.

Annual distribution of festivals is characterized by dispersion, yet, for the particular genres there are preferred months and seasons.

- **National structure of participants** – When an event is international, there arise organizational difficulties: (transfers, possible delays; duly compliance with specific national requirements and others.

- **Cultural program other than the main topic of the event.** It concerns all participant and their companions, including their families. The duration of the event can be half a day or more depending on the topic and location – radial or circular itinerary for attractive natural and anthropogenic sites in the hinterland nearby. It is possible to include visits to gastronomic sites with characteristic cuisine and interior, as well as other initiatives.

- **Hierarchy of events and location** – hierarchy is a result of aligning events according to their significance and social recognition of performers. First come those of world importance and uniqueness, followed by national and local ones.

- **High frequency of holding the festival** – this depends on people’s interest in the event. For example, at a theatre festival performances could be on in the time of the cultural season or at a particular time segment as part of it. This allows enlarging the audience significantly and increasing the social importance of the art of theatre. Besides, the number of spectators depends largely on the place of holding the event – seating capacity of halls, open-air theatres, stadiums or other used indoor and outdoor spaces.

- **Differentiation and split of tourist interest** – Perceiving multicultural values is usually underpinned by intuitional judgment, yet, it depends on one’s age,
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gender, social background and other individual features of tourists. In organizing festival this circumstance sets the requirement to direct the event to a particular user (market niche). In many cases differentiation is a result of the tourists’ interest, the uniqueness and opposing character in respect to tourists’ local culture. This circumstance is due to tourists’ strong sympathy for the cultural life in touristic areas.

At the same time, one needs to point out that due to lack of systematic information for getting to know the audience (tourists), it is hard to set a precise boundary between the interest of local population and tourists in a particular festival event.

In view of the Act for local autonomy and local administration municipalities have the right to organize festival events. This is the most popular form of organizing traditional and well-established festival events held in Bulgaria. Most of the significant festival events are financed with money in the section “Other cultural activities” of municipal budgets. Having in mind audience, festivals create the most powerful institution for assessing art today. In many aspects it is the audience that has crucial influence both for the development of artistic genre-activities, styles and categories, and for creative artists and performers of artistic works. That is why, besides having an immediate social and economic effect, making festivals popular professionally performs significant and responsible functions in national cultural policy.

European experience shows that festivals which attract tourists can be an exceptionally reliable tool both for mutual familiarization and cooperation between peoples in Europe and for the socio-economic growth of regions. Because of their specific feature festivals create a natural environment and conditions for large-scale implementation of a wide-range of services. This is a good base for developing tourism, stimulating small and medium local businesses, changing the whole socio-economic profile of regions and improving the quality of life. An example of good practice for developing festival tourism in Bulgaria is the Festival of folk costume in the village of Zheravna.

2. Characteristics and positive sides if the Festival of folk costume in the village of Zheravna

The evaluation of using the opportunities of the Festival of folk costume in Zheravna as a good example for developing festival tourism in Bulgaria is based on a specific research process focused on:

- Carrying out a field study because there are no operating and statistical data, neither secondary sources of information.
- Clarifying specific features of tourists about whom one has little knowledge as users.
- Complexity of the characteristics of the subject of study – user tourists have complex and different behavior which results from their various needs, judgments, motives for participation in a festival event;
- Clarifying difficulties and hardships of organizational, linguistic and technical character for determining tourists’ behavior in respect to the folk product
offered, in view of defining the directions for using folklore in the festival event.

- **Formulating restrictions** that result from the specific features of Bulgarian folklore and presenting it in a festival event (professional groups, aptitude of sites, props and others).

The field research provided information on tourists’ attitude to Bulgarian folklore based on their participation in the Festival of folk costume in the village of Zheravna. The study was made in August 2013 by using a questionnaire. The respondents were:

- 30 tourists participating in the Festival of folk costume in Zheravna in August 2013,
- 30 performers participating in the festival program (dancers, instrumentalists, choristers), including event organizers, employees of the Zheravna municipality aiming at providing more complete information.

Due to the presence of two general sets of respondents in the research (tourists and performers as service providers) **two separate questionnaire studies were made and extra information was gathered** by making three personal interviews.

The Festival of folk costume was created by the initiative and idea of the producer, choreographer and director of the National Dance Ensemble “BULGARE” Hristo Dimitrov. Characteristic features of the festival are:

a) it has been held annually in August since 2008 and this year marks the 7th edition in the park “Dobromirets” near Zheravna. The dates of the traditional event in 2014 are 23, 24 and 25 August. The Festival of folk costume is privately organized – the entrance fee is BGN 20. According to data of the people interviewed since its very first edition the organizers’ idea was to make it an international festival, yet, it received participants from abroad in 2009. In 2008 the “BULGARE” ensemble performed the role of a host and main performer in the festival programme.

b) The main objective of the festival event is the rich folk programme, as well as the experience of both adults and youth in putting on a folk costume. The Festival makes people “search for something that their grandmother left them in their old chests…”.

c) In the first festival evening a concert is given by a Bulgarian professional dance ensemble. Until today in the festival there participated: the Thrace Ensemble, Severnyashki Ensemble, the Pirin Folk Ensemble, the Philip Koutev Ensemble and the “Bulgare” National Ensemble (there is still no information about which professional ensemble will perform this year). The second festival evening presents foreign ensembles – in 2013 these were from Indonesia, Russia, Holland, Serbia, Poland and Cyprus; Russia being on the festival stage in a second consecutive year. The regulations of the festival give foreign performers 35 minutes to dance on stage after an application for participation.

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3 Interview with the artistic director of the festival.
that needs to be confirmed beforehand. In the third festival evening the so-called “camp fire” is started, with the participation of hot-coal dancers.
e) Every year the festival is attended by guests from regional structures, as well as representatives of the authorities. In 2013 about 15 000 participants were on the festival premises.
f) In the area there are no accommodation facilities up to 70 km away from Zheravna. In 2014 bookings for the Festival of folk costume start as early as December 2013. To handle the accommodation issue a campsite with tents is made.
g) The focus of the festival is on putting on a folk costume, tasting delicious food by use of 180-year-old recipes, as well as demonstration of crafts. The festival event is a chance to make Bulgarian crafts popular and known. The Festival of folk costume in Zheravna gathers masters of musical instruments, weavers, woodcarvers, potters and stimulates immensely the development of souvenir industry. The emphasis of the festival is to experience something together with others – go 200 years back in time, rather than folk dances. To do this every participant has to know and obey the following rules at the event:

The festival organization includes:

- **Compulsory condition:** Participants have to wear folk costumes (authentic, stage or stylized. It is allowed also to wear clothes from the beginning of XX C, as well as traditional clothes for other countries, old military uniforms and arms.
- **It is forbidden to:**
  - Use video cameras and cameras on the territory of the festival;
  - Use mobile phones except at places specially meant for it.
  - Bring alcohol and soft drinks, as well as using plastic cups, plates, bottles, thermos flasks, forks, spoons, napkins and others.
  - Wear modern ladies’ and men’s bags, suitcases, backpacks, carry-alls and others;
  - Use blankets and mats, hats and scarves;
  - Use sun glasses.
- **It is allowed to:** use fur hats, white scarves against sun and neck-wraps, use matches.
- **The festival is attractive with its authentic experience similar to a time machine.**

In order to define the condition and opportunities for developing festival tourism in the village of Zheravna, the field research provided valuable information as follows:

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4 For the objectives of this study an interview has been made with Ivaylo Stoev - producer of Bulgarian drums and wooden bushels from Varna, who has participated 4 times in the Festival of folk costume in Zheravna. For him the festival event is a chance to make Bulgarian crafts popular and known to people. The contacts made during the festival days are priceless. I. Stoev’s participation is a prerequisite for more sales all the year round.


6 The guests have the opportunity to have their pictures taken by photographs or order a DVD.
• Level of information in locals and guests of Zheravna about the event, used sources of information and advertising, as well as evaluation of the whole communication campaign;
• General satisfaction and assessment of the festival organization;
• Readiness for recommending the festival to other known audiences, acquaintances and relatives living in Bulgaria and abroad;
• The contribution of the festival for creating an image of Zheravna as a destination for cultural and event tourism.

The results of the survey have been summarized further in this paper.

We can analyze the degree of influence of the festival of folk costume on the development of tourism in Zheravna and tourists’ attitude to it based on respondents’ replies in the questionnaire.

Chart 1. How did you learn about the event?

From Chart 1 it is evident that information about the event has reached tourists mainly “by word of mouth”. This shows that the municipality needs to optimize its marketing-and-communication policy and direct its activities to signing contracts with more tour operators who will promote the festival of folk costume in Zheravna, simply because only 5% of the people questioned have learn about the event from a tour operator. A relatively small percentage of people have been informed from Internet which means that the municipality has to increase advertising online too.

Most respondents have been to Zheravna before and this proves that the region is familiar. At the festival they are accompanied by families, friends and relatives. The main goal of most guests in Zheravna, who practice festival tourism, is to be entertained and have pleasant emotions. 35% of the individuals questioned arrive with their families. Therefore, Zheravna and the Festival of folk costume are preferred by families with children. The festival event held in Zheravna attracts audiences of all ages.
According to the last two charts, part of the respondents assess transport and information accessibility as excellent. These are about 40% of the people questioned. About 25% give a satisfactory assessment which shows that the municipality needs to work for improving these two elements of the tourist product offered. For 15% of the tourists transport accessibility is unsatisfactory due to lack of regular direct bus shuttles.
The assessments of the tourist servicing of the event are undisputable, most of the tourists have evaluated it as excellent and very good, which proves the organization the “Bulgare” NFE has made.

**Chart 5. A second visit to the region and the Festival of folk costume**

Chart 5 shows tourists’ positive attitude to festival tourism in the village (65% would visit Zheravna and attend the festival again) and their readiness to recommend it to relatives and friends.

**Chart 6. Attitude to the festival event in Zheravna**

**Chart 7. New job vacancies in the region due to the festival event**
Data in Chart 6 and Chart 7 makes it clear that the municipality employees are unanimous about the positive attitude to the organized Festival of folk costume. They characterize the festival event as too short – almost 50% of them think that it creates employment only temporary. The small duration of the event is an obstacle for developing sustainable tourism which is also proved by the fact that neither of the questioned individuals accepts the festival as a basic opportunity for making a living.

Chart 8. Study of possible conflicts between the Festival of folk costume and local population

According to 50% of the questioned Zheravna-municipality employees, the festival of folk costume contributes positively for the development of tourism in Zheravna. According to Chart 8, though, 40% of the responding professionals and organizers think that despite the positive effect of the festival, it generates problems for the local population. These issues concern various aspects of this type of event – noise, the specific segment of tourists visiting the festival, litter, loading the infra- and superstructure of the region.

Chart 9. Involvement of local authorities in developing festival tourism in the village of Zheravna
Chart 10. “What could be done to develop better festival tourism in the village of Zheravna?”

Data in the last two charts show that, according to the respondents local authorities do not help enough the development of festival tourism in the village of Zheravna. The figures assess the private initiative of organizing the festival. Most of the respondents think that in the last couple of years the municipality has worked for the development of this type of tourism, but they still need to do more in order to use the complete potential of resources. 65% of the professionals and organizers recommend increasing advertising the festival events, especially abroad. It is necessary also to improve the infrastructure of the village and hold other types of festivals.

In view of data shown, we can sum up that tourists’ attitudes to the Festival of folk costume in the village of Zheravna are positive and most of them besides attending the festival again, would recommend it to friends and relatives. Local authorities should focus attention on improving the transport and information accessibility of Zheravna, as well as the quality of the tourist service.

According to the other beneficiary of the study – professionals and organizers, festival tourism contributes for creating a positive image of the village and has a strong impact on its identity. However, there is still more to do for solving the issues caused by the festival to locals, as well as to attract more tourists to this type of tourism.

3. Conclusion

The analysis of the uniqueness, organization and condition of the Festival of folk costume in the village of Zheravna and the results of the study shows that the event is a good practice for developing and encouraging festival tourism in Bulgaria. The big number of various types of festivals in the country determines their considerable social and cultural significance and a closer connection needs to be made between improving the opportunities for the development of festival tourism in Bulgaria. There should also be added:

• Broadening advertising activities for promoting the festival events in the country-advertising campaigns, organized together with business;
• Training unemployed and other people who are offered jobs at the festival events;
• Applying good practices from other regions, including outside Bulgaria, in respect to organization, coping with issues which concern festival events;
• Promoting the significance of festival tourism among businesses in the region with the aim to get support in advertising and marketing the events;
• Cooperation with non-governmental organization, thus enhancing knowledge and broadening information on festival events;
• Implementing internship and other programs which concern universities in the region with the aim to provide personnel;
• Studying opportunities for organizing also festival events on various topics with the aim to attract more tourists with specific interests;
• Making a detailed analysis of the municipal activities oriented to promoting festival practices and improving these activities with the aim to increase recognition of the festival tourist product;
• Participation of municipalities in international competitions, forums and presentations for promoting festival tourism in Bulgaria;
• Signing contracts with foreign tour operators and organizing trips with visits to festival events in the country.

As a consequence of the outlined opportunities and weaknesses in developing festival tourism in Zheravna, a conclusion can be drawn that: **there exist all prerequisites for turning festival events into a competitive advantage of the tourist product and affirming Bulgaria as an interesting and attractive destination for festival tourism.**

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ASPECTS OF IMPROVING FESTIVAL TOURISM IN BULGARIA

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Abstract

Festival tourism represents one of the fastest developing kinds in the entire tourism sector. Trips connected with certain events are extremely popular and are the result of the increased necessity for experiences. It’s about specially staged events whose main features are uniqueness, transience, rarity, thus they differ from the remaining natural and permanent cultural offers. Their cultural variety encompasses different events in the area of music, theatre, art and religion, as well as traditions, customs, science, technology and the media. More and more regions see in festival tourism the possibility - through big and large-scale projects - to attract the attention and interest to themselves, by which to increase their cultural capital, and which would lead to attracting more visitors and increasing economic revenues. One example of such a region is the village of Zheravna and the festival of the national costume.

Keywords: festival, festival tourism, event tourism.