CONDITIONS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF EVENT TOURISM ALONG THE BLACK SEA COAST OF BULGARIA

Doctoral student Boryana Umnikova

The Black Sea coast of Bulgaria is an established tourist destination for the development of mass sun, sand and sea recreational tourism on both a national and international scale. Its role and meaning is associated not only with the welfare of the region, but also with the economic prosperity of the country in general. However, its projected image of a cheap holiday destination has shifted the focus of political subjects from a low-cost mass market packaged tourism product to alternative forms of tourism.

The rich cultural heritage, traditions and sports achievements, together with the cities and holiday resorts situated along the Black Sea coast: Varna, Burgas, Kavarna, Nessebar, Sozopol, the resort complexes Golden Sands, Albena, Sunny Beach, etc. are a prerequisite for the transformation of the Bulgarian Black Sea coast into a destination offering a complex tourism product.

The circumstances presented so far determine the significance and topicality of the issues related to increasing the role of event tourism for the tourism development of the Black Sea coast of Bulgaria and define the motives for the choice of theme of the present article. Its research purpose is to define and assess the conditions and resource potential of the Bulgarian Black Sea coast for the development of event tourism and lay the foundations for future studies of how special events can be turned into significant tourist attractions.

For the purposes of this study, the Bulgarian Black Sea coast tourist region is constrained within the administrative boundaries of the regions of Dobrich, Varna and Burgas, which exhibit similar tourism characteristics and resources and offer a huge potential for the development of event tourism.

Special events are defined as a tourist attraction which brings together public institutions, organizing committees, sponsors, tourism organizations, business entities and consumers joining their efforts to realize a unique, value-generating event (Vitor, L., 2011). Special events are a planned, time-limited phenomenon, distinguished by conditions, participants and a management system with the respective structural elements and a program (Getz, D., 2012).

Event tourism is defined as a special type of tourism, which involves arranging and holding events to meet multiple tourist needs and helps extend the range of tourist products and boost tourism development in the destination country. The specifics of the event tourism product and the leading role of visitors’ preferences, needs and objectives are a prerequisite for distinguishing its variations primarily according to motives for visiting the event.
In cultural event tourism, the tourist visit is motivated by local customs, various forms of presentation and expression, the visitor’s knowledge and skills, as well as the related instruments, sites, artefacts and cultural spaces recognized by local communities and groups. Here, festival tourism plays a special role, as the visitor travels to “actively participate in, or passively enjoy festivals of a variety of arts and crafts, folklore holidays, etc.” (Marinov, St., 2011)

Sport events tourism suggests travel, motivated by “active participation or passive observation of events with a particular sport theme” (Gibson, J., 1998). The necessary condition for hosting and holding sports events in a particular destination is the availability of specialized facilities.

Business event tourism is associated with travelling and staying in a particular place, motivated by the wish to be involved in specialized events where participants share common business interests. Typically, business events require specialized facilities, technical service and maintenance and use of hotel superstructure.

Efforts to extend the summer tourist season along the Bulgarian Black Sea coast to 6-7 months have failed and problems arising from the constantly shrinking period of exploitation are exacerbating. Changes in the status-quo of the destination can be implemented through a complex use of the remaining resources of the region, in particular the ones related to the cultural and historical heritage, which includes: material cultural heritage (building, architectural sites belonging to the world heritage, national and historical monuments, etc.), intangible cultural heritage (literature, art, folklore, etc.), as well as institutions exhibiting cultural heritage - museums, collections, libraries, centres and monuments connected with historical figures (Parusheva, T., 2014).

Event tourism is a strategic alternative in this aspect. Through promoting local culture, traditions and values it can actively contribute to overcome the effect of seasonality and raise the competitiveness of our Black Sea coast as a tourism destination.

Community centres are also hubs of cultural life and promoters of cultural events in Bulgaria. According to NSI data for 2012, there are 415 community centres in the defined region. Only 77 of these are located in cities. Events and cultural activities associated with them usually involve anniversaries and celebrations of memorable dates in Bulgarian history, as well as prominent figures who are held in high respect in the local community (total of 14 842). City and village fairs and conventions most often commemorate the patron saint of the city or village (3953). These events are a major attraction for the inhabitants of the neighboring towns and villages. At this stage we cannot consider the cultural and creative activities of the community centres as potential tourist attractions within the event tourism sector.

Among the major valuesto be included in the content of the intangible cultural heritage are the spirit, cultural traditions, creative work and customs of the host community. Fire dancing is a recognized intangible cultural asset on the territory of the Bulgarian Black Sea region. The Ministry of Culture, ITH “Traditional rituals and fests” within the framework of the project “Fire dancing – Bulgarian magic fiery glow” (for the village of Balgari, municipality Tsarevo) aims to keep authenticity and support traditions (UNESCO, 2014).
Cultural events that allow the manifestation of creativity, cultural exchange, stimulation of public dialogue and popularization of intangible cultural values are an instrument for preservation of cultural values and national talent. Cultural institutions are the venues but also the main participants in the process of creating, organizing and holding the special event of cultural identity. Numerous such events of international, national and local importance are held on the territory of the Bulgarian Black Sea coast. International events stimulate trans-border cultural exchange and enjoy international participants. Those of national importance are popular throughout the country, while the impact of the local ones is only regional.

A number of cultural events are organized and held along the Black Sea coast of Bulgaria. According to research of Internet space and the official portals of the municipalities in the districts of Varna, Burgas and Dobrich, in 2014, 20 international events were held in the district of Varna, 13 in that of Burgas and 18 in the region of Dobrich. These events were most often held in cities and administrative district centres, because of the availability of the necessary superstructure facilities (we exclude here the district of Dobrich, where these facilities are located only in municipalities along the Black Sea coast.). There are 4 events of national importance in the district of Varna, 10 in the district of Burgas and 11 in the district of Dobrich. 9 events of local importance are organized in the district of Varna, 6 – in the district of Burgas and 8 for the district of Dobrich. The prevalence of international events is due to the foreign participants invited by the organizers, with the district of Varna holding a champion position as it has traditions in this field, being considered “sea capital” and a festival city.

Because of their international significance and attractive cultural drive, there is high tourism potential in the following events: International Festival for Popular Music “Discovery”; International Festival “Varna Summer”; International Jazz Festival; International Festival of Handicrafts and Arts; International Folk Festival Varna Summer’; Sand Sculptures festival; MTV Festival “Spirit of Burgas”; International Festival “Balchik Classic Days”; Kavarna Rock Festival.

The concentration of cultural events in the summer tourist season (May – November) is logically justified by the possibility to combine sea recreational tourism and event tourism for guests and active participants in the organized events. The advantage of such a combination is beneficial to both the consumer and the destination, with the latter, however, requiring a strategic plan for development.

It is worth noting that cultural events are organized and held by non-profit organizations and societies, with the support of local municipalities. This limits funding and places obstacles to the process of preparation owing to a number of administrative regulations. Venues are mostly open-air and share specific characteristics (location/layout, capacity, technical support, etc.). It is exactly the specialized structure that is a necessary condition for developing event tourism.

The organization and production of sports events is usually carried out by various formations, clubs and alliances, whereby the host city holds the major responsibility in providing the necessary conditions and facilities for the event. Bulgarian Black Sea
The marine water area allows for the organization of swimming, rowing, surf competitions, regattas, etc. In the district of Varna several sports events are held, such as: International regatta Tall Ships; Swimming marathon “Galata – Varna” (the oldest swimming competition of the kind in this country) and European week of exercise and sports.

These three events in the sports calendar of the city are very different in character, audiences and organizational peculiarities. However, until this point in time poor promotion and advertising for the international regatta failed to facilitate the popularization of the event and attract tourists from the resort complexes in close proximity. Besides, the regatta is held at the beginning of the summer season and is characterized by weaker visitor activity, as tourists mostly come for curative and recreational tourism. As the temperature of the sea water is around 18-20 degrees C, the tourists aged 55+ seek alternative entertainment. A prestigious event like the Tall Ships regatta would attract a much higher interest and turn-out, were it to be held at peak season.

Galata – Varna Marathon is a traditional sports initiative, attracting sportsmen from across the country. The swimming marathon is organized by the Naval Forces of the Republic of Bulgaria, the municipality of Varna, and the Swimming Sports Club “Black Sea”. It is held on the first Sunday of August. The impossibility to watch the competition itself does not allow for its turning into spectator attraction, but its wide popularity draws participants, family members and friends who support them and thus the city gains additional visitors during the event. There is certain potential for expanding the duration of this initiative by organizing extra camps, preparatory competitions, etc.

European capital of exercise is an international initiative aimed at the local citizens and their sporting activity. The event is organized by Varna municipality (Direction Youth Activities and Sport) and is co-ordinated by the association Varna Youth Festival – FUNCITY. The event is of local importance, which motivates the internal migration of groups of young people and families travelling from smaller towns to the administrative centre of the district for the week-end.

The district of Dobrich (and in particular Black Sea municipalities of Balchik and Kavarna) have been getting popular for the last few years with the construction of three golf complexes (BlackSeaRama, ThracianCliffs and Lighthouse Golf & Spa), which are a natural draw for golf lovers. The 2013 hosting of the golf tournament “Volvo International Star Championship” raised the prestige of the destination. The event places the hosts from “Thracian Cliffs” on a very high international and European level with the participation of world-class golfers like Graeme Meddowell, Tong Hai, Jade, etc. According to a statement made by the Bulgarian Golf Association, the event has been covered by over 250 world sport media and watched by over 1.5 billion of people. Parallel to covering the game, media present the host country history, conditions for tourism and business, sport facilities and the cultural sites of the region. Golf complexes also organize other events to boost the golfers’ sports spirit and attract new guests. Participation is stimulated by preferential rates for accommodation and
offering complementary services. The motive for visiting is sports spirit, the desire to socialize and the chance to win.

Resort complex Albena also holds sports events. Hotels in the complex raise their occupancy rates and earn additional income from the use of sports facilities and equipment. The resort’s sports calendar includes: International tennis tournament “Albena Open”; International chess tournament; European petanque championship; International women’s tennis tournament form the ITF calendar and many other tournaments and competitions of private companies, sports club teams, etc.

The district of Burgas initiates and hosts a large number of tournaments, the majority of them of local importance, but there are also national events such as beach tennis and beach volleyball for men and women and horse races for the “Cup of Burgas”. The sports events of international importance are a tennis men tournament and a fencing tournament for the “Cup of Burgas”; 64th international cycling tour of Bulgaria; International regatta “Black Sea Blue Cup”. Young adventurous audiences are interested in events such as: Burgas Kite Cup; Wind surf regatta “Flora 2014”; International paragliding tournament – target landing; National Surf Competition – Ahtopol. Sports events in the district address the needs of a specific target market group, that of active sportsmen.

The Bulgarian Black Sea coast concentrates numerous tourist accommodation facilities, suitable for business tourism. The districts of Varna, Burgas and Dobrich account for 39.4% of the tourist beds in the country. NSI data for 2013 quote 2953 accommodation units, where the total for the districts of Varna, Burgas and Dobrich is 1163, with the district of Burgas coming first with 656 accommodation facilities (NSI 2014). Though of smaller share (15.6%), 4-5* accommodation units are available in the destination and they have considerable bed capacity, amounting to 26.1% of total bed capacity, that is, 53 297 beds out of the 203 894 beds in the whole Black Sea region of Bulgaria. High-category hotel complexes have the necessary conference halls and technical equipment to organize and hold business events. The palace of Culture and Sports and the Festival and Congress Centre, which are both situated in Varna, also have long-standing traditions in the organization and staging of business events.

There are relatively few events in the sphere of tourism—“Tourism and Leisure Fair” (until 2008); “Black Sea Tourist Forum”; “Culinary Festival”. A bigger event for the industry is “The Three Keys” fair.

The concentration of beds in the region, combined with the large numbers of foreign tourists (44% of the total for the country, or over 2.5 million), is a prerequisite for increasing the role of event tourism as a means to encourage tourist spending in the destination, overcome the seasonality of employment and upgrade the tourism product. In order to successfully offer event tourism along the Bulgarian Black Sea coast, attractive special events and the relevant superstructure facilities to hold them have to be available. Outstanding examples for the region are the Festival and Congress Centre and the Palace of Culture and Sports in Varna. These are a symbol of the city as an event centre and host some of the most popular events of national and international significance, both in the past and at present.
The Palace of Culture and Sports has various rooms and halls that are suitable for business tourism. The “Congress” hall is multifunctional and can be adapted for the purpose of sports, cultural and business events. Its capacity ranges from 2340 to 2900 seats. The hall has 4 adjacent offices, which are provided as working spaces to organizational committees, federations, supervisors and technical staff. PCS also has smaller rooms of varying size and a sitting capacity of up to 1800 seats (Youth B hall - 36 x 24 meters and height of 12.60 meters; Youth Chall - 36 x 18 meters and height of 12.60 meters; Youth D hall - 30 x 18 meters and 8.70 m high; Hall 20 - 30/18 m, height 4.70 m).

The Palace of Culture and Sports in Varna is a multipurpose complex for congress, cultural and sports activities. Over the years, since its opening in 1968, it has earned a reputation of a national centre for holding nationally and internationally important events. Today facilities are run-down and obsolete and fail to meet the high standards of international music stars, sports federations and teams. The necessary condition for staging special events in the PCS is expanding the capacity of the Congress hall, refurbishing and updating the adjacent rooms, changing rooms, offices, technical equipment (sound and PA systems, multimedia, lighting, etc.). In this aspect it is a positive fact that, as of November 2014, a project for modernization and starting building repair works has been approved.

The Summer Theater of Varna was built in 1956-1957. Initially it had 1600 seats. At the end of the 1960s a balcony was built, which increased capacity to 2400 seats. For decades the Summer Theater stage has been hosting events like the International Music Festival “Varna Summer”, “International Ballet Competition – Varna”, “International Folklore Festival”, pop and rock concerts. The open air theatre is municipal property and is managed by the PCS. It is worth noting the distinctive ambience of the Summer Theater, a result of the open-air stage and the Primorski park that surrounds it. The seasonal nature of this cultural attraction could be overcome by modernization and building an adjustable roof construction.

The Festival and Congress Centre (FCC) – Varna features 11 multipurpose halls with a seating capacity from 50 to 1000, a restaurant, coffee bars and summer terraces, all under one roof and 4000 sq.m area, on the busiest street of Varna. The FCC is a co-organizer of over 10 annual festivals and in 1993 it became the initiator and organizer of the International Film Festival “Love is Folly”. FCC is the Bulgarian ‘face’ in the only pan-European chain of cinema halls EUROPACINEMAS, as well as in prestigious congress organizations like ICCA (based in Amsterdam) and AIPC (Brussels). The complex offers 5 halls of varying capacity, the biggest being Hall 1 (1014 seats) in the small stage variant and 874 seats in the large stage one. Europe Hall is adapted for congress and conference activity, chamber concerts and performances, film shows and festivals (239 seats capacity). The Festival complex hosts press conferences (120 seats capacity); discussions, trainings, presentations, business negotiations, board meetings (30 seats capacity).

The Festival and Congress Center was purposefully built for special events and its main task is to organize and host a variety of events. Built in 1986 and with no
major refurbishment performed so far, it needs an updating of the interior of the building and various rooms and modernization of the existing technical equipment. With its crucial central location and the close proximity of hotels (“Odessos” and “Black Sea”), catering and entertainment facilities, the congress centre possesses a serious potential for turning it into a centre of cultural life for both the citizens of Varna and their guests.

The Sports Centre “Albena” - Bulgaria is one of the largest sports and recreational facilities in this part of the world. Albena offers a wide choice of over 42 sports. The complex has 7 football stadiums, a grass hockey field, 13 outdoor and 3 indoor tennis courts, 21 outdoor and 4 indoor swimming pools, as well as a number of facilities for practicing water sports. There is horse riding on the territory of the complex and an annual riding tournament takes place. The Sports Centre in Albena is a unique combination of sports and recreational facilities and provides an opportunity for organizing and holding both amateur and professional sports events. The poor integration of event attractions in the tourist offering of the complex and lack of innovative thinking prevents the development of event tourism in the Albena resort complex.

Sanatorium and health complex Kamchia possesses modern superstructure for the organization and hosting a variety of sports and cultural events. On the territory of the complex there are hotels, a holiday village and various facilities for sports, recreation and cultural exchange. The multipurpose Atrium Hall of the Longose hotel allows for the staging of theatre performances, festivals, concerts, dance parties, film shows, authors talks, exhibitions. The large 600-seat cinema –and-concert hall with a full scale stage and state-of-the-art sound and lighting equipment is also part of the public area.

Kamchia Sports Complex meets all Olympic standards – a swimming pool, field athletics, ice skating rink, football pitch, training halls and multipurpose outdoor playgrounds for games. The summer amphitheater can sit 2000 spectators. Sanatorium health complex Kamchia is a sole owner joint-stock company registered under the legislation of the Republic of Bulgaria. It is owned by the government of the city of Moscow. Variants need to be sought to enhance the cooperation between the management of the complex and Bulgarian educational institutions, as well as dance, sports and music schools for the purpose of hosting summer creativity camps and special events.

A multifunctional sports hall with a 7 000 seat- capacity is being built in the city of Burgas. The building will rise at the point of entering the city, after the round traffic, where the former military divisions used to be, whose terrain of 23 acres has already been transferred to the municipality by the Ministry of Defense. (Apostolova Y., ‘Standart’ newspaper, 2012). In 2013 a representative course for beach sports was built in Burgas. It is situated on the Central beach and 500 spectator seats have been mounted, as well as powerful lighting and a stage that will also be used for cultural events. The building of such a course allows for the organization of international beach football, volleyball and tennis tournaments. The municipality has also planned other investment projects for improving sport facilities and playgrounds in the context of the initiative “Burgas – European city of sports 2015” A prize like that is expected to both contribute to social improvement in the well-being of local citizens, but also for attracting the hosting of sports events and thus increase the economic benefits for the municipality.
In conclusion we can summarize, that the researched region is characterized by a wealth of resources for organizing and staging special events. However, at present they mostly meet the needs of the local people or a limited group of tourists. Specialized facilities – the necessary condition for developing event tourism, are outdated and need fundamental reconstruction and updating in order to respond to modern needs. The outlined advantages of tourist beds for hosting business events, of the sports facilities in Albena and Kamchia resort complexes and those in the city of Burgas, as well as the cultural institutions of Varna, are the proof for the suitable conditions for developing event tourism along the Bulgarian Black Sea coast. Cultural resources, specialized superstructure and the rich event calendar are a prerequisite for the extension of the tourist season, motivation for additional visits, multiplication of the economic effect of tourism and sustainable development of the Bulgarian Black Sea coast as a tourist destination.

References

3. Marinov, St. Modern types of tourism, Science and economics, Varna, 2011, p. 137
6. ***Statistical manual, NSI, Sofia 2014, p. 87
17. http://albena.bg/bg/pages/sport.html
CONDITIONS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF EVENT TOURISM
ALONG THE BLACK SEA COAST OF BULGARIA

PhD student Boryana Umnikova

Abstract

The goal of the study is to identify and assess the present conditions and resources for the development of event tourism on the Bulgarian Black Sea Coast. The richness of the event calendar, the developed facilities, as well as the necessity for their renovation and adaptation to the needs of tourists are principal emphases of the study.

Keywords: conditions, resources, development, event tourism, Bulgarian Black Sea Coast.