

Biodiversity Conservation & Economic Growth (BCEG) Project

Concept for Community Based Ecotourism Around Protected Areas in Bulgaria

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Bulgaria Biodiversity Conservation and Economic Growth Project

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

ARD	Associates in Rural Development, Inc.
BAAT	Bulgarian Association of Alternative Tourism
BATA	Bulgarian Association of Travel Agents
BCEG	Biodiversity Conservation and Economic Growth Project
BSBCP	Bulgarian-Swiss Biodiversity Conservation Program
CTO	Cognizant Technical Officer
EEBI	Ecotourism Enterprise Business Incubator
EEC	Ecotourism Enterprise Center
EIG	Ecotourism Initiative Group
EU	European Union
GEF	Global Environment Facility (note the acronym “GEF” is also generically in Bulgaria for the USAID/GEF Biodiversity project)
GW	George Washington
GWU	George Washington University
HRD	Human Resource Development
IME	Institute of Market Economics
MBA	Master of Business Administration
MOE	Ministry of Economy
MOEW	Ministry of Environment and Waters
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MSI	Management Systems International
MTA	Master of Tourism Administration
NGO	Non-Government Organization
NNPS	National Nature Protection Service (of MOEW)
PMU	Project Management Unit (ARD team for BCEG Project)
SBDC	Small Business Development Center
SME	Small and Medium Enterprises
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USIS	United States Information Service

Preface

The Biodiversity Conservation and Economic Growth (BCEG) Project is funded by the United States Agency for International Development, (USAID), as part of its strategic support to the Republic of Bulgaria. The Project is sponsored by USAID in conjunction with the Government of Bulgaria – the Ministry of Environment and Waters (MOEW). The Project is governed by a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the two governments, and its implementation covers the period: May 2000 – October 2002.

This Project is a logical evolution of earlier USAID assistance to biodiversity conservation in the country. It follows some 10 years of assessment, technical assistance and financing of Bulgaria's biodiversity conservation strategic development, new protected areas legislation, and new national park institutions. The Project is designed to capitalize on the achievements of the Bulgaria Global Environmental Facility (GEF) Biodiversity Project (implemented during the period June 1995-April 2000), and builds on lessons learned.

The BCEG Project addresses six specific contract themes known as “contract result packages”. The BCEG Project includes the finalization and implementation of two national park management plans, the development of a new management plan for Rila Monastery Nature Park. It assists in the development of financial mechanisms and strategies to ensure the solvency of national parks. The Project pilots economic growth activities with select target groups around two Bulgarian national parks. And it continues to build on the principles of strong public information and awareness as stepping stones for informed public engagement and promotion of biodiversity conservation and protected area management activities.

This Project is issued as a Task Order (Contract Number LAG-I-00-99-00013-00) under the USAID Global Biodiversity and Forestry Indefinite Quantities Contract (IQC); and is implemented on behalf of USAID by Associates in Rural Development, (ARD) Inc., of Burlington, Vermont, USA.

The Project is implemented through a Project Management Unit (PMU) based in Sofia, and includes a Team Leader, three Bulgarian technical specialists, and support staff. Project activities are coordinated through two mechanisms –

- (a) Project Counterpart Team – PMU staff and MOEW/NNPS counterparts
- (b) Project Coordination Group – that serves as a steering committee for Project planning and monitors implementation. This consists of the National Nature Protection Service of the MOEW, and national park directors, the PMU and USAID.

The Project is largely implemented through the Directorates for Rila and Central Balkan National Parks. Additional technical assistance is provided by Bulgarian and international consultants, and is based on specific terms of reference.

1. Executive Summary

Ecotourism, or nature tourism, conserves the natural environment and contributes to the well being of local people. As one of the fastest growing sectors in the world, this form of sustainable tourism has been cited internationally as a major opportunity for local economic growth and rural development in partnership with managed protected areas.

The Bulgarian Protected Areas Act of 1998 provides a sound policy framework for ecotourism development related to biodiversity resources. The law clearly identifies the purposes of protected areas to include the “*creation of opportunities for enjoyment of the nature by visitors, AND the creation of opportunities for the local people to benefit from living close to these areas.*”

One of the major new opportunities in Bulgaria is the development of sustainable, environmentally sound tourism businesses based on natural attractions. Protected area management plans (the first in the country) are identifying opportunities and developing programs *with local communities for the wise and sustainable management of these territories of high conservation value.*

Joint protected area -community management efforts linked to sustainable economic activities are replacing earlier approaches of strict restrictions on access and use within protected areas. In addition, there are a growing number of financial mechanisms and investment tools that are becoming available to support opportunities for entrepreneur initiatives inside and outside the national protected area network, without jeopardizing the future of the natural resources.

The country’s first two national park management plans – for Central Balkan and Rila, provide clear opportunities for local tourism development linked to resources and sites found within the Parks. These 10-year strategic plans provide for the development of mechanisms and implementation of ecotourism activities and projects in the communities surrounding the parks. Natural attractions and their interpretation provide an ideal opportunity to create local partnerships with tourism enterprises – services and facilities – that are located near protected areas.

The Biodiversity Conservation and Economic Growth (BCEG) Project is being implemented as a logical step with ten years of support of the U.S. Government for the establishment and management of the protected areas system as the prime tool for biodiversity conservation in Bulgaria. One of the major tasks of the BCEG Project is to develop and test operational models for income generation and economic growth for the local populations surrounding National Parks. This aspect of the BCEG Project is directly related to the implementation of management plans called for in the Protected Areas Act. Since March 2001, this effort has been initiated through the design and testing of pilot projects.

Pilot Projects

The objective of the pilot projects is to develop an operational model for ecotourism enterprises that focus on the resources and natural attractions of these two national parks. The aim is to stimulate the creation and development of business opportunities for local entrepreneurs dealing with tourist services, facilities, and goods compatible with the purpose and objectives of the national parks. The pilot activities demonstrate how to improve local socio-economic conditions using community associations with the Parks, thus strengthening inter-dependence and public support for national parks locally and nationally.

Pilot areas

The pilot areas for ecotourism development were selected using the following criteria.

- Existence of natural assets and attractions inside the park territory (trails, attractions, traditions);
- Availability of attractions and tourist service providers near the park;
- Socio-economic conditions in the region, particularly high levels of unemployment;
- General status of the infrastructure in the local municipalities;
- Prior donor activity;
- Readiness of the local government administrations and local entrepreneurs to engage in dialogue with Parks,
- Magnitude of ecotourism opportunities identified in the preparation of management plans for both parks.

Thus the pilot areas for this phase include:

Rila National Park – Focusing on the communities north of the Park, the pilot area includes the Beli Iskar and Govedartsi Park Sections. Joint ecotourism activities focus on Samokov Municipality, and include the town of Samokov, and the villages of Mala Tsurkva, Govedartci and Beli Iskar.

Central Balkan National Park – Focusing on communities to the southeast of the Park, this pilot area covers one Park Section, Kalofer, with the intention to include soon the Park section of Tuzha. Joint activities focus on the Karlovo municipality. The town of Kalofer is the focal point of the pilot project.

The Operational Model

The National Parks realize that a successful model requires a set of strategic steps for the development of these new relationships. Parks are required to establish relationships at both the local and national levels, as their community and business-related dimensions are being examined and developed according to their ten-year plans. Significant time is being devoted to public discussions and collaborative planning, as new relationships are being developed through social engineering processes.

The core idea of the relationship is to develop the capacity of local entrepreneurs to become players in the Bulgarian “tourism market place”, using their relationships with the National Park as an added advantage. By encouraging these relationships, the National Parks also aim to engender a sense of partnership and shared responsibility for the joint care of natural resources. The best way to realize this mutually beneficial relationship is to encourage real and sustainable links that benefit local people and businesses close to the Parks.

During the preliminary preparation of the pilot program, the Parks assembled extensive inventories of existing community and Park based ecotourism resources for many of the municipalities surrounding their territory. These inventories contain information about facilities - accommodation and food- as well a wide range of attractions – museums, churches, festivals, handicrafts, etc. These inventories are a rich collection of local information, which also include transportation and mountain guide services, local tourist associations, and emergency services in the region.

Steps in Model Development

- ◆ *Identification of interested stakeholders.* This process started during the management planning process, but was consolidated during the public hearings for the National Park Management Plans in March and April of 2001. Focus group discussions were organized and conducted for interested institutions and groups of local stakeholders. Stakeholders include: local government authorities, private hotel/ restaurant keepers, mountain guides and their associations, local craftsmen and their associations, private transport companies, representatives of the local Tourist Associations, local cultural centers (*chitalishte*), local NGOs, other tourist services (horse riding, biking, etc), and experts in specialized services (wild life watching, technical rock climbing, etc).
- ◆ *Formation of a Local Ecotourism Initiative Group.* Using the public hearings on their management plan as a tool, National Parks, assisted by the BCEG Project, initiated a series of meetings with stakeholders to discuss the merits and opportunities of establishing **local ecotourism groups** to serve as a more formal mechanism for establishing a longer-term working relationship between Parks and community tourism entrepreneurs. As a result, stakeholders have formed an **Ecotourism Initiative Group (EIG) in each pilot site** to further their business development objectives and to better address their relationships with the Parks. The EIGs include full-time membership from the National Park Sections in each pilot site.
- ◆ *Identification of training and technical assistance needs and review of existing opportunities inside and outside of the park.* Formation of these groups has involved the development of a vision and priority action plans to achieve their objectives. They have also identified their training and technical assistance needs with the help of the BCEG Project.
- ◆ *Development of viable tourism projects.* There was a period of intensive work to review and analyze existing opportunities, identify new business opportunities and to establish important marketing, business, and public information relevant to the pilot areas. At this stage of the Model, the local EIGs “test” their first ecotourism products through servicing tourists from the big cities of Bulgaria and from the international expatriate residents community through specially designed and initiated catalytic events. These events celebrate both new ecotourism services as well as special events in association with each of the National Parks.
- ◆ *Development and implementation of marketing strategies.* Each EIG decides how and with what resources they will market their products. Specialized technical assistance is provided from both national and international sources. At this stage the EIGs are making decisions and establishing linkages with national tourism associations, tour operators and other actors in the tourism industry.
- ◆ *Business plan development and EIG monitoring.* This next stage covers a period of 7 to 8 months of business plan implementation and EIG project monitoring in the local communities. Venture capital and small and medium business loans are to be brokered in support of viable business plans.

Successful implementation of these pilot projects uses a mechanism for coordinating all the efforts through sharing clearly established *roles and responsibilities* among different groups and institutions.

National Working Group

The Group includes the BCEG Project eco-enterprise specialist, NNPS member, representative of the Ministry of Economy, ARD international consultant (Professor Donald Hawkins), National Park Directorate experts for tourism, and the section heads from the relevant park sections. The role of this group is to review the development of the project and to report to the two Ministries, as well to advocate for legal and policy improvements. It ensures effective information flow between the field and the national levels. It liaises with national tourism societies, associations and organizations. It provides advice

on existing opportunities in cases of training needs, consultancy needs, etc. When appropriate, the national working group will serve as a mediator in matters of public information, policy guidance, etc.

National Parks

The Park Directorates are the public face of the project. They appear publicly in negotiations with partners. They initiate and monitor the results of the pilot efforts using their management plan and corresponding regimes and norms.

Local Ecotourism Initiative Groups (EIGs)

These are the focal point of the operational model – representatives of key stakeholders (park, local authorities, local business, mountain guides groups, local craftsmen, etc.). They are the primary participants in the effort. They plan, organize, and act as partners with their respective National Park. As a group they recommend actions, which need to be undertaken by municipal authorities. Based upon their success and experience, they may choose to formalize their association as an NGO.

Recent Activities

The local ecotourism initiative groups in the two pilot areas were established with the assistance of a professional facilitator supported by the BCEG Project. She works with them on a regular basis in support of group organization, management, and planning of pilot area activities and events.

International ecotourism consultant, Professor Donald Hawkins from George Washington University, has provided two important levels of international technical assistance. In May 2001, he helped the EIGs facilitate strategic planning, which resulted in an action plan for each of the pilot areas.

Professor Hawkins is assisting the Working Group with the development of a core concept for an operational model for protected area ecotourism and economic growth activities. The model has emerged as a result of intensive discussions that involved local and national assessments of the ecotourism options and opportunities.

The Pilot program received a second round of technical input when Professor Hawkins returned in June 2001 to supervise a George Washington University technical team of 12 graduate students from the School of Business and Public Management. The George Washington technical teams worked with each EIG to develop useful drafts of business and development materials for their future work. Important tools include a Product Development Manual, which was prepared and used to start up the product development process. The Manual was translated into Bulgarian and will be used for future work in the initiative groups, and for the purposes of the replication of the pilots. Specific business plan concepts were developed during workshops held in each pilot area. These plans will be refined and brokered, where feasible, to venture capital and financing sources.

BCEG staff are currently planning a series of market research activities focused on Bulgarian middle class travel patterns, which will include:

- (a) focus group meetings in major urban centers to determine ecotourism market needs,
- (b) exit surveys at each pilot site to estimate travel expenditures, length of stay, and levels of satisfaction,
- (c) quantitative sampling surveys of potential travelers to Bulgarian protected areas to determine travel behavior in the past year AND intentions in the coming year; and
- (d) training activities for EIGs in each pilot area focused on using the research data and market intelligence to create marketing plans.

Future Steps

The further development of the model will focus on:

- ✓ Ecotourism Investment / Matching Grants Fund
- ✓ Development of Protected Areas Ecotourism Clusters
- ✓ An Ecotourism Incubator Initiative

Ecotourism Investment / Matching Grants Fund

Development of ecotourism enterprise in Bulgaria is seen as a viable economic growth activity. It provides three immediate benefits in keeping with national development goals:

- 1) it is aimed at rural communities where annual incomes and economic development are most immediately needed;
- 2) it reinforces elements of decentralization and local government – helping to strengthen both, through stronger civil society and citizen participation;
- 3) it identifies and capitalizes on a comparative advantage at regional and European levels – helping to elevate Bulgaria’s reputation for nature conservation, a value-added local and regional holiday, and an effective sustainable development paradigm.

Development of an Ecotourism Fund is an important tool in capitalizing this tool for rural economic growth and development. The BCEG Project offers some suggestions for the fund’s operation and use, choosing to model it after similar efforts in Canada, Spain, and Tennessee. A fund that consists of the best of the SME and matching grants components of capital investment in this sector is seen as appropriate to further development of the ecotourism model in the country. The fund is seen as an integral part of the next two elements of an ecotourism strategy for Bulgaria.

Development of the Protected Areas Ecotourism Competitive Cluster Concept

The BCEG Project plans to engage the Government and international donors community in the creation of a **national initiative in support of the future of the protected area based ecotourism**. The “competitive cluster” concept is a strategic set of activities and services organized as a complete ecotourism supply chain. The core of the “cluster” is the comparative advantage represented by the protected area’s natural attractions and biodiversity. The Competitive Cluster is used to examine and support a set of strategic relationships between donors, the private sector and government in a specific program of support to ecotourism development linked to improved management of Bulgaria’s protected areas. We believe that such a concept has merit as a key element of Bulgaria’s national tourism development and promotion strategy, as well as promoting biodiversity conservation and local enterprise development in rural areas. No single protected area or pilot area ecotourism business can thrive without the effective synergy between all aspects of these elements of this specialized, competitive cluster.

Establishment of an Ecotourism Enterprise Business Incubator (EEBI)

To be successful, the EIGs working in concert with the protected areas need to find the ways and means to assure on-going technical and financial assistance to SMEs for:

- (a) Ecotourism business development incubation or acceleration (from concept to capital financing) with a particular emphasis on assisting small business in bringing ideas to market;
- (b) Use of existing business development tools, including those available on the internet;

- (c) Developing, “cultivating” and maintaining direct contacts with potential project investors, including: venture capital firms, foundations, multilateral financial institutions, bilateral aid agencies and commercial banks; and,
- (d) Developing viable business projects that are “bankable”.

The goal of an ecotourism enterprise business incubator is to promote the creation and strengthening of strategic new businesses using a protected area competitive cluster approach. Incubators are being used around Bulgaria, and are supported by international donors such as the UNDP and USAID. We believe that pilot areas hold some promise for an ecotourism enterprise business incubator, or to examine ways in which existing incubators can be expanded in order to provide these services.

Three Important Actions to Consider:

1. SmartInfo

The National Tourism Database managed by the Government and based in the National Tourist Information Center, at the Ministry of Economy. We intend to work in cooperation with the SmartInfo staff to: (a) develop specifications for the re-design and upgrading of the system to include attractions, other relevant data and images, (b) pilot test the new data base, (c) determine how links can be provided to reservation systems that might be developed through Web sites that exist, or are being created, which are relevant to Bulgaria’s tourism industry; and (d) help develop the most strategic use and home for this data base.

2. Memorandum of Understanding

The MOU would be designed to strengthen the working relationships between the Ministries of Environment and Waters, and Economy, on efforts related to protected area management, ecotourism, and economic growth. The BCEG Project will provide guidelines for an MOU, specifically designed to address issues of policy, promotion, advertising, and marketing related to Protected Area Ecotourism in Bulgaria. In addition, it would serve to strengthen the elements of the proposed Ecotourism Enterprise Business Incubator and the Ecotourism Competitive Cluster initiatives, which require wider national attention and support.

3. Year of Ecotourism/Year of Mountains Forum

An international forum is proposed for Bulgaria – hosted by the MOEW and MOE with technical support provided by the BCEG Project. The Forum could be held over a 2-to 3-day period in 2002. The proposed Forum will be offered in conjunction with the international Year of Ecotourism and Year of the Mountains, declared by the United Nations. BCEG Project efforts will focus on its organization as part of its public awareness and eco-enterprise activities, linking both to the Project’s themes of biodiversity conservation, mountains parks, and economic growth. Emphasis will be placed on presenting how the operational model developed at the Rila and Central Balkan pilot sites could be replicated throughout Bulgaria’s Protected Areas.

2. Ecotourism in the Bulgarian Context

2.1. Current Policy and Legal Framework

During the period of transition from a centralized to a market economy Bulgaria has been reconsidering its priorities and is restructuring its general economic development framework. The role of tourism in national economic development has been repeatedly considered by a succession of governments and donors over the last 10 years. Much of their focus has been on privatization of the tourism sector, with a strong emphasis on large-scale tourism facilities that are heavily focused on the Black Sea coast and winter alpine ski areas.

There has been limited focus however, on rural tourist development. Attempts to diversify the tourism sector aim at capitalizing on Bulgaria's historical, cultural, crafts landscape, and agricultural base, with various efforts labeled as ecotourism, agricultural tourism, agro-ecotourism, alternative tourism, etc. These contemporary approaches to rural development and income redistribution have met with some limited success in the country. Unfortunately, many of the country's successful examples are largely linked to more affluent investors and operators with a strong base in the country's larger cities. Few rural tourism efforts have resulted in income generation and enterprise development for rural, small community Bulgarians.

Nature conservation, on the other hand, has taken a persistent course over the last 10 years. Because of its exceptional natural resource base, and rightful place in Europe as a premier landscape with high plant and animal diversity, Bulgaria has pursued a strong biodiversity conservation policy. This focus on biodiversity conservation reflects the country's comparative advantage on a continent that is increasingly confronted with threats and reductions to its natural resource base. With supporting changes in policy, the *wise and sustainable management of territories of high conservation value, including protected areas, has replaced a protected area's approach of restricting access and keeping benefits centralized.*

In the beginning of the nineties, the National Strategy for the Conservation of Biological Diversity was developed and is among the first such strategies in Europe. Later in the same decade, the National Biodiversity Conservation Plan was developed and adopted by the Government. Both of these strategic documents stress the need to create mechanisms for modern nature conservation using approaches of partnerships with local communities and providing opportunities for socio-economic development in the surroundings of the wilderness areas. Both these concepts are the cornerstone of sustainable development and Agenda 21.

The Protected Areas Act of 1998 emphasizes the links between protected area management, the enjoyment of nature (tourism and recreation), and the provision of opportunities for local people to benefit. This legislation is further supported by the 10 year management plans for national park, in which specific programs and projects are identified to implement this policy.

The Tourism Act, adopted in 1998, is now in the process of including more options specific to the development of small-scale alternative tourism. National tourism policy is again being reviewed with an eye towards a strategy that encourages and favors rural- ecotourism, and the greater spread of benefits.

2.2. Recent History and Experience

Since the early nineties, there have been several attempts to initiate *small-scale*, alternative, rural, “ecotourism” enterprises. Examples include the PREST Project, funded by the British Know How Fund, in the areas of Pirin and southern Rila National Parks. Their purpose was to create opportunities for ecotourism based on the attractions of Rila and Pirin National Parks. As a result of this Project, the Pirin Tourist Forum was established as an NGO, in 1997. It continues to promote sustainable, rural tourism in southwestern Bulgaria. While the geographic focus remains the same, the latest activities of this NGO show that the focus is primarily on community-based tourist services. The relationship with the National Park has not been consolidated, and the Park as an institution and destination does not figure prominently in most local tourism development and marketing schemes.

Another example of a rural tourism initiative is the Stara Planina Tourist Association. It was established with the support of a Swiss government. It began in 1999 and operates as an NGO, primarily in the towns bordering the northern side of the Central Balkan range. Its experiences very much mirror those of the Pirin Tourist Forum. Activities include an extensive inventory of existing facilities and services, supported by an effort to market small-scale, rural tourism with a strong agriculture and rural Bulgaria focus.

There have also been rural tourism development attempts in the region of the Rhodopes. Most recently, a youth tourism information center (NGO) and an Association for Nature Tourism (Pamporov Association) were established. Both attempt to identify and develop a host of rural tourist products and marketing opportunities, with a special focus on crafts, culture, local agriculture, and the landscape of the Rhodopes mountains.

Since 1998, there has been a Bulgarian Association for Alternative Tourism. Registered as an NGO, the Association is coordinated through one of the very few specialized tour operator companies (Odyssea Inn) privately engaged in developing and promoting alternative tourism throughout the country. Ecotourism features as one of the aims of this Association. There are also a host of small, specialized companies and associations (clubs) that focus on specialized, alternative tourism – ornithological tours, speleological tours, mountaineering tours, etc. These tend to be small, special interest groups catering to specialized clientele, and capitalizing on the diversity of Bulgarian nature and landscape.

The experience with Bulgarian “ecotourism” however, remains limited. In the absence of coordinated ecotourism policy and promotion, most activities and products remain relatively unknown and receive little local or central government support. Incentives for ecotourism development and marketing are few, and ecotourism promotion remains largely relegated to the efforts of project supported by international donors.

Various attempts have been made to galvanize “small-scale” rural tourism around Bulgaria’s exceptional rural landscapes, culture, history, and agriculture. While different rural tourism promoters and projects often argue over the definitions given rural tourism development, all agree that small-scale, rural-based tourism is a tool for rural development and income generation.

As the management capacity and intent of protected areas in Bulgaria become more clear to the nation and to the international community, the Bulgarian system of protected areas also begins to become a viable network of natural, tourist attractions. These can be linked to rural communities in close proximity, and to the opportunity for focused tourism development. As a consequence, there is a growing need to develop an operational model for the relationships between nature conservation, rural communities, and enterprise development.

The first protected area management plans in the country help provide the framework necessary for the development and testing of this model. Two of the country's largest National Parks – Rila and Central Balkan, are now guided by 10-year strategic plans for their management and operation. These documents, combined with the mandate of the both Park Directorates to develop programs and projects demonstrating benefits to local communities, are the newest framework for rural tourism linked to protected area sites, features and visitor opportunities. The core concept joins the attractions of the wild nature, the joint development of visitor experience and interpretation opportunities in the park with bordering communities, and the creation of small-scale ecotourism enterprises with bordering municipalities and communities.

3. Ecotourism in a National Parks Context

Ecotourism pilot projects are being assisted by the Biodiversity Conservation and Economic Growth Project as a logical step in the establishment and management of the protected areas system in Bulgaria. Two ecotourism enterprise pilot sites have been selected by Central Balkan and Rila National Parks, and are among the first in a series of management plan implementation activities. Each area is testing the efficacy of a model of tourism development that is focused on nature and the parks natural features, strong community engagement, local government support, and small and medium business development.

3.1. Ecotourism as a tool for realizing management plan goals

The purpose statements of the two parks include opportunities for visitor recreation and enjoyment surrounded by exemplary nature. The Parks also make provisions for the creation of appropriate conditions for sustainable livelihood of the local people in the communities surrounding the parks. One of these opportunities is protected area- based ecotourism. In addition, the management plans for the two National parks include management objectives related to conservation, tourism, and benefit sharing with surrounding communities.

Ecotourism is also one of the concepts for management of protected areas. It is assumed internationally as a conservation management tool. Ecotourism that links protected area visitor opportunities with income generation helps to build a strong sense of community pride, and increases the incentives for conservation and protection. Communities whose livelihood is improved as a result of partnerships with the Park management are more likely to support the regimes of park management. They are more likely to support conservation activities, and are more likely to encourage and instruct others to do the same.

3.2. Pilot Program Approach

Since National Park Directorates are new institutions, and operating with new management plans that are in their first year of implementation, the BCEG project addresses ecotourism development as a pilot program with the aim of developing operational models. The two national park models are restricted to select geographical areas in close proximity to each Park.

Through the national park directorates, the Project aims to form community groups that are interested in steering the development of their ecotourism program with their national park. Each group is designed to stimulate and guide the creation of business opportunities. These typically include local entrepreneurs dealing with different tourist services, facilities, and goods linked to the purpose and objectives of the national parks. The pilot effort aims improve the local socio-economic situation in select municipalities, and to strengthen the support for national parks locally. By using pilot programs we also hope to advise national policy and practice with the approaches and tools that work best to realize this model in association with other protected areas.

For the “ecotourism models”, we define “operational” as a combination of municipal leaders, private sector tourism service providers, community groups, and NGOs that are engaged in:

- The formation and support of an ecotourism group (possibly an association) for the development of a regional ecotourism strategy
- The identification and prioritization of activities that can be conducted in partnership with national parks;
- The co-financing of activities with national parks that are in keeping with the objectives of the management plan;
- An ecotourism “group” structure that is self-operating, includes park staff in their deliberations, and can be viewed as contributing to, and benefiting from their proximity to the national park.

The challenge for each of these pilot program regions is the urgent need to improve the socio-economic situation. Most communities have high unemployment rates with few opportunities for employment. The pilot programs must also address the absence of professional experience in developing and providing a host of tourist services. Some communities have restricted communication infrastructure, and many of them find their primary infrastructure in a state of disrepair. Town and municipal government resources are already stretched, and access to development and investment capital in the country limited.

The ecotourism pilot program aims to address the interests of at least four stakeholder groups:

- The National parks (protected areas). Their “stake” (interest) is to attract visitors, and to manage visitors flow in a manner which will avoid negative impacts on biodiversity and landscapes.
- Visitors – tourists to the park or its surroundings. Their interest is service, comfort, relaxation, fresh air, natural surroundings, and an opportunity to learn, or experience something new or stimulating.
- Local business – their interest is the provision of goods and services that generate income, a profit, and provide for a reasonable livelihood.
- Local government – their interest is increase their reputation and profile as a destination, to raise revenues through ecotourism-associated taxes, and to increase tourist expenditure, and to attract subsidy and/or investment.

Every effort in the pilot programs is aimed at providing assistance to the development of sound local enterprises of a scale and cost that can be replicated and sustained by Parks and local entrepreneurs. Thus, the Project is reluctant to provide subsidies or grants to activities that are better addressed as part of a community or individual business plan.

Role of the BCEG Project

The Project coordinates the activities and inputs to the pilot programs, and manages Project/USAID resource and technical advice. The Project provides subsidies for the organization, assessment and planning of activities. We anticipate that some publicity and awareness materials will be supported through the Project. Marketing materials however, will be developed and supported primarily as a cost within each community or business plan. The BCEG Project supports the travel costs of the Park extension staff in conjunction with development of the “operational models” managed by each Park Directorate.

The Project approach remains focused on brokering business development and financing for these pilot sites through existing USAID and/or other SME and Micro-enterprise programs in the country. These strategic partnerships are sought between pilot program communities and sources of business development and financing assistance – such as the Firm Level Assistance Group/University of Delaware, UNDP, and the National Agency for SMEs, and various SME banking/loan opportunities.

Coordination with Others

In order to share widely our experience and to ensure better the replication of these models from the very beginning, formal contacts have been established and maintained by the working group and the BCEG Project on the national level. These include: The National Nature Protection Service within the Ministry of Environment and Waters, the National Tourism Department within the Ministry of Economy, the Bulgarian Association of Alternative Tourism (BAAT), the Bulgarian Association of Travel Agents (BATA), MSI/IME Tourism Industry Working Group and Competitiveness Cluster

The Role of the National Parks

The National parks have the role of pilot program manager. They are the public faces of the project. They appear publicly in negotiations with partners. They initiate and monitor the results of the program using the tools found within their management plans.

They assign an expert from the headquarters to coordinate the effort on behalf of the Park directorate. They assign the Park section heads to play major role in the implementation of projects. Section Heads are the focal point for the local counterparts and stakeholders and manage the events and budgets locally. They report to the Park directorate financially and report programmatically both to the park Directorate and to the BCEG project.

The Use of Working Groups

The implementation of the pilot program uses mechanisms for coordinating efforts at different levels. Each of these mechanisms is assisted by the Project to ensure a clear sense of roles and responsibilities is developed and is maintained between different groups and institutions.

- National working group – includes the BCEG eco-enterprise specialist, an NNPS member, representative of the Ministry of Economy, BCEG Ecotourism Pilot Program Facilitator and intermittent consultant, National Park headquarters experts for tourism, and the section heads from the parks

The role of this group is to review the development of the project and to report to the two Ministries, as well to advocate for legal and policy improvements. It will ensure effective information flow between the field and the national levels. It will liaise with national tourism societies, associations and organizations. It will provide also advice for existing opportunities in cases of identified training needs, consultancy needs, etc. When appropriate the national working group will serve as a first mediator for release of information to the wide public .

- Local Ecotourism Initiative Groups – these are the focal groups of the project – representatives of community stakeholders (the national park, local authorities, local businesses, NGOs (mountain guides), local craftspeople, associations, etc.)

These are the primary participants in the effort. They are given the opportunity to plan, organize, recommend, and act as a group in concert with the National Park and municipal authorities. It is expected that later, they may register as an NGO or company.

3.3. Steps in the Pilot Program – Developing an Operational Model

Ecotourism planning efforts began long ago as part of the National Park management planning process. In many respects, the dimensions and intent of the pilot program were consolidated as an element of the public hearings conducted during the final phases of management plan approval. Public hearings are a component of the review process of each protected area management plan. They are required by law, and are specified in the Protected Areas Act.

The BCEG Project and the National Parks used the final public review and approval process to focus specific discussions on the tourism development and management aspects of the Plans. Focus groups were formed by communities and national park directorate staff to review and discuss ecotourism as a park program in rural communities surrounding the parks. As a result of these discussions, stakeholders were identified – and a wide ranging set of possible pilot program participants began to focus their attention on this new plan and new National Park Directorate. These discussions included representatives of the parks, local governments, local tourist services businesses, local craftspeople, mountain guide and rescue groups, and additional local service providers.

With the results of the focus groups, and approved National Park management plans, the Directorates and the BCEG Project moved to the next phase of pilot programming. The following steps were developed to help ensure a systematic and consistent process for ecotourism development. We trust that they will serve as the basis for replication of the model in other communities surround the national parks, and other protected areas.

- **Selection of Pilot Program Areas**

The National parks Directorates, together with the BCEG Project, agreed criteria for selection of ecotourism pilot areas. Criteria include:

- Existence of natural assets and attractions inside the park territory (trails and trail systems, natural features and attractions, wildlife viewing opportunities, access)
- Existence of attractions, traditions, and tourist services providers outside of the park
- Socio-economic situation in the region – high level of unemployment
- general status of the infrastructure in a municipality
- others donors interests

For Rila National Park, the a northern portion of the Park was selected and includes the Beli Iskar and Govedartsi park sections. The territory outside of the park focuses on Samokov municipality and includes the town of Samokov, and the villages Mala Tsurkva, Govedartsi and Beli Iskar.

Samokov - Pilot Program Area Profile

The pilot area in the park covers a territory of about 22, 000 ha. It includes the biggest reserve of the park – the Central Rila Reserve. Special features include the two most heavily visited areas in the Park – the area surrounding the second highest peak of Rila Mountain, Maliovitza, and parts of the area of the Seven Lakes. There are four mountain chalets in the area and it is crossed by the most popular tourist trails. These connect the north and the south sides of the mountain. The Pilot area is also an important staging area for trekking trips to Rila Monastery. The area includes the National Mountain Guide Training Center, Maliovitza, which offers a wide range of services, and includes the Mountain Climbing Museum.

The population of Samokov municipality is about 43,000 people with an evenly distributed ratio of men to women. More than 54% of the residents are considered part of the active labor force, with approximately 28 % pensioners, and only 18% under the age of 18. The average rate of unemployment for the municipality is conservatively estimated at 15 %.

According to the national park social surveys conducted for the purposes of the management plan, about 60 % of the people living in this area believe that tourism is the most appropriate opportunity for economic development of the area. Of these people, approximately 70% believe that the Park and nature conservation are among the area's strongest assets.

The municipality also includes the winter ski resort, Borovetz, one of Bulgaria's classic winter tourism areas. Significant winter tourism facilities were developed there in the 70s and 80s, and they provided a significant source of employment for the northern border area of the Rila mountains. With the loss of state subsidies, and moves toward privatization, Borovetz struggled. Today, the resort offers fewer opportunities for employment to the municipality than ever before, and many former Borovetz employees are attempting to use their previous skills and experience to set up small and medium enterprises.

During the last two to five years, many of these start-up entrepreneurs experimented with different businesses and different styles of operation. The Pilot program's situation analysis shows that many of these people lack the skills, experience, and knowledge of small business operations to compete effectively. The area of Samokov municipality, the villages and the town itself offer more than 100 opportunities for accommodation, restaurants, different types of tourist services and attractions. The Samokov area is also rich in cultural and historical assets – museums, art galleries, and churches.

The pilot area for Central Balkan was chosen using the same criteria. It covers one park section – Kalofer, with the intention to include another park section in close proximity – Tuzha.

Kalofer Pilot Program Area Profile

Park section Kalofer covers a territory of approximately 10, 000 ha and includes the most significant part of Djendema reserve – the Park's biggest reserve. The area includes the highest peak in the Balkan mountain chain – Botev, as well as a most famous natural - the highest waterfall on the Balkan Peninsula – “Raikoto pruskalo”. Two of the most significant tourist trails in the Park and the “Stara Planina” cross the area.

The pilot area is in Karlovo municipality, one of the country's largest. The population of the municipality is about 73,700 people, with a ratio of men to women of 48% : 52%. More than 57% of the population are considered in the “active labor” age, about 24 % are pensioners, and only 19% are younger than 18. The average official rate of unemployment for the municipality is 15 %, although, again, the actual percentage of unemployed is higher. About 70 % of the unemployed are a result of the collapse of many of industries in valley between the Sredna Gora and Stara Planina mountains.

Surveys conducted as part of the Central Balkan management planning effort indicated that about 70% of the people living in this area share the opinion that the area is attractive for tourists because of the beautiful area, its protected status, and the high cultural and historical values.

The town of Kalofer is the focal point of the pilot program. It has about 4,000 people. The most important feature of Kalofer is its historical and cultural significance as well as its traditional architecture.

Many of the residents of Kalofer used to work for the big industries in the region. Most of these have collapsed in recent years. There is a weak history of tourism services and facilities in the town, despite a strong civic, cultural and historic pride. The town currently only has two small, private hotels. The town is rich in handicrafts but product development and marketing experience is limited. There are a number of exceptional cultural and historical sites that feature museums, galleries, monasteries, and churches of national significance.

➤ **Inventories of Park - Community Ecotourism Opportunities**

During the preliminary preparation of the pilot program, community ecotourism inventories were compiled. Each municipal inventory was based on information and interviews conducted in the field. All inventories were compiled by an expert/consultant in the field of rural tourism development. They include information about existing facilities for accommodation and food, as well different types of attractions – museums, churches, festivals, handicrafts, etc. They also included information about transportation and mountain guide services, local tourist associations and different emergency services in the region. Where possible, pricing information, operating standards, and special services are noted.

Inventories exist in electronic format, and in hard copies, for ease of use and access. They include text and illustrations. These inventories are designed to be used in the development of tourist promotion materials, advertising, and public information. The inventories also serve as baseline information for municipal ecotourism goods and services.

In the case of both pilot areas, these inventories were assembled prior to the start-up of the ecotourism pilot program, and as a part of park management plan development.

➤ **Formation of a Local Ecotourism Initiative Group.**

Based on the identification of the stakeholders, the National Parks initiated a meeting of stakeholders who have expressed readiness to participate in aspects of a park-public-private relationship. The first step in the process is the formation of a local ecotourism group. Each group includes representatives of local stakeholders, with the group defining composition and geographical range based on ease of communication and coordination. Typically, each group consists of a representative of the National Park, local government authorities, related NGOs (clubs and associations), and local tourism services providers.

A professional facilitator (long-term, intermittent consultant of the BCEG Project) helps the group establish their common agenda, and encourages the group to develop a working set of roles and responsibilities. From experience, this process takes several months, with the group focusing on a combination of team building, park management and tourist development opportunities, and ecotourism program development. Typically, the Initiative group builds consensus of the common interests, issues, and based on this they agree upon general strategic objectives of the group. Each Initiative Group is challenged to identify objectives of a partnership with the National Park Directorate and to develop sustainable ecotourism activities that benefit nature conservation and the socio-economic conditions of the local people.

➤ **Scoping**

This stage includes a review of existing ecotourism opportunities using the inventories, management plans, and discussions with National Parks. The Group “consults” with the National Park in the development of visitor services and opportunities inside the park. Consultation and idea sharing is used to identify tourism development and interpretation opportunities within the context of the Park Management Plan. Typically, this period includes field visits, and the identification of local interpretation, education, and adventure/recreation opportunities. They also review the existing sets of infrastructure, services, facilities and goods that can be linked to these tourism activities inside the Park. This exercise is aimed at building inter-dependence between communities and national parks, and encourages the holistic development of “tourism packages” for the area.

➤ **Development of concrete pilot tourism projects (products)**

This is a period of intensive work of review and analysis of all ecotourism development opportunities. Using a combination of existing tourist profiles, market information, and Bulgarian “tradition”, the Initiative Group develops a set of tourism products. These products are given a cost/price structure, and a marketing strategy is created – often in conjunction with a national park event. “Testing” of these “products” is encouraged to see how the public responds to them. The test is also used to build group confidence and organizational cohesion. Typically, customer satisfaction surveys are conducted to review services, facilities, and pricing. Such feedback is used to further develop and refine products.

➤ **Preliminary Business Planning**

Some of these tourism products are ready for business planning, further development and financing. The BCEG Project helps to broker these plans with existing SME business planning and investment services in Bulgaria.

➤ **Monitoring and Measuring success and impacts**

Each Initiative Group is assisted with the identification and collection of information on indicators that measure success and impacts – both positive and negative – to the community, to business, and to the community environment and national park resources.

➤ **Market Strategy Development**

The Group decides how and with what resources they will market the products over the long-term. Instead of individual marketing materials, the group examines the comparative advantages of marketing “group” goods and services. The Project assists with the development of market survey(s) targeted at populations of Bulgarians likely to subscribe to ecotourism goods and services. Emphasis is given to marketing to a Bulgarian audience, rather than an international one, as it is easier for each Initiative Group to address language and service issues for a national rather than an international audience. In addition, market survey information is used to help further target national park messages – both regarding conservation and recreation opportunities.

➤ **Networking**

With the confidence afforded by testing products, the feedback offered by exit surveys, and the comparative advantage offered by a targeted market survey, the Ecotourism Initiative Group is ready to establish links with national tourism associations, with tour operators, and other actors in the tourism industry. The BCEG Project considers this the *second major stage of the pilot project development*. If possible, Initiative Group participation is encouraged in regional and national tourism fairs.

➤ **Business plan Implementation and Tourism development**

Business plans are refined, reviewed and financed during this next step in pilot program development. The BCEG Project assists by linking business services and financing to projects that have passed through the first review round. This phase covers a period of 7 – 8 months, and regular encouragement and networking is conducted in support of applicants. In parallel the BCEG Project supports efforts of national parks to develop infrastructure, education, interpretation, and concession or “commissioning” of tourism goods and service activities in pilot areas. This parallel phase of project implementation is used to instill confidence in the compatible and concurrent development of local enterprise, community liaison, and management plan implementation.

International and national technical assistance, training, and lobbying/networking assist each of the steps in this ecotourism model.

Training – At every step in this process, technical assistance is provided in the form of education and training. Examples include:

1. Assistance with the concepts and opportunities for ecotourism development alongside national parks;
2. Scoping – identification and analysis of existing and new opportunities;
3. Product development manual, and product development technical assistance;
4. Marketing and Promotion
5. Measuring Success and Impacts – selecting and monitoring indicators of success and impact.

Business planning and financing is NOT part of the BCEG Project training and technical assistance strategy. As noted earlier, this technical assistance and skills development is linked to other sources of business development and planning services in the country.

The BCEG Project does attempt to link pilot programs and Initiative Groups to other USAID, UNDP, and EU programs and projects providing technical assistance and financing of rural economic development and SMEs.

4. Major Findings and Recommendations¹

4.1. Ecotourism in the International Context

ECOTOURISM is tourism that involves traveling to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated natural areas with the specific objective of studying, admiring and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals, as well as any existing cultural areas.

Sustainable tourism is defined as all types of tourism, whether based on natural or human resources that contribute to sustainable development.

Nature tourism is defined as all tourism dependent on natural resources.

Ecotourism: nature tourism that is responsible conserves the natural environment and sustains the well being of local people.

Essential elements:

- Positive Commitment to Biodiversity Conservation
- Community Participation & Empowerment
- Environmental Education of Stakeholders
- Viable Businesses

U.S. Quick Facts:

- 8 million US travelers (7% of total) have taken at least ONE ECOTRIP
- Bird watchers
80 million Americans interested – accounts for \$14 billion on equipment, travel and related expenses
- Skin and scuba diving
3 million divers in the US, increasing 16% annually
500 thousand new divers certified annually

Principles of Ecotourism:

- The natural, historical, cultural and related biodiversity resources used for tourism are conserved for continuous use in the future, while still bringing benefits to society.
- Tourism development is planned and managed so that it does not generate serious economic, environmental or socio-cultural problems in local communities.
- The overall environmental quality of the tourism area is maintained and improved where needed.
- A high level of tourist satisfaction is maintained so that the tourist destinations will retain their marketability and popularity.
- The benefits of tourism are widely spread throughout the society

¹ These comments and observations are based on the technical assistance of the Project's Ecotourism Specialist, Professor Donald Hawkins, Eisenhower Professor, The George Washington University, Washington, D.C.

4.2. Inputs to Date

Consultation Mission – May 2001

International ecotourism consultant, Professor Donald Hawkins visited the country and worked with the two pilot initiative groups, and conducted meetings with both ecotourism policy developers and investors at the national level, in May 2001. With the assistance of the BCEG Project and the intermittent consultant N. Georgieva, he conducted a visioning/planning workshop with each of the initiative groups. The workshop was designed as an interactive training session and resulted in an action plan for each of the pilot areas.

Professor Hawkins assisted the BCEG Project to broker investment opportunities within the Sofia financial and donor community. A series of meetings were conducted with USAID programs and other donors/organizations, to investigate the opportunities to attract investment interest. Professor Hawkins assisted with the development of the Project's concept of an operational model for Park, ecotourism, and economic growth activities. The model was a result of intensive discussions, and local and national assessments of the ecotourism options and opportunities.

The George Washington University Technical Team – Consulting Practicum – June 2001

The Pilot program received a second round of technical input when Professor Hawkins returned to supervise a **12 person technical team comprised of MBA / MTA students** from The George Washington University School of Business, with an emphasis on Tourism management and development.

Each of the pilot areas hosted 6 students. The technical team worked with each ecotourism initiative group to develop:

- business plans,
- promotional and marketing materials,
- design and plans for events and,
- identify park attractions.

George Washington University technical teams left each Initiative Group with sets of useful materials for their future work. In addition, the Project hosted a series of product development workshops, assisted by Professor Hawkins and the GWU Technical Team. These workshops set the stage for development of each groups "catalytic event", as well as the preliminary development of individual business plans for select entrepreneurs within each of the initiative groups.

USAID and Stakeholders Briefings

Three presentations were conducted to publicize and share widely the results of the Initiative Groups' efforts.

USAID- Bulgaria- The first one was devoted to the *concept* for the future development of protected areas based ecotourism in the country. The USAID program department in Bulgaria and representatives of programs and contractors of USAID in Bulgaria attended it.

Public Meeting - The second presentation was for a wider public and included the participation of the representatives of the National Parks, the initiative groups, members of the tourism business community at national level, government agencies and USAID. The public presentation on Ecotourism Models for Protected Areas - Case studies from Rila and Central Balkan National Parks, was delivered in a PowerPoint presentation at the USIS, in Sofia, on June 15.

USAID-Washington-This presentation was refined and presented to a USAID audience in Washington DC, on June 28, 2001, by Professor Hawkins and select members of the GW University Technical Team. Organization of this meeting was facilitated by the Project's CTO, Alicia Grimes.

There are several programmatic recommendations that stem from this international assistance. These are specific to the pilot program and contribute to coordination and promotion at national level. They include:

4.3. Training Needs and Human Resource Development (HRD)

Emphasis needs to be placed on using existing training programs, which can be adapted and translated to meet the needs of the National Park staff and pilot Ecotourism Initiative Groups. Local regional and national training resources should be used wherever possible, including government, university and private sector training capabilities. Professor Hawkins' review of training needs suggest that the BCEG focus on the following priority areas:

- (a) Strategic Marketing: cooperative marketing, promotion techniques, including Internet use, data base management and small property reservation systems,
- (b) Managing Service Excellence: customer service standards, introduction of "Eco-Host" program adapted to Bulgaria, and community awareness of tourism's role in economic growth;
- (c) Guide Training: interpretation techniques, marketing guide services, business considerations, and
- (d) Protected Area Revenue Enhancement: municipalities role as gateways, public use planning, perimeter vigilance, concession operations and fee collection.

The pilot Ecotourism Initiative Group members would benefit from direct communications and visits to benchmark sites and business activities in Bulgaria. It would also be advisable to participate as customers in ecotourism and adventure travel tours focused on Bulgaria and other regional protected areas. As participants, members could assess the quality of the tours using a checklist (developed by the International Ecotourism Society for this purpose) and possibly identify potential international and national tour operator partners.

4.4. Publication of the Product Development Manual

A *Product Development Manual* was prepared and used to start up the product development process for each of the Initiative Groups. It contributed to a process of visioning and planning activities led by Professor Hawkins. Major outputs included the decision of each Initiative Group to plan and conduct catalytic events, which would be the first attempt of the local ecotourism initiative groups to promote and market their products. For Rila National Park group, this event is devoted to the opening of the newly established park visitors' infrastructure. For Central Balkan National Park, it is devoted to the celebration of the 10th Anniversary of the National Park.

The Manual is one of the first tools in a series, translated into Bulgarian, that can be used for the future work of the initiative groups and for the purposes of the duplication of the pilot program.

4.5. Smart Info – a Database for Ecotourism

Smart Info is the National Tourism Database managed by the Government and based in the National Tourist Information Center, at the Ministry of Economy. At present, the database is restricted in its information collection and management fields. There are clear interests in expanding its information categories, and improving its content. For example, the present model does not include reservation services, features in association with pilot areas, and protected area services/experiences. We believe that these omissions can be easily remedied.

With a copy of the software, the BCEG Project is able to add all pilot area ecotourism inventories. These include local tourism services and registered businesses, as well as new tourism services.

The BCEG Project is expected to work in cooperation with the MOE, Department of Tourism, Smart Info staff to:

- (a) Develop specifications for the re-design and upgrading of the system to include attractions, other data, and images,
- (b) Pilot test the new data base,
- (c) Determine how links can be provided to reservation systems that might be developed through the EEC.

4.6. Memorandum of Understanding between MOEW and MOE/Tourism

An MOU, formally agreed and approved by MOEW and MOE, could form the basis for cooperation on ecotourism promotion and development. This might include:

- (a) Joint production of a brochure focused on ecotourism in Bulgaria's protected areas,
- (b) Joint staff training programs,
- (c) Creation of a policy dialogue linking the National Competitiveness Initiative to Protected Area Management and Biodiversity Conservation,

- (d) Use of the Sophia-based Tourism Information Center for National Park information distribution and craft displays, and
- (e) Detailing staff from both Ministries to work on the Protected Areas Ecotourism Competitive Cluster Development at the National and Pilot Project levels.

4.7. Year of Ecotourism/Year of Mountains Symposium

The Project will organize and conduct an international symposium in support of the international year of ecotourism and mountains, as proposed by the UN. With the experience and products of the ecotourism pilot program, this Symposium could be held at the conclusion of the next tourist season – 2002. An October date is considered most appropriate.

The BCEG Project with the MOEW and MOE would jointly plan the symposium. The Symposium could be held over a 2-to 3-day period, and would be complemented by a public awareness campaign surrounding parks and economic development opportunities. A planning committee established by BCEG Project for this purpose would develop the concept and develop the design, to include its purpose, objectives, content, venue and costs. The committee would represent key national and local stakeholders involved in establishing the Protected Areas Ecotourism Competitive Cluster.

The title of the Symposium might be, “**International Mountain Ecotourism Forum: Linking Protected Area Management, Biodiversity Conservation and Competitiveness Strategies.**” The content would emphasize what Bulgaria can contribute and learn from case studies from regions of the world. Pilot ecotourism initiatives from the BCEG Project, Pirin and Rhodope Mountains, and other locations will be highlighted.

An international team could also join Bulgarian experts and donors to participate in a pre-Symposium orientation visit to assess the pilot project sites. Participants may also have an opportunity to participate in a study tour of the BCEG pilot sites.

Case studies and key-note presentations would serve as the basis for a web site operating in support of competitiveness clusters (at present, this is the MSI Competitiveness Web Site).

A quality International Forum involves significant expenses. Funding in the range of \$40-\$50,000 will be needed to secure 3 to 5 international speakers, their fees and travel expenses, as well as conference coordination, management, activities support, materials, and promotion activities etc. A concept paper for the conference, as well as a more detailed proposal for its support and funding, will be circulated before the end of 2001.

5. Longer-term Ecotourism and Economic Growth Opportunities

5.1 Strategic Aims

The potential for replication of the ecotourism pilot projects is dependent on additional USAID technical and capital support. Other bilateral or international donors might become involved, particularly UNDP, EU, multi-lateral donor programs.

The BCEG Project envisions the establishment and financing of ecotourism enterprise as the next step in the growth of protected areas management, economic growth, and citizen participation in biodiversity conservation in the country. We recommend it as the next contribution of USAID to their economic growth portfolio, in the country.

The model that is evolving through the BCEG Project could serve to stimulate a host of supportive and strategic ecotourism developments in the country. We believe that the experience to date demonstrates the importance of the pilot program approach, as well as the succinct opportunities for its replication as a major economic growth component for rural areas in association with protected areas. Key to replication of operational models for ecotourism development are three important thematic elements:

5.2 Ecotourism Development Fund

Procedures for a two-phase “tourism innovation marketplace” or “matching grant program” could be adapted for use in Bulgaria. A similar program – The Canadian Product Club, developed by the Canadian Tourism Commission, the Barcelona Province in Spain, or the Tennessee State Tourism Commission Matching Grant Program for rural community Tourism Development - could be used as potential models. In order to stimulate ecotourism development and economic growth, the concept requires a “fund”- investment capital for SMEs linked to ecotourism. The management of the fund would require expertise and experience in tourism product development and the initiation of innovative public and private sector collaborative approaches.

The first phase for accessing fund money would entail the solicitation and evaluation of project concepts, presented in one-page summaries – each from an ecotourism enterprise seeking support. An expert panel would assess these concepts, and 20 to 30 projects could be selected for a small award (as much as US\$1,000). This amount would be used by enterprises to prepare a full proposal seeking matching funds.

The second phase will focus on the evaluation and funding of the most promising proposals. An appointed coordinator and management team would supervise the development of:

- (a) a manual describing the Protected Area Ecotourism Fund – with guidance on the ecotourism product development process,
- (b) a pilot project application process in two stages - (i) selection of promising project ideas and (ii) selection of matching grants for project implementation;
- (c) an “Innovation Marketplace” event in which project concepts are presented in an appropriate format for public review;

- (d) Recommendations for the creation of an independent pilot project review panel representative of the public and private sector and tasked to make final decision on selection of project concept awards and pilot project grants.

The organization responsible for administration of the Fund would need to provide support for the review panel, assist potential grantees through the application review process, arrange for publicity coverage, disperse grants and audit matching grant requirements, monitor and evaluate the program, and develop a strategy for continuation of the program.

In terms of funding level, it is recommended that \$500,000 be allocated for grants to be matched with \$500,000 in cash, loans or documented in kind contributions from the grantees. Eligible grantees would include established businesses and entrepreneurs involved in start-ups. All projects would need to demonstrate a direct relationship at least one protected area and its surrounding community.

5.3. Protected Areas Ecotourism Competitive Cluster

The concept of competitive clusters is being tested in various economic growth and development sectors in Bulgaria. Tourism is one of these. Our experience shows, however, that the competitiveness cluster concept is not easily applied to a sector with such a wide range of development options, goods and services. In fact, any attempt to address tourism in a single competitive cluster will only dilute the competitive analysis and comparative advantages of the sector for Bulgaria.

Instead, we propose the development of a protected areas ecotourism competitive cluster. It is more focused, more tangible and more practical in terms of Bulgaria's competitive advantage at a national and European level. Given the extent of Bulgaria's natural resource base, the extent of its protected areas network, and the growing number of small and medium enterprise options in association with these, a focus on a competitive cluster addressing protected areas and ecotourism is more advantageous. This leaves additional clusters of Black Sea tourism, ski tourism, and wine /vineyard-based tourism for more careful scrutiny.

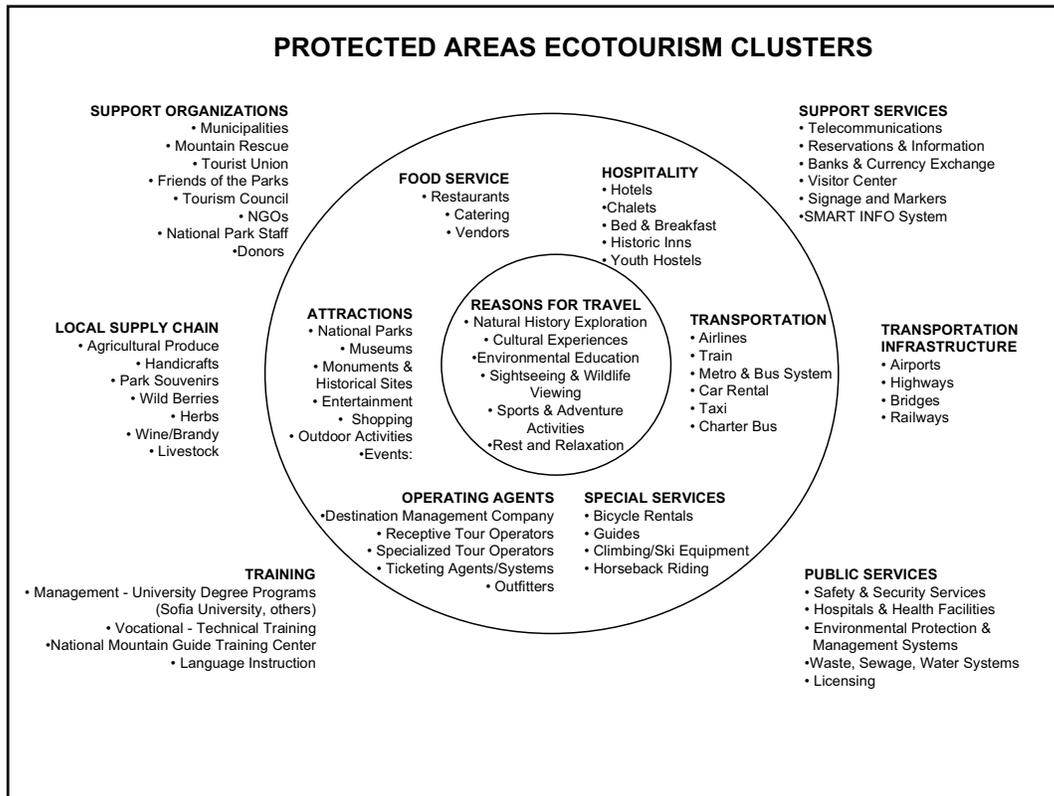
The tourism cluster analysis for protected areas and ecotourism suggests an alternative approach – one that is keeping with a SME approach promoted and supported by a host of donors and investment banks. In short, we envision a competitive cluster that is focused on the national system of protected areas, and that:

- (a) creates new tourism products and support the development of established and emerging destinations;
- (b) encourages community control, and participation of communities, including minorities in the process rural development, income “re-distribution”, and economic growth;
- (c) encourages ecotourism development as a way of conserving and protecting the environment;
- (d) targets specialty markets versus mass markets, involves environmentally sensitive consumers in a process of learning and interaction with communities; and
- (e) embraces new information technologies to improve marketing communications.

The pilot Ecotourism Initiative Groups in the Samokov and Kalofer areas have developed a great deal of social capital that is integral to implementing their strategic plans. What remains

is to consolidate these gains and provide much-needed support to help these groups finalize and carry out their strategies, action plans, and business activities.

We have tested the Protected Area Ecotourism Cluster concept at the two Ecotourism Product Development Workshops conducted at our pilot sites and have found it quite workable and potentially replicable on a national scale in Bulgaria. It is described in the following diagram:



The approach taken in the development of the BCEG pilot programs is beginning to yield the tools necessary for replication. The operational model will provide a “tool kit” of steps, activities, and materials that can be further tested and refined. Existing tools include:

- (a) the USAID - RAISE- IQC Ecotourism Rapid Assessment;
- (b) Ecotourism Inventory (linked to existing and proposed revision of MOE/Tourism SMART INFO Database and Internet site);
- (c) Guidelines and Training Manuals for (Situation Analysis, Visioning and Product Development Workshops);
- (d) Identification of Private Sector, Government and Bilateral/International Sources of Funding, technical assistance and related resources for Ecotourism Development in Bulgaria;
- (e) Legal advice on non-profit and profit organizational structure and related tax issues, including the new one-stop windows for SMEs to be offered at the municipal level.

In order to motivate and support a more regular program of cross-fertilization between regional tourism associations, rural tourism, and ecotourism, the Project will attempt to facilitate the organization and hosting of a series of roundtable workshops. These will be dedicated to furthering the development of an ecotourism cluster group within the national

park catchment areas. The roundtable meetings will largely focus on the national park system as the focal point for rural, ecotourism development, and will draw from regional associations to reflect and share activities and information, including strategic synergies and cooperative advantages. The BCEG Project will fund these preliminary meetings.

The BCEG Project roundtable discussions plan to include:

- Karlovo Tourist Association and Swiss supported Visitor Center in Karlovo, Wilderness Fund, and the BSBCP;
- Pirin Tourism Forum
- Stara Planina Association
- BSBCP Pirin Management Planning Team
- National Park Directorates and Project Ecotourism Initiative Groups
- Rhodopes Tourist Association

This competitive cluster and its specialized theme is an important vehicle for the coordinated development of ecotourism policy, promotion, marketing and financing in the country. We envision participants in the competitive cluster to bring regional perspectives and experiences to a forum that is presently dominated by centralized discussions and operators.

5.4. Ecotourism Enterprise Center (EEC) and the Concept of Ecotourism Business Incubators

To be successful, the BCEG needs to find the ways and means to focus on- going technical assistance to ecotourism SMEs for:

- (a) business development and incubation (from concept to capital financing) with a particular emphasis on assisting small business in bringing ideas to market;
- (b) use of existing business development tools, including those available on Internet and by other electronic means;
- (c) developing, “cultivating” and maintaining direct contacts with potential project investors, including: venture capital firms, foundations, multilateral financial institutions, bilateral aid agencies and commercial banks; and
- (d) developing viable business projects that can be submitted to pre-qualified investors.

The development of Ecotourism Enterprise Centers is another element of ecotourism development and support to their more localized development. They are modeled on the concept of Business Incubators already used around the country.

The EEC incubator is defined as a hybrid instrument for economic development related to Bulgaria’s Protected Areas under the MOEW. It is designed to support small and medium tourism businesses linked to the establishment, growth, or re-establishment of ecotourism in regions where there is a high potential for nature based tourism activities and a relatively under-developed private sector. The proposed incubator would comprise a network of tourism enterprises with complementary products and services. A tool to guide the development of the EEC was developed by George Washington University and Conservation International under the USAID RAISE Consortium. This tool recommends activities for application in Bulgaria.

BCEG would continue to identify a group of potential participants in an ecotourism enterprise center (incubator), including initially the Rila National Park/Samokov and Central Balkans National Park/Kalofer areas. The Center would address:

- Local receptive tour operators and transport providers
- Lodging in local communities
- Conversion of chalets/hotels/inns into “ecolodges”
- Rental agencies for bicycles, horses, special vehicles, etc.
- Adventure activities—Rock climbing, spelunking, snow shoeing, etc.
- Souvenir shops and artisan products
- Specialized guides, outfitters, etc.

At a later stage, the Incubator could be expanded to include other communities near national parks and other protected areas—nature parks, wetlands, etc.

Objectives and expected results

The goal of an ecotourism enterprise incubator is to promote the creation and/or strengthening of strategic new businesses in the area of ecotourism and related industries, as an instrument for the conservation of biodiversity and the creation of jobs, based on the principles of sustainable development. The expected results include:

- A network of competitive ecotourism enterprises in strategic pilot areas focused on the conservation of biodiversity and sustainable development.
- A pilot model for incubators in ecotourism, potentially replicable in other rural municipalities near protected areas.
- A mechanism for assisting in the financing of protected areas
- Greater harmony between the financial sector and entrepreneurs in ecotourism, creating possibilities for other interested entrepreneurs.
- Sustainability of a nucleus of synergistic enterprises, united by service standards and attention to environmental management improvements and social concerns.

Methodology

Phase 1:

The implementation of an ecotourism business incubator could be carried out in two stages. The first stage includes (a) the elaboration of the Business Plans. (*The BCEG Project is seeking assistance to do this.*), (b) the establishment of criteria for the selection of participating businesses, (c) the selection of the aforementioned participants, and (d) basic training in entrepreneurial skills for proprietors/administrators of the selected businesses. This process will take approximately six months. Also during phase 1, professionals involved in the project will develop criteria for the selection of a manager for the incubator and they will begin a search for a professional that adequately meets these criteria. The following is a summary description of each activity associated with the first phase of the project:

Criteria for the selection of businesses participating in the incubator: main qualities a business must possess for acceptance into the incubator, in accordance with the objective criteria

established for evaluation, selection, and recruitment. We estimate that between 15 and 25 businesses from the 2 pilot areas will participate in the incubator.

Elaboration of the Business Plan: determines the viability of the project, the goals and objectives to be attained, and the time frame for completion; establishes criteria and parameters for evaluation and monitoring of effectiveness and efficiency of incubators and an overall business diagnosis.

Recruitment: according to the criteria previously established, with assistance by BCEG's staff and Ecotourism Product Development Workshop.

Training of selected participants in entrepreneurial skills: aims to offer preliminary training to managers and/or proprietors of selected businesses, prior to the implementation of the incubator.

Phase 2:

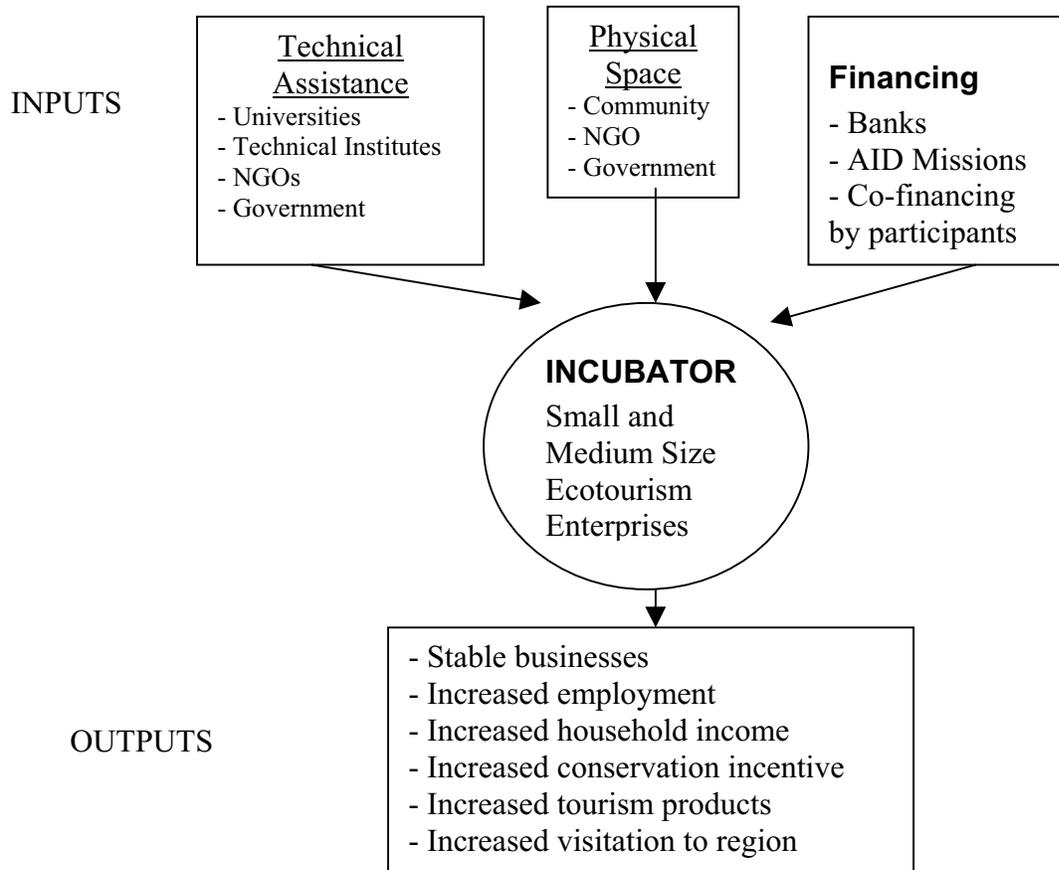
The second phase involves the implementation of the incubator itself. Included in this stage is an elaboration of the norms of cooperation and relations among incubator enterprises as well as preparation of the physical space to house the incubator headquarters in each municipality. This main office will function as the Ecotourism Enterprise Center (EEC) where all incubator businesses may be either permanently or temporarily represented and where tourists may obtain accurate advice and information about the many ecotourism-related products and services available.

This Ecotourism Enterprise Center should contain adequate installations for receiving and attending tourists and other parties interested in the project, office space/representation of member businesses, and meeting rooms. It will also have telephone lines, FAX machines, computers, printers, Internet access, and a secretary to aid the project manager and business representatives. The EEC could be housed in the same facility providing visitor information, National Park liaison, and a centralized reservation service, souvenir shop, publications, handicraft products, and similar services. A well located space committed to public outreach and visitor services will increase the visibility and effectiveness of the project.

During the inception of activities in the EEC, the incubator will promote training courses specific to the needs of the participating businesses (financial management, product development, use and maintenance of equipment, customer service, marketing and sales, etc.). The project anticipates regular technical assistance, which will be offered by the institutions directly involved in the project and other supporters.

Partners are sought for this second phase. This second phase, which will begin immediately after the 6-month preparatory phase, will last between 2 and 3 years. Therefore, the current EEC concept proposal covers only the preparatory stage (first 6 months) and the first year (implementation). The specific goal of the proposed project will be the solidification of the incubator and its results, as evidenced by the advances and results attained during an 18 month period.

The model is described in the following diagram:

Model of the Ecotourism Incubator ProcessIncubators and SBDCs

There are differences between incubators and a small business development center (SBDC). The “physical facility” is an essential element of an incubator as it provides the enterprise tenancy. A small business development center (SBDC) is a facility that, with rare exceptions, provides small business development services without enterprise tenancies. Sometimes SBDCs are referred “incubator without walls” but this definition is misleading. The same specification could be made in relation to small-medium enterprise (SME) development centers of other types, such as agri-business development centers. None of these should be called “incubators” if they do not allow small, new or early-stage enterprises to occupy at least some part of their facilities. The physical proximity of entrepreneurs provided by an incubator environment makes a qualitative difference from an SBDC or similar SME assistance center in three essential respects:

- (1) Entrepreneurs and their enterprises receive extended and integrated assistance, in contrast to the brief, topical, fragmented doses of assistance provided by a typical SBDC.
- (2) Formal and informal interactions among entrepreneurs served by an incubator lead to information-sharing, trading and investment relationships that enhance the facility's economic development impact; i.e., increase its economic multiplier.
- (3) Incubators substantially reduce (by a factor of about four) the probability of business failure and substantially increase the likelihood of business survival and success.

Networking and Benefits Sharing

The combination of the support of a physical facility and services creates a networking synergy of great impact. An incubator should be viewed as the center of activity inside an area focused on enterprise development and the implementation of an entrepreneurial economic development strategy, thus forming a "business incubation system". In this case, to the extent that SBDCs assist the development of small, new or early-stage enterprises, they are also essential components of such a system. A well-managed incubator should:

- Facilitate the formation of networks among companies so that they can amplify their producer, marketing, exporting, supply-sourcing, capacity utilization and other capabilities.
- Identify, qualify and certify sources of supplies and services outside the incubator to comprise an external network of quality services.
- Establish an "affiliates" program so that entrepreneurs and enterprises outside the incubator can also utilize incubator facilities and services.
- Help to focus and integrate the provision of existing small business assistance resources, which are often fragmented, little known and ineffectively deployed.

Risks

Business incubators are complex, risky projects that are very difficult to create and manage successfully. The difficulties are direct corollaries of such projects' hybrid nature. Risk overall can be of three basic types:

- Business risk: the high risk of failure with start-up or early-stage enterprises (although evidence shows that business incubators substantially reduce the likelihood of failure).
- Property development risk: the difficulties of developing and managing a commercial facility, compounded by property market risks.
- Technological risks: the high risks of new product development or technology development, to the extent that an incubator includes technology-based enterprises.

Business Incubators in Developing Countries

In developing countries or those with economies in transition, the scope for a business incubator is significantly greater than in developed economies. The radical restructuring of enterprises now going on or required in developing or transitional economies is tantamount to businesses being reborn. Thus, the distinction between "start-up" and "existing" enterprises is neither sharp nor useful, and a higher percentage of existing enterprises can benefit from business incubation services. To minimize the risk factors, it is important to meet the following prerequisites:

- Governmental support in the form of a donated building and/or grants and/or equity capital to finance the early stages of incubator development.
- Official commitments that the incubators created with government support would be managed in entrepreneurial, businesslike ways, at least semi-autonomously in relation to government agencies, by qualified persons who are not government employees.
- Decentralized and flexible project implementation grounded upon a strong base of community support in the area in which an incubator may be located.

- Local in-kind and monetary commitments of resources for incubator development to match or complement those from international or governmental sources.
- A market-oriented or entrepreneurial economic development strategy for the country or region in which the incubator might be located.
- Full, advance disclosure of the costs and risks of incubator development conveyed to potential project sponsors, as well as promotion of project benefits.

APPENDICES

Scope of Work
Professor Donald E. Hawkins

*Pilot Ecotourism Activities
in Rila and Central Balkan National Park*

Background

Ecotourism figures prominently as an aspiration of both the National Park management plans for communities surrounding Rila and Central Balkan National Parks.

The concept of ecotourism is broadly supported by two park management objectives –

- Ensure tourism development inside the Park is in accordance with the Park's national and international significance, by establishing conditions for aesthetic enjoyment, spiritual enrichment and contact with wild nature.
- Establish conditions between the Park and local communities to share the responsibility and benefits from developing ecotourism related to the National Park.

Some 16 municipalities share boundaries with both the national parks – 9 for Rila and 8 for Central Balkan. Each has a vested interest in the Park's future. All are eager to identify ways to work with their respective Park, and all are interested in benefits.

With respect to these broad objectives, both national parks have:

- (1) Selected pilot areas to focus park attention and BCEG Project resources on local tourism and enterprise development projects ;
- (2) Compiled detailed inventories of local services, facilities, monuments, and handicrafts that could serve as the focal point for ecotourism enterprise development.
- (3) Identified park areas and opportunities for tourism infrastructure development, tourist information, and additional tourism activities;
- (4) Developed working relationships with local Bulgarian Tourist Union representatives to improve and maintain the extensive system of trails found throughout the national parks;
- (5) Identified the need for development of specialized tourism services and opportunities such as bird-watching, wildlife observation, mountain biking, mountain climbing, etc.
- (6) Emphasized the role of local communities in all future tourist development activities inside and outside the park;
- (7) Started to develop links with the private sector operating inside and outside the national parks;
- (8) Started to link tourism development and marketing activities with appropriate national authorities (Ministry of Economy) and national tourism and travel associations (BATA and BAAT).

The BCEG Project is working with national park staff to pilot ecotourism enterprise development in target communities around each park. Pilot project areas are clustered for ease of support and service, as well as for ease of planning, communication, working groups, advertising/marketing, and public information and training.

Towards this end, the BCEG Project has been preparing for the formation of local (eco)tourism associations (collections of local government representatives, the private sector, and the national parks) to:

- ◆ Review the ecotourism development and marketing opportunities already identified in the tourism inventories for both pilot areas;
- ◆ Establish the parameters for participation in the association. Identify a package of benefits and responsibilities with being an association member. Develop the association's membership;
- ◆ Develop a local (regional) marketing strategy, and promotion action plan with members of the association;
- ◆ Identify tourist development projects with the national park. These may include, but are not limited to trail development, excursion itineraries, wildlife viewing opportunities, interpretation and education programs/facilities, guide training, special mountain services, etc.

As a consequence of these planning and organization activities, the BCEG Project expects to finance the development of marketing and publicity activities (materials, training, travels, etc) and to support the implementation of approved, park-focused tourism development efforts.

In addition, the BCEG Project expects to host the in-country practicum of 12 Masters students from George Washington University. Students will conduct a two-week practical ecotourism consultancy at two pilot areas. They will assist:

- (1) With an assessment of locally available ecotourism opportunities and services, with opportunities for links with the national parks,
- (2) local tourist associations to identify and prioritize promotion and marketing aspects from among them, and
- (3) To develop guidelines and formats for promotional and marketing materials for printing and website publication; and where possible, develop some of these materials/examples.

In order to further the objectives and activities of this pilot "eco-enterprise" program, the BCEG Project is specifically requesting the services of **Professor Donald E. Hawkins**, Eisenhower Professor of Tourism Policy, Department of Tourism and Hospitality Management, School of Business and Public Management, The George Washington University.

To provide short term technical assistance from **April 30 to May 10, 2001**, to conduct the following tasks:

Tasks

1. Visit the ecotourism pilot areas, and familiarize himself with:
 - a. the preliminary stages of local tourism association formation;
 - b. the local roles and functions of the national park staff
 - c. some of the local tourism opportunities identified in the inventory
 - d. local municipal leadership

2. Assist the Project staff to identify and assess the opportunities for links with marketing and promotion agencies and organizations at international level.
3. Familiarize himself with some of the key tourist marketing and promotion agencies and organizations at national level;
4. Develop a slide presentation on international ecotourism, and the role that ecotourism is playing in the international economy. Provide specific examples of “ecotourism” developed in association with mountains, protected areas, and wildlife/biodiversity.
5. Assist in the conduct of familiarization/orientation meetings with key community ecotourism associations from Rila and Central Balkan National Parks (separately), to explain some of the principles of ecotourism, international tourist expectations, and marketing opportunities.
6. Meet with the Project’s ecotourism advisors, consultants, and volunteers to design the Master’s student practicum scheduled for June 3-16.
7. Assist the Project to identify the components of a local (regional) ecotourism development and marketing strategy;
8. Provide recommendations for criteria to select participants for the US-focused study tour;
9. Provide a preliminary review and assessment of the Project’s pilot ecotourism strategy and activities.

Deliverables

1. Slide presentation and orientation to international ecotourism efforts, especially for mountains, protected areas, and biodiversity conservation, for a Bulgarian audience.
2. Objectives, products, and schedule of events for June field practicum;
3. Outline of the components of a local (regional) ecotourism development and marketing strategy;
4. Brief report of activities conducted in Bulgaria, presentation materials, MBA practicum schedule, and thoughts/observation on the Projects pilot ecotourism strategy and activities.

June 3-16, 2001 - SUSTAINABLE TOURISM CONSULTING PRACTICUM

Professor Hawkins will accompany the GWU Masters degree students (12) for the duration of their practicum at no additional cost to the BCEG Project. The BCEG Project will cover in-country travel, translation, and per diem costs for the students and Professor Hawkins.

Prior to their arrival, Professor Hawkins and BCEG Project will agree all the details of the practicum, including student assignments, activities, counterparts, and products from the Practicum exercise.

For the purposes of this Project, however, we are expecting student assistance with:

- ◆ Assessment of local eco-tourism opportunities and constraints
- ◆ Pilot marketing strategies for ecotourism and park products identified by the practicum
- ◆ Pilot marketing materials for testing in the Bulgarian and expatriate market place;
- ◆ Identification of international marketing and promotional contacts, and assistance with their establishment;

September 2001 EASTERN TENNESSEE STUDY TOUR

The BCEG Project is a recipient of a USAID Societies in Transition Training Grant. The grant will be used to fund a study tour of small community tourism development and promotion in the rural areas of Eastern Tennessee, bordering the Great Smokey Mountains National Park. The Study tour will examine various aspects of regional tourism development, small community ecotourism development and marketing, and the Tennessee community matching grants program.

The BCEG Project will ask GWU students and Professor Hawkins to examine ways in which Bulgarian study tour participants can benefit from this study tour, by helping study tour participants to develop, identify and analyze specific themes on which the study tour will focus.

Schedule

Depart US	April 29
Arrive Sofia, Bulgaria	April 30
Orientation and Field Trip Prep	2 days
Rila National Park pilot area	2 days
Central Balkan National Park pilot area	2 days
National level meetings and draft report	4 days
Departure	May 10
Total LOE	10 days



ARD Bulgaria
**Biodiversity Conservation &
Economic Growth
Project**

*Sponsored by
USAID and the Government of Bulgaria*

**George Washington University MBA Practicum
Bulgaria, May 3-16, 2001
Schedule**

Date	Activity	Location	Responsible
3 June 7:30 p.m.	Arrival to Sofia and checking in the hotel Meeting with Peter Hetz, Kamelia Georgieva and Prof. Hawkins	Sofia	ARD
4 June - 10 a.m.	Briefing about the BCEG Project, the pilot projects, expectations to their work, assignments	ARD Office	ARD
- 1.30 p.m.	Meetings with MoEW and Ministry of Economy	ARD Office	
- 3 p.m.	Meeting with SMARTINFO administrator (DH and KG)	Their office	
- later	Tour around Sofia downtown		
5 June - 9 a.m.	Travel to the pilot sites and checking in the hotel	Samokov	Kamelia,
- 12 a.m.	Meeting and lunch with the parks representatives	Kalofer	Nelly
- 2 p.m.	Meeting with the Initiative Group and work in the task forces		
- 5 p.m.	break		
- 6 p.m.	Public presentation		
6 – 10 June	Working in task forces on the students' assignment	Samokov Kalofer	Svetla Nelly
9 June	Preparation for the Tourist Products Workshop	Samokov	DH, Kamelia
10 June	Preparation for the Tourist Products Workshop	Kalofer	DH, Kamelia
11 June	Workshop	Kalofer	DH, Kamelia
12 June	Workshop	Samokov	DH, Kamelia

13 June	Students work on their reports and presentation Presentation before the Initiative Group Public presentation	Samokov Kalofer	Svetla, Nelly
14 June - morning - 1:30 p.m. - afternoon	Travel to Sofia Meeting with DH and KG Preparation of reports	Sofia	DH
15 June - morning - 4 p.m. - evening	Rehearsal for the presentation Presentation before USAID and others Farewell party	Sofia	DH and ARD
16 June	Departure		

Appendix 3

Power Point Presentation

Visioning Workshops: National Park and Biodiversity for Bulgaria

May 16-17, 2001 Samokov

May 18-19, 2001 Kalofer

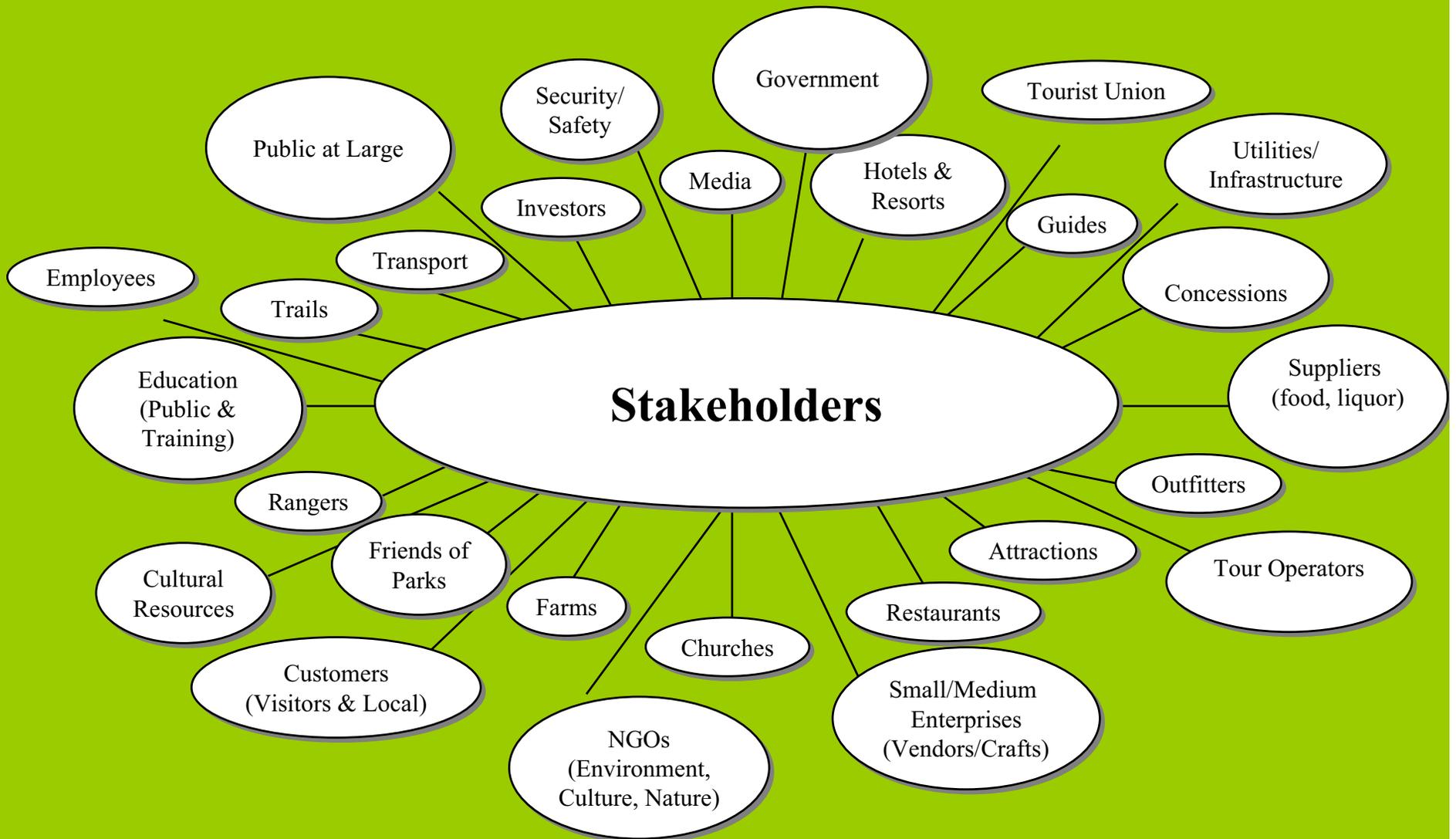
Ecotourism

A National Park and Biodiversity Strategy for Bulgaria

Dr. Donald E. Hawkins
Eisenhower Professor of Tourism Policy
The George Washington University



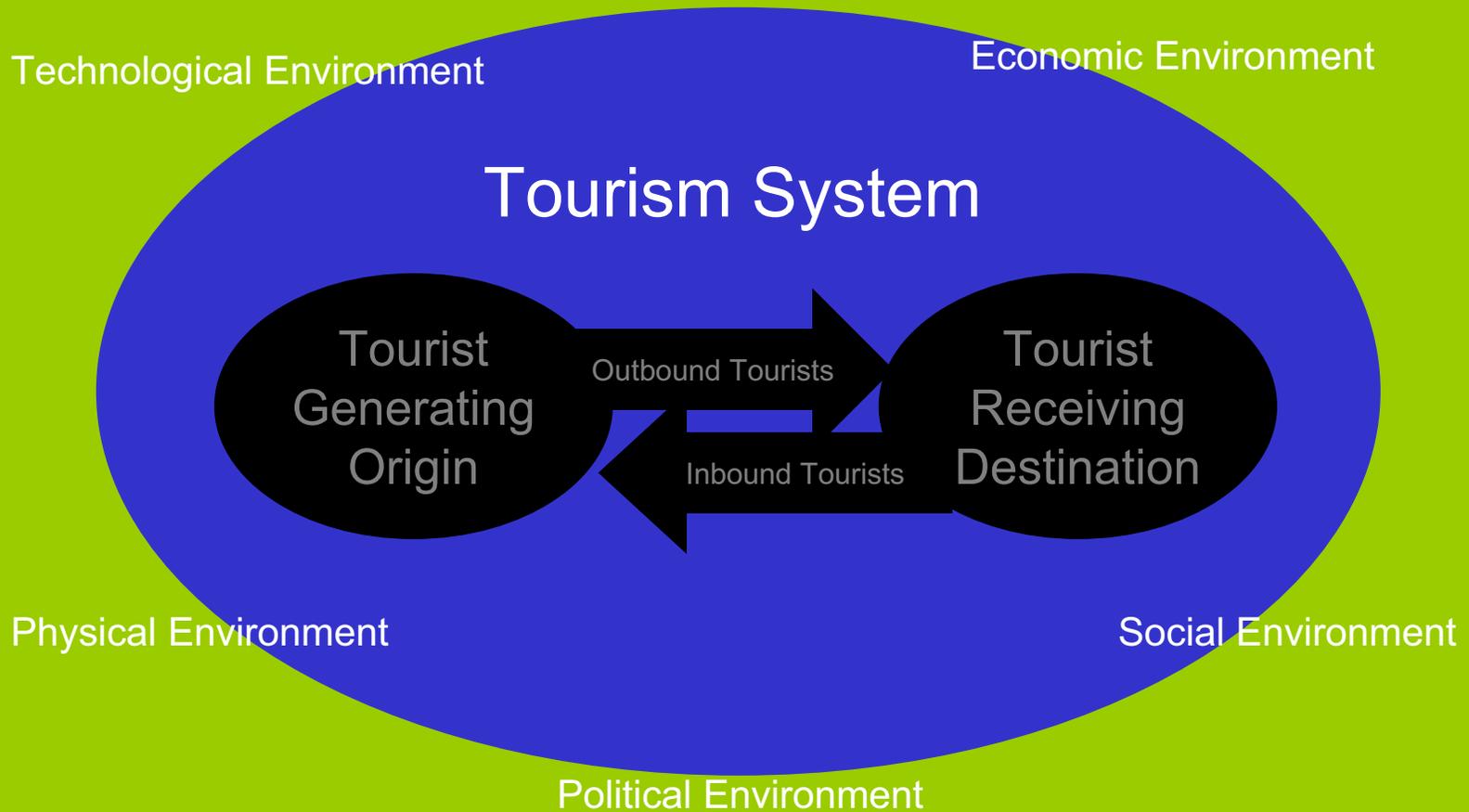
Mountain Ecotourism Cluster



Where are we now?

What are the important ecotourism issues--problems or opportunities--which can be realistically addressed now given the resources available and competitive situation

What is Tourism?



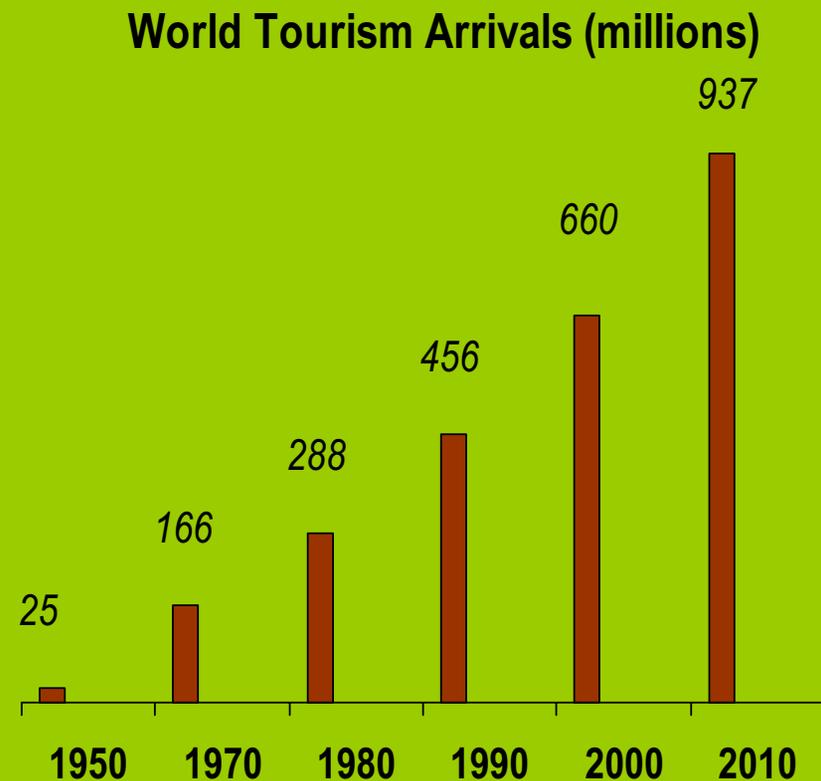
Source: N. Leiper

Tourism

The World's Largest Industry

International Visitors

- Arrivals will grow 4.1% per year
- Spending will grow 6.7% per year

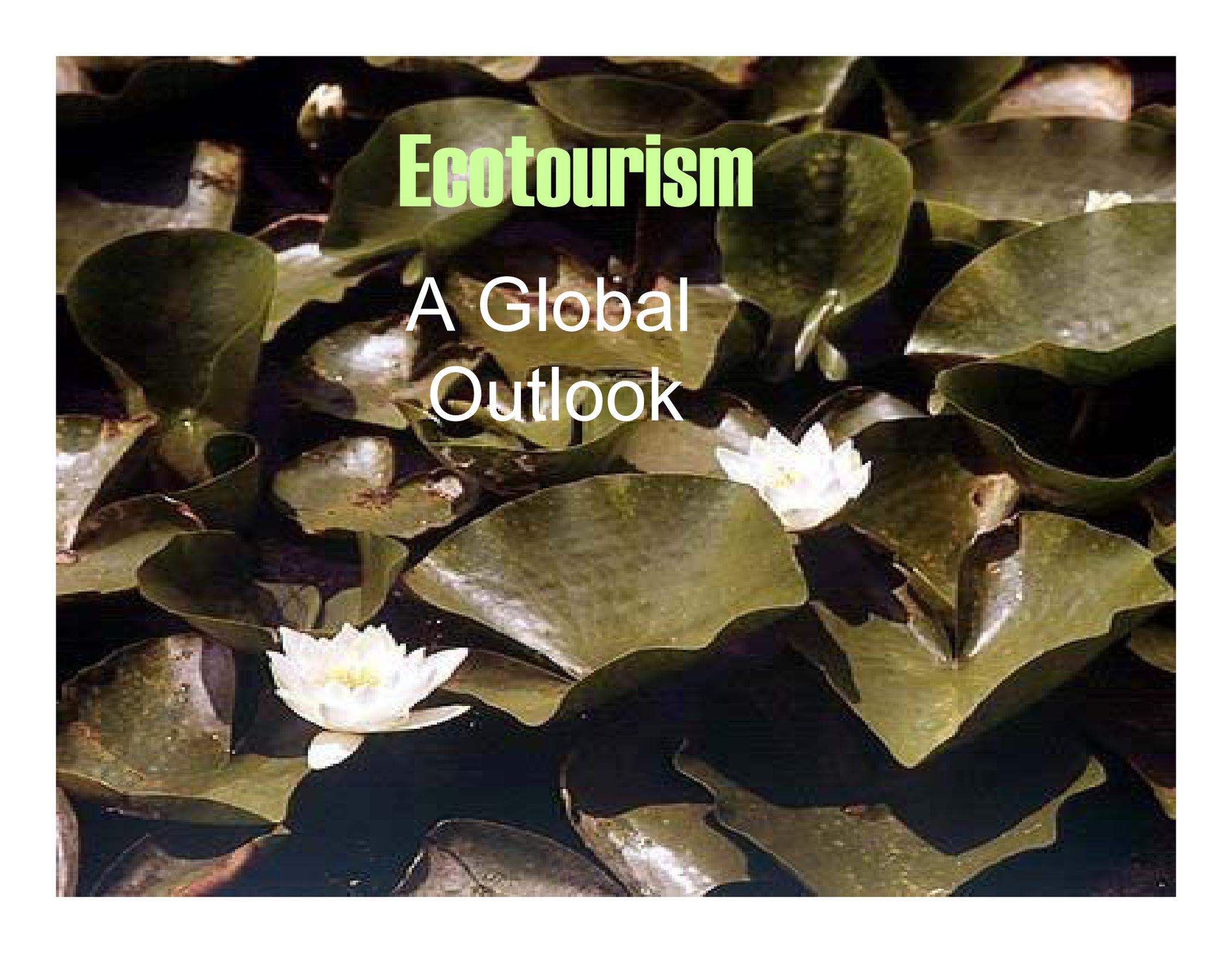


Source: WTO Vision 2020

Tourism

The World's Largest Industry-- 2001 estimates

- Tourism will generate 664 million arrivals
- Tourists will spend US \$2.1 trillion
- Tourism capital investment will total US \$657 billion
- Tourism will employ 78 million people

A photograph of a pond filled with large, dark green lily pads. Two white water lilies are in bloom, one in the lower left and one in the middle right. The background is dark, suggesting a night or low-light setting.

Ecotourism

A Global Outlook

Ecotourism

What is it?



- Sustainable tourism
all types of tourism, whether based on natural or human resources, that contribute to sustainable development.
- Nature tourism
all tourism dependent on natural resources.
- Ecotourism
nature tourism that is responsible, conserves the natural environment and sustains the well-being of local people.

Ecotourism

“ECOTOURISM is tourism that involves traveling to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated natural areas with the specific objective of studying, admiring and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals, as well as any existing cultural areas”

{Policies for Maximum Natural Tourism}



Ecotourism

Essentials



Positive Commitment To Biodiversity Conservation

Community Participation & Empowerment

Environmental Education Of Stakeholders

Viable Business

Ecotourism

U.S. Quick Facts



- 8 million US travelers (7%) have taken at least ONE ECOTRIP
- Bird watchers
80 million Americans interested – accounts for \$14 billion on equipment, travel and related expenses
- Skin and scuba diving
3 million divers in the US, increasing 16% annually
500 thousand new divers certified annually

Ecotourism Principles



The natural, historical, cultural and related biodiversity resources used for tourism are conserved for continuous use in the future, while still bringing benefits to the present society.

Tourism development is planned and managed so that it does not generate serious economic, environmental or socio-cultural problems in local communities.

The overall environmental quality of the tourism area is maintained and improved where needed.

A high level of tourist satisfaction is maintained so that the tourist destinations will retain their marketability and popularity.

The benefits of tourism are widely spread throughout the society.

Ecotourism

Planning Tools



Ecotourism Planning

Stakeholders



- Consumers
- Local population/Pos
- Governments
- Public Organizations
- Training / Learning Institutions

- Private sector (transport, lodging, foodservice, suppliers)
- Financing facilities
- Development Agencies
- NGOs

Ecotourism Planning

Government Tools



- Policies and strategies
- Tourism master plans
- PA Management Plan
- PA Visitor Use Plan
- Laws, regulations, norms
- EIA, EIS
- Concession / Licenses
- Land Use / Zoning

- Land Tenure Instruments
- Committees
- Taxes, incentives, credit
- Fee yield management
- Access / Infrastructure
- Marketing / Promotion
- Education / Training
- Enforcement / Audits

Ecotourism Planning

Industry Tools



- Business / Marketing Plans
- Best Practices / Codes / Standards
- Eco-Audits
- Self-accreditation / regulation
- Certification by independent bodies
- Product Clubs
- Human Resource Development

Ecotourism Planning

Development Tools



Tax Incentives—grace period from property taxes

Tax credits—for private conservation initiatives

Low interest loans—historic renovation projects

Cluster development—preserving open space

Tourism tax—finance public land acquisition

Transfer tax on real estate—finance land acquisition

Municipal bonds—raise money for land acquisition

Debt Swaps & Conservation easements

Ecotourism Planning

Community Tools



- Organization - Building the Team
- Situation Analysis: Product Inventory and Market assessment
- Creating a Vision of the Future
- Action Planning and Implementation
- Continuous Monitoring and Periodic Evaluations

Ecotourism Planning

Ecolabeling & Certification



- Tourism - vested interest in the environment
- Voluntary Actions - ensure long-term commitments and improvements
- Marketing Potential
 - Good Public Relations/Good Neighbor
 - Increase in consumer awareness

Tourism Planning

Why Ecolabeling?



- Raise environmental awareness - industry stakeholders, government, consumers
- Involve small and medium size business in environmental activities
- Improve environmental performance especially by targeting areas where protection is lacking
- Clearinghouse of information to consumers, industry, etc.

Source: UNEP Ecolabels in the Tourism Industry, 1998

Sustainable Tourism Certification



- Certification of Sustainable Tourism. Green certification program developed by Costa Rica and being used in other Central American countries
- **Green Globe (International)**
- **Tour Operators Initiative.** Cooperative effort of UNEP, WTO and UNESCO.
- **Blue Flag (Europe):** A certification program promoted by the Foundation For Environmental Education in Europe, which is a non-governmental organization and is aimed primarily at the preservation and responsible use of beaches in Europe.
- **Committed to Green (Europe):** Certification program developed by the European Golf Association's Ecology Unit.
- **Ecotel (International):** Developed by HVS Eco Services, the environmental consulting division of HVS dedicated exclusively to the hospitality industry.
- **Code of Practice for Ecotourism Operators (Regional):** Code developed in 1991 by the Ecotourism Association of Australia to foster ethics and standards for ecotourism and to facilitate understanding and interaction between the tourist, host communities, the tourism industries and government and conservation groups.

Ecotourism Trends



CONSUMERS

- Segmentation
- Greening of Industry
- Independence
- Activity & Participation

INDUSTRY

- Big X Small
- Ecolodges
- Competition
- Brand Identity

Ecotourism Trends



- The World Travel and Tourism Council estimates a 10-15% GROWTH per annum in ecotourism.
{Positive Impact, Autumn, 1997}
- Outdoor recreation, adventure travel and nature based tourism generated REVENUE of over \$10 billion in 1998.
{Adventure Travel Society}

Ecotourists

Activities Ranking

Hiking	45
Rafting	35
Camping	23
Cycling	18
Wildlife viewing	14
Kayaking	12
Visiting parks	12
Skiing	11
Backpacking	10
Canoeing	10
Touring	10
Sailing	10
Other water activities	10



Source:
North American Ecotourism Markets, Pamela Wright, 1996

Ecotourists

Willingness to Pay



	<u>General consumer</u>	<u>Experienced ecotourist</u>
\$500.00	15%	7%
\$501.00 - \$1,000	25%	29%
\$1,000 - \$1,500	21%	26%
\$1,501 - \$2,000	16%	21%
\$2,001 - \$3,000	14%	16%
\$3,000 - \$5,000	6%	7%
\$5,000+	2%	1%

* per 7 days

Source:

North American Ecotourism Markets, Pamela Wright, 1996

Adventure Travel



- **Definition**

Activities of tourists that are physically challenging and involve some element of real or perceived danger
{WTO}

- **Soft Adventure--e.g.:**

hiking, birdwatching, wildlife viewing, fishing, etc.

- **Hard Adventure --e.g.:**

white water rafting, rock and mountain climbing, hunting, scuba diving, etc.

Mountain Ecotourism

- Primarily focused on low-impact adventure activities
- Certain degree of risk (i.e. low oxygen, rugged terrain)
- Cultural - trekking, aboriginal areas, resource-based wellness sites/hot springs
- Adventure oriented water (kayaking, rafting), land (mountain climbing, snow shoeing, cross country skiing) and air (aerial wildlife/nature viewing, hot air ballooning)



Mountain Ecotourism

Guidelines

- Attractions are based on natural features
- Must balance protection of natural resources, needs of local people and desires of tourists
- Cultural heritage is often key in the attractiveness of the mountain region



Mountain Ecotourism

Examples



Mountain Ecotourism

European Outlook



- Centered in the Alps and lesser ranges (Pyrenees, Cantarians, Taurus, Apennines, Balkans, etc.)
- Emerging mountain ecotourism
- Focus is on small scale adventure and cultural activities
- Similar to US mountain tourism development

Mountain Ecotourism

Mt. Pinatubo Trek



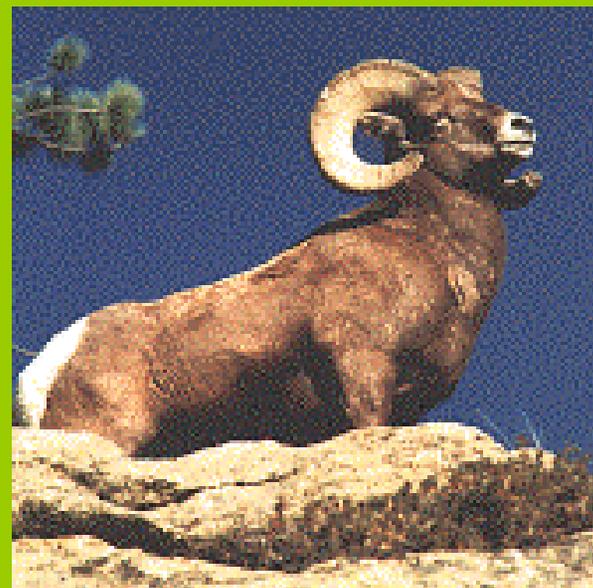
- Objective: to improve local quality of life
- Department of Tourism worked with indigenous people to accept increasing number of foreigners already coming to the area
- Created new trek to preserve other landscape
- New tourism strategy
- Results
 - New Visitor center from donations, photo museum
 - 1200 tourists a month
 - Local residents receive P3,000 (average) in guide and porter fees monthly

Mountain Ecotourism

Estes Park, Colorado



- Local Asset - Wildlife (Big Horn Sheep and Elk)
- Private Development Diminishing Wintering Habitat
- Cooperative Project with Park Service
- Approval of a .25% Sales Tax to Finance Land Acquisition
- Park Promotion Activities to Extend Tourist Season



Wildlife, Estes Park, CO

Teaming Up With Public Land Managers

Mountain Ecotourism

Red Lodge, Montana



- From Mining to Tourism
- “Festival of Nations”
- Boys and Girls Club
- Water Testing Program
- Beartooth Front Corporation
- Found the Importance of Community Empowerment



Red Lodge, Montana
Preserved historic buildings

Recognize the Role of the NGO's

Science

Integrating scientific research and conservation in ecotourism planning-- AAAS Conference on Heritage Tourism in the Next Millennium, Panama, 1998



- Tourism-Conservation-Tourism (TCR) Strategic Alliance
- TCR design team lead by Frank Gehry

Conservation International

Ecotourism Operator Standards



Operator Standards

Company-Wide Policies



- **Standards committee established**
- **Use of local transportation**
- **Open line of communication for clients, suppliers and staff**
- **Staff and partners - aware and knowledgeable**
- **Donate minimum to social or environmental causes**

Operator Standards

Marketing



- **P**romote standards constantly
- **E**nvironmental issues in marketing efforts
- **M**arketing materials

Operator Standards

Tour Operations



- Info on local conservation projects
- Visit to Protected Areas included
- Employment and/or business opportunities to local people
- Food predominantly local
- Vegetarian option available
- Hygiene training provided

Operator Standards

Tour Operations



- Suppliers encouraged to improve environmental / social standards
- Maximum group size
- Local guides in every tour
- Ratio of leaders to tourists
- No sale of endangered species
- Encourage suppliers not to keep captive wildlife and/or mistreat animals

Operator Standards

Accommodation



- All hotels have less than 30 rooms
- Majority local ownership
- Local character displayed by facility
- No daily change of linen
- Waste and resource management
- Fair treatment of employees

Operator Standards Management



- Local Involvement and Control
- Running with weights
- Conflicts:
government, private sector, communities, NGOs
- Risk X Authenticity
- People or the Environment

Challenges

- Tourism is worldwide; communities cannot just “play” in tourism
- Cost of travel requires staying competitive
- Selling experiences, not just things
- Developing the concept of “carrying capacity” for communities
- Private sector coopetition needed
- Cooperation between public and private sectors
- Infrastructure is critical



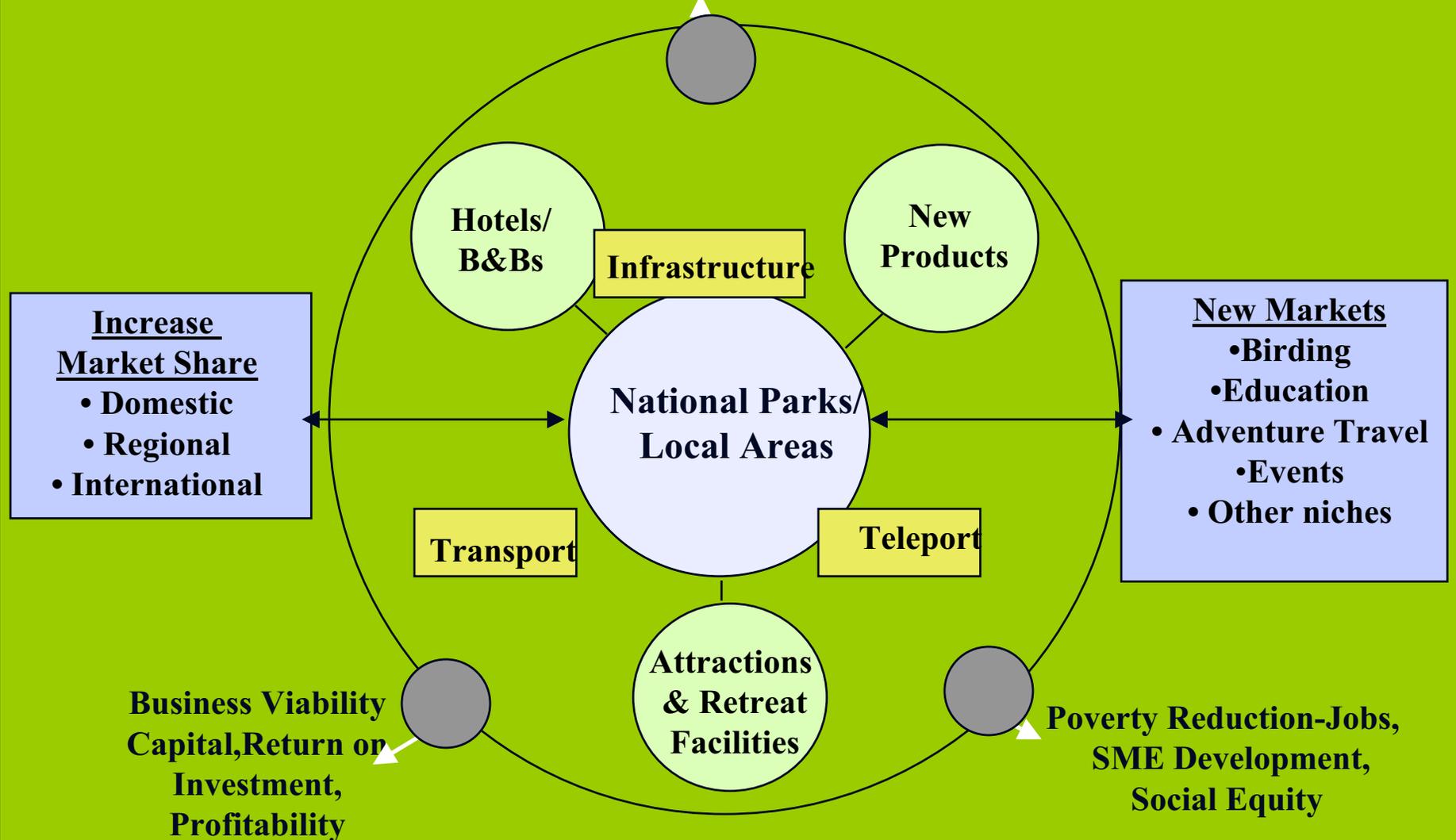
More Challenges

- Preparing for a service orientation
- Small population bases
- Limited financial resources
- Isolation from transportation networks
- Misunderstanding tourism industry
- Competing with neighbors
- Leadership
- Balancing environmental protection
- Communications & research



Mountain Ecotourism in Bulgaria

Preservation, Conservation & Enhancement of Natural & Cultural Resources



Where do we want to be?

A shared vision of a desired
future for our pilot area

Visioning

“It is the year 2006 and ecotourism is thriving in Bulgaria! Local citizens, municipalities, the private sector and National Park managers appreciate the vital importance that ecotourism plays in sustainable development.” Describe your vision in terms of desired market position, product offered, & success indicators

What unifying themes are stated or implied in the vision statements?

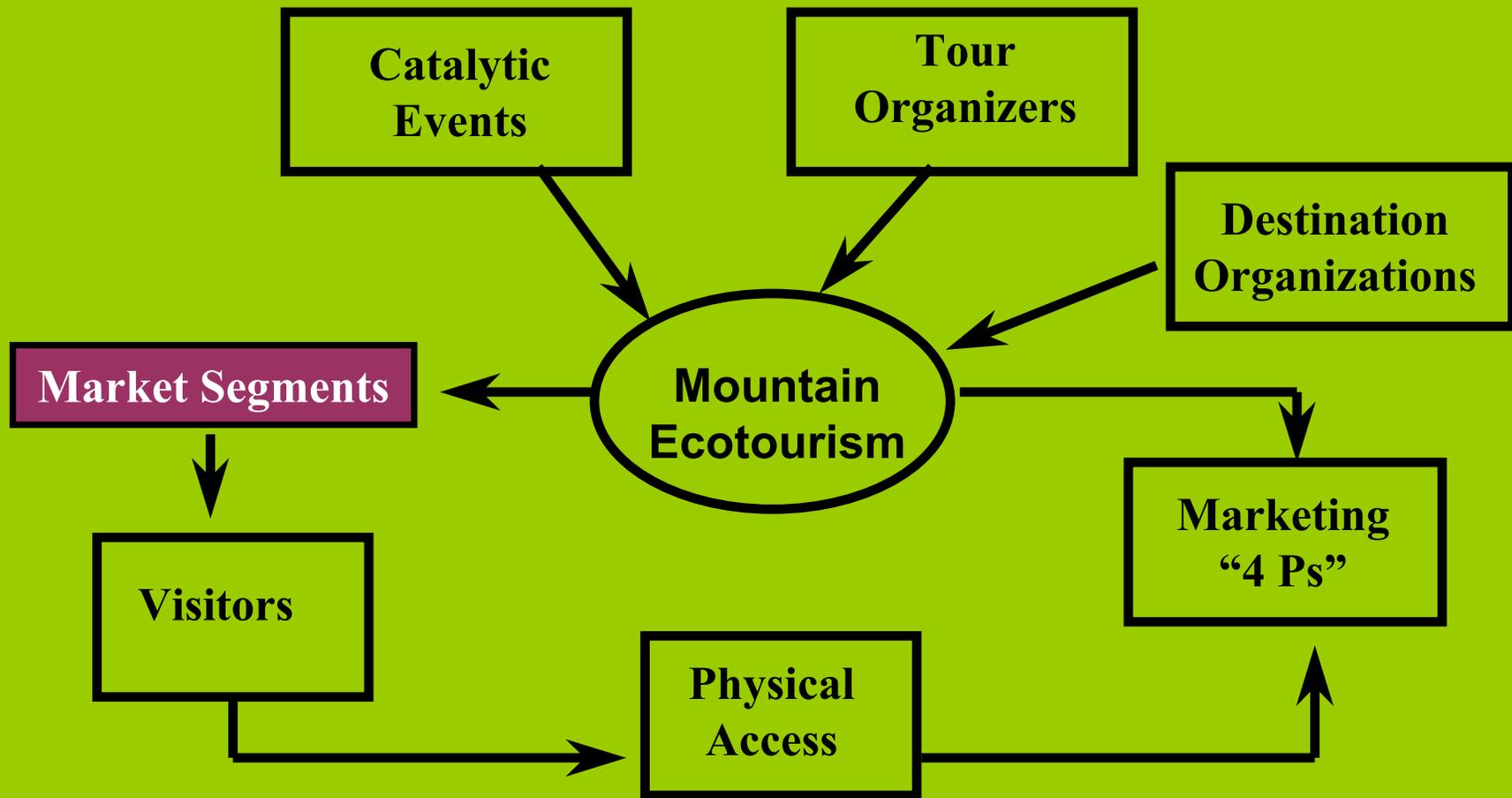
Vote for your highest priority themes from the list. You may want to consider the following criteria:

- Potential for public/private partnerships with National Parks that can be implemented over the short term using existing resources
- Capacity to mobilize community support, stimulate economic development and reduce poverty
- Meets sustainable development and biodiversity conservation goals

How do we get there?

Formulate actions and implementation strategies that are realistic, consensus-building, and achievable

Competitive Networks
Systematic Links Between
Demand and Supply



Action Planning

What priority actions can be initiated through competitive networks involving cooperative efforts by National Parks and key stakeholders ? Describe the actions & expected outcomes

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Next Steps

- Create task forces to implement high priority actions with GW Consulting Project students during the first 2 weeks in June
- Plan high visibility “kick off” events celebrating Year of Ecotourism and Year of Mountains in 2002



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REPORT
on
Ecotourism Workshop
held in Samokov Municipality
16-17 May, 2001

prepared by Ms. Nely Georgieva

On May 16 and 17 in the village of Mala Tsarkva, Samokov municipality, a Workshop on Ecotourism was held. The meeting was part of the Ecotourism development program in the municipality. The meeting was initiated by the Rila National Park Directorate in cooperation with ARD.

The program was prepared after a needs assessment conducted by the Ecotourism Initiative group, to determine the necessity to clarify ecotourism nature and standards, to inform about existing world practices as well as to clarify Initiative group priorities and plan its activities.

Meeting attended Ecotourism Initiative group representatives from Samokov municipality - private contractors hotel keepers and restaurant owners from villages Mala Tsarkva, Govedartsi and Beli Iskar, representatives of Samokov municipality and National park Directorate, and ARD representatives. Prof. Don Hawkins from George Washington University was invited as a consultant to the Eco tourism Initiative group.

First stage of the Workshop was aimed at sharing facts and points of view concerning Initiative group development for the period between the two meetings - from the beginning to mid- May. The participants said that the most important issues were as follows:

- Raising the activity of the Initiative group members;
- Improving coordination between the parties in concern;
- Informing people from the settlements around the park on Initiative group intentions;
- Gathering photo and information materials representing the possibility to develop ecotourism in the settlements around the park;
- Carry out a meeting with the Initiative group to discuss the materials collected and to share ideas.

At next stage Prof. Don Hawkins presented the concept and standards for the development of ecotourism as well as certain practices from the experience in this sphere worldwide.

The presentation provoked *discussion on major topics* put by the Initiative group, i.e.:

- What is the world experience of applying ecotourism development programs;
- How and where it is possible to seek information about tourist services market;
- What function do standards in Ecotourism products and services have;
- What is the specifics of the transportation services in Ecotourism and how do they integrate with products and services;
- Is there a description of the experience of other related parks in ecotourism sphere;
- How services in a tourist package are structured.

The possibilities to develop ecotourism on the basis of cooperation with Rila National Park were determined from the following viewpoint:

- Events initiation (special subject weekends, craft demonstration, celebrations in the park);
- Necessity the products and services to be tested on Bulgarian market primarily;
- Settlements around the park differentiation as entries to the Rila National park.

It was made clear that on ecotourism activities planning the following approaches could be used:

- A/ Market study and study of the group needs to which services and products are targeted.
- B/ Planning based on the existing good experience (a starting point planning).

One of the main Initiative group needs was to outline the road that all interested in ecotourism development must walk and to determine the beginning and the stages of the road.

For this purpose the participants were given an opportunity to share and discuss their ideas about the future of their business during the next 7 years. Common vision for the future included ideas for environmental protection, improvement of the services and the conditions of their offering, park infrastructure building, improvement of the skills to work with tourists, development of cooperation between the park and local community, increasing the number of tourists and work load of the facilities.

Based on this common idea the aims of Ecotourism Initiative group were determined as follows:

- Environmental protection;
- Partnership development;
- Professionalism and skills mastering;
- Increase collaboration with the Municipality;
- Infrastructure improvement;
- Financial stability of group's activities;
- Improvement of the legal frame for ecotourism development;
- Joint activity for strategic marketing implementation and tourist product forming;
- Tourist safety improvement.

After a process of prioritizing, the following aims were identified as the most important for the Initiative group:

1. *Environmental protection and improvement of cooperation between the park and local community.*
2. *Product development and marketing.*
3. *Provision of information resources and infrastructure improvement.*

The Initiative group suggested *specific activities* that might contribute to the achievement of particular aims.

Activities to achieve Aim 1

- Training for the local people by the National Park Directorate;
- Production of plates showing the rules of how tourists must behave in the park;
- Preparation of recreation centers;
- Put up a marking;
- Organizing cleaning actions around park's territory;
- Application of the principle "carry in - carry out" for solid wastes;
- Park popularization and interpretation;
- Provision of information about rare and endangered species;
- Popularization of norms concerning Park's products use;
- Park valuables celebrations and organization;
- Car access restriction.

Activities to achieve Aim 2

- Specific tourist products and services demand and supply study;
- Products creation training;
- Inventory completion and information summary;
- Park presentation components development;
- Leaders recruiting and training;
- New ideas amongst the local community and the park - study and identification.

Activities to achieve Aim 3

- Information materials summary;
- Information booklet preparation;
- Cleaning actions organization;
- Studying the way of information to the customers;
- Putting up park information billboards;
- Data base creation;
- Building up the vision of the Information center;
- Coordination of ideas in order to improve the infrastructure with the local authority;
- Creation of a strategy for Public relations;
- Internet website creation with an option to book rooms.

Work groups for each priority aim were formed and the groups prepared an action plan determining main objectives, activities and responsibilities.

**Action Plan concerning Aim 1:
“Environmental protection and improvement of cooperation
between the park and local community”**

Work group - Mr. Krassimir Runtov, Mr. Nikola Dzhambazki, Mr. Emil Bogdanov

Sub-aims	Activities	Responsibilities
<i>Subaim 1:</i> Raising local people confidence in Park through training and information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Park Management plan popularization • Ecological training 	Park Section Head Mr. Krassimir Runtov
<i>Subaim 2:</i> Park infrastructure improvement through cooperation with local community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local people engagement in infrastructure building • Local traditions study 	Mr. E. Bogdanov Mayor of Samokov
<i>Subaim 3:</i> Special events initiation and organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Popularization and organization of feasts connected with the protection of the nature • Opening Park Entries celebration 	N. Dzhambazki Park Section Head, National Park Directorate (NPD) - Public relations NPD

**Action Plan concerning Aim 2:
Production and production marketing**

Work group - Mr. Christo Konyarski, Mr. Christo Zarkin, Mr. Latchezar Stefanov

Sub-aims	Activities	Responsibilities
<i>Subaim 1:</i> Improvement of the skills connected with tourist products creation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training on the nature of tourist products and qualitative and quantitative indices they must correspond • Tourist Products Handbook Preparation 	
<i>Subaim 3:</i> Market study and marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Market needs study and National park visitors and their needs characteristic • Website 	
<i>Subaim 4:</i> Journey of the product to the market study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Study of the possibilities to establish an own tourist agency • Identification of an appropriate existing agency 	

Tourist product recommendations:

- To reflect the local sights and unique nature and common heritage
- To include visits to Rila National park
- To respond to the high quality ecotourism standards.

Action Plan concerning Aim 3:**Provision of information resources and infrastructure improvement**

Work group - Ms Lyubka Kyoseva, Ms Lyudmila Stoykova, Mr. Ivan Stoynev, Mr. Vladimir Tchapkanski

Sub-aims	Activities	Responsibilities
<i>Subaim 1:</i> Data base creation and improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expansion and improvement of existing inventory • Creation of an uniform format for object description • Appropriate data base information input 	Lyudmila, Ivan, Nickolay Prof. Don Hawkins Prof. Don Hawkins
<i>Subaim 2:</i> Settlements infrastructure improvement (billboards, wastes, streets)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Procedures regarding permits for billboards lifting • Meeting with mayors concerning solid wastes disposal management • Preliminary study of the options for infrastructure projects external financing 	Mr. Vladimir Tchapkanski Lyubka Kyosseva, Vladimir Tchapkanski Lyubka Kyosseva, Lyudmila Stoykova, Kamelia Georgieva, Lyubka Kyosseva
<i>Subaim 3:</i> Creation of an Information center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Study of the possibilities • Development of a strategy 	Vladimir Tchapkanski
<i>Subaim 4:</i> Public relations strategy development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation of an events' calendar • Provision of information to the local authority about the results of the USA students visit • Informing the population from the villages 	Lyudmila Stoykova Lyubka Kyosseva Vladimir Tchapkanski

Groups' work plans were presented and considered by all Initiative group members. It was decided that the plans shall be further developed and improved.

At the end of the work meeting the Initiative group has determined its most important further steps as follows:

- Work meeting to be held on 29 May 2001 on subjects concerning the development of the plans and preparation of the meetings with the USA students.
- Making contacts with Technical school of Tourism, Samokov.
- Attracting new people for implementing certain activities.

Conclusions and Recommendations

1. The beginning of Group consolidation was laid. The participants identify themselves to a great extent as an Initiative group. The group has led the initiative for gathering business oriented information materials as planned on previous meeting.
2. It is necessary to discuss the *limits of the group* because at this stage an excessive expansion of participation is not advisable - too broad a participation could lead to loss of feeling of authorship connected with the process of products' creation and lack of distinctness when taking on a responsibility. Other considerable danger of group's excessive expansion is the appearance of eventual inner competition, which is useful in principle, but at this early stage could lead to a negative dynamics within the group. From this point of view the presence of a consolidated *active group* that attracts new participants for discussion and implementation of *specific planned activities* will be useful.
3. Park sections heads need assistance when attracting local community because they must be in the clear with the various stages and the necessity to apply them as well as with the advantages and shortcomings of applying specific methods for work with the public. This assessment of methods and approaches of work with local community necessitates because of the fact that Samokov municipality pilot project is being implemented in several settlements.
4. There are certain expectations from the trainees of Prof. Don Hawkins. The organization of a common work process during students' training will be important for the Initiative group because the process will allow people to see each other every day and share the progress and difficulties of work. If the process is based only on the work of a separate group and only one final meeting is envisaged then, probably, there will be some products but it will create and deepen the differentiation within the group.
5. The Initiative group must have Prof. Hawkins' preliminary subject program and his students in order to form separate projects' work groups and if necessary, new people to be invited, taking into consideration the private time of each participant (the process of work will be for a long time and will need good preliminary coordination).
6. During the meeting the necessity to inform the public and exchange experience with municipalities where ecotourism is well developed was stated. As this type of tourism is new for Bulgaria it will be good the Initiative group to hold meetings with representatives of corresponding Initiative group from Central Balkan National park, of Pirin Tourist Forum. These meetings must be carried out a little later because it is necessary to ensure authenticity of the process of work of each separate group in the beginning of their activity.



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REPORT

on
Ecotourism Workshop
town of Kalofer, 18-19 May, 2001

prepared by Ms. Nely Georgieva

On May 18 and 19 in Kalofer a Workshop on Ecotourism was held as part of the pilot project for ecotourism development in the municipality of Karlovo. The meeting was initiated by the Central Balkan National Park Directorate in cooperation with ARD.

The program for the meeting was prepared after an Ecotourism Initiative group needs study, to determine the necessity to clarify ecotourism nature and standards, to inform about existing world practices, and because of the necessity to clarify the Initiative group priorities and plan its activities.

Meeting attended Ecotourism Initiative group representatives from Kalofer - private contractors hotel keepers and restaurant owners, representatives of Kalofer City and Library Halls, Central Balkan National Park Directorate representatives, and ARD representatives. Prof. Don Hawkins from George Washington University was invited as a consultant to the Eco tourism Initiative group.

First stage of the Work meeting was aimed at sharing facts and points of view concerning Initiative group development for the period between the two meetings - from end-April to mid-May. According to the Initiative group the most important issues during this period were connected with:

- Raising public interest concerning Initiative group activity and possibilities for tourism development;
- Raising the activity of the Initiative group members;
- Realizing the necessity of good planning and coordination of the activity of the parties in concern;
- Central Balkan National Park and Ecotourism Initiative group joint participation in preparing public meeting with the consultant on ecotourism.

At next stage of the meeting Prof. Don Hawkins presented *the concept and standards for the development of ecotourism* as well as certain practices concerning the experience in the sphere of tourism worldwide.

Main recommendations to the Initiative group were connected with the necessity to change the point of view - from the past to create a vision for the future assessing the present. The possibilities to develop ecotourism are connected with the following:

- Cooperation with the Central Balkan National Park and creation of common businesses for the local community on the basis of natural product offers;
- Presence of preserved traditions and culture in the city;
- Possibility to promote traditional crafts.

First step of the joint planning process was the creation of a vision for the future of Ecotourism Initiative group. As a result of sharing views of what future expects their business, the participants have determined the following aims:

- Offering more tourist products;
- Development of a tourist product that represents the traditional way of life, crafts and feasts;
- Establish park infrastructure;
- Environmental protection;
- Tourist attractions development;
- Attraction of more tourists;
- Development of cooperation between the Central Balkan National Park and local community;
- Infrastructure improvement;
- Development of the tourist information infrastructure and better communication with the tourists;
- Improvement of the social status (higher income and investments).

Ecotourism Initiative group determined the following aims as priority one:

1. *Environmental protection and development of cooperation between the Central Balkan National Park and local community.*
2. *Income and investments increase through tourist products development.*
3. *Tourist information infrastructure development and better communication with the tourists.*

The Initiative group suggested concrete activities that might contribute to achieve the priority aims selected.

Activities to achieve Aim 1

- Creation of a school club named Green patrols;
- Development of the Club's activity within Information center;
- Development of a system for trespassers sanctions and stimulation for those who protect the environment;
- Resound and publicity of these measures;
- Introducing ecological training in schools;
- Joint celebration of Park feasts and events;
- Informing local people and tourists about Park's valuables;
- Sunday eco-school;
- Collaboration with local cable TV;
- Development of a system to stimulate local producers and contractors that keep to ecological standards.

Activities to achieve Aim 2

- Clarifying the concept for tourist products;
- Presentation of traditional crafts and ecological products (“Crafts’ street”);
- Inventory deepening;
- Inventory results summary and finalization;
- Park presentation components - identifying and description;
- Ready products market presentation;
- Handbook on Tourist products creation;
- Assistance on possible sources of financing;
- Training on business-planning;
- Trade mark registration;
- Routes development;
- Human resources (local leaders, craftsmen) study.

Activities to achieve Aim 3

- Creation of an Internet Ecotourism Website;
- Creation of an city Information center;
- Information center strategy and business plan development;
- Data base creation and development;
- Billboards putting up;
- Preparation of a map of the city and the Park together with its tourist sites and attractions;
- Keeping contacts with media and public;
- Advertisements preparation;
- Identifying local people - interpreters;
- Video record traditional feasts and customs and preparation of an advertisement video cassette;
- Feasts and customs inventory.

For each priority aim work groups were formed and they started developing an *action plan* including specific aims and objectives description, activities and distribution of responsibilities.

Action Plan concerning Priority Aim 1: Environmental protection and cooperation between the Central Balkan National Park and local community

**Work group - Nanko Minkov, Liliana Paralingova, George Philipov, Toncho Tonchev,
Donka Ivanova**

Sub-aims	Activities	Responsibilities
Subaim 1: Raising citizens’ and tourists’ responsibility towards nature	• Work with local pupils for Initiative group activities popularization	Nanko, George, Liliana
	• Local volunteers motivation to participate in park’s infrastructure	Liliana, Donka

<i>Subaim 2: Partnership development</i>	assembly	George, Nanko
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Come to an agreement for joint actions between the City Hall and National Park for certain trespassers sanctions • Park's birthday joint celebration • Exchange of experience with Rila and Pirin National parks 	Nanko, Tsvetana

Action Plan concerning Priority Aim 2:

Income and investments increase through tourist products development

Work group - Nikolay Staykov, Ivan Doctorski, Maria Markova, Tsvetana Petkova, Svetla Yoveva

Sub-aims	Activities	Responsibilities
<i>Subaim 1: Tourist products Handbook and training program</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Handbook preparation and development • Workshop on tourist products preparation • Report on Workshop results 	GW City Hall, National Park Directorate (NPD) ARD
<i>Subaim 2: New products development and inventory deepening</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New routes development • Human resources and trade marks study • Market niches study through certain materials review, meetings with tourist offices, etc. • Technical assistance 	Park Section, Mountain Rescue service Svetla, Tsvetana Prof. Hawkins, Velitchka Naydenova ARD
<i>Subaim 3: Assistance on possible sources of finance</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finance market study • Project preparation 	ARD Work groups

Action Plan concerning Priority Aim 3:

Tourist information infrastructure development and better communication with the tourists

Work group - Petya Kovatcheva, Lyudmila Karadzhova, Liliana Dzhondzhorova, Dobrinka Tsutsova

Sub-aims	Activities	Responsibilities
<i>Subaim 1: Data base</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actualization of the 	Donka, Dobrinka

creation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> existing inventory • Events calendar preparation • Software installation 	Svetla Park Section, Troyan, Pirin Tourist Forum
<i>Subaim 2:</i> Marketing and advertisement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internet website preparation and creation • Provision of Website operator 	Prof. Hawkins
<i>Subaim 3:</i> Public relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of a public relations strategy • Organization of open meetings before and at the end of students' visit in Sofia • Provision of regular information for City Hall and Municipality 	NPD ARD Nanko
<i>Subaim 4:</i> Creation of an Information center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regulation of the rules in order to use the building • Information Center strategy • Business plan development • Information center design and implementation 	Petya, Nanko Kamelya, NPD, Initiative group Prof. Hawkins Consultant, Kamelia Georgieva
<i>Subaim 5:</i> Information infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selection of suitable places outside the Park • Project preparation • Specifying the procedure for issuing permits • Billboards and plates production and lifting up 	Liliana Donka
	Park infrastructure - preparation and installation	NPD

Groups' work plans were presented and considered on a general session. It was decided that the plans shall be further developed.

At the end of the work meeting the Ecotourism Initiative group determined its most important *further steps* as follows:

- Work meeting to be held on 30 May 2001 to review the results from the meeting, held on 18-19 May, the development of the plans and oncoming work with the trainees-consultants.

- Attending work meetings with the trainees.

Conclusions and recommendations

1. The work meeting had a motivating effect on Initiative group members. The created action plan arranged to a great extent people's concepts and realized their expectation with regard to the pilot project. Yet, some members of the group have greater expectations about investments, which are a priority task.
2. The oncoming Pilot project meetings, for which the Initiative group was informed, acted mobilizing in renewing some of the existing tourist facilities.
3. The Initiative group has an authorship feeling with regard to the preparation of the open meeting with Prof. Hawkins. People have exerted common efforts in informing the public and organizing the meeting. The open meeting provided new information about ecotourism standards for the people from Kalofer and at the same time served to identify new people interested in the pilot project.
4. Assistance to the Park Section Head on the methods and stages of attracting people and work with public is necessary in order to have clear idea for the effects of actions taken.
5. In order to implement the Action plan new people most probably will be attracted. Limits of the group must be considered because a large and active group at this stage will delay the process and it will need more time to structure itself. At the same time new people are bearers of new ideas. I think that for the time being it is O.K. the *Initiative group to be the active group* that will organize interaction with new people, attracting them for discussion and implementation of *specific planned activities*.
6. The oncoming work with Prof. Hawkins trainees must be organized as a general process - subject work groups that, however, will be able to see each other every day (for example, at the end of the day) to share their progress. This type of work process organization will create a feeling of community.
7. The Initiative group must have Prof. Hawkins' preliminary subject program and his students in order Initiative group members to organize their time in a way to fully participate in the whole work process, expected to be quite long.
8. It will be useful for the group to organize meetings in Rila National Park and Pirin Tourist Forum for exchange of experience. It is recommended these meetings to be held a little later in order to provide authenticity of the first work process.

Appendix 6

Maps of Rila and Central Balkan National Parks