

CASE STUDY OF ECO/RURAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN MONOSPITOVSKO BLATO

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ABSTRACT

The case study is presenting a successful story of development of eco and rural tourism in the area of Monospitovsko Blato. The Monospitovsko Blato is a swamp ecosystem in the Municipality of Bosilovo, Republic of Macedonia. The ecosystem is used for centuries from the local population for fishing, hunting and collecting medical plants. The current situation in the area of Monospitovsko Blato had shown that the usual income of the local population coming from the cultivation of horticultural crops is not satisfactory, so there is need for new and alternative sources of income. Their interest was the area to be developed in sustainable way which will attract visitor with different interests to the site. Since the site is placed in geographical position that has great potential for eco/rural tourism development, different activities were undertaken to develop and promote eco and rural tourism in the area of Monospitovsko Blato.

Key words: Monospitovsko Blato, swamp, Nature Monument, biodiversity, tourist site

INTRODUCTION

Despite the fact that Republic of Macedonia has three national parks, it is rich in mountains, springs and rivers, flora and fauna, the rural and ecotourism are undeveloped and the potential of natural beauties and rural areas is underestimated. This case study is presenting a successful story of development of eco and rural tourism in the area of Monospitovsko Blato as part of the project Development of eco/rural tourism in Municipality of Bosilovo, financed from the Neighbourhood Programme between Bulgaria and Macedonia, Grant scheme for Nature Protection, Valorisation of Cultural Heritage and Cooperation among Public Institutions at Regional/Local Level. The project activities were carried out from March 2007 to March 2008, where the Municipality of Bosilovo was the implementation body and Municipality of Garmen was project partner.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Monospitovsko Blato covers area of 400 ha and it is situated in the South-East Planning Region of Republic of Macedonia in the vicinity of village Monospitovo and it is under administration of Municipality of Bosilovo (Figure 1). The swamp is in the nearest vicinity of Koleshinski and Smolarski Waterfalls, the thermal springs Banja Bansko, 10 km from Strumica as the biggest town in the region and about 20 km from the Bulgarian border. The location of the swamp is giving good geographical predisposition to be developed in eco/rural tourist site.



Figure 1. Location of Monospitovsko Blato. Source: [5]

In 1987 it was proclaimed as Nature Monument because it is the only location in the country where the royal fern *Osmunda regalis* is growing. In the Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan of Republic of Macedonia form 2004, revitalization, traditional utilization of biodiversity and development of ecotourism for Monospitovsko Blato were recommended and foreseen [1] [4].

Approximately 9000 citizens are living and working in the nearest environment of the swamp. There is long tradition of collection of reed from the swamp, used for weaving ragcarpets locally called rogozini. The Monospitovsko Blato is very known hunting site. The hunting is very traditional; the hunters are making reed cottages (cheki) where they are waiting for the birds. Although reduced, the fishing is still performed in traditional way with kind of a handmade canoe (shayka) and handmade harpoons (sapkani) [4].

Taking into account all above-mentioned facts, Municipality of Bosilovo undertook first steps for sustainable development of Municipality of Bosilovo through development of eco and rural tourism in the area of Monospitovsko Blato. The objective of the action was reached with several activities: training in folklore and traditions; training in handcrafts; training for capacity building of local institutions involved in cultural and environmental management; youth camp for environmental and cultural issues; theatre show with traditional and folklore motifs; research of biodiversity, publication of monograph, multimedia CD and brochure about the Monospitovsko Blato; public forum Sustainable development of eco/rural tourism in Municipality of Bosilovo and micro region of Strumica; construction of 3 km access road from village Monospitovo to Monospitovsko Blato; construction of 1 km wooden pathway, 7 wooden cottages and 2 birdwatcher towers inside the swamp which are used for walks, hunting and they contribute to the specific landscape beauty (Figure 2) [2].



Figure 2. Monospitovsko Blato landscape with wooden cottage, pathways and watchtower.

The biodiversity of the swamp is moderately reported in [2], but the monograph Monospitovsko Blato. Last marsh in Macedonia [4] is first detailed ecological and biodiversity report of the Monospitovsko Blato. Six different types of biotopes are described: marsh, swamp, wet meadows, forests, fragments of bogs and agricultural fields.

CONCLUSIONS

The described activities that were undertaken within the grant were the first and initial steps towards development of eco and rural tourism in Monospitovsko Blato. This initiative shall be further developed with establishment of action and management plan for eco/ rural tourism in the area of Monospitovsko Blato and strong connection between local population and entrepreneurship.

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