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Montenegro: Wild Beauty

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Synopsis and Learning Outcomes

Despite tremendous pressures for rapid development of coastal tourism, mainly fuelled by foreign investment, the Ministry of Tourism together with its National Tourism Organisation (NTO) have “shifted the focus from traditional package tour holidays in coastal regions to creating a higher-yield tourism product based on nature tourism [and regional traditional culture]. This includes the promotion of local, authentic restaurants and hotel facilities, as well as the establishment of well-connected bicycle trails” (Montenegro National Tourism Organisation, 2010).

This case focuses on a 10-year development project in the region of the Biogradska Gora National Park in the north-eastern part of the country. A slow step-by-step development based on trust building, cooperation between five communities and the National Park and integration of regional stakeholders has resulted in sustainable tourism products that are successful in the international, mainly German-speaking market.

Naturefriends International (NFI) played an important role in the starting phase of the project in 1999 together with the country office of the OECD. Later on the tourism development project was financed by the Austrian Development Agency (ADA) and implemented by the ÖAR (Österreichische Arbeitsgemeinschaft für eigenständige Regionalentwicklung / Austrian Association for Endogenous Regional Development), while the author and NFI colleagues were continuously involved as experts, moderators or within monitoring processes.

The case of the development of the Bjelasica-Komovi region, with the central national park Biogradska Gora, shows that sustainable tourism development should have an eye on overall sustainable regional development, linking its specific products to regional resources and empowering regional stakeholders to gain benefit from the tourism development.

After completing this case study, learners should be able to demonstrate the following principles of sustainable tourism development:

- 1 The principle of participation of local and regional stakeholders to ensure the long-lasting success of the development.
- 2 The principle of local empowerment, especially in comparison with foreign investment.
- 3 The principle of systemic project management and step-by-step implementation plans.

■ Background

Montenegro (Crna Gora, meaning 'Black Mountain') was a part of former Yugoslavia. The country is situated with the Adriatic coast to the south-west and is bordered by Croatia to the west, Bosnia and Herzegovina to the north-west, Serbia to the north-east, Kosovo to the east and Albania to the south-east.

Montenegro has put in place several concrete measures in implementing the abstract ideas of sustainable development. In 2001 the Office for Sustainable Development was established. The same year, the Government adopted the first Masterplan for Sustainable Tourism Development. This plan clearly states that the responsibility for policy implementation lies with both an inter-ministerial committee and the private sector. In 2004 the 'Strategic Framework for Development of Sustainable Tourism in Northern and Central Montenegro' was adopted as the roadmap for development of the brand 'Wild Beauty' and, finally, the Parliament adopted the 'Tourism Development Strategy to 2020' in 2008.

There are 237,899 hectares under international protection and 100,000 hectares of pristine national parks, representing over 20 per cent of the country's 13,812 km² territory. In 1991 the Parliament articulated a bold vision, proclaiming Montenegro to be an Ecological State (National Tourism Organisation of Montenegro, 2010). Nature can therefore be understood as a logical resource for tourism development, especially in combination with the rich cultural landscapes of the hinterland.

The region of Bielasica-Komovi lies in the central north-east of the country and is characterised by its two mountain ranges: Bielasica – framing the Biogradska Gora National Park – and Komovi. The five municipalities of the region and the national park administrative body became partners in a 10-year development program that fosters active outdoor tourism, including hiking, rafting and mountain biking. The project has developed important linkages with the cultural assets of the region and created synergies with other economic sectors to generate regional benefit.

Some years after political will first enabled different development processes, the tourism outcomes have been largely positive. Destinations based on nature and culture have observed positive development of tourism related indicators. Tourist arrivals and overnight stays increased in the northern region between 2008 and 2010 in all months of the summer season (May till September). Hiking was the main activity in Montenegro for 67.1% of the questioned holidaymakers, followed by swimming (52.4%), enjoying good food (41.9%) and cultural sightseeing (41.3%).

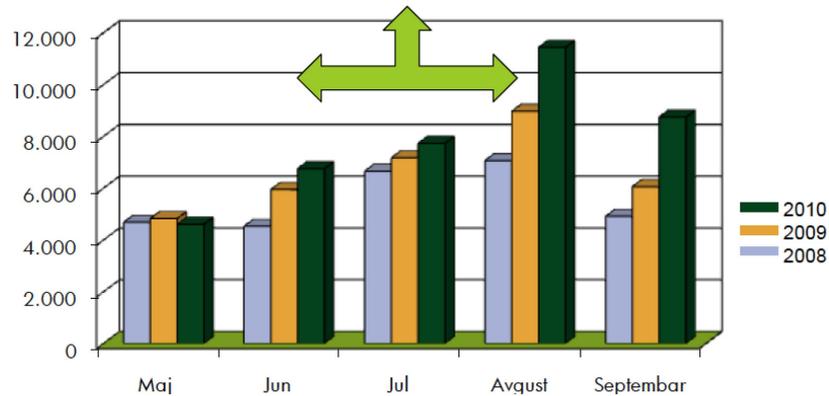


Figure 4.1: Number of tourists in the Northern Region (May-September 2008-2010).

Source: Monstat in: Montenegro Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism, 2011

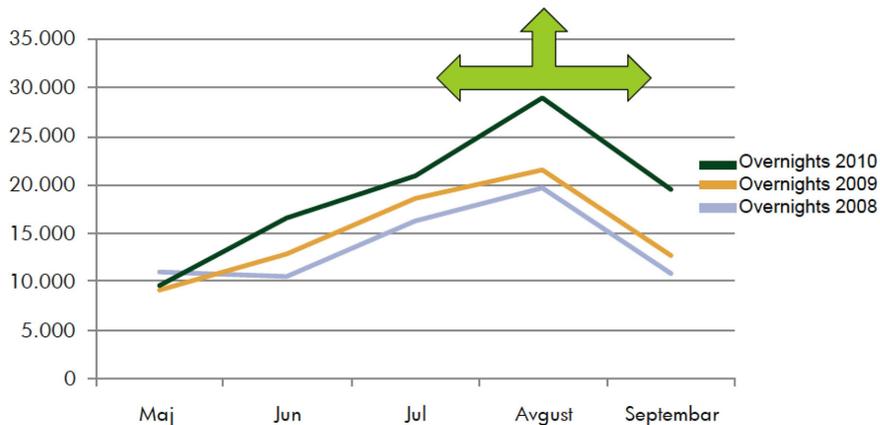


Figure 4.2: Number of overnights in the Northern Region (May-September 2008-2010).

Source: Monstat in: Montenegro Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism, 2011

According to figures from the Central Bank, total annual income from tourism has increased by 460% between 2001 and 2007, or from €86 million to €480 million (Montenegro Ministry of Tourism and Environment, 2008). In 2011, more than 1.5 million tourists visited Montenegro, with the Travel and Tourism economy