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SYMBIOSIS OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM AND BIODIVERSITY PROTECTION WITH REFERENCE TO THE SPECIAL NATURE RESERVE “TIVAT SALINA”³

Abstract

Sustainable tourism brings economic prosperity while preserving the environment, cultural values and identity of the local community. The aim of the work is to show that through the symbiosis of biodiversity protection and sustainable tourism, nature protected areas can improve the management of natural resources and contribute to the development of tourism at the state and regional level. This paper presents the way of current management of the “Tivat Salina” Special Nature Reserve and opportunities for its improvement, with an emphasis on the development of ecosystem services. In the research, desk research methods were used, for the conclusion of induction and deduction methods, empirical statistical data were analyzed using descriptive statistics methods, and the obtained results were adequately commented. The result of the research showed that the municipality of Tivat represents the most successful green tourist destination in Montenegro, which is consisted with the tourism brand “Montenegro - wild beauty”.

Keywords: sustainable tourism, biodiversity protection, natural resources management, ecosystem services, green tourism destination

JEL classification: P28, Q01, Q57, Z32, O13

СИМБИОЗА ОДРЖИВОГ ТУРИЗМА И ЗАШТИТЕ БИОДИВЕРЗИТЕТА СА ОСВРТОМ НА ПОСЕБНИ РЕЗЕРВАТ ПРИРОДЕ “ТИВАТСКА СОЛИЛА”

Апстракт

Одрживи туризам доноси економски просперитет уз очување животне средине, културних вриједности и идентитета локалне заједнице. Циљ рада је да покажемо да симбиозом заштите биодиверзитетa и одрживог туризма заштићена подручја природе унаприједити ће управљање природним ресурсима и да допринесу развоју туризма на државном и регионалном нивоу.

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У овом раду је приказан начин тренутног управљања посебним резерватом природе “тиватска солила” и могућностима за његово унапређење, са акцентом на развој екосистемских услуга. У истраживању коришћене су методе деск истраживања, за закључивање методе индукције и дедуције, емпиријски статистички подаци анализирани су применом метода декриптивне статистике, а добијени резултати су адекватно коментарисани. Резултат истраживања показао је да општина тиват представља најуспјешнију зелену туристичку дестинацију у црној гори што је у складу са туристичким брендом “црна гора – дивља љепота”.

Кључне ријечи: одрживи туризам, заштита биодиверзитета, управљање природним ресурсима, екосистемске услуге, зелена туристичка дестинација

Introduction

Sustainable development of any country implies meeting the needs of present generations without jeopardizing future generations' opportunities for further development (Sarić et al., 2013; Vuković and Grujić, 2020), which can only be achieved with balanced development of economy, society, and environment (Sarić and Grujić, 2018).

“By applying sustainable development methods, permanent foundations are created for the rational use of natural resources and energy, as well as for the improvement of the environment as a whole. Due to the increasing pressure on natural resources, there is a need to plan and control tourism, and the concept of sustainable development of tourism should represent the basis of long-term development within the tourist destination” (Khoja et al., 2021). This applies primarily to the destinations that, without diminishing the importance of the financial and social aspects, prioritize environmental protection. United Nations World Tourism Organization (UN WTO) emphasizes that sustainable tourism development can be applied to different segments of tourism while respecting the principles of sustainability relating to the ecological, economic and socio-cultural aspects and a proper balance must be established between all three dimensions in order to guarantee long-term sustainability (<https://www.unwto.org>). “The essence of the concept of sustainable development is the interaction of economic development and the environment, and the mutual conditionality and complementarity of development policy and environmental protection policy, which respect the laws of ecological systems.” (Milanović, 2009, p.39).

Lane (2018) states that the concept of sustainable tourism has begun to develop in the 1970s and '80s, as a response to the rapid growth of tourism in the post-war period. Tourism as an industry is worth more than a billion dollars, requiring constant financial investments to remain sustainable.

Tourism as an industry is realized by constantly consuming natural resources, which directly affects the environment, ecosystem, economy and other activities (Stukalo et al., 2018). This group of Authors is of an opinion that it is important for the tourist destination to be positioned on a global level so it would be able to constantly generate income in tourism sector. However, mass tourism is affecting the destruction of ecosystems and infrastructure, which makes it necessary to combat the negative effects of tourism.

Nowadays, tourists are looking for tourism products that emphasize environmental friendliness and healthy lifestyle. Thus, tourists choose to turn to sophisticated vacations and with pre-defined interests (Vuković and Grujić, 2020). Project activities in the tourism sector are based, above all, on respecting the principle of sustainability, which applies not only to the environment and the economy, but also to human resources.

“The modern era has brought an increase in the number of human populations, a growing consumption of resources and various negative impacts on the environment” (Čađenović, 2023). The Government of Montenegro has so far adopted two National Strategic Plans for Sustainable Development (NSOR) for period of 2007-2012, and 2016 - 2030. “It is often forgotten that a sustainable development strategy is not just a document adopted by a particular institution (Government, Parliament, or local self-government unit). Sustainable development strategy is equally the process of seeking a vision, as well as solutions for sustainability in the community” (Milutinović, 2012, p.245).

Priority topics of NSOR by the year 2030 are:

- Improving human resources and strengthening social inclusion,
- Supporting the values, norms, and patterns of behavior essential to the society’s sustainability,
- Preservation of natural capital,
- Introducing green economy,
- Management for sustainable development,
- Financing sustainable development.

The key strategic direction for achieving sustainable growth and development in Montenegro, defined in NSOR by year 2030, is the concept of resource efficiency and circular economy. This concept is complementary to the green economy based on the application of sustainable consumption and production as one of the ways to better use the resources that Montenegro successfully adheres to.

“The purpose of sustainable tourism development is to ensure sustainability within the tourism development of certain areas, regardless of their characteristics, and to apply the principle of sustainability to all types of tourism activities, business operations and project management. It ensures the sustainability of both natural and man-made resources” (Vujović et al., 2012, p.66). The development of tourism in modern society also requires the diversification of the tourist product. “For the field of sustainable tourism, both the provisions of Community law dedicated to environmental protection and those regulating the field of tourism are equally relevant” (Joldžić et al., 2018). In order to determine the adequate path towards that goal, Montenegro passed several laws with direct impact on tourism: Tourism and Hospitality Law (Sl. list CG br.2/18,4/18-ispr., 13/18, 25/19, 67/19, 76/20 i 130/21), Tourist Organizations Law (Sl. list RCG br. 11/04, 46/07, Sl.list CG br. 73/10, 40/11, 45/14, 42/17 I 27/19), Residence Tax Law (Sl.list RCG br.11/04, 13/04, Sl.list CG br. 73/10 i 48/15), Mountain Trails Law (Sl.list CG br. 51/08 i 53/11), Ski Resorts Law (Sl.list CG br. 13/07, 40/11 i 21/14), Rafting Law (Sl.list CG br. 53/11 i 57/16). At the same time, laws that have indirect impact on tourism have been passed, such as: Zoning and Construction Law (Sl. list CG br. 64/17,44/18, 63/18, 11/19, 82/20), Nature Protection Law (Sl. list CG br. 54/16 i 18/19), National Parks Law (Sl. list CG br. 28/14 i 39/16) and Environmental Impact Assessment Law (Sl. list CG br. 75/18). We

also highlight important strategies and plans: Tourism Development Strategy for years 2021-2025 with Action Plan, Cultural Tourism Development Program with Action Plan for 2019-2021, Health Tourism Development Program with Action Plan for 2021-2023, Rural Tourism Development Program with Action Plan for 2023-2025.

The most important strategic goal of the Tourism Development Strategy of Montenegro by year 2025 is for tourism in Montenegro to develop on the basis of sustainable, inclusive, green and smart growth and to continuously be a dominant component in the economic development of the country, ensuring the reduction of regional inequality, while respecting the needs Montenegrin population and tourists.

According to Masin et al. (2009), the essence of sustainable planning, organization, and management of tourist areas and centers is to establish balance to the basic directions:

- Tourist accommodation capacities,
- Sports-recreational, cultural, entertainment and other contents of the year-round tourist offer in the area;
- Increasing the accessibility and infrastructural equipping of the tourist areas (by traffic and technical infrastructure, and communal facilities);
- Economic and social development of local communities and preservation of their cultural characteristics and values;
- Protection, sustainable usage, and presentation of natural and cultural heritage;
- Protection and improvement of the environment and landscape.

At a time when climate change and environmental degradation are our present models of sustainable development have been recognized as having the potential to reduce the effects of tourism on specific, vulnerable destinations (Lakićević et al., 2022). Recognizing the importance of the tourism potential of protected areas and their impact on the complete image of Montenegro's tourism destination, the adoption of the Program for the Development of Tourism in Protected Areas in 2025-2027 with the Action Plan was announced.

By adopting the Declaration of the Ecological State on 20th of September, 1991, Montenegro became first ecological country in the world. The Declaration defines the country's strategic commitment to adopt and apply the highest standards and norms in the field of environmental protection, while basing the economic development on the principles of ecologically sustainable system. The aforementioned document was presented the following year at the United Nations conference on environmental protection. Thirty years later, by the proclamation in the Official Gazzete of Montenegro (Sl list Crne Gore br. 145/21) published on 31st December 2021, Amendment to the Law on State and Other Holidays, 20th of September – Ecological State Day was declared a public holiday.

Declared as an ecological state, and significantly tourism-oriented, Montenegro is defining its development path towards a green economy, resource efficiency, sustainable production and consumption with the implementation of ecological standards. Blečić (2016) points out that “The strategic direction of the development of the national economy, through the prominence of tourism, imperatively imposes the obligation to make the process of revitalization of available capacities in the institutional sense simpler, more efficient and more rational.”

Management and protection of natural resources is a multi-layered process from an ecological and economic point of view. This paper will present the sustainable tourism valorization of the Special Nature Reserve “Tivat Salina” and its importance in obtaining the certificate “Green Destination 2021” for Tivat municipality. As stipulated in article 23 paragraph 5 of Nature Protection Law (Sl. list CG br. 54/16, 18/19) “in a special nature reserve, visits may be made for the purpose of monitoring the state of nature, education and tourism on the basis of the approval of the management, provided that wildlife populations are not disturbed and the habitat of wild animals, plants and fungi is not violated”.

Objective and Methods

The aim of this scientific research is to showcase the possibility of a symbiosis of sustainable tourism and biodiversity protection, and how much of it was achieved in Tivat. Understanding the cause-and-effect relationship between sustainable economic development and environmental protection, as well as its impact on the quality of life of the wider community, represents the driving force towards achieving the stated goal.

This paper will use the methods of scientific description (qualitative and quantitative), analysis and synthesis, as well as the induction-deduction method. The scientific justification of the research is reflected in the deepening and expansion of knowledge, and especially the applicability of the concept of sustainable tourism in our conditions, so that the contribution will be heuristic. The results will be verifiable, confirming scientific knowledge already acquired.

The social relevance of the research topic in this work is at a high level, as it touches the daily lives of all citizens.

The main sources of data used in this paper are: Directorate for Statistic of Montenegro - MONSTAT, Tourist Organization of Tivat and Official Gazzete of Montenegro (for legislative framework descriptions).

Sustainable Tourism Development in Tivat in period of 2016 - 2022

Tivat is home to internationally protected species of flora and fauna and is the best example of the development of sustainable tourism and environmental protection in Montenegro, and has been working diligently and worthily towards this goal for years. This city is also known for its developed nautical and congress tourism. More than 15 years ago, a luxury yacht marina with a 5-star hotel and exclusive residential units was opened – Porto Montenegro, and since recently there is also Luštica Bay with similar tourist offer. Proximity to the airport, as well as good infrastructural connections with other coastal towns, as well as the mountain region and national parks, completes the tourist offer of Tivat.

A large number of countries around the world are committed to implementing the principles of sustainable tourism development in their strategic plans (Milićević, Momirović, Simonović, 2022). Montenegro has adopted significant national and local strategic plans on this basis. Here, we will focus on municipality of Tivat and list the development documents, such as: Tourism Development Strategy of the Municipality of Tivat for the years 2020-2024 with Action Plan (Sl. list CG br. 53/19), Local Action Plan for Biodiversity from 2018 to 2023,

General Plan of Protection against the Harmful Effects of Water, for water of local significance of the Municipality of Tivat for the period from 2018 to 2023. (Sl. list CG br. 32/18), Local Energy Plan of Municipality of Tivat from 2017 to 2023, i Energy Efficiency Improvement Program for the period 2021-2023. Some of the significant Strategies and Action Plans relate to the period that has passed, but they are still relevant, such as: Local Environmental Protection Plan for the period 2017-2021 (Sl. list CG br. 12/17), Local Municipal and Non-hazardous Construction Waste Management Plan for the period 2017-2020 (Sl. list CG br. 12/17), as they define the future strategic directions for sustainable tourism development.

In the Tourism Development Strategy of the Municipality of Tivat for the period 2020 - 2024 with the Action Plan for 2020 - 2024 (Sl. list Crne Gore br. 53/19) it is stated that in 2018, the total number of beds in hotels was 1,578, while in the remaining collective accommodation there were 142 beds. There are total of 4,016 beds in private accommodation, and 487 beds in apartment blocks.

Data on the number of guests and overnight stays in period of 2016 to 2022 (Table 1) shows that the steady growth has been recorded from year to year. The most successful year in terms of the number of guests was 2019, with an increase of 37,864 guests or 30.7% compared to the previous year, and compared to 2016, the increase was 86,792 guests or 116.7%. The increase in the number of guests in 2017 amounted to 29.6%, and in 2018, compared to the previous year, amounted to 27.9%. As for the number of overnight stays, the most successful year was 2022, which compared to 2016 amounts to an increase of 65.9%, and compared to 2016 the number of overnight stays increased by 37.8%. In March 2020, the first case of Covid-19 virus was recorded and Montenegro introduced restrictive measures for entering the country, and bearing in mind that foreign guests account for over 90% of guests on the territory of the municipality of Tivat, we must emphasize that for these reasons the worst results were achieved in 2020. Thus, the data shows that the number of guests that year was 80.4% less compared to 2019, and in 2021 an increase of 205.8% was achieved. Similar situation happened with the number of overnight stays – decline compared to 2019 was 77.4%, and increase in 2021 amounted to 234.4%.

Table 1: Number of guests and overnight stays in Tivat for 2016-2022

| Year | Guests -Total | Index level of 2016 = 100 | Percentage of change (%) | Overnight stays - Total | Index level of 2016 = 100 | Percentage of change (%) |
|-------------|---------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| 2016 | 74,361 | 100 | - | 733,542 | 100 | - |
| 2017 | 96,384 | 129.6 | 29.6 | 869,542 | 118.5 | 18.5 |
| 2018 | 123,289 | 165.8 | 27.9 | 926,574 | 126.3 | 6.6 |
| 2019 | 161,153 | 216.7 | 30.7 | 1,167,092 | 159.1 | 26 |
| 2020 | 31,595 | 42.5 | -80.4 | 264,200 | 36 | -77.4 |
| 2021 | 96,604 | 129.9 | 205.8 | 883,359 | 120.4 | 234.4 |
| 2022 | 139,048 | 187 | 44 | 1,217,218 | 165.9 | 37.8 |

Source: Author's estimate calculated using data from <https://www.monstat.me> (accessed April 1st, 2023.)

Following trends in the number of guests over the seven-year period, we see that in the period from 2016 to 2019 (a record year for the entire observed period) the increase

ranged from 27.9% to 30.7% on an annual basis. Excluding year 2020 and 2021, an interannual growth of 44% was recorded in 2022. As for the number of overnight stays, there was a slightly smaller increase compared to the number of guests. Namely, in 2017, compared to previous year, an increase of 18.5% was recorded, in 2019 an increase of 26%, and the least increase (6.6%) was recorded in 2018. After a large drop in number of guests of 80.4% and overnight stays of 77.4% in 2020, during 2021 an increase of over 200% was achieved, compared to previous year; compared to 2016, that increase amounts to 29.9% for the number of guests and 20.4% for number of overnight stays. In 2022 the number of overnight stays increased by 37.8% compared to the previous year.

Analyzing the trend in the number of guests and overnight stays in the seven-year period, i.e. from 2016 to 2022, a big drop is visible in 2020, but we have previously explained the objective reasons for such a situation in tourism not only in Tivat, but we must emphasize in the whole of Montenegro, where tourism is the main economic branch. However, the recovery came soon. In 2021, the number of overnight stays was slightly higher than in 2017, and in 2022 an increase was recorded compared to the record year 2019. Comparing the number of overnight stays in 2022. to the initial year (2016), we see that there was an increase of 65.9%, and the number of guests increased by 87%, which represents a very significant progress.

If we single out the two most challenging years for tourism in recent history - 2020 and 2021, we will see that in those years the number of guests and overnight stays recorded an evident decline, but still we see that in 2021 due to the relaxation of the prescribed measures - conditions for entry into the country, much better results were achieved. Worldwide, the declaration of a pandemic dealt a major blow to the tourism sector. This has particularly affected countries that are primarily tourist-oriented, such as Montenegro. However, there are noticeably more tourists in 2021, heralding a recovery and new momentum in the development of the tourist destination.

In following table (Table 2) the main indicators of the descriptive statistics of the observed variables over the analyzed seven-year period are presented.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of the total number of guests and overnight stays in Tivat from 2016 to 2022

| Year | Guests - total | Overnight stays - total |
|----------|----------------|-------------------------|
| Average | 103,204.9 | 865,932.4 |
| Min | 31,595 | 264,200 |
| Max | 161,153 | 1,217,218 |
| Std. Dev | 43,004.1 | 315,621.6 |
| Cv (%) | 41.7 | 36.4 |
| PGSP | 11 | 8.8 |

Source: Author’s calculation based on data from <https://www.monstat.me>

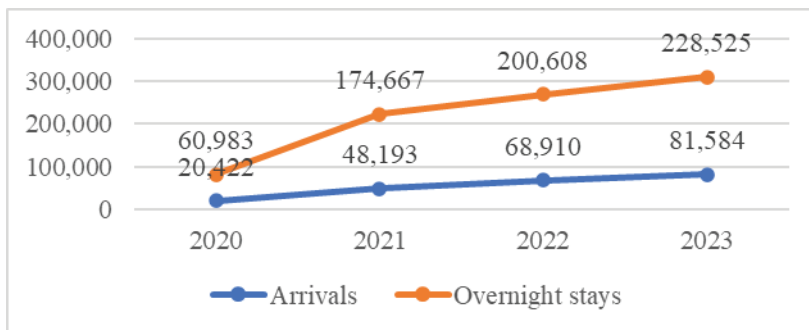
Based on the data shown in the table above, we came to the following conclusions:

- the average number of guests and overnight stays is at a satisfactory level, given that the analyzed period includes two pandemic years (2020 and 2021);
- the lowest numbers of guests and overnight stays was achieved in 2020;
- the highest number of guests was recorded in 2019, while the highest number of

- overnight stays was recorded in 2022;
- the average deviation from the total number of guests is 43,004.1, and for the number of overnight stays is 315,621.6;
- moderate variability in the number of guests and overnight stays was recorded in the observed period,
- in the period analyzed, the total number of guests increased on average by 11% per year and the number of overnight stays by 8.8%.

If we single out the two most challenging years for tourism in recent history - 2020 and 2021, we will see that in those years the number of guests and overnight stays recorded an evident decline, but still we see that in 2021 due to the relaxation of the prescribed measures - conditions for entry into the country, much better results were achieved. Worldwide, the declaration of a pandemic dealt a major blow to the tourism sector. This has particularly affected countries that are primarily tourist-oriented, such as Montenegro. However, there are noticeably more tourists in 2021, heralding a recovery and new momentum in the development of the tourist destination. Constant growth is expected in the coming period, and in graph no. 1 we will show the number of overnight stays and arrivals in collective accommodation (hotels, motels, hostels, resorts) in the municipality of Tivat from 2020 to 2023 (Graph. 1.).

Graph. 1: Overnight stays and arrivals in collective accommodation in the municipality of Tivat from 2020 to 2023



Source: Autor's graf based on data from <https://monstat.org>

For several years now, Montenegro's promotional tourism slogan has been "In the company of nature" with the already recognizable brand "Montenegro - Wild Beauty". Particular attention is paid to online promotions and recommendations complete with beautiful photos and videos of the natural beauty of Montenegro. "If online recommendations contain more photos and visual information, it is more likely that tourist consumers are going to chose a travel destination based on it" (Marić et al,2022).

Green Tourism Destination - Tivat

At the Berlin Tourism Fair, at the ceremony “Green Destinations Story Award 2021” Tivat was declared a winner in the category “Nature and Ecotourism” for the story of good practice: Restoration of natural values through management of the Special Nature Reserve “Tivat Salina / Tivatska solila”. Second place in this category went to the city of Kočevje (Slovenia), and third to Saba (Caribbean Netherlands). At the end of September 2022, the Tourism Organization of Tivat participated in the annual congress “Green Destinations 2022 - Future of Tourism Summit”, together with representatives from over 40 countries. A panel “Sustainable tourism in the Balkans” was also held - organized by the Balkan Green group which currently includes Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania, North Macedonia and Slovenia. Balkan Green platform was created for the purpose of connecting business professionals and businesses with the aim of driving further sustainable development. These activities are supported by USAID- EDGE regional project. During the summit, a contract was signed between Green Destinations and Balkan Green group for exclusive regional representation. Tivat was awarded the 2022 Bronze Medal by Green Destinations, as it passed the evaluation and audit process, although the auditor’s opinion was that in the next two years, intensive work should be done on the Action Plan and the roadmap for sustainability. Tivat is the first destination in the Western Balkans to reach this level (Data taken from <https://www.tivat.travel>).

On web page of Touristic Organization of Tivat (<https://www.tivat.travel>) a prominent place is held by “green Tivat” where sustainable tourism is promoted through the introduction of the winners of “Green Key” certificate, who are meeting the conditions of environmental protection and sustainable development. Certificates are awarded to hotels, travel agencies, and individual accommodation renters who have met the prescribed criteria.

Municipality of Tivat and Touristic Organization of Tivat have provided two locations within the project “On the Paths of Sustainability” where tourists and residents of Tivat can inspect their bicycles and remove any malfunctions. Also, since 2019, the first electric vehicle charging station has been installed, and three more locations of e-charging stations are currently available.

National Touristic Organization of Montenegro in July 2022 has, together with TO Tivat, TO Bar and TO Podgorica, Public Company “Morsko dobro” and Travel Agency “Monticola” (founded by Center for Protection and Study of Birds) presented the offer of Montenegro as a new birdwatching destination at the “Global Bird Fair” which was held in Oakham (Great Britain). This large fair brings together exhibitors and bird-watching enthusiasts from around the world. Birdwatching tourism attracts mostly tourists from Great Britain, Germany and the Netherlands. Great Interest has been shown for the offers of Tivat Salina, Nacional Park “Skadar Lake” and other localities in Montenegro that can meet the demands of this category of tourists (<https://www.montenegro.travel>).

In 2023, TO Tivat continued on the path of development and retention of the achieved goals, such as the re-certification “Green Destination”. In addition to the development of birdwatching tourism, incentives are planned for cultural, nautical and sports tourism. The results achieved in the first seven months of 2023 bring a constant increase in the number of guests and overnight stays, which confirms the good development path of the tourist destination of the municipality of Tivat.

Special Nature Reserve “Tivat Salina”

According to historical data, the exploitation of salt in the area of today’s Tivat Salina dates back to 1425. During Ottoman Empire occupation in the 17th century, almost 81% of the population of Luštica, Đurašević, and Kotor has earned income from the salt production. Similarly, during the 1960s an attempt was made to organize the salt factory, but the project was abandoned after two seasons. Therefore, in 2007, this area was protected as a special nature reserve for the conservation of plant and animal species, especially ornithofauna (<https://www.bokanews.me>).

Special nature reserve “Tivat Salina” is situated in the marshy part of Tivat bay (between Tivat Airport and Luštica peninsula) and covers an area of 150 ha; and since 2013 it has been registered with RAMSAR list (list of internationally significant wetland habitats) as a special reserve of flora and fauna. In accordance with Bern Conference this location has been made a part of Emerald network, and it has also been declared an IBA (Important Bird Area). 114 species of birds have been registered, out of which more than 109 enjoys a protected species status. The system of shallow salt pools and canals creates a unique ecosystem that can only be seen in one other place in Montenegro – Nature Park “Ulcinj Salina”.

Public Company “Morsko dobro Crne Gore” is managing Special Nature Reserve “Tivat Salina” since 2011, in cooperation with the Municipality of Tivat, TO Tivat and the Center for the Protection and Study of Birds (CZIP). In the document - Information on the conservation status and activities in the Special Nature Reserve “Tivat Salina” from December 2021, the following activities are listed (<https://www.gov.me>):

- a) There were 114 species of birds registered, in 2020 this number is 185 (improvement);
- b) Extended deadline to four years for giving a final assessment of the state of phyto and zooplankton;
- c) Furnishing and equipping (installation of awnings, fencing the boundaries of the reserve, installation of galvanized boards, information boards, road signs, new rest areas);
- d) Educational and touristic activities (organized visits of schools, university students, and NGOs, press visits, social networks promotions);
- e) Collaboration with other institutions:
 - TO Tivat (Green Destination Story Award 2021 for story of good practice of managing Special Nature Reserve “Tivat Salinas”)
 - Realization of project “e-PATH - Endemic Pathways” – IPA regional project (Montenegro, Bosnia and Hercegovina, and Croatia) which will include an info center with multimedia and birdwatching equipment,
 - TO Tivat and TO Herceg Novi have initiated activities on the development of a panoramic route on the Luštica peninsula.

By applying good management practices to protected areas of European and global significance, the protection of biodiversity will not be jeopardized by tourist valorization, if maintained at a sustainable level. The sites that are on IBA and RAMSAR list (internationally significant wetland habitats) have great potential to develop into a birdwatching tourist destination (Bird watching tourism). Raising awareness of the local population about the importance of natural resources for the tourist offer of the entire destination is very important.

Using the example of establishing Nature Park “Vrmac, which is intended to protect the peninsula – hill that connects Kotor and Tivat, it has caused great resistance from local population who feared that they will be denied the use of natural resources in that area. Education on the responsible management of natural resources is set as a priority for achieving sustainable green development, which is the basis of all strategic plans in Montenegro.

In the final pages of the document - Information on the conservation status and activities in the Special Nature Reserve “Tivat Salina /Tivatska Solila” from December 2021, conclusion has been made: “that this reserve has maintained the state of conservation and protection from the time it was placed under protection (2008), as well as that the state of the reserve has been improved through active management”. The public has also been informed that the illegal activities within the reserve (fishing with nets, disposal of materials, and illegal hunting) have been reported to the competent inspection authorities. The great help in the management, organization of educational and promotional activities from the Tivat Tourist Organization and the NGO “Center for the Protection and Study of Birds” - Podgorica was emphasized.

Taking into consideration that the Public Company “Morsko dobro” is managing reserve since 2011, actual achievement in the course of the decade long work are admittedly small. Perhaps the cause of this is the insufficient financial resources allocated for this purpose, insufficiently skilled human resources (without the help of NGO “Center for the Protection and Study of Birds” adequate monitoring and protection of biodiversity would not be possible), lack of vision for untapped potentials that would affect not only Tivat, but the country as a whole in the future; nevertheless, the results could have been much better.

Image 1 shows one of new wooden rest areas for visitors, that has placed in Special Reserve “Tivat Salina”. Natural materials have been used, and care has been taken not to damage the ecosystem and the natural environment. Same material has been used to make wooden awnings and road signs.

Image 2 shows natural salt pools. Salt pools provide habitat for a host of protected species of flora and fauna, especially birds. Maintaining this type of habitat requires a serious continuous professional work plan, in order to conserve this ecosystem.

Image 1: Tivat Salina – wooden rest area for visitors



Image 2: Salt pools – Tivat Salina



Source: Photographs by the paper's author

Educational-recreational visits of educational institutions, non-governmental organizations and experts are outlined in the Local Action Plans of the Tivat's Municipality. This type of activity represents the basis for the development of environmental awareness and a responsible attitude towards natural resources from the youngest age of the local population to the promotion of scientific and research work of interested professionals.

Proximity to protected water areas listed on RAMSAR List – NP Skadar Lake only 67 km away and the Nature Park “Ulcinj Salina” 90 km away (with also Bojana river Delta - 10km further), creates a good platform for organizing joint tours for birdwatching tourists. Travel Agency “Monticola” currently offers birdwatching tours for individual nature parks or national parks.

The promotion of sustainable and birdwatching tourism carried out by TO Tivat represents a good basis for adequate financial valorization of the potential of the Tivat salt flats, not forgetting the importance of protecting the biodiversity of the protected area. Nevertheless, we must emphasize the weak development of ecosystem services, which would significantly improve the responsible management of the reserve, and the well-being of both people and nature.

Ecosystem Services

In June 2020, the European Commission adopted the Biodiversity Protection Strategy by 2030, defining it as “a comprehensive, ambitious and long-term plan for nature protection and ecosystem degradation”. This strategy is one of the key elements underpinning both the European Green Plan and the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans. Montenegro is late with the adoption of the new strategies, the latest being the National Biodiversity Strategy 2016-2020.

In the light of the recommendations of these Strategies, the importance of ecosystem services in protected natural areas is highlighted. The concept of ecosystem services emphasizes the connection between man and nature, and their loss affects nature, the economy and the well-being of people. The institution's support to local producers and tourism service providers in recognizing the importance of biodiversity conservation for the promotion of their products is very significant. Eco certificates of tourist accommodation and various products are recognized by an increasing number of providers of these services as a prerequisite for a responsible attitude towards natural resources.

Non-material ecosystem services are very important for the promotion of a tourist destination. The necessity of linking the promotion of the cultural heritage, which represents the immeasurable richness of this climate, with the biodiversity and representation of endemic species, is recognized as a key determinant of branding a distinctive unique tourist destination.

The National Biodiversity Strategy 2016-2020 researched the possibilities of valorizing ecosystem services and reported that in 2011, the gross value of total production amounted to 5.24 billion euros, the gross value of ecosystem services amounted to almost a fifth of this value. It has been estimated that the value of ecosystem services could be much higher if all potentials are harnessed. This assessment is still valid today, and can be applied both to the Special Nature Reserve “Tivat Salina” and to all other protected areas in Montenegro.

Bearing in mind that sustainable tourism is a form of tourism development that has a balanced impact on natural, economic, cultural, and social values it is necessary to highlight the fact that tourism has emerged as a factor in the revitalization and development of underdeveloped areas (Raičević et al., 2021). If we all adopted this way of thinking, planning and acting, we would succeed in achieving a symbiosis of sustainable tourism and biodiversity conservation.

Conclusion

The first steps on the path to the development of sustainable tourism and the protection of biodiversity is the adoption of a legislative and planning framework at the state level. We have seen that Montenegro's legal compliance with European standards has been achieved almost completely, but their implementation is either delayed or inadequate. In the coming period, the Municipality of Tivat plans to reduce the identified pressures on biodiversity, establish a manager for all their nature resources, adequate waste management and environmental education of population.

Tivat is the most positive example and has certainly reached the furthest on the path of sustainable tourism development with the international Green Tourism Destination Award. Special Nature Reserve "Tivat Salina" is part of the green sustainable development story of Tivat. For a decade, Public Company "Morsko dobro" has been managing it, maintaining the level of biodiversity conservation, but with very little development and economic valorization. Tourist Organization of Tivat is involved in the promotional activities (since last year with an emphasis on the promotion of birdwatching tourism) and the organization of educational visits together with CZIP (NGO "Center for the Protection and Study of Birds").

The development of a protected natural area as a tourist destination is very important, but this must be approached with extreme caution by planning well for the protection of biodiversity, creating sustainable development without the degradation of ecosystems. The inclusion and adequate valorization of ecosystem services is necessary and desirable in protected natural areas. Monitoring the condition and introducing the control is mandatory for responsible management of natural resources and sustainable development.

In the coming period, attention should be paid to linking the tourism valorization of protected areas in Montenegro, as well as the possibility of cross-border cooperation with neighboring countries. If we connect the tourist offer according to e.g. the desire of tourists to observe birds, we are able to offer the National Park "Skadar Lake", the Special Nature Reserve "Tivat Salina" and the Nature Park "Ulcinj Solina", which are very close and represent a roadmap for further development of a joint tourist presentation.

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