

# TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN SERBIA – – ON THE WAY TO SUSTAINABILITY AND EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

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*The aim of the paper is to contribute to improvement of tourism policy and practice in Serbia towards defining and implementing sustainability principles and meeting European integration requirements. It encompasses short review of international implications on Serbian tourism policy and legislation. Current policy and its sustainability are analyzed using two indicators: application of integrated (cross sector) and local community approach, with particular focus on tourism, environmental and planning documents.*

*There is general orientation towards sustainability and involvement of local community into the planning and implementation of projects in the field. Precisely defined mechanisms for public participation and integrated approach, first of all mainstreaming of environmental issues into tourism strategic document, are preconditions for reaching country's sustainability goals and EU integration orientation.*

*Points that should be improved are suggested and the need for mutual cooperation and capacity development of stakeholders at all levels, including further international support, strongly advocated.*

**Key words:** *Tourism policy; environment; sustainability; European integration.*

## INTRODUCTION

Natural values, cultural heritage and hospitality of people are among major appeals recognized by the strategic documents in Serbia and official statements of policy makers in the field of tourism.

For the Government of Serbia, tourism is one of the priority areas in further socioeconomic development and also important for its reform within the process of accession. At the same time, the progress made towards EU integration during the last years provides important conditions and requirements for tourism development. In 2008, Serbia signed the 'Stabilization and Association Agreement' and in 2012, its candidate status was approved. Number of foreign tourists is increasing in Serbia, as well as the number of

people travelling abroad, owing to the introduction of visa-free travel throughout EU countries for Serbian citizens (since 2010).

At the national level, there is a Department for Tourism within the Ministry of Finance and Economy of Serbia, the National Tourism Organization of Serbia, dealing with promotion and market research of tourism, and National Corporation for Tourism Development supporting implementation of the Tourism Strategy and tourism development. At the local level, there are municipalities and, in some cases, local tourist organizations, mainly funded by local authorities. The tourism planning and development, including human capacities and infrastructure, is under way mainly at the national level.

Despite the challenges faced inside the country, as well as the crisis and global recession influencing tourism market in Serbia as elsewhere since 2008, the efforts have been made in developing this sector, providing the

policy and legislation support, as well as international assistance, mainly through projects and consulting that resulted in strategic documents and recommendations for further growth.

## IMPLICATIONS OF SUSTAINABILITY PRINCIPLES ON SERBIAN TOURISM POLICY

Being signatory of numerous global and EU conventions and agreements, Serbia has taken responsibility for their implementation in accordance with sustainability principles embedded in each of the documents. Starting from the globally accepted Millennium Development Goals, through the Convention on

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Biological Diversity with its Guidelines on Biodiversity and Tourism developed in 2004, Serbian policy and approach in developing sustainable tourism is under unavoidable implications of the broad set of documents, adopted at the national level over the past few years. Receiving the status of EU candidate country, Serbia is to comply with principles and directions developed by the EU over the past few years. The European Union Strategy for Sustainable Development (EU SDS), developed by the European Council, adopted in 2001 and revised in 2006 and 2009 (EU SDS, 2012) is an umbrella document. Specific guidelines for the policy development and practice towards sustainability and EU integration are suggested by the most relevant documents for sustainable tourism developed recently at the European level, such as the Declaration on Ecotourism (2002), Declaration on Climate Change and Tourism (Davos Declaration), as well as the Agenda for a Sustainable and Competitive European Tourism (2007).

Some of the common messages embedded in the above mentioned documents are very important for developing the approach and strategic foundation for sustainable tourism in Serbia. As it was stated 'sustainable tourism is positive approach intended to reduce the tensions and frictions created by the complex interactions between the tourism industry, visitors, the environment and the communities which are host to holidaymakers...i.e. it is an approach which involves working for the long-term viability and quality of both natural and human resources. It is not antigrowth, but it acknowledges that there are limits to growth.' (Bramwell & Lane, 1993:2). Therefore, taking into consideration that 'tourism will grow...main task is not to limit growth but to manage growth in a way that is appropriate to the tourists, the destination environment and the host population' (Liu, 2003:472).

In achieving both competitive and sustainable tourism it is necessary to apply mechanisms and principles based on a "quadruple bottom line" – integration of three pillars of sustainability and emerging climate change issue, promoted by the Davos Declaration (Davos Declaration – Climate Change and Tourism: Responding to Global Challenges, 2012). It requires integrated approach, collaboration and solidarity at international, national and local levels. The development of sustainable tourist destination is interlinked with natural and social environment, as well as with wellbeing for all. Raising awareness, education, participation, mutual policy integration and financial support, as well as consumers' responsibility, are some of the

crucial preconditions for sustainable tourism.

Useful guidelines for developing plans and projects in the field of sustainable tourism can also be found in documents describing policy of European donors and banks, with funds available for Serbian governmental institutions, private and non-governmental organizations initiating infrastructure and development projects. Among the others, there is a possibility for Member States and all Regions to finance tourism projects through the European Regional Development Fund, the Cohesion funds (the European Regional Development Fund and the European Social Fund), the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, the European Fisheries Fund, the 7<sup>th</sup> EC Framework Program for Research, Technological Development and Demonstration activities ( the key priority on climate change includes impacts on tourism) – and in the 'Leonardo da Vinci' Program.

Since the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) is one of the main funding mechanisms of the EU for the accession countries, it is important to consider its Strategic Coherence Framework (SCF) document, setting Serbia's economic, social and environmental development goals for the EU programming period of 2012-2013. It emphasizes the importance of the environment in tourism development in terms of protection of natural values, but also in terms of improving the waste and water management and environmental services crucial for "both economic development and societal well-being, and their sustainability" (SCF - Third Draft, Government of Serbia, 2011).

Implementing the policy and projects in Serbia today and in the future needs a significant support, both technical and financial, to tourism, as well as to other fields of development. Therefore, it is very important to consider the European Principles for the Environment (EPE) as an initiative of the five signatory European-based Multilateral Financing

Institutions (MFIs): Council of Europe Development Bank (CEB), European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), European Investment Bank (EIB), Nordic Environment Finance Corporation (NEFCO) and Nordic Investment Bank (NIB). It is founded on their commitment to promote and ensure sustainable development and environmental principles, practices and standards associated with financing the projects.

For projects located in the Member States of the EU, the European Economic Area countries, the EU Acceding, Accession, Candidate and potential Candidate Countries, the EU approach, which is defined in the EC Treaty and the relevant secondary legislation is the logical and mandatory reference. The projects in this region should also comply with any obligation and standards upheld in relevant Multilateral Environmental Agreements (Multilateral agreement of European investment banks, 2013).

Since one of them, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) is present in Serbia providing funds for projects in different fields, including tourism, it is of particular interest for policy makers and implementers to understand, respect and comply with the principles they incorporate into its Social and Environmental Policy - ranking the financing of sustainable development projects among the highest priorities. The Bank has defined a set of specific Performance Requirements ("PRs") that clients are expected to meet, covering key areas of environmental and social impacts and issues. Under each of the PRs, there are objectives, scope and specific steps and activities described in order to provide clear guidance for project holders and stakeholders. Though all the principles are important for achieving sustainability, a particular attention in the Policy, and from the point of view of this analysis, is given to the PR 1 and PR 10 and their mutual interrelationship as presented in Table 1.

*Table 1. Mutual interrelationship between the Performance Requirements (EBRD,2013)*

Environmental and Social Appraisal and Management (PR 1)	Information Disclosure and Stakeholder Engagement (PR 10)
<p>To identify and assess environmental and social impacts and issues, both adverse and beneficial, associated with the project.</p> <p>To adopt measures to avoid, or where avoidance is not possible, minimize, mitigate, or offset/compensate for adverse impacts on workers, affected communities, and the environment.</p> <p>To identify and, where feasible, adopt opportunities to improve environmental and social performance.</p> <p>To promote improved environmental and social performance through a dynamic process of performance monitoring and evaluation.</p>	<p>To identify people or communities that are or could be affected by the project, as well as other interested parties.</p> <p>To ensure that such stakeholders are appropriately engaged on environmental and social issues that could potentially affect them through a process of information disclosure and meaningful consultation.</p> <p>To maintain a constructive relationship with stakeholders on an ongoing basis through meaningful engagement during the project implementation.</p>

Based on findings of the environmental and social appraisal and on the results of consultations with affected stakeholders, the clients, it may be required to develop and implement a program for mitigation and performance improvement measures and actions that address the identified social and environmental issues, impacts and opportunities in the form of an Environmental and Social Action Plan (ESAP).

Other EU funding institutions, including the EIB and the Commission itself, the World Bank, USAID and other donors active in Serbia, have adopted similar policies promoting social corporate responsibility and/or sustainable development principles/requirements from clients.

Besides direct investments in business field or budget funding, there is a potential opportunity to secure finances for sustainable tourism through international/European projects and by connecting with organizations through international specialized networks, thus fostering the implementation and promotion of principles of sustainable tourism and mechanisms of public participation in the field. One of such networks has been created within the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas. Gathering members from 36 European countries, the Charter stimulates strategic and action planning of sustainable tourism, aiming at '...the protection of the natural and cultural heritage and the continuous improvement of tourism in the protected area in terms of the environment, local population and businesses, as well as visitors' (Europarc Federation – European Charter for Sustainable Tourism, 2013:4).

The Charter and the Charter Network is coordinated by the EUROPARC Federation. Serbia is involved in work of the Federation, with national and nature park management and governmental bodies as members. In 2011, the Đerdap National Park was hosting the 7th Charter Network Meeting on "Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas: Building bridges - Seeking Solutions".

Above briefly reviewed sustainability principles embedded in global and European strategies, governmental and business/international organizations' policies, have been considered in order to provide context for further analysis of the strategic and legislative framework for sustainable tourism in Serbia. Among the main sustainability principles, for the sake of this analysis, we are going to concentrate on the following: integrated (cross-sector) approach and the local community participation.

## INTEGRATED APPROACH IN SERBIAN TOURISM RELATED POLICY

By "integrated approach" in this paper we consider a cross sector approach and integration of issues and goals of other sectors into tourism policy and legislation. Having in mind close link between tourism and the environment, first of all in terms of sustainable use of resources and protection of biodiversity, our analysis will mainly focus on relationship between environmental and tourism strategies and legislation in Serbia.

### Environmental policy and legislation

Under the influences of European and international trends and requirements, Serbia joined a majority of relevant conventions and multilateral agreements in the field of the environment in the second half of the 20th century, and especially in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, adjusting its policy and legislation to the global and in particular EU requirements. Following that, in 2004, Serbian government adopted the set of environmental laws, including the systemic Law on Environmental Protection and three specific documents: Law on Strategic Impact Assessment (SIA), updated Law on Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and the Law on Integrated Prevention and Control of Environmental Pollution. The systemic law and SIA/EIA define that the Spatial Plan of Republic of Serbia and National Strategy for Sustainable Use of Natural Resources and Goods make the national planning basis for the sustainable use of natural resources and protected areas, while urban planning provides plans for integrated environmental protection (Maksin *et al.*, 2011). New set of environmental laws was adopted in 2009, covering seven specific fields: nature protection, waste management, packaging and packaging waste, air protection, noise protection, ionizing and non-ionizing radiation protection.

The most relevant strategies, such as the National Biodiversity Strategy (2011) and the (Draft) Strategy for Sustainable Use of Natural Resources and Goods (2011) were developed after above mentioned laws instead prior to it. Still, those documents, as well as the National Strategy on Sustainable Development (2008), provide a solid strategic basis for the sustainable tourism development in the country.

The National Strategy on Sustainable Development of RS (Official Gazette of Republic of Serbia, No, 57/09) is based on

general orientation of the country to direct development towards the balance between three "pillars" of sustainable development. It is also obvious in priorities set up by the Document, promoting European membership in the first place. The importance of integrating the measures and goals of the policies of different sectors has been generally emphasized, and in particular regarding those concerning the environmental protection and sustainable use of natural resources. The Strategy identifies threats of "unsustainable" tourism development to the protection of natural resources, but also recognizes that there are solid institutional capacities for sustainable tourism development in Serbia.

The National Biodiversity Strategy for the period of 2011-2018 (Ministry of environment and spatial planning, 2011) recognizes necessity of integrating biodiversity into other policies and sectors. It identifies relationships between biodiversity and economy, expressing the need of biodiversity sector to provide guidelines for economic valorization of biodiversity and ecosystem services assessment for the sake of environmental, social and economic benefits of community. Social aspects are being mentioned, but not equally embedded. Though it recognizes importance of revenues coming from tourism to protected areas, the Strategy defines tourism and outdoor activities as direct threats to biodiversity (Draft / Strategy on Sustainable Use of Natural Resources, 2012).

The development process of the (Draft) Strategy for Sustainable Use of Natural Resources and Goods has been guided by the sustainable development as the main principle. Economic and social impacts of the Strategy are analyzed within the separate chapter, related to demographic, macroeconomic and economic trends. However, tourism has not been mentioned at all in the Draft (*Ibid.*).

As already mentioned above, *The Law on Environmental Protection* (RS Official Gazette No 135/2004; 36/2009), as a systemic law, sets up the basis for an integral environmental system in Serbia. It also promotes linkages with other sectors, guided by the principles of integration and sustainable development:

- *Integration principle* state authorities, those of the autonomous province and local self-governance units, shall provide the integration of environmental protection and enhancement into all sectoral policies by implementing mutually harmonized plans and programs and by implementing regulations through permit system, technical and other standards and norms, by financing through incentives and

other measures of environmental protection.

- *Principle of sustainable development* - the sustainable development is a harmonized system of technical/technological, economic and social activities in the overall development, where the natural and acquired values of the Republic are used in a cost-efficient and reasonable manner, in order to preserve and enhance the quality of the environment for the present and future generations.

*The Law on Nature Protection* (RS Official Gazette No 36/2009; 88/2010) has clear and strong focus on sustainability principles, first of all on sustainable use of resources, as well as on integrated protection. It relates to the sector of spatial and urban planning and, indirectly, to other sectors relevant for protection and use of natural resources. However, it does not specify precisely enough the possible links to tourism sector, but rather defines relationships to organized visits and recreation activities in and around the protected areas

The above selected and briefly analyzed environmental documents reflect modern international trends and European requirements towards sustainability, first of all a general orientation to strive for a balance between environmental, social and economic development. Looking at promotion of integrated approach as criteria in our analysis, it may be concluded that the Law on Environmental Protection is the closest to its fulfillment, while in other documents there is still tendency to look at tourism as a potential threat to the protection of natural resources and not as a potential for the sustainable development and use.

### **Tourism policy and legislation**

The most relevant strategies and legislation in the field of tourism in Serbia have been developed and adopted over the last ten years, supported by foreign technical and financial aid. However, as it was stated, the "plan implementation is still at the low level, and aspects of economic development in trans-border cooperation are insufficiently promoted" (Dabić *et al.*, 2009:239).

*The Tourism Strategy of the Republic of Serbia* was adopted in 2006. The Project aimed at the Support to Implementation of the National Strategy for Tourism (2010-2012), funded by EU and performed in close cooperation with the Department for Tourism of the Ministry of Economy and Finance as the main beneficiary, resulted in recommendations for updating "... the Strategy related policies in line with best EU practice" (Support to the Implementation of the National Strategy for Tourism, 2012).

From the perspective of cross sector approach and sustainability principles, the Strategy 2006 needs significant improvements. Sustainable development principles are not clearly present as guidelines and the foundation of the Tourism Strategy of Serbia.

One of the four goals formulated in the Strategy is the following: "By means of tourism, and in the best interest of the tourism development, Serbia must assure the long term protection of natural and cultural resources" (The Ministry of Economy and Finance of Serbia, 2012). Natural values and protected areas are also estimated as an important and solid basis for tourism development by public policy groups consulted during the development of the Strategy: according to results of the survey on environmental aspects, "...clean and preserved nature and beauty of the landscape" (ibid.) is estimated by 3 on the scale from 1-5. At the same time, in the same survey, the awareness of the local population about the importance of the preservation of the natural and cultural heritage is marked by the lowest number - 1.

While natural values and protected areas are seen as important resources for tourism development, and its integrated management as one of the preconditions for its sustainability, it is not recognized as one of the key elements of tourism product branding. The expansion of protected area over the territory of Serbia may be considered as one of the measures of its biodiversity protection, and that is the only, indirect, link found in the Strategy between biodiversity and tourism development.

Climate change, mitigation or adaptation, as well as some other environmental issues of global importance (energy efficiency, renewable resources and their sustainable use) are not mentioned in the Strategy at all. In respect to the climate change problem, it should be also noted that the current legal framework is not fully supportive (Crnčević *et al.*, 2011).

The concept of sustainable tourism is generally recognized, though not directly mentioned, neither its principles systematically mainstreamed into the Strategy. Economic development is predominant as a goal of the Strategy, aimed first of all at the development of competitiveness of clusters and at the provision of "accommodation supply" in "undiscovered" areas (among which national parks and nature parks).

*The Strategy for Sustainable Rural Tourism Development in Serbia/Main Report* - The Document is developed within the MDG-F Joint Program (JP) *Sustainable Tourism for Rural Development* in Serbia, being

implemented by participating UN agencies (UNDP, UNEP, FAO, UNWTO and UNICEF) and national partners, namely the Ministry of Economy and Regional Development, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management, and Tourism Organization of Serbia). It makes the basis for development of the Rural Tourism Master Plan of Serbia.

By Environmental Goals of this document, it is strongly recognized and suggested that rural tourism should be developed as "...catalyst to preserve, protect and manage natural and cultural assets in rural areas, minimizing pressures on biodiversity and by supporting the sustainable usage of biological resources in Rural Tourism projects...with respect to the character, the value and the carrying capacity of the existing rural landscape". (Spanish Mdg Achievement Fund - Joint Programme Sustainable Tourism For Rural Development, 2010).

By its Social Strategy, the document focuses on the role that Rural Tourism should play in addressing social issues in rural Serbia such as unemployment, depopulation and the disempowerment of women and the youth. Among other measures, the Strategy proposes the following:

- To use rural tourism as a catalyst to drive the diversification of the rural economy;
- To provide training and skills development;
- To activate the participation of women, youth and other disadvantaged groups in Rural Tourism;
- To revitalize rural schools.

The rural tourism economic and tourism demand goals suggested in this document are as follows:

- Increase the demand for overnights;
- Increase revenues from rural tourism activities;
- Increase occupancy rates of rural accommodation.

The Strategy is clearly guided by the global development goals (Millennium Development Goals, targeting in particular goals 1,7 and 8), EU accession principles and general principles of sustainable development, defining the linkage of rural tourism with environmental, social and other segments of economic sectors.

*The Tourism Law of Serbia* (RS Official Gazette No 36/2009,88/2010,99/2011), adopted in 2009 with updates from 2010 and 2011, is based on the following principles:

- 1) integrated development of tourism and related activities as factors of overall economic and social development in line with the law

provides for the implementation of mutually harmonized plans and programs;

2) sustainable development of tourism as a harmonized system of technical, technological, economic and social activities based on economic development, preservation of natural and cultural goods, preservation and development of the local community.

The planning documents which should contribute to the integrated planning of tourism and which should be harmonized with the Tourism Development Strategy of the Republic of Serbia are specified in Article 5 of the Law as follows:

- 1) Tourism Development Strategy of the Republic of Serbia;
- 2) Strategic Master Plan;
- 3) Strategic Marketing Plan;
- 4) Program for the development of tourist products;
- 5) Program for the development of tourism;
- 6) Program of promotional activities.

The most direct reference to protected nature areas and resources is made within the proclamation of a tourist area, where listed in the contents of feasibility study (necessary part of proclamation documentation), in case there are some natural areas/goods on the territory of particular tourism area (Article 17). Other environmental issues are not involved in this document.

Despite the above presented principles, this Law applies to integral (the level of tourism sector) rather than integrated approach. Environmental issues (links to the environmental sector and planning) are not mainstreamed into the document. Sustainable tourism development is mentioned only in the second general principle on which the Law is based, and therefore represents a declarative rather than truly cross sector orientation.

Based on the above given analysis of both environmental and tourism-related strategic and legal documents, it can be concluded that there is a general common orientation towards integrated approach. Incorporation of this, as one of the main sustainability principles, varies among the analyzed documents and between the sectors (tourism and environment):

– Mainstreaming of environmental issues into other sectors is strong point of environmental strategies and regulation; it is somewhat more developed in relation to economy than to social issues in most of the cases (except for the Sustainable Development Strategy);

– Except for the Rural Tourism Development Strategy of Serbia, environmental issues are only partially incorporated into the segments of tourism documents and regulation; protection of natural resources and protected area expansion is accepted and promoted, but their sustainable use and relationship between tourism and climate change, waste management, energy efficiency and other important issues, as recommended by relevant global and European documents, are not adequately emphasized and involved;

– At the strategy level, there is focus on predominance of one sector, despite the efforts to promote integrated approach to the development. For example, the National Biodiversity Strategy establishes links with goals of economic development, stressing the need to support it by providing guidelines for economic valorization of biodiversity and ecosystem services, and its sustainable use; however, at the same time, tourism is defined as one of the direct threats to biodiversity conservation; the Strategy for Sustainable Use of Natural Resources and Goods (draft) relates to many other sectors, without precisely mentioning the tourism in the entire text; from the side of tourism, with the exception of (drafted) strategies and programs for the Sustainable Rural Tourism, economic sectors and related goals are predominant to other sectors, including the environmental sector.

### **LOCAL COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION**

Involving of local community in planning, decision making and implementing of activities has been largely embedded in relevant international documents and requirements of EU policy. In Serbia, as in many other countries, this is reflected in all the documents regulating environmental and tourism sectors, including planning procedures.

The Law on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters, adopted in Serbia in 2004, provides the platform for public participation relevant in many aspects for tourism development.

The Law on Environmental Protection, as well as specific laws pertaining to the Strategic Environmental Assessment (Law on Strategic Environmental Assessment, RS Official Gazette No 135/2004 and 88/2010) and Environmental Impact Assessment (Law on Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), RS Official Gazette No 135/2004, 36/2009) and those covering planning procedures, bring to Serbian society new

opportunities to be informed and involved in decision making on issues relevant for their everyday life, and to government institutions and project holders new, sometimes complex, responsibilities. In planning, as defined by Article 13 of the Tourism Law, the Strategic Master Plan is a crucial document for “drafting spatial and urban plans at the priority tourist destinations and tourism areas” as these plans shall establish “conditions for the construction of tourism infrastructure facilities”. However, it should be stated that the Law on Planning and Construction (Official Gazette of RS No 72/09, 81/09-change, 64/10-US, and 24/11) does not oblige the developer of the Plan to cooperate with the local community and civil society who live in the vicinity (Petovar, Jokić, 2011:10). Also, one of the limitations for public participation in decision making in Serbia is a lack of experience and knowledge about techniques and methods, as well as insufficiently developed mechanisms and procedures for public participation in decision making.

However, it should be stated that in recent years initiatives have been taken to mobilize public awareness of various programmes and actions for protecting the environment and implementing sustainable development strategies such as the Local Environmental Action Programmes (LEAP) and Local Agendas (LA21) (Crnčević, 2007). For these, strong support of local authorities and population has been reported, together with that of foreign donors.

In strategies for tourism, rural tourism and natural resources development, there is a general awareness of community issues and their rights to public participation. There is a common understanding on the needs of the public to be informed and involved in the development. However, this is interpreted mainly as being confined to levels of information and consultation rather than to specific instruments and mechanisms of participation on an equal basis.

In the documents in both sectors, the focus on “stakeholders”, “public”, local authorities or NGO (civil) sector, is much stronger than on local communities and specifically targeted groups. Local community issues are directly incorporated into, and elaborated in the most successful manner within, the Draft National Strategy of Sustainable Use of Natural Resources and Goods and in the Draft Sustainable Rural Tourism Development Strategy. There is a general respect for local culture, but not directly related to the promotion of traditional knowledge in sustainable development and use of resources, or local communities sharing in economic and other benefits of tourism.

There is also a general awareness of the close interrelationship between local community participation, e.g. opportunities for decision making in tourism/sustainable development, and capacity development of all the actors. This is slightly better promoted in environmental documents (in the Law on Environment Protection and in the Biodiversity Strategy) in terms of understanding that the process has to be supported by different forms of awareness raising and education of locals, in addition to financial mechanisms and incentives. It is recognized as responsibility of formal governmental institutions, but the provision of such support should be coordinated, not only performed, by them.

## CONCLUSIONS

The last decade brought improvements into Serbian policy and legislation in tourism and environmental sectors, as the country is making progress towards the EU integration. It implies the progress in mainstreaming sustainable principles into strategies and plans, as well as facing the challenges in its implementation.

Looking at tourism as one of the driving forces for further socioeconomic growth, the decision and policy makers are also aware that potentials for its development are not adequately realized. This has resulted in efforts to provide international assistance in improving policy and practice in the field. This process requires understanding and compliance with clearly defined criteria by social and environmental policies of international donors, as well as increasing the competences of all actors involved to perform it. The local, national, and international cooperation and involvement of stakeholders are therefore not only well formulated requests in most of the documents, but obviously a necessary mechanism for increasing competences to participate and make progress in this, as in other fields of development.

There is a need for improving the strategic and legal documents in tourism sector in order to ensure better mainstreaming of environmental issues. In the tourism sector documents there is a somewhat stronger tendency to provide the basis for integral, rather than integrated approach (lack of linkage to other sectors). For the sake of policy development towards sustainability in both sectors, there is a need to apply real cross sector approach, based on equality of all life sectors, instead of developing links and recommendations from "within the box" of the respective sector.

As stated in the Final Report of the Support to Tourism Strategy Implementation Project

(2012), tourism resources need to be clearly defined in the law in order to be protected. Mutual cooperation in developing tourism management plans of protected areas and tourism and cultural sites is one of the preconditions for the implementation of sustainability in the practice. Such a practice needs to be founded on clearly defined sustainable principles in strategic and legal documents and plans in all the sectors.

Also, the strong determination of the professionals involved in tourism development planning for cohesion between nature protection and tourism development should be mentioned, as well as spatial specificity of the country, national development policies, applied models and concepts, while the importance of trans-border cooperation is highlighted (Krunic *et al.*, 2010).

It is important to improve most of the documents in parts providing a basis for democratic policy towards local communities so that it could open more adequate opportunities: 1) for the public to participate instead of being only informed/consulted, and 2) for local stakeholders to be able to improve capacities and use all mechanisms of participation and decision making in the development of tourism on sustainable basis. In that way, sustainable tourism development 'should not only seek to minimize local environmental impact, but also give greater priority to community participation and poverty alleviation' (Neto, 2003:212).

The fact that in current practice of developed, as well as less developed societies, there is still much effort to be invested in the implementation of sustainability has been largely documented in recent years by many authors. In this context, it is not surprising that in Serbia there is a need for adjustments in tourism policy, as well as in planning documents and practice, in order to improve prospects for sustainable tourism development. In the result of comparative assessment of planning systems and SEA in achieving sustainability, for example, authors reached the same conclusion, despite the differences between countries, that there is '...quite slight promotion of sustainability in plans ...common for both England and Serbia' (Crnčević, Therivel, 2009:104).

It certainly does not imply that implementation of sustainable principles in tourism and related sectors is not possible. On the contrary, as 'tourism has been a phenomenon characterized by immense innovativeness (within various categories - product, process, managerial, marketing and institutional)' (Hjalager, 2010:1),

permanent efforts in policy improvements and capacity development of all stakeholders through local, national and international cooperation is a necessary precondition for achieving progress in practice.

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