

Linking people and culture with nature

“Sustainable tourism development as a base for additional income and self-employment for the population in the mountain regions”

The village of Brajcino, (Former Yugoslavia Republic of Macedonia, Balkan Region, Europe)

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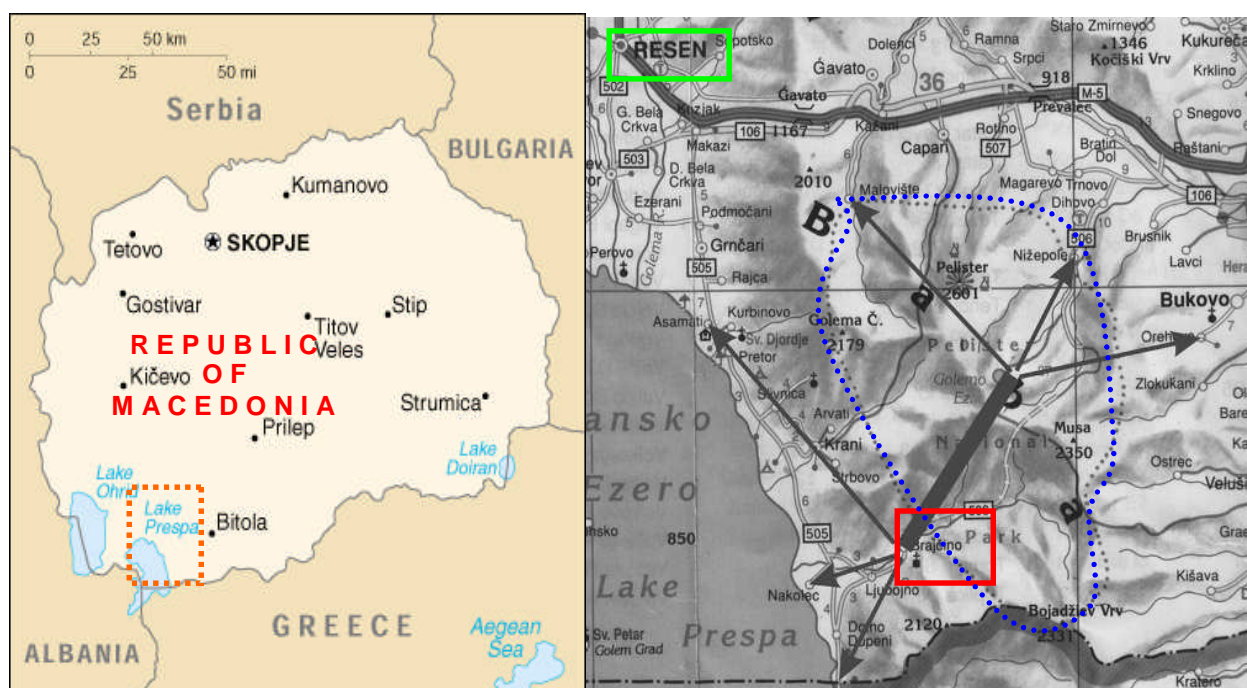
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Introduction:

Brajcino (marked in red on table 1 - the right map) is a mountain village located on the outskirts of Pelister National Park (traced in blue on table 1 - the right map) at an altitude of about 1000 metres above sea level in Former Yugoslavia Republic of Macedonia. Is a village inside a the Resen municipality (marked in green in the map) located in the southwestern part of Macedonia, in the Prespa valley, near the Prespa Lake. Brajčino is at the foot of the Baba mountain, very close to the national park Pelister, just 15 minutes from Prespansko (Prespa) lake. This unique Macedonian village is placed on the world touristic map in the category “ecological tourism”. It is rich in clear waters, tall and green forests, mountain peaks that overwhelm with beauty, apples that grow at 1000 meters altitude and strawberries that ripen in late summer. Formerly a rich trading village, it still has a small population of mixed ages despite the emigration of many of the villagers in the middle of the 20th century to Canada and Scandinavia due to lack of employment or in order to escape communist persecution. The departure of the vast majority of business know-how from the village has left it in hard times, even more so since the break-up of Yugoslavia wich has taken its toll on the village’s formerly prosperous apple trade. Previously, apples from the area would be sold as far away as Zagreb and Ljubljana, whereas new borders and taxes have all but eliminated the apple export.

Table 1: Former Yugoslavia Republic of Macedonia Map and Brajcino Village Area



Source: Exploringmacedonia.com

Project Background

The Pilot Eco-Tourism Project in Brajcino Village (Resen Municipality) is a component of the Pellister Mountain Conservation Project (PMCP), which additionally consists of two other components: Management Plan for Pelister National Park, the first of its kind in Macedonia, and Nature Education Program.

Table 2: Project development area (Prespa Lake, Resen Municipality and Brajcino Village)



Source: www.brajcino.com.mk/main.html

Pelister National Park:

Pelister National Park covers relatively small area (10.870 ha) on the northern side of the Baba Mountain massif, in the south-western part Macedonia, at altitude of 891 to 2601 m. The territory of the Park includes various glacial and periglacial geomorphological forms, some of which are rare in the Balkans, preserved in their natural state and of high attractiveness to Park' visitors.

Because of the geological composition, specific terrain and the local mountain climate, various habitat types have been formed in the Park supporting rich and important biological diversity. Of these the most prominent are the extensive forests of the Macedonian Pine – Molika – the most important habitat of its type in the Balkans and therefore in the World, the glacial lakes and the alpine grasslands. In addition to the nine local endemics – species that can only be found in Park's territory – there are also several dozens of rare and threatened species. In addition to the natural, within the territory of Pelister National Park there are also numerous cultural values.

Plan of Management for Pelister National Park:

The management of Pelister National Park in the next ten years (2006-2015) will be directed toward reaching the following objectives:

1. The biological diversity, landscape, cultural and geological heritage in the Park are protected for the benefit of the current and future generations;
2. The visitors have the opportunity to get to know and understand the natural and cultural values of the Park without affecting the natural conditions and processes;

3. Pelister National Park contributes to the social and economic development of the local communities in and around the Park;
4. The scientific research function of the Park is developed.

In achieving these objectives the Park Authority will enhance its management capacity and will make effort to increase the support by the wider society. The specific measures and activities to achieve these objectives are grouped into several interrelated themes: a) Conservation of the natural and cultural heritage; b) The Park and the visitors; c) Supporting the socio-economic development of the local communities; c) Enhancing the management capacity of the Park Authority; c) Zoning; c) Research and monitoring.

The decision for the preparation of a Management Plan for Pelister National Park was made in 2001. The decision to prepare the Management Plan – first of its kind in the Republic of Macedonia – was an important step towards the implementation of the law, and also to introducing the international standards concerning management of protected areas in the country, following the recommendations by EUROSITE and the World Conservation Union (IUCN). The process for preparation of the Plan of Management for Pelister National Park has begun in 2001 through a financial support from the Government of the Swiss Federation and the Pelister Mountain Conservation Process (PMCP). The project is being implemented by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the Swiss non-governmental organization Pronatura, in cooperation with the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning (MoEPP) of the Republic of Macedonia and non-governmental organizations from the country. The planning process has been carried out in two phases. The first phase (2001- 2003) has been implemented by the Society for Research and Protection of Birds of Macedonia (SRPBM) which coordinated the activities for data collection and analysis. In the meantime the Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia endorsed the new Law on Nature Protection (O.J. R.M. 67/04) which regulates the nature protection by protecting the biological and landscape diversity, and the protection of the natural heritage, in and outside the protected areas. Following Article 73 of this law the public institution national park shall adopt a plan of management for Park. According to Article 98, paragraph 1, of the same law, “the management plans for natural heritage shall be in accordance with the Spatial Plan of the Republic of Macedonia and shall contain all the prescribed measures and activities for nature protection, in particular:

1. Preparation of overview of the protected natural heritage and the ecologically important areas therein, with their characteristics and status assessment;
2. Protection measures and developmental guidelines for the protected area and the ecologically important areas;
3. Measures for protection of biological diversity, especially measures for conservation of natural habitats;
4. Measures for protection of characteristic landscapes;
5. Establishment of a system of measures and activities for protection against fires and other natural disasters; and
6. Cartographic presentation of natural habitats.

According to Article 98, paragraph 4, the plans of management for protected areas shall be adopted by “the entity responsible for the execution of management and protection activities, according to the proclamation act, upon prior consent of the body of the public administration responsible for the execution of the works in the field of nature protection.” The Law on Nature Protection (O.J. R.M. 67/04) also provides for a procedure for adoption of the plans (Article 101) so that “the body of the public administration responsible for the execution of the works in the field of nature protection, as well as the entities entrusted with the management of the protected area, shall organize a public hearing” and that “the opinions, proposals and recommendations stated at the public hearing shall be taken into account during the development of the Management Plans for Protected Areas.”

Thus, during the second phase (2005-2006) Pelister National Park and PMCP embarked upon the finalization of the Plan for Management of Pelister National Park following the provisions of the new Law on Nature Protection. A number of stakeholders were involved in the process of finalization of the Park through numerous meetings and workshops. In addition to this, during the public consultation process for the Draft version of this Plan all stakeholders had the opportunity to submit their opinions, proposals and recommendations in writing or at the public hearings organizing in Bitola and Resen in December 2005. The submitted opinions, proposals and recommendations were carefully considered by a working group comprising members of the Directorate of Pelister National Park, the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning of Republic of Macedonia and the expert team of the Pelister Mountain Conservation Project.

The Brajcino village ecotourism project

With the start of the Pelister Mountain Conservation Project in 2001 (a pioneer approach has been promoted to address natural resource management in the Pelister region) an eco-tourism component was developed in order to contribute to income generation for the local population in the Pelister region through sustainable use of the natural resources. The villagers of Brajcino, through the help of Swiss Cooperation, Pro Natura and the local non governmental organizations of DEM (Ecological Movement of Macedonia) and BSPM (Bird Society Protection of Macedonia), are trying to revive the local economy by offering visitors access to their pristine lifestyle in return for keeping it so. Eco-tourism is chosen as a model to show that sustainable use of natural and cultural resources in protected areas can provide income generation and self-employment for the population in the mountain regions and contribute to overall Sustainable Development

The idea/philosophy:

The philosophy of the project is connecting people with culture and nature and providing the village with facilities necessary to host potential tourists. "Linking people and culture with nature" - linking Lake Prespa and Pelister Mountain with a mountain nature trail from the village of Brajcino (Lake Prespa Region) to Lake Golemo Ezero (Pelister National Park).

Work methodology

- Collaboration and synergies within the Pelister Mountain Conservation Project (PMCP)
- Participation of the local population from the very beginning
- Linking to existing tourism development resources and local know-how
- Starting small and learning by doing
- Including local tour operators in product development from the very beginning

Stakeholders and partners:

- Swiss Cooperation Agency
- Pro Natura, Swiss ngo
- The Pelister National Park
- The villagers of Brajcino
- The ecologist's Movement of Macedonia (DEM)
- Bird Society Protection of Macedonia (BSPM)
- The Mountaineering Club Pelister - Bitola
- Natura Nova Ltd

Assessment of the sub-Pellister villages

In the first phase of the Project (Pellister Mountain Conservation Project – PMCP- 2001 – 2004) an assessment of 37 villages in Pelister region was conducted and in order to select a model village the following key parameters were investigated: a) Access to village; b) Infrastructure (roads, houses); c) Attractions (cultural and historical monuments); d) Connection with NP Pelister; Willingness of local people to participate. Following the assessment, Brajcino was selected as a model village for developing eco-tourism pilot project. Some factors contribute to chose Brajcino as village model: 1) The proximity of the lake Prespa (6 km from Brajcino) that contributes to the mild climate and favourable wheatear conditions all year round; 2) The location of Brajcino where is possible to combine outdoor activities on the mountain, leisure of the lake and visit to different cultural sites. 3) Proximity to the main Macedonian tourist destination: Brajcino is one hour drive from the centre of Macedonian tourism and the UNESCO site – Ohrid and has a good road connection and developed public transport system. 4) The pristine and picturesque setting on the edge of Pellister National Park.

Specific objectives

The Project focused on:

- a) Building up eco- and village tourism attractions
- b) Supporting Services
- c) Promoting the eco-tourism project
- d) Capacity building and organizational development

a) Building up eco- and village tourism attractions

Through series of workshops and community meetings, together with the local people tourist attractions combining nature and culture were identified.

- 1) development of three different trails was supported
 - village walk for experiencing the traditional architecture and village lifestyle (Upper and lower village walk)
 - Monastery walk for visiting the religious sites and experiencing the nature around the village; (Brajcino hike on the slopes around the village) and
 - Nature trail from Brajcino to the glacial lake Golem Ezero in Pelister National Park, which is the first example of interpretative trail in Macedonia (Interpreted mountain nature trail)
- 2) National meals –Brajcino food specialties and events

Families interested for offering accommodation and catering services were identified. At the beginning of the Project there was only one house in Brajcino who provided accommodation and catering services restricted to exclusive customers. The Project supported small scale direct investments for improvement and re - adaptation of the accommodation facilities.

b) Supporting Services

- Mountain and village guides
- Village lunches and dinners in local families and in the Monastery of St. Petka
- Various standards of accomodation: private and in the Monastery of St. Petka
- Information point and info-coffee-shop in the center of the village

c) Promoting the eco-tourism project

- Promotion and information concept
- Marketing strategy
- Promotion and information material
- Test tours and visits

Promotion of all tourist products was supported by: a) Organising test tours for spreading “word of mouth”; b) Promotion of special events and inauguration of the pilot project, press conferences; c) Promotion material (flyers, brochure and map); c) Basic map for the mountain and village trail; d) Creating and maintaining a web site and link with tourism portal Exploring Macedonia.

d) Capacity building and organizational development

The Project focused on investing in human resources and capacity building of the Brajcino people in order to enable them to successfully run eco – tourism initiatives.

- Tourism sector training and customer care: guiding, catering, accommodation, and information
- Tourism management
- Institution building: village development society

An NGO – Society for sustainable development of Brajcino was formed in 2003, and was supported through trainings in: a) customer care and hospitality; b) basic rules for catering and accommodation; c) guiding; d) English lessons and working with computers.

Results achieved

During the second Project phase (2004 – 2006) majority of the activities focussed on phasing out from Brajcino and ensuring that the Association can function independently. In that regard, series of meeting related to organisation development and strategic planning were conducted. The Project gradually handed over responsibilities such as booking, promotion and contacts with tour operators to the Association. Ten percent of income of the guides, accommodation, catering services and the village shop is reinvested into Society for sustainable development of Brajcino and preserving the local area.

Table 3: Accommodations, catering and guiding service from 2003 to 2006

YEARS	2003	2004	2005	2006
Accommodation (Overnights)	76	327	462	656
Catering (portions)	288	963	1523	2271
Guiding services	16	37	83	161

Source: Brajcino Business Plan

Table 4: Accommodations, catering and guiding service revenues (€) in 2006

YEAR 2006	
Accommodation (Overnights):	656 x EUR 12 .00 = EUR 7872 .00
Catering (portions):	2271 x EUR 7 .00 = EUR 15897 .00
Guid ing services:	161 x EUR 25 .00 = EUR 4025 .00
Total:	EUR 27794 .00

Source: *Brajcino Business Plan*

Table 5: Total Income in Brajcino Village ecotourism project in 2006

Accommodat ion, Catering & Guid ing Services :	EUR 27794 .00
Handicrafts , Home made products :	EUR 11000 .00
Total Income 2006:	EUR 38794.00

Source: *Brajcino Business Plan Project*

Number of persons directly engaged with eco-tourism activities:	Persons 18
Average additional annual income per person (family):	EUR 2155.00

Today, there are five houses and a monastery dorm which offer accommodation for tourists and three houses which offer catering services. There is one restaurant in the village specialised in traditional meals. The number of visitors is constantly increasing (e.g. the number of overnights was 76 in 2003 and 327 in 2004) and it is possible to make internet booking. Brajcino is present in guidebooks about Macedonia and covered in numerous articles in different national and international magazines. Brajcino Society has 22 members and is now implementing a new Project for protection of the endemic Pelister trout in a cross border cooperation with one NGO from Greece.

Monitoring activities:

Monitoring of this component was done within the overall monitoring process of the project which encompassed internal and external evaluation on regular bases (at each project phase there was a mid term and final evaluation). Additionally, the activities at Brajcino were monitored by frequent field visits and reporting scheme.

Project funding:

The Project for Conservation of Pelister Mountain is financially supported by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) in cooperation with the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning (MOEPP).

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