



EVENTS AND TRADITION AS A POTENTIAL FOR INCREASED TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

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Abstract:

Holding a variety of events is often directly related to tradition as an important segment of life throughout development of human civilization. The beginnings in researching events and tourism date from the late 20th century and are associated with the opportunities for increased economic effects on the destination, and their role in increasing the overall competitiveness. Development of events and their relation to tourism is particularly expressed when they began to be more exploited for promotion of tourism destinations, in which cultural values and tradition are mostly included through a new form of tourism - event tourism. Given the contents that include elements of tradition, they themselves are unique in representing specific tourism offer. Tradition as an inherited socio-cultural continuity is often included in the organization of cultural tourism events in a form of cultural celebrations, entertainment and art programs, and is an important component of cultural tourism offer. This paper explores the importance of events for increased tourism development in the Republic of Macedonia through assessment of the scope and types in order to identify their role in tourism through implementation desk research method, quantitative and qualitative analysis.

Key words:

events,
tradition,
tourism development,
event tourism,
competitiveness.

1. INTRODUCTION

Continuing increase of different events contributes to their differentiation as a specific sector identified and established as event industry within international framework and is often closely related and connected to event tourism. As evidenced around the world, festivals and events are among the most successful tools available to communities, regions and even countries to enhance tourism, create powerful and memorable branding and imaging opportunities, bond people together, encourage positive media coverage, increase economic impact, and add to the quality of lives for those who live there (Schmader, 2014). According to IFEA data, the average number of events held worldwide is estimated to include about 5 million festivals and events, not including other events as corporate celebrations, weddings, religious gatherings, school carnivals, *etc.* (IFEA, 2014).

Many tourism countries face with challenges as to how to create an offer that will contribute to increased competitive position on tourist market by attracting more tourists. It opens possibilities for comprehensive tourist offer. The content of tourism offer understands an active attitude towards the treatment of different natural and cultural values. Based on that, it should get to an optimal use of available resources and encourage selectivity in the performance on tourism market, which is one of the most modern trends in the development of this activity. For that purpose, different cultural values and resources are an important segment of tourism offer, and the basis for creation of specific

cultural activities and events. It is evidenced internationally that they are among the most successful tools for increasing tourism demand not only within the communities as destinations, but also regions and even countries. The specific of events is their capacity to create memorable experience to visitors, enhance economic impact and increase the quality of life for residents. Therefore, events are an important motivator for tourism and very often are included in development planning, and marketing of numerous destinations.

According to Ali-Knight and Robertson, "culture" is difficult to define (Bladen *et al.*, 2012), since it consists of beliefs, customs, arts, thinking, behaving or working within a particular society, group, place, or time. It is "the set of attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviour shared by a group of people, but different for each individual, communicated from one generation to the next one" (Matsumoto, 1996). Related to definition of culture, cultural events are also difficult to define taking into consideration their anthropological and aesthetic diversity that ranges different types of events which mostly include tradition, art and music. The relationship between tourism and culture is not new since it is mostly the reason for visiting different places. Inclusion of culture in tourism is manifested as cultural tourism that may appear as a new term, but the phenomenon is not new (Yeoman *et al.*, 2006). As Getz explains, events and festivals with different cultural context have potential to satisfy residents and visitors to foster local organizational development, leadership and networking, all of which are part of the community-based tourism development (Getz, 1997).

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It also contributes to destination sustainable development for a longer term.

Events, where elements of tradition are included, have potential to attract visitors to a place or region that otherwise they would not visit. Some destinations have seasonality issues which can be overcome through organization of such events by attracting more visitors. Simultaneously, inclusion of such events in tourism offer implies qualitative complement of tourism destination's offer, particularly if they are connected to elements of tradition and offer rich and diverse programs through which socio-cultural and economic effects come to expression. Utilization of culture and tradition in development of specific, selective and current tourist offer is significantly more important for tourism development in the Republic of Macedonia and its positioning as a competitive tourist destination in the region and broader.

2. CULTURE, TRADITION, AND EVENTS IN TOURISM

The variety of events can be observed since the beginnings of human civilization and, within different historical periods, reflecting culture and tradition in everyday life. Development of events and increased research interest concerning their relation to tourism has been especially notable from the 1980's onwards when different values of culture, tradition, sport and recreation included in different events became orientation in order to promote destinations and attract tourists. Tradition can be defined as an inherited socio-cultural continuity in social attitudes, customs and institutions and is a characteristic of behaviour in a particular environment and within particular period. As content it is often present in the organization of cultural events for tourism in the form of cultural events, festivals, celebrations and different programs, and is an important component of cultural tourism offer. The constant increase in the volume of different types of events contributed to differentiate them as a separate economic activity as "event industry".

This specific type of tourism offer includes a wide range of accompanying tourism programs and contents that attract many visitors. Holding of events contributes to creation of a unique image of the destination and is an incentive for increased competitiveness on the regional, national and international level. In many countries, traditions are at risk of disappearance with different factors contributing to this situation, mostly industrialization and globalization. Usually, customary celebrations are among the traditions that are interesting to include in different cultural events for two main reasons: (1) to preserve and maintain traditions that are part of everyday life of a community / nation, and (2) to promote it among younger generations and to "others" who are mostly visitors or tourists belonging to other nationalities, ethnic groups and countries. Utilization of the tradition as a basis for creating specific, selective and modern tourism offer is becoming increasingly important in tourism development in many places, and also for increasing and diversifying tourism offer in the Republic of Macedonia. Therefore, it is essential for the country as tourism destination to take a place on the map of competitive destinations in the region and broader within the diverse and comprehensive tourist offer.

Tradition also refers to use of resources through different periods at same or similar manner. Thus, not only attractions as material heritage are the basis for development of tourism products, but they are enriched with traditionalism, as a complementary category to the cultural heritage. Also, through evaluation, tradition has a treatment as attraction in itself. It preoccupies tourist attention as incorporated attraction of tourism offer and as part of other values. Tourists are able to follow traditions and be active participants in this segment of tourist values. Utilization of tradition in events enables optimal use of resources for encouraging each community or destination to join the long-term, strategic approach to tourism events, and thus to plan and develop in order to understand their full potential. Regardless of the content, scope and character of the events organized, they all have one aim: to gather people at one place at the same time and gain new cultural experiences. Based on the reason upon which events are organized (Bowdin *et al.*, 2006; Getz, 2007; Goldblatt, 1997), the following typology of events is generally accepted:

- ◆ According to the content
 - *Cultural events*
 - cultural celebrations (festivals, carnivals, religious events, parades, tradition / heritage memorials)
 - arts and entertainment (concerts, exhibitions, ceremonial awards, performance)
 - *Recreational events* (sports competitions (amateur / professional) sports and recreational fun games)
 - *Business and commercial events* (meetings, conventions, exhibitions, trade shows, fairs)
 - *Educational and scientific* (conferences, congresses, seminars, trainings)
 - *Individual events* (weddings, birthdays, anniversaries, parties / social gatherings)
- ◆ According to the purpose of organization
 - *Individual*
 - *Public / social*
 - *Volunteer*
- ◆ According to the spatial scope and importance for the destination
 - *Local events* (can be organized periodically or once and are characterized by weak demand and low value)
 - *Regional events* (can be organized once or periodically and are characterized by average tourist demand)
 - *Recognized (hallmark) events* (organized periodically and are characterized by high tourist demand and high value)
 - *Occasional mega events* (high tourist demand and high value)

This is a usual typology, and a starting point towards understanding diversity and scope of events which, after all, have common characteristics that are very important, and certain preconditions are necessary for their organization:

- ◆ Event's size from the point of program content
- ◆ Complexity and diversity of provided services to the visitors



- ◆ Number of participants, their expenses, activities' time frame and technical conditions
- ◆ Interaction with visitors, contacts and experiencing satisfaction

Regardless of the size and type of events, the following is evident: there is an increasing interest in the so-called "unique cultural experience" enabled by the content provided through various elements of tradition as an integral component of the overall cultural tourism offer (Getz, 1997). Furthermore, in favor of these experiences, the most common offered content are festivals and events which provide authenticity and uniqueness in the experience, especially if such events are based on inherited traditional values coupled with accommodation facilities and theme. Such approach to organizing events enables establishing connection between the following three basic elements that lead to "a unique cultural experience" (Figure 1):

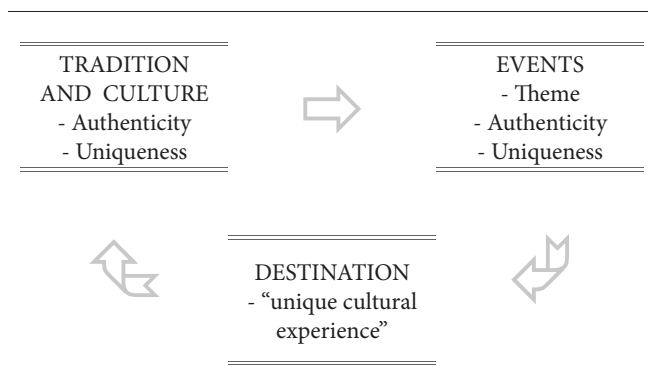


Fig 1. Basic elements for "unique cultural experience"

The events play an important role for the destination, especially having in mind their importance as "attractiveness, image creator, animator and catalyst for future tourist destination development" (Getz, 1997). Even more important is their role in reducing the negative effects of mass tourism and its contribution to sustainable development of the destination, reducing seasonality, introducing new season, strengthening the awareness of cultural traditions and values equally in promoting to the domestic population and to tourists, strengthening the relationship between domestic population - visitors / tourists, enriching the socio-cultural values of the destination and the quality of life.

According to Goldblatt (1997), event is defined as a special event that recognizes the unique moment in time with rights to meet the specific needs of participants. They include elements of tradition while contributing to the establishment of a connection with the lifestyle destination in familiarizing participants with the socio-cultural dimension and it also makes them animated with traditional values. Their maintenance allows animation of local residents and visitors and contributes to promoting the destination and creating an image of the tourist market.

Depending on the type and size of events, some destinations are recognizable around the world because they host spectacular festivals and events such as Carnival in Rio de Janeiro, Calgary stampede in Canada, Mardi Gras in New Orleans, USA, Munich's Oktoberfest and others (Bladen *et al.* 2012). Holding the events is in very close relationship with two main aspects of management: destination management and event management. In destinations where events

are held, special attention needs to be addressed to spatial management and resources as important elements in the process of determining the role of the destination and show the "magical" to the visitors. Here, especially important is the role of all stakeholders. Managing the events as a framework includes research, detailed planning, implementation and evaluation (Yeoman *et al.*, 2006)

Events allow destination cultural development as a result of the complexity of relations that such events produce during their maintenance. Destinations "share their culture with others" through events and offer "cultural content" as part of tourism offer, thus providing them with cultural experience. In this way, socio-cultural, economic and environmental dimensions become more evident and contribute to increased promotion, image and identity of destinations.

3. POTENTIAL OF EVENTS FOR INCLUSION IN TOURISM OFFER IN THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

The wealth of cultural values in the Republic of Macedonia is an important potential for tourism offer aimed at creating events. Their distribution throughout the country highlights the ability of all regions to proceed towards enriched tourist offer by exploiting these potentials. Their involvement and appropriate diversification across regions is the basis for creation of tourism offer that will cover the entire territory of the country. Such potential contributes to development of event tourism that is usually based on two concepts:

- ◆ *utilization of already existing events related to tradition, and*
- ◆ *creation of new events with content that will include elements of tradition.*

Utilization of the existing events related to tradition is the basis for approaching towards future planning of this type of tourism offer and paying special attention to the experiences of the maintenance of existing events and their promotion aimed at increased tourist flows by attracting visitors from wider domestic and international environment. In this context, follows the review of the scope of already existing events evidenced by the Agency for Promotion and Support of Tourism (APST) of Republic of Macedonia. The current review of APST by municipalities was the basis for preparation of quantitative analysis of events in the regions (Table 1). Data shows that 401 recorded events are held yearly, which are by their content mainly linked with the tradition of the population. However, it should be noted that there is a number of events with an extremely local importance whose capacity is not sufficient to attract a wider audience of local population. Following the conducted qualitative analysis, the actual number of events that have the capacity to attract visitors from the wider environment is 300.

Temporal distribution of events suggests that January and August are the months in which most events are held (30%), followed by May, June and July, with about 34%. In reality, more than half of the events were held during these five months, *i.e.* 64%. However, it should be noted that it is associated with the tradition of the population in which most of the events are interrelated with these time dimensions (Figure 2).



Table 1. List of events in the Republic of Macedonia by months and regions, 2013

Region	Number of existing events by months in Planning Regions												TOTAL
	Number of events by months												
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	
Vardar	3	1	1	1	2	3	4	4	2	4	4	/	29
Eastern	11	1	5	4	6	9	8	13	11	6	1	3	78
Southwest	10	2	6	4	7	13	7	17	3	1	4	7	81
Southeast	5	2	/	2	6	3	3	4	1	2	3	2	33
Pelagonija	10	1	6	1	15	8	16	15	8	8	4	7	99
Polog	5	1	/	/	3	1	3	5	1	1	/	/	20
Northeast	5	/	1	3	2	2	2	4	3	4	/	2	28
Skopje	6	1	1	4	8	2	4	3	/	2	2	/	33
TOTAL	55	9	20	19	49	41	47	65	29	28	18	21	401

Source: ASPT of the Republic of Macedonia (2014)

The spatial distribution reveals that most of the events are organized in Pelagonija (99), South West (81) and Eastern (78), representing 59% of the total number of events held in the country. The representation of events in these regions indicates their orientation towards enriching the tourism offer with events that contribute to realization of greater attendance. However, what it lacks is the absence of a record of the number of participants in most of the events, which would contribute to identification and differentiation of another market segment of tourists, those who are participants in cultural tourism and event tourism. This lack of recording of such an important market segment will be overcome with the introduction of this record of the event. It will contribute considerably to follow up on the trends and demands of this market segment in tourism.

Considering that events contribute to sustainable development of communities throughout the year and increase in the number of visitors, there is a need for greater involve-

ment of other regions in the creation of the tourism offer. However, although share of these three regions according to the number of events is quite large compared to others, it is notable that in the structure of many events there are more of those with local importance and many of the events are with same thematic content and overlap not only in time, but also in space, *i.e.* a significant part of events is held simultaneously within the same region. This venue overlap does not contribute to creation of attractive and unique content that would attract a much larger number of visitors.

The analyzed situation of the events in the Republic of Macedonia indicates an obvious need for stronger horizontal and vertical coordination at the national, regional and local level, not only within the institutional framework, but also in the business sector and NGOs. Such coordination between these three sectors will more easily contribute to a well-defined and designed tourism offer of the regions not only within the national but also international framework.

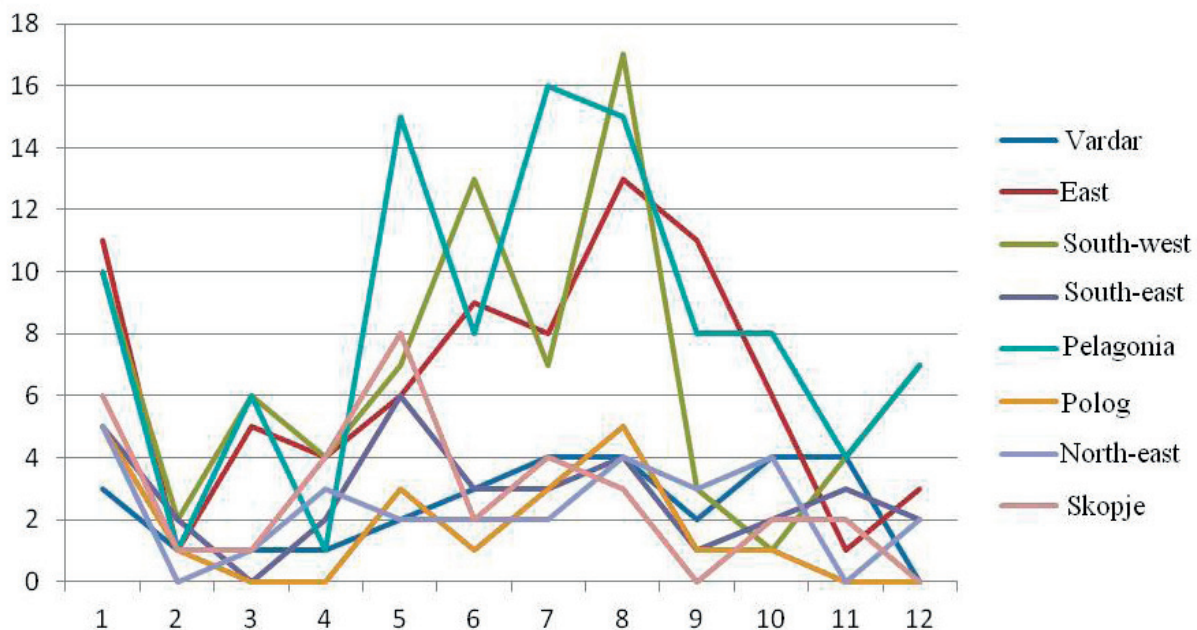


Fig 2. Number of existing events per months in the planning regions



This will allow differentiation of each region's offer on the basis of selection of themes related to culture and tradition as the best way to reflect and promote their heritage.

Therefore, identifying and creating such an offer should be performed by all interested and involved stakeholders. The events have the potential to strengthen their cooperation and mutual networking, which is a key element towards encouraging the development of tourism in municipalities or local communities. The result of this concept of horizontal and vertical coordination is tourism development through preservation of authenticity and simultaneously realizing the needs of both domestic population and tourists, as the basis for sustainable community development. On the other hand, socio-cultural development of communities is the result of complex relationship established not only between visitors but also among domestic population, and domestic population and visitors to the community as participants in the events. Events provide all involved with the "Now" which is related to intercultural communication and experience and represents the basis for organizing future events. The feeling that visitors perceived for the community by participating in events is indescribable complexity of services and experiences. The contents of the events that promote tradition and culture of living through tourism experience to tourists, and simultaneously promote and represent local and regional distinctive characteristics are advantage for those who organize them. Thus, they create an increasing interest in "specificity" of the region, contribute to creation of added value in destination communities, promote and preserve their identity and create an opportunity to achieve prosperity of all stakeholders.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research and analysis of the current situation and potentials for utilizing tradition and events in favor of the increased tourism offer in the Republic of Macedonia that

can contribute to tourism development indicate a need for greater involvement of stakeholders. The quantitative analysis shows a satisfactory number of events organized in different regions, for which different structure of accommodation facilities, cultural and educational institutions, associations and NGO-s and public administration support their organization and realization. According to the State Statistical Office (2014), potential, scope, dynamic and spatial distribution of accommodation capacities have good potential for providing different accommodation services to participants of different events (Graphic 2). Heterogeneous demands and expectations of participants in different events have enabled establishing the balanced relationship with diversity of accommodation facilities in the country.

The qualitative analysis conducted for the content of the currently organized events (ZELS, 2009) shows that the structure of events includes the following:

- ◆ Events related to tradition (these events are dominant).
- ◆ Music events (festivals and competitions).
- ◆ Theater events.
- ◆ Educational events.
- ◆ Events related to celebration of international days.

Many of the events are related to tradition (ZELS, 2009). The analysis of recourses enables performing the classification of recognizable products of such kind in the tourism offer of the Republic of Macedonia. The heterogeneity of the nature of events allows the choice within a relatively wide range of events. Their characteristics vary for religious holidays, festivals, fairs, carnivals, gastro events, creative events, memorial events, *etc.*

The Republic of Macedonia is characterized by remarkable cultural heritage connected with ethnographic and ethnological characteristics within numerous events created for different purposes. Tradition is considered one of the most important values of different entities in this area that creates opportunities for comprehensive tourism offer

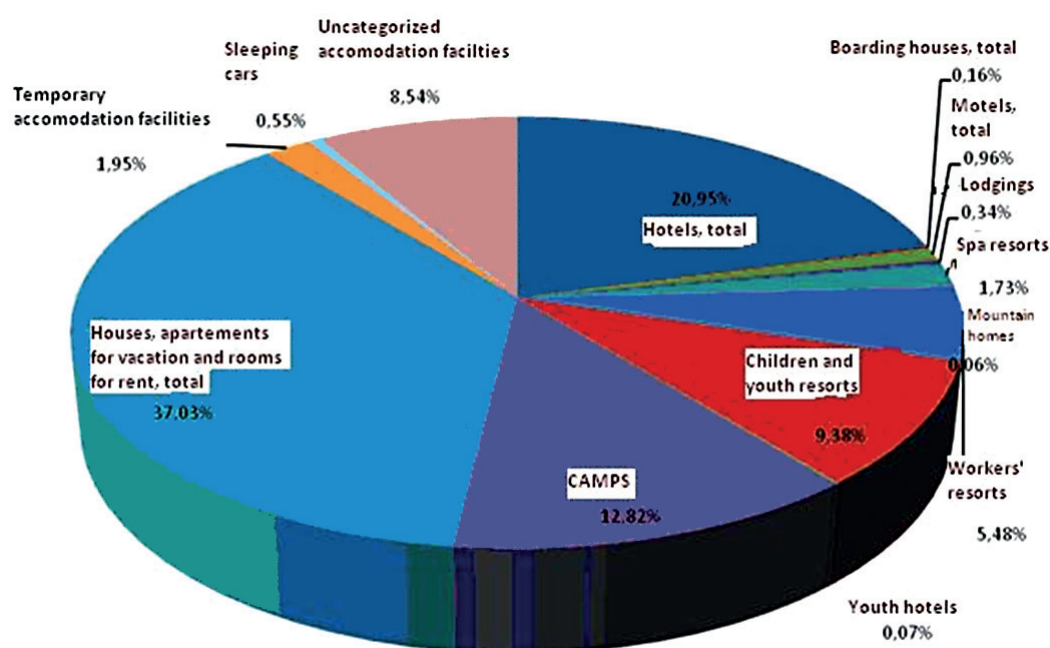


Fig 3. Percentage relations of accommodation facilities that can be used in event tourism

Source: The State Statistical Office of the Republic of Macedonia (2014a)



based on a variety of values. Tradition and events are vital cultural elements of the Republic of Macedonia. The connection between tourism and tradition and events will lead to an improved position of the country not only on tourism market, but also within the cultural identity worldwide.

5. SUMMARY

Tourism sector in the Republic of Macedonia is constantly facing various challenges related to the adjustments to current trends and changes in the tourism market. The situation in this sector demands appropriate balance between tourist potentials and developmental needs for achieving the competitive position in the region. Such approach enables reasonable use of culture as an essential component of tourist offer. According to the research conducted, the findings about the scope and structure of the existing events in the Republic of Macedonia indicate that tradition and events are recognizable segments of tourism offer generating increased tourist flows.

As a component of tourism offer, events and tradition are closely related to appropriate tourism demand, which is why it is important to define market segments through identification of emotive tourism markets and their segmentation. Namely, segmentation relies on differentiated types of events and visitors as their participants. However, there is still a need for the improved quality content of this offer with attractive and unique events that will become recognizable as part of Macedonian tourism offer. Even though many events are overlapping, there is a need for synchronized creation of events' calendars within the regional event program's offer with other types of events that will contribute to enriching the tourism offer of the regions and sustainable tourism development.

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