Volume II – Destination Development Plans – Plan No.3:

Tourism Development Plan for Pelagonija

One of ten Destination Development Plans for Macedonia

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1. Introduction

This tourism destination development plan has been created in consultation with and with inputs from stakeholders from the areas of Prilep, Krusevo, Bitola, Pelister National Park and the surroundings. It is designed to guide implementation of critical activities that will increase competitiveness and improve the visitor experience.

Definition: Destination
"A tourism destination is a physical space in which a visitor spends ***at least one overnight***. It includes ***tourism products*** such as support services and attractions, and tourism resources within ***one day´s return travel time***. It has boundaries defining its management, and images and perceptions defining its market competitiveness."
- UNWTO

1.1 Definition of destination:

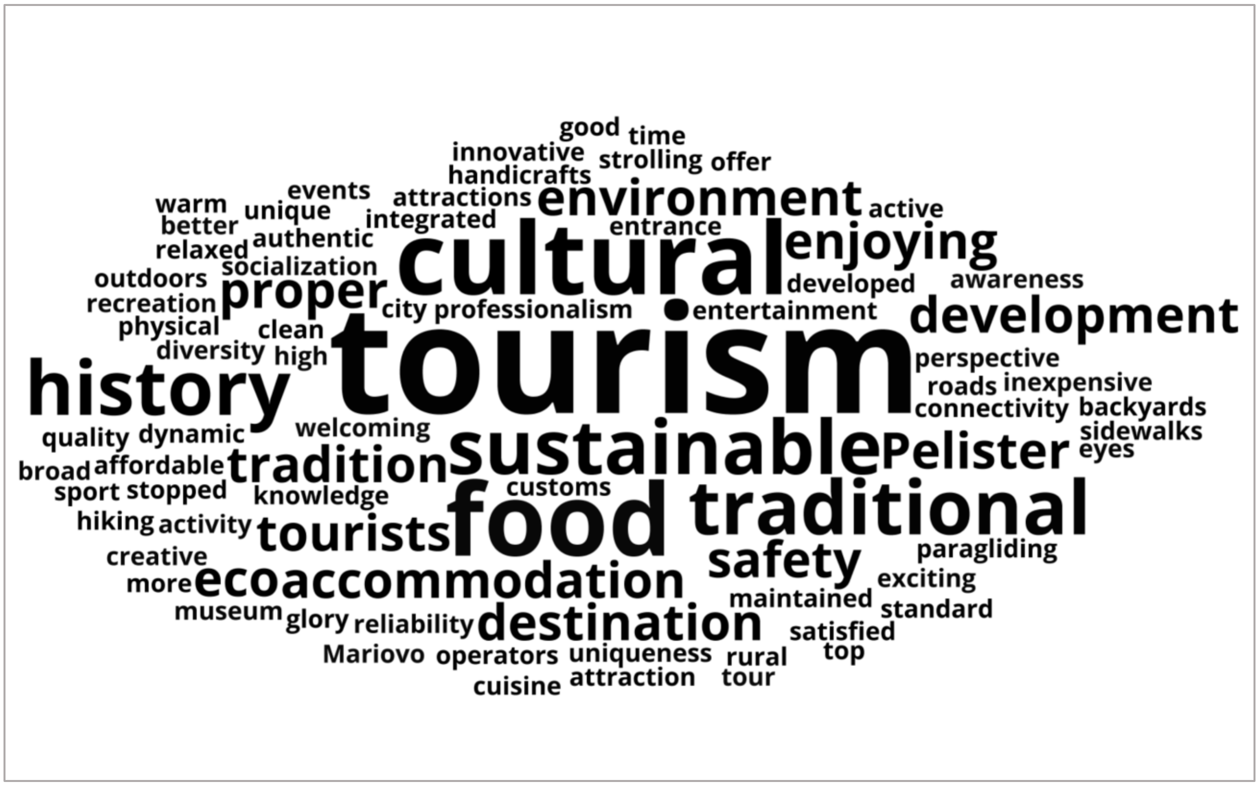
The 'destination' is not defined by administrative boundaries, but rather by key elements that make up a destination from a visitor perspective. This destination therefore includes the natural, cultural and man-made attractions, facilities, services and resources that make up this particular hub of tourist activity, centered around the centers of Prilep/ Krusevo and Bitola[1]. This destination therefore includes tourism assets in Krusevo and Prilep, Bitola and their surroundings. This destination also includes Pelister National Park. On its territory is one of the most prominent archeological sits in the country – Heraclea. These attractions are linked together in one destination as they are within the catchment area (one day excursion) of the tourist hubs of Prilep/ Krusevo and Bitola, and they offer attractions which are complementary and well-suited to the market segments prioritized for this region.

2. Vision, USP and Strategic Goals[2]:

2.1 Vision

The following shows a graphical representation of the frequency of terms and phrases that were used by stakeholders to express their vision of how tourism in the destination will look by 2030[3]. This can also be interpreted as an aspirational unique selling proposition (USP).

[1] Section 2 of Volume 1 provides further detail on how destinations were identified and selected
[2] The data used in this section was collected during a destination management workshop on January 22, 2018 in Bitola
[3] The data used in this section was collected during a destination management workshop on January 12, 2018 in Veles



These words are aspirational and reflect the ambition of stakeholders to develop and build on their core strengths, particularly around ideas of culture heritage, tradition and history.

The following vison for the destination has therefore been developed:

Vision: *In 2030, Pelagonija will be renowned as the premier adventure destination of Macedonia, offering visitors a wealth of exciting experiences year-round in a spectacular mountain landscape, combined with enjoyment of good food, cultural heritage and living Macedonian traditions. The quality of the adventure opportunities, together with the excellent sunshine record and authentic hospitality, enable Pelagonija to attract adventure travelers from throughout Europe and beyond.*

Strategic Goals and Targets for 2020:

The following goals were identified by stakeholders during participatory workshops as most important for the destination:

1) Maintain and enhance (more and better) job opportunities
2) Preservation of local traditions and culture including handicrafts and heritage structures
3) Increased awareness of the importance of environment protection
4) Better conservation of ecosystems and natural resource management
5) Enhanced image of the area ('make people proud to live in it')

Destination-specific targets that show how these goals will be met need to be formulated by destination stakeholders together with timings.

3. Destination Overview and Supply Characteristics

3.1. Destination Supply and Tourism Assets

Pelagonija has some of the highest potential in the country for the development of a dynamic and sustainable tourism sector. It is rich in both tangible and intangible cultural heritage, as well as diverse natural landscapes that are favorable for a variety of outdoor experiences. While some of that potential has been realized, a lot more can be done to increase traveler arrivals, length of stay and spending.

Pelagonija region is located in the Southwest part of fYR Macedonia and is home to one tenth of the population of the country (est. 231,000). Demographically the region is characterized with one of the lowest population densities and highest proportions of older population (above 65+) across the country. In terms of birth rates Pelagonija is also at the bottom of the regional rankings. The average unemployment rate for the region is 22.2% (2015), which is one of the lowest in the country and is lower than the national average (29% in 2015).

For the purposes of this plan the ‘Pelagonija destination’ is divided into two sub-destinations with slightly different demand dynamics:

- Prilep, Krusevo and surroundings
- Bitola, Pelister NP and surroundings

The wide portfolio of attractions in Pelagonija has been recorded and analyzed in detail in previous reports[4] and literature which this plan will not repeat. The following groups of attractions in the area are highlighted simply to outline the profile of the destination supply, especially in the context of priority market segments discussed later in this document:

Prilep, Krusevo and Surroundings

The region around Krusevo and Prilep has a rich portfolio of assets based on diverse and well-preserved nature as well as distinctive tangible and intangible cultural heritage. The main attractions in the area include:

- Treskavets Monastery
- Makedonium Ilinden Memorial
- Tose Proeski memorial house
- Paragliding and hand gliding
- Bouldering and rock climbing

This region is characterized by a modest accommodation portfolio with few larger hotels and many small family-owned bed & breakfast facilities, as well as many opportunities for homestays (a significant share of which are informal and cannot be booked online). In Prilep the main hotels include Kristal Palace, Salida, Sonce and guest houses Breza and Kostoski Inn. In

[4] For a list of strategic documents and reports reviewed as part of the work on the development plans, see Volume 1 of this document

Krushevo the main hotels are the larger Montana and smaller guesthouse Vila Gora. Especially during active tourist season and during paragliding competitions there are a number of informal homestays and bed and breakfast opportunities.

Bitola, Pelister NP and Surroundings

Bitola is one of the most important destinations for fYR Macedonia outside of the two tourism centers of Ohrid and Skopje. It attracts tourists interested in the historical significance of the town, the numerous cultural attractions, living villages with traditional feel, as well as the excellent opportunities for outdoor experiences in the nearby Pelister National Park. The main attractions in the area include:

- Heraclea Lyncestis site
- Bitola and Sirok Sokak
- Pelister National Park
- Hiking, mountaineering, some biking
- Rural and traditional experiences

Bitola and the area has a limited portfolio of hotels. There are a small number of hotels categorized as three- and four-star properties (Hotel Millenium, Hotel Epinal, Hotel Treff, Molika Hotel in Pelister NP, Shumski feneri). In addition there is a group of smaller bed & breakfast facilities, as well as available homestays. Dihovo village, which is just outside of Bitola is home to the prominent rural guest house Vila Dihovo.

The table below summarizes the accommodations available online around the main tourism hubs of Krusevo. Prilep and Bitola/ Pelister National Park.

Table 1: Pelagonija's Online Accommodation Portfolio*

Hotels	19
Guest houses	8
Villas	1
Holiday homes	2
Bed and breakfast	1
Country houses	1
Hostels	2
Apartments	13

Note: *based on data from Booking.com

Pelagonija's geographic position offers excellent opportunities for linkages with other destinations in the area. Its proximity to the destination of Ohrid can be used to provide some higher-value experiences to the itineraries of the visiting Independent and Organized active travelers. By creating linkages to itineraries of tourists visiting Ohrid, the destination can build on the attractiveness of its neighboring destination and attract higher number of visitors. This destination is also easy to link to Tikvesh and its wine tourism opportunities. Pelagonija also neighbors Gevgelija and Dojranwhich offers mutually beneficial opportunities for creating cross-destination experiences that appeal to the same priority segments.

3.2. Current Development Pipeline and Opportunities

The portfolio of existing attractions and undeveloped assets, as well as existing services in the destination offer a strong supply mix that matches the demand specifics of the priority segments discussed later in this plan. In addition to that there are some recent developments and destination specifics that represent particular opportunities for improving the offerings for priority segments in Pelagonija:

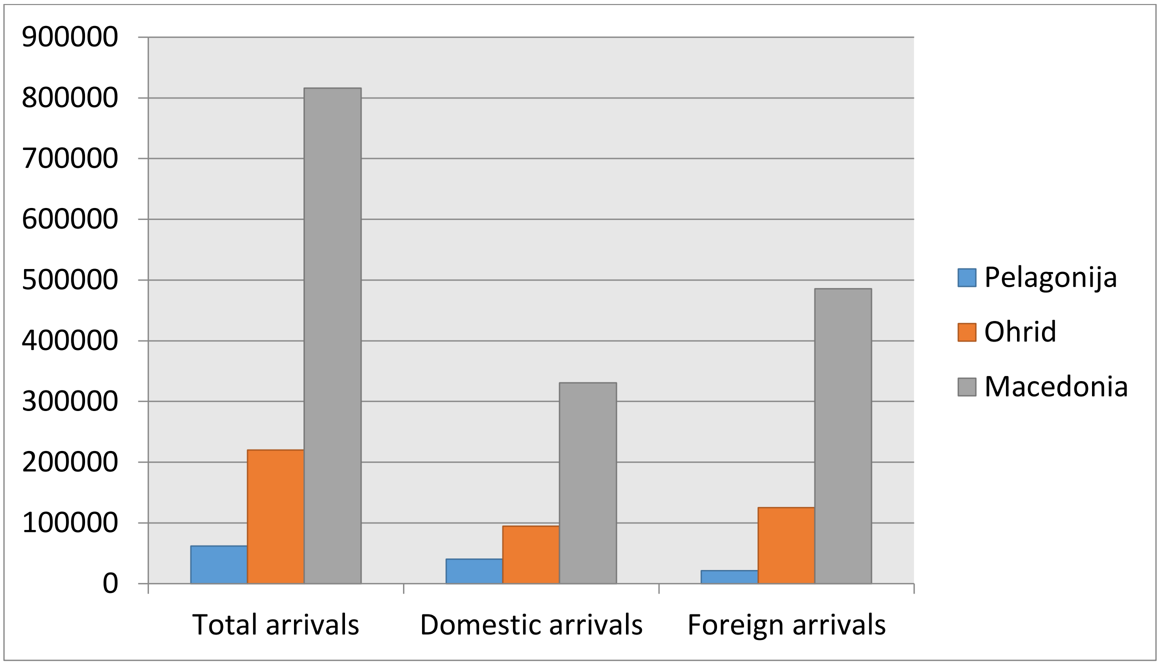
- The **recently conducted AdventureNEXT** event organized by the US-based Adventure Travel Trade Association (ATTA), which took place in Ohrid in May 2016, increased the visibility of fYR Macedonia as an adventure destination featuring operators and stakeholders from the entire country and specifically from Pelagonija. The continuing international travel media coverage and raised awareness of Macedonia creates momentum for strengthening its positioning among the outdoor and adventure-oriented market segments, as well as among independent travelers.
- The growing **popularity of Krusevo as internationally competitive destination for paragliding** catalyzes increasing flows of visiting adventure tourists. The prominence of the competitions that are held in the area (including World cups and European cups) as well as the success of local competitors in competitions around the world is source of increased awareness about the adventure tourism potential of this part of fYR Macedonia.
- The geographical **proximity to the lakes of Prespa and Ohrid** offer favorable opportunities for attractive outdoor and adventure offerings that include nature- and water-based experiences. There are opportunities for regional offerings that are appealing for priority segments.
- The proximity to the border with Greece creates additional benefits as there is **a flow of transit regional visitors** who pass through the area on the way to or way back from Greece. Some of these travelers make a stopover in Pelagonija for a day or two but a more diverse and attractive offer could motivate more to spend a day or two in the area.
- The **existence of living villages** with active residents and living traditions in areas throughout Pelagonija offer opportunities for the development of high-value rural, traditional and culinary offerings. The success of developments in Dihovo is indicative of the potential in this direction.

4. Arrival and Demand Trends

Pelagonija attracts a relatively small share of tourists coming to fYR Macedonia: less than 10% of the arrivals in the country come to the area. The region is visited by less than 30% of the tourists who are in neighboring Ohrid (see figures below). It should be noted that a significant share of the visitors to the region remain outside of official statistics as they come for a few hours to visit Heraclea and some other key attractions in Bitola, and do not spend the night.

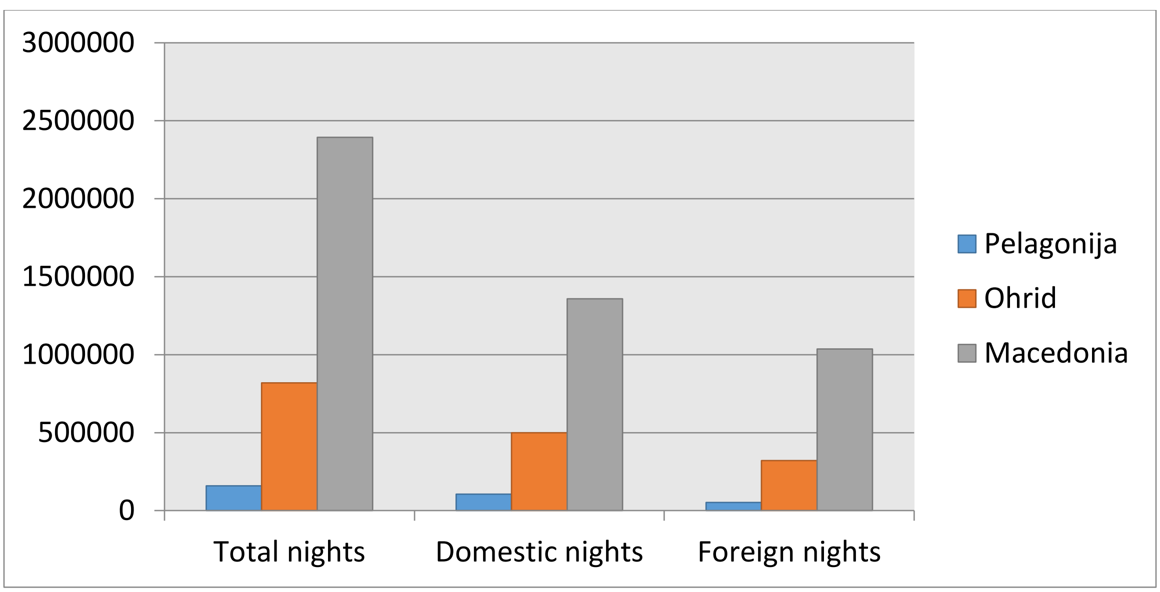
Given that arrivals data is generated on the basis of reported arrivals at hotels these short-term visitors or ‘day-trippers’ remain uncounted.

Figure 1: Arrivals in Pelagonija, Ohrid and fYR Macedonia



Source: State Statistical Office

Figure 2: Overnight stays in Pelagonija, Ohrid and fYR Macedonia



Source: State Statistical Office

Prilep, Krusevo and Surroundings

Prilep, Krusevo and the wider area attract a mix of domestic, regional and international tourists. Particular attractions in the area (Treskavets Monastery, Makedonium Ilinden Memorial, Tose Proeski memorial house and others) are especially interesting for domestic tourists from different parts of the country. Krusevo is a popular destination for domestic guests around specific celebrations and cultural events. In the past Krusevo used to attract domestic tourists for traditional winter sports but decreasing snow cover and unfavorable weather conditions have made this offering less competitive. According to interviews with stakeholders from the region attempts to reinvest in the winter sports infrastructure has been made but proved economically unviable.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the growing popularity of Krusevo and Prilep as a destination for paragliding has visibly increased visitation in the area. According to estimates of local providers in the last year outside of paragliding championships, Krusevo has welcomed at least 1,000 international guests who visited for leisure paragliding activities or to prepare for upcoming competitions. Some of the top source markets are Slovenia, UK, Bulgaria, Serbia and other countries in the region. The minimum stay for this segment is 5 days, the most common length of stay is 7 days and around competitions championship participants stay for 14 days. The average spending of leisure paragliders who come on training packages is around 70 Euros per day. The package for leisure paragliders coming to train with local clubs is 50 Euro per day for board and breakfast, and includes trainer and local support (transportation for example). This does not include food and beverage spending, as well as any other services that such tourists may consume.

Table 2: Number of Overnight Stays and Tourist Arrivals in Krusevo, 2010 and 2015

	Number of Overnight Stays			**Number of Tourist Arrivals**			**Average Length of Stay**
	2010	**2015**	**% change**	**2010**	**2015**	**% change**	
Foreign	8,147	11,396	40%	1,969	2,728	39%	4.18
Serbia	n/a	782	-	284	193	-32%	4.05
Bulgaria	780	897	15%	n/a	315	-	2.85
Germany	n/a	691	-	n/a	156	-	4.43
Slovenia	n/a	576	-	115	138	20%	4.17
Domestic	81,184	48,040	-41%	36,799	20,493	-44%	2.34

Source: State Statistical Office

Bitola, Pelister NP and Surroundings

In quantity terms the bigger share of visitors in Bitola and the region are groups visiting Heraklea and the cultural heritage sites in the town in combination with lunch. Despite their quantitative dominance their impact on Bitola and the local economy is very small. If they stop for lunch, food is part of a low package price, which leaves little for the local providers. Active outdoor tourists traveling independently or as part of small tour groups are identified by many local operators as a very attractive market for Bitola and the surrounding areas. These travelers are typically from Europe, the region or even some long-haul destinations such as the US. They visit Bitola for one to three days and can engage in different level of outdoor activities such as hiking, biking and mountaineering. They prefer to stay in rural or family-owned bed and breakfast facilities, to eat and learn about local food, and combine outdoors experiences with cultural experiences. Rough estimate of their spending indicates that they spend between 35-65 Euros per day in the area.

During the winter months the area has started attracted small groups of free style skiers and snowboarders. The operation is very small (estimated 250 people for winter season 2014/2015) but the average spending on a package for this segment varies between 50 and 150 Euros per day.

Table 3: Number of Overnight Stays and Tourist Arrivals in Bitola, 2010 and 2015

	Number of Overnight Stays			**Number of Tourist Arrivals**		
	2010	**2015**	**% change**	**2010**	**2015**	**% change**
Foreign						
Greece	2,554	2,368	-7%	1,224	1,568	28%
Albania	1,638	n/a	-	1,192	884	-26%
Serbia	1,492	2,244	50%	859	1210	41%
Turkey	1,205	1,832	52%	678	1,017	50%
Australia	1,673	4,768	185%	547	1,210	12%
Domestic	31,381	21,178	-33%	12,929	11,129	-14%

Source: State Statistical Office

5. High Potential Market Segments

The area of Krusevo and Prilep offer great opportunities for competitive offerings that can appeal to a variety of traveler profiles. The current plan places priority on three specific traveler segments that offer significant market opportunities for this destination: hard adventure tourists, organized active tourists and independent active tourists. In the last few years the main source of growth in tourism is the advanced positioning of the region as a prime destination for hard adventure, namely paragliding. While paragliding is and should continue to be an important focus in the development of tourism in the area, there is significant potential for development of a richer portfolio of attractions and experiences that can cater to hard adventure tourists as well as independent and organized tourists interested in soft adventure, outdoor experiences and cultural heritage.

Bitola, Pelister National Park and the surrounding areas hold strong potential for offerings that can appeal to organized and independent active tourists, as well as hard adventure tourists (mainly freeride skiers). Representatives of the local tourism industry feel that the expansion of offerings that are outdoors and nature-based can be really beneficial for Bitola. Targeted developments that cater to the identified priority markets can help diversify the area's portfolio to increase arrivals among tourists who are willing to stay longer and spend more in the local economy.

The high potential markets for Pelagonija destination are:

Organized active tourists are part of an organized tour group (size ranging from 5-25 people) traveling with a specialty operator around fYR Macedonia. For them Pelagonija is of interest as it offers a mix of cultural and nature-based experiences that are attractive to this segment. While many of the attractions in the region are underdeveloped or below market readiness, organized active tourists are among the first to engage in new off-the-beaten path experiences. Specialized tour operators working with them have the expertise and capacity to identify new and underutilized assets, and weave them into tour itineraries enriching the market. This can catalyze advancement of the destination portfolio. Many of the investments that would meet the needs of these travelers will appeal to representatives of other segments as well so there will be strong spillover effect. This segment is high priority for Bitola, Pelister National Park and the surrounding areas where they are already visiting for outdoor activities and cultural experiences. They are also visiting the area of Prilep and Krusevo but their numbers could be much higher if there is better infrastructure, more market-relevant product offerings and improved service quality.

Key Segment Insights and Prioritization Rationale: This segment is prioritized for Pelagonija because of its higher spending power, its interest in outdoor and cultural offerings, interest in buying from local providers, and conscious attitude towards natural and cultural assets. Anecdotal evidence suggests that organized active travelers devote on average 4 to 7 days to exploring the country and spend between $150-300 per day. At the same time, this segment has high expectations in terms of service culture and quality of experiences. This means that tourism development with prioritized targeting of Organized active tourists requires investment in infrastructure and services that match their expectation and make Pelagonija a desired destination to visit and experience. Among the opportunities for improving existing supply to drive growth in this segment are better quality of the tourism infrastructure, more market-relevant product offerings and improved service quality.

Independent active tourists (including domestic) are naturally drawn to Pelagonija region as it offers the mix of natural, outdoors and cultural experiences that are attractive for this segment. They travel on their own taking care of their bookings and itinerary developments. They are adventurous and attracted to new and less-conventional experiences. They are a leading market for many rural offerings, including traditional B&Bs, traditional restaurants and culinary experiences, combined with outdoor activities such as biking, hiking, mountaineering, etc.

They hold significant potential for growth in terms of arrivals as well as length of stay and spending that is direct with local providers. Currently independent tourists are more actively present in Bitola, Pelister National Park and surrounding areas that Krusevo and Prilep where limited infrastructure and limited offerings are impeding growth.

Key Segment Insights and Prioritization Rationale: This segment is prioritized for Pelagonija because of its spending power and preferred direct spending with local providers. Anecdotal evidence suggests that independent active tourists spend on average between $35-65 per day. It holds significant potential for growth in terms of arrivals as well as length of stay and spending if there are more locally provided outdoors and interesting cultural and culinary offerings in the areas surrounding Prilep/ Krusevo and Bitola/ Pelister NP. Services enabling self-navigation can truly unlock the potential of this segment in terms of length of stay. With better infrastructure, more market-relevant product offerings and improved service quality, growth in this segment can generate significant economic benefits.

Hard adventure tourists (including domestic) that constitute a priority for this region include two main groups. The first group includes paragliders who are high priority for Krusevo, Prilep and the surrounding areas where there is sufficient market proof for the international competitiveness of the conditions for paragliding. Growth in this segment as well as diversification of the hard adventure offering with other activities such as rock climbing, bouldering and others has very strong potential to create new business opportunities and new high-skilled jobs. Developing additional offerings that are not directly linked to the core hard adventure activity is also important as cultural, heritage and soft adventure activities also represent interest for this segment and can lead to increased spending. The second group includes freestyle skiers (CAT skiers) who are more relevant to Bitola, Pelister NP and the surroundings. Although the conditions for freestyle in Pelister are not as good as in Popova shapka, they offer potential for high value offerings.

Key Segment Insights and Prioritization Rationale: This segment is prioritized for Pelagonija because it is already visibly transforming certain areas in the destination. Despite the fact that adventure tourist segments are relatively niche, they are characterized with significant spending power, direct spending with local providers and an extraordinary length of stay. According to anecdotal evidence paragliders stay in the destination between 5 and 7 days on average, and spend on average between $50-70 per day. Further investment and better targeting of this segment can lead to further growth and even higher length of stay and average spend. The awareness and publicity effects associated with the paragliding competitions and specialized media attention produces additional value added linked to this segment.

6. Gaps and challenges

6.1. Destination Development Challenges

Currently the main challenges facing tourism in the Pelagonija destination is the underutilization of its significant tourism potential. Many of the groups of tourists that currently pass through the area spend a few hours or a maximum of one day focusing only on the principle attractions such Heraclea and Sirok Sokak in Bitola. This leads to very low economic impact of tourism, as most of the spending at the destination is limited to visitor tickets and low-cost lunch.

Despite the rich natural resources, the limited portfolio of attractions presents another problem. Pelister National Park offers much more than is currently available. It is home to some of the most innovative nature-based offerings in the country (for example, bear and wildlife watching by night). A number of areas around Pelister and Bitola, as well as in the surroundings of Prilep hold excellent assets for the development of both soft outdoor and hard adventure experiences but they remain underdeveloped.

While Krusevo and Prilep have been successful in putting themselves on the international map for their niche hard-adventure offerings, there is much to be done in terms of strengthening the quality and consistency of the offered experiences and sustaining recent growth. There is a need to diversify the portfolio of Prilep and Krusevo and to increase spending of the hard-adventure tourists who are attracted by opportunities for paragliding.

Just like in many other parts of the country the inconsistent quality of the experience that travelers have is a challenge here too. Lack of or poor quality of visitor infrastructure, interpretation and support services lead to low satisfaction of tourists. Accommodation facilities are often inadequate, with poor amenities and very low service quality. Problematic waste collection and waste management leaves some otherwise beautiful sites polluted and unpleasant to visit.

It is important to note that while some challenges are more urgent than others, a real and visible strengthening of the competitiveness of the destination is only possible if the full array of gaps and challenges are addressed.

6.2. Gaps in the experience of the priority market segments:

The diversity of natural assets combined with cultural and historical attractions makes Pelagonija an attractive destination for Organized and Independent Active Tourists as well as for Hard Adventure tourists. Relatively easy access from and to the main tourist hub Ohrid is an added benefit too. All three priority segments enjoy opportunities to visit new places with extraordinary natural beauty, interesting culture and rich history. While existing tourism products hold strong potential for appeal to the priority segments, the value chain analysis of the visitor experience for each of these groups (see Volume 1 for more details) revealed gaps in current supply and delivery, as well as underutilized opportunities.

The following section summarizes the gaps and opportunities for improvements in the traveler experience that the destination currently offers across the three priority segments. They are 14rganized below in six sections; accommodation and hospitality, activities and experiences, attractions, capacity, brand or image and infrastructure. This is followed by a section of indicative interventions for addressing the gaps and lead to strengthened competitiveness of Pelagonija destination.

6.2.1. Accommodation and Hospitality

<u>Gap 1: There is a gap in the available accommodation that gears towards the priority markets</u>

Detail and explanation:

- The hospitality services (accommodation and food) in the region are very limited
- The style of existing accommodations does not align with the expectations of priority markets (interior and ambiance, furniture, quality of mattresses, etc.)
- Many accommodations do not offer services that are important for the priority segments (flexible food timing options, laundry services, bike parking, etc.)
- The availability of homestays is appropriate for some of the priority segments (hard adventure and independent) but most of them are in the informal sector, which leads to inconsistent quality and service, lack of standards, inability to secure safety

These problems arise because;

- There is limited entrepreneurial and investment capacity for developing new accommodation facilities
- Many accommodation providers are effectively competing on price rather than quality. There is evidence, however, that travelers from priority segments would be willing to pay higher prices for a better product
- Many service providers lack information on needs and requirements of targeted tourists, and are not accustomed to directly addressing or modifying the product according the traveler expectations or feedback

Feedback from specialized adventure tour operator:

‘There are few good accommodations and they are spread out so operators do not have many options. Accommodations force you to have lower price as the quality is not there to offer a higher-quality package with higher price for lodging. Sometimes it is a matter of improving convenience basics such as having a lamp or matching curtains but other times it is the lack of amenities’.

Feedback from Independent Traveler:
‘The hotel was clean and inexpensive but the beds were quite uncomfortable and the shower leaks everywhere’.

‘The staff was nice and the room was good but the shower tap was broken and was not properly fixed after we called reception’

Filling the gaps

<u>1a. Ensure availability of more relevant accommodation facilities that meet the expectations of the target market</u>

There is need to expand the accommodation and food offerings in the region, especially those that are grounded in local traditions and culture. Homestays or local B&Bs are better fit for the profile of the destination and the targeted segments. They also secure more linkages to local economy and channeling of economic benefits directly to local communities.

Indicative Activities:
a. Support for new accommodation projects should be focused on small-scale facilities (up to 20 rooms) with traditional or distinctive style and feel.

b. Support for market access to existing small properties, which are in operation but are not registered or have limited access to the market. This can include assistance with development of online marketing channels (website, social media presence) and distribution channels (presence on Booking.com and others). These can only be in rural areas outside of the area of Skopje.

c. The diversification of properties with more traditional and rural properties in the area needs to be linked to capacity building that secures alignment with the expectations and needs of targeted segments. This is discussed in capacity building gaps in the national and cross-destination gaps section.

Illustration:
Example for rural accommodations with traditional Macedonian design and authentic feel.




<u>1b. Ensure the style of accommodation facilities meets the expectations of target market segments</u>

There is need to align the design and style of existing accommodations with the expectations of the priority segments. This includes improving interior design and ambiance, as well as availability of specific elements, which are very important for the traveler experience: quality of bed and mattress, well-functioning bathroom with a simple but well working shower (instead of bathtubs for example), consistent and well working heating/ cooling, water and electricity, etc.

Feedback from International Operator

'The most important things in the room are the quality of the bed (mattress) and the quality of the shower. Owners sometimes throw money at accessories and equipment but fail at these two simple things. When the bed and the shower are not of good quality, nothing else matters. If they are good, then everything else can be very simple and clean'

Indicative Activities:
a. Improvements and maintenance of existing small, traditional and rural properties that offer homestays or bed & breakfast accommodation. Improvements need to be towards bringing existing small properties (up to 20 rooms) to current market standards such as ensuring quality of bathrooms, improvement of bed quality and mattresses, adding or removing room accessories, improving green areas around properties (for more details see checklist in Annex).

b. Improvements can also support the development of additional installations that are needed to meet the needs of targeted markets. These may include: bike parking or storage areas, laundry rooms, kitchen improvement to enable additional or extended service, etc.

<u>1b. Activity and experience providers need to be better aligned with the expectations and needs of targeted segments.</u>

This is may be achieved through capacity buildings and is discussed in more detail in the non-destination specific gaps chapter (chapter 2), but there are opportunities for implementation and some innovation to address this gap at the local level.

Gap 2: There is limited and uneven availability of food offerings geared towards the tastes and needs of the priority segments

Detail and explanation:

- While there are plenty of eating locations in Ohrid, many of them lack distinctive ambiance and menus that reveal showcase culinary traditions and highlight the quality of local food. This is very important to the priority market segments who place high value on traditional culinary experiences as part of their trips. This is very important to the Independent and Organized active tourists who prioritize culinary experiences as part of their trips.
- There is gap between the quality of local produce and interesting culinary traditions of the region and available food offerings
- The design and presentation of food is not aligned with expectations and new trends in culinary experience design (there is focus on overwhelming design rather than simplicity)
- Local providers' culture towards quantity of served food is very shocking for international travelers as they associate with unnecessary food waste
- There is lack of food options that meet the needs of people with dietary restrictions

These problems are likely to arise because;

- Many food service providers have very limited understanding of the needs and wants of priority segments, and expectations of international tour operators.
- There is inclination among food providers to attempt to recreate international cuisine rather than to highlight the Macedonian/ Balkan culinary tradition.

Filling the gap

2a. Ensure priority markets have access to more and better quality food service providers with a strong emphasis on local ingredients and tradition

There is need to expand the food offering providers in the region, especially those that are grounded in local traditions and culture. Small local traditional restaurants that serve traditional meals or interpretations of traditional meals will both meet the expectations of priority segments, increase linkages to local economy and agriculture, and secure distinctiveness of the Macedonian experience.

Indicative Activities:
a. Investments in development of new food service facilities should be encouraged throughout the region. These should be distinctive in character and focused on interpretation of local culinary tradition. During phase one priority should be placed on developing food service facilities throughout the area (outside of Bitola), and especially in places where there is potential for tourism flow but no food service in proximity.

2b. Ensure visitors experience culinary services outside of standard meal services

There is need to grow and diversify the culinary offerings available to tourists. The excellent local food and traditions hold tremendous potential for the design of high value added culinary experiences that may include food preparation demonstrations of local meals, cooking classes, farm experiences, spice and fresh produce gardening experiences, etc. Diversification can come also from the format in which food services are offered, for example through the incorporation of farm-to-table experience or open-air picnics instead of standard lunch at a restaurant. These can be incorporated both as food service components and as attractions.

Indicative Activities:
b. Investments in development of new food-related experience, which diversify the format in which meals are presented (adding flexibility for itineraries) and which contributes to diversification of traveler experiences. Examples can include but should not be limited to: outdoor wine and cheese tastings, picnic offerings, farm-to-table experiences, etc. During phase one, investments should support a limited number of viable projects for alternative and unique culinary experiences.

Case Study: Farm-to-table

This experience is part of a rural food tour in Tuscany and is included in high-end specialized adventure **operator itineraries.**

Highlights of the tour: Organic garden tour; pasta/dessert cooking class; walk to a 13th century abbey; wine demystification tasting/class

This is a one-day experience starts with a tour through the vegetable garden. The host will describe the cycle of the various crops through the year and methods for providing the kitchen with fresh, flavorful products. Then to the kitchen, where under the guidance of the host the group will prepare Tuscan pasta and desserts utilizing ingredients from the estate.

After a leisurely lunch enjoying their own culinary creations, the group will visit San Galgano abbey for an afternoon walk in the area. Built as a Cistercian monastery in the 1200s, San Galgano's decline began in the 15th century and now it stands, roofless and monumental, one of the most evocative sites in all of Italy. The monumental complex of Saint Galgano rises approximately 30km (approx. 19 mi) to the west of Siena, between the villages of Monticiano and Chiusdino, in a rugged, but beautiful natural landscape.

This afternoon's wine demystification class and tasting is a wine tour with a difference – at Spannocchia. What exactly is wine? What does terroir mean? What is a super Tuscan? From demijohns to D.O.C. labeling, together the group will demystify the wine culture of Italy, with a little help from the very visual and fragrant 'aroma board'. Wine tasting will include wines from at least five of Italy's wine regions..

Source: http://www.wholejourneys.com/trips/tuscan-farm-to-table-italy

2c. Ensure that service providers are better prepared for visitors requirements and dietary needs

There is need to improve the understanding of food service providers towards potential dietary restrictions and ways to address them. They need to develop specific skills and add necessary services (such as providing information on ingredients or source of produce) to meet the expectation of priority traveler segments.

Indicative Activities:
c. Investments in development and execution of training or skill improvement programs, which use relevant and working approaches. Relevant activities may include sessions for information and experience exchange with international operators. This is addressed in more details in chapter 2 on non-destination specific gaps – but illustrations are provided in the Annex.

6.2.2. Activities and Experiences

Gap 3: There are not enough products and attractions that are specifically geared towards the priority segments

- The current opportunities for experiences that gear towards the different priority segments are limited, including opportunities to engage in core experiences (such as paragliding and freestyle skiing for hard adventure tourists, hiking/ biking for organized and independent active tourists) as well as opportunities for supporting and supplemental experiences (such as doing something different when not engaged in paragliding or skiing)
- There are unutilized assets for other hard- and soft adventure activities, which are high-value: classical rock climbing, bouldering and others
- The outdoor activities such as hiking, biking, mountaineering and others are underdeveloped and at times with quality that is lower than expected
- There is very limited availability of experiences based in local culture and history, local celebrations, culinary traditions, etc.

These problems are likely to arise because;

  - Many local tourism business operators have very limited understanding of the needs and wants of priority segments, and expectations of international tour operators.
  - There is limited access to market knowledge that can guide tourism businesses in their decisions to invest in new experiences and offerings.
  - There is limited public investment in infrastructure that gears towards the targeted segments due to the lack of priority on outdoor forms of tourism.

Filling the gaps:

3a. Ensure visitors have access to expanded and diverse paragliding offering, which is at the core of their traveler experience:

In order to continue raising the profile of Krusevo and Prilep as prime destination for paragliding, it is important to continue investing in relevant infrastructure and services. Current sites need to be maintained and improved to meet global quality and safety standards. In addition, investing in infrastructure and development of new sites represents an opportunity to expand the capacity of the destination and enable the offering of experiences with different level of difficulty.

Indicative Activities:
a. Investment in maintenance and expansion of existing infrastructure and fields for paragliding activities. Expansion may include the evaluation and assessment of new sites in the area of Prilep or elsewhere in Pelagonija, which would allow the region to host more visitors, offer diversity of experience in terms of difficulty, complexity and variety, as well as offer more options for different weather conditions (when the use of certain sites is not safe).

<u>3b. Ensure visitors have access to expanded and diverse freeride skiing offering:</u>

In order to put the region on the map of freestyle skiing, it is important to continue investing in relevant infrastructure, equipment and services in and around Pelister National Park.

Indicative Activities:
b. Investment in maintenance and expansion of equipment, infrastructure and services supporting freeride skiing. This may include purchase of new transportation equipment (such as snowcat), gear for freeride skiing, as well as marking and other relevant infrastructure.

<u>3c. Ensure availability of new hard adventure offerings for visitors:</u>

The region enjoys favorable conditions and assets for rock climbing and bouldering. Developing these can contribute to the diversification of the experiences that the region offers and the market that is able to target. There may be opportunities for the development of niche winter offerings such as snowshoeing, which may benefit from some existing winter sports infrastructure and may offer opportunities for increased visitation during off-season periods.

Indicative Activities:
c. Investment in maintenance and expansion of equipment, infrastructure and services supporting freeride skiing. This may include purchase of new transportation equipment (such as snowcat), gear for freeride skiing, as well as marking and other relevant infrastructure.

<u>3d. Ensure visitors have access to visitor infrastructure in natural areas in the region to enable outdoor activities</u>

The development of hiking, biking and horseback riding paths is important for the destination for several reasons. First, travelers interested in nature-based experiences seek to engage in active exploration of nature through activities such as hiking, biking, horseback riding, water sports, etc. The practicing of these activities requires paths and supporting infrastructure, which is currently very limited in the areas in and around Prilep and Krusevo despite the favorable conditions and wealth of natural. These can use improvements also around Bitola and in Pelister National Park where some infrastructure and marking exist. Second, routes and trails that enable easy movement throughout the region will allow for enjoyment of different parts of the destination and will encourage visitors to stay longer and visit more places. Third, visitor infrastructure encourages non-motorized movement, which is associated with low impact on biodiversity and ecosystems. Fourth, visitor infrastructure itself can enhance the quality of the natural environment and become an additional draw for tourists (see visual examples).

Figure 1: Example for observation deck in natural area

Indicative Activities:
d. Investment in the designing and installation of infrastructure that enables hiking, biking and horseback riding: investments in natural areas around Prilep and Krushevo as well as in and around Pelister National Park. Activities can include improvement and maintenance of existing visitor infrastructure (for example in Pelister NP) as well as development and installation of new infrastructure, attractions or experiences.

3e. Ensure visitors have access to more and better quality offerings around local culture, farming and culinary traditions

There are almost no visitor experiences in the area that are based on local culture, culinary tradition, farming practices or other distinctive elements of the heritage of the region and its people. The development of these is possible and relatively easy as there is an abundance of assets that are in place. There is need to address the lack of skills and capacity in identifying these assets and packaging them in a market-relevant format. Collaboration with specialized tour operators can help address some of the missing capacity as well.

Indicative Activities:
e. Invest in development (private sector-led) of traveler experiences that are based on enjoying outdoors, nature, culture and local traditions. Use more effectively Macedonia's natural and cultural assets such as natural and cultural landscapes to offer experiences that allow travelers to learn about and "taste" local culture, traditional ways in which Macedonian people interact with nature, their cultural and culinary traditions.

Illustration

Ajvar is one of the symbols of Macedonian farming and culinary tradition. A local operator offers a specialized itinerary for travelers during the ajvar making season. There is an endless list of possible similar offerings around cheese making, making of rakia and wine, making of jams and other natural foods.

3f. Ensure visitors have access to locally-produced crafts, souvenirs and supplementary products linked to local traditions:

There is limited availability of products and souvenirs that are typical for Macedonia or the specific regions. In addition to the especially designed souvenir booths installed around tourist areas, there is need to make local souvenirs, crafts and easy-to-take-home[5] food items (bottles of wine or rakia, jars with aivar or fruit jams, traditional herbs and spices, etc.) available at more places visited by tourists. These can be tourist sites but also hotels and other accommodation facilities, restaurants, different attractions, resting points, etc. The purchase of locally produced crafts, souvenirs, food items can generate more economic benefits than visitor fees so this is an important opportunity to multiply the impact of tourism. The improved availability should be combined with actions stimulating the development of such products, including improving skills as to the design, packaging, branding, pricing, etc.

Indicative Activities:
f. Invest in the development of local capacity to produce better and more souvenirs, which are authentic and relevant to Macedonia's traveler experience. This may involve efforts to generate ideas about potential souvenirs as well as capacity building (enabling) for their production by local communities.

Case Study: Hawaii and the links between tourism and agriculture

Although in many cases tourism development is seen as a threat to agriculture, the experience of Hawaii proves that linking the two sectors can magnify the economic success of both. An analysis of the practice of linking agriculture and tourism in Hawaii published in 1995 (Cox et al. 1995) reveals that there were two major benefits from stronger linkages between rural and agricultural life, and tourism. The first is that agriculture became an even stronger source of supply for local hotels and restaurants as tourists expected fresh and local food. The second is that agriculture contributed to the diversification of the attraction portfolio of the destination. The study revealed that agriculture-related experiences and sites attracted 6.3 million visitors and generated $31.9 million in revenue. The most important findings was that the majority of the reported profit was not generated from tours and visits but from the sale of products and services produced at the visited site.

Source: Cox, L., Fox, M., & Bowen, R. L. (1995). Does Tourirms Destroy Agriculture? Annals of Tourism Research , 22 (1), 210-213.

3g. Ensure that activities are designed in order to better meet the expectations of visitors

The growing demand for experiential consumption requires the incorporation of more service and product design approaches that create experiences by engaging travelers through their senses, emotions and mind. Active culinary experiences are an excellent example of experiential design where travelers have the opportunity to smell ingredients, feel products and 'do' by trying to prepare some local foods. Experiential design techniques can transform the quality of attractions that are currently static including museum, exhibitions, etc. Interpretation and storytelling techniques are essential and will be discussed later in this section as well.

Indicative Activities:
g. Invest in the development and delivery of programs for training and capacity building focused on principles of experience design and experiential engagement of customers.

Definition: experiential consumerism

Experiential consumption is *consumption that involves the engagement of consumer senses, emotions and imagination* (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982) *in a way that creates meaning for them* (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Contemporary thinking about experiential consumption and experiential design of commercial offerings was introduced by Pine and Gilmore (1999) who officially welcomed us to the Experience Economy with their famous book published in 1999 introducing the notion that consumers desire experiences while businesses respond by designing and promoting services and goods, which "engage individual customers in a way that creates a memorable event".
In literature experiences are defined as form of consumption "involving a steady flow of fantasies, feelings, and fun" (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). In more recent conceptualizations experiential consumption is also presented as manifestation of post-modernity where the line between consumption and production is blurred and the consumer takes an active part in the production process (Hopkinson & Pujari, 1999).

Sources:
Hirschman, E. C., & Holbrook, M. B. (1982). Hedonic consumption: Emerging concepts, methods and propositions. *Journal of Marketing, 46*(3), 92-101

Hopkinson, G. C., & Pujari, D. (1999). A factor analytic study of the sources of meaning in hedonic consumption. *European Journal of Marketing, 33*(3), 273-290.

Pine, J. P., & Gilmore, J. H. (1999). *The experience economy: Work is theater & every business is a stage: Goods & services are no longer enough*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.

6.2.3. Attractions

<u>Gap 4: There is inconsistent maintenance of sites and attractions, which negatively impacts the visitor experience</u>

Detail and explanation:

- The region has some attractions which are not well maintained and need repair
- Some of the existing attractions need upgrade and modernization in terms of interpretation and visitor services
- Some attractions and sites suffer from poor waste collection and the presence of waste damages the traveler experience (for example area around Heraclea or areas in downtown Bitola)

These problems arise because;

  - There is limited understanding on the importance of good maintenance of attractions and the fact that they are the main reason travelers visit.

- There are limited resources for maintenance and refurbishment activities.

Filling the gaps

4a. Ensure that attractions and sites are rehabilitated to a condition that meets visitor expectations

There is need to improve some of the natural sites in the area in order to attract existing and new visitors. In addition to improving their overall physical condition there is need to improve the interpretation (including by incorporating some contemporary technological solutions) and the overall visitor experience. The gaps (discussed above) in the infrastructure section are linked with this gap as well.

Indicative Activities:
a. Attractions in the destination need to be improved and refreshed to match contemporary expectations for experience. Focus should be placed on the overall state of visited places (such as the trails in Pelister NP, main street of Bitola and other tourist towns, tourist attractions such as Heraclea), removal of undesirable or poorly designed elements, improvement of the state or installation of new visitor infrastructure, installation of signage and interpretation elements. Marking, signage and interpretation are essential for improving the visitor experience on trails and at attractions in the destination.

4b. Ensure the visitor experience is improved through better waste management:

There is need to clean areas from existing waste as well as to introduce measures for more effective waste collection. This may include physical infrastructure (fixing and installation of waste bins) as well as some processes associated with effective and regular waste management. Other relevant measures may include behavioral tactics, which lead to proper waste management behavior by citizens, travelers and businesses in the region.

4c. Beyond the destination level there are a number of additional ways to address this gap, some requiring support and cooperation from the national or central level.

These have been explored in more detail in Chapter 2.

For more details on these non-destination specific gaps, see chapter 2 of *Volume II – Destination Development Plans*

6.2.4. Capacity building

Gap 5: There is a gap between the level of service offered and the expectation of priority markets

Detail and explanation

- Service providers across the destination show inconsistent service culture in the delivery of visitor services
- There is a lack of sensitivity towards the expectations and needs of different traveler groups, as well as lack of adequate response to traveler expectations and needs

Filling the gap

This problem is complex and will need to be addressed at a variety of levels both at the destination, but also at the regional or national level.

5a. Ensure that accommodation and other tourism providers in the destination have a good understanding of the needs and wants of tour operators and the priority market segments.

There is a need by new entrants as well more established tourism service providers to receive guidance on the expectations of tour operators as well as individual travelers.

5b. Beyond the destination level there are a number of additional ways to address this gap, some requiring support and cooperation from the national or central level.

These have been explored in more detail in Chapter 2.

For more details on these non-destination specific gaps, see chapter 2 of *Volume II – Destination Development Plans*

Gap 6: There is a lack of adequate guiding capacity and skills to meet the expectations of the priority market segments

This issue is widespread across many destinations. More details have been provided in Chapter 2.

Filling the gap

This problem is complex and will need to be addressed at a variety of levels both at the destination, but also at the regional or national level.

6a. Ensure that local guides in the destination have a good understanding of the needs and wants of tour operators and the priority market segments.

6b. Beyond the destination level there are a number of additional ways to address this gap, some requiring support and cooperation from the national or central level.

These have been explored in more detail in Chapter 2.

For more details on these non-destination specific gaps, see chapter 2 of *Volume II – Destination Development Plans*

6.2.5. Marketing, branding and access to information

Gap 7: There is limited online content for promotion and/or information at the destination level. This affects the visitor experience in accessing timely information.

Detail and explanation

- There is limited and uncoordinated online information about the different events, attractions, activities and sites in and around the region. Visitors have a need for basic information such as directions to specific attractions, opening hours or possible entrance fees, as well as more sophisticated online tools such as event calendars, itinerary generators, etc. This is especially relevant when attracting independent domestic, regional and international travelers.

Filling the gap

This problem is complex and will need to be addressed at a variety of levels both at the destination, but also at the regional or national level.

7a. Ensure that independent travelers have easy access to information in order to book accommodation as well as information on local restaurants and activities such as hiking and biking.

7b. Beyond the destination level there are a number of additional ways to address this gap, some requiring support and cooperation from the national or central level.

These have been explored in more detail in Chapter 2.

For more details on these non-destination specific gaps, see chapter 2 of *Volume II – Destination Development Plans*

6.2.6. Accessibility and infrastructure

Gap 8: There is a lack of signage and roadside information necessary to guide priority market segments

Detail and explanation

- The region lacks roadside information and signage in English that enables independent travelers to navigate throughout the region on their own with motor vehicles or bike.
- The region has limited and inconsistent visitor signage within towns and settlements, as well as recreational areas facilitating easy navigation by independent travelers.

Filling the gap

This problem is complex and will need to be addressed at a variety of levels both at the destination, but also at the regional or national level.

8a. Ensure visitors are better guided to destination attractions, as well as within towns and settlements.
At the local or destination level, once responsibility for key signage is determined, a plan should be put in place to address this problem, covering where to put signs, the type of signs, consistency of design, maintenance of signage etc. A first step may be to undertake a rapid assessment and to prepare a prioritized list of currently missing signage as well as signage that is in need of replacement

8b. Beyond the destination level there are a number of additional ways to address this gap, some requiring support and cooperation from the national or central level.

These have been explored in more detail in Chapter 2.

For more details on these non-destination specific gaps, see chapter 2 of *Volume II – Destination Development Plans*

6.3. Summary of gaps and proposed interventions

Table 4: Summary of gaps

#	**Gap description**
1	Gap between the quality of offered accommodation and the expectation of priority markets
2	Limited and uneven availability of food offerings geared towards the tastes and needs of the priority segments
3	There are not enough products and attractions that are specifically geared towards the priority segments
4	There is inconsistent and poor maintenance of sites and attractions, which negatively impacts the visitor experience
5	There is a gap between the level of service offered and the expectation of priority markets
6	There is a lack of adequate guiding capacity and skills to meet the expectations of both market segments
7	There is limited online content for promotion and/ or information at the destination level. this affects the visitor experience in accessing timely information
8	There is a lack of signage and roadside information necessary to guide priority market segments

Table 5: Summary of indicative interventions to fill gaps*

Intervention
Accommodation and Hospitality
Expand available accommodation with focus on small rural and authentic accommodations (up to 20 rooms)
Improve quality of design and services at existing accommodations
Expand available food service providers
Enrich availability of culinary experiences outside of standard meal services
Improve food providers' culture and preparedness for traveler dietary restrictions*
Activities and Experiences
Expand paragliding offering
Expand freestyle skiing offering
Develop new hard adventure offerings

Develop a system of visitor infrastructure in natural areas in the region to enable outdoor activities
Develop new products and experiences around local culture, farming and culinary traditions
Develop and improve access to locally-produced crafts, souvenirs and supplementary products linked to local traditions
Improve experiential design of activities
Attractions
Refurbish and restore attractions and sites
Improve waste collection and waste management culture (national)
Capacity Building
Advance service culture and service quality (national)
Modernize and diversify available capacity building and skill development programs for guides (national)
Marketing, Branding and Access to Information
Create and maintain contemporary online presence for the region
Increase digital communications and social media skills of tourism operators (national)
Develop contemporary digital services for independent travelers and other priority segments (national)
Accessibility and Infrastructure
Improve signage and information on roads (national)
Improve signage and information in towns, settlements and recreational areas (national)
Develop roadside visitor infrastructure (national)

*This plan provides indicative interventions only, the gaps may be filled by numerous other innovative solutions by a variety of stakeholders.

Next Steps

This development plan is a living and working document, which will need to be updated at regular periods (1-3 years). This will need to be done through a participatory destination-level process that involves the main tourism sector stakeholders. The primary goals for this destination are for tourism to:

1) Maintain and enhance (more and better) job opportunities

2) Preservation of local traditions and culture including handicrafts and heritage structures

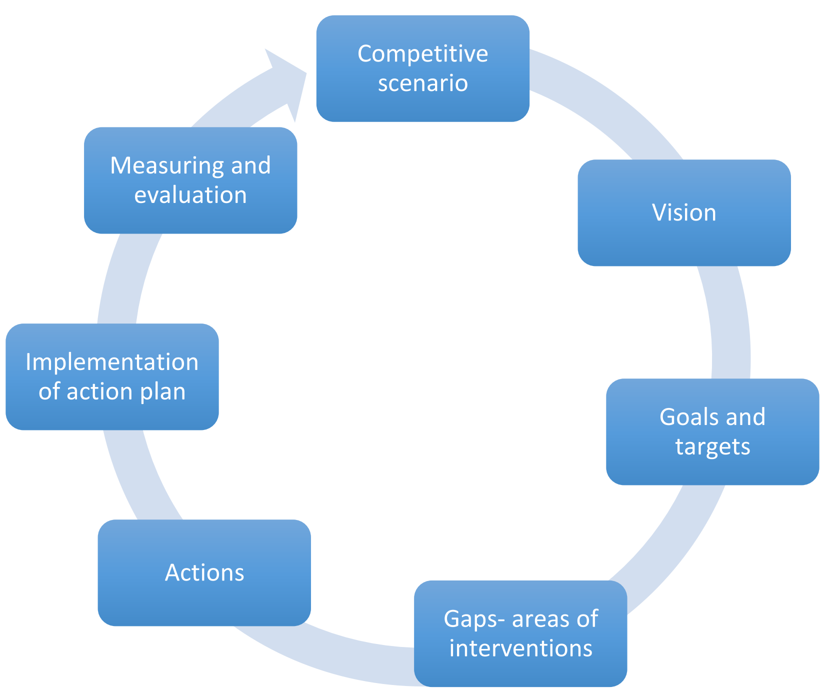
3) Increased awareness of the importance of environment protection

4) Better conservation of ecosystems and natural resource management

5) Enhanced image of the area ('make people proud to live in it')

These goals need to be followed by a set of clear targets, and an action plan with specific steps leading to the achievement of these targets within a specific timeframe. It gives an indication of the activities that are to be carried out, the timeframe in which they should be achieved, the stakeholders that should carry them out and the investment they will require.

Figure 2: Destination development plan cycle

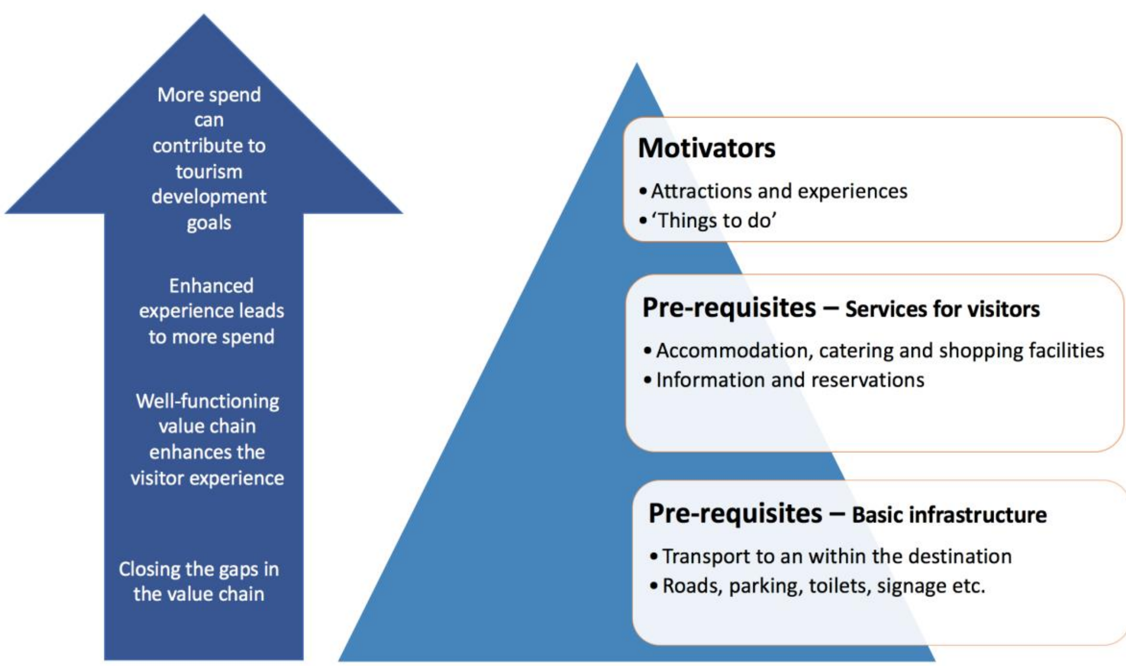


The sequencing of actions to fill the gaps depends on the goals, the level of priority and urgency and investment needed to fill the gap. Results and impact need to be monitored and measured during and after execution. The destination management partnership is responsible for the development plan and for its regular updating.

When determining the sequencing of actions to fill the gaps it is important to distinguish between the ones that are 'pre-requisites' that any destination must have to meet the expectations of visitors and the 'motivators' to attract them. Pre-requisites refer to the basic facilities and services that any destination should have if it is to compete effectively in the tourism marketplace for the respective segment. These are not the factors that will motivate people to come to the destination, but rather the fundamentals that people expect to find when they are in the destination – food and drink of certain type and quality, accommodation of certain style, availability of guides, safe transportation, etc. Different market segments have different basic requirements and provisions should be made according to the needs of the target markets that have been prioritized for the destination.

The motivators are those aspects of a destination that will trigger people's desire to go to this particular place, rather than to any of the (many) other destinations available to them. These could be well-known attractions or events, unique authentic cultural experiences, outstanding landscapes and natural features, towns and cities with great ambience, exceptional food and drink, activity/adventure opportunities, health giving spa waters, wellness opportunities, etc.

Figure 3: The relationship between the quality of the value chain and the goals for the destination



As illustrated in the figure above, some of the gaps presented in this plan are more critical than others and will need to be addressed first, especially when they relate to prerequisites. However, a real difference in the ability of the destination to attract and impress travellers form the priority segments is only possible if all the identified gaps are filled to really enable improved visitor experience and achievement of the tourism goals of the destination.

Destination management is an ongoing process where stakeholders plan and manage the destination towards common goals. Evaluation and monitoring is therefore a key component of the development plan and can be used to demonstrate value, i.e. ensure that the activities are really contributing to the achieving of the goals. During each new cycle of the development plan, it will be important to reassess the competitive context and reevaluate the goals and targets for the destination.

ANNEX

1) Detailed Demand and Supply Data

Indicators	Pelagonija	Macedonia Total
Total arrivals	62,019	816,067
- Domestic	40,447	330,537
- Foreign	21,572	485,530
Total nights spend	157,766	2,394,205
- Domestic	104,922	1,357,822
- Foreign	52,844	1,036,383
Number of rooms	3,386	27,812
Number of beds	9,993	72,021

2) Checklist of leading concerns with accommodation quality
(based on feedback from international operators and traveler feedback in Booking.com and Trip advisor)

- ✓ ***Comfort of bed and quality of mattress*** is one of the most important things that determine quality of the experience in accommodations. Even if design of the room is simple, the quality of the bed is essential and should be one of the first things accommodation providers invest in.
- ✓ ***Quality of shower and bathroom*** is another fundamental factor determining the quality of the experience. Many accommodation owners have wrongfully assumed that it makes sense to invest in bathtubs rather than have a simple shower. In a very high number of places, including in Skopje and Ohrid, bathroom facilities and accessories are poor quality and function poorly, which leads to poor water flow, leakages and poor bathroom experience overall. Have simple but well-functioning bathrooms is much more desirable for the market.
- ✓ ***Water flow, electricity and heating*** services need to be stable and reliable. In some places interruptions are caused by poor utility infrastructure in settlements but in many occasions these are due to poorly designed or executed utility systems in the accommodation facility.
- ✓ ***Basic room amenities*** such as night lamps, chair and table seem to be missing from some accomodations, escpecially in rural areas. Even thought these are small details, they contribute to the basic convenience of the accomodation room experience.
- ✓ ***Food service availability and flexibility*** is also extremely important in making an accommodation attractive and convenient. Even if the accommodation facility does not have food service premises, it can partner with someone who offers food so that it can meet some basic food requests (such as providing late dinner in case of late arrivals or an additional meal between main meals).
- ✓ ***Specific amenities*** that gear to the specific needs of specialized segments. These can include
  - washing services (even if self-serviced) for active tourists who prefer to travel with less outfits but need to wash after biking, hiking, etc.
  - bike parking areas and storage areas for equipment and gear, which are safe and secure
- ✓ ***Safety and security*** is fundamentally important for the traveler experience. In many cases sense for safety depends on basic things such as lit up entrance and hallways, working locks at doors and property gates, etc.
- ✓ ***Ambiance and design*** are what can create the character of an accommodation facility. Using traditional accessories or design elements that create a traditional local ambiance is one of the ways to build a distinctive character of an accommodation place. Even if not directly related to local cultural traditions, many successful and well-performing accommodation facilities (especially small) use original interesting design elements to create an identity that makes them stand out among the rest.