



## ЭКОЛОГИЧЕСКИЙ ТУРИЗМ И РЕКРЕАЦИЯ

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### **РАМСАРСКИЕ ТЕРРИТОРИИ В СТРАНАХ БАЛКАНСКОГО РЕГИОНА И РАЗВИТИЕ ТУРИЗМА**

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Один из крупнейших зон с повышенной влажностью – это территории со специальным статусом защиты, из-за исключительной своей значимости в охране некоторых видов фауны (животных) и их естественной среды обитания. Хотя и охраняют ценные виды флоры и фауны но, эти территории остаются незнакомыми для общества, а их ресурсный потенциал не используется в оптимальных границах. Поэтому, исходя из концепции развития устойчивого туризма, в работе предложена модель рекреационного осваивания территорий для целей туризма, через развитие экологического туризма. В ходе исследований проанализированы рамсарские зоны в странах Балканского региона и основываясь на их ресурсы сделаны конкретные выводы и предложения.

Wetlands are areas of special protection status due to their extraordinary significance for the preservation of some animal species and their natural habitats. Despite the fact that such territories preserve valuable animal and plant species, they remain unknown for the community and their resource potential is not used optimally. Based on the concept for sustainable tourism development, this paper offers a model for their recreational assimilation in comply with tourism purposes, especially through tourism development. Under analysis are the Ramsar sites in the countries of the Balkan peninsula . Some recommendations and conclusions are made on the basis of their assessment and unused resources.

**Ключевые слова:** Рамсарские места, экологический туризм, биологическое разнообразие, орнитология.

**Keywords:** Ramsar sites, ecotourism, sustainable tourism, biodiversity, ornithofauna.

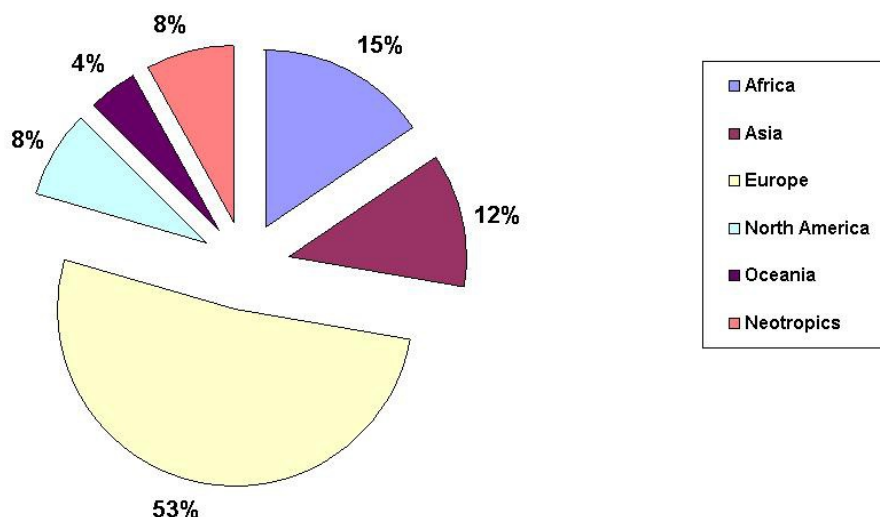
Wetlands are areas of special protection status due to their extraordinary significance for the preservation of some animal species and their natural habitats. The latter are especially important in terms of the ornithofauna in global scale. For that reason the most significant species are included in the Convention on wetlands of international importance, especially as waterfowl habitat.

Despite the fact that such territories preserve valuable animal and plant species, they remain unknown for the community and their resource potential is not used optimally. The purpose of this paper is to investigate what opportunities exist for assimilation of the recreational potential of the wetlands on the Balkan peninsula within the scope of tourism and its sustainable development. Under observation is the concept for sustainable tourism development, in particular ecotourism applied as a means aimed at contributing to sustainable results. The latter lay the basis for some conclusions and recommendations.



The International Union for Conservation of Nature defines wetlands as “areas of marsh, fen, peatland or water, whether natural or artificial, permanent or temporary, with water that is static or flowing, fresh, brackish or salt, including areas of marine water the depth of which at low tide does not exceed six metres”<sup>2</sup>. It is obvious that wetlands play the role of regulators of the water regime as habitats, creating favourable conditions for specific flora and fauna, in particular waterfowl birds. They constitute resources with great economic, cultural, scientific and recreational value, whose loss would be fatal.

The fact that conservation of the wetlands and their flora and fauna could be ensured through the means of a long-term national policy combined with coordinated international activities should be taken into consideration with a view to the great significance of these territories. For that reason the scientific community adopted the Ramsar Convention, especially as waterfowl habitat answering the processes of wetland over-exploitation and their unwise use. The convention was adopted on 02 February 1971 in Ramsar (a relatively small town in Iran, situated on the coast of the Caspian sea) at the First International Conference on the problems concerning the status and conservation of wetlands throughout the world. It came into force in December 1975. In fact this is the first treaty, related to conservation of habitats and biodiversity. Presently there are 159 Contracting Parties to the Convention, united in seven geographic regions which are - Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, Western Europe, South America and North America and Oceania, comprising of 1869 wetland sites, covering 183 681 110 hectares. The region of the European continent has the largest share in terms of wetland distribution throughout the world (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** World distribution of wetlands by region dated August 2008

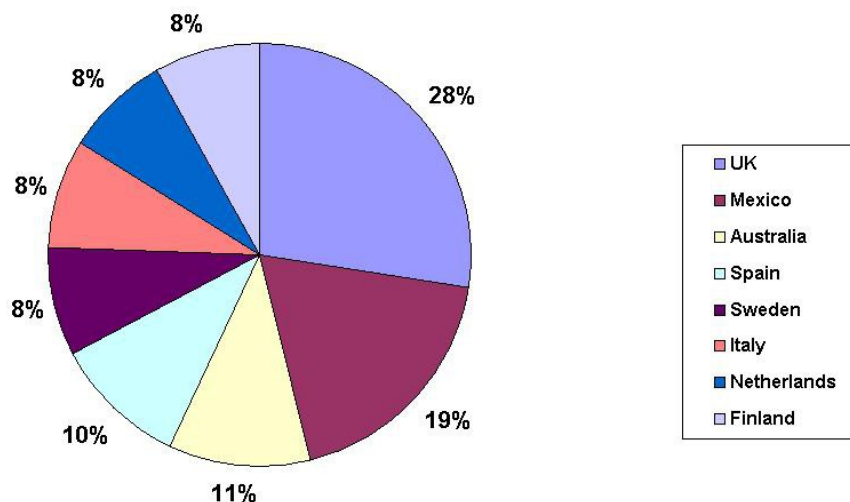
The wetland distribution by countries reveals that the largest number of sites are located in the United Kingdom – 168, including 16 sites situated outside its island area, followed by Mexico – 113, Sweden – 51, Denmark – 38, out of which 11 are located in Greenland, France – 36 and seven of them are outside the continental regions of the country, China – 37, Ukraine – 33, Hungary – 28, India – 25, USA – 25, Pakistan – 19 and etc.<sup>3</sup> (Figure 2).

<sup>2</sup> Ramsar Convention, Article 1.1., [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wetland#Technical\\_definitions](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wetland#Technical_definitions)

<sup>3</sup> The Ramsar convention is signed on behalf of Bulgaria, without the obligation be ratified as execution of Decree No 389, dated 18<sup>th</sup> of November 1974 by the Council of Ministers. It came into force on 24<sup>th</sup> of January 1976. It was amended by a protocol, signed in Paris on 03<sup>rd</sup> of December 1982, which entered into force in Bulgaria on 27.02.1986. Decree No 76, issued by the Bureau of the Council of Ministers on 10<sup>th</sup> of April 1990. Bulgaria accept the amendments to articles 6 and 7 of the Convention, that are affirmed by the participating countries at the conference in Regina – Canada and introduced to the Convention Bureau on 21<sup>st</sup> of October 1990. Later (on 10<sup>th</sup> of July 1992) the Convention is ratified and promulgated in State Gazette Issue56/10<sup>th</sup> of October 1992. The Supreme authority of the Ramsar convention is the Conference of member-states. It has sessions once in every three years. The executive activities are in charge of the Permanent committee (popular also as Ramsar Directorate, headquartered in Gland, Switzerland) as well as the Secretariat. The Ramsar convention works in close



It is obvious that the mission of the Convention is to preserve and use wisely the wetlands throughout the world by the means of national activities and international cooperation, with the aim to ensure sustainable development in global scale. The main objectives of this document are intended to serve as a tool for management of wetlands as sites of great economic, cultural, scientific and conservation value. It also aims to prevent their devastation and extinction as well as to preserve them through wise use, that is through permanent development.



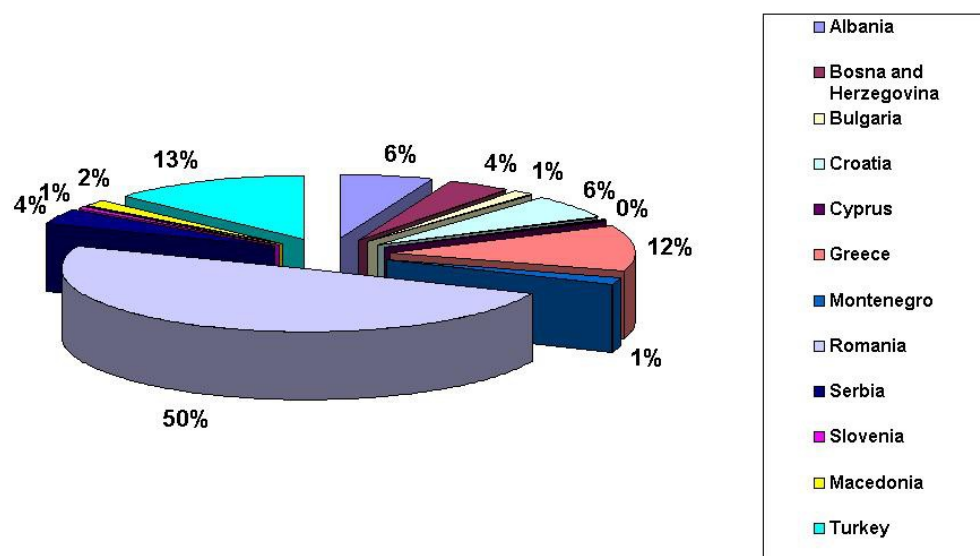
We should emphasize the fact that each of the member-countries has the obligation to determine their relevant wetlands of international importance, located on their territory. The boundaries of each area are described in details and marked on maps. They could comprise of river and coastal areas, adjoining islands or sea water tables deeper than 6 m or ebb-tides, if the latter are of importance for waterfowl birds.

The wetlands are selected on the basis of their international importance in terms of ecology, botany, zoology, limnology, hydrology. Sites of international importance for the year round waterfowl birds are ranked first. It is important to note that in order to enlist any wetland site, the latter should not infringe the executive rights of the contracting party, on which territory it is situated.

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partnership with BirdLife International ; IUCN – The World Conservation Union; Wetlands International; WWF.

The most important instruments of this important international initiative constitute the Ramsar list of wetlands of international importance, assessment criteria for site selection, Montreux Record (list of endangered sites), guideline management procedure as well as the strategic plan 2003-2008, containing five main and 21 operative objects as well as 192 specific activities. The coordinating body in Bulgaria is the National Nature Protection Service Directorate at the Ministry of Environment and Water.



Except for that the contracting parties establish and apply specially developed plans, in the aim to assist the site conservation, to find new ways for their proper utilization within the boundaries of their countries.

Natural reserves are established within their territories with the aim to preserve such sites as waterfowl bird habitats, nevertheless the latter are enlisted in the Ramsar list and if they are subject to special care and protection. Moreover, the obligations of the country-states are related to the overall conservation of the biodiversity of the wetlands, development of management plans, promoting activities to public and etc.

For their geographical location the Balkan countries have diverse and specific wetlands. This is the reason for which on their territories are proclaimed 63 Ramsar sites, covering an area of 1 377 979 (figure 3).

Romanian wetlands occupy the largest area coming to 683 628 ha. One of them represents a unique protected area of its kind – the Danube river delta (647 000ha). The Small Island of Braila 17 586 ha, and MureşFloodplain (17 166 ha). The Ramsar sites in Turkey are ranked second. They comprise of 12 wetlands, encompassing 179 482 ha, including the Lake Burdur (24 800 ha), the Lake Kus (20 400), Uluabat (19 900), Yumurtalik Lagoons 19 833 ha and etc.

This international initiative is represented by 10 Ramsar sites in Greece, occupying in total 163 501 ha. The most popular of them include Artificial lake Kerkini (10 996 ha), Messolonghi lagoons<sup>MR AND</sup> (33 687 ha), Nestos delta & adjoining lagoons<sup>MR</sup> (21 930 ha), Axios, Loudias, Aliakmon delta<sup>MR</sup> (11 808 ha), Evros delta (9 267 ha) and etc. Albania has proclaimed three wetlands covering an area of 83 062 ha. The emphasis should be laid upon Lake Shkodra and River Buna (49 562 ha). The wetlands in Croatia are also of great interest. There are four sites within the country, encompassing 86 579 ha. The most popular among them is the Delta Neretve (11 500 ha) as well as Lonjsko Polje and Mokro Polje (incl. Krapje Djol 50 560 ha).

Bulgaria has ten wetlands with total area of 20 360 ha, enlisted in this international initiative. These are Ibissha Islands complex 307 ha, Belene Islands Complex 6898 ha, Srebarna MR, 1357 ha, Lake Shabla, (Protected locality) 530 ha, Durankulak Lake (protected locality) 450 ha, Atanasovo Lake MR 1404 ha, Pomorie Wetland Complex 814 ha, Vaya Lake 2900 ha, Poda 307 ha, Ropotamo Complex 5500 ha.

Other 23 sites meet the inclusion criteria of the Ramsar convention and could be proclaimed for wetlands of international importance. These areas include Mandra lake, Varna-beloslavice lake complex, reservoirs Ovcharitsa and Rozov kladenets, Pyasachnik and etc. (Profirov, 2003).

The importance of the Ramsar sites on the Balkans as wetlands of global importance is mainly due to their role in terms of conservation of unique ecosystems. It concerns mainly the ornithofauna. For that reason their sustainable development should consist of initiatives and activities aimed at protection and



conservation of the natural habitats and their genetic fund as well as wise use of the natural resources, and ecotourism development as an integral part of sustainable tourism practice. That way ecotourism could contribute simultaneously to the economic development of these areas on the one hand and to form an eco-friendly attitude of local communities, on the other hand. The latter could also be used as a management tool and leverage.

Due to their location the Ramsar sites could be used to diversify tourist products of the regions they belong to. The integration of ecotourism activities and services as well as the development of other specialized tourism forms could accelerate the process of transformation of the mass product profile into more customized one. The latter requires an objective assessment of the recreational resources of these sites and their inclusion into the scope of tourist products. The conducted analysis could serve as a basis to prove that the Ramsar sites in the Balkan countries are of significant scientific and conservation value, which in turn is a prerequisite for their implication to ecotourism.

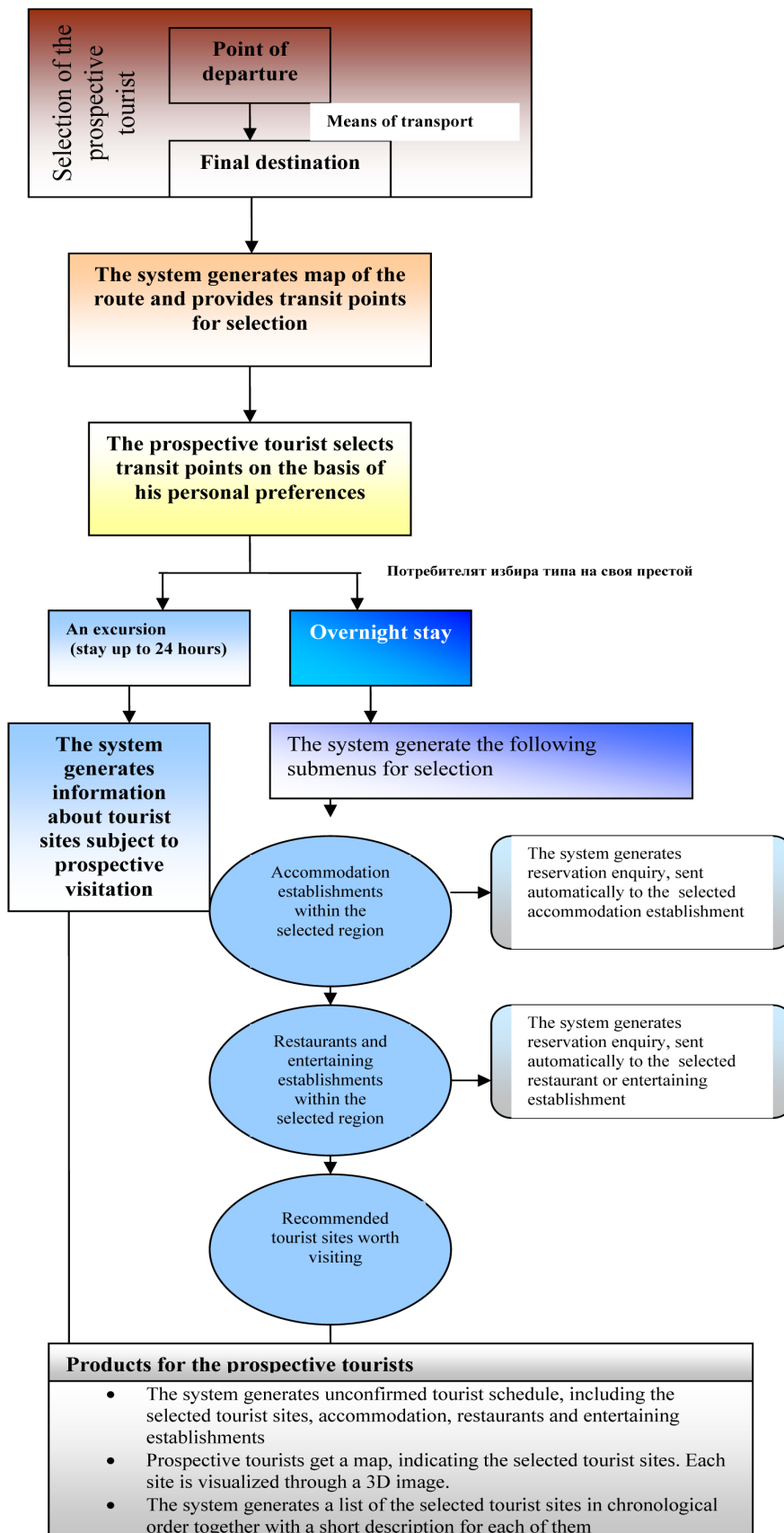
The tourist attractiveness of these areas is dependent on their biodiversity, which could be used:

- To present and promote specific plants and especially ornithological species, nevertheless they are shown to tourists directly or indirectly through the means of interpretative routes;
- To establish thematic tours within the boundaries of the wetlands;
- To organize special attractions such as thematic observations along the migratory routes Via Pontika and Via Aristotelis, with an emphasis laid upon the bird behavior.

In terms of the large-scale promotion and popularization of ecotourism practiced in the Ramsar sites, we consider that development of a web portal would be a reasonable solution as it could allow internet users to create their own tourist products on the basis of their personal preferences and with a view to the local natural and anthropogenic resources. Together with that in the scope of ecotourism we cannot ignore the latest trends:

- The majority of tourists who visit certain sites for ecotourism practice are individual, unorganized tourists, seeking customized tourist products and services;
- More and more tourists plan their travel on the basis of the information launched in Internet. The number of those who make their reservations online increases annually;
- Tour operators who provide information about the natural heritage in the countries of the Balkan peninsula, including the Ramsar sites are relatively limited due to their poor knowledge and lack of interest toward these natural resources. Another disadvantage for tourists is related with their time and cost consumption.







With a view to the above analysis, we consider that in terms of the time-, effort- and cost-effectiveness, a web based portal could serve as a tool for providing information and assisting planning activities, aimed at creation of ecotourism products within the boundaries of the Ramsar sites on the Balkan peninsula. The opportunity for creation of joint tourist products should not be ignored, too. In its sense it is the best way for advertising and promoting the regions and their tourism resources. It is also the fastest tool to reach the prospective markets at local, regional, national and international level. On the basis of the above, we recommend a model of a system, promoting ecotourism in the Ramsar sites in the countries of the Balkan peninsula.

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