

Analysis of the first session of the Working Group "Regional Development" of GAMCON – Gagauzian Modernization convention

Overall summary of the WG1 meeting

The 1st meeting of the Working Group 1 (WG1) for Regional Development of the Gagauzia Modernization Convention (GaMCon) was held on 29.06.2017 in Comrat, Moldova (see Program of the WG1 meeting). Its aim was to create the expert group and start to work on the issues related to regional development of the Gagauzia, very specific region of the Moldova. Organisers after discussion with the Regional administration decided that the specific topic of the WG1 meeting will be development of tourism in the region as possible economic driving force of the region in the future.

After organisers welcomed members of the WG1, each member introduced itself and institution she/he is representing. Next, Mr. Vadim Cheban, deputy head of the Gagauzia regional administration welcomed the participants and informed them on the priorities of regional development of Gagauzia, the support of Regional administration of the tourism and also critically identified shortages of the development of the region, incl. of the tourism sector. He also pointed out that the Regional administration of ATO Gagauzia is planning to start to elaborate comprehensive strategy of the tourism development in ATO Gagauzia. He also pointed out on the need for better promotion of the Gagauzia tourism in region itself, in Moldova and abroad, incl. urgent need to create unique brand of "Tourism Gagauzia". First Q&As were done between him and the WG1 members, after his speech.

Mr. Seghei Pashkov, internal expert of the WG1 and Director Executive of the NGO European Center of Civil Initiatives "Stalker" as well as Vice-chairman at Public Council of Comrat municipality as the 2nd speaker introduced his analysis of the tourism development in Gagauzia (see attachment No.1). He focused on defining the problems, but also potential of the tourism development in ATO Gagauzia. He identified and analysed mainly 5 types of most important types of tourism that could be developed in Gagauzia: Wine tourism; Rural/ecotourism tourism; Excursion tourism; Cultural tourism; and Nostalgic tourism. He presented results of his analysis and also presented SWOT of the tourism development in region.

Wide discussion started after his speech. WG1 members commented on the results of his analysis, pointed out on other problems of development of tourism in region, several people express their negative (personal) experience of tourism development in region, on unprepared conditions (infrastructure, people, information etc.) for tourism development as well as absence of public and private investments into the sector. Almost all participants agreed that tourism is one of the most dynamically developing branches of the world economy, but in Moldova and ATO Gagauzia this sector is poorly represented, despite the presence of a rather significant

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tourist potential. ATU Gagauzia has a certain potential for the development of tourism, the development of which would contribute to increasing the level of social and economic development of the region, and the country. Unused potential provides real opportunities for the development of tourism in the region, as well as for creating new jobs, as tourism is a complex activity and a link for many related industries (transport, agricultural and food enterprises, cultural institutions, crafts, etc.). This particularly applies to the development of rural, agrarian, ecological and nostalgic tourism, based on local resources and traditional hospitality of residents. However, the degree of development of tourism potential is extremely low, and the tourism industry is at the initial stage of its development. A lot of discussants evaluate on very poor infrastructure that limits the potential of tourism development.

WG1 members a lot discussed esp. on nostalgic tourism and cultural tourisms (based on the unique nation of the Gagauz people). Some members consider this as the very important segment of the future development of the tourism in the regions. Another participants would like to focus more on other types of tourism, e.g. on creative tourism and on involvement also of young people into development of this sector.

The discussion was also on the statistics available in the tourism sector. And generally, they are not existing ... The present system of tourism management in Moldova and ATO Gagauzia does not provide a transparent evaluation of activities, institutions and as well as entrepreneurs involved in tourism.

After the 2 hours of discussion, it was stopped, and Mr. Vladimír Benč, expert on reg. development from Slovakia presented his presentation. He focused on how the system of tourism support (legal, institutional, financial, etc.) is organised in Slovakia and its regions. He provided several examples how the tourism is managed at the regional, but also local level, presented also several case studies. At the end, he presented possible version how the tourism development strategy in Gagauzia can be elaborated, using the “standard” EU methodology. He showed some examples from Slovakia, how the development strategies are done and bound to financial resources. He also commented on the discussion and also shown some examples how the regional and local tourism marketing strategies are done (e.g. tourism region Liptov – www.visitliptov.sk).

After his speech, several Q&As were answered, but discussion continued mainly to two points:

- how to coordinate work of the WG with another initiatives, e.g. on tourism strategy elaboration and coordinate with the Strategy of social and economic development of Gagauzia 2017-2022, that was recently finalized and approved by Regional administration of Gagauzia;
- how to “easily” start to work on the tourism promotion of Gagauzia region (web portal, brand development, etc.).

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To sum up the meeting – WG1 successfully started to work. Participants shared information about the current situation in the sphere of tourism in ATO Gagauzia, as well as discussed key problems, but also potential of tourism development in Gagauzia. We can conclude that a stable civil information and communication platform was established that is willing to closely work within the GaMCon project on this issue. WG1 participants however were not able to formulate the exact work plan for next meeting, but they generally agreed, that the next WG1 session will again focus on tourism development, and possibly on work on Gagauzia tourism development strategy, or some of its part.

Key identified problems of tourism in Gagauzia by WG1 members can be sum up to:

- the degree of development of tourism potential is extremely low, and the tourism industry is at the initial stage of its development – this is the main conclusion ...;
- so, far, very low attention of responsible institutions, as well as Moldovan government for development of tourism in regions, incl. almost not existing system of institutional, financial and other support for development of tourism in Moldova regions;
- absence of strategic planning and institutions responsible for tourism development in the Gagauzia;
- lack of a regional and/or any local Tourist Information Center, as well as lack of regional tourist and excursion agencies;
- very weak international and domestic awareness of tourist routes and leisure options in Gagauzia, incl. almost non-existing marketing of Gagauzia tourism (absence of tourism web portal, published and electronic materials for tourists, brand of tourism Gagauzia, souvenirs, etc. ...);
- absence of statistics on tourism at the regional level – difficult conditions for planning and strategy making;
- absence of passportization of the possible tourism attractions in the region, only first analysis occurred, now (not very well elaborated);
- very poor tourism infrastructure, incl. absence of hotels, campsites, and those existing are poor quality of services;
- very poor tourism relevant infrastructure, e.g. roads, esp. in countryside;
- technical condition of some possible tourism attractions, such as Cultural and historical monuments, museums etc. is poor;
- absence of comprehensive tourism products;
- orientation through the pointers of the location of attractions is at a very low level;
- generally, very weak/unprepared human capacities for providing the tourism services, incl. low level of knowledge of foreign languages;
- absence of any standards for the quality measurement of tourist services;
- absence of support to entrepreneurs for the development of tourism;
- and many others ...

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Recommendations for the next work of the WG1

1) Enlarging the WG1 membership

Generally, the group already includes key stakeholders active in regional development in Gagauzia. However, as discussed, it is need to involve also representatives of other municipalities in Gagauzia, as well as representatives of Local Action Groups that are already created. We would welcome also higher participation of the business involved in tourism to be included into WG1, if the work of the WG1 will be related primarily to the tourism development.

2) Supporting positive initiatives regarding the instutualization of the regional and tourism sector development in Gagauzia

WG1 should consider possible expert/technical/marketing support to the initiatives of stakeholders e.g. Regional administration in setting up tourism support tools at regional/local level. Such simply assistance can be in helping regional administration to prepare Gagauzia tourism brand and also tourism web portal.

Slovak experts are ready e.g. to provide case studies examples, strategies elaboration examples – so called good cases learning – for better regional development and tourism development of Gagauzia.

3) Decision on the WG1 key output must be taken, soon

The WG1 has to decide ASAP, how to organize the work, and which way to go in helping Gagauzia in regional development. There are several options:

a.) Help Regional administration of Gagauzia to elaborate comprehensive and a long-term development framework for tourism (10-15 years) with emphasis on policy and strategy, planning, institutional strengthening, legislation and regulation, product development and diversification, marketing and promotion, tourism infrastructure and superstructure, economic impact of tourism and tourism investment, human resource development, and socio-cultural and environmental impacts of tourism. It should include a short term (e.g. a three-year) action plan for priority actions to be undertaken to kick-start sustainable tourism development, and preparation of several demonstration projects for pilot areas.

b.) related to a.) – focus only on some part of the document, e.g. Strategic part and within WG1 session draft and discuss strategic priorities and possible measures for development of tourism in Gagauzia.

c.) related to a.) – help to elaborate some strategic segment of the Gagauzia tourism, e.g. wine tourism, community-based tourism or rural tourism, in form of some short sectoral strategic document.

d.) focus on other issues related to tourism development in Gagauzia, e.g. proposed marketing (elaboration of marketing strategy, contributing to brand and web portal creation, etc.).

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- e) make WG1 just a platform for know-how sharing on modern ways of tourism, e.g. creative tourism.
- f) touch other issues of regional and/or rural development, and not to focus only on tourism (industrial parks, investment conditions, urban planning, etc.).
- g) any other topics that are in urgent need of regional development of Gagauzia.

- 4) Looking for positive cases/pilot projects for regional development/tourism and helping to develop them

While there is a huge absence of information and statistics on regional development and also on tourism in Gagauzia, WG1 should consider spending some time during the WG1 meetings to give a floor for presentation of projects that are implemented by whatever stakeholder in Gagauzia related to reg. development/development of tourism. This can lead to identification of possible successful projects that should receive further support, and also serve as good cases for other stakeholders to be active in reg. dev./tourism in the future. WG1 can also help to promote these projects (and create database of institutions involved in the sector).

- 5) Looking for other financial resources for enlarging the work of the created WG1 (outside the GaMCon project)

WG1 organisers, as well as WG1 members should be actively looking for other possible financial resources to enhance and broaden the work of the WG1. As the first meeting shown, there is a huge will of the group to help with tourism development of Gagauzia. It requires time, activity and finances. GaMCon project didn't expected needed activities like strategy elaboration or web portal creation. To broaden the scope of work of the WG, it requires to find source of financing those :extra: activities.

- 6) Others

List of members of the WG1 should be created, including contacts (e-mail, phone, web page of institution ...) and distributed among members and/or published at the GaMCon webpage, to foster discussion among members also outside the WG1 meetings.

Recommendations regarding the tourism development in Gagauzia

1.) It is positive that Gagauzia regional administration elaborated and approved the Strategy of social and economic development of Gagauzia 2017-2022. It also includes measure / Activity 2.8. Sustainable and dynamic development of tourism at the regional level. It is important to focus on this document in next steps to be taken, esp. for its implementation. Any strategy to be elaborated in the sector of tourism must be in line with priorities defined in above mentioned strategy. Regional administration should concentrate its resources (human, technical, financial ...) to successfully implement the Strategy.

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The restructuring of the development of tourism must be implemented on the basis of a targeted programme that will allow optimal use of natural resources, built-up capacities, establishments and services provided there, taking into account the requirements for sustainable development. Tourism is rather a conglomerate of the products and activities from many different sectors that participate in the activities of tourism. If tourism is to gain more weight in the Gagauzian economy, its interests and objectives will have to be furthered more intensively in all sectoral policies.

Although the private sector plays the decisive role in the development of tourism, the public sector has to formulate strategies for its development and to define instruments for its implementation. The substance of state / regional policy in tourism and the need for its new orientation are therefore important.

So, we recommend elaborating comprehensive Strategy of the tourism development in Gagauzia.

2.) For further development of tourism, it is necessary to start collect and analyse statistical information related to tourism, incl. e.g. passportization of tourism attractions and offered services in the region.

We recommend Regional administration of Gagauzia to:

- communicate with responsible national institutions such as statistical office of Moldova to enhance statistics on regions and municipal level, and on sectors such as tourism;
- realize analysis – passportization of tourism situation and capacities in Gagauzia region.

3.) There is an urgent need to enhance institutional and communication tools regarding coordination of the tourism development in the region.

We recommend defining the institutional system at regional level responsible for tourism planning, development, monitoring and supporting. It is necessary also to allocate money (or search for possible external financing – e.g. Fund for regional development of Moldova) for keeping the system functional and also for supporting other stakeholders. Example of activity for supporting of other stakeholders can be creation of small regional fund that will support small non-for-profit projects in area of tourism development.

4.) Creation of basic marketing tools

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We recommend Regional administration to prepare set of basic marketing tools, having in place joint regional brand, such Gagauzia Tourism or Visit Gagauzia. It requires creation of logo, tourist information portal in several languages and preparation of information campaign. It can be done in a short time and without any extensive financing. Later on, more sophisticated marketing tools can be developed.

5.) Creation of other marketing measures, esp. supporting the private sector

We recommend establishing regional and/or local Tourist Information Center that can fulfil a lot of positive tasks related to development of the tourism. If done so, it must have secured financing for several years, later on can act as PPP – combining public and private sources from services it will be providing (selling of postcards, souvenirs, maps etc.).

It is also necessary (maybe in cooperation with University and/or NGOs) develop tourist advertising and information materials about Gagauzia in several languages. They must be available in print and also on-line.

Similarly, it is important to start planning, development and promotion of tourist routes, incl. marking of those tourist routes. Important activity is to collect and then promote festivals and educational events, help organisers to make it more visible in Gagauzia, but also in other parts of Moldova (and abroad in the future).

At the end, it is important to start to prepare comprehensive tourism products that can combine different kinds of available tourism, so Gagauzia in 5-7 years can become competitive on international market of tourism.

6.) Building the human sources / expert base on regional development and tourism development in the region

Human capacity building must go in line with activities related enhancing tourism infrastructure. It is even more demanding and complicated than to build a hotel. You cannot just turn a winemaker to wine tourism operator and promoter in a day or two. There is need and we recommend:

- further improve and educate group of experts on regional development and tourism making – could be several groups from public and private sector – that can be “start-up people” of the tourism development in Gagauzia;
- develop human capacities for providing the tourism services, e.g. setting up educational programs or re-profiling programs at the Comrat University, for unemployed, for farmers/wine producers willing to broaden scope of their business activities, and so forth.

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This can involve university, but also NGOs and business sectors – all can do formal, informal and other kinds of education of people willing to develop tourism, tourism products and tourism business in Gagauzia.

7) Infrastructure enhancing – prioritization

There is a huge need to modernize, reconstruct old and build new tourism infrastructure in Gagauzia, if tourism is to be considered as future important sector of Gagauzia economy. It requires a lot of money to invest, and also in line with feasible strategy how to bring the tourists to the region. We think, it should be done on clever decision based on correct and independent information, e.g. on the feasibility study or strategy elaborated (see point 1.) of recommendations. If going for strategy or feasibility study, the important part must be a system of key priorities that should be supported. List of project proposals is good, but not enough. Transparent, realistic and expert base system must be done to decide, what priorities should be prioritized and supported. This should go also in line with development of modern rules for urban and rural development, protection of nature and other factors that must regulate the tourism activities in region.

8) Infrastructure enhancing – motivation of private sector

There is a need to involve business into the whole process. They should be involved also in planning activities for tourism development. Regional government should plan some support programs for businesses active in tourism, esp. for SMEs, start-ups etc.

Regional government (in cooperation with national level, or not) should also put in place standards for the quality measurement of tourist services.

9) International and cross-border cooperation – project development

It is important that responsible stakeholders increase their participation in international tourism development projects within different frameworks (e.g. "Lower Danube" and "Prut-Dniester" Euroregions), EU co-financed CBC programs available for Moldova, or any others. Transfer of know-how, esp. in sector of tourism with hi-speed development, is very necessary, if you want to develop something interesting and/or compete on global tourism market. It is important to find reliable partners in other regions and countries, since comprehensive tourism products require information exchange, market knowledge and "global" tourist is becoming more and more demanding. Gagauzia can produce unique tourism products with its neighbours.

10) Analysis of new/trendy ways of tourism

Gagauzia should explore possibilities in new ways of tourism, e.g. creative tourism, event – or congress tourism, gastronomy tourism, and so forth. Responsible stakeholders should improve

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their knowledge on the new – emerging – ways and forms of tourism and analyse possibilities how to include them into the tourism mix of Gagauzia.

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