

# TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN THE DILIJAN COMMUNITY AND AT THE TERRITORY OF THE DILIJAN NATIONAL PARK

## TRANSDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN THE CAUCASUS REGION

**ASPU Student Report  
September 2019**

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## **INTRODUCTION WHY DILIJAN WAS SELECTED**

From 23 to 30 June, 2019 for the second time in Armenia a student field practice/Case-study by using a transdisciplinary approach to research was carried out. The Case-study was conducted in Dilijan. 22 students and 7 lecturers of master's programs of three faculties (Faculty of Geography /including landscape planning/, Faculty of History and Faculty of Sociology) have participated in the Case-study.

Dilijan was chosen as one of the unique tourist regions of Armenia, based on ecotourism and resort tourism, as well as interesting historical and architectural buildings in the area.

The existence of Dilijan National Park in the area was also important for the case-study. The resources of the national park are not used very efficiently.

Our aim was to analyze and understand the sustainable tourism development in Dilijan National Park, what can be done to improve it. We intended to involve some of the main residents as stakeholders in all of these processes so that they were directly involved in each of these processes. In addition to a specially designed questionnaire, we tried to understand how local residents receive tourists, we evaluated the quality and effectiveness of the services provided by hotels and guest houses in the city from the point of view of sustainable tourism.

## **THE MAIN ACTIVITIES OF THE FIELD WORK, INFORMATION ABOUT EVERY DAY ACTIVITIES, FIELD VISITS AND INTERVIEWS**

- ✚ 20/06-21/06 preparation seminars/presentations by Tamara Mitrofanenko from BOKU, professor Ashot Khoetsyan, Marine Matosyan from ASPU.
- ✚ 23/06 - Departure from the ASPU to Dilijan. Initial meeting with all students, working groups. Defining of the tasks /research topics/ for each group and basic schedule.
- ✚ 24/06 - Visit to Dilijan National Park, meeting with park director and staff, discuss current issues
- ✚ 25/06 - field work, data collection. Each group made an Interim Presentation, joint reflection and Q&A. Meeting with the head of tourism department of Dilijan municipality, inquiries with local residents, tourists /English version of the questionnaire is attached to the document /
- ✚ 26/06 - Field data analysis, surveys with locals, hotels, guesthouses.
- ✚ 27/06 - Visiting-hiking on almost unused eco-trail, exploring the advantages and disadvantages of the route in order to further improve this eco-trail and make it usable by tourists
- ✚ 28/06- Each group works on individual recommendations, summarizing and completing key research questions. Creating a final, unified work for the performance.
- ✚ 29/06 - Presentation of a group and collaborative work involving all participants and local stakeholders.

## BRIEF GROUP REPORTS

### 1. Community infrastructure and services as a precondition for sustainable tourism.

Muradyan Marieta

- 1) Tatoyan Narine
- 2) Abovyan Shushan
- 3) Sahakyan Narek
- 4) Madoyan Anahit
- 5) Ghambaryan Mariam

The first group looked at the overall infrastructure and services of the Dilijan community to be studied prior to fieldwork. Roads, hotels in the community, popular restaurants, and resorts were particularly explored within this theme. **The main research questions for this group were:**

- create questionnaires for tourist and main residents, try to find out problems of tourism infrastructures;
- study main tourism infrastructures of the research area, which are more important for tourists, find the pros and cons;
- to make recommendations for the further improvement of the studied tourism infrastructures.

The fieldwork provided more opportunities to discover the real state of infrastructure and services offered in the community as part of sustainable tourism development. The fieldwork began with the preparation of a questionnaire for the population survey. We worked with sociologists to formulate a questionnaire. The participation of sociology students was important for the success for our field work. The main questions included in the questionnaire were:

Do you often meet tourists in Dilijan? Do you have any links with the tourism industry? Would you like to work in this field? How do you think Dilijan's infrastructure is impacting tourism

development? etc. Then we developed questionnaires for tourists and locals working on the same principle. The main goal of the work was to get a lot of information about the infrastructure and services in the area in a short period of time and to understand how they contribute to the development of sustainable tourism.



Working discussion

### 2. Elaboration of geographical trail descriptions of selected eco-trails in the Dilijan National Park

Babayan Tigran

- 1) Margaryan Lili
- 2) Margaryan Qristine
- 3) Haroyan Ani
- 4) Avetisyan Ofelya
- 5) Rashoyan Laura
- 6) Yenoqyan Tatev

The main issue (research question) of the group was to create a trail description of an eco-trail in Dilijan National Park. The first day of the group work planning was followed by meetings with stakeholders. As the topic of the group was related to eco-paths, the students of the group camped with one eco-path, accompanied

by a guide. We then identified the problems and benefits we encountered while crossing that eco-trail.

The end result was that with the joint efforts of all project participants, we developed a plan of practical changes for one of the existing trails.



Hiking along the Eco-trail

### **3. Natural and historical heritage of a community as a sustainable development resource.**

Khachatryan Susanna

- 1) Vardanyan Narine
- 2) Manukyan Zvard
- 3) Babloyan Anna
- 4) Tadevosyan Irina
- 5) Safaryan Haykuhi

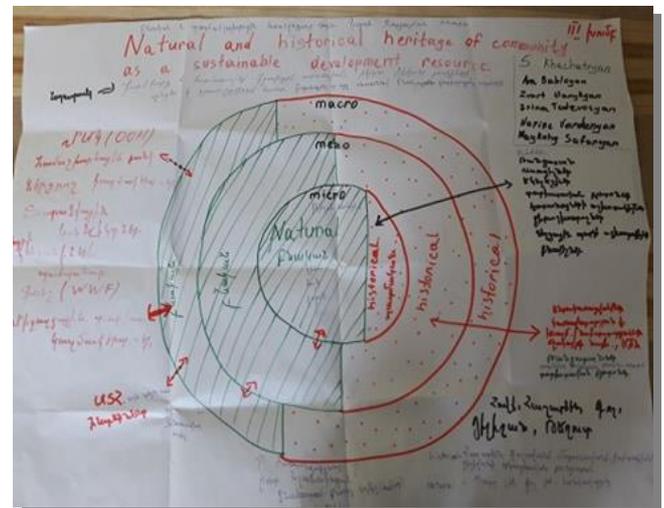
The research questions was

- first, to study natural and historical heritage of Dilijan community
- second, to find out how this heritage can foster sustainable tourism development in Dilijan.

The topic assigned to the group has been discussed at 3 levels; from the point of view of community representatives, at the republican and global level.

At the community, republican, and world levels we have presented the ratio of natural and historical-cultural heritage. Our goal was to present the presence of key players at different levels in the right use of natural and historical and cultural resources for sustainable community development. At the end of the work we touched upon the interrelationships between these levels and identified the primary actors.

The study revealed that natural and historical-cultural monuments as a resource for sustainable community development can be used especially in the tourism sector. The rational use of natural resources by the local population will contribute to this process. The main areas of the region where most tourists visit are also highlighted. They are Haghartsin, Goshavank and Lake Parz.



Dilijan Community Tourism Resources Opportunity Analysis

#### **4. Environmental problems of the case study Region/Climate, Change, Land Degradation and Deforestation/**

Hovhanisyan Varduhi

- 1) Boyakhchyan Silva
- 2) Manukyan Yeranuhi
- 3) Hambardzumyan Liana
- 4) Abrahamyan Nazeli
- 5) Petrosyan Seda
- 6) Ohanyan Ani

Main issue for the group was to find environmental problems of the Community, and study what role they have for sustainable tourism development here. In order to do the work, the climatic conditions of the Dilijan community have been studied as well as the impact of global climate change on the area. The research has tried to predict what impacts land degradation and global climate change will have here. For the purpose of the study, relevant literature has been studied, a sociological survey has been conducted among the population to find out how the climate and soils have changed in practice.

Based on the studies, the students together with the stakeholders tried to predict possible changes in tourism and recommendations were made for further development of tourism in Dilijan National Park. The goal is to promote sustainable tourism, which will also contribute to environmental protection, forest resource conservation and sustainable use.

The group's important work was to maintain the natural environment through tourism.



Working on the analysis

#### **PARTICIPATION AND INPUT OF THE LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS**

During the Case-study students closely cooperated with local stakeholders representing public, civil and private sectors. At first stakeholders helped students with information about natural resources and demand, tourism situation and services they offer, microclimate and the changes that they noticed.

A local school teacher, for example spoke about deforestation. She described peoples' attitude and behavior to their city and forest.

A hotel manager talked about tourism services in Dilijan.

A local NGO coordinator told about seminars and meetings which they organized with schools, communities and youth groups. The coordinator gave us fliers and other resources to familiarize us with the work carried out in the community.

Local people with whom we did interviews gave a lot more information about their desires and real conditions.

The team of employees of «Dilijan National Park» were always ready to give information and share experiences with us. During our eco-trail the manager of tourism department of «Dilijan National Park» guided us through the forest. We learnt details about the trail and then could make offers. It was really useful because in the

end we enriched the trail with new ideas and created a visualized image of the trail.



The proposed Eco-trail map

The main idea behind the eco-trail feature is to provide information panels here that would simplify the campaign process and inform about dangers on the trail.

At the end of our project the stakeholders made suggestions to improve our scenario. We can say that the local stakeholders did their best to share views of their community and forests.

### **BENEFITS FOR THE STAKEHOLDERS AND FOR THE COMMUNITY, FINAL RESULTS**

The project had benefits both for students and the stakeholders. In the end of the project the stakeholders were given a modified, modern and much more interesting eco-trail idea. They understood that a fully designed eco-trail can be a natural attraction for tourism. They also understood that there will be an alternative way to make money if they stop thinking about deforestation and start to use their ideas to develop tourism, because benefits from tourism are higher than from wood sale. Furthermore, they saw that foreigners are eager to do research and are interested in this region as a resort area. So there will be a change in their mind to protect and improve the conditions, which will affect their well-being. As the eco trail has been already used we hope they will improve it following our scenario.

As a result we had a modified eco-trail which can be one of the most visited trails in the national park, based on our personal and stakeholders' opinions.

It is understandable, of course, that developing an eco-trail was a small step for a region with huge tourism opportunities like Dilijan.

Objectively assessing the case, it should be noted that the fieldwork was only available for seven days. There was really little time for effective work, and we didn't have the opportunity to get many people involved in this project. For such a short period of time, it was important for the groups to do research on different topics and exchange materials.

When discussing the benefits for the community, it is also important to consider the presence of a geography teacher from one of the local schools, as a stakeholder in our research. By adapting the whole process and results of our research, he can spread those ideas among the students, teach them the peculiarities of applying their sustainable development principles in practice and organizing sustainable tourism in the Dilijan community. In this regard, it is important to note that high school students are already involved in the service sector, for example "Café 2" is staffed by high school students.

### **WHAT HAVE STUDENTS LEARNED AS A RESULT OF THE FIELD WORK?**

This project was quite useful for students. Some of the students already took part in this project last year. The field research using the transdisciplinary approach was very interesting. Students generally learned to work with different professionals in pursuit of a common goal. It was interesting to work with professors in the field, to understand how they do field work. Also work and communication with foreign scientists was interesting because the students were able to understand the differences between Western scientific

thought and the Armenian scientific thought under study. During this work, students learned how to do field research in a short period of time and achieve practical results. For most students it was a good opportunity to develop English languages skills. Some students mentioned that as a result of the program they began to better recognize Armenia, value our resources and the potential we have for tourism development. The population of Dilijan region is also very different from other regions of Armenia with its mentality, some students found it very interesting to interact with people from this region. And let's not forget that fieldwork reinforces theoretical knowledge, enabling them to apply it in practice. Students can also apply the research done here in other regions as part of their work. Some of the results of the study were used to develop master theses.