

DOI 10.20544/HORIZONS.A.20.1.17.P14

UDC 338.48-6>379.845(497.7-18)

**APPLICATION OF FAS METHODOLOGY FOR  
IDENTIFICATION OF RURAL TOURISM  
DEVELOPMENT POTENTIALS IN THE  
MOUNTAINOUS AREA OF THE NORTHEAST  
PLANNING REGION<sup>21</sup>**

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**ABSTRACT**

The Northeast Planning Region (NEPR) is one of the planning regions of the Republic of Macedonia that are created with the purpose of administrative governing and statistical evidencing of spatial areas. In circumstances when a balanced regional development of the Republic of Macedonia becomes an important issue, these regions represent a solid basis for identifying the potentials which they possess. Rural policy and rural development enable possibilities for increasing the interest for inclusion of tourism as the basic accelerator for creating balanced development. Mountain areas are spatial categories that are consisted of heterogeneous possibilities for rural tourism development. Therefore, they have prioritized significance in the identification of the resource basis regarding this issue. The methodology for identifying the important potentials in the mountainous areas is defined through the application of the UNWTO's "FAS-methodology", with identification of the Factors, Attractors and Support services of the important resources for tourism development. In this research the FAS-methodology approach was implemented for concrete circumstances in the mountainous areas. The research in this paper refers to the determining of resources with the goal to obtain a register that should be the basis for future activities related to rural tourism development in the NEPR.

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<sup>21</sup> Original scientific article

*Key words:* Northeast Planning Region (NEPR), FAS methodology, rural tourism, mountainous area

## INTRODUCTION

Rural tourism in Republic of Macedonia is on the beginning developing level, and is seen as a factor of protection of the natural and cultural heritage, mainly concentrated in the mountainous Macedonian villages, as well as the possibility for socio-economic growth of rural areas and villages. There are numerous perspective potentials for development of rural tourism, among which the most important are traditional villages within fairly untouched, undisturbed and unspoiled environment, the rich cultural heritage, hospitality of local population, presence of protected natural areas, rich mountainous and water resources, authentic and traditional agricultural products, bio-geo diversity, geographic diversity of culture, tradition, events and increased interest for rural development investments.

Currently rural development in the Republic of Macedonia is supported by many governmental institutions and international organizations through different programs. This is an additional possibility for developing rural tourism in the country. The use of different strategies, programs and instruments for implementing development actions will enable the local population in rural areas to benefit from visitors, by providing them different activities and services of “life practicing”, “farming entertaining” or just rural experience and recreation.

It becomes more and more evident that tourism plays an important role in rural development because of its contribution as accelerator of social and economic relations in specific and defined spatial areas, as well as its role in supporting the development of rural areas as new tourist destinations contributing to a general socioeconomic development of such areas. With its dynamics, tourism encourages the development of different activities in many local areas that are connected with it. It is also a factor that contributes to the activation of potentials towards their optimal use. It has also the role of a promoter of values of the area, an important factor in the protection and improvement of the environment and the improvement of the existing potentials. These roles, relations and implications of tourism for such areas are important for the local communities, local leaders, businesses and organizations with the aim to identify, valorize and create policies that will activate tourist processes within the NEPR.

This paper represents a part of the research activities for the creation of a Register for tourist values and potentials, within the UNDP and the Ministry

of Local Self-government of the Republic of Macedonia (MLSRM) that funded the project “Innovative Solutions for Improved Access to Services at Local Level”- Creating a Register of Potentials for Rural Tourism Development in NEPR, by applying a contemporary methodology which led to the results. These results were independently recognized by the stakeholders and show opportunities for exploiting tourism potentials of the mountainous rural areas in NEPR.

This approach created opportunities for inclusion of resources in the tourist offer and creating specific tourist products. The benefits are applicable not only in the domain of intensifying the development of the planning region but also in the internal and external cooperation and balanced socio-economic development. The readiness of the involved stakeholders to include the identified tourist values into promotion on local, national and international tourist market, will lead to increased opportunities for rural tourism development.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The main focus of rural tourism development is directed towards the promotion of rural areas’ natural and cultural values for tourism purposes and presenting the villages and their rural lifestyle as tourist attractions, or offering the tourists to participate in rural lifestyle. Rural tourism enables the creation of an alternative source of income in rural areas and contributes to the revival of lost folk art and handicrafts. Therefore, as Knowd noted, tourism in rural areas represents a potential panacea for many of the host communities, many of whom, face uncertain futures in the post-modern world (Knowd, 2001).

In Europe rural tourism is usually used to describe agritourism (tourism on farms) but expands to encompass basically all tourism activities in the countryside when needed (EC-AEIDL). Furthermore, rural tourism is farm tourism and non-farm tourism in rural areas and communities, but does not include activities in outdoor recreation areas such as national parks, forest or wilderness areas (Oppermann, 1996).

Until the 1960s recreational activities and tourism in rural areas were not in the tourists’ focus. The interest was mainly towards mountain and sea tourist resorts as well as urban areas as places where tourism was concentrated and developed as an economic activity. Since the very beginning there was a tendency for distinction of recreation and tourism, while at same time, the difference between tourism and recreation in rural areas compared to urban areas in the vicinity of cities, was underlined. Leisure time during the weekends and holidays was mostly spent in rural

areas, while vacations were usually spent in sea and mountain tourist resorts. During this period, tourism and rural areas become more and more interconnected because leisure time spent in such areas was increased. *Economic changes during the 1970s had reflection to rural communities' economies as well, and they were the reason for undertaking actions for increasing their sustainability. One of the most popular nontraditional rural development strategies has been tourism and its associated entrepreneurship opportunities because of tourism's ability to bring in incomes and to generate jobs and support retail growth (Wilson et al., 2008).*

The question of rural tourism in Europe after the 1970s was discussed mostly from the point of view of agricultural development and cultural heritage protection, after which activities were directed towards planning development of rural environment. The main activities were towards providing basic conditions in rural areas with spatial planning and valorization of economic resources, new directions for agriculture and forest development, environmental protection, and resolving social problems in rural areas.

Nowadays, tourism in rural regions plays a very important role as a part of general tourist offer, and it is an integrated tourist product within the development of such regions. Different tourist activities in many rural areas attract the attention of visitors on a local, regional, national and even international level. European experiences on rural tourism development is indicated on defined priorities where particularly the importance of tourism for rural areas is underlined, directed towards the improvement of quality of life in rural areas and encouraging the diversification of rural economy. Adopted guideline policy of EU (2006/144/EC) recommends the following key actions in the following fields:

- raising economic activity and employment rates in the wider rural economy and creating a better territorial balance, both in economic and social terms (tourism, crafts and the provision of rural amenities);
- encouraging the entry of women into the labor market by creating child-care infrastructure;
- putting the heart back into villages by means of integrated initiatives combining diversification, business creation, investment in cultural heritage, infrastructure for local services and renovation;
- developing micro-business and crafts, which can build on traditional skills or introduce new competencies, helping to promote entrepreneurship and develop the economic fabric;
- training young people in skills needed for the diversification of the local economy;

- encouraging the take-up and diffusion of ICT, the use of which will also enable economies of scale to be achieved, facilitating IT take-up by local farms and rural businesses and the adoption of e-business and e-commerce;
- developing the provision and innovative use of renewable energy sources, which can contribute to creating new outlets for agricultural and forestry products, the provision of local services and the diversification of the rural economy;
- encouraging the development of tourism;
- upgrading local infrastructure (major telecommunications, transport, energy and water infrastructure), particularly in the new Member States.

According to L.Roberts & D.Hall (2003) various estimates suggest that tourism in rural areas makes up 10-20% of all tourism activity, and approximately 23% of European holidaymakers choose the countryside as a destination every year. Moreover, tourism is considered to be an important part of different strategies for rural development within many countries or regions, and can also be seen as a contributor to improved economic development of rural areas (Chuang, 2010; Simpson 2008; Hall and Richards, 2002; Roberts and Hall, 2001). The importance of tourism for rural development is identified in the Republic of Macedonia, and therefore the main attention is put not only on rural development (Law on Agriculture and Rural development, 2012) but also on rural tourism development (National Strategy for rural tourism, 2012-2017). The potentials of rural regions in the Republic of Macedonia were fairly underestimated until recently in terms of their potentials for considerably contributing the economic prosperity and job creation for the benefit of all citizens. Therefore, the development of rural regions can be identified as a need for diversifying income in the rural regions of Macedonia (NSSD, 2009-2020), with the aim for generating regional added value-cycles, facilitating regional and urban sustainable development, spatial planning, as well as ensuring the consistency of the Government's policies with the global sustainable development and its international commitments. Rural development is considered to be very important for all planning regions of the country. Therefore the attention of rural tourism development is directed towards the Northeastern Planning Region (NEPR), Vardar Planning Region (VPR), Polog Planning Region (PPR) and the Southwestern Planning Region (SPR) (UNDP-MLSRM, 2016).

## METHODOLOGY

The applied methodological approach in the research includes quantitative and qualitative aspects with the implementation of methods of analysis, description, desk research, interview, questionnaires, and FAS (Factors, Attractors, Support Services) methodology that is considered to be a methodological framework for conducting analysis of destinations' structure. The Factors represent resources and their potential for attracting tourists and have not yet been sufficiently involved in tourism. Attractors are the created tourist products, while Support services are all those services that support tourism in the given destination. This Methodology was officially approved after a think-tank held at the UNWTO Headquarters in 2002 (Fayos-Sola, Fuentes and Munoz, 2012). This model describes the destination as a structural complex of Factors, Attractors and Support Services that derives from the interaction of subsystems that are in constant cross-linking relations (Fayos-Sola, Alvarez and Cooper, 2014).

The purpose of this methodology is to identify the situation of planning regions and municipalities which are the subject of this project's research in terms of development of their resources for rural tourism purposes. The identification and classification of various elements is directly related to the created models of research on supply, demand, competition and trends in tourism. This serves as the basis for identifying the Factors, Attractors and the elements of Support using a structured questionnaire.

This research approach had its contribution for the structuring of a Register of potentials for rural tourism in the defined mountainous areas of the Northeast Planning Region. The FAS methodology is applied in many programs and projects as those by United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), UN Millenium Deveopment Goals Fund by UN Dvelopment Programs (Fayos\_Sola, Alvarez and Cooper, 2014), in several destinations of countries such as Mexico, Argentina, Turkey, or in strategic documents (Sustainable Tourism for Rural Development, a joint UN programme in Serbia, 2011). The applied methodology for identification of potentials for rural tourism development in the mountainous areas in the Northeast Planning Region provides a complex analysis of the Factors, Attractors and Support Services for rural tourism in this area.

Analysis of relevant literature, documents and statistical data was comprised of different resources (National Strategy for Rural Tourism of the Republic of Macedonia 2012-2017, the Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development of the Republic of Macedonia, 2007-2013; the Sub-strategy of traditions and events of the Republic of Macedonia, the Sub-strategy for

sports tourism in the Republic of Macedonia, Leader II (Links between actions for the development of the rural economy), the Guidelines for Stakeholder Identification and Analysis: A Manual for Caribbean Natural Resource Managers and Planners, Developing Naturally: An Exploratory Process for Nature-Based Community Tourism (Clemson University Clemson, South Carolina), the Master plan for sustainable development of tourism in Serbia, 2012-2017, the European Tourism Indicator System TOOLKIT For Sustainable Destinations, DG Enterprise and Industry (*February 2013*), the Program for Development of the NEPR 2009-2014 , the Strategic Plan for Tourism Development in NEPR 2011-2016, the Action Plan for the development of tourism in the NEPR 2011-2016 , the Study for optimal use of cultural and historical heritage of NEPR in tourist purposes, the Study on the optimal use of the natural heritage of NEPR for tourist purposes, as well as the Study for evaluation with a proposal for establishing a protected area in the Osogovo mountains.

The field research was realized by organizing meetings, interviews, workshops and questionnaires. The spatial inventory and evaluation of the NEPR's local environment and tourism potentials was conducted in order to give directions for optimal use of the region's mountainous areas for rural tourism activities.

## **RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The application of the research methodology was the basis for obtaining certain outcomes and results that will find practical implementations in the future. The desk research resulted in the preparation of a *Guide for defining the basics of rural tourism* with the following components: inventory and valorization of tourist offer components; evaluation and implementation of tourist potentials in the NEPR; analysis of the components of the tourist demand, the competition and market trends, as well as defining the basics for rural tourism development in different areas according to the gained parameters and values of the Region.

By implementing the FAS methodology, tourist values in the NEPR were assessed in particular areas, that could be classified as natural factors (potentials) and attractors (mountains, valleys, gorges, canyons, caves, climate, springs, rivers, lakes and biodiversity), as well as cultural factors (potentials) and attractors (cultural and historical monuments, ethnographic heritage, festivals and events). The both types of tourist values were graded by their curiosity, rarity, monumentality, potentials for attracting tourists, esthetical values, tradition, and spatial distribution). This methodology

enabled the assessment of tourism content in the NEPR which describes the destination as a complex interaction of subsystems in these three interconnected areas. The research results for determining the rural tourism potentials in the mountainous area of the NEPR are very encouraging because they provide a very solid basis for continuing activities by the policy makers of the NEPR, local leaders, businesses and NGO-s. Moreover, the theoretical and practical applications were understood by the involved participants during the field research, and they provided very useful inputs to the research. The highest given scores and estimates, due to the estimated average and dispersion were important for determining developmental poles, while the best results were selected from highest average and lowest dispersion.

The mountainous rural areas of the NEPR include tourist sites as the main drivers for growth and complementary contents that can be included in rural tourism development. According to the rated attributes of the mountainous area in NEPR (table 1) that were defined as factors for rural tourism development, the results show that the highest potentials were determined for Mountain Kozjak, followed by Skopska Crna Gora, German and Bilino



Table 1. Potentials of mountainous areas in the NEPR as factors for rural tourism development

	Alpinism				Rarities				Landscapes				Biodiversity				Viewpoints				Mountain horse riding			
Rating from 1 to 5	Skopska Crna Gora	Kozjak	German	Bilino	Skopska Crna Gora	Kozjak	German	Bilino	Skopska Crna Gora	Kozjak	German	Bilino	Skopska Crna Gora	Kozjak	German	Bilino	Skopska Crna Gora	Kozjak	German	Bilino	Skopska Crna Gora	Kozjak	German	Bilino
Average value	3,4	3,5	3,8	3,1	4,1	3,8	3,9	3,9	4,2	4,0	3,9	3,9	3,9	4,2	4,1	4,0	3,9	4,1	3,9	3,8	3,4	3,8	3,4	3,3
Dispersion	1,2	1,1	1,1	1,2	1,0	1,2	1,0	1,2	1,0	1,0	1,0	1,2	1,1	0,8	0,9	0,8	1,2	1,1	1,2	1,1	1,2	1,0	1,3	1,2
Best score	3,8	1,1			4,1	1,0			4,2	1,0			4,2	0,8			4,1	1,1			3,8	1,0		
	German				Skopska Crna Gora				Skopska Crna Gora				Kozjak				Kozjak				Kozjak			

Source: Register of potentials for rural tourism development of NEPR, UNDP-MLSRM Project: “Innovative Solutions for Improved Access to Services at Local Level”, 2016

All these mountains were rated by the following attributes that have been identified as important potentials for rural tourism development: alpinism, rarities in the mountainous areas, landscapes, biodiversity, places with outstanding viewpoints that can be promoted as recreational points and mountain horse riding were. The results indicate a high potential of these areas for initiating tourism related activities. Differently, besides the above mentioned mountains, in the mountainous areas of the NEPR, the Osogovski Mountains show a different position in the Region for tourism, because they are included in the current tourist offer along with other attractors (Table 2). As part of the defined attractors in this region, Osogovski Mountains although not being among the best rated values, represent a very strong tourist attractor in the Region with a solid average value of 4,4 points for its attractiveness and 4,3 points for realized visits and its accessibility. Osogovski Mountains are already promoted as a tourist destination in this region and can be seen as good example for developing rural tourism activities.

Table 2 Potentials of the mountainous areas in the NEPR as factors for rural tourism development

Atractivitate	Vizibilitate	Diversitate	Distanța	Baza	Scor	Observatoriu						
							Scor	Scor	Scor	Scor		
Atractivitate	Vizibilitate	Diversitate	Distanța	Baza	Scor	Observatoriu						
							TS	4.3	0.9			
							hond	4.2	1.0			
							Pin	4.5	0.6			
							manovo	4.4	0.9			
							Sev	4.6	0.7			
							Klca	4.6	0.6			
							volcanic	4.6	0.7			
							kin-	4.6	0.6			
							observa	4.4	0.8	4.6	0.6	
							ogovski	4.4	0.7			
							Mounta	4.4	0.9			
							TS	4.4	0.7			
Atractivitate	Vizibilitate	Diversitate	Distanța	Baza	Scor	Observatoriu						
							hond	4.2	1.1			
							Pin	4.4	0.9			
							manovo	4.3	1.0			
							Sev	4.2	1.0			
							Klca	4.2	1.0			
							volcanic	4.4	0.8			
							kin-	4.4	0.8			
							observa	4.3	0.8	4.4	0.7	
							ogovski	3.9	1.1			
							Mounta	3.8	1.2			
							Pin	3.9	1.1			
							hond	4.1	1.0			
Sev	4	1										
Klca	2.0											
volcanic	4.4	0.7										
kin-	4.3	0.9	4.4	0.7								
observa	4.3	0.9	4.4	0.7								
ogovski	4.3	0.9	4.4	0.7								
Mounta	4.3	0.9	4.4	0.7								

Source: Register of potentials for rural tourism development of NEPR, UNDP-MLSRM Project: "Innovative Solutions for Improved Access to Services at Local Level", 2016

The values that were obtained during this research were valuable input for the defining of zones that have the possibilities for rural tourism development in the NEPR. The approach towards zoning was determined for each municipality and it included poles of development, environmental and developmental potentials for rural tourism. Using a cartographic basis the different developmental zones were marked illustratively, and the rating from 1-9 was based on their scores derived from the cumulative results of the applied research methodology. Mountains are important segments in the zones and are the main poles for development. The identified zones are presented in a map (map 1), and they are listed by the prioritization for development from 1 to 9, by taking into consideration the general score of the zones according to different indicators. The mountainous areas in the NEPR are defined by the Osogovski Mountains as Attractors, while Bilino, Kozjak and German are the dominant Factors. They are presented in the zones 1,2,3 and 9. In all zones these mountainous areas are listed with 35 identified individual sites for rural tourism development.

**Map 1 Identified zones for rural tourism development in the NEPR**



Source: Register of potentials for rural tourism development of NEPR, UNDP-MLSRM Project: “Innovative Solutions for Improved Access to Services at Local Level”, 2016

The identified sites as poles for development represent gravitational centers within the areas of rural development, and the evaluated categories are basis for investing activities and improving conditions in rural areas.

## CONCLUSION

Rural tourism development is the current dominant preoccupation within the creation of developing policies of many areas, because it mainly enables the vitalization and affirmation of rural areas, while preventing emigration of the rural population into urban areas. It also contributes the reasonable use of existing resources in non-developed areas with which it creates the basis for economic development. The Northeast Planning Region covers a territory where tourism is a significant potential for development. In this context, rural tourism is differentiated as one of the possible components. In the region's distinctive landscape there are possibilities for diverse activities in rural areas. Mountainous rural areas and villages are incorporated in excellent ambient units. In the mountainous pastures and meadows there are still sites where cattle breeding is the main activity of the local population and it also can be included in specific tourist offers for life practicing or life farming. Visiting the caves in the mountainous areas has educational significance and it provides opportunities for professional and recreational activities in caves as tourist attractions. The potentials of the variety of cultural, traditional and sport events in the mountainous areas are an added value for the creation of rural tourism offer and the diversification of incomes in the rural areas.

The application of FAS methodology in this research contributed to complex approach in the analysis of tourist potentials and determining the possibilities for rural tourism development in the NEPR. It also enabled an improved evaluation of tourist resources as Factors, tourist products as Attractors and Support services in the NEPR as for promoting tourism development.

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