

TOURIST VALORIZATION OF THE VARDAR PLANNING REGION IN THE FUNCTION OF CREATION OF REGISTER FOR RURAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT¹

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ABSTRACT

Tourist valorization of Vardar Planning Region (VPR) has multidimensional character as basis for dimensioning of possibilities for vitalization of spatial components and economic values, and is important component for determining the development possibilities of rural areas. As part of the research activities significant results were obtained, and they were related to theoretical and empirical approaches implemented in the methodology. The results showed a high percentage of compatibility between the research results of authors with the qualitative evaluations and opinions of involved participants as best informed in the surveyed area. Therefore, the prioritization of values enabled creation of framework for mapping the tourist values and identification of the development zones, sites and facilities in function of the development of rural tourism. The results and their inclusion in a register have an active character and can be further upgraded with new research results and promotional content.

KEY WORDS: Vardar Planning Region (VPR), valorization, register, rural tourism

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INTRODUCTION

Rural tourism in many regions plays an important role in improving economic development. When it comes to the development of rural tourism in the Republic of Macedonia, the current situation points to an initial level of development, although it is identified as a factor for improving the development of rural areas, as well as for protecting the natural and cultural heritage in those regions. As significant potentials that can be used and become part of the future promising development of rural tourism in the Republic of Macedonia, as well as in the Vardar planning region (VPR), the natural and cultural heritage, tradition, preparation and production of authentic and traditional agricultural products and the hospitality of the locals.

In the past period, rural tourism in the Republic of Macedonia has been identified and supported as an important factor for rural development, and it is financed by various government institutions, programs and international organizations. In addition, the National Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development of the Republic of Macedonia for the period 2009-2030, as well as various programs and instruments for the implementation of various activities, enable rural regions and the rural population to benefit from such development, which include the development of rural tourism. This proves that tourism is identified and recognized as an important segment of rural development, taking into account its role as an initiator and accelerator of socio-economic development in certain rural areas. Also, tourism contributes to discovering new tourist destinations in rural regions and encourages the development of various socio-economic activities at such destinations by activating their potentials through optimum use and by promoting sociocultural values in places as existing potentials for rural development tourism. This enables the local communities, businesses and institutions within the regions to engage more actively in the process of identification and valorization of tourist potentials, as well as in initiating and creating policies that will enable the development of rural tourism. The aim of the paper is to present the process of research activities carried out by the authors as research experts for creating a Register of Tourist Values and Potentials within the UNDP and the Ministry of Local Self-Government of the Republic of Macedonia (MLSP). Funded Project "Innovative solutions for better access to services at the local level "by applying the method of valorization of tourist potentials in the VPR. Through the process of valorization, it was possible to identify the attractors and factors for the development of rural

tourism as important resources that can be considered as a component of the tourist offer and in the process of creating specific tourism products. The benefits of the research results should contribute to the development of rural tourism in the VPR, which on the other hand will lead to a balanced socio-economic development of this region.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

The main focus of the development of rural tourism is directed towards promoting the natural and cultural values of the rural areas and presenting the villages and lifestyle of the village population as a tourist attraction, often encouraging the tourists to participate in everyday activities. 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, "rural tourism is an important potential for many of the local communities, many of whom face the uncertain future in the post-modern world" (Knowd, 2001). The term "rural tourism" in European countries is commonly used to describe agritourism (farm tourism), but it expands and encompasses all tourism activities taking place in the countryside (EC-AEIDL, 1997). In this context, rural tourism is identified with agritourism and tourism in rural areas, and does not include open-air recreation activities such as national parks, forests and other areas (Oppermann, 1996). However, we believe that in this regard, in the process of tourist valorization, a distinction should be made between agro-tourism and tourism in rural areas. Often, among the popular approaches and strategies for the development of rural areas in Europe, tourism and its entrepreneurial capabilities are due to the potentials of this activity to provide increased revenue and generate jobs (Wilson et al., 2008). The main activities are basically aimed at valorization of natural, cultural and socioeconomic resources, as well as identifying new guidelines for the development of rural areas.

Today, tourism in rural regions plays a very important role integrated within the development of such regions. Various tourist activities in many rural areas attract attention to visitors on a local, regional, national and even international level. European experiences for the development of rural tourism point to the defined priorities, where the importance of tourism in rural areas is particularly emphasized in improving the quality of life in rural areas and encouraging the diversification of the rural economy. The adopted EU Guidelines for Policies

(2006/144 / EC) recommend monitoring key activities in several areas. The importance of increasing economic activity and employment rates in the wider rural economy (tourism, crafts and providing rural goods) and the creation of a better territorial balance, both in economic and social terms, are especially emphasized. In this context, it should be noted that the inclusion of women in the labor market is increased through tourism as an employment opportunity. Encouraging the development of tourism is among the priority activities that enable diversification of rural economies.

Tourism development initiatives contribute to the diversification of incomes in rural areas, creating businesses, investing in the protection and promotion of cultural heritage, and diversifying the infrastructure of local services, developing micro-businesses and crafts by promoting traditional skills that help to promote entrepreneurship. This policy envisages training young people for the skills needed to diversify the local economy, developing security and innovative use of renewable energy sources, which can contribute to the creation of new locations for agricultural and forest products.

L.Roberts&D.Hall (2003) indicate that tourism in rural areas accounts for between 10-20% of all tourism activity in European countries, and about 23% of European tourists most often choose rural areas as destinations. Numerous authors point to the importance of tourism as an integral part of rural development strategies in different countries or regions and their rural environments (Chuang2010, Hall and Richards 2002; Simpson 2008). Analogously, in the Republic of Macedonia, the importance of tourism for rural development has also been identified by undertaking various measures and activities, adopting strategic documents and enacting legislation (Law on Agriculture and Rural Development, 2012). In this context, in particular, the development of rural tourism is foreseen with the National Strategy for Rural Tourism, 2012-2017). Nevertheless, the potentials of rural regions in the Republic of Macedonia are not sufficiently utilized in terms of their contribution to economic development and creation of jobs in favor of the population in these areas. The National Strategy for Sustainable Development of the Republic of Macedonia (2009-2020) envisages the development of rural regions through diversification of incomes from various economic activities, including tourism, which emphasizes its role in promoting the authentic cultural heritage in rural areas, such as the reduction of emigration, especially to the young population. Also, the rural development is expected to increase the possibilities for tourism development in all planning regions in the Republic of Macedonia, including in the VPR.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH IN THE RESEARCH

The starting point for the process of identifying the VPR resources for the development of tourism in rural areas was desk research method based on the analysis of relevant data sources covering projects and strategic documents related to the research of the potentials of the VPR for rural tourism development. The analysis covered the Law on Tourism Activity of the Republic of Macedonia, the Law on catering activity of the Republic of Macedonia, the National Strategy for Rural Tourism of the Republic of Macedonia. 2012-2017, Strategy for Rural Development of the Republic of Macedonia, Sub strategy for Traditions and Events of the Republic of Macedonia, Substrategy for Sport Tourism of the Republic of Macedonia, Strategy for Promotion and Marketing in the Tourism of the Vardar Planning Region, 2011, Strategy for regional development of the Republic of Macedonia, 2009-2019, Regions in the Republic of Macedonia - Publication of the State Statistical Office, 2015, Study for identification of strategic locations for organizing information points along the corridor 10 and the M-5 Vardar Planning Region, Study for defining agricultural products with potentials al for protection Vardar Planning Region, Guide for Investors in the Vardar Planning Region, 2015, Documents from Local Self-Governments of the Ward Mountain Region, Program for Development of the Vardar Planning Region 2015-2019, Study on Identification of Integrated and Additional Needs, Services and Contents, Leader II Links between actions for the development of the rural economy, 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), Master plan for sustaining the development of rural tourism in Serbia, 2012-2017 Joint program "UN" and Tourism in Functional Rural Development ", European Tourism Indicator System TOOLKIT for Sustainable Destinations, DG Enterprise and Industry (February 2013). Our approach to tourism valorization is based on the use of the FAS methodology.

Apart from desk research, empirical research has been carried out in the approach of tourist valorization of the resources for rural tourism development of the VPR. The main goal was to distribute questionnaires, conduct an interview, hold consultative meetings with the experts on the situation in the VPR, and get more relevant data for inventory of the space and assess the overall environment of the VPR and the tourist potentials. This approach in the research

contributed to the possibilities for optimal utilization of the resources of the area of this region and to be valorized in the function of development of rural tourism. Also, the research enabled to prepare a guide for defining the basics of rural tourism, to create indicators of indicators and information, to analyze the obtained indicators and information, and to map and zoning sites for rural tourism in the VPR and their prioritization. In order to obtain relevant indicators and information and their tourist valorization in function of the development of rural tourism, we created matrices. The matrices refer to values that are obtained through research activities in the office and field sections. Each individual matrix allows cross-matching the values of the indicators.

RESULTS OF THE SURVEY AND ANALYSIS OF THE OBTAINED INDICATORS AND INFORMATION

The obtained data from the survey enabled creation of database of information and indicators that will serve in the establishment of the Register of Potentials for rural tourism in rural municipalities and rural areas of urban municipalities. In the creation of research models, Leader II experiences and guidelines have been applied. The Guide for Assessing Tourist Potentials - Links between Rural Economic Development Activities: Links between actions for the development of the rural economy (Leader European Observatory) and the European Tourist Guide, and European Tourism Indicator System Toolkit for Sustainable Destinations.

Quantitative research was based on created matrix for assessing tourism potentials based on the analysis of: tourist offer, tourist demand, competitiveness and market trends. The tourist offer covers the tourist potentials in a certain rural environment which involves analyzing the current tourist situation and a diagnosis which, by comparing the results of the current situation, will enable identification of the spatial characteristics in a positive and negative sense. The analysis of the number of visitors, the utilization of certain types of accommodation, the overnight stays, the regional distribution of demand and the structure of foreign visitors by country of belonging is the basis for identifying the tourist demand in the regions that are being explored. The knowledge gained through research competition in the regions and municipalities will help to realize the opportunities to exploit the competitive advantages of the research regions, but also to exploit the existing ones in the competitive regions, opening opportunities for creating common tourism products. The market trends as part

of the matrix enable the development policy stakeholders to take into account when creating specific tourism products.

The analysis of the indicators and provided information enables us to give a description and illustrate the possibilities for their use in the development of rural tourism. Within the field research through workshops with participation of stakeholders, the evaluation of the indicated value parameters was enabled. Thus, values were obtained which represented an average estimate of the values for the development of rural tourism, dispersive evaluation ie. assessment of the compliance of the attitudes and opinions of the experts of the values in the region in the function of development of rural tourism and obtaining the best assessment covering the average grade and the smallest dispersion. The analysis of the results resulted in the establishment of an evident list of values that enable the perception of the opportunities for development of rural tourism in the VPR. The evidentiary list of the tourist offer encompassed the following components: environment, population, economic activity, production and services; access, transport and travel; culture and cultural activities; recreation and sports; accommodation and restaurants; and events (ie fairs, congresses and conferences. These values reflect the covered areas of research, indicators, parameters and information, which through the description indicate the possibilities for their use in the development of rural tourism. The interpretation of the values of the indicators has contributed to documenting the comments and suggestions in the function of obtaining correct assessments of the values for the development of rural tourism. Developments were made through the best grades. Their environment in function of rural tourism allows differentiation of zones for development of rural tourism. The zones cover rural tourist sites as carriers of development and complementary content that are part of the matrixes. Established sites as developmental poles represent gravity centers within the zones of rural development. On the basis of the obtained estimates the best solutions are differentiated. Prioritization encompassed just such rated categories. They are the basis for investment activities and improvement of conditions in rural areas.

The valorization of resources for rural tourism development is made by assessing tourist values in the defined VPR space. This methodology provides an assessment of the tourism content identified by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) as Factors, Attractors and Support Services (FAS), which explains the destination as a complex of interactions of subsystems in these three areas that are interconnected. Factors represent resources and their potentials to attract

tourists, but are not yet involved in tourism. Attractors are actually tourist attractions, localities and facilities that attract tourists and mark a certain degree of touristic attendance. They are actually the existing touristic reality in the regions and municipalities. The support represents all the elements that support the activities created by the tourist attractions of the tourism industry.

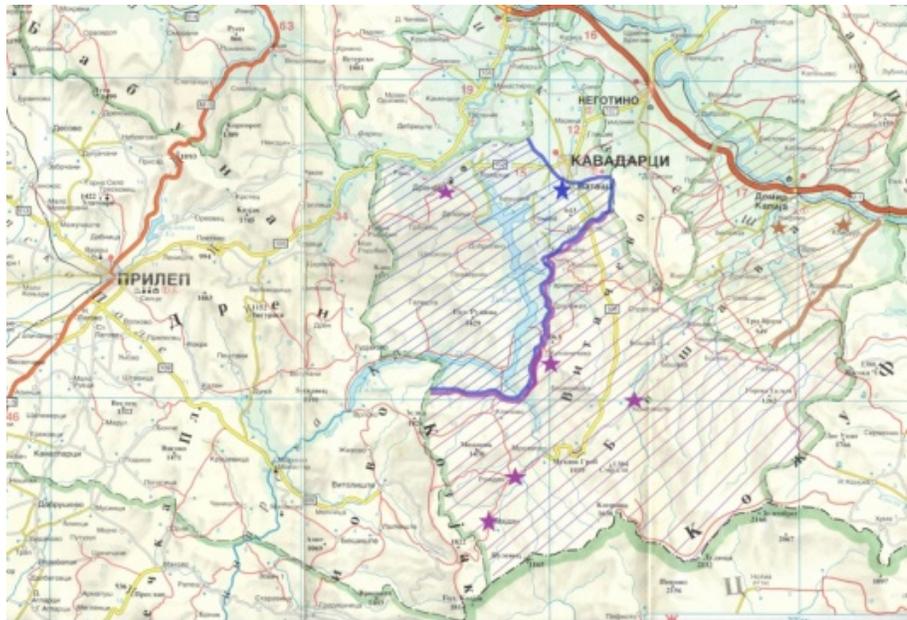
The identification and classification of the various elements is in direct relation with the created models of research on supply, demand, competitiveness and trends in tourism. This served as a basis for identifying factors, attracters and support elements, and to structure the questionnaire. The assessments in this research were provided by the VPR experts on the occasion chosen by the following stakeholders: local self-governments, the business sector, the non-governmental sector, cultural institutions, education associations, professional associations in the field of agriculture and tourism. The assessment process gave the values as the mean value, dispersion and the best estimate. They refer to the tourist offer, tourist demand, competitiveness and market trends. The evaluation of the tourist offer encompassed tourist factors, attracters and support for tourism in the VPR. On the basis of the desk research, the field research and the assessments obtained within the qualitative evaluation questionnaire, determined the zones of possibilities for development of the rural tourism in the VPR.

MAPPING AS A SUMMARY CARTOGRAPHIC PROJECTION OBTAINED IN THE PROCESS OF TOURIST VALORIZATION

Mapping is based on cumulative results. In the cartographic basis, zones for the development of rural tourism have been entered in an illustrative way. The cartographic basis is derived according to the valorization characteristics of the space given on a map type, spatially defined on a regional and municipal basis. Prioritization was carried out according to the best assessment of the zone. The ranged zones are ranked in the order of 1-9 as the priority zones are differentiated. The region is characterized by the dissection of the relief that provides various activities in the rural areas. They are transmitted in the cartographic representations and interact with the elements of the environment in the VPR.

Mountainous rural settlements are composed of excellent ambient units and as such have a cartographic form with precisely determined spatial stretches and territorial volume. The valley area, is woven with excellent opportunities for activating the villages. In the context of dissection, the gorgeous parts that can

be used for outdoor educational activities and staying in nature are especially important. From a narrative form they get cartographic presentation. DemirKapijagorge, which is an important attractor with a special potential for enriching the contents for the purpose of rural-tourist activities and contents, is particularly prominent in the cartographic basis. On the mountains there are pastures and meadows in which Bacillus livestock is of special significance. The cave visit has educational significance, provides opportunities for expert speleological research and speleological touristic content (maps 1-4).



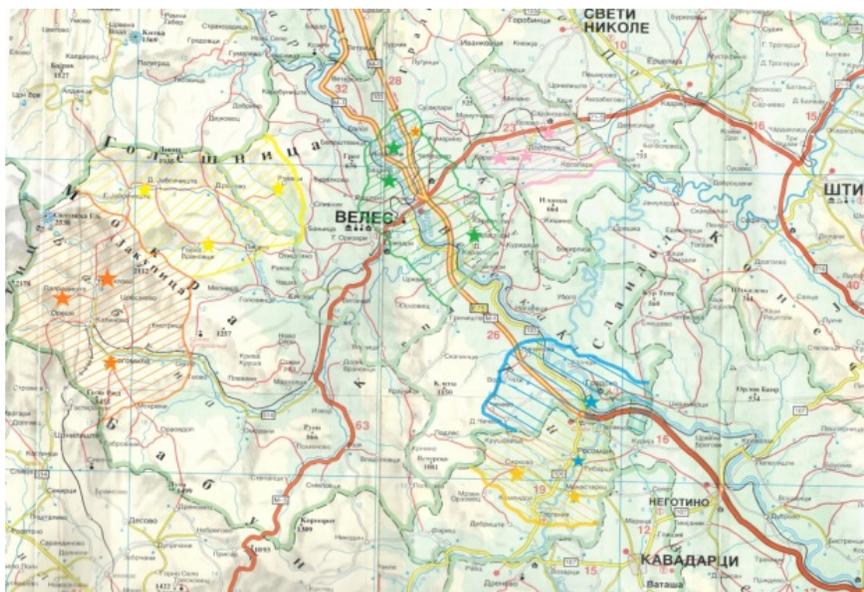
Map 1.:Kavadarci and Demirkapija



Map 2.:Negotino



Map 3.:Sveti Nikole



Map 4.: Veles, Negotino, Caska, GRadsko, Lozovo, Rosoman

Geographic and tourist map of the Republic of Macedonia is used for the cartographic background, Size: 1: 260000, Publisher: GizMap. The mapping was performed illustratively with the linear coloration of the prioritization and designations of the developmental poles in such differentiated and graphically presented spatial environments in the form of zones, sites and objects. The practical utilization of the registry for the potentials for rural tourism development refers to the essential opportunities for future investments, such as spatial visual orientation and mutual distant value.

DISCUSSION

The assessment of the factors and attractors in the Vardar planning region by stakeholders of VPR and municipalities enabled the definition of specific spatial units and complexes, their degree of rural tourism development and the development opportunities that should be taken into account by the creators of tourism policies in order to advance the existing situation. Developments were made through the best grades. Their environment, in function of rural tourism, enables the differentiation and mapping of zones (complexes) for the development of rural tourism. The zones cover rural tourist sites as carriers of development and complementary content that are part of the matrixes. Established sites as developmental poles represent gravity centers within the zones of rural development. On the basis of the obtained estimates the best solutions are differentiated. The pre-registration covers exactly the categories considered. They are the basis for investment activities and improvement of conditions in rural areas.

The basis of the FAS methodology implies an analysis of the destination through a joint evaluation of all subsystems and key elements of the destination. The purpose of this methodology is to identify the situation in the planning region and its municipalities that are the subject of research of this project in terms of the development of their resources for rural tourism. The questionnaire provided relevant indicators that enable the scope check contained in the cabinet research models. The crossing of the obtained results is in the function of creating a robust registry of potentials for development of rural tourism. The application of

the FAS methodology is taken in original form, but adapted to the conditions in the Vardar Planning Region.

The region occupies a territory in which tourism is a significant potential development factor. In this context, rural tourism is differentiated as one of the possible components. The possibilities with which this planning region is available are contained in the attractiveness of its own. Attractions appear as potentials that can be activated and attractors that are already affirmed objects and objects within the development zones. The tourist-geographical position is favorable because it provides good communication, transit and polyvalence. VPR is distinguished by the extraordinary natural handling of relief and climatic character. It is also known for its remarkable springs and rivers, which are a factor of the vividness of the rural areas and part of the possibilities for staying. Pure water at the springs is an idyllic category. For fishing activities, rivers and artificial lakes with which the region is abundant are used. In the mountainous region, fauna-floristic and aesthetic features are of great importance. They are suitable for mountaineering, camping and lodging with activities in nature. Lake Mladost is a significant attraction in the region with the potential for tourism types that can have a complementary effect and be used in the tourist offer.

Cultural values in urban areas have complementary significance, while rural structures represent an original developmental indicator. In this context, the potential of the attractiveness of the site Stobi should be emphasized. For the development of rural tourism, the events and manifestations with which the region is abundant are of particular importance. They are a factor of out-of-band activity that has a multiplicative effect in the structure of the tourist offer. The existence of ethnographic heritage is a convenient circumstance for visiting the villages in this region. But also the development should be seen in the agricultural and livestock activities in the use of fishponds and gastronomic opportunities. Based on the tourist valorization of the space, parameters have been obtained which enable mapping and graphic presentation of the factors, attractors and development support in cartographic differentiated spatial units in the region.

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