

**APPLYING THE FAS-METHODOLOGY FOR
IDENTIFYING AND ANALYZING NATURAL
FACTORS IN THE SOUTH-WEST PLANNING REGION
FOR RURAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT¹**

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ABSTRACT

Tourist competition has become very fierce and unpredictable in the contemporary marketplace. Tourist destinations are constantly trying to be innovative in their tourist offer. One of the most common ways to improve the tourist offer is through upgrading the quality of services and products being offered. However, tourists are not only in the search of high-quality tourism products, but also want to explore and try new things and to visit unknown tourist destinations. Therefore, destinations are developing interesting and attractive types of tourism. This is more important for destinations that are either new on the tourism market, or are in the declining phases in their life-cycle. The South-west Planning Region (SWPR) in the Republic of Macedonia can be regarded as such a destination that is declining although in the past few years we can see an increase in tourist arrivals. However it is important to mention that the current infrastructure is still based on the development of lake tourism. Global trends show that tourists more and more want to explore nature-based tourist destinations as well as to visit cultural areas. Therefore, the SWPR must develop some new tourism type in this direction. Such an attractive type of tourism is rural tourism. In this paper we will explore the natural base for the development of rural tourism in the SWPR by using the FAS-methodology.

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More specifically the natural factors will be elaborated as part of the complex *Factors-Attractors-Support Services* (FAS). The data that will be presented in this paper are in fact the results obtained from the created Register of potentials for rural tourism development in the SWPR. The natural factors that will be explored are the results of the conducted quantitative and qualitative research activities as part of the study for creating the Register. The field research of this study included completing, evaluating and analysis of a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was based on the FAS methodology applied by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) with the aim to assess the tourist values in a particular region. This methodology identifies the destination as a complexity of three interacting and interconnected subsystems (Factors, Attractors and Support Services). The results from the questionnaire were the subject of interactive discussions and exchange of experiences with the most relevant stakeholders in the different municipalities of this region. This created synergistic relations between the research team, the observers and the stakeholders who were discussing the gained results. The aim of this paper is not only to promote the importance of rural tourism development in the SWPR, but also to be an applicable basis for creating concrete rural tourism products in this region. It is important to mention that the FAS-methodology has numerously been implemented in many tourist regions in the world. Therefore the practicality of such a research is evident. This should also be the groundwork for further related research activities, not only in this region but also in other spatial units with similar characteristics.

KEY WORDS: South-west Planning Region, rural tourism, FAS-methodology, natural factors.

INTRODUCTION

Rural tourism in the Republic of Macedonia is not developed on a satisfying level, compared to the other neighboring countries. This can also be said for the South – West Planning Region of the Republic of Macedonia (SWPR). This type of tourism shows great potential given the fact that there is an abundance of natural and cultural heritage values that are protected and are unspoiled. However, they are still largely unknown to the visitors. It is very important to develop rural tourism in this region because many rural areas face the problem

of uncontrolled emigration and economic decline. With the development of rural tourism many additional possibilities for socio-economic growth of rural areas and villages will be created. We must also mention the cultural richness and diversity as well as the recognizable hospitality of local population, authentic and traditional agricultural products, bio-geo diversity as significant potentials.

Currently many programs, strategies and actions are oriented towards rural development in SWPR and the Republic of Macedonia in general. These activities are being organized and implemented by many governmental and non-governmental institutions as well as international organizations. Such developmental strategies have shown only little effects in practice. It must be noted that this is a continuous process that takes relatively long time in order to be effective. The use of different strategies, programs and instruments for implementing development actions in the domain of rural tourism will enable the local population (mostly in the rural areas) to benefit from the increased number of visitors. The creation of new and interesting rural – tourism services and products will also benefit the local leaders, businesses and organizations whose aim is to identify, valorize and create development within the SWPR.

This paper presents a part of the research activities for the creation of a Register of tourist values and potentials, within the UNDP and the Ministry of Local Self-government of the Republic of Macedonia (MLSRM) that financed the project “Innovative Solutions for Improved Access to Services at Local Level”- ***Creating a Register of Potentials for Rural Tourism Development in SWPR***, by applying a contemporary methodology which led to obtaining important results. A structured questionnaire was given to the most important stakeholders from the state, NGO, and business sector. A total of 300 respondents took part in this research. In the questionnaire the respondents had to evaluate the different elements of the destination according to the FAS – methodology (Factors, Attractors and Support Services). In this paper only the results for the natural factors will be presented. The grades were gained in such a way that they were based on two determined values according to the responses. The first is the average value of the received responses, while the second is the dispersion(standard deviation) from the average grade. The best results are determined for the highest average grades with lowest dispersion. The obtained results were independently determined by the stakeholders and show opportunities for exploiting tourism potentials in the rural areas in SWPR that will be used for the creation of a competitive rural – tourism supply in the region. Thus, new opportunities will be created for including new tourism

resources in the making of specific and natural-based tourist products (Renard, 2004). 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 as well as in a balanced socio-economic development.

Defining rural tourism

In the search for new tourism products, tourists and service providers are striving towards changing the essence of nature and the environment as a tourist attraction. The full and intimate experience of authentic, non-urbanized nature has become a relatively new point of interest of tourists. Only in the past two decades, there have been many attempts to define and differentiate the many concepts of tourism offers related to natural values. This has been done in order to ensure diversity and raise quality of the experience for such values. This is also related to the increased need for protecting natural resources. Therefore, numerous types of tourism have been developed which are primarily based on offering authentic and unspoiled natural values to the tourists. Such a tourism type is rural tourism which allows for a more sustainable tourism development.

One of the most common definitions of rural tourism is the “experience of the country”. In this sense, rural tourism includes several activities that can be conducted in agricultural and non-urban areas (Irshad, 2010). The main determinants of rural tourism can be also defined: to take place in larger spatial regions; mostly to be developed in areas or countries that have lower levels of economic development; tourists to be able directly to experience agricultural and natural environments (Pearce, 1989). Practically almost all types of tourism are related to natural resources such as hydrographical values, beaches, snow cover, forests, landscapes, caves, biodiversity, as well as socio – cultural attractions. The rapid and uncontrolled increase of tourism activities has caused endangerment of such resources. Contemporary tourism development is about types of tourism that are not oriented towards the protection of natural values, or are at least trying to minimize the negative effects of tourism on the environment (Mihalic and Kaspar, 1996). On the other hand, there exist numerous means for maximizing the positive impacts of tourism on the environment, through incorporating ecological education and ethics. This will lead towards long-term social and economic benefits for the local population (Honey, 2002). The diversity of attractions that are part of rural tourism can be the following: cultural heritage, nature based tourism / eco-tourism, agritourism, as well as

visiting of landscapes and regional heritage (Risteski and Rakichevikj, 2018). The involvement of tourists in rural tourism activities can be on a different level. In this sense, there are active and passive rural tourism activities. Passive activities are characterized by solely observing different phenomena and activities in rural tourism. Active activities are defined by active engagement of tourists in outdoor, recreation or adventure based tourism activities. Rural tourism can be considered a selective type of tourism that primarily consists of different activities on a farm or agriculture-related activities.

Analysis of the tourist-geographical situation of the South-West Planning Region

Tourist-geographical situation of any tourist region (destination) is the basis for tourism development. Namely, the spatial characteristics of spatial units are determined through the tourist – geographical situation in terms of their nearer and wider surroundings (Marinoski, 2012). The situation of a spatial unit can be classified as:

- Situation towards a geographical region;
- Situation towards the main tourism routes;
- Situation towards emitting regions and countries;
- Situation towards competitive spatial units.

Tourist – geographical situation of a region can be defined through its functional elements. These elements are: *contactability*, *transitivity* and *polyvalence*. These elements were the subject of evaluation by the stakeholders in the conducted research. The gained results are shown in the following table (Risteski and Marinoski, 2017).

Table 1. Tourist – geographical situation of the SWPR

	Contactability	Transitivity	Polyvalence
Average value	3,5	3,6	3,6
Dispersion	1,6	1,5	1,5
Best value	3,6		

Based on the table it can be concluded that the highest grade for the tourist-geographical situation of the SWPR was achieved for its transitivity.

Transitivity allows participants in transit to consume the different components of the rural-tourist offer in the region. The same result was obtained for polyvalence. This means that in the SWPR there are numerous resources (natural and cultural) which can be combined in an attractive and competitive tourism offer.

Analyzing the natural factors in the South-West Planning Region

According to the used FAS-methodology natural factors are such tourist values and facilities that are not visited by a large number of tourists while they can also be an important factor for the development of rural tourism. They do not have human origin. Mountains, valleys, gorges and canyons, caves, volcanic forms, climate, springs, rivers and lakes, as well as the biogeographic values that exist in the SWPR were evaluated as types of natural factors by the stakeholders (Marinoski et al., 2013). In the interest of this paper, only those natural factors will be presented that play the most important role in the future development of rural tourism in the region (Risteski and Marinoski, 2017).

Table 2. Analyzing the mountains as natural factors in the SWPR

Element of evaluation	Mountain	Average value	Dispersion	Best value
Pastures	Plakjenska Mountain	3,8	1,9	4,4
	Petrino	3	2,8	
	Karaorman	4,4	0,9	
	Ilinska Mountain	3,7	2,3	
	Desat	3,3	2	
	Celoica	2	1,4	
	Stogovo	3,2	2	
	Baba Sach	3	2	
Mountain trails	Plakjenska Mountain	2,5	1,9	3,6
	Petrino	1	/	
	Karaorman	3,6	1,3	
	Ilinska Mountain	3,7	2,3	
	Desat	2,6	1,5	
	Celoica	1,5	0,7	

	Stogovo	2,6	1,5	
	Baba Sach	2,3	1,5	
Ski activities (skiing, sledding, running etc.)	Plakjenska Mountain	1,8	1,5	2
	Petrino	1	/	
	Karaorman	2	1,4	
	Ilinska Mountain	2,3	2,3	
	Desat	2	2	
	Celoica	2	/	
	Stogovo	1,3	0,6	
	Baba Sach	2	1,4	
Alpinism (climbing peaks)	Plakjenska Mountain	1	/	4
	Petrino	1	/	
	Karaorman	2,8	1,8	
	Ilinska Mountain	2,3	1,2	
	Desat	2,3	1,5	
	Celoica	4	/	
	Stogovo	3	2	
	Baba Sach	4	1,4	
Natural rarities	Plakjenska Mountain	3	1,8	3,3
	Petrino	3	/	
	Karaorman	2,8	1,3	
	Ilinska Mountain	3,3	1,5	
	Desat	2,7	1,5	
	Celoica	2	/	
	Stogovo	2,8	1,3	
	Baba Sach	3	/	
Significant sceneries	Plakjenska Mountain	4	1,4	4
	Petrino	4	/	
	Karaorman	3,5	1,7	
	Ilinska Mountain	3,3	2,1	
	Desat	2,8	2,1	
	Celoica	4	1,4	

	Stogovo	2,5	1,9	
	Baba Sach	2,5	2,1	
Biodiversity	Plakjenska Mountain	3,5	1,3	4
	Petrino	2	/	
	Karaorman	3,5	1	
	Ilinska Mountain	3,3	1,5	
	Desat	2,7	1,5	
	Celoica	4	1,4	
	Stogovo	3	1,4	
	Baba Sach	2,5	0,7	
Viewpoints	Plakjenska Mountain	1,7	0,6	2,7
	Petrino	2	/	
	Karaorman	2,5	1,3	
	Ilinska Mountain	2,7	2,1	
	Desat	1,7	1,2	
	Celoica	2	/	
	Stogovo	2	1,4	
	Baba Sach	1,5	0,7	
Horse riding on mountains	Plakjenska Mountain	3,5	1,3	4
	Petrino	2	/	
	Karaorman	4	1	
	Ilinska Mountain	3,7	1,5	
	Desat	2,3	1	
	Celoica	3,5	2,1	
	Stogovo	2,5	1,3	
	Baba Sach	2,5	0,7	

The mountains of the SWPR that have not yet been developed in a touristically and fully sense, were assessed based on their opportunities for organizing and conducting alpine and skiing activities, the existence of pastures, mountain trails, natural rarities, significant sceneries, biodiversity, viewpoints and possibilities for horse riding (Program for the Development of the South-West Planning Region, 2010-2015). From the table above it can be concluded that the highest grades were achieved for the existence of pastures, the opportunities for alpine activities, available sceneries, biodiversity and horse riding opportunities. A more detailed analysis of the results shows that most positively rated were

pastures, mountain trails, ski activities and viewpoints of Karaorman Mountain. Baba Sach received highest grades for the possibilities to conduct ski and alpinism activities, while Ilinska Mountain for horse riding activities and the existence of natural rarities. The respondents graded Plakjenska Mountain and Celoica as most appropriate for visiting significant natural sceneries. Celoica also received highest grades for its biodiversity.

Table 3. Analyzing the valleys as natural factors in the SWPR

Element of evaluation	Valley	Average value	Dispersion	Best value
Pastures	Ohrid-Struga	2,8	0,9	4,0
	Debrca	4,0	1,4	
	Porechie	2,5	2,1	
	Kicevo	1,5	0,7	
	Debar	3,0	1,7	
Arable land	Ohrid-Struga	3,8	1,0	3,8
	Debrca	5,0	/	
	Porechie	3,0	/	
	Kicevo	2,0	/	
	Debar	3,5	1,4	
Farmlands intended for bio crops	Ohrid-Struga	2,7	1,0	3,5
	Debrca	2,0	/	
	Porechie	2,5	0,7	
	Kicevo	3,5	0,7	
	Debar	3,2	1,5	
Possibility for starting farming businesses	Ohrid-Struga	4,1	0,9	4,1
	Debrca	3,5	2,1	
	Porechie	3,0	1,4	
	Kicevo	3,7	0,6	
	Debar	2,7	1,0	
Biodiversity	Ohrid-Struga	3,9	1,1	3,9
	Debrca	3,5	2,1	
	Porechie	3,0	1,4	
	Kicevo	3,0	1,4	
	Debar	2,8	1,2	

The valleys in SWPR as natural factors were evaluated in terms of the presence of pastures, arable land, farmlands intended for organic (bio-) crops, the possibility for starting farming businesses and available biodiversity. Regarding the pastures, the highest grades were achieved for the Debrca valley. The Ohrid-Struga valley achieved best results for several elements of evaluation. In this regard, the best grades were given for its arable land, biodiversity and the possibilities for starting farming businesses. Kicevo valley was evaluated as most suitable for growing bio-crops.

Table 4. Analyzing the climate as a natural factor in the SWPR

Element of evaluation	Clean air	Adapting to climate change	Endangered areas' facilities	Sport and recreation possibilities	Sun-bathing	Outdoor activities	Snow cover	Natural phenomena
Average value	4,6	4,2	2,6	4,1	4,4	4,7	3,7	3,5
Dispersion	0,9	1,0	1,2	1,1	1,1	0,9	1,2	1,1

Determining the climate was done by evaluating the clean air, the adapting to the conditions of climate change, the location of facilities in endangered zones, opportunities for sport and recreation activities, outdoor activities, snow cover, as well as the presence of various natural phenomena. Dominant place in evaluating the climatic values has outdoor activities which is rated with the highest grades, followed by clean air, the possibility for sunbathing and adapting towards the conditions of climate change.

Table 5. Analyzing hydrographic values as a natural factor in the SWPR

Element of evaluation	Hydrographic value	Average value	Dispersion	Best value
Clean water	Springs	4,6	0,6	4,6
	Rivers	4,2	1,0	
	Waterfalls	4,1	1,5	
Ambience and sceneries	Springs	4,7	0,6	4,7
	Rivers	4,5	1,1	
	Waterfalls	4,6	0,5	

Coastal trails	Springs	3,5	1,0	3,5
	Rivers	3,5	0,7	
	Waterfalls	2,5	1,7	
Fishing	Springs	3,6	1,1	3,6
	Rivers	3,6	1,1	
	Waterfalls	3,5	1,3	
Water sports (kayaking)	Springs	3,2	1,4	3,2
	Rivers	3,2	1,5	
	Waterfalls	2,3	2,3	
Rafting	Springs	2,4	1,4	2,5
	Rivers	2,5	1,4	
	Waterfalls	2,3	2,3	
Swimming	Springs	3,1	1,7	3,1
	Rivers	2,8	1,7	
	Waterfalls	2,3	2,3	
Rarities	Springs	3,7	1,3	3,7
	Rivers	3,3	1,3	
	Waterfalls	2,7	2,1	

Springs, rivers and waterfalls as hydrographic natural factors of the SWPR were evaluated in terms of the purity of their water, surrounding ambience and sceneries, coastal trails, opportunities for fishing, water sports, rafting and swimming, as well as the presence of natural rarities. The highest grades were obtained for the existence of attractive ambience and sceneries of springs. It is important to note that springs were evaluated with the highest grades for most of the elements of evaluation. In this regard, they achieved the best results for their clean waters, fishing opportunities, water sports, swimming and the existence of natural rarities. Rivers received the best results for the existence of coastal trails and rafting opportunities.

Table 6. Analyzing biodiversity (flora and fauna) and protected areas as natural factors in the SWPR

Element of evaluation	Average value	Dispersion
Pastures and grasslands	4,2	0,9
Forest trails	4,1	1,1

Complexes of forests	4,3	0,9
Sport and recreation	4,0	1,1
Ambience and sceneries	4,6	0,7
Rarities	4,1	0,8
Using as food	3,9	1,3
Wetlands	2,0	1,2
Hunting	3,7	1,0
Bird watching	3,8	1,0
Riding	3,9	0,9
Fishing	3,6	1,3

Biodiversity as an important category of the available natural factors in the region were evaluated in terms of the presence of pastures and grasslands, forest trails, complexes of forests, opportunities for sport and recreation activities, ambience and sceneries, the presence of rarities, using as food, wetland areas, opportunities for hunting, fishing, riding and bird watching activities. In this respect, the highest grades were achieved for the existence of ambience and sceneries of the surroundings. Second most important natural factors were evaluated the complexes of forests, while third best results were obtained for the availability of pastures and grasslands.

CONCLUSION

The assessment of the *Factors* in the South-West Planning Region by the experts and stakeholders in the individual municipalities allowed for the definition of specific spatial units and complexes, as well as the determining of their level of rural-tourism development. This allowed for the stakeholders and experts to provide suggestions for activities that need to be undertaken by the creators of tourism policies with the aim to improve the use of existing natural values that are regarded as factors. The obtained results made it possible to differentiate and map different rural – tourism zones as well as to prioritize the available values (natural and cultural). In this paper are analyzed in detail only those natural factors that are essential for the development of rural tourism in areas that are touristically underdeveloped. This will help the decision - makers to create adequate strategies, policies and actions for improving the present level of rural tourism development in the South-West Planning Region.

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