

## **TOURIST POTENTIALS IN UNDERDEVELOPED RURAL AREAS IN THE EASTERN REGION OF THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA**

**Ace Milenkovski**  
**Sashko Gramatnikovski**  
**Dejan Nakovski**

### **Abstract**

The area of the eastern region of Republic of Macedonia belongs to the least developed regions in the country. This situation, among other is reflected in the tourism industry, in which the region has a very small share of the total tourism industry in the state. In terms of potentials that have an impact on tourism development, the area has a rich and diverse natural and cultural heritage that has not been used to a sufficient extent in the function of tourism development.

The authors are of the opinion that the proper representation of the tourist potentials, their typology and classification should be the basis for quality planning of the development of tourism in the region, by defining and emphasizing the selective tourist forms that need to be developed on the basis of the determined potentials. In the paper authors make an inventory and systematization of the tourist potentials of the analyzed area, as well as their classification and separation according to the type of the resources and impact they have on the development of tourism.

**Keywords:** natural potentials, cultural heritage, tourism development.

### **INTRODUCTION**

One of the ways to develop the underdeveloped rural areas is through tourism. For certain rural areas often considered that the development of tourism is the main pillar for development. In particular, rural tourism has been promoted as a key driver of rural development, and many funds have been devoted to supporting the development (Polo Pena et al, 2015). Tourism provides several benefits to rural areas, revitalizes local communities, and enhances residents' quality of life (Park, Nunkoo and Yoon, 2015). It did not require large-scale capital investment, although it did require some infrastructural development, including signing, marketing and heritage interpretation. In many areas (but not in all) it was seen as a rural diversification and development tool for a countryside losing jobs and income through the tourism. Rural tourism claimed a link to sustainability through its role of supporting, using and valorizing the "traditional" countryside and culture (Lane and Kastenholz, 2015). In the analyzed region, tourism can be the basis of rural development if all tourism potentials are properly utilized. Depending on the characteristics of attractiveness, the cultural and historical heritage and natural potentials can be basic or it can be incentive and it can be an addition for the tourists in a given destination.

## **1. METODOLOGY**

The methodology used during the valorization is important to get as much as possible objectivity in evaluating the potentials. Given the lack of adequate methodology or original method, in the procedure, other methods are used from related fields, where upon geography and the application of its methods is proved as the most suitable in the process of the creation of this paper. So, secondary data is collected or it is a secondary data that is available and is official data in the State Statistical Office, Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning of the Republic of Macedonia, the list of protected goods from the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Macedonia, the Action plans for tourism development in the area of the municipalities located in the region and so on. Research was carried out through a survey of experts and members of tourism management from the region who were interviewed to evaluate the value of the natural and anthropogenic tourist potential of the region. For this purpose were interviewed 14 respondents, 3 managers of the tourism and regional development sector, in the Regional Planning Offices in the eastern region of the Republic of Macedonia and 11 employees in the sector of tourism and local economic development in the municipalities covered in the region. While preparing the paper and the data processing several different scientific research methods were used for research in tourism: a method of analysis by which the collected data was analyzed, a comparative method for comparing data, statistical method for presenting statistical data, inventory of tourism resources that are subject to the valorization etc. While the assessment or the valorization of tourist potentials the method or model of scouring is used in order to obtain objectivity in evaluation.

## **2. DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE AREA**

The East Region is mainly a mountainous region and comprises the extreme east of the Republic of Macedonia. It spreads along the Bregalnica River, over the basins of Shtip, Maleshevo and Pijanec and the field of Kochani. The region comprises 14.2% of the total area of the Republic of Macedonia, with 8.5% of the total population, and 49.9 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>.

The eastern statistical region in the Republic of Macedonia is comprised of 11 municipalities, of which three municipalities are completely rural municipalities (Zrnovci, Karbinci and Cesinovo-Oblesevo). Of the remaining eight municipalities, the municipalities of Stip and Kocani are larger urban centers, while the rest are small urban municipalities with fewer than 10,000 inhabitants. In these 11 municipalities in the eastern statistical region there are a total of 2017 settlements, out of which 209 settlements are rural settlements (villages), indicating the fact that it is an express rural area.

**Table 1: Number and structure of the population in the region**

Municipality	total population	number of urban population	number of rural population
Berovo	13941	7002	6939
Vinica	19938	10863	9075
Delcevo	17505	11500	6005
Zrnovci	3264	/	3264
Karbinici	4012	/	4012
Kocani	38092	28330	9762
Makedonska Kamenica	8110	5147	2963
Pehcevo	5517	3237	2280
Probistip	16193	10147	6046
Cesinovo-Oblesevo	7490	/	7490
Stip	47796	43652	4144
Total:	181858	119878	61980

Source: Macedonia in numbers 2017. Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Macedonia 2017.

Table 1 presents data on the total number of population in the region, the number of population by municipalities, and the number of urban and rural population. It is evident from the data that 181,858 inhabitants live in the region, of which 119,878 inhabitants live in the cities, while 61,980 inhabitants live in the rural area, ie in the villages. Expressed in percentages, 34% of the population in the region is a rural population, which lives in 209 rural settlements. The authors present the previous data in order to indicate the rural characteristics of the eastern statistical region.

### 3. OVERVIEW OF TOURISM IN THE AREA

Regarding the tourist activity of the area, the situation has not yet been satisfactory. The area occupied by the region of the Eastern Macedonia is not notable with longer and significant tourist tradition and is not characterized by increased tourist movement in the past (Gjorgievski, Milenkovski and Nakovski 2015). The overview of the current tourist development of the region of Eastern Macedonia will start with an overview of the number of tourists who have visited this region. The overview refers to the three-year period from 2014 to 2016 and in it, besides the total number of tourist arrivals (visits), separately is presented the number of foreign arrivals and the number of arrivals of domestic tourists.

**Table 2: Tourist arrivals in the region of Eastern Macedonia for the period 2014–2016**

	year	2014	2015	2016
Republic of Macedonia	Total number of tourists	735.650	816.067	856.843
	Domestic tourists	310.336	330.537	346.359
	Foreign tourists	425.314	485.530	510.484
East Region	Total number of tourists	23.035	25.907	30.568
	Domestic tourists	14.306	16.751	20.643
	Foreign tourists	8.729	9.156	9.925

Source: Tourism in the Republic of Macedonia 2017.

In the data of the table that are obtained from the State Statistical Office one can notice upward changes in terms of arrival i.e. the number of tourists who visited the region of Eastern Macedonia, so at the beginning of the analyzed period in 2014 the region was visited by a total of 23.035 tourists, which compared with the total number of tourists visiting the Republic of Macedonia (735.650 tourists) in the same year represents only 3.13%. The number of tourists, expressed in absolute numbers, who are visiting the region in the next period is continuously increasing so at the end of the analyzed period, in 2016, the region was visited by a total of 30.568 visitors, representing 3.5% of the total number of tourists who visited the Republic of Macedonia (856.843 tourists) in the same year. The authors are of the opinion that the basic data for the analyzed region from table 2 indicate that the region has very little participation in the tourism industry of the country, which is an indicator of its tourist underdevelopment.

#### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Although the introductory part records the tourist underdevelopment of a region, the authors believe that according to the tourist potentials of the space, there are opportunities for increasing the tourist attractiveness and activity of the region. For this purpose it is necessary to make an inventory and to determine the importance of the tourist potentials of the region and according to them to determine the types of tourism for which there are opportunities for development. For that purpose, research was carried out through a survey of experts and members of tourism management from the region who were interviewed to evaluate the value of the natural and anthropogenic tourist potential of the region. With the use of Likert-type Scale they graded the possibility of development of the offer of selective tourism forms.

Table 3: Grading of tourist potentials of the region

Number	Weighting points	Tourist potentials	Grade by the Tourism Management (TM)	TM's Average grade
1	1	Relief characteristics of mountains	1. Very weak	3,46
	2		2. Weak	
	3		3. Good	
	4		4. Very good	
	5		5. Excellent	
2	1	Climate characteristics	1. Very weak	3,26
	2		2. Weak	
	3		3. Good	
	4		4. Very good	
	5		5. Excellent	
3	1	Hydrographic characteristics	1. Very weak	1,66
	2		2. Weak	
	3		3. Good	
	4		4. Very good	
	5		5. Excellent	

Number	Weighting points	Tourist potentials	Grade by the Tourism Management (TM)	TM's Average grade
4	1	Flora and fauna	1. Very weak	1,93
	2		2. Weak	
	3		3. Good	
	4		4. Very good	
	5		5. Excellent	
	3	Average grade of natural resources		2,57
1	1	Cultural-historical heritage	1. Very weak condition	3,46
	2		2. Weak condition	
	3		3. Good condition	
	4		4. Very good condition	
	5		5. Excellent condition	
2	1	Archeological sites	1. Very weak condition	3,6
	2		2. Weak condition	
	3		3. Good condition	
	4		4. Very good condition	
	5		5. Excellent condition	
3	1	Religious buildings (churches, mosques, etc).	1. Very weak condition	3,73
	2		2. Weak condition	
	3		3. Good condition	
	4		4. Very good condition	
	5		5. Excellent condition	
	4	Average grade of anthropogenic resources		3,59

From data processing, the following can be concluded: Natural resources got a good average grade (2.57). The relief characteristics of mountains (3.46) and climate characteristics (3.26) were graded as good, while hydrographic resources (1.66) and Flora and Fauna (1.93) were graded as weak. Anthropogenic resources got a very good average grade (3.59). Cultural-historical heritage (3.46), archaeological site (3.60) and religious buildings (3.73) were graded as very good, respectively, that they are in a very good condition and could be used for tourist offer development.

Based on the results obtained from the survey, according to the opinion of the authors, in the region there are opportunities for development of several alternative forms of tourism, such as: mountain, hunting, religious, cultural tourism.

In order to get a complete picture of the tourist potential of the region and to see the possibility of their utilization, it is necessary to present the situation with the accommodation capacities found in the region, as a basis for the development of tourism and utilization of the tourist potentials.

**Table 4: Number of accommodation facilities in the region**

Municipality	Nr. of accommodation facilities	In terms of Rep. of Macedonia in %	Nr. of rooms	In terms of Rep. of Macedonia in %	Nr. of beds	In terms of Rep. of Macedonia in %
Berovo	5	1,03	97	0,59	238	0,53
Vinica	...	...	...	...	...	...
Delcevo	3	0,62	72	0,44	282	0,62
Zrnovci	...	...	...	...	...	...
Karbinci	1	0,21	27	0,17	150	0,33
Kocani	8	1,65	163	1	477	1,06
Makedonska Kamenica	3	0,62	41	0,25	82	0,18
Pehcevo	1	0,21	6	0,04	20	0,04
Probitip	4	0,82	36	0,22	82	0,18
Cesinovo/Oblesevo	...	...	...	...	...	...
Stip	5	1,03	99	0,61	181	0,4
Total:	30	6.19	541	3.32	1512	3.34

Source: Census of catering capacities in the Republic of Macedonia, 2016.

The previously mentioned indicates that the accommodation capacities in the region are unevenly spatially distributed, which results in poorer tourist offer development in relation to its potential. The data in Table 4 shows that in three municipalities there are no accommodation facilities, while in two municipalities there is only one accommodation facility. Regarding the accommodation capacities in the region, the most favorable is the situation in Kocani, where there are eight accommodation facilities.

Regarding the spatial distribution and location of tourist potentials, depending on the municipality in which they are located, the authors have made a spatial scheme according to the municipalities and the tourist potentials they have for development of tourist forms.

**Table 5: Tourism forms for which there are potentials for development**

forms of tourism	Municipality										
	Berovo	Vinica	Delcevo	Zrnovci	Karbinci	Kocani	Makedonska Kamenica	Pehcevo	Probitip	Cesinovo/Oblesevo	Stip
mountain											
religious											
cultural											
hunting											
	- forms of tourism for which there are potentials										

Source: Author's own work

From the resulting pattern can be observed the following: in the region of the total number of municipalities, in three of them there are tourist potentials for the development of mountain, religious, cultural and hunting tourism. In two municipalities there are potentials for development of three tourist forms: mountain, cultural and hunting tourism. In four municipalities there are potentials for the development of two forms of tourism, and in two municipalities there are potentials for development of only one touristic form. What is remarkable is that throughout the region there are potentials for the development of hunting tourism, and in most of the territory of the region there are potentials for mountain tourism development.

## CONCLUSION

The data presented in the first part of the paper is visible that the eastern region of the Republic of Macedonia is characterized by small tourist activity in relation to Republic of Macedonia. Further results point to the fact that the eastern region has good tourism potentials, which are the basis for the development of several forms of alternative tourism that can be developed on the whole territory of the region. The authors associate the reason for this factual situation with the insufficient utilization of the tourist potentials of the region. One of the reasons for the lack of utilization of potentials may be the insufficient knowledge of the tourism potentials available to the region by the tourism industry. It is necessary to adjust the tourist offer of the region. It involves the creation of tourism offer through which to exploit the tourism potential. At the same time, the tourist offer should be spatially set according to the types of tourism for each municipality in the region. In addition to the tourist offer, it is necessary to undertake activities for improvement of the situation with the accommodation capacities (number of accommodation facilities, number of rooms and beds, category of facilities ...), since the accommodation capacities complement the tourist potentials and complete the tourist offer of region. The authors are of the opinion that the results of this paper (proper representation of the tourist potentials, their typology and classification) should be the basis for quality planning of the development of tourism in the region, by defining and emphasizing the selective tourist forms that need to be developed on the basis of the determined potentials.

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## TURISTIČKI POTENCIJALI U SLABO RAZVIJENIM RURALNIM PODRUČJIMA ISTOČNE REGIJE REPUBLIKE MAKEDONIJE

### Sažetak

Područje istočne regije Republike Makedonije među najslabije je razvijenim područjima u toj državi. Ta se činjenica, između ostaloga, odražava i na turistički sektor jer turizam te regije predstavlja veoma malen udio u ukupnom turističkom prometu u državi. Ako govorimo o potencijalima koji utječu na razvoj turizma, to je područje bogatog i raznolikog prirodnog i kulturnog naslijeđa koje nije dovoljno iskorišteno za turistički razvoj.

Autori smatraju da bi odgovarajuće predstavljanje turističkih potencijala, njihove tipologije i klasifikacije trebalo biti polazište za kvalitetno planiranje razvoja turizma u regiji, pri čemu valja definirati i istaknuti odabrane turističke sadržaje koje treba razviti na temelju utvrđenih potencijala. U ovom radu autori iznose sustavni pregled turističkih potencijala analiziranog područja, njihovu klasifikaciju te podjelu prema vrsti resursa i utjecaju koji imaju na razvoj turizma.

**Ključne riječi:** prirodni potencijali, kulturna baština, razvoj turizma.

**Ace Milenkovski**, PhD, Full Professor

University of Tourism and Management, Skopje

Blvd. Partizanski odredi, No. 99, Skopje, Republic of Macedonia

E-mail: a.milenkovski@utms.edu.mk

**Sashko Gramatnikovski**, PhD, Associate Professor

University of Tourism and Management, Skopje

Blvd. Partizanski odredi, No. 99, Skopje, Republic of Macedonia

E-mail: sgramatnikovski@utms.edu.mk

**Dejan Nakovski**, PhD, Assistant Professor

University of Tourism and Management, Skopje

Blvd. Partizanski odredi, No. 99, Skopje, Republic of Macedonia

E-mail: dnakovski@utms.edu.mk