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**GEO-ECONOMIC ASPECTS OF TOURISM DEVELOPMENT
IN THE MOUNTAIN REGIONS AND RESORTS IN BULGARIA**

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Abstract

The growing importance and the role of spatial development of mountain regions as a commitment of the European Union for the implementation of a common regional policy on the continent as a whole, has put forward the need for a new approach and analysis of these areas. This analysis stems from the diversity and scale of the resource potential which the mountain regions have. The differentiation of the geo-urban development models of the mountain regions, which are a natural result of the impact of multiple factors, leads to the formation of a number of spatial features in the distribution of the population in the different in size mountain areas and types of mountain communities. This in a large extent sets out the possible aspects of tourism development in the semi-urbanized territories outside the major tourist spots. Defining the contemporary geo-urban realities in these areas through active research activities and objective analysis will make the formulation of clear objectives and priorities for a possible future policy for the development of the mountains.

Keywords

Mountain development geo-urban studies – Regional policy – Modeling

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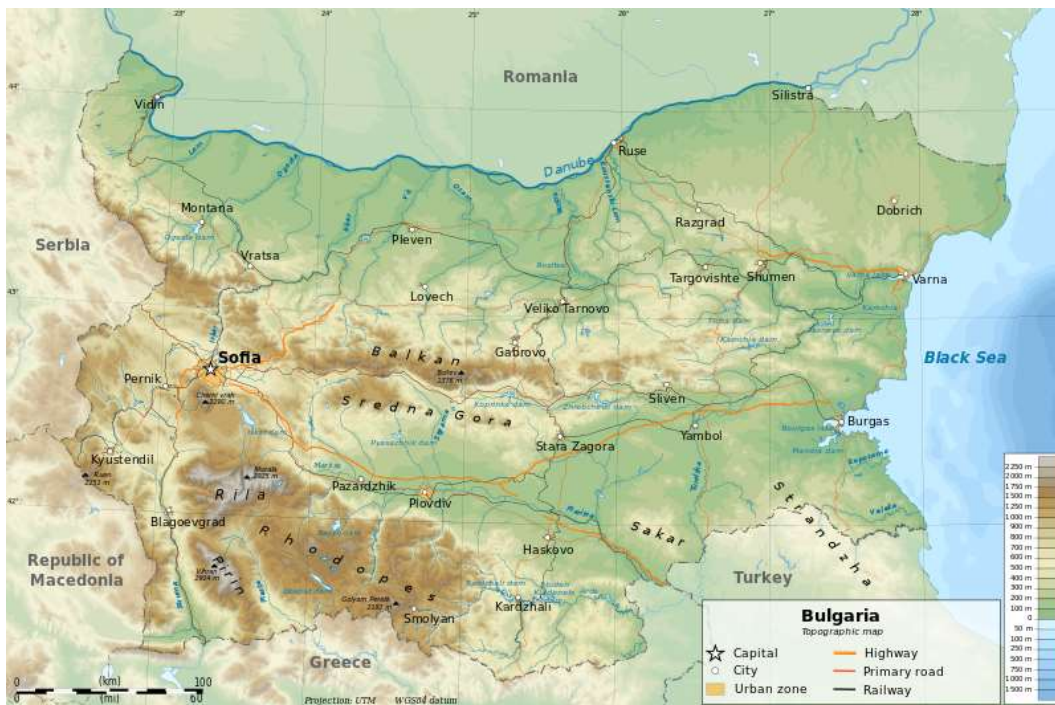
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Introduction

Tourism policy as well as the tools for promotion of tourism development takes an important place among the policies and the tools for the development of the mountain regions because of the great contemporary economic importance of tourism for their economies as well as the limited economic alternatives. The extent of economic and tourist absorption in Bulgarian mountain regions is relatively low compared to other European mountain areas and this is their major advantage, which should be carefully used.



Source: https://Geography_of_Bulgaria#/media/File:Bulgaria-geographic_map-en.svg
Figure 1

Topographic map of Bulgaria

In Bulgaria, the utilization of mountain areas for recreation and tourism purposes strongly lags behind the utilization of the sea coast, where we witness a real boom of tourist structures with all the negative traits of a consumerist and shortsighted attitude towards the natural environment and recreation and tourism resources. But there are already signs of moving the building wave to the inland mountains as well. Bansko, Pamporovo and Borovets already feel the capital pressure and are enduring the principles of consistent and friendly tourist development becomes harder and harder as well as more responsible.

The tourism and recreation related policy is not usually established as an independent policy area and the responsibilities for the development of tourism are divided between several ministries and public bodies, which create a major problem for their coordination. Independently from this, various instruments and incentives, aimed at the promotion of the mountain tourism, are established. Its (initial) focus on winter (ski) tourism is assessed as a weakness of the tourism policy in mountain regions. In geo-economic context, in the development of the contemporary global economy, mountain areas hide a tremendous potential for Europe and besides being an excellent environment for tourism development, they also perform numerous other functions – environmental, economic,

social, cultural and agricultural. Long ago, even before the establishment of the European Union, the Alpine countries aim for a targeted policy, regulated by laws, allowing support for the mountain areas, taking into account their specific geographic and climatic conditions, as well as the lifestyle of the people living in the mountains.

Nowadays, these national practices have evolved into a pan-European policy. With this regard, the policy for the mountain areas is seen as a crucial part of the pan-European spatial planning and regional policy, which must impose measures for economic and social development in the mountains, aimed at the natural resources management and conservation, as well as of the preservation of local traditions and cultures. Also, development policies for the mountains are closely related to regional policy and to the spatial policy and planning. Besides that, a few countries have comprehensive, integrated policy for the mountains, as well as specific tools such as laws on the mountains or funds for the mountains (France, Italy, with some conditionality – Switzerland). The public interventions, aimed at promoting the development of mountain regions, vary considerably, not only depending on the importance and diversity of these areas, but also on the institutional structure of each country (centralized, federal, old or a new EU member state, an EU acceding country, etc.). An especially important policy tool, which is often a prerequisite for the application of other tools, is the adoption of a definition for mountain areas. The criteria for determining mountainous areas are different, but always include the altitude – although with different values in the different countries, often depending on their latitude (France - 600-800 m, Switzerland - 1000 m, Greece - 800 m, Italy - 600 m, Spain - 1000 meters, Slovakia - 600 m). Other (modified) criteria are the gradients (France, Spain, Slovakia) as well as the relative height (Italy). In some of the countries, an explicit definition of ski resorts exists in a legal act as well as the conditions for their functioning (Spain - Aragon). In some cases (Slovakia), put a strong emphasis on the use of tourist zoning as a tool of the tourism policy. Four types of tourist areas (mountains, lakes, urban, etc.) are defined in Switzerland.

Findings

The spatial development of the mountain areas is an activity, which should be based on good coordination and special attention should be paid to the specific conditions in the mountain areas, as well as to the impact of the different sectorial policies. The mentioned sectorial policies should contribute to the diversification and increase in the number of the activities oriented to the development of the crafts and SMEs, as well as to the cooperation between them. In each part of the mountainous areas specific development of the agriculture and forestry is observed. This imposes the need for local development programs and policies, that should be based on the production of local quality products and which should also contribute to environmental protection. The design and the planning of the specific types of tourism activities, which should comply with the environmental, economic, social, cultural, architectural and historical environment in the mountains, should be the engine for the growth in mountain regions in Bulgaria.

From a geo-economic point of view, the public services in the mountain areas should not be at a lower level, compared to the level of their development in the rest of the areas, but tax breaks and incentives are necessary to be introduced for their promotion. The attempts for establishing mountain agrarian campuses or farms, where organic agriculture and livestock is promoted, while respecting the sustainable conservation of soil, water and air, would be of great benefit. In my opinion, the reasonable approach would be an executive agency entitled “Environmental control and management of natural resources”, based in the

town of Smolyan, to be established. This agency should provide an accurate examination of the landscape status, the damaged areas, the fauna and flora preservation and their habitats and, where appropriate, their rehabilitation. In the Bulgarian conditions, it is very important the cultural identity of the mountain population to be preserved, as well as the diversity and richness of its cultural heritage. This should be done on the spot in the mountains. It is necessary the building activities, related to the absorption of the mountain recreation potential, to be done with tact and care in order to avoid a number of errors, known to us through our current practice as well as through the practice of European alpine countries. We need to find our Bulgarian form of tourism development and spatial planning, which should focus on the spring – summer and autumn – winter exploitation, which is characteristic for our conditions, as well as on the use of the existing settlements with permanent population, which have rich recreational resources and the Bulgarian national spirit, history, traditions and material culture. Given the geographical location of Bulgaria, a consensus is necessary for the establishment of various tools and incentives, with the goal to promote mountain tourism successfully in society. Its (initial) focus on winter (ski) tourism is assessed as a weakness of the Bulgarian tourism policy, concerning the mountainous regions.

At the present stage, the promotion of tourism in the mountain regions in most of the countries is not limited to the promotion of winter tourism and ski resorts, rather the opposite – a differentiation of the tourist products is sought, as well as possibilities for their use in the summer. For example, the Tourism Development Programmer in Bergamo – Italy focuses on promoting SPA tourism in the mountainous regions of France. The case with the “Snow Plan” Programmer in France in the 60s and 70s of the twentieth century is the same – it includes investments in specialized ski tourism infrastructure made by the state and local authorities. In Bulgaria the single season independent tourist complexes, which are typical for some of the Alpine countries, such as France, located at higher altitudes and suitable only for winter exploitation, are the inappropriate foreign model for the Bulgarian conditions, which should not be copied and applied in Bulgarian mountain regions. Bulgaria should construct multi-seasonal and multifunctional resorts with a limited capacity, attached to the existing settlements and resorts.

We have to admit that after the enthusiasm in the 70s of the last century with proposals for the construction of such complexes in the mountains of Rila, Pirin, Vitosha and the Rhodopes, gradually these plans were postponed, forgotten and replaced by other concepts, based on the localization of tourism construction, close to existing mountain villages and resorts. In the second half of the twentieth century, a series of territorial development plans for the mountain areas have been developed in Bulgaria. The territorial development plans for the Rila Mountains were developed in 1962 by the architect L. Konstantinov and in 1968 by architect P. Grigorov. A “Programme for the complex development of the recreation activities and tourism in Northern Rila” was developed in 1975 by a team led by Professor L. Stoytchev and in 1985 a Landscape plan was developed by Professor L. Stoytchev in a team. A spatial planning scheme for the Pirin Mountain was developed in 1972 by architect P. Grigorov and a team and in 1977 engineer N. Chucheva and a team designed park landscape structure projects for the National Park “Pirin”. In 1991, a team led by Professor L. Yotsova developed new landscape projects for the National Park “Pirin”. Concerning the Vitosha Mountain, in 1954 professor E. Sugarev developed a Master Plan; in 1977 a territorial development plan was developed by a team headed by architect K. Bisserov and in 1987, with regard to the application of Sofia as a host of the Winter Olympics games, a structure scheme was developed by a team headed by architect Chipev. For the Western Rhodopes, the spatial planning scheme was developed in 1978 by a team

headed by Professor M. Kovatcheva. For the Central Stara Planina, the territorial development plan was prepared in 1985 by a team headed by professor M. Mladenova and professor L. Dinev and the territorial development plans for the recreation and the tourist sites were prepared by a team headed by architect P. Evrev and architect J. Slavkova.

Evolution in environmental thinking and the development of environmental legislation has largely helped, mainly with the introduction of national parks and then national and nature parks. Unfortunately, new reliable territorial plans for the mountain areas have not been developed in the recent years. But on the other hand, the management plans for the national parks “Central Balkan”, “Rila” and “Pirin” and the natural park “Vitosha” were prepared.



Source: https://www.mapshop.lv/en/veikals/prece/?shop_id=38281

Figure 2

Map of Bulgaria's National Parks

The Management plans for the national parks “Central Balkan”, “Rila” and “Pirin”, however, cover only a part of the mountainous regions and mostly, the protected natural environment. The whole territory of the mountains, along with the mountain villages, mostly are a subject of spatial plans, which, with no doubt, not only are more comprehensive but also treat the problems of the structure in a more complex way, and also consider the protection and the development of mountainous regions. The task of the government is to revive the practice of planning at a regional level, as well as to find a suitable mechanism for the assigning and the development of spatial plans of the mountain regions. This practice should be interrelated with the preparation and the approval of a law for the mountains. A draft of such law has been available since 1998, but the procedure of its adoption has been delayed. The need for such law was provoked by the specific problems of mountain areas – depopulation and deterioration of the social structure, high unemployment, economic backwardness, inefficient agriculture and livestock, backwardness in the infrastructure fitment, problems with environmental protection. A law for the mountains would lay the foundations of a national policy oriented towards the revival of these areas. In case the government has no will to enact a law for the mountains, then, I think, a special section in the Law for Regional Development, titled

“Development and management of the mountain regions”, could be inserted. This chapter should focus on the support of social and economic development of the mountain regions, as well as on the development and preservation of the mountain territories. In a similar way, like in some European laws, a number of concessions and incentives, aimed at the encouragement of the economic development and transformation of the mountainous areas into attractive places for production, tourism and providing better services to the population, have been provided. The laws should focus on the development and the preservation of mountain areas by drafting spatial plans for mountain municipalities and parts of them, as well as general and detailed spatial plans for urban areas in the mountain communities. It is necessary, to a large extent, the state policy on the development of mountainous territories to be entrusted to a specialized state authority. The task of this government body will be to implement new structural schemes and plans, which should define the overall structure of the territory, the zones with different conditions of use, protection, structure and development of the technical infrastructure, spatial development of settlements and settlement structures, the permitted limit, concerning the sizes of the resorts, in accordance with the norms for recreation load of the territory and the resources, as well as measures for conservation of the environment and the mountain resources. Moreover, those plans should define the boundaries between public and private property, the design limits of the urban, agricultural, forest, disturbed and protected areas, the areas for skiing and hiking, as well as specific requirements, rules and regulations for spatial planning, protection and improvement of the environment.

While carrying out planning activities for the mountain areas, it is particularly important the territory to be structured in a way to ensure a coordinated development of the individual functions and activities, as well as the implementation of effective nature conservation measures. Large natural areas under NATURA 2000 should be protected in our mountains without active absorption and tourist use as an example of the natural balance. These are the areas falling under the regime of protected natural environment and those territories occupy the heart of the mountains. The special regime includes all the areas above the upper limits of the forests, the protected nature areas, the protected water areas and forests, as well as the protected areas around resorts and the resort resources. In the rest of the mountain areas, territories of forestry and natural environment areas should be delineated, and in those areas, recreation activities and business activities, compatible with them, should be practiced. These are forests and forest lands of economic and recreational importance.

The areas for locating the resort facilities should be oriented in accordance with the existing mountain villages and should form recreation and tourist locations. In practice, this could be a built zone of a village and a resort environment named “U – zone” (an area with urban territories and resorts), which also could include the urban territories in the building boundaries of the cities and settlements as well as the territory around settlements. While deploying the sites for locating settlements and recreation areas in the structure of the mountain regions, the principle of alternation of those areas with free natural environment should be applied and the designation “N” – zone should be introduced.

In compliance with this principle, the different mountains produce, different structural patterns of tourist utilization and disposal in accordance with their geological structure such as – the radial scheme (the Rila, Verila, Pirin, Vitosha and Osogovo mountains), the cross-parallel scheme (the Fore-Balkan, the Balkan, Sredna Gora and Sakar mountains) and the mesh scheme (the Western Rhodopes, the Eastern Rhodopes, Strandja and Bakadzhit site). With this regard, in the master plan of Bulgaria, a single transport system with accessibility

to the resort areas and rural territories should be built. That is needed because of the localization of resort settlements as the resort zones and complexes normally develop in linear directions mainly in the valleys of rivers and road links. In these most actively absorbed areas, the principle of rotation is also applied - the acquired urban areas are followed by free and green areas around the settlements and territories between the settlements. This allows the entry of nature environment in the settlements and the formation of a continuous band construction in the valleys is not allowed within the resort and tourist locations, the resort settlements, the resort zones and the recreation complexes form the resort – urban entity of agglomeration type. That entity should be a subject to common spatial planning in a special general structure plan. Although a number of general and detailed spatial plans have been prepared in the recent years, such as the spatial plans of the resort tourist sites and the areas for ski resorts and villages such as Pamporovo, Momchil yunak, Large Perelik, Pashaliytsa, Bansko, Chepelare, Syutka, Panichiste, Razlog, Predela, Samokov – Borovets – Beli Iskar, Semkovo, Uzana, Kom Beklemeto, Tryavna, Elena and others. In some of these studies namely the approach for integrated development of the tourism has been applied and this tourism development was related to the existing settlements in the mountains not only as starting points, but also as places for locating the tourist construction as well as their functioning into a single system of mountain resorts.



Source: <http://www.turkhotelmarket.com/en/bulgaria/ski/hotels/borovets/maps.htm>

Figure 3

The biggest mountain resorts in Bulgaria

In line with the possibilities for spatial development and the opportunity which Bulgaria has – a new wave of emigration of 25-40 thousand foreigners to enter the country and its impact on the labor market, it would be good through the development of new tourist centers to attract some of the immigrants in order to mitigate the burden on the urbanized areas in Bulgaria. Unfortunately, there is no clear policy on the modernization of resorts like Syutka, Banite (Smolyan district), Belite brezi (close to Ardino), Byala cherkva (Plovdiv district), Laki (the village of Manastir), Panichiste and Separeva banya, Berkovitz, Beklemeto, Yundola and Varshets, where opportunities for building new mountain resorts exist. But for now, a congestion in the existing complexes is observed (Pamporovo, Borovets

and Bansko) while decline in some of the resort areas as Semkovo, Predela, Atoluka, Kartala, Uzana and others is observed.

Tourism development has partial progress in and near the existing settlements like Beli Iskar, Govedartsi, Apriltsi, Predela, the village of Vrata (Plovdiv district), the villa settlement “Constantia”, Tsigov chark, Saint Konstantin (Peshtera) and others. The planning of the mountain resorts should start with the preparation of spatial plans on a regional and local level, which to determine the overall structure of the planning area and the location of the facilities for recreation and tourism – those should be located close to the existing resorts with permanent population as well in independent resort complex. The location of the resort should be determined on the basis of an integrated analysis of the recreation potential of the territory and evaluation of the resort and the tourist needs. The specific location of the individual resort settlement should be refined and further clarified in the spatial plan of a specific resort and tourism location.

The size of the resort depends on a number of factors and conditions of natural, technical, functional, economic, aesthetic and psychological nature. The capacity or carrying capacity of the main resort resource is a particularly important factor among the mentioned factors. For the ski resorts, this should be the carrying capacity of the ski slopes. Ignoring this factor and the construction of a number of tourist sites and accommodations larger than those allowed by their capacity, will result in a larger load on the ski slopes and the cable cars and just like the crowded beaches along the seaside, which would mean disturbed comfort for the visitors as well as threatened environment balance. Symptoms of such an overload of the recreational capacity of the ski slopes and cable cars is already observed in Bansko and Pamporovo and in the near future such overload could be expected in other mountain resorts as well. The current planning is based on the finding that mountain resorts have an intrinsic segmented shape with separate cores, mainly due to the complex forms of relief (Pamporovo, Semkovo, Lake Batak, Predela, etc.). The compact form could be found much more rarely (Borovets, Bekelemeto, etc.). With this regard, the approach to tourism must be diversified, based on the characteristic of the tourism profile, as well as on its development and the combination of at least three or more types of tourism. For these reasons, a change with regard to the land and buildings for shelter and habitation is needed, as those represent the “basic fabric” of the resort, which occupies the largest part of its territory. In the Bulgarian resorts the hotels and holiday homes prevail. The individual houses are found as components of some mountain resorts (Yundola, Semkovo, the lake of Batak, the Panagyurishte colonies, etc.).

Some typical European resort forms such individual apartments in hotel buildings, family hotels, pensions, houses in villages, family resorts, hotel resorts and others occur on the Bulgarian tourism market and it is expected that those will get more widely spread. It is worrying that the form “apartment hotel” sometimes degenerates into a residential apartment building without the necessary public service facilities. This is dictated by the entrepreneurs’ desire to make a profit quickly, but the quality of the resort environment gets lower and the resorts begin to look like residential complexes. The excessive concentration of shelters in large multi-store buildings is unacceptable as a way of building and disrupts the natural balance in the mountains. It is appropriate a more moderate concentration to be applied through where the construction could crystallize in consonance with the natural environment structure. The recommended density indicators in the net land for housing are 170-220 l/ha or 120-150 m²/bed. The construction density is suitable to be less than 20%, and the intensity of the construction should be the lower than 1.00. A bigger density and intensity

would make the resort environment worse and would bring it closer to the nature of the urban environment. As the privatization of the resorts has already been implemented new plots (RLE) for individual hotel and leisure buildings are expected to delineate, but those should not take up more than 50-60% of the total area of the complex. In this way, the need for larger public space for general public use in the resorts will be protected. This space includes not only the streets, alleys and the infrastructure networks and facilities, but also the public green areas (the parks in the resorts) and the land, the buildings, as well as the facilities for sports and recreation – ski slopes, ski trails, ski fields. T

Conclusion

The trend for shrinking and reducing the public space in resorts is detrimental and all the potential and means of the planning should be used in order to resist to this trend and protect the general public free spaces. Bulgarian architecture in the mountain resorts nowadays, in spite of some successful examples, is still in demand and rambling as a whole and unfortunately, it is not very well-oriented in the nature and the correct image of mountain architecture. For this reason, in the Bulgarian mountain resorts you can find domes and illustrations, as well as materials, which are not suitable for the mountain conditions, and also downright false imitation of architectural models from the past. That's why, although small in number, the serious and successful implementations in the mountain resorts bring us delight and give us real hope that the architecture will overcome this period of contagious childhood disease and will be able to shift to a more serious approach to the creation of the architectural environment and the architectural image of the mountains and mountain resorts.

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