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**RURAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT ZONES:  
THE CASE OF MACEDONIA  
РУРАЛНЕ ТУРИСТИЧКЕ РАЗВОЈНЕ ЗОНЕ: СЛУЧАЈ  
МАКЕДОНИЈЕ**

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**ABSTRACT:** *The paper attempts to make an overview on current patterns of rural tourism in Macedonia as well as to recommend future steps for introducing rural tourism development zones. In this respect, the research is based on various analyses made upon available secondary data collected through desk-research on descriptive statistics and stylized facts. The outcomes point out that Macedonia, opposite many tourism-oriented countries, notes very modest results in this area. So, the paper identifies numerous potentials for developing rural tourism zones thus emphasizing the need for undertaking serious measures and activities on central and local level. Moreover, it points to the necessity for identifying effective strategic framework for enhancing rural tourism which might result with existence of around thirty rural tourism development zones, over twenty rural tourist centers and over two-hundred rural tourism settlements in Macedonia.*

**Keywords:** *Rural tourism; Tourism development; Rural zones; Macedonia.*

**РЕЗИМЕ:** *Овај рад настоји да прикаже тренутно стање у руралном туризму у Македонији, као и да предложи будуће кораке у увођењу руралне туристичке развојне зоне. У том циљу, истраживање садржи различите анализе спроведене на расположљивим секундарним изворима података, на дескриптивној статистици и на стилизираним фактима. Резултати истраживања указују да Македонија, наспрот многим туристички ориентисаним земљама, бележи веома скромне резултате у овој области. У том смислу, овај рад указује на многобројне потенцијале за развој руралне туристичке зоне наглашавајући потребу о предузимању озбиљнијих мера и активности на централном и локалном нивоу. Истовремено, рад указује на неопходношћу у идентификацију ефективног стратешког плана за унапређивање руралног туризма што би могло резултирати са постојање око тридесет туристичке развојне зоне, преко двадесет руралних туристичких центара и преко двеста руралних туристичких насеља у Македонији.*

**Кључне речи:** *рурални туризам, туристички развој, руралне зоне, Македонија.*

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## **1. Introduction**

One may argue that rural tourism became very popular in the international tourism market, particularly in Europe which became the world leader. In this respect, every country is interesting in developing rural tourism since it contributes to variety and numerous positive impacts on their economy.

Based on wide variety of activities that it is consisted of, the rural tourism unites more than 19 possible kinds of tourism: tourism on a farm; tourism on other farm dwellings; residential tourism; homeland tourism; sports- and recreational tourism; adventurous tourism; health tourism; educational tourism; transit tourism; camping tourism; nautical tourism; continental tourism; cultural tourism; religious tourism; hunting tourism; fishing tourism; wine-tasting tourism; gastronomic tourism; eco-tourism (Kushen, 1995). In this line, it must be noted that rural tourism currently has strong advantages on the international market as it has already played a key role in development of some rural zones that were economically and socially depressed (Dernoi, 1991; Blaine and Golan, 1993; Ploeg and Renting, 2000; Ploeg et al. 2000; Roberts and Hall, 2001; Hall and Richards, 2002; Simpson, 2008; Chuang, 2010).

Due to the fact that Macedonia is rich on beautiful and well preserved nature, traditional and autochthonous values and favorable socio-demographic, historical-ethnographic as well as natural-geographic environment, it fulfills the basic preconditions for rural tourism. The objective of this paper is to illustrate numerous potentials for developing rural tourism zones in Macedonia. Furthermore, it emphasizes the need for undertaking serious measures and activities on central and local level for fulfilling this goal. In this respect, the research outcomes point to the necessity for identifying effective strategic framework for enhancing rural tourism. The heterogeneous lanscape, field configuration, natural resources as well as ethnography support the fact of noting around thirty rural tourism development zones, over twenty rural tourist centers and over two-hundred rural tourism settlements in Macedonia.

## **2. Preconditions for rural tourism development in Macedonia**

According to official statistics, in 2010, Macedonia had 2055004 inhabitants, out of which 17.6% live in pure rural municipalities. The proportion urban-rural population changed significantly over the past decades. In this respect, in 1948, the ratio was 26.7% towards 73.3% in favor of urban population. Five decades later, in 2002, the same proportion notes significant changes in qualitative manner, resulting with 58.1% urban population versus 41.9% rural population. Yet, the recent statistics present that in 2008, the percentage of urban population has substantially changed by

making domination of urban population of 68.1% towards only 31.0% rural population (State Statistical Office, 2009).

Based on the Law on territorial division implemented in 2004, Macedonia has 1767 settlements, out of which only 34 are urban settlements and 1733 are rural settlements. It is interesting to note that 146 settlements are uninhabited or resettled due to rapid emigration processes. So, the real picture is that Macedonia has 1621 inhabited settlements (State Statistical Office, 2011).

With regards to other aspects of rural issue in Macedonia, the last statistical data point to the fact that 99.5% of rural economy falls in individual rural enterprises (State Statistical Office, 2007). Another data refers to poverty index, noting that in 2010, 27.1% of poor population live in rural areas, 43.7% live in urban municipalities, while the remainder of 9.2% is situated in the capital city of Skopje (State Statistical Office, 2012).

Early 2000s may be noted as years for beginning of rural tourism development in Macedonia, generally initiated by donor funded projects. The accent in this area is put on cross border projects. In the line of enhancing this issue, a promotional campaign for development of rural tourism in Macedonia was initiated. This was a measure from the Programme of financial support for rural tourism 2010, for which Macedonia provided €115000 in total. All associations and foundations with seats in rural areas and local self-governments in rural communities were eligible for this means administered by the Agency for Financial Support for Agriculture and Rural Development. The greatest part of the means, some €65500, were meant for construction of pedestrian and cycling paths in rural areas.

### **3. Current situation and future challenges towards rural tourism development**

The up-to-date results point that Macedonia, opposite many tourism-oriented countries, notes very modest results in this area. Although there is a strategic document for this issue, the rural tourism potentials in Macedonia are still insufficiently used (Government of Macedonia, 2009). In this regards, it is necessary that rural tourism must have significant position in regional programs and national development strategy being defined as a key opportunity for economic development.

Consequently, just recently a National Strategy for rural tourism was adopted covering a five-year horizon from 2012 till 2017 (Government of Macedonia, 2012). This document addresses various approaches in the line of strengthening rural tourism in Macedonia. So, it encompasses the issues of: methodology, trend analyses and current status, human resources, legal frame, marketing and management activities, strategic directions, standardization models, indicators for fulfillment of target goals and aims, as

well as many more measures and activities with regards to supporting rural development in Macedonia.

**Table 1.** Current locations of rural tourism by type of activity  
**Табела 1.** Локације руралног туризма са видовима активности

No	Rural municipality	Accommodation	Catering	Pathway	Sightseeing
1	Aracinovo	-	+	-	-
2	Bogovinje	+	+	+	-
3	Bosilovo	-	+	-	-
4	Brvenica	-	+	-	-
5	Vasilevo	+	+	-	-
6	Vevcani	+	+	+	+
7	Vranestica	-	+	-	-
8	Vrapciste	-	+	-	-
9	Gradsko	-	+	-	-
10	Debarca	-	+	+	-
11	Dojran	+	+	+	+
12	Dolneni	-	+	-	-
13	Drugovo	-	+	+	-
14	Zelino	+	+	-	-
15	Zajas	+	+	-	-
16	Zelenikovo	-	+	-	-
17	Zenovci	-	+	+	-
18	Jegunovce	-	+	-	-
19	Karbinci	+	+	+	+
20	Konce	-	+	-	-
21	Krivogastani	-	+	-	-
22	Lipkovo	-	+	-	-
23	Lozovo	-	+	-	-
24	Mavrovo-Rostuse	+	+	+	+
25	Mogila	-	+	-	-
26	Novaci	-	+	-	-
27	Novo Selo	+	+	+	+
28	Osomej	+	+	-	-
29	Petrovec	+	+	-	-
30	Plasnica	-	+	-	-
31	Rankovce	+	+	-	-
32	Rosoman	+	+	-	-
33	Sopiste	+	+	-	-
34	Staro Nagoricane	-	+	+	+
35	Studenicani	-	+	+	+
36	Tearce	-	+	+	-
37	Centar Zupa	-	+	-	-
38	Caska	+	+	+	+
39	Cesinovo-Oblesevo	-	+	-	-
40	Cucer-Sandevo	-	+	-	-

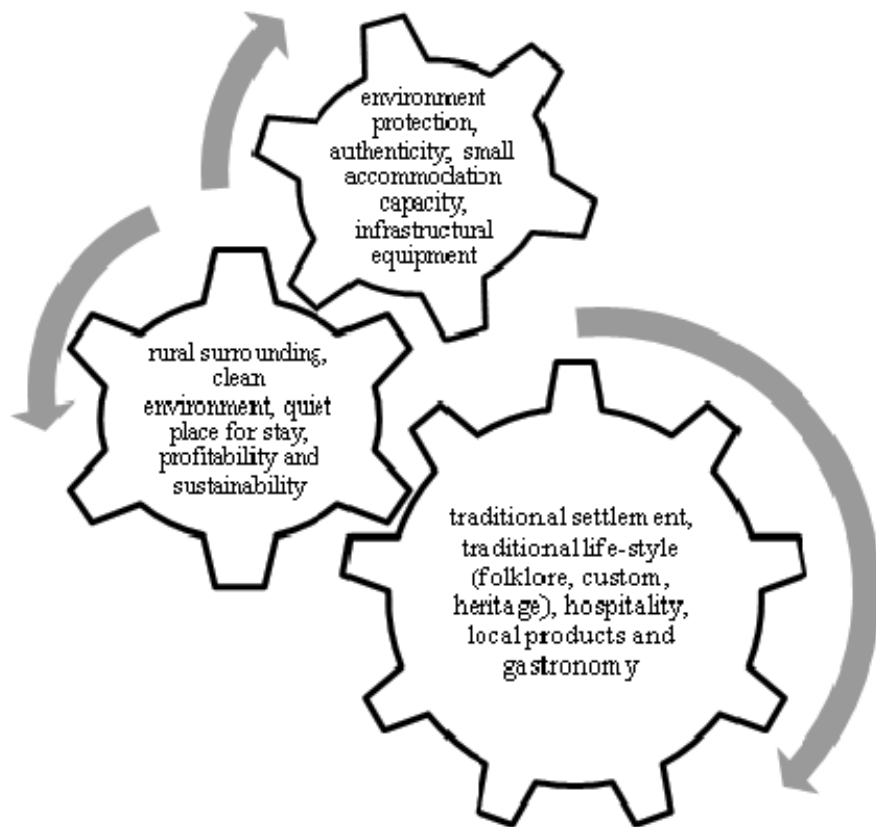
Source: Research of the authors  
 Извор: Истраживање аутора

Table 1 gives an overview on current locations of rural tourism in Macedonia by type of activity. Generally, it presents forty rural municipalities that are foreseen for developing rural tourism by using their facilities for accommodation, catering, tracking paths and sightseeing. It is noticeable that all of them unconditionally have catering resources, which is a main precondition for rural tourism development. Yet, only 20% of rural municipalities noted in Table 1 have opportunity to include sightseeing as an element of rural tourism. Furthermore, the data indicate a fact that just one-third of rural municipalities have pathways, which are essential for introducing rural tourism. Finally, 38% have accommodation capacities, which may serve as a good starting point in setting preliminary conditions for further rural tourism development in Macedonia.

It is pointlessly to have excellent natural surroundings, firm catering resources and steady accommodation capacities if additional institutional support is missing. In this line, the central and local government may raise initiatives for strengthening and enhancing existing status of rural tourism. So, current diversified structure of attractiveness should be accompanied by an adequate policy since poor investments result with poor development.

Consequently, one may argue the necessity of introducing different fiscal and economic measures, like: subsidies, subventions, tax deductions, employment opportunities, revision and control and so forth. In this line, we must note the urgent need for taking measures in: infrastructure improvement, accommodation renovation, improvement of electricity empowering system, reanimation of private sector in rural communities, revival of neglected and forgotten traditional professions, education and training on positive effects of rural tourism, preservation of natural, anthropogenic and cultural values etc. Further in this context, some similar supportive measures and activities may be introduced, like: the need for starting-up tourist agencies with rural tourism supply or demand as their main scope of work; creating specific profile of rural tourist guide, as well as strengthening human resources by introducing rural tourism police, managers of rural tourism zones and other experts in the field of rural catering.

The forth mentioned suggestions for rural tourism development in Macedonia are sublimated and visually presented in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Components of rural tourism development

**Прилог 1.** Компоненте развоја руралног туризма

*Source: Research of the authors*

*Извор: Истраживање аутора*

The fact that Macedonia has unique and well-preserved natural resources, large number of traditional rural households and much supplementary potential, imposes great future challenges towards rural tourism development. Moreover, it may be noted that due to ever-growing interest of international market in rural lifestyle, rural tourism sounds like inevitable alternative for regional development in Macedonia. So, some additional suggestions for future challenges may include development of different types of tourism related to rural areas, like: farm tourism, eco-tourism, gastronomic tourism, camping tourism, ethno tourism, hunting and fishing and wine tourism. It is expected that all this tourism types will be supplemented by:

- Various recreational activities, like: horse riding, cycling, walking, swimming, hunting and fishing, bird watching etc., and

- Various educative rural activities, like: knitting, weaving, cooking traditional dishes, practicing traditional work and art.

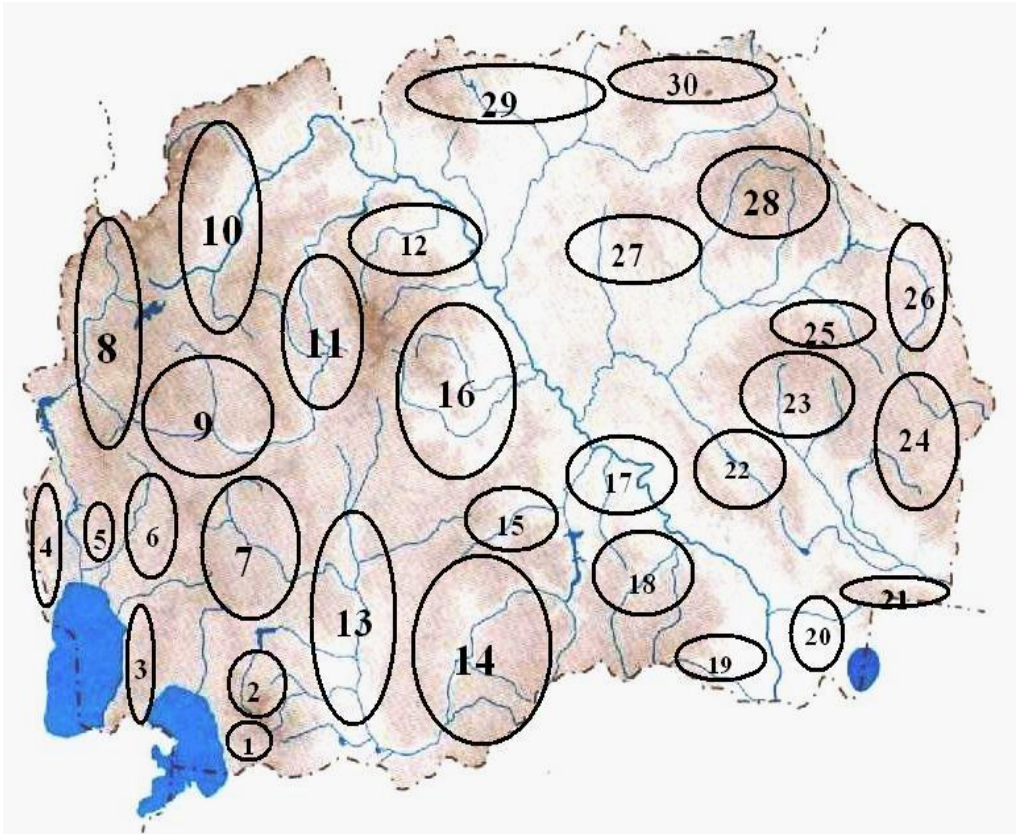
Additionally, many other positive impulses may be noted in the area of: rural accommodation construction; tourism traffic signalization; introducing voluntarism of young generation; initiation of collaboration with world rural tourism operators; launching training centers; establishing partnership with educational institutions; strong motivation of local community; initiating country branding in this area; raising higher budget for rural tourism promotion on central and local level; organizing local events and rural expos; introducing possibilities for establishing different types of associations that may support rural tourism development zones; launching new types of rural tourism products and so forth.

#### **4. Rural tourism regionalization in Macedonia**

There is a relatively large body of literature of local academicians and practitioners dealing the issue of rural tourism regionalization in Macedonia. In this respect, different approaches and attitudes may be observed resulting with territorial division into regions, counties, zones and local areas (Jeremic, 1971; Panov, 1972; Stojmilov, 1993; Marinovski, 1998).

Based upon above mentioned analyses and discussions, one may note and suggest a list of rural tourism zones and settlements. In this respect, Map 1 makes an overview of thirty rural tourism development zones spread over entire territory of Macedonia. It is noticeable that the size of rural tourism zones differs in a quite manner. The bigger the circle, the larger territorial dispersion. So, the rural tourism development zone of Mariovo (number 14 on the Map 1) is the largest one encountering only six rural settlements that practice rural tourism versus more than thirty-three rural settlements that are rich on potentials for developing rural tourism.

Based on field-research, the knowledge on geographic and socio-ethnographic landscape of Macedonia supplemented by institutional framework given in the national strategy for rural development, we developed Table 2. It presents data on rural municipalities, rural tourism zones and rural settlements according to the planning regions in Macedonia. Namely, all eight planning regions in Macedonia (Vardar, East, South-West, South-East, Pelagonija, Polog, North-East and Skopje region) encompass fifty rural municipalities with the Skopje region as the leading one. Generally, they comprise of thirty rural tourism settlements that already practice rural tourism. In this respect, the Polog region is the richest one with eight rural settlements that already develop rural tourism.



**Map 1. Rural tourism development zones in Macedonia**  
**Карта 1. Руралне туристичке развојне зоне у Македонији**

1. Dolna Prespa; 2. Pelister; 3. Galicica; 4. Drimkol; 5. Malesija; 6. Debarca; 7. Demir Hisar-Krusevo; 8. Mavrovo-Rostuse; 9. Kicevija; 10. Polog; 11. Porece; 12. Karsijak-Torbesija-Blatija; 13. Pelagonija; 14. Mariovo; 15. Raec-Trojanci; 16. Azot; 17. Tikves; 18. Vitacevo-Bosava; 19. Kozuf; 20. Bojmija; 21. Belasica; 22. Mantovo-Serta; 23. Jurukluk; 24. Malesevija; 25. Zrnovci-Plackovica; 26. Pijanec; 27. Ovce Pole-Mangovica; 28. Osogovija; 29. Lipkovo-Kumanovo; 30. Kozjacija.

*Source: Authors*

*Извор: Аутору*

With regards to future steps and potentials for enhancing rural settlements' development, Table 2 presents interesting conclusions towards this issue. Namely, one may detect over one-hundred and thirty rural settlements that have legitimate basis for developing rural tourism and for transforming into actual rural tourism settlements. In this line, the South-West region is the leader with more than thirty-seven initial spots.



**Table 2.** Rural municipalities, rural tourism zones and rural settlements according to planning regions in Macedonia

**Табела 2.** Руралне општине, руралне туристичке развојне зоне и рурално насеље у планским регионима Македоније

Planning region	Rural municipalities (urban municipalities with city-Skopje)	Rural settlements			
		Number	Name of rural tourism zone	Settlements...	
				...that practice rural tourism	...with potentials for rural tourism
Vardar	4 (9)	211	Azot, Tikvesija, Vitacevo-Bosava	4	8 >
East	3 (11)	214	Maleseviija, Pijanec, Zrnovci-Plackovica, Osogovija, Ovce Pole-Mangovica	2	12 >
South-West	8 (13)	278	Debarca, Malesija, Jablanica, Galicica, Kicevija, Porece	4	37 >
South-East	5 (10)	183	Bojmija, Kozuf, Belasica, Mantovo-Serta, Jurukluk	3	18 >
Pelagonija	4 (9)	339	Pelister, Dolna Prespa, Mariovo, Raec-Trojanci, Pelagonija, DemirHisar-Krusevo	6	33 >
Polog	7 (9)	177	Mavrovo-Rostuse, Polog	8	15 >
North-East	3 (6)	189	Lipkovo-Kumanovo, Kozjacija	1	10 >
Skopje	16 (17)	126	Karsijak-Torbesija-Blatija	2	5 >
Macedonia	50 (84)	1717	30 zones	30	130 >

Source: Research of the authors  
Извор: Истраживање аутора

Yet, the suggested list is not over and can be easily transformed in a long and countless panel. Even more, in the line of enhancing rural tourism development in Macedonia, further typology and diversification may be introduced, like: rural tourist regions, counties, centers, locations, places, destinations, routes, tourism and so forth.

## 5. SWOT analysis

Based on the research detailed analyses certain strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats may be noted with regards to regional tourism planning and management processes in Macedonia.

In this line, the paper identifies strength i.e. the following assets are in favor: geographic position; climate; natural heritage; history; anthropology; attractive surrounding; health organic food; authentic products; innovations etc.

Furthermore, we may note the following general weaknesses that may appear while developing rural tourism: decrease in rural population; unfavorable age structure; small and old households; unfavorable educational structure; lethargy; lack of awareness; lack of finance; new professions etc.

Additionally, the paper identifies potential challenges Macedonia may face in its attempt to employ rural tourism as part of a comprehensive regional development strategy. In this context, we note the following challenges: investments; popularity; short vocations; new frontiers; employment; new technologies; categorization; local food; tourism clusters; package tours; differentiation in tourism supply and so forth.

Previously mentioned initial weaknesses may be supplemented by certain potential threats, like: conflicts between local community and tourists; marginalization; neglecting traditions; lack of coordination between old and new approach of tourism development; competition to other tourism types; degradation of natural and anthropogenic surrounding; fear of new way of thinking and acting; migration and depopulation etc. In this line, further development in rural tourism depends on: (1) public policies directed towards specific investments which is tailored according to the needs of specific region; (2) efforts to increase tourist accommodation capacity and occupancy rate and (3) significant efforts to increase rural tourism income as a precondition for regions' tourism development.

## **6. Concluding remarks**

The paper in general makes an overview on current patterns of rural tourism development in Macedonia. The research outcomes point to valuable fact that forty rural municipalities in Macedonia have substantial background for developing rural tourism by using their facilities for accommodation, catering, tracking paths and sightseeing. Moreover, all of them unconditionally have catering resources and opportunity for including sightseeing as main preconditions for rural tourism development. Yet, poor infrastructure in terms of pathways is a limiting factor supplemented by lack of institutional support and adequate policy.

So, rural tourism in Macedonia has initial potentials for emerging as major factor for economic development by spreading economic and social impacts at regional and local levels, particularly in areas where rural tourism activities take place. Additionally, the research outcome identifies that rural tourism must have a significant position in regional programs and national development strategy being defined as a key opportunity for economic

development. The analyzed data point to conclusion that rural tourism potentials are still insufficiently used. The outcomes underline that Macedonia, opposite many tourism-oriented countries, notes very modest results in this area. Furthermore, the research allows increased understanding of the way rural tourism operates in Macedonia.

In order to achieve the above noted concluding remarks and future steps, it is necessary to undertake serious measures and activities on central and local level. Moreover, the modest up-to-date results in this area, urges the necessity for identifying effective strategic framework for enhancing rural tourism. Finally, the paper strongly supports fulfillment of research objective thus resulting with introduction of around thirty rural tourism development zones, over twenty rural tourist centers and over two-hundred rural tourism settlements in Macedonia.

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