

# **TITLE: SUSTAINABLE RURAL TOURISM IN THE REVITALIZATION OF VILLAGES IN THE BORDER REGION BETWEEN MACEDONIA AND SERBIA**

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**Abstract:** The rural population is non-resistant to degradation, but the process takes too long in some countries, making them really vulnerable same like the rest of the community. Through many years of transition economic activity was reduced in this region. These circumstances have encouraged the need of finding solutions that contribute to the development of society.

Rural areas make up a large part of the territory of SEE. Half Serbian and Macedonian populations along the border are located in rural areas. No difference how intense industrialization and economic development in the SEE countries is, the significant natural, economic and human potential of rural areas is in the service of extensive production.

Rural development, as one of the regional policy, is a key instrument of restructuring of the agricultural sector and should have a task to steer the strategic use of the potential of attractiveness these tourist villages have, consisted of natural areas and specific regions on many criteria. Thus, these specifics should recognized and used as instruments for alternative economic activity in the villages-tourism. Judging from the morphological diversity of the relief of Serbia and Macedonia, and the former, not so high level, the prosperity of the village was based on agricultural production, now there is an alternative in the village development. At this point, encouragement and support of the rapid development economic activities in rural areas and the development of human resources, as well as economic prosperity and independence of the villages in accordance with the principles of environmental and sustainable development in the field of rural development, it is of utmost importance.

**Key words:** sustainable tourism, evaluation, rural tourism

## **INTRODUCTION**

Overall social conditions of previous decades have led to the impoverishment of rural communities, especially those in marginalized areas. Rural population in the border region between Serbia and Macedonia is particularly vulnerable, which causes extreme poverty increase. Adverse trends in their development have resulted in a competitive disadvantage rural regions of SEE (South East Europe) have, and their ability to successfully integrate into the EU and civilized world in general. A positive answer depends largely on the regional rural development policies in each country, and also of their cross-border cooperation and mutual assistance in the process of entry into the EU.

Marginalization actually stems from the establishment of borders more than any other reason. Problems arising from the division of the region, although from time to time to treatment in the context of national territorial policies and programs for the development of underdeveloped regions (mountainous and border) and the measures that will support local initiatives- local governments, NGOs, the business sector, the question was never integrally asked, on a regional basis within the EU context and the meaning of this.

Rural economy in the region can have a significant benefit if a strong financial support is provided, which will help to reduce the aspirations of the national policy in favor of rural areas. Separated cultures and national heritage of the areas around the Serbian-Macedonian border can be very helpful in this process like never before in this region.

## **OBJECTIVE**

The aim of this paper is how and in what way to stimulate and activate the villagers bordering areas of Northeastern Macedonia and south-east Serbia, in order to revive the country for sustainable rural tourism. It is emphasized that sustainable tourism can greatly improve the lives of people who live in those areas. When it comes to rural households, often ignored is the fact that many of them in addition to dealing with agriculture and other complementary activities, such as forestry, handicraft processing, services and even tourism.

This is especially important for small farms, which are not able to achieve a high enough income with just dealing with agricultural activity, and their education should include these additional activities. With traditional manufacturing and food preparation, equal and sustainable tourism activity should be included as a supplementary activity and in the restoration of the village and the overall development of rural areas. Different forms of tourism have a very significant place. When agriculture and tourism are connected, the number of young people not leaving the rural areas would be growing, and the ones already there would rearrange their homes for accommodating tourists. Tourism can be considered as the most appropriate activity that will contribute to the increase of various economic activities in these areas.

This unique multi-ethnic region, but with a common cultural heritage, distinctive dialects and local mentality that is unique among all the people of neighboring countries. The EU integration prospects for this region have good potential for the development of sustainable rural communities.

However, a more urgent intervention to initiate processes in overcoming the major social and economic problems of the region, and bringing the level of modern economic development in cooperation with the relevant requirements of the EU is necessary. Since this area like many others across the troubled region of Southeast Europe inherited ethnic tensions and conflicts, so this action could have a role in preventing conflicts of character. Macedonia and Serbia are in different stages of accession and entry into the EU, and today there is a great mutual interest in international and cross border sustainable development in the region.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

During the research, method used is PLA (participatory learning and action). It is a complex method composed of more resources related to the situational analysis and planning, and it was made possible to acquire an authentic picture of the situation seen by the eyes of residents in rural communities. By applying this method they were allowed to identify their problems and options for improving their situation, together with the identification of potential, scope and type of assistance required. This method assumes that the members of the community and the PLA facilitators need to be active participants in the development process, and we should point out that the members of the community are the key. Their standards of value and ideas to improve their own situation, prejudices, hopes, fears, needs and resources, are the basic starting point for entry into the development process. They bear the consequences of their improving actions, be they positive or negative, so it is their responsibility.

PLA method allows the systematic situation analysis of the village. Its use is also expected to bring the remaining rural people an idea of his own commitment to the implementation of rural development through the mobilization of their own resources. This method provides an unbiased and transparent processing problems and needs of the village, and an overview of natural resources and potential for development of traditional rural activities whose reactivation is justified in view of sustainable rural development. Recorded are testimonies of former normal way of living, traditional crafts and traditional land use and livestock etc. providing the basis for an analysis of their options in light of global trends in the open market. The aim of the PLA method, however, is not situational analysis per se, but to initiate a sustainable development process in the villages.

## **SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL TOURISM IN THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA AND MACEDONIA**

Tourism development is based on the fundamental principles and knowledge that comes from the paradigm of sustainable development, which involves mutual coordination environment and economic development in order to preserve the natural resources of the Earth for future generations. Sustainable development is aimed at creating a better world in which there is alignment of the three spheres of influence and action: economic, social and environmental issues. The concept of sustainable development is the result of knowledge and perception of the danger of the policy of economic development for the individual and for the planet Earth, which is serious, the need to download the emergency measures to regenerate the Earth. This has created the paradigm of sustainable development contained in Agenda 21, which provides recommendations for sustainable resource management in the twenty-first century (water, forest, land).

Under the responsible and sustainable development of tourism is considered a development that meets the needs of present tourists, tourist destinations and all stakeholders in the tourism industry, while preserving and increasing the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, and improve the quality of life of people (tourists and locals). Sustainable development is the subject of many government documents and strategies in the field of environmental protection, tourism development, rural development, agriculture, water management, natural and cultural resources, etc...

Tourism with its activities, in countries with rapid economic growth, is taking the leading role in the economic structure, achieving a significant share of global gross, domestic product and total employment. Tourism has an important responsibility in relation to the economic, social, cultural and natural environment. In order to prevent the negative impacts

of economic activities and the establishment of rules for responsible behavior of all subjects in the field of tourism, the World Tourism Organization and other international institutions have recognized the universal rules for all participants in the development of tourism and all states. The basis of these rules is in the guidelines concerning the protection of the environment identified in Agenda 21, signed and adopted by 182 governments at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, and the 1992nd Summit in Rio de Janeiro.

Sustainable tourism development is informative, where passengers will not only gain knowledge about the destination, but also learn how to help maintain its characteristics while at the same time deepen their travel experience. Hosts to understand that what they know and what seems ordinary for them can be interesting and valuable to outsiders (Hawkins, 2006). Sustainable Tourism supporting the integrity of the place where travelers exploring the destination looking for a portfolio that emphasizes the local character in terms of architecture, cuisine, heritage, aesthetic and environmental values. In turn, revenues from tourism and raise local experience can benefit the local population - travel companies are struggling to hire and train local people, buy local products and use local services. Sustainable tourism conserves resources, respects local culture and tradition, not to misuse the product, seeks quality over quantity, means of travel and exceptional customer satisfaction - happy, delighted tourists carry home new knowledge and suggest friends to experience the same thing as ensuring the continuity of operations of the destination (Hawkins, 2006).

When we talk about the rural areas of Macedonia and Serbia, tourist activities are certainly one of the most important ways to achieve its sustainable development. However, creating an attractive rural destinations requires far more than natural resources which they possess - requires binding of natural and cultural heritage with the modern tourist interests. In order to create an unforgettable experience for visitors, while preserving the uniqueness of the area, it is necessary that we implement that uniqueness in the tourist offer through quality and taste of the food served, and entertainment to.

Number of areas in Serbia and Macedonia are developing or plan to develop tourism, like everywhere else in the world tourism increases and it's necessary to find new and alternative tourism products. Regions that simply copy the existing attractions will not offer anything new to the tourists, so he will go where the tradition is longer and more known. So, it's not enough to have a unique attraction. When they arrive, visitors must be able to offer a choice of classic tourist activities - swimming, cycling, hiking in nature, hunting, fishing, local products, but they need to offer something new – maybe to learn something about the product, with a specificity of its origin (even if it's been invented) or how to make them yourself. That is the only thing that could entice them to stay longer at the destination, or to participate in more activities. Maybe learn to ride, or to play folk dances or to make cheese. In the development of these choices, we must make sure that they are compatible with the main attractions, cultural and natural resources of the community, that is, if it takes place in winter, when skiing is the main reason for coming, these activities must take place in the late afternoon or evening, when tourists are bored.

In order for the village to obtain a tourist function, agricultural production must be preserved as a core business, because that is the only way a tourist can feel the rural way of life, and it being the main thing a tourist is interested in. You need to preserve the rural way of life, through the cultivation of old customs, and culture of food, clothing and housing, old crafts etc... in order for the tourist to join directly, through the family of his host in the entire village life. In this way the tourist becomes a farmer and his visit gets a full meaning, because the village and rural households cannot be allowed to represent only the tourist facade.

This means that responsible and sustainable tourism development means development that meets the needs of present tourists and all stakeholders in the tourism industry, with

simultaneous preservation and increasing the potential for the use of tourism resources in the future, without compromising and reducing the possibility of future generations to meet their own needs. That is, it involves improving the quality of life within the abilities of ecosystems that surround us.

Benefit from the development of these specific economic activities are the basis for further development of rural areas, which will allow the creation of new postulates in ensuring prosperity of the population and prolonging his stay in his homeland. The economic benefits of rural development will allow the return of the population, which in the past few decades, migrated in search of better living conditions and left his native hearth.

Progressive economic benefits will increase interest in other residents to turn into a tourist family business, enabling them to have better living standards and opportunities to restore the confidence of the local population about the real values and has selflessly given by their motherland.

**Table 1 Categorization elements "tourist enjoyment"**

<b>Elements</b>	<b>Adventures</b>
Aesthetic perception	Wildlife, natural environment
Runing away (release)	Stress relief and urban alianation
Religiosity	Finding of holy places and the release in the wild and natural environment
Encouragement	Satisfaction in overcoming the dangers of the natural environment
Historical/ romance	Possibility of reviving the history of human development and comunity
Socializing	Unlike previous- the desire to share the experience with others
Research/ teaching	Oportunities to study plants, animals and nature
Admiration	Enthusiasm mere existence of protected nature

Source: Hall (1991)

Sustainable tourism includes activities that have little negative impact on the environment. Unfortunately the researched region of Macedonia and Serbia, it is evident that lack of adequate infrastructure to support the development of sustainable tourism. It also lacks adequate planning and effective waste management in tourist areas, so that the negative impact of tourism activities on the environment is as low as possible. Special emphasis should be put on "the development of environmentally friendly" technologies. For tourism development crucial is the involvement of all stakeholders, from local government, local businesses, non-governmental organizations, and above all - of the local population.

Local government is the generator of movements in this department. It creates a strategy for tourism development, promoting the region as a tourist destination, investing in local infrastructure, inform and train the locals on how to provide quality service, sets basic standards of work and is concerned about protecting the environment from degradation.

Forms of sustainable tourism that are applicable in the region and relate to all villages are: Rural tourism, agricultural tourism, cultural tourism, eco-tourism, Mountain, Fishing, Hiking, monastery, health tourism and the like.

Rural tourism involves visiting natural heritage of rural areas, scenic drives, enjoying the rural landscape and rural residence on the farm, riding horses, etc... This region has great potential for tourism development, and a number of activities, such as:

**Table 2 Activities for development of rural tourism in the regions investigated**

<b>Tours</b>	Walking, hiking, climbing, riding horses and donkeys, goided caravan, eco-tours, bike tours, climbing etc...
<b>Water activities</b>	Swiming, fishing, canoening/kayaking etc...
<b>Air activities</b>	Saliling, paragliding, baloon flight, bird watching
<b>Sport activities</b>	Tennis, skiing, jumping, climbing, caving
<b>Workflow discovery and attractions</b>	Local production (wine, brandy, handicrafts, weaving, knitting etc...) souvenirs, traditional handicrafting
<b>Cultural activities</b>	Archeology, handicraft courses, dance groups, food and drink
<b>Health activities</b>	Fitness training, ethno-fitness, health benefits

## RESEARCHED REGION

A Unique region that is multi-ethnic, but with a common cultural heritage, typified by local dialects and mentality, divided among the people in the neighboring countries. Accessible natural and cultural heritage is often divided within the limits that seem more artificial and harmful than elsewhere in the Balkans. From the perspective of EU integration, the region has good potential for the development of sustainable communities. After a process of transition and the collapse of former Yugoslavia, the region has remained integrated and heterogeneous terminated with political connections, as well as severed economic and social ties. Joint efforts related to the stabilization of the region, with the goal of regional economic cooperation and full European integration, instead of increasing fragmentation.

The studied region covers part of the territory of Serbia and Macedonia. These are border regions belonging southeastern Serbia (Dimitrovgrad, Targovishte, Bosilegrad and Black Grass) and northeastern Macedonia (Kumanovo, Staro Nagoričane, Rankovce and Kriva Palanka). Half the population of this region lives in rural areas. Rural development is an important point for socio-economic development of the two countries. Rural development for decades was limited because of the poorly defined agricultural policy and its lack of a positive attitude towards the needs of rural development.



**Figure 1 Map of researched region**

## SUSTAINABLE RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE RESEARCHED REGION OF MACEDONIA-SERBIA

Rural tourism is often considered a form of tourism that its biggest characteristic is sustainability, and that attracts a small number of visitors, does not need a large infrastructure development, tourists are usually truly interested in the local culture and tradition. One of the main attractions of rural tourism is the interaction with the local population, so that the hosts and guests are able to share ideas and knowledge.

People who live in rural areas and who themselves have never been tourists find it difficult to understand why anyone outside the community would want to come and experience the village life. Everyday activities, sights, smells and tastes are not something that the locals considered interesting. Tourists, however, are seeking experiences that are different from their usual routine or daily life. What was unusual for tourists can be very usual for the host community.

Community members in the investigated region, identify the different people whose skills are associated with rural life. This way I can be identified with a bright image in a given area, historic buildings and legendary places, large trees or unusual flora, and may even make maps of old business or shopping centers.

An example from rural Honduras (institute for Integrated Rural Tourism), where people get up before dawn and take corn to be grinded in a nearby market, in order to be able to prepare fresh tortillas for breakfast, can be very interesting for tourists, as much as getting up early in the morning on Old mountain- Serbia, in order to milk the cattle and take the milk to be sold- in Mandra, where they start the production of cheese in traditional methodology. Or, on certain days, bread is made out in large furnaces in the form of hives – “vurnjama”, heated with wood gathered from nearby woods. Other members of the community (though but seldom) are fleece on the river and wash it, then carry “vunovlačaru”(a person that works with fleece), spin and weave in rugs or make wooden kitchen utensils, or earthenware. These examples of everyday life in the country can be directly inserted into travel experience through targeted action, and interpretation (Suzana Djordjevic-Milosevic, 2007).

The visitor could be involved in the whole process of making bread, from collecting firewood to supplying fresh baked bread to rural families. The family who owns and operates the furnace can easily be integrated into a mix of tourism products which expands the community involvement in the tourism industry in addition to providing expanded opportunities for involving consumers in the ways of life of the rural community (Institute for Integrated Rural Tourism).

The inclusion of daily activities of the community members in the visitor experience through hands-on activities, tourists begin to appreciate the way of life of the community. Forms of rural life become a tourist attraction.

Integrating the daily life of the rural population helps to keep the tourists interested to experience something, see and learn. Tourists should remember these activities because they are authentic and tested. They would be willing to pay for an experience that is authentic and typical of ordinary life in local communities.

Tourists want to take home a souvenir



**Figure 2** Pruning grapes of (top left), picking watermelons (top right), collecting seeds (bottom left), milking goats (bottom right)

and memory of that experience. Shops for tourists to purchase authentic products that will tell the story of the local community. It could be pottery and traditional dairy products, wool products, derived from wild plants and etc..., Including raw meat, vegetables and fruits, herbs and forest products, but this kind of offers are very weak and disorganized. Stores should supply the members of the household, or local artisans could sell their products directly from their homes. But for locals is still difficult to understand what from their traditions can be attractive tourists, so unless a special request, none of these products offer, but they prefer, if they ever intended for the market through municipal green market or buyers mostly buy rare fungus, blueberries and herbs. It would be good if the person who owns accommodations, invited local artists to demonstrate and teach their craft visitors. But are these activities in this area still linked to the modest efforts of local non-governmental organizations and the project, rather than the continuous type.



Figure 3. Tourist souvenirs

## STORYTELLING THROUGH EXPERIENCE

The territory of Serbia and Macedonia is suitable for many types of tourism, especially village / rural tourism. Increasingly, the host begins to do this job. Those who go to these regions will remain in awe of the beauty of nature, hospitality of the host and historical places that can be visited while staying there.

A tourist, a traveler, a passerby in rural areas are always warmly received and applauded. There are many reasons why you should go to a village in Serbia and Macedonia. Nature in most villages is still intact, and the residents of many villages still live traditionally in harmony with nature. A variety of woods, pastures and meadows with an abundance of medicinal plants, wild strawberries, blueberries, raspberries, blackberries and mushrooms are just a part of what is related to the two villages of the state. Rural landscapes are beautiful and popular throughout the year, regardless of the season. Many local people have the skills and knowledge of the past that are related to nature and its healing powers, bound by traditions, ancestors and preserve their musical heritage - songs, games and costumes. Ethnic diversity is a very interesting aspect.

The beauty of the village and the rural environment is often seen through familial and kinship ties. Reconstruction of emotional connection and an environment that supports a good starting point for the development of rural tourism, especially when they target domestic tourists from urban areas, whether he has or does not have a personal connection with the village today, or in his memory.



Figure 4 Rural environment -  
Sleeping in the hay

Caring for the friendship between the inhabitants of towns and villages in the village is a realistic option, because of the traditional hospitality towards travelers, which is able to time and time again bring tourists to the village. However, this environment can only be made in small villages with a combined household where guests can experience the awakening and the bleating of lambs,

roosters crowing and to milk the cow and pick fruit, and to sleep on the hay. It is the atmosphere of the village, which does not deal with modern, but traditional agriculture. Only in such a household, tourists can enjoy the whole meal in a local environment that is poured from his early childhood in the village of memory as a synonym (Suzana Djordjevic-Milosevic).

## EXAMPLES OF SUCCESSFUL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN THE BORDER REGION IN MACEDONIA

One of the most beautiful monasteries in Macedonia and the region, the Monastery of St. Joachim Osogovskog which is located three kilometers from Palanka curves, at the foot of mountains Osogovskih. The monastery was founded in the eleventh century in honor of St. Joachim, a hermit and miracle worker who has lived in the area and whose relics are in the monastery. In addition to the monastery church, there is a small church dedicated to the Holy Virgin.

Milk transportation within the monastery complex of St. Joakim Osogovski a marvelous creations of the human mind, which has existed since the Middle Ages. A special feature gives a way of building and setting up the steep terrain, as well as solutions for the transport of milk to the Monastery. The construction was more difficult because of the underground installation of clay pipes with a length of over 3 km.

Mlekovod (milk transportations) was set for the monastery's economy, which in the past was very advanced and there was a need for such an undertaking.

This monastery had their flocks of sheep and goats, and was known for its dairy products. Today the monastery is the monastery's seal, a rectangle with a prominent letter "M" that dominates the center of the mark. Sheep were expelled over the summer to graze in Osogovo, and there wooden "Lassie" were made "sweep" in which the sheep were overnight. When milked, usually with the help of horses transported to the monastery, where monks were making cheese. Since the monastery was located a few kilometers from where the cattle was milked, much time was spent on transportation of the milk and the heat the summer the milk was often spoiled. Difficulties in transferring the milk by hand, horse or otherwise forced the people from the Monastery to invent and build mlekovod. Using clay pipes, a merger with another built mlekovod, whose remains can still be found in the mountains

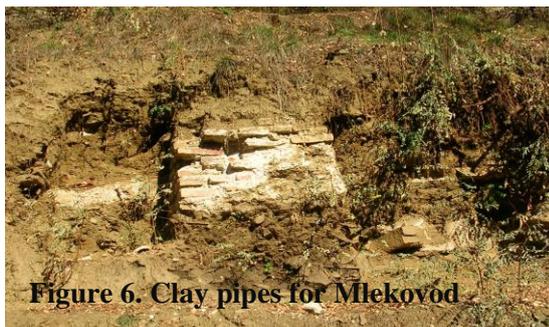


Figure 6. Clay pipes for Mlekovod



Figure 5 Monastery complex Joakim Osogovski

Osogovska. At certain distances posed control shafts that are in addition to the control group and dirt. Of particular interest is the way of communication between the monks who were sending the milk from the area where animals are kept and those who waited for the milk, near the monastery complex. Communication was achieved by making use of th sunlight and shadow and by prior arrangement at a particular time when the shaddows overlapped, milk would

start running through the clay pipes. „Mlekovod“ whose remains were recently found represents a significant part of the monastery complex and has potential in the future to become a tourist attraction. Its total renovation would boost interest and visits of tourists who would be familiar with the traditional way of transferring milk. Mlekovods attractiveness comes from the fact that many people in the region are not yet familiar with his discovery.

The reason of the existence of the mlekovod is associated with the use of milk in the wider region and not only in Kriva Palanka. For „mlekovod“ can be said to be part of the Milky Way, which links the three border region between Macedonia, Serbia and Bulgaria.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The tourism sector in the region is characterized by a remarkable ability to develop a large number and various types of tourism activities, attractive both for domestic and for foreign tourist. However, to achieve a satisfactory level of quality and standards, large investments in modernization and capital investment in infrastructure are required.

In addition, it is necessary to deepen the organizational and administrative skills as a prerequisite for the dynamic operation of the tourism sector of the economy. In this way, can ensured the recovery and development of the entire economy of Macedonia and Serbia. They have to solve the problems of infrastructure, to implement environmental protection and to implement specific solutions for each investment project in tourism, making the economic activity will have an adequate profiling in the economic development of local communities and national economies. The valuation significance of tourism for the whole economy and well-being of the population need to change the attitude of previous employment policy, which has not provided sufficient funds for the development of this increasingly important economic activity.

Offer a competitive tourism product in the world market, can be achieved through inter-agency cooperation and collaboration between local and central government, through joint appearances at fairs, exchange of scientific technology and human resources, regulating the movement of tourists, better communication between all stakeholders of tourism etc... Participation in trade fairs is one of the key elements of promoting analyzed rural areas, and with it the Republic of Macedonia and the Republic of Serbia as a tourist destination, attracting more and more tourists from other countries and we need aggressive and affirmative presence at important fairs festivals in the world. For the realization of the goals of sustainable tourism development in these rural areas modernisation of solid infrastructure is necessary. This requires capital investments, primarily in the development of road infrastructure. The need exists in the field of human resources and organization deepened and increased knowledge of the local population are key prerequisites for the improvement of all aspects of starting and running a business in the tourism industry. On that basis, allow for changes not only in tourism but also in improving the economic and social situation of the village, by the standards, increased income, employment and creation of other complementary activities associated with tourism activities.

We need to implement environmental protection and application specific solutions in every rural village as a special destination, to be recognized in the tourism market, both domestic and foreign, in order to create the preconditions for successful tourism development, is set to the criteria of efficiency and profitability. All this will contribute to the economic development of the municipality and the total national economy. It is well known that tourism is characterized with miltyplicativity, not only in terms of contribution to the development of complementary activities, but also has a significant impact on the area that

extends from the local community to other tourist sites and beyond, to the tourist areas, which are characterized by high tourism potential.

Therefore, it is necessary for each country in its development strategy to create opportunities for the development of tourism on a sustainable basis which respects the cultural identity of the area, its ecological preservation and development that will be based on the needs and interests of the local population. Directing the future investments should be based on the principles of sustainable development and respect for the cultural values of the area.

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