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RURAL TOURISM IN THE SPACE OF NP “PELISTER” CASE STUDY: “EIGHT PELISTER VILLAGES”

Nikola V. Dimitrov¹; Biljana Petrevska²; Aleksandra Terzić³

Abstract

This paper explores the factors for the development of several alternative forms of tourism in the rural environment of eight Bitola suburban villages (Capari, Dihovo, Kazani, Nishopole, Magarevo, Rotino and Trnovo are located less than one kilometer away of NP “Pelister”, and the village of Malovista is in the area of Pelister National Park).

Segmented and valorized are specific activities inherent in several alternative forms of tourism in the listed rural areas.

Through a number of parameters, we appreciate the space for tourism activities from which you can identify the direct market segments for many types of tourism (cultural, rural, religious, mountain, etc.).

The validity of these segments is confirmed by field research (research and interview) and qualitative - quantitative analysis. Each segment showed different characteristics on how to streamline marketing activities in the direction of development of rural tourism in the mentioned rural settlements belonging to the municipality of Bitola.

Key Words: *tourism, valorization, segmentation, rural area, municipality Bitola, NP “Pelister”, Republic of North Macedonia*

JEL classification: *Z3, Z32*

Introduction

Rural tourism in the Republic of North Macedonia⁴ started in 2003 with several initial activities in the village of Brajcino, and somewhat later in the villages Ljubojno, Dihovo, Lesnovo, Vevcani etc. (Metodijeski & Dimitrov, 2018). Today, there are about 80 villages, spread in different planning regions that practice active rural tourism, i.e. providing accommodation, food, recreational walks, visits to cultural and historical monuments, and other activities.

The early beginnings of rural tourism in the National Park (NP) “Pelister” are noted in the village of Dihovo, around 2003. Several years later there were facilities for accommodation of tourists that offered various activities in rural areas in the villages of Trnovo, Magarevo and Nizopole. However, there are still no accommodation facilities for tourists in the rural areas of Malovista, Rotino, Capari and Kazani.

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⁴The Republic of Macedonia, as of 2019 with the Prespa Agreement between the Republic of Macedonia and the Republic of Greece has a new constitutional name as the Republic of North Macedonia.

All villages except Malovista, comprising a group of seven villages (Dihovo, Kazani, Magarevo, Nizopole, Rotino, Trnovi and Capari) are less than 1 kilometer from NP “Pelister”.¹ The total area of all eight villages is 212.7 km², of which 115 km² or 54% is in the national park area.² In the total area of the NP “Pelister” which is 171.7 km², the selected eight villages participate with 66.8%. All settlements have own specifics and different conditions for practicing rural tourism. The current tourism supply of NP “Pelister” consists of hiking, walking in nature, skiing, biking, jeep safari, mountaineering near the area of the World War I, horse riding, tasting local gastronomic specialties, and more.

Methodology and materials

The research is based on quantitative and qualitative methods. It applies data from secondary sources, as the State Statistical Office and the Spatial Plan of the NP “Pelister” for the period 2016-2030. In addition, the literature review is made along with calculations from the electronic system of the state cadastre. Furthermore, the main data are gathered by a field research conducted during the period September 2018 - September 2019. The sample consisted of eight Bitola suburban villages (Capari, Dihovo, Kazani, Nizopole, Magarevo, Rotino and Trnovo, all being located less than one kilometer from the NP “Pelister”, and the village of Malovista which is located within the area of the NP “Pelister”).

Results and discussion

The main findings upon the research results are classified in three groups:

- (i) General geographical features;
- (ii) General socio-economic characteristics; and
- (iii) General characteristics of tourism activities.

General geographical features

The area of NP “Pelister” is characterized by extremely valuable natural resources, landscape and ambient values, which make the park attractive for visiting and overnings for all tourists. The area is of international importance and there is a need for a special approach to increase its competitiveness on both domestic and international market. The general geographical characteristics of the sampled villages are summarized within Table 1.

Table 1: *General geographical characteristics of the villages*

No	Settlement	Altitude in metres	Distance form Bitola (km)	Area in km ²	Population					Natural motives	Antropogenic motives	Communication motives	Receptive
					Maximum	1905	1953	2002	2019 (assessment)				
1	Dihovo	840	5	12.1	686	560	686	310	250	+	+	+	+
2	Kazani	880	16	7.7	536	536	178	75	60	+	+	+	+
3	Magarevo	1,060	7	16.1	2,400*	2,160	158	87	60	+	+	+	+

¹Total length of the border of NP “Pelister” is 86.99 km. The distance from the most eastern point to the most western point is 20.37 km and from the most northern point to the most southern point is 23.48 km. The lowest elevation of the park is 927 masl and the highest 2,601 m. Within these limits the area of NP “Pelister” is 17,170 ha, or 171.7 km² (Official Gazette of RM no. 150/07, Law on Proclaiming Part of Pelister Mountain as National Park).

²Calculations based on the gis.katastar.gov.mk/arec

4	Malovichta	1,172	20	29.3	2,300*	2,160	446	98	80	+	+	+	+
5	Nizopole	1,064	8	46.8	2,030*	940	619	186	150	+	+	+	+
6	Rotino	1,020	12	10.3	598	400	598	113	80	+	+	+	+
7	Trnovo	960	6	43.4	2,450*	1,920	306	278	230	+	+	+	+
8	Capari	1,010	15	25.4	1,904	1,904	1,809	493	380	+	+	+	+
	Total and average	8,006 1,000	89 11.1	212.7 26.6	12,904 1,613	10,58 0	4,800 600	1,640 205	1,290 161	+	+	+	+

*Data from 1900

Source: *Кънчов, В. (1900); Brancoff, D. M. (1905). SZS. (1959); SSO. (2004 a, b); Authors' field research.*

The natural values of the park are mostly to be found in the mountainous area of the eight villages in terms of geomorphological features, such as anticlines and synclines, and a multitude of almost forty mountain peaks above 2,000 m. whereas the highest is the peak "Pelister" (2,601m). There are variety of stone rivers, boulders, stone blocks, marine materials, and much more. The mountainous climate is very suitable for tourism development. Hydrographic elements, numerous springs, watercourses, waterfalls, valleys and glacial lakes (Great Lake 2,218 m. and Malo Lake 2,180 m.) are rare natural phenomena. Biological diversity is also an important factor for tourism development, especially as endemic species of flora, some of international importance, are found on the territory of the park. The wildlife is also diverse with features of specific fauna.

As per the anthropogenic values of the Park, cultural and historical values such as archaeological sites, religious sites and buildings, memorial parks and memorial landmarks and characteristic vernacular architecture, are distinguished as motives and factors for tourism development. The most significant are the religious sites and buildings such as the churches in the villages of Trnovo, Magarevo, Rotino, Capari and Malovista. Among the memorials, there are several memorial plaques and monuments most often dedicated to fallen fighters in the national liberation war. With regards to the rural settlements as characteristic ethno regions that represent potential locations for rural tourism development, all sampled eight villages are characterized with a distinctive ambient. In addition, the manifestation values are characteristic for the villages of Malovista, Nizopole, Trnovo and Capari, where cultural events are held.

Communication motives are in a relatively good condition. Namely, asphalt roads lead to all sampled villages. All rural settlements have local water supply, while wastewater is discharged into septic tanks. Hence, the energy and electronic communication links meet the needs of local residents.

The great motivational heterogeneity of the space of the eight villages gives opportunity for development of many types of tourism. Some of them have a dominant role as rural, winter sports, mountain - recreational, picnics, while others such as congress or health, are less represented. Out of the existing tourist sites, the most visited are: "Golema Livada" picnic areas above the village Magarevo, "Begova Cesma", "Mala Livada", "7 Kladenci - Infocentar", "Palisnopic", "Siroka" picnic area and "Kaj pecurkata" picnic area, ski centers "Kopanki" and "Nizopole", etc. Furthermore, the monasteries and lodgings of St. Petka (above the village of Capari), St. Anna (above the village Malovista), St. Bogorodica (in the village of Trnovo), and other rural and weekend settlements possess tourist sites with

mountain cycling trails (total length 127.5 km.) and mountain recreational trails (total length 151.6 km.).

Within the NP “Pelister” as well as the sampled eight rural settlements, there are small number of accommodation facilities such as hotels, villas, apartments and mountain cottages. Generally, they do not meet the needs of modern tourists who are increasingly seeking alternative forms of accommodation such as holiday homes and renovated rural houses. In this regard, potential buildings in NP “Pelister” as an alternative accommodation might be the forest houses, some village houses, old school village buildings or buildings of culture houses, cooperatives and similar.

Through the NP “Pelister” flow over ten larger watercourses, many springs most of which are impounded and arranged in fountains whose waters are of exceptionally high quality. Hence, further development in water management should take place in order to preserve them.

Tourist sites, like: Hotel Molika, Children's Resort, Kopanki Mountain Home and Big Lake Mountain Home, are supplied by local sources. There is no agricultural production and no irrigation activities. All this should be taken into account in the process of planning and conceptualizing rural tourism development, based on natural and created material values. At the same time, the planning process should respect the spatial, economic and social opportunities as well as the criteria for nature protection in general, with a special focus on rural development. Many recommendations should be placed within the Spatial Plan of the NP “Pelister” for its development until 2030.

General socio - economic characteristics

According to the 2002 Census (State Statistical Office, 2004) in the village Malovista and the seven settlements on the border of the NP “Pelister” (Dihovo, Kazani, Nizopole, Rotino, Capari, Magarevo and Trnovo) live 1,640 inhabitants, in 536 households and 1,262 dwellings.

Comparison of the data for the analyzed period between the census (1953-2002) shows a decrease of the total population by 3,160 inhabitants, i.e. 65.8%. The downward trend of the total population is present in all settlements, noting the most drastic data for the villages of Rotino (81%), Malovista (78%), Capari (73%) and Nizepole (70%) (SSO, 2004) (Table 1).

Furthermore, gender structure is important in many aspects. The quantitative relations between two sexes and reproductive ability influence the socio-economic development of the space, i.e. they provide the opportunity to offer labor in various sectors. This stands for tourism as an activity in which the male and female population can be equally actively involved.

The age structure is also very important for the reproductive ability of the population as a prerequisite for socio-economic development. For several decades, this structure has shown a continuous aging that directly affects the working ability of the population. This is a trend that negatively affects the development of settlements in general. Thus, according to the 2002 census data on age structure by five-year age groups, it is noted that the largest population is in the age group of 65-69 years with 172 inhabitants, followed by the 60-64 age group with 123 inhabitants, 35-39 years with 121 inhabitants, 40-44 years with 120 inhabitants, 70-74 years with 112 inhabitants, and the smallest age structure 0-4 years participates with only 67 inhabitants (SSO, 2004).

According to the basic age contingents, the high share of the mature population (20-59 years) is characteristic with 46% in relation to the total and the old population (60+> years) with 33.4%. On the other hand, the young population (0-19 years) participates with 20.4% according to data from the 2002 Census of Population, Households and Housing. Within the age groups, the largest share is in the age group of 65-69 years with 10.48% or 172 persons. The absolute number of the working population is 980 and it accounts for 59.7% of the total population in this area (SSO, 2004).

Tourism, services and activities related to land use (like: livestock breeding, forestry, orcharding, fruit growing, beekeeping, etc.) dominate the economy in the sampled villages and within the Park boundaries. Namely, 738 persons (45.0%) out of the total number of population (1,640 inhabitants) are economically active, while 665 persons are economically inactive (40.5%). The rest of 237 persons (14.5%) are people with personal income.

From the national structure data (Table 2) it can be concluded that the total population living in the eight settlements within the NP “Pelister” borders is 1,640 inhabitants. The majority of 1,235 (75.3%) are Macedonians, 264 (16.10%) are Vlachs, 126 (7.7%) are Albanians, 6 (0.36%) are Turks, 4 (0.24%) are Serbs and 5 (0.3%) are residents of other nationalities (SSO, 2004).

Table 2: *Population by nationality according to the 1953 and 2002 censuses*

Settlement	Census	Population census by Nationality in 1953 and 2002								
		Total	Mac.	Alb.	Tour.	Roma	Vlach	Serb	Bosch.	Others
Dihovo	1953	686	681	0	0	0	2	2	/	1
	2002	310	305	0	0	0	0	3	0	2
Kazani	1953	178	130	0	45	0	0	1	/	2
	2002	75	59	13	2	0	0	0	0	1
Magarevo	1953	158	81	1	0	0	76	0	/	0
	2002	87	62	0	0	0	24	0	0	1
Malovista	1953	446	143	0	0	0	300	2	/	1
	2002	98	10	1	0	0	87	0	0	0
Nizopole	1953	619	155	107	20	0	289	0	/	48
	2002	186	47	30	4	0	105	0	0	0
Rotino	1953	598	597	0	0	0	1	0	/	0
	2002	113	113	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Trnovo	1953	306	125	41	39	0	101	0	/	0
	2002	278	146	82	0	0	48	1	0	1
Capari	1953	1,809	1,808	0	0	0	1	0	/	0
	2002	493	493	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	1953	4,800	3,720	149	104	0	770	5	/	52
	%	100	77.5	3.1	2.2	0	16.0	0.1	/	1.1
	2002	1,640	1,235	126	6	0	264	4	0	5
	%	100	75.3	7.7	0.4	0	16.1	0.2	0	0.3
Difference	%	100	-2.2	+4.6	-1.8	0	+0.1	-0.1	0	-0.8
Reduce	1953/ 2002	- 3,160	-2,485	-23	-98	0	-506	-1	0	-47

Source: *RZS. (1964); SSO. (2004a, b).*

Observed by religion, Orthodox believers dominate with 91.3%, followed by Muslims with 8%, and others with 0.7% (Table 3).

Table 3: *Population by religion, 2002 Census*

Settlement	Total inhabitants	Orthodox	Muslim	Catholics	Other
Dihovo	310	306	0	1	3
Kazani	75	59	15	0	1
Magarevo	87	87	0	0	0
Malovista	98	96	0	0	2
Nizopole	186	151	34	0	1
Rotino	113	113	0	0	0
Trnovo	278	193	82	0	3
Capari	493	493	0	0	0
Total	1,640	1,498	131	1	10
%	100	91.3	8.0	0.1	0.6

Source: *SSO. (2004).*

Based on Tables 1, 2 and 3, the following observations may be concluded. Out of 1,640 inhabitants, 1,403 are over 15 years (85.5%). About 45% (738 inhabitants) of the total population in the eight settlements fall into the category of economically active population. Tourism, services and activities related to land use predominate in the economy of the sampled villages and within the Park boundaries.

All sampled settlements have a housing surplus of 726 apartments, representing 58% of the total number of dwellings. The largest housing surplus is in Dihovo, Trnovo and Nizopole, due to the large number of unoccupied flats and apartments for vacation and recreation (weekend houses). The smallest housing surplus is in Kazani (only 5% of the total number of dwellings). In the village of Malovista, the housing surplus is 47 apartments or just 6% of the total number of apartments.

The largest building activity in terms of construction was registered in the period 1971-1994 within all settlements. After 1994, there is a decline in building construction generally due to the unfavorable economic situation and depopulation of villages. The exception is the village of Trnovo where the trend of building construction continues after 1994. Today, most of tourism accommodation facilities are located in the villages of Dihovo, Capari, Nizopole and Magarevo.

General characteristics of tourism activities

Apart from the three dominant activities (agriculture, forestry and tourism), trade and traffic are less present, and in the energy sector particularly in the field of electricity production from renewable sources, there are three small hydroelectric plants.

Forestry is the only activity with a substantial development for decades, based on medium- and long-term sustainable business planning.

Agriculture, more precisely the cattle breeding, has always been a developmental theme of the Park. This maintained the characteristic of underdeveloped and extensive economic activity with an extremely unfavorable decreasing trend and a sharp decline in cattle number.

The material-production activities of this area are complemented by service activities separated in the tertiary sector whereas tourism did not meet expectations. Transition changes and unresolved ownership relationships for certain tourism facilities (like the open issues for the Begova Cema site, Strezevo neighborhood, Pelister children's resort and Kopanki mountain lodge) adversely affected the dynamics of tourism development in the Park. Active accommodation in the eight villages and the Park are: 5 hotels ("Molika", "Forest Lanterns", "Tent", "Drenka" and "Rees") over 20 villas and apartments (some of which are: "Dihovo", "Ilinden 1903", "Patricia", "Silver Pine", "Vista", "Trenchevski", "Paradiso", "Damaya", "Patele", "Babin Zab", "Three Sisters", "Edelweiss", "Zograf", "Ellen", "Montana", "Paio", "Bee", "Pelister", "Green Apartments", "Sers", "Trnovo", and others), over 10 restaurants and cafes (some of which are: "Idila", "Sokolski", "Oscar", "Glamor", "Garden", and others), 2 mountain homes ("Dimitar Ilievski Murato" at 2,222 m., "Shiroka" at 1,950 m. Due to fire in 2014, the mountain home "Kopanki" at 1,610 m. is under construction) and monasteries (St. Petka built in 1724, St. Mother of God built in 1837, and St. Anne built in 1856).

Tourist activities are manifested by the dominance of winter tourism, which is realized in a limited number of accommodation facilities, like: Hotel Molika, Children's Resort (which is not operational today), mountain homes, villas and private buildings in the villages of Trnovo, Magarevo, Dihovo and Nizopole. During summer season, tourist activities generally consists of visiting and sightseeing the distinguished "mountain eyes", i.e. the glacial Big and Small Lake, the architecture of the village Malovista and Capari, recreational and picnics areas, mountain homes, 18 churches, and many monasteries with and without lodgings.

The development of trade and crafts is characterized by a small volume of turnover of goods and services. According to available data within the boundaries of the NP "Pelister", the trade network is underdeveloped. There are only small grocery stores that do not meet modern consumer needs and standards.

In the service sector of the NP "Pelister" area, handicrafts are marginally represented. By serious and profound restructuring of personal services in households and much greater specialization of productive crafts along with sustaining and maintaining the old crafts, it may be expected to revitalize this activity that is so important for rural economy. Potential exists in restoring the traditional crafts characteristic for this area and developing the craft production of specific souvenir products with recognizable attributes of the folk culture and natural beauty of the area.

Rural activities vary, from cattle breeding to horse-keeping. For example, in Malovista, one can find sheep, goats and cows breeding, bee keeping, then picking berries and mushrooms, planting potatoes, and more. According to the field research findings, the main occupations of the local population in the sampled settlements used to be: livestock breeding, forestry, trade and crafts. On the other hand, a prospective activity for which the area has great potential is tourism, i.e. rural tourism development.

Due to the current high unemployment rate, unregular placement of agricultural products, passivity of space and other reasons, the emigration and migration processes are still present,

especially among the young work force. This is a serious problem which requires urgent measures and activities to "keep" the locals in this area. Having in mind that all rural settlements located in the NP "Pelister" and its surroundings are also attractive places and the area has excellent conditions for its development, they may attract both domestic and foreign tourists. If tourism is well planned and organized, it may contribute substantially to activation of the space by bringing numerous economic and social benefits. The more intensive development of tourism may be one of the measures to stop or reduce the process of depopulation and migration from the sampled rural settlements.

The area has many natural motives (a mountain rich in diverse geology and geomorphology, pleasant mountain climate, hydrography, flora, fauna) and anthropogenic motives (architecture, religious objects, tradition, memorials, various manifestations, etc.). In terms of social organization, migration movements and emigration have had their impact on this area, which has led to the gradual depopulation of settlements. This is due to their slow economic, cultural and educational development. Regarding the infrastructure, the settlements have well infrastructure. This is found to be a positive factor, as it directly affects settlements' organization and development as well as the functioning of non-economic activities in terms of connecting with other settlements in the gravity area and the city of Bitola as the largest nearby center.

Tourism types that are more or less practiced in the sampled villages are: mountain tourism, cultural-historical tourism, event tourism, religious or monastery tourism, ski tourism, recreational-sport tourism (hiking, hiking, cycling, mountaineering, etc.).

Until 2030, many activities in the NP "Pelister" should be undertaken with an aim to improve conditions in the existing tourist sites, in the first line by reconstructing the current accommodation facilities, increasing the attractiveness and competitiveness on domestic and international tourist market. It is envisaged to reconstruct the existing Kopanki Mountain Lodge and to open three new ski resorts at the sites of Skrkovo and Muse, which enter the boundaries of the NP "Pelister" and the site of Crna Stena in the park's contact zone. Furthermore, it is planned to activate the former quarry near the village Magarevo for the purpose of tourist attraction by actively involving tourists and visitors in making stone blocks and their symbolic incorporation in certain locations and spots.

According to the forecasts noted in the Spatial Plan of NP "Pelister", it may be expected an increase in capacity. So, from the existing number of 247 functional beds in the Park and surrounding area, along with 530 out of function beds, to increase to 2,000 beds until 2030. Besides in the current hotels, villas and mountain homes, it is planned these 2,000 beds to be dispersed in private accommodation and other alternative accommodation forms (info centers, forest houses, rural ethno houses, bungalows, etc.). The projected data may be accomplished if all tourism projects are implemented. Hence, the forecasted number of beds will allow an increase of 1,223 beds in total. This represent an increase of 2.57 times, or an increase of 9.26% per year meaning 72 new beds per year in case of a proportional projection (NSP Spatial Plan 2016-2030).

According to data from 2014, the total number of domestic tourists who visited the municipality of Bitola is 12,397, out of which only 4,997 domestic tourists visited the NP "Pelister" (40.3%). In the planning period until 2030, the percentage of domestic tourists visiting the Pelagonia region and the municipality of Bitola is expected to increase to at least 40%, while the percentage of domestic tourists visiting the municipality of Bitola and visiting the NP "Pelister", is expected to reach 60%. On the other hand, according to 2014 data, out 13,659

foreign tourists who visited the municipality of Bitola, only 982 visited the NP “Pelister” (7%). Furthermore, by 2030, it is expected that the number of foreign tourists visiting the Pelagonia Region and the municipality of Bitola will increase to at least 80%, while the number of foreign tourists visiting the municipality of Bitola and the NP “Pelister” will reach 50%. In this line, the ratio of domestic and foreign tourists is expected to be 70:30, especially given the one-day visits to the Park by domestic tourists (NSP Spatial Plan 2016-2030).

Table 4: *Basic activities for rural tourism*

Settlement	Number of basic activities for rural tourism																
	Natural motives				Anthropogenic motives				Communication motives				Receptive motives				
	Geological objects	Geomorphological objects	Hidrographic objects	Flora and fauna	Archeological sites	Memorials	Cultural and religious events	Religious buildings	Modern road	Plumbing*	Sewer** *	Other infrastructure ***	Stores	Restaurants and cafes	Accommodation facilities	Mountain trails	Tourist sightseeing
Dihovo	1	2	3	2	4	1	0	3	2	1	1	1	1	5	7	2	1
Kazani	1	2	2	3	0	1	0	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1
Magarevo	2	12	2	11	0	1	0	2	1	1	1	2	1	2	4	2	1
Malovista	2	10	5	12	2	1	1	5	1	1	1	3	1	0	0	2	1
Nizopole	3	15	16	20	2	1	1	4	1	1	1	2	1	1	14	4	1
Rotino	1	4	4	5	4	1	0	2	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	2	1
Trnovo	1	2	2	4	6	1	3	3	1	1	1	1	1	3	5	2	1
Capari	2	10	5	13	4	1	2	6	2	1	1	1	2	1	0	2	1
Total	13	57	39	70	22	8	7	26	11	8	8	12	8	13	30	17	8
	179				63				39				76				

Note: *local water supply; **discharge of wastewater into septic tanks. The sewage treatment plant in Malovista and Trnovo is under construction; ***Electronic communication links. In Malovista there are two small flow hydropower plants, one each in the area of Magarevo and Nizopole.

In-depth tourism analysis

Tourism with all its content elements, besides sociological, is also an economic phenomenon with strong impacts where it originates and performs its basic function: reception phase, accommodating, and satisfying a wide variety of tourists’ demands and desires. With its multiplier effect in the management process, directly and indirectly, tourism includes other activities in the total supply of tourism market.

This applies primarily to catering, commerce, traffic, handicrafts, healthcare and various other services. Tourism also offers and sells intangible values as: information, customs, folklore, entertainment, sports and leisure activities.

Table 5: SWOT analysis for rural tourism development in "eight Pelister villages"

Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Favorable natural-geographical features and climatic conditions • Potential for alternative accommodation • Existence of tourism development initiative in NP "Pelister", • Long tradition of skiing in Kopanki, Nizopole and winter sports • Significant and diverse cultural and architectural heritage • Rich and diverse natural heritage • Closeness to Bitola • Closeness to Ohrid (the bidest tourist center in North Macedonia). 	Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of strategies for promotion and development of rural tourism and other alternative tourism types • Underdeveloped and damaged road infrastructure • Low level of hygiene • Lack of packaged tourism routes • Unorganized private accommodation facilities • Insufficient maintenance of ski slopes in winter • Lack of tourism supply for winter hikers • Lack of financing investments of the local self-government and the NP "Pelister" for tourism development • Absence of regulation with parameters to respect and use traditional principles.
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solid rural tourism resources • Solid resources for alternative accommodation capacities (rural ethno-houses, ethno villas, monastery lodgings) • Solid resources for development of various tourism types for diversification of tourism supply • Good conditions for development of extreme sports both in summer and winter • Good geomorphological and climatic conditions for development of new ski resorts as public-private partnership • Solid resources for initiating the diaspora to invest in rural tourism. 	Threats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Depopulation of settlements, emigration and migration processes, demographic aging • Low living standard of locals • Extinction of old traditional crafts, traditions and cultural events • Ruining old vernacular architecture • Pollution of natural resources by uncontrolled tourist visit, • Fire threats, soil erosion and deforestation • Lack of local human resources for planning and maintaining space sustainability.

Tourism has a certain role in promoting and vitalizing spatial resources, but with a particular treatment of the resource utilization on which is based. For this reason, tourism must be developed in accordance with the protection of natural and cultural heritage within the scope of the plan. Based on tourism resources identified with the field research, an in-depth analysis of rural tourism development in the "eight Pelister villages" is performed as SWOT analysis (Table 5).

Conclusion

The eight rural settlements, which are part of the NP "Pelister", are not sufficiently promoted as tourist destinations despite the fact of possessing enormous untapped potential. All

settlements have numerous values as outstanding landscapes, along with diversified anthropology, history, culture and tradition.

The NP “Pelister” in the planning period until 2030, may complement the existing network of attractive tourist destinations, based on a previously prepared Landscape Diversity Study of the Park. In this line, it should initiate many activities for revitalizing the space and settlements and create more diversified tourism supply that would have an important place in rural tourism. Promoting and highlighting the potential of the area stands as economic benefit to the local population (training events for local recipients on the history, geography and nature of the areas, along with their inclusion as tour guides around the park, being included in preparation of traditional specialties and local crafts specific for the area).

The complex valorisation of tourism development factors of eight settlements and the NP “Pelister” as a whole, may promote this area as one of the highest quality tourist destinations in the North Macedonia. However, for all this to be feasible and for the projection to become a reality, it is necessary to invest heavily in tourism that may contribute to economic development.

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