

ASSESSMENT AND ANALYSIS OF THE TOURISM POTENTIAL OF THE BULGARIAN DANUBE MUNICIPALITIES IN THE NORTH-WEST PLANNING REGION

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Abstract

Tourism aims to satisfy certain social, cultural, spiritual, aesthetic, medical, etc. needs. This implies the idea of a conscious choice of tourist routes, of the period and duration of stay of each individual tourist. The aim of this paper is to evaluate and analyze the tourism potential of 13 Danube municipalities located in the North-West planning region of Bulgaria. A tourism portrait of the municipalities of Bregovo, Novo Selo, Vidin, Dimovo, Lom, Valchedrum, Kozloduy, Mizia, Oryahovo, Dolna Mitropolia, Gulyantsi, Nikopol and Belene has been developed, which consistently includes an assessment of the tourist geographic situation, natural and anthropogenic tourism resources, tourism infrastructure, types of tourism offered in the municipality, priorities and guidelines for tourism development. From the point of view of the Bulgarian Danube municipalities, a state strategy is needed that offers the possibility to develop the districts in the north-western planning region by diversifying socio-economic functions, developing the local network, diversifying the tourist offer, developing transport networks. Only then, the region along the river. Danube region will become competitive, attractive, limiting the migration of labour both to other regions of the country and to other countries.

Key words: *tourism potential, Danube municipalities, North West Planning Region, natural tourism resources, anthropogenic tourism resources*

The Republic of Bulgaria is one of the Danube countries. The Danube, like no other European river, flows through and past ten countries - Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, Bulgaria, Romania, Moldova and Ukraine. It is a river-continent on whose banks so many languages can be heard, and it flows through the centuries, through the geography and history of Europe - the cradle of our civilisation. Unlike other Western European rivers, the Danube is the only one that flows eastwards, and perhaps presciently it has taken on the mission of uniting West and East.

The Danube is as eternal as the Tiber, as fertile as the Nile, as majestic as the Mississippi, as adored as the Ganges, as lively as the Rhine; it is the river of an entire continent (Doykov, Genchev, 2001).

The importance of the waterway increased after the opening of the Europe Canal on German territory for navigation in 1992, which joined the Rhine, Main and Danube rivers. Today, this junction is the main European waterway from the city of Danube to the town of Danube. Rotterdam (the Netherlands) to the city of Sulina (Romania), the axis of the European waterways - Eurocorridor №7.

The Danube and the parallel transport and economic routes passing along it are an important part of the transcontinental diagonal links between the North Sea coast, Central and South-Eastern Europe, the Straits, Asia Minor and the Middle East (Doykov, Genchev, 2011).

The Danube can be one of the most popular and developing tourist destinations in Europe. If all local values are respected and properly used, this could become a tourist corridor with spectacular scenery and culinary experiences, water sports, cultural heritage and local traditions, but without the destructive influence of mass tourism. This will stimulate local socio-economic regeneration, with sustainability as the main focus.

Sustainable tourism refers to a combination of actions that lead to local economic development that respects nature and cultural diversity (Gregor, P., L. Vitkova, B. Kadar, 2019).

The Danube is the blue northern framework of Bulgaria. It starts from the mouth of the river. Timok and continues to the town of Danube. Silistra for 470 km. The Danube catchment covers parts of central and south-eastern Europe and occupies 817 thousand km of the Danube basin. km². It comprises 100 % of Hungary, 98 % of Serbia, 97 % of Romania, 96 % of Austria and Slovakia. A smaller but significant role is played by the river. Danube and its tributaries for Bulgaria - 43 %.

On the territory of Bulgaria, the direct outlet of the Danube and the Danube rivers is 47%. The Danube has 7 administrative-territorial units. They include 23 Danube municipalities which have a direct border on the river. The Danube districts are located in the Danube riparian areas with a direct Danube connection, out of a total of 68 municipalities located in the districts. Only the first 4 districts forming the structure of the North-Western planning area include 13 Danube municipalities, accounting for 56.6% of all Danube municipalities.

In practice, turning to the Danube will lead to their integration into the pan-European Danube region, to the stimulation and development of cross-border partnerships for integrated river basin management, water protection and biodiversity conservation. At the same time, conditions will be created for the restoration and protection of the environment, ultimately leading to the sustainable use of natural resources.

There is no doubt that the trans-European corridor № 7 along the Danube fulfils very important functions. Through the town of The route of Trans-European Corridor 4, which has active links with the South-West planning area, passes through Vidin. Between the town of Vidin and the Vidin River, the Vidin River is a part of the Danube region. Vidin and Vidin. Calafat (Romania), the New Europe Bridge has been built, and ferry lines connect the towns of Vidin and Calafat. Oryakhovo with. Orea and the towns of Beket (Romania) and Beket (Romania). Nikopol with the town of Beket. Turnu Magurele (Romania). The Danube is not only a transport axis, but also a unifying element favouring strong cultural, educational and business interactions. The accumulated movable and immovable cultural heritage of several significant civilisations and three religions (Christianity, Islam, Judaism) is the basis for the development of tourism along the Danube coast of the North-West planning area.

The main objective of the paper is to assess and analyze the tourism potential of the Danube municipalities located on the territory of the North-West planning region in Bulgaria and to indicate priorities and directions for tourism development.

Of the 13 Danube municipalities, four (Bregovo, Novo Selo, Vidin and Dimovo) are in Vidin District, two (Lom and Valchedrum) in Montana District, three (Kozloduy, Mizia and Oryakhovo) in Vratsa District and four (Dolna Mitropolia, Gulyantsi, Nikopol and Belene) in Pleven District (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Northwest planning region in the Republic of Bulgaria

Vidin region has conditions for the development of tourism based on the existing traditions, the wealth of natural and anthropogenic tourist resources, despite the emerging adverse trends associated with a decline in the number of active subjects. It is an ecologically clean area without major pollutants. The natural and cultural attractions of the area, its rich history, make the region an interesting place for various types of tourism. The Danube River offers conditions for the development of water tourism.

The municipality of Bregovo is located as the northernmost Bulgarian municipality, part of the Vidin District in the North-West Planning Region. It can be characterised as a territorial unit with a favourable tourist-geographical situation due to the fact that it borders two countries (Serbia and Romania) and its proximity to the regional centre of Brest. Vidin. At the same time, the peripheral nature of the municipality's territory, both in terms of its geographical position within the district and the North-West region, determines the nature of the links between its territory, the neighbouring municipalities and the district centre. It comprises 10 settlements, nine villages and the town. Bregovo, which falls into the category of very small towns. Bregovo municipality is thus categorised as a sparsely urbanised peripheral municipality with less capacity for tourism development. Of all the settlements in the municipality, the direct outlet to the r. Danube have. Kudelin and the village of Vrav.

Tourist resources are natural and anthropogenic objects and phenomena that have qualities to satisfy healing, recreational, cognitive, business or entertainment needs and therefore attract tourists (Apostolov, 2003). They are therefore a prerequisite for the development of tourism in a given territory.

Natural tourism resources are related to natural attractions that are attractive to tourists. The municipality falls within the Danube catchment area. The rivers Timok and Danube form a natural border between Bulgaria and the two neighbouring countries Serbia and Romania. Water resources are also represented by constructed dams such as the Deleina dam, which has now been converted into a recreational and fishing area. There are 4 protected areas on the territory of the municipality: "Deleina", "Novo Selo", "Rabrovo" and "Timok".

Anthropogenic tourist resources are related to the material and spiritual culture of the population and have tourist attractiveness. The municipality of Bregovo falls within the "Danube cultural space" according to the distribution of the territory of the country with a concentration of cultural values.

Anthropogenic tourist resources are represented by historical-archaeological, religious and cultural sites. The following historical-archaeological sites are located on the territory of the municipality. Vrhov, which served as an important customs centre for people and goods passing along the Danube), excavations of a Roman settlement near the village of Dorktist. Balei and a Tatar well near the village of Kudelin.

The first lighthouse was built on the Bulgarian bank of the river. Danube, which can become a tourist attraction. In the centre of the village of. 4 km from the village of Deleina is a monument to the 32 inhabitants of the village who died in the wars from 1912 to 1945. Deleina is located in the Albotin rock monastery and the famous "Hajduk fountain". Among the cultural and cognitive sites, the community centres stand out, which have become centres of preserved identity and folklore and find stage expression in the traditional folklore festivals organised in the municipality.

The economic development of the municipality is characterized by limited potential and a predominantly agrarian orientation, but has potential for tourism development. The clean and unpolluted environment around the mouth of the Timok River in the radius is an opportunity for ecotourism development, and specific folklore and cultural events can be a prerequisite for cultural tourism development. The local cuisine is a good opportunity for the development of culinary tourism. The municipality of Bregovo is the gateway to Europe in the most north-western region of Bulgaria. The easy crossing of the two borders with Romania and Serbia creates conditions for the development of cross-border and rural tourism in the municipality, linked to the presentation of local ethnographic customs and traditions, as well as the implementation of thematic tourist routes.

Novo Selo Municipality is located along the r. It is located on the Danube, but has a peripheral geographical position due to its distance from major urban and economic centres. Although located on the border with Romania, the territory of the municipality does not have an established connection along the river. The territory of the municipality does not have a connection with the Danube. It is categorised as a peripheral rural municipality with a difficult socio-economic development. It comprises only 5 settlements separated by 5 to 7 km. Of these, on the right bank of the Danube are located the villages of. Novo Selo, Florentin and Jasen.

In terms of natural tourist resources, the topography is lowland and flat-hilly, with the municipality's territory falling in the westernmost and lowest part of the Danube Plain. The beaches at the villages of Novo Selo, Florentin and Jasen are well developed. The climate is temperate-continental, and the main watercourse is the river. The Danube, which runs for 16 km within the municipality. It is suitable for fishing and water sports.

Three sites of the protected areas and the National Ecological Network fall within the spatial scope of the municipality - the protected area "Deposit of Ruzhevidna povetica", the protected area "Timok" and the protected area "Novo Selo".

Anthropogenic tourist resources in the municipality of Novo Selo are represented by religious, ethnographic and cultural sites. Churches are maintained in all five villages of the municipality, among which stands out "Assumption of the Virgin Mary" in the village of. It is one of the largest in the Vidin Spiritual District. Among the ethnographic sites the Ritual Hall in the village of S. Vinarovo, which is painted with folk motifs. Also emblematic for the municipality is the ethnographic complex "Sredna Cheshma" in the village of Vinarova. Vinarovo. Every year, on the last Saturday of August, a folklore festival "Father's hearth with age-old roots" is held there. The five community centres in the municipality as cultural and cognitive sites preserve and develop the traditions and customs of the local population.

The service sector in the municipality is poorly developed and it is difficult to talk about the development of the tourism sector. However, the availability of favourable natural tourist resources, the ecological purity of the municipality, the opportunities for the development of ecologically clean agriculture related to grape growing and the development of fishing create conditions for the development of ecotourism, rural tourism, wine tourism, sport fishing, but a lot of investment is needed. As a typical rural municipality, rural tourism can be developed as a priority, but accommodation facilities are limited. A still undeveloped niche with extremely suitable conditions is wine tourism. Vineyards occupy about 1/4 of the total arable land in the municipality, mainly wine varieties are cultivated. Throughout all the years of its existence, Novosel wines have been very well known in Bulgaria and around the world for the legendary Gamza variety.

Adventure and cycling tourism are also developed in the municipality. Every year the participants of the international Danube regatta TID, which dates back to 1956, dock at the Novo Selo port. The sailing route is 2080 km long and lasts 2.5 months (from the end of June to the middle of September). The "Danube Ultra" cycling route, 730 km long along the Danube River, passes through part of the territory of Novo Selo Municipality. The Danube is 730 km long.

The potential for tourism development in Novo Selo Municipality has not been optimally realised. A possible option is to combine festival tourism with ecotourism. This could include meetings with local communities that have preserved their traditions and customs.

In the future it is necessary to pay attention to the areas with untapped tourist potential in the municipality, which should be improved and used for the development of rural, cultural, cognitive and ecotourism. In addition to these, it is appropriate to link tourism activities with the designation and marking of eco-routes, the development of traditional crafts, the production of souvenirs showing the specific folklore of the village, which together will have a synergistic effect on the whole territory.

Vidin Municipality occupies the northern part of Vidin District on the coast of the Vidin River. Vidin. It is situated in the north-western part of Bulgaria at the two characteristic bends in the Bulgarian section of the river. Danube. The location of the municipal centre on the banks of the river. Danube, places the municipality at the crossroads of two European transport corridors. The area under consideration is the intersection of corridors № 7 and № 4. The strategic location of the municipality in relation to key European transport arteries and the presence of the Port of Vidin, create favourable opportunities for the development of tourism in the municipality at national and international level (Stoyanova, Vladev, 2020).

The municipality includes 34 settlements of which 2 towns (Vidin and Dunavtsi) and 32 villages. The role and the impact of the town of Vidin's role in the municipality is mainly determined by the fact that it has the functions of an administrative, socio-economic, tourist and cultural centre. The other settlements in the municipality are of a lower category. Of all the geographical sites on the right bank of the Danube, the following are located. Kosava, the island of Kutovo, the town of S. Vidin, the mouth of the r. Topolovets, Bogdan-Sečan Island, the town of Kutovo, the town of Kutovo, the town of Kutovo. Danavtsi, the mouth of the river. Voynishka, the mouth of the r. Vidbol, the island of Bliznatsi and the village of Tsar Simeonovo.

Important for the development of the municipality is the one built at the town of Vidin second bridge on the river. The Danube, officially opened in June 2013. The "New Europe" Bridge is a road and rail transport link between the municipal centre of Danube and the town of Danube. The new railway line between Vidin and the Romanian town of Calafat.

In terms of natural tourist resources, the topography is flat. The altitude of the territory fluctuates between 30-35 m at the bank of the river. Danube to 200-300 m in the hilly foothills of the Pre-Balkan. The municipal centre of Vidin is situated in the lowest part of the territory. The climate is temperate-continental.

Among the main river arteries in the municipality stand out the rivers Deliiska, Topolovitsa, Voinishka and Vidbol. The tourist importance of the rivers. The Danube's significance is mainly expressed in its function as a "waterway" for river cruise tours between Central Europe and the Danube Delta. The Danube coastline, in turn, is a resource for the development of water recreation and leisure, especially in places where the conditions are right. Every year in August, the towns of Vidin hosts the traditional international regatta TID. On the territory of the municipal centre and the villages of Slanotrun, Antimovo, Gradets, etc., deposits of thermo-mineral springs have been identified, which should be considered as an important natural tourist resource.

The territory of Vidin municipality does not fall within the scope of national and nature parks, and there are no declared reserves on its territory. The category of protected areas is represented by 2 protected areas - Kutovo Island and Bliznatsi Island and 12 protected areas of the European ecological network NATURA 2000. They are a resource for ecotourism development.

Of the anthropogenic tourist resources in the category of cultural monuments of "national importance", which are of high cultural and historical value, most are located in the town of Vidin. The numerous historical, archaeological, architectural, religious and cultural and cognitive resources, among which stand out the fortress "Kaleto" and the fortress "Baba Vida".

Of the religious tourist resources, the Cathedral of St. The Cathedral of St. Demetrius is a national monument of culture and is the second largest church in Bulgaria after the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral in Sofia. The cultural and historical heritage is not well enough promoted in Vidin municipality and in the municipal centre, although it provides unique opportunities for investment initiatives. Attracting funds for the immovable cultural monuments will not only help their preservation, proper exposure and adaptation to modern urban life, but will stimulate the overall economic development of the city of Vidin. Flexible funding mechanisms need to be identified and implemented to help the municipality take its rightful place in the European cultural treasury.

Tourism is a priority area in the economic development of Vidin municipality. The territory of the municipality has potential for the development of cultural, cognitive, ecotourism, hunting, fishing, water, sports, wine, balneological, cruise, congress tourism. The proximity of the territory to Serbia and Romania creates potential for attracting tourists from both countries and favours the development of cross-border tourism.

The presence of the river. Danube creates favorable conditions for the development of water, sports and cruise tourism on the territory of the municipality. The water transport offers tourist attractions - cruises that pass from the town of Danube to the Danube. The municipality of Vidin offers cruise tours, which take visitors through destinations in Hungary, Serbia and Romania. To the north of the town is the water-tourist base. On the r. The Danube is regularly used for excursions with tourist ships that leave from the River Station - Vidin. The numerous cultural events held on the territory of the municipality (holidays, festivals, competitions, etc.) create favourable conditions for the development of cultural and event tourism.

The various sports events realized over the years create conditions for the development of sports tourism in Vidin municipality. Among the most significant sports events are: the International Danube Regatta - TID and mountain bike routes (under the project "Bulgarian Bike Routes"). At the bridge "New Europe" on the river. International tournaments in sambo, volleyball and chess are also held.

The territory of the municipality has a specific potential that can boost the development of tourism, with a focus on integrating the local tourism product into a regional one. To this end, it is necessary to include Vidin municipality in a common regional product in order to increase the number of visitors and the length of their stay, to improve the seasonal and territorial distribution based on integrated destination management and marketing, and to use different tools, techniques and systems to ensure effective tourist information and marketing.

Dimovo Municipality is located in north-western Bulgaria, in the south-eastern part of Vidin District along the Vidin River. The village is located in the south of the Danube, in the south-south part of the region. Although located on the border with Romania, the territory of the municipality does not have an established connection along the river. Danube with the neighbouring country. On the right bank of the r. Danube is located only one settlement - the village of. Archar. This proves to be a serious obstacle for the development of tourism. East of the village of. Archar are the Bulgarian Danube islands of Dovlek, Skomlja, Dobrina and Skomen. The municipality covers 23 settlements, 22 villages and the town of Dimovo.

In terms of natural tourism resources, the topography is flat, hilly and low mountainous. Of the micro-relief forms, caves are important for tourism development. On the territory of the municipality about 5 caves have been discovered and explored, each of them unique in its origin and internal formations. These are "Venetsa", "Kozarnika", "Mirizlivka", "Propast" and "Vodni pech". The municipality of Dimovo falls in the temperate continental climate area and its territory is drained by the right tributaries of the river. The main rivers of the municipality are the rivers of the Danube - the Archar, the Skomlja, the Belshtitsa and the Lom. The passage of these rivers and the presence of 5 micro-dams (Vrbovec, Medovnica, Shipot, Skomlja and Jarlovitsa) through the analysed territory create opportunities for the development of sports, fishing, river and rural tourism. An adverse effect on the economic development of the municipality, and in particular on tourism, are the frequent cases of flooding from the waters of the River Vrbovica. Danube flooding is frequent in the surrounding areas. On the territory of the municipality of Dimovo there is one protected area - the Natural Landmark "Venetsa" for the protection of the Venetsa Cave.

Among the anthropogenic tourist resources, the historical and archaeological resources stand out - the ancient and late antique town of "Ratsiaria" in the area of the village of. Archar. It is the only Roman-era site on our lands that was a military center, Roman colony and provincial capital. East of the village of. Cladorub, on a high plateau is the ancient city of Conbustica.

From the group of architectural tourist resources, we must highlight the village of Oreshec, which has preserved its unique architecture from the middle and late 17th century. The municipality of Dimovo is rich in Christian churches out of a total of 13, 9 are monuments of culture. These include the Monastery of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, 2 km south of the village of Izvor, which offers accommodation for 17 people.

There are 7 Chitalishtes operating on the territory of the municipality. The Chitalishte in the town of Dimovo organizes the folklore festival "Living Water".

The municipality has no traditions in the development of mass tourism. Besides speleological tourism, there are resources and prerequisites for the development of cultural, ecological, culinary, hunting tourism. The area of the village of. Oreshets Station is rich in karst caves, the larger and easily accessible of which are the caves "Venets" and "Kozarnika". Research, development and exposure of the remaining caves in the municipality, with easy access and interesting offer will lead to their inclusion in common tourist packages and the development of routes. In the field of cultural tourism there is still untapped tourist potential. The available anthropogenic tourist resources have not been sufficiently explored and therefore exposed and promoted. At present, existing cultural heritage sites are not the subject of tourist interest and are not included in appropriate cultural itineraries due to insufficient research.

Currently, the specificities of the possible tourist products of the Danube municipalities of Vidin region (except Vidin municipality) are related to relatively short stays and limited supply. This requires coordination and coordination between these municipalities of a vision for a common marketable tourism product, including cooperation with organisations and municipalities from Romania and Serbia.

The Montana region falls outside the traditional tourist regions of Bulgaria, but can offer its own tourist attractions, which create opportunities for the development of regional tourism products together with the neighboring Vidin and Vratsa regions. The tendency is that these opportunities will outline future cross-border cooperation projects with Danube municipalities in Romania. Montana Region has good recreational potential, but there are underused opportunities for the development of river tourism along the Danube in the municipalities of Lom and Valchedrum.

The municipality of Lom is located in northwestern Bulgaria, in the northern part of the Montana region, on the coast of the river. The municipality is located in the north of the Danube. The strategic geographical position of Lom municipality, in relation to key European transport corridors № 7 and №

4, as well as the presence of the port of Lom as a crossing point, create favourable opportunities for the economic development of the municipality, including tourism at national and international level. The Port of Lom is the second largest Danube port in the country and provides the shortest direct land link to the Mediterranean port of Thessaloniki (Plan for integrated development of the municipality Lom 2021-2027).

The municipality of Lom comprises 10 settlements, nine villages and the town of Lom, which falls into the category of small towns in the country. Of all the geographical sites, the villages of Orsoia, Dolno Linevo, Stanevo, the town of Lom, the mouth of the Lom River are located on the right bank of the Danube.

In terms of natural tourism resources, the topography is lowland and hilly. The territory of the municipality falls in the area of temperate continental climate. River inflows are a problem in relation to economic activity. The location of the town of Lom and the villages of Orsoja, Dolno Linevo and Stanevo on the Danube bank determines the risk of flooding from the Danube. Overcoming the Danube floods is an extremely topical problem because it poses a risk to the health and life of the population, destroying an important part of the tourist infrastructure and generally paralysing the main economic functions of the municipality.

The strong anthropogenization of the territory of the municipality of Lom and the uniqueness of some landscapes and species, highly threatened by population decline or extinction, have led to the designation of 5 protected areas ("Mominbrodsko Bog", "Orsoya", "Lom River", "Tsiber" and "Dolno Linevo"). The diverse flora and fauna in them is a condition for the development of ecotourism, scientific and educational tourism and some specialised forms of alternative tourism.

Lom Municipality has also anthropogenic tourist resources. Among the historical and archaeological resources we can mention the ancient town of Almus, which was declared a monument of national importance in 1971. 3 km east of the town of Lom is Asparuhov/Lomski Val, an early medieval wooden earthwork fortification that started on the banks of the Danube and is believed to have been part of the defensive system of the First Bulgarian Kingdom. 2 km northwest of the village of Stanevo in the locality of "Maltepe", on the Danube bank itself, is an ancient fortress and Roman road station Pomodiana burgus. A Thracian cult centre has been discovered 2 km southeast of the village of Staliiska mahala in the locality of Bagachina. On this terrace, a settlement from the Stone-Copper Age existed for a millennium.

To the group of architectural tourist resources are of interest 57 ancient buildings in the town of Lom, declared architectural monuments of culture in 1986.

The presence of religious tourist resources is a prerequisite for the development of cultural and cultural-religious tourism. In most of the settlements in the municipality, the built churches are declared monuments of culture. Cultural and touristic resources are mainly concentrated in the municipal centre. The town is notable for one of the first theatre performances in Bulgaria and the house-museum of the Renaissance cultural worker Krusty Pishurka. Nowadays, cultural traditions are maintained through the performances of the Lom Operetta, the International Plein Air Art Festival and exhibitions in the new art gallery.

Lom municipality has the potential for development of various traditional and alternative types of tourism: cultural and event tourism, ecotourism, hunting and fishing, river, cycling, wine, rural and sports tourism. At present, they remain underutilised. The existing natural and anthropogenic tourist resources are not sufficiently linked to the traditions of development of the sector among the local population, the construction of tourist and accompanying infrastructure, the improvement of the qualification of service and management staff, the low information provision of tourists on the existing tourist sites and the possibilities of practicing different types of tourism.

The strategic geographic position of Lom municipality creates favourable conditions for the development of cross-border tourism products that will increase the added value of tourism and the competitiveness of the border regions.

The municipality of Valchedrum is located in northwestern Bulgaria, in the northeastern part of Montana region. The municipality of Valchedrum comprises 11 settlements, ten villages and the town of Valchedrum, which falls into the category of very small towns in the country. Of the geographical sites included in the municipality, the villages of Dolni Tsibar, Gorni Tsibar and the mouth of the Tsibrica River are located on the right bank of the Danube. Opportunities

for closer links with the river are related to the reconstruction of the existing passenger port at the village of Dolni Tsibar as a cruise ship stop for day visits to natural attractions and anthropogenic resources available in the municipality.

Of the natural tourist resources, the topography is lowland to hilly. Of the micro-relief forms, the beach at the village of Dolni Tsibar and at the island of Ibisha, which are preferred for recreation by local residents and tourists.

The main watercourse on the territory of the municipality is the Cibrica River (a right tributary of the Danube). Several micro-dams have been built in the river basin, which are used not only for irrigation but also for fishing and recreation, and there is a fishing lake at its mouth. On the border with the Kozloduy municipality, the large dam "Shishmanov Val" has been built, which is suitable for sport fishing. There are two protected areas on the territory of the municipality: the Ibisha Conservation Reserve and the Tsibar Island Conservation Area. There are 8 protected areas on the territory of the municipality of Valchedrum. They create good preconditions for the development of eco-tourism, creation of eco-trails and development of ornithological tourism.

There are anthropogenic tourist resources on the territory of Valchedrum municipality that could be used for tourism development. According to the registration lists of the National Institute for Immovable Cultural Heritage, there are 30 immovable cultural properties in the municipality of Valchedrum. 12 of them are in the land of the town of Valchedrum. For the most part, the immovable cultural heritage sites are not specifically identified, maintained and known as such (Plan for integrated development of the municipality of Valchedrum 2021-2027).

The historical and archaeological sites on the territory of the municipality of Valchedrum are 23, which are also not sufficiently explored, exposed and popularized and are therefore currently not the subject of tourist interest and are not included in appropriate cultural routes. It is possible in the future to select one of them with the most significant cultural and historical value to be studied in detail, restored and exposed as a tourist site. Such a site could possibly be the Cebrus Fortress near the village of Dolni Tsibar.

An important centre of spirituality and culture of the population in the municipality are the church temples, which are referred to as religious tourist resources. There are 9 of them and all of them are active. In the town of Valchedrum stands the church of St. Paraskeva (a miniature model of the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral in Sofia), famous for its unique iconostasis. In 2016, the temple was classified as an artistic and architectural single immovable cultural property of modern times in the category of "local importance".

Of the cultural and cognitive resources, the object of tourism is the large museum collection in the Chitalishte "Ralo-1891" Valchedrum, which displays about 3350 exhibits from the primitive communal system to the present day.

Tourism in the municipality of Valchedrum does not have much potential, has not been developed and does not bring revenue and income to the local population. In order to attract tourist interest, it is necessary to stimulate entrepreneurship and investment in the construction of new accommodation, dining and entertainment facilities. There are opportunities for the development of integrated ecological, ornithological, cultural, pilgrimage, rural and fishing tourism in the municipality. It is possible to attract tourists for short weekend visits, recreation and leisure.

The main advantage of the municipality is the Danube River. Apart from its tourist purpose, it also provides a convenient transport link to the rest of the country and to Europe. The most serious problem is the underdeveloped infrastructure both by land and by water. Another very serious problem is the low relative proportion of the population of working age, which results in a lack of qualified personnel.

The municipality has the potential to create alternative tourism products by exploiting the attractiveness of the Danube. This can be achieved by developing the transport potential of the river, restoring cultural and historical sites, combined with festival tourism, which will have a stimulating effect on the development of activities gravitating around tourism and additional tourist services.

An important factor for the development of tourism in Vratsa is the strategic geographical location, the border with the Danube and the proximity to neighbouring Romania. Some of the district's natural resources and significant cultural and historical heritage are valorised to varying degrees in different municipalities and are still poorly integrated into high added value tourism activities.

Tourism in *Vratsa District* does not have a clearly defined seasonal character; cultural and event tourism is dominant. In order to be able to use all tourism resources, one of the perspectives is to develop their integrated offer within the district and in cooperation with other districts, municipalities and localities of the North-West planning region.

The importance of tourism as a factor for economic growth and employment is significant. The development of tourism is a prerequisite to preserve, conserve and develop the potential of the existing natural and cultural attractions, as well as to ensure economic development, increase employment and incomes, create conditions for recreation and recovery, in addition to tourists and local residents (Regional Strategy for Tourism Development in Vratsa District for the period 2021-2027).

In terms of the three Danube municipalities in the district, despite the proximity of the river, tourism is poorly developed. The problems are road connectivity, the maintenance of the river itself, the state of infrastructure in small settlements, the poor state of cultural monuments, and small municipal budgets. The lack of a regular passenger river connection, combined with the lack of a first-class road linking the municipalities in a west-east direction, is a serious obstacle to the economic integration of the area, as well as to its development as a tourist destination.

This is also a problem when organizing cultural, cycling, sports, wine, hiking and other tourist routes. Therefore, it is extremely important to build a first-class Danube north road, which will improve transport accessibility to the coastal areas and increase investor and tourist interest in them. Together with the Danube as a waterway, the route will be important for integrating the districts and municipalities located along the coastal territory and strengthening territorial cooperation with neighbouring border regions.

Kozloduy Municipality is located in northwestern Bulgaria, in the northwestern part of Vratsa region on the banks of the Vratsa river. The municipality is located in the northwest of the town of Vratsa, in the north-west part of the Danube. The territory under consideration is part of corridor № 7. It comprises 5 settlements that have emerged along the rivers. The municipal centre is situated on the Danube. The remaining settlements are along the left bank of the river Ogasta. The municipality has a well-established infrastructure and communications, a highly skilled workforce. The natural centre of the municipality - the town of Kozloduy is almost equidistant from the regional centres of Vratsa and Montana. Of the geographical sites on the right bank of the Danube are the town of Kozloduy and the islands of Svraka and Kozloduy (the second largest among the Bulgarian Danube islands).

There are two river port terminals on the territory of Kozloduy Municipality - for servicing the "Kozloduy Nuclear Power Plant" and for bulk cargo handling. There is a transport port in Botev Park in Kozloduy, which is not in use today. It could be operated as a cruise ship stop for day visits to the tourist sites available in the municipality.

In terms of natural tourist resources, the topography is flat and the climate is temperate continental. The main waterway, the Danube River, runs for 21 km within the municipality.

On the territory of the municipality is the Kozloduy Protected Area, declared a historical site in 1972 and recategorised as a protected area in 2003. On the territory of Kozloduy municipality fall in whole or in part three protected areas of Natura 2000 - "Zlatia", "Kozloduy" and "Kozloduy Islands". They create good conditions for the development of ecotourism and ornithological tourism.

The anthropogenic tourist resources, represented by the historical and archaeological resources: the Roman Fortress "Regianum", the Archaeological Reserve "Augusta", the Memorial Complex "Botev Road" and "Botev Park", provide favorable opportunities for the development of tourism in the municipality. All are of national importance. On the territory of the municipality a zone for tourism and recreation development has been created, which includes "Botev Park", "Botev Road", the pier of the ship "Radetsky".

In the western part of the municipality, on the border with the municipality of Valchedrum, stands the monument "Asparuhov Val", for which it is assumed that in the 7th century the founder of the Bulgarian state erected a temporary defensive fortification 32 km long, which was part of the defensive system of the medieval border areas.

Of religious tourist resources, the Holy Trinity Church in Kozloduy, which was built in 1914 and is an architectural and artistic monument of national importance, is of interest. The National Museum of the Radetsky Steamship, which was used by Hristo Botev's detachment to cross from Romania to Bulgaria, stands out among the cultural and tourist resources.

In May the traditional Botev Days and the National Tourist March dedicated to Hristo Botev are held. At the end of June, the annual Fish Festival is held, dedicated to the International Danube Day and the World Fishing Day. A culinary competition and a fishing contest are organised, accompanied by a rich cultural programme. In May, the village of Glozhene organises a folklore festival "Ogosta sings" with the participation of amateur groups from the region and the country. In the second week of June in the village of Butan a National Festival of Amateur Art "Sing and Dance for Butan" is held.

Kozloduy Municipality also has other anthropogenic resources subject to tourism, which include sports events and competitions. The sports and recreation complex in Kozloduy provides conditions for full sports activities and recovery. The equestrian sports centre in the village of Butan is one of the five best complexes in the country for holding national and international equestrian competitions.

Cultural tourism emerges as the leading type of tourism. European cultural corridors such as the Danube Cultural Route pass through the municipality. However, the local tourism business does not advertise itself and the region well enough. In addition to cultural tourism, there is a need to focus attention and investment on culinary, adventure and water tourism.

There are potential opportunities in the municipality to adapt the sub-types of cruise tourism to the available resources and local characteristics. These are related to fishing, yacht and river tourism. The Danube River and the preserved nature along the coast define favourable opportunities for short-term alternative holidays and for long-term sightseeing trips. Rural tourism can also be identified as a potential opportunity. It is of interest to local and foreign tourists, but is at present generally undeveloped.

Overall, the advantages of Kozloduy municipality are related to its natural resources, nature, climate, geographical location, cultural heritage and favourable conditions for their future development. The disadvantages lie in the under-utilisation of the potential advantages of the advantageous Danube-side location. The municipality has not established itself as an established international tourist destination. The cultural heritage of the town is not recognised. Kozloduy's cultural heritage needs serious and regulated maintenance in order to be preserved.

Mizia Municipality is located in northwestern Bulgaria, in the northern part of Vratsa District. It consists of 6 settlements. The geographic location of the settlements is along the coast of the river Sklut, suitable for recreation and fishing. Of the geographical sites on the right bank of the Danube, on the border with the municipality of Oryahovo, is the mouth of the rivers Skut and Ogosta. This is because only 2 km of the Danube coast fall within the territory of the municipality of Mizia. This small section includes the municipality to the Bulgarian Danube municipalities.

In terms of natural tourist resources, the topography is mostly flat to gently undulating and the climate is temperate continental. The municipality of Mizia falls within the catchment area of the river Mizia. The Danube, with the rivers Ogosta, Sklut and Burzina passing through its territory. The potential of the rivers Ogosta and Skut is not yet exploited for tourism. Part of the territory of the municipality has been identified as an area with significant potential flood risk.

On the territory of Mizia municipality there are two protected areas - "Koritata" and "Daneva mound" and three areas of the Natura 2000 network - "Zlatiata", "Skat River" and "Ogosta River".

Among the objects of immovable cultural property on the territory of the municipality of Mizia stands out the Old Municipality Building, which has a specific architecture, typical for the 1930s and is a symbol of the town. The historical and archaeological resources include: the settlement in the locality "Dolno Livade"; the church "Holy Ascension of Christ" in the town of Mizia from 1874; the humpback bridge in the village of Lipnitsa, which is part of the memorial complex "Botev Road", declared in 1993 as a group historical monument of culture of national importance. It is the only architectural witness of the passage of the Botev's Cheta through this territory.

Tourism in the municipality is undeveloped, but there is some potential for the development of alternative types of tourism given the natural features and cultural heritage. The municipality possesses a rich tangible and intangible cultural heritage, which is the basis for cultural tourism. It should focus on existing resources. Other types of tourism are rural tourism, which includes local resources: preserved authentic traditions, specific cuisine, folklore, customs and crafts, and ecotourism, linked to the development and promotion of eco-trails, routes and events. The Trans-European Bicycle Corridor № 6 passes through the municipality, along the Danube.

The guidelines for the development of tourism are related to increasing the attractiveness of the territory of Mizia municipality and improving the quality of life of the people, by protecting the

environment and building accessible and modern infrastructure, promoting local natural features and traditions. Development of competitive local business and handicraft, increasing opportunities for training, employment and sustainable tourism with a focus on clean environment and promoting the beauty of local nature and cultural and historical sites.

Oryahovo municipality is located in Northwestern Bulgaria, in the northeastern part of Vratsa region. The border with the Danube River determines its important and strategic transport-geographical position. The municipality has been identified as an area with potential for the development of cross-border cooperation. Its important role and function is determined by the presence of a border crossing point and the Oryahovo - Becket Ferry. Access to the northern border with Romania and allows the inclusion of water transport of passengers and goods through the established Port and Ferry Complex.

The municipality consists of 7 settlements: the town of Oryahovo and the villages of Leskovets, Ostrov, Gorni Vadin, Dolni Vadin. There are harbours in the town of Oryahovo, the villages of Ostrov, Gorni Vadin and Dolni Vadin. The location of the municipality had a significant influence on the development of economic life in the region and the country and was a prerequisite for the survival of the surrounding settlements.

In terms of natural tourist resources, the topography is flat and plateau-like. The particularities of the relief and the nature of the geological structure are a prerequisite for the occurrence of landslides, which are an adverse natural phenomenon adversely affecting the development of tourism. The climate in the municipality is temperate-continental. The municipality is one of the driest places in Bulgaria, due to the rainfall shade it receives from the Carpathian Mountains. The northern border of Oryahovo Municipality is the Danube River, which is the largest river basin in the territory. It is a serious threat and a prerequisite for floods on the territory of the municipality. On the territory of Oryahovo municipality there are 3 protected areas located in the land of the village of Selanovtsi - "Kochumina", "Gola Bara" and "Kalugerski grad - Topolite".

The area of Oryahovo has been inhabited since ancient times and has a variety of anthropogenic tourist resources. The historical and archaeological resources include the ancient fortresses of "Variana" near the village of Leskovets, "Valeriana" near the village of Dolni Vadin and "Pedoniana" and the medieval fortress "Kamaka" from the 9th-14th centuries.

Among the architectural tourist resources, the Ekimdzhiiev House in the town of Oryahovo stands out, which is over 130 years old. Among the religious tourist resources, it is worth noting the churches in the town of Oryahovo – "Dormition of the Mother of God" and "St. George." The cultural and informational tourist resources include the historical museum, the house museum of "Diko Iliev and the wind bands," and the art gallery in the municipal center.

Tourism in the municipality of Oryahovo is not well developed. There are favorable opportunities through the utilization of natural and cultural-historical heritage and the development of alternative forms of tourism. National events with a tourist focus held in the municipality include: the festival of brass bands in August in the town of Oryahovo, the "Corn Smiles" festival in the village of Selanovtsi in October, and the fish and fishermen festival in the village of Ostrov in July. Wine tourism is beginning to develop in the municipality, represented by two wineries: Chateau Burgozone and Ahinora.

To develop tourism in the territory of the municipality of Oryahovo, it is necessary to improve border connections by modernizing the ports and expanding the infrastructure at transport hubs, which will facilitate cross-border cooperation activities with the Danube riverside regions in the Danube River basin. Organizing and holding cross-border festivals and forums will contribute to the cultural rapprochement of local communities from both sides of the Danube River.

Pleven region possesses exceptional historical and cultural wealth. Utilizing it in an effective and sustainable manner is an opportunity for development and stimulating economic growth. An important factor for the development of tourism in the region is the border with the Danube River and the proximity to neighboring Romania. The transport function of the Danube River is very important and is crucial for the areas adjacent to the river. Water transport along transport corridor № 7 is served by the ports in the town of Nikopol, the village of Somovit, the village of Zagrazhden, and the village of Baikal, but their significance for the economy in the region is not great. Nevertheless, the Somovit port is of national significance. The port infrastructure is in poor technical condition and has deteriorated operational capabilities. An important tool for improving their condition and actively involving them in

the field of tourism activities is the implementation of projects in accordance with the EU Danube Strategy.

Utilizing the Danube River area through the municipalities of Dolna Mitropolia, Gulantsi, Nikopol, and Belene is an opportunity to stimulate economic and infrastructural development in the territory in the field of tourism, develop joint plans for environmental protection and management, and promote alternative types of tourism with Romania, such as eco, adventure, and water tourism. For the Pleven region, the Danube River can play a significant positive role as long as the local public sector and regional business recognize this opportunity, as turning towards the river will contribute to the development of the region and enhance the well-being of the population.

The municipality of Dolna Mitropolia is located in Central Northern Bulgaria, in the central and northwestern part of Pleven Province. The length of the Danube River within the municipality is about 11,100 m. This transport-geographic location is an important factor for the development of the municipality, as one of the corridors of the main Trans-European transport network "Rhine - Main - Danube" passes through its territory.

The municipality of Dolna Mitropolia includes 16 populated places, of which 2 are towns (Dolna Mitropolia and Trastenik) and 14 are villages. Among the geographic features included in the municipality on the right Danube bank are the village of Baikal and the mouth of the Iskar River. Currently, at the western end of the village of Baikal, there exists a multi-purpose pier, where a water-level gauge is installed for continuous monitoring of the river level.

The municipality of Dolna Mitropolia has developed a project in the conceptual phase for the construction of a port in the village of Baikal for public transport of regional significance on the Danube River for passenger transport and other functions. With the implementation of the project, excellent conditions will be created for the development of international connections of the municipality with the Danube cities (Integrated Development Plan of Dolna Mitropolia Municipality 2021-2027).

Despite the weak economic development and the lack of recognition of the municipality as a tourist destination, both for foreign and domestic tourists, the diverse natural and anthropogenic resources are a prerequisite for promoting the region and developing year-round tourism.

The terrain from natural tourist resources is flat and slightly hilly, characterized by predominantly flat forms with low absolute heights. The municipality occupies an area with a typical temperate continental climate. To the north, the municipality borders the Danube River, and through its territory flow the rivers Iskar, Vit, and Gostilya. West of the town of Dolna Mitropolia, the "Valchovets" dam has been built, with waters used for irrigation and fishing. In the vicinity of the village of Gorana Mitropolia, a mineral spring has been discovered, which in the future may be used for tourism purposes. There are 10 protected areas in the municipality, including 7 protected sites and 3 natural landmarks.

The municipality has anthropogenic tourist resources related to the historical-geographical characteristics and spatial development of the settlement structure. The Danube River and the valleys of the Iskar and Vit rivers, along with their tributaries, are a prerequisite for the settlement of various civilizations in its territory. Evidence of this are the historical-archaeological and architectural resources from Antiquity and the Middle Ages.

Various types of tourism can be successfully developed on the territory of the municipality. It is necessary to create a comprehensive tourist product of the Danube Limes, which will attract a significant number of tourists to the Danube.

In addition to cultural tourism, which is the main tourism for the municipality, wine and culinary tourism are also part of the tourism product. A strength of the tourism product is its ability to integrate with other types of tourism: eco, rural, hiking, cycling, river. An opportunity to enrich the product palette is the creation of bicycle routes and the development of bicycle infrastructure and services. Engaging with the tourism function of small settlements that are unpopular as tourist destinations will contribute to the development of tourism-related services and the preservation of local lifestyles.

Gulyantsi Municipality is located in North-Central Bulgaria, in the northern part of Pleven District. The northern border is with the Danube River. Given the advantageous geographical position of the municipality, strengthening cross-border cooperation in the implementation of joint projects with Romania would contribute to the positive development of the municipality.

It includes 12 settlements - the town of Gulyantsi and 11 villages. The greatest wealth of the municipality of Gulyantsi from the tourist point of view are the outlet of the Danube and the preserved

environment. Due to the flat topography and the low bank of the river. The historical and archaeological heritage is at risk because of the low and low-lying Danube river. The Vitus and Iskar rivers flow through the territory in their lower reaches and empty into the Danube. The presence of the Danube, Vitus and Iskar rivers is a prerequisite for the development of fishing tourism, which can increase the contribution of tourism to the local economy. Three protected areas of the NATURA 2000 network are located in the municipality.

Anthropogenic tourism resources are numerous but not well enough explored and developed. Four of them are of national importance - the archaeological reserve "Ulpia Escus" in the village of Gigen; the ancient settlement "Utus"; the Roman necropolis at the village of Milkovitsa and the ancient fortress near the village of Somovit.

The main types of tourism are cultural and nature tourism. There are also resources for the development of experience-based tourism - rural, culinary, eco, photo observation, hunting and fishing.

The Danube plays the role of a limes, but at the same time it can be used as a link and resource in a combination of different types of tourism. The available river port infrastructure in the village of Somovit is a prerequisite for active tourism contacts with Romania.

Areas for an integrated approach have been identified where cooperation with neighbouring municipalities is foreseen. One of these areas is "Ulpia Escus" (Integrated Development Plan of Gulyantsi Municipality 2021-2027). Another zone is the "Danube riparian zone", where fishing villages can be built - in the village of Somovit and the village of Zagradjen, which, in addition to supporting the local economy, will also help to develop water sports and tourist attractions along the river.

Nikopol Municipality is located in North-Central Bulgaria, in the northeastern part of Pleven Region. It includes 14 settlements with the town of Nikopol as the centre and 13 villages. Nikopol is a port town, with the first stage of a ferry complex, a border crossing and a customs office. The port and the ferry connection to Turnu Mugurele are considered to be a major potential, but are not yet well exploited. Tourist and ferry traffic is operating at minimum capacity, compounded by underdeveloped transport, communication and tourism infrastructure.

The efforts of the Nikopol Municipality are aimed at improving the infrastructure and building a tourist information centre at the port to strengthen the functions of the town as a tourist destination (Nikopol Municipality Integrated Development Plan 2021-2027).

The immediate border of the municipality with the Danube River determines problems related to landslide and coastal erosion. The municipality is characterised by a rich biodiversity. There are 5 protected areas within the municipality, including the Persina Nature Park.

The best preserved among the anthropogenic tourist resources are the Shishman's Fortress and the Eliya Fountain in the town of Nikopol. The presence of cultural and historical potential and unique natural resources in the municipality are the basis for the development of cultural, festival, sports, adventure and hunting tourism. The potential of the municipality for the development of ecological, rural and religious tourism has not yet been developed.

An important project that could have an important impact on the development of the town of Nikopol and the municipality is the construction of Danube Bridge 3 to improve transport accessibility and opportunities for the development of tourism and cultural cooperation in the region.

Belene Municipality is located in North-Central Bulgaria, in the northeastern part of Pleven Region. The northern border with the Danube River is 15 km long, and part of the territory is o. Belene. It consists of six settlements: the municipal centre of Belene and 5 villages. The geographical position of the municipality is assessed as favourable in terms of its development opportunities and for the implementation of joint projects in different areas (Belene Municipality Integrated Development Plan 2021-2027).

Protected areas located on the territory of the municipality are Nature Park "Persina", Reserve "Persina Marshes" and others, which are a prerequisite for the development of tourism. Over 36 archaeological sites have been discovered and registered in Belene Municipality. Among the most attractive is the old Roman fortress "Dimum".

Tourism in the municipality is not developed and has a relatively small share in the municipal economy. The natural and anthropogenic resources provide opportunities for the development of hunting, fishing, sightseeing and ecological tourism. The presence of the Persina Nature Park, protected areas and localities, historical and religious sites contribute to the development of nature and cultural tourism.

За да се осъществи идеята град Белене постепенно да се обръща с лице към река Дунав е възможността за създаване на Дунавски парк в града. Към това в бъдеще може да се добави и изграждането на Посетителски център „Димум“. Това ще даде нови функции на брега и ще допринесе за туристическата привлекателност на града.

In order to realize the idea of Belene gradually turning its face to the Danube River, there is the possibility of creating a Danube Park in the city. To this could be added in the future the construction of the Dimum Visitor Centre. This would give new features to the waterfront and contribute to the tourist attractiveness of the town.

Conclusion

A state strategy is needed to offer development opportunities for the districts in the north-western region and the Bulgarian Danube municipalities by diversifying socio-economic functions, developing the local network, diversifying the tourist offer and developing transport networks. Only then will the municipalities along the riverside be able to benefit from the development of the Danube region. Danube will become competitive, attractive, limiting the migration of labour to other regions of the country and to other countries. In this way, cross-border and interregional cooperation will be stimulated, leading to the bridging of social and economic disparities along the river. An important element to ensure future development is the consolidation of links between settlements through the creation of functional urban-urban, urban-rural and rural-rural partnerships and the formatting of cross-border cooperation with Romanian cities.

At this stage of development, important natural and anthropogenic tourist resources along the Danube remain untapped and it is "partially disconnected" from the main tourist flow in Bulgaria.

Therefore, the mission of the Northwest Planning Region should be aimed at creating conditions for the development of tourism potential, stimulating different forms of tourism, increasing the competitiveness of the tourism sector and the quality of the tourism product through tools for integral territorial development, so that the region can position itself as a sought-after tourist destination.

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