

Tourism as a chance for development of serbian border regions

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Abstract: Tourism as an activity of the future is the driving force of the rural and peripheral European regions development. Those areas are usually located near the geospatial borders of the countries and they are often considered as an ideal area for the promotion of different types of the tourism. Border area could become a tourist attraction if it has enough potential represented by specific and unique features which can attract many tourists and curious visitors. Only as such, the border area provides opportunities for the development of tourism types which are not based on massiveness, but on the individualization of the modern tourists needs.

The aim of this paper was to identify the possibilities for tourism development in the border region Lower Danube in Serbia. Based on the detailed overview of this region, it was concluded that this area has significant advantages compared to the other tourist destinations located around the Serbian borders. Possibilities for regional development are predominantly reflected in the different types of the tourism - ecotourism, nature tourism, sport tourism, cultural tourism, etc. Nevertheless, identified potentials are still insufficiently used. In order to develop tourism and the region as a whole, precisely defined tourist product and comprehensive strategy is required. Also, some of the guidelines could be: stimulation of cross-border cooperation between the interested neighbour countries, implementation of measures for improving the educational structure of tourist workers in this area and encouragement of the public-private partnerships.

Keywords: Regional development, Tourism, Border region, Lower Danube, Serbia

1 Introduction

Tourism is becoming one of the most important factors of economic development in many countries of the world. Modern tourism experts are increasingly emphasizing the great importance that the border has in the development of tourism. The complex and mutual connection of tourism and border phenomenon represents an interesting and attractive field of research. By considering tourism as a complex economic branch and boundary as a complex term, it can be concluded

that their relationship is an area that has significant potential for research. In many European Commission documents, tourism is seen as one of the significant opportunities for the development of border (mainly remote and poorly populated) municipalities [1].

In this paper, the concept of the border is first examined, especially the term of political boundary. Then, the relationship between tourism and border phenomenon is considered. In the central part of the paper, opportunities for the development of specific forms of tourism in the five border municipalities of northeastern Serbia, the border region of central Serbia against Romania, are being analyzed. Concluding part of the paper pointed out some limitations that hinder the development of tourism in this "most prosperous tourist zone" in Serbia, and therefore propose appropriate measures in order to promote the development of tourism in the area from Veliko Gradište to Negotin.

2 Cross-national border as tourist attraction

For a long time, the borders were vague areas of suspicious political control. However, today most of the international borders are clearly defined and labeled intentionally, and many are more attractive than they were in the past. The political boundary is a term used in political geography and signifies a landmark of a given political entity or legal jurisdiction, state or sub-national administrative units and their divisions. The process of globalization, as the most important contemporary social process of global dimensions, is best studied right at the borders. The complexity and multidimensional nature of globalization contributes to a great extent to increased interest in the border phenomenon.

In tourism researches, interest in studying the border phenomenon has developed just recently. The researchers' attention was mainly focused on three specific research questions: (1) the perception of crossing the border; (2) tourism management and tourism development strategy in border municipalities; and (3) tourism development through co-operative cross-border projects [2][3][4]. The border phenomenon, as a tourist attraction, can be viewed from two aspects [5][6]. First, it is a borderline with all its demarcation objects that attract curious tourists. These objects are also classified as so-called "known boundaries" (for example, the former Berlin Wall). The border may represent a tourist attraction if its marking uses unusual methods, which distinguish it from the usual surrounding landscapes. Another way in which international borders can attract tourists and recreationists are not lines themselves, but activities, attractions and specific characteristics of communities living close to the borders [7]. The border of Serbia with Romania in the Lower Danube Region is an obvious example. The Vlach national community living in the border municipalities of eastern Serbia, with its specific language and customs, can attract tourists eager to get to know new

cultures. Also, Djerdap National Park, located at the very border of these two countries, is a natural tourism potential that can be even more tourist valorised if the cooperation of the two neighboring countries is raised to a higher level.

The relationship between borders and tourism can be described in three ways [8]. First, it is possible to talk about the boundaries that pass between the two tourist destinations, but they are considerably distant from both. In the second case, the tourist area touches the border only on one side. Finally, in the third case, there are tourist areas that "lean" on the border line on both sides. The border in the form of an obstacle to the development of tourism is characteristic for the first situation – the movement of tourists depends on the degree of its permeability. The cohesion of the two neighboring tourist regions depends to a large extent on the degree of openness of the border between these countries [5].

2.1 Specific types of tourism in border regions

The greater orientation of tourist activity towards border regions, as well as the border itself, is in line with modern tendencies in tourism trends. Potential tourist destinations, including border areas, are the easiest to include in the tourist offer through the realization of specific forms of tourism. Various tourist potentials influence the "creation of specificities of certain tourist destinations, which also influences the possibilities of developing certain forms of tourism in them" [9]. Depending on the primary motive of travel, the four main areas within which specific forms of tourism are formed: (1) *the environment*, (2) *culture*, (3) *events* and (4) *the rest*. The first group of specific forms of tourism includes those whose development is based on the richness of natural resources (ie. care about their preservation), so in that sense, in practice, tourism forms such as: green, hunting, ecotourism and wildlife tourism are recognized. When it comes to specific forms of tourism based on cultural heritage, then most often it is thought of: heritage tourism, commune tourism, aboriginal tourism, wine tours, gastronomic tours, religious tourism, third-world tourism, and ethnic tourism. Congress tourism, sports events, festivals and carnivals are examples of specific forms of tourism in the field of "events". Finally, the "rest" from the point of view of specific forms of tourism refers to: educational tourism, health tourism, spa tourism, rural tourism, cruises, nautical tourism, urban, transit, adventure and hiking tourism. A wide range of specific forms of tourism can be considered as a result of the "individualization of needs" that characterizes tourism in the 21st century [10].

The core of a specific tourist product is its authenticity, uniqueness, accentuated locality, and individual approach to potential tourists. The development of these forms of tourism is based on the potential of the local community, the discovery of hidden natural values, the valorization of natural and anthropogenic motives, the involvement of a local (underdeveloped) community, the use of local knowledge and workforce, and the local community investment in new development programs [9]. All of these factors should be taken into account in assessing the

ability of border municipalities to put their natural and cultural values into the function of tourism development.

3 Tourist destination lower danube in serbia

The Lower Danube region covers the administrative territory of five border municipalities in northeastern Serbia (Veliko Gradište, Golubac, Majdanpek, Kladovo and Negotin). It spreads over the border with Romania (from Rama to Prahovo) and partly with Bulgaria (Figure 1). The boundary of this area towards the inland hinterland is determined by the water reservoir between the Danube and the Morava river basins, across the Veliko brdo, Rakoborski vis and Šomrda, descending to the south to the Carpathian Mountains (Homoljske planine, Mali and Veliki krš and Deli Jovan). The proximity of the eastern Mediterranean direction and the river corridor VII contributes to the good strategic position of this geographical area. The tourist position of the Lower Danube region in Serbia is favorable because this area is well connected with the largest emitting zone in the country (Belgrade). On the other hand, connection with other cities in Serbia is hampered.

The connection between tourism and environmental factors is evident at the tourist destination Lower Danube, which has typically border character, particularly. Usually, the border regions are naturally created relief continents, that provide opportunities for the formation of transnational tourist regions as specific tourist destinations [11]. Since recently, there has been made a progress in the upgrading transnational cooperation between Serbia and Romania. Romania's involvement in European development projects, especially after joining the European Union, sets the basis for a coherent approach to the natural resources management and increasing the level of populations' awareness about the urgency of joint planning and realization of the activities, primarily related to the Danube river [12].

The Danube river flows through the Lower Danube region in the length of 250 km, approximately. Considering that this is the largest water course in Europe, the Danube river can be viewed as the backbone of the European Union. Exceptional attractiveness and specificity of the Danube river and its tributaries presents basis for the tourist development of all of the five municipalities in Đerdap tourist area. The Đerdap national park, as the greatest value of this tourist region, spreads over the right bank of Danube (from Golubac to Karataš near Kladovo). The main natural beauty of this national park is 98 km long Đerdap gorge.

The great wealth of the Đerdap National Park is reflected in large forest area, diverse flora and fauna and numerous cultural and historical monuments dating from the earliest epochs. Đerdap national park is distinguished by one of the richest fauna in this European region. This park presents the habitat for more than

150 bird species and this fact indicates the existence of significant opportunities for the “birdwatching” – activity which is especially attractive for ecotourists. Also, here grows about 1,100 plant species. Very significant species among them are tertiary relics – ancient species that survived the Ice Age and still exist today. There are ten nature reserve in Djerdap national park.

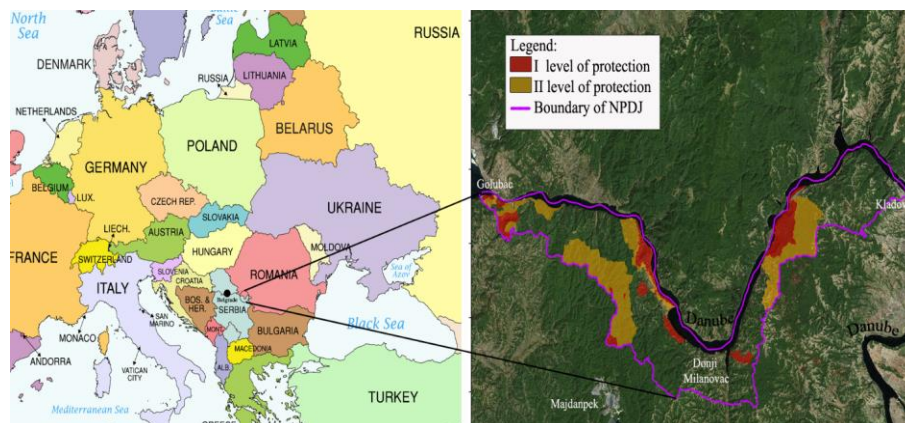


Figure 1
Lower Danube region

Djerdap lake is the greatest hydrological value of the national park Djerdap. Favorable climate provides good conditions for the long bath season, but high water pollution is a limiting factor. Also, this area is consisted of numerous mountains, geo-heritage objects, caves, prerasts, the oldest monument of mining, canyons, diverse and unique water forms (Figure 1).

In spite of the numerous comparative advantages of this region, tourism product and destination position are not at satisfactory level. Current tourism product includes only few types of tourism. In order to take advantages of the main natural values of Djerdap tourism area, it is necessary to create and implement innovative and sustainable tourism strategy. For the purpose of elaborating tourism development plan of the mentioned border municipalities, it should be considered all potential target groups and adapted tourism product according to the specific customer demands.

3.1 Analysis od natural geographical features of Lower Danube region

In order to gain clear insight into the advantages and disadvantages of natural geographical features of Lower Danube tourism destination, it is necessary to

carry out detailed analysis. Obtained results should be the basis for finding the most optimal tourism development strategy. For that purpose, in this article SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats - acronym) was conducted. The results of the SWOT analysis of Lower Danube natural geographical features are shown in Table 1.

Table 1
SWOT analysis of Lower Danube natural geographical features

<p style="text-align: center;">STRENGTHS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Favorable climate conditions • Forest wealth • Flora and fauna diversity • Water resources (Danube with tributaries, Djerdap lake, Silver lake...) • Djerdap national park • Morphological diversity 	<p style="text-align: center;">WEAKNESSES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of local communities cohesion and cooperation • Insufficient care for the environment • Neglected rivers and lakes areas • Cloudness • Poor infrastructure
<p style="text-align: center;">OPPORTUNITIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher demand for ecotourism • Higher demand for rural tourism • Contemporary environmental legislative • Waterways (Danube) • Cross-border cooperation with Romania 	<p style="text-align: center;">THREATS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neglected natural resources • Investments in other border tourist destinations (Stara Planina, Vlasina, Zlatibor) • Seasonal character of special forms of tourism • Decreasing volume and intensity of cooperation between local government and tourist organizations

Natural geographical features of Lower Danube tourism destination satisfy all conditions for the development of various tourism types, particularly special forms that arise from the environmental factors. In the last few years, there has been an expansion of ecotourism and rural tourism, that were recognized as the main opportunities for the development of this region. Contemporary environmental protection legislative of the Republic of Serbia, as an active factor of the environment, contributes to the preservation and improvement of the natural resources state. Also, cross-border cooperation with Romania is very important, especially in the case of Djerdap national park, which is located on the border of those two countries. In that sense, there is an initiative for the foundation of unique national park, which will include left bank and coastal area of Danube river and Djerdap lake in Romania. Tourist valorization of Djerdap region indicated that humans are the main causer of this region weaknesses. Environmental awareness of domestic population is at very low level. The best ways for overcoming these problems are: organization of study programs, seminars, trainings, as well as providing information of tourism strategy and its importance for regional development. On the other hand, irresponsibility of local community regarding municipal waste disposal led to the occurrence of many rural wild

dumps. Accordingly, for the creation of future tourism strategies for border municipalities in Lower Danube region, it will be very important to pay attention on preventing environmental degradation.

3.2 Special forms of tourism in the Lower Danube region

Lower Danube, as one of the most important tourist destinations, requires strategic adjustment and improvement of existing tourism forms, as well as design of new products customized to the trends of tourist demand. Modern tourists are increasingly interested in seeking the adventure and discovering new areas, while number of the so-called "traditional" trips for fun and vacation are reducing. Novelties that are dictated by tourism nowadays present a development opportunity for all five municipalities in the Lower Danube region in order to exploit all the described natural potentials.

In the previous period, pupils and youth tourism, resident tourism, recreational and sport tourism, short-term tourism (weekends and holidays) and business tourism were dominant forms of tourism in this tourist destination. Bearing in mind the already analyzed natural tourist values of the Danube municipalities, it can be concluded that the Lower Danube region have potentials for development of other, specific forms of tourism. In this regard, it could be emphasized the following types of tourism: (1) ecotourism, (2) hunting and fishing tourism (3) rural tourism, (4) nautical tourism (as well as cruises) and (5) pedestrian tourism (Table 2).

Table 2
Potentials for specific types of tourism in Lower Danube region

Potentials	Type of tourism
Preserved natural ecosystems; archaeological sites; historical monuments; healthy water and food	Ecotourism
Rich wildlife; fish species diversity	Hunting and fishing tourism
Healthy water and food; hospitality; authentic rural areas	Rural tourism
Danube - river corridor VII	Nautical tourism
Road sections E7 and E4	Pedestrian tourism
Rich natural heritage	Cyclotourism

Ecotourism. Ecotourism is usually defined as a responsible travel and visits to areas of relatively conserved nature in order to enjoy the natural values, as well as all the accompanying cultural objects from the past and present. The International Ecotourism Society - TIES defines this form of tourism as "responsible travel to the nature areas, that preserves the environment and maintains the welfare of the local population" [13]. The fact of great importance, which stems from the previous definition, is that ecotourism creates opportunities for the socio-economic involvement of the local population. Opportunities for the development of ecotourism in the Lower Danube are based on preserved natural ecosystems, archaeological sites, historical monuments, healthy water and food and hospitality.

Finally, the diverse features of indigenous culture complement the tourism product of this region, which, hence, can be considered a potential eco-destination. The renewal of passenger water transport on Danube will accelerate the development of ecotourism, due to possibility to offer to the tourist circular journey to this destination. Journey (and cruise) on Danube provides additional experience regarding its status of border river that physically separates the two countries.

Hunting and fishing tourism. The hunting grounds of the Djerdap tourist region considered to be the richest hunting grounds for deer, roe deer, wild boars, foxes, rabbits, wolves, and other large and small wild game. The coastal areas of the Danube and its tributaries, as well as numerous lakes in the area, are the favorite destinations for fishermen. However, due to lack of accommodation capacities (huts, log cabins, hunting lodges and arranged camping sites), the expected effects of this type of tourism are missing. Nevertheless, numerous manifestations that affirm the richness of river fauna and hunting have been revived in the Lower Danube region.

Rural tourism. Although over 85% of the territory in the Republic of Serbia is rural, rural tourism is the most developed in parts of western Serbia (Dragovic et al., 2009). Regarding the Lower Danube region, the future of rural tourism in recent development studies is relaying on the development of tourist supply during the entire year. This, of course, implies the complementarity of rural tourism with ecotourism, hunting tourism, healthy food and mountain tourism, i.e. hiking.

Nautical tourism. On the European market, there is a trend of increasing interest in nautical tourism on the rivers and the Danube and the Djerdap area are one of the most attractive destinations in Europe in that sense. Nautical tourists are a significant factor of increasing demand in the future, bearing in mind that they spend a lot of money during the trip. However, the capacities of existing infrastructure (marinas) in the Lower Danube region still does not comply with increased demand trend. The Danube cruise in this region is also not sufficiently exploited due to a number of limitations (lack of arranged access roads and ports, border controls and lack of diversity of tourist facilities), so the large tourist ships still bypass Lower Danube region on their route.

In addition to the mentioned four forms of tourism, it should be pointed out that there are conditions for the development of some additional forms of tourism in the Lower Danube region, like the city tourism (Donji Milanovac, Kladovo, Veliko Gradište), transit tourism (after the restoration of water transport by the Danube) and sports and recreational tourism, due to expansion of tourism capacities in Kladovo, as well as in Veliko Gradište (new accommodation capacities on the Silver Lake).

Pedestrian tourism. A particularly attractive possibility for expansion of tourism supply in the Lower Danube region is reflected in the fact that the European footpath passes through Republic of Serbia - road section E7 passes through the western and road section E4 through the eastern part of the country (Figure 1). The road section E4 firstly passes along the right bank of the Danube (from Ram fortress and further through Veliko Gradište and Golubac) and then over the

mountains (Mali krš, Liskovac, Veliki Greben and Miroč) to Vratna and Rajačke Pimnice. The future development of pedestrian tourism will contribute to increase of Lower Danube region attractiveness.

The rich natural heritage of the region represent the ideal basis for the expansion of a special form of selective tourism - *cyclotourism* (or bicycle tourism). The cyclotourism, which can be defined as a recreational form of tourism, usually includes one night or a daily visit, where cycling is an essential part of the stay. The future of tourist destination Lower Danube is reflected in the development of specific forms of tourism, which are mostly determined by available natural resources. The quality of the tourist supply depends primarily on the quality of the natural-geographic characteristics of the region. In this context, it is necessary to take concrete measures to preserve and protect the environment and to establish cross-border cooperation.

Conclusion

Decades before, borders have been viewed as barriers or obstacles to tourism trends. Such a perception of the relations between boundary and tourism originated from the belief of most tourists that the border is, first and foremost, a symbol of strict controls and formalities that are often exposed at the border crossings. Service economic activities, including tourism, are particularly sensitive to political boundaries and all the negative connotations associated with them.

However, in recent years, increasing attention has been paid to analysis of the border as tourist potential, having in mind its tourist attractiveness. The border itself can become a tourist attraction, if it has the potential to attract numerous tourists and curious visitors by some specificity and interesting characteristic. An analysis of tourist natural values in the Danube border municipalities showed that the Lower Danube region has comparative advantages for the specific forms of tourism development compared to the other border tourist destinations in Republic of Serbia. This is especially true for ecotourism, but also for other types of tourism such as recreational, excursion, congress, nautical and pedestrian tourism. Among all natural resources, hydro-resources, like Danube, Djerdap Lake and Silver Lake, have the highest tourist value.

In addition, it is necessary to be "better, cheaper and faster than others" in order to achieve the competitive advantage of the Lower Danube region in the tourist market in Republic of Serbia, which implies "inventive" behavior of every individual in the region that is participating in the provision of tourist services [14]. Tourism workers in all border municipalities must, first of all, pay attention to the positioning of the tourism product - the main instrument of the marketing mix - taking into account the complementarity of special forms of tourism. Only a precisely defined structure of the tourism product and supply can enable the tourism development and the choice of the appropriate tourism strategy (nautical tourism, for example, is not sufficiently included in the offer despite the increased demand for such form of tourism in other destinations). In order to improve the

quality of tourism services in the Lower Danube region, some measures should be implemented, like improvement of the educational structure of the tourism employees, strengthening of promotional attitudes, designing new projects of cross-border cooperation, establishing of cooperation between the municipalities in the Djerdap tourist region and greater involvement of their tourist organizations in the implementation of tourism projects. Finally, cooperation between the private and public sectors in the tourism of this border tourist region should be raised to the higher level. The exploitation of all opportunities for developing specific forms of tourism in the mentioned area is particularly important due to poor economic development.

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