

## SPATIAL ORGANIZATION OF TOURISM IN BULGARIA

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### ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to present some of the major results of a study on the territorial development of tourism in Bulgaria over the period 2000 – 2009, carried out within an EU project. The study proves that the spatial organization of tourism will influence its dynamics, effectiveness and competitiveness in the years to come – till 2020. Amongst the findings of the study are the major features, problems and trends in the territorial development of tourism in Bulgaria such as: increasing territorial disproportions, lower efficiency of tourism in the traditional tourism areas compared to alternative tourism areas, emerging domestic market demanding for alternative types of tourism – balneology/spa, cultural, rural, and eco tourism. Based on a cluster analysis a spatial model, consisting of four macro- tourism structures (at national level) has been identified.

### Key Words:

territorial development of tourism,  
tourism regionalization,  
Bulgaria

### INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a priority in the National Strategy for Regional Development in Bulgaria. The dynamic character of tourism leads to the formation of territorial natural and social-economic structures distinguished by their resource potential, organization, functionality and spatial influence. The territorial development of tourism which always flows unevenly generates and maintains spatial imbalances limiting the competitiveness of the regional and the national tourist products. Therefore it requires systematic studies and a corresponding general model for its organization and management -a National Scheme of Tourist Regions (NSTR). This general model serves a basis for coordinated actions and policies in accordance with the national and European priorities for the social-economic and the cultural-ecological development over the period 2013 -2020. However, the existing practice indicates for a fragmented approach being applied to the territorial planning and management processes. The dynamics in the territorial development of tourism is not subject of permanent monitoring, analysis, evaluation and coordination. Therefore the improvement of the spatial organization of tourism is one of the major areas of concern of both current tourism regional policy and tourism regional studies in Bulgaria.

The country faces tremendous need of tourism regionalization (districting strategies). The National Tourist Regional Schemes developed before 1990 are not relevant to the new social-economic environment in Bulgaria. Besides this type of a planning and management tool has been subject of underestimation for a long time after entering upon the new transition period to a market economy. However, the uncontrolled tourism growth has turned the tourism regionalization scheme to be the most appealing aspect to tourism planners at all levels – national, regional and local. In 2007 the State Tourism Agency (now Ministry of Energetic, Economy and Tourism) has elaborated a National Scheme of Tourist Regions (NSTR) for the purpose of marketing, incl. branding the regional tourist products of Bulgaria. It has been strongly criticized by both practical and academic experts (Marinov et al, 2008). A deep analysis of the NSTR has also revealed a number of problems of methodological nature determining the approach to the tourism regionalization. The Government needs scientifically substantiated NSTR as a tool to guide the decision making process on the future territorial development of tourism in terms of identification of special regions for infrastructural development or improvement, for allocating public funds for economic development and for a number of other actions directed towards enhancing the regional effectiveness, coordination and competitiveness of the tourist destinations in Bulgaria. This will result in decreasing and limiting the territorial imbalances and will provide an opportunity for social and territorial cohesion. On the other hand the problems related to the organization and management of tourism emerge and are solved in the local communities. The national and regional policy of spatial planning of the territory, including the policy for sustainable and balanced use of the natural and cultural resources is implemented through the local communities. This justifies the application of a community based approach to the regional tourism studies for the purpose of formulating and implementing an effective regional tourism policy as well as for the purpose of the regional product marketing.

**The aim** of this paper is to present some of the major results of a study on the territorial development of tourism in Bulgaria over the period 2001 – 2009, carried out within an EU project<sup>1</sup> under the leadership of the author.

**Methodological framework** . It is the first scientific study with national geographic coverage that is conveyed at a local (community) level. The conceptual framework of the study is based on the general idea about the structural character of the tourist system. The methodological framework applied in the study corresponds to this concept and is therefore focused on revealing the relationships between the components within the tourist system as well as between the system and its social-economic and cultural-ecological environment. This allows the implementation of an innovative integrated (social, economic, and ecological) approach in compliance with the principles of territorial cohesion and concentration of the resources (*The Green Book of Territorial Cohesion*, including the Cohesion Reports — 2007, 2008, 2009, and 2010) to the overall regional planning, incl. tourist planning. It is a model based on the introduction and measuring of the regional (integral) effectiveness as a primary tool of coordination and management of the regional tourist structures. A set of modern methods – statistical methods, GIS, neural networks, cluster analysis, regional and expert analysis have been applied in the study. To reveal the existing space organization of tourism in Bulgaria four basic groups of indicators have been identified:

1/ Basic Indicators of the Intensity of the Tourist Development

- absolute concentration of tourist accommodation (number of beds per sq. kilometer) — serves to group the territorial units at the local and regional levels by type of modern concentration of tourist accommodation;
- relative concentration of tourist accommodation (index – the density of beds in relation to the density of the population and a coefficient of favorable natural conditions) –allows a typology of the territorial units at the local and regional levels depending on the degree of correspondence of supply and demand;
- tourist function (size of the temporary population in relation to the sum of the permanent and temporary population) – a specific criterion to be used at a local level (populated place and municipality). It is revealed through a generalized resultant indicator of the density of the available beds capacity. It allows a typology of the municipalities with the aim of finding out those for which the tourist function is the only type of economic activity;
- tourist intensity (100 overnight stays per 1 inhabitant) – it measures the socio-economic impacts of tourism by using a basic indicator of overnight stays, taking into account the size of the population. Unlike the tourist function, which reveals the potentially possible impact, this indicator shows the real impact of tourism on the community.

2/ Basic indicators measuring the structure and the type of modern tourist development –the seasonal fluctuations of these indicators are also analyzed;

- Relative share of the hotel beds capacity (%);
- Relative share of the average occupancy of the beds capacity (%);
- Relative share of the overnight stays of foreigners (%);
- Average length of stay of the tourists (days);
- Revenues per one bed (BGN).

3/ Basic indicators measuring the regional effectiveness –

- the economic effectiveness (revenues per bed in BGN);
- the social effectiveness (level of unemployment in %);
- the environmental /ecological effectiveness (expenditures made for the preservation and reproduction of the environment in BGN);

4/ Baseline indicators measuring the regional / district performance;

- economic efficiency (income per person in BGN);
- social performance (unemployment rate in%);
- ecological -efficiency (cost of preservation and reproduction of the environment in BGN).

Special attention has been paid to the quantitative measurement of the effectiveness of the territorial development of tourism (the effectiveness of the identified territorial structures). A new algorithm for the evaluation of the regional effectiveness has been proposed. The effect from the proposed approach has two dimensions: the first one allows to determine the effectiveness of tourism in a certain municipality, administrative region and/or area for a specific time period; and the second one – to make a comparison of the effectiveness between the territorial units (horizontal analysis). One of the advantages of the approach is the

<sup>1</sup> BG161PO001/3.3-01/2008/001-1 "Marketing research and assessment of the effectiveness of the national marketing', 'Analysis of the Territorial Development of Tourism in Bulgaria', MEET, Sofia, 2010

opportunity to perform the comparative analysis of the territorial development of tourism in Bulgaria in dynamics for a certain period. Therefore, the effectiveness of the territorial tourism structures in the country has been brought out as a “standard” of qualitative and comparative analysis, and is defined as a fundamental dimension (basic characteristic for measurement and comparison). The reason for this is that it cannot be replaced by another characteristic (indicator).

**Major results** of the study on the analysis of the territorial development of tourism in Bulgaria over 2001 – 2009 period:

*Major problems related to the territorial development of tourism in Bulgaria*

The conducted analysis has revealed a number of problems within the following areas:

- insufficient statistical data in terms of volume, content coverage, geographical stratification (especially at community level) and reliability;
- underdeveloped methodological framework of conducting regional tourist studies, incl. some specific aspects – substantiated indicators and methods of data collection,;
- limiting studies down to a characteristic of the tourist territorial system and its components while neglecting its structural nature and inter-regional relationships;
- lack of a created data base relevant to the new structural approach to the regional tourist studies;
- lapses and lack of concept clarity in the legal regulatory framework of tourism that restrict the conducting of comprehensive regional tourist studies and as a result – the formulation and implementation of an effective regional tourist policy.

*Major features and trends in the territorial development of tourism in Bulgaria*

Amongst the findings of the study are the major features and trends in the territorial development of tourism in Bulgaria over the period 2001 - 2009:

1/ A major unfavorable characteristic and a stable trend is that the territorial development of tourism in the country over 2001–2009 period has led to increasing territorial disproportions (spatial imbalances).

Degree of tourist development

- A total of 20 municipalities in Bulgaria representing 7.5 % of all the municipalities ( 264 ) in the country are considered to be tourist municipality. They have registered more than 100 thousand (the lowest threshold criterion of Birkenhauer (1976) overnight stays in 2009. The uppermost threshold above which a municipality is considered urbanized is above 500 thousand overnight stays. Four municipalities (3 out of 4 seaside municipalities) fall into the group with registered number of overnight stays exceeding 500 thousand (the uppermost threshold above which a municipality is considered urbanized)

Index of variation based on the overnight stays for 2009 shows:

- enormous differences in the values of the index varying from 0 up to 43.12;
- strong polarization of the municipalities by this indicator — very few municipalities (19) have a value above 1. They provide half of the overnight stays in the country. Among them stand out substantially two seaside municipalities (Nessebar and Varna) with values of the index 43.12 and 41.88 respectively. The value of this index of the winter-sports mountain municipalities varies between 2.0 and 5.0.
- variegated functional profile of the municipalities with value of the index of variation above 1 – the functional profile of a number of municipalities located in the internal parts of the country is related to cultural tourism, spa / balneology tourism and other alternative types of tourism.

Enlargement of the material base (superstructure) of tourism and its territorial concentration in the seaside and the winter-sports mountain resorts.

- the total number of beds in the various types of accommodation facilities in 2009 ( 287 423 )) has grown by more than 130 % compared to the number in 2001.
- the Black sea coast municipalities have the biggest relative share (66%) of the beds capacity.
- three seaside municipalities (Balchik, Varna, and Nessebar) supply more than half of the capacity in 2009.

2/Another unfavorable characteristic and a stable trend in the tourism development is related to the seasonality (temporal imbalance).

The impact of the seasonal factor is on the increase during the period under investigation,

- the deviations (the differences) between the maximum number of beds made available during the third quarter and their number during the first and the fourth quarters respectively are significant and show a general trend toward increase (during 2001 — +66 and +33 % respectively; during 2005 — +190 and +55 %; and during 2009 — +130 and +73 %).

3/ Lower economic efficiency of tourism in traditional tourist areas compared to alternative tourist areas (spa/balneology, cultural tourism, eco-tourism) oriented mostly towards domestic tourists.

- the average value of the revenue per bed in the spa/balneology municipalities is almost equal to that in the winter-sports municipalities and exceeds the average value of the revenue in the seaside municipalities
- the direct relationship between the revenues per bed and the share of the overnight stays of foreign tourists shows great deviations across the seaside municipalities and a relatively smaller deviation in the winter-sports municipalities.

4/Emerging domestic market demanding for alternative types of tourism – balneology/spa and cultural tourism, rural and eco tourism.

- the relative share of the overnight stays of domestic tourists has increase by 10% over the period 2005 – 2009, whilst that of foreign tourists has decreased by 10 % over the same period. This is due to the fact that the domestic tourist flows are oriented mostly outside the traditional tourist areas.

5/ Incomplete, unbalanced, and ineffective use of the resource potential (natural and cultural) for the development of tourism.

- the typology of municipalities according to a set of indicators ( degree of development of tourism, and natural and cultural resource potential) has revealed a number of municipalities with high and/or medium resource potential of both kinds and weak level of tourist development. They are widespread mostly in the Western and the Northern Central regions of the country.

#### Territorial structure of tourism in Bulgaria

##### Typology „potential – degree of development“

Based on an innovative methodological approach through the application of modern quantitative methods municipalities are grouped by using a set of indicators showing the degree of the tourist development, the attractiveness of the resource potential (natural and cultural) and the level of utilization of the potential. The large number and the types of the used indicators predetermine the selection of the method., in particular the neural networks, and more precisely, — the self-organizing maps of Kohonen (Tzvetkov, 2006). A series of clusters-maps have been developed according to the level of the natural, and cultural potential, and the level of tourist development. Every one of the three characteristics (natural potential, cultural potential, and degree of development of tourism) has been transformed into a three graded scale with values: low, medium, high. The final typology represents 3 types and 10 sub-types of communities.

Within the first type: Municipalities with very good tourism development, fall the two most developed seaside municipalities and the Capital City

Within the second type: Municipalities with good tourism development, fall two groups (sub-types according to the potentials) of municipalities. The most wide-spread occurrence of municipalities with high cultural potential can be found in the Northern Central Region - Ruse, Veliko Tarnovo, Dryanovo, Kotel, Lovech, and Pleven and in the Southern Central Region - the Rhodopes mountain municipalities of Asenovgrad, Zlatograd, Smolyan, Bratsigovo, and Plovdiv These municipalities are popular due to their cultural resource potential, and they are primary territorial localizations for cultural tourism. They represent a significant reserve for the development of tourism with opportunities for the implementation of new investment policies in the sector and new policies of territorial development, respectively new forms of territorial and functional organization of tourism.

Within the third type: Municipalities with weak tourism development, fall a large number of municipalities. The group of municipalities with high and medium potential of one kind are widespread mostly in the Western tourism region and are related to the not yet utilized natural and anthropogenic resources of Pirin, Rila, the western-most parts of the Rodopi mountains, and Western part of the Balkan range. At this stage they are not considered to play the role of a factor that shapes the territorial system of tourism.

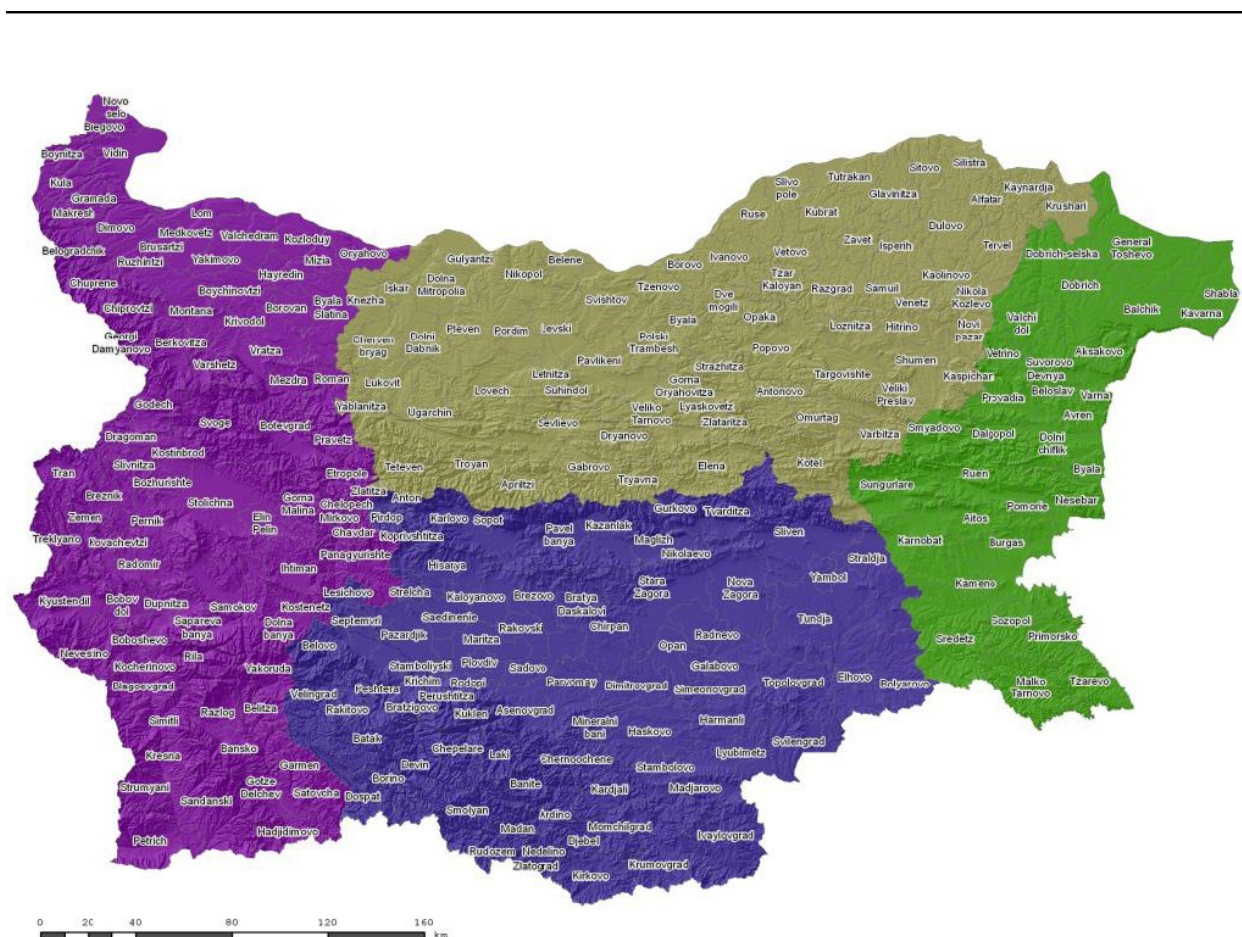
##### Territorial macro-structures of tourism

The typology „potential – degree of development“ has been built up by a number of iterations (again through neural networks). Based on the clusters obtained, at the third iteration a structural model of regional (territorial) planning and management of tourism in Bulgaria has been developed. It consists of four tourism macro - structures (at national level) (Frg.1) Their spatial scope and boundaries have been determined at the level of the municipalities (level LAU1 according to the classification standards of the European Union). This is indicative of a detailed study and provides the opportunity to use the model as an effective instrument for territorial planning and horizontal management of tourism.

Some of the major features and advantages of the macro-structures for the planning and the management of the sector are the following:

- In terms of territory, population, populated places, and number of municipalities, there is a marked balance between the tourism macro-structures, except the most powerful one — the Eastern macro-structure;
- In terms of the major economic indicators - revenues per bed, there is a relative balance between the macro-tourist structures in the country;
- The tourism macro-structure East is characterized by lower values in terms of the basic tourist indicators. They are considered to be offset by the large potential in terms of resources and material base (super structure) for the development of the sector. It is the most developed, with the strongest economic and the social impacts on the results for tourism in Bulgaria;
- The dynamics of the regional effectiveness of the tourism macro-structures for the period 2008 and 2009 shows that it can and must be used as a primary strategic tool for an integrated territorial policy of tourism. The inconsistency between the groups of tourism sites defined in the Tourism Act and the lack of comparability in terms of methodology of the official statistical information about them do not allow to analyze the regional effectiveness for a longer period of time. The overcoming of the mentioned limitations will create real opportunities for effective and efficient territorial management of tourism in Bulgaria;
- The evaluateion of the tourism macro-structures according to the model „center-periphery” justifies the conclusion that the Eastern tourism macro-structure will be preserved as the generator of economic influence that stimulates the development of tourism in the other macro-structures of the country;

**Figure 1**  
**Tourism macro-structures in Bulgaria**



The territorial organization and dynamics of the regional effectiveness of tourism is directly dependent on the structure of the territory. According to the Law on Administrative-Territorial Division of Republic of Bulgaria (art. 3, section (1); art. 4, section (1) and art. 5, section (1) the policy concerning the structure of the territory is implemented at three levels – national, regional (at the level of the administrative

districts) and local (at the level of the municipalities). It is determinative for the territorial development of tourism in the identified macro-tourism structures in the country. That is why, when developing the land use planning schemes and plans, it is recommendable to solve three basic strategic priorities: *the first one* – setting apart of a separate (independent) national priority “territorial development and spatial organization of tourism” in Bulgaria; *the second one* – taking into account and determining the specifics in the territorial development of tourism in the five (5) types of territories of the country as defined in art. 7 of the Regional Development Act ( State Gazette. 50) and *the third one* – establishment and application of criteria of the degree of attractiveness of the social-natural environment for the organization, the coordination, and the management of the tourism activities in Bulgaria.

### Conclusion

1 The study proves that the spatial organization of tourism will influence its dynamics, effectiveness and competitiveness in the years to come – till 2020. An important peculiar feature and a stable trend in the territorial development of tourism is the growth of the territorial anomalies, which decrease revenues in the sector, put limits to its competition, diminish its competitiveness, and bring about imbalanced regional development.

2. It is necessary to carry out systemic studies on the territorial development of tourism, the results of which would be used to substantiate policies directed at limiting and decreasing the existing and the newly emerging spatial differences, increasing the regional effectiveness.

3 The proposed approach and methodology for conveying studies on the territorial development of tourism provide real opportunities for a transition to more effective and integrated regional policies in the planning and management of tourism throughout the territory of the country.

4. The four macro-territorial tourism structures identified in the study can serve the basis for the formulation of general and local policies for the development of tourism. They allow the integration with the administrative-territorial units thus increasing the administrative capacities for the utilization of the financial resources from the Structural Funds of the EU, and for the implementation of a common regional policy for the development of tourism.

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