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GOVERNMENT OF BULGARIA



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DOCUMENTATING THE CULTURAL AND
NATURAL HERITAGE IN RUSE-GIURGIU
REGION AND EXISTING TOURIST
POTENTIAL



Project "A joint strategy for tourism
development in the Giurgiu-Rousse region,
TourDev Giurgiu-Ruse"

Project Code
ROBG-501

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I. PREFACE

The "Joint Tourism Development Strategy Giurgiu-Ruse, TourDev Giurgiu-Ruse" project is financed under the Romania-Bulgaria Cross-Border Cooperation Program. The project has a duration of 14 months and a total budget of EUR 416,588.17, of which EUR 354,099.94 is provided by the European Regional Development Fund.

Main objective of the project is to contribute to the development of tourism in the Giurgiu-Ruse area by providing local stakeholders with a comprehensive strategy to increase the visibility of both counties as a destination to visit, and facilitate the formation of a stakeholder's network that will provide their contribution to the development of the strategy.

Main activities of the project include:

1. Exploration and popularization of landmarks in the region of Giurgiu - Ruse. This activity includes the following specific tasks:

- Documenting the cultural and natural heritage in the Giurgiu - Ruse area;
- Maintenance and popularization of tourism in the region of Giurgiu - Ruse;
- Implementing surveys, research, information system, tourism development strategy;
- Organizing workshops with stakeholders;
- Developing and disseminating a joint strategy.

2. Development of a joint strategy for the progress of the Giurgiu - Ruse region. This activity includes the following specific tasks:

- Organizing workshops with stakeholders;
- Developing and disseminating a joint strategy;

3. Communication. This activity includes the following specific tasks:

- Launch activities;
- Developing and printing a joint tourist guide;
- Preparing a shared tourist photo album;
- Capturing 10 videos to be distributed through the project site and social networks;
- Public information events;

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II. RESEARCH AND DESCRIPTION OF THE MOST ATTRACTIVE CULTURAL AND NATURAL RESOURCES IN THE RUSE-GIURGIU REGION

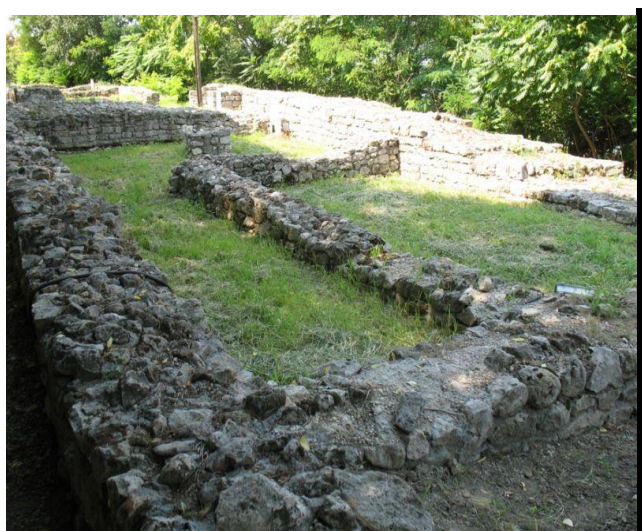
A. Ruse region

II.1. SECTION HISTORICAL RESOURCES AND HERITAGE

II.1.1. Site: SEXAGINTA PRISTA FORTRESS

General information about the site:

Sexaginta Prista or just Prista is an ancient Roman fortress on the territory of today's city of Ruse. Sexaginta Prista in Latin means Port of the Sixty Ships. Even before the Romans built the Sexaginta Prista, this place was inhabited by the Thracians. Proof of this are the ceramic vessels, bronze objects, coins, bones and other finds. Sexaginta Prista shared the fate of the other fortresses on the right bank of the Lower Danube. It died under the blows of the Avars and Slavs at the end of the 6th and the beginning of the 7th century.



Sexaginta Prista is located in the modern north-western part of the city of Ruse, on an elevation up to the bank of the Danube River. The fortress was located at the end of the 19th century by Felix Kanitz on the basis of the distances between the fortresses marked on Roman route maps. First information about the fortress and its remains we received at the beginning of the twentieth century from the Shkorpil brothers. During excavation and construction works in the courtyard of the Military Club, remains of the fortress have been found, but real archaeological research was carried out in the periods 1976-1978 and 2005-2006. As a result, about 50 meters from the northwest fortress wall and tower, six buildings, Temple of Apollo and the Principality headquarters of the military part of Sexaginta Prista were found. Conservation of open structures was carried out in 1976-1978, and in 2002 an outdoor Sexaginta Prista exposition was opened. In the past years, the site has been popularized and is now among the museum expositions visited.

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After analyzing all available sources, it was found that the castle was given its name in connection with events from the end of the 1st century, namely the Dacian wars of Emperor Domitian (85-89 AD). At that time a Roman legion, consisting of approximately 6000 people, was transferred to the mouth of the Rusenski Lom river via the Danube River. Exactly 60 ships of the pristis type were needed for this action. In honor of the victory over the Dacians, the castle got its new name. Probably until then the castle bore the Thracian name of the Rusenski Lom river. The first known epigraphic and written sources of Sexaginta Prista date from the beginning of the second century.

Until now, it has been assumed that on the territory of the castle in the period from the third century BC until the arrival of the Romans there was an unfortified Thracian settlement. The latest studies prove without doubt that the hill was a place where the Thracians have performed rituals and cult practices unknown to us. Remnants of this activity are hundreds of pits, of which about 50 have been explored so far. Thracian pit complex is dated in the 1st century BC to 1st century AD. The place is an important religious center, and the settlement located not far from it (about 500m) had important commercial and political functions. This period is among the poorly researched archaeological periods in Bulgaria. Many ceramic vessels, bronze objects, coins, bones and other finds have been discovered in the pits. Some of the vessels were preserved intact. A zoomorphic vessel with a rich cut and polished decoration ending with the head of an eagle is unique.

Tourist information and site evaluation:

Criterion	Description and evaluation
Physical condition	Very good. The finds in the fortress are exposed in an appropriate way, with the aim of maximizing the effect on the visitors.
Management and maintenance	The site is managed by the Regional Museum of History, Ruse. Service staff is available. Working hours are from Tuesday to Saturday (9.00 - 17.30). Entrance fees: for students - 2,00 BGN, for individual visitors - 5,00 BGN, for organized groups (over 5 people) - 4,00 BGN per person, talk in

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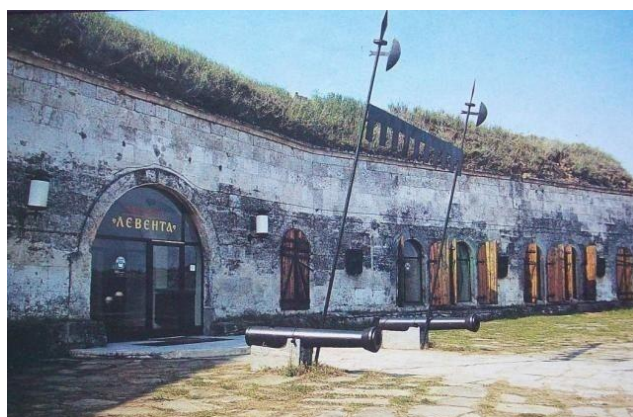
	Bulgarian - 10,00 BGN
Infrastructure and accessibility	Excellent. The site is located within the boundaries of the city of Ruse and can be reached by both walking and means of transport. This makes the fortress fully accessible.
Period of possible operation	All year round. The site has no seasonal character and can operate throughout the year.
Accommodation near the site	Given the fact that the site is located within the city of Ruse, over 90 accommodation places are available of all categories.
Level of popularization	Poor. Most information about the site is provided by the Regional Museum of History - Ruse. It is not in sufficient volume. There is no strategic approach to popularize the site and attract more visitors.
Opportunities for development	The site has a high potential for development. Due to its historical value, it can be included in a wide range of tourist destinations. The site can also develop as an independent tourist attraction.

II.1.2. Site: LEVENT TABIA FORT

General information about the site:

Levent Tabia fortress is situated at the highest point of the city of Ruse, the hill of Sara Bair. The fortress was built in the 20s of the XIX century by the Ottoman Empire as part of a defense system. The project of the fortress was made by the Prussian military engineer, officer Helmut von Moltke, who also designed the Medjidi Tabia fortress near the city of Silistra.

Levent Tabia had been a safe and secure facility and remained unharmed until the Liberation of Bulgaria from the Ottoman Empire, when it continued to serve the purposes and needs of the newly formed Danube Military Fleet. The Fort had a garrison of 3000 soldiers and artillery. During the Second World War, it accommodated an anti-aircraft battery.



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The information about the Levent Tabia fort is limited due to its classification by the Ottoman and Bulgarian military authorities. However, it is known that it was one of the most important parts in the defense of the Danube border of the Ottoman Empire and the largest and strongest unit of the Ruse Ottoman Fortress. Its construction at the dominant height of Sara Bair near Ruse (then Ruschuk) began in the 20s of the XIX century. On the eve of the Russian-Turkish War of 1828-1829 the fort still had only temporary facilities, but in the early 30s of the XIX century it was thoroughly rebuilt under the Prussian military engineers' projects, and despite the later modernizations, it retained its appearance in the Liberation War in 1876-1878. Exceptional measures were taken to strengthen it, because it was considered that due to its strategic location its capture would lead to the capitulation of the entire fortress.

The fortification's external line of the fort consisted of a ground fieldwork and a ditch facing south. Its complexly built concealed entrance was from the north. During the Liberation War, 20 Krup large caliber long-range artillery cannons were dislocated there. Barracks, ammunition dumps, etc., were located inside. The fort had a garrison of 3000 people (1 regiment) and was adapted to withstand a prolonged siege. Even as early as the Crimean Russian-Turkish War of 1854-1856 it was connected to the command point by a telegraph line, and during the Liberation War laying of an underground telegraph connection to the town has been started, which remained unfinished. Due to its great importance, a photo of the fort has found a place in Emperor Alexander II's album with photographs of the most important Ottoman castles captured by the Russian army.



In 1972 it was turned into the attractive restaurant complex Levent. In the 7 halls that had the atmosphere of each of the Danube capitals, welcomed prominent statesmen, Fidel Castro, Leonid Brezhnev, Chaushesko and hundreds of tourists. In the mid-1990s, the restaurant ceased operations to be rebuilt and renovated at the end of 2005 as the LEVENTA complex. The complex consists of a restaurant and Ruse Winery. The restaurant has 150 seats distributed in 7 halls, richly decorated with frescoes. The Ruse Winery produces elite red and white wines under the trade mark LEVENT. Production methods combine an ancient way of natural wine making with the scientific achievements in this field.

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Tourist information and site evaluation:

Criterion	Description and evaluation
Physical condition	Excellent. The site contains plenty of well-maintained historical artifacts.
Management and maintenance	The site is managed by a private entrepreneur.
Infrastructure and accessibility	Excellent. The site is located within the boundaries of the city of Ruse and can be reached by both means of transport and walking. This makes the fortress fully accessible.
Period of possible operation	All year round. The site has no seasonal character and can operate throughout the year.
Accommodation near the site	Given the fact that the site is located within the city of Ruse, over 90 accommodation places are available of all categories.
Level of popularization	Good. The site is more popular with the current restaurant and wine tasting options. The level of awareness of the historical value of the site is low. There is a website on the site (http://www.leventa-bg.net), which also focuses on the culinary opportunities of the current restaurant. There is no strategic approach to popularizing the site and attracting more visitors in terms of its cultural and historical value.
Opportunities for development	The site has a high potential for development. Due to its uniqueness and the combination of history and gastronomy, it can be attractive to a wide range of tourist groups. Accordingly, it can be included in both massive and narrowly targeted tourist destinations.

II.1.3. Site: "BABA TONKA" HOUSE-MUSEUM

General information about the site:

Baba Tonka Museum is a key exposition for the understanding and presentation of the Bulgarian Renaissance and the role of Ruse in the processes of national maturation. Its

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implementation represents the contribution of the Obretenovs family and Baba Tonka in the accomplishment of the tasks of the Renaissance - a movement for an independent church, enlightenment and revolutionary struggle.

Since October 1993, the house has been vacated by museum officials and has remained uninhabited. On June 2, 1994, the Obretenovs Family exposition was opened in the Zahari Stoyanov Museum House. In 1998 under the project "Beautiful Bulgaria" the facade of the building of the former museum Baba Tonka Museum was renovated. The water pipeline was also repaired to reduce the sinking of the outhouse. The Municipality of Ruse redeems the restituted floor and at present the whole house is owned by the Municipality and is granted for free management of the Ruse Regional Museum of History.



Baba Tonka Museum is located in a two-storey building with a ground floor. The main purpose of the exposition is to present the nation's maturing through education and religion. There are many personal belongings of Baba Tonka (Granny Tonka) and the family, as well as many such belongings of prominent revolutionaries: Panayot Hitov, Philip Totyu and others. They lived in Ruse after the Liberation. Some of the most interesting and exciting artifacts are the sabers of Stefan Karadja and Georgi Sava Rakovski. Even until today Stefan Karadzha's skull, which is a personal donation of Baba Tonka's granddaughter Lilyana Balkanska, is kept there. Special screens are installed in the house-museum presenting the history of the town and the fate of the Obretenovs family, who were dedicated to the cause for the liberation of Bulgaria.



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The ground floor of the museum houses a historic reconstruction of the Ruschuk prison, which shows the original doors of the prison, chains and padlocks from the XIX century, as well as silhouettes of prisoners, with which visitors can take pictures. An audio background depicts the atmosphere in the prison at that time.

Tourist information and site evaluation:

Criterion	Description and evaluation
Physical condition	Excellent. The site contains plenty of well-maintained historical artifacts.
Management and maintenance	The site is managed by the Ruse Regional Museum of History. Service staff is available. Working hours from Tuesday to Saturday (9.00 - 17.30 ч.). Entrance fee: for students - 2,00 BGN, for individual visitors - 5,00 BGN, for organized groups (over 5 people) - 4,00 BGN, tourist guiding in Bulgarian - 10,00 BGN
Infrastructure and accessibility	Excellent. The site is located within the boundaries of the city of Ruse and can be reached by both means of transport and walking. There is an elevator available in the museum, making it accessible for people with physical disabilities. This makes the museum fully accessible.
Period of possible operation	All year round. The site has no seasonal character and can operate throughout the year.
Accommodation near the site	Given the fact that the site is located within the city of Ruse, over 90 accommodation places are available of all categories.
Level of popularization	Poor. Most information about the site is provided by the Regional Museum of History - Ruse. It is not

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	in sufficient volume. There is no strategic approach to popularize the site and attract more visitors.
Opportunities for development	The site has a relatively high development potential. Due to its historical value, it can be included in a wide range of tourist destinations. The site can also develop as an independent tourist attraction.

II.1.4. Site: PANTHEON OF NATIONAL REVIVAL HEROES

General information about the site:

The Pantheon of the National Revival Heroes is a national monument-ossuary located in Ruse. It was built under the design of architect Nikola Nikolov and was opened on February 28, 1978. There are buried 39 famous Bulgarians including Lyuben Karavelov, Zahari Stoyanov, Stefan Karadja, Panayot Hitov, Baba Tonka, Nikola Obretenov, Panayot Volov, Angel Kanchev, and others. Honored are 453 people, participants in the Botev's detachment, the Chervenovodska rebellions detachment, the April Uprising and opalchentsi (volunteers) whose names are inscribed in the interior.



The Pantheon is among the 100 national tourist sites. The monument was opened on 28 February, 1978 on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the Bulgarian Liberation from the Turkish slavery. For the construction of the Pantheon in 1977 the "All Saints" church in the old Ruse cemetery had to be demolished. After a broad discussion, in 2001, the Pantheon was "Christianized" by mounting a cross on its dome, and the "St. Paisiy Hilendarski" chapel, as well as a museum exposition were opened.

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Special place is dedicated in the Pantheon to the Ruse Obretenovs family: Tiho Obretenov and Baba Tonka, with their seven children, headed by Nikola and Georgi, all having vigorously worked for the Bulgarian liberation. Around the memorial plate are placed many belongings of the revolutionaries, as well as some personal weapons. The four corners of the central square are towered impressive statues, each of which carries its message to the visitors. A niche in the walls passes into a small corridor that take the visitors into the history of the Pantheon and the park as a whole. It also leads to the "St. Paisiy Hilendarski" small chapel, which was sanctified in connection with the Christianization of the monument, where some non-standard icons can be seen.

Tourist information and site evaluation:

Criterion	Description and evaluation
Physical condition	Good. The site contains enough historical artifacts.
Management and maintenance	The site is managed by the Ruse Regional Museum of History. Service staff is not available. Visiting hours: Upon prior request. Entrance fee: students - 2,00 BGN, individual visitors - 5,00 BGN, groups (over 5 people) - 4,00 BGN
Infrastructure and accessibility	Excellent. The site is located in the very center of Ruse, and can be reached by both transport and walking. This makes the site fully accessible.
Period of possible operation	All year round. The site has no seasonal character and can operate throughout the year.
Accommodation near the site	Given the fact that the site is located within the city of Ruse, over 90 accommodation places are available of all categories.
Level of popularization	Poor. Most information about the site is provided by the Regional Museum of History - Ruse. It is not in sufficient volume. There is no strategic approach to popularize the site and attract more visitors.
Opportunities for development	The site is an emblem of the city of Ruse and has

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	an extremely high potential for development. Due to its historical value, it can be included in a wide range of tourist destinations. The site can also develop as an independent tourist attraction.
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II.1.5. Site: MONUMENT OF FREEDOM

General information about the site:

The Monument of Freedom is the modern symbol of Ruse. It was erected on the main square to celebrate the liberation of the city. The Monument of Freedom in Ruse was designed by the Italian sculptor Arnaldo Tzoki at the beginning of the 20th century and was made by Georgi Kiselinchev. Over time, it has acquired importance as one of the emblems of the city and is part of its coat of arms. The monument was erected with the donations of the townspeople of Ruse and of the followers from the whole of Bulgaria at the initiative of the Veteran-Volunteers Society and with the decisive help of the Simeonov brothers, famous bankers and founders of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry in the town. Granite blocks were delivered from Austria, with the original idea of the monument depicting the Liberator King Alexander II, but ultimately it was decided that the figure would be a woman, a symbol of freedom. The monument was officially opened on August 11, 1909.



It is one of the most beautiful one-figure compositions in Europe. One of the most resistant classical forms, pyramidal composition, was applied in its construction. It is topped by a 3.75 m high statue of a bronze woman which symbolizes liberated Bulgaria. She holds a sword in her left hand and her right-hand points to where the Russian soldiers came from. At the front side of the base of the monument there are two bronze lions. One with its mouth tears the slave chains, and the other protects the sword and the shield of freedom. On the four side-walls of the pedestal there are relief scenes depicting the Bulgarian volunteers. Behind the monument are placed two cannons from the war, and on the front side there is an inscription: *"To the veterans and volunteers who took part in the liberation of Bulgaria in 1877-1878"*

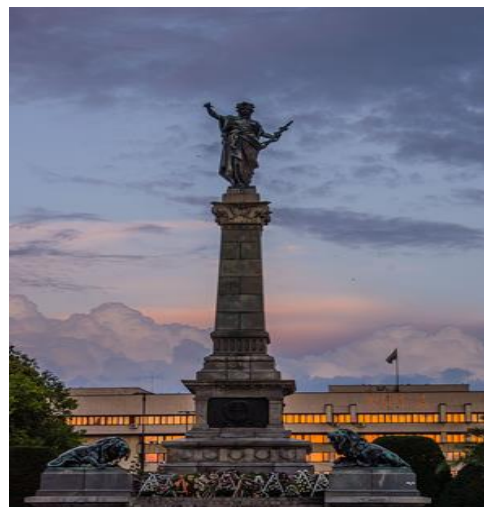
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Tourist information and site evaluation:

Criterion	Description and evaluation
Physical condition	Excellent.
Management and maintenance	The site is managed by the Municipality of Ruse.
Infrastructure and accessibility	The site is located in the very center of Ruse, and can be reached by both transport and walking. This makes the site fully accessible.
Period of possible operation	All year round. The site has no seasonal character and can operate throughout the year.
Accommodation near the site	Given the fact that the site is located within the city of Ruse, over 90 accommodation places are available of all categories.
Level of popularization	Very good. Information about the site is in sufficient volume.
Opportunities for development	The site is one of the main emblems of Ruse and is therefore widely recognizable. As a major flaw that can be noted is the insufficient popularization of its history and symbolism.

II.1.6. Site: ZAHARI STOYANOV HOUSE-MUSEUM

General information about the site:

Zahari Stoyanov House-Museum was opened on March 3, 1978 in honor of the 100th anniversary of the Bulgarian Liberation from the Ottoman yoke. The exposition is set-up in four halls. It features many personal belongings to the writer and revolutionary Zahari

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Stoyanov, as well as objects belonging to his family. The exposition shows many details of the Bulgarian struggles for national and ecclesial liberation, as well as the life and works of Zahari Stoyanov and the Obretenovs family - the family of Baba Tonka, who was the mother of Anastasia Obretenova, the wife of the Zahari Stoyanov.



In the house-museum there is a hall devoted to the Bulgarian revolutionaries in the struggles for the freedom of Bulgaria. Presented there are Stefan Karadzha, Philip Totyu, Panayot Hitov and Hadzhi Dimitar. Many of their personal belongings are exhibited there, one of which is the saber, which belonged to Stefan Karadzha. The museum is among the 100 national tourist sites.



Tourist information and site evaluation:

Criterion	Description and evaluation
Physical condition	Excellent. The site contains plenty of well-maintained historical artifacts.
Management and maintenance	The site is managed by the Ruse Regional Museum of History. Service staff is available. Working hours from Tuesday to Saturday (9.00 - 17.30 ч.). Entrance fee: for students - 2,00 BGN, for

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	individual visitors - 5,00 BGN, for organized groups (over 5 people) - 4,00 BGN, tourist guiding in Bulgarian - 10,00 BGN
Infrastructure and accessibility	Excellent. The site is located within the boundaries of the city of Ruse and can be reached by both means of transport and walking. There is an elevator available in the museum, making it accessible for people with physical disabilities. This makes the museum fully accessible.
Period of possible operation	All year round. The site has no seasonal character and can operate throughout the year.
Accommodation near the site	Given the fact that the site is located within the city of Ruse, over 90 accommodation places are available of all categories.
Level of popularization	Poor. Most information about the site is provided by the Ruse Regional Museum of History. It is not in sufficient volume. There is no strategic approach to popularize the site and attract more visitors.
Opportunities for development	The site has a relatively high development potential. Due to its historical value, it can be included in a wide range of tourist destinations. The site can also develop as an independent tourist attraction.

II.1.7. Site: BATENBERG PALACE

General information about the site:

The Battenberg Palace is the popular name of the building, which today houses the Ruse Regional Museum of History. It is located in the city of Ruse on Battenberg Square. The palace was built in 1882 according to the plans of the Austrian architect Friedrich Gruenanger. The building was designed to serve as the official residence of the Bulgarian prince Alexander I Battenberg in Ruse. Since the palace was completed after the retirement of Prince Alexander I from the Bulgarian throne, it was never used as the seat of a Bulgarian ruler. Instead, after its completion, it houses the district government in Ruse and since 1948 the building has been used for the needs of the Regional Court in Ruse.

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The building has a large dungeon, where interrogations of criminals and political prisoners have been carried out. In addition, the building was connected to an underground tunnel with the nearby house of the Ruse mayor. A large park with fountains and sculptural compositions is built in front of the palace.

In 1990, it was decided that the Battenberg Palace would accommodate the expositions of the Ruse Regional Museum of History. A large-scale program for the renovation and reconstruction of the palace was implemented for this purpose. After a long break of the repair works, the renovation of the building ended in fifteen years.



Tourist information and site evaluation:

Criterion	Description and evaluation
Physical condition	Excellent.
Management and maintenance	The site is managed by the Ruse Regional Museum of History. Service staff is available.
Infrastructure and accessibility	The site is located in the center of Ruse, and can be reached by both transport and walking. This makes the site fully accessible.

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Period of possible operation	All year round. The site has no seasonal character and can operate throughout the year.
Accommodation near the site	Given the fact that the site is located within the city of Ruse, over 90 accommodation places are available of all categories.
Level of popularization	Good. Information on the site is insufficient. There is no strategic approach to promoting the site as an architectural landmark and attracting more visitors.
Opportunities for development	The site is one of the main emblems of Ruse and is therefore widely recognizable. Due to its historical value, it can be included in a wide range of tourist destinations. The site can also develop as an independent tourist attraction.

II.1.8. Site: REGIONAL HISTORICAL MUSEUM

General information about the site:

The Ruse Museum was founded in 1904. At its core are the archeological collections of Karel and Hermengild Shkorpil and the naturalist Vasil Kovachev, who gathered at the Ruse Knyaz Boris Men's Lyceum. In 1937 the School Museum Collection became a City Museum under the leadership of the municipality settled in one of the salons of the Income Building.

In 1949 the museum was nationalized under the name of National Museum. In 1952, it was granted the status of Regional Museum and since July 2000 it has been transformed into a Regional Museum. Since 2007, the permanent exposition of the museum has been housed in the building of the district government, built in 1882 - 1892 by arch. Friedrich Gruenanger. The original plan was to use the building as the residence of Prince Alexander I Battenberg, which is why today it is called the Battenberg Palace.

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The museum stores about 140,000 fund units. Among its exhibits the following can be distinguished:

- Prehistoric ceramics and idol plastic;
- Borovsko Treasure from the 4th Century BC (ritual service for wine, silver with gilding);
- Finds from the archaeological excavations of the ancient Danubian castles Jatrus and Sexaginta Prista, the medieval Bulgarian town of Cherven;
- Collection of medieval frescoes;
- Collections of exhibits from the traditional lifestyle;
- Ethnographic collections of urban clothing, porcelain, glass and silver from the late 19th - early 20th century;
- Personal belongings of prominent figures of the Bulgarian national liberation struggles such as Panayot Hitov, Georgi Rakovski and others;
- Numismatic collection;
- Collection of bones of prehistoric mammals, including the unique lower jaw of Mamutus Romanus, the only one in the world, and others.



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Institutionally Ruse Regional Museum of History unites the expositions of the Historical Museum, the Pantheon of Renaissance, the Ruse Urban Ethnography House-Museum (known as the House of Kaliopa), the Baba Tonka House-Museum, the Zahariy Stoyanov House-Museum, the Toma Kardjiev House-Museum, as well as three outdoor expositions: the Ivanovo Rock Churches, the Medieval town of Cherven, the Roman fortress Sexaginta Prista. The museum develops scientific and popularization activities. It conducts field archeological and ethnological research. It is the organizer of the well-established forum Fair of Museum Expositions.



Tourist information and site evaluation:

Criterion	Description and evaluation
Physical condition	Excellent. The site contains plenty of well-kept historical and cultural artifacts.
Management and maintenance	The site is managed by the Ruse Regional Museum of History. Service staff is available. Visiting hours: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Summer visiting hours 9.00 - 18.00 (non-working days: none);- Winter visiting hours: 9.00 - 18.00 (non-working days: Sunday)
Infrastructure and accessibility	Excellent. The site is located within the boundaries of the city of Ruse and can be reached by both means of transport and walking. This makes the fortress fully accessible.
Period of possible operation	All year round. The site has no seasonal character and can operate throughout the year.

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Accommodation near the site	Given the fact that the site is located within the city of Ruse, over 90 accommodation places are available of all categories.
Level of popularization	Good. Information on the site is insufficient. There is no strategic approach to popularize the site and attract more visitors.
Opportunities for development	The site has tremendous potential for development, as it has many historical and cultural values of great value. The Web site of the museum is outdated and does not contain the necessary information and vision to attract more tourists. The site can also develop as an independent tourist attraction.

II.1.9. Site: NATIONAL MUSEUM OF TRANSPORT

General information about the site:

The National Museum of Transport is located in Ruse, on the bank of the Danube, and is unique in the whole country. It is located in the building of the first railway station in the country, built in 1866 under the Barkley brothers project. The exposition is located in two parts in the station building and outdoors - several steam locomotives, various wagon models and the personal wagon of King Ferdinand I, the wagon with which the Turkish sultan has taken tours and many other interesting exhibits are kept.



The magnificent train station complex (designed and built in 1864-1866) offers to the visitors 3 museum expositions:

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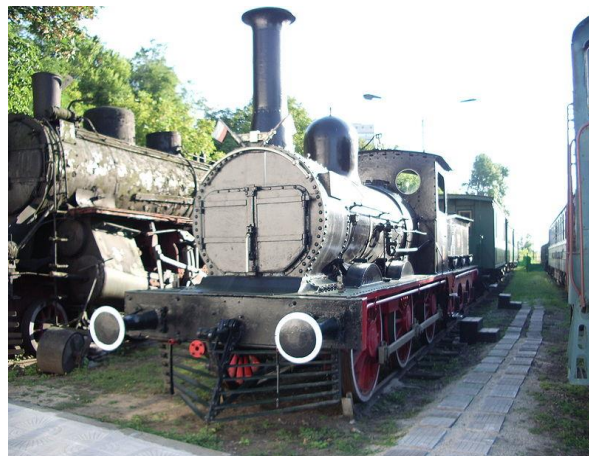
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- The Old Train Station, representing the main moments of the development of the railway transport in Bulgaria and the connection of the railway with the passenger navigation on the Danube;
- The Park-museum with train compositions from the mid-19th century and mid-20th century, freight and specialized wagons;
- The Wagon-salons, unique exhibits, used for royalty trips in the compositions of the I and II government trains. Among the crowned individuals, who had the privilege of traveling with them were Sultan Abdul Aziz, Empress Evgenia, Knyagina Klementina, HM Duke Alexander Battenberg, HM King Ferdinand I, HM King Boris III and others.



On 26 June 1966 on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the launching of the railway transport in Bulgaria the museum was categorized as a national railway and communications museum. The building of the museum was declared a historic monument.



Tourist information and site evaluation:

Criterion	Description and evaluation
Physical condition	Good. The site contains enough museum artifacts, most of which are in good physical condition.
Management and maintenance	The site is managed by the Bulgarian Railroads.

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	<p>Service staff is available. Visiting hours:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - from November to March from Monday to Friday, from 09:00 to 17:00; - from April to October from Tuesday to Saturday from 09:00 to 17:00;
Infrastructure and accessibility	Excellent. The site is located in the central part of Ruse, and can be reached by both transport and walking. This makes the site fully accessible.
Period of possible operation	All year round. The site has no seasonal character and can operate throughout the year.
Accommodation near the site	Given the fact that the site is located within the city of Ruse, over 90 accommodation places are available of all categories.
Level of popularization	Relatively poor. Given the narrow specialization of the Museum the information about the site is insufficient. The main part of the available information is part of the Bulgarian State Railways web site www.bdz.bg There is no strategic approach to popularize the site and attract more visitors.
Opportunities for development	The site has exceptionally high development potential. Considering the historical value of the exhibits stored, it can be included in a wide range of tourist destinations, both conventional and narrowly specialized. The site can also develop as an independent tourist attraction.

II.1.9. Site: BYALA BRIDGE

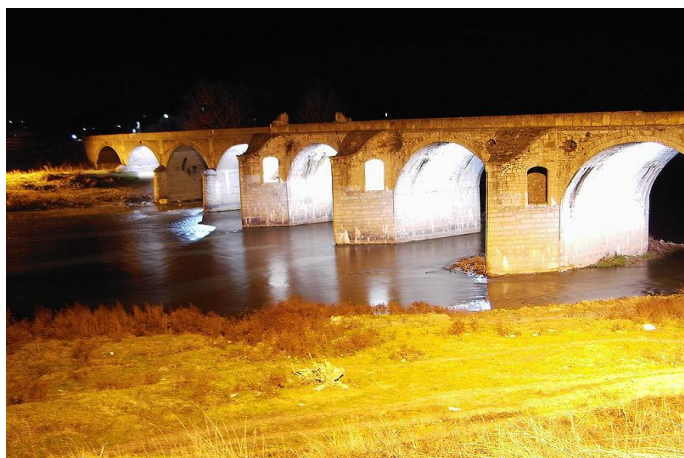
General information about the site:

Byala Bridge is an arched bridge located above the Yantra River, 1 km from the town of Byala (Ruse District), whose name the bridge carries. It was built by Kolyu Ficheto and is considered to be an achievement of the Bulgarian Renaissance engineering, construction and architectural art. Work on it began in 1865 and ended in 1867. The bridge was made of lime stone and lime mortar and its construction lasted 2 years. It has a length of 276 m and is 9 m wide. Its 14 vaults with 12 m openings are decorated with embossed images of animals. It is supported by 13 supports with water cuts and relieving niches, as well as two abutment walls.

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The idea of building the bridge was given in 1865 at the request of the Ruler of the Danube Vilayet (Province of the Ottoman Empire) at that time, Midhat Pasha. The legend has it that when Midhat Pasha decided that a bridge to connect Ruschuk (Ruse) with Tarnovo, Pleven and Sofia should be built over the Yantra River, someone told the Pasha that there is a self-taught master in Bulgaria, but who worked both well and cheap. Midhat Pasha called Master Kolyo Ficheto and assigned him the task for the bridge. The master asked two weeks for calculations. He returned to Tarnovo, bought wax candles from a church and started work. He heated the wax in the flame, then bent and stuck the wax. Thus, he made a model of a bridge with 14 arches, with flat and not arched span like the old Roman bridges, with a simple but sturdy construction, just to the taste of the Bulgarians of that time.



The bridge is preserved as a monument of building art. It is only used for pedestrian. South of it there is a modern bridge.

Tourist information and site evaluation:

Criterion	Description and evaluation
Physical condition	Very good. The site is socialized and exposed in

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	an appropriate manner.
Management and maintenance	The site is managed and maintained by the Municipality of Byala.
Infrastructure and accessibility	Excellent. The site is located in the immediate vicinity of the main road Ruse - Veliko Tarnovo and Byala, and can be reached by means of transport. The site can be walked around by foot. This makes the site fully accessible.
Period of possible operation	All year round. The site has no seasonal character and can operate throughout the year.
Accommodation near the site	Near the site there are 5 accommodation locations of all categories. In view of the fact that the site is 52 km away from Ruse, the accommodation locations can reach more than 90 of all categories.
Level of popularization	Relatively poor. Information on the site is insufficient. There is no strategic approach to promoting the site as an architectural landmark and attracting more visitors.
Opportunities for development	The site is one of the main emblems for the overall activity of Kolyu Ficheto and of the town of Byala respectively and is therefore widely recognizable. Due to its historical and architectural value, it can be included in a wide range of tourist destinations. The site can hardly be developed as an independent tourist attraction.

III.2. SECTION CULTURAL RESOURCES

III.2.1. Site: March Music Days Festival

General information about the site:

The March Music Days International Festival is one of the oldest and most renowned festival stages for classical music in Bulgaria. It is a festival with a modern programming strategy and a high public rating. It was founded in 1961 and organized by the Municipality of Ruse. The edition of the festival is annual, and it has become a meeting place for elite performers from the European and world music scene.

The festival podium in Ruse was shared by prominent performers from all over the world - D. Shostakovich, S. Richter, K. Mazur, G. Rozhdestvenski, V. Neumann, J. Temirkanov, S. Sondetszki, S. Costa, M. Stokhausen, Sir N Mariner, Y. Bashmet, G. Kremer, M. Mayski, K. Penderecki, D. Sitkovicki, P. Galoa, Jordi Saval; orchestra of the class of the

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Bucharest Philharmonic, the Bucharest Radio Orchestra, the Lithuanian Philharmonic Bruckner Orchestra, Linz, the Paris chamber orchestra and others.



The festival today is developing a broad platform for stimulating young and talented musicians from around the world and for real and active dialogue between performers with a different artistic and cultural background.

The festival is the winner of the prestigious international label European Festival on the pilot project of the European Commission and EFA Europe for the festivals. In 2017, the world-famous Bulgarian violinist Svetlin Rusev was invited as an artistic consultant of the festival.

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Traditionally, the concert program of the festival is performed in the halls of the Income Building and the Ruse State Opera. These are emblematic buildings for the city, which further contribute to the unique atmosphere of the festival.

Tourist information and site evaluation:

Criterion	Description and evaluation
Physical condition	Not applicable.
Management and maintenance	The festival is one of the leading cultural events in the calendar of Ruse Municipality. The event is administered and managed by the local administration with the help of non-governmental organizations and sponsors.
Infrastructure and accessibility	Excellent. The event is hosted in the halls of the Income Building and the Ruse State Opera. The buildings are located in the very city center, making the event fully accessible.
Period of possible operation	Annually. The event is held every year.
Accommodation near the site	Given the fact that the event is held within the boundaries of the city of Ruse, more than 90 accommodation places are available of all categories.
Level of popularization	Excellent. The festival has its own web site: www.marchmusicdays.eu . The information is in sufficient volume.
Opportunities for development	The site has a high potential for development. The

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	main opportunity for its future development is to attract even more visitors from the target group, by enriching and expanding the festival program. The event develops mainly as a separate tourist attraction but can be part of various tourist destinations.
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II.2.2. Site: Folk Festival "Living Water"

General information about the site:

The Living Water folklore festival takes place in the Ayazmoto locality near the healing spring of the St. Marina monastery near the village of Karan Varbovka. Organizers are the Municipality of Dve Mogili and the Community Center "Razvitie 1908", Karan Varbovka. The festival gives the opportunity to talents to express themselves in the field of Bulgarian folk song, instrumental and dance art for preservation and enrichment of the Bulgarian national culture. The main objectives of the gathering are to help preserve traditions and customs, to allow expression and cultural exchange of different formations and individual performers, to cultivate love for Bulgarian folklore and to establish itself as a significant event in the cultural calendar of Dve Mogili Municipality.



Objectives of the festival:

- To preserve and promote the uniqueness of Bulgarian folklore;
- To stimulate the interest and the love of all generations towards the Bulgarian folk art;
- To encourage the search, preservation and distribution of authentic songs, fairy tales, narratives, encyclopedic content;
- To encourage the search, preservation and distribution of specific folk customs and dances;
- To encourage the creation and popularization of new folklore-based works of author's, from which generations can draw wisdom and moral;

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- To encourage and stimulate the participation of creative teams and performers;
- To establish itself as a significant event in the cultural calendar of the Municipality of Dve Mogili;
- To establish itself as a major cultural event on a national scale;



Община Две могили,
кметство с.Каран Върбовка,
НЧ "Развитие-1908"
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ЖИВА ВОДА



The festival also includes additional competitions:

- Contest for the presentation of the folk costumes of the participants. The presentation of authentic costumes must be accompanied by an explanatory text of the individual elements and details of the costume.
- Contest for presentation of Bulgarian folk embroidery;
- Contest for the presentation of kuker masks;

The specificity of the festival comes from the fact that it takes place in the immediate vicinity of the "St. Marina" monastery, which is not yet well known to the general public. This, in turn, is an opportunity for the festival to attract additional numbers of visitors.

Tourist information and site evaluation:

Criterion	Description and evaluation
Physical condition	Not applicable.
Management and maintenance	The festival is one of the leading cultural events in the Dve Mogili Municipality calendar. The event is administered and managed by the Community Center "Razvitie 1908", Karan Varbovka with the help of the municipal administration.
Infrastructure and accessibility	Very good. The event takes place in the Ayazmoto locality near the healing spring of the "St. Marina" monastery, near the village of Karan Varbovka.

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	The physical location is accessible by means of transport and walking, making the event fully accessible.
Period of possible operation	Annually. The event is held every year.
Accommodation near the site	No immediate accommodations are available nearby. In this regard tourists should use the opportunities provided mostly by the city of Ruse where more than 90 accommodation places are available of all categories.
Level of popularization	Relatively poor. The information about the festival is distributed only by the Municipality of Dve Mogili. It is sporadic and updated only before the next edition of the festival. The information about the festival is not in sufficient volume
Opportunities for development	The event has a very good development potential. The main opportunity for its future development is to attract even more visitors, to whom to offer a combination of a visit to the festival and the opportunity to visit the nearby "St. Marina" monastery. The event can be developed as an independent tourist attraction but can also be included in various tourist destinations.

II.2.3. Site: APPLE FESTIVAL, VILLAGE OF EKZARH YOSIF

General information about the site:

The apple festival is an annual event and is considered one of the attractions in this region. It is traditionally held around August 28, when the Assumption of St. Mother of God in old style is celebrated. This is the only event of its kind in Bulgaria. It is not accidental that the festival is held in the village of Ekzarh Yosif because the settlement is accredited to grow 23 apple varieties, half of them for the whole country. Part of the holiday is an exposition of culinary delights from the fruit, and more - cosmetics, household and everyday life goods with apples. The program also includes many attractions for guests.

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Within a culinary exposition in the center of the village, guests and locals can see and taste different strudels, pies, cakes with different varieties of apples - Chadel, Melrose, Florina, Charden, Jonagold, Mucu, Golden Excellent, Red Excellent, Eidared, Fuji, and others.

Over 30 local growers already have apple gardens with an area of more than 1 acre. Their number increases every year. The land of the village of Ekzarh Yosif hosts almost 1000 decares of apple plantations with nearly 800 decares of them already harvested.



Tourist information and site evaluation:

Criterion	Description and evaluation
Physical condition	Not applicable.
Management and maintenance	The festival is one of the leading cultural events in the Borovo municipality calendar. The event is administered and managed by the local community center with the help of the municipal administration.
Infrastructure and accessibility	Very good. The event takes place in the center of the village of Ekzarh Yosif, making the event fully

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	accessible.
Period of possible operation	Annually. The event is held every year.
Accommodation near the site	No accommodation is available nearby. In view of this, tourists should use the opportunities provided mostly by the city of Ruse where more than 90 accommodation places are available of all categories.
Level of popularization	Relatively poor. The information about the festival is sporadic and it is being updated only before its next edition. The information about the festival is not in sufficient volume. It is distributed only in local and regional media.
Opportunities for development	The event has very good development potential. The festival is unique in nature and can therefore be attractive to a wide range of tourist groups. Accordingly, it can be included in both mass and narrowly targeted tourist destinations - culinary. The event can be developed as an independent tourist attraction.

II.2.4. Site: RUSE NATIONAL JAZZ FEST

General information about the site:

One of the oldest and most reputable festivals in Bulgaria. It gathers the elite of the Bulgarian jazz musicians and maintains the prestige of its native jazz scene at home and abroad. It is traditionally held at the end of November, with concerts taking place in the Income Building.

The Ruse National Jazz Fest has been present in the musical tradition of the city for 43 years. Its main goal has always been to present the leading trends in Bulgarian jazz and its most successful representatives. The forum is also open to musicians and jazz formations guesting from other countries. It is included in the cultural calendar of the Ministry of culture.

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The first edition of the festival was organized in 1975 by Petar Parcheto Petrov, a legendary Bulgarian jazz performer, amateur and jazz popularizer in Bulgaria. The National Jazz Fest is open to musicians and jazz formations not only from Bulgaria but also from other countries. Over the years, the program has been attended by performers from other countries without this being an accent in the organizers' concept. The event is part of the Ruse Autumn Salon of Arts.

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Tourist information and site evaluation:

Criterion	Description and evaluation
Physical condition	Not applicable.
Management and maintenance	The festival is one of the leading cultural events in the calendar of Ruse. The event is administered and managed by the Municipality of Ruse with the support of the Ministry of Culture.
Infrastructure and accessibility	Excellent. The event is held in the Income Building, located in the center of Ruse, making the event fully accessible.
Period of possible operation	Annually. The event is held every year.
Accommodation near the site	Given the fact that the event is held within the boundaries of the city of Ruse, more than 90 accommodation places are available of all

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	categories.
Level of popularization	Relatively poor. The information about the festival is sporadic and it is being updated only before its next edition. The information about the festival is not in sufficient volume. It is distributed only in local and regional media.
Opportunities for development	The event has very good development potential. The festival is unique in character and has its historical significance. Accordingly, it can be included in both massive and narrowly targeted tourist destinations. The event can be developed as an independent tourist attraction.

II.3. SECTION RELIGION

II.3.1. Site: ST. TRINITY TEMPLE

General information about the site:

The St. Trinity Orthodox Church in Ruse was built in 1632. The year is written on a handwritten Bulgarian gospel dating back to the 17th century. In the southwest corner of the temple there is a room called the catacomb. Its construction history is rather vague. It is supposed to have been a catacomb of the 5th century or a medieval church later included in today's church. During the Ottoman rule, it was easier to issue a permit to build a new temple when there was previous one in the same place, restoring the old temple. Ruse Christians probably used the old catacomb to build their church.

The present temple is a three-nave basilica measuring 15.60 / 31.20 m. Two rows of seven columns separate the naves. The middle nave is higher. The current appearance of the temple is from after the Liberation. Two chapels were built through donations. One was dedicated to St. Alexander Nevsky and was sanctified on August 5, 1884. It was not in operation since 1979, and in 1983 it was rebuilt and houses a museum exposition of church service ware, icons and old-printed books. The second chapel is dedicated to the holy brothers Cyril and Methodius. It was consecrated on 16 March 1886 by Metropolitan Gregory of Dorostol and Cherven.



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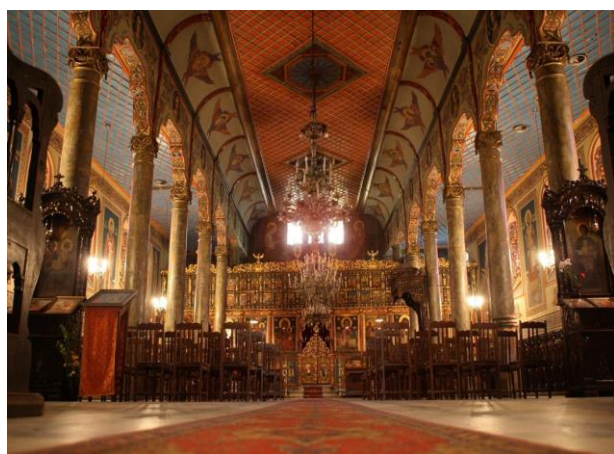
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The most colorful in the interior of the temple is the iconostasis, which according to some sources is the only one in Northern Bulgaria created by the Samokov school. According to other sources, it is the work of the marrangozes (woodcarvers) Marin and Vassil of the famous Tryavna School and the icons were created by the Tryavna masters Vitanovtsi. The third view is that the iconostasis was made by an unknown Wallachian woodcarver. The icons are in Byzantine style and were painted in the period 1805-1807 and are believed to have been painted by Zahari Zograf's father Hristo Dimitrov. The St. Trinity cathedral temple was declared a Memorial of Culture of National Importance in 1983.



Tourist information and site evaluation:

Criterion	Description and evaluation
Physical condition	Excellent.
Management and maintenance	The site is managed by the Ruse Bishopric.
Infrastructure and accessibility	Excellent. The site is located in the central part of the city of Ruse, making it fully accessible.
Period of possible operation	All year round. The site has no seasonal character and can operate throughout the year.
Accommodation near the site	Given the fact that the site is located within the

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	city of Ruse, over 90 accommodation places are available of all categories.
Level of popularization	Fairly Good. Information about the history of the temple is available and accessible.
Opportunities for development	The site has good potential for development. The temple is located in the very center of the city and because of its great historical value it can be an attractive tourist center. Accordingly, it can be included in both massive and narrowly targeted tourist destinations. The site can hardly be developed as an independent tourist attraction.

II.3.2. Site: "ST. MARINA "KARAN VARBOVKA MONASTERY General information about the site:

The St. Marina Caran Varbovka monastery is located near the village of Karan Varbovka 22 km from the town of Dve Mogili and about 55 km south of Ruse. The St. Marina Caran Varbovka monastery was founded during the Second Bulgarian Kingdom and was completely destroyed upon the fall of Bulgaria under Ottoman domination.

The legend has it that the revival of the St. Marina Caran Varbovka monastery is due to a blind Turkish boy who washed its face with the water springing from the site of the destroyed monastery and his sight recovered. This happened on July 17, the day that commemorates St. Marina. As a sign of gratitude, the father of the child who was also the owner of the field gave the Christians the land where the miraculous spring was. In the period 1828-1859 gradually there were built monastic cells and a small church



Caran Varbovka Nunnery "St. Marina" is permanently active and inhabited by four elderly nuns. The monastery church was built in 1890, and then the holy spring was shaped like a well. Water is believed to help heal blind and dumb people, people with kidney problems, etc. The monastery kitchen, dining room, storage room, basement and bathroom were built in 1940. The temple's day is on July 17th.

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Tourist information and site evaluation:

Criterion	Description and evaluation
Physical condition	Excellent.
Management and maintenance	The site is managed by the Ruse Bishopric.
Infrastructure and accessibility	Good. St. Marina Caran Varbovka monastery can be reached from the village of Caran Varbovka on an asphalt road, making the site fully accessible.
Period of possible operation	All year round. The site has no seasonal character and can operate throughout the year.
Accommodation near the site	No accommodations are available nearby. In view of this, tourists should use the opportunities provided mostly by the city of Ruse where more than 90 accommodation places are available of all categories.
Level of popularization	Relatively poor. Information about the site is sporadic and rarely updated. It is distributed only in specialized local and regional media.
Opportunities for development	The site has good potential for development. The monastery is poorly known and because of its great historical value it can be an attractive center for many visitors. Accordingly, it can be included in both massive and narrowly targeted tourist destinations. The site can hardly be developed as an independent tourist attraction.

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II.3.3. Site: BASARABOVSKI ROCK MONASTERY

General information about the site:

The St. Dimitriy Basarbovski Rock Monastery is situated in the valley of the Rusenski Lom River, near the village of Basarbovo and 10 km from the city of Ruse.

The rock monastery dates back to the Second Bulgarian Kingdom, but for the first time its name was mentioned in an Ottoman tax register dating back to 1431. For some time in the 19th century, the monastery remained without inhabitants, but in 1937 Father Hrisant from the Preobrazhenski Monastery settled here and gave a new beginning to the religious center. The most famous inhabitant of the monastery was St. Dimitriy Basarbovski, born in 1685 in the village of Basarbovo, who spent his entire life in the holy cloister. After his death, the monk was buried in the village church, but during the Russian-Turkish war of 1768-1774 his relics were transferred to Bucharest in the church of St. Konstantin and Elena, where they have remained until the present today.



Basarbovo Monastery is the only active rock monastery in Bulgaria. The path to the entrance of the monastery passes through a beautifully landscaped courtyard and ends at a well dug by St. Dimitriy. Local people believe that the water in the well is healing. At the foot of the monastery's rocks, there are two rooms and the dining cave, built in 1956. From there, 48 steps lead to a rocky area, where the niche where St. Dimitriy, according to the legend slept, is located. To the right of it is situated the rock church with a wood-carved iconostasis, made in 1941, and next to it is the big icon of the saint, depicted in full height.



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Tourist information and site evaluation:

Criterion	Description and evaluation
Physical condition	Excellent.
Management and maintenance	The site is managed by the Ruse Bishopric.
Infrastructure and accessibility	Good. The Basarbovo Rock Monastery is accessible via an asphalt road, making the site fully accessible.
Period of possible operation	All year round. The site has no seasonal character and can operate throughout the year.
Accommodation near the site	No accommodations are available nearby. In view of this, tourists should use the opportunities provided mostly by the city of Ruse where more than 90 accommodation places are available of all categories.
Level of popularization	Fairly Good. Information about the monastery's history is available and accessible. It is part of many tourist-specialized sites.
Opportunities for development	The site has excellent development potential. The monastery is relatively familiar and because of its great historical value it can be an attractive center for many visitors. Accordingly, it can be included in both massive and narrowly targeted tourist destinations. The event can be developed as an independent tourist attraction.

II.3.4. Site: GRAMOVETS ROCK MONASTERY COMPLEX

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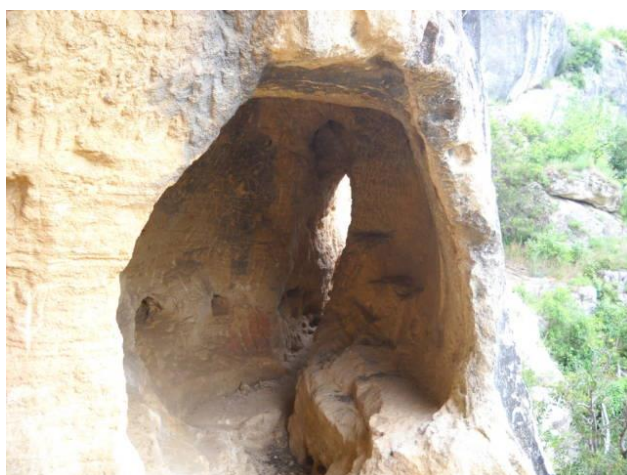


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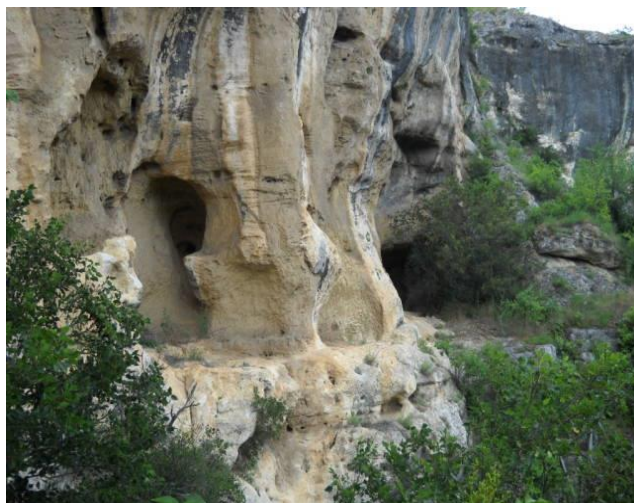


General information about the site:

The Gramovets Rock Monastery Complex is located 4.5 km north of the village of Koshov, on the left bank of the Cherni Lom river at its inflow into the Beli Lom River. In Gramovets the vertical rock there is a group of artificial caves and an eco-path is built from the base of the rock. Here, in the village of Cherven, at the specially constructed wooden port ends the water touristic route for canoes along the Cherni Lom River.



The Gramovets Eco path was established on the territory of Rusenski Lom Nature Park to increase the popularity of Gramovets, one of the most famous rock monasteries in Bulgaria. It is situated on the vertical rock of the same name and is a complex of artificial niches in the limestone rock used for chapels and monasteries during the Second Bulgarian State. Together with the Ivanovo Rock Churches and the Cherven Fortress, Gramovets is one of the biggest attractions along the gorge of the Rusenski Lom river.



Tourist information and site evaluation:

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Criterion	Description and evaluation
Physical condition	Good
Management and maintenance	The site is not managed and maintained in an organized manner.
Infrastructure and accessibility	Poor. Due to its location, the rocky complex is only accessible by a trail, making it difficult to reach.
Period of possible operation	All year round. The site has no seasonal character and can operate throughout the year.
Accommodation near the site	No accommodations are available nearby. In view of this, tourists should use the opportunities provided mostly by the city of Ruse where more than 90 accommodation places are available of all categories.
Level of popularization	Relatively poor. Information about the site is sporadic and it rarely updated. It is distributed only in specialized media.
Opportunities for development	The site has excellent development potential. The complex is relatively unknown and part of an active eco-path, which can attract the interest of a specific target group of tourists. For this purpose, its accessibility and socialization should be improved. The site can only be included in narrowly targeted tourist destinations. The site cannot be developed as an independent tourist attraction.

II.3.5. Site: IVANOVO ROCK CHURCHES

General information about the site:

The St. Archangel Michael rock lavra-monastery near the village of Ivanovo is located in the valley of the Rusenski Lom river, not far from the village of Ivanovo. It was founded in the twenties of the 13th century by the monk Yoakim, who later became Bulgarian patriarch. Its donors are King Yoan Assen II (1218-1241), King Yoan Alexander (1331-1371) and other representatives of the royal court, whose portraits as ktitors (church founders and donors) have been preserved. The monastery has a complex structure and unites several rock complexes. Its six temples have preserved frescoes revealing the characteristics of Bulgarian art in the 11th and 13th centuries. During the Second Bulgarian Kingdom (XII-XI century) the monastery was established as a great spiritual and literary center, the activity of which is associated with the so-called Visarionov's paterikon. Graffiti and inscriptions with important historical information can still be read on the walls of the monastery.

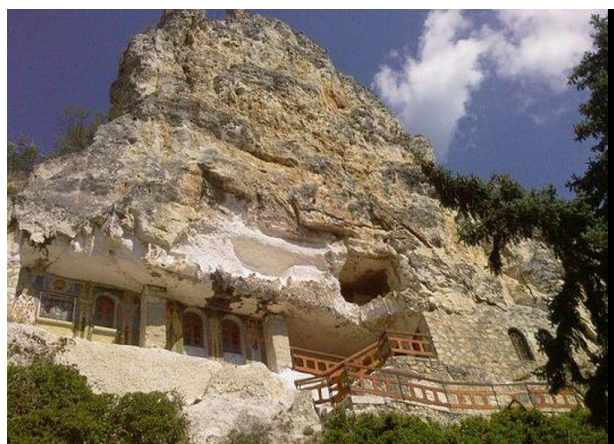
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The world renowned frescoes in the St. Mother of God church are among the most representative examples of the Paleologian art on the Balkans. Their high artistic value is the reason for their inclusion in UNESCO's World Heritage List. In the 11th century the monastery became the center of Hesychasm. It existed in the early centuries of Ottoman domination, but gradually declined. Since 1978, it has been declared a National Archeological Reserve.

Tourist information and site evaluation:

Criterion	Description and evaluation
Physical condition	Excellent. The site contains enough historical artifacts.
Management and maintenance	The site is managed by the Ruse Regional Museum of History. Service staff is available. Visiting hours: Upon prior request. Entrance fee: for students - 2,00 BGN, for individual visitors - 5,00 BGN, for organized groups (over 5 people) - 4,00 BGN, tourist guiding in Bulgarian - 10,00 BGN
Infrastructure and accessibility	Excellent. The site can be reached by an asphalt road, making it fully accessible.
Period of possible operation	The site is generally non-seasonal and can be used year-round. Given its location and in view of the openness of the rocky niches, the site is mainly visited in the warm part of the year.
Accommodation near the site	Nearest accommodation is available in the town of Ivanovo. Given the proximity of Ruse, over 90 accommodation places in all categories are available.
Level of popularization	Very good. Information about the monastery's history is available and available. It is included in

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	many tourist-specialized sites.
Opportunities for development	The site has excellent development potential. The monastery is well-known and because of its great historical value and uniqueness it can be an attractive center for many visitors. Accordingly, it can be included in both massive and narrowly targeted tourist destinations. The event can be developed as an independent tourist attraction.

II.4. SECTION NATURAL RESOURCES

II.4.1. Site: BATIN ISLAND

General information about the site:

Batin is a Bulgarian Danube island, located 522.5 to 529.5 km along the river in Ruse District, Borovo Municipality. Its area is 4.2 km², making it the 4th largest among the Bulgarian Danube islands after Belene, Kozloduy and Vardim.



The island is situated to the north of the village of Batin, having elliptical shape with a length of 6 km and a maximum width of 1,8 km, and is at 180 - 200 m from the Bulgarian coast. Its maximum altitude is 19.8 m and is located in the westernmost part of the island, with about 9 m displacement above the level of the Danube River. It is formed from clay-sandy river beds with alluvial soils, overgrown with willows. Part of the island is flooded by high water on the river and there are 2 swamps, the larger one being about 14 ha and the smaller one about 4.5 ha. It is used for livestock grazing, and part of its land is being processed. The island is part of the territory of the Danube state hunting farm, Ruse.

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The island is kept and managed by the Danube state hunting farm. The Batin hunting lodge, built on the island is a massive two-storey building, facing the Bulgarian bank of the Danube. The island is accessible by boat, which is available to guests at home. The house can accommodate 13 visitors in one apartment and five double rooms.

Tourist information and site evaluation:

Criterion	Description and evaluation
Physical condition	The flora and fauna of the island are in excellent shape.
Management and maintenance	The site is managed by the Danube state hunting farm
Infrastructure and accessibility	Excellent. The island is reachable by boats available to the visitors.
Period of possible operation	All year round. The site has no seasonal character and can operate throughout the year.
Accommodation near the site	The Batin hunting lodge, built on the island can accommodate up to 13 visitors at a time
Level of popularization	Good. Information about the island is in a relatively good volume and can be easily found.
Opportunities for development	The site has excellent potential for development in the field of hunting, fishing and photo tourism. Accordingly, the site can only be included in narrowly targeted tourist destinations. The event can be developed as an independent tourist attraction.

II.4.2. Site: RUSENSKI LOM NATURE PARK

General information about the site:

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In the eastern part of the Danube hilly plain, about 20 km south of Ruse there is a unique and picturesque corner of Bulgarian nature - Rusenski Lom Nature Park. The park is named after the river Rusenski Lom, the last right tributary of the Danube. By Order No. 567 of February 26, 1970, SG 30 / 14.04.1970 it was declared public park with an area of 22267 decares located along the valleys of Mali, Cherni and Beli Lom rivers, with a total length of 42 km. This order determines the boundaries and the regime of management of the protected area, as well as a number of conditions to the activities carried out on the territory of the park.



The territory of the park is 3260 hectares. In 1989 a comprehensive project for the management and conservation of the territories included in the Park was prepared. The combination of rocks, forests, rivers, caves and meadows is the reason for the extremely rich biodiversity. Due to the low altitude of the park, the broad-leaved forests are the most common. Coniferous species are poorly represented. Of particular interest is the hornbeam, as these are some of the northernmost parts of its distribution range. In addition, the species of cherry, oak, winter oak, hairy oak, lime, maple, ash, acacia, walnut, black pine, maple, summer oak, lilac, sumac, hawthorn, can be seen.



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Although the main goal of the National Park is to conserve the richness of deciduous ecosystems, meadow plants are also of interest here. More than 700 species of higher plants are found in the meadows of the park. There are also a large number of rare and endangered species. Significant is the number of plants that are listed in the Red Book of Bulgaria. Specially tailored routes allow tourists to explore the diversity of the park.

Tourist information and site evaluation:

Criterion	Description and evaluation
Physical condition	Excellent.
Management and maintenance	The site is managed by the Natural Park Rusenski Lom Directorate, part of the Executive Agency of Forestry at Ministry of Agriculture and Food. Staff is available to maintain the park.
Infrastructure and accessibility	Excellent. The site can be reached through several routes, making it fully accessible.
Period of possible operation	All year round. The site has no seasonal character and can operate throughout the year.
Accommodation near the site	Given the fact that the site is located near the city of Ruse, more than 90 accommodation places are available of all categories.
Level of popularization	Excellent. The site has a web site http://lomea.org/ , which provides a sufficient amount of information.
Opportunities for development	The site has excellent potential for development in the field of alternative and photo tourism. Accordingly, the site can only be included in narrowly targeted tourist destinations. The site can be developed as an independent tourist attraction.

II.4.3. Site: ORLOVA CHUCKA CAVE

General information about the site:

Orlova Chuka is a cave in the Danube hilly plain, located on the territory of Dve Mogili Municipality, Bulgaria. Remnants of prehistoric people and bears were found there. The cave is illuminated and accessible for visits. It is situated on the right slope of the Cherni Lom River valley, 6 km east of Dve Mogili and 2,5 km east of the village of Pepelina, village of Shirokovo, village of Ostritsa, 45 km from Ruse. The entrance of the cave is 40 m above the

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river level, down to the entrance of the cave there is a steep path with stairs. From the entrance there is a view of the Rusenski Lom Nature Park and the beautiful rock sights around. The cave was opened in 1941. In 1957 it was renovated. It was declared a natural landmark in 1962 along with an adjoining area of 7.5 hectares.

Many interdisciplinary studies have been conducted in the Orlova Chuka Cave. In it are found remnants of the late Paleolith: cave bones and traces of nails believed to be left immediately after awakening the bear after hibernation and before its first hunt. There are also clues from the life of cavemen who used the cave because of its relatively constant temperature.



All year round, the cave is inhabited by a total of 14 bat species that live in the cave in different seasons in a colony of about 12,000 specimens. Of these 14 species, 3 are included in the World Red List.



From the artificial entrance of Orlova Chuka you can enter the first cave hall. It is called "The Concert hall" because of its good acoustics, concerts are often performed there, and every year during August, during the Cave Fair festive concert is also held there. It is in the "Concert Hall" where the "Great Stalactites" with a height of 3.5m and a diameter of 50cm is located. In the cave there are many other interesting formations - "The Dinosaur", "The Owl", "The Turtle", etc. In the "Great Gallery", which is to the west of the "Concert Hall" there are many beautifully shaped sinter lakes. The largest hall in the cave is "The Great Screens" on the walls of which there are sinter formations.

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Near the Orlova Chuka cave there is a hut. It is a massive two-storey building, water-supplied and electrified, which can accommodate 27 people. It offers excellent conditions as a starting point for rock climbing and tracking.

Tourist information and site evaluation:

Criterion	Description and evaluation
Physical condition	Excellent.
Management and maintenance	The site is kept and managed by the municipality of Dve Mogili and the Ruse cave club. Service staff is available. The site is open for visiting from 01.04 to 31.10. Visiting hours: 9.00 - 17.00 ч. No holyday.
Infrastructure and accessibility	Excellent. the site can be reached by an asphalt road, which makes it fully accessible.
Period of possible operation	Seasonal. The site has a seasonal character and cannot be used year-round.
Accommodation near the site	Near the Orlova Chuka Cave there is a hut with a capacity of 27 people. Given the fact that the site is located near the city of Ruse, more than 90 accommodation places are available of all categories.
Level of popularization	Fairly Good. Fairly Good. Cave information is available and accessible. It is included in many tourist-specialized sites.
Opportunities for development	The site has excellent potential for development in the field of alternative and photo tourism. Accordingly, the site can only be included in narrowly targeted tourist destinations. The site can be developed as an independent tourist attraction.

II.4.4. Site: ECO-MUSEUM WITH AQUARIUM

General information about the site:

The Eco-Museum with Aquarium is the Natural History Museum in Ruse. Opened on September 28, 2014, it is located on Alexander Battenberg Square and is unique in Bulgaria due to the aquarium with Danube fish on the underground floor and the exhibits on the top floor. The museum is located in a building built in the early 20th century. The exposition is situated on four floors with a total area of 2400 sq. m. The Eco-museum differs from the

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Museums of Natural History in that it presents the relationships between plants, animals and man.



The first floor hosts a collection of fossils of several million years, including giant mammoth bones. On the territory of Bulgaria remains of 4 species of mammoths have been found. The collection of the Ruse Museum is one of the best in the world and can boast the only preserved full jaw of the most primitive mammoth that lived 3 million years ago - *Mammuthus romanus*. In the museum a real size mammoth, which is especially attractive for children can be seen.

Many dioramas have been made to present animals and birds in their natural environment. Among the stuffed exhibits there is even a calf with two heads, a huge cock with squamas on the legs like a dinosaur, a three-meter housen, a giant turtle, etc. Especially interesting is the model of a cave, more than 15 meters long. It is divided into two parts and presents the Ivanovo rock churches, which are included in the list of the world cultural heritage, and the cave Orlova chuka with bats and stalactites.

On the ground floor of the museum there is a small aquarium, which is the only one in Bulgaria presenting the diversity of Danube fish - sturgeons, carp, white amur, silver carp, pike, sheatfish etc. They are divided so that also bottom fish inhabit the same aquarium.



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Films about the biodiversity, marsh ecosystems, bats and deer are also part of the expositions. Interactive games for kids are also in preparation. Collections of different items from the beginning of the 20th century to the present, as well as the first things that happened in Ruse, are presented separately.

Tourist information and site evaluation:

Criterion	Description and evaluation
Physical condition	Excellent. The site has enough in number and well-exposed and maintained animal species and models.
Management and maintenance	The site is managed by the Ruse Regional Museum of History. Service staff is available. Visiting hours: 9.00 - 18.00. No holyday. Entrance fee: for students - 2,00 BGN, for individual visitors - 5,00 BGN, for organized groups (over 5 people) - 4,00 BGN, tourist guiding in Bulgarian - 10,00 BGN
Infrastructure and accessibility	Excellent. The site is located in the very center of Ruse, and can be reached by both transport and walking. This makes the site fully accessible.
Period of possible operation	All year round. The site has no seasonal character and can operate throughout the year.
Accommodation near the site	Given the fact that the site is located within the city of Ruse, over 90 accommodation places are available of all categories.
Level of popularization	Good. Most of the information about the site is provided by the Ruse Regional Museum of History. It is not in sufficient volume. There is no strategic approach to popularize the site and attract more visitors.
Opportunities for development	The site is unique not only for Ruse, but for the whole country. In view of this, the museum has an extremely high potential for development. It can be included in a wide range of tourist destinations as well as in highly specialized ones. The site can also develop as an independent tourist attraction.

B. Giurgiu region

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We focused on the tourism potential of Giurgiu area and provide information over the most significant communities as attractive tourist destinations from the point of view of resources, receptiveness and long-time development.

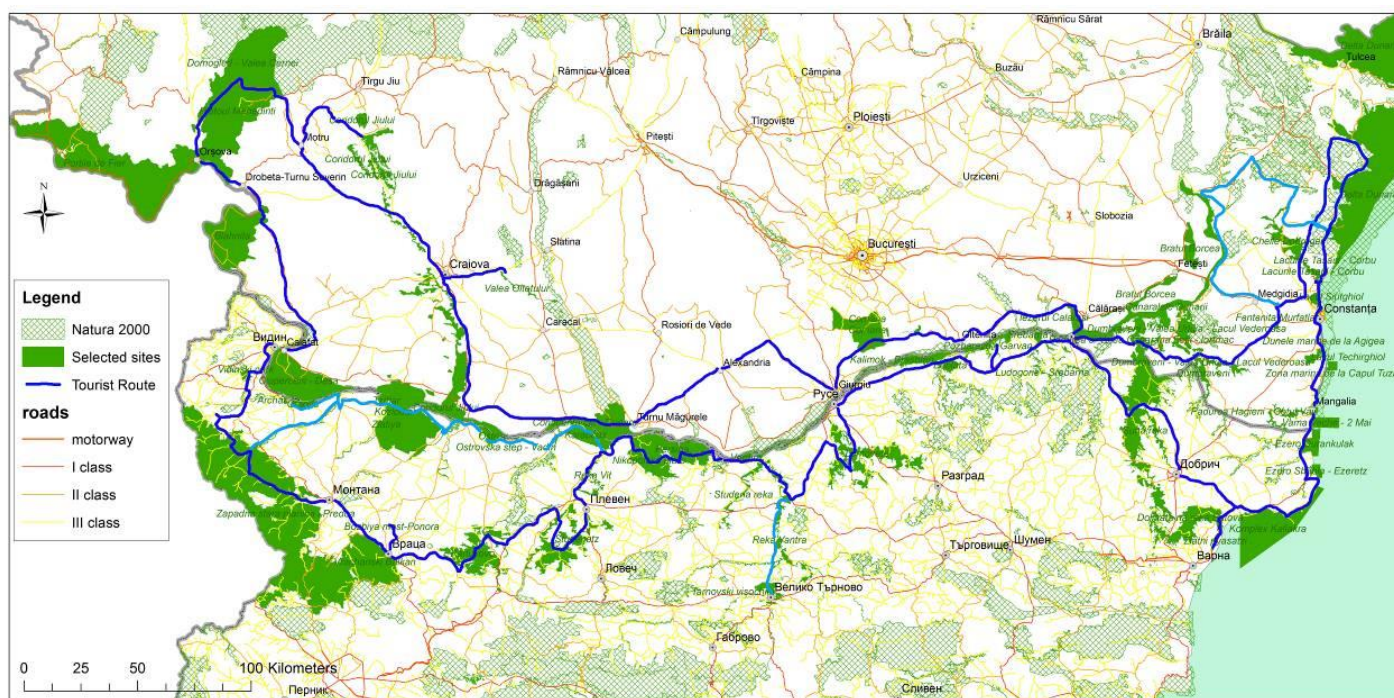
The analysis followed the recommended project methodology tools so that to offer a realistic and solid basis for the final common approach of the topic for both Romanian and Bulgarian areas in discussion.

The objective of the current study tried to identify, document and present the attractions that have the largest touristic potential, an accent on intangible cultural heritage included, underlining force features and opportunities for tourist perspective in the county. These findings are meant to support the development of the joint strategy for the Giurgiu-Ruse area.

Even by this stage of the project, during the opinion polls conducted in the field among different actors within communities, locals and organizations, we increased the awareness and interest on encouraging the locals and stakeholders for the tourist development of their places to live. By being better informed, they got the chance to become more committed in the daily activity to develop their localities.

A view to start

The panoramic map of the cross-border Romanian-Bulgarian region facilitates us to understand the central place that Giurgiu-Ruse area occupies within the touristic framework possible to be developed in the years to come (see the blue line).



Source: "The common strategy for the development and promotion of a common natural heritage tourist product: the route "protected natural patrimony within the Romania-Bulgaria cross-border area", Interreg project

General presentation of the Giurgiu county

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Surface: 3.526 km²;
Number of cities and municipalities: 3, of which one municipality - Giurgiu;
Number of communes: 51; Number of villages: 167.

Giurgiu county is located in the southern part of Romania, on the lower course of the Danube. Location on the Danube bank facilitates river connections with riparian and Black Sea countries. Giurgiu is bordered by Călărași county in the East, Teleorman county in the West, Ilfov county and North-West Arges county and Dâmbovița county in the North.

The area of the county represents 1.5% of the country's surface.

Within the radius of Giurgiu, there are the crossing points of the road and railway border between Giurgiu and Ruse.

Giurgiu county ranks among the counties with the lowest number of people living as stable population, 281,422 inhabitants. In Giurgiu, communes hold over two thirds of the stable population, with the rural area accounting for 70.8% of the total. The stable population of the three cities is the following: Giurgiu 61,400, Bolintin Vale 12,900 and Mihăilești 7,900 people. Ethnic information was available for 263,800 people, of whom Romanians were 248,400 (94.1%), Roma of 15,200 (5.8%), and other ethnicities below 1%.

The county is located in the Romanian Plain, in the place where the Argeș, Neajlov and Sabar rivers meet, in a large and low valley. From North to South, the county runs on a length of 94 km, and from West to East on a distance of 79 km. The Danube borders the county on a distance of 72 km.

The relief of Giurgiu county is made up of five main subunits of the Romanian Plain: Burnas, Vlășia, Găvanu-Burdea, the Titu-Potlogi subsidence Plain and the Danube Meadow. The maximum altitudes reach the North - Western extremity, with values of 140 m - 142 m, on the territory of Vânătorii Mici commune. The minimum altitude is recorded in the South-Eastern extremity: 14.6 m, on the Danube, South of the Greaca village.

The territory of the county includes, to a significant extent, forests and arable land. In the North of the county with petroleum deposits, crude oilfields are exploited and sand and gravel are extracted from the bed of Danube and the other rivers in the county.

The list of protected areas in the county includes: Comana Natural Park (24.963 ha), Oloaga - Gradinari Forest and Padina Tătarului Forest (areas included in the Comana Natural Park), Cama - Dinu - Pășărica islands (2,400 ha bird and flora type), Manafu Forest (28 ha), Teșila Forest (52.5 ha).

In the economy of Giurgiu county, agriculture, industry and commerce are distinguished as significant activities. Giurgiu is known as a predominantly agricultural county, with approximately 50% of the population being employed in this sector.

Giurgiu is one of the most important Romanian ports on the Danube. The county's residence is located 64 km from the capital of the country, on the Bucharest-Sofia-Athens and Bucharest-Istanbul routes. The Danube exit represents an important geostrategic point for Romania, making it one of the main links of Western Europe with the Near East, which reveals the high potential for tourism development of this county, a good choice in building cooperation bridges with Bulgarian neighbors in Ruse area.

Landmark destinations with touristic potential

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According to Table 1 from recommended methodology, we selected the most significant cultural, natural and anthropogenic sites and evaluated based on key features and indicators. The chosen sites are to be found in the Annexes to the Survey and these will be the tool to be considered, in the further step of the analysis, for the landmark destinations to be presented.

Following the methodology recommended in the project, we selected several landmark destinations considered to represent attractions with tourist potential in the present and for the future to come. The target zones in this survey are representative for the communities living there.

By using Table 2, the following items as content have been reviewed for each of the selected destination, either to be a commune/ village or town.

Elements of the survey:

- As cultural heritage, there have been taken into consideration aspects as: built heritage (monuments, antiquities, fortresses, churches, etc.); small historical places (fountains, chapels, walls etc.); local buildings; historical items (tools, clothes, furnishings, decorations, tapestries etc.); traditions (skills, know-how, customs etc.); gastronomy (local products, recipes, production methods etc.); events and festivals.

- As natural resources, there have been investigated aspects as: unusual, attractive, representative locations; protected areas (national parks, natural reserves); geological features (forests, lakes, rivers, waterfalls etc.); diversity of ecosystems.

- As space, surroundings and infrastructure, we looked for: places of accommodation; public facilities (restaurants, shops etc.); access, ways of transportation and connections; marketing and communication channels.

- As stakeholders, legal and administrative climate, the search looked also for the existence of: public units; local tourism priorities; operational NGOs; tourism operators; development and protection related legislation; locals' activities; competitive good practices to develop a tourism product.

The analysis method was based on a scoring meant to reveal the significant characteristics for a zone of tourism interest.

Ranking and motivation for the elements of the survey:

The cultural heritage - measures 40 % as maximum limit, considering it as the most solid treasure the communities have as identity, basic element to rely on building a future tourism plan, historical legacy built since ages ago, of indisputable value as national and international level, architectural or religious items, customs and traditions - a reference we can turn to any time, a complex asset that always attracted many kind of visitors and will do it in the future, as well, a direction worthwhile to consider for developing responsible tourism.

The natural resources - measures 30 % as limit, as these represent another solid treasure of the territory, parts of inherited relief we have, always in the objectives of people travelling in hope to relax and enjoy the time spent close to nature and at the same time, a complex asset for preserving ecosystems and keeping the lungs of a region clean and able to offer protected conditions and land continuity.

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The space, surroundings and infrastructure - measures 20 % as limit, considering them as important survey elements, too, but having in mind that apart from what is already constructed and operational, these can be improved, extended by the creative inhabitants, supported with current and future professional projects.

The stakeholders, legal and administrative climate - measures 10 % as limit, taking into consideration that the tourist private sector, the NGOs and interest groups, although are at the beginning, could improve their activity, the number has good conditions to increase, investors are always invited to involve the more the current achievements get success on the market and the local policies in terms of tourism, local administration and environment protection are encouraged to be spread within the community.

Therefore, a whole of 100% will consist of 40 + 30 + 20 + 10

As we are interested mainly in anthropogenic elements, the final evaluation will also receive a percentage on this issue, as part of the tourism development general potential (calculated as percentage part of the total limit of 40).

LANDMARK DESTINATIONS

GIURGIU

a/ Cultural heritage (40%=MAX)

Evaluation: 40%

--Number of historic buildings, community sites and monuments to be found at destination and on a radius of 10 km from the center of the community = , of which to be mentioned:

The Clock Tower - town symbol

Bizets Bridge - the first ranked in Europe due to the construction angle

Episcopal Cathedral of St. George

Fortress of Mircea cel Batran (Mircea The Elder) - ruins

St. Nicholas Hermitage - built with stones from Mircea's Fortress

The Annunciation Church - painted by famous painter Ghe.Tattaescu

"Teohari Antonescu" County Museum

--Traditions and customs:

County Center for Conservation and Promotion of Traditional Culture

--Craftsmanship:

Ethnography Museum

--Local events held in town:

b/ Natural resources (30%=MAX)

Evaluation: 29%

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--Natural heritage or anthropogenic sites that are in proximity of the destination, on a radius of 10 km from the center of the community:

The Giurgiu Harbor on the Danube river

c/ Space, surroundings and infrastructure (20%=MAX)

Evaluation: 20%

--Attractions found at destination or on a 10 km radius from the center of the community, to be mentioned:

Giurgiu Railway Station - first railway line in Romania was Bucharest-

Giurgiu

“Ion Vinea” Cultural Centre

Heros’ Church

Cathedral of Assumption (“Adormirea Maicii Domnului”)

--Acceptable number of public facilities (restaurants, shops, bars) found at destination

--The destination is easily accessible by transportation. We took into account the state of the roads, the existence of a train station, the possibility of using alternative transport such as bicycles. Considered easily accessible as it can be easily accessed by at least 3-4 different transportation methods

--The town has accommodation facilities at location / on a 5 km radius from the community. Room for development.

d/ The stakeholders, legal and administrative climate (10%=MAX)

Evaluation: 9%

--The town has economic businesses and tourist agencies

--Tourist products under process design and implementation via local programs

--Interest on development and protection legislation

--Locals’ activities focused on responsible tourism

TOTAL SCORE ----- 98% is ready for tourism development

With 100 % consistent cultural heritage

COMANA

a/ Cultural heritage (40%=MAX)

Evaluation: 35%

--Number of historic buildings, community sites and monuments to be found in the community and on a radius of 10 km from the center of the community = 8, of which to be mentioned:

Comana Monastery

“Gellu Naum” Memorial House

“Neajlov Delta” Hermitage

--The number of traditions still held in the community = 3

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- The number of the community's customs = 2
- As craftsmanship, as crafts persons there were identified = 6, to be mentioned:
Crafts Village and Paper Mill
- The number of local events still held in the community = 5, of which to be mentioned:
Peony Festival, held annually, in May-June

b/ Natural resources (30%=MAX)

Evaluation: 25%

- Number of natural heritage sites that are in proximity of the community, on a radius of 10 km from the center of the community = 3, of which to be mentioned:
Comana Natural Park, including the Thorn Reserve
Neajlov Delta
Bird watching point

c/ Space, surroundings and infrastructure (20%=MAX)

Evaluation: 15%

- Number of attractions found in the community or on a 10 km radius from the center of the community = 5, of which to be mentioned:
Comana House Complex, including a miniature "Orient Express" train
Comana Adventure Park
"Horse Kingdom" - horse riding base
- Number of public facilities (restaurants, shops, bars) found in the community = 5
- The destination is easily accessible by transportation. We took into account the state of the roads, the existence of a train station, the possibility of using alternative transport such as bicycles. Considered easily accessible as it can be easily accessed by at least 2 different transportation methods = 3
- There were quantified existent accommodation facilities in the community / on a 5 km radius from the community = 4

d/ The stakeholders, legal and administrative climate (10%=MAX)

Evaluation: 8%

- Number of local entrepreneurs = 15
- Number of local products developed by locals that can be commercialized = 10
- Interest on development and protection legislation;
- Locals' activities focused on responsible tourism

TOTAL SCORE ----- 83% is ready for tourism development

With 87,50% consistent cultural heritage

HERESTI

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a/ Cultural heritage (40%=MAX)

Evaluation: 18%

--Number of historic buildings, community sites and monuments to be found in the community and on a radius of 10 km from the center of the community = 3, of which to be mentioned:

“Udriste Nasturel” Mension

--The number of traditions still held in the community = 3, to be mentioned:

Folkloric Art Museum

--The number of the community's customs = 2

--As craftsmanship, as crafts persons there were identified = 1, to be mentioned:

--The number of local events still held in the community = 1, of which to be mentioned:

Peony Festival, held annually, in May-June

b/ Natural resources (30%=MAX)

Evaluation: 10%

--Number of natural heritage sites that are in proximity of the community, on a radius of 10 km from the center of the community = 2

c/ Space, surroundings and infrastructure (20%=MAX)

Evaluation: 9%

--Number of attractions found in the community or on a 10 km radius from the center of the community = 4

--Number of public facilities (restaurants, shops, bars) found in the community = 1

--The destination is easily accessible by transportation. We took into account the state of the roads, the existence of a train station, the possibility of using alternative transport such as bicycles. Considered easily accessible as it can be easily accessed by at least 2 different transportation methods = 2

--There were quantified existent accommodation facilities in the community / on a 5 km radius from the community = 1

d/ The stakeholders, legal and administrative climate (10%=MAX)

Evaluation: 5%

--Number of local entrepreneurs = 5

--Number of local products developed by locals that can be commercialized = 2

--Interest on development and protection legislation;

--Locals' activities focused on responsible tourism

TOTAL SCORE ----- 42% is ready for tourism development

With 45 % consistent cultural heritage

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IZVOARELE

a/ Cultural heritage (40%=MAX)

Evaluation: 30%

--Number of historic buildings, community sites and monuments to be found in the community and on a radius of 10 km from the center of the community = 3, of which to be mentioned:

“Cover of the Mother of God” Hermitage

- The number of traditions still held in the community = 3
- The number of the community’s customs = 3
- As craftsmanship, as crafts persons there were identified = 5
- The number of local events still held in the community = 3

b/ Natural resources (30%=MAX)

Evaluation: 22%

--Number of natural heritage sites that are in proximity of the community, on a radius of 10 km from the center of the community = 2, of which to be mentioned:

Izvoarele Natural Reserve with Fishing bays

Manafu Forest

c/ Space, surroundings and infrastructure (20%=MAX)

Evaluation: 15%

--Number of attractions found in the community or on a 10 km radius from the center of the community = 12

--Number of public facilities (restaurants, shops, bars) found in the community = 3

--The destination is easily accessible by transportation. We took into account the state of the roads, the existence of a train station, the possibility of using alternative transport such as bicycles. Considered easily accessible as it can be easily accessed by at least 2 different transportation methods = 2

--There were quantified existent accommodation facilities in the community / on a 5 km radius from the community = 1

d/ The stakeholders, legal and administrative climate (10%=MAX)

Evaluation: 7%

--Number of local entrepreneurs = 14

--Number of local products developed by locals that can be commercialized = 4

--Interest on development and protection legislation;

--Locals’ activities focused on responsible tourism

TOTAL SCORE ----- 74% is ready for tourism development

With 75 % consistent cultural heritage

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DRAGANESCU

a/ Cultural heritage (40%=MAX)

Evaluation: 38%

--Number of historic buildings, community sites and monuments to be found in the community and on a radius of 10 km from the center of the community = 12, of which to be mentioned:

The Church painted by Priest Arsenie Boca

--The number of traditions still held in the community = 2

--The number of the community's customs = 1

--As craftsmanship, as crafts persons there were identified = 1

--The number of local events still held in the community = 2

b/ Natural resources (30%=MAX)

Evaluation: 27%

--Number of natural heritage sites that are in proximity of the community, on a radius of 10 km from the center of the community = 12

c/ Space, surroundings and infrastructure (20%=MAX)

Evaluation: 9 %

--Number of attractions found in the community or on a 10 km radius from the center of the community = 2

--Number of public facilities (restaurants, shops, bars) found in the community = 1

--The destination is easily accessible by transportation. We took into account the state of the roads, the existence of a train station, the possibility of using alternative transport such as bicycles. Considered easily accessible as it can be easily accessed by at least 2 different transportation methods = 2

--Existent accommodation facilities in the community / on a 5 km radius from the community = 0

d/ The stakeholders, legal and administrative climate (10%=MAX)

Evaluation: 4%

--Number of local entrepreneurs = 4

--Number of local products developed by locals that can be commercialized = 3

--Low level of local development facilities, but priorities to be considered in connection with Mihailesti' policies

TOTAL SCORE ----- 78% is ready for tourism development

With 95 % consistent cultural heritage

LETCA NOUA

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a/ Cultural heritage (40%=MAX)

Evaluation: 28%

--Number of historic buildings, community sites and monuments to be found in the community and on a radius of 10 km from the center of the community = 3, of which to be mentioned:

The Nunnery Monastery painted by great painter Gheorghe Tattarescu, holding the Miracle Icon of Sf. Mary

--The number of traditions still held in the community = 2

--The number of the community's customs = 2

--As craftsmanship, as crafts persons there were identified = 0

--The number of local events still held in the community = 1

b/ Natural resources (30%=MAX)

Evaluation: 0 %

--Number of natural heritage sites that are in proximity of the community, on a radius of 10 km from the center of the community = 0

c/ Space, surroundings and infrastructure (20%=MAX)

Evaluation: 6 %

--Number of attractions found in the community or on a 10 km radius from the center of the community = 2

--Number of public facilities (restaurants, shops, bars) found in the community = 2

--The destination is easily accessible by transportation. We took into account the state of the roads, the existence of a train station, the possibility of using alternative transport such as bicycles. Considered easily accessible as it can be easily accessed by at least 2 different transportation methods = 2

--Existent accommodation facilities in the community / on a 5 km radius from the community = 0

d/ The stakeholders, legal and administrative climate (10%=MAX)

Evaluation: 3%

--Number of local entrepreneurs = 3

--Number of local products developed by locals that can be commercialized = 0

--Local tourist development under process

TOTAL SCORE ----- 37 % is ready for tourism development

With 70 % consistent cultural heritage

GOSTINU

a/ Cultural heritage (40%=MAX)

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Evaluation: 32%

- Number of historic buildings, community sites and monuments to be found in the community and on a radius of 10 km from the center of the community = 1
- The number of traditions still held in the community = 4
- The number of the community's customs = 3
- As craftsmanship, *famous crafts people* were identified = 3
- The number of local events still held in the community = 2, of which to be mentioned:
County Festival "Handicraft Get Together" ("Sezatoarea") - Romanian Traditions and Customs

b/ Natural resources (30%=MAX)

Evaluation: 15%

- Number of natural heritage sites that are in proximity of the community, on a radius of 10 km from the center of the community = 2

c/ Space, surroundings and infrastructure (20%=MAX)

Evaluation: 9%

- Number of attractions found in the community or on a 10 km radius from the center of the community = 3
- Number of public facilities (restaurants, shops, bars) found in the community = 1
- The destination is easily accessible by transportation. We took into account the state of the roads, the existence of a train station, the possibility of using alternative transport such as bicycles. Considered easily accessible as it can be easily accessed by at least 2 different transportation methods = 2
- There were quantified existent accommodation facilities in the community / on a 5 km radius from the community = 1

d/ The stakeholders, legal and administrative climate (10%=MAX)

Evaluation: 6%

- Number of local entrepreneurs = 2
- Number of local products developed by locals that can be commercialized = 4
- Locals' activities - a good base for responsible tourism development

TOTAL SCORE ----- 62% is ready for tourism development

With 80 % consistent cultural heritage

OINACU

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a/ Cultural heritage (40%=MAX)

Evaluation: 30%

- Number of historic buildings, community sites and monuments to be found in the community and on a radius of 10 km from the center of the community = 3
- The number of traditions still held in the community = 5
- The number of the community's customs = 2
- As craftsmanship, crafts people identified = 1
- The number of local events still held in the community = 2, of which to be mentioned:
County Festival "Handicraft Get Together" ("Sezatoarea") - Romanian Traditions and Customs

b/ Natural resources (30%=MAX)

Evaluation: 12%

- Number of natural heritage sites that are in proximity of the community, on a radius of 10 km from the center of the community = 1

c/ Space, surroundings and infrastructure (20%=MAX)

Evaluation: 9%

- Number of attractions found in the community or on a 10 km radius from the center of the community = 2
- Number of public facilities (restaurants, shops, bars) found in the community = 1
- The destination is easily accessible by transportation. We took into account the state of the roads, the existence of a train station, the possibility of using alternative transport such as bicycles. Considered easily accessible as it can be easily accessed by at least 2 different transportation methods = 2
- There were quantified existent accommodation facilities in the community / on a 5 km radius from the community = 0

d/ The stakeholders, legal and administrative climate (10%=MAX)

Evaluation: 6%

- Number of local entrepreneurs = 5
- Number of local products developed by locals that can be commercialized = 2
- Locals' activities - a good base for responsible tourism development

TOTAL SCORE ----- 57% is ready for tourism development

With 75 % consistent cultural heritage

CLEJANI

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a/ Cultural heritage (40%=MAX)

Evaluation: 36%

- Number of historic buildings, community sites and monuments to be found in the community and on a radius of 10 km from the center of the community = 9
- The number of traditions still held in the community = 3
- The number of the community's customs = 2
- As craftsmanship, crafts people identified = 7
The oldest genuine folklore singer
Famous Clejani Folk Music Band
- The number of local events still held in the community = 4

b/ Natural resources (30%=MAX)

Evaluation: 12%

- Number of natural heritage sites that are in proximity of the community, on a radius of 10 km from the center of the community = 1

c/ Space, surroundings and infrastructure (20%=MAX)

Evaluation: 12%

- Number of attractions found in the community or on a 10 km radius from the center of the community = 5
- Number of public facilities (restaurants, shops, bars) found in the community = 2
- The destination is easily accessible by transportation. We took into account the state of the roads, the existence of a train station, the possibility of using alternative transport such as bicycles. Considered easily accessible as it can be easily accessed by at least 2 different transportation methods = 2
- There were quantified existent accommodation facilities in the community / on a 5 km radius from the community = 0

d/ The stakeholders, legal and administrative climate (10%=MAX)

Evaluation: 8%

- Number of local entrepreneurs = 5
- Number of local products developed by locals that can be commercialized = 6
- Locals' activities - a good base for responsible tourism development

TOTAL SCORE ----- 68% is ready for tourism development

With 90 % consistent cultural heritage

SLOBOZIA

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a/ Cultural heritage (40%=MAX)

Evaluation: 29%

--Number of historic buildings, community sites and monuments to be found in the community and on a radius of 10 km from the center of the community = 4, of which to be mentioned:

"St. John the Russian" Monastery

- The number of traditions still held in the community = 3
- The number of the community's customs = 2
- As craftsmanship, crafts people identified = 1
- The number of local events still held in the community = 4

b/ Natural resources (30%=MAX)

Evaluation: 27%

--Number of natural heritage sites that are in proximity of the community, on a radius of 10 km from the center of the community = 2

The Natural Reserve "Camadinu Island" on Danube river

c/ Space, surroundings and infrastructure (20%=MAX)

Evaluation: 14%

--Number of attractions found in the community or on a 10 km radius from the center of the community = 2

--Number of public facilities (restaurants, shops, bars) found in the community = 1

--The destination is easily accessible by transportation. We took into account the state of the roads, the existence of a train station, the possibility of using alternative transport such as bicycles. Considered easily accessible as it can be easily accessed by at least 2 different transportation methods = 2

--There were quantified existent accommodation facilities in the community / on a 5 km radius from the community = 1

d/ The stakeholders, legal and administrative climate (10%=MAX)

Evaluation: 7%

--Number of local entrepreneurs = 5

--Number of local products developed by locals that can be commercialized = 4

--Locals' activities - potential for ecological tourism development

TOTAL SCORE ----- 77% is ready for tourism development

With 72,5 % consistent cultural heritage

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BALANOIA

a/ Cultural heritage (40%=MAX)

Evaluation: 28%

- Number of historic buildings, community sites and monuments to be found in the community and on a radius of 10 km from the center of the community = 7
- The number of traditions still held in the community = 3
- The number of the community's customs = 2
- As craftsmanship, crafts people identified = 1
- The number of local events still held in the community = 4

b/ Natural resources (30%=MAX)

Evaluation: 29%

- Number of natural heritage sites that are in proximity of the community, on a radius of 10 km from the center of the community = 3, of which to be mentioned:

Balanoia Forest

"Hanul Cosminului" (Inn) - fishing and rest resort

c/ Space, surroundings and infrastructure (20%=MAX)

Evaluation: 18%

- Number of attractions found in the community or on a 10 km radius from the center of the community = 5, of which to be mentioned:
"Stejarul" (The Oak Tree) Leisure Centre
- Number of public facilities (restaurants, shops, bars) found in the community = 2
- The destination is easily accessible by transportation. We took into account the state of the roads, the existence of a train station, the possibility of using alternative transport such as bicycles. Considered easily accessible as it can be easily accessed by at least 2 different transportation methods = 2
- There were quantified existent accommodation facilities in the community / on a 5 km radius from the community = 2

d/ The stakeholders, legal and administrative climate (10%=MAX)

Evaluation: 9%

- Number of local entrepreneurs = 5
- Number of local products developed by locals that can be commercialized = 3
- Locals' activities - potential for ecological tourism development
- Interest on local tourism development

TOTAL SCORE ----- 84% is ready for tourism development

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With 70 % consistent cultural heritage

III. DETERMINATION OF POTENTIAL TOURISTS' DEMAND AND THE LEVEL OF PREPAREDNESS FOR INCLUSION AND COOPERATION OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES TO DEVELOP A SUSTAINABLE TOURIST DESTINATION

III.1 Determination of potential tourists' demand

Evaluation of tourism development potential in the region should help to achieve a unified position and pool the efforts of stakeholders and subjects of regional tourism policy to develop sustainable tourism based on cultural and historical heritage, local conditions and opportunities for cross-border cooperation in this sphere. The survey, unquestionably, shows that the available tourist sites and activities in the region could attract significant tourist interest and targeted investment, respectively. However, it is also necessary to conclude that the long-term development of the industry goes through the obligatory application of the principles of sustainable development. Key part in this respect plays the knowledge of market attitudes and trends in demand for the products and services surveyed.

In order to create a real momentary picture of the demand for tourist products and services in the Ruse - Giurgiu region, as well as to determine its development potential, it was important to define its specific characteristics. In summary, they are:

- + increasing demand from tourists for quality, authenticity, attractiveness and diversity / range of tourism products and services;
- + increasing the importance of factors such as safety and security when choosing destinations and places to visit;
- + enhancing the importance of ecology and the state of the environment as an integral part of tourist sites and resources;
- + increasing demands of tourists towards the quality of the overall technical infrastructure and the material base of the places they would choose to visit, as well as the provision of specific additional services;
- + increasing the role of information and communication systems in relation to the demand, planning and conducting of tourist trips;
- + increased pre-search for additional information on tourist sites, hence finding such information is an essential element of the decision to choose a destination;
- + increasing the share of specialized forms of tourism - cultural, eco- and rural, adventure, etc.;

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- ✚ increasing the share of children and young people, especially students, in cultural and cognitive tourism;
- ✚ increasing the share of the elderly population in tourism / participation of the "third age" people in tourist trips.

Determined this way, the specific characteristics of demand for tourism in the region show clearly defined target groups to which efforts should be targeted. However here is the place to emphasize that the question of the real opportunities of the region to offer a specific tourist product is of particular importance in order to accurately assess the demand of potential tourists. It is from the point of view of the current state of the tourist branch in the region that it can be concluded that the following realities are at hand:

- Incomplete use of available resources;
- Unsatisfactory market realization of the existing supply of basic and auxiliary services;
- Lack of marketing policy;
- Poor presence of the small tourist business.

These realities determine the demand for the regional tourist product mostly as variable. This naturally affects the regional tourist product, making it quickly replaceable. In order to favor the product of the tourist destination and in particular that of the Ruse - Giurgiu region, it must be highly competitive. And it is currently absent. This necessitates the study of the competitiveness of the tourist destination, the identification of the sources of competitive advantages and the determination of their exactness. In this case, it is useful to make a real assessment from the perspective of the tourist, but without forgetting that **it** is largely subjective. The main factors for such an assessment are:

- Coincidence between the expected perception and the actual characteristics of the tourist resource;
- Price-quality ratio;
- Individual needs and requirements of different target groups of tourists (nationality, gender, age, solvency, social status, etc.);
- Existing competition on the market.

According to the information provided here and in view of the survey data, it can be claimed that visitors' satisfaction is currently low, which leads to a decrease in demand. Thus, in practice, tourist destinations in the region can be identified as not sufficiently active. In terms of available resources, including the human factor, the region has excellent potential for developing specific types of tourism products and services. This is evidenced by the research of the attitudes of potential tourists. The emphasis should be on the development of thematic forms of tourism. The concrete forms of tourism development are ecological, cultural-historical, pilgrimage, adventurous. In recent years, alternative tourism,

in all its forms, is an extremely popular sub-sector, attracting significant tourist flows due to the diversity of supply and opportunities for different experiences. Obviously, the desire of potential tourists to be offered various and specialized tourist products and services. In this case, the problem of developing these forms is that there is no consensus and a stakeholder policy on how to develop sustainably.

III.2 Preparedness for inclusion and cooperation of local communities to develop a sustainable tourist destination

Development of tourist destinations is directly related to both the state of the environment, cultural identity, social interaction, and the security and well-being of local communities. The competitiveness of the tourism sector is directly related to its sustainability as the quality of tourist destinations is influenced by the natural and cultural environment and by the attitudes of local communities.

The main conclusion from the meetings and discussions on the topic is that the attitude of the local population towards the tourist development is mostly positive. Expectations for the development of the tourist business by the local population are mostly optimistic in view of improving the economic situation of the settlements. Most respondents agree that tourism development would have a beneficial impact on the growth of the economy, indicating that the local population will improve their social status as a result of tourism development.

Inclusion and real cooperation with local communities to develop a sustainable tourist destination is of utmost importance. The most important reason for this is that they would best evaluate the price of tourism development in the region. Regarding the possible negative effects of visitors' impact and excessive exploitation of resources, according to local communities, the development of tourism has more positive than negative influences - the majority share the positive influences, which again proves that the community is favorable to the tourist development in the region of Ruse - Giurgiu. The attitude is that the attraction of investments to implement projects for sustainable and balanced development of tourism at regional and local level will lead to the renovation and development of the local technical infrastructure. The common understanding is that new resources and conditions for social wellbeing will be created for local communities. In view of this information, it can be argued that the willingness for inclusion and cooperation by local communities to develop a sustainable tourist destination is very good.

Obviously, the importance of tourism to the local economy and the desire of local communities to develop tourism is great, but on the other hand, the current capacity for their full participation in the process must be taken into account. Also, the real risks to future cooperation and possible points of conflict and tension between local people and external residents and entrepreneurs, between business and local authorities involved at different stages of the creation and supply of tourism products and services, should be taken into account. To date, there is a clear lack of understanding of the need for wider regional cooperation and, ultimately, a lack of consensus and unidirectional action. When analyzing the opportunities for inclusion of local communities, it is noticeable that no "internal" (own) problems are identified, only in isolated cases the inertia and the lack of initiative among the local entrepreneurs and the local population, as well as the low linguistic culture of the



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employed in tourism (mainly mentioned by representatives of the local authorities).

Similarly, there is no "self-criticism" on the part of the representatives of the local authorities (their problems are mentioned by the business). This in turn is an indication of a typical weakness - focusing on external problems and limitations in underestimating own weaknesses. In this respect, concrete actions will be needed to change these attitudes. The creation of local tourist culture must be an integral part of the general policy for the development of tourist destinations in the region. This will support the diversification of the tourism product and stimulate the development of local economies.

As regards the tourist product itself, there is a high level of initiative from local communities. They have ideas and practical readiness to upgrade the value of tourist resources by adding different events related to local festivals, fairs, festivals, customs and rituals related to the local people's lifestyle.

In conclusion, the analysis shows that local communities in the region have a positive attitude towards the possibility of developing specific tourist destinations. Local communities are highly motivated to work together and enrich the tourist services in the areas. There is a clear desire to participate in this process, which allows direct dialogue with them. In this context, all future actions in the field of regional tourism should include representatives of local communities.

IV. ANALYSIS OF BOTTLENECKS AND WEAKNESSES IDENTIFIED AT THE LOCAL LEVEL TO BE INCLUDED IN THE RUSE-GIURGIU REGION TOURISM DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY.

Conclusions about Giurgiu region

The county of Giurgiu proved to offer solid cultural heritage as well as attractive natural resources so that to become useful elements to be included within urban and rural touristic programs and to attract visitors from all over the world. In general terms, the results of the searched data reveled the followings:

Strengths

- The history of the territory generated historic sites, valuable monuments, some of which bear unicity touch, solid elements to be included within tourist circuits.
- The municipality of the county gathered plenty of cultural assets, making the tourist planner easier task to reach more visitors in the same area.
- Giurgiu town is a port to Danube river, with increased tourism traffic possibilities and economic development.
- The Municipality of Giurgiu carries development and tourism programs on, at local and national level.
- The national identity is still preserved either through craftsmen keeping traditions, Romanian art, attending local festivals or through the cultural centers and public institutions to display artefacts, handicrafts and old and modern work of arts.

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Opportunities

- One cultural asset existing, many times, in a village/ commune with a poor current development, could boost the local community development by attracting visitors, if responsible tourism management is conducted.
- Giurgiu town is close to Bucharest capital (64 km distance), the route most of the tourists follow when coming to Romania and, therefore, easy and ready to be visited.
- Geographically, Giurgiu is the best placed among all other South Romanian areas to border Danube so that to become integrated in a tourist Bulgarian-Romanian project.
- Danube borders the county on a quite long distance (72 km), with chance to develop economic activities in the long run.
- The agricultural people could be directed to work more on specific food, genuine local products to become attraction for community visitors, increase labor and become a direction for local responsible tourism development.
- When explained the advantages for their community, people are open and ready to host visitors.

Weaknesses

- The localities of the whole county account the lowest number of people living as stable population.
- Two thirds of the population leave in the rural areas, where the accommodation and public facilities are still underdeveloped for tourist offer.
- Marina in Giurgiu has still shortcomings in the naval traffic and cannot provide cruises to carry tourist for sightseeing.

Threats

- The county is focused on agriculture, predominantly 50% of the people are employed in this sector. The weather could determine blockages.
- The restoration work for many sites to preserve the quality of monuments might be at risk if the planning for the localities is delayed by group interests and difficulties in investments and funding.
- A low performance in handling local, national or international projects could jeopardize the chance for locals to attend training courses in the field of tourism services.

Religious tourism has good chances to flourish.

Ethnographic based on traditions, customs and art has also good perspectives.

Local products from the gastronomy and craftsmanship fields must be directions to turn to.

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Historic buildings will get their special quantum of interested tourists, as well.

Sports, could also become a direction to develop, as having a plain, many fields, but also forests, paths and spots bordering water, a lot of nature oriented activities are meant to attract visitors.

Conclusions about Ruse region

According to the current version of the National Tourism Development Strategy in the Republic of Bulgaria 2014-2030, tourism is a key sector of the Bulgarian economy. It forms 13-15% of GDP and provides a total of over 363,000 jobs. Tourism in Bulgaria as well as in other countries in Europe and the world develops in the environment of an aging population, active migration processes, adverse climate change, increased environmental pressures and other negative factors that directly affect the state of tourism resources and the development of the tourism industry as a whole. In particular, at the local and regional level also negative is the tendency of the constantly decreasing level of education and qualification of the labor market participants. In view of all these threats, the creation of a working institutional framework and real policies for the sustainable development of destinations (including strategic planning, implementation, monitoring and control) are among the biggest challenges facing the Bulgarian tourism industry. In the context of Bulgaria's EU membership, the sustainable development of destinations should be considered in the context of supranational connectivity, given the possibilities of creating more attractive and diverse tourist products. All the positive and weak points of the Ruse - Giurgiu region should be considered in this framework.

This analysis examines bottlenecks and weaknesses in the strategic development of local tourism as a regional industry with high potential for development. The bottlenecks and weaknesses examined and analyzed are topics that are not covered or are only partly explored in existing planning and strategic documents at the regional level. Identifying them locally is the result of:

- Research and description of the most attractive cultural and natural resources in the region of Ruse- Giurgiu;
- Survey of current higher-ranking documents in effect;
- Dialogue with stakeholders.

Based on the above described activities, sufficient information and data were accumulated to identify the main weaknesses and bottlenecks in the field of regional tourism. These are as follows:

Poor information provision at all levels

A major weakness of the different sectoral and complex strategies (national and regional) is the lack of a clear picture of the state of the available resource as well as the corresponding assessment or reassessment for the development of the particular economic industry. In this sense good planning cannot be done without a good knowledge of the

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resource potential and especially without quality information provision. A lack of detailed, adequate and up-to-date information on the state of tourism at the local level (by municipalities and as a whole for the region) can be considered a fundamental problem for the development of tourist destinations in the region of Ruse - Giurgiu. This pronounced information deficit is a much-discussed issue that is topical in the context of sustainable development, destination management and the need for real action in regional tourism policy. The solution to this problem, not only in the region but also in Bulgaria, is hampered by the lack of traditions of right and correct interaction and partnership between the numerous subjects directly related to the development of the national and regional tourist product. The lack of sufficient information on the state of tourism at the local level is the result of insufficient and often missing local capacity for regular collection, processing, synthesis and analysis of the necessary information. The problem of information provision is especially acute in smaller settlements and areas with tourist potential, which have a highly fragmented tourism offering. As a result of the lack of a clear and well-organized process of gathering and processing the necessary tourist information, there is another persistent problem, namely taking unjustified and poorly motivated management decisions in the field of tourism.

One of the first possible and easily applicable measures to overcome these problems is the creation of a Methodology for information provision of destinations in the region. It will structure and channel the process of collecting, processing, analyzing and creating arrays of necessary information on tourism in the target area. The development of such a methodology should be a commitment of all stakeholders and be seen as a major tool for overcoming poor information provision. A basic part of such a methodology should be the creation and maintenance of an information map for the municipalities and settlements in the Ruse region - Giurgiu. The idea is for this information map to contain systematized information about the population, economy, infrastructure, tourism resources, and local ownership of tourism. The primary purpose of this map is to provide the necessary information in a compact and unified way, suitable for benchmarking and online access. The main source of information for filling in, should be local communities and relevant municipal administrations and mayoral deputies, and possibly different institutions at a higher territorial level like the Ministry of Tourism, the National Statistical Institute, the Employment Agency, etc.

Negligible tourism offering

The studies and research of the region's leading tourism resources, as well as the dialogue with all stakeholders, showed unequivocally that tourism offering is very low. There is virtually no complex and targeted supply of tourist products and even more specific destinations including packages of tourist attractions and experiences. This fact leads to the conclusion that the existing potential of the cross-border region is obviously not being used effectively. As a result, the region and all stakeholders have not benefited yet. Obviously, the investments made in the region for the development of the offered tourist products are extremely small. This implies that regional tourism offering needs to be reorganized with the aim of adapting to the new conditions in terms of achieving sustainable destination development. It should highlight the main types of tourism resources, respectively the types

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of tourism, for which there are conditions in the region. Strategically, access to information on available tourist sites, auxiliary infrastructure, available accommodation facilities, combined package travel opportunities, etc. should be considered. The lack of a common long-term approach to the supply of regional tourist products naturally leads to low interest on the part of potential consumers. In fact, the issue of tourist offering in the Ruse - Giurgiu region is not covered in any single regional strategy document. That is why it can be categorized as a bottleneck of the regional tourism industry.

To overcome this weakness, measures are needed to stimulate organizations that have a direct bearing on the supply and popularization of the region. Local authorities should also be active in this process as they have the necessary channels for disseminating information. It is of utmost importance to work with tour operators to raise their awareness of the region's potential and to increase its supply as a tourist destination. Another effective instrument could be the interaction with journalists with a portfolio in the respective countries to improve the image of the region. Priority must be given to launching product offerings that are appropriate for both active tourists and those who are less active. Also, quantitative and qualitative supply indicators should be emphasized: beds and / or accommodation, number and categories of establishments, additional services offered, etc. This aspect of tourism supply is essential for the modern tourist product.

The implementation of these measures will not only support the tourism industry in the region, but will provide the necessary diversification of the tourist product and stimulate the development of local economies. Last but not least, it is important to look for an improvement in online supply and the possibility of using electronic services to ensure a steady tourists flow. This will allow the combination of recreational activities over time (reduction of seasonality in supply) and space (linking the territorial organization of tourism with specific spatial planning policies).

Insufficient knowledge of tourist demand

Apart from the poor tourist offering in the region, the lack of knowledge of the tourist demand can be considered another weakness of the local tourist industry. The detailed knowledge of the characteristics of the tourist demand will highlight the type of tourists who are the main visitors of the region, will give information about their origin, objectives and motivation to visit the respective tourist sites, the duration of the stay, etc. These are important indicators for the formation and development of sustainable tourist destinations. Through a qualitative analysis of tourism flows, potential users of tourism services can be identified and taking into account the purpose of tourist visits, find out where tourist flows are generated. Surveys are extremely necessary given the observed changes in travelers behavior that are visible in country-specific annual statistics. It should be borne in mind that one of the characteristics of the tourist demand is its relative uncontrollability.

Poor knowledge of the tourist demand in the region is also evidenced by the dynamics of its growth in the last 5 years. Data from surveys shows that demand is rather volatile. This fact proves that there is a supply of tourist services available in the region and by a better study of their demand and by realization of a good marketing strategy the Ruse - Giurgiu region can significantly increase the volume of tourists' flow.

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With regard to accurately identifying tourist development, monitoring surveys should be carried out regularly to determine the current state of tourism demand. The tourist search information will show the accessibility and attractiveness of the tourist destination, thus defining the strategic segments of the tourist market and determining its capacity. A good knowledge of the state of tourist demand and the profile of tourists in the region will give all the chances that it will be presented equally well on both the domestic and the external tourist market. In a purely market context, demand analysis is of great importance for the correct identification of target market segments and the conduct of a successful marketing policy as well as a reorientation of supply in order to better meet customer requirements. This is also important from the point of view of tourism management and its impact on the regional socio-economic environment.

Poor strategic management of the regional tourism industry

Today sustainable development and sustainability are key elements of the debate on how tourism should use natural, cultural, historical and social resources to gain economic benefits. This leads to an increasing understanding that stakeholders in the sector (both public and private) should take into account the need for its strategic management. Competitiveness of the tourism sector is directly related to the way it is managed, as the quality of tourist destinations is influenced by the natural and cultural environment and by the attitudes of local communities. It is clear that, to date, the strategic management of regional tourism is poor, mostly in medium-term documents at municipal level. The lack of a regional strategy that focuses on the development of tourist destinations has a negative impact.

It is clear from the information presented here that there is a potential for development of tourism in the region of Ruse - Giurgiu, but there are a number of weaknesses. The favorable preconditions are mainly related to the local natural and cultural potential, historical heritage and, above all, the possibility of creating cross-border tourist destinations. Limiting factors are mainly confined to the relatively weak local economy and the insignificant place of tourism in it, insufficient infrastructure and negative demographic processes. The tourist development of the researched resources in the region is related to numerous and often interrelated problems, some of which are quite visible - the state of the physical environment, the accessibility to the tourist attractions, the information provision of the sector, good marketing policy, etc. While others are rather hidden, but certainly more important from a strategic point of view - policies, real interaction, cooperation, including between municipal authorities and local communities and business, issues related to the overall management of the regional tourism industry. If the former requires primarily financial resources, the latter require primarily initiative, communication and organization. But here it is important to note that in any case the clearing of the problems related to the strategic management of the regional tourist industry is a prerequisite for solving the problems of the first group. For objective and subjective reasons, the development of tourism in the region is not a real priority for local authorities, and this presents it with serious challenges in terms of creating a quality product, attracting tourists and achieving competitiveness. In this context, although the need for initiatives and partnership in this direction is being realized, its actual implementation is currently limited. All this highlights

the issues of regional cooperation and the establishment of adequate tourist destination management organizations. For the participants in this process it should be clear that tourism is a multi-layer industry, its development depends not only on the availability of natural bounties and assets, but also to a great extent on the human factor that controls the various processes.

Lack of real marketing policy in the tourism sector

Promoting the Ruse - Giurgiu region as a tourist destination on the market requires not only the availability of appropriate resources but also a marketing promotional campaign. Investments in increasing the quality of supply, diversifying the tourist product, improving the material and technical base, optimizing price-quality ratio, overcoming seasonality and developing hotel services, will undoubtedly lead to increased tourist flows. But effective marketing requires, above all, a good knowledge of the features and trends in available tourism demand and behavior, identifying potential new markets for the products and services offered, and constantly monitoring developments and trends in the competitive environment. At this stage, however, it has been found that there is a lack of up-to-date information and research, and there is no clear and long-term vision of how the available tourism resources should be realized. Also, the potential market segments to which efforts should be addressed and which should be guided by tourism supply and pricing policy are not clarified. This strategic marketing deficit has its retentive impact on the local tourism industry.

The significance of this bottleneck in regional tourism is due to one major factor, namely the huge variety of supply in the sector. In this strong competitive environment for stakeholders in the region, there is the question of how to attract, retain and satisfy more customers (tourists) without forgetting that they often change their demand. In the context of the strategic goal - creating and developing sustainable tourist destinations in the Ruse - Giurgiu region, the inclusion of a real and relevant marketing policy would be an appropriate and justifiable solution.

The existence of an effective marketing policy is an important condition and, in another aspect, the creation of a regional tourist brand. The marketing concept is the tool that can successfully design a particular tourist product and highlight its unique qualities. Similar to goods and services from other economic spheres as well as tourist destinations, the characteristic, the thing that distinguishes them from the others and which makes them unique, is to be found. Individualism and uniqueness are properties that guarantee good marketing communication and make a remarkable brand. In this context, it should be emphasized that tourism is above all an ever-expanding business, broad-based, and as with any other business the economic interest is the leading part of it. Quality tourism products are created through the efforts and collaborative work of a large partner network, and trust and bona fide implementation are crucial. As much as the individual marketing of the individual tourist product or attraction is important, the overall goal of creating a unified conceptual marketing model that symbolizes the unification of everyone and ensuring the quality of the offer is equally as important. This is especially true when it comes to creating regional tourist destinations involving two-country regions.

Available local environment in which the regional tourist product is developing

Local environment for the tourists themselves forms an integral part of the tourist product. The degree of urban development and the state of the general infrastructure (water supply, sewerage, power supply, street network, cleanliness and solid waste, road network, car parks, etc.), accessibility to relevant tourist sites, public utilities services (health and safety), social and living conditions in accommodation locations, the surrounding environment. All of them are of the utmost importance in order to guarantee the main components of the tourist offering. In practice, the state of the local environment determines the opportunities for development of tourism in a given region.

In view of the geographical location of the Ruse - Giurgiu region, its natural assets, historical past, all factors influencing the development of large-scale tourist destinations, the general condition of the local environment can be defined as unsatisfactory. As leading problem areas of the local environment, the following can be identified:

- Unbalanced territorial distribution of the accommodation base in urban centers;
- Unbalanced state of the common technical infrastructure in different settlements with tourist potential;
- Increasing air, water and soil pollution, which changes the anthropogenic resources needed for tourism;
- Insufficient and unevenly developed transport system, high share of settlements to which access by public transport is almost impossible;
- Inadequate health care in areas with a marked tourist function, lack of medical care in remote locations;

All these elements of the local environment have a key impact on the development of the tourism industry. Therefore, the future development of the tourism industry in the region should also focus on ensuring the necessary conditions for sustainable development of the sector through a balance between the well-being of tourists and local communities, the needs of the natural and cultural environment and the development and competitiveness of the destinations and the business. Achieving the overarching goal and tackling challenges requires excellent interinstitutional interaction and a high degree of stakeholder engagement.

All the above shows that the local tourism development environment in the Ruse - Giurgiu region provides opportunities, but in certain aspects it requires immediate action and activity to improve the overall environment.

Poor communication and cooperation between stakeholders

Surveys show that there is a lack of understanding among industry stakeholders about the need for wider regional cooperation and, ultimately, a lack of consensus and unidirectional action. This is an indisputable weakness of the regional tourism industry, which impedes its development. In order to formulate clear needs and long-term objectives of the sector, much more active cooperation between local administrations, tourist

associations, tourism enterprises and educational institutions is needed. This will strengthen links in local communities, ensure sustainability in the development of tourism products, improve their quality, create healthy competition between individual economic operators, which will provide the necessary sustainability. The main measures to promote various forms of partnerships and cooperation for the balanced development of tourism in the region are:

- Encouraging interaction with existing tourist information centers;
- Creating a permanent forum for cooperation of local business and business organizations with regional and local authorities;
- Building a partnership with educational institutions;

Creating a model for cooperation and partnership between representatives of the tourism business, local authorities and educational institutions would provide much higher effectiveness and efficiency in the industry. By improving communication, the deficits in information security, strategic management and opportunities for improving the local environment will be greatly reduced. To date, one of the main problems of the sector is the lack of accurate assessment of the employers' needs of a labor force with specific characteristics and skills. This issue can be resolved through active communication and cooperation. Focused co-operation between educational institutions and businesses will contribute to the development of staffing potential in tourism.

Making a policy based on long-term partnerships at national, regional and local level, and in this case at an international level, among all stakeholders, is a prerequisite for creating sustainable and competitive tourist destinations.

Lessons to be learned from the review and analysis of the bottlenecks and weaknesses of the tourism industry are that the region has very good conditions for the development of tourist destinations and related activities. There are a number of difficulties and issues that need to be addressed through partnership and mutual efforts from all stakeholders. A clear strategic approach in organizing and creating cross-border tourist products is required to make them competitive and properly positioned on the market. Understanding that tourism product is the outcome of the common effort of many actors in the process (state and business) should be a guiding principle. In this context, it is necessary to consolidate the management and marketing processes of tourism resources.

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Used source of information:

1. *National Tourism Development Strategy in the Republic of Bulgaria 2014-2030*
2. *Planning and strategic documents of:*
 - *Ruse Municipality;*
 - *Borovo Municipality;*
 - *Byala Municipality;*
 - *Vetovo Municipality;*
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- *Ivanovo Municipality;*
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