

FEATURES IN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND TOURIST POTENTIAL OF THE MOUNTAIN REGIONS AND AREAS IN BULGARIA

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Abstract

The focus on mountain areas within the European Union in recent years has become an essential part of the common regional policy, which is aimed at making spatial development a top priority of the European institutions. In the present exhibition an analysis is made of the tourist potential of the mountain municipalities in Bulgaria, which develop tourism. The territorial peculiarities of these regions are presented, their peculiarities and specifics in the context of their regional development are considered. The opportunities for them to improve their tourism potential and, above all, to create a new environment for implementing regional development policies are also outlined. The relevant conclusions and recommendations for achieving a sustainable tourist framework of the mountainous regions in Bulgaria have been made.

Key words: mountain, development, geourbanism, regional policy, modeling, area

INTRODUCTION

In Bulgaria, regional development and tourism since the mid-1980s have emerged as priority areas for promoting local socio-economic development. However, this process is not only for Bulgaria, similar policies towards mountain regions are pursued throughout Europe. The volume of the accommodation base of tourism in Bulgaria has been growing very fast since the mid-60s of the last century - from 302 thousand beds in 1969, 420 thousand in 1972 and 490 thousand in 1981 to 572 thousand beds in 1986 according to our national statistics. This predetermines the focus of our research on mountain regions. In Bulgaria, after the changes in the 1990s and the withdrawal of government to pursue targeted policies in mountainous regions over the past 20 years, they have been identified as problematic areas. The opportunities for their withdrawal development go through the creation of economic alternatives. In the Bulgarian conditions in recent years there has been a loss of significant demographic potential in the mountainous regions. For example, in Smolyan district the population as of 1992

was 154,554, and in 2019 it amounted to 105,421 inhabitants according to data from the National Statistical Institute. This shows that for almost 30 years in one of the mountainous areas the population has decreased by almost 1/3, the picture is similar in the districts of Gabrovo, Lovech, Vratsa, as well as in the mountainous areas of the other districts in the country. In this respect, a significant reason is the lagging behind in the level of economic development and tourist development in our mountainous parts. Over the last 30 years, regional development in these regions has been relatively low compared to other European mountain regions. In our conditions, the main deficit is related to the deteriorated infrastructure and transport accessibility to a number of tourist sites. This deficit has been overcome in most European countries. In addition, we can assume that a large part of the territory of Bulgaria is characterized by low saturation/density of the total tourist potential. The high density of anthropogenic tourist sites is naturally established in settlements with a concentration of architectural monuments and well-preserved Revival architecture (Plovdiv, Koprivshitsa, Veliko Tarnovo, Nessebar and

others) or where there is a large number of archaeological sites (Plovdiv, Veliki Preslav, Kaspichan, Nessebar, Kazanlak and others). In general, the model of regional development does not create sufficiently reliable mechanisms for the development of regional business, and hence the tourism potential of the regions. The model of development of the Black Sea resorts has been chosen, and the development of the mountainous areas for entertainment and tourist purposes is quite lagging behind in comparison with Bansko, Borovets and Pamporovo. There are 143 resorts in Bulgaria, of which 54 are balneotherapy, 55 are climatic mountain resorts and 34 are climatic sea resorts. The capacity and healing potential of some of them are the reason for granting them the status of national importance [9]. In the years of transition there was a reduction in the total capacity of the accommodation base (up to 136 thousand beds in 2000), but at the same time in recent years there has been a change in the type of tourists by actually reducing the number of beds in chalets, student camps, private homes and campsites at the expense of hotel complexes and specialized guest houses.

In the period between 2001 and 2016 the number of beds (in hotels, campsites and other places for short-term accommodation - tourist and holiday villages, chalets, private rooms and apartments, holiday resorts, holiday bungalows, guest houses, etc.) increased - from 129 thousand in 2001 to 328 thousand in 2016. In the last 5 years, construction in tourism has also made some progress [8]. A bad sign for the development of tourism was the crisis with COVID-19, which became a test for people, businesses and government institutions. The solutions in this direction are related to the good coordination and the joint efforts are a necessary condition for understanding the nature of the problem and the search for adequate solutions. In the new conditions, regional development and tourism are still without an alternative and basis for the economic development of the world. In practice, the tourism industry provides a livelihood for millions of people in both developing and developed economies. The

crisis has put about 150 million tourism jobs at risk globally. Small businesses (which account for 85% of world tourism) are particularly vulnerable. Women, who make up nearly 60% of the tourism workforce, young people and workers in the informal economy are among the most at risk. Problems facing regional development and tourism have intensified since 2020. Referring to the National Statistical Institute [9] for the visits of foreigners to the country, in 2020 a serious decline in the travel of foreign citizens was registered, due to the suspension of international flights and the closure of land borders. The annual rate of decline in visits by foreigners to Bulgaria in April amounted to - 88.9% (by 650.3 thousand fewer visits), and in total for 2020 the decrease amounted to - 60.4% (by 7,578.7 thousand more). few visits). On this basis, new challenges to regional development are brought to the fore, and hence to the functioning of the tourism business. The search for solutions in the direction of reassessment of operational models and long-term business model of development of mountain areas. This means that regional development must modernize mountain regions. This means complete electronization on the territory of Bulgaria. It is necessary to create a widespread use of online payments, the introduction of best practices for the management of the tourist base. Also forecasting future travel trends, tourist preferences, and pricing models to maintain profitability. In this way we will try to bring out those features of the regional development that can contribute to the development of the local tourist potential in the mountainous regions of Bulgaria [13].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The focus of our exhibition will be on the opportunities for development of mountain tourism. It attracts a large number of visitors who have an impact on the local economy. This provides opportunities for strengthening local economic activity in the direction of transport, tourist base, food, souvenir production and more. The object of this type of regional policy are about 30% of the area

of Bulgaria, which is occupied by mountains. Here it is necessary to present the main picture of the tourist flow in Bulgaria. It shows that the longest stay of foreigners in the areas specializing in sea holiday tourism - longer in the Burgas region (average 6.7 nights per person) and slightly shorter in the Varna region (5.8 nights). For Bulgarians the values are 3.8 and 3.0 nights respectively. In the areas where the ski resorts are positioned, the average length of stay is a little over 3 nights for foreigners and about 2 - for Bulgarians. A place for a longer stay for foreigners is the region of the Valley of Roses (4.0 nights). For Bulgarians the stay in all other areas is very short - 1-2 nights [20]. We can assume that tourism has its niche, especially if we deduce the data for 2019, as can be seen from Table 1, that the total number of tourist visits of foreigners in Bulgaria is 9,311,681, before the entry of Covid-19.

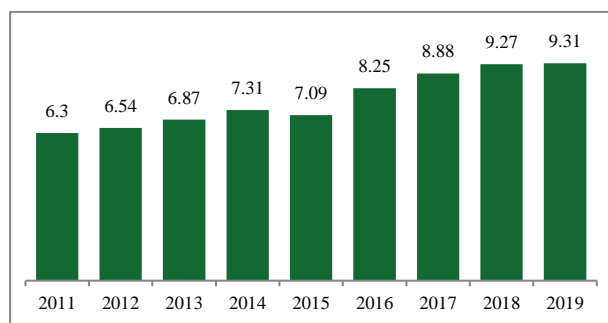


Fig. 1. Tourist visits of foreigners in Bulgaria (millions)
Source: National Institute of Statistics, NIS, 2021 [9].

In this direction, provided that investments are made in the tourism industry and, above all, we see real improvements in the regional development of Bulgaria in the period 2022-2027, we can reach these levels again. Moreover, the country has the potential to develop the industry and annually welcome about 14-15 million tourists. The analysis of revenues from the period before Kovid-19 shows a positive trend. Thus, revenues from international tourism for Bulgaria amount to over 3.7 billion euros in 2018. The growth compared to 2017 is 6.5%. In 2018, Bulgarian tourism continued to develop in an upward direction, building on the excellent results of the previous two years - the peak for the

sector in 2016, which achieved records in all parameters, and 2017, which was remembered with a boom in international travel due to the peak of low-cost airlines.



Fig. 2. Revenues from international Tourism (Euro million) - monthly and annual data

Source: Bulgarian National Bank, 2021 [1].

According to experts, 2019 is slightly weaker than in 2018, but the crisis of 2020 had an extremely negative impact on the tourism industry. While 2020 was particularly difficult for the tourism industry, in 2021 the picture is at least somewhat more favorable. The change came both in the form of various government support schemes for business and relief in travel requirements in Europe. Based on expert assessment by experts in tourism and data announced by the Institute for Market Economy, 2021 is more favorable for the tourism industry. In the three summer months (June, July and August) of 2021, the total number of overnight stays in the country reached 11.3 million - a significant improvement from 6.3 million in 2020, but still far from 16.4 million for 2019. As expected, most of them - about 5.3 million overnight stays - were in the Burgas region, where sea tourism is concentrated. The district has almost doubled the number of overnight stays compared to last year, but their number remains almost three million less than in pre-crisis 2019. The dynamics is similar in Varna, where overnight stays reach 2.6 million, compared to 4 million before the crisis, and in Dobrich - 985 thousand compared to 1.7 million [11]. From the presented picture it is evident that sea tourism prevails again. This gives us reason to focus our attention on

tourism in mountainous and semi-mountainous areas. It is obvious that in these territories there are great reserves to achieve attractive socio-economic development by creating a sustainable regional economy based on tourism and related industries. The spatial planning of mountain areas, this can be seen as an activity and good coordination, but perhaps the specificities of mountain areas and how they are affected by specific sectoral policies need to be brought to the fore. They, in turn, have the corresponding added value for diversification and increasing the number of activities of small and medium-sized enterprises., as well as for cooperation between them [6]. In each part of the mountainous areas we observe a specific development of agriculture and forestry. In order to improve regional development in our conditions in this direction, the Pan-European regional policy has its territorial dimensions, which also includes visions for a targeted impact on mountain areas. The focus of regional development must impose policies for economic and social development of mountain areas, equating them with the pursuit of conservation of natural resources, local traditions and culture, in the direction of their effective management and opportunities for spatial planning. However, few countries have a more comprehensive, integrated mountain policy and specific instruments such as mountain laws or mountain funds (France, Italy, with some conditionality - Switzerland). Public interventions to promote the development of mountain areas vary significantly not only depending on the importance and diversity of these areas, but also on the institutional structure of each country (centralized, federal, old and new EU member states, acceding countries, etc.). A particularly important policy instrument, which is often a prerequisite for the implementation of other instruments, is the definition of mountain areas. The criteria for determining mountain areas are different, but always include altitude - although with different values in different countries, most often depending on their latitude - Italy, France and to some extent Switzerland). It is important to note that the institutional

structure of the state has a significant impact on the policies pursued to promote the development of mountain regions. Of course, what is important is the socio-economic situation of the country, what experience it has and what is its access to European Union funds. Additionally, their diversity and features that require a specific approach to them. This predetermines the imposition of specific investment instruments through which the implementation of policies for the development of mountain regions is required. Criteria for defining mountain regions have been introduced in individual countries, for example in France, Italy and Slovakia they define 600 meters depending on their latitude. Other countries such as Greece consider 800 meters to be suitable for a mountainous area, and in Spain, Switzerland mountainous areas are areas with 1,000 meters above sea level. In some countries, additional criteria are introduced, such as relative height in Italy, and in countries such as France, Slovenia and Spain, the slope of the mountains is also influenced. According to the global criteria in connection with global warming, the need for the explicit framework of ski resorts and a mandatory requirement for their functioning has been introduced. For example, in countries such as Slovakia, tourist zoning is an essential element of tourism policy for these specific regions and territories. In this respect, we have the best developed zoning system in Switzerland, where 4 (four) types of tourist areas are formed (mountain areas, lake areas, urban areas and other areas). The focus on Bulgaria shows that agreement can be sought on setting the priorities of mountain tourism and its segmentation. A common weakness of the Bulgarian tourism policy is the attempt to orient itself initially with ski tourism. In modern development, mountainous areas have the opportunity to develop different types of tourism, which are essential for the development of settlements in the mountains. To a large extent, mountain tourism can be enriched and develop the diversification of a tourist product. This means looking for opportunities for year-round work of mountain areas with tourists, which means the development of different

types of tourist products. There are large reserves in the rational use of the spring and summer seasons, as well as partly the autumn [12]. In practice, in mountainous areas it is necessary to pursue a targeted territorial policy, both in housing and the formation of functional areas that combine settlements, entertainment, nature and transport accessibility, so as to protect our environment. This is related to the formation of the Bulgarian mountains on large areas of NATURA 2000, which have a special model of nature management. They provide various opportunities for recreation, entertainment and sports. Tourism in the mountains can be practiced both in winter and in summer. The duration of the ski season is about 130 days, and the rest of the year has its charm for tourism. From the point of view of transport accessibility, the largest mountains are best secured, as well as those with a central location in the country. In this respect, the Rhodopes and the Balkan Mountains stand out. Due to its central location in the Central Balkan Mountains and the Middle Fore-Balkans are some of the most visited tourist sites by Bulgarian tourists. Important roads pass along Rila and Pirin, as well as some mountains in the region. The border mountains are in the most unfavorable position [11]. Undoubtedly, the tourist potential of Bulgaria is great, but in geo-economics terms there are deficits in the implementation of a number of regional policies to encourage its development. In this regard, the factors for the development of mountain tourism in Bulgaria can be divided into general (with global impact) and local (with regional or local impact). In addition, the factors can be considered as selective, localization and implementation in terms of ongoing regional development policies. This determines the focus on the development of mountain tourism to fall on the municipalities in the mountainous areas [20]. What has been said so far implies that the use of statistical information, the reference to expert assessment and analysis of published public information by state and local authorities will give us the necessary methodological justification and opportunity for accurate

assessment of ongoing processes. To a large extent, the comparative analysis, spatial approach and statistical information capture the trends in regional development and how it affects tourism development. In addition, the tourism industry itself needs additional focus not only on creating infrastructure and improving accessibility, but also on quality service of the tourist flow [11].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In our time, mountain regions are focusing more and more on investment projects. In practice, however, mountain areas need to be known and brought to the forefront of pan-European spatial development policy. It is necessary to point out that the planning of financial and program instruments for the development of mountain areas is becoming an increasingly important part of European regional policy. The set policy should be based on the modernization of the mountainous areas, as well as to create conditions for the preservation of the local culture and tradition. An important aspect in the development of mountain areas is to improve the accessibility to them and the possibility to create local productions and promote tourist destinations [4]. However, few countries have a more comprehensive, integrated mountain policy and specific instruments such as mountain laws or mountain funds (France, Italy, with some conditionality - Switzerland) In most European countries, a targeted policy for the development of mountain areas has been pursued since the late 1970s. The solution of local problems is not identical, because the mountainous areas are diverse and have different problems and the need to implement targeted regional development policies. Another significant problem is their institutional nature, due to the specifics of regional and local government, which results from the unitary or federal nature of the countries in Europe. In this direction, the definition of a mountainous area is discourse, which requires different impact instruments to be applied in different regions. In Bulgaria, the mountain and semi-mountain

municipalities in the country are 123 and occupy 42.5% of the country's territory, with 2,555 settlements, in which 20.9% of the country's population is concentrated [12]. These parameters rank our country 7th in terms of the share of mountain areas among the EU member states. When applying the European methodology for Bulgaria, the similar indicators are higher (over 50% for the territory and the population), as this category of municipalities includes regional centers such as Smolyan, Gabrovo, Kardzhali and even the capital municipality, which meet the above criteria. The choice of one or another criteria and indicators for determining these areas depends on the number of municipalities and settlements that will be subject to targeted regional policy by the state. Depending on the objectives of the individual normative documents and studies, the criteria adopted in them are different and according to them the number of mountain and semi-mountain municipalities in Bulgaria varies from 120 to 144, and in their settlements - between 2,170 and 2,900. This is the framework determined by the criteria of the draft law on mountain areas of 1995, which defines 142 municipalities with 2,996 settlements in these regions. In 2003 Ordinance № 14 /01.04.2003 for determination of settlements in rural and mountainous areas was published areas issued by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and the Ministry of Regional development and public works (SG, issue 35 of 16.04.2003), which identifies 138 rural municipalities with 2,172 settlements in them. Important for determining the range of mountainous areas is their altitude. This creates an important prerequisite to define the mountain areas depending on the latitude, climatic features and the level of accessibility. We can recall that, for example, for countries such as Italy, Slovakia and France, the mountainous area is over 600 meters, and for countries such as Spain and Switzerland it is 1,000 meters. In both cases, the leading criteria is the height and slope of the territory, but somewhere the available tourist site or resort are sufficient grounds to define the area as mountainous. The case is similar with the region of Aragon in Spain, as well as in

Slovakia, Switzerland, Austria and others. We can summarize that the winning model is successful when we have successful zoning. The different typologies for defining an area as mountainous require either at least 50% of their population to live in areas defined by morphometric indicators as mountainous, or more than 50% of the area of the respective territorial unit to be mountainous [5].

When focusing on the mountainous areas in Bulgaria, it is evident that they include a little over 70% of the forest reserves, but large massifs of forests remain outside them. This creates conditions for the development of forestry and the construction of small and medium enterprises related to wood and its processing. About 1/4 of the forest fund is forests with special purpose - water protection, anti-erosion, reclamation, recreational, green systems, etc. (protected forests and territories). Almost all protected natural areas (national parks, nature parks, protected natural and historical sites, reserves, etc.) are located in the mountains. It is important to note that a little over 85% of the meadow area is also included in the NATURA 2000 boundaries, and a little over 70% are suitable for pastures. The plant diversity also has impressive characteristics [13]. In our mountains are about 2/3 of the common species of plants and plant communities in the country, many of which are of great economic importance. It is important to note the extremely important ecological function of natural vegetation (woody, herbaceous and shrubby), which is traditionally used as a source of various resources - wood, fodder, food, fruits, herbs, raw materials (production of essential oils, resins, dyes and others), mainly due to the fact that a number of plant species are also honey-bearing (about 600), or have decorative qualities (over 1,000). The mountainous regions are the main generator of the country's water resources, as they contain over 2/3 of the main water sources. Numerous mountain rivers, hundreds of alpine lakes (especially in Rila and Pirin), built over 700 reservoirs in the lower belts of all mountains, as well as numerous and attractive waterfalls determine not only the tourist attractiveness of our

mountains, but also their significant hydropower potential. An important place in the natural resource potential is also occupied by the mineral waters, connected mainly with the fault zones in the mountainous areas [6]. Here are a total of 70% of all mineral water deposits in the country. This natural potential of the mountains is traditionally used in a number of balneological centers, established not only with national but also with international importance such as: Hissarya, Pavel Banya, Narechen, Sandanski. Unlike other resources, mineral waters have renewable reserves and, if properly exploited, are virtually inexhaustible. There are various minerals in the mountainous and semi-mountainous territories of the country. Fuel and energy resources are represented by brown and lignite. From the ore minerals there are discovered deposits of gold, silver and lead-zinc ores and the extraction is carried out in the municipalities of Lucky, Pirdop, Zlatitsa, Chelopech, Madan, Rudozem, Krumovgrad and others. The extraction of various non-metallic minerals is much more widely represented [20]. Bentonite, quartz, perlite, talc, magnesite, fluorite, marble and limestone are mined. Nearly 1/3 of the agricultural fund and 24.6% of the arable land are located in mountainous areas [9]. The cultural and historical heritage in the Bulgarian mountain municipalities is also a kind of resource potential for development. It is based on the presence of authentic archaeological and architectural monuments from antiquity, the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, unique natural landmarks, as well as preserved over the centuries folk art and craft [7]. In terms of geo-economic development, mountain regions in Europe have their exceptional potential not only for tourism, but also for the development of specific industries and the generation of environmentally friendly life. In the mountainous regions it is possible to create a model of regional development with an emphasis on the ecological, cultural and socio-economic specifics of the individual territories. In this respect, even before the creation of the European Union, the Alpine countries in Europe pursued targeted policies

regulated to support mountain regions in view of their geographical and climatic features and the way of life of the local population. Thus, the mountainous areas need quality and effective spatial planning, which will bring to the fore the specific features of connectivity, infrastructural order and creation of socio-economic environment, which will impose the model of optimal development of settlements in accordance with their demographic profile. This means that priority should be given to small and medium-sized enterprises that are linked to the local labor market and economic viability. In this respect, state measures must contribute to diversification and the possibility of imposing alternative opportunities for regional development of agriculture and forestry. Finding solutions for the development of animal husbandry, fish farming and poultry farming is one of the alternatives for local economic development [9]. These needs of mountain areas require at national level, and why not at European Union level, to develop specific operational programs for these areas. It should be borne in mind that mountainous areas will generate resources and added value from local productions and maximally compliant with the ecological environment. This will increase the range of tourism policy by developing more types of tourism in accordance with the imposed economic brands and brands. In addition, through the leverage effect of the programs, the preservation of the architectural and historical environment of the mountain as an engine of growth of the Bulgarian mountain areas will be encouraged. [10] In geo-economic terms, the development of the services sector through tax relief of half the profit tax, as well as modernization of public electronic services for citizens and companies in mountainous areas. To a large extent, attempts have been made to build mountain agricultural campuses or farms in which to promote organic farming and animal husbandry, while respecting the sustainable protection of soil, water and air [20].

Settlement and urbanization structure of the mountain regions in Bulgaria

Our mountainous areas are characterized by small settlements. A significant part of them

consists of scattered neighborhoods. Their localization is very large in the Rhodopes (in the municipalities: Madan, Rudozem, Velingrad, Chernoochene, etc.) and Stara Planina (Tryavna, Troyan, Svoge, etc.). In the mountain and semi-mountain municipalities the 4th and 5th functional type prevails, i.e. they have low socio-economic and demographic potential. They are located 39.4% of the villages and 36.6% of the cities of the country [4]. Unlike other territories in the country, here the relative share of the rural population is very high - 45.6%. The high concentration of villages and rural population shows the low degree of urbanization. The share of the unused housing stock is constantly growing, as well as the reconstruction of the rural houses into villa properties. On the other hand, the preservation of relatively small municipalities makes it possible to stabilize a certain administrative and institutional capacity for the provision of public services close to people's place of residence. In the second half of the twentieth century in Bulgaria were made a series of spatial plans for mountainous areas. It is important to emphasize that in the 1950s and 1960s, several development plans were made for mountain areas. Thus, the architects L. Konstantinov (1962) and P. Grigorov (1968) developed the first development plans for Rila Mountain, and in 1975 a "Program for complex development of recreation and tourism in Northern Rila" was developed by a team led by L. Stoychev. Later, in 1985, a comprehensive landscaping plan was made again by L. Stoychev with a medium-term horizon until 2000. For Pirin Mountain a territorial scheme was developed in 1972 by arch. P. Grigorov with a team, in 1977 eng. N. Chucheva with a team designed a park development project of Pirin National Park. At the beginning of 1991, under the leadership of engineer L. Yotsova, a team developed a project with the respective development planning of Pirin National Park. This project is of significant value because it outlines the problem areas in the Pirin Mountains and provides an opportunity to solve a number of problems for the development of tourism in the mountains. An

important moment in the development policies is also the general development plan for the Vitosha Mountain made by D. Sugarev (1954), later a new development plan was made, but under the leadership of arch. K. Bisserov (1975), and in connection with the application of the city of Sofia for the Winter Olympic Capital, a team led by arch. Chipev (1987) created the latest development plan of Vitosha. [4]. For the Western Rhodopes a territorial scheme was developed in 1978 by a team led by Eng. M. Kovacheva. For Sredna Stara Planina a spatial plan was developed in 1985 by a team led by Eng. M. Mladenova and Prof. L. Dinev and spatial plans of resort and tourist localizations by teams led by arch. P. Evrev and arch. [4]. The evolution of the ecological thinking and the development of the nature protection legislation with the declaration of the national parks, and later the national and nature parks, contributed to this to a great extent. Here is the place to share that after 1990 no new spatial plans of mountainous areas have been developed. There were feasibility studies for the construction of resorts such as "Super Borovets" (complex "Samokov - Borovets – Beli Iskar"), "Syutka" and "Super Perelik", but no real construction activities were reached. It is interesting that the Syutka project was developed back in 1986 and is named after the highest peak in the Rhodopes, Golyama Syutka peak - 2,186 meters above sea level. Its implementation was to affect the development of three municipalities - Velingrad, Rakitovo and Batak. The Super Borovets project is similar, which was supposed to affect three municipalities of Samokov, Dolna Banya and Kostenets. Very ambitious is the project "Super Perelik", which is a widespread name in the investment plan of the municipality of Smolyan (complex "Perelik - Pamporovo - Mechi Chal") for development and expansion of the existing resort Pamporovo as the largest and most modern tourist ski area. The Rhodopes from 300 kilometers of slopes. In practice, there are other projects that appear over time, such as the idea of building a new large resort for BGN 100 million under Kom peak in the Balkan Mountains. The project, called

Berkovski Balkan, should include new runways, lifts, hotels, restaurants, delta and paragliding opportunities. This gave rise to expectations in Berkovitsa for a powerful boost to the region, which has otherwise been declared a spa resort of national importance. The municipality of Troyan is also developing an investment project for the transformation of Beklemeto into a modern ski center. In the following, the idea is that the existing 930 m of tracks will become 9,700 m. New projects for ski tourism are being considered in the region of Uzana (Gabrovo), the Elena region below Chumerna peak, in Osogovo (above Kyustendil) and others, but in general no large investors have been found to have a lasting interest in the development of tourism. In these parts of the Bulgarian mountains [5]. To a large extent, the emerging demographic problems, the problems with the outdated infrastructure and other local problems do not have a positive impact on future investment intentions towards the Bulgarian mountains [13]. This is especially true for transport connectivity and, above all, for the road network, as road transport is the main means of accessibility in these areas. Over 90% of the roads are of low class (third and fourth) and with deteriorated functional performance. Nearly 1/3 of the settlements do not have transport connections with the local and regional centers of a higher hierarchical type. Electricity and water supply networks need investment, although they are relatively well developed and evenly distributed. With normal maintenance and rehabilitation, they can meet the future needs of the population and business. The same applies to Internet coverage, which naturally requires improved technological performance. The severely limited sewerage network and the lack of treatment plants are increasingly becoming a factor holding back modern development [2]. It is important to take into account the geographical position of Bulgaria in the European space in terms of tourism development. It is obvious that Bulgaria does not have the opportunity to develop from 7 to no more than 11 winter resorts (Bansko, Kom, Borovets, Pamporovo, Syutka, Beklemeto, Sinite Kamani, Malyovitsa, Panichishte,

Chepelare and Semkovo), which means to create opportunities and development of rural, ecological and mountain tourism, because so far the effect of ski tourism is mainly sought. In the conditions of global warming the lower limit of ski tourism is already 1,200-1,700 meters above sea level, which for the Bulgarian conditions means large investments. At the present stage, the promotion of tourism in mountainous areas in most countries is not limited to the promotion of winter tourism and ski resorts, but rather the opposite - looking for differentiation of tourist products and opportunities for use during the summer season. For example, the Bergamo Tourism Development Program - Italy, the promotion of spa and spa tourism in the mountainous regions of France. We can mention as a good practice the program for the development of tourism in France, where in the 60s and 70s of the twentieth century serious investments were made in the tourist infrastructure (As well as the "Snow Plan" program in France in the 60s and 70s of the twentieth century). These investments can be explored, but the different latitudes and altitudes make their field of application difficult in Bulgaria. On the other hand, the investments of local authorities in France are aimed at promoting local business, building tourist infrastructure and providing utilities can also be designed by Bulgarian municipalities [11]. Moreover, given the capacity of our settlements in our country, resorts with small and medium capacity must be built in order to be economically connected with the existing settlements. We can emphasize that in Bulgaria requests are made for the construction of large complexes, but they require huge investments and funds, so these intentions are gradually postponed or suspended. Thus, in Bulgaria it is necessary to build medium-sized resorts and holiday villages in order to successfully fit into the socio-economic picture of the country's development. In our country, multi-season and multifunctional resorts with small capacity should be built, tied to the existing settlements and resorts [2].

Need for a new spatial planning of mountain regions

The emerging challenges facing the mountainous regions impose the need for new spatial development plans, which will undoubtedly not only more comprehensively, but also more comprehensively address the problems of development, protection and development of these areas. This need arises from the difficult transport accessibility and the deteriorating economic environment, which is a strong limiting factor for meeting the real needs of the population. Access to health care and health care is one of the most serious problems of mountain villages in the country [20]. It is argued that the task of public administration is to restore the practice of programming and planning at the local and regional level. The state and the municipalities do not find an optimal variant and an appropriate mechanism for determining and developing development plans of the mountainous areas in order to create an opportunity for an effective level of public works. Attempts in this direction are related to its preparation, promotion and voting by the Bulgarian Parliament [6]. Several draft laws have been drafted, the most recent being in 1998. However, this draft normative act does not become widely available to the public. According to expert assessment, such a law is dictated by the prevailing opinion that mountainous areas have specific problems and their solution should be supported by legislation. It is assumed that the mountainous areas are in an extremely difficult situation, there are processes of depopulation and disruption of the social structure, high unemployment, economic backwardness and others. According to expert assessment, a Mountain Law will lay the foundations of a national policy aimed at revitalizing these areas and purposefully investing in them [6]. Provided that the state does not have the will for a law on the mountains, I believe that it can structure a special section in the Law on Regional Development entitled "Development and Management of Mountain Territories". In this chapter, the emphasis will be on supporting socio-economic development, as

well as on the structure and protection of mountain areas. We can look for an analogy with other European laws on mountains and mountain areas, which provide relief, a number of incentives for regional development, financial programs and support from public administration in order to make them an attractive place to live, work and tourism [19]. The adoption of new legislation must be based on the development and protection of mountain areas, the construction by the state of development schemes and plans of mountain regions. At the same time, it is good to build technical infrastructure in the settlements and resort areas within the mountain municipalities [10]. To regulate the relations in the mountainous regions, a state agency can be established, which will implement the general policies for the development of the mountainous regions. The role of the public sector is to promote the development of entrepreneurship of the population through the implementation of programs and projects to promote attractive economic development. In addition, it is important to determine the perimeter of construction and protection of the surrounding country. In this direction, the creation of a quality level of public works means that the mountainous areas have a modern technical infrastructure that can meet the recreational load on the territory and is responsible for environmental protection. It is important within the mountain municipalities to develop quality municipal plans and strategies that regulate the relations between the public and private sector, as well as defining the framework of the boundaries of urban areas, agricultural areas, protected areas and those for tourism and sports [11]. This predetermines the mountain areas are called to have a specific development that will model the development so as to provide opportunities for optimal functioning of mountain municipalities for the implementation of effective nature protection. The peculiarities of the NATURA 2000 sites located within the mountain municipalities must also be observed, which must be preserved as a standard of natural balance. These are the territories with a regime of

protected natural environment which occupy the core of the mountains. The special regime with regard to includes all areas above the upper limit of the forest, protected natural areas, water protection zones and forests, protection zones around the resorts and resort resources. In the rest of the mountain there should be territories of natural and forestry environment, in which recreation activities and compatible economic activities are practiced. These are forests and lands from the forest fund for economic and recreational purposes [13]. The territories for localization of a resort base are oriented towards existing mountain settlements and form resort-tourist localizations. In practice, this can be a zone of urban and resort environment called "U - zone" (territory with urbanized territories and resorts), which defines the framework of urban areas and building boundaries in settlements, as well as the modeling and development of suburban areas [12]. The problems of the local areas and resort settlements must have their integrated place in the structure of the mountainous areas with application of the principle of their alternation with free natural environment, and for them the designation "N" - zone has been introduced. In practice, mountainous areas have a specific geomorphological structure, which may require the use of different schemes and models of tourism development and framework of the location of tourist sites, the choice of scheme can be for example - transversely parallel scheme in Stara Planina, Sredna Gora, Sakar and Fore-Balkans and radial scheme in Rila Mountain, Osogovo, Pirin and Verila, network scheme (Western Rhodopes, Eastern Rhodopes, Bakadzhitsite and Strandzha). In this direction, the adoption of a model of a unified transport system, which is to be completed in its most general form, turns out to be a deficit in the development of Bulgaria. This transport system must establish the necessary connections with the resort and villa areas in order to achieve a high level of accessibility to them [12]. This is necessary for several reasons, the first is the outdated road infrastructure that needs rehabilitation, secondly due to the increased number of cars

it is necessary to create new parking areas and road arteries to facilitate road traffic, thirdly it is necessary to change the linear connection with the creation of linear-radial traffic systems given the location of the resorts. Last but not least, compliance with the principle of alternating urban areas with free and green areas, as well as the creation of sustainable energy infrastructure (in addition to electricity, to include gasification of mountain areas).

Strengthening and development of the settlement network and infrastructure in the mountains

Bulgarian mountain regions, as well as European ones, face common challenges arising from the presence of unfavorable factors. They are related to remoteness, depopulation and aging of the population, limited opportunities for work and access to services, lack of connectivity. This determines the need for regional development policies to overcome these deficits [8]. First of all, a complete passportization of the settlements is needed in order to bring their strengths to the fore. Within the resort-tourist localization the resort settlements, resort zones and complexes to encourage the formation of resort-settlement formations of agglomeration type [11]. Thus, all entities related to tourism must be subject to spatial planning and, accordingly, do not have a special general development plan. The measures taken by the local authorities in Bulgaria to make general and detailed development plans of resorts and tourist areas or settlements is not enough. It is necessary to build integrated development plans, where development plans and schemes have a key role and role. Our main mountain resorts such as Pamporovo, Bansko and Borovets need a similar development approach, as well as more detailed strategies for Chepelare, Atoluka, Panichishte, Beli Brezi, Semkovo, Beli Iskar, Tryavna, Elena and Kom. Regarding the opportunities for development of mountainous areas such as Momchil Yunak, Golyam Perelik, Sv. Constantine and Helena, Pashaliitsa, Syutka, Beklemeto, Uzana, Kartala and others, in addition to selection plans, it is necessary to prepare strategic documents and programs for

their development and transformation into leading mountain resorts and tourist resorts. In practice, in Bulgaria, with limited human resources and declining regional economic activity in mountainous areas, it sets the need for targeted measures to improve the development of mountain settlements. In this direction, the population can be directed to these regions in terms of the wave of immigrants to our country. By building a system of financial incentives and promoting the development of tourism and small and medium-sized enterprises in these regions, it can mitigate the deteriorating demographic and urbanization processes in the country [16]. In terms of regional development, there are large deficits and lags in the development of resorts such as Banite (Smolyan), Narechenski Bani (Asenovgrad), Beli Brezi (Ardinko), Byala Cherkva (Plovdiv), Sapareva Banya, Berkovitsa, Yundola, Sliven Mineral Baths and others. In mountainous areas, the state needs to adopt a series of policies to stimulate local economic development and encourage the strengthening of their role as tourist centers. In the last few years there has been partial progress in new construction in existing settlements and resorts such as Beli Iskar, Govedartsi, Apriltsi, Predela, Vrata village (Plovdiv region), holiday village "Constantia", Tsigov Chark, St. Constantine (Cave) and etc., but they lack quality development of the local infrastructure and a sufficiently high level of public works. As a result of the demographic decline of mountainous areas and resorts, they are experiencing difficulties in providing quality tourist services. This should be done to optimize the development plans, which means to build effective development schemes for access and development of the material base for recreation and tourism. Thus, the tourist sites can be certified and then plans and programs for their maintenance can be prepared and as well as work can be done to increase the quality of the available human capital in the area of [18]. Moreover, the settlements and the tourist sites are not always in the same territory, which necessitates to determine the basis for a complex recreational analysis of the territory. In addition, the

tourist opportunities of the respective mountain region and its capacity must be assessed. This also means determining the development scheme of the settlement in relation to the individual buildings and facilities and their connection between them. In general, the size and size of the resort and its area of gravity depend on a number of territorial, demographic, urban and economic factors. An important and significant factor is the capacity of the places of accommodation in the respective region, as well as the quality of the offered tourist services. In practice, the resort resource of the settlement is essential, in this regard, for example, the capacity of winter resorts on ski slopes, ski lifts, dining places and others, which can generally show how much a resort can be loaded [15]. In our country there are similar symptoms of congestion in the active season in the resorts of Bansko and Pamporovo in terms of congestion of the capacity of slopes and lifts, with increasing interest in winter tourism will certainly arise and other similar problems. Moreover, most of our resorts have a dissected shape of the terrain (Pamporovo and Semkovo), fewer are the resorts with a compact shape (Borovets, Beklemeto). This implies finding optimal solutions for the construction of tourist infrastructure, which also affects the cost of investment in mountainous areas [17]. In practice, in the mountain resorts we need a new and better infrastructure, which will increase access and solutions to improve the tourist potential. To improve the condition of the resorts it is necessary to improve the condition of the terrains and the level of the building stock in order to rationally maintain and be friendly. It is important to mention that seasonal tourism dominates in Bulgaria and hotels and holiday homes are rarely used all year round. This requires looking for opportunities for year-round maintenance and renovation. In some of the mountain resorts such as Yundola, Semkovo, Panagyurishte columns and Orbita. In recent years, the opportunity has been created to purchase individual apartments in hotel buildings, family hotels, village houses and others. This trend is likely to continue and more and more people living in mountain

resorts will acquire property. This in turn will increase the requirements for municipalities for a higher level of maintenance of regional infrastructure. [16]. It is important to note that in the mountainous regions it is good for low construction to prevail, and where taller buildings are built not to disturb the natural balance in the mountains by maximally sparing nature. According to the construction requirements, higher density and level of construction would worsen the resort environment and would bring it closer to the nature of the urban environment [3]. Undoubtedly, the investment intentions related to the construction in the mountainous areas must be in accordance with the ecological peculiarities of the separate territories and to spare the nature as much as possible. With the already implemented privatization in the resort complexes, new plots (RLE) are to be established for the separate hotel and holiday buildings, which should not occupy more than 50-60% of the total territory of the complexes. This will protect the need for more spacious public space for wide public use in resorts [18]. In practice, in mountainous areas and especially in urban areas, resort parks, places for active sports, entertainment, recreation and recreation areas, as well as optimal location of streets, alleys, infrastructure facilities, which actually form the architectural ensemble of urban regions in mountainous areas. The emerging trend of shrinking and reducing public space in resorts and settlements in mountainous areas must be limited. It is necessary to have effective spatial planning, which will create a sustainable mountain environment for rational and modern development of mountain areas. The modernization of mountain areas and their ecological development must become a national priority.

CONCLUSIONS

Mountain areas are important for the spatial development of our country. It is necessary to objectively assess the role and potential contribution of mountain areas to achieving the pan-European development goals. There is

an awareness that these areas can become an additional generator of growth with their rich resource potential, with the possibilities to provide numerous ecosystem services, with the contribution to the fight against climate change, as well as with the preservation of biodiversity and protected areas. In Bulgaria, the attempts to form a specific attitude towards these regions are carried out mainly through sectoral policies and especially in the Operational Program for Rural Development. The regional development planning documents (Strategy and National Concept for Spatial Development) also pay attention to these areas. Unfortunately, a very small part of the planned measures and instruments for impact are being implemented and so far no visible effect of their implementation is observed. The negative processes in the development of the mountainous and semi-mountainous regions are deepening, as in more than half of the municipalities they acquire critical scales. It is necessary to target targeted public investments in mountainous areas, which together with market mechanisms to develop the traditional know-how of the regions for modern agriculture and forestry, tourism and energy, ecosystem services and preservation of cultural and natural heritage, taking into account objective constraints and conditions for their development. The change in policies targeting mountain areas will ultimately lead to the involvement of the potential of these areas in a lasting generator of additional national income. Integrated development of resource-related and complementary economic sectors in order to increase the added value for the regions and the development of the country. Typical examples of suitable production chains are: logging - woodworking - furniture production; animal husbandry - meat and dairy production - dairy and meat products; forestry - herbal medicine, cosmetics and pharmaceuticals. Priority development of small and medium enterprises such as family businesses and traditional crafts. Family businesses have strong roots in agriculture and animal husbandry, ceramics and woodworking, rural tourism and local crafts. Introduction of a national quality standard

"mountain product" with clear criteria for geographical origin and unambiguous regulation of foods that may be subject to such a standard. Also creating a favorable environment for business development in mountainous and semi-mountainous regions by establishing special measures with a guaranteed budget for beneficiaries from mountainous regions in the Rural Development Program (second pillar of the CAP) for the period 2021-2027. In general, care is needed for mountainous regions. In this regard, a comprehensive overhaul of the standards and allocation mechanisms for state transfers needs to be undertaken in order to take into account the higher costs of providing services in mountainous and semi-mountainous municipalities, especially in the most remote and hard-to-reach areas.

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