

DATOURWAY

National Analysis of the
Territorial Tourism Strategy

Bulgaria



Location of the area covered by the project DATORWAY

The Danube River is an important factor for the economic, urban, cultural and historical development of Bulgaria; 470 km of the longest river in the EU are a natural boundary between Bulgaria and Romania, a driver of successful cross-border and trans-national cooperation and regional development based on the potential of the river.

The area is located in Northern Bulgaria and comprises of 8 provinces and 75 municipalities bordering on the Danube River: Vidin (including 11 municipalities), Montana (11 municipalities), Vratsa (10 municipalities), Pleven – (11 municipalities), Veliko Tarnovo (10 municipalities), Ruse (8 municipalities), Silistra (7 municipalities) and Razgrad (7 municipalities).

The total area is 27 892,5 m² or 25,1% of the national area. 21 municipalities with a total area of 7 994,6 m² have direct access to the river Danube. There are 1158 settlements with a population of 1554,9 000 people or 20,4% of the total Bulgarian population (2008).

The incredibly diverse natural and cultural heritage of the area is an important premise for the successful development of tourism. Yet this potential has not been fully developed. With a view to the prospects for development of tourism, it is important to include the Danube area in the Strategic Plan for Cultural Tourism Development in Bulgaria which was approved in the late 2009 and which is based on the identification and development of local systems drawing on the historical, cultural and natural identity of various places - Loci. Including the Danube area in this plan shows that the geographical scope of the area covers parts of three tourist areas – Loci.

LoCuS: The Petrified Forest holds importance mainly for the local tourism demand. The locus covers the provinces of Vidin, Montana and Vratsa. It is important to add value to the attractive resources and enhance the capacity of the delivered services.

LoCuS: Along the banks of the Danube River includes the cities of Pleven and Ruse which are the main administrative and cultural centres of the LoCuS; they highlight the tourism potential of the area for the development of national and international tourism. The development strategy is focused on raising the value of the Danube River as a natural axis which links the whole area and enhances the rich tourism potential including unique natural phenomena and cultural and historical layers.

LoCuS: The Revival Town offers cultural heritage directly connected to the Bulgarian national identity. In the mid-term the strategy aims at increasing the non-material content of cultural services, the integration of the existing sites with exhibitions and other tourist products targeting the visitors of the Bulgarian Black Sea coast as well.

The main priority highlighted in Bulgaria's national position as a contribution to the EU strategy for the development of the Danube area is: *“A large-scale showcase and dissemination of the remarkably rich cultural heritage, integration in the European cultural corridor of the River Danube via a full-blown tourist product with its specificity and tourism marketing of the River Danube and the Danube area based on specific natural and cultural landscapes and historical environment. Tourism shall organize and be a financial facility for the conservation and presentation of the regional cultural heritage “.*



Geographical features and tourism resources

Landscape:

The diverse landscape comprises of mainly agricultural (rural), forest, water and riparian areas. The area is characterized by a broad range of agricultural landscapes and minimum natural vegetation. Based on such features as landscape, vegetation cover, etc. the landscape in the area is mountainous (14,7%), hilly (31,3%), flat (37,7%) and lowland (16,3%).

Mineral springs:

Mineral springs geographically located in the following 5 areas are the water resources of greatest importance for spa tourism:

- Vidin – in the area of Vidin – Slanotran - Koshava;
- Berkovitsa - Varshets – the warm mineral springs in Varshets Municipality, the town of Varshets, and the village of Spanchevtsi are of national importance but there are also mineral springs in the village of Barziya, Borovtsi and Zamfirovo in Berkovitsa Municipality;
- Veliko Tarnovo –in the village of Voneshta Voda;
- Svishtov;
- Pleven.

The mineral springs in only two areas: Berkovitsa - Varshets (Varshets) and Veliko Tarnovo – Svishtov (Voneshta Voda and Ovcha Mogila) are used for the purposes of spa tourism.

Natural landmarks and protected areas:

Bulgaria boasts a great number of natural sites with preserved authentic natural features combining various components of animate and inanimate nature (rock formations, caves, waterfalls and other water resources, rare plants and animals). Having and exhibiting them in the proper way is a premise for the development of certain types of tourism such as ecological, educational, hunting, fishing, sports tourism, etc.

Natural landmarks and protected areas can be subdivided into several groups:

- **Biosphere, national and natural parks** – National park Vratsa Balkan, Natural reserve Tsiber, National park Ruse Lom, National park Persina, Natural reserve Srebarna;
- **Reserves** (biosphere and natural) - Biosphere reserve Chuprene, Natural reserve Vratsa Karst , Natural reserve Srebarna;
- **Natural rock phenomena:** Belogradchik Rocks, “ Vratzata (the Door), Ritlite, The Bridges of the God;
- **Caves** – Magura, Venetsa, Ledenika, Ponora;
- **Wetlands** – 3 of the 10 wetlands in Bulgaria are located in the Danube area: the lake Srebarna, the group od Belene islands, the Ibisha island.



Natural sites which are very attractive tourist destinations are the ones located in the western Danube area. Such sites are the natural phenomena of Belogradchik Rocks with the fortress built in the 3rd century and used in the Middle Ages as well, the Magura Cave near the village of Rabisha with 700 cave paintings, the biggest prehistoric gallery in the Balkan peninsula, the Ledenika Cave, the rock formations Vratsata and Ritlite. In the central and eastern Danube area such a site is the lake Srebarna which is a natural reserve on UNESCO's World Natural and Cultural Heritage List. In the Danube area there are 108 protected areas covered by the European NATURA network.

Anthropogenic tourism resources

The following remains of Roman fortresses were discovered in the geographical scope of the Bulgarian Danube area: Bononia (near today's Vidin) as well as ruins from the following Roman towns: Nicopolis ad Istrum founded by Emperor Trajan (in Veliko Tarnovo Municipality) and Nove (Svishtov Municipality in the province of Veliko Tarnovo). The foundations of such basilicas as the one of the ancient town of Storgosia (which set the beginning for the city of Pleven) have remained since Roman times. In Ruse the remains of the seat of the Roman navy Sexaginta Pristas founded by Emperor Vespasian can be found. Medieval cultural and historical landmarks such as the Bdin Fortress and Durostorum – Drastar (in Silistra) have been preserved.

National revival centres with preserved cultural and historical monuments are Veliko Tarnovo (906 monuments), Gorna Oryahovitsa, Elena, Lyaskovets, the village of Zlataritsa, Ruse and Svishtov. There are 267 buildings in Ruse which have been granted the status of cultural monuments.

Tourists are also interested in historical sites from the more recent history of Bulgaria such as Pleven Panorama known as the Pleven Epopee 1877, the Mausoleum – Bone-vault, General Skobelev's Museum, the Museum of Plevens Liberation 1877 and the Pantheon of National Revival Heroes in Ruse, etc.

The other specific anthropogenic tourism resources (of interest for religious tourists) are the numerous active monasteries. The area of Veliko Tarnovo boasts the highest number of monasteries in Bulgaria, 15 altogether. A great archeological sensation from the antiquity is the Thracian Tomb near the village of Sveshtari (Razgrad Province) which is a Thracian – Hellenic tomb dating back to the first half of the III century BC. The Rock-Hewn Churches of Ivanovo (Ivanovo Municipality, Ruse Province) are on UNESCO's list as a remarkable monument of world historical heritage.

Accommodation structures

The existing tourism accommodation infrastructure is concentrated mainly in several areas with established tourist destinations such as Veliko Tarnovo, Ruse, Pleven, Elena, Svishtov, Berkovitsa and Varshets. The accommodation structure by types and categories of accommodation seems to meet the potential demand with a few exceptions given the potential segments and their requirements for accommodation. The insufficient number or shortfall of 4- and 5-star sites has been observed in the LoCi The Valley of Thracian Kings and The Petrified Forest. Small municipalities in Ruse area (Ivanovo and Dve Mogili) with available tourism resources have underdeveloped tourism infrastructure. A similar mismatch can be observed between the available tourism resources and the existing tourism infrastructure in the municipalities in the area of Pleven, Vidin, etc.

Supplementary tourism infrastructure

Since 1995 in the southern mountainous parts of the Danube area approximately 20 eco-tracks were created. They are financed by various sponsorship programmes and they are designed to provide pedestrian access to natural and historical landmarks in protected areas.

Two ski runs were created in the area of Kom Peak (Berkovitsa Municipality) and Parshevitsa (Vratsa Municipality). They have a small capacity and are of regional importance off established tourist destinations of winter (ski) tourism in Bulgaria.

28 hunting grounds were created for the purpose of hunting and hobby tourism complete with hunting cabins, watchtowers and other facilities of hunting tourism.

There are 22 equestrian facilities for equestrian tourism.

Strengths

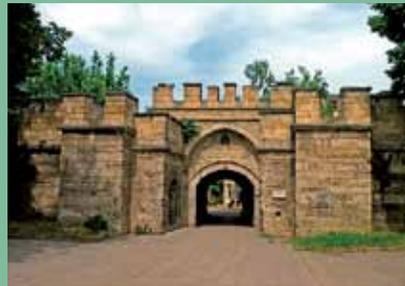
- Favourable geo-strategic, transport and geographical location of the area;
- Favourable opportunities to attract tourists because the area is wide open (via the River Danube) to the tourism markets of the Danubian and other European countries;
- Diverse natural and anthropogenic resources;
- Positive attitude of the local authorities and business to tourism development;
- The area has the reputation of a relatively cheap, quiet and safe tourist destination;
- Taking advantage of the opportunities to improve the status of tourism by means of the Operational Programme Regional Development and Cross-border Cooperation Programme between Bulgaria and Romania in the period 2007 -2013;
- A marked increase in the number of projects for the development of various types of tourism in the municipalities in the Bulgarian Danube Area;
- Relatively equally developed system of river ports

Weaknesses

- Underestimated role of the Danube River for the development of specific types of tourism including cross-border tourist exchange;
- Short stay and insufficient number of tourists;
- Poorly organized and chaotic ecological and rural tourism;
- No well-developed integrated regional information system for an integrated tourist product in the Danube area;
- Formally developed municipal programmes for tourism development in Danubian municipalities where tourism is declared to be a strategic industry;
- Absence of a recognized national and regional policy for tourism development at a macro level (in the Danube area);
- Distance of attractive tourism centres in the middle and western parts of the Danube area from existing Bulgarian international airports;
- No easily recognizable national and international image of the Danube area as a tourist destination;
- Untapped available and well-explored hot mineral springs;
- Marked mismatch between the available tourism resources and the tourism infrastructure in small Danubian municipalities;
- Few river crossings between Bulgaria and Romania

Opportunities

- Create conditions to offer an integrated tourist product in the Bulgarian Danube area;
- Carry out a policy in order to benefit from the capacity of the River Danube to be an integrating driver of cross-border and transnational tourism development;
- Promote the development of industrial sectors directly related to the development of various tourism types;
- Raise tourist interest in the Bulgarian Danube area by appropriate advertising;
- Take advantage of the opportunities of European structural funds and various sponsorship programmes to implement projects in tourism.



Threats

- Potential risks posed by natural disasters and bad climate conditions
- Continuing underestimated environmental factor as a threat to the conservation of the animate and inanimate nature in ecological areas
- Underestimated competition from other areas in Bulgaria and abroad
- Low motivation of local authorities to use the available resources for tourism development;
- Underestimated opportunities for public private partnerships to implement more significant tourism projects in smaller Danubian municipalities.

Sources of conflict

Tourism - environment

Actions aiming to develop tourism (mainly by building tourism infrastructure) which involve destinations in the wild pose the risk of conflicts related to environment destruction and violation of the requirements for sustainable development. Tourism development should not be hindered but should be organized in a way so as to prevent any environmental conflicts.



Tourism – human resources

A conflict of interest can be observed between the demand for workforce in tourism delivering high-quality services (the offered tourist product) and the quality of education and qualifications of the people employed in tourism. Due to insufficient experience and wanting entrepreneurship (despite various types of stimuli available), entrepreneurship in rural, ecological and other types of tourism is underdeveloped. This conclusion is reinforced by the still low number of well-prepared and grounded projects for funding by various beneficiaries from small municipalities capable of developing such tourism.

Assessment of the tourism potential

The area has rich and high-quality natural, cultural and historical potential for tourism development: health (spa), cultural, rural, ecotourism, hunting, mountain tourism, educational and wine tourism. The majority of the potential attractions including the River Danube don't have the capacity to fulfill their potential (to be capable of ensuring sufficient number of visitors for a longer stay); the infrastructure related to local tourism is insufficient, outdated or absent. In addition, Bulgarian sites on the Danube River are not very popular tourist destinations and they need to have a positive regional image. At the same time even well-developed tourist destinations in the area face difficulties in diversifying their products and expanding their market segments by ensuring higher revenues, longer tourist season and greater employment. Cooperation and synergy to develop local, regional and national tourism remain limited. As a result many sites have been turned mainly into "stops" not real tourist destinations; thus they cannot provide for longer stay of visitors and the related economic benefits.



The brochure was developed under the project DATOURWAY Transnational Strategy for the Sustainable Territorial Development of the Danube Area with special regard to Tourism. The full texts of the national analyses of Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, Hungary, Serbia and Croatia can be found at the project website: www.datourway.eu