

# APPROACH TO IDENTIFICATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF MOUNTAIN TOURISM REGIONS AND DESTINATIONS IN SERBIA WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE STARA PLANINA MOUNTAIN

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*This paper deals with theoretical-methodological issues of tourism offer planning and regulation of settlements in mountain destinations. The basic determinants of the development of mountain tourist regions destinations in EU countries, in which respectable development results have been achieved, first of all in terms of income, together with appropriately adjusted development and environmental management system, have been emphasized. The ongoing transition and structural processes in Serbia will have an impact on application of these experiences. At the same time, a basis for competitiveness of mountain regions will not be determined only by spatial capacity and geological location, but also by creative-innovative developing environment. Taking into account the spatial-functional criteria and criteria for the development and protection, the possible spatial definition of mountain tourist regions/destinations in Serbia are presented. The justifiability and positioning of tourism development projects are analyzed aiming at uniform regional development, where two segments of demand are of particularly importance, i.e. demand for mountain tourism services and for real estates in mountain centers. Furthermore, holders of tourism offer will be analyzed through a contemporary approach which may be defined as the development and non-commercial and market and commercial one. International criteria which are evaluated while selecting city/mountain destination for Winter Olympic Games are particularly analyzed. Considering experience of countries with higher level of development of mountain regions, the main starting point for positioning projects for sustainable development of tourist destinations are defined by specifying them according to specific local and regional conditions. A rational model for spatial organization of tourism offer is shown on the example of the Stara Planina tourist region.*

**Key words:** regulation of settlements, tourism offer, tourist region, sustainable development

## INTRODUCTION

Mountain regions consist of various regional entities, sub-entities and parts which need to be physically and functionally organized and regulated with the aim to preserve natural values, develop and regulate system of tourist centers and settlements and tourist-recreational infrastructure. Mountain

destinations cannot be considered only as spaces for rest and recreation, but also as "economic enterprises" which function organizedly as, more or less, spatial entities, and which require appropriate urbanization that would direct development towards creation of authentic ambience, use of local materials, energy efficiency and, in certain sense, typizations in terms of urban planning, architecture and development (Marić, 2002). Urbanization is, as a rule, directed in two directions, towards the points of intensive tourism offer, such as mountain

centers/resorts, and towards the places of less intensive tourism offer, i.e. towards traditional or new settlements in mountain regions. Urbanization of mountain regions may be concentrated or dispersive one, each having certain limitations. Concentrated development influences creation of large urbanized areas which

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may have an impact on natural balance and requires a long realization period, as well as an impact of works on the nature; danger due to non-functioning of sewage system, etc. Dispersive development has the following deficiencies: greater soil erosion and cost of the provision of infrastructure; greater number of polluters during the heating season; greater number of waste disposal locations and waste collection problem, occupation of greater land areas, etc. Possible solution may be found in limiting the urbanization in the most attractive parts of altitude zones according to the capacity of space and nature protection regime, as well as in activation of several smaller localities in lower parts and sub-mountain villages by including local population in tourism development. In cases where there are several mountain tourist centers and settlements in a mountain region, regulation includes infrastructure linkage, linkage of tangent facilities of tourism offer in the area, connectivity between the protected areas, development of public services adjusted to the needs of tourists, local population and functions of settlements, etc.

Integral development of mountain regions is based on several strategic goals (ESDP, 1999; Zanetti, 2000; Ravbar, 2003): integral and sustainable spatial development; balanced and polycentric development of metropolitan regions with functional zones of sustainable and dynamic functional integrations and partnerships between urban, rural and mountain regions, thus enabling the strengthening of economic competitiveness of mountain regions; resolving the problem of development in scarcely inhabited mountain areas by creating conditions for population to stay and return and conditions for rest and recreation of urban population; development of infrastructure, better access to traffic and improvement of access to information; development of mountain tourist centers/resorts according to natural conditions and standards of planning, regulation and development by forming organized and compact clusters thus enabling greater competitiveness; greater authenticity and better image both through integration with local cultural and natural environment and through application of spatial and urban planning standards by investors, promoters, developers and operators in tourism.

Defining the strategic development goals is only an initial phase in determining strategies for a long-term development of mountain regions in Serbia. The goals are conditioned,

just like the development itself, by the need to make selection and choice of priorities in the development of mountain regions. However, this is not possible unless prior regionalization of these regions is done and, within it, also identification of tourist regions as the most appropriate functional spatial parts for stabilization and acceleration of a mountain region with tourism as a key driving force. Determining priorities according to the goals for the development of mountain regions is conditioned by the scope and structure of available natural, human and capital resources, as well as economic, social and ecological effects of the realized and current development processes. Availability and structure of development resources, and particularly realization of socio-economic effects expressed through overall national income, in particular by the level of national income per capita, which is dynamically conditioned by greater capital investments and realized employment rate, markedly vary from mountain region to mountain region in Serbia. Some parts of mountain regions, spatially limited, but naturally predetermined for contemporary economic activities, primarily tourism related activities, have far greater chances for the development compared to other mountain regions which are, otherwise, underdeveloped in Serbia (Milijić, 2005). The choice and determination of priorities in interwoven development, spatial and ecological contexts is conditioned by existence of a limited number of mountain complexes with opportunity for faster development based on tourism as a major driving force. To assess, analyze and determine these priorities, it is necessary to make regionalization of mountain regions, however, less by principles of homogeneity, as the regional geography does, but more by principles of development and ecological (protection) functionality. At the same time, spatial and environmental planning should have an important role both in identification of mountain tourist space and in coordination and integration of various fields of planning in achieving a sustainable regional development (Maksin-Mičić et al., 2009). Regionalization of mountain regions according to indicators of and criteria for development-ecological functionality requires the tourism, as a driving force with reciprocal effects of the development and connections and relationships which may be ecologically controlled, to be spatially defined and designated by the system for identification of tourist regions and destinations. In this way,

including analytical deliberations and comparisons, one gets an insight in diverse possibilities for their development and ecological protection, which is a basis for the choice and determination of priorities for the development of mountain regions and their hierarchical-functional rating, thus finally enabling planning, regulation and development of mountain destinations.

Starting from the goals for integral development, the regional differentiation of mountain regions lies in a criterion for determining the level at which they are integrated into national economy. By applying this criterion, they are classified in three groups: *integrated mountain regions* – with growing population and employment, due to realization of projects for tourism and complementary activity development, as well as due to established image of a destination with developed tourism market; *insufficiently integrated mountain regions* – with population stagnation and prevailing sources of income coming from agricultural production, which are relatively remote from urban centers and without developed tourist capacities and tourism market; and *neglected mountain regions* – with lowest population density and income, worst qualitative and quantitative population structure, economic activities and road network. Support from the EU structural funds is directed based on the level of development, i.e. on the level of mountain region integration. At the same time, there are certain differences which are dependent on whether greater attention is paid to development of tourism, agriculture and diversification of activities in order to provide additional sources of income, or to renewal of settlements and infrastructure, provision of higher level of public services and other services and improvement of quality of life in mountain regions and their immediate environment.

## **APPROACH TO IDENTIFICATION OF MOUNTAIN TOURIST REGIONS IN SERBIA**

Regionalization of mountain regions in Serbia into tourist regions does not follow steps, but rather regionalization processes based on analytical manifold identification of natural and created potentials and disparity as key dynamic and not static physical indicators and criteria for designating the regions as developmental spatial entities and subjects. However, designating mountain regions as tourist

regions leaves large parts of these regions outside development impetus, thus widening the problem of non-uniform regional development. This problem arises in a wider context of an approach to the development of mountain regions, but in the context of the objectively considered and checked development possibilities susceptible to interaction between time and space, i.e. certainty and uncertainty in the sense of fluctuation, cycles, rise and fall, and particularly non-uniformity. What the regionalization of mountain regions proves is that the development in space is not uniform and that there are many procedures for defining regions, depending on the final goal, demands and expectations. Regionalization of mountain regions in Serbia for the purpose of determining development priorities requires identification of tourist regions and destinations, which further requires application of a specific procedure. This may be realized by using rich scientific professional and practical experience of western developed countries.

The selection of primary mountain destinations and choice of development priorities of mountain regions in Serbia has been made based on analytical deliberations and checking of data and information on differentiation of these spaces relative to the existence of specific development potentials, and, in doing so, the following criteria were applied: evaluation of natural and anthropogenic factors of development; evaluation of capacity of space; possibility for overcoming limitations; and complementarity between the development concept and natural resources in environment and nature protection. Primary mountain tourist destinations as regional entities of integrated offer within tourist clusters have been identified by criteria for participation of a year-round tourist season in: 1) mountain destinations with smaller participation in year-round offer – Šumadija mountains and Kučaj Mountains; 2) mountain destinations with considerable participation of year-round offer – Valjevo-Podrinje mountains; Drina-Tara-Zlatibor; and Zlatar-Pešter, and 3) mountain destinations with a complete year-round offer – Stara planina, Vlasina-Krajište, Kopaonik, Golija, Prokletije with Mokra Gora, and Šar Planina mountains (Dabić et al., 2009). Starting from the possibility for applying experiences of European mountain tourist centers, it has been estimated that, under assumption of improving the management system, a sustainable and competitive development of mountain

destinations in Serbia may be realized on a long-term basis, the priorities being High mountain region of Kopaonik (modernization of ski infrastructure, development of tourist places and places for rest, completing, traffic connections and integration of offer into environment), and Stara Planina (development of tourist places, places for rest and ski centers) associated with an attempt to maintain the status of natural resources.

However, previous criteria must be fitted into procedure for regionalization of mountain regions in Serbia given that selecting priority mountain entity is conditioned and predetermined by this. A comprehensive and detailed regionalization of mountain regions in Serbia directed towards development and protection has not been made to date, and such approach has not been applied in professional practice either. However, partial and mutually uncoordinated identification and delimitation, i.e. selection of homogeneous mountain regions, have been carried out based on (Tošić and Krunić, 2002): physical geographical, primarily morphological and ecological climatic characteristics, which have been identified with mountain systems; socio-economic impacts in transformation of mountain landscapes which relied on cultural social constants established by Jovan Cvijić, and which have today been reduced to giving attributes to certain functions which a mountain region has (tourist and forest functions, function of cattle breeding, etc.); and conditionally integral approach based on complex indicators of geographic, socio-economic and functional parameters used for the needs of selecting tourist regions in the Spatial Plan of the Republic of Serbia (PPRS 1996).

Mountain regions, from the geo-spatial aspect, may be considered at macro, mezzo and micro levels. At the macro level, mountain regions are presented as mountain, mountain ravine and mountain valley systems, at the mezzo level as mountain area, and at the micro level as inner-mountain landscape entities. Although they are characterized by individuality and integrality, the structure of mountain regions is most often heterogeneous according to tectonic geological, morphological, climatic, ecological and socio-economic characteristics. There is no uniform typology of mountain regions in regional geography, regional sciences and spatial planning, but there are different approaches to their identification and spatial selection.

In the Draft Plan of the Republic of Serbia (Nacr. PPRS 2010), regionalization of tourist spaces in Serbia, amongst which also of mountain regions, is identified with tourist clusters in Serbia, which are selected according to the Decision on Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics and the Law on Regional Development. Thus, the territory of Serbia has indicatively been divided in five tourist clusters, as there are "statistical regions" (Vojvodina, Belgrade, Southeast Serbia, Central and Western Serbia, and Kosovo and Metohija). Tourist clusters, as a resource basis and basic areas of tourism development, should represent spatial functional entities of unified tourism offer, including tourist destinations/regions of related characteristics, city tourist centers and places, spa tourist centers and places, as well as segments of circular and linear tourist directions, etc. Given that they should be based on economic footholds for the further development, the market will have an impact on final formation of clusters. Therefore, such division of tourist spaces in Serbia, in the process of implementing spatial plans should not be considered as strictly physical division, but as partly statistical and progressively functional one, since tourist spaces (destinations / regions) most often encompass the territory of two or more adjoining municipalities, and not rarely the territory of more than one region, which means that a tourist space and/or its parts may be located within one or more administratively competent territorial entities. This has been proven in practice of the developed Western European countries indicating that, in the spatial functional context, the development and protection of priority mountain regions are directed by designating and spatially defining tourist regions and destinations on the basis of the following criteria: presence, quality, equality, attractiveness and uniqueness of natural and created potentials for tourism development; possibility of using potentials in the function of contemporary, complex, integral and year-round tourism offer; geographical position and access to traffic in tourist regions with relation to the existing and potential markets; possibility of extending tourist season to the maximum and secure higher occupancy rate of capacities; the existing and possible rank of protection and regime of the use of natural and cultural values of tourist regions; and the role of tourism as an agent for developing complementary activities, particularly in insufficiently developed regions.

Important segments of tourist regions/destinations are tourist localities, facilities, places and centers, which have to be unified in a functional and development sense for the purpose of joint appearance on both international and home market (Mitrović et al., 2002), which is well laid out in the following scheme (Figure 1).

In order to more comprehensively consider and understand activities and functioning of a tourist region and its abovementioned segments, it is necessary to point out that it establishes business connections based on: complex tourism product, i.e. income; unified appearance on market; coordination of functions for improving the development by continually investment; and by coordinating the protection of space through appropriate systems of developing, regulating and using the covered space (Figure 2).

mountains); 2. Stari Vlah (Tara, Zlatibor, Zlatar, Pešter mountains); 3. Stara Planina and Vlasina with Krajište; 4. Prokletije and Šar Planina; 5. Valjevo-Podrinje; and 6. Kučaj-Homolje mountain regions.

Depending on dominant economic activities and their trends, a spectrum of development processes is created, as well as tendencies to polarize functions. In this sense, spatial and socio-economic categories represent development poles which are found in parts or surrounding of mountain tourist regions as centers which have capital for activating development of mountain regions or as centers attracting capital, and whose offer is in demand on market. It has been concluded that tourism is a dominant economic activity in mountain regions since it has a capacity for initiating innovative activities, i.e. a capacity for initiating a whole spectrum of complementary activities which have a reciprocal impact on formation

account territories, potentials and contents of tourism offer which include tourist image and preferably the administrative boundaries of administrative competence of authorities which make decisions on planning. A particular problem of regionalization of mountain tourist regions arises in situations when tourism overlaps with nature protection or other functions of general social interest. In such situations, the region is made conditional upon being semi-functional region consisting of nature protected areas with tourism as one of the specific functions, and which is managed in environmentally appropriate way. This has been proven in practice of regulating the national and regional parks in most parts of Alpine regions.

### APPROACH TO DEVELOPMENT OF MOUNTAIN TOURIST REGIONS

For more complete analysis of possibilities for uniform development of mountain destinations, it is necessary to analyze basic elements of justifiability and spatial positioning of specific projects. For the mountain tourism development project, two segments of home and particularly foreign demand market are important, i.e. the demand for: (1) **services in mountain tourism**; and (2) **real estates in mountain centers and settlements**. Also, for projects for development, regulation and protection of priority mountain regions in Serbia, it is necessary to critically consider experiences of countries with higher level of the development of mountain regions, specifying them according to specific local and regional conditions.

**Mountain tourism**, primarily winter tourism, is one of the fastest growing market segments of tourism as a result of tourists coming from the widest layers of the population, particularly young people who are interested in this form of rest and recreation. After many years of lower demand for mountain tourism, a growing demand has been recorded in Europe, which is evident from the data showing that today over 50% of income from inland tourism comes from mountain regions. Until today, over 600 mountain centers have been developed in European mountain regions, out of which 70% in Alpine countries, which are visited by 60 to 80 million annually tourists. Great number of tourists visiting mountain regions has put greater pressure on the environment, but also an increased pressure on job creation which has prevented migrations from mountain regions and has brought about positive changes in demographic trends. It is anticipated

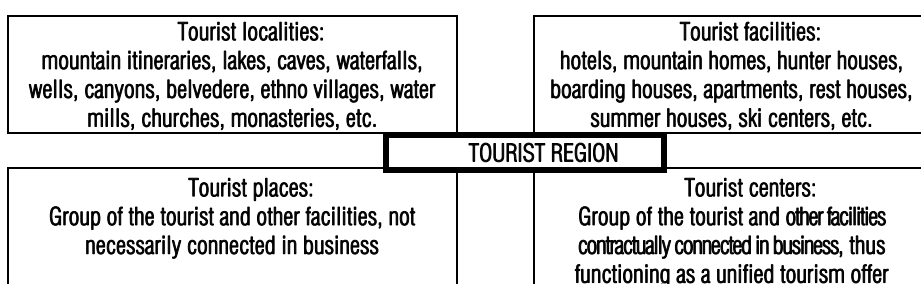


Figure 1: Segments of tourist regions

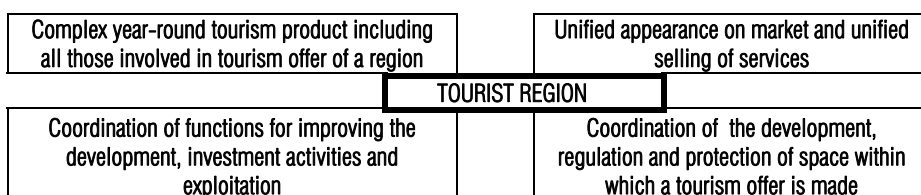


Figure 2: Business connections of a tourist region

To illustrate, but also for comparison sake, we present the number of mountain tourist regions in Alpine countries: Germany 8, Austria 6, Switzerland 6, France 5, and Italy 3. In these mountain tourist regions, where several hundred mountain centers have been developed, respectable development results have been achieved, primarily in terms of income, along with appropriate ecologically adjusted nature and environmental protection system. Also, taking into account the spatial functional and protection criteria and criteria for development, the possible designation and definition of six mountain tourist regions in Serbia have been shown, and they are the following: 1. Stari Ras (Kopaonik and Golija

and development (Derić, 2001). Tourism is a generator of development which has a capacity to transfer the innovations to agriculture and other industries supplying it with various products, semi-products and services, which may be considered as being crucial for prosperity of mountain regions. Besides, tourism has an innovative capacity oriented towards markets outside the competitive mountain region, which will depend on its competitiveness related to demand for a specific tourism product, i.e. image of mountain regions.

Regardless of spatial coverage size, national and regional development documents take into

that in coming years the demand for mountain tourism will be doubled, which particularly refers to the South Eastern European countries. The development of mountain tourist centers must be integral, with particular reference to economic constraints, regarding financial support, and natural limitations, regarding climatic conditions. In coming decades, global warming could lead to reduction in number of mountain centers with dominantly winter offer, particularly those whose locations and ski centers are in lower altitude zones. It has been estimated that two-degree rise in average temperature would lead to reduction of 40%, while rise in temperature for four degrees (expected to occur by the end of this century) would influence the reduction in number of mountain centers with the possibility for providing winter offer to about 200 centres (Milijić et al., 2006). These changes will influence re-planning of existing and development of new generation of mountain centers, i.e. a reduction in the number and change in specialization of high mountain destinations with dominantly winter offer and consequently an increase in the number of mountain centers with dominantly summer offer.

In contemporary approach to development of mountain regions, the holders of tourism offer are present in two categories: development-commercial and market-commercial one (Dabić, 1995). The development-commercial conditions of the development are provided by the national, state and regional, and somewhere, local administration system, and include investment in basic infrastructure development and development of non-commercial public facilities of tourist destinations. The non-commercial bearers of development may initiate, by various simulative policies, and sometimes also by direct investments, some commercial contents crucial for overall development and for getting large commercial holders of tourism offer interested primarily in opening ski centers through construction of the first ski lift, etc. Commercial holders of tourism offer, as its major investors, come mainly from wider regional environments and partly from local communities (particularly land owners). Commercial holders of tourism offer are interested in directly profitable facilities (tourist accommodation, hotels, restaurants and alike, recreational sports facilities, etc.). Commercial business activities in tourist destinations imply promotion, marketing, accommodation management and public infrastructure facilities, recreation, sports, as well as coordination between these functions within various services, institutions, clubs, etc.

Table 1: Example of referent mountain destinations

| Country | Name of mountain center – m a.s.l. | Number of beds | Number of inhabitants | No. of ski lifts/ trails - km | Max. altitude of ski trails - m | Ratings of ski trails in % |
|---------|------------------------------------|----------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------|
|         |                                    |                |                       |                               |                                 | easy-intern.-difficult     |
| SAD     | Sun Valley- 1753                   | 6 000          | 1654                  | 19/150                        | 1036                            | 36-42-22                   |
| CAN     | Whistler (3 nas.)- 680             | 40 000         | 10000                 | 31/200                        | 1609                            | 20-55-25                   |
| CAN     | Sun Peaks- 1255                    | 2 500          | 250                   | 6/61                          | 900                             | 15-60-25                   |
| CH      | Crans-Montana- 1500                | 37 317         | 7000                  | 28/140                        | 1500                            | 38-50-12                   |
| CH      | Davos- 1560                        | 23 824         | 13000                 | 57/305                        | 2034                            | 20-44-39                   |
| CH      | Verbier- 1500                      | 15 200         | 2500                  | 36/190                        | 1830                            | 33-42-25                   |
| CH      | St. Moritz- 1856                   | 13 200         | 5589                  | 56/350                        | 1553                            | 20-70-10                   |
| CH      | Zermatt- 1620                      | 12 653         | 5634                  | 63/313                        | 2260                            | 22-60-18                   |
| CH      | Saas Fee- 1800                     | 7 090          | 1672                  | 22/145                        | 1800                            | 25-50-25                   |
| CH      | Wengen- 1274                       | 5 278          | 1405                  | 44/110                        | 1125                            | 20-60-20                   |
| CH      | Gstaad-1050                        | 3 190          | 7199                  | 21/90                         | 1100                            | 20-50-30                   |
| CH      | Arolla- 2000                       | 1 864          | 50                    | 6/47                          | 1000                            | 25-50-25                   |
| CH      | Evelone- 1380                      | 983            | 950                   | 8/42                          | 1273                            | 60-30-10                   |
| BUG     | Bansko- 925                        | 15 000         | 9000                  | 11/65                         | 1675                            | 35-40-25                   |
| BUG     | Borovec- 1300-1600                 | 10 000         | 1500                  | 9/40                          | 1210                            | 30-60-10                   |
| F       | Tignes-1600-2100                   | 9 000          | 2000                  | 43/150                        | 1810                            | 10-65-25                   |
| F       | Chamonix- 1042                     | 6 100          | 5900                  | 46/157                        | 2800                            | 20-67-13                   |
| A       | Saalbach- 1095                     | 17 500         | 3000                  | 55/200                        | 1003                            | 46-49-5                    |
| A       | Kitzbuehel- 800                    | 8700           | 8600                  | 56/168                        | 1200                            | 30-40-30                   |
| A       | Schladming -749                    | 3500           | 4800                  | 81/175                        | 1243                            | 28-61-11                   |
| A       | Bad Kleinkirchheim-1100            | 7200           | 2000                  | 26/100                        | 1364                            | 11-78-11                   |

Sources: City of Sun Valley; Borovets Ski and Snowboard Mountain Resort in Bulgaria; Ski Independence, Ski resort reviews, off piste and après ski and travel guides; British Columbia Travel Guide; Destinations, Resorts, Cities , Holiday destinations in Switzerland; The Blue Book of European Ski Resorts; Property & Business Directory, Real Estate Services & Information.

Examples of the development of mountain destinations (Table 1) indicate that interest of international tourism market depends on the image and offer of a destination in winter and summer season; overall impression of the quality of tourist destination management and feeling of security; availability of snow (natural or artificial) for winter skiing for at least 100 days, and particularly for summer skiing on glaciers; ski lifts with overall capacity of minimum 6 to 8 thousand people simultaneously, altitude difference and great variety of ski trails; at the distance within maximum 4 to 5 hours drive or maximum flight journey time up to 2 hours; quality of hotels and apartments (capacity 2,000-4,000 beds in smaller centers, 4,000-8,000 beds in medium-sized centers, which are considered as being optimal, 10,000-15,000 beds in large centers, and over 15,000 beds in mega-centers or resorts); possibility for infrastructure provision; etc. (Maksin et al., 2009). Locations of mountain tourist centers and settlements are defined on the following basis: distribution of tourism offer and capacity of winter and summer offer in the area (primarily the system of alpine ski centers), evaluation of the terrain favorability for the development at the lowest part of the ski resort, as well as the possibility for easy access to traffic, rational water supply and channeling waste waters.

**Real estate market** in mountain destinations is, besides tourist infrastructure and year-round offer, an important investment lever for the development. Such approach to development has been proven by various experiences in realization of traditional and new mountain centers in Alpine countries in Europe, as well as mountain regions of America and Canada where 70% of investment for the past two decades relates to certain types of investments in real estates. A precondition for the development of real estate market is in the planned infrastructure provision on building land and for public facilities in tourist settlements. Various forms of real estate management are directed towards regulating the use of capacities and are aimed at revival of mountain centers and profitable commercial real estate business all year round. Due to differences in regional specificities of countries and approaches to planning, the so far urban structure development in mountain destinations has been based on various concepts. In Alpine countries, the concept of tourism development has changed over time and has been adjusted to market demands and specific natural conditions. The first phase of the development of mountain destinations, which took place by the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century and at the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century and derived from traditional rural and mixed settlements at the foot of the Alps, in which the transformation of rural economy into tourism economy took place (e.g. Courmayeur in Italy,

Chamonix, La Clusaz, Megeve in France, etc.), was not initially based on real estate market. However, in later phases of the development of mountain centers, the Alpine countries have, to greater or smaller extent, also opened their mountain centers for the real estate development, but with much greater external control of the development. First, between 40-ties and 70-ties of 20<sup>th</sup> century, by the real estate development in uninhabited mountain terrains above traditional settlements on locations at an altitude from 1,200 to 1,500 m a.s.l. (e.g. Sestriere in Italy, Courcheval in France, etc.), and later, between 70-ties and 80-ties of 20<sup>th</sup> century, by real estate development on locations at an altitude from 1,500 to 2,000 m a.s.l. (e.g. Tignes, Flaine, Les Arcs, La Plagne, Avoriaz and Izola in France, Kopaonik mountain in Serbia, etc.), and from the mid 80-ties of 20<sup>th</sup> century, by renewing the trend of the real estate development in lower locations and sub-mountain villages at an altitude of approximately 1,000 m a.s.l. along with adequate connections with ski centers/altitude zones of the mountain through vertical transport systems (e.g. Pila, San Sicaio, Biemonte in Italy, etc.), as well as by the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century by modifying mountain ski centers at altitudes above 1,600 m a.s.l., as a consequence of climatic changes and decisions on the way of directing investments towards the mountain regions. Activation of the development in the Alps resulted in the development of complex and, by offer, highly attractive tourist centers within traditional settlements or connected to them, in higher mountain regions, with infrastructure developed to the highest standards, strictly taking into account the capacity of the region and environmental protection, since the majority of mountain centers are located within the boundaries of protected natural resources. In the European mountain regions, the medium and small sized centers dominate and account for about 80% on market demand for mountain tourism (e.g. Wengen, Switzerland, with 5,278 beds and 1,405 inhabitants; Chamonix, France, with 6,100 beds and 5,900 inhabitants; and in Austria, Kitzbuhel with 8,700 beds and 8,600 inhabitants and Schladming with 3,500 beds and 4,800 inhabitants), while there are only several big centers and, as a rule, in highly developed countries (e.g. in Switzerland in Cras-Montana with 37,317 beds and 7,000 inhabitants; Davos with 23,824 beds and 13,000 inhabitants, Verbier with 15,200 beds and 2,500 inhabitants), and rarely new destinations (e.g. Bansko in Bulgaria with approximately 15,000 beds and 9,000 inhabitants). New winter destinations in South Eastern and Eastern Europe are also oriented

towards the real estate development, which has been, in majority of cases, based on experiences of Alpine countries, and due to considerably more liberal approach to the real estate development and disregard of local and regional specificities, which has resulted in a decrease in activities and lessening of the image of mountain centers (IAUS, 2008).

The development concept for mountain tourism in the USA and Canada was different. It was not initiated and conditioned by a traditional mountain settlements and could be realized in the space where the area of mountain region is much greater than in Europe, which enabled conditioned separation of those mountain regions in which the concept of protection and presentation of the nature, i.e. parts of mountain regions with intensive development in which tourists centers are located, was thoroughly dominant. The protection of nature was also an important dimension in the development of these regions, but not a crucial one for decision-making on initiating the development, particularly for implementation, which, in principle, relied more on economic criteria. The protection was given more attention only after the centers were realized, while, at the same time, the nature was undergoing notable transformation and particularly in terms of planning urban structure of mountain centers and ski trails, based on the criterion for optimal protection of forest areas. Regardless of whether the tourist centers are planned on the state or private property, the laws and plans which regulate the construction and zoning activities are applied. In the USA, management system is stricter regarding the construction on the state-owned land due to particular competence of the US Forestry Service (USFS), US Bureau of Land Management (USBLM), US National Park Service (NPS), as well as some other agencies. In Canada, the development of mountain regions is regulated by Integrated Resource Management (IRM) Strategy based on which the Integrated Resource Plans (IRP) are made. One example is the IRM of Eastern Slopes of the Rocky Mountains comprising an area of about 90,000 km<sup>2</sup> within which several tens of mountain centers are situated (Belyea, 2002). In mountain regions of North America, medium and small sized centers dominate (e.g. Sun Valley, USA, with 6,000 beds and 1,654 inhabitants; Sun Peaks, Canada, with 2500 beds and 250 inhabitants, etc.), while there are only several big centers (e.g. the Whistler resort, Canada, where three settlements are situated with 40,000 beds and 10,000 inhabitants). The ski lift capacity in bigger centers is not proportional to stationary capacity, i.e. it is

much greater than the capacity of centers due to great number of daily visitors coming from urban areas in vicinity of ski resorts (e.g. several tens of centers near Vancouver, Toronto, Calgary, etc.).

Depending on the type in which the realization and image of mountain destinations/centers are planned, and particularly on the type of the real estate market management, the degree of their economic utilization varies, while their prices range from 1,000 to 10,000 euro per m<sup>2</sup>. Today, in successful and competitive mountain centers, as a rule, the price of real estates is not below 3,000 to 3,500 euro per m<sup>2</sup>, while in the most luxurious ones, such as those in Crans-Montana or St. Moritz, the price of real estates is above 10,000 euro per m<sup>2</sup>. Less successful mountain centers record prices of quality apartments of approximately 800 to 1,500 euro per m<sup>2</sup> (e.g. Bansko), which are mostly influenced by excessive concentration of accommodation and limited ski lift capacity.

In developing and regulating mountain centers of Alpine countries, uniform standards for planning specific tourist and recreational facilities and recreational-sports infrastructure are applied. According to their purpose, they are classified into standards for (Baud-Bovy, Lavson, 1977; Mitrović, 1983, Milijić S., 2005): mountain center location, mountain center size and capacity, alpine skiing, ski trails, vertical transport of skiers/tourists, other facilities and areas of mountain centers, etc. Besides, there are specific standards for spatial organization of tourist settlements and for competition ski trails which are applied in planning and development of top mountain destinations and regions. According to the International Olympic Committee (IOC, 2007), the basic criteria which are evaluated when selecting the candidate cities/regions for the Winter Olympic Games are the following:

- Bus journey average time from the candidate city and settlement (official bed and tourist accommodation) and from Olympic village (accommodation for sportsmen/sportswomen) to Olympic competition ski trails;
- Guarantee of accommodation capacity in radius of 50 km from Olympic competition ski trails, uniformly distributed in tourist centers and settlements and the candidate city, i.e. in various locations of tourist region, with the following capacity: 40,000 – 90,000 beds for the needs of tourists, and 22,800 beds/rooms of various categories for official needs (a total of 60,000-110,000), Table 2 and Figure 3;

Table 2: Overview of some characteristics of the candidate for the Olympic Games 2014

| City/region        | Beds in radius of 50 km | Capacity of Olympic Village   |
|--------------------|-------------------------|---|
| Sochi-Russia       | 94.000                  | 5,600 (3,000 in Sochi and 2,600 in snow zone, distance between them being 63 km)    |
| Salzburg-Austria   | 81.700                  | 6,150 (3,000 u Salzburgu and 3,150 in snow zone, distance between them being 68 km) |
| Pueong Chang-Korea | 44.780                  | 6,150 (on two locations, distance between them being 37 km)                         |

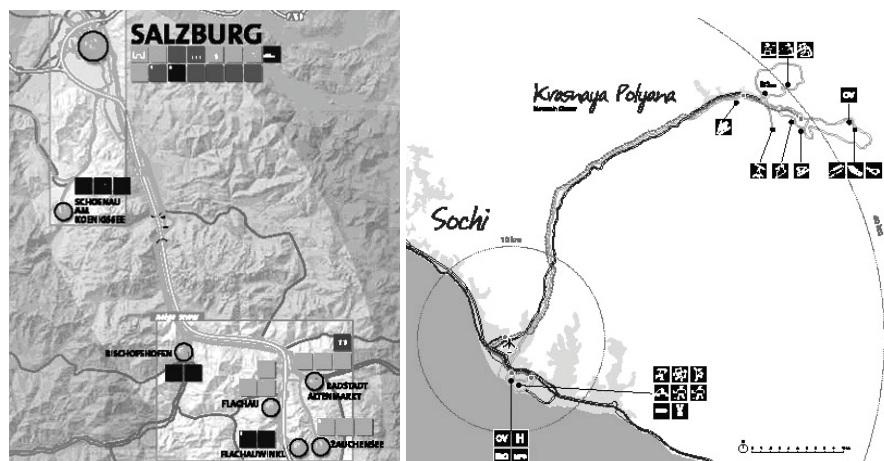


Figure 3: Examples of spatial organization of tourist regions of Salzburg and Sochi in radius of 50 km  
Source: IOC (2007)

- Guarantee of the accommodation capacities for the needs of sportsmen/ sportswomen, within one or more Olympic villages, in favorable locations between the candidate city and the snow zone, at the contact of the best ski resorts, of capacity of approximately 3,000 beds (a total of about 6,000);
- Planned budget for organization of Olympic games, expressed in USD and local currency, for the candidacy and in the year of holding the Olympic Games (according to current statistics of the World Bank);
- Security and preventive measures (which are not evaluated but mandatory);
- Environmental impact assessment and assessment methods (location, altitude above sea level, snow cover, artificial snow, water resources, energy production, hazards, etc.);
- Functional testing of Olympic competition ski trails by organizing international competitions;
- Survey on public opinion of the candidate city and country on organization of Olympic games in % (gradation: extremely supports, supports, it does not matter, does not support, does not support at all);
- Attitudes of representative entities for the organization of the Games (per all levels and in all fields);
- Plans, also showing regions, of the candidate city, tourist settlements, Olympic village, Olympic competition ski trails; etc.

### MODEL FOR THE DEVELOPMENT AND SPATIAL ORGANIZATION OF THE STARA PLANINA TOURIST REGION

Stara Planina is a high mountain region with functions of a natural park and a tourist region of priority importance for the Republic of Serbia.

According to natural potentials of the Natural Park and tourist region, the dominant form of tourism will be stationary and excursion mountain tourism, with main activities related to winter sports and recreation – alpine skiing and activities in other winter sports. Considering that dealing profitably with tourism in mountains implies a year-round utilization of capacity, for which this region has enough potential, different other forms of tourism in summer season are also anticipated such as water sports and recreation, on mountain localities and excursion and mountain itineraries, partly using mountain lifts. The following forms of tourism are also envisaged mostly during summer and partly during winter period: cultural tourism, rural tourism, hunting tourism, health tourism, and in Piroć and partly in Knjaževac, the city and transit tourism as well.

The tourist, recreational and sports facilities in the National Park and tourist region of Stara Planina have been zoned and organized in two major altitude zones: the mountain and sub-

mountain one. The mountain zone encompasses higher mountain belt with a dominant mountain tourism offer in the region and new tourist accommodation facilities directly related to this offer (at the entrance to alpine and Nordic ski resort from the ski lift departure points, points of departure of mountain walking and mountain excursion routes, and other mountain facilities within the offer in this space). Sub-mountain zone encompasses lower foot of the mountain and its wider surrounding, with hilly and lowland contents of tourism offer and accommodation in the existing rural and mixed settlements and urban centers. The architecture of the planned facilities and micro-ambience of interiors will be functionally realized by taking into account good models of mountain tourist centers, and designed according to motifs of ethno-architecture of Stara Planina.

Planning criteria and determination for realization of commercial mountain tourist facilities on Stara Planina are the following:

- Achievement of high standard tourism offer in this space (contemporary alpine / snowboard and Nordic ski trails, summer recreational and sports polygons, excursion and mountain tourist routes, etc.), which will be at the same time in the function of tourism development and in the function of presenting the Natural Park;
- Organization of activities and Inadscaping of the Natural Park space for specific types of offer related to ecology, ethno-culture and heritage in this space (ecological and ethno-investigation points, thematic excursion routes – mountain walking, heritage routes along ethnic lines, historic heritage routes, etc.);
- Determination for dispersive distribution of tourist accommodation in tourist centers of “Golema Reka”, “Topli Do”, “Mramor” and “Senokos” and several mountain settlements (with the exception of the concentrated tourist resort of Jabučko ravnište – Figure 4) depending on availability of space for developing facilities directly related to tourism offer in the mountain zone (particularly ski resort); regime of the Natural Park protection; possibility for water supply and channeling waste waters, and possibility for rational access to traffic; tourist centers are envisaged as polyvalent mountain centers focused on exclusive, highly commercial tourism;
- Rising the standard of existing accommodation and developing new tourist high standard accommodation;

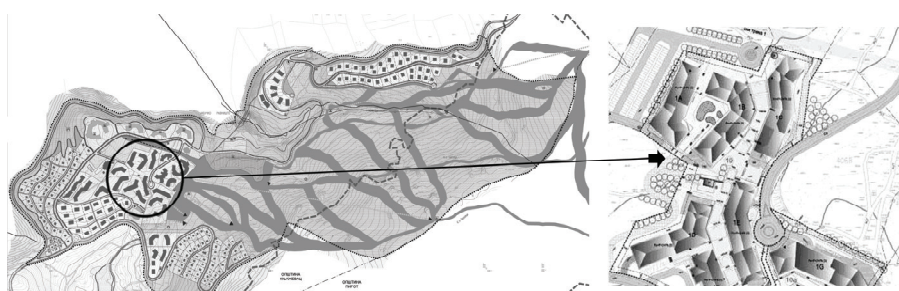


Figure 4: Tourist resort Jabučko ravnište on Stara Planina – the first phase

Source: IAUS (2009)

- Development of new high standard recreation and sports facilities, public services and other services within a year-round offer of the tourist resort, tourist centers and settlements which are at the same time of importance for tourism, functioning of the Natural Park and mountain villages;
- Realization of rational utilization of tourist capacity at annual level (at least 240 days and 60% occupancy), by providing a variety of tourism offer and conducting intensive market research on demand;
- Traffic and functional connectivity of tourism offer for the mountain zone with emitting areas and tourism offer for the sub-mountain tourist zone; and
- Education of all space users on the sustainable development, protection and use of the Natural Park and tourist region, i.e. raising awareness of both local inhabitants and visitors on the tourist development and other resources and values of the region.

Taking into account experiences of countries with higher level of the development of mountain regions, the economic and profit-making interest of tourism market in destinations on Stara Planina will be aroused based on the following:

- International demand for mountain tourism, which will grow faster than tourism offer, due to full occupancy of traditional mountain destinations, first of all in Alps; in European southeastern regions, the demand also exceeds tourism offer, and after an inflow of 6 to 7 thousand euros of average local GDP per capita will cross the limit the demand will grow considerably; and
- Home demand for mountain tourism, which is several times greater than tourism offer, both due to full occupancy of capacities on Mt. Kopaonik and impossibility of going to Brezovica on the Šar Planina mountain, and due to the fact that development potentials of other mountains have not been activated. It is estimated that, in the next 15 to 20 years, the market for mountain destinations in

Serbia will generate demand for about 3 million days of skiing annually, which is much greater compared to the capacity of home mountain tourism offer and which, today, accounts for about 15 % of expected demand, and may satisfy international market demand (primarily in Alpine countries, Bulgaria and Republic of Srpska); considering their potentials, the mountain regions of Serbia cannot achieve the level of development of Alpine countries, but may definitely become closer to them regarding the level of services, tourism offer in space in several top high-mountain tourist destinations, primarily Kopaonik and Stara Planina mountains as leaders of mountain tourism in Serbia which should have higher rating, oriented towards international and quality home market.

Commencement of the Stara Planina development project realization will considerably contribute to materialization of a part of tourist potential of mountain regions in Serbia. Knowledge of methodology from foreign sources and foreign experience in developing mountain regions with relation to different socio-economic systems, organization, cultural patterns, and alike, must be subjected to careful deliberation in order to select procedures which will meet the conditions in Serbia, assuming that these conditions will be, in near future, generally adjusted to EU general principles and conditions for organization. The ongoing

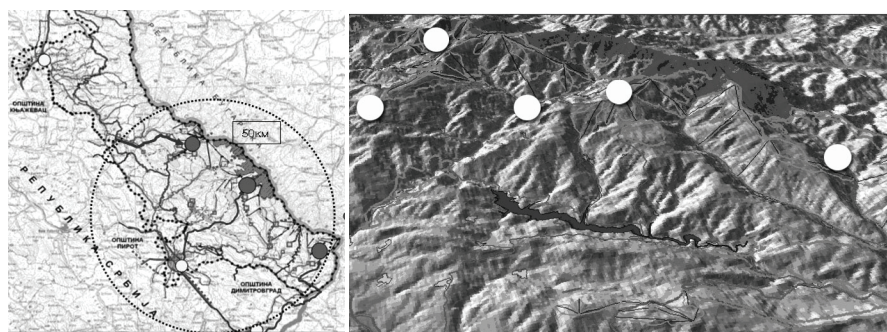


Figure 5: Balanced and polycentric development of the Stara Planina tourist region and Natural Park

Source: IAUS (2008)

transition process and structural changes in Serbia will have an impact on implementation of these projects. At the same time, competitiveness of mountain regions in Serbia will not be determined only by spatial capacities and geo-political position, but also by creative innovative development environment including the following: products and service activities, technology transfer and, particularly, exchange of information and cooperation between home and foreign experts; regional identity; high level of quality of living and environmental protection; organizational development management forms and adjustment of local competencies, harmonization of system laws, and coordination between policies and activities, which are still lacking and adjusted to regional and local conditions and demand, etc.

The starting points for positioning the development projects for Stara Planina as a tourist region will be based on the following:

- Uniform and polycentric development of several tourist centers (in the category of small world centers with 2,000-4,000 beds) and settlements in immediate vicinity, with functional directions of sustainable and dynamic integrations towards municipal centers of Knjaževac, Pirot and Dimitrovgrad, urban regions and traditional settlements, as well as towards possible realization of tourist resort (Figure 5);
- Respect of basic sustainable development principles as follows; *ecological acceptability*, in terms of tourism development and development of complementary activities, which may be realized in regions with exceptional natural values; *cost-effectiveness*, in terms of investments and active protection of mountain region from a part of income coming from tourism development; and *social acceptability*, in terms of protection of local interests, improvement of living and working conditions, creation of conditions for stay and



return of population, active inclusion of local population in tourism offer and protection of nature;

- Development of a tourist resort which may be included in big, organized and compact clusters thus enabling greater competitiveness (marketing and development of products), lower operating costs, possibility for developing appropriate capacities – products for the purpose of risk management;
- Greater sophistication of the development concept, thus enabling greater environmental control and protection, creating greater number of services with various participants and gaining more experience in the development of tourism products;
- Greater authenticity, thus enabling integration into local cultural and natural environment and local social community;
- Greater diversity of tourism offer by providing different types of accommodation, diverse prices and structure of guests;
- Application of high technologies in tourism development, terrain design, maintenance, operational use, offer of entertainment facilities and animation;
- Establishment of cooperation and unions with investors, promoters, developers and operators in tourism;
- Development of an attractive destination which would be a leader in mountain tourism in South Eastern Europe, with year-round tourism offer in the region and with an image based on traditional values, preserved nature and top conditions for recreation and rest, following experiences and standards of countries with a higher level of development of mountain regions, as well as respecting regional and local specificities;
- Ensuring long-term sustainable development and protection of the Stara Planina National Park and tourist region, for which the Government of the Republic of Serbia and municipalities/ cities in the vicinity will combine their interests in the protection of nature and in propelling the largest public-private tourist project in Serbia;
- Use of relevant methods for development planning and management for the purpose of ensuring competitive and transparent approach to obtaining investors and operations management; and
- Gradual fulfillment of conditions for joint candidacy of Serbia and Bulgaria for organization of Winter Olympic Games, with a candidate city within the Stara Planina tourist region, for which the city of Pirot may fulfill conditions, together with locating and organizing tourist centers and Olympic villages

according to the criteria of the International Olympic Committee (a positive example being the initiative of a joint candidacy of Italy, Slovenia and Austria in the three-boarder region of Alps, with the cities of Treviso-Villach-Ljubljana as centers of this transnational region).

## CONCLUSIONS

Mountain regions consist of various regional entities, sub-entities and parts not only in the context of regulation but also in the context of the development of tourism offer. Definition of priorities in the development of mountain regions requires prior regionalization of these regions and, within it, identification of tourist areas - regions and destinations as the most favorable functional spatial entities for stabilizing and accelerating the development of tourism and complementary activities. Regulation of mountain regions requires both the development and the protection to be physically and functionally organized in order to preserve natural values and cultural heritage, and also organized in functional system of tourist centers and settlements. It also requires the development of rational and adjusted infrastructure, without greater ecological consequences. Only a small part of available tourist resources of mountain regions in Serbia has been activated. The major problem of tourism and overall development in mountain regions in Serbia lies in limitations related to their potentials, which are less absolute when considering impossibility for initiating the development (lack of critical mass of high mountain regions and natural resources, degraded nature, etc.) and more relative when considering limitations of some of the development factors (access to traffic, infrastructure, protected regions, etc.). In the contemporary approach to development of mountain tourist regions, a spectrum of development processes is created and the tendency to polarization of functions is strengthened, which is manifested through activation of development of mountain centers which attract capital and whose services and real estates are in demand on market. Spatial coverage of tourist regions, with relation to territorial levels of the country, its administrative units - regions and spatial-functional sub-entities - regions of various purposes, is treated uniformly. The coverage on regional level most often relates to spatial-functional entities of tourist regions, whose final formation is influenced by market. An analysis of experiences of countries with higher level of development of mountain regions

leads to the conclusion that there is no uniform model for the development and regulation of mountain regions, and that recommendations and examples of sustainable development should be specified according to the conditions of Serbia and a specific mountain region. In such situation, spatial organization of tourism in the function of sustainable development of the Stara Planina tourist region does not only mean revitalization of interests of economy and ecology, i.e. realization of economic and social justifiability, as well as protection and preservation of natural resources and values, but also an alternative existence or complete depopulation of this region. Positioning of the Stara Planina development project should be based on balanced and polycentric development of several tourist centers (Golema reka, Topli Do, Mramor, Senokos, and Jabučko Ravnište in the category of small world centers with 2,000-4,000 beds, mostly found in the Alps, and acceptable for specific conditions and potentials of Stara Planina in Serbia) and settlements in immediate vicinity, with functional directions of sustainable and dynamic integrations towards municipal centers of Knjaževac, Pirot and Dimitrovgrad, urban regions and traditional settlements.

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