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CENTRAL TOURIST TRAFFIC ARTERY: AGRICULTURAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

**ABSTRACT:** The idea of a central tourist traffic artery of the Balkan Peninsula is dealt with in this paper. In addition, the motives for its existence are explained. Regarding the specific interdependence of agriculture and tourism, the agricultural regions surrounding the proposed east Serbian artery are analyzed. Within the given scope of resources, exploitation of certain organizational opportunities is suggested.

**KEY WORDS:** the Balkans, tourism, traffic highway

1. INTRODUCTION

The idea of a central tourist artery in the Balkans is not entirely new. Generally, it is related to a highway communication leading through the heartland of the Peninsula. Such communication route already exists in some parts of particular trunk roads. However, certain parts of Serbian regional roads would have to be modernized to match the requirements of a trunk road. In this paper, the initial idea has been extended with the intention to include some additional towns. In order to find the answer to the question whether agriculture could represent a stimulating factor of the development of tourism along the traffic artery, the structure of the farmland in its surroundings should be investigated. The Spatial Plan of the Republic of Serbia may be used for this purpose. In addition to this, certain organizational tourism-stimulating possibilities have still been underutilized.

2. CENTRAL TOURIST TRAFFIC ARTERY: BASIC IDEA AND MOTIVES

The central tourist traffic artery of the Balkan Peninsula would stretch over Banat, the Danube basin, the district of Timočka Krajina, Zaglavak, the Pirot region, Vlasina, Kralješte and the valley of Pčinja. This idea could and certainly should be further studied and developed. In its essence, however, this idea relates to the encouragement of international tourist journeys through the Peninsula.

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1 Pejčić, H., Periferni turizam (Peripheral Tourism), Bona Fides, Niš, 2002, pp. 96-102.
heartland, that is between the Central, North and Northeast Europe on one side and the Balkan Peninsula on the other. And all the more so, since the movements and communications of population in these directions in Serbia have not been burdened with the memory of the times of war and intolerance, like the experience of the western direction from the recent past\(^\text{2}\).

The mentioned tourist movements may concretely be induced southwards, across Macedonia to the Aegean Sea. Towards the north and northeast, they may flow from (to) the west Romania (Timișoara, Oradea), east Hungary (Debrecen), Slovakia, Poland, Ukraine, Byelorussia, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Russia. The complementarity of littoral and continental tourism in the Peninsula would thus be increased.

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\(^2\) Dungaciu, D., "European Integration and Representations of the Balkans", Kultura u procesima razvoja, regionalizacije i evrointegracije Balkana, Faculty of Philosophy, Niš, 2003, p. 43.
This concept does not imply the motorway, which enables the fastest road traffic, but reduces the approachability of immediate surroundings due to the technical conditions of its usage. It is focused on an international road for tourist journeys with relatively frequent entrances and exits, which would make the natural environment much more accessible. The point at issue is an international road that will offer tourists a greater choice of contacts with tourist resources in the environment and that shall not be intended for the fastest motion and, therefore, the shortest stay in the area of transit.

A central artery would contribute to better usage of the underrepresented potentials of east Serbia. Not only would it facilitate the improvement of domestic and international tourism, but it would also stimulate a faster economic development of the border area. The traffic artery would better connect eastern parts of Serbia both mutually and with the neighboring countries. Its existence surely serves the interest of Serbia, but it could be in the interest of other countries, as well. It represents a contribution to the enrichment of the tourist-trade offer in Europe. This is a new opportunity, new dimension of possible international tourist movements.

The construction of a tourist traffic artery is, indeed, based on long-term and interdependent motives or objectives. Their preliminary groups may, among other elements, be arranged according to the following:

1) existing natural and social-historic factors of the development of tourism and other economic activities,
2) higher political stability in these regions,
3) development of the population in eastern peripheral areas, and
4) a new pivot of development and encouragement of territorially more uniform economic development.

1) Potential foreign tourists, and to a certain extent the domestic ones as well, are generally not aware that almost the entire tract expanding from the Mountains of Vršac to the end of the Pčinja Valley and further to the south is composed of interlinked tourist zones and regions of different levels. The tourist area around Zrenjanin may be added to this.

This tract contains attractive mountain relief as a possible tourist motive, especially the Stara Planina and other mountains stretching southwards. The climate, rivers, lakes, hunting preserves, numerous spas and cultural-historical monuments represent a surprising treasure of east Serbia, which are insufficiently known to many people. Particularly remarkable in this respect are the Danube basin with its monuments of antiquity, the Stara Planina Mountain and the large Lake of Vlasina, located at the height of about 1200 m above sea-level. Moreover, the traffic artery is surrounded by numerous spas, as shown in the following table:
2) A relatively higher political stability has been achieved in the eastern part of Serbia, as compared to other parts of the Balkan Peninsula. There are no signs of intolerance or terrorist activities here. There are no grounds for eventual crises and destabilization of this area, unless such process is induced from abroad, which is hardly expected. Therefore, the advantage of the traffic artery surroundings lies in the fact that tourists encounter no risks based on political instability here, which represents a factor of ultimate importance for the development of tourism.

3) The region of southeast Serbia, particularly the area from the district of Knjaževac to Kumanovo, is marked with very unfavorable demographic characteristics. These areas have been neglected by the economic policy, which resulted in a long-lasting emigration of the population, so that some of the settlements are now significantly decreased. Underutilized natural resources and unemployment of the second and third generations of rural population that had moved in towns and municipal places point out the necessity of directing the active part of population towards this economic area, which has been partially disregarded so far.

The tourist traffic artery would represent to east Serbia a symbol of the new age regarding its former falling behind the development of other regions. The traffic artery project would psychologically influence remaining of the existing population and partial homecoming of emigrants.

4) The traffic route Timišoara-Pirot-Vlasina Lake-Kumanovo would be a new axis of economic development in the area of east Serbia. It could additionally foster economic activities along its immediate surroundings. The subject under discussion is not tourism only, but also the development of agriculture, as well as other interdependent activities in this part of the Peninsula.
With several exceptions, the economy of the east peripheral part of Serbia is lagging behind the economy of the Republic as a whole. The encouragement by larger infrastructure would in this case be a long-term incentive to a more balanced economic development. Alongside with the construction of the central traffic artery, the network of regional roads should be modernized too, since they are in bad condition, especially in southeast Serbia. The conditions would be created for the improvement of economic integration of border areas, as well. It is well known that the present border-area economic flows are directed toward central regions, primarily due to the existing lines of communication. This situation is natural, but these areas are also not economically integrated among themselves. For example, there is insufficient economic cooperation between the districts of Braničevo and South Banat, Zaječar and Pirot, Pirot and Pčinja.

3. AGRICULTURAL OPPORTUNITIES WITH THE VIEW TO TOURISM

Natural conditions, which are determined by the quality of soil, distribution of waters, precipitation, temperature and light, have a crucial impact on the spatial pattern of agricultural production. These conditions are substantially different in the area of east Serbia in comparison with the regions south or north of the Danube\(^3\), as shown in the following map. The numbers given in the map symbolize the following:

1. Areas suitable for irrigation,
2. Crop-farming - livestock-raising macroregion,
3. Most important wine-growing areas,
4. Livestock-raising - fruit-growing - wine-growing macroregion,
5. Livestock-raising - mountain macroregion, and
6. Principal mountain meadow areas.

Observed from the south to the north, the proposed traffic artery follows the valley of Pčinja in its greater part. This valley, together with its catchment area, belongs to the livestock-raising - mountain macroregion. Further northward, the part of this area that encompasses the Vlasina Plateau, that is the space between the Mountains of Besna Kobila and Dukat and the Mountain of Čemernik, represents the area of principal mountain meadows. North and northeast of the Čemernik Mountain to the Lužnica Basin, there is the livestock-raising - mountain territory as well.

Lužnica and the Pirot Valley belong to the livestock-raising - fruit-growing - wine-growing macroregion. A part of the Stara Planina Mountain foothills toward the Pirot Valley and the Beli Timok River falls under the most important wine-growing areas.

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The drainage area of the Suva Planina Mountain, the highland and mountain areas surrounding Lužnica and the Pirot Valley, Jalovik, Zaglavak and further space to the north hillsides of the Stara Planina Mountain and to the beginning of the Timok Valley belong to the wide livestock-raising - mountain macroregion. In the Stara Planina Mountain region, Visok, Vidlič and the tracts of the right tributaries of the River Visošica to the mouth of the Dojčinačka Reka River, as well as the watershed of this river, represent the area of principal mountain meadows.

The valley of the Trgoviški Timok River and the valley of the Beli Timok River until Zaječar, the district of Krajina, Ključ and Pirot represent unconnected parts of the livestock-raising - fruit-growing - wine-growing macroregion. The region around Negotin and Kladovo, as well as the watershed of the Zamna River, the Danube tributary, falls under the most important wine-growing areas. The narrow space adjacent to the Timok River, the plain between Negotin and the Danube, as well as the riparian part of Ključ are the unconnected parts of the crop-farming - livestock-raising macroregion. A part of the flatland between Negotin and the Danube and the eastern coastal area of Ključ are suitable for irrigation.

The mountains of Miroč, Veliki Greben, Liškovac and Severni Kučaj belong to the livestock-raising - mountain macroregion.

The preliminary design of the traffic artery traces it further westward, along the Danube basin, through the district of Braničevo. In the agricultural regional distribution, Braničevo is a part of the zone of the livestock-raising - fruit-growing - wine-growing macroregion spreading towards the south. A part of the most important wine-growing areas is also located here. The Danube-basin part of Braničevo is suitable for irrigation.

The largest crop-farming - livestock-raising macroregion of Serbia spreads to the west, towards Smederevo, and primarily northwards. The farming areas of northeast Serbia are mainly suitable for the crop-farming - livestock-raising production. The southeast Banat area varies from this general characteristic.

The sandy desert of Deliblatska Peščara and the Mountains of Vršac belong to the livestock-raising - mountain macroregion. The southeast Banat is a livestock-raising - fruit-growing - wine-growing region, with the exemption of the area of the Mountains of Vršac. Alongside with this, the northeast side of the Deliblatska Peščara desert, the foothills of the Mountains of Vršac and the surroundings of Bela Crkva enclose the most important wine-growing areas.

The territory of east Serbia, in the environment of the designed route of the traffic artery, contains all the types of agricultural regions in the Republic.
Various primary agricultural activities have been developed there in the spheres of crop-farming, livestock-breeding and fruit-growing. Based on this production, the existing manufacturing capacities have been constructed, like oil refineries, cold-storage plants, dairy plants, distilleries, breweries and wineries. Therefore, the agricultural resources and the food-processing industry based on them enable the production of various foodstuffs in the environment of the traffic artery. The offer of restaurants along the tourist traffic artery could be based mainly on local production.

4. ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITIES

Separate business initiatives of individual economic entities cannot provide any significant implementation of changes that could be profitable in the tourist business operations in the mentioned region. A successful creation of conditions necessary for tourist movement and economic operations along the tourist artery requires appropriate joint organizational activities. In this respect, the following may be possible:

1. Joint commercial advertising,
2. Research and professional workshops on common opportunities and limitations regarding the catering services along the tourist artery,
3. Organization of special events of significance for the tourist business,
4. Foundation of alliances of specific groups of economic entities skirting the tourist artery,
5. Establishment of a governmental agency for the tourist artery completion and modernization, etc.

Joint commercial advertising can particularly stimulate certain target groups to satisfy their needs regarding excursions of one or several days' duration, hunting, fishing, etc. The groups of higher mobility that are oriented toward the longest possible staying in the outdoors are of the importance in this context. For instance, it would be possible to publish brochures on mutual topical issues in the field of tourist business operations.

There is a common need for designing a project to solve technical problems of the road traffic along the artery, as well as of the total tourist-trade development in its surroundings. It should be preceded by preliminary research, the results of which could be of benefit to many business people. The main motives of the economic entities in the region to assemble and cooperate are to exchange experiences and launch joint initiatives aimed at overcoming common limitations.

Caterers, as well as other business people, used to have specific occupational associations in the past. Particularly in the outlying districts of the Republic, they
face common limitations in their operations. Mutual rivalry through fair competition represents a natural characteristic of present-day business operations. However, mutual partnership may also be a form of their communication. Caterers, travel agencies and public carriers would be able to solve many problems much more successfully via their professional associations if they were region-oriented as well.

The tourist artery could be used for the organization of various sports events that would be in the function of both media promotion of the artery itself and of fostering tourist activities throughout its full length. To that effect, possible sports competitions may be, for example, an international cycle race or a car-race (rally driving).

A thorough long-term completion and modernization of the tourist artery may be accomplished more efficiently if a specific governmental agency is established for this purpose. The agency would be in charge of providing financial means and organizing adequate capital projects. Construction of other infrastructure facilities along the artery could also be within the competence of the agency. Similar experience has already been gained with the development of tourism in the Mountain of Kopaonik.

5. THE IDEA REVERBERATION AND PROSPECTS

The Institute of Architecture and Regional & Urban Planning of Serbia authorities expressed their interest and have become familiar with the idea related to the central tourist artery. Considerable interest in it has also been provoked within some scholarly circles in Skopje. There was a qualified acceptance of this idea outside the artery catchment area, expressed in unofficial, off-the-record declarations. However, the outlined idea on the artery is not based on any economic egoism and particularism. The logic of the route stemmed from the natural distribution of tourist resources. The opposition to the idea could not have solid grounds if it originated from disputing the usage of tourist capacities only because they are located in one and not another part of the state territory.

East Serbia did not put up any resistance when, for example, the Šamac-Sarajevo and Belgrade-Bar railroad lines were constructed or when the route of the Belgrade-Skopje motorway was traced along the Morava River valley. It is logical that the shortest international traffic route should be through the valleys of Morava and Nišava, and the same logic should be applied in the case of constructing traffic communications and creating the conditions for a better employment of natural tourist capacities existing in east Serbia. Such capacities are rather modest in the Morava valley.
In some publications, this idea has been amended and altered in certain details in the name of the author but without the author's knowledge. This was the case of the publication edited by the Ecological Society "Ekoman – Niš".

The idea of tourist movement through east Serbia cannot be suppressed by any standard. Its realization cannot depend on anyone's envy or benevolence. It is permanently based on the very interests of tourist demand exponents. It can only happen that the exploitation of tourist capacities in this region develops in either faster and better or slower manner, while the world is getting ever smaller in the present society of information technologies and new traffic possibilities. Even the underutilized east Serbian natural tourist resources shall not remain unknown or unexploited over the long run. In fact, the idea is related to a faster accomplishment of the useful, the possible and the unavoidable.

CONCLUSION

The central tourist artery of the Balkan Peninsula would especially foster tourist movements of the central, northern and northeastern areas of Europe towards south Europe through the Balkan heartland. It would contribute to the integration of the tourist offer in its surroundings and stimulate the development of continental tourism in the Peninsula. Specific, so far underutilized, tourist capacities of this region would thus be exploited to a much greater extent. East Serbia contains agricultural land of different production features on both sides of the Danube. This is the basic requirement for the production of various foodstuffs needed for the purpose of catering development in the surroundings of the artery. The current agricultural production regionalizing in this area bears witness to this. Moreover, there are the possibilities of business arrangements of economic entities and governmental bodies based on the introduction of joint developmental undertakings along the artery.
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