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## Article

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## THE IMPACT OF THE TRAFFIC INFRASTRUCTURE ON THE TOURIST DESTINATION

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### **Abstract:**

Tourism activity in the region depends on internal and external factors that affect the level of tourist development of the destination. Internal and external tourism factors complement each other and they are interdependent. These factors are not constant, but it may come to their change over time, especially when it comes to anthropogenic factors. The changes can directly affect negative or positive on development of the tourist destination. The authors of this paper aim to present how the changed anthropogenic external factors shown through the traffic infrastructure, and how they affect the transformation of the level of tourist development of the region, through the example of the new traffic infrastructure in the Republic of North Macedonia. The changes caused by the newly created external factors, in the future will initiate adjustment and correction of the existing plans for tourist development of the destination and a new managerial approach in tourism planning.

Keywords: tourism policy, development, tourist demand, tourism factors.

*JEL classification:* : L83; Z32; I15; O18

## INTRODUCTION

The East Region is mainly a mountainous region and comprises the extreme east of the Republic of Macedonia. It spreads along the Bregalnica River, over the basins of Shtip, Maleshevo and Pijanec and the field of Kochani. The region comprises 14.2% of the total area of the Republic of North Macedonia, with 8.5% of the total population, and 49.9 citizens per km<sup>2</sup>. The natural, geographical, climate and hydrological characteristics give the potential for tourism development. The mountainous terrains in the region have great potential for development of winter and alternative tourism even though they are still in the early stages of development. The push factors are treated as the internal factors by which people feel motivated for the trip considering their own needs. Following that, pull factors of destinations attract people towards themselves with respect to their motivation (Nikjoo and Ketabi 2015).

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The eastern region has a number of internal factors for tourism development, which represent great tourism potential and that is important because tourism has become a tool for economic development in some countries – by improving the standard of living of their population (Sánchez-Rivero and Cárdenas-García 2014). Tourism is a vitally important industry to many regions of the world and forms an important and growing part of the world's economy (Jarvis, Natalie and Liu 2016). These tourism resources are important pull factors for tourism development in the region. It is indisputable that the geographical attributes of tourism destinations represent the key component of their resource base (Jovicic 2016).

However, increasingly, the impacts of climate change, natural and man-made disasters, economic instability, and other macro-environmental factors, have profound implications on local and global economies, fragile ecosystems, and human cultures and livelihoods. In response, tourism within these natural environments is also changing and evolving rapidly in both developed and developing regions (Ooi, Duke and O'Leary 2018). But despite the numerous internal factors, the eastern region still has a low level of tourism development. The low level of tourist development of the region in relation to the Republic of North Macedonia is presented in the following table which show the data on the number of tourists and the number of overnight stays in the region and in the country.

**Table 1.** Number of foreign and domestic tourists in the Republic of North Macedonia and in the East Planning Region

Year	Republic of North Macedonia			East Region		
	Total	Domestic	Foreign	Total	Domestic	Foreign
2015	816 067	330 537	485 530	25 907	16 751	9 156
2016	856 843	346 359	510 484	30 568	20 643	9 925
2017	998 841	368 247	630 594	31 775	19 947	11 828
2018	1 126 935	419 590	707 345	34 354	20 490	13 864
2019	1 184 963	427 370	757 593	32 077	17 657	14 420

Source: Data from Statistical review: Transport, tourism and other services. 2019. State statistical office of the Republic of North Macedonia. 2019: 11, table 1.

This small share of tourism in the eastern region in terms of tourism in the country, according to the authors is the result of ongoing weak infrastructure and poor connectivity of the region. Infrastructure have a positive, statistically significant relationship with tourism development; infrastructure increase, the level of tourist arrivals also increases (Adeola and Evans 2019). From this observation of the authors it follows that the subject of analysis in this paper is the traffic infrastructure as an external factor for tourism development in the Eastern region of the Republic of North Macedonia.

## 1. METODOLOGY

The basic theoretical assumption in the paper is that main reason for low level of tourism development in Eastern region of the Republic of North Macedonia is weak infrastructure and poor connectivity of the region in the past. The methodology used during the valorization is especially important to get as much as possible objectivity in

evaluating the resources. While preparing the paper and the data processing several different scientific research methods were used for research in tourism: a method of analysis by which the collected data was analyzed, a comparative method for comparing data, statistical method for presenting statistical data, inventory of tourism resources that are subject to the valorization etc. So, secondary data is collected or it is a secondary data that is available and is official data in the State Statistical Office, Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning of the Republic of Macedonia, the Action plans for tourism development in the area of the municipalities located in the region and so on.

## 2. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The primary factor for the economic development of the region is the traffic infrastructure. This is even more pronounced when it comes to tourism development of the region and the tourist destination. The East Planning Region has a favorable geographical position in relation to the other regions and it occupies the central position in the eastern part of the Republic of North Macedonia. Due to this favorable geographical position, important international traffic routes pass through the eastern planning region. The first international road passes through the entire length of the region in a west-east direction and through the border crossing Delchevo continues in the Republic of Bulgaria. The second international road passes through the region and continues through the southeast planning region and through the border crossing Novo Selo continues in the Republic of Bulgaria. These international road routes, especially the first one, are very important for the development of tourism (transit tourism) in the region, if we take into account that the most important tourist destination in the region is located in its eastern part. Tourism is widely regarded as a social and economic phenomenon that calls for proactive measures to help ensure positive development trajectories (Saarinen, M. Rogerson and Hall 2017). Despite the existing international road routes, the level of tourism development in the East Planning Region remains low until now.

The main area where the tourists who visit the East Planning Region come from is the Skopje region. The trip of the tourists from the Skopje region to the East planning region until 2019 took place on the road E-75 through the Vardar region and continued along the road M-5 through the East planning region. This road route from Skopje to the tourist destination Berovo in the East Planning Region has a length of 165 km, and the journey took up to 3-4 hours. The quality of the road infrastructure has also been a problem so far. Out of the total 165 km, only the section from Skopje to Veles was a highway, while the remaining 115 km section was a regional road, of poor quality. This long journey on relatively short route reflected unfavorably on the development of tourism in the East Planning Region. Distance has a profound, though often underrapreciated impact on all aspects of tourism, extending well beyond the volume of tourist movements (McKercher 2018).

The current infrastructural investments in the East Planning Region in the future should change the current situation with the level of tourist development of the destination. Two major infrastructure investments are important for the analyzed

region, as follows: The highway "Goce Delchev" from Skopje to the city of Stip and the highway from the city of Stip to the city of Kocani.

The highway from Skopje to Stip was officially put into use in 2019. This highway significantly reduces the travel time from Skopje to Stip, reduces the distance between these two cities and greatly improves travel safety. Before the construction of the new infrastructure, the distance between the city of Skopje and the city of Stip was 91 km, and in order to pass that distance it took 90 minutes. Today with the new highway "Goce Delchev", the distance between the city of Skopje and the city of Stip is 45 km, and that distance is covered in 30 minutes.

The highway from the city of Stip to the city of Kocani is in an advanced phase of the construction and with it will greatly reduce the travel time between these two cities, but will also increase the safety of the trip. Until now, the distance between Stip and Kocani was 35 km and this distance was covered in 40 minutes. With the new highway, the distance between these two cities will be covered in 20 minutes. What is also important for these two infrastructure projects is the following: the highway from Stip to Kocani is an extension of the highway "Goce Delchev", which reduces the distance from Skopje to the city of Kocani. Until now, that distance was 120 km and it took 130 minutes to cross that section. In the near future, with the completion of the highway from Stip to Kocani, the distance from Skopje to the city of Kocani will be covered in 60 minutes. These two roads also reduce travel time from the Skopje region to the tourist destination Berovo, which is the most important tourist destination in the East Planning Region. So tourists will cover the distance from Skopje to the tourist destination Berovo in 115 minutes. Tourists generally show preference for a geographically close locale than a distanced one when both places offer similar attractions or amenities (Wong and Zhao 2016). Imaginaries of touristic otherness have traditionally been closely related to geographical distance and travel far away from the

everyday. But in today's context of sustainable tourism, a moral and behavioral shift may be expected, toward traveling near home. Distance may actually become a disadvantage and proximity a new commodity (Jeuring and Haartsen 2017). It is therefore important for tourism destination management to understand the likelihood that a visitor travels beyond the city to nearby areas, especially on day trips (Le-Klähn, Roosen, Gerike and Hall 2015).

## CONCLUSION

The traffic infrastructure is an important external factor for the development of tourism, at the same time it is an important pull factor that influences the choice of the tourist destination. The East Planning Region in the Republic of Northern Macedonia so far is characterized by insufficiently developed traffic connection with the largest region in the country, the Skopje region. The authors are of the opinion that this is one of the main reasons for the low level of tourism development in the East Planning Region. However, with the recent capital investments in the transport infrastructure in the East Planning Region, the connection of the region with the other regions in the country is greatly improved. This situation in the future opens opportunities for increased tourism development of the region with proper tourism planning. This means that the local

authorities should adjust the future tourism development of the area and the future tourist plans with the impact that the new traffic infrastructure will have on the East Planning Region.

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