INSUFFICIENTLY UTILIZED NATURAL TOURIST RESOURCES OF SOUTHERN SERBIA

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Abstract. South Serbia is highly attractive for tourists due to its homogenous relief structures, rich historical heritage and pleasant natural wealth of flora and fauna, natural mineral and thermal springs and rivers, and bodies of water. It has a unique and outstanding historical and cultural heritage, monuments, monasteries, authentic folklore, music and traditions, and traditionally hospitable Serbian hosts. It has many hot springs, health resorts, natural phenomena, the potential for sports fields, numerable events, which all gives the possibility for further development of this economic niche.

Keywords: *tourism, natural resources, mountains, hot springs, spas, historic treasures and heritage, folklore.*

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is an important segment of income generation, as part of the national economy, especially in recent times when it is gaining momentum due to developing of new demands of the society, caused by rising of the overall living standard. It is a specific phenomenon of economy, which is based on people's need for new experiences, which is reflected in the desire of certain populations to meet new landscapes and people, their culture and customs, cultural heritage and natural beauties, etc.

Tourism adheres in particular to securing the satisfaction of the people in the beauties of nature and historical monuments, but it also has other aspects depending on the purpose might have.

Any type of movements of people out of their place of residence but not for the

purpose of shopping and business activities, could be perceived as tourism.

Tourism can be differentiated into:

- rural tourism,
- residential tourism,
- heritage tourism,
- sport/recreation and hunting tourism,
- adventure tourism,
- medical tourism,
- conferences and educational tourism,
- transit tourism,
- camping tourism.

Such a view of this economic segment indicates the tremendous opportunities for business development, especially in areas that are rich in tourism potential of certain tourist interest. This indicates the commitment of entrepreneurs and managers to discover a specific tourism potential, and enable access for tourists, what consequentially stimulates other economic activities.

Broadly discussing, each spatial unit has a certain potential for tourism, just that the target group has to be discovered and the interest should be attracted, as well as the desire and motivation, so that the offer could be animated in the form of meeting the needs which cover the specific demand. For that reason, it is necessary to point out the tourism potential in the region of Southern Serbia and to propose the necessary actions, which would enhance the use of these resources.

Tourist Resources of South Serbia

The area of South Serbia covers the districts of Pirot, Jablanica, Niš and Pčinja.

Southern Serbia occupies an area of the river basins of South Morava River and its tributaries including the river of Nišava. These rivers flow through broad and fertile plains and steep and rugged gorges which all gives the attractiveness to the area including specific natural features. This is the most important pass route of the Balkan Peninsula with major highways leading to the southeast across Bulgaria to Istanbul and to the south in the direction of Greece, which makes the link between Central Europe and the Mediterranean to Asia and Africa. Cities of this area are lying in the valleys, surrounded by the mountains, whereas the villages are spread out over the mountain meadows and open spaces, in the river valleys, or in the periurban areas. Cities are generally located in the valleys of the mountains that surround them, and there is a need to mention at least a few mountain beauties of exceptional attractiveness for both the rural as well as for sports and recreation, convention and hunting tourism. We must not neglect the central city areas with its historical and cultural heritage (monasteries and numerous places of worship, which formed the hub of Christianity), survived and resisted the weathering challenges of the past centuries and several war destructions.

Elements of special importance:

Stara Planina¹² - The Old Mountain is covering the area east of the towns of Knjaževac and Pirot. It is the highest mountain in eastern Serbia. High mountain range of fascinating beauty and pristine nature extends as a natural border with Bulgaria. It is one of the most beautiful mountains in the country and it has a huge potential for tourism development. Stara Planina is a natural resource of great importance, and it could be seen as the first category when ranking the natural resources. This area of exceptional beauty and magic is

covered by snow for almost five months of the year.

Mountain altitudes range from 1,100 to 1,900 meters and this creates a great potential for development and construction of trails for alpine skiing, so we especially emphasize the following resources:

“Babin zub” (Grannies Tooth) – mountain peak, located at an altitude of 1,758 meters, is one of the most beautiful parts Stara Planina. Spectacular rocks of Babin Zub are ending southwest of Midžor mountain peak at an altitude of 2,169 meters, which is the highest peak of Stara Planina and overall Serbia. Babin Zub makes a protected nature reserve. Ski center was built in this beautiful area. "The offer of the ski center Babin Zub includes ski paths at locations such as: "Konjarnik", "Sun Valley" and "Marko's Meadow." Ski resort of Babin Zub has a four-seater chairlift "Konjarnik" with conveyor for loading skiers, with capacity of up to 1,400 skiers per hour and a ski lift "Anchor" - "Sun Valley" with capacity of 1,200 skiers per hour, and ski kindergarten for children with conveyor "Marko's Meadow ."

The first gondola chairlift in Serbia can be found at the location of "Jabučko ravnište". Eight seater gondola chairlift transports skiers to the connecting system of chairlifts and lifts and ski slopes. This part of the resort has and four-seater lift, a ski lift so that it is connected with the other part of the resort at Babin Zub. More than 13 kilometers of ski paths of different levels of difficulty were prepared for skiers of all categories. A path for the free ride is also provided for the extreme sports enthusiasts. In addition, the ski center of Stara Planina has built an artificial snowing system, so that in case of lack of natural snow, visitors of the center can enjoy winter sports¹³.

This potential is not used enough, and infrastructural investments are needed, such as higher quality roads and the construction of accommodation facilities.

Special attraction could be provided in the congress tourism, but not enough work is

¹² /www.skijalistasrbije.rs/sr

¹³ /www.skijalistasrbije.rs/sr

carried out in this tourist segment although some activities are organized by using of hotel space, and there are implementation plans for construction of new ones too.

Stara Planina Hotel & Spa is located in such a position so that it offers direct access to the ski paths. It was open in 2012 and it has impressive wellness offer (hydro massage tub, fitness center, swimming pool, etc.). Ski equipment can be rented there and ski school is organized. All rooms are multi-purpose, they have natural lighting and sound insulation and they can be differently arranged. All conveniences a guest could need are available (for organization of seminars, conferences, workshops, or special reception arrangements and accommodation). Rental space includes 146 units of accommodation within the hotel chain of Falkensteiner Hotels & Residence. It is the youngest, but certainly the more promising Ski Centre of Serbia and the Balkans. Stara Planina along with Kopaonik Mountain range is among the touristic areas of highest value in Serbia. The nearest inhabited settlement in the vicinity of the tourist center is the village Kalna, some 20 km away. Babin Zub is one of the peaks of Stara Planina Mountain and is located at an altitude of 1,780 m.

The largest mountain resort in Serbia is being built on Stara Planina and the investment should be over 500 million euros. An alpine ski resort with capacity of 14,000 skiers of all categories is planned in the area of Babin Zub with 40 km of ski lifts and 100 km of ski paths/slopes. Accommodation center Golema Reka river with 5,000 beds and Jabučko Ravnište with 3,000 beds are planned to be built at the two ends of the ski resort.

Given the wealth of wildlife in this area, it is possible to develop hunting tourism as well. It must include hunting associations through international association of hunting societies, to organize international hunting meetings and hunting gatherings.

Organization of the hunting days to hunt specific types of game in this area could provide foreign currency inflow.

Suva Planina¹⁴ This mountain is the gem of South Serbia, as one of our most beautiful, but at the same time it is a wild mountain. Suva Planina has not been adequately explored and is a true oasis of pristine nature. There are places where even today human foot has not encroached yet. From 2002 on, it is under state protection along the area of 45 km in length 15 km in width. The mountain belongs to the Carpatho-Balkan group based on the geological and geographical findings. It extends in the direction northwest-southeast in altitude zones of 250 to 1,810 meters above sea level. It starts east of Niška Banja Spa and it ends at the southwest near Babušnica. This mountain has truly an amazing enchanting magic and beauty. Located in the area of the so called CATENA MUNDI - the imaginary center of the Balkans or the "chains of the world", 15 km east of Nis, on the area of 250 square kilometers Suva Planina ranks among the most scenic and the most beautiful mountains of Serbia. It is shaped as a particularly high and huge mountain range of south-eastern Serbia, which belongs to the southwestern part of the Carpathian-Balkan mountain system in the municipalities of Niška Banja, Gadžin Han, Bela Palanka, Babušnica and Vlasotince. It has very poor infrastructure (accommodation facilities and roads) for tourism but the remaining population living in the area is very hospitable and ready to accept any traveler be it random or organized. Hotel "Trem" – porch (the only hotel in the area which is currently out of business), with 90 beds, a restaurant, a terrace with 200 seats and landscaped sports courts) is located at the settlement of Donji Dušnik, next to the river of Kutina, where the first slopes of Suva Planina rise above.

Suva Planina is different from other mountains in this part of Serbia due to its high mountain peaks and its gigantic, near-vertical slopes.

North side of the mountain is characterized by steep limestone cliffs and extremely inaccessible parts, which makes it one of the wildest mountains of the Balkans. The highest peak of Suva Planina Mountain is Trem, 1,810 m high, and Sokolov kamen, 1,523

¹⁴/ www.panacomp.net/srbija

m high, Golemo Stražište, 1,714 m and hardly accessible Mošor, 985 m, which is a special challenge and experience for adventurous mountain hikers. Bojanine vode is one of the most famous mountain resorts of Suva Planina, which is located northwest of the peak Sokolov kamen, located at an altitude of 860 m. Bojana's waters is a geographical complex in Suva Planina covering the area of 17 km². It can be assumed that the greater area of the majestic Suva Planina Mountain is characterized by diverse ecosystems and lush forests, which are creating the habitat for around 1,300 species of plants, i.e. almost half the floral diversity of Serbia in general. High mountain peaks protect the Suva Planina Mountain from the penetration of strong winds and rapid change of air masses, contributing to a moderate continental climate, although Mediterranean air circulation could be also felt, which is favourable for the presence of the Mediterranean aromatic herbs, vineyards, what is a tourist attraction by itself.

"Suva Planina offers unique conditions for special quality of medicinal herbs, which are even better than the Dalmatian and French lavender. Suva Planina is abundant in a variety of flora and fauna, including feral horses, one of its unique features. Suva Planina is a protected area with different levels of protection and it is also a special nature reserve covering the area of 18,176 hectares. Moreover it has a status of the IBA area suitable for bird watching and studying. The team of the National Institute for Protection of Cultural Monuments from Belgrade discovered three graves from the late IV and the beginning of the V century, a necropolis from the first half of the IV century and three buildings, which are all dating back to the IV century.

Based on the current findings on the future route of the highway near Bela Palanka and along the route of the future Corridor 10, just behind the remains of the old intersection and Antique road Via Militaris, the archeological sites have been discovered in 2011 around the town of Dimitrovgrad. This discovery at the foothills of the Suva Planina

form part of a antique settlement of Remezijana".¹⁵

Suva Planina Mountain is divided by a very attractive, beautiful and unusually magnificent Sićevačka klisura gorge from the Svrljiške planine Mountains. Tourism and recreation offer of Suva Planina Mountain is underdeveloped and insufficiently well-established. The state of the roads in some sections is very poor, which greatly reduces the accessibility and quality of stay in the most attractive tourist resorts or potential accommodation facilities for rural tourism, which all reflects the state of being underdeveloped. This is also obvious since there is a small number of high-quality tourist facilities and poorly organized and associated tourist offer, both among the municipalities in the area of Suva Planina and with other municipalities in the region. Thus, the tourist offer of Suva Planina primarily relies on:

Student tourism

Children's resort Divljana - "School in Nature" is being used by the elementary schools from the districts of Niš and Pirot for carrying out part of the school curricula related to outdoor education and this resort is located in the village of Divljana, about 10 km from Bela Palanka. This picturesque place is situated at an altitude of 510 m, surrounded by mountains from all sides and protected thus from the wind, with 40 km² of dense forest of oak, beech and pine trees. In addition to the school program of outdoor education, there is a mini hotel "Gaj," which is owned by the Serbian Red Cross.

Furthermore, the Monastery of St. Dimitri is near the resort and it is one of the sacred sites which foundation is often linked to the IV century and the beginnings of Christianity in this region.

Divljansko jezero lake, which is ideal for swimming during the hot summer months is only 2 km away from the resort, in the direction towards Bela Palanka.

Besides the students and local residents who are the main users of this resort, scout

¹⁵ /www.niscafe.com/index.php

groups from Serbia are interested in camping in the pine forest. Religious people and tourists are visiting the monastery as well.

In mid August, the famous manifestation of the "Days of banica"¹⁶, is traditionally organized in Vrelo and Bela Palanka, and this outstanding cultural event, as it has successfully preserved its authenticity and it is known as a unique happening promoting cultural values of this area of Serbia. Cultural manifestation "Days of banica" assembles a large number of competitors from Serbia and the neighbouring countries in order to prepare and choose the best cheese pie known as "gibanica", and it is always being served with yoghurt in a clay pot and with baked beans dish known as "prebranac".

There are opportunities for adventure tourism (mountaineering and jeep rides). One of the participants of the jeep ride manifestation in the area said: "We were participating at jeep ride tour at Stara Planina in the last weekend of August. Mr. Mladen Stojanović lead the volunteering organisation of several people from Pirot so that around twenty people was heading their way through the wilderness of Stara Planina Mountain. It was really fun and the company was great".¹⁷

Besna Kobila Mountain (Angry Mare) is located 34 km east of Vranje and about 400 km away from Belgrade and the first slopes of this mountain beauty are rising from the right river bank of the South Morava river.

This ecological oasis with pristine nature and its beauty is a true pleasure for long walks in the mountain valleys and plateaus. There are also numerous wildlife habitats at Besna Kobila Mountain as it is rich in wild boars, foxes and wolves, which gives the preconditions for hunting tourism and makes foreign exchange earnings, given that the hunting can be organized on an international level, which has not been tried yet for now. The hunters are coming here during the hunting season for hunting trophies of wild boars, wolves and foxes. And when they get tired, there is a mountain resort for their refreshment

and rest at 1,480 m above sea level, with a capacity of 60 beds. Hikers and primary school pupils prefer to spend their winter vacations here because Besna Kobila Mountain is under snow cover for nine months during the year.

It has been estimated that Besna Kobila has exceptional ski terrains but they are still under-utilized. It is a mountain with ideal conditions for winter sports, but they are by no means used, not forgetting some pioneering attempts. Besna Kobila and the mountain resort can be reached through Kriva Feja; however the road is still macadam in length of 4 km and the regular bus line from Vranje can reach up to this point.

The highest peak of this mountain is 1,922 m above sea level, and this is the vantage point from where you can see many mountains of the Balkans (Kopaonik, Šara, Rila and others). "Mountain resort experts claim that besides the potentially beautiful ski terrain and long snowy season (nine months), this mountain beauty is characterized by a climate that resembles the climate of the famous Austrian ski resort Kitzbühel".¹⁸ This advantage is unique compared to several other mountain is within the mountain range that covers Dukat, Bele Vode, Doganica, Gloška planina, etc. Valleys at the foothills of Besna Kobila Mountain are covered by forest, whereas the higher peaks are under grazeland.

Besna Kobila extends between Vranjska Banja spa and Vlasinsko Jezero lake and it is relatively near distance-wise, which enables preconditions for more complex tourist use of all three units.

This mountain is characterized by abundant plant life, which is based on the wild, uncultivated, medicinal plants and wild fruits and berries. There are habitats with over 700 species of tree, shrub and herbaceous plants – mostly relevant for medicinal use. Mountain pastures, forests, unpolluted soil, water and air and in particular hospitality of local hosts provide conditions for staying and enjoying for the visitors, which makes the base for rural tourism. One of the guests expressed his feelings about the beauties of Besna Kobila

¹⁶ /www.panacomp.net/srbija

¹⁷ /stara planina-karavan dzip

¹⁸ /www.skijanje.rs/ski-centri/srbije

Mountain using the following words: "We headed to the first mountain peak. I had the chance to capture all four seasons on my pictures once we reached certain altitude. It was springtime in the form of blue flowers, summer depicted by the the crystallly clear sky and strong sun, when it suddently changed into autumn with many dry leaves, and of course we had a glimpse of winter snow too. Such scenes are rare and they undoubtedly cause impressive feelings".¹⁹

Kukavica²⁰ Mountain (Coward / Coo-coo bird) is located in the south of Serbia, north of Vranje and south of Leskovac. It belongs to the mountain chain of Rhodope Mountains. The highest peak is Vlaina (1,442 m), while others are Valjovska čuka peak (1,207 m), Tumba (1,192 m), Furnište (1,370 m) and Bukovska čuka peak (1,386 m). Particular advantage of this mountain is that it is only 16 km away from the town of Leskovac, which is the main generator of dispersive outing movement. It is connected with the nearby towns by commuter traffic lines, with frequent departures, and through a modern highway. Limited capacities for the intake of visitors to the site Vučjanka and an increasing number of visitors were a direct incentive for new actions.

A modern hotel "Vlaina of "B" category was built in the heart of the mountains where the erosion has expanded the area, at an upstream location of about 7 km away from the first tourist point of "Vučjanka". The hotel has 77 beds and 590 guest places in the two restaurants, in the bar and on the terrace, with a modern kitchen having the capacity to prepare 1,000 meals. In the next phase, another building with 100 new beds, indoor swimming pool and a small sauna, with equipment for sports recreation, rehabilitation, etc. is to be built. The newly built asphalt road, which linked "Vučjanka" with the hotel "Vlaina" made more room and it has attracted visitors to new recreational area long the Vučjanska reka river.

The gravel macadam road is leading from the mountain top of Kukavica (1,441 m), and from the well maintained mountain center, which is about 25 miles away. The center has

45 beds and it is attended quite well throughout the year. The road continues from this point in the same direction to Vladičin Han where it merges with the highway (most of the route is the modern, asphalt road). It is also significant in the light of dispersive movement since it is possible to continue on, in the direction of the Vasinsko jezero lake from Vladičin Han. Thus, a circular travel path is formed (for excursions – through the mentioned route via Crna Trava and Vlasotince to Leskovac), which is important for the exchange of stationary guests. Crowns of the mountain peaks divided the mountain into northern, steeper part, without the settlements and the southern, flatter part where a number of villages have nested.

The mountain is almost entirely covered with pine and oak, centennial beech trees, and diverse species of herbs. Vučjanka river is 18 km long together with Golema Reka. It is created by merging of the two rivers: Golema and Mala reka rivers, meeting at the point of Jašičko ravnište, at an altitude of 600 m above sea level. "The watershed of Vučjanka river without Golema reka river is not more than 7 km long.

A canyon reaching the depths over 300 m on the right side and around 150 m on the left bank is cut only 3km downstream of the confluence of Vučjanka. The canyon is 2 km long, embedded between the mountain peaks of Kitka (988 m) and Samarić (619 m). The canyon entrance is about 500 meters above sea level, and the exit is at 340 m of altitude. The tower Skobaljica city is housed at one outlying cliffs of the left bank of the canyon, at 150 m above the river, but it is partially infested by the weed vegetation. Special addition to the picturesque beauty of this landscape is the river of Vučjanka and its canyon, rich in whirlpools and deep river pots suitable for bathing. The best known river spots of this kind are Devkazan, Jaz, Donji Đokin Vir, Srednji Đokin Vir, Crni Vir which is said to be 10 m deep, and hardly accessible".²¹

Vučjanka river flows through the spectacular mountain cliffs and rocks of the Kukavica Mountain, which is an excellent habitat for local trout species because of its

¹⁹ /www.tt.group.net/fotografije_srbije/besna kobila

²⁰ / www.pancomp.net/srbija/kukavica

²¹/www.pancomp.net/srbija/kukavica

clarity. A hydropower plant was built on this river, not far from Vučje and Leskovac, in 1903 and it is still functioning. Students and tourists are very fond of this place and they are often visiting the area. The mentioned hydropower plant on the river of Vučjanka is the second oldest of its kind in Serbia, since the oldest one is in Užice on Đetinja river, which was built two years earlier. Nevertheless, the one close to Leskovac is still the first one based on the chroniclers' accounts since it is still working and generating electricity, as it used to be functional throughout the century, not counting the end of World War II, as the hydropower generation shortly stood still due to the diversive activities.

There are many cultural and historical monuments in the foothills of Kukavica Mountain while the small gentle town of Vučje attracts nostalgic people who enjoy daydreaming and lamenting.

"Kukavica Mountain is known for its many historic monuments and the most famous site is the Skobaljić town, located at one of the peaks of a rocky ridge, on the left bank of the beautiful Vučjanka river. The city was commissioned by the Byzantine rulers. It was declared as location of special cultural value in 1986.

Hotel Vlaina is built on Kukavica Mountain, at an altitude of 650 m, located 25 km away from Leskovac and 9 km away from Vučje. The hotel is located at a kind of a crossroad in between Leskovac, Vranje and Vladičin Han. The hotel has been completely renovated in 2008 and it has 30 rooms, whereas the eco-base on the river bank gives a special charm to the site. There is a meteorological station and a mountain lodge at the top of the mountain, with 45 beds and many visitors, mostly hunters love staying on the mountain of Kukavica throughout the year."²²

Kukavica Mountain is the jewel of southern Serbia. There is neither a single factory, nor any pollutant in the mountain nor in the surrounding area of ten kilometers in diameter. Therefore, this mountain is a permanent habitat of many animal and plant

species and nature lovers consider it as a "fresh-air spa". Once you visit the mountain of Kukavica it embraces you in her arms and for many years which makes a great tourism potential. Two river gorges of particular interest are the following: Sićevačka klisura gorge and Grdelica gorge as they are considered as great attractions of Southern Serbia.

This area is known for its beauty, created by nature for centuries, and the Devil's Town (Đavolja Varoš) is an example of a nature monument located in the south of Serbia, 27 km south-east of Kuršumlija, 98 km southwest of Niš and 288 km away from Belgrade.

This monument of nature is composed of two natural rare world phenomena: the earth figures, i.e. specific forms of relief of ornamental beauty and the two springs of very acidic water with a high mineral content. These two rare natural phenomena can be observed together in the Devil's Town and hence they are considered as a real wonder of nature. The attractiveness of the two spectacular wonders of nature is complemented by the surrounding natural environment that can be depicted as rather harsh, almost mystical, but at the same time it is picturesque and timid, just as the remains of the town, old church, cemetery, and several interesting mining pits". This attraction is luring the attention of anyone that with the spirit of a tourist.

"The "Devil's Town" Location has been put under state protection since 1959, and it was declared the natural good of great importance by the The Decree of the Republic of Serbia in 1995 and placed in the first category as the *Monument of Nature*. A total of 67 hectares has been protected. Currently, there is a request submitted to the government of the Republic of Serbia to protect 1,014 ha."²³

Vlasinsko jezero lake²⁴ is located in the municipality of Surdulica, on the former plateau of Vlasina and it originated from the mud, peat soils, reeds, cane, clay and open water surface in certain parts. Historical records mentioning the Vlasina plateau date back to the

²² /www.pancomp.net/srbija/kukavica

²³ /www.djavalja varos.com

²⁴ /www.vlasinsko jezero.com

eighteenth century and they have been known as the Vlasina muds or peat bogs because of the accumulated peat and mud resulting from erosion of rivers. In this way, wetlands have been established in the 20 km long canyon and it was filled with quicksand in some places especially along the flow of the Vlasina.

A dam was built on the site where the muds used to be and an artificial lake was created, known as Lake Vlasina in the fifties of the last century.

The lake is now very picturesque water body, surrounded by the mountains of Gramada, Vardenik and Čemernik; it attracts weekend visitors and tourists at a high altitude of 1,213 m. The so-called floating islands, occurring when the water level of the lake are high is a unique feature of the lake. There islands are made of peat, product of the centennial decomposition of the moss.

The lake water color varies from gray-blue near the coast to dark blue in the middle of the lake, with green coastal areas and it creates special color images of the Vlasina landscape.

Vlasinsko jezero lake is bordered by the winding plateau resembling a vast carpet of green meadows, pastures and forests hiding diverse flora and fauna, while the high mountains above the lake embrace a few villages hidden between the clear mountain streams and brooks running through the wooded gorges. The mountains of Čemernik and Vardenik are particularly distinctive compared to other mountains surrounding the lake. Clean mountain air, near the water of the lake is full of Ozone and is known as a very favorable "fresh-air spa" often visited by the people staying in the area.

This indicates the enormous potential for the organised tourism not only around the lake, but also in the area of the Vlasina plateau, where the population is still lively and the people are still attached to live in this region.

Thermal springs and spas:

Niška Banja is a settlement in the city of Niš, with over 4,000 inhabitants. It is among the most developed spas in Serbia, holding the

reputation of a relatively well developed healing center with solid financial performance and favorable geographical position because of the proximity to urban areas. Natural healing factors distinctive for in Niška Banja are mild continental climate, mineral waters, natural mineral mud and medicinal gases.

Healing waters come from the five sources, belonging to the group of alkaline earth homeothermae (36 - 38 ° C), slightly mineralized, with low radioactivity and capacity of 56 liters/second.

Vranjska Banja spa is located near Vranje, on the slopes of Besna Kobila Mountain, surrounded by the picturesque greenery in the valley of river Banjštica. It is about 340 km away from Belgrade, about 100 km away from Skopje, and only a few kilometers from the highway. Curative waters of this spa are classified in the group with the low content of sulfur, and in the group of alkaline and saline hot thermal waters rich in iron. The temperature of the water springs is among the highest in Europe and ranges from from 94 to 110 degrees Celsius. An artificial lake of Prvonek is only a few kilometers away from the spa is and about 60 kilometers away from the Vlasinsko jezero lake.

Bujanovačka Banja spa is located in the south of Serbia, along the road and rail route Belgrade-Skopje, about 2.5 km from Bujanovac. It is situated 360 km away from Belgrade, and 14 km away from Vranje. This part of Vranje basin is situated in the upper flow of the South Morava River, at an altitude of 400 m. The thermo-mineral waters of this spa belong to the category of sodium hydrocarbonate, fluoride, sulfide and carbonic acid hyperthermal waters. The water temperature is 43 ° C at the source. Bujanovac mud is of volcanic origin and it is considered to be among the best in the world. It has tripple effect during the treatment including mechanical, thermal and pharmacological. Bujanovačka Banja spa is the only spa in the country applying the modern healing methods such as using of natural carbon dioxide gas in the treatment of various ailments. The healing is performed by combining various medical treatments using the medicinal features of natural factors – thermo-mineral waters, healing mud - peloid and natural gas.

The following ailments can be treated in Bujanovačka Banja spa: rheumatic diseases (chronic rheumatism, Bekhterev disease, joint arthrosis, spondylosis, discopathy), post injury conditions, chronic digestive diseases, skin diseases (eczema, psoriasis), gynecological disorders, neurological disorders (central and peripheral paralysis, neuralgia and ischialgia).

Kuršumlijska Banja spa is surrounded by well-wooded slopes of the Kopaonik Mountain (2,017 m) from all sides and it is located 11 km southwest of Kuršumlija in Southern Serbia. The surrounding forested slopes and heights are at an ideal altitude (570-900 m) and the position is in the dry sheltered side of the mountain with no fog and strong winds. This spa resort is located at 432-448 m above sea level in the valley of Banjska River (the right tributary of Toplica River), about 276 km from Belgrade if travelling via Kruševac, 76 km from Niš and 77 km from Priština. This spa has four types of water that differ in chemical composition and hard water features (sulfur, carbon acid, alkaline and iron waters), they have different temperature (14 ° - 67 ° C) and they are being exploited from a dozen of sources. The waters that are actively used for therapeutic purposes (drinking, swimming, gentle pads and spraying) are sodium hydro carbonate, fluoride and sulphide hyperthermal waters (67 ° C). Peloid - thermo medicinal mud is also being used in this spa. The small town of Kuršumlija is nearby the Kuršumlijska Banja spa, and this place has been famous as the first capital of Stefan Nemanja, founder of the Dynasty of Nemanjić and he commissioned construction of the first two monasteries here: St. Nicholas and St. Mary.

Lukovska Banja spa is located in the south of Serbia, on the eastern slopes of Kopaonik. The spa has a pleasant temperate climate since it is located 681 m above sea level, being the highest spa in Serbia, surrounded by peaks of over 1,000 m high, and. Lukovska Banja spa is characterized by an abundance of mineral water, pristine wooded nature of Kopaonik and crystal clear air.

It is one of the most resourceful spas in the country based on the number of mineral water springs of varying chemical composition

and temperature of the waters, and their abundance (more than 100 l/s).

Prolom Banja spa is located in the south of Serbia, on the wooded slopes of the Radan Mountain. It is primarily known for its natural mineral water "PROLOM" belonging to the rare group of waters with high balneological values. This spa is in the vicinity of the natural wonders of the "Devil's Town", Lazarica church and ethno-cultural buildings and restaurants, and it is suitable not only for medicinal tourism, but also for tourism in general.

Cultural and historical monuments and sites

The area of south Serbia is rich in cultural and historical heritage in the form of archaeological and historical monuments. Some of the sites can be highlighted based on the closest cities:

The City of Niš is considered as the oldest city on the Balkans based on the historical narratives because of its geographical position as a "gate" between the East and the West. It used to be a Roman fortress on the way to Byzantium, whereas today it is the capital of Southern Serbia.

Emperor Constantine, who built a luxury residence therein, was born in this city, and thus Niš became one of the most important administrative centers. Many wars have been led in and for this city, so that it was several times destroyed and rebuilt throughout history. The Hun nomads had almost nearly dismembered the entire city during the times of the siege. Byzantine Emperor Justinian the Great renovated it in the mid IV century and named it Naissopolis. "As the city is located on the road to Constantinople, the Crusaders were repeatedly passing through the city during their campaign against Byzantium.

Stefan Nemanja, the great ruler of the Serbian state met Frederich Barbarossa I during the Second Crusade in the summer of 1189".²⁵

Important historical monuments of the city of Niš:

²⁵/www.naissus.info/historija.htm

MEDIJANA - summer residence of Emperor Constantine;

FORTRESS of NIŠ -Turkish building from 1723;

ČEGAR - Monument in the honour of Stevan Sindelić's death during the battle with the numerically much stronger Turkish army (3,000 Serbian soldiers versus 10,000 Turks on the hill);

ĆELE KULA - a monument built by the Turks from the skulls of Serbian warrior, as a warning to the Serbs after the death of Stevan Sindelić;

LIBERATION MONUMENT - horse statue in downtown Niš as a memorial for the Serbian soldiers fallen in wars (1874, 1877,1917 and 1918).

Pirot District²⁶ Cultural and historical monuments are numerous in this area and therefore only the most important ones are listed here as cultural heritage sites:

The house-museum of family Hristić – Museum of Ponišavlje;

Monument of the town of Pirot City;

Church of St. Paraskeva;

The building of BELA MEČKA (white bear) - cultural monument;

The Monastery of St.George;

The Monastery of Sukovo;

The Church of Pećinska;

The St. George's Church in the village of Osmakovo;

The Church of the Holy Nativity;

The Monument of the Pirot liberators from the Turks in the Pirot district;

The Tija bara;

The Church of St. Nicholas in Krupac;

The Monastery St. Mary – in Krupac and Visočka Ržana;

The Church of St. John in Krupac; and A number of cultural monuments. (kale – hill near Pirot from the fourteenth century).

Jablanica District²⁷, is famous for the following cultural and historical monuments:

The Monastery of Rudare;

The House of Bora Dimitrijević – Oiksla;

The Old Church of St. Mary;

The Monastery of Babičko,

The Church of the the Holy Assumption of St. Mary in Konopnica;

The House of Giga;

The Church of St. Apostle in Turekovac;

The Church St. Petka in Kumarevo;

The Monastery of Čukljenik;

The house of Đoka Shop;

Tthe house of National Hero Đuka Dinić;

The House of National Hero Kosta Stamenković;

The Church of the Holy Trinity;

The medieval village of Skobljic, etc.

Pčinja District²⁸ is rich in historical and cultural landmarks and the following are worthy of being mentioned:

The Marko Kale, the remains of a medieval fortress on the foundations from the Roman times. It is assumed that it was built by the Byzantine Emperor Justin I in the VI century (3 - 4 km north of Vranje);

²⁶ sr.wikipedia.org/sr-pirot

²⁷ www.trivago.rs/leskovac

²⁸ /www.vranj.org.rs/o gradu

St. Nicholas Church. (XIV century) founded by the Balšić brothers (Josif Pančić Street);

The Church of St. Petka (Crossed mosque), better known as "Krstata džamija". The Turks were attempting to reconcile the two religions by putting both the cross and the crescent on the top of the minaret (Street Crnogorska);

The Church of the Assumption of St. Mary in Sobina dating back to the times of the medieval Serbia. The Turks destroyed it and it was rebuilt in 1820 (Hadži Tomina Street);

Hammam (or 'Ammam) is an old Turkish bath, built in the late seventeenth century. Bora Stanković, the famous writer often mentioned it in his writings. (Street of the Fifth Congress),

The Pasha's House and Haremluk, which was built by a powerful Raif Bey Džinić in 1765. The first part of the building (National Museum) was "selamuk" room for men and the other (business center of Simpo Company) was the "haremluk" room for the women of pasha. (Street of the King Stefan the First-Crowned);

The Cathedral of the Holy Trinity dominated the whole area with several domes seen and since it was higher than the mosques, the Turks decided to destroy it. It was restored in 1858 due to the generous contribution from the citizens of Vranje. (Milutinovića Street No 26);

The Fountain of Đerenka has been constructed as a memorial to the unfortunate love between a Turk and a Serbian girl. A legend says that the Turks erected a monument to their favorite hero of Đerdelez, who failed to win the heart of a beautiful dark-eyed Serbian girl;

The White Bridge (from the XIX century) was built in 1844. It is also known as the "bridge of love" because, it was built in memory of an unfortunate love of a Turkish girl named Ayša and a Serbian shepherd named Stojan, according to a local legend (the Street of the Nine Jugović Brothers);

Šarena češma – colorful fountain was once in the city center and it was poetically depicted in an old song from Vranje. It was demolished long time ago and it was again

rebuilt in the nineties, but it is still being neglected;

The Building of the Municipal district of Vranje is among the most beautiful buildings of its kind and it is certainly the most beautiful building in the city. Bulgarian occupiers destroyed it twice between 1905 and in 1907 and it has been rebuilt later;

The Monument to the Liberators of Vranje (Uncle Mitke's Street) was built just before the May coup d'etat in 1903. It is the work of the great sculptor Simeon Roksandić but representing a wounded warrior, though without his arms and rifle, he is proudly breaking the Turkish flag under his foot;

The Church of St. Petka in Šapranac is a monument to the atrocities from the Bulgarian – Serbian wars;

The Memorial Mausoleum of the First World War;

The Revolution Monument;

The Monument of Borislav Stanković in the City Park;

The Monument of a famous trumpet player - Bakija Bakić;

The Bust of Father Justin Popović in the City Park;

The Bust of Đorđe Tasić in the City Park;

The Bust of Dr. Franja Kopša in the City Park;

The Memorial Plaque of Đorđe Tasić in the building of the District Court;

The Memorial Plaque of Karađorđe;

The Memorial Plaque of Governor Petar Bojović;

The historical value of the Monastery of St. Prohor Pčinjski is not to be undermined. It is located on the banks of the river Pčinja in a very picturesque area, where the Mediterranean climate is also reaching its northern frontier;

The monastery St. Stevan in G. Zapska and several other places in the region of Vranje are also very attractive.

Events and Cultural Heritage

Events tourism is such a type of tourist offer where the content of the manifestations itself has its own tourist value. Several places have many events to offer thanks to their rich history and they can all serve as a basis for the development of event tourism. Events held at the central city areas and in the surrounding environment both express the richness and diversity of folk art based on using the combination of old and traditional to develop new and modern elements of culture, art and the overall creativity. Cultural events and various happenings are an integral part of the tourist offer of the specific area. Besides the cultural events, economic manifestations are also being organized in the form of fairs or as traditional gatherings for presentation of the creativity. Thus, certain events that traditionally organized in the cities are listed below:

The City of Niš²⁹:

International Students' Folklore Festival includes representatives of student groups from Universities in Serbia in addition to its program dedicated to international guests. Over 500 domestic and foreign participants are showing their arts and programmes during the five days of the festival at five different locations in and around the city. The festival is important because it creates new contacts and it is an opportunity for a real cultural exchange among many participants from different cultural backgrounds, gathered in one place every year. The guest performers are participating at the receptions in the City Council, Universities and in all the Municipalities of the partners of the festival. The guests are attending the guided cultural city tours during the day. Musical gatherings with guests and hosts of the Festival are organized every night in the University Yard from 16 to 22 h;

The European Review Exhibition of Serbian Folklore from diaspora and Serbs in the region. This traditional event brings more than 3,000 people from diaspora to Niš during the two days of competition and competition

programme. The participants are presenting how they nurture the best examples of Serbian tradition, in the countries where they are coming from;

The European two-day festival of Serbian folklore is held in Niš and it brings dozens of participating folk ensembles from a number of countries (not a fixed number). The Niš City and Student Cultural Center initiated a unique idea three years ago to make contribution to the celebration of 1,700 annual of the Edict of Milan in the year of the Great Jubilee by hosting the folk festival in the very the City of Niš by the citizens of Niš;

The Days of the St. Emperor Constantine and Empress Helena;

International Choir Festival;

The Burek Pie Days;

NIMUS - Classical Music Festival, traditionally held in Niš for 35 years;

Film Festival held at the Summer Stage in Niš;

Southeast Serbia Trade Fair of Civil Societies held in Niš;

The Fair of Tourism and Active Vacation in Niš.

The City of Leskovac³⁰:

Folk Festival for retirees from Leskovac;

The Traditional Event Barbeque is held every year in Leskovac in fall.

The City of Pirot³¹:

Given the rich tradition of Pirot and its renowned brands (carpet, kačkavalj cheese, pottery, roasted Pirot lamb, Pirot flat sausage), various kinds of cultural events, from culinary to ethnographic, it has great resources for improving the tourism offer and stay of guests. The following events are of great importance:

The Fair of the Flat Pirot Sausage;

The Book and Graphics Fair;

²⁹ /www.evropska-smotra-2013.com

³⁰ / www.google.com/webhp

³¹ / www.srbija.travel/kalendar-dogadjaja

The Fair of Fishing and Hunting;

The Fair of Bee Products;

The Pirot "jagnjijada" (baked lamb) Festival;

The Scientific Research Camp of Old Mountain;

Festival "Refreshment";

The Fair of the Dishes from Stara Planina Mountain;

The Pirot Cultural Summer;

International Folk Festival;

Art Colony in the Village of Temska;

The Nišava River Rafting;

The Rafting of Vladikine ploče (Vladika plates);

The Festival of Grill Masters of the Pirot Barbeque;

The Traditional Fair of Pirot;

International Fishing Competition using Fishing Bobber Technique;

The Fish Pot in Pirot;

Pasuljijada – Beans dish Festival.

Events in Vranje³²

Bora's Week;

Bora's Theatre Days;

Ethno Fair Vranje;

International Children's Animation Film;

Workshop (IDRAF) and Zlatni Puž (Golden Snail);

Justin's Preaches;

International Workshop of Animation Movies;
Memorial of Bakija Bakić;

The Old days; and

Saint Sava's Week.

Human Resources

Southern Serbia, in particular the observed sites, has people who would and who might get involved in tourism. Making reference to rural tourism, especially in the light of mountains and villages but also in the light of other tourist modalities, such as: adventure, sports and recreation, health, education and conference tourism, we have the first-line managers and agents but also the average managers and top managers able to deal with inventive and creative activities. However the lacking elements are the ability to provide the necessary resources developing at least minimal infrastructure and motivating of the target groups. It is necessary for all the social communities, particularly the specific institutions and departments to better understand the potentials of tourism as a serious segment and to address its development.

Conclusion

It is noticable from the presented elements, without hesitation, that South Serbia possesses an abundance of natural tourist resources, especially in the form of spectacular mountain beauties, providing attraction for meeting the needs of all kinds of mentalities. This region is an area where one can find peace in the pristine nature and adoring odours of various medicinal plants and where adventurers can test courage by climbing the mountains or in other forms of sports activities if they are physically and mentally fit and healthy, but they can also relax their souls and bodies. The spas are ideal for finding natural curing therapies and the peace for the mind.

South Serbia is attractive as it offers opportunities for familiarizing with the history of the people, folklore and culture and opportunities for experiencing the

³² /www.manifestacije.com/manifestacije-dogadjaja

pleasurable hospitality of Serbian hosts. Natural resources are abundant, just as the human resources and this makes great potential together because it is a pleasure to host interested guests and offer them food, drinks, and more importantly to show them the culture and open their souls. There is a lack of entrepreneurial mind for all this, just as there is not enough initiative for business readiness, for investments in infrastructure.

„Regardless of the fact that it is a very difficult economic situation, funds are always available for promising ideas that guarantee making profit, if a beginner in the business is not able to realize their ideas otherwise. Associations of small entrepreneurs need to be set up with the sole task of funding the good ideas and programmes, which would consequently motivate young people and those able to commit to the creation of inventive ideas. „33

In case of providing these, safe profit would be ensured even beyond the foreseen expectations. It is a must to understand that a tourist is an individual with greater purchasing power and refined taste, thirsting for new knowledge about the history, culture and the lifestyle of the people in the exotic regions. Tourist wants to spend, to respect and to be respected. In other words, tourist understands correctly both the life and time and these factors are not reversible once they are exhausted.

It is necessary to invest in promotion tourism and to create tourist brand if we are to develop tourism. Particular landscapes, spas and natural beauties need to be sorted out based on the preferences which they certainly have. Further attempts are needed in the direction of discovering, selecting and presenting the abundant resources attractive for the

tourists. Promotion needs to be understood correctly and it should be directed towards specific target groups. It is widely known that no one is ready to buy a dollar for 80 cents if the offer is not advertised.

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