

CROSS-BORDER STRATEGY

FOR A CULTURE HERITAGE - FRIENDLY TOURISM ENVIRONMENT



Project CB006.2.23.044

**„A CULTURE HERITAGE-FRIENDLY TOURISM IN CROSS-BORDER
REGION BULGARIA -MACEDONIA“**

**This project is co-financed by European Union through the Interreg-IPA
CBC Programme Bulgaria-The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.**



January 2020

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the present strategic document (the Strategy) is to define the essence, characteristics and significance of the cultural heritage in the target cross-border region. To reveal the peculiarities and prerequisites for tourism based on the cultural heritage of the area and study the opportunities for developing this type of tourism, as well as the extent of utilization of cultural heritage sites. To identify new models of realistic, applicable and heritage-friendly activities in the tourism sector. To define measures for joint tourism interpretation and use for the purposes of tourism.

The scope of the Strategy is the cross-border region, comprising the administrative District of Kyustendil from Bulgarian side and the North-East Planning Region from the side of North Macedonia. This includes the territories of the following 15 municipalities:

- in Bulgaria (9 municipalities): Bobov Dol, Boboshevo, Dupnitsa, Kocherinovo, Kyustendil, Nevestino, Rila, Sapareva Banya, Treklyano
- in North Macedonia (6 municipalities): Kriva Palanka, Kratovo, Rankovce, Kumanovo, Lipkovo and Staro Nagorichane.

The working methods include distant research of available information sources in Bulgaria and North Macedonia: municipal development plans, existing tourism development programmes, web-sites of various organizations and institutions, project reports and others; consultations with key stakeholders from the area; field visits with the purpose of checking and completing information, as well as performing expert assessment of the potential of precise cultural heritage sites to become part of tourism development and hence – to be included in the present Strategy.

ANALYSIS OF THE ESSENCE, CHARACTERISTICS AND IMPORTANCE OF CULTURAL HERITAGE IN THE TARGET CROSS-BORDER REGION. ROLE OF CULTURAL TOURISM IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CROSS-BORDER REGION

SYSTEM OF CULTURAL RESOURCES IN THE TARGET CROSS-BORDER REGION

The cross-border region defined above is exceptionally rich in cultural resources of all types, both historical and contemporary. As the focus of the present Strategy is the development of an appropriate environment for tourism development, in the analysis of the system of resources we have taken into account mostly those which possess real tourism potential.

Cultural-and-historical resources

A. Archaeological sites

Rock niches, village of Babinska Reka, Bobov Dol Municipality

Allegedly related to some Thracian cult practices; they are rather large niches dug into the rocks in the locality of Duralinko near the village. The site has not been studied so far.

Pre-historic settlement in the locality of Chardako, village of Slatino, Boboshevo Municipality

The settlement is located on the banks of Dzherman River and dates back to the Eneolithic Era, 5th-4th millennium BC. Archaeological excavations have taken place at the end of the last century and the findings from them can be seen in the museum collection in the town of Boboshevo.

Late Roman fortress with medieval tower, town of Dupnitsa

The locality is known among local people as The Tower. The fortress was built in the 5th-4th century BC on a hill at the banks of Dzherman River. Local legends have it that the keep had at least 5-6 towers. The site was abandoned in the 12th century AD, although there is a local legend telling of the defense against Ottoman Turks and the consequent destruction of the fortification. Here one can also find an ossuary of about 1200 killed Bulgarian soldiers in the Balkan Wars. During excavations in the periods 1993-95 and 2009-2012, they discovered many precious artifacts. A designated Monument of Culture in a procedure of receiving the statute “of national significance”.

Early Christian basilica with a medieval church, village of Cherven Breg, Dupnitsa Municipality

Since 2019, the site carries the statute of a Monument of Culture of National Significance. The basilica bears the name of St. Spas and has been dated to the 4th-6th century AD. It was a part of a monastery complex and was destroyed by an earthquake. What one can see today on the spot is a later medieval temple built over the remnants of the older one. Nearby they have marked a necropolis and a settlement which existed from late Roman epoch to the Middle Ages.

Neolithic settlement at the village of Mursalevo, Kocherinovo Municipality

A very special site from the 7th-5th millennium BC, covering an area of over 20 decares on the banks of Struma River. It was an exceptionally big settlement for its time; more than 60 buildings have been registered. What is very special here is the existence of urban planning in the construction of houses and streets.

Pautalia Fortress, town of Kyustendil

Monument of Culture of National Significance dating back to the end of the 4th – beginning of 5th c. AD. This was the citadel of the Roman town of Pautalia which existed all the way to the Middle Ages and the conquering of these lands by the Ottoman Empire. The fortress covers an area of 2.12 ha, 117 x 175 m. It has 14 towers altogether - circular, triangular and rectangular, and two gates. The main gate is

located in the eastern wall, close to the main road. The fortress walls were 1.6 to 3 m thick and probably up to 10 m high, with the towers reaching 12 m. Restorations have been made within a project of the Kyustendil Municipality.

Roman Baths, town of Kyustendil

An Archaeological Monument of National Significance from the 2nd-3rd century AD. The baths were probably part of a larger complex called Asklepion. They cover an area of 3000 sq. m. and are rectangular in shape. Nine of the premises have been explored and six exhibited. They all have a water-supply system (called hypocaust) and use the warm mineral springs. The floors and walls were decorated with marble tiles; niches and pools were constructed at some places. These baths are the second in size which have been discovered on the territory of Bulgaria and the most interesting in terms of construction techniques and organization.

Ancient Thracian sanctuary called The Cross, town of Rila

It is actually located outside the city but close to it and is related to many local legends and myths; most of them speak of ritual practices (incl. sacrifices to the gods) performed by Thracian priests in the time when a Roman settlement called Sportela stood on the spot of today's town of Rila. In the vicinity, they have discovered finds from the same period, mostly pottery. The legends are also related to the nearby rocks of The Horseman and The Bee and eventually with the existence of a sacred spring, curative stones and others.

Pre-historic settlement in the locality of Kremenik, town of Sapareva Banya

It has been dated to the 6th millennium BC and covers periods of the Early Neolith, the Bronze and Iron Ages, through to the Middle Ages. Many finds have been made of ceramics, such as various pots, weights for vertical looms, anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figurines, etc.

Roman town of Germaneya, town of Sapareva Banya

A huge for its time and thriving Thracian and Roman city which existed on the spot of today's Sapareva Banya at the end of the 1st millennium BC and the beginning of the 1st millennium AD. It is known that the city was expanded and fortified additionally during the 6th century AD but soon after that was broken and Slav tribes settled on the spot. During the Ottoman Rule, Germaneya was just a small village of farmers. Unfortunately, today there is very little visible from the ancient town on the surface although it has been designated as a Monument of Culture of National Significance.

Medieval fortress at the village of Dragoychintsi, Treklyano Municipality

It is located at about 650 m from the village in the locality of Kulata (the Tower) which was so called because of the only remaining construction from the old fortress, namely a rectangular tower. One can also see traces of the fortress walls which were built of granite and gneiss. Nearby there was a settlement with an Early-Christian basilica and other buildings which are now destroyed. The fortress was very well protected as it was inaccessible from three sides due to the steep slopes and could only be accessed from the north-west where there was a fortress moat.

Drezga site, village of Lopate, Lipkovo Municipality

A necropolis from Roman times, tied to an existing nearby travel and customs station, according to an inscription found on the spot. There are also traces of a later human presence during the Middle Ages. They have also discovered golden and other jewelry, ceramic and glass pots.

Kisela Voda locality, close to the village of Lipkovo

This is an insufficiently studied site; this is where the so-called Lipkovo Mummies originate from – burials from the Late Hellenic period with the bodies in the oak coffins being exceptionally well preserved. The first three discovered tombs during the construction of the road to Lipkovo in 1957 were only reported and re-buried by the workers; they were never found again. An archaeological team made a second attempt in 1963 when one burial of an elderly man was discovered but the 'mummy' is now in a bad condition during bad treatment in the very beginning. It is claimed that three

other ‘mummies’ have been found later on but taken for studying to Belgrade from where their traces have been lost.

Complex of Golemo Gradishte,,village of Konyuh, Kratovo Municipality

The largest settlement from the 6th c. AD in Northeast Macedonia with an area of 17 hectares. The acropolis of the town is studied best, revealing streets, water reservoir and various buildings. Most interesting are the monks’ cells dug into the rocks. Four churches have also been found up to now; three dating from the 6th c. and one from the 9th-11th c. with a second level of construction from the 14th-16th c. Two of them are well studied – the so-called Rotunda and the Episcopal Basilica. The later church of Sveti Gorgi is a designated Monument of Culture protected by Law.

Pisan Kamen locality, village of Shlegovo, Kratovo Municipality

Rock monk cells with traces of paintings; people still come here nowadays to spend the night in order to get healed from some heavy disease.

Tsotsev Kamen locality, village of Shopsko Rudare, Kratovo Municipality

The site is dated to about 20,000 years ago and presents a large rock with several caves. Inside, there are the remains of a Paleolithic house. In the Neolithic period, there was a whole settlement here. During the Bronze Age, here used to exist a sanctuary dedicated to Dionisius, the God of wine. This is shown by the three stone tubs discovered in the second-level cave that are typical for the worshipping of grapes and wine. Above the cave, there was a stone basin that was filled with water at certain times of the year for ceremonial purposes. The site had a watch spot, and two well-fortified gates. At the back, archaeologists have discovered wonderful samples of rock art. The whole site is under the protection of the State.

Tsarkvishte-Ramnishte locality, village of Klechovce, Kumanovo Municipality

A site which has not been fully studied and uncovered. An inscription found on the spot suggests this was the Roman customs station of Visianum. A basilica from the 6th century has been partially dug out; there is also a necropolis nearby.

Gradishte locality, village of Opila, Rankovce Municipality

Late Roman fortification close to an old Roman trade road with housing quarters, and tunnels and niches dug into the soft rock, presumably built in the 5th or 6th century AD. The remains of a water reservoir have been found at the foot of the hill. In the western part of the site, there is also a necropolis, not explored well. Findings have also been collected from the locality, dating back to the 3rd and 4th century, and also to the Iron Age, 6th century BC.

Rovishte locality, village of Psacha, Rankovce Municipality

A late Roman settlement and necropolis where two important findings were made: a unique bronze statuette and a ceramic lamp of the Ephesus type, now exhibited at the National Museum of North Macedonia. Other remains from Roman times have been found in nearby localities of Vlashki Dol, Manastirishte, Gradishte, Dolno Lozye and Selishte.

Astronomic observatory of Kokino, Staro Nagorichane Municipality

It is located on the hill of Tatichev Kamen at 1030 m. above sea level, and has been discovered by accident in 2001. The site comprises volcanic rocks cut by weather and erosion during the centuries. This landscape was used as early as the Bronze Age (1800 BC) for astronomic observations. In 2010, the site was designated as a Cultural Monument of Special Importance.

Kostoperska Karpa, village of Mlado Nagorichane, Staro Nagorichane Municipality

The giant basalt rock also called Zhegligovski Stone has been designated as a Monument of Culture. The place was inhabited from the Neolith till the late Middle Ages. Drilling research of the hill has revealed a housing layer from the Eneolith, a defense wall, an Early-Christian basilica from the 6th century and tombs from the 4th-6th century which have been re-used manifold during the ages and some very interesting finds have been made there. Studies have not been finalized yet.

Gradishte, village of Pelince, Staro Nagorichane Municipality

Insufficiently studied and uncovered location from the Bronze Age (3rd-2nd millennium BC), with the only ritual site or sanctuary from that period currently found in North Macedonia. There is also a later settlement from the Iron Age (about 8th century BC).

B. Architectural sites

Clock tower, town of Dupnitsa

Built in 1782 as a defense tower with 4 battle slits. In the period 1790-1800 was turned into a clock tower at the order of the local Ottoman ruler. Restored in 1979, and in 1993 the clock mechanism was replaced and modernized.

Town of Kyustendil

Ahmed Bey Mosque - Monument of Architecture and Culture of National Significance from the 15th century. According to some sources, it was built on top of the remains of an older Christian temple bearing the name of Sveta Nedelya. The mosque was reconstructed and expanded in 1734. Today, the original exterior can be seen only in the preserved arcade over the entrance with three small domes. The outer walls are decorated with bricks - something typical for the medieval Bulgarian architecture. It is currently used for various exhibitions by the Regional Historical Museum.

Dervish Bath – Monument of Architecture and Culture of Local Significance from 1556. The bath was used actively for over 400 years until 1992. It was one of nine similar baths existing on the territory of the town. Two brick inscriptions on the façade – 1604 and 1835 – show the dates of supposed renovation works on the building. It was completely restored in 2005 and is a part of the National Architectural and Archaeological Reserve of Pautalia – Velbazhd – Kyustendil designated in 1977.

Pirkova Tower - Monument of Architecture and Culture of National Significance, probably from the end of the 14th – beginning of the 15th century. The name comes from the Greek ‘pirgos’ which actually means ‘tower’. The tower is rectangular, 8.25 m x 8.35 m and height of 15 m. The ground floor was once used as a store-room. The first floor has an entrance from the north side, a stone fireplace on the south side, and two vents. The second floor was used for housing and has a fireplace, 2 niches and

again some vents. The third floor had defensive functions. According to experts Pirkova Tower is a fine example of the architectural models of the medieval town of Velbazhd. It was restored in 2009.

Among the valuable architectural monuments of Kyustendil are also Chifte Bath, an old Turkish Bath that was first built in 1489 over the ruins of a Roman Asklepion; the present-day building dates from 1910, and the Fatih Sultan Mehmed Mosque built in 1531, with a very specific architecture. Of interest is also the Iron Bridge over Banshtitsa River also known as The Female Bridge as it is decorated with four white-stone sculptures of beautiful women.

Kadin Bridge, village of Nevestino

It is a Monument of Architecture of National Significance built in 1470. The impressive bridge over Struma River is 100 m. long and has 5 arches, the biggest one in the middle. It is made of giant stone blocks and covered with granite plates. In each of the columns, there is a 'window' left open for the water to pass when the river is high. A granite plate on the eastern railing of the bridge quotes the year of its construction and the name of Isak Pasha who commissioned that construction. It has beautiful lighting in the night adding to its attractiveness.

Babinska Mahala Quarter, town of Rila

A complex of preserved Renaissance urban houses, 27 altogether, designated as Cultural Monuments. In the past, those were the homes of the nuns from Orlitsa Nunnery (see below). The complex also comprises a cell school from 1830 and the cemetery church of Sveti Arhangel Mihail.

Town of Kratovo

It is a Cultural Monument protected by Law. Kratovo is often called "An Open-Air Museum", or "The Town of Towers and Bridges". In the center of the town one can see the so-called Ayduchka Charshia (the Main Street), with the typical craftsmen and merchants' workshops and small streets called Sokatsi going in different directions. Local masters offered pottery, metal-processing, sewing and other services; making of

shoes and horse saddles. 6 of the former 13 towers of the town have been preserved to the present day. It is believed that all the towers were connected via secret underground tunnels but none of them unfortunately survives today. The towers were used by the Ottoman rulers and abandoned after the Liberation. Today they carry the names of their last inhabitants (Simikeva, Zlatkova, Saat, Srezska, Krasteva, and Atsikostova). The town has 12 bridges altogether. The best known among those is Radin Bridge which is renovated today. From the preserved houses with traditional architecture, we should mention the Saray House, Bidikova House, the old Turkish Hamam (Bath), the Turkish prison and others.

Town of Kriva Palanka

There are about 30 individual samples of traditional architecture in the town center (Starata Charshia), all in rather poor condition. The traditional local urban house from the 19th c. which also had its influence on the rural house, had a stone ground floor and an upper floor of wood-and-hedge walls covered with mud and straw.

Zabernyak Memorial, near the town of Kumanovo

A large monument built of basalt and concrete in 1937 on the spot of the so-called Kumanovo Battle during the First Balkan War and commemorating those who died in that battle. The high tower was later destroyed and today one can only see the base which is also quite impressive.

C. Religious sites

Sveti Teodor Tiron Church, village of Novoselyane, Bobov Dol Municipality

Built in the period 1860-69; the murals are the work of masters from the Samokov Art School and quite in a bad shape today. The wood-carving decoration is of high artistic value.

Medieval monastery, village of Golema Fucha, Bobov Dol Municipality

It is located in the locality of Manastiro (the Monastery) or Tsarkvishteto (the Church). Today one can only see ruins and fragments of the painted walls of the monastery

church. There are no written documents; local legends say that the complex was rather big and important in the past.

Monastery of the village of Gorna Koznitsa, Bobov Dol Municipality

Located in the mountain above the village; what is left of it today are mostly ruins. It is believed the monastery dated back to the 16th-17th century and the fragments found on the spot from the church suggest the latter was beautifully decorated. In the vicinity, there is also an Ayazmo (sacred spring) which is claimed to cure eye diseases.

Ruen Monastery of Sveti Yoan Rilski, village of Skrino, Boboshevo Municipality

A new and operating monastery, built in the period 1995-2002, developing literary activities. During the construction, they found remains of two older Christian temples, as well as a pagan sanctuary.

Sveta Bogoroditsa Church, town of Boboshevo

It was built in the period 1851-1862; of special value are the murals painted by the famous Bulgarian artist Stanislav Dospevski and his brothers. The building is a three-nave basilica of stone and bricks, rather impressive and expensive for its time. It is a designated Monument of Culture.

Sveti Atanasiy Church, town of Boboshevo

The church is believed to be late-medieval, probably from the very end of the 16th century but there is no exact dating. After the building of the church of Sveta Bogoroditsa, this one remained as a cemetery church; it is a small one-nave and one-apse construction. Expanded during the 18th century and the first third of the 20th century, its murals are in need of renovation today. The church is a designated Architectural and Artistic Monument of Culture of National Significance.

Sveti Ilija Church, town of Boboshevo

Built in 1678, it is also a one-nave and one-apse church made of stone. There are two layers of murals partially preserved – an earlier layer from the time of the temple's

construction and a later one from the 19th century. It is a Monument of Culture of National Significance.

Sveti Todor Church, Selishte locality near the town of Boboshevo

There are some arguments as to when the church was built; most experts believe it was between the 12th and 14th centuries but some think it is earlier, from the 9th century. A cross-domed stone church with a semi-round apse, it has two layers of murals inside and there are again arguments about their dating. The lower one dates probably back to the time of the church's construction while the second might be from the 17th century. In the 60s of the previous century, the church was 'packed' in a wooden coat with the purpose of protection until time comes for its restoration. This hasn't happened yet and the temple is in a very bad condition despite the fact that it has been designated as a Monument of Culture of National Significance.

Boboshevo Monastery of Sveti Dimitar, Ruen Mountains, Boboshevo Municipality

A non-functional monastery from the 9th-10th century, renovated in the 15th century. From the old monastery, only the church remains with its valuable murals, for which it has been designated as an Architectural and Artistic Monument of Culture of National Significance. The complex also included housing premises, kitchen, farming buildings, water mill, rakia-making device (rakia is strong Balkan type of alcohol) and others. The church itself is a small one-nave building with a semi-round apse. It is wholly decorated with murals from the 15th century, the work of masters from the Ohrid School of Art.

Sveta Petka Church, village of Vukovo, Boboshevo Municipality

It is supposed that the church was built in the beginning of the 16th century and painted at its end. A small stone building, with one nave and one apse. It was restored in the 80s of the 20th century. The murals whose authors are unknown are considered among the best samples of the late-medieval Bulgarian religious painting. Because of them, the church has been designated as an Artistic Monument of Culture of National Significance.

Sveti Nikola Church, village of Vukovo, Boboshevo Municipality

It is located in a small and hardly accessible ravine close to the village. Very similar to the church of Sveta Petka as both architecture and dating but the murals inside have been made by a different artist or artists. This church, too, is a designated Artistic Monument of Culture of National Significance but not well-maintained; the roof is in very bad condition and some of the priceless murals have already been lost.

Sveti Nikola Church, town of Dupnitsa

Built in 1844, supposedly over the remains of an older temple from the 14th century. An Architectural Monument of Culture, a three-nave basilica with internal domes. Of importance is the wood-carved iconostasis which is in itself an Artistic Monument of Culture. Some of the murals are the work of masters from the Debarsko and Samokov Schools of Art.

Tyurmeto Mosque, town of Dupnitsa

It is dated to the end of the 15th – beginning of the 16th century, built over the ruins of an older Christian temple. After the Liberation from Ottoman Rule, it was used as a prison and archaeological museum; currently an exhibition hall. Together with the nearby Okoliyska House (former Turkish town hall, now also an exhibition room), they have been designated as local Monuments of Culture.

Pokrov Bogorodichen Church, town of Dupnitsa

Built in 1816; an interesting fact is that the permission for construction was granted 20 years later and that is why the church is semi-dug into the ground and they used to work on it mostly at nights. In 1874, they built a Community Center (Chitalishte) next to the church; there one can also find the old school and the bell workshop. The bell tower was built in 1926, when the church was renovated. Of interest is also the commemorative plate of the local people who died in the Balkan Wars, built into the walls of the bell tower.

Sveti Velikomachenik Georgi Pobedonosets Church, town of Dupnitsa

It was built in the period 1888-1895 by local people; in honour of its 108th anniversary, the image of St. George was painted above its main entrance. Most interesting are the 12 big (2x1 m.) icons at the iconostasis which were brought from Kiev in Ukraine and are the only ones of their kind in Bulgaria.

Sveti Nikola Church, village of Cherven Breg, Dupnitsa Municipality

Built in 1874 over the ruins of an older temple. What remains from it now is the sacred spring (the Ayazmo) for which they claim that the water is curative. The murals inside have some artistic value, especially the one showing “The Baptizing of Tsar Boris”.

Sveti Nikola Church, village of Topolnitsa, Dupnitsa Municipality

Built in 1856 of stone. Of interest are the murals on the western outer wall and inside the temple, as well as the wood-carved iconostasis with the preserved original icons.

Sveti Prokopiya Church, village of Stob, Kocherinovo Municipality

The first church on that spot was constructed in 1393 according to a stone plate preserved from it and then enwalled in the newer temple from 1860. It was originally standing on a hill by the village but then moved stone by stone to its present location. It is a one-nave building and the only church in Bulgaria bearing the name of Sveti Prokopiya who is mostly known as a protector of newly-weds.

Uspenie Bogorodichno Bishop's Church with Cell School, town of Kyustendil

Monument of Architecture and Art of National Significance from 1816. It was constructed on the spot of a medieval church named Sveti Nikola. It is a three-nave pseudo-basilica with one apse and a wooden roof. In 1883, they added a bell-tower to the north of the church, rectangular in shape and 10 m in height. In 1933, two narthexes were added to the north and west, together with a candle-making workshop and ossuary. Of special value are the altar gates of the female compartment from the 16th-17th century., and some icons from the 19th century, work of masters from the Bansko School of Art. The old Cell School built in the second half of the 19th century

in the southern part of the churchyard, has now been restored and is being used for various cultural events.

Sveti Mina Church, town of Kyustendil

First built in 1859, the older church is a three-nave pseudo-basilica - a part of a monastery complex, with an underground chapel and a sacred spring (Ayazmo). In 1934, a newer church was built next to the older one, using the great cathedral of Sveti Aleksandar Nevski in Sofia as a model. The building is rather impressive, on two floors and richly decorated.

Sveti Dimitar Church, town of Kyustendil

It was built in 1864-65 and what is precious about it is its beautiful location amidst a green park and some of the icons that are the work of a painter from the Samokov School of Art.

Sveti Luka Monastery, village of Granitsa, Kyustendil Municipality

Monument of Culture of Local Significance from the 10th century. The monastery church is a one-nave one-apse building without a dome. The bell-tower is right next to it, as well as the dormitories; there is a small stone fountain in the yard. It was ruined several times and finally restored in the mid-20th century. The Monastery Holiday is celebrated on October 18th.

Sveta Troitsa Church, village of Gyueshevo, Kyustendil Municipality

Also known as The Ossuary, it was built in 1930 with the purpose to commemorate the Bulgarian soldiers and officers who died in the wars during the early 20th century.

Sveti Theodor Tiron Church, village of Sovolyano, Kyustendil Municipality

A one-nave church built in 1834 over the ruins of an older one. Of interest is the iconostasis (its structure and the icons themselves).

Sveti Petar i Pavel Church, village of Prekolnitsa, Kyustendil Municipality

It was built in 1848 and presents a three-nave basilica with a carved iconostasis. Its yard keeps remains from the former cell school and a baking oven.

Sveti Nikola Church, village of Slokoshtitsa, Kyustendil Municipality

It is a small church with one nave and one apse, with several layers of paintings – late Medieval, Renaissance and early 20th century.

Sveti Ivan Rilski Sanctuary, village of Garbino, Kyustendil Municipality

This is actually the cave where, according to local legends, the saint Ivan Rilski used to live for a while as a pilgrim. There is an inscription in the cave wall dated to the 12th century. A religious celebration is held here on every October 19th, the Day of St. Ivan Rilski.

Sveti Arhangel Mihail Church, village of Goranovtsi, Kyustendil Municipality

It is unknown when exactly they built the first church on that spot (about 2 km north of the village). It is supposed, however, that the first church was destroyed in the 12th century and then re-built probably somewhere in the 13th century. It is known that in the 16th century, the temple was part of a small monastery complex. The dating of the murals is also controversial – some experts quote the 14th century, and others – the 16th century. The building is small and made of stone, with one nave and one apse. It has been designated as an Artistic Monument of Culture of National Significance.

Sveti Arhangel Mihail Church, village of Vaksevo, Nevestino Municipality

It was built in 1863 out of stone. Two carved doors open to the west and north in stone arcades. On the western wall, another arcade is formed by the roof cornice. The church is a designated Monument of Culture.

Sveta Ana (Yana) Church, village of Smolichano, Nevestino Municipality

Built over the remains of a Medieval church with a rock niche where there is a small waterfall and a sacred spring (Ayazmo). It was renovated in 1888 and painted by a famous local artist. The decoration of the iconostasis is specific and quite valuable.

Sveta Troitsa Church, village of Rakovo, Nevestino Municipality

The church was built in 1884 as a three-nave temple, with wooden columns and ceilings. Of special value are the murals painted by a local artist, and especially the huge painting on the western façade covering it all. For that, the church has been designated as a Monument of Culture.

Rila Monastery of Sveti Ivan Rilski

This is the spiritual and tourist symbol of Bulgaria, and Ivan Rilski is among the most beloved Bulgarian saints ever. He is the founder of the monastery, somewhere in the first half of the 10th century. Since then, the place has always been a center of literacy and spirituality, honoured by all Bulgarian and later even Ottoman rulers. In the period 1334-35, a defense wall was built around the monastery, plus a church and tower in the yard, all funded by a donation of the local ruler Hrelyo Dragovol. Today we can only see the tower from that period which bears the name of the donor – Hrelyova Tower, 23 m. high, on 5 floors, with the small chapel of Preobrazhenie Hristovo on the last floor and the monastery bell added to it in 1844. The present church of Rozhdestvo Bogorodichno has been built on the spot of the medieval one in 1834 and it resembles the Athos churches in architecture and design. It was painted by the best Bulgarian artists at the time. We have to mention the nearby ossuary church of Vavedenie Bogorodichno which keeps the bones of all monks who ever lived in the monastery. It is not known when it was built exactly but the murals and wood-carvings date to the 18th century. The monastery is a Monument of Culture of National Significance and part of the UNESCO List of World Heritage.

The grave of St. Ivan Rilski, Rila Monastery

The remains of the saint have been moved several times in the course of history but where they believe his original grave was, that is near the pilgrim cave where he lived before founding the monastery, a church was built even back in 1746. In 1820, the present church was built on the same spot and was called Uspenie of Sveti Yoan Rilski (Assumption of the Saint). Nearby stands the so-called New Hermitage with the churches of Sveti Luka and Pokrov Bogorodichen.

Orlitsa Nunnery of the Rila Monastery

It is located at the very road to the Rila Monastery near the town of Rila. It is supposed to have been built in the 14th century. There are housing and additional premises; of interest is the church of Sveti Apostoli Petar i Pavel built and painted in 1478. Parts of these old murals are still visible at some places although the whole church was re-painted in 1863 by master Nikola Obrazopisov from the Samokov School of Art. This is also the year since when the Nunnery exists in its present appearance.

Pchelina Convent of the Rila Monastery

Located at about 4 km east of the monastery. There is a dormitory and a small church of Uspenie Bogorodichno from the end of the 18th century, very much similar to the church of Orlitsa Nunnery as architecture and painting.

Cemetery church of Sveti Arhangel Mihail, town of Rila

It dates to the 12th-13th century and is among the few cross-domed temples inserted in a square in Bulgaria. The old murals from that period have been concealed beneath a later layer of Renaissance paintings. Because of them, the church has been designated as an Artistic Monument of Culture of National Significance. In its yard, they built the first cell school of the region in 1830. Both are part of the Revival Period architectural complex of Babinska Mahala.

Sveti Nikola Church, town of Rila

Built in 1885. Of interest is the rare sample of medieval embroidery of the Epitaphos type. Here one can see the Bishop's Throne of the Sveti Arhangel Mihail Church, given as a donation in 1819.

Sveti Nikola Church, town of Sapareva Banya

Dates back to the 12th-13th century, renovated in 1937. The building is cross-domed with a semi-round apse; the murals are only partially preserved. In the 19th century, they discovered close by the foundations of a larger temple which gave the experts a reason to think that the present church was, for instance, a chapel adjacent to the

bigger one. It has been designated as a Monument of Culture of National Significance (artistic, architectural and construction).

Church of Sveti Chetirideset Machenitsi, town of Sapareva Banya

Built in 1859, a three-nave stone building with a broad semi-round apse. It was painted a bit later, in 1878-79. Of value is the wood-carved iconostasis with icons painted by Stanislav Dospevski. Many pilgrims come here only to see the miraculous icon of the Holy Mother.

Sveti Stefan Monastery, town of Sapareva Banya

The only monastery in Bulgaria bearing the name of that saint, it is located on an elongated terrace on the banks of Dzherman River and comprises a temple, housing premises and the chapel of Sveti Stiliyan Paflagonski with a sacred spring, Ayazmo. It is dated to the times of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom. Local people say that about 30 monks used to live here in the past and the place was the center of busy literary activity.

Monastery of Pokrov na Presveta Bogoroditsa, village of Resilovo, Sapareva Banya Municipality

Acting female monastery from the early 20th century with evidence of existing older religious sites on the spot. There is a church, housing and farming buildings; along the road one finds a sacred spring, Ayazmo, and the chapel of Sveti Duh. The monastery holiday is on October 1st.

Sveti Nikola Letni Church, village of Resilovo, Sapareva Banya Municipality

Built in 1806 on the spot of an older temple which has been proven by some specific archaeological finds. It is said that the Apostle of Liberty of Bulgaria, Vasil Levski, used to come here during his visits to the area.

Sveti Arhangel Mihail Monastery, village of Saparevo, Sapareva Banya Municipality

Dates to the second half of the 15th century; today we may only see the church with murals from the same period. The church has been expanded and renovated during the National Revival Period (1863). It was renovated several more times after that, the last time in 1997 when more buildings were added with the idea of restoring the monastery. It is, however, still non-acting.

Uspenie na Sveta Bogoroditsa Church, village of Saparevo, Sapareva Banya Municipality

It was built in the period 1861-1864 and its whole history is wrapped in legends and myths, starting with the setting of the construction site by angels who appeared in the dreams of a local man; ending with the obtaining of the Sultan's permission by the healing of his beloved wife. The church was erected on a hill and has a bell tower and clock. The wood-carvings and icons are the work of a master from the Bansko School of Art.

Sveti Yoan Bogoslov Church, village of Ovchartsı, Sapareva Banya Municipality

The church was built in 1881 and presents an excellent sample of the architectural, construction and artistic tradition of the Debarsko School of Art. Part of the icons are, on the other hand, samples of the Samokov School of Art. Of certain value is also the wood-carved iconostasis. The dome was added later in 1960. An older church existed here before together with a cell school.

Late-medieval church, village of Gabreshevtsi, Treklyano Municipality

There is no precise dating of this church; it is located in the village cemetery. A small one-nave building with a semi-round apse of stone. Almost destroyed, the preserved height of the walls is up to 1.70 m.

Late-medieval church, village of Cheshlyantsi, Treklyano Municipality

As with the church in Gabreshevtsi, there is no exact dating. The temple is located in the cemetery of Vishoritsa Neighbourhood. A small one-nave and one-apse church made of stone and mud. Half-destroyed, the preserved height of walls is up to 1 m.

Sveti Ilija Church, village of Dragoychintsi, Treklyano Municipality

Built in 1884, a small one-nave and one-apse building with a width of the stone walls of almost 1 m.

Sveti Gorgi Kratovski Church, town of Kratovo

The church was built in 1925 to commemorate the patron saint and keeper of the town – the Saint Gorgi Kratovski. He was born and raised in Kratovo. At the age of 18, he stood up to the conversion to Islam and was sentenced to death and burnt in the name of Christ in 1515. The church holiday is on the same day as the Day of Kratovo – 24 February.

Sveti Yoan Predtecha Church, town of Kratovo

The church was erected by master Andrey Damyanov from the region of Veles, and was renovated in 1836 with the adding of the outer narthex and the bell-tower. The church is a three-nave basilica with rectangular basis and 8-sided outer apse. The most remarkable feature in the church is the three-layered iconostasis with one large cross in the middle and two smaller on both sides, all carved beautifully. Some of the icons were painted at the end of the 19th century, others – in the beginning of the 20th century.

Sveti Nikolay Mirlikiyski – Chudotvorets Church, town of Kratovo

The church is a one-nave one-apse building with size 10.50 x 5.90 x 6.80 m, made of stone. It was probably built in the 17th c., destroyed and re-built many times. It is in its present state since 1848. The internal walls are painted; the carved iconostasis contains icons from the 16th c. In the late 19th c., a school was built next to the church known as The Old-Time School.

Osogovo Monastery of Sveti Yoakim Osogovski, town of Kriva Palanka

A Cultural Monument protected by Law, supposedly built in the 11th century. It is thought that the monastery was founded by the monk Theofan who brought the holy remains of St. Yoakim to this spot. The main monastery church of Sveti Yoakim was

probably first built in the late 13th century; the present-day building is the work of a famous master called Andrea Damyanov and dates from the 40s of the 19th century. Four painters worked on the church murals. The main church is a three-nave basilica with 12 domes (7 smaller and 5 bigger) and is made of stone from Rankovce Village. The other church - Rozhdestvo na Presveta Bogoroditsa – dates from the 11th century and was renovated first in the 16th century and then in the late 19th century. Most of the murals are from the later periods. The Monastery holiday is on August 28th (the Day of Holy Mother) and is attended by hundreds of pilgrims from Macedonia and Serbia. The monastery complex offers accommodation and catering. There is a small info-desk with souvenirs.

Church of Sveti Dimitri, town of Kriva Palanka

This is a three-nave pseudo-basilica with an open narthex to the west and northwest and short semi-round apse to the east. The murals are quite interesting, with natural panoramic and floral images. Next to the church is the Engerov House, where the first church school was opened in 1817. There is an interesting legend about the construction of the church and its donor, David Yerey. He got the permission to build a new church as big as an ox's skin – which they did, only cut the skin into stripes and tied them together in a rope 75 m. long.

Church of Sveti Nikola, village of Gradets, Kriva Palanka Municipality

The church was built in the year 1857; it is a one-nave construction with internal columns. Some of the icons were painted in 1869 while the murals were painted in 1876 by an artist of the Debarsko School of Art.

Hermitage of Sveti Yoakim Osogovski, village of Gradets, Kriva Palanka Municipality

According to the biography of St. Yoakim Osogovski, he used to live at this spot for a while in the second half of the 11th c. Now there is a monument dedicated to the saint on that spot, as well as a stage for various cultural events.

Church of Sveti Nikola, village of Tarnovo, Kriva Palanka Municipality

This is a monastery church with one-nave and a semi-round apse. There are two possible years of its construction – 1505 and 1605. In the 19th century, a closed porch was added to the western side of the church, and an open one – to the south. Of the murals, one must mention the Birth of Christ and the images of St. Nikola, St. Theodor Tiron and St. Theodor Stratilat, St. Yoakim Osogovski, and others. The iconostasis is also of interest with its composition and the seven icons.

Church of Sveti Theodor Tiron, village of Konopnitsa, Kriva Palanka Municipality

The church has an interesting architecture that is not typical for this area; it bears features that may be seen in some regions in Asia. It has an equilateral construction with stone walls and a dome made of straw and covered with lime tiles. According to legends, the construction plans were brought by the master-builders who were building a similar church in Romania at the time. Of interest are also the icons at the iconostasis painted in the 19th century. The place is also known for the custom of the Pilgrimage of the Brides (see below).

Sveti Nikola Church, town of Kumanovo

The construction was started in 1843 by the famous master Andrea Damyanov from the village of Papradishte near the town of Veles, and was finished in 1851. The building has three naves and is surrounded by spacious corridors with arcades, with a bell-tower over the narthex. Inside, there are galleries, one of which hosts an icon exhibition. The large iconostasis with carved royal gates and a huge gilded cross is remarkable. Attention has to be paid also the icons painted by the famous artist Dimitar Papradishki in the period 1937-38.

Sveta Troitsa Church, town of Kumanovo

It was built in 1902 at the initiative of the supporters of the Serbian Patriarchy; that is why the painted images inside belong mostly to Serbian saints. Close by, they have built a Patriarchy school.

Eski Mosque (the Old Mosque), town of Kumanovo

Built in 1532 in the then Turkish neighbourhood of Kumanovo called Orta Bunar. A little later, an administrative building (konak) and a prison were built nearby. The real name is Tatar Sinan Beg Mosque, Sinan Beg being the main benefactor of the construction. Of interest are the artistic decorations over the windows and the main entrance on the outer façade of the mosque.

Uspenie na Presveta Bogoroditsa Church, village of Mateyche, Lipkovo Municipality

Built around 1350, it is a cross-shaped five-domed church with a narthex, an example of a late-Byzantine church architecture. There is a stone monastery complex next to it, also dating to the 14th century. The icons in the church are the biggest preserved composition of this period and this kind in North Macedonia. Among the most important images are those of Tsaritsa Elena and Tsar Urosh whom this church is mostly related to.

Chalid Efendi Mosque, village of Slupchane, Lipkovo Municipality

It was built in 1415 and restored many times, the last one in 1994 when the minaret was renovated too.

Sveti Nikola Church, village of Opila, Rankovce Municipality

The church was built in 1853 as shown in the inscription on the western wall. It is a one-nave building with a semi-round apse and an open porch to the west, partially south. From the entrance, there are some stairs going upwards which is very rare for the churches from the Ottoman period. The construction materials are mostly stone and bricks.

Sveti Gorgi Church, village of Petralitsa, Rankovce Municipality

It is believed that the church dates back to the 17th century though it was renewed in the 19th century. The present internal decoration was also done at that time, more precisely in 1886 but everywhere one can see traces of the older murals. Of greatest value are actually the Royal Gates which are currently exhibited in Skopje.

Sveti Nikola Monastery Church, village of Psacha, Rankovce Municipality

The church is supposedly dating to 1355 (painted in 1365-1371) and built by the local nobleman Vlatko, one of the people close to the Serbian King Dushan. It was made from stone and bricks and the outer walls are richly decorated. Of the murals, one should mention the non-traditional images of St. Yoakim and St. Merkuri. More paintings were added in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The Monastery holiday is Ilinden when local people organize great celebrations.

Sveti Gorgi Church, village of Staro Nagorichane

It is believed that the first church was built on this spot in the period 1068-1071. In 1312-1313, the temple was fully renovated with a donation from the Serbian king Stefan Milutin. By design, it is a cross inside a rectangle with five domes. The inner decoration (the murals from 1316-1318) should be mentioned since those murals were the work of the artists of the same Serbian king – Mihaylo and Eutihy, and have great artistic value.

Sveta Petka Church, village of Mlado Nagorichane

It was built and painted in 1682. Located at the foot of the so-called Kostoperska Karpa (a giant basalt rock) with remains of a settlement from the Eneolithic period, 4th-3rd millennium BC. The church is small, one-nave and made of stone. It was conserved in 2003 although the murals are already quite damaged.

Sveti Gorgi Pobedonosets, village of Mlado Nagorichane, Staro Nagorichane Municipality

According to different sources, the church dates from wither the 14th or the 15th century and is located on the spot of an Early-Christian basilica. It was renovated in 1864 and had the shape of an inserted cross, with a three-sided apse outside and a narthex wider than the naos. Of interest is mostly the church façade with the fine processing of stones and even remains of some stone decoration; the inner decoration has been rather damaged with the exception of the iconostasis from 1892.

Zabelski Monastery, between the villages of Nikulyane, Staro Nagorichane and Chelopek, Staro Nagorichane Municipality

It is believed that the monastery church of Uspenie na Presveta Bogoroditsa dates from 1330 but has been destroyed in the times of the Ottoman Rule. The church was restored in 1852-1856. It is a three-nave temple with an inserted cross shape and a dome. The complex comprises housing premises, a kitchen with dining room, plus some additional buildings.

Vavedenie na Sveta Bogoroditsa Church, village of Orah, Staro Nagorichane Municipality

It is supposed the church was built around 1592. It is part of the Karpinski Monastery complex, comprising a kitchen with dining room, housing premises, bell-tower and additional buildings, today in a very bad state. The church itself is a one-nave building; the original roof was made of stone plates. The murals show clear connection with the traditions of painting from the end of the 16th and the beginning of the 17th century. The original icons from the iconostasis are today kept in other places, including the National Museum of North Macedonia.

Sveti Gorgi and Sveti Nikola Church, village of Orah, Staro Nagorichane Municipality

It dates to the end of the 16th – the beginning of the 17th century. Also called the Double Church since it is a unique site dedicated to two saints instead of one. There are two separate entrances, two naves and two apses to the east. Of the original internal decoration, very little has been preserved; most of what is seen today is the result of renovations in the 19th century.

Cemetery church of Sveti Nikola, village of Strezovce, Staro Nagorichane Municipality

Built and painted in 1606 over the ruins of an older temple. A three-nave basilica with a double-sloped roof and a semi-round apse. The inner decoration has not been preserved well.

D. Museums

Museum of Coal Extraction, town of Bobov Dol

It is more like a museum collection which is not very popular and hard to find information about. It presents the history of mining industry in the area, together with various items from the miners' life, tools, etc.

Museum collection at the Napredak Community Center (Chitalishte), village of Mlamolovo, Bobov Dol Municipality

An ethnographic collection, containing items from everyday life: pots, loom, instruments, furniture, male and female costumes from the area, jewelry, etc.

Museum house of Nikifor Bibin, town of Boboshevo

It is located at the center of Boboshevo town and is dedicated to the life and personality of Nikifor Bibin, one of the organizers of the September Revolt against fascism in 1923. The building is not in a good condition and measures are needed for its renovation.

Municipal Historical Museum – Dupnitsa

It was formally established in 1992 and possesses over 7000 potential exhibit items which are however not organized in an exhibition at the moment due to the lack of appropriate space. Temporary exhibitions are held at the Mosque of Tyurbeto. Here one should also mention the museum houses of Stanke Dimitrov and Zhelyu Demirevski (local figures of modern history) which are not functioning currently but could be re-opened in the right conditions.

Regional Historical Museum, town of Kyustendil

The museum presents the historical heritage of the area of Kyustendil from the first traces of civilization to modern history. It has the following exhibitions: Archeology; Numismatics; Ethnology; Folklore; History of Bulgarian Lands (15th – 19th c.); New and Modern History; Monuments of Culture

Other sites managed by the Regional Historical Museum are: Sveti Georgi Complex, Dimitar Peshev Museum House, Ilyo Voivoda Museum House, Emfiedzhieva House and Ahmed Bey Mosque.

Dimitar Peshev Museum House - Monument of Culture of Local Significance; the house was restored and opened to visitors in 2002 as a result of a joint initiative of Kyustendil Municipality and the Ambassador of Israel in Bulgaria, to commemorate the famous politician who had a very important role for the saving of Bulgarian Jews during WWII. The museum house has permanent exhibitions of personal belongings, photos and documents who tell about the life and deeds of this renowned citizen of Kyustendil.

Ilyo Voivoda Museum House – dating from the 70s of the 19th century, the house used to belong to Ilyo Markov, a hero of the struggles for the liberation of Bulgaria from the Ottoman Rule. It hosts a permanent exhibition dedicated to these struggles in the area of Kyustendil. Together with two other restored houses of Kyustendil heroes – Konstantin Popgeorgiev – Berovski and Tonche Kadinmostki, they form a specific National Revival complex.

Emfiedzhieva Museum House - Monument of Architecture of Local Significance dating from 1874; the house used to belong to Hristo Lazov, who was a local master craftsman and a cultural activist. Now it hosts the permanent exhibition entitled “Urban Culture and Mode of Life of the Citizens of Kyustendil at the End of the 19th and Beginning of the 20th centuries”

Sveti Georgi Complex - Monument of Architecture and Art of National Significance; one of the 100 National Tourist Sites of Bulgaria. Dates from the end of the 10th – beginning of the 11th century. This is one of the most important medieval monuments in Bulgarian lands. According to some sources, here is the grave of the Bulgarian Tsar Mihail III Shishman who was killed in the battle for Kyustendil in 1330. During Ottoman Rule, the church was destroyed down to the basements of the arches, and restored in 1878-1880. It is a small cross-domes church, 10 x 8.70 m. in size. Both the medieval and renaissance murals which are still visible are of great artistic value. The church and the cell school in its yard were renovated in 2009. The latter operates as a small museum itself, showing replicas of some of the murals that were taken down during restoration to reveal the lower levels of paintings, as well as an exhibition of icons and old books.

Vladimir Dimitrov the Master Complex, village of Shishkovtsi, Kyustendil Municipality

The museum house of the famous Bulgarian painter Vladimir Dimitrov was opened in 1982 to celebrate the 100th anniversary of The Master. This is the house where he lived and created his masterpieces in the period 1926-1944. It keeps the atmosphere of the time when the artist lived here, plus documents related to his great legacy.

Museum collection at Hristo Botev Community Center, village of Goranovtsi, Kyustendil Municipality

It comprises an open-air museum of agriculture and a collection entitled “Mode of Life and Culture of the 19th-20th Centuries”. It is being maintained by the Chitelishte workers and is in a good condition.

Museum collection of Vaksevo Village, Nevestino Municipality

The collection includes historic and ethnographic expositions, such as the first radio which appeared in the village and the propeller from the plane which fell nearby during WWII. The collection was opened in 1986 by initiative of a local history expert. The building was renovated in 2012 through a project of Nevestino Municipality.

Museums of the Rila Monastery

The Rila Monastery Museum was opened in 1965. It shows documents and materials related to the life and deeds of St. Ivan Rilski, the local medieval ruler Hrelyo Dragovol and the period of the Ottoman Rule in Bulgarian lands. The exhibits include gifts made to the monastery during the ages, as well as interesting items from the monk's life or made by the monks, such as the so-called Raphael's Cross – an exceptional wood-carved 3-dimensional cross with more than 600 tiny figures depicted.

The Ethnographic Museum of the monastery shows the visitor various aspects from the everyday monk's life, e.g. storing goods, grinding wheat, making bread and baking it in the huge monastery oven, making and repair of tools and instruments, etc.

The Kitchen called Magernitsa is naturally connected to the above museum but, unlike it, it's free to visit. Inside you can see the huge cooking pot for the monks' meals, as well as many kitchen tools and instruments.

The model monk cell is arranged right next to the monastery museum and can be opened by its curator. It recreates the place and style of life of the monks in the National Revival Period, so it is in itself an ethnographic exhibition.

Museum collection at the Hristo Botev Community Center, town of Rila

Comprises old discovered clay pots, items of everyday life in the past, old keys, stamps, archive photos from the construction of the hospital, the school and others related to the development of the town of Rila.

Municipal museum of Alexi Rilets, town of Rila

It is organized more like a collection of archive documents in the building of the old cell school by the Sveti Arhangel Mihail Church in Babinska Mahala Neighbourhood. The exhibition is dedicated to the personality of the founder of that school, Daskal (teacher) Dimitar Rilets, a cultural activist and friend of Neofit Rilski, one of the abbots of the Rila Monastery and an exceptional encyclopedist.

Museum collection at Prosveten Lach Community Center, town of Sapareva Banya

It presents certain finds from archaeological excavations that took place in the area of Sapareva Banya – from the pre-historic settlement of Kremenik and ancient Germaneya, the Roman town which existed here before the modern one.

Ethnographic collection, village of Zlogosh, Treklyano Municipality

It contains items from the material culture of people living in the area of Treklyano – their mode of life, traditional activities, religious beliefs and others.

Kratovo Museum, town of Kratovo

A Cultural Monument protected by Law, the museum of Kratovo is located in the building of the Old Turkish 'Konak' (administrative center), which is a historical landmark in itself. It has an archaeological exhibition showing items found through excavations in the area, and an ethnological exposition with local costumes and decorations, crafts products, etc.

Kriva Palanka Museum, town of Kriva Palanka

The museum of Kriva Palanka is very new and is a successful local initiative. The building has been renovated under a cross-border cooperation project and is quite attractive in itself. The museum has an archaeological and ethnographic sections with exhibits from the area.

Kumanovo Museum, town of Kumanovo

The museum was founded back in 1951. It has five sections: Archaeology, History, Ethnography, Arts and Department of Documentation and Restoration. It has more than 7000 items for display, from pre-history to the socialist period, and also traditional costumes, everyday life items of local people, old musical instruments, etc.

Memorial Center of ASNOM, village of Pelince, Kumanovo Municipality

It is dedicated to the first gathering of ASNOM (Anti-fascist coalition for the people's liberation of Macedonia), held on 02.08.1944. The gathering itself was held at the Monastery of Sveti Prohor Pchinski which is located right over the border between North Macedonia and Serbia, at 8 direct km. from Pelince. There is a copy of the room at the monastery where the meeting took place, a memorial room and a sports-and-recreation complex.

E. Traditional crafts and practices

In the whole cross-border region between Bulgaria and North Macedonia, many traditional crafts and household practices were developed during the 18th-19th century and even the beginning of the 20th century, as well as many everyday practices of

local population. Many of those are typical of the whole Balkan Peninsula and even outside it, while others are more specific, connected to the resources of this precise territory. The following crafts can be outlined that might be utilized and contribute to local tourism development:

Pottery

Clay processing for the production of various in shape and purpose items, their baking and decoration are present among the traditional practices of this area ever since the Neolithic period. This includes pots for the household incl. plates, bowls, lamps, etc.; for ritual purposes, sculptures, clay tiles for walls and floors, personal decorations and many others.

Metal-processing

It is present in various forms, incl. the production of tools, instruments, containers for storage and cooking pots, decorative elements, etc. As a variation of the craft one might quote jewelry-making – the processing of gold, silver and other more or less precious metals.

Wood-processing

One of the oldest crafts in the area, it appears in several variations:

Production of wooden everyday tools – plows, instrument handles, pressers, pounders and others.

Production of household items, known in the area of Kyustendil as ‘kopanarstvo’- wooden plates, bowls, cutlery, buckets for water and milk, for making butter and so on. A special variation existing even today is the making of large and small wooden barrels for wine, rakia, pickles and other.

Wood-carving – an artistic craft applicable both to people’s everyday life (furniture, wooden ceilings, decorated wooden pots, etc.) and to the public and religious social life (decoration of public buildings, churches – columns, iconostases, icons, crosses, sculptures and so on).

Production and processing of textiles

Another one of the oldest crafts in the area which has been preserved till the present day. It appears in many variations too:

Carpet-making – especially in the region of Kratovo. It includes the production not only of carpets but also rugs, blankets, wall rugs for isolation and decoration and others.

Dying of textiles and textile raw materials – in its original version, it was done using natural substances mostly floral and mineral; in more recent times – by chemical agents.

Weaving, knitting, embroidery – these were practiced in every house as a typical female practice, with the corresponding tools and instruments (loom, distaff, etc.). There was also a social function to it, with the women from the neighbourhood gathering together to work and chat. One of the most important skills that young girls had to acquire in their home before getting married and taking the dowry they made with their hands to their husband's house.

Leather-processing

Also called 'sarachestvo' in Kyustendil area. It was practiced with the purpose of making clothes but also covers, rugs, bags, water-skins, book-covers, etc.

Stone-processing

A rarer craft, tied closely to the existence of natural deposits of stone suitable for use in the houses or any aspect of economic life; extremely hard and dangerous to the people practicing it.

Icon-painting

In the past, there were several icon-painting (artistic) schools of art with established traditions and specific style of painting in that part of the Balkan Peninsula. Local

painters were usually trained extensively in those traditions before being let to travel or return to their home place and practice that craft.

Basket-making

This is a common title for a group of crafts related to the making of baskets, crates, bags, covers, floor insulations and many others out of corn straw, willow branches or other suitable material. Very typical for the area of Kyustendil.

Saddle-making

A rare and hard to acquire craft in the whole target region but very prestigious since horses were among the most precious, dear and cared for domestic animals; so the production of saddles and all other items for the horses was very important in people's everyday life.

Traditional household practices and facilities

In the region, there are still operational old-technique facilities for laundry or flour-grinding. As a part of the cultural heritage of Kochani for example, we must point a working water mill in the village of Bavchaluk and a fulling mill on Bela River near Kostin Dol Village. Operational water mill and fulling mill may be seen in the village of Stantsi, municipality of Kriva Palanka.

Speaking of traditional economic practices of the region, animal breeding has always been a main occupation for local people. Even though it is somewhat abandoned today, mostly due to the depopulation of mountain villages, there are places with a larger number of domestic animals. Such is, for instance, the village of Nivichani in Kochani Municipality where they keep herds of about 300 sheep and goats and make delicious cheese, presently for domestic purposes only.

In the not so distant past, local people bred sheep and less goats, pigs, cows, oxes, horses and donkeys. The herds were either looked after by family members (mostly the children) or given to a shepherd who looked after bigger herds sometimes higher in the mountain. In winter, the animals were kept at the houses and fed with barley and

oats. Cows and goats were bred mostly for milk from which cheese, curd and so on were made; same was for sheep but they were also ‘trimmed’ for wool around Spasovden (40 days after Easter). Oxes were bred for the farming activities, pigs – for meat. Most families also kept some bee hives for honey.

Farming has been another traditional occupation for local people, naturally depending on the terrain. In the lower parts and the fields surrounding the mountain, they were growing cereals and the famous Kochani rice. Pomology has been a main economic branch in all parts of the region while potatoes were more common up in the mountain.

Traditional agricultural practices were based on the knowing of seasons and the year circle. Land was first ploughed right after harvesting and left like this till the next year when wheat was sown again, though they usually rotated crops: wheat – maize – wheat, etc. Sowing was done in October, after the second ploughing and after ‘sanctifying’ the seeds in the church. First they sowed rye, 2-3 weeks later – wheat; the barley was sown early in December or even early next spring so that it didn’t freeze. Oats was sown at the end of February, millet for feeding the animals – in the spring. Harvesting started in mid-July, two weeks before St. Peter’s Day. Harvested crops were tied in sheafs and remained for 2-3 days at the field to ‘bake’ in the sun. The threshing was done in special places near the houses, usually with a big tree in the middle to which the animals (horses, donkeys or oxes) were tied to be able to go around in a circle. This method was not used on rye because they wanted the stems to remain intact for the making of rugs and similar. The clean seeds were put in a special store house lifted above the ground so it doesn’t get damp or invaded by rodents.

Vegetable gardens were usually made close to water. They grew garlic, onions, peppers, aubergines, cabbage, peas, leeks, potatoes and such, with flowers between the grooves. Vines were grown on sandy soils. The roots were ‘buried’ in soil for the winter and unearthed early in the spring. On the day of St. Trifon Zarezan (early February), they trimmed the vines. During the year, the vineyard was treated several times with limewater or similar against parasites. Orchards were made on less fertile soils unsuitable for corns; most popular were apples, pears, plums, cherries, apricots,

and nuts. Melons and water melons were sowed in early spring on rich soils and for that they collected seeds from the sweetest fruits of the previous year.

Another tradition which is alive even nowadays is the gathering of many non-timber products from nature. 67% of the population gather such products today and for 10% it is a major occupation. They collect forest fruits such as blueberries and briars; herbs (wort, primula, nettle, lime, thyme and others) and mushrooms.

F. Traditional folklore

Musical folklore

Traditional folklore in the area includes songs for every important occasion in the life of local people – for weddings, mourning, for various holidays. For Christmas and Lazarovden, there often are special songs that are typically dedication songs, i.e. every piece is dedicated to an individual member of the family, domestic animals, the fields and crops, etc., wishing for health, luck and fertility. Sometimes they are performed by young girls (lazarki), sometimes by young boys, and are accompanied by various rituals and games. In view of some differences in the festivity calendar of the Albanian population, mostly in the area of Lipkovo Municipality, some differences are also seen in the ritual music folklore. Specific songs are related to most of the everyday activities: the ploughing, harvesting, the gathering of girls together to make wishes for their future husbands, work together to prepare their dowry / sow clothes, etc. Other songs were meant to produce some magical effect like the songs calling for rain in times of draught. A separate group of songs were the ones meant for dancing (horo). Music accompaniment was provided by Gaida (bag-pipe) and Kemene or Gadulka (old stringed musical instrument).

Traditional costumes

Traditional costumes in the Macedonian part of the region includes a dark (grey) top garment with limited decoration of woolen threads. Initially all garments were not dyed and had the original colour of the material. The dying in darker colours started in late 19th century; it is said that was done mostly for hygienic purposes; they are made

predominantly of wool while the female garments could also be of cotton. The undergarments are white and simple made of linen, cotton or hemp. They are decorated with lace and embroidery. Men's belts are mostly red, up to 20 cm wide with fringes at the end. In the summer, men used to cover their heads with white kerchiefs. Male adornments to the costume are often weapons, e.g. a knife; female adornments are also meant for protection but a spiritual one (their meaning is ritual). The Albanian national costume has other specifics which can be observed in the village of Lipkovo Municipality.

In the Bulgarian part, the female costume included *Saya* – a long top garment made of dark woolen cloth open on front except for below the breasts where there are 5-6 buttons, with tight short sleeves. The shirt is simple again, white, with limited decoration. Aprons are a combination of many colours – red, orange, green, blue and black. The belt is long and narrow. The kerchief is made of silk with some lace on the edges.

The male costume also has a white shirt with no decoration. Trousers are made of brown woolen cloth, wide, made to match the vest which was worn on top of the shirt. Both are decorated by braids. The woven belt was long, wide and mostly red, and a narrow leather belt was put on top, sometimes adorned with colourful kerchiefs. Men covered heads by *Kalpak* made of sheep's skin with the wool.

Traditional celebrations

Traditional celebrations are quite similar on both sides of the border only some of them (especially in winter) do not coincide by dates. It depends on which calendar is used – the 'old' or the 'new' one. Thus, Christmas in Bulgaria is on December 25th while in North Macedonia it is on January 7th. As already mentioned, there is also certain specifics related to the festivity calendar of the Albanian population in Lipkovo Municipality.

Badnik (Xmas Eve) – A special dinner is cooked to renounce the end of the long Christmas fasting. For example, it includes a special loaf of bread with hidden 'luck charms' for every member of the family, plus an odd number of vegan dishes. Before

the dinner, the host invites God ritually to join the family's table; at some places, they just leave the front door open. The table is not cleaned up after the dinner, so that the luck of the household is not cleaned up either.

Surva - the ritual is performed at the verge of the New Year by male groups (sometimes children too) who would go around the houses singing special songs and wishing a happy and healthy year to everyone. They carry oak poles and cornel branches with which they would pat every family member on the back, wishing health, luck, wealth, etc.

Throwing of the cross – performed on Yordanovden in January, when the local priest throws the church cross in a nearby river/pond. The men from the village are then entitled to jump in the water and compete who'll be the first to catch the cross and take it out. This is followed by a male dance in the icy waters.

Babinden – also celebrated in January, it is about paying respect to the older women who help the birth of new babies. In some villages, the older woman would visit all the young mothers whom she helped give birth in the last year; in other places, the mothers would visit the older woman together with the children. Sometimes there are common celebrations accompanied by dancing and singing in the village square.

Day of Forgiveness – also known as Sirni Zagovezni or Prikladi; celebrated on the Sunday, 7 weeks before Easter. The custom includes the making of big fires at some open space and jumping over them when possible, for health. In many places, the holiday is accompanied by the custom 'Amkane' where a boiled egg or an apple is hung on a thread from the ceiling and the family members try to bite a piece without using their hands. On that day, everyone can ask for forgiveness the people close to him/her, if s/he has somehow offended them during the year.

Todorovden - this is the first Saturday of Lent. Usually, this is a day for massive celebrations accompanied by horse/cart races, wrestling, music and dancing. At some places, this is the day when the new brides are presented to the whole village.

Lazarovden – on the 8th day before Easter, young girls perform the ritual of Lazaruvane. They sing special Lazar songs and go around the houses in the village, wishing health, luck and wealth to everyone.

Gergyovden – celebrated on May 6th, it is one of the biggest Christian holidays. It is connected to many early spring rituals, incl. the first taking of herds out to the meadows, to graze the first spring grass, making wreaths for the animals, etc. The preparation and eating of the ritual Gergyovden lamb are obligatory, this is a custom remaining from pagan times.

Ramazan Bayram – festive days, celebrating the end of the Ramazan month (the ninth month in the Muslim calendar) – a month of extremely strict fasting. On these days, families cook ritual dishes and the children ask their parents for forgiveness.

Enyovden – at the end of the month of June, a celebration of summer, solstice and the magical power of plants picked up on that day. People get up before sunrise and go to an open meadow, full of herbs. They greet the sun and perform special rituals. They believe that the herbs gathered with the first dew on that day possess an exceptional healing and magical power; that is why people make wreaths and put them on their family, the animals, the houses and farming premises; the herbs are also dried and stored for use later in the year.

Kurban Bairam – a Muslim holiday related to a ritual sacrifice that marks the end of a 10-day adoration. They cook the ritual dish of Kurban, read special prayers and give donations to the poor.

The autumn ritual cycle also includes very interesting rituals, for instance, the so-called Wolf Days (late November) when various taboos are kept, e.g. not to weave or knit; not to use scissors, etc., all related to the protection of the sheep herds from harm and predators. Another ritual day – the Mice Day – was tied to Dimitrovden, when people performed various activities to protect their homes and food from mice.

Beliefs and customs

These are usually connected to the normal cycles or periods of human life, for example:

Wedding – the cycle begins with special ‘selection’ events where young boys and girls would come with their families and they would arrange the future bonds often using intermediaries. A cycle of engagement customs would follow, with exchange of gifts and arrangements for the wedding itself. Weddings were usually organized in the autumn or winter, always on Sunday, and accompanied by a new cycle of customs such as the ‘buying of the bride’, ‘shaving of the groom’, ‘putting shoes on the mother-in-law’, etc.

Birth – nothing should be hidden from the pregnant woman, especially food; the pregnant women must not steal; she should not cut her hair, etc. The clothes of the baby are not left out to dry after washing in the dark; the mother cannot remain outdoors when dark until the 40th day after giving birth, etc.

Death and funeral – the cycle includes customs before the funeral, during the funeral and after it. Some are connected to the vigil and the ‘sending off’ of the deceased in his/her house; with actions that must be, or on the contrary, must not be performed, so that the deceased is not chased by bad events in the after-life.

Beliefs related to animals - e.g. no one should kill a snake inside the house as it is the keeper of the home.

Beliefs related to plants - e.g. no one should sleep under a willow or kidney disease will come unwanted.

Beliefs related to weather - e.g. when there are thunders, it is St. Ilia rolling barrels in the skies.

Beliefs related to work - e.g. when someone has to give a sickle to another person, it is never handed; on the contrary, it is being thrown to the ground for the other person to get it him/herself so that he/she does not get lazy.

Beliefs related to the home - e.g. one should not give fire to another house from one's own fireplace; this is as if giving away one's luck.

Myths and legends

The region is very rich in myths and legends. There are, for instance, legends resembling others from the whole of the Balkan Peninsula, or at least the whole of Bulgaria and North Macedonia, and local ones, related to a specific place, rock, peak or a historic event. There are legends of kings and peasants, of heroes and villains, of love and relations among humans. Some legends or tales are remembered by everyone, others are less known or almost forgotten, and third vary curiously in the details from village to village. Very popular are the tales about the names of settlements and sites, and there are numerous tales about the times of the Ottoman Empire and especially how local people succeeded to outsmart their Turkish masters. There are also many legends and tales dedicated to certain people – the saints Yoakim Osogovski and Ivan Rilski, or to mythical heroes like Krali Marko, known as one of the bravest and strongest men of these lands.

Contemporary culture

A. Cultural agenda

January

01.01 - Mummers Games in the village of Zhabokrat, Kyustendil Municipality. A tradition that has been kept through the centuries. The 'Kukeri' or mummers groups have more than 140 members.

19.01 – Voditsi in the town of Kriva Palanka,. They organize the event Piftiyada when Piftia is made after a special local recipe (these are small loafs of bread made in special 'boat' shapes and filled with meat and various spices).

February

24.02 – Day of the town of Kratovo. The patron day of the town starts with a morning service at the Sveti Gorgi Kratovski Church, followed by a cultural programme. In

recent years, the holiday is preceded by other events such as literary presentations, art exhibitions, sports contests, etc.

March

Beginning of the month – Brides' Pilgrimage, village of Konopnitsa, Kriva Palanka Municipality. It is held on the Sunday after the Day of Todoritsa (the so-called Todorov Saturday or the first Saturday of Lent). The center is the church of Sveti Theodor Tiron, the patron saint of the young and the kin. The tradition is dedicated to the next generations and was cut for 33 years but then restored several years ago. All young women who have got married between the past and present Todoritsa, dress in traditional costumes and come together with their mothers in law in a colourful procession to bow before the saint and be blessed by the priests in hope of health and fertility.

21.03 - Kyustendil Spring in the town of Kyustendil. It is also perceived as the Holiday of Kyustendil itself. Celebrated with a rich cultural programme with the participation of famous performers. They also elect a Queen of Beauty and Spring – the Kyustendil Spring Maid.

May

17-24.05 – May Days of Culture in the town of Dupnitsa. In 2019 was their 42nd edition. They include literary events, dancing tournament, cycling tours, concerts, theatrical shows and others.

27-30.05 – Southwest International Folklore Festival called “Peace on the Balkans”, town of Dupnitsa. It is a regional event and covers the towns of Dupnitsa, Sapareva Banya, Bobov Dol, Kocherinovo and Kyustendil. In 2019 was its 18th edition.

End of May – Municipal celebrations in the town of Sapareva Banya. They include the International Folklore Festival called “The Maid Sings, the Forest Bends”. In 2019 was its 5th edition.

June

Mid-June – National Folklore Festival of Designed Horo Dances called “Rila Watches Us”, town of Dupnitsa. In 2019 was its 10th edition; there is already international representation, as well as demonstrations of local crafts and other.

Mid-June – Rila Sings and Dances Festival, town of Rila. The participants are amateurs from the Districts of Blagoevgrad and Kyustendil. In 2019 was its 12th edition.

17.06 – Jeep Rally of Kalin Kamen, Kriva Palanka Municipality. The off-road trail includes not only jeeps but also cross-bikes and other suitable vehicles. The tradition started in 2009 when it was held on 24.05. The starting point is the town of Kriva Palanka and the trail reaches Mt. Tsarev Vrav, from where they return to the Monastery of Sveti Yoakim Osogovski, with an option of camping at the locality of Kalin Kamen.

19.06 – Cherry Day in the village of Shatrovo, Bobov Dol Municipality. It is being held since 2010, with only local significance so far. It includes a fair of cherry producers, with rewards for the best among them, plus a folklore programme.

End of June – Cherry Festival in the town of Kyustendil. The programme includes an exhibition of all varieties of cherries and other local products, competitions (e.g. for the biggest cherry, the most beautifully arranged cherry stand, etc.) and an extensive folklore programme. In 2019 was its 12th edition.

Last Saturday of June – International Gathering called “Slavcheto” near the village of Ushi, Treklyano Municipality. The stage is being erected on the border between Bulgaria and Serbia and the programme involves performers from both countries. They claim the tradition comes from the times of the Ottoman Rule, so it is hard to say which edition it was in 2019.

August

14-15.08 – Panagiya Festival, town of Kyustendil and neighbouring villages. This is a celebration of bread which is related to the Day of the Holy Mother (Golyama Bogoroditsa) on 15.08.

15.08 (or close by dates) – Struma Sings Folklore Festival, town of Nevestino. It is also related to the Day of the Holy Mother and in 2019 was its 14th edition. Local and guest performers take part. This is also the Holiday of Nevestino itself.

16.08 – Day of St. Yoakim Osogovski, Day of Kriva Palanka. The fact that the two celebrations are held on one and the same date show how deep is the connection between the town and the monastery (the saint). The celebration includes many cultural and religious events.

Week-end in mid-August – International Folklore Festival called “Boboshevsko Celebration”, town of Boboshevo. In 2019 was its 6th edition. It has no competition character; there are performers from Bulgaria, North Macedonia and Serbia. Usually coincides with the Holiday of My Town in Boboshevo.

17-18.08 – Nestiya International Folklore Festival, town of Sapareva Banya and Panichishte Resort. In 2019 was its 7th edition.

23-24.08 – International Mandolin Festival in the town of Kumanovo. In 2019 was its anniversary 15th edition.

24-26.08 - International Folklore Festival of Sveti Yoakim Osogovski, town of Kriva Palanka. The biggest folklore festival in the area of Osogovo, it attracts participants from the whole of North Macedonia, Bulgaria, Serbia, Bosnia, Slovakia, Poland, etc. In 2019 was its 15th edition.

End of August - Joy Fest in the town of Kriva Palanka,. A rock festival that promotes new and established performers and is a true joy for the admirers of rock music. In 2019 was its 8th edition.

End of August / beginning of September – International Ethno-Festival called “Music under the Rila Sky”, Rila Municipality. It gathers together musicians from many countries, incl. Belgium, Sweden, Germany, Estonia, France, Czech Republic, Slovenia and others who perform ethno-music. The concerts are held in the nearby villages – Pastra, Smochevo, Stob, Barakovo. In 2019 was the 8th edition of the festival.

September

Mid-September – Pey Sartse Festival of the so-called Old City Songs, town of Kyustendil. Those songs were popular melodies in the early 20th c. In 2019 was the 13th edition of the festival.

15-21.09 - Theatrical Festival of Sveti Yoakim Osogovski, town of Kriva Palanka. The Theatrical Festival promotes both well-known and loved performances and modern theatrical art.

22.09 – International Festival of Kraishte, village of Bobeshino, Kyustendil Municipality. This is a folklore festival of three countries – it unites performers from the municipalities of Kyustendil, Kriva Palanka and Bosilegrad in Serbia.

21-23.09 - Balkan Rug (Balkanska Cherga) Festival, village of Shishkovtsi, Kyustendil Municipality. It is being organized for 7 years now by a local NGO. The programme includes folklore performances from the region and guests; demonstrations of crafts; amateur wrestling; tasting of local food and others.

End of September - Fertility Holiday in the town of Kyustendil. Very similar to the Cherry Festival but presents all the products that the land of the Kyustendil Region gives to its people. In 2019 was its 12th edition.

End of September - Golden Apples Children's Musical Festival, town of Kyustendil. Annual festival organized for the 16th time in 2019. It gathers together talented children from Kyustendil but also from all over Bulgaria and other countries.

October

19-20.10 – International Festival of Male Choirs called “Sveti Ivan Rilski”, town of Dupnitsa. It is connected to the Day of Dupnitsa on October 19th. In 2019 was its 10th edition.

November

16.11 – Kompiriyada in the town of Kratovo. A holiday of the local sort of potatoes (kompiri) and clean food in general which is being produced in the region. They organize an exhibition of local producers accompanied by a cultural programme.

December

Beginning of December – end of February – Kratun Month in the town of Rila. It is known as The Longest Month of 99 days, dedicated to wine production. The tradition is more than 100 years old and the name is connected to a local sort of pumpkins (kratuni) which are used for drinking wine. It covers the whole winter festive cycle, including competitions for the best red and white wine.

B. Cuisine

The present-day cuisine of the target region contains many traditional ingredients and recipes. For example, by tradition the main food ingredient for local population were cereals: rye for the poorer families, wheat (often mixed with rye, barley and oats) for the wealthier ones. On an ordinary day, the main food was bread. It was also the main ritual component for every celebration and custom including Christmas, Easter, weddings, funerals, etc. Everyday bread was made with yeast while ritual bread was mostly yeast-less and specially decorated. People prepared a lot of meals from flour: the simplest and oldest dish in the region of Kriva Palanka, for example, was the so-called skrob, or mush. The poorer people made it only with water and salt; the wealthier added fried onions with red pepper and butter. Among the traditional pastry dishes, there are also the Zelnik (layered pastry with spinach or any other edible green-leaved plant), Yufka and Trano (dried pastry which is then boiled), Tiganitsa (fried pastry), and many others. Wheat was also boiled in whole grains for ritual purposes, e.g. with sugar for memorial services.

Out of maize, they made Kachamak (baked mush) in various forms – with butter only, with cheese, with bacon, with fried meat, etc. Vegetables were often kept for longer consumption by drying, as pickles or in various cooked salads such as the Lyutenitsa, Aivar, Pindjur or others (made from peppers, tomatoes, onions, sometimes aubergines or carrots). People cooked a lot of soups or stew with sauce and ate them with bread.

These were usually meat-less on an ordinary day and with some meat for week-ends or holidays. Very popular was the soup of potatoes and peas, or of dried plums, leeks and rice. Dairy products were widely used, from cow's, sheep's or goat's milk. Fruits were also processed for longer preservation; they were often dried or used for Kompot (boiled in water with sugar) and various jams or marmalades.

In the different parts of the region, they have some specific dishes such is, for example, the Simid (small loafs of bread made in special forms and in special way) and the Saramskalia (layered pastry with sheep yoghurt and onions) in Kriva Palanka. In Kratovo, they make a special type of pastrmalia (dried pork) and k'cana salt (salt mixed with all sorts of dried spring herbs). Kyustendil has a special tradition of preparing spelled bread.

Some local recipes:

Saramskalii - Make dough of 700 g white flour, 5 spoons of butter, salt and water. Knead well and divide into 16 balls. Roll each ball into a 20-cm circle. Spread butter over each 'circle' and stick 8 pieces together one ontop the other. Roll the two halves now into rectangles 80 x 40 cm and cut each of them in three, then flip three times to get 6 roulades, greasing constantly. Put each of these into a separate pan and cut into 7. Bake for 30 minutes at 200°C. Take out, pour youghourt, sour cream and 3 onions crushed with salt, then leave to bake for another 5 minutes.

Muchkalitsa - Fry 500-700 g of pork into heated oil. Just before it is done, add chopped onions or leeks and some peppers. When they are done, add chooped tomatoes and mushrooms, parsley and bay leaves, salt and – if you wish – some red wine. In 10 minutes, the dish is ready to serve.

Kratovo Pastrmailia - Mix 300 g of white flour with 30 g of yeast, some sugar, salt and water; knead and leave to rise. Then knead again and leave for some more time. When it is ready, spread it in the baking pot you have (one big or several smaller) and fill with chopped meat, onions and anything else you'd like to add. Bake at 300°C, consume with red wine.

C. Modern arts

Vladimir Dimitrov the Master Art Gallery, town of Kyustendil

One of the 100 National Tourist Sites of Bulgaria. Vladimir Dimitrov called ‘The Master’ is one of the greatest artists of Bulgaria ever, and he was born in Kyustendil. The first exhibition of 50 of his works was opened in 1944 in the Ahmed Bey Mosque. In 1959 the exhibition became part of the Kyustendil Art Gallery opened in the Jewish Sinagogue. The present building of the gallery was built in 1972 to commemorate the 90th anniversary of The Master. It has about 3400 art pieces now, including 1357 works of Vladimir Dimitrov himself. It also has 8 exposition halls, 1 meeting hall and 2 more halls for temporary exhibitions.

Municipal Art Gallery – Dupnitsa town

It is hosted in the so-called Okoliyska House, a local architectural Monument of Culture. Owns a fund of over 1000 art-works, including modern art.

Art gallery of Evtim Tomov, village of Treklyano

Presents the best works (graphics) of the artist Evtim Tomov, a professor at the National Art Academy of Bulgaria who was born in Treklyano.

Art Schools and planers

Second half of May – beginning of June - International Chamber Music Academy in the town of Kyustendil. It gathers together music students from Bulgaria and USA; the programme includes lectures, discussions and meetings but also many concerts.

09-14.06 – Lazar Sofiyanov Childrens’ Art Planer, town of Kratovo. It is dedicated to the unique architecture of the town of Kratovo and lasts for 5 days. The participants are children up to 16 years old, and since 2008, they also invite participants from Bulgaria.

08-14.08 - Kumanovo Art-Colony at the ACHOM Memorial Complex, Kumanovo Municipality. A painting planer which involves artists from various countries; in 2019 was its 45th edition.

End of August – International Art-Colony (planer) of Karpino, related to the monastery in the village of Orah, Staro Nagorichane Municipality, bearing the same name. Artists from various countries take part. In 2019 was its 17th edition.

September - International Art Planer of Sveti Yoakim Osogovski, a tradition for almost 30 years now, this event gathers together artists from near and afar, inspired by the beautiful nature and the spiritual atmosphere of the Osogovo Monastery.

Groups and institutions keeping and developing local folklore and arts

In the municipality of Bobov Dol: 16 Chitalista (Community Centers); folk dance ensemble, dance ensemble for Roma folklore; 2 folklore singing groups; 2 schools of folklore dances; 2 groups for authentic folklore; groups for modern ballet and aerobics; gobelin club; courses of cooking, sewing and embroidery; 2 painting schools and 2 mandolin schools; language courses; recital group.

In the municipality of Boboshevo: 4 Chitalishta; 3 groups for authentic folklore; 2 recital groups; one mixed choir; brass band; theatrical group; women's and children's dance ensembles, children's singing group; sports dance club; art-school.

In the municipality of Dupnitsa: 13 Chitalishta; brass band and cheer-leading group; 4 choirs – male, mixed, boys' and tourists'; 2 folklore dance ensembles; 2 modern dance formations; 4 children's vocal groups; 1 children's satire group; 1 children's folklore group; group for Old City Songs; 2 amateur Mummers Groups.

In the municipality of Kocherinovo: 6 Chitalishta; children's theatrical formations; 2 dance groups; a music school; an eco-club; group for authentic folklore; children's theater school.

In the municipality of Kyustendil: 41 Chitalishta; guitar orchestra and Lovers of Classic Guitar Club; 3 children's dance ensembles and 3 folklore formations;

children's vocal formation and 2 folklore choirs; acapella folklore formation; school of authentic Roma songs and Roma dance ensemble; 3 children's music schools; 4 folklore dance formations for adults and 7 groups for authentic folklore; 1 Mummers Group and 1 Lazarki Group; 7 art-studios / schools of painting and applied arts; 2 amateur photograph groups; 3 chess clubs; language courses; 4 literary clubs; recital group; theatrical studio; rock-band and recording studio; 2 modern dance formations; environmental club.

In the municipality of Nevestino: 7 Chitalishta; 3 groups for authentic folklore; children's dance ensemble.

In the municipality of Rila: 3 Chitalishta; group for Old City Songs; children's vocal group and folklore dance ensemble; women's and children's groups for authentic folklore; theatrical group and men's singing group.

In the municipality of Sapareva Banya: 4 Chitalishta; 6 folklore groups and 1 folklore ensemble; group for folklore dances; piano and art schools.

In the municipality of Treklyano: 6 Chitalishta; no clubs or amateur groups.

In the municipality of Kratovo: 1 active Culture-and-Art Association (KUD; they usually maintain various folklore or other arts groups)

In the municipality of Kriva Palanka: 3 active KUD

In the municipality of Kumanovo: 6 active KUD and 3 dance ensembles

In the municipality of Staro Nagorichane: 1 active KUD

ANALYSIS OF THE SITES AND OBJECTS OF CULTURAL HERITAGE

This analysis has been made exclusively from the point of view of tourism development in the target region. That is why we see it necessary to introduce some clarifications and definitions for the purposes of the current document, as the terminology existing in the national and international theory and practice is quite varied.

Tourism - according to the World Tourism Organisation, tourism means “activities by people during their stay in places outside their permanent residence for a period shorter than a year, related to fun, business or other purposes”. This definition more or less reflects and summarises existing other definitions, so it may be taken as appropriate for the purposes of this document.

Cultural tourism - the broader and most meaningful definition of this term is “tourism whose purpose is seeing / visiting / getting to know / communicating with the cultural heritage of a certain tourist place. It is a fact, however, that in modern tourism, very often the goal of tourists is not that simple; for example, people visiting the Osogovo Monastery would gladly take a walk in the mountains towards Kalin Kamen if they are offered to and they have the needed time. That is why, the definition of cultural tourism should probably include the word “main”, i.e. “tourism whose *main* purpose is...” Of course, in this case it is important to define the terms “heritage” and “cultural heritage” too.

Heritage - out of the narrow (personalised) meaning that can be found in established international vocabularies and mostly means “property that can be received from or passed to other people”, Heritage for larger groups of people can be understood as material or non material values which have come to us from previous generations and/or are worth delivering by us to the next generations. Of course, the using of the very word value already means that the understanding of common heritage will not be the same for the different members of a given group of people. Here, however, time acts as a corrective and it naturally selects the values cause meaning is greater. All this comes with the condition that the very human activity itself does not damage or destroy sites and objects heritage.

Cultural heritage - in the above definition, we add the clarification that we are speaking of values of the material or non-material human culture.

Tourist product - a combination of all basic (accommodation, catering, transport) and additional (opportunities for the leisure time, experiences, attractions) tourist

services in a given place. When the accent is laid on services based on cultural heritage, we can speak of a cultural tourism product or a product of cultural tourism.

Sustainable tourism - lately, there's a lot of misuse of this term as it is modern and gives certain added value to documents, plans, strategies, project and so on. In its most simplified definition, it means tourism which does not what damage its resources (especially the natural and cultural heritage), at the same time bringing economic benefits for local communities.

The analysis of cultural heritage of the target region in this Strategy is oriented towards assessing the potentials and opportunities for development of sustainable tourism. Therefore, the analysis includes also aspects which are not directly linked to this cultural heritage but are of importance for the development of sustainable tourism. For example - transport accessibility and state of general infrastructure, quality of human resources for tourism development, etc. By the term 'objects' of cultural heritage below we summarise all non movable sites (churches, prehistoric settlements), movable objects (finds from archaeological excavations, exhibited in the museum) and immaterial heritage (folk songs and dances).

Advantages

- The region in question is very rich in objects of cultural heritage of all types and kinds which are sufficient as a resource for the compilation of a quality tourism product.
- Among those objects, there are such with national (for both countries) and over- national significance which can be used as a point of attraction for a large circle of visitors.
- Although the large part of the objects are not unique for Bulgaria, North Macedonia or even the Balkan Peninsula, they are sufficiently interesting in

order to be included interest services and products which can be unique for the target region.

- The access to most of the objects is sufficiently good in order to provide for their easy and safe incorporation into tourism services and products.
- The target region is rich in other resources which can secure diversification of the cultural tourism product, for instance protected natural territories, interesting rock phenomena, waterfalls and water objects, endemic plant and animal species, etc.
- The level of development of basic tourist services and mostly the places to stay and eat is sufficient for the development of an integrated tourist products for the region.
- The geographical location of the target region is favourable from the point of view you of emitting markets. Of special importance is the proximity of the two capitals of Sofia and Skopje which are the biggest markets of domestic tourism for the two countries - Bulgaria and North Macedonia.
- Road and transport accessibility of the region is good and we have to mention the international airports in Sofia and Skopje, the Struma Highway in the Bulgarian part and the Pan European transport corridor 8 which connects the Adriatic Sea to the Black Sea and passes from Skopje to Sofia via Kumanovo, Kriva Palanka, Kyustendil and Dupnitsa.
- The status of general infrastructure, trade, and public services is sufficiently good in order to allow the compilation and selling of quality tourism products.
- The region has some parts with a long-term in serious focus of tourism interest, for example the Rila Monastery or the Monastery of Sveti Yoakim Osogovski. we should add here also the places with lower or an even tourist volumes but where tourism still exists - as an example, we can give some

established folklore events attracting a large number of participants and viewers two non tourist destinations but only once a year. established tourist flows to these places can be used for the gradual development of other parts of the territory.

- There are sufficient human resources for the development of a quality modern tourism product. we should also mention the will of local authorities for such a development, expressed in the existing endorsed strategic and planning documents.

Challenges

- The objects of non movable cultural heritage, as well as the carriers of movable and intangible search heritage are unevenly distributed on the territory of the target region. this creates certain difficulties when trying to develop a joint tourism product.
- Many of the objects are only of local importance which which makes it difficult to attract a broader circular visitors.
- Many of the objects are insufficiently studied which very much limits the opportunities for introducing meaning in development of attractive and marketable tourism services based on those objects. This applies equally to the tangible and intangible cultural heritage.
- Many of the objects and mostly those of non-movable cultural heritage are in an insufficiently good condition on their own and for for inclusion in tourists products and services. with some, there is already a loss of cultural heritage, for example destroyed murals in some isolated churches due to leakages on walls and ceilings. Apart from being unattractive from the point of view of tourism, in some cases these places can be also dangerous for tourists.

- To some of the objects, there is no easy or safe access. This applies mostly to non-movable sites outside settlements, and more distant ones.
- Many of the existing other (outside cultural) resources for development of tourism in the target region are also not in a sufficiently good state, sufficiently studied or with an easy and safe access, for example interesting canyons of rivers or waterfalls high in the mountains.
- There are places in the region where the level of basic tourism services (accommodation, catering) is extremely low or they are missing altogether. Although this is not an unbreakable obstacle for the development of an integrated tourism product (since a combination may be made with other places which have those services), in some cases this lack can seriously restrict the opportunities of a certain mini-destination.
- Regarding the road and transport accessibility of the target region, we have to mention the insufficient provision of rail transport, as well as the bad condition of some of the roads outside the main arteries and especially leading to distant places and sites.
- Although the status of general infrastructure, trade and public services is not an unbreakable obstacle for the development of sustainable tourism in the region, at some places the level is below the expected for the 20s of the 21st century. Of special importance, for example, for the modern tourist is the fast and easy connection to the Internet in every point of his or her journey.
- A large part of the territory of the target region has no tourism of any kind which means a lack of traditions and experience, and the need of investing more efforts for development.
- In relation to the above, we see a lack of sufficient (of sufficient quality) tourist personnel who is to welcome and serve tourists. This is especially important for the places with no developed tourism.

ANALYSIS OF THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR VALORIZATION OF CULTURAL RESOURCES AND LINKING OF THE RELATED SECTORS OF TOURISM-CULTURE-BUSINESS

A review of the existing planning and strategic documents in the target region (municipal development plans, tourism development programs, studies of cultural heritage, etc.) has shown the identification of the following summarised opportunities for tourism development based on cultural heritage:

Municipality of Bobov Dol: studying of all objects of cultural heritage; restoration, conservation etc; provision of access; signing; marketing and advertisement campaigns; establishment of a tourist information centre; organisation of festivals; training of personnel; cooperation with neighbouring regions; attracting appropriate experts.

Municipality of Boboshevo: studying of archaeological and historical landmarks and publishing of collected information; restoring local traditions and customs; saving the specifics and authenticity of traditional lifestyle and culture, as well as the natural environment; preparation of a registry of tourists and natural sites and promotion of that registry; support for organisation of traditional and innovative cultural events.

Municipality of Dupnitsa: securing a building for the municipal museum - exhibiting of the collected materials; development of a multi-functional hall for various events; finalising the archaeological studies of important sites; organising innovative cultural events and new cultural infrastructure; carrying a professional marketing; establishment of a festival brand “Made in Dupnitsa”.

Municipality of Kocherinovo: no special measures have been planned in relation to cultural heritage.

Municipality of Kyustendil: maintenance of the buildings of Community Centres / Chitalishta; maintenance and socialisation of the sites of cultural heritage; enrichment of the cultural agenda.

Municipality of Nevestino: development of a program for tourism development and a specialised urban design scheme; establishment of an integrated tourism product; organisation of cultural and tourist events; participation in tourism fairs; marketing; new portal for Nevestino; training of people; exhibiting and socialising of cultural sites; development of tourist infrastructure.

Municipality of Rila: Studying and mapping of the objects of cultural heritage; establishment of a local fund of intangible heritage and thematic exhibitions in the Chitalishta; organising an international festival of the Christian choir song; restoration and conservation of cultural monuments; improving the environment; maintenance and modernization of Chitalishta; development of cultural trails; establishment of an integrated tourism product; establishment of a visitor centre with presentations about the life of St. Ivan Rilski, children's playgrounds, crafts workshops; in Babinska neighbourhood - a multimedia spiritual Centre; opening of a Sportela Museum dedicated to the Roman heritage in the town and area; transformation of the cultural agenda into a tourist agenda adding new events such as a craft fair; development of a model winery and programs for involving tourists into wine making activities; development of the human resources in all possible ways; inter-regional, cross-border and transnational cooperation and networking; marketing studies and annual marketing programs; integrated tourist Portal and profiles in the social media; films, guidebooks, printed materials; participation in fairs; familiarisation trips for journalists and tour operators; media advertisement; external advertisement; production of souvenirs.

Municipality of Sapareva Banya - finalising archaeological studies of important sites; repairs and renovations of sites where necessary; improving access to sites; establishment of an electronic registry of cultural heritage; opening of tourist information centre; development of info portal for the municipality; participation in fairs and exhibitions.

Municipality of Treklyano - elaboration of a tourism development programme; establishment of integrated products; renovation and exhibiting of attractions and

provision of access to them; carrying out a suitable marketing; establishment of a cultural and information centre of Treklyano.

North-East Planning Region of North Macedonia - development of the institutional framework for the protection of cultural heritage and raising the institutional capacity for its proper management; establishment of a conservation centre in Kumanovo with branches in Kratovo and Kriva Palanka; re-evaluation and classification of all objects of cultural heritage - tangible and intangible; finalising all archaeological and other studies where necessary; expanding the network of museums in the region; taking responsibility for the objects of cultural heritage on behalf of local communities; development of integrated policy for protection of cultural heritage and its sustainable use; development of the human resources for cultural heritage protection and tourism development; stimulating the cultural identity of the region as a marketing advantage; stimulating the development of public-and-private partnerships in that sphere; making market and marketing research; maintaining a tourist portal for the region and information about the North-East Planning Region in national websites and portals.

The analysis done by experts and local authorities of the opportunities for local development through valorisation of cultural resources and connecting of the corresponding sectors of tourism- culture- business has shown that the region as a whole demonstrates a proper and multi-sided vision for the protection, development and utilisation of the cultural heritage, related to the development of sustainable tourism and the provision of livelihoods for local communities. Various aspects of the process of tourism development based on cultural heritage have been taken into account. They have realised the need of as full as possible research and documenting of all types of heritage objects. They have evaluated the need of maintenance, access provision and proper exhibition, as well as the securing of suitable information for the visitors. The importance of human resources for the development of cultural tourism is not being neglected - both as qualification, preparedness, cooperation and networking. Trends of modern tourism have been taken into account, as well as the demand for integrated tourism products. Last but not least, they have paid important

attention to the activities for marketing and promotion, with their modern aspects such as Internet portals and social networks.

On this background, the average common levels of tourism development in the target region, and of cultural tourism in particular, can be explained with the facts that many of the well planned activities and measures remain only on paper, i.e. the planning and strategy documents have only the character of recommendation. Despite the substantial quantities of funding security in recent years through projects for cross-border cooperation or other, in the bigger part of the target region tourist visits remain at a low level, and the state of many objects of cultural heritage is alarming.

The reasons for this this are probably complex but maybe the most important one are the weak intersectoral connections. The municipalities are the carriers of the strategic visions for development and have the power to create conditions in which the business could work but it is not their function to develop business such as tourism. The business, on its part, including the potential suppliers of services among local communities, are often neglectful to the strategic and political guidelines for local development; they don't see the 'big picture'. And and cooperation and networking, though realised as I need, is still not what quite implemented in practice.

The analysis of opportunities would not be full without taking into account the real or potentially existing risks facing the successful valorisation of the cultural heritage when developing tourism. The risks are aspects of the outer environment which normally appear regardless of us but can be predicted and sometimes avoided or at least minimised.

One real risk is the neglecting of the need of preserving certain objects of the cultural heritage on behalf of the competent state bodies in both Bulgaria and North Macedonia. The already described bad condition of some such objects in the target region is due exactly to such a neglect. At the same time, there is a sort of a monopoly over the management of cultural heritage which sets restrictions before its valorization - for example the impossibility of opening private museums in Bulgaria. the unnecessarily complicated administrative procedures for management of Museum

activities (and other cultural activities) also pose risks for the successful valorization of heritage.

Vandalism, in all its forms, is a great threat to the objects of cultural heritage. Here we speak about poaching - the robbing and destruction of non movable cultural and historical sites; hooligan deeds against established visitor infrastructure; the transformation of samples of intangible heritage to the level of mass culture etc.

A very important risk that has to be taken into account is the external pressure for non sustainable development of tourism in the region. Usually that risk appears when there are big economic interests towards the resources of given local communities, without caring for these communities or their natural and cultural heritage. Unsustainable tourism development is also visible when the carrying capacity of tourism destinations is exceeded; then the excessive tourist pressure threatens local resources and sometimes the lifestyle of local communities.

STRATEGIC PART

STRATEGIC GOALS

General strategic goal

Develop sustainable tourism based on the cultural heritage of the target cross-border region and supporting its preservation.

Specific strategic goals

1. Create a suitable environment for the development of sustainable cultural tourism
2. Support the protection of cultural heritage with all possible means and methods

STRATEGIC MODEL FOR INTERVENTION FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF CULTURAL TOURISM IN THE CROSS-BORDER REGION

New models of viable and heritage-friendly activities in the tourist sector

In the international practice, there are many new models demonstrating how cultural heritage can be used in a sustainable way in order to develop a quality tourism product. Some of these models relate to the initial and current planning of development. The trends are that a broad participatory model is applied for that, i.e. with the involvement of all stakeholders – local authorities and local/regional branches of national bodies, tourism-related businesses, NGOs, cultural and educational institutes, the media. In this way, it is guaranteed that all interests are met and there is common ‘ownership’ over the plans.

In some models, they experiment with the joint management of cultural tourist destinations. Using the example of UNESCO MAB Biosphere Reserves where there is a central strictly protected core zone and layers of adjacent economic activities using the natural resources in a sustainable way, cultural tourist regions may be established, with one or more important sites in the center (e.g. the Rila Monastery and the Monastery of Sveti Yoakim Osogovski) and groups of other sites, products and services around them with a common regional identity. The model is currently being tested in Greece where they are establishing the so-called DMO or Destination Management Organizations.

Another group of innovative models is linked to the essence of the culture-based tourism product. In general, the aim is to answer the expectations of the modern tourist who is traveling to search for experiences and memories. It is obvious that s/he cannot simply be informed about some cultural site and quoted a list of important dates and names which speak nothing to him or her. There is a whole new set of instruments for development of modern heritage-based tourist services; it has been presented in detail in the next chapter.

Many innovative models are applied in the field of cultural tourism marketing. They are mostly related to e-marketing or the electronic marketing which is tied to the Internet as a media and is of growing importance. It is expected that, not long from now, it will replace all traditional forms of marketing.

Of significance are also the models which make assessment of the so-called carrying capacity of tourism destinations. The latter is a practical scientific system of indicators which give a complex evaluation of the number of tourists that a certain destination can 'carry' within a certain time before the tourist pressure starts damaging it. The target cross-border region between Bulgaria and North Macedonia is far from such border values but the right approach would be to calculate the carrying capacity before the planning of tourism development so that the status is monitored during the development process. Or there is a risk to miss the moment in which this capacity is reached or even overstepped.

Choice of a strategic model for intervention in the target region

The recommended intervention model for cultural tourism development in the cross-border region is applying the principles of heritage interpretation to the development of all new culture-based service and products. The reasons for that proposal are as follows:

1. The so developed products and services are more attractive, more entertaining and more dynamic. They create experiences and memories and answer the expectations of the modern tourist.
2. Interpretation brings added value to both the cultural heritage and the tourist service.
3. This methodology allows the usage of cultural heritage without the need of physical intervention.
4. Interpretation creates a special attitude in visitors towards the given region and people which helps the will for heritage protection to become a natural desire and need and not a limitation imposed by Law.

What is heritage interpretation?

It can be defined as a translation of factual heritage information in a language that is interesting and understandable to the public. This means the interpreter does not teach the public or inform it about a site but delivers messages about the value of that same site, entertaining the audience.

Interpretation has the following qualities:

- It is fun and pleasure. It requires a non-formal atmosphere where casual styles are used differing from traditional museum talks
- Interpretation relies on the involvement of the public; that is why it has a special instrument set including games, competitions, drama, changes of styles, humour, music, etc.
- Interpretation is compliant with the public; it makes sense to them and relates to things people know. For that, it uses examples, analogies and comparisons.
- Interpretation is personal; it not only refers to things the audience knows but thing that matter to the people. Here come the so-called global values – family, love, war, etc.
- Interpretation is structured, it has a hierarchy of ideas (no more than 5) and accents.
- Interpretation has a topic and a message. The latter is especially important as it is precisely what the audience remembers and not the bare facts. The message is the central or key idea of a presentation / talk. It has to be formulated as a short, simple and logical sentence; to reveal the general aim of the talk; to be specific and worded in an interesting, attention-drawing way. For example, if the topic is the monastery of St. Yoakim Osogovski, then the message could be: “No big construction was finished in a day”, or “Yoakim Osogovski was an amazing person except a beloved saint”.

- Interpretation tells stories which have a beginning, a ‘knot’, development, culmination and ending.

Examples from the instrument set of interpretation:

1. Smiling. The smile shows pleasure in most cultures, and the mood of the interpreter is conveyed to the public. If s/he looks like having fun, then it is most likely the public will have it too.
2. Using of active verbs. They are the power of language, e.g. “Hrelyo Dragovol built that tower” and not “This tower was built by Hrelyo Dragovol”.
3. Showing the cause-and-effect chains. People love to know the reasons for certain phenomena.
4. Inserting ‘living’ people in the story. This doesn’t mean to use only real historical persons but to enliven them, to show them as breathing human beings who thought, loved, hated, were curious and after all resembled the modern human.
5. Using ‘visual metaphors’ to describe complex ideas. This is an illustration that visualizes what can hardly be expressed in words. For example, how many grown men have to stand on each other’s shoulders in order to ‘build’ Hrelyo’s tower.
6. Using ‘carriers’ for the ideas of the interpreter. It is a part of the communication strategy and is used to make a topic more attractive by putting git in the context of a scene or a situation. For instance:
 - *Disproportion in size.* If we were small enough to enter the bee-hive, you would be amazed what we could see”.

- *Disproportion in time.* If we could travel XXX years back in time, we would be looking right now at Dimitar Papradishki painting the image of Sveti Nikola”.
 - *Dominating analogies.* There are analogies that the whole presentation is built around, e.g. comparing heritage protection to a person with split personality – on one hand, he is the one threatening that heritage while on the other he has to protect it from himself.
 - *Fictional situations.* What if...? Imagine that a certain cultural site is gone?
 - *Personifications.* Assigning certain human qualities to non-humans, e.g. What would the stones from the wall of this church say if they could speak? Or – How would this 200-years old tree by the monument see the men who built it?
 - *Focusing on the individual.* Using a fictional but scientifically correct story about a person or object (animal, plant, stone, water molecule, ice crystal, etc.). For example, what happens to the stone during its voyage from the mountain to the wall of that fortress; or how would the last days of the last person remaining in the fortress look? The personal element often helps to make a story more interesting and more fun.
7. Using examples. Making a reference to something the audience knows such as: This is what the hot-meals window of a medieval fortress would look like.
 8. Using analogies. Showing the similarities between an object of interpretation and something the audience knows, e.g. In order to understand how volcanoes work, you should imagine a boiling pot with a lid.
 9. Using comparisons. Showing the important similarities and differences between an object of interpretation and something the audience knows; the

use of the word 'like' or 'such as' is a good idea. For example: If you pay attention, you will see that the mantle of the saint on that icon is red like blood.

Types of interpretation means

Oral presentations

Used to present a certain site, place, museum exposition or other on its spot. It has three parts:

- Introduction: draws the attention of the public; presents the message and the main ideas
- Main part: develops the topic around the main ideas. Uses facts, concepts, examples, anecdotes, illustrations, etc.
- Conclusion: re-instates the message

The steps of preparing an oral presentation include:

- Step 1: selection of the general topic, e.g. The Monastery of Sveti Yoakim Osogovski. It is obligatory to research all possible information on this topic in advance.
- Step 2: selection of a more specific topic if necessary, e.g. The Construction of the Monastery of Sveti Yoakim Osogovski.
- Step 3: selection of a message: No big construction was finished in a day.
- Step 4: preparation of a draft content table for the presentation (first the main part, then the conclusion and finally the introduction); planning of the transitions between them.
- Step 5: development of main part of the presentation which is basically 'filling in' the content table with contents. This is also the moment to plan the methods for involving the public (games, competitions, etc.)

- Step 6: preparation of the conclusion of the presentation, answering the question: And so what?
- Step 7: preparation of the introduction which has to contain the message and start in a way focusing the attention of the public: a short story, question, some example of the things that will be discussed, a joke, etc.
- Step 8: re-arranging the parts and finalizing the presentation.
- Step 9: rehearsal. What to learn by heart – the first thing to tell the audience upon arrival, the content table of the presentation, the first sentence of the introduction, the transitions between the main ideas, the last sentence of the conclusion.
- Step 10: selecting a title for the presentation, e.g. “Monastery for a Day?”

Often the interpreter needs visual support tools in his/her work. They have to fulfill the following criteria: simplicity, clarity, readability, compliance with what is being discussed; they are only used as long as needed to illustrate the facts. These tools can be very different: slides, real samples (stones, seeds, leaves), models (building, animal figure), drawings, photos, maps, flip-charts, writing boards, post-it papers, etc.

Guided tours

These can be classified in different ways, e.g. walking, cycling or automobile tours; architectural, archaeological, folklore tours; presentation or production tours (when a production process is presented, e.g. the making of bread from the grain)...

Every tour has four parts:

- Acquaintance part: when the group arrives. First the guide presents himself; photos of the group are made; checks whether everyone has the necessary equipment, water, sun screen lotion, etc.

- Introduction: same as for interpretive presentations. The route is presented: length, difficulty, stops on the way, toilets, etc.
- Main part: same as for interpretive presentations, only here transitions between the stops are very important; the guide may give various tasks to the audience while walking/cycling, e.g. to find as many words as possible that rhyme with something or simply seek things along (e.g. who will make the most photos of round stones).
- Conclusion: same as for interpretive presentations. The guests are invited to come again.

The steps for preparing an interpretive tour are the same as for presentations. There are some simple methods to make a tour more dynamic:

- Using support visual tools: guidebooks, binoculars, thermometers, dolls, rope, photo album, drawings and other illustrations, maps, compass, mirror, records of songs, things that might not always be seen in the field (e.g. a special flower)
- Using mysteries or puzzles
- Fun activities: cognitive games, use of senses, treasure hunting etc.
- Asking questions: to focus attention (do you see that letter on the wall?); to compare (what is common between these two things?); to apply (why is this important to know?); to find a solution (how can we stop erosion behind the fortress?); to assess (is this good or bad?)

Useful advice to the guide/interpreter:

- Stay always in the front of the group
- With a larger group, you may have to cut the number of stops down
- If something unexpected happens, try to incorporate it in the tour

- If possible, finish the tour at the starting point
- Stick to the preliminary schedule; if late anyway, warn the group
- Pay attention to the slowest in the group
- Monitor the group dynamics and state
- In case of incident with one group member, try to pay attention to him/her AND the rest of the group.

Other interpretive activities with the participation of an interpreter

- Demonstrations of living history (theatrical performance of real or fictional persons from the past)
- Personifications (theatrical performance of a non-human – animal, rock, tree, etc.)
- Puppet theatres
- Wandering interpretation (personal talks with people visiting the site)
- Information points (personal talks with people visiting the point)

Useful advice for dramatizations:

- Seek authenticity in clothing and behavior
- Seek accuracy from a historical point of view
- Speak in present tense – Now, in 1820...
- Avoid real famous persons; there is a danger of falling into conflict with the notion that the public already has of that person
- Prepare very well for the topic, the world and time that will be presented
- If possible, start a dialogue with the public

- Select carefully the place for dramatization: next to a building or out in nature
- Plan the dramatization well: one or two people; involving someone 'from the past' to join the group during the tour
- Plan the appearance of the interpreter: we meet the group in our role; we first greet them and then take the role; and so on
- Plan the final act: we get off role and make the conclusion as ourselves; we retire before the end still in role; we never leave the role, etc.

Useful advice for personifications:

- Accuracy in appearance is not so important as the accuracy in the characteristics of the object
- It is most important that the whole play is fun; then it can be used for adults and children alike
- Not talk too much; focus on acting

Useful advice for puppet theatres:

- Puppets may present real life persons or non-human objects
- Puppet theatres can be used as a separate event or as addition to other activities, e.g. the tour guide may use a puppet at some point of the tour to reinforce some information
- The puppets may be made of any material: gloves or socks; masks or faces on a stick; sponge; balloon with painted eyes; paper bags, etc.
- Puppets must have faces and facial expressions
- The script should be in line with the available material and human resources
- Less dialogue, more action

- A colourful background is better, and to be changed during the show if possible
- Sound effects are recommended; they may be recorded or performed live
- The show should be short, and so should the message

Useful advice for wandering interpretation:

- There should be a well-considered message but subjected to what the visitor is interested in
- The interpreter should first introduce him/herself and be objective about the topic or situation in question; the description of any effects or consequences from the situation should be made from a professional point of view and not legal
- The interpreter should be polite and friendly; showing interest in the visitors themselves – where they are from; what is their background, etc.
- The interpreter must answer any question as if they are asked for the first time (though a/he better be prepared with some answers in advance)
- The interpreter should not dominate the conversation and stay too long, unless people show real interest

Useful advice for organization of info points:

- When greeting visitors: make them feel welcome and not just tolerated. Wear a badge with your name. Prepare a poster or s.th. saying “Welcome! How can we help you?” Let people feel important. You may play some quiet music; it creates an informal atmosphere.
- When orienting visitors: let people know what they can see and do in the area and neighbouring regions; prepare guidebooks, brochures, maps with places to visit and distances; times to get to those places by car or by bike /

on foot if applicable. Weather information is always well accepted by visitors.

- When trying to create attitudes in visitors: prepare information about the region's history. Be ready to tell how local people live and how visitors should behave in order not to inflict damage. Use positive messages: "Thank you for leaving flowers for the others!" instead of "Do not pick up flowers!"
- When answering visitors' needs: be prepared to answer a large variety of questions, incl. the location of toilets and drinking water, gas stations and restaurants, campings and picnic places. Make a directory of FAQs. When you don't have an answer to a question, apologize but try to find it for the next time.
- When interpreting the area: prepare a set of visual supporting materials. Prepare answers to more questions about the history of the region.
- Provide more dynamic services:
 - Positive image is important – as both appearance and behaviour
 - Be active when welcoming visitors: smile, nod, eye contact
 - Keep the info point visitor-friendly as well
 - Prepare a collection of supporting materials
 - Pay real attention to every visitor; if there are many, try to give them equal attention
 - Listen to the visitor
 - Provide visible information when the info point is closed
 - Be ready to suggest alternatives (e.g. in bad weather) and to secure first aid

- Be prepared to handle angry or irritated visitors; listen and be sympathetic, do not lose patience and interrupt; do not answer to abusive remarks; let visitors ‘steam off’ and then offer assistance

Interpretive exhibitions

There are the following types:

- Indoor exhibitions – on walls, tables, in information centers, museums, offices, municipalities, company headquarters...
- Outdoor exhibitions – with interpretive boards and constructions, prepared to endure various weather conditions; at bus and train stops, viewpoints, campings, picnic places, rivers, etc.
- Temporary exhibitions (indoors or outdoors) – everywhere our audience can be reached, incl. at festivals and other events
- Information boards – along tourist trails, at parking lots, historical sites, museums, etc.
- Regulatory signs – where there are certain behavior rules

The concept of building an interpretive exhibition is similar to that of presentations, only here the title is usually the message. There are four levels of presenting:

- The message (the first thing visible)
- Not more than 5 main ideas, visually divided
- Selected details for each idea (text and illustrations)
- Information for the visitors how they could learn more themselves (web-addresses, attached calendar of events, names of experts on the subject, offers for guided tours, etc.)

There are also some specific requirements in the design of interpretive exhibitions:

- Unity: identical visual separators (graphic, physical, etc.); identical scripts and colour schemes; identical lines and angles; identical illustrations (paintings, graphics, photos)
- Accents: separating (physically, by colour or size); pointing out
- Balance: symmetrical (vertically and horizontally); asymmetrical
- Colour: selection of a colour scheme of the exhibition: 1 main colour and 1 to 3 complementary; plan carefully the lighting of the exhibition; special rules apply to the formatting of texts
- Attractiveness: more vision, less text; 3D-elements (sticking letters, replacing wall panels with boxes and drawers, hanging objects from the ceiling); interactivity (the visitor takes physical part); introducing questions and answers; connecting elements (e.g. which apron goes with each of the female folk costumes); mechanical tools or objects the visitor can touch e.g. aromatic plants, stones, etc.

Self-guided tours

The ‘technology’ of their development is very much similar to that of the guided tours but there are some important points:

- Selecting a place for the tour: same requirements as for the guided tours; minimal interference in the natural environment
- Selecting a tour with an interpretive potential
- Tour accessibility for children, elderly people, people with special needs
- Positioning the tour close to tourist centers, picnic area or similar
- Tour duration: 400 to 1600 m; 30 minutes to 1 hour

- Signing of the trail, including arrow signs where necessary
- Avoid potentially dangerous zones
- Choice of stops: no more than 10-12, all connected to the topic and subjected to no more than 5 main ideas; it is recommended that most of the stops are in the first half of the tour
- Tour design: circular or same track in both directions
- Predicting visitors' needs: parking places, toilets, drinking water, benches, dust bins, viewpoints, etc.
- Placing info boards in the beginning, at the end and at stops, plus some information on paper (e.g. self-guiding leaflet)

These tours can also be made more dynamic despite the lack of interpreter (guide, host). Some simple advice:

- Questions and answers – the answer is hidden for the visitor to find
- Treasure hunt – objects that cannot be moved
- Points for distant observations (binoculars, spyglass)
- Use of riddles and puzzles whenever possible

The principles and method of heritage interpretation are being applied in countries with better developed tourism than Bulgaria and North Macedonia for many years now. The future of modern cultural and natural tourism is definitely connected to that methodology. The earlier it is introduced in the regions willing to protect their precious heritage through tourism, the greater competitive advantages will be accumulated by those regions.

MEASURES AND ACTIVITIES FOR GOAL REALIZATION AND MONITORING

Measures for joint tourist interpretation and usage of cultural heritage in the cross-border region

A. Measures related to the direct usage of the cultural heritage for tourism purposes

A.1. Undertaking scientific research and organizing the information about the cultural heritage of the region

This group of measures is related to identified needs in the development of the strategic and planning documents existing in the target region. Furthermore, the lack of information about a certain cultural heritage object does not allow this object to be interpreted and hence restricts the chances for its 'sale' as a tourist service. In this group, there are the following measures:

- *Making full archaeological research or finalizing such research that has already started for precise unmovable objects from the territory*

This concerns such sites as the rock niches at the village of Babinska Reka in the municipality of Bobov Dol and the site of Kisela Voda at the village of Lipkovo where the so-called 'Lipkovo mummies' come from. It is necessary that the sites with greater tourist potential are given a priority in the planning and funding of archaeological research – either from state funds or from projects with external funding. The focus has to be laid on the uncovering of as much as possible from sites that could be seen by the future visitors on the spot, as well as the collecting and processing of maximal volume of factual information which could be used for the development of interpretative programmes related to those sites. It is also important to acquire visual information for the purposes of interpretation and marketing, and even use the research itself as a marketing instrument, for example through a video-log in YouTube or other similar modern means.

Proper planning is crucial from the very beginning for the future exhibiting of the finds made during excavations – the ideal case is, in principle, the creation of an exhibition at/near the very location, in the form of a museum or a visitor center. In practice, realistic opportunities go down to the exhibiting in an already existing museum but the aim should be for the local / regional museum and not the national one located outside the territory.

All the collected information must be digitalized and organized in a way allowing an easy access and use by all stakeholders. Carriers can be again the museums in the region but the access to the directories and archives has to be possible via the Internet.

- *Making detailed target research of the intangible cultural heritage of the region*

This is about local songs, dances, tales and even old culinary recipes, as well as crafts which used to be traditional but are already lost (e.g. knowledge of the dying of textiles in the past when there were no chemical dyes). A lot of information in this respect has already been collected by the existing museums, the Chitalishta in the Bulgarian side and the cultural-and-artistic associations from the Macedonian side, as well as by various projects of national institutes and universities. It is necessary that this information is systemized and then completed by research on the spot, making records and photos / videos, as well as collection of samples where possible.

Here as well, what was already said about providing easy access to information archives and databases for all stakeholders, is very much relevant.

- *Full digitalization of already created funds and archives of the cultural heritage of the region*

This measure is directed mainly to the funds of museums in the target region but also the Chitalishta and cultural associations (when they have such funds and archives). The final aim is full digitalization, so that every piece of cultural heritage is surely preserved at least as knowledge but it is recommendable that the process starts and the focus is laid on those elements that will be the first to enter new tourism products and

services. That is why networking and inter-regional coordination among all stakeholders is of special importance. Again, the need of easy access to the digitalized content for everyone is crucial.

A.2. Reconstruction, conservation and maintenance of the cultural heritage objects of the region

- *Improving the condition of exhibited cultural heritage objects where necessary*

In view of the exactness of formulations, it is important to say that this includes objects which have not been specially exhibited by experts in order to be accessible to the general public but are just present on the spot – such is the case, for instance, with churches and other religious sites. This also concerns movable objects of tangible heritage that are part of museum funds – icons, old books and similar, which need restoration. As in research, here again the ideal case would be to put all cultural heritage objects in good condition and maintain it in time but the realistic scenario is to start with those of greater value and/or biggest potential to be included in attractive tourist products and services. Especially in view of the fact that these activities are more expensive than the other measures proposed in this Strategy and hence – harder and slower to implement.

- *Providing a constant and appropriate maintenance for the cultural heritage objects which are currently in a (relatively) good condition*

It is not necessary to leave the care for the maintenance of cultural heritage solely on the backs of institutions which have limited funds (e.g. museums) or other priorities too (e.g. the Bulgarian Church or the municipal administrations). It would be more sustainable if that responsibility was divided among more stakeholders, including the sectors of business and tourism in particular which are using or will be using the heritage objects in a responsible way, generating income. Apart from the organization of public campaigns for saving objects at risk, a permanent measure could be the establishment of a regional (or municipal) funds for maintaining of heritage objects, which would be filled in by percentages of the income generated by every tourist visiting the region; then those funds could be spent according to a programme of

priority objects and activities, accepted through a consensus by the local stakeholders. At the worst, funds can be assigned for these purposes under the municipal or regional tourism development programmes but there priorities could be different.

A.3. Putting the cultural heritage objects of the region in a state suitable for tourist visits

- *Exhibiting movable tangible objects of cultural heritage*

Apart from the case with the municipal museum in the town of Dupnitsa, which has no building of its own and hence no space for exhibiting the collected materials, there are other cases in which whole collections remain packed in various funds and archives. Cultural heritage has to reach people, be shown and known. Usually, space is never enough to show all items of a given group, so exhibitions are developed conceptually and the corresponding selection is made. As in the common case permanent expositions in the museums are the subject of administrative procedures and, and as shown by their name, they are really altered, it is recommendable to work for temporary exhibitions and maybe even travelling exhibitions around the region and out of it. The planning of such exhibitions requires modern approaches and instruments, so that they can be easily packed, transported and arranged again in accordance with the available space and conditions in every single place.

- *Socialisation of non movable tangible objects of cultural heritage*

Here we include activities of different kinds which can be improving the space around the site (making alleys, greening and planting flowers and trees, placing benches and rest places, dustbins etc.), installing the right lighting, putting up fences and entrances, securing parking lots, toilets, water, vending machines for coffee, beverages and snacks. In all circumstances, one has to think about the provision of access for people with special needs, for example hindered mobility, eyesight or hearing etc. After which, it is necessary to decide what the working times of the site will be, how and by whom it will be opened, and also so whether or not taxes will be collected from the visitors (entrance tickets, parking taxes and others); what will the size of those taxes be and where where will they go / how they will be used. If money

is to be collected, then a financial plan must be made which will clarify things such as price tables, discounts, promotions etc.

A.4. Development of a tourist cultural agenda of the target region

- Transforming existing cultural events into tourist ones

The analysis of the current cultural agenda of the target region shows that most of the events are of focal character. Even those of national or international character can hardly be defined as tourist, except in the the purely theoretical meaning of tourism as spending time outside one's place of residence with the purpose of recreation, business or other. Then the participants from other regions and countries can be defined as tourists and event can eventually be classified as a tourist one, especially bearing in mind that the participants in question are spending some money in the destination and therefore generating some income. But the goal all of this Strategy and of the efforts for tourism development as a whole cannot be eventual classification of existing activities as tourists ones. A real tourist event should attract external spectators and guests who should consume various products and services in the region and generate tangible income in local economy.

Not all events from the current cultural agenda can be transformed into tourist events. The review of national cultural calendars of both Bulgaria and North Macedonia shows that over 1/3 of all events which pretend to be touristic are folklore, followed by almost 1/4 of festivals dedicated to food and drinks. The target cross-border region has some established events from both groups which can be developed into tourist events but that must be done with extreme caution. From a marketing point of view, there is no point in making products or services which are identical or at least similar to those of the competition - and that is exactly what is happening at the moment on the national level. Folklore festivals are being organised in almost identical ways, as well as the festivals of food and drinks where they make stands with the corresponding products plus (!) a folklore program. Furthermore, the folklore program is rarely territorially specific; in all parts of the country, they're showing folklore from everywhere.

From all that was said, it follows that the planners of tourist events related to folklore or food and drinks in the target cross-border region must first answer the question why would a visitor come to listen folklore or participate in a culinary festival exactly in this region, and the answer is not because here they make the same events as everywhere else. On the contrary, the tourist events in the District of Kyustendil and the North-East Planning Region must offer something different than the other parts of Bulgaria and North Macedonia, and this must be well marketed in advance.

- *Developing new cultural events with purely tourist purposes*

Tourist events are an exceptional tool for speeding up tourist development in a given region. They are planned to show the best of the region's resources; they are fun; they do not last too long and are hence easy to visit; they generate a lot of income within a limited time; and they have an exclusive marketing effect as they draw a lot of media and public attention. The danger here is to make them again celebrations for the local community and not for the visitors. When the visitor is celebrating, the local community or at least the local suppliers are working. Practice at present is showing that this rule appears to be a great challenge for the Balkan common psychology.

The proper planning of a tourist event includes the following recommendable steps, presented in a simplified form:

- a. taking a decision to organise the event; gathering of partners, forming an organisational committee with people responsible for the various parts;
- b. selecting a date for the event, after having decided how many days it will be and checking which non working days are "free" from other similar events (similar in type or in place; in that case competition has to be minimised as much as possible);
- c. selecting a venue for the event, not only as settlement but as precise locations for the stage, the stands, the parking of visitors' cars etc. Thinking of options in case of bad weather;

- d. compiling a detailed program of the event by hours; it is important to think from the point of view you of the visitor, so there are are no overlapping activities or too long empty periods between activities when the guests would wonder what to do;
- e. planning of the publicity for the event - in the media, in social networks and all other accessible channels;
- f. planning and calculating all necessary materials, financial and human resources, budgeting and distributing roles and responsibilities;
- g. monitoring of the implementation; evaluation and conclusions for the next events.

It is obvious that festival cultural tourism is not an effort for one man, one organisation or even one institution; it is important to work in partnership and to involve all stakeholders, including among the media.

B. Measures related to the interpretation of cultural heritage for the purposes of sustainable tourism

B.1. Development of interpretative cultural tourist products and services

- *Developing of interpretative presentations for precise objects of cultural heritage*

The point of interpretative presentations, as they were described above, is to enliven and make more interesting and attractive the object of cultural heritage for the general public. It is suitable to prepare such presentations for all non-movable objects described in the present Strategy as by expert estimation they have the greatest tourist potential. It is also suitable to make interpretative presentations for various groups of movable objects, for example the paintings of Vladimir Dimitrov - The Master, all the icons in the gallery of the church of Sveti Nikola in Kumanovo. Same goes for the elements of intangible cultural heritage such as the Shoppe folklore dance or the legend of the four Saints who founded the monasteries of Osogovo, Lesново, Pchinya and Rila. Adding interpretation to the folklore festivals would also help to create a

unique product or at least a product differing from the mass of all other events in Bulgaria and North Macedonia which are practically indistinct from each other, from the point of view of the potential visitor.

- *Developing of interpretative cultural tourist trails in the region*

It is recommendable that there is diversity in the preparation of cultural tourist trails, i.e. that the accent is put on the quality and not on the quantity. As a start, there can be just two trails of each type but developed in the most interesting and attractive way possible and answering the needs and demons of as many potential visitors as possible. This means to prepare a set of short walking trails, longer walking trails, cycling trails (and even by horse or cart if possible) and automobile trails. Keeping in mind that there will be most clients for the first and last ones, but the other two groups are growing in significance. It is not necessary to think obligatorily in the scope of building a trail, that is of creating a tourist infrastructure - this would delay the opening of trails until the time funding is secured for this infrastructure. Plus in many cases, it is not even actually necessary, unless we are speaking of securing the track, for instance placing rails, strengthening the terrain etc. In the general case, it is enough to have a safe path and a good interpreter.

The Pirin Tourism Forum has a short list of steps for developing walking trails, prepared for the training of local communities who are willing to work for sustainable tourism. The list includes the following:

1. the trail must be located close to the place where there is or there will be a tourist flow;
2. if possible, the trail should use existing paths instead of cutting new ones; there should be minimal need of interfering in the natural environment (additional strengthening or safety measures etc);
3. the difficulty of the trail should be estimated in accordance with the potential public, for instance close to settlements that will be visited mostly by families with children, it is recommendable to plan the trail in such a way

so that it can be used by children. The best option is to prepare several trails with different difficulty;

4. the starting point of the trail must be well planned in view of access; if a vehicle must be used to get there, are this service must be offered on the spot;
5. it is best if the starting and final point coincide or are at least close to one another;
6. the length of the trail must also be decided according to the potential public. For short circular trails, for example, the maximum recommendable length is 4 hours;
7. the trailer must connect suitable objects (natural, cultural), united by a certain theme such as “Traditional livelihoods of local population in the 18th- 19th century” or “The deciduous forest”; if possible, it should not repeat the themes of other existing trails;
8. trails which are located close to protected areas must give an option to connect - thematically or physically - with the natural heritage and the existing trails in the very protected territory;
9. the trail was not endanger the sources of valuable (rare or protected) species;
10. when safety works are needed along the trail or even the construction of additional infrastructure (bridges, railings etc), two things must be considered: (1) the new infrastructure must fit in the environment as much as possible and and (2) the safety of visitors is of utmost importance, so help should be sought from experts when developing the trail;
11. the signing of the trail must not repeat existing signings and must not create a risk from confusing the visitors. Clear and readable colours and signs must

be used and those must be announced in the starting point of the trail. Signing should be placed on clearly visible spots;

12. a good estimation must be made about the placing of arrow signs - at forks, turns, water sources and others. Signs themselves must be clearly visible and readable, and must be made out of material which fits into the environment;
13. an interpretive program must be developed for the selected topic of the trail in two versions - with and without a guide. In line with the topic, the number of stops on the trail must be planned. Depending on the precise situation, it has to be decided whether or not the creation of rest places (fireplaces, benches, tables, shelters) and viewpoints is necessary;
14. for each of the chosen stops along the trail, and information (interpretation) board must be prepared, plus additional boards for the starting and final points if these do not coincide;
15. interpretive guides must be prepared for the trail - minimum 2 in order for them to be able to replace one another. Their preparation must include minimal safety rules;
16. a printed material with a map of the trail must be prepared, in as many languages as needed;
17. the trail must be tested by representatives of the potential target group, for instance families with children. Only then is the length of the trail confirmed;
18. the trial must be marketed according to the selected target audience.

When developing automobile trails, there is a certain specificity but the general rules are all the same - apart from interpretation, it is important always to think about the comfort, safety and entertainment of the visitors.

- *Developing of interpretative exhibitions and information materials for the cultural heritage of the region*

The exhibiting of heritage objects in the best possible way in space, provision of suitable lighting, access etc is obligatory when creating expositions; the adding of interpretation to the exhibit is a totally new level which brings added value to heritage and guarantees the quality of the tourist service. It is recommendable that elements of interpretation are added to all existing or future museum expositions, including the small museum collections.

Furthermore, fully interpreted expositions can be developed with replicas, photos, drawings, video materials, models etc of object of heritage with which we cannot or shouldn't work freely outside their place of storage or location. If interpretation is done properly, the visitor will not suffer from the lack of the real object. And such an exposition could be very flexible in terms available space opportunities and could travel easily around the region and out of it.

The information materials that are being published about cultural heritage with the purpose of tourism and not with purely academic purposes should also carry at least some elements of interpretation. Especially if the aim is to sell those and generate additional income. Then the attractiveness of the material is of special importance. It must not be neglected too, that non-specialised public is more likely to learn and remember something about the given object if the suggested information is interpreted and not just told in a good scientific language with lots of facts.

B.2. Offering an integrated sustainable tourism product based on the cultural heritage of the region

The developed interpretive presentations, trails and expositions should be united in an integrated tourism product, so that they can be sold on the tourism market. This means first of all all that they should be packed as separate tourist services. Or, for each of them, the following details should be clarified:

- a. what exactly is included in the service - a complete description
- b. who is offering the service - better be more than one person, so that they are able to replace each other
- c. where is the service offered - precise stops, access, options in case of bad weather if in principle the service is to be offered outdoors
- d. how long does the service take - with the arrival of visitors, introduction, eventually time for additional questions, seeing the visitors off
- e. how much does the service cost - price per person in a group of minimum XX people (it is recommendable how to set a maximal number of visitors in a group in view of available space or other considerations); discounts for children, elderly people, repeat visitors, days of week etc. Practice has shown that price calculation tends to create certain difficulties in places with insufficient experience, and this mostly concerns the calculation of labour for the service suppliers. We recommend that this moment is not neglected but expert help is sought or at least some comparative information from available sources (for example on the Internet).

C. Measures related to the provision of a suitable environment for the development of sustainable tourism based on the cultural heritage of the target region

Note: we have not included measures for improvement of general or public infrastructure and public services as their current state is not unbreakable obstacle for the development of equality cultural tourism products in the target cross border territory. Although there are places with needs of improving various elements of the environment (for example repairing village roads, sewage systems, better waste management etc), the greater need is for the development of the tourist product itself as the repair of the road will not bring tourists alone.

C.1. Developing the human resources for sustainable tourism in the region

- *Preparation of interpreters who will offer the new interpretive cultural tourism services*

As it was already pointed out when describing the different types of interpretive methods and means, it is possible to develop interpretive services without the direct participation of an interpreter. In some cases, this can even be the only option due to objective . circumstances. But as a whole, it is recommendable that the services are offered by guides or presenters who have been trained in the principles and instruments of heritage interpretation - in that way, the added value you of the experience for the visitor is much greater, and more income is generated in the local economy. What are the requirements towards the good interpreters:

- a. they themselves must like and be interested in the topic which is being interpreted. The public can feel this and it gives the best results
- b. they must have good memory or at least the willingness to pay enough efforts to remember as much facts about the object of interpretation as possible. This is the raw material with which the interpreter must work and they cannot afford to be unprepared. Especially nowadays, when there are so many accessible information sources on the internet and the public has often made an effort to read them in advance. Of course, not all of these sources are reliable and some may even carry disinformation which is dangerous. That is why the interpreter must use for his or her preparation only reliable sources and the help of the relevant experts
- c. they must be good storytellers and be able to work with words and speech as a whole. To express themselves correctly and be able to explain terms and use synonyms and idioms. To speak clearly and audibly and have no parasite sounds and words. The use of jargon and dialects have its place for the achievement of certain effects in certain moments of interpretation but it should not be used during the whole presentation
- d. They must give a sense of humour and treat their guests friendly. The sense of humour is very helpful for both interpretation itself and the management of

visitors but it should be used with caution - the interpreters must not overuse jokes and they have to be careful about the age, gender, ethnic origin and other features of the public

e. they must be able to react quickly and adequately in unforeseen situations
With time and experience, every guide expands the circle of situations that he or she is able to predict and therefore prepare for them but even then, there are cases when s/he when can be surprised. Keeping self control and calmness is the first important thing in such situations, and then combinatory thinking for handling the problem. The sense of humour can be of help again. As well as the following -

f. they must have at least elementary knowledge and skills in guiding groups (this is valid mostly for the guides on interpretive trails but some principles apply to all interpreters). For example, apart from being able to provide elementary first aid, the interpreters must be able to monitor and manage group dynamics; to keep eye contact with everyone and not allow themselves be monopolized by certain group members; to comply with the last person in the group; to have ready tricks for focusing attention when there is indication that people are losing interest etc.

g. they must keep a welcoming appearance which includes personal hygiene, the keeping of tidy hair, not too much jewellery or makeup, non-intrusive clothes and accessories and so on.

The organising of trainings for local interpreters is one of the most important steps in the development of sustainable tourism based on cultural heritage.

- *Providing high quality of all tourist services which are part of the cultural tourism product of the target region*

It is logical that every supplier of tourist services must be well and professionally prepared for the specifics of the precise service being offered - accommodation, catering etc. For all, however, it is equally important to have knowledge about customer care. This includes, for example, the making of first distant contact with

the client (during reservations), welcoming, accommodating, monitoring the needs of the client, willing to provide added value through a small gift or gesture of attention and so on. The improvement of personnel can be achieved in different ways including the provision of information sources, training, study visits to other regions with developed tourism and exchange of experience, practical training etc.

- *Developing partnerships, cooperation, networking*

In the tourism sector, it is especially important to be able to work in a team as the product which is being sold is a complex one. Many and different service suppliers take part in its compilation, and the creation of a suitable environment for its development involves also other stakeholders, outside the sphere of business. The need of partnership is of great significance in the development of regional products as is the case with the target cross-border region in the current Strategy. The establishment of a network, formal or not, helps the strengthening of connections between the different participants and eases communication - especially with the opportunities existing today (mailing lists, web forums, Facebook groups and others). In the future, if sustainable tourism and cultural tourism in particular really become a regional priority for all stakeholders, it is worth thinking of the establishment of a formal structure which would coordinate and manage its development, be the carrier of various brands and quality systems etc.

One should not neglect the benefits that might be derived from the cooperation with people, organizations and institutions outside the target territory. Cooperating with neighbouring regions gives opportunities for attractive diversification of the tourist product. The exchange of experience with people working for the achievement of similar goals in other regions, even distant ones, help to evade some growth mistakes and gives innovative ideas. Keeping contact with national and even international institutions related to sustainable tourism guarantees that the knowledge of participants about legal and regulatory matters is up to date and gives them better opportunity for lobbying at higher levels for the achievements of the common goals of the region.

B.2. Information provision and marketing of the tourist services and products based on the cultural heritage of the region

- Information provision of cultural tourism in the region

Information is very important for the visitors of a given region. This means both information about the cultural and natural resources of the region and practical issues such as roads, transport, places to stay and eat, maps, ATMs, shops for mobile phones charging devices, museum opening times etc. In the best case scenario, there are tourist information centres where this information is concentrated and constantly updated. The tourist information centre can also be virtual, i.e. an information portal on the Internet which has the advantage of being accessible at any time and from any place but lacks the life contacts with the people in the information office - and that has other type of advantages. One level higher stands the visitor centre which also includes a tourist information office but is in itself a tourist site since it offers various additional services.

In case of limited opportunities, to provide visitor information one can use information points that can be offices of other organisations or institutions, specialised stands in commercial sites, displays or boards with information located at spots on the track of the tourist flow, and even information kiosks in a more modern version which however are more pretentious in terms of maintenance and connection to the electricity network and the Internet.

The initial provision and constant updating of the information itself is actually the most important moments when speaking of visitor information provision. The most sustainable option would be for each carrier of information to be responsible for his own updating in cases of change, e.g. hotels would update themselves their prices in the common database; museums would change themselves the summer opening times to winter; the owners of transport companies would update the timetables of buses. Unfortunately, the Balkan experience shows that this option is for some reason not working in our conditions and there should always be at least

one person or legal entity responsible for information updating. This has to be carried in mind when planning tourism information provision in the target region.

- *Professional marketing of the cultural tourism products of the region*

Marketing is the final element of the product chain of tourism and it is the process of actual sale of tourism products and services. Tourism marketing has some structural peculiarities which are equally important - this is known as the marketing mix or the five Ps of marketing:

1. Product. A precise and detailed definition of the tourist product which is subject to sale. guaranteed and quality tourist services, well prepared suppliers.
2. People. Defining the target group/s of clients whom we want to sell our products to. There are no universal products which would be equally usable by all groups of potential tourists. That is why market segmentation and the identification of key characteristics of the target groups is of utmost importance for the successful sales. Among the key characteristics of the target groups are things such as: age, gender, family status, educational and professional status, financial opportunities, preferred means of travel, preferred sources of information, preferred products and services to buy etc. In the ideal case, this information about the potential visitors can be obtained through a market research which is however expensive and time-consuming. Indirect information can be gained via alternative channels: through a review you of the websites of tour operators, interviews with owners or managers of similar sites having high volumes of visitors, placing short questionnaires in ticket centres of museums or on the web sites of cultural tourists objects which have certain clientele etc.
3. Positioning. This is related to the selection of a distinctive guiding feature or a face of the offered product, in line with the selected target market. For example, the Monastery of Sveti Yoakim Osogovski can be offered as a

tourist site to: religious tourists or pilgrims as a holy place; to lovers of architecture as a sample of construction mastery from several historic periods; to non-specialised travelling groups as a stop between the visits to the astronomical observatory of Kokino and the museums in Kyustendil.

4. Price. This is actually about the formulating of a price policy for the selling of the tourism product which includes the calculation of a relevant and competitive price of services, planning of percentage for intermediaries (tour operators or travel agents), planning of discounts for various occasions - in low season, for repeat visits, for children, for bigger groups etc.
5. Promotion. Or the advertisement and PR campaign through which the desired markets are accessed. There is a very broad circle of possible measures the choice of which must be made carefully and on the basis of the first four Ps of the marketing mix: production of printed advertisement materials (brochures, leaflets, flyers, albums, posters etc); production of films and promotional videos; direct advertisement in different media - newspapers and magazines, radio, television, internet media; participation interest fares - national and international; organisation of familiarisation tours for journalists and tour operators; maintenance of websites and portals; maintenance of profiles in social networks; production and sale of specialised souvenirs and many others.

The choice of appropriate marketing for the cultural tourism products of the target cross-border region can be alone the subject of a separate strategy programme. It is recommendable the development of such a document involves both marketing or tourism experts and as many local stakeholders as possible.

C.3. Integrating the development of sustainable tourism based on the cultural heritage of the region in all planning and strategic documents regarding the territory

This measure is important as it will guarantee the involvement and will of all stakeholders for the sustainable development of cultural tourism in the target territory. Opportunities will be expanded for the provision of more activities which are needed for this development and the securing of greater funding from more than one potential source.

Monitoring plan for the effectiveness of implementation in view of improving that effectiveness

Monitoring is the process of constant observation and following the progress and development of certain processes, with the aim of seeing whether the expected results and set goals are being achieved. If deviations from those expected results are reported, corrective measures and actions are applied in order to guarantee the final effect. Monitoring is an obligatory element of the process of strategic planning and the further implementation of strategic goals and measures.

There are different monitoring methods which are applied according to precise situations and processes. One of the most objective methods is the monitoring based on a system of preliminary indicators which could be objectively verified. For the purposes of the current Strategy, we suggest the effectiveness of implementation to be done through the indicators below, on periodic annual principle or, in case of identified deviations an taken corrective measures, until the deviation is removed.

Indicator 1: Number of cultural heritage objects for which full information has been collected after the development of this Strategy

Target value: minimum 20

Sources of verification: reports from studies, museum archives, documentation of Community Centers and Cultural-and-Artistic Associations, photos, video-materials, digitalized databases

Indicator 2: Number of cultural heritage objects whose state was improved after the development of this Strategy

Target value: minimum 10

Sources of verification: project reports, acceptance protocols for works, conservation protocols, photos, video-materials

Indicator 3: Number of cultural heritage sites, socialized for tourist visits after the development of this Strategy

Target value: minimum 10

Sources of verification: project reports, acceptance protocols for works and supply of equipment and furniture, photos, video-materials

Indicator 4: Percentage of tourist events by which the cultural agenda of the region has been enriched after the development of this Strategy (existing ones that have been transformed and new ones)

Target value: minimum 50%

Sources of verification: programmes of tourist events, photos and video-materials from the events, media coverage incl. in social networks

Indicator 5: Number of interpretative cultural tourist services developed after the development of this Strategy

Target value: minimum 10 interpretative presentations; minimum 5 interpretative trails; minimum 5 interpretative expositions

Sources of verification: Interpretative programmes, tourist offers, Internet-sites of local suppliers and/or tour operators and travel agents

Indicator 6: Number of local interpreters trained after the development of this Strategy

Target value: minimum 30

Sources of verification: protocols and lists from trainings, photos, feedback forms

Indicator 7: Number of local suppliers of tourist services prepared to offer better quality of those services, after the development of this Strategy

Target value: minimum 100

Sources of verification: protocols and lists from trainings and study visits, photos, feedback forms, published information guidebooks and other materials

Indicator 8: Number of new marketing measures implemented for the sales of the cultural tourism product of the region, after the development of this Strategy

Target value: minimum 20 new types of printed materials and souvenirs; minimum 5 new video-materials; minimum 5000 followers of the Facebook-page of the region

Sources of verification: copies of the printed and video-materials and souvenirs; protocols for their dissemination; Facebook statistics

Indicator 9: Number of the planning and strategic documents for the region where the enhancement of cultural tourism is included after the development of this Strategy

Target value: minimum 10

Sources of verification: planning and strategic documents for the territory of the target cross-border region; protocols from the sessions of municipal councils or other bodies endorsing the above documents; project reports where applicable



Lead partner: **CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY OF
KYUSTENDIL, BULGARIA**

Project partner: **FONDATION FOR DEVELOPMENT OF SMALL AND
MEDIUM ENTERPRISES, KUMANOVO, NORTH
MACEDONIA**

CONSULTANT:
PIRIN TOURISM FORUM

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