

## PRELIMINARY REPORT

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**THE CHALLENGES IN NEW  
TOURIST DESTINATION  
DEVELOPMENT WITHIN  
THE AREA OF ECOLOGICAL  
NETWORK NATURA 2000**

**ABSTRACT:** Natura 2000 is often equated with protected areas where human activities are significantly limited or even excluded in order to preserve biodiversity. However, Natura 2000 is based on other settings. Most of the activities and projects in the Natura area can be carried out with the mitigation of possible negative impacts. Sometimes they need only minor adjustments. Proposals of major development projects or changes in land use should undergo the evaluation of acceptability for the ecological network. If

the assessment is positive, the procedure will be allowed if it is in the Natura area. As such, the Natura 2000 can provide new opportunities for rural areas, for example through eco-tourism and recreation. The paper will provide a SWOT analysis of micro location of building a new transport route, which is aimed at the development of new tourist destinations in the protected area.

**KEY WORDS:** Natura 2000, a tourist destination, a new traffic railway route

## INTRODUCTION

For the development of tourism we have to have a destination as a main goal, as some authors (Čomić, 1998; Ahmetović – Tomka, 1996) point out. For them tourism derives from space, takes place in space, and has irreversible impact on the transformation of the space. Global trends in relation to the development and growth of tourism demand, travel behaviour and preferences of tourists and destinations that are faced with trends of experiential structuring values associated with the development of destination indicate that the destination of the observed area should use its core values. This certainly includes the benefits of distance from urban areas (the feeling of exclusivity / isolation), the wealth of natural and cultural values, the wealth of historical heritage. It is therefore necessary to integrate the tourist offer of the entire destination, following the principles of sustainable development. The construction of new transport infrastructure in this environment brings changes that are long-term. When we add to this the fact that one direct result, besides better transport connectivity, is also the development of a new tourist destination, the challenges are even greater.

## CROATIAN TOURISM RESULTS

Outstanding tourist results in 2016 show that the expected financial effect that will come close to the level of eight billion euros (according to Lorencin, 2015), is proof that the program Croatia 365 produces results and that Croatia certainly extends the season.

A large number of investments and the realization of the Strategy of Development of Tourism, i.e. the development of products and the increase of tourist spending are a guideline to the achievement of the ultimate goal which stipulates that by 2020 Croatia will have become one of the twenty most competitive tourist destinations in the world.

The increase is caused by the growth of arrivals of foreign (9.6 percent) and domestic guests (8.9 percent). On the other hand, in the same period over 68.6 million overnight stays were recorded, which, compared to the same period last year, is an increase of nearly 5 million overnight stays (7.8 percent).<sup>1</sup>

Croatia depends more on tourism than any other member of the European Union, even more than Malta, Cyprus and Greece, as evidenced by data on foreign exchange income from tourism in Croatia realized at 17 per cent of GDP, the highest in Europe. In the last few years Croatian GDP has been in decline so the growth of foreign currency income from tourism in GDP is visible. Such a high indicator in the case of Croatia suggests a high degree of dependence of the economy on tourism and refers to the inadequate development of other sectors. This raises the question of whether the prosperity of the national economy should be based on a variable whose value is about one-fifth of GDP, while being under the influence of risks, such as various natural disasters, geopolitical instability and partly underdeveloped transport infrastructure. These excellent indicators of GDP show that a more well-developed transport network has added significance.<sup>2</sup>

## THE CATEGORIES OF PROTECTED AREAS IN THE NATURA 2000 CROATIA

Ecological network of the Republic of Croatia proclaimed the Decree on the Ecological Network (Official Gazette No. 124/2013). The ecological network of the European Union's Natura 2000 ecological network (Natura 2000 network)<sup>3</sup> pursuant to Article 6 of the Regulation on the ecological network (OG 124/2013) includes conservation areas of important bird - POP (areas important for conservation and the achievement of a favourable state of wild bird species of interest to the European Union, as well as their habitats, and areas important for the conservation of

migratory bird species, especially wetland areas of international importance) and conservation areas important for species and habitat types – summed up (areas important for conservation and the achievement of favourable status of other wildlife and their habitats, as well as the natural habitats of interest to the European Union). Ecological The network of Croatia covers 36.67% of the continental territory and 16.39% of the coastal sea and consists of 571 polygon areas of conservation of important species and habitat types (summed up), 171 point areas of conservation of important species and habitat types (mostly cave structures) (summed up) and 38 polygon areas of conservation important for birds (POP). When planning any kind of infrastructural projects in this environment it is necessary to draw up environmental impact studies, as well as a SWOT analysis in order to assess the quality of environmental impact, and decide whether it is profitable in the long run to allow intervention in a fragile eco-sphere.<sup>4</sup>

The Nature Protection Act (Official Gazette No. 80/13) defines nine categories of protected areas. The national category largely corresponds to one of the internationally recognized IUCN categories of protected areas.

State Institute for Nature Protection has established and regularly maintains the protected area of Croatia. This database contains the boundaries of protected areas of Croatia in terms of protection under the Nature Protection Act: strict nature reserve, national park, Nature Park, special reserve, Regional Park, a natural monument, important landscape, the park - forest and park architecture monument.

## THE MANAGEMENT OF PROTECTED AREAS

The need for active management of protected areas has become clear after the experience has shown that the protection of an area cannot be achieved by just a declaration of its protection (the so-called “Paper parks”), but it is necessary for the

protection of nature to affect the activities taking place in the area. The management of protected areas, like any other form of management, is in fact the management of human activities that take place in that area where some activities may be restricted or adapted, while others are encouraged. When we specifically talk about a tourism location, the most important factors are location’s natural and anthropogenic values that are not alone in the wider environment. However, in tourism we have specific factors and criteria that are most frequently occurring: tourist-geographical position, which means the position in relation to communication and availability (distance from the place of demand, length, price and attractiveness of the periods), followed by development of the tourism market and the development of tourism demand as the dominant factor of the tourism market. Of course, we should not neglect the factors in the domain of environmental protection, because it is an essential prerequisite for a clean, attractive and well-preserved tourism natural environment, but also in terms of planning, sizing and dispersion of tourism, and thus preventing the adverse effects of tourism on the environment (Tomka, 2012). Bearing all this in mind, the attractions must be the focus of attention for destination management, as well as for researchers (Rabotić, 2015). The essence of tourist attractions is best determined by specific economics of tourism, according to which every tourist service contains three groups of essential factors for the offer: attractive factors of supply, i.e. tourist attractions in the area; communicative factors – offers of transport conditions for access to the destination; receptive factors – offers of accommodation and food and beverage in the area.

Management of the site sometimes may seem very simple, but sometimes unattainable, complicated or even meaningless. In fact, this is a complex and demanding process and, if carried out deliberately and if conditions under which it is carried out are customized, it usually makes sense. Simply put, the management of the site is a cyclical process of implementation of pre-defined activities through

which it tries to achieve its goals. This process includes an assessment or evaluation of the conditions of the site, defining the objectives of the management and planning of activities to be implemented to achieve them, the implementation of these activities while monitoring their implementation and assessment of the effectiveness and adjustment of planned activities if necessary, after which the whole process is repeated.

## THE PROBLEM AND THE SUBJECT OF RESEARCH

The subject of this work is the SWOT analysis of the introduction of the new railway transport infrastructure as a generator of sustainable development and the creation (development) of the new tourist destination and theoretical elaboration of changes, i.e. the positive and negative effects of transport on tourism and vice versa, their mutual limitations but also the synergy effects. Introduction, i.e. building of a new transport route in the area where it was non-existent entails changes in the socio-economic picture of the population, its ethos and its environment. One of the factors that should not be omitted from consideration is the fact that the construction, i.e. any intervention in the area of Natura 2000, entails additional costs.<sup>5</sup> These costs can be considered as the cumulative cost of tourism in protected areas. Costs are analysed from three aspects:

☞ *First aspect:* financial-economic (costs of building roads in the protected area are multiplying because of the need to protect the area during the work and the necessity of using different standards of protection in the construction, of the increase in the cost of security, staff recruitment and construction of tourist facilities with particular emphasis on waste water treatment, the use of alternative energy sources, protection of the biotope, etc.).

☞ *Second aspect:* socio-cultural (the impact of tourists on the local population, the objectives of tourism development and the population at the site).

☞ *Third aspect:* environmental costs (the need for continued protection of the environment, the threat of loss of bio-diversity (biological maximum locations, etc.).

Area under observation is the area of a new railroad Koprivnica – Kotoriba – State Border – (Murakeresztúr) construction which will allow direct connection to the river network of the railway lines in the north-western part of Hungary. The new railway line would link the existing railway lines of importance for international traffic M201 State border – Botovo – Koprivnica – Dugo Selo and M501 DG – Čakovec – Kotoriba – DG. The new lines, and thus the new tourist destination would cover an area of two counties, Koprivnica – Križevci and Međimurje.

In the area of research that is underdeveloped there is no plan or vision for the development of tourist destinations.

Previous studies are reflected precisely in the lack of development vision and the necessary infrastructure. The Plan for the Development of Organic and Continental Tourism for the area includes research that has not been presented; this is not even partially processed in the literature.

The theoretical elaboration of positive and negative effects of transport on tourism and vice versa is subject of this paper, i.e. their mutual limitations, and synergy effects. As expected, when selecting the location for the introduction of new tourist destinations quality criteria are very important. In this case a SWOT analysis of geolocation and other aspects of the site will be made and they will show what type of destination development is expected, with regard to the factors that exist at the test site.

## PROTECTED AREAS

The route of the planned railway line has the length of 4.7 kilometres on three occasions in and

out of the protected area Regional Park Mura – Drava, according to the Nature Protection Act (Official Gazette No. 80/13).

Regional Park Mura – Drava section is one of the most important European river ecosystems: floodplain for rivers Drava, Mura and Danube, and thus forms part of the future largest planned single river transboundary UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in Europe that will extend through five neighbouring countries. It is the area of exceptional natural assets on a regional, national and European level, and the complete area as the cross-border river ecosystem, which extends into neighbouring countries and in the upstream and downstream countries of the basin.

### CONSTRUCTION OF A NEW TRAFFIC ROUTE

Good transport infrastructure is one of the key prerequisites for economic development of nation-states and their individual parts. This is especially true on the issue of tourism as an important economic branch in many countries around the world. Page and Lumsdon (2011) in their research concluded that the transport system has a direct impact on how tourists choose and experience the tourist destination. Improvements in different modes of transport, and low cost of transport services increases availability of remote and inaccessible areas. The availability of tourist destinations depends on the natural environment, the infrastructure and the efficiency of the public transport system.

Roads, railways and shipping goods, and the airport, should be linked to metropolitan regions. Close to major cities and European markets there are the bases of the feasibility of investing in better infrastructure. Northwest Croatia with regions such as Međimurje, and the cities of Varaždin and Zagreb, but also part of the Primorje – Gorski Kotar County and Istria, represents a great entrepreneurial space.

**IMAGE 1. THE AREAS OF ECOLOGICAL NETWORK (NATURA 2000 AREA) WITHIN THE AREA OF CONSTRUCTION**



Source: Study of feasible possibilities of new railway Koprivnica – Kotoriba – DG (IBŽ d.o.o., Zagreb, 2014) construction: Traffic-technology conceptual design, Previous economic and financial project assessment

### NATURA 2000 IN THE AREA OF THE NEW TRAFFIC ROUTE CONSTRUCTION

Here we have a display of parts of an ecological network through which the new traffic route was planned and, consequently, a new tourist destination.

According to a map of ecological network (Image 1) the alignment of the planned railway line Koprivnica – Kotoriba – State Border passes through the following areas within the area of the ecological network:

1. HR1000014 and HR5000014, upper Drava stream (from Donja Dubrava to Terezino polje) – the area of preservation important for birds and other species and habitat types (the railway passes through this area from around 14+500 to 17+200);
2. HR2000364, Mura – the area of preservation important for birds and other species and habitat types (the railway passes through this area from around 22+100 do 23+400).

In the wider area, there are the following areas of the ecological network (at the distance of up to 5 km):

1. HR2000672, Zovje – the area of preservation important for diverse species and habitat types (distance from line alignment 1,7 km);
2. HR2000368 Peteranec – the area of preservation important for diverse species and habitat types (distance from line alignment 3,7 km);
3. HR2001320 Crna Gora – the area of preservation important for diverse species and habitat types (distance from line alignment 2,5 km).

It is visible that about one quarter of the whole alignment passes through Natura 2000. That is one of the factors that influence the prices of construction and area protection that will be a threat in the SWOT analysis of the location.

## RECOGNITION / COMPETITIVENESS OF NEW TOURIST DESTINATION

In the IPA cross-border cooperation Hungary-Croatia 2007-2013, the program ECOTOP was conducted whose main goal is to create conditions for the development of eco-tourism in the border area of Croatia and Hungary through research,

study tours and the development of new study programs and lifelong learning programs.

Based on previous research (Interreg) border area Hungary - Croatia, it was noted that the major obstacles to local development consist of demographic characteristics of the population, which imply significant differences in the age structure, unsatisfactory educational potential of the population and critically high proportion of the unemployed in many small regions on both sides of the border. In addition to the analysed cross-border area (especially in the rural microregions) income of the population is relatively low and is largely based on the income from traditional agricultural activities, which are not sufficient to increase the standard of living.

A major tourist attraction, where one can promote potential investments and take advantage of the perceived development opportunities, i.e. mobilize investment capital in the area, including the construction of new railway lines or the creation of new tourist destinations, highlights the natural and built environment for tourists in function of tourism.

Accordingly, several conclusions were made:

☞ Currently, the overall tourism potential of the county was not significantly used, which is reflected in the fact that over 90% of tourist traffic takes place in the form of one-day trips without overnight stays. Through the project INVEST-PRO and a study made in the framework of this project, common features of the tourist potential of cross-border areas have been identified, related to the future prospects of tourism development and investment. The results showed that the future development of tourism in cross-border areas should primarily be based on a recreational / active tourism, cultural, water and agritourism, and the least attractive for future development and investment is religious tourism.

Research within the project INVEST-PRO has proved attractive cross-border area for the development of tourism through the natural beauty

and clean environment, rich cultural heritage and developed grape growing, winemaking, wine tourism and gastronomy, which are the basic elements and attractions on which to develop ecotourism. Common weaknesses are observed (which are more than the benefits) of which, in the analysed counties, the most important are: poor tourism promotion, underdeveloped tourist infrastructure with an emphasis on the lack of accommodation and catering facilities, poor road infrastructure and lack of financial resources for the development of tourism.

Resource base for ecotourism development in Koprivnica – Križevac county dominantly represents protected areas in the territory of a single county.

### SWOT ANALYSIS OF THE NEW TOURIST DESTINATION CONSTRUCTION

In Table 1 we present the SWOT analysis of the new tourist destination construction.

New tourist destination would be located in the area of Koprivnica – Križevci county characterized by the following:

☞ To position itself on the tourist market as a destination for sports and recreation of preserved and diverse nature, and accented traditional values of gastronomy and oenology;

☞ Recognizable as the centre of “naïve” art;

☞ Has a natural (river Drava, plain areas of the lake, mountain scenery on the slopes of Bilogora and Kalnik) and historical and cultural heritage (a set of religious buildings, developed artistic tradition - naive painting), which is a significant tourist attraction base for various forms of continental tourism (rural, hunting and fishing, outdoor activities - hiking, bird watching, gastro-tourism, cycling, sightseeing and transit tourism), but there are also many events and various projects. A part of KKŽ was included in the EDEN network;

☞ Favourable geographical position: at the intersection of transport routes, the proximity to the Zagreb area in which a quarter of the population of the Republic of Croatia is concentrated and the proximity of the EU (Hungary, Slovenia, and Italy). Those are the benefits of further development of tourism in the area KKŽ.

Under-utilized capacity for intensive rural tourism of all forms is evident in the area (cycling by existing

**TABLE 1. SWOT ANALYSIS OF THE NEW TOURIST DESTINATION CONSTRUCTION**

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Location potential</li> <li>• untouched nature</li> <li>• absence of competitive destinations</li> <li>• not concerned with half-measures</li> <li>• excellent future traffic connection</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• weak local community</li> <li>• lack of qualified manpower</li> <li>• moderate continental climate with lots of rainy days</li> <li>• legal limitations concerning NATURA 2000</li> </ul>
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• new traffic route opening</li> <li>• the change in Croatian tourist strategy, revolving towards tourism 365</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the vicinity of already established tourist destinations in Hungary</li> <li>• insufficient monitoring of construction and consummation of the location that would breach NATURA 2000 conditions</li> <li>• the costs of construction in the area of NATURA 2000</li> </ul>

bicycle lanes along the Drava river, mountain tourism, adventure tourism on Kalnik), while special emphasis should be placed on increasing development of tourism in rural households (providing preparation of authentic food and gastronomic services, the development of wine roads, etc.).

There is a need for better promotion and branding of indigenous tourism products of traditional character in order to complement our entire Podravina and Prigorje area as a tourist destination, which can be achieved through systematic training of employees in the tourism industry at all levels. The existing potential has not been significantly exploited, and this is reflected in the fact that more than 90% of tourist traffic takes place in the form of one-day trips without overnight stays. In the long run one of the potential forms of tourism which will develop is health tourism.

## CONCLUSION

We performed a SWOT analysis of the tourism potential and investment opportunities in tourism

in the area of the construction of new railway lines on the basis of the data identifying the specifics of the local tourist areas that could be incorporated into the joint strategy of tourism development and serve as a basis for development of the area.

The space is basic with limited resources of each country and its population, and its careful and sustainable management is a prerequisite for ensuring long-term development and well-being of society. Planning of space utilization is essential for the social, environmental, developmental, economic, regional and demographic aspects. On the other hand, economic development, mobility and the increase in standards of the population encourage changes in space and require increased development of all forms of infrastructure. The development of transport infrastructure enables the realization of private and business goals, personal freedom, the development of trade and business and ensures economic progress of society. Developed transport infrastructure is a precondition for sustainable and regionally balanced development of Croatia. At the same time, increased traffic and strong transport infrastructure inevitably have a negative impact on the environment.



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