

TOURISM AND DEPOPULATION IN MOUNTAIN REGIONS OF BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA: CASE STUDY OF BJELAŠNICA AND VRANICA

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Abstract: Many rural mountain areas face the challenges of negative demographic trends, caused by emigration, low fertility rates, and the accelerated process of demographic ageing. Such processes are direct consequence of the war events and the situation that followed, as well as industrialization, which indicates the need to revitalize or mitigate these negative effects. Tourism is often cited as a factor in stimulating development process, so this paper examines relationship between the development of tourism activity and the degree of depopulation of rural settlements in the Bjelašnica and Vranica mountains. The paper uses the demographic and statistical (t-test) methods, as well as a survey to examine the attitudes of local population towards the development of tourism. Based on the conducted analysis at the level of the main indicators on population and tourism activity, conclusion about positive connection between tourism and reduced level of depopulation in the mountain regions can be drawn.

Keywords: depopulation; tourism; Bjelašnica; Vranica; rural settlements; rural revitalization.

INTRODUCTION

In the last inter-census period, between 1991 and 2013, demographic changes took place in Bosnia and Herzegovina as a result of long-term changes in the dynamic and structural characteristics of population development, as well as the war and its demographic, economic, social and other consequences. The main demographic changes, which are manifested in low rates of determinants of natural change (especially births and fertility),

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continuous negative net migration rate, negative changes in age composition (the share of the elderly population is constantly increasing) have led to total depopulation (Wertheimer - Baletić, 2017).

According to Krsmanović et al. (2017), the last census showed numerous disturbances of the Bosnian-Herzegovinian demographic structure with depopulation, village extinguishing, demographic ageing, and pronounced emigration as the main features. These changes limit the overall socio-economic development (Ćorović, 2015). The highest degree of depopulation, in relation to the entire national territory, is seen in rural settlements in the border and mountainous areas, not only in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but also in general (Nejašmić, 1991; Šiljković, 2010; Nejašmić and Toskić, 2015; Kohler et al., 2017; Zupanc, 2018; Pantić, 2019; Vinas, 2019).

Mountainous rural areas, due to decades of population exodus, are characterized by a weakened demographic potential, which means that these areas are often positioned on the margins of economic and social development (Bogdanov et al., 2015, Lukić, 2016). Such a situation certainly affects the preservation of their natural and traditional values (Pantić, 2019). Despite numerous development opportunities, these areas are most often classified as underdeveloped regions that survive with the help of the state (Šiljković, 2010). Science and society are looking for answers to the questions: how to stop depopulation in these areas, how to prevent the further socio-economic decline of villages, and how to bring migration flows in the function of the revitalization of certain depopulation areas (Nejašmić, 1991). The experience of some European countries shows that the revitalization of rural areas is possible only within the overall development and by encouraging secondary and tertiary activities, most often small businesses, tourism, and some other activities (The Future of Rural Society 1988). In various demographic studies of recent date, tourism is often mentioned as a factor in the revitalization of settlements, the development of which should not only stop emigration but, eventually, also lead to return migrations and economic recovery. Some authors (Zupanc et al., 2000; Čejvanović, 2009; Bajkuša and Mehmedović, 2014) point out that tourism mitigates negative demographic trends, which is reflected in the overall development aspect.

The World Tourism Organization also talks about the importance of this economic activity in stimulating socio-economic growth and development of local communities, specifically in mountainous areas, and numerous conferences are held to define the methodological approach and model of revitalization (UNWTO, 2018). Thus, tourism is a major economic factor in the development of mountain areas in Sweden (Heberlein et al., 2002), as well as many other European, North American and Latin American regions in which it has brought numerous benefits in terms of infrastructure improvement and job creation (Debarbieux et.

al., 2014;Lun et al., 2016). Research conducted by Kieselbach and Long (1990), Gannon (1994), Okech et al. (2012), Hohl and Tisdell (1995) and Nurković and Džeko (2014),points to the fact that tourism development can positively affect economic development, economic stabilization (as a primary, but also secondary source of income), by creating new jobs, and reducing depopulation.

One of the best examples of how the tourism function of rural settlements is a stronger stimulus for its population growth can be found in neighboring Serbia, more precisely Zlatibor, where the development of the mentioned activity, as stated by Devedžić (2007) led to the population increase. In addition to the strong progression of the population, the development of accompanying economic activities and infrastructural progress indicate that tourism has been a strong generator of development. We should certainly not ignore the fact that the demographic development was also influenced by the position on the transit route, which enabled continuous tourist traffic and diverse tourism demand (Devedžić, 2007). Although the possibility of the revitalization of mountainous rural areas is usually reflected in the development of various forms of tourism (Opačić & Banda, 2017), as previously pointed out, some authors state that the true survival of these areas depends on attractive opportunities acceptable to young people (Šiljković, 2010).

The development of tourism largely depends on the attitude of the local population, especially when it comes to smaller communities such as mountain villages. There are numerous papers in the international literature that treat the opinion and attitudes of the local community towards the development of tourism, as well as various aspects of the impact of tourism (Ap, 1992; Johnson et al., 1994; Madrigal, 1995; Korca, 1998; Mason and Cheyne, 2000; Choi and Sirakaya-Turk, 2005; Yolal and Sevinc, 2018). Numerous studies point to the fact that members of the local community, who make a profit from tourism or work in tourism, have a more positive attitude towards tourism development than those who do not earn money in this way (Brunt and Courtney, 1999; Sirakaya et al., 2002; Andereck et al. 2005; Vargas-Sanchez et al., 2009).

This paper aims to examine the relationship between tourist activity and demographic processes, more precisely the degree of depopulation on the examples of the case studies of Bjelašnica and Vranica mountains. Although these mountainous areas are characterized by a favorable geographical position as well as the possibility that due to the richness of tourism motives, they become tourist destinations, rural settlements are still undergoing significant economic, demographic, and social changes.

The research begins with the formation of the hypothesis that tourism is a significant factor in mitigating depopulation processes in these areas. In accordance with the aim of the study, the demographic processes of the settlements of the examined area are analyzed, as well as their tourism function. In addition, a survey was conducted, the results of which resemble the attitudes of the local population towards the development of rural tourism.

STUDY AREA

The mountainous area of Bjelašnica is located in the zone of the central Dinaric Alps, i.e. in the western part of the Mediterranean zone of the fold mountain chain. The northeastern or "main" part of Bjelašnica can be seen from the lowlands of the Sarajevo valley, although this vast mountain massif extends all the way to Mount Prenj in the southwest, where they are separated by the Neretva valley (Popović, 1935).

This study area consists of two separate morphological units, Igman (Crni Vrh, 1504 m) and Bjelašnica (Zvezdarnica peak, 2066 m), which are interconnected by the morphodepressions of the Malo Polje and Veliko Polje, at an altitude of about 1150 to 1300 meters. Lepirica (2013) states that Igman represents the foothills of the high mountain massif of Bjelašnica. In the past, the Bjelašnica plateau was a popular area of transhumant animal husbandry, as evidenced by a large number of livestock localities or huts. Popović (1935) mentions more than 18 huts in the northern and western parts of Bjelašnica (1400-1700 m) and four in the Igman area. The permanent settlements on Bjelašnica are located in the hypsometric zone from 1300 to 1500 m above sea level in the southern and southeastern parts. In the belt above 1000 m above sea level, there were 1261 inhabitants in 1991 and 472 inhabitants in 2013. Out of a total of 15 settlements, Tušila, Bobovica, and Vrdolje stand out in terms of number, while the most attractive rural settlements are Umoljani and Lukomir.

Vranica group consists of connected mountains, which have a general Dinaric direction. In a broader sense, these are the mountains east of the Uskoplje valley, which represent the neotectonically elevated Vranica anticlinorium, i.e. the geomorphological region of the Vranica group.

With a favorable geographical position and an abundance of natural and cultural tourism motives, both Bjelašnica and Vranica have the potential to become tourism destinations.

METHODOLOGY

Through the first phase of the research, an attempt was made to precisely determine the area of research. Taking into account the character of the examined terrain, it was estimated that an isohypse of 800 meters represents an approximately adequate boundary between mountain and valley settlements in a given area. Only villages located above that line were considered in this study. In those settlements in the boundary zone, only those in which most of the houses are located above the critical isohypse are classified in the mountain group. GIS technology was used for precise delineation.

In the second phase, the corresponding rural settlements were classified according to their tourism activity – active and inactive. The villages with tourism activity include those that have: registered accommodation capacities, farms that offer local gastronomic products, organized tourist tours, cultural and historical heritage in the tourism offer, or offer and infrastructure for various sports and recreational activities.

The third research phase was related to the selection of relevant demographic data, which in this case refers to the number of inhabitants. These data are necessary to determine the general demographic trends in mountainous regions, and due to spatial differentiation, it is important to collect the same data at the level of populated places, i.e. statistically defined rural settlements. In this way, it is possible to perform a comparative analysis between the categories to which the focus is placed here – tourism-active and inactive villages. In the context of recent demographic trends, the data from the last two censuses, those from 1991 and 2013, stand out as the most relevant. For this purpose, the formula was used:

$$I = \frac{P_{2013}}{P_{1991}} * 100$$

Here *I* stands for index of increase/decrease in the number of inhabitants in a certain populated place during the last inter-census period. Several villages that had less than 10 inhabitants in 1991 were excluded from this calculation. This was done because these settlements could already be considered extinct, as well as because the mathematical processing of such small numbers would adversely affect the relevance of the research results.

The next step (fourth phase) is presented by examining possible significant differences in demographic trends between previously defined categories of rural settlements according to their tourism activity, which serves as independent variables. On the other hand, the population growth/decline indices for each considered village are a dependent variable. One-way Student's t-test was used as a statistical method to assess the existence of significant differences between these categories, where the critical value is taken as $\alpha = .05$.

The last research phase included fieldwork in 2017, as it involved surveying the local population on their attitudes towards the development of rural tourism. For this purpose, a sample of a total of 203 respondents was included. It was important to examine the differences between the younger and older population, as they may have certain implications for the future development of these areas. According to the latest census, the average life expectancy of the Bosnian population is 40 years, but it is significantly higher in mountainous regions. Therefore, the age of 45 was taken as the cut-off boundary between the two age categories of respondents. For this research, information on the age of the respondents was collected through a survey, and their answers to two questions were conceived in the form of a Likert scale with five offered options. The questions refer to the readiness of the respondents to retrain and engage in tourism, and financial investment in tourism. Finally, the average score of the given answers was calculated for each respondent, and it was treated as a dependent variable within the two-way t-test, the purpose of which is to determine whether there is a statistically significant difference between the answers of younger and older residents of the studied regions.

RESULTS

During the delimitation of the investigated area, which includes morphostructural areas of the mountainous regions of Bjelašnica and Vranica group, the centroids of rural settlements belonging to the altitude zone above 800 meters were identified using ArcGIS 10.1 software. In this way, 151 mountain villages were identified, noting that this number does not include those settlements that in 1991 could be considered extinguished or about to be extinguished. A much larger number of villages was found in the Vranica region (123) than in the Bjelašnica region (28), which is understandable given the difference in territorial coverage and certain natural characteristics. Also, Vranica villages are distributed in nine municipalities, while in the Bjelašnica region there are only three of them. It should be noted that only the Municipality of Konjic owns parts of both regions.

Within the Vranica region, 27 villages were found to have a certain degree of tourism activity, which represents about 20% of the total number of villages in this area. The central

tourism motif of the mountain Vranica is the glacial Prokoško Lake, which is located on the territory of the Municipality of Fojnica. The lake is located near the villages of Mujakovići and Paljike, but the entire rural micro-region of Prokos (with the villages of Obojak, Turkovići, Klisura and Carev Do) is closely related to this destination in terms of tourism and geography. The village of Obojak is a particularly good example of the development of rural tourism. Among the villages of Fojnica, Bistrica and Lučice should also be included in this group as the starting points of mountaineering routes, and Živčići with the Naksibenditekke, which has the status of a national monument. In the territory of populated place of Rovna there is Rostovo, a sports and recreation center with a tourism offer for all seasons. The villages in the upper course of the Vrbas (Jelići, Svilići and Crkvica) stand out as the starting points of attractive mountaineering routes. Several villages in this region are notable for their significant medieval heritage in the form of necropolises of *stećak* tombstones, which also attract the attention of tourists. These are Bistrica, Orašac, Repovci and Seona. The villages of Ljubunci (archeological excavations from the ancient period) and Šenkovići (Old Mosque from the Ottoman period – a national monument) are also characterized by a touristically significant historical heritage. The mining heritage is connected to Deževica, Donje Pećine and Gornje Pećine. Small lakes exist in the villages of Has and Hum. Pulac has also been recognized as a tourism-active settlement thanks to its rural economy, Sebešić due to favorable conditions for the development of sports and recreational tourism, and Pričani, which are recognizable by the tradition of old crafts.

As already mentioned, the Bjelašnica region is characterized by a smaller number of settlements. However, among them, it is much easier to identify those with a tourism function. This primarily refers to Lukomir and Umoljani, which are symbols of rural tourism, not only in this area, but also at the level of entire Bosnia and Herzegovina. These are remote villages at high altitudes. However, they have certain accommodation and catering facilities. In the relative vicinity of Umoljani, there are several other villages with similar characteristics (Bobovica, Brda, Kramari, Lukavac, Šabići and Tušila), which also represent the starting or important points on the popular hiking routes. In the western part of the Bjelašnica region are the two largest settlements in this area – Dečjići and Dujmovići. Tourist activity of Dečjići is based on the local outing area and mountain lodge, from which the neighboring villages of Šabanci and Ostojići also benefit. In Dujmovići, there is a larger catering and accommodation facility, which is visited by a large number of tourists. In Municipality of Hadžići there is the village of Lokve, which has recently become specific for the construction of a modern resort for tourists from Arab countries. In this paper, all the previously mentioned villages are treated as active in tourism. This category makes up 46% of the total number of settlements in the Bjelašnica mountain region.

Among the 11 municipalities that include the settlements considered in this research, only in the Municipality of Donji Vakuf there is not a single village with noticeable signs of tourism activity. Based on available data, population growth/decline indices were calculated. They show that depopulation affected all mountainous parts of municipalities that entered statistical analysis, regardless of whether they are tourism-active or inactive areas. Nevertheless, a clear pattern can be seen in ten municipalities according to which tourism-active settlements in the summary context recorded a smaller decline in the number of inhabitants in the last inter-census period. The biggest disparities in that respect were determined on the example of the municipalities of Hadžići and Bugojno, while in the area of Gornji Vakuf – Uskoplje such a difference is relatively small. The index of increase/decrease for all tourism-active settlements is also significantly higher compared to the value of this parameter for inactive settlements. It can be said that tourism-active settlements have lost less than a third of their population in the observed period, while inactive ones have lost more than half.

Although the differences between the mentioned categories of settlements seem obvious practically at the levels of all municipalities included in the research, for scientific verification of such knowledge it was necessary to conduct an adequate statistical test on the total number of settlements in selected mountain regions (Table 1). For this purpose, the method of one-way t-test was chosen, which showed a very high level of statistical significance ($p = .000$) in the differences between depopulative trends in tourism-active, in relation to inactive settlements. However, if the two investigated regions are compared, then it is evident that the differences in Vranica villages ($p = .000$) are statistically somewhat more pronounced than in Bjelašnica ($p = .032$). This fact can be attributed primarily to sample size. Namely, in the Bjelašnica region, there is a much smaller number of mountain rural settlements, but in addition to that, a critical level of statistical significance has been achieved.

Table 1. Summary values of basic parameters and level of significance of differences between them

| | Vranica region | Bjelašnica region | TOTAL |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|--------------|
| Number of active villages | 27 | 13 | 40 |
| Number of inactive villages | 96 | 15 | 111 |
| I (active villages) | 69.2 | 65.6 | 68.6 |
| I (inactive villages) | 43.4 | 40.3 | 43.2 |
| P | .000 | .032 | .000 |

Source: own elaboration

Based on a survey conducted in the form of the Likert scale with five offered answers among the relevant sample of inhabitants of the given areas ($n = 203$), results were obtained on the general attitudes of the local population on rural tourism development, more precisely on their propensity to retrain and engage in tourism and willingness to financially invest in it. Considering that on this occasion two age categories were defined (the age of 45 was taken as the limit) through the one-way Student's t-test, an extremely high degree of statistical significance of the differences between them was found in terms of answers to both questions ($p = .000$). Namely, the average numerical value of the answers of the younger population to the questions asked is in both cases ($\bar{x} = 3.12$; $\bar{x} = 2.26$) is significantly higher in relation to the responses of older respondents ($\bar{x} = 1.96$; $\bar{x} = 1.63$). It is evident that the respondents, regardless of age, are more willing to engage in tourism, if it does not mean financial investment. When it comes to comparing mountain regions, the obtained results show that the difference between the younger and older population in this regard is more pronounced in Bjelašnica settlements than in Vranica ones. Thus, for example, in the context of readiness for financial investment in the development of tourism, no significant difference was found between the younger and older segment of the sample of respondents in the Vranica region ($p = .060$).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The most important result of this research is the statistical confirmation that the villages of the mountain regions of Bjelašnica and Vranica, in which tourism activity was recorded, have a lower degree of depopulation compared to villages without tourist offer ($p = 0.031$ for Bjelašnica; $p = 0.000$ for Vranica). Lajić (1992) and Zupanc et al. (2000) came to similar results in their research, emphasizing that tourism in the current framework (as well as in the analyzed mountain areas), direct and indirect impacts, can not prevent or encourage migratory movements, but that the role is reflected in mitigating depopulation. However, the results obtained in this case do not necessarily have to be interpreted in a cause-and-effect context, since it is not possible to determine the actual nature of causality by this method. Instead, there is a realistic basis for the conclusion about the connection between tourism activity and lesser depopulation in mountainous areas, i.e. about the mutual indicativeness of the mentioned two variables.

Since the studied rural mountain areas face significant demographic problems, rural tourism can be one of the answers to the question of how to revitalize rural areas (Nurković, 2018). Rural tourism can contribute to economic diversity and create new jobs, especially for young people. In 2012, UNDP surveyed rural households in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and came up with surprising results, according to which only 6% of rural households live

from agriculture or livestock, while more than 50% of the population is employed in some other activity (Banda, 2020), with close to 36% earning income on a second basis (pension, rent, private business, etc.). These results indicate the complexity of the situation in rural areas.

Tourism as an economic activity meets general expectations regarding its role in supporting rural development encourages greater sustainable development and provides a better quality of life for locals compared to sites not visited by tourists (Wanhill and Buhalis, 1999; Ghaderi and Henderson, 2012; Abdollahzadeh and Sharifzadeh, 2014; Almeida-Garcia et al., 2016), which implies that it could represent a real chance for many of Bosnia and Herzegovina's sensitive rural mountain areas facing economic and socio-demographic problems, such as depopulation (Nurković and Drešković, 2013; Hrelja, 2016). Rural communities largely preserve the traditional way of life, and through investments and good promotion of natural and cultural tourism motives, tourists could be attracted (Kršić et al., 2015; Mirić et al., 2016; Ibanescu et al., 2018).

The biggest obstacles to the more intensive development of rural tourism are poor promotion, lack of cooperation between rural households and destinations, poor knowledge of foreign languages and insufficient investment. Although rural tourism is not developing fast enough in selected mountain areas, it is increasingly recognized as a significant form of selective tourism, which contributes to the development of local communities. The peculiarities of the development of rural tourism in mountain regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina are that individuals and the local community are interested in its development, which gives rise to many special forms of offer and types of tourism. Thus, regardless of the lack of institutional support, local communities and the non-governmental sector invest financial resources, organize training and workshops, and help rural households in the promotion. Rural tourism, in addition to the positive economic aspects, also helps to preserve tradition and customs in the mountain regions. Unfortunately, the competent institutions invest very little in this segment, and it is developed mostly by the will and effort of a few enthusiasts.

Finally, it is recommended that the identified specifics of the development of rural tourism in Bosnia and Herzegovina should be better emphasized for tourists to recognize them and to establish a common understanding of everything that makes a destination or tourism product special. Additionally, it is advisable to notice the peculiarities of rural tourism in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the existing plans, strategies, policies, propaganda materials and other available documents.

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