

BANJA LUKA AS THE LEISURE AND RECREATIONAL TOURISM- GEOGRAPHICAL REGION

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Abstract: Banja Luka as the leisure and recreational tourism region is rich in natural tourism potentials, where specific forms of tourism can be developed: mountain, hunting, rural, excursion-recreational, adventure, recreational-sports, fishing, speleological, ecotourism, religious, cultural, event, business, congress and transit tourism. This paper presents the main natural-geographical features of this tourism region, as well as the possibility of its valorization for the development of leisure and recreational tourism. There will be applied few different and adopted models related to tourism regionalisation, identification and valorisation of natural potentials in order to define leisure and recreative tourist sites. There are plenty of them in the region of Banja Luka and some of them are even protected areas (Kozara NP), as well as the part of UNESCO World Heritage List (Strict Nature Reserve Primeval Forest Janj).

Key words: Banja Luka tourism region, natural potentials, leisure and recreation, tourism valorization, protected areas

INTRODUCTION

Leisure travel is the main purpose of visit in all tourism macroregions in the world except the Middle East (VFR, health and religious tourism predominates). The share of leisure travel in global tourism is 56% (UNWTO, 2018), which is relevant indicator of its popularity and importance. Liszewski (2009) defined leisure and recreational region as the area based on the natural attractions (coastal and mountain areas, spa sites). It includes activities related to simple leisure like free time, learning, fun and health programs. Šecibović and Žunic (2008) explained 2 forms

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of recreational tourism: leisure and non-leisure. Non-leisure form includes business tourism, professional sport activities and VFR. Leisure form includes: different range of indoor and outdoor activities, excursions, environmental activities. Liszewski's classification of leisure regions is also based on their exploitation: seasonal (summer and/or winter) or throughout the year (e.g. spa). According to tourism-geographical analysis of the Banja Luka region, there were identified resources and potentials for development of the leisure and recreational tourism, which falls into developing character nowadays.

Aim, materials and methods

The aim of this paper was to identify and valorise natural tourist potentials at Banja Luka tourist-geographical region for the purpose of leisure and recreation. Firstly, the S. Liszewski (2009) model of tourism regionalisation was applied (3 types of tourism-oriented regions): tourist-metropolitan region; leisure and recreation region; cognitive, educational & religion region to identify type of region Banja Luka (the region of leisure and recreation) (Liszewski S., 2009; Bidžan A., 2016). The modified McKercher & Hillary du Cross model of tourism valorization were applied to evaluate relevant indicators: tourism location, ambience, attractiveness and aesthetic value, compatibility, uniqueness, the level of utilization for tourist purposes, two-season possibility of exploitation, tourist attendance. The research was based on methods: tourism-geographical analysis, identification, valorisation, terrain observations (the field work), while orthophoto & satellite maps were helpful in additional terrain analysis and identification of specific tourist attractions and routes... There was calculated general tourist value for each of them and rated on the Likert scale (1-5) to measure the spatial tourist significance :

- 0 to 1.5 (inadequate quality and low market attractiveness)- not suitable for tourist exploitation/ zero tourist significance (ZTS);
- 1.5 to 2.5 (satisfactory quality and medium market attractiveness) - local tourist significance (LTS);
- 2.5 to 3.5 (good quality and good market attractiveness) - regional tourism significance (RTS);
- 3.5 to 4.5 (very good quality and very good market attractiveness) - national tourist significance (NTS), and
- 4.5 to 5 (excellent quality and high market attractiveness) - international tourist significance (ITS).

VALORISATION OF NATURAL TOURIST POTENTIALS FOR THE LEISURE AND RECREATION

Banja Luka tourism region area: 7.977 km² is located on the northwest of Bosnia and Herzegovina. It's administrative area of 16 municipalities. Banja Luka city is the tourist center of this region, which is at the same time the main political, economic, financial and cultural- gravitational & administrative center of smaller entity Republika Srpska. The unique beauty of this region lies in its natural wealth (rivers, spa, mountains, valleys, 3 different ecosystems), so-called: „region of greenery“. The region has very favorable tourist-geographical position as the M-16 road connecting it with the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Adriatic coast, as well as with Central Europe. This direction is also recognized as the important tourist corridor in Europe. According to official statistics, Banja Luka made 136.696 overnights in 2019, share of international >60% (Statistical bulletin of Banja Luka, 2020).

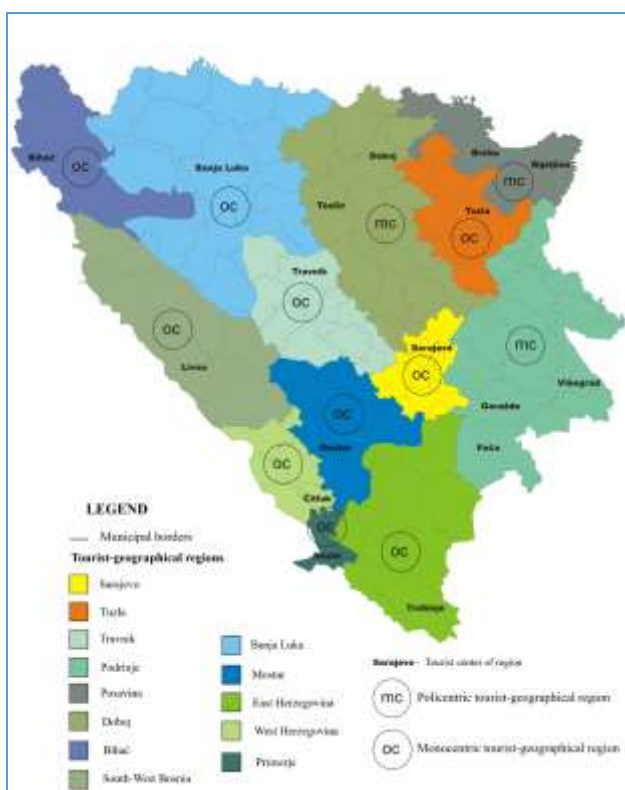


Fig.1. Tourism regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina
(Source: Bidžan, 2016)

Tourism identification of natural potentials- „leisure and recreational areas“, was based on the complexed analysis of the plenty of relevant literature and relevant spatial-planner documentation, available maps and data from competent institutions, as well as data collected during terrain, field work (observation and authors' judgement). There were identified and classified natural potentials: reliefs & forms, waters, climate, vegetation/ bioms followed with determination of tourism type (tab.1). For each of them is calculated general tourist value (average mark) and determined the rank of tourism & spatial importance (tab.2).

Banja Luka tourism region is predominantly leisure and recreational area, which can be seen from the tourist map below:

Tab.1. Identified Natural potentials of leisure and recreational tourism

Natural potentials: leisure & recreation			Tourism type (bosnian marks)
Relief & forms	Mountains & Protected areas	Manjača	PT/LT/ST/IR
		Čemernica	PT/LT/ST/IR
		Zmijanje	PT/LT/ST/IR
		Lisina	PT/LT/ST/IR
		Kozara (NP)	PT/LT/ST/IR/ET/ECO
		Rainforest Janj (SNR)	ET/ECO
	Gorges & canyons	Tijesno	IR/ET/RS/RT
		Zvečajska	IR/ET/RST/RT
	Caves	Hajdučka	SPT
		Lazareva	SPT
		Mišarica	SPT
		Zaglavački kamen	SPT
Waters	Rivers	Vrbas	IR/RST/RT
	Thermomineral waters	Banja Slatina	ZL
		Banja G. Šeher	ZL
Climate	Moderately climate	Banja Luka	KT/BT/ST/KT/TT
	Pre-mt. climate	Manjača Čemernica	ZST/IR/ZL
Vegetation	Biome of moderately moist willow and poplar forests		IR/ZL

	Biome of beech and beech-fir forests	IR/ZL
	Biome of moist forests of pedunculate oak and field ash	IR/ZL

(Updated table 2021 by Authors; Bidžan, 2016)

Legend: *PT- Mt. tourism; LT- Hunting; ST- Sport; IR- Picnic; BT- Business; ET- Education & Science; RST- Fishing & sport; SPT- Speleologic; ZST- Winter & Sport; KT- Culture; ZL- Health & Rehab; ECO- Ecotourism; TT- Transit tourism; NP- National Park (IUCN-II); SNR- Strict Nature Reserve (IUCN-Ia)*

Tab.2. Tourism valorisation of Banja Luka region for the leisure and recreation

Natural potentials: leisure & recreation	Location	Ambience	Attractiveness	Compatibility	Uniqueness	Utilization	Access	Exploitation	Attendance	GTV	Rank
Kozara NP	5	5	5	4	5	3	3,5	4	3,5	4,2	NTS
Janj SNR	4,5	5	5	5	5	4	4	4	4	4,5	ITS
Čemernica	1,5	4	4	3	5	1	2	2	1	2,6	RTS
Lisina mt.	4,5	5	5	3	5	1,5	2	3,5	2	3,5	RTS
Tijesno Cyn.	3	4,5	4,5	3	5	1	3	2	1	3	RTS
Zvečajska G.	1,5	4	4	3	5	1,5	1,5	1,5	1,5	2,6	RTS
Hajdučka C.	3,5	4	5	3,5	5	1,5	2	1,5	1,5	3,1	RTS
Lazareva C.	3,5	4	5	3,5	5	1,5	2	1,5	1,5	3,1	RTS
Mišarica C.	1,5	4	4	3	5	1	2	2	1	2,6	RTS
Vrbas Riv.	5	5	5	5	5	4	4	4,5	4	4,6	ITS
Slatina Spa	4,5	4,5	4,5	4,5	4	3,5	5	5	3,5	4,3	NTS
G. Šcher Spa	3,5	4	5	3,5	5	2,5	3	3	3	3,6	NTS

Climate (2)	4,5	2,8	3,5	2,8	2,5	3	3	3,5	3,5	3,3	RTS
Bioms (3)	3,5	2,7	2,7	2,5	2,5	2,2	2,5	2,5	2,7	2,6	RTS
B. LUKA	3,6	4,0	4,2	3,4	4,3	2,3	2,7	2,7	2,4	3,9	NTS

(Updated table 2021 by Authors; Bidžan, 2016)

According to this results of evaluation of natural potentials (tab.2), Banja Luka tourist-geographical region belongs to the second rank of spatial importance, NTS-national tourist significance predominant (gtv. 3.9). This finding is new revelation, as few years ago Bidžan (2016) classified this region into the third rank (3,3)-regional tourist significance. Tourism & spatial importance of this region was increased due to the recent UNESCO acceptance of Rainforest „Janj“ on its prestigious World Heritage List (officially Strict Nature Reserve, IUCN category Ia, since July 2021). The highest value is found at uniqueness (4.3), which means very good quality and very good market attractiveness. It's because every geographical area is unique itself and objectively the region of Banja Luka possess beautiful landscapes and sceneries with refreshing & recreational attributes. The lowest value is found at tourist attendance (2.4), satisfactory quality and medium market attractiveness. It's mostly because lack in tourism marketing and weak promotion tools.

The Rainforest Janj (SNR-Ia, UNESCO 2021)

Primeval reserve "Janj" is located near Šipovo, south area of Banja Luka tourist-geographical region, western part of Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is located between 44°07'-44°10' N and 17°15'-17°17' E, elevational range 1,180 - 1,510 m above sea level. In primeval forest Janj, there is a strict area of the reserve, that covers 295 hectares. Protection regime of the first degree (Ia) represents area with outstanding or representative ecosystems, geological or physiological features and types, which are primarily used for scientific purposes and the monitoring of the environment, and it's part of the UNESCO since July 2021. In the surrounding area there are rivers Pliva with Pliva Lake, Vrbas, Sana and Janj, and mountains Lisina (1,333 m), Podovi (1,084 m), Čemernica (1,631 m), Vitorog (1,906 m), Hrbina (1,543 m) and Crni vrh (1,514 m). Area of the reserve is located in western Bosnia in the region of internal mountains Dinarides which is characterized by mountainous climate. By its altitude and position, it is located in the zone of beech and fir forest with spruce, except the highest parts which belong to the subalpine vegetation belt. "Janj" is located on the border of Illyrian vegetation provinces. Community of beech and fir

with spruce occupies about 95% of the reserve "Janj". Permanently protected mammals that live in this area are: ermine (*Mustela erminea L.*), squirrel (*Sciurus vulgaris L.*), and lynx (*Lynx lynx L.*). Permanent birds: western capercaillie (*Tetrao urogallus L.*), hazel grouse (*Tetrastes bonasia L.*), hawk (*Accipiter gentilis L.*), falcon (*Falco peregrinus T.*). Mammals protected during haunting season: brown bear, roe deer, rabbit. Birds protected during haunting season: rooster of western capercaillie, rooster of hazel grouse. Migratory birds that are protected: common wood pigeon (*Columba palumbus L.*). The main functions of this area are: educational, ecological and aesthetic.



Fig.2. Hermeline (*Ermine*)
(Protected Areas of Republika Srpska, 2013)

National park Kozara (1967)

The National Park Kozara is popular like “the air spa”, the "Krajina beauty". Kozara Mountain (NW Bosnia & Herzegovina) is low, island mountain between the Pannonian Plain in the north and the Dinarides in the south, and bordered by the rivers Sava, Una, Vrbas and Sana. The area is specific by its dense complexes of deciduous and coniferous forests, glades, clear streams, wealth of flora and fauna. Natural heritage is presented by plenty of different geological, geomorphological, hidrographic and biodiversity features. There are Mesozoic and Tertiary layers in Kozara Mountain (SE, NW), although it's basically made up of older rocks (Paleozoic, Precambrian).



Fig.3. Tourist Map NP Kozara
(Official website of Banja Luka municipality)

There are different relief forms: mountain peaks, reefs, plateaus, slopes, valleys, ravines, sinkholes, hills, etc.; long slopes steeply descending into the stream valleys; karst features (ridges, valleys and basins) in limestone areas (Kozarački and Zečiji kamen, etc.). Hydrographic network is very dense, radial-dendroid type. There are 3 main rivers: Mlječanica, Crna Rijeka, Moštanica. Some rivers created deep valleys, canyons and gorges, waterfalls (The waterfall at Zečji kamen, Gumline, etc). All water sources are of good quality – drinkable water. The Park has moderate climate

with clearly marked four seasons. 90% of its territory is forest area: mostly high beech and fir. High biodiversity includes: flora 865 plant species (117 fungi, 11 lichens, 80 mosses and 657 higher plants e.g. ferns, trees) and fauna: numerous species, mammals: roe deer, wild bear, wolf, fox, wild cat, etc., birds: nightingale, etc. Cultural heritage includes most popular sites: the city of Maria Theresa (the Middle Age); the Mehmed church, chapel: Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary (1903); Mrakovica plateau (806 m)- central part of the park, area with recognized urban content & cultural events; The Kozara tower (1972), memorial complex to deceased soldiers- partisans from World War II: Monument, Memorial Wall and Museum, monument of 33 m, symbolically, represents the size of liberty and freedom- loving spirit of Kozara people, while concrete columns around it represent physical pressure that enemy put on Kozara.



Fig.4. The Kozara Tower, Mrakovica
(Foto by Žunić, L.)

Popular activities in the area of National Park Kozara are: hiking, cycling, sport climbing and skiing; history education; nature & cultural tourism.

River Vrbas & events

„The paradise valley“ is another name for the river Vrbas in Bosnia and Herzegovina. River source: under Zec mt. 1530 m. River mouth: Sava, 90 m. River length: 235 km. Vrbas Adventure Resort is area recognized by its recreative activities: kayak and dayak race boats, rafting race, jumping from city bridge, swim over Vrbas, sand volleyball, closed stadium football, basketball, sports fishing competition, parachute jumping, promotion of the activities of sports clubs, etc. Dominant types of tourism are: sports, adventures, ecotourism. The most popular manifestation is „Summer at Vrbas“ (since 1953). The IRF World Cup 2021 Banja

Luka, Bosnia & Herzegovina (June)- International Rafting Federation competition of 15 teams from 6 countries (Serbia, Romania, Latvia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Hungary, Russia), which is worth of mention as the COVID-19 crisis affected tourism badly, but this manifestation kept her international content anyway.



Fig.5. River Vrbas
(Foto by Bidžan-Gekić, A.)

The spa complex in Slatina

The Spa complex in Slatina is the popular centre of physical medicine and rehabilitation (since 1888) with the bed capacity: 500. It is located 12 km distance from city centre of Banja Luka. Thanks to the natural healing factors: thermomineral water which is well mineralized calcium-magnesium-sulfate-hydrocarbonate-carbonic hyperthermia (40-42°C), healing mud (peloid), forest complex, this is an attractive and rentabile site of health & spa tourism, and congress tourism. Thermomineral waters of Slatina belong to the Vrbas river basin, geological position is determined by the Jurassic-Cretaceous and Upper Cretaceous flysch zone.



Fig.6. The Spa complex Slatina
(Source: Official Website)

Recreational „picnic“ areas

There are few recreational picnic areas near Banja Luka: Šibovi, Krupa at Vrbas, Banj hill, Duboka, Trapisti-Forest Park, as it can be seen from the map below.

Šibovi (383 m) is panoramic site with scenic viewpoint. Activities: picnic, walking, hiking. *Krupa at Vrbas* is a small town in valley between canyons of the Vrbas-river (25 km south of B. Luka). *Banj hill (431 m)* is panoramic site with different range of activities: walking, hiking, resting; culture: memorial monument (World War II). *Duboka (near B. Luka)* is picnic area with traditional gastronomy, but it's also practical for sports and recreation. It also includes scenic viewpoint. *Trapisti-Forest Park* is leisure and recreational area. There is interesting Delibasha village (1869), agricultural vocational-industrial complex (beer, cheese, pasta, fabric; monastery, power station, mill, printing house, bakery, etc.), whose founder were Catholic priests (originated from the French monastery La Trappe) and Trappists community, approved by the Ottoman government then.

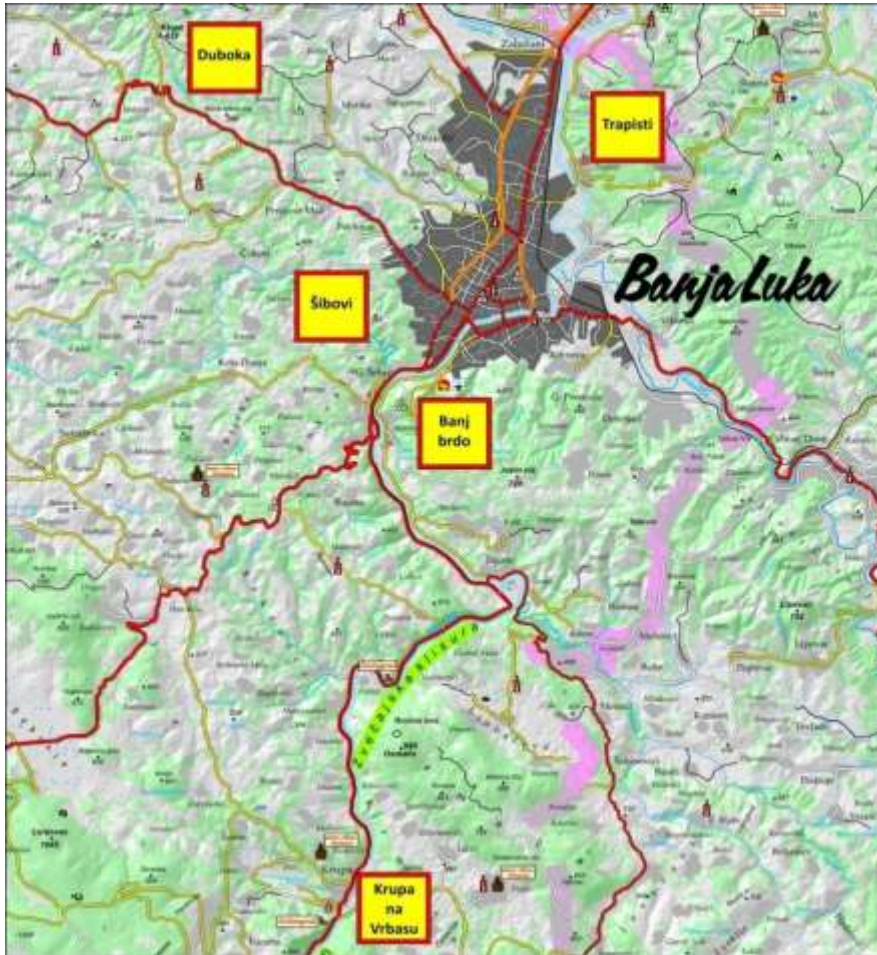


Fig.7. Recreational Picnic Areas in Banja Luka region
(Source: JU Tourist organisation of Banja Luka)

Cycling: bike trails

There are over 150 cycling routes in and around Banja Luka, mostly of hilly type. Between most popular is bike route „Krupa on Vrbas“ which is long 45 km and made of asphalt and gravel. The route starts on the cascades of the Krupa and goes upstream to the river's spring and Strika's cave, continues to the Stricici village, down to the village Dobrnja and back to the cascades and mills on the river Krupa. There are also 3 MBT in NP Kozara, but Kozara cycling route (30 km) is the most adventurous. It's the part of international route (Bosnia&Herzegovina; Croatia; MTB 60 km) and it connects the Kozara National Park, the Mostanica monastery

and Kozarska Dubica. It has 4 rest areas and 3 springs situated along the route, and beautiful landscapes.

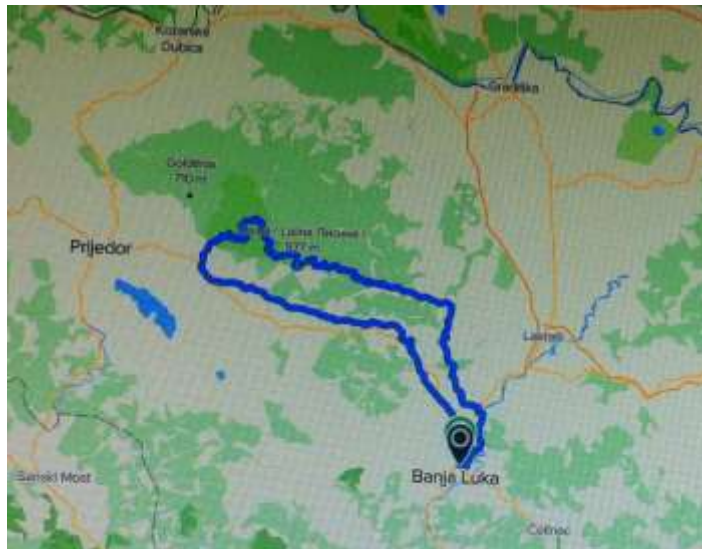


Fig. 8. Banja Luka-Kozara cycling route
(Source: Portal Bikemap)



Fig. 9. Biker's resting area with scenic view
(Source:NP Kozara Official Website)

Hiking

Hiking is practicing in recreative area of Banja Luka. Popular hiking trail Suturlija (near the city of Banja Luka) consists 6 shorter sport's routes. In Vrbas Adventure Resort there is canyon Tijesno with hiking trail (7 km) and scenic view on Vrbas river. There are sports hiking on the marked routes with elevation range 10-100 m. Hiking trails in NP Kozara: Mrakovica trail; Mrakovica (806 m) –Gumline (520 m)-Gola mt. (876 m); Mrakovica (806)-Kozaracki st. (658).

Adventure

Besides adventurous sites that are mentioned above (Vrbas Adventure Resort, Summer at Vrbas, NP Kozara hiking and cycling routes, etc.), it's important to remark that Banja Luka is also popular by adventurous skydiving tourism. The city has skydiving centre *Skydive Banja Luka* (jumping since 1938) and sport airport „Zalužani“ where the parachute jump activities are held.



Fig. 10. Skydiving Banja Luka
(Source: Banja Luka tourist board)

CONCLUSIONS

Banja Luka as the leisure and recreational tourism region has national tourist significance with developing character. There are plenty of natural potentials evaluated for leisure and recreation. This region offers different forms of tourism: leisure and recreation; nature tourism, cultural tourism; city tourism; rural tourism; eco-tourism; sport's and adventure tourism; hunting tourism; etc. There is more to be done to create popular nodus of leisure & recreation and to promote them efficiently, as an identified exceptional natural potential for this purpose is not

adequately exploited. There is still minority of identified leisure & recreational potentials with the international tourist significance. The tourism of Banja Luka region has not been sufficiently represented on foreign markets, it's „somehow“ exclusively predominantly oriented to the eastern block of Europe countries. The number of overnight stays has not achieved the million number yet. There is hard access to many natural potentials because of 2 reasons mainly: a) the complexed topography, mountain relief and deep valleys, and b) lack of investments and bad communications. Most of events has local or regional tourist significance although they are labeled as international manifestations. Other problems are: depopulated areas; lack of accommodation properties; poor traffic infrastructure (bad communications & weak tourist signalisation); weak cooperation between the state government- entities- local community- the tourist community. Measures to improve the tourism development particularly related to leisure and recreation include steps:

- to improve public and private traffic, communications (different varieties)
- to improve tourist infrastructure (accommodation, different type of routes, land & navigational signalization)
- to create strong promotion (web presentations and brochures in several languages; word of mouth; media)
- to create more interesting and bigger number of different programs to accomplish everyone's wishes and needs (all generations)
- to establish effective co-operation on the relation between representatives of governments- local community -tourism sector, which would increase types and level of exploitation natural potentials for leisure & recreational tourism
- to invest more in nature tourism, means leisure & recreation
- to create new and receptive areas: popular leisure & recreational nodes-centres
- to invest in scientific research of natural areas for recreation
- to follow the positive examples from Europe etc. (advanced models implementation)
- to work actively on the goals to fulfil international requirements and standards that lead us to the UNESCO and IUCN list of protected heritage

Banja Luka tourism region has plenty of natural potential for the leisure & recreational tourism development, but it strongly needs rational investments, radical human resources and professionals (scientists, geographers, spatial

planners, tourismologists, engineers, etc.) to achieve the higher level of tourism significance in the Europe and the rest of the World.

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