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## CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL HERITAGE IN RURAL REGIONS

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### ABSTRACT

The rich cultural and historical heritage of Stara Zagora region can be successfully included into the business paradigm of the local economic development. It is also relevant to the recommendations of the European development.

The proposed article considers a route pattern to the villages and similar could be used for other small settlements in the region. The idea of nowadays tourism has been advanced which could bring substantial financial and other benefits to the rural regions.

### CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL HERITAGE IN RURAL REGIONS

Usage of genuine cultural heritage and its transformation into a market product has become a powerful tendency both in Europe and in Bulgaria. This process goes simultaneously with the development of the policies concerning preservation and building of the cultural heritage on national, regional and local levels. Cultural heritage institutes such as museums for example, focus their efforts in this field guaranteeing consensus and introducing common policies on transnational, national, regional and local levels. Programs of the EU pay a special attention to the national heritage of different countries. This is a sector that creates very many jobs in Europe. Additionally this is a sphere where the member countries reach consensus very fast creating a “common fund”. No wonder that Europe is called “the biggest alive museum ever”.

The term “heritage” covers unity of natural resources and those created by men without any limitations in time and space. Heritage is a result, a product of action of reason, which is transformed during the centuries and is an object of intellectual pursuit and scientific research. It has value not only within the frame of the social regeneration; it is legitimated throughout preservation, through protection of “traces, testimony, artifacts, and monuments”. It concerns the past which is waived in a canopy of the present, in our time of living. The past has become a part of the present, it is

pursuit as an undivided part of it, and it can be co-experienced, governed and developed. The past is represented not only by admirable items in the museums. They are not mere stunned signs of the past eras. Their purpose here is to create a bond between the nowadays observers – the members of our society and the others – the ancient creators of items and rituals. A dynamic process of an establishment, transformation and rationalization of values of the cultural heritage takes place on different and manifold levels. Common frame here is the understanding of the culture and more specific of the cultural heritage as a lifestyle, a way of living, making choices, sharing values, building cultural policies.

Turning them into a market product is an important moment of the creation of heritage and of building the identity. Nowadays traditional cultures are objects of mass consumerism. In the past they were a ground for ethnic mobilization. The role of the cultural heritage is specific and is understood as a local administrative framework. How cultural heritage plays an instrumental role in creating territories or in their design in a new way on the map of nationalities or on the map of the regions? Can heritage and place mutually reinforce the importance of each other? How the functions of museums in Bulgaria change according to the new contexts for regional development in the Mediterranean and within the European Union? In other words, cultural heritage becomes a worthy to buy and sell tourism product.

Bulgaria has been famous for many of its attractions. Black Sea resorts are well known, the country has become attractive with winter resorts too, it is already widely known about the Thracians and their unique golden treasures, the Valley of Roses and the monasteries with their specific architecture. Bulgaria is unique with its climate and natural resources too, so alternative tourism consistently evolves in recent years.

In the approved in 2007 (1) by the European Commission strategy for culture, which our country cannot disregard, the need to strengthen the role of individual regions and cities is strongly emphasized in order to stimulate cross-border cultural links. This cultural cooperation should be seen not only as exchange of cultural goods and services but also as an opportunity to exchange ideas and best practices. Bulgaria actually has many opportunities in the field of cultural and historical heritage (2).

Focus on free niches in alternative tourism helps to discover what Bulgaria might be unique with. More and more sights of cultural heritage, if they can get more encouragement from the state, from the municipal governments as well as from businesses, have something of value to offer people. Bulgaria has a heritage that offers a unique blending of cultures. Thanks to media Bulgaria is in line with international trends in culture, but this does not mean that it should seek inspiration from abroad, what is ultimately valued by the outside world, is endogenous.

Where do Stara Zagora and its region fit in this paradigm?

This part of the Thracian Plain has offered wonderful environmental and weather conditions for human living and activity, evident from numerous monuments from prehistoric times through antiquity up to the present days. Despite the fact that the museum is filled with artifacts, there still remains undeveloped a niche of cultural and historical tourism, which undoubtedly deserves more attention and care. This niche is the rural and cultural tourism with their sight-seeing places, natural beauty and monuments encountered along the routes to villages in the region. They need adequate infrastructure, access, interpretation and socialization.

Consider the following route: Stara Zagora – Cyrilovo village - Elhovo village - Sladak

Kladenets (Sweet Waters Well) village - Pastrovo village and let's see what it offers us.

Villages along the route are located on the southern slopes and spurs of Surnena Sredna Gora Mountain and because of its unique climate were inhabited in very ancient times. Its favorable conditions, abundance of water and many springs and fertile soil have been attracting people since prehistoric times. Along the proposed tourism route are known several large prehistoric settlements, inhabited for thousands of years. There is a huge mound in the center of Cyrilovo village partially studied back in the 40-ies of the twentieth century. There are similar prehistoric settlements and settlement mounds in the area of Chataalka located in the cup of dam Chataalka, on the territory of Elhovo village, as well as in Sladak Kladenets (Sweet Water Well) village.

The area was densely populated even in the first millennium BC. Most likely there was a local road near the route of the contemporary road to Pastrovo village which connected the numerous settlements in the area during the time of the Thracians. It led north through the St. Nikola's pass near the Kavakliyka chalet towards the sub-Balkan fields.

There were created large agricultural estates in the area - villa rustic – owned by the Thracian aristocracy during the period of Roman rule. They were emerging as centers of large-scale land ownership in the Thracian lands. The most famous was the Thracian-rustic villa in the area Chataalka <sup>3</sup>. It was located in a fertile valley where the rivers Chataalka and Mogilovska merge. It consists of fortified residence of the owners and individual farm buildings. To the complex belonged a large mound necropolis, where both representatives of landlords were buried as well residents of nearby Thracian village, who leased the land and worked on the fields. Villa-rustic belonged to a rich Thracian family, whose members were prominent citizens of the nearby town of Augusta Traiana. Fully investigated and researched necropolis provided conclusive evidences of opulence and wealth and of a high social status of owners of this large agricultural estate. The abundance of gold jewelry, luxury goods import - Anatolian glassware, Italic bronze objects, exotic beauty cosmetics, etc. show lively economic and cultural contacts of the representatives of the Thracian aristocracy

both with the center and also with the remote provinces of the Roman Empire in the I and II century AD.

Today the villa is situated about 500 meters south of the contemporary road to Elhovo village. The ongoing archaeological excavations there provided a background and scenery for shooting the film "Detour" based on the novel of the famous Bulgarian writer Blaga Dimitrova during the 60-ies of the last century.

There are more roman settlements known in the area of villages Cyrilovo, Elhovo and Sladak Kladenets (Sweet Water Well).

Barbarian invasions brought a lot of anxiety and troubles in Thrace in the fourth - sixth century AC and as a result the population from the region was forced to seek protection and security in the nearby castles built on peaks. During this period strongholds have been located near villa-rustic in "Chatalka" such as a fortress on the peak "Chatala" (Mount Crotch) in the land of Elhovo village, a small fortress north of the same village and fortresses in Sladak Kladenets (Sweet Water Well) and Pastrovo village.

In the middle ages, the area along the old Thracian road is densely populated. There were medieval villages all along its route and they were built on the top of the earlier settlements. The earlier existed late Roman fortresses were restored and further strengthened. Garrisons and troops stationed there guarded the road and protected the population of the area against invaders such as nomadic tribes.

During the Russian-Turkish War in 1877 near Sladak Kladenets (Sweet Water Well) village were slaughtered nearly all its Bulgarian inhabitants by the raging Turks. After the liberation of Bulgaria from the Ottoman yoke a monument for remembrance was raised at the place of slaughter and it has been there up to now.

The proposed model for a route provides only a small glimpse to the cultural and historical heritage of the area. It also gives a chance to Bulgarian and foreign guests to discover benefits of the archaeological tourism. Fans of archeology can have a unique opportunity to

spend their holydays having pastime and working at the same time on archaeological excavations. They can get a suntan under the hot Thracian sun, to take walks near water reservoirs and ponds, to climb the surrounding mountains, to eat ecologically clean food obtained from the nearby orchards and vegetable gardens. Here financial benefits for the local population, the cultural and historical gain of knowledge for the visitors will be reinforced with the added value of the discloser of another unknown up to now rich and beautiful region of united Europe! Such initiatives approve the concept of cultural heritage of the regions as part of national and European cultural heritage. With the help of local governments and businesses and with appropriate acquisition of European funds under the Operational programs orientated towards development of cultural and ecological tourism this kind of projects must contribute to the development of the region. National heritage can become a factor for sustainable socio-economic development of this part of our country.

Through this conference, the initiative of Thracian University helps to deepen understanding of the strategic location of the Stara Zagora region, determines importance attached to its past, allows contemporary interpretation and dignified presentation of the local culture. Stara Zagora becomes a unifying center through focusing numerous cultural thematic routes leading to historic sites of different periods and eras and incorporating ecological landmarks of the Southeastern Bulgaria.

The conference main topic "Business and regional development. Rural regions - a look at Europe 2020" is much needed and comes at the right time.

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