

# The presentation of some cultural-historical resources of Vidin district and their promotion as tourist objects

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**Abstract.** The presentation and provision of access to the cultural values of the Vidin region (Bulgaria) by the local community aim to promote them and increase visitor's interest. Two of the objects located on the territory of the district have been proposed for inclusion in the UNESCO World Cultural and Natural Heritage List - the Magura Cave with drawings from the Bronze Age (proposed for inclusion in 1984) and the Belogradchik Rocks (proposed for inclusion in 2011). The local cultural and historical heritage is valuable for developing regional tourism. The article aims to draw attention to the general state of Vidin's cultural-historical and archaeological heritage, evaluated from its visitors' point of view. Based on field surveys conducted in the administrative area, conclusions and recommendations for developing cultural-historical tourism are drawn. The research results confirm the positive relationship between cultural tourism and the promotion of the cultural and historical heritage of the region through the application of some stimulating mechanisms.

## 1 Introduction

Vidin district is located in the northwestern part of Bulgaria, bordering two neighbouring countries - Serbia and Romania. In economic terms, nowadays the district and the region lag behind in comparison to other regions of our country. However, as a border territory, it still preserves many cultural and historical monuments from different historical eras, associated with many tribes and peoples, professing different religions and religious cults. Some of our most remarkable natural phenomena and protected areas are also located here.

The local cultural, historical and natural heritage is a valuable resource for the development of tourism in the region. Two of the sites located on the territory of the district have been proposed for inclusion in the UNESCO World Cultural and Natural Heritage List - the Magura Cave with drawings from the Bronze Age (proposed for inclusion in 1984) and the Belogradchik Rocks (proposed for inclusion in 2011).

This study aims to draw attention to the general state of the cultural-historical and archaeological heritage of the Vidin region (with an emphasis on two of the region's municipalities – Vidin and Belogradchik), evaluated from the point of view of its visitors.

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The problem of exhibiting the natural and cultural-historical heritage of the region and its inclusion in the tourism branch of the North-West region is represented in part in the scientific literature.

In the first decade of the XXI century, a Guide for the development of competitive tourist products in the Lower Danube Euroregion was promulgated, which included the city of Vidin as a destination. The publication indicates the need to protect the natural and cultural-historical environment, which would lead to its sustainable development. The authors offer their ideas for the development of competitive tourist products and sample package offers, which include the city of Vidin as one of Bulgaria's major ports.[1]

When in 2007 the Swiss New Open World Corporation organized a Campaign to determine the New Seven Wonders of the World, the Belogradchik Rocks entered the race. This indisputable success of Northwestern Bulgaria was also reflected in the scientific literature. A series of articles highlight its merits and point out that the campaign has played its part for the development of the city and the region. The tourist flow to Belogradchik is increasing and the local tourist business is being revived. [2-4] Attention is paid to the state's concern for the preservation of cultural-historical heritage and conclusions are drawn according to which knowing one's own culture is "the key to effective intercultural communication in tourism". [5]

The Roman sites on the territory of Northwestern Bulgaria and the possibilities for their interpretation for the needs of tourism are part of a study aimed at inventorying the heritage, pointing out the problems and opportunities for tourism development. The attitudes of the local authorities and the expert opinion of the museum institutions have been monitored, the possibilities of creating an independent or integrated tourist product based on the Roman archaeological heritage have been analysed. [6]

In another scientific study with a larger territorial scope, part of the regions of Northwestern Bulgaria (Vratsa and Montana) were included, as bordering the Danube River. The authors aim to present the basic assumptions for creating a regional brand built on the tourist resources of the Bulgaria-Romania cross-border region and through an analysis to outline the possibilities for the development of alternative tourism. [7]

In the second decade of the 21st century, the Belogradchik region was described in a scientific article: "... on the one hand, it contains a natural rock phenomenon - the Belogradchik rocks, which is an endless source of tourist potential, on the other hand, it is a part of the region of Northwest Bulgaria, which, according to Eurostat statistics, is the poorest European region". [8] In the analyses, the author tries to look for the parallels between "reconstruction and de-construction of urban memory" and the development of the local tourist potential. [8]

During the same period, researchers set themselves the goal of assessing the state of the key implementation factors that influence the development of tourism in the Danube region. [9-10] The article draws attention to important European and national strategic documents, as well as to a number of important international initiatives within the framework of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) and the Danube Strategy. In the conclusion drawn, it is stated that tourism is the sector that focuses precisely on a number of priorities and develops the economic structure of the area. Specific attention is paid to cultural-historical tourism (related to antiquity and Roman heritage). [9]

Another study draws attention to the attitude of young people towards the preservation and conservation of the national cultural heritage. The answers obtained from a survey questionnaire led to an interesting conclusion that young people need more specialized information about the essence and manifestations of cultural and historical heritage, while at the same time they have positive and conscious attitude towards its preservation. [11]

After the acceptance of Bulgaria as a member of the European Union, it became possible to talk about the creation of cross-border tourist destinations, and more recently, a

number of non-governmental organizations have made attempts to implement similar ideas. [12]

None of the scientific studies mentioned so far pay attention to the promotion of the cultural and historical resources of the Vidin region as tourist sites. It has not been investigated to what extent the publicly available information about the cultural and historical sites of the Vidin region creates realistic expectations among potential visitors.

This study aims to pay attention to the general condition of the cultural-historical and archaeological heritage of Vidin, evaluated from the point of view of its visitors.

## **2 Popular cultural and historical monuments located on the territory of Vidin region**

In the World Code of Ethics in Tourism [13], tourism is seen as a consumer of the cultural heritage of humanity and a contributor to its increase. The International Cultural Tourism Charter [14] says that heritage is a broad concept and encompasses natural and cultural environments. The most important objective of heritage management is to communicate its importance and the need for its preservation to both the local community and visitors. Reasonable and well-managed physical, intellectual and emotional access to cultural heritage and development is both a right and a privilege.

On the territory of the municipalities of Vidin and Belogradchik, many immovable cultural and historical values are exhibited for visitors. Two of these sites are waiting to be recognized as World Heritage sites, and others are of national importance. Those cultural monuments that are of local importance are excluded from this study.

### **Historical data on the most popular cultural and historical monuments included in this study**

The official site of the *Vidin* district proclaims the rich history of the region, pointing out the many cultural layers accumulated over the millennia, including ancient Roman, medieval Bulgarian, Turkish, the post-liberation one and the one from recent times. In the first millennium BC, the area was inhabited by the Thracian tribes Mizi and Tribali, who were colonized by the Roman Empire in the 1st century AD. Numerous monuments, including architectural sites, have remained from the era of Antiquity to the present day. [15]

In the Middle Ages, the city was known under the name of *Bdin*. During the First Bulgarian Kingdom, it was a border fortress with the task of guarding and controlling the Danube River. During the Second Bulgarian State, at the end of the 13th century, the Bdin region existed as an independent feudal principality with rulers such as despot Shishman and Tsar Ivan-Sratsimir. [16-20] The Bdin fortress was the last to fall under the rule of the Ottoman Turks. [21] Many written testimonies remain from the era of Ottoman rule. [22]

Nowadays, Vidin is known as the city of the three fortresses: the ancient Bononia, from a part of which the Baba Vida fortress was built, and then the Ottoman fortress Kaleto.

It is stated in the scientific literature that *Bononia* arose probably at the end of the 1st century and the beginning of the 2nd century as a castle and a road station along the Danube Road of the Roman province of *Mysia*. Over the centuries, in addition to a road station and a castle, there was also a port serving the military and merchant fleet. Towards the end of the 3rd century and the beginning of the 4th century, the city had a solid fortification system with a fortified area and was one of the major urban centres of the empire. In the 6th century, during an Avar invasion, Bononia was captured and gradually abandoned under the pressure of barbarian tribes invading from the north. [23-24]

Nowadays, the only completely preserved medieval fortress in Bulgaria (partly a successor of the ancient Bononia) is known as the *Baba Vida castle*. The name of the fortress is associated with the legend about the daughter of a Bulgarian boyar - Vida, who

after his death built a castle well-fortified against foreign attacks. The castle was named after her - Baba Vida, or Babini Vidini Kuli". [24]

The remains of ancient **Raciaria** are located northeast of nowadays Archar village. The researchers point out that the city arose during the time of the Roman Empire in the second half of the 1st century, in a place where there was a Thracian settlement. Two major thoroughfares passed through here: the Via Danu-biana (Danube Road) and the road to the Adriatic, providing the fastest connection from Rome to the Danube border. Over the centuries, the city was strengthened and reached a high economic and cultural prosperity. It is assumed that it existed until the 6th century, when it was destroyed by the Avars. [24] [25]

Nowadays, the **Belogradchik rocks**, around which the **medieval fortress** is located, are one of our most famous natural attractions. Publicly available materials that analyse the process of symbiosis between natural features, the **fortress** as a historical heritage and the modern city of **Belogradchik**. [26-27] In ancient times, the Romans took advantage of the natural inaccessibility of the Belogradchik rocks and built a castle, which, according to researchers, had the task of serving as a watch-tower fortress. According to historical data, the fortress was expanded during the Second Bulgarian Kingdom. Its next expansion was after its capture by the Ottoman Turks, who further rebuilt and strengthened it. Evidence indicate that it obtained its current more European appearance under the guidance of French and Italian engineers. [2-4, 28]

**Magurata** is one of the largest caves in Bulgaria and is located 18 km away to the north of Belogradchik. It is famous for its rock drawings made with bat guano. The drawings mainly depict hunting scenes, as well as rites dedicated to the cult of fertility. Astronomical images and a solar calendar can also be seen. Scientists date the drawings to different eras - Paleolithic, Neolithic, Eneolithic, early Bronze Age and even the Iron Age. During archaeological excavations in the Magurata cave, dwellings that belong to the early Iron Age were investigated. [4, 29-32]



Photo 1 Baba Vida Fortress



Photo 2 Belogradchik Focks



Photo 3 Magurata cave

### 3 Observation and analysis of the promotion of the cultural and historical resources of the Vidin region as tourist sites

Various methodological approaches were used in this study, including familiarization with the available archival documents and literature, observation and causerie (interview).

In collecting the empirical material, a direct standardized interview and survey of the respondent was used in front of three of the most popular cultural and historical sites in the Vidin region: Baba Vida fortress, Magurata cave and Belogradchik rocks.

The research covers a set of visitors to the cultural-historical sites during the so-called extended weekend and on several days off, after one of the country's public holidays. It is assumed that the interest and attendance of the sites during these days is greater compared to weekdays.

The number of surveys actually completed, with correctly filled-in cards by the respondents, is 90. Some of the respondents gave more than one answer, and therefore the

total percentage ratio in data processing exceeds 100%. When calculating the final results, the surveys were further processed to remove any inappropriate or illogical responses.

### 4 Survey data analysis. Results

The first questions of the survey card clarify the demographic profile of the survey participants. In the sample from the conducted field study, 51% are women against 49% - men. The majority of them are of working age, respectively: 30% aged 18-30, 24% between 30 and 40 and 21% aged between 40 and 50. Only 9% are under the age of 18, and 16% are over 50.

Similarly, the respondents indicated that 68% of them were working and 23% were students. Only 10% were unemployed and 1% are pensioners.

The majority of respondents indicated secondary education (including vocational secondary education) as their level of education - 47%, 41% had higher education and 6% were students.

One of the questions in the survey card had the task of clarifying which of the tourism sites was the favourite of the respondents (Fig. 1). The most votes were declared for the Baba Vida fortress - 66%, followed by the Magurata cave - 34%, the Belogradchik rocks - 31% and the Kaleto fortress - 13%. These are also the most popular natural and cultural-historical sites of the district, which have national status, and as mentioned above, two of them are waiting to be recognized as world treasures.

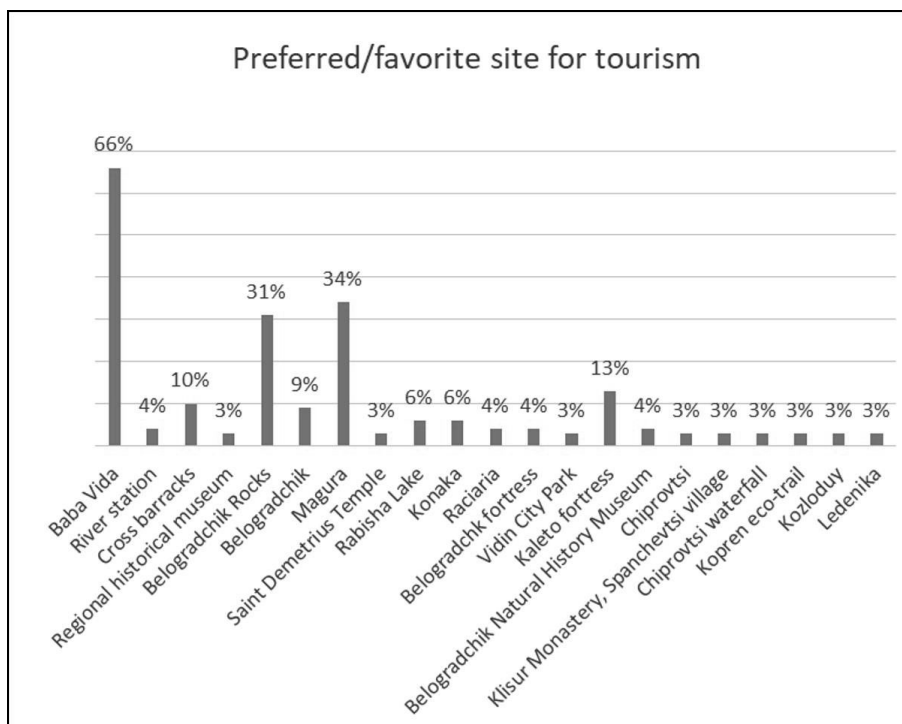


Fig. 1. Preferred site for tourism.

Fig. 2 presents the answers to the question to what extent the Regional History Museum in Vidin plays the role of a cultural and educational institute and how fully and in detail it presents the cultural and historical heritage of the region, informing its visitors about it. After visiting the museum, 43% answered that they were relatively well acquainted with the

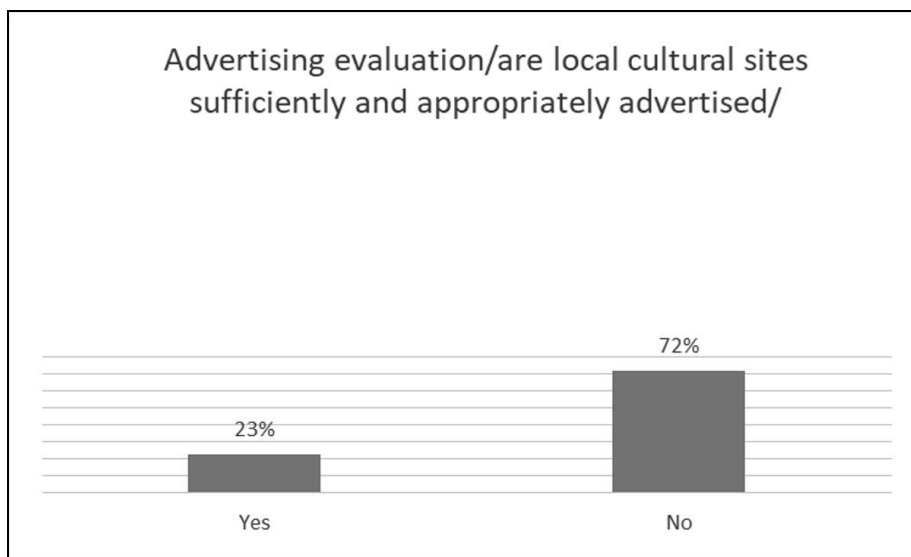
cultural and historical heritage of the region, and 29% - that they were partially acquainted. Only 24% declared that they were hardly acquainted with the heritage area.



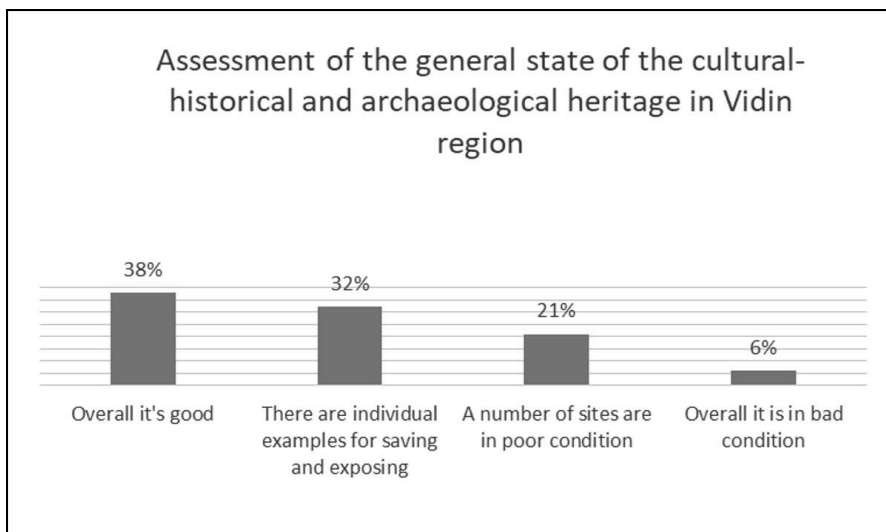
**Fig. 2.** Exhibition of the cultural and historical heritage in the Regional History Museum, Vidin.

Nowadays, advertising is an indispensable part of the promotion of tourism sites, including also cultural and historical monuments. Good publicity guarantees success, especially when it comes to heritage sites of national and world importance. Moreover, a number of international documents indicate that the promotion of heritage in tourism requires potential visitors to be responsibly informed about its specific characteristics.

Unfortunately, 72% of the respondent's state that local cultural sites are not advertised sufficiently and in an appropriate way (Fig. 3). The percentage (23%) of those who give a positive assessment of the advertisement is obviously too small.



**Fig. 3.** Advertising of cultural sites in Vidin region.



**Fig. 4.** Assessment of the state of the cultural and historical heritage of the Vidin district.

It is the duty of every community to identify, protect, manage and present its natural and cultural wealth in a dignified way. The participants in the survey were asked to give an assessment of the general state of the cultural-historical and archaeological heritage in the Vidin region (Fig. 3). More than half of the respondents gave a positive assessment, 38% of them indicated that the condition of the cultural-historical sites is very good, and 32% indicated that there are separate examples of preservation and exposure, 21% indicated that a number of sites were in poor condition. Only 6% gave a negative assessment and indicated that the sites were generally in poor condition.

## 5 Conclusion

Economically, the Northwest region of the country lags behind in its development. In the field of international tourism, it is practically of marginal importance - the percentage of realized overnight stays is small compared to the average for the country and other regions. This is probably due to poor transport accessibility and the small number of hotels and accommodation facilities.

However, as far as our domestic tourism is concerned, the Vidin region plays an important role, as there are cultural and historical sites of historical significance for our country and nation.

The research done showed that the local community takes care of the places related to its heritage by striving to exhibit them in an appropriate way so that visitors can enjoy their authenticity in their natural environment. Tourists who participated in the survey shared that they had a worthwhile and satisfying experience that fuelled their patriotic pride.

From the survey and interviews conducted, it became clear that visitors respect local values, treat with respect and behave responsibly during their visits to the natural and cultural-historical sites.

The identified weaknesses in relation to advertising should come to the attention of the regional and municipal administrations, cultural institutions, and non-governmental organizations in the region. It is necessary to identify measures and look for the right mechanisms through which the role of the local natural and cultural heritage in our national history and culture will be emphasized.



Thus, a higher level of public engagement and support will be encouraged, with the help of which the long-term sustainable preservation, promotion and presentation of the cultural and historical resources of the Vidin district can be guaranteed.

It will be a pride for our country if they take their rightful place on the international tourist map and become popular sites for cultural tourism.

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