

DIVERSIFICATION OF TOURISM OFFER AS A MEANS OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF PERIPHERAL REGIONS – CASE STUDY OF KUPRES

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Abstract

Diversification of Tourism Offer as a Means of Socio-economic Development of Peripheral Regions – Case Study of Kupres

Many modern countries have significant problems with disparities in development between core and periphery. Municipality of Kupres in Bosnia and Herzegovina is one typical example of peripheral area, which is located within the sparsely populated region of Dinaric Karst Highland. It is taken for the case study in this paper, because it shows certain signs of economic activation in the field of tourism. However, its mainstream tourism offer is of seasonal character, and it is not sufficient for sustainable economic growth and significant progress in socio-economic sense. That is why tourism offer need to become more diversified. Methodology in this paper is focused on analysis of all potentials and motives that wider area of Kupres possesses, which can be valorized through systematic approach of institutions and local community. It is intended to emphasize a significance of geographical expertise in these kinds of problematic. Field research and GIS analysis are used for exploration of study area.

Key words

Kupres, periphery, tourism offer, ski resort, rural tourism, ecotourism

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1. Introduction

Development of peripheral and rural areas is a great challenge for any country, especially for transition economies. According to Hall and Boyd (2005), peripheral areas are defined as geographically remote from mass markets. This implies increased transportation and communication costs between these and core areas. One of the most obvious ways to prevent further socio-economic decline is to stimulate development of rural tourism, which is usually based on local cultural heritage, as well as natural environment. Depending on environment, it is also closely related with various sub-types of alternative tourism branches (ecotourism, adventure tourism, recreation tourism etc.). The global market for ecotourism has grown significantly, with a gradual shift in worldwide travel patterns and preferences (Nepal 2002). It is important to emphasize that this type of activity requires social, economic and political determination (Bessièrè 1998). Jaafar et al. (2015) argue that even if local people regard a tourism development in their area positively, government and other stakeholders should still emphasize the benefits of community involvement.

In a post-socialist countries of Eastern, Central and Southeastern Europe, large peripheral areas are exposed to intensive depopulation, due to combined factors of economic problems, such as unemployment, massive rural-urban migrations and demographic transition. On the example of Slovenian region of Notranjski Kras, Simpson et al. (1998) proved that tourism has been identified as a catalyst to stimulate economic growth and improve the standard of living of local communities. Tourism potentials are especially noticeable in Southeastern Europe, where rural settlements in mountain regions provide a unique and attractive ambience. Bosnia and Herzegovina belongs to this group, but rural tourism here is not recognized as a means to planned economic and demographic regeneration (Antolović 2009). Progress in this field is generally result of individual actions and lack of systematic and comprehensive approach is evident. In this paper, municipality of Kupres in the typical peripheral region (Canton 10) is taken for the case study. Geographical approach is used for analysis of tourism resources and motives in selected area.

2. Geography of Kupres

Kupres is a town and municipality in southwestern Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is a part of macroregion of Karst Highland. Even though it represents a road junction between neighboring regions, including the shortest road that connects central Dalmatia with central Bosnia, its geographical position can not be considered as particularly favorable. The reasons are distance from large urban centers in Bosnia and Herzegovina, from which it takes approximately 3 hours of car driving to get in Kupres (Tab. 1), and also unfavorable physical conditions for general human development. Primarily, that refers on geological, hypsometric, climatic and hydrological characteristics of this area. Kupres is located in Outer Dinaric Alps, where karst terrain is dominant. The largest geomorphological landform in this area is Kupreško polje (Kupres Field), surrounded by mountains of Stožer, Plazenica, Lupoglava, Stražbenica, Vitorog, Hrbine, Malovan and others. Southeast of Kupreško polje are locations of Vukovsko polje and Ravanjsko polje – the most elevated karstic fields in Dinaric Alps. Town of Kupres is at almost 1200 meters above sea level. That makes it the highest urban settlement in Bosnia and Herzegovina. As a result, climate conditions in this region are characterized by very cold and windy winter, while summer is also relatively cool (mean July temperature is around 15°C). Kupreško polje also represents the part of watershed between Black Sea and Adriatic drainage

basins. It is somewhat disrupted by subterranean bifurcation as a result of karst hydrology. Certain parts of the municipality have problems with water supply.

Tab. 1: Distance between Kupres and the nearest large urban centers.

City	Distance	
	km	h
Banja Luka	138	3:00
Mostar	124	2:54
Sarajevo	146	2:54
Split (Croatia)	143	2:58
Zenica	86	2:03

Source: viamichelin.com.

Contemporary social situation cannot be considered as favorable either. Wartime between 1992 and 1995 has significantly affected the number of population, demographic picture and economic development in Kupres. By the provisions of Dayton Peace Agreement, territory of pre-war municipality was split into two parts – Kupres (FBIH) and Kupres (RS), in order that by far the larger part went to entity of Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Some 13% of pre-war municipal territory with only three villages and total population of 300 (according to 2013 census) went to Republika Srpska. Municipality of Kupres (FBIH) is also an administrative part of Canton 10, largest by area, but also the most sparsely populated canton in Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

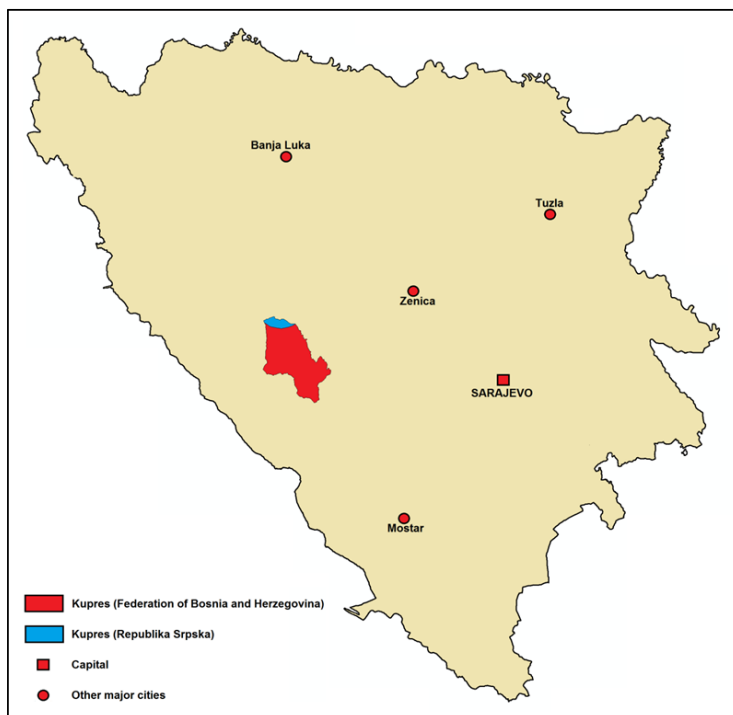


Fig. 1: Geographical position of Kupres within Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Source: Authors, 2016.

Average population density for both Kupres municipalities is only 8 people per square kilometer. Even before negative effects of war, region of Kupres was exposed to depopulation, with continuous trends of population decline through the whole second half of the 20th century. According to 1991 census, Municipality of Kupres had a population of 9618 people, while in 2013 that number is officially down to 5357 (unofficially it is significantly lower). Extremely negative natural increase and emigration of younger population indicate that these disturbing tendencies will continue in the future. More than half of the population is concentrated in urban center, and the rest of people lives on northeast margin of Kupreško polje. Its western part is not generally suitable for settlements, because of water scarcity and exposure to strong and cold winds.

3. Main tourism offer of Kupres

Aforementioned natural and historical conditions resulted in Kupres economic marginalization. Local population is traditionally oriented to cattle herding, but significance of this activity is declining in modern times. Industrial facilities that was built during the socialist period are devastated during and after the war. Forest exploitation is still economically profitable activity, but lack of adequate planning approach created some other type of (environmental) concerns. In such socio-economic circumstances, tourism emerged in post-war period as a backbone of new local development. This tertiary economic branch abruptly started to develop in Kupres in the first decade of 21st century, when were constructed numerous receptive objects, including four hotels (Knez, Maestral, Adria Ski and Kupres), as well as many apartments and cottages. Total of 700 beds comprise tourist accommodation of Kupres (Begić, Duman 2013).

Soon after that, tens of thousands of tourists are visiting Kupres annually, and it can be said that Kupres distinguish itself as one of the most visited winter destinations in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Most tourists come from Croatia, especially Dalmatia. However, economic recession caused stagnation and even decline in number of tourists. This fact emphasized a need for diversification of tourism supply on the time of whole year, not only a winter. Šiljeg et al. (2010) conducted research on tourists and local population satisfaction with various tourism elements in Kupres. Results showed that tourists are significantly more satisfied with tourism offer than local population with economic benefits.

Irrespective of alternative and wider tourism supply conception, winter and ski-tourism have remained a backbone of Kupres economic development, regarding the fact that snow cover lasts usually for five months per year. Spatial plan from 2006 has ambitiously outlined creation of 11 sport and recreation facilities on the territory of Kupres municipality – nine of them for alpine, and two for nordic skiing. Only two (Stožer-Vrana and Čajuša) have been constructed so far. Ski resort Stožer-Vrana is located on the Mount Stožer, only 1.5 kilometers northeast of Kupres. Total length of ski slopes are 4.5 kilometers, and they are differentiated according to the required level of skiing expertise. This resort has a proper infrastructure, including cable car, ski-lift, and wind protection.

Ski resort Čajuša is placed on the opposite, southwestern side of Kupreško polje, 1 kilometer north of Gornji Malovan. It is comprised of four ski slopes, with total length of 13,5 kilometers, and also has adequate infrastructure that includes ski-lifts and snow cannons. Elevation difference between the start and finish of ski slopes at Čajuša

resort is 350 meters, which is less than in the case of Stožer-Vrana, where the difference is 415 meters. There are more than 200 cottages at the foothills of Čajuša. Hotel Ski Adria is also located here, while the rest of hotels are in the urban center. Čajuša is 8 kilometers away from Kupres. According to Hamad et al. (2010), Kupres resorts occupy the position of marker niches.



Fig. 2. Ski resort of Čajuša.

Source: Google Earth, 2016.

Climate change, however, increasingly determines success of seasonal activities like winter tourism. This fact was especially visible in the 2014/15 and 2015/16 winter seasons, when lack of snow caused much lower number of tourists and nights than expected. Tourism board of Kupres has recognized this problem, and tries to mitigate negative effects of failed winter seasons through diversification of tourism offer, but the lack of higher degree of its affirmation and valorization is still evident.

The manifestation of "Dani kosidbe – Days of Mowing" (so-called Strljanica) is one significant exemption from this context, because it exists for a long period of time as one of the most famous ethnocultural events, not only in Kupres, but also in Bosnia and Herzegovina in general. The manifestation is held every first week of July, and orderly attracts tens of thousands of visitors every year, which makes it by far the biggest tourism attraction in this region outside the winter season. Cutting the grass has been part of everyday life of Kupres rural population since olden times, which eventually became tradition. This activity today does not have the same agricultural meaning as before, but represents a central motive of this tourism manifestation. Its program in contemporary context is enriched with various events. Except mowing competition, there are also horse race, football tournament, other type of competition, cattle exhibition, folklore festival etc.

4. Possibilities for tourism offer diversification

The most obvious advantage of Kupres in the context of diversified tourism offer creation is unique ambient, that is comprised of natural environment, attractive landscapes, clean air and remoteness from urban and densely populated areas. Basic element of natural environment in Kupres region is karst, with various characteristic landforms. Very specific Dinaric karst, with few exemptions, generally has not been considered seriously in the context of tourism valorization. However, example of Kupreško polje and its immediate surroundings, which represents one of the typical Dinaric karst landscape, confirms the tourism attractiveness of this ambient. Some of the most visible geomorphological landforms on the territory of Kupres region are sinkholes of various dimensions.

Largest and the most spectacular sinkholes can be found on the north side of Kupreško polje, on the locality known as Japage, next to village Rastičevo. Five large sinkholes (Topolovica, Mrnjašica, Crljenka, Kotlić and Japažica) are found here. Some 50 meters high rocky uplift is located between them, and it can serve as fantastic viewpoint to significant part of Kupreško polje and its phenomena. Diameters of these gigantic sinkholes vary between 140 and 320 meters, while their depth varies between 32 and 112 meters (Mijoč 2011; Stepišnik 2014). Sinkholes bottoms are covered with forest vegetation. Locality of Japage is extremely rare karst phenomenon, so it is very interesting to geomorphological and geological explorers, but it has not been done much on its tourism promotion for more diverse types of tourists so far.



Fig. 3. Locality of Japage.

Source: Authors, 2016.

Just north of Japage, in its immediate proximity, Rastičevo Lake is located. It is one of three natural lakes in Kupreško polje. Its length is 180 meters, width is 130 meters, and maximum depth is 10 meters. Some alternative names, like Blagaj Lake, Vilino Lake, or Crno Oko, are also in use. Two other lakes are located much more to the south, next to eastern margin of the field. These are Kukavice Lake (near the village of Kukavice) and Turjača Lake (next to village Zanaglina). Both have similar dimensions as the Rastičevo Lake. Tourism potential of these lakes is insignificantly valorized so far, partly because tourism promotion of Kupres was not focused on them. On the other hand, if it comes to higher degree of tourism exploitation of these lakes, it is necessary to consider ecological issues and preservation of original natural ambient. Lakes, however, are not the only hydrological phenomena that can be used for tourism purposes.



Fig. 4. Kukavice Lake.

Source: Authors, 2016.

Several streams flow through Kupreško polje – Milač, Mrtvica, Karićevac etc. Milač is recognizable by the high number of meanders, and Mrtvica is primarily known by its ponor (sinkhole) on the western side of the field, as well as by subterranean bifurcation of tic water. Bigger share of water from Kupreško polje through underground ways drains to lower karstic fields in the Outer Dinaric Alps, and further to Adriatic Sea, but the Mrtvica water partly drains to the basin of Pliva, Vrbas, Sava and Danube rivers, as well as Black Sea (hierarchical order). This karst phenomenon is also very attractive to scientists and explorers, but there is a potential for wider tourism role, especially because the main ponor zone is easily accessible to visitors.

The wider region of Kupres can be considered as a unique ecosystem, which fits well into local natural ambient. Kupres is placed in the contact zone between maritime and

continental climatic influence, which caused high level of biodiversity. Field is covered with grass vegetation, which is traditionally used for pasture, while mountains have mixed vegetation where dominate coniferous (fir) forests and meadows. All these vegetation types can be successfully valorized from the aspect of recreation, rural, adventure, hunting and ecotourism. Different species of flowers, herbs, berry fruits and mushrooms are present in this area. However, important notion about mushrooms is the need for moderation in picking, so that local species could sustain.

Many species of wild animals live in the surrounding forests, like rabbit, deer, brown bear, quail, wild cat, marten, badger, as well as certain endangered species like lynx, squirrel, black grouse, hazel grouse, heron, and many other bird species. Municipality took some effort on creating a necessary infrastructure for this type of tourism, as well as on adoption of measures in the field of hunting control. Two hunting grounds are clearly defined in territorial sense. These are Kupres-Kiprovača and Raduša-Ljubuša. Both are located in the peripheral parts of municipality. First one is located in the northern, and the second in the southern portion.

Beside aforementioned, there are many other activities that can be practised in the Kupres municipality. This is especially true for sports and recreation activities like paragliding, motocross, biking, horse riding, hiking or simply walking. Many sports teams and individuals come to Kupres for high altitude training, e. g. it is well-known destination for pre-season preparation of numerous football clubs. Kupres is known as favorite destination for paragliders, and three runways for them exist on the Mount Stožer. Because of Kupreško polje wideness, there are great possibilities for long flights and many options for safe landing place, for those who are interested in this type of adventure. Relative flatness of Kupreško polje enables good predispositions for biking and motocross, as well as horse riding. All three options are included in tourism offer of Kupres, and resources for them are provided. For those who prefer challenges of steeper terrain, there is a possibilities for recreation and exploration of surrounding mountains. In this context, fresh and clean air should be emphasized as an important tourism factor of Kupres area.

Although natural motives are primary tourism value of Kupres, neither cultural nor historical heritage of this area should not be ignored. Cultural heritage is generally perceived through aforementioned manifestation of "Dani kosidbe", but more determined orientation toward year-long rural tourism would bring a much higher economic benefits for the local population, and make a huge contribution to sustainable rural development. Most of rural settlements in this area are deeply in process of depopulation, some of them are completely abandoned, but the fact that remained rural population still has a large number of traditional elements in its everyday life, which is especially visible in typical rural landscape of Kupres surroundings, in combination with reserved natural environment represents unique potential for halting the decline of local villages through development of rural tourism. So far, this alternative did not get a systematic treatment, but certain activities in the field are the exclusive result of several families enthusiasm.

One positive example represents the farm on the periphery of municipal center, where tourists can experience rural way of life, with special emphasis on agriculture (cattle breeding in the first place), horse riding and gastronomy. Local gastronomic offer is represented by Kupres cheese and yogurt, pies, ham, lamb, veal, pura, potatoes, bread, honey and other dishes, which have exclusively domestic and organic origin. Šiljković (2009) emphasizes Kupres with its autochthonous meat and cheese

products, as one of the places that belong to the most elevated region of organic food production in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Gastronomical aspect has increasingly important role within the tourism offer. Tourists buy local products or eat in restaurants or on farms, thus representing a sizeable source of income for local communities (Bessière 1998).

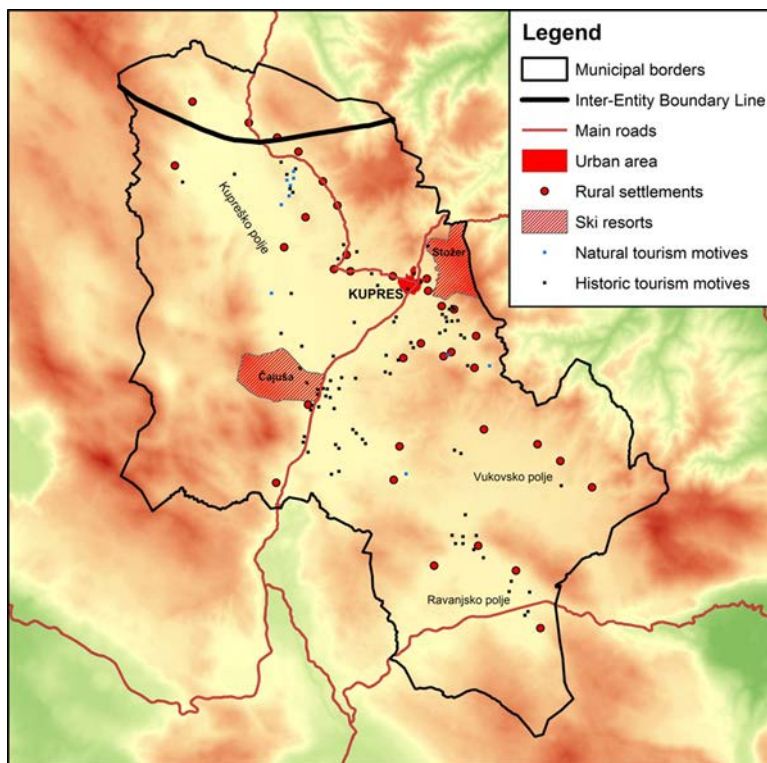


Fig. 5. Distribution of tourism motives on Kupres.

Source: Authors, 2016.

Historical buildings are one of the most crucial elements of tourism offer in many destinations. However, that is not case with Kupres, whose tourism potential is based predominantly on natural and rural landscape. Nevertheless, fact that Kupres region has a continuity of human existence since prehistory and that every historic period left certain remains that can be found in the area even today, can be used for additional diversification of tourism offer. Significant number of tumuli and hillforts from prehistoric ages can be found in the area (Benac 1990). Antique period is represented by well preserved remnants of Roman roads and basilica in Otinovci (Gudelj 2000). General direction of Roman roads in this area was north – south, in order to connect valleys of Rama River and Janj River, with the purpose of transcending the main Dinaric watershed. Medieval heritage is, as in other parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina, represented with numerous stećci (tombstones), distributed over the whole territory of Kupres municipality.

Church of John the Baptist from 19th century is located in aforementioned village of Otinovci, on the foundations of medieval church that was built under the request of Bosnian queen Catherine in 15th century. The most interesting modern building is

Church of Holy Family, which dominates the panorama of Kupres town, and represents one of the largest religious objects in the country. In the town center also exists the Ahmed Fadil-pasha Mosque, while in several villages around Kupres minor orthodox churches can be found.

5. Conclusion

Kupres is town and municipality with multiple issues related to consequences of war, economic stagnation and population decline. Considering also the distance from political, economic, social and demographic core(s) of Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is perfect example of peripheral area in socio-economic sense. However, unlike many other municipalities that are in similar situation, local people in Kupres have succeeded to create a relatively solid tourism offer and attract a significant number of tourists. This especially looks impressive when it is put in the context of whole region of High Karst or Canton 10 regarding administrative division, but the right question is whether this local orientation toward tourism is sufficient to invert the existing socio-economic decline.

Tourism in Kupres is generally associated with two branches – winter (two ski resorts) and manifestation (Dani kosidbe – Days of Mowing) tourism. Although it managed to become one of the most renowned center of winter tourism in Bosnia and Herzegovina in a relatively short period of time, Kupres do not have conditions to compete with national leaders in this tourism type – Mount Jahorina, Mount Bjelašnica and Mount Vlašić. However, its comparative advantage is possibility to diversify offer on the period of whole year. For that purpose, it is necessary to stimulate development of various alternative tourism types – rural tourism, ecotourism, adventure tourism, recreation tourism etc. Considering the fact that highest number of tourists in Kupres are from Croatia, there is also a space for better promotion of this destination within the Bosnia and Herzegovina, in order to attract more domestic tourists. As it is presented in this paper, potential for diverse tourism offer is undisputable, but planning approach, better marketing and education of local population are needed for the adequate valorization of these motives.

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Summary

Development of peripheral regions is a great challenge for any country. That is especially true for post-socialist transition countries in South East Europe. Bosnia and Herzegovina is one of them. Town and municipality of Kupres in southwestern Bosnia has been traditionally considered as a part of Dinaric Karst Highland, one typical peripheral region in socio-economic context. Its geographical position can not be considered as particularly favorable, because of distance from the political and economic core of the country, as well as harsh natural environment (high altitude, cold climate and water scarcity). In combination with the factor of turbulent recent history, this fact has effected on low population density, negative demographic trends and economic stagnation of Kupres.

In such socio-economic circumstances, tourism emerged in post-war period as a backbone of new local development. This tertiary economic branch abruptly started to develop in Kupres in the first decade of 21st century, when were constructed numerous receptive objects, including four hotels and many apartments and cottages. Tourism in Kupres is generally associated with two branches – winter and manifestation tourism. Winter tourism is mostly developed through two ski resorts – Stožer and Čajuša, while principal manifestation during summer season, which brings more than 10.000 tourists each year, is called “Dani kosidbe” (Days of Mowing). Climate change, however, increasingly determines success of seasonal activities like winter tourism, and manifestation events last too briefly, so it is concluded that tourism offer needs to be more diversified and to include the period of whole year.

This paper is primarily focused on the potential diversification of tourism offer of Kupres. Geographical analysis of natural environment, historical processes in the area and local cultural heritage is used for identification of additional tourism motives. For this purpose, field research as well as GIS analysis of available maps, aerial photos and documented data are conducted. Geomorphological (mostly karstic) landforms and hydrological objects are identified as potential tourism motives and the general terrain characteristics are analyzed in the context of existing and potential tourism activities. Historic and cultural heritage is also taken into account as an basis for rural tourism. In the end, synthetic map of tourism motives distribution is made, with the visible elements such as terrain features (hypsometry), position of Kupres town within the municipality, distribution of rural settlements, location of two ski resorts, and distribution of numerous natural and historic tourism motives.