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**TOURISM DEVELOPMENT COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS
OF THE PROVINCES IN THE NORTH-WEST REGION (BULGARIA):
INTRA-REGIONAL DISPARITIES**

Abstract: The North-West region of Bulgaria is the one with the lowest economic activity and employment rates in the country. The main objective of the report is to examine the state of tourism in the different provinces of the region and to analyze the potential for diversification of the region's economy through tourism development.

Keywords: tourism, north-west region, economy.

Introduction

The tourism sector in Bulgaria is a priority industry in the country's economy. According to the Ministry of Tourism, the tourism industry generates about 13% of GDP. In 2018, there are 3 458 accommodation establishments in the country, and the realized overnights amount to 26 845 013. The visits of foreigners to Bulgaria show a steady growth of about 1% annually, reaching 12 368 363 in 2018¹. Due to the importance of the tourism sector for the Bulgarian economy, the main objective of the report is to make a comparative analysis of this industry in the different provinces of one of the least developed economic regions in Bulgaria (The North-West Region) and to trace which of them have the greatest potential for tourism development as an opportunity to regional economy diversification. The study focuses on the five districts in the North-West region – Vidin, Montana, Vratsa, Lovech and Pleven. The data of the National Statistical Institute for 2018 are used.

North-West Region – Area and Economic Status

According to Art. 4 para. 1 of the Law on Regional Development of the Republic of Bulgaria “for the purposes of planning, programming, management, resourcing, monitoring and evaluation of regional development, regions are divided into levels in accordance with the requirements of the general classification of territorial units for statistical purposes, applied in the European Union.” The territorial units for statistical purposes (from the French NUTS – Nomenclature des unités territoriales statistiques) are divided into three levels: level 1 (NUTS 1) – zones (regions) (“North and Southeastern Bulgaria” and “South-West and South Central Bulgaria”); Level 2 (NUTS 2) – regions (North-West, North Central, North-East, South-East, South Central and South-West); level 3 (NUTS 3) – provinces (coincide with the provinces in Bulgaria).

The North-West region covers the provinces of Vidin, Montana, Vratsa, Lovech and Pleven. The area of the region is 19 070 km², which makes up 17.18% of the country's territory². The main economic activities that have been developed are in the field of the food industry, the timber and wood processing industry, the mechanical engineering, the clothing industry, the pharmaceutical and chemical industries, services, agriculture. The North-West region remains with the lowest economic activity and employment levels, and therefore the highest unemployment in 2018. In a situation of a restored labor market in the country, in four of the five

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¹ <https://www.nsi.bg>, accessed on 27 January 2020

² <https://www.mrrb.bg/bg/regionalno-razvitie/socialno-ikonomicheski-profil/severozapaden-rajon/>, accessed on 25 January 2020

districts of the North-West region – Vidin, Vratsa, Lovech and Pleven employment in 2018 declines compared to 2017. The most significant is in Vratsa province, where on an annual basis the number of employed persons decreases by 1 019 annually (-2.6%)³. According to the data of the National Statistical Institute (NSI), the average annual salary of employees in the North-West region in 2018 is BGN 10 693, which is lower than the average in the country – BGN 13 755⁴. According to the figures provided by the Employment Agency to EURES Job Mobility Agency, in 2018, 1 795 jobs or 9.2% of the jobs in the region were created in the hospitality and food industry⁵. The most sought after professions by employers in the tourism industry in the region are bartenders, waiters, cooks, confectioners.

According to NSI data⁶ in the North-West region the total length of the national road network is 3 422 km, which is 0.17% of the total of the Republic of Bulgaria. In the region there are only 7 km of motorways, 402 km of first-class roads, 766 km of second-class roads and 2 247 km of third-class roads. The main thoroughfares of the area are: European Transport Corridor No. IV, which connects the countries of Central Europe with Turkey and through the branch Sofia – Kulata – Thessaloniki with the Aegean Sea; the first-class roads E-83 (Sofia – Pleven – Ruse) and E-772 (Sofia – Veliko Tarnovo – Shumen – Varna). A part of the first-class E-79 road, that connects Vidin and Sofia, passes through the region. The constructed railway roads in the region are 648 km, which represents 16% of the length of the railway roads in the country. There is no functioning airport serving passengers in the North-West Region. Water transport is represented by Trans-European Transport Corridor No. 7, along which are the ports of Vidin, Lom and Oryahovo. The importance of the port of Vidin is related to the operation of four port terminals, and especially to the Vidin – Calafat ferry. It is included in the list of ports for public transport of national importance, in accordance with the Law on Maritime Spaces, Inland Waterways and Ports of the Republic of Bulgaria.

Intra-regional disparities in the tourism potential

The North-West region has natural and anthropogenic tourist resources of national importance. Bulgaria is the first country with two national parks (Central Balkan National Park and Rila National Park) included in the PAN Parks network⁷. A part of the Central Balkan National Park is located on the territory of the North-West Region. There are 32 sites that are part of the initiative of the Bulgarian Tourist Union (BTU) – the “100 National Tourist Sites”⁸. In the region there are 3 883 registered immovable cultural values dating back to different historical eras. According to the Immovable cultural values Registry⁹, there are 210 sites in the North-West Region labeled as “nationally important”.

Table 1. Immovable cultural values, labeled as “nationally important” in North-West region, by provinces

Province	Vidin	Montana	Vratsa	Lovech	Pleven
Number	36	32	47	66	29

There are no sites in the UNESCO World Natural and Cultural Heritage List in the North-West region. To date, three sites form part of the proposals for inclusion in this list, appearing in the indicative lists of Bulgaria’s natural and cultural sites respectively. These are the Magura Cave with Bronze Age paintings – included in 1984 in the indicative list of cultural sites of Bulgaria, the Vrachanski Karst Reserve and the Belogradchik Rocks natural landmark, also included in 1984 in the indicative list of natural sites of Bulgaria. In 2016, 33 remnants of fortresses were proposed by Bulgaria as part of the project “Borders of the Roman Empire” –

³ <https://ec.europa.eu>, accessed on 27 January 2020

⁴ <https://www.nsi.bg>, accessed on 22 January 2020

⁵ <https://ec.europa.eu>, accessed on 26 January 2020

⁶ <https://www.nsi.bg>, accessed on 26 January 2020

⁷ **Zhelezov, G.** Models and Strategies for Sustainable Management of Mountain Territories in Central and Southeastern Europe. *Sustainable Development in Mountain Regions: Southeastern Europe*, Second edition, Zhelezov, G. (ed.), Springer, 2016.

⁸ <https://www.btsbg.org/>, accessed on 5 February 2020

⁹ <http://ninkn.bg/Documents/categoryPreview/13>

“Danube limes” for inclusion in the largest cross-border single site of the World Heritage. 18 of these sites are located in the North-West region.

Accommodation establishments in the country are increasing every year, in the period 2014–2018. There is a different trend in the North-West region. There is an annual decrease, with the exception of 2016. In 2018, they are 185 or 5.35% of the accommodation establishments in the country.

Table 2. Number of accommodation establishments in the period 2014–2018

Area	Year				
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Number of accommodation establishments in North-West region	206	197	200	192	185
Number of accommodation establishments in Bulgaria	3 163	3 202	3 331	3 346	3 458

The overnights in the North-West region are 545 035 or only 2% of the total number of overnights in the country. They increase annually in the period 2014–2017, but in 2018 there is a decrease by 15 275 or – 2.68%.

Table 3. Number of overnights in the period 2014–2018

Area	Year				
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Total number of overnights in North-West region	502229	503904	548076	560310	545035
Total number of overnights in Bulgaria	21698391	21397816	25185996	26054096	26845013

Vidin province – tourism potential

The municipalities of Belogradchik, Bojnitsa, Bregovo, Vidin, Gramada, Dimovo, Kula, Makresh, Novo selo, Ruzhintsi and Chuprene are included within the boundaries of Vidin province. The province comprises 141 settlements, of which 7 are cities. It covers an area of 3 022 km², which is 2.7% of the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria¹⁰.

There are only 35 tourist attractions¹¹, registered in the province, which is almost twice less than in any of the other provinces in the area. There are 13 in the Municipality of Vidin. Some of them are the museum “Krastatata kazarma”, the medieval Baba Vida Fortress, the Kaleto Defense System, the St. Pantaleimon Temple, the St. Dimitar Cathedral, the mosque and the Pazvantoglu Library. They are of national importance. There are 9 in the Novo Selo municipality. Nationally important are the Roman castle Florentiana in the village of Florentin and the prehistoric and antique settlement Unio Alba in the village of Jasen. There are 8 in the Belogradchik municipality, of which the Magura Cave, the Belogradchik Rocks and the Kaleto Fortress are cultural monuments of national importance, too. There are 2 in Dimovo municipality, where is the cave “Venetsa” in the village of Oreshets. In the municipality of Gramada is the stone forest “Chuturite”, in Kula is the late antique Roman fortress “Castro Martis” and in the village of Rakovitsa in the municipality of Makresh is the Holy Trinity Monastery, which is a cultural monument of national importance.

Caves have been of increasing interest during the last years as very attractive tourist destinations¹². In the province, cave tourism is mainly practiced in the Magura and Venetsa caves, which since 2015 is open to visitors year-round.

¹⁰ <https://vidin.government.bg/obshti-svedenia>, accessed on 22 January 2020

¹¹ <http://tourism.egov.bg/register/TARegister.aspxq> accessed on 28 January 2020

¹² **Stefanova, D., P. Stefanov.** Current state and problems of cave tourism in Bulgaria. *Traditions and innovations in Contemporary tourism*. Marinov, V. et al. (ed.), Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018.

The basic resource for water tourism is mainly the Danube River. The Danube International Tourist Regatta – TID (by German language: Tour International Danubien) has been held annually in August since 1956. The quality of the water in the port areas of the Bulgarian section is greatly influenced by human activity. The active reaction, dissolved oxygen, electrical conductivity, BOD5, ammonium and nitrite nitrogen are in the threshold values¹³.

There are three sites in the province that are included in the Bulgarian Tourism Union initiative – “The 100 National Tourist Sites”. These are the Magura Cave, the Vidin Historical Museum with the Baba Vida Fortress and Belogradchik History Museum with the Belogradchik Rocks and the Fortress.

In 2018, there are 30 accommodation establishments in Vidin province with a total of 870 beds. The number of overnights by tourists in the province is 55 168 and 24% (13 259) of them have been spent by foreigners. In the same year, the number of persons visiting the province, with at least one overnight, is 37 663, 23.6% being foreigners. The revenues generated by the accommodation establishments in 2018 amount to BGN 2 073 219. The share of accommodation establishments’ revenues generated by foreign nationals amounting to 26.4% (BGN 546 394) of the total revenues. The average income per night in accommodation establishments in the province amounts to BGN 37. The average income by Bulgarians is BGN 36 and BGN 41 – by foreigners.

Only five travel agents, three tour operators and one company with a double tour operator and tourist agent license are registered in the territory of the province. Of these, one tour operator is registered in Belogradchik and one travel agent in Kula, but has an office in Vidin¹⁴.

There are only two tourist associations registered on the territory of the province – the Belogradchik Rocks Tourist Association in Belogradchik and the Bononia Tourist Association in Vidin.

There are tourist information centers in Belogradchik, Vidin, Kula and Chuprene.

Montana province – tourism potential

Montana province has an area of 3 636 km². It includes 129 settlements. 8 of them are cities and 121 villages. They are located in 11 municipalities – Berkovitsa, Boychinovtsi, Brusartsi, Vulchedrum, Varshets, Georgi Damyanovo, Lom, Medkovets, Montana, Chiprovtsi and Yakimovo.

There are 57 tourist attractions registered in the province¹⁵. 17 are located in Berkovitsa municipality. The architectural monuments of culture of national importance are the Ivan Vazov House Museum, the Church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Church of St. Nicholas the Wonderworker in Berkovitsa. There are 11 tourist attractions in Varshets municipality and a monument of culture is Klisura Monastery. There are 7 registered tourist attractions in the municipality of Lom. Some of them are Krastio Pishurka’s house, the city’s historical museum and the ancient fortress “Almus”. They are of national importance. 7 registered tourist attractions are located in the municipality of Medkovets. The most important is the cultural monument St. Paraskeva Temple. There are 5 tourist attractions in Vulchedrum. All of them have national importance. They are the ancient Tsebrus Fortress, the Grapevine Mound, the Mound close to the Cemeteries, the Monument of the rebels in Shumaka area and the ancient Kamistra Fortress. There are 5 local landmarks in the Chiprovtsi municipality, including the Catholic Cathedral of Santa Maria. There are 4 in the municipality of Georgi Damyanovo. A cultural monument there is the Lopushan Monastery. In Boychinovtsi the clock tower and in Montana the ancient fortress “Kaletu” are immovable monuments of culture of national importance.

In 2018, there are 26 registered accommodation establishments on the territory of the Montana province. They have a total of 1 269 beds, which is about three times less than in Lovech province. The high-category accommodation establishments in the province are only two four-star hotels in Varshets – the Medicus Hotel and the ATA Hotel.

The number of overnights spent by tourists in the province is 70 557. Only 8% (5 543) of them are spent by foreigners. The average length of stay for both Bulgarians and foreigners is two nights. The total annual revenue for 2018 is about BGN 2.3 million, which is four times lower than in Lovech province. 7.5% of them are generated by foreigners. The average income per bed for foreigners is BGN 47 and for Bulgarians

¹³ **Gartsiyanova, K.** Water Quality in Selected Bulgarian Ports Areas in the Danube. *SocioBrains*, issue 41, January 2018, p. 248.

¹⁴ <https://ntr.tourism.government.bg/Registration.nsf/alltato.xsp>, accessed on 1 February 2020

¹⁵ <http://tourism.egov.bg/registerers/TARregister.aspx>

BGN 30. These results show that foreigners spend the nights in higher categories of accommodation establishments.

Only 7 tour operators and travel agents are registered in the province. Five of them are in Montana city. 4 companies have travel agents license, and 3 companies have double – tour operator and travel agents license.

Only one tourist association – “Asparuhov Hill” (in the town of Lom) – is registered on the territory of the province. There are two tourist information centers in Montana province – in Berkovitsa and in Varshets.

Vratsa province – tourism potential

Vratsa province covers 3 620 km². It is located in the northwestern part of Bulgaria. It borders Romania via the Danube River to the north, to the east – Lovech and Pleven provinces, to the south – Sofia Province, and to the West – Montana province. Vratsa province includes a total of 123 settlements. 8 of them are cities. The municipalities that form the province are: Borovan, Byala Slatina, Vratsa, Mezdra, Mizia, Kozloduy, Krivodol, Oryahovo, Roman and Hayredin.

There are 67 tourist attractions registered in the province¹⁶. 20 are located in the municipality of Vratsa. Four of them have national importance: the silver treasure from the village of Rogozen, the treasure from the Mogilan mound, the Botev Road Memorial Complex and the Ledenika Amusement Park. Vrachanski Balkan Natural Park is a protected area. Borovan municipality has 18 military monuments and museums. In Oryahovo municipality there are 8 tourist attractions, where the medieval Kamaka Fortress is of national importance. There are 7 tourist attractions in the municipality of Kozloduy. Some of the most important are the place where Botev’s detachment descends (a cultural monument of national importance) and the ancient fortress “Augusta” (an archaeological reserve and a cultural monument of national importance). There are 5 tourist attractions in Mezdra municipality. National importance have the archeological complex “Kaleto” and the Cherepish monastery “Uspenie Bogorodichno”. In Roman municipality there are 6 tourist attractions. The fortress “Krivgrad” is a cultural monument of national importance. In Byala Slatina the tourist attraction is the prehistoric settlement in the Drashan cave, and in the village of Sofronievo in the municipality of Mizia there is a center for artistic crafts.

The richness of historical and archeological tourist resources, the numerous immovable cultural values of national importance, the significant treasures discovered in Vratsa province and the connection of this province with significant historical figures for the country such as Hristo Botev, determine the tourist potential profile of the province in the field of cultural and historical tourism.

There are 6 sites on the territory of the province, which are included in the list of “The 100 National Tourist Sites” of the Bulgarian Tourism Union. These are Ledenika Cave, the Regional Museum of History in Vratsa, Kaleto Archaeological Complex in Mezdra, Okolchitsa Peak – the burial site of Hristo Botev, the National Steamboat Radetski Museum and the monument of Hristo Botev and his detachment.

The negative trend in the settlement structure in Bulgaria’s rural regions started in the mid-20th century and led to their gradual depopulation, loss of resources, and economic opportunities¹⁷. However, the villages in Vratsa province are attractive with their identity and in some of them (Drashan, Borovan and others) old and Renaissance houses have been preserved. They are potential for rural tourism development.

In 2018, according to NSI data, there are 27 accommodation establishments in Vratsa province with a total bed capacity of 899 beds. The spent overnights are 79 790, which places it second after Lovech province in the North-West region. The number of overnights spent by foreign citizens ranks the province last but one place in the region – just before the Montana province. This data shows that the international tourism in the province is not well developed yet. The total number of overnights spent in the province ranks it third in the region after Lovech and Pleven provinces. The number of overnights spent by Bulgarians in Vratsa province determines its third place in the North-West region, but the length of stay of Bulgarian citizens ranks it second only after Lovech province. This data shows the interest of domestic tourists for a longer stay in the destination. The number of foreigners who stayed at least one night in the province is commensurate with the rest of the region. The average prices for accommodation in Vratsa province, both for foreigners (BGN 35) and for

¹⁶ <http://tourism.egov.bg/registers/TARegister.aspx>, accessed on 28 January 2020

¹⁷ **Koulov, B., V. Boyadjiev, A. Ravnachka.** The Demographic Draining of Bulgaria’s Rural area: A GIS-aided geospatial analysis (1992–2017). *Three Decades of Transformation in the East-Central European Countryside*. Banski, J. (ed.) Springer, 2019, DOI:10.1007/978-3-030-21237-7_11, 22

Bulgarian citizens (BGN 25), are the lowest in the North-West region. This makes the province the most financially affordable for accommodation in the region.

The registered tour operators and travel agents in the province mainly operate in the town of Vratsa. One company having a tour operator and travel agent license is registered in Mezdra, but its offices are in Sofia, Plovdiv and Varna. Two of the registered tourism companies in Vratsa have offices outside the city, respectively in Sunny Beach and in Sofia and Pernik.

Two tourist associations have been registered in the province. “Veselets” Tourist Association – Vratsa has been deleted in by the register in 2019. The only active association is the “Radetsky – 99” Tourist Association.

Lovech province – tourism potential

Lovech province has an area of 4 128 km². It includes 110 settlements (8 cities – Lovech, Troyan, Teteven, Apriltsi, Lukovit, Ugarchin, Letnitsa and Yablanitsa and 102 villages).

There are 75 tourist attractions registered in the province¹⁸. There are 24 in Teteven municipality. 8 of them are eco-trails. There are 23 tourist attractions in the municipality of Apriltsi. Most of them are eco trails, natural landmarks and hiking trails. There are 20 registered tourist attractions in the municipality of Troyan. Three of them have been declared monuments of culture – the Roman Road Complex Sostra, the Roman Road via Trayana and the Monument Arch of Liberty in the Beklemeto area. There are 8 registered tourist attractions in Lukovit municipality. The most important is Prohodna Cave. There are 8 tourist attractions in the municipality of Letnitsa. 7 of them are eco-trails and caves. There are 6 registered attractions in the municipality of Lovech. Three of them have national importance – the Devetashka Cave, the Medieval Fortress and the Old City Bath “Deli Hamam” in Lovech. The most emblematic site in Lovech – the Covered bridge is a private municipality property and it is not registered as a monument of culture. There are 4 tourist attractions in the municipality of Yablanitsa. One of them – the Saeva dupka cave, is a national tourist site.

In 2018, there are 78 registered accommodation establishments on the territory of Lovech, which have a total of 4 157 beds. The high category accommodations in the province are only 4. The four-star hotels are the Presidium Palace in Lovech, the Hotel Olymp in Teteven, the Troyan Plaza and the Diplomat Plaza Hotel and Resort in Lukovit.

The number of nights spent by tourists in the province is 259 873. Only 5% (12 446) of them have been spent by foreigners. The average length of stay for both Bulgarians and foreigners is two nights. The total annual revenue is about BGN 9.5 million. Only 6.5% is generated by foreigners. The average income per bed for foreigners is BGN 50 and for Bulgarians is BGN 36, which can lead to the conclusion that foreigners spend the night in higher categories of accommodation establishments. The Municipality of Lovech has the most effectively developed tourism in the North-West region.

A total of 12 tour operators and travel agents are registered in the territory of the province. Five companies are licensed as tour operators, 3 – only for travel agents and 4 – with double tour operator and travel agent license. All of them are located in the municipal centers of the province. Seven of the companies are registered in Lovech, two in Troyan and one tour operator in cities of Apriltsi, Lukovit and Ugarchin.

There are five tourist associations registered on the territory of the province – three in Troyan and one in Lovech and Lukovit.

There are five tourist information centers in Lovech province. Only the one, in the town of Lovech, is certified. There are two information centers in Troyan that provide complete information to tourists both about the province and about the area of Central Balkan. There is one tourist information center in Lukovit and Teteven. The information center in Lukovit provides an eco trail guide and boat ride on request.

The presented data for Lovech province show that domestic tourism is highly developed. 95% of the tourists are Bulgarians. The province has good tourism potential through its natural and anthropogenic tourism resources and accommodation facilities. Unfortunately, there is no airport in the province and the nearest one is about 150 km away. Participation in international tourism fairs and exhibitions specializing in eco and mountain tourism, cultural and slow tourism has the potential to attract tourists from urbanized regions.

Pleven province – tourism potential

Pleven province has an area of 4 337 km². It includes 123 settlements – 14 cities and 109 villages. It is divided into 11 municipalities – Belene, Gulyantsi, Dolna Mitropolia, Dolni Dabnik, Iskar, Kneja, Levski, Nikopol, Pleven, Pordim, Cherven Bryag.

¹⁸ <http://tourism.egov.bg/register/TARregister.aspx>

Pleven province is rich in historical and cultural monuments. There are 78 tourist attractions registered in the province¹⁹. Their number is the largest in the municipality of Nikopol – 28 churches and immovable cultural monuments. There are 13 in the Municipality of Gulyantsi. The Ulpia Escus Archaeological Reserve has national importance. There are 12 museums and real cultural assets in Pleven, all of them of national importance. In the municipality of Levski there are 8 sites, in Knezha – 5, in Dolna Mitropolia – 4. The Roman station “Ad Putea”, near the village of Riben, has national importance. There are three tourist attractions in the municipalities of Cherven Bryag and Belene. The most important is the Roman castle Dimum. It is a national cultural monument. There are two state museums in Pordim.

In 2018, there are 24 registered accommodation establishments on the territory of Pleven province, with a total of 1 251 beds. The high-category accommodation establishments in the province are only two four-star hotels in Pleven – Rostov Hotel and Park Kailaka Hotel. The number of overnights spent by tourists is 79 647. 19% (15 466) of them are spent by foreigners. The total annual revenue is about BGN 3.2 million. 33% is generated by foreigner citizens. The average income per bed by foreigners is BGN 69, and by Bulgarian citizens BGN 34. It can be concluded that Bulgarians do not spend the night in high-class accommodation establishments.

A total of 28 tour operators and travel agents are registered on the territory of the province. All of them are registered in the province city center. There is one travel agent in Belene. There are 2 tour operators in Pleven, 15 travel agents and 10 companies with double tour operator and travel agent license.

There are two tourist associations registered on the territory of the province – Association “Regional Business Center Pleven” and “Kailushka Valley” Tourist Association in Pleven.

There are only two tourist information centers in Pleven province – one in Pordim and one in Pleven city. The second one gives information about the city and the opportunities for recreation in Kailaka Park and Chernelka Natural Reserve.

The presented data shows that international tourism has a significant share in Pleven province. About 20% of the total number of visitors are foreigners, despite the fact that there is no international airport in the province and the closest one is in Sofia (about 163 km away). These results are achieved because of the north border of Pleven province with Romania along the Danube river.

Comparative analysis by provinces

Comparative characteristics of accommodation establishments

Although the provinces in the North-West region are comparable in size, the number of accommodation establishments varies significantly. Figure 1 clearly shows that over 40% of them are located in Lovech province, while in the other provinces they are almost evenly distributed – between 13 and 16%.

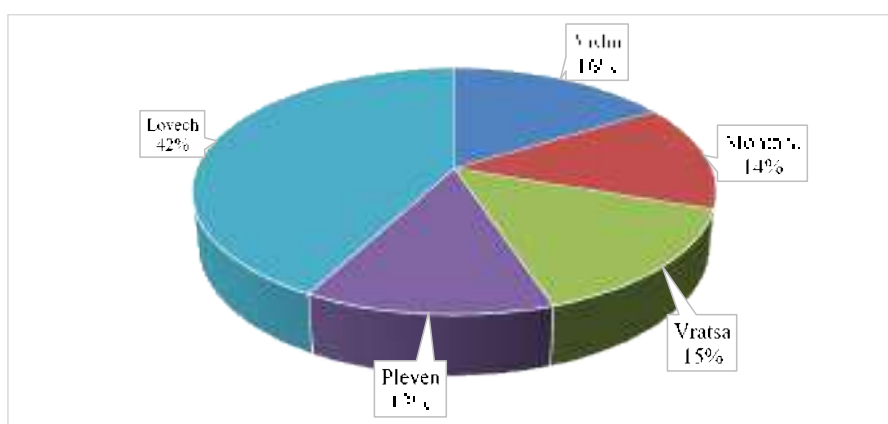


Figure 1. Percentage distribution of accommodation establishments by provinces in the North-West Region in 2018

¹⁹ <http://tourism.egov.bg/registers/TARegister.aspx>

Comparative characteristics of the overnights spent in the region

The total number of spent overnights in the North-West region is 545 035, with almost half of them being in Lovech province. Although Vidin province has more accommodation establishments compared to Pleven, Vratsa and Montana provinces, the number of overnights spent there, is about 10%.

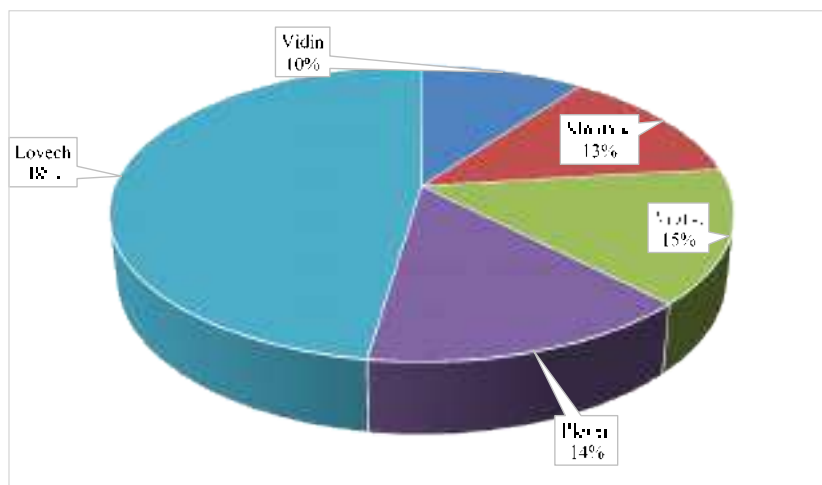


Figure 2. Percentage of spent overnights by provinces in the North-West region in 2018

The analysis of the spent overnights by foreigners shows that in all provinces the percentage is between 20 and 26, while in the Montana province it is only 9%.

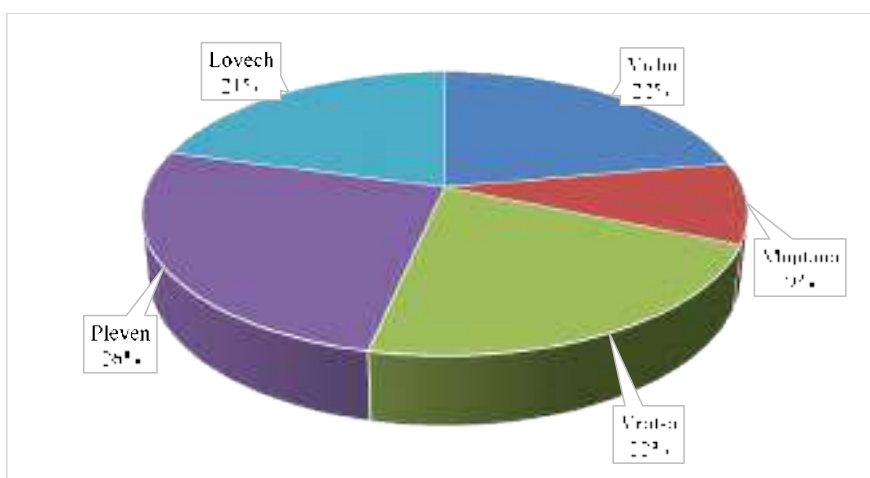


Figure 3. Percentage distribution of overnights spent by foreigners by provinces in the North-West region for 2018

Comparative characteristics of the revenues, generated by spent overnights

The revenues by overnights spent in the North-West Region are approximately BGN 19.3 million for 2018, shown in figure 4 by provinces.

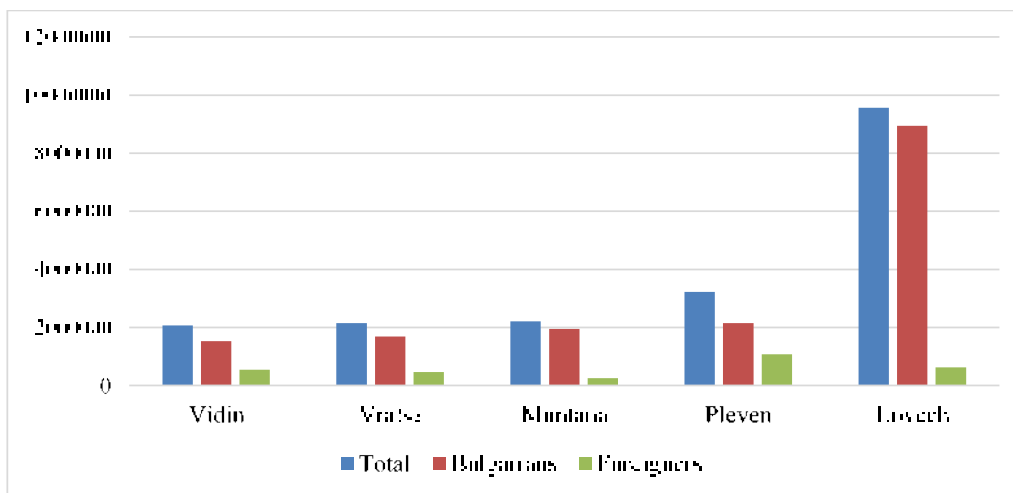


Figure 4. Overnights revenue by provinces in the North-West region for 2018

50% of the revenues are generated in Lovech province, where the number of accommodation establishments is the highest. The other provinces, respectively the provinces of Vidin, Montana and Vratsa have 11% each and Pleven – 17%.

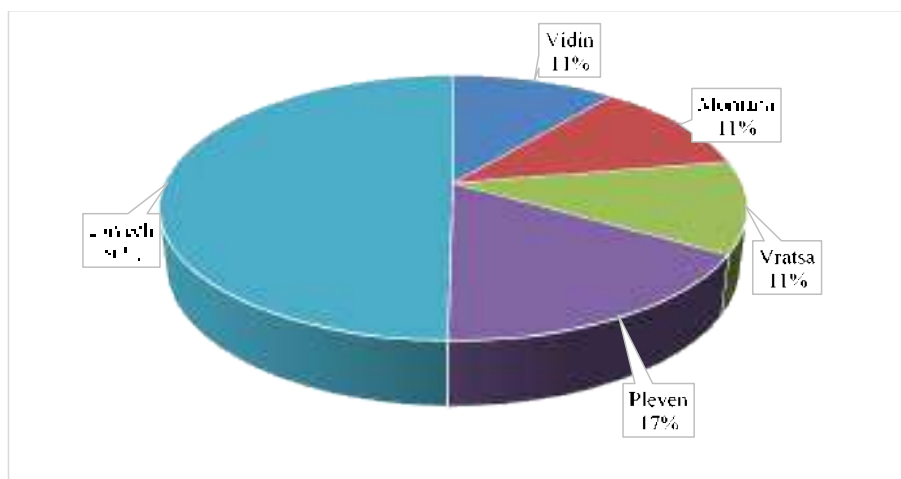


Figure 5. Percentage of overnights revenue by provinces in the North-West Region for 2018

When analyzing the incomes generated by foreigners, it is noticeable that Lovech province, which has the highest contribution to the revenues, has only 21% of the income by foreigners, while Pleven province has the highest percentage – 36%.

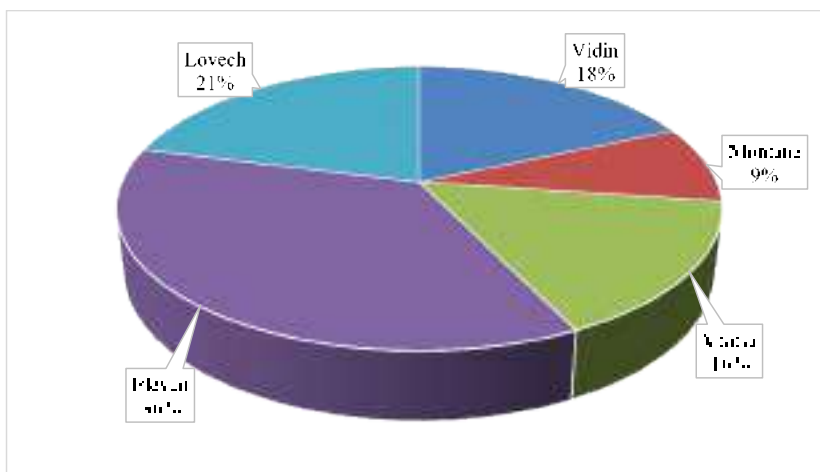


Figure 6. Percentage of overnights revenue, generated by foreigners, shown by provinces, in the North-West region for 2018

An analysis of the spent overnights shows that the incomes by foreigners in all provinces are higher than those from Bulgarians. The biggest disparity is in Pleven province, where they are twice as high (foreigners – BGN 69/night, Bulgarians – BGN 34/night). As there are only two high-class hotels in Pleven province, which are located on the territory of Pleven city, it is necessary to conclude that the foreign tourists spend the night primarily in the town of Pleven.

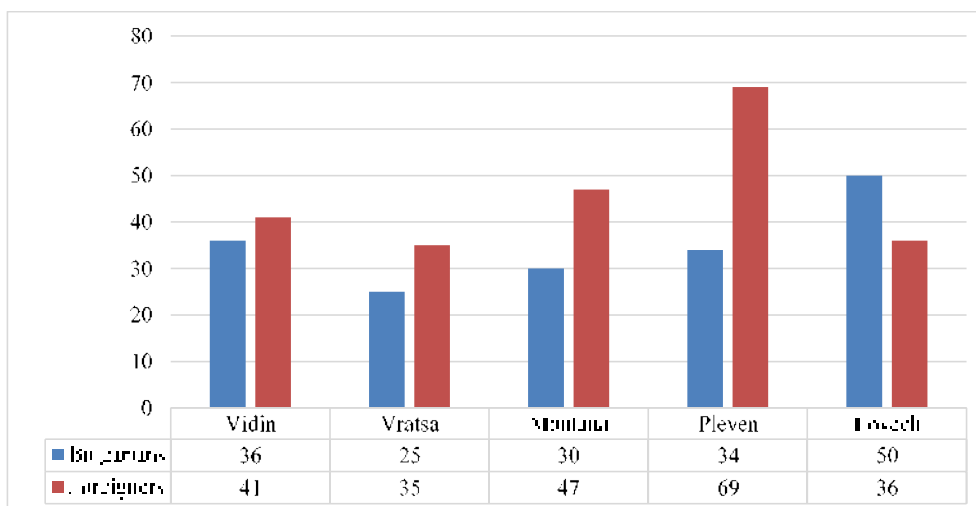


Figure 7. Revenues from overnights by Bulgarians and foreigners by provinces in the North-West Region for 2018

Conclusion

The municipalities in Vidin, Montana, Vratsa and Pleven provinces differ radically in capacity and degree of tourism development. Most of them have the characteristics of underdeveloped rural areas – sparsely populated, in separate parts with the character of depopulated territory. It is rural tourism that is a niche that gives good chances for the development of backward and low-urbanized territories, where the potential of other sectors of the economy is limited²⁰.

The North-West region has the lowest income from accommodation compared to other regions in the country, despite the potential for the development of ecotourism, cave, cultural, historical, wine and other

²⁰ Грозева, М. Условия и възможности за развитие на туризъм в селските територии на северозападния район за планиране. *Проблеми на географията*, кн. 1–2, София, 2017, <http://geoproblems.eu>, посетено на 30 януари 2020.

alternative forms of tourism. There are significant intra-regional disparities within the region. Lovech province has the most accommodation establishments and the largest share of total revenue in the area.

The measures to be taken to increase the economic efficiency of the tourism industry are related to the implementation of a more aggressive marketing policy and strategy, participation in national and international tourism fairs and exhibitions, improvement of services quality and qualification of the employees in the tourism industry.

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