

Opportunities for integrated development of rural tourism enterprises, agriculture, local industry and services in rural areas in the municipality of Mineralni Bani

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Abstract. This article aims to study and analyze the opportunities for achieving integrated development of rural tourism enterprises, agriculture (agribusiness), industry and services in the municipality of Mineralni Bani. The guest houses and small family hotels serve products produced by their owners and other producers in the village. The system of connections and interconnections between the different types of business in Mineralni Bani municipality built not without the assistance of the municipal leadership, helps to achieve a higher degree of completion of the agricultural and animal products produced in the region (they have a higher added value). This strengthens the demand for these products and increases the tourist flow to the tourist sites in the municipality. In this way, in the municipality of Mineralni Bani, the integration between rural tourism enterprises, individual producers of agricultural products and small processing enterprises gives a strong impetus to the development of the rural area. The strengthening of this integration will lead to results that confirm the positive role and contribution of rural tourism to the stabilization of the economy of the Municipality of Mineralni Bani. In the current research carried out in the period (2014-2019), we used a methodological approach, which is implemented through specific methods: the survey and interview method, the method of comparison, synthesis and analysis, etc.

1 Introduction

The Municipality of Mineralni Bani is located in the Eastern Rhodopes, 280 m. altitude. It was established by Decree No. 2932/promulgated on September 30, 1983, which separated 12 settlements with their lands from the municipality of Haskovo and created a new municipality of Mineralni Bani with the administrative center in the village of Mineralni Bani. It is located on the territory of 214,666 km² and is the smallest among the 11 municipalities of the district, which constitutes 3.9% of the territory of the district [Fig. 1].



Fig. 1. Location of Mineralni Bani municipality

The municipality of Mineralni Bani is only 100 km away from our borders with Greece and Turkey and 14 km from the international road E-80 /Sofia-Plovdiv-Istanbul/. From the capital Sofia /230 km/ through Mineralni Bani to Kardzhali /45 km/ and back, comfortable buses pass daily. There is also a regular and convenient bus connection to the city of Haskovo /18km/. The area has a mild continental climate - mild winter, warm summer and long autumn, which favours year-round balneotherapy. The resort center is located in a hilly and wooded area, overgrown with deciduous and coniferous forests. Famous for its warm mineral springs, 14 in number, the water temperature is 50-60 degrees. The village of Mineralni Bani has its fame as a spa resort since the Roman era. Even then, the thermal springs attracted people with their healing effect for rheumatic, peripheral-vascular, musculoskeletal, gynaecological and other diseases. According to historians, an ancient city with over 12,000 inhabitants /Toplitos/ was located around the warm mineral springs in the 2nd century. The good transport accessibility, the location of Mineralni Bani, the favourable climate, the unique healing properties of the mineral water and the growing investor interest are all factors that define the municipality of Mineralni Bani as a promising and attractive spa and spa center [1].

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industry and services in the municipality of Mineralni Bani. In the present study, we used a methodological approach, which is realized through specific methods: the survey and interview method, the method of comparison, synthesis and analysis, etc.

1.1 Characteristics of agriculture and rural tourism

Urbanization has determined a high concentration of the population of about 80% in the urban areas in the developed countries, while 50% of the population lives in the rural areas of the developing countries [2]. Therefore, rural areas are of high importance at the world level for any continent, country and region [3]. With the introduction of democratic changes and a market economy in Bulgaria, the number and share of people living in cities increased. Currently, 5.4 million inhabitants live in cities, which is 71.4% of the country's population. Rural areas cover 80% of the country's territory. Geographically, rural areas are spread in various relief forms including plains, hilly and mountain zones, whose specificity has a deep impact on land structure and utilizations: agricultural area, forest land, natural reservations, seashore areas and also on the territorial administration and life of the small communities and localities [4, 5]. The social division of labor, the greatly contracted economy and the state of agriculture, intensified the process of urbanization. Looking for work, people of working age concentrated in large cities and towns. In addition to this mechanical growth, cities expand by "absorbing" the surrounding villages and turning them into their own neighbourhoods. Villages in Bulgaria gradually decrease their inhabitants, become depopulated and even disappear.

These negative trends are the basis of the active policy for the development of rural areas developed and implemented by the European Union. The European Union recommends a strategy of diversification - development of new products and entry into new markets, development of completely new activities for the enterprise or the region. The European Union's concept of rural development emphasizes the diversification of activities in rural areas. "diversifying farm activities with non-agricultural activities, supporting off-farm activities and strengthening the links between agriculture and other sectors of the rural economy have an important role in achieving rural sustainability. A rural municipality is sustainable when its economy is competitive when the living conditions in it are socially acceptable, the development is ecologically compatible with the requirements for environmental protection. The local economy is developed mainly due to the activities carried out in agriculture, forestry, fishing, aquaculture, rural and agri-tourism and partially in trade, fields where rural population could find jobs, get an income or develop its own small business [6, 7]. But in the rural areas labor market is weak, employment rate is low and unemployment is very high [8, 9, 10]. Over 80% of rural municipalities in Bulgaria have a weak and unsustainable economy. Therefore, it is necessary to start a process of diversification of economic activities and to develop the

infrastructure. Rural municipalities have building stock, potential and traditions for the resumption or development of new industries and accompanying activities.

The main part of agricultural land in Mineralni Bani municipality falls into the "fields" category, about 90%. A positive trend is that the size of uncultivable areas is decreasing. By form of ownership, agricultural lands are distributed as follows: 98.16% to individuals; 0.72% - of sole traders; 0.38% - to agricultural cooperatives; and 0.36% - to commercial companies, etc. The average size of agricultural holdings of individuals is 16.7 acres, of tenants - 187 acres, and of agricultural cooperatives - 7350 acres. The main specialization of the farms is grain production. For private farmers who farm and cultivate about 10 acres of land, increasing the size of the land is unjustified and economically unprofitable, as it does not create higher income for the farm. This is also in contradiction with the requirements of the European Union for efficient oriented development of agriculture. Therefore, it is necessary for small private agricultural holdings to diversify their production and activities in order to increase their income. Increasing the cultivated land by a few acres is economically unprofitable because it does not lead to a significant increase in income in the agricultural holding. It is clear from the survey that in the municipality of Mineralni Bani, agriculture and animal husbandry are still the main livelihood of the population in the villages. The main means of production is land, it determines the amount of possible agricultural production. The usable agricultural area is owned and managed by a large number of farmers. About 33.5% of farmers cultivate from 10 to 100 acres of land. 20% of farmers farm more than 1,000 acres. All activities related to the cultivation and harvesting of agricultural crops are carried out mechanized. Animal husbandry is mainly in households. In the municipality of Mineralni Bani with a territory of 215 km² and population 28.7 people per km². there are five or six livestock farms with a small number of cattle. There is no manual labor in agriculture in the villages of Mineralni Bani municipality. All agrotechnical activities are carried out mechanized. In animal husbandry, there is a tendency to stabilize the herds, their productivity also remains at a certain level, but still low. Therefore, in the villages of Mineralni Bani municipality, it is necessary to restructure agriculture by reducing the current specialization in grain production and increasing the share of vegetables and fruits, for which there are very good conditions. At the same time, it is imperative to diversify the economy in the villages by including non-agricultural activities. A major role in this regard can be played by the development of rural tourism, combined with other alternative forms, for which there are conditions and prerequisites.

In the mountainous and plain areas, such as the area of the Mineralni Bani municipality, adherence to diversification of agricultural production is leading, i.e. several agricultural sub-sectors characteristic of the region - viticulture, vegetable production, grain production, but not as the main production direction.

A big role in overcoming the very narrow product structure of agriculture, and in taking measures for its restructuring and diversification can be played by the so-

called "producer organizations". Members of such organizations have a number of advantages: an opportunity for better planning and adaptation of production to market conditions; getting help when needed; a collection of manufactured products and delivery to wholesalers; provision of information on the latest techniques and production technology, on varieties, quality classes, yields, plant protection measures, etc.; increasing the added value of manufactured products; better pricing etc.

Rural municipalities must be developed not only economically, but also socially. The human factor must be placed at the center of development. The labor force in predominantly rural and intermediate rural areas is characterized by a very low level of economic activity, which is explained by the small opportunities for work in them. Regardless of high unemployment, entrepreneurs face difficulties in finding qualified labor. Unemployment in the villages of Mineralni Bani municipality is affected by a large number of sources: the demographic collapse, migration, the dominance of agriculture in the economy of the villages and the related seasonal employment; irregularity of activities; a sustainable trend of decreasing employment in the agrarian sector is established, related to the renewal of agricultural machinery; there are almost no investment projects in the villages; low incomes of the population limit the development of services; the economically active population is mobile within the municipality and to the nearby town of Haskovo, where there are actually no larger industrial enterprises, apart from sewing shops and those for drinks and food products. Agricultural cooperatives and tenants do not offer jobs for qualified staff due to their limited activity. Preserving the rural together with everything that is significant from an economic, social, cultural point of view, implies the initiation and development of rural tourism. At the same time, tourism can actively participate in maintaining the viability and stability of rural localities, given that the phenomenon of depopulation is increasingly evident, by the departure of young people to urban areas, by abandoning old households and land [11,12].

In the municipality of Mineralni Bani, the population density is higher, the road infrastructure is in better condition, agriculture, albeit at a very slow pace, is reviving, and the cultivated areas are increasing. Guest houses, travel agencies and family hotels have been created in recent years, which is a very important prerequisite for the development of rural tourism. A part of the tourist facilities that offer rural tourism is a form of diversification of agricultural production, which contributes to improving the welfare of the families and population in the municipality. Another part of the tourist facilities is specific, specialized, independent organizational forms (economic structures), performing targeted activities in the field of tourism services. This part includes the following tourist facilities family hotels, guest-houses, etc., which are independent organizational and economic business structures, they have nothing to do with the agricultural farm [13]. The owners gain experience in serving tourists. Rural tourism creates an opportunity for revitalizing backward areas and turning them into attractive tourist destinations. The sustainability

of tourism management in indigenous communities that adopt tourism as a way of life is an issue that contributes to local and national development [14].

Through agrotourism, the tourism activity is carried out by family farmers active in agricultural and livestock activities and presupposes interaction and exchange of experiences with the visitor [15]. It is not by chance that in a number of countries agrarian tourism is called "farm tourism", because the tourist will not only feel the atmosphere of the farm - agricultural, livestock mixed but will also consume products produced on this farm and will buy from them on departure, for to take them home. Sales of products from the farm and the income from these sales increase the profits of the owners and will contribute to the more sustainable development of the agricultural holding. For the preparation of breakfast, which is necessarily included in the price of the night's stay, you need bread, cheese, eggs, milk, sour or fresh, all products produced on the farm. The hosts, together with the tourist, can prepare typical dishes of the area, which are offered at lunch or dinner. Owners can include all available resources in the complex tourism product. The cultivation of vineyards, as in the municipality of Mineralni Bani, and the production of wine, Bulgarian brandy (rakia), and homemade vinegar, attract tourists both for a walk and for tasting.

Rural tourism in the different European countries is organized by taking into account their national specificities: culture, traditions, geographic resources, etc. It is not only the countries but the individual regions themselves that try to create their own, different models of organization of rural tourism [16]. In the specialized literature, a number of authors interpret the essence of the "rural tourism" concept and give their definitions. There is no single, generally accepted, definition for it, but the existing ones can help us bring out some of its basic elements that characterize it: holiday in a rural area; traditions and folklore; traditional dishes; rural lifestyle; contact with nature and people; humanism; agriculture; divergence; "host-guest" connection, etc. [17]

All the components of additional services are actually the connection of the rural tourism product with alternative forms of tourism. They have helped to create employment and income for local communities, the need to value the local culture, diversify the offer of differentiated services, and from a history of resistance to mass tourism [18,19]

From an economic point of view, in rural tourism, the economic utility for the tourist from the input costs is greater, since he receives more "goods" and effects from the received tourist product. These effects are: social, economic, cultural, cognitive, environmental, etc. For the entrepreneur who organizes and offers the rural tourism product, added value is realized, which increases his income and is redistributed in the local economy and the state budget. The positive trends in the development of rural tourism are mainly the result of private initiatives as well as the constantly rising demand for high-quality tourist services. Along with agriculture, rural tourism is the other, great important sector which can provide sustainable, long-term employment and income for the rural population [20].

1.2 Opportunities for integrated development of agriculture, rural tourism, local industry and services

Tourism destinations incorporate several stakeholders that generally include the local community and form a more extensive network of destinations [21]. In order to achieve integrated development of agriculture (agribusiness), industry, services, and rural tourism in Mineralni Bani municipality, the application of the "Leader" approach - in short, management from the bottom up - plays a big role. A local initiative group (LIG) is being created to develop a project and strategy for the sustainable development of the region. Within the framework of this Project, a partnership, cooperation between agricultural producers and small wine cellars and small dairies, entrepreneurs carrying out typical local crafts, the municipal administration and owners of rural tourist sites are created. In the settlement of Mineralni Bani and in the villages of the municipality, commercial establishments and stands are being created, where food products from this cooperation are offered. A project is being developed for a milk processing plant that will collect milk from individual producers and produce cheese that will be available in commercial outlets in villages in the region.

The guest houses and small family hotels serve products produced not only by their owners but also by other producers in the village. The system of connections and interconnections between the various types of business in the Municipality of Mineralni Bani built not without the assistance of the municipal leadership, helps to achieve a higher degree of completion of the agricultural and livestock products produced in the region (they have a higher added value). Investing in quality information aims to improve the commercial relationships between demand and supply in the municipality, based on the promotion, dissemination, and integration associated with the local tourist market [22]. This strengthens the demand for these products and increases the tourist flow to the tourist sites in the municipality. New jobs are also created. As indicated above, in the municipality of Mineralni Bani, there is a movement of the population mostly within the municipality. So, the integration between rural tourism and other activities supports the economic revitalization of the area, preserves and stabilizes the small settlements and improves the lives of the people in them [23].

Table 1 reflects the changes in the annual sales of local food products before and after the implementation of guest houses in the villages of Spahievo, Susam, Bryastovo, and Tatarevo. The sales were made both at the special stands and in the households themselves. The table does not reflect the quantities of fruit and vegetables sold. The following is very clear from the data in the table: the opinion of rural tourism researchers is confirmed that its content necessarily includes the sale of agricultural and animal products produced in the village or region. These transactions and contacts are elements of the "fusion of the tourist with the village community".

Table 1. Change in the amount of realized agricultural and livestock products after the implementation of guest houses in the municipality of Mineralni Bani (annually)

Food product	Before 2014-2015	After 2018-2019
Homemade red wine, L	8 000	24 000
Homemade Bulgarian brandy, L	740	1860
Homemade wine vinegar, L	98	98
Homemade apple vinegar, L	86	184
Local cow cheese, kg	73	420
Pork babeek, number	36	163
Sheep bleats, kg	17	48
Sheep's milk (katuk), jar	46	216
Bacon, kg	24	38
Homemade red wine, L	8 000	24 000

Source: author's research

They also have, albeit a small, impact on the incomes of the villagers.

Since the majority of farmers are small producers, they compensate for their low incomes, which are mainly from pensions and welfare benefits, by subsistence farming. About 40% of agricultural holdings are semi-market, and the opportunity to sell the produced products is available in the municipal center of Mineralni Bani, mainly in the period May - October when tourists are the most numerous. Also, tourists staying in guest houses and family hotels buy agricultural and animal products: wine, Bulgarian brandy (rakia), vinegar, babeek, petmez, and sour and fresh milk. A number of crafts related to the processing of leather, metal, wood, weaving, basket weaving, pottery painting and others are characteristic of the region and are practised, the existing craft workshops producing typical local products and souvenirs. Tourists also buy knitted socks, slippers, gloves, sweaters, ornaments, traditional costumes of the population of the region, antiques, ancient coins and women's ornaments.

In this way, in the municipality of Mineralni Bani, the integration between agritourism enterprises, individual producers of agricultural products and small processing enterprises gives a strong impetus to the development of the rural area. The strengthening of this integration will lead to results that confirm the positive role and contribution of rural tourism to the stabilization of the economy of the Municipality of Mineralni Bani.

Additional services (attractions), organized excursions to the rural tourism product in guest houses in the above-mentioned villages in Mineralni Bani municipality are reflected in the following Table 2. The data were taken from the cultural and information center in Mineralni Bani. Increasing the number of attractions to the rural tourism product offered in the mentioned guesthouses makes it more attractive and competitive. The length of stay in guest houses is extended.

Mineralni Bani Municipality attracts a large number of tourists as a balneological center. The municipal management must develop a strategy and a concrete plan for the most complete utilization of the thermal waters. Under the leadership of the municipality, local entrepreneurs and businessmen could unite, as a public-private partnership or in another form, and utilize these

waters (with a temperature above 50 degrees). These waters are a national treasure.

Table 2. Changes in the number of organized cultural events in the Municipality of Mineralni Bani (annually)

Cultural events	Before 2014-2015	After 2018-2019
Excursions to Mount peak Aida, number	12	34
Excursions to the "Kenana" Complex, number	28	53
Excursions to the architectural-historical complex, number	7	39
Visit the village of Klokochnitsa, number	6	23
Interested in a green school in the village of Mineralni Bani, number	92	204
Visit a vineyard and a winery, number	5	27

Source: author's research

Table 3. Typical menu in a guest house in the village of Bryastovo

Catering	Menu items
Breakfast	
	A glass of goat's/sheep's milk
	Homemade butter popara / trahana
	Maslenitsa / pie with cabbage
	Eggs from a domestic hen
	Homemade sausage
	Mineral water, Tea, Coffee
	A glass of goat's/sheep's milk
Lunch	
	(On a table or by the hearth)
	Seasonal salad of vegetables from the garden
	Lamb soup
	Kavarma with pork in a claypot
	Sarmi with vine leaves in a clay pot
	Fresh fruit / raisins
	A glass of homemade wine
	Mineral water
Dinner	
	(Under the vine)
	Mixed grill (steak, meatball, skewer) from a domestic animal
	Kachamak with homemade butter
	Goat/Sheep yoghurt with berry jam
	A bowl of homemade dried fruit oshav
	A glass of homemade wine
	Mineral water

From the data in Table 3 it is clear that in the guest houses extremely great attention is paid to the food offered. On the one hand, the aspiration is to offer homemade food from self-produced products, to offer specific foods (dishes) characteristic of the region and the village. On the other hand, a more special atmosphere is created in the environment in which tourists eat. A lot of

effort and work is put in, which cannot be accounted for in the cost price of the offered product.

Calculating the cost per overnight stay (Table 4) is difficult due to the impossibility of accurately measuring individual types of costs. This circumstance gives a great deal of conditionality to the value of the individual elements of the cost of one night's stay.

Table 4. Self-worth of one night in a guest house (Tatarevo village)

Elements (expenditure types)	Value, BGN
Depreciation of bed linen	0.70
Depreciation of furniture	1.40
Cleaning a room (labor)	1.50
Electrical energy	6.80
Firewood	3.90
Water	1.20
Laundry and cleaning products	2.40
Service (reception)	2.70
Attractions	4.00
Breakfast	6.50
Total costs	31.10
Price per night	45.00
Profit	13.90

Breakfast is also included in the price of the overnight stay, which is necessarily offered to the tourist. The main part of the expenses is those for attractions since these services are expensively paid. Of the other types of costs, the value of electricity is high, as there are large costs of such in the kitchen and for heating or cooling (according to the season). The profit from one night in the guest house is small, so the owners are betting on attracting a larger number of tourists. For this purpose, marketing activity and advertising intervention in the market should be strengthened.

Table 5. Number of nights per month per

Season	Bryastovo village	Susum village	Tatarevo village
Spring	16/24	18/36	20/40
Summer	28/56	25/50	29/58
Autumn	29/58	21/42	24/48
Winter	12/24	10/20	14/28

Source: author's research

The data was obtained by interviewing owners

The competitiveness of rural tourism is determined by the content and combination of its elements. In order to achieve a complex tourist product, the development of the third element of the rural tourism product - additional services - is very important. The content of this element depends on the specific conditions in the region, on the possibilities of combining it with other types of alternative tourism: ecological, culinary, wine, sports, mountain, etc.

From the data in Table 5, it is clear that there is seasonality in visits to guest houses. The most attractive seasons are summer and autumn when the climatic conditions are most favourable, there is an abundance of agricultural products and the use of balneotherapy and spa services.

2 Conclusions

Based on our research, we can summarize that the Mineralni Bani municipality is characterized by unbalanced settlement systems, weak diversification of the local economy; a small number of companies from the industrial sector; fragmentation of land ownership and extensive agriculture; high unemployment; in terms of socio-economic development, these areas, for the most part, belong to the so-called "disadvantaged rural areas".

The existing guest houses, private rooms /private accommodation/, hotels and small family hotels offer wonderful conditions for full relaxation, spa and physiotherapy procedures for the guests of the resort.

Several new modern hotel complexes are currently under construction. Natural and anthropogenic features in the region enrich the rural tourism product. Loves, traditions, traditional dishes and crafts, maintained and unchanged over time, show the way of life of the population of the region over the centuries in accordance with its economic, religious and daily needs. In the studied municipality, there are excellent conditions and prerequisites for the development of rural tourism have been created, but the poorly developed infrastructure - physical, institutional, and economic - hinders its development. Rural tourism is one of Europe's most important industries, and it plays a significant part in the economy of the nations where it is practiced. As a result, competition in this market has substantially increased.

The ability to achieve a strategic competitive advantage in this highly competitive industry can be seen as a guarantee of long-term survival and profitability [24].

In recent years, the cluster approach has gained widespread popularity in the literature and a few attempts at practical implementation. It is based on the partnership and cooperation of various direct and indirect participants in the performance of a certain activity or production of a certain product. The cluster in tourism unites mainly representatives of small and medium-sized tourism businesses, for the exchange of experience and knowledge, for the development and implementation of innovations, inclusion in national and international networks, and for joint marketing activity. All these activities aim at a more complete and high-quality service for tourists. To achieve integrated development of agriculture (agribusiness), industry, services, and rural tourism in the municipality of Mineralni Bani, the cluster approach can be used, such as a separate cluster can unite sectors from the sphere of tourism, culture, local industry, agriculture (agribusiness), as well as the local state and municipal administration. This type of association, formed on the basis of the so-called "diagonal integration", ensure mutual complementarity of organizations and institutions in order to ensure a

complete, complete organization of the tourist's stay. In this way, the cross-sectoral cluster approach ensures the supply of a better quality tourist product and ensures higher competitiveness of the rural tourism enterprise.

The application of the cluster approach ensures integrated development of the economy and business life of the region - economic, social, ecological and institutional; regulated environmental impact; balancing the interests of business, the population and the municipal government. Through the integrated development of the economy in a certain region, the so-called "synergistic effect" – is a multidimensional effect and result. In economically undeveloped or underdeveloped areas, the need for the application of the cluster, integrated approach is higher. Economic life in backward areas needs diversification of the economy due to the impossibility of strong, anticipatory development of a separate economic sector. Application of the cluster approach by bringing together certain activities that are either organizationally and technologically related or not, for example:

1. rural tourism and production of wine and specific local food products;
2. production of clothes - local costumes, souvenirs and pavilions for their sale;
3. participants in recreational activities and sports instructors and mountain guides;
4. production of high-quality food from products from local farmers and its offering in restaurants and family hotels;

In this way, the application of the strategy of diversification of activities in a certain rural area, of the cluster approach, helps to create added value to the produced rural tourism product and makes it more attractive, more in demand and more competitive. The application of this approach is in accordance with the Regulation of the European Union N1698/2005 on promoting the diversification of the economy in rural areas [25].

Informal initiative groups for carrying out certain activities can be organized in the village on various occasions: for example, to clean the bed of the village river, to carry out repair work in the village church, school or playground. Informal associations are particularly popular in Europe. Such groups are usually organized around individuals - enthusiasts. The cooperation and assistance of the municipality or the town hall will play a very important role in order to achieve a certain result desired by all the inhabitants of the village. Local entrepreneurs can unite in the name of improving the village.

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