



MOVING
MOUNTAIN VALORISATION THROUGH
INTERCONNECTEDNESS AND GREEN GROWTH

Policy Brief

MALESHEVSKI MOUNTAINS | Rural Tourism



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This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No. 862739

Maleshevski Mountains: Rural tourism

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Summary

The Republic of North Macedonia has richly authentic, cultural, natural and traditional resources, thereby offering good opportunities for rural tourism development.

In the eastern part of the country, where the Maleshevski Mountains are, rural tourism is characterised by hiking and biking trails, waterfalls, lakes and a clean mountain environment. The trails are part of the Balkan Mountaineering Transversal pathway and are published as maps. There are numerous rapids, small cascades and waterfalls (up to 10 m high) along the mountain rivers in the region.

Rural tourism development in the Maleshevija area will require proactive government intervention, to foster the evolution of a competitive tourism sector.

The rural tourism value chain is closely related to the transformation of the value elements of rural production, life, ecology and culture.

Know more about the **Maleshevski mountains Reference Region**, its selected value chain and the regional multi-actor platform (MAP), [here](#).

Key policy messages

- Promoting rural tourism as the key element for local economic development of Maleshevski mountains.
- Better coordination of key stakeholders in the region of Maleshevski mountains.
- Proper planning, realisation and monitoring tourism initiatives.

1. The Mountain Reference Region (MRR)

The Maleshevski Mountains cover the municipalities of Berovo and Pehchevo. They are known for their outstanding natural and cultural value, and rural tourism here has a long tradition. From an administrative point of view, the municipalities of Berovo and Pehchevo belong to the East Planning Region and are part of the catchment area of the river Bregalnica. The area is a plateau whose borders include three mountain massifs: Vlaina, Maleshevski Mountains, and Obozna. The direction of the Maleshevski Mountains is south-southwest to north-northeast, with a ridge 32 km long. The border between the Republic of North Macedonia and Republic of Bulgaria passes along the ridge of the Maleshevski Mountains, intersecting the rounded ridges,



the peaks of Jami Tepe (1 801 m), Chengino Kale (1 748 m) and others. In terms of altitude range, the lowest point in the Maleshevo region is 660 m, and is in the bed of Bezgashchovska Reka, and the highest point is 1 932 m, on the top of Kadiica on the mountain Vlaina.

2. Resilience & Innovation

According to an analysis by the World Tourism Organisation and the European Travel Commission, there is an increase in the number of tourists who use extended weekends to avoid stressful living in urban areas. When choosing destinations for extended weekends (3-4 days)¹, tourists choose nearby places accessible by car and bus, or transport organised by low-cost airlines. Destinations for short stays offering various forms of rural, mountain and spa tourism have an advantage in the analysis. The primary factors that influence the choice of destination are: a) promotion of the destination on the internet, comments from visitors to the destination and their recommended experiences; b) authenticity of the destination; c) price of the package service (transport, accommodation, catering services, tickets and other accompanying costs); and d) quality of service as a total perception, including contact with the local population, culture and way of life. Increased competition in the areas of rural tourism, as well as the large number of available tools for comparing the tourist offer on the internet (websites, portals, blogs), impose high standards for attracting the attention of potential tourists.

The total contribution of tourism in North Macedonia is at around 5.2% of the national GDP. The rural concept, which integrates eco-tourism, hunting tourism, fishing, and rural (farm) tourism, ensures the preservation of natural resources and biodiversity. Moreover, rural tourism is becoming an integrating factor for like-minded people who are increasingly raising their voices against the disruption of natural resources.

3. Value chain contribution to sustainability and resilience of the Mountain Reference Region: barriers and opportunities

The rural tourism value chain is closely related to the transformation of the value elements of rural production, life, ecology and culture. The Republic of Northern Macedonia has a rich authentic, cultural, natural and traditional resources, thereby offering good opportunities for socio-economic development. In the eastern part of the country, where the Maleshevski Mountains are, rural tourism is characterised by recreational hiking trails, mountain biking, waterfalls, and clean mountain air. The trails are part of the Balkan Mountaineering Transversal pathway, and are published as maps. There are numerous rapids, small cascades and waterfalls (up to 10 m high) along the mountain rivers in the region.

¹ National Strategy for Rural Tourism in Macedonia 2017, p.11.



Maleshevija is part of the national strategy for tourism development of North Macedonia, and is emphasised for its excellent potential for rural tourism development. The region has a very clear identity and very good natural resources, and the hospitality of inhabitants in the area of Maleshevija makes the region very attractive for tourists. The private accommodation in addition to the hotels in the region, offers traditional memorable moments to those who visit the region.

In the immediate vicinity of the waterfalls there is the tourist settlement Ravna Reka. The combination of the traditional and the modern is mostly reflected in the few hotels in the region that have their own fish, offering delicious specialties prepared according to the "grandma's" recipes. Within the Maleshevski Mountains is the lake of Berovo, which lies within 7 km of the town of Berovo. The lake is surrounded by evergreen and deciduous types of forests. Many local people go swimming, fishing or sailing in the lake. This site also has private villas for accommodation, sports field for football and basketball, and swimming pools at hotels, which help make the place very attractive for picnics (summer cottages), bicycle paths, and hiking and mountain biking trails. Under the source part of the river Bregalnica, about 17 km from Pehchevo, at Chengino Kale, there is the highest Pehchevo waterfalls.

Nature protection and climate change are the two most important challenges for tourism in the long run. Businesses and individuals who undertake tourism activities should be aware that their actions might impact negatively on the environment. The development of large tourist facilities that cause the destruction of the natural environment is increasingly being condemned by the public. The trends for preservation of the natural environment and the characteristics of the region are especially in favour of the development of sustainable rural tourism.

4. Policy relevant considerations

North Macedonia has identified tourism as an industry with the potential to promote important economic goals, such as enhancing the foreign export demand for domestic goods and services, generating foreign currency earnings and new employment opportunities, contributing to the repayment of foreign debt, and increasing national revenue. Supporting rural tourism development will require government intervention in a proactive manner, particularly by fostering the evolution of a more competitive tourism sector and by facilitating systematic change through the improvement of the tourist product and the strengthening of the role of the private tourism and hospitality sector. Policy efforts should be focused on promotion, mainly through the introduction of new innovative approaches. Measures for improving tourism competitiveness to strengthen the coordination between central and local governments is of high importance. Concrete policy measures would help such as: a) a specific Law on Rural Tourism; b) strengthening the role of municipalities in rural tourism development; c) tax regulations and financial transactions system revision; d) introduction of efficient mechanisms to solve property issues and rural space planning; and e) more engagement of local people in the tourist sector.



References

National Strategy for Rural Tourism in Macedonia 2012-2017.

Strategy for Developing Eco tourism in Berovo.

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