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### **Impact of Tourism on Spatial Transformation: a Case Study of the Bela Crkva Municipality (Serbia)**

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#### **Abstract**

Municipality of Bela Crkva is located in the northeastern part of Serbia, at the southeast end of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina and Banat. In recent years, tourism in this Municipality is expanding, creating certain effects. The effects of tourism on spatial transformation are still not noticeably, but there are some changes which are present.

The aim of this paper is to show spatial transformation that is created as a result of the development of tourism in the municipality of Bela Crkva.

**Keywords:** tourism, spatial transformation, municipality of Bela Crkva, Serbia.

#### **Introduction**

Tourism has become one of the world's leading industries. Growth and development of the so-called tourism industry, despite numerous positive effects (economic, social, cultural and others), realized a series of negative consequences. These negative effects are primarily related to environmental degradation, transformation of area, as well as problems in the life of local communities in a tourist place. In this regard, there is a plethora and regression of some destinations, destruction of local cultures, traffic problems and dissatisfaction of the local population. People with their activities, including the activities in the sphere of tourism, are exhausting natural and anthropogenic resources much faster than they can recover. Having in mind the fact that most of the tourist activities depends precisely on these resources it is clear that it is necessary to protect and preserve them for the future. Awareness of the negative consequences of tourism on environment comes in late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Many tourism businesses are turning to a new way of doing business, which is focused on caring for the environment, different programs are applied, bringing documents and plans aimed at the sustainable development of tourism. However, the current development of tourism has greatly influenced the degradation of the environment and transformed the space to the extent that some destinations completely lost their original appearance and function.

Serbia can't be characterized as a country with a developed tourism, yet the problem of spatial transformation due to its development exists. This problem is present to a greater or lesser measure in certain destinations in Serbia and one of them is the municipality of Bela Crkva.

**Relationship of tourism and space**

The space is unique, inseparable, entirety of physical conditions, natural and man-made resources and values. It represent basic resource of existence, development and survival of human society. Space is a system in which different subsystems coexist (natural, economic, social, technical, infrastructural, political). Not one of them can exist and develop independently by itself and outside particular space (Maksin, 2012).

Tourism is more than any other industry conditioned by space. Space in tourism can be seen as a framework in which tourism is cycling, and that involves tourists traveling from their place of residence to the tourist destination, and returning to their home city. On the other hand, space is the objective of the trip, because it contains the potential attractiveness to tourists and motivating them to travel. It is a place where tourist demand and supply meet and where expectations of all stakeholders in tourism come to expression (Tomka, 2006). Tourism represents a link between the urban centers and areas with native, preserved nature and unchanged space. Increasing pollution of urban and industrial centers reinforces the need for tourist travel aimed at non urban environment (Stojanović, 2011). Tourism is a kind of space consumer, which often uses those objects and surfaces that are not of interest to some other industry. Degradation of these objects and surfaces can lead to irreversible loss of tourist potential, or to disable the tourism activity (Stanković, 1998). If tourism continues to transform the area in which it takes place in the manner and to the extent that it is today, and leads to saturation and decline of tourist destinations survival of this industry is questionable.

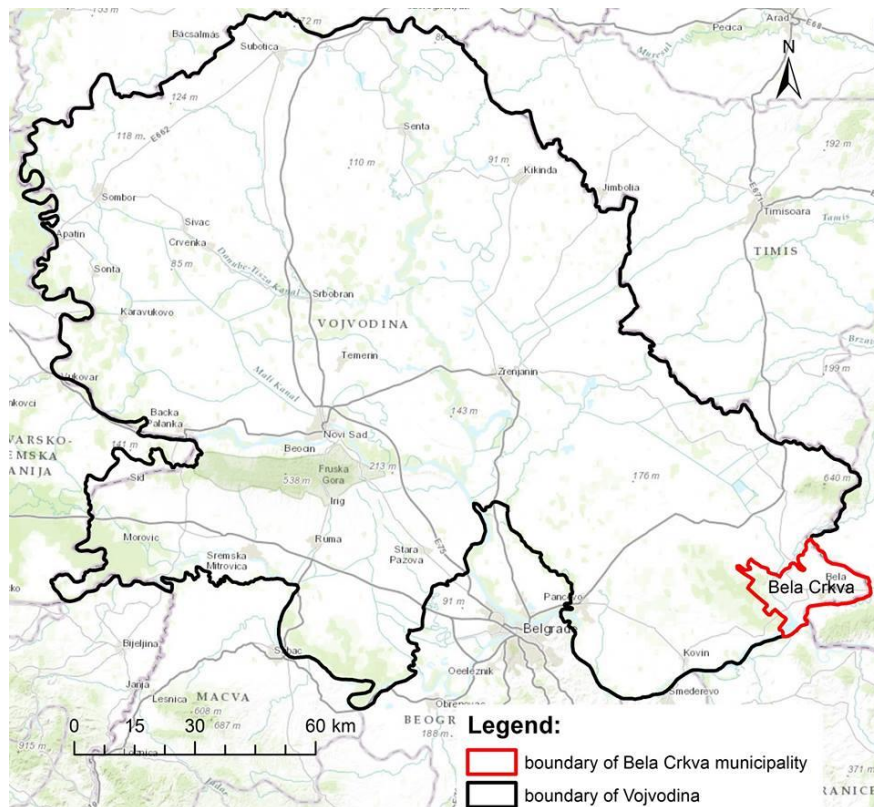


Figure 1. Location of Bela Crkva municipality in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina  
 Source: Boškov at all, 2015

On the other hand, there is a certain dependence of space from tourism. Thought here is primarily on economic and social dependence. Many tourist destinations, and the population of

those destinations achieved great economic benefits thanks to the development of tourism. Tourism in this region encourages the employment of the local population and creates new enterprises. It also leads to cultural exchange, and local population is introduced to different culture that tourists from different parts of the world bring. On the other hand tourists get acquainted with the local culture of the place where they reside. What is also important when it comes to dependence on space and tourism, is the fact that some forms of tourism through its activities contribute to raising awareness of the threats to the natural heritage and allow a better understanding of the need for its protection.

However, despite being largely dependent on space, tourism constantly contributes to its transformation. Under the influence of tourism, receptive place is increasingly changing, gaining specific tourist physiognomy. Tourism has the power to make each potentially attractive space more accessible for tourists. In this way tourism as a factor of transformation of the space plays a major role (Čomić, 2002).

### **Study area**

Bela Crkva municipality is located in the northeastern part of Serbia, in the southeast of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina and Banat district. It covers an area of 353 km<sup>2</sup> and territorially belongs to the South Banat district. On the north it borders with the municipalities of Kovin and Vršac, while on the east it borders with the Republic of Romania (Devrnja et al., 2015).

Despite its peripheral position, the Municipality is well connected with contiguous municipalities. The main form of transport and the most important communication of this area is road traffic. The road network of this Municipality consists of 26 km of highway, 21 km of regional and 39 km of local roads. The distance from Belgrade, the capital and most important city center is about 95 km. The distance of other centers is: Vršac (37 km), Kovin (47 km), Požarevac (50 km), Smederevo (60 km), Pančevo (80 km). Over the border crossing Kaluđerovo, Bela Crkva is connected with border villages in Republic of Romania. The distance from Timisoara (Romania) is about 110 km (Boškov, 2014b).

On the territory of the Municipality there are numerous natural values, and some of them are protected, such as Special Nature Reserve "Deliblatska sands", Ramsar site Labudovo okno Landscape of exceptional features "Karaš-Nera" (Boškov, 2014a).

### **Examples of spatial transformation to the impact of tourism**

When it comes to the transformation that has occurred as a result of the development and operation of tourism in a given area, it should be noted that it is not only about changes in physical space. The impacts of tourism are complex and should be distinguished ecological, socio-cultural and economic effects of tourism (Stojanović, 2006). It can be said that in the case of the Bela Crkva, socio-cultural effects of tourism are not largely expressed. Culture and lifestyle of the local community has not changed. So far there have been no cases of conflicts between tourists and locals, the deliberate destruction of cultural monuments and architectural value, nor any inappropriate behavior of tourists. Economic effects are expressed to a certain extent. They are most expressed in period of the most famous events ("Karneval cveća", "Bela Crkva u jabukama", "Lov na Besija"), and in the summer, during the bathing season on Belocrkvanska lakes. On the other hand, tourism in this region realized a number of environmental impacts, and impacts on the physical spatial transformation.

#### **Environmental impacts of tourism**

Studies on ecological transformation mainly emphasize the changes that tourism makes on the nature and ecosystems of a landscape (Stojanović, 2011). In the case of the Bela Crkva, there are numerous ecological problems. Some of these problems have been created solely as a consequence of the development of tourism, while most of them are caused by a combination of tourism activities, neglect of the local population, as well as the inactivity of local government in the field of preventing and solving these problems.

Plastic waste in the rivers Nera and Karaš: is caused by great irresponsibility of tourists. Hikers and bathers on these rivers during the summer months, leave behind large amounts of plastic waste, which together with fallen trees retained in certain places, make a kind of dam.

It should be noted that tourists are not the only ones to blame for this problem. Local residents showed an equal level of negligence and irresponsibility, as well as local authorities which refuse to take specific measures to address this problem.

The emergence of garbage on the beaches of the Gradsko and Vračevgajsko lake: these two lakes, the most visited tourist sites of Bela Crkva, are also the most polluted. During the bathing season the beaches are full of garbage that tourists leave behind.

Fishing with illegal means: on the river Nera, Karaš and the canal Danube-Tisa-Danube was recorded illegal fishing with electricity, explosives and "hooks", which leads to the question of fish population (Kotrla and Belobabić, 2014). For this problem mostly are guilty locals, however, there are a number of tourists, visitors of these sites, which also contribute to the spread of this problem.

Ramsar site Labudovo okno: this Ramsar site includes the shores of Danube and Nere, islands Žilavu, Čibukliju and Zavojsko, sunken meanders of Karaš, the Nera river confluence of the Danube. Flow of Danube in this sector is slowing down, it has a higher water level, flooding the low coastal terrain and extreme southern edge of the Banat sands. Coastal river swamps have conditions for different types of aquatic biodiversity, and also for species typical for damp areas such as these. For Ramsar site Labudovo okno was declared on 01. 05. 2006. The protected area covers an area of 3,733 hectares ([www.ramsar.org](http://www.ramsar.org)). Protection of this area contributed to establishment of tourism infrastructure. At the site there is an information board, viewpoint, and in the immediate vicinity there are several significant anthropogenic values such as remnants of the Smederevo and Ram fortress, Roman Castrum and others. Tourism in this area exists, although the overall potential is not used enough. Tourist visits are realized mostly through school field trips or individuals and small groups who come alone (without the intermediation of tourist organizations and travel agencies). These visitors are largely environmentally conscious so that environmental pollution by tourism is minimal.

#### Impacts of tourism on the physical transformation of space

This group includes the visible impact of the changes that tourism is realized in the municipality of Bela Crkva, which are due to the construction and adaptation of space so that it subordinated the needs of tourism, such as the construction of certain buildings, concreting works, arranging beaches and resorts. It should be noted that these effects are directly intertwined with environmental impacts that tourism accounts.

Excessive urbanization of Glavno lake: in past few years a large number of prefabricated buildings have been built near the Dečija beach on the Glavno (Gradsko) lake. On the western side of the lake, in the former forest of plane trees, there are numerous apartment buildings. Some of the restaurants on the main lake are: Resort "Rafaelo", bungalows "Jezero" Camping "Belocrkvanska lakes" in which there are basketball, volleyball and football courts, then a restaurant "Jezero", cafes and numerous villas. Most beaches on the lake are made of concrete. In order to prevent further urbanization of the Main Lake, it is necessary to direct the construction of tourist facilities to other lakes (Kotrla and Belobabić, 2014).



Figure 2. Tourist villas on the Glavno lake  
Photo: J. Boškov

In this way further urbanization of the area around Glavno lake would be stopped and that would also activate tourism on other lakes in Bela Crkva. Balanced tourism development at all (or at least most) Belocrkvanska lakes would contribute to preserving biodiversity at each of these places.

The facilities built here do not fit into the natural environment. The facades of bright, varied colors are not in accordance with the environment or with one another. Colorful tourist villas give the impression of confusion and deviate greatly from the ambient environment.

Urbanization on Vračevgajsko lake grows rapidly: however, in comparison to Glavno lake urbanization is not so expressed here. Auto-camp "Bela Crkva" is located on the lake coast. Capacity is 100 camping units, it has parking space for about 400 vehicles. In the camp there are beaches, football field and volleyball, shop, cafe and restaurant (Boškov, 2014a). As already mentioned, in order to prevent excessive urbanization, it is necessary to divert tourist activity to other lakes in Bela Crkva.

Illegal cottages on the Dunav–Tisa–Dunav: on some parts of the channel, at the dam itself, there are illegally buildings. Currently, there are 15 objects constructed about 50-70 meters from the confluence with the Dunav canal. These objects are damaging the natural environment and represent a danger when floods occur. Waste waters from these facilities are also a problem, alongside waste that remains after staying visitors. Most of this waste ends up in the channel.

Construction of weekend houses in the Siga area: this source of cold water is also known as Pricentalov valley. In Siga today there are remnants of old oak forest, which covered this area. Provincial Institute for Nature Protection has registered seven specimens of old oaks between 200-300 years. Due to the high humidity in the vicinity, large numbers of plants typical of humid areas are present. It is clear that the construction of weekend houses in Siga area, which are 5 at the moment, leads to a distortion of visual beauty of the landscape, but there is also the danger of disrupting the ecosystem in this area. Lack of sewerage network, concreting soil, noise, construction on the former forest glades have negative consequences for the flora and fauna of Siga (Kotrla and Belobabić, 2014).

#### Impacts of tourism on the cultural heritage

In the area of Bela Crkva municipality impacts of tourism on cultural heritage are not largely expressed. One of possible reasons for this is the fact that tourists in Bela Crkva more visit natural sites (lakes, river banks), and in these localities impacts of tourism are more visible. Numerous cultural values in Bela Crkva, such as archaeological sites, churches (Roman Catholic, Romanian Orthodox, Russian Orthodox, Evangelical), the National Museum, the National Library, the mill on Nera river, monument of technical culture, as well as numerous events have not yet been



sufficiently activated for tourism purposes. Careful planning of tourism development and attracting tourists can be achieved by the including these sites in tourist activities. It is of great importance their sustainable use.

Water mill on Nera river: this monument of technical culture today is completely ruined and is a true example of neglect of the authorities for the protection and promotion of cultural heritage. The whole area around the former watermill is very shabby, water mill wheel is missing, there is only building in ruins. Given the current state of this cultural monument, it is clear that it is not used for tourist purposes. During the field survey conducted in July 2014 in Bela Crkva for the purpose of making a study "Geoheritage of Bela Crkva", local residents and tourists answered several questions related to the water mill on the river Nera. Respondents mostly did not even know that this facility exists.

In the 19th century from the basin of Nera river to Stara Palanka about twenty water mills and mills existed. Over time, they were destroyed or burnt down, and this water mill is the only one remaining. The reconstruction and development of this property can be its inclusion in tourism. The inclusion in the tourist offer would allow the protection of monuments of culture and prevent the traditional way of doing business in oblivion. In the case of renewal of the water mill also would be necessary to promote it through various promotional materials and media, because as already mentioned this facility is largely unknown to the public.



Figure 3. Water Mill on Nera  
Source: Historical Archives of Bela Crkva

The architecture of the city center: it is a noticeable impact of tourism on the architecture of the old core of Bela Crkva. Tourism development has caused the opening of a large number of restaurants in the city center. In order to allow the construction of cafes, restaurants, fast foods restaurants and similar objects, a number of old buildings were torn down or their original condition was changed. The beautiful facade of the famous kibic windows are very rare now. Instead street in the center of Bela Crkva now adorn the outdoor cafe and shop windows which are completely inept in architectural solutions



Figure 4. Details of architecture in Bela Crkva  
Photo: J. Boškov

Tourist events as part of the cultural heritage play an important role in tourism of Bela Crkva. The most important and most visited tourist event is "Carnival of Flowers". This event has a tradition of 150 years and it is every year in June. After the carnival in Bela Crkva the most important manifestations are "Hunt on Besi" (first time held in 1988) and "Bela Crkva in apples" (Boškov, 2014a). The impact of tourism development on the events reflected primarily in providing various products for tourists, which originally were not an integral part of the event (souvenirs, food and beverage offer, etc.). Events, especially the "Carnival of Flowers" every year attracts large number of tourists, which is why their importance is growing, and also to achieve greater economic effects. For the "Carnival of Flowers" can be said to represent a kind of brand of Bela Crkva.

### Conclusion

Bela Crkva has rich natural and anthropogenic resources which have great scientific, educational, landscape and tourist value. These values are the result of complex geological structure and geomorphologic processes in the course of Earth's history took place in this area, as well as rich and turbulent history of these areas. In the municipality there are numerous natural resources and several of them are protected. There is a plateau Dumače which enters into the composition of the Special Nature Reserve "Deliblatska peščara", Labudovo okno which is protected as a Ramsar site, and now is during the process of forming a landscape of exceptional characteristics "Karaš-Nera" as a protected area in second category, with a total area of 1.541,27 ha. This area also has a number of anthropogenic values and the most importantes are archaeological sites. The rich heritage provides good conditions for the development of different forms of tourism, and so far in this area to some extent developed swimming, mountaineering, event, sports and recreational tourism. In Bela Crkva tourism has not largely influenced the transformation of the area, but the changes exist. On some sites they are more pronounced, while in some locations are in the beginning. The area around Glavno lake and spring Siga suffered the biggest transformation, as a result of tourism development.

In order to adequately respond to demands of modern tourism, it is necessary for tourist destination to accept the changes that it brings. It is extremely important that there is monitoring of the impact of tourism. Any changes that tourism brings in one area inevitably changes the

natural environment, but with careful planning of tourism development that can be prevented, or at least to limit the negative aspects of tourism as an agent of spatial transformation. On the other hand, the careful planning of tourism, a specific area can be revitalized, protected and enhanced.

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### Влияние туризма на пространственную трансформацию: тематическое исследование муниципалитета Бела-Црква (Сербия)

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**Аннотация.** Муниципалитет Бела-Црква находится в северо-восточной части Сербии, на юго-восточной части автономного края – Воеводине и Банате. В последние годы туризм в этом муниципалитете расширяется, создавая определенные предпосылки. Воздействие туризма на пространственную трансформацию до сих пор не столь заметно, но уже можно отметить какие-то изменения.

Цель данной работы показать пространственную трансформацию, которая создается в результате развития туризма в муниципалитете Бела-Црква.

**Ключевые слова:** туризм, пространственная трансформация, муниципалитет Бела Црква, Сербия.