

POSSIBILITIES OF IMPROVING INTERNATIONAL CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION THROUGH CYCLING THE “SZEKELYS ROUTE”

Aleksandra VUJKO*

University of Novi Sad, Faculty of Geography, Tourism and Hotel Management,
Mažuranićeva 53/a, 21131 Petrovaradin (Novi Sad),
Vojvodina (Serbia), e-mail: aleksandravujko@yahoo.com

Jovan PLAVŠA

University of Novi Sad, Faculty of Geography, Tourism and Hotel Management,
Trg Dositeja Obradovića 3, 21000 Novi Sad, Serbia, e-mail: pivoljak@yahoo.com

Abstract : International cycling the “*Szekelys route*” could become the backbone of cycling as part of sports and recreational tourism in Serbia. Within it there are two EU member states (Romania and Hungary), both bordering Serbia, therefore with the help of the IPA pre-accession funds, cross-border cooperation would be facilitated for Serbia in the future. The “*Szekelys route*” participants-cyclists for years start their cycling from Radauci in Romania and in the length of about 1,200 km they are cycling through the unique landscapes of Romania, Hungary and Serbia, thus approaching natural, cultural and spiritual values of the area they are passing. With that in mind, one of the fundamental aims of this research was to indicate the potential of networking the region through which the route passes by. It would be possible with various sport and recreational and cultural events, and natural and cultural values, aimed at becoming an official cycle route, which would consequently generate many other facilities. Also, the aim was the promotion of Romania, Hungary and Serbia (Vojvodina). The field research resulted in mapping of the area and interviews with professionals from the Bicycle Alliance of Vojvodina, the organizer of the “*Szekelys route*” and participants in the cycling, helped in SWOT analyzing.

Key words: Cycling, Networking, Serbian-Hungarian-Romanian cooperation, The “*Szekelys route*”

* * * * *

INTRODUCTION

One of the major opportunities for the development of sports and recreational tourism in Serbia lies in participation in various EU programmes, initiated to help increase regional development. In order to simplify the system of external assistance, as well as to achieve maximum results using the allocated financial resources, the

* Corresponding author

European Commission has decided that all pre-accession funds (PHARE, ISPA, SAPARD and CARDS), be replaced by a new pre-accession instrument IPA. The basic components of IPA, and therefore the chances of developing sports and recreational tourism in Serbia, are diverse. One of them is cross-border cooperation. In the future, this component would finance various cross-border projects of institutions from border regions of one country with the institutions in the border regions of neighbouring countries (regardless EU membership of the neighbouring country), within all the areas of the two countries defined as top priority. Priorities are defined multi-annual planning documents called Operational Programmes (www.europa.rs). The European Cyclists' Federation has prepared preliminary project designs for all European routes and route details are worked out based on common criteria and standards. The task of Serbia is to clearly define cycle routes throughout the municipalities with precise planning and project documentation.

The Ministry of Construction considers the initiative to commence drafting the Master Plan of transport infrastructure and spatial plan network transport infrastructure. It was suggested that all municipalities make recommendations on the inclusion of these routes in the local regional and urban planning (Vujko & Plavša, 2010; www.europa.rs). Therefore, it could be said that it is of particular importance precisely the territory that could achieve cross-border cooperation through the system of bicycle paths, which the “*Szekelys route*” could. In fact, its result would be the Romanian-Hungarian-Serbian cycle transversal which would consequently generate many other sports and recreational facilities. In this sense, the aim of this research is that the observed connectivity of Romania, Hungary and Serbia, used for making actual innovative projects (Cutumisu & Cottrels, 2004) that developed the system of internal and cross-border partnerships that would contribute to sustainable and regional development, encouraging entrepreneurship and a number of consumers in cycling tourism in this region and all over Europe and connecting the “*Szekelys route*” with the “*Danube cycle route*”. Also, the aim is to promote *Romania, Hungary and Serbia (Vojvodina)* through a system of 10 cycle paths connected into the system and to use this as a basis for setting a SWOT analysis of cycling tourism of the “*Szekelys route*” obtained by the current opinions of decision makers in Tourism in Vojvodina as well as participants in the “*Szekelys route*”.

METHODOLOGY

The research was a combination of quantitative methods (statistics and web analysis) and qualitative methods (surveys, interviews, interview and written documents). Bibliographic speculative method was used in the stage of defining the theoretical framework, and descriptive method for data processing and results interpretation. The sample consisted of 30 cyclist participants. The participants were of different nationalities from the regions of Romania, Hungary and Serbia. Starting point, from which the study started there was a group of variables concerned the feasibility and importance of the “*Szekelys route*” for cycling tourism. The data were analyzed using statistical methods and comparative descriptive character, which enabled the explication of research results and perform specific conclusions. Bearing in mind that the resulting data confirmed the initial assumption that one of the main advantages of “*Szekelys route*” are future international cross-border cooperation, it was necessary to move to another step in the implementation of the mapping cycling area. The proposal paths given on the map were the result of field research (cycling the “*Szekelys route*”, organized by the Youth Club “*Tinet*” from Skorenovac (Vojvodina), which wanted to examine the feasibility of a route which is the result of mapping the field provided). The maps were drawn with web software Google map. In order to obtain the best results possible, SWOT analysis of planning cycle paths on the territory of Romania, Hungary

and Serbia. Also the interviews were conducted with everyone directly or indirectly involved in functioning of sports and recreational tourism in the area of the “*Szekelys route*”, and everyone who could contribute to its development.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

During the analysis the data obtained from former participants of the “*Szekelys route*” there is some information of “*subjective nature*” bearing in mind the number of participants (30 participants, cyclists). However, it is important to emphasize that it is the number of organized participants in the annual “*Szekelys route*” organized by the club “*Tinet*” from Skorenovac (Vojvodina) not representing the real demand for the cycling on the Route. Such a small number of participants reflects the club’s capacity for taking people on the route and providing good care of them. The organizers of the “*Szekelys route*” informed us that there are a number of cyclists from three countries through which the route passes (Romania, Hungary and Serbia) who could not be taken (Table 1).

Table 1. Age of participants-cyclists in the “*Szekelys route*”

		Frequency	%
Valid	16-25	9	30
	26-35	7	23,3
	36-45	7	23,3
	46-55	7	23,3
	Total:	30	100

Regarding the gender of the participants, the number of male participants is significantly higher (22 male participants). Interestingly enough, when the age of the participants is in question, then almost all categories ranging from 16-25 and category to the category 46-55 years are represented. This information is very important because it indicates the possibility of the Route being used by a large number of cyclists, which may be a good indicator of the profitability of marking the “*Szekelys route*” in the future. The feasibility variables of the “*Szekelys route*” initiated the participants’ assessment of the feasibility (ranging from 1 to 5) considering all the paths (10 cycle paths). The table 2 (Figure 1) indicates that most participants rated it four (4) which leads to a positive conclusion about feasibility (material base of tourism or the state of transport and road infrastructure and accommodation facilities along the Route).

Table 2. Assessing the feasibility “*Szekelys route*” by the participants

		Which grade would you assess the feasibility of “ <i>Szekelys route</i> ”?				Total
		2	3	4	5	
Age of examinee	16-25	0	0	9	0	9
	26-35	0	3	2	2	7
	36-45	0	1	4	2	7
	46-55	1	1	2	3	7
Total:		1	5	17	7	30

Data obtained from the dependent variables were cross analyzed with one independent variable (age of the participants as the most distinguishing indicator) to detect differences in responses measured on the basis of statistically significant differences in the distribution of the dependent variable in relation to an independent, whereas statistically significant differences are those for which $p < 0.05$.

Taking into account that $p = 0.066$, statistically significant difference is perceived in the responses of participants of different age groups on the very border of statistical significance, yet not significant (Table 3).

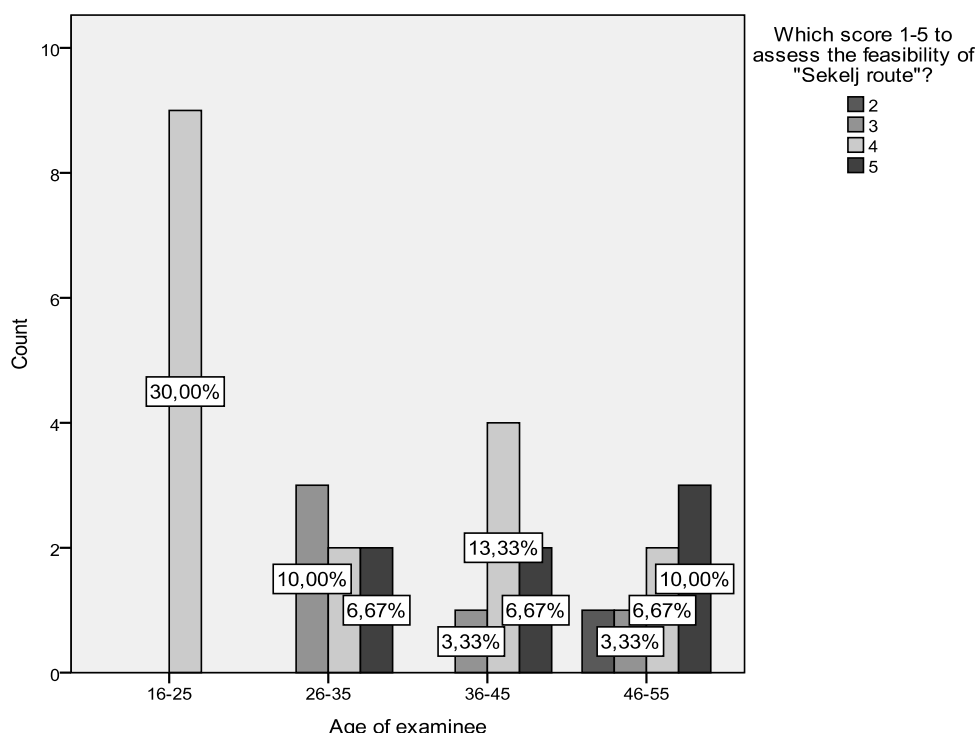


Figure 1. Assessing the feasibility “Szekelys route” by the participants

Table 3. Pearson Chi-Square Test

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig (p)
Pearson Chi-Square	16.055	9	0.066

The second group of variables relates to the evaluation of the route. Among very interesting data we find those indicating that most participants believe that one of the greatest values of the “Szekelys route” was the international cross-border co-operation between Romania, Hungary and Serbia. This group of responses was ahead of training and acquiring new skills, socializing and meeting new people and even in front of the cycling (Figure 2).

Table 4. Pearson Chi-Square Test

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig (p)
Pearson Chi-Square	10.323	9	0.325

As $p = 0.325$, it shows that there is no statistically significant difference in the responses of participants of different ages (Table 4).

Through its function of connecting and overlapping the natural, cultural, historical and spatial elements, tourism easily lifted the boundaries between nations and opens the way for various forms of regional networking. Territories in the border regions, due to its natural geographic features, have always been the subject of interest for many civilizations that have left behind permanent traces of their culture. Every nation left its specific ethno-sociological, folklore and other features, and this kind of “ancestral land”, with its turbulent historical past, represents a significant tourism potential.

International cycling the “Szekelys route” was first organized in 2003 at the 125th anniversary of the founding of the village Skorenovac located in southern Banat near Kovin (Vojvodina, Serbia), which was founded by former residents of the village Ciumani.

Ciumani is the homeland of “*Szekelys*” (east of Transylvania in Romania) who, after leaving that area, founded five villages in Vojvodina, including Skorenovac whose name means “*Székelykeve*” “*Szekely village*” in Hungarian. The Székelys or Szeklers (Hungarian: Székely, Romanian: Secui, German: Szekler, Latin: Siculi) are a subgroup of the Hungarian people living mostly in the “*Székely Land*”, an ethno-cultural region in eastern Transylvania, Romania.

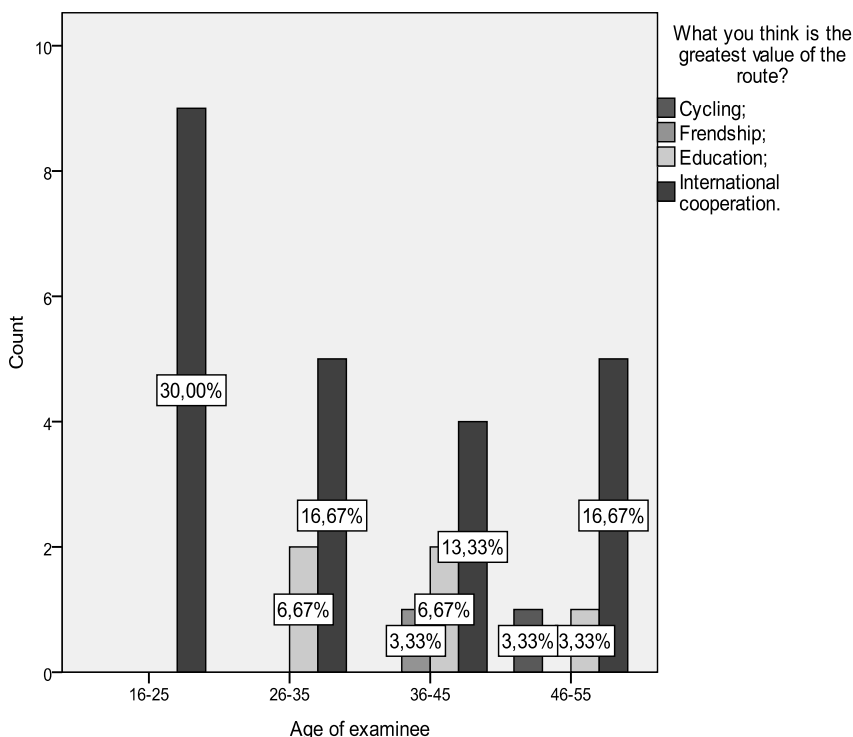


Figure 2. Evaluation of “*Szekelys route*” by the participants

A significant population descending from the Székelys of Bukovina lives in Tolna and Baranya counties in Hungary and in certain districts of Vojvodina, Serbia. The population of Szekelys comes from the territory in the nation, known as “*Szekely Land*”, which is in the former Kingdom of Hungary including the historic area Csikszék, Marosszék, Aranyosszék, Udvarhelyszék and Háromszék. Today, these territories are located on the east and southeast of the Transylvanian basin, within the Carpathian arc and partly in the eastern Carpathian Mountains in central Romania (Baron, 2002; www.wikipedia.org). Szekelys present their ethnic autochthonous features through cultural heritage, customs and traditions. The most famous examples of this are ornamental embroidery, handicrafts, ornamental boxes for keeping family valuables etc. The importance of “*Szekelys route*” lies in the fact that last year (2010) the team of 26 cyclists was met, welcomed and escorted by the Mayor of Ciumani, Laszlo Marton Szilárd.

When first organized, “*Szekelys route*” had 16 cyclists, and the current number of those participating in the event is only about 30 cyclists, and this number varies slightly from year to year. The fact is that the formalization of the route and marking its reach in the number of user routes, and that would, among other things should also be a priority task of marking and the formalization of the route. Formalization and marking the route would not in itself mean a larger number of participants but would also open

possibilities for better promotion, various sponsorships, additional content and more. The “Szekelys route” boasts multiculturalism and spreads the “good mood”. Socializing and meeting the local people contributes to a better understanding of the differences that sometimes might cause intolerance.



Figure 3. The first stage of the path to “Szekelys route”
(Source: base Google map – modified by Vujko; Scale: 1 cm = 10 km)

The starting point of the first stage is Rădăuți in Romania, and the length is about 110 km (Figure 3). Rădăuți is a town in the far northern part of Romania (10 km from the border with Ukraine), the historical province of Bucovina, and the third most important city in the county of Județul Suceava. Rădăuți is situated on a plain between the Suceava and Sucevița rivers, 37 km (23 miles) north from Suceava, at 375 m (410 yards) altitude. It is one of the oldest settlements in Moldavia, known since the 15th century (Davidović, 1999; Baron, 2002; www.wikipedia.org).

The second stage, a distance of about 83 km would commence from Vatra Dornei and would lead to Bistrita. The present town of Vatra Dornei developed around the former settlement of Dorna pe Giumalau mentioned in documents of the end of the 16th and the beginning of the 17th centuries. Vatra Dornei, also known as the “*Pearl of Bucovina*”, is located at the confluence of the Dorna River, the Neagra Sarului and the Bistrita River. The town is well known for its natural mineral water resources. Spa’s healing properties that have made it famous across the world include mineral springs, mud and strongly negative ionized air. Tourists come to Vatra Dornei to treat their cardiovascular diseases and rheumatism, to rest, practice winter sports or just to have a good time (Figure 4). The spectacular landscape also allows for numerous leisure

activities – walking, horse-riding, river-rafting, and visits to monasteries in Bucovina and Maramures. Vatra Dornei is also known as a winter sports resort with its many slopes and ski lifts. Black Hill (Dealul Negru altitude 1,300 m) and Runc Hill have tracks and slopes for winter sports. From Vatra Dornei there are routes to Giumalau Mountain and to Suhard Mountain.

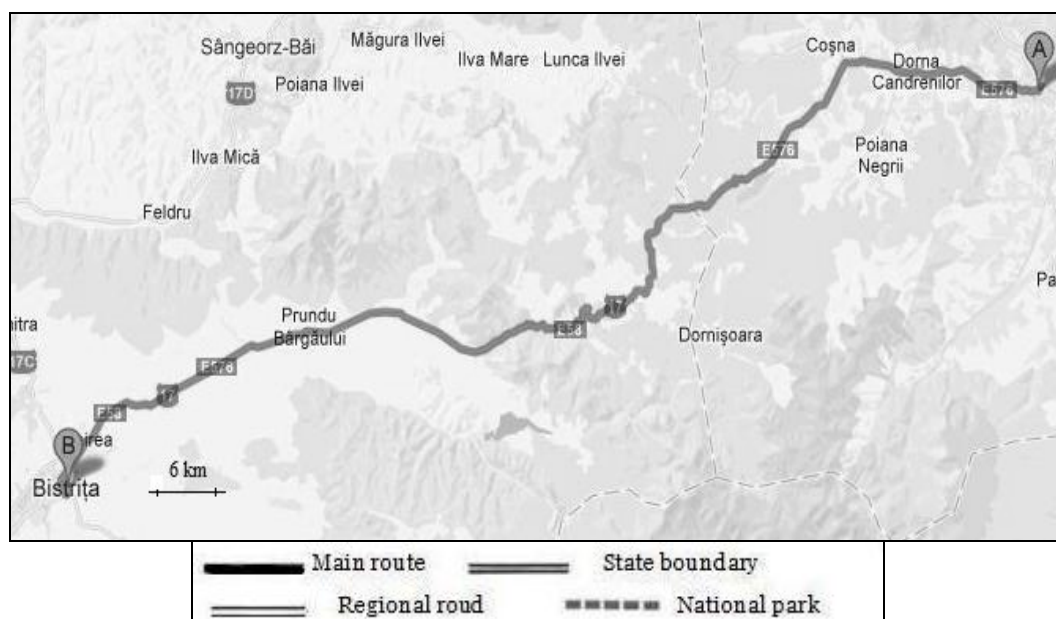


Figure 4. The second stage of the path to "Szekelys route"
(Source: base Google map – modified by Vujko; Scale: 1 cm = 6 km)

Historical Bucovina was about twice its present size, but its northern part now belongs to Ukraine as a result of the Soviet-German Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact of August 1940. Bucovina is a synthesis of the variety, harmony and beauty of Romanian landscape, its richness of relief with mountains, plateaus, gorges, hills, fields, and valleys, its rivers, streams and lakes, its forests, flora and fauna. The Eastern Carpathians extend from the Ukrainian frontier in the north to the Prahova River Valley in the far south. Together with the sub-Carpathians they occupy the western two-thirds of Bucovina, whereas in the east the Suceava plateau lies. The mountain region is made up of a series of parallel ranges (named "*obcîni*"), oriented in a roughly north-south direction. Forest reserve of Slătioara, near the Rarău peak, encompasses one of the oldest woods in Romania, some of the trees being over 400 years old (Figure 5). One of the natural reserves, on the terraces of Poiana Stampei, is the habitat of rare flowering plants. This is a paradise for bees and apiculture, one of the oldest occupations in Romania that is widely practised. The impressive number of churches are to be found in Bucovina, Romania, with their fine exterior and interior frescoes, have been preserved from medieval times, and because of their uniqueness and artistic value, were added to UNESCO's World Cultural Heritage List in 1993. There is, indeed, no other place in the world where such a group of churches, with such high quality exterior frescoes, are to be found. The churches were founded, in most cases, as family burial places of princes and noble people. Each painter, although following the canonical iconographic programme, interpreted the scenes in a slightly different way. Using colours like the famous Voronet blue, the green-red of Sucevita, the yellow of Moldovita, the red of Humor and the green of Arbore, the painters (most of them unknown) described the biblical stories of the earth and heaven, scenes from the lives of

the Holly Virgin and Jesus Christ, stories of man’s beginnings and of his life after death. The scenes were first painted on the interior walls, and then extended to the exterior ones. The reasons for such vast scenes were both religious and didactic: to promote Orthodoxy and to educate the illiterate (Davidović, 1999; Baron, 2002; www.wikipedia.org).



Figure 5. Detail from the Carpathians to the “Székely route”
(Photo: D. Stanković, 2010)

Bistrița is located in the north-east of the Transylvanian plateau, in the Bistrița basin which is crossed by the river bearing the same name. Bistrița was founded in the early 13th century by German settlers and (due to its location on the main trading route with Moldavia), became one of Transylvania's major medieval cities. The city is the administrative centre of the district Bistita – Nasaud (Cianga & Surd, 2003, 2005).

The third stage will take from Bistrita to Cluj Napoca, about 115 km (Figure 6). Cluj-Napoca, commonly known as Cluj, is the fourth most populous city in Romania and the seat of Cluj County in the north-western part of the country. Geographically, it is roughly equidistant from Bucharest (441 km / 276 mi), Budapest (409 km / 256 mi) and Belgrade (465 km / 291 mi). Located in the Someșul Mic River valley, the city is considered the unofficial capital to the historical province of Transylvania (Davidović, 1999; Baron, 2002; www.wikipedia.org)

Transylvania is the largest region of Romania and probably the best known one. Transylvania is a unitary region, but diverse at the same time: it is worth trying to observe the differences between the region, both culturally and naturally. This region is a place with abundant history and multicultural convergence. All over Transylvania the cohabitation of Romanians, Hungarians, Saxons and Romas is the leading theme. Transylvania is rich in myth and misty medieval sites: there about 100 castles and fortresses and about 70 fortified churches. Romania's greatest and best preserved castles and fortresses are to be found here. But for the more curious traveller, there are many small villages with old houses and fortified churches. As Transylvania is circled by the Carpathian Mountains there are a lot of mountain forests and hiking or climbing possibilities. All over the Carpathians there are great national parks. In the centre of Transylvania there are green hills and rivers. Most big cities are very Western Europe like, and the infrastructure is generally good quality and appropriate for travellers. At the border between Transylvania and Valachia there is the famous Bran Castle, known as the

Castle of Dracula and medieval Brasov and Sighisoara. Iasi is home to the oldest Romanian university, founded in 1860 (Macura, 2006).



Figure 6. The third stage of the path to “Szekelys route”
(Source: base Google map – modified by Vujko; Scale: 1 cm = 10 km)

Figure 7 shows that the fourth stage on the “Szekelys route” goes from Cluj Napoca to Ciucea, about 73 km. Ciucea is the region of the municipality of Cluj, located 20 km northwest of places Huedin on the right bank of the river Crisul Repede. Ciucea is famous for the memorial museum of Octavian Goga, which was founded in the castle of the family Bonci 1986/7 and the Hungarian poet, Ady Endre. The fourth stage is, like the previous ones, very specific (Figure 8). Especially interesting are the Romanian villages. People from Romania are proud, kind, social; they love their land and eagerly introduce the visitors to its features.



Figure 7. The fourth stage of the path to “Szekelys route”
(Source: base Google map - modified by Vujko; Scale: 1 cm = 9 km)

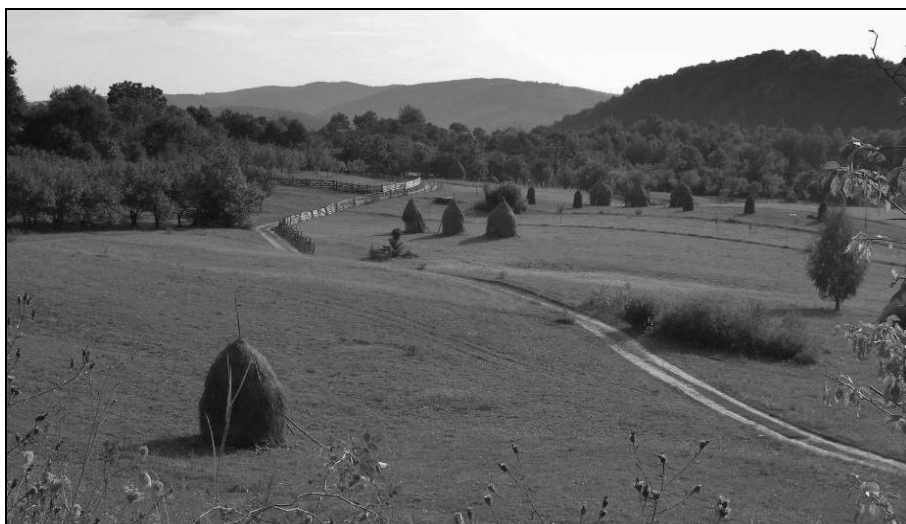


Figure 8. Detail from the road to Ciucei on the “Szekelys route”
(Photo: D. Stanković, 2010)

The fifth stage goes from Ciucea to Oradea, about 80 km (Figure 9). Oradea is the capital city of Bihor County, in Crişana region, in north-western Romania. City lies at the meeting point of the Crişana plain and the Crişul Repede's basin. It is situated 126 meters above sea-level, surrounded on the north-eastern part by the hills of Oradea belonging to the Ses hills. The main part of the settlement is situated on the floodplain and on the terraces situated down the river Crişul Repede. Oradea is famous for its thermal springs. The river Crişul Repede flows right through the city centre, providing it with a picturesque beauty. From the Hungarian border Oradea is only 13 km away (Davidović, 1999; Baron, 2002; www.wikipedia.org).

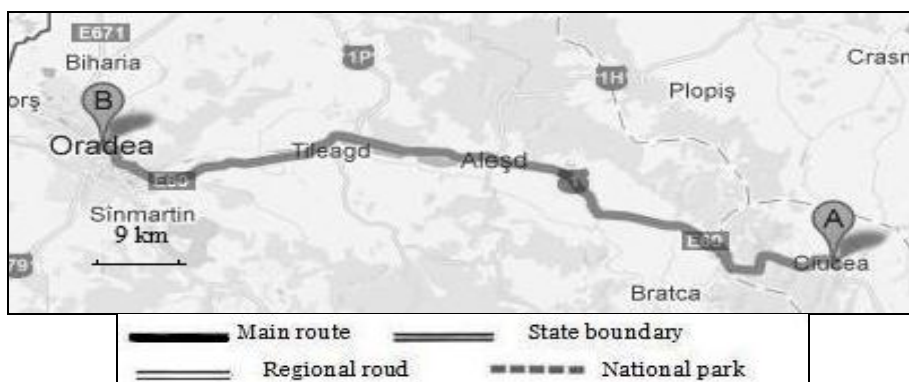


Figure 9. The fifth stage of the path to “Szekelys route”
(Source: base Google map - modified by Vujko; Scale: 1 cm = 9 km)

The term “Crişana” originated from Romanian “Crişul” for the Körös River and its three tributaries: the Crişul Alb, the Crişul Negru and the Crişul Repede which downstream flows into the river Tisza. Other, more Hungarian name for this area is Districts Bihor because of Bihor Mountain. Crişana is the most distant part of the Romanian state from the capital Bucharest. Romanian Crişana is bounded in Romania by Maramureş to the north, Transylvania proper to the east, the Banat to the south, and the Hungarian Pannonian Plain to the west. The western border with Hungary's political background was created in 1918 (Davidović, 1999; Baron, 2002; www.wikipedia.org).



Figure 10. Detail on the way to a restaurant 1201 Cota on the “*Szekely route*” – the Carpathians
(Photo: D. Stanković, 2010)



Figure 11. Detail of Oradea on the “*Szekely route*”
(Photo: D. Stanković, 2010)

The sixth stage (Figure 12) goes from Oradea to spa Dorobanți, about 104 km. Dorobanți commune lies in the Aradului Plateau and the commune centre is situated 25 km from the city of Arad. Spa is an excellent place for rest and relaxation, according to Zoltan Dani, and one of the favourite places along the “*Szekelys route*”. The spa offers several thermal water pools with water temperature reaching 60°C.



Figure 12. The sixth stage of the path to “*Szekelys route*”
(Source: Google base map – modified by Vujko; Scale: 1 cm = 9 km)

It is known that cyclists use all types of accommodation along the cycling route, from the camp sites to 5 star accommodations, and they gladly visit cafes and restaurants along the cycle route. Therefore, another benefit of marking cycle “*Szekelys route*” would certainly be the development of local entrepreneurship in the context of job creation in the newly opened facilities for providing food and beverages as well as the accommodation facilities. Cycling tourism in this sense would initiate the development of

the area through which the cycle routes go, the improvement of infrastructure and development of bicycle paths, raise the level of supporting facilities, rental equipment, services in the field and also cooperation with the local authorities. Moreover, the food offer should meet the specific needs of cyclists, including light food with an emphasis on “*packages to go*”, produced by the local community. The peasants from Romania are famous for their delicious dishes. A feature of this way of cooking is the preparing the food in earthen pots. Together with these delicious dishes, people from Romania make a toast; they usually drink red wine, plum brandy or “*palinca*” (traditional drink), (Simonsen et al., 1998; Koorey, 2001; www.romanianmonasteries.org).

The seventh (Figure 13) stage of the path leads from the spa Dorobanti to Mórahalom, a small town in Hungary, about 98 km. The cycle “*Szekelys route*” through Hungary would be 250 km long, divided into two stages. Mórahalom is a town in Csongrád county in the Southern Great Plain region of southern Hungary, a place which Hungarians call “*South Gate*”. The town is just 12 km from the Serbian border and the Romanian border is within 45 km. Despite the fact that Mórahalom is not a large town, it offers significant cultural and recreation programmes. Everyone can find the most suitable activity or relaxation according to individual specific demands. Those wishing to spend their leisure time in nature are offered several possibilities from riding to hiking in the surroundings. In the local nature conservation area around Madarász-tó (Bird Catcher Lake), there is an opportunity for camping. Within the town, the Erzsébet Thermal Spa stands at the service of those who are desirous of complete rest. The “*Aranyszöm*” Community House also provides cultural programmes and performances for those who are interested in Hungarian traditions.



Figure 13. The seventh stage of the path to “*Szekelys route*”
(Source: Google base map – modified by Vujko; Scale: 1 cm = 6 km)

The eighth (Figure 14) stage of the path goes from Mórahalom to Bonyhád, about 132 km. Bonyhád is a town in Tolna County in South-western Hungary (Davidović, 1999; Moldavai, 2006; www.wikipedia.org). In 2010, Bonyhád was final stage for several cyclists. This specifically organized “*Szekelys route*” emphasises as its advantage the fact that the cyclists are escorted by the van equipped to offer necessary service and medical help in case of accidents. This means that cyclists are able to stop cycling at any time of day or night and continue the route in a vehicle. The advantages of organized tours, as well as marked trails are reflected in cyclists “*feeling safe*” because they always can seek for and obtain helping case of emergency.

The ninth (Figure 15) and tenth stage (Figure 16) of the “*Szekelys route*” go through Vojvodina, Serbia. Bearing in mind that cycling tourism in Serbia is insufficiently

developed, it should be noted that the availability of cycle paths is determined, primarily by their geographical and traffic position. However, the availability for cyclists is determined also by the easy access to accurate information. The routes on which it is difficult to obtain accurate information typically remain unvisited. The organizers have demonstrated that Serbia has the potential in cycling tourism development and attempted to introduce cyclists on the “*Szekelys route*” to the beauties of Serbia.



Figure 14. The eighth stage of the road “*Szekelys route*”
(Source: Google base map – modified by Vujko, Scale: 1 cm = 10 km)

The ninth stage of the route goes from Bonyhád to Apatin in Serbia, about 118 km. The Municipality of Apatin is located on the left bank of the Danube river (natural border with Croatia), between the Municipality of Sombor (in the north) and Municipality of Odžaci (in the south-east). Apatin is situated in the north-western part of the spacious plain in Bačka. It is considered one of Vojvodina's pristine gems. Such favourable geographic position, proximity to the Danube, and natural wealth of this area (fruitful ground, woods next to the river, abundance of fish in swampy regions and backwaters, and game in woods) attracted people to settle there during all ages. For the same reasons, in pre-historic times, the cultures of Sarmatians, Celts, Goths and many others were being replaced by each other respectively within this region. Near the city of Apatin there is Junaković Spa, a modern and well-equipped rehabilitation and recreation centre with sports fields, outdoor pools, indoor therapy and saunas (Jovičić, 2009; www.wikipedia.org).

The mere cycle paths, although being one of the most important preconditions for cycle tourism development, remain insufficient for successful in promotion of this tourism type. It is necessary to develop the appropriate supportive infrastructure and services for potential tourists - cyclists, the users of the cycle “*Szekelys route*” in order to enable them the accomplishment of their cycle tours without difficulties. Such capital investments include opportunities for rental, service and repair bikes, accommodation tailored to the needs of cyclists (for clothes drying, designated areas for secure bicycle parking, adequate food and beverages supply, etc.). Moreover, the investments should include the possibility to transport bicycle by public transport, to provide recreation facilities and shelter from bad weather in remote places far from villages, signage for tourist attractions situated outside cycle paths, etc.

In order to connect Romania, Hungary and Serbia into a specific cycling “*Szekelys route*” complex, it is necessary to provide excellent orientation facilities for the cyclists. The first step to be introduced would be the signage and marking of the “*Szekelys route*”, i.e. accurate information for all traffic participants. The proper signage for cultural,

historical and natural sights would also inform cyclists about the possibilities in sports and recreational activities, and also the distances on the “*Szekelys route*”, such as places for rest and relaxation, public toilettes, service stations, rental agencies, etc. It is necessary to mention the importance of supporting tourism infrastructure, such as shops, post offices, ATM machines, police, health service, etc. The aforementioned has an indirect impact on the organization of all tourism types, including cycle tourism, but often remains unjustly neglected (Matei & Vert, 2007).



Figure 15. The ninth stage of the path to “*Szekelys route*”
(Source: Google base map - modified by Vujko; Scale: 1 cm = 10 km;)

The tenth (Figure 16) stage of the route from Apatin to Skorenovac is divided into two separate stages during which the cyclists can stay overnight in Petrovaradin, near Novi Sad. The length of the two, connected stages is about 250 km. Petrovaradin is the part of the agglomeration of Novi Sad in Serbia, which lies lying opposite the main part of Novi Sad on the river Danube, around Petrovaradin Fortress and it is well-known as the “*Gibraltar on the Danube*”. Much of land outside of urban area is part of National Park of Fruška gora. The northern part of Fruška Gora consists of massive landslide zones, but they are not active, except in Ribnjak area (between Sremska Kamenica and Petrovaradin Fortress), (Jovičić, 2009; www.wikipedia.org).

Taking into account that “*Szekelys route*” can become a basis for development of cycling tourism in the framework of interregional cooperation among the countries through which it passes, it was necessary to move to the second step, which is the SWOT analysis. The interviewees were: MSc Dragiša Savić, PhD Aleksandar Marić and PhD Goran Matić from Fruška Gora National park, Gvozden Perković from Tourism organisation of Vojvodina (TOV), Tamara Stojanović, person in charge for Fruška gora mountain from Provincial Secretariat for the Environment, Nebojša

Subić, President of Cycling Association of Vojvodina, and Zoltan Dani, President of the Youth Club “*Tinet*” from Skorenovac (Vojvodina) and Organizer of “*Szekelys route*” and cyclists in the “*Szekelys route*”.



Figure 16. The tenth stage of the path to “*Szekelys route*”
(Source: Google base map – modified by Vujko; Scale: 1 cm = 20 km)

The data obtained from Opportunities (Table 5) in this analysis leads to the conclusion that the advantage of potential “*Szekelys route*” is the cross-border cooperation and establishing contacts with cross border entrepreneurship and joint projects. These projects facilitate cross-border business partners and the institutions to find partners, including fairs, databases, web pages, which means that projects should contribute significantly to the development of cross-border business contacts.

Therefore, networking and cross-border cooperation would mean continuous development of the entire territory. Experts suggest the following as the key priorities for developing and promoting the “*Szekelys route*” as cycle tourism product: the development of an infrastructure of safe, convenient, and attractive cycle routes for day/holiday cycling, centre-based cycling short breaks and cycle touring holidays, with an emphasis on traffic-free routes and circular routes; safer and easier cycle access into, around and out of towns and cities; coherent and visible route signing, without which cyclists will lose the route; improved arrangements for cycle carriage by public transport and promotion of cycle access by train or bus; easy-to-book cycle friendly accommodation; better co-ordinated and targeted marketing of cycle routes, cycle hire and cycling holidays. In this sense the development of the Network: will improve cycle access into and out of towns and cities, making them more marketable as cycling short break or touring holiday destinations, and increasing the potential for encouraging cycling tourism day visits, and local leisure cycling trips from home by city and town dwellers; will provide new opportunities for tourism businesses located along the Network to promote themselves to cycling tourist markets, e.g. attractions will be able to promote access by bike, while accommodation establishments

may be able to attract cycle tours; will create new commercial opportunities for the development of cycle hire and cycling holiday businesses, and the development of other businesses, such as refreshment stops, campsites, other forms of tourist accommodation, and other support services, such as luggage transfer or cycle repair/rescue; will provide opportunities for sections of the Network to be incorporated into linked circuits and loops for circular day cycle rides and cycle touring holidays and will provide opportunities for strategic routes (“*Szekelys route*”) to be promoted as cycle tour ‘pilgrimage’ or ‘challenge’ routes for all three markets holidaymakers (Simonsen & Jorgenson, 1998, Ritchie & Hall, 1999; Hayward, 2001; Hudson, 2003; Weed & Bull, 2004; Torkildsen, 2005; Weed, 2008; Matthew, 2009; www.sustrans.org.uk).

Table 5. The SWOT analysis of “*Szekelys route*” between Radauci (Romania) and Skorenovac (Vojvodina, Serbia)

Strengths
- The existence of major tourism resources (protected areas, constructed sports facilities, the possibility of cycling tourism as a complementary forms of rural, event based tourism, cultural tourism, wine and other forms of tourism; Multiethnic and tolerant mentality; The existence of network sports facilities in all residential areas; Existence of unique historic structures, and geographic characteristics; The existence of diverse events; Fostering tradition; A solid structure and good road position to the “ <i>Danube-bike route</i> ” and Sustainable form of tourism.
Weaknesses
- Lack of integrated tourism; Weak analytical and statistical bases; Lack of resource utilization; Lack of internal communication; Lack of information centre; Lack of camping space; Lack of public toilets; Lack of accommodation specialized for cyclists - small market; Insufficient number of experts and other services; Lack of integrated tourism; Poor marketing; Lack of Web portals in foreign languages on bicycle tourism to “ <i>Szekelys route</i> ”; Lack of signage;
Opportunities
- Networking, Provincial and central government funds; EU funds; Participation in cross-border projects; IPA funds; Close to “ <i>Danube cycle route</i> ”; Trade and tourism portals sports and recreation facilities-good image (cycling, hiking, horseback riding). Specialized catering and tourism; Increase in the number of events; Standardization and Quality Improvement of facilities; Improvement of promotion and marketing activities;
Threats
- Devastation of natural resources by increasing traffic of tourists; Not understanding the importance of joint bids; Poor Coordination with neighbouring regions and countries; Unfavourable economic situation; Small market; Neglecting of sports and recreational tourism by decision makers.

Special importance would be the connection between cyclists from the “*Szekelys route*” with cyclists from the “*Danube cycle route*”. It would consequently result in the Serbian-Hungarian-Romanian cycling transversal, which would generate many other tourist products (Barnett, 2004; Cutumisu & Cottrels, 2004).

CONCLUSION

Benefits that cycling offers compared to other means of transportation are reflected primarily in direct contact with the space through which it passes. This means that cycling has more advantages in its attempt to return a man to nature. Recreational cycling enables cyclists to stop at any time and enjoy the environment. It should be noted that the “*Szekelys route*” is abundant in beautiful landscape. Cycling has many positive effects on physical and biochemical mechanisms in human body. Experts claim responsibly that physical activity is the best medicine (Hayward, 2001; Hudson, 2003, Buckley, 2006; Vujko, 2008). On the other hand, cyclists are among the highly desirable tourists, because they are using the means of transportation that does not pollute the environment. With regard to the fact that the cycling market in Europe is the market on the rise, it is clear that marking of as many

routes as possible is a must. Cycle tourism is an environmentally sustainable form of tourism with minimal impact on the environment and host communities.

One of the main priorities in future development will be expanding the network of cycling paths EuroVelo and striving to create a network that would offer visits to all the countries of the European Union. Bicycle Trip, where cycling is the main motive and the basic form of transport, participated with 2-4% of total travels in some European countries in 2010 and targets to double or triple it in the upcoming decades (Cope & Doxford, 1998; www.sustrans.co.uk). Hence, cycling tourism and the “*Szekelys route*” is an opportunity for development of cycling tourism in Serbia because it is undisputable that the cyclists look for new and exciting destinations and European bicycle traverses EuroVelo, the new spaces that can be networked. Also, cycle tourism makes good use of existing, often under-utilised resources, e.g. country lanes and by-roads and can provide an alternative use for redundant or derelict resources, e.g. disused railway lines. Cycle tourism can help introduce rural traffic-calming which will further benefit both local people and tourists. Cycle tourism can provide new incentives for people to visit an area and can help to attract new types of visitor (Simonsen & Jorgenson, 1998; Ritchie & Hall, 1999; Hayward, 2001; Hudson, 2003; Weed & Bull, 2004; Torkildsen, 2005; Weed, 2008; Matthew, 2009; Vujko & Plavša, 2010; Vujko, 2011). Cycle tourism also offers opportunities for the development of cycle hire and cycling holiday operations in rural areas (the “*Danube cycle route*” has supported the establishment of a successful cycle tour operation and has generated significant additional trade from tourism along the route), (Vujko & Plavša, 2010; www.gtz.de; www.dunavskastrategija.rs; www.ciklonaut.com). The “*Szekelys route*” was founded in 2003 and since then has been the conveyor of the message of peace, tolerance and international cooperation. Natural predisposition, cultural and historical heritage, material base and a position that allows cross-border cooperation are the factors which could affect the marking of the “*Szekelys route*” in the future. That would certainly mean the specific steps in the construction and reconstruction of essential infrastructure network and signage as important preconditions for linking these areas. According to the fact, that every marked destination on the route is also the place for cyclists to stay overnight, it is necessary to emphasise that within the route there are planned sightseeing of destinations. This contributes to better understanding of local ways of life and cultural heritage of the people, and stimulates the motivation of returning to the destination (Macura, 2006). Moreover, visits to places of interest, museums and other cultural objects are pre-organized within the marking of “*Szekelys route*” they should be found in the maps and brochures as places to be visited. In the future, the “*Szekelys route*” would bring several benefits and changes in the region. First of all, it would mean the development of not only cycling but also other forms of sports and recreational activities (Surd & Moldovan, 2005; Turnock, 2006; Plavša, 2007).

Serbia has a strategic decision to become a candidate country for accession to European Union in the near future. The status of candidate country would open possibility to a range of specific funds, constituted just to support urban development, in order to improve and coordinate existing and potential spatial structure with the European ones. Regarding the time spent and missed opportunities over the past ten years, it is necessary to think about strategic projects and apply for support from these funds. The fundamental objectives of the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) in respect of which have been formulated by appropriate policy development must meet several requirements. The first requirement refers to the overcoming of geographical differences in terms of prosperity and welfare, the other to optimize the business climate, while the third focuses on defining the spatial framework in which to reflect the spatial consequences of European sector policies to fulfil these three functions are defined in three main policy domains. These are: a polycentric spatial development and new relationships between urban and rural areas, equity in access to infrastructure and knowledge and careful management of natural

and cultural heritage (Bjeljac & Ćurčić, 2006; Turnock, 2006). Finally, the opportunities for development of the “Szekelys route” are tangible and clearly defined and the potentials for its formalization are realistic and feasible. The first steps of implementation have been taken, but it depends on us to recognise and utilise all the possibilities offered.

REFERENCES

- Barnett, P., (2004), *Networking and Partnerships in Destination Development and Management*, Collection of papers, ATLAS, Vol.1, Naples, Italy., Pp 11-21.
- Bjeljac, Ž., Ćurčić, N., (2006), *Tourism in the Serbian, Romanian and Hungarian Borderline Area as Part of Cross-border Cooperation*, Scientific and technical journal in tourism Geographica Pannonica, Vol. 10, pp 73-77, Faculty of Science, Novi Sad.
- Buckley, R., (2006), *Adventure Tourism*, CABI Publishing, Wallingford.
- Baron, P., (2002), *Romania*, Casa Estorila, Bucuresti.
- Cianga, N., Surd, V., (2003), *The Features of Tourist Planning in the Romanian Carpathians*, Scientific and technical journal in tourism Tourism, Vol. 7, pp 22-25, Faculty of Science, Novi Sad.
- Cianga, N., Surd, V., (2005), *The Tourism Arrangement of the Romanian Carpathian Mountainous Space*, Scientific and technical journal in tourism Tourism, Vol. 9, pp 49-51, Faculty of Science, Novi Sad.
- Cope, A., M., Doxford, D., (1998), *Visitor Monitoring of the C2C Cycle Route 1997*, University of Sunderland School of Environment.
- Cutumisu, N., Cottrell, S., (2004), *Images of a sustainable tourism development strategy in WWF Pan Parks: A Comparison between Swedish and Latin National Park*, Collection of Papers, ATLAS, Vol. 1, Iss. 1, Naples, Italy, pp 189-203.
- Davidović, R., (1999), *Regional geography*, Faculty of Science, Novi Sad.
- Jovičić, D., (2009), *Touristic geography of Serbia*, Faculty of Science, Belgrade.
- Koorey, G., (2001), *National Cycle Touring Routes*, www.ccc.govt.nz/recreation/cycling/conference
- Matthew, L., (2009), *Reinventing the Wheel: A Definitional Discussion of Bicycle Tourism*, Journal of Sport & Tourism, Vol. 14, No. 1, pp. 5–23, Routledge, London.
- Macura, M., (2006), *Dracula tour as one of the major destinations in Romania*, diploma thesis, Faculty of Science, Institute of Geography, Tourism and Hotel Management, Novi Sad.
- Matei, E., Vert, C., (2007), *The human resources and its quality from the respective of touristic activity in the 5 west region*, Scientific and technical journal in tourism Tourism, Vol. 11, pp 202-204, Faculty of Science, Novi Sad.
- Moldavai, O., (2006), *Hungary*, Symbol, Novi Sad.
- Plavša, J., (2007), *The sports and recreation*, Faculty of Science, Novi Sad.
- Ritchie, B., W., Hall, C., M., (1999), *Bicycle tourism and regional development: A New Zealand case study. Anatolia*, An international journal of tourism and hospitality research, 10(2), 89–112.
- Simonsen, P., Jorgenson, B., (1998), *Cycle tourism: an economic and environmental sustainable form of tourism?* Unit of Tourism Research, Research Centre of Bornholm, <http://www.crt.dk/Pdf/Rep/0058.pdf>
- Surd, V., Moldovan, C., (2005), *Turistical Potentials of Iara Hasdate Depression, Cluj Country, Romania*, Scientific and technical journal in tourism Tourism, Vol. 9, pp 28-29, Faculty of Science, Novi Sad;
- Turnock, D., (2006), *Alternative Tourisms in Romania: The Role of Culture and Ecology*, Scientific and technical journal in tourism Geographica Pannonica, Vol. 10, pp 56-72, Faculty of Science, Novi Sad;
- Torkildsen, G., (2005), *Leisure and recreation management*, (5th edn). Abingdon: Routledge.
- Vujko, A., Plavša, J., (2010), *Networking of Fruška Gora lakes tourist offer through system of cyclepaths – case study Sot*, Bruje and Moharač, Scientific and technical journal in tourism Tourism, Vol. 15 Issue 1 (2011), p. 1-10, Faculty of Science, Novi Sad.
- Weed, M., (2008), *Sport tourism experience*, Journal of Sport and tourism, Vol. 13, p. 1-4, Routledge, London.
- Weed, M., Bull, C., (2004), *Sports tourism: participants, policy and providers*, Oxford: Elsevier Butterworth-Heinemann.
- <http://www.europa.rs>.
- <http://www.sustrans.org.uk>.
- <http://www.wikipedia.org>.
- <http://www.romanianmonasteries.org>.
- <http://www.gtz.de>.
- <http://www.dunavskastrategija.rs>.
- <http://www.ciklonaut.com>.

Submitted:
27.11.2012

Revised:
27.05.2013

Accepted and published online
03.06.2013