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ЮГОЗАПАДЕН УНИВЕРСИТЕТ „НЕОФИТ РИЛСКИ”, БЛАГОЕВГРАД

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**НЯКОИ ОСОБЕНОСТИ И ПРОБЛЕМИ В РАЗВИТИЕТО НА СЕЛСКИЯТ ТУРИЗЪМ В
РЕПУБЛИКА ГЪРЦИЯ**

**SOME FEATURES AND PROBLEMS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL TOURISM IN
GREECE**

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Abstract: In pursuing specific options for resolving problems and unthreading conflicts, which accompany the development of modern tourism it is necessary to elaborate, perceive and implement in the touristic practice two modern concepts: for development of sustainable tourism and those for alternative tourism. The concept for the development of the alternative forms of tourism, complements the concept for the development of the sustainable tourism.

In this article it shows an historical overview of the beginning and development of rural tourism, both in global and regional scale. Evolution of the definition of this concept is traced as well as the modern understanding of the nature of rural tourism, showing some of major problems in its development.

A significant part of the article discusses the problems of the development and special features of rural tourism in Greece. Also, there were considered the local specific features of this form of alternative tourism. There have been some recommendations, particularly on cross-border cooperation in this field. Rural tourism is viewed as a meant for mobilizing the economy of small villages and municipalities, overcoming the problems of employment of local population, etc.

Keywords: sustainable tourism, alternative forms of tourism, rural tourism, agrotourism, farm tourism

The demand for special opportunities for problem-solving and conflict resolution, which accompany the development of modern tourism leads to the need for work up, perceive and implement of two modern concepts in the touristic practice: for development of sustainable tourism and of alternative forms of tourism. The concept for development of the above not only complements the sustainable tourism, but it also reveals some of the approaches for achieving the desired results (Rakadjiiska, 2007)¹. According to

the same author, quoting Wackermann (1988), the alternative tourism is theoretically defined as "overturning of the dominant models in the development of tourism in three major levels, social, cultural and tourism ethics, economic realism and protection of the environment: there can not be alternative tourism without alternative forms of hospitality, service and staff qualification". Thus, alternative tourism is seen as a dynamic system that is not explained by its component parts, but by the presence of strong, obliging, in the same time working links between those parts, which take off the disadvantages of mass tourism, including the concentration of tourist flows, improvisation processes of

¹ Rakadjiiska Sv.2007. Concepts for development of sustainable and alternative tourism. In „Introduction to Tourism”, Publication “Science and Economics”, University of Economics –Varna, Varna, p. 129-131.

tourism, mass "takeover" of large areas, spread of advertising and product stereotypes. Existing homogeneous and diverse forms of tourism products and the phenomenon of gigantism on their base can not satisfy the requirements of the tourist, whose choice of travel is based on the specific motivation. From alternative tourism products there are expecting original combinations of elements of natural and anthropogenic environment, which are able to ensure security, peace, obliging comfort and specific effects, including regulation of the tourist visits to a particular region. So, the alternative forms of tourism are in opposition to mass tourism. Very often these types of tourism are named with adjectives like **"delicate"**, **"soft"**, **"friendly"**, **"local"** as opposed to the definition **"hard"** for mass tourism (Rakadjiiska, 2007).

One of the most common forms of alternative tourism is rural tourism.

Rural tourism occurs as a result of agricultural activities promoting with tourism purpose and the integration of tourism products in rural environment. It is characterized by presence (active and passive) in the rural environment, contact with the hosts, access to farm, or stay in a farm. Suggests an active participation in everyday life of the household, including customs and festivals in the region, training in local crafts, folklore, traditions, etc. (Mileva, 2004)¹. **The specificity of rural tourism is determined by the place of delivering and the type of tourist product. In most cases the product of rural tourism is completed, or is part of a package with other specialized types of tourism - cultural, ecological, etc.** These features make the product of the rural tourism particularly attractive for tourists wishing to combine leisure in the countryside and nature with some activities in agricultural production. When defining the product of rural tourism the contrast is on urban tourism and urban lifestyle. Chief

user is an urban type of person (Mileva, 2004).

France has been for a long time leader in supply and demand of rural tourism, where even in 1951 had established the organization of housing in the villages during the holidays. Several years later the National Federation for the development of rural tourism was formed. Gradually, similar organizations were registered in other western European countries. A very important point in the association of efforts for development of rural tourism was the creation in 1990 of Pan-European Federation for the development of rural tourism, with a membership of nine countries - Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, Spain, Italy, Luxembourg, Portugal and Hungary. In 1992 the Union for green rural provincial tourism in Central and Eastern Europe was created in Hungary.

Today, in the countries of Western and Central Europe rural environment plays an important role in the use of leisure and tourism. About one fifth of the all tourism trips in the European Union took place in agricultural areas. In the Netherlands it is 39%, Denmark - 35% Germany - 34%, Britain, France and Portugal - 29%, Spain and Ireland - 27%. Within the boundaries of united Europe 25% of all forms of holidays are associated with the practice of rural tourism, in France, Portugal and Britain this percentage is 30%.

Following the development of tourism over the past two - three decades, it is more than obvious that with their needs and behavior the modern tourists go beyond the traditional overcrowded sea and mountain holiday. Gradually making way for something new and different, allowing for real mental and physical relaxation. The need for direct contact with nature arises, in the absence of large and disturbing groups of tourists. Love is waking up to the peaceful and natural life in a rural environment, the ancient tradition of spending the holidays in the countryside continues in a tourism form. Thus, on the

¹ Mileva S.2004. Recreation through specialized tourism. Publication Avangard Prima, Sofia, p.64.

basis of this motivation, the rural tourism arises and develops (Marinov, 2002)¹. According to the same author, except the presence of tourist demand, an important role to its development plays the offer of opportunities to its practice. **The supply of rural tourism is formed and implemented different in each country, depending on the ownership of lands and forests, the organization of agriculture and forestry, tradition, and relations in the society of the village, the relationship between town and village, etc. The growing crisis in agricultural production has led to intense efforts of rural households and municipalities to diversify their work by offering rural tourism, which catalyze its development (Marinov, 2002).**

We must emphasize that because of the complex phenomenon of appearance motivation and its specific development in different countries it does not exist unambiguous definitions and terminology for this type of tourism. Very often, rural tourism is defined as **"provincial", "local", "agro", "recreative", "alternative"** or any other form of tourism different than mass tourism. In some cases it is confined to **"agrotourism"**, while in others it extends to **"green", "relaxing", "local", "open"**, etc. It is believed that a serious advantage of rural tourism is that it differs from the **"industrial" (mass) tourism** and is far from the overcrowded resorts.

At the same time in a number of publications it is argued that concepts such as **"provincial", "rural"** and **"agrotourism"** are conceptually similar and that it is generally provincial tourism, which includes the following two.

Agrotourism is often used as synonymous with rural tourism, but it has a narrow concept. It refers to a variety of activities that are directly associated with agricultural work – production of fruits, vegetables, livestock, etc., as well as with the

buildings required for the activity. Therefore it is practiced by farmers, for whom tourism is the second source of income after the main agricultural activity they perform (Popova, 1997)². Unlike agrotourism, the rural tourism has a complex character as it includes not only agricultural activities, but also sport, cognitive, health, environmental and recreational activities.

In recent years, especially in the British-American literature, there is a collective entry for the term **"farm tourism"**. This term emphasizes on one hand, the use of farm houses as a means of accommodation for tourists and the transformation of many of them into health clubs, on the other - the loss of direct connection of the owners with the agricultural activity. **Tourism for them became the main source of income. They specialize in providing accommodation and food to the tourists.** The popularity of this type of rural tourism in many European countries has led to emerging into a large network of specialized tourist accommodation provided by the typical rural houses. **Despite the loss of direct connection with the agricultural sector, it plays an important role in the local economy and is considered as one of the most important forms of rural tourism (Popova, 1997)³.**

Other authors make efforts to attempt the kinds of tourism based on the components of the tourism product. They stage rural tourism as a tourism whose product is based on the rural culture. Depending on the basic activity terms such as **"agro", "green", "gastronomic", "hunting", "water-tourism", "horse-tourism", "historic", "cultural"** etc are used. Tourism activities related to major hotels, ski resorts, golf courses, etc are difficult to be integrated into the concept of rural tourism.

¹ Marinov St 2002. Rural tourism and destination Bulgaria. In „Specialized tourist products in Bulgaria“. Publication Slavena, Varna, p.95.

² Popova N.1997. Nature and characteristics of the organization of rural tourism. Yearbook of Sofia University „St.Kliment Ohridski“, Sofia p.361.

³ Popova N. 1997. p.361

Georgiev (1982)¹ nominates rural tourism as **"tourism in the village"** and defines it as **"tourism travel of urban residents, where the basic motive is to stay in the village very close to nature in order to avoid urban noise and polluted urban environment"**. Tourists are accommodated in the houses of local residents or in tents or caravans. Often they participate in agricultural work.

Gilbert (Gilbert, 1989)² attends rural tourism as a planned use of resources of the rural environment, leading to increased prosperity of the common environment of local residents and visitors-tourists.

European Community (1987) formulated the following definition of rural tourism: **"Rural tourism is a complex, broad-based activity. It is much more than agrotourism, although it comprises elements of agricultural activities. It is also related with different holiday activities depending on the people's interests and ecotourism, walking tours, climbing and biking, adventure, sport and health tourism, hunting and fishing, educational tours, heritage tourism, and in some cases, ethnic tourism"**.

According to **Medlik (Medlik, 1996)³**, quoted by **Marinov (2002)**, **"alternative tourism"**, **"responsible tourism"**, **"appropriate tourism"**, **"soft tourism"**, **"ecotourism"**, **"green tourism"** are synonyms. Concepts have a broader sense and refer to such forms of tourism that generate positive social, cultural and environmental impact on the tourist spot, and therefore they are perceived as an alternative to mass tourism. The author looks at rural tourism as a form of alternative tourism. He determines that holiday tourism focuses on environments out of the city. Emphasis is placed on the fact that although, rural

tourism is often identified with the farm tourism or agrotourism it is a broader concept, as it covers a number of other activities related to natural pathways (ecopaths), picnics, agricultural and folk museums is tangential along with agricultural production.

Marinov (2002)⁴ summing up the interpretation of the term rural tourism believes that first it must be stressed its bilateral nature. On the one hand, this type of tourism involves the stay of tourists in rural environment and their passively or actively interact with it through the exercise of various activities and consumption of various goods and services. On the other hand it is a combination of physical facilities, activities, processes and products, ensured by farmers and rural residents in order to attract and retain tourists in their area and to generate additional income for their business. Later, the author stresses that the essence of rural tourism is reflected in its specifics, and they are: complex motivational basis, short-distance trips, the dominance of the private car, shorts of extensive construction of infrastructure facilities and residence accommodation. These are relatively less dominant seasonally; concentration of demand and consumption in the week, especially in holiday tourism, lack of high concentrations of the same place, same time; tolerance to local culture and traditions; hosts are small farmers, lack of isolation between host and guests, which implies a high degree of personalised service, rural tourism, as opposed to mass holiday tourism is predominantly individual, uncoordinated, or partially organized.

A similar definition of rural tourism is given by **Alexieva and Stamov (2005)⁵**,

¹ **Georgiev A.1982.** Short glossary of economics and organization of tourism.VINS, Varna.

² **Gilbert D. 1989.**Rural tourism and Marketing(Tourism management).Vol.3

³ **Medlik S. 1996.** Dictionary of travel, tourism and hospitality, Sec.ed.Oxford ect

⁴ **Marinov St.2002.** Rural tourism and destination Bulgaria. In „Specialized tourist products in Bulgaria".Publication "Slavena", Varna, p.96-97.

⁵ **Aleksieva I., St.Stamov.2005.** Specialized types of tourism.Rural tourism.Part two.Publication "Kota", St.Zagora, p.10.

defined as tourism in rural regions, which satisfy the interests of tourists to the traditions, customs, culture, agricultural and other specific activities as well as natural, historical and cultural realities of the region, to relaxation and informal human relationships. Rural tourism is one of the chances for a person to be released from the problems of the big city and to join the nature and live in a smaller home and closer to the land to revert to their generic roots by participating in various events organized by hosts. The above authors consider that a feature of the tourism idea in rural tourism is the personal contact with visitors, creating the opportunity to feel the environment and spirituality and to participate in activities, traditions and lifestyles of local people. There is also a strong cultural and educational element in this form of tourism. Rural tourism is special to the local region, for which people locally are caring and are creating the holiday environments. This is a kind of tourism, where there is contact and sharing of expertise and experience. Result of local ownership and management, rural tourism is based on the local landscape and culture (Aleksieva, Stamov, 2005).

By this rural tourism should be seen as a means of preserving the land and the way of life. The development of this type of tourism can help to revitalize the low-developed regions by creating new places for employment and opening new opportunities for additional incomings. It is an incentive for building and improving the infrastructure. This has a multiplying effect on investment. This may be increased by improving the quality of service, by offering new products and services to meet the growing demand. At the same time we must point out that it is not always the answer to solve all economic and social problems in rural areas. Tourism must be balanced with development of other spheres of economic life, like a part of the model for integrated development, like the subject of service and like

providing of the service. It is necessary to underline that in the countries of the Western European area, rural tourism is possible and is offered by a large number of enterprises (companies), each specific to itself, but being in one of the following categories: hotel enterprises, accommodation in rooms of a farmhouse, renting separate apartments, camping, food supply, participation in agricultural activities. Characteristic of rural tourism is that in many cases it may be supplemented by some other types of specialized tourism, where more or less it expanded its tourism product with their components. This applies especially for hunting and cultural tourism, ecotourism, wine tourism, etc. Along with the positive moments in the development of this type of tourism there is a danger in its excessive development to the emergence of some negative effects. The great accumulation of tourists leads to depersonalization of the characteristics of the agricultural region. A strong commercialization may lead to deterioration of services, to their alignment and reducing the quality. Moreover, in rural tourism there are often contradictions between the need to preserve the originality and authenticity of the place visited and the search for comfort of the tourists.

At the same time when strategies for developing of this type of tourism are confected, there must be a profile of users of rural tourism. The researches which were made show that in such cases it is necessary to make a socio-demographic and psihografic characterization.

Depending on the motives of tourists, rural tourism can be: recreational, sport, cultural-cognitive, health and event (Marinov, 2002; Mileva, 2004)¹².

In practice, different types of rural tourism are not resist, and most often

¹ Marinov St. 2002. Rural tourism and destination Bulgaria. In „Specialized tourist products in Bulgaria“.Publication “Slavena”, Varna, p.101-107

² Mileva S. 2004. Recreation through specialized tourism.Publication Avangard Prima, Sofia, p.64-65.

complete each other and blend into one another within a particular tourist trip.

Rural tourism can be implemented in various forms. According to the above author the predominant ones are:

- **According to the states territorial framework** - domestical and international;
- **by type of transport** - road, rail, water and air;
- **the place of residence** - in a farm, in a "green holiday station", in a holiday natural park, surrounding rural tourism;
- **by means of residence** - tourism in provincial, aristocratic dwellings, tourism in hotels, tourism in rural houses, tourism in other types of accommodation, tourism in their own cottages;
- **by type of food** - tourism in sites with self-service facilities, at sites with tourism services;
- **according to length of stay** - take-off, short and long-lasting rural tourism;

- **by type of organization** - an non organized and organized rural tourism

- **by the number and types of participants** - individual, group and youth rural tourism;

The development of rural tourism in a certain country is impossible without the appropriate organization (aims, strategies, programs, entities, structures, functions) at national, regional, local and corporate level. This applies to both government and non-government sector.

Greece is Bulgaria's neighboring country. Starting from environmental, geographical, economic and social peculiarities of the country is more than evident that there are favorable conditions for development of alternative types of tourism, including rural tourism (Table 1).

TABLE 1: Stays of natives and foreigners in all types tourism accommodation (2008)¹

TYPE AND CATEGORY			2008			
			NATIVES	FOREIGNERS	TOTAL	%
OF ACCOMMODATION			HOTELS			
5*****			2 042 091	7 766 348	9 808 439	14,95%
4****			3 601 549	18 278 097	21 879 646	33,34%
3***			4 507 033	9 148 302	13 655 335	20,81%
2**			4 513 222	4 952 320	9 465 542	14,42%
1*			694 322	658 310	1 352 632	2,06%
TOTAL			15 358 217	40 803 377	56 161 594	85,58%
			OTHER TYPES OF ACCOMMODATION			
APARTMENTS			1 085 825	6 172 056	7 257 881	11,06%
CAMPING			810 503	740 333	1 550 836	2,36%
TRADITIONAL HOUSES			396 069	258 183	654 252	1%
TOTAL			17 650 614	47 973 949	65 624 563	100%

¹ Statistical Data: General Secretariat of the National Statistical Service of Greece

According to the definition of the Greek National Tourism Organization (1983) and expressed by the Economic and Social Council of Greece opinion, rural tourism is defined as: **"Tourist activity that takes place in non-urban areas of the workforce, mainly in primary and secondary sector, especially in family or small cooperative tourist sites providing goods and services to improve farm income and the local economy from tourist accommodation (rooms, hostels, camping), and provision of tourist facilities with products locally manufactured from agricultural companies (Venetsanopulu, 2002)¹**. This definition is taken later and in the Bill **"Upgrading the quality, safety and expansion of the Greek tourist product"**.

All the concept for the development of rural tourism in Greece is based on interpersonal, human and immediate link between rural residents and tourists, as they help their guests to get acquainted with nature, with the way of cultivation of the land, with the main occupations in agriculture, animal husbandry, harvesting fruits and vegetables, protecting the environment, traditional cuisine, cultural elements and their daily lives.

Rural tourism in Greece is developing in rural areas including villages and small urban settlements developing mainly in agriculture, forestry, fisheries, etc. Very often the tourist activities are accompanied by other forms of alternative tourism (ecological, religious, etc).

As the first major initiative in the field of rural tourism in Greece could be considered the program of the Hellenic National Tourism Organization (GNOT) for conservation and utilization of resources in traditional villages (1975). In its initial version that encompass six villages: **Vatia** (Mani area, Peloponnese periphery); **Vizitsa** (Pilion area, Thessaly

periphery) **Mesta** - **Chios island** (North Aegean periphery), **Oia** - **Santorini Island** (South Aegean periphery); **Papigo** (Epir periphery) and **Fiskardo** - **Kefalonia Island** (Ionian Islands periphery). Later the program was expanded on: **Arnea** (Halkidiki area, Central Macedonia periphery); **Monemvasiya** (Peloponnese periphery) **Psara Island** (North Aegean periphery) **Kitnos Island** (South Aegean periphery).

The first serious steps in the development of rural tourism in Greece were taken in 1983 awarded by the Ministry of Agriculture subsidies for the construction of rural tourism sites.

This support has continued with **Regulation 797/85** of the European Union, as is further reinforced by the **second Delors package²** and particularly with **Regulation 2328/91³**.

² After the signing of the Maastricht Treaty in February (1992)*, the Commission of the European Community presented in the same month the Delors packages, which provide one medium planning within the newly established European Union. Actualizing the decisions of Maastricht must be guaranteed with increased budgetary provision. First, it was necessary to consider the objectives in terms of competitiveness, economic and social cohesion of Member States (cohesion) and the expansion of the international responsibility of the EU. In December 1992 the package was adopted by the European Council in Edinburgh. Among other things it contains a phased increase in the EU's own resources from 1.2 to 1.27 percent of gross product in 1999 and the foundation of a united cohesion fund.

*The Maastricht Treaty (formally the Treaty of the European Union) was signed on 07.02.1992 in the town of Maastricht between the 12 between member countries in the European Economic Community, after lengthy negotiations for the establishment of political, economic and monetary union. It entered into force on 01.11.1993 and lead to the creation of the European Union (EU). It is modified by the entering into Amsterdam Treaty on 01.05.1999. The contract regulates the activity of the European Institutions (European Parliament, Council of the European Union, European Commission, Court of Justice, Court of Auditors of the European Union, etc.) and defines the minimum competencies of the Union in the field of culture, health, consumers etc. It decided the creation of a common European Union with a common currency.

³ Regulation 2328/91 means Regulation 2328/91 (ECO) for improving of the efficiency of agricultural structures, as amended by Regulation (ECO) 870/93.

¹ Venetsanopoulou M. 2002. Regional policy and tourism. Publication Panteion University press, Athens, p.18.

With the support of the regional operative programs of the second Delors package there are met 286 investment programs for rural tourism with a value of 13.2 million euros.

In 1994 the Greek National Tourism Organization adopted a plan for the future development of rural tourism. The basic idea embedded in its development strategy is that it must be developed as an integrated regional product, which will ensure not only the accommodation, but also the communication between tourists and locals, taking part in their everyday lives, acquaintance with the kitchen, wine, traditional products, habits, history and environment in the region. It is stressed the need for quality standards and specifications for all these elements, which have to represent the rural tourism product.

It is worth to mention the initiatives of the General Secretariat for Equality, launched to promote rural tourism too. In 1983 the first female rural tourist associations were instructed with significant and multilateral action (village Petra - Lesbos island and Mastihohoriya - island of Chios, North Aegean periphery, Arahova - periphery of Central Greece, Agios Germanos - Prespes- periphery of Western Macedonia). Particularly instructive is the case of Petra village located 55 km north of the capital of the island of Lesbos - Mytilini. Here in 1983 by the initiative of the Council for Gender Equality in collaboration with the prefecture of Lesbos and the Greek National Tourism Organization is founded the first women's association. The Association offers accommodation in the homes of its members, has a restaurant in the center of the village, where every visitor can experience the authentic cuisine of the island, with its traditional recipes prepared by local women, and the fresh produce as well. They also organize trips around the island, visits to monasteries, Greek language lessons and traditional dance, ceramics, hand crafts, evening fishing, collection of vegetables and olives from the garden, reviving traditions and competitions

for the best pictures of the village. **Thus be achieved:**

- **Social empowerment of disadvantaged women in rural areas;**
- **Public recognition for strengthening the sense of creativity through teamwork;**
- **Economic independence for women through the improvement of family income;**
- **Exchange of experience and contacts with people from different countries;**
- **Creation of new opportunities within the villages;**
- **Conducting programs close to the environment, by which are demonstrated the possibilities for development of alternative types of tourism in Greece.**
- **Creating opportunities for the tourists to get acquainted also with the historical past of Greece, as well as with the modern face of the local population.**

By offering this form of alternative tourism, the first female tourist association in Greece, achieved to advertise the country abroad. Moreover, conditions for revitalizing the economy of the region. This revitalization created the conditions for a movement in many other sectors of the economy.

“Leader”¹ Initiative gave new meaning to the development of rural tourism in Greece, which was accompanied by constant investments. Based on these programs they set up local action groups that committed themselves to implement at local level. Rural tourism has been one of the main priorities of these programs. Unlike other donating programs positive in this case was the large extensive opportunity for funding. Only for the period

¹ Different “Leader” programs promote rural development. They start functioning from 1991 and the aim is to encourage people to form local, regional, national and international networks so that they can benefit from each others experiences. Later, the initiative moved into a new area, as the financing is done by the new European Fund for rural development.

1991 – 2001 for rural tourism in Greece had been invested 167, 8 million euros incurred in the upgrading of the accommodation and other tourist activities. Of these, 53.8 million euros was given in the period 1991-1995 for 757 projects of rural tourism and the remaining 114,0 million was disbursed in the range of 1996-2001 for 1150 drafts. In the period 2000-2006 the Ministry of Agriculture focused the investments on 125 mountainous regions with a total funding of 1.4 billion euros.

The European Union policy through **the European Fund for Rural Development for the period 2007-2013** aims to promote rural tourism. The main task which is set is to be achieve parallel development of activities focused mainly on economic and social regeneration of rural areas with the promotion of alternative forms of tourism on local agricultural production, trade of traditional products and conservation of natural and cultural heritage.

As a result of the efforts made in the recent years in Greece the number of travel agencies dealing with rural tourism and offer holidays in rural, not well known areas far from popular, noisy and crowded Greek resorts, increased significantly.

Greek tour operators have begun to launch on the market a new type of accommodation, so-called "**ksenonas**" (from the Greek "**guest room**"). This type of tourism product offers a complete set of additional services, mostly related to opportunities for active spending of time, while making a serious effort to distinguish

this type of service "rooms to let". Another feature of the Greek rural tourism is the offer of "agroktime" (farm), indicating and the activities and results expected from the visit to one such farm.

To overcome the existing disparities in this area, travel agencies engaged with marketing of the product of rural tourism demanded to be created an appropriate legal framework for tourism in the countryside, the purpose of which will promote initiatives in this type of tourism that will prepare the use of subsidies under the Fourth Framework Program of the European Union. This created a special working group comprising representatives of tourism businesses operators in the field of rural tourism, farmers, and trade associations, the Greek National Tourism Organization and the Ministry of Tourism, with the task to renew the bill. The guidelines included a determination of the criteria for "guest rooms" and "farms", also the procedure by which the projects and the possible tax incentives will be financed.

At the same time the development of rural tourism in Greece is characterized by some local typical for the region features. In administrative terms the country is divided to 13 peripheries (Map 1: Peripheries of Greece) and an autonomous one (Agio Oros - Mount Athos). Peripheries include 51 prefectures. Lowest administrative units are municipalities. They are of two types: Demi - 130 in number and kinotites - 901 in number.

Map 1: Peripheries of Greece / Data: Wikipedia/



Eastern Macedonia and Thrace (14 157 square kilometers) is the administrative periphery in the northeastern part of Greece. Administrative includes the Macedonian prefectures of Drama and Kavala, and the Thracian Xanthi, Rodopi and Evros. Center of the periphery is Komotini (Gioumourdjina 43 326 inhabitants). This administrative unit almost coincides with the historic and geographical Aegean region, which covers the western part of Thrace and Macedonia, between the rivers Struma and Mesta. Its Population is 623 428 people, a not inconsiderable part of which belongs to the Muslim minority. The periphery offers limited opportunities for rural tourism. The accommodation has been built entirely with traditional natural materials, local stone and wood, furniture is carefully designed, the rooms are comfortable with a common room – living room, a perfect place to create interaction with local residents and other guests. Proposed meal allows tourists to get acquainted with the features of the local

cuisine. Developed tourist packages allow guests to get acquainted with local traditions and folklore, to take part in traditional festivals and horse racing, there are organized walks with mountain bikes or mountain hiking. The possibility of direct participation in agricultural activities are limited because the main occupation, especially in the northern part of Thrace is the production and processing of silk as a result of the development of silkworm. Some specialist stores are working on various projects too. In the periphery there are also a lot of cultural and historical landmarks. There are also organized and several educational programs.

Central Macedonia (18 811 square km) includes seven prefectures: Imanthia, Thessaloniki, Kilkis, Pella, Pieria, Chalkidiki, Serres. Its opulation is 1 931 870 inhabitants. Its administrative centre is Thessaloniki (800 764 inhabitants).

Most rural tourist sites in the periphery offer tourist services at very high level. Some of them have added halls suitable for

conferences and business meetings. In most of the cases the food is served from organic farming. The main activities for tourists are hiking, horse riding, visiting archaeological and historical sites, monasteries, caves, participation in agricultural activities.

Western Macedonia (9 451 sq km) consists of four prefectures: Kozani, Kastoria Florina (Lerin), and Grevena. Kozani is the main town (49 812 inhabitants). A significant part of the periphery (82%) is occupied by hilly and mountainous ranges, and has a population of 303 405 inhabitants. It is believed that in this periphery in the small island Agios Ahilos (Saint Achilles) in Mala Prespa Lake in the tomb church the Bulgarian King Samuil is buried. In these places the rural tourism is diversifying with elements of ecological, cultural, historical tourism, the practice of extreme sports, etc. The accommodation is very good, and the restaurants in rural tourism sites satisfy the tastes of the most demanding customers, because the traditional Greek dishes are cooked on the basis of quality natural ingredients.

Thessaly periphery (14 037 sq. km) separated from the historic Macedonia through the valley of Tempi and mountain range Olympus - Hasi - Kambunitsa. In west Pindus separates it from Epirus, to the southwest is Evrytania and to south - Central Greece. Epirus is the most western zone of the Aegean Sea. Both lowlands around Larissa and Trikala form the fruitful field of Thessaly - the largest plane in Greece, surrounded by a ring of mountains. Thessaly is known as the granary of Greece. Includes four prefectures: Larissa, Trikala, Karditsa and Magnesia. Chief town of the periphery is Larissa (124 394 inhabitants) and the population is 760 714 inhabitants.

The periphery provides an excellent opportunity for rural tourism, including participation in agricultural activities. In these places there are numerous cultural, historical and natural attractions.

Epirus is one of the largest administrative peripheries in Greece, covering 9 200 square kilometers, with a population of around 350 000. Its capital is the city Ioannina 157 000 inhabitants). It includes four prefectures: Arta, Preveza, Ioannina and Tesprotiya. The terrain is mostly mountainous. This is the biggest mountain range in Greece with an altitude above 2 600 m. The sites of rural tourism are clearly near to the general architectural plan of the periphery. This part of the country is characterized by well-preserved nature, rich cultural heritage and folklore. All this makes it one of the attractive centers for this type of alternative tourism.

Attica (in Greek Attica - the coastal part) covers 3 808 square km and has a population of 3 841 408 inhabitants with a density of 1 009 persons per sq km. It includes four prefectures: Attica, eastern Attica, Piraeus and western Attica. Administrative center of the periphery is the capital city Athens (3 745 514 inhabitants). Rural tourism sites are mainly located on the outskirts of the capital and at the nearby islands. Here, along with traditional rural tourism many other activities are offered, including visits to dozens of cultural and historical sites, to the Delta of Falir, one of the tourist attractions in this part of Greece - Peania with the famous wine and beautiful cave, Mount Parnitha, Shunio with the ancient monuments, etc.

Periphery Central Greece (Sterea Ellada - Continental Greece) covers 15 549 square kilometers with a population of 614 614 inhabitants. It consists of five prefectures: Boiotia, Evdeya, Evrytania, Phocis and Fthiotida. Administrative centre of the periphery is the city Lamia (58 601 inhabitants). Central Greece is mountainous. Tourism activities associated with rural tourism is mainly geared towards participation in agricultural work, trekking in the mountains with shepherds, horse riding, visits to protected areas, herb gathering, participation in courses for learning the Greek language, the Greek mythology, cuisine etc.

Administrative periphery of Peloponnese (in Greek Peripheria Peloponisu) covers the southern and central peninsula and includes five prefectures: Arcadia, Argolida, Corinthia, Laconia, Messinia. Periphery covers 15 490 square kilometers with a population of 650 310 inhabitants. Its capital is the city of Tripoli (28 976 inhabitants). In this part of Greece offers almost all forms of rural tourism, combined with elements of cultural, historical and ecological tourism. Here are some of the most remarkable historic cities of ancient Greece, including ancient Sparta, Corinth and Argos, many monasteries etc.

Periphery of the Ionian Islands (2 307 square kilometers) comprises a group of Greek islands in the Ionian Sea. It consists of six major and numerous small islands: Corfu (Kerkyra), Lefkada, Cephalonia, Ithaca, Zakynthos, Cythera and others. The population is about 220 000 people. Administrative center of the periphery is Corfu (28 185 inhabitants). Here, alongside traditional products of rural tourism, visitors can try the local eco-agriculture, participate in the collection of the olive harvest, etc.

North Aegean is the administrative region in Greece, covering a group of islands in the northern Aegean Sea with an area of 3 863 sq. km and a population of 208 151 inhabitants. It is divided into three prefectures: Lesbos, Samos and Chios. Capital of the periphery is the city of Mytilene (36 000 inhabitants), located on the island of Lesbos. Typical of these islands is that tourists are accommodated in rooms in houses, which are copies of those of past times and are in direct contact with local populations. The tourism product of rural tourism is diversifying with the involvement of getting know the typical for the periphery hand crafts, cooking courses, participation in agricultural activities etc.

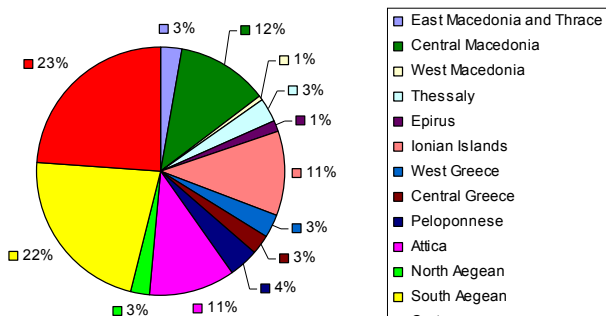
South Aegean is a administrative periphery, which includes a group of islands comprising in the southern part of the country with an area of 5 286 sq.km. and a population of 320 000 inhabitants. It shares on two prefectures: Cyclades and Dodecanese. From the first group of islands are famous, and as a globally recognized tourist destinations (TABLE 2), Santorini (Thira), Mykonos, Amorgos, Andros, Ios, Milos, Naxos, Paros, Syros, Tinos.

TABLE 2: Total stays of tourists in the 13 Greek regions (2008)¹

	TOTAL	%
East Macedonia and Thrace	1 759 226	2,7 %
Central Macedonia	7 891 536	12,0 %
West Macedonia	392 241	0,6 %
Thessaly	1 983 379	3,0 %
Epirus	900 065	1,4 %
Ionian Islands	7 381 425	11,2 %
West Greece	1 860 051	2,8 %
Central Greece	1 643 172	2,5 %
Peloponnese	2 569 268	3,9 %
Attica	7 315 351	11,1 %
North Aegean	1 653 390	2,5 %
South Aegean	14 546 143	22,2 %
Crete	15 729 316	24,0 %
TOTAL	65 624 563	100%

¹ Statistical Data: General Secretariat of the National Statistical Service of Greece

DIAGRAM 1: TOTAL STAYS OF TOURISTS IN THE 13 GREEK REGIONS in % (2008)



Of the Dodecanese (in Greek Dodekanisa - twelve islands), also called Southern Sporades - Rhodes, Patmos, Astipalea, Leros, Kos, and others. Administrative center of the periphery is Ermoupoli (13 400 inhabitants), located on the island of Syros. The region offers almost all forms of rural tourism, combined with elements of ecological, marine, recreational and cultural-historical tourism.

Crete is one of the thirteen administrative peripheries of Greece. It is the biggest Greek island with an area of 8 336 square kilometers and is the fifth largest in the Mediterranean Sea. Its population is 623 655 inhabitants. Its capital is Heraklion city (of gr.Iraklio) with a population of 117 167 inhabitants. It includes four prefectures: Chania, Heraklion, Lasithi, and Rethymno. Other major urban settlements include Perama, Vamos, Agios Nikolaos, Ierapetra. Large numbers of tourists visit destinations such as Knossos, Festos, Gortis, Venetian castle in Rethymno, Samaria Gorge, etc.

Located 110 kilometers from mainland Europe, 175 kilometers from Asia and 300 kilometers from Africa, inhabited since

ancient times and has numerous historical and natural attractions, Crete is one of the most prominent tourist destinations in the European continent. Here was born and developed the first great European civilization – the Minoan. Its monuments can be seen and nowadays in a large number of archaeological sites at Knossos, Festos and Gortis. There are a lot of medieval monuments, from when the island was a part of the Venetian Republic. The island offers many options of rural tourism. Visitors have the opportunity to monitor programs and to engage in activities which will allow them to be acquainted with nature, history, cuisine, folklore and other local features.

Evaluating the development of rural tourism in Greece it is worth emphasizing that initially it was marked by some of its specific features that make it a small or greater than the model in Central and Western Europe, and not to the last place and this in Bulgaria. The first major difference is that in Greece there is observed a sharp distinction between the places of shelter and accommodation and those for agricultural activities. The cases of

adjacent farms with a set of tools to accommodate tourists are very rare. Rural tourism in Greece is related to the stay of the guests in a hotel or individual rooms. Stay of tourists is characterized not so much of direct involvement in agricultural activities, but to the serious contact with the rural environment - meeting friends, reconnecting with tribal roots, contacts with neighbors, participation in the daily lives of local people (church, coffee etc). These are the elements that define the identity of Greek rural tourism.

Later, with the inclusion of the country in a huge number of European programs for promoting rural development, rural tourism in Greece has adopted some elements of this form of alternative tourism characteristic for the rest of the European Union. Today, rural tourism in Greece is one of the alternative types of tourism,

which consists of multi-activities in rural areas, with the purpose the visitors to be aware of them, with the nature of agricultural occupations, local products, traditional cuisine and daily life of residents, in which they can participate, be entertained, to feel the vitality, the joy of acquiring new knowledge, information etc.

At the same time something that makes impression is that almost nothing is being done on cross-border cooperation in particular with the neighboring countries of Greece, especially with Bulgaria as a country member of the European Union. Elaboration of modern tourist products of both sides will help the increase of the economy of the economically backward villages, will resolve in a sense the overcoming of the employment problems of local people, improve infrastructure, etc.

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