



## *The “Balkan Velo Trail – BVT 13”*



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# **RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS OF THE TOURIST POTENTIAL AND THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT OF ALTERNATIVE TOURISM IN THE COMMON CROSS- BORDER REGION OF BULGARIA AND THE FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA**

## **GEOGRAPHICAL COVERAGE:**

**DISTRICT OF BLAGOEVGRAD, DISTRICT OF KYUSTENDIL  
(BULGARIA), EAST PLANNING REGION, SOUTHEAST PLANNING  
REGION (FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA)**

**PROJECT: „THE BALKAN VELO TRAIL – BVT -13”, APRIL 2011**

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# 1. EXISTING TOURIST RESOURCES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF ALTERNATIVE FORMS OF TOURISM IN THE TARGET AREAS

## 1.1 DISTRICT OF BLAGOEVGRAD



Blagoevgrad District is situated in the Southwest part of the Republic of Bulgaria. To the south the district borders with the Republic of Greece; to the west with the Republic of Macedonia; to the east – District of Pazardzhik and District of Smolyan; to the north – District of Kyustendil; Blagoevgrad encompasses the valleys of Struma River and Mesta River as well as the mountain ridges of Rila, Pirin, Rodhopi, Slavyanka, Belasitsa, Ograzdhen, Maleshevska and Vlahina. Blagoevgrad covers an area of 6 449 km<sup>2</sup> which puts after the districts of Bourgas and Sofia. Blagoevgrad District includes a total of 14 municipalities, 96 communities and 280 settlements. The Border Checkpoints of Kulata, Zlatarevo, Stanke Lisichkovo and Pinden are also located on the territory of the district. The total population of Blagoevgrad is 335.000 inhabitants. The administrative center of the district is the city of Blagoevgrad with a population of 80 000 people. The city of Blagoevgrad is located in the valley of the Struma River at an altitude of 360 meters between the mountain ridges of Rila and Vlahina mountains. Blagoevgrad is situated just 31 km of the border with FYROM; 83 km of the border with Greece; 88 km of the border with Serbia. The capital city of Sofia is situated just 96 km of the city of Blagoevgrad. In the vicinity of Blagoevgrad are the international winter resorts of Bansko (57 km.), Borovets (83), as well as the summer resorts of the Aegen Sea (185 km.). The international transport corridor E-79 which is part of the Pan-European transport corridor №4 , as well as the international railroad between Central Europe and Greece are passing through the area of the district. The climate is transitional continental with a strong Mediterranean influence, due to air masses that enter from the south valley of the Struma River.

### **1.1.1 Municipality of Bansko**

Geographic area – 492 km<sup>2</sup>.

Settlements - 8

Population - 13 088 (01.02.2011)

Administrative Center – town of Bansko

The municipality of Bansko /462 sq.km.; 13394 p./ takes the most beautiful part of the Pirin mountain, Razlog valley, Momina Klisura gorge and the Dubrashky region of the Rodope mountain. Bansko borders with the following municipalities of the District of Blagoevgrad: to the north with Razlog and Belitsa; to the east – Velinograd and Garmen; to the south – Gotse Delchev and Sandanski; to the west – Strumyani and Kresna. Near the town of Bansko begin the protected areas of the Pirin National Park.

#### **Natural landmarks:**

#### **Ecosystems**

#### **Pirin National Park**

Bansko is a small municipality which includes large parts of the Pirin National Park within its territory. In addition in the Bansko region there are 2 nature reserves, 1 protected area, 13 historic sites, 11 natural monuments, 3 waterfalls, a century-old tree and many caves. Due to its unique natural compositions in 1983 the Pirin National Park was included in the World Heritage Convention as natural and cultural heritage of UNESCO. Pirin National Park was also included in the United Nations list of national parks and equivalent reserves.

Pirin National Park has a total area of 40,356 ha that encompasses diverse natural, cultural and historical landmarks.

#### **Nature reserves**

- Biosphere Reserve Bayuvi Douпки – Dzhindzhiritsa

The Biosphere Reserve Bayuvi Douпки – Dzhindzhiritsa is one of the oldest biosphere reserves in Bulgaria. It was declared as such in 1934 with the aim to preserve the unique natural forests of white and black fir trees, as well as the wide variety of animal and plants species. In 1977 the reserve was officially recognized as a Biosphere reserve under the Man and the Biosphere Programme of UNESCO. This unique location includes a wide variety of some 500 species of vascular plants and 55 endemic species many of which are included in the Red Book of endangered species of Bulgaria.

- Biosphere Reserve Yulen

The Yulen Biosphere Reserve was created in 1994 and it is currently encompassing an area of 3 156.2 ha. The location of Yulen stretches from 1650 m. to 2851 m. in altitude. Century-old forests of white fir, white pine, spruce and mountain pine cover the areas of the reserves. The wide variety of plant species include 700 types of higher plants 44 of which are included in the Red Book of endangered species of Bulgaria.

#### **Mountain trails**

There are 13 primary and 17 secondary mountain trails and tracks which have been developed within the Pirin National Park for the purpose of promoting the summer tourism.

One of the most interesting eco tracks is called “Damyanishka river” story” The trail is located at the heart of the national park and provides a good opportunity for tourist to discover more of the cultural history and natural highlights of the region. At the alpine part of the park there are a 8 mountain huts and 5 tourist shelters that provide accommodation for tourists during the summer season.

- **Mineral water springs**

The natural mineral water spring located at the small town of Dobrinishte (located 6 km. from Bansko) are considered as one of the most precious natural resources of the region. Dobrinishte has developed as an attractive SPA resort due to its 16 natural mineral water springs (30-45C). The thermal waters are suitable for healing various medical conditions both by drinking and bathing.

**Other distinct natural highlights:**

- “Yulenski Skok” waterfall

This unique natural site is located at the heart of the Pirin National Park – Bansko. The waterfall has been formed down the middle stream of the Demyanitsa River. It is located in the Gradishteto place, at 1650 m above sea level. The bed of the Demyanitsa River has been barred by stone shoots, down which descends the waterfall. The water collects into a stone cauldron hollowed out in the very rock by its destructive power. The 9-meter waterfall is quite attractive but the descent to it is highly

- Baikusheva Mura is the oldest tree in Bulgaria which is more than 1300 years old. The impressive Baikushevata Mura is black fir and it is endemic.
- Svadbata (in English “The wedding”) is a rock formation which was declared as a protected area (13.1 ha) is located at the village of Osenovo, Municipality of Bansko.

**Cultural and historical landmarks**

**Historical monuments:**

- Monument of Nikola Vaptsarov
- Monument of Paisiy Hilendarski

The monuments are located at the center of the town of Bansko.

**Archaeological sites**

At the Bansko region there are more than 100 archeological sites of various ages which provide evidence of the ancient settlements.

- Remains of an ancient forest located at the Yulen Biosphere Reserve
- Early Christian and Medieval basilica with necropolis located at the Shipotsko area
- Saint Nikola Archeological complex
- Remains of fortress of the late antiquity period (Sitan kale)
- Momina Kula (Village of Kremena) – remains of a fortress of the late antiquity and medieval period
- Kremenska krepost – located at the picturesque gorge of the Mesta River which flow between the Gotsedelchevska and Razlozkata valleys.

The most significant archeological remains are located at the Saint Nikola Archeological Remains which include ruins of a Thracian fortress, Thracian mounds and a Christian basilica. Nowadays the archeological works in the area are still active. The fortress is built in a very picturesque area over a rock formation (100m. in height). In the vicinity of the complex is located the Sain Nicola waterfall.

**Museums**

- Museum house Nikola Vaptsarov

The Nikola Vaptsarov museum house is a historical monument of national importance. The house was the home of one of Bulgaria’s most famous poets Nikola Vaptsarov. His poetic masterpieces made him one of the most famous poets of the XX century. Nikola Vaptsarov is the only Bulgarian awarded the International Peace Award in 1952.

- **Museum house Neofit Rilski**  
The Neofit Rilski Museum house is historical monument of national importance. The birthplace of Neofit Rilski was established as a museum in 1981. Neofit Rilski is a very famous Bulgarian scholar who is considered to be a founder of the modern Bulgarian education. The house is a typical example of Bansko's architecture from the period between XVII - XVIII century.
- **Museum house Velyanovata kashta (from Eng. Kashta – house)**  
Velyanova house is an architectural – ethnographic museum, proclaimed a cultural monument of national importance for its unique decorations and woodcarvings. The house represents a typical example of a Bansko house from the National Revival period (XVIII c.). The most spectacular parts of the house include the magnificent wall carvings at the “Blue room”, the wood – carvings on the porch, the geometrical and flower shapes in the southeast room, etc.
- **Permanent icon exhibition of the Bansko Art School**

The exhibition was started at 1986 within one of the oldest buildings in Bansko which was used as a nunnery associated with both the Hilendarsky and the Rila monasteries. There are six exhibition halls where one can enjoy the finest masterpieces of the famous Bansko icon-painting school and photocopies of original Rila Monastery murals.

- **Cultural Information Center Saint Otets Paisiy**  
The information center is relatively the newest cultural monument which was established in 2008. It represents a real live copy of the cellar where Paisiy Hilendarski wrote the first Bulgarian book called “Istoria Slavianobalgarskaya”. In addition there are copies of the original wall carvings of the Saint Ivan Rilski Chapel, which were taken of the Hilendarskia Monastery at Mount Atos.
- **Historical and ethnographic museum Radonova kashta**  
The house was built in the early XIX century and belonged to the Handzhivalchevi family. The house was the home of one of the famous Bulgarian fighters for national independence Hadzhi Dygarinin, who was a close associate of other two very famous Bulgarian revolutionaries Vasil Levski and Georgi Benkovski. Later the house was purchased by George Hadzhiradonov. It was declared a cultural monument of local importance. The house holds a famous collection of photos, documents and relics which depict the traditional lifestyle of the people of Bansko back in the days.

### **Traditional settlements**

- The old part of the town of Bansko

Bansko is recognized as a cultural capital and a town of international importance for business and tourism. Its typical architecture, rich cultural heritage, beautiful landscape and unique atmosphere distinguish it from other famous ski resorts across Europe.

### **Churches and Monasteries**

- Sveta Troitsa Church (Church of Holy Trinity) - Bansko

The Church of the Holy Trinity in Bansko is a massive three – nave pseudo – basilica which is the second largest church in Bulgaria. Local masters built the church in 1835. The mural paintings were done by Velian Ognev – representative of the Debar School of painting and Dimitar and Simeon Mollerov – the notorious masters from Bansko Icon-painting School. The

church presents a masterpiece of beautiful synthesis between architectural volumes and spaces, woodcarving, frescos and icons. The church is still operational and it is famous nowadays for its church choir.

- Uspenie Bogorodichno Church (Assumption of the Holy Mother) - Bansko

The church was built in 1774 and it is famous for its unique architecture and iconostasis which is one of the most famous masterpieces of the Bulgarian woodcarving fine art. Flowers are the basic motif of the carvings, and among them stylized images of birds and mythical animals have been inserted.

### **Other touristic sites with distinct cultural and historical significance**

- Watch Tower – Bansko

The Watch Tower at the town of Bansko was built in 1866 by the famous Bansko master Todor Hadzhiradonov. The construction of the tower and the fitting of the clock mechanism represented a significant technical achievement in those days. The expert technical knowledge and precision of the builder of the tower is evident in the precise elaboration of the clock and the sophistication of the various clock details.

### **Cultural events:**

- Folklore festival “Between the three mountains” – May

The Folklore Festival “Between the three mountains” is held every May during the Days of Bansko’s traditions. Each year the festival is participated by more than 800 dance and vocal artistic groups for authentic folklore from all over Bulgaria and the Balkans.

- Summer Theater Festival - July

The first summer theater festival of Bansko was held on 01 July 2008. Since then every year the festival aims to present some of the best theatrical performance of the past year to the citizens and guest of the town.

- International Jazz Festival Bansko – 6-13 August

International Jazz Festival is one of the largest and most significant events in the musical life of Bulgaria. In addition the festival is very famous both in Bulgaria and abroad. Each year its popularity abroad is growing more and more. Every year the festival is attended by various groups and musicians of more than 35 countries and representative of almost all styles of the jazz music.

- International festival of the mountain movie “Bansko Film Fest”

Each year in late November in Bansko hosts the International Festival of the Mountain Movies with participants and representatives of the movie industries of Italy, Germany, Switzerland, Austria and France, Mexico, Turkey, Norway and the Netherlands.

### **1.1.2 Municipality of Belitsa**

Geographic area – 382 km<sup>2</sup>.

Settlements - 13

Population - 11 400 (01.02.2011)

Administrative Center – town of Belitsa

The Municipality of Belitsa is a small community situated on the southern slopes of Rila Mountain in Southwest Bulgaria

The international transport corridor E-79 which connects Sofia and Athens as well as the road connection between Sofia-Plovdiv-Istanbul pass through the territory of Belitsa. The municipality borders with Bansko, Razlog, Samokov, Yakoruda and Velingrad.

#### **Natural landmarks:**

##### **Ecosystems**

There are some areas of the municipality which are part of the Rila National Park.

##### **Mountain trails**

**In the region of Belitsa municipality and the tourist resort of Semkovo there are 6 Eco trails.** Each eco-trail is given an interpretation and is devoted to a specific key subject – The Temple of Eternity, The Mystery of the Peat Ground, Along the Glacier's Trails, The Lord of the Mountains, The Guardian of Life and The Flying Flowers.

##### **Natural places of interest:**

- Kazanite Waterfall is located in the Stenitsi area near the tourist resort of Semkovo
- “Tsar’s Well” is located at the town of Belitsa on the way to the Andrianov chark area. In 1939 the Bulgarian Tsar (from English Tsar – King) visited the area and drank water from the natural well. Later a fountain and a barbeque were built near the well.
- The Andrianov Chark area is located some 12 km from the town of Belitsa. The area stretches over a territory of 120 km<sup>2</sup>. The area is known for its unique Dancing Bears Rehabilitation Park which is the park of such type on the Balkans.
- The tourist resort of Semkovo is located at 17 km from the town of Belitsa. The resort is famous for its unique natural surroundings and excellent conditions for winter and summer recreation. The resort is the starting point for many tourist and mountain tracks and trails to the Rila National Park.

#### **Cultural and historical landmarks**

##### **Historical monuments:**

- Monument of the children heroes Vasil and Sava Kokareshkovi;
- Monument of the fallen revolutionaries of Belitsa 1941-1944;

##### **Archaeological sites**

- Neolithic Settlement in the area of Raven

The archeological remains of the Neolithic settlement are located just 6 km of the town of Belitsa towards the direction of tourist resort of Semkovo. The village was dated back to the early Neolithic period. The archeological studies have uncovered an old Neolithic wooden building with a well preserved fire place, a barn and a place for recreation.

- Thracian sanctuary located in the Temnitsko area

The site is situated at the vicinity of the town of Belitsa just 2 km from the Dancing Bears Rehabilitation Park. The well preserved Necropolis dates back to IV c. BC. The sanctuary was a

place where people from the region were praying to their gods. The sanctuary is a part of an entire complex of holy places located throughout the Pirin, Rila and Rhodopi Mountains.

- Archeological site Belichka chukka – located 3 km. of Belitsa

Belichka chukka is a burial mound which dates back to period between IV – V c. BC. During the archeological excavations of the sites scientists found a wooden sarcophagus some 2500 years old.

- Thracian sanctuary located in the area of Krsastava mogila area

The sanctuary is located just 3 km of the town of Belitsa to the northeast of the village of Kraishte. From the top of the sanctuary one can see another Thracian shrine located in the area of Babayashka chukka. The Krastava mogila sanctuary is declared as an archeological monument of national importance.

### **Museums**

- Historical museum collection Belitsa

This unique museum collection is the only collection which gathers articles and artifacts of the settlements situated down the Valley of Mesta River. The museum exhibition is divided into six departments – archeology, revival period, ethnography, picture gallery, modern Belitsa lifestyle, local handicrafts and productions.

### **Churches and Monasteries**

- Sveti Georgi Church (Church of Saint George) – it was built in 1835 (prior to the Revival period and it was declared a cultural monuments of regional importance.
- Sveti Dimitar Church – the first church in Belitsa was built in 1716.

### **Other touristic sites with distinct cultural and historical significance**

- There are various well preserved old buildings with distinctive architectural features typical for the period of Bulgarian revival.

### **Cultural events:**

#### **Cultural events**

- Celebrations of the Bear

It is being held annually at the town of Belitsa and the Dancing Bears Rehabilitation Park.

### **1.1.3 Municipality of Blagoevgrad**

Geographic area – 621 km<sup>2</sup>

Settlements - 26

Population – 83 263

Administrative Center – city of Blagoevgrad

The Municipality of Blagoevgrad is located in Southwest Bulgaria and includes the city of Blagoevgrad and 25 other settlements. Blagoevgrad is located at the southwestern slopes of the Rila Mountains at the valley of Struma River and Blagoevgradska Bistritsa River. The municipality is located on the E-79 International road 100 km to the south of the Capital city of Sofia; 25 km to the east of the Republic of Macedonia; 100 km to the north of the Republic of Greece; and 200 km to the north of the port of Thesaloniki.

## **Natural landmarks:**

### **Ecosystems:**

- **Parangalitsa Biosphere Reserve**

Located in southwest Rila Mountain, just 30 km northeast of the town of Blagoevgrad, Parangalitsa Biosphere Reserve covers an area of 1509 ha, with an average altitude between 1450-2490 m. The reserve was established with the aim to preserve the the venerable natural spruce forests in Bulgaria, as well as the only one remaining herd of red deer. In Parangalitsa there are about 289 species of higher plants (6 of them are Bulgarian endemic species, 30 Balkan endemics and 40 relicts protected exclusively by the Bulgarian Law on Nature Protection). Since 1977 the reserve was included is included in the under the Man and the Biosphere Programme of UNESCO. The starting point for ventures into the Natural reserve is the Bodrost resort area located near the town of Blagoevgrad.

- **Bodrost Resort Area**

The resort area is located in the southwest parts of the Rila mountain just 30 km north of the city of Blagoevgrad. The area is recognized as a climatic resort of regional importance where one can enjoy vast green meadows, naturally mixed coniferous and broadleaf forests of birch, aspen, beech, white pine, spruce, fir, as well as abundance of blueberries, raspberries, strawberries and mushrooms. The numerous waterfalls and small lakes which are formed down the stream of Bistrica river provide good opportunities for recreation, sports and fishing. The area is a convenient starting point for short trips and walks to nearby areas of natural beauty such as: Dobro Pole, Orlite (from English Orlite – Eagles), Markov kamak, Macedonia tourist hut, etc.).

- **Dobro Pole area**

Dobro Pole is located in Southwest Rila Mountains approximately 1 km to the west of the Bodrost resort area on the road to Blagoevgrad. The area covers a large area situated along the right bank of the Bistritsa River and its tributaries of Dobropolska River and Dulgopolska River. The average altitude of the area is between 1200 – 2000 meters. Dobre pole area has a wide variety of mixed forests of beech, spruce, fir, white fir, etc. The higher parts of the area are covered with dense grass, mountain pines and the highest parts (saddle good field) - with a high grass, dwarf pine and junipers.

- **Orlite area (in English Orlite – Eagles)**

The area is located in the Southwest part of the Rila Mountains to the northeast of the Bodros area approximately one hour walk from Bodrost. Its vast alpine pastures cut through the upper tributaries of Zloto Dere River. In past times the area had a large population of eagles, hence the name.

- **Chakalitsa area**

Chakalitsa is located in the Southwest part of the Rila Mountain on the way to the Bodrsot resort area just 20 km from the city of Blagoevgrad. The area's vast mountain pasture along the southeastern slope of Chakalitsa mountain (2298 m) are covered with coniferous forests of spruce and white fir, as well as various types of mountain grass, blueberries, strawberries etc. For the purpose of providing accommodation for tourist a tourist shelter Chakalitsa was built. From here one can reach the nearby Chakalitsa peak and the Predel valley.

- **Tapaneto area**

The area is located about 20 km from the city of Blagoevgrad near the Slavovo area along a 5 km forest road. The area covers an entire slope of the Ravnets peak (1600 m) where rich forests of spruce, white pine and white fir are thriving among vast open meadows. At present a Modern facility for hunting of Red Deer, Wild Boars and Wood Grouse outdoor is being constructed.

### **Mineral water springs**

In the region of Blagoevgrad there are more than 30 thermal water springs with a total capacity of 13.6 liters per second and a temperature of 54, 6°C. There are two sets of springs located at the north and west parts of the city along the Struma River. The average altitude of the region is 400 m. The thermal water composition is dominated by nitrogen, sulphate-carbonate-sodium, fluorine, etc. Thermal waters are well known for treatment of rheumatic diseases, chronic inflammation of the peripheral nervous system, gynecological diseases, etc. There are 1 indoor and 2 outdoor swimming pools.

### **Other distincts natural highlights:**

- **Markov kamak (from Bulgarian Markov's stone)**

Markov kamak is located in the Southwest part of the Rila Mountains approximately 1.30 h. walk from the Bodrost resort area. Markov kamak represents a rock formation situated just south of Tsarev Peak and to the west of the Dobro pole valey at an altitude of 2027 m. At the foothills of the granite rock formation lays a small niche which contains ancient inscription containing unknown letters and symbols. According to local legends Markov kamak was a part of an ancient religious complex, built to honor the goddess Bendida. A famous tourist mountain trail passes through Markov kamak on the way to the Macedonia tourist hut.

### **Ecotrails and tourist footpaths:**

- Tourist footpath from the village of Bistritsa to Macedonia tourist hut;
- Tourist footpath connecting Chakalitsa peak with the Predel valley.

### **Cultural and historical landmarks**

#### **Historical monuments:**

One of the most prominent historical monuments of the region is the old town Varosha which is nowadays part of the city of Blagoevgrad. Varosha district is famous for its unique architecture and the nearby Vavedenie Bogorodichno Church which is one of the landmarks to be seen in the district. The church has been named monument of culture. Other landmarks include the house of April Uprising revolutionary Georgi Izmirliiev, the regional history museum and the directorate of Rila National Park. The entire district was declared a cultural monument.

#### **Museums**

- Regional History Museum - Blagoevgrad

The museum has a rich collection, presenting the rich historical past of the Blagoevgrad region and Southwestern Bulgaria. Several collections make up the museum, which was put established more than 50 years ago. The main exhibition halls of the museum are divided into Archaeology, Ethnography, Bulgaria from the 15th to the 20th Century, New History, Nature and Art, Exhibition "Skaptopara- Upper Dzhumaya - Blagoevgrad – the city and its inhabitants throughout the ages", as well as many temporary exhibitions of artifacts and objects which testify for the historical processes and events of the first settlements in these lands.

### **Cultural events:**

- Summer in Blagoevgrad

The event contains a series of cultural activities throughout August and September each year.

## 1.1.4 Municipality of Gotse Delchev

Area – 315.8 km<sup>2</sup>.

Settlements - 11

Population – 32 480

Administrative Center – city of Gotse Delchev

The municipality of Gotse Delchev is situated in South-Western Bulgaria and borders with the municipalities of Bansko, Garmen, Hadzhidimovo and Sandanski. It includes the picturesque Gotse Delchev valley of the Mesta River, parts of Southern Pirin and the Western Rhodopes.

### **Natural landmarks:**

The municipality of Gotse Delchev covers the southeastern parts of the Pirin National Park with a total area of 1823.4 ha stretching south to the area of Todorova polyana. In this part of Pirin there are three mountain cirques – Kamenishki, Breznishki and Kornishki. Main staging points in the area are the city of Gotse Delchev, Popovi Livadi area, village of Breznitsa and village of Koznitsa.

- Oreliak Biosphere Reserve

The borders of Orelyak stretch along the main mountain ridge of Orelyak Peak and to the east along the Lazhnickata River, which is a tributary of the Mareva River. The average altitude of the Orelyak is between 900 and 1800 meters which is one of the main features.

- Resort area Popovi Livadi

The area of Popovi Livadi is situated on the border between the middle and south parts of the Pirin Mountain. The area is located at an altitude of 1430 m. above sea level at approximately 12 km from the borders of the Pirin National Park.

### **Mountain tracks and Ecotrails**

- Cycling trail “Galabova Meadow”

Route description: Starting point – Forest control point – Dalgia Chuchur – Galabova Meadow – Kriva River – Forest Control point – End point. The total length of the cycling trail is approximately 3.5 km. Its starting point is located at the Popovi Livadi resort area just 18 km away from the city of Gotse Delchev. The starting point of the cycling trail is situated at an altitude of 1410 meters above sea level. The end point is the same as the starting point. The trail passes through an existing forest road climbing up to 1446.5 m. above sea level. Then the route deviates to the west on a footpath through an area with small bushes and small handmade excavation which were done to level the surface of the trail. The trail passes through the area of Galabova Meadow at an altitude of 1388.2 m. which is a popular tourist and recreation spot. At this part of the trail there are small wooden shelters, outdoor fireplace, wooden tables and benches and recycle bins. Then the trail continues to curve down alongside the river at an altitude of 1360 m. After a gradual ascent the trail passes through the river bed of Kriva River where it merges with Tourist trail №3 at an altitude of 1365.3 m. The most typical vegetation species along the trail are pine trees, spruces, fir-trees, blueberries, raspberries, strawberries. The cycling trail is marked with wooden signs, arrows, posts and the necessary tourist markings.

- Cycling trail “Mlaki” and tourist trail №1

Route description: Starting point – Forest Control Point – Mlaki area – Teshoshki point – Tupovishka River – Forest Control point – End point. Cycling trail “Mlaki” and tourist trail №1 are following one and the same path along a 14 km. long route which is the hardest and longest tourist track in the area. As most of the tourist routes in the region its starting point is located at the Forest Control Point. The trail follows a southern direction with a slight ascent to the area of Dalag

Chuchur (1520 m.) where one can find fresh drinking water sink, rest areas and places for food preparation. In addition there are a small shelter and picnic place with 4 benches and a table. The trail then continues further south along International tourist track E – 4 to the Mlaki Area (1600 m.) which is the highest altitude point of the trail. At this part of the trail there is a wide open meadow. At the north part of the meadow there are shelter, open fireplace and a table with 4 benches, fresh drinking water, garbage bins, guidance signs, warning and prohibition signs. Between the Mlaki area and the next waypoint of the trail there is an area where various work have been done in order to prevent erosion. The route then continues down a slight descent to the area of Teshovshki punkt (1550 meters), where there are an open fireplace and a table with 4 benches. The next part of the trail crosses the Tupovishka River (1545 m) where one can find a nice open air picnic place with a fireplace, table with benches, garbage bins and route description posts. The trail will pass through areas with picturesque panoramic views of Slavyanka mountain, Stargach mountain and Parilska saddle. The entire route is carefully marked with wooden signs, arrows, posts and the necessary tourist markings.

- Cycling trail “Lagera”

Route description: Starting point – Summer school camp – Srednenski Chukar – The Old Hotel area – Teshovski Pat Waypoint – Summer school camp

Like many other cycling trails “Lagera” trail is a circular route with a total length of 3 km located in the surrounding of a Summer School Camp at the area of Popovi Livadi. Large parts of the route have undergone small scale construction work in order to level the surface, clear the dense vegetation and divert some small mountain streams. The lowest point of the route is located at the area of the school camp which is situated at an altitude of 1305 m. The highest waypoint of the route is located at an altitude just above 1375 m. The route passes through pine and spruce forest, in separate sections for travel on existing forest roads. The entire route is carefully marked with wooden signs, arrows, posts and the necessary tourist markings.

- Ecotrail Gotse Delchev – village of Delchevo – Popovi Livadi area

The Ecotrail starts from the city of Gotse Delchev to the west via the road to Manastircheto (a small chapel). The route curves along the hills above the city among a narrow forest road surrounded by a tame forest of chestnuts which is the only one in the region around Mesta River. The road continues through an area called Bliznatsite (from Bulgarian Bliznatstite - Gemini). The name of the area comes from the two 400 years old chestnut trees. After a 10 min walk the road reaches the small monastery “Uspenie Bogorodichno” (from Bulgarian – Assumption of Virgin Mary). The chapel is situated in a small valley on the eastern slopes of South Pirin Mountains among chestnut forests. After that the road continues through the Zhivotopriemni Iztochnik Monastery to the small village of Delchevo. Here the footpath crosses the main tarmac road twice as we continue upwards on a cobblestone track. One can have a small break upon arrival on a small meadow. From here one can enjoy the view of the valley with the village of Delchevo, Delchevska River and the magnificent Rhodopi Mountains.

- Cycling route over the slopes of the Pirin Mountains (E-4) from Popovi Livadi Hut to Slavyanka Hut.

### **Mineral water springs**

- Mineral water springs at the village of Banichan
- Mineral water springs Topolitsata at the village of Musomishte

There are a total of 10 thermal water spring located just 4 km from the city of Gotse Delchev at the small area of Toplika. The temperature of the water is constant during the year at about 22°C as the springs do not freeze even in the coldest winter days. The view to the nearby Lyaskovski Peak and

the beautiful forests of acacia trees make the area quite picturesque. In the vicinity there are remains of an ancient fortress.

### **Other distincts natural highlights**

- Breznishki Waterfall

The waterfall on the Tufcha River is 11 meters in height and it is situated in the vicinity of the village of Breznitsa. The waterfall is a natural landmark of national significance. Just 200 meters up the river there is another waterfall which is 8 meters in height.

- Momina Klisura Gorge

Momina Klisura is a picturesque gorge formed by the Mesta River between the eastern foothills of the Pirin Mountains and the western parts of the Rhodopi Mountains. The gorge is 25 km in length and connects the Gotse Delchev and Razlog valleys. Momina Klisura begins at creek of Bezboshka River and ends near the village of Gospodintsi. The villages of Filipovo and Mesta as well as archeological remains of the medieval fortress of Momina Kula near the village of Gospodintsi are all nestled in the Momina Klisura gorge. The main road connecting the city of Razlog and the border communities of Greece passes through the gorge.

- Pirostiata – a natural landmark near the village of Musomishte.
- Delchevo Waterfalls – A series of 6 waterfalls with various height are situated near the village of Delchevo.
- Kupena Rock Formation – natural landmark near the village of Bukovo.

### **Cultural and historical landmarks**

#### **Historical monuments**

- Monument “Desantchicite” – situated 1,8 km of the city of Gotse Delchev on the road to Manastircheto.
- Russian cheshma – near the village of Banichan. The area was a camping ground of Russian military during the Second World War.
- German military graveyard – part of the city graveyards of Gotse Delchev.

The city was used as a staging area of the German troops. Here the soldiers were injured and transported for treatment. Germans used the local school as a field hospital. It is important to mention that most of the soldiers buried here have died in March 1941, when there were no military operations. It is presumed that most of them died during reconnaissance operations in Greece. The actual military operation in Greece began on April 6, 1941 from the villages around the town of Gotse Delchev from where Germans bought donkeys. Lanterns were attached to the animals. Donkeys were then released towards the enemy lines. When Greek troops opened fire the German military detected their strongholds which were then shelled by the artillery.

- Monument of Gotse Delchev at the Popovi Livadi area

#### **Archaeological sites**

- Medieval fortress “Momina Kula”

The fortress is located in a picturesque gorge formed by the Mesta River between the eastern foothills of the Pirin Mountains and the western parts of the Rhodopi Mountains. The fortress is situated at a key area connecting the Gotse Delchev and Razlog valleys. The fortification has an irregular shape with 2 watch towers, situated over an area of 10 ha. The southern parts of the fortress’s walls are well preserved and reach over 6 m. in height.

- Late antiquity and Medieval fortress “Sudin Grad”

The fortress is recognized as a cultural monument of local importance. The remains of the fortress include the fortification walls (40 m in length and 1 m in height), tower ruins, roman frescoes and ceramics are well preserved.

### **Museums**

- Historical Museum of the city of Gotse Delchev

The museum is recognized as an architectural and ethnographic cultural monument of national importance. The building was built in 1877 in Baroque style with well-preserved unique carvings of the ceilings, which were made by craftsmen of the Debar School of Art. The museum collection features several exhibitions – archeological, traditional crafts and folklore lifestyle. In addition there is a unique collection of photos and models of ancient architecture from the region of Kovachevitsa and Dolen Nevrokop. The museum collection consists of more than 3000 items.

### **Traditional settlements**

- Village of Delchevo

Delchevo is famous for its unique architectural style of the buildings which was typical for the Bulgarian Revival period. In the village there are a total of 64 cultural monuments built in a unique manner in harmony with the surrounding nature and the Pirin Mountains. Krushmovata Kashta (kashta – house), Chochevata Kashta and the Uspenie Bogorodichno Church are some of the famous examples of this typical architectural style.

### **Churches and Monasteries**

- Monastery "Zhivopriemni iztochnik

The monastery is situated between the city of Gotse Delchev and the village of Delchevo. The monastery was built in 1888 over the remains of an older monastery dating back to X c. It was declared a cultural monument of local significance.

### **Other touristic sites with distinct cultural and historical significance**

- Momina Kula near the village of Delchevo

Momina Kula is a roman watch tower which was used by the Roman military in the Middle Ages.

### **Cultural events:**

- Annul International Festival of the Ancient Rituals “Eniov Den”

The festival is held annually between 22 and 25<sup>th</sup> of June in the village of Delchevo.

- Annual Festival of Wine and Love – “Trifon Zarezan Day”

The festival is held in February each year in the village of Delchevo. Trifon Zarezan Day corresponds with the date of the festival when men go to the vineyards and make a ritual first pruning of the vines for the year. A traditional local wedding is also presented during the festival. A competition for the best homemade wine is also held during the festival days.

- Ilinden convocation

It is held annually in the first weekend before August 2 at the Popovi Livadi area. The celebrations are in honor of the Ilindensko – Preobrazenskoto rebellion which started at the area of Popovi Livadi. During the celebrations there are performances of local folklore singers and dancers.

### **1.1.5 Municipality of Garmen**

Geographic area – 388.5km<sup>2</sup>.

Settlements - 16

Population – 14 825 (01.02.2011)

Administrative Center – town of Garmen

Garmen municipality is situated in the Southwestern Rhodope Mountains. It includes parts of the valley of the Mesta River and of the western slopes of the Dabrash part of the Rhodopi. It borders with the following municipalities: Satovcha to the east; Velingrad to the northeast, Bansko to the northwest; Gotse Delchev to the southwest; Hadzhidimovo to the South. The area is characterized by mountainous and highland landscape as Beslet Peak (1 938 m.) is the highest point of the area. A small part of the southwestern territory of the municipality has a typical flat landscape as part of the Nevropkskata Valley of the Mesta River.

#### **Natural landmarks/resources:**

- Biosphere Reserve “Tamnata Gora”

The Biosphere Reserve I situated near the village of Kovachevitsa in the Municipality of Garmen. Travel details and distances: village of Garmen – Kovachevitsa – 17 km. (tarmac road); Kovachevitsa – Tamnata Gora Reserve – 16 km. (gravel road).

- Tamnata Gora

Tamnata Gora is definitely the most valuable protected site in the region. The site is situated in the mid-altitude mountain zone of Dabrash on 1400–1600 m above sea level, and occupies an area of 30.2 hectares. The reserve is declared with the purpose to protect centuries-old forests containing Spruce, Pine spruce and Beech. The forest massif is 180-200 years old, whereas separate specimens reach a height of 50-60 m. All visits in the reserve require obligatory prior permission from the Ministry of Environment and Water (for more information you can contact the Regional Inspectorate of Environment and Water - Blagoevgrad). The route is marked starting from the Beslet locality. Any walk apart from the tourist path within the reserve's borders is strictly forbidden. Experienced mountain guides can be provided upon request by the State Forestry Service of Garmen. Best season for visits: May through October. Upon request optional photography tours for observation of valuable ecosystems with attractive flora and fauna could be organized.

#### **Mountain trails and tracks**

- Kaninska Eco-trail

The trail consists of:

- A long loop: Kovachevitza – Skrebatno - Gorno Dryanovo- Kovachevitza. One could use each of the affor mentioned villages as a Start/end point of the trail.

- A short loop: Gorno Dryanovo – the gorge and the cascade of the Cherna Reka River – Gorno Dryanovo.

There are a total of 6 main transects, connecting the particular settlements which might be used as a separate routes. The four villages listed above are all situated on the territory of Municipality of Garmen.

Kaninska Ecotrail offers a wide variety of terrain and landscapes. It is highly attractive, very picturesque and extreme at the same time. On the route of the trail one can enjoy the bizzare twist and turns of Kanina River (Long loop) or the cascading waterfalls of Cherna Reka River surrounded by ancient forests and thick vegetation, wide pastures and meadows. The rich biodiversity of the area, together with attractive rock formation, waterfalls, resting areas, places with fresh drinking water and a series of extreme sections provide unique experience for visitors of the area. At the

same time the eco-trail passes through four villages where tourist could learn more of the history and culture of the local population, taste traditional meals and experience the local folklore, lifestyle and crafts.

The Kaninska Ecotrails is quite diverse as it provides various routes both in distance and time and related to various cultural or natural highlights of the region. Various combinations are possible for passing through the eco-trail transects, taking into consideration the time available, the weather conditions, the water sources, the trail difficulty, as well as the age, skills, experience, and interests of the visitor.

### **Mineral water springs**

Half kilometer north of the village of Ognyanovo near the Kraisel'sko area there are a group of seven thermal water springs with a temperature between 35-39 °C. The mineralization degree of the waters is very low which makes them suitable for treatment of various conditions of the respiratory and musculoskeletal system, as well as gynecological or urological disorders. Balneology treatment healthcare centre, holiday houses and bungalows have been built.

One and a half kilometers to the north of the Krairechno area there is a second group of thermal water springs with a temperature of 41°C. In 1963 the village of Ognyanovo was declared as a balneological resort.

### **Other distincts natural highlights**

- Natural landmark “Kozi Kakam” (Goat’s stone)

Kozi Kamak is located in the Kozi Kamak area, situated 16 km by asphalt road in northeastern direction from the center of the village of Kovatchevitza, followed by 45 min walk along the marked forest path west / northwest from the Beslet locality.

Situated in a beautiful alpine area with coniferous forests, Kozi Kamak occupies 0.6 hectares and is an imposing rock of domed form, separately rising from the surrounding landscape. Geologically, it is a result of the spherical weathering of the granite. A number of variably sized holes cut in the rock in regular order and connected with each other by grooves provide serious reason to the scientists to suggest that millennia ago the rock was used as a Thracian sanctuary and was probably functioning as an ancient astronomical observatory, too. Best season for visits: May through October.

- Natural landmark “Kayaliyski Skali”

The natural phenomena is situated in the “Kayalietzo” area on the Dabrash hill, 16 km by asphalt road in northeastern direction from the center of the village of Kovatchevitza, followed by 4 km of dirt road in north and northeast direction from the Beslet locality leading straight to the rocks’ foot. Kayaliyski skali is a protected group of rock formations declared a nature landmark since 1984. It is situated on 1600 m above sea level, in centuries-old forest of White pine and Spruce, occupies 8 hectares and is a unique complex of huge rising rocks and rock crowns with a height of up to 70 m. It was formed as a result of the spherical weathering of the granite. The route is comparatively easy and is marked starting from the Beslet locality, thus allowing individual climbing without a mountain guide. Best season for visits: May through October.

- Century-old Plane Trees

The two plane trees are situated on the right side of Gotse Delchev Street - Marchevo in Gotse Delchev valley 0, 5 km west from the center of Garmen – in Zagrade neighborhood.

The Zagrade’s plane trees (over 600 years old) are the two most attractive venerable trees in the municipality. In 1968, due to their their gigantic size and astounding beauty , they were declared protected. The trees are members of the relict species Oriental plane (*Platanus orientalis*) – a remainder of a Tertiary age, when the Mesta River valley was covered with thick forests of that species.

- Kanina River Gorge at the Siniya Vir Area, near the village of Kovachevitsa

"Siniya vir" natural site is situated in a picturesque and pristine location, with dense pine forests and inaccessible rocks being rich in niches and other formations, and rising on both sides of the 300m high gorge of the Kanina river, deeply hewn in the southwestern slopes of the Dabrash hill. Here, the riverbed is covered by massive round-shaped stones and becomes a cascade of rapids and waterfalls collapsing with roar in several 5m deep evorsion cauldrons (i.e. drilled by the grinding effect of the falling water on the base rock), where the water gets emerald blue-green color.

## **Cultural and historical landmarks**

### **Archaeological sites**

- Antique and Late Antique Town of Nikopolis Ad Nestum

(Located on the left side of the road Gotse Delchev – Garmen at the areas of Markov Chiflik and Hisarlaka).

The ancient town of Nikopolis Ad Nestum was established by the Roman emperor Trajan in honor of his victory to the Dakie on the River Mesta. The town is called “The Town of the Victory on the Mesta River”. There are remains of fortress walls, ritual buildings and other facilities. Nikopolis ad Nestum is also one of the few relatively preserved antique towns in Bulgaria and the only one in the Rhodope Mountains of the period of Roman domination over the Balkans. It was designated in 1965 as an archeological and architectural monument from the ancient times and the middle ages. (Currently the site is applying for achieving the status of Biosphere Reserve). As a result of the archeological excavations that have taken place in 1980 – 1984 and in 2007 the south wall with the gate and a large part of the east and west walls have been entirely revealed. 4 round towers on the south wall, 2 nearly square towers in front of the wide-open semi-circular exedra on the south gate, 1 V-shaped tower on the west wall and 1 rectangular town on the east wall have been uncovered. A bath house (thermae) provided with a spacious changing room (apodyterium), a cold pool (frigidarium) and a hot pool (caldarium) have been uncovered right next to the inside of the south wall. A rich peristyle building with a patio, a marble colonnade and a covered portico has also been researched in the south-east corner of the fortified town. A find of 137 coins of the Byzantine emperor Justin and his wife Sophia (518 – 527), which also dates the perishing of the town, has been discovered in a clay vessel on the brick wall of the largest room in the peristyle dwelling. Fragments from a votive relief of the Thracian Horseman, a statuette of Hermes, an old-Christian gravestone, glass, bronze and ceramic vessels, a gold ring and other objects have also been found in the excavations.

- Prehistoric Settlement and Thracian Sanctuary near the village of Dolno Dryanovo

The prehistoric settlement and Thracian Sanctuary is situated on the outskirts of the Rhodope Mountains, near the village of Dolno Dryanovo, in the locality “Gradishteto”. It is located 13 km of asphalt road east-southeast from Garmen, followed by 2.5 km of asphalt road northeast from the center of Dolno Dryanovo village, plus about a 5 minutes of walk along a forest trail on the right side of the road to Satovcha.

The newly discovered chalcolite settlement (5th millenium B.C.) and a sanctuary from the late iron age (VI–II century BC) are a unique symbiosis between a relatively rare phenomenon and a Thracian sanctuary. Such an archaeological site is one of a kind in Bulgaria. The site was declared a cultural monument of national significance and represents the most attractive Thracian sanctuary in the Western Rhodopi Mountains.

### **Museums**

- Museum exhibition at the village of Skrebatno

The exhibit is established in 1978 with the support and donations of the local population. The exhibition contains historical documents, photos, and cultural articles of the village of Skrebatno.

## **Traditional settlements**

- Architectural and Historical Reserve “Kovachevitsa”

Kovachevitsa Reserve is located 17 km away from the village of Garmen. Kovachevitsa is one of the two villages in the Rhodopi region that have with fully preserved their architecture from the times of the Bulgarian National Revival. Kovachevitsa was declared by the Bulgarian government as a cultural and historical reserve in 1977. The village has kept its ancient lifestyle architecture and unique atmosphere of the National Revival period.

- Village of Leshten - located 15 km away from Garmen

The village of Leshten is one of the most attractive and authentic settlements for rural tourism in Bulgaria. The village is situated on the south slope of the West Rhodope Mountains and displays an unforgettable panoramic view of the Pirin Mountains. The renovated typical houses provide the ambiance of the Bulgarian National Revival’s architecture combined with all the modern comforts of the 21st century.

## **Churches and Monasteries**

- “Sveti Nikola” (Saint Nicholas) Church in Kovachevitsa (12.03.2010)

The church was built in 1847 and is declared an architectural and artistic monument of national significance. It is a nave and two aisles pseudo-basilica, with a vast semicircular apse from the east side and an outdoor gallery from the west. In 1893, on the northwest side of the church, a four floored belfry and a monastery school were constructed. The entire complex is surrounded by a stone wall and forms a distinctive architectural ensemble.

- “Sveti Dimitar” Church in the village of Osikovo

The church in the village of Osikovo was built in 1846 and is an artistic monument of culture of local significance. It is a semicircular three-nave pseudo basilica with an open wood narthex to the west. The northern and southern facades have arched cornices that follow the inclination of the terrain. The belfry, built later, in 1894, is made of stone and is 7 meters high, with 2 bells. At the yard of the church there was a school which has been destroyed in the past/ The iconostasis and the icons date from the middle of the 19th century and are minutely painted with miniature details.

## **Cultural events:**

- International Folklore Festival “Lets sing and dance together” – 15 – 16 April at the village of Garmen

### **1.1.6 Municipality of Kresna**

Geographic area – 344 km<sup>2</sup>.

Settlements - 7

Population – 4009 people

Administrative Center – town of Kresna

Kresna is situated in Southwest Bulgaria and has a key geographical location. The municipality borders with the Republic of Macedonia. Kresna is sits at a distance of 144 km to the south of the capital city of Sofia. The territory of Kresna represents a diverse landscape mixture of valley, low-lawing foothills, and high mountain peaks. The region of Kresna covers large parts of the scenic Kresna gorge, Maleshevska Mountain (Ilyov Peak – 1803 m.) and the northern parts of Pirin Mountains (Vihren Peak – 2914 m.).

## **Natural landmarks/resources:**

Some areas of the Kresna are part of Pirin National Park.

- Natural reserve “Tisata”

Tisata is a protected natural territory covering an area of 574, 5 ha stretching across the two riversides of the Strouma River, Malashevka and Pirin Mountains.

In Tisata there is the largest natural habitat of Greek juniperus in Bulgaria and one of the most significant in Europe. The tree juniper is a protected plant species of that can reach up to 10 m in height and up to 1 m thickness of the stem. Tisata is home of various Mediterranean plant species such as the downy oak (border), oriental hornbeam, chestnut oak, flowering ash, black pine, etc. The rich flora of the reserve contains more than 450 plant species, 28 of which are included in the Bulgarian Red Book of Endangered Species. There are more than 100 bird species (most of which are protected species), 9 rare species of snakes, wide variety of invertebrate animals, butterflies (156 species), etc.

- Protected area “Moravska”

Moravska is located just 2 km west of the town of Kresna and covers an area of 184.5 ha. The area is the second largest natural habitat of the protected species of juniper in Bulgaria. In the nearby localities of Nikolov chukar, Gradishte and Breyanitsa there are various Mediterranean plant and animal species.

- Natural landmark “Orlite” (The Eagles)

Orlite is located in Chernata Voda area in the northern parts of the Pirin mountains over an area of 10 ha. The landmark includes various rock formations as the biggest and most impressive is called Shangalov Kamak. The area is a nestling place of many eagles.

- Natural landmark “Chinarite” (11,4 ha)

Chinarite is a natural habitat of plane trees some more than 300 years-old. The area is situated near the village of Gorna Breznitsa in the Malashevka Mountain. Chinarite is an area of impressive natural beauty with giant trees, wide open areas for picnic and recreation.

- Natural landmark “Byina” (1,1 ha)

Located in the northwestern part of the village of Gorna Breznitsa Byina is an area of century old forest of plane trees some aging between 180 years and 300 years. The area is one of the few natural habitats of plane trees in Bulgaria.

## **Mountain trails and tracks**

- Tourist route Kresna – “Varbite” area – Sinanitsa Hut

One can reach Sinanitsa Hut in a 9 hours walk from the town of Kresna (24 km on a road and 3 hours along a marked footpath along the left riverside of Sinanishka River).

## **Mineral water springs**

- “Gradeshki” thermal springs

The thermal springs are located between the town of Kresna and the village of Dolna Gradeshnitsa. There are a total of 5 mineral springs with water temperatures ranging between 20-68°C. The waters are clean, odorless and pleasant to drink. The thermal water composition is dominated by nitrogen, sulphate-carbonate-sodium, fluoride, etc. The waters are well known for treatment of various musculoskeletal, respiratory, neurological and gastrointestinal conditions.

- “Oshtavski” mineral water baths

Located in the village of Oshtava which is recognized as a balneological resort of regional importance the thermal water springs are with water temperature between 38°C and 65°C. The thermal water composition is dominated by hydro-sulphate-sodium, silicon and fluorine. The waters are well known for treatment of various diseases of the musculoskeletal and cardiovascular systems, as well as in cases of severe inflammatory, gynecological and skin conditions. Nearby the thermal spring there are two indoor facilities used for mud-bathing.

- “Vlahinski” thermal spring

This cold mineral water spring is located just 3 km south of the village of Vlaha. The waters are characterized with low amount of mineral components.

- “Breznishki” mineral springs

Located in the village of Gorna Breznitsa the two springs have a temperature between 36°C-38°C and a capacity of 2,6 l/sec. The water is suitable for the treatment of various lung, skin and bone diseases.

## **Cultural and historical landmarks**

### **Historical monuments**

- Temple Monument and ossuary “Sveti Ivan Rilski” – located at the town of Kresna

The temple was declared a cultural monument of regional significance. It was built from 1939 to 1941 with donations and to honor the fallen war heroes. The monument represent a church building with a nave, one-based vaulted with a bone vault in the basement.

The unique iconostasis with a fretwork carving, made in 1939 by craftsmen from the Debar iconography school has an exceptional value. There are original frescoes on the walls, which date back from 1939. There is a church shop which sells icons which are painted by local artists.

### **Archaeological sites**

- Remains of an Ancient town nearby Kresna

The remains were found on the right riverside of Strouma River over an area of 2 km. starting near the neighbourhood of Moravska at the foothills of the Maleshevska Mountain. The remains are scattered over a terrace shaped terrain split across by the rivers of Moravska and Mostetska. Old legends testify that the settlement was called Dyukyanite. Another name which is commonly used for the ancient town was Bella which is related to the name of the sand pyramids around Kresna which are called Melo. According to scientist the name of the ancient city might be Kalipol. Archeological studies have found the remains of 3 ancient churches. The area was declared as a cultural and historical monument of national importance which is protected by the Cultural Monuments Protection Act.

- Ancient town of Neine – near the village of Gorna Gradesnitsa

The remains of the town are recognized as a cultural monument of regional importance. The ancient town of Neine in the period I- III c. Various archeological find provide for the the presence of a temple of the Egyptian goddess of Izida and Serapsis. There were also discovered votive tablets of a Thracian horseman, Artemis, Zeus and Hera, a pedestal from a statue of Dionysus.

- Ancient settlement in the Nerese Area

The remains of the settlement are located just 2 km to the north-east of the town of Kresna, near the village of Novo Selo. The area is also considered a cultural monument with regional importance. Archeological excavations found the remains of an ancient building (most probably a church), bronze Roman coins, marble pillars, remains of friezes, arc, etc.

- Remains of an ancient Roman Road

Down the valley of Struma River several well-preserved section of an ancient roman road which connected the Mediterranean with the Danube River and central Europe were discovered in the region covering the lower stream of Struma River.

## **Museums**

- Museum exhibition at the town of Kresna

The exhibition contains various archeological items and depicts the history of the region.

## **Churches and Monasteries**

- Monastery “Sveti Prorok Iliya” – village of Gorna Breznitsa

The Gorna Breznitsa monastery, named St Prophet Iliya, is one of the new Bulgarian monasteries as it was established in 1992. It consists of a monks’ dwelling part, a small church and a bell-tower. The monastery’s yard keeps remains of a nunnery, ruined during the Ottoman rule and abandoned by its nuns which fled to present-day Macedonia. A few meters away from the monks’ dwellings, one can see a holy spring, where long ago, a shepherd found the icon of St. Iliya, shown in the church and considered to be miraculous by the monks. In the church, visitors can also see remains of ancient Thracian earthenware, which were come across during the construction of the temple. The vessels are believed to date back to the middle of the 3rd century AC. The monastery offers 3 rooms with 3 beds each for accommodation, the price being 3 leva (1.5 EUR) per person. Food is not served, though the nearby village of Gorna Breznitsa has 2-3 nice pubs. A big fireplace, erected just next to the entrance of the monastery, can be used by the visitors.

## **Cultural events:**

- Celebrations in honor of the Kresna-Razlog Uprising are being held annually on the 5<sup>th</sup> of October.

### **1.1.7 Municipality of Petrich**

Geographic area – 650 km<sup>2</sup>.

Settlements - 53

Population – 53 326 people

Administrative Center – town of Petrich

The Municipality of Petrich covers large areas of the Petrichko – Sandanskata Valley down the middle stream of the Struma River and the lower stream of the Strumeshnitsa River. The plane stretches to the northern slopes of Belasitsa Mountain and the southern slopes of Ograzdhen Mountain. Petrich borders to the northeast with the Municipality of Sandanski; to the north – Municipality of Strumyani; to the west with FYROM; to the south with the Republic of Greece;

## **Natural landmarks/resources:**

- Biosphere Reserve "Kongura" in the Belasitsa Mountain
- Belasitsa Natural Park – protected area

## **Forests**

- Main natural characteristic of the region are the chestnut forests

## **Mineral water springs**

- There are more than 20 mineral water springs and a medical center for mud-bathing nearby the village of Marikostinovo situated 11 km to the east of the town of Petrich.

The healing features of the thermal waters in the region are well known for treating conditions of the musculoskeletal and peripheral nervous systems, digestion and cardiovascular systems, osteoporosis and skin diseases. The curative mud is suitable in cases of cervical disc disease and disc hernia

- Mineral water spring in the Rupite Area in the foothills of Kozhuh Mountain.

The thermal waters are fueled by a volcano which has not been active since 6 million years. The waters are rich in sodium and carbon dioxide with a temperature of 70 °C. The exceptional healing features of the water are proven for the treatment of condition of the digestive, endocrine, musculoskeletal and neurological systems.

## **Other distinct natural highlights**

- Protected area "Rupite"

Rupite area is one cultivated spot about 10 km northeast by Petrich, with beautiful flora and fauna, some of which are included in Red Book of Bulgaria. Located on the right bank of the Struma River the place has gained widespread popularity thanks to the most famous Bulgarian prophet Vangelia Gushterova - Vanga (3.10.1911 - 11.08.1996). In 1992 she built a temple Memorial called "Sveta Petka Balgarska" which became a place of pilgrimage for thousands of people. Nearby the temple complex there are mineral waters springs with a temperature of 70°C. The exceptional healing features of the water are proven for the treatment of condition of the digestive, endocrine, musculoskeletal and neurological systems.

- Natural landmark "Kozhuha" near the village of Rupite

The hill rising over the area of Rupite is called Kozhuh and it is a part of an extinct volcano. At the southwestern slopes of Kozhuh lie the ruins of the ancient city of Petra which flourished in the last quarter of the fourth century BC

- Protected area "Toplishte" near the village of Kolarovo

At the foothill of Belasitsa Mountain near the village of Kolarovo lies the protected area "Toplishte". The protected area was established in 1992 in order to protect the natural habitat of the Royal Fern (*Osmunda regalis* L). Various activities are prohibited in the Toplishte including: construction and any other activities, which alter the natural appearance of the area; introduction of non-indigenous plant and animal species to the area; removal of dirt and reconstructions of any type; picking of flowers and collection of herbs; etc.

## **Cultural and historical landmarks**

### **Historical monuments**

- "Monument of the Perished in the name of the State" – a 1937 monument in the town of Petrich
- "Manush Voivoda" - the monument was built in 1968.

- "Colonel Drangov" - military monument which was built in 1916 at the village of Drangovo
- "Cheshmata" - military monument which was built in 1917 at the village of Samuilovo

### **Archaeological sites**

- Heraclea Sintika near the village of Rupite

The city of Heraclea Sintika was once a center of the Sintika area, inhabited by the Thracian tribe Sinti. Its remains were found near the Rupite village in the foothills and southern slopes of the extinct volcano Kozhuh. The existence of the town was proved when scientists came across a Latin inscription, dated 308 AD, of an imperial appeal addressed to the local urban citizens of Heraclea Sintika. The city is mentioned in the works of ancient writers such as Livius, Diodorus, Strabo, Plinius and Claudius Ptolomeyus

- Prehistoric settlement "Topolnitsa" near the village of Topolnitsa

The settlement Promahon-Topolnitsa dates back to the Late Neolithic period and it is situated on both sides of the border between Bulgaria and Greece just 2 km south of the village of Topolnitsa (Bulgaria) and 3, 5 km from the Greek village of Promahonas. The results of the archeological research clearly show that the construction of the settlements went through four different stages. At first (around 5320–5300 BC) a huge temple was constructed some 8 m. below the surface. The second period of the settlement (5300–5070 BC) was quite lengthy. In 5070 BC the settlement was burned down. At the third period in the settlement began to appear the first pottery with graphite ornaments (0.5 – 2 cm). The fourth period was marked by a harsh change in the cultural behavior of the population and in 4650 BC the settlement was completely deserted as a result of the sudden rise in the temperatures at the southern parts of the Balkan Peninsula.

### **Museums**

- Historical museum of Petrich
- National Park and Museum "Samuilova Fortress" located near the village of Kliuch, 18 km of the town of Petrich.

### **Cultural events:**

- Fair of the agricultural produce „Malilak”, village of Karnalovo - October
- International Festival of the Youth Song "Rising Stars" – May each year
- National Festival of the Bulgarian song "Golden Chestnut" – held annually at the last week of October.

### **1.1.8 Municipality of Razlog**

Geographic area – 440,3 km<sup>2</sup>.

Settlements - 8

Population – 20 410 people

Administrative Center – town of Razlog

The Municipality of Razlog is located in a typical mountainous region. It nestles in the Razlog valley and is surrounded by three mountains - Rila to the north, Pirin to the south and the Rhodopes - to the east. The capital Sofia is 155 km away, the town of Blagoevgrad is at a distance of 53 km. The famous ski resort of Bansko is only 6 km south of Razlog. The Municipality is connected with the Gotse Delchev planes to the south by the "Molina Klisura" Gorge. To the west lies the valley of Predel. Razlog border with the following municipalities and settlements: Bansko, Kresna, Belitsa, Simitli, Rila and Blagoevgrad.

## **Natural landmarks/resources:**

Municipality of Razlog covers large parts of Rila National Park and Pirin National Park

- Biosphere Reserve " Baiuvi Dupki-Djindjiritsa "

The "Baiuvi Dupki-Djindjiritsa" Reserve is located on the territory of Pirin National Park over an area of 4,508.5 ha. The Reserve stretches between the mountain peaks of Pirin and Banski Suhodol and includes the glacier valleys of Baiuvi Dupki, Razlojki Suhodol, Kamenititsa, Okaden Peak, Segmen Tepe Peak, Dautov Vrah Peak, the Konyarnika area and the valeey of the Byala Reka River. The average altitude caries between 1100 m. and 2884 m. above sea level on Banski Suhodol Peak. "Baiuvi Dupki-Djindjiritsa" was declared as a Biosphere Reserve in order to preserve the unique plant species and forests of white and black fir trees, various relict plant species, endemic species both for Bulgaria and Europe. The total area of the reserve stretches over 2858.5 ha. The largest natural habitat of alpine edelweiss and zhlezistochashkova ochanka (*Euphrasia drosocalyx* Freyn) in Europe are located on the territory of the Biosphere Reserve. Over the alpine pastures and steep rocky terrain one can see herds of herds of wild goats. The mountain pine and the vast white fir forest provide natural habitat for brown bears wolves, foxes and deer. The representative of the bird population include imperial eagles, peregrine falcon, peregrine hobby, hollow dove, mountain quail, hazel hens, capercaillie, haidushka crow, woodpeckers and many others.

### **Mineral water springs:**

On the territory of the Municipality of Razlog there are many thermal water springs with a temperature up to 60°C and capacity of 70-80 l/sec. Such springs are Gulina Banya, Katarino, Razdavets, etc.

The village of Banya is recognized as a balneological resort of regional importance. There are 72 mineral water spring in the village and its surrounding with an average temperature of 60°C and capacity of 76 l/sec. The potential capacity of the springs reaches to 300 l/sec. Banya is particularly attractive for tourist because of its outdoor swimming pools with mineral water (Olympic size and a smaller one for children). The main chemical features of the mineral waters of the region include high levels of sodium, fluorine and sulfur compounds.

The detailed characteristics include: Capacity - 76 l/sec at a temperature of 55-57°C. Level of mineralization 327 mg/l; PH - 9.4, Hydrocarbons - 101 mg/l; Sulphate - 51 mg/l; Chlorine - 7 mg/l; Sodium potassium - 90 mg; Calcium - 2 mg/l;

The content of oxidizable sulfur compounds is 3 mg/l. The level of Radon is 4.5 Nano Curie, or 166.5 Bq per liter. (Becquerel - units for measuring the radioactivity of the human body).

The thermal waters of the region are suitable for treatment of medical conditions of the musculoskeletal, neurological, and digestive systems.

In the Razdavets area is located the Banishte spring. According to a study carried out by scientists of the Bulgarian Science Academy the Banishte Spring is one of the three springs in the region of Razlog which have the most curative effect of its drinking waters. In addition to its pleasant taste the waters of Banishte have proven healing qualities for treatment of gastrointestinal disorders, inflammatory and skin diseases and nervous system conditions.

### **Mountain trails and tracks**

- Eco-trail "To the kingdom of the edelweiss" located in Pirin National Park

The route of the ecotrail begins at the town of Razlog, continues through the areas of Betolovoto and Varnitsata and finishes ate the Peyo Yavorov Hut (Average time 5 hours). Following the ecotrail one will stumble upon remains of old medieval churches. The ecotrail crosses another trail called "Visiting the bear and the imperial eagle" which was constructed in 2007 for cycling and trekking. The trail is particularly attractive for children.

- Ecotrail “Samodivskata” located in Pirin National Park

Route description: Bachevo – Garvanitsa – Karakachanski Kolibi – Valchi Dol – Rysaliyte (Average time 5 ½ hours). There are additional tourist services and attractions which are provided such as horseback riding, folklore activities and fishing trips;

- Ecotrail “Haydushkata”

Route description: Godlevo – Trionska skala – Stankova Laka – Vada – Radanov Grob Peak (Average time 5 ½ hours). The route provide additional opportunities for:

- 1) Cultural tour of Godlevo, Dobarsko and the surrounding areas;
- 2) Folklore attraction and tasting of traditional cuisine;
- 3) Visit to the home of the Wood Grouse and the Rila Primula at the Visitors Information Center in the village of Dobarsko.

- Wood Grouse Trail
- Wild Goat Trail
- Wild Primula Trail

### **Other distincts natural highlights**

- Shtrokaloto Waterfall

Situate around the village of Dobarsko the waterfull is a popular year round tourist destination. In the vicinity there is a well-preserved ancient ceramic kiln which was used for the production of bricks and various types of ceramic back in the period between II-IV AD.

- Razdavets Area

In the Razdavets area is located the Banishte spring. According to a study carried out by scientists of the Bulgarian Science Academy the Banishte Spring is one of the three springs in the region of Razlog which have the most curative effect of its drinking waters. In addition to its pleasant taste the waters of Banishte have proven healing qualities for treatment of gastrointestinal disorders, inflammatory and skin diseases and nervous system conditions.

- Katarino Area

The picturesque area of Katarino is situated in the foothills of the Rila Mountain just 3 km from the town of Razlog and 10 km from the town Bansko. As in other areas of the region Katarino also has several thermal water spring and deposits.

- Predela Area

The resort area “Predela” is located 12 km of the town of Razlog. There are numerous tourist facilities constructed in the area which can provide accommodation for a large number of tourists. The entire area is surrounded by beautiful pine and oak forests which provide various opportunities for hunting. The area is situated on the crossroads between Pirin and Rila mountains.

- Betolovot Area
- Kulinoto Area
- Boykov Rid Area

### **Cultural and historical landmarks**

#### **Archaeological sites**

- Settlement of the Early Neolith period and a museum exhibition in the village of Eleshnitsa;
- Archeological remains at the Stolovatets area near the town of Razlog which was dated back to 2 400 BC during the Bronze Age; Temple and Sanctuary of the Sun;

- Bendida Sanctuary – one of the most significant Thracian shrines in the region and in Bulgaria;
- Early-Christian Basilica “Sveti Ilya” and “Sveti Georgi” at the town of Razlog – dated back to V – VI century;
- Remains of churches in the villages of Godlevo, Bachevo and the town of Razlog, as well as remains of an ancient fortress in the village of Eleshnitsa;
- A total of 70 houses with distinct architectural features which were declared as architectural monuments;
- Small churches of the period of early Christianity in the Betolovoto area. The churches were named “Byalata” (The White), “Pisanata” and “Sveti Nicola”. All churches were dated back to XII-XIV century.
- “Sveta Katerina” Church in the Katarino Area;

### **Museums**

- Historical museum in the town of Razlog.

The museum has a rich collection of XIX century pottery, ceramics, local handmade fabrics and examples of Bell-molding craftsmanship

### **Churches and Monasteries**

- “Sveti Sveti Teodor Tiron and Teodor Stratilat” Church in the village of Dobarsko which was built in 1614.

The temple represents a three-nave basilica where one can frescoes of 460 biblical characters which have preserved in a very good condition. What is interesting is that the temple hasn't been renovated in the recent years. The striking frescoes and authentic architecture of the temple considered it to the most valuable models of the Bulgarian art. This fact makes “Sveti Sveti Teodor Tiron and Teodor Stratilat” Church one of the most valuable temples of Bulgaria. Literally every centimeter of the wall was covered in frescoes. The temple was declared as a cultural monument part of the UNESCO world heritage.

### **Other touristic sites with distinct cultural and historical significance**

- Old Roman Bath in the village of Banya

The old Roman bath is situated at the southwestern part of the village near the Pihla River. It was built in a typical Roman style. In 1735 it was completely renovated by a local mason Master Zaho who built addition support beams in the interior of the bath house. In 1933 – 34 the local administration started the utilization of the thermal springs situated around the bath house. The bath is relatively well preserved and it is currently used for hygienic purposes. At present the bath house lack electricity and functioning water and sewage system. The bath is situated at a central area of the village where several other building of the same period are still well-preserved.

- Old Turkish Bath in the village of Banya

The old Turkish bath is situated at the northeastern part of the village near a small river. The bath house is built in the traditions of similar Turkish baths with brick cover. Currently the building is in a very poor condition. Next to the Turkish bath there is the new Municipal bath as well as many other resort facilities which are using the thermal spring located in the area.

### **Cultural events:**

- “Pirin Sings” Festival for National Folklore

The festival is held once each 4 years at the Predela Area and takes a prominent spot in the Cultural calendar of Bulgaria in the last 30 years. The festival presents a variety of local and regional arts and events aimed at exploring the local folklore and ethnographic heritage of the region by

performing traditional Bulgarian songs, dances, crafts, various musical instruments, costumes, jewelry, fabrics, religious symbols and rituals etc.

- Youth Festival “Rock Predel” and a motorcycle parade

The event takes place each August at the Predela area where bikers and rock fans from all over Bulgaria gather together. The festival begins with a formal motorcycle tour around the town of Razlog and continues with various competitions, music and entertainment for two days. The main organizers of the event are the Municipality of Razlog and the motorcycle clubs of “Pirin Wolves” (Blagoevgrad) and “Brothers from Hell” (Sofia).

- Todorov Den or Todor’s Day – the Famous Horse Easter in the village of Bachevo and the town of Razlog

Todorov’s day in Razlog is celebrated with a traditional horse race called “kushia”. The horse races are a century old tradition for the region. An official liturgy is held in the village where horses are fed and songs are sang. Then everybody gathers at the Vlasovitsa area for the beginning of the horse races.

### **1.1.9 Municipality of Sandanski**

Geographic area – 1060 km<sup>2</sup>.

Settlements - 54

Population – 39 898 people (01.02.2011)

Administrative Center – town of Sandanski

Large parts of the Sandanski region are situated in the Sandansko-Petrichka Valley down the middle stream of the Struma River. The valley stretches to the west and southwest slopes of Pirin Mountain; northeast foothills of Slavyanka Mountain; low-laying foothills of Maleshevska Mountain and Ograzdhen Mountain.

The E-79 International Road and the International Railroad (Sofia – Athens) are passing through the territory of Sandanski.

#### **Natural landmarks/resources:**

- Pirin National Park

Pirin National Park covers 31% of the territory of Sandanski and it is divided in two park regions – Kamenitsa and Trite Reki areas.

- Biosphere Reserve “Aliboutush”

Aliboutush is situated in the Slavyanka Mountains formerly known as Alibotuş (from Turkish) and Kitka Planina. The reserve covers territories of the village of Goleshveo, municipality of Sandanski, the villages of Paril, Nova Lovcha and the municipality of Hadzhidimovo. The altitude ranges from 1140 – 2212 meters. Aliboutush was declared as a biosphere reserve in order to protect the unique relict forest of black fir and pine trees, the rare type of Borisova pine, as well as some endemic plant and animal species. The reserve’s protected territory has been expanded several times and it is now covering an area of 1628 ha. The biosphere reserve is the largest natural habitat of black fir on the Balkan Peninsula. Because of its unique geology and climate, the area is recognized as a natural habitat of various endemic and rare plant species. In March 1977 Aliboutush was officially enlisted in the Man and the Biosphere Programme of UNESCO. The area of Alibotush is not a popular tourist destination and lack marked tourist routes and other tourist facilities.

- Protected area “Melnik Sand Pyramids”

The sand pyramids around the town of Melnik are unique rock formations that reach a height of 100 m. The pyramids are scattered in the areas around the town of Melnik and the villages of Karlanovo, Rozhen, Sushitsa situated on the territory of Sandanski. The pyramids were recognized as a natural landmark during 1960's and cover an area of 1165 ha. In addition they are considered a geological phenomenon of regional importance. Melnik is suitable for visits in all seasons as the winter here is relatively warm. Melnik is accessible via a tarmac which continues for 13 km after the village of Novo Delchevo near the international road E-79. The road to Melnik passes through the villages of Hotovo and Lozenitsa surrounded by vineyards and green meadows.

### **Mountain trails and tracks**

There are several ecotrails covering the area of the Melnik Pyramids (Melnik – Rozhen monastery – Rozhen – Zlatolist – Melnik)

### **Other distinct natural highlights**

- “Popina Laka” Waterfall

The waterfall is located at the Popina Laka area - a place of distinct natural beauty which is rare to be seen in Bulgaria and the region. Popina Laka Waterfall is situated on the Sandanska Bistritsa River at an altitude of 1230 m.

- Waterfall near the village of Kashina

Kashina Waterfall is one of the highest and most beautiful natural landmarks at the Pirin Mountains. The height of the waterfall is more than 20 meters. The village of Kashina is located in the Southern part of the Pirin Mountains. The village is accessible via the international road E-79. One should take the road to Melnik from the deviation of E-79 at the village of Novo Delchevo. The road then passes through the villages of Spatovo, Hotovo, Lozenitsa, Melnik Kurlanovo, Rozhen and Lyubovishte. Near the village of Lyubovishte there is an 8 km gravel road that goes to Kashina. The road is usually in very poor condition. Kashina is situated just 10 km from the Rozhen monastery. The waterfall itself is located in an area about 40 minutes' walk from the village.

- Karst spring in the Slavyanka Mountains

At an area situated just 15 min. walk from the Izvora Hut there is a karst spring with a capacity of 1200 l./sec. The spring is the starting point of the Petrovska River. The spring is part of a karst system of the Aliboutush Mountain. The Izvora Hut is located just 6 km from the village of Goleshevo at an altitude of 700 meters above sea level.

## **Cultural and historical landmarks**

### **Historical monuments**

- Monument of Spartacus

The local legend says that the brave Thracian hero Spartacus was born somewhere in the areas around the town of Sandanski.

- Various monuments of the heroes and revolutionaries of the region which are erected at the town of Sandanski, Melnik, the village of Levounovo, etc.

### **Archaeological sites**

There are various archaeological remains of an ancient city which is found under the present city of Sandanski. The remains date back to the periods of Early Christianity and Late Antiquity. Some of the archaeological sites which are worth to visit include:

- Episcopal Basilica
- Basilica of Saint John
- Archeological complex from the period of Early Christianity
- Roman gymnasium

- Reservoir for drinking water
- Fortress of Despot Slav at the town of Melnik
- Numerous remains of ancient churches and monasteries
- “Sveta Spaleopisa” Monastery

The ancient city which lies below the modern town of Sandanski was an administrative center of the entire region during the period of Early Christianity. Most attractive for the visitors are the four basilicas dated back to the period of Early Christianity which are situated in a relatively small area around the old center of the town.

### **Museums**

- Archeological museum – Sandanski
- Historical museum - Melnik

### **Traditional settlements**

- Architectural Reserve – The Town of Melnik

Due to its unique archeological, architectural and cultural features the town of Melnik was declared as a museum city which is a part of a Biosphere Reserve of international importance. The unique architectural features of Melnik have preserved the spirit and lifestyle of the National Revival period of Bulgaria.

### **Churches and Monasteries**

- Rozhen Monastery

“Sveto Rozhdestvo Bogorodichno” Monastery (Holy Birth of Virgin Mary) is the largest monastery in the Pirin region and it is one of the few remaining Bulgarian monasteries from the medieval period.

- “Sveti Georgi” Church (Saint George Church) of the prophet Prepodobna Stoyna at the village of Zlatolist

The village of Zlatolist is famous for its “Sveti Georgi” church where the local prophet Prpodobna Stoyna used to live and help the local people. The village of Zlatolist is located in the Sandansko – Petrichko Plane at the southern foothills of the Pirin Mountain near the town of Sandanski and the town of Melnik. The village of Zlatolist is accessible via 7 km gravel road starting from the village of Katuntsi. There is an Eco-trail which reaches Zlatolist via the Rozhen Monastery and the town of Melnik.

### **Cultural events:**

#### **Traditional fairs**

- Traditional fair at the village of Sklave

#### **Festivals**

- Pirin Folk

The Pirin Folk Festival was established in 1993 and it already has 16 years of existence. In 2000 it was included in the Cultural Calendar of the Ministry of Culture of Bulgaria and continued to develop as an international festival – a place where authors from Bulgaria, Greece, Macedonia, Serbia and Romania meet, compete and exchange experiences. With the Bulgarian National Television as a broadcaster, as well as other national televisions of neighbouring countries, the festival practically turns into a performance and cooperation stage displaying the cultures of the Balkan countries, three of which are member states of the European Union.

- Balkan Youth Festival

The Balkan Youth Festival “The Balkan Youth” (BYF) is the biggest international youth event in South-East Europe and every year it is organized by youngsters. The main goal of the BYF is: to assist young people from Bulgaria, the Balkan’s and European states in the achievement of their

aspirations to get to know each other, to exchange information, to expand the network of contacts in various fields related to their interests and problems, skills, and opportunities for participation and collaboration.

The Balkan Youth Festival has set itself the following FESTIVAL EVENTS: Defile; Concerts; Competitions: The Best Pop Singer Competition, The Most Attractive Festival Couple Competition, Special Festival Moments Photography Competition “All different, but not indifferent”; Balkan Youth Party; Stage for Contemporary Street Arts; Exhibition “Heat, Thirst, Life”; Youth Eco Happening; Picnic and Sport event; Sintica: Traditions and perspectives; Round table “Partnership now and for the future”; Introduction with historical, cultural, ethnographic and tourist sights of the region of Sandanski.

- First Old Time Sunday festival "Leb i Vino", Spatovo

The festival is held annually in June. The event gathers together artists and performers of traditional folklore songs and dances from the regions of Belasitsa, Ograzden, Maleshevia, Pirin, Osogovo and Vitosha. The rich festival program offers a “Country Lunch Contest”, “Pretty Lass Contest”, etc. The aim is to help the old people recall the values, lifestyle and culture of their ancestors, and the youth to participate, feel and remember their good spirits. Every guest-participant must adhere to the traditional style and wear traditional costumes. All dishes should be homemade (artificial food, drinks and packaging is not permitted). Each participant should bring a traditional “cherga” (blanket). The use of blankets and other modern textiles is not permitted.

### **Other cultural events**

- Nights of the Melnik Poetry

The Nights of the Melnik Poetry are held in October each year during the time when the wine of the Melnik region is getting ready in the barrels hidden deep in cold cellars.

Besides poets the festival gathers together artists, musicians and singers from all over Bulgaria and abroad. The number of participants is increasing each year as in 2003 there were more than 300 participants in the festival.

In 2005 the event was officially recognized as an international festival of poetry as participants from FYROM, Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina have also attended the festival transforming it into a common gathering of all Slavic poetry.

### **1.1.10 Municipality of Satovcha**

Geographic area – 334.2 km<sup>2</sup>.

Settlements - 14

Population – 17 269 people

Administrative Center – town of Satovcha

The Municipality of Satovcha is located southwestern area of the Rhodope Mountains and covers large parts of the river Valley of Mesta River at the southeastern part of the Dabrashki region. To the east Satovcha shares a common border with the Municipality of Dospat, Municipality of Garmen to the East and to the North with the Municipality of Velingrad. To the south the Municipality of Satovcha borders with the Republic of Greece and parts of the Municipality of Hadzhidimovo.

### **Natural landmarks/resources:**

#### **Mountain trails and tracks**

- Marked tourist track “Horse travel” – the track begins from the town of Smolyan through the villages of Dolen and Kovachevitsa to the village of Leshten.

## **Cultural and historical landmarks**

### **Archaeological sites**

In the vicinity of Satovcha several ancient cemeteries and remains of mediaeval settlements were discovered and were later declared as cultural monuments. A necropolis of the medieval period was discovered in the area of Zhidovo. Additional remains and archeological relics of the late antiquity and roman period were found throughout the region. In the summer of 1977 a Turkish treasure of silver coins was discovered by accident in the surroundings of Satovcha.

### **Museums**

- Cultural – historical Reserve “Dolen”
- Museum exhibition “A Bridge Between Past and Present”

The exhibition is divided into several sections:

- The campaigns of Alexander The Great
- Orpheus
- Religions
- Roman Bridges
- Fountains
- Local cuisine
- Pletenska wedding
- The Revival period in Dolen

### **1.1.11 Municipality of Simitli**

Geographic area – 529 km<sup>2</sup>.

Settlements - 17

Population – 17 804 people

Administrative Center – town of Simitli

The Simitli municipality is located in South-West Bulgaria, at a distance of 118 km to the south of Sofia in Blagoevgrad District (15 km from town of Blagoevgrad). It is situated along the middle part of the Struma River, not far from the Oranovski Gorge. The typical landscape is mountainous and semi mountainous. There are six settlements located near the Struma River at the central parts of the municipality. Other five settlements are located in the mountainous parts to the west. To the east along the course of the mountain creeks there are six other settlements.

### **Natural landmarks/resources:**

Simitli covers some areas of Rila National Park and Pirin National Park

On the territory of the Municipality there are the following protected areas of the local flora and fauna:

- Protected area of the wild birds “Kresna”
- Protected area “Kresna – Ilindentsi”
- Protected areas of natural habitats “Oranovski Prolom – Leshko”

### **Forests**

- A typical feature of the region is the Genus tree (Cornus mas)

The forest areas of the municipality are located mostly in the Vlahina Mountain and Maleshevska Mountain.

## Mountain trails and tracks

- Ecotrail “Following the footpaths of the bear”

The trail connects the village of Senokos with the “Gradishki Chukar” area. The trail consists of several parts each has a different length and difficulty level.

- Green trail - It starts at the village center, heads northwards and turns right along a track behind the bar. After about a kilometer, it passes through the Chakarska neighborhood, frozen in time since almost a century. At the end of the village, one must take a steep horse path, leading to the Sveti Nikola Hill. The path divides in two, and the right deviation reaches the Gradishte locality: a vast flat saddle, where one can clearly see why the village was called Senokos (haymaking). Average length of the trail (forth and back): 2 hours; Level of difficulty: Average.
- White (circular) trail - It starts at the Vezenkova neighborhood and heads westwards, partly following an existing track. After half an hour and a deviation through a young pine forest, it reaches the Kamaka rock offering a panoramic view of the Strouma River valley and Pirin Mountains. The path turns southwards and - curving through meadows and gardens - reaches an asphalt road close to the neighborhood of Dyakovtsi. There one could take a rest at the local dairy and taste the fresh cheese and yogurt. The road continues to Arnautska neighborhood, turns left (to the north-east) and goes up and over the hill, to the Dimovtsi neighborhood. From there, the trail follows a track, descending by the Mazneva neighborhood and turning left and downward to Vezenkovtsi neighborhood just before the SvetaMarena locality. Average length of the trail: 3 hours; Level of difficulty: Below average.
- Red and yellow trails - Starting together at the village center, they follow the main road and reach the riverbed. Before the bridge, one must turn left and follow a track, passing by the neighborhoods of Garkovtsi and Papchiovtsi (which, unlike the central neighborhood, look more like a bunch of houses scattered along the hill). A little before Minovtsi neighborhood, the trail leaves the track and turns left to follow a steep horse path, which winds around hills and ravines amidst deciduous and - later on - coniferous forests. After an hour, the trail passes through the locality of Arnautskite Livadi, meets the track Senokos - Shirinata, and then turns left along a steep cart road. Soon it crosses the river close to a waterfall, and reaches the Voditsa locality (a small widening of the track Senokos - Shirinata with water and fireplace, suitable for a short rest). Here the two trails separate:
  - Yellow trail continues along the track and, after 15 minutes, reaches the vast meadows of the Shirinata area. Average length of the trail: 5 hours; Level of difficulty: Above average.
  - Red trail continues steeply upwards through a young pine forest, which soon ends and the path becomes wider. The trail then reaches the Koprivite area, where there is a small clearing with big rocks on one side which form a natural shelter, and a larger meadow with an old farm. After Koprivite, the path enters the territory of the Pirin National Park and leads to the locality of Boyov Chukar (known also as Belyov, Bulyov, Boyuv, etc.) and the Pirin Peak. Average length of the trail: 7 hours; Level of difficulty: Very difficult.
- Blue (circular) trail - It also starts at the village center, descends by the church, the Village Hall, and the beautiful but almost fallen Popova House-a former inn and a heritage from better times. The trail goes down to the river and crosses it along a small wooden bridge. The path is not difficult, but it is slow due to the abundance of rasp-and blueberry bushes, especially during their season. It passes above the last houses of Vezenkovtsi neighborhood, heads upwards and crosses the asphalt road Senokos-Dyakovtsi; then it turns to follow the road to Kalaydzhiiska neighborhood. The trail crosses it and -winding amidst meadows and gardens - reaches the Maznevski ridge below Maznevaska neighborhood. Crossing the track

Senokos-Shirinata, it descends through a beautiful beech forest towards the river and Papchiovtsi neighborhood. Then the trail goes down by the neighborhood of Garkovtsi, along a track, and ends at the starting point. Average length of the trail: 2 hours; Level of difficulty: Below average.

### **Other distincts natural highlights**

- Rock formation “Komatisnki Skali” situated in the Vlahina Mountain.
- Area “The footprint of Krali Marko” in the village of Senokos.
- The Waterfall in the village of Senokos

### **Cultural and historical landmarks**

#### **Historical monuments**

- Monument of the heroes of the Great Patriotic War – village of Gradevo;
- Memorial plate of the Soviet Army - village of Chernitche;
- Memorial plate of the Russo-Turkish War - village of Rakita;
- Memorial plate in honor of the heroes of the Russo-Turkish war – situated on a hill at the “Krasta” Area
- Monument of the fallen revolutionaries – village of Dolno Osenovo;
- Monument of the Liberators of Simitli – town of Simitli;
- Monument of the Ilindenskoto Uprising - town of Simitli;
- Monument of the Kresnensko – Razloshkoto Uprising – village of Senokos;

#### **Archaeological sites**

- Prehistoric settlement in the “Raven” are near the village of Brezhani;
- Remains of an Roman Road – village of Poletto;
- Burial tomb of the late antiquity period – village of Krupnik;
- Remains of an ancient and medieval fortress – village of Krupnik;
- Ruins of fortress wall – watch tower, walls and stone floor – “Grado” area in the Oranovski Gorge
- Sun watch in the village of Mechkul

#### **Museums**

Historical museum in the village of Krupnik

#### **Cultural events**

- “Days of Pirin” Celebrations

“Days of Pirin” is a typical tourist celebration organized by the Pirin Tourist Forum with the cooperation of the Municipalities of the region. The celebrations are held in July each year.

- “Traditions and succession”

This festival of the national folklore of the Simitli region is held annually in September at the “Sveti Georgi” Area which is situated between the villages of Mechkul and Senokos.

### **1.1.12 Municipality of Strumyani**

Geographic area – 366 km<sup>2</sup>.

Settlements - 21

Population – 5 720 people (01.02.2011)

Administrative Center – village of Strumyani

Strumyani nestles on the eastern slopes of Malashevka Mountain, throughout the valley of the Struma River and in smaller area of the western parts of Pirin Mountain. The highest peak in Strumyani region is Sharalia Peak (2171 m.).

Strumyani borders with: Kresna – to the north; Sandanski – to the south; Petrich – to the southeast; The Macedonian municipality of Berovo – to the west.

### **Natural landmarks/resources:**

Parts of the municipality are situated in the territory of Pirin National Park.

- Natural Reserve “Sokolata”

Located just 6 km southwest of the village of Igralishte the reserve was declared as a protected area in 1985 with the purpose to preserve the natural habitats of the rare oak -tree of the type Blagun (*Quercus pubescens*) and the rich variety of plant and animal species. The oak-trees here reach up to 250 years in age. The buffer area of the reserve covers a territory of 135.3 ha.

- Via Aristotelis – International Migration route of the birds down the stream of the Strouma River.

The migration route Via Aristotelis passes through the territory of Strumyani and has regional importance for migrating birds – mainly passerines and raptors, but also waterbirds. The migration route follows the current of the Strouma River towards the southern parts of Europe and Africa.

### **Forests**

- Maleshevska Mountain

There are well preserved natural habitats of coniferous and broadleaf forest which fall under the protection of the European network of NATURA 2000. Pahsovia dab is a 600 years-old oak tree with a status of protected natural site.

### **Mountain trails and tracks**

- Ecotrail “Visitors from the past” – near the village of Ilindentsi

The route is suitable for people of all ages and stretches from the Art Center in Ilindentsi to the Lekovitata Voda spring.

### **Other distincts natural highlights**

- “Lekovitata voda” spring

According to local legends the waters of the springs have positive influence for people with impaired vision.

### **Cultural and historical landmarks**

#### **Historical monuments**

- Monument of the Fallen Heroes of Mikrevo Region in the periods between 1912-1913 and 1915-1918;
- Monument of the Fallen Heroes of Strumyani Region in the Wars in 1912 and 1945;
- Monument of the Fallen Heroes, Soldiers and Officers in the periods between 1912-1913 and 1915-1918;

#### **Archaeological sites**

- Episcopal Basilica from the period of Early Christianity (IV-IV c.) – located at the Gradishteto Area near the village of Mikrevo.

The site was discovered in 1996. At the central part of the site lies a Christogram. At the baptistery there is a floor mosaic with a Tetraconch shape which is one of a kind for Bulgaria.

- Ancient settlement of Neine – village of Ilindentsi

The settlement existed in the period between I-III AD. s

- Ruins of an fortress of the late antiquity period – Dobri Laki area

### **Museums**

- Museum exhibition in the village of Strumyani

### **Other touristic sites with distinct cultural and historical significance**

- Art Center “Ilindentsi”

This International sculpture exhibition consists of 50 sculptures of artists of Bulgaria, Japan, Austria, USA, etc. Amateurs and tourists are provided with the opportunity to take lessons in stonework and painting.

### **Cultural events:**

- Celebrations of the Gods of Wine

The celebrations are held each year on the first Saturday of February. Each year the celebrations start with the first pruning of the vines for the year by the recreation of a century old tradition to honor the Gods of wine and prosperity – Trifon Zarezan, Bacchus and Dionysus. Particularly attractive is the recreation of the pagan ritual where offerings of wine, are poured out onto the fire. The celebrations are concluded with a wine contest.

- International Folklore Festival “Maleshevo sings and dances”

The festival is held annually with the purpose to preserve and promote ancient folklore traditions of the Balkan nations. The event is organized by the Municipality of Strumyani in association with Foundation “Ancient Bulgaria”

## **1.1.13 Municipality of Hadzhidimovo**

Geographic area – 327,8 km<sup>2</sup>.

Settlements - 15

Population – 9 981 people (01.02.2011)

Administrative Center – town of Hadzhidimovo

Hadzhidimovo covers the southern parts of the Pirin Mountain, as well as parts of Slavyanka Mountain and the Western Rodhopi. Parts of the municipality are located along the Mesta River and the Gotse Delchev Plane. Hadzhidimovo borders with the following municipalities: Sandanski – to the west; Gotse Delchev – to the North; Garmen – to the South; Satovcha – to the east; The Republic of Greece – to the south.

### **Natural landmarks/resources:**

Biosphere Reserve “Aliboutush” near the villages of Paril and Nova Lovcha.

### **Mountain trails and tracks**

Ecotrail with a total length of 25 km. Route description: Teshovo – Sveti Petar Peak – Kupena Peak – Suhi Vrah peak – Paril – Teshovo.

## **Cultural and historical landmarks**

### **Archaeological sites**

- Ancient settlement “Kozluka” – village of Koprivlen
- Remains of a fortress “Sveti Dimitar” of the late antiquity period - town of Hadzhidimovo

### **Museums**

- Unique museum exhibition at the village of Laki

The museum exhibition has the first tractor which was imported from the former USSR in 1948.

### **Churches and Monasteries**

- “Sveti Georgi” Monastery in the town of Hadzhidimovo

## **1.1.14 Municipality of Yakoruda**

Geographic area – 339,3 km<sup>2</sup>.

Settlements - 8

Population – 10 684 people (01.02.2011)

Administrative Center – town of Yakoruda

Yakoruda is a municipality of 6 000 inhabitants which is situated 80 km from the district center of Blagoevgrad, 30 km from Bansko and 40 km from Velingrad. The landscape of the municipality is dominated by mountains and highlands. It covers parts of Western Rila and Rhodope Mountains and a narrow valley in the upper stream of the Mesta River.

### **Natural landmarks/resources:**

On the territory of the municipality there is the Natural Park “Yakoruda” which is part of the Rila National Park. Yakoruda is a starting point for tourist routes to the lakes in the alpine part of the mountain - Yakorudskite Lakes, Granchar Lake and Ropalishkite.

### **Mountain trails and tracks**

Two of the main tourist routes in the Rila Mountains pass through the municipality of Yakoruda. Here one can find the picturesque narrow gauge railroad “Septemvri-Dobrinishte”, which has the highest railway station on the Balkan Peninsula called “Avramovo” (1267 meters above sea level) also passes through the territory of Yakoruda.

### **Other distincts natural highlights**

Waterfall in “Chestna” area

## **Cultural and historical landmarks**

### **Archaeological sites**

In Yakoruda there are remains of one of the main roads of the Roman Empire - Via Egnatia. Ancient ruins of various prehistoric settlements and a medieval church (V-VI century) are also found on the territory of the municipality.

## 1.2 DISTRICT OF KYUSTENDIL



The region of Kyustendil is situated in the southwestern part of the country and is a part of the southwestern planning region for development. To the north, northeast and east, the region is bordered by the regions of Sofia and Pernik, to the south – by the region of Blagoevgrad. To the west, the border of the region coincides with the state border of the Republic of Bulgaria with the Republic of Macedonia and the Republic of Serbia and Montenegro.

The administrative centre of the region – the town of Kyustendil – is a historically distinct communication junction. It is located 86 km away from Sofia on first-class road № 6 /E 870/ and 22 km away from border checkpoint Gyueshevo. First-class road № 6 – the border – Kyustendil – Radomir – Sofia – Podbalkana /an under mountain area/ - Bourgas is the main travel artery and link with the capital of neighboring Macedonia through Kumanovo and Skopje. Southeast of the town starts secondary road № 62 – Kyustendil – Dupnitsa – Klisura – Samokov, while northwest of the town - third-class road № 601 – Kyustendil – Dragovishtitsa – Dolno Uyno – The Border.

The passage of European corridors E8 and E4 through the territory of the region, as well as the areas with concentration of unique natural and cultural-historical landmarks, are an important prerequisite and real conditions for the development of tourism, socio-economic internal and cross-border cooperation.

The international tourist routes in the region have a transit character (aimed at Sofia or the Black sea), as well as a local focus – connected with the local religious, cultural and natural phenomena. Extremely favorable is the combination of natural attractions, the cultural and historical heritage of the region of Kyustendil, Sapareva banya, Rila, Dupnitsa, along the Struma River from Nevestino to the village of Shishkovtsi, as well as the remarkable combination of natural with anthropogenic tourist resources along the Rilska River from the town of Rila to the Rila Monastery.

### 1.2.1 Municipality of Bobov Dol

Geographic area – 206,19 km<sup>2</sup>.

Settlements - 18

Population – 9 979 people (01.02.2011)

Administrative Center – town of Bobov Dol

Bobov Dol is a town in southwestern Bulgaria, part of the District of Kyustendil. Located in a mountainous region, it is surrounded on three sides by the mountain Konyavska Planina, with the Gologlavski Rid ridge to the north and east and the volcano-resembling peak of Kolosh to the west.

To the south is the Razmetanitsa plain which reaches the valley of the Struma River. There are no tourist facilities in Bobov Dol. In addition the local administration has not developed a Local Action Plan for the development of tourism and more specifically the eco-tourism.

### **1.2.2 Municipality of Boboshevo**

Area – 135,14 km<sup>2</sup>.

Settlements - 12

Population – 2 828 people (01.02.2011)

Administrative Center – town of Boboshevo

The town of Boboshevo is located in the Boboshevo Plane at the geographical area of Dolno Pole covering the fertile valley of the Struma River (where it meets with the German River). The area is sitting at an altitude of 380 meters above sea level. Boboshevo is situated around 63 km to the south of Sofia, 30 km of Kyustendil, 14 km of Dupnitsa and 17 km of the town of Blagoevgrad.

The entire region provides excellent conditions for fishing of mountain barbell, sturgeon, nase and catfish in the Struma River.

#### **Natural landmarks:**

- Wild Birds Protected Area “Boboshevo” BG 0002107
- Wild Birds Protected Area “Skrino” BG 0002108
- “Manastircheto” Area

Near the town of Boboshevo, on the way to the “Manastircheto” Area (The Monastery), there is a habitat of the protected species of the colored wedge with an area of 10 acres and a good number. This species is represented by two populations in Bulgaria – in Boboshevo and in the village of Ribben (District of Plven). It is also included in the Red List of World Endangered Species and the European List of Rare Endangered Endemic Plants.

#### **Mountain trails**

“Yana” Mountain Hut (69 beds) and “Pioner” Mountain Hut (40 beds) are located just 3 km of the town of Boboshevo. One can reach them through a well-maintained asphalt road. Both huts could be used as a starting point for trips along several marked tourist routes.

In the territory of Boboshevo Municipality there are two locations which have been declared natural landmarks: the over 300-year-old Turkish hazel trees and the 200 acres of centennial beech forest in the “Kossana” Area and the village of Skrino.

#### **Cultural and historical landmarks**

##### **Historical Monuments:**

- Monument of the Heroes of the Balkan Wars and the First World War

##### **Archeological sites**

- Medieval Fortress “Gradishteto”

The ruins are situated just 2 km to the west of the town of Boboshevo, over “Dragoina Mogila” in the “Gorno Pole” Area. On the top of the mound there are remains of fortress walls made of stones and plaster. The fortress dates back to the period of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom.

- Prehistoric settlements in the “Chardako” Area near the village of Srebatno

The prehistoric settlement is situated on a plateau on the left bank of the Dzherman River. The place has been inhabited by the prehistoric people during the Eolith period /5000 - 4000 BC/. It was found by the American archaeologist J.H. Gaul. In 1939 and in 1981 were conducted rescue archaeological excavations. Exhibits of the discoveries, made of bone, stone and ceramics are exhibited in the museum collection in the town of Boboshevo.

## **Churches and Monasteries**

- The medieval church of St. Dimitar

In the “Manastircheto” area, 3.5 km away from Boboshevo is located St. Dimitar Church which was built during the reign of Turkish Sultan Bayazid II (1481 – 1512). During this period the old monastery which was destroyed was moved here from its original location above the village of Skrino.

- Ruen Monastery “Sveti Ivan Rilski” (Saint John of Rila)

The Ruen monastery, “St John of Rila”, is situated in a beautiful area near the town of Boboshevo just 8 km of the E-79 international road and 2,5 km of the village of Skrino. Skrino is believed to be the birth place of the Saint Ivan Rilski. The construction of the monastery began in 1999 over the ruins of the old Christian temple. By following a picturesque trail one can reach the cave of Sveti Ivan Rilski.

## **Cultural Events**

- Each year on the first Sunday of November the town of Boboshevo hosts a Motocross Competition.
- Each year in January the town of Boboshevo organizes a Festival of the wine called “Vinaria” where local producers present their wines.

### **1.2.3 Municipality of Kocherinovo**

Geographic area – 182,31 km<sup>2</sup>.

Settlements - 11

Population – 5 158 people (01.02.2011)

Administrative Center – town of Kocherinovo

Kocherinovo is a small community situated in Southwest Bulgaria at an area covering the both riversides of the Stuma River and the Rilska River. Part of the territory of the municipality covers the Boboshevsko – Kocherinovskata Valley, as well as parts of Rila Mountain to the northeast and southeast and Vlahina Mountain to the northwest and southwest.

Kocherinovo is just 3 km away of the E-79 International road and 25 km of the Rila Monastery which provides good opportunities for the developments of the tourism in the region. The unique mixture of diverse natural resources and well-preserved historical monuments, as well as the close proximity to the Rila Mountain and Rila monastery makes Kocherinovo an attractive town for living and tourism.

The town of Kocherinovo is also called “Town of the stroke”. At the central area of the town there are more than 20 stroke nests. The beautiful birds are considered a symbol of the community.

## **Natural landmarks/resources:**

- Stob Pyramids

The natural phenomena Stob pyramid is one of the most famous and attractive tourist destinations in the area. They are situated near the village of Stob in the west part of the Rila Mountains. The average height of the pyramids is between 7 and 10 meters, but there are some formations which reach up to 12 meters in height. The pyramids are diverse in form and shape but most of them resemble a mushroom with their conical foundations and a stone cap. Sediments are colored in rusty-brown, reddish and dark yellow which makes them particularly attractive at sunset or under the light of the Full Moon. In 1964 Stob pyramids were officially recognized as a natural landmark.

## **Cultural and Historical Landmarks**

### **Archeological sites**

Near the village of Porominovo there are remains of an ancient roman temple built in honor of the Greek God Sabazious and ruins of the ancient town of Sportela.

### **1.2.4 Municipality of Kyustendil**

Geographic area – 979,91 km<sup>2</sup>.

Settlements - 72

Population – 60 333 people (01.02.2011)

Administrative Center – city of Kyustendil

Kyustendil is situated in the southern part of Kyustendil valley at the foot of the Osogovo Mountain, at an altitude of 527 meters, on both riversides of the Banshtitsa River which is a tributary of Struma River. South of the town rises the hill Hissarluka which is part of the northeast branch of the Osogovo Mountain. The distance between Kyustendil and the capital city of Sofia is 86 km. The border with the Republic of Macedonia is situated 22 km away from the city. The border with the Republic of Serbia lies at a distance of 30 km. The city situated on the vital transport crossroad between the capital city of Bulgaria, Sofia and Skopje, the capital city of Macedonia. The main railway from Sofia to Gyeshevo, as well as the Pan-European Transport Corridor zNo:8 (Vlora - Tirana - Skopje - Sofia - Burgas - Asia) also pass through the region. The region of Kyustendil is recognized as a balneological resort and a tourist destination of international importance. The city of Kyustendil provides excellent conditions for trekking tourism and skiing in the Osogovo Mountain.

### **Natural landmarks:**

#### **Protected areas:**

- “Tsarna Reka” Natural Reserve – located in the areas around the village of Sazdenik;
- Century-Old Beech Forest – near the village of Granitsa;
- Group of Redwood Trees – near the village of Bogoslov;
- Koriyata – village of Dobri Dol, Municipality of Treklyano;
- Skakavitsa Waterfall – village of Polska Skakavitsa
- Zemen Rocks – village of Polska Skakavitsa;
- Shegava Canyon – natural landmark Shegava – the Canyon of the Parching River

Various legends, votive plates, monuments and other documents provide that the local mineral waters have been active for more than 25 centuries. This is considered the main reason for the establishment of the settlements in the area at ancient times.

### **Mineral water springs**

There are a total of 40 thermal waters springs on the territory of the region of Kyustendil. The water temperature varies between 50 and 79 °C. The chemical composition of the waters is dominated by Sulfurede Sodium и Hyposulfite Sodium and it is similar in terms of chemical composition to thermal spring in the French Pyrenees, such as: Eaux le Bonnes, Bagneres de Luchon, and Bareges et cauterets.

The thermal waters of the region are used in various balneological centers and a SPA hotel where various thermal water treatments are included in the tourist packages.

## **Cultural and Historical Landmarks**

### **Archeological sites**

- Architectural and Archaeological Reserve Pautalia-Velbuzhd-Kyustendil
- Ancient and Medieval Fortress “Hisarlaka”

It is situated at the highest part of the “Hisarlaka” Hill which is located just 2 km of the city of Kyustendil. The fortress was built in the IV c. BC. The fortification was completely renovated during the period between V-VI c. when it became a stronghold of the First and Second Bulgarian Kingdoms. It was destroyed by the Ottomans in the XV c. The fortress was officially recognized as a cultural monument of national importance.

- Pirgova Kula (Pirgova Tower)

Pirgova Kula is a medieval watch tower which ruins are situated in the city of Kyustendil near the Roman baths. The name “Pirgova Kula” comes from the Greek word for tower “pirgos”. It was constructed in the period between XIV – XV century. The tower was officially recognized as a cultural monument of national importance.

### **Museums**

- Regional Historical Museum “Akademik Yordan Ivanov”

The museum collection contains various items found throughout the region of Kystendil and dated back to period between VII-VI BC and XVII AD.

- Museum House “Emfedzhieva Kashta”

The house is an architectural monument of the Revival period. It contains a rich collection of items showing the typical lifestyle in the region at the end of XIV and the beginning of XX century.

- Museum House “Ilyo Voivoda”

Ilyo Voivoda was one of the most prominent activists during the Bulgarian National Liberation Movement during the second half of the XIX century. An exhibition on the topic ‘The National Liberation Struggle of the People from Kyustendil Region’ is now arranged in his renovated house

- Museum House “Dimitar Peshev”

The museum houses a rich collection of original belongings, articles, documents and photos of Dimitar Peshev and his associates Assen Sychmezov, Vladimir Kurtev, Ivan Momchilov, and Peter Michalev who contributed to stop the deportation of Bulgarian Jews from the train station in Kyustendil planned for March 1943.

- Art Gallery “Valdimir Dimitrov – Maistora”

The gallery displays the largest collection of painting of the great Bulgarian artist – Valdimir Dimitrov – Maistora. In addition other famous artists from the Kystendil region such as Stoyan Venev, Morits Bentsinov, Nikola Mirchev, Asen Vasilev, etc. frequently exhibit their works in the gallery.

### **Cultural Events**

- Cherry Festival – held in June

It is held in three consecutive days in June at the town of Kyustendil. Celebrating the fruit orchards started in the town of Kyustendil in 1896 when the first national fruit growing exhibition. The celebrations were reinstated in 2008.

- “Panagia” Celebrations – held in August

During the religious holiday “Assumption of the Holy Virgin Mary” Kyustendil celebrates “Panagia” – The Raising of the Bread”. During the celebrations there are exhibitions of icons and traditional homemade bread.

- "Celebrations of the fertility"

It is held in three consecutive days in the middle of October. During the celebrations there is an exhibition of local fruit and vegetable produce from the Kystendil region.

## 1.2.5 Municipality of Nevestino

Geographic area – 439,69 km<sup>2</sup>.

Settlements - 23

Population – 2 771 people (01.02.2011)

Administrative Center – village of Nevestino

The Municipality of Nevestino is located in Western Bulgaria and is one of the constituent municipalities of the administrative region with center located in the town of Kyustendil. It is situated in the southwestern part of the Kyustendil Region, covering the ridges of the Ossogovo and Vlahina Mountains. Its area is 442 square kilometers (0.4% of the territory of the country). Large parts of the Municipality cover the physiographic province of Piyanets.

The community's administrative centre is located at the village of Nevestino. There are 23 villages in Nevestino, most of which are scattered across picturesque landscapes along the local rivers and flat plateaus of the local mountainous terrain. Nevestino is located 13 km away from the city of Kyustendil. There are two main roads passing through Nevestino – one of them leads to the city of Dupnitsa, while the other one – along the Struma River, passes through Boboshevo towards the Rilla Monastery or to Greece via E79 international road. According to statistical data of August 2009 the municipality has 23 settlements with a total population of around 3100 residents.

### **Natural landmarks:**

- Natural Reserve “Gabra”

In the territory of the municipality, near the village of Tsarvaritsa is situated the “Gabra” Natural Reserve. It occupies a large part of the southeastern ridge of the Ossogovo Mountain over an area of 5000 ha. Its forests begin at an altitude of 900 m and reaches up to 1250 m. above sea level. It is composed of over 85% black pine trees.

- Rock Formation “Garvan Kamuk” (Raven Stone)

Garvan Kamuk is an exceptional natural phenomenon which is located on the left bank of the Struma River. It can be best viewed from the road that goes from Kyustendil to Boboshevo.

### **Mountain trails**

There are three marked eco-paths with a total length of 48 km.

1. Tsarvaritsa – Gabra Reserve – Chernata Skala Passage - Tsarvaritsa (13 km)
2. Vetren – Golyamata Peshtera - Kaleto Peak – Smolichano (18 km)
3. Iliya – Golyamata Peshtera - Smolichano (17 km)

### **Cultural and Historical Landmarks**

#### **Monuments:**

- Kadin Most (Kadin Bridge)

Kadin Most is the most valuable architectural monument of culture on the territory of Nevestino. Today in the centre of Nevestino, just several metres away from the legendary Kadin Most there is a statue of “Struma Nevesta” (Struma Bride) which symbolizes the courage, dignity and self-sacrifice of the Bulgarian woman.

#### **Archeological sites**

- Remains of a fortress in the “Skaletto” Area near the village of Pastuh

#### **Churches and Monasteries**

- “Sveti Pravedni Joachim and Anna” in the village of Smolichano

The monastery is located at the Osogovska Mountain, 20 km away from the administrative centre of Nevestino. It is one of the most impressive cultural attractions of the

community. Despite its small size, the monastery has a great emotional impact on the visitors with its fascinating history and amazing scenery. In the courtyard there are a holy spring and a fountain with twelve sinks equal to the number of the Disciples of Jesus Christ. In close proximity to the church there is another natural masterpiece – a twelve-metre high waterfall fascinates with its beauty and unique shapes especially during the winter period. Another impressive natural landmark is the century-old oak tree which receives has been a witness of various generations that came to admire its greatness.

- Medieval Church at the village of Marvodol

The medieval church in the village of Murvodol is declared a national monument of culture. It was built on a steep slope descending to a small creek. The church is teeming with various frescoes which are seen in two layers which were painted during different periods between XIV – XVI century. There are two layers of painting over the eastern façade which are partially preserved.

### **1.2.6 Municipality of Rila**

Geographic area – 360,96 km<sup>2</sup>.

Settlements - 5

Population – 2 859 people (01.02.2011)

Administrative Center – town of Rila

Rila is located in Western part of Bulgaria, in the southeastern region of Kyustendil. Its territory occupies an area of 364 square kilometers stretching between the middle and southwest parts of the Rilla Mountain and its foothills. The municipality of Rila includes the villages of Padala, Smochevo, Pastra and the Rilla Monastery.

#### **Natural landmarks:**

- **Natural reserve “Rilomanastrirska Gora” (Rila Monastery Forest)**

The Reserve is part of a forest territory, as the average age of most trees is 160 years. However, the forests of pine, beech and fir are older than 200 years, as some tree species reach up to even 300 years of age.

- **Natural park “Rilski Manastir” (Rila Monastery)**

The park stretches over an area of 25 253.2 ha covering mostly alpine pastures and meadows. The park provides natural habitat for more than 230 herbs, plants species and 38 different species of mushrooms. The largest and most valuable deposits of Tsarborisova ela (Pine tree) and Rilski dab (Oak) in Europe are found here.

#### **Mountain trails**

- Botanical route Kirilova Polyana – Ribni Lakes – Smradlivo Lake

The average length of the route is 5 hours on foot. The starting point is the area of “Kirilova Polyana” situated at an altitude of 1500 m. The various rock formation shaped by Zlya Zab, Iglata Peak, Kупenite, Lovnitsa, Orlovets and Eleni Peak contribute for the unique scenery of the area.

- Botanical route Kirilova polyana – Suhoto Lake

This is one of the most typical mountain routes where one can enjoy the large and well preserved variety of plant and animal species in the Rila National Park. The starting point is the area of “Kirilova Polyana” situated at an altitude of 1500 m. The final stage of the route is Suhoto Lake located at an altitude of 1928 meters in the northeastern part of Rila National Park. The route covers areas with an average difference in altitude of 400 meters. The entire route has an average length of 2 hours. One should following the white-green-white markings of the route.

- Eco-trail “Krasta” (The Cross)

The trail was constructed under a joint cross-border cooperation project between local administrations from Bulgaria and Macedonia. The aim of the project was to support the preservation of the rich cultural heritage of the region. Traveling to the Rila monastery one should pass through the small town of Rila which is situated along the Rilska River. Following the road to the Rila Monastery 1km of the town of Rila there is a strange shaped rock which is called “Krasta”. It is said that the Saint Ivan Rilski passed through the area on his way to the Rila Mountains.

## **Cultural and Historical Landmarks**

### **Museums**

- Municipal Museum “Aleksiy Rants”

There are a total of 130 museum exhibits 58 of which are declared as cultural artifacts. There are two separate exhibition galleries – Ethnography and Modern History.

- Historical museum of the Rila Monastery

In the Rila Monastery are kept manuscripts, old-printed books, ancient documents, icons, weapons, coins, scepters, ect. The museum of the Rila Monastery is particularly famous for its Wooden Cross which was made of walnut-tree. It took 12 years to finish the masterpiece.

- Museum “Manastirsko stopanstvo”

The museum collection contains various items used for baking of bread, parts of a watermill, bee hives, etc.

### **Traditional settlements**

- Architectural complex “Babinska Mahala”

The settlement is comprised of 27 buildings, a church school and “Sveti Archangel Michael” Church.

### **Churches and Monasteries**

- Rila Monastery

The monastery was established in X century by the Saint Sveti Ivan Rilski Chudotvorets. The monastery complex, regarded as one of the foremost masterpieces of Bulgarian National Revival architecture, was declared a national historical monument in 1976 and became a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1983.

## **Cultural Events**

- Village Festival “Sveti Duh” (Saint Spirit)

It is held annually in June. The celebrations feature diverse cultural activities such as concerts, dances and sport competitions.

- Kratun Month

It is held annually in December. It represents a live tasting of homemade wine of the Rila region which is served in traditional Bulgarian style.

### **1.2.7 Municipality of Sapareva Banya**

Geographic area – 180,92 km<sup>2</sup>.

Settlements - 4

Population – 7 540 people (01.02.2011)

Administrative Center – town of Sapareva Banya

The Municipality of Sapareva Banya is situated in Southwestern Bulgaria over an area 180.8 square kilometers stretching over the northeastern part of the Kyustendil Region. The area of the municipality features diverse landscape which includes Dupniskata Valey; parts of the Dzherman River; the steep slopes of the Rila Mountains and the low-laying foothills of Verila Mountain. The altitude of the area varies between 600-200 meters above sea level which determines the diverse geographical profile of the region. Sapareva Banya include the following settlements and villages of Ovchartsı, Panichishte, Resilovo, Sapareva Banya and Saparevo.

### **Natural landmarks:**

The Seven Rila Lakes and the clean natural surroundings provide excellent conditions for tourism.

### **Mountain trails**

Sapareva Banya provides a good starting point for some of the most popular mountain routes in the Rila Mountains and the areas of Maliovitsa, Skakaitsa, Seven Rila Lakes, Borovets and Rila Monastery. Nearby villages provide various options for mountaineering in Northwest Rila. The waterfalls on the Bistritsa River are accessible via a picturesque ecotrial. The tourist who prefer higher altitudes can use the nearby mountain trails to reach the nearby Golyam and Malak Sivria Peaks, Kabul Peak, etc. A place of distinct natural beauty is the scenic cascade consisting of seven waterfalls (Ovcharenskia Waterfall – 39m. in height).

Some of the more popular destinations include Maliovitsa, Skakavitsa, Seven Rila Lakes, Rila Monastery and Borovets.

- Sapareva Banya – Ovchartsı – Ocharenski Waterfall – Duration 1.3 hours.
- Sapareva Banya – Bonchuk Monument – Yarebkovitsa
- Sapareva Banya – Seven Rila Lakes Hut – Seven Rila Lakes

### **Mineral water springs**

- In Sapareva Banya is located the only natural Geyser in continental Europe. The water temperature is 103°C. It was transformed into a natural fountain.

### **Cultural and Historical Landmarks**

#### **Historical Monuments:**

- Monument of the Fallen Heroes during the Great Patriotic War.

#### **Archeological sites**

Numerous archeological relics and remains have been found in the “Kremenik” Area where a prehistoric settlement was located. The settlement was inhabited during the Neolithic period. The first inhabitants were representatives of some of the most ancient civilizations of Europe who came from the valley of the Struma River.

#### **Churches and Monasteries**

- Medieval Church “Sveti Nikola”

The Church of St Nicholas lies in the centre of Sapareva Banya. The church was constructed out of rows of red bricks stuck together with white mortar. Its size is 7.20 by 5.50 metres. It was constructed anytime from the 11th to the 14th century. The church was thoroughly reconstructed in 1937 by a team under architect Rashenov. The church was constructed out of rows of red bricks stuck together with white mortar. The dome has twelve sides and large niches that determine its magnificent appearance.

- Resilovo Monastery “The Shroud of Virgin Mary”

The monastery is located in the village of Resilovo and was constructed in 1927 by the wealthy widow of a seaman lost in the Black Sea. It is one of the few functioning convents in Bulgaria and

can be visited daily. The church is a cultural monument of national importance. Food, drinks and accommodation are not provided at the Monastery.

### **1.2.8 Municipality of Dupnitsa**

Geographic area – 329,06 km<sup>2</sup>.

Settlements - 17

Population – 44 615 people (01.02.2011)

Administrative Center – town of Dupnitsa

The municipality of Dupnitsa is situated in the southwestern part of Bulgaria, along the valley of Struma River and the foothills of the Rila Mountains. The E-79 International Road passes through the city of Dupnitsa which is situated on the crossroad between the southern cities of Thessaloniki (Greece) and Istanbul (Turkey) and Macedonia, Serbia and Western Europe Countries to the west.

#### **Natural landmarks:**

- **Rila Park**

The park area was officially opened in 2010. It stretched over an area of 28 ha which is situated just 1,5 km from the center of Dupnitsa. There is a special cycling alley with a length of 1,2 km. There are 8 bridges which were constructed over the Bistritsa River. In addition there is an artificial lake, sport facilities, swimming pool and other tourist facilities.

- **Bistrishki Waterfall**

Bistrishki Waterfall is located on the Bistritsa River. The height of the waterfall is 20 meters. The waterfall is situated near the footpath to the “Ivan Vazov” hut among a scenic area of coniferous forests.

- **Skakavishki Waterfall**

The waterfall attracts tourist in all seasons. Skakavishki Waterfall is the highest waterfall in the Rila Mountain with a height of 70 meters. It is located in the eastern slopes of “Kabul” Peak. During winter time the water is completely frozen which makes it attractive for ice climbers.

- **“Morenite” Area**

Morenite was once a huge glacier. It is situated near Bistritsa River on the road to “Ivan Vazov” Hut.

- **Sand Pyramid near the village of Dzherman**

The pyramid was shaped by the powers of wind and water. Its distinctive color makes it particularly attractive during the day.

#### **Mountain trails**

Dupnitsa is a staging area for many mountain routes that lead to the Rila Mountains, Seven Rila Lakes, Rila Monastery, etc. Nearby Dupnitsa are situated the mountain and ski resorts of Maliovitza, Panichishte, Bansko and Borovets.

#### **Cultural and Historical Landmarks**

##### **Monuments:**

- Ossuary and Monument of the Member of the Seventh Rila Division which participated in the Balkan Wars and the First World War
- Monument of the Fallen Soldier during the Balkan Wars and the Second World War
- Memorial plates of the Fallen Soldiers and the Commander of the Division – General Georgi Todorov.

## **Museums**

- Okoliyska Kashta (Okoliyska House)

Part of a museum complex with a Mosque – used for exhibitions and art gallery’

- Ethnographic house

The former "Zhelyova House" is now an ethnographic composition with different themes of the history of Dupnitsa.

## **Churches and Monasteries**

- Church „Sveti Georgi Pobedonosets”
- Church „Sveti Nikola”

### **1.2.9 Municipality of Treklyano**

Geographic area – 257,83 km<sup>2</sup>.

Settlements - 19

Population – 607 people (01.02.2011)

Administrative Center – village of Treklyano

Treklyano is a village in southwestern Bulgaria. It is the administrative center of the Municipality of Treklyano which is part of the District of Kyustendil. The village is located in the Kraishte area, very close to the Serbian border 40 kilometers to the north of Kyustendil. Treklyano is situated in a typical mountain region 15 km from the Milevets Peak (1733 m.) in the Malashevaska Mountain. The municipality of Treklyano covers an area of 267,6 square kilometers and consists of 19 villages, 4 of which are uninhabited.

#### **Natural, Cultural and Historical Landmarks:**

Through Treklyano flows Treklyanska River also called Elenka and Korito. The waters of the river are teeming with mountain barbell, maple and trout. The village of Treklyano is surrounded by beech and black fir forests. Treklyano is famous for its numerous springs such as: “Vrelo”, “Groot”, “Studena Voda”, “Sveta Voda”, “Ridzhanovo”, “Dliboki Dol”, “Koritata”, “Eremia”, etc. The large continuous flow of the waters at the “Velo” Spring (16 l/sec) was used to power local water mills. Three such mills existed in the neighborhood of Todorovtsi up to 1960.

The cultural and natural attractions of the municipality feature:

- the Art Gallery of Evtim Tomov - a local artist and a professor in the National Academy of Arts.
- The century old oak tree “Krastatoto Darvo” is located at the neighborhood of Todorovtsi. The area was used in ancient times as a pagan religious site.
- In the area around the neighborhoods of Stoykovtsi and Todorovtsi there are two caves.

### 1.3 EAST PLANNING REGION ( MACEDONIA)



The **Eastern planning region** is one of eight arbitrary statistical regions in the Republic of Macedonia. The Eastern region is located in the eastern part of the country and borders with the Republic of Bulgaria.

This region borders with Bulgaria on the east side, and the communication with the neighboring country is established through the border crossing called Delchevo in the municipality of Delchevo. There is possibility to open the border also through Klepalo, Ajduchka cheshma and Carna skala. The region has almost four times less population growth in comparison to the average growth in other regions of the country.

#### 1.3.1 Municipality of Berovo

Geographic area: 595 km<sup>2</sup>

Population: 13,941

Settlements: 8

Berovo with borders Pehchevo municipality, Delchevo municipality, and Vinica municipality in the north, Radovish municipality and Vasilevo municipality in the west, Bosilovo municipality and Novo Selo municipality in the south, and Bulgaria in the east.

Sustained by the Bregalnica River, Berovo stands at 830-900 meters (2,725–2,950 ft) above sea level and can be reached by car using a single asphalt road leading to the city. Berovo Lake and the forest of the Malsevo Mountains are two popular sites for tourists and Berovo craftsmen are well known for their skill in traditional wood crafting. Berovo cheese is also a well-known commodity.

#### Natural landmarks/resources:

- Malesh Mountain

The Malesh Mountains are rich in flora and fauna. Oak and beech forests predominate in the municipality. The beech zone is found in the mountain and lower mountain areas. The mountain beech forests are better preserved, and they are of great significance for the forest economy. The meadows are less present, mainly in the proximity of the River Bregalnica. Due to a repression of the forests, the hill pastures stretch over large areas, opposite of mountain pastures that are less present. As for the rest of the vegetation, the region is known for the presence of mountain medicinal herbs, forest fruits: mushrooms, raspberries, blackberries, forest strawberries etc.

- Berovo Lake

Berovo Lake is 6 km away from Berovo, on the road to the border crossing Klepalo. The area of the Lake is 0,57 km<sup>2</sup>. There are numerous villas, stretching along the Lake that could be rented, incredible terrains for picnic, recreation and sports.

- Tourist settlement Ablanica

Ablanica is tourist settlement stretching on both sides of the River Bregalnica. It is 2 km away from Berovo and it is the area with the most attractive archeological sites in the municipality. At the moment there are about 130 weekend houses, and parts of them are private accommodation capacities in the municipality.

- Suvi Laki

The tourist settlement Suvi Laki is 28 km from Berovo on the road to Strumica. At the moment there are 450 weekend houses, 2 children's holiday resorts and there is a projection for possible construction of another hundred weekend and commercial objects.

#### **Eco-paths:**

- Track 1: The most southern to the most northern part of Males region.
- Track 2: Berovo Lake, through Babin Chukar and the village Ratevo to the final destination Berovo
- Track 3: Berovo Lake through the village Ratevo to Berovo
- Track 4: the walking track from Berovo (Juovec) through the tourist settlement Ablanica to Berovo Lake.
- Track 5: Path of the Ilinden revolutionaries

#### **Other places with potential for development of alternative tourism**

- Hunting tourism

The region is divided in 5 hunting grounds where one can find various kinds of protected game such as wild rabbit, partridge, rock partridge, doves, doe, wild boar, wolf and others. The unprotected species that can be found in this region are the fox, the wild cat, marten, ash-grey crow, magpie, white marten, badger, skunk, hawk, goshawk and others.

- Sheepfold "Klepalo"

Meal in a sheepfold hut having a three century tradition at an altitude of 1400 m, where the food served is prepared there with products from its close surrounding.

### **Cultural and Historical Landmarks**

#### **Museums**

- Berovo Museum

The historic display consists of documents and objects that speak about the history of the Malesh people in the time of Dedo Iljo Maleshevski, Dimitar Pop Georgjiev Berovski, the Razlog Uprising, the development of Malesh between the two World Wars and its development after the Second World War. In order to have a richer display there are some other accidentally discovered antique and Middle Age coins, which speak about the economic development and the trading relations in the Malesh region.

The ethnological display consists of a reconstruction of a traditional Malesh room, Malesh costume, jewelry items, pottery, music instruments and reconstruction of a Malesh blacksmith's workshop.

## **Traditional settlements**

- village of Vladimirovo

The village of Vladimirovo is the so called “village of educated people” due to the large number of graduates, masters and doctors among the local population. This village will enchant you with its architecture. In the center of the village you can visit the old An (Inn) dating from the 18th century and the church “Sveti Spas” from 1842 which during its existence has been not only a church but also a school and a police station. A “Chronicles of the church St. Ascension of Christ” was discovered in this church. The patron holiday of the village is Saint Spas, and on Ilinden (the day of the Saint Ilija) there is a kurban (church and folk gathering).

- village of Dvorishte

Dvorishte is the furthest rural settlement in the municipality and the only village where the inhabitants are separated in neighborhoods and thus identify one another. Here you can visit the church “Uspenie Bogorodichno” built at the beginning of the 20th century by immigrants from Ribnica, in the Pirin part of Macedonia. There is an interesting custom called “Surova”, which takes place on the night between 13th and 14th January every year. The patron holiday is Mala Bogorodica (Small Virgin Mary), among the people known as Rozen, and there is a kurban (church and folk gathering) on Ilinden (the day of the Saint Ilija).

- village of Ratevo

The rural settlement Ratevo is 7 km away from Berovo. The famous Miss Stone stayed in Garagan’s house (a resident of this village) in 1906. You can visit the church “Sveti Apostoli Peter and Pavel” built in the second half of the 19th century. This church organizes kurban (church and folk gathering) on Golema Bogorodica (Great Virgin Mary) and on Ilinden (the day of the Saint Ilija). The patron saint of the village is Sveti Pavle (St. Paul). Every year on 20th January Ratevo organizes a unique traditional carnival called “Bamburci”.

## **Churches and Monasteries**

- Monastery “Presveta Bogorodica” (Holy Mother) – Balaklija” (East Friday), Berovo

The church “Presveta Bogorodica” began its construction in 1972 and it was finished in 1975. It was built in the style of Byzantine-Macedonian churches from the Middle century. The monastery is male, and the type is isihastic. In the vicinity of the monastery, an older church had been located and ruined, and its icons were transferred in the new church object.

On 28th August, the Orthodox people celebrate the holiday the Assembly of Holy Mother. For that occasion, Berovo hosts the church-national traditional meeting which is organized in the monastery “Holy Mother – East Friday”. On August 28, people come in Berovo from all parts of Macedonia and abroad, whose number mounts to 15,000. In the monastery, the host citizens organize mass celebration in honour of the holiday and each visitor-pilgrim worships Mother Mary as well as participates in the national dining table. Thus continues the ten century tradition.

## **The Monastery “St. Archangel Michael”**

- Monastery “Sveti Archangel Mihail” (Saint Archangel Michael)

The Monastery “Sveti Archangel Mihail” was built in 1818 between the two old churches, “Sveti Gyorji” from the right side at about hundred meters and “Sveta Bogorodica” on the left, at the entrance of Bregalnica gorge, where Berovo was located in the 18th century. The construction method of the monastery is associated with a legend that the Berovo citizens proudly narrate. The church with a large porch, built in the architectural opus in the 19th century, dominates the monastery courtyard. In its interior the characters of saints are painted in a distinctive style that deviates from Byzantine canons. The iconostasis that separates the altar from the middle section has built in 10 so-called royal icons with superb artistic achievement. In its most thriving period, the monastery numbered up to sixty (nuns) in rich developed economy, a theological school, weaver.

The nuns' chambers are located on the south, west and northern side of the church. There were built in genuine old Maleshevo architecture of basements, with 16 rooms in total and 560m<sup>2</sup> area. The monastery activities are closely connected to the Razlovec (1876) and Kresnen (1878) Uprisings.

- Church "Sveti Spas" in the village of Vladimirovo  
"Sveti Spas" church was built in the period from 1840 to 1842 and through time apart from being church, it also served as school and police station. The building is a three-nave with semicircular apse. "Chronicles of the Church of Sts. Ascension of Christ" has been discovered in the church as well as a book of revenues, expenses and inventory, which recorded details of construction, furniture, building the new school, the costs incurred. The church leaves special impression is by the ten oak pillars are shaped with an ax in hexagonal right prisms. The icons on the iconostasis were made on Mount Athos as gifts from the local population.

This village aspires with its old architecture. In the center of the village is the old Inn dating from the 18th century. The village celebration day is Spasovden and clergy – national gathering is held on August 2 - Ilinden.

### **Other tourist sites**

- "Petlec"

"Petlec" is 12 km away from Berovo near village Rusinovo. At this point in the heart of Maleshevo Mountains in 1906 ceased the life of Damian Gruev, one of the greatest Macedonian revolutionaries, a visionary and a fighter for independent and sovereign Macedonia.

In his honour, every year on December 19, the day he died in an unequal struggle with the Turkish army, a traditional march is organized from village Rusinovo to "Petlec".

- Military Guard (Checkpoint) – Klepalo
- Military Guard (Checkpoint) (Karaula Dvorishte - Dobri Laki (BG))

### **Cultural event:**

- International Fair of Traditional Products part of Ethno square festival,  
To promote the traditional products and handiwork's and in order to bring them closer to the consumers and the visitors, every year on 27th and 28th August Berovo organizes an international fair of traditional products "Maleshevia is in Your Hand". The fair represents three sectors: healthy food, skillful hands and souvenirs and wood-carving.

Ethno Square Festival is an integrated promotion of the cultural heritage of the region, treating more segments of the rich tradition in several parts:

- Maleshevia is in your hands - Fair of local traditional products.
- Ethno Camp - music workshop where international artists working on themes of authentic folklore and musical stylization
- Maleshevo Folklore Meetings - Performances of folk societies from the Balkans

The aim of the festival is promotion of the cultural heritage of the region by creating an attractive cultural event. Ethno Festival is one of the key tools for promoting Berovo as an attractive destination for development of alternative tourism.

### **1.3.2 Municipality of Vinica**

Geographic area: 432.67 km<sup>2</sup>

Population: 19,938

Settlements: 16

The municipality borders Kochani municipality and Makedonska Kamenica municipality in the north, Delchevo municipality in the east, Radovish municipality and Berovo municipality in the south and Zarnovci municipality in the west.

#### **Cultural and historical tourist landmarks**

- Museum of Terakota - Vinica

In the museum is located the largest collection of terracotta icons in Macedonia. They testify about the high artistic achievements of ancient Christian art created at the dawn of the Middle Age and undoubtedly indicate that the roots of Christianity in Macedonia initiated in Vinica.

- Archeological site "Vinicko Kale"

On the site Vinicko Kale one can see the remains of several buildings and an old Christian church. This church, which occupies the southwestern part of this site, is built in the first half of IV century.

- International Folk Festival "Istibansko Zdravozivo"

The International Folk Festival attracts over 600 people every year in the second half of September in the village of Istibanja.

### **1.3.3 Municipality of Delchevo**

Geographic area: 422.39 km<sup>2</sup>

Population: 17,505

Settlements: 22

#### **Natural landmarks**

- Golak Mountain

Golak Mountain is declared as a protected area, with special accent over the biodiversity and wide range of special plants, trees and animals. Golak is an attractive and scenic picnic place with distinct climate. It is hot during the winter and fresh throughout the summer. Golak is considered a natural infirmary for people with respiratory conditions. Its highest peak rises to 1536 meters above sea level.

- Park forest Gotse Delchev on Golak Mountain

With proclamation of the local and state authorities a memorial park forest on Golak Mountain was established, with all of the characteristic and significant plant trees and beautiful landscapes.

- Holy Water trails, 3-4 km near village of Trabatoviste

There is a traditional belief that the three natural springs of water dedicated to three orthodox saints have the healing power, to heal different kinds of illnesses, among the people. These three springs are settled 3-4 km from village of Trabatoviste, discoverable along the trails which are passing by the marvelous natural landscapes.

- Ilin Kamen (Ilin Stone), 2 km above the Village of Dzvegor

Old geomorphologic stone shape, with breath taking look, placed on the hillside above the regional road M-5 and village of Dzvegor. The stone is often related by local people as a place with healing powers for pregnant women and young mothers.

- Kukulje (Stone dolls), 4 km near village of Nov Istevnik and 3 km near village of Trabatoviste  
Astonishing geo- morphologic shapes - statues developed under the outer forces of the nature, with grandiose and respectable sizes, connected to different legends, local stories, and beliefs, surrounded with breath taking nature and natural beauties. Along exhaustible climbing forest route to Kukulje one can enjoy old traditional animal farms and, with naturally rich-developed forest surroundings.

- Markovo sedlo (the throne of king Marko), near the village of Grad

Naturally formed structure with a look of a stone throne, for which the local inhabitants believe was the resting place of king Marko—a historically significant person—one of the rulers in this region during the medieval era.

- Lake Sandanski, 4 km from the center of Delcevo

Small lake placed in the presence of beautiful natural ambient, next to the river of Bregalnica, with existence of variety of different animals. The lake is rich with different kinds of fishes, and it is a significant place for recreational sport fishing events, and picnic place of many passengers, and local folks.

### **Eco-paths**

- Golak trekking trail 1
- Golak trekking trail 2

On the Peak of Golak Mountain are placed two basic trim trails suitable, for running, walking and basic preparations of athletes.

### **Cultural and historical landmarks**

- Museum of Delcevo, located at the Memorial house ASNOM in the center of Delcevo

In the museum of Delcevo are placed many archeological artifacts found during the researches in different periods in the past. The collection of artifacts is over 200 pieces. The museum is divided in two parts: Ethnological collection and archeological collection. The age of the items in the museum varies from the period of the neolith -5000 BC to the 14-th century AD.

- Razlovci uprising memorial house, at the center of village of Razlovci

The monument represents memorial house of the first uprising (Razlovci uprising) of the Macedonian people during the differentiation of the nations in XIX century, against the ottoman's rule in Macedonia. In the memorial house are placed the photos, documents and significant items from the time of the uprising and a small library.

- ASNOM memorial house, center of Delcevo

ASNOM is a monumental building located in the center of Delcevo with the purpose to be one of three largest cultural houses in Yugoslavia. It is a typical representative of the architectural traditions of the period of Yugoslavia.

### **Archeological sites**

- Medieval tower site "Kulata", near village of Chiflik on 4 km from the center of Delcevo.

The remains of the medieval tower which was a significant point of the trading route that passed next to it. Across the Pijanec region there were placed many significant transit routes, which were used in 13-th and 14-th century, that give Pijanec important role in the history. This routes were controlled by this medieval towers (3 known locations of this kind of towers), and all of them were ruined in the earthquake in 1904. The tower near village of Chiflik is the most preserved one

- Gradishte, near village of Grad, 6 km from center of Delcevo

Gradishte is a reconstructed fortress from the early roman period. With large amount of archeological items found in its surroundings from all historical periods in the past, this fortress is one of the significant inhabited towns from the ancient times, and a cross road of routes, that are known for this region. This was one of the most significant inhabited places in the past. In 2001 during the archeological research that was made on the site was found an metal sculpture item of female goddess – mother which dates back to 5500 BC. Also on the site were found the remains of Neolithic house, early ancient money coins, and other items.

## **Traditional settlements**

- Ethno village of Grad

The first ethno village project in Macedonia. The start of the project was established in 2001, when the construction process started but never has been finished. Nowadays a visitor can see the remains of the buildings in naturally beautiful surroundings and ecologically clean area.

## **Monasteries**

- Monastery “Sveta Bogorodica Istocen petok Balaklija” (St.Bogorodica Balaklija-Eastern Friday Balaklija), 3 km from the center of Delchevo.

The monastery is the most impressive religious object in Pijanec region. The monastery was reconstructed in the beginning of this century, and the whole surroundings were adopted, cultivated, on a very high level of aesthetics, with the touch of the traditional architectural style, from this region. The monastery is particular with its astonishing look, beautiful forest marvelous walking trails, natural springs, waterfall etc. Lots of ceremonial events have happened here along the year, and it is indeed the most popular picnic place in the region

- Monastery of Sveti Ilija (St.Ilija), 1.5 km from Village of Dzvegor

The monastery has been built in the year 1982, after a dream that one of the local people dreamed, how St.Ilija told him to build this monastery and to dedicate it to him. Near the monastery there is a spring of holy water that local people think have healing power for some diseases. The monastery is settled in beautiful landscape and colorful site.

- Sveti Georgi (St. Georgi), Village of Virche

This monastery is placed near the old oak tree called Georgov dab, and is one of the significant places for religious gatherings during Giorgovden (the day of St.George).

- Sveti Pantelejmon (St.Pantelejmon), on the top of Golak mountain

This monastery is situated on top of Golak Mountain at 1536 meters above sea level. It was built in honor of Sveti Panteleymon - a local doctor and a healer of the local people who received his healing powers from god and was totally dedicated to Christianity. Local people believe that if someone sleeps near the monastery during the night on 8-th of August the one will receive the healing from the saint to heal its deceases and spiritual problems. Every year on the same date (8 August) the monastery is being visited by more than 5000 people.

## **Mosques**

- Mosque Sultan Fatih Mehmed II, Center of Delcevo

The mosque is the oldest building in Delchevo. It was built in 1448, and it is mentioned in the scripts of the famous Evliya Chelebia-traveler-writer from the year 1670. This mosque and the one in village of Trabotivishte are one of the rarest in the world where the highest part of the mosque – so called minaret is on the left side of the entrance of the mosque.

## **Cultural events:**

- Golak folk meetings, 8-9 August

The folk festival in Golak is dedicated to the orthodox saint Sveti Panteleymon. With participants of folk groups from all over the Balkan region, this traditional festival is one of the most significant of this kind on international level in the region.

- Pianec-Maleshevo wedding, first week of September, Pianec-Maleshevo region

It symbolizes a typical representation of a wedding according to old traditions and customs. Marriage is one of the holiest things in lives of the people in Pijanec-Maleshevo region, so its celebration has been done in the past by strict and well known customs, prolonged from generation to generation.

### **1.3.4 Municipality of Zarnovci**

Geographic area: 55.82 km<sup>2</sup>

Population: 3,264

Settlements: 3

Zarnovci is a municipality in the eastern part of Republic of Macedonia. Zarnovci is the name of the village where the municipal seat is found. Zarnovci municipality is part of Eastern statistical/administrative region of Macedonia. The population of the Zarnovci municipality is 3,264 of whom 2,221 live in the municipality center at the town of Zarnovci, while the rest live in the villages across the municipality.

#### **Natural landmarks**

- River Zranovka – Zarnovci
- Rice fields – Zarnovci
- Plackovica mountain

#### **Eco-paths**

- Zarnovci – St. Petka monastery, Vidoviste
- Zarnovci – river Zrnovka – place called “Brana”

### **1.3.5 Municipality of Karbinci**

Geographic area: 229.7 km<sup>2</sup>

Population: 8707

Settlements: 29

The municipality borders Probishtip municipality, Cheshinovo-Obleshevo municipality and Zarnovci municipality in the north and east, and Radovish municipality and Shtip municipality in the west and south.

#### **Archeological sites**

- Bargala

Bargala was one of the most important fortified towns in Macedonia during Late Antiquity and early Byzantium periods. It was constructed between the 4th and 6th century. Its name is related to the river Bregalnica. It is protected by the Government as a national Monument of culture. Today, the archaeological site of Bargala represents a cultural and historic monument, which is operating also as a recreational center because of its favorable location.

#### **Monasteries**

- Monastery of Sveta Petka, near the village of Kalauzliya

The Monastery is dedicated to Sveta Petka and it is located in the Municipality of Karbinci, along the same road as to the archaeological sites of Bargala and Vrteska. It is located between Bargala and Vrteska. There are several sources with holy water. The monastery provides accommodation for tourists and visitors. It is located on the right (west) bank of the Bregalnica River.

### 1.3.6 Municipality of Kochani

Geographic area: 375.44 km<sup>2</sup>

Population: 38 092

Settlements: 28

The municipality borders Kriva Palanka municipality in the north, Kratovo municipality and Probishtip municipality in the west, Makedonska Kamenica municipality and Vinitsa municipality in the east, Cheshinovo-Obleshevo municipality and Zarnovtsi municipality in the south.

#### Natural landmarks:

- The Old Oak in the village of Beli;
- Monastery Sveti Iliya – 600 years old, a protected cultural heritage.

#### Eco-paths:

- Eco trail connecting the village of Lesново - municipality of ProbiShtip and the village of Panteley - municipality of Kochani, eco-trail for relaxation and walking with 14 km length.
- Trim trail at the Gratche dam.

#### Traditional settlements

- Krusharsko maalo
- Strichani

Krusharsko Maalo and Strichani are the oldest neighbourhoods in Kochani with authentic old houses and infrastructure.

#### Monuments

- Medieval tower, Kochani town
- Monument of Liberty in Kochani town

The Monument of Liberty in Kochani is a monumental structure built on the Lokubiya Hill located at the northwest part of the town. The monument is a large complex of open wall constructions, which are covered in mosaics.

#### Museums

- Centre for the Valorisation of Cultural Heritage, located at the village of Yastrebnik in Osogovo mountain

The Centre holds various collections of traditional objects with cultural value and representatives of the local flora and fauna.

#### Archaeological sites

- Dolno Gradishte
- Lokubiya – Kochani
- Archeological site Bela Crkva in Orizari Village

#### Monasteries

- Monastery complex “Sveti Panteleymon”, village Panteley

Near the village of Panteley, only 12 km from Kochani, there is a monastery complex Sveti Panteleymon, built in the XIX century. Every year on 9th of August there is a church fair visited by thousands of people.

- Monastery “Sveti Ilija”, village of Beli
- Monastery “Sveti Spas”, village of Polaki
- Monastery “Dobra voda”, village of Orizari

## **Cultural events**

- Days of Roma culture in April

The International Day of the Roma (April 8) is a day to celebrate Roma culture and raise awareness of the issues related to Roma communities.

- Drama Amateur Festival

Drama amateur festival (DAF) (in June) is international festival with numerous theatrical performances with participants from the country and region.

- Saint Peter's Day Celebrations in July

The celebrations of Saint Peter's day are a large cultural event with theatrical performances, Folklore concerts and open exhibitions. The event has international character.

- Days of Kochani's rice in October

The „Days of rice” carries with itself the spiritual and material cultural inheritance connected with the rice as a traditional agriculture in Kochani. The celebrations are part of the vast cultural and historical heritage of Kochani.

### **1.3.7 Municipality of Makedonska Kamenica**

Geographic area: 190.37 km<sup>2</sup>

Population: 8,110

Settlements: 9

The municipality borders Kriva Palanka municipality in the north, Bulgaria and Delchevo municipality in the east, Kochani municipality and Vinitsa municipality in the west.

#### **Eco-systems:**

- The Lake of Rice (Kalimanci Lake)

This artificial lake, filled with the waters of the beautiful rivers Bregalnitsa and Kamenichka, is used to irrigate the famous rice plantations of Kochani. Built in 1969, the lake is 14 km long and its maximum depth can reach 80 meters. The main purpose of the lake is to provide irrigation of about 28,000 hectares, mainly in the valley of Kochani, but it is also used for the irrigation of Ovce Pole by using a 100 km long canal. The water of the lake is populated with a large range of fish and other aquatic population.

- Osogovo Mountains

The forests of Osogovo are stretching north from the town of Makedonska Kamenica along the hills around the Kamenichka River, all the way to the mountain highs somewhere around 1700 meters above the sea level from where the pastures are starting up to the highest peak named Ruen located at 2252 meters above sea level. The forest is mainly composed of oak and pine trees.

There are many walking trails leading to one of the many rural inhabited places belonging to the municipality of Makedonska Kamenica. Each of them represents great opportunity for adopting for touristic purposes. There are many water springs along the paths and the air is clean and fresh just perfect for tourism and recreation.

#### **Eco-paths**

- Kosevichki rid

The 3 km walking trail starts at the local police station then continues up the hill through the pine forest to a local picnic spot with a wonderful panoramic view to the town below and the Kalimanci Lake.

- “Kalata” - The Tin Town

Kalata is the only island in the artificial Kalimanci Lake. Kalata is the sole island in Kalimanci accumulation. Only four miles from Makedonska Kamenica one can find remains of late ancient city, submerged under the water. Kalata is an abbreviation of "Tin Town," because gold and tin were mined here in the past. The ancient Via Ignatia Road was also passing through here. The area of the ancient settlement is protected on three sides by steep hill and the deeply incised riverbeds of both rivers. The flat-top plateau rises above the surface of the artificial lake and it is cut by a defensive ditch carved into the rock.

In the bed of Kalimanci Lake on the shore of the village of Dulica, near by the place called Begov Dab was discovered great basilica from V century with many ancient artefacts (ceramics, columns and capitals). Also in the bed of Kalimanci Lake in Ilijovo, in vicinity to the area of Carkvishte, were discovered remains of an ancient building.

### **Monuments**

- The monument of the national hero “Vera Josich”

The monument was sculptured in bronze by the famous Macedonian sculptor Tome Serafimovski in 1982 in honour of Vera Josich. She was a Macedonian and Yugoslav revolutionary and People's Hero of Yugoslavia. She fought in the Yugoslav People's Liberation War and was wounded at the area of Sasa, where she died on May 22<sup>nd</sup> 1944.

- The Memorial Ossuary in the village of Cera

Makedonska Kamenica during the Second Balkan War has experienced all the horrors that a war can bring. In the outskirts of the municipality at an area called “Govedar” (Cattle Breeder) was fought one of the most fearsome battles of the Second Balkan War. Remains of dead soldiers from that battle are kept in the ossuary that was built by the Serbian authorities in 1933, marking the 20th anniversary of the Second Balkan War.

### **1.3.8 Municipality of Pehchevo**

Geographic area: 207 km<sup>2</sup>

Population: 5,517

Settlements: 7

Municipality of Pehcevo is bordered by the municipality of Sandanski (Republic of Bulgaria) to the East, Municipality of Berovo to the South, Municipality of Vinitsa to the West and with the Municipality of Delcevo to the North. Municipality of Pehcevo has a moderate continental climate with modification of the climate in the higher mountain and lowland parts. The relief is mainly hilly-mountainous, with lowland terrains.

### **Eco-systems**

- Maleshevska Mountain
- Vlaina Mountain
- Natural Park “Judovi livadi” (Meadows of Judas) - 9 km. from Pehchevo

Natural Park “Judovi livadi” is characterized with its unique flora species such as *Drosera Rotundifolia* a local endemic carnivorous plant which is rare both for Macedonia region and the Balkans.

### **Natural landmarks**

- “Vratena skala” (Twirled Rock), 9 km from Pehchevo - specific rock formation linked with local folklore;
- Pehchevo waterfalls - 10 km from Pehchevo;

- Waterfalls “Cran Dol” - 12 km from Pehchevo;
- Waterfalls ”Debel Rid” - 16 km from Pehchevo;
- Ljutacka River Waterfalls - 17 km from Pehchevo;

### **Eco-paths**

- Hiking Trail “Ravna Reka” (Pehchevo) – “Ablanica” (Berovo).

The eco-path is a link between two tourist settlements, Ravna reka and Ablanica located at the neighbouring municipalities of Pehchevo and Berovo. This 4, 1 km hiking trail connects the two of the most renowned tourist areas - Ravna Reka and Ablanica. The trail passes through a valley of cool and scenic forests located on both riverbanks of Bregalnitsa River.

- Trekking route 1 – “Maleshevska Mountain path”, between the Municipalities of Pehchevo and Berovo.

From Berovo to Juovets (838 m.) the trail goes north-east through Kutenets (965 m.) and Parkach (1095 m.) keeping the direction northeast towards Konar (1098 m.) and turning north toward Spikovo (1932 m.). The path curves towards north-east through Skalite (1334 m.) and Gushteritsa (1568 m.). Then it continues north to Kadan Bunar (1793 m.) to the highest point in the the Maleshevska Mountain, the peak of Kadiytza (1932 m.). The total length of the trial is 15 km.

- Trekking route 2 along the border line between Republic of Macedonia and Republic of Bulgaria.

The route starts at the peak of Kadiitsa (1932 m.) and goes south to Kadan Bunar (1793 m). The descent continues down and to the east to “Vlashki Kolibi” (1683 m.). After a small ascent to 1703 m. at Aydushki Peak it continues to Chengino kale (1690 m). Then it descends south-east to Golem Trebomir (1620 m.) and through Breza (1443 m.) to Kriva River.

- Trekking route 3 – “Ayduchki kladenec”

The route starts from the village of Pehchevo and continues along Ramno Borie, Skalite, Gusteritsa, Signal and Ayduchki Rid (1.615 m.). Ayduchki Kladenec is the name of the border crossing checkpoint between Republic of Macedonia and Republic of Bulgaria (it is currently not operative).

### **Tourist settlements**

- Tourist settlement “Ravna Reka”

Ravna Reka is a popular tourist settlement which has two motels, ponds, more than 50 private villas and recreational facilities, soccer and basketball fields, children playgrounds, pavilions etc.

### **Archaeological sites**

- Archaeological site “Sveti Petka”- 4 km from Pehchevo - The old Christian Monastery complex is located near Pehchevo.

- “Bobishte”, 17 km from Pehchevo, near village of Pancharevo - remnants of old Roman settlement.

- “Gradishte/Manastirishte”, 9 km from Pehchevo, near village Spikovo - remnants of a late ancient settlement and citadel, surrounded by stone walls of fine stone and lime mortar.

- “Bukovik”, 5 km from Pehchevo – Ruins of late antiquity buildings are located just 3 km from the village Negrevo on a flattened plateau.

- „,Manastir”, 4 km from Pehchevo are the remains of early Christian church

- “Rudishte/Rakovec”, 3 km from Pehchevo, near the village of Negrevo

Archaeological site Rudishe or Rakovec is early medieval mining settlement located just 3 km to the east of Pehchevo at the foothills of Bukovik. At a large meadow there are well-preserved remains of foundations of a building, as well as fragments of ceramic pots and vessels. At the lower end of the site there are remains of an early Christian church.

- Medieval city of Raven, 5 km from Pehchevo

According to historic sources this location is one of most likely positions of the city of Raven - the cradle of Slavic alphabet. Raven is the name of the city where Methodius wrote the Slavic alphabet.

### **1.3.9 Municipality of Probishtip**

Geographic area: 325.57 km<sup>2</sup>

Population: 16 193

Settlements: 37

The municipality borders Kratovo municipality in the north, Kochani and Cheshinovo-Obleshevo in the east, Sveti Nikole in the west, Štip and Karbintsi in the south.

#### **Eco-paths**

Eco-path from Lesnovo monastery to Panteley Monastery, Probishtip and Kochani, Osogovo Mountain

This eco- path connects two monasteries – Lesnovo monastery from ProbiShtip and Panteley monastery from Kochani. On the route of the eco-path there are well organized resting areas with viewpoints, benches, drinking fountains, etc.

#### **Other places with potential for development of the tourism**

Newly constructed location called “Peski” at the river of Zletovo is the place where the traditional custom –bathing of the grooms is performed on the holiday “Vodichi”

#### **Museums**

- House of Culture – Probishtip with mineralogical and ethno collection

Probishtip is a mining community. Therefore the most prominent exhibition at the local House of Culture is the mineralogical collection which contains samples of earth minerals found at the local mine. The ethno collection is also exhibited at the House of culture and includes traditional costumes and traditional Macedonian objects which were used from past generations.

#### **Monasteries**

- Monastery “Sveti Gavrail Lesnovski” – village of Lesnovo

The Monastery of Lesnovo is one of the most significant religious and cultural centres in the municipality of ProbiShtip, with a long history that probably began in the 11th - 12th century AD. Restored in the second quarter of the 14th century, by building a monumental sanctuary of Archangel Michael (1341 - 1349.) and painting its interior, (1346 - 1347 and after 1349) and bestowed with many assets, the monastery is the biggest memorial commissioned by a nobleman (Lord Jovan Oliver) from the period of the expansion of the Serbian monarchy in the middle ages (King Stefan Dushan). The other buildings in the complex (lodging-houses, bell tower, school, wood-carved iconostasis of the church), were erected much later (19th century) and illustrate the contribution of the local community and monastic brotherhood in providing continuity of this spiritual and enlightened centre. The previous conservation activities were focused on the church and its fresco paintings.

- Monastery “Sveti Spiridon Magesnik”- village of Zletovo

It is relatively new monastery which was built over the foundations of an old church which was destroyed in ancient times. It is placed near by the fish restaurant and the river Zletovica. There are a lot of small village churches with a significant local meaning.

### **1.3.10 Municipality of Cheshinovo-Obleshevo**

Geographic area: 132.2 km<sup>2</sup>

Population: 7,490

Settlements: 14

The municipality borders Kochani municipality and Zarnovtsi municipality in the east and Probishtip municipality and Karbintsi municipality in the west.

#### **Eco-systems**

- Osogovo Mountain

Osogovo is located in the south-east part of the municipality. In the plinth of the mountain lies the village of Bania which is renowned for its vast thermal water resources.

- Plachkovitsa Mountain

Plachkovitsa is located in the south part of the municipality. In the foothills of the mountain lie the villages of Terantsii, Kuchichino and Buričhevo.

#### **Traditional settlements**

- Village Varbica - old traditional Vlach houses
- Village Lepopeltsi - old traditional Vlach houses

#### **Monasteries**

- The monastery “Sveti Ilija” in the village of Spanchevo
- The monastery “Sveti Atanas” in the village of Spanchevo
- The monastery “Sveti Petka” in the village of Sokolarci
- The monastery “Sveti Petka” in the village of Novoselani
- The monastery “Sveti Petka” in the village of Cheshinovo
- The monastery “Sveti Arhangel Mihail” in the village of Kuchichino
- The monastery “Mala Bogorodica” in the village of Kuchichino
- The monastery “Golema Bogorodica” in the village of Chiflik
- The monastery “Saint Georgi” in the village of Sokolarci
- The monastery “Saint Nedelya” in the village of Ziganci
- The monastery “Saint Nedelya” in the village of Obleshevo

### **1.3.11 Municipality of Shtip**

Geographic area: 583.24 km<sup>2</sup>

Population: 43 652

Settlements: 44

#### **Natural landmarks/resources:**

##### **Eco-paths**

- Brioni

That is a park area in the centre of the city.

##### **Other places with potential for development of tourism**

- Kezhovitsa thermal baths

Kezhovica baths are situated on the right bank of the river Bregalnitsa, about 2 km southwest from the center of Shtip, near the exit to Novo Selo.

The complex has entirely renovated bath and a rehabilitation centre. The temperature of the water is 58°C.

## Monuments

- Monument of the lost soldiers during the Second World War

Around 814 people from the region lost their lives during the war. In their honour, in 1974 the local Community Council decided to construct a memorial monument.

- Monument of fallen heroes

On May 3, 2001, around 5:40 a.m. soldiers of the Macedonian Army were ambushed near the village of Vaksintse (Kumanovo) by terrorists who opened fire on their convoy. Two soldiers lost their lives in the severe gun battle. The victims were Dimitar Dvoyakovski (29 years), father of one son, and Vlatko Petrov (24 years) both from the village of Chardakliya, Shtip.

- Monument of the Deported Jews

In honour of deported Jews, in 1985 was raised a monument. The monument was built by the local artist Metodi Andonov and symbolizes the life path of Jews. On March 11, 1943, 551 people were deported from Shtip and were killed in the concentration camp "Treblinka".

## Archaeological sites

- Bargala in mountain Plachkovitsa

The ancient town of Bargala was located at the foothills of Plachkovitsa Mountain. Nearby are the river of Kozyachka and the small village of Koziak. The town was built in the early 4-th century. This was evident in some Roman documents which were found here. They contain information that the city gate of Bargala was built by Anthon Alipius, who was administrator of the province. The town of Bargala soon expanded into an Episcopal centre of the Bregalnitsa region.

- Isar

The ancient fortification of Isar is situated on a rocky hill above the town of Shtip. The exact time of the construction of the fortress is unknown. It is believed that it is dated back to the early periods of the Middle Ages due to its distinctive architecture features. It guarded the town of Shtip during the reign of Tsar Samuil. Three churches were built within the fortification - the Church of Sveti Vlasius - to the north; the Church of Sveti Archangel Mihail - to the east and the church of Sveti Yoan Krastitel (John the Baptist) - to the south. During Ottoman presence the fortress was destroyed and today only some parts of it still remain.

## Museums

- City Museum - Shtip

Main activities of the city's museum in Shtip are to explore, discover and preserve both historical and archaeological relics which were found in the region. In addition museum experts manage and aid in the restoration of many churches and ancient settlements. During work on the pipelines, a settlement from the earliest Neolithic phase, the only of the kind in Macedonia, has been unearthed near Shtip. A team of archaeologists working in the field near the village of Krupishte has found the settlement at the Grancharitsa locality.

- Old town clock - Shtip

The old town clock is monument of culture dated back to 17-th century. It is under official protection of the state. The local population has named the clock "Begova kula" or the Tower of the Beg. According to some historical documents, the clock was built by a Turkish ruler that used to live in the town. But his name remained unknown. He built the clock tower in order to protect his family during times of war. That is why on the top of the tower there was a gun-room and a terrace. A century later, a clock mechanism was placed on the top of the tower. Part of the tower was destroyed in 1934. According to old documents which were written by the clock keeper, the tower was built in 1650 and it is related with a local legend. A Turkish Beg was in love with a beautiful girl called Anka. He wanted to take her and made her his wife. She promised to marry the Beg only if he was to build some monument in value for the local population. She suggested building a clock tower. Anka thought that the Turkish beg will gave up, but because he was madly in love, for very short time he managed to construct the tower and married the beautiful Anka from Shtip.

- Bezisten (Art Gallery) - Shtip

Among the buildings in the central part of the town of Shtip, there is a building outstanding with its architecture, typical for the Medieval Islamic trade centers. It is the Bezisten (Turkish word for market place). The time of its construction cannot be precisely determined. The Bezisten was used as the main market place where trade and selling of various goods was blooming during the time of the Turkish rule. This suggests that the building dates back to 16-th or 17-th Century. It was burned down during the war between Austria and Turkey. The Bezisten in Shtip has a stone construction with a rectangular foundation that is divided into three separate rooms covered with vaults and massive domes. There are glass holes on them that allow for the daylight to penetrate the interior space and contribute to the noble ambient of the Bezisten. Today, the Bezisten is used as an art gallery.

### **Traditional settlements**

- Village of Novo Selo

One of the oldest settlements in Shtip is Novo Selo. Old Macedonian architecture is very unique and can be seen in many settlements around Shtip. The village has preserved many of its old buildings which are quite distinctive due to their specific architectural features. Novo Selo is also famous for its Religious Icons Gallery.

### **Cultural events**

- Shtip Cultural Summer - June-August

Summer festival is a local traditional gathering with a wide variety of music performances, theatre, exhibitions, book promotions, etc.

- Makfest Song Festival - Shtip (7-9 October)

Each year 28 songs are competing in two festival nights. The final competition day is on the 9-th of October and it is live broadcasted over the National Television. General sponsor of the festival is the Municipality of Shtip.

- Astibo Jazz Festival - Shtip (27-29 May)

- Spring Art Festival – Shtip (15-16 April )

Spring Art Festival is a multimedia festival with educational and entertaining character, created for the promotion of cultural and artistic awareness through the presentation and promotion of works and projects created by our famous and anonymous authors.

- RUN Festival Macedonia (1-2 April)

RUN MK is the Macedonian version of RUN @ Motion, which happens in Bristol, UK, and it is the only drum and bass festival in Macedonia. The starts on 1 April and it abounds with music, workshops, exhibitions etc.

## 1.4 SOUTH-EAST PLANNING REGION



The South-eastern statistical region is one of eight arbitrary statistical regions in the Republic of Macedonia. It is located in the south-eastern part of the country and borders both the Republic of Greece and the Republic of Bulgaria.

### 1.4.1 Municipality of Bogdantsi

Geographic area: 114 km<sup>2</sup>

Population: 8707

Settlements: 4

Municipality of Bogdantsi is located along the left bank of the Vardar River and covers the southernmost part of the Republic of Macedonia. It borders with the municipalities of Doiran, Valandovo and Gevgelija, and shares a common border with the Republic of Greece.

#### Eco-paths

- Sporting- recreational path “Paljurci”- Doiran

The recreational path has huge historical significance since back in the beginning of the century here laid the main defensive line of the Thessaloniki (Macedonian) front during the World War I. In ancient times one of the Seven Disciples of Christ, Saint Paul visited the region on his journey east. The path is abundant with landscapes and is particularly interesting for the admirers of walks in nature and hunting.

#### Archeological sites

- Bardanov Kamen (Bardanov Stone)

Bardanov Kamen is a Roman settlement which is located 500 meters to the west of Bogdantsi. Various ceramic vessels, pottery and other construction tools were found in the area during archaeological excavations.

- Sveta Gora

Sveta Gora is a settlement and a necropolis from the period of Late Antiquity. Just 2km. south-west of Bogdantsi, on the left of the road towards Gevgelija, one can easily spot the remains of a wall and other buildings. The remains indicate that in ancient times there was a basilica and a big necropolis.

- Tumba

Tumba is a necropolis from the period of Late Antiquity, located just 2.5 km. northwest of the village of Bogdantsi. In 1990, the Museum of Gevgelija conducted a large research during which they stumbled upon two tombs.

- Stoyakovo

Stoyakovo is an iron-age settlement located in the center of the village of Stoyakovo. The remains of the settlement were found in the backyard of a local resident (Mr. Dzorov).

- Begovo

Begovo is a settlement which still has not been examined. It dates back to the 10th century BC during the migrations of the Slavs to the areas of the Balkans. In this settlement a great number of ancient Macedonian coins were found.

- Mamino

Mamino is a settlement dating back to the late ancient period, located in the village of Giavoto. Four kilometers north of the village, on a high hill the foundations of a defensive bulwark can be seen, which at some points reaches a height of 1.20 meters. There are also fragments of ceramic vessels and coins dating back the 6th century. The findings are exhibited at the Museum of Gevegeliya.

- Ramnishte

Ramnishte is a settlement from the late ancient period located also in the village Giavoto. On the north-east outskirts of the village, fragments of ceramic vessels have been found as well as parts of roman roof tiles, etc.

- Golema Cheshma

Golema Cheshma is a settlement dating back to the late ancient period, located in the village of Selempli. South of the village in the region of an artificial lake, fragments of ceramic vessels and construction material were as well as piles of cliffy stone.

- Shipkov Dol

Shipkov Dol is a settlement from the Hellenistic period, and necropolis from the late ancient period located in the village of Stoyakovo. Just 2km. west of the village big piles of cliffy stone, roman roof tiles, fragments of ceramic vessel can be seen, along with flagstones from tomb constructions. More significant are the silver coins of Alexander the Great and the copper coins of the late ancient period.

### **Monasteries**

- Monastery “Sveti Dimitri“

The monastery was built next to a spring with healing water, which is believed to heal wounds, as it is believed that the relics of Saint Dimitri were also healing.

### **Cultural event**

- Traditional races - village of Stoyakovo (1 May)

Traditional races have been organized in the village of Stoyakovo for the holiday of May 1st, since the time after World War II, with only a few exceptions over the years due to bad weather. There event is quite popular and attendees come from Bogdantsi and the surrounding settlements as well as from all parts region. Every year, according to the tradition the race starts with horses, followed with the race of the donkeys and finally the race with big bags.

- ✓ Bicycle race – from the bridge on Luda Mara River, through the beltway, the sport hall Mlaz up to the center of Bogdantsi;
- ✓ Running race – from Mlaz to the center of Bogdantsi;
- ✓ Roller-skating race – on the boulevard at the entrance of Bogdantsi.

- Exhibition Graphic workshop “Sofia” – Bogdantsi (September)

The main session of the graphic workshop “Sofiaa” – Bogdantsi ends on the first Friday of September with a farewell evening and exhibition of the workshop creations. All activities connected to the Graphic workshop are performed in the premises of the Printing Company Sofia in Bogdantsi.

- Carnival “Maskarada” in Bogdantsi

The Maskarada (Masquerade) is a massive manifestation, mainly aimed at young students. It is a place where they can show their creativity and inventiveness by creating their masks for the Masquerade Day. Since 2005, thousands of students have taken part in the masquerade.

### 1.4.2 Municipality of Bosilovo

Geographic area: 149,5 km<sup>2</sup>

Population: 14 260

Settlements: 16

Municipality of Bosilovo is located in the fertile Strumitsa valley, between Ograzhden and Belasitsa Mountains. The rivers of Strumitsa and Turiya pass through this municipality and continue down to Struma River in the Republic of Bulgaria. It borders with the neighbour municipalities of Vasilevo, Novo Selo and Strumitsa.

#### Natural landmarks/resources:

- “Monospitovsko Blato”, Municipality of Bosilovo

Monospitovsko Blato (Monospitovo Swamp) is the largest swamp of spread water in the Republic of Macedonia. Today, one can only find the remains of the past surfaces under the water, reed, and wet pastures rich with flora. Monospitovskoto Blato is located at the outskirts of the village of Monospitovo and belongs to a group of protected natural landmarks. The swamp’s rich variety of flora and fauna offer many opportunities for environmental education and eco-tourism development. Following the history of the swamp it is evident that in the period between 1947 and 2008, the swamp has undergone big changes, marked by the reduction of the water level, and its surface area, the decrease and reduction in number of floral animal types, due to the swamp’s uncontrolled use for irrigational purposes.

According to local stories, at the end of the 18th and in the beginning of the 19th century this swamp was named as a lake. During this period, the water of Monospitovskoto Swamp had maximum depth of six meters, and the people from this region, travelled to the nearby villages of Zubovo, Bansko and Murtino by small boats called “shaiki”. Immediately after the Second World War, from 1945 to 1947, Monospitovskoto Swamp was spread upon a territory of around 5000 hectares, with a maximum depth of four meters during the winter. In the period between 1947 and 1975, as a result of the ameliorative occurrences, the surface of Monospitovskoto swamp had reduced up to 10 times. Nowadays the current surface area of the swamp is around 400 hectares. Monospitovskoto Swamp is proposed as protected area in the scope of the Emerald Network (ecological network for protection of wildlife and natural habitats in Europe, predecessor of Natura 2000 network).

- Natural habitat of the King’s fern (*Osmunda regalis*) in the area of “Monospitovsko Blato”

One of the most important protected species that can be found in Monospitovo Swamp is the ‘king’s fern’ (*Osmunda regalis*). The Strumitsa region is the only region in Macedonia where the king’s fern can grow. Therefore the local administration of Strumitsa adopted a decision for protection of king’s fern in 1987. In this region the four leaf marsilea (*Marsilea quadrifolia*) can also be found. This fern looks like a four leaf clod, floating on the surface of the water. The marsilea is now more and more rarely seen in the swamp. The plant species are mentioned in the Bern Convention as a kind which is threatened of extinction. In addition there are several other plants which can grow in different regions throughout Macedonia, such as: marsh ferns (*Thelypteris palustris*), tamarix smyrensis (*Tamarix smyrensis*), blue-eyed grass (*Sisyrinchium bermudiana*), orchids (*Orchis laxiflora*), Isoetes phrygia, spiny amaranths (*Amaranthus spinosus*) and saw grass (*Cladium mariscus*).

- Ograzhden Mountain

Ograzhden is part of the Osogovska Mountain Range as the highest peak reaches 1744 meters. Ograzhden has rich biodiversity, mainly populated with beech and oak forest. There are several mountain rivers that flow from the mountain to the fertile valleys below. There is large sodium mine located on the foothills of Ograzhden which is one of the largest of such type in Macedonia.

- Stone of Hope - village of Ilovica

The Stone of Hope is located in the vicinity of the village of Ilovica. It amazes with its natural beauty and mysticism. According to local legends the stone has magical powers that heal infertility in women. There is also a belief that every married couple who pass through the stone will have successful and fruitful marriage.

### **Eco-paths**

“Monospitovsko Blato” eco-path – village of Monospitovo

The total length of the route is 3 km. It provides a good opportunity for tourists to experience both the natural beauty and rich biodiversity of the region. Suitable both for trekking and cycling tours.

### **Monasteries**

- “Sveti Kliment and Naum Ohridski Chudotvortsii” Monastery

The monastery “Saint Kliment and Naum Ohridski Cudotvorci”, (Saints Clement and Naum) is located in the village of Hamzali in the large valley of Ograzhden Mountain. The monastery was constructed along with a monastery church in 2000. The church is built from stone, in Byzantine style, with an iconostasis that follows the tradition of the early Christian basilicas. The male hospice with internal chapel dedicated to the great master and leader of the monks, the venerable Grigorij Palama, was built in 2003.

- “Sveti Anastas” Church (Saint Anastas’s Church)

The church of Sveti Anastas in the village of Bosilovo was built in 1842 and was one of the first churches built in the Strumitsa region. Near the church was found a Plashtenica (a shroud which symbolizes the covering of the dead body of Jesus Christ, when he was taken down from the cross). The relic is kept at the “Gallery of Icons” in the town of Strumitsa. The Plashtenica was brought from Russia and it dates back to the 19th century. This church amazes people with its iconostasis, which is a true masterpiece.

### **Cultural events**

- “Rusali” Celebrations - village of Sekirnik (3 times per year in Sekirnik village);

Three times each year the Rusalii people from the Sekirnik region perform the traditional Rusalii rituals. The purpose of the rituals is to bring health, luck and good harvest to the village, as well to continue and preserve the long history of Macedonians of the Kukus area. During the celebrations locals dress up in festive national costumes, decorated with various ornaments, and wear black woollen hats, red headscarves crossed on the front and back, and hold matching sabre handles in their hands.

- The Drovosh Bull Fights - village of Drovosh (end of February);

The renowned Drovosh bull fights started in 1984 and has been organized each year ever since. The initiators of the competition were Nikola Mitrov and Vancho Timov. The fights take place at an area called “Tenovi Topoli”. More than a thousand people attended the competition each year.

### 1.4.3 Municipality of Valandovo

Geographic area: 331 km<sup>2</sup>

Population: 11 890

Settlements: 19

Valandovo is an urban municipality located near the Vardar River. According to absolute sea level, it is one of the lowest points in the country, with average height of 226 meters. The settlements are located along Vardar River, on its left bank, and at the foothills of the Plavush Mountain. Competitive advantages of the municipality are the excellent climatic conditions, favourable geographical location (crossroads to the borders with Republic of Greece and Republic of Bulgaria) as well as the various archaeological sites.

- The hunting ground “Chestovo”

The hunting ground “Chestovo” near Valandovo was established as hunting ground for smaller game. It spreads to the east of the Vardar River and to the south of the town Valandovo on area of 7.000ha. There are excellent conditions for hunting of wild rabbit, Polish partridge, rock partridge, and pheasant.

- The hunting ground “Bashivosh”

The hunting ground “Bashivosh” near Valandovo is located at the lower part of Vardar hunting area and it is suitable for hunting of bigger game. The total area of the hunting ground is 5.790ha. There are excellent conditions for hunting of wild boar and deer.

#### Archaeological sites

- Isar – Marvintsi – village of Marvintsi

Isar-Marvinci – The site Isar-Marvinci is located near the village of Marvinci and spreads on a hill southwest of the village. The site has a very favourable strategic position overlooking the Valandovo basin and the Vardar River Valley. The site represents the ruins of an ancient city that was built during the 6th century BC and experienced its peak during the Hellenic period. The evidence from that period was uncovered during the excavation of the large necropolis dating back to the period of the Iron Age. In addition many other relics were found from the same period. The site revealed many constructions of that time and the most interesting appears to be the temple devoted to Hercules and in honour of King Komodus. The inscription found contain the name of Makedoniyarh, high official (priest) in the Macedonian Koinon who built the temple. The temple was built on the southeast foot of the city acropolis, at a flat territory before the south city gate. In the early fourth century, there were small barns for horses in that place. The wall closed a rectangular space of 60 X 80 m, with gates at the southeast and southwest side and angular towers. The centre of the fortification had a huge command outpost. Next to the wall were the quarters for the soldiers, warehouses, rooms etc. The walls of the fortification were built fast and many older monuments and blocks have been used for the construction to support the wall. The width of the northwest gate was adjusted to organize an alternative escape route for soldiers on horses. There was an open flat field, since primarily the castle was of an offensive character.

- Marko Tower

It is a typical observation tower, most likely dating from the 12th or 13th century. The tower is located north of Valandovo on Plavish Mountain at 622 meters altitude above sea level on an inaccessible and rocky terrain. The tower is almost rectangular, 10 x 11 meters in dimension and stands at the highest point of the region. The tower does not have a proper entrance, which was most likely built on some of the higher floors and is accessible through wooden moving escalators. The interior of the tower is rectangular and probably served to gather crew or as a place to store water and food. 100 meters southwest of the tower, there are the ruins of a wall, which have not yet been researched.

- Archeological Complex – Valandovo

Various remains of the Roman period lay scattered below the modern town of Valandovo. These are ruins of the Peony civilization and also from the Hellenic, Roman and Early Byzantine periods, when old Valandovo reached a high level of civilization. In the first zone, a mosaic was found, spread over about 200 m<sup>2</sup>, in the, northwest part of the city. In the second zone, mosaics were found at the area of “Rasadnik”.

- Karakush – Dedeli

The archeological site “Karakush-Dedeli” is a necropolis from the Iron Age (7-6th century before Christ). It was found between the villages of Dedeli and Sobri, one kilometer northeast of the village of Dedeli at an altitude of 395 meters above sea level. The site is a long, almost flat plateau, pointing northwest-southeast. The relics which were found here provided precious information about the Iron Age population of the region.

### **Monasteries**

- Monastery “Sveti Georgi” in Valandovo

The monastery complex “Sveti Georgi” at Valandovo is devoted to the Saint and a Martyr Georgi Pobedonosec and was raised on the slopes of the Plavush Mountain, at an altitude of 500 meters. The monastery church was constructed in 1934, partly on the foundations of the ancient church, constructed in 1344 in three shapes. The church was decorated inside and outside. Besides the temple, the monastery complex “Sveti Georgi” consists provides suitable accommodation for tourists.

### **Cultural events**

- Folk Fest – town of Valandovo (annually in May)

Folk Fest – Valandovo is a festival of new Macedonian songs performed in a traditional manner. The idea of the festival started in 1984 by the initiative of Leonid Manchev – Director of Cultural Centre “25th of May”; Kostadin Kostadinovski – music editor in the National Radio of Macedonia; and Dragi Mitev – academic musician and member of the National Orchestra within the Macedonian Radio Television. The first edition of the festival took place on April 28th 1985, in the cinema hall of the Cultural Centre “25th of May” in Valandovo, with 25 songs performed, which were recorded on tapes and produced by Jugoton – Zagreb. In 1989 the festival moved to the newly constructed “Summer Theatre” in the Cultural House of Valandovo. The Festival takes place every year, on the 23rd, 24th and 25th of May.

- Festival of Spring Joys – village of Chalakli (annually in May)

The Festival of Spring Joys is an international festival of Turkish tradition which has taken place since 1992 in the village Chalakli which is a Turkish speaking community. The event takes place in May, during the celebrations of Georgiovdan (The Day of Saint George) and celebrates the coming of the spring as part of the Turkish tradition, but at the same time presents a promotion of the Turkish culture and tradition. Hidrelez marks the start of the new natural cycle, the natural renovation, and presents a celebration of life. During the festival days there are folklore and cultural performances, exhibitions, concerts, theatre plays, traditional Pelivan fights, and a football tournament.

- “Rakiada” festival – town of Valandovo (September)

“Rakiada” was first celebrated in 2000 as a traditional event visited by vine-growers from entire Macedonia. Twenty caldrons are set up at this event, boiling chilly and good “rakia” (traditional spirit), as the participators compete and present their skills in preparing the alcoholic drink. The event takes place at the City Pool of the town of Valandovo.

- Art Colony – Monastery “Sveti Georgi” (September)

The art colony is a ten day event of international character with artists from Macedonia and abroad. It is organized every year in September in the monastery “Sveti Georgi”. Around 10 to 15 artists participate in the colony, producing 30 new pieces of art. The artworks from the colony are presented in the country and abroad. In Valandovo they are presented at an exhibition on the ‘Day of Liberation of Valandovo’ on the 6th of November.

#### **1.4.4 Municipality of Vasilevo**

Geographic area: 221 km<sup>2</sup>

Population: 12 122

Settlements: 18

The municipality of Vasilevo covers the northwest part of the Strumitsa Valley. It borders the municipalities of Bosilovo, Berovo, Radovich, and parts of Konche and Strumitsa. Competitive advantages of the municipality are the possibility for developing rural tourism, production of environmentally clean products, etc.

#### **Archaeological sites**

- “Stranata Angieltsi” - village of Angieltsi

The most recent proof of the existence of prehistoric settlements in this area is located at the Stranata settlement which is situated near the village of Angieltsi. It represents a typical settlement of the Late Stone Age period. The simple settlement is spread over an area of roughly six hectares, close to the Sushitsa River. It is trough-shaped in the middle, situated towards the Eastern sunrise and protected against strong winds. The settlement had a water supply from the Sushitsa River and a fertile field which meets all basic agricultural needs. According to various relics which were found in the settlements it is considered that there were two phases of life in this settlement.

- Varvara

On the territory of the village of Varvaritsa was found an ancient settlement which contains a small chapel from the period of Early Christianity. During that period the name of the village was Sveta Varvara (Saint Varvara). According to both local legends and the archaeological finds, on a high hill around four kilometers west of the village, there was a tower built from stone and chalky mortar. There is also evidence of remains of a reservoir. Today this place is called Gradishte.

- Pilat – village of Visoka Maala

The village of Visoka Maala is famous for the archaeological site Pilat, which is located just 2.5 kilometres north of the village, near the left banks of the Turia River.

- Trebichino, Derven, Dribol

In the vicinity of the village of Trebichino, there are the remains of three ancient settlements: “Trebichino” – remains of an ancient Roman warrior; “Derven” – an ancient settlement dating from the period of the Middle Ages located just 2.5 kilometres south-east of the village of Trebichino, where fragments of ceramic vessels and roof tiles were found; and “Dribol” - a settlement and necropolis from the period of Late Antiquity located just 1 km. south of the village. Often during the cultivation of the fields in the region, objects and tombs have been discovered by local population.

#### **Traditional settlements**

- Village of Tribichino
- Village of Varvaritsa
- Village of Nivitsino

## **Churches and Monasteries**

- “Sveta Paraskeva” Church

The church of Sveta Paraskeva is located at the village of Tribichino just 15 kilometers north-west of the town of Strumitsa. The church was built in 1871 on a hill, at a place which was once a necropolis. The church is particularly small consisting only of a small nave. Information about the founders, the date of construction and the frescoes can be found on the inside of the west-facing door. What makes this church unique is the fact that it was constructed over a nave church, and is therefore especially picturesque from the inside. It is also important to mention the artistic value of the 26 icons and the iconostasis, as well as the three priceless icons. The frescoes and the iconostasis originate from the time between 1875 and 1882, and possess a unique artistic quality among the single-nave churches in the Strumitsa region. The painters Grigor Petrov from Tresonche (near Debar), and Grigor Pecanov from Strumitsa created colours and content which recreate the original artistic intentions. The artistic expression of the icon and the fresco wall painting at this church represent the link between the spiritual and the artistic creation in both the Republic of Macedonia and Strumitsa, whose roots date from the 9th and 13th century.

- “Sveti Nikola” Church

The church of Sveti Nikola is located at the village of Gradoshroci was built in 1878. It is famous for the events in February 1902, when in the yard of the church, the local rebels (“komiti”), after receiving a bribe, left the American missionary Miss Helen Stone and her companion Katerina Stefanova (Tsilka) blind-folded.

- “Sveti Ivan Zlatoust” Monastery

The monastery of Saint Jovan Zlatoust is a small church built in 1963. In the past at the same place there was a chapel which was visited by the famous prophetess Baba Vanga. The icons in this church date to 1988 and they were a gift from the believers in the village of Angieltsi.

## **Cultural events**

- Festival of the Leek- village of Gradosortsi (13 November);

The festival of the leek is celebrated in Gradoshortsitsi – a village that is renowned for the production and growing of leek. The celebration is aimed at promoting the production of high quality leeks and includes several activities. One of the activities is the discussion forum, where representatives of the producers, buyers, seed importers, state and agricultural associations debate on the increase of production, quality, protection and sale of leeks. The event provides an opportunity to experience the taste of the local traditional food prepared with leek, which is especially prepared for this occasion by the women at the municipality of Vasilevo. During the festival days a workshop is also organized, on the topic: ‘The leek as a medicine’, where famous nutritionists debate on the various nutritious qualities of the leeks. Organoleptic researches show that compared to the other good quality leek produced in the other parts of Macedonia, the leek produced in Gradoshortsitsi in the municipality of Vasilevo has special taste and friableness, which makes the leek suitable for fresh consumption as well.

- “Apriliada” Celebrations – village of Vasilevo (1 April);

The “Apriliada” celebrations are organized on the first of April (April Fool’s Day) and was organized for the first time in 1998. All students of the local “Gotse Delchev” High School take part in the celebrations. The preparations last several days and involve students, teachers and parents. The manifestation is of competitive character, and is performed in front of a jury, which consists of teachers, parents, and a representative from the local government. The manifestation continues on the streets of Vasilevo.

### 1.4.5 Municipality of Gevgelia

Geographic area: 485 km<sup>2</sup>

Population: 22 988

Settlements: 17

Municipality of Gevgelia is situated in the southern part of Macedonia, near the border with Republic of Greece. The primary axis of development of the region stretching across the Vardar valley in the north-south is a part of the 10th international transport corridor, which passes through Gevgelia. The border position of the municipality of Gevgelia with Republic of Greece is an important competitive advantage. There is potential for locating company capacities, requiring large transport of raw materials and finished products due to close proximity of the Thessaloniki port. One future consideration is creating a "horizontal" link - from Bitola through Mariovo to Gevgelia, as a traffic route linking the eastern and western parts of Macedonia and would also integrate the most important tourist venues.

#### Natural landmarks

- Kozuf Mountain

The highest peak of Kozuf Mountain is actually on the border between Macedonia and Greece, is the peak Zelenbeg, It reaches an altitude of 2,200 meters above sea level. Up to the late 1980s, the place was abandoned, and only shepherds could have been found in the mountain, riding horses through roads used during World War I in order to reach their mountain pasture. Today, at a distance of 210 kilometers from Skopje, and only 130km from Thessaloniki, the new ski-center on Mountain Kozuf can be found. Construction began in 2001, and is expected to be completely finished in 2011. The center is equipped with the latest equipment, and offers perfect conditions for skiing. Currently there are two ski-lifts with a capacity to take up to 3,000 skiers to the top of the mountain. There is also a six-seats lift - the only of its kind in the Balkans. There is a restaurant, a small dairy shop, 16 apartments, and a ski slope of 16 kilometres. This is the only center in Macedonia that has artificial snow. The view from the top does not reach the lowland, and the centre remains in the low heavy clouds. At some places the clouds appear as islands in the middle of the sea. Besides the winter period, Mountain Kozuf is also attractive in any other period of the year. It offers excellent conditions for historical tourism, mountain biking, horse riding, paragliding, walking and hunting. The River Tochnica could potentially offer the possibility of fishing and kayaking.

- "Negorski Bani" Thermal water baths - 3 kilometers north-west from the town of Gevgelia

The data for the therapeutic effect of the mineral waters in Negorski Bani has existed since 1864. As opposed to most of baths throughout Macedonia which mainly date from the Roman period, it is considered that this bath was first used by Shukri Pasha. The scientific proof for the therapeutic effects of the baths dates back to 1950, when the healing center was founded. Today, Negorski Bani is a centre for treatment and rehabilitation with modern equipped rooms for all types of therapy; from the field of physical medicine to rehabilitation. The bath is located south-east of Kozuf Mountain, five kilometers north-west of Gevgelia, at 59 meters above sea level. It is the only bath located at such a low sea level. There are two springs – Vrela Bania (Hot Bath) with a water temperature of 40°C (104F), and Studena Bania (Cold Bath) with a water temperature of 38°C (100F). The water itself contains calcium, magnesium, rubidium, cesium, radon and other minerals. The bathing complex has 336 beds, two covered swimming pools and several open air swimming pools. They are all located in the Valley of Kozuf Mountain among the rich ash forest which forms a natural park. In the surrounding of Negorski Bani there are 36 hectares of thick and beautiful forest.

- Bel Rai – Miravci (White Paradise)

Beli Rai area is located near the village of Miravtsi, 15 kilometres north from Gevgelia. It is an area with ambient values.

- Arbutus Andrachne in Kozuf Mountain

At the territory of municipality of Gevgelia there are many rare plants such as the magnificent arbutus andrachne, which changes its colours 4 times throughout the year.

### **Mineral springs**

- Smradлива voda

The thermal springs at Smradлива voda are located just 24 km. from Gevgelia at an altitude of 850 meters above sea level. They are famous for their mineral waters, which are said to have a healing effect on stomach and kidney conditions. In the forest area nearby there are 400 weekend houses and a hotel.

### **Monuments**

- Turkish bath

The old Turkish bath will be transformed into a museum gallery with a statute of a National Monument.

### **Archaeological sites**

- Vardarski Rid – near the town of Gevgelia

The archaeological site contains the remains of the ancient cities of Atalanta and Gortinia from V century B.C.

- Suva Reka - located on the east side of the highway E-75.

It is a flat necropolis entombed in grave structures, including cysts of flagstones, etc.

- Gradashor – Mramor - Miletkovo - located near the road Gevgelia - Valandovo

In a recent research conducted by the Museum of Gevgelia remains of ancient construction have been found which are believed to belong to a Roman building“Villa Rustica”.

- Agova Cheshma (Fountain) - located 1 km. south of the village of Smokvitsa

### **Museums**

- Museum of Gevgelia

The museum is located on one of the most famous streets in Gevgelia named “Marshal Tito”. The museum possesses a rich archaeological collection which totals about 4500 museum items. The items in the collection consists of 350 items, which date back the Neolith period (4500 B.C.), Late Bronze Age period (1300 – 1100 B.C.), Iron Age period (1000 – 500 B.C.), pre Roman period and Late Roman period and the ages of Macedonian imperialism (500 – 168 B.C.) and the Roman period by the end of 2nd and beginning of 4th century A.D.

### **Monasteries**

- The monastery “Sveti Spas” - town of Gevgelia

The monastery of Saint Spas was constructed in the 19th century, and has been reconstructed several times since then. The temple is located in the south-eastern part of Gevgelia. It is the oldest church in Gevgelia region, built in 1842. According to the new architectonic shape, the church is five-nave church with gable roof. On the western side there is a porch, with the bell tower on its northern portion. The main entrance is on the western side, and above the main door, worshippers can see a fresco dedicated to Christ Ascension. The church also has a wall-painting and an iconostasis made up of three lines of icons. On the western side of the church there is one-floor hospice.

- The monastery “Sveti Ilija” – village of Davidovo

The monastery of Sveti Iliya was built in 1937 on a small hill in the Kozuf Mountain. The monastery has three-nave shape with six sided arches. The walls of the monastery were reconstructed in 1980. On the western side of the monastery, a new hospice was built, with two rooms for accommodation worshipers. Many local people visit the monastery during the Ilinden holidays.

- The monastery “Sveti Atanas” – village of Petrovo

The monastery of Saint Atanas is located at the entrance of the village of Petrovo. In 1980, the monastery collapsed. Recently, the monastery was reconstructed by Vasil Markov from Petrovo, and today is a single-nave church.

### **Cultural events**

- “Smokvijada” Festival (Festival of the fig) in September

The festival is welcoming Gevgelia’s guests with a delicious locally made fig jam. The production of fig jam is a century old tradition in the region of Gevgelia.

- “Folk necklace“ Festival in November

It is a traditional event where folk groups from Gevgelia sing and dance.

- "Gitarijada” Festival in April

Festival of young musicians - rock bands from Macedonia.

- “Spasovden” Celebrations

Every year in honor of Sveti Spas the saint-patron of Gevgelia, a festival and a fair are held in the town of Gevgelia. The date of the celebrations which are usually done in May or June varies due to the specifics of the Orthodox religious calendar.

- “Days of the comedy” in November

“Days of the comedy” in Gevgelia, is a new international theatre festival which was founded in 2010 under the motto “Laughing is a balsam for the soul”. The 2010 edition of the festival was started with the comedy “Tsunami” which was performed by artists of the town of Tetovo.

- Milci Motocross

It is an international motocross competition part of the European championships which is held every April.

### **1.4.6 Municipality of Doiran**

Geographic area: 132 km<sup>2</sup>

Population: 3426

Settlements: 14

Municipality of Doiran is located on the Lake of Doiran in the Southeast part of Macedonia, sitting at an elevation of 146 meters, on the border with the neighboring Republic of Greece. At the western part of the lake Kaletepe hill (691m.) is located. The mountains of Belasitsa and Krusha are located on the far eastern side of the lake. The vast planes around the lake are perfect for the development of agricultural activities. The lowest part of the valley is located to the south, near the village of Kara-Doiran in the Republic of Greece.

## Natural landmarks

- Doiran Lake

The Doiran Lake is particularly rich in terms of flora and fauna species. The fauna in the area is represented by invertebrates (protozoan-single-celled animals, sponges, worms, mollusks, arthropods, insects, etc.) as well as representatives of vertebrates (fish, amphibians, reptiles, birds and mammals). There are 12 fauna endemic species living at the lake of Doiran. From 15 fish species, one is local endemic specie. Some invertebrates and several bird species are at the list of CORINE. Doiran Lake is famous for its traditional way of fishing in the so called sheepfolds.

### Flora

From the various types of submersed plants which are found here the most common are: *Ceratophyllum Demersum*, *Najas Marina*, *Potamogeton Perfoliatus*, *Myriophyllum Spicatum*, *Vallisneria Spiralis*, etc. The plant species of *Najas minor* are limited to the shallow southern edge parts of the lake, while *Myriophyllum Spicatum* is present in almost all lake communities and grows mostly at depths of 40 cm, and thus forms spacious underwater meadows. *Najas Marina* and *Potamogeton perfoliatus* grow almost equally except that *Najas Marina* penetrates in depths of 3 feet, while *Potamogeton Perfoliatus* much deeper. In addition among other plant species one can find *Centaurea Rigidula*, *Verbascum Doiranense*, *Verbascum Burgeffi* and *Astragalus Thracicus Doiranensis*. The Micro floral component of Doiran Lake until 1988 was comprised by 257 phytoplankton and Periphyton Taxon. The role of the main producer of organic substances in lake's eco - system is the plankton algae, phytoplankton, which stands at the bottom of the food chain.

### Fauna

The biodiversity of the fauna found in the Doiran Lake and the surrounding areas is particularly complex and diverse in ecological aspect. The representatives of the fauna species of Protoza (protozoan) are very poorly explored. During various studies it was registered the presence of the representatives of the gender *Difflugia Cephalic Amoebae*, typical inhabitants of the marshes and wetlands. Other registered species of protozoa in the lake belong to the members of the *Epistylus* and *Vorticella* families.

- Fishing in the lake

Doiran Lake is famous for its diverse aquatic and fish resources which provide excellent conditions for recreational and sport fishing. The average annual production of fish in the region reaches up to 200 kg/ha. Today in almost all local restaurants and taverns the guests can enjoy fresh fish cooked in a traditional manner (on reed).

- Therapeutic effects of the mud from the lake

The Lake of Doiran has renowned mud resources which are favourable effect for some skin, inflammatory and respiratory conditions. The healing effects of local mud have been famous since ancient times. Moreover it is believed that Alexander the Great used to bring his armies to heal in the area.

- The Doiran area

Doiran is a highland area. On the western shore of the lake is the hillock Kalatepe with an elevation of 691 meters. To the west is the city of Nov Dojran (Нов Дојран), to the east the village of Mouries, to the north the mountain Belasica/Beles and to the south the Greek town of Doirani. The lake of Doiran has a rounded shape, a maximum depth of 10 m and a north-to-south length of 8.9 km and is 7.1 km at its widest, making it the third largest lake partially in the Republic of Macedonia after Lake Ohrid and Lake Prespa.

## **Eco-paths**

- Touristic - recreational path “Doiran – Palyurtsi”

Touristic - recreational path Doiran - Palyurtsi offers a good opportunity for practising of alternative forms of tourism in the areas around Doiran. During the Word War I the main front line “Thessaloniki” was passing through the region. In honour of the soldiers of 22<sup>nd</sup> English Division a monument was constructed in the area. The old village of Palyurtsi is also located on the path of the trail. It is believed that Saint Paul visited this place during his journeys. The area has particularly scenic landscape abundant of various animal and plant species.

## **Archaeological sites**

- Turkish Bath in the old town of Doiran

The Turkish bath was built around XVII century and was operational up until the beginning of the Balkan Wars or the First World War. It is a typical example of Muslim architectural tradition. Located in what is believed to be the ancient city of Polin (Old Doiran) the bath is composed of thick stone and brick wall and a large dome. The interior of the bathroom is lit by many small four angled openings set on the six pillars which used to be covered with glass.

- Clock Tower in the old town of Doiran

The Old Clock Tower is located at the middle part of the old city of Polin (Old Doiran) on flattened hill plateau just above the old Turkish school. Clock towers were a distinctive feature of the urban landscape in Macedonia during the Turkish rule in the region. The tower is built of stone and bricks tied with lime mortar. Following the written sources the tower is probably from the time of the Ottoman Empire, specifically the 19th century, but there is data that the tower was actually built on older foundations of a building from 1372 and later it was reconstructed as a Clock Tower. During the First World War the building was partially ruined.

## **Museums**

- The Museum of Doiran

The Museum of Doiran is located in the premises of the municipal building, next to the famous maple trees of Doiran, and it has a huge collection of flora and fauna species found in the Doiran Lake and the region. This museum was established by the financial support of Norway.

## **Churches and Monasteries**

- The Church Sveti Prorok Ilya

The temple was built in 1874 in an area called “Mesechinka Skala”. In the past year the church has undergone a complete renovation. During archaeological excavation in 2009 were discovered numerous graves and burial sites of the period of Late Middle Ages (XVII-XVIII century).

- The monastery complex "Sveti Partheniy Zografski”

The monastery complex was established in 2001, near the former Episcopal residence of Partheniy Zografski.

## **Cultural event**

- "Doiran Handshakes" Festival

"Doiran Handshakes" represent is a cultural-artistic gathering which has taken place since 1976 during summer months. Each year between July and August the event is attended by a large number of dancing, ballet, artistic, and theatrical groups. There is an art exhibition, many scientific workshops as well as special “Days of the Macedonian Movie”.

- “Doiran Authentica”

“Doiran Authentica” is a cultural gathering which is held annually at the city beach in the old town of Doiran. During the festival days the visitors can enjoy the traditional spirit of the Doiran region including local products, crafts traditions etc. There is a special cooking competition and lessons in traditional fishing.

- Festival of the Fig Jam

It is organized annually by the Municipality of Doiran and the Farmers' Federation of Republic of Macedonia. The wild fig jam is a traditional Macedonian dessert typical for the south-eastern regions of the country i.e. the region of Gevgelia, Bogdantsi, Nov Doiran, Star Doiran and Valandovo. Though the jam is produced basically the same way each housewife had a secret for cooking it. Such recipes were passed from generation to generation over the centuries.

- “Doiran Evenings” Festival

The 2010 edition of the festival was held in the Istatov hotel in the town of Doiran and represents a typical celebration of the local population which is famous for their hospitality and politeness.

- “Skillfull Doiran Women” Exhibition

It is held annually and represents a typical exhibition where local women prepare dishes in a traditional manner, such as: fish on reed, “frigovani” fish, pan with carp etc.

### **1.4.7 Municipality of Konche**

Geographic area: 237 km<sup>2</sup>

Population: 3536

Settlements: 14

The Municipality of Konche is a typically rural municipality located in the central–east part of R. Macedonia, surrounded with Konechka Mountain, Demir Kapija, Valandovo, Strumitsa, Vasilevo and Radovish. According to the morphological characteristics of this municipality, it presents a separate natural geographical environment. This agricultural farm municipality has three artificial lakes.

#### **Natural landmarks / resources**

- Mantovo Lake

Lake Mantovo in the municipality of Konche, is spread over a territory of 356 hectares and has a water volume of 50 million m<sup>3</sup>. On the coast of the lake there is monastery, and in immediate vicinity is the famous hill “Chukata”, which is currently still an unexplored archaeological site. There is another interesting area containing granite rocks, 3 – 15 meters in size, which provides a perfect setting for climbing activities.

- Hunting ground “Lipovik “and “Gabrevtsi”

The hunting ground “Gabrevtsi” is intended for hunting smaller kinds of game such as turtle-dove, pheasant, Polish partridge and other kinds of flying game. The hunting ground “Lipovo” is intended for bigger kinds of game such as wild boars, deer, wolves and rabbits.

#### **Archeological sites**

- Gajnov Dol

“Gajnov Dol” is a site of a 2nd century necropolis from the early Roman period. For the first time in a necropolis such as this, three wooden vessels and beautifully decorated leather shoes were discovered. The wooden vessel and the two pairs of shoes are 1,800 years old. Besides the unique findings, there are bronze vessels and a huge number of coins and a bronze necklace, which was wrapped around both a glass tear-vessel. The discovery of the floor necropolis happened as a result of the discovery of a ritual mortuary which had been found in immediate vicinity.

## Monasteries

- “Sveti Archdeacon Stefan” Monastery

The monastery “Sveti Archdeacon Stefan” was built in 1366 by Nikola Stanoevski. The first wall painting was started in 1371, and only part of it is still preserved. The second wall painting dates from the 18th and 19th century. The icons were made by Dimitar Angelov and Vangelov between 1921 and 1922. The interior of the church is shaped as an engraved cross with cupola on a tumbrel. Today, most of it has been painted and whitewashed – only a part of the former painting has been preserved. The beauty and mysticism of the monastery are enhanced by the story of “Kantakuzhina”, the daughter of the local ruler Despot Giurag, who spent the last years of her life residing in the cupola of the church. Since the tower, or “pirgo”, as the residents called the cupola, had no outside entrance, Kantakuzhina had to enter and exit the cupola through an underground tunnel between the altar of the church and the tower. Her tomb is located near the tower.

### 1.4.8 Municipality of Novo Selo

Geographic area: 252 km<sup>2</sup>

Population: 11 966

Settlements: 16

Municipality of Novo Selo is located in the southeast part of Macedonia. Ograzhden Mountain is located on the north side of the municipality, the wide plain of the river Strumitsa is in the middle part and the Belasitsa Mountain is in the southern part. This municipality borders with the municipalities of Berovo, Bosilovo and Strumitsa, and it is the only municipality in Macedonia that borders two EU states. The highest waterfalls in Macedonia as well as many other natural, historical and cultural monuments are located in Novo Selo.

#### Natural landmarks

- Belasitsa Mountain

Belasitsa Mountain covers large parts of the territory of the Municipality of Novo Selo. This mountain is famous in the world history for the Belasitsa battle that happened on the 29th of July 1014. Through the brow of the mountain spreads the border between Macedonia and Greece and the geographical crossroads between Macedonia, Greece and Bulgaria. Various small settlements such as the villages of Koleshino, Borisovo, Mokrievno, Mokrino, Smolari, Drazhevo and Staro Konjarevo are located at the foothills of the mountain. The highest peak of Belasitsa from the Macedonian side stands at an elevation of 1883m. The Smolari Waterfall (38 m.) is also located in Belasitsa Mountain. Here is also the wonderful Koleshino Waterfall (10m.) and the famous “Smolari” springs. Many rivers start from the Belasitsa Mountain, such as: Baba, Borisovska, Lomnica or Smolarska, Drazevska.

- Ograzhden Mountain

Ograzhden Mountain represents the natural border between Macedonia and Bulgaria. The traditional settlements of Badilen, Baykovo, Stinik and Barbarevo are typical mountain villages that have preserved their ancient lifestyle and architecture. However, these villages are facing with extinguishing because of the mass emigration of the inhabitants from various reasons. The excavation sites of Tsarveno Pole and Dragulevo are also located in the foothills of the mountain. The highest peak in Ograzhden reaches up to 1746 m. above sea level. There are many excavation sites on the mountain that date back to the Roman times and later.

- Smolari waterfall

The Smolari waterfall is the biggest waterfall in Macedonia with its waters falling from more than 39 meters. It is located above the village Smolari and formed on the river Lomnica on the Belasitsa Mountain at an elevation of 630 meters. The area around the waterfall is suitable for tourists. A trail was built with a total length of 580 meters with 200 stone stairs and a small wooden bridge. The water is white because of the fast flow of the Lomnica River and it is being emphasized with the dark rock cliffs of the Belasitsa Mountain. The trail is lit up with solar powered lamps thus making it possible for hikes at night.

- Koleshino Waterfall

Nestled within the foliage of Belasitsa Mountain, above the village of Koleshino at an elevation of 610 meters, is the Koleshino Waterfall. It is 19 meters high and enchants with the maple trees surrounding it. There are several smaller waterfalls just further up the stream of the river. A walking path was built arranging a 200 meters trail with wooden railing. The water of the waterfall is crystal clear, thus providing home for the crayfish. This trail is also lit up with solar powered lamps thus making it possible for hikes at night.

- Mokrino Springs

Mokrino Springs are located at the foothills of Belasitsa Mountain, at an elevation of 330 meters, in the vicinity of the village of Mokrino. The water springs from the roots of century old maple trees. A trail around the springs was constructed with benches and small tables, all being made from wood typical for this region. In the vicinity of the springs there is a watermill which was used in the past.

- Pirog in Mokirevo

It is a historical site where the famous Belasitsa battle of 1014 took place.

## **Archaeological sites**

- Red Field

The site is situated on Ograzhden Mountain, 8,5 kilometers from the village of Barbarevo, at an elevation of about 1200 meters. It is an open type settlement with a number of housing and commercial objects. The brook Belogazica divides it into two parts: northern - Yanina Cheshma, and a southern part - Papri with remains from two large objects. The necropolis is located on the first in the row of hills coming from southeast, a hill known as Gushterova Chukarka, and it was used from the end of the first until the third century. The locality of "Spasov Rid" was used as a necropolis during the fourth century.

- Golema Masa

The site is located in the area of the village of Novo Koniarevo just 100 meters from the border between Republic of Macedonia and Republic of Bulgaria. The site is situated on a hill over a flattened elongated plateau on which the settlement was located. Here the remains of a tower and turret were found. The site has not been yet being researched, but scientist believe it dates back to the Bronze Age Period.

- Kieramidarka

The site is located just 20 km east from Strumitsa in the foothills of the Belasitsa Mountain in the village of Mokrino. The tombs found here contained mostly jewellery and some Roman

## **Monasteries**

- Monastery "Sveti Georgi and Antony" - Novo Selo

Monastery "Sveti George and Antony" was established on the 28th of August 2004 on the religious holiday of "Assumption of the Virgin Mary". The monastery is located on a hill above Novo Selo. There is lodging-house as part of the monastery complex where monks live in accordance with the

ascetic-eremital tradition of the Mount Athos monasteries. One of the activities of the monastery is beekeeping and production of homemade honey.

- Monastery “Sveti Peter and Sveti Paul” – village of Baykovo

Monastery “Sveti Peter and Pavel” was firstly built in 1943. In February 1996 it was renewed and widened with financial support of the local population and the local family Nikovi. The wooden iconostasis was made by a craftsman from Ohrid.

- Church “Sveti Georgi” – Novo Selo

The church was built in 1842 and it is considered to be one of the first village churches in the Strumitsa region. The religious services in this church were firstly held in Church Slavic language. The iconostasis is made of wood and the icons are divided into 4 rows. The holy throne was made in 1864. There are many frescos of individual saints in the dome, while on the walls in the church a lot of frescos that depict the life of Jesus Christ.

- Church “Sveti Constantin and Elena”- village of Mokrino

The church was built in 1876 by donations of local residents. The iconostasis is wooden with cross on top and beautifully carved royal seats. It was painted by the icon-painter from the town of Melnik at the time when it was built.

- Church “Sveta Troitsa” – village of Smolari

The church was built in 1872 and it fascinates with the wooden iconostasis with cross on the top, and the beautifully carved royal seats and the bishop’s throne. The frescoes were painted by Grigori Petsanov from Strumitsa in 1897.

## **Cultural eventss**

- NovoFest - Festival of traditional food and wine – Koleshino Waterfalls (August – September)

NovoFest Festival is a festival that presents traditional food, wine and folklore performances which are typical for the region. For the first time organized 2007 as a result of cross-border cooperation between the Municipality of Novo Selo, Macedonia and Municipality of Muries, Greece and became a tradition that continues each year.

- Smolare Chestnut Festival - Smolari Waterfalls (October – November)

It was organized for a first time in 2010. During the festival local present products and foods made of chestnuts. In addition there are many songs and dances performed during the event.

- “Stanicharski Igri” – village of Mokrievo (13 – 14 January)

The so called Saint Vasil’s Ceremonial Dances represent a typical custom symbolising the coming of the New Year. The festival is a century old tradition for the local population.

During the festival everybody dresses up in hand made special costume and a mask. The costumes are typical for each community. For disguising, various objects of nature, animal and plant origin (skulls, horns, feathers, teeth, wool, leather, strings of dried peppers, etc.) are used. On their waist the “Kukuri” as locals call them, wear bells and long sticks. The aim is to make as much noise as possible in order to expel the evil spirits.

## 1.4.9 Municipality of Radovich

Geographic area: 608 km<sup>2</sup>

Population: 28 244

Settlements: 20

Situated in southeast part of Macedonia, municipality of Radovich covers the northwest part of the wide Radovich – Strumitsa valley and the upper stream of the Radovichka River. Competitive main advantages of this municipality are the location, the production of healthy ecological food and favourable conditions for development and investments.

### Natural landmarks

- Plashkovitsa Mountain

Plashkovitsa is medium-sized mountain in the east part of Republic of Macedonia. The highest peak of this mountain is Lisets (1754 m). In the geological structure there is granite (on east), crystal shale, gneiss and narrow zone of marble at the west parts of the mountain. Plashkovitsa is divided by many deep river valleys. Most of the rivers in the area have many waterfalls and gigantic basins. In the marble rocks there are many caves. The west and southwest slopes are bare and there is erosion developed while the other parts are forestated.

### Eco-paths

- Eco-path – “Pilav Tepe” area

It represent a 6<sup>th</sup> degree climbing rock formation.

### Archeological sites

- “Hisar” Area

“Hisar” is an elongated hill located at the northwest part Radovich. It is the highest part of the valley of the Radovichka River along which goes an old mountain path toward the slope of Plachkovitsa and further to Maleshevo. There is a magnificent view over the large Strumitsa Plane and the old road Shtip-Strumitsa.

- “Pilav Tepe” Hill

“Pilav Tepe” lies 1,5 km southeast from Shopor and 12km to the west of Radovich. Here a large mining community of ancient times, covering an area of 12-15 ha was found. In addition in the southeast slopes of Pilav Tepe were found many tombs from Hellenic and Roman periods. The town on Pilav Tepe probably can be identified as the miner’s town Astraion (Astraea), found in the written notes of early and late antics.

### Museums

- Ethno museum

Ethno-museum collection which is a part of the cultural center “Aco Karamanov” has huge collection of national clothes from the Radovich region.

### Monasteries

- The Monastery “Assumption of Holy Mother of God”- village of Voislavtsii

- Cathedral “Sveta Troitsa” – town of Radovich

The Cathedral was constructed on the third day of Easter in 1997, and the consecration happened 6 years after. It has a capacity of 600 people and represents one of the most beautiful churches at the Balkan Peninsula built lately. According to the architectonic conception, the cathedral belongs to the type of single nave churches with amazingly engraved cross, in rectangle space and arched cupola projected in Byzantine style. At the cross sides section, huge cupola is raising with ten sided

tambour and four smaller cupolas at the space among the sides. The temple itself covers an area of 550m<sup>2</sup>, placed on location of 4000m<sup>2</sup> with arranged space around the church, bell tower, baptistry, parking lot, fountain and spring.

- The Monastery “Sveti Panteleymon”

The Monastery represents a medieval building. It existed even before the times of Ottoman Invasion. In the period during 1905 and 1915 the monastery had its renaissance - it was rebuilt and renovated on its former foundations.

- The Monastery “Sveti George” – village of Oraovitsa

The Monastery is located in the yard of the present church of “Sveti Georgi”. Today, people gather here to celebrate the Day of Saint George as the area is suitable for outdoor recreation and gatherings.

### **Cultural events**

- “Sveti Spaso Radovishki” Festival

It is held every year between 10 and 21 august in honour of Sveti Spaso Radovishki - patron and protector of the town Radovish.

- International children folk festival “Oro veselo”

“Oro veselo” is a traditional festival of the children’s song which has been organized ever since 2000 in occasion of the religious holiday of Sveta Troitsa (Saint Trinity).

- Festival of original folklore “Gaida”

The festival is held on the 26th of April and has been organized for more than 15 years. It is held in the village of Inzhevo at the church complex of Sveta Bogoroditsa.

### **1.4.10 Municipality of Strumitsa**

Geographic area: 322 km<sup>2</sup>

Population: 54 676

Settlements: 25

Municipality of Strumitsa is embedded in the southeast part of Macedonia, below the interstate line between R. Bulgaria and Republic of Greece. It covers the western part of the fruitful Strumitsa valley. On the east side this municipality borders Bosilovo, on the west side borders Konche, on the north side borders Vasilevo, on the southeast Novo Selo, and on the southwest borders Valandovo.

### **Natural landmarks**

- Belasitsa Mountain
- Ograzhden Mountain
- Elenica Mountain

Strumitsa region is surrounded by the mountains Belasitsa, Ograzhden and Elenica. The configuration of these mountain ranges is such that they give to the valley the form of large irregular triangle. Belasitsa is located south-east of Strumitsa, with the highest peak of 2031 meters. It stretches in direction east-west with the length of 70 km. Belasitsa is one of the oldest mountains not only in Macedonia but also in the Balkan Peninsula. Ograzhden is located north-east of Strumitsa with the highest peak 1746 meters. Elenica is located west of Strumitsa with its highest peak reaching up to 970 meters.

- Tomb of Struma

It is a medieval tomb located just 3 km. to the west of Strumitsa, near the village of Banitsa. The tomb looks like a mausoleum and is composed of 9 layers of carved freestone. It is 230 cm high, 240 cm wide and 400 cm long.

- Bansko Thermal springs - 12 km southeast from the city of Strumitsa

The thermal water springs of Bansko are located at the foothills of the Belasitsa Mountain, just 12 km southeast from the town of Strumitsa. There is an artificial lake just 8 km from Bansko. The waters emerging from the springs of the Bansko are considered the hottest in Macedonia. Their temperature reaches 72C. They assist in the treatment of diseases of the digestive, respiratory, nervous and reproduction systems.

### **Eco-paths**

- Tourist trail “Loven dom – Carevi Kuli”, 1.5 km from the center of Strumitsa

It is stretched over the city of Strumitsa. It starts from Loven Dom and ends to the monastery of Sveti Iliya. The trail is 2 km and 70 meters long and 2 meters wide. Signs with informative content are placed along the trail.

### **Monuments**

- Monument of Revolution

It is located at the entrance of the town park and is dedicated to the fallen fighters in NOB (National Liberation Struggle) from Strumitsa. The monument, uncovered in 1963, is composed of two elements.

- Monument of 11 October

It is located in the upper part of the small town park. The monument was uncovered on 11 October 1949. It is composed of a figure, vertical stone canvas (obelisk) and two marble plaques on each side, with text dedicated to the fallen fighters in NOB.

- Monument of the Five Students from Strumitsa

It is located in the small town park. It is dedicated to five students from Strumitsa (Boris Belev, Gjorgji Jarmov, Gjorgji Kosturanov, Mirko Pecev and Stevo Topchev) who were killed on August 13, 1951, near the village of Dorlombos.

- Feudal Tower

The feudal tower is located in Strumitsa. It was probably built in the Ottoman period for both defensive purposes and to provide lodging. The tower was built out of chipped freestone and has a rectangular foundation with dimensions of 6.9 x 9 meters. The tower consists of a cellar, a basement and three levels. Hanging wooden balconies are attached to the structure on the second and third level.

### **Museums**

- The National Institute for Preservation of Monuments of Culture and Museum
- The Icon Gallery
- Fifteen Holy - Hieromartyrs of Tiberiopolis.

### **Archeological sites**

- Tzar's Towers

The Tzar's towers, erected on a hill of about 180 meters, southwest of Strumitsa, are considered a part of the medieval cultural heritage. Like the other medieval town-fortresses, this one is also located on one of the most important antique cross-roads. The oldest findings (coins) speak of life in this area since Hellenic times. The oval space of the citadel with an extended north point surrounds the hard limestone wall, erected in the late antiquity.

The acropolis itself is separated by an internal wall. On its west side, there are the entrance gate and the two towers, which according to the manner of construction, belong to the VI century, but were renovated in the period between 12th and 14th centuries, most probably during the reign of Tzar Tiberius, which is also the source of the new, Byzantine name of the town - Tiberiopolis.

- Late Roman thermal baths – village of Bansko

The Romans through their constructive operations left visible marks in this area. One of the most presentable proofs is the construction of the late roman bath in Bansko, at 12 km southeast of Strumitsa, under the slopes of the mountain of Belasitsa. The construction was using the thermal-mineral waters of the source of Parilo which is located fifty meters southwest from the bath.

### **Churches and Monasteries**

- Church complex of The Fifteen Holy Hieromartyrs of Tiberiopolis

The oldest structure in the complex is an early Christian basilica built as a triple-aisled church in the 5th Century and decorated on the floor with a polychrome mosaic representing a cross. The basilica was built on top of the tombs of the Fifteen Holy Hieromartyrs of Tiberiopolis. A cross-shaped temple or martirium was built on top of the basilica, probably in the time of Justinian (527 A.D. - 565 A.D.). The church complex also includes a guest-house on its premises.

- The cathedral church “Sveti Cyril and Mehtodius”

It is a double apse church. The lower altar is in the basement and is dedicated to the Fifteen Holy Hieromartyrs of Tiberiopolis. The building of the lower church began in 1750 under the Strumitsa bishop Paisius, and was finished in 1760

- The church complex “Saint Leontius” - about 4km west of Strumitsa in the village of Vodocha.

The complex consists of three churches, the oldest of which is the eastern one. It is a triple apse domed church built in the 6th and 7th Century that was destroyed after the fall of Tzar Samuil’s state.

- The monastery of The Holy Mother of God Eleusa - located in the village of Veliusa about 7km west of Strumitsa.

The monastery was founded in 1080 with the personal means of the monk Manuel, who later became the 19th Episcopo of Strumitsa.

- Sveti Iliya monastery - located on the Elenitsa Mountain about four kilometres away from Strumitsa.

It is very probable that the monastery was built at the end of 16th century since most of the icons found here originate from that period.

- Orta Mosque – town of Strumitsa

Orta mosque represents a complex set of structures that used to be part of the old city center. Findings originating from various periods have been collected here including the Hellenistic, the Roman, the Late Ancient, and the Middle Ages. The Hellenistic period is represented by the following findings: Megara cups with motifs from Homer’s Illiad (3rd-2nd Century B.C.), a plate featuring Artemis, the goddess of hunting, worshipped greatly in this region in the 3rd and 2nd Centuries B.C., and a plate holder featuring Silen, a wilderness deity. The Roman period is represented by an eagle and many other findings from the 2nd Century A.D. There are also many plates, cups, jars, ear rings, and coins from the 3rd and 2nd Century B.C. until 17th Century.

## Cultural events

- Strumitsa's Carnival – in February - March

The Strumitsa Carnival is a centuries-old tradition of the town under the Tsar's Towers and is directly connected to the religious festival Trimeri. The only manifestation of such kind in Republic of Macedonia, dedicated to the engaged girls. The date changes depending on date of Easter and it is always on Tuesday after Ash Monday. During the festivity after the carnival procession, the masked groups visit the homes of the engaged girls where among the masked, the girls should recognize their fiancé. The Strumitsa Carnival is a centuries-old tradition and the first written sources come from the Turkish travel writer Evliya Celebiya.

- International Strumitsa Art Colony (in the period 1-20 August)

International Strumitsa Art Colony is organized 1964 on the initiative of Kocho Urdin, and from 1969 grown into an international event. It takes place every year in August.

- Asterfest (Film festival) in May-June

This festival of new millennium is aimed at promoting and presenting cultural knowledge and trends recorded through contemporary film & video technologies made by professional authors from South-eastern Europe and outside

- Festival of Caricatures and Aphorisms – in February - March

As of 2000, the Festival of Caricatures and Aphorisms has started under the auspices of the carnival. The festival has international character and takes place during the Trimeri festivities. The theme of the festival is the carnival combined with light eroticism.

## **2. ANALYSIS OF THE PRODUCTS AND SERVICES OFFERED IN THE TOURISM SECTOR WITHIN THE CROSS-BORDER TARGET REGION. TOURISM MARKET TENDENCIES.**

### *Analysis of the products and services*

Tourism has been considered as an important social and economic phenomenon that influences the daily lives of hundreds of millions of people around the globe. The main aspects of tourism do not cover only the free movement of people, but also play an important role in utilizing our free time, facilitating the connection between people and providing the basis for the establishment of various political, cultural and economic relationships. Tourism is also an important source of revenue. Tourism industry generates 20% of global GDP. It stimulates the development of other vital economic sectors such as trade, transport, communications, agriculture, production of household goods, etc. Tourism plays an important social role by positively influencing employment.

The system of indicators for evaluating the characteristics of the demand in the tourism industry is based on the following features:

- characteristics of tourist supply
- average period of accommodation:
- quarterly availability;
- degree of organization of accommodations;
- degree of internationality of tourists;

### Activity of Accommodation Establishments

District	Accommodation establishment - number	Bed-places-number	Available beds-nights-number	Nights spent		Arrivals in accommodation establishment - number		Revenues from nights spent – BGN	
				Total	Of which by foreigners	Total	Of which by foreigners	Total	Of which by foreigners
Blagoevgrad/ Bulgaria	207	17757	5078351	734639	368251	316149	133513	15790056	7968303
Kyustendil/ Bulgaria	38	2270	761163	101973	9515	53115	5720	1420463	311637
East Planning Region / FYROM	391	1718	575530	27509	11767	12680	4545		
Southeast Planning Region / FYROM	73	5 893		260 351	43 811	84 031	21 139	1 912 833	
<b>Total</b>	<b>709</b>	<b>27638</b>	<b>6415044</b>	<b>1124472</b>	<b>433344</b>	<b>465975</b>	<b>164917</b>	<b>19123352</b>	<b>8279940</b>

In relation to the types of accommodation facilities which exist in the researched border regions the data of the analysis shows a relative balance between the hotels and other types of accommodation. Nevertheless the hotels are the dominant tourist accommodation in the region. In terms of distribution of accommodations in both Bulgarian districts there is a huge imbalance as the number of active accommodations in the District of Blagoevgrad (207) is five times higher than the number of active accommodations in the District of Kyustendil (38). In terms of available bed-places the number of available beds in the Blagoevgrad region is eight times higher than the number of available beds in the Kyustendil region. Although the total number of accommodation facilities in the East Planning Region of FYROM is 391 the number of bed-places is only 1718 which show that most of the tourist accommodations in the region are relatively small in their size. The number of tourist accommodations in the Southeast Planning Region is more than 5 times lower than the number of accommodations in the East Planning Region. In contrast the number of bed-places in the Southeast Planning Region is almost 3, 5 times higher than the same number in the East region. The rapid growth of the tourism industry in Bansko has influenced the process of the development of the tourist accommodations (more particularly hotels) in the Blagoevgrad region as their numbers have risen dramatically within the past several years. The same is evident in the municipalities of Sandanski and Razlog where the number of tourist accommodations and facilities has also risen within the past years. The growth tendencies were determined mainly by the development of Bansko and Razlog as international resorts for winter tourism and Sandanski as an international SPA destination. In FYROM there has been an increase in the number of large tourist accommodations (hotels) in the Southeast Planning Region which was determined by the rapid tourism development in the region of Gevgelia.

The indicators for seasonal availability of the room accommodations in the region of Blagoevgrad is 14,47% , 13, 40% in Kyustendil, 4,78% in the East Planning Region of FYROM and 13,19% in the Southeast Planning Region. The data showing the degree of seasonal availability is indicating the relatively low level of occupation on one hand. On the other hand it shows the high percentage of unexploited capacity of tourist accommodations which might play an important role in the development of the tourism. An important fact is that a large part of the tourist accommodations besides the large hotels are very often in poor condition. These are mainly mountain chalets and camping areas which are mostly used for alpine, hunting, eco and cycling tourism. The poor conditions of those establishments hinders to a great extent the proper development of such types of tourism.

The average period of accommodation of most tourists is 2.32 days for the region of Blagoevgrad; 1.92 in Kyustendil; 2.17 days for tourists in the East Planning Region and 3.10 days for the Southeast Planning Region. The average period of accommodation of foreign tourist equals to 2.76 days for the region of Blagoevgrad; 1.66 days of average accommodation for the region of Kyustendil; 2.59 days for tourist staying at accommodations at the East Planning Region; and 2.07 days for tourist visiting the Southeast Planning Region.

The relatively short period of accommodation indicates that most tourists tend to visit a certain tourist destination mainly for a short vacation and do not plan for longer stays. The data indicates the necessity of developing joint tourist packages which should combine the various tourist attractions, services and events. This will be a guarantee for increasing the accommodation period of tourists in the region.

The generate incomes of a single night spent in the Blagoevgrad region equals to 21.49 Euro and to 13.93 Euro in the region of Kyustendil. For example the same indicator for the Southeast Planning Region in FYROM equals to 7.35 Euro. The low price of accommodation in the region is determined to a great extent both by the presence of many unoccupied tourist accommodations and the influences of the global financial crisis during the respective period of the analysis. However the low prices for accommodation present a good opportunity for attracting more tourists to the target regions, especially those practicing eco- and cycling tourism.

There is relatively high number of pre-organized tourist groups and reservations especially made by foreign tourists which reaches up to 90% of the total number of realized tourist reservations

especially concerning the winter tourism. The general trends of development of the tourism indicate that foreign tourists prefer the pre-organized tourism. On the contrary due to the lack of language barrier local and regional tourists prefer the direct reservations as well as the flexible vacation program. Therefore the relatively high amount of pre-organized reservations indicate a good opportunity for local tourist industries to establish and provide joint packages and pre-organized tourist routes in various regions combined with participation in various events and activities.

The number of the nights spent by foreigners in accommodation establishments of the region compared to the total number of nights spent in the tourist accommodations amounts to 42% for the Blagoevgrad region; 11% for the Kyustendil region; 36% for the East Planning Region; and 25% for the Southeast planning region; The high value of this indicator which is evident in the regions of Blagoevgrad and the East Planning Region of FYROM together with the high level of provided services is a guarantee for the sustainable development of the region in those regions. The low values measure in the other two regions indicate the urgent need to: actively promote the tourist potential; improve the quality of services and tourist facilities; increase and diversify the number and types of services and tourist attractions; improve tourist infrastructure; improve the quality of the workforce in tourism (including language skills).

The following conclusion could be drawn based on the findings of the analysis of tourism industry in the target regions:

- 1) Generally there is no real need of increasing the capacity of tourist accommodation establishments which will determine the relatively low amount of investments needed for the construction of new hotels and facilities.
- 2) The efficiency and management of tourist accommodation establishments is relatively poor. It is necessary to improve the operational efficiency of such establishments in order to achieve sustainability in the development of tourism. Therefore it is necessary to invest in the development of local attractions, tourism infrastructure and the promotion of local tourist products.
- 3) The construction of new facilities should be directed towards areas and regions, where such facilities are not present;
- 4) The new tourist accommodation establishments described above should comprise mostly of smaller hotels, family owned hotels, guest houses and other facilities following the typical architectural traditions of the particular region and in respect to the environment;
- 5) The poor state of the tourist accommodations mostly in the mountains and camping areas should be taken into account and more funds should be invested in order to renovate and restore the attractiveness of this valuable tourist resource.
- 6) The lack of small tourist shelters, shacks, drinking fountains, resting areas and toilets throughout the open areas of the region represents a major obstacle for people practicing eco-, trekking and cycling tourism. Therefore it is necessary to invest additional funds in the construction of such facilities or their renovation.

## **LEADING COMPANIES IN THE TOURISM INDUSTRY**

### **DISTRICT OF BLAGOEVGRAD**

The leading companies are situated around the main tourist destinations in Bansko and Sandanski are recognized as famous international resorts.

Bulgaria Holidays is a licensed Bulgarian tour operator that has been on the Bulgarian market for over 10 years. The company is part of the Balkanstroy Group – one of the leading local companies in the field of building and construction with huge investments in the field of hospitality and tourism.

The rapid expansion of the company led to the establishment of 4 separate departments:

- Bulgaria Holidays Hotels & Resorts
- Bulgaria Holidays Sport Department
- Bulgaria Holidays Property Management
- Bulgaria Holidays Travel Services

The main touristic activities include golf, SPA and ski vacations organized in the region of Bansko and Razlog.

Under the brand Bulgaria Holidays Hotels & Resorts the company manages 4 hotels, an apartment hotel and a golf resort in the region of Bansko and Razlog with total capacity of more than 1000 beds:

- Bulgaria Hotel Bansko
- Perun Hotel Bansko
- Sveti Ivan Ski & SPA Resort
- Razlog Hotel
- Katarino Hotel & SPA
- Pirin Golf & Country Club

**Hotel Bulgaria Bansko** is the first hotel in the large chain of Bulgaria Holidays which was officially opened in 1997. It is the first hotel in Bulgaria which was certified under Lloyd's Register Quality Assurance.

**Hotel Perun** in Bansko was established in 2004 and has provided excellent services to tourist from Bulgaria. In 2005 the hotel was awarded the prestigious Gold Medal for exceptional service quality, based on the customers' feedback, by the famous Thomson and Crystal holidays tourist agency.

**SPA Complex Katarino** in the region between Bansko and Razlog represents an innovative policy of constructing a modern tourist facility in a typically rural region surrounded by scenic natural landscapes. The complex was officially opened in 2005 in the area of Katarino near a cold mineral water spring. The modern SPA centre of Katarino uses the curable qualities of the thermal waters. It has received numerous awards for exceptional service and SPA.

**Hotel Razlog** was officially opened at the end of 2005. It is situated in the town of Razlog which as an administrative, cultural and economic centre of the region. The hotel is suitable for both business activities and family vacations during all seasons of the year.

**Sveti Ivan Rilski SPA&Resort** is an apartment hotel located in Bansko on the southern slopes of the Pirin Mountain. The complex has a modern SPA centre which specializes in Asian medicine and treatment.

**Pirin Golf&Country Club** is situated near Razlog and represents the largest and most expensive investment of the company of Bulgarian Holidays. Pirin Golf is a modern golf complex covering an area of 150 ha of golf courses and natural pine forests. The resort has been recognized as one of the best golf schools in Eastern Europe.

#### **Other leading companies of the region:**

**Kempinski Hotel Grand Arena Ski&Spa** - the five star resort is located in Bansko and provides excellent conditions for your ski, Spa, or business vacation.

**Guinness hotel complex** is a five-star luxury hotel, situated at the foot of the Pirin Mountains, in one of the most beautiful Bulgarian resorts – the town of Bansko. The hotel provides excellent conditions for recreation, ski, spa or business tourism.

**Lucky-Bansko Apartment Hotel** has one of the most modern SPA centers.

**Pirin Park Hotel** is a member of „Sharlopov Hotels” chain. The hotel provides excellent conditions for SPA and climatic treatment, SPA & wellness vacation, outdoor recreation, eco, mountain and hunting tourism, cognitive, cultural and historical tours. The five-star Pirin Park Hotel is especially popular for successful business events, meetings, team buildings and memorable family celebrations.

**Interhotel Sandanski** has one of the largest balneology centres in Bulgaria. The hotel provides excellent conditions for treatment of locomotory system problems, asthma, allergies, prophylaxis for children and adults as well as indulging procedures for body revitalization and stress-relief, slimming and stimulation.

## **DISTRICT OF KYUSTENDIL**

“**Zori**” Tourist Agency is a certified tourist agency operating in the area of Kyustendil. The company offers various options for vacations in Bulgaria and abroad. “Zori” TA provides additional services such as plane ticket reservations, language classes, organization of “Green schools”, summer camps, etc.

**The FIVE-STAR “STRIMON SPA CLUB”** provides unique specialized medical procedures, including:

- Liver cleansing Medical Program
- Health and Recreation Program
- Sterility Treatment Program
- Gynecological and Inflammatory Conditions Treatment Program

## **EAST PLANNING REGION**

**The hotel complex "Manstir"** is located within the Maleshevo Mountains, nearby the monastery of Sveti Archangel Michael, which was actually the inspiration for the hotel’s specific architecture. The hotel complex “Manastir” comprises of three hotel wings, SPA facilities, a seminar room, two summer terraces, “chardak”, a tennis court, a volleyball court, children’s theme park, and a monitored parking lot. The beautiful scenery along with the marked cycling and tracking trails are perfect for relaxing walks, mountaineering and mountain-biking lovers.

**Aurora Tours is the owner of a luxurious Hotel Resort & Spa** currently at the final stages of construction. It’s expected to be opened during spring 2011. At an altitude of 1100m, the resort is located in the mountainous Eastern part of Macedonia near the town of Berovo, overlooking a Lake nestled in a breathtakingly picturesque canyon. Unrounded by the grace and serenity of its 5 hectares of own natural landscape guarantying remarkable views throughout the whole year, the resort has been effortlessly incorporated into the charm and elegance of a modern day “Eco Hotel” – completely built with local volcanic rocks and rich wood accents.

**The modern high-rise hotel OAZA** is located in the very centre of the city of Shtip, overlooking the little river of Otinja and the hill known as Isar. In the vicinity of the hotel there are numerous cultural and historical attractions. It is at only 5 minutes from the museum “Naroden muzej”, the church “Sveti Nikola” (built in 1867) and the art gallery “Bezisten” (built in 1662)with its permanent exhibition. In 2001, the interior of the hotel was renovated into a modern style and very tasteful decoration. The hotel has single and double rooms as well as apartments, its own parking space, a restaurant, a snack bar, a conference room, a meeting room, a fitness centre and a sauna.

**Kezhovitsa SPA Shtip** is located near the shore of the river Bregalnitsa, in the south east part of Shtip. The water is distinctive chemical composition contains sodium chloride, sodium sulfate, and sodium oxide. The spa-water is curative for rheumatism, ankle and nervous system conditions, diabetes, arteriosclerosis, high blood pressure, etc.

## **SOUTH-EAST PLANNING REGION**

**Hotel Sirius** is situated in a quiet and peaceful surrounding on a distance of only 1.5km from the centre of the city Strumitsa; 20km away from the Macedonian-Bulgarian border; 30km from the Macedonian-Greek border; 250km from Ohrid; 150km away from the airport in Skopie.

### **Hotel Tsar Samuil**

The Public Health Organization – Natural SPA “BANIA BANSKO” is situated at the Hotel “CAR SAMUIL” in the locality Bania Bansko, at the foot of the mountain Belasitsa – 12 km south-east of the Strumitsa town.

**Ramada Plaza Hotel - Gevgelia** is situated near the Greek border and represents the newest object stretching over 4000 m<sup>2</sup>. The resort offers their guests exclusive possibilities of recreation, relaxation and beautification in its own highly equipped and modern spa centres. Ramada Plaza Gevgelia is a renowned spa centre both in Macedonia, and the Balkans. It's uniquely designed warm swimming pool, spa treatments, saunas, and place where you can relax, refresh and beautify.

**Flamingo Hotel and Casino** in Gevgelia is an exciting destination where our guests may experience an atmosphere of exhilaration and, for the duration of their stay, put the everyday worries to one side. The complex is located immediately adjacent on the border with Greece, situated over 30 000 m<sup>2</sup> and 12.000 m<sup>2</sup> build-up area.

It comprises a Casino, Five-Star Hotel, Night club, Penthouse, several superb Restaurants and an extensive selection of Bars. The Casino Flamingo Hotel is proving to be one of the region's most popular entertainment attractions. It is not simply a place to play and stay, but a whole new world of fun and excitement.

**Hotel Istatov** is located at the entrance of New Doiran, 12 km. from the Greek border and has 180 (one hundred and eighty) beds catering capacity. Istatov hotel has a sports hall with standard sizes where visitors can play handball, basketball, volleyball and soccer. In addition there are two football fields, a professional playground, fitness room, sauna and pool.

### **3. ANALYSIS OF SUPPLY IN THE SECTOR AND THE MARKET EXPANSION OPPURTUNITES**

#### **3.1 DISTRICT OF BLAGOEVGRAD**

At present the tourism industry is the predominant sector of the regional economies especially in the areas of Bansko and Sandanski. The settlements around the Pirin Mountain have some of the most developed tourist and accommodation facilities in Bulgaria.

##### **Main tourist destinations on the territory of the region:**

- The town of Sandanski and the adjacent settlements and municipalities.

Sandanski is known as the best SPA resort in Bulgaria. The area is teeming of natural thermal water springs. The small town of Melnik is one of the most distinct cultural and historical landmarks of the region. It is famous for its wine, typical architecture and scenic Sand Pyramids.

- The mineral baths near the village of Marikostinovo and the famous “Sveta Petka” Church in the municipality of Petrich.

The favorable climate features together with the thermal waters and mud-bath in the villages of Marikostinovo and Rupite make the region particularly attractive for the development of the SPA and balneological tourism.

- Municipality of Bansko and the town of Bansko is recognized as an international winter resort with excellent conditions for both winter and summer tourism. The village of Dobriniste is a SPA and balneological resort of regional importance.
- The valley of Razlog has several distinct tourist destinations:
  - a) Municipality of Razlog: Mountain resort area “Predel” (suiotable for both winter and summer tourism); the town of Razlog – famous for it “Kukeri” festival”; the village of Banya; the village of Dobarsko; “Bayuvi Dupki – Dzhindzhiritsa” Biosphere Reserve;
  - b) Mountain resort of Semkovo (Municipality of Belitsa) – suitable for both summer and winter tourism;
  - c) Mountain resort area “Treshtenik” (Municipality of Yakoruda” – suitable mostly for summer museum; the thermal springs of Yakoruda have very well developed hotel infrastructure and swimming facilities.
- The region of Gotse Delchev has several tourist destinations:
  - a) a) The areas surrounding the villages of Kovatshevitsa, Leshten, Dolen are particularly attractive for the development of rural tourism. The village of Delchevo is also very attractive for tourists.
  - b) б) The thermal water springs around the village of Ognyanovo, are particularly attractive for tourists;
  - c) b) The area of Popovi Livadi (Popovi Meadows).
  - d) r) The town of Gotse Delchev.

- The region around the city of Blagoevgrad

Blagoevgrad is one of the most pleasant cities in Bulgaria with its attractive architectural outlook, the old town “Varosha” and the rich nightlife. The SPA tourism has a great potential for development, as well as ski tourism in the region of Kartala. Blagoevgrad and Bodrost resort area are suitable starting points for mountaineering in the Rila Mountain. Moreover, the oldest natural reserve in the country, “Parangalitsa” is located there.

- Down the middle parts of the Struma River there are various tourist destinations which have not been exploited yet. Such tourist destinations include: the thermal water spring in Simitli; “Tisata” Natural Reserve – a place for ornithological tourism; the various rock formations around the village of Ilindentsi, located in the Municipality of Sandanski.
- The mountains located in the area and in particular the Pirin Mountain are considered the main tourist asset of the region. In addition to the winter tourism in Dobrinishte and Bansko there are excellent opportunities for summer mountain trekking and ecotourism. Pirin National Park is included in the World Heritage Convention as a Natural and Cultural Heritage Site of UNESCO. In Pirin there are a total of 160 alpine lakes which are accessible through a well-developed network of mountain routes and tourist chalets.

### **Tourist products – Opportunities for development and related issues**

The development of the tourism in Blagoevgrad District is situated around several main objectives:

- To seek new opportunities for increasing the attractiveness of the region for Bulgarian tourist;
- To provide diverse tourist attractions and opportunities for recreation, tourism and sports for the local population;
- To cooperate with foreign markets in order to increase to tourism attractiveness of the region.

### **The region provides opportunities for practicing the following types of tourism:**

#### ***Cultural tourism***

The cultural tourism is aimed at utilizing the diverse assets and unique features of the region. The main destinations for practicing of cultural tourism are located at:

- Rila Monastery and the town of Blagoevgrad
- Sandanski and the town of Melnik with the Rozhen Monastery
- Bansko and Pirin Mountain

When practicing such types of tourism it is important to mention the most prominent folklore and cultural activities in the region: “Pirin Sings” Festival (Razlog), “Pirin Folk” Festival (Sandanski), Festival of the traditional Macedonian tunes (Blagoevgrad), Jazz Festival (Bansko), “Kukerski” Festival, etc.

The main people who practice such tourism are mostly citizens of the Western European countries such as England, France, Germany, Belgium, Netherlands, and Belgium.

The joint efforts of all active tourist operators from the area are needed in order to ensure the longest possible stay of tourists in the Pirin region on their way to other cultural destinations in Bulgaria. A vast promotional campaign is underway in order to increase the attractiveness of the small villages around Gotse Delchev and Razlog. Therefore it is essential to improve the road infrastructure in the region which will facilitate the free movement of people.

#### ***Rural tourism***

The term “rural” tourism relates to a type of tourism which utilizes the diverse assets of a particular village or settlement. This type of tourism provides various benefits to the local population as it provides opportunities for longer periods of vacation in a certain territory. Like most of the areas of Bulgaria the district of Blagoevgrad is particularly abundant of location suitable for practicing of rural tourism. The development of the common infrastructure as well as the maintenance and revitalization of the main cultural and historical resources are particularly important for the development of the rural tourism.

#### ***Trekking***

This type of tourism relates to long journeys undertaken in a particular mountain area combined with a short stay in a local settlement. Tourists who are practicing such type of tourism are mainly

Bulgarians as well as visitors from England, France and Germany. The maintenance of the mountain routes and chalets is of particular importance for the much needed development of this type of tourism.

### ***Ecotourism***

Ecotourism is related providing access to specific areas and places providing bird observation, specific flora or fauna, etc. The proper and constant maintenance of natural reserves and habitats is of particular importance for the development of such tourism. Most of the people practicing such tourism are foreigners. A National Plan for the Development of Ecotourism in Bulgaria was crafted in 2001 with the participation of more than 100 representatives of various organizations and private companies working in the industry.

### ***Mountain recreation tourism***

For the region of Blagoevgrad the mountain tourism is related to summer recreation in the mountain resorts of Predel, Popovi Livadi, Popina Laka, Semkovo, Treshtenik, Bodrost, Sini Vrah, etc. Most of the tourists are people from the region and the rest of Bulgaria.

The major obstacle towards the additional development of such tourism is the very poor condition of most of the state owned tourist facilities. It is also necessary to constantly maintain the vast network of mountain routes and trails.

### ***Balneological tourism***

More than 42% of the thermal waters springs in Bulgaria are situated on the territory of the Pirin region.

The development of the balneological tourism product might be divided into several aspects:

- a) Establishment of favorable conditions for recreation and treatment of the population of the region
- b) Attraction of tourist from other regions of the country;
- c) Marketing of the tourist products to international markets;

There are two main areas where the balneological tourism is relatively well developed in terms of existing infrastructure and facilities – Sandanski and Ognyanovo. Most of the tourists visiting the area are from Scandinavia and the region. Therefore it is important to establish favorable conditions for people from the region and the area to use the thermal water resources and assets of the region. Nevertheless in order to fully exploit the local potential it is necessary to attract the attention of both the local communal administration and the respective government institutions. Particular areas with potential for development are:

- The springs at the “Tisata” natural reserve and in the village of Oshtava;
- Thermal water springs in the village of Marikostinovo;
- thermal springs in the village of Dobrinishte;

### ***Ski tourism***

At present the ski tourism is the main source of income for the tourism businesses located in the District of Blagoevgrad. The main tourist destinations suitable for practicing of ski tourism are the town of Bansko (national and international importance) and the resort areas of Semkovo, Dobrinishte, Treshtenik, Predel and Kartala.

## **3.2 DISTRICT OF KYUSTENDIL**

The territory of the Kyustendil region with its favourable geographical location, natural resources, the specific cultural and historical heritage, and development of the European transport corridors E-4 and E-8 is extremely suitable for tourism.

The brilliant combination of favourable climate, mineral waters, ecologically clean, rich in natural landmarks environment and unique cultural monuments characterize Kyustendil and the entire

region as a “gold mine” for the development of complex tourism: spa, balneological, cultural, mountain, hunting, winter, rural and other forms of tourism.

### **The region provides opportunities for practicing the following types of tourism:**

#### ***Balneological tourism***

Kyustendil is a famous wellness and SPA resort with national importance. The basic structure-forming factor for the development of the region over the centuries were the warm mineral springs which healing ability has contributed for the town prominence through the centuries and nowadays. Today local rehabilitation centres are specialized in the treatment of rheumatic diseases, gynaecological diseases with medical treatment of infertility in women, neurological and dermatological diseases, etc.

The town of Sapareva Banya is also very abundant of thermal water spring. The water contains sulphides, silicon, chlorine and sodium sulphates, with a flow rate of 2.400l/m. Its healing and prophylactic qualities are mainly due to the sulphides, the high temperature, hypotonic effect, mild mineralization and relatively high fluorine content. The healing effect of the waters has been proved to treat various conditions of the musculoskeletal, peripheral and central nervous system, as well as inflammatory and gynaecological diseases.

#### ***Cultural tourism***

The region of Kyustendil is famous for its rich cultural and historical heritage. In the territory of the region is being located the cultural-historic monument of world significance – Rila Holy Cloister, the town of Rila – the Rila Monastery. The monastery is located in the unique natural environment of The Rila National Park, Nature Reserve “Rila Monastery Forest”, Natural Park “Rila Monastery” and in proximity to Natural Park “Pirin”. In the territory of the region are located 35 unique monuments of ancient, medieval and Renaissance art and culture, an integral part of the national and world cultural heritage, declared monuments of national importance.

#### **Most distinct historical and architectural monuments:**

- Rila Monastery – monument of culture of international importance
- Regional History Museum “Akademik Yordan Ivanov”
- National Reserve “Pautalia – Velbazd”
- Art-gallery “Valdimir Dimitrov – Maistora”
- Medieval Bridge “Kadin Most”, village of Nevestino
- 14 medieval churches – national cultural monuments (Kystendil, Boboshevo, Sapareva Banya, Rila)
- Museum House “Dimitar Peshev”
- Medieval Fortress “Kulata”, “Okolyiska” House, Clock Tower (town of Dupnitsa)

Tourists visiting the region may receive additional information for local attractions and tourist highlights in the Cultural – Information Center at the town of Kystendil and in information desks located at the town of Boboshevo, Rila and Panichisthe. There are two thematic routes suitable for cultural tourism. In addition there is an interactive web portal, multimedia products, tourist guides, brochures and leaflets which aim to promote the tourist attractiveness of the region.

#### ***Mountain tourism***

The mountain tourism in the region is represented by the route-cognitive tourism. Excellent opportunities for its development offer the well-marked routes in Rila and Osogovo which lead to famous national sites.

The diverse relief of Osogovo Mountain is suitable for hiking. To the heart of the mountain, the region around Osogovo Chalet, the area of Tri Buki and Mandrata, where the major tourist attractions are situated, could be reached in 20 minutes (21 km) on a smooth and offering picturesque views asphalt road. Along with the marked and used tourist routes from the village Bogoslov to Igljika Chalet and from Osogovo Chalet to Ruen Peak, there are opportunities for the development of various in length and difficulty eco routes which pass through territories with

significant species diversity, including rare, protected and endangered species, endemic species, relicts and medicinal plants. As a region with a former status of a border zone and a strong depopulation has a relatively good level of biodiversity conservation. There are 11 marked by BTU /Bulgarian Tourist Union/ tourist routes.

The steep slopes of the Kabul part of North-Western Rila, the deeply incised valleys of the Dzherman River and Gornitsa River and the cirques of Sedemte Rilski Ezera (The Seven Rila Lakes), offer routes for trips and excursions. The Panichishte Resort is located near the town of Sapareva Banya. The resort is situated in the north-western part of the Rila Mountain at an altitude of 1350-1450 meters.

Here is the lowest and the only non-draining lake in Rila which is a kind of a natural phenomenon. Panichishte is a starting point of tourist routes to the alpine part of the Rila Mountain. In this part of the park passes European tourist route E-4, connecting the western part of the Iberian Peninsula – Portugal and the southern part of the Balkans – Greece.

### ***Hunting tourism***

In February 2001, State Game Breeding Station Osogovo was established in the territory of State Forestry Osogovo, with an area of 16, 812 ha and an altitude of 600 to 1,700 m. The hunting grounds located around the Breeding Station provide excellent conditions for hunting of various types of game.

### ***Winter tourism***

The Osogovo Mountain is extremely favorable for the development of winter sports and skiing. In order to attract more tourists in the bases of Osogovo Mountain, it is essential to be constructed new ski runs and lifts, as well as the marking of new tourist routes. At this stage, there is one children ski track in the area of sports-tourist complex Tri Buki and there is also another ordinary ski track near the area Plaviloto. Regarding the development of hiking and mountain tourism, we believe that 2 or 3 new tourist routes should be created and marked. The construction of fountains is being planned, as well as tourist lodges where necessary. The future development of the Osogovo Mountain involves the construction of a lift to facilitate the transport of Bulgarian and foreign tourists from the town itself to the mountain.

### **In order to improve the conditions for winter sports it is necessary to:**

- Construct new facilities – ski track, lift and tow ropes;
- Repair the existing facilities in order to guarantee for the safety of tourists

### ***Rural tourism***

Suitable for this type of tourism are the small municipalities in the territory of the region – Treklyano, Nevestino, Rila, Kocherinovo and Sapareva Banya. This alternative tourism has not yet been developed, but the overall development of the integrated tourism may determine and cause its manifestation as a tourist product, as an appendix and enrichment of the main packages of tourist services.

## **3.3 EAST PLANNING REGION**

Some of the most important natural resources in the region are the mineral and thermal water springs in Vinitsa (Isti Bania) and Shtip (Kezovica).

Besides the springs, other important water resource is Bregalnitsa River. It has two dams - “Kalimanci Dam” and “Kochani lake”. In this region there are good conditions for development of lake tourism.

Only four miles from Makedonska Kamenitsa one can stumble upon the remains of late ancient city, submerged under the water. **Kalata** is an abbreviation of "Tin Town," because gold and tin

used to be exploited from this locality. Rocks containing golden wires were heated and people used chisels to take those wires out and further on, to re-melt them. The highest point of the former tin town is 200 meters from the bottom of the Kalimantsi River. Via Ignatia Road was passing here. Kalam site is protected on three sides by steep downhill and deeply incised beds of the two rivers. There is a flattened plateau which even today rises above the surface of the artificial lake, whereas an access existed only on the northern side. That side is cut by a defensive ditch carved into the rock. Defensive walls lead around the edge of the plateau and enclose total area of 345 cm by 80 cm. One can easily identify three contours of city gates and remains of numerous buildings. Today Kalam is the smallest living "town" in Macedonia, with only two inhabitants.

In the bed of Kalimantsi Lake on the shore of the village Dulitsa, near by the place called Begov Dab was discovered great basilica from V century with many materials (ceramics, columns and capitals). Also in the bed of Kalimanci Lake in Ilijovo, in vicinity of the locality Crkvishte, were discovered remains of an ancient building, where later was built and existed with graves from the end of XIV or early XV century.

**Ponikva** is located at altitude of 1560 meters, situated in area with dense beech forests and various plant species. As one of 34 Macedonian's winter tourist centres, Ponikva is one of the most visited places in Osogovo Region.

The urban area with sports and recreation centre includes two ski lifts, weekend houses, auto-camps, bungalows, objects of daily supply, multipurpose spaces, fields for sports and recreation, catering facilities and ski equipment services. Besides the weekend settlements and a few motels, in Ponikva there is a children' resort with a capacity of 220 beds.

The natural beauty, environmentally friendly clean environment and climate are excellent prerequisites for the great attendance of Ponikva. Besides the already existing sports fields, it is planned to build pathways for biathlon and Nordic running. Special tourist attraction for fans of hunting, near Ponikva is the game reserves. The commercial hunting place-the game park, in addition to accommodation, offers to the guests a unique opportunity to hunt deer, muffles and wild boars.

### 3.4 SOUTH-EAST PLANNING REGION

In the southern part of Macedonia, in the area of Gevgelia, near the border with Greece, on an area of 9 280 ha, the hunting site "Milisin" is located. The hunting area is distributed over a developed relief, with various configurations of the terrain and an altitude of 430 - 2165 m.

The influence of the Mediterranean climate, the large presence of water sources, oak and elm forests create ideal conditions for the wild boar and roe. On the hunting site, there is a fenced area of 313 Ha for breeding of wild boar. Within the fence you can hunt throughout the year and apart from the wild boar, roes can also be hunted. In the hunting site there is a hunting cottage, with a useful area of about 100 m<sup>2</sup> and a capacity of four beds.

The smallest of the Macedonian tectonic lakes, **Lake Doiran**, is situated in the southernmost part of the country. Its unique features set it apart from the others. It measures only 9 km at its longest, and 7 km at its broadest part, and covers an area of 43.1 km<sup>2</sup>. The greatest depth in the lake is 10 m. Due to its mild climate and warm water (28°C in summer) it is considered to have medicinal qualities. This lake is teeming with fish: bleak, carp, catfish and chub, a real angler's paradise! The ancient method of fishing with the aid of the cormorant, still practised on this lake, is a rare sight that can seldom be found elsewhere in the world. There are several hotels, resorts and camping sites on the shore of this lake, too.

#### **Smolare and Koleshino Waterfalls**

**Smolare waterfall** is situated in the lower course of Smolare River, the right tributary of the Struma River, at an altitude of 600 meters in the region of the village Smolari. The total height of the vertical section of Smolare waterfall is 39.5 meters. The waterfall is a tectonic predisposed with

rift valley structure, which lies perpendicular to the direction of water flow of Smolare River. At the bottom of the waterfall is formed a giant pot, whose length, in the direction of water flow of river, is five meters, the width is 11 m and the depth varies from 0.5 to 0.7 meters.

**Koleshino waterfall** is located in the lower course of the Baba River at an altitude of 500 meters. With a height of 15 m, it belongs among the highest waterfalls in Macedonia, with the fall width of about 6 m. It is a tectonic waterfall, created in granite stones.

**Negortsi Baths** are centre for extended treatment and rehabilitation in modern and equipped facilities for all types of therapy in the field of physical medicine and rehabilitation. These facilities are located under the southeast slopes of Mount Kozuf, 5 km northwest of Gevgelia, at an altitude of only 59 meters. The bathroom is the lowest in our entire country. There are two sources - Vrela Banya (Hot Bath) with water temperature of 40°C and Ladna Bania (Cold Bath) with water temperature of 38°C. The water contains calcium, magnesium, rubidium, caesium, radon and other minerals. Accommodation facilities in spa bath complex have total of 336 beds, with two indoors swimming pools and several outdoors pools. Based in the foothills of Mount Kozuf, among ashen forests that form a natural park, Negorci Baths have 36 hectares of dense and magnificent forest in its surrounding environment.

**The newest Kozuf Ski Centre in Macedonia**, whose construction began in 2001 and it is expected to be fully completed until 2011. The centre is modern and well-equipped and provides excellent conditions for skiing. Currently it has two ski lifts with a capacity of carrying up to 3000 skiers to the top of the cable railway per hour; one six-row lift, unique of this type in the Balkans, restaurant, sheepfold, 16 suites and 16 km ski trails. This centre is exclusive and possesses equipment for production of artificial snow.

Pure air, sun and natural beauty are what most visitors of Kozuf are attracted by. Spacious ski slopes without trees have been prepared for almost six years, location and natural resources on the mountain Kozuf ensure that the ski centre will become a new attractive winter tourist destination in Macedonia.

Except in winter, Kozuf is attractive in the other seasons of the year as well. Kozuf offers excellent conditions for historical tourism, mountain biking, horse riding, paragliding, hiking and hunting, and the dam on River Tocnica provides opportunity for fishing and kayak.

**Sports mountaineering, sports hunting and fishing are recognizable features of Plachkovitsa**, an average high mountain situated in the eastern part of Macedonia. It can be reached from Radovish, Shtip and Vinica. The mountain is separated into deep river valleys and its highest peak is Lisec, with height of 1754 meters above the sea level.

The tourists can reach the mountain house "Dzumaja" by ground path in good condition, with length of two kilometres and it takes two hours on marked walking path to arrive to the peak Lisec. Also, Lisec can be climbed from the mountaineering house called "Vrteshka", again on marked path. On this road there are a lot resources and streams, and meadows suitable for camping. Often there is snow on Lisec in late spring, in the course of month April and May. Children mountain resort Plackovice is one of the most visited sites in this part of the state.

#### **POTENTIALS FOR TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN BOTH MACEDONIAN REGIONS:**

- Favourable geographic position on a crossroad (north-south and east-west transport corridor);
- Well preserved nature and ecosystems (mountains, landscapes, three lakes and plenty of national parks rich with flora and fauna);
- Rich history and cultural heritage (churches and monasteries, handcraft, archaeological sites and monuments);
- traditional hospitality (traditional cuisine with variety of food and drinks- famous lamb and vine)
- Well preserved and still practised national folklore and traditional arts and crafts.