



БЪЛГАРСКА ФОНДАЦИЯ  
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КЛОН БЕЛАСИЦА

Project title:  
Feasibility Study for Trans-border  
Biosphere Reserve Osogovo  
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## **Final Report - Summary**

# **SOCIOLOGY**



## **Feasibility Study for Trans-border Biosphere Reserve Osogovo**

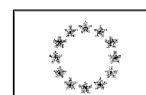
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# **Sociological study of the population in trans-border region Osogovo regarding the opportunities for establishment of protected territory „Osogovo“**

The work done by me as an Expert of Sociology in the implementation period of the contract was in line with the detailed Terms of Reference, part of the documentation of the tender procedure, and with the Inception Report approved by the Contracting Authority (BBF). It included the some basic units:

1. Information about empirical study – Introduction;
2. Information about all collected sociological facts- Description of the approach and the methodology for activity realization;
3. Mathematical and statistical analyses – stage of information's summary, quantitative and qualitative analyses - Analysis and interpretation of data from in-depth interviews and questionnaires in CAWI;
4. Analysis of the survey results, basic deductions and recommendations - Conclusions and recommendations.
5. Annexes : Annex 1, Annex2, Annex 3, Annex 3, Annex 5 .These include information about Questionnaire In-depth interviews, Questionnaire Computer Assisted Web Interviews, Data of respondents -CAWI and Random sample of interviews with respondents.

The implementation of the structure of the sociological survey will provide following information:

- Methodology of the empirical study, which determined subject of study, purpose and task in various fields of culture, tourism, forestry, economic development of the cross-border biosphere reserve Osogovo.

The methodology will include a statement on the following parameters:

- methodology of indicators (scaling) - there are scales of criteria;
- methods of registration - it would indicate where the information is obtained and how it will be used;
- methodology of data processing – collecting information on individual cases, as well as selected target groups;
- methodology of representative sample – ‘answer the questions’: how many people have been investigated, as well as if this survey is representative;

Achieving stated above of the sociological study's targets there are these tools:

Interviews - with the relevant questionnaire to them;

**On the spot:**

- Meetings with the municipalities – gathering additional information
- Meetings with the other stakeholders – the same
- Visits to selected sites

**Stakeholders:**

Representatives of municipalities

Relevant interest groups

**Description of the approach and the methodology for activity realization:**

Upon conduction of the study have been used the following approach and methodology:

1. Study design has been developed: selection and concretization of the approach for study, localization of the resources (time, human and financial);
2. Methodology for conduction of the study has been developed;
3. The features of the methods for collection and analysis of information have been defined.

For realization of the sociological study has been made excerpt from 171 respondents, which is representative for the identified interested parties and main target groups, including here non-organized residents of the municipalities.

Fifty respondents have been interviewed in the study – 15 „non-organized” residents of the municipalities and 35 representatives of the local administration, representatives of the business, NGO, representatives of cultural, sport, ecological and other institutions and organizations; media representatives; representatives of civil associations.

In the process of the study the number of the interviewed „non-organized residents“ from the trans-border region is 121.

Upon development of the excerpt the team has taken into account the three main characteristics, which determine the “quality” of the excerpt: authenticity, representation and volume. **The authenticity** is connected with the rate of “truthfulness” of the collected information, i.e. to what extent are true the answers of the respondents. The representativeness of the excerpt is connected with the opportunity conclusions to be made, based on the excerpt for the population, i.e.

reproduction of the population structure in order not to be allowed incorrectness of the conclusions. **The volume** of the excerpt is connected with the accuracy of the assessment for the population parameters.

**The main target respondent groups, included in the study are as follows:**

- ✓ Heads of directorates, heads of departments, state and senior experts, chairs of working groups and participants in them, mayors of settlements;
- ✓ Representatives of the de-concentrated structures of the central executive power including here representatives of Regional directorate „Agriculture” in Bulgaria;
- ✓ representatives of the business – local and regional ;
- ✓ managers/directors of NGO, associations in the field of business, entrepreneurship, of municipal, district and regional importance;
- ✓ representatives of cultural, ecological, sport and other institutions and organizations;
- ✓ media representatives;
- ✓ representatives of civil associations;
- ✓ non-organized citizens.

The number of the questions is in accordance with:

- ✓ the purposes of the sociological study,
- ✓ the volume of the topics to be studied;
- ✓ the maximum duration for conduction of thorough interviews and conduction of interviews through filling of the questionnaires.

The detailed information collected by me is given in Annex 1- Annex 5 to the report while the summary of my findings is given in Introduction. The analysis of the advantages and disadvantages (strengths and weaknesses) of the development potentials is given below.

In connection with the contract I fulfill these obligations:

- I. I took part in three meetings of all the experts and the project team – in the beginning of the studies and in the middle. I intend to keep my obligation to take part in the third planned meeting, at the end of our contracts.

- II. I tried my best to assist other experts and the project team where necessary and possible, for the successful finalization of the feasibility study for Osogovo Biosphere Reserve.
- III. Based on the findings, I prepared information for inclusion into the dossier/nomination form of Osogovo as Biosphere Reserve, see below.
- IV. I prepared summary information for PR purposes of the project which is also given below.

### **Systematization of strengths and weaknesses – Osogovo Region**

#### *Strengths*

<i><b>Identified strengths of the region</b></i>	<i><b>Ranged strong points from the interviewed individuals</b></i>	<i><b>Ranged strong points from the interviewed individuals,,non-organized,, citizens from the questionnaire</b></i>
Good location of the region	Good location of the region	Good location of the region
Transport connectivity	Transport connectivity	Available natural phenomena and cultural heritage
Clean environment	Clean environment	Transport connectivity
Available natural phenomena and cultural heritage	Availability of built sports infrastructure	Clean environment
Enterprises operating in the mining industry	Available natural phenomena and cultural heritage	Developed agriculture
Availability of developed social infrastructure	Enterprises operating in the mining industry	Available protected areas
Developed agriculture	Developed agriculture	Available cultural sites

Available cultural sites	Qualified staff to work in the industry	Well-educated population
Available protected areas	Network operating SMEs	Qualified staff to work in the industry
Well-educated population	Availability of developed social infrastructure	Enterprises operating in the mining industry
Qualified staff to work in the industry	Well-educated population	Network operating SMEs
Network operating SMEs	Available cultural sites	Availability of built sports infrastructure
Availability of built sports infrastructure	Available protected areas	Availability of developed social infrastructure

### *Weaknesses*

<b><i>Identified weaknesses in the region</i></b>	<b><i>Ranged weak points from the interviewed individuals</i></b>	<b><i>Ranged weak points from the interviewed individuals „non-organized,, citizens from the questionnaire</i></b>
Negative population growth	Negative population growth	Migration of population
Migration of population	Depopulation of the region	Lack of jobs and hence poverty population
Depopulation of the region	Lack of a comprehensive development strategy for the region	Negative population growth
Industrial decline	Outdated development plans of municipalities in the region	Missing foreign investment
Lack of jobs and hence poverty population	Lack of jobs and hence poverty population	Industrial decline
Missing foreign investment	Lack of urban plans in Macedonian municipalities	Lack of material and technical base, service

		tourist flows
Poorly developed transport infrastructure	Missing foreign investment	Depopulation of the region
Lack of regional landfills	Migration of population	Need to build new water installations
Need to build new water installations	Need to build new water installations	Lack of a comprehensive development strategy for the region
Lack of a comprehensive development strategy for the region	Lack of material and technical base, service tourist flows	Poorly developed transport infrastructure
Lack of media coverage of the information in the public sphere	Lack of railway transport in the Macedonian part of the region	Lack of regional landfills
Lack of material and technical base, service tourist flows	Industrial decline	Lack of urban plans in Macedonian municipalities
Outdated development plans of municipalities in the region	Lack of regional landfills	Outdated development plans of municipalities in the region
Lack of urban plans in Macedonian municipalities	Poorly developed transport infrastructure	Lack of railway transport in the Macedonian part of the region
Lack of railway transport in the Macedonian part of the region	Lack of media coverage of the information in the public sphere	Lack of media coverage of the information in the public sphere

*Opportunities for development of Osogovo Region :*

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<i>Identified opportunities of the region</i>	<i>Ranged opportunities from the interviewed individuals</i>	<i>Ranged opportunities from the interviewed individuals, „non-organized” citizens from the questionnaire</i>
Use EU membership of Bulgaria for attracting investment in the border region Osogovo	Use EU membership of Bulgaria for attracting investment in the border region Osogovo	Use EU membership of Bulgaria for attracting investment in the border region Osogovo
Developed cooperation between the municipalities of the region in joint project initiatives.	Road I-6 with European categorization E871 from the Bulgarian side, provides passage to Macedonia	Establishment of a joint structure of the Bulgarian and Macedonian side for economic development of the region
Establishment of a joint structure of the Bulgarian and Macedonian side for economic development of the region	Developed cooperation between the municipalities of the region in joint project initiatives.	Development of alternative forms of tourism, eco, rural and religious
Development of agriculture in the Bulgarian half of the region, fruit, rice production in the Macedonian part	Development of small and medium-sized enterprises involved in agricultural processing production industry;	Developed cooperation between the municipalities of the region in joint project initiatives.
Road I-6 with European categorization E871 from the Bulgarian side, provides passage to Macedonia	Development of alternative forms of tourism, eco, rural and religious	Natural phenomena and cultural and historical heritage
FPEIC №8: Durres - Tirana - Skopje - Kyustendil - Sofia -	Establishment of a joint structure of the Bulgarian and Macedonian side for economic	Availability of clean nature in the region



Plovdiv - Burgas / Varna	development of the region	
Development of small and medium-sized enterprises involved in agricultural processing production industry;	FPEIC №8: Durres - Tirana - Skopje - Kyustendil - Sofia - Plovdiv - Burgas / Varna	Road I-6 with European categorization E871 from the Bulgarian side, provides passage to Macedonia
Developed railway transport on the Bulgarian side, which is implemented in conjunction by VIth main railway line Sofia / Radomir-Kyustendil-Gyueshevo, a constituent of FPEIC №8.	Developed railway transport on the Bulgarian side, which is implemented in conjunction by VIth main railway line Sofia / Radomir-Kyustendil-Gyueshevo, a constituent of FPEIC №8.	Development of agriculture in the Bulgarian half of the region, fruit, rice production in the Macedonian part
Conditions for the development of secondary industry Processed	Conditions for the development of secondary industry Processed	Conditions for the development of secondary industry Processed
Development of alternative forms of tourism, eco, rural and religious	Availability of clean nature in the region	Presence of protected areas in the region, suggest that the development of tourism potential
Availability of clean nature in the region	Natural phenomena and cultural and historical heritage	Developed railway transport on the Bulgarian side, which is implemented in conjunction by VIth main railway line Sofia / Radomir-Kyustendil-Gyueshevo, a constituent of FPEIC №8.

Presence of protected areas in the region, suggest that the development of tourism potential	Development of agriculture in the Bulgarian half of the region, fruit, rice production in the Macedonian part	Development of small and medium-sized enterprises involved in agricultural processing production industry;
Natural phenomena and cultural and historical heritage	Presence of protected areas in the region, suggest that the development of tourism potential	FPEIC №8: Durres - Tirana - Skopje - Kyustendil - Sofia - Plovdiv - Burgas / Varna

The main analysis of received results shows that the question of the announcement of Osogovo border region has no one answer. The study registers two types of attitudes. The first type is attitude of respondents, representing the local institutions, who are concerned with the announcement of the region for a protected area, because it will stop launched economic initiatives.

The opinions and attitudes of independent respondents fully support the view of forming a trans-border biosphere Osogovo reserve that this will lead to economic development of the region.

Undoubtedly, the respondents are not familiar with the available documentation and mechanisms of operation of a biosphere reserve. This determines the necessity of an educational campaign for achievement of several goals:

- Introducing local population to the advantages and disadvantages of an operating biosphere reserve;
- Demonstration of good practices in registered reserves;
- Introduction to international experience, as well as to international trans-border reserves, working jointly for development of a territory in some countries;
- Organization of public forums to present the views of the entire population and registered specifics of the region;
- Establishment of a strategy for economic development of the trans-border region;
- Creation of a common brand for promotion of Osogovo region;

### **Information for PR purposes of the project**

➤ The last census in Bulgaria in 2011 and in Macedonia in 2002 showed the tendencies towards decrease of population in both countries, the percentage rising in recent years.

In the cross-border region of Osogovo, there is a trend of a negative natural and mechanical growth, with a greater impact of the first one, and the corresponding ageing of population. The main reasons for the negative values of the natural growth in the municipalities are the high mortality rates and the low birth rates. There is also a trend of high levels of migration which is especially acute in Macedonia, according to data from the East and Northeast Region of FYROM.

The sociological research registered a problem with the migration of young population in Osogovo Region, the trend being equally expressed in Bulgaria and Macedonia. The municipal experts commented that while villages are being deserted due to the fact that population is moving towards the bigger towns or even outside the two countries.

The lack of a strong and stable economy, the low income of population, poverty, and the high percentage of unemployment are the reasons for the migration of young people out of the region. The solving of that problem is possible through the transition to economically stable municipalities which would offer opportunities for the development of young and well-educated people, keeping the latter into their birthplaces. For the sustainable development of the region, it is necessary to use all the opportunities of the Bulgarian and Macedonian municipalities. The registered opportunities include the following:

- Make active use of the membership of Bulgaria in the EU in order to draw investments to the cross-border Osogovo Region;
- Develop cooperation among the municipalities from the region for joint projects for economic development of the region;
- Develop the SME sector related to the processing industry based on local agricultural production;
- Develop tourism – ecological, rural and religious – as the main economic branch of the area;

- Organize a joint management structure for the economic develop of the region (both Bulgaria and Macedonia);
  - Utilize better the existing transport infrastructure;
  - Create conditions for the development of a secondary industry – the processing one;
  - Develop agriculture better, fruit-growing in the Bulgarian part and rice-growing in the Macedonian part;
  - Utilize the opportunities offered by the existing protected areas in the region which can support the development of sustainable tourism.
- The sociological research among the respondents from the Osogovo Region showed that, despite the already long-running cross-border cooperation programmes that cover both countries, there is still a need of experience exchange and training at the expert level in order to move towards the sustainable development of the region.

During the research, most of the interviewed commented on the possibilities for training of people and exchange of good practices in the cross-border area as the tool to achieve local and regional sustainable development. The examples of such training were related to cooperation in the following sectors: tourism, development of processing industry, development of small and medium enterprises. They also stressed on the need of environmental education which would give answers to questions related to the expanded opportunities of a region designated as a larger protected territory.

The designation of Osogovo as a biosphere reserve may be interpreted in two different ways by the representatives of local population and of local administrative structures.

The interviewed experts from municipal administrations commented on the obstacles that would arise from the designation of Osogovo as a biosphere reserve which, according to them, would affect directly its economic development. From the Macedonian side, there are many legislative restrictions that could hardly be overcome by the local administrations. On the other hand, the opportunities that would be opened by a potential biosphere reserve are unknown to common people. The options of financing local economic development through projects targeting local communities and based on the symbiosis between people and nature are not seen at the local level.

Results show that there are bottom-up efforts needed throughout the whole social system in order to reach such a large-scale proposal, and implement it.

- The answers of the independent respondents who have expressed personal attitudes are totally positive and are related to the need of a joint office that would work for the common development of Osogovo Region.

The respondents have supported the idea enthusiastically and the answers to the question what should be the form of existence of such a joint structure, have been united in two main aspects:

- To have offices on both sides of the border which work together for the common economic development of the region;
- To have one common office with Bulgarian and Macedonian experts which would develop and implement joint projects for Osogovo.

As a good example of a working structure, the respondents quoted the Joint Technical Secretariat of the IPA Cross Border Programme Bulgaria – FYROM.

- The main registered problems of the Osogovo cross-border region are related to the poor economic development (81% of the respondents); the migration of young people (78%); the lack of investments in the area (54%); followed by the bad infrastructure, the lack of promotion and of specialized tourist infrastructure incl. places to stay.

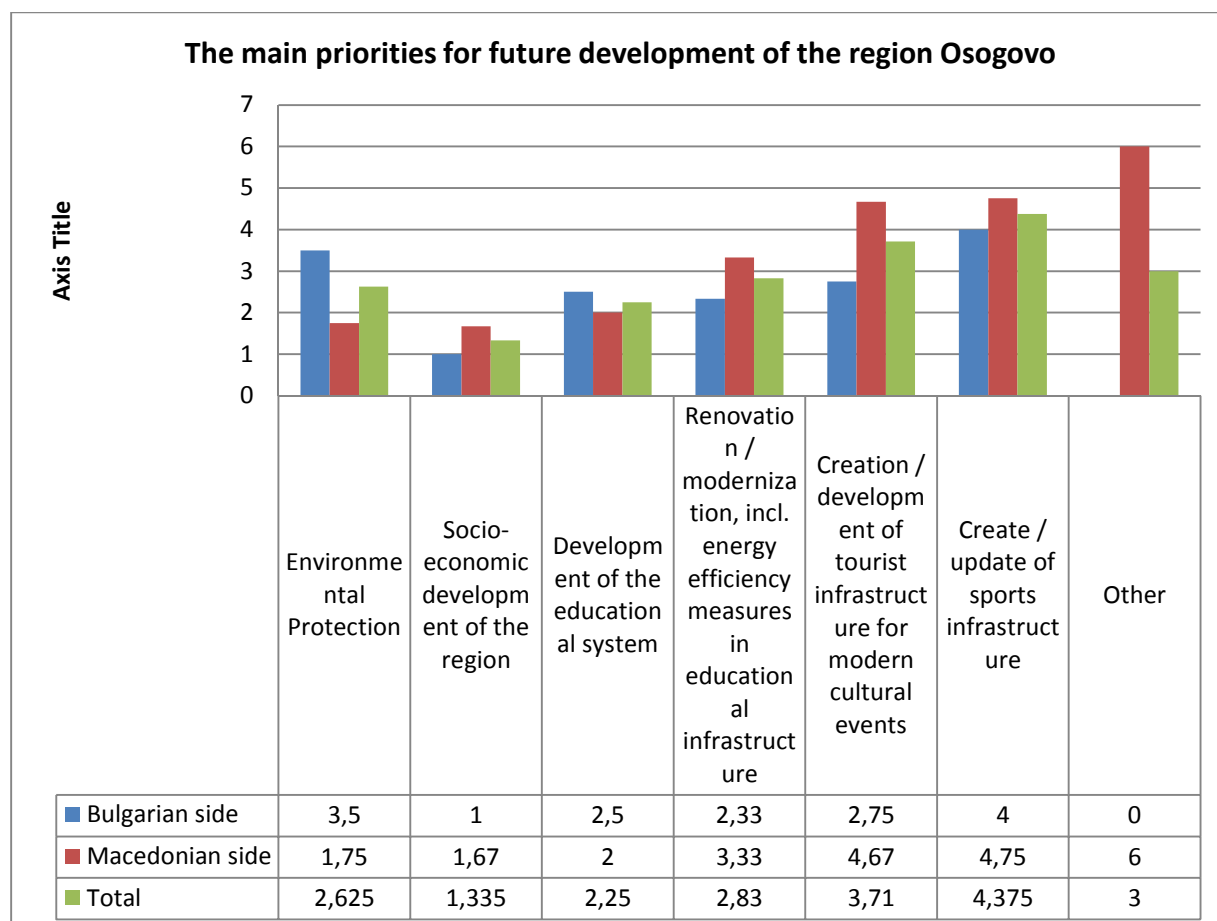
The overcoming of the migration problem is possible through the well-planned economic development of the region, compliant with the available resources. This would secure the development of every single municipality and would provide options for the young people.

The designation of Osogovo Region as a biosphere reserve will provide the young with opportunities for business initiatives which would allow them to stay and work in the places where they were born.

The main development priorities of Osogovo Region were outlined by the respondents on both sides of the border as follows.

For the Bulgarian municipalities, the future development of the region is related to the protection of the environment (weighed average of 3.5%), followed by the need to

develop tourist infrastructure (weighed average of 2.75%). The third place is occupied by the social and economic development of the region which is possible after the realization of the first two elements (weighed average of 2.5%). For the Macedonian partners, the priority future development is related to the construction of sports infrastructure and tourist infrastructure; modernization and energy efficiency. Data has been summarized on Figure 1:



**Figure 1 The main priorities for future development of the region Osogovo**

### Source Survey

Where the ranking of the development priorities for the whole Osogovo Region is as follows (based on weighted average):

- *Create / update sports infrastructure - 4,375*
- *Creation / development of tourist infrastructure for modern cultural events - 3,71*
- *Renovation / modernization, incl. energy efficiency measures in educational infrastructure - 2,83*
- *Environmental Protection - 2,625*
- *Development of the educational system - 2,25*
- *Socio-economic development of the region - 1,335*

The differences between the answers of the Bulgarian and Macedonian municipalities about the ranking of development priorities for the region are quite distinctive. The municipal administrations of three of the Macedonian municipalities show the tourism branch development as their top priority, the preferred type of tourism being ski tourism. These are the municipalities of Kriva Palanka, Probishtip and Kochani. For the Bulgarian side, tourism is related to the wealth of mineral waters and spa/wellness development (Kyustendil Municipality).

When registering the developed economic branches of the region, there are also certain differences between the answers of the Bulgarian and Macedonian respondents. These are related to the profiles of the corresponding municipalities. The latter give preference to the social and economic development of the municipalities followed by the protection of the environment. The Bulgarian side places the accent on the sustainable use of the environment for the development of the region, followed by the cultural and historical heritage as a basis for tourism development. The third place is taken by production – agricultural and fruit in particular. There are no large industrial capacities.

The main ideas for the economic development of Osogovo Region are related to the following priorities:

- Economic development and profiling of the basic economic sectors
- Construction of specialized infrastructure;
- Implementation of economic development projects;
- Utilization of natural assets for the economic development of the region;
- Development of transport infrastructure;
- Development of the management capacity;
- Restoration and renovation of the urban environment;
- Development of the social infrastructure;
- Utilization of cultural sites as tourism attractions;
- Development of ecological infrastructure;
- Energy efficiency of the municipal centers;
- Improvement of the educational infrastructure;
- Priority efforts for the improvement of environment quality;

- Improvement of the legislation and cooperation among the various institutions: national, regional and local;
- Establishment of joint offices for the development of the economic potential of the region;
- Support for the small and medium enterprises;
- Raising public awareness about the components of the environment;
- Simulation of urban activity;
- Development of joint partnerships between the Bulgarian and the Macedonian side.

The development of the region is possible through the promotion of its strengths and opportunities, plus the realization of a joint marketing strategy showing its advantages as a unified cross-border territory. This development is related to various proposals made by the local people in the individual municipalities. Each one shows a specific brand that could be assigned to it within the regional marketing.

The accents of the individual proposals have been summarized in four priority areas ranked as follows:

***Priority area 1 – Economy: Processing industry, tourism, trade***

- ✓ Economy, tourism
- ✓ Production
- ✓ SME development and cross-border networks
- ✓ Trainings and joint meetings for exchange of experience and mutual cooperation
- ✓ Development of processing industry for the agricultural production.

***Priority area 2 – Social sphere: Education, culture, health and social care***

- ✓ Health care
- ✓ Social care
- ✓ Organization of international cultural events
- ✓ Homes for elderly people
- ✓ Establishment of youth centers
- ✓ Trainings and joint meetings for exchange of experience and mutual cooperation



- ✓ Culture

***Priority area 3 – Living space: Environment, infrastructure, public spaces, green system, energy efficiency***

- ✓ Development of public spaces
- ✓ Reconstruction of ski lifts in Ponikva resort
- ✓ Improvement and synchronization of legislation, and its effective implementation
- ✓ Improvement of energy efficiency
- ✓ Water treatment plants construction; construction of regional waste disposal sites; solid waste management
- ✓ Infrastructure

***Priority area 4 – Social relations; Management, security, civil activity, partnerships***

- ✓ Raising civic activity
- ✓ Regional promotion campaign, organization of fairs, excursions and schools for specialized professionals
- ✓ Organization of industrial / economic clusters
- ✓ Joint projects implemented via EC funds
- ✓ Implementation of small projects for public awareness raising by NGOs.