



**iron
curtain
trail**



**BULGARIAN
BIODIVERSITY
FOUNDATION**



**ФОНДАЦИЯ
ЕКОПАРТНЕРСТВО**



EuroVelo Route No. 13

strateg-ic@googlegroups.com
+359 (0)2 9807685

Ministry of
Economy,
Energy and
Tourism

Bulgarian
Association for
Alternative
Tourism

Bulgarian
Biodiversity Foundation

Bulgarian
Environmental
Partnership
Foundation

Bike Attack
Association
Romania

Municipality of
Thassos,
Greece

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FEASIBILITY STUDY

Of the Iron Curtain Trail on the Balkans

December, 2011
Sofia

The ICT route is divided into sections according to the administrative territorial structure. The description of the route is from West to the East by districts. The studies about Serbia, Macedonia, Greece and Turkey are given in Appendices.

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INTRODUCTION

This study is meant to help regional authorities, local actors, project teams, researchers and experts dealing with the development of the Iron Curtain Trail covering approximately 1700 km starting from the border between Romania and Serbia and going along the Bulgarian border with Serbia, FYROM, Greece and Turkey to the Black Sea.. The study was conducted according to a methodology also developed under the project “StrategIC: Development of Long-term Strategy and Networks for Promotion and Implementation of the Iron Curtain Trail in its Balkan Section”, co-financed by the European Commission. The feasibility of the ICT according to the standards of the Euro Velo network is the core subject of the study as well as the possible impacts the route may have in environmental, social, economic and development aspects. The Iron Curtain Trail is planned to be part of the European network of cycling trails and bear the number 13. More information for the ICT idea and development projects may be found at the project web page: <http://13.eurovelo.bg/>

According to the project the Feasibility Study investigates and provides analysis and information for the following Feasibility Study and short-term ICT Action Plan components:

- ICT infrastructure (incl. cross-border points) and its compatibility with Euro Velo route standards
- Tourism potential – facilities, service providers, attraction sites (incl. natural, cultural and historical heritage, incl. Iron Curtain remains)
- Economic assessment
- Legal feasibility
- Funding options, EC and other existing financial mechanism for its implementation, etc.
- ICT Short-term Action Plan: Implementation Stages and Timing

The methods of conducting the study and the expected outcomes are fully described in the respective methodology document. All recommended methods and actions in the study are planned fully in line within the perspectives, tasks and agreed activities of the “StrategIC” project. All methods and actions are agreed by the project team, including geographical tasks distribution as follows:

- *Bulgarian Association for Alternative Tourism (BAAT), leading partner:* responsible for feasibility study analysis of the districts Kardzhali and Haskovo in Bulgaria
- *Bulgarian Biodiversity Foundation, partner:* responsible for feasibility study analysis of the districts Blagoevgrad, Yambol and Bourgas in Bulgaria
- *Bulgarian Environmental Partnership Foundation, partner:* responsible for feasibility study analysis of the districts Sofia, Pernik and Smolyan in Bulgaria
- *Bike Attack Association, partner:* responsible for overall study of Romanian-Serbian border conditions for ICT development
- *Municipality of Thassos, Greece, partner:* responsible for feasibility study analysis of the Greece-Bulgarian border conditions for ICT development

The goal of the study is to identify and recommend the backbone of the physical route along with interesting side-routes and to assess the trail with respect to the special criteria of ICT and the general standards of Euro Velo Network as explicitly listed in the Methodology and below in the present study.

The Overall methods for conducting the feasibility study include:

- **Desktop research** – research via Internet, specialized publications and books to identify stakeholders and provide baseline information for the feasibility study components.
- **Terrain visits** – experts and project team visit places in the Balkan ICT region to identify stakeholders, investigate local conditions and capacity, route options, incl. bikeability, and discuss route feasibility potential.
- **Local steering/discussion groups** – groups formed on local transboundary level involving key local stakeholders.
- **Expert consultation** for Euro Velo standards feasibility of the route.

An analysis of the current situation for economy, technical capacity, evaluation of tourist resources (existing routes, possibilities for new routes, needs assessment for new cycling infrastructure, local heritage, etc.), legislative procedures and standards, existing national regional financial schemes and measures, etc. were made on both sides of each cross-border section. Terrain studies were made to create a database of the ICT development potential of the regions – routes, alternative roads, biodiversity, cultural and historical sites, incl. remains of the Iron Curtain, infrastructure, service providers, etc. The study was conducted according to geographical distribution of tasks between project partners along the border territories between Bulgaria and Serbia, FYR Macedonia, Greece, and Turkey and included desk research, terrain visits and workshops with stakeholders. The desk research preceded site visits and terrain studies and workshops. Terrain studies were made by the project team experts. Site visits and terrain studies explored the possible route alternatives and were a basis for discussions at regional level later with the cross-border stakeholders along the route sections. The studies also included research on the neighboring non-EU member states – Turkey, FYROM and Serbia.

Stakeholder groups were identified at regional level by each project partner through desk research, site visits, interviews and local workshops. Data for the stakeholders was structured and analyzed by the respective regional project partners. Local government representatives of different departments (e.g. municipal councilors, local development, tourism and/or culture municipal experts, municipal NGO expert, etc.) were involved:

- Regional authorities (incl. tourism and development experts, etc.)
- Representatives of NGOs (including tourist, biking, hiking clubs, environmental NGOs, etc.)
- Representatives of protected area management teams and environmental control (especially forestry units)
- Businesses related to tourism and service provision
- Museums and other local sites of interest for tourists
- Educational institutions

During the regional and final conferences and workshops consultations were made with all stakeholders for the results of the feasibility study of the route and as well its further use for the development of a Strategy and Action Plan as final expected outcomes of the project.

The findings of the study are organized as descriptions of the route and its potential by districts in the respective countries. In addition a reference is given for approximate daily route sections to verify the findings respond to practical cycling tourism needs.

An important part of the feasibility study is the findings in terms of environmental, social and economical impacts. The ICT was assessed in these terms according to the geographical conditions, the availability of protected territories along the route, special concerns regarding the management of the territories and as well the socio-economical and cultural specifics of the territories and their population.

According to all findings of the feasibility study ideas and recommendations are given for legislation changes, short-term actions and funding opportunities.

Route requirements

The route requirements, which applied to all sections of the ICT, in terms of where the route passes are as follows:

1. **stay as close as possible to Bulgarian – Greek border;**
2. **cross the border at existing/planned Bulgaria-Greece cross points;**
3. **pass along/through, as many as possible, remains of the Iron Curtain** (border control facilities, fences, border patrol buildings, watch towers) and other thematic objects (museum exhibitions, monuments, historical places connected with the Cold War, events and attractions related to the borders, etc.);
4. **stay close to enough places with necessary services, easily reachable by bike** – accommodation and food, health care, shops, tourism related services and bicycle repair and shops.
5. **be safe for cycling with cross country bikes with luggage.** This is the reason to consider carefully the different alternatives according to the slope, road surface, automobile traffic and other related risks.

The proposals for the route in each of the sections described consider the local conditions according to the above requirements and also take into account the potential for improvement of the local conditions with specific measures and described possibilities. Of course, the final decision for choosing a particular route is determined by objective factors, which cannot be changed in the near future or would need huge unjustified investments.

BULGARIA

A. Sofia District

A.I. Description of physical ICT backbone route in Sofia District

Overview

Backbone in Sofia District: Kalotina – Dragoman – Gaber – Krusha

1. Roads

A challenge for the route is the need to go through mountain terrains, which supposes steep sections, bad condition of the road surface and often there is no road shoulder on the road sides, narrow roads and decreased visibility because of many curves. Other preconditions for choosing the backbone are the lack of suitable surfaced roads and the availability of services for the tourist cyclists.

At present it is possible to cross the Bulgarian Serbian border only at the existing border crossing at Kalotina. Another cross-point is planned near the village of Smolcha, Godech municipality, which could be useful for the future development of the ICT.

The proposed route is identical to the primary proposal of Michael Cramer – the creator of the idea for this thematic EU cycling corridor. There are possibilities for the route to vary, but a trace was chosen according to the Euro Velo criteria:

- the proposed route has better quality of road surface compared to other options;
- where possible calm roads are used
- the proposed roads have lower denivelations
- availability of services, incl. accommodation and provisions
- availability of tourist attractions

The route follows the best asphalt roads, although their quality is different.

In the first guide-book dedicated to the ICT, Michael Cramer proposes that the distance between Dimitrovgrad in Serbia to Dragoman in Bulgaria could be covered by train in order to cross the border. A major concern about that proposal is that the transportation of bikes with this international train connection is not allowed. This was confirmed in interviews and information received during the study from representatives from the Bulgarian Railway Company. The cyclists may follow a paved old road which goes parallel to the main E80 road from Kalotina to Dragoman instead. This old road enters the main one only for short distance. The same road could be used as a quiet alternative for a detour to Sofia. The road Dragoman – Gaber – Krusha is asphalted. It is necessary that this road should be properly signposted, especially at the intersection near Gaber village, where the direction to the town of Tran should be easily visible.

There are good possibilities for future development of branch routes in direction to the town of Godech. The roads in this municipality are narrow, but picturesque and quietly passing through hilly territories suitable for cycling.

2. Services

Given the relatively short section of the route going through Sofia District the availability of accommodation services is relatively good. A family hotel and bungalows with camping site near Kalotina village, and a family hotel near Dragoman are enough options, satisfactory for the beginning of the route development in the district. There is also the possibility that the capital Sofia could be easily reached and the

service capacity of the city could be used. Other services related to tourism are not developed, though tourism is stated as a priority for development by the respective municipalities. According to the ECF criteria for service development related to the route, the ICT route in this district is “good”.

3. Attractiveness

Very small number of sites exists, which are connected to the border control from the Cold War years. Most of them are situated in high mountains, are destroyed or in very bad condition. Thus they are not included in the proposed itinerary of the route. Still one could see socialist monuments along the roads, but they too are in need for restoration. Decades ago there has been a tradition of organized annual gathering celebrations for communities once separated by the borders. These gatherings are now sporadic.

There are though other interesting sites very close to the route. The region of Dragoman is famous for the 2 ornithologically important Natura 2000 zones – the Dragoman Marsh and the Aldomirovsko Marsh. The ICT backbone is not supposed to go directly through these places, but it is possible and recommended that branch route could be developed to promote the rich biodiversity of the region and especially as part of the European Greenbelt initiative.

There are also good possibilities to develop branch routes in direction to the town of Godech. This region is famous with the numerous old monasteries and churches with high cultural and artistic value. An old building of a border patrol barrack could be seen near Smolcha village, where the local authorities are lobbying for a new local border-crossing.

ICT attractions/sites:

- socialist commemoration monuments in the villages
- border control posts in Lipintsi and Staniantsi villages, on the north from the chosen itinerary of the ICT
- a possibility to open a small border crossing near the active border control post at Smolcha village, Godech municipality

Cultural sites:

- numerous old monasteries and churches with high cultural and artistic value in the region of Godech municipality, north of the backbone ICT itinerary

Natural sites:

- Dragoman Marsh – ornithologically important site and protected Natura 2000 zone
- Aldomirovsko Marsh - ornithologically important site and protected Natura 2000 zone

4. Promotion of the section

There are promotional materials and web-sites, which refer to specific cultural or natural objects along the proposed route. The heritage from the Cold War is not addressed in them. There are no specific materials addressed to the wide public bearing overall information for this particular route section. Even if web-sites are found they are not being updated. Thus the general promotional status, according to ECF criteria, could be described as “inappropriate”.

5. Organisation

The organizational status in ECF terms can be evaluated as “just appropriate”. There are no suitable organizations to be found along the region to develop and maintain the route and the capacity in the municipalities is low. Even though, the route could be properly developed, if external capacities from Sofia are included in the process, because the local cycling tourism interest of its citizens could be satisfied with this nearby ICT section. The local municipalities are small and have low budgets which is an obstacle to use bigger amounts of funding from available EU funds.

A.II.Feasibility analysis of conditions in Sofia District

DRAGOMAN Municipality

Dragoman municipality is located in Sofia district. It consists of the town of Dragoman and 33 villages. The town of Dragoman is located along the western Bulgarian border 36 km to the West of Sofia and 15 km from Serbia. The population of the municipality is 5 641 out of which 3 462 live in the town of Dragoman. Since the area is in a mountainous region it has the typical mountain climate with an average yearly temperature of 8⁰C. The reason is the open character of the terrain and its carst formations, which allows cooling in winter while in summer there is nothing to stop the almost constant winds. The average altitude in Dragoman municipality is 722,40 m, with 488,66 m being the lowest and 1206 m (at Mount Petrov krast) being the highest. In terms of water the region is considered to be a watershed for Nishava River and Gaberska (Burelska) River.

1.Description of Iron Curtain Trail tourism potential

1.1. Socio-political and economic situation

There is a strong tendency towards ageing of the population of the region as well as depopulation of the small villages. Unemployment rates have decreased two fold in the last three years. One reason for this are the measures taken by the government for creating temporary job positions and increasing professional qualification of the population. Nevertheless, the young and qualified people leave the towns and villages to go to work in Sofia.

The active industries in the region include: electronics (polymer), textile, coal, processing of used automobile tires and food processing. The municipality recognizes coal mining, the automobile tires processing and the textile industry as determining the economic character of the region and worth supporting, but investments in the municipality are not sufficient. Thus, based on the latest SWOT analysis the municipality distinguishes the textile industry as an opportunity for economic development. It also stresses the importance of the support for small and medium enterprises and the development of tourism in all its forms that are suitable for this region and climate.

The local forestry is an important part of the economic development of the municipality. The total area covered with forests is 11241,6 ha. Except for timber, forests are a resource for herbs, mushrooms, berries, development of the hunting tourism and the eco-tourism. The main problems in this sector are the illegal logging, fires and the lack of financial resources to invest in afforestation initiatives in treeless areas and such suffering from erosion.

Since the area is not occupied by any mountain or water-related resorts it has to compensate this fact with the existing cultural characteristics of the region. The municipality is planning on development of a manifold approach to tourism. Combining the potential of the place for specialized forms of tourism and extreme sports (such as spaleo-tourism, climbing, paragliding, etc) and cultural tourism could lead to the increased attractiveness of the region. This is something that the municipality considers one of its greatest strengths and also an opportunity for development. The local administration recognizes the need for development of the tourist infrastructure in terms of signage of routes, designating places for camping, etc. It is also devoted to studying and preserving the biodiversity of the region.

1.2. Public facilities

All the settlements in the municipality are connected with roads, but some of the villages in the mountainous region are difficult to get to. The provision with drinking water is secured for almost all of the settlements, with three border villages having no drinking water supply and two other villages having only street fountains. All of the settlements are electrified and there is mobile telephone connection, except in some border villages. There is landline coverage in the town of Dragoman and in Gaber village – the rest of the

villages have only one telephone post, and 7 villages have no landline connection. Internet connection is secured only in the town of Dragoman.

1.3. Tourism-related services and facilities

Tourism has not been developed but is considered to have great potential by the local authorities. Currently there is no tourist infrastructure and no working hotels and tourist houses/ locations. Private houses offer places to sleep. There are about 12 such places available in the town of Dragoman and the surrounding villages. In the Kalotina village there is a fishpond and a couple of bungalows with 8 beds where visitors could stay.. There are not many cafes and restaurants.

There is also no infrastructure for sustainable tourism. Thanks to the Balkani Wildlife Society there is one marked trekking route going up and around the Chepan Mountain and a board-walk within Dragoman marsh taking visitors to the birds watchtower.

1.4. Attraction sites - natural, cultural and historical heritage

- “Temnata dupka” Cave – close to Lepintsi village and Berende Izvor Village. It is 425 m long and is rich in stalactites, stalagmites, stone lilies, cave pearls and others. It is one of the caves with the richest variety of cave fauna. It is declared a natural site by the Bulgarian council of ministers.
- “Dupnik Rocky Bridge” – a karst formation west from the Berende village.
- Dragoman Marsh and the Wetlands Conservation Centre “Dragoman Marsh” – the marsh is the only one with a karst origin in Bulgaria. The marsh and the wetlands of the town of Dragoman and Tsraklevtsi village have been declared an Important Bird Area. The center is a fully-functional visitor and educational center situated in the town of Dragoman and a walking distance from Dragoman marsh and Chepan Mountain. The building has a parking, souvenir corner, and spacious conference (film) hall for 40 persons, a unique wetland exhibition and WC facilities.
- Two Natura 2000 sites under the Birds and the Habitats directives have also been designated in the region
- There are a few century-old trees (oak trees) in the vicinity of the Berende village. One of the most fascinating is with a diameter of 8m. The species are *Quercus pubescens* and *Quercus robur* L.
- There are numerous cultural and historical sights in the region. Some of the oldest and/or most attractive ones are the medieval church “St. Apostol Peter” from the 13th century, the Malo Malovski Monastery in Malo Malovo village (http://www.bulgariamonasteries.com/malomalovski_manastir.html), the “St. St. Peter and Pavel” Monastery in Berende village, the “St. Nikolay” Monastery in Kalotina village, the monastery in the village of Nedelishte and others. The churches are not so valuable in terms of church architecture, but more in terms of painting masterpieces. There are many remains from the Thracian culture such as Sabazii sanctuary at mount “Petrov krast” on the Chepan Mountain. The origin of Dragoman is also connected to the ancient “Via militaris” (military road) aka. the Road of Traian.

1.5. Remains of the IC reachable by bike

The “death strip” fence could be renovated in the area of Kalotina village and Lipintzi village (next to the border checkpoint). There is no information for other places with IC heritage.

2. Public transport integration

2.1. Transport modes to the cycle route/destination

Route E-80, connecting Western Europe and the Middle East passes through the territory of the municipality. The transport connections between villages and towns are by train or motorized transport

means. The Kalotina border cross-point and the Dragoman railway station are situated in this area. There are railway and bus connections between Dragoman and Sofia.

2.2.Travel by Railways

There is a daily railway connection from Sofia to Dragoman and back. Bicycles are allowed to be taken at the train platforms but only on Bulgarian territory. The research of the international railway connections for opportunities for transportation of bicycles shows no options for such service. According to the explanation given by the Bulgarian Railways Company administration, the neighboring countries, Serbia in this case, do not have suitable wagons for international connections. Thus, bikes are not allowed to be taken across the Bulgarian-Serbian border. The only legal option is for the bicycle to be disassembled and packed as luggage. However, there are cases of cross-border transportation of bikes where such allowance could be given at the conductor's discretion.

2.3.Travel by Long-distance Coaches

Such trips are common but transit for the town of Dragoman as it is situated near the border and on the main road connection to Sofia. There is no data available for bike transportation service on long-distance coaches for Bulgarian or foreign transport service providers.

2.4.Roads Infrastructure

The road infrastructure in the municipality according to data given by the administration itself is relatively well-constructed and developed; however elements like dimensions, roads building material, drainage facilities, signage and posting do not correspond to the European standards for security and comfort of traveling. All settlements are connected by roads, but in the mountainous regions some of the villages are difficult to get to. The municipality sees the development of new road infrastructure and the reconstruction of the old one as one of its opportunities for development based on a SWOT analysis.

2.5.Existing cycling trails along the ICT

There are no existing signposted trails. At the present moment foreign bikers use the road between Kalotina and Dragoman to enter Bulgaria, and then most of them continue to Sofia on a cobble side-road along the Dragoman-Sofia main road.

GODECH Municipality

The municipality of Godech has a population of 5375 people living in 19 villages and in the town of Godech. The territory of the municipality is surrounded by the Berkovitsa section of the Balkan Mountains to the north with mount Kom (2016m) and the Chepan Mountain to the south with mount Petrov Krast (1206m). The relief allows agriculture mainly in the southern parts of the municipality's territory. Agricultural land accounts for 51.8% of the area of the municipality. The slopes of the Balkan Mountain are characterized by grasslands important for the development of sheep and cattle breeding. The second largest portion of the land is taken up by forests (42.3%). An important feature of the economy in the region is that 2.6% of the area is used for the mining.

1.Description of Iron Curtain Trail tourism potential

1.1. Socio-political and economic situation

A significant factor for the development of this region is the constant depopulation, which is also valid for other peripheral territories. Just a few enterprises could be listed, each in one of the following sectors: coal mining, fish-farming, electrical engineering components production, food-processing - including an organic

milk-producing enterprise. These are relatively small enterprises with local significance. The sectors of agriculture and forestry are also poorly developed. In the last years the municipality has been privatizing and giving out concessions for public property and facilities in order to attract more resources in the municipality's budget and achieve more efficient use and management of the facilities, as well as provide better quality of services. In terms of development of tourism (cultural, ecological and rural) the local administration has planned the renovation of municipality-owned buildings and their adjacent sport facilities, which are appropriate for hotels or recreational places or guest houses. It is also planning to provide owners of houses, suitable for rural tourism, with training on the required quality standards for the inclusion of their property in a uniform municipal system for rural tourism. Together with the planned construction (signage) of a number of sustainable tourist routes (for pedestrians and cyclists), the administration is going to work on the development of a common network of cultural tourism routes with a database with all the major sites of historical and cultural importance.

1.2. Public facilities

All the settlements in the municipality are connected with roads. As in most of the rural areas, there are problems with sewage and garbage collection. All of the settlements are electrified and there is mobile telephone connection with some exclusion in close to the border villages. There is relatively good landline coverage in the town of Godech and in 4 villages – the rest of territory has low level of landline coverage. There are problems with the provision of drinking water for the households in the municipality as new water-sources will be sought. Especially in the hot summer season many villages and even the town of Godech experience a water supply regime with situations of up to several days without tap drinking water supply. Medical care is provided only in the municipal centre Godech – there is a hospital, a medical centre and 5 dentist cabinets.

1.3. Tourism-related services and facilities

The provision of goods and food supply is well-secured only in Godech. Shops exist in 6 villages in the municipality – the rest are provided with goods once or twice a week with small delivery buses. There are still no tour operators who offer tourist products in the municipality of Godech. The only exclusion is a small tourist enterprise offering 1-7 days excursions to old monasteries together in the regions of western Bulgaria and east Serbia. There are two tourist huts both in the territory of Gintsi village, close to the Petrohan mountain passage, which is away from the border region and ICT route. In the town of Godech there are two guest houses with capacity of 16 beds, while 13 more beds are available in the newly-developed tourist center, which is intended to be also a tourist-info point and 18 beds in a hunters' hut. There is no provision of bike repair service or bicycle retailers in the municipality.

The municipality has considered the tourism sector development as a priority and has several projects aimed at cross-border cooperation with Serbia, development of a tourist info-centre and an eco-path between Godech and Gintsi village. Due to the specific local climate, an opportunity that is considered is to make Godech a centre of recreation and rehabilitation. A project proposal has also been elaborated for the development of a regional farmers' market (awaiting approval).

1.4. Attraction sites - natural, cultural and historical heritage

There are a few attractive nature sites in the region: a beautiful rock formation with a karst precipice, 4 caves and a waterfall. None of them is currently presented as a tourist site and the caves are accessible only with special equipment. The forests in the area of Chepan Mountain and at the foot of mount Kom (near Gintsi, Komshtitsa, Smolcha etc. villages) are very suitable for hiking tourism. The Nishava River, together with other small rivers and water bodies allow for recreational activities and angling.

There are more than 12 cultural and historical sites in the region, including medieval churches, monasteries and remains from Roman temples most of which are believed to be part of the group of religious monuments in the so called "Holly forest" of the city of Sofia including a rock monastery (Razboishte village).

Archeologically it has been proven that the region is located along the road system and a group of ancient Roman villages, part of the big military diagonal route connecting modern Belgrade, Nis, Sofia, Plovdiv, Edirne and Istanbul.

1.5. Remains of the ICT reachable by bike

- Border control post “Lisina” near Komshtitza village – it is partially ruined with no equipment left. The road to it is macadam, it is picturesque but is passable with off-road vehicles only.
- Border control post near Smolcha village - the buildings still exist and are used by the present border police patrol-Kalotino. There are watch-towers left, as well as other buildings and facilities.
- Border control post near Staniantsi village – it is situated in the village and is reachable by bike.

In these villages in the border region there are also monuments by the famous local sculptor Vaska Emanuilova, as well as some remains of the border electric fence and dead strip in high mountain areas above the border control post near Komshtitza village.

2. Public transport integration

2.1. Transport modes to the cycle route/destination

There are a couple of bus/ minibus connections Sofia - Godech with 6-7 return trips daily. Their schedule can be found at <http://godech.net/transport>. These are mostly minibuses and one could hardly take a bicycle on such a trip.

2.2. Travel by Railways

There is a railway connection to one of the border villages – Staniantsi. This connection only serves the needs of a coal mine near the village and is not used for public transport service.

2.3. Travel by Long Distance Coaches

No long distance coaches are running to this destination due to the close distance to the capital city of Sofia.

2.4. Roads Infrastructure

The town of Godech is situated 50 km away from the capital (Sofia) and 25 km from the Kalotina border cross-point at the border with the Republic of Serbia. The territory of the municipality is crossed by the route Montana – Sofia – Kulata part of the international European corridor number 4.

The roads in the municipality are 3rd and 4th class roads, most of them between the villages are asphalt but narrow and quite frequently with low visibility due to the vegetation of trees and bushes. A project for the repair of the road between Staniantsi and Razboishte villages has been prepared by the municipality for submission under the Rural Development program.

2.5. Existing cycling trails along the ICT

Signposted cycling routes in the region still do not exist. Intentions for development of cycling tourism exist in the municipality's planning documents and consultations have been made for connecting some sites with cycling paths. Several unmarked routes are published by cyclists in www.bikemap.net for the region Godech – Petrohan – Berkovitsa – Montana, which do not serve the ICT route.

B. Pernik District

B.I. Description of physical ICT backbone route in Pernik District

Overview

Backbone in Pernik District:

Krusha – Vrabcha – Tran – Vukan – Gorochevtsi – Leva Reka – Dolna melna – Dalga Luka – Treklyano

1. Roads

The route goes from Krusha in Sofia District to Tran. Before reaching Tran there are two places with high denivelations – one is after Krusha village and the other between the Vrabcha village and Tran. The slopes are steep but bikeable and the road has low traffic levels. After Tran the route follows quiet roads along river valleys and small villages to Treklyano, where the route enters into the Kyustendil District. The Tran – Treklyano section also has high denivelations up to 7-10 %, which also complies to the Euro Velo criteria. All roads used for this section of the ICT are asphalt. There are some short parts where the asphalt needs to be repaired but the motion of cyclists is possible and safe.

2. Services

Along this proposed backbone the places to find accommodation are Tran and Gorochevtsi. The region however offers also other possibilities aside from the route at short distances, such as a hotel in Yarlovtsi, a family house in Busintsi and others.

3. Attractiveness

All attractions in the region including those related to the Iron Curtain are also situated near the route. The condition of the attraction sites and as well the condition and availability of roads are the reasons to choose a backbone aside from the thematic objects. They are however attractive enough and only suitable sihposting is needed to be reachable easily with bikes.

ICT attractions/sites:

- monuments left from the communist years, including a bone-vault monument near Slishovtsi village – still existing but needs repair.
- Border control posts near Vrabcha village and Gralska padina village.
- Karvav Kamik /Bloody stone/ - a site near the border by Shipkovitsa village, a stretch from the itinerary at Dolna melna village, where a rocky place with deep precipice has been used through the ages and by the communists for assassinations

Cultural sites:

- The Youghurt museum in Studen Izvor village– dedicated to the discoverer of the yoghurt bacteria – *Lactobacillus bulgaricus*
- The Busintsi ceramics Museum in Busintsi village – a place traditional for its ceramics pottery crafts.
- Old churches, monasteries and chapels in the villages along the route

Natural sites:

- The Erma river gorge near Tran – an eco-path is built there, but because of the terrain it is accessible for pedestrians only or in some parts for mountain bikes.

4. Promotion of the section

There are promotional materials and web-sites, which refer to specific cultural or natural objects along the proposed route. The heritage from the Cold War is not addressed in them. There are no specific materials addressed to the wide public bearing overall information for this particular route section. Even if web-sites

are found they are not being updated. Thus the general promotional status, according to ECF criteria, could be described as “inappropriate”.

5. Organisation

The organizational status in ECF terms can be evaluated as “just appropriate”. There are just few suitable organizations to be found along the region to develop and maintain the route and the capacity in the municipalities is low. Even though, the route could be properly developed, if external capacities from Sofia and Pernik are included in the process, because the local cycling tourism interest of its citizens could be satisfied with this nearby ICT section. The local municipalities are small and have low budgets, which is an obstacle to use bigger amounts of funding from available EU funds.

B.II. Feasibility analysis of conditions in Pernik District

Here only the municipality of Tran is analyzed as the only municipality in Pernik district, through which the ICT route passes.

TRAN Municipality

Tran Municipality is situated in the Northwest part of Pernik district, in Southwest Bulgaria at the border with Serbia. It has borders with the Municipalities of Trekliano (Kiustendil district) to the south, Breznik and Zemen (Pernik district) to the east, Dragoman (Sofia district) to the north-east and in Serbia the municipality of Dimitrovgrad to the north, Babushnitsa to the north-west, Crna Trava and Surdulitsa to the west. The town of Tran is 48 km away from the district center Pernik and 72 km from the capital city of Sofia.

1. Description of Iron Curtain Trail tourism potential

1.1. Socio-political and economic situation

According to data from the National Statistics Institute obtained by counting of the population in 2011 the population of the municipality is 4146 people of which 1703 live in the villages. Compared with data from 2003 when the total population has been 5461 people, the municipality has lost 24 % of its citizens for 8 years. There is a constant trend of depopulation of the region, which has started back in the 1940s as the most educated and qualified citizens left the region of Tran in search of better employment. As main factors for this trend the municipality has recognized the hard economic condition of the households, declined health condition of the population and the poor socio-economic environment because of the failure in the industrialization of the production sectors. A significant part of the population is working in state budget enterprises and organizations, 25 % are working in manufactures, 10 % in the agriculture and forestry sector and just 5 % are employed in the sector of services.

The restructuring of the economy in the Municipality of Tran after 1990 led to the closure of structure-defining machinery and forestry state companies and the creation of private sector companies mainly in the field of trade, foods and beverages production and intermediation. The total number of companies has decreased while at the same time the proportion for the private sector has increased and consists mainly of small companies and micro-investments. The lack of financial resources limits the entrepreneurial activity in the region and the companies are unable to develop and offer new products and/or services on the market. The relatively low degree of education and therefore lower ability to adapt to changes, the lower entrepreneurial culture and limited access to financial resources makes it difficult for the people in the municipality to find their place in the new fast-changing economic conditions.

Development of tourism is a key priority for the Municipality of Tran and it is very well-acknowledged and defined in all of the planning documents of the local administration. In 2002 under the project of UNDP *“Sustainable development of rural areas”* a strategy was developed for sustainable development of Municipality of Tran in the fields of tourism, agriculture and forestry. The development of caving and hiking tourism, as well as social tourism for workers, disabled people and students are listed as promising forms of tourism in the region. The statistics for the “Hotels & restaurants” sector for the local economy shows changing tendencies from increase to decline and vice versa, which seems indicative for the tourism potential of the region and the need for better management.

The municipality also has the potential to develop and offer cycling, mountain biking, rural and ecotourism. With purposeful efforts to educate and train the local households in delivering quality services related to those kinds of tourism activities, a significant improvement in the tourism development could be achieved. However, besides the necessity of education in this very specific professional activity, there would be need for serious investments for renovation of the places of accommodation in order to meet the expected requirements.

1.2. Public services

All of the settlements in the municipality of Tran are supplied with tap water. The municipality has a priority for rehabilitation of the water supply infrastructure and for the construction of sewage water treatment plant near Tran. All of the settlements are electrified, there is good mobile telephone connection. There is also good landline coverage and only ADSL Internet connection.

In the town of Tran there are 13 cafés, bars and local restaurants. Such places exist also in the villages of Filipovci, Paramun, Zelenigrad, Turkovci, Glavanovci, Iarlovci, Strezimirovci, Gorochevci, Lomnica and Lialinci. It is hard to find food stores out of the municipal centre – such goods are provided to the remote villages by small busses once or twice a week.

Health care is provided only in the hospital in Tran, but its functioning is questionable because of financial difficulties.

1.3. Tourism-related services and facilities

At present there are two small tourist chalets in the municipality of Tran. Erma Chalet is situated on the left bank of the Erma River close to the Erma Gorge. Rui Chalet is situated at the foot of peak Rui and has capacity of 40 beds, supplied with water and electricity. Both huts are owned by the municipality and rented. In the villages in the municipality there are about 6 family hotels and guest houses which should be always checked in advance since operation is conditional. At the moment the only categorized accommodation places are in the villages of Filipovci, Gorochevci and Yarlovtsi. There is a new hotel in the centre of Tran, but it is still not officially open.

Judging by customer feedback for the region shared in Internet forums, problems with the quality of the offered tourist services still exist. Tourist maps could not be found for the region of Tran, despite the overall tourist flow. The municipality has the intention to print such a map in the future.

The tourist flow is concentrated in the period May-September and consists mainly of one-day trips and a small number of per-nights. There is no available statistic data for the number of the actual realised overnight stays in Tran municipality. Conclusions are made according to the statements of interviewed municipal officials and tourist guides.

As for the basic provision of tourist services in Pernik District there are 4 tourist operators offering mainly excursions abroad. Bike retailers and bike repair services could be found only in two shops in Pernik.

1.4. Attractions - natural, cultural and historical heritage

In terms of cultural and historical sites in the municipality, there are 9 monasteries (one of the most famous of which is the “Saint Archangel Michael”- a valuable monument of the medieval art); several churches; a rock chapel; The Historical museum of the town of Tran and The Museum of Busmanka ceramics. There is also a museum of the yoghurt, dedicated to the Bulgarian discoverer of the yoghurt bacteria. A bone-vault

monument is left in Slishovtsi village. There are some historical military artifacts from the region, which are kept in the Regional Museum of History in Pernik, but are not exposed. Over 20 archaeological sites from the middle ages exist in the region but are also not exposed for tourists.

A big local border festival has been happening every year during the Cold War years near Strezimirovtsi village– a village split to two parts on both sides of the border. There are some efforts to revive this tradition.

The picturesque gorge of Erma River is situated near Tran – a cross-border gorge that can also be visited from the Serbian side. The wild Rui mountain is also situated in Tran municipality and is designated as a Natura 2000 site for protecting a number of birds and old deciduous forests and habitats of the lynx, an animal which has disappeared from Bulgaria for more than 50 years, but is gradually returning in the recent years. The municipality participated in the investment program “Ecotourism development” in association with BARET (Bulgarian Association for Rural and Ecological Tourism). As part of the program the Tran Ecopath was built which allows the Erma gorge and Yablanitza gorge to be visited.

1.5. Remains of the IC reachable by bike

There are some remains of military border patrol barracks left in the villages of Vrabcha, Bankya, Lomnitsa and Strezimirovtsi. However, these remains are not reachable by bike and are hard to get to. Many efforts are needed for these buildings to be renovated and exposed for tourist visits. Such effort would be needed also for exposure of the system of the trenches built near the borders around 1957.

Parts of the border control electric fence might still exist, but they are situated in high mountains and close to the present border with Serbia. A local expert in history stated that there are more well-preserved border facilities along the Serbian part of the border, including watch towers.

The only reachable by bike IC site is along the road near Leva reka village – a border control barrier and a border patrol shelter.

2. Public transport integration

2.1. Transport modes to the cycle route/destination

The only type of transportation to the municipality of Tran is the automobile.

The bus service in the region is held at present by one private company from Pernik. There are petrol stations in Tran and Glavanovci village.

As a whole the road network in Tran Municipality is with low traffic and favors the development of velotourism and hiking. The roads, however, are not in a good condition and need rehabilitation.

At present Tran Municipality is communicating with Surdulica Municipality in Serbia through the border check-point at Strezimirovci village.

There are well-documented intentions of the municipality for the opening of a new pedestrian border cross-point near Petachinci village. This is intended in the frame of existing and planned cross-border projects with Serbian partners for development of joint tourism products.

2.2. Travel by Railways

No travel by railway is available to Tran. One can take a train from Sofia to Kyustendil through the gorgeous gorge of Zemen and then continue by bike on the ICT.

2.3. Travel by Long Distance Coaches

At present there are no regular long-distance coach lines to run through the region of Tran. There is also no foreseen possibility for such lines as there is hardly population left to be transported. Organized bus transport can be arranged for tourists on demand via travel agencies.

2.4. Roads Infrastructure

The data for the roads in Penik Districts shows that road infrastructure consists of 34,69 km class II roads; 92,12 km class III roads (of which 78,5 km – asphalt, 11,5 km – dirt, 2,1 km – macadam); 109,4 km class IV roads.

II and III class as well as a big part of the IV class roads need to be repaired or renewed. The road servitude of IV class road network needs to be cleaned.

2.5. Existing cycling trails along the ICT

Signposted cycling trails do not exist in the region of Tran municipality along the borders or anywhere nearby.

Still the region is interesting for cyclists and single bikers and small groups could be seen. Several internet sites show bike routes ran by bikers who visited the region - Tran, Breznik, Zemen, Pernik and the nearby villages.

C. Kyustendil District

C.I. Description of physical ICT backbone route in Kyustendil District

The backbone of the route in Kyustendil District consists of:

- part of the daily section Gorochevtsi - Ushi
- the daily section Ushi – Kyustendil
- the daily section Kyustendil – Pastuh
- part of the daily section Pastuh – Blagoevgrad

1. Treklyano - Sredorek - Slavcheto locality – Ushi (16 km)
2. Ushi - Gorni Koriten - Gorno Ujno - Dolno Ujno - Goranovtsi – Dragovishtitsa – Sovoliano – Kyustendil (40 km)
3. Kyustendil – Slokoshtitsa – Granitsa – Bersin – Zgurovo - Nedelkova Grashtitsa – Nevestino – Chetirtsı – Pastuh (34 km)
4. Pastuh – Boboshevo – Dragodan – Borovets – Buranovo - Krumovo - Panevska mahala (27 km)

1. Roads

The big diversity of the relief and the type and quality of roads utilized when choosing the route through the Kyustendil district determines the variety of the different route fragments and provides the possibility for the route users to surmount relatively steep sections and enjoying downhill parts. This is valid basically for the parts of the route that go through Zemen heights and the footsteps of Osogovo. What is also typical for the semi-mountainous section of this route fragment is the relatively bad condition of road surface (holes in the asphalt and rough and uneven asphalt surface), lack or too narrow road shoulders on the road sides and lack of proper signposting at certain places. The route fragment going along the Struma River is of particular beauty, following the natural meanders of the river bed and can be characterized with a constant downhill with small percent of denivelation. Despite the fact that the traffic along the river is not so dense, the numerous curves that impede the visibility and the lack of proper road shoulders along the road requires extra attention from the cyclists. When summarizing the overall quality of the Kyustendil district route fragment it can be concluded that the parts with low quality of surface are not predominant for the whole

route section and the quality of the road infrastructure can be determined as satisfactory, which combined with the average traffic and the fact that there are parts of the route that are with very small percent or no denivelation make the traveling along the route accessible and doable for the average cyclist. Nevertheless the overall quality of the road and signposting infrastructure is assessed as just appropriate according to the ECF criteria

The existing cross border point between Bulgaria and Macedonia located at the village of Gjueshevo (BG) gives the possibility for crossing the BG-MK border. Although the cross border point is not on the way of the chosen route the location of it in the vicinity of the city of Kyustendil gives opportunities for the users of the route to cross the border and use Kyustendil as departing point for their traveling along the route. Although there are certain possibilities for the route to vary and the current trace was chosen according to the Euro Velo criteria:

- the proposed route has better quality of road surface compared to other options;
- where possible calm roads are used
- the proposed roads have lower denivelations (as much as possible and in consistency with the relief in the region)
- availability of services, incl. accommodation and provisions
- availability of tourist attractions

2. Services

Given the long distance of the section and covering of a large territory the availability of accommodation places is relatively good. All of the day-tour sections and their length as well as their starting/ending points are chosen in accordance to the availability of accommodation services and accessibility to stores with basic goods as well as of other services. The route goes also through the administrative center of the Kyustendil district, which is an important hub not only from the point of availability of accommodation, but also of all types of services that might be necessary for the route users. The types of accommodation available vary between hotels, holiday houses and guest houses.

3. Attractiveness

ICT attractions/sites: The relief of the mountains of Kraishte, Osogovo and Vlahina (up to 2251 m) and the lack of a network of asphalted roads there are hindering the ICT route to pass close to the real border line. Between Treklyano and Dolno Ujno the air distance to the border is less than 5 km and some remainings from the Cold War can be seen, but afterwards it reaches 25 km and the visitor should undertake special trips to these sites.

There are also good options to develop branch routes (without luggage) in Osogovo mountain starting from Kyustendil with the possibility to reach the highest peak – Ruen, observe old piquets, watch towers, border stones, monuments from the Cold War.

The point where the Bulgarian, Macedonian and Serbian border meet (near Bobeshino village) can be turned also into attraction for ICT visitors and a goal for a one-day bicycle trip from Kyutendil.

Besides the remaining of the Cold war there are also other places and subjects of interest in the vicinity of the route. There are numerous chapels, churches and monasteries in the region surrounding Kyustendil and along the valley of Struma river. Archeological remainings from different periods can be found in the municipalities of Kyustendil, Nevestino, Boboshevo. The route also goes along and through several Natura 2000 zones in accordance to both Directives for habitats and Birds.

Cultural sites: Numerous cultural sites of interest – mainly churches, small chapels and monasteries that are directly on the route or in its vicinity particularly along the section following the river bed of Struma river in the section between Nevestino and Boboshevo.

- *Natural sites:* Numerous nature monuments and protected landscapes for protection of flora and fauna species and specific habitats as well as specific abiotic formations, Natura 2000 sites: for the municipality of Trekljano on the land of the village of Sredorek - Karvav kamak Natura 2000 zone according to the Habitat directive, on the land of the village of Trekljano - Zemen Natura 2000 zone according to the Habitat directive, for the municipality of Kyustendil – on the land of the village of Dolno Yino – Karshalevo Natura 2000 zone according to the Habitat directive, on the land of the village of Gorno Yino – Dolni Koriten Natura 2000 zone according to the Habitat directive, for the municipality of Nevestino – on the land of the village of Nevestino, Chetirci and Pastuh – Skrino Natura 2000 zone – according to the Habitat directive, on the land of the village of Chetirci – Osogovska planina Natura 2000 zone according to the Habitat directive, for the municipality of Boboshevo – on the land of the city of Boboshevo – Skrino and Rila buffer – according to the Habitat directive.

4. Promotion of the section

Although there are promotional materials and web-sites, which refer to specific cultural or natural objects along the proposed route, there is no particular information regarding the heritage from the Cold War. Furthermore there are no specific materials addressed to the wide public bearing overall information for this particular route section. There are some information materials regarding bicycle trails in several areas from the district region, but these routes do not correspond and refer to the needs and the idea of the ICT route. Thus the general promotional status, according to ECF criteria, could be described as just appropriate.

5. Organization

The organizational status in ECF terms can be evaluated as “just appropriate”. The availability and capacity of suitable organizations along the region which can develop and maintain the route is low. Nevertheless certain interest is shown by various stakeholders and the route could be properly developed, if external capacities are included and give support in the process. The local municipalities (excluding the municipality of Kyustendil) are small and have low budgets, which is an obstacle to use bigger amounts of funding from available EU funds.

C.II. Feasibility analysis of conditions in Kyustendil District

TREKLJANO Municipality

The municipality of Trekljano is located in the most northern part of the Kyustendil district. It borders with Serbia to the west, the municipality of Kyustendil to the south and with the municipalities of Tran and Zemen to the east. The relief of the municipality is mountainous with big differences in the denivilation – from 710 to 1700 m. above the sea level. The area covered by the municipality is 135,14 sq. km. The administrative center is the village of Trekljano. The municipality is the smallest and most underdeveloped from the Kyustendil district.

1. Description of Iron Curtain Trail tourism potential in Trekljano Municipality

1.1. Socio-political and economic situation

According to the National census of 2011 the number of people living in the municipality is 629, 324 of which male and 305 female living in 19 settlements. There are no cities falling into the territory of the municipality. The process of depopulation and migration of the local population is very strong, which

leads to total depopulation of some settlements such as Dragoichinci in which during 2011 zero population has been registered. What is also typical for the region is that the people who live permanently in the municipality are only 260. The rest of the population (mainly elder people) inhabit the settlements only during the summer period and spend the rest of the year in the cities with their families. The process of depopulation and aging of the inhabitants of the villages has started during the fifties of the 20 century. Due to the active aging of the population and the reduction of people living in the area the number of the economically active inhabitants of the municipality is low. The only industry presented in the municipality is related with production of plastic products but it is a small scale business. The other economic source is related with the forestry and timber extraction. The agriculture activities are related only with satisfying the personal needs of the households. There are good conditions for development of tourism. An international fair with participants from Bulgaria and Serbia is held annually in the municipality.

1.2. Public facilities

The electric supply infrastructure in the municipality is well established. There is General practitioner in Trekljano but only for the weekdays, no cash machine, the only way for cash withdrawal is through the postal services of the post office located in Trekljano.

1.3. Tourism-related services and facilities

Most of the service providers are located in Trekljano. There is a dining place in the village as well as food and basic goods shop and a private bakery. There are no bicycle shop or bicycle repair services, but there are people who are involved in car repair and they might be asked for help if a bike repair is needed. The only officially registered place for accommodation in the municipality is a small guest house in traditional style and architecture that is located in the village Ushi.

1.4. Attraction sites - natural, cultural and historical heritage

- Cultural and historical heritage: A ceramic museum in village of Gabreshevci, ethnographic exhibition in village of Zlogosh, Kozjak peak – close to the village of Pobit kamak, church Sveti Nikola in the village of Kosovo, A picture exhibition in village of Trekljano; church “Sveta Bogoroditza”-village of Trekljano.
- Natural landscapes: Nature monument Koriata, located in the vicinity of the village of Dobri dol established for the protection of an oak forest; Nature monument Pobit Kamak, located in the vicinity of the village of Pobit Kamak – proclaimed for the protection of a rock formation.
- Natura 2000 sites: Karvav kamak, Dolni Koriten and Zemen– according to the Habitat directive.

1.5. Remains of the ICT reachable by bike

At the Slavcheto locality (near Sredorek) the route goes very close to the border with Serbia. Abandoned picket and a watch tower can be observed. Monuments in Trekljano and Sredorek remind of the times when Europe was divided.

2. Public transport integration

The public transport is represented by regular bus lines that link the municipal center with Kyustendil and Zemen, the later destination being serviced only during the weekends. From those two places a train connection to other parts of the country can be done.

2.1. Transport modes to the cycle route/destination

There is a daily operating bus line linking Trekljano with Kyustendil going through the villages of Sovoljano Dragovisthica, Zlogosh, Sushica, Gabrenevci, Trekljano and Sredorek. There is a bus stop in each of the mentioned villages from where the bus can be boarded, but the transportation of heavily loaded bykes might be difficult. There is a bus linking Ushi with Kyustendil.

2.2. Travel by Railways

There is no train station in Trekljano. The closest are located in Zemen and Kustendi.

2.3. Travel by Long Distance Coaches

There are no direct lines that might be used from the municipality. The closest possible places with direct link to Makedonia is Kyustendil.

2.4. Roads Infrastructure

The quality of the road infrastructure is not of very high level, nevertheless it will serve well the needs of the cycling route.

KYUSTENDIL Municipality

The municipality of Kyustendil is located in the southwest part of the Republic of Bulgaria in the Kyustendil field. The municipality covers an area of 959,4 sq. m. The municipality has important geographical location – bordering to the west with the republic of Macedonia – the distance between the city of Kyustendil and the border being only 23 km and respectively 30 km to the border with Serbia. The cross border points available in the municipality provide a link only with Macedonia and there is no cross border point to the Republic of Serbia. To the west the municipality borders the Zemen gorge and to the south – the Konjavaska mountain and Sofia district.

1. Description of Iron Curtain Trail tourism potential in Kyustendil Municipality

1.1. Socio-political and economic situation

According to the National census 2011 the population size of the municipality of Kyustendil is 60 681 people - from which 29 388 male and 31 293 female. The spread of population is as follows: 44 532 living in the city of Kyustendil and 16 149 living in the villages from the municipality of Kyustendil. The number of villages in Kyustendil municipality is 71 and there is just one city in the municipality of Kyustendil - 1.

The trend shown by comparison of previous population size data available is of slow decrease of the number of people living in the area and depopulation of smaller settlements in the municipality borders and focusing bigger part of the people in the administrative center.

The municipality is famous as the “orchard garden“ of Bulgaria due to its strong positions in production of various fruits. Mining has also been typical for the municipality – coal, lime, clay and inert materials are extracted. In the past there has been a polymetal ore extraction in Osogovo Mountain, but at present this process continues only in the Macedonian part of the mountain while in the Bulgarian it is ceased. The city of Kyustendil attracts most of the investment interests in the region, due to the specific demographic conditions and focusing of the bigger part of the population in the city; the closeness of Osogovo Mountain to the city as well as the existing natural resources for balneology tourism in the city. The development of the city is also affected by the fact that it is both administrative center of the District of Kyustendil and the municipality of Kyustendil. The industry branches typical for the municipality are related with textile and leather industry, energy and gas distribution, extraction industry and production of building materials, food processing industry and commercial trade. There is a steady growth of establishment of companies involved in the industry branches of commercial trade and provision of civic

services and provision of hotel and restaurant services, the processing industry and agriculture and forestry. Nevertheless the economic tendency shows a steady trend of decreasing the number of companies with big personal and increase of the small scale business companies with smaller staff. Bigger part of the investments that are drawn to the municipality are focused on improvement of the infrastructure of the municipality. There are also plans for development of various types of tourism services related with the abundance of cultural and historical resources as well as natural resources provided by the Osogovo Mountain and the balneology conditions in the municipality. According to the economic assessments the municipality of Kyustendil is determined as having a relative economic stability, nevertheless there is a need of improvement of the size of the annual income per person per year as well as improvement in of the competitiveness of the production companies in the region.

1.2. Public facilities

The municipality of Kyustendil has well developed health care system that includes hospitals, emergency health care centers, diagnostic and consultancy centers, dental centers as well as private medical officers and provision of health care services outside of health care centers. All settlements in the municipality are connected to the national power supply grid and have well developed water supply network, which is also constantly upgraded. There is full mobile coverage as well as well developed land phone connection in the municipality and internet clubs in Kyustendil. There are several banks and ATM machines for cash withdrawal. There are a few restaurants, bars and dining places located in Kyustendil have wireless internet connection that might be used by the clients of these places of resort.

1.3. Tourism-related services and facilities

The relatively big size of the city of Kyustendil as well as the fact that it is a district and municipality center determines the numerous possibilities for accommodation and dining, various types of shops and provision of civic services. The city also has long standing traditions in provision of tourist services which is mainly related with the balneology as well as the availability of a border cross point Gjueshevo – Kriva Palanka- one of the main border cross points with the Republic of Macedonia and the natural resources represented by the Osogovo Mountain.

The certified accommodation facilities in the municipality of Kyustendil are presented by: hotels, motels, villas, family hotels, holiday houses, single rooms, bungalows, huts, guest houses, municipal holiday houses. The majority of the aforementioned facilities are focused mainly in the city of Kyustendil – due to its location in the vicinity of main road artery leading to the border with Republic of Macedonia and to the role of district administrative center. Nevertheless the other settlements from the municipality such as Polska Skakavica, Bogoslov, Jilenci and Vratca also provide possibilities for certified accommodation services. The Osogovo Mountain hosts municipal holiday houses, a hut and several hotels. Almost all settlements (excluding few almost completely desolated villages in the border area) have shops in which basic food and first necessity goods can be obtained. The bigger settlements also have small restaurants and/or eating houses where various meals are served.

The city of Kyustendil has several bike shops and bike repair places, which provides the possibility of general maintenance and repair of bikes of any tourists traveling in the region and the vicinity of the city. Unfortunately most of the smaller settlements do not provide such services.

Due to the fact that there is no operational tourist information center in the city, the role of such is played by the Association Council of Tourism - during the daily working hours and also from the Department for tourism and balneology of the municipality of Kyustendil, where information related to tourism services in the region can be obtained. Furthermore there are three tourist agencies in the city of Kyustendil which offer excursions in the country and abroad and may also serve as info points for provision of information for available tours, tourist destinations and accommodation services in the territory of the municipality.

1.4. Attraction sites - natural, cultural and historical heritage

The municipality of Kyustendil has an abundance of various attraction sites, but due to the location of the chosen route, visiting bigger part of the attraction points listed below requires detour from the main velo route.

- Cultural and historical heritage: Roman city fortification walls - Archeological excavations; Roman thermal baths "Asclepion" - from II and III century AC - proclaimed for archeological monument with national significance; Necropolis of Pautalia; "Hisarlaka" - middle age fortress located in the city park Hisarlaka; Pirkova" Tower - middle age defensive tower; Middle age baths Dervish banya - restaurated in 2005; Chifte banya - still functioning and Alay banya - mineral water public baths with historical significance; School building from the 19 century; The Doctor's house and "Procopieva" house - buildings with typical architectural style; Regional historical museum Kjustendil; Mosque "Ahmed bay" from 1575 year; Museum houses of Dimitar Peshev, Ilio Voivoda and Emfediieva house; Kjustendil spring - the holiday of the city, the Holiday of the cherry - a holiday dedicated to the production of cherries in the region of Kjustendil;
- Natural places of interest and landmarks: reserve "Cerna reka" - located in the land of Sajdenik village; Nature monument - group of sequoia trees "Uchbunar" - village of Bogoslov; Protected landscape Century old beech forest - village of Granitza; Nature monument Skakavica waterfall in the land of Polska Skakavica village; Zemen rocks - in the land of Polska Skakavica village; Zeleniat rid – protected landscape in the vicinity of village of Sajdenik
- Natura 2000 sites : Osogovo and Osogovska planina - according to the Bird and the Habitat Directives encompassing bigger part of the Osogovo Mountain and Karshalevo, Konyavska planina, Zemen, Dolni Koriten and Chokljovo blato – according to the Habitat Directive.

1.5. Remains of the ICT reachable by bike

A Memorial in the village center of Goranovtsi with monuments and exposed WWII Machine Guns remind of the times of the division of Europe.

A piquet on the Ruen peak now used as a tourist shelter, a watchtower and piquet can be found also in the vicinity of the village of Tsarvarica, but reaching these attraction points require detour from the main velo route and also will be easily done if bigger part of the load of the bikes is left at the accommodation places (due to the mountainous character of the region).

2. Public transport integration

Kyustendil has a train station and a bus station, both of which link the city with the main bigger settlements in the country.

2.1. Transport modes to the cycle route/destination

There is a bus station in Kyustendil that links the city with Sofia through several bus lines that are daily operating. Kyustendil can be reached by bus from Plovdiv (only two lines operating on Monday and Friday), Blagoevgrad, Dupnitsa and Bobov dol. The internal city transport is arranged through the utilization of small minibusses, the size and the capacity of which makes loading and transportation of a bike difficult (if not impossible task). Nevertheless traveling in the city with a bike is possible. Taxis are also available in the city as well as outside of the city (through negotiation with the drivers for the price of the travel).

2.2. Travel by Railways

Kyustendil has a train station that directly links the city with Sofia, Pernik, Radomir, Razdavitza and Gjueshevo. From Sofia connection with other cities in Bulgaria and abroad is possible.

2.3.Travel by Long Distance Coaches

There are two companies (Matpu and Transkop) that provide daily transfer to Skopje, Macedonia with bus line route: Sofia – Kyustendil – Gjueshevo – Skopje Due to the fact that the buses start from Sofia and Kyustendil is just a stop on the route, a ticket from Kyustendil to Skopje has to be purchased in the city, otherwise if there are no announced passengers from Kyustendil the buses do not enter the city but, continue directly to Makedonia.

2.4.Roads Infrastructure

The road infrastructure in the municipality is well developed, with a total length of 219 km. There are for main road arteries reaching the administrative center of the municipality. E871 is the shortest road from Sofia to Kyustendil that also reaches the cross border point at Gjueshevo thus linking the municipality with the bordering Republic of Macedonia. Possibility for entering Serbia is delivered by a road artery linking Kyustendil with the cross border point at the village of Oltomanci. Bigger part of the roads -are covered by asphalt, but there is also considerable part almost 50% of the total length that are without any type of road pavement.

Despite the well developed road infrastructure the municipality experiences difficulties with the road maintenance thus leaving bigger part of the main roads in relatively good conditions while roads linking the smaller settlements need profound repairmen works.

2.5.Existing cycling trails along the ICT

There is a round cycling trail located in the upper part of the Osogovo Mountain that starts from Osogovo hut and goes in the direction of the hotel Tri buci and comes back, but it is not very close to the real border and does not have a direct connection with the ICT.

NEVESTINO Municipality

The municipality of Nevestino is located in the south southwest part of district of Kyustendil, bordering to the west with the municipality of Kyustendil, to the south with the Republic of Macedonia, to the north with the municipality of Bobov dol and to the east with the municipalities of Boboshevo and Kocherinovo. The municipality covers an area of 442 sq. km encompassing the massifs of Osogovo and Vlahina Mountains. The administrative center of the municipality is the Village of Nevestino located 13 km eastwards from the city of Kyustendil.

1.Description of Iron Curtain Trail tourism potential in Nevestino Municipality

1.1. Socio-political and economic situation

According to the National census of 2011 the population size of the municipality of n Nevestino is 2 821 people - from which 1 413 male and 1 408 female. All of the people from the municipality live in the 23 villages that are part of the municipality. The villages from the region have peculiar structure – most of them are spread on a big territory and are actually composed by several quarters (hamlets). Similarly to the neighboring municipality of Kyustendil a trend of decreasing the size of population and a process of migration to bigger cities (Kyustendil and Sofia) is observed in the municipality of Nevestino. The depopulation value is higher than the average value for the country and for the district of Kyustendil.

Bigger part of the employed people work in the public sector. The investment interests in the municipality are relatively low and the economic development is presented by development of small scale family business. In general the economics of the municipality is largely based on agriculture (production of fruits

and vegetables) – land being one of the main municipal resources. Despite of this very few of the people can implement intensive agricultural practices due to the small sizes of owned land. The livelihood of the locals is also based on stockbreeding and beekeeping, but they are also related with problems that reduce the economic benefit from these activities. Nevertheless there are tendencies for decrease of the amount of land that is used for production due to big material losses, lack of well organized buying up of the production and crisis in the processing industry. The forestry and commercial trade and repairmen services are the other main economic branch typical for the municipality. The main perspectives for economic development of the municipality are seen in the direction of development of food processing industry, textile and sewing industry, production of electric appliances and development of alternative forms of tourism - cycling tourism, camping and cultural tourism being several of the directions for development.

1.2. Public facilities

All settlements of the municipality are connected to the national power grid. The villages are well supplied with water from their own local sources.. There is full mobile coverage and well developed land phone connection. There is no public internet access, but there is a project for provision of internet access in the informational touristic center in Nevestino. There is an emergency health center in Nevestino that provides the health care for the municipality, it has to be taken into account that the smaller settlements do not have their own centers and have to rely on medics coming from the bigger cities from the region and Nevestino as well. Cash machine for cash withdrawal is available in Nevestino.

1.3. Tourism-related services and facilities

The trading services and provision of basic goods and food in shops in the villages is well developed. It has to be taken into account though, that the food stores and shops for other goods are mainly focused in central parts of the villages of Nevestino, Vaksevo, Pelatikovo, Drumohar, Rashka Grashtica and Liliach due to their relatively bigger size.

Several guest houses, villas, single rooms and a holiday complex as well as small restaurants are located along the road linking Nevestino and Blagoevgrad that winds along the Struma river. The accommodation services focused mainly in Pastuh, Zgurovo, Nevestino. Pastuh and Zgurovo host small complexes of holiday houses that provide excellent conditions for fishing and hiking in the region. There is a holiday complex in Eremitiya but it is still under construction and is not functioning. There is a small hotel located close to the municipal building in Nevestino.

Although special facilities for bike storage may not be presented in all places offering accommodation possibilities, bikes may be properly stored by reaching common agreement with the owners of the place. The owner of the holiday complex in Pastuh had intentions of development of eco trails and ATV trails in the region in order to be able to attract more tourists as visitors. This shows the need of dissemination of information and raising the public awareness towards the principles of alternative forms of tourism that are both economically profitable, but also are environmental friendly.

1.4. Attraction sites - natural, cultural and historical heritage

- Archeological and cultural land marks: A Neolithic village has been found in the vicinity of the village of Nevestino. Another archeological site where three prehistoric periods can be observed is located close to the village of Vaksevo. Remaining of the medieval times in the form of medieval fortress in the Skalet close to the village of Pastuh can be seen. There are also churches from the medieval times that are in the vicinity of Pastuh. A monastery "Sv. Pravedni Joakim and Anna" located over a rock niche with a waterfall is in the vicinity of Somlichano village. "Kadin bridge" located in the village of Nevestino is a fine example of an architecture monument in the region, being a structure that is a mixture of medieval and Renaissance forms combined with local

motives. The bridge dates back to the year of 1470. A chapel of Saint Ivan Rilski located on the road from Nevestino to Blagoevgrad is another fine example of a cultural land mark in the region.

- Natural Land marks: Nature Reserve Gabra - located in the vicinity of the village of Tsarvarica. Proclaimed for protection of natural population of Pinus Nigra - black pine; protected site Manolovoto - the buffer zone of Gabra reserve is located also in the vicinity of the village of Tsarvaritsa; Natural monument - cave - located in the vicinity of the village of Ilia - proclaimed for the protection of this unique natural land mark; Natural monument - Saint Ana - waterfall located in the vicinity of the village of Smolichano.
- Natura 2000 sites: Osogovo and Skrino according to the Bird directive and Osogovska planina according to the Habitat Directive.
- Marked Eco trails in the municipality of Nevestino (does not have real connection with the ICT):
 - Tsarvaritsa – Gabra Reserve – Chernata Skala Passage - Tsarvaritsa (13 km)
 - Vetren – Golyamata Peshtera - Kaleto Peak – Smolichano (18 km)
 - Iliya – Golyamata Peshtera - Smolichano (17 km)

1.5. Remains of the ICT reachable by bike

A watchtower, piquet and some monuments can be found in the vicinity of the village of Tsarvarica, but reaching these attraction points require detour from the main velo route and also will be easily done if bigger part of the load of the bikes is left at the accommodation places (due to the mountainous character of the region).

2. Public transport integration

Nevestino does not have a train station and a bus station. There is a bus stop in the center of the village and a daily operating bus line that links Nevestino with Kyustendil.

2.1. Transport modes to the cycle route/destination Most of the villages from the municipality have bus stop and public busses that link the villages with the city of Kyustendil. The bus lines that link Kyustendil with Dupnitsa and Kyustendil with Blagoevgrad go through Piperkov Chiflik, Novi Chiflik, Nevestino, the cross road towards Chetirci, Pastuh, Boboshevo. Each of the villages has a bus stop where a bus can be taken to either to Dupnitsa or to Blagoevgrad. These lines are operated on daily basis. Nevertheless it is good to know that there are settlements in the municipality where no regular daily bus line.

2.2. Travel by Railways

The closest train stations are in Kyustendil, Dupnitsa and Blagoevgrad.

2.3. Travel by Long Distance Coaches

The possibility is to reach one of the bigger cities in the region: Kyustendil, Dupnitsa and Blagoevgrad from where there are lines to Macedonia and Greece and to Sofia.

2.4. Roads Infrastructure

The total length of the existing infrastructure in the municipality of Nevestino is 102 km. The quality of the roads is not very good – one third of them are determined to be in poor state. Most of the municipal (low class) roads are asphalted, but need better maintenance and rehabilitation. Nevertheless the main roads linking the municipality with the bigger cities of the region are in good condition.

BOBOSHEVO Municipality

The municipality of Boboshevo is located in the southeast part of the Kyustendil district along the rivers of Struma German. Boboshevo borders with the municipality of Nevestino to the west, the municipality of Kocherinovo to the south and the municipalities of Dupnitsa and Bobov dol to the north. It is one of the smaller municipalities with territory of 134 sq. km. The relief of the municipality is mountainous and semi-mountainous. The municipality consists of 12 villages with municipal center the city of Boboshevo. A short part of the planned route goes through the municipality going through the city of Boboshevo.

1. Description of Iron Curtain Trail tourism potential in Boboshevo Municipality

1.1. Socio-political and economic situation

According to the National census of 2011 the population size of the municipality of Boboshevo is 2 870 people - from which 1 368 male and 1 502 female. 1221 people live in the city of Boboshevo and 1649 live in the 11 villages that lay in the municipal territory. The economy of the municipality is presented by agriculture (production of fruits, vegetables, tobacco and stockbreeding – animals bred only in the households), commercial trade, textile and sewing industry, food and processing industry and forestry. Big part of the population is employed in a few tailoring companies. During the last years a process of creation of new missives with apple orchard trees has started.

Despite the good conditions for agriculture the municipality is facing some difficulties related with low levels of production and bad organization and cooperation among the local agricultural cooperatives, lack of investments in new technologies, irrational utilization of the existing material base. All these conditions lead to increase of the amount of land that is not utilized to 70% of the territory of the municipality. The large territories covered by forests that are under the management of the local forestry units create good conditions for hunting activities. Furthermore the natural resources of the municipality and its mountainous character create good conditions for development of tourism, the potential of which has not been fully used for the moment. There are some actions for development of cultural and historical tourism, but there are in very initial stage.

1.2. Public facilities

All settlements are connected with the national power grid. The health care in the municipality is provided by four medics and an emergency centre located in the city of Boboshevo. Due to this provision of health care services in the smaller settlements from the municipality might be difficult. The water supply is provided mainly from local sources for each of the settlements. Due to the low capacity of the water sources there are some difficulties with the fulfilment of the needs of the locals for certain periods of the year. There is full mobile phone coverage and the land phone system is well developed. ATM machine for cash withdrawal and a bank are available in the city of Boboshevo.

1.3. Tourism-related services and facilities

Since the city of Boboshevo is the administrative center and the biggest settlement in the municipality all types of services can be found there. There are shops providing food and all types of goods as well as dining place. The places for accommodation are provided by the hotel that is located in the vicinity of the stadium of Boboshevo as well as by the two huts Yana and Pioner that are located 4 km northwest from the city of Boboshevo. The huts are reachable by well maintained asphalt road. There are no bicycle shop or bicycle repair services; nevertheless the city hosts several car repair services, which can provide basic help for bicycles if needed.

1.4. Attraction sites - natural, cultural and historical heritage

- Cultural and historical landmarks: prehistorical village located in the Chardako area, close to the village of Slatino; Manastircheto area hosts a church – “Sveti Dimitar” that dates back to the fifteenth century; numerous churches and small chapels dating back from the tenth to seventeenth century located along the river bed of Struma river; a functioning monastery in Boboshevo build in nineteenth century with architecture similar to the Rila monastery; a church from the sixteenth century can be found in the village of Vukovo; the Ruen monastery is located in the village of Skrino.
- Natural landmarks: Nature monument for protection of the habitat of *Corylus Colurna* (hazlebush) located in the vicinity of the village of Skrino; 200 years old beech forest located in the Kosana area, close to the village of Skrino.
- Natura 2000 sites: Boboshevo and Skrino – according to the Birds directive and Habitat Directive.

1.5. Remains of the ICT reachable by bike

None are available due to the relatively far location from the border.

2. Public transport integration

One of the characteristics of the transport integration of the city of Boboshevo is its vicinity to bigger administrative and cultural centers in the region such as Kyustendil, Blagoevgrad and Dupnitsa. E79 – an important road artery that links the southwest part of Bulgaria with its south part goes through the municipality. The cross border point with Greece is located 117 km away from the city of Boboshevo and the cross point to Macedonia – 62 km. The transportation services are provided by buses operated by companies from Dupnitsa, Blagoevgrad and Kyustendil.

2.1. Transport modes to the cycle route/destination

There is a bus station in Boboshevo that provides link with Dupnitsa, Blagoevgrad and Sofia

2.2. Travel by Railways

A train station that is on the train route Sofia – Kulata (the cross border point with Greece) is located 3km away from the city of Boboshevo.

2.3. Travel by Long Distance Coaches

There is no direct possibility for getting a long distance coach directly from Boboshevo. A transfer to one of the bigger cities in the region has to be made.

2.4 .Roads Infrastructure

All settlements in the municipality are linked with forth class asphalt roads. There are also roads that belong to second and third class and they are in relatively good condition. During to the relatively poor state of the 4th class roads and to difficulties with their maintenance during the winter period not all of them are accessible and provide good possibilities for transport. Nevertheless this refers mainly to the smaller villages in the municipality and does not refer to the city of Boboshevo and respectively to the planned ICT route.

The municipality of Kocherinovo is located in the south east part of Kyustendil district, bordering to the north with the municipality of Boboshevo, to the east with the municipality of Rila, to the west with the municipality of Nevestino and to the south with the municipality of Blagoevgrad. The total size of its territory is 182, 31 sq. km. The administrative center is the city of Kocherinovo located only 3 km away of the E-79 International road and 25 km of the Rila Monastery. These conditions combined with the unique natural resources, the location of the municipality in the vicinity of Rila mountain and the existing historical monuments makes the municipality and its administrative center suitable for development of tourism.

1. Description of Iron Curtain Trail tourism potential in Kocherinovo Municipality

1.1. Socio-political and economic situation

According to the National census for 2011 the total population of the municipality is 5214 people from which 2479 are male and 2735 are female. 2362 live in the city of Kocherinovo while the rest of the population is located in the 10 villages falling into the territory of the municipality. From demographic point of view the municipality does not differ from the rest that are part of Kyustendil district. A steady trend of depopulation and focusing the local inhabitants in the administrative center and other bigger cities in the area is observed again.

The geographical location, climate and relief of the municipality determine the priorities for its economic development, mainly focused on agriculture, forestry and timber extraction, rural and ecotourism and processing industry. What is typical for the municipality is that the development of agricultural activities get ahead of the activities related with development of the industry branches. The agriculture is mainly presented by orchardry, vegetable growing and tobacco production. Stockbreeding is mainly focused on breeding of species for meat production. The industry branches are presented by the tailoring production and forestry and timber extraction. The commercial trade is well presented in the municipality in the form of numerous food stores in the settlements. Although the municipality has good potential for tourism services, tourism is not well developed. Nevertheless plans for development of sustainable tourism, improvement of tourism services as well as development of cultural tourism are part of the principles for future financial development of the municipality.

1.2. Public facilities

The health care system is presented by an emergency center and a general practitioner located in the city of Kocherinovo that provides health care for the whole municipality. It has to be taken into account that provision of adequate health care in the smaller settlements might be difficult. All of the settlements are electrified and water supplied and have full mobile coverage. There is a cash machine in the center for money withdrawal as well as a bank office and postal office. There is no internet club or facility accessible for tourists.

1.3. Tourism-related services and facilities

The city of Kocherinovo provides all necessary services in terms of food and goods store. There are also dining places and a hotel situated in the center of the city. A guest house can be also found in the city of Kocherinovo. In the rest of the settlements no officially registered accommodation places have been found.

1.4. Attraction sites - natural, cultural and historical heritage

- Cultural and historical landmarks: numerous churches that are built in the 19 century are located in the villages of Barakovo, Porominovo, Stob, Mursalevo, Dragodan, Borovetz, Buranovo, Krumovo, Tzarvishte, Frolosh as well as in the city of Kocherinovo.

- Natural landmarks: Natural monument Stobski piramidi, located in the vicinity of the village of Stob, proclaimed for protection of unique rock formations.
- Natura 2000 sites: Boboshevo and Kocherinovo according to the Bird directive and Skrinovo according to the Habitat Directive.

2. Public transport integration

The main types of transport that might be used in order to reach the municipal center are the buses and the trains that link Kocherinovo with the bigger cities from the region. In order to reach further incountry distances transfer should be made in one of the bigger cities – Dupnitsa, Kyustendil and Blagoevgrad. These regional centers may also serve as dispatch stations for getting long distance cauches.

2.1. Transport modes to the cycle route/destination

The city of Kocherinovo is linked with bus to the regional bigger cities of Dupnitsa, Kyustendil and Blagoevgrad as well as with a possibility for direct travel to Sofia by boarding one of the busses passing through the city. The bus line that links Kocherinovo with Blagoevgrad also provide bus services to the villages that lay on the bus route, but the possibility for transportation of heavy loaded bikes depends on the type and the size of the vehicle that is operating on the line.

2.2. Travel by Railways

The train line linking Sofia with the cross border point with Greece goes through the territory of the municipality. There is a train station in the city of Kocherinovo.

2.3. Travel by Long Distance Coaches

Traveling by long distance coaches is possible only by reaching one of the bigger cities of the region – Dupnitsa, Kyustendil and Blagoevgrad.

2.4. Roads Infrastructure

The road infrastructure is well developed. The international road E79 going into the direction of Greece is one of the main road arteries in the municipality. Nevertheless due to the heavy traffic, the road is not suitable for biking and overlapping of the bike route with it was avoided as much as possible. The lesser class roads linking the smaller settlements in the municipality are in relatively good condition and are suitable for biking.

D. Blagoevgrad District

D.I. Description of physical ICT backbone route in Blagoevgrad District

The backbone of the route in Blagoevgrad District consists of:

- part of the daily section Pastuh – Blagoevgrad
- part of the daily section Blagoevgrad – Delchevo (MK)
- part of the daily section Strumitsa (MK) - Petrich
- the daily section Petrich – Izvora mountain hut
- the daily section Izvora mountain hut - Gotse Delchev

- the daily section Gotse Delchev - Satovcha
- part of the daily section Satovcha – Dospat

1. Buchino – Balgarchevo - Zeleni dol – Blagoevgrad (13 km)
2. Blagoevgrad - Zeleni dol – Selishte – Logodazh – Obel – border crossing point Blagoevgrad/ Delchevo (25 km)
3. border crossing point Novo Selo/ Petrich – Gabrene – Skrat – Kljuch – Yavornitsa - Samuilovo - Kolarovo - Belasitsa – Petrich (27 km)
4. Petrich – Drangovo - Marino pole – Chuchuligovo - Dolno Spanchevo – Vranja – Katuntsi – Yanovo – Petrovo – Izvora mountain hut (40 km)
5. Izvora mountain hut – Goleshovo – Paril – Koprivlen - Novo Leski - Gotse Delchev (46 km)
6. Gotse Delchev - Novo Leski – Koprivlen – Hadzhidimovo – Blatska – Ablanitsa – Valkosel – Fargovo – Satovcha (45 km)
7. Satovcha – Kochan – Vaklinovo (10 km)

1. Roads

The types and quality of road infrastructure that coincides with the chosen route for ICT, going through the district of Blagoevgrad differs widely in range - from high traffic asphalted public roads with good surface to non-asphalted traffic free roads and low traffic public roads that need improvement, concerning the type and the quality of the surface as well as the sign posting. The overall quality of the sign posting of this route section varies between (3) – existing with national/regional signs and (2) – poor and not complete according to the ECF criteria. The poor quality of the signposting is especially relevant for the mountainous parts of the route. This section of the route starts with a stretch of high traffic asphalted public road that links Blagoevgrad with the cross border point of Stanke Lisichkovo (BG) – Delchevo (MK). Due to the fact that there are no parallel roads going in this direction there is no other option than utilizing this road artery, regardless the fact that it serves the traffic to and from the cross border point. Nevertheless the road has asphalt shoulders and a good surface (according to the ECF criteria) which facilitates the utilization of the road by cyclists, although special attention is needed. The section has a length of 40 km and denivelation from 340 m from the Valley of Struma River to 1150 m to the cross border point. After entering Bulgaria from the direction of Macedonia at the cross border point of Zlatarevo the ICT route utilizes low traffic asphalt roads – the road artery linking the villages that are in the footsteps of Belasitza Mountain located in the vicinity of Belasitza Nature Park. Bigger part of this stretch of the road is covered by asphalt with a good quality of the surface, but there are also non-asphalted traffic free agricultural road parts the quality of which can be considered as just appropriate and improvement and asphaltting is needed – mainly the sections between the villages of Kolarovo and Belasitza and Belasitza and Petrich. The quality of the surface of the subsequent sections of the route going through Katuntzi, Izvora hut and Goleshovo also vary between just appropriate and inappropriate. The surface of the section between Goleshovo and Paril is partly macadam partly sandy road, which makes it passable in good weather conditions, but might be difficult when raining. This section of the route can be considered as the hardest for cycling (especially with heavy loaded bikes) but the short length of it and the lack of any traffic make it possible for passing. After Paril the road is characterized by a good asphalt surface and low traffic until reaching Koprivlen. The stretch between Koprivlen and Gotze Delchev has good asphalt surface, but coincides with the route going to the cross border point of Ilinden (BG) – Promahonas (GR), which determines the high traffic of vehicles, thus making it relatively uncomfortable for cycling. Due to this the overall quality of the road infrastructure can be assessed as just appropriate with small sections that can be characterized as inappropriate due to the heavy vehicle traffic.

2. Services

This section of the route covers relatively long distance that goes through various types of landscape and various sizes of settlements – from big cities that play the role of district or municipal administrative centers (such as Blagoevgrad and Gotze Delchev) to relatively small, but lively villages (such as the villages in the footsteps of Belasitza Mountain) to remote and poorly populated villages in the higher parts of the mountains such as (Goleshovo and Paril). Due to this the types of accommodation and other services vary a lot, from hotels and guest houses to huts and single rooms for rent. The overall quality of the services can be assessed as just appropriate according to the ECF criteria. Nevertheless it has to be taken into account, that some of the smaller and remote settlements such as Goleshovo for example can provide only basic supplies and food for the visitors. If any specific services are needed the bigger settlements or administrative centers are the places where more specific needs such as bike repairmen in a specialized shop can be provided.

3. Attractiveness

The remainings related to the border control from the Cold War years in the region are few. They are mainly situated in higher parts of the mountains and can be characterized with poor state – most of them being destroyed or in bad condition. Nevertheless some of them can be still accessed relatively easy and even give possibility for accommodation – such examples are two former piquets in Alibotush mountain (now known as Izvora and Slavjanka huts located resp. in the municipalities of Sandanski and Gotze Delchev) located on the route and at present serving as mountain huts. The Kongura hut, also a former piquet located in Belasitza Mountain (municipality of Petrich), can be accessed with an asphalt road. Nevertheless due to its position in the higher parts of Belasitza Mountain the former piquet is not part of the ICT itinerary, but might serve as a separate tourist attraction for visitors in the region.

There are other interesting sites very close to the route that presents the cultural and the natural heritage of this part of the ICT route. Such is the case with the city of Blagoevgrad with its well preserved quarter of Varosha – exposing the traditional building architecture of the region. Various locations along the road in the municipality of Petrich (especially the part located in the footsteps of Belasitza Mountain - give the opportunity for visiting military monuments, which might be of interest for the visitors, despite the fact that they are not directly linked with the Cold war period. Going through the small settlements in the Belasitza region and the provision of accommodation and local food for the local inhabitants also gives unique charm of this part of the route. Furthermore the immediate proximity of the route to the Belasitza Mountain presents the opportunity of visiting the newest Bulgarian Nature park – Belasitza and enjoying the well protected nature and the eco-paths in the mountain.

The cultural heritage that is possible to be observed while traveling along this section of the ICT route also includes remainings of fortress and fortification systems, churches and monasteries, located in the proximity of the city of Hadzhidimovo, the city of Gotze Delchev, the village of Koprivlen. Other parts of the route – especially the parts going in the higher parts of the mountainous regions of the municipality of Gotze Delchev and Sandanski present the possibility of going through regions with intact nature and visiting numerous nature protection sites such as – the reserve Ali Botush located in the vicinities of Goleshovo and Paril, the Protected landscape Slavjanka – located in the vicinity of the villages of Goleshovo and Paril, The Natura 2000 site of Sreden Paril and Ali Botush – proclaimed according to the Habitat Directive, National park Pirin, just to name a few.

There are also good possibilities to develop branch routes in direction to the town of Gotze Delchev – the city being one of the bigger administrative centers in the region and serving as the main location where types of services not available in the smaller settlements can be found. Similar is the case with the village of Rupite in the municipality of Petrich and the city of Melnik in the municipality of Sandanski and villages of Dolen and Delchevo – located in the municipality of Gotze Delchev and proclaimed as architectural monuments. Despite the fact that the route does not go through the aforementioned settlements, paying a

visit to them might be of interest for the users of the route with its cultural and historical values – the existence of archeological sites, natural springs, the traditional architectures and the unique landscape of the areas neighboring the settlements.

Cultural sites: Cultural and historical landmarks: the old town Varosha in Blagoevgrad - famous for its unique architecture; Vavedenie Bogorodichno Church, located in Varosha; the regional historical museum in Blagoevgrad; Rila National Park - declared a cultural monument

Historical museum of Petrich; Park and Museum Samuilova Fortress located near the village of Kliuch; several military monuments including Monument of the Perished in the name of the State – in the town of Petrich, Colonel Drangov - military monument which was built in 1916 at the village of Drangovo and Cheshmata - military monument which was built in 1917 at the village of Samuilovo; archeological site Heraclea Sintika near the village of Rupite; numerous buildings proclaimed as natural monuments resembling traditional architectural styles located in the villages of Vranja, Goleshovo; four churches dating back to the 19th century located in Gotze Delchev presenting unique architecture, wood carvings and traditional styles of Christian mural paintings; three monasteries located in the vicinity of the city of Gotze Delchev; the village of Delchevo – architectural monument - located 8 km away from Gotze Delchev in Pirin mountain; remaining of a fortress “Sveti Dimitar” dating back to the late antiquity period, located in the city of Hadzhidimovo; remains of a “Sveti Georgi” Monastery in the town of Hadzhidimovo; ancient settlement “Kozluka” – village of Koprivlen; antique necropolis and remaining of medieval villages in the villages of Satovcha, Dolen, Kochan and Tuhovica

Natural sites: Mineral water springs - more than 30 thermal springs with can be found in the region of Blagoevgrad; Nature park Belasitza; Nature monument Kojuha located in the vicinity of the village of Rupite, proclaimed for the protection of rare and endangered animal and plant species; reserve Kongura – proclaimed for protection of natural ecosystems of edible chestnuts and beech forests; Natura 2000 sites: According to the Habitat Directive – Belasitza, Ograjden-Malashevska; reserve Ali Botush, the located in the vicinity of the village of Goleshovo, Paril and Nova Lovcha – proclaimed for the protection of the biggest natural habitat of black fir; National Park Pirin; Protected landscape Slavjanka – located in the vicinity of the villages of Goleshovo, Nova Lovcha and Paril.

4. Promotion of the section

There are two well functioning web sites that provide information regarding the cultural and the natural heritage of the respective regions of Gotze Delchev and Belasitza. Nevertheless the sites address only specific regions thus the information included does not cover the whole ICT section. Both information sources do not refer explicitly to remaining of the Cold war and do not utilize them as tourist attractions. No materials containing information for this particular section of the ICT route is available for the wide public. Nevertheless the existence and the good maintenance of the two web sites may serve as basis of determining the promotion of at least parts of the section as just appropriate in accordance to the ECF criteria.

5. Organization

According to the ECF criteria the organizational status of this section can be assessed as just appropriate. There are no suitable organizations along the region that have the capacity and knowhow for development and maintenance of the route. Most of the municipalities are small which affects their capacity. Nevertheless regions of the section such as the municipalities of Gotze Delchev, Petrich and Sandanski can participate in the process of proper development of the route if external capacities are included in the process. The local municipalities are small and have low budgets which is an obstacle to use bigger amounts of funding from available EU funds. The Directorate of Nature Park Belasitza can be a good potential partner for the implementation of the route, but due to the limited capacity and funding possibilities which are also bounded to the geographical boundaries of the park cannot participate in the process of route development for the whole route section.

D.II. Feasibility analysis of conditions in Blagoevgrad District

BLAGOEVGRAD Municipality

The municipality of Blagoevgrad is located in the most northwest part of Blagoevgrad district, bordering with the municipalities of Simitli and Razlog to the south and to the east and the municipalities of Nevestino and Kocherinovo to the north. The total size of its territory is 621 sq. km. The administrative center of the municipality is the city of Blagoevgrad, located in the proximity of the southwest slopes of Rila and 100 km away from Sofia. The main road artery leading to Greece is in the immediate vicinity of the city. Blagoevgrad is 20 km away from the border with Republic of Macedonia with a cross border point of Stanke Lisichkovo – Delchevo facilitating the entrance in Macedonia and 100 km away from the border with Greece and the cross border point of Kulata – Promahon. The geographical location, the natural resources such as Rila Mountain and the existing hot springs as well as the existing road system gives good possibilities for reaching the municipality and development of alternative forms of tourism.

1. Description of Iron Curtain Trail tourism potential in Blagoevgrad Municipality

1.1. Socio-political and economic situation

According to the National census for 2011 the total population of the municipality is with a population size of 77 441 from which 37 183 are male and 40 258 female. 70 881 live in the city of Blagoevgrad and 6 560 live in the villages falling in the territory of the district. Comparing these numbers with the data available for the year of 2007 when the population size of the municipality was 83 079 shows again the common trend of depopulation of the municipality.

The economics of the municipality are based on: food processing industry including production of cigarettes and beer brewery, meat processing, wine production and paste products; tailoring industry that includes small scale to medium and large scale producers of yarn, textile materials, labor clothes and ready to wear male and female clothes. A considerable part of the tailoring companies are owned by Greeks and part of the production is for export. The machinery construction industry is also represented by production of measuring devices and telecommunications. The timber extraction industry and furniture industry are also developed in the municipality; most of the production is for export in Greece and Macedonia. The tourism industry is well developed in the municipality and in the city of Blagoevgrad. There are numerous possibilities for accommodation and dining and the municipality plans to invest further in the development of cultural, balneo, hiking and ski tourism through utilization of the existing natural and cultural resources in the region.

1.2. Public facilities

The health care services are well developed in the municipality, although most of the facilities are located in the administration center. There is a hospital, specialized dispensaries and emergency centers in Blagoevgrad and private obstetrician clinic in the village of Mursalevo as well as numerous general practitioners that provide health services in the city, but also for the citizens of the villages in the municipality. There are several pharmacies in Blagoevgrad. There is a tourist information center in Blagoevgrad that provide information for the tourist attractions in the region. All settlements from the municipality have water supply and are connected to the national power grid. There is full mobile coverage. The city of Blagoevgrad hosts several banks and cash machines as well as postal offices for money withdrawal and provision of postal services. A big number of restaurants, bars and dining places located in Blagoevgrad have wireless internet connection that might be used by the clients of these places of resort.

1.3. Tourism-related services and facilities

Due to its location and the fact that Blagoevgrad is the administrative center of both the district and the municipality all types of services can be found in the city. The possibilities for accommodation are diverse and include big hotels with the capacity of 100 beds to several smaller hotels and guest houses. All types of shops are available in the city, there are also bicycle shops and bike repair services. The villages that lay between Blagoevgrad and the cross border point of Stanke Lisichkovo – Delchevo (Macedonia) have shops with that provide all necessary foods and goods.

1.4. Attraction sites - natural, cultural and historical heritage

- Cultural and historical landmarks: the old town Varosha - famous for its unique architecture; Vavedenie Bogorodichno Church, located in Varosha, the regional historical museum in Blagoevgrad; Rila National Park - declared a cultural monument.
- Natural landmarks: Parangalitsa Biosphere Reserve located in the vicinity of the village of Bistriza, proclaimed for the protection of century old spruce forests. It is also part of the Man and Biosphere programme of UNESCO; Nature monument - cave in the area of Boichova skala in the vicinity of the village of Logodajl; National park Rila – protected territory with international importance, proclaimed for conservation of self regulating ecosystems and the typical biodiversity as well as natural landmarks. The territory of the park also covers partially or fully the territories of several strict reserves: Ibar, Parangalica and Skakavitza; Mineral water springs more than 30 thermal springs with can be found in the region of Blagoevgrad.
- Ecotrails and footpaths: Tourist footpath from the village of Bistriza to Macedonia tourist hut; Tourist footpath connecting Chakalitsa peak with the Predel valley.
- Natura 2000 sites: Boboshevo – Birds directive and Oranovski Prolom Leshko - according to the Habitat directive.

1.5. Remains of the ICT reachable by bike

No such available because of the distance between the selected route and the border line.

2. Public transport integration

2.1. Transport modes to the cycle route/destination

Beside numerous bus lines linking Blagoevgrad with the bigger cities in the region, there is also a train line linking Sofia with Thessaloniki that goes through Blagoevgrad. The two closest airports are the one in Sofia located just 100 km away from Blagoevgrad and the airport in Thessaloniki – located at 200 km away from the administrative center. There are also bus lines linking Blagoevgrad with Greece and Macedonia.

2.2. Travel by Railways

There is a train station in Blagoevgrad that links the city with the bigger cities from the region as well as with Sofia and Greece.

2.3. Travel by Long Distance Coaches

Numerous private bus companies provide transport services thus linking Blagoevgrad with the bigger cities from the region as well as direct lines with Sofia and Plovdiv.

2.4. Roads Infrastructure

The road infrastructure is well developed. Two international road arteries E79, linking Slovakia with Greece and E 80 linking Portugal with Turkey cross the municipality. The total length of the roads from class four is 134 km and is of relatively good condition. One of the priorities of the municipality is to provide funds for rehabilitation and reconstruction of roads leading to tourist destinations.

PETRICH Municipality

The municipality of Petrich is located in the Southwest part of the Blagoevgrad district. Parts of the borders of the municipality coincide with the national borders of Bulgaria with Macedonia and Greece. To the north and east the municipality borders with the neighbouring municipalities of Sandanski and Strumyani. The total area of the municipality is 650 sq.km .It includes bigger parts of the mountain massive of Ograjden and Belasitza as well as the southwest parts of South Pirin. The administrative center of the municipality is the city of Petrich located 79 km southwest from the city of Blagoevgrad. The city has a long lasting history; the first written documents mentioning the settlement are dating back to the 14th century. Beside the mountains the municipality is famous with the area of Ruptie, located just 10 km away of the city of Petrich. Except the unique biodiversity – some of the species are included in the Red Book of Bulgaria for rare and endangered species, the area is famous with Vanga – an important person who had prophetic skills and the church that was build for honouring her. The area is also rich of thermal springs related with the location of the area in the vicinity of the remaining of a crater of volcano which is not active anymore. There are two cross border points – Zlatarevo – Novo Selo linking Bulgaria and Macedonia and Kultata – Promahon – linking Bulgaria with Greece. A very strong factor for development of alternative forms of tourism and development of tourism related services is the proclamation of the mountain of Belasitza as a Nature park, which increases the attractiveness of the region.

1. Description of Iron Curtain Trail tourism potential in Petrich Municipality

1.1. Socio-political and economic situation

According to the National census for 2011 the total population of the municipality is 54 006. There are 57 settlements in the municipality, only one of them being a city – Petrich and the rest are villages. The economy of the municipality is showing a steady growth and development and relies mainly on the tailoring and processing industry, as well as on commercial trade and provision of civic services, agriculture and forestry and timber processing, transport services and telecommunications. What is typical for the economic sector is that bigger percent of the private companies are small and medium sized. The biggest part of the private companies is involved in commercial trade and provision of civic services. There is also considerable part of companies working in the sphere of hotel keeping and restaurants. The municipality also has big potential for further development of the agriculture in terms of growth of specific plants that are not typical for the country such as pomegranate, olives and kiwis. The cultivation of these plants is possible due to the geographical and climate conditions of the municipality. Despite the fact that the potential for development of tourism based on the natural and cultural resources of the region is very big, the municipality does not have long lasting tourism traditions. One of the reasons is the proximity of the municipality to the national border with Greece and Macedonia and the period of time in which the access to Belasitza Mountain – being a border mountain has been restricted. Nevertheless after the abolishment of the strict border regime during the last years there is certain development in the direction of provision of accommodation and tourism related services, which is also boosted by the recent proclamation of Belasitza as a Nature park, thus increasing the tourist attraction power of the municipality.

1.2. Public facilities

The health care services in the municipality are focused in the city of Petrich, the place where a hospital and two medical centers are located. The health care for the settlements from the municipality is not well developed and people have to rely on provision of these services from the administrative center. The postal

and telecommunication services are well developed, there is also full mobile coverage and due to the location of the municipality in the vicinity of the borders with Greece and Macedonia very often mobile phones get linked with the foreign providers of mobile telecommunication services. There are several banks and cash machines in the city of Petrich. All the settlements are linked with the national power grid and are water supplied, but due to the character of the water resources, in some settlements there might be water shortage during the summer period. Some of the dining places and bars in the city of Petrich have internet wifi connection.

1.3. Tourism-related services and facilities

Similar to other administrative centers the city of Petrich is also the center of provision of all types of services in the municipality. There are numerous shops providing everything necessary from food to repair parts for bicycles. There are numerous places for accommodation varying from hotels to small guest houses and single rooms for rent. Beside the city of Petrich accommodation and dining places as well as shops with all necessary goods can be found in the villages located in the foothills of Belasitza Mountain, some of them lying on the road leading to the cross border point of Zlatarevo – Novo Selo – the proposed ICT route. The villages that provide accommodation and place for food are Yavornica, Samuilovo, Kamena, Srkat. The village of Kluch provides dining place. Beside this there are two huts in Belasitsa mountain – hut Belasitza that is renovated and provides excellent accommodation and dining services and hut Kongura that utilizes the former piquet used by the garrison which protected the border.

The proclamation of the mountain of Belasitza for Nature park played and is still playing very important role for the development of service provisions in the region and especially of those services linked with the development of alternative forms of tourism such as the eco, hiking and photo tourism.

1.4. Attraction sites - natural, cultural and historical heritage

- Cultural and historical landmarks: Historical museum of Petrich; Park and Museum Samuilova Fortress located near the village of Kliuch; several military monuments including Monument of the Perished in the name of the State – in the town of Petrich, Colonel Drangov - military monument which was built in 1916 at the village of Drangovo and Cheshmata - military monument which was built in 1917 at the village of Samuilovo; archeological site Heraclea Sintika near the village of Rupite; prehistoric settlement Topolnitsa near the village of Topolnitsa,
- Natural landmarks: Nature park Belasitza. Nature monument Kojuha located in the vicinity of the village of Rupite, proclaimed for the protection of rare and endangered animal and plant species; reserve Kongura – proclaimed for protection of natural ecosystems of edible chestnuts and beech forests; Protected landscape Ruptie – in the vicinity of the village of Rupite and the village of Starcehvo – proclaimed for the protection of riverine forers and typical flora and fauna, Protected landscape Toplishte – located in the vicinity of the village of Kolarovo – for protection of *Osmunda regalis* L. – Royal fern; mineral water springs in the area of Rupite and Marikostinovo
- Natura 2000 sites: According to the Bird Directive – Rupite, According to the Habitat Directive – Belasitza, Ograjden-Malashevskia, Rupite – Strumeshnitza.
- Eco trails and thematic routes: There is considerable number of marked eco trails and thematic routes lying on the territory of Nature park Belasitza, full description of which can be found at www.Belasitza.net

1.5. Remains of the ICT reachable by bike

Most of the objects are situated in the high parts of Belasitza Mountain and hard to reach by bike.

2. Public transport integration

2.1. Transport modes to the cycle route/destination

The transport modes available in the municipality of Petrich are represented by buses and trains. There is a bus station in Petrich that links the city with Sofia via regular daily operating bus lines. Petrich is linked also with Panaguristhe and Hisaria via the utilization of the bus transport. There is a bus link between Petrich and Thessaloniki. The closest airports are located in Sofia and Thessaloniki – Greece.

2.2. Travel by Railways

There is a train station in Petrich and a train line from Petrich to General Todorov – which is an important train stop on the train route Sofia – Kralovo. Getting the train from Petrich to General Todorov gives option for transferring to the locations using the train transport.

2.3. Travel by Long Distance Coaches

There are daily operating buses from Petrich to Sofia. There is also a bus line linking Petrich with Thessaloniki.

2.4. Roads Infrastructure

The total length of the road infrastructure in the municipality of Petrich is 308 km of which 87 are first and second class and the remaining roads are maintained by the municipality. The first class road E 79 that links Bulgaria with Greece goes through the municipality. Bigger part of the municipal roads need routine repairs

SANDANSKI municipality

The municipality of Sandanski is located in the southeast part of the Blagoevgrad district, bordering with Petrich and Strumitsa municipality to the west and the municipalities of Gotze Delchev and Hadji Dimovo to the east. The size of the municipality is 1060 sq.km. The administrative center is the city of Sandanski. The city is located 160 km away from Sofia and approximately on the same distance to Thessaloniki, which combined with the vicinity of the international road artery E-79 determines the importance and the good connectivity of Sandanski with the rest of the country and its significance as a hub for travelers entering and leaving Bulgaria.

1. Description of Iron Curtain Trail tourism potential in Sandanski Municipality

1.1. Socio-political and economic situation

According to the National census for 2011 the total population of the municipality is 40 470, from which 26 472 live in the cities of Melnik and Sandanski and 13 998 live in the 52 villages located on the territory of the municipality. Comparing the population size with older available data and taking into account the common trend of the demographic processes from 1992 onward show small but steady reduction of the number of people inhabiting the municipality. Similar to other parts of the country the main reasons for reduction of the population size are the aging as well as migration from smaller settlements to the bigger administrative centers in or outside of the district.

After the economic crisis in the beginning of the 90-ties the municipal economics went to the process of reorganization that led to starting the process of dynamic economic development of the municipality. The leading industry branches are presented by the processing industry and its sub branches of food production, production of medicines, tailoring industry as well as building and timber processing industry. The city of Sandanski as well as the whole municipality has long lasting traditions in tourism industry and provision of tourism related services, that are based on the natural resources (thermal springs) and the geographical location of the municipality in the vicinity of several mountains and in the vicinity of National park Pirin.

There is a constant trend of increasing of the importance and the role of the small and medium size private companies for the economic development of the municipality. Bigger part of them are involved in trading and processing industry followed by entrepreneurs involved in provision of accommodation and dining services (hotels and restaurants) and the provision of transport and telecommunication services. Similar to other municipalities, bigger part of the production and the service provision is located in the municipal administrative center. In contrast the agriculture, which plays important role for the municipality serving as a basis for development of the food production and procession industry as well as being one of the main sources of incomes for the rural municipal population is located mainly in the villages and the surrounding territories.

As already mentioned the tourism industry plays important role for the economic situation of the municipality. The statistical data shows a steady trend of increasing the number of people employed in the field of provision of tourism related services. According to the stated priorities for development of the municipality further sustainable development of the tourism is of high importance for the future economic development of the region. The future development plans include elaboration of such types of tourism that will further utilize the existing natural resources and will try to link the tourism industry with other industries typical for the region. This trend of tourism development can be illustrated with the plans for development of rural tourism that may serve as a direct advertisement of the agricultural and food production processes and the unique quality and taste of the Bulgarian food products. Similar ideas can be used for development of hiking and educative tourism and linking it with acquaintance of the tourists with the ecological quality and importance of certain herbs and mushrooms that may be gathered and the importance of pasture habitats as terrains for stock breeding and production of products with guaranteed ecological qualities. The process of further development of the tourism potential in the region also includes development of bicycle trails and routes as well as support for improvement or development of accommodation in regions that have lesser degree of development of tourism related services, such as mountainous and semi-mountainous border villages. Despite there is still no direct link with the ICT established, the plans for tourism development of the region coincide and can be successfully linked with the further development of the ICT route.

1.2. Public facilities

Most of the settlements in the municipality of Sandanski are water supplied. Only 5 of the villages, located mainly in the mountainous regions and border areas are not water supplied, but the designated route does not go through these settlements. The municipality has a priority for rehabilitation of the water supply infrastructure due to its aging and amortization as well as construction of water accumulation installations for settlements which do not have such. All of the settlements are electrified; there is good mobile telephone connection. There is also good landline coverage and the internet connection is secured through ADSL and cable operators, but only in the administrative center. There are also wifi access points, but they are available only at certain locations such as gas stations, dining places, bars and restaurants located in Sandanski and Melnik. Health care is provided mainly in the medical centers and hospital in the city of Sandanski. There are also medical practitioners who provide medical services for the secondary centers such as the city of Melnik and the village of Katunci and the neighboring villages. Both cities – Sandanski and Melnik have at disposal food stores, which on the other hand are difficult to find in the smaller settlements. There are bars restaurants and dining places in Sandanski and Melnik. The villages of Goleshovo and Petrovo also host local small restaurants.

1.3. Tourism-related services and facilities

The accommodation services in the municipality of Sandanski are presented by hotels – mainly focused in the cities of Sandanski and Melnik, motels, holiday resorts, campings, huts- Yane Sandanski, Kamenitza – Bregovitza and Malina, and rooms for rent located in Sandanski, Melnik, Petrovo and Malki Tzalam.

Despite that the number and the capacity of the accommodation places in the municipality is high, their distribution among the settlements is uneven – Sandanski and Melnik, being the main places of interest in the region have turned to be the focal points of provision of accommodation services. Nevertheless some of the villages such as Katuntsi that lay on the chosen route provide accommodation possibilities. Accommodation is provided also in the mountain hut Izvora. Most of the smaller settlements do not have accommodation places. Bike repair parts and services can be found only in Sandanski and Melnik.

1.4. Attraction sites - natural, cultural and historical heritage

- Cultrual and historical landmarks: Prehiistorical remainings of settlements in the vicinity of the villages of Kovatchevo and Damyanitza; various archeological remains of an ancient city, found under the present city of Sandanski that date back to to the periods of Early Christianity and Late Antiquity: episcopal basilica and the basilica of Saint John, roman gymnasium, reservoir for drinking water; Archeological musem in Sandanski; fortress of Despot Slav – located in the city of Melnik; Architectural reserve Melnik; numerous buildings proclaimed as natural monuments resembling traditional architectural styles located in the villages of Vranja, Goleshovo.
- Natural landmarks: reserve Ali Botush, the located in the vicinity of the village of Goleshovo, Paril and Nova Lovcha – proclaimed for the protection of the biggest natural habitat of black fir; Nature monument Melnishki piramidi – in the vicinity of the city of Melnik, proclaimed for the protection of unique landscapes; National Park Pirin; Protected landscape Slavjanka – located in the vicinity of the villages of Goleshovo, Nova Lovcha and Paril,
- Natura 2000 sites: According to the Bird Directive – Rupite, Melnishki Piramidi, Slavjanka; According to the Habitat directive – Rupite – Strumeshtnitza, Sreden Pirin – Ali Botush,

1.5. Remains of the ICT reachable by bike

Former piquet turned into a mountain hut Izvora.

2. Public transport integration

2.1. Transport modes to the cycle route/destination

The international transport corridors E-4 and E-79 that connect Central Europe with Greece and Turkey go through the territory of the municipality. The transport connection between the settlements in the municipality is organized through utilization of train or motorized transport. The closest airports are located in Sofia, Plovdiv and Thessaloniki.

2.2. Travel by Railways

The trans European railway corridor IV goes through the territory of the municipality. This is the shortest possible railway route linking the ports at Aegean sea with the ports on the Danube river at Vidin and Lom. There are two train stations – in Sandanski and in Damyanitza as well as a train stop at Ploski. The tarin stations are located respectively in the vicinity of the international corridor E-79 and in the vicinity of the regional road deviations leading to the corss border points of Ilinden – Promahonas with Greece and the cross border point to Macedonia located in the vicinity of the village of Zlatarevo.

2.3. Travel by Long Distance Coaches

Such trips are common but transit for the town of Sandanski as it is situated near the border and at the same time on the main transport route linking Sofia with Greece. There is no data available for bike transportation service on long-distance coaches for Bulgarian or foreign transport service providers.

2.4. Roads Infrastructure

The quality of the road infrastructure in the municipality can be considered as poor, due to the shortage of funding. The road network is well-constructed and developed. Nevertheless there are parts of the roads for which elements such as – road surface and material, signing and posting do not correspond to the European standards for security and comfort of traveling. This is of particular relevance for the mountainous region of the municipality and for the road linking the villages of Petrovo with Goleshovo and Paril. Most of the roads outside of the mountainous region are characterized with heavy traffic due to the transit traffic coming from West and Central Europe and going into the direction of Greece and Turkey.

GOTZE DELCHEV municipality

The municipality of Gotze Delchev is located in the mountainous part of the Blagoevgrad district. It borders with the municipalities of Bansko and Garmen to the north and the east and with Sandanski and Hadji Dimovo to the west and to the south. The territory of the municipality is 315.8 sq.km. The administrative center – the city of Gotze Delchev is located 105 km away from the city of Blagoevgrad and 205 km from Sofia. The relief of the municipality is very diverse and includes the south alpine parts of Pirin Mountain as well as bigger parts of the geographical region of Gotze Delchev plain. The northeast part of the municipality borders with Rhodopi Mountains. The municipality is rich of water and timber resources.

1. Description of Iron Curtain Trail tourism potential in Gotze Delchev Municipality

1.1. Socio-political and economic situation

According to the National census for 2011 the total population of the municipality is 31 236 people, 19 219 living in the city of Gotze Delchev and 12017 living in the 10 villages located on the municipal territory. A tendency for emigration of the population towards neighboring Tuzla is observed during the last decade, the process being of particular significance for reduction of the number of people living in the villages. Meanwhile the number of people living in the municipal administrative center is growing as a result of the movement of inhabitants of smaller settlements to Gotze Delchev.

Bigger part of the municipal population is employed in large scale companies operating in the field of the processing industry with subbranches in the tailoring and textile industry and food production. The second largest industry branch is the trading. Agriculture used to play important role for the local economy, 1/3 of the municipal territory being agricultural land, however this industry branch play less and less role for the economic development of the municipality since most of the land is not used for agricultural production. The tobacco production that used to be an important economic factor has also reduced its significance due to the constant decrease of the bought up production amount during the last years.

Despite the fact that the municipality is rich of natural resources suitable for tourism development, the potential of the tourism industry as means for economic development is not fully utilized. The availability of accommodation and other tourism related facilities and services are relatively low. The opening of the new cross border point at Ilinden-Promahonas which provides direct link with Greece is an important factor that will increase the number of travelers going through the municipality and may play significant role in boosting up the tourism development in the region.

1.2. Public facilities

All of the settlements in the municipality are water supplied. Despite of this bigger part of the water supply system is quite old and needs to be repaired and tubes to be replaced. All settlements are connected to the national power grid. The landline coverage is well developed and all of the three mobile operators have full

coverage in the region. There is internet connection in Gotze Delchev as well as in certain bar and dining places that provide wifi connection. The health care services are provided by multi profile medical center located in the city of Gotze Delchev, an emergency center, a private medical center as well as general practitioners operating in the city and providing health care for the villages from the municipality. Nevertheless bigger part of the population from the villages faces certain difficulties in receiving adequate health care services.

1.3. Tourism-related services and facilities

The city of Gotze Delchev has all type of necessary shops. Bike repairment services are also available in the city. There is a variety of different dining places, bars, and restaurants as well as places for accommodation such as hotels and tourist bedrooms. Most of the accommodation facilities located outside of the borders of the city are focused in the area of Popovi livadi which is crossed by the road linking Gotze Delchev with Petrich. The area has been differentiated as a holiday resort area both for people from the region as well as for other tourists, which has determined the big concentration of variety of accommodation places - hotels, huts, villas etc. The city of Gotze Delchev hosts a touristic association called Momini Dvori, which is very active in supporting and developing various tourism related initiatives in the region as well as in working for popularization of various forms of alternative tourism including bicycle tourism. The association manages a tourist bedroom located in the city of Gotze Delchev as well as the hut Popovi livadi, and Slavjanka hut, located in Slavjanka Mountain, which also stays on the ICT route.

1.4. Attraction sites - natural, cultural and historical heritage

- Cultural and historical landmarks: there are numerous historical and cultural monuments located in the municipality and in the city of Gotze Delchev: four churches dating back to the 19th century located in the administrative center presenting unique architecture, wood carvings and traditional styles of Christian mural paintings; three monasteries located in the vicinity of the city of Gotze Delchev – the monastery of Saint Marry located just three km away for the city with remainings of a medieval fortress tower being a cultural monument of particular interest; the village of Delchevo located 8 km away from Gotze Delchev in Pirin Mountain- proclaimed as architectural reserve.
- Natural landmarks: Natural monument Tufcha waterfall located in the vicinity of the village of Breznitza; Natural monument Kupena, located in the vicinity of the village of Gospodinotzi, proclaimed for protection of unique rock formations; reserve Oreljak, located in the vicinity of the city of Gotze Delchev, proclaimed for the protection of primary beech forest; National park Pirin; Nature monument Pirostiata, located in the vicinity of the village of Musomishta, proclaimed for protection of unique rock formations.
- Natura 2000 sites: According to the Bird directive: Mesta; According to the Habitat directive: Sreden Pirin – Ali Botush

1.5. Remains of the ICT reachable by bike

Former piquet turned into a mountain hut Slavjanka.

2. Public transport integration

2.1. Transport modes to the cycle route/destination

The inter city public transport in the municipality is organized through the utilization of buses that operate on certain bus lines. The closest port is located in the city of Kavala – Greece, at a distance of 95 km from Gotze Delchev. The closest airports are the ones in Plovdiv – 180 km and Sofia – 230 km away from Gotze Delchev as well as the airport of Kavala, Greece located only at 120 km away from Gotze Delchev.

2.2. Travel by Railways

There is no railway operating in the municipality. The closest train station are located in the city of Sandanski 65 km away from Gotze Delchev and in the village of Dobriniste – 45 km away from the municipal administrative center.

2.3. Travel by Long Distance Coaches

The long distance coach travelling is well organized and operated by private companies. There are regular daily bus lines operating and linking Gotze Delchev with Sofia, Plovdiv, Blagoevgrad and Petrich. There are also regular bus connections between the administrative center and the villages from the municipality. Nevertheless bike transportation is difficult due to the fact that the busses are not specifically designed for bike transportation. Despite of this loading and transportation of bikes might be achieved in personal communication with the drivers.

2.4. Roads Infrastructure

Most of the roads in the municipality are second class roads. The northern road infrastructure is characterized by bigger traffic, while the southern part serves mostly for people travelling between the municipal settlements, thus having less traffic.

HADJIDIMOVO municipality

The municipality of Hadjidimovo is located in the southeast part of Blagoevgrad district. It borders with the municipalities of Sandanski, Gotze Delchev and Garmen to the west and to the north and with Satovcha to the east. The south border of the municipality coincides with the national border of Bulgaria and Greece. The relief of the municipality is mountainous, its territory encompassing the most southern slopes of Pirin, parts of Western Rhodopi and Slavjanka Mountain as well as the valley of Mesta river. The total size of the municipality is 327,8 sq.km.

1. Description of Iron Curtain Trail tourism potential in Hadjidimovo Municipality

1.1. Socio-political and economic situation

According to the National census for 2011 the total population of the municipality is 10 091 people. 2730 people living in the only city located on the territory of the municipality – Hadjidimovo and 7 361 living in the 14 villages of the municipality. The municipal demographic development can be characterized with increase of the population during the fifties of the 20 century, followed by decrease of the number of inhabitants during the seventies followed by a stabilization of the number of people living here. Comparing the last available data from the census from 2001 with the current situation shows that there is no big change of the number of people living in the area. Nevertheless there is a trend of aging of the population which is particularly valid for the smaller settlements. This combined with the negative mechanical and natural growth in population determines the tendency of slow decrease of the municipal population.

The industry branch that secures the highest percentage of work load for the locals is the processing industry, while agriculture provides income for just 1 % of the total population, the main reason for this being that very few of the people involved in agricultural activities are registered according to the trading laws. The main market-oriented product of agricultural production in the region which is also the main source of income for the locals is the tobacco, the rest of the produced products are used for satisfaction of the personal needs of the producers. The textile and tailoring industry as well as processing of leather goods provides employment of the bigger part of the population. Provision of services is one of the fast

growing industry branches that provide incomes mainly for the so-called "family companies" – the small scale businesses. The civil services provided are related with trading, repairment car maintenance goods of daily use services. The municipality is rich of natural and cultural resources that provide excellent possibilities for development of alternative forms of tourism, nevertheless this industry branch is not well developed. The touristic infrastructure is underdeveloped. The tourist information system – signing and info boards needs improvement.

The general conclusion for the economic situation in the municipality of Hadjidimovo is that despite there is small increase in the main economic indexes, the degree of this is not enough for creation of sustainable economics of the municipality. There is uneven distribution of the economic activities on the territory of the municipality and lack of serious investments that can renew the production and procession facilities.

1.2. Public facilities

Despite the fact that all of the settlements are water supplied, the water supply system is very old, which causes big losses of water when delivered to the users. Due to this there is water regime for some of the villages. The landline coverage of the municipality does not cover 100 percent of the settlements. Phone coverage is provided by the there national mobile operators. There is internet access in Hadjidimovo and the villages of Ablanica and Koprivlen. All of the settlements are connected to the national power grid. The health care services are provided by general practitioners and medical offices in Hadjidimovo, Koprivlen, Teshovo and Ablanica. Nevertheless the number of practitioners and the facilities are not enough for covering the needs of the local population.

1.3. Tourism-related services and facilities

The city of Hadjidimovo has food stores and other shops that can satisfy the basic needs of tourists traveling in the region. Nevertheless the tourism related services and facilities located on the territory of the municipality are very scarce. There are no hotels or motels. Accommodation is provided in several private houses in the city of Hadjidimovo as well as by Slavjanka hut, that has been opened during 2005 and utilizes the building of a former piquet located in the vicinity of the village of Paril in the north-west part of Slavjanka mountain. There are no companies which are related with provision of organized touristic services.

1.4. Attraction sites - natural, cultural and historical heritage

- Cultrual and historical landmarks: remaining of a fortress "Sveti Dimitar" dating back to the late antiquity period, located in the city of Hadzhidimovo; remains of a "Sveti Georgi" Monastery in the town of Hadzhidimovo; ancient settlement "Kozluka" – village of Koprivlen
- Natural landmarks: Reserve Ali Botush, located in the vicinity of the villages of Paril and Nova Lovcha, proclaimed for protection of natural habitat of fir; Protected landscape Pavljova padina, lated in the vicinity of the villaged Laki, proclaimed for the protection of mediteranenan and submediteranean rare and endangered flora species; Protected landscape Slavjanka, located in the vicinity of Nova Lovcha and Paril
- Natura 2000 sites: According to the Bird Directive - Mesta, Slavjanka; According to the Habitat Directive – Dolna Mesta, Sreden Pirin – Ali Botush, Zapadni Rhodopi

1.5. Remains of the ICT reachable by bike

No suitable access.

2. Public transport integration

2.1. Transport modes to the cycle route/destination

The transportation in the municipality is organized solely by motor transport, there is no railway system, the closest being the railway Sofia-Kulata- Greece that is 50 km away from the municipality.

2.2. Travel by Railways

Not available due to lack of developed railway infrastructure.

2.3. Travel by Long Distance Coaches

There are direct bus lines going to Sofia and Plovdiv, nevertheless the vehicles are not specially designed and equipped for bicycle transportation. Such might be agreed with the bus driver.

2.4. Roads Infrastructure

The main road that connects the municipality with the rest of the country interior is the second class road that links Simitli, Razlog, Gotze Delchev Koprilven and finishes at the cross border point of Ilinden – Promahonas. It also links the municipality with the international Road I-1 that links Vidin with Kulata. Unfortunately the road has heavy traffic, and the traffic situation is additionally aggravated by the lack of a third lane for overtaking of lorries and other heavy vehicles. The last part of the road – between Gotze Delchev and the cross border point – is with very good quality considering the surface and the width of the road. The municipal road infrastructure that provides the linkage between the villages from the municipality is in bad state, which creates difficulties for the transportation especially in the winter season. All settlements are linked with the municipal road infrastructure, but some parts of it are without proper surface, which again creates difficulties for reaching the settlements.

SATOVCHA municipality

The Municipality of Satovcha is located in the most southeast part of the Blagoevgrad district and in the southwest part of the Rhodopei Mountains. The municipality borders to the east with the municipalities of Dospat and Garmen and with the municipality of Velingrad to the north. The south municipal border coincides with the national border with Greece and partially with the neighbouring municipality of Hadzhidimovo. The territory of Satovcha municipality covers big parts of the Valley of Mesta River at the southeast part of the Dabrashki region. The total size of the municipality is 334.2 sq. km

1. Description of Iron Curtain Trail tourism potential in Satovcha Municipality

1.1. Socio-political and economic situation

According to the National census for 2011 the total population of the municipality is 15 444, all of the people living in the 14 villages that fall in the territory of the municipality. Comparing the current number of people living in the municipality with previously available data shows relatively small decrease of the population. The administrative center of the municipality is the village of Satovcha, which is located 130 km away from the city of Blagoevgrad.

1.2. Public facilities

Seven of the villages are water supplied by the water supply system, while the other seven utilize water from their own water sources. Similar to other municipalities the water supply system also needs repairmen and replacement of tubes in order to reduce the losses of water during the supply process. All of the settlements are connected to the national power grid, but the energy efficiency of the households is very low due to the old infrastructure, old technologies and types of buildings. The landline coverage practically covers all settlements, but the quality of services may be improved. All the mobile operators

have coverage in the region, although there might be places with low coverage due to the characteristics of the relief. The health care services are provided by a medical center located in the village of Satovcha. The center provides health care services for the rest of the municipality as well. Similar to the other municipalities from the region, people living in settlements located at a bigger distance from the administrative center face problems in acquiring sufficient and opportune health care services. There are several villages that do not have postal services: Kribul, Fargovo, Zjizjevo, Bogloin, Tuhovishta and Osina

1.3. Tourism-related services and facilities

Despite the big potential of the municipality for development of various types of tourism based on the richness of natural and cultural resources, there is lack of knowhow and experience in the sphere of tourism development in the region. There are no starting tourist points leading to any of the attractions in the municipality.

Beside the municipal administrative center finding a food store is difficult in most of the places. The poor state of the road infrastructure impedes the easy access and the stocking of goods in the settlements. There is a holiday house that is managed by the municipality and that provide accommodation for the visitors of the village of Satovcha.

1.4. Attraction sites - natural, cultural and historical heritage

- Cultural and historical landmarks: numerous rock formation and bridges from Roman times in the villages of Kribul, Dolen, Pletena, Satovcha, Vaklinovo, Slashten and Bogloin; cultural-historical reserve – the village of Dolen; antique necropolis and remaining of medieval villages in the villages of Satovcha, Dolen, Kochan and Tuhovica
- Natural landmarks: Maintained reserve Konski Dol, located in the vicinity of the village of Satovcha, proclaimed for the protection of mix forest of beech and spruce, Protected landscape Manastirishteto, located in the vicinity of the village of Pletena,
- Natura 2000 sites: According to the Habitat Directive – Dolna Mesta, According to the Bird Directive – Mest, Zapadni Rhodopi

2. Public transport integration

2.1. Transport modes to the cycle route/destination

The transport modes available in the municipality include only the utilization of motor vehicles. There is no railway infrastructure in the municipality. There is a regularly operating bus line between Satovcha and Gotze Delchev, from where buses to other big cities can be boarded.

2.2. Travel by Railways

There is no railway infrastructure in the municipality. The closest train station is located in Dobrinishte – 50 km away from the village of Satovcha.

2.3. Travel by Long Distance Coaches

There is direct bus link from Satovcha to Sofia.

2.4. Roads Infrastructure

The second class road Simitli, Razlog Gotze Delchev and Greece is the main road artery linking the municipality of Satovcha with the interior of the country. The total length of the road infrastructure is 31 km

and its density is much lower than the average for the Blagoevgrad district. All characteristics of the road infrastructure – surface, signalization and signposting, draining etc. are far beyond the European standards for security and comfort of traveling. Bigger part of the settlements is with limited accessibility during the winter season.

E. Smolyan District

E.I. Short description of ICT route in Smolyan District

Overview

ICT backbone in Smolyan district:

(**Satovcha** – Kochan – Vaklinovo) – Brashten – Barutin – **Dospat** – Borino – **Yagodina** – Buynovo – Kozhari – Vodni pad – **Trigrad** – Teshel – Grohotno – Nastan – **Shiroka laka** – Stoykite – Vodata – **Smolyan** – Chokmanovo – Smilyan – Byala reka – **Rudozem** – Srednogortsi – Madan – Tsatsarovtsi – **Zlatograd** – (Preseka)

1. Roads

Benefit to the development of the route in Smolyan district is that the majority of the roads are calm – with no, little or moderate traffic, i.e. less than 500 vehicles per day.

Challenges for the development of the route in Smolyan district are the steep slopes, the narrow roads and sharp curves, the erosion of certain roads, the abandonment or lack of regular maintenance of certain roads, the poor maintenance of the road shoulders or lack of shoulders, the not winter sand on the asphalt that is not removed, the unsuitable road surface of some roads, the lack of signposting, and the lack of cycle lanes along heavier traffic sections.

At present it is possible to cross the border between Bulgaria and Greece within the described ICT section only at one place – the border check point at Zlatograd – Thermes. Another cross-border point “Elidge” should soon be opened between Rudozem and Xanthi. After Bulgaria joins the Schengen area other crossing points could be used on existing roads, which were in use before the closing of the border after WWII.

2. Services

The district of Smolyan has an overall satisfactory level of development of services, such as tourist accommodation, food provision, everyday necessities and health care. In some areas the development of tourism – services and attractions – is at a beneficial level, in others it is just sufficient for the development of the route. The provision of specific services and goods related to cycling tourism are to be found in only few settlements (the major towns) and could be insufficient in other places. However, with some efforts to invest more time and money, it is possible for the tourists even at present to satisfy their needs of such services and goods. Specific cycling tourism services could be improved as the ICT route eventually gets more interest and visitors. The supply and demand chain for these services could be easily regulated as the main conditions exist – human resources, local business entrepreneurship, internal market supply, etc.

Disadvantage to the development of the route is the lack of train or plane connection in the district. However there are train connections within 30 and 70 km from the route and plane within 90 and 250 km. Another disadvantage is that the bus connections in the district, the only public transport, are not accommodated to transport bicycles.

3. Attractiveness

Beneficial to the development of the route in Smolyan district are the picturesque landscapes along the route, the natural and cultural heritage and landmarks in the area, the calm roads, the traditional by-road taps and shelters and the hospitality of the local people, as well as the remains of the Cold War border control. Sites related to the Iron curtain border control are still preserved, though at many places the border infrastructure has been destroyed (electric border control facilities, watch towers) or the objects are in bad condition (barriers, border patrol barracks). Monuments and exhibitions dedicated to the border control exist along the route. There are pilot initiatives utilizing the Iron Curtain heritage and theme for the sake of tourism: game simulations of chasing “illegal border trespassers” at the villages of Trigrad, Mochura, and Buynovo; plans for annual military retro parade with vehicles, weapons and military uniforms from the Cold War in Zlatograd; accommodation at the military barracks and thematic site visits near the village of Barutin and other. There are commemoration events along the border for battles during the Cold War – such as at Vaklinovo and Brashten villages. There are also local fairs of the open borders organized by the people once separated on the different sides of the border, as the one organized in Zlatograd.

4. Promotion of the section

Specific promotion of the section as EuroVelo 13 part is missing. General tourist promotion of the district can be described as “good” in ECF criteria – printed and web tools exist, but may not be updated frequently enough or/and may not be enough extensive, efficient and attractive.

5. Organisation

Organisation situation can be described in ECF terms as “just appropriate” – responsible organizations can be identified on every field of route development and maintenance (infrastructure, service, promotion) but they don’t have the full appropriate budget, and the other sources are not visible yet.

Notes:

1. Specific EuroVelo signposting does not exist for the whole Smolyan district section, so that data is not included in the table.
2. Cycling friendly public transport connection does not exist for the whole Smolyan district section, so the data is not included in the section breakdown table. Bus is the only public transport mode in the district. Vehicles are not equipped to carry bicycles. Most of the lines are serviced by small vehicles difficult to fit bicycles in, though it is done when possible due to the good intentions of the driver.
3. Cyclist welcome type system has been introduced in the region by Bikearea Association, but it is still at a starter stage and underdeveloped.
4. In general, roads in Smolyan district are narrower and curves are sharper than what you find in low lands due to the mountainous terrain and that requires reconsideration of the generally accepted at ECF level traffic ratio standards concerning safety of cycling when analysing the route in Smolyan district.
5. Attractions listed are on the route or within 5 km proximity, accessible or visible by bike, where otherwise it is mentioned in brackets. Hiking needed up to 300 m distance is not mentioned.
6. The description presents the section of the ICT in Smolyan District and its connections to the nearest settlements along the route in the neighboring districts of Blagoevgrad and Kardzhali. The route is described in the table below, broken into indicative day sections.

E.II. Feasibility analysis of conditions in Smolyan District

1. Description of Iron Curtain Trail tourism potential in the Smolyan District

1.1. Sosio-political and economic situation

Smolyan district is situated in the central southern part of Bulgaria and on the border with Greece. To the north it neighbors the districts of Plovdiv and Pazardzhik, to the west it neighbors the district of Blagoevgrad, to the east the district of Kardzhali, which are also part of the southern border line and the Iron Curtain route, and to the south it reaches the Greek border. The district of Smolyan is also in the middle of the Rodopi Mountains and on altitudes from 600 to 2191 m above sea level, which determines the predominant landscapes as high mountains and mountains. A major part of the territory – 66% is forests, and 27% is agricultural landscapes.

Located in high mountain region, the municipalities in Smolyan District are dependent on the geographical and climate conditions in the Rodopi Mountains. More or less their social and demographic situation is a result of strong historical and economic factors. The social life is aggregated in the municipal centres and most of the villages experience a high level of depopulation and low living standard. The level of socio-economical development is low and for some municipalities even critical. The municipality of Smolyan is the economical leader in the district as it concentrates 80 % of the economical potential and 2/3 of the incomes are realised there. At the same time the economy of the municipality is in crisis due to liquidation of leading sectors and the old infrastructure and equipment. There is also a process of chaotic establishment of small factories at occasional places which causes certain difficulties in the urban planning and development. The registered enterprises in the municipality of Smolyan are over 2000, with over 800 of them in the trade sector and about 300 in the hotel & restaurants sector. An important feature of the economy are the individual owners of small agricultural properties which are a significant income source for the local population. The region is famous with the production of potatoes, but most of this production is not reselled. Even the milk and meat production are used to meet the needs of the population of owners. Despite the important role of this production sector, the manufacturing of the agricultural production i.e. milk, meat, herbs, mushrooms etc. and the possibilities for bio-products manufacturing are not well developed. A leading role has been taken with investments in tailoring factories which use mostly women workers. Yet the structural changes in the local economy show a process of development of small and medium manufacturing enterprises based on local resources.

The tourism sector has earned 10 % of the incomes in the sector of trade & services. From the total of 8400 workers in this sector 11% are working in tourism related activities. The tourism is considered as priority for the municipality due to the high potential of the territory for all season tourism activities. Many efforts are put in gaining good quality of service, development of infrastructure and variety of tourism activities. In the recent years most of the economic sectors have experienced decline, so the intention and political will for tourism development as an alternative sector is increasing.

The district of Smolyan is part of NUTS2 south-central planning region and occupies a **territory** of 3192,9 sq. km. The district has the smallest percentage of arable land in the region and a great part of the rest of the land is wilderness – woods, meadows and cliffs. Forestry, stock breeding, mining, industry and tourism are the main economic activities in the district. It is the most depopulated district in the region and one of the most rarely populated districts in the country. The average **density** of the population is 38 people per square km. According to the 2011 national census¹ the **population** of Smolyan district is 121752 people, 30642 of which reside in the district centre, the town of Smolyan. Compared to the 2001 census a drop of 18314 people for the district is registered or 13,1 % decrease of the population for a 10-year period. The reasons for the decrease of the population are the negative birth – death ratio in the district. The tendency of an aging population common to the whole country is also relevant to the district of Smolyan. Though, especially in comparison to the rest of the country, the district still has a good majority of the population in

¹ <http://www.nsi.bg/EPDOCS/Census2011final.pdf>

the economically active age, the low share of the population below 15 years of age is alarming, since that rate undermines the future long-term demographic and economic vitality of the region. Major reason for the low share of children is the economic stagnation of the region and the resulting emigration of the population in active fertility age, and the feeling of economic insecurity discouraging many of those still living in the district to have children. In respect to the development of the ICT and related tourism the relatively high percentage of the population in the economically active age is favorable, though the aging of the population and the relatively small share of young people in it pose threats to the entrepreneurship, flexibility and quality of the tourist services related to this new tourist product, as the negative labor replacement rate and the decrease of the population² undermines its long term vitality. Particularly alarming in reference to ICT development is the depopulation of the small villages that could be on the future ICT route, since their desolation means no services, even basic ones, for the tourists. Signs of that phenomenon are already visible, i.e. in some small villages bread and other basic goods are supplied and sold by van and there is no shop to offer them except at the schedule of the van. The small density of the population and the vast territory of wilderness is favorable to the development of tourism for nature lovers and also results in less traffic per kilometer which is favorable for the development of cycling tourism.

A favorable to the potential of entrepreneurship for the development of ICT tourism in the region is the tendency of increase of the share of the private enterprises in the district, though it is a bit for the decline of the state run economy, still there was an important growth of the **private sector** and there is a sufficient number of micro and small companies in the district that can provide for the development of the necessary services. However the decreasing investment capacity of the companies and the unfavorable capital raising conditions that companies face the last 3 years could pose an obstacle to that. Other obstacle to the development of ICT tourism in the district could be the lack of public initiative and investment for the necessary public infrastructure and promotion, if the local, district and state authorities do not take on and if the local business do not cooperate to raise such funds, since the capacity of the individual enterprises is not sufficient to handle those tasks, the majority of them being micro and small companies and surviving in very strained conditions.

Tourism is the particular and main economic sector related to the development of the ICT and benefiting from it. The accommodation provision can be taken as a relevant indicator for the tourism in the region, though not a complete indicator, but the only one for which consistent data exists. The data of the NIS^{3,4} for 2008, 2009 and 2010 show that after the peak of 2008 there is decline in the nights and income realized from accommodation in the district, justified by the world financial crisis and its economic effects, as well as the worsening of the Bulgarian economic situation in that period and the consequent stagnation and shrinking of expenditures. In the same period, however, NIS data shows that the number of accommodation facilities and beds available in the district is still increasing, i.e. there is construction or establishment of new accommodation facilities and increase of the number of beds available. No matter the reasons and despite that it cannot be well assessed as an indicator of tourism growth in the district, the increase of the accommodation capacity is both favorable to and in demand of the exploration and development of new tourist products and markets as ICT can provide for. That is, the business needs to attract tourists to fill the available accommodation capacity and the existence of free accommodation capacity is beneficial to the development of new tourist flow, so the situation of surplus of accommodation facilities can be assessed as favorable for the development of the ICT. At the same time the current crisis of the tourism in the region threatens the survival of small accommodation establishments that do not have the reserves and capacity to live through or overcome the stagnation and shrinking of the market.

During our field visit interviews information was provided that there already were small accommodation facilities (guest houses and small family hotels) that were closed in 2011 as unprofitable due to the lack of

² Population forecast of the National Institute of Statistics <http://www.nsi.bg/otrasal.php?otr=19&a1=376&a2=387&a3=389#cont>

³ Per nights: <http://www.nsi.bg/otrasal.php?otr=8&a1=954&a2=955&a3=957#cont>

⁴ Activities of resorts: <http://www.nsi.bg/otrasal.php?otr=8&a1=954&a2=958&a3=2102#cont>

tourists. The current crisis of the tourism in the region augments the trend of last years that one and two star accommodation establishments, the majority of them small as capacity, but spread in many settlements, hold minority of beds, income realized and number of foreigners received in the district, though being greater in number, while the 3, 4 and 5 star hotels hold the greater share of beds, income realized and foreigners received though being less in number and concentrated in the resort locations. The tendency of concentrating the accommodation capacity in only few resort locations in the district, Pamporovo being the main one is a natural result of the mass tourism developed in the region and the ease provided by automobile transport to visit the attractions spread around. Such tendency for the structure of accommodation provision is not in favor of the development of the ICT long distance cycling tourism, since it requires accommodation facilities spread on the route more or less every 40 km and not more than 60 from each other in a mountainous region. In that respect, the development of the Iron Curtain Trail in Smolyan district could help keep the small accommodation establishments in the villages on the route, and even open new ones, by increasing the tourist visits and the accommodation demand in those villages.

NIS:

<http://www.nsi.bg/otrasal.php?otr=8&a1=954&a2=955&a3=957#cont>

<http://www.nsi.bg/otrasal.php?otr=8&a1=954&a2=958&a3=2102#cont>

Education

The literacy in the region is at a good level and the provision of education is sufficient for the development of ICT. The secondary education in the district provides specialized education relevant and beneficial to the development of tourism in the region. Vasil Levski Vocational High School in Dospat and Hristo Botev Vocational High School in Zlatograd offer education and training in cookery. Karl Marx Vocational High School of Economics in Smolyan offers education in economics, entrepreneurship, management and ICT in trade and economics. The Vocational High School of Tourism in Smolyan prepares specialists for hotel and restaurant management and service. Ivan Vazov FL High School in Smolyan provides comprehensive FLT of English, Spanish, German, as well as training in information and communication technologies. (RIE website data, websites of the schools and Guide Bulgaria website data). Besides the listed schools, all schools in the district provide FLT as per the national curriculum with English as the most common language taught in the subject. Further support especially to English language acquisition is the strong presence of US Peace corps and language teaching volunteers in the region. The existence of language teaching in the compulsory, secondary and upper-secondary education (1. – 12. grade) and the existence of specialized subjects relevant to tourism taught in the secondary and upper-secondary schools in the district are beneficial to the development of tourism, including international cycling tourism as is one of the major markets of ICT.

The higher education in the district is represented by branches in the town of Smolyan of Paisiy Hilendarski Plovdiv University and Chernorizets Hrabar Varna Free University, as well as a Technical College to the Plovdiv University. Particularly beneficial to the development of tourism in the region are the following fields taught: Tourism, Marketing, Environmental Studies and Languages in the branch of Plovdiv University and Business, Management, Marketing, Tourism and Economics in the branch of Varna University.

The system of vocational and language training for adults is also sufficiently developed, though mainly concentrated in the district centre Smolyan.

The overall provision of education in the target district has the capacity to be successfully employed in the development of the human resources necessary for the quality development of the Iron Curtain Trail as a tourist product there. Further financing for the implementation of the extra training required might be necessary.

1.2. Public facilities

The small towns and villages in the district vary in terms of availability and condition of the facilities available, thus services provided. Most of the settlements have problems with sewage and garbage

collection, but this is not affecting the general perception of the region as one with naturally preserved environment. They are all electrified, there is mobile telephone coverage and in some places internet is also provided. The post office service is well functioning, but medical care is problematic. Medical care services are mainly provided in the municipal centres or in the district centre (the town of Smolyan), as the geographical terrain, difficult and costly accessibility, as well as economically unsustainable operation of most transport connections and decreasing number of the population make it impossible to maintain such service centres.

1.3. Service providers

Tourist operators are located in Smolyan, Pamporovo and Devin, but they only act in the field of ski tourism and guided mountain tours. In most of the cases family hotel owners provide different attractions in interesting localities for the tourists – guided tours, off-road tours, horse riding, bike tours, and craftsmanship. The number of tourists is highest in July, August and October. The number of Bulgarian visitors is highest in July and October. Foreigners are most frequent guests in July and August.

Municipality	Overall number of beds, categories & location in the municipality	Restaurants & cafeterias	Transportation mode to the municipality
Dospat	500 beds, 1-3 stars, all located in the town, 1 border barrach turned into challet	10 restaurants, 33 cafeterias	Autobus
Borino	228 beds, 24 family hotels, hotels, guest houses and challets	5 restaurants	Autobus
Devin	600 beds in hotels, guest houses and challets		Autobus
Smolyan	1666 beds in town and border villages in about 100 hotels	80 restaurants и cafeterias	Autobus
Madan	87 beds in town	22 restaurants	Autobus
Rudozem	135 in town and nearby villages	12 restaurants	Autobus
Zlatograd	348 beds in 1-3 stars hotels and guest houses	14 restaurants	Autobus

The distribution of the accommodation facilities in the Smolyan District is uneven in terms of categories and capacity of the facilities. The bigger objects with bigger capacity and thus with higher category, are located mainly in the town centers and in the resorts. Most of the accommodations which are located in the villages, including those in the border areas, have low capacity and low category of services. It should be considered that the district has a good level of availability of accommodation, but for the needs of the ICT route development more efforts should be put in district areas where no availability of accommodation is present. It should also be pointed out that the availability of facilities with low category of service (1-2 stars) could be beneficial for the route development if compared to the demand of services close to the customs of the local communities.

Tourist information centers exist in Smolyan, Devin, Zlatograd, and in the villages Shiroka laka, Arda, Smilyan, Mogilitza. The information centers have different capacity to provide services, information materials and local products and souvenirs. They are also different in terms of the functional structure –

some have permanent personnel, some function seasonally or give information and service after a phone call.

1.4.Attraction sites - natural, cultural and historical heritage

The district of Smolyan has a rich variety of objects of natural, cultural and historical heritage. Data for the objects could be found on the Internet pages of the municipalities, in strategic documents and as well in the tourist info centers. Generally the distribution of the types of attraction objects is as follows:

Municipality	Attractions			
	Natural	Historical	Cultural	Iron Curtain heritage
Dospat				2
Borino	5		1	2
Smolyan	20	8	3	10
Devin	7		1	1
Madan	2	4	3	0
Rudozem	2	3	2	2
Zlatograd	2	2	5	1

Especially important for the route development are the objects connected to the heritage of the Cold War years – socialist monuments and art, border control facilities (barracks, barriers, electric fences, watch towers, etc.), museums and thematic collections. Such objects exist on the territories of all municipalities from the district, but they are in different condition in terms of interpretation for tourism purposes.

1.5.Remains of the ICT reachable by bike

- **Dospat** - frontier post near Brashten village; frontier post turned into tourist hut near Barutin Village
- **Borino** – watch towers exist but are in bad condition and potential threat for tourists; the border could be reached near Tsrancha village; A good asphalt road exists from Kozhari village south to a Greek nature reserve near the border (and Skaloti village in Greece) – this crossing of the border will be possible only after accession to the Schengen area.
- **Devin** – A frontier post near Kozhari village exists and could be reached by bike. A winding dirt road leads to the post.
- **Smolyan** – former frontier posts exist near the villages of Kesten, Mugla, Kiselchovo, Borikovo, Koshuta, Sivino, Arda, Gorovo. Remains of the border electric fence detection facilities are also existing near those villages. Some of the posts have been sold to private owners or conceded to municipalities to be managed for different purposes. Some of the buildings are constantly being ruined, but most of them could still be used for tourism purposes.
- **Madan** – no information for existing ICT remains

- **Rudozem** - a frontier post, reconstructed watch-tower and rebuilt electric fence detection facility exist as a tourist attraction and accommodation place near the border close to Mochura village. A former frontier post exists also near the Chepintsi village.
- **Zlatograd** – a part of the border fence and a frontier post still exist along the road to the border cross-point Zlatograd –Termes

Interesting data and museum exhibits are being collected and preserved by the border control authorities in the district. Museum collections exist at the border directorates in Dospat and Smolyan, but it is necessary to be exposed and properly interpreted for tourists.

2. Public transport integration

2.1. Transport modes to the cycle route/destination

All transportation within Smolyan district, as well as to and from it, is organized only by bus, automobile and lorry.

2.2. Roads Infrastructure

Roads are the only transport connection between the settlements in the district and out of it.

There is no highway on the territory of the district, but a 1st class road has been recently extended to make the transit connection easier from Smolyan via Rudozem through Elidje pass to Greece - part of E86 road and main transport connection with the rest of the country. The border check point at Elidje is still not open, since the road on the Greek side is not ready, so the traffic on the road is still not heavy.

In respect to the conditions of the roads surface, Smolyan municipality data base shows that 14,7% of the roads in this municipality have good quality, 14,9% - decent and 70,4 % - bad quality. The data collected from the other municipalities in the border region of the district shows more or less the same road conditions. A major part of the roads are not covered with asphalt and do not have drainage. They are narrow roads with big longitudinal slopes (over 15% slopes). However most of the roads in the district have only local significance and are not overloaded with automobile traffic, which provides good possibilities for cycling tourism. Forestry and dirt roads exist and they vary in quality. Those are mostly passable by off-road vehicles, because they are not surfaced and depending on the weather conditions could be quite muddy and impassable for long-distance touring bikes. Most of these roads are used by logging trucks and thus their quality is subject to the intensity of usage and weather conditions, as well as to the availability of funding for their repair, which makes an assessment of their condition greatly unpredictable in the long term. Due to limited budget and low priority of their renovation, it is difficult to rely on their condition for the IC route. There are also 2 other types of roads that might be considered for the purposes of the ICT:

- “truck” roads – those are permanent roads connecting settlements, which can be partially asphalt surfaced, macadam, with other hard surface or hard solid dirt roads. For motorized transport they can be used only by sturdy vehicles, hence their common name – truck roads. They are characterized by no or very limited traffic and serve local economic needs – forestry, agriculture and stock breeding. Many of them are also used for tourism – horse riding, tracking and cycling. They have to be closely examined in terms of compatibility with the ICT route.
- frontier roads – these connect all the frontier posts along the border. They should be examined in terms of accessibility of the former frontier posts as sites of tourist interest. Some of them could be used for the main route of the ICT if their long term maintenance is secured.

Both types above were used in the past by the border troops, and often parts of them coincide.

Particular attention in respect to ICT deserves the road between the villages of Teshel and Mugla. Once a main connection of the village of Mugla to the nearby town of Devin, for the last 20 years the road has

remained in neglect, due to the accession of the village to the municipality of Smolyan and the construction of an asphalt road between them. This road connects the municipalities of Devin and Smolyan, as a quiet alternative to the only road connection between them now – the road through Shiroka Laka – and will serve as a far more suitable route for the backbone of the ICT, once its bridges are rebuilt, since it is shorter and far quieter than the road through Shiroka Laka, used at present for the ICT. Unfortunately such investments are not planned by the local authorities and resources and justification for the rehabilitation of the road need to be identified – the development of the ICT and tourism in general in the region could be one.

2.3. Travel by airplane

The closest international airport to the district is Plovdiv Airport (90 km away from the district centre Smolyan). In 2009 the airport got a new passengers terminal and extended apron. Though it mainly operates holiday charters, in recent years it is also seen as a promising facility for low-cost airlines operation. At present it serves regular flights to England, Italy and Russia and is quite possible to increase destinations in future and become quite convenient access to the ICT. The second closest airport is Kavala Airport (KVA) in Greece (165 km from the district centre Smolyan). Other and far more frequented international airports nearby are Sofia Airport (SOF) (244 km from the district centre Smolyan) and Thessaloniki Airport (SKG) (281 km from the district centre Smolyan).

2.4. Travel by Railways

Closest railroad connections in Bulgaria are Plovdiv (100 km from the district centre Smolyan), which has the advantage to ICT of being a busy train station, operating also the international line Vienna - Istanbul, Asenovgrad (79 km from the district centre Smolyan), Xanthi in Greece (113 km away from the district centre Smolyan), Velingrad (148 km from the district centre Smolyan and 72 km from the town of Dospat at the west end of the ICT in the district of Smolyan), Peshtera (116 km from the district centre Smolyan and 67 km from the town of Dospat at the west end of the ICT in the district of Smolyan), Podkova (87 km from the district centre Smolyan and 32 km from the town of Zlatograd at the east end of ICT in the district of Smolyan). All trains in Bulgaria allow the transportation of bicycles on them for fixed fare of 1 euro, irrespective of type of train or distance travelled. Difficulties of transportation may occur on busy trains on holidays, since not all trains have a separate luggage compartment and bicycles and passengers share the same platforms. It is advisable to check carefully in advance if you have to travel with the holiday flow and possibly avoid the busiest trains without luggage compartment. Trains in Greece do not allow assembled bicycles on them. Particularly convenient to join the ICT can be to use the train stations of Velingrad for its relatively high altitude, that would save cycling efforts, and proximity to the west side of the route and the train station of Podkova for being almost on the route and very close to the IC border. The train trip to Velingrad on the only narrow track railway left in the country is also particularly picturesque. Not bad options to access the ICT are also the stations of Peshtera and Asenovgrad for their proximity to the route and more frequent train service compared to the previous two, though being at a lower altitude as a disadvantage.

2.5. Travel by Long Distance Coaches

There are good bus connections with the neighboring districts – Blagoevgrad, Plovdiv, Pazardjik, Haskovo, and Kardzhali. All of the municipal centers have direct connections to Sofia and Plovdiv. There are even direct lines to the Black sea coast - from Smolyan, Zlatograd and Nedelino to Slanchev briag, Primorsko and Varna. The public transport connections between the municipal centers are also by bus, but the coaches running are small with no place for safe transportation of bicycles. Some of the villages in the district are hard to reach by public transport, due to the limited number of trips per week – only once a day and not every day.

There are no restrictions for transportation of bikes on the coaches, but there are also no rules. Usually on week days the buses have free space for more luggage, but negotiations have to be made directly with the

driver or company prior to each attempt of transportation of a bike or two at a time. Lines serving villages are operated by smaller buses with capacity of 12-24 passengers and in most of the cases have no possibilities to transport bikes.

2.6. Existing cycling trails along the ICT

The Bikearea Association has developed the “Rudopia” route, which passes through the Rhodope Mountains and also through the region of Smolyan. The route is suitable for mountain biking, horseback riding and hiking. The total length of the “Rudopia” trail is about 400 km and it crosses the Rhodope Mountains from west to east. The starting point is in the town of Velingrad and the route terminates in Mezek, not far from the Bulgarian – Greek border. Along the route there are seven local centers providing you with the possibility to explore in detail the rich natural and cultural heritage of the Rhodopes. These centers are Velingrad, Beglika, Trigrad, Smolyan, Kardzhali, Madzharovo and Ivajlovgrad. The “Rudopia” trail goes mainly on existing forest roads, trails and narrow asphalt roads. The level of technical difficulty is medium. The route has its own signposting – red and white triangle with the letter “R” in it.

More information could be found on the dedicated web page: <http://www.rudopia.org>

There is also a cycling route developed by the Smolyan Municipality as part of a system of tourist routes in the region. This particular route is circular, starting from the village of Smilyan through Bukatsite village – Gorovo village – Cheplyat village – Zmievo village and ending in Smilyan.

However these routes exist as marked routes or publicized possibilities, they are not convenient for the purposes of the ICT. These routes seek for hard terrain, tracks that require high physical and technical capability of the bikers that are different in comparison with the long-distance touring bikers. The routes listed above in some places are traced very close to the border, but are only passable with mountain bike. They are in the most of the cases the only way to reach the IC remains. If such routes are considered as part of the ICT, their quality and technical requirements for the bikers have to be explicitly listed in all information materials and signposting.

Further information for the interest of bikers for exploration of Smolyan district could be found at <http://www.bikemap.net> where bikers share routes they have passed or enjoyed, but these routes are not official or signposted.

3. Environment conditions and Environmental impacts

Smolyan District is situated in south-central Bulgaria in the central part of the Rhodope Mountains on territory of 3192,9 sq. km, that is 2,9 % of the territory of the country. The altitude of the district varies from 600 to 2191 m above sea level. 66% of the territory of the district is covered with wood and 27% of the territory is designated for agriculture, mainly pastures. The woods consist of deciduous forests in the lower parts and coniferous forests in the higher parts. The landscape is mountainous and that imposes a major difficulty to the development of the cycling route along the Iron Curtain in the region, since the majority of the slopes are too steep for long-distance (heavy-load) cycling and cycling is predominantly only possible along the river valleys, which more often, than not are not parallel to the border.

The **climate** in the district is mild mid-latitude transitional temperate continental with Mediterranean influence and areas of mountainous climate. The winter is mild and wet and the summer is relatively cool. In respect to ICT tourism development an advantage is the moderate (cooler than in the low-lands) temperatures during the holiday summer season. A disadvantage could be the summer showers characteristic of the mountainous areas, if tourists are not prepared for them. Rain peaks in the region are in May and June. Tourist information for the area should include advice on proper clothing for the summer season regarding the specific climate in the mountainous region. In the high lands snow may keep for up to

5 months, though as a whole temperature and road conditions are suitable for cycling with proper outfit in the whole April – November period. January and February are the coldest months in the year, and July and August – the warmest. The period December, January, and February is not suitable for cycling tourism

The **water** resources in the region are sufficient and the water quality is good and beneficial to the development of tourism. The district has higher water security than many other regions, mainly due to the amount of rainfall in the district which is higher than the average for the country. The public water supply system covers 90,8% of the district population, the rest rely on the traditional water sources of the settlements. The public sewage system covers 61% of the population, the rest mainly use underground depositing. The recorded in the past significant pollution of rivers (mainly Madanska and Varbitsa) and soil resulting from the mining industry has been significantly minimized, due to the decrease of exploitation and production in the sector. Still a source of river pollution is the inflow of the untreated sewage waters (grey water) from the settlements. The planned construction of water treatment plants in the district needs to be finalized to overcome that problem. The overall condition of waters and soil in the district is satisfactory for the development of ICT. To prevent dust (lead, zinc, cadmium and arsenic containing, as well) pollution of air and soil from the mining industry, though it is much decreased, special attention must be paid to the maintenance of the mining depositories and transportation of material. Cycling tourism is not expected to cause any adverse effects on waters, especially when waste waters are treated properly, since waste water amount is likely to increase, as a result of tourism development.

The overall quality of the **air** in the district is good and suitable for the development of cycling tourism. There are no big industrial polluters, potentially dangerous enterprises are equipped with exhaust air treatment facilities, the natural air conditions do not keep air pollution close to the ground for long and the quality of the air in the district is relatively high and among the best in the country. The only place with air pollution levels over the standards is the town of Smolyan, where instances of fine dust particles, NO₂ and more rarely SO₂ pollution have often occurred. The sources of the pollution are the operation of coal, diesel and wood building heaters during winter (especially SO₂ and NO₂, but also dust particles), car traffic (NO₂, but also raising dust particles in the air), construction works (dust particles) and the use of sand to maintain the streets during winter (dust particles).

Construction works are responsible for fine dust particles pollution not only in the city of Smolyan, but also in the resorts with extensive tourism in the district, in which construction has been growing. To minimize the air pollution from construction works and prevent its negative effect on tourist experience, strict rules must be introduced and control imposed over construction sites. Construction sites have negative effect on tourist experience, particularly cycling, not only through air pollution, but also through noise pollution and pollution and damage of the road infrastructure. The use of sand to maintain the streets and roads during winter has been pointed as a main factor responsible for fine dust particles air pollution during the winter and early spring months. This kind of pollution can affect the cycling tourism not only through the air pollution, but also through the surface pollution of streets and roads creating risks of accidents at cycling.

The local authority of Smolyan municipality has recently developed measures to reduce the dust pollution in the town that are to be implemented in coming years. One of the proposed measures is to substitute chemicals for sand in the streets maintenance next winter. The municipalities in the district should take care to clean the streets and municipal roads of the sand accumulations immediately after the winter to decrease air pollution and provide for safer cycling, as well as motor transport. The same care must be taken by the state, as well, for the state roads in the district. The issue of road and street surface pollution is even more important for cycling safety taking into account the steep slopes and sharp curves abundant in the district road system.

The latest data publicly available on fine dust particles air pollution from the automatic measuring unit in the town of Smolyan is from the period January – March 2011 and shows 57 days with higher than the norm (50 µg/m³) levels of fine dust particles in the air out of 87 days of measurement. The data are alarming, but when compared to the data from the background measuring unit situated at the mount Rozhen in Smolyan

district, showing zero instances of over-standard levels out of 90 measured days for the same January – March period, a conclusion can be drawn that the fine dust particles pollution is characteristic only for certain settlements in the district and do not affect the overall quality of the air of the rest of the territory of the district) (Data source: Executive Environment Agency - <http://eea.government.bg/bul/Output/Threemonth/41/index.html>)

There is no **noise pollution** threat to ICT tourism development in the district. The only problem that may occur in that respect is if the work and traffic of new construction sites close to accommodation facilities disturb the rest of the tourists and so proper regulation and control of its application must be imposed on construction in respect to noise and other pollution resulting from it. The development of ICT and cycling tourism in the region is not expected to create important noise emission that would disturb people or **wild life**, more over the proposed route goes over already established roads and do not propose new crossing of wild life sanctuaries. **Unrestrained dogs** both pets and dogs without owners may attack cyclists; especially dangerous are the second type when gathered in packs. Authorities must take speedy and effective measures against unrestrained free ranging dogs, since they impose danger, cause injuries, accidents and stress and consequently discourage cycling tourism. The problem is less evident in Smolyan district than in other parts of the country, but still there is need of precaution. Special attention in Smolyan district must be paid to **shepherd dogs**. The risk of their attacks on cyclists must be analyzed and precautions along the ICT taken, what and if needed.

The **solid waste** management in the district of Smolyan faces the same issues as the rest of the country – need to develop measures to decrease accumulation, to implement separation, recycling, composting and safe treatment. The reconstructed regional depository by the town of Smolyan is expected to solve part of the problems. Separate waste collection has been introduced in the district, but still is limited and insufficient. The positive experience of the ICT stretch from Mugla to Smolyan may be affected negatively by the solid waste transportation to the regional depository by the town of Smolyan since about 8 km of the route just before and in the town of Smolyan coincide with the road to the depository. A reason for the increased garbage trucks traffic on that road is also the fact that that depository collects not only the solid waste of Smolyan municipality but also of some of the neighboring municipalities. Tourists should be warned about the truck traffic in that section though the time of garbage truck passing will rarely coincide with the tourist flow time. In that respect garbage transportation should be kept at night.

Erosion

The proposed route passes on hard surface roads, so cycling on them will not affect their surface, and no particular precautions are necessary in terms of erosion, since such is not expected as a result of the development of the ICT - the route does not pass on soil surface or anything soft enough to be harmed by a passing bicycle. Erosion occurring on dirt roads that could be used for the ICT is potential and current problem for the comfort and safety of the route. Main reasons for it are rain water, passing timber trucks, and the rare maintenance of the roads.

2.7. ICT and Natura 2000

There are 2 Territories protected under the Birds Directive and 2 Protected under the Habitats Directive in the district of Smolyan and cover a major part of the Rhodope Mountain. These territories are:

- Persenk, code BG0002105 (under the Birds Directive)
- Trigrad-Mursalitsa, code BG0002113 (under the Birds Directive)
- Western Rodopi, code BG0001030 (under the Habitats Directive)
- Tsigansko Gradishte, code BG0000372 (under the Habitats Directive)

2.8. ICT and protected territories

The district of Smolyan is famous for its preserved nature and biodiversity and the total protected territories under the Bulgarian legislation are 41. The IC trail is passing through 2 territories and is passing at 5 km near 30 territories.

The trail is passing along existing asphalt roads through the natural site “Buinovo gorge” and the protected territory “Trigrad gorge”. These roads have local significance and are important for the tourist traffic, because of the popularity of these territories. No additional restrictions are needed for the protection of these sites, according to the current situation.

Each of the protected territories has a protection regime and management and conservation objectives. They should be carefully considered if any activities are planned for change of the trail, public events and others. Among all of the prescriptions in the protection regimes the local route developers should consider prohibitions such as:

- building of new roads, buildings,
- changing or contaminating of water currents
- mowing grass, picking flowers, herbs and wild fruits
- making fires, contaminating the region with food garbage or any other activities that may contaminate or destroy the landscape
- damaging or destroying any signs, inscriptions or other equipments and as well installing of new ones without the permission of the respective authorities
- camping and making fires out of the dedicated spots

F. Kardzhali District

F.I. Description of physical ICT backbone route in Kardzhali District

Overview

Backbone in Kardzhali district:

Preseka – General Geshevo – Ustren – Dzhebel – **Momchilgrad** – Zvezdel – Krumovgrad – Edrino – Goliamo Kameniane - **Chernichevo**

1. Roads

The proposed route in the section is identical to the original (proposed by M. Cramer). The attractiveness of the route is good, directness is just appropriate, safety is good and comfort is good (ECF evaluation criteria).

The route follows asphalted roads in good condition. There are no unnecessary detours and the environment is pleasant – small villages, mountain views, remains from a Roman castle. The route goes more than 20 km away of the border, but this is due to the mountainous relief of the region. In the section Preseka – Dzhebel the road is narrow and there is no shoulder. However, it is very quiet with rare traffic. The rest of the roads are secondary roads, part of the national road network. Here, the shoulder could be used since the traffic is more intense.

There is need of new informational EuroVelo signposting in the section Preseka – Dzhebel and national traffic calming signposting at the main roads (Momchilgrad – Krumovgrad).

Transportation of bicycles is hard, since most of the public transport is operated by minibuses and no space for bikes is available in many cases.

2. Services

The section is just appropriate regarding services. The density of the accommodation and pubs is not more than 40 km. The comfort is just appropriate and the availability of the services is excellent. Details could be found in the following feasibility analysis section.

3. Attractiveness

There are no attractions related to the theme of the route. However, this is the only possible option having in mind the mountainous relief. The region is rich in cultural and natural attraction sites. See details below.

4. Promotion of the section

The promotion of the section is inappropriate similarly to the overall promotion of ICT route at national level.

5. Organization

The organization of the section is just appropriate. There are local/regional partners with some capacity, but they have limited financial and human resources.

Description of the route

1. Section Preseka – Momchilgrad 40 km

This is part of the daily section Zlatograd – Momchilgrad that is located in Kardzhali district. From the village of Preseka the route follows the main road and at the intersection for the village of General Geshevo takes left for a serious uphill with parts where slope is over 10%. The uphill has a denivelation of 400 m for about 5 km ride and reaches the junction with the road from the village of Dobrintsi. Although it is very narrow, there are hardly any vehicles. After the uphill the route goes at an altitude of 750 m for 9 km and reaches the village of Ustren. There is a sign for visiting an ancient fortress “Ustra” on a branch dirt road with serious slopes. After Ustren the route goes slowly downhill and after Mrezhicko joins the main road from Zlatograd to Dzhebel III-508 which is of medium traffic. After Dzhebel the route goes slowly downhill for 11 km along road III-508 until the intersection with road I-5 (Ruse – Makaza). This road is wide, but the traffic is intense. The intersection is only at 6 km from Momchilgrad where the route follows road II-59 which is also wide but with not much traffic. The whole section is asphalted with parts of different quality from medium to excellent.

2. Section Momchilgrad - Krumovgrad – Chernichevo 58 km

From Momchilgrad to Krumovgrad the surface is good and there is no serious denivelation except for the first 10 km where it is 300 m.

It is possible to go to Kardzhali from the intersection of road III-508 and I-5. The distance is 8 km and the road is wide enough (with a shoulder).

The section from Krumovgrad to Chernichevo is proposed in order to go closer to the boarder and to avoid the original relatively busy section Krumovgrad – Ivajlovgrad. The roads are narrow with rare traffic and asphalted, but not always with good quality.

F.II. Feasibility analysis of conditions in Kardzhali District

DZHEBEL Municipality

Dzhebel municipality is located in Central Southern Bulgaria, in the Eastern Rhodopes. It is located 285 km from Sofia and 20 km from the regional center - Kardzhali. The municipality is adjacent to the municipalities: Kardzhali, Momchilgrad, Ardino, Zlatograd, Nedelino and Kirkovo. When the new border point at Makaza pass is open it will be 70 km from the Greek sea.

1. Description of Iron Curtain Trail tourism potential in Dzhebel municipality

1.1 Socio-political and economic situation

The population of the municipality is 9453 people according to the municipal record. Most of the population is from the Turkish ethnic group. There is slight negative demographic tendency due to migration. There is high rate of unemployment.

The main economic activity is tobacco growing, but textile industry has a small share as well.

The main problems for development of the tourism sector are: poor condition of roads, poor communications, problems with water supply and sewage system, abandonment of the huts, insufficient funds, lack of organized tourism, lack of control and maintenance of cultural and historical heritage.

1.2 Public Facilities

All the settlements in the municipality are electrified. The telephone landlines are not fully developed. There is mobile phone coverage. There is no hospital in the municipality, but medical care is provided by private medical practitioners and a polyclinic.

1.3 Service Providers

In the centre of the city there are few shops and 4 restaurants. There are 3 hotels with capacity of around 90 beds. There is no local tour operator agency.

1.4 Attraction sites - natural, cultural and historical heritage

- Chamlaka reserve with the ancient rock sanctuary “Hambar kaya” and rock niche sanctuary near Vodenicharsko village
- Rock formations “Kaletso” and the Ustra medieval castle near the village of Ustren
- Churches and mosques downtown Dzhebel and in the villages in its vicinity
- Sheih Baba Tekke – informal religious worship place downtown Dzhebel

1.5 Remains of the ICT reachable by bike - not available

2. Public transport integration in Dzhebel municipality

2.1 Transport modes to the cycle route/destination

Dzhebel can be reached by direct bus connection from the big Bulgarian cities like Sofia, Varna, Bourgas and Ruse. There are bus connections to Momchilgrad and Kardzhali.

2.2 Travel by Railways

There is no railway going through the town, but the closest railway connection is 12 km away, in Momchilgrad.

2.3 Travel by Long Distance Coaches

From Dzhebel there are direct bus connections to neighboring Greece and Turkey almost every day.

2.4 Roads Infrastructure

Dzhebel is connected with the roads network through third class roads: road III - 508 - sp.Dzhebel - Dzhebel - Fotinovo; III - 8673 - "Dobrintsi - General Geshevo"; III - 5082 - "Dzhebel - Mishevsko - Squill" and III - 5084 - "Mrezhichko - Ustren - Pripek."

2.5 Existing cycling trails along the ICT

There are no marked cycling routes in the area.

KARDZHALI Municipality

The Municipality of Kardzhali is located in Southeast Bulgaria. It is the biggest municipality in the Eastern-Rhodope mountain range, covering an area of 642 sq. km, which is 20% of the territory of Kardzhali District and is also 0.51% of the whole country's territory.

The relief of the municipality is mountainous with dense river network and steep ridges. There are two dams on the territory of the municipality – Kardzhali dam and Studen kladenets dam and river Arda also passes through it.

The municipality covers 117 villages, administered in 45 town councils. It borders the municipalities of Haskovo, Stambolovo, Momchilgrad, Ardino and Chernoochene. There are 68 406 permanent residents of the Municipality as per 2011 census.

The town of Kardzhali has become an administrative, commercial, cultural and industrial center not only of the Municipality of Kardzhali, but also of the whole Eastern Rhodopes. The town is 259 km away from Sofia and 90 km away from the town of Plovdiv, which is the second largest town in Bulgaria. The nearest border checkpoint “Slaveevo” is around 110 km away from the town and it connects Bulgaria to Greece.

1. Description of Iron Curtain Trail tourism potential in Kardzhali Municipality

1.1 Socio-political and economic situation

A considerable number of enterprises have been established in the Municipality of Kardzhali in the sphere of the non-ferrous metallurgy, mechanical engineering, textile and knitting industry, wood processing and furniture industry, electronics and food, wine and tobacco industries. However, in the structure of the registered companies, trade has the greatest number and only 10% belongs to industry.

In regard to tourism, there is a large project “The new Thracian gold” developed by a local tour operator company (Gabi tour) and a Dutch foundation. One of its aims is to develop a local network of bike routes on the territory of the municipality (<http://newthraciangold.eu/?lng=en>).

1.2 Public Facilities

The Municipality of Kardzhali can be characterized by a well-developed health care system, which includes private medical offices, a hospital and a Dental Centre.

The Municipality has a well-developed water supply network. However, in a certain number of villages considerable water shortage still exists, especially during the summer period. The electric power supply on the territory of the Municipality of Kardzhali is in good condition with 100 % of the villages electrified.

1.3 Service providers

Kardzhali is a large town, which is also a district administrative center. Therefore, numerous options for accommodation, shops and dining exist. There are 5 hotels with around 380 beds in the town of Kardzhali. In addition, there are numerous small boutique hotels in the recreation area near Kardzhali dam.

There are 7 travel agencies in the city offering different travel services. One of the main tour operator is “Gabi tour”, which is also a partner in the above mentioned tourist project “The new Thracian gold”. They provide numerous services including nature trips, accommodation in the whole region, bear watching, adventure trips, farm, organic, cultural and many other holidays (<http://www.gabitour.com>).

1.4 Attraction sites - natural, cultural and historical heritage

- The Regional Museum of History in the town of Kardzhali contains about 37 000 exponents. It has registered 179 archaeological sites, 19 of which are pre-historic, 122 are ancient, and 37 are Medieval. 30 of the registered cultural monuments are of national significance.

- Several protected areas– the “Stone Wedding” natural site, the “Stone Mushrooms” near the village of Beli plast, the “Rock window” near the village of Kostino, as well as certain protected territories with habitats of globally endangered species of flora and fauna - “Maiden-hair fern”, “Fist rock” and “Middle Arda”.

A large part of the municipality area is covered by the “Studen Kladenets” Natura 2000 site under the Birds Directive, protecting about 100 birds species, including the Griffon and Egyptian vultures, which are a common bird watching attraction. Most of the municipality’s area is also covered by the “Rodopi-Iztochni” Natura 2000 site under the Habitats Directive, protecting important riverside habitats and oak forests and is the most important site for the protection of the two species of tortoises.

- Along the valley of River Arda and near the dams of “Kardzhali” and “Studen kladenetz” all kinds of water sports have been developed and short-term recreation zones have been constructed. The region provides perfect conditions for hunting, fishing and rowing tourism.
- Numerous unique Neolithic monuments, fortresses and other archaeological findings present the rich cultural and historical past of this region.
- The Medieval fortress of “Perperikon” and under it the Thracian king’s palace with sanctuaries dating back to V-IV century B.C.
- The monastery complex “ St. John the Precursor”, IX- X century.

1.5 Remains of the ICT reachable by bike

Kardzhali is relatively far from the border area and there are no ICT remains.

2 Public transport integration

2.1 Transport modes to the cycle route/destination

There are two bus stations in the city – the central station and Arpezos bus station (<http://www.bgrazpisanie.com/busstations.php?To=53>). Kardzhali can be reached from most of the big cities in Bulgaria (Sofia, Plovdiv, Varna). There are bus connections to Zlatograd, Momchilgrad, Smolyan, Dzhebel, Krumovgrad, Haskovo.

2.2 Travel by Railways

Rail transport is represented by the railroad Dimitrovgrad - Kardzhali - Podkova.

2.3 Travel by Long Distance Coaches

Major bus service provider throughout the district and abroad is “Arpezos bus”. There is a daily bus line to Istanbul and other cities in Turkey serviced by Arda tur. (<http://www.ardatur.bg>)

2.4 Roads Infrastructure

The development of the road network in the municipality is below the average level typical for the country as a whole. This is a result of the mountainous features of the area and also because of population’s flow to particular densely-populated centers. Predominant is the 4th -class road-network. The roads in the municipality are in a bad condition, and this is typical especially for the roads leading to the smaller villages of the Municipality.

The transport connections with Sofia and the other parts of the country are being realized through railroad transport and motorways. There also exists a fully-equipped landing area which, however, is not used for the time being.

The municipality is being served by the 1st class road Haskovo – Kardzhali. The Pan-European Transport Corridor №9 “Helsinki – Alexandropolis” is being constructed to pass through the Municipality. In the near

future, a new border checkpoint “Makaza” will be opened at the frontier with Greece. It is located 55 km south from the town of Kardzhali.

2.5 Existing cycling trails along the ICT

- Leg 11 of the Trans Rhodopean Trail (www.rudopia.org) with length of 20 km and marked with red triangle. From Kardzhali you follow the asphalt road in NE direction towards the rock phenomena called "The Stone Wedding". The tufa formations are located a couple of hundred meters to the left of the road so you have to push the bike if you want to see them. From "The Stone Wedding" you have to keep riding on the asphalt road in the direction of Povet and Panchevo. Just before you enter Panchevo you have to leave the asphalt and turn left - nice forest road through the meadows starts from here. The next goal is to reach the village of Oreshnitsa located on the slopes of the hills in northern direction. At the top end of Oreshnitsa one must follow the road through the open areas to reach the village of Bolyartsi. From this point to main asphalt road from Murgovo to Perperikon is only downhill.

MOMCHILGRAD Municipality

The municipality of Momchilgrad is situated in the Eastern Rhodope mountains among the Varbitsa and Nanovishka Rivers. It covers an area of 360 sq.km. The town neighbors the municipalities of Dzhebel, Kirkovo, Krumovgrad and Kardzhali, which is the administrative regional center. There are 49 villages and the town of Momchilgrad, which is the administrative, economical and cultural center. Most of the villages are under 200 people and one of them is depopulated.

It is located in the highly segmented part of the Eastern Rhodope Stramni Ridge, which has a length of about 40 km and a width between 15 and 22 km. The slopes are deforested and eroded; in some places there are landslides. The nature of the terrain has a negative impact on the villages and transport system.

1 Description of Iron Curtain Trail tourism potential in Momchilgrad Municipality

1.1 Socio-political and economic situation

According to the data by National Statistical Institute the population of the municipality of Momchilgrad is 16 354 people. Most of the population is from the Turkish ethnic group. There is negative demographic growth in the recent years due to migration. The main agricultural tradition for the population of Momchilgrad is growing tobacco. There are some industrial and manufacturing enterprises (textile).

Tourist services are not well developed in the municipality and tourism forms an insignificant part of the revenue. In the Municipal program for tourism development there are measures for improving the tourist infrastructure, preserving the local cultural heritage and developing human resources.

1.2. Public facilities

All the settlements in the municipality are electrified. There are sewage and canalization problems in the small settlements of the municipality. The telephone landlines are not in good condition, but there is good mobile coverage. An optical cable route passes through the municipality, which creates an opportunity for high-speed data transfer and there is Internet club in the centre of Momchilgrad.

1.3 Service providers

There are 4 hotels, 2 huts, 7 restaurants downtown Momchilgrad and in its vicinity. The overall accommodation capacity is around 100 beds. In the centre there are food shops and cafeterias. Medical care is provided by one hospital in the town, as well as by 6 private practitioners and 9 dentists.

1.4 Attraction sites - natural, cultural and historical heritage

There are 10 tourist trails in the municipality going to the main attractions and according to the Municipal program for tourism development 4 more will be developed. Among the attractions are:

- Natural phenomenon "Petrified Forest",
- Peak "Dambala"
- Nature reserve "Borovets".
- Sanctuary of Orpheus
- Medieval castle at village of Zvezdel
- Sanctuary of Harman kaya – rock niche
- Religious complex “Elmala baba – village of Bivoliane
- The old town mosque
- Kedikchal – a park of 600 years old oak trees located 7 km. from Momchilgrad at village of Raven

Large part of the municipality falls within the “Rhodopes - Iztochni” Natura 2000 site under the Habitats Directive, as well as within the “Studen Kladenets” Natura 2000 site under the Birds Directive.

1.5 Remains of the ICT reachable by bike

The municipality is relatively far from the border and there are no ICT remains.

2 Public transport integration

2.1 Transport modes to the cycle route/destination

There are regular bus lines to Haskovo, Kardzhali, and Krumovgrad. The bus line to Sofia is once a day (<http://www.centralnaavtogara.bg/>). Buses to Zlatograd, Krumovgrad, Dzhebel and Kirkovo are also passing Momchilgrad.

2.2 Travel by Railways

Rail transport is represented by the railroad Khaskovo - Momchilgrad - Podkova.

2.3 Travel by Long Distance Coaches

No long distance coaches travel from Momchilgrad. The nearest point is Kardzhali.

2.4 Roads Infrastructure

The municipality is intersected by the trans-European international transport corridor № 9 Helsinki - Dimitrovgrad - Alexandroupoulos. Its importance will increase with the completion of the project PHARE - Cross-border cooperation for reconstruction and new construction of the segment Podkova - Makaza checkpoint. This will ensure the proper functioning of the road. Opening the road link with neighboring Greece is expected to revitalize the area economically and in particular Momchilgrad, creating opportunities for direct investment by the Greek side. Distance to the nearest land border crossing checkpoint Makaza will be 42 km.

The road III-509 – Kardzhali – Momchilgrad – Krumovgrad – Ivailovgrad, where the ICT route passes, is with regional importance. The road is part of the national network and is in good condition. The municipal road network has a total length of 90.30 kilometers; there are additional macadam roads with a total length of 50 kilometers.

The municipal roads are in poor condition. The most significant municipal roads are:

- Momchilgrad – Nanovitsa
- Zvezdel- Nanovitsa going to Studen kladenets

2.5 Existing cycling trails along the ICT

There are no marked cycling routes in the municipality

KRUMOVGRAD Municipality

The municipality of Krumovgrad is located in Southern Bulgaria and is part of Kardzhali District. It borders Ivailovgrad municipality to the East, Momchilgrad municipality to the west and Greece to the South. Its territory is entirely within Eastern Rhodope Mountains and it has transitional Mediterranean climate. The relief is hilly and low mountainous. The river Arda is crossing the municipality with its dam “Studen kladenets”.

1 Description of Iron Curtain Trail tourism potential in Krumovgrad Municipality

1.1 Socio-political and economic situation

The population of the municipality is around 22 424 people and is decreasing due to migration. The largest share of the population is from the Turkish ethnic group. The average income of the population is relatively low and there is high level of unemployment. The companies that operate in the municipality are mostly small enterprises (under 10 people). The foreign investment is around 10%.

According to the Municipal Plan for Development, the economy of Krumovgrad depends mainly on agriculture and most of all on tobacco growing. The tourism is underdeveloped in the municipality and does not generate significant income. The capacity of the accommodation is relatively low and the potential of the municipality for rural tourism is not exploited and there is no big interest by investors in the tourism sector. A major issue is the lack of qualified human resources. The Municipal Plan also mentions that it is important to develop a regional tourist product in cooperation with the neighboring municipalities.

A project for development of tourism is financed by the EU and an ecological centre for education is being built and a section for accommodation is envisioned with capacity of 30 beds. It will be located in the village of Avren which is close to the Greek border.

1.2. Public Facilities

All the settlements in the municipality are connected with roads. There is drinking water in all settlements, but sewage is available only in Krumovgrad. There is one hospital and a Medical centre, as well as 19 private medical practices and 2 dentists. There are branches of 4 banks downtown Krumovgrad.

There is a plan for opening of new border point at the village of Avren for increasing local mobility.

1.3 Service providers

There are shops in the centre of Krumovgrad that provide food, drinks and other goods.

There are 3 hotels with capacity of around 90 beds. In one of the hotels (Complex Ahrida) there is restaurant, bank, dentist, cosmetic studio, laundry.

In addition, there are more than 10 restaurants and numerous cafeterias in the centre of Krumovgrad. Along the route there is a bistro in the village of Polkovnik Zheliazovo (just after Krumovgrad in Ivailovgrad direction). At the beginning of Krumovgrad, there is a food shop opposite to the ex-building of the frontier troops (zastava in Bulgarian). Bicycle parts are sold in a local shop next to the bus station.

1.4 Attraction sites - natural, cultural and historical heritage

- Museum of archeology, contemporary history and ethnography at Krumovgrad with more than 2000 exhibits and area of 250 sq.m.
- 31 archeological objects and 12 architecture monuments.
- Ruins of ancient Thracian sanctuaries and necropolis
- Tobacco storehouses, watermills, mosque and churches
- Ruins of castles and Roman bridge (near village of Egrek)

- Nature reserve “Valchi dol”, part of protected area “Studen kladenets” which is also an Important Bird Area.
- Nature protection centre at village of Studen kladenets, where two eco trails for observation of vultures start
- 4 waterfalls
- Habitats of garden tea (Salvia)
- 6 caves located in the territory of protected site Oreshari.
- Parts of the municipality also fall within the two Natura 2000 sites “Studen Kladenets” and “Rodopi – Iztochni”

1.5 Remains of the ICT reachable by bike

- The building of the frontier post, located in the beginning of Krumovgrad and now abandoned
- Small museum of the border police situated in the operating building of the Regional Directorate of Border Police.

2 Public transport integration

2.1 Transport modes to the cycle route/destination

There is no bus station in Krumovgrad, but there are plans to build one. The municipality receives subsidies to support passenger transport in unpopulated border areas.

Krumovgrad could be reached by bus from Sofia, Haskovo and Plovdiv once a day in the early morning (4-5 o'clock). The buses from/to Kardzhali are almost every hour. There are buses that start from Kardzhali and pass through Momchilgrad, Krumovgrad and Ivajlovgrad.

2.2 Travel by Railways

There is no railway infrastructure on the territory of the municipality and the closest railway connection is in Momchilgrad (32 km. from Krumovgrad).

2.3 Travel by Long Distance Coaches

No long distance coaches are running to this destination.

2.4 Roads Infrastructure

The road network of Krumovgrad includes secondary roads (27 km), third-class roads (75 km) and municipal main roads (261 km). The density of the road network is 43 km/100 sq. km. which is higher compared to the national average (33km/100 sq. km.).

The main road in the municipality is road III-509 Momchilgrad - Krumovgrad - Ivailovgrad that passes through the municipal center Krumovgrad in east-west direction and connects the municipality with neighboring municipalities, regions and the national road network. Of particular importance for socio-economic development of the municipality is the transport corridor № 9 Kardzhali - Makaza – Alexandropoulos, which creates prerequisites for active economic development. The importance of this connection will increase with the opening of the border Makaza and actual operation of the transport corridor.

The municipal roads in good condition are 66 km, in average condition are 78 km, and in poor condition are 117 km. The asphalt roads are highly distorted and do not meet the requirements for secure, modern and easy transport. The constructed facilities (bridges, culverts, retaining walls and ditches) are in poor technical condition and the dimensions of the facilities do not meet the dimensions of the road. Very often road signs and nameplates are missing.

2.5 Existing cycling trails along the ICT

Signposted cycling routes in the region do not exist yet.

G. Haskovo District

G.I. Description of physical ICT backbone route in Khaskovo District

Overview

Backbone in Haskovo district:

Pelin – Belopolci – Planinets - **Ivailovgrad** – Slaveevo – Kyprinos (Greece) – Pendalofos - Petrota – **Svilengrad (Bulgaria)** – Raikova mogila – Shtit – Sladun – Varnik – Radovets – Srem

1. Roads

The proposed ICT route in Haskovo district builds on the ICT route as outlined by Michael Cramer with one new section from Ivailovgrad to Svilengrad through Greece and another from Svilengrad to Srem.

The attractiveness of the route, its directness, safety and comfort are good in these sections.

The route follows asphalted roads in relatively good condition. There are no unnecessary detours and the environment is pleasant – small villages, mountain views, and abundance of Iron Curtain remains. The route does not go more than 20 km away from the border. The route uses secondary roads, part of the national road network or narrow village roads with rare traffic.

There is need of new informational EuroVelo signposting and national traffic calming signposting at the main roads.

Transportation of bicycles is hard, since most of the public transport is operated by minibuses and no space for bikes is available in many cases. The only bigger transport hub is located in Svilengrad, where long distance coaches operate.

Proposed changes

- **Proposed new backbone section Ivailovgrad – Petrota – Svilengrad – Sladun – Radovets – Srem**

Michael Cramer suggests a route from Ivailovgrad to Svilengrad (along the main road in Bulgaria) as an older option when border point Slaveevo-Kyprinos didn't exist. In 2011, the road from Slaveevo to Kyprinos is finished and the border crossing operating. The proposed section has the following advantages:

- calmer route with smaller elevation;
- frequent crossing of the border;
- availability of sights of the IC history, e.g. military post and a portal through the alarm fence near Pashovo and Matochina, many watch towers and fully-existing fences.

After reaching Svilengrad, at the proposed new section it is not feasible to go directly to Edirne, because of the extremely heavy traffic. Much more suitable is to continue on the Bulgarian side of the border, where existing roads go very close to the border and even cross the fence three times. Roads are asphalted except for the section from Varnik to Radovets and traffic is insignificant.

- **Proposed new branch route**

The attractive branch route from Varnik to Matochina is recommended for the unique remains of a former *portal, alarm fences and watch towers*.

- **Proposed loop route – Green corridor “Bike area” 102 km**

From Ivailovgrad a branch route can be done to the south visiting *Svirachi – Mandritsa – Dolno Lukovo – Meden Buk – Zhelezari – Pelevun*. On this road many attractions can be seen such as typical architecture in Mandrica and Dolno Lukovo; church at ancient holy site in Dolno Lukovo as well as the meanders of Byala reka where a bath can be taken in the summer. From Meden buk to Zhelezino the road is not asphalted and the river crossing might be hard in the winter and spring. Accommodation is available in Svirachi, Pelevun and Kostilkovo. If the loop is done for two days it is possible to follow the Green corridor velo marking through the peak where Liutitsa fortress is, but conditions suppose mountain bike ride.

2. Attractiveness

There are quite a few attractions related to the theme of the route: fences, portals and other remains from the IC.

3. Promotion of the section

The promotion of the section is inappropriate similarly to the overall promotion of ICT route at national level.

4. Organization

The organization of the section is just appropriate. There are local/regional partners with some capacity, but they have limited financial and human resources.

5. Services

The services in the section are just appropriate. The density of the accommodation and pubs is not more than 40 km. The comfort is just appropriate, since cycle friendly services are missing. The availability of the services in every category is good. Luxury hotels and restaurants are missing, but there are 3 stars hotels and the restaurants are good. Details could be found in the following feasibility analysis section.

Description of the route

1. Section Krumovgrad - Ivailovgrad 56 km

The route follows the main road II-59 that is of good condition with low to medium traffic without many heavy vehicles. The road passes next to the villages and for visiting them, one needs to leave the main road and come back again. Belopoltsi and Planinets are closer to the road. There are fountains next to the road but in the dry season some of them might not work. There are no serious uphill stretches.

2. Section Ivailovgrad – Slaveevo – Kyprinos (Greece) – Petrota – Kapitan Petko Voivoda border point – Svilengrad 55 km

At Ivailovgrad, the route descends in the Thrace plane and after crossing the border reaches Kyprinos. The road and border point are brand new in 2011. Kyprinos is followed by an uphill with denivelation of 180 m at Pentalofo. To Petrota there is no big denivelation before going down to the plane again at Ormenio. The road is of good condition and very little traffic, but nice sceneries. Entering in Bulgaria is through Kapitan Petko Voivoda border point and is very calm in comparison to Kapitan Andreevo at the Turkish border.

3. Section Svilengrad – Raikova mogila – Shtit – Sladun – Varnik – Filipovo - Radovets – Ustrem – Srem 56 km

From Svilengrad, the route passes under the heavy loaded E-80 and goes to Raikova mogila and Shtit. The road surface is of bad condition and is almost abandoned, thus biking is very quiet. After Shtit the road

passes through the portal of the zone surrounded by security fence. Due to the fact that here passes EU outer frontier the fence is still on its place, although the portal is not closeable. The fence forms a visible strip in the vicinity. After a while the route leaves the security zone and reaches Varnik. A little branch (4 km) leads south-east to Matochina village with the ancient fortress Bukelion. From Varnik to Filipovo there is a sandy ground-road leading you through quite bald fields with just few trees. The first 500 m will take a little effort to conquer an up-hill stretch, but afterwards the road becomes almost even. From Filipovo there is an asphalt road to Srem and 7 km further to the north there are accommodation facilities.

G.II. Feasibility analysis of conditions in Khaskovo District

IVAILOVGRAD Municipality

Ivailovgrad municipality is located in Khaskovo District. It borders Greece to the South and East, Krumovgrad, Madzharovo and Liubimets municipalities to the West and North. The population of the municipality is 6 426 out of which 3 739 (2011 census) living in the town of Ivailovgrad. Even if the relief is hilly-mountainous the Mediterranean influence is significant, thus summer is hot and winter is mild. The terrain is of variable structure and altitude varies from 70 to 700 m. Ivailovgrad dam is built on the biggest river Arda. Another main river is Byala to the south where the border with Greece passes. Ivailovgrad is twin town to Kyprinos (Greece).

1 Description of Iron Curtain Trail tourism potential in Ivailovgrad Municipality

1.1 Socio-political and economic situation

The remoteness of the region surrounded by the national border and its side position from the main transport corridor connecting Europe with the Middle East, defines the municipality as less attractive for living. Depopulation and unemployment are the key words for the socio-economic situation.

The main economic sectors are agriculture (tobacco, crops, vine, fruits, and stock), textile, non-metal minerals, and hydro power. The new border point with Greece at Slaveevo-Kyprinos is expected to bring vital cooperation with neighbours. Despite the less attractive investment climate the municipality administration succeeds in management of grants and lowers its own resources contribution for the performed improvements incl. technical and social infrastructure, sustainable forestry and tourism.

1.2. Public Facilities

The main roads are in good condition, although comfortable access to the south of the municipality needs a lot of investments. 19 villages do not have water-supply, and the existing infrastructure needs general repair. The road from Ivailovgrad to Krumovgrad (used by the ICT), though, has several fountains. All of the settlements are electrified. There is mobile telephone connection with some exceptions in close to the border villages. The landline coverage is good, although 8 villages have no landline connection. Internet connection exists but digitalisation of landline is needed for a better quality.

1.3 Service providers

Tourism is being developed for the last decade and in 2011 17 hotels and restaurants exist. There are two tourist information centres – in the town of Ivailovgrad and at the tourist site of Villa Armira. In the village of Kostilkovo there is a demonstration centre for natural living.

1.4 Attraction sites - natural, cultural and historical heritage

- Villa Armira is a roman villa of local aristocrat dated from II century. The villa shows the internal arrangement with a swimming pool and roman mosaic frescoes. It is on the road from Ivailovgrad to Dolno Lukovo. Next to the villa a border fence can be seen as well as former border post

- Thracian tomb Golyama Mogila, next to Svirachi village, is a small hillock where it is thought that the holder of Villa Armira is buried.
- The meanders of Byala river as well as Ivailovgrad dam are NATURA 2000 sites under the Birds Directive protecting bird habitats and wetlands. Almost the entire territory of the municipality is included in the Eastern Rhodopi Natura 2000 site under the Habitats Directive.
- Mandritsa village is unique for its architecture of big houses for production of silk. This industry is abandoned after the loss of markets because of the liberation from Ottoman Empire.
- Ethnographic museum is well established in an authentic renovated old house “Paskaleva”.
- Medieval fortress Liutitsa is the only one in Bulgaria that has its walls conserved at full height. By 2011 it is not reachable by bike and not maintained at all, but it is in the wish list of Municipal strategy for tourism development.

1.5 Remains of the ICT reachable by bike

- The municipality has acquired two watchtowers next to Drabishna village and Slaveevo border point. By 2011 access is denied, but the municipality foresees their repair.
- The park of Ivailovgrad hides two interesting remains of the Cold War period. A former bunker is now used as a foundation of monument representing a cross. The park is on a karst terrain and has one precipice cave which has served as refugee tunnel, but has been destroyed. When visiting the park one can have the chance to see many orchids depending on the season.

2 Public transport integration

2.1 Transport modes to the cycle route/destination

The access to the municipality is only by automobile transport. The main town of Ivailovgrad lies at 61 km from international road E-80 and train connection from Europe to the Middle East. The closest airport is Alexandroupoulos but no direct connection exists.

There is a regular bus connection to the towns of Haskovo and Kardzhali, but bikes might not be allowed due to small capacity of vehicles.

2.2 Roads Infrastructure

The municipality town is connected with Krumovgrad through secondary road II-59 that is being renovated in 2011 in its section to Slaveevo and the new border point with Greece. From the other side the road to Kyprinos is also being constructed in 2011. To the north road III-597 is renovated in the same year and connects Ivailovgrad to E-80.

South to Ivailovgrad a municipal road ring connects secondary municipal centers Svirachi, Mandritsa, Meden Buk and Pelevun. The road has bad sections but its repair is a priority to the municipality administration.

2.3 Existing cycling trails along the ICT

The velo association Bikearea and Green School Village have marked a bike route with the following itinerary: Ivailovgrad – Meden buk – Pelevun –Liutitsa fortress – Ivailovgrad. The part from Meden buk is

not yet asphalted and it might be difficult to cross Byala River in the spring. The shortcut through Lyutitsa is for mountain bikes only.

SVILENGRAD Municipality

Svilengrad municipality is located in Haskovo District. It borders Greece and Turkey to the east and south and Luibimets and Topolovgrad to the west and north. The population of the municipality is 24 550 out of which 18 115 (2011 census) living in the town of Svilengrad. The relief to the north-east (Sakar Mountain) and south-west (Rhodope Mountains) is hilly. River Maritsa valley runs through the center leaving no obstacle to the Mediterranean influence, thus summer is hot and dry while winter is mild and abounding in water. The terrain is of variable structure and altitude varies from 70 to 703 m. Maritsa River is passing next to the town.

1 Description of Iron Curtain Trail tourism potential in Svilengrad Municipality

1.1. Socio-political and economic situation

The municipality is next to the national border and away from the main centres but is on an important main transport corridor connecting Europe with the Middle East. This is both bad and good for its development. Nevertheless, a significant factor is the constant depopulation and unemployment.

Main economic sectors are intensified agriculture (crops, tobacco, vine, vegetables, fruits, and stock), textile, food, tobacco and beverage industry as well as automobile services. Trade is important for the municipality as well as restaurants and hotelier businesses. The tourist traffic is mainly transit and still is an important activity. Future plans include coordination of tourism development through other resources of cultural and natural interest in the municipality. A business centre operates as well as two youth organizations and two biking clubs that coordinate interested parties.

1.2. Public Facilities

The main roads are in good condition to the south where E-80 passes. Its international importance and expensive servicing does not allow equal conditions for the roads to the north. The condition of Border Point Kapitan Andreevo is critical. All villages are electrified and have water supply but the existing infrastructure needs general repair. There is mobile telephone connection with some exclusion in close to the border villages to the north. The landline coverage is good. Internet connection exists but digitalisation of landline is needed for a better quality.

1.3 Service providers

Tourist services are being provided for the needs of international traffic on the road as well as in town. There are 24 hotels and guesthouses in Svilengrad and 32 dining and fast food restaurants of variable categories. The town is big and postal, healthcare and banking services are available. One bike-shop in town sells and repairs bikes. There is also a repair centre at the town stadium with cycle-racing track.

1.4 Attraction sites - natural, cultural and historical heritage

- Mezek Thracian tomb is located almost in the border area close to Mezek village. Functioning until IV-III c. BC there have been at least 4 funerals.
- Mustafa Pasha Old Stone Bridge on Maritsa River is built in 1529 with 20 arches, the longest of 18 m.
- The fortress in Mezek is built in IX and XII c. AC and functioned until XIV during the Second Bulgarian State
- Bukelion fortress in Matochina is dated IV c. AC and served to Romans and Bulgarians. Two emperors of Rome and Latin Empire have been captured here by Goths and Bulgarians.

- The Old Rock Church of Matochina Village was functioning until 1936. It is 14 m long, 4 m wide and 3 m high.
- The Old Rock Church of Michalich Village.
- The municipality falls under “Sakar” Natura 2000 site under the Birds Directive, protecting more than 100 bird species of conservation importance, including the globally threatened Imperial Eagle. Two other Natura 2000 sites under the Habitats Directive – “Sakar” and “Maritza River”, parts of which are in Svilengrad Municipality, protect forests, caves, and riverside habitats and a large number of bats and forest mammals.

1.5 Remains of the ICT reachable by bike

- The Bulgarian-Turkish border facilities are not yet disassembled, because it is external frontier of the European Union. Some roads to the north after the village of Pashovo cross three times the fence of the security area. One can see the portals and the watchtowers on his way.

2 Public transport integration

2.1 Transport modes to the cycle route/destination

The access to the municipality is easy both by automobile and railway transport. The main town of Svilengrad lies next to the international road E-80 from Europe to the Middle East. Istanbul is only 250 km away and Edirne – 50 km. The closest airport is Bourgas. Two border points serve the transit traffic. One is border point is Kapitan Andreevo to Turkey that services the heavy traffic with Asia. Another is Kapitan Petko Voivoda that connects to Greece and is of little traffic.

There are regular bus and train connections to Khaskovo, Bourgas and Sofia.

2.2 Roads Infrastructure

The municipality town is connected with Liubimets and Kapitan Andreevo through highway A3, paralleled by Rail and primary road I-8 that is in good condition. In 2011 a new road from I-8 to Kapitan Petko Voivoda has been finished. To the North Svilengrad is connected by roads II-76 and II-55 to Veliko Tarnovo and Bourgas. The road Svilengrad – Raikova mogila – Shtit is in bad condition, but enters in the secure border area and can be used by touring bikes.

2.3 Existing cycling trails along the ICT

The road Svilengrad – Kapitan Petko Voivoda – Petrota – Pendalofos – Kyprinos – Slaveevo – Ivailovgrad is very suitable for biking (68 km). It is one of the routes that is part of the Svilengrad’s annual cycling marathon.

H.Bourgas District

H.I. Description of physical ICT backbone route in Bourgas District

The backbone of the route in Bourgas District consists of:

- part of the daily section Kırklareli (TK) - Malko Tarnovo
- the daily section Malko Tarnovo – Kosti
- the daily section Kosti – Rezovo

1. Border crossing point Dereköy/ Malko Tarnovo - Malko Tarnovo (8 km)
2. Malko Tarnovo - Mavrova niva locality – Slivarovo - Odereto locality – Kosti (42 km)
3. Kosti – Balgari – non-asphalted road along the border of Nature Park Strandzha – Brodilovo – non-asphalted road along the right bank of Veleka river - Sinemorets – Rezovo (50 km)

1. Roads

The peripheral geographical location of both of the concerned municipalities of Malko Tarnovo and Tzarevo in the most south east part of the country, as well as the long period of strict border control which has affected the development of the municipalities especially in their most southern parts have placed an imprint on the type and the quality of the road infrastructure in the region. All of the settlements are connected with well developed asphalt road network. Nevertheless bigger parts of the roads, especially in the inner part of Strandja Mountain as well as the most southern parts of both municipalities are characterized with narrow roads with no proper road shoulders, markings and poor state of the surface. Some parts of the route such as the case with the village of Slivarovo include the utilization of non-asphalted road covered by gravel, which may be passable under normal weather conditions even with a heavy loaded bike, which might not be the case when the weather conditions are not favorable for the travelers. Bigger part of the route section is in the municipality of Malko Tarnovo and goes through either high traffic asphalt public roads which need improvement or non asphalted low traffic roads – the total length of both roads in poor state amounting to 35 km, from the overall section of 45 km. The situation in the municipality of Tzarevo is similar 24 km out of the total route length of 50 km consist of asphalt or non asphalt roads which needs improvement of their quality. When planning the route the most accessible roads were utilized taking into account the factors of having low traffic and passing through settlements that provide both accommodation and provision of basic goods and civic services, despite of it the local conditions and peculiarities of the road infrastructure determine the quality of the road infrastructure as just appropriate according to the EFC criteria.

2. Services

Despite the poor state of the road infrastructure provision of tourism related services in the settlements from both municipalities is well developed, the closeness and the attractiveness of the Black sea as well as the Stranja mountain, Nature park Stranja and the constant efforts of the park directorate in direction of sustainable development of the local communities being the main factors that play positive role for this. There are various possibilities and types of accommodation facilities – from rooms to let and guest houses to family hotels and hotels spread all over the settlements of both municipalities. Similar is the situation

with dining places and cafes. All of the settlements (excluding the village of Slivarovo) have easy access to stores serving basic goods. The bigger settlements provide also access to bank and internet services. Nevertheless provision of bike spare parts and repair services are not so well developed in the region and the provision of services is not specially developed for satisfying the needs of the cycling tourists, due to this the quality of provision of services in this route section may be assessed as just appropriate.

3. Attractiveness

This route section might be of particular interest for its potential visitors due to several factors that determine the attractive power of the region – first of all the possibility for easy access to numerous remaining of the Cold war that can be visited – fence installations and fence portals, watch towers and piquets are several of the objects that can be visited in the former strictly guarded border zone. Despite the fact that no special care is provided for the Cold war remaining they are still in very good condition. One of the areas that has numerous Cold war points is the village of Slivarovo. The 11 km road to the village is not asphalted, but still acceptable for biking. Due to its high attractive power the future improvement and development of this route section is of particular interest and has to be brought forward in plans for development of the region. This route section is also chosen in a way that allows maximal exposure of the Cold war remaining and is also one of the sections that allows biking in immediate proximity to the former fence installations. The high attractiveness of the region is also due to the proximity of Black sea and the natural and cultural heritage of Strandja Mountain. The fact that the territories of the municipalities fall in the coverage of Nature Park Strandja combined with the efforts of the Park Directorate for development of alternative forms of tourism as a mean for sustainable development of the local communities additionally increases the attractiveness of the region. Due to this the attractiveness of this route section could be determined as excellent.

Cultural sites: Numerous Thracian sanctuaries spread in the region. Due to the rich and well preserved cultural heritage of the region most of the villages have unique atmosphere and well preserved architecture typical for the region – can be seen in buildings in the city of Malko Tarnovo, Balgari, Kostinovo as well as in the village of Brashlyan – although it is not part of the envisaged route development of a branch route to the village might be a further option for development of this route section. Most of the villages host numerous festivals related with the cultural traditions typical only for the region of Strandja – the firedancing celebrations being one of the most unique and attractive cultural events in the region. The annual Festival of the periwinkle organized and held by the directorate of Nature Park Strandja that happens simultaneously in several settlements part of the park attracts more and more visitors each year and also stimulates the sustainable development through provision of support of production of local products having the label of the registered regional brand of Strandja.

Natural sites: Beside the Nature Park Strandja and the adjoining reserves, protected landscapes and natural monuments Strandja Mountain is also part of the Natura 2000 network – two Natura 2000 sites – according to the Bird and the Habitat directives encompass the lands of most of the municipal settlements. At the same time the well preserved sea coast also has strong attractive power for the potential visitors of the region.

4. Promotion of the section

The promotion of the region is provided through several tools – the website of Nature park Strandja has large and continuously updated data base for the protected territories, the history and culture, tourism possibilities and events on the territory of the Park which coincides with the territories of the two municipalities at stake. Furthermore the web sites of the municipalities of Malko Tarnovo and Tzarevo also provide sufficient information regarding tourism services, accommodation, planned touristic routes etc. Beside this there is well functioning tourist information center located in the city of Malko Tarnovo where

beside detailed touristic information numerous leaflets and other printed materials with information for the region can be obtained. The city of Tzarevo also hosts tourist information center. The visitor center of Nature Park Strandja located in the city of Malko Tarnovo also provides information and thus facilitates the promotion of the region. It also gives possibilities for renting of bikes. Despite the fact that all the available materials are designed for the common tourist and visitor and are not targeted specifically to the cycling tourists neither to the cycling in the specific route section the available information for the region is sufficient to cover the basic needs of the cyclists in the area and serves well the needs of promotion of the region. Due to this the assessment according to ECF criteria is just appropriate - despite that there are numerous tools for promotion of the region available they are not complete from the point of view as promotion of the region as cycling destination and from the point of view of promotion of the EV13.

5. Organization

The main organization that may serve as partner in the process of development and implementation of the ICT route section in Strandja is the directorate of the Nature park. The organization is well known among the locals and plays important role in the process of sustainable development of the region. Development of the route coincides with the ambitions of proposing possibilities for development of alternative forms of tourism that are one of the spheres of work of the park directorate. Nevertheless the issue with the capacity and funding of such initiative is one of the factors that has to be overcome in order to make the implementation and the maintenance of the route possible. Other potential partners are the municipalities of Malko Tarnovo and Tzarevo. Due to the fact that none of the listed institutions have the full potential for implementation the assessment of the organization according to the ECF criteria is just appropriate.

H.II. Feasibility analysis of conditions in Bourgas District

MALKO TARNOVO Municipality

The municipality of Malko Tarnovo is located in the southeast part of the district of Bourgas. It borders with the municipality of Tzarevo to the east, and the municipalities of Primorsko, Sozopol and Sredetz to the north and northwest. To the west Malko Tarnovo borders with the municipality of Sredetz and to the south with Turkey. There is a cross border point at Malko Tarnovo giving possibility for entering Turkey. The relief of the municipality is hilly and low-mountainous - bigger part of the municipal territory coincides with the territory of Strandja Mountain. Despite the low latitude the relief of the municipality is diverse, dynamic and attractive for visitors and tourists. The area covered by the municipality is 798 sq. km. The whole territory of the municipality is included in the boundaries of Nature Park Strandja.

1.Description of Iron Curtain Trail tourism potential in Malko Tarnovo Municipality

1.1. Socio-political and economic situation

According to the National census of 2011 the number of people living in the municipality is 3793 from which 2447 live in the city of Malko Tarnovo - the administrative center of the municipality and 1346 live in the 12 villages located on the territory of the municipality. The city of Malko Tarnovo is located 76 km away from the district administrative center – the city of Bourgas, which is an important transport hub in the region. The municipal population is focused mainly in the city of Malko Tarnovo and the villages of Gramatikovo and Zvezdetz. Bigger part of the population living in the smaller settlements consisting of elders, which combined with the high negative natural and mechanical growth determines the constant trend of depopulation of the municipal settlements. This process is further intensified by the increasing migration process of people moving to the district administrative center of Bourgas.

Due to the strict border control implied in the region until 1990 the municipality remained underdeveloped in economic terms. In the past the main means of livelihood for the local population have

been the mining and the agriculture. Nevertheless the closing of the Bourgas copper mines combined with other factors such as closing of the bigger industry factories in the region led to demographic collapse and rapid increase of unemployment in the region. At present the industry branches that determine the economic structure of the region are: light industry, agriculture, forestry, trading and provision of civic services. Despite the fact that the timber procession and furniture building industries have good economic potential, both of them are not well developed. After the successful finalization of the process of restoration of the land ownership, it turned out that bigger parts of the private workable lands in the municipality have sizes smaller than 1 decare. This factor impedes the successful implementation of mechanical agricultural practices and further impedes the possibility of economic growth based on the development of agriculture in the region. Nevertheless the territory of the municipality of Malko Tarnovo combines unique cultural, historical and natural heritage which determines one of the possible alternatives for the socio-economic development of the region - tourism development. Programs for utilization of the tourism potential of the region and development of sustainable means of the livelihood of local people have been developed. This direction of development coincides with the ideas related to the development of the ICT route. One of the main difficulties met in the process of tourism development is the inadequate and insufficient base for provision of tourism related services.

1.2. Public facilities

All of the settlements are connected to the national power grid and are also water supplied. There is phone landline coverage and all the mobile operators have coverage in the area. The city of Malko Tarnovo provides postal and bank services as well as internet access. The health care in the municipality is provided by a hospital and emergency center located in the city of Malko Tarnovo and a general practitioner in the village of Gramatikovo. Nevertheless the provision of the services is not sufficient to cover the whole territory of the municipality. Often people who need medical treatment are hospitalized in medical institutions in the city of Bourgas.

1.3. Tourism-related services and facilities

There are several important factors that determine the level of development and provision of tourism and the related services in the municipality of Malko Tarnovo – the location in the proximity of Black sea, the natural resources of the municipality – Stranja Mountain as well as the fact that the whole municipal territory is part of Nature park Stranja, and the cultural heritage – the Thracian archeological sites and the fire dancing traditions typical for the region. This combined with the efforts of the municipality and the Directorate of the Nature Park leads to good provision of the main tourism related services – provision of accommodation and places for provision of food. Most of the certified places for accommodation are located in Malko Tarnovo, Gramatikovo and Brashlian (which is not part of the foreseen ICT route, but has very big touristic potential and might be suitable for development of a branch route). The accommodation possibilities vary from guest rooms and guest houses to villas, and holiday homes. Cafes and restaurants can be found in Malko Tarnovo and Gramatikovo. Slivarlovo also provides possibilities for accommodation. All settlements that are included in the route have shops where basic goods can be found. Malko Tarnovo provides bigger diversity of available goods due to its position of administrative center of the municipality. Due to the specific location of Slivarovo basic goods and foods are provided, but in order to be obtained the deputy mayor of the village has to be approached. Regarding bike repair services and spare parts, there are no specialized shops. There is Tourist information center in Malko Tarnovo which provides information regarding tourist destinations, transportation modes to and from the municipality, informational brochures, tours and places for accommodation available on the territory of the municipality.

1.4. Attraction sites - natural, cultural and historical heritage

- Cultural and historical heritage: the area of Mishkova Niva located 3 km away from Malko Tarnovo – ancient trhacian tomb and sanctuary; Tracian rock sanctuary related with the Solar cults located on the land of the village of Slivarovo as well as similar sanctuary located 10 km away from Malko Tarnovo in the direction of the city of Tzarevo. Typical house architecture can be noticed in the city of Malko Tarnovo, Brashlian and Gramatikovo, Historical museum in Malko Tarnovo
- Natural landscapes: Reserve Vitanovo – located on the land of the city of Malko Tarnovo and Brashlian – proclaimed for the protection of forests of beech and durmast with average age between 80 and 110 years. Reserve Sredoka – located on the land of Malko Tarnovo and Stoilovo – proclaimed for the protection of forests typical for Stranja mountain, Bioshpere reserve Uzunbujak – located on the land of Slivarovo – proclaimed for the protection of unique beech, durmast and oak forests with strong presence of the Stranja periwinkle which is also the symbol of Nature park Stranja, Protected landscape – Rudinovo in the vicinity of the village of Slivarovo – proclaimed for the protection of a deposit of the Stranja blueberry, Protected landscape Dokusak – located in the vicinity of Malko Tarnovo – proclaimed for the protection of the most compact deposits of Sideritis syriaca.
- Natura 2000 sites: According to the Bird Directive – Stranja – located on the land of Malko Tarnovo and Slivarovo from the settlements being part of the ICT route. (otherwise encompassing all villages of the Malko Tarnovo municipality) According to the Habitat Directive – Stranja – located on the lands of Malko Tarnovo and Slivarovo

1.5. Remains of the ICT reachable by bike

Remainings of the border fence with some gates can still be seen on the route between Slivarovo village and Odereto locality. Near the almost abandoned Slivarovo village a former piquet and a watch tower can be observed.

2. Public transport integration

2.1. Transport modes to the cycle route/destination

The transportation modes available in the municipality include only the utilization of public busses and private cars. The only possible link via public transport is the daily operating bus line between Malko Tarnovo and Bourgas.

2.2. Travel by Railways

There is no railway system on the territory of the municipality. The closest operating train station from where a link with public busses to Malko Tarnovo can be made is located in Bourgas.

2.3. Travel by Long Distance Coaches

There are no direct long distance coaches travelling to and from Malko Tarnovo. The possibility is to take a coach to Bourgas and from there to reach Malko Tarnovo.

2.4. Roads Infrastructure

The transport infrastructure in the municipality is well developed. The international road II – 99 linking Duran Kulak with Malko Tarnovo and also providing a link of the European countries with the near East goes through the municipality. In the recent years this road has been recognized as suitable for touristic needs – mainly providing possibilities for travelling of tourists from Sozopol to Malko Tarnovo in the summer season. All settlements are linked with asphalted roads except a 10 km stretch of road linking the village of Slivarovo with the transport network of the municipality. This road has no pavement and might be difficult for bike use with bad weather conditions. Despite of this the state of the asphalt roads is poor, the

surface needs improvement and repair works. The roads are characterized with low traffic, which despite the low quality of the transport networks make it suitable for bicycling.

TZAREVO Municipality

The municipality of Tzarevo is located in the most southeast part of the Bourgas District. The municipality borders to the east with Black sea, to the south with Turkey and to the north and west with the neighboring municipalities of Primorsko and Malko Tarnovo. The total territory of the municipality is 513,32 sq.km. The length of the beach stripes located on the territory of the municipality is 9 184 m. The outlet on the sea gives possibilities for for development of port services, tourism, fishery and trade. The municipality is located 70 km away from Bourgas and has easy access to the district center via an international road E-87. The municipality also has two ports located in the cities of Tzarevo and Ahtopol. The geographical location of the municipality – the sea outlet and Strandja Mountain are among the most important characteristics for attraction of visitors and development of tourism in the region.

1.Description of Iron Curtain Trail tourism potential in Tzarevo Municipality

1.1. Socio-political and economic situation

According to the National census of 2011 the number of people living in the municipality is 9 291 from which 7 359 living in the city of Ahtopol and the city of Tzarevo, which is also the administrative center of the municipality and 1932 living in the 112 villages located on the territory of the municipality. The demographic structure is similar to the neighbouring municipality of Malko Tarnovo – most of the villages have population consisting of elders, while the two cities – Ahtopol and Tzarevo have population with more diversified age structure. Considering the demographic data it can be concluded that the municipality of Tzarevo has low population density, with aggravated age structure and aging population in smaller settlements while the two cities have higher concentration of inhabitants and more diversified age structure. The municipality manages to keep a relatively stable number of the population varying between 9 000 to 10 000 during the last decades. Despite of this the low number of inhabitants who are in able to work age combined with the relatively high percent of unemployment among youths at the age of 20 – 24 years determines problems related with the labor market in the municipality.

The economic development of the municipality is largely based on the tourism industry – in relation with development of sea-based tourism and the cultural and natural heritage of Strandja Mountain as well as the attractive power of Nature Park Strandja. During the last years, development of tourism branches related with cultural heritage, festivals, eco tourism, aqua tourism and other tourism branches have become more and more popular and have positive effects on the municipal economic development. Beside this other industry branches that provide employment for the inhabitants of the municipality are light industry, building activities, forestry and agriculture, transport and telecommunications and provision of civic services.

The light industry used to play important role in the past, but during the last decades its role is presented through fish caning fabrics in the city of Tzarevo. There is certain trend of the spatial distribution of the industries related with provision of the means of livelihood for the locals – tourism and industry branches being leading for the city of Tzarevo and the city of Ahtopol together with the smaller settlements located at the sea coast, while the villages located inland rely more on agricultural and forestry being of particular importance for the village of Kosti and to a lesser extend for the city of Tzarevo. Despite of this during the last years tourism development and the related tourism products and services based on cultural and natural tourism and festival tourism have been successfully developed in the inland settlements as well – the village of Balgari, Kosti and Brodilovo being few of the examples for this.

1.2. Public facilities

Provision of the health care in the municipality is secured through small multiprofile hospital and general practitioners based in the city of Tzarevo and Ahtopol. All of the settlements are connected to the power grid and are water supplied. Due to the tourism development most of the settlements located at the sea coast provide all kind of civic services including banking services and internet access. There is landline coverage as well as full mobile coverage by all mobile operators.

1.3. Tourism-related services and facilities

All of the settlements that are included in the ICT route have various places providing accommodation services – varying from different size and category hotels – located mainly in the coastal settlements – Sinemoretz and Rezovo to villas, guest houses and guest rooms – available in Kosti, Balgari, Brodilovo as well as in Sinemoretz and Rezovo. All of the settlements provide various dining places and cafes. A certain seasonal trend of the functioning of these facilities can be observed – summer being the more active period, while during the winter not all of the places are operating. Nevertheless the variety and numerousness of such places is enough to provide the necessary services for the visitors of the area. All settlements have food stores as well as stores for basic goods. Nevertheless Tzarevo and Ahtopol are the places where more specific goods and services such as spare bike parts and bike repair may be found.

1.4. Attraction sites - natural, cultural and historical heritage

- Cultural and historical heritage: Gradishteto fortress located 4 km north from the village of Balgari, dated back to the sixth century AD. Traditional festivals: Kukerovden and Palikosh – celebrated 7 weeks before Easter in the villages of Brodilovo and Kosti, the Festival of the periwinkle – during May in various villages located on the territory of the Nature park, Holidays of literature and art for youth – in the city of Tzarevo – the last week of May, Pilgrimage of the five firedancing Stranja villages to a the Big Holy spring – the last week of May before the 3rd of June – starting points – the villages of Balgari, Kosti, Kondolovo, Slivarovo and Gramatikovo, Firedancing festivities – tradition presented by ritual dancing on embers, unique and performed only in Strandja- celebrated on the 3 of June in the village Balgari, the Week of the sea – the first week of August in the city of Tzarevo, Festival of the manna honey – the first ten days in the city of Tzarevo.
- Natural landscapes: Tisovitza reserve – located in the vicinity of the village of Balgari, proclaimed for the protection of the only natural habitat of *Taxus baccata* in Strandja, Protected landscape – the outfall of Veleka river – located in the vicinity of the village of Sinemoretz and the village of Brodilovo – proclaimed for the protection of unique landscape and specific fauna and flora species, Protected landscape Silistar- located in the vicinity of the village of Rezovo – proclaimed for the protection of unique coastal landscape and specific flora and fauna species, Protected landscape Kalkata – located in the vicinity of the village of Kosti, proclaimed for the protection of a nesting place of a couple of owls, Protected landscape Marina reka, located in the vicinity of the village of Kosti – proclaimed for the protection of forest communities including oak, beech, periwinkle, durmast, Protected landscape Strandja periwinkle – located in the vicinity of the village of Slivarovo.
- Natura 2000 sites: According to the Bird Directive – Strandja – located on the lands of Tzarevo, Sinemoretz, Rezovo, Kosti, Balgari, According to the Habitat Directive – Bosna – located on the lands of Tzarevo, Brodilovo, Strandja – located on the lands of Tzarevo, Sinemoretz, Rezovo, Kosti, Balgari

2. Public transport integration

2.1. Transport modes to the cycle route/destination

The available transportation modes on the territory of the municipality include the utilization of public buses which operate on the lines between Bourgas and Tzarevo and Bourgas and Ahtopol. There is no railway and the closest train station is located in Bourgas. Bourgas hosts also the closest airport. Both Tzarevo and Ahtopol have ports, but for the moment no public transport services are available through these facilities. Nevertheless utilization of sea transport may be of future potential for reaching the municipality.

2.2. Travel by Railways

The closest railway station is located in the city of Bourgas. There is no railway system functioning on the territory of the municipality.

2.3. Travel by Long Distance Coaches

There is direct line of a long distance coach linking Tzarevo with Sofia. Otherwise a possible way of reaching Tzarevo is through Bourgas. There are no direct lines from Tzarevo to any of the settlements from the municipality of Malko Tarnovo.

2.4. Roads Infrastructure

The international route E – 87 going to the border with Turkey goes through the municipality.

Although plans for development of cross border point with Turkey at the village with Rezovo, such still does not exist. Due to this the only possible way enter Turkey is via the municipality of Malko Tarnovo and the adjacent cross border point. The total length of the road infrastructure in the municipality of Tzarevo is 105 km. Due to the peripheral geographical location of the municipality and the period of strict border regime, the road infrastructure consists of mainly asphalt roads, with relatively small width – such is the case with the roads between Varvara and Ahtopol and Ahtopol, Sinemoretz and Resovo and the roads in the inner part of Strandja – linking Balgari, Kostinovo and Brodilovo with the rest of the municipal settlement system. Although some improvements on parts of the road have been made and some sections are covered with wider good quality asphalt the overall quality of the road infrastructure is characterized with uneven asphalt coverage and narrow roads. There are no proper road shoulders. Nevertheless the traffic, especially in the inner parts of the mountain is relatively low, which to a certain extent facilitate the biking in the area.

I. Environmental impacts

One of the main features of the ICT is the pristine nature, rich biodiversity and the high number of protected areas along its way. The restricted border regime during the Iron Curtain age created conditions for the preservation of unspoiled natural habitats and richness of species. For this reason it is particularly important to study carefully the environmental conditions and possible environmental impacts of the ICT development.

1. ICT and protected areas and Natura 2000 sites

In this study only protected territories, which the ICT is crossing or is passing by at most 10 km, are considered. There are 65 such territories along the Bulgarian part of the ICT – nature parks, habitats, natural monuments, nature reserves. In some cases territories have been listed though being relatively far from the route. The reason for that is the consideration that the access to some territories is sometimes marked with approved signs, which may lead tourists to turn aside from the trail and experience the local attractions. The risks from uncontrolled camping, unconscious use of fire-places and even unintentional damages to protected species must be taken into account and properly communicated with the expected groups of tourists. For some sensitive territories these kinds of activities are strictly prohibited, which is stated in their protection regimes. It has to be assured by the local tourism developers that the tourists will be clearly informed for their responsibilities when entering into sensible environments and the risks will be minimized. It is accepted in general that a cycling trail could not affect NATURA 2000 sites and other protected areas in a significant way, although some concerns exist (and are listed below in “*ICT and environmental risks*”). Careful attention should be paid to the specific recommendations for the protection regimes of each of the crossed Natura 2000 sites. Such regimes might include forbidden or limited opportunities for building of roads and even eco-paths and tourist trails at given places, landscape changes or disturbance of high-speed vehicles during the breeding season for bird species.

It must be clear that the IC trail proposed so far, including in the present study is preferably using existing roads and paths and does not recommend building of unnecessary infrastructure.

If a NATURA 2000 site or a protected site should be reached or crossed by the ICT it is recommended that the access be consulted with the respective administrative body (according to the legislation and practices in each country along the ICT). It should be carefully considered that sensitive territories might suffer from human impact and results as disturbance of animal populations, habitat loss, etc. might occur. Access to these territories should be consulted with the responsible administration of the territory which should be deeply involved in the process of route design. This would guarantee a sustainable and environment-friendly route. The development of cycling tourism could be a contribution to the protection of Natura 2000 and other protected areas, e.g. by awareness-raising both of tourists and of local communities, and also by creation of economic benefits for the regions.

2. ICT and the Greenbelt

The European Green Belt is an initiative of the IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature). The initiative aims at creation of a backbone along an ecological network that runs from the Barents to the Black Sea, covering some very important habitats for biodiversity and almost all biogeographical regions in Europe. It connects National Parks, Nature Parks, Biosphere Reserves and transboundary protected areas. Other non-protected areas along or across borders are also included. The initiative supports sustainable regional development initiatives based on nature conservation of local and global scale. The Green Belt consists mainly of areas of the former Iron Curtain which had become inviolable wildlife territories due to frontier guardianship to keep people out of these places. The Iron Curtain Trail idea rests on the concepts of

Greenways - development of cycling and hiking long-distance routes that connect places and people, with care to the environment and exposing cultural, historical and natural heritage. The Green Belt is thus meant to be presented to the wide public, to be opened for nature-friendly access to these places - by bicycles through the Iron Curtain Trail.

3. ICT and environmental risks

It should be pointed out that some concerns exist about introducing bikes in sensitive environments. Cycling could “speed up” the traffic in otherwise quiet sites and even settlements, which is highly unacceptable in terms of nature conservation in specific habitats. A careful approach should be implemented when planning the access of cyclists and hikers to important protected areas of any kind. This includes involvement of experts from responsible administration bodies – nature park directorates, protected site management agencies, etc.; environmental NGOs, local public authorities. Consultation should be made with a range of experts in a way to guarantee the avoidance of any disturbance of populations of species, loss of habitats, pollution, and other possible negative impacts that cyclists and hikers flow might cause in the territories.

Cycling tourism and its sustainability have already been questioned and investigated in several studies. According to the study “*The European cycle route network EuroVelo. Challenges and opportunities for sustainable tourism*”, requested by the EP’s Committee on Transport and Tourism, 2009, some serious impacts should be considered when cycling is to be implemented in sensible territories. Such direct effects could be:

- deterioration of soil and vegetation;
- fauna disturbance;
- increased crowding and traffic.

There are also some indirect impacts, mainly caused by access transport to the cycle routes and accommodation:

- energy use,
- air quality problems and greenhouse gas emissions,
- water pollution,
- landscape deterioration
- increased noise.

The tourism sector contributes to the climate change mainly in terms of the impact of transport between home and destination. Compared to other activities that tourists prefer to practice in close contact with nature like walking, hiking, motor-bike and ATV riding, cycling has the minimum impact on soil erosion, soil and vegetation trampling & rutting, and also on fauna disturbance. It has been found that impacts are generally strong in small habitats, but may be negligible in large habitats or in habitats with strong connection to other alternative habitats. The planned tracks should avoid the daily walking routes of deer and bears. Fauna could be severely disturbed during the breeding season for birds, due to leaving their nests. Other impacts out of the breeding season could be less food intake, increased flying time and increased stress. The latter impacts are closely dependent on the number of tourists and particularly on the flow of cyclists in the case with ICT routes. The kind of recreation and the peculiarity of the visitors’ behavior determine the overall impacts. These effects also depend on how the given environmental characteristics (type of soil, vegetation, climate) determine the vulnerability to recreational use. Therefore it is important to consider all local circumstances when planning a new cycle route. A general statement by Taylor et al., 2003 – p.962 is: “If management objectives include minimizing disturbance to wildlife habitat, new trails should follow existing edges and avoid water and forage resources, wildlife travel corridors, and escape terrain”. At the same time it is clear that apart from the mainstream tourism, alternative tourism activities like cycling, have rather negligible impacts compared to other sectors like industry, agriculture, etc.

Management mitigation measures would be to concentrate recreational pressure on as small an area as possible. An instrument for this could be the development of cycling routes, specifically the concept of Euro Velo, that generally makes use of existing trails and routes, thus just helping to increase the recreational (and economic) value of places that have been already disturbed (Mourek 2006). It should be clear for the future developers that the core principle of the Europe network development and ICT development in particular, emphasize on reuse of old routes and existing roads. Construction of new road infrastructure is to be avoided with the exception of cases where roads should be renovated, safeguarded or a safer trespassing is aimed. In such cases where protected areas or Natura 2000 sites are involved, the needed environmental assessment and appropriate assessment procedures should be respected in order to study in detail possible impacts on the environment and avoid deterioration.

The environment surrounding the chosen cycling routes determines the tourism or transportation success of the route. Any pollution, unfriendly industrial landscapes, noise and traffic make uncomfortable conditions for cyclists, who would thus seek other alternative routes. Although in general the ICT passes through natural and semi-natural areas, in some areas where mining and adjacent industrial production still exist, this may affect the attractiveness of the trail. Another, though controversial, possibility along the ICT through the Balkan Mountains and borders is the possibility of close encounters with wild animals and especially with brown bears. The population of the brown bear (*Ursus arctos*) is estimated for 500-1000 individuals on the territory of Bulgaria. The numbers are still not accepted as accurate by the scientists as the taxation of this species is not complete. However in the recent years close encounters with brown bears have risen significantly as well as damages to livestock and injuries to people. The authorities in Bulgaria have taken measures to limit the possibilities for damages from bears, but there are still attempts of animals to enter settlements in search for food.

4. Is cycling along ICT a sustainable practice contributing to environmental conservation

Some of the special features of cycling tourism, which makes it a sustainable practice in the general case are discussed using existing guidelines provided by Smalinskis (2008, p.78). Here is a short analysis of these features in relation to the ICT:

- Most frequently cyclists bike along the general roads or on the roads existing in nature already, trails used by people and relatively rarely – in natural biotopes, attractive relief forms, hillsides etc. Due to the existing possibilities for the ICT and the requirements for long distance cycling, it is mostly expected that cyclists will use already existing roads convenient for cycling.
- The speed of the cyclists (10 – 20 km/h) *does not give them a chance* to pay attention to single details (single plant, animal species, micro biotopes etc.), thereby they see and visit mostly „larger objects” – landscapes, various architectonic forms, single nature monuments or attractions already listed in the guided tours, such as in the case with the ICT – remains of the IC of different kind, monuments, former military buildings, border facilities. This will limit the pressure on biodiversity.
- any of the sightseeing objects along the ICT will be related to culture and history. It is a positive aspect, because they turn away the load from natural territories and sites.
- Cycling does not cause pollution and the negative impact on the environment is smaller, as compared to the motor transport, which is a very important factor influencing the environment in some nature protected territories.
- Cycling tourists stay longer in the territory (district, region, state) as compared to car tourists, which is a very important economic aspect of the tourism. It thus has greater benefits for local entrepreneurs, especially when opportunities for the tourists to use local services exist.
- A possible negative aspect within the context of nature protection in sensitive habitats could be that cyclists can reach places, which are not accessible when one uses public transport or a private car.

The main reason for introduction of this long route along the Iron Curtain could be found in the natural desire of people and nations, and as well of politicians, to revitalize the former death strip and give opportunities for local people in these areas to gain the long-denied economic and social development. At the same time a careful approach for gradual development is needed in a way not to harm the naturally-preserved areas. It can be argued that the cycling route can have these desired effects in the long term.

J. Social impact

As is the case with some specific environmental impacts caused by cycling, it could also have the effect of “speeding up” of traffic and tourists flow through remote border regions. The local communities along the borders have still not developed tourism initiatives in a way to sustain the local economy. In general these remote settlements have simple lifestyles and the road access and facilities improvements are not priorities for the responsible regional authorities, which is due to the constant depopulation of the settlements in the recent years. These processes are seen on both sides of the borders of all the neighboring countries in the Southern part of the ICT. Any economic activity is well-accepted as the local people are eager to see a revitalization of the villages. They are hospitable keepers of traditional customs and sometimes of many stories for the past Cold War years. Some of these communities are used to the tourist flow of mountain hikers, as these areas, for example in the Bulgarian border regions, are situated in high mountains with traditions in hiking.

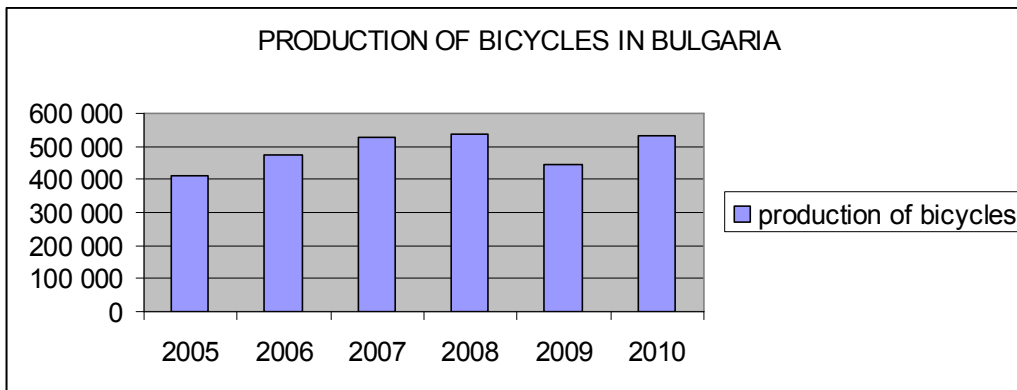
Having these conditions mentioned above, the ICT is considered a potential beneficial initiative in terms of improvement of the local economies and quality of life in the border regions. Yet some impacts should be expected, such as noise, increased traffic from tourists making one-day trips, etc. Except the expected cycling related businesses that might emerge, the cyclists flow, if significant, may influence also a shift in mobility patterns in some of the local communities.

An issue that needs to be considered is how the ICT would help for the better understanding of the intimate experiences of both groups – those living near the borders and those who were once restricted to access these regions. The regions along the ICT have gone through dramatic historical changes just in the past few decades and a gap is existing in the perception of these events for the older and the younger generations, and as well for people from different nations. These concerns have to be made by the local authorities and tourist experts for the careful interpretation of the inherited historical remains and the history itself.

K. Economic impact

1. Cycle market in Bulgaria

Bulgaria has long-standing traditions in the production of bicycles and has an established market position in Europe with a few strong brand names such as DRAG, CROSS and SPRINT. The country produces about 500,000 bicycles annually, but a large proportion of them, sometimes up to 90% is for export, which generated about €50 million revenue in 2010. (NSI; Radoslavova 2011).



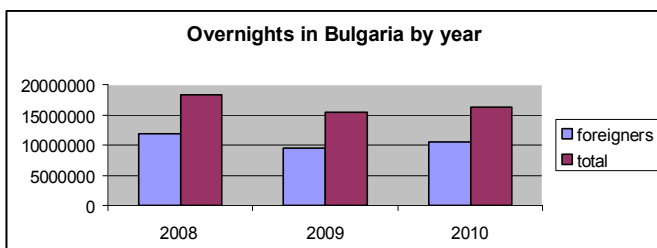
Source: Data for the chart have been drawn from the National Statistical Institute

There are no official statistics of cyclists, but according to estimates by industry leaders, about 120-130,000 people use bicycles in Bulgaria (Nikolov 2011). The internal market is slowly but gradually expanding, as shown by the gradual expansion of specialized cycle shops (currently more than 20 only in Sofia) (Radoslavova 2011).

According to industry experts, the Bulgarian users see bicycles more as a tool for recreation rather than transport (Nikolov 2011) although recently in the big cities cycling is expanding as a transport mode as well. This is in line with findings by the study of the European Parliament for countries with a marginal cycling share, where bicycles are mainly used for recreational purposes or in certain cities where provision for the cycle has been made. (EP 2009).

There are no official statistics on cycle tourism market in Bulgaria. As the cycle tourism market across Europe is predominantly domestic (EP 2009) and with the relatively low numbers of estimated bicycle users in Bulgaria, it can be argued that the overall market is also low. A review of tour operators offering cycle tours in Bulgaria indicates that the market is slowly expanding with about 20 big tour operators offering such products in the country currently, most of which are Bulgarian, but also German, Italian, Austrian, Canadian, etc. However, out of the 33 major cycle tour operators in the European Union, listed in the study by the European Parliament, only 2 offer trips in Bulgaria – the Bulgarian “Cycle Bulgaria” and the Austrian “Euro Bike” - which is an indication of the low level of development of the cycle tourism market. It should be noted, however, that the cycle tourism market is primarily about independent travel (EP 2009) and so the tour operators’ offers may not capture the overall picture.

According to experts’ estimates (EP 2009) Bulgaria has a low cycle tourism demand, approximately 0,5% of all holidays. The domestic tourism sector in Bulgaria is experiencing some decline with overall tourism expenses in 2010 of approximately €1 billion compared to €1,4 billion in 2008. The total number of overnights is relatively constant for the last 3 years, with about 16 million overnights generating about €350 million revenue from accommodation alone. It is interesting to note that more than 50% of the overnights are by foreigners.



Source: Data for the charts have been drawn from the National Statistical Institute

Applying the “0,5% of all holidays” approach, the European Parliament study (EP 2009) estimated cycle tourism demand for Bulgaria to 12,000,000 daytrips and 1,000,000 overnight trips annually, generating €200 million in daytrips and €50 million in overnight trips or €250 million in total. The revenue figure was based on an estimate by the study that a cycle tourist spends approximately €53 for an overnight stay trip and approximately €16 for a day cycling trip – average figures for Europe. According to the study cycle tourists spend roughly the same amount of money per day as other tourists. These figures need to be refined for Bulgaria both in terms of the volume of tourism and in terms of the revenue generated. Looking at the internal market alone, if we estimate that the cycle tourism accounts for 0,5% of all holidays, the annual revenue from it would have been only between €4,5 and €7 million for the last three years.

The main outbound markets of the European tourism sector are Germany and the UK (EP 2009) and they are expected to be the major group of international cycle tourists in Bulgaria as well. This is in line with the data from the National Statistical Institute, showing that tourists from Germany and UK are among the largest groups of mainstream foreign tourists in Bulgaria.

2. Demand for the ICT route and economic benefits for the local population

The study on EuroVelo network by the European Parliament (EP 2009) has developed a demand model for cycle tourism and has applied it to estimate the demand for the section of the ICT route passing through Bulgaria. The study shows that the ICT trail passing through Bulgaria is 993 km long. It is expected to attract 55,000 holiday trips and 223,000 day excursions annually. Overall it is expected to attract 588,000 trip days annually. Thus, the trail is expected to generate €20 million revenue from holiday trips and €4 million revenue from day excursions, or in total €24 million revenue annually. The study has found a correlation between the demand for a certain cycle route and the population density of the area (local tourist flow) as well as the accommodation facilities available. As the Southeast section of the ICT is passing predominantly through areas with low population density, as well as low density of accommodation facilities and tourism infrastructure, the demand for this section of the route can be estimated to be lower than other sections of the ICT, e.g. in Central Europe, and the revenues generated will also be lower.

An analysis of the data on accommodation in the districts through which the ICT is passing (Vidin, Montana, Sofia district, Pernik, Kyustendil, Blagoevgrad, Smolyan, Kardzhali, Haskovo and Yambol) shows that the number of overnights for the last three years is relatively steady and amounts to approximately 2 million annually. Compared to the data for the whole country, in the ICT districts, overnights by foreigners account for a much smaller percentage – approximately 35%. A positive trend is that the number of accommodation places and the number of beds are gradually increasing over the last three years, but it is still relatively low compared to other parts of the country. The average price for an overnight in the ICT districts for 2010 is €18, which is in line with the figure of the EP (2009) study, estimating that cycle tourists in Europe spend approximately €21 per night for accommodation.

ICT districts in Bulgaria (without Bourgas)	Accommodation places (number)	Beds (number)	Number of overnights		Income from overnights (Euro)	
			Total	Incl. foreigners	Total	Incl. foreigners
For 2010	876	46 577	1 927 803	717 003	35 978 583	14 762 541
For 2009	833	43 619	1 911 810	650 691	36 212 816	14 029 765
For 2008	716	42 822	2 182 903	774 870	40 605 133	16 763 309

Source: Data for the table have been drawn from the National Statistical Institute

One important aspect of cycle route development is the way in which direct spending in local economies can generate businesses and create or maintain jobs. The evidence from Europe indicates that cycle tourists bring major benefits to localities which currently do not enjoy mainstream tourism development. Spending by cycle tourists is similar to that of other visitors. The difference is that the spending is focused more in the area through which the route passes and, depending on nature of local supply chains, will circulate in these local economies for longer before leakages occur (EP 2009). According to the EP study (EP 2009) of the average €53, spent by a cycle tourist per day around 40% (€21) is spent on accommodation, 30% (€16) on food and drinks and another 30% (€16) on all other expenses like shopping (almost half this amount), local transport and activities. Day excursionists usually spend around 60 to 75% of their daily total on food and drinks. Although the daily amount for the ICT route is likely to be less, given the standard of living and prices in Bulgaria, almost all of the money a cycle tourist spends will be accumulated in the local economy for accommodation, food, shopping and local activities. Evidence from Danube Cycle Route in Serbia shows that the route has brought about an increase in the accommodation sector: 80 businesses were set up in 2008 alone. An increase in accommodation services can also be expected for the ICT route.

3. Readiness of the ICT route and investments needed

In order for the Southern section of the ICT route to become an integrated cycle tourism product, it is important to assess its readiness and need of investments relative to the requirements of cycle tourists across Europe.

According to the EP study (EP 2009)⁵, cycle tourists have very similar characteristics across all countries, with the key success factors in attracting cycle tourists being:

- Safe and continuous routes
- Pleasant countryside and cyclist friendly villages and cities en route
- Clear and reliable signage and interpretation

In terms of safe and continuous routes, the ICT trail is unevenly developed with some safer sections on quiet and good quality roads and some more problematic sections on busier or bad quality roads. Investments will be needed for road reconstruction and roads surface improvements to fulfill the requirements for safe cycling and comfort. In terms of pleasant countryside and cyclist friendly villages and cities en route, the ICT route can be said to generally answer to this requirement. The clear and reliable signage and interpretation of the ICT route are a top priority for investment as currently there is none dedicated to this thematic route.

Other factors fundamental to the tourist experience, are: quality accommodation and hospitality venues en route, service facilities and adequate information. Studies show that about 45% of cycle tourists use hotels for accommodation, about 40% use guesthouse/bed and breakfast type of accommodation and about 15% use camping (EP 2009). The quality of accommodation is variable along the ICT trail and needs improvement and investments in many sections of the route. The mix of hotels and guesthouses generally reflects the demand of cycle tourists, discussed above. Data shows that the number of accommodation places is increasing over the years, which is a positive signal. Cyclist welcome type system for accommodation places has been introduced in the region by Bikearea Association, but it is still at a starter stage and underdeveloped.

Cycle tourists are motivated especially by the opportunity to enjoy nature and relax away from everyday life (EP 2009). A very strong asset of the ICT route is that it offers the potential to bring the core themes of culture, heritage and nature to a new market. The trail covers both extensive range of monuments and

⁵ EP (2009). *The European cycle route network EuroVelo: challenges and opportunities for sustainable tourism*. Brussels, Belgium: European Parliament, Directorate-General for Internal Policies, Policy Department B: Structural and Cohesion Policies, Transport and Tourism.

Nikolov, K. (2011). *The Wheel of Life*. In *Capital Weekly Newspaper*, 1.7.2011
Radoslavova, S. (2011). *Ready to Ride*. In *Capital Weekly Newspaper*, 27.4.2011

museums of the Iron Curtain age, as well as a relatively untouched “green belt” with many protected areas through which the cyclist would pass.

Studies in Europe indicate that for cycle tourists and day excursionists, the main season is from May until the end of August, with a share of 79% of all trips during these four months. There are significantly larger numbers of cycle tourists in the summer months and a predominantly day excursion market in the other seasons and at weekends. The average length of stay for holiday cyclists appears to lie between 5 and 7 days (EP 2009). The predominantly summer character of cycle tourism is favorable for the ICT trail, as these is the best season in terms of access to the route and to the ICT remains, lack of pollution from local sources, etc.

A significant majority of day excursionists cycle to and from home or holiday accommodation. With regard to cycle holidays compared to holidays as a whole, the share of tourists using rail is three times higher, the share of the car travel to the destination is 30% lower and the share of air transport is 75% lower (EP 2009). This is why good connectivity with transport modes to and from the ICT route is essential. The integration into public transport along the ICT route in many of its sections is good with opportunities to use trains and buses, but is poor in some sections of the route where only automobile transport is available. A strong asset is the opportunity to carry bicycles on trains in Bulgaria.

L. Legal and organizational framework

1. The need of official national cycling policies

The situation in the European countries shows different approaches for national cycling policies. Few countries have official documents to unite the efforts of authorities, urban planners and organizations to improve urban mobility and cycling tourism. Three categories of approaches can be summarized:

- Development of long-term strategies and policy – this is common for countries with traditions in constant deliberate improvements in cycling transport and tourism measures, such as the Netherlands and Denmark;
- Implementation of restrictive measures on urban planning regarding cycling transport - this has given a results with variable success;
- Trying to make up for the time lost by integrating cycling measures in laws and in planning or transport policy guidance.

Bulgaria has its own approach which could be characterized as:

- Lack of an overall policy or strategy regarding cycling and implementation of promiscuous choices among foreign good practices.

Cycling is rarely integrated as a strategic goal or measure in other related strategic documents. Moreover cycling is not officially treated as “cycling transport”, but is more accepted as a recreational activity or sport when city planning is considered. Yet bigger cities have started implementation of cycling measures such as: building of cycling paths, integration of cycling paths with other transportation improvements, discussion for implementation of bike plans for cities. Such initiatives have started in Sofia, Varna, Rousse, Pleven, Plovdiv and others. In the ICT regions in Bulgaria, some improvements for cyclists have been made or considered or just discussed in Blagoevgrad, Kardzhali, Smolyan, and Svilengrad – and again these are aimed at recreational purposes and tourism. These are in general some adopted practices from abroad which do not necessarily serve the special needs of local cyclists and because of the absence of profound legal standards these measures are in the most cases compromised by the low quality of implementation.

It should also be pointed out that there is a certain group of Bulgarians from relatively small settlements without public transport, or from cities with low quality of public transport, who cycle for daily commuting. There is no official data for the number of cyclists but it is believed to be below 1-2 % of the population. In

bigger cities this kind of transport has gained public support, it is often discussed in the media how, where and when some cycling improvements should be made. The media have also built the image of cycling as a good transport alternative, emission-free and healthy activity. This has influenced an apparently growing number of cyclists but at the present only indirect data could prove this tendency.

2. Cycling infrastructure development – national legal standards

Bulgaria

Cycling has been a common transport mode in the country and also a strong sports discipline during the 1970-80s. It has never been considered seriously in a way to have its place in the transport planning, urban planning and the related legal documents and standards. Even in the recent years there are only sporadic initiatives for development of cycling paths for tourism or recreation. A political will has not been demonstrated for serious legislative changes to enhance cycling measures for transport integration. The opportunities for urban improvements given by the financial instruments of the EU have led to development of several positive examples of new bicycle alleys in some municipalities. These are still not part of any documented policy or strategy, but projects.

A standard however exists for the pavement and dimensions/parameters for construction of a cycling path. It is part of the Bulgarian State Standards for roads construction. Due to legislation changes this particular standard is not obligatory but is used for reference when needed. The planning of cycling paths beside roads outside of the towns is not a practice, whilst in towns new urban planners are not obliged to insert infrastructure for alternative transportation - such initiatives are left to the visioning for every particular case at the architects' judgment.

3. Cycling and driving safety

Bulgaria

The Road Traffic Law gives special rules for the movement of cyclists on roads: cyclists are obliged to cycle as close as possible to the right side of the roadway. A cyclist on the road is also obliged to have on his bicycle operational breaks, a ring-bell or other sound-signal producing device, a front white light and a back red light, white or yellow reflectors on the spokes of the wheels. Cycling alongside other vehicles is not allowed, as well as cycling without handling the wheel or with feet aside from the pedals. Cycling on the sidewalks is allowed only for children aged up to 12 years. The law also prohibits "cycling for training" if the group of cyclists is not accompanied by a car in front and at the back of the group. The last condition is practically applicable for any group of cyclists on the roads, but is applied actually mainly for sports and urban events and rarely for tourist groups. Another ordinance of this law is that cyclists are allowed to cycle on dedicated cycling paths or alleys. And if such are not present, they should either use the outer right side of the road if it is possible for cycling, or use the road if there they do not obstruct the motion of the other vehicles.

4. National signposting standards

Bulgaria

There is no official legal signposting standard in the country though there are initiatives of some organizations and individual bikers for marking of cycling routes. There is such a standard applied by the Bulgarian Union of Tourism for pedestrian or hiking tourist routes, which has sometimes served as a basis for other type of routes signposting. In some cases projects for routes have used foreign good practices and thus many different approaches could be seen along cycling routes in Bulgaria.

There is an initiative for combining of all these efforts into one standard, although it is still not accepted as official, but is optional for cycling enthusiasts. It is published as a document created by Bikearea Association after examination of other good practices and discussions at national level among bikers' organizations. The basis of this document is the signposting systems and methodologies developed by the International Mountain Bike Association. The document itself "*Rules for assessment of types of routes, level*

of technical skills required, graphic signs and methodology for signposting of mountain bike routes in Bulgaria” could be found on the internet sites: www.bikearea.org and www.mtb-bg.com . These rules recognize four levels of technical or physical skills required for a cyclist to use a given route. Each level is graphically labeled with a triangular mark whose color shows the technical skill level, direction and name of the route. The colors of the triangular marks scale the technical skill levels from easy to middle, high and extreme level and the respective colors graduation: green, blue, red and yellow.



Scheme of the graphical signs according to the Bikearea Association methodology “Rules for assessment of types of routes, level of technical skills required, graphic signs and methodology for signposting of mountain bike routes in Bulgaria”

The triangular marks could be part of a metal or wooden sign, but should more often be put on rocks, existing suitable stones, fences, pillars, etc. or stone pyramids. This methodology is also explicit regarding the distances at which signs should be put, and also how to signpost if the new route is crossing or covering another cycling or hiking trail. A mountain bike route signposted according to this document is the Rudopia route running across the Rhodope Mountains and also in some parts along the ICT at the Bulgarian –Greek border (www.rudopia.org).

M. Funding options for ICT measures & timeline of potential action implementation

There are two types of funding programs that could be used for financing the ICT development actions – centralized (at EU level) and decentralized (at national level) funding programs.

Among the decentralized funding programs suitable are: (<http://eufunds.bg/>)

- Regional Development Operational Program – to support public infrastructure development;
- Rural Development Program and LEADER+ – to support small scale infrastructure, human resources development, promotion;
- Fisheries and aquaculture operational program - to support small scale infrastructure, human resources development, promotion;
- Bulgaria - Greece Transboundary Cooperation Program (Interreg IVA) – to support small scale infrastructure, human resources development and promotion;
- Transport Operational Program – to support transport infrastructure development;
- Environment Operational Program – to support public infrastructure development in the areas of waste and water management, valorization of the tourist value of the natural resources through nature conservation, small scale tourist infrastructure, promotion, human resources development;
- Human Resources Development Operational Program – to support human resources development in the areas of tourism and services;

Centralized funding programs:

- INTERREG IVB South East Europe (The South East Europe Program - <http://www.southeast-europe.net/en/>) and INTERREG IVC (<http://i4c.eu/>) – to support the exchange of good practices, know-how and capacity growth, development of cooperation, development of plans and systems, promotion in the areas of sustainable transport, sustainable tourism and environment management;
- Culture 2007 (http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/culture/program/about_culture_en.php) – to support networking, development of joint initiatives and research of cultural institutions and promotion concerning Iron Curtain cultural heritage.
- Tourism dedicated actions within the Entrepreneurship and Innovation Program (http://ec.europa.eu/cip/eip/index_en.htm) (which is part of the Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Program (2007-2013) (<http://ec.europa.eu/cip/>)), like (23/G/ENT/CIP/11/B/N02S008) “Trans-national cooperation projects on European Cultural Routes” in 2011; and Sustainable Tourism Preparatory Action (http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/sectors/tourism/iron-curtain-trail/index_en.htm) funded by the general budget of the European Communities, like (12/G/ENT/TOU/11/411B) “Promotion of trans-national thematic tourism products in the European Union as means of sustainable tourism development” in 2011 – both programs are managed by the Directorate General Enterprise and Industry (http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/index_en.htm) (grants list: <http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/newsroom/cf/newsbytheme.cfm?lang=en&displayType=fo&fosubtype=p&tpa=0>) and provide support for the definition, marketing and promotion of tourism products and destinations on European level.
- Intelligent Energy Europe Program (http://ec.europa.eu/cip/iee/index_en.htm) (which is part of the Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Program (2007-2013)) – to support the development of more energy-efficient and cleaner transport (including support to enhancement of cycling as transport, intermodality and accessibility (for example adaptation of public intercity transport to bicycle carriage, that would serve both local people and tourists). “The IEE program aims at improving energy efficiency and encourages the wider uptake of new and renewable energies. Cycling projects can be funded under its STEER strand which promotes more sustainable energy use in transport. STEER does not fund infrastructure, but only measures to increase demand for sustainable transport such as campaigns, promoting best practices, education and training, and capacity building. How to apply: Any private or public organization established in the EU (or Croatia, Norway, Lichtenstein, Iceland) can respond to a call for proposals. Projects should normally run for two to three years and involve at least three partners from three countries. More information on the IEE program: <http://ec.europa.eu/energy/intelligent/>” (http://www.eesc.europa.eu/resources/docs/bikelexicon_en_web.pdf, p. 13)
- “The EU Research Framework Programs (FP7, FP8). The “Seventh Framework Program” (FP7) (to be followed by FP8 for 2013-2020) is the main financial tool through which the EU supports research and technological development and demonstration activities, covering almost all scientific disciplines. Its “cooperation” sub-program is divided in ten themes (including Transport). One key initiative for cycling projects within the FP7 is CIVITAS. With the CIVITAS Initiative, the EC aims to generate a decisive breakthrough by testing ambitious integrated sustainable urban transport strategies. Through the CIVITAS Initiative the EU also funds the development and evaluation of new approaches to safe cycling in cities. How to apply: Project proposals submitted in response to the publication of a ‘Call for proposals’ are selected by the European Commission for funding. Calls of the Transport Work Program will be announced on this page: http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/transport/home_en.html

For others themes (including ICT, health) see: http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/understand_en.html

- Program of Community Action in the Field of Health. The Health Program is the key means of implementing health objectives at European level. Projects under this program fall into three categories, known as “strands”: health security/health threats; health information; and health determinants/health promotion. Cycling could be funded under the “health promotion” strand which includes the promotion of physical activity. How to apply: More information on the annual call for

proposals:http://ec.europa.eu/health/program/policy/2008-2013/index_en.htm”
(http://www.eesc.europa.eu/resources/docs/bikelexicon_en_web.pdf).

APPENDICES

SERBIA

Since Serbian partners were not involved in the implementation of project StrategIC, there are some gaps in the information gathered about Serbia. The ICT backbone suggested is consulted with Serbian stakeholders during regional workshops.

I. Description of physical ICT backbone route in Serbia

Overview

This description includes the ICT backbone daily sections from Kladovo to Dimitrovgrad in the areas in the scope of the StrategIC project. .

1. Roads

The route uses various types of roads in the described section: busy asphalted roads, bad asphalt and macadam roads, as well as agricultural and forest roads. For details on attraction and quality of the route see the following section of the text. According to the ECF criteria the roads could be evaluated regarding:

attractiveness - excellent to good, directness – good, safety is good, comfort is good

- *Section Kladovo – Brza Palanka - Negotin 75 km*

There is asphalt road along that "nose" that river Danube forms there (via villages Rtkovo and Korbovo). After that, from village Brza Palanka there is old Danube road going along right at the edge of the river bank. It is a mixture of old asphalt and macadam, very quiet and nice. You ride one meter from the Danube river. This road then goes through villages Samarinovac and Milosevo, and enters Negotin from north-east direction - all this is also part of the Danube cycling route.

- *Section Negotin – Zajecar 70 km*

The route runs on very nice asphalted road with no considerable denivelation. There are few mistakes in the ICT guide:

- Better not to go through Veliki Jasenovac, it is away from the main route, the road is difficult. The route could pass through Mali Jasenovac.
- There is shop/café at Shipikovo (mentioned as abandoned in the guide).

- *Section Zajecar – Knjazevac*

N/A

- *Section Knjazevac – Pirot 65 km*

The route goes along 2nd class road connecting the two cities. There is no high traffic and the road is in good condition. No significant denivelation.

- *Section Pirot – Dimitrovgrad 40 km*

There are 3 options suggested by Michael Cramer.

One of the alternatives goes along E80 road. It will be quieter after completion of the highway under construction till the end of the year. It is recommended in the long term. If this alternative is taken a stretch is possible to Poganovo monastery – a world heritage site. The monastery is located 13 km from the main road before you reach Dimitrovgrad, 100 denivelation, nice restaurant, and mineral baths at Zvonce. You have to turn left when you see the signpost.

The second alternative is shorter, but the road is in very bad condition (Piro, Izvor, Krupac, Smilovci, Radejna, Dimitrovgrad). Measures need to be taken in order to improve the road. There is a cave near Smilovci. The road does not pass the village of Smilovci but turns south at the crossroad.

The third alternative is a quiet picturesque road, but again in bad condition (broken asphalt and macadam). It is very long with high denivelation and impossible to do in one day with long distance bike. There are many churches and small guest houses along the route. Info is available about the accommodation upon request, but is not included here in order to keep it short.

Proposed changes

- **Proposed alternative route Zajecar - Belogradchik, Bulgaria – Knjazevac 83 km.**

From Zajecar the route goes through Vrashka cuka border point (10 km). From Vrashka cuka to Belogradchik 47 km. Belogradchik (through Salash/Novo Korito (580 m. above sea level, 11km). Salash/Novo korito to Knjazevac (15 km.). There are buildings of the border police at the village of Salas. The Belogradchik rocks are spectacular natural attraction. A sleepover in Belogradchik or Salash is possible.

- **Proposed branch route Knjazevac - Novo korito - 15 km.** There are remains of the ICT in the village of Novo Korito.

- **From Knjazevac to Dimitrovgrad bypassing Piro (option than needs construction works – widening and maintenance of 1 km narrow path)**

This option is suggested in order to avoid the original three options that have some disadvantages (intensive traffic, big denivelation etc.)

From Knjazevac the route follows the main road to Temska (app. 16km before Piro) and then towards north-east in the canyon of Temska river. Then turns south-east and up to Zavojsko lake, continue along the lake and enter the road (Piro - Rsovc, etc) bypassing Piro. The only problem is only last kilometer on this variant - a narrow path that has to be cleaned and maintained. Piro authorities (tourist organization) could provide support and good will exists, but they need to be reminded.

- **From Piro to Tran (needs infrastructure development – tourist cross border point at the village of Petacinci)**

This option is suggested in order to avoid the intensive traffic and cross border point Kalotina/Gradina).

The route goes from Piro south-west via Blato and Krnjino to Babušnica, then south-east via Kambelevac, Studena and Zvonce to the canyon of Jerma, Trnski Odorovci, Iskrovci to Petacinci, Transka Bankya, Tran..

2. Services

The section is just appropriate regarding services. The density of the accommodation and pubs is not more than 40 km in some cases to 80 km from each other. The comfort is just appropriate and the availability of the services is excellent. There are 3-4 star hotels in the large cities and towns (Knjazevac, Zajecar, Piro, Dimitrovgrad) and guest houses in the rural areas along the route (density - 20/40 km. away from each other – the villages in Stara planina/West Balkan Mountain).

3. Attractiveness

There are attractions related to the theme of the route such as the Danube river, historical remains from the IC times. The region is rich in cultural and natural attraction sites as well. Each municipality is described in the following section of the text..

4. Promotion of the section

The promotion of the section is inappropriate and the promotion tools are similar to Bulgaria, Romania, Greece, Macedonia and Turkey.

As result of the project StrateIC the following sources of information about the Balkan section of ICT has been developed:

- Bikeline Guide Iron Curtain Trail 3 Along the Green Belt from the German-Czech Border to the Black Sea (not distributed in BG)
- Michael Cramer's book about the Iron Curtain Trail (not distributed in BG)
- Promotion brochure in English and German about the Balkan section of ICT issued by the project StrateIC to be distributed among stakeholders in Bulgaria and abroad.
- Promotion flyer and poster of the Romanian/Serbian part of the route in Romanian also produced by the StrateIC project (Bike Attack) and distributed in Romania.
- Website about the Balkan section of ICT in Bulgarian and English elaborated by the project StrateiC and administrated by the project partners: <http://13.eurovelo.bg/>
- Facebook profile of the ICT Balkan section administrated by the StrateIC project partners "The Iron Curtain Trail/Пътят на желязната завеса" (leading organisation: BAAT)
- Publication with the Transnational Action Plan of the project the "Balkan Velo Trail - BVT 13" in English (leading organisation: Association of South Western Municipalities ASWM)
- Facebook profile "The Balkan Velo Trail - BVT 13" (leading organisation: ASWM)

Organization

The organization of the section is just appropriate. There are local/regional partners with some capacity, but they have limited financial and human resources. The most active partners are the Tourist Organizations linked to the municipalities and the local cycling organizations in Pirot, Dimitrovgrad, Zajecar and Knjazevac as well as the municipality of Belogradchik and Vidin. The Management body of Nature Park Vrachanski Balkan has also participated in the regional stakeholders workshops.

II. Feasibility analysis of conditions in the Serbian municipalities

NEGOTIN municipality

According to the 2002 census the population of the Negotin municipality is 43,551 of which 17,762 live in the town of Negotin. The population of the villages around Negotin are mostly supported by the family members who work as guest-workers in the countries of western Europe, agriculture is a side activity more than an income-generating one.

The largest employer in the municipality is the Chemical Industry developed in *Prahovo*, although this company, just like many others in Serbia, is in very poor financial shape.

1. Description of Iron Curtain Trail tourism potential

- Facilities

There are two hotels in Negotin and few cafeterias/restaurants in the center.

- Service providers

Negotin is also relatively large town where all basic services could be found.

- Attraction sites - natural, cultural and historical heritage

The Negotin museum is home of many archeological findings from Roman times to the more recent World War II era. There are many galleries, monuments, churches and monasteries, and archeological sites in the town. The nearby Iron Gates national park offers breathtaking views, many trails for hiking (most trails are not well marked or maintained, so hiking is recommended only for the experienced).

"Pivnice" at Rogljevo are located 1-2 km. from the route. These are ancient wine cellars which are being renovated and some of them operate. They offer wine-tasting and historical sites. In the village of Rogljevo there are signs showing how to find the wine cellars. There are guest houses in the village.

- *remains of the ICT reachable by bike*

N/A.

2. Public transport integration

Transport modes to the cycle route/destination

N/A

Travel by Railways

There are train connections to Romania, Vidin and Belgrade

Travel by Long Distance Coaches

N/A

Roads Infrastructure

There are 1st and 2nd class roads to:

Belgrade 260 km

Nish 160 km

Bor 65 km

Zaječar 60 km

Existing cycling trails along the ICT

The Eurovelo route 6 is passing through the town and is signposted, including in the town center.

ZAJECAR DISTRICT

ZAJECAR municipality

<http://www.zajecar.info/en/>

Zaječar is a city and municipality in the eastern part of Serbia. According to the 2002 census the town has a population of 40,700. Zaječar is widely known for its rock music festival Gitarijada which has existed for more than 40 years and for the festival dedicated to contemporary art, ZALET. It is the administrative center of the Zaječar District and a main town in the Timočka Krajina region.

1. Description of Iron Curtain Trail tourism potential

- Socio-political and economic situation

Trends of economic development of the Zaječar District lead from crafts and semi-industrial processing of agricultural products over coal exploitation (textile factory, leather factory, brewery, quartz sand mine and coal mine) to the modern plants and high output rate.

Zajecar is a part of the **Danube Euroregion**, where cities from Bulgaria, Serbia and Romania participate. Here, the cities relevant to the route are mentioned: Zajecar, Negotin, Majdanpek, Kladovo, Vidin, Belogradchik, Kalafat.

It is a twin city with Vidin.

- Facilities

Zajecar is a district center and as such possesses all needed facilities. There are 5 hotels in the city and 6 pizzerias and Irish pub in the old town. On the territory the municipality operates quite a few pharmacies, a number of dentist offices, private medical and Polyclinic centres, ophthalmologic office and others.

There are museums, theatre and cinema.

- Service providers

There is a tourist information center in the city center providing all kinds of tourist services and selling souvenirs and local products.

There are bicycle shops for spare parts and repair.

- Attraction sites - natural, cultural and historical heritage

- *"Popova plaža" - sport-recreation center with sandy beach located at Crni Timok river, with nice restaurants around. It is in the centre of Zajecar. Nice to swim.*
- *Monument of soldiers killed in National Liberation War and to the victims of fascist terror.*
- *Gamzigradska Spa is located about 11 km west from Zaječar (Map), next to the magistral road Zaječar - Belgrade. It has hotels, villas, a bakery and a confectioner's shop.*
- *Late antique imperial palace Gamzigrad - Romuliana (3rd to 4th century) is located close to the road Paracin - Zaječar. The settlement encompasses an area of 6,5 hectares, encircled by a defence system made up of 20 towers, inside of which the remains of an older four - tower system can be seen.*
- Lake Grliško is located between the villages of Leskovac and Grlišće.
- Lake Sovinac is located near Salaš, near the road Zaječar - Negotin.
- Rgotsko Lake is located near the village of Rgotina, 11 km away from Zaječar.
- The Festival of Contemporary Art ZALET (stylized as ZA*73T). Exhibitions, concerts, experimental theater, with innovative and progressive aspects of artistic expressions. www.zalet.org
- Gitarijada is a musical festival held during the summer to promote demo bands. Held since 1969, Gitarijada is one of the longest-lasting festivals in Serbia and in South Eastern Europe.

- remains of the ICT reachable by bike

N/A

2. Public transport integration

- Transport modes to the cycle route/destination

Two international roads are going through Zajecar:

Paraćin – Zaječar – Vidin

Niš – Zaječar – Negotin – Kladovo – Romania

Highway - Đerdapska magistrala - through Kladovo and Negotin to the Danube and European transport corridor VII

Airplane could be taken at Nis and Belgrade (250 km)

- Railroad

Niš – Prahovo i Majdanpek – Bor – Prahovo.

Distance from Zajecar to main cities

- Belgrade - 250km
- Niš - 95 km
- Vidin - 40 km
- Sofia - 200 km
- Paraćin - 90 km
- Prahovo, Danube - 60 km
- Sokobanja - 40 km

- Roads Infrastructure

The road infrastructure is in good condition.

- Existing cycling trails along the ICT

N/A.

KNJAZEVC Municipality

<http://www.toknjazevac.org.rs/>,

Knjaževac is a municipality situated in the eastern part of Serbia bordering the Republic of Bulgaria and is part of Timočka Krajina region. The municipality extends over an area of 1202 km² and is the fourth largest in the Republic of Serbia. Its countryside is mostly hilly and mountainous. The town is situated between three mountains. The highest point in the territory of the municipality is Midžor on Stara Planina (2169 m), which is also the second highest peak in the Republic of Serbia and is reachable from the Bulgarian side as well.. The lowest point is 176m and is situated in the Knjaževac valley. There are 86 inhabited places in the municipality of which 85 are villages. The town itself is situated at the confluence of the Trgoviški Timok and the Svrljiški Timok which become the Beli Timok river. It flows on towards Zajecar, merges with the Crni Timok and becomes Timok river (border with Bulgaria).

Knjaževac is twinned with Belogradchik, Bulgaria, which could be used when developing cross border projects for developing the route.

1. Description of Iron Curtain Trail tourism potential

- Socio-political and economic situation

The population of the municipality includes 36,569 452 people. As oppose to Pirot and Dimitrovgrad, where Bulgarian minority is quite large, here the population is mostly of Serbs.

- Facilities

There are 5 hotels (Konak) in the city. Knjazevac is relatively large town and has post office, banks, hospital and all other services that might be needed.

- Service providers

The Tourist information centre works until 8 p.m. and offers information about places of interest, souvenirs and local products. It is located in the center of the city.

- Attraction sites - natural, cultural and historical heritage

- Babin Zub ski resort. Its picnic areas are set in areas of natural beauty (like Banjica, Baranica etc.) are a real place for rest and recreation. The 14th-century Church of the Holy Mother of God lies in the nearby village of Donja Kamenica.

There are numerous museums and churches. The city has rich cultural calendar.

The following web site provides information on tourist resources in Zajecar and Pirot districts as well as in Bulgaria (Pernik, Vidin)

<http://see.bcvidin.org/en/za/index-za.html>

- remains of the ICT reachable by bike

- There is a watch tower and building of the border police (zastava) at Novo korito village.
- Important event for ICT is the traditional crossborder fair organized at the border (Novo Korito/Salas) at Kadibogaz (Belogradchishki) pass. The border opens for 3 days and Bulgarian and Serbian people mix together - food and drinks, folk concerts, etc. The pass is most likely to become new border cross point in the next 3 years. There is a Memorandum of understating signed by the Bulgarian and Serbian presidents.

2. Public transport integration

Roads Infrastructure

Knjaževac is connected to the surrounding towns by road and railroad network. It is integral part of the road network of Timočka Krajina region.

Existing cycling trails along the ICT

N/A

PIROT DISTRICT

PIROT Municipality

Pirot is a town and municipality with area of 1,235 km² and is surrounded by several mountains: Stara Planina, Vlaška Planina, Belava, Suva Planina, etc. The following rivers flow through: Nišava, Jerma, Rasnička reka, Temštica, Visočica. It also has four lakes: Zavoj Lake, Berovacko Lake, Krupac Lake and Sukov Lake. In 2002, the town had a total population of 40,678, while the population of the municipality was 63,791. The town is the administrative center of the Pirot District. It has an average altitude 368m.

1.Description of Iron Curtain Trail tourism potential

- Socio-political and economic situation

The most important companies in the region are “Tigar” Ltd., producing tires and the textile factory “Prvi maj”. The area also suffers from unemployment, depopulation and low income rate as Dimitrovgrad

municipality. The rural part of the municipality is 35%. Among the priorities for development are alternative tourism (carpets, bio products).

- Facilities

The city of Pirot is a centre of Pirot district and has all needed facilities and services – post office, bank, hospital, shops, and restaurants. The Hunter hotel is located 3 km. from the city center in direction Bulgaria and has Olympic size pool.

- Service providers

There is large Tourist information centre in the center of city offering booklets, tourist services, souvenirs and local products.

- Attraction sites - natural, cultural and historical heritage

Pirot is known for the [Pirot Kilim](#) (Pirotski ćilim), a traditional woven carpet, highly regarded in Serbian culture. It is also a traditional producer of dairy (Pirotski kackaval – cheese).

- Pirot Fortress, dating to the 14th century Serbian Empire
- Temska Monastery, 16th-century Orthodox monastery.
- In its vicinity is the church from the thirteenth century: the [Church of St. Petka](#), and the monastery of St. John Theologian from the late fourteenth century displays a fine example of the medieval architecture.
- A big Roman military diagonal route (Via Militaris) connecting modern Belgrade, Nis, Sofia, Plovdiv, Edrine and Istanbul is being currently exposed with the support of national funding.

2. Public transport integration

Transport modes to the cycle route/destination

Similar to Dimitrovgrad

Travel by Railways

Similar to Dimitrovgrad

Travel by Long Distance Coaches

The transportation is similar to Dimitrovgrad.

Roads Infrastructure

N/A

Existing cycling trails along the ICT

There are no sign-posted cycling trails. The local mountaineering society can provide guiding services for mountain biking in the region of Stara planina. (Balkan mountain).

DIMITROVGRAD Municipality

Dimitrovgrad (known also as Caribrod) is a town and 483 km² located in the Pirot District. It is located at the border with Bulgaria just 14 kilometers from border cross Kalotina and approximately 60 km from Sofia. According to 2002 census, the municipality of Dimitrovgrad had a population of 11,748 people and the town 6,968.

The terrain in the municipality is hilly-mountainous. Southwest of the valley of Nishava river dominate hilly mountainous areas, known as Burel, Derekul, and Barry, which end in the east with the valley of Lukavitsa river and to the west with the intersection of Erma Gorge. East and southeast of the Municipality is the border with Bulgaria and to the north and northwest is the municipality of Pirost and Babushnitsa. The entire municipality is crossed by Tsaribrod Valley Nishava that runs in southeast-northwest direction.

An interesting fact for Dimitrovgrad is that it is a twin city with Dragoman, Bulgaria (where ICT passes after crossing the border).

1. Description of Iron Curtain Trail tourism potential

- Socio-political and economic situation

The area of the municipality is considered to be marginal for Serbia – high level of depopulation, unemployment and low economic development. Priorities for the municipalities are rural tourism and agriculture. Important local tourism resources are the local breeds of animals, the cultural heritage (Poganovo monastery – world heritage site, ethnographic heritage – shopi) and the preserved nature of the region (Erma gorge). An annual agro biodiversity festival is organized with international participants. There is a large project for development of agriculture as resource for tourism financed by the national government and international funding organizations. Most of the tourism development is carried out by the Natura Balkanica NGO and the Municipal Tourist organization and financed by GTZ, SDC and other international organizations.

- Facilities

All the settlements in the municipality are connected with roads. All of the settlements are electrified, there is mobile telephone connection. Medical care is provided – there is a hospital in the town. There is post office and banks.

- Service providers

There are numerous shops in the town of Dimitrovgrad. Along the route there are shops in almost all of the villages. There is a Tourist information Center in the city center together with the office of the Municipal tourist organization.

There are 3 hotels in the town with the capacity of around 200 beds and a guest house in the village of Lukavitsa. Along the main street there are numerous cafeterias and “pecara” (fast food place for typical for the region pastry called “burek”). There is a traditional restaurant in Hotel Balkan at the city centre.

- Attraction sites - natural, cultural and historical heritage

As mentioned the most famous sites in the region are Poganovo monastery, River Erma gorge and the ethnographic group of shopi – that also live in Bulgaria and Macedonia. Some bio products are produced by farms for local breeds of sheep, pigs and chicken. Interesting site is also the mineral bath at the village of Zvonce.

Archeologically it has been proved that the region is located along the road system and a group of ancient Roman villages part of the big military diagonal route connecting modern Belgrade, Nis, Sofia, Plovdiv, Edirne and Istanbul. There is a project for its exposition undergoing.

- Remains of the ICT reachable by bike

- border control post “Kalotina”
- Transka Bankya – a village that has a house that is half in Bulgaria, half in Serbia

2. Public transport integration

Transport modes to the cycle route/destination

There is a bus line from Sofia going to Pirot, Nis and Belgrade: <http://www.centralnaavtogara.bg/>. There is a train connection Sofia – Nis – Belgrade that stops at Dimitrovgrad. You can also reach Knjazevac and Zajecar through bus and train connections at Nis.

Roads Infrastructure

The route goes along E80 from Dimitrovgrad directly to the boarder checkpoint Gradina/Kalotina. A new highway is under construction parallel to the road E80 near Dimitrovgrad. After its completion the road will be much more quiet. The roads in the municipality are in good condition except the ones connecting villages in the mountain.

Existing cycling trails along the ICT

Signposted cycling routes in the region still do not exist. The local Mountaineering and Biking Society organizes regular marathon passing through Erma river gorge. There are some mountain biking trails, which however are hard for cross-country bikes.

MACEDONIA

I. Description of physical ICT backbone route in Macedonia

The backbone of the route in Macedonia consists of part of the daily section Blagoevgrad (BG) – Delchevo (MK) :

- the daily section Delchevo-Berovo
- the daily section Berovo-Strumitsa
- part of the daily section Strumitsa – Petrich (BG)

1. Border crossing point Stanke Lisichkovo – Ilin Kamen locality – Delchevo (12,5 km)

From the Border crossing point Stanke Lisichkovo (Delchevo pass in Vlahina Mountain) the route follows Motorway M5 with medium motorized traffic, going slightly downhill. After 6 km the route branches to the right through the Ilin Kamen locality on a calm stabilized 6,5 km non asphalted road, going again slightly downhill, to Delchevo.

2. Delchevo – Chiflik - Pehchevo – Ablanitsa locality – Berovo (43,5 km)

The outskirts of Vlahina and Maleshevska Mountains are the trail's scenery from Delchevo to Berovo. From Delchevo the route continues southwards with a slight up-hill to Pehchevo following the main asphalt road with low motorized traffic. Then it branches to the left following a low motorized road leading to Ravna Rjeka locality, the springs of Bregalnica river and their waterfalls for about 6,5 km (up-hill). Then the route turns right and for some 3,5 km the surface is non-asphalted but stabilized, afterwards it passes Ablanica locality and reaches Berovo (down-hill).

There are options for following one-day round trips (without luggage) starting from Pehchevo and Berovo:

- Pehchevo - the springs of Bregalnitsa river and their waterfalls - Ravna Rjeka locality - Berovo lake - Ablanica locality – Pehchevo (42 km)
- Berovo – around the Berovo lake – Berovo (26 km)

3. Berovo - Suvi Laki – Petralinci – Dabilja – Strumica (53 km)

The whole section is asphalted with low motorized traffic on the main road and it is the only one in the Macedonian part of the ICT that coincides entirely with the proposed route by Michael Cramer. After Berovo the road alternates ups and downs up to 10% while going via Palazlija Pass 1140 m, Suvi Laki recreational village and Prevedena Pass 1167 m in the Ograzhden Mountain. This part is followed by a steep down-hill up to 12% until Hamzali Monastery Church and continues on an even terrain until Strumica.

4. Strumica – Dabilja - Murtino – Bansko – Gabrovo – Koleshino – Mokrievno – Mokrino – Smolari – Drazhevo - Staro Konjarevo - Novo Konjarevo – Border crossing point Zlatarevo (40 km)

From Strumica to the Border crossing point to Bulgaria the road goes eastward through a slight hilly terrain with low motorized traffic through a number of small villages situated in the outskirts of the “Macedonian” part of Belasica Mountain. The surface is mostly asphalt with some exceptions just appropriate for biking: Mokrino-Smolari (4,5 km) which is non-asphalted but stabilized road (sand and gravel) and Staro Konjarevo - Novo Konjarevo (3,5 km) which is covered with cobblestones. The road from Novo Konjarevo to the border crossing point Zlatarevo (connecting Novo selo in Macedonia and Petrich in Bulgaria) is part of the main road M6 with medium motorized traffic.

There are options for a one-day round trip (without luggage) starting from Strumitsa:

Strumica – Vassilevo – Gradoshorci – Angelci – Veljusa – Vodocha - Banica – Strumica (20 km)
Worth visiting on this tour are the Monastery Churches in the villages Veljusa and Vodocha.

1. Roads

The border between Macedonia and Bulgaria has a length of 185 km and follows the mountain ridges (from North to South) of: some mountains of the Kraishte region, Osogovo, Vlahina, Maleshevska, Ograzhden and the north slopes of Belasitsa Mountains.

Because of the terrain specifics there are no close parallel roads along the borderline and the ICT route passes in the outskirts of the mountains - from 6 km (e.g. Chiflik and Ravna Rjeka) to 17 km (e.g. Hamzali and Strumitsa) air distance from the border.

According to the ECF criteria for directness the route can be evaluated as good to excellent.

The ICT route is continuous and uses existing public roads with low and medium motorized traffic, forestry and agricultural roads. *According to the ECF criteria for safety the route can be evaluated as just appropriate to good.*

The mountainous character of the region supposes some challenges on the route - many ups and downs, sometimes steep slopes up to 12%, especially descending Ograzhden Mountain, sharp curves with less visibility.

The surface of the proposed route is mostly in good condition (on non-asphalted sections just appropriate/right) and the national signposting is clear according to the national standards. Though, there is neither EuroVelo signposting, nor cycling friendly public transport available.

The whole ICT route in Macedonia is 150 km long:

123 km on asphalted roads with low motorized traffic which need signposting.

10 km on busy roads (border crossing point Stanke Lisichkovo - 6 km after; Dabilja – fork to Robovo 1,5 km; Novo Konjarevo - border crossing point Zlatarevo 2,5 km) which need an asphalted shoulder;

17 km on non-asphalted but stabilized roads (Ilin Kamen-Delchevo 6,5 km; Ravna rjeka–Ablanica 3,5 km; Mokrino-Smolari 4,5 km and Staro Konjarevo-Novoo Konjarevo 3,5 km) which needs surface improvement or its recommended to asphalt them, mainly not because of the cyclists, but to improve the general mobility conditions of the local population.

According to the ECF criteria for comfort the route can be evaluated as just appropriate to good (no bike transportation available, though).

At present it is possible to cross the Bulgarian-Macedonian border at 3 border crossing points at:

“Gjueshevo” between Kyustendil (BG) and Kriva palanka (MK)

“Stanke Lisichkovo” between Blagoevgrad (BG) and Delchevo (MK) used by the ICT route to enter Macedonia on its way to the Black Sea

“Zlatarevo” connecting Petrich (BG) and Strumitsa (MK) used by the ICT route to leave Macedonia on its way to the Black Sea

Because of the relief of Osogovo Mountain the roads parallel to the border are passing further than 30 km away from it and that is why Gjueshevo is not used by the trail.

The closest (to the ICT) border crossing point Macedonia - Greece is Star Dojran but in order to get there the cyclist should use an extremely busy, narrow, exhaustive and dangerous road (Strumitsa-Lake Dojran). That is why the route is not continuing via Greece.

The proposed ICT route enters Macedonia at the border crossing Stanke Lisichkovo and leaves the country at Zlatarevo.

Planned border crossing points between BG and MK, which could be useful for the future development of the ICT:

"Ajduchka cheshma" (MK) in the feet the highest peak of the Osogovo mountain - Ruen

"Crna skala" connecting Nevestino (BG) and Delchevo (MK)

between Simitli (BG) and Pehchevo (MK)

"Klepalo" connecting Strumiani (BG) and Berovo (MK)

The proposed route differs from the primary proposal of Michael Cramer. The route is optimized at several points: via Ilin Kamen near Delchevo, via Ablanitsa near Pehchevo, via Smolari and Staro Konjarevo near the border crossing point Zlatarevo, taking into account following EuroVelo criteria:

- stay close as possible to the border
- use of calmer roads
- availability of tourist attractions and cycling friendly environment

There are options for one-day round trips (without luggage) starting from Pehchevo, Berovo and Strumica including various attractions.

2. Services

According to the ECF criteria for density of accommodation and density of restaurants, pubs and shops the route in Macedonia can be evaluated as just appropriate to good.

The accommodation capacities and restaurants are well distributed along the route in Macedonia. They are concentrated in Delchevo, Pehchevo, Berovo, Strumica, Bansko and Koleshino thus providing enough options, satisfactory for the beginning of the route development.

The whole quality range of hotels and restaurants - good quality, medium, standard and low category is presented only in Berovo and Strumica. *Generally for the route the price – category can be evaluated as good.*

Pubs and shops for basic provisions are available in every settlement on the road.

The region has traditions related to tourism and recreation (mostly local customers and from the neighbouring countries). Tour operator's offers, guided tours, hiking paths, provided access to natural and cultural sites could enrich the stay of the visitor. Though, cycling tourism is not that popular and developed and therefore "cycling friendly" labelled services are missing. *According to this criterion the route can be evaluated as just appropriate.*

3. Attractiveness

FYROM belonged to the so called Western part of Europe during the times of the Cold War and its border control differed fundamentally from the one in the Eastern part. There are frontier stones marking the state border but they are situated in the high mountains and hard to reach by bike.

There are no special attractions connected to the Iron Curtain and there isn't any touristic highlight, but there are local, regional, national attractions and the section is placed in cycling friendly environment (forest, mosaic landscape use, tidy urban and rural settlements etc.).

Thus the attractiveness of the route in Macedonia according to the ECF criteria can be evaluated as "good".

4. Promotion of the section

For the time being the materials about the Balkan section of ICT provide only a general overview about the route in Macedonia:

- Bikeline Guide Iron Curtain Trail 3 Along the Green Belt from the German-Czech Border to the Black Sea (not distributed in MK)
- Michael Cramer's book about the Iron Curtain Trail (not distributed in MK)
- Promotion brochure in English and German about the Balkan section of ICT issued by the project StrategIC (leading organisation: Bulgarian Association for Alternative Tourism BAAT) to be distributed among stakeholders in Bulgaria and abroad
- Website about the Balkan section of ICT in Bulgarian and English elaborated by the project StrategIC (leading organisation: BAAT) and administrated by the project partners: <http://13.eurovelo.bg/>
- Facebook profile of the ICT Balkan section administrated by the StrategIC project partners "The Iron Curtain Trail/Пътят на желязната завеса" (leading organisation: BAAT)
- Publication with the Transnational Action Plan of the project the "Balkan Velo Trail - BVT 13" in English (leading organisation: Association of South Western Municipalities ASWM)
- Facebook profile "The Balkan Velo Trail - BVT 13" (leading organisation: ASWM)

There are no promotional materials and web-sites elaborated by local stakeholders about the ICT and addressed to the wide public or to the specific target group.

Materials and web-based publications about cultural or natural sites along the proposed route can be found but they can be obtained just one by one, mostly in local language and without reference to the ICT route.

Thus the general promotional status according to ECF criteria could be described as "inappropriate".

5. Organization

The Centre for development of East planning region and the Centre for development of South-East planning region took part in the project "The Balkan Velo Trail - BVT 13" supported by EC with leading organization The Association of South-Western Municipalities in Bulgaria and carried out in 2011. The Macedonian project partners were involved in the following processes: establishment of a network for development and promotion of cycling tourism along the Southern part of the ICT, definition of the physical route in Macedonia, elaboration of project proposals concerning the route in Macedonia in accordance with the EuroVelo standards and criteria.

The good news following the successful closure of that project is that the Macedonian Government decided to put markings and signpost the route in Macedonia using the proposed by the two centres backbone.

It can be stated that responsible organizations can be identified on every field of route development and maintenance (infrastructure, service, promotion) but they don't have the full appropriate budget. In some aspects the sources are already visible.

According to the ECF criteria for organization and financial tools the route in Macedonia can be evaluated as "just appropriate" to "good".

II. Feasibility analysis of conditions in Macedonia

The established planning regions in Macedonia correspond to the statistical regions defined by the nomenclature of territorial units for statistics NTES-3, in order to provide a statistical basis for planning the development of the regions. Macedonia has 8 planning regions. The proposed ICT backbone passes through the two of them bordering Bulgaria: East planning region and South-East planning region.

The East planning region of Macedonia

Location wise the East Planning Region comprises the catchment area of Bregalnica River and covers an area of 3537 km² or 14.2% of the territory of Macedonia. The region consists of 11 municipalities and the proposed ICT route passes through three of them: Delchevo, Pehchevo and Berovo.

The Center for development of the East planning region is situated in the town of Shtip.

From the 217 settlements in the region, 209 bear rural characteristics.

The East Planning Region is characterised by a very dynamic relief structure, which includes plains, valleys, hilly areas, cones and mountains. The scenery of the ICT route is marked mostly by the mountains Vlahina, Maleshevo and Ograzhden.

The climate in the East Planning Region is arid – dry: long and dry summers, often with temperatures up to +41°C, and mild, wet winters (in rare cases up to -22 °C) due to the Mediterranean influence on the continental climate. Continental climate is predominant in the Maleshevo region. Rainfall is maximal in April and May and minimal in July and August. The average annual temperature in the plains is 12.9 °C, and in Maleshevo - 8.7 °C. Snow falls from December until March. Fog is rare in this region, except in Maleshevo.

The forests (136,738 ha) cover 38% of the territory of the region and are utilized in the wood processing industry, as well as in the development of mountain tourism.

The region faces also some environmental problems such as problems in waste management; water management, including pollution of water resources and non-existent waste water treatment; air pollution of different intensity in different areas of the region; and soil contamination. The lack of a comprehensive environmental monitoring system is a special problem that affects all media.

1. Description of Iron Curtain Trail tourism potential in the East Planning Region

1.1. Socio-political and economic situation

As it is the case in other regions of Macedonia, there is a high percentage of rural municipalities in the East Planning Region; however, the majority of the population lives in the larger urban centres, which is an indicator of the uneven concentration of the population within the region. This situation stresses out the need to revitalize and improve the quality of life in rural communities, in order to reduce disparities within the region.

The East Planning Region has a population growth rate that is almost four times lower than the average for the country. According to the Population Census at the end of 2007, the population numbered 180,442. The natural population fluctuation in the region is characterised by below-average birth rate, above-average mortality rate and a negative population growth rate.

The population density amounts to 51.2 inhabitants/ km². However, due to the permanent depopulation process, there is a very large number of abandoned villages, villages with a population lower than 100 and villages with exceptionally high aging index. This leads to a concentration of approximately 66% of the population in urban areas.

The problems of transformation to market economy brought the former industrial giant of the region in a difficult situation. There are companies from other industries in the region, including agricultural industry, cattle farms, slaughterhouses with cooling facilities, an alcohol distillery etc. Most important industries in the region are textile, wood, shoe-making, trade and agriculture. As is the case in the other regions, small and medium-sized enterprises are the engine of development in the East region, which make up 72% of total production. In 2006 the annual gross product of the East Planning Region contributed 6.4% to the total gross domestic product of Macedonia. This indicator shows that economic development in the East Planning Region is at a very low level.

According to the official statistical data, manufacturing industry has a dominant role in production in the East Planning Region with 67%, and at the same time employs 70% of the total number of employees. Services participate with approximately 30% in production and 20% in employment, while agriculture contributes 5%.

Temperate climate in the region enables development of agriculture, especially production of rice. Rice fields in the East region cover around 95% from the total rice production in Republic of Macedonia.

Large amount of arable land is covered also with barley, wheat and maize, providing a good base for livestock breeding (40% of the pig raising in Macedonia).

Due to excellent natural conditions for development of agriculture, it can be concluded that this branch has high potential to enhance economic development of this region. Other developed branches include early-garden products, fruits and grapes.

Arable lands and gardens as part of cultivable lands participate with 84%. Agriculture land spreads on 165,639 ha. i.e. 14% from total agriculture land in the country, and 88,075 ha i.e. 53.1 % are pastures.

The tobacco is dominant industrial plant. The East planning region is also the biggest potato producer in the country. In this regard, there is a large potential for creation of export brands of potato and rice. There is also a large potential for export of products from sheep and goat rising and development of milk and meat processing industry. Regarding vegetable production, this branch is not well developed in the East Planning Region.

Transition of many individual farmers from the informal sector in the small enterprise sector has been recorded; the sector is still dominated by individual farmers not registered as economic entities though.

The agriculture development potential of the region is not used entirely, production is often carried out without the use of modern methods and mechanisation, and a significant problem is the irrigation of agricultural land.

Regarding employment it should be taken into account that part of the workers are engaged in the informal sector and in agriculture, i.e. they are not recorded in official statistics. However, unemployment remains one of the most serious problems in the region as a result of unfavourable economic change, closing down of many companies, as well as increased number of working age population.

Total forest area in the region is 135,378 ha i.e. 13% from total forest in the Republic of Macedonia, covering 38% from total territory in the region.

Important water resources in the region are the mineral and thermal water springs in Vinica (Istibanja) and Shtip (Kezovica), as well as Bregalnica River with its two big dams “Kalimanci” and “Kochani lake”. These resources do not secure the water supply and irrigation of the region though.

1.2. Public facilities

All the settlements in the region are connected with roads, though the quality of the national, regional and local road infrastructure is considered to be rather poor, mostly due to lack of investments and inappropriate maintenance.

According to the data of the Census 2002, 94.4% of the households in the region have a drinking water supply. In rural areas, this index varies from 10% to 80%.

Problems regarding the drinking water supply result from high average per capita consumption, water losses of more than 50% along the water supply systems, due to their age (older than 15 years), insufficient capacity of reservoirs, water treatment plants and other facilities.

The primary and secondary wastewater collection network is located primarily in urban municipal centres. Coverage of population with the canalisation network in urban areas varies from 80% to 100%, and in rural areas from 0% (septic tanks) to 80%. The wastewater collection systems need improvement since there are leakages during transportation, which increases the risk of soil and ground water contamination.

Construction of wastewater treatment plants is one of the most important preconditions for development of organic agriculture, tourism and other economic branches.

Solid waste disposal is done on municipal landfills which do not satisfy the basic sanitary and technical standards for safe waste disposal.

All of the settlements are electrified and there is mobile telephone connection.

The University "Goce Delchev"-Shtip established in 2007 has following faculties on the territory of the region: Faculty of Law – Kochani, Faculty of Economics – Shtip, Faculty of Agriculture – Shtip, Faculty of Computer Science– Shtip, Faculty of natural and technical sciences – Shtip, Faculty of Music – Shtip, Faculty of Medicine – Shtip, Faculty of Philology – Shtip, Faculty of Technology – Probishtip, Faculty of Mechanical engineering – Vinitsa.

1.3. Tourism-related services and facilities

The East Planning Region has tourism potentials and this sector is recognized as one of the development priorities. Abundant natural resources and numerous cultural sites enable development of rural, mountain, spa and wellness and eco tourism, 365 days a year.

The tourism industry is run mostly by private companies; however development of this industry requires support from the public sector.

Regarding the requirements of the ICT, the accommodation capacities, restaurants and pubs are well distributed along the route. They are most concentrated in Delchevo, Pehchevo and Berovo thus providing enough options, satisfactory for the beginning of the route development.

Delchevo accommodation capacities amount to 125 beds in 1 hotel, 1 motel and private houses and the town disposes of a variety of restaurants, pubs and cafes.

Pehchevo accommodation capacities are situated in the holiday area Ravna Reka along the upper stream of Bregalnica river. They consist of weekend houses offering facilities for a longer stay. Several eco paths are leading to interesting sites such as waterfalls, rock formations, protected areas, archaeological sites; some of them can be used also for bikes.

Berovo disposes of a variety of accommodation capacities in the town itself – about 95 beds in hotels, guest houses, private houses; in the holiday area Ablanitsa on the both sides of Bregalnica river there are about 25 beds in weekend houses available for tourists, and the hotels and villas around Berovo lake can accommodate around 150 people. In Berovo one can profit from the variety of restaurants, pubs and cafes. Several eco paths connecting interesting sites such as Berovo lake, neighboring villages, peaks, mountain farm houses, beautiful forests; some of them can be used also for bikes.

The holiday area Suvi Laki in Ograzhden Mountain dominated by weekend-houses disposes of two youth camps (with some management problems, for the moment) and there are projects to develop capacities for visitors.

From the annual events taking place in Berovo worth mentioning is the Ethno Square festival held in August.

Concerning local products the region is famous with the Berovo milk products, plum rakia, honey, forest fruits, herbs, local cuisine specialties and with the handicrafts based on wool and wood processing.

1.4. Attraction sites - natural, cultural and historical heritage

Natural heritage is especially rich and opens the possibility to develop rural tourism. In this regard, sites worth mentioning along or near the route on the territory of the Eastern Planning Region are:

- slopes of Vlahina, Maleshevska and Ograzhden mountain
- protected forests near Trabatovishte (7 ha), Zvegor (25 ha) and along Bregalnica river (160 ha)
- rock formation "Ilin Kamen" on the northeast of the village Zvegor occupying an area of 75 ha with a characteristic geological profile – on the ICT route

- earth pyramids “Kukljeto” near Nov Istevnik (Balabanska mahala) in the North-East outskirts of the small mountain Bejaz Tepe (1326 m) – around 3 km away from the ICT route
- area around the springs of Bregalnica River and their waterfalls (6-13 km from Pehchevo) and up to 7 km away from the ICT route
- Ravna Rjeka tourist settlement (in the area around the springs of Bregalnica River and their waterfalls), 13 km from Pehchevo and 7 km away from the ICT route
- Ablanica tourist settlement with archaeological attractions, on both sides of Bregalnica river, 2 km from Berovo and on the ICT route
- Berovo lake and its recreational area, situated 6 km from Berovo and 3,5 km away from the route
- Suvi Laki tourist settlement – on the ICT route

Cultural and historical resources and highlights:

- Towns of Delchevo, Pehchevo and Berovo
- Monasteries, churches, chapels, local architecture
- Monastery of St. Archangel Michael in Berovo
- Monastery of Presveta Bogorodica Balakija (Holy Mother - East Friday) on the road towards Berovo lake
- Museum of Berovo with a reconstruction of a Macedonian room, some costumes, tools etc.
- Statue of the Macedonian revolutionary Dimitar Berovski, Berovo
- Monument for Iljo Maleshevski (Ilyo Voyvoda) national hero in both Bulgaria and Macedonia who fought against the Ottoman occupation
- Church Rozhdestvo of Prevetta Bogorodica, or Nativity of the Blessed Virgin, Berovo

2. Public transport integration in the East Planning Region

2.1. Transport modes to the cycle route/destination

There is one national road passing through the East planning region (M-5: Veles – Shtip – Kochani – Makedonska Kamenica – Delchevo) and three regional roads (R-523: Delchevo – Pehchevo – Berovo, R-527: Kochani – Vinica – Berovo and R-603: Radovich – Berovo).

The ICT route is using parts of: the M-5 coming from Blagoevgrad (BG) to Delchevo and the R-523 from Delchevo to Pehchevo.

2.2. Travel by Railways

The development of the railway network in the East Planning Region can be assessed as insufficient. A section of 70 km of the railway line Veles – Kochani passes through the East Planning Region and ends in a dead end. From the urban centres in the region, only Shtip and Kochani are connected by rail.

Kochani lies 55 km away from Delchevo which is the nearest point on the ICT route.

An east-west railway to connect Bulgaria with Macedonia is at present under construction.

Other possible railway connection is the one in Blagoevgrad (BG) lying 28 km from the Bulgarian border crossing; there are trains from Blagoevgrad to Sofia 5 times per day and buses more than 15 times per day.

Bikes are allowed in all trains in the Bulgarian national railway network, the price is reasonable, but there are particular problems with provision of space.

2.3. Travel by Long-distance Coaches

The only international bus connection in the region is the one between Sofia (BG) and Shtip one time a day in each direction. This bus stops also at Delchevo.

There is a regular bus connection to Skopje, the main transport hub in the country. From Skopje there are only two international train connections - for Belgrade and Prishtina, as well as busses to 20 countries, including the neighbouring states and various European destinations.

2.4. Roads Infrastructure

The existing road infrastructure in the East Planning Region consists of 1,245 km local roads, 156 km national and 345 km regional roads. The road network in this region is at a medium level of development, and the current condition of national (M-5: Veles – Shtip – Kochani – Makedonska Kamenica – Delchevo) and part of the regional roads (R-523: Delchevo – Pehchevo – Berovo, R-527: Kochani – Vinica – Berovo and R-603: Radovish – Berovo) is poor;

The local road network in the East Planning Region is also insufficiently developed and of poor quality. All settlements are connected by roads though.

2.5. Existing cycling trails along the ICT

Worth mentioning are some short trails of local importance:

The eco-path Berovo - Ablanitsa holiday area - Berovo Lake (6 km) is marked and suitable both for hiking and biking.

The eco-path Ablanitsa – Ravna Reka (4,1 km) is marked and suitable both for hiking and biking.

The South-East planning region of Macedonia

The region is located in the South-East part of the Republic of Macedonia covering a total surface area of 2739 km² or approximately 11% of the territory of the Republic of Macedonia. In the south it borders Greece, in the east - Bulgaria, in the north and west the East and Vardar Planning Regions of Macedonia.

The region consists of 10 municipalities; the proposed ICT route passes through three of them: Bosilovo, Strumitsa and Novo selo.

The Center for development of the South-East planning region is situated in the town of Strumitsa.

The South-East Planning Region consists of the basin of Strumica River and the lower basin of the Vardar River (south from Demir Kapija). The mountains presented in the region are Belasica, Ograzden, Plachkovica, Serta and Kozuf.

46% of arable land is in the plane area, located at an altitude of 250-300 m and is of primary significance to the agriculture in the region. These areas lie along the river basin of the Vardar, Strumica, Trkanja and Kriva rivers. The remaining arable land is located in the slope area (52%) and in the hilly relief area (2%). This quality and soil characteristic of the region also determines the manner of land utilisation by agricultural entities. Altitude varies between 64 m to 2.157 m above sea level (Zelen Breg peak of the Kozuf Mountain).

1. Description of Iron Curtain Trail tourism potential in the South-East planning region

1.1. Socio-political and economic situation

There are 188 populated places in the region dominated by rural areas. From the 10 municipalities in the region 5 are rural ones and 45.3% of the population is living in the cities.

The total population number of the region is 171972. The average population density of the region is 63 inhabitants per km² and the municipality of Strumitsa has the highest population density - 169,80 inhabitants per km².

The percentage of the population older than 60 years is 15%.

According to the Survey for the labour market prepared by the State Statistical Office in 2005, the unemployment rate stood at 34,4%.

Small businesses absolutely dominate the South-East Region with a share of 67% in the production of the non-financial sector, against 23% for medium and 10% for large enterprises.

The most significant sectors are textile, tobacco, agriculture, construction, catering, and trade.

The Municipality of Strumitsa has the most developed industry in the region. Processing and finishing of primary agricultural production make a significant economic contribution with capacity to produce tinned vegetables, milk and dairy products, meat products, fermented tobacco, mill and baker's goods, and sweets in small production plants. Wood packing and wood processing industry (furniture, cabinetwork) is also presented in the municipality. The most active sector is the textile industry, producing yarn and clothing. There is a factory for sanitary ceramics in the municipality utilizing raw local materials and a brick production factory. The electrical industry and the metal processing industry include micro production capacities with the following products: electrometers, pressed parts, metal luxury items from metal sheets, cash registers, safes, safety doors, fireproof closets, aluminium locksmith products, and others.

The contribution of the South-East Region to the total gross domestic product of Macedonia is 7%.

The total arable land in the South-East Region amounts to around 10% of the total arable land in the country including fields, vineyards, orchards and pastures.

Vegetables production is one of the most significant potentials for agriculture in the South-East Region. It is concentrated in the Strumica micro-region and the Gevgelija region, on approximately 52.000 ha of fields. Around 300 ha are covered with greenhouses equipped with heating systems. The following crops are dominant: tomato, pepper, cucumber, cabbage, onion, melon and watermelon. They are traditionally produced in this area together with the yields that are produced in smaller quantities, such as: peas, garlic, leek, lettuce, aubergine, carrot, cauliflower, and recently non-traditional products such as broccoli, Brussels sprouts, asparagus, Chinese cabbage, and others. Five main products dominate export: tomatoes, peppers, watermelons and cucumbers, with the main destination being the EU markets, as well as neighbouring countries. A specific product from this region is the Japanese apple in Valandovo as well as the pomegranate. The Russian Federation is the main market for these fruit products.

Cattle production mainly takes place in the hilly areas in the northern and southern parts of the region. It is carried out by small agricultural or commercially-oriented family companies, as well as by several bigger cattle companies. Sheep, goats, pigs and poultry are also presented. Since the region is rural, regional development programmes will focus on the IPA instrument and will be financed by the IPARD programme. Forest and forest land covers 170.814 ha of the South-East Planning Region or 62% of its territory. The harvestable quantity of the wooden mass has a share of 22% in the total wooden mass in the Republic of Macedonia.

1.2. Public facilities

According to the 2002 census 55,8% of the total households use apartments with bath and toilet, 51,2% - apartments connected to public drainage, 83,9% - apartments connected to public water supply system.

The South-East Region has no regional sanitary landfill, and instead uses many illegal dumpsites, which poses a great problem for the region.

The region has only one wastewater treatment plant located in Dojran and in some small residential areas.

Problems regarding the potable water supply result from the lack of natural water springs, water losses along the water supply systems due to their age, insufficient capacity of reservoirs, water treatment plants and other facilities.

The region has a sufficiently developed network of 110 and 220 kV power lines through the larger urban areas. There are possibilities to connect the region with a gas pipeline from the Republic of Bulgaria.

There is a developed landline telephone, mobile and internet network.

Following Faculties of the University of Shtip “Gotse Delchev” are situated in the South-East planning region: Faculty of Agriculture and Faculty of Education (pre-school teaching and primary school education) in Strumitsa, Faculty Of Tourism And Business Logistics in Gevgelija, Faculty of Electrical Engineering – Radovish.

1.3. Tourism-related services and facilities

Regarding the requirements of the ICT, the accommodation capacities, restaurants and pubs are well distributed along the route. They are most concentrated in Strumitsa, Bansko and Koleshino thus providing enough options, satisfactory for the beginning of the route development.

At Vassilevo there is a motel with 22 beds.

Strumitsa accommodation capacities amounts to over than 250 beds in a hotel with four and with three stars, a pension and a motel; the town offers a big variety of restaurants, pubs and cafes.

Bansko disposes of more than 280 beds in a big and very shabby spa hotel and two smaller hotels.

In the motel by Koleshino around 100 visitors can be accommodated.

There are developed eco-paths to the waterfalls of Gabrovo, Koleshino and Smolare situated in the slopes of Belasitsa Mountain thus providing a scenery stroll along the stream and access to the falling water.

From the annually held events in the region worth mentioning is the Strumica Carnival traditionally held within the “Trimeri” days, that is at the beginning of the Lenten Fast (c a r n e v a l comes from the Latin c a r n e – meat and v a l i – goodbye).

1.4. Attraction sites - natural, cultural and historical heritage

There is a diverse and expansive heritage in the region with many natural monuments and reserves. Particularly noteworthy are the Smolare and Koleshino waterfalls, Monospitovo Swamp (lying close to the route). Lake Dojran is protected by the Law on Lakes of the Republic of Macedonia (the site is worth visiting but is lies 40 km away from the ICT route).

Natural heritage is especially rich and opens the possibility to develop rural and spa tourism.

- Mokrino springs situated in a wood of old plane trees (*Platanus orientalis*)- 1.5 km east from the village center and on the ICT route
- Hot mineral springs in Bansko - on the ICT route
- Gabrovo waterfalls within walking distance from the ICT route
- Koleshino waterfall in the lower flow of the river Baba falling from 13,80 m height within walking distance from the ICT route

- Smolare waterfall in the lower flow of the river Lomnica falling from 38 m height – within walking distance from the ICT route

Cultural and historical resources and highlights:

- Monastery of St. Leonthius in Vodocha, 4 km from Strumica
- Monastery of St Bogorodica Eleusa (Holy Mother of God - Eleusa), 7 km from Strumica
- Czar's Towers located on the hill overlooking Strumica - remains of a medieval fortress
- Monastery of St Ilija located in the mountains above Strumica (2.5 km walk)
- Monastery of the 15 Martyrs of Tiberiopolis, Strumica
- Medieval Ottoman tower, Strumica
- Statue of the famous Macedonian revolutionary Goce Delchev, Strumica
- Catholic Church of the Ascension of the Holy Mother of God, Strumica
- Lady with a Mask, a monument dedicated to the Strumica Carnival, Strumica
- Strumica City Hall and Tourist Information
- Orta Mosque built on the foundations of a church, Strumica
- Church of St. Cyril and Methodius, Strumica
- Foundations of the Church of the 40 Martyrs of Sebastea near Bansko
- Ruins of an old Turkish Bath near Bansko and former Turkish Bath in the village
- Roman Baths near Bansko (former thermal spa)
- Church of St Konstantin and Elena in Mokrino

2. Public transport integration in the South-East planning region

2.1. Transport modes to the cycle route/destination

The international highway E-75 (also known as corridor 10) runs north-south from Serbia to Greece, bisecting Macedonia. This is the most common route for overland tourists to take for entering Macedonia and it passes along the Vardar River valley of the planning region.

The road M-6 is passing through the Strumica-Radovish valley (from the Bulgarian border - Strumica - Radovish - Shtip).

At present it is possible to cross the Macedonian-Bulgarian border at “Zlatarevo” connecting Petrich (BG) and Strumitsa (MK) used by the ICT route to leave Macedonia on its way to the Black Sea.

The connection of the region to Greece is established through the border crossing points Star Dojran (40 km away from Strumitsa) and Bogoroditsa (45 km away from Strumitsa).

Strumitsa which is a daily section end/ beginning point of ICT and the only city along the route in that region lies 150 km from Skopje, 115 km from Thessaloniki and 210 km from Sofia.

2.2. Travel by Railways

The closest train station to Strumitsa (i.e. to the ICT) is Gevgelija which lies about 45 km away (at the border to Greece). There is a bus connection Strumitsa - Gevgelija twice a day. From Gevgelija there is a train connection to Skopje, the main railway and transport hub of the country.

The international trains from Skopje now depart only for Belgrade and Prishtina.

2.3. Travel by Long-distance Coaches

There used to be an international train connecting Ljubljana, Slovenia and Thessaloniki, Greece by way of Macedonia via Tabanovce at the Macedonian-Serbian border, Kumanovo, Skopje, Veles, Gradsko, Negotino, Demir Kapija, and Gevgelija at the Macedonian-Greek border. Unfortunately, travelling by train from Greece to locations abroad is no longer possible since TrainOSE, the long-distance railway network, discontinued international service on February 13, 2011. But there are buses that fill the gap.

There is a regular bus connection to Skopje, the main transport hub in the country (dozen buses per day from Strumitsa). From Skopje there are only two international train connections - for Belgrade and Prishtina, as well as busses to 20 countries, including the neighbouring states and various European destinations.

The only international connection abroad from Strumitsa is the daily bus to Sofia (Bulgaria).

There are busses from Skopje to Thessaloniki that stop at Gevgelija (bus connection Strumitsa - Gevgelija is available twice a day).

2.4. Roads Infrastructure

Along the Vardar River valley in the planning region, runs the E75 highway, also known as corridor 10 with great significance to the European and Balkan road network. The arterial road M-6 also runs through the Strumica-Radovish valley (from the Bulgarian border - Strumica - Radovish - Shtip) where regional and local roads connect to each other.

The selected route for ICT avoids these busy roads; it uses local asphalted roads in good condition and for 7 km non-asphalted roads which need stabilization (but can be used now also).

2.5. Existing cycling trails along the ICT

Not available so far.

TURKEY

Description of the physical ICT backbone route in Turkey

The backbone of the route in Turkey consists of part of the daily section Srem (BG) – Edirne (TK):

- the daily section Edirne - Kırklareli
- part of the daily section Kırklareli - Malko Tarnovo (BG)

6. *Border crossing point Lesovo/ Hamzabeyli – Uzunbayır – Hüseyinpınar – Saksagan – Edirne (37 km)*

Less than 1 km from the border crossing point Lesovo/ Hamzabeyli the route leaves the state road and branches to the right following the sign to the village Uzunbayır. The route descends from the Dervent hills along the Tundzha River valley on calm well maintained roads though partly covered by gravel. This calm area, dominated by oak-trees and open spaces, is the habitat of the Eastern Imperial Eagle. The road enters Edirne using a side road passing along the graveyard in front of the Beylerbeyi Türbesi.

Thus the route avoids the newly reconstructed road D535 to Edirne via Lalapaşa which is with high motorized traffic and not attractive.

2. *Edirne – Büyükdöllük – Menekşesofular – Küçükdöllük – Karayusuf – Ortakçı – Kavaklı – Yağcılı – Süloğlu – Keramettin – Dolhan – Kayalı – Eriklice – Kırklareli (78 km)*

The route continues eastwards avoiding the motorway O-3 to Kırklareli (and Istanbul) and the direct road to Süloğlu where the base of the 55th Mechanized Infantry Brigade is situated and the narrow asphalt road is frequented by military trucks and agricultural machinery; the trail uses calm roads through a slight hilly terrain with mainly agricultural landscapes to Kırklareli.

3. *Kırklareli – Karakoc – Ahmetce – Kuzulu – border crossing point Dereköy/ Malko Tarnovo (43 km)*

After Kırklareli the road leads north-eastwards back to the Bulgarian border through the western part of Yıldız/ Strandzha Mountain, where the forest becomes denser and encompasses more and more of the landscape.

First, the route uses the calm roads (partly non-asphalted but gravel in good condition) via the villages Karakoc – Ahmetce – Kuzulu and at Koruköy it joins the European road E87 and reaches the Bulgarian border. This part of the E87 is with medium motorized traffic and has been recently reconstructed. It has an asphalted shoulder suitable for cycling especially after signposting.

The proposed route differs from the primary proposal of Michael Cramer. The route is optimized the following way:

- it enters Turkey via the border crossing point Lesovo/ Hamzabeyli (functioning since 2005) which was not opened during Michael Cramer's survey and uses the calm roads along Tundzha river valley to go to Edirne
- Edirne - Lalapaşa has become a busy section since the opening of the border crossing point Lesovo/ Hamzabeyli and going to Vaysal via alternative calmer roads makes the daily section difficult and

too long (more than 100 km); that is why the route between Edirne and Kırklareli stays in the lowest south parts of the Derwent hills and uses more direct calmer roads with little denivelation

- For the first half of the section Kırklareli – Malko Tarnovo the route uses a parallel road to the E87 via small villages to avoid the traffic and to make it less monotonous

Following EuroVelo criteria have been taken into account:

- cross the Iron Curtain borders as frequent as possible
- use of calmer roads
- to avoid uninteresting or monotonous stretches wherever possible
- sections not longer than 80 km on flat areas

1. Roads

The border between Turkey and Bulgaria is 259 km long and passes through hilly to mountainous area (Derwent hills, Strandzha Mountain). For the moment it can be crossed via the three border crossing points:

- Kapitan Andreevo (where the river Maritsa leaves Bulgaria)
- Hamzabeyli/ Lesovo (where the river Tundzha leaves Bulgaria)
- Dereköy/ Malko Tarnovo

The proposed ICT route enters Turkey at the border crossing Hamzabeyli/ Lesovo and leaves the country at Dereköy/ Malko Tarnovo.

Planned border crossing points between BG and TK which could be useful for the future development of the ICT:

- Strandzha (BG) – Malkoçlar (TK) in West Strandzha Mountain
- Belevren (BG) – Ahlatlı (TK) in West Strandzha Mountain
- Rezovo (BG) – Beğendik (TK) at the Black sea coast

The road network between the border villages of Edirne and Kırklareli provinces is very well developed and maintained having in mind the small size and remoteness of the settlements. This is partly due to the presence of military barracks situated near the border to Bulgaria.

There is a possibility to ride on almost traffic free roads very close to the Bulgarian border (between 0,5 km up to 7 km air distance from the border) where watch towers and abandoned bunkers can be seen. The road surface is well maintained though partly covered with gravel. The road goes up and down through hilly terrain – a puzzle of forests and open spaces for agriculture. The habitat of the Eastern Imperial Eagle is here. All the villages along the road between the two border crossing points are vital and people are friendly, there are no accommodation capacities though. That makes a section of 145 km (starting at Srem, BG and ending at Malko Tarnovo, BG) with no accommodation.

The next places with accommodation in Turkey are Edirne and Kırklareli but they are too far, resp. 35 km and 40 km, away from the route (provided that it passes along the border villages).

Further actions related to the development of the ICT route could be planned in order to convince local people in offering bed and breakfast services and organize information campaigns about the ICT in general and the needs of the cyclists.

The whole ICT route in Turkey is 153 km long:

- 30 km on asphalted road shoulder with medium motorized traffic which need signposting.
- 123 km on roads with low motorized traffic partly asphalted, partly gravel which need signposting

Because of lack of accommodation facilities the route makes a detour via the two province centers Edirne and Kırklareli which are also section beginning/ end points. The section Edirne- Kırklareli is for the most part quite far from the line of the Iron Curtain Trail (10-35 km away from it).

According to the ECF criteria for directness the route can be evaluated as follows:

- border crossing point Lesovo/ Hamzabejli – Uzunbayır – Hüseyinpinar – Saksagan – Edirne: *excellent to good*
- Edirne – Büyükdöllük – Menekşesofular – Küçükdöllük – Karayusuf – Ortakçı – Kavaklı – Yağcılı – Süloğlu – Keramettin – Dolhan – Kayalı – Eriklice – Kırklareli: *good to inappropriate*
- Kırklareli – Karakoc – Ahmetce – Kuzulu – border crossing point Dereköy/ Malko Tarnovo: *inappropriate to excellent*

The ICT route is continuous and uses existing public roads with low motorized traffic and agricultural roads.

According to the ECF criteria for safety the route can be evaluated as good.

The surface of the proposed route is solid and smooth (asphalt and well maintained gravel road) possible to be used at every weather condition (no mud) during the season. The national signposting is clear according to the national standards. Rest stations (village tea-houses and small shops for basic provisions) are available almost in every village.

Though, there is neither EuroVelo signposting, nor cycling friendly public transport available.

According to the ECF criteria for comfort the route can be evaluated as good (no bike transportation available, though).

2. Services

Only the big province centers (daily section beginning and end points) have accommodation capacities and variety of restaurants, pubs and shops. These options are satisfactory for the beginning of the route development, though. Actions addressed to service development (especially bed & breakfast), also on transboundary level, must be initiated in order to have at least one more option for daily section beginning/ end between Edirne and Kırklareli.

According to the ECF criteria for density of accommodation and density of restaurants, pubs and shops the route in Turkey can be evaluated as just appropriate.

Except for the town of Edirne, the region has no traditions related to tourism. Long-distance cyclists frequent the city on their way to Istanbul but cycling tourism is not recognized as priority and therefore “cycling friendly” labelled services are missing. *According to this criterion the route can be evaluated as just appropriate.*

4. Attractiveness

There are no special attractions connected to the Iron Curtain. Edirne is undoubtedly the international touristic highlight, worth mentioning in this regard is also Kırklareli. The section is placed in cycling friendly environment (mosaic landscape, rural settlements, forest, etc.).

According to the ECF criteria for attractiveness the route can be evaluated as good to excellent.

The natural sites of interest along the route in Turkey:

- The Dervent hills and their landscape dominated by oak-trees and open spaces - the habitat of the Eastern Imperial Eagle and other species
- Tundzha river valley
- Agricultural slight hilly landscape
- Megaliths (in the Regions of Lalapaşa and Süloğlu in the Province of Edirne and the Regions of Kofcaz, Kırklareli and Demirköy in the Province of Kırklareli, in the Eastern Thrace) - dolmens, menhirs and tumulus
- the western part of Yildiz/ Strandzha Mountain with its dense forests

Edirne cultural and architectural sites

Edirne is a city of rivers – the Meriç, Arda and Tunca rivers all meet at Edirne and join the Ergene river in the south. Edirne has become famous for the historical bridges on these many rivers – Gazi Mihal bridge built in 1420 is the oldest and Uzunköprü bridge the longest (1 392 m long) with 174 arches.

As an economic and commercial centre, life in Edirne was rich and colourful and bazaars and caravanserais spread around the city. Four ancient bazaars are worth seeing: Bedesten, a covered bazaar where valuable goods and jewellery were sold, Arasta Bazaar, Ali Pasa Bazaar, the centre of commercial life in the 16-17th centuries with 129 shops, and Rüstempaşa Caravanserai which was converted into a hotel in 1972. The last two buildings were built by the architect Sinan.

Edirne is also famed for its mosques the most spectacular of which are:

- Selimiye Mosque considered to be the masterpiece of architect Mimar Sinan built in the 16th century
- Eski Camii, the old mosque, covered with nine domes is the oldest monumental Ottoman structure in Edirne dating back to the 15th century
- Üc Serefeli Mosque with his remarkable minaret with 3 balconies built in the 15th century

Other interesting sites are:

- Macedonian Tower
- Tunca Bridge
- Meriç Bridge
- Statue of Mimar Sinan
- Sokullu Turkish Bath constructed by Mimar Sinan
- Ruins of Great Synagogue
- Pehlivani monument

Museums preserving the history and traditions of the city:

- the health museum (Sultan Bayezid II. Mosque and Complex) – from the 15. century where patients were treated with the sound of water, music, scents, various occupations, as well as medical knowledge and medicine
- Edirne archeology and ethnography museum where Ottoman household goods and furniture, rugs, coins, dresses, wooden goods are exhibited
- Kirkpinar house – encasing belongings of Kirkpinar wrestlers, pictures and documents about Kirkpinar
- Hafizaga kiosk (the city history museum) – an authentic example of traditional Turkish houses

- the museum of Turkish Islamic works exhibiting Ottoman tiles and ceramics, artefacts belong to wrestlers
- the museum of Balkan War and the memorial of Sükrü Pasa
- the Lausanne memorial war museum built at the historical train station area in the Karaagaç district.

From the traditional handicrafts worth mentioning are:

- Edirnekari - paint or varnish motives and compositions applied to materials such as wood, carton and leather; a technique used since the 15th century first in Edirne during the Ottoman era
- Brooms with mirrors, fruit soaps and Edirne dolls

Concerning local products the region is famous with its white cheese, almond paste, fried liver, wrapped liver, Deva-i misk (a kind of halva) and Hardaliye (a drink produced mainly from grape juice mixed with mustard and marzipan)

From the annual events taking place in Edirne worth mentioning are the Kırkpınar wrestling events organised since 1925.

A wrestling contest takes place in the area of Sarayıçi. The master Pehlivan (wrestler) is the one who out of 1 000 Pehlivans takes victory on the Er Meydanı (the field of battle) competition. Pehlivans are educated according to specific values and rules and are symbols for the city. They wear a specific water buffalo leather garment, the kışbet.

Kırklareli sites

- Hızır Bey Külliye: this religious complex consists of the Hızır Bey Mosque (the oldest mosque in Thrace), Hızır Bey Bath and Arasta (Bazaar)
- Cedit Ali Pasha Mosque, Kadi Mosque, Sokollu Mehmet Pasha Mosque and Beyazıt Mosque
- Kırklareli Jewish Quarter, a historic neighborhood
- number of old fountains (e.g. Çarşı Çeşmesi - Market Fountain)
- old houses with interesting architecture typical for the region (some are restored)
- Several villages in the vicinity of Kırklareli contain rather unusual domed tombs. Examples can be seen in the ancient cemeteries (second-fourth century B.C.) near Eriklice, 3km northwest of Kırklareli, and at Çadırhlar Tepesi, 3km southeast

5. Promotion of the section

For the time being the materials about the Balkan section of ICT provide only a general overview about the route in Turkey:

- Bikeline Guide Iron Curtain Trail 3 Along the Green Belt from the German-Czech Border to the Black Sea (not distributed in MK)
- Michael Cramer's book about the Iron Curtain Trail (not distributed in MK)
- Promotion brochure in English and German about the Balkan section of ICT issued by the project StrategIC (leading organisation: Bulgarian Association for Alternative Tourism BAAT) to be distributed among stakeholders in Bulgaria and abroad
- Website about the Balkan section of ICT in Bulgarian and English elaborated by the project StrategIC (leading organisation: BAAT) and administrated by the project partners: <http://13.eurovelo.bg/>

- Facebook profile of the ICT Balkan section administrated by the StrategIC project partners “The Iron Curtain Trail/Пътят на желязната завеса” (leading organisation: BAAT)

There are no promotional materials and web-sites elaborated by local stakeholders about the ICT and addressed to the wide public or to the specific target group.

Materials and web-based publications about cultural or natural sites along the proposed route can be found but they can be obtained just one by one, mostly in local language and without reference to the ICT route.

Thus the general promotional status according to ECF criteria could be described as “inappropriate”.

4. Organization

The project StrategIC did not have a partner organization from Turkey and the proposed route is based on desk-research, consultations with experts working on transborder projects and field visits. Developing the route in Edirne and Kırklareli provinces could be the topic of future transborder projects between Bulgaria and Turkey.

According to the ECF criteria for organization and financial tools the route in Macedonia can be evaluated as “inappropriate” to “just appropriate”.

Feasibility Study for Iron Curtain Trail cross-border sections in the Balkans

(Bulgarian-Greek / Bulgarian-Turkish / Bulgarian-FYROM and
Bulgarian-Serbian borders)

The Feasibility Study is part of the project
“StrategIC: Development of Long-term Strategy and Networks for Promotion and Implementation
of the Iron Curtain Trail in its Balkan Section”

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1. The goal of the Feasibility Study

This methodology is meant to help project teams, researchers and experts dealing with the development of the Iron Curtain Trail in the Balkan Peninsula between Romania, Serbia, Bulgaria, FYROM, Greece and Turkey. The methodology gives guidelines for a feasibility study for the ICT according to the standards of the Euro Velo network, as this trail is planned to be part of the European network of cycling trails and bear the number 13. The Feasibility Study is part of the project “StrategIC: Development of Long-term Strategy and Networks for Promotion and Implementation of the Iron Curtain Trail in its Balkan Section”, co-financed by the European Commission.

According to the project the study investigates and provides analysis and information for the following Feasibility Study and short-term ICT Action Plan components:

- ICT infrastructure (incl. cross-border points) and its compatibility with Euro Velo route standards
- Tourism potential – facilities, service providers, attraction sites (incl. natural, cultural and historical heritage, incl. Iron Curtain remains).
- Economic assessment
- Legal feasibility
- Funding options, EC and other existing financial mechanism for its implementation, etc.
- ICT Short-term Action Plan: Implementation Stages and Timing

The methods of conducting the study are planned fully in line within the perspectives, tasks and agreed activities of the “StrategIC” project.

The goal of the study is to identify and recommend a major possible physical route along with interesting side-routes, which are interesting and visited by the tourists. However, the main „skeleton” of the ICT route is visible. The Feasibility Study assesses the feasibility of the main and complementary routes in respect to the special criteria of ICT and the general standards of Euro Velo Network. However, it focuses on the route not as an existing and developed as a tourist product destination line, but aims to determine the actual route as a finalisable and pending final development tourist product. That is why it is not the purpose of the Study to propose only the main-core route, but also to enlarge to nearby alternatives or side routes.

In general ICT route keeps as close to the physical border as possible, given its name and focuses on the heritage of the Iron Curtain. Therefore relevant attraction sites for visitors are also identified with priority through their historical and political relation and importance to the Iron Curtain (e.g. vs. other types of attractions).

2. Description of Iron Curtain Trail tourism potential in the Balkans

FIST ROUTE

DIDIMOTIXO – ISAAKIO – PETRADES - PITHIO – RIGIO – SOFIKO– THOURIO – XIMONIO – ORESTIADA– SAKOS – KAVILI – KASTANIES - MARASIA – KANADAS – PLATI– SPILAI0 – DIKEA – PTELIA – ORMENIO – BORDERS – PETROTA – PEDALOFOS– KOMARA – THERAPIO – MILIA– KIPRINOS – ZONI– BORDERS – LADI - METAXADES –LITTLE DERIO –GRAND DERIO – NEW SANTA – SAPEs

Starting the journey from Didimotixo, a city capable of meeting visitors' needs, we come across the train station and continuing in the same road we meet Isaakio at a distance of 4km. After Isaakio and after taking a mild uphill road, 3km further we come across the junction which leads to the village named Praggi. We drive straight ahead and after 2km we meet Petrades. After 6km of mild altitudinal variances, we arrive at Pythio, where a first thing for the visitor to notice is its Byzantine Tower. A mild uphill road follows and 3km later we find Rigio. Afterwards, covering a flat distance of 13km, we consecutively meet Rigio in the first 3km, Sofiko in the next 3km, Thourio follows after 3km and finally Ximonio after 2. There is a low traffic across the journey while at the same time the clusters of trees that frame river Evros, the natural barrier between Greece and Turkey, can be distinguished. In Orestiada, the biggest city in North Evros, can satisfy all traveler's needs.

Approximately, 4km away from Orestiada, driving on the old provincial road, we come across Sakos while keeping on driving 3km more, we meet Kavili. The altitudinal variances of the up-to-that-point journey can be characterized as mild.

Driving on the same old provincial road and 10km later, we meet Kastanies where a customs office through which we pass to Turkey, exists (around 2 km away from the village). It is worth mentioning that ends of July with beginnings of August, a music and other events festival takes place in the region of Ardas, attracting a lot of visitors. In Kastanies, river Ardas can be crossed through a cemented area which is still covered by the water, throughout the whole year. It is to be stated that this specific area is essentially dangerous during the winter of after thunderstorms, as the flow of the river grows bigger. After crossing river Ardas and in a distance of 2 km away from Kastanies, the village "Marasia" appears, 6km away from which we meet Kanada while 7km away we find the village "Plati" where the visitor can satisfy his basic needs for food and drink. 2km later we meet Spilaio and 8km later, with some small altitudinal variances, we come across Dikea, where, among others, a health center and a train station can be found. After 3km with small angles we meet Pali and after 4km of corresponding altitudinal variances Ptelia is met. The same scenery is repeated in the next 2km when we find Ormenio, which corresponds to the visitor's needs. Before Ormenio and as long as we desire to meet the borders we drive out to the central road where the traffic is relevantly low and after having followed a route with small and medium angles we find the Hellenic-Bulgarian borders in a distance of 6km. From Ormenio we can route to the west in a road with small and medium angles and in the 7th km we meet Petrota. From Petrota and after 8km of small, medium, yet sudden and intense altitudinal variances we come across Pedalofos. After 8km of analogous altitudinal variances, we find the settlement of Komara, where a dam is built and an artificial lake has been made. Turning in the right of Komara we find Therapio in a distance of 4km of medium angles, whereas 3km later a settlement named "Milia" is to be found; an older dam exists before arriving to Milia. On our way from Komara to Therapio we see the oldest dam with the small hydroelectrical factory and also the small artificial lake which has now been converted into a wetland. Furthermore, there is a guest house and a restaurant (tel:255602100) in the right slope of the hill, with a view to the artificial lake. Over the dam there is a road which we take and which, while driving on the asphalt, leads to Kyprinos in about 2km distance, a place suitable for the visitor's needs. 10km away and with mild altitudinal variances we come across Zoni and even further, in 7km of small to medium angles, we meet the settlement of Ladi. Turning on the right of

Ladi, we take the provincial road which leads to Metaxades. 5km away from there, we meet the settlement of Avdella, whereas 1km further the village of Metaxades is located; the route includes medium size angles. Continuing our route with small and medium size angles, medium road surface and through forests of beeches we come across Small Darios. Driving 13km more and keeping the same route, yet seeing pine forests as well, we find the Grand Darios with an important level of ecotourism development. Driving further 9km to the north, with intense to medium variances, we come across Nea Santa. A lowland road follows and we 12km away we meet Sapias.

The traffic throughout the whole route has been low to minimum except for the road which leaded from Ormenio to the borders, where the traffic was low to medium yet non perceptible due to the wide and wheel-made surface road. It is not possible to identify the differentiations of the road traffic after the completion of the new road in the area of Zoni. The route from Dikea to Zoni it can be said to have been particularly pleasant due to the alterations it offers. The area of Derios (little and grand) also can attract ecotourism interest. The route from Nea Santa to Derios is prohibitive for bicycles since for the greatest part of it, there are big angles for a long distance.

In the area of north Evros, we also contacted the bicyclists' association "Risos" (www.risos.gr) which bestirs itself to that area. Mr. Xadionas is its president (tel: 6932587823). After a relevant discussion on the suggested routes in this specific area we concluded that in order for the particular area to form part of the ICT program, a circular road should be built in this area of north Evros through which not only the historicity but also the ecological wealth of the area will be highlighted.

The suggested route is as follows:

Zoni – Kiprinos - Therapio –Komara – Pedalofos –Ptelea –Ormenio – Ptelea – Dikea – Plati – Rizia – Kastanies – Kavili – Sakos – Orestia – Ximonio – Thyrio – Rigio – Pytheio – Petrades – Isaakio – Didimotixo – Ellinoxori –Mani – Elafoxori– Ladi – Zoni.

In this area there are many points of entrance and exit, which offer an easy access not only to the Bulgarian but also to the Turkish borders, due to the mild lowland surface of the road. These points are located in Zoni, Ormenio and Kastanies if a road is taken and also in Pytheio if going to Turkey by train.

Ardas festival, which takes place in Kastanies in the ends of July constitutes the biggest cultural event not only of the specific area but also of the whole area of north Evros. It lasts a week and a big number of tourists dwells not only in hotels and guest houses but also the area of the festival itself using camps. This festival includes a lot of concerts, with Greek and international bands taking part. Furthermore, dancers and various associations from different parts of the country offer spectacles and entertainment in general. Where the festival takes place, various companies also present their products to the public.

In the area of Didimotixo and Pythio ruins of towers and walls discounted in the Byzantine era can be found. In addition, excavated graves from the first Christian eras are located in different points of the area.

Interesting for bicyclist is the area along the river of Evros, especially in the one located between Isaakio and Rigio, where the visitor is able to notice the high guard houses which even today are used in the guarding of the external borders of the European Union. Currently and due to projects that take place for the construction of a new ditch in the Greek-Turkish borders, it is not acknowledgeable how this part of land will be affected and which its final form will be.

In the region of Pedalofos a notable ecotouristic department of hospitality and wild animals' breeding is brought into action, namely "EUROTHIRAMA". Further information can be found in www.eurothirama.gr and in the telephones: 00306978890861 and 00302556061202.

The table that follows presents the different amenities to be offered in every settlement in every suggested route.

	ACCOMODATION	BANQUET	CAFES	PHARMACY	MARKET	HEALTH CENTERS	HOSPITAL	GAS STATIONS	POLICE DEPARTMENT	TOURISTS' OFFICES
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ZONI					X		X		
KYPRINOS		X	X	X	X		X	X	
THERAPIO	X	X			X				
KOMARA		X	X	X	X				
PEDALOFOS	X	X	X		X				
PTELEA		X	X		X		X		
ORMENIO	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	
PTELEA		X	X		X		X		
DIKAIA	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
PLATI		X	X		X				
RIZIA		X	X		X		X		
KASTANIES	X	X	X	X	X		X		
KAVILI		X	X	X	X		X		
SAKOS					X				
ORESTIADA	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X
XIMONIO		X	X		X		X	X	
THOURIO		X	X		X		X		
RIGIO			X		X				
PYTHIO		X	X		X				
PETRADES			X		X				
ISAAKIO			X		X				
DIDIMOTIXO	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
ELLINOXORI					X		χ		
MANI		χ	X		X			χ	
ELAFOXORI					X				
LADI		X	X		X				

SECOND ROUTE

PROMAXONAS – FORT ROUPEL – XAROPO – SIDIROKASTRO– AXLADOXORI KARIDOXORI – KATAFITO– PERITHORI - FORTRESS – KATO NEUROKOPO – EKSOXI.

Starting the journey from the Greek-Bulgarian borders, in the area of Promaxonas, we drive south to Sidirolastro until we meet the junction with the statue of Ioannis Metaxas from which, following the uphill road on the left for 2,5km distance we meet the military guard house of Fort Roupel, which today constitutes rather an historical monument. The visitor can leave his ID card there and travel 2,5km to arrive to the the Fort's museum and to the drink shop where all the tours to Fort's part begin, during which he can get historical information about the fort's projects taking place there.

At a distance of 9km away from the Fort Roupel we come across the settlement of Xaropos and 2km later we are at Sidirokastro. In Sidirokastro the visitor can stopover to the byzantine castle of 10th century names as "Dermi Isaar" or "Isaari", which in Turkish means "the steel castle", namely a castle unconquerable, as well as the byzantine public clock. In addition and due to the geothermal field of the area, there is a plethora of thermal sources while at the same time an hydrotherapy house can be found in a distance of 6km towards the borders as well as in the area of Aggistro, which is located about 8km away from the borders.

The route between the borders and Sidirokastro could be droved through the national road but, since it is one of the main entries to the country, a lot of traffic would me met. In many points of the route parallel to the national road, earthen or asphalt streets can be found which hold a minimum amount of traffic, yet they are not contiguous. From Xaropos to Sidirokastro the old provincial road can be followed as well. Before entering Sidirokastro, there is a junction on the left towards Axladoxori, which can be reached in a distance of 19km. The surface road is generally in a good condition with relevantly mild uphill and downhill; it

becomes strong though and demands a certain amount of precaution in a distance of 2-3km. It still does not hold a lot of traffic. The route is lovely since in many points, is parallel to the river of Kousovitis through the homonymous valley. During this route, many ruins of old watermills can be seen. The route is also 'decorated' with a lot of geological formations which attract the visitor's interest.

Around 7km away from Axladoxori, Karidoxori is located and there the asphalt road terminates and presents uphill and downhill while the surface road is in good condition without traffic.

After discussing with locals of the area and also soldiers who guard it, we became aware of some earthen streets starting from Karidoxori and leading to Katafito and Upper Vrontou, passing through mountain areas. According to the people foregoing mentioned, there is a dirt road that leads to the verdant, but in the winter time with the big amount of raining given, it becomes problematic due to the earthen terrain of the area. From Karydochori there are two roads that lead to the Upper Vrontou, which because of the rocky terrain do not present particular problems of disaster. From research through GOOGLE we found that trips to Upper Vrontou show marked variations in gradient, in contrast to that of Katafitos which presents mild geographical structure. Our proposal is to follow the path towards Katafitos which if included in the program, with interventions that can upgrade existing forest road network by either the municipality or from the forest area can contribute in avoiding these problems.

Before arriving to the settlement of Katafitos, the visitor encounters the artificial dam area with the little lake. The area is mostly utilized by ecotourism and many barbecues and gazebos are constructed at the side. After a journey of about two kilometers with mild hypsometric variations we find the settlement of Vathytopos where an organic farming of semi-wild pigs operates. Continuing the route after six kilometres, we encounter a junction from which if we follow the road that goes straight we will end after 7km in Nevrokopi, and if we follow the right path we will be after 4km in Perithori, a village with strong economic and social life. From Perithori along the route we will be left after 6km to the village of Fortress. In this settlement we will also find Fort Lisse which belongs to the line of Metaxa and is open to the public, after consultation with the military unit in the area. From Fort after 1km path we get onto the central road Drama-Nevrokopi which is located 2km from this intersection. From Vathytopo up Nevrokopi paths are straight and the traffic encountered moderate to minimal. The quality of the pavement is quite good. From Lower Nevrokopi there is a wide street with mild elevations which leads to the border of the countryside in distance of 11km from it. The traffic is moderate. At Eksoxi, the visitor can find the ruins of the old steam and the tzami of that settlement. In several parts of the route, visitors can see the remains of anti-tank projects that exist at the time of World War II, both in Perithorio and in the area from Nevrokopi to Eksoxi. In the region of Upper Nevrokopi enough work has been done in surveying and recording cycle routes within the limits of the municipality. The work was carried out with cooperation of the municipality and the cycling group Drama (DAEDALUS) and is issued on leaflets with suggested itineraries and useful data for each route (information Nevrokopeiou City, tel:2523350162, chief of the program: Charismidou Effie). In general, this path can raise the visibility through intermunicipal cooperation between the two municipalities. In general we can say that the proposed route has elements able to integrate it fully in the spirit of the program ICT. In addition, there is a relevant background in the Municipality of Nevrokopi since they have worked in printing and promoting cycle routes in their area. So it is easily understandable and activities and support projects for the bike path can be promoted. On the other hand, the two major urban centres in the region of Sidirokastro and of Upper Nevrokopi can be converted into centres of daily excursions to nearby areas that present a significant interest in ecotourism. Such areas is Lake Kerkini, spas of Sidirokastro, Kousovitis, cave Aggiti etc.

The given table shows the services provided in each settlement

	ACCOMMODATION	HOUSING	COFFEE SHOPS	PHARMACIES	MARKETS	HEALTHCENTERS HOSPITALS	GAS STATIONS	POLICE DEPARTMENTS	TOURISTS OFFICES
PROMAXONAS	X	X	X	X			X	X	
FORT ROUPEL			X						
XAROPO		X	X	X			X		
SIDIROKASTRO	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
AXLADOXORI	X	X	X	X	X				
KARIDOXORI	X		X						
KATAFYTO		X	X		X				
VATHITOPOS		X	X		X				
PERITHORI			X	X			X		
FORTRESS	X		X						
NEVROKKOPI	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X
EKSOXI		X	X						



3. Public transport integration

The Region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace is one of the outlying regions of the country that has now become an important transport and energy hub of the country. The features included on these two areas appear to be significant and prospects even more.

Considering the natural resources found that the region is particularly rich in terms of the number of resources, but also in terms of variety. Indeed, the study concluded that with proper utilization of these resources can be started for the region a process of tourism development that goes beyond the twofold sun - sea is not only dominant in the whole country, but for the present situation of tourism in the Region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace.

Noted that apart from the availability of these natural resources like mountains, forests, flora and fauna, wetlands and other specially protected areas is an essential factor in the fact that these resources remain virtually untouched, preserving the character of the "virgin".

Accessibility

One of the major problems of the Region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace is the great distance from the main centers of the country.

The degree of accessibility of tourist resources in the region, on road, rail, sea and air access seems to have improved over the last decade, however estimated to be improved in order to achieve the number of visitors from other parts of the country and from foreign countries.

The completion of the Egnatia Odos (Via) and vertical roads, the modernization of the rail network, upgrading of ports are prerequisites for enhancing the role of the Region of Eastern Macedonia - Thrace, making a bridge of contact between Europe and the Balkans and the Black Seaside.

The completion of these infrastructures utilizes the location of the region and strengthens its ties with the Balkan and Black Sea economies.

Finally, the Region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace has a large network of provincial, inter-municipal and cross roads, which ensures the accessibility of tourist resources but needs improvements, especially on the roads of the mountains.

Road Access

Main Roads

The main roads in the region, which has a total length of 2.847 Km, include the highways and the provincial network. With the realization of projects on transport infrastructure, the state of roads in the Region in recent years has improved significantly.

National Road Network

This category includes the following roads:

NR 2 (Axis East - West), which is the hitherto main road of the study area. It starts from Thessaloniki and providing interconnection of the prefectures of Eastern Macedonia - Thrace, and crossed Kavala, Xanthi, Komotini and Alexandroupolis. By this road, are the coastal areas in the prefectures of Kavala, Xanthi, Rodopi and Alexandroupoli, where the capitals of the above laws as well as airports Chrysoupoli (Kavala) and Alexandroupolis, and major ports of the region (Kavala and Alexandroupolis).

E.O.14, connects the Drama Xanthi through Pranestiou and Stavropol region which has rich natural and human tourism resources.

NR 51 (axis north - south). The starting point lies in Alexandroupolis, ends at the border outpost of chestnut and continues through the provincial highway Chesnut - Ormenio by tri Greece - Bulgaria - Turkey. On the road this axis ensures the connection of PAMTH m, with Turkey through the Gardens, with Svilegkrant and Central Bulgaria through Ormenio and the connection to the Black Sea regions through Kastanies. In establishing the European Network for Transport, this line is part of European Corridor 9 (Helsinki, Finland - Alexandroupolis).

Provincial Road Network

The other provincial network serves both urban and main production centers of the Region, and the smaller urban and suburban areas, and includes the following roads which do not have the desired geometric characteristics nor in the right quality asphalt.

It should here be noted that the existing road network serving satisfactorily the mobility needs of the Region. With the extensive road works in progress intended to circumvent the major junctions of the main urban centers in order to reduce the access time of the Region.

However after the completion of the Egnatia Motorway section of which, passing through the Region of Eastern Macedonia - Thrace in length about 258 km, a further improvement of transport infrastructure in the sense that it significantly improved road accessibility in the region, while this will be factor in reducing the cost of processing (trade, transport, telecommunications, energy) and transportation inputs.

Secondary Road Network

The Region has developed a number of secondary roads, connecting the urban and suburban areas to rural and serves the communication between rural areas. Much of this network is paved and in good condition, with the exception of secondary roads in the Rhodope massif where even several openings of new roads and surfacing of existing dirt roads, to give the region a good degree of accessibility of tourist resources .

Rail Access

The Region of Eastern Macedonia - Thrace served by rail crossing four of the five laws, Drama, Xanthi the Rodopi and Evros. The total network length is approximately 410 km, for the most part is part of Corridor Thessaloniki - Alexandroupolis and connecting the region with Bulgaria Ormenio.

The rail network extends from the border Ormenio border with Bulgaria until Fotolivos the limits of the Drama and Serres (Central Macedonia), with 34 stations.

The average daily traffic includes 14 trains, of which 9 are 5 passenger and commercial.

The current design and geometry of the rail line, allows a maximum speed of 90 to 100 km / hour on average. In small segments is possible to develop speed up to 120 km / hour.

It should also be noted that in recent years have seen an increase in passenger traffic due to the routing of trains Intercity (to and from Athens and Thessaloniki), which led to shorter distance and more accuracy in the performance of services. This proves that if offered a high level of rail services in the Region could be a means to attract tourists wishing to visit the area.

Finally it should be noted the existing railway line passes very close to important tourist resources of the region, providing an important degree of accessibility to them.

Specifically through the region of Drama - Praneștiou - Stavropol - Xanthi, which has rich tourist resources as described in previous sections.

Water Access

In the Region of Eastern Macedonia - Thrace there are 12 ports, which serve local and national movements.

As ports of national importance have been designated commercial ports of Alexandroupoli and Kavala, which are included among the 13 most important ports of our country, in terms of passenger traffic and freight. In addition there are several ports which are designated as ports of local importance.

The port of Alexandroupolis: This is an artificial harbor that grows along the sea front southeast of the city and includes two areas, the existing harbor and the New Commercial - Passenger Port, which is produced for the exclusive service of commercial services.

The port of Alexandroupolis mainly serves the prefectures of Evros and Rodopi. Passenger traffic is multiplied during the summer months where there is an increase frequency of service due to increased traffic to Samothrace and Lemnos.

The port of Kavala: Does the existing port, which serve the mobility needs of passengers and the new port which is manufactured in South Karvali and serving the needs of logistics, which has increased traffic.

Also the port of Keramoti serves commercial and passenger traffic, the port of Peramos the traffic to Thassos and finally the small port of Iraklitsa the dock young professional and amateur boats.

The more traffic there is on the ferry to Thassos, which is particularly high during the summer months, which highlights the importance of tourism to this island.

Air Access

In the Region of Eastern Macedonia - Thrace, two national civil airport of Alexandroupoli and Kavala are covered by air transportation in the region.

The airport "Demokritos" Alexandroupolis is situated 13 km from Alexandroupolis, has a modern runway two kilometers and a width of 45 meters. In relation to the existing traffic infrastructure of the airport may be sufficient qualified as having the potential to serve multiple traffic than today.

The service on flights to and from Athens, with a fixed number of 61 flights per week (31 routes Alexandroupolis - Athens 30 Athens - Alexandroupolis) and charter flights from abroad during the summer months.

Airport "Megas Alexandros" Kavala is located in Chrissoupoli and essentially is the main gateway of foreign tourists to the region particular to Thassos.

Constructed in the late 1970's and started serving only flights charter. It constructed to accommodate all types of aircraft, with the only limitation that cannot be serviced moves two aircraft simultaneously. The airport occupies an area of 1000sq.m., Has a runway 3,000. x 60m., taxiway 3,000. x 45m. and 110m track. x 300m.

Finally it should be noted that the Alexandroupolis Airport serves the Rodopi and the airport of Kavala serves the counties of Drama and Xanthi and due to their location (distance from the financial and

administrative center of Athens, proximity to the Balkan countries and Turkey), the role in transporting goods and passengers to and from the boundaries of the Region is of particular interest.

Accessibility Tourism Resources of the Region

On the accessibility of tourist resources of the Region should be noted that, on the road network is composed of sections of highway, from provincial roads, and by local or forest roads. The network is quite dense, the largest percentage of asphalt and gravel less (especially in mountainous areas), but in good condition and allows smooth access.

The coastal areas of the Region which start from Kavala to the prefecture of Evros, linked through provincial roads, as there is no direct road link will pass through these areas.

The general condition of the road network can be regarded as quite satisfactory in the sense not present adverse conditions when access to the tourist resources of the region is quite easy. Some problems may occur during the winter months, particularly in mountainous areas.

The roads of Thassos include asphalt ring road through which the roads are leading to crowded coastal areas. In Samothrace, but only the North and Northwest part of the ring road which connects with the coastal areas are paved.

4. Environmental impacts

ICT and Nature 2000

Natura 2000 is a European network of important ecological sites. Member States are required to propose sites to protect the habitat types listed in Annex I and the species listed in Annex II as Sites of Community Importance (SCI), and if accepted by the procedure described in the Habitats Directive.(EEC/92/43) adopted in 1992, designate these sites as Special Areas (SAC). The SAC together with Special Protection Areas (SPAs) designated under the Birds Directive (2009/147/EC).

Natura 2000 sites form part of the Natura 2000 Network. They exist in all 27 countries of the EU and vary in size from a few hectares to thousands of square kilometers. Over 26,000 sites have been included in the Natura 2000 Network so far covering around 18% of the land and significant areas of the sea, making it the largest network of conservation areas anywhere in the world.

Around 2000 species, from mammals and birds to butterflies and beetles - are protected under the Natura 2000 Network. They are amongst the most endangered species in the EU. The Natura 2000 Network also

protects ca 230 rare and threatened habitat types, such as coastal lagoons, heath lands, flower rich grasslands, and natural forests.

Natura 2000 is not restricted to nature reserves; it is based on a much broader principal of conservation and sustainable use, where people and wildlife can live together in harmony. The Natura 2000 Network is a cornerstone of the EU's nature policy and demonstrates Europe's strong commitment to preserve its rich native biodiversity for future generations.

According to the chapter 2, the cycling routes are proposed within the Natura 2000 sites and ICT territories as well. The relevant sites are displaying in the <http://natura2000.eea.europa.eu/#>.

ICT and Protected Areas

Protected areas are locations which receive protection because of their recognized natural, ecological and/or cultural values. There are several kinds of protected areas, which vary by level of protection depending on the enabling laws of each country or the regulations of the international organizations involved. There are over 161.000 protected areas in the world (as of October 2010).

How to manage areas protected for conservation brings up a range of challenges - whether it is regarding the local population, specific ecosystems or the design of the reserve itself - and because of the many unpredictable elements in ecology issues, each protected area requires a case-specific set of guidelines.

Enforcing protected area boundaries is a costly and labour-heavy endeavour, particularly if the allocation of a new protected region places new restrictions on the use of resources by the native people which may lead to their subsequent displacement. This has troubled relationships between conservationists and rural communities in many protected regions and is often why many Wildlife Reserves and National Parks face the human threat of poaching for the illegal bushmeat or trophy trades which is resorted to as an alternative form of subsistence.

There is increasing and justifiable pressure to take proper account of human needs when setting up protected areas and these sometimes have to be "traded off" against conservation needs. Whereas in the past governments often made decisions about protected areas and informed local people afterwards, today the emphasis is shifting towards greater discussions with stakeholders and joint decisions about how such lands should be set aside and managed. Such negotiations are never easy but usually produce stronger and longer-lasting results for both conservation and people.

So, the cycling routes within the protected areas will provide the tourism enhancing, combining the environmental sustainability.

ICT and Greenbelts

A greenbelt is a policy and land use designation used in land use planning to retain areas of largely undeveloped, wild, or agricultural land surrounding or neighbouring urban areas. Similar concepts are greenways or green wedges which have a linear character and may run through an urban area instead of around it. In essence, a green belt is an invisible line encircling a certain area, preventing development of the area allowing wildlife to return and be established.

ICT and Environmental Risks

According to the definition, the environmental risk is “Actual or potential threat of adverse effects on living organisms and environment by effluents, emissions, wastes, resource depletion, etc., arising out of the organization’s activities.

The environmental risks are identified, measured and controlled by the Risk Management System

Special Protection Areas

These areas are under a protection regime are distinguished according to whether they are protected by international conventions or national protection system.

The International Protection Contracts are:

- Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, especially as habitats of wild birds
- Bonn Convention on the conservation of migratory species of wild animals
- Convention for the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage
- Berne Convention for the Conservation of European wildlife and natural habitats
- Directive 79/409 and Council decision of the European Union for the Conservation of wild birds
- Council Directive 92/43 of the European Union for the Conservation of natural habitats, wild fauna and flora
- Barcelona Convention for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea against pollution
- Program of UNESCO for humans and the biosphere European network of biogenetic park

The National Protection Regime distinguishes the protected areas in the following categories:

- National Parks
- Aesthetic Forests

- Preserved Natural Monuments
- Game Refuges and Restricted Hunting Areas
- Marine Parks

The **Ramsar Convention** on Wetlands of International Importance, especially as habitats of wild birds came into force in December 1975 and was the first convention was devoted to the protection of habitats. It includes 24 European parties and 278 European regions (including Greenland) contributing significantly to the conservation of European wetlands.

Greece was the seventh country to sign and activated the Ramsar Convention with LD 191/74, declaring 11 wetland areas (Amvrakikos, Kerkini, Missolonghi, Kotychi, Prespa, Nestos, Ismarida, Vistonida, Axios - Loudias - Aliakmonas, Evros, and bulbs - Koronia) included in the list of Wetlands of International Importance. For these areas, there are proposals for the delineation of protected areas since 1986 and started operations from the D / Division of Environmental Planning and Public Works to implement the proposals.

The regions of Eastern Macedonia - Thrace, which are under the protection status of the International **Ramsar Convention**, are:

The Delta of Nestos

The Nestos delta occupies an area of 500 sq. km and belongs to the Prefecture of Kavala and Xanthi. The river originates from the Bulgarian Rhodope and crosses valleys and canyons in the mountains between Orvilos and Rodopi, enters the Greek territory. Shed opposite the island of Thassos and the length, in Greek territory is 130 km west from the mouth of the river there is a lagoon Agiasmata (Gkoumpournou), important habitat for many species of aquatic birds and a series of several lagoons such as Vasovas, Eratini, bones, Keramoti Gefyraki etc.

After many efforts of the Greek Society for the Protection of Nature, 700 acres of this forest have been now under protection.

Evros Delta

The Evro Delta is part of the river with great ecological value. Breeding and wintering site for thousands of waterfowl. The first proposals for the protection of the Delta region were made by the Greek Society for the Protection of Nature in 1962. Despite the damage suffered by you, the Ebro Delta remains today one of the most important habitats in Europe. The Ebro is divided in the Delta region, two main arms. The one called 'alignment', receives the bulk of the water of the river. The other is the old river bed, which forms the border with Turkey.

In the Ebro Delta found quite a variety of habitats such as bare meadows, brackish States chortoleivada, crops of wheat and corn areas with trees, small riparian forests, remnants of ancient forests, reeds, marshes seasonally or permanently with fresh water lagoons; sandy beaches and plant communities with *Halocnemum* sp. along the coast, like dunes, often forming a dam.

Lake Vistonida

The lake Vistonida located on the borders of the prefectures of Xanthi and Rodopi is an extension of the bay of Porto Lagos. It has an area of 45,000 acres and its depth varies from 2 to 3.5 meters. The lake is the natural recipient of all the mountain streams of the region. In this poured rivers Kosynthos and elegant (Kourou).

On the coast of Porto - Lagos, the vegetation that exists in various forms ammophilous species such as *Cakile maritima*, the *Salicornia europaea* and marine Lily (*Pancratium maritimum*). The grove beach pine (*Pinus maritima*), located in front of the harbor of Porto - Lagos, from reforestation.

The lake Mitrikou or Ismarida

Lake Ismarida is located in the prefecture of Rodopi, in an area rich in wetlands. The lake Breastmilk is just 3 km from the coast of the Thracian Sea and receives the waters of two rivers. From the north comes down and flows into the lake, river Bospou while east is the river or streams Filiouris Filiouris, poured in the southern part of the lake.

The river valley Filiouri is also an important habitat and included on the network of habitats of EU while in the southwest, near the coast, there is a significant number of lagoons, from which the five largest is Lake Karatzas (Relief), Alikí (Middle), the Xirolimni (Fanar), the Ptelea and Marsh (Karatzali).

The area of the lake along with the Breast basin is 370 km² Bospou, while the area of the lagoon reaches 132 km²

The regions of Eastern Macedonia - Thrace included in the **NATURA 2000** network are:

The Forest of Dadia

Dadia forest is located near Soufli and ecologically connected to the Ebro Delta. This is a series of wooded hills, situated in Evros prefecture, north of Dadia village and is part of a mountain resort with low peaks, known as "Mountains of the Ebro." The forests of the region consist mainly of two kinds of pine, the pine

(*Pinus brutia*) and pines (*Pinus nigra*). Among these is a large variety of shrubs, as well as many rare herbaceous plants. In the forest of Dadia live and play twenty one species of raptors, from the rarest birds of prey in Europe.

Straits of Nestos

It is a deep gorge of Nestos River with tall cliffs, wooded slopes, riparian forest and maquis. Human activities are focused on farming and a railway line crosses the area. The restrictions do not apply to hunting.

Central Rhodope and the Nestos Valley

An extensive forest in the Rhodope mountain ridge is between the River Nestos and the Bulgarian border, including the Virgin Forest of Paranesti, consisting of acute forest (*Fagus* sp.), pine (*Pinus* sp.) forests of oak (*Quercus* sp.) in lower altitudes. The main human activities include forestry, farming and hunting. The exploitation of the forest is intense and has recently expanded the road network leading to drilling and logging of remote areas. River Nestos has planned construction of four dams on the corresponding reservoirs from which the two have begun to be constructed. The dam of the Treasury is one of the largest in Europe.

Valley Kompsatos

It consists of hills north of Iasmos and coachmen with the abrupt valley Kompsatos, forest oak (*Quercus* sp.) grazed freely and deep valleys with dense riverine with forest in places. The main human activities are farming and hunting. There are scattered settlements.

The particular geological substrate (consisting of granites and marbles), in conjunction with climate, soil and topographical conditions created a significant variety of habitats of particular botanical interest. Apart from common mammals and birds of the region rarely encountered invertebrates characterize the value of fauna and flora of the importance attributed to rare in our country herbaceous plants that form valuable habitats in the mountains, meadows and rocky peaks of the mountain.

The island of Thassos.

Natural Monument

- Babouris Thassos Aliko (GG 415/V/19.11.1962)

- Port of Thassos (GG 1501/V/14.12.1976)
- Area Theologos Thassos (GG 116/V/3.3.1977)
- Forest Amygdaleona (GG 606/D/1979)
- Pangaio Mountain (GG 367/V/26.6.1981)
- Cape Brasidas (GG 363/V/11.4.1994)

5. Social impact

Demographic Data

The population of the Region of Eastern Macedonia - Thrace is, according to provisional figures of census 2001, 610,254 people, accounting for approximately 5.56% of the population of the Greek territory (10,897,393 inhabitants). From the table shows a small population concentration in the prefectures of Kavala and Evros.

Table 1.5.1.: Population by Province of Eastern Macedonia - Thrace and Percentage Distribution

Area Population Percentage of total

Drama	103	763	17.00%
Kavala	144	920	23.75%
Xanthi	101	510	16.63%
Rodopi	111	038	18.20%
Evros	149	023	24.42%
Region	A.M.-TH. 610	254	100%

Source: Edit NSS, Census 2001

Human Resources

The population of working age (between 15 and 64) in the Region of Eastern Macedonia - Thrace stands at 481,250 people in 2001, according to data from the Labor Force Survey of NSSG, of which 50.8 % (244,700 people) are part of the workforce and 49.2% (236,550 people) are non-active population

Details of Employment – Unemployment

Of the total workforce in the Region in 2001 (according to the data of Table 1.6.1), employ 244,700 people, or 46.3% of the population of working age, over 233,543 people in 1994, which accounted for 51% working-age population that year. There is a decrease in the employment rate by 4.7 points and number of employees in absolute terms over the period 1994 to 2001.

6. Economic impact

The GDP of the Region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace (Table 1.6.2) rose from 55.8% of EU average in 1986 to 64.2% in 1999, ranking sixth in the region among the 13 Regions of the Greek Territory.

A. Disadvantages in the region

The problems have been identified and which are also the disadvantages of the region especially in relation to tourism, the living standards and development of the region of Philippi can be summarized as follows:

1. Economic problems of both residents and regional bodies. The general economic situation and clearly affects the residents of Kavala and by extension the people of the City of Philippi.
2. Lack of some basic infrastructure, such as completion of the vertical axes of Egnatia Odos, and between mountainous and remote or mountainous communities access, lack of integrated drainage system, causing the water to be thrown into pits and occasionally in adjacent streams. Also there is a lack in organized reception and accommodation of tourists, leaving virtually untapped the great advantage that gives the crucial archaeological site of Philippi.
3. Lack of investment in both industrial and manufacturing, but especially in tourist activities (new forms of healing, religious, archaeological and mountain tourism and others).
4. Lack of organized planning, programming, information and training for a number of problems and opportunities that truly shows the area.
5. Lack of rural tourism and ecotourism facilities and services but also need to improve those that exist.
6. Lack of tourism promotion, advertising in the region organized by both government agencies and from local agents, and hotel infrastructure level 4 or 5 star would increase both the level of visiting tourists, and the per capita consumption by visitors.

7. Unbalanced developed municipal districts. Presents the phenomenon of mountain settlements are less developed in terms of infrastructure and services (health education) and economic activity to the lowland villages.

B. Benefits in the area

The region, offers some significant advantages over other regions, and with proper motions are all possibilities for a significant and sustained tourism development and upgrade.

Among the main advantages of the region we can identify the following:

1. The wonderful natural environment.
2. The existence of the spas' Laspouloutra Krinidon ", which hosts thousands of visitors each year.
3. There are several wooded areas, hills and mountains suitable for touring, walking, hiking and sports. In conjunction with the Mediterranean climate can be seen that there is already a key foundation for tourism.
4. Residents and human resources of the region renowned for its hospitality and the traditional lifestyle, which can be a powerful attraction for visitors.
5. Mores that connect directly today with yesterday. Traditional dishes, traditional weddings, local festivals customs that encountered in a few areas of Greece, revival of old customs and festivals and local events with the characteristic color complete the picture of an attractive area for visitors every social stratum and age.
6. Existence of archaeological sites and monuments (archaeological site of Philippi), historical events, but also substantial tourist development proposals with events and themed projections.
7. The Baptistry of St. Lydia. The space was baptized the first European Christian, and where religious tourism has the potential to flourish. Already at the Metropolis of Neapolis Philippi and Thassos is completing a modern Conference Centre, which will bring new possibilities and prospects for development in the area.
8. Existence of a short (35 km), Airport to connect directly with cities in the region, target group and large travel agencies in Europe, through the promotion of the region can attract a sufficient number of quality tourism (tourism high incomes.)
9. The completion of road works and particularly the Via Egnatia and its vertical axes for Bulgaria.
10. The fact that the City of Philippi is located close to major urban centers in the region, Thessaloniki, Kavala and Drama, gives a strong advantage for growth in new production units.

11. The location of the area (Northern Greece) and until a few years ago was a disadvantage (long distance from major tourist markets in the center), now is a key advantage because of its proximity to major tourism markets of the Balkans and Eastern Europe

12. The proximity of the mountains and the sea component, since a very short time you can enjoy the pleasures of the mountainous and marine tourism. Both the terrestrial part of Kavala, the combination of mountain and sea can offer visitors simultaneously both types of tourism.

7. Legal framework

There is no any particular regime or codes of cycling behavior.

8. Conclusions and recommendations

Strategic Plan is to seek the greatest possible additional impact that may have on existing capabilities and those that will be created for developing regions.

The focus and cooperation in the promotion and enhancement of homogenized cycle routes that form trans-European touring routes which link similar cultural resources towards the development, promotion and networking of all relevant resource areas and contribute to openness and traffic as their main issues function as prosthetic resources can be integrated into the target to the project and additional collaborations to be developed in future.

The creation of the image, therefore a joint tourist product for the participating regions will be as a direct result of creating a collective identity by focusing on this transnational project. This identity will facilitate the placement of regions participating in a joint tourism system as well as the level of recognition for potential tourists.

The recording, promotion and networking of homogenized cycling routes outside the browser in these areas contributes to the further enhancement of homogenized culture and activities of transnational areas.

Indirect Aims

With the implementation of the transnational project will create the potential for further cooperation in the following programs and initiatives that can develop common forms of cooperation in many areas, particularly in developing joint tourism packages.

The Strategic Plan therefore seeks to diversify from the current situation, with the vision of sustainable use of all natural and cultural resources in the development of mild forms of economy. This program focuses on existing and new markets, aiming to strengthen traffic in rural areas. While

focusing on developing partnerships and create the conditions for the protection and enhancement of natural and cultural heritage and enhance sustainable development of regions.

Finally, to strengthen the competitiveness of this cultural - tourism product that we want to shape future joint actions, through this transnational project of the cycle paths we intend to give particular emphasis to the active nature of the tourism experience offered, compared with more passive traditional commercialization. You will be going to visit but for active participation in the visited environment, a living experience.

The implementation and continuation in the future of the transnational project will allow formation conditions organized commercialization of critical resources of each partner region by matching investments in organized networks that incorporate quality and feedback of the tourist potential of different regions, organized traffic management, promotion of local products and networking of cultural events of the area and cultural resources in joint cultural routes.

Specifically the action will contribute to achieving the following objectives:

- Improve and establish the image of the region
- Improving openness of the area
- Creation and integration into supra and transnational networks of all resources, natural, cultural and other resources, services and products
- The creation of homogenized-tourist routes packets to all forms of Rural Tourism (Winter, touring, religious, ecological, cultural, adventure tourism, etc.) at regional level and international level.
- Improving the competitiveness of enterprises in rural areas.
- The human resource development and capacity building for the management of the tourism product

The ultimate goal is the Cycling Routes become a neon Holiday Product in the form of package tours that will link all the offered tourist services which are developed in these areas and then creating a whole new tourism product in the form of route will run all areas throughout the year, feeding the existing traffic and further developing it to new markets Tourists.

In ongoing projects based on critical mass of cooperation formed with cycling routes longer acquaintance of regions, institutions and sectors and the integration of almost all areas within a structured cooperation and also have a huge stock of homogenized natural and cultural resources can be networked and contribute decisively to the overall development of the regions.

Future projects may be extended in addition to the tourism sector, the promotion of natural and cultural resources and local products areas.

Therefore, in general settings, institutions and tools that will be undertaken in future cooperation partners should include activities in culture. To the extent that a future transnational cooperation project aims to create and organize the leading edge of agro-tourist offer, the same will apply to cultural activities.

Therefore partnerships that will link the cultural operating reserve, the tradition of areas with all sectors and industries of these regions, particularly with local products and their respective regions, will contribute to increasing tourist traffic to them and will strengthen position of their products, which will create multiplier effects, such as promotion of entrepreneurship, increase the income of residents of areas, upgrading the cultural level and quality of life.

According to the above, subject to future collaborations in terms of culture, will be:

Participation in cultural events in the creation of tourist packages for the region.

- The adaptation of quality standards in matters concerning the planning and organizing cultural events.
- Integration of cultural programs at the local, hyper-local and international marketing networks.
- The co-production of promotional material - promotional, archival materials, etc. between tourism and cultural sectors, tourism and cultural institutions.
- Participation in joint hyper-local and transnational meetings for exchange of experiences, knowledge, events, etc.
- In particular, in relation to local gastronomy, integration both as local and transnational networks, and the common system standards of the European Network.
- Further promote joint initiatives or under other programs or as part of wider partnerships and development of transnational networks.