

STRATEGY FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN THE SPECIAL NATURE RESERVE GORNJE PODUNAVLJE



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The text of the strategy is the result of fieldwork, research, meetings and consultations within the Forum which also adopted this Strategy as a valid document for future development of sustainable tourism.

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PREFACE

Sustainable tourism is a positive approach to the development of this field which aims to decrease the tension and disruption that results from the interaction between tourism commerce, visitors, the environment and local communities. It is an approach which includes a long term concept of development of natural and man-made resources. It is not a concept of anti-development, but rather insists that the limits of development be recognized. Sustainable tourism is a paradigm for the development of tourism in protected areas. Protected areas are important tourist destinations. The principles of sustainable tourism help planners and managers to organize their spaces as small sustainable tourist destinations. Visits to national parks and other protected areas are on the rise all throughout the world and as such, it is important that a strategic approach to these activities be taken.

The strategy for the development of sustainable tourism in the Special Nature Reserve Gornje Podunavlje, above all, reflects the efforts made by the Manager of the protected area to conceptualize and initiate the development of tourism in a manner that will not degrade the natural and cultural resources. The strategy insists on the cooperation and recognition of all stakeholders, which, after all, is the only way to achieve sustainable development of tourism. To that end, before the drafting of the document itself, several meetings and consultations were held with the current and potential actors in the protection of nature and development of tourism. More precisely, the text of the strategy is the result of fieldwork, research, meetings and consultations within the Forum which also adopted this Strategy as a valid document for future development of sustainable tourism.

The Special Nature Reserve Gornje Podunavlje is the first protected area in Serbia to undertake the task of applying for Charter Area status by the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas. The Manager of the protected area expects the status of a Charter Area to be used as a tool to achieve the ecological, socio-cultural and economic goals of this destination. In the future, it is expected that the entire areas will be declared a part of the UNESCO Transboundary Biosphere Reserve Mura-Drava-Danube (TBR MDD). Considering that international protection statuses attract a larger number of tourists, it can be expected that proper organization of the destination will contribute to better utilization of all tourism resources.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Special Nature Reserve Gornje Podunavlje is located in the northwestern part of Vojvodina and Serbia. It extends along the left bank of the Danube and encompasses a number of meanders, stagnant tributaries and canals, as well as wetland, swamp, meadow and forest ecosystems resulting from the constant influence of the river. The total area of the Special Nature Reserve is 19,648 hectares.

Given the potential and current effect of the local population on the protected area, as well as the effect of the protected area on the local population, the area analyzed within this strategy, along with the Special Nature Reserve Gornje Podunavlje, also encompasses the settlements that surround and share a border with the Special Nature Reserve. Those include: Bački Breg, Kolut, Beždan, Bački Monoštor, Kupusina, Apatin, Svilojevo and Sonta. Sombor – the administrative seat of the West Bačka District and a town of great significance in the management of the Gornje Podunavlje area – was also added to this group of settlements.

The Special Nature Reserve Gornje Podunavlje has been analyzed and studied several times over the past ten years from the perspective of tourism development and the protection of nature. This is evidenced by the numerous projects and plans developed in these areas. Just like in a number of other destinations in economically less developed regions and countries, this protected area is faced with a number of challenges. How realistic is it to expect that a correlation in the management of protection and tourism makes this region, made up of the territory of one municipality and one town, more successful, ecologically more advanced and better for the life of the local population?

Based on the research that was conducted, the following advantages have been identified which can help make Gornje Podunavlje more competitive:

- good location, including all of the possibilities offered by the fact that it is a border region;
- well-preserved state of natural characteristics of the wetlands along the bank of the Danube making this area exceptionally valuable in the sense of tourist valorization.
- well-preserved local architecture and ambient units the villages surrounding the Special Nature Reserve, as well as the presence of material and non-material folklore heritage.
- multiculturalism and the presence of several peoples and ethnic groups who have lived together in these areas for centuries.
- interest of the local population, manager and local institutions in the development of tourism.

The Special Nature Reserve Gornje Podunavlje represents one of the last well-preserved wetlands of the floodplains in Serbia. Similar to the case with a number of other protected areas, this natural region is jeopardized by activities taking place around it. Some of the commercial activities have been developed over centuries (farming, animal husbandry, fishing, timber

harvesting). During the past ten years, there has been increased interest in the potential for development of tourism.

In order to avoid the chaotic development of tourism and the harmful effects on the ecosystems and local culture, it is necessary to take a certain strategic approach. The goals and vision of tourism must be harmonized with the natural resources and needs of the local population. One of the possible avenues for achieving the goals of sustainable tourism is the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas. This charter would support the manager of SNP Gornje Podunavlje in protecting the natural and cultural value of the region through the development of this area, providing a high quality experience in all aspects of tourism, forming new and high quality tourism products and implementing a system for monitoring the effects on the environment.

Most importantly, during the initial phase of tourism development, the European Charter for Sustainable Development of Tourism in Protected Areas would launch an initiative for achieving better communication between all interested parties for the development of tourism in the area. Chief among those are: the manager of the protected area, local self-governments, municipal tourist organizations and the local communities with their representatives.

Despite past expectations, tourism has still not reached the optimum level of development in Gornje Podunavlje. The status of a protected area at the national level, as well as the international statuses: Ramsar Site, IBA (Important Bird Area), IPA (Important Plant Area), PBA (Prime Butterfly Area), and, in the foreseeable future, UNESCO Transboundary Biosphere Reserve Mura-Drava-Danube (TBR MDD), represent a great opportunity for the development of tourism throughout the entire region. Rural ecotourism should especially be highlighted. The charter would be the primary guarantee for sustainability for each of the segments of tourism and all tourism activities.

2. THE EUROPEAN CHARTER FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN PROTECTED AREAS

The European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas is a practical management tool for ensuring that tourism development in Europe's protected areas is sustainable. The Charter is awarded by the Europarc Federation, an umbrella organization of protected areas across 37 European countries.

The underlying aims of the Charter are:

- to increase awareness of, and support for, Europe's protected areas as a fundamental part of our heritage that should be preserved for, and enjoyed by, current and future generations;
- to improve the sustainable development and management of tourism in protected areas, which takes account of the needs of the environment, local residents, local businesses and visitors.

These aims are elaborated in a set of ten principles, which are to:

- involve all those implicated by tourism in and around the protected area in its development and management;
- prepare and implement a sustainable tourism strategy and action plan for the protected area;
- protect and enhance the area's natural and cultural heritage, for and through tourism, and protect it from excessive tourism development;
- provide all visitors with a high-quality experience in all aspects of their visit;
- communicate effectively to visitors about the special qualities of the area;
- encourage specific tourism products which enable discovery and understanding of the area;
- increase knowledge of the protected area and sustainability issues amongst all those involved in tourism;
- ensure that tourism supports and does not reduce the quality of life of local residents;
- increase benefits from tourism to the local economy;
- monitor and influence visitor flows to reduce negative impacts.

3. ANALYSIS OF THE AREA AND POTENTIALS

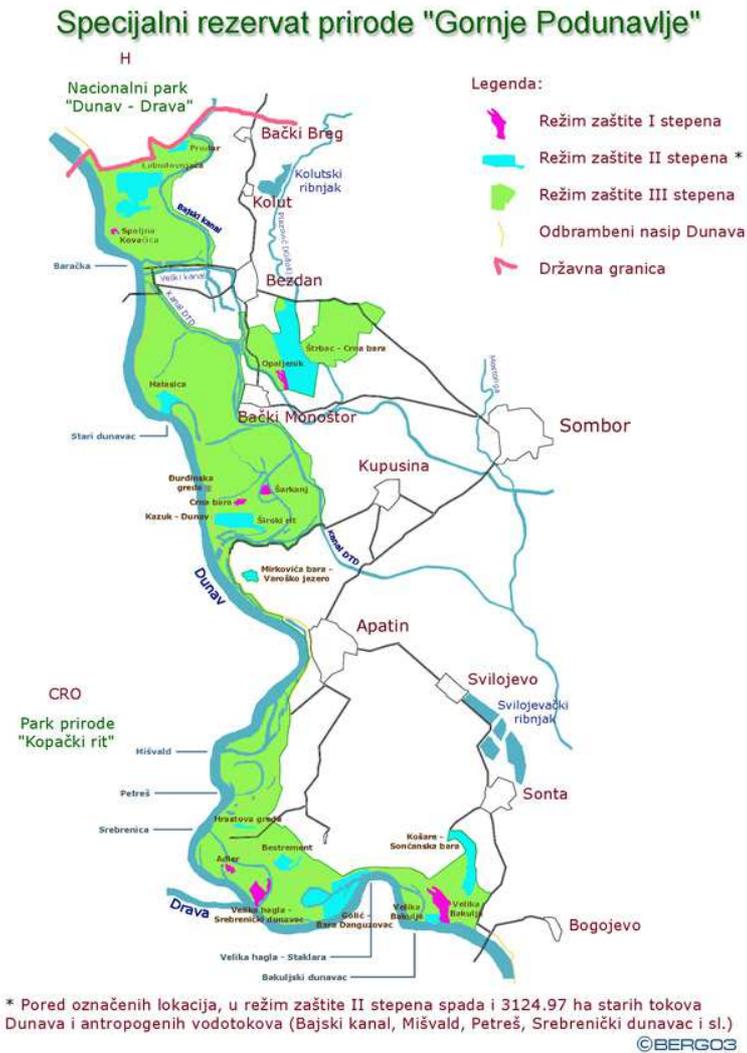
3.1. Geographic Location and Borders of the Area That is the Subject of the Strategy

Gornje Podunavlje is located between 45° 31' 47'' and 45° 55' 16'' north latitude and 18° 49' 08'' and 19° 05' 43'' east longitude.

The Special Nature Reserve Gornje Podunavlje is of an irregular and extended shape, in the direction of north-south. The northern border of this protected natural resource is also the national border between Serbia and Hungary. The western border is formed by the Danube River. The southern border is also formed by the Danube River which, following the confluence with the Drava, flows in an east-west direction. Na krajnjem jugoistoku Gornje Podunavlje doseže do granice između opština Apatin i Odžaci, nedaleko od mosta između Bogojeva (Srbija) i Erduta (Hrvatska). The eastern border, through its course of direction, is the greatest contributor to the deviation from straight extended shape. Not in a single sector is it even close to parallel with the course of the Danube, i.e. with the western border. The deviation is the greatest near the settlements of Bezdán and Bački Monoštor, between which the Gornje Podunavlje area runs. Within the sector of the town of Apatin, the territorial continuity ends, i.e. it runs exclusively along the left bank of the Danube.

The Special Nature Reserve and its surrounding areas are well connected to regional and local roadways. The most significant are those which connect Novi Sad with Sombor, through Bački Petrovac and Odžak, as well as the Novi Sad – Vrbas – Kula – Sombor regional road. The Special Nature Reserve is connected to international route E-75 through several different roads.

This area also includes three border crossings, two into Croatia (Bezdan and Bogojevo) and one into Hungary (Bački Breg).



Map 1 Geographic Location and Borders of the Special Nature Reserve Gornje Podunavlje

The location of the Special Nature Reserve Gornje Podunavlje, bordering with the Kopački Rit Nature Park (Croatia) and the Danube-Drava National Park (Hungary), is of special importance for the protection of nature and the potential development of tourism. These protected areas are a part of a unique natural region of floodplains which is one of the largest in Europe and because of this its significance is indisputable. Activities related to the protection of the UNESCO Transboundary Biosphere Reserve Mura-Drava-Danube (TBR MDD), which

would encompass all three protected areas with their extended surroundings, began with the declaration of the status of Biosphere Reserve in Croatia and Hungary. International statuses for protection of nature make attractive destinations for tourists, both due to the natural and cultural potential, as well as the significance of those statuses in forming an overall image.

3.2. Protection of Gornje Podunavlje and the Status of Planning Documentation

Gornje Podunavlje is protected as a Category I natural resource. Protection of the area and its natural resources dates back to 1955 when the Bureau for the Protection of Nature passed the resolution on the protection of the Monoštor Forests as they were habitats for the White-tailed Eagle and Black Stork. Eight years later, the Municipality of Sombor passed the decision to place portions of mixed stands of poplars, white poplars, willows and other types of trees in the area of the Monoštor swamp (600 hectares) under protection as a strict nature reserve. The municipality also, at the proposal of the Provincial Bureau for the Protection of Nature, passed the decision on the protection of the Monoštor Forests as a strict nature reserve (74.93 hectares). Parallel with that, 6.06 hectares of forest were protected as a natural landmark. In 1987, the Municipality of Apatin placed the Bestrement area (9.63 hectares) under protection as a reserve for maintaining the stock of rare and endangered plant and animal species.

Based on the opinion of researchers from the Provincial Bureau for the Protection of Nature, the Municipalities of Sombor and Apatin passed the decision on the formation of the Regional Park Gornje Podunavlje in 1982. Following extensive research and fieldwork in 2001, Gornje Podunavlje was declared a special nature reserve.

Gornje Podunavlje has been recognized with several international protection statuses. Due its well known ornithological value, this natural resource under the name of “Gornje Podunavlje or Monoštor”, was registered as an Important Bird Area (IBA) in 1989. In 2007 it was designated as a Ramsar Site. Gornje Podunavlje was registered as an Important Plant Area in 2007. In September 2013, Gornje Podunavlje was nominated together with the surrounding areas as the UNESCO Transboundary Biosphere Reserve Mura-Drava-Danube (TBR MDD). Finally, the Special Nature Reserve is a part of the European Green Belt. The European Green Belt is a pan-European initiative that encompasses 22 countries with the purpose of creating an ecological network along the former Iron Curtain which emphasizes the importance of connecting biodiversity conservation and sustainable rural development. The goal of the European Green Belt is to integrate the needs of the local community and nature conservation through cross-border cooperation. Furthermore, the European Green Belt unites the countries of Europe including those that are members of the European Union, those that are candidates and those that are neither.

The Special Nature Reserve Gornje Podunavlje, since its designation in July 2001, has been managed by PE Vojvodinašume from Petrovaradin. For the purpose of ensuring its long term preservation and protection, a ten-year management plan and annual management programs have been developed which detail the following activities of the manager:

- drafting of planning documentation;
- maintaining, overseeing and monitoring the condition of the nature reserve;
- working in cooperation with beneficiaries and interest groups;
- protection and preservation of natural resources;
- protective measures and utilization of natural resources;
- development activities;
- scientific research activities;
- cultural, educational, tourist and recreational activities;
- project activities;
- organizing and equipping the area with infrastructure;
- international cooperation.

The documents and plans related to conservation and the use of the resources of this area for tourism are as follows:

- Tourism Development Strategy of the Republic of Serbia, Horwath Consulting – Zagreb, Faculty of Economics – Belgrade, 2005, 2006.
- Vojvodina Tourism Marketing Strategy, Secretariat for Commerce, Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, Novi Sad, 2009.
- Feasibility Study for the Development of Ecotourism in Protected Natural Resources, with special consideration of Ramsar Sites, Department for Geography, Tourism and Hotel Management, Provincial Secretariat for Environmental Protection and Sustainable Development, Novi Sad, 2011.-
- Master Plan for the Tourist destination Gornje Podunavlje, Scientific Research Center, Faculty of Economics, Belgrade, 2007.
- Regulation on the Protection of the Special Nature Reserve “Gornje Podunavlje”, Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, No. 45, 2001.
- Spatial Plan of the Republic of Serbia 2010 – 2014 – 2021, Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning, Republic Agency for Spatial Planning, Belgrade 2010.
- Regional Spatial Plan of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina until 2020, Bureau for Urbanism of Vojvodina, Novi Sad, 2012.
- Spatial Plan of the Special Purpose Area Special Nature Reserve Gornje Podunavlje, Bureau for Urbanism of Vojvodina, Novi Sad, 2012.

Confirmation of the support for development of tourism can also be found in a number of projects realized during the past several years in this area. Some of the more significant ones include:

- Culture and Nature for a Higher Quality of Life – a comparative analysis of the legal and regulatory framework related to the area of tourism, IPA – cross-border cooperation with

Hungary, the Agency for Development of Small and Medium Enterprises – Town of Sombor, 2006;

- Placement of tourist signs in Sombor, Provincial Secretariat for Commerce, Municipality of Sombor, 2007;
- Tradition for the Future – rural tourism (project goals are social and cultural development of Baranja in Croatia and Bačka in Serbia, as well as sustainable management of the natural and cultural resources through the development of rural tourism), IPA – cross-border cooperation with Croatia, Municipality of Apatin, 2011 – 2013.

3.3. Natural Characteristics of the Special Nature Reserve Gornje Podunavlje

The natural region of the Special Nature Reserve Gornje Podunavlje at its core, represents a well-preserved floodplain that runs along the bank of the Danube. This protected area encompasses Apatin swamp, Monoštor swamp and Karapandža. The value of the ecosystems of Gornje Podunavlje is reflected in the fact that they represent one of the few preserved natural regions in the primarily agrarian environment of West Bačka.



Figure 1 Apatin swamp in the southern part of the Special Nature Reserve Gornje Podunavlje

Photo: L. Lazić

The Special Nature Reserve extends over loess terraces and an alluvial plain. The loess terraces are less prevalent in the Štrbac forest. The geological composition consists primarily of diluvial drylands, swamp, and overlying loess deposits. The average elevation is around 90 m.

The alluvial plain is 3-4 m lower than the relief unit in which the geological composition consist primarily of overlying loess, sand, alluvial gravel, sands, clays and mud. The microrelief of this unit is exceptionally dynamic with the remains of old waterways, as well as hills and depressions along the banks. Together they represent a significant part of the local geological heritage.



Figure 2 Autochthonous marsh forest under the flood wave of the Danube

Photo: V. Stojanović

The area has a continental climate with warm summers and cold winters. According to the multi-year averages from the nearby meteorological station, the lowest temperatures are recorded in January (-1.6°C), and the highest are in July (21.1°C). The average annual air temperature is 10.7°C. The weather in Gornje Podunavlje is especially pleasant during the spring, autumn and summer months.

The hydrological characteristics represent one of the fundamental natural phenomena of Gornje Podunavlje. The Danube provides the entire region with its fundamental traits. The high waters during regular annual flooding are of great importance to the entire Special Nature Reserve and especially for the ecosystems of Apatin swamp. The Special Nature Reserve has a large number of meanders resulting from the complex hydrological activity of the large river. The most significant are: Bajski Canal, Baračka, Monoštorski Dunavac, Petreški Dunavac, Srebrnički and Staklarski Dunavac. The Plazović River flows through the northeastern part of the Special Nature Reserve, through the Štrbac Forest, where it features important ecological and aesthetic attributes. Lastly, the large number of lakes and swamps give Gornje Podunavlje, in the hydrological sense, its final regional form. The recreational and touristic significance of these

hydrological characteristics have been confirmed numerous times. These are considered the favorite locations of numerous hikers, fishermen, hunters, athletes and, more recently, ecotourists.

The intertwined wetland, swamp, meadow and forest ecosystems contribute to the building of a significant mosaic of various vegetation forms. Within the exceptional floral richness, the dendroflora has the most significant influence because half of the total area of the Reserve is covered in forest. The most significant species are the English oak (*Quercus robur*), white poplar (*Populus alba*), black poplar (*Populus nigra*), white willow (*Salix alba*), narrow leaved ash (*Fraxinus angustifolia*) and the European white elm (*Ulmus laevis*). These forests are also known as marsh forests and represent important autochthonous forest communities. Individually, the following species of flora should be mentioned and highlighted: water violet (*Hottonia palustris*), mare's tail (*Hippuris vulgaris*), winter aconite (*Eranthis hyemalis*), blue iris (*Iris spuria*) and the greater spearwort (*Ranunculus lingua*).



Figure 3 Red deer (*Cervus elaphus*)

Photo: J. Pap

The characteristic flora and vegetation play a major role in creating good conditions to support the life of a large number of animal species. Chief among them are: the red deer (*Cervus elaphus*), wild boar (*Sus scrofa*), white-tailed eagle (*Haliaeetus albicila*) and black stork (*Ciconia nigra*). With the richness of the water and numerous water surfaces, the ichthyofauna is also quite diverse. In the past, the wildlife have been utilized in the development of hunting tourism, for which Gornje Podunavlje is well known, as well as sport fishing which has yet to

reach an optimal level of development as a segment of tourism. The utilization of wildlife for the purpose of developing ecotourism is still in its inception.

3.4. Social Characteristics in the Surroundings of the Special Nature Reserve Gornje Podunavlje

In the surroundings of the Special Nature Reserve there are nine settlements of which seven are villages and two are towns. The village settlements are Bački Breg, Kolut, Bezdan, Bački Monoštor, Kupusina, Sonta, and Svilojevo. The two towns are Sombor and Apatin.

There are a total of 83,111 residents living in the villages and towns around the Special Nature Reserve Gornje Podunavlje. Depopulation, like in other areas of Serbia, is a fundamental demographic problem. The number of residents in the settlements around Gornje Podunavlje is falling. The ethnic structure of the population is quite diverse and is one of the primary demographic and cultural characteristics of this region. In this area there are around 20 separate peoples and ethnic groups. The largest in numbers are Serbs, Hungarians and Croats. The ethnic diversity is the result of a number of colonizations which took place in this area during the past several centuries depending on the changing rulers and national borders.

Table 1 Changes in the number of residents in settlements around the Special Nature Reserve Gornje Podunavlje

	1948	1953	1961	1971	1981	1991	2002	2011
Bački Breg	2,244	2,218	2,045	2,006	1,770	1,585	1,388	1,140
Kolut	2,927	2,877	2,597	2,148	1,866	1,710	1,710	1,327
Bezdan	6,691	6,681	6,813	6,427	6,085	5,472	5,263	4,623
Bački Monoštor	4,555	4,636	4,560	4,590	4,432	4,205	3,920	3,485
Kupusina	3,200	3,146	3,133	3,036	2,694	2,500	2,356	1,952
Svilojevo	1,750	1,917	1,785	1,667	1,490	1,278	1,364	1,219
Sonta	7,181	6,981	6,821	6,508	6,313	5,990	4,992	4,331
Apatin	13,195	14,465	17,191	17,565	18,320	18,389	19,320	17,411
Sombor	33,613	33,632	37,760	44,100	48,454	48,993	51,471	47,623
Total	75,356	76,553	82,705	88,047	91,424	90,122	91,784	83,111

Village settlements began to take shape after the colonization during the mid-18th century. They were built up mainly according to the orthogonal principle in which street intersect at a right angle. Even today, examples of the traditional architecture have been preserved in which two types of houses are dominant. The first type follows along with the depth of the yard (so-called house in a ditch), and with the second type the front faces the street (so-called house along the road). Decoration of facades follows along with the cultural and artistic trends of the times in which they emerged (baroque, classicism, secession...). Valuable examples of folklore

architectures are still preserved in a number of villages. The following villages particularly stand out: Bački Breg, Bezdán, Bački Monoštor, Kupusina and Sonta.



Figure 4 Traditional construction in villages around the Reserve Gornje Podunavlje
Photo: L. Lazić

In Sombor, as the largest town in this region, the heritage of civil society is quite noticeable. The morphology of the downtown area is quite specific when compared to other towns in the area. The old town was held within a four-walled fortress surrounded by a trench. During the 18th century, when the strategic position of the location lost its importance, the trench was filled in and in its place four large roads were built – the so-called wreath. Still today they surround the heart of the old town. The most important architectural features of Apatin are concentrated in the main street. They were once mostly private houses inhabited by residents of Apatin in the past, and as such living in this street was considered a status symbol. The clinker bricks used to build many of the houses were also used in the construction of numerous buildings in Budapest and Vienna, which speaks to its quality and the fact that Apatin was once a center of commerce.

In the villages around the Special Nature Reserve, there are 41 protected cultural landmarks of exceptional, great and general significance. The cultural self-awareness of the local population is reflected in the opening of ethno-houses in Bezdán, Bački Monoštor, Kupusina and Sonta, with the primary task of nurturing traditional culture and customs. Almost all of the villages hold local festivals and events. Some have even been celebrated for several decades (e.g. the Grape Ball in Sonta). Within the Reserve itself and in the surrounding areas, there is a large

number of monuments to the technological culture which documents the management of water throughout the entire region.

3.5. Economic Characteristics and Employment of the Local Population

One of the greatest problems in the region is the lack of commercial and economic activity, especially when compared to the parameters and indicators from the 1980s before the wars and conflicts that took place throughout the former Yugoslavia. The economic conditions are also made worse by the high percentage of unemployment.

The dominant commercial activities in the region are agriculture and industry. The largest number of people are employed within these sectors. Agriculture has thrived thanks to the Chernozem which is one of the most fertile soils in this part of Europe. The most common cultivated crops are: wheat, corn, sunflowers and sugar beets. Farming is much better organized than animal husbandry which is mostly of an extensive character and occurs along the embankments of the Danube in select marshes. Among the numerous canals and distributaries lie the remains of former agricultural-economic farms (e.g. the large farm near Sonta). Under the conditions of a socialist economy, they were giants. Now, they have very little significance at all. Animal husbandry is much less developed than farming and in the past 20 years the share of this branch within the total agricultural production has fallen significantly. Many farms were shuttered during that period.

The massive agricultural potential could be transformed into a concept of sustainable agriculture, which would improve the quality of the environment and satisfy the demand for healthy food. With this in mind, the river deposits, which traditionally provide a successful harvest of fruits and vegetables (e.g. around the village of Kupusina), are especially important. The marsh areas, especially in the alluvial terrace, have great importance in the development of animal husbandry. Animal husbandry, through the details from the traditional way of life, can also be presented to tourists, for example, in the marshes around Sonta, Sviljovo and Sombor. The opportunity for development in agriculture, regardless of whether it involves small farms or large corporations, must be equal for everyone.

The largest industrial centers are Sombor and Apatin. During the period of transition, many enterprises which were once large companies within the socialist economy were shuttered. Some others survived, but under the conditions of transformation, ownership changed from public hands to private.

The primary conditions for economic and social development in this area must be the protection of nature, primarily through the preservation of the flood plains and the flooding regime in the Apatin and Monoštor swamps, and then through the preservation of important marshes in the alluvial plain of the Danube and on the loess terrace. Proper management of the entire area could provide new possibilities for the local population through sustainable development of tourism and agriculture. That process should include all stakeholders, including the manager of the protected area, the local and regional government, agricultural producers,

tourist organizations, the non-government sector and others. Some agricultural products could also be successfully marketed through the development of tourism (e.g. grains, honey from Gornje Podunavlje, Sombor cheese...).

3.6. Analysis and Valorization of Tourism Potentials

The natural tourism potentials are linked to the fact that Gornje Podunavlje is one of the few remaining and well preserved floodplains along the banks of the Danube. The basic tourism potentials are related to the hydrological characteristics and biodiversity of this region. The recreational characteristics of the region have been used by the local population for decades. Now it is necessary for this potential to be linked with the extended contractive zone.

Table 2 Natural Tourism Potentials of Gornje Podunavlje

Relief	Climate	Hydrography	Plant and Wildlife
Micro relief forms contribute to a dynamic region, but their real value to tourism can be viewed through the diverse plant and wildlife.	Represents an important prerequisite for taking part in tourism activities, but is not a tourism potential.	Of great importance for the development of tourism and one of the most significant potentials of Gornje Podunavlje. <i>Key resources:</i> Danube, Bajski Canal, Baračka, Veliki Bački Canal, Plazović, Monoštorki Dunavac, Kupusinski Dunavac.	An essential phenomenon of Gornje Podunavlje of crucial importance for the development of tourism. <i>Key resources:</i> Large game, ornithofauna, ichthyofauna, forest ecosystems, wetland meadows.
Assessment: *	Assessment: *	Assessment: ***	Assessment: ***

*important ** very importance *** of exceptional importance

Wetland habitats have attracted people since the earliest times because they are suitable for settlement and for supporting life. Human settlements in the area around the Special Nature Reserve have been found to exist as early as the Neolithic Era. Numerous peoples, cultures and states have risen and fallen in this area leaving behind an exception cultural footprint which in the sense of tourism is of great significance. This, above all, can be found in the village settlements with their valuable folklore heritage and local culture, the primary characteristic of which is multiculturalism.

Table 3 Cultural Tourism Potentials of Gornje Podunavlje

Ambient Units	Cultural Landmarks	Technological Cultural Structures	Folklore and Non-material Heritage
<p>Parts of village settlements still possess original characteristics of significant importance for the ethnographic architecture of this region. Individual streets in Bački Breg, Bezdan, Bački Monoštor, Kupusina and Sonta are of special interest.</p> <p>The heart of the town of Sombor is surrounded by a wreath made up of four streets. It is enriched by the architectural heritage from various time periods in the style of baroque, classicism, eclectic, secession and modern. The main street in Apatin is an ambient unit consisting of houses of well-off residents. Its characteristics have preserved the identity of the town.</p>	<p>In the villages around the Reserve there are 41 protected cultural landmarks. Orthodox Christian and Roman Catholic churches with historical, artistic and spiritual significance for the residents that built them are of special importance.</p> <p>Most cultural landmarks are located in Sombor and Apatin. This list contains the houses of well-off residents, administrative buildings, churches and sacral monuments.</p>	<p>In several locations throughout the Reserve and in the surrounding areas there are important hydrotechnical structures which provide a record of the multi-century tendency towards water management and controlling waterways (Šebešfok and Kendija near Bezdan, Mostonga near Sombor, Kupusina Station)</p>	<p>Multiculturalism in the region is reflected in the unique diversity of folklore. Hungarian, Croatian and Serbian folklore are especially visible.</p> <p>Ethno houses signify the presence of traditional culture and art.</p> <p>Of great importance for the local communities are the local festivals and events (Bodrog Fest in Bački Monoštor, Grape Ball in Sonta, Fisherman Nights in Apatin).</p>
Assessment: **	Assessment: **	Assessment: *	Assessment: ***

*important ** of great importance *** of significantly great importance

3.7. Lodging and Accommodations

Accommodation capacities for tourism in the Special Nature Reserve and within its direct vicinity follow the dynamic and trends of tourism development of the entire region. Up until ten

years ago, the typical and only type of accommodations were hotels in the town of the region (Sombor and Apatin). Following the designation as a Special Nature Reserve and a number of educational activities and development programs for rural and ecotourism, the trend towards renting out rooms and lodging in village households began to emerge. In recent times there has been talk of renting out weekend cabins both in the Reserve and in its surrounding areas. This has helped to make this natural region much more accessible to visitors with less income.



Figure 5 Rural Tourism Household in Bački Monoštor

Photo: V. Stojanović

Currently, hotels and pensions are located exclusively within the towns. In Sombor there is the Hotel Andrić, as well as several villas which are structured as hotel lodging (Kronić, Beli Dvor, Tamara). In Apatin there is the Banja Junaković Pension, as well as the Čarda Zlatna Kruna Inn. Lodging primarily intended for mariners is provided within the Apatin Marina. Near Sombor there is lodging with a unique old farm ambient which depicts the tradition of past times (Dida Hornjak Farm). Lodging in rural tourism households is available in Bački Monoštor. Information about this type of lodging is also provided by the Tourism Info Center in Bački Monoštor. Weekend cabins can be rented out in attractive natural locations (Kendija, Opaljenik). Within the borders of the Special Nature Reserve, lodging is available in hunting cabins on the Kozara hunting grounds and in Apatin swamp. Right on the border of the Special Nature Reserve, not far from Apatin, Camp Budžak has been set up which also provides lodging from April until October (Table 3).

Table 4 Structure of Lodging Capacities in the Special Nature Reserve
Gornje Podunavlje and its Surrounding Areas

Area	Type of Lodging	Number of Structures	Number of Rooms	Number of Beds	Market Segment
Special Nature Reserve Gornje Podunavlje	Hotels	-	-	-	-
	Pensions	-	-	-	-
	Village Households	-	-	-	-
	Farms	-	-	-	-
	Hunting Cabins	2	12	23	Hunters
	Campgrounds	-	-	-	-
	Marinas	-	-	-	-
Town of Sombor (area outside of the Special Nature Reserve)	Hotels	1	12	27	Business people
	Pensions	7	80	209	Business people, foreign tourists, domestic tourists
	Village Households	7	20	40	Couples, families with children
	Farms	1	3	6	Couples, families with children
	Hunting Cabins	-	-	-	Hunters
	Campgrounds	1	-	60	Students, couples with children
	Marinas	-	-	-	-
Municipality of Apatin (area outside of the Special Nature Reserve)	Hotels	-	-	-	-
	Pensions	5	161	333	Business people, foreign tourists, domestic tourists
	Village Households	2	5	13	Couples, families with children
	Farms	1	3	5	Couples, families with children
	Hunting Cabins	-	-	-	Hunters
	Campgrounds	1	-	-	Couples with children, special interest groups (bicyclists)
	Marinas	1	8	16	Mariners
Total		29	304	732	-

3.8. Segments of Tourism and Tourism Activities

Based on the analysis of the aforementioned potentials, it has been determined that there is an opportunity for the development of tourism in the following areas:

1. Ecotourism
2. Rural tourism
3. Cultural tourism in towns
4. Fishing and hunting
5. Excursions and field trips
6. Sports and recreation tourism
7. Spa tourism
8. Gastronomy

Table 5 Order of Priorities for Segments of Tourism

Ecotourism	***
Rural tourism	***
Cultural tourism in towns	**
Fishing and hunting	**
Excursions and field trips	***
Sports and recreation tourism	*
Spa tourism	*
Gastronomy	***

*medium; **high; ***exceptionally high

Ecotourism – The floodplain of the Apatin swamp, with the distributaries of the Monoštor swamp and Karapandža, represents one of the primary potentials for the development of tourism in Vojvodina and Serbia. Here one can see the opportunity in developing a number of thematic educational-ecological routes dedicated to the study of nature and its conservation, which is already the case. The Karapandža educational trail covers runs through the Karapandža area and extends for three kilometers. It is equipped with educational signs and rest areas. The Štrbac educational trail is two kilometers long and presents the diversity of its ecosystems. It is equipped with informational signs and an observation post at the Šarkanj swamp. The Bestrement educational trail is three kilometers long and passes through ecologically rich habitats of this part of the Apatin swamp. These trails are visited by 500 tourists annually and that is far below their potential capacity for tourists. Typically, visitors are university students, primary and secondary school students and couples enjoying the nature.



Figure 6 Ecotourism on the Štrbac Educational Trail
Photo: V. Stojanović

The most common tourism activities include: observing nature, studying important ecosystems and habitats, studies on vegetation, birdwatching, observing wildlife and participating in volunteer camps.

In order to improve this segment of tourism, it is necessary to renovate the existing structures of the ranger's cottage at Karapandža in the visitors center, which is already underway. The location of Štrbac has much more potential than what has been utilized up until now. For example, a new ecological-tourism trail should be developed around the revitalized Sakadoš swamp. Finally, the tourism advertising program should be improved and a new image must be created.

Rural tourism – Village settlements in hinterland of the Special Nature Reserve have a good disposition for the development of rural tourism. Similar offerings are already available in Bački Monoštor. Annually, this village is visited by 300 tourists who are interested exclusively in rural tourism. The preserved architectural-ethnographic units, traditional customs and special events represent a good foundation for this segment of tourism. The tourism value of villages is also found in the potentials provided by the natural environment. An especially attractive form of tourism can be found on the farms outside of Sombor and a good example of well organized ethno and rural tourism is the Dida Hornjak Farm which provides visitors with delicious gastronomic offerings.

An important component of rural tourism is the special events and festivals held in villages. Bački Monoštor organizes the Bodrog Fest which openly supports the protection of the

Special Nature Reserve Gornje Podunavlje. Mika's Days in Bački Breg are dedicated to tamburica music and the legendary musician Mika Ivošev Kuzma. The Grape Ball has been held in Sonta since 1928. It is the most significant village cultural event during the entire year and is well known for the wedding of the duke and duchess where a traditional Šokac wedding is presented. Each year the event is visited by around 300 people.

However, the general assessment is that rural tourism is still in its infancy. There is a lack of quality lodging, the population is insufficiently educated in the business of rural tourism and there is a low degree of inclusion of accompanying resources (e.g. cultural landmarks, natural resources, lack of thematic cultural trails).

Cultural Tourism in Towns – Sombor and Apatin have a long tradition of civil society. Sombor was the administrative center of the former Bačko-Bodoroške District, and thanks to that function as well as the enterprising nature of its residents, it left a visible mark on the culture of the extended Bačka area. The history of Apatin is most closely linked with the colonization of Germans. Since the 18th century, the town has developed as a center for various vocations and then as a center for industry. The main street in the town is a good example of the small town architecture at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century.



Figure 7 Special Tourism Event Sombor Kettle in Sombor

Photo: L. Lazić

When staying in Sombor, tourists most often visit the building of the former District Officer in which paintings of the Battle at Senta are on display, the largest oil paintings on canvas in the country. Museums and galleries attract a large number of visitors who decide to come to Sombor. Among them are some of the most important cultural institutions in Serbia.

Among them are the Milan Konjović Gallery, Sava Stojkov Gallery in Preparandija and the Sombor Town Museum. The offering is rounded out with guided tours, informational centers, souvenir shops and special tourist events.

Apatin holds the Fisherman Nights which is one of the most well known tourist events in Serbia. Within the framework of that event, the town holds a number of sports competitions and cultural programs. The Sombor Kettle draws around 2,000 visitors each July who cook stew in the town square with a rich program of entertainment.

Fishing and Hunting – Gornje Podunavlje is traditionally known as a destination for hunting tourism. This segment of tourism is at a much higher level compared to the others and the one in which the most has been invested up until now. The results were most visible up until the crisis in the 1990s. The hunting cabins in Gornje Podunavlje are visited by 180 hunters annually who collectively stay for a total of 650 nights.

Fishing is considered a recreational activity by the local population, but until now it has not ranked high as a serious area for tourism. There are several fishing points all along the Danube and its distributaries.

Excursions and Field Trips – Excursions completely reveal a destination's potential to tourists. The large concentration of natural and cultural potential allows the tourism organizers of Gornje Podunavlje to organize these types of tourism programs. Furthermore, Gornje Podunavlje could be included as a part of multi-destination trips on the regional and national level. The themes of these trips could be quite diverse (protected areas, folklore of the plains, unique gastronomy, architectural heritage).

One-day tours of the main natural and cultural attractions (natural locations, ethno houses, village households) are common. Most often the groups come from Belgrade and Novi Sad. In the future, greater focus should be placed on developing an advertising campaign for multi-day excursions and expansion of the contractive zone.

Sports and Recreation Tourism – Preserved nature and a healthy environment will help with the development of sports tourism in Gornje Podunavlje in the areas (embankments, distributaries, lakes, forest trails) which differ greatly from the environments encountered by tourists in the everyday lives. The typical tourism activities include: utilizing various sports facilities and equipment, schools for various disciplines in sports, competitions, tournaments, recreational sporting activities, youth sports education.

This segment of tourism has been invested in the least and its output is small. Several locations in the region are suitable for development of sports tourism, including: locations under Class III protection and outside of the Special Nature Reserve – embankments, shoreline of distributaries, shoreline of the Danube, shoreline of the Great Bački Canal, Apatin, Sombor.

Spa Tourism (Health/Wellness) – Health tourism would provide tourists with the opportunity to receive the proper therapy according to the health problems, while wellness programs would provide tourists with the opportunity to maintain their good health. These types of programs and segments of tourism could significantly improve the final image of tourism in Gornje Podunavlje. Services from this segment of tourism have until now been provided in

Banja Junaković. The most common activities include: health services, professional services on a daily basis, fitness, use of thermal mineral pools, wellness services in hotels.

Unfortunately, this segment of tourism is often reduced down to just “healing tourism”, so the statistics on the number of “tourists” was unrealistic, despite the excellent potential.

Gastronomy – Gastronomy serves as form of support for the aforementioned segments of tourism. It is an integral component of what makes Vojvodina well known. The richness of the culinary skill is an important component of the culture and tourism for all of Vojvodina as well as the Gornje Podunavlje region. A special trait of the gastronomy of this region is the aforementioned multiculturalism because it has been influenced by Serbian, Šokac, Hungarian and German cuisine.

The gastronomic offering is readily available to tourist taking part in rural tourism in Bački Monoštor and on farms. One can sample traditional specialties which are not available in other regions, including: guineafowl soup, dumplings, ravioli, strudel... One of the best examples of gastronomy can be found at the Dida Hornjak Farm near Sombor.

One of the unique traits of Gornje Podunavlje is the huts along the Danube and its distributaries. Just along the Danube there are around ten. They offer fish specialties, including: spicy fish stew, fish stew with homemade noodles, pike pörkölt, fried perch... Along with domestic guests, visitors to these restaurants also include Croats and Hungarians.

As a special offering, in the future there should be festivals and thematic days dedicated to specific agricultural products or traditional food for the purpose of enriching the overall tourism offering. Trails inspired by gastronomic flavors represent a great potential. This type of offering could be established for the local huts and farms.

3.9. Influence of Tourism on the Environment

The area within the borders of the Special Nature Reserve Gornje Podunavlje and its surrounding areas have been under the influence of humans and their activities for centuries. Agriculture, as one of the oldest activities, results in the clearing of native ecosystems and transforming them into cultivated surfaces. In recent times, the significant pressure in this area has resulted in land reclamation and regulation of waterways. The draining of wetland habitats was especially prevalent in the Monoštor Swamp, but also in other areas where due to the rising of the embankment, the entire marsh area was untouched by the flood wave of the Danube. The regulation of flow of the Danube was especially common at the beginning of the 20th century for the purpose of regulating ship routes.

If considered from the perspective of tourism development, then one can conclude that the influence of these activities on the ecosystems is almost nonexistent. Tourism as an activity in Gornje Podunavlje is still in its infancy. The number of tourists and their activities do not put nature in jeopardy. The especially relates to the parts of the Special Nature Reserve which are most attractive to tourists (Karapandža, Štrbac, Apatin Swamp) and which are fenced in, so movement around the Reserve is not possible without the presence of employees. There is a

somewhat greater influence in the zone of weekend settlements (greater freedom of movement, motor vehicles, boats...). Here the people (hikers and recreationalists) are present in greater numbers and their movements are difficult to monitor and as such a greater amount of negligence has been observed in the form of garbage being deposited along the banks of the river. Unfortunately, negligence in the form of unauthorized disposal of trash has also been observed in the fishing areas.

3.10. Managing Tourism Activities

The content of the tourism offering, considering the spatial undertaking of this Strategy, could be divided into two groups, those being: (a) the Special Nature Reserve and (b) its surrounding areas, primarily the inhabited areas.

The Town of Sombor and the Municipality of Apatin have established tourist organizations tasked with organizing and promoting tourism. Both make significant reference to the Special Nature Reserve Gornje Podunavlje, its resources and the content that it offers as a destination. The tourist organization within the Special Nature Reserve itself is in large part under the influence and control of the manager of the protected area (Vojvodinašume). This institution has developed tourism activities and programs which are offered and promoted through its website. Additionally, the job of being a guide and organizing tourist walks along educational trails is responsibility of the manager of the protected area. Two of three such locations are fenced in (Karapandža and Bestrement), so unauthorized movement in these areas is limited, while in one (Štrbac), movement is allowed only when accompanied by a guide which is indicated on the informational signs at the entry to this part of the Special Nature Reserve. In this manner, the control of visitors is under the strict supervision of the manager and that being in the ecologically very sensitive areas.

The basic tourism offerings in the Special Nature Reserve include the previously mentioned educational trails and hunting cabins as well as the Kozara hunting camp and the Apatin Swamp. These areas are primarily located within the fenced in area of the Special Nature Reserve. There are also the fishing areas, huts (restaurants), weekend cabins and weekend settlements. The most popular fishing areas in West Bačka are located in the Special Nature Reserve Gornje Podunavlje. Here protective measures have been implemented for the fishing area which prevent unwanted pressure on the ecosystem. As a special type of hospitality offering with a recognizable cuisine, huts are opened primarily outside of inhabited areas, along roads and often in the vicinity of the river. Most of these facilities operate around Bezdan, Kupusina and Apatin. Weekend cabins and weekend settlements have been constructed so people can spend their free time outside of their regular environments. In the past, these structures were built in several locations. Weekend settlements are primarily located on the banks of the river, distributaries and canals. They are primarily found in the northern part of the Special Nature Reserve. The largest settlements are around Bezdan – Baračka and on the Bajski Canal – Kendija. On the section along the Danube between Bezdan and Apatin, there are also several

more of these settlements (Daraži Fok, Vagoni). Finally, bicycle paths along the Danube round out the offering within the Reserve (EuroVelo 6).



Figure 8 Sombor and Apatin, as important towns in West Bačka, have an important place within the tourism offering of Gornje Podunavlje, but are also important from the perspective of tourism management.

Photo: V. Stojanović

In the surrounding settlements, as a segment of the offering, there are also museums, galleries, special events and hotel accommodations. The tourism-informational centers provide all necessary information (Sombor, Apatin, Bački Monoštor). It is simpler to manage possible influences here because as a part of the tourist destination, this area is not ecologically sensitive.

4. MARKET

As a segment of tourism, ecotourism is often classified with other segments of tourism based on nature, including segments of alternative tourism. However, the International Society for Ecotourism composed a report in 2005 (with amendments in 2006) on the power of the global ecotourism market. Some of the trends indicated the following:

- Ecotourism/tourism based on nature grew three times faster in 2004 than global tourism observed as a whole (World Tourist organization, 2004);
- Tourism based on nature sees growth of 10% to 12% annually on the international market (European Commission, 2004);
- The mass tourism market is in the mature phase. In contrast to that, experiential tourism, which encompasses ecotourism, tourism based on nature and heritage, as well as cultural tourism, adventure tourism, rural tourism and tourism based on communities, falls into the sector for which very rapid growth is expected in the coming period (World Tourist organization, 2001);

- The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and Conservation International have determined that the greatest expansion in tourism is occurring in or around the remaining global nature areas;
- Environmentally friendly tourism achieves 20% to 30% growth annually. That is a significantly higher rate of growth compared to tourism viewed as a whole, where the annual growth rate is 9% (ICUN, 2008).

In Europe, the following trends have been observed:

- 20% to 30% of tourists are aware of the need for and importance of sustainable tourism;
- 10% to 20% of tourists look for “green” options;
- 5% to 10% of tourists demand “green” vacations;
- In Germany, 65% of tourists (39 million people) expect ecological quality and 42% (25 million people) "think that it is especially important to find environmentally friendly accommodations".
- Around half of tourists in Great Britain indicated that they would likely travel with a "company that has a code of ethics that guarantees good working conditions, environmental protection and supports local benefaction in tourist destinations".

The Special Nature Reserve Gornje Podunavlje with its surrounding areas, according to the realized turnover, represents a tourist destination in its initial phase of development. The total number of tourists amounts to 16,000 annually. These tourists collectively stay for a total of 61,000 nights. From that number, just 180 hunting tourists stay within the territory of the Special Nature Reserve. The others mostly find their accommodations in Sombor and Apatin. Among them, most are domestic tourists.

What is the current situation in terms of the potential market for Gornje Podunavlje?

Of great significance in the initial phase of development of tourism is the potential of the domestic market and the analysis of the habits of potential domestic tourists. For the purposes of composing the “Feasibility Study for the Development of Ecotourism in the Protected Natural Resources of Vojvodina”, a research questionnaire was distributed during the period of January/February 2011 (electronically and in paper form). The sample was composed so that the polled individuals would include those of different genders, ages, levels of education and careers. The sample consisted of individuals from all parts of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina.

Responding to the question of **whether they consider natural resources to be tourist destinations**, a large percentage, 87%, said that they did consider natural resources to be a destination for tourism. Only 8% of those polled felt that protected natural resources were not attractive tourist destinations and 5% of those polled did not have an opinion regarding this question. Viewed according to demographics, there were no differences noticed in the responses of those polled, meaning all demographics shared relatively the same opinions. Very positive results were obtained from the question *would you visit any protected natural resources*, where

99% gave a positive response and just 1% said they had no opinion. All demographics shared the same opinion.

During the polling, it was asked **which is the strongest resource due to which potential tourists would visit a protected natural resource**. Those polled were offered several resources which they evaluated on the basis of their affinity towards that resource. On the Likert scale from 1 to 5 all of those polled evaluated the strength of the resources and for each resource the mean value was calculated (arithmetic mean). The motives for visits ranged from 4.4 (highest value) to 3.2 (lowest value). The dominant resource for a visit was the relaxing atmosphere which is present in a protected natural resource, with a mean grade of 4.4. Next came scientific-educational motives (mean value 4.0), meaning the possibility of learning something about nature and its protection during a visit to such a destination and for such places to be utilized for the organization of field trips and excursions. Somewhat lower grades were received for the motive of enjoying oneself in nature (3.6) and the motive of untouched nature (3.5), while the possibility of one's stay contributing to the protection of nature and recreation as a motive came in last place (mean values of 3.3 and 3.2).

4.1. Harmonizing the Positions of the Local Population with the Market

One of the vital elements of ecotourism and tourism in protected areas is the inclusion of the local population and local communities. This type of tourism must be paired with the social and economic life of the community. The process should be carried out directly, through the distribution of earned incomes, employment and, most importantly, through the control of development.

Public opinion polls, seminars and educational programs, during which the positions of the local populations were recorded, were conducted several times over the past ten years in the region of Gornje Podunavlje. The most significant are:

- **Establishing ecotourism as a tool for improving transboundary management of the Lower Drava and Danube River confluence in Croatia, Hungary and Serbia-Montenegro, Blue Danube and WWF International – DCP, 2006.**

During the realization of this project, educational programs were held and contact was made with the local communities in Bački Monoštor, Kupusina and Sonta.

- **Training employees in village tourism, Ministry of Trade, Tourism and Service and the Department for Geography, Tourism and Hotel Management, Faculty of Sciences, University of Novi Sad, 2007.**

The program was held in Bački Monoštor for the Vojvodina cluster and along with learning opportunities also encompassed the researching of the opinions of the local population regarding rural tourism. As a result of the project the notes for rural tourism were published.

- **SY_CULTour: Synergy of Culture and Tourism – using cultural potentials in less developed rural areas, Department for Geography, Tourism and Hotel Management; Faculty of Sciences, Novi Sad, 2011-2014.**

During the realization of this project, two-day seminars and talks with representatives of the local population were held in July 2012 (Sombor) and March 2013 (Apatin).



Figure 9 Educating the Local Population in Bački Monoštor on Rural Tourism and Ecotourism
Photo: L. Lazić

The first public opinion polling of the local population was conducted in 2003 and 2004 in the settlements surrounding the Special Nature Reserve which led to the following indicators. More than 90% of the population feels that the rational use of natural resources can contribute to prosperity in an economic and wider societal sense. 60% of those polled feel that these types of areas have a strong potential for tourism, but that they are not sufficiently utilized. Regarding the question of whether they would, if the opportunity presented itself, be included in the tourism presentation of the Special Nature Reserve and its surrounding areas or enter the tourism business, 88% said they would.

The most recent polling and talks held in July 2012 and March 2013 confirm the willingness of the local population to get involved in rural and ecotourism. Of particular interest are activities and engagement of women's organizations in the area of making souvenirs, presentations of ethnographic values and the willingness to become more seriously involved in the tourism business.

5. SWOT ANALYSIS

Based on the analysis of the potentials and market, the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for ecotourism and the sustainable development of Gornje Podunavlje are presented in Table 3. The analysis of the area as a tourist destination is the result of meetings and talks within the working group of local stakeholders (Forum) who helped to form the analysis with their suggestions and proposals. The SWOT analysis is aimed at creating future solutions in the development of sustainable tourism and serves as a stimulus for rising out of the current situation in which this destination is still not properly formed as a location for tourism.

Table 6 SWOT analysis of the tourist destination Gornje Podunavlje

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suitable geographic and border position (in accordance with the idea that bordering regions become more important tourist destinations). • Well connected to nearby traffic ways and settlements around the Special Nature Reserve, as well as to neighboring countries. • Well preserved and diverse nature (floodplains, forests, wetland meadows, marshes...). • Importance of plant and wildlife species for which this area is well known (English oak, white and black poplar, deer, white-tailed eagle, black stork). • Confirmation of the recreational and tourism potential of nature (water sports, fishing, hunting, ecotourism). • Original and preserved material and non-material heritage of local cultures. • Multiculturalism in the settlements which surround the Special Nature Reserve. • Hospitable population. • Rich gastronomic offering. • Thermal mineral pools (Junaković, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small extent of tourism development. • Lack of newly created tourism attractions and locations. • Lack of professionally shaped tourism products. • Lack of services content in attractive locations (visitors centers, non-accommodation spending). • Lack of docks and tie offs set up for tourism on rivers, canals and distributaries. • Insufficient recognition of Gornje Podunavlje as a tourist destination on the national and international market. • Lack of and insufficient quality of lodging capacities (in towns, villages, natural environment). • Small scope of tourism infrastructure, especially that which would be intended for alternative tourism (ecotourism). • Insufficient organization of village settlements for the needs of tourism development. • Unconvincing tourism marketing campaigns and insufficient representation in the media.

<p>Bezdan).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International protection statuses (IBA, Ramsar, IPA, MaB currently in the process). • Determination of the manager (Vojvodinašume) to develop tourism and improve the tourism offering. • Construction and organization of a visitors center in Karapandža and Bestrement, as well as the transformation of neglected forest service buildings into facilities for tourism. • Catamaran for the development of tourism on the Bajski Canal. • Defined bicycle paths EuroVelo 6 and Pannonian Peace Trail. • Positive view of local population towards the environment. • Presence of municipal tourist organizations (Sombor and Apatin) which work on tourism development programs. • SNR Gornje Podunavlje website and the presentation of all its valuable attributes. • Tourism offering based on ecotourism (educational trails, thematic walks). • Adopted strategy for the development of tourism in the municipalities of Sombor and Apatin and the Spatial Plan for Special Purpose Areas. • Presence of the marina in Apatin as a guarantee for easier access to destinations from the river. • Support of agriculture (healthy food). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insufficient cooperation between all stakeholders (institutions for the protection of nature, tourist organizations, local citizens organizations, individuals). • Small and insufficient scope of financial resources intended for investing in tourism. • Lack of personnel in new segments of tourism and tourism activities (e.g. tourist guides in ecotourism). • Local population is poorly informed regarding conservation and tourism. • Lack of developed trade offering intended for tourists (souvenirs). • Manager of the Special Nature Reserve does not have a service of organizing tourism with employees educated in tourism management.
<p>Opportunities</p>	<p>Threats</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recreational tourism potential of the extended surroundings of Podunavlje 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lagging behind more competitive destinations and losing the market.

<p>and Vojvodina.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determination of local, provincial and republic level authorities to protect this region as a special nature reserve. • Possibility of integration, creating a united protected area and tourist destination with the Kopački Rit Nature Park (Croatia) and the Dunav-Drava National Park (Hungary). • UNESCO Transboundary Biosphere Reserve Mura-Drava-Danube (TBR MDD). • Possibility of presenting old trades and traditional products (agricultural products, souvenirs). • New jobs and rise in the standard of living. • Shift in trends on the tourism market where alternative tourism becomes more important. • Connecting with professional organizations (bicyclists, photographers, ecological movements...). • Tourism as a factor in the protection of nature is gaining importance. • Good cooperation between the manager and institutions of higher learning and science. • Presence of agriculture as a traditional activity and the possibility of establishing a connection between ecology, agriculture and tourism. • Increase in the number of project in which tourism is recognized as an opportunity for the region and its surroundings. • Possibility of using experiences from other regions that have already 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of financial support. • Devastation of the natural and cultural areas due to the development of commerce and the loss of space for development of tourism. • Poaching of animals and fish. • Lack of domestic and foreign investment in the field of developing sustainable ecotourism. • Economic crisis in which tourism is the first to experience negative consequences. • Corruption as a consequence of poverty and unregulated social relations. • Decreased growth and stagnation of the achieved turnover of tourists due to a crisis or other reasons. • Possible political tensions on the extended regional and international level. • High degree of unemployment and the trend of young and educated people moving away. • Poor legislation with a small degree of support for development of tourism, especially rural tourism.
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<p>navigated this part of the path towards development of tourism.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Starting negotiations with the European Union, considering the fact that the region lies on the border. • Use of pre-accession funds. • Activities in the non-government sector and contribution to the field of conservation and the development of tourism. • Unique promotions and tourism advertising campaigns. • Training individuals from the local community to work as tourist guides. 	
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6. STRATEGIC DIRECTIVES FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM IN GORNJE PODUNAVLJE

6.1. Vision

The strategy for tourism in the Republic of Serbia acknowledges the central identity of Vojvodina with the slogan: “Watery treasure, a Pannonian pleasure”. This implies that its main tourism product is the rivers and lakes, and that as a cluster it is connected with nature. Through the form of personalization, Vojvodina is, among other things, an admirer of water, hospitable and creative. Its symbol is the Danube. The short analysis clearly indicates that the characteristics of Vojvodina as a tourist destination can be easily recognized in the area of Gornje Podunavlje. The vision should be built off of these bases.

Vision statement:

Gornje Podunavlje is a tourist destination in which nature and people live in harmony, where coexistence is based on the preservation of all plant and wildlife species, mutual respect, cooperation and ensuring a prosperous future for the local population.

6.2. Mission

Mission statement:

In the coming period it is necessary to work on making Gornje Podunavlje a recognizable tourist destination in which the goals of conservation and the development of tourism are harmonized and complimentary. The tourism offering of the Special Nature Reserve and the surrounding areas must be recognizable, content rich and innovative tourism products with an emphasis placed on ecotourism and rural tourism. The activities of an active vacation in nature, learning about nature, enjoying nature and active participation in village life and events must especially be distinguished. The organization of the area as a tourist destination must be improved while the tourism signs should meet the needs of the tourists. Cooperation between the stakeholders must be at a high level and must function in the interest of the local communities

6.3. Image

Gornje Podunavlje still lacks the image of a tourist destination, despite significant advances which have been reached during the past ten years following the designation as a special nature reserve. The solution for building an image can be found in the excellent position of the entire region, the Danube Basin character, diversity of the ecosystems within a small area, as well as the multiculturalism and folklore of the local population. The persistent presentation of these potentials would help to better position Gornje Podunavlje on the tourism market. A tourism advertising campaign could and would have a significant role in presenting the new image. It must illustrate Gornje Podunavlje as small romantic destinations, organized for tourism with natural and cultural areas that tourists gladly return to.

Building the image of a tourist destination for Gornje Podunavlje will represent a serious task, because the destination is at the beginning of its tourism development and positioning. In order for the image to be formed, the area of Gornje Podunavlje should be seen and conceptualized as a tourist destination in which:

- nature, ecosystems and biodiversity represent the basis of the offering;
- cultural resources are adequately protected and through the forming of tourism guidebooks;
- the relaxing atmosphere creates the basis for enjoyment;
- the manager must take an active role in building the link between conservation and tourism;
- the local population must respect and protect nature and the environment of the destination (without wildlife and fish poaching, with a high level of knowledge of ecological and aesthetic attributes of the entire region) and in doing so send a clear message regarding the determination towards sustainable ecotourism;

- a high quality tourism offering (tourism products in which the interpretive value is on the level of the task, organized destination, tourist satisfaction), represents a guarantee based on which tourists will gladly return;
- tourism workers and entrepreneurs perform their job responsibly;
- the tourism business has understanding for environmental protection, including the protection of nature and cultural landmarks;
- the safety of tourists is not a question;
- tourism products are innovative, modern and in harmony with the capacities of the environment;
- the organization of the area corresponds to modern eco-destinations;
- the local population has to opportunity to use the content intended for tourists;
- tourism content corresponds to the demands and interests of various generations from the youngest to the oldest;
- tourism content can be adapted for individuals with special needs;
- hospitality and tourism facilities respect the norms of ecologically acceptable business practices, while their organization and aesthetic value preserve the traditions of the area, and
- finally, it is a destination in which, along with the previously recognizable tourism locations, has a location for discovering new similar areas for the purpose of achieving even and uniform development that does not put significant pressure on the ecosystems.

The primary foundations for building the new image of Gornje Podunavlje can be presented in the following manner:

- **Experience of Nature Based on Biodiversity** The importance of biodiversity in this relatively small area has been confirmed through a number of international protection statuses (IBA, IPA, Ramsar, MaB). Plants and wildlife, including entire ecosystems, allow for this area to be enjoyed in a different manner than other destinations in the extended surroundings.
- **The Danube – the main street of Europe.** The tourism experience linked to the Danube provides a number of possibilities through the development of sailing, sports, recreation and ecological-tourism research. The significance of the Danube to tourism is in the river's exceptional potential and as the main focus of the image it is present in numerous European regions. A component of this segment is the numerous canals and distributaries that are connected to the river.
- **Rural pastoral views, revealing multiculturalism.** At the center of this stage are the picturesque Bačka, Danube Basin villages between the distributaries and canals, with the specific physiognomy of baroque bell towers and small houses featuring traditional

architecture. Viewed integrally, the greatest cultural identity is contained in the presence of several peoples and ethnic groups.



Figure 10 Ethno Houses in Kupusina. Multiculturalism through the presentation of ethnographic heritage must remain the main focus of the image of Gornje Podunavlje

Foto: V. Stojanović

- Heritage and pictures of civil society. Towns rich in heritage and culture on various levels – architecture, cultural institutions, mentality... At the center of this stage are the stories of the events, families, well-off residents and famous personalities who give the enjoyment of the area a new sense.

6.4. Selection of the Primary Strategic Bases

The research that was conducted, along with the contact with the local population and institutions that are important for the protection of nature and development of tourism, led to several important strategic bases.

1. The determination towards tourism in harmony with the environment:

Within the process of the development of tourism, which implies the introduction of new tourist locations, tourism products and offerings; all actors must be aware of the sensitivity of the ecosystems and nature in the Special Nature Reserve Gornje Podunavlje. A special approach must be taken to develop the institutions of the manager

as the specifically responsible for the concept of sustainable tourism. It is based on innovative tourism products, the use of the concept of carrying capacity, codes of ethics and monitoring (indicators of sustainable tourism).

2. Determination towards tourism that the local population understands and participates in:

A scenario in which the local population does not participate in or contribute to conservation management and the development of tourism does not meet the standard for sustainable development. The population of all seven village settlements and two towns must be included according to the principle of (1) interactive participation or (2) self-initiative and association. In the first case, the population takes part in joint analyses, development of an action plan and the creation of local organizations. In the second, the population takes action independent from external factors. External institutions are necessary only for obtaining advice.

3. Cooperation of all stakeholders:

This strategic basis is the key to success for the development of sustainable tourism. It is a process in which the manager of the protected area primarily cooperates with the representatives of the local population, tourist organizations and local authorities. Additionally, it is a process in which all actors share the joint vision for development of tourism and in which the problem of conflicting viewpoints will be resolved harmoniously.

4. Integrated management of tourism at the level of the entire region:

In the past, the Municipality of Apatin and the Town of Sombor mostly worked separately on the development of tourism. Considering that they are connected by the Special Nature Reserve Gornje Podunavlje, which is also their main tourist attraction, it is necessary to integrate tourism through joint management activities, advertising campaigns and monitoring. For this reason, it is important that the name Gornje Podunavlje be used for marketing the municipalities of Sombor and Apatin as tourist destinations. The management strategy should include the concept of public-private partnership.

5. Linking with neighboring tourist destinations in Croatia and Hungary:

The status of UNESCO Transboundary Biosphere Reserve Mura-Drava-Danube (TBR MDD), in addition to being significant for the protection of the nature on the banks of the

large river, is also important for the quality of the tourism offering. Linking with the protected areas and tourist destinations in neighboring countries opens new possibilities. The diversity of natural and cultural resources in that case is even greater and would allow the area to compete better on the European market than it could as small and divided protected areas.

6. Well thought-out tourism development that is confirmed through the application of sustainability indicators:

The application of indicators for sustainable tourism represents a guarantee for the sustainability of the destination Gornje Podunavlje. The indicators for sustainable tourism must be selected according to the type of destination and type of tourist activity. They must integrate the set of indicators for (1) destinations with natural areas and ecologically sensitive locations and (2) destinations with traditional local communities.

6.5. Integral goals

The integral goals of the development of tourism in Gornje Podunavlje include the preservation of natural resources and biodiversity, nurturing the cultural value of the villages and towns in the surrounding areas, optimal tourist satisfaction and benefits for tourism for the local population. In order to achieve this, it is necessary to reposition and change the current understanding, move towards market trends and develop a new image. On the basis of this type of scenario, specific sector goals for the development of tourism have been defined which can be classified into three groups:

1. Economic goals:

- **Tourism as a stimulus for commercial development and economic diversification** – increasing the number of tourists; opening new accommodation capacities and improving the quality of the offering within those that already exist;
- **Increase employment** – creating new jobs wherever possible (guides, custodians in ethno houses, entertainers, ecological educators...) and training the local tourism guides, creating souvenirs and marketing them in ethno houses and visitors centers;
- **Increase investments** – insisting on local authorities creating the conditions in which an interest will be shown in investing in the area of ecotourism;
- **Complementary and strong bonds between nature, agriculture and tourism** – possibility of marketing agricultural products within the hospitality facilities and as products that tourists are unable to purchase elsewhere (e.g. honey, jam, grain products...); development of rural and eco-rural tourism; popularization of agriculture through development of tourism on farms; popularization of traditional agricultural products (e.g. Sombor cheese); culinary and traditional specialties;

- **Constantly increasing the quality of services** – implementing norms and standards, certification of local services in cooperation with institutions of higher learning and science.
- **Development of new and innovative tourism products** – tourist destinations can be successful only if new products are constantly being developed;
- **Economic indicators of sustainable tourism** – the number of total collective nights stayed, ration or stays compared to capacity, seasonal character of turnover.

2. Economic goals:

- Protection of nature and biodiversity - synchronizing tourist activities and sensitive locations, small groups of ecologically aware tourists in sensitive locations, popularization of conservation through tourism products (trails featuring rare plant species, birdwatching, photo safari), volunteer camps for the most ambitious tourists - protectors (preserving the wetland habitats, e.g. in the location of Štrbac and in the Monoštor Swamp).



Figure 11 Ecological education in the location of Bestrement

Photo: V. Stojanović

- **Preserving original regional characteristics** – introducing a standard for educational-interpretive value (informational signs, thematic trails like those in the location of Štrbac, the presence of tourist guides, investments in printing materials which are in accordance with the norms of ecological publications), visitors centers, schools in nature with

thematically and conceptually similar the one in Baračka, affirmation of other locations within the ecological education, educating the local population on regional characteristics.

- **Preserving and preventing pollution of waterways** - the harmonization of all activities with the water protection management (preventing movements during periods of high sensitivity of ecosystems, boats on electrical motor drives); construction of piers and fishing points where permitted.
- **Rational use of energy** – application of a program to conserve energy according to the accepted standards, especially in hospitality facilities (e.g. according to the example of the project Hotel Energy Solution, WTO).
- **Preventing aesthetic degradation of the area (both natural and cultural resources)** – including experts in the tourism development program from the area of protecting nature and cultural landmarks, education of the local population, the role of local authorities.
- **Indicators for sustainable tourism** – the number of plant and wildlife species before and during the realization of tourism, the aesthetic assessment of resources from tourists (questionnaires), carrying capacity, zoning (“honey pot”, the number of tourists who arrive by public transportation, air and water quality, noise).

3. Socio-cultural goals:

- **Rise in the quality of life** – a rise in the living standard through the development of tourism, introducing tourism content and infrastructure provide lift in the village with a new sense (tourism infrastructure is also used by the local population – structures for recreation, pools, visitors centers, bicycle rentals, boats).
- **Additional education and higher cultural standards** – teaching people to be hospitable in the hospitality business and tourism (professional hospitality and not "simplification").
- **Recognizing the positive relation towards other cultures** - creating a unique tourism offering for cultural tourism with neighboring regions in Hungary and Croatia (paths towards peace and reconciliation between peoples).
- **Nurturing the local identity** – tourism programs and new tourists as the critical mass of the public necessary for cultural programs, performances and festivals (Bodrog Fest, Apatin Fisherman Nights, the Grape Ball, Tradition for the Future, Danube Day), a feeling of local pride, highlighting the multiculturalism through the introduction of new tourism products and festivals.



Figure 12 Nurturing customs and traditions must be one of the key goals of sustainable tourism.

Grape Ball event in Sonta.

Photo: V. Stojanović

- **Developing general security** – protective measures for tourists and local population (stop crime, drugs, prostitution, abuse of women and discrimination of minority groups).
- **Preserving the pastoral Bačka Danube Basin villages** – fulfill the standards defined in spatial plans, construction of tourism facilities in the local architectural style, new construction harmonized with old and traditional structures, preserving exterior appearances.
- **Preserving the cultural identity of the towns** – implementing the measures prescribed by the Provincial Bureau for Protection of Cultural Landmarks to prevent devastation.
- **Protection of cultural landmarks** – introducing protected cultural landmarks to the new tourism program, reviving content and historical context, reviving historical stories through new guidebooks (baroque churches, famous families, industrial heritage, vocations...), hiring experts from the fields of cultural landmark protection, ethnology and art history.

6.6. Specific Goals

Goal 1: Preserve the rich biodiversity in Gornje Podunavlje by using ecotourism as a means for sustainable development of tourism and conservation.

(complete works on the construction of a visitors center at Karapandža; organize and maintain two trails, Šarkanj Swamp and Semenjača Swamp and lookout point in the location of Štrbac and provide regular maintenance; organize and maintain the location of Bestrement; promote the natural potentials of the Special Nature Reserve through an annual thematic press tour – journalists and tourism agencies.)

Goal 2: Contribute to the economic and cultural revitalization of villages and employment of the local population through the enrichment and improvement of the current offering, communal and tourist organization of villages, improvement of the conditions of accommodations.

(educate the local village residents with lodging capacities or hold at least two rural and ecotourism workshops with 20 participants on the topic of: sustainable tourism, organization of tourism offerings, standards with examples of best practices; linking with at least three local (eco and ethno) events and festivals with the tourism offering of the Reserve; research the conditions for establishing a souvenir brand and products with the Gornje Podunavlje designation (branding), e.g. forest honey and honey from giant goldenrod, marinated smoked bream, ground paprika, handmade wooden clogs; select and create the official souvenir of Gornje Podunavlje – black stork, deer.)

Goal 3: Include the towns in the tourism offering and contribute to their cultural revitalization.

(inform the owners of accommodations and hospitality facilities of the principles of sustainable tourism, affirmation of local history and pride through education and local guided routes intended for the local population.)

Goal 4: Develop fishing tourism according to the criteria of sustainable tourism.

(compose a list of alternative tourist accommodations (weekend cabins, huts, fishing houses...) for fisherman; set up a minimum of 5 fishing areas.)

Goal 5: Create a plan for the development of wellness, sports and gastronomy tourism.

(stimulate the development of wellness and gastronomy tourism in cooperation with interested parties; develop cycling.)

Goal 6: Create a tourist management plan related to sustainable tourism and improving the capacities of the Special Nature Reserve for managing sustainable tourism.

(establish the mechanism to control tourists; raise the level of knowledge and awareness of 20 employees from all profiles at the Special Nature Reserve regarding the importance of sustainable tourism, the relation towards tourists and the monitoring of tourists.)

Goal 7: Raising the awareness of Gornje Podunavlje as a tourist destination among the local population, visitors and foreign tourists.

(create adequate promotional materials with the designation of the Charter; establish cooperation with at least 10 local and national media outlets; get Gornje Podunavlje certified as a location for shooting films by the Film Association of Serbia; develop an Android application for the protected area SNR Gornje Podunavlje.)