

# TOURISM AS AN EFFECTIVE INSTRUMENT OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT – CASE STUDY OF THE MUNICIPALITY OF DONOVALY

CIVAN MAREK<sup>1,2</sup>, KROGMANN ALFRED<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Geography and Regional Development

<sup>2</sup>Department of Ecology and Environmental Sciences

Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra

Trieda Andreja Hlinku 1, 949 74 Nitra

SLOVAKIA

marek.civan@ukf.sk

*Abstract:* The paper is focused on the transformation of former rural territory by tourism, which is an effective tool for regional development of rural areas. Firstly, the formation and economic orientation of former municipality of Donovaly is pointed out along with the consequential changes influenced by tourism. The increase in the number of accommodation facilities is highlighted, because it represents one of the cornerstones of tourism facilities. The main part of the paper lies in the analysis of questionnaire survey, which was realized among the visitors of municipality. Based on that, the prototype visitor of Donovaly during summer season is designed, while there are emphasized the most attractive places along with the attendance zones of visitors, what can be useful in future marketing activities. The results may become an effective tool in further development of the municipality also from the perspective of products of tourism in order to reach current and potential target markets.

*Key Words:* tourism, transformation, rural development, Donovaly, questionnaire survey

## INTRODUCTION

Regional development is a long-term burning issue affecting not only urban, but rural areas as well. Just countryside becomes more endangered area, because there are not as many functions as in urban environment, while if there is a lack of possibilities or potential for development, rural localities face negative changes, such as depopulation processes, which can cause an overall decline for closer and wider rural region. Rural development is possible to achieve by various ways, while one of the effective tools is tourism. It can transform an original rural settlement into a tourism destination providing that there exist favourable assumptions for tourism along with its proper directing and management. These phenomena can bring to the area not only many desirable effects (such as creation of job opportunities), but also some negative impacts (e.g. at the expense of natural landscape).

Political and economic changes after 1989, gradual opening of borders whether integration of Slovakia into the EU structures enabled tourism to affect urban and rural development more considerable than before. In accordance with Johnson (1995), mountainous resorts belong to the group of attractive tourism destinations, while they were hit by the most significant form of spatial and investment development. The municipality of Donovaly can be included in the aforementioned category, because it was transformed from the original village into a yearlong tourism destination. The aim of the paper is to point out the selected matters of development of the catchment area and based on the perception of its visitors to outline the possibilities for its future management and development.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

### Theoretical background

The issues of development of rural territories were the research subject among Czech and Slovak geographers, but they are wider explored mainly by foreign experts. In Slovakia, a study at the local level was presented by Grežo and Némethová (2011), who focused on the development of the municipality of Hrušovany, while rural development influenced by tourism was examined in

detail by Némethová and Kajanovič (2012) on the example of micro-regions of Hron and Biely Kameň in the district of Levice. In the Czech Republic, the development of micro-region of Bystřice nad Pernštejnem was studied by Vaishar et al. (2015) from the perspective of tourism. A comprehensive monograph describing different positive and negative effects of tourism in various destinations was presented by Pásková (2009). Within the international authors, there may be highlighted the study by Gyimah (2006), who evaluated impacts of tourism on the local economy in the Kwabre district in Ghana. The issues of development of rural areas on the basis of tourism were presented by Lo et al. (2014) on the example of Malaysian rural tourism in Sarawak, Borneo. Bahrami and Noori (2013) concentrated on the evaluation of tourism effects on the development of Middle East rural areas in Marivan, Iran.

### **History of the municipality of Donovaly**

Time-space development of the original settlement called Donovaly and its later formation into the municipality was explored mainly by Škrinářová et al. (2002) and Tomeček (2003). The area of the Staré Hory hills – surrounding Donovaly – registered an expansion of mining in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> century, along with the arrival of German colonist in Central Slovakia. Natural preconditions, especially a plenty of wood, were favourable for the development of mining and metallurgy. From the 16<sup>th</sup> century, these 8 settlements – Bully, Donovaly, Hanesy, Mistríky, Mišúty, Močiar, Polianka and Sliachany – were gradually formed in the Staré Hory valley. That economic aggrandizement had a positive influence on their development. In 1652, there were only 29 inhabitants in the Donovaly settlement, while in 1787, even 239 residents were registered. Donovaly became the largest settlement of all and reached a dominant position. The end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century was characterized by the decline of mining and consequent closure of smelting works in Staré Hory that affected also the local population that was forced to change its economic orientation. Many workers looked for a job in more distant factories in Harmanec or Podbrezová. The important milestone occurred in 1860, when all settlements were united into the one with the leading position of Donovaly. In 1895, Donovaly acquired the status of large municipality and thereby reached more significant position among other rural municipalities.

The World War I deepened the economic decline, resulting in foreign migration of people. The interwar period brought the development of local infrastructure, such as electrification and beginning of construction of water supply. During this period, Donovaly became to be recognized as the suitable area for activities related to tourism that was underlined by the construction of the first mass accommodation facility (Športhotel Donovaly) finished 2 years later, when the construction of the first ski lift started. The development of Donovaly continued after the World War II. The road connection between Banská Bystrica and Ružomberok (through Donovaly) started to be built even in 1957 due to the broken relief in Staré Hory hills. The aggrandizement hit also the development of various accommodation facilities (e.g. Slniečko, Žiar, Encián, Smrekovec, etc.), while many of them were recreational objects of state owned enterprises. In 1985, Donovaly acquired the status of recreational municipality (Čuka 1989), confirming the transformation influenced by tourism. Generally, travelling and tourism were limited till 1989, so just domestic tourism was mainly supported by the state, what reflected in the formation of individual chalets and company cottages. At the end of 80s, Donovaly was typical by bound tourism, what was confirmed by 34 company cottages with the capacity above 700 beds, while the capacity of free tourism facilities reached about 500 beds.

The contemporary period of development of Donovaly and adjacent territories has been running since 90s. Expansion of business and changes in economic conditions caused transformation of former state owned recreational objects used for bound tourism into the objects of private ownership available for all tourists. Besides traditional facilities, there were built new ones reflecting a demand of coming visitors and also responded to the development of municipality into a yearlong tourism centre.

In accordance with Čuka (1995), the four main causes of rural development in the area of Staré Hory hills were identified: (I) economic decline of original mining region; necessity to seek new ways of development, (II) attractive natural preconditions for tourism development, (III) development of mass tourism in Europe, (IV) construction of transit communication through Staré Hory valley.

## Methods and data

The input statistical data were obtained from the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic that collects annual data on the development of number and structure of accommodation facilities and number of beds at the municipal level since 1996, while the last processed data were from 2012. Information about the number of unemployed was acquired from the Central Office of the Labour and Social Affairs of the Slovak Republic that collects these data at the municipal level since 1999. Within the particular municipalities in the district of Banská Bystrica, Donovaly was – in both indicators – compared with other municipalities in order to point out the impacts of tourism on rural development.

An effective method for examination of facts in tourism and associated aspects is the field survey. Within this method, a questionnaire survey was applied, while it belongs to the traditional tools of geographical research, what is confirmed by Dubcová et al. (2003). A methodical creation and its application are widely described within the study by Bird (2009). The questionnaire included open as well as closed questions, while the last one contained five statements to which the respondent answered in terms of the 5-point Likert scale.

For the purposes of expression of spatial characteristics as well as visitors' dominant attendance zones, the cartographic method (cartogram) was used via ArcGIS 9.3 software.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Accommodation facilities as a reflection of rural development by tourism

Accommodation facilities (AF) present the essential element of realization assumptions of tourism. Their number and bed capacity also reflect preferences of coming clients. Taking into account the availability of data, the noticed changes may be evaluated – via the Change Index (CI) – in number and bed capacity of accommodation facilities between the years 2012 and 1996 (see Table 1).

*Table 1 Development of the number of AF and bed capacity in the municipality of Donovaly and other municipalities in the district of Banská Bystrica in comparison 2012 and 1996*

Territory / year	Number of AF			Bed capacity		
	1996	2012	CI (%)	1996	2012	CI (%)
Donovaly	21	39	185.7	1,582	1,494	94.4
Other municipalities	53	43	81.1	1,851	1,311	70.8

In 1996, there were 74 AF registered in the district of Banská Bystrica, while 21 (28.4%) of them were located in the municipality of Donovaly. At the end of the reference period, there were together 82 AF in the selected district, while their dispersion was maintained in 20 of 42 municipalities. In case of the municipality of Donovaly – that became the known yearlong tourism centre of national significance – the number of AF was almost doubled. There were built mostly large capacity accommodation facilities (e.g. Galileo hotel and Residence hotel) localized in the heart of the municipality. Also, some new guest houses were registered, while the visible increase was noticed in the group of “other facilities” including also the apartment houses, which do not have own category within the categorization of AF. The drop was recorded within the pensions, which fell from 12 in 1996 to 7 in 2012. Despite these facts, the development of bed capacity registered just a slight decrease. In case of Donovaly, there was a drop less than 6%, while within the other municipalities, the decline of almost 30% was noticed. This tendency reflects current preferences of providers and tourists, who favour smaller facilities (e.g. pensions, private accommodation) prior to large-scale ones.

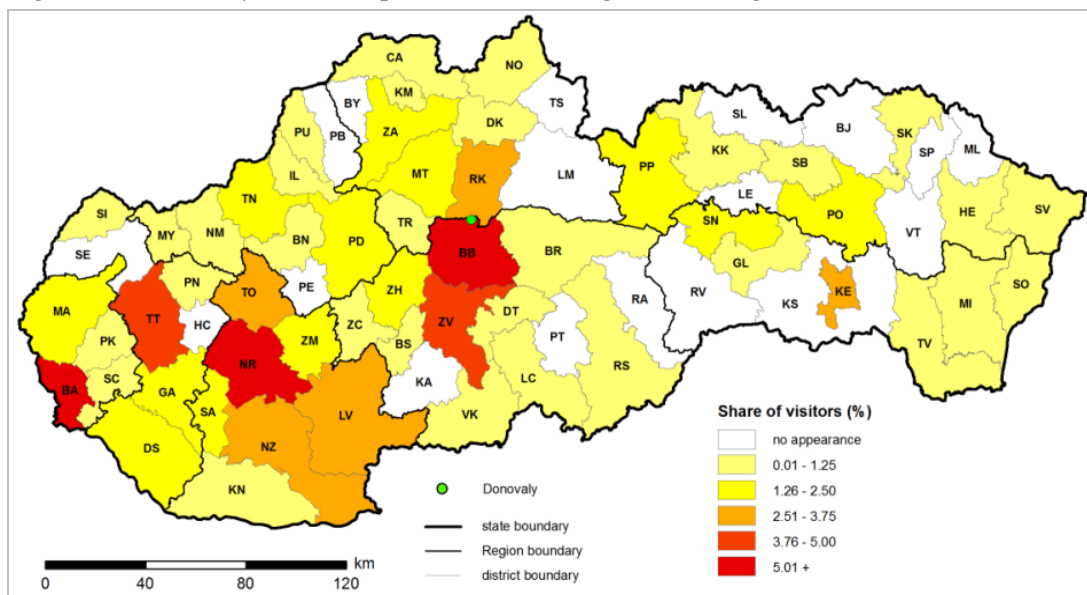
The construction of AF and associated development of services in tourism can positively affect on residents of the municipality, such as in form of creation and supply of jobs, also for lower-skilled workers. From the viewpoint of share of unemployed in the total number of inhabitants, Donovaly reached – during the reference period from 1999 to 2014 – the best results confirmed by 2.1% of unemployed in average, while the average value for other municipalities in district reached 5.2%. We can deduce that just tourism had a desirable impact on the employment of Donovaly's locals.

## Questionnaire survey

The survey was realized among the visitors during the summer season (July, August 2015) in the selected days that took into consideration the organized event of international importance (Spartan Race), events of regional significance (Fa Donovaly Night Run, Festival of Mascots at Toboggan Run) as well as during the days without any special organized event. The poll was conducted at the places of high density of tourists, mostly at the centre of municipality, nearby the favourite fairy-tale village called Habakuky – representing Pavol Dobšinský's literary production – and within the PARK SNOW Donovaly centre. Summarily, 213 visitors participated on the survey.

In terms of **basic characteristics** of respondents, there was registered the predominance of 116 (54.5%) women over 97 (45.5%) men. Within the ten-year age groups, the category from 31 to 40 yrs. reached the highest share (43.2%). Generally, the mountainous environment in Donovaly associated with hiking was more attractive for younger population, because respondents not older than 40 yrs. formed 61.0% of the whole sample. From the perspective of marital status, married participants (63.8%) dominated and were followed by single ones (24.9%). Within the educational structure, the visitors with completed university education (48.9%) and secondary education with school-leaving exam (45.1%) were mainly recorded, while the share of respondents with lower education was insignificant. From the viewpoint of economic categories, employees (128 people; 60.1%) prevailed, while the share of other groups oscillated up to 15%. The origin of visitors is a useful finding, because it enables to know the main regions of attendance and consecutively adapt the overall product of tourism. The positive finding lies in that the visitors came from 75% districts of Slovakia (districts of Bratislava were counted as one – the same in case of Košice), what highlighted a nationwide scope of the municipality that is supported by its geographical location and accessibility from the all directions (see Figure 1). Even 199 of 213 (93.4%) of respondents came from Slovakia, while 14 foreign visitors were registered (from the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Lithuania, the USA and Australia).

Figure 1 Structure of Slovak respondents according to their origin at the district level



The most significant proportion was registered within the district of Banská Bystrica (14.6%) that displays a primary hinterland of the municipality. The second most noticeable share belonged to the visitors from districts of Bratislava (12.1%) followed by tourists from the district of Nitra (7.0%). In case of inhabitants of the capital, the main driving force for a trip is probably an economic power of the region, reflecting in other features (e.g. unemployment, purchasing power) supporting tourism. On the other hand, the visitors coming from districts of Nitra or Trnava (4.5%) are motivated especially by the favourable transport connection through Prlbina motorway. Based on that, the first attendance zone can be defined just by this direction, as all of the districts through which it is routed, registered participants within the survey. The second attractive attendance zone is Central Slovakia with the slight domination of neighbouring districts of Zvolen (4.5%) and Ružomberok (3.0%) due to the favourable transport or time accessibility. A positive finding is the share of tourists

from the Váh River region, Orava and Upper Nitra region. This fact is caused primarily by the suitable location of Donovaly or shorter time accessibility in comparison with the larger Tatra resorts.

The main part of the questionnaire lied in the **preferences of visitors in relation to tourism**. The largest proportion (33.3%) of respondents declared the first arrival in Donovaly before 1989, confirming the long-term orientation of the municipality for tourism purposes. This subcategory consisted of tourists from 29 districts, what underlines that Donovaly has undergone a positive development since 1989; thereby it attracts wider clientele now than before. Almost the one quarter (24.4%) of questioned participants stated that their first coming to Donovaly was dated during the 90s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, highlighting the positive tendency of long-term popularity of the municipality. Contrary to that, 50 (23.5%) of respondents visited Donovaly for the first time in 2012 or later, showing that the municipality still has a potential to reach new tourists. Within the favourite period, more than the half (54.0%) of participants answered that they visited Donovaly during summer and winter and confirmed a yearlong character of the centre. This fact was underlined in the following question, because nearly the two thirds (65.3%) of visitors travelled to Donovaly at least two times a year. Within the mentioned group, there prevailed 70 tourists travelling there just two times a year, who represented 50.4% of the group. The location along with the accessibility of the municipality had an influence on the results of another question exploring the length of stay. Even 120 of 213 (56.3%) tourists remained in Donovaly only during the day of arrival, while with increasing length of stay decreased the proportion of visitors. Within the following question, the participants were asked to tick the events or places that they visited in Donovaly (more answers were possible). The most favourite became the Habakuky fairy-tale village, chosen by 99 respondents. The Fun Arena within the PARK SNOW Donovaly centre, offering various attractions and activities (e.g. toboggan run, rope centre, climbing wall), was ticked by 68 persons. Also the popular Dog Sled Race reached a noticeable proportion, as 54 visitors marked it. This event had a longstanding tradition in the municipality, and was the one of the main marketing elements of Donovaly in the past. Identically, 18 participants ticked two organized sport events – Spartan Race and Fa Donovaly Night Run. Other events or places acquired not more than 10 points and thereby their participation can be assessed as insignificant.

In accordance with the massive boom of AF in the municipality, the statements – within the last section – were associated with the visitors' perception on these issues in relation to tourism and municipal development, using the 5-point Likert scale (1 – strongly agree ... 5 – strongly disagree). The results point out their viewpoint on the hitherto development of Donovaly (see Table 2).

*Table 2 Assessment of the statements by visitors*

Statement	Pts.
(A) Construction of AF deteriorated the image of natural landscape in the municipality.	2.94
(B) Nature protection is more important than further development of tourism in Donovaly.	1.77
(C) Number and structure of AF is sufficient and further construction should not proceed.	1.85
(D) Original features of rural village were negatively disrupted by the construction of AF.	1.93
(E) I will appreciate potential investments into tourism in the municipality in the future.	2.93

Based on these results, the two groups of attitudes towards claims are identified. The statements A and E gained neutral perception and were typical for wide range of answers within the point scale. Respondents carefully assessed the visual impact of construction of AF on nature as well as related investments in the future, as based on their many reactions, the number and structure of AF in Donovaly is sufficient. The second group consists of the statements B, C and D, which are presented in affirmative way to the deflection from further construction towards the preservation of recent situation with regard to natural environment, which has lost its rural features just because of processes associated with the development of municipality and its transformation into a yearlong tourism centre.

## CONCLUSION

The development of rural territories is a difficult process depending on many – including geographical – factors. Tourism represents an ideal tool enabling (not only) economic growth for rural areas. On the example of the municipality of Donovaly, there was proved that tourism positively

affects the selected characteristics. During the reference period, the highest increase in AF was recorded, confirming new trends in tourism development in Slovakia in 1989. Moreover, Donovaly reached the best results in unemployment of own inhabitants. Donovaly became a nationwide tourism centre, which is attractive not only in the dominant winter season, but through its offer and events can engage visitors also in summer. The major comparative advantage of the municipality lies in its location along with the transport accessibility on the Prľbina motorway, which has a centripetal effect. The prototype visitor is at the age from 31 to 40, coming with family and staying only in the day of arrival, but tends to more visits during the year. The main attraction in the summer season is the Habakuky fairy-tale village, along with the PARK SNOW Donovaly centre offering several free-time activities for sport and entertainment at the Fun Arena. These subjects can address their advertisements and products of tourism especially to visitors coming from the main attendance zones. In case of perception of Donovaly, tourists take into account sustainable development of tourism as well as environmental aspect that are favoured at the expense of further construction of AF and other investments due to the natural character of the municipality. This is an important message for investors in order to maintain the desirable balance between future development and original natural image.

The presented findings have a potential to draw attention not only to the local government in the decision-making processes on future investments related to tourism in Donovaly, but they can be useful also for operators of attractions and other facilities for tourism purposes. The paper offers some proposals and ideas for the future studies, which research subject will lie in the impacts of tourism on municipalities or rural development in Slovakia as well as abroad.

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