


Подобрување на туристичкиот потенцијал
на општините Кустендил и Конче -
ЗАЕДНИЧКА ОДРЖЛИВА ИДНИНА
CB006.1.21.164



A Sustainable Joint Future

Enhancing the Tourism Potential of the
Municipalities of Kyustendil and Konche -
A SUSTAINABLE JOINT FUTURE
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Research study for the natural
and anthropogenic potentials
for tourism development of
the municipality of Konche

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Introductory notes

Introduction

The territory of the municipality of Konche, following its location and the great number of natural and created values it has, has a solid foundation for touristic development and becoming an interesting tourist destination. The municipality has a strong potential for developing an authentic recreational, alternative, rural and religious-monastery tourism though, unfortunately there is no organized effort and mobilized infrastructure for presenting this potential and for providing services in these fields. This potential has also been taken into account in the old municipal strategy and in the data of the current Programme for development of the South-East Planning Region. In these documents, the tourism is part of the economic sector-services which should contribute to the economic development of the municipality. However, at the time of the preparation of this study, the tourism does not participate in the overall economic development as there is still no tourist activity on the territory of the municipality.

In this context, the municipality lacks studies and strategic documents which will provide knowledge and a database of the potentials for tourism development in order for it to be institutionalized and become an important economic sector.

However, it is important to be noted here that in the last few years the tourism has been recognized by the Municipality as an economic activity with a great potential. This has been confirmed by the great number of initiatives and projects in the tourism sector which have been implemented in the municipality in various degrees.

As stated above, the tourism has been identified as a strategic middle-term goal of the Programme for development of this region – as a Strategic goal 2 – Sustainable development of the tourism and culture in the region. The tourism is part of the economic service sector which contributes to the increase of the regional GDP, but if we take into account that the service sector is much wider, it could be concluded that the tourism in this region does not contribute to the overall economic development of the Region in accordance with its potential.

Having in mind the present condition of this economic sector as well as the modern European and world tourism trends, the focus of the region and the municipality should be directed towards creating conditions for articulated, organized and integrated presentation of the local natural attractions and the cultural and historic heritage with a single goal of getting the interest of the home middle class tourists - tourists that show greater and clearly defined interest for this type of tourism but also the interest of tourists from the neighborhood and the wider region.

Support for such efforts would be provided by the institutions at national level because the tourism, together with the agriculture and the rural development, has been identified by the Government as one of the priority sectors for development in the Republic of Macedonia. This has been confirmed and defined in the National strategy for tourism development in the Republic of Macedonia (2009-2013) and in the Global study on tourism in the Republic of Macedonia.

The goal of this Study is to research and present the importance of this industry's development for the economic growth of the municipality, to identify and recommend models for tourism development to the relevant stakeholders and interested potential investors which are in accordance with the present situation and the potential of the resources present.

The preparation of the Study for tourism development potentials' state is part of the project "Enhancing the tourism potential of the municipalities of Kyustendil and Konche- A sustainable Joint Future". This is a partner project of the municipalities of Kyustendil and Konche and is being implemented within the INTERREG - IPA Cross-Border Cooperation Programme between the Republic of Macedonia and the Republic of Bulgaria 2014-2020.

Goals of the Study

The Study, as a foundational and important document which points out the potentials and opportunities for the touristic development of this region, has many goals. The main goal is to analyze, inventory and valorize tourist resources in the municipality from a touristic aspect. The municipality has numerous resources but not all suitable for touristic purposes. From those with a potential not all could be used in the initial activities for creating conditions for tourism development due to the actual situation in the municipality in which there is no touristic economic activity. This action should provide differentiation and identification of those resources that have a fitting attractive potential, have a transport connection and allow an execution of appropriate activities. As a second but equally important goal, is analyzing and finding appropriate solutions for sustainable use of the allocated touristic resources, as a prevention of endangerment, degradation, disturbance and significance loss. This is of great importance as some of the attractive sights, landscapes and buildings are being protected by the law and their exploitation for touristic purpose should be in line with their status and the legal framework that defines their exploitation. This goal should lay the foundations of the sustainable use of natural and anthropogenic resources. Since the Municipality of Konche is at the very beginning of creating institutional conditions for tourism development, this goal, in synergy with the main goal, could define initiatives, activities and steps which will trace serious strategic commitments, freed from the burden of the present situation, with all the elements included in building the tourism sector. In other words, the good side of this situation is that the municipality has a clear field for creating solutions for tourism development which could be used, without any disturbance or influence from past implemented or planned activities, if there is a vision and a strong dedication for such measures in the municipality.

From the above said it could be concluded that the main goal of the study is the touristic valorization of natural and cultural (created) attractions in the field, in accordance with the principle of sustainable use and in function of the local development, taking into consideration that some rural settlements are very poverty-stricken and have a high trend of depopulation. With their optimal valorization a more balanced municipal development would be provided and this would also contribute to the regional development.

Apart from the main goal, the study also has more specific and concrete goals such:

- To review and take into account all relevant documents and legal framework related to tourism and the Municipality for the preparation of a Study for researching natural and anthropogenic potentials for tourism development in the Municipality of Konche;
- To review and analyze the existing institutional set up / structure for tourism, management, marketing and promotion with a special focus on roles and responsibilities at national, regional and local level, as well as existing tourism organizations, including relevant associations, networking, staff; etc.
- To give a description of the methodology used for the preparation of a Study for researching natural and anthropogenic potentials for tourism development;

- To give a description of the tourist-geographical position and connection in the municipality by analyzing: the geographical position, the transport connection and the position in relation to other municipalities and tourism regions;
- To identify and analyze the key factors for potential tourism development through analysis of the values created - human - demographic characteristics of the region;
- To identify and analyze the natural characteristics and factors (natural heritage: geomorphological characteristics, climate characteristics, hydrographic characteristics), environmental factors (characteristics and uniqueness of the flora and fauna) and the anthropogenic factors (cultural-historical, ethno - social and event values).
- To identify and describe the types of tourism in the municipality (mountain, lake, hunting and fishing, residential, rural, eco, sports and recreational, excursion, manifestation and other types of tourism);
- To identify and describe the existing tourism sites in the municipality;
- To prepare a final report with conclusions and recommendations from the Study in an electronic format, suitable for printing and publishing to a web page.

Basic information about the Municipality of Konche

The municipality of Konche is a typical rural municipality, located in the central-eastern part of the Republic of Macedonia. The geographical configuration of the terrain is predominantly hilly and mountainous. The territory of the municipality covers the upper part of the basin of the river Kriva Lakavica, which is surrounded by low mountains on three sides: Konechka with Gradeshka mountain on the west and south side and the Smrdesh mountain on the east side. Only to the north the terrain is open along the valley of the Lakavica River towards the river Bregalnica. The municipality extends to an area of 225 km² and is in the rank of medium-sized rural municipalities in the Republic of Macedonia. On its territory there is one rural and administrative center and 13 village settlements. Of these, eleven are inhabited, of which seven are active, three settlements have a small number of permanent residents, while the remaining four are abandoned villages. Three settlements have more than 500 inhabitants: Konche, Dedino and Rakitec. In the remaining four settlements there are 300-500 inhabitants. In three settlements there are less than 50 inhabitants.

According to the 2002 census, the total population in the municipality is 3,690 and the total number of households is 1,057. Regarding the ethnic structure of the population, the Macedonian population is dominant with 85.10% (3,007 inhabitants) of the total population, then Turks 14.73% (521 inhabitants), Serbs 0.08% (3 inhabitants) and else 0, 08% (3 inhabitants).

Settlement	Population	Macedonians	Turks	Serbs	Else
Konche	967	444	521		2
Dedino	716	716			
Rakitec	519	519			
Dolni Lipovikj	423	423			
Lubnica	361	359		1	1
Gabrevci	355	355			
Gorni Lipovikj	163	162		1	
Skorusha	11	11			
Garvan	11	10		1	
Zagorci	10	10			
Negrenovci	/				
Dolni Radesh	/				
Gorna Vrashtica	/				

Dolna Vrashtica	/				
Total	3.690	3.007	521	3	3

Table 1: Population in the municipality of Konche, source: 2002 census, State Statistical Office of RM

The age structure of the population shows that 21, 4% are between 0 and 14 years old, 67, 0% are aged between 15 and 64, while 11, 6% are over the age of 65. The majority of the population has not completed primary education – 50, 6%, 34, 5% have completed primary education, 14% have completed secondary education while 0,9% have higher education.

However, it should be taken into account that this information is old and that, due to factors such as population aging, low birth-rate and migration, the figures should be different. The projections indicate that the general demographic situation would be: A municipality with reduced total population and increased age.

Regarding the location, the Municipality of Konche is located on the right side of the road Radovich-Strumica. It is located 143km from Skopje, or two hours and five minutes away by driving. The municipality is 64km away from the Corridor 10 (Negotino), 77km from the Republic of Bulgaria (border crossing Dojran) and 100 km from the Republic of Greece (border crossing Bogorodica).

The transport connection and the accessibility of the municipality have been improved with the construction of the asphalt road from the village of Lipovikj, along the lake Mantovo, to the junction at the regional road Shtip-Radovich. Traveling along this road offers a vivid picturesque view, especially along the lake Mantovo. Unfortunately, lacking a good road connectivity to Strumica, through the villages of Lipovikj and Ric is still a handicap. Another important and picturesque road is passing from Radovich to the village of Konche. This road passes through Smrdesh mountain, along the valley of Dedinska river.

Due to its geographic location, the municipality borders 7 other municipalities.

Municipality	Road distance - km	Air distance - km
Radovich	22	17
Vasilevo	44	21
Strumica	49	22
Stip	55	32
Negotino	64	25
Valandovo	76	25
Demir Kapija	80	15

Table 2: Neighboring municipalities and their distance from Konche municipality

The geographic location, the road connectivity and the type of municipalities bordering the municipality of Konche indicate that the primary target group of tourists should be the population of these municipalities, together with the population of Skopje, and as a secondary and equally important target group, should be the population of the cross-border regions of neighboring countries.

The clean and ecologically healthy environment, rich in resources and potential for healthy food production has allowed the agriculture, animal husbandry, forestry and water economy to be the main economic activities. They have been directly involved in the municipality's development.

The majority of the population has been engaged in agriculture and owns a large number of agriculture mechanization which could be seen from a visit to the municipality. The main agricultural product is the high quality tobacco type "Jaka", which is being produced by the population of the Konche municipality in quantities of around 1 million kilograms annually or 5% of the total tobacco production in the country. Many domestic and foreign companies in the field of tobacco trade have been interested for this tobacco type. Unfortunately, there is no single trading station on the territory of the municipality so the tobacco producers often trade the tobacco in the municipality of Probishtip.

In addition to these strategic economic activities, small trade facilities (shops), companies for local transport and small economic capacity for purchase and processing of milk have been registered and function in the settlements of the municipality.

The municipality of Konche also has huge amounts of marble, clay and copper ore which is a potential for mining development but it could only be used when the standards of managing such resources reach and respect the high criteria for environment protection.

The territory of the municipality of Konche is one of the cleanest regions in the country. Apart from its own food production potentials, the municipality has a huge forest and water wealth and a long and interesting history which, throughout the centuries, has created an authentic cultural heritage.

Natural attractions of the municipality of Konche

The municipality has an abundance of natural resources whose exploitation could contribute the economic development. Most of them could also be used in the tourism development as an economic sector. Taking into account the present situation in the municipality where there are almost no organized activities part of some organized economic action relevant to the tourism sector, the analysis created in this study will use the following criteria in order to separate the resources with greatest potential for creating conditions for tourism development: high attractiveness potential, accessibility or road connectivity, present conditions for tourist activities and resources which, with relatively small investments, can create conditions for appropriate activities.

From this aspect, the most attractive natural values of the municipality of Konche are: the basin of the river Lakavica, the lake Mantovo, the mountains Konechka and Gradeshka from the west and Smrdesh from the east side, the specific vegetation and animal world.

The basin of the river Lakavica is a tectonic depression, 49m long and 5-10m wide where the valley of the river is located, together with its short tributaries. Kriva Lakavica is the largest river in the municipality and is a left tributary of the river Bregalnica. Its spring is located in the northern slopes of Gradeshka Mountain, south from the village Dolni Lopovikj, at a height of 570m, and flows into Bregalnica, near the village Sofilari, at a height of 251m. It is 42km long and it flows from south, southeast to north, northwest and is characterized by a slight longitudinal fall. Apart from Kriva Lakavica, its tributaries, which are usually periodic or occasional, are also important. Such are: Makresh River, Tiska River, Gerov Dol, Derin River, Gabresh River etc. These rivers have big seasonal flow fluctuations. During summer they are usually dry while, through the rainy season they can have a huge flow causing them to overflow and even cause floods. For these reasons, the reservoir Mantovo has been built on the river Lakavica. In addition to the Lakavica basin, a small area in the southern part of the municipality of Konche belongs to several short left tributaries of Vardar, and among them the most significant is the river Vodospir.

The lake "Mantovo" is an artificial water reservoir and as such is part of the created anthropogenic heritage. However, being a lake, it also represents a natural value and according to the valorization criteria, could be the core of the future activities for creation of the tourism sector in the municipality. Hence, "Mantovo" could be seen as a touristic resource with the greatest potential in the municipality of Konche or, in other words, could become the most attractive touristic resource offering conditions for recreational and leisure activities, typical for lake tourism. The lake is 15km from Konche, 18km from Radovich and 25km from Shtip. It is located in the north-west part of the municipality, near the villages Dolni Radesh, Gabrevci and Dolna Vrashtica. "Mantovo" has been built in the late 70s of the last century with a dam construction on the river Kriva Lakavica. The dam has been built from rocks, with a clay core. The lake stretches from northwest to southeast, it is 4,5km long and 600-800m wide. The shore, which is 15,2km long is quite branched, with 6 prominent bays and several peninsulas. The average altitude of the lake is 402m above sea level but it could oscillate a few meters, depending on the season. "Mantovo" could accumulate a maximum of 49 million cubic meters of water, which, according to the volume, makes the lake the second biggest reservoir in the eastern part of the Republic of Macedonia after Kalimanci. The water area is 4,5km² and the greatest depth is 20m (next to the dam). Although it is entirely located in the municipality of Konche, the lake has been built in order to fulfill the needs of the

neighboring municipalities. Its primary function is to irrigate the Radovish fields, to provide water supply to the municipality of Konche and the "Bucim" mine. Even at the time of the construction of this reservoir, its potentials were noticed and since then, parallel with its primary function, it has been intended for "Mantovo" to become the main vacation and recreation center for Shtip as the biggest city in the region and the surrounding municipalities. Of all the planned functions, today, the lake performs just one- supplies the "Bucim" mine with water, which uses around 2 million cube meters for its needs. With this the use of the water potential of the lake is barely ten percent.

Regarding tourism, "Mantovo" and its surroundings could offer numerous amenities such: clean air, wonderful landscape with impressive volcanic cones, diverse wildlife, quiet and peace surrounding this place. The lake has a pleasant microclimate, reducing the air temperature for several degrees during the hot summer months. The water, on the other hand, could get up to 25 °C in summer which makes the lake suitable for bathing and various types of water sport. The lake is abundant in diverse biodiversity, different types of freshwater fish, crabs and birds. In the reservoir there are frogs, turtles, and snakes. The composition of the fish world is very rich with the carp, catfish, chub, crucian carp, perch, common nase, common roach, tench being the most prevalent and because of that the lake is a frequent destination for recreational fishing lovers. Industrial carp and trout have been grown on three fish farms in the lake waters. Unfortunately, there is no facility where visitors could be served with fish specialties.

The entire wider surroundings of the lake is surrounded by forests and meadows, so that if pedestrian paths are set up, they could be used by hikers, and if cycling paths are constructed they could be used for mountain biking. For those who do not practice any of these sports, in case of entrepreneurial initiatives, excursions can be organized by visiting a country house in the villages nearby, where, how to milk a cow and make cheese, how bread and meat are prepared in a wood-fired oven could be shown, and at the end all that to be tasted. The excursions could also include visiting an old water mill to see how grain used to be milled, how homemade rakija is made, how the tobacco is being thread, a visit to a sheep pen etc.

There is also a monastery located on the lake shore. Also, in the vicinity is the famous hill Gabrovska Chuka, which is a half-explored archaeological site. Near the hill there is an area of vertical granite, very interesting rocks 2-25m tall. These rocks provide good conditions for alpine climbing and have already been visited by the lovers of this adrenaline sport- members of the local alpine club "Ploca" from Radovish.

The location of the lake "Mantovo" is an important habitat for birds, especially for vultures and migratory birds. The territory's border is located east of the hill "Pilav Tepe", northwest of the peak "Ruevo Brdo", then goes west, through the village Goracino, through the river Kriva Lakavica where it reaches a contour line of 400 m. Then, east of the village Leskovitsa, where it climbs to 500m. Going to the village of Garvan, the village of Zagorci, the village of Skorosha to Radeshki Hill and along the river Radeshka to the eastern shore of Lake Mantovo. Then it passes through the location "Goliti Ridinje", towards "Golema Niva" and "Samardzica". From here on the hill "Golema Chuka" and goes down again to "Pilav Tepe". The area is part of the Kriva Lakavica basin, dominated by volcanic rocks with a paleozoic relief.

According to the preliminary research of this area, in the nesting period, there is a presence of a certain type of globally endangered Egyptian vultures and a pair of European black stork (*Ciconia nigra*) and short-toed eagle (*Circaetus gallicus*). The wider area is suitable for nesting of the globally sensitive eastern imperial eagle (*Aquila heliaca*) but a research is needed to determine the actual situation. The area is suitable for passing of birds of prey while migration, and during autumn migration, several species of European honey buzzard (*Pernis apivorus*), short-toed eagle, booted eagle (*Hieraaetus pennatus*) and many species of falcons have been observed. Research on the number of birds passing through this region of both, birds of prey and groups of storks (*Ciconiiformes*) and anseriformes is needed¹. This resource is extremely important and has a great potential for developing eco-tourism, manifested through recreation, hiking and bird watching.

At the moment, the lake does not have any tourist offer. There are several reasons for this: no accommodation facilities, no grocery shops, neglected trails and beaches, no tourism marketing etc. Maybe until now, the main reason for all this was the inactivity of the local population, traditionally oriented towards agriculture and distrusts tourism as a profession and a source of income. For these reasons, only one-day or weekend campers or owners of the nearby holiday houses visit the lake. The fact that the lake, after almost 40 years of existence, has still not used its touristic potentials shows that tourism cannot develop spontaneously. For exploiting all the above mentioned touristic potentials and their developing and upgrading, all relevant factors in the municipality, the region and even the country should be included. The first steps have already been taken by the Municipality of Konche by creating an urban planning documentation for a tourism settlement in which a big number of holiday homes are planned to be constructed together with three hotels, a campground, trim trails and sport grounds located by the lake and road infrastructure which will supply the visitors, tourists and owners of the nearby holiday houses with goods needed. Unfortunately, no basic electric infrastructure, water supply or sewage system have yet been provided. This is the main reason for the low interest for investments in this location which has a potential to grow into an attractive recreational and sport tourist center with a high number of visitors, especially in the warm summer months and, with its further development, throughout the whole year. With the construction of the three "Aromanian Huts", the municipality has provided accommodation for a small number of tourists (for up to ten people) in a demi-camp style. This accommodation is suitable for active people and nature lovers who need minimal conditions for passing the night (just a roof over their heads). The renting price of such a hut is symbolic and is done directly in the municipality which again, points out the lack of entities in the tourist field. The huts have been built as part of the project "Cultural heritage of the Aromanians in the regions of Konche and Serres", under the Programme for Cross-border cooperation between Macedonia and Greece. The huts have an authentic story and were built on a location where a road used to pass, used by the Aromanians to take their livestock from Shara Mountain to the south, warmer parts. This story has a great potential for creating products and tourist offer based on history, tradition and gastronomy which could provide an authentic experience and motivate tourists to come and visit this region and unfortunately is something that still lacks.

Apart from the biggest lake Mantovo, on the territory of the municipality of Konche there are also several micro water reservoirs used for irrigation, livestock watering, fishing, recreation etc. such

¹ Local Action Group (LAG) "Plackovica" - Strategy for rural development

Konche 1 and Konche 3, built at around 600m above the sea level and located 2km to the north from Konche, in the basin of the river Vodeni Dol. They are 300-400m long and 100-150m wide. These lakes are used for irrigation of around 10-15ha area and the capacity of the accumulated water in both lakes is 20 million m³. On parts of their shores there are walking trails and benches built which increase their attractiveness for recreational activities.

Two low mountains – Konechka Mountain, also known as Serta, with its south ending Gradeshka Mountain and the mountain Smrdesh, located in the municipality, are also rich in natural resources and touristic values. These two mountains border the basin of the river Lakavica from three sides except the north side.

Konechka mountain (Serta) with Gradeshka mountain is a low mountain massif comprised of several mountains, stretching from northwest to the southeast, 60 km long and 5-13 km wide. The mountains making up the massive also stretch in the same direction, although they are not clearly separated as autonomous entities. To the north is Konechka mountain, between Tikvesh valley and the valley of the river Kriva Lakavica, to the south is Gradeshka mountain, between the Canyon Demir Kapija and the valley of Bela Reka. Plaush is stretching even more to the south, but it is outside the borders of the municipality. The main ridge of the massif is almost straight, and its height gradually increases from north to south, from 800 to 1100 m. The ridge is rounded and represents an old erosive leveling. On some places there are elevations which are actually the highest mountain peaks: Volcjak (1159 m) and Bel Kamen (1151 m) on Konechka mountain, then Vršnik (1031 m) and Jamichki Vrv (1030 m) on Gradeshka mountain. The ridge of Konechka mountain and Gradeshka mountain is a drainage divide between Vardar and its tributary Bregalnica. The Konechka mountain massif with Gradeshka mountain, geotectonically, lies in the Vardar Zone. In geological terms, the higher part of the massif is built from paleozoic shales and marbles and at the base there are neogene sediments. The mountain massif is quite divided by numerous, often torrential watercourses, giving it a ribbed look. Due to the roughness of the terrain and the geological composition, present erosion is very evident. In several small localities at Beli Rid (1107 m) there are short caves in the carbonate rocks.

Smrdesh is a low mountain stretching between the Strumica-Radovish Valley to the east, the Lakavica basin (valley of Kriva Lakavica) to the west, Derwent gorge to the north and the valley of Turija to the south. The mountain is 27km long, stretching from northwest to southeast and has an area of 201,5km². The Macedonian revolutionary Gjorce Petrov wrote down an interpretation of the local people for the origin of the mountain's name: "some shepherd fell asleep so deeply that the wolf ate all his sheep and because of his laziness he got the nickname "smrdle", a name later given to the mountain where the event happened."² In geological terms, it is mainly built of crystalline shales, gneiss, mica, phyllite and marble. In the far northwestern part there are tertiary effusive rocks: andesite, tuff and breccia, and laterally along the mountain there are pliocene sediments (Arsovski, 1997). Due to the diverse, mainly impermeable geological composition, denudation forms prevail in the relief. In the far northwest a paleo-volcanic relief is prevalent (20-30 million years old) with remaining of fossil volcanic cones, craters-calderas and sharp rock peaks-necks. This area is amongst the most attractive natural regions of the municipality of Konche. Along the east shore of the Mantovo lake several impressive

² Petrov, Gjorce (1896). translation: Mario Sharevski. Materials on the study of Macedonia (2016 edition). Skopje: Unique Macedonia.

cones rise, amongst which are: Treskovechka Cuka (599m), Drmilov Kamen (489m), Muovec (635m) etc. There is a great view of the Lakavica area and the Mantovo lake from their tops. They are suitable for geotourism, as viewpoints, paraglyding and similar tourist activities. The cones have numerous denudation forms as rock pillars, mushroom rocks, piles, impressive rock blocks, lava flow trails etc. In the central part of the Smrdesh mountain, around the Krasta peak (951m), in the marble there are surface and underground karst forms like sinkholes, short caves that, from a tourist aspect, could be very interesting. With the construction of a good asphalt road along the lake and the valley of Lakavica, all these beautiful paleo-volcanic sights became easily accessible so they all can be seen and experienced as witnesses of a turbulent geological time. What lacks here is an accommodation and catering infrastructure that will serve the tourists' needs.

Flora and Fauna

Flora

Forest complexes on the territory of the Municipality of Konche in the past occupied larger areas but, due to their exploitation, the forest area has been reduced. Nevertheless, the forest areas are quite large and they are managed by the Public Enterprise "Macedonian Forests". The forests of Konechka mountain occupy a space from 500 meters in height to the highest peaks, while the Smrdesh forest zone extends between 500 and 800 meters above the sea level. On Konechka mountain forest complexes are represented by oak, beech and mixed forest. The oak forest covers an area of about 800 ha, the beech has an area of about 700 ha, while the mixed low forest has an area of about 1,700 ha. Most of the forests on the Smrdesh mountain are deciduous with the oak and the hornbeam at the most present. This forest stretches to about 10,000 ha.

The grassland, i.e. the pastures on the territory of the municipality are not developed as a vegetation belt. Namely, in the municipality of Konche, only medium-sized forest pastures have been developed, isolated with forest, and located on the highest forest belts and in the rivers' sources.

In the Municipality of Konche, the turpentine tree, also called smrdesh (*Pistacia terebinthus* L., fam. Anacardiaceae) is also present. This plant is a deciduous bush with a small trunk. One of the theories about the name of Smrdesh mountain is related to this plant, that is, the mountain has got its name because of the significant presence of this bush.

Several types of herbs, lichens, forest fruits and mushrooms could also be found on the territory of the municipality of Konche. The diversity of this type of flora is no different from the usual type found on the territory of the Republic of Macedonia. The herbs include chamomile, St. John's wort, Sideritis, nettle, thyme, yarrow etc. self-sowing forest fruits are represented by the spruce, blueberries, European crab apple, blackberries, raspberries, wild strawberries etc. The lichen are represented by the beech and the oak lichen. The most common mushrooms on the territory of the municipality are porcini, red pine mushroom, chanterelle, morel etc. These natural resources can be used very effectively in the local tourist and gastronomic offer as final processed products: dry and canned mushrooms, teas, jams and compotes, spices, pharmaceutical products, souvenirs etc.

Authentic crops and products

The **“Jaka” tobacco** is a high quality tobacco, produced in the municipality in quantities of around 1 million kilograms annually which is more than 5% of the total tobacco production in the Republic of Macedonia. In the tobacco production industry almost all population from the municipality who is fit for work is involved. As the most important agriculture crop, the tobacco production characterizes the entire life of the population and is done according to its agricultural calendar. Because of its strategic significance, the tobacco and the annual activities related to its production could become an important resource used to create an authentic tourist offer. The municipality could create a museum tobacco exhibition, following the example of the Tobacco Museum in Prilep and together with the local population, the civil and business sector it could also organize events for the annual tobacco production cycle where many visitors from the area and the wider regions would be invited to visit and participate.

Opium poppy- an agriculture crop which, together with the cotton, had been present on the whole territory of the municipality. Its production started going down at the beginning of this century because of the legal obligation for obtaining a production permit, the difficult sale and low price. At the moment, only three families in the village of Gabrevci grow opium poppy. Its production and production calendar could also be a significant resource for creating an authentic tourist offer in the rural and agro tourism.

In the past, the opium poppy was probably also used for production of opium poppy salt. If the production of this crop increases, additional efforts could be put into the return of the salt production which would increase the authenticity of the tourist offer. It is believed that the families have kept the old recipes for salt production but this should be further researched. If, however the recipe is not found, it could be “imported” from locations in the country where its production still exists.

The significance of these two crops and their potential can be seen in the fact that the coat of arms of the municipality contains the representations of a local folk motif showing the poppy and tobacco.

Broad bean (*Vicia faba*) – is a garden plant with white flowers and a fruit containing seeds bigger than beans. The broad bean is a crop which faces extinction and urgent measures are needed for its protection. Only three samples (plants) have been registered on the territory of the municipality. The broad bean, in general, is very rarely grown. It is still grown, in small quantitate, in Gostivar and Bitola region. According to the estimations of the organization *Slow Food*, in Macedonia it is probable that there are recipes kept in the collective memory for broad bean local specialties. The company “Farnahem” from Skopje puts effort in protection of such rare plants. There is a large project (4 +4 years) for protection of the biodiversity in the valley of the Bregalnica region.³ The same approach could be used for creating a similar project for protection of the bio diversity in Konche.

Fauna

The diverse vegetation provides living conditions for various game, ground and winged and with that conditions for hunting tourism development. From the protected game the rabbit and doe are present. The rabbit could be found in the lowlands and hill areas and rarely in higher regions. There is a

³ Bio diversity in the valley of the river Bregalnica, Dekons-Ema and the Macedonian ecology association, Skopje, 2015

regulation for the rabbit hunting season. The doe on the other hand is permanently prohibited for hunting and it could be found on the slopes of Konechka mountain and Smrdesh.

From the game that is not law protected, here we could find the wolf, the badger, the fox, the wild boar (this animal is protected by the law during its mating season), the marten etc. All these could be found mainly in areas with higher altitude i.e. mountain regions.

Regarding the winged game, in this area the grey partridge, the rock partridge and pheasant could be seen. The grey partridge could be seen in lower parts of the river Kriva Lakavica and its hunting is regulated by temporary prohibits. The rock partridge lives in higher areas of the municipality. This bird's hunting is also regulated. The pheasant found in the municipality is not autochthonous species and is brought from different parts of the country and inhabits the region of the Kriva Lakavica valley. The hunting and fishing association "Studeneč" from Konche which regulates the game and its hunting provides offspring for this type of bird.

Additionally, on the territory of the municipality, various types of herpetofauna (turtles, lizards, snakes (venomous and non-venomous) could be seen, crickets and different types of butterflies.

Rare water invertebrates in the Mantovo reservoir

The number of known aquatic macroinvertebrates living in the basin of the river Bregalnica is high and it amounts to 327 species. The basin of the river Bregalnica is the only site of the genus *Hydrochus* and the types *Hydrobius fuscipes* and *Agabus didymus* in Macedonia. About ten species of beetles live in Mantovo, Konche 1 and Konche 3. Apart from the territory of the Konche Municipality, these macroinvertebrates are inhabitants of the salt ponds in Ovce Pole, Slan Dol and Kocani valley⁴.

⁴ Bio diversity in the valley of the river Bregalnica, Dekons-Ema and the Macedonian ecology association, Skopje, 2015

Cultural attractiveness of the municipality of Konche

From a historic point of view, the data shows that on the territory of the municipality there was continuous life before the time of Christ. In this area, there is an abundance of created heritage, part of which has a huge touristic attractiveness.

Monuments of Christian culture

Culture monuments on the territory of Konche municipality

The monastery and church St. Stephen in the village of Konche

When taking about immovable cultural heritage in the municipality of Konche, the church “St. Stephen- the deacon”, in the vicinity of the Konche monastery is the most representative structure. It is located in the west part of the village, near the school “Goce Delchev”, at the base of the Konechka mountain. This complex has two names. The second one is “Saint Mary - Mother of Jesus Christ”, after which the monastery is still known among people. This name is related to the miraculous icon of Saint Mary which showed in the monastery and which is believed to be from the Gevgelija region.

At the moment the monastery complex is being renovated. The monastery garden has also been arranged and a new gate has been built and at the moment new konaks (lodgings in the monastery) have been built with which the monastery complex will be complete again and the municipality will have additional accommodation facilities for visitors.

From the few available publications in which the monastery has been mentioned, it could be concluded that its history, architecture and paintings have not been studied enough.

As the authors of the few available science analysis state, one of the reasons for this is the fact that the church has been damaged and partially reconstructed several times and as a consequence two thirds of the icons are destroyed and the rest are faded, some retouched and hardly visible.

The authors Kosta Balabanov, Antonie Nikolovski and Dimitar Kjornakov give a short science review of the monastery in the monography *Culture monuments in Macedonia* (e-edition, Kalamus, Skopje, 2014).

As stated in the monography, the monastery was built or rebuilt by the great ‘voivode’ (General) Nikola Stanjevikj, during the reign of Tsar Dushan, before 1366. A witness to this is a medieval document (chrysobull) issued in 1366 with which Tsar Dushan approves the monastery to be under the monastery Hilandar in Mount Athos. The document also states that the duchess Katarina Kantakuzina, daughter of the despot Gjurgje spent the last years of her life and was buried in the monastery. The monastery complex, according to the authors, consists of the church St. Stephen with a narthex and an open porch from the west side; a square tower and lodgings west from the church, erected in newer times.

Regarding the architectural characteristics, the church form is a cross with a dome on top of an octagonal tholobate erected on four solid columns. On the east side of the church a pentagonal altar apse has been built, with a double window whose opening is divided by a marble square pillar, with a plaster finish on the outside.

Among the preserved compositions are the frescos "The communion of the apostles" and "Adoration of the Lamb of God" in the apse and the portraits of the Holy Mother and Jesus Christ on the pillars of the iconostasis, painted, according to some, before 1371. The icons are from newer times, painted after the initial reconstruction of the church, by Dimitar Andonov - Papradishki and the painter from Shtip Kostadin Vangelov.

The science monography "Monastery of Konche" by the Serbian art historian Smiljka Gabelikj, from the Art history institute of the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade (2008) has some valuable information about the monastery in Konche and the church St. Stephen.

On the basis of extensive research, analyzes and analogies, the author gives an overview of the history, architectural and decorative features of the temple and the monastery complex, but, as the author herself claims, for a more complete research and understanding of the church and the monastery's architecture, new, additional and extensive research, both on the church and the tower, as well as on the monastery as a whole is needed.

In the part where the history of the monastery is given, there is information about the ktitor- the great 'voivode' Nikola Stanjevikj and events regarding the founding, economy and the use of the monastery, the dedication and its dating; information about the tomb of the 'voivode' Stanjevikj and information taken from the greatly illustrated "Tetravangelion", one of his two donations still preserved.

According to the author, the history of the monastery in Ottoman times is highlighted by an information from the end of the 15th century regarding the countess from Celje, the duchess Katarina Kantakuzina Brankovikj, buried in the monastery. Trying to understand the reasons for her arrival, her life, which ended in the monastery, a past metochion of the Hilandar monastery, has been studied. The life in the monastery, as Gabelikj writes, disappeared later and was brought back in the second half of 19th and 20th century. In that period the narthex, porch and some elements of the gate were constructed and reconstruction has been also done in the interior of the church which got new frescos, a tall iconostasis with big icons and painted throne that testify about the aspirations and views of the time in which they were created, and for which some new research is expected.

In the conclusion of the scientific work, the author concludes that, in spite of the fragmentation of the data, the monastery St Stephen in Konche is a cultural monument, rich in content, which in its time was, of course, one of the most prominent among its contemporaries, something which its remains testify for.

According to the research, the monastery is, in fact, the largest preserved ruler's temple on the territory of former Serbia from the time of Tsar Uros, and the preserved parts of the wall paintings and the monastery in general, speak of the great significance of Konche in the medieval Serbian state.

According to the author, the endurance and appearance of the church, its relief architectural appearance and the content of the paintings, expressed through a contemporary art language witness all this.

In terms of history, it is stated that the church was probably built and painted in the seventh decade of the 14th century, just before the collapse of the medieval Serbian state, and was erected on land that the ktitor, the great 'voivode' and ruler Nikola Stanjevikj inherited from the previous ruler, Stefan

Dushan. After securing the monastery with property and people who will serve, in the period before 1366, the ktetor of the monastery handed it over to the Hilandar monastery in Mount Athos. The year stated is the only chronological determinant related to the monastery and its founder Nikola Stanjevikj, who in the same period, ordered for a luxury gospel to be made, which he also presented to the Hilandar monastery.

The author further writes that, despite the belief that Stenjevikj died and was buried on Mount Athos, it is very likely that he was buried in the church in Konche, which is indicated by a inscription on the tombstone found in the church in Konche, whose contents indicate that the ktetor, was probably buried there in the period from 1366 to 1371. The second most interesting part of the monastery's history is related to the time of the Ottoman rule, when Katarina Kantakuzina, the widow of Count Ulrich II of Celje (today's Slovenia), and the younger daughter of the Serbian despot Gjuragj Brankovikj, found her refuge in the monastery, which was still active at the time. Some Serbian chronicles also refer to this possibility, according to which the duchess was buried in Konche in 1492.

According to the remains of the former buildings, it is assumed that Kantakuzina, which was known as the enterprising and dedicated patron of the church, erected a stone tower as her residence in the monastery area, today in a ruined state. Starting from the former administrative and legal subordination of Konche to the monastery of Hilandar and the understanding of the dynastic dignity, the author estimates that the stay of Kantakuzina in the monastery of St. Stephen, where she lived without becoming a nun, raises some questions about the way in which life was ordered in the monastery.

The continuity of the monastery, according to the author, was probably interrupted by an earthquake, and its third significant period begins with its renewal in the mid-19th or the first half of the 20th century. With the construction interventions and decorations that were made in 1922, Konche aslo became part of the significant artistic endeavours of that period. A tall iconostasis of contemporary type was built, and a wooden throne and large icons were painted. Authors of the icons were the famous painters Kosta Vangelov (Vangelovik) and Andon Papradiski (Dimitar Andonov Papradishki), who gave their works in numerous monasteries in the area. However, the time when the new wall frescoes were painted still cannot be determined.

The historical overview is completed with information about the latest construction in the church, in the 1970s and 1980s, when the church was reconstructed and the restoration of the original frescoes was done.

The rectangular plan of the monastery, situated on a levelled slope at the foot of the mountain, according to the form of the base follows the local Byzantium tradition, characteristic for the important monasteries in Slavic Macedonia such Lesnovo, Treskavec, Zrze and the monastery in Markovo.

As a consequence of the multiple reconstructions of the church in Konche, especially in the upper parts, it is difficult to take a detailed view on the features of its architecture. However, one can definitely define the typology of the church, as the most widespread in the 14th century. The church belongs to the churches of the Early Byzantine type, that is, the Byzantine dome temples with a cross with four free columns and a semi-circular apse on the east side, a solution previously seen in the church of the Holy Archangels in Shtip and in the church in the Lesnovo Monastery. Especially characteristic is the horizontal elongation of the pillars' base under the dome and the size of the building itself. Observing

the building, even without the narthex, for which we do not know whether it originally existed, shows that it is one of the largest rulers' churches in medieval Serbia. Its comprehensive form today is undoubtedly bare and there are no any significant constructional features. According to the architectural design, the church did not stand out in its time nor by any particular spatial assembly, nor by the way it was built, although the various procedures used in the construction of the parts of the apse and the western facade, compared to the other surfaces of the walls should be taken into consideration. The church in Konche is part of the group of Byzantine provincial temples from the 14th century influenced by the Thessalonian architecture, especially in the specifics of the tholobate of the dome.

In the interior, there are previously unknown construction details such: a hole in southeast pillar, a stone water drainage system in the corner, near the diaconicon, a tunnel going under the apse floor (covered by a stone slab)⁵ which, following some leads could also be the tomb of the church founder. The rebuilt floor of the temple and its details should be the focus of a thorough archaeological research.

A significant décor of the interior was the iconostasis built from old stones probably dating from the 11th century. The pillars of the old barrier, one of which today is part of the apse window and three are fragmented, have shallow, painted decoration with geometric, plant and partially zoomorphic motives. The reliefs are very similar to the plaster finish of the church "Saint Mary - Mother of Jesus Christ" in Drenovo, near Kavadarci. Their similarity with the architectural plaster finish of the Vatopedi and Xenophontos monasteries on Mount Athos should also be taken into account.

The demolished stone tower is the oldest object in the monastery complex since the period after the construction of the church. It was erected in the immediate vicinity of the temple apse, with an entrance to the ground floor and a window on the first floor, indicating that the tower was used for living. According to the form and the way it was built, it most likely belonged to the Ottoman period, when numerous towers with different purposes among others -residential, were built on the wider territory of the Balkan Peninsula. From the present condition, it seems that the tower in Konche resembles the well-preserved towers in Kratovo, built of crushed stones with stone blocks on the corners, and with underground evacuation tunnels, similar to those the tower is believed to have. Before detailed archaeological and architectural research to be carried out, it could not be said when the tower was built and by whom, but this does not exclude the possibility that the tower was ordered by Katarina Kantakuzina Brankovikj.

The faded and damaged frescos are in an almost unrecognizable state, but with the help of analogous analyses, where for comparison were taken monuments of culture from the nearby regions of the Byzantine period, most of them have been identified and reconstructed. Thus, program similarities

⁵ There are several legends among the local populations about the tunnel and the slab. According to one of them, the big stone slab, keeps the entrance to 2 underground tunnels. One leading to the outside tower and the other up the mountain, used for escape and hiding Christians. The most interesting is the legend about Katarina Kantakuzina. She spent the last years of her life here, residing in the tower next to the church. Because the tower had no entrance from outside, Kantakuzina had to enter through the underground tunnel. Her tomb is located near the tower.

Another legend is related to the revolutionary movement in the country. The monastery was a hiding place for the companies and the activists of IMRO (Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization). They used the second tunnel which led to the mountain as a safe exit from the village.

were found with the frescos from the monasteries of St. Nikita in Banjani, Skopje, as well as with those of the Lesnovo Monastery, the church The Holy Mother of God - Peribleptos in Ohrid, St. George in Staro Nagorichane, the monasteries in Kuceviste, Matejce and Psacha.

When talking about the church "St Stephen" and the monastery in Konche we must mention the legend about the miraculous icon of the Holy Mother of God, who was crying and leaking miraculous myrrh. As stated in one of the records from, the folklorist Marko Cepenkov, the local people had their own customs and had prayer gathering related to the icon on the holidays of St. Constantine and Helena and The Ascension of Jesus.

In the municipality's touristic potential context, we would point out the examples of the traditional procession with the miraculous icon and relics of the Holy Great Martyr George in Struga, organized by the Monastery "St. John - Bigorski" and the metochion "St. George the Victorious" from the village of Rajchica , with the patronage of the Debar-Kicevo eparchy of the MOC-OA, as well as the recently organized procession with the icon of the Most Holy Mother of God – "Skoroposlushnica" in the city of Strumica , organized by the Strumica eparchy.

Katarina Kantakuzina Brankovikj

We appreciate that the monastery in Konche, the resting place of the Serbian Duchess and Countess of the Count of Celje, Katarina Kantakuzina, opens up numerous opportunities for building the tourist story Konche, as well as the possibility of building international recognition and strategic friendly relations of the Municipality.

Let's briefly look back at her genealogy. On father's side, Kantakuzina is the granddaughter of the medieval ruler Vuk Brankovikj (1329-1397) - ruler of Kosovo (1371-1398) and daughter of Gjuragj Brankovikj (1377-1456), ruler of Rashka and despot of Serbia (1427-1456). On her mother side, Irina Kantakuzina, she originates from the lineage of the Byzantine Emperor John VI Kantakuzin (1292-1383), who ruled from 1347 to 1354. In the historical records, Katarina Kantakuzina could also be found as the Countess Katarina Celjska, wife of Count Ulrich II of Celje, today's Slovenia, who lived in the Earl's Castle in Celje until the death of her husband in the Battle of the Zemun Fortress, and remained loyal to the Orthodoxy even in marriage and unselfishly supported it. As an example of the importance of the County of Celje for the Republic of Slovenia, it is enough to mention the fact that the stars on the coat of arms of the Celje Counts are also present to the coat of arms of the modern Republic of Slovenia. This information opens serious perspectives for the creation of integrated international tourist offers connected by the name of this woman.

As an illustration of her significance in the area of the former Celje County and beyond, we will mention the fact that the Serbian Orthodox General Gymnasium "Kantakuzina Katarina Brankovikj" in Zagreb, founded by the Zagreb-Ljubljana Metropolis of the Serbian Orthodox Church, and The Order Katarina Kantakuzina Brankovikj, which is given by the Zagreb Metropolitanate to meritorious persons from the society bear her name. The Zagreb Metropolitanate, also has relics as objects that once belonged to Kantakuzina.

Having in mind the aforementioned information about the significance of Kantakuzina and the material traces left behind her, the fact that she rests in the monastery complex in Konche, the many celebrations in her name and work in the wider Balkan region, we consider as one of the most important

priorities from a cultural and touristic aspect to be a construction of a museum within the monastery St. Stefan dedicated to her name. With the commencement of an intensive communication and cooperation with the aforementioned institutions and places, the Municipality of Konche could obtain experience and replicas which could be part of a museum exposition dedicated to the duchess. We think that this museum will receive support from Serbia and Slovenia and the institutions in these countries related to the image and work of Kantakuzina, because the opening of such a museum would also be in their interest too because this would contribute to the increase of their influence and positioning through promotion of their work. Such museum would contribute to a creation of a multilateral touristic story (covering Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Macedonia and Turkey) which could be defined and created as a touristic route called "Following the road of the Duchess Kantakuzina" from which the Konche municipality could have great benefits in mapping the tourism map in the Balkans, and have material benefits in a form of touristic revenues.

Regarding a promising museum exhibition devoted to Kantakuzina in Konche, as an obligatory attractive exhibit, we believe that a replica from the exclusive exhibit - the mitre of Katarina Kantakuzina - which today is a part of the Museum of the Serbian Orthodox Church exhibition in Belgrade.

As part of the story, we believe that it would be beneficial for the Municipality of Konche to develop friendly relations with the Municipality of Celje in Slovenia and the Municipality of Zemun in Serbia, as fraternal municipalities joined by the life of Katarina Kantakuzina. The cooperation with Celje would open multiple possibilities for developing the touristic story of the Municipality of Konche like getting experience of the Celje Fortress management (the former Kantakuzina home) as a touristic site and connecting with the Celje Provincial Museum which as an institution is a heritage keeper of the Celje Counties.

In terms of spreading the "visibility" of the Municipality to the wider public through its cultural heritage, we propose improving the connections but also twinning with the Municipality of Kratovo, the city of medieval towers, which, according to expert analysis, are the closest ones according to their characteristics to the tower in the monastery in Konche.

As a\the last but not less important element in the mosaic of the story about the monastery in Konche is the old, large maple tree, which, according to the legends, is as old as the church itself. It is a silent witness of the history of this complex. This tree is a monument of nature and as such is an attraction that adds value to the monastery complex from a touristic aspect.

Perspective systematic research on the church and the monastery will further increase these opportunities.

Other Christian places of worship and calendar of events

The rest of the churches in the municipality of Konche are from newer period and most of them were built in the XIX and XX century while others are completely newly built places. They have an architecture and painting typical for the village churches from this period and as such they do not have any greater historic and art significance i.e. they do not have any monumental significance. However, they are places of worship and are locations visited by the local population and people from the region for fulfilling their religious needs. That is actually their attractiveness and their touristic potential taking into consideration that each of these churches has its own holiday when a number of believers come to

celebrate the day. The churches, in general, attract many believers during big Christian holidays and on their ground different religious manifestations, celebrations and fairs often take place. This is the potential for developing certain forms of religious tourism that could be combined with other offers such rural tourism, mountain tourism etc.

The following are the most important village churches in the municipality, briefly described, together with the calendar of events that should be considered if there is an ambition to create a specific tourist offer.

Village churches

- **St. George** in Gorni Lipovikj. The church is located at the entrance of the village, on an elevation on the left side of the road. It was built in 1877 while the famous painter Nikola Mihajlo from Krushevo painted the icons in 1860.
- **St. Elijah** in Gorni Lipovikj. A building without any architectural nor cultural value.
- **Dormition of the Mother of God** in Dolni Lipovikj, built in 1947, consecrated in 1991. It has a porch in front of the church entrance, a wide grass area, convenient for gatherings and cultural event. The commemorative plaque for the Salandzak and Kole Padina massacre victims is placed here.
- **St. George** – a chapel in Dolni Lipovikj, near the main village church - Dormition of the Mother of God. The floor of the naos is depressed which indicates that, maybe the church was built before 1856, i.e. Before the period of the reform for equality of all religions in the Ottoman Empire. A pillar with ionic capital on the south-west corner under the roof.
- **St. Demetrius**, a chapel in the village Dolni Lipovikj. With a small shrine by the road. By removing the wild vegetation and building a small pergola, this place could a rest point on a bicycle or mountain trail.
- **St. Constantine and Helena** in the village Lubnica built in 1840, not painted, with a bell tower, a small porch and an attached facility. It is located in the centre of the village.
- **St. Elijah** – a monastery church in Lubnica built on the foundations of an older church, by an initiative of Spase from the village Injevo and finished in 2006. It is located on the hill over the village, overlooking it and surrounded by well-maintained grass area. Facing the church there is a facility with a porch.
- **St. George-** in Lubnica, built in the fields, hundred meters from the village, by the road to Konche. A pillar with ionic capital on the south-west corner under the roof, similar to St. George chapel in Dolno Lipovikj.
- **Birth of the Virgin Mary** in the village Rakitec, built in 1939. The church is located on a slight elevation in the centre of the village. According to the villagers, the church was painted by an amateur-painter from Skopje. The icons were painted by the painter Gavril Atanasov (1863-1951) from Berovo. IN the church area there is a facility with a porch.
- **Church of the Ascension of Jesus**, in Rakitec. A church built in newer period on a sloping land, surrounded by trees, with an additional facility and a fountain.
- **St. George in Rakitec**. A church from a newer period with an additional facility and partially overgrown vegetation in the surrounding.

- **St. Nicolas** in the village Dedino, located in the upper neighbourhood, on the south periphery of the village, built in 1910 by the master-builder Stoilov from Maleshevo. The church complex is comprised of a bell tower and an additional facility. The village cemetery are located near the church. The iconostasis has icons dating from the 19 century and are older than the church itself which means that they have been brought from another church. The author of these icons is unknown.
- **St. Athanasius** in the village Dedino built in newer period at the village entrance. The church has an additional facility.
- **St. George** in the village Zagorci. Built in newer time, with a bell tower, additional facility, a fountain, cobblestone road and a well-maintained garden surrounded by trees. It is a place suitable for cultural events on the open.
- **Church of the Ascension of Jesus** – an old church in the village Gabrevci with a ruined roof and abandoned.
- **Church of the Ascension of Jesus** – a newly built church in Gabrevci, built in 19/20 century, next to the old one.
- **St. Demetrius** – a monastery in Gabrevci, in the forest above the village, next to the monastery- church St. Marena.
- **St. Marena- St. Margaret of Antioch-** a monastery in Gabrevci, in the forest above the village, next to the monastery- church St. Demetrius.
- **Saint Mary - Mother of Jesus Christ** in the village Skorusha, a big church with a porch, bell tower, a fountain and fenced garden.
- **St. George** in Skorusha.
- **St. George** in the village Garvan.
- **St. Demetrius** in the village Negrenovci, a small chapel on a hill, with an additional facility.

A calendar of events

- **9 January** - The protomartyr and deacon- St. Stephen – the third day of Christmas (Konche)
- **31 January** – St. Athanasius – the day of Athanasius – a lamb stew called “kurban” is prepared (Gabrovo)
- **6 May** - Saint George's Day (Dolni Lipovikj, Lubnica)
- **The Ascension of Jesus** (40 after the Resurrection)- the main saint day in the village (Gabrovo)
- **15 May** - Translation of the relics of St. Athanasius the Great – summer Saint day – village holiday (Dedino)
- **22 May**- Translation of the relics of St. Nikolaos of Myra – village Saint day (Dedino)
- **3 June** - St. Constantine and Helena (Lubnica)
- **19 July** – St. Marena (Gabrovo)
- **2 August** – St. Elijah- Elijah's day (Lubnica)
- **28 August** - Dormition of the Mother of God (Dolni Lipovikj)
- **21 September** - The Birth of the Virgin Mary (Rakitec)
- **8 November** - Saint Demetrios of Thessaloniki- Mitrovden – (Gabrovo)
- **9 December** - St. George (Dolni Lipovikj, Lubnica)

Islamic culture monuments

The village mosque in Konche

The only mosque in the municipality is located in the center of Konche and it serves all the Muslims living in the municipality. According to its architecture it dates from newer period but the people living in the region do not know the exact date of its construction nor whether it has been built on the foundations of a =n older mosque another religious structure. According to the past hodja in the village, Ejvaz Husein (or Husein Ejvaz; in Turkish also Husein Redzepov) the mosques suffered a huge fire together with a vast collection of books and records. It is believed that with this, numerous records for the history and life of the village of Konche and its surroundings have been forever lost.

Although the mosque does not have any significant architecture or art features, it is a well-preserved religious structure with a porch, which, according to its characteristics, probably dates from the late ottoman period with several improvements done throughout the years. It is assumed that the last refurbishment dates from the 19 century. In 2011, a taller minaret, with two balconies (sherefe) has been built on the place of the old one with one balcony. In front of the main entrance, there is a porch.

The interior of the mosque is opulently decorated. The walls are painted or decorated with ceramic tiles depicting flora elements in traditional Islamic style and messages from the Quran written in calligraphy. As in other mosques, the interior allows all worshippers to be able to see the imam while preaching and performing the rituals.

The muftiship of Shtip, part of the Islamic Religious Community of Macedonia manages the mosque in Konche.

The first source of information for the mosque could be the muftiship of Shtip of the Islamic Religious Community of Macedonia. The inscription written in Ottoman Turkish or, according to some, in Arabic, preserved on one of the walls of the porch could provide more information for the mosque history and its founder.

We believe that the archives of the ottoman period related to the Kyustendil sanjak, in the part related to the Radovish kaza and the Konche nahiyah should be searched for a possible source of information for the mosque.

The Konche mosque could be a serious touristic potential, especially for tourists favouring the so-called cultural or religious tourism because its presents witnesses the rich cultural and religious diversity of the municipality. Further research connected to the mosque could provide information used for creating touristic stories, especially interesting for visitors coming from Turkey descended from this region. Through such stories, these tourists could directly, through the mosque and the rest of the tourist offer, face their historic heritage and to finish the mosaic of their origin.

The ottoman “turbe” (tomb) near the villages of Dedino and Konche

According to a post on one of the pages on the social network Facebook, dedicated to the village and municipality of Konche and written in Turkish, on this place there are remainings from a tomb, built in rocks in an ottoman style. This site is located between the villages of Dedino and Konche, near the

mouth of the river Tiska where it flows into Lakavica. The tomb is easily noticeable and reachable due to its location (near the road leading to Konche).

According to the telling of the local Turkish population, cited in the post, “Gazi Nevrunuz-Bey” (somewhere mentioned as “Nevruz-Bey”) has been buried in the tomb. He was wounded on the battlefield where he bled to death. On the same place the tomb has been built where he was buried. The name “Nevrunuz-Bey”, “Nevruz-Bey” or “Evrenos-Bey”, all variations used by the people of Konche suggests the possibility that, maybe the tomb belongs to (the long-lived) **Gazi Evrenos-Bey** (1288-1417), one of the eminent generals of the Ottoman Empire in its first campaigns towards the European continent who conquered Dojran, Prilep and Skopje and who participated in the Battle of Kosovo.

According to the post, a witness to this was Gjulbahar, the daughter of Bekir- Effendi who lived in the period around 1840 and moved from the village of Iberli, near Demir Kapija, to Konche where he earned a great opulence and power. The story of Gjulbahar is still being told, even today, by her nephew, Ejvaz Husein that used to be hodja in the Konche mosque.

From what he had heard from his grandmother, at the location of the “turbe”, there used to be a bazar every year where people from the village gathered in the memory of the buried soldier. The bazar happened 30 days before the holiday Hidrez (Saint George's Day), on 5th or 6th April. As stated by someone, the festivity was on the Feast of the Annunciation day (7th April). As told by the Turkish population from Konche, for the holiday, the village was visited by people from Rakitec, Lipovikj and other neighbouring villages with Turkish population.

As told by a participant in a panel-discussion as part of this project, the “turbe” has been also researched by the Macedonian historian Aleksandar Trajanov.

In another text, also posted in Turkish on Facebook, the tomb is mentioned as the tomb of Isa-Bey. Although, at first, this might refer to a possible connection or coincidence with the third ottoman governor, Isa-Bey, after which the famous Skopje Isa-Bey Mosque (1475) was built, from the text we learn that it is a person with the same name, but who lived a hundred years earlier.

As the text states, the tomb of Isa-Bey is located south-west of Radovish, by the shore of the Kriva Lakavica river (Lakaviçe Deresi) and was built by his son, Evrenos-Bey.

Because there is no settlement near the tomb, its remainings are positioned between the villages of Dedino and Konche (in the text stated as Koniçe in Turkish).

The document for the repair made to the “turbe” in 1658 (according to the Hegira: 1068), built by Evrenos-Bey for his father, and for the cost reveals unknown details for the tomb and the waqf land on which it was built. According to the document from the 17 century, the tomb in which Gazi-Isa_Bey had been buried, in the swamp in Konche (again: Koniçe), in the Radovish kaza, though created as a place of worship, was destroyed and abandoned.

“So, the “turbe” of Isa-Bey was thought of a sacred place by the local population and was often visited in groups.”

The document also states that, due to the bad condition (müşrif-i harâb olduğundan esâsından hedm olunub) the tomb was demolished and rebuilt. Today, we can notice that the few remainings of

the tomb we can see today are the only remainings left of the new tomb built in 1670. According to the text, the tombs' dimensions were around 8m x 7,5m (on zirâ' altı parmak, eni dokuz zirâ'), with four corners, built on a rock with dimensions of 74m x 9.6m, built from rocks/tiles.

The area was 4.480 (5.600 zirâ) square meters and was surrounded by rocks and tiles (kârgir) walls. Near the tomb, there was an accommodation with few rooms and three *konak* (residence house) with many rooms. In the accommodations, public administrators were also accommodated.

As the text states, due to the closeness of the river shore, the "turbe" was often damaged by the overflowing water and as a protection measure, the riverside was built with rocks and plaster.

In the document, for the first time is stated that there are indications that the tomb belongs to Isa-Bey (or to Pranko Lazarat).

The document also gives the construction date (1658), the materials used for reconstruction and details for the costs made. The total cost for the repairs of the tomb and the people hired was 92.594 and a half akçe⁶, most of which were covered by the income of the waqf and the Evrenos-Bey's descendants.

Two articles of Asil S. Tuncher, a professional tour guide from Turkey, also contain information about the "turbe". In an article for the touristic portal "Tourism Haberleri" (www.turizmhaberleri.com), published on 31 March 2016, the author extensively writes about the tomb near Dedino and Konche. The author writes that the tomb is that of **Pranko Lazarat**, also known as **Isa-Bey**, the father of **Gazi Evrenos-Bey**.

The name of Pranko Lazarat (Isa-Bey), according to the author is known from the epitaph on the tomb of Evrenos-Bey, buried in Yenice Vardar (today known as Giannitsa in Greece). According to other sources, as the author writes, the ruins of the tomb of, as stated in them, of Pranga Lazarat, are believed to be in the area of the (now, non-existent) village Prhsova or Srchova, named by the Macedonians as Branki by which the river Kriva Lakavica flowed. The "turbe" is located on the mouth of the river Tiska. In another article by the same author, published on 21 February 2011 is stated that Isa-Bey accompanied Gazi Suleiman Pasha (?-1357) in the campaigns to Rumelia where later he died in a battle near Radovish. Isa-Bey and his son Evrenos-Bey though part of the unit of beylik Karesi went to serve Orhan Gazi (under whose rule the Ottoman Empire was founded from the Seljuq beyliks).

Furthermore, in the article, we read that the tomb of Isa-Bey, the father of Gazi Evrenos-Bey, the supreme commander in the service of Sultan Murat Hudavendigâr, is located halfway between the villages of Dedino and Konche, near Radovish. The tomb is easily seen when approached. The Radovish yuruks, are referred as yuruks from Aglardag, originating from the Turks of Saruhan (Saruhanoğulları Beyliği, near the city of Manisa), and the Yuruks from Konche, that they originate from the Turks from the beylik Karamanogullari (Karesi Beyliği, near the city Balıkesir).

The text gives the impression that the author has invested a great deal of research into the Konche's history, the relations with the Turks before and during the Seljuq, as well as during the Ottoman Empire and the migrations to present-day Turkey.

⁶ a silver coin , the chief monetary unit of the Ottoman Empire (translation note)

The author concludes that the “turbe” is of particular importance to the Turkish history and that, according to its situation, can be easily restored and without any large investments. The possible excavation of the remainings, according to the author, could be used for further research on the genetic ties of the local population with the Turks and modern-day Turkey. All this, he concludes, will contribute Macedonia to gain even greater significance for the Turkish traces in the Balkans.

The name of Pranko Lazarat is mentioned in the doctoral dissertation of Ajshegjul Cali (Ayşegül Çalı Kılıç), who received her doctorate degree at the Institute of Social Sciences at the Ankara University in 2011, titled "Gazi Evrenos-Bey".

Referring to the origin of Gazi Evrenos-Bey and his father, mentioned as Isa-Bey on the epitaph on his son's tomb, in the city of Giannitsa (formerly: Yenice Vardar) in Greece, the author traces the origin and the meaning of the name "Pranko Lazarat", mentioned for the first time in 1457, in a document of his nephew, Isa. In addition, the author sets out the thesis for the possible Slavic origin of Pranko Lazarat. She states that so far there is no information about the activities or the life of Isa-beg (Pranko Lazarat) and that his son Evrenos-Bey built a tomb at the place where he died and founded a waqf in his memory, near the city of Radovich.

The attempt to find a connection with the possible Slavic origin of Isa-Bey (Pranko Lazarat), inevitably directs the research towards the historical figures associated with Konche just before the Ottoman conquests or in the early years of the Ottoman rule.

It is a known fact that Katerina Kantakuzina, the daughter of Gjuragj Brankovikj, the ruler of Rashka and the despot of Serbia, and the Byzantine-Serbian noblewoman Irina Kantakuzina, from the line of the Byzantine emperor John VI Kantakuzin, is buried in the church of St. Stephen in Konche. The possibility of finding a name in the line of names of this family, coined from the names Branko and Lazar, which would sound like Pranko Lazarat, would be justified. Especially because those names were very common in the noble circles of that time in Serbia and Macedonia, and considering that the sister of Katarina Kantakuzina, Mara Brankovikj was married to the sultan Murat the Second. In addition to elaborating the thesis of Ajshegjul Cali (Kalach) the fact that the names of the great-grandfathers of Kantakuzina, on her father's side (the grandfathers of Gjuragj Brankovikj) are **Lazar** (Hrebeljanovikj – Tsar Lazar) and **Branko** (Mladenovikj – a serbian nobleman, sebastokrator) should also be taken into account. For illustration, we present a brief chronological overview of the close relatives of the Kantakuzina family, taking into account the elements Branko and Lazar, as well as the chronological span of the time in which Isa Bey and Gazi Evrenos Bey lived.

- Vuk Mladenovikj (Brankovikj) (1329-1397), ruler of Kosovo (1371-1398)
- **Lazar Brankovikj (Vukovikj)** (1359 / 1405-1410) - brother of Gjuragj Brankovikj (Katarina Kantakuzina's uncle, died before she was born)
- Gjuragj Brankovikj (1377-1456), the ruler of Raska and the despot of Serbia (1427-1456), the father of Katarina Kantakuzina
- **Lazar Brankovikj Gjurgjevikj** (1421-1458) - Despot of Serbia (1456-1458), the youngest son of Gjuragj Brankovikj, Katarina Kantakuzina's brother - Katarina Celjska
- Katarina Knautuzina - Katarina Celjska (Vukovic Gjurgjevikj) (1418-1492)

Finally, we find it interesting that Pranko Lazarat, according to one speculative data lived in the 14th century, and that Euronos Bey (his son), if not a historiographical mistake, lived surprisingly long, 129 years (1288-1417). Taking this information with reserve, it is not excluded that the name Pranko Lazarat could refer to a person born later.

This site has a great potential for tourism and, if restored, can grow into one of the most important and attractive tourism sites. The mystique of the stories that surround the tomb are attractive enough to challenge tourists' attention through a well-thought offer. If scientific research for the buried person continues, and if the current assumptions about the deceased and his origin are confirmed, then this tomb will position itself by its attractiveness and cultural - historical significance on the same level with the church of St. Stephen in Konche and will become a monumental attraction with a wider significance for the region. Such investment in research can have a result and will map Konche as a tourist destination that connect the east and the west, Christianity and Islam.

Archaeological sites on the territory of Konche Municipality

The organized living on the territory of the Municipality of Konche has been present continuously since prehistory. Different historical periods required adjusting to the organization and the way of life that resulted in diversity of the material traces of the past. The intensity of the organized life is due primarily to the geographical position (positioning and proximity to important cultural and economic areas and centres and existing road infrastructure in historical periods), the natural characteristics and resources and the climatic features of this territory. This area was exposed to influences from different cultures and under such influences the local people created their own features forming the basis for a developed social life throughout history. Various prehistoric cultures have been recognized throughout the territory, and the settlements and sites dating from Neolithic, Eneolithic, and Bronze Ages have distinct characteristics. The richness and diversity of the present prehistoric cultures created conditions for further development and regulation of the way of life in the following historical periods. Also, traces of material culture of antiquity, ancient Macedonian, pre-Roman and Roman era are visible.

On the territory of the municipality, traces of all historical eras are found, including the medieval times, i.e. the Byzantium age (with all its characteristics) and the ottoman culture. There is a significant number of sites from these historical periods.

However, due to the dynamics of the historical circumstances there are evident traces of rises and falls. There are archaeological sites of large and established settlements of urban type but with the Middle Ages and the arrival of the Ottoman Empire and its strategic organization and management through regions known as wilayahs, sanjaks or pashaliks forced out the urban way of life in this area and the urban settlements slowly began disappearing. This dictated the format of life of the population that became dominantly rural, but this lifestyle was influenced by the largest centres of the Empire such as Thessaloniki and Istanbul, primarily through keeping the economic relations with them. Furthermore, the Balkan wars and the division of the geographical unit of Macedonia formed the last form of settlements and the organization of life. Since then, life had a dominant rural character with less opportunities for communication with the larger Balkan centers, and the settlements and population were exposed to influences of larger and neighbouring urban centers (Strumica, Shtip, etc.) that entered

the administrative entity to what is geographically known as Vardar Macedonia, and became part of the state known as Serbia, the Kingdom of SCS and ultimately as Yugoslavia.

During the reconstruction and the research of the archaeological sites, settlements, necropolis, fortifications, tumuli and sacred constructions from all historical eras have been found. Most often, pieces of crushed, processed stones, bricks and ceramics, glass, metal coins and weapons have been found on the sites.

However, most of the archaeological sites on the territory of the municipality are not yet explored enough and adapted for touristic exploitation. Much more effort and energy is needed for this to happen. Most of them could be visited and seen in their present condition. As such, these sites could be used and integrated in other tourist offers such are the rural, religious and mountain tourism. The lack of professional guides could be resolved by creating a mobile application which will present the history, archaeology, the most important sites and artefacts in several languages to all tourists and visitors.

The research of the identified and recognized sites shows that there were settlements, necropolis, thermae and milestones present. Remains of bricks, glass, ceramics, metal and other objects were found in them. Most of the archaeological treasure found on the territory of the municipality has been stored and exhibited in the Museum in Shtip. A cooperation between the Ministry of culture and the Museum on Shtip could yield a plan for producing copies of these artefacts and even transferring part of these objects to the municipality of Konche for an exhibit if the municipality creates and implements a plan for a museum construction or a museum exhibition for presenting the historical and ethnological treasure, in accordance to the highest standards for storing, protection and exhibiting such artefacts. This could increase the level of the municipality's competence for creating and delivering services in the tourism field and there are sources of financing, on national and European level through IPA and other EU structural funds for such projects.

The wealth and design of the items found indicate the high level of development and the dominance of the craft skills and technologies used by the then population. These artefacts can serve the municipality, artisans and artists from this region in order to make their own interpretations of these objects and to create a range of souvenirs that can further contribute the creation of a souvenir - brand of the municipality.

The following are the recognized archaeological sites on the territory of the municipality of Konche

The village of Gabrevci

- **Ilinica-Elenica**, medieval settlement. At 1km north-west of the village fragments of ceramic vessels, pithoi and coins could be found. There is an evidence showing that a settlement form the Iron Age was probably located here.
- **Mavrovica**, medieval necropolis. Among the sites Ilinica and Selishte, on the right bank of the Gabrovska River there are remains of tombstones.
- **Manastir**, tumulus from Roman times. 1, 5 km south-east of the village there is a tumulus 25m wide and 5m tall.
- **Manastirishte**, necropolis from the Iron Age. 500m southeast of the village there is a tumulus with smaller dimensions.

Village of Garvan

- **Gradishte**, medieval settlement. At about 500m north-west of the village fragments of ceramic vessels, pithoi and building materials could be found.
- **Dolna Bara**, vicus from late antiquity and a medieval settlement. 1km north-east of the village, in the forest Osojnica, building materials and fragments of imbrices and tegulae could be found.

Gorna Vrashtica village

- **Manastir- Ilinica**, medieval sacred construction. At about 500m north-west of the village shingles and other building materials could be found. According to the legends, this was the place of a monastery called St. Elijah.

Dolni Lipovikj village

- **Crkvishte – Ilinica (Elenica)**, settlement from Neolithic times and medieval sacred construction. Remains of Neolithic settlement and foundation of an apse of a bigger sacred construction- a church, could be found at 400-500 south-west of the village, on a hill.

Dedino village

- **Beluovo- Bedva**, medieval settlement. At about 200m west of the village, on an area of 300 x 150m, fragments of ceramic vessels and building materials could be found.
- **Mezar**, settlement of late antiquity. At about 3km north-west of the village, fragments of tegulae, imbrices, pithoi and ceramic vessels as well as slag and crushed stones could be found.
- **Suv Dol**, settlement from Neolithic times. At 2,5km north of the village, on the right side of the asphalt road leading to Radovich, on an area of 150x 100m, fragments of house foundations and ceramic vessels could be found. Two stone hatchets and many other flint tools have also been found.
- **Crkvishte**, medieval settlement. At about 2km north-west of the village, on an area of 200 x 100m remains of ceramics, pithoi and building materials could be found.

Dolni Radesh village

- **Ajushova Bavca**, settlement dating from the Iron Age. Located 1km north of the village, on the left bank of Kriva Lakavica. Fragments of ceramics and melted iron ore slag could be found.
- **Gjurov Dol**, tumulus dating from the Iron Age. At 1km south-east of the village, near Radesh river and Gjurov Dol there is a tumulus with small dimensions, partially covered in woods.
- **Treskavec**, medieval necropolis. Near the site Hanche –An, on a plateau several tombs facing east west could be seen.
- **Hanche –An**, medieval necropolis. On the right bank of Kriva Lakavica, at 1km north of the village there are remains of walls built of crushed stones and plaster.

Zagorci village

- **Manastir**, an Iron Age settlement and a medieval sacred construction. At 200-300m southeast of the village, on a hill near the village river, all shaded by oak trees, foundations of medieval sacred construction could be seen. Fragments of ceramic vessels dating from the Iron Age could be found.

Injevo village

- **Golema Tumba**, tumulus from the Iron Age. At around 1,5km east of the village there is a partially ruined tumulus.
- **Gramadi**, settlement from late antiquity. In a cultivated soil, at 2km south of the village, many piles of stones, fragments of ceramic vessels, shingles, pithoi etc. could be found.
- **Mala Tumba**, tumulus dating from the Iron Age. Located at around 1km northeast of the village, north of the site Megjishte.
- **Megjishte**, settlement and necropolis dating from late antiquity. At 500m east of the village, on an area of 200 x 400m piles of stones, fragments ceramic vessels and pithoi could be found. On the west end of the area, big tombstones facing east west could be seen.
- **Selishte**, settlement from Roman Age. At 200m west of the village, on both sides of the village road leading to Gorovska Ceshma, fragments of ceramics, tegulae, implex and pithoi could be seen.
- **Selishte P**, medieval church and necropolis. At 300m west of the village remains of walls of a single-nave church, the south and the west wall together with the entrance being 3 to4 m tall. The apse part was built later. There are traces of painting on the interior part. South-west of the church there is a necropolis, partially ruined.

The village of Konche

- **Barovska Vodenica**, tumulus from Roman Age. At 2km north of the village, 70m on the right of the asphalt road Konche- Radovish there is a tumulus with 15m wide and 3m tall. Damaged on one side by the construction of the road.
- **Denkjini Chuki**, tumulus from Roman Age. At 4-5m north-east of the village, in the area of the site Kostadinci there are two tumuli 30m wide and 5m tall.
- **Dernovec**, settlement from Iron Age. At around 500m north-east of the village, at an area of 200 x 150m there are fragments of fractured ceramic vessels.
- **Koreshevec**, necropolis – tumuli from Roman Age. In the left bank of the torrent Koreshevec, 2km north-east of the village there are two tumuli, one covered in woods. The bigger one is 30m wide and 5m tall.
- **Kostadinci**, settlement from late antiquity. On an area of 200 x 100m, 5km north-east of the village there are numerous fragments of ceramic vessels, pithoi, imbrices and building materials. Probably, the tumulus of Denkjini Chuki belongs to this settlement. According to the village legend, this was the old village of Konche, built by tar Constantine and abandoned because of a plague.
- **Lakata**, settlement from late antiquity. North-west of the tumuli of Koreshevec, on an area of 150 x 100m there are remains of foundations and fragments of building materials.

- **Prshovo**, tumulus from Roman Age. At 4km north of the village, 200m on the left of the asphalt road Konche – Radovish there is a tumulus 20m wide and 5m tall.
- **Chuj Petel**, findings from Roman Age. 3km north of the village, on a plateau on the left of the road Konche- Radovish there is a fragment of relief presentation of a Thracian horseman.

The village of Lubnica

- **Gramagje**, settlement from late antiquity. 3,5m north-west of the village, on an area of 500 x 300m there are remains of many piles of crushed stones, fragments of tegulae and ceramic vessels. A capital and a part of a pillar have also been found.
- **Lubnica**, settlement from late antiquity. 3km west of the village, to the left of the road leading to the village of Skorusha, on an area of 100 x 50m tegulae, imbrices, pithoi and ceramic vessels could be found.

The village of Rakitec

- **Pasaralica**, medieval settlement. Next to the village, at around 150m at the north-west side, along the fields fragments of ceramic vessels, tegulae, imbrices and stones could be found.

Skorusha village

- **Belata Loza**, settlement from the Bronze Age. 1,5km west of the village there are fragments of ceramic vessels and stone hatchets.
- **Vodna Poljana**, medieval settlement. 1km south-east of the village there are remains of pithoi, imbrices and piles of crushed stones.

Villages in the municipality

The municipality of Konche has a significant fund of authentic, cultural, natural and traditional resources and products which, according to the global trends in rural tourism in the last decades, offer serious opportunities for development of this branch. At the same time, the uniqueness of the approach to the traditional products is a good basis for creating a specific and unified model and concept for the development of rural tourism in the municipality.

The rural settlements, in addition to their basic residential function, are increasingly receiving recreational and touristic function. A recreational tourist function is the temporary residence of the urban population in a rural area near the city. A touristic function is the temporary residence of visitors coming from distant places in the rural areas (Comic 2001).

The National Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development for the period 2009-2013 emphasizes tourism and agriculture as priority sectors for development of the country and analyzes the situation and the responsibilities of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy. The National Strategy for Rural Tourism 2012-2017 defines the priority goals for the development of rural tourism, and the IPARD program, through the measure 302, provides access to funds for the development of rural tourism.

In the Republic of Macedonia, which, according to its geographical and demographic characteristics, is mainly rural, the application of an integrated approach to the concept of rural tourism allows

development of a regional approach and promotion of hot spots for rural tourism. This study is of particular importance for the Municipality of Konche, primarily because of the current situation with the tourism on its territory.

From the viewpoint of a tourist offer, we can divide the rural settlements into:

- Independent tourist villages with a complete tourist offer (accommodation, food, recreation, cultural content etc.)
- Touristic villages with partial tourist offer followed by other segments of the touristic demand (villages near lakes, spas, mountain centers etc.)
- Villages with a tourist offer including events (bazars, fairs, festivals, village celebrations, art colonies etc.)
- Transit touristic villages (villages by roads)
- Picnic touristic villages (villages near city centers)
- Villages providing various services (hunting, fishing, sports, religious content, lectures in nature etc.)

The Municipality of Konche has small, vibrant and old villages of predominantly hilly character, surrounded by forests, pastures and arable land. All villages are located in a drainage basin, which means that they are located near water. Such environment has provided them with conditions for basic economic sustainability throughout history. However, the industrialization of the seventies and eighties of the last century, as well as the migration trends present for decades, and especially strengthened in the last decade, have contributed to reducing the population in the villages, and completely disappeared in four. In those villages where life still exists, the population still nurtures the traditional lifestyle, dealing mostly with agriculture and husbandry. That is why, at a certain period of the year, at the time of harvesting and drying the fruits, houses, porches, verandas and gardens are coloured with the colours of tobacco, peppers, onions, and their smell spreads through the air. There, visitors could experience tradition and rural lifestyle and have the opportunity to taste authentic freshly prepared foods from local products. In some of the villages it seems like life has stopped. Being empty they are excellent geographical and cultural space for observation and photography. At the moment, visitors will not be able to get organized services in the field of rural tourism, but they can see part of the authentic village architecture and the traditional lifestyle. Certainly, the kindness and hospitality of the population can be a substitute for the lack of a tourist infrastructure and tourists to feel welcomed. This is an unused potential that with certain and not very high investments and with municipal support could be economically moving and become an additional income for the population.

The following are the villages with the greatest potential for development of the rural tourism, in terms of population and workforce capacities, infrastructure and connectivity, authenticity of the architecture and the existence of authentic contents and stories. The rest of the villages could initially be involved in securing logistics and in the supply chain.

The village of Dedino is one of the oldest villages in the municipality. There are written records since the 14th century proving this. The village is mentioned in a record from 1366, when the church "St. Stephen" in the village of Konche was built. The beauty of Dedino is its nature and preserved traditional architecture and the village organization.

According to the legends, the village got its name after a man and his grandchild who lived in this area and the name comes from the term 'dedo' (grandpa) or the name Dedo.

For the village of Dedino in his book "Materials on the study of Macedonia" from 1896, the Macedonian revolutionary Gjorche Petrov wrote that the village is located 2 hours south of Radovis on the mountain Smrdes, and the road from Radovis to Krivolak was passing through, which, on one hand it was beneficial, and on the other hand this was harmful, because the road of the Konche Turks was also passing through. At that time, at the end of the XIX century, the village had about 90 Macedonian houses, and its inhabitants - farmers were engaged in agriculture, producing wheat and bred cattle, but their main occupation was the lime production.

Dedino is also an interesting place to visit from a history aspect. From the time of the Ottoman Empire, several historical events, such as the creation of the first grenades, are tied to the village. The hand grenade workshop in the village was opened in late 1896, but closed in November 1897. During the national revolutionary movement, the two biggest Macedonian revolutionaries – Goce Delchev and Jane Sandanski resided in the village.

On 25 August in Dedino there was a murder of two tobacco tax gatherers who were very troubling. This killing was the beginning of the so-called "Dedino affair".

This makes the village a great potential for a touristic attraction for rural and historic tourism.

The village of Gabrevci is also an old village. The name originates from the name of the tree 'gaber' (hornbeam) present in the forest area around the village. There are historic records since medieval period for it. The village is mentioned as a Christian village owned by Haidar, an important military officer at the Sultan's court.

There are legends about Gabrevci. One of them says that the village changed its locations three times because of a plague. There is even an old song about this:

"Gabrevci, our village,

Three times moved,

From three plagues saved..."

Here, visitors could see the distinct rural architecture. The houses have distinct built ovens and granaries in their gardens and are divided in three neighborhoods: Upper, Lower and the Further one.

The village of Gabrevci is known as a place of a good dance and the villagers are known as good and well-known dancers. It is also known as a settlement with highly developed pottery. Every household in the past engaged in creation of pottery dishes and sold their products in the wider area. Unfortunately, with the industrialization, only one potter is still active.

Gabrevci also has a potential to become a tourist destination where visitors could meet the living culture of the population and to witness folklore and production of pottery products.

Konche

Konche is the administrative centre of the municipality and the only multi-ethnic settlement where the Turkish population is majority. Konche is a hilly settlement, at 580m above the sea level. It is one of the oldest settlements in the region and it has survived for more than thousand years. Its name was mentioned for the first time in 1019 in the records of the Byzantine emperor Vasil II. There are assumptions that in the past Konche was a town. There are remains of antique and medieval fortress in the area called Gorna Kula and in 1366 the impressive monastery complex dedicated to St. Stephen was built which made Konche a church seat. With the arrival of the Turks, the social and managing life in Konche dies and the settlement got a rural character.

Besides the monastery St. Stephen, Konche is also the home of the only mosque in the municipality.

It is 20km from the regional road Radovish- Strumica and is connected by an asphalt road to most of the settlements and touristic attractions in the municipality.

As a settlement, Konche has all the infrastructure possibilities that could be put into service provision function. It has an ambulance, dental offices and pharmacies which are always welcomed as an additional infrastructure for touristic services.

Having all the above information, Konche could play the central role in the development of the tourism. It could be the base from where, at the beginning, touristic content and the concept of Community Based Tourism to be developed. The Municipality has its own building in good condition which could be granted under concession for touristic investments. On the other hand, the House of Culture can receive added value if it hosts an ethnological and historical-archaeological setting or a Museum that would become a new attraction for which it will be worth visiting Konche. Financial resources for such activities exist primarily in the IPA Cross-border Program and in the World Bank Local and Regional Competitiveness Project in the field of tourism. On the other hand, it is good that new konaks are being built in the monastery complex, and in cooperation with the Church, some of them can be used as accommodation capacities (even for tourists - pilgrims).

In Konche there is also one accommodation capacity - private accommodation Apartment Lipa in which can accommodate up to four persons. The apartment is very important for the tourism development and urgent support is needed for it to make its offer on social networks more efficient and more professional. The presentation of the apartment will mean a lot for the presentation of the tourist facilities of the municipality.

What needs to be done next is to invest energy in motivating the people in modifying part of their homes into accommodation facilities of a rural type. The municipality should also make a serious effort in providing conditions for investment in infrastructure for hospitality and accommodation facilities. For such investments there is a grant support within the IPARD program.

Abandoned settlements also have the capacity and attractiveness. Being empty they are an excellent geographical and cultural space for observation and photography. Such are the villages Skorush and Dolna Vrashtica. Authentic old clay brick houses are still found in Skorosha, while in Dolna Vrashtica there are still authentic old stone houses. The houses are degrading and it is necessary for

warning signs to be placed in the villages to warn tourists from entering them because they could easily collapse.

Other attractions

Tree house – Konechka mountain

The construction of tree houses is becoming more and more popular touristic attraction around the world. Their magnificent appearance and smell of wood give the houses a warm feeling, and to those who stay in them, a special sense of calm and connection with nature.

On the territory of the Municipality of Konche, the first tree house has been built on the slopes of Konechka Mountain. The house itself is a special attraction and can be used as accommodation capacity of recreational character. It is built on an area of 16 m² and placed on a beech tree, and can accommodate up to three visitors. Visitors can also be provided with groceries and food during their stay. The tree house today is visited by mountaineers and hunters.

The house is ecological, built exclusively from natural material - wood and therefore the use of toxic materials used for insulation of the house is eliminated. The big, branched tree provides natural chill air during summer and warmer air during winter months.

There is no direct access to sanitary and drinking water. A project for its realization is underway. The access to the house is through a dirt road and it could be reached by a field vehicle or on foot.

The municipality has a project, in cooperation with investors, for building ten such houses in the future, which will offer new content and a form of experiencing nature in Konche.

Fountains

- Fountain in the village Lubnica, built in 1978, installed in 2004 by Vanco and Milka Sekulov with the family. With its surroundings (tree, crossroad), and an additional arrangement it has the potential to be used for small cultural events, as literary readings or events regarding various forms of folk art. Also, as a place for cyclists, under the shade of the tree; possibility of setting up stall for selling or serving local snacks.
- Fountain in the village Dolna Vrashtica, built of stone, with a cattle feed

Memorial landmarks

- A memorial plaque in honor of the victims in the massacre near Salandzak and Kole Padina. The plaque is located in the church *Dormition of the Most Holy Mother of God* in the village of Dolni Lipovikj.

Handicraft

A craft is a handmade creation of objects through a specific skill. With the emergence of the industrial production, and the very low prices of goods due to global trends of trade, the crafts are disappearing.

The handicraft is well recognized in world trends and policies. A lot is invested in it and there is a lot of possibilities in handicraft when used as a source for a small family business and existential option, as an employer and unemployment regulator. It offers an economic potential where the artisan is an initiator of his/her own upgrade and a creator of an economic foundation for future generations. The position of the crafts today and the possibilities of their development urged the need for a universal and organized approach for further development in order for the artisans' needs to be met. In the direction of the European Strategy 2020, which refers to the development of the economy in the European Union for the next period, the European Employment Strategy, the Strategy of the National Chamber of Crafts of Republic of Macedonia aims at increasing the employment, structuring the education of the existing and potential providers of craft activities and providing new opportunities for young people above all.

From a touristic aspect, old crafts add authentic value to the destination itself and its experience. They complement the destination's story with the whole beauty of their individuality and uniqueness.

According to the data collected, the handicrafts were strongly developed and diversified in the past, whose products had function and value in all aspects of human life. The crafts were well known and because of their quality they were sold in the whole region. In the past, the pottery was greatly developed in Gabrevci, the lime burning in Dedino, Gorno Lipovikj and Rakitec, and there were also other crafts that provided the necessary products and tools for life and work. Because of that, the handicrafts are a generator of income and provided the well-being of the people involved in this economic activity. It is actually the handicraft as an economic activity that could contribute to the creation of souvenirs and authentic tools for tourists. Since artisans are very creative, with high esthetic sense, they could contribute the interpretation and recreation of historical heritage objects that could become authentic souvenirs of the municipality. They could even go a step further and help create a souvenir- brand of the municipality.

Today, the handicrafts are not present enough in the municipality and only several adults are involved in them. Organized sales and exhibitions can only be found during certain events. There are no organized sales points nor education of the locals for the benefits and possibilities of the handicraft. In the municipality there is no association working in this field. Urgent institutional support, education and networking of these people are needed if the municipality wants the handicrafts to survive.

Dedino - woodwork - hand production of wooden spoons, hatchet handles and other tools and woodwork. Only one elderly man with no successor engages in this craft. The production is unorganized and for personal needs.

Gabrevci - pottery - a family pottery workshop that produces traditional pottery from this region. It is the only remaining workshop in Gabrevci. There is a great interest to expand this workshop within the family business and to better map it on the craft map of Macedonia. This workshop has interest and capacities for more serious development steps regarding the diversity and quantity of products. Bearing

in mind that the archaeological findings of ceramics originating from this territory are rich and varied, this pottery workshop can actively engage in their interpretation and design objects that would be of interest for the tourists.

The municipality, in cooperation with the business community, civil society and individuals, should make efforts to find entities that could, through networking, training and grants, help these people survive as artisans and to further develop their skills. Without the clear and obvious existence of crafts, it will be difficult to build an authentic story of the municipality as a tourist destination.

Folklore societies

Three folklore associations are active on the territory of the Municipality of Konche. They work intensively on preserving and protecting the essence of the village spirit by preserving the original folklore and customs. Here, it is worth mentioning that the dancers from these societies are enthusiasts, with a lot of love towards the folklore of this region, putting a lot of energy and finances in its nurture.

The folk societies threat the folk dances ('ora'), a product of the traditional life and the characteristics of the Islam, the separated life of men and women which was the foundation for the establishment of social ordering and communication systems in the past. From there, similar to other parts of the country, as a preserved heritage emerged the male, female and mixed dances (ora). Since on social events, celebrations and similar events sexes were not allowed to mingle with each other's, and even less for men and women to hold hands, male and female dances appeared, that is, men danced their own dances and women their own. With the liberalization of these social norms, when people started to mingle but men and women were still not allowed to hold hands, the connection in dances was made by a scarf both sides held and in such way mixed dances emerged. Later, new generations and the new way of life caused these dances to mix and the first physical male-female contact to be between relatives and then to this norm to disappear completely. All this is part of these folklore societies and their nourished cultural heritage.

The folk dancers usually dance in their own authentic costumes, more than hundred years old and for which a special and expensive protection is needed. The folk costumes of this region are among the most beautiful ones in Macedonia. As a proof of this are the awards received for authenticity and most beautiful costume on manifestations such "Ilinden days" in Bitola, "A review of folk costumes" in Struga etc.

Folk music group "Cvetovi" from the village of Dedino, established in 1975, works with two folk groups: children and adults. So far, "Cvetovi" participated in many important international and national events and honorably presented the folk heritage of Dedino and the region. With the help of this group, the Macedonian National Television has shot four documentaries showing certain folk customs and dances, part of the celebrations of the more important Christian holidays and showing the customs of a traditional wedding from Dedino. The specific dances nurtured by this group are male, female and mixed dances. The 'Komitsko oro' is also mentioned. Villagers tell that this dance is related to the visit of Goce Delcev in Dedino and the work of the foundry and the grenade workshop.

Folk music group "Karajaoglan" from the village of Konche is the only group that nourishes, protects and promotes the authenticity of the Konche Turks' folklore. The group is very active and participates in all major folklore manifestations at national level, such as Ilinden days in Bitola and

others. "Karajaoglan" participates in events outside the country, and often participates in events in the Republic of Turkey.

Folk music group "Gabrevci" from the village of Gabrevci is also a very active group composed of enthusiastic, elderly residents of the village who unselfishly nurture the folklore and the customs of Gabrevci and the region. Gabrevci's folklore is closely related to the life, work and economic characteristics of the village. Since it is one of the most famous pottery villages, there is a dance in Gabrevci that is closely connected with this craft. Namely, each of the dancers dance with a pitcher of 12 liters on the head, full of water. For this dance "Gabrevci" has won first place on a festival in Maribor, Slovenia in 2015. Even before, this folk group had success with its performances on an international field.

In the past, there was another folk music group called "Makedonski glas" which, at the 31st State Festival of folk dances and songs "Ilinden days" received an award for greatest source folklore. It is important to note that the village of Gabrevci is a treasure of the Macedonian folklore. The authenticity and richness of the 'oro' dances and folklore were the reason the village to be studied by researchers - folklorists, historians and archaeologists from the Shtip University "Goce Delcev".

The folk music groups could make a significant contribution to the tourism development. They could be used to create an authentic cultural and tourist offer of the municipality, and at the same time to be used as subjects that would directly represent the rich cultural heritage to the tourists. With this, in the future, the municipality, the cultural and accommodating infrastructure would get partners in enriching their offer and in return, this partnership would provide these folk groups with resources for sustainability.

The traditional wedding in Dedino may be reconstructed in the future and established as a cultural and tourist event that could be attractive to a large number of domestic and foreign visitors who are staying in the country at the moment of the wedding. Since it has been recorded, the wedding has been a topic of many analysis and researches and according to the dancers of "Cvetovi", there is an extensive documentation for it which could help the wedding to be authentically reconstructed. The written materials could also help in reconstructing other customs that could later become ethno-tourism events.

Gastronomy

The traditional way of living also influenced the local gastronomy. Living from nature, people created their culture and nourishment in a relation with the earth, the sun and the water and throughout the centuries prepared their food from plants, fruits, milk and meat, all found around them.

On the territory of the municipality, thanks to the clean nature, all types of agriculture products, including fruits and nuts have been cultivated and nature has also given an abundance of plants and forest fruits. From the agriculture products, wheat, barley, potato, pepper, onion, tomato, cucumber etc. have been cultivated. These products are used fresh, dried or as ingredients in preparation of local food. From fruits here could be found apples, plums etc. Often, they are sold on markets and what is left is used for personal use, fresh or as jams, vinegar or rakija. Table wine has also been grown in this region. It is sold on markets and part is used in wine, rakija and madzun production. The biggest part of

local wine and madzun is made of local types of grape. From the forest fruit and plants here are present mushrooms, plants used as spices and tea, blackberries, raspberries, wild strawberries and other berries. The population traditionally uses them in their diet whether fresh or dried or incorporated in various stews, syrups or jams.

Forests and pastures provide conditions for honey production. A big part of the population produces honey and honey products, known as one of the healthiest and ecologically purest honey in Macedonia. A proof of this are the many awards and recognitions on national and international level.

The pastures also provide conditions for growing different types of cattle used for milk and milk products as well as meat and meat products. Almost every family keeps some domestic animal from which it produces milk, cheese and meat. In the municipality there is only one small capacity for cheese production. In the gardens of the households there are different types of poultry, kept for the meat and eggs.

The richness and diversity of the products present here allowed for the population to prepare different types and variations of bread, pies, fried and roasted vegetables, meat and desserts from local products (kept, picked or prepared by themselves).

As most typical in the region the following products are present:

Bread – mainly made of wheat flour by a traditional recipe and baked in a built home oven where the lid of the vessel is covered in clay or droppings in order for temperature to be increased and the gases inside not to escape while baking. There is no house in the municipality that does not have its own built oven for baking bread. They are also used for baking various pies and other food.

Madzun- a grape malt syrup with an original taste, produced from the grape juice of the most quality and autochthonous types of grapes from this municipality. It is rich in vitamins, minerals, fruit sugar and other ingredient such tannins, flavonoids and organic acids. It is used by the local population as sweetener, immunity strengthener and as a medicine for airways and lung diseases, jaundice etc. Madzun is prepared by the local Turkish people.

Ashure- baked product from dozen of products (wheat, chickpeas, corn, rice, beans, walnuts, hazelnuts, raisins, dry apricots, pomegranates, gooseberries, cinnamon, figs, pistachios, orange peel etc.) combining a unique taste. Those who prepare it say that the ashure is pretty complicated to prepare and a lot of time is needed. It is rich in vitamins and it is a source of energy. According to the nutritionists, the ashure is very healthy, especially in winter. The grains used have fiber that help immunity. It is said that the ashure is food of love and humanity, shared with neighbors, friends and relatives. This dish is also prepared by the local Turks in Konche.

Pepper- sweet and chilly and it is always present in the local population's food. It is widely known and villagers say there is a huge demand for the local pepper in the region and it is the primary choice on markets in Shtip, Valandovo etc. it is sold fresh and dry. According to the people that grow it, it is a local breed of sweet and chilly pepper.

The local gastronomy could be the main key in tourism development and building the tourist offer. It could be the primary motif for visiting this region and then, returning again in it.

In order for a good basis for tourism development, based on local cuisine prepared by local population to be provided, the following conditions have to be fulfilled:

- Preserving the authentic types of vegetables and fruits. They have an authentic taste and are adapted to the local climate thanks to the “genetic baggage”, created by growing in authentic environment. The fruit and vegetable from an ‘old’ seed have their own authentic story and value;
- Supplying the consumer with fruits and vegetables with proven origin and emphasizing the origin, quality and the brand ‘old seed’ while selling the products. According to the local population, the differentiation of Konche products on markets is obvious, among all other fruit and vegetables with unknown, imported or domestic, industrial origin.

As an example could be taken “My 40 kilometers”, a project by Vasko Markovski, part of Slow Food Vodno, Skopje. This project has a local contribution to the world campaign of Slow Food for changing consumers’ habits while buying food, giving priority to buying products produced in a radius of 40km of the consumer’s surrounding.

If the local population accepts the concept of production of local authentic food and products more intensively, there are possibilities for participating in projects and funds which support reducing the imprint on nature in the food supply chain. The local producers, local population and future hospitality service providers could also be involved in the Slow Food campaigns. The municipality (since it starts with building capacities for tourism services provision, freed from the burden of the past) has an opportunity to become a recognizable municipality, avant-garde in supplying the local population with food i.e. providing a gastronomic offer in the menus of the future hospitality units, produced in a radius of 40km.

Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions

- The territory of the municipality of Konche, following its geographical location and the great number of natural and created values, has a solid base for touristic development and becoming an interesting tourist destination. The local resources own serious possibilities for creating an authentic, recreational, alternative, rural and religious tourism but, unfortunately, the potentials and infrastructure for service provision in tourism are not used.
- The Municipality lacks studies and strategic documents which will provide some knowledge and a database of the potentials for tourism development. This study is the first step forward.
- In the last years however, the tourism is recognized by the municipal administration as an economic activity with a great potential.
- The location, the road connectivity and the type of municipalities bordering the municipality of Konche indicate that the primary target group of tourists should be the population of these municipalities, together with the population of Skopje, and as a secondary and equally important target group, should be the population of the cross-border regions of neighboring countries.
- The territory of the municipality is one of the cleanest and ecologically healthiest environments in the country and is rich in water and forest wealth. The clean and ecologically healthy environment creates potentials for healthy food production, a precondition of the municipality to start with tourism development. The municipality has also a long and interesting history which have created authentic culture heritage which could make the municipality one of the most interesting locations for development of rural tourism.
- Most of the natural resources in the municipality could be used from a tourism development aspect. As most attractive natural values are: the basin of the river Lakavica with the lake Mantovo, the mountains Konechka with Gradeshka from the west side and Smrdesh from the east.
- At the moment, the lake and other attractions do not have any tourist offer. There are several reasons for this: no accommodation facilities, no grocery shops, neglected trails and beaches, no tourism marketing etc. Also, the inactivity and scepticism of the local population is an additional reason for this. Serious work with the local population is needed because they are the ones that could initially take an initiative and invest in the tourism.
- However, the first initiative has been done by Municipality of Konche by creating an urban planning documentation for a tourism settlement near Mantovo in which a big number of holiday homes, hotels, a campground, sport grounds located by the lake and road infrastructure which will supply the visitors and tourists with goods needed are planned to be built.
- On the location of the natural resources there are great conditions for development of rural, mountain, hunting, adventurous, recreational and lake tourism to be developed but an integrated approach for their establishment is needed.
- The climate, soil and the clean environment on this territory could provide almost all agriculture cultures. There are different types of authentic vegetables and fruits as well as plants, lichen, wild fruits and mushrooms used in various ways.

- The diverse vegetation provides conditions for the life of many domestic animals as well as game, and with that provides conditions for the development of the hunting tourism.
- In this area there is also a variety of cultural resources with a big touristic attractiveness. The monastery church St. Stephen in Konche, the Ottoman tomb near Dedino and Konche are part of these resources.
- The church St. Stephen is a culture monument, protected by law and is one of the most representative medieval monuments in Macedonia. The figure of Katarina Kantakuzina gives the church a huge potential of tourist attraction from wider regional character.
- The Ottoman tomb (“turbe”) with further research and its reconstruction and protection could provide great opportunities for it to become as attractive as the church St. Stephen.
- There are other sacred constructions in Konche with some capacities in the area of religious tourism, as archeological sites with some material findings which could additionally increase the touristic value of the municipality.
- The villages still have the traditional lifestyle, dealing mostly with agriculture and husbandry. They qualify for development of rural tourism. The rich local food and folklore, their diversity and authenticity provide serious basis for Konche to be engaged in tourism development based on the community capacities.

Recommendations

- To become a recognized tourist destination, the Konche Municipality must seriously address the challenge of developing all the elements and stakeholders needed to develop a tourist destination.
- Since in the municipality there is no visible infrastructure or developed content that could provide a certain touristic service, it is recommended that the municipality take it as a current situation and a positive side and to begin strategically plan the tourism sector and what it wants to achieve in it. For that purpose, it is advisable to initially develop a local tourism development strategy through which, the vision, the strategic directions for the types of tourism and their development and the measures and activities for realization of such development will be defined.
- The municipality must create a partnership with the business community and the civil sector and jointly determine the priorities for development and action in the tourism sector. Such partnership will enable the municipality to take seriously the challenge of attracting investments in the area of tourism infrastructure.
- Natural resources must be fully utilized and prepared for accepting tourists. The creation of urban planning documentation is a good start, but the municipality must also provide infrastructure conditions (access to water, sewage, electricity, roads, etc.) to help investors make an easier investment decision.
- Facilities in municipal property should be analyzed and offered to investors for them to be transformed into tourism infrastructure. Some of the facilities could be further organized and value to be added by moving or opening certain types of museums or exhibitions, primarily in the form of ethno-historical and archeological museum settings. In doing so, it is important to mention that in these efforts, Konche has the opportunity to access certain national and

European funds. The municipal administration should prepare quality project documentation and applications.

- Because of the figure and work of Katarina Kantakuzina, as well as the fact that she lived and was buried in the monastery church in Konche, the municipality should initiate the idea of establishing a Museum of Katarina Kantakuzina within the monastery complex. Such museum will map the municipality on the regional tourism map, will provide development of multinational tourism projects and will provide generating higher revenues from tourism.
- Having in mind the current situation with the infrastructure and the tourist offer and content, it is desirable for the municipality to begin creating a tourism development approach based on community capacities. This approach uses the bottom-up methodology and provides maximum participation of all stakeholders.
- Below are the conditions and obstacles for development of community based tourism

Conditions and obstacles for development of Community Based Tourism	
Conditions providing good practice for Community Based Tourism development (CBT)	Obstacles for Community Based Tourism development (CBT)
The community is already well organized and cohesive	The foundations of the community and the NGO sector are fragmented and unorganized
Members of the community, women, men and young people are widely included in the decision-making process and the financial management of CBT (Community Based Tourism)	The decision-making process is only in the domain of powerful individuals (most often men) and the benefits are not properly allocated
Land ownership and other issues regarding resources are clear and well defined	Land and the conflicts regarding ownership/ use of resources are many and repeated
Community desire to implement a bottom-up approach reflected in the creation of objects, decision-making and governance structures	Centralized decision-making and governance structures and application of the "top-down" approach where the CBT is "set" by external structures (imposed), especially if it is from international sources and there is a local perception that the motivations are purely financial.
The decision on CBT is made by the community based on informed choice, influence, options, risk and results	There is no real local decision-making or it is based on limited information and the opportunities are not considered
High level of participation	The participation is during the implementation of the CBT
The motif is not purely generating revenue but also protecting cultural and natural heritage and intercultural learning	The motif is only financial
The activity is supported by good marketing mechanisms	Small amount of marketing or unjustified marketing
A strong plan for expanding and / or limiting visitor numbers in a balance with community and environmental capacity to avoid the negative	When people think they can invite tourists, then they "emerge" in the thought "money will come in" and there is no planning for the future (to the

impacts of both	damage of the community and the landscape)
Strong partnerships with local non-governmental organizations, relevant government bodies and other supporters	Formed through external funding mechanisms
The approaches are contextual and locally appropriate, not just "imported" from other contexts	The unification is considered as a CBT venture - "one bid fits all"
The CBT is part of a wider / broader community development strategy	CBT is considered as a quick way out of the poverty cycle
Linked to the education of visitors about the value of culture and resources present. Clear zoning of visitors	There is no attempt to inform visitors about the specific nature of the local natural and cultural heritage, so there is no sense of the uniqueness of the "place"
There is a good infrastructure for accessing the product	Infrastructure is inadequate and has no investment potential

- The main opportunity for developing some type of tourism is recognized in the rural tourism. Following is a brief description of this type of tourism and its benefits.

Rural tourism

The analysis of the individual characteristics of some types of tourism such are eco-tourism, wine tourism, hunting tourism, fishing tourism, farm tourism, agricultural farm tourism, cultural tourism and religious tourism indicate a common component, that is, activities in a rural environment. Rural tourism is a new type of tourism with double benefits for both, tourism and rural space. Defining rural tourism differs in different countries in Europe. Also, there is no single definition for rural tourism. When talking about rural tourism we think of all services and activities offered in a rural area. Common key elements of rural tourism are:

- rural space,
- preserved nature,
- accommodation in traditional rural households,
- Bed and breakfast with possibility of individual preparation of food,
- traditional rural gastronomy,
- communication with hosts,
- getting acquainted and / or participating in agricultural activities, the tradition and the way of life of the local population.

Through the development of this type of tourism, rural areas can be regenerated and on the other hand, economic progress and conservation of nature can be achieved. According to the World Tourism

Organization and ETC (European Travel Commission), Europe as number 1 tourist destination in the world shows a tendency to increase the number of tourists who use extended weekends as a way of vacation. When choosing short-stay destinations, the destinations that offer various forms of rural, mountain and spa tourism are in advantage.

Primary factors that influence the choice of destination are:

- promotion of the destination on the Internet, comments from visitors of the destination and recommended experience,
- the authenticity of the destination,
- cost of package service (transport, accommodation, hospitality services, tickets and other costs),
- Quality of service as a total perception from all points of contact with the local population, culture and way of live.

The basic characteristics of Konche Municipality show that the region has significant natural resources and interesting cultural and historical heritage, which provides the municipality with the possibility of developing rural tourism. Also, in the Municipality the artificial lakes, the mountains and culture monuments are also very important. All this leads to the conclusion that the development of a destination for rural tourism in Konche is possible.

Municipality of Konche in publications - bibliographic list

Below is a list of titles - texts and papers that could serve the interested in further studies and analyzes related to the development of tourism, the creation of an authentic tourist offer and destination. The following publications can also serve those who will direct their research to other areas and thus contribute to the socio-economic and cultural development of the Municipality of Konche.

Decorated ceilings, pantries and doors in Radovish and the village of Konche – near Radovish, Aneta Svetieva, article, 1986.

Cooperative member with a high quality raw tobacco, Vancho Atanas Mihajlov, individual farmer, the village of Konche, Radovish, article 2000.

Macedonian folk songs (printed notes), Josif Cheshmedziev, notes, 2009

Orientalisms and their correlation with some musical features of Turkish folk songs from Konche and Topolnica, Radovish, Gjorgji Gjorgjiev, 1984.

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The economic development of the municipalities Radovish, Konche and Podaresh, computer CD / DVD, Hristo Kartalov, 2002.

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Infrastructural features of settlements in the municipalities of Radovish and Konche, article, Zorancho Atanasov, 2011.

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Despot Stefan Lazarevikj - biography of the first Belgrade citizen, Luca Micheta, Laguna, 2015

Materials on the study of Macedonia, Gjorche Petrov, Sofia, 1896

Cultural Monuments of Macedonia, Kosta Balabanov, Anthony Nikolovski, Dimitar Kjornakov, Kalamus, Skopje, 2014

A memorial to the 20th anniversary of the liberation of the South Serbia 1912-1937, p. 555, Aleksa Jovanovikj, 1937, Skopje

Biological diversity in the basin of the river Bregalnica, Decons-Ema and the Macedonian Ecological Society, Skopje, 2015

Evrenos Bey'in babası Pranko Lazarat'ın (Pranko İsa) vakfı ve türbesi, Ayşegül Kılıç”, 2012 (article based on the doctoral dissertation of the author on the topic "Gazi Evrenos Bey": *Ayşegül Çalı, Gazi Evrenos Bey*, Ankara Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Basılmamış Doktora Tezi, Ankara 2011).

Photo Gallery

Natural attractions of the Municipality of Konche



Gradeshka Mountain - landscape



Lake Mantovo

Authentic Crops and Products



Strings of Dried Tobacco



Baking of Red Peppers for Ajvar

Monuments of Christian Culture



The Church of St. Stephen



Katarina Kantakuzina

Islamic Culture Monuments



The Village Mosque in Konche



The Turbe near the villages of Dedino and Konche

Archaeological artefacts from the territory of Municipality of Konche



Archaeological artefacts -pottery and glass, NI Museum, Shtip



Archaeological artefacts -pottery, NI Museum, Shtip

Villages in the Municipality



Village of Konche



Village of Dedino

Other Attractions



Wooden House on Tree



Konche Valley



Vineyards



A Lake in winter

Handicraft



A Potter



Woodcarving

Gastronomy



Dough for Filo of Wheat Flour



Ajvar



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