

# The rural areas – the unutilized potential in light of tourism

## *Vidiek – nevyužitý potenciál z hľadiska cestovného ruchu*

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**Abstract:** The rural areas represent an extensive territorial or natural, human and economic potential which is utilized unevenly and imperfectly. One of the alternatives of using this potential is to develop tourism in those municipalities, which have appropriate conditions for the development of activities connected to tourism at their disposal. The aim of this paper is to identify the development potential of rural municipalities in the light of tourism (in the area of the Nitra Self-governing Region), to evaluate this potential using the valorisation method and to define the individual categories of rural municipalities. The results of the typology provide important information about the potential of the rural areas for the development of tourism and about the current utilization of this potential. They are also used to create the concept of the development of rural tourism in the Nitra Self-governing Region and to represent a tool for effectively allocated public resources for municipalities and for entrepreneurial subjects in the municipalities.

**Key words:** rural areas, potential, tourism, typology of rural municipalities

**Abstrakt:** Vidiek predstavuje rozsiahly územný resp. prírodný, ľudský a ekonomický potenciál, ktorý je nerovnomerne a nedostatočne využitý. Jednou z alternatív, ako potenciál obcí využiť, je rozvíjať cestovný ruch v tých obciach, ktoré disponujú vhodnými podmienkami pre rozvoj aktivít viazaných na cestovný ruch. Rozvoj cestovného ruchu prináša so sebou efekty, ktoré sa prejavujú vo všetkých sférach rozvoja vidieckej obce, t.j. v ekonomickej, sociálnej, kultúrnej a environmentálnej dimenzii. Cieľom príspevku je identifikovať rozvojový potenciál vidieckych obcí z hľadiska cestovného ruchu (na území Nitrianskeho samosprávneho kraja), zhodnotiť tento potenciál pomocou valorizačnej metódy a definovať jednotlivé kategórie vidieckych obcí. Výsledky typológie poskytujú dôležitú informáciu o potenciáli vidieka pre rozvoj cestovného ruchu a jeho súčasnom využití. Sú podporným nástrojom pre tvorbu koncepcie rozvoja vidieckeho cestovného ruchu v Nitrianskom samosprávnom kraji a nástrojom efektívnej alokácie verejných zdrojov obciam a podnikateľským subjektom v obciach.

**Klíúčové slová:** vidiek, potenciál, cestovný ruch, typológia obcí

In the '90s, rural areas became an object of investigation of many authors and research institutions because politicians, economists and sociologists started to realise that the rural areas represent an extensive territorial or natural, human and economical potential which is utilized unevenly and imperfectly. Various approaches to defining rural areas, rural region and municipality reflect the different perception of the used terms in the professional literature and also the particularity of rural areas. The use of different qualitative and quantitative definitions results in classifications of rural areas. These become the

basis for the creation of concepts and development strategies for rural areas.

The results of many analyses of the factors of development of rural areas and municipalities in Slovakia indicate that they have to react to a whole scale of negative tendencies such as the high rates of unemployment, low average incomes, weak entrepreneurial activity, the missing quality human potential (Buchta and Blaas 2006: 286), the disadvantageous structure of settlements with a high representation of municipalities up to 300 inhabitants, the insufficiently developed technical and social infrastructure and the

slow restructuring of the rural economy (Belajová 2006: 280).

Many causes of the problems and conflicts in rural regions and municipalities can be found in the transformation of the socio-economic system and the previous development in rural areas (Fáziková 2006). Belajová (2006: 277) introduces two particularly significant causes for the continuing problems of rural areas:

- (a) the deepening areal imbalance in the development of the regions caused by concentrating tendencies of capital in the urbanized regions which thus acquire the agglomeration effect (savings),
- (b) the insufficient use of the available natural and human resources allocated in rural areas, where they are able to contribute more to the economic development of the country.

A possible solution to the given problems of rural regions appears to be the concept of endogenous development which is based on the utilization of the inner resources of rural municipalities, on the development of small and medium enterprises and establishing partnerships of private and public sector.

In connection with the insufficiently utilized potential of rural areas, still more discussions about the development of tourism take place in the professional and political circles. The use of the material and immaterial cultural values can radically influence the existing approaches to solving the future of rural areas and offer new possibilities which could lead to new entrepreneurial activities and to the revival of their life and life conditions of their inhabitants (Kadeřábková and Trhlínová 2006: 371).

The effects of the development of tourism are reflected in all spheres of development of a rural municipality, which means in the economic, social, cultural and environmental dimension.

According to Svobodová (2009: 244), the development of rural tourism produces additional incomes for the inhabitants of the municipality, it contributes to the preservation of the culture and traditions of rural areas and it enables people to present them externally. For farmers, it means a possibility of additional incomes from agro-tourism, it increases the demand for the services and performance of the infrastructure, it intensifies the pressure on preserving the countryside and its protection and it also intensifies the pressure on the management of the municipality to coordinate and support the activities of tourism.

Positive effects of tourism on the local level were summarized by Lordkipanidze (2002: 53). She divided them into three groups – economic, socio-cultural and environmental. From the economic point of view, an enterprise in tourism in the rural areas:

- (a) creates incomes flowing into the local economy (accommodation tax, real estate tax and other local taxes) but also into the governmental budget (income tax, value added tax and others),
- (b) creates new working positions directly in the tourism enterprises and indirectly in the related and supplying activities provided by other enterprises in the municipality,
- (c) supports investments in the infrastructure of the municipality,
- (d) contributes to the development of the local economy (entrepreneurs' incomes from the enterprise in tourism and their multiplying effect).

In the socio-cultural dimension, the development of tourism brings:

- (a) the increased attention to the protection and preservation of the cultural heritage,
- (b) the growing interest in the preservation of traditional languages,
- (c) the establishment of new markets for the traditional crafts and forms of art, the revival of the traditional forms of art,
- (d) the reception of the positive aspects of values and behaviour of visitors,
- (e) slowing or stopping the process of expatriation, the growth of the immigration into the municipality.

In connection with the effects of the development of tourism on the environment of the municipality, Lordkipanidze (2002: 55) writes primarily about the negative effects related to building of the tourism infrastructure and the activities of undisciplined visitors. In spite of that, she considers tourism to be able to contribute to the protection and preservation of the environment, particularly by increasing the awareness of environmental values, and also to serve as a means of financing the protection of nature in the mistreated environment and as a means of growth of its economic influence. The positive environmental effects resulting from the development of tourism in a municipality are:

- (a) the intensified attention to the exterior of the municipality,
- (b) the renewal of the existing infrastructure in the municipality,
- (c) the reconstruction of the unused buildings, the protection of historical objects, the renewal and modernization of the unused housing stock.

Tourism can bring the above mentioned positive effects only to those municipalities, which have appropriate conditions for the development of activities connected to tourism at their disposal (Petrášová 2009).

## METHODS OF EVALUATING THE SUPPLY IN TOURISM

Many authors have tried to evaluate the potential of rural municipalities and then to create a typology based on different points of view (Mariot 1983; Michálek 1996; Otrubová 1996; Spišiak et al. 2000; Bína 2002).

The mentioned typologies are established on the basic principles of the valorisation method and considering the appointed aim of evaluation, they differ from each other primarily by the applied criteria.

Spišiak et al. (2000: 118–124) apply the valorisation method while evaluating the dispositions of the environmentally specific countryside for the development of rural tourism and agro-tourism. The evaluation of the chosen selective conditions and the conditions of localization and realization is part of the analysis. This analysis results in the specification of regions with similar qualities and functions, which have a more or less suitable potential for the pursued aim. At the same time, it also results in the spatial portrayal of ecologically stable, attractive and highly evaluated regional localities just like the regional segments with a low or damaged ecological stability, where the realization of the eco-stabilizing measures is necessary.

Konečná (1999: 283–308) concerns with the evaluation of areas in the light of their suitability for the development of tourism. She considers the natural, infrastructural, and demographic, i.e. the original and also the created factors to be the main suitability criteria of an area for the development of tourism. She suggests ensuring the objectivity of the evaluating of the chosen area by arousing the interest of more specialists from different fields in the final evaluation and by distinguishing the meaning of the selected criteria through different weights of the individual factors.

The potential of rural municipalities regarding their recreational utilization is studied by Michálek (1996). The objects of evaluation were 64 rural municipalities in Záhorská nížina. 12 factors have been selected for the evaluation of the potential of rural municipalities – the existence and use of water surfaces for entertainment and sports, woodiness, heterogeneity and attractiveness of the region, climatic conditions, vegetation of the region, the quality of the region in the light of the conservation of landmarks and nature, the development of cottage recreation, centres of tourism and the quality of tourism infrastructure, the equipment of rural municipalities regarding the basic cultural and sporting infrastructure, the accommodation capacity, the negative phenomena in

the region and the time necessary to overcome the distance from a town. Michálková's valorisation of the region in the light of tourism results in the typology of rural municipalities (municipalities of I., II. and III. category).

Bína (2002) tried to evaluate the potential of tourism in the Czech Republic municipalities comprehensively. In evaluation, he distinguishes two basic subsystems of the potential, natural and cultural. The natural subsystem consists of the components of tourism based on active tourism, recreation, cognition of nature or of the components which utilize the nature, such as the surroundings for specialized sporting activities. The cultural subsystem consists of the components of tourism expressed by travelling for culture and knowledge or for entertaining and other events. The evaluation of the tourism potential in the municipalities in the Czech Republic results in their typology in the view of the overall potential and also with respect to the evaluated subsystems. Bína (2002: 10) defines 5 types of municipalities: natural definite type, natural type, cultural type, cultural definite type and mixed type.

For the classification, the typology or the categorization of regions in practice, there was also used the method of the fuzzy cluster analysis. For example, it was used for the typology of rural municipalities in the Slovak Republic in terms of their demographic development (Fáziková 1999: 85–90).

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

The aim of this paper is to identify the development potential of rural municipalities from the viewpoint of tourism (in the area of the Nitra Self-governing Region), to evaluate this potential using the valorisation method and to define the individual categories of rural municipalities. The results of the typology provide important information about the potential of rural areas for the development of tourism and about the current utilization of this potential. They are also used to create the concept of the development of rural tourism in the Nitra Self-governing Region and represent a tool for the effective allocation of public resources for the municipalities and for entrepreneurial subjects in the municipalities.

We applied the valorisation method to evaluate the individual rural municipalities regarding their conditions for the development of tourism. The basic principle of the valorisation method for evaluating the potential of rural municipalities is to evaluate how the individual component or the given fact of the area influences its suitability or unsuitability for

the realization of the tourism activities. This means that every given fact or feature of the area is evaluated from the aspect of the possibilities which it possesses for the individual recreational activities (activities of people). Miazdra (1997: 28) says that these become an auxiliary measure when evaluating the individual components and the given facts, and thus evaluating the whole area.

The basic precondition of evaluating the recreational potential of municipalities was a correct setting and selection of the individual components and the given facts of the area – the criteria. The selection and combination primarily depended on the aim of the evaluation, on the availability of the individual data necessary for the evaluation and on the experiences of the evaluating subject. The set of the evaluation criteria included, apart from the important localization and realization factors which are according to many authors the determining factors of the development of rural tourism, also the demographic, economic and environmental factors. The chosen criteria differed from each other by their importance to the aim of the evaluation, for that reason we assigned them a consistent weight. We determined this using the method of the paired comparison of the individual criteria which was established by Micháľková (1996: 218). We used the model of the Fuller's triangle to unequivocally determine which one of the compared criteria is more significant to the evaluation.

1 1 1 .....	1	1
2 3 4 .....	(n – 1)	n
2 2 .....	2	2
3 4 .....	(n – 1)	n
3 .....	3	3
4 .....	(n – 1)	n
...		
	(n – 1)	

Another key step of the applied method was setting the point scale for evaluating each of the criteria. We use the point scale in the range of 0–4 points. We established the theoretical interval  $\langle U_{\min}, U_{\max} \rangle$ , which includes all the point assessments of the potential of the selected rural municipalities according to the ratios:

$$U_{\min} = \frac{n(n-1)b_{\min}}{2} \quad (1)$$

$$U_{\max} = \frac{n(n-1)b_{\max}}{2} \quad (2)$$

The value near the  $U_{\max}$  represents a rural municipality with optimal conditions for the development of tourism and the value near  $U_{\min}$  represents a rural municipality with unsuitable conditions for the development of tourism.

Based on the comparison of values of the potential of rural municipalities of chosen regions, we established the individual categories, types of the rural municipalities. For the classification and categorization, we used the Natural Breaks Classification. The data were processed using the software ArcView 3.2a GIS.

## RESULTS

### The typology of rural municipalities belonging to the Nitra Self-governing Region in relation to the utilization of their potential for the development of rural tourism

In the Nitra Self-governing Region, there are 339 rural municipalities which differ in their location, the population structure, the economic, environmental, natural conditions and infrastructure. Each of these municipalities has a certain potential which was to be inventoried, evaluated and compared. The evaluated potential of rural municipalities in the terms of their conditions for the rural tourism development results in their classification into 5 categories (Figure 1).

*Category I* consists of 10 municipalities with the value of the synthetic index  $U = (158-218)$ . These municipalities are developed, having exceedingly attractive natural surroundings and numerous cultural and historic landmarks. Those located in the Northern part of the Nitra Self-governing Region are in the territory of two protected landscape areas: the Ponitrie and the Štiavnické vrchy; each of them has also two or more small-scale protected areas in their territory. Regarding the predominantly lowland character of the landscape, the attractiveness of natural surroundings of these municipalities is proved by the relatively high area share of woods, 45% in average. Their environment is not stricken by the negative influence of concentrated industrial activities. Their cultural and historic potential is ample, with almost seven cultural monuments per 1 municipality, in average. Regarding the corresponding infrastructure, this group of municipalities has their limitations. Despite the fact that this group includes municipalities with the largest accommodation capacity in the analyzed area (Patince, Chľaba, Santovka, Topoľčianky), they are equipped with only 4 accommodation facilities per 1000 inhabitants in average, however, there are considerable distinctions within the group. Likewise, there are considerable distinctions in their equipment regarding the sports and recreational facilities. The group is more homogenous when considering the hospitality and socio-cultural facilities. In average, there are more than two hospitality and more than

four socio-cultural facilities per 1000 inhabitants. The category I municipalities reach the highest value of the Index of Entrepreneurial Activity in tourism. In average, more than 6 entrepreneurs per 1000 inhabitants run business in accommodation, catering and the related services. The municipalities of Topoľčianky, Prašice and Patince experience the highest value of entrepreneurial activity. They also enjoy relatively favourable demographic conditions. Their inhabitants are well-educated; in average, 322 inhabitants with the high-school or university education fall on 1000 inhabitants in the productive and post-productive age; with the Labour-force Participation Rate of more than 78%. The only negative phenomenon in this category is a high proportion of inhabitants in the post-productive age.

*The category II* consists of 63 municipalities with the value of the synthetic index  $U = (117-157)$ . This group possesses a certain latent potential which has not been intensively utilized yet.

Most of these municipalities are located close to the Category I ones; hence their natural potential is mutually linked. In their area, there are also important small-scale protected areas and some of them are even parts of the above-mentioned protected landscape areas, marginally. The average share of woods reaches up to 30%. When considering the concentration of cultural and historic landmarks, Brhlovce, Komjatice, Pukanec, Beladice and Tovarníky belong among the most attractive municipalities. There are three cultural monuments (formerly classified as national cultural landmarks) per 1 municipality in average. The environment of these municipalities is not damaged substantially, 97% of them reach 2<sup>nd</sup> level of damage at the maximum – satisfactory environment/high quality environment. Their infrastructural accessibility is also satisfactory – with the medium distance of 20 km to the centre, by the 3<sup>rd</sup> class roads mostly. Their equipment with the specific tourism infrastructure is low, however (exemptions: Podhájska, Trávnica, Nesvady), particularly in the basic equipment with accommodation and catering facilities (0.6 and 3 per municipality, respectively). The situation improves when considering the sports and recreational facilities and the socio-cultural facilities. The intensity of entrepreneurial activity is lower than in the previous category, with almost 4 tourism enterprises per 1000 inhabitants. Demographic conditions of these municipalities are predominantly positive, with a high value of the Labour-force Participation Rate, a relatively high portion of well-educated inhabitants and the predominant proportion of the post-productive population with the average value of the vitality index of 63.2 (exemption: Slatina with 104.9).

*The category III* consists of 78 rural municipalities with the value of the synthetic index  $U = (90-116)$ . These municipalities are of the intermediate level, having reached the average values in the individual characteristics. The occurrence of significant natural, cultural and historic landmarks within their area is limited and unevenly distributed. In average, there are almost 2 cultural monuments per 1 municipality. However, there is no monument in 56.4% of them and, similarly, no significant natural monument in 68% of them. The share of woods in their area is lower, too; reaching up to 18.4%. This is related to the fact that these municipalities are mostly located in the lowlands. On the other hand, their location brings them a good accessibility; with the medium distance of 18 km to the centre and a relatively quality infrastructural connection mostly with the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> class roads. However, these municipalities are totally unprepared for the long-term stay of tourists; in 83% of them, there is no accommodation facility available. Their equipment with hospitality facilities is medium, with nearly 3 facilities per 1 municipality. Regarding their population, they are very well equipped with the sports and recreational facilities and in all of them; there is at least one socio-cultural facility. With respect to their short distance to urban municipalities, a good accessibility and limited basic equipment, these municipalities are suitable for short-term stays of tourists and the suburban recreation. The quality of environment is high, 2<sup>nd</sup> level of damage in average. Land-registered areas of certain municipalities (Martovce, Vrbová nad Váhom, Starý Tekov, Čata, Bína, Belince) are parts of highly polluted regions: the Dolnopoľský region and the Ponitriansky region. The total entrepreneurial activity in tourism reaches up to 3.6 enterprises per 1000 inhabitants in average; it reaches higher values particularly in smaller municipalities (up to 500 inhabitants). When regarding the structure of enterprises, there are predominantly hospitality and complementary services. In the view of the demographic structure, this group of municipalities is heterogeneous. In most of them, there is an unfavourable age structure (85% of the municipalities having the vitality index value lower than 70). There are considerable differences in the educational structure; the share of inhabitants with the high-school or university education is lower in comparison with the previous category.

*The category IV* consists of 121 rural municipalities with the value of the synthetic index  $U = (68-89)$ , which is rather unsuitable for the development of tourism. In comparison with the previous categories, attractiveness of their natural potential does not pose any significant incentive for tourists to visit them. The

average share of woods in the area is very low – 8%. There is a connection between the lower attractiveness of the natural potential of certain municipalities in this group (Trnovec nad Váhom, Dlhá nad Váhom, Dedina Mládeže, Bešeňov, Bánov) and negative influences of the nearby agglomerations which caused a permanent damage to their environment. Cultural and historic landmarks are distributed unevenly; their utilization in tourism is limited. In these municipalities, there are currently no accommodation facilities (exceptions: Diakovce, Zemianska Olča, Veľký Kýr, Veľké Lovce, Tvrdošovce, Semerovo, Pribeta, Plášťovce, Palárikovo, Mojmírovce, Hronské Kosičky, Hronovce, Horný Pial, Dedina Mládeže). Their equipment with the hospitality, socio-cultural and sports and recreational facilities is medium. In average, there are more than two hospitality facilities, nearly three sports and recreational facilities and one socio-cultural facility per 1 municipality. The entrepreneurial activity is low in these municipalities. In average, there are three active tourism enterprises per 1000 inhabitants. However, 17% of the municipalities do not show any

entrepreneurial activity in tourism. Age structure of the population living there is in favour of the post-productive component. In average, the education structure of the productive component of population is lower than in the previous categories.

The category V consists of 67 rural municipalities with the value of the synthetic index  $U = (33-67)$ . They could be specified as the problematic ones and, regarding their perspective development of tourism, unattractive. In particular, these municipalities have problems with the absent or insufficient basic infrastructure for tourism. In their area, there is the absence of any significant natural and cultural and historic attractions. The quality of environment in these municipalities is medium to low; almost one quarter of them is located in the damaged or strongly damaged areas. Most of them are characterized by a low intensity of the entrepreneurial activity in tourism, the unfavourable age structure and the predominant component of the post-productive population. Their education structure is considerably variable.

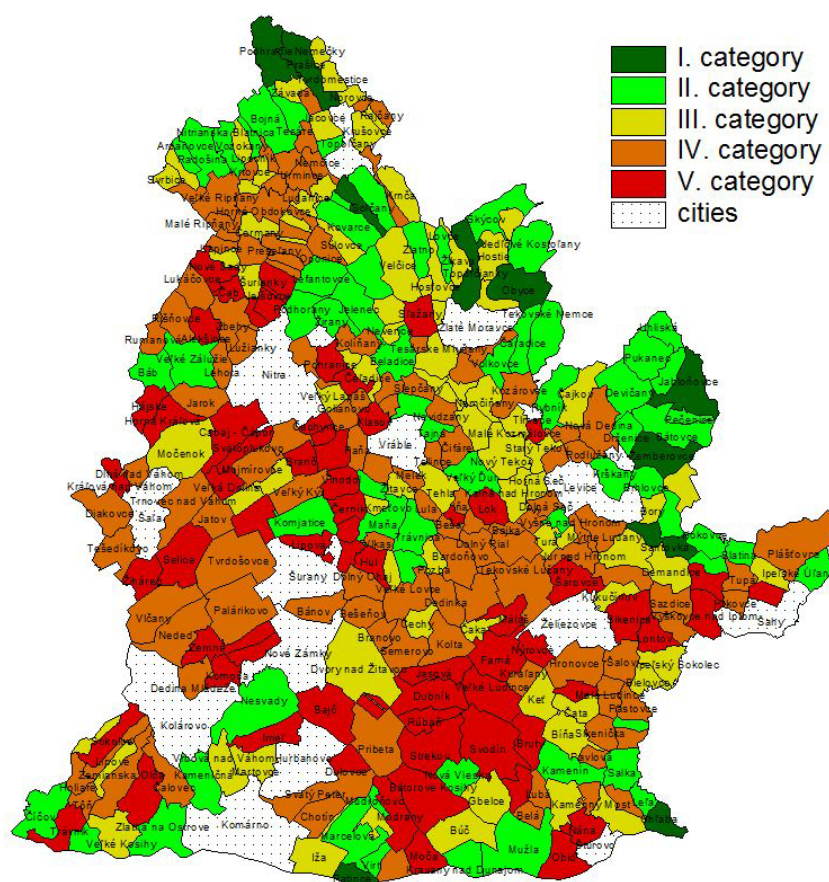


Figure 1. Typology of rural municipalities belonging to the Nitra Self-governing Region in relation to the utilization of their potential in the development of rural tourism

Source: Own calculations

## CONCLUSION

Rural development is a multi-level process with its roots in historic traditions. It arose on all levels as an answer for the previous model of modernization. The basic level of rural development results from the global relations between agriculture and society. It is clear then, that agriculture must have changed its orientation to fulfil the rapidly moving needs of the population of Europe (Otepka and Habán 2007). The times, when towns expected the surrounding countryside to supply them with a cheap foodstuff only, are away. Nowadays, the urbanized towns have new needs and expectations. A wide supply of the non-market public goods, such as the beautiful countryside, natural values, is expected of rural areas and agriculture. There is a direct competitive relation between social demands for the manifold utilization of the countryside and the traditional values caused by agricultural production. Agriculture is increasingly perceived as a segment utilizing land and other resources for the production of various goods and services required by the society (Buchta and Buchta 2009). A bigger amount of free time and a higher income are projected in the changes of the lifestyle and the consumers' habits. The post-modern society requires productive rural areas as an object of consumption available for recreation, vacation and hobbies (Van Huylenbroeck and Durand 2004: 17). With respect to this, it is inevitable to draw attention to the fact that not all rural areas or rural municipalities have preconditions for the fulfilment of new forms of demand, nor ability to adapt to the changed consumers' expectations towards such areas (Chrenková 2009). The main objective of the scientific work was to identify the developing potential of rural municipalities with respect to tourism in the area of the Nitra Self-governing Region, to evaluate this potential using the valorisation method and to define the individual categories of rural municipalities. The analysis helped to select the municipalities with optimal conditions for the development of tourism and, simultaneously, municipalities which are suitable for the allocation of resources supporting tourism. This regards the Category I and Category II municipalities where there is a high natural and cultural and historic potential available, together with a stable environment, unaffected by industrial activities, a quality and sufficient infrastructure (regarding capacity) allowing for long-term stays of tourists, and a quality human potential. The development of tourism in these municipalities links to longer traditions; many of them were classified as recreational villages according to the former regionalization of tourism.

They fulfilled mostly the recreational function, the economic function only to a limited extent and tourism became important, if not the only economic activity for their inhabitants. Thus, the prospective support of tourism development in these municipalities, provided by the regional government, the national government or other persons could strengthen the synergy effect from the utilization of endogenous resources of these municipalities on behalf of the tourism development.

With respect to its methodical character, the utilization of results of this paper is substantially wider. The enumeration of resources of rural municipalities could become a basis for the creation of the tourism development conceptions on the regional level and developing plans for the individual municipalities. It could also become an example for the creation of a partial database of tourism which will become a part of the existing information system of the given area. Within the analysis, not only the enumeration of resources of the Nitra Self-governing Region's rural municipalities was realized, but also the preconditions for the tourism development were evaluated. Thus, the possible directions of their development are partially defined. The main objective of the proposed database of tourism is to provide information about the area itself and the possibilities for its utilization for the tourism development and, thus, to create qualified presuppositions for decision-making in this field.

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