JOURNAL
OF THE BULGARIAN GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY

Recreational functions of settlement formations of local importance

Mariela Nekova *, Galin Petrov, Rumen Yankov

"St. Cyril and St. Methodius" University of Veliko Tarnovo, Veliko Tarnovo, Bulgaria
* Corresponding author: m.nekova@ts.uni-vt.bg

Key words:
accommodation, Bulgaria, classification system, level, tourist resources

ABSTRACT

Settlement formations are a specific and relative new category of territorial units in Bulgaria. They were introduced by law in 1995. According to the Act of Administrative and Territorial Structure of the Republic of Bulgaria, settlement formations are built-up areas outside the construction boundaries of settlements. Unlike settlements, settlement formations have no permanent population. They serve specific functions—residential, industrial, transport, etc. They are differentiated into settlement formations of national importance and those of local importance. So far, no special scientific studies have been conducted on the settlement formations in the country. This study focuses on the settlement formations of local importance with recreational functions. Settlement formations with potential for tourist supply are identified. An analysis of tourist resources and accommodation facilities as factors for their formation and functional development is conducted. On this basis, a classification of settlement formations of local importance is proposed, in which they are differentiated into six types. Examples of settlement formations with different recreational profiles are provided. The study presents the current state of settlement formations of local importance in Bulgaria, because they are a dynamic category of settlement structures. The results of the study are illustrated by relevant maps.

Article processing
Submitted: 01 November 2023
Accepted: 18 November 2023
Published: 30 November 2023
Academic editor: Rafael de Miguel González

© *M. Nekova et al.* This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

OPEN ACCESS

1. Introduction

Settlement formations are a specific settlement form, inherent to Bulgaria, statutorily defined by Act of Administrative and Territorial Structure of the Republic of Bulgaria (AATSRB). Upon certain research conducted in the international scientific publications, we can conclude that the concept of exurban settlement is conditionally close in meaning. An exurban settlement is thought of as "a place of transition between urban and rural, located somewhere between the suburbs and truly rural areas and within the commuting zone of a large, urbanized area" (Clark et al. 2009). Another term used to refer to settlements other than the formally accepted forms, urban and rural, is informal settlement. Informal settlements are associated with illegal construction of residential buildings in peri-urban areas (Dubovyk et al. 2011), making this term unusable for the purposes of this study.

Settlement formations are regulated by the 1995 AATSRB, which defines them as territorial units along with other settlements in the country. According to the AATSRB settlement formations are not administrative units. The Act states that they are "… territories outside the construction boundaries of settlements, established to serve specific functions, which are defined by construction boundaries but have no permanent resident population". Unlike most settlements, settlement formations do not possess independent land territories. They are located on the territory of one (rarely two or more) settlements—towns or villages. Therefore, the territory of settlement formations is defined by their construction boundaries, outlined in the respective development plans.

Settlement formations have both national and local importance. Those of national importance are determined by a decision of the Council of Ministers (MC) in coordination with the municipal council of the municipality on whose territory they are situated. The main prerequisite for establishing a settlement formation is "meeting resort or industrial needs of local or national importance that have emerged" (AATSRB). Settlement formations of national importance were determined by MC and promulgated in the State Gazette at the start of 2005. The decision only concerns holiday resort complexes; initially, seven seaside and two mountain resorts: Albena, Golden Sands, St. Constantine and Helena, Elenite, Sunny Beach, Duni, International Youth Centre—Primorsko, Pamporovo and Borovets. Elenite, located in the municipality of Nessebar, was removed from the list of settlement formations that same year.

Settlement formations of local importance are established with a decision of the municipal council and proposed by the mayor of the municipality. The act of establishment also states the name of the respective settlement formation. As of October 2023, the total number of settlement formations of local importance is 158.

In the 2001 Spatial Development Act (SDA), settlement formations are defined as a sub-type of urbanized territories. Consequently, along with settlement areas themselves and industrial zones outside settlements, they are distinguished from the other categories of land with primary use—agricultural, forest, protected and damaged. The location and boundaries of locally important settlement formations are defined in the general development plans of municipalities while structuring and construction in them is laid out in a detailed development plan. It is important to note that in contrast to AATSRB, SDA interprets the territory of a settlement only as the territory that comes within its construction boundaries (settlement territory), without including the land (Supplementary Provisions of SDA, § 5, item 6).

There are various aspects to settlement formations issues. In terms of settlement planning, they are mainly villa areas with partial transformation from holiday (secondary) homes to primary dwellings of permanent residence. In terms of urbanization, many settlement formations are extensions of urban areas and part of emerging resort and tourist agglomerations. Special attention deserves their economic importance for industrial production, tourism, transport and logistics.

Equally important are the pending questions of legal regulation, the criteria for establishing settlement formations, planning and development in them, property ownership and investment intentions as well as the role of local government initiatives.

In fact, a large number of separate territories with varying intensity of development and different functions in non-residential spaces are settlement formations, i.e. they meet the formal requirements without being declared as such by the local authorities.

The Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, for example, has registered 67 industrial zones, including logistics-industrial parks, industrial-commercial zones, business zones and free zones. The aim is to consolidate regulated land plots intended for construction and offered for sale, attracting investors for the development of high-tech industries in areas that are provided with transport, warehouse space and other infrastructure. Some of the industrial zones are managed by a state-owned company under the Ministry of Economy, others are owned and managed by municipal or private companies. Many of the industrial zones have the characteristics of settlement formations, both by virtue of their geographical position in relation to the settlement areas and as meeting the legal requirements: satisfying emerging resort or industrial needs of local or national importance, and the existence of a development plan or construction boundaries.

Monasteries in Bulgarian provide another example. More than a hundred of them are situated outside settlements, including the ones neighboring villa areas or tourist attractions and offering shelter.

The introduction of settlement formations as a category of territorial units in 1995 was in no way related to the historical-geographical inheritance of thousands of settlements in the form of villa areas, spa and tourist areas, industrial and agricultural enterprises, roadside sites, monasteries, etc. Significantly, in the Territorial and Settlement Planning Act (TSPA) of 1973, the so-called illegal constructions outside the construction boundaries of settlements excluded those residential buildings that were in "areas of rural nature" and were inhabited all year round. The transitional provisions of the same law require the inclusion of land developed with buildings in existing residential, villa and resort areas, or its recognition as separate.

Given the very general regulation for their creation, the leading role of municipalities and the diversity in the way and type of development, it is not surprising that the administrative recognition of the settlement formations of local importance (SFLI) and their actual emergence in time considerably differ. An administrative act usually takes into account the development of villa and resort areas started or even completed decades ago. In other cases, settlement formations are declared in advance, i.e. land is reserved for future development on the basis of announced investment plans that may not be put into practice. The process of the new announcement itself is very uneven. From the adoption of the law in 1995 until the end of 1999, only 6 locally important settlement formations were created. In 2000 there was a real boom, with 80 SFLIs being declared, which is half of all those existing today. The first and second decades of this century have seen an increase of 32 and 39 settlement formations respectively. The last declaration is from 2023—SFLI Kichevo-North in Aksakovo municipality.

The differences in the willingness, interest and policy of local authorities are evident from the grouping of settlement formations in certain years, and especially, from their uneven distribution across municipalities. All the SFLIs in the municipality of Varna (33), for example, have resulted from decisions taken at two separate meetings of the municipal council, in 2000 and 2001 respectively. Of the 23 SFLIs established in 2012 in the country, 17 are to be found in this municipality. The municipality of Etropole, which has shown remarkable activity in this direction, declared 18 SFLIs in 2000—8 in the land territory of the town and 10 in the land territories of four constituent villages. Five SFLIs were declared in 2009 by the municipality of Parvomay, 6—by the municipality of Tsarevo in 2010 and so on.

When clarifying the functions of locally significant settlement formations, the mode of origin must be considered. The largest group of settlement formations function as villa areas, both in the vicinity of some larger cities and close to smaller settlements and resorts. Some SFLIs originate from spa complexes or other tourist places—Slivenski Mineral Baths, Beklemeto, Tsigov Chark, Dobrudja Campsite (Shabla municipality), etc.

Four of the settlement formations gave a fresh start to closed villages, and three others succeeded neighborhoods of scattered villages (Etropole municipality). In the future, it is possible for this approach of transition of villages to SFLI to be applied to a large number of depopulated settlements with temporary (seasonal) occupation. There are still no cases of declaration of settlement formations as settlements despite the expansion of permanent residency, not only in those of national importance. In the 1980s, the villages of Yundola, Panichishte, Panagyurski kolonii, and in more recent times, the village of St. Spas (2015) originated from resorts and villa areas.

The number of settlement formations is considerable—renovated, newly built or industrial facilities planned for construction—photovoltaic parks, industrial zones, hydroelectric power plants, business parks for high-tech industries, etc. The next group of SFLI are formed by farmyards of agricultural enterprises of the socialist period, which have changed their functions in modern conditions. They also include those established on the basis of fishponds and fishing villages.

Separate decisions for the establishment of settlement formations are related to projects for the construction of satellite complexes or holiday villages upon new undeveloped land. According to the law, any development measures and construction of technical infrastructure facilities are the responsibility of property owners at their own expense and in coordination with the municipality. In terms of cadastral scope, SFLIs comprise a group of land parcels with different ownership—private, municipal and state—from one or two adjacent land territories. Their area usually ranges from a few tens to a few hundred acres. There are exceptions: the two settlement formations in the vicinity of the village of Kunino, municipality of Roman—Hydroelectric Power Plant and Concrete Junction have a territorial extent of single properties under 10 acres. Settlement formations occupying the territory of former villages are a special case.

Examples show that the administrative process of designating settlement formations of local importance only partially covers objectively existing and long-established settlements and is not always directly linked to the existing state of development of particular territory. Add to this the possibility of pushing through new administrative decisions at municipal level under pressure from local business lobbying interests, and the result is a highly fragmented geographical picture of settlement formations heterogeneous in function, size, degree of built-up area and development.

At the current stage of development of the science of tourism, and more specifically the geography of tourism in Bulgaria, it is difficult to find studies of tourism at the lowest territorial level—settlements or settlement formations. The main points in the analyses in the territorial aspect are related to individual destinations, usually districts and municipalities (Dogramadjieva 2002, Assenova 2013, Nikolova 2013, Vodenska and Nikolova 2016). In the development of a monitoring system for sustainable tourism development, an analysis of resorts of national importance in Bulgaria was conducted (Vodenska et al. 2021). An in-depth study of the villages of Dolen, Leshten and Kovachevitsa has been done (Dogramdjieva et al. 2013).

The research of Marinov (1990, 1992, 1994, 1999) on villa recreation stands out in older publications. Brambarov (1990) partly deals with villa zones, with an emphasis on determining the recreational areas. Later the research was continued and a monograph "Short-term recreation" (Brambarov and Robev 1994) was published. The authors identified the need for the tourist potential of the sub-village areas to be revealed (p. 71), thus indirectly including the current SFLIs. They explore the inter-settlement territory to highlight areas for short-term recreation. In turn, Bachvarov (1986) explores the tourism potential of the settlement system of Sozopol. Also of interest are the studies of Evrev (1987, 1999) regarding mountain resorts and territorial and spatial planning of tourism. The internal structure and layout of resorts in the planning aspect as well as the recreational territories in the suburban area are outlined (Evrev 1999). The state and possibilities of tourism development in mountain settlements in Bulgaria are analyzed (Evrev 1987).

This study is the first to explore the recreational functions of SFLS in the country, on the basis of which a newly developed classification is justified. Internationally, there are a number of classifications and typologies of human settlements based on different criteria (Baiocchi et al. 2015; Drobnjakovic 2019; Ntassiou 2020; Jochem et al. 2021). Classifications and typologies of tourist resorts are of interest for tourism (Brey 2011, Sulc and Opacic 2015, Bucekova et al. 2019). In its context, Nepal (2007) proposes a classification of rural settlements in the Annapurna region based on selected criteria. In this paper, a classification different from the above-mentioned is presented.

The main aim of the research is to identify the potential for tourism and recreation of settlement formations of local importance and to derive a classification of SFLIs on this basis. To group them at the lowest level, two criteria were used—the existence or absence of tourist resources and the presence or absence of commercial accommodation facilities. The different groups are fleshed out with specific examples.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Data acquisition

Up-to-date information on all settlement formations is available in the National register of human settlements (NRHS) of the National Statistical Institute (NSI 2023). The data can be downloaded as a table in .xlsx or .json format. Settlement formations of national importance which are not the subject of this study have been removed from the table.

The first step in the research is related to the acquisition of necessary data. An important point was the precise location of all 158 settlement formations of local importance. The NRHS website so far lacks the corresponding user spatial data—map information about the boundaries of settlement formations. For this purpose, topographic maps in scale 1:5000 as well as the cadastral map of Cadastral-administrative information system (CAIS)—the portal for administrative services of the Geodesy, cartography and cadastre agency (CAIS 2023) were used. Google Maps (Google Maps 2023) and base layers in ArcGIS Pro (World Imagery) were used as an additional source for some of the settlement formations. Images from the 2021 and 2022 orthophotography were used to establish the extent of development for part of the SFLI. These are available in QGIS as a web mapping service—WMS layers.

The problem is that some of the settlement formations have gradually merged while expanding, making it difficult to visually estimate precise boundaries between them. This is the case of Dolna Traka, Gorna Traka and Traka-Extension in the municipality of Varna, as well as Panorama 1, Panorama 2 and Panorama 3 in the territory of Aksakovo municipality. For some more specific and difficult to locate cases, advertisements of electricity distribution companies, court decisions and even a list of streets in a polling station (e.g. for Traka-Extension) were also used.

The websites of municipal councils of some municipalities, where decisions on the declaration of settlement formations have been published, proved useful – Burgas (MC Burgas 2023), Varna (MC Varna 2023), Aksakovo (MC Aksakovo 2023) and Etropole (MC Etropole 2023). The access to the decisions of other municipalities is incomplete for a number of reasons—unpublished archives, limited periods of maintaining internet archives, missing annexes to the declaration decisions, etc.

Data from the National tourist register (NTR 2023) was used to determine the availability of commercial *tourist accommodation*. It should be noted that some of them are registered in a specific settlement formation, while the registration of others is in the nearest locality. Data from Google Maps (2023), BGMountains (2023) online map, corporate websites of tourism intermediaries and individual tourist sites were used as additional information sources. Thus, all settlement formations with accommodations were identified.

The Register of tourist attractions (RTA 2023) has been used in regard to tourist resources availability. Useful information is also available in the National public register of immovable cultural property (NICIH 2023). These are important for the development of cultural and pilgrimage tourism and for determining the level of importance of tourist resources. The register is maintained by the National institute for immovable cultural heritage (NICIH 2023). Protected areas in the country represent specific tourist resources. Up-to-date information on them is published in the Register of protected areas and protected zones of the Executive environmental agency (RPTPZB 2023). In addition to textual information, there are also shapefiles containing the current boundaries of each protected area and protected zone in the country. The register of mineral water resources (MW 2023) was also used for reference.

2.2. Data processing and classification

The spatial distribution of the settlement formations of local importance indirectly indicates the main features of their functional typology. There are 93 SFLIs in eight seaside municipalities, i.e. 59% of the total number. To these clusters in the municipalities of Burgas and Varna, those in the municipalities of Aksakovo (14) and Tsarevo are added. The clarification of the recreational functions of SFLIs requires classification. Consequently, some characteristic types can be identified. In relation to this we created a classification system, presented on Fig. 1.

2.2.1. First classification level

At the first classification level, starting from the definition in the law, a distinction is made between settlement formations declared in connection with resort or industrial uses (Fig. 2). According to our estimate, there are 133 SFLIs (84% of the total number) in the first group. They include villa areas, resort areas, outlying developments with "secondary" homes and former villages or parts of villages with a change in status. In the second group—for industrial or other production activities there are 25 settlement formations (16%). It includes industrial zones, business parks and individual enterprises outside settlements. This type of SFLIs lie beyond the scope of the present study. It is worth mentioning that there are some exceptions among them. Examples are the settlement formations DZS (Ruse municipality) and Fifth Kilometer (Burgas municipality). Originally established as agricultural sites and transformed into non-tourist service activities, they have an existing, albeit very limited, accommodation base.

2.2.2. Second classification level

The next classification level concerns settlement formations which, in functional terms, mainly satisfy recreational needs. The analysis of the location, the availability and type of tourist facilities and resources, tourist importance and other factors provide the basis for differentiating them into resort areas and recreational areas. They include, respectively, 20 settlement formations—resort areas, mainly of regional importance, sites of wine and cultural tourism, 113 villa areas and formations similar to them.

More challenging is the identification of the relationship with tourist resources. It is very pronounced in resort areas and to a much lesser extent in suburban recreation and non-commercial agricultural production areas. It can be summarised that attachment to a specific tourist attraction or to the seashore is a determinant of the emergence of less than a quarter of the latter, which are in the category of settlement formations of local importance.

2.2.3. Third classification level

The presence of commercial accommodation in SFLIs is a significant indicator of the development of their recreational functions. It has been chosen as a criterion for the third classification level in this study. The reference to the National tourist register of accommodations with valid categorization/registration shows that 41 settlement formations have such establishments (Fig. 3). This number is considered indicative only because some other data supports a wider range. In addition to the 13 resort localities, the group with accommodation facilities is formed by 28 villa areas, mostly located around Varna and the seaside resorts north of the city. At present, there are seven resort areas without registered accommodation—established outing and camping sites.

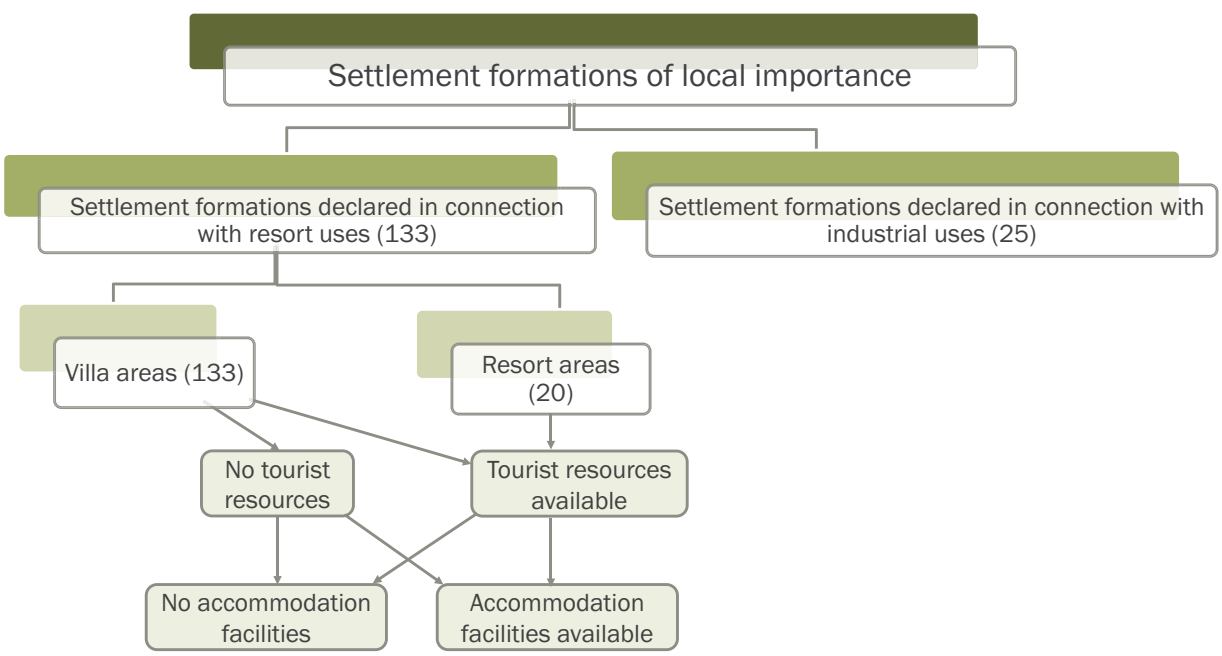

Figure 1. Classification system of SFLIs.

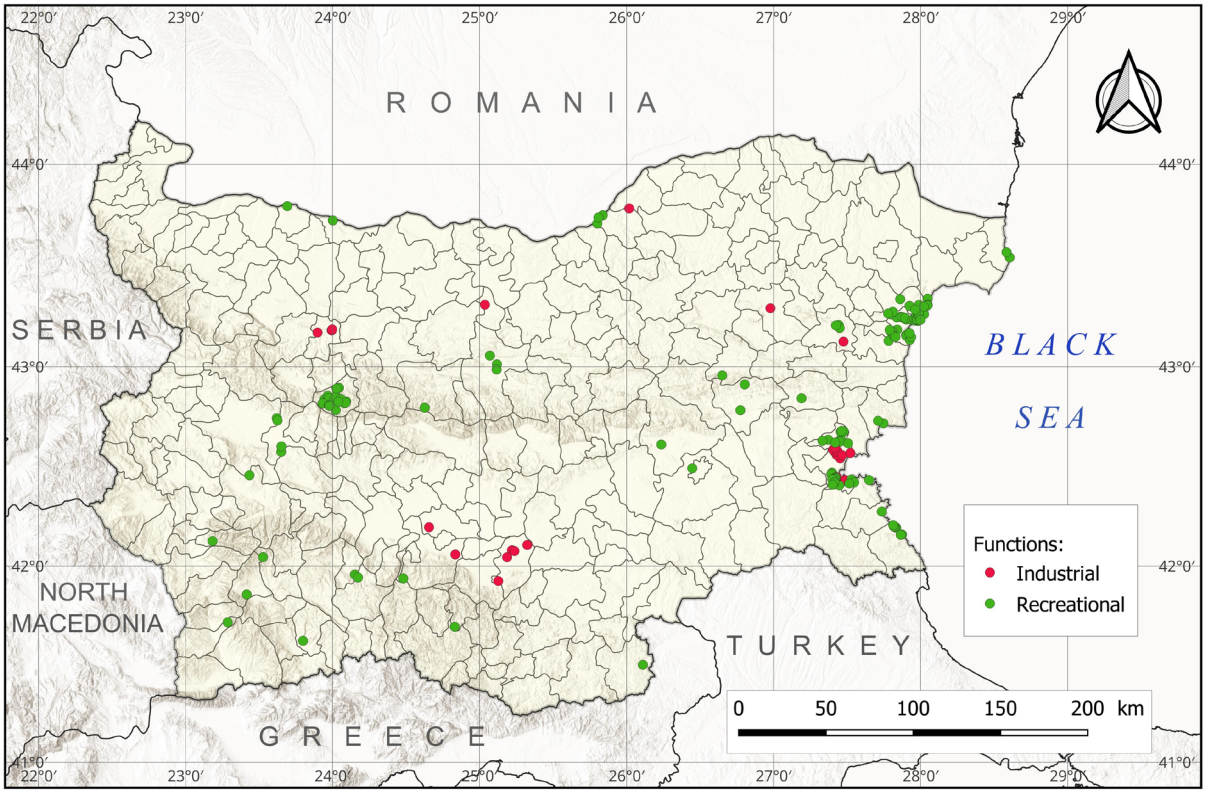

Figure 2. First classification level of SFLIs.

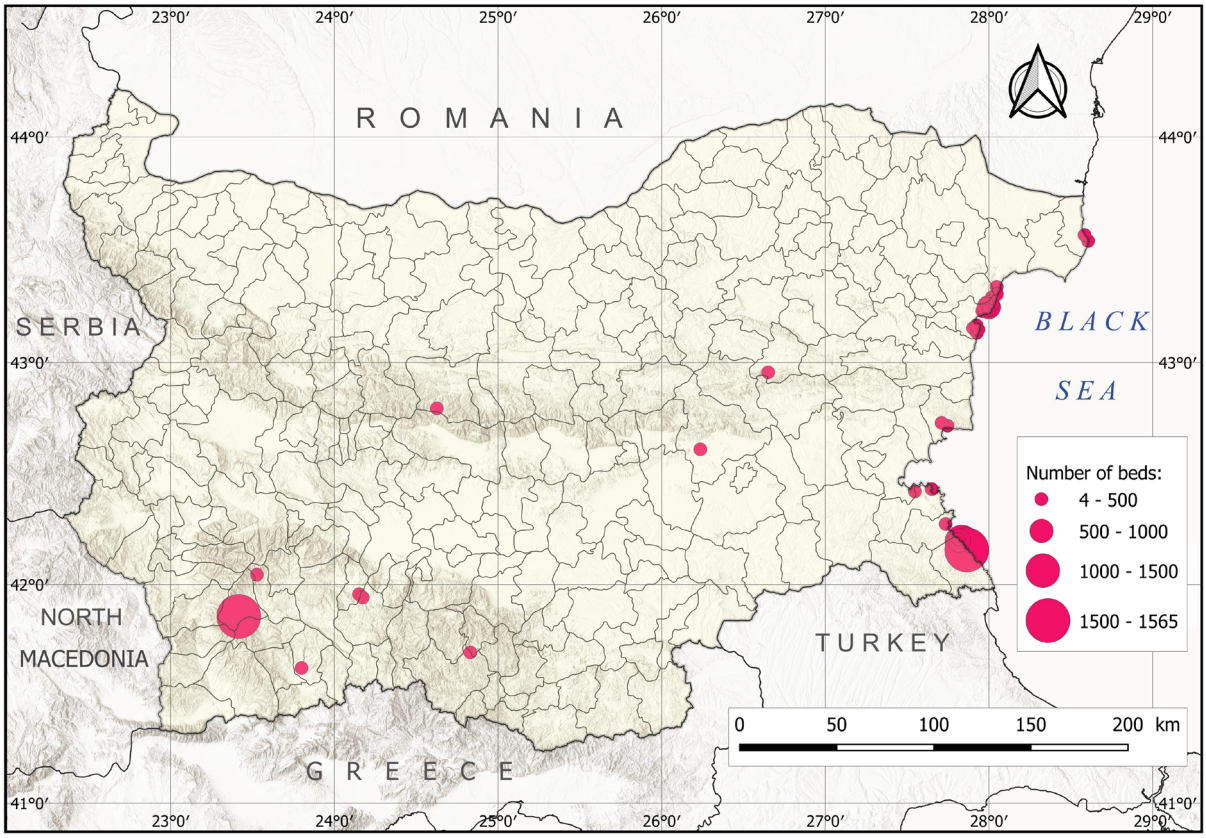

Figure 3. Presence of commercial accommodation in SFLIs.

3. Results

The applied classifications of SFLIs allow for six types to be synthesized (Table 1). The types of SFLIs are cartographically represented in Fig. 4.

3.1. First group

Settlement formations of the first group—villa areas without tourist resources and accommodation facilities are the most. Seventy-six settlement formations, which account for 57% of all SFLIs with recreational functions, come here. In terms of recreation, they are of importance only to the owners of the villa properties and their guests.

A significant part—22 of them—are located in the territory of Burgas municipality. Some of the settlement formations are situated far from the city and are villa areas near villages—Suhoto Dere and Kaptazha near the village of Izvorishte, Prastnitsata, Bryastite and Lozyata near the village of Bryastovets, Bataka and Varbitsata near the village of Tvarditsa, etc.

Eighteen settlement formations located on the territory of the municipality of Varna also belong here—Pripek, Orehcheto, Chereshova Gradina, Krushova Gradina, etc. The number of settlement formations of this type in Etropole municipality is relatively high—11 in total. Some of them are not villa areas, which have emerged on empty land, but inherit old-time neighbourhoods—Raykyovets, Gorunaka, Dolni Dol (former neighbourhood of Laga village), etc. Aksakovo municipality also stands out among the municipalities with a total of 7 settlement formations of this type—Yancheva Polyana, Terasite, Dobrogledski Lozya, Trite Vodenitsi, Studen Kladenets. The municipalities of Sevlievo and Provadia with 3 settlement formations in this group can also be noted.

In terms of genesis, these are mostly suburban villa areas, including private vineyards and orchards. There may be or have been a business site in the vicinity—pheasantry, fish ponds and the like. In some cases, settlement formations are the successors of already obliterated neighbourhoods and huts (e.g. in the municipality of Etropole), with the owners keeping up their properties and using them as secondary homes.

Table 1. Types of SFLIs.

SFLIs with resort uses	Villa areas	1. Suburban villa areas without a tourist resource beyond the local pull and without accommodation;
		2. Villa areas the development of which is directly related to the utilization of a tourist attraction, but without accommodation facilities;
		3. Villa areas without a defining tourist resource, having accommodation facilities that expand the tourist base of the town;
		4. Villa areas with accommodation facilities developed around a natural or anthropogenic tourist attraction;
	Resort areas	5. Resort areas with accommodation facilities;
		6. Resort areas without functioning accommodation facilities.

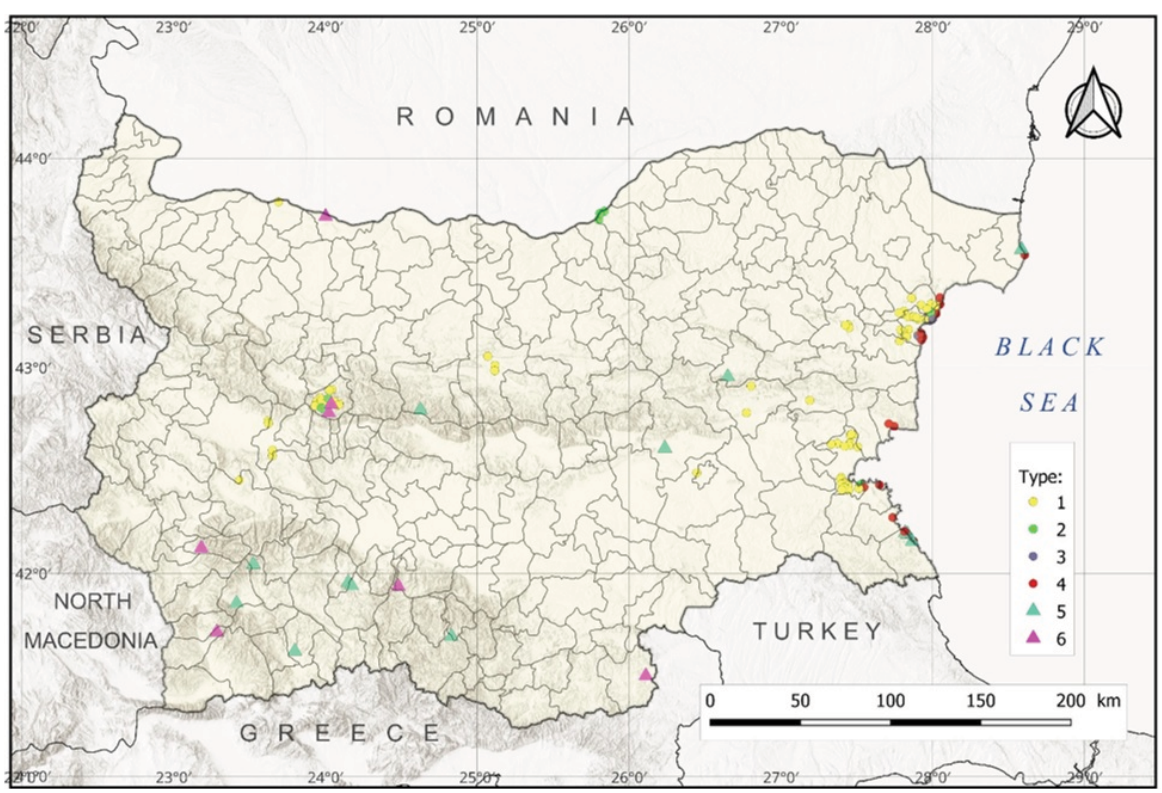

Figure 4. Classification of settlement formations of local importance. Villa areas type: 1 – no tourist resources, no accommodation facilities; 2 – tourist resources available, no accommodation facilities; 3 – no tourist resources, accommodation facilities available; 4 – tourist resources available, accommodation facilities available; Resort areas type: 5 – accommodation facilities available; 6 – no accommodation facilities.

3.2. Second group

The second differentiated type includes villa areas with no accommodation facilities located close to a tourist resource. Chengene Skele (Gypsy Harbour), a fishing village in the locality of Otmanliy, south of the city of Burgas, holds a special place among the SFLIs of this type. It was recognised as a settlement formation by a decision of the municipal council of Burgas in 2012. Without going further back into the history of the place, it should be noted that the modern stage of development in the locality began in the early 1970s, when, during the expansion of the port of Burgas, small fishing vessels were moved to Chengene Skele, where a pier was built. The fast villa development that followed was accompanied by many administrative obstacles and disputes, and the settlement functionally evolved into an ethnographic complex without accommodation facilities.

Another example is Chernomorska Panorama found in 2000 and thus, one of the settlement formations established relatively early. It is located in the land territory of the village of Kichevo, Aksakovo municipality, and finishes in the north the strip of villa zones parallel to the seashore and the resort complex of Golden Sands. The settlement formation is in the immediate vicinity of the territory of Golden Sands Nature Park. It consists of several hundred built-up land plots. Judging by the developments in the neighbouring villa zones Perchemliyata and Panorama, supply of tourist accommodation is only a matter of time.

3.3. Third group

The third group—villa areas without tourist resources but with accommodation facilities—includes 12 settlement formations in the country. Eleven of them are in the territory of Varna municipality and only one—Lozite, is on the land territory of the village of. Kichevo, Aksakovo municipality. The settlement formation Borovets-South is located south of Varna, while the others are in the north. They are located at a relatively large distance from the sea coast, which excludes the possibility of the sea and beaches being the main impetus for the construction of the tourist base there.

Functionally, settlement formations of this type expand the accommodation base of the big city. They originated as typical suburban villa areas. Such are Perchemliyata, Akchelar, Manastirski Rid, Vayalar, Dobreva Cheshma, etc. It should be noted that the settlement formations Dolna Traka, Traka-Extension and Gorna Traka have practically merged with the urbanized territory of Varna. There are also no clear boundaries between them. Gradually, they are becoming places of permanent habitation.

The accommodation in the settlement formations under review is preferred by individual tourists and tourist groups who wish to avoid the noise and congestion of the big city. Probably, an additional motive is the lower accommodation prices. In terms of accommodation facilities, Manastirski Rid stands out with 17 accommodations and a total of 788 beds in them. Perchemliyata, Dobreva Cheshma and Lozite are polar opposites with only one accommodation place each, and the settlement formation Byalata Cheshma and Dabravata—with two places.

3.4. Fourth group

A total of 16 SFLI are included in the fourth group—villa areas with accommodation facilities, developed around a tourist attraction. Uzundzhata, found in 2000, belongs here (Fig. 5). The northeastern slope of the hill of the same name began to be developed as a villa zone in the 1980s, happily close to Lake Stomoplo, the northern beach of the town of Primorsko and the main road Burgas—Tsarevo. In recent years, the supply of guest houses and villas for rent prevails.

The settlement formations of Priboy and Rakitnika are the type of villa zones with accommodations developed near the seashore of the municipality of Varna. Several holiday stations and campsites are located separately from them, between the beaches of Fichoza and Pasha Dere. Suburban villa recreation in the area is combined with sea tourism in a lightly crowded area less than 10 km from Galata and Asparuhovos neighborhoods. Priboy and Rakitnika are administratively part of Asparuhovo neighbourhood of the city of Varna. They boast advanced development and are inhabited all year round.

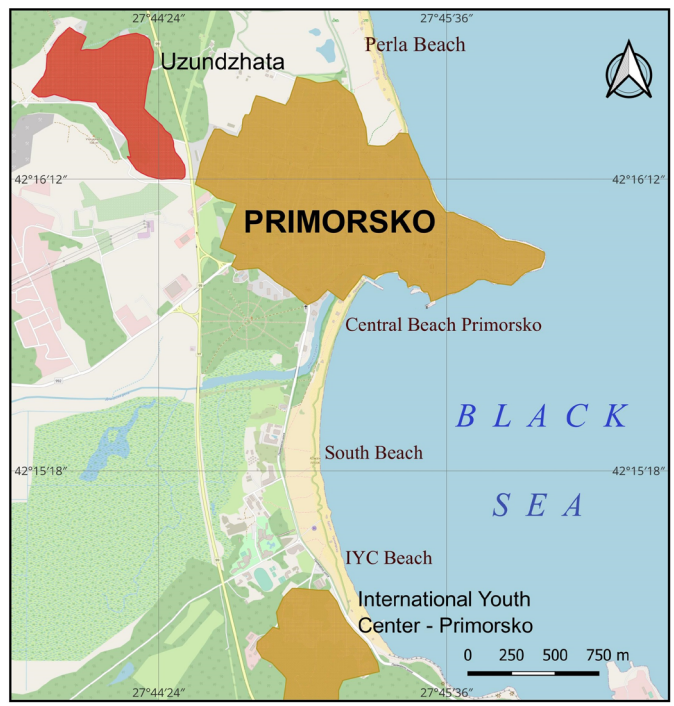

Figure 5. Case study map: SFLI Uzundzhata near the town of Primorsko, Burgas Province.

3.5. Fifth group

The primary reason for the emergence of SFLIs designated as resort areas is to meet resort needs and the availability of a significant tourist resource. We provisionally divide them into two groups—with and without functioning accommodation. The tourism specialization of this type of SFLI is diverse and directly depends on the type of the main tourism resource.

The resort areas with accommodation, as stated above, include 13 SFLIs. For example, the settlement formation of Pirin is the successor of the resort area of Betolovoto, located in the northern foothills of the Pirin Mountain. Today it is a developing mountain resort with a golf course, spa hotel, several four-star hotels and one five-star hotel, as well as guest houses and apartments. Of all the SFLIs, it is the formation with the largest accommodation base—almost 1,600 beds. The diversity in the type of accommodation base suggests a broad tourist interest and a competitive tourist product offering. Tsigov Chark, Semkovo, Varbitsa Resort Complex and Beklemeto Mountain Tourist Complex were similarly founded; they have a similar tourist specialization—mountain tourism. Skiing sports facilities have been built in Semkovo, Tsigov Chark and Beklemeto Mountain Tourist Complex.

SFLIs such as Ognyanovski Mineral Baths and the resort of Slivenski Mineral Baths were formed because of their mineral springs. They are now well-established spa destinations in the country.

For the formation of SFLIs Arapya, Nestinarka, Oasis and Dobrudja Campsite, it is their localization on the Black Sea coast that plays a key role. The main tourist resource is the beach, i.e. the natural resource of the sea combined with sand and a suitable climate. This determines their specialization—sea tourism (recreational and sports). Commercial accommodation is represented by two-, three—and four-star hotels, guest houses and apartments as well as bungalows.

3.6. Sixth group

There are seven resort areas without commercial accommodation facilities, according to the National Tourist Register data for accommodation with valid categorization/registration. The settlement formations of Armira Tourist Complex, Manastirskoto and Chateau Burgozone are depend on a single tourist attraction, respectively a historical-archaeological site, a religious site and a winery. In the settlement formations of Chereshovo, Zhabokrek and Varbite, accommodation facilities have existed over the past decades, which are now depreciated and disused.

4. Discussion

The study of settlement formations became particularly relevant with the adoption of the legal changes in the administrative-territorial structure of the country in 1995, especially in the part regulating territorial units. In one aspect or another, areas outside settlements developed for resort or other economic purposes have been the subject of various previous studies in statistics, urban planning, geography and tourism. What is new here is the subject of the study—the recognised settlement formations of local importance declared in relation to resort needs and in their functional recreational role.

The results confirm that in their formalized form (although limited in scope compared to the actual multitude) SFLIs in their vast majority—over 80%, have been developing as villa and resort areas. In a number of cases they renovate and expand the base of the recreational profiles established in the past decades—suburban recreation, spa, sea and mountain tourism.

The study adds to the knowledge about the origin, place, recreational importance and prospects of SFLI as a unit in the spatial structure of the tourism in Bulgaria.

An advantage of the adopted approach is the geographical detail, which manifests itself in the expert analysis of both the data from the registers, mapping materials and documentation, and the interdependencies with urban development, tourist specialization, etc. At the same time, we acknowledge the limitations arising from the impossibility of making more comprehensive field observations and establishing direct contact with the municipal authorities involved in the process. These limitations predetermine possible inaccuracies in determining the composition of settlement formations, the nature of development and exploitation, and hence, in their functional typology.

Future studies in this direction look very promising. They would provide an opportunity to complement and compare the more general findings, and also make a number of refinements on the accommodation base, the intensity of recreational functions, the links with tourist attractions, the specialization of tourist areas, etc. For the time being, the questions of recreational potential, evaluation of tourist resources, transformations in the tourist base, and, generally, of SFLIs—the future of this category of territorial units in the development of the tourism in Bulgaria – do not have a convincing answer in relation to the individual settlement formations.

We consider that the topic discussing the formation and development of settlement formations of local importance should be subject of an independent scientific research. This also regards the perspectives these specific settlement structures have. Such future studies could have not only theoretical, but also practical-applied significance, because they will allow scientifically substantiated prognoses to be made and clear recommendations to local authorities to be formulated. The present research could be a starting point for such future studies. Special attention should be paid to those settlement formations, whose areas have practically merged with the built-up area of the nearby city and function as its quarters with permanent population. In the focus could be such settlement formations of local importance, which are in the immediate vicinity of large protected areas, such as the settlement formations Pirin and Varbite. Of interest could be the relationship between the formation of such SFLIs and the provision of cultural ecosystem services since, as Nikolova (2022) notes, "the greater share of the costs for access to the benefits from RRES (recreation-related cultural ecosystem services) provided within the park are carried out outside its boundaries, in the adjacent resorts with their tourism services as accommodation, food, entertainments and transport facilities". It is reasonable to raise a scientific discussion about the names of the settlement formations of local importance (and not only theirs), which seem strange and inadequate compared to the traditionally established toponymy in the country and can lead to confusion and ambiguities.

5. Conclusion

This study is a first attempt at SFLI typology. It is based on their recreational functions, taking into account the availability of tourist resources and accommodation facilities. No doubt other approaches and criteria can be proposed for a scientifically based classification and typology.

It should be noted that a snapshot of the current state of the settlement formations in Bulgaria is presented here. They are perceived as a dynamic category of settlement structures that are undergoing rapid development in terms of their place in the administrative-territorial structure of the country and their economic functions. It is likely that some of the villa areas which are close to the seashore will gradually acquire their tourist accommodation base. Although some of the settlement formations have not found their material expression yet, only remaining an idea or intention, they are codified in the relevant municipal documents. Among them are Plana Hills, some of the announced business parks, etc. On the other hand, clearly formed and well-structured settlement structures (e.g. some villa areas) have not acquired the status of settlement formations. It becomes clear that the announcement of SFLIs corresponds not only and not so much to the real situation, but rather to the views, ambitions and initiative of the respective municipal councils. In this sense, some of them were born out of interests of local political and corporate leaders. However, we believe that the genesis and development of settlement formations in Bulgaria must be the subject of a special study.

References

Assenova M (2013) Life Cycle of Tsarevo Municipality as a Tourist Destination. Annual of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", Faculty of Geology and Geography, Book 2 – Geography 105: 367–379. (in Bulgarian) https://www.uni-sofia.bg/docs/ggf/AnnSU_105_2_Geography_2013.pdf

Bachvarov M (1986) Potential for Tourism of the Sozopol administration (unit). Journal of the Bulgarian Geographical Society 34: 127–135. https://geography.bg/publication/magazines/item/1214-vol34-1986-11 (in Bulgarian)

Baiocchi G, Creutzig F, Minx J, Pichler PP (2015) A spatial typology of human settlements and their CO2 emissions in England. Global Environmental Change: Human and Policy Dimensions 34: 13–21. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2015.06.001

Brambarov I (1990) Recreation Areas in Bulgaria. Centre of Tourist Propaganda and Advertising, Sofia. (in Bulgarian)

Brambarov I, Robev R (1994) Short-term Recreation. Galik, Sofia. (in Bulgarian)

Brey ET (2011) A Taxonomy for Resorts. Cornell Hospitality Quarterly 52(3): 283–290. https://doi.org/10.1177/1938965510397537

Bucekova I, Erbert L, Klobucnik M (2019) Classification of the ski resorts in Slovakia. Geograficky Casopis-Geographical Journal 71(4): 363–382. https://doi.org/10.31577/geogrcas.2019.71.4.19

Clark JK, McChesney R, Munroe DK, Irwin EG (2009) Spatial characteristics of exurban settlement pattern in the United States. Landscape and Urban Planning 90(3–4): 178–188. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landurbplan.2008.11.002

Dogramadjieva E (2002) Attitudes Towards Sustainable Development and Tourism Planning in the Municipalities of Teteven, Troyan and Apriltsi. In: Collected Reports from Anniversary Scientific Conference "Tourism in the 21st Century", 29-30 November 2002. Sofia, 62–67. (in Bulgarian) https://www.researchgate.net/publication/369335181_Otnosenie_km_ustojcivoto_razvitie_i_planiraneto_na_turizma_v_obsinite_Teteven_Troan_i_Aprilci

Dogramadjieva E, Asenova M, Marinov V, Vodenska M, Puneva M (2013) A Model for the Study of Tourism Development and Management at the Local Level: a comparative analysis of the villages of Dolen, Leshten and Kovachevitsa. Annual of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", Faculty of Geology and Geography, Book 2 – Geography 105: 317–350. (in Bulgarian) https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323704242_MODEL_ZA_PROUCVANE_NA_TURISTICESKOTO_RAZVITIE_I_UPRAVLENIETO_NA_TURIZMA_NA_MESTNO_NIVO_SRAVNITELEN_ANALIZ_NA_SELATA_DOLEN_LESEN_I_KOVACEVICA

Drobnjakovic M (2019) Methodology of typological classification in the study of rural settlements in Serbia. Journal of the Geographical Institute "Jovan Cvijić" SASA 69(2): 157–173. https://doi.org/10.2298/IJGI1902157D

Dubovyk O, Sliuzas R, Flacke J (2011) Spatio-temporal modelling of informal settlement development in Sancaktepe district, Istanbul, Turkey. ISPRS Journal of Photogrammetry and Remote Sensing 66(2): 235–246. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.isprsjprs.2010.10.002

Evrev P (1987) Mountain Resorts. Structure and Planning. State Publishing House "Tehnika", Sofia, 190 pp. (in Bulgarian)

Evrev P (1999) Territorial and Spatial Planning of Recreation and Tourism. University Press "St. Kliment Ohridski", Sofia, 206 pp. (in Bulgarian)

Jochem WC, Leasure DR, Pannell O, Chamberlain HR, Jones P, Tatem AJ (2021) Classifying settlement types from multi-scale spatial patterns of building footprints. Environment and Planning B: Urban Analytics and City Science 48(5): 1161–1179. https://doi.org/10.1177/2399808320921208

Marinov V, Chubrieva G (1990) Features, factors and problems of the spatial distribution of the leisure home recreation in Bulgaria. Journal of the Bulgarian Geographical Society 38: 95–105. https://geography.bg/publication/magazines/item/1239-vol38-1990-11 (in Bulgarian)

Marinov V (1992) Second Homes for Recreation in Bulgaria. Annual of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", Faculty of Geology and Geography, Book 2 – Geography 80: 148–166. (in Bulgarian)

Marinov V (1994) Influence of Second Homes on the Development and Territorial Organization of Recreation and Tourism (following the example of Sofia and its short-term recreation area). Annual of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", Faculty of Geology and Geography, Book 2 – Geography 85: 389–409. (in Bulgarian)

Marinov V, Petrova K (1999) A Study of Users and Use of Second Homes for Recreation. Annual of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", Faculty of Geology and Geography, Book 2 – Geography 89: 351–373. (in Bulgarian)

Nepal SK (2007) Tourism and rural settlements Nepal's Annapurna region. Annals of Tourism Research 34 (4): 855–875. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2007.03.012

Nikolova V (2013) Analysis of Tourist Supply and Tourist Demand in the Municipalities of Samokov, Dolna Banya and Sapareva Banya. Annual of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", Faculty of Geology and Geography, Book 2 – Geography 105: 381–398. (in Bulgarian) https://www.uni-sofia.bg/docs/ggf/AnnSU_105_2_Geography_2013.pdf

Nikolova M (2022) Valuation of recreation-related cultural ecosystem services provided by Pirin National Park, Bulgaria. Journal of the Bulgarian Geographical Society 47: 61–72. https://doi.org/10.3897/jbgs.e97901

Ntassiou K (2020) Settlements and mobility: mapping settlements with seasonal migrations in the West Macedonia area of Greece, early twentieth century. GeoJournal 85: 1429–1456. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10708-019-10031-3

Sulc I, Opacic VT (2015) Typology of Tourist resorts in Croatia: The Case of South Dalmatia. Mitteilungen der Österreichischen Geographischen Gesellschaft 157: 229–252. https://www.austriaca.at/0xc1aa5576%200x0032bbc1.pdf

Vodenska M, Nikolova V (2016) Dynamics of Tourist Demand and Tourist Supply in Razlog Municipality. Annual of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", Faculty of Geology and Geography, Book 2 – Geography 108: 327–352. (in Bulgarian) https://scholar.google.com/citations?view_op=view_citation&hl=bg&user=CATgUtMAAAAJ&citation_for_view=CATgUtMAAAAJ:UeHWp8X0CEIC

Vodenska M, Popova N, Aleksova D, Dogramadjieva E (2021) Monitoring and Evaluation of Sustainable Tourism Development in the National Resorts of Bulgaria — part one. International Business School, Botevgrad, 170 pp. (in Bulgarian) https://www.researchgate.net/publication/374404354_Monitoring_i_ocenka_na_ustojcivoto_razvitie_na_turizma_v_nacionalnite_kurorti_v_Blgaria_-_prva_cast

Act of administrative and territorial structure of the republic of Bulgaria (in Bulgarian) https://lex.bg/laws/ldoc/2133622784 (accessed 11.06.2023)

BGMountains 2023 https://map.bgmountains.org/#map=8/2810000/5250000/0 (accessed 03.07.2023)

CAIS 2023 – CAIS – Portal for electronic administrative services – Geodesy, cartography and cadastre agency https://kais.cadastre.bg/bg/Map (accessed 03.07.2023)

Google Maps 2023 www.google.com/maps/ (accessed 03.07.2023)

MC Aksakovo 2023 – Municipal council Aksakovo https://aksakovo.bg/section-4099-content.html (accessed 29.07.2023)

MC Burgas 2023 – Municipal council Burgas https://burgascouncil.org/index.php/content/1-1 (accessed 18.07.2023)
MC Etropole 2023 – Municipal council Etropole http://etropole.bg/obs (accessed 22.07.2023)
MC Varna 2023 – Municipal council Varna https://varnacouncil.bg/arhiv/ (accessed 21.07.2023)
MW 2023 – Mineral water/registers, Ministry of environment and water https://www.moew.government.bg/bg/vodi/registri/mineralni-vodi/ (accessed 10.09.2023)
NICIH 2023 – National institute of cultural immovable heritage http://ninkn.bg/# (accessed 02.09.2023)
NRPP 2023 – National register of populated places, National statistical institute, current administrative-territorial structure https://www.nsi.bg/nrnm/ekatte/territorial-formations?page=9 (accessed 15.06.2023)
NTR 2023 – National tourist register https://ntr.tourism.government.bg/CategoryzationAll.nsf/mn.xs (accessed 6.08.2023)
RPTPZB 2023 – Register of protected territories and protected zones in Bulgaria, Executive Environment Agency (ExEA) https://eea.government.bg/zpo/bg (accessed 06.09.2023)
RTA 2023 – Register of tourist attractions http://rta.tourism.government.bg/TARegister.aspx (accessed 01.09.2023)
Spatial development act (in Bulgarian) https://lex.bg/laws/ldoc/2135163904 (accessed 11.06.2023)

Author contributions (CRediT roles)

Conceptualization – RY; Data curation – GP, MN; Formal analysis – RY, GP, MN; Investigation – RY, GP, MN; Methodology – RY, GP; Resources – GP, MN, RY; Visualization – GP, MN, RY; Writing – original draft – RY, GP, MN; Writing – review & editing – RY, GP, MN.

Conflict of interest

The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

ORCID

https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7115-4726 - M. Nekova
https://orcid.org/0009-0007-3560-5201 - G. Petrov
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7573-109X - R. Yankov