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GIS based assessment of landscape in CEE – The evaluation of natural givens for alternative tourism and other development purposes

Tourism based on natural givens is often chosen as a development perspective in peripheral rural regions that lost their one-time good position. Alternative tourism can be a compromise between development activity and the protection of natural and cultural landscape. The benefits and impacts of ecotourism are well known. The potential benefits are generation of financial resources, appearing of new jobs and promotion of environmental learning for local level (for protected area) and for macroeconomic level as well. Negative impacts are environmental degradation, economic inequality and instability, negative socio-economic and cultural changes within local community.

Supporting the decision making and development planning process an evaluation methodology was developed. The assessment identifies the areas which have the highest potential in complex physical geography. The presented method and analysis are adequate to assess the givens of a certain region and delimitate thematic zones from the point of view of tourism development serving the decision making at the level of local and regional spatial strategic planning/regional development as well.

The evaluation was elaborated in different countries of CEE. The purpose was twofold. Firstly we would have liked to evaluate the different regions in different CEE countries from the perspective of alternative tourism potentials. On the other hand, we had also taken into consideration different aspects of development and evaluated the regions of CEE from the view-point of eco-system services.

The result of the two types of evaluation approaches show us (and to decision makers) those areas that have the highest potentials in natural givens/eco-system services for different environmental-friendly development, such as alternative tourism development.