

EVALUATION OF DEVELOPMENT CONCEPTS OF SELECTED MUNICIPALITIES IN SLOVAKIA FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Regina Mišovičová, Zuzana Pucherová, Adam Čaplák

*Department of Ecology and Environmentalistics, Faculty of Natural Sciences and Informatics,
Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, Tr. A. Hlinku 1, 949 01 Nitra, Slovakia*

<https://doi.org/10.11118/978-80-7701-025-2/0103>

Abstract

The strategic document Economic and Social Development Program (ESDP) has become an integral part of municipalities at present, serving as a basic tool for planning and implementing activities contributing to improving the quality of life and sustainable development. According to the Act of the National Council of the Slovak Republic No. 539/2008 Coll. on the Support of Regional Development, the existence of a ESDP is a condition for obtaining resources from the state budget and additional resources for municipal development projects. This is also the basic motivation for municipalities to prepare this kind of document. For this reason, we focused on evaluating development programs in 3 selected municipalities – Podhájska, Ždiar and Liptovský Ján, oriented to tourism activities. We evaluated their strategic documents from the perspective of sustainable development and planned activities aimed at the development of sustainable forms of tourism. We used a modified STEEPLED analysis, in which we selected the following factors: socio-cultural (S) – population growth and demography; technological (T) – research and development; economic (E) – living standards, inflation, purchasing power of the population; environmental (E) – the state of environmental components; political (P) – political and legislative environment. The STEEP analysis allows us to compare the development plans of selected municipalities by assessing external factors that influence them, but in a poorly controlled manner.

Key words: strategic document, development, STEEP analysis, sustainability, tourism

Introduction

Currently, the strategic document Economic and Social Development Program (ESDP) has become an integral part of municipalities, serving as a basic tool for planning and implementing activities contributing to improving the quality of life of residents and sustainable development by defining long-term goals and priorities for municipal development. According to Act of the National Council of the Slovak Republic No. 539/2008 Coll. on the Support of Regional Development, as amended, the existence of a ESDP is a condition for obtaining resources from the state budget and additional resources for municipal development projects. The benefits of ESDP can be an improvement in the quality of life of residents, sustainable development of the municipality, increased competitiveness, efficient use of public resources, and increased transparency and public participation (Zamkovský et al., 2004). For this reason, we focused on the evaluation of PHSR in 3 selected rural municipalities – Podhájska, Ždiar and Liptovský Ján, tourism-oriented. The penetration of sustainable principles into the tourism industry has resulted in the vision of so-called sustainable (ST) or responsible tourism. ST represents a new manager approach where are all needs (economic, social, cultural and environmental) met while maintaining cultural integrity, ecological processes, social and biological diversity (Dubská, 2010). It is also synonymous with environmentally friendly tourism or ecotourism. Rural tourism is probably its most developed form (Závodná, 2015). The essence of rural tourism development is the return of man to nature and the shift from mass forms of tourism to its individual forms. It includes activities related to agrotourism and eco-agrotourism, forest tourism, ecotourism and gastrotourism.

The aim of the article is to evaluate the strategic documents of municipalities from the perspective of sustainable development and planned activities aimed at the development of the municipality from the perspective of sustainable forms of tourism, also to evaluate model municipalities using STEEP analysis, which allows comparing the development plans of selected municipalities by evaluating external factors that influence and limit their implementation.

Materials and methods

The selected municipalities are rural and focused on tourism. The municipality of Liptovský Ján in northern Slovakia in the foothills of the Low Tatras (Žilina self-governing region, Liptovský Mikuláš district) belongs to the Liptov tourism region and offers year-round tourism. As of January 1, 2024, it has 1,033 inhabitants and an area of 6,777 ha (<https://www.e-obce.sk/obec/liptovskyyjan/liptovsky->

[jan.html](https://www.e-obce.sk/obec/zdiar/zdiar.html)). The distinctive highland municipality of Ždiar, with its typical traditions, customs, folklore and culture in the northeastern part of Slovakia (Prešov Self-Governing Region, Poprad District), belongs to the Tatra tourism region. As of January 1, 2024, it has 1,368 inhabitants and an area of 2,733 ha (<https://www.e-obce.sk/obec/zdiar/zdiar.html>). The municipality of Podhájska in southern Slovakia with thermal waters (Nitra Self-Governing Region, Nové Zámky District) belongs to the Nitra tourism region and offers year-round tourism. As of January 1, 2024, it has 1,063 inhabitants and an area of 1,112 ha (<https://www.e-obce.sk/obec/podhajska/podhajska.html>).

All municipalities have developed their own strategic development documents (ESDP) with standardized content divided into three basic parts: analytical, strategic, and implementation. Their goal is to formulate an idea of the direction of the municipality that expresses the economic and social interests of its citizens and is at the same time in line with the adopted concepts of the state, higher territorial unit, the development strategy of the relevant microregion, or departmental strategies, interests in environmental protection, cultural heritage, etc. (Zamkovský et al., 2004). It is an open document with the possibility of additions and updates according to pre-established rules.

In model municipalities, we focused on evaluating planned development activities from the perspective of sustainable development and sustainable forms of tourism. Suitable activities for the sustainable development of rural settlements are listed in Tab. 1. In the ESDP in the Strategic and Programmatic Part, we identified activities aimed at tourism development and selected those that can be considered as its sustainable forms applicable in rural municipalities (Tab. 2). Development activities were assessed as supporting, threatening or with neutral impact on sustainable tourism. For rural tourism activities and forms (Tab. 3), their occurrence (+) or absence (-) was marked in the table. The model municipalities were assessed using a modified STEEP method, which is considered a multidimensional and multifaceted analytical tool that helps identify strengths (Georgioudou et al. 2019). It allows to compare development plans of selected municipalities by evaluating specific macro-environmental external factors that may affect a product, brand, business or place (PEASTLEAnalysis, 2024) and at the same time influence and limit their implementation. According to Georgioudou et al. (2019), sociocultural (S) factors include population growth and demography, technological (T) factors include research and development, economic (E) factors relate to living standards, inflation, purchasing power and wages, environmental (E) factors relate to the state of environmental components, political (P) factors include sanctions, political and legislative environment. These factors were assigned an importance on a scale of low – medium – high (Tab. 4).

Results

The model villages are similar in terms of the occurrence of rural tourism activities and their year-round implementation (Tab. 1). All of them lack agrotourism, beekeeping, and in the foothill villages of northern Slovakia, walks in vineyards.

Tab. 1: Activities of rural tourism in model municipalities

<i>Activities of rural tourism</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>C</i>
Rural hiking	+	+	+
Bicycle tourism	+	+	+
Horse riding, carriage transport	+	+	-
Hunting	+	+	+
Fishing	-	-	+
Cruising on rivers, wading in streams and torrents	+	+	-
Crafts, customs, folklore – learning about rural life and participating in events and fairs	+	+	+
Gastrotourism, visiting local markets and fairs	+	+	+
Outdoor picnics	+	+	+
Collecting wild berries, mushrooms and medicinal herbs	+	+	+
Agrotourism – on the farm – active rest, participation in typical farm work	-	-	-
Walk in the vineyards and wine tasting	-	-	+
Eco-agrotourism – on eco-farms, farms with alternative agriculture	-	-	-
Apiculture	-	-	-
Cottagers – living and working in cottages, log cabins	+	+	+
Relaxation in natural thermal and mineral waters	+	-	+
Getting to know folk architecture, historical monuments (UNESCO)	+	+	+
Visiting sacred objects	+	+	+
Share of activities in municipalities	72%	67%	78%

Municipalities: A – Liptovský Ján B – Ždiar C – Podhájska

The municipality of Liptovský Ján has a development program within the framework of a joint strategic document with 25 municipalities belonging to the Horný Liptov LAG (Local Action Group) up to 2030 (Herichová et al., 2023). The municipality's effort is to strengthen and increase activities towards the tourism development, which can lead to its mass form and discomfort for residents. Of the planned activities, the construction of new accommodation facilities and the renovation and development of spas can be considered as threatening in relation to sustainable tourism (Tab. 2). The revitalization of the mineral spring area has the potential to threaten sustainable use due to mass attendance throughout the year, especially in the summer.

Tab. 2: Development activities focused on Tourism in municipalities

Planned Projects aimed on Tourism	Implementat ion Period	Relationship to sustainable tourism
Liptovský Ján Municipality		
Building cycle paths	2023– 2030	Support
Reconstruction of the TJ Štart building – (sports and cultural events, accommodation, restaurant and other services)		Support
Improving accommodation capacities and services within tourism towards a higher standard		Neutral impact
Construction of new accommodation facilities		Threat
Renewal and development of the spa tradition on a new basis		Threat
Revitalization of the Teplica and Kaďa mineral spring area (valid building permits)		Threat
Operation of built playgrounds – children's (3), football, multifunctional		Neutral impact
Installation of information boards		Neutral impact
Operation of the Information Center, maintenance of the position of municipal photographer		Neutral impact
Coordinated provision of information at hotels and guesthouse receptions		Support
Ždiar Municipality		
Building information boards	2023– 2030	Support
Repair of hiking and cycling trail markings		Support
Revitalization and completion of cross-country ski trails		Support
Construction of a tourist lookout tower		Threat
Making educational trails accessible (Tokáreň + Ridge to Strednica)		Support
Establishment of a municipal marketplace (point of sale)		Support
Construction of a cycle path between Ždiar and Spišská Belá		Support
Establishment of additional infrastructure – bicycle racks, parking lots, electric chargers		Support
Construction/reconstruction of hiking trails and cycle paths		Support
Construction of bus stops		Support
Podhájska Municipality		
Purchase of multifunctional equipment	2021	Neutral impact
Bus stop	2022	Support
Park irrigation system	2022	Support
Children's playground in the park	2022	Support
Park benches	2022	Support
Construction of the park wall	2022	Neutral impact
Construction of sidewalk, reconstruction of sidewalks	2022– 2024	Support
Completion of the cycling infrastructure	2025	Support

Processed by Herichová et al. (2023); Benes et al. (2022); Oremusová, Kramáreková (2021)

Municipality of Ždiar has an updated ESDP for 2023–2030 (Benes et al., 2022). Of the planned activities, only the construction of a tourist lookout tower can be considered as threatening sustainable

development, which is unnecessary given the surroundings of the village and supports mass tourism (Tab. 2). The municipality of Podhájska (Microregion Termál) has a developed ESDP until 2030 (Oremusová, Kramáreková, 2021) and focuses on recreational and spa tourism, especially in the summer months. All development activities focused on tourism can be considered as supporting sustainable tourism, or with a neutral impact (Tab. 2).

The evaluation rural tourism forms shows (Tab. 3) that all forms are represented in the municipalities except for farm (agrotourism) and eco-agrotourism. In the municipality of Podhájska, hipotourism is absent.

Tab. 3: Occurrence of rural tourism forms in model municipalities

Form of Rural Tourism	A	B	C
green (low-capacity accommodation in the region, rural tourism)	+	+	+
ecological (nature, protected areas)	+	+	+
farm (agrotourism)	-	-	-
eco-agrotourism (farms with alternative agriculture)	-	-	-
gourmet and gastronomic	+	+	+
bicycle hiking	+	+	+
hippo tourism	+	+	-
Scandinavian (accommodation rental without additional services)	+	+	+
second residence in the countryside (cottage)	+	+	+
cultural (learning about history, culture, traditions, customs)	+	+	+

Source: Jarábková et al. 2021; municipalities: A – Liptovský Ján B – Ždiar C – Podhájska

STEEP analysis of model municipalities confirmed their similarity in terms of the occurrence of external factors influencing their development. The most serious obstacles to the municipalities development clearly include demographic change and population aging (social factors), unfavourable business environment and economic crisis (economic factors), unpreparedness of municipalities and residents for the informatization of society and technological backwardness (technical factors), accumulation of environmental problems and low awareness of residents towards nature protection (ecological factors), poor readiness to draw on EU funds and the transfer of competences to municipalities (political factors) (Tab. 4).

Tab. 4: Evaluation of model municipalities by STEEP analysis

Factors and its importance		Factors and its importance		Factors and its importance		Factors and its importance		Factors and its importance	
Social		Technical		Economic		Ecological		Political	
Demographic changes (population aging)	High	High pace of technological innovation	High	Economic crisis	High	Accumulation of environmental problems	High	Political decisions at national and international level	Medium
Insufficient social infrastructure	Medium	Computerization of society	Medium	Low quality of the business environment in Slovakia	High	Insufficient flood protection measures	Medium	Administrative readiness to draw on EU funds	High
Changes in the lifestyle of residents	Medium	Insufficient technological infrastructure	High	Limited spending on basic household needs	High	Depletion of thermal and mineral water	High	Level of citizen participation in policy making and political decisions	High
Outflow of the young population from village	High	Incomplete sewer system	High	Reduced revenues to the municipal budget	High	The threat of climate change and its consequences	High	Legislative restrictions	Medium
Low housing support	High			Lack of funding for the development of villages	High	Energy crisis	High	Transfer of competences to local governments	High

				New job opportunities in the tourism sector	High	Unpredictable ecological disasters and threats	High		
				Traffic congestion in the parking area	Medium	Low awareness among residents about nature and landscape protection	High		

Processed by Herichová et al. (2023); Benes et al. (2022); Oremusová, Kramáreková (2021)

Discussion and conclusion

The evaluation of municipalities from the perspective of tourism development and its sustainable forms showed that in the planned period, municipalities will focus on attracting tourists, building accommodation facilities, additional services, and completing infrastructure. In the municipalities of Ždiar and Podhájska, these activities are supportive and neutral in relation to sustainable tourism. Activities that can be considered threatening sustainable tourism are also planned in the village of Liptovský Ján – proven by its vision for 2030, in which the municipality wants to overtake Demänovská Valley in terms of visitor numbers – the largest and most popular tourist destination in Slovakia after the High Tatras Mts. They also state in their program documents that the main reasons for their insufficient development (and therefore also of rural tourism) are the trend of population aging and the overall population decline. Municipalities also struggle with a lack of financial resources for development, a small level of support from the state, or the transfer of state competences to municipalities without financial coverage. This also includes insufficient infrastructure and support from local governments and the region. Therefore, their development activities are oriented towards more mass forms of tourism. Model municipalities have all the prerequisites for developing sustainable forms of tourism and applying sustainable principles of tourism development, which are also promoted by the UNWTO in the document Global Code of Ethics for Tourism (Dubská, 2010).

References

- Benes, A. et al. (2022). Economic and Social Development Program of Ždiar Municipality up to 2023-2030 (ESDP Municipality of Ždiar). Agency of Regional Development – Prešov Self-Governing Region, 105 pp.
- Dubská, M. (2010). Cultural Tourism and Principle of Sustainable Development. In: CONTEXTS of Culture and Tourism 1/2010, p. 16–19.
- Georgiodou et al. (2019). A STEEPLED Analysis of the SPI Manifesto. In Systems, Software and Services Process Improvement: 26th European Conference, EuroSPI 2019, Edinburgh, UK, Proceedings 26 (pp. 209-221).
- Herichová, M. et al. (2023). Joint Program for the Development of Municipalities of Horný Liptov Until 2030 – Processor LAG Horný Liptov, p. 268 – 278. [online]. Available: <https://www.hornyliptov.sk/sprado-roku-2030.html>
- Jarábková, J. et al. (2021). Rural Tourism and its Perspectives. Nitra: SUA in Nitra. 216 pp. ISBN 978-80-552-2322-3.
- Oremusová, D., Kramáreková, H. (2021). Economic and Social Development Program of Podhájska municipality 2021-2027 (with a view to 2030). Municipality of Podhájska, 2021. 66 pp. [online]. Available: https://www.obecpodhajska.sk/e_download.php?file=data/uredni_deska/obsah1269_2.pdf&original=PHSR_Podhajska_2021%20-%202027.pdf.
- Peastleanalysis. STEEPLED Analysis: What is it with Examples. [online]. 2024. [cit. 2024-11-13] Available: <https://peastleanalysis.com/steepled-analysis/>.
- Zamkovský et al. (2004). Economic and Social Development Program of municipality (Meaning, structure and basic methodological theses). Banská Bystrica: Merkantil, s. r. o. 20 pp.
- Závodná, L. S. (2015). Sustainable tourism. Olomouc: Palacký University, 123 pp. ISBN 978-80-244-4576-2.
- Act of the National Council of the Slovak Republic No. 539/2008 Coll. on the Support of Regional Development, as amended
<https://www.e-obce.sk/obec/liptovskyjan/liptovsky-jan.html>
<https://www.e-obce.sk/obec/zdiar/zdiar.html>
<https://www.e-obce.sk/obec/podhajska/podhajska.html>

Acknowledgement

This article was supported by project VEGA 1/0578/24 Ecosystem functions and services in spatial planning.

Souhrn

V současné době se strategický dokument Program hospodářského a sociálního rozvoje (PHSR) stal nedílnou součástí obcí a slouží jako základní nástroj pro plánování a realizaci aktivit přispívajících ke zlepšení kvality života obyvatel, udržitelnému rozvoji a zapojení veřejnosti do rozvoje obce. V modelových obcích jsme se zaměřili na hodnocení plánovaných rozvojových aktivit z hlediska udržitelného rozvoje a udržitelných forem cestovního ruchu. V PHSR jsme ve strategické a programové části identifikovali aktivity zaměřené na rozvoj CR a vybrali ty, které lze považovat za jeho udržitelné formy uplatnitelné v obcích venkovského typu. Rozvojové aktivity byly hodnoceny jako podporující, ohrožující udržitelný CR nebo s neutrálním dopadem. U aktivit a forem venkovského cestovního ruchu byla v tabulce zaznamenána jejich přítomnost (+) nebo absence (-). Modelové obce byly hodnoceny modifikovanou metodou STEEP, jejímž cílem bylo posoudit vnější faktory ovlivňující rozvoj obce na škále nízká - střední - vysoká důležitost. Všechny modelové obce mají zpracovaný strategický rozvojový dokument s výhledem do roku 2030. Z hlediska rozvoje CR a jeho udržitelných forem vyplývá, že obce se v plánovacím období zaměří na přilákání turistů, výstavbu ubytovacích zařízení, doplňkových služeb a dobudování infrastruktury. V obcích Ždiar a Podhájska jsou tyto aktivity ve vztahu k udržitelnému cestovnímu ruchu podpůrné a neutrální. V obci Liptovský Ján jsou plánovány i aktivity, které lze považovat za ohrožující udržitelný cestovní ruch. Ve svých programových dokumentech také uvádějí, že hlavními důvody jejich nedostatečného rozvoje (a tedy i venkovského cestovního ruchu) jsou trend stárnutí populace a celkový úbytek obyvatelstva. Obce se také potýkají s nedostatkem finančních prostředků na rozvoj, malou podporou ze strany státu, resp. s přenesením kompetencí státu na obce bez finančního krytí. K tomu přistupuje nedostatečná infrastruktura a podpora ze strany obcí a kraje. Proto se jejich rozvojové aktivity orientují na masovější formy cestovního ruchu. Modelové obce mají všechny předpoklady pro rozvoj udržitelných forem cestovního ruchu a uplatňování zásad udržitelného rozvoje cestovního ruchu, které prosazuje i UNWTO.

Contact:

Ing. Regina Mišovičová, PhD.
E-mail: rmisovicova@ukf.sk

Open Access. This article is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, CC-BY 4.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)

