

GEOGRAPHICAL ASPECT OF THE VALORISATION OF THE TOURISM POTENTIAL OF THE TOWN OF ŠIROKI BRIJEG

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Abstract: The article presents the results of the research into the tourism potential of the town of Široki Brijeg from a geographical point of view. There is a valuable cultural-historical and natural heritage in the area of Široki Brijeg, as well as cultural and sports events that are significant for the tourism valorisation and future tourism development. The town is currently underdeveloped in terms of tourism, as confirmed by research, statistical data on tourist trends, and a survey of the local population. Tourism development should be based on investments and promotion of religious, cultural-historical and natural attractions important for the development of tourism, with significant projects such as Street Food Fest and West Herzegovina Fest. Naturally attractive areas and attractions should be valorised for tourism purposes in accordance with the concept of sustainable development. The area of Široki Brijeg is the most important and the most developed economic centre of the canton and significant outbound tourist centre at the international and regional level. The role of outbound tourism in the region is supported by research on the ownership of second homes and apartments in the beautiful Blidinje Nature Park. Additionally, a survey was conducted on the appealing factors of both international and regional tourist destinations, including the neighbouring Croatian coast and the Blidinje Nature Park, as well as the tourism significance and attractiveness of Mostar, Međugorje (Čitluk), and Ljubuški. The inhabitants of low Herzegovina traditionally went to the mountains – higher parts of Herzegovina - as seasonal herders in the past, and in modern times, going to the mountains - Blidinje Nature Park - is for rest and recreation. The research has shown and confirmed that Široki Brijeg is a significant outbound area, the highest number of registered second homes in the Blidinje Nature Park, near the ski resort and other settlements are owned by the residents of Široki Brijeg, and in the same locations where seasonal cattle farming settlements were located in the past. An economically developed town should take advantage of its excellent geo-traffic position in the vicinity of regional developed tourist destinations, attract a portion of visitors through tourism valorisation and attractions, and find its role in tourist flows and develop sustainable tourism.

Keywords: geographical aspect, tourism potentials, Široki Brijeg, tourism valorisation, Blidinje Nature Park

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INTRODUCTION

The area of Široki Brijeg has a significant cultural and historical heritage, which is attractive in terms of tourism, from prehistoric tumuli, ancient, Roman and Medieval forts, stećak tombstone necropolises, stone bridges, mills, to significant monuments from the 20th century. The Monastery with the Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Franciscan Gallery with its rich treasury represent the most significant and most attractive cultural and historical heritage. The Franciscans had an enormous religious, scientific, cultural, and artistic significance for the development of the Široki Brijeg area from the 19th century onward, and their special contribution to the development of the town is reflected in major infrastructure projects such as the construction of the bridge, the hydroelectric power plant, the grammar school, the student dormitory, etc.

The stećak necropolises, with rich ornamentation, represent a significant, but also endangered cultural and historical heritage: Barevište - stećak Vitko is in the National Museum in Sarajevo, Šarampovo - the most magnificent necropolis in the region, and the necropolis Lipovci, where the famous Kočerin Tablet was discovered, which testifies to the literacy, population, and the long tradition of the Catholic faith in this area. Tobacco Processing and Purchasing Station and bauxite mines bear witness to the culture and labour of past times, as well as to the first employment of female workers and the local population. The natural heritage represents the most significant tourist attraction, but also the most endangered: the area of the Lištica canyon, the Borak natural area with interesting and attractive underground and above-ground attractions, especially around Lončar's mills. In addition to its significant inbound factors, the area of Široki Brijeg, due to its economic development, represents a significant international and regional outbound region. The residents of Široki Brijeg, due to good transport connections, ownership of second homes, and other attractive factors, frequently visit the Croatian coast, Blidinje Nature Park, Mostar, Međugorje, Ljubuški, as well as attractive, more or less depopulated rural settlements in the surrounding area.

OBJECTIVES, HYPOTHESES, AND METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH

The objectives of this paper are to explore and evaluate tourist-attractive sites as potential resources for the development of tourism in Široki Brijeg. It is necessary to explore which tourist destinations, due to their spatial accessibility and attractiveness, are attractive to the residents of Široki Brijeg, and which of the local and regional tourist-attractive factors attract the local population the most.

The main hypothesis H1 – Is Široki Brijeg an inbound or outbound tourist area in terms of tourism?

The methodology used in research and valorisation of the tourism potentials of the town of Široki Brijeg is based on the analysis of the available scientific and professional literature (books and papers), spatial plan, development strategies, and statistical processing of data using Excel and SPSS, and data from the Federal Institute of Statistics. During the field survey, significant tourist locations and potentials necessary for tourism development were identified. The methods used in research are: inductive and deductive methods, synthesis and analysis method, classification method, description method, comparative method and statistical method. Given that the objective of the research was to determine the level of tourism development of the town itself, and the level of attractiveness of regional tourist destinations that are interesting to the residents of Široki Brijeg, the case study method was used to determine the level of attractiveness of the most attractive area of the Blidinje Nature Park. Using a survey method processed in Excel, with graphic illustrations, 155 respondents from the town area were surveyed.

SPATIAL COVERAGE AND MAIN GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF THE RESEARCH AREA

The first permanent settlement was initially called Lise, and it was mentioned in a written document from 1468. The most significant river in the area, the Lištica, also takes its name from this settlement. The first written records of four mills in Lise date back to 1477, when the Turks listed property for taxation purposes. Some authors consider that the first name for Široki Brijeg was Ćemer, however, Ćemer referred only to the narrow area around the Rizvanbegović mill on the Lištica, which was built in 1634 and was known as Ćemer. The beginnings of more intensive settlement and expansion of the inhabited area can be associated with several key infrastructural and socio-historical factors, one of the most significant incentives being the construction of the Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Franciscan monastery in 1846 on Brijeg, which became an important spiritual, cultural and spatial centre.

Construction of the stone bridge based on the Fr. M. Lorenzzoni's design, enabled the connection of the existing permanent settlements with the new sacral and commercial centre on Brijeg.

An additional incentive to the development of the settlement was the construction of road infrastructure during the Austro-Hungarian period, which enabled better connectivity with the surrounding areas, as well as the earlier construction of mills on the Lištica, which played an important economic role in the everyday life of the local population (Dugandžić, 2006; Čolak et al., 2008, Zovko 2006).

Široki Brijeg, with an area of 387.6 km², and the population of 28,929 (2013), population density of 74.63 inhabitants/km², and a developed processing industry, represents the administrative and economic centre of the West Herzegovina Canton (hereinafter referred to as the WHC). Široki Brijeg consists of 34 settlements, including one primary urban settlement (6,149 inhabitants), as well as two secondary urbanised centres (Kočerina and Knešpolje) (Institute for Statistics of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2013; Zovko et al., 2017). The area of Široki Brijeg is a high karst area, in which three natural and geographical units can be distinguished: 1. A fertile valley located between the Čabulja mountain in the north, Trtle in the south and the lower elevations of Varda, Gvozd and Rujan (600-900 m). Four significant karst fields are: Mostarsko blato, Kočerin, Trnsko and Mokarsko Fields 2. North of the fertile valley, at the foot of the Čabulja mountain range, the "Mountain Rural Settlements" are located and 3 In the southern part, towards Međugorje, Čitluk and Ljubuški, there are rural settlements with characteristic Mediterranean features. The rural settlement of Čerigaj is the only spatially distinct settlement, and is situated at the junction of Trtle (690 m) and Magovnik (550 m) (Galić, 2012; Zovko et al., 2017).

The climate of the Široki Brijeg area is predominantly temperate warm and humid classified as type C under the Köppen system, with two main subtypes: 1. Cf – temperate warm and humid, and 2. Cs – Mediterranean climate (Galić, 2012; Putica Džajić, 2024; Zovko et al., 2017). Since the 1930s, the exploitation of bauxite ore began in the Široki Brijeg area, which represents significant progress in the economic structure of the region. Factories "FEAL" and TT Cables d.o.o. Široki Brijeg are the most important manufacturing industries, which employ a large number of workers and their greatest importance at the regional and national level is that they are among the main exporters in Bosnia and Herzegovina³. In the period from 2017 to 2019, thanks to trade and manufacturing activities, Široki Brijeg recorded the highest total revenues, the highest net profit, and the largest number of employees at the cantonal level (Rotim, 1994; Čolak et al., 2008; Jurilj, 2021).

³ Internet, <https://www.jabuka.tv/cetiri-tvrtke-iz-hercegovine-u-top-10-najvecih-bh-izvoznika/> (7 January 2024)

CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL HERITAGE AS AN ATTRACTIVE TOURISM POTENTIAL

Široki Brijeg is abundant in cultural and historical heritage, which holds significant potential for specialised types of tourism. Traces of human presence can be traced from prehistoric tumuli, through ancient, Roman, and medieval fortifications, as well as stećak necropolises, up to sacral buildings, stone bridges, mills, and significant 20th-century monuments such as the Tobacco Processing and Purchasing Station. Numerous archaeological finds testify to the continuous settlement of this region from prehistoric times to the modern era. Tumuli, hillforts and necropolises of stećak tombstones are located in almost all settlements in this region, which testify to the settlement of this region since prehistoric times. Significant tumuli and hillforts are: 1. Large prehistoric tumulus and hillfort on Cigansko Brdo hill, 2. Tumuli above Soldo's houses (along the Oklaji-Dobrkovići road) 3. Tumuli in the area of Radešice, 4. Markanović hillfort, 5. Hillfort (Krstine) and tumulus on Čavarovo (Bošnjakovo) hill, 6. Tumuli on Štražarnica hill, 7. Tumuli at the edge of Mokarsko Field (Dugandžić, 2004; Dugandžić, 2006).

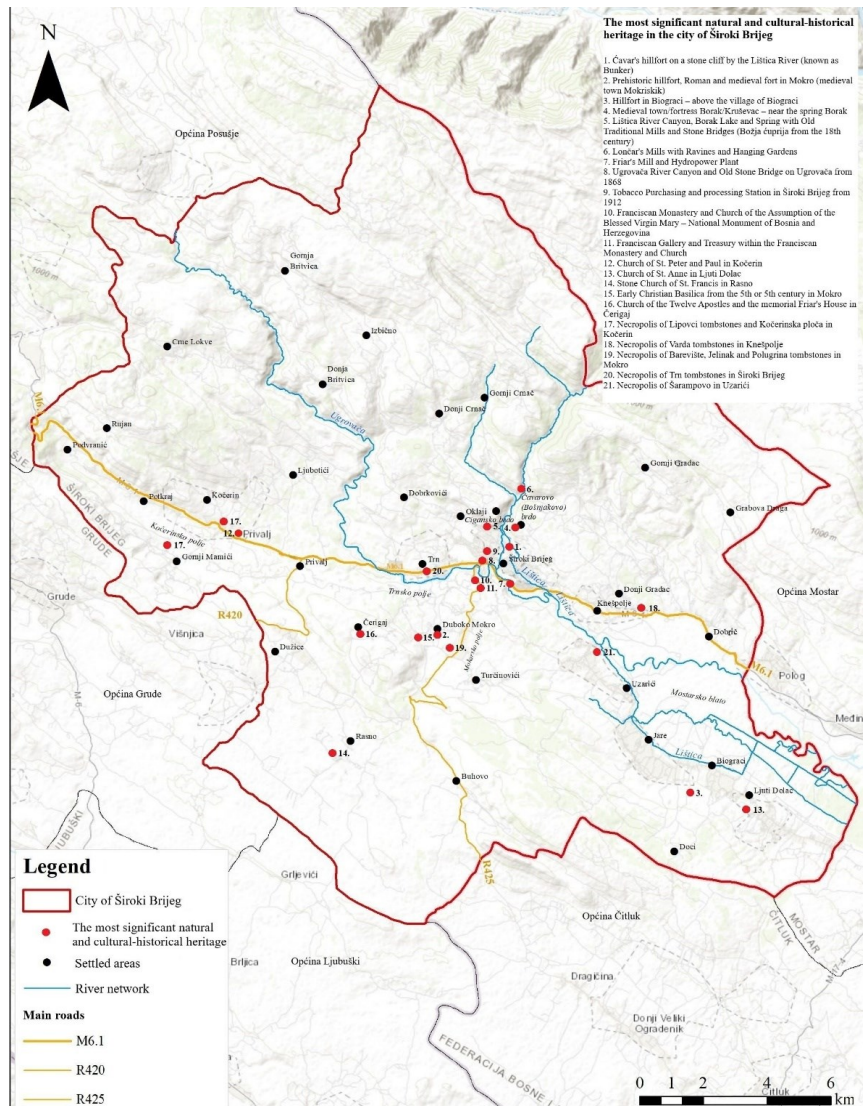


Fig. 1. The most significant natural and cultural-historical heritage in the city of Široki Brijeg

The most significant monument of cultural and historical heritage, the only official monument of national importance in Široki Brijeg, is the Franciscan Monastery and the Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, along with a horticulturally designed courtyard and a century-old oak tree, and the inner monastery garden. This protected area encompasses a zone extending 150 metres in length. The Franciscan Gallery (Franciscan Treasury) is an important cultural institution and custodian of sacral and artistic treasures.

The most significant monuments of the cultural and historical heritage of the Široki Brijeg are, which are also of regional or national importance for this region, are: 1. St. Peter and Paul's Church in Kočerin, 2. St. Ana's Church in Ljuti Dolac, 3. Prehistoric hillfort, Roman and medieval fortress - medieval town Mokriskik, early Christian basilica from the 5th or 6th century and the necropolis of stećak tombstones – in Mokro, 4. Necropolises of stećak tombstones with rich ornamentation: Barevište necropolis with 13 stećak tombstones, Jelinak with 11 stećak tombstones and Polugrina cemetery with 25 stećak tombstones (Mokro), Šarampovo necropolis with 11 stećak tombstones and Grovište with 15 stećak tombstones (Uzarići), Lipovci necropolis with 4 stećak tombstones and the Kočerin Tablet (Kočerin), necropolis of stećak tombstones and Trn cemetery with 20 stećak tombstones, 5. Church and memorial Friar's House, Čerigaj (Bešlagić, 1971; Glavaš, 2006; Dugandžić, 2004; Marić and Spajić, 2006, Karačić, 2016).

The Franciscan Monastery and the Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary - the name of the town of Široki Brijeg is derived from the topographical position of the Franciscan Monastery and church on the hill called Široki Brijeg. Since the 19th century, the Franciscans have played a crucial spiritual, cultural, intellectual and infrastructural role in the development of this area. Their activities included the construction of churches, monasteries, schools, economic facilities, roads and bridges, which directly stimulated both the settlement and urbanisation of Široki Brijeg. In 1844, the Franciscans relocated their seat from Kreševo to the rural settlement of Čerigaj, where they built the first Franciscan residence. During the Ottoman rule in the 15th and 16th centuries, all Catholic sacral buildings in Herzegovina were destroyed. The town of Široki Brijeg expanded toward the end of Ottoman rule and continued to grow under Austro-Hungarian administration. In order to obtain permission from the Ottoman authorities to build a new church, the Franciscans, with the help of the local population, buried several older stećak tombstones and stone blocks on the Široki Brijeg hill⁴ (Zovko, 2006). With the approval of the Ottoman authorities for the construction of a church, the Franciscans purchased the bare hill from Ahmet Kurt in 1845 for 145 gold ducats (Rotim, 1994).

In 1846, Bishop Barišić blessed the foundation stone of the first Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary and monastery in Herzegovina. The church was small in size, and two large stone cisterns were constructed in its immediate vicinity. In order to connect the monastery with the main road (Mostar – Posušje), the Franciscans cut a new road route in 1892. They built a long single-story building,

⁴ During Ottoman rule, it was only possible to build or restore sacral buildings, or churches, only in places where they had already been built in the past.

covered with stone slabs on the land they owned, in 1860, where there were eight shops that they rented out to merchants.

In order to connect the church, monastery, and shops with the settlement that was then forming, the Franciscans built a stone bridge over the Ugrovača River in 1868. The old church was demolished in 1905, and in the same year the foundation stone for a new church in the Neo-Romanesque style was laid, based on a design by Max Maximilian David from 1906. The church was built from the grey limestone sourced from nearby quarries. The monastery complex attained its current form in 1990 with the addition of a three-storey building and a space for the Franciscan Gallery. The Franciscans also played a key role in the first electrification. They built the Franciscan mills with eight mill wheels on the Lištica in 1868. Two mills were removed in 1934, to facilitate the construction of a small hydroelectric plant, which enabled the electrification of Široki Brijeg in 1936, one of the first places in Herzegovina to receive electricity (Zovko, 2006; Dugandžić, 2006; Mikulić, 2008).

The Franciscan Gallery and Treasury – The Franciscan Treasury was restored and renovated in 1979. The Franciscans founded the Franciscan Gallery, which opened on July 25, 1990, covers an area of 300 m², and possesses around 1,000 works of art. During the year, the Gallery organises between 10 and 15 exhibitions by prominent artists from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Europe. There is a significant bronze cast of the relief of the Stigmatization of St. Francis at the entrance to the Franciscan Gallery, a work by the artist I. Meštrović from 1942. The Gallery's collection comprises works by internationally acclaimed artists, including V. Bukovac, M. Bečić, B. Čikoš, E. Delacroix, I. Meštrović, de Rivera, G. Jurkić, among others, as well as pieces by regional and local artists such as A. Mikulić, S. Sikirica, G. Jurkić, and the sculptures "Penavuša" by a local sculptress (Mikulić, 2008; Karačić, 2016). By 2025, the Franciscan Gallery and its treasury hold approximately 6,000 exhibits, encompassing works from various periods—from artworks by foreign masters (13th–19th century), through classical and modern pieces, to contemporary visual expressions of global art.

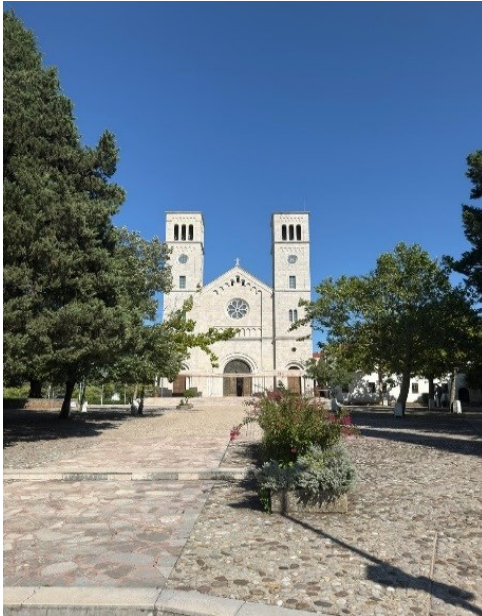


Fig. 2. The Franciscan Monastery and the Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Široki Brijeg), St. Ana's Church (Ljuti Dolac) and St. Peter and Paul's Church (Kočerin); Source: Authors

Prehistoric hillfort, Roman and medieval fortress and early Christian Basilica from the 5th or 6th century – the medieval town of Mokriskik in Mokro – The early Christian basilica in Mokro village is believed to have been built in 5th or 6th century. Archaeological research was carried out on several occasions, the earliest experimental investigations taking place in 1958. Movable and small artefacts from the basilica in Mokro are preserved in the National Museum in Sarajevo. The investigations carried out in 1997 and 1998 contributed to a more detailed understanding of the architectural structure of this building. The basilica, measuring 24×18 m, was a single-nave structure with three apses, with a smaller central area designated for liturgical ceremonies.

A particularly important discovery was the baptistery with its baptismal font. The narthex (entrance area) was relatively small, and its southern section was converted into a memoriae, an enclosed space with three tombs. The building was constructed in a single building phase and remained in use until the early 7th century, when it was destroyed (Glavaš, 2006). Besides the basilica, the site also contained a prehistoric hillfort, as well as Roman and medieval fortifications measuring approximately 180×60 m, with the remains of a bastion discovered at the lowest point. The town or fortress of Mokriskik in Mokro was mentioned as early as 945 in the work "On the

Governance of the Empire" by Constantine Porphyrogenitus (Dugandžić, 2006; Karačić, 2016).

Necropolis of stećak tombstones with rich ornamentation in the Široki Brijeg area - Stećak, medieval tombstones, were crafted between the 12th and 15th centuries. Over the course of time, many were destroyed or concealed, whether through their reuse as building material for houses, fences, or roads, or through deterioration caused by natural weather conditions. The most significant necropolises, which are characterised by exceptionally rich ornamentation, are: 1. Barevište – located in the settlement of Mokro, this necropolis has 13 stećak tombstones located on a gentle hill by the road, near the cemetery and chapel. The stećak tombstones are known for their massiveness and exceptional ornamentation. Among them, the stećak with the inscription mentioning Vitko, which was transferred to the National Museum in Sarajevo, stands out. 2. Šarampovo - a necropolis in the rural settlement of Uzarići, which contains 11 massive and well-preserved stećak tombstones, located next to the old Catholic cemetery. The monumental stećak tombstones of Šarampovo stand out for their massiveness and specific ornamentation, making this necropolis recognisable in the Široki Brijeg area, 3. Lipovci – a necropolis of 4 stećak tombstones is located in Kočerinsko Field about a kilometre southwest of Kočerin, along the road to Mamičko Field and Podkraj. The Kočerin Tablet was found here. The most important memorial tablet, measuring 137 cm in height, with 319 characters, was written in Old Croatian Cyrillic or Bosnian Cyrillic alphabet. It was created in 1404 as a tombstone for the nobleman Viganj Milošević and contains a list of rulers from his time, which is an extremely valuable historical document, 4. Necropolis of stećak tombstones and Trn cemetery – the necropolis is perfectly integrated into the modern Trn cemetery, and stands out for its rich, relief ornamentation on the sarcophagi and crosses (Bešlagić, 1971; Dugandžić, 2004; Mikulić, 2008).



Fig. 3. Necropolis of stećak tombstones Lipovci (Kočerin), Šarampovo (Uzarići) i Barevište (Mokro); Source: Authors

The most notable monuments of the cultural and historical heritage of the Široki Brijeg area, which also hold regional or local significance, include: 1. Medieval town, Borak Fort (Kruševac) – near the spring of the Lištica, 2. Hillfort Biograci – Roman fort (refugium), 3. Varda stećak necropolis – Knešpolje, 4. Stone bridge over the Ugrovača – Klanac, 5. Stone Church of St. Francis – Rasno, 6. Lončar mills and other traditional mills, 7. Franciscan mill and hydroelectric power plant, 8. Tobacco Processing and Purchasing Station – center of Široki Brijeg (Zovko et al., 2017; Dugandžić, 2006).

Medieval town, Borak Fort (Kruševac) - The medieval town (Borak or Kruševac fort) is a small medieval hillfort located on a rocky slope surrounded by dense vegetation, in a naturally beautiful setting east of the spring of the Lištica. The medieval Borak fort dates back to the 15th century, has an irregular square shape, measuring 3x10 m. The walls are built of solid stone, between 1 and 1.5 m thick and between 1 and 6 m high. A cistern was found inside the fort during archaeological research. During the Middle Ages, the fort served as a strategic protection for roads, and was located at the intersection of important Mostar - Duvno roads, connecting low and high mountainous Herzegovina. The fort was conquered by the Turks in 1477 (Dugandžić, 2006; Zovko et al. 2017).

Tobacco Processing and Purchasing Station - The most significant monument reflecting the culture of life and work in Široki Brijeg from the 20th century is the Tobacco Processing and Purchasing Station, which significantly contributed to the city's cultural and economic development. The Mostar Tobacco Factory was founded in 1880, while the purchasing office, known as the Tobacco Processing and Purchasing Station or "Dogana," was opened in Široki Brijeg in 1912. Initial tobacco purchases were carried out in six temporary barracks, and construction of the new Tobacco Station began in 1930, and was completed in 1938. The complex included two large warehouses and an administrative building. At the peak of its operation, the Tobacco Station employed an average of 538 local workers per month, mostly seasonal. In 1940, the number of employees ranged from 64 to 1,074. Approximately half of the seasonal female workers were young women from rural settlements, for whom employment at the Tobacco Station was often their only source of income (Dugandžić, 2006).

Cultural events in Široki Brijeg

Cultural events – which have exceptional tourist importance and attract visitors from the region and beyond, and they are: 1. Briješka zvona, a cultural and musical event that has been held since 1999, 2. Mediterranean Film Festival (MFF), a significant regional documentary film festival, 3. West Herzegovina Fest, a festival dedicated to domestic film production and arts, bringing together local and international filmmakers, 4. Gastronomic meetings "Flavours from the Stone" were held in May, but today the most popular is the regionally and internationally known Street Food Fest, which lasts three days and is held at the end of July, at the attractive location of the Široki Brijeg's Veterans Park, along the Lištica River. 5. The Municipality Day and the Feast of the Assumption are celebrated in August, attracting a large number of local, regional and foreign visitors. The Franciscan Gallery hosts exhibitions of local and foreign artists, including those from the Široki Brijeg Academy of Fine Arts, as well as occasional concerts of spiritual and popular music (Mikulić, 2008, Čolak et al., 2008).

NATURAL HERITAGE OF ŠIROKI BRIJEG ATTRACTIVE IN TERMS OF TOURISM

There are two significant geomorphological monuments that are under official protection in the area of the town of Široki Brijeg: 1. Lištica spring near Borak - protected since 1965 and Pravačeva cave near the Lištica spring - under protection since 1968. Significant monuments of the city's natural heritage that have great potential for protection and tourism valorisation in accordance with the principles of sustainable development are the following: 1. Borak Spring, canyon of the Lištica River, this area includes the spring of the Lištica River, 2 km from the town centre, next to the area of Cigansko and Čavarovo (Bošnjakovo) hills, where several strong springs spring up. Pravačeva cave next to the spring has not yet been sufficiently explored from a speleological perspective and deserves additional research in order to ensure more adequate protection. 2. The Ugrovača River Canyon (Brina Canyon), the Ugrovača River springs in Rakitsko Field, 3. Ladina Canyon, the area above and below Lončar's mills, is rich in natural and cultural sites, including old cascading gardens with an irrigation system, located between canyon cliffs on both sides, and in the immediate vicinity is the insufficiently explored Kruševac fortress and several old stone bridges, such as the Roman and medieval bridge "Božja Ćuprija", 4. Bačina Canyon, known for its steep limestone layers and the 50-meter-high Grkuš waterfall, 5. Dobrinjska and Resnička Draga, in the rural settlement Crnač. 6. Springs of Crnašnjica, Orovik, Žvatić, Dobrinj and Vrace, natural springs of potable water,

7. Park-forests Gelbaj, Borak spring and forest areas of Grabovina, Njivice, Puringaj, rural settlements Uzarići, Biograce, Matanović and Friars' benat, these areas represent a natural complex of category III since 1991, Lončar's mills with ravines, the spring of the Lištica with lower and upper springs. There were once about 20 mills in the area of the Borak spring, the most famous of which are Rizvanbegović's mill (Ćemer) and Friars' mill (Mikulić, 2008), 9. Mostarsko blato, a vast field stretching from Široki Brijeg to Mostar, through which the Lištica flows. This area is rich in sources of potable water that create small pools suitable for swimming and relaxation for the local population (Zovko et al., 2017; Mikulić, 2008).



Fig. 4. Lončar's mills, old cascading gardens with an irrigation system and old stone bridge; Source: Authors

SPORTS TOURIST ATTRACTIONS OF ŠIROKI BRIJEG

Fishing is one of the earliest historically documented sports, and is mentioned in the Ottoman Defters (Records) dating back to 1585. The fish ponds in Dobrič and Knešpolje, in the Mostar Blato region, have been documented since the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian periods. Following 1946, the formation of sports associations and clubs began, and they continue to play a significant role in the local community. Today, the most prominent sports clubs are the Croatian Basketball Club Široki Brijeg, multiple-time champions of Bosnia and Herzegovina and national cup winners, and Football Club Široki Brijeg. Tennis was introduced to the region in the 1930s and experienced rapid development in the 1990s with the construction of numerous tennis courts.

The largest and most significant tennis complex, with a hotel, restaurant, and tennis courts in a naturally beautiful and attractive setting, is the "Đulić" Tennis Center in Široki Brijeg (Rotim, 1994; Čolak et al., 2008). Today, the largest sports complex is located in Pecara, where a modern sports hall and football stadium are located. The "Đulić" Tennis Center continues to operate with a somewhat reduced capacity, while a

football camp with several pitches is located in Mostarsko Blato. The football tournament "Street vs Street" is particularly popular, and is organized according to the same rules in all towns of the WHC. Široki Brijeg organizes numerous attractive sports events that attract tourists and sports enthusiasts: international and regional basketball and football matches, indoor competitions; and the popular Street Basketball in the Široki Brijeg's Veterans Park, local football tournaments, hunting, fishing, and activities such as hiking and cycling in naturally attractive locations along the Lištica River, Mostarsko Blato, and the surrounding forest and mountain complexes contribute to the diversity and attractiveness of the sports and recreational tourist offer.

TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN ŠIROKI BRIJEG

In the municipality of Široki Brijeg (Lištica), the systematic monitoring of tourist arrivals and overnight stays began in the 1960s, during the period of the first significant tourist flows to the Croatian Adriatic coast. The first official data were recorded in 1968, and the peak of tourist activity was recorded in 1970, when 951 arrivals and 1,111 overnight stays were registered. We have more relevant data on tourist arrivals and overnight stays between 1974 and 1990.

The highest number of arrivals and overnight stays was recorded in 1985 with a total of 4544 arrivals and a total of 7037 overnight stays, and in 1987 a total of 4191 arrivals and a total of 7523 overnight stays were recorded. The majority of visitors were domestic tourists in the period from 1974 to 1983, while a significant increase in foreign tourists was recorded from 1984 to 1987, which increased the total number of visitors in the then municipality of Lištica. After 1988, until the outbreak of war, domestic tourists again made up the majority of tourists. A significant drop in tourist arrivals and overnight stays was recorded in 1990 due to the unstable political and economic situation and the war that followed in 1991.⁵

After several years of interruption, the statistical monitoring of tourist flows resumed in 2013. The peak in tourist arrivals and overnight stays was reached in 2018, when 2,976 arrivals and 5,258 overnight stays were recorded. Visitor numbers increased steadily until 2018, after which a decline occurred as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021.

⁵ Source: Federal Institute of Statistics, Sarajevo, Federation of BH

In the period from 2022 to 2024, tourist arrivals in Široki Brijeg have shown a renewed upward trend. Based on the analysed data, it can be concluded that the number of foreign visitors is significantly higher than that of domestic visitors⁶.

According to the data from 2020, a total of 12 tourist accommodation facilities are registered in the WHC area, 4 of which are hotels (2 4-star hotels and 2 3-star hotels), 5 motels, 2 resorts and 1 rural tourism facility. The most significant accommodation facilities in the town of Široki Brijeg are: 1. Hotel "Park", 4 stars, 33 rooms, 2. Hotel "Đulić", 13 rooms and 3. Rooms in the household "Šeherzada", 8 rooms. In addition to officially registered accommodation units, there is an increasing number of luxuriously equipped apartments and holiday homes in the town that are rented to tourists for a short period of time for a few days or per day, but most of these capacities are not officially registered. There are 27 restaurants with a rich gastronomic offer in the WHC area, two of which are seasonal, and the other 25 are open throughout the year (Kunst, 2019; Jurilj et al., 2021).

ATTRACTIVE TOURIST INBOUND AREA BLIDINJE NATURE PARK – FROM LIVESTOCK FARMS TO SECOND HOMES (CASE STUDY)

Blidinje Nature Park (Blidinje NP) is the only managed nature reserve in the West Herzegovina Canton that has been under official protection even before the war. In addition to its extremely attractive natural landscapes, Blidinje NP features a rich cultural and historical heritage that testifies to centuries-old settlement and the traditional way of life of the local population. In the past, there was a significant mobility of herders from low Herzegovina, the areas of Mostar, Široki Brijeg, Čitluk, Ljubuški, Posušje and Grude, towards the high mountain pastures of the Blidinje Nature Park. Frequent seasonal stay in the mountains was primarily due to the inaccessibility of pasture-rich areas, the scarcity of arable land in the karst regions of low Herzegovina, and the intense summer heat. Families engaged in livestock farming owned huts, stables, storage barns, and zirates (plots for growing vegetables such as potatoes, carrots, onions, and cabbage), and spent the summer months in the mountains of highland Herzegovina. Livestock had a key economic value because in this sparse karst area it was the main source of survival and food, as agricultural development was limited. The largest number of these livestock buildings was located in Dugo Polje, a vast area located between the mountain ranges of Vran (west) and Čvrstica and Muharnica (east).

Occasional residents from the area of low Herzegovina, with special emphasis on the town of Široki Brijeg, came from the following settlements: Crnač, Mokro, Izbično,

⁶ Source: Federal Institute of Statistics, Sarajevo, Federation of BH

Oklaži, the villages of Lise, Dobrkovići, Grabova Draga, Mamići, Uzarići, Rasno, Kočerin, Dužice, Ljubotići, Crne Lokve, Privalj (Popović, 2008; Jolić 2015).

Research conducted in 2017 shows that the settlements in the Blidinje NP have not been abandoned, but have acquired a new function. Residents of low Herzegovina today own second homes in the aforementioned settlements. A modern Sports and Recreation Center was built on Risovac, as well as catering facilities such as Hajdučki vrleti, which attract visitors from low Herzegovina and neighbouring Croatia throughout the year. Entire families from the nearby urban settlements of Mostar, Široki Brijeg, Ljubuški, and the municipalities of Čitluk, Posušje, and Grude often come for an inversion from urban everyday life, and for rest and recreation in a naturally attractive landscape. It is interesting to note that the inhabitants of low Herzegovina, despite changes in their lifestyle, and after almost a century, still visit the area of highland Herzegovina seasonally, but now for completely different reasons. The study encompassed 609 second homes within Blidinje NP.

Analysis of the structural characteristics of 495 owners residing in Bosnia and Herzegovina revealed that the majority of these properties are owned by residents of Široki Brijeg, which is consistent with the historical association of ownership of livestock huts and zirates in the region. In the settlements of the Blidinje NP, a total of 209 owners of second homes reside in Široki Brijeg, with a share of 41.62% (Table 1). A large number of second homes built for recreation are owned by owners residing in the regional urban centre of Mostar, with a total of 100 second homes and a share of 20.20%. Significant shares of second homes built in the Blidinje NP are also owned by owners residing in the municipalities of Čitluk, Posušje, Grude and the town of Ljubuški, which confirms the connection between modern ownership and livestock traditions in the region (Ćavar, 2018).

Tab. 1. Number of owners of second homes in the settlements of the Blidinje Nature Park 2016/2017 according to the place of residence in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Municipality/Town	Risovac Rudo polje	Masna Luka Gornji and Donji Badnji	Settlements near the Blidinje Lake	Settlements in Dugo polje	Total	Share (%)
Široki Brijeg	71	71	51	13	206	41,62
Mostar	73	9	8	10	100	20,20
Čitluk	34	3	3	23	63	12,73
Grude	36	3	1	0	40	8,08
Posušje	16	6	12	1	35	7,07
Čapljina	18	3	1	1	23	4,65
Čitluk /Međugorje*	8	0	0	2	10	2,02
Ljubuški	7	2	0	1	10	2,02
Tomislavgrad	5	1	0	0	6	1,21
Neum	0	0	0	2	2	0,40
Total	268	98	76	53	495	100,00

*The settlement of Međugorje is located in the municipality of Čitluk.

Source: Internal data of the public company Electric Power Company of the HZHB (JP "EP HZ HB") d.d. Mostar, Southern supply area, Mostar Plant, Doljani Work Unit, Author

The owners of second homes mostly have permanent residences relatively close to the Blidinje NP, with good transport connections, which allows for more frequent visits and use of second homes throughout the year. In the attractive tourist settlements of Risovac and Rudo Polje, where the ski resort is located, the largest number of owners is from the Široki Brijeg and Mostar areas, while in the settlements of Masna Luka, Gornji and Donji Badnji, and around Blidinje Lake, owners from Široki Brijeg predominate. In line with the example of second homes ownership in the Swedish mountain areas, second homes ownership in the Blidinje NP is developing in attractive mountain areas close to urban agglomerations, where personal connections and the level of real estate prices significantly influence the choice of location. Most of the facilities are located at a distance of about 30km from the owner's permanent residence, while the average distance is 87km.

A higher concentration of second homes ownership is recorded near ski-lifts, but in protected areas construction is strictly controlled (Lundmark, Marjavaara, 2005; Müller 2013). Following the designation of Blidinje NP as a national park, construction regulations are expected to become even stricter, permitting development only in zones specified by the spatial plan. Due to all of the above, the construction of second homes is currently intensified in Blidinje NP, and some buildings disrupt the natural environment and degrade the space because, in the architectural sense, they were not built in accordance with the natural environment and tradition.

ANALYSIS OF INBOUND AND OUTBOUND TOURIST ATTRACTIVE FACTORS IN THE TOWN OF ŠIROKI BRIJEG

Based on the conducted research and analysis of inbound tourist-attractive factors for the development of tourism in Široki Brijeg, it can be concluded that there are potential and significant tourist attractions, such as cultural, historical and natural heritage, as well as significant sports, cultural and gastronomic events. However, based on the available statistical data on tourism trends in the Široki Brijeg area from 1974 to 2024, we can see that tourism is not sufficiently developed. Although there are attractive tourist locations, their full development, valorisation and visitors are prevented by the lack of organized tourism activities, the absence of a tourist organization, tourist offer, marketing promotion, and investments in the development of cultural, historical and natural heritage, and the promotion of sports, gastronomic and cultural events.

Statistical data show a relatively small number of registered visitors, but it is also necessary to take into account a significant number of arrivals of the domicile population, who, due to unfavourable economic circumstances in the past, live abroad and often visit Široki Brijeg (at least three to four times a year), which is not recorded in statistics due to the lack of a system that would register arrivals in private accommodation facilities such as apartments and holiday homes.

A more significant analysis of inbound and outbound tourism factors for the development of tourism in Široki Brijeg at the regional, national and international levels can only be done through surveys. In 2025, a survey entitled "Research on the Tourist Potential of the town of Široki Brijeg" was conducted, covering 155 respondents over the age of 18 residing in the Široki Brijeg area. The survey included 68.4% female and 31.6% male participants. Regarding age distribution, the largest group of respondents (63.23%) were aged 26 to 45, followed by 29.03% aged 46 to 65, 6.45% aged 18 to 25, and 1.29% over 65 years of age.

Regarding the attractive, significant tourist and cultural offers in the city of Široki Brijeg and the West Herzegovina Canton, the largest number of respondents is dissatisfied. 55.5% of respondents are dissatisfied with the significant tourist and cultural offer of Široki Brijeg, and 42.6% of respondents are dissatisfied with the significant tourist and cultural offer of the West Herzegovina Canton.

Tab. 2. Tourist attractions according to significance and attractiveness in Široki Brijeg

Tourist attractions of Široki Brijeg	Number of respondents	%
1. Franciscan complex (Franciscan Church, monastery and museum/gallery)	124	80
2. Natural heritage (the Lištica and Ugrovača Canyons, spatial unit Borak, caves...)	108	69,7
3. Gastronomic events (Street Food Fest Široki Brijeg)	65	41,9
4. Cultural events (West Herzegovina Fest, advents, concerts...)	49	31,6
5. Cultural and historical heritage (Basilica in Mokro, stećak tombstones, Kočer in tablet, hillforts, mills...)	36	23,2
6. Sports events (football, basketball, futsal, karate competitions)	26	16,8

Source: Survey questionnaire "Research on the tourist potential of the town of Široki Brijeg, Authors

Based on the data obtained regarding the town's tourist attractions in terms of significance and attractiveness, respondents consider religious tourist attractions to be the most important, with 80%. Natural tourist attractions follow with 69.7%, while a surprisingly high number of respondents (41.9%) consider Gastronomic events to be significant. Cultural and cultural-historical attractions are also considered important, whereas Sports tourist attractions are perceived as less attractive (Tab. 2). Specifically, the most attractive tourist sites are the Franciscan complex, including the church, monastery, and Franciscan gallery, as well as the Lištica River canyon with the Borak spring, Lončar's mills, cascading gardens, Borak Lake and cave, the old stone bridge, and Kruševac fort. Street Food Široki Brijeg is a gastronomic event that has achieved great success in tourism at the local and regional level according to the number of visitors, which is also confirmed by scientific survey research.

In terms of transport accessibility, the largest number of respondents, i.e. 42.6%, expressed dissatisfaction with the transport connections within the West Herzegovina Canton, while the transport connections with the tourist-attractive destinations of the South Croatian coast of neighbouring Croatia were assessed as satisfactory by 47.1% of respondents.

The analysis of outbound tourist-attraction factors based on a case study of owners of second homes in the Blidinje NP confirms that the residents of Široki Brijeg have the largest share in ownership of these facilities, which maintains the historical connection of the Široki Brijeg area with this destination. Blidinje NP has attracted the inhabitants of low Herzegovina for centuries due to its natural resources, in the past for livestock farming, and today for rest and recreation in an attractive natural landscape. Accordingly, Široki Brijeg, as an economically developed centre, represents an important outbound tourist centre at the regional, national and international levels. This conclusion is confirmed by the results of the survey in which respondents could select several locations that they frequently visit.

Based on the survey data, 76.77% of respondents frequently visit the Croatian coast in neighboring Croatia, which is easily accessible and considered an attractive tourist destination. Blidinje NP represents a major destination frequently visited by the residents of Široki Brijeg, with a share of 71.6% based on survey data. Over the years, residents of low Herzegovina have moved to the highland areas of Herzegovina, however, the reasons for these migrations or circulations have changed in modern times. The religious and tourist centre of Međugorje has been attracting a large number of domestic and foreign visitors for many years, and for the people of Široki Brijeg, it represents the favourite and closest attractive tourist destination. It is a place of peace, prayer, pilgrimage and community.

According to the survey, 56.1% of respondents visit Međugorje. Statistical data on tourist visits to Međugorje (Čitluk) for 2024 record a total of 142,000 tourist overnight stays, of which 136,407 were by foreign visitors. In addition, 58,720 tourist arrivals were registered, including 55,575 foreign visitors⁷. As the nearest regional centre, Mostar, in addition to its natural beauty, offers a rich cultural, sports, and artistic program of regional and national significance. It is visited by 25.8% of respondents. In 2024, Mostar recorded 158,885 tourist overnight stays out of a total of 638,478

⁷ Data on tourist flows in the municipality of Čitluk (Međugorje) obtained from the Federal Institute of Statistics, Sarajevo, Federation of BH

overnight stays registered in the Herzegovina-Neretva Canton (HNC), and 111,939 tourist arrivals out of a total of 299,372 arrivals at the canton level⁸.

Ljubuški stands out as the most developed and most attractive tourist area in the West Herzegovina Canton, thanks to valorised tourist attractions such as the Kravice Waterfalls, the Čeveljuša, Koćuša and Bililo swimming areas, the Humac Monastery and Museum, and the Old Town and Ljubuša Fortress. Based on the survey, it is visited by 12.9% of respondents. Statistical data show an increase in the number of registered overnight stays in the town from 8,797 in 2019 to 11,144 in 2024, while the number of tourist arrivals in the same period increased from 5,965 (2019) to 8,003 (2024)⁹. A large number of residents of Široki Brijeg frequently visit their partially or completely abandoned rural settlements, with a share of 8.4% of respondents. These residents own older or renovated family homes or cottages, which they visit for vacation, recreation, barbecues, family gatherings, planting crops, and spending free time in a naturally peaceful environment (returning to their roots).

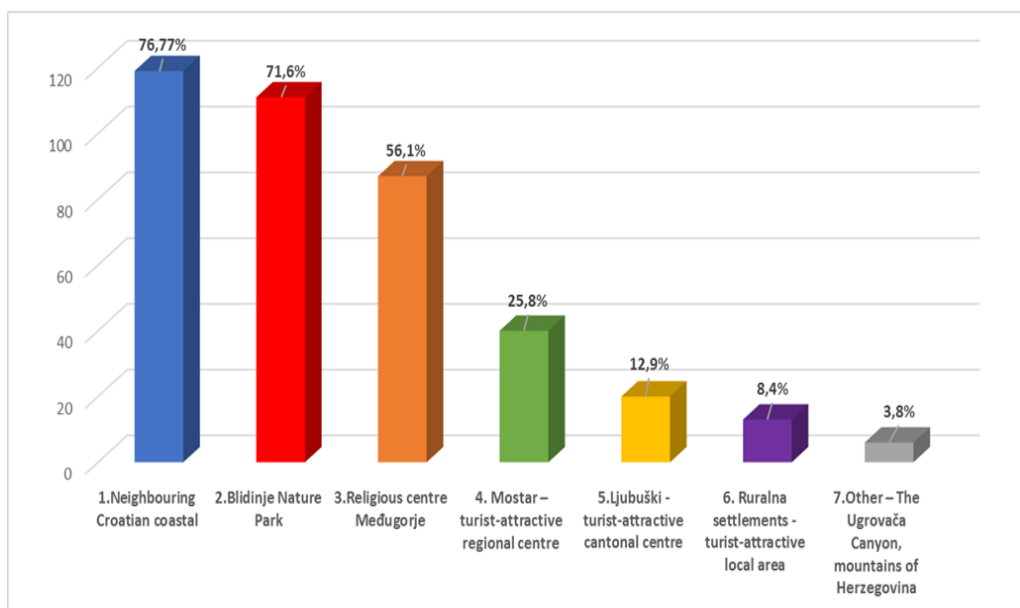


Fig. 5. Tourist visits by the residents of Široki Brijeg to attractive tourist destinations in the region and neighbouring Croatia

Source: Survey questionnaire "Research on the tourist potential of the town of Široki Brijeg", Authors

⁸ Data on tourist flows in Mostar obtained from Federal Institute of Statistics, Sarajevo, Federation of BH

⁹ Data on tourist flows in the town of Ljubuški obtained from the Federal Institute of Statistics, Sarajevo, Federation of BH

Based on the data from the survey, it can be concluded that a relatively large number of 125 respondents, or 80.8% of respondents, visit or own a second home. It can be noted, due to the possibility of multiple answers, that they own or visit second homes in multiple locations.

Second home owners combine the best of what is offered, in the summer period the Croatian Coast, and in the winter period the Blidinje NP. However, 65 respondents, 41.9%, do not own or visit a second home (Figure 6). The largest number of second home owners owns a holiday second home in the Blidinje NP, which confirms the earlier research and confirms the outbound tourist importance of Široki Brijeg.

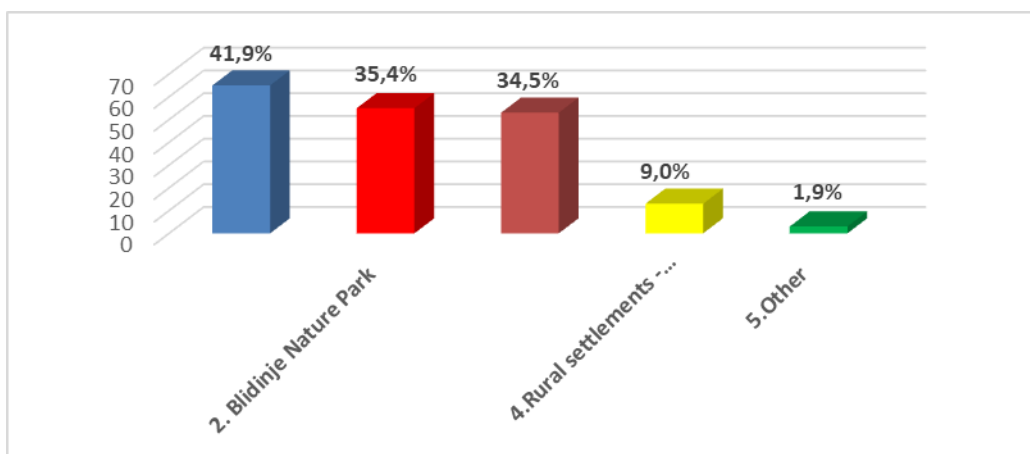


Fig. 6. Quantitative data on ownership of second homes in regionally attractive tourist destinations and neighbouring Croatia

Source: Survey questionnaire "Research on the tourist potential of the town of Široki Brijeg, Authors

Based on the collected data and survey results, we can conclude that the town of Široki Brijeg has significant cultural and historical, natural and sports tourist attractions, but they are not adequately valorised in terms of tourism. Religious, cultural, and natural attractions have the greatest tourism significance. Široki Brijeg, located in close proximity to attractive tourist destinations such as the Croatian coast, Blidinje NP, Mostar, Međugorje, and Ljubuški, which record a high number of registered and foreign visitors, has the potential to take its place within regional tourism flows through the development of its tourism offer and high-quality valorisation. Due to the absence of a tourist board, an underdeveloped tourist offer, and the lack of strategic valorisation in line with the concept of sustainable development, as well as competition from more developed nearby tourist destinations, Široki Brijeg currently represents a primarily outbound tourism area at the international and regional levels.

CONCLUSION

Through the study of tourism potential and valorisation in the Široki Brijeg area, the question arises as to whether this area represents an inbound or outbound tourism region. The hypothesis, or the hypothetical research question with which this study began, has been partially confirmed. Široki Brijeg possesses significant cultural and historical and natural heritage, as well as attractive cultural, gastronomic, and sports events, which is also confirmed by a survey of the local population. The analysis of statistical data on tourism trends in the Široki Brijeg area in the period from 1974 to 2024 indicates a weaker development of tourism, meaning that it does not represent an inbound tourist area, thus completely disproving the initial hypothesis. For more intensive tourism valorisation and tourism development, it is necessary to improve the city's infrastructure and transport accessibility, develop and complement the tourist offer, promote and invest in significant events and projects such as Street Food Fest and West Herzegovina Fest by establishing a tourist board.

Široki Brijeg is located near attractive regional tourist destinations: Ljubuški (tourist centre of the WHC), Međugorje (Čitluk), a religious tourist centre of international importance, and Mostar (tourist centre of the HNC and regional centre of Herzegovina). The frequency of visits to the above destinations is confirmed through a survey of the local population. Given the presence of these significant tourist destinations in the vicinity, Široki Brijeg has the potential to capitalize on existing tourist flows and encourage visitors to include this destination in their travels. For successful inclusion in the regional tourist flows of Herzegovina, tourism valorisation, investment and development of the tourist offer, establishment of a tourist board, and protection of valuable natural and cultural heritage and tourism development in accordance with the concept of sustainable development are necessary.

In addition to the aforementioned regional tourist centres, Široki Brijeg is located near the Blidinje NP (a tourist centre of national importance) and the Croatian Coast (a tourist centre of international importance), and the frequency of visits is additionally confirmed by a survey of the local population. Research on the structural characteristics of second homes ownership in Blidinje NP indicates that the majority of owners are residents of Široki Brijeg, particularly in areas close to ski resorts and surrounding settlements, which were historically inhabited by seasonal pastoral communities. Traditional migrations from the area of low Herzegovina to the area of highland Herzegovina are still present in the modern era, but the reasons for the migration are significantly different. As the most economically developed cantonal centre, Široki Brijeg plays the role of a significant international and regional outbound tourism area, thus partially confirming the initial hypothesis.

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