

Reviving the Past and Inspiring the Future: The Role of Vernacular Architecture in the Development of Tourism in North Macedonia

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Abstract

Traditional architecture in rural areas plays a significant role in preserving cultural identity of nations. It represents a unique approach to manifesting traditional ways of living within specific natural environments. In this context, this study provides an insightful overview of Zovik, a mountain village in North Macedonia located in a splendid natural environment. Despite being vastly neglected and experiencing a significant decrease in the population over the years, the village has recently gained interest as a location for various forms of adventure tourism.

This research utilizes an exploratory sequential design conducted in two phases. The first phase involved collecting qualitative data through a thorough document review, while the second phase encompassed qualitative data analysis, incorporating critical analysis and evaluative judgement.

The strength of this research lies in its analysis of the possibilities for adapting traditional architecture to promote rural prosperity and stimulate economic development through tourism. However, its weakness is that it focuses solely on a specific case study, which may limit its general applicability.

The findings of this research propose innovative approaches to revitalize the village by leveraging its traditional architecture. These approaches emphasize the importance of preserving cultural identity, attracting tourists, and promoting sustainable practices.

Keywords: Rural tourism, Sustainability, Cultural identity, Preservation, North Macedonia.

Introduction

Rural areas face numerous challenges regarding their existence, as they are often heavily reliant on natural resources and agriculture. In North Macedonia, they are currently struggling with the issue of high emigration rates, which have eroded the vitality of villages and rural communities. Additionally, factors such as the aging populations, globalization, the concentration of capital in urban centers, and various other phenomena contribute to regional disparities.

Tourism is generally defined as an activity that has the potential to foster development by leveraging existing resources, providing benefits, and motivating locals to explore alternative means of ensuring sustainable livelihoods. Consequently, rural areas play a crucial role in the development of sustainable tourism, with a focus on preserving environmental and cultural quality and diversity (Nestoroska & Marinovski, 2017). Therefore, tourism is frequently seen to rejuvenate and transform rural areas (Petrevska & Terzić, 2020; Terzić & Petrevska, 2021), particularly small, neglected, and depopulated villages that possess potential for aesthetic and outdoor activities. Rural areas worldwide, particularly mountain villages with abundant natural and cultural environments offer various forms of alternative tourism (Lantitsou, 2017). On the other hand, tourism developments often involve the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage sites, including traditional architecture. Rural architecture holds significance as it fosters community engagement, supports local economies, and helps preserve cultural identity. Preserving and promoting authentic rural architecture contributes significantly to the sustainable development of rural areas, supporting community well-being and cultural continuity.

Tourism development can have both positive and negative impacts on the authenticity of traditional architecture. While tourism can raise awareness and support conservation efforts by generating funds for restoration and maintenance, it also poses challenges such as increased footfall and infrastructure demands that can potentially compromise the integrity and character of architecture. In this manner, the community may be involved in developing strategies that harness the economic potential of rural traditional architecture while ensuring its long-term sustainability and the well-being of the local communities.

One of the challenges faced by the rural areas is diversifying their tourism supply. The potentials of rural traditional architecture is vital in attracting tourists who seek unique cultural experiences (Hall & Mitchell, 2000). Authenticity, sense of place, and cultural heritage are fundamental elements that rural traditional architecture brings to sustainable tourism experiences. As such, strategies for sustainable tourism development, sustainable tourism practices, and sustainable development initiatives should incorporate rural traditional architecture to enhance visitor experiences and support local communities (Xu & Deng, 2020).

North Macedonia's rural areas, in terms of their potential for tourism development have been explored extensively, with numerous villages serving as case studies (Atanasovski, 2012; Dimitrov et al., 2019; Dimitrov & Petrevska, 2019, 2020; Korunovski et al., 2013; Namicev & Namiceva, 2016; Petkovska-Mirchevska, 2008; Petrevska & Dimitrov, 2020). Furthermore, researchers have also examined the links between traditional architecture and tourism development in North Macedonia (Ivkovska, 2014; Namicev, 2005, 2014; Namicev & Namiceva, 2016).

The primary aim of this research is to contribute to the existing literature that explores the relationship between rural vernacular architecture and development of tourism. It also assesses the potential for expanding tourism supply by promoting traditional rural architecture and adapting it for tourism purposes. The case study focuses on the village of Zovik in North Macedonia, which has recently witnessed an increase in adventure tourism activities such as canyoning. The village boasts rich architectural structures that hold significant cultural values, making them suitable for tourism after appropriate conservation and adaptation measures. Finally, this study enhances scholarly understanding of the complexities and considerations involved in preserving and promoting rural traditional architecture as a significant cultural tourism resource.

Literature Review

The link between rural traditional architecture and tourism has always provoked interest. Scholars have extensively discussed various aspects to evaluate the relationship between rural traditional architecture and its impact on tourism development. Many argue about the importance of authenticity in terms of spatial dimensions and sense of place (Gursoy & Chi, 2018; Hall & Page, 2014; Ioannides & Debbage, 1998; Li & Cheng, 2021; Liu & Zhao, 2021; Martin & Woodside, 2022; Novelli, 2020; Perić & Miletić, 2017; Richards, 2007; Richards &

Marques, 2019; Shoval & Isaac, 2012; Wang & Djurica, 2017; Wang & Fesenmaier, 2004). Other scholars emphasize cultural identity as a symbol and a source of pride for the local communities (Crouch, 2010; Hall, 2002; Harvey, 2001; Rong & Xu, 2018; Tasci & Telci, 2019; Wang, 2013). The issue of preservation and promotion of traditional architecture is also discussed (Gao & Ryan, 2019; García-Falcón & Méndez-Rodríguez, 2018; Giovanardi & Sampaio, 2016; Hysenaj, 2020) along with the contribution to local economic development by generating opportunities for community resilience (Agarwal & Pathak, 2021; Carpio, 2019; Dalli & Chockalingam, 2022; Nadin & Steadman, 2017; Ongaro & Vanolo, 2020; Smith, 2017; Wang & Li, 2018).

Authenticity is a crucial aspect of rural traditional architecture in the context of tourism and serves as a key criterion for tourists seeking meaningful and immersive experiences. Richards (2007) explores the concept of cultural tourism, emphasizing the significance of authenticity in cultural encounters, including interactions with rural traditional architecture. Wang and Fesenmaier (2004) provide a comprehensive model of destination competitiveness and sustainability, highlighting the importance of authenticity as a determining factor in tourists' evaluation of a destination's appeal. Their insights offer valuable understanding of preserving authenticity within the context of tourism development. Liu and Zhao (2021) provide valuable insights into the complexities of authenticity preservation. They discuss the influence of tourism on physical authenticity, including issues of reconstruction and retrofitting that may impact the original design and materials. They also examine the challenges of maintaining historical authenticity in the face of commercialization and interpretation biases.

On the other hand, Perić and Miletić (2017) investigate the challenges and opportunities for revitalization of rural traditional architecture, emphasizing the importance of authenticity in providing visitors with a genuine and meaningful experience. Similarly, Wang and Djurica (2017) focus specifically on how authenticity of traditional architecture influences tourists' perceptions and satisfaction. Li and Cheng (2021) investigate how the preservation of traditional architecture contributes to authenticity of the destination and the satisfaction of tourists. They emphasize the need to balance authenticity with the demands of tourism development. A holistic understanding of the subject matter is provided by Ioannides and Debbage (1998), who thoroughly explore the multifaceted issues related to the role of authenticity in less developed countries. They emphasize the significance of preserving and promoting authentic experiences and cultural heritage in rural tourism destinations.

Richards and Marques (2019) take a multidisciplinary perspective on the multifaceted nature of authenticity and its relevance in rural tourism experiences. They bring together perspectives from cultural anthropology, geography, sociology, and tourism studies to shed light on the complex nature of authenticity. They explore different theoretical frameworks and conceptualizations of authenticity, highlighting the tensions between commercialization and the preservation of rural authenticity, as well as the challenges faced by rural communities in maintaining their cultural heritage while catering to tourist demands. Similarly, Martin and Woodside (2022) delve into the conceptualization of authenticity, highlighting the importance of understanding tourists' perceptions and expectations of authenticity in rural tourism experiences. They provide empirical evidence and insights into the various dimensions of authenticity in rural tourism settings, supporting the argument that authenticity is a critical factor influencing tourists' perceptions, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions in rural tourism destinations.

Authentic rural traditional architecture enhances a sense of place, contributing to the distinctiveness and uniqueness of a destination. Gursoy and Chi (2018), and Shoval and Isaac (2012) emphasize the role of authenticity in rural tourism development and highlight how rural traditional architecture contributes to the creation of an authentic sense of place and cultural heritage, thus enhancing tourist experience and strengthens cultural identity. They also discuss that rural traditional architecture carries historical and cultural significance, reflecting the local community's values, practices, and lifestyle. By preserving these elements, rural destinations can enhance authenticity of their tourism supply. Similarly, Novelli (2020) emphasizes the role of authenticity in creating a sense of place and fostering meaningful experiences for tourists,

highlighting its relevance to the long-term sustainability of destinations. They extend the concept of authenticity beyond rural traditional architecture and encompass the overall development and management of tourist destinations.

Literature also highlights the spatial dimension of authenticity in rural traditional architecture. Hall and Page (2014) emphasize the importance of place in tourism experiences, highlighting how authentic rural architecture creates a sense of rootedness and connection to the local environment.

Cultural identity is another crucial dimension explored in the literature when addressing the link between rural traditional architecture, cultural identity, and tourism valorization. Rong and Xu (2018) delve into the relationship between cultural identity and rural traditional architecture, highlighting how traditional architecture serves as a tangible expression of local cultural identity. They effectively demonstrate how rural traditional architecture contributes to the preservation and continuity of cultural heritage in the context of rapidly changing rural landscapes. Tasci and Telci (2019) examine the cultural significance of traditional rural architecture in shaping identity and heritage, capturing the experiences of both tourists and residents affected by tourism impacts. They offer valuable insights and understanding of how cultural identity of a unique rural heritage is perceived.

Furthermore, the researchers highlight how tourists are drawn to the uniqueness of rural traditional architecture, which serves as a lens through which they experience and construct their cultural identities (Harvey, 2001). Cultural identity, in this context, refers to the shared values, beliefs, and practices of a community tied to their architectural heritage (Hall, 2002). Construction and reinforcement of cultural identity may be initiated and contributed to by the sociological dimension of tourism in terms of rural traditional architecture, which may act as a cultural symbol for the locals (Wang, 2013). On the other hand, Crouch (2010) emphasizes the materiality of tourism, highlighting how the physicality of traditional architecture shapes tourist experience and contributes to the construction of cultural identities. Richards and Wilson (2006) discuss how tourism can act as a catalyst for cultural revitalization, empowering local communities to reclaim their cultural heritage through the preservation and promotion of rural traditional architecture.

Many studies have explored the interplay between the development of tourism and the preservation of traditional architectural forms. Gao and Ryan (2019) examine how tourism influences the preservation, transformation, and commodification of traditional architectural heritage in rural areas. They provide insights into the complexities and challenges faced by rural communities in balancing tourism developments with the preservation of their cultural heritage. García-Falcón and Méndez-Rodríguez (2018) reach a similar conclusion, pointing out that tourism demand should be controlled to preserve cultural identity. The process of gentrification and cultural change brought about by tourism development is also discussed by Giovanardi and Sampaio (2016), who raise questions about the preservation of cultural authenticity in the face of commercialization. In addition, Hysenaj (2020) argues that the preservation of traditional architecture can help create a unique tourist experience that showcases the country's cultural heritage.

Sustainability considerations are also addressed in the literature (Cai & Yan, 2020; Li & Li, 2021; Vlachos & Fousiani, 2020; Xu & Deng, 2020). Generally, studies examine the relationship between rural traditional architecture and sustainable tourism development by analyzing the impacts of rural traditional architecture on tourists' experiences. Overall, they highlight the need to consider local culture, including rural traditional architecture, in promoting sustainable tourism development strategies. Scholars investigate how traditional architecture can support sustainable rural tourism in different contexts but, more importantly, emphasize the significance of rural traditional architecture as a cultural asset that contributes to sustainable tourism practices, community engagement, and the preservation of local identity.

Tourism in rural areas often involves encounters with local communities and their cultural practices, of which traditional architecture is an integral part. Researchers have investigated the role of rural traditional architecture in tourism development that results in local empowerment. Overall, the studies by Nadin and Steadman (2017), Ongaro and Vanolo (2020),

Smith (2017), and Wang and Li (2018) explore the ways in which traditional architectural forms contribute to overall tourism experience and act as a catalyst for local economic developments. They discuss cultural significance of traditional architecture, emphasizing its role in attracting visitors, fostering cultural and rural tourism, and generating economic opportunities for local community resilience. Moreover, the scholars focus on the cultural significance of rural traditional architecture to demonstrate its role in attracting tourists and sustaining local communities (Wang & Li, 2018), the preservation of cultural heritage (Eichhorn, 2018), the catalyst for economic activities such as agro-tourism and handicraft production (Carpio, 2019), the vital role in sustainable local entrepreneurship (Agarwal & Pathak, 2021), and community empowerment (Dalli & Chockalingam, 2022).

Based on scholarly discussions, multiple aspects of the relationship between rural traditional architecture and tourism have been examined, generally emphasizing the significance of authenticity in rural traditional architecture as a key factor in shaping tourists' overall experience, enabling them to connect with cultural heritage and traditions of a destination. Moreover, the importance of cultural identity as a symbol and source of pride for the local communities is highlighted, alongside discussions on the challenges involved in preserving and promoting traditional architecture. Additionally, there is extensive discourse on how rural traditional architecture contributes to local economic development by creating opportunities for community resilience.

Research Methodology

This research aims to explore the link between rural traditional architecture and tourism by investigating the case of the village Zovik. To achieve this, the study employed a two-phase exploratory sequential design. The first phase involved collecting qualitative data from secondary sources and conducting bibliographical research to establish stylized facts about Zovik and assess the functional, physical, and experiential authenticity of its architectural features. In the second phase, a qualitative critical analysis was conducted on the observations of current adventure tourism activities, along with an evaluative judgement on the potential of adopting vernacular architecture for tourism development.

Findings

Stylized facts for Zovik

Nestled in the picturesque mountains, Zovik is a tranquil village that falls under the jurisdiction of Novaci Municipality, just 49 kilometers away from the vibrant city of Bitola. Perched at an impressive altitude of 680 meters above the sea level, this settlement boasts of approximately 80 houses. Over the years, Zovik has experienced a significant transformation, shaped by the ebbs and flows of migration. The village, once teeming with life, has witnessed a sharp decline in its population. In 1953, Zovik was home to 356 inhabitants, but by 2002, this number had dwindled to 31. Today, the village is home to less than 15 permanent residents, highlighting the profound depopulation it has faced. Despite the decline in its population, Zovik remains a captivating destination, providing breathtaking views of the surrounding mountains and an enchanting glimpse into rural life. The atmosphere of the village rich with natural beauty creates a perfect idyllic retreat for those seeking tranquility and a deep connection with the embrace of Nature. Zovik truly stands as an enchanting retreat for the seekers of solace amidst the bountiful offerings of the great outdoors.

Traditional architecture in Zovik

The village of Zovik encompasses examples of dwellings that hold significant importance in understanding the chronology of house types that have emerged in rural areas of North Macedonia. It has an interesting traditional architecture expressing authenticity in terms of physical place, functionality of the buildings and offering experiential feelings. Specifically, physical authenticity relates to the originality and integrity of the architectural structures (Fig. 1), functional authenticity refers to the preservation of traditional uses and activities within the

buildings (Figs 2 and 3), and experiential authenticity provides visitors with a genuine and meaningful experience (Figs 4-7).

The development of rural houses in Zovik was closely related to the economic progress of households and the social conditions that influenced their construction.

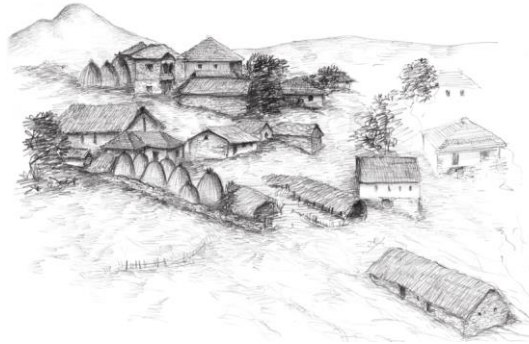


Fig. 1: Group of houses with economic buildings
Source: Namicev, 2005: 29.

During the initial stages of rural settlement formation, only a few simple business premises were built alongside the houses (Fig. 1). Subsequently, their number has increased based on the needs and businesses of each family. Older villages with established families had more business premises compared to newly settled families. The economic courtyard of the pioneering families, who engaged more extensively in stockbreeding and farming, have comprised multiple structures enclosed by thorn or branch fences. After the World War I, these enclosures have begun to be bounded. Typically, the main house occupied a dominant and strategically suitable position compared to the other accessory premises, both in terms of site configuration and functionality. The economic courtyard represented a meaningful organizational entity shaped by centuries of experience and the work of the families. It encompassed various aspects of rural living and family rituals.

Barns, primarily constructed of stone (Fig. 2), sometimes featured two levels with a cellar on the ground floor used for storing working clothes. They served as storage spaces for cattle, food, household goods, and winter provisions. The batch (Fig. 3) typically built of stone was primarily situated in the yard, while the pigsty mostly consisted of wattle, daub, and stone walls.

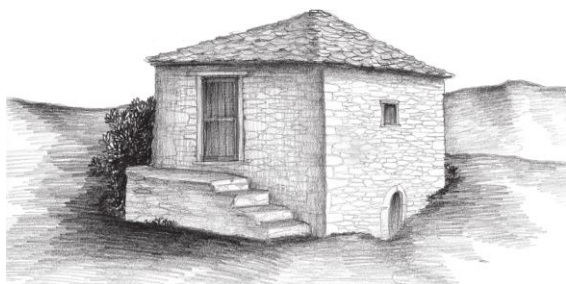


Fig. 2: Barn
Source: Namicev, 2005: 35

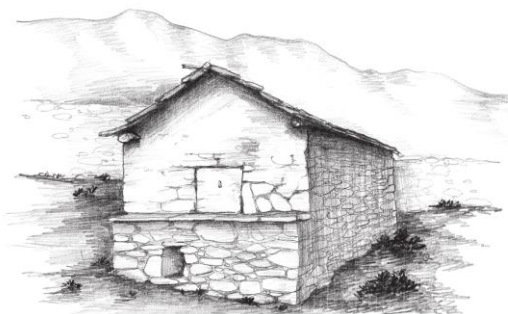


Fig. 3: Batch
Source: Namicev, 2005: 44

During the period of economic courtyard development, haylofts were predominantly built adjacent to the houses, often serving as ground-floor structures. They were constructed using wattle and daub, mudbrick, or stone, with mud plastered on and covered with straw or tiles. The haylofts were mainly composed of wattle and daub or stone. Later, the dwellings evolved into multi-space structures, incorporating an open porch facing the yard and a basement

room for food storage. The houses have often been closely situated to one another (Fig. 4) and have had closed layouts (Fig. 5).



Fig. 4: Alley

Source: Namicev,2005: 80



Fig. 5: Closed type of a house

Source: Namicev,2005: 83

The houses have been built as either single-story or two-story structures (Fig. 6), and in some cases, three-level houses with enclosed or open porches have been constructed (Fig. 7).



Fig. 6: House with a ground-floor and a floor

Source: Namicev,2005: 88

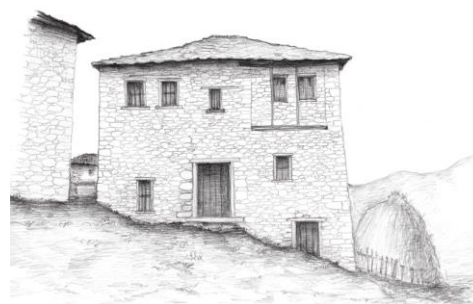


Fig. 7: Three-level house

Source: Namicev,2005: 89

The interior design has been developed in the final stage of construction, with specific elements tailored to the structure and aesthetic shapes of the buildings, based on the family's needs and daily activities. The central and most significant room has been the bakery, where cooking took place and ritual activities were performed. It typically had a rectangular geometric shape.

The final form of the dwelling has been achieved through the finishing touches on the exterior surfaces. This has included the main front door (gate), the number, frequency, and decoration of windows, ornaments on the balcony, the staircase design, wooden pillars, and the struts. Inscriptions on the houses, stating the year of construction have been unfortunately destroyed when they were over-inscribed in Bulgarian language during the World War II. The exterior of the houses have featured colorful decorations with rustic plant motifs, and inscriptions have been typically inscribed on rectangular bases.

The building trade, along with woodcarving and icon painting has held a significant importance among the residents. The vernacular builders have utilized raw materials such as stone, wood and soil, which were either sourced from the surroundings or processed. The construction of a house marked a significant period of change in the dwelling's shape and space, making the act of building ceremonially important. Rituals have been practiced at various

crucial stages, including the selection of the building location, the start of construction, foundation laying, wall erection, roof covering, and before entering the new dwelling.

Tourism patterns in Zovik

Zovik has a well-preserved natural environment and traditional ambiance, making it an ideal destination for the initiation and development of rural tourism. The village relies on its natural landscapes and the potential to create favorable conditions for attracting visitors seeking recreation, adventure, relaxation, well-being, and rejuvenation. The pristine environment of Zovik, as well as the entire Mariovo region, offers a clean and unpolluted air, along with the stunning Gradeska River canyon. Climate is also conducive to apiculture, resulting in the production of locally sourced raw and organic honey. On the other hand, environmental benefits include support for the preservation of the landscape and a stimulus for the protection and improvement of the natural environment. In this manner, tourism may be detected as a good way to provide and sustain such benefits.

In addition to its natural attractions, Zovik boasts religious landmarks that can also attract visitors and tourists. The small, restored St. Nicholas church, dating back to the 19th century, is located just 180 meters from the village center. St. Athanasius, a one-aisled church known as a monastery, is situated 300 meters from the center in a picturesque location, providing visitors with breathtaking panoramas of the Mariovo region. The Chebren Monastery, nestled in outstanding natural surroundings is approximately an hour's hike away.

The village is renowned for its Stone Bridge (Fig. 8). The bridge, constructed with intricately carved stone and pronounced stone blocks in an interesting arc shape, is set in a picturesque setting. It is famously known as the "Movie Bridge" due to its appearance in the film "Dust" directed by Milco Mancevski in 2001. The bridge itself is a captivating attraction due to its unique integration with Nature. Adjacent to the Stone Bridge, there is a stone watermill, which was in use until recently. Additionally, a fresco painting of St. George riding a white horse, adorned with a reddish cloak and slaying a dragon, can be found near the bridge. The painting dates to 1925 and has undergone restoration in 2006.



Fig. 8: The Stone Bridge in the village of Zovik
Source: Original photo of Ivanka Nestoroska (co-author)

The picturesque Gradeska River canyon is well-suited for certain types of adventure tourism. In recent years, canyoning has been introduced as a tourism activity, attracting domestic and foreign visitors. This thrilling adventure involves four hours of river hiking, abseiling, sliding, and swimming, accompanied by walking through the canyon and overcoming natural obstacles such as waterfalls and natural pools (Fig. 9). Canyoning season typically runs from May to October when the village is vibrant and filled with individuals, couples, groups of friends, and families seeking unique experiences and an adrenaline rush.

Besides canyoning that is directly related to the village of Zovik, the broader Mariovo region offers jeep safaris, mountain climbing, mountain biking, and other leisure activities in unusual, exotic, and remote locations. Visitors and tourists can explore the area by hiking alone or with a certified tour guide, or by renting a bike or a jeep.

Despite the limited tourist infrastructure, a few facilities provide accommodation options. The Ethno House "At the Bridge" offers four rooms along with traditional local dishes, homemade bread, honey, sheep's milk cheese, meat, various types of authentic local fruits and salads, and other famous gourmet specialties from the Mariovo region. "Zovik - Mariovo Apartments" provide guests with stunning views of the surrounding countryside, a tranquil and rejuvenating retreat, and delicious meals prepared with fresh locally sourced ingredients.



Fig. 9: Canyoning on Gradeska river, Zovik
Source: Original photos of Biljana Petrevska (co-author)

On the other hand, the architectural and aesthetic values of Zovik's traditional rural architecture serve as an excellent foundation for enhancing the current modest level of tourism development. By offering accommodation in traditional facilities, a completely new and authentic image can be created to attract tourists and visitors engaged in adventure tourism activities in the village and its vicinity. This approach adds to the creation of a unique and immersive experience, contributing to the revitalization of the village and supporting community empowerment.

Discussion

The study reveals that the houses in Zovik village exhibit a compact design, featuring alleys, front doors and small courtyards. These houses are typically situated on steep terrain, often built on rocky foundations within a mountainous environment. They are predominantly arranged in a linear or sequential manner, determining the layout and paths of the alleys, which are mostly paved with coarse stones and located in the central part of the village. Thus, the houses have rural character, and rurality is the fundamental attraction of the countryside as a rural tourism destination (Jepson & Sharpley, 2015). Zovik may thus easily become an attractive destination where hosts may offer local food, stories, and various activities, which contribute to the development of tourism businesses with characteristics that link strongly to the rural resources and maintain strong connections to the past (Brandth & Haugen, 2011). As such, rural tourism can activate the rural capital of the village, preserve local traditions and customs, and strengthen indigenous, traditional, and ecological production. This may further be developed as a small-scale rural tourism spot which often promotes employment, vitality, and sustainability in the rural areas (Hall et al., 2003; Kneafsey, 2000).

Furthermore, it is evident that specific architectural characteristics in Zovik have been shaped by local building practices, spatial considerations, and cultural traditions. Craftsmen have meticulously crafted various elements using locally sourced materials. These materials are carefully processed, considering methods of material gathering, wood and stone cutting, and ground preparation for construction. Consequently, the houses exemplify vernacular craftsmanship incorporating the expertise of artisans and adapting to local climatic conditions using construction materials sourced from the immediate surroundings (Ivkovska, 2020). This is a solid base for developing storytelling for safeguarding traditions, adding values, and preserving rural identities. Due to their enclosed nature, the village houses can be easily adapted for commercial purposes while preserving their functional authenticity and respecting cultural integrity. Consequently, they can serve as tourist accommodation facilities, providing visitors with the opportunity to engage in Nature-based activities in the surrounding areas. As such, Zovik may achieve sustainability and multi-functionality (Ploeg, 2008). Similar cases have been observed in the villages of Galicnik and Vevcani (Atanasovski, 2012), as well as Dolno Palchishte (Petkovska-Mirchevska, 2008).

However, viability of rural tourism lies in its compatibility and complementarity with traditional activities, rather than serving as a substitute for existing sources of income. Economically, it is considered an additional income source for the households, complementing traditional agricultural and livestock-based livelihoods. Nevertheless, considering that this may bring about changes in the traditional practices, it is crucial to conduct prior assessments of tourism impacts. Rural tourism destinations, in particular need to explore alternative businesses to maintain their identities and adapt their structures to any potential disruptions.

Moreover, the sustainability aspect of the village should be addressed by optimizing environmental resources as a fundamental element for tourism, while simultaneously preserving Nature, respecting socio-cultural authenticity, and ensuring economic benefits. Sustainable rural tourism development entails the preservation of natural resources, biodiversity, architectural and cultural assets, and traditional values, all while benefiting host communities by reducing poverty and improving their quality of life (Fons et al., 2011).

The study finds that the focus should be on introducing and maintaining experiential authenticity, aiming to maximize the satisfaction of tourists visiting Zovik by offering tailored storytelling to shape their experiences. This underscores the importance of effective destination management and marketing strategies that prioritize interpretation, heritage preservation, and the promotion of authentic rural tourism. Additionally, sustainable practices and community involvement are crucial for ensuring the long-term viability of the village. These findings corroborate previous studies by Ivkovska (2014), Mitkova-Petrovska and Blaževska (2020), Ristevska and Tuntevski (2020), and Trpkoska and Petrovska (2020), emphasizing the necessity of preserving traditional architecture. Well preserved heritage along with adrenaline and cultural experience, leads to local economic growth enabling the sustainable development of the village.

Conclusion

This research establishes the significance of rural traditional architecture in the context of tourism, highlighting its role in achieving sustainability and resilience in the rural areas. It emphasizes the importance of preserving and maintaining traditional architectural features to create unique experiences that attract tourists and visitors. The study reveals how traditional architecture shapes tourist experience, constructs cultural identities, and contributes to the revitalization of rural communities as evidenced in Zovik. However, it also acknowledges the challenges of balancing the preservation of traditional elements with the commercialization demands of tourism. Nonetheless, preserving authentic architecture enhances the overall tourist experience fosters connections to local culture and traditions, and contributes to the distinctiveness and long-term sustainability of rural destinations.

The analysis demonstrates that traditional architecture has the potential to drive rural prosperity and community well-being, as shown in Zovik. It can serve as a catalyst for local economic development and the sustainability of rural communities by creating economic

opportunities for revitalization. Moreover, traditional architecture plays a crucial role in promoting sustainable livelihoods and empowering the local communities.

This research focuses on a specific case study, which may limit its applicability, but its fundamental insights and analyses remain relevant and informative. The research found that the vernacular buildings in Zovik require effective conservation strategies and sustainable tourism practices to preserve authenticity while balancing tourism development. The Zovik case study can serve as a valuable example for other rural areas facing similar challenges, offering lessons for policymakers, destination managers, and heritage conservation practitioners. Future research should continue to explore the various dimensions and manifestations of the relationship between rural architecture and tourism, considering the diverse perspectives of tourists, local communities, and other stakeholders.

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