

WATER, AGRICULTURE AND THE HUMAN FACTOR IN THE BULGARIAN REGION OF SOPOT

Yora Atanasova

The Town of Sopot, respectively the administrative region of Sopot is one of those in Bulgaria that have got most water resources and at the same time is a illustration of how the latter may not be taken advantage of for sustainable development without the involvement of the human factor, ie proper organization, attention on the human resources and marketing.

According to various sources, even just the spring water fountains in the town count 24, and three more fountains are supplied with dam water. It is despite Sopot does not hold the first place in Bulgaria in this regard; for example Satovcha Village in South-Western Bulgaria with its 50 fountains is going to apply for the Guinness Book of Records. The fountain water has a high capacity. Most of the fountains do not havet taps to stop the water, ie pure spring-water flows round the clock, and mostly remains unused. Only a small part of it goes for drinking and watering of personal gardens of the locals.

Alongside with the wealth of water resources, Sopot has really favorable climatic conditions and potential for growing oil crops and orchards, which is not being used.

Fountains remain an affordable luxury for the local people in times of environmental change and are as an emblem of the city, which also relates to the history and legends about its origin. And of course, also an interesting twist for the tourists, who are increasing in number in the recent years.

1 THE WATER WEALTH OF SOPOT REGION

The water wealth of the Town of Sopot and the Village of Anevo that have composed the Sopot Region as an administrative unit since 2003 consists of:

- Two rivers with waters used for drinking, in the household, for irrigation of private gardens and for industrial purposes;
- Groundwater in the river terraces, which also have high purity and good qualities;
- River water from the upper reaches of the mountain streams;
- Four dams with a total capacity of 830,000 cubic meters that collect part of thee water resources including those of many rivers running down the slopes of nearby mountains;
- Six springs, which supply the 24 fountains of the city of Sopot.

The capacity of the flowing fountains in Sopot is about 40 liters/second. Most of the fountains were built in the 18th. and 19. centuries and were renovated in the late 60s to 80s of 20. century. Recently, three of the supplying wells were cleaned of roots and vegetation, and it led to increased capacity of the fountains fed by them.

A few months ago, the famous company "Nestle" proclaimed via the media its intention to concession of one of the springs for the purpose of bottling and selling spring water. They found the water had all necessary qualities that make it appropriate for infants.

A Photo Gallery with some of the fountains of the town of Sopot:

1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8

9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20-1
20-2	21	22	23
24			

It is believed that the name of the town was directly related to a fountain with running water. According to Constantine Irechek "Sopot" comes from the Slavic word „сопотъ” ("sopota"), which means "a flow" or "artificial water outfall."

A legend about the founding of the town also links it with water. According to it, it was founded by three caravan members, who lost three of their buffaloes, and later found them in a spacious lawn with lush grass and lush spring next to a huge oak tree on a spot in the frameworks of today's Sopot. The very next day after the settlement of the caravan members and their families, the spring water was already flowing through the timber spout or "sopot". Originally, as "Sopot" as just named the source, and then the new settlement got the same name.

The climate is milder, and the snowfall is less compared to the other fields the Sub-Balkan Mountains Valley. The average number of days with lasting snow cover is 25-30. The average annual rainfall in the region is between 650 and 1000 mm, with summer rainfall maximum in June and winter precipitation minimum in February.

The Forests in Sopot Municipality has a total of 15,480 decare or 27.5% of the territory. 50 years ago much of the beech forests were cut down, and were later replaced with pine that led to some reduction of the water resources.

As a whole, the waters of Sopot Region are clean and still somewhat naturally self-healing. Pollutants are mainly caused by VMZ, the biggest plant in the area producing military equipment and machinery, by the non-environmental livestock and by the exploited both regulated and unregulated **dung-hills** in the municipality. Positive is that the administration of the Sopot Region has recently opened a new treatment plant for effluents.

2 AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE SOPOT REGION

2 1 THE ECONOMY OF THE MUNICIPALITY OF SOPOT

A major economy entities in Sopot Region are the two large industrial enterprises VMZ and SKF linked respectively to the military industry and bearings production. The cultivation of the oil-bearing crops (rose and mint), and garment industries has also been a Significant livelihood for the local people for centuries.

VMZ, which is the largest enterprise in the regions of Sopot and the neighboring Karlovo, was founded in the 30s of the last century on the initiative of the then king of Bulgaria. It assumed great priority, and flourished during the years of socialism when the government relied on the development of heavy industry and industrialization. The plant, which employs thousands of people has been in crisis for nearly 2 decades, and the government has decided for its privatization. Its eventual failure would reflected very negatively on both employment and living standard in the area.

The tourism is considered the most promising sector in the region as a revenue source and an alternative employment generator. The town will be visited by about 30,000 tourists annually, with potential for growth if they increase the amount and diversify the tourist products. The main tourist attractions are traditionally connected with the Bulgarian history, culture and nature, and in recent years also with the extreme sports such as paragliding, mountain biking and motorcycling, etc., which are mainly offered by "Shambhala". The company has bought and developed the lift and skiing facilities when they were privatization years ago. Alongside with the development of tourism, the hospitality and restaurant sector grow as well.

As a whole, the consumption power of population is low. The average annual salary is at least 1/3 lower than the national average. In demographic terms, the trends are in line with those in the country: a negative growth and a high level of immigration, although there could be periods of detention of the emigration increase. The young and the most active tend to go to study or earn their livelihood in big cities in Bulgaria and Europe, and stay there. The population is around 10,000 people, of which 61% is of working age. Here to as it is throughout the country, there is a trend of aging. The unemployment rate is high, especially among minority groups and young people.

2 2 THE AGRICULTURE IN THE REGION OF SOPOT

The specific climate, soil and water resources in the region are conducive to the cultivation of oil-bearing crops such as rose plantations, lavender, etc., but only a small proportion of the land is planted with them. In the development plan of the municipality (2004-2011), they point at the growing need for growing such profitable oilseeds in order to more rationally use the limited arable land area (98,077 acres or about 16.5% of the total land fund, 6% of which irrigated). However in practice, even many of the existing rose plantations are deserted. According to the strategy of the regional administration, the reasons relate to the market: the relevant market in Bulgaria is limited, and there are difficulties in the foreign markets.

Association of the Rose Producers warned in 2011 that the production of the worldwide famous Bulgarian rose oil (*Rosa Damascena* and somewhat *Rosa Alba*) is about to die, because only in the Plovdiv Province, which includes the Sopot Region, uncultivated rose plantations are more than 1,000 hectares or almost one third of the total land area. The plantations of oil rose live for 20-25 years, so the rose plants stay but are not handled by their owners. The Association indicates as reasons for that the low prices, the lack of law on the rose production and the late payments of farm subsidies. The rose producers believe that the state is not on their side.

Despite the yield crops are much lower than the average for Bulgaria, the main cultures in Sopot Region are presented by barley, wheat and corn. 3.5% of the Region of Sopot's territory is planted with vines and fruit such as cherry, morello-cherry, plum, walnuts, although there seems to be favorable conditions for them here. The elder people in the area remember that Karlovo-Sopot's part of the Rose Valley once looked like a flowering garden, while now it is largely deserted. The agricultural market is not well developed, and they produce vegetables and fruits mainly in the private sector for meeting the family needs.

The ownership of the agricultural land is private, but the agricultural areas are fragmented. A part of the lands is united in two agricultural cooperatives in the two settlements which compose the administrative region. There is agricultural machinery, although physically obsolete, however the fragmentation of the agricultural land does not allow its rational use.

The stock-farming is of minor importance in the agricultural sector; there is cattle, sheep,

goats and pigs mainly in private farms and mostly for meeting the family needs.

3 DISCREPANCY BETWEEN NATURAL RESOURCES AND SOPOT REGION DEVELOPMENT AS A POLITICAL ISSUE

Sopot is a new administrative region, which separated from Karlovo Region as an independent just eight years ago, and looks like an enclave within it. So speaking about Sopot Region, it also relates to the area around Karlovo as well. And the problems are not much different in the whole Rose Valley.

While there is a shortage of water resources and quality related problems in many places worldwide and in Bulgaria, in Sopot Region they are abundant and with high quality. The soil and climate are favorable, and provide unique opportunities for growing many crops that are in demand worldwide, such as essential oils and fruits. Both beautiful environment and cultural heritage are prerequisites for successful development of sustainable tourism including rural tourism.

The main problem here seems to be how the water and the natural resources in general should be used rationally for sustainable development. Perhaps, the reason preventing this happens is, on the one hand, inertia and tradition, on the other - the economic crisis context and the political decisions at national level.

The regional governments complain that they are burdened with more financial responsibilities and obligations alongside with increasing deprivation from control on the regional resources and opportunities to be more autonomous.

The people feel that the country is not on their side. The rulers rely on the road infrastructure development and fiscal discipline, which is also important; however it looks like they do not think in favour of the human factor. They seem to care for their media image and PR, and earning as much more power as possible at all levels (national, regional and local), but are not concerned with creating favorable conditions for the small business and the farmers and with raising the people life standard.

As a result, the Region of Sopot and the West of the Rose Valley offer increasingly fewer opportunities for livelihood, and are exposed to depopulation.

Sopot, December 2011

SOURCES:

1. Водни ресурси <http://sopot-ecotour.com/bg/%D0%B2%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%BD%D0%B8-%D1%80%D0%B5%D1%81%D1%83%D1%80%D1%81%D0%B8.html>
2. Караганчев, М. Водното богатство на Сопот, в. Диалог днес 27.9.-3.10.2006 г.
3. Любомир ВЪЛКОВ, ВОДНИТЕ РЕСУРСИ НА БЪЛГАРИЯ КАТО ПОЛИТИЧЕСКИ ПРОБЛЕМ <http://www.obshtestvo.net/content/view/1510/4/>
4. ЛЕГЕНДА ЗА СОПОТ http://websopot.hit.bg/Sopot_files/webhtml/Legenda_za_Sopot.html
5. Маслодайна роза - агробиологична и ботаническа характеристика <http://www.kaminata.net/viewtopic.php?f=122&t=3609>
6. Маслодайни казанлъшки рози <http://tourism.kazanlak.bg/discover/2-1-3.html>
7. Общински план за развитие на Община Сопот 2007 - 2013 г. <http://www.strategy.bg/StrategicDocuments/View.aspx?lang=bg-BG&Id=234>
8. От Нестле харесаха сопотската изворна вода http://news.ibox.bg/news/id_1269753609
9. ПРОИЗВОДСТВО И ТЪРГОВИЯ С РОЗОВО МАСЛО http://www.karlovobg.eu/index.php?option=com_sobi2&sobi2Task=sobi2Details&catid=243&sobi2Id=1645&Itemid=77
10. Прочети повече: <http://www.bulgarianproperties.bg/statii-ot-bulgaria/kategorii-na-zemedelskata-zemya-3403.html?property=545>

11. Родното розопроизводство загиба алармират производители
http://dariknews.bg/view_article.php?article_id=732420
12. Сопот <http://bg.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%A1%D0%BE%D0%BF%D0%BE%D1%82>
13. Сопот е на път да се сдобие с "Къща на розата"
(C) Plovdiv24.bg | Източник: <http://news.plovdiv24.bg//278551.html#ixzz1ffb8d6oZ>
14. Състояние на Водния сектор в България <http://ispa-mrrb.org/?id=111#id5>
15. Water for Food Water for Life
http://www.iwmi.cgiar.org/assessment/files_new/synthesis/Summary_SynthesisBook.pdf
16. Shaping the Future of Water for Agriculture
http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTARD/Resources/Shaping_the_Future_of_Water_for_Agriculture.pdf

A FUNDRAISING APPEAL

Kukeri Foundation is a Bulgarian not-for-profit organization with activity mainly linked with the masquerade custom in the Region of Karlovo, Central Bulgaria.

We are fundraising for our activity and on behalf of our member Kuker (mummer) groups, and especially concerning Kukerfest Karlovo 2012 and the included Kukermoda International Student Contest.

Any support would be highly appreciated. You can support us through:

1. Donation;
2. Purchase of online advertising on some of our web-sites www.kukeri-karlovsko.eu and www.kukermoda2012.weebly.com ;
3. Engaging some Kuker band of Karlovo region for a performance via us (probably only applicable for Europe);
4. Purchasing a souvenir from some of the Souvenir pages of www.kukeri-karlovsko.eu .

For more information please see the above websites and contact us.