

CULTURAL AND TOURIST PRODUCTS IN THE RHODOPI CULTURAL AREA

We, the 5th year students in Preservation of Architectural Heritage at the Department “*History and Theory of Architecture*”, understand during the process of our education the necessity of harmonious equilibrium between the preservation of the heritage, its use and sustainable development. Step by step we become aware of the potential of the cultural roads as a new type of cultural heritage and as an effective instrument for cultural tourism. We get acquainted with the experience and the contribution of Bulgaria in this field: the cultural routes of South East Europe, the pilot fragment *Going Back Millennia* – part of the great cultural corridor *Eastern Trans-Balkan Road* and the existing local cultural and tourist products along the corridor. We learn to work in network.

On this base, in the frames of the general organisation of the Association for Cultural Tourism, and under the guidance of our tutors, and having at our disposal the resources of the Multimedia Laboratory for Cultural Heritage at the University of Architecture, Civil Engineering and Geodesy (UACEG), we put forward a **common goal**: to develop project for regional cultural and tourist products along the Eastern Trans-Balkan Road. The territory we work on comprises 20 municipalities in the Central and Eastern Rhodopi Mountains, which we defined as Rhodopi Cultural Area.

The first phase of our work, presented at this exhibition, is the elaboration of a territorial basis of the future regional cultural and tourist products – the THEMATIC CULTURAL ROUTES, linked to the network of the European cultural routes. For that purpose, first, we studied the territory and its resources. We all – students and tutors – travelled together through the Rhodopi Mountains and met the values of the territory. We formed six teams and each one of them collected, analysed and synthesised information on different aspects of the territory.

On the basis of the work of each team, **studies** in the following aspects gradually emerged:

- Cultural vestiges from the Prehistory and the Thracian culture;
- Cultural vestiges from the Antiquity;
- Cultural vestiges from the Middle Ages;
- Cultural vestiges from the National Renaissance and the Modern times;
- Intangible heritage – crafts, traditional occupation;
- Folklore – music, dance, legends.

Each team studied in addition other aspects of the territory: geography of the territory and natural resources, types of tourism and existing tourist products, transport, tourist and information infrastructure.

As a result of a comparison of the studies, a great variety of specific **THEMES** corresponding to certain values emerged. These themes were synthesised in six integral themes – basis for the following six thematic cultural routes in the territory:

- (1) ANCIENT ROADS AND BRIDGES OF EUROPE
- (2) RURAL HABITAT
- (3) WATER – INESTIMABLE WEALTH
- (4) VARIETY OF PEOPLES AND RELIGIONS – COMMON HERITAGE
- (5) MAN AND NATURE
- (6) ANCIENT CULTS: MAN - GODS - NATURE

What you see before your eyes is a synthesis map with the sixth thematic cultural routes in the Rhodopi Cultural Area – our common product. Each of these thematic cultural routes could be a basis for a particular regional tourist product. The development of such products in the frames of the cross-border cultural corridors of South East Europe could become real through effective use of the structural funds under the Operational Programme “*Regional Development*”. A network of possible leading cultural and tourist products with cross-border effect, linked to the network of the cultural corridors of South East Europe and the European and world cultural roads, would have strong impact on the sustainable development of the territory. The work on this network is the basis for our work in the following months – the development of the particular regional cultural and tourist products as integral parts of the Eastern Trans-Balkan Road, as well as projects for certain parts of them.

Our team is:

- **students** – team of students in Preservation of the architectural heritage to the *History and Theory of Architecture* Department, Faculty of Architecture, UACEG: Boyka Ognianova, Vela Nikolova, Georgie Todorov, Danail Dimov, Dimitar Rahov, Ivan Kiurkchiiski, Ivan Rujev, Ivan Shterev, Ina Dineva, Ioana Dimitrova, Lidia Liubomirova, Lina Iotova, Magdalena Yordanova, Maria Petkova, Maia Mollova, Olga Doreva, Rositsa Boyanova, Svetoslava Shtilianova, Stanko Musov, Tsvetomir Panaiotov, Yassen Popov;
- **tutors**: Prof. Todor Krestev, PhD in Architecture (leader of the project), Assist. Prof. Arch. Yordanka Kandulkova, PhD, Assist. Prof. Arch. Emil Yordanov, Assist. Prof. Arch. Velina Pandjarova, Assist. Prof. Arch. Donika Georgieva, Arch. Miroslav Velkov