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**TOURISM  
IN FUNCTION OF DEVELOPMENT  
OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA**

Tourism product as a factor of competitiveness of  
the Serbian economy and experiences of other countries



**THEMATIC  
PROCEEDINGS**

**I**



**UNIVERSITY OF KRAGUJEVAC  
FACULTY OF HOTEL MANAGEMENT  
AND TOURISM IN VRNJAČKA BANJA**



# THE ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS OF RURAL AREA INHABITANTS AS FACTOR OF TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

Aleksandra Šarković<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

*Rural areas to their natural resources, cultural heritage and traditional characteristics represent a rich basis for the development of rural tourism, which is the largest and fastest growing segment of the tourism industry in the last decade. In order to "wise" use of natural resources in rural areas it is necessary to consider the economic, social as well as environmental factors. In addition to the preserved resources, quality products and infrastructure facilities for the successful development of rural tourism, both education and environmental awareness of inhabitants of rural areas are necessary to a certain level. In this paper, environmental awareness was seen through its main factors, such as environmental attitudes, behavior and motives that influence decision-making on key issues related to the environment and among other things depend on characteristics such as level of education and level of awareness of rural area inhabitants.*

*Residents of rural areas are aware that their main business, being agricultural production, contributes to environmental pollution but that the poverty reduction and solving existential problems have been perceived as more important than the environmental protection. The attitudes of the respondents indicate that they, at this point, are not willing to accept the extra costs in order to protect the environment, which also confirms the finding that economic status is often more important than the positive intentions of ecological behavior*

**Key Words:** *rural areas, environmental awareness, tourism, inhabitants of rural areas, education, information.*

**JEL classification:** *Q56, R14*

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<sup>1</sup> Aleksandra Šarković, Phd, Editor in chief, Educational and scientific program, Radio Television Serbia, phone: 064 861 2775, e-mail: aleksandrasarkovic@yahoo.com;

## Opening considerations

Growth of global interests for problems of environmental protection and at the same time much more developed awareness about the need to preserve natural goods encourages the care for rural areas. Interest of contemporary man for natural resources such as forests, rivers, mountains, rare plants and animal species are defining rural areas as places of paramount importance for health and relaxation and at the same time they encourage topicality and importance of their preservation.

Some rural areas with their natural resources overcome traditional function which is related to agriculture as process of producing food. Heritage of traditional rural areas represents the ground for development of rural tourism which preserves scenery and traditional features such as architecture, cultural and historical monuments, local gastronomical dish and traditional crafts (Bryden, 2006, See: Јанковић, 2012).

Large number of studies about protecting environment in rural areas deals with the technical and economic aspects of that problem, neglecting the aspect of ecological awareness of population in rural areas (Akca, Sayili, Yilmazcoban, 2007).

Literature does not provide much information on the ecological awareness of inhabitants in rural areas in Serbia. In addition to those who research countryside and rural communities with emphasize on the sociological aspects of relations within the community, there is a small number of researchers who are analyzing the attitudes of rural population towards the nature, which represent dominant framework of their life and work. Main activity of rural population is agriculture and thus their life and work could significantly affect the environment. On the other hand, sustainable rural development is based on the development of multifunctional and diversified activity from which rural tourism stands out as a great potential. Environmental awareness of inhabitants is important factor which affects the status and quality of the environment as one of important elements for the development of rural tourism.

The conclusion of numerous authors who have studied economic, social and environmental dimensions of rural tourism (Muhi, 2013; Ristić, 2013) indicates that besides infrastructure, the role of local population and capacities that they possess are of crucial importance for the tourism development. Therefore, Pajvancić and Ristić are pointing out that the

modern conception and institutional strategies, as their elementary assumption, should include strong environmental awareness and active participation of citizens, because that is how the relationship between the general interest and specific needs of local communities is established (Pajvančić, Ristić, 2010).

The subject of this work is ecological awareness of rural areas and its influence on development of rural tourism. The work focuses on the factors that have influence on attitudes about the environment, such as formal education and the level of awareness of the population living in rural areas. The aim is to determine the importance and role of ecological awareness of local population as the main actors in the development of the rural tourism.

### **Rural areas- potentials and limitations**

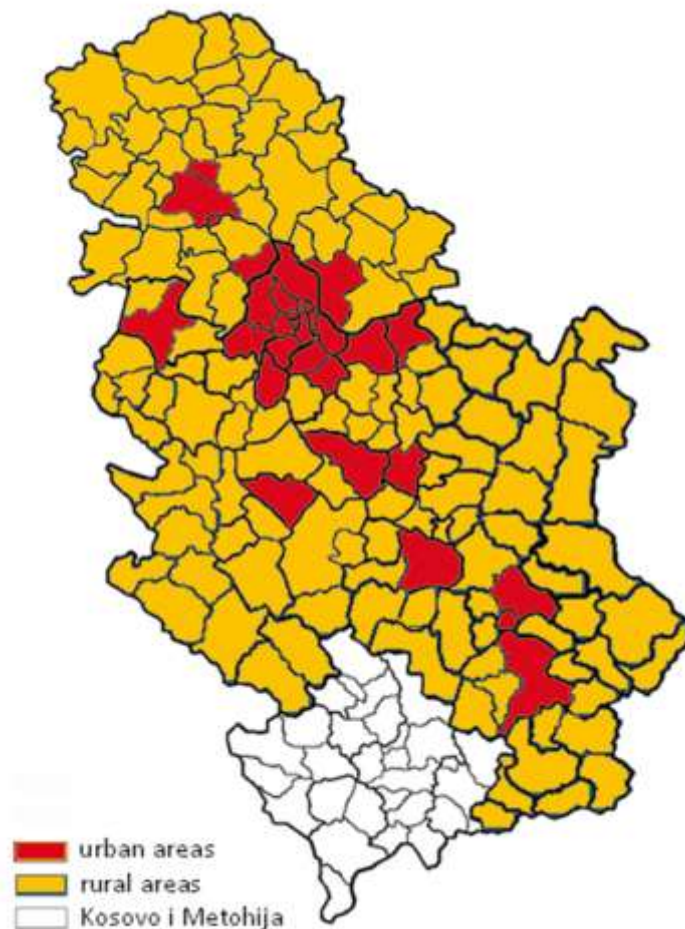
Rural society still has an important role in the demographic, social and economic processes. Rural areas cover 91% of the total territory of the EU, providing livelihoods for 53% of the total working engaged population, and more than 56% of the total population live there (Common Agricultural Policy, 2012). Food production, renewable raw materials, maintenance of natural resources that can be used for tourist purposes, specific economic and social structures within which we develop local crafts and products are some of the functions of these areas which are important not only for local population, but also for society in whole. Synergy of agriculture and tourism which is developing in these areas, if successful, provides socio-economic development and represents platform for further diversification of the economy in these areas. Besides that, compared with the global economy, many rural areas are lagging behind in economic development.

World Bank data show that rural areas, in spite of natural and cultural resources, are significantly lagging behind in economic development when compared to urban areas. According to the same source, per capita income in rural areas is about one third lower than in urban areas, the employment rate is lower, especially for women, service sector is less developed, level of higher education is in general lower and a smaller percentage of households have access to the broadband Network. Studies are showing that high level of rural poverty and unemployment is usually closely related to the high reliance of rural areas on agriculture, where the

use of natural resources is being the mainstay of economic development (Common Agricultural Policy, 2012).

The geographical area of Serbia has great potential for development of rural tourism, because 85% of the territory consists of rural areas with about 45-55% of the population, and agriculture is considered as traditional most common activity of the rural economy. From a total number of 160 municipalities in Serbia, 130 municipalities that consist of 3,904 settlements have characteristics of rural economy (Map).

Figure1: *Map of the rural areas in Serbia defined according to the OECD rural criteria*



Source: *Small rural households in Serbia and the rural non-farm economy*, (Bogdanov, 2008)

Based on the criteria of the World Conservation Union, rural territory of the Republic of Serbia represents one of six European and 153 world centers of biodiversity. Cultural and historical heritage, as well as the population represents special potential.

The area on which The Republic of Serbia is located is characterized by high genetic, species and ecosystem diversity. High mountain and mountain region of the Republic of Serbia is one of six European Biodiversity centers thanks to its rich flora. Serbia is potentially one of the global centers of plant diversity wherein the habitats of endemic species are particularly pointed out. Rural areas of Serbia are characterized by a diversity of landscapes and biodiversity, rich cultural heritage and natural resources, which is enough for successful implementation of the concept of the sustainable development, but on the other hand there are a lot of limiting factors: negative demographic trends, undeveloped infrastructure, fragmented and non-market orientated farms, inadequate production structure, low agricultural productivity and low income per farm, high share of agriculture in the rural economy, low level of diversification of the rural economy, insufficient investment in rural areas, high unemployment rate, insufficient capacity of trade, industry inputs and the processing industry, primarily food industry, lack of horizontal and vertical integration of business entities, etc. (Ristić, 2013).

Improving of the rural economy is increasingly based on multifunctional development and diversification of economic activities of residents. In that process, tourism, due to its numerous advantages, has singled out as one of the most important activities. The experiences of some European countries(e.g. Austria and Italy) have confirmed that rural development models which are based primarily on the synergy of agricultural production and rural tourism can contribute to economic revitalization and strengthening of underdeveloped rural areas (Bosković, 2012). For the implementation of such models, appropriate policies and effective institutional regulation is necessary to encourage rural residents, encourage and guide their activities in all types of rural tourism, but it is also necessary to work on their education and development of ecological awareness.

## **Rural tourism as an integral part of rural development**

Science, in the fields of economy, society, and ecology, deals with the creation and improvement of various possibilities of rural development that would contribute to the revitalization and further development of villages without endangering the environment and human health. (Leader, 1999; 2000).

According to generally accepted definition, rural tourism includes: “wide range of activities, services and additional content provided by hosts (farmers) in their households and estates in order to attract tourists and create additional revenue, while at the same time they need to respect the principle of sustainable development and preservation of the natural resources” (Muhi, 2013).

Rural tourism is also defined as tourism that offers rural environment to visitors by allowing them to experience the atmosphere of life, nature, culture and people in a unique way. This means that visitors are enjoying in the authentic, original experiences and they are returning to the roots and essence of the rural way of life (Milosevic-Đorđević, Milovanović, 2012).

The World Tourism Organization (WTO) has defined rural tourism as tourism activities in rural areas, organized and managed by the local people relying on the local tourist resources (natural, cultural, historical, folk) and tourist objects (inns, farms, etc.).

Rural tourism is significant component of an integrated and sustainable rural development and is also important factor in encouraging the development of local agriculture and non-agricultural activities in rural areas. Rural tourism has the potential to solve many economic issues related to the depopulation of rural areas, to improve the conditions of life, to preserve the environment, to enable the development of other economic activities, to increase the stability of the working age population and enable migration in the opposite direction, from urban to rural areas. Because of its potential, which contributes to socio-economic progress, many countries of the European Union have included rural tourism development in strategy of regions and rural areas (Muhi, 2013).

Rural tourism records steady growth in the world, due to increased demand in the tourist market, but also because of public support for its

development. Development of rural tourism is one of the goals of „The strategy of agriculture and rural development of the Republic of Serbia from 2014 until 2024”, set to achieve optimal development of rural areas (The strategy of agriculture and rural development of the Republic of Serbia from 2014 until 2024).

In Europe, this type of tourism exists at least 100 years, and is growing faster than other types of tourist modalities and is more resistant to economic recession. It is estimated that at least 3% of all international passengers practice rural tourism, which generates 12 billion Euros annually and employs 500,000 people. On the territory of the EU, rural tourism is most developed in France, Germany, Austria, Great Britain and Italy, which together make over 77% of the total market of rural tourism in Europe.

Efficient and effective development of rural tourism is inconceivable without the preserved environment and spatial area in which ecological systems function without special disturbance. Rural tourism depends on a number of natural and cultural assets which must be preserved, used in a sustainable manner and continuously improved. So, in addition to economic progress, rural tourism should establish responsibility for rural development in order to preserve the environment as a resource. For such an approach to the problem of the great importance are human resources: the existence of awareness, knowledge and practice in the use of material (natural and built) resources and commitment for change in local communities (Leader, 1999; 2000).

Rural households today through synergy of their economic activities combine agricultural production as the most important activity with other activities and services in rural areas and thus contribute to a better quality of life, improve living standards, rational use of resources and their preservation for future generations. In order to achieve integrated rural development it is necessary to strengthen the awareness of the population that primary agricultural production and exploitation of natural resources alone cannot sustain the rural economy. Many rural areas that cannot develop intensive production have benefits for rural tourism under the condition that all these activities are dimensioned in line with the environment.

## **The environmental awareness – conceptual definition**

Ecological awareness is a significant factor that influences environment conditions. Its three components are ecological knowledge, evaluation of ecological situation and ecological behavior (Cifrić, 1989). Ecological awareness is awareness of the environment which includes information about the ecological situation or motives of action, wishes and expectations that are referring to human environment and behavior wherewith the ecological state that is pursued is to be achieved.

Ecological knowledge is the basis for an ecological way of thinking, which allows people to treat nature in a different way. Those are the findings about the limitations of nature and about the causes that lead to endangering of natural systems, as well as the necessity to control man's domination over the nature. The result of ecological knowledge is awareness of the global ecological crisis and support to the concept of the development of society, which will be in harmony with the nature.

Other relevant content of the ecological awareness is evaluating the ecological situation. The attitude of individual towards the ecological values ultimately depends on how much these values are his own, or the extent to which individual can be identified with them and tie his existence and way of life to them. Ecological values are associated with knowledge. With the knowledge about the harmful effects of human activities on the soil, water, air, the animal planet world, and the quality of life, grows awareness of the need and importance of preserving these values.

The third element of ecological awareness relates to ecological behavior of individual or group in order to solve ecological problems, which is in compliance with ecological knowledge and the values. The manifestation of positive environmental behavior is determined by the individual characteristics, needs and possibilities. Building of socially desirable ecological behavior is necessary due to changes in daily behavior and actions of people that are not always adequately environmentally positive solutions.

## **The environmental awareness of rural area inhabitants**

Interaction between agriculture and environment is inevitable and could be positive and negative. Agriculture could improve, but also endanger

soil fertility or the habitat of different plant and animal species (OECD, 1992). Preservation of soil, water and forest resources as vital for rural population are one of the most important preconditions for their survival and development.

Rural areas are very rich and have wide range of biodiversity at landscape and cultural heritage and they are a great reserve of human skills and energy. In this work, it was presumed that households that are engaged with agricultural production could be the leaders of development of rural tourism. In this respect, their awareness about cultural heritage and environment that surrounds them and which should be preserved and improved as a basis for the development of rural tourism is very significant.

Ecological awareness, as a condition for the development of ecological culture whose basis consists of knowledge, contributes to advancement of sustainable agricultural and rural development in terms of harmonization of agricultural production with the laws of nature and the improvement of rural revenue on the one hand, and also the reducing the risks to natural ecosystems, on the other. (Agenda 21, chapter 14, see in Milotijević, 2006).

The research conducted by Berenguer (2005) shows that there is certain difference between ecological attitudes of people who live in rural areas in regard to people who live in cities and that research says that rural population shows more responsibility toward the environment and more willingness to behavior which is coordinated with environmental protection. Various researches, up to this point have shown that agricultural producers have ecological ethics because they are in close daily contact with soil on which they and their families' existence depends upon. That finding is in line with Westmacott's research which points out that farmer worries about the environment, but in the same time pollutes it (Westmacott, 1983).

Numerous authors (Westmacott, 1983; McKenna, 1997, Miltojević 2011) found that farmers are aware of the fact that agricultural production, as their main activity, contributes to pollution of the environment. Although they worry about the environment, the polluting is indicating that the level of environmental awareness of the protection of environment is not sufficiently developed. Milotijević and his Bulgarian colleagues indicate

that the ecological awareness of individual farmers in border areas of Serbia and Bulgaria is at low level (Milotijević et al., 2011).

The study of environmental attitudes and behavior carried out in Serbia on a sample of 314 respondents who are the owners of farms showed that existential problems and the reduction of poverty have priority for the majority of respondents (40.8%) over environmental protection (Šarković et al., 2016).

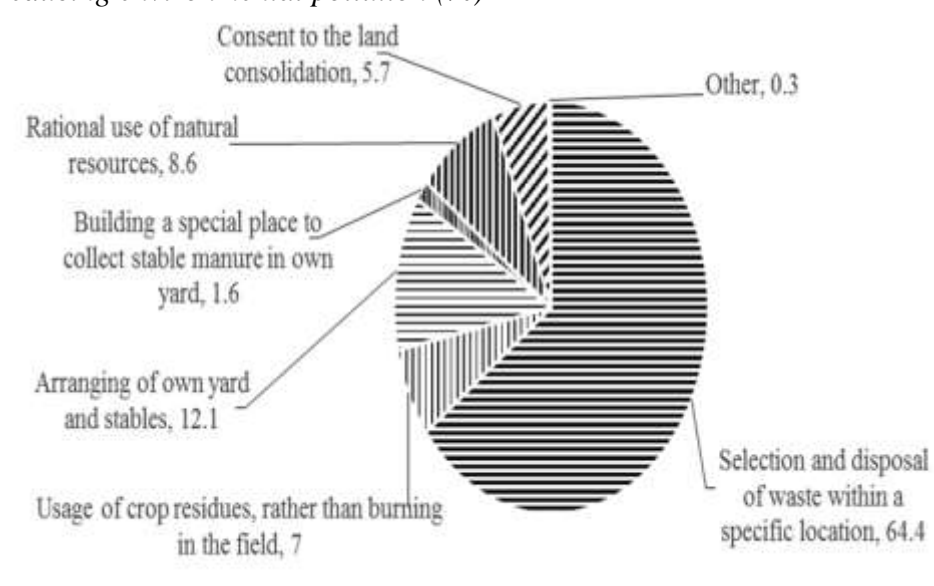
### **Environmental attitudes**

Attitudes of respondents about the willingness to tolerate higher costs in order to protect the environment, show that they are not fully prepared for such changes and changing entrenched practices. Findings of Stern (2000) show that 42% of the respondents are concerned with the environment and only 6% prepared to pay higher taxes and fees in order for its protection; economic status is often more important than the positive intentions of ecological behavior. The discrepancy between high level of concern about the state of the environment and low readiness for financial participation in its improvement can be explained by ignorance and lack of information, but also by economic problems. Within another research (Cvejić et al, 2010), it is found that rural population is facing serious problems of poverty and social exclusion in all of its dimensions, especially farmers and old single households.

Poverty is twice as high in rural than it is in urban areas (9.8%: 4.3%), which is one of the reasons for the low participation of population in rural areas in the environmental protection when it requires investment funds (Cvejić et al, 2010). Research shows that concern for the quality of the environment can be a luxury in which people can engage only after the fulfillment of basic needs (food, housing, economic security) (Sant, 2007).

These findings confirm the results of research conducted on the territory of Serbia on a sample of 314 respondents, owners of farms. The largest proportion of respondents (64.6%) opts for the least 'sacrifice' so as to be engaged in the selection of waste, and the least (1.6%) of them are willing to build a special place for collecting manure in their own backyard.

Graph1: *The way in which a household would be able to contribute to reducing environmental pollution (%)*



Source: *The role of television in spreading environmental awareness of inhabitants within the rural areas of Serbia*, (Šarković, A., 2016), Doctoral Dissertation, University of Belgrade

### **Education and awareness as factors in the formation of environmental attitudes**

Environmental attitudes vary by age, gender, socio-economic status, ethnicity, degree of urban areas, personality, experience, education and knowledge about the environment (Gifford & Sussman, 2012). Another important factor of ecological awareness is ecological knowledge. The assumption is that the knowledge about the environment, which is acquired through education, is helping people to understand the ecological issues, they are becoming aware of the problem and motivated to take a responsible attitude towards the environment.

As an example of an ignorance and poor awareness of farmers, Maširević cites the example of Bačka, where in the last decade of the 20th century, on 47% of total surveyed areas provided for planting row crops, profusely intake of insecticides was established into the soil (Maširević et al, 2009).

Study (Šarković et al, 2016) shows a high correlation between educational level of farmers, the size of the estate, which is processed and their concern for the environment. The highest percentage concerned (62.8%) was recorded among the best educated (college or university), among which none of the respondents stated that he is not concerned about the environment. The lowest percentage of those concerned (30.5%) for the environment is in the group with the lowest level of education (Table 1).

Table 1: *Concern for the environment by education level of respondents (%)*

Level of education	Degree of concern for the environment			
	Worried	Partially worried	Not worried	Total
Without or with Elementary school	30,5	51,6	17,9	100,0
High school	46,5	47,2	6,3	100,0
College or University	62,8	37,2	0,0	100,0
Total	43,8	48,7	9,2	100,0

$X^2=22,691$ ;  $P<0,001$ ;  $C=0,273$

Source: *Ecological awareness of agricultural producers in Serbia: attitudes and practices (Šarković et al, 2016) Teme, XL,(2). 2016.*

With the increase in the level of education, the number of those who are somewhat or completely willing to pay the expenses for environmental protection increases as well (Tab. 2). Similar results were gained in the research of Fahliquist (2008), stating that those who know more about the environment and related issues, have a higher level of awareness and motivation to solve problems in this area.

Table 2: *Willingness for higher expenses for environmental protection based on education (% respondents)*

The level of education	Degree of willingness to pay higher fees and taxes				
	Willing	Partially willing	Unwilling	Cannot decide	Total
Without school or only with Elementary school	4,2	51,6	38,9	5,3	100,0
High school	4,2	61,8	26,4	7,6	100,0

College or University	16,3	72,1	11,6	0,0	100,0
Total	6,0	59,9	28,4	5,7	100,0

$X^2=22,738$ ;  $p<0,001$ ;  $C=0,273$

Source: *Ecological awareness of agricultural producers in Serbia: attitudes and practices* (Šarković et al., 2016) *Teme, XL*, (2). 2016.

Findings about the media's role in increasing the level of awareness of rural area residents among whom the highest number are agricultural producers, we can find in Akca's research (2006). He analysed the ecological awareness of residents in two rural provinces in Turkey and showed that television and press stand out as major source of informing about the environment.

Research conducted in Serbia has revealed the existence of significant connection between the level of informing and the attitude of respondents towards concern about the environment (Table 3). The highest percentage of concern was found among the best-informed (64.1%), while the lowest one among the least-informed respondents (30.9%).

Table 3: *Concern about the environment based on the level of awareness (% respondents)*

The level of awareness	Degree of concern			
	Very worried	Partially worried	Not worried	Total
Poor	30,9	52,6	16,5	100,0
Medium	43,0	49,6	7,4	100,0
Good	64,1	34,4	1,6	100,0
Total	43,6	47,2	29,2	100,0

$X^2=24,435$ ;  $P<0,000$ ;  $C=0,282$

Source: *Ecological awareness of agricultural producers in Serbia: attitudes and practices* (Šarković et al., 2016) *Teme, XL*, (2.) 2016.

### **Adoption of environmental practices as factor of environmental behavior**

Contemporary concept of agricultural management in the EU has been recommended through the principles of good agricultural practices which includes the use of certain procedures in the process of agricultural production and enable the achievement of the sustainable agriculture and

environmental protection. This measurement system is based on knowledge rather than on high investment and the use of natural resources in a sustainable manner. Principles of good agricultural practices make the minimum of standards for farm management (environmental protection, environmental management, food safety, animal health and welfare) and they have been adopted as support of sustainable agriculture and environment protection. The use of these principles in the EU is in line with national legal framework. Although their use is voluntary, it provides value added to the manufacturers of products. The use and approval of environmental practices is contributing to preservation of natural goods as the ground for integrated rural development with an emphasis on rural tourism.

In the research undertaken in Serbia (Šarković et al., 2016) environmental behavior of the respondents was analyzed through the adoption of environmental and agricultural practices. This study has shown that farmers largely apply environmentally harmful practices which threaten the environment:

- More than a half (58.3%) of respondents does not separate biological waste within their household.
- More than a third of respondents (35.4%) bury dead animals in a place for them to determine.
- More than a third of respondents (38.7%) have never done soil analysis.
- One fifth of respondents (20.9%) burns crop residues directly in the field.
- One fifth of respondents (20.2%) burns empty pesticide containers in an unsecured part of the yard.
- On the other hand, the responses indicate that respondents are aware of the importance of environmental protection. Thus, for example:
  - More than two fifths of respondents (43.3%) plowed crop residues.
  - Almost two fifths of the respondents (39.0%) perform the soil analysis once in five years.

Such findings indicate that farmers are willing to respect the positive environmental practices if they are familiar with them, have long personal experience in their application and if this enables infrastructure development.

Another research conducted in Serbia (Šarković et al., 2016) has shown that education has an impact on the choice of ecological practices

implemented by farmers. Respondents who have a higher level of education in higher percentage do soil analysis, and much less implement environmentally harmful practice of burning crop residues directly in the field.

### **Conclusion**

Development of rural tourism is based on the well-preserved natural and cultural resources, that in the process of its development must be used in a sustainable manner and continue to improve. For such an approach the existence of awareness, knowledge and practice in the use of material (natural and built) resources and commitment for change in local communities is of great importance.

The research results indicate that inhabitants of rural areas are aware of the fact that agricultural production, as their main activity, contributes to environmental pollution. Based on their own testimonies, many of them show concern for the environment. However, poverty reduction and existential problems are more important to them than the protection of the environment.

Unwillingness to bear additional costs in order to protect the environment confirms the finding that economic status is often more important than the positive intentions of the ecological behavior which is contrary to the views on environmental concerns.

The level of concern for the environment is highly correlated with the level of education. The highest percentage concerned is registered among the best educated (college or university) and best informed people.

The fact that manufacturers often use practices which threaten the environment shows the low level of pro-ecological behavior among rural residents. The low level of pro-ecological behavior indicates a potential threat to the environment by those who should save it and is not in line with high level of concern that they express about the environment. There are unrealistic expectations about the rural tourism development on farms which implemented harmful practices. These findings point to a necessity to incorporate education in order to improve the environmental awareness of people as a significant factor in the development of rural tourism.

Based on the results, which indicate non-compliance of environmental attitudes and behaviors it can be concluded that the environmental

awareness of rural population is not at a level that enables sustainable rural development with special emphasis on rural tourism, which requires further work on its promotion.

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