

TOURISM AS A DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITY OF RURAL AREAS IN THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

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Abstract

Rural areas cover a significant part of the territory and the total population of the Republic of Serbia. However, the population of these areas is mainly engaged in agriculture, with greater poverty than urban areas. Therefore, it is necessary to foster better integration of the primary sector with other sectors, especially with the manufacturing industry, first of all with the food industry and the tertiary sector, i.e. tourism, to provide additional income for the rural economy. The subject of this research is the role and importance of tourism in the development of rural areas of the Republic of Serbia, with the aim of indicating that tourism represents one of the significant opportunities for the future sustainable development of rural areas of the Republic of Serbia. This paper will also analyze the impact of tourists' overnight stays by type of tourist resorts on the share of tourism in GDP, with an emphasis on the rural tourist households.

Key Words: rural areas, rural tourism, type of tourist resorts, rural tourist households, accommodation facilities

JEL classification: O18, R11, Z32

Introduction

The development of tourism in rural areas could contribute to the development of many villages that today still rely on agriculture as an economic activity. Most rural areas in Serbia are among the poorest areas and at the same time represent areas with low diversified activities (Ristić et al., 2019). Bearing in mind that the population primarily engaged in agriculture is usually poor, the necessity of diversifying the activities of the

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population of these areas is recognizable. Namely, it is necessary to connect agriculture both with the secondary sector through the development of the manufacturing industry, and with the tertiary sector in the form of providing services and development of tourism in rural areas. Linking agriculture to tourism in rural areas is of particular importance because of the possibility of using rural resources for agricultural, food and tourism purposes, with the additional income of the rural population based on manufacturing and accommodation facilities, as well as the development of various supporting services.

In recent years, tourism has been developing and taking on new forms. Among the specific forms of tourism, rural tourism is becoming more and more interesting. Accordingly, the question is how to attract tourists to rural areas of Serbia which have abundant resources and how to improve tourist offer of these areas (Bogdanov, 2007). This issue is of particular importance given that rural areas cover about 85% of the territory of the Republic of Serbia and that about half of the population lives there. High percentage of rural population employment in agriculture indicates a low diversification of income and activities of the population in rural areas (Bošković, 2012), and also the low level of tourism development.

The multifunctionality of agriculture is an important factor for diversification of activities in rural areas (Ploeg et al., 2000). Thereby, there is clear evidence that rural tourism sector captures benefits of agriculture. Some analyses of rural accommodation show the clear link between the presence of agricultural amenities in the landscape and the price that can be charged to rural tourists. Namely, prices of rural accommodation are usually higher in areas with more agricultural amenities (Huylenbroeck et al., 2007, p. 18).

The subject of research in this paper is the development of tourism in rural areas of the Republic of Serbia. The aim of the paper is to point out the importance of tourism for the future development of rural areas of the Republic of Serbia, and in particular to point out the importance of rural tourist households in rural development.

According to the defined subject and the aim of this research, the basic hypothesis in this paper is: If the number of tourists' arrivals and overnight stays in rural areas is encouraged it will have a significant positive impact on the rural and overall economic development of the Republic of Serbia.

Literature review

Tourism can initiate the development of rural areas and contribute to more balanced regional development. It can at the same time be an additional source of income for agricultural households and can mitigate rural unemployment.

Tourism is considered as one of instruments for rural development. It can influence the development of a certain area. Tourism in developing countries is usually considered as one of the important approaches to balancing regional development, while in developed societies it is considered as an important source of income for local community and one of important factors of diversification of economic activities of rural areas (Manić, 2014). Also, tourism is considered as one important determinant of development at national level.

The development of rural tourism as an organized activity began in Serbia in the late 1970s. One of the most important segments for rural tourism development of Serbia is development of rural tourism in agricultural households. A significant advantage of the development of this type of tourism is manifested in securing additional tourism income to rural areas with minimal investment by the farmers themselves, as well as in expanding economic development in the peripheral areas based on the interdependence of agriculture and tourism (Čomić, 2002). Therefore, the government should pursue a responsible economic and agrarian policy in order to reduce poverty and social inequality, which is especially pronounced in rural areas where agriculture is a dominant economic activity, which would create conditions for economic and sustainable development (Veselinović et al., 2019). Given that tourism can play an important role in sustainable development, not only in rural areas but also the entire economy, it is essential to increase the competitiveness of tourist destinations in order to improve the parameters of tourism that would influence to economic growth and development of the country (Dimitrijević, 2018).

At the beginning of the 21st century, in accordance with the specific requirements of tourists, new forms of tourism began to develop, within which rural tourism occupies a significant care (Njegovan et al., 2015). Thus, rural tourism is most easily defined as tourism that takes place in the countryside (OECD, 1994, p. 8). Namely, rural tourism means any form of tourism that represents rural life, art, culture and heritage at rural locations,

thereby benefiting the local community economically and socially as well as enabling interaction between the tourists and the locals for a more enriching tourism experience can be termed as rural tourism (Nagaraju & Chandrashekara, 2014, p. 43). As such, rural tourism encompasses several types of tourism such as agritourism, ethnic tourism, ecotourism, creative tourism, and culinary tourism – food and wine routes (Sasu & Epuran, 2016) and it is widely recognized as an important factor for rural development.

Traditionally, agriculture was the main activity in rural areas, which employed most of rural population and was a main source of income. The situation has changed over time, so rural tourism is now considered as a potential for solving certain agricultural problems. Today, many farmers and rural residents try to find the alternative sources of income, with a link between agriculture and tourism. In some areas and for some businesses, tourism can be of great benefit. Rural tourism in the whole is based on rural environment, whereas farm tourism is based on the farm and farmers. This means that within the framework of rural tourism, farm tourism enterprises are more closely related to agriculture than other rural tourism types and operations (Fleischer & Tchetchik, 2005, p. 493).

Many forms of tourism do not have very negative impact on environment, unlike industry, mining and modern agribusiness. That is why sustainable tourism is the favorite type of tourism which tries to reduce bad impacts on natural resources and environment, especially in mountainous rural areas (Bošković et al., 2019; Ristić et al., 2016).

Thereby, the countryside is usually at risk from unmanaged or ill-managed tourism. Parts of the physical environment are at risk because they are fragile: natural habitats, archaeological features and footpaths are but a few of the features under threat from visitor numbers. The economic stability of the rural world can be at risk from new, perhaps large scale, tourism businesses seeking short-term gains. For all these reasons, a sustainable approach to rural tourism would seem to be especially important (Lane, 1994, p. 19).

Indicators of the statement and development of agriculture and tourism of the Republic of Serbia could be presented (Table 1).

Table 1: *Contribution of agriculture and tourism to the economic development of the Republic of Serbia*

	Agriculture		Tourism		
	Production value (current prices, mill. RSD*)	Agricultural GVA** share in GDP,%	Number of tourists' arrivals	Number of tourists' overnight stays	Contribution of travel and tourism to GDP*** (% of GDP)
2010	498776.4	6.3	2000597	6413515	5.1
2011	564117.8	6.7	2068610	6644738	5.4
2012	542919.5	6.0	2079643	6484702	5.6
2013	621215.3	6.4	2192435	6567460	5.6
2014	635984.9	6.4	2192268	6086275	5.9
2015	584834.1	5.6	2437165	6651852	6.4
2016	643685.6	6.0	2753591	7533739	6.6
2017	590706.9	5.4	3085866	8325144	6.9
2018	640861.9	5.4	3430522	9336103	6.9

**RSD - Republic Serbia Dinars

**GVA - Gross Value Added

***GDP - Gross Domestic Product

Source: *SORS - Economic Account of Agriculture, 2018, p. 24; Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Serbia, 2011-2019; Knoema, 2020.*

According to WTTC data, tourism in Serbia participated in GDP with 6.9% in 2018. In Serbia, the value of agricultural production fluctuated from year to year, as well as the share of agriculture in GDP, with a tendency to decrease in recent years, while tourism indicators in the form of tourists' arrivals and overnight stays generally recorded growth, with constant increase of tourism share in GDP. Accordingly, agriculture in the past was more important than tourism for economic development of the Republic of Serbia, while today it is tourism, measured by the share in GDP. Therefore, a special attention should be paid to the development of tourism in rural areas where agriculture is still the primary activity and relatively small number of tourists' overnight stays take place in rural these areas.

The strongest connection between agriculture and tourism is visible in rural areas due to the fact that agricultural production takes place in these areas, where also many forms of tourism are developing in rural areas. Obviously, rural tourism reflects the links between agriculture and tourism in the best way, encompassing a whole range of activities, products and services, offering tourists a number of the elements of the natural environment, as

natural experience, rural tradition, culture and the other values of the local community, combining different forms of tourism, linking traditional and modern elements (Ristić et al., 2019).

Research methodology

The analysis in this paper will be conducted for the period 2010-2018 as tourists' arrivals and overnight stays will be observed by regions and type of tourist resorts. The analysis will be made on the basis of data of the Statistical Office of Republic of Serbia, with special emphasis on tourists' overnight stays and accommodation facilities in rural tourist households. The SPSS statistical package will be used to examine differences in tourists' arrivals and overnight stays. These differences will be examined using the Kruskal-Wallis test since these are one-factor variables that do not have a normal schedule, for which Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests were used. The impact of tourists' overnight stays by type of tourist resorts on economic development will be examined through OLS regression in the EViews econometric package. The statistical package SPSS, using the Kruskal-Wallis test will also be used to test the difference of tourists' overnight stays as well as accommodation facilities in rural tourist households by type of tourist resorts. Finally, the structure of accommodation facilities in rural areas of the Republic of Serbia will be analyzed. Considering that according to the current classification of tourist resorts in the Republic of Serbia, there are no special resorts for rural tourism, the paper analyzes other tourists' resorts and other resorts (according to the data of the Statistical Office of Republic of Serbia: selected tourist resorts of the SORS).

Research results

Bearing in mind that regional differences affect rural areas, i.e. that all regions except Belgrade can be considered as extremely rural, their observation and mutual differences in attracting tourists and tourism development are important.

The presented Table 2 shows that there is a significant difference in tourists' arrivals and overnight stays between regions, i.e. the Region of Šumadija and Western Serbia recorded the highest number of tourists' arrivals and overnight stays, then the Belgrade region, the Region of Southern and Eastern Serbia and finally the Region of Vojvodina.

Table 2: *Number of tourists' arrivals and overnight stays by regions of the Republic of Serbia, 2010-2018*

	Tourists' arrivals	Tourists' overnight stays
Chi-Square	26.596	29.849
Asymp. Sig.	.000***	.000***
Mean rank		
Belgrade region	26.11	22.22
Region of Vojvodina	9.22	6.44
Region of Sumadija and Western Serbia	28.89	32.00
Region of Southern and Eastern Serbia	9.78	13.33

Note: *The value is significant at 10% (*), 5% (*), and 1% (***) confidence level*

Source: *Authors', based on SORS, Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Serbia, 2011-2019*

The development of rural tourism, increase in accommodation facilities and promotion of tourist destinations in rural areas should be certainly directed to the Region of Sumadija and Western Serbia, as well as the Region of Southern and Eastern Serbia and the Region of Vojvodina, which can also be considered extremely rural and lagging behind the Belgrade region as an urban area in terms of tourists' arrivals and overnight stays.

In addition to regional differences, it is even more important to examine the impact of tourists' overnight stays by type of tourist resorts on the economic development.

The presented Table 3 shows that the model is suitable for examining the impact of tourists' overnight stays by type of tourist resorts on economic development (0.000), and that it largely describes this significance in reality (0.980148). The greatest statistical significance of the impact on economic development is the tourists' overnight stays in spas and mountain resorts, followed immediately by tourists' overnight stays in other accommodation, while tourists' overnight stays in other tourist accommodation has no statistical significance for the economic development of the Republic of Serbia, calculated according to the OLS regression methodology.

Table 3: *Impact of tourists' overnight stays by type of tourist resorts on the economic development of the Republic of Serbia, 2010-2018*

Variable	Coefficient	t-Statistic	Prob.
Spas	-1.69E-06	-5.168433	0.007***
Mountain resorts	2.06E-06	5.553179	0.005***
Other tourists' resorts	-5.78E-07	-0.815959	0.460
Other resorts	5.99E-06	4.437816	0.011**
R-squared	Adjusted R-squared	F-statistic	Prob(F-statistic)
0.990074	0.980148	99.74498	0.000***

Note: *The value is significant at 10% (*), 5% (*), and 1% (***) confidence level dependent variable: contribution of travel and tourism to GDP (% of GDP)*

Source: *Authors', based on SORS, Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Serbia, 2011-2019*

In addition to the impact of tourists' overnight stays by type of tourist accommodation on economic development, it is important to observe their mutual differences in attracting tourists.

Table 4: *Number and share (%) of tourists' overnight stays by type of tourist resorts (selected tourist resorts of the SORS data), 2010-2018*

	In total	Spas	Mountain resorts	Other tourist accommodation	Other accommodation	% Spas	% Mountain resorts	% Other tourist accommodation	% Other accommodation
2010	6413515	2210710	1466907	1230534	207180	34.47	22.87	19.19	3.23
2011	6644738	2308197	1590016	1172913	211034	34.74	23.93	17.65	3.18
2012	6484702	2035385	1601042	1198988	183234	31.39	24.69	18.49	2.83
2013	6567460	2134497	1558126	1130999	225634	32.50	23.72	17.22	3.44
2014	6086275	1852036	1411822	995332	223220	30.43	23.20	16.35	3.67
2015	6651852	1854582	1661487	1130209	221990	27.88	24.98	16.99	3.34
2016	7533739	2085044	1928533	1216312	269663	27.68	25.60	16.14	3.58
2017	8325144	2227945	2078690	1380257	300980	26.76	24.97	16.58	3.62
2018	9336103	2542391	2172906	1539478	373552	27.23	23.27	16.49	4.00

Source: *Authors', based on SORS, Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Serbia, 2011-2019*

From the presented Table 4, it can be seen that year in, year out the smallest number of tourists stay in other accommodation, as well as in other tourist

accommodation, while the majority of tourists visit spas and mountain resorts. Thus, it is important to analyze the share of foreign tourists visiting these areas and the number of domestic tourists (Table 5).

Table 5: *Share of foreign tourists' overnight stays by type of tourist resorts in the Republic of Serbia (%), 2010-2018*

	In total	Spas	Mountain resorts	Other tourist accommodation	Other accommodation
2010	22.64	4.72	8.80	22.71	23.37
2011	24.73	5.71	9.30	27.75	22.50
2012	27.70	6.61	9.69	32.78	27.44
2013	30.28	8.49	12.47	33.89	28.13
2014	35.51	10.86	15.23	37.60	38.33
2015	36.23	12.45	14.59	37.96	37.25
2016	36.36	12.17	14.89	37.27	36.64
2017	38.14	12.18	15.46	39.16	39.48
2018	39.18	12.42	15.88	39.72	41.08

Source: *Authors', based on SORS, Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Serbia, 2011-2019*

It can be concluded that all tourist resorts are dominated by domestic tourists compared to the foreign ones. Compared with the spa and mountain resorts, there is a smaller number of tourists staying in other tourist accommodation and other accommodation. However, there is a higher share of foreign tourists in the total number of tourists' overnight stays compared to spas and mountain resorts. Further research will analyse tourists' overnight stays in rural tourist households by type of tourist resorts, i.e. compare their differences.

Table 6: *Tourists' overnight stays in rural tourist households by type of tourist resorts, 2014-2018*

Type of tourist resorts	Mean rank	Chi-Square	Asymp. Sig.
Spas	7.10	4.538	.209
Mountain resorts	8.90		
Other tourist accommodation	14.60		
Other accommodation	11.40		

Note: *The value is significant at 10% (*), 5% (*), and 1% (***) confidence level*

Source: *Authors', based on SORS, Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Serbia, 2015-2019*

According to Table 6, most of tourists' overnight stays in rural tourist households are realized in other tourist accommodation and other accommodation, unlike spas and mountain resorts, but these differences are not statistically significant, so we should also analyse accommodation facilities in those areas (Table 7).

Table 7: *Accommodation facilities (rooms) in rural tourist households by type of tourist resorts, 2014-2018*

Type of tourist resorts	Mean rank	Chi-Square	Asymp. Sig.
Spas	10.60	6.074	.108
Mountain resorts	10.60		
Other tourists accommodation	15.00		
Other accommodation	5.80		

Note: *The value is significant at 10% (*), 5% (*), and 1% (***) confidence level*
Source: *Authors', based on SORS, Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Serbia, 2015-2019*

The analysis of the accommodation facilities in rural tourist households shows that the largest number of such households is in other tourist accommodation, spas and mountain resorts, while the least rural tourist households are in other accommodation, but these differences are not statistically significant, so the whole structure of accommodation facilities in rural areas of the Republic of Serbia must be observed. As most tourists' overnight stays in rural tourist households after other tourist accommodation are in other accommodation, it needs to develop more in these locations, and attract tourists to these areas.

Most accommodation facilities in rural areas of the Republic of Serbia refer to rural tourist households, then apartments and guest houses. However, it is important to note that these are accommodation facilities collected on the basis of data from the National Association of Rural Tourism of Serbia (selo.rs), while there are many accommodation facilities that have not been registered in this way. There are even differences in the data from the Tourist Organization of Serbia and the Directory of Rural Tourism Households. Anyway, the accommodation facilities must be observed according to the data of the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, since these data are collected by the monthly report of catering trade and other business entities that provide accommodation services to tourists, or who mediate the provision of those services.

Table 8: *Share of accommodation facilities (rooms) by type of tourist resorts and facilities, 2018 (%)*

	Spas	Mountain resorts	Other tourist accommodation	Other accommodation
Hotels	11.92	17.70	23.64	5.54
Motels	2.61	4.44	58.22	34.73
Apartments	5.87	66.23	13.87	0.86
Tourist settlements	0.00	37.00	24.00	10.00
Boarding houses	0.00	57.55	0.00	42.45
Overnight stays	15.35	17.05	35.70	18.79
Inns	13.11	11.09	49.36	23.67
Garni hotels	5.79	2.86	32.98	1.88
Apartment hotels	0.00	94.75	3.21	0.00
Spa cures	96.01	0.00	3.99	0.00
Climatic cures	54.73	45.27	0.00	0.00
Mountain shelters and huts	0.00	87.86	7.77	4.37
Workers' resorts	31.01	64.87	4.11	0.00
Youth and children's resorts	6.21	72.60	15.98	5.22
Hostels	2.54	4.51	28.45	0.00
Camp sites	9.62	46.15	26.92	0.00
Camping grounds	0.00	3.04	13.40	26.64
Private rooms	57.01	9.87	15.05	16.31
Private houses	66.53	10.12	17.61	5.21
Rural tourist household	3.73	25.16	63.47	7.63
Dinning and sleeping cars	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Hunting lodges and cottages	14.29	0.00	0.00	85.71
Other	0.00	0.00	78.95	21.05

Source: *Authors', based on SORS, Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Serbia, 2019, p. 349.*

Table 8 shows that other tourist accommodation is predominantly accommodation in hotels, motels, overnight stays, inns, hostels and rural tourist household, while in spa resorts it is spa cures, climatic cures, private rooms and private houses. Apartments, tourist settlements, boarding houses, apart hotels, mountain shelters and huts, workers' resorts, youth

and children’s resorts and camp sites dominate in mountain resorts. In other resorts, it is only camping grounds and hunting lodges and cottages. This leads to the conclusion that the smallest number of diverse structures of accommodation facilities is in other accommodation. Therefore, the total accommodation facilities according to the type of tourist resorts will be compared.

Table 9: *Total share of accommodation facilities by type of tourist resorts (%)*

	Spas	Mountain resorts	Other tourists’ resorts	Other resorts	Spas	Mountain resorts	Other tourist accommodation	Other accommodation
	Rooms				Beds			
2010	29.85	16.93	26.32	8.93	31.24	19.10	24.06	8.95
2011	28.46	15.81	25.99	8.57	29.33	17.53	23.30	8.43
2012	29.74	18.55	27.34	7.11	31.35	21.35	24.94	7.02
2013	27.88	16.60	25.86	9.83	24.74	19.16	24.13	12.13
2014	25.52	17.02	25.27	8.08	23.70	20.06	25.52	9.20
2015	25.53	16.42	24.92	8.93	23.99	20.00	25.22	9.85
2016	25.44	17.01	24.02	8.81	24.06	20.74	23.98	10.10
2017	25.02	17.15	23.11	9.23	23.77	21.32	23.07	10.48
2018	23.50	17.66	22.61	9.31	23.44	21.79	22.33	10.23

Source: *Authors’*, based on SORS, *Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Serbia, 2011-2019*

Table 9 shows that most of the abovementioned accommodation capacities (rooms and beds) are in spas, while the least is in other places, which can be equated with the arrival of tourists in those places.

Conclusion

Regarding the hypothesis of this paper, which is namely the starting point of this research, we can conclude that if the number of tourists' arrivals and overnight stays in rural areas is encouraged, it will have a significant positive impact on rural and overall economic development of the Republic of Serbia. For now, spas and mountain resorts have the highest number of tourists’ overnight stays as accommodation facilities, and they also

contribute most to the economic development of the Republic of Serbia. On the other hand, the least accommodation facilities and tourists' overnight stays are in other accommodation, which also has a significant impact on economic development, so this accommodation should be more promoted and should be made more attractive for tourists, as well as other tourist accommodation. Also, it is necessary to classify accurately the data regarding categorization of tourist resorts by type of tourist resorts in the Republic of Serbia where exactly the data for rural tourism are extracted, because for now it does not exist, but it is of high importance for future rural tourism development.

From the above it can be concluded that rural tourism of the Republic of Serbia is not at a satisfactory level of development. Therefore, special attention should be paid to the promotion and development of tourism in rural areas. This is also of main importance for the diversification of activities of the population living in these areas. Thus, special emphasis should be placed on linking agriculture primarily with the tertiary sector, especially with tourism in rural areas, but also with the manufacturing industry by encouraging the multifunctionality of agriculture.

Although most tourists' overnight stays in rural tourist households are realized in other tourist accommodation and other accommodation, this difference is not statistically significant in relation to spas and mountain resorts. Also, the difference in accommodation facilities in rural tourist households is not statistically significant, although accommodation facilities in other tourist accommodation dominate, while other accommodation at the bottom. Therefore, these accommodation facilities should develop more, having in mind the tourists' overnight stays in them.

Considering the structure of accommodation facilities in rural areas, there is a large difference in accommodation facilities between the SORS data, the National Association of Rural Tourism of Serbia and the Tourist Organization of Serbia, which indicates insufficient public availability of data on rural accommodation facilities, especially of rural tourist households. In addition to better statistical monitoring, promotion and modernization, it is also important to introduce special programs that will include specific itineraries, nature walks and exploring the natural beauty of rural areas of Serbia. It requires the assistance of the government, by providing incentives, subsidies, specific developing programs and projects. Also, local initiatives are necessary as well as the adequate promotion of

rural areas and their beauties, not only in the country, but also at the international level.

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