

CLUSTERING IN AGRICULTURE AND TOURISM AS A POTENTIAL FOR DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL TOURISM

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Abstract

Global trends that enhance healthy lifestyles, turning back to nature, preservation of the environment, using renewable energy sources, biodiversity conservation, and more are making the area of rural tourism more attractive. There is sometimes a discrepancy between the possibilities and the level of development, as it is in Serbia. Despite many fulfilled conditions, all the benefits and potential that rural tourism holds, it is not sufficiently developed in Serbia. Clustering leads to improved competitiveness of member organizations because of the increased productivity and efficiency, implementation of innovations, development of new technologies, and introduction of the latest quality standards, as well as better access to the market. Additionally, clusters contribute to the economic development of individual regions, and they are of particular importance for increasing exports and internationalizing businesses. This paper aims to show that clustering in agriculture supports and encourages member organizations to achieve the potentials for the development of rural tourism. In the linking of tourism and agriculture in clustering there emerges the agritourism cluster, which brings many benefits and possibilities that are individually much harder to realize.

Key Words: *rural tourism, clusters, agricultural clusters, tourism clusters, agritourism cluster, Serbia*

JEL classification: *Z32, R58, O13*

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Introduction

Tourism became one of the fastest-growing economies in the recent years, which is why governments around the world are more intensively recognizing the power of tourism and trying to use it as a way to improve their country's development and prosperity. In many countries, tourism is becoming an important industry or even the leading one. Rural tourism, as a particular type of tourism, is a vital instrument of the economic development of rural areas. Protected nature and the environment in rural areas have always attracted, and even more recently, a large number of the urban population, which is why there is an increasing interest in rural travel or, as Ružić (2012) points out, the story of rural tourism started in rural areas, and it will be expanding in the future.

On the other hand, it is necessary to find and emphasize all those options that can make tourism in general and mainly rural tourism more competitive in the increasingly demanding market. Tourism destination stakeholders are trying to identify the diverse approaches and tools that can be used to present a destination in the best possible way (Cvijanović et al., 2019). The study of innovation in tourism is additionally complicated compared to some other branches of services, given the complexity and heterogeneous structure of the tourism industry, which connects many actors and sectors, including business, users, and government. Therefore, the emergence of new forms of tourism (which have a prefix to sustainable and ecological, for example) is difficult to identify, and it is unknown whether these new forms aim for something that is ordinary old "tourism" or not (Mowfoth & Munt, 2016, p. 26). In recent years, researchers have recognized the gap in the literature, so it is to be expected that with the rise of tourism innovation studies, it will establish itself as a vital discipline with essential research directions and application in tourism practice (Zakić & Vukotić, 2019).

One way of achieving a competitive advantage is clustering. The role of clusters in regional development policy is evident in many countries. It is a fact that with some delay, the cluster concept is introduced and implemented in transition conditions (Kersan-Škabić, 2011; Anić et al., 2019). By acquiring most of the input from suppliers in their area or region, by hiring a skilled workforce, linking closely with innovation and research and development centers, financial institutions and investors, by branding new products, clusters produce the conditions for a more stable and faster economic development of the region (Aničić et al., 2016).

A particular domain of analysis in this paper relates to agricultural, and to some extent, tourism clusters. The starting assumption is that the formation of both agricultural and tourism clusters can make a positive influence on the development of rural tourism, that is, in the symbiosis of agrarian and tourist clusters, the benefits for the development of rural tourism can be realized. The structure of the paper is as follows: after the introduction, the context of rural tourism is considered, with an overview of aspects in developed, less developed countries and finally in Serbia. The second section of the paper is clustering, as it is the most beneficial point for rural tourism development. A general approach to clustering and an additional focus on tourism clusters is further elaborated, with a recapitulation on Serbia at the end of this section. The last segment deals with agrarian clusters, a relatively new model of agritourism clusters. The paper is intended for the interested expert and scientific society and can serve as a guideline for promoting the development of rural tourism.

Context of the rural tourism

Rural development implies integrated management of natural resources in a sustainable way, i.e., harmonization of economic, social, and environmental principles within the rural community. Agriculture studies in certain localities are associated with new geographical food sources. These new geographical food dispositions are influenced by globalization, which modifies the relationships that make up rural areas (Woods & McDonagh, 2011).

According to Calabrò & Vieri (2016), agriculture can shape the characteristics of almost the entire national territory, even where it is not an economically leading sector. In Italy, about 57% of the area is allocated for agriculture and forestry, and according to the National Development Plan of this country, about 92% of the area is classified as rural, more than 2/3 consisting of so-called "urbanized rural areas", characterized by a high density of population and relevant (specific) importance of agriculture. In these regions, agriculture plays a significant role, which is not only recognizable in the production of material goods, and a particular contribution is further made by the basic territorial characteristics with high tourist value. According to Van Sandt et al. (2018), agritourism is an innovation for consumers that producers are exploring as a method of diversifying and increasing farm income. Moreover, Van Sandt et al. (2018) conducted an analysis based on the examples in the USA and stated that the most significant impact on the success of agritourism is: travel

infrastructure, region and rurality, local economy characteristics, and proximity to outdoor attractions. As the authors themselves point out, they have explored best practices that other regions may follow.

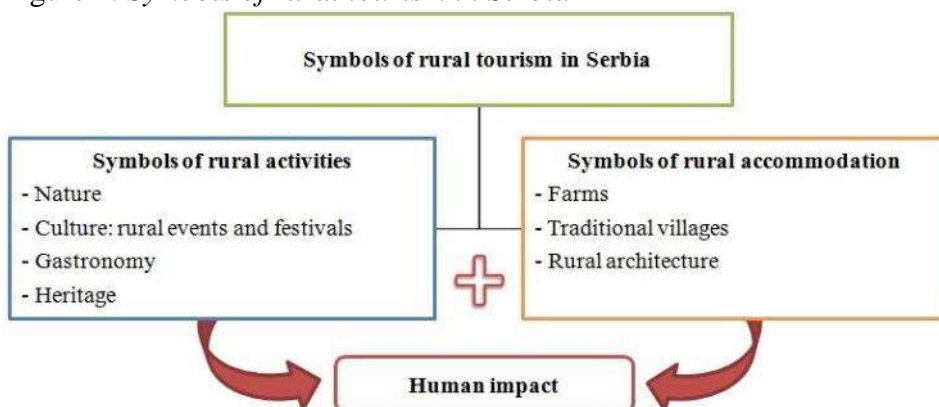
Rural tourism is an instrument of rural development, and it represents tourism in rural regions with all the activities carried out in the area (Živković, 2013). It is also defined as tourism that offers the visitor a rural environment, enabling him to experience a combination of nature, culture, and people (Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, 2011, p. 3).

According to the Tourism Development Strategy of the Republic of Serbia for the period 2016-2025 (Government of the Republic of Serbia, 2016) rural tourism is a tourist product of particular importance for tourism development. The importance of rural tourism for the Republic of Serbia is also reflected in the strategy mentioned above, which includes vocational training and acquisition of skills related to the development of rural tourism, as priority activities and programs envisaged for financing and supported by the European Union. Rural tourism can be combined with other tourism products: cultural tourism, recreational tourism, sports tourism, adventure tourism, children's and family tourism, and similar. Rural tourism targets the urban population, although clients may also be local. Sznajder & Przezbórska (2004) point out that the agritourism product provides visitors with a personalized contact, a sense of physical experience and the environment in the countryside, allowing them to participate in the activities, traditions, and lifestyles of people in these areas. Rural tourism can, according to a study by Broccardo et al. (2017), where the Piedmont region was analyzed, increase the well-being of both the rural family, by contributing to the employment of family members and future generations, and non-families, by attracting youth in rural communities. From an environmental point of view, the offer of ecotourism activities strengthens the preservation of the rural landscape and can sensitize customers to conserve nature.

The synergy of agriculture and tourism ensures the socio-economic development of rural areas, and it is a platform for economic diversification in rural communities, which is why strengthening rural development policy has become one of the European Union's top priorities (Muhi, 2013). On the other hand, despite the consensus that proper positioning of tourism can be successfully used as a powerful tool for the economic development of communities in rural areas and for improving their well-being (Walker, 2017, p. 27), the fact is that a positive contribution, based on the tourism

development in many developing countries, and especially at the local level, is still not sufficiently accepted (Luvanga & Shitundu, 2003; Mbaiwa, 2005; Anderson, 2013). In Serbia, the existence of natural and anthropogenic resources alone is not a sufficient condition for tourism competitiveness. Tourism, as a culture of living, belongs to a social upgrade, which people turn to only if they are existentially safe and satisfied. This fact is the root of the underdevelopment of tourism in Serbia (Torlak, 2015). Due to the geographical position of Serbia, natural beauties, areas suitable for numerous forms of recreation, as well as rich cultural heritage and folklore, there are favorable conditions for the development of rural tourism. They make a comparative advantage, but what makes essential competitiveness in the tourism market is the ability to use resources in the long term in an efficient way in the function of tourism, that is, end consumers on the one side and residents on the other. Certain symbols are often used to create a mental image and association with a destination (Master plan for sustainable development of rural tourism in Serbia, 2011). Their purpose is to enhance and illustrate tourist destinations, where the very essence would be more tangible. Symbols in rural tourism constitute a combination of countryside activities and rural accommodation. One example of rural symbols is shown in Figure 1.

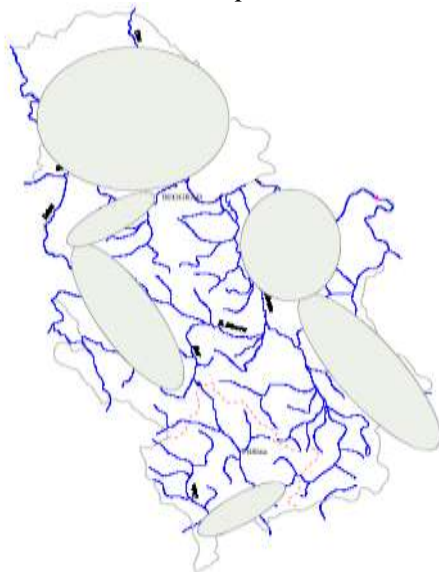
Figure 1: *Symbols of rural tourism in Serbia*



Source: *Master plan for sustainable development of rural tourism in Serbia* (2011, p. 84), UN Joint programme 'Sustainable tourism for rural development', Belgrade, <https://futurehospitalityleaders.files.wordpress.com/2012/11/master-plan-odrzivog-razvoja-ruralnog-turizma-u-srbiji.pdf>, (20 February 2020).

Map 1 shows the gray-shaded areas that are representing regions where rural tourism development activities are being implemented in Serbia.

Map 1: *Areas with rural tourism development activities in Serbia*



Source: Cvijanović, D., Vuković, P., Kljajić, N. (2011). *Stanje i perspektive razvoja ruralnog turizma u Republici Srbiji. Međunarodni naučni skup Mediteranski dani Trebinje (VI), Turizam i ruralni razvoj - savremene tendencije, problemi i mogućnosti razvoja, Trebinje, 11-21.*

Choosing the right strategies, as well as positioning instruments, the right position on the tourist map of the region can be taken, while contributing to the revitalization and development of rural areas, increasing agricultural producers' profits and protecting the environment. One way to accomplish this is through clustering.

A general approach to cluster connecting and tourism clusters

Porter (2000, 2003) found that clusters considerably influence the level of employment, wages, and innovation in a region, which strengthened the theoretical basis for the notion of regional development through the clustering. Clusters are a basic factor for understanding the phenomenon of geographical concentration of economic and innovative activities (Andersson et al., 2004). Depending on the purpose and the specific context, there are many various definitions of clusters. Authors define cluster identity as a mutual understanding of the basic industrial,

technological, social, and institutional characteristics of the cluster (Staber & Sautter, 2011, p. 1350).

According to Rantanen & Granberg (2008, p. 12), examples of organizational innovation may include network organizations, regional clusters, and different types of partnerships. Often, partnerships arise from social innovation. Due to limited resources, small and medium enterprises, through inclusion in networks and clusters, can significantly expand innovation opportunities (Tinsley & Linch, 2001; Fuglsang & Eide, 2013). Besides innovation, sometimes information sharing or knowledge transfer is a priority benefit of clustering. On the other hand, the clustering advantage is the availability of information. For example, businesses through the Scottish Food & Drink cluster have been able to: have access to key information, have a new retail listing in the United Kingdom available, strengthen their workforce abilities and create new products (Cluster Development Strategy, 2008, p. 94).

Clusters also affect competition in three ways (Iordache et al., 2010):

- a) increasing the productivity of the company in a particular area;
- b) implementing the direction and pace of innovation, which will increase future productivity;
- c) stimulating new jobs that will develop and strengthen that cluster.

Clusters can be initiators of agricultural development (Bell & Giuliani, 2007; Džanković-Jerebičanin, 2014; Kilelu et al., 2017; Paraušić & Domazet, 2018). Both in literature and practice, the motivation for clustering by tourism clusters is most often found in marketing activities (Vukotić & Vojnović, 2016). One of the reasons for clustering in tourism is to build the competitiveness of a tourist destination through clusters (Đurašević, 2009). According to Malakauskaite & Navickas (2010), tourism companies from clusters have better access to complementary services. Cluster members can also collaborate with governments and academic institutions, which often support stimulating the growth of the tourism sector. Stating the shortcomings of the Vologda Tourism Cluster in Russia, Alexandrova & Vladimirov (2016) underline the importance of the existence of unity at the federal and local levels as a factor of development. Năstase & Vasile (2019) analyze that the term cluster in Romania, considered in the perspective of economic growth, is moderately known and that its impact on economic development is rather vague. According to the same authors, in regards to the management of the tourist

destination, clustering is preparing for long-term development support for tourism, integrated into the European development strategy.

Clustering is, as Morić (2013) points out, a relatively new phenomenon, and when it comes to rural tourism and clusters, there is a gap in the existing literature in transition countries. Based on a comparative study conducted by Petrović et al. (2015, p.12), rural tourism development strategies have been defined in the countries of the European Union. Based on the established strategies, quality control and categorization are carried out, which are in charge of specialized agencies. According to the same authors, the development of rural tourism in Serbia, on the other hand, is accompanied by numerous difficulties, restrictions, and problems, and therefore it lacks proper networking and educational programs. Because there are excellent preconditions for the development of rural tourism in Serbia, it is necessary to intensify the education of the population to engage in this activity. Engagement of the community would also improve the possibility of knowledge transfer.

Clustering is one way this can be accomplished. According to Mirčetić et al. (2019), there is no single model that can be applied; however, policymakers need to develop a new model based on the situational and environmental characteristics and determine specific tourist cluster model they should choose and adjust in order to be the most suitable for the desired tourist destination. Not only tourism clusters but also agricultural clusters are of great importance for achieving better performance and progress in the field of rural tourism development.

Agricultural clusters and agritourism clusters

It can be rightly argued that there is relatively little research conducted relating to the agricultural and food sectors, although Ping & Koziol (2011) state that the agricultural cluster represents a trend of modern agricultural development. These authors elaborate that agricultural clusters are of great importance for promoting the growth of the regional economy, strengthening the competition, improving the specialization of agricultural production, and increasing incomes of agricultural laborers. In transition countries, clustering in agriculture also develops with some delay compared to developed countries.

The results of the analysis of agricultural clusters in China in the study by Kiminami & Kiminami (2009) indicate that clusters achieve certain

positive results in the development of the agricultural sector and rural areas. For this situation, the authors emphasize agricultural industrialization policies, which are mostly coincident with the industrial cluster policies in the country or approaching them. Paraušić et al. (2007) point out that in Serbia, the formation of agriclusters is based on the aspiration for better positioning in the market, not on the country's assistance. The regional layout of the agriclusters formed until now in Serbia is shown in Map 2 and symbol color explanation is given in Legend 1.

Map 2: Locations of agriclusters in Serbia



Source: *Authors*

Legend 1: Symbol colors of Map 2 explanation

Symbol color	Administrative district	No. of clusters	Symbol color	Administrative district	No. of clusters
Dark Green	North Bačka	2	Red	North Banat	1
Light Green	West Bačka	5	Orange-Red	Central Banat	2
Yellow-Green	South Bačka	7	Orange	South Banat	1
White	Belgrade	9	Brown	Braničevo	1
Dark Blue	Šumadija	6	Yellow-Orange	Nišava	3
Light Blue	Pirot	1	Purple	Jablanica	1
Yellow	Zlatibor	2			

Table 1 shows the establishment of agriclusters in Serbia.

Table 1: *Agriclusters in Serbia*

No	Agricluster name	Headquarters	Since
1.	Vegetable growers cluster Banatski Brestovac	Pančevo	2002
2.	Association for family households Fokus	Zrenjanin	2004
3.	Cluster Šumadijski cvet	Kragujevac	2006
4.	Association for fruit growers Fruitland	Subotica	2006
5.	Development Center Rakovica agricluster	Belgrade	2007
6.	Cluster Somborski salaši	Sombor	2008
7.	Cluster for ornamental plants producers	Belgrade	2008
8.	Agro start up cluster	Niš	2008
9.	Beef meat producers and exporters Baby beef	Belgrade	2009
10.	Cluster for stockbreeders Uvačka reka mleka	Nova Varoš	2009
11.	Agricluster Obrenovac	Belgrade	2009
12.	Cluster association Agroindustrija	Subotica	2010
13.	Cluster of winemakers Alma Mons	Sre. Karlovci	2010
14.	Center for Organic Production	Selenča, Bač	2010
15.	Association of food manufacturers Polux	Kikinda	2010
16.	Association Cluster of vegetables sector	Sombor	2010
17.	Cluster for mushrooms Fungiklaster Šumadije	Arandelovac	2010
18.	Cluster for cheeses Jug	Niš	2011
19.	Cluster for fruit growers Rača	Rača	2011
20.	Cluster for grain producers Rača	Rača	2011
21.	Cluster of flowers Obrenovac	Belgrade	2011
22.	Association Agrocluster	Belgrade	2011
23.	Agricultural cluster Prigrevica	Apatin	2011
24.	Cluster of flowers Pirotska ciklama	Pirot	2011
25.	Pešter agricluster	Sjenica	2012
26.	Regional fruit cluster of South Serbia	Leskovac	2012
27.	Agricluster Homolje	Žagubica	2012
28.	Association cluster for fruits Obrenovac	Belgrade	2012
29.	Association cluster for vegetables Obrenovac	Belgrade	2012
30.	Association Klaster mleko	Sombor	2012
31.	Cluster fruškogorska jabuka	Novi Sad	2012
32.	Agricultural cluster Agro-jug	Niš	2012
33.	Cluster Cvetna Šumadija	Rača	2012
34.	Cluster Plodovi Kolubare	Belgrade	2012
35.	Cluster for florists Rača	Rača	2012
36.	Business Association Klaster Panonska rakija	Zrenjanin	2013
37.	Business Association Klaster Bač agrar	Bač	2013
38.	Vojvodina organic cluster	Novi Sad	2014
39.	Cluster for beekeepers Panonska pčela	Novi Sad	2014
40.	Agricluster Sombor	Sombor	2015
41.	Agricluster of Serbia	Novi Sad	2017

Source: *Authors*

Gajić et al. (2018) point out that a small number of authors pointed to discrepancies that exist in the level and quality of service provided in rural parts of Serbia. According to their analysis, this has negative implications for the development of rural tourism in Serbia. Based on the intensification of research related to rural tourism, it is possible to develop long-term plans to eliminate regional disparities in rural clusters in Serbia.

The goal of establishing an agriclusters in Serbia can be understood and somewhat generalized through the vision of one of the agriclusters, Agro Cluster of Eastern Serbia: "to establish the preconditions for improving and innovating current agricultural technology, food processing, logistics, agritourism, and building new business capabilities for cluster members." Furthermore, the vision of Agro Cluster of Eastern Serbia is to establish its own local and regional markets and to expand them into the European and world markets of agricultural products, quality foods, and rural tourism. Small and medium enterprises in Eastern Serbia have many challenges - lower credit availability, outdated technology and skills, poor infrastructure, absence of information, lack of knowledge on how to find new markets, how to improve their products, how to increase their production, how to improve their offer and need for other information regarding performance improvement.

Agro Cluster of Eastern Serbia represents the most favorable form of integration and inclusion for poorly developed local agricultural holdings, cooperatives, micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, entrepreneurial shops and business associations in Eastern Serbia working in the field of agriculture, purchase, storage, processing, distribution, and export of agricultural products, as well as ethno-tourism and eco-tourism, in the national, European and world competitive markets (ACES, 2018).

The vision and the goals of the agricluster mentioned earlier help to conclude that the development of tourism and mainly rural tourism is well represented, which was ultimately sought the establishment of this cluster.

From the inextricable link between agriculture and tourism when it comes to rural tourism, it arises that the best model would, when it comes to clustering, be the creation of agritourism clusters. It could be said that they represent a symbiosis of the operational linking of tourism and other entities to strengthen rural tourism.

Of the countries in the Balkan region, Slovenia is one of the examples of good practice, which has established the following conditions for the establishment of agriclusters:

- Mapping - identification of the spatial concentration of a recognized tourism resource compared to neighboring regions, countries or other resources;
- Discovering and analyzing links between participants in agro, tourism and rural destination policies;
- Identification of potential cluster members.

Clusters enable the initiation of the education process at all levels and in many ways: designing different pilot projects, where the education of cluster members is formed towards the direction of cooperation and joint appearance, as the first and most important task. Digitalization and innovation of techniques, technologies and globalization calls for a renewed focus on what constitutes genuine leadership (Mirčetić, 2018, p. 394), and it is affecting clusters as well. Leadership is observed as a very complex resource (Cvijanović et al., 2018) and effective leadership is one of the preconditions to effective organizations, and therefore clusters seek effective leaders.

Furthermore, it is necessary to develop cluster programs that would cover all stages. Some of the mentioned stages include analysis of tourism and agro potentials, infrastructures, detection of centripetal forces of destinations, and then all potentials that would constitute a tourism product: agriculture, old crafts, natural features, economic potentials, and other services that necessarily accompany the development of a tourism product: accommodation, restaurants, entertainment, and attractions (Agroplanet, 2018).

An example of an agricluster in Serbia is the European Cluster Alpe Adria Pannonia, founded on September 27, 2014, in Novi Sad. The cluster brings together organizations, institutions, and associations dealing with activities in various fields of economy and agriculture, especially agro-eco-tourism. The forming of this cluster joined numerous chambers of commerce from Serbia, Croatia, Hungary, Slovenia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, many tourism organizations, and scientific institutions of the faculties, institutes, and bureaus, local self-governments, non-governmental organizations, unions, cooperatives, clusters, enterprises, and agricultural holdings (Poljosfera, 2014).

Conclusion

Contemporary business conditions have contributed to numerous changes in the tourism industry. The tourism market simultaneously represents a highly dynamic and open system. Everything impossible for individual market participants (high quality of products and processes, cost rationalization, higher offer, aggressive and effective marketing, brand recognition), due to lack of financial strength, capacities, personnel, or time can be achieved by clustering.

On the other hand, with the resulting changes, the demand for alternative forms of tourism is increasing, of which tourism in rural areas is becoming more important. Demand for this form of tourism is on the rise as tourists are increasingly interested in interacting with nature, getting to know new landscapes, people, other cultures, and customs. Therefore, rural tourism is a vital segment of all the guidelines, directions, and development strategies.

There are some inconsistencies, paradoxes, and obstacles to the development of agriculture in Serbia. All agricultural stakeholders have a chance to depreciate or completely overcome the problems mentioned earlier by using the examples of good practice or joining agriclusters. However, forming tourism clusters would also make rural areas interesting for tourism.

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