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CHARACTERISTICS OF ENTREPRENEURIAL VENTURES OF FEMALE ENTREPRENEURS IN RURAL TOURISM ON THE TERRITORY OF AP VOJVODINA

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Abstract

This study follows the development and transformation of the socio-economic aspect of entrepreneurial ventures of rural women, who live and do business on the territory of AP Vojvodina. The aim of the research was to analyze the relationship between the development of rural tourism and female rural entrepreneurship, as well as the characteristics of their entrepreneurial ventures. Qualitative research was conducted based on the application of a combined method - multiple case and biographical, with an emphasis on the attitudes of the interviewees. The results support the observed characteristics of lifestyle entrepreneurship, a strong family pattern in the value system of business, and a sense of „life and business“ in harmony with the environment and cultural values of the community. The main issue that regards the development of capacities for rural tourism is related to the lack of systematic institutional support, financial challenges and socio-cultural limitations.

Key Words: female rural entrepreneurship, rural tourism, AP Vojvodina, entrepreneurial ventures

Introduction

Contemporary development tendencies and understandings of sociological and many other structural changes in the conceptions of rurality, rural space, rural entrepreneurship and tourism emphasize the fact that women are a potentially important source of development, but still an insufficiently discovered and mobilized factor. Women, as

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possible carriers of creative and innovative impulses of local communities and a factor in the development of diversification of the rural economy, are still not (enough) recognized as a relevant factor, and the realization of their opportunities and entrepreneurial abilities is accompanied by all those aggravating factors that have been affecting it for decades². Rural women (still) remain a marginalized social group. Getting free of stereotypes, attributed rigid work roles and appreciation of gender-balanced rural development are key factors for changing the social and economic position, as well as the business capacities of rural women entrepreneurs. This especially applies to women in rural areas characterized by pronounced patriarchal, cultural patterns and lifestyles. We see rural tourism and entrepreneurial ventures as one of the mechanisms for changing the social position, and also the position of rural women in the household and the local community. Rural tourism thus becomes a factor and outcome of the empowerment of rural women and the strengthening of their entrepreneurial, creative and innovative abilities. Thus, this relationship between female entrepreneurship and the development of rural tourism is being analyzed in the context of new conceptions of rural development, which emphasize the internal development factors of a local community, the active role of all its stakeholders and the widest engagement and mobilization of general capital of a rural area (Čikić, 2013; Shortall, 2002; Markov, 1995; Hughson, 2015; Šobot, 2010; Shortall & Bock, 2015, Franić et al., 2015; Černič-Istenič, 2015; Čikić & Nedeljković, 2019; Cloke et al., 2006; Van der Ploeg, 1995; Shucksmith, 2009). According to those insights, the aim of the research is to identify the role and importance of rural tourism for the empowerment of rural women and to evaluate its development capacities and potential in the territory of AP Vojvodina.

Considering the apostrophized fact that rural tourism can be an important factor in the creation of gender-balanced rural development and a factor in strengthening and changing the unfavorable socio-economic position of rural women, the paper follows the analysis of observed patterns in the ways and characteristics of business of rural women entrepreneurs in the

² Aggravating factors in our rural structure, in general, are: depopulation, negative migration balance, the dysfunctionality of the rural economy, unprofitability of business, the continuous growth of unemployment of the rural population, employment instability, loss of social vitality, senility and declining quality of life. However, the position of rural women is additionally burdened by the possibility of their emancipation and empowerment, economic and social independence, professional work productivity, self-realization and creative economic and entrepreneurial niches.

territory of AP Vojvodina. The most important insights lead to the identification of several key sociological patterns in the characteristics of rural women's entrepreneurial ventures: 1. lifestyle entrepreneurship, 2. a pronounced family pattern in business, and 3. a sense of „life and business“ in accordance with the environment, natural and cultural values of a local community and value system of respondents. This conclusion is based on the results of the research of biographies and case studies of 31 rural women who live and engage in various forms of rural tourism in the territory of the AP Vojvodina.

Methodological framework of research and cognitive-practical goals

Bearing in mind that rural tourism and rural entrepreneurship can be a multifunctional and powerful source of changes in the social position of rural women, the work follows the analysis of data obtained from the application of the combined method - multiple case and biographical method, with qualitative structure and the use of the semi-structured interview research technique (Mimica & Bogdanović, 2007; Milas, 2009; Babbie, 2011; Yin, 2009; Bogdanov, 2007; Esterberg, 2002; Milić, 2014; Padfield & Procter, 1996; May, 1993) The choice of the mentioned methods and techniques was the most suitable choice, bearing in mind that it was an exploratory research, with an emphasis on the insufficiently researched relationship between the development of rural tourism and the characteristics of the entrepreneurial activities of rural women. The importance of such research is reflected in the fact that the relationship between the development of rural tourism and its role and importance in the concepts of neo-endogenous rural development is (still) an insufficiently scientifically researched area, especially when is about social sciences like sociology, and more of its disciplines such as rural sociology, sociology of rural development, sociology of tourism, sociology of gender.

Lifestyle entrepreneurship as an immanent value of rural women's entrepreneurial ventures

Lifestyle entrepreneurship is understood in the literature as a special way of life and business/entrepreneurial activity, which is complementary to the value system of entrepreneurs, is oriented more towards sustainability and meaningfulness, i.e. quality of life, than modern hyperproduction and mass production, which implies that it is about a life concept that is less profit-oriented and more value-oriented (Schiebel, 2005; Peters et al.,

2009; Morrison & Thomas, 1999; Ateljevic & Lee, 2009; Presenza et al., 2015; Marchant & Mottiar, 2011; Marcketti et al., 2006; Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000; Deakins & Freel, 2006; Burns, 2001; Davidson & Henrekson, 2002; Thompson et al., 2000; Kuratko & Hodgetts 1998; Kaplan, 2003; Saleilles & Gomez-Velasco, 2007; Shortall, 2015). According to Nedeljković and Čikić (2019) „lifestyle entrepreneurship is considered to be „a specific form of economic activity in which individuals organize and plan participation in the market based on their own initiative, but are not primarily motivated by the desire to make a profit, but the main driver and goal of their activity is the promotion, achievement and preservation of a certain quality life and lifestyle“ (p.548), with an emphasis on the fact that lifestyle entrepreneurs „can be considered those innovative and creative individuals - carriers of entrepreneurial activities who perceive the development of their own business as a personal and life strategy, looking for an adequate balance between private and business needs and aspirations“ (p.548).

Based on the conducted analysis, we can conclude that in the case of rural women entrepreneurs in rural tourism there are characteristics of lifestyle entrepreneurship:

1. A clear distinction was observed in the perceptions of the respondents regarding their orientation towards the preservation of authenticity, tradition, and uniqueness, but at the same time innovation and creativity in the presentation of their own rural-tourism offer, compared to, on the other hand, a classic profit-making business whose goal is to maximize profit;
2. Although the material moment, both investment and earnings, cannot be excluded from any entrepreneurial action, the essence of the connection with lifestyle entrepreneurship lies in the fact that these rural women entrepreneurs would not conduct business at any cost, that is, not at the cost of their own values, attitudes and way of life;
3. The importance of the desired lifestyle, choice and change of traditional patterns of women's distance from the epicenter of entrepreneurial activities and activities related to decision-making and concentration of active power is apostrophized;
4. A connection with lifestyle entrepreneurship was also observed in terms of the treatment of their own products and the way in which they place them on the market (the concept of mass production is fundamentally distant and unacceptable to them, because they believe that this prevents direct contact with customers/consumers of their

products and services and the feeling of closeness and intimacy with them);

5. In the end, it was noticed that lifestyle entrepreneurship and this way of doing business for them also means an opportunity to strengthen family ties, closeness and togetherness. Even some authors, along that line, talk about couple entrepreneurship (Othman et al., 2016), however, with frequent ideological and cultural limitations (Bensemann & Hall, 2010).

One of the respondents said: *„I didn't want to give my product to big supermarkets, because they don't offer any conditions.“ It's almost a scam. For me, this is the right thing, when a guest or customer comes to my rural tourist household and buys what he wants”* (respondent M.H., type of facility - rural tourist household).

Complementarity of family pattern and lifestyle entrepreneurship

The presence and importance of the role of the family structure in the value system of the respondents is reflected in the following answers and observed patterns that were observed in their attitudes:

1. The importance and influence of the family structure when it comes to starting a business/support or disapproval;
2. A sense of connection and solidarity /empathy on the part of family members when it comes to the decision to engage in entrepreneurship;
3. Family support in specific tasks, involvement of other individuals from the family structure in the work team and production/providing services;
4. Starting a business and doing business with the intention of involving more generations/transgenerational moment;
5. The feeling/value that there is an intention to preserve family property, continue the family tradition and/or save it from oblivion
6. Attitude towards material and intangible cultural heritage - „preserving from oblivion old crafts, skills...“.

Such research results confirm the view that the concept of family tourism can be connected to the motives of lifestyle entrepreneurship, the need for autonomy and the desired way of life, as well as the decision to choose a place to live (in this case, it is rural areas) (Getz et al., 2004). In addition to the strong family pattern, the feeling that rural tourism is much more than an ordinary job or business and that it simultaneously represents a great source and reservoir of meaning and satisfaction for the respondents

is also complementary. The family pattern comes to the fore when it comes to the environment as a support system. It was observed that it represents an important indicator of validation of their own business ability and sense of success, in addition to, of course, personal perseverance, will and firm intention to succeed and survive in business. However, the environment can also be a source of misunderstanding and lack of tolerance and support for the development of entrepreneurial capacities of rural women (Čikić & Jovanović, 2015).

One of the respondents' answers was: *„For us it is a pleasure. We don't see it as work. Nor, by force, are we overloaded with obligations that now I only have to think about that. And that this takes up all my time, so I get nervous or I don't even know what. This does not drain me like an ordinary job. We do it out of love and pleasure. People who come to us leave happy and satisfied. What distinguishes rural tourism from commercial tourism (restaurants or cafes) is that not every dinar or bite is measured. We don't look at how many grams are in one steak or portion so that we measure earnings in dinars. Rural tourism does not require that every bite must be charged, as in commercial. I think it is important that the guest comes and tries something, to be satisfied“* (respondent J.G., type of facility - rural tourist household).

The lifestyle of rural women entrepreneurs as a condition and consequence of their choices - advantages and limitations

The following specific characteristics of their lifestyle and entrepreneurial endeavors were determined by analyzing the answers of the respondents. They assume most of the job responsibilities themselves, with a tendency to have either limited or informal assistance in carrying out their business duties and tasks. Exactly that is another characteristic and feature of lifestyle entrepreneurship. In addition, the insight into the fact that the guests themselves are not completely separated from the service of the rural tourism offer is particularly significant. On the contrary, they themselves sometimes participate in the creation of the table and serving, which we can understand as an additional advantage of rural tourism.

None of the interviewees showed a tendency to develop their business in the direction of a larger number of full-time employees than the number of a few of them, and many seek help in their work outside of regular workflows, e.g. in family members, neighbors, friends, and even guests who sometimes serve together with the hostess. Here, quantitative

indicators, i.e. economic growth is not in the foreground and that is why there is no pronounced tendency towards business expansion, which speaks to what rural women entrepreneurs want, but also to the possibilities available to them. That is why their entrepreneurship has certain limitations when it comes to the development aspect, and the capacities themselves will not always be recognized either by themselves or by others (such as institutions and local rural communities). Some of these limitations are self-imposed, because they clearly say „no“ to commercialization and quantitative growth in business. Sometimes these limitations are the result of a combination of wider social, political and economic structures and flows³. However, finances are singled out as one of the main obstacles to the development of business and its daily reproduction in general, for which the respondents consider themselves to be responsible, but they also expect support from other relevant development and strategic factors - local community, state and province.

In support of that, one respondent said: *„We were in moments where we were literally giving up. “ Due to financial reasons. It's just investing and investing, always something more. I am especially grateful to our children who put up with us all these years, because it was often no, we can't, we have to pay the workers in the vineyard first”* (respondent G.T., type of facility - rural tourist household).

Conclusion

The aim of the research was the analysis of rural tourism as a factor in the creation of gender-balanced rural development and a factor in strengthening and changing the unfavorable socio-economic position of rural women. The key research conclusions are reduced to the following several statements, and in connection with the main characteristics of entrepreneurial ventures of rural women in the territory of AP Vojvodina, which open up space for further research:

1. There is a confirmed idea of mutual strengthening of the relationship between the development of rural tourism and the empowerment of rural women. That relationship is based on a positive feedback loop.

³ Such as: the amount of available resources and capital in the local community and wider society for the development of rural tourism, the importance of the concept of rural tourism in rural development policies and its importance in the value and entrepreneurial system of business goals and generally accepted way of doing business, features of female and rural entrepreneurship in general.

Strengthening the role of rural tourism in those rural areas that have real capacities, resources and the interest of local stakeholders (in this case women) will directly affect the improvement of the socio-economic position of sensitive groups. These relations and positive feedback loops can be understood as one of the factors of the modernization of work roles in rural areas and a special dimension of the diversification of the rural economy, in the context of the possibility of revitalization of the Serbian countryside;

2. The development of rural tourism represents the potential for changing the way of thinking, cultural patterns and breaking through certain stereotypes regarding the co-personality, importance and role of rural women in generating income and family reproduction.

However, the research also indicates that there are still numerous obstacles and aggravating factors for the development of rural women's entrepreneurial ventures in rural tourism, such as finances, wider social and institutional support, more adequate legal solutions and rural development policies, cultural and traditional restrictions in terms of more rigid attitudes when it comes to changes in their positions in society and the local community. In the end, it should be pointed out that there are visible patterns and characteristics of their entrepreneurial ventures, such as lifestyle entrepreneurship and its intertwining with the family business model, a sense of the quality and authenticity of service and rural products, and the attitude that entrepreneurship, after all, represents a personal choice, value connotation and lifestyle.

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