

2nd

**International
Scientific
Conference**

1-3 June, 2017

Vrnjačka Banja, Serbia

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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**

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



GASTRONOMY AS A MEANS OF COUNTRYSIDE TOURISM POSITIONING IN SERBIA

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Abstract

Being engaged in countryside tourism means applying various skills and numerous scientific disciplines. However, every contribution to the development of countryside tourism is welcomed to help it become a profitable business in Serbia at the same time being a possible guidepost for those who start being engaged in this branch of economy.

This work has the aim to motivate the self-employment of young people and their staying in villages with the esteem of high ecological standards for the sake of long term sustainable valorization of tourism potentials of countryside and preserving authentic country houses, old interesting skills and crafts. Agricultural production on small areas and finding a market for goods through tourist services, as autochthonous and traditional gastronomic specialties is a way of branding and marketing positioning of the Serbian village as well as maintaining the village vitality and the attractiveness of country life style.

Standards are set before Serbian householders and the question is: can we implement them in time and be ready for the next phase in the development of countryside tourism?

Key words: *countryside tourism, positioning, sustainable development, gastronomy, autochthonous specificities.*

JEL: *Q13, Q26, R41*

Introduction

The rural areas comprise about 80% of the total territory of the European Union with the 25% of all population. In the tourism development plans of Spain, Italy, Slovenia, Hungary, Austria and many other countries, the

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countryside tourism is getting more and more important. The growth of all its parameters (greater offer, increased number of tourist nights, larger circulation of capital) is evident. The contribution to the whole development of the rural areas given by countryside tourism also means keeping the young in villages, the changed relationship of the local people to the environment, more intense employment of women, the usage of earlier unused capacities, new working places and so on (Veer & Tuunter, 2005).

The attractiveness of the rural areas for tourism and relaxation can be best explained by the image of the rural, which is closely connected with the traditional and romantic idea of 'old good times', naive and simple way of life, intact nature and the perfect adjustment of a man to his natural environment. So the longing and the need for returning to one's roots and to a simple way of life without organized, stressful and urban surrounding leads to greater and greater interest for the rural areas (Kastenholz-Davis et al., 1999).

The research about the countryside way of living and activities (most often through agriculture) done by British magazine "*Country Living*" in 2004 gave interesting data. Out of 1,000 surveyed people, 41% think that moving to the countryside put excitement to their life, while 39% feel their life has become better or they expect it to happen. Most of the questioned consider the life in the countryside as better for health, to have less crime so they expect to live longer. Among those who moved to the countryside, 44% say that they spend more time with their partners, 38% have more mutual friends, 27% argue less frequently, and the general level of satisfaction is higher among the people who moved from an urban to a rural area than with the people who did not move.

According to the World Tourist Organization (WTO), the market trends in the world are going in the direction of countryside tourism. The demand for this kind of tourism in the last twenty years shows significant growth. The biggest increase rate in yearly capital circulation of about 25% has been recorded in some of the South and Eastern Europe countries. In the region of South-Eastern Europe the most developed countryside tourism is in Slovenia. The World Tourist Organization (WTO) recommends Serbia to a rapid development of this kind of tourism, which it considers one of the comparative advantages of Serbia at global tourist market (<http://www.world-tourism.org>)

The indicators for Europe (2010) are as follows:

- - 200,000 recognized registered service offerors in countryside tourism;
- - 2,000,000 registered beds;
- - 500,000 – the number of directly or indirectly employed in countryside tourism;
- - 65,000,000,000 € is a tourist expenditure a year.

The competitiveness of Serbia in the sphere of countryside tourism is not at a significant level, although there are all natural, cultural and social prerequisites for its development (natural potentials, considerable agricultural land, considerable number of people actively involved in agriculture, the traditional approach to agriculture, land not polluted by chemical substances and the possibility for producing “healthy food”, a good potential for developing complementary activities such as taking walks, recreation, hunting, fishing, riding, taking part in everyday chores in country households, traditional local gastronomic specialties and so on).

It is necessary for marketing to create special packages with the experience of salash, rural resorts and rural villages as well as a special kind of camping in rural landscape. In the beginning this offer should be intended to domestic visitors from urban areas, but also to foreigners residing in Serbia, that is to the travellers in transit. After setting all the prerequisites (standards, the Internet websites, rural buildings catalogues), the product should be valorized and commercialized at the international market.

Countryside family households represent a great chance for tourist development in these regions and without large concreting they fit in the rural area where they exist and even more importantly they have a special, personalized relationship with tourists. If they apply a marketing conception, countryside family households will be able to realize all their goals and the goals of rural tourism in general. The bigger and bigger demand for these services in the world, as well as the fact that tourism in the countryside family households is in expansion relating to stagnating mass tourism, significantly has an effect on making thematic marketing activity in offering this kind of tourism, one of the most influential factors which will contribute to the development of tourist offer in Serbia and its balancing as well.

We can determine that the present situation in tourism in Serbia is marked by insufficient existence of quality offer of receptive capacities in rural areas. Taking the whole of tourist offer in consideration, we have come to the conclusion that the development of these capacities can be the characteristic of creating Serbian recognizable brand. Serbia has all important and relevant prerequisites to become a significant tourist destination with the offer of small family accommodation capacities not only in Europe but all over the world, too. This segment of selective form of tourism will constantly get stronger owing to its flexibility and competitiveness, which is based primarily on the quality of offer and the personalized relationship with guests. Anyway, countryside tourism of family type can be one of the major trump cards in tourism in Serbia in the following years.

Tourism in countryside family households in Serbia

Serbia is a country of rural character and one of the most agricultural countries in Europe. Rural development, as a part of regional policies, is the key instrument for agriculture sector restructuring and it should have the task to direct and strategically use the potential of villages attractive for tourism. Local specificities and resources availability make difficult the creation of a universal model for developing rural tourist products and destinations (Mathieson & Wall, 1982).

The development of tourism in the villages of Serbia, as an organized activity, started a little more than three decades ago. Its beginnings were connected with a spontaneous movement of tourists, who wanted, even for a short time, to escape from town, ecologically disrupted environment and to spend certain time in the nature. In the beginning, only some of the households were engaged in this kind of tourism. At the end of the 1980s, about 50 villages with 3,000 beds in 800 households were in the business of tourism. Only three decades later, 2,500 households had about 18,000 beds. A crucial advantage of countryside tourism reflects in getting the income with a minimum investment, but also in the possibility for the countryside households to sell their own products at the most favourable retail prices, without the cost of the transport, as the guests come to buy the goods themselves. Tourism in countryside family households in Serbia is a real trump card of the revitalization of numerous smaller and larger countryside space entities, which, if not died away, are very dormant. Tourism development in these areas can stop the young from leaving, as today it means creating elementary conditions for general,

considerably greater community comfort of countryside settlements. In such circumstances, the young can find not only economic, but also socio-cultural motives to stay at their family homes in the environment in which the general quality of life actually comes close to the level that is nowadays considered as necessary world-wide (Vratuša & Anastasijević, 2002). The environment and its protection represent a very important business segment and influence the quality of the entire lifestyle, with a tendency to become more important in future (Rudež-Riznić et al., 2015).

Taking specific economic and other functions of tourism into consideration, as well as various, high-quality potentials, the site plan and the economic policy of the Republic of Serbia were both given the possibility and the adequate importance in the development of this activity. Besides, the Strategy of Tourism Development in Serbia determined a selective approach, with rural tourism being treated as having a high priority among those types of tourism with special interests. According to this Strategy, countryside tourism in Serbia should contribute to preserving environment and cultural heritage and also motivating local people to stay in villages. This type of tourism could also contribute significantly to the protection of bio-diversity, but also provide funds for the survival and development of the countryside.

The rich natural and cultural-historical diversity of the Republic of Serbia creates extraordinary prerequisites for countryside tourism developing and placing the rich offer of different demand segments to the tourist market. Countryside tourism is a large potential area, as there are many great opportunities in it. At rural area, which comprises more than 85% of the total territory of the Republic of Serbia, live about 43% inhabitants in about 42% households that are directly or indirectly involved in agriculture. Bearing in mind the natural and cultural diversity of the area, the rich resource foundation of the tourist attractions, the preserved environment and more than a thousand agricultural households, the Republic of Serbia possess all the conditions for developing countryside and other specialized forms of tourism related to rural area. Ecological crisis, primarily in the developed but also more and more in the developing countries, is bigger, deeper than it seems to be at first sight. In the rural areas of Serbia there is not such a problem (Rudež -Riznić et al., 2015).

Countryside tourism, like other kinds of rural tourism, greatly enriches tourist offer and gives quality and an impulse to the development of tourism in Serbia (Đorđević-Milošević & Milovanović, 2012.)

The villages in Serbia possess extremely favourable natural and cultural qualities for developing countryside tourism. Shorter staying in villages are recommended, most often family weekends. Rest, recreation, fishing, mountaineering, riding, herbs gathering, picnics and other activities are a real opportunity for enjoying the beauties of the intact nature.

For the fear of harmful elements in the form of pesticides and heavy metals, people are willing to pay from 30 to 80% higher price for certified products. In the rural parts of Serbia they can get them even at a lower price. Organic production is more profitable, although the yields are in smaller quantities (Pavlović et al., 2014).

The tourists will be welcomed by hospitable local people, with rich home made food and the preserved tradition of countryside households. It is necessary to enable the guests to buy healthy, organic food at prices considerably lower than at town markets. It is not rare that new friendships are made, while the children enjoy the charms of careless running across meadows and pastures, where, if nothing else, they will get to know that cows are not of violet colour. Countryside tourism in Serbia has definitely advanced and the present offer is the best sign of that: a countryside house with a tennis court with dross or tartan covering, with a swimming pool in a shadow or overlooking a field covered with milfoil, with a Finnish sauna or Turkish bath, even with a massage! Thanks to the Internet presentations, which has recently begun, the guests' profile has changed and now it is more and more rarely that grandmas come with their grandchildren. Mostly, the countryside tourists are families with their children, as well as couples. Then follow the groups of friends, students, the young looking for a different kind of pastime. At the fourth place, there are the business people who like working themselves, watching the local dancing groups, eating a lot and they pay well for all of that. Only at the last place, there are retired people, which is a complete turnover in relation to the last ten years.

A swimming pool is not always asked for, but the guests can have it in about twenty households: Gostoljublje (Mionica, Kosjerić), Vila Milica (Trudelj, Gornji Milanovac), Obradovići (Katići, Ivanjica), Lepenica (Ključ, Mionica)... Kačerac in the village of Brančić near Ljig has a tennis

court. A sauna and a jacuzzi have become a standard offer in the households in Gornji Milanovac, Kosjerić, Knić and Užice. Villa Etna in the village of Ugrinovci near Gornji Milanovac offers a real wellness, together with a Turkish bath, massage and a salty room. There is an opinion that it is not a tourism any more, but everything that is in a village is countryside tourism. However, the guests do not imagine countryside tourism to be like sleeping in a bed stuffed with straw or waking up in an outdoor toilet. There are exceptionally luxurious accommodations where only a night costs 160 euros! If two people are ready to travel to the village of Zdravac in order to pay 300 euros for a weekend and go back home satisfied, then it is the top of countryside tourism (Krsmanović, 2013.)

Serbia is well-known as an agricultural country and it should be taken as a comparative advantage. Tourists are given an opportunity for an ideal break from an urban life, with fresh air, the scent of hay, flowers, pine and freshly mown meadows and clean spring water and rivers. There is a possibility for various activities: hiking through the nature and gathering herbs and forest fruit, hunting and fishing, but what a guest will never forget is the hospitality of the hosts and delicious homemade food. Village people still keep on living an autochthonous way of life, working hard in the field and feeding domestic animals. During the harvest in summer and autumn months each village is a little factory, where winter stores, fruit brandy and juice are made by the recipes kept for centuries. The offerors in countryside areas can make a profit, because they are mostly ecologically healthy areas, where food products, outside hothouse, can be grown, and that is the most profitable kind of production. According to the research (Pavlović et al., 2014), a conventional cucumber costs 652.50 € per a surface unit, while the price for the organically grown one is 390 €.

The most important products are raspberries, plums, which the world famous “sljivovica” is made of, grapes and autochthonous wines, as well as other alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks. During a stay one must not miss to try homemade “kaymak”, a product unique in the whole world.

The relative technological backwardness of our agricultural production (an extensive way of production, an insufficient usage of mineral fertilizers, a lessened usage of crop protection chemicals and the like) can transform overnight into a comparative advantage and a form of tourist

product differentiation by fitting into the world megatrend (the production and consumption of healthy-organic food) (Đenadić, 2010).

Challenges and directions of countryside tourism development in Serbia

Countryside tourism is the key factor in the activation and sustainable development of rural areas, which helps preserving the local identity, tradition and custom and enhances autochthonous, traditional and ecological healthy food production. Since the very beginning of countryside tourism development in Serbia everyone wanting to start providing tourist services at their households has been facing the shortage of useful and detailed pieces of information and the knowledge about countryside and rural tourism as a more overall concept. Such types of information (regarding obligations, promotion, marketing and other issues) are at first place needed for those who intend to be engaged in countryside tourism.

Tourist business in the villages of Serbia does not have a long tradition, as a more organized tourist trade on these areas started only in the beginning of the '70s. So far the development of countryside tourist offer in Serbia has been marked by an uncoordinated and unsynchronized development of the offer's components, without adjusting them to other subjects. Such a development has formed an incomplete and insufficiently differentiated offer of countryside tourism (Hrabović-Tomić, 2008).

One of the most important tasks in the development of countryside tourism is the education of the hosts for dealing with this activity. It is necessary, by using an expert analysis of home and foreign positive experiences in this field, to point out the economic justification of being engaged in this business. By using an aggressive advertising and marketing approach, propaganda and spreading information, it is needed to set a goal for making both home and foreign tourists, that is the whole public, familiar with the extraordinary beauties and possibilities that the countryside tourism offers.

The strategy for developing countryside tourism and its realization should be done with the co-operation not only at the local community level, but also through a regional co-operation and integration in broader international programmes. To obtain a significant promotion in the region, rural tourism should apply a marketing approach, which would be

undertaken by local communities, tourist organizations, non governmental organizations, private business sector etc. Bonding with national and international associations whose activities are related not only to the development of countryside tourism but also to an integral and sustainable development on the whole enables the exchange of information and experiences and adopting methodology, which leads to a more efficient marketing as well.

The degree of the countryside tourism development in a country depends mostly on an overall socio-economic growth. The total income made by countryside tourism subjects in our country is very small and insufficient, but even though, from the individual household's point of view, it is not negligible. A very notable effect of developing countryside tourism is a prevailing engagement of woman working force in this kind of business. Taking into the consideration the most important elements of rural tourism in Serbia, we can underline the following observations:

- Insufficient utilization of already low range accommodation capacities
- Shortage of suites and other accommodation capacities of higher class resulting in lower prices and income
- Considerable number of countryside households (almost 40%) do not provide food service thus earning less
- Inadequate and undeveloped promo-advertising mix, as well as inadequate channels of sale, which is primarily shown in the limited use of the Internet as a worldwide web and in insufficient taking part in tourist trade of local tourist organizations
- Low average accommodation and food prices, which, together with a small range of services, results in small overall earnings (The average price of a bed-and-breakfast is about 10 Euros, with one more meal 14 Euros, and of boarding and lodging 16 Euros)
- Poor offer of accompanying activities in countryside households (sports-recreational, trade, transport, crafts and the like)
- Insufficient investment in the capacities, which is the sign that still there is not a need for their broadening

The most frequent consequence of the exclusive or prevailing reliance to agriculture in the rural development of a country (although it is the most important and the most present activity in rural economics) is a phenomenon of rural poverty and unemployment. The experiences of developed countries in solving economic and demographic problems of rural areas put the non-agricultural aspects of sustainable rural

development in the first place: manufacturing (secondary) industry, autochthonous crafts, the trade of people's own products and especially countryside tourism.

SWOT analysis is used for estimating the strengths and the weaknesses of rural tourism development in the Republic of Serbia but also for estimating the chances and threats from the neighbourhood. Based on this analysis, it has been noticed that the weaknesses of rural areas are more numerous and with a stronger effect comparing the competitiveness advantages and that in the following period the neighbourhood factors will, at the same time, represent both great chances and a danger to a sustainable development of rural tourism in Serbia. We think primarily of the forthcoming European integration, a necessary level of the tourist product quality, foreign trade balance in the field of agricultural goods, meeting the competition in this area and the like.

Table 1: *SWOT analysis of the rural tourism of the Republic of Serbia*

Strengths	Weaknesses
Geographic and tourist location Preserved natural resources and rural landscapes Biodiversity Geothermal springs, lakes, rivers, forests The rich cultural and historical heritage Traditional rural hospitality	Lack of financial resources for investments Underdeveloped infrastructure Migration of populations from rural areas Unfavourable educational and age structure The isolation and rural poverty Undeveloped and undiversified rural economy Inadequate production in terms of quality and volume Inadequate waste treatment Insufficient economic integration
Opportunities	Threats
Sustainable use of natural resources Economic diversification Development of small and medium-sized enterprises Horizontal and vertical integration in tourism	Competition in the domestic and international markets Low purchasing power of the local population Changes in trends and consumer demand Socio-economic and political

The production and use of renewable energy	instability
Organic and traditionally prepared food	Climate changes
Autochthonous products with protected origin	Inadequate use of natural resources
EU pre-accession fund	International standards of service quality
	Lack of skilled labor

Source: Đenadić- Muhi et al. (2016)

Both an effort and an endeavour are needed to help the development of countryside tourism in Serbia through education, that is to encourage those who have the intention to start providing tourist services in their households. Also, it is necessary to make dealing with business more easily for all those who are already engaged in tourism as countryside households (who are engaged in agro-tourism). There is a need for further motivation as regards preserving: ambience architecture, rustic houses, local specificities, tradition, customs, old and interesting skills and crafts, bio-diversity, agricultural production on small spaces, original products. The aim should be, through tourist services as the motivators of countryside development, to enable keeping village vitality and the attractiveness of country lifestyle. All this needs to be done in the way it was done many years ago in France and other nowadays well-developed tourist destinations all over the world (Đenadić-Muhi et al., 2016).

Modern trends in gastronomic offer

Once, not so long ago, food used to be simple and natural. For many, it means travelling backwards, in the time of their childhood, when tomato still smelled although it was not of such a beautiful shape as it is today, when apples were still full of vitamins, not pesticides, when all the fish was good for health and when beef could be eaten without a danger for you to get mad. However, nowadays, when we say healthy food, we mean, at first place, *vegetarian food*, that is the food that excludes any kind of meat.

The first vegetarian society was founded in London in the middle of the 19th century, while today it consists of hundreds of members all over the world, which comprises 3% of the total population. Many people, inspired by a new way of diet, wrote down their thoughts. One of them, found on an old Egyptian papyrus, reads: *We live on of a quarter what we swallow*,

doctors live on the rest three quarters (<http://www.gastro.hr/ekogastronomija-2219.aspx>)

Each visitor during a stay in a tourist destination wants to be treated not as a part of a mass of tourists but as an individual with his wishes and habits. He wants to enjoy, with all his senses, consuming food whose flavour will be unforgettable to him. He often likes trying other, so far completely unknown flavours of various agricultural products. Today modern agricultural production can produce different kinds of agricultural products. For tourists, including healthy, organic food in tourist offer is very interesting. A large number of consumers (tourists) divisions can be made according to their demands and wished regarding food and drink consumption in catering-hotel firms and restaurants. We will mention only three segments of consumers (tourists):

- Those who want vegetarian food
- Those who want macrobiotic food and
- Those who want eco-gastronomic food

In all earlier times the amount of consumed meat grew in accordance with social status. The meat in the most developed countries is becoming more and more food for lower social classes, while the citizens who are well paid and who have a university degree eat meat and saussages least. That is the result of the National study in Germany on diet, which also deals with the relationship between the consumption of certain food and social status. There is a threat that meat will become food for lower social classes, asserts one of the authors of the study, Professor *Achim Spiller*, sustaining food marketing professor at the University of Göttingen. One of the reasons is lowering the reputation of meat industry, which has been struggling for years with the scandals regarding livestock contagions or the use of illicit substances in breeding and curing livestock. Besides, a considerable number of citizens is ready to lessen the consumption out of health reasons, as well as due to the warning of ecology experts that meat production has a negative effect on the world climate changes. Meat consumption in Germany has decreased from 66 kg a year per a person during the mid '80sto 60.3 kg. (<http://www.gastro.hr/ekogastronomija-2219.aspx>)

The price of healthy food products, alternative food products and special demands of hotel guests is the most important barometer. If a customer is willing to pay for a certain agricultural product or a gastronomic specialty feeling satisfied, that is the right sign that the agricultural manufacturer,

processing industry and caterers have done their job. Agriculture economics, which, among other things, comprises the marketing of agricultural goods to rural tourism, implies that the agricultural manufacturer has to know where his marketing is, what a consumer (tourist) wants to buy out of their products, what they want to consume in country family house holds, how much they are ready to pay for that, what quality of agricultural, i.e. gastronomic products they ask for and the like.

In 2005 the Strategy for Agriculture Development was enacted in Serbia, which will enable an unobstructed development of agriculture in the Republic of Serbia and the integration into the agriculture of the European Union. The Strategy envisages the changes that need to be done in agricultural sector. They include three most important elements: the end of the transition from socialist to completely marketing economics; the integration into and the association with the European Union; a more radical reconstruction and modernization of the entire agricultural sector, as well as the establishment of marketing economics, which will have strong effects on the state role in agriculture, and on the relationships between agricultural manufacturers, the state and consumers. (The Strategy for Agriculture Development, 2005)

Eco-gastronomy in rural tourism

Food is a basic human need which connects us with the rest of the world and is an integral part of our future. Often, it is a motive for tourist travelling or staying at a country family household that offers it. It is necessary that country households should make a conception of their gastronomic products aimed at customers and thus differentiate from the competition. The use of natural, organic food is a way of differentiation. Country family households engaged in tourism can make an infrastructure of agriculturists that will supply them with fresh products which are made according to the standards of healthy food. By creating unforgettable gastronomic experiences, this type of tourism can place itself to the market of tourist services (Kotler-Bowen et al., 2010).

The differentiation of gastronomic offer which excites the guest and offers something new can lead to excellent public relationship opportunities, to the loyalty of potential tourists and to bigger earnings. The country family household that is well-known for the high quality of its gastronomic offer and service has a stronger competitive position than

the competition that has no continuity as regards high-quality products and services. The marketing kind of the relationship with the guests and loyal customers are created by a high-quality service (Cravens, 1995).

The service production and consumption in countryside tourism occur in one place and at the same time, and the user actively takes part in them having a unique interactive relationship with the service provider. Frequently, the quality of such a service personally experienced by the user depends on the quality of the interaction (relationship). The managing of the interaction between the provider and the user is the essence of the strategy of countryside tourism as a business, whose aim is to provide a lasting relationship with the user, who once entering the circle stays in it. Because of that, the quality of the product (service) in countryside tourism to a great extent depends on the quality and qualification of the provider, which is often a limiting factor in this business.

Carlo Petrini, the founder of *Slow Food* movement, which came into being as an answer to *fast food*, has opened a new chapter in the area of food understanding and so eco-gastronomy was born. To everyone concerned it should be pointed out that putting a carrot into a mouth is not enough. A very important question is who has grown that carrot, how it has come to us, who has produced the seed for it, how it has been served on a plate in a restaurant, who has served it and what way... and there are many other questions. The programme that combines a nutritional, agricultural and catering approach will not drastically reflect on the traditional love for pizza and beer, but it will teach people to look upon food from as many points of view as possible so that they can understand better the sustainable principle of food production and consumption. We have become aware of a growing interest of the young in food and the sustainable development and of their wish to understand the link between the local, the regional and the global food system. Eco-gastronomic offer in countryside tourism should get more and more space.

Creating a menu with organic, macrobiotic or vegetarian food is done through several phases: making the activity plan of a restaurant, choosing recipes, preparing food and taking pictures of it, making the design, printing the menus... Such projects are extremely demanding and in layers, and it is primarily necessary that the people who are highly professional and creative in their jobs should be consulted so that all the elements could be put into an attractive design. The guests must be

convinced that it is possible, even with such a limited culinary approach, to create and make both the dishes that look attractive and the dishes of different culinary directions. *Vegetarian* cuisine is always thought of as the cuisine that excludes a whole series of ingredients and that is why there are many people who are skeptical about it. Because of that, it is necessary that all the natural foodstuff should be used to the maximum to make an acceptable dish as much as possible. At present, the situation is that in such restaurants about 80% of vegetable is truly organic, and the rest is supplied by the manufacturers who, even though smaller in their business range, surely stick to the standards.

There is a big difference in tastes and habits across the continents separately. For example, the Americans mix fruit with everything, they mix the sweet, the sour and the chilly. Anything will do there. However, the Europeans, for example, are used to certain flavours and the extreme exotic will not do. Customers accept experiments to a certain extent but such an approach does not have success in long term. The guest looks for something familiar, possibly with an addition of some elements of other cuisines. The situation in Serbia is very similar. Our customers like trying something new, but they rather chose relatively recognizable flavours. Innovations in gastronomy should make people begin not only to recognize the dishes as “healthy” but also to take tourist trips because of interesting tastes themselves, because of the combination of the elements from various cuisines combined into new and delicious meals.

Frequently, traditional kitchen with its interior dominates the entire country household and enables exquisite opportunities for getting to know autochthonous culinary techniques, and for the foodstuff it is important to say that they come from the verified suppliers. There are no artificial flavours, no ready-to-serve sauces in bags – there are only natural ways of discovering new tastes and the combinations of them, and of having fun with food and wine. The high quality of the cuisine is not only the one served in expensive and shiny restaurants. The label of the haute cuisine deserves all first-class dishes, products or holiday places, regardless where they give us the pleasure: in a warm country family household or in a luxurious restaurant that attracts the jet-set.

Traditional tourist-gastronomic offer in Serbia

Serbian traditional cuisine has its specificities due to very different, traditional ways of preparing food. The German historian from the 12th

century Helmond, while describing the conquering campaigns of Carl the Great into the Slavic countries, wrote about an abundant feast at the court of Serbian king Pribislav: *on the table they had laid for us there were twenty different dishes*. The basic foodstuff in the national diet was bread baked on the hearth or over the fire in the forest. The kneaded dough used to be covered from under and from above with the leaves of dock plant, cabbage or some other plant, put into the embers and then covered with the ash. The bread made in such a way was of a special taste. It was recorded that during the famine in 1813 bread was made of ground oak nuts. Traditional ways of preparing food were: outlaws' cooking in the tree bark, roasting lambs wrapped with mud in embers and ash, frying (boiling) meat in a paunch hanging over the fire, using red-hot stones for roasting etc. Maybe these ways of preparing food nowadays seem ritual and archaic, but still they are able to arouse the imagination of modern gourmands.

In our country a large number of traditional food and drinks that are the characteristics of many an entertaining-tourist manifestation are prepared. The varied gastronomic offer prepared in a way and in the form that have not changed for centuries is a part of the interesting, attractive and tempting tourist offer of Serbia. Such a gastronomic diversity definitely represents notable ethnographic richness and a component of the cultural heritage of Serbia and furthermore an attractive and original tourist product that contributes to positioning Serbia as a tourist destination. Certain traditional and autochthonous dishes from Serbia have already found their place in the global offer of the world tourist market. Some food with a global sign (pizza, hamburger) with an addition of the national cuisine can be also found in the tourist offer of Serbia. At the moment, the trend of organizing ethno events related with traditional gastronomy is in great expansion. In Serbia there are about 150 manifestations of regional and international importance. As almost every village wants to have its own manifestation, at present there are 660 in Vojvodina only. It is interesting to mention that a considerable number of these manifestations are concentrated along Pan-European corridors through Serbia. Next, 49.2% of them are held in places extremely suitable for the development of rural and countryside tourism, and 54.0% in places qualified as tourist places. Bearing in mind that every manifestation contributes the economic development of the region, we have to say that this is a good trend if the manifestations are well-designed and well-organized. About 40,000 such manifestations are organized in the USA a year. Because of the growing extension of this type of tourism in our

country, every year the Chamber of Economy of Serbia organizes the manifestation organizers' gatherings where the organizing experiences are shared, help is granted, the ways of providing funds are discussed and the like. The recommendation made on these gatherings and addressed to the government agencies is that an expert help to the manifestations is the most important in the beginning, not later when they get independent and begin to make profit.

The comparative advantage of countryside is the clean and unpolluted nature, which enables the production of ecologically healthy food. Food is imported into Serbia in considerable volume, but as far as country family tourist facilities are concerned the households should endeavour to make food for tourists themselves. Healthy food is a priority and a matter of prestige in the Western world. From the same reason country households should secure their products, pack them into authentic packaging accentuating their quality. Preparing, cooking, arranging and serving food logically go with it all.

Hard-working and skilled housewives cherish the traditional way of preparing food. The best of them could organize trainings for preparing gastronomic specialties of home cuisine, which are rarer and rarer on the town table. Various kinds of pies (buckwheat, dock plant, pumpkin, cheese), layered cheese pie, "cicvara" (a type of polenta), "proja" (cornbread), home-made bread and unique dishes and roasted pork and lamb under sach (baking bell) leave nobody indifferent. The very act of cherishing home cuisine underlines the unique milieu of intimacy and welcome. The ritual of country dinner has many specificities: country parties with food, toasts, orations, which all leads to a relaxing and authentic atmosphere. Meeting the need for food is not only a biological need, but also a culinary-gastronomic experience fit into a complete autochthonous content of a country tourist destination. The tendency that healthy food should become a brand and as such become an export product that can give our tourist economy a considerable and sustainable competitive advantage and fulfill the prerequisites for further countryside tourism developing.

Which food to offer

On a country family tourist facility there should be the dishes of the regional character (traditional specialties) and in accordance with it the entire food offer has to be designed and created. It is especially

recommended that specific specialties, the ones that can be found only in that village or neighbourhood, should be offered. Guests always need to be given an explanation about what food is offered, what it is made of, how it is prepared. If there is a story about some food or a dish, it needs to be told (how the food came into being, why that way of preparation and how it is related to that region). It is always interesting to point out that a certain dish is made of autochthonous sort of vegetables, fruit, grains, fowl and livestock (meat, eggs, milk) or wild, self-sprouted, edible plants. Further, including some of the long forgotten dishes in the menu is always desirable, even though they may seem to be so simple that they do not represent traditional specialties.

Some minor interventions regarding the traditional menu are permitted only in cases when some guests do not take certain foodstuff (out of health, religious reasons or personal convictions), but even then with an amount of creativity, following the local tradition and using autochthonous foodstuff. It is not a rare case that a number of guests expect and demand the standard and classic dishes that are offered in most of the hotels and restaurants (Karageorge's schnitzel, grilled minced meat, grilled pork meat on the stick etc.). Such guests need a kind explanation that the point of country tourism and its basic characteristic is to offer exclusively authentic, traditional and almost forgotten dishes of the region and that they will certainly find something which suits their taste. Although this can provoke temporary misunderstandings and difficulties, we are sure that a consistent and principled offer of traditional food will pay in long term, as only with such a gastronomic offer your country tourist household will make a position and be recognized as a unique destination with an authentic and original gastronomic supply. Otherwise, by offering all kinds of things and fulfilling the gastronomic wishes that cannot be classified as traditional and autochthonous, you will turn your authentic country family household into a classic restaurant which has lost its recognizability.

As far as drinks are concerned, the principle of tradition, the same as with food, has to be obeyed. Of all the drinks that are served in a country family tourist facility, wine is, of course, chiefly served as a traditional product, then there are different kinds of brandy ("rakija") as aperitifs, home-made juice and local mineral water (if there is one). Fashionable carbonated beverages and beer are really not appropriate to be in the offer of country tourism (except in case of beer being made in that household – for example, Slovenia, Germany). A special emphasis is put on offering

home-made juice and syrups, made of the fruit and plants from the area (blackberry,raspberry, sour cherry, elderflower etc.)

Traditional Serbian dishes that are most frequently served in country family households:

- Cornbread, “somon” (a kind of bread), Serbian soda bread, lepinja (triple-raised soft baked flatbread), layered cheese pie, polenta, “cicvara” (a kind of polenta), “popara-masanica” (a kind of panada);
- “Belmuž” (corn flour and cheese) – Eastern Serbia;
- “Šardeni” (lamb intestines in an earthenware dish) Brus, Kopaonik;
- “Čalaufa” (boiled pieces of pie pastry) Čačak, Western Serbia;
- “Ležbaba” (fat pancakes) Sombor;
- “Trkanica” (a tomato salad with leek and baked paprika) Soko Banja;
- “Plašnic” (Vlach pancakes filled with cheese) Eastern Serbia;
- “Mamaljuga” (polenta with kaymak and dried meat) Užice, Western Serbia;
- “Šuš-muš” (chitterlings) Eastern Serbia;
- “Češket” (chicken with barley or wheat) Herzegovinian, Smederevo;
- “Medžanik” (mashed beans) Brus;
- “Kvrguša” (small pieces of chicken on dough);
- “Čulama” (boiled chicken) Zaječar.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that for now only natural, cultural-historical and ethnographic contents represent a significant and positive impulse to tourist positioning of Serbia as a tourist destination. The recommendation of the World Tourist Organization (WTO) to Serbia follows that course, too. It says that Serbia should rapidly develop countryside tourism, which is judged as one of the comparative advantages of Serbia on the global tourist market. The tourist offer in countryside tourism is based on existing potentials, including real estates; on existing agricultural production; on autochthonous knowledge and skills such as traditional crafts, folk instruments handiwork, folk dancing, customs, hunt and fishing.

The developing concept of countryside tourism includes the use of the foodstuff that is produced and prepared in a healthy way and in the spirit of Serbian traditional cuisine. Traditional, autochthonous food products, specific for the region, should be presented and promoted in the offer of

the country family household, and that should be the base for home-made food choice. It is especially recommended to offer particular specialties that can be found only in that village or the region where the household is. As far as drinks are concerned, the principle of traditional, local products has to be obeyed, too. In a country family tourist facility home-made wine, made of traditional sorts of grapes characteristic for that region should be served, but also there are different kinds of brandy ("rakija"), home-made juice and local mineral water (if there is one) that should be served as well.

How and in which ways these potentials will be used and made into an attractive tourist offer depends on a precisely elaborate idea of a potential provider of the tourist services in a country family household, as well as on recognizing the attractiveness which the future tourist offer in countrytourism can be formed on.

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