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

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**UNIVERSITY OF KRAGUJEVAC
FACULTY OF HOTEL MANAGEMENT
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RURAL TOURISM IN THE FUNCTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

The goal of the paper is to highlight the economic importance of rural tourism for the development of the Republic of Serbia due to the fact that rural areas account for 85% of its area. The Republic of Serbia has no development of rural tourism that is adequate compared to the available resources, and the reason for that is the lack of a clear strategic development direction as well as insufficient financial investments into development of this economic branch. Therefore, it is necessary that in the future period to adopt the Strategy for Sustainable Development of Rural Tourism, as a special document with clearly defined development priorities and modalities of financing the development of all segments of the rural tourism supply. In this paper, we use the methods of analysis and synthesis, descriptive, as well as the historical methods.

Keywords: *rural tourism, development, Republic of Serbia, financing*

Introduction

According to the definition of rural tourism stated in the Encyclopedia of Tourism (2000), two facts are pointed out: (1) the rural area is a basic resource for the development of rural tourism, and (2) the development of this kind of tourism has been caused by the need of inhabitants from the urban areas for rest and recreation in rural areas. In 1986, the Council of Europe adopted a definition accepted in the European Union, according to which the term rural tourism is used in the cases when the rural culture is a key component of the offered tourism product. (Demonja, Ružić, 2010) The definition of rural tourism suggested by the Council of Europe also implies the activities that can be implemented in rural areas, above all

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gastronomic activities, as well as those of health character. (Pančić Kombol, 2000)

According to the definition adopted at the EU, rural tourism comprises all tourist activities that can take place in rural areas and that can be included in their touristic offer. An analysis of available domestic and foreign literature leads to the conclusion there is no single, internationally accepted definition of rural areas. Therefore, in order to establish a common criterion of rurality, the definition proposed by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) is accepted in the European Union. According to this criterion, rural areas, at local level, are considered to be those ones that have a population density of less than 150 inhabitants per km². In the domestic literature, beside the term *rural tourism*, there are often used *agro-tourism* and *village tourism*. The utilization of those two terms is not adequate due to the fact that agro-tourism is only one of the forms of rural tourism, while the village tourism includes only the tourism in villages.

The rural tourism has economic, social and political importance. The development of rural tourism has positive economic effects both for farms and local communities, as well as for the country. The economic effects of the rural tourism development at the farm level are the following: diversification of activities, i.e. provision of additional income to the household from non-agricultural activities (tourism, sales of the homemade products, products of traditional crafts, souvenirs, processed agricultural products, etc.). The activity of rural tourism has also enabled the valorization of the women activities within the household, activities of youth and older members of the household, as well as the development of organic agricultural production, i.e. the sales and a realistic evaluation of the mentioned products through the rural tourism.

The economic effects of the rural tourism development at the level of local economic communities are diversification and development of rural economies, as well as reduction of unemployment through the creation of new jobs in rural tourism and related activities.

The economic effects of the rural tourism development at the country level are the following: preservation of traditional architecture, gastronomy, customs, folklore, development of rural infrastructure, i.e. the creation of better living conditions in rural areas. In addition, the effects are manifested even in reduction of differences in economic development between rural and urban areas, then differences in regional

development, which enables the reduction of migration from the rural to the urban areas. If the users of services in rural tourism are foreign tourists, it could enable the realization of "invisible exports", which could have positive effects on the balance of payments of the country. Acquainting foreign tourists with the culture and the way of living in one country has a social and political significance for that country.

The Republic of Serbia has comparative advantages for development of rural tourism, as, according to the categorization of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), 85% of its territory are rural areas. There are three rural regions in the Republic of Serbia. (Đorđević-Milošević, Milovanović, 2012) The first region, and the largest one, covers 44% of the total area and is located in the southern part of the country. It is the least developed and poorest region with undeveloped rural economy (RE). The second region consists of hilly-mountainous areas of Central Serbia and it covers 28% of the total area, with the 44% of the total population living there. This region is the most populated one and its rural economy (RE) is diverse and characterized by a developed services sector. The third northern region is mainly the agricultural one and it is located in the plain area of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina. This region makes 28% of the total area, with the 26% of the total population living there. This region has a developed rural economy, while only less than 10% of municipalities are classified as undeveloped ones according to the criteria of the United Nations (UN). The regions differ between themselves in economic, social and demographic characteristics. By the development of rural tourism, as the common development chance of all regions, economic development could be equalized, i.e. development of rural economies which today mainly rely on agriculture could be enabled. (Đorđević-Milošević, Milovanović, 2012)

The Republic of Serbia is one of the most agrarian European countries, while in its rural areas "dominates the diversification of the household income, not the diversification of activities." (Bogdanov, 2007, p.55) According to many authors (Štetić, Cvijanović, Šimičević, 2014) the future of tourism development in Serbia is in selective tourism, i.e. the tourism of special interests, with rural tourism as one of its components.

The aim of the paper is to highlight the economic importance of rural tourism for development of the Republic of Serbia, considering the fact that rural areas account for 85% of its surface. The development of rural

tourism in the Republic of Serbia is a complex process due to the fact that its rural areas have been classified as heterogeneous ones in Europe in terms of natural, economic, demographic and social conditions. For the purpose of the paper, we employ the methods of analysis and synthesis, descriptive, as well as the historical methods.

Review of the Literature

The rapid development of rural tourism in the European Union in the 1990s was the result of needs for provision of additional income for the farms. According to the attitude of the World Tourism Organization the greatest economic importance of rural tourism is that this activity helps the poverty elimination (*tourism helps poverty elimination*). Rural tourism is mainly developed in areas that have limited financial resources, but extraordinary natural resources that could be a platform of economic development (Jing, 2006). The economic importance of rural tourism for the local economic community can be described in short by the term *CARE*, which means: *C*reate New Jobs; *A*ttract New Business; *R*etain Existing Firms; *E*xpand Existing Firms. (Đekić, Vučić, 2003)

Rural tourism is one of the most labor-intensive industries, that has a potential contribution to job creation and economic development of rural areas, which is often the most important element in the rural development strategies (Mitchell, Hall, 2005). Rural tourism also allows the market valuation of cultural heritage and its symbols, environment and identity of rural areas. The development strategy of rural tourism should be based on ecological, economic and social sustainability (Roberts, Hall, 2003). The sustainable development of rural tourism is a part of integral rural development, which is defined as "a modern concept that represents a complex development of a particular rural area on the basis of available natural, financial, infrastructural and human resources to be managed with due care to preserve the balance between man and nature" (Njegovan, Pejanović, 2009, p.121).

It is necessary that a village which tends to get a tourism function maintains agricultural production as the core business; has architectural solutions of accommodation facilities that fit into the rural landscape and preserves the rural way of life through fostering old customs and festivities, as well as the culture of food, clothing and housing. Also, it is necessary to engage the tourists through their host families in the whole country life, and that the local population is not isolated from tourists, i.e.

that it is not a "nameless provider of touristic services with limited working hours," but that it is simultaneously engaged both in the farm activities and in touristic ones and that it treats the tourists as a part of local, everyday life (Milenković, 2005). Rural tourism is a factor in development trends of rural areas, the supplementary activity of the rural population, the market for agricultural products, a factor of agricultural development and "softener" of depopulation flows (Todorović, Štetić, 2009).

The most important economic functions of rural tourism are the following: accelerative (development), inductive, multiplicative and the one of conversion. The accelerative function indicates the impact of rural tourism on the acceleration of the overall economic and social development, which is of particular importance for the economic development of undeveloped areas. The inductive function of rural tourism represents its impact on economic activities that are directly or indirectly associated with it. The multiplicative function of rural tourism means the impact of funds spent in this type of tourism to added (multiplicative) effects on the national economy. "The multiplication coefficient indicates the number of turnovers of money received from foreign tourists in one year ... the greater number of hands through which the 'foreign money' flows, the greater effect of tourism on the economy of the host" (Unković, Zečević, 2011, p.37).

According to Milojević, the multiplication effect of the rural tourism money spent in the local community is extremely high (Milojević, 2007). It is estimated that it amounts to 2.2, which means that 1 dinar spent by the tourist generates 2.2 dinars at the level of the local economy. The conversion function refers to the ability of rural tourism to convert natural and anthropogenic (non-economic) resources into the commodity, which enables them become "the elements of touristic demand and have the prices, and therefore the economic touristic effects as well"(Milenković, 2009, p.71). There is an agreement by domestic authors (Čomić, 2003) and foreign ones (George, Mair, Reid, 2009) that development of rural tourism cannot be realized only as economic growth; it should also be considered from the point of view of ecological and social development.

Development of Rural Tourism

On the territory of the Republic of Serbia the rural tourism began to develop spontaneously in the 1970s in Deviči village (municipality of

Ivanjica). This was the beginning of practicing rural tourism not only in Serbia, but also in the whole Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) (Marković, Ostojić, 2012). According to information from the archives of the Tourism Alliance, at the end of the 1980s, 800 households were dealing with rural tourism in Serbia, which were located in 50 villages equipped with approximately 3,000 beds.³ Due to the adverse social, political and economic factors, in the last decade of the 20th century it came to a halt in this development process.

According to the data of the Tourist Organization of Serbia, in 1999 the rural tourism was present in only 40 villages and 15 municipalities, and 140 households dealt with this type of tourism, with the capacity of approximately 630 beds (Marić, 2001). At the beginning of the 21st century more significant results in rural tourism have been recorded at the area of AP Vojvodina and in Central and Western Serbia. Thus, for example, in the municipality of Gornji Milanovac, in the global crisis year of 2009, 80 rural households, with a total of 572 beds, have realized 15,000 overnight stays and obtained a turnover of 230,000 € (Ševarlić, Petrović, 2010). In the same year, on the whole territory of the Republic of Serbia, a total of 145,354 registered overnight stays in rural tourism was recorded in the narrow sense and 2,556,128 overnight stays which can be attributed to rural tourism, making a total of 2,700,000 or 27% of total overnight stays in the Republic of Serbia in all aspects of tourism.⁴

Based on the results from the Census of Agriculture from 2012, in the Republic of Serbia there is a total number of 628,552 farms. Only 78,301 farms or 12.4% are engaged in other profitable activities (OPA) except from agriculture. The average representation of rural tourism in other farm income-generating activities is 0.66% for the entire territory of the Republic of Serbia (Table 1). By regions, this representation is the largest in the area of AP Vojvodina and makes 1.11%, in the region of Šumadija and Western Serbia it is 0.67%, while in the Southern and Eastern Serbia and the Belgrade region it is 0.48% (Bogdanov, Babović, 2014).

3 National Association "Rural Tourism of Serbia", <http://www.selo.co.rs>. (accessed on 10th March 2016)

4 Development Program of Sustainable Rural Tourism in the Republic of Serbia, Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, No. 85/2011.

Table 1: *The territorial distribution of agricultural households in the Republic of Serbia which are dealing with rural tourism*

Name of the Region (District)	Number of households engaged in rural tourism
Belgrade Region	14
Vojvodina Region	93
West Bačka District	13
South Banat District	14
South Bačka District	19
North Banat District	11
North Bačka District	10
Central Banat District	6
Sremski District	20
The Region of Šumadija and West Serbia	295
Zlatiborski District	127
Kolubarski District	22
Mačvanski District	18
Moravički District	37
Pomoravski District	11
Rasinski District	39
Raški District	18
Šumadijski District	23
The Region of South and Eastern Serbia	112
Borski District	22
Braničevski District	18
Zaječarski District	27
Jablanički District	4
Nišavski District	6
Pirotski District	18
Podunavski District	1
Pčinjski District	10
Toplički District	6
Kosovo and Metohija Region	-
Total:	514

Source: *Census of Agriculture 2012 - Agriculture in the Republic of Serbia (2012): Volume II, National Institute for Statistics, Belgrade, pp. 190-197.*

According to the National Association "Rural Tourism of Serbia", which collects data and monitors the work of over 80% of rural tourist households, around 200 thousand overnight stays was realized in rural

tourism in the Republic of Serbia in 2013, while in 2014 that indicator was about 180 thousand overnight stays.⁵

The development of rural tourism in some areas is the result of the agility, associations and service providers in rural tourism. Also, the current level of the rural tourism development is based on the vision, persistence and commitment of employees in particular tourist organizations, who have managed to provide the necessary financial resources by participation in various competitions and projects, both for the development of accommodation facilities, and for education (Radović, 2013).

On the basis of the reviewed research, it can be concluded that there are numerous problems in the development of rural tourism in the Republic of Serbia (Radović, 2015). They can be noted as: (a) the lack of financial sources; (b) the lack of Registry and defined standards; (c) the mismatch of what is envisaged in legal solutions to the current situation in practice; (d) insufficient supply of tourist facilities; (e) underdevelopment of infrastructure and tourist signs; (f) underdevelopment of tourism brokerage, i.e. insufficient involvement of travel agencies in the promotion and sales of the rural tourism products; (g) insufficient cooperation of the service providers and their training; and (h) adverse demographic characteristics of rural areas.

On the basis of analyzed information, it can be concluded that the rural tourism in the Republic of Serbia is insufficiently developed. An assessment of underdevelopment of Serbian rural tourism is to be found in the reports of various international experts who believe that there are opportunities for higher level of rural tourism development in Serbia (Bartlet, 2006).

Resources as a Potential of the Rural Tourism Development

The resources of importance for the development of the rural tourism can be classified as natural, human, social, physical and financial.

Natural resources important for the development of rural tourism in Serbia are favorable characteristics of natural landscapes and their diversity, richness of flora and fauna, relatively clean air, water and soil,

⁵ Data obtained from V. Ivanovic, Director of the National Association "Rural Tourism of Serbia".

wealth of thermal waters, pleasant climate, etc. In rural areas, there are protected natural areas that are suitable for the development of eco-rural tourism. According to the criteria of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the territory of the Republic of Serbia is one of six European and 153 world centers of biodiversity. "The total area of protected natural areas accounts for 6.5% of the total territory of the Republic of Serbia, which has a total of five national parks, 98 nature reserves, 16 zones of protected landscape, 296 natural monuments, 24 nature parks, where there are located 215 plant and 462 animal species that are classified as protected and rare" (RARIS, 2012). In the AP of Vojvodina there are 15 protected natural areas, which are suitable for the development of agro-eco tourism and where it is necessary to pay special attention to the formation and development of eco-tourism facilities in order to establish sustainable development (Radović et al, 2011).

On the territory of the AP of Vojvodina, there are defined and protected natural areas and this activity has been implemented by the Provincial Secretariat for Environmental Protection and Sustainable Development. According to current data, on the territory of Vojvodina there are fifteen protected areas in which it is necessary to pay special attention to the formation and development of eco-tourism facilities in order to establish sustainable development. It is therefore to initiate educational centers for visitors in these areas, whose main function should be the promotion of protected areas, education and exchange of information and experience. Also, within these centers, tourists would be able to obtain information on accommodation capacities in agricultural households in the immediate environment. In order to implement those activities, it is necessary to have the support of the local economic communities that should implement the agro-eco tourism in the protected areas of the AP of Vojvodina, as well as that of the Ministry of Agriculture and the relevant Provincial Secretariat which would take care of the sustainable agricultural and rural development in this area in accordance with their responsibilities.

In the past, the natural resources of rural areas were primarily valorized through agriculture. In the future period, it would be necessary to valorize favorable natural resources even through the development of rural tourism. On the touristic market, the higher prices for agricultural products can be achieved (Vasiljević, Savić, 2014). Therefore, it is necessary to develop rural tourism and agriculture simultaneously as complementary activities. For this purpose, it is necessary to define the

modalities of financing the development of rural tourism offer, which should include accommodation facilities, catering and touristic facilities (Radović 2015).

There are no official statistical data on the number of residents in Serbia who are engaged in rural tourism. The relevant framework indicators may be data from the Census of Agriculture (2012), according to which there is 2% of the active working population engaged in the services of accommodation and food in rural areas, i.e. 19,331 out of 922,158 economically active population members living in rural areas are dealing with rural tourism (Bogdanov, Babović, 2014).

In order to analyze human resources, in terms of their importance for the development of rural tourism in Serbia, it is important to consider the following indicators: the share of rural population in total population, the age structure, level of education and unemployment rate of the population in rural areas. Number of people living in rural areas makes 40.6% of the total population, and every fifth rural resident of the Republic of Serbia is older than 65.⁶

According to the data from the Labor Force Survey for 2014, 36% of the total unemployed population in the Republic of Serbia lives in rural areas⁷. Women make 55% and men 45% of the total number of unemployed population in rural areas. In the structure of unemployed rural population, 28.6% are the residents of the most productive working age period (age from 25 to 34). In this age group, females make 29.6%, while males make 27.7%. The age and gender structures of the unemployed rural population represent a potential for the rural tourism development considering that this industry predominantly employs female laborforce.

According to 2011 Census, the population in rural areas in the Republic of Serbia has predominantly secondary education; 49.1% are men and 36.0% women. The high proportion of the total population has only elementary education and even 30.4% of the female population is without elementary education. Only 6% of women and 6.2% of men have post-secondary education (Bogdanov, Babović, 2014). All this implies that there is

6 Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development of the Republic of Serbia for the Period 2014-2024, Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, No. 85/2014.

7 National Institute for Statistics (2015): Labor Force Survey, 2014, Belgrade.

working inactive population in rural areas, which can be engaged in rural tourism. The level of education can be a limiting factor in the development, so it is necessary to provide the financing resources for education of this population (Radović, 2015).

The social resources which are significant for the development of rural tourism are the following: rich cultural and historical heritage, preserved characteristics of ethno features, folklore, traditional handicrafts and gastronomy, the treasury of folk customs, old crafts and events that take place in rural areas. The events have social significance in the preservation of tradition and cultural heritage, but they can also have economic significance if they are integrated into the touristic offer and adequately promoted on domestic and international touristic market.

It is estimated that in the Republic of Serbia, there are 1,000 to 1,500 touristic events per year, most of which are the ethnographic and gastronomic ones, which mainly take place in rural areas. It is therefore necessary to create a rural touristic product, which besides visiting the events should include the stay in rural touristic households, as well as a visit to cultural and historical monuments or protected natural areas that are in immediate vicinity. By organized promotion and marketing of the touristic market, an adequate valorization of the social and natural resources in the rural areas could be provided (Pejanović, Radović, 2012). For this purpose, it is necessary to define the modalities of financing the sales channels and promotion of the rural tourism product (Radović, 2015).

The physical resources of importance for the development of rural tourism are the following: the preserved traditional rural architecture, cultural and historical monuments, museums, galleries, libraries and other cultural institutions in rural areas, religious facilities, public infrastructure and tourist signalization. The Republic of Serbia has adequate physical resources for development of rural tourism, but public infrastructure, i.e. the transport, telecommunications, energy and communal infrastructure is characterized by low quality, while the touristic signalization is underdeveloped. It is therefore necessary to define the modalities of financing the development of public infrastructure in rural areas, as well as the touristic signalization (Radović, 2015).

Due to the poor economic situation of agriculture, agricultural holdings do not have the financial resources for the development of rural tourism,

i.e. they need external sources of financing (Vasiljević, 1998; Radović, 2014). On the other hand, the lack of financial resources represents the existential problem of some rural areas in the Republic of Serbia (Vasiljević, Dedeić, 2011). In recent years, poverty has become "a rural phenomenon" due to the fact that in rural areas 14.2% of the total population are poor, while in the Southeast and partly in Western Serbia the rural population accounts for 25% of the total number of poor population in the Republic of Serbia (Bogdanov, 2007).

According to the World Bank study "Rural Vulnerability in Serbia", in the rural areas that are marginal for agriculture "approximately one million people live below the poverty line, with two dollars a day, because these areas rely almost exclusively on agriculture, i.e. agriculture is the main source of income for 68% households" (Đorđević Milošević, Milovanović, 2012, p.117). It is therefore necessary to direct the development of poor regions to that of non-agricultural activities, primarily to the rural tourism. Based on the multiplicative effect of tourism, this activity allows the fastest diversification and development of rural economies.

Having analyzed natural, human, social and physical resources, we can say that their valorization through the development of rural tourism can ensure the development of rural areas. For that purpose, it is essential to provide the necessary financial support to each of these resources. The synthesis of the analyzed data imply that the financial resources are one of the greatest limitations for development of rural tourism in the Republic of Serbia (Radović, 2015).

The limited financial resources are not only characteristic of rural areas in the Republic of Serbia. A similar problem is present even in economically developed countries. For example, in North America the limited financial resources are a significant limitation in development of many rural areas, so the poor rural areas are entitled to the grants provided by the higher-order administration (Timothy, 2005). Therefore, even in the Republic of Serbia the governmental financial support should be a primary modality of rural tourism financing in the initial stage of development, but at the same time it is necessary to establish a system of the rural tourism financing based on the market principles. In other words, the market that should be set up is the one of full competition in terms of involvement in the domestic banking market of other financial institutions, apart from

commercial banks, such as micro-credit organizations, savings and credit cooperatives, etc. (Radović, 2015).

Conclusions and Recommendations

The Republic of Serbia has no developed rural tourism in accordance with disposable resources and the reasons for that are the lack of a clear strategic direction of development and insufficient financial investments into development of this economic activity. Therefore, in future, it is necessary to adopt the Strategy for sustainable development of rural tourism in the Republic of Serbia as a special development planning document with clearly defined development priorities and modalities of financing the development of all rural tourism offer segments.

In the Strategy for sustainable development of rural tourism, it is necessary to define development priorities, i.e. the forms of rural tourism that should be developed in particular parts of the Republic of Serbia. It is necessary to base the development on the principles of sustainability viewed from the ecological, economic and sociological aspects. Furthermore, it is necessary to adopt the action plans, and to determine the responsibility for their implementation, i.e. to define the executors and management, but particularly the control of the goals' implementation. It would be appropriate to form the destination management organizations which would manage the sustainable development of rural tourism at the regional level in accordance with the current Law on tourism.⁸

It is necessary to define competencies in the management of sustainable development of rural tourism at the national level, which are now intertwined between the Ministry of Trade, Tourism and Telecommunications and the Ministry of Agriculture and Environmental Protection. If we hold that development is mainly based on the development of agro-tourism, taking into account the need for provision, an additional income for agricultural households by development of rural tourism, it is then logical that jurisdiction should be assigned to the Ministry of Agriculture and Environmental Protection.

⁸ The Law on Tourism of the Republic of Serbia, Official Gazette No. 36/2009, 88/2010, 99/2011, 93/2012, 84/2015.

It is necessary that the Strategy for sustainable development of rural tourism in the Republic of Serbia defines the modalities of financing the development and construction of touristic facilities, touristic contents and rural infrastructure, training of personnel and leadership development, as well as the development of touristic promotion and marketing channels of the rural tourism products. In addition to recently used modes of financing, which are mainly founded on the state budget and foreign donations, it is also necessary to include new modalities of financing. Solving of the problem of financing the development of touristic supply is of vital importance for development of rural tourism. In order to invest the financial resources adequately, and, also, to provide the control of expenditures and achieved results, it is necessary to establish the efficient way of management by financing sustainable development of the rural tourism in the Republic of Serbia.

Bearing in mind that the multiplier effect in rural tourism is high, the development of this sector has the ability to realize the fastest diversification of the rural economy. The development of rural tourism would allow reducing unemployment and providing additional income for the residents of rural areas. Also, the development of this activity should contribute to the reduction of differences in economic development between rural and urban areas, as well as reduce the depopulation of rural areas. Based on the above mentioned findings, it can be concluded that the development of rural tourism should enable the comprehensive development of the Republic of Serbia with regard to the fact that 85% of its territory consists of rural areas.

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