

RESOURCES AND THE RURAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA³

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to analyse resources, the current development and developmental perspectives of rural tourism in the Republic of Serbia. Rural tourism in the Republic of Serbia has not been sufficiently developed in spite of a good basis. It is characterized by great seasonal variations in tourists' visit, while the average occupancy of accommodation capacities is only 4%. The development of rural tourism in the Republic of Serbia is complex given that rural areas are among the most heterogeneous in Europe regarding natural, economic, demographic and social conditions. Therefore, it is necessary in the future to perceive the development from multi-sector point of view, to base it on adequate and strategic framework, as well as on the principles of ecological, social, cultural and economic sustainability.

Key words: rural tourism, resources, development, Republic of Serbia

INTRODUCTION

Rural tourism is a common name for all forms of tourism, which can be realized in rural areas. According to a definition stated in (Encyclopaedia of Tourism, 2000) there asserts that rural space is a basic resource for the development of rural tourism, as well as that the development of this form of tourism has been caused by a need of urban population to rest and recreate in rural areas. A rural area can be defined as a space with low concentration of populations, which are engaged in agriculture, and are characterized by special customs and rural identity (Štetić, Cvijanović, Šimičević, 2014).

According to Kušen (2007) rural tourism is a complex tourist product, consisted of numerous partial tourist products inter-connected in a functional, economic, sociological and spatial, as well as a tourist entirety, because rural space disposes with numerous local and regional tourist attractions, which create the specific products typical for rural space and rural tourism after the „fine embroidery“ principle. Therefore, George et al.,

³ Review article

(2009) point out that the development of rural tourism „cannot be observed only as economic growth, but also from the ecological and social development point of view. “

The development of rural tourism in Europe records sudden increase starting from nineties of XX Century. This is a result of organized and strategically directed development, as well as the facts that the European Union, within the Common Agrarian Policy reform (AGENDA 2000), has provided special incentives for multifunctional agriculture and rural development, and rural tourism as its significant segment. Instantaneously with supply increase, there has come to the expansion of tourist demand, which has been a result of tourists' reorientation from massive to the selective forms of tourism. During the mid '90s of XX Century, only 9% of European tourists were interested in rural tourist areas (Cvijanović, 2014). In the first decade of XX Century, according to estimates, around 23% of European tourists had stayed in rural areas once a year (Roberts, Hall, 2011).

In the Republic of Serbia, according to the categorization of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), rural areas stretch on 85% of the territory. In accordance to the Census of Agriculture results in 2012, there are totally 628,552 agricultural holdings in the Republic of Serbia. Of this number only 78,301 or 12.4% of holdings are engaged in other profitable activities (OPA) beside agriculture. Less than 1% of total number of agricultural holdings in the Republic of Serbia is engaged in rural tourism (Bogdanov, Babović, 2014).

This paper aims to analyse resources, current development and perspectives of the rural tourism development in the Republic of Serbia. In the paper was used a method of analysis and synthesis, as well as a comparative method. The development of rural tourism would enable positive economic effects at the level of agricultural holdings, local-economic communities, as well as the state level. The development of rural tourism, as labour-intensive, perspective and potentially profitable activity could stop the current demographic depopulation of rural areas in the Republic of Serbia.

RESOURCES

The resources of great importance for the development of rural tourism are: natural, human, social, physical and financial.

Natural resources – Natural resources in the Republic of Serbia, significant for the development of rural tourism, are: natural beauties, diversity of flora and fauna, relatively ecologically fresh air, clean water and land, thermal waters wealth, pleasant climate, etc. There are also protected natural areas within rural areas, which are favourable for the development of

eco-rural tourism. In accordance to criteria of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the territory of the Republic of Serbia represents one of the six European and 153 world centres of biological diversity (RARIS, 2012). Natural resources of rural areas had been used primarily for agriculture development in the past. In the future it will be necessary to valorise these resources on tourist market with the development of rural tourism, where can also be achieved higher prices for agricultural products. Therefore, it is necessary to develop in parallel rural tourism and agriculture, as complementary activities.

Human resources – Aiming to perceive the human resources from aspect of their significance for the development of rural tourism in the Republic of Serbia, it is inevitable to analyse a share of rural population in total population, age structure, educational level, as well as a rate of rural population unemployment. According to statistical data, 40.6% of total population live in rural areas and every fifth inhabitant is elder than 65 years (Strategy, 2014-2024). The unemployment rate is 19.9%; 54% populations have a high school degree; 31.6% have only elementary education, while only 6.8% of a total number of labour-intensive rural populations has higher and university education (Labour Survey, 2013). According to all mentioned data, it can be concluded that in rural areas there are labour-inactive populations, who have to be engaged in rural tourism. However, mainly low educational level can be a limiting factor for the development.

Social resources – In social resources, significant for the development of rural tourism, we count in: wealthy cultural and historical heritage, well preserved ethnic characteristics, folklore, traditional handicrafts and gastronomy, repository of folk customs, old handicrafts and manifestations (events) in rural areas. „Events can have a social significance in preservation of tradition and cultural inheritance, but can also have economic significance if they integrate in a tourist offer and promote adequately on domestic and international tourist market“ (Radović et al., 2012). It is estimated that in the Republic of Serbia organizes annually from 1,000 to 1,500 tourist events, among which the most common are ethnographic and gastronomic, which mostly take place in rural areas. Therefore, it is necessary to create a rural tourist product, which would involve stay of tourists in agricultural tourist households, besides visits to the events, as well as visit to cultural-historical monuments or protected natural areas in the vicinity. In this way, there would provide greater valorisation of social resources through rural tourism, and at the same time the incomes for rural tourist households, too.

Physical resources – Physical resources, significant for the development of rural tourism, are: a) preserved traditional rural architecture, b) cultural-historical monuments, museums, galleries, libraries and other cultural institutions in rural areas, c) religious buildings, d) public infrastructure, and

e) tourist signalization. The Republic of Serbia has adequate physical resources for the rural tourism development. Nevertheless, public infrastructure, i.e. transport, telecommunication, energetic and communal infrastructure is characterized by low quality, and tourist signalization is insufficiently developed.

Financial resources – Due to unfavourable financial position of agriculture, the agricultural holdings do not have financial resources for the development of rural tourism, i.e. they need the external financing resources. On the other hand, lack of financial resources is a great existential problem of some rural areas in the Republic of Serbia. According to Bogdanov (2007), poverty has become a „rural phenomenon“ in past years, in regard that in rural areas 14.2% of total population is poor, and in south-east and partially west Serbia, rural population makes 25% of a total number of total poor population in the Republic of Serbia (Bogdanov, 2007). In accordance to the World Bank study „Rural vulnerability in Serbia“, in rural areas marginal for agriculture, „approximately one million people live below the poverty line with 2 USD per a day, because these areas almost solely rely on agriculture, i.e. it is the main income source for 68% households“ (Djordjević-Milošević, Milovanović, 2012).

With the analysis of natural, human, social and physical resources, we can conclude that there can provide their adequate valorisation through rural tourism. Therefore, it is necessary for every mentioned resource to ensure necessary financial resources, in order to put them into operation of the rural tourism development. We can draw a conclusion, by the synthesis of analysed data, that „financial resources are one of the most common limitations for the development of rural tourism in the Republic of Serbia“(Radović, 2015).

DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL TOURISM

The rural tourism in Serbia has started to develop spontaneously during '70s of the XX Century in the village Deviči, on the territory of Ivanjica municipality. That was the beginning of being engaged in rural tourism, not only in the Republic of Serbia, but also the whole Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) (Marković, Ostojić, 2012). In late '80s of the XX Century, according to information from tourist associations' archive, around 800 households were engaged in rural tourism, which were in 50 villages and disposed with 3,000 beds. In the last decade of XX Century had come to a delay in developmental process, due to unfavourable social, political and economic factors. In 1999, in accordance to data of Serbian Tourist Organisation, the rural tourism had been present in only 40 villages, i.e. 15

municipalities, while 140 households, with around 630 beds, had been engaged in this form of tourism (Marić, 2001).

At the beginning of XX Century, more significant results in rural tourism turnover were recorded on the territory of AP Vojvodina and in Central and West Serbia. In 2010, in the whole area of the Republic of Serbia, there were realized totally 145,354 registered overnight stays in rural tourism in the narrow sense and 2,556.128 overnight stays which can be credited to rural tourism, and which had made totally 2,700.000 or 27% of total overnight stays realized on the territory of the Republic of Serbia in all forms of tourism. It is estimated that in 2010 the income from rural tourism was 10 milliards dinars (RSD), which made 16% of total 62 milliards dinars, i.e. a total direct tourist gross domestic product for Serbia in that year. Rural tourism is characterized by great seasonal variations in tourists visit, as well as very low occupancy. An average occupancy of accommodations in rural tourism in the Republic of Serbia is only 4%, while in other fields of tourism 21% (Program, 2011).

There are no official data on a number of registered agricultural households in Serbia, which are engaged in rural tourism. According to estimates of the local tourist organizations, Serbia disposes with 10,567 beds in rural households and it is assumed that 32,747 more beds could use for this form of tourism (Program, 2011).

Table 1: Number of accommodation facilities by municipalities

MUNICIPALITY	Number of accommodations	%	MUNICIPALITY	Number of accommodations	%	MUNICIPALITY	Number of accommodations	%
Aleksandrovac	1	0.2	Koceljeva	1	0.2	Novi Sad	5	1.0
Arandjelovac	4	0.8	Kosjerić	12	2.4	Novi Pazar	1	0.2
Arilje	14	2.8	Kovačica	4	0.8	Osečina	12	2.4
Babušnica	1	0.2	Kovin	5	1.0	Petrovac on Mlava	1	0.2

Bačka Palanka	2	0.4	Kragujevac	12	2.4	Pirot	23	4.5
Bačka Topola	1	0.2	Kraljevo	9	1.8	Požega	6	1.2
Bajina Bašta	8	1.6	Krupanj	1	0.2	Priboj	3	0.6
Barajevo	3	0.6	Kruševac	1	0.2	Prokuplje	1	0.2
Boljevac	1	0.2	Lazarevac	3	0.6	Šabac	1	0.2
Bor	5	1.0	Ljig	18	3.6	Senta	2	0.4
Brus	8	1.6	Ljubovija	28	5.6	Smederevska Palanka	1	0.2
Bujanovac	7	1.4	Loznica	8	1.6	Sokobanja	4	0.8
Čačak	3	0.6	Lučani	17	3.4	Sombor	9	1.8
Čajetina	36	7.1	Majdanpek	4	0.8	Sopot	1	0.2
Despotovac	3	0.6	Mali Idoš	1	0.2	Stara Pazova	1	0.2
Dimitrovgrad	4	0.8	Mali Zvornik	4	0.8	Subotica	5	1.0
Gornji Milanovac	67	13.3	Malo Crniće	2	0.4	Surdulica	1	0.2
Indjija	3	0.6	Medveđa	2	0.4	Topola	1	0.2
Irig	4	0.8	Mionica	8	1.6	Trstenik	2	0.4
Ivanjica	11	2.2	Mladenovac	2	0.4	Užice	37	7.2
Jagodina	1	0.2	Negotin	2	0.4	Valjevo	11	2.2
Kikinda	1	0.2	Niš	1	0.2	Vrnjačka Banja	2	0.4
Knić	12	2.4	Nova Varoš	11	2.2	Žagubica	1	0.2
Kujaževac	14	2.8	Novi Beograd	1	0.2	Zaječar	2	0.4

Source: http://www.selo.co.rs/listing_browse.php?city (website accessed on 27th October 2013)

The national association „Serbian Rural Tourism“ has the most complete database of subjects in the rural tourism. This association was founded in 2002 by service providers in rural tourism and it has been a representative of the Republic of Serbia in the European Organization for Rural Tourism (EUROGITES). According to this association's data (<http://www.selo.co.rs>), rural tourism has become widespread on 78 municipalities and 955 categorized subjects have been engaged until the end of 2013 (Table 1).

Based on the data analysis shown in the table 1, we can conclude that in the observed year, the most of accommodations had these municipalities: Gornji Milanovac, Užice and Čajetina. These municipalities have recognized a common interest in joining, and have been members of the Regional

Tourist Organization „West Serbia“, which have continuously made good business results in rural tourism.

TABLE 2: TYPES AND NUMBER OF ACCOMMODATIONS IN RURAL TOURISM IN THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA IN 2013 AND 2016

Type of accomodation	Number of accommodations in	Number of accommodations in
Houses in villages (rural)	320	88
Farmsteads	10	-
Outbuildings and Lodgings	3	26
Ethno-villages	11	-
Outbuildings and Apartments	16	3
Hotels, hostels or motels in	25	-
Weekend cottages	40	58
Villas	6	2
Exclusive	23	13
Guest house	33	11
Rooms	3	-
Pension	-	44
Tourist complex	-	9
Overnight stay	-	5
Flat	-	5
Cottages	-	1
Total:	490	272

Source: according to <http://www.selo.co.rs> (website accessed on 27th October 2013 and 25th May 2016)

Types of accommodations and their proportion in tourist supply of the National Association „Serbian Rural Tourism“ are shown in the *table 2*. We can see a great differentiation of accommodations in rural tourism by this data analysis in regard to defined service providers in the Law on Tourism, where subjects of rural tourism are divided only to rural tourist households and home craft (Law, 2012). According to data analysis shown in the *table 2*, we can conclude that in 2016, in regard to 2013, besides the change of

accommodation structure, their number was also decreased. It points out to numerous problems in the development of rural tourism of the Republic of Serbia.

Main problems in the rural tourism development in the Republic of Serbia are: a) unfavourable demographic characteristics of rural areas, b) absence of defined standards and a register of rural tourism, c) lack of financing sources, d) insufficient supply of tourist-created contents, e) under development of infrastructure and tourist signalization, f) under development of tourist mediation, i.e. insufficient engagement of tourist agencies in promotion and sale of a rural tourist product, g) insufficient joining of service providers, as well as their education, h) incongruity of the rural tourism subjects anticipated by a legal solution with the current situation in practice (Radović, 2013).

Based on the displayed information, it can be concluded that rural tourism in the Republic of Serbia is not sufficiently developed, besides a good resource base. We find rating of under development in the records of international experts (Bartlet, 2006), who think that there are possibilities for better development of rural tourism in the Republic of Serbia.

DEVELOPMENTAL ASPECTS

The question how to solve financing problem is of great significance for the development of rural tourism. In order to place adequately financial resources, but also to ensure the control of consumption and the achieved results, it is necessary an efficient way of managing the rural tourism development in the Republic of Serbia. It is inevitable to provide favourable financing resources for the development of all segments of rural tourist supply: a) accommodation capacities, b) catering facilities, c) tourist-created contents, d) rural infrastructure (transport and communal infrastructure, as well as tourist signalization), e) promotions, f) sales channels, g) education of service providers and the development of leaders (Radović, 2015).

In the *table 3* were shown some aspects of tourist-created contents as the most important segment of rural tourist supply for a modern tourist.

**TABLE 3: DEVELOPMENTAL ASPECTS OF
TOURIST-CREATED CONTENTS IN RURAL
TOURISM IN THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA**

Type of accommodation	Description of activities
Tourists welcome center	Specific zone in which tourists would inform on the local tourist supply of the specific area.
Serbian gastronomy and other hospitality supply	These facilities would represent places on which the tourists would get familiar with the traditional Serbian culinary specialties and rich wine offer.
Farmer school	Farmer schools could be organized in abandoned village schools
Development of ethno-village	Every part of the Republic of Serbia should have an ethno-village. In this way could represent the tradition of rural areas.
Facilities for education and fun for kids	Facilities meant for the youngest population. The goal is to bring closer tradition, customs and a way of life in the specific rural area by adequate

Source: Cvijanović D. (2014). Tourist market in the Danube region, monograph, Institute of Agricultural Economics, Belgrade, p 147

In the development of tourist-created contents, of which are some of the potential contents shown in the *table 3*, there is necessary a great creativity. A carrier of this business should be local authorities, because the development of tourist-created contents necessarily requires also the development of tourist signalization, as well as rural infrastructure, promotions, sales channels, accommodation capacities, etc.

CONCLUSION

Affirmation of the rural tourism development in the Republic of Serbia has a stronghold, if the availability of resources is observed, relative development of agriculture, as well as the possibility of rural development

based on a multi-sector access. However, an average occupancy of capacities in rural tourism in the Republic of Serbia is 4%, while an average occupancy of capacities in rural tourism on the territory of European Union is 25%.

The development of rural tourism in the Republic of Serbia is a complex process regarding that rural areas are among the most heterogeneous in Europe from natural, economic, demographic and social conditions point of view. Therefore, it is necessary to make the Strategy of Rural Tourism Development in the Republic of Serbia, as well as the action plans. There is also inevitable to provide financing resources of all segments of rural tourist supply development, as well as to realize the necessary institutional and organizational changes.

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