

SUSTAINABLE RURAL TOURISM AS A DEVELOPMENT FACTOR OF RURAL AREAS: THE EXAMPLE OF SERBIA

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Rural development is focused on improvement of overall competitiveness of rural areas and their market orientation, as well as the development of their economic infrastructure. Rural areas are usually poorly developed depopulative areas, with small share of employed population in total population and with high level of poverty. Today's competitive economy requires a balance between the dominant agricultural production on one side, and other economic activities, environmental protection and social development on the other side. Therefore, rural tourism is considered as one of the key factors of economic and social development of rural areas, but also as the solution to the problem of unemployment in rural areas.

The paper provides an assessment of Serbia's rural development through the analysis of rural tourism products and prioritization of tourism clusters, but in the context of the Serbia rural areas economic status. Although rural tourism in Serbia is facing with many challenges, it is still considered as one of the instruments for revitalization of rural areas and increasement of their overall competitiveness.

Key words: rural tourism, rural tourism clusters (RTCs), sustainable development, labor market

INTRODUCTION

Rural areas are generally sparsely populated areas, with a marked depopulation and a negative migration balance. Economic activity in such an environment, usually is in a downward trend, and often presents ecological changes manifested in the form of the negative consequences of over-exploitation of natural resources. In order to stop further degradation and weakening of rural areas, creating a development strategy based on the concept of sustainable development is needed, with the attempt to meet the needs of key stakeholders (local population and community, interested investors capital, state), (Butler et al. 1998, Knowd 2006, Nah & Martin 2003). Rural areas are the opposite of what is now called modern way of life (increased stress, fatigue, improper diet and polluted environment). All this creates, in a modern manthe need to turn to nature and ecologically clean areas during their vacation. At the same time, the pace of life and work impose shorter and more frequent breaks, with the rising expectations of tourists. Therefore, modern tourists are increasingly turning to destinations that are different from their everyday environment, where they can experience what they they do not have in their living space, expecting, however, areas with good infrastructure, good quality accommodation facilities and services, and tourism products that can satisfy all their discerning taste. A comprehensive response to such needs of tourists, and local communities are provided by products of rural tourism.

Rural tourism is considered, not just as a type of tourism, but also as an instrument for development of rural areas (Sorensen & Epps 1996), its revitalization and increasing attractiveness (Murphy & Murphy 2001, Hakkarainen & Seija 2008). Leisure, recreation and tourism in rural areas are seen as a new approach in the development of rural areas and that, and is moving from a concept in which the local community is directed towards production, and towards a concept where the actors are directed towards consumption (Wahab & Pigram 1997). There is a large number of studies dealing with rural tourism and its impact on the economic development of that area (Cohen 1993, Lash & Urry 1994, Hunter 1995, Selwyn 1996, Turnock 2002, Walmsley 2003, Robinson & Boniface in 1999, Swarbrooke 1996, Russo 2005). In developing countries, this type of tourism is considered as one of the approaches in balancing the regional development within national boundaries (Hall 1998, Mafunzwaini & Hugo 2005). On the other hand, in developed societies, rural tourism is seen as a source of income of the local community and one of the directions of diversified economic activities of rural areas (Clark & Chabrel 2007). However, what both groups of countries stand out in their strategies is the fact that rural tourism should be based on the concept of sustainable development and good management policies (Cronin 1990, Karpowicz 1993, Hall & Kinnaird 1994). Rural tourism should contribute to economic and social development of areas, and not to their additional collapse (environmental or social) (Tisdell 2000). That is why it's often spoken about Integrated Rural Tourism (IRT) as the best approach (Jenkins & Oliver 2001, Saxena et al. 2007, Petrou et al. 2007). IRT best way is integrating natural and anthropogenic tourism resources, tourism infrastructure and superstructure in one hand, with the local community, its economy and the environment, on the other, thereby building a competitive product (Bousset et al. 2007). This approach enables the highest level of satisfaction of the needs and requirements of all stakeholders in rural areas, providing at the same time its own targets and protecting the environment (Bryden et al. 2002).

RURAL AREA OF SERBIA

Republic of Serbia doesn't have an official definition of rural areas, instead every area not thought of as urban is considered as rural (division on urban/rural area is decided through municipal decisions). Depending on the definition of what rural area is and depending on the indicators we consider when classifying it, there are couple of different views on Serbia's rural areas. (Bogdanov & Stojanovic 2006, Strategic plan of agricultural development 2009-2013). According to OECD criterion (density of population under 150 residents per kilometer squared), almost half of the Serbia's population lives in rural areas (42% of the population), inhabiting almost three-quarters of the nation's territory (Jovanovic & Manic 2012).

Table 1. Basic development indicators of the rural areas in Serbia

	Republic of Serbia	Rural Areas
Geographical indicators		
Area, km ²	88.361	65.952
Number of settlements	4.715	3.904
Population density, residents/km ²	96,74	63,10
Population and human capital		
Number of residents (2002)	7.498.001	4.161.660
Number of residents (2011)	7.186.862	3.786.536
Migration balance	1,48	-0,14

Residents under the age of 15 (%)	15,69	16,17
Residents over the age of 65 (%)	16,54	17,49
Educational structure of the residents over the age of 15		
% without formal education	21,84	28,19
% with primary school	23,88	26,69
% with high school	41,07	36,09
% with higher education	11,03	6,95
% unknown	2,18	2,07

Source: National program of rural development 2011-2013, "Official Gazette of RS", nr.79/11, 2011.

Serbia went, similar as the other central and eastern european countries, through a period of demographic discharge of rural areas and intensive industrialization since the World War 2. That process stagnates during the 90's (emptied „demographic reservoir“ in rural areas and forthcoming economical and social crisis), as well as noticable and reversible migrations on the town-village relations in the past decade (not to improve the quality of life in agricultural areas, but rather as a result of the economical crisis in the first decade of the 21st century). Serbia couldn't find answers for the migration of the people from rural areas during the 20th century.

Table 2. Basic economic development indicators of rural areas in Republic Serbia

	Republic of Serbia	Rural areas
Economic structure		
DP/capita	137	375
DP/capita (Serbia=100%)	100	273,04
Structure DP		
% primary sector	19,33	32,48
% secondary sector	39,48	41,12
% tertiary sector	40,79	26,06
% public sector	0,40	0,34
% Agroculture, hunting, forestry and waterpower engineering	16,33	29,81
Productivity in primary sector (Serbia = 100%)	100	87,38
Productivity in secondary sector (Serbia = 100%)	100	74,93
Productivity in tertiary sector (Serbia = 100%)	100	62,48
Employment		
Sector structure of employment		
% primary sector	23,36	32,98
% secondary sector	30,08	30,69
% tertiary sector	24,82	18,60
% public sector	18,94	14,84
% unknown	2,80	2,89
Degree of activity	53,76	53,81
Degree of employment	41,81	42,18
Degree of unemployment	22,22	21,32
Degree of unemployment (women)	24,22	23,44

Source: National program of rural development 2011-2013, "Official Gazette of RS", nr.79/11, 2011

The consequence were many problems which Serbia is still facing in rural areas: demographical discharge and aging, low degree of diversification of agricultural activities and lack of job opportunities, dominant agriculture defined by low productivity, high degree of unemployment and very bad educational structure of agricultural population, declining

capacity of agro-alimentary sector, poor infrastructure, low turn out of rural areas throughout the country GDP.

Economic structure of rural Serbia is highly dependent on the primary sector, especially agriculture and is still based on the depletion of natural resources. Unfavourable demographic trends have resulted in an unfavorable education structure, which can not fulfill the requirements of the labor market (very low diversification of the rural population). High unemployment rates in rural areas are the result of the overall economic situation of the state, but also the specificity of rural areas (the unemployment rate up to 25 years of age is three times higher in rural areas compared to this average). Infrastructural equipment of rural areas in Serbia is such that about 80% of villages have access to up the basis of services such as road network, electricity, telephone network (fixed and mobile). However, water supply systems, gas, sewage and garbage dumps are much less common (the population of this area (the population of the region often cites municipal infrastructure often as a far higher priority than of economic problems).

Although very diverse, rural area of Serbia is through cluster analysis, typologically divided into four homogeneous groups of municipalities (National Rural Development Programme from 2011 to 2013):

- Type 1: highly productive agriculture and integrated economy - consists of the area of Vojvodina and the area around the Sava and Danube rivers, and is characterized by somewhat more favorable trends compared to the other groups (demographic and economic trends are relatively stable, agriculture is highly productive and vertical link between agriculture and alimentary sector is better)
- Type 2: Small urban economies with intensive work in agriculture - Spatial includes municipalities that stretch along the river valleys and the main traffic routes that extend radially from Belgrade to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Macedonia, Bulgaria (grouped around the towns with agriculture which is aimed to settling needs of urban markets, and Indicators of development are mainly at national average);
- Type 3: Mostly mountainous economy oriented on natural resources - includes municipalities in South-eastern Serbia, where they expressed negative demographic and socioeconomic trends (Indicators of development are far below the national average) and, where higher concentration of natural resources is present, unused, and those that can be the basis of tourist activities;)
- Type 4: A large tourist facilities and poor agricultural structure - represents a group of municipalities concentrated in the western part of Serbia, and is characterized by the already initiated tourist activity (agricultural activity is very modest and far below the national average).

Rural areas in Serbia cover a large part of the national territory (almost three quarters), and is home to a significant part of the population, directly or indirectly engaged in agriculture. Therefore, the economic and social development of these areas has to be carefully planned and it has to be adequately managed. Previous analysis make clear that there are potentials for intensive agriculture, as well as problems and obstacles on the way towards that goal. At the same time, the creation of additional sources of income in rural

areas must be seen as one of the solutions, and in those segments which are not tied to agricultural production, but which rely on it (tourism and recreation, local and traditional trades, catering). In such circumstances, tourism and rural tourism particularly stand out, as an activity that would contribute to the revitalization and development of rural areas, but also reduce existing regional difference in the state (maintained and Bošković 2008). Wealth, maintained and attractiveness of natural resources, a large number of traditional agricultural households, the gradual rise in living standards of the local population, as well as the growing interest of the international tourism market for the experiences of rural tourism, are pretty solid foundation for the development of rural tourism in Serbia, especially in its southwestern and southeastern part. Among most characteristic tourism products of rural tourism Serbia it is possible to outstand: agritourism and rural experience in a rural area in different locations (Western and Eastern Serbia), eco-rural tourism (individual destinations in the entire territory of Serbia), combined forms of rural tourism and special interests (cycling tours by rural areas, visits to local villages events).

Rural tourism in Serbia and prioritization of rural tourism clusters

By analyzing the natural and anthropogenic up tourist resources in Serbia, it is concluded that it has significant potential for development of rural tourism (Jovanovic & Manic, Todorovic and Bjeljac 2007, Zivanovic and Marijana 2006, Lazic 2007, Stojanovic and Manic 2007, 2009). However, not all five star tourist resources are equally important for the development of rural tourism, and that could include talk of a serious planning of tourism activities. Except tourist attractions, elements of infra and superstructure must be taken in (Jovanovic & Manic 2012).

The most important tourist attractions in the rural areas of Serbia are four National parks (Fruska Gora, Đerdap, Tara and Šar Mountain), a major watercourse (the Danube as an international waterway, river Drina), already well-established and potentials of mountain areas (Zlatibor and Zlatar, Golija, Valjevo mountains), specific forms of natural heritage (Đavolja Varoš). Identification of the most important tourist sites / attractions, one of the most important directions of further tourism development in rural areas would be the creation of adequate tourism products of rural tourism. In this context should be considered the necessity of development of tourism infrastructure (transportation infrastructure, public utility facilities, accommodation and catering facilities), as well as tourism superstructure (Management Organisation and planning tourism, promotion and marketing).

Looking at the accommodation capacity of rural areas in Serbia, the conclusion is that after extensive analysis, it is necessary for the future capacity to be designed so as to draw on existing typologies of accommodation capacities by the rural areas, with a tendency to introduce new standard and types of accommodation (Tourism Strategy of the Republic of Serbia, Strategy for sustainable rural tourism development in Serbia).

Physical segments of this part of the tourism products are very important, but when it comes to rural tourism, far more important are "intangible" elements that can be grouped under the category of experience. This "experience" that tourist has by consuming a given product in a rural setting in large part rests on the experience he has in authentic accommodation facilities. Here we come to the third segmenta in the construction of the tourism product, and this is precisely the experience. The experience is what tourist buys at the location. The more a tourist attraction interesting / more specific is and the more tourism

infrastructure is completely formed, and the experience more intensely is, it is the success of the tourism product sales is higher.

By analyzing foreign tourist offers of rural tourism, it is impossible not to look after side of tourist demands. The main market segments of rural tourism are: families with children, couples without children (retired), individuals / groups who come for activities and special interests (biking, horseback riding, hunting, fishing, artists, observers of nature). Typical rural tourist is a person who has traveled widely in the world, highly educated and very interested in culture, ecology, and often gastronomy (particularly wines). Rural tourists are usually aged between 40 and 50 years and living in an urban area which is of the desired destination away 2-3 hours by car. The most common length of stay in a rural setting weekend, and rarely are longer stays (that can last up to 10 days). Some researches show that for rural vacation the following activities are typical: enjoying the scenery of rural (75%), pub (70%), going to the lakes and rivers (58%), visiting historical and cultural attractions (41%), fishing hunting-sail boat (32%), cycling-riding-hiking-hiking (24%) (Đurić and Cvijić 2011).

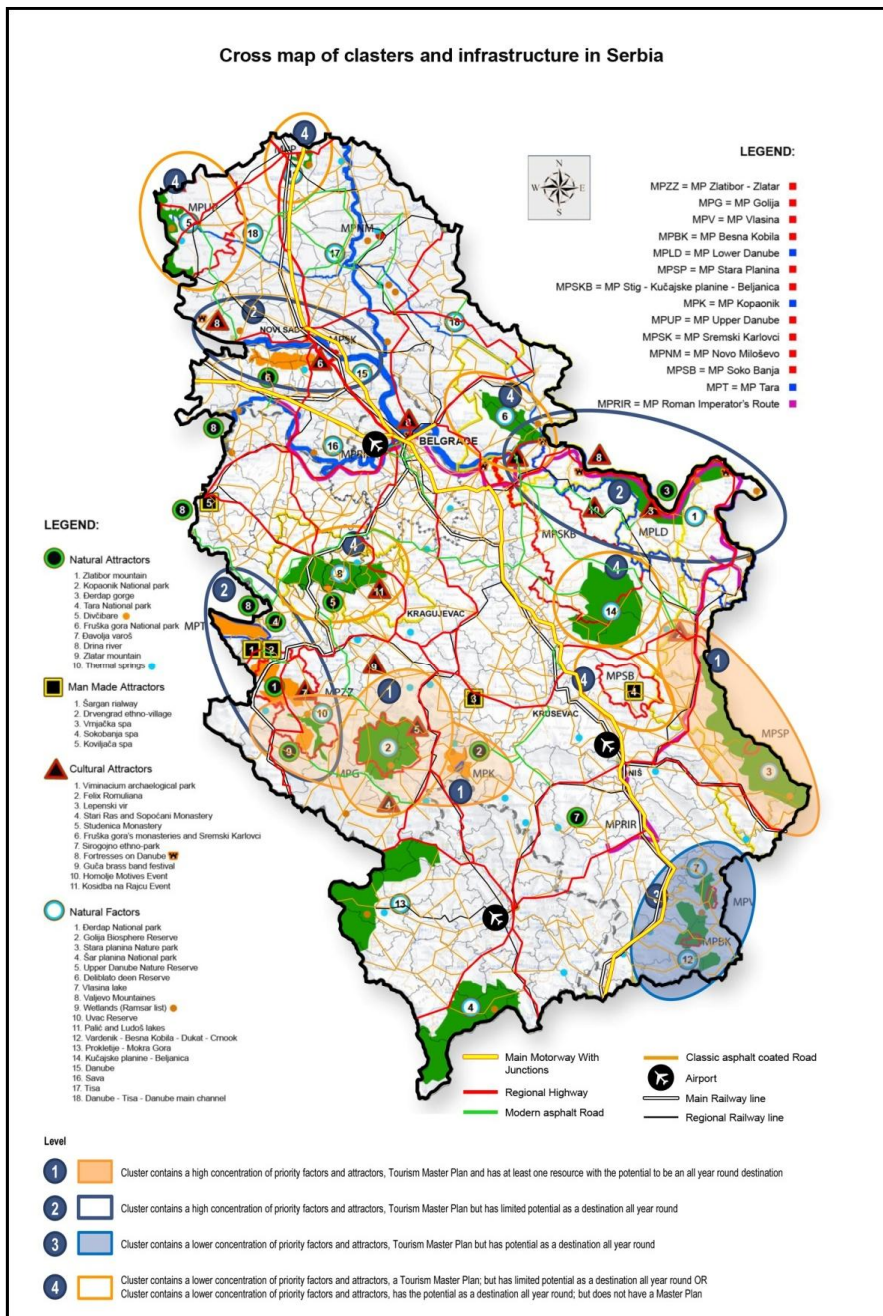
In Serbia, national tourist products of rural tourism are positioned as a cross-section of several segments: rural tourism, agritourism and farm events related to rural space, rural traditions and gastronomy (Strategy for sustainable rural tourism development in Serbia). This way Serbia can position itself as a destination for unique rural tourism, and rely not only on the natural and cultural heritage, but on the emotional experience of the rural environment which is intensified through the interaction between tourists, rural environment and local communities. As an important segment of proper positioning of the rural tourism product to tourist market (domestic or foreign) is the establishment of development priorities, through the determination of Rural tourism Clusters - RTCs.

Standard methodology for assessment of different regions in the context of rural tourism development involves a combination of physical valorization ("hardware") and nematarijalnih ("Software") aspects of a given space. The physical elements include material dimension destinations (what tourists can see, touch, hear, feel). Intangible elements include those elements on destinations that tourists consume through their experience of space (they are especially important in creation of uniqueness and specialities of destination on the tourist market). Research on the world market show that experience and personal connection with destination play a key role in attracting tourists and the return to the destination (staying at destination tourists have their own experiences and create their own memories which make them to come back to this place)

Clustering of rural areas in Serbia for the development of rural tourism involves identifying clusters that have different development periods: short-term (3-5 years), medium term (5-10 years) and long- term (over 10 years), into two phases of determining priorities of development (the first phase, which results in initial clusters (RTCs) and rural tourist cluster groups - RTCGs and the second phase of development that the final clusters) (Strategy for sustainable rural tourism development in Serbia).

Analysis of distribution and distance of tourist resources is the initial step in process of clustering of rural areas (initial clusters are actually the result of concentration of tourist resources). Then clusters are evaluated in terms of their seasonality and their potential to become a year-round destination (in the rural area Serbia has been allocated 14 such clusters organized into four levels). Extracting groups of rural tourism clusters (RTCGs) which are in Serbia divided into four, guided by a factor of geographical distances, represents the last stage of the first phase of clustering.

Map 1: Rural tourism clusters (RTCs) and rural tourism cluster groups (RTCGs) in Serbia



Source: Jovanovic V., Manic E., 2012: Evaluation of Sustainable Rural Tourism Development in Serbia, Scientific Annals of the Danube Delta Institute, vol. 18, pp. 285 – 294,

Central and Western Serbia showed the highest five star tourist potential in terms of drawing power of tourism resources and development opportunities for year-round tourist season (diversity of natural and cultural heritage). The second group of clusters is the one that applies to the territory of South Banat, Lower Danube (Đerdap Gate) and parts of Eastern Serbia (the large variety of tourist attractions, but not so high level of development opportunities for year-round season). The third group of rural tourist clusters represents Eastern Serbia, which has an attractive natural heritage, but not especially highlighted "tourist anchor" (a major five star tourist attraction that is initially attracted by large number of tourists).

The last group of tourist clusters represents Vojvodina which owns tourist resources, but which are not highly concentrated as the remaining groups. Finalization of prioritization of rural tourism clusters itself involves binding defined clusters and cluster groups with several other criteria (infrastructure, proximity to source markets, distribution of unemployment, offered catering facilities, experience in tourism and rural tourism).

Analyzing groups of tourist clusters after the final stage, it can be concluded that the greatest potential to build value chain and regain the invested funds have the right and the fourth group of rural tourism clusters (central and Western Serbia and Vojvodina), while the other two groups are in somewhat poorer position.

Table 3. The result of second phase in prioritizing groups of rural tourism clusters (RTCGs)

	Second phase					
	Availability	Nearness of market	Unemployment	Services	Experiences in tourism	Average grade
RTCG1	1	1	1	1	1	1
RTCG2	3	1	5	5	3	3,4
RTCG3	5	3	1	5	5	3,8
RTCG4	1	1	1	1	1	1

Source: Jovanovic V., Manic E., 2012: Evaluation of Sustainable Rural Tourism Development in Serbia, Scientific Annals of the Danube Delta Institute, vol. 18, pp. 285 – 294,

CONCLUSIONS

Although Serbia has repeatedly proclaimed agriculture to one of the strategic development sectors, and tourism as one of the economic sectors on which the future seriously relies, those efforts that would lead to concrete and visible results in any of these activities are not made. Movement has been made, especially during the last years in the tourism sector, where was intensively worked on establishing certain organizational and management models as well as the construction of tourist infrastructure. However, when it comes to tourism in rural areas, the situation is not so great.

Rural tourism is now one of the world's growing tourism products, being developed thanks to the increasing demands of tourists, but also due the opportunities to be developed in different ways (by combining it with a host of other tourist products). The World Tourism Organization, in its analysis has "recognized" Serbia as an area that has the potential for development of rural tourism, especially rural tourism (most of the territory of Serbia is the rural area). Information about the eighties prove that this is a product which is not unknown in Serbia. There were about 50 villages that had developed tourist offer and in which there were about 800 households with about 3,000 registered beds. However, rural tourism as a tourist attraction in Serbia isn't yet developed.

Cluster analysis of the rural tourism of Serbia pointed to the positive impact of tourism on the overall social, and especially social and economic development of rural areas. This can be seen in several categories: balancing uneven regional development, increased employment, slowing down the negative population trends, increase access to education, maintenance and fostering of tradition and culture. However, it also pointed to several categories of problems: problems regarding accommodation capacity, problems related to the service sector, small investment capacity of space, inadequate promotion and inadequate workforce. Overcoming difficulties can be given by system solutions within the framework of a wider campaign of agricultural development, tourism and related activities in rural areas. Thus rural areas have to be seen as a whole, where the diverse activities are integrated and inseparable. The role of government must be directed towards the creation of better living conditions of the local population in rural areas, and through measurements that legal and planning regulations adopted in individual sectors (agriculture, spatial planning, tourism, trade). In this context the development of rural tourism should be considered , which should be well structured. Its development raises the level of quality of life of the local community, but it should incorporate instruments and protection of natural and cultural heritage. Protected areas in rural areas are not threatened due to objective circumstances in the last decade, but the lack of a stronger legal regulaive opens this question as a major problem.

Estimations of experts are that in future the number of foreign tourists in Serbia will grow (up to 40% of the total number of tourists), while in rural tourism domestic tourism remains very dominant (foreign tourists up to 15% of all arrivals). Since one of the most competitive tourist offers of Serbia in the segment rural tourism is in its environment, Serbia is forced to build a unique marketing strategy in this tourist product (creation of integrated products of rural area). However, rural integrated product can not only be supported on the provision of accommodation and possibly food. It should also include the offer of taking tourists to attractive tourist resources in the environment (natural and cultural heritage, participation in household activities, organization of educational programs (school in nature, old crafts).

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