

## 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