THEORETICAL CONCEPTS OF RURAL TOURISM AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT IN THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

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Abstract: Rural tourism is tourism of local character, initiated and controlled by the people who living in that local community. Rural tourism offers new opportunities and possibilities for economic prosperity of the local population, and also affects the positive attitude of the development of tourism in general. In rural tourism are valued agricultural activities, natural resources, cultural heritage, traditional architecture, traditions and customs. This paper presents theoretical aspects of rural tourism as well as the basic characteristics of tourism demand and valuable foundations of rural tourism in Republic of Serbia.

Key words: Tourism, rural area, development, destination, sharing, rural life

1. INTRODUCTION

Under the term "rural area" means the area whose basic physical and geographical characteristics are primarily use of the land for farming and forestry. Rural areas in Serbia are very rich and diverse and represented by landscape diversity and cultural heritage. The village is an anthropogenic tourist base, usually located within the emphasized recreational and serene environment. Recreational potentials are primarily expressed by the very atmosphere, because the village is characterized by preserved nature, the absence of pollution and large green areas [1]. Therefore, represents a huge potential of human skill and energy because they provide most of the food, timber, etc. Nevertheless rural areas of Serbia represent a space for rest and recreation, both for domestic and foreign tourists, and in other words very suitable for development, and evaluation of rural tourism. Rural tourism development is complex, and long-term job. Understanding the needs of the local population, as well as their aspirations and habits, customs and financial power, contributes the best for development of rural tourism, because rural areas differ significantly in character and that of suburban rural areas to pastures in the high mountains. Development activities, with quality and professional program for the development of rural tourism can contribute to the development of rural areas, as well as adequate development of all types of supporting infrastructure, and also can contribute to the successful implementation of the national policy on environmental protection and nature conservation. Therefore, the development of rural tourism should deal with a group of expert teams who can see the wider picture and understand rural development as a whole.
2. THEORETICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF RURAL TOURISM

Basic resources for the development of rural tourism are, of course, rural areas. They represent a very large and still little exploited tourist potential. Meeting the needs of city residents for peace and the need for recreation outdoors, can best be realized in rural areas.

The term rural tourism, is used for cases when the rural culture is a key component of the offered tourism product. Specific attempt to provide to the visitor a personal contact, feeling the physical environment in rural areas and, to the extent possible, that he be given the opportunity to participate in activities, traditions and lifestyle of the local population [2]. This allows the visitor a unique way to experience the web of life of nature, culture and people. Rural tourism is based on the principles of sustainability and involves a range of activities and services that people in rural areas are organized precisely on the basis of the elements that characterize rural areas. This implies that the visitor enjoys the authentic, original experiences and return to the roots and essence of rural life [3]. The offer in rural tourism includes not only the visible features of nature, architecture, folk literature, gastronomy, but to experience the unique multi-dimensional web of life achieved through personal contact with the local population, which makes rural tourism unique by giving it a unique and invisible features such as traditional hospitality, customs, culture, relationships with nature, culture, communication, beliefs and legends of local people of different nationalities and religions, the populations at particular area has developed a specific way of life. The very vision of sustainable rural tourism, is a balance of economic sustainability, social and cultural sustainability and environmental sustainability, as shown in Figure No.1.

![Figure 1. The vision of sustainable rural tourism](source: Master plan održivog razvoja ruralnog turizma u Srbiji, (2011), str. 8.)

Rural tourism is a combination of many different aspects of the experience, sharing and presenting rural life. These rural experience can be defined in terms of rural activities and experiences found. The combination of these forms is the essence of rural tourism.
Rural activities have different levels of complexity, which can be summarized in two main aspects:

- level of engagement of visitors activities in the rural environment;
- level of entertainment value and educational level.

The level of engagement in the activities of visitors in a rural setting varies from very active to very passive. World trends show that fun and educational activities are becoming increasingly important in the design of new destinations and this is a key element for the differentiation of destinations.

2.1 Rural touristic resort

One of the rural settlements in attractive rural areas, which have a certain level of infrastructural facilities and transport accessibility and preserved architectural heritage, can be involved in the tourist industry. One of the criteria is that towns and rural areas have natural and anthropogenic tourist resources for attractive presentation and use for tourism promotion. Other criteria include human resources. In fact, rural areas, especially in Central Serbia are in process of depopulation, in certain rural settlements are losing permanent residents, or the average age is over 60 years. In other words, is crucial in some instances, the availability of skilled workforce of residents in the village. Only then can be developed tourist functions of villages and then we can talk about rural resorts in which visitors comes to leisure, to temporarily return to nature and traditional way of life. Most often in these villages are coming residents of large cities for which village is touristic cultural framework in which it takes a life different from their everyday life in the city. In order to be a tourist village, it must meet the following criteria:

1. Agricultural production is at the village primary production activity. Indigenous people engaged in everyday activities, while tourists witness and participant of a number of acts done by the local population;
2. Rural households, houses and farm must comply with the ambient unit of villages and landscapes;
3. Introducing the traditional way of life of the rural traditions (villages, meetings, feasts), culture, food, dress, as well as with traditional crafts (weaving, furs, traditional footwear, pottery, quilts crafts);
4. Tourist live with the host under the same roof and over him is included in the life of the family and the entire village, which stay in the country gets full meaning;
5. The local population is not isolated from the tourists, or becomes nameless provider of travel services to certain working hours. Still dealing with the affairs of the estate as usual, carries out activities related to tourism, and treat tourists as the locals.

The division of rural touristic village according to tourist facilities, according certain authors, can be:

1. Self rural touristic resort with a complete tourist and cultural offer (accommodation, meals, other tourist and cultural facilities);
2. Rural touristic resort with partial tourist and cultural offerings included in other segmented forms of tourism demand (spa, winter and summer tourist centers, transit corridors, cultural and natural heritage, etc.).
3. Rural touristic complex with the manifestation of tourist-cultural offer (fairs, trade fairs, parades, festivals, competitions, colonies);
4. Excursion rural touristic settlements (villages near the emitting city centers);
5. Other villages (villages engaged in providing services: local food store or food for the winter, keeping pets, picking herbs, teas processing, giving courses - weaving, knitting, crocheting, storage, etc.) [4, pp 13].

Since natural resources are only one part of the natural conditions, it is the gift of nature, which is used in the reproduction process to create new useful values [5]. While terms such as „natural capital“ has long been established in the literature, specific term „rural capital“ has entered in academic discourse only in the last few years. As such there is no definition about which everyone agrees. This term is first used in the UK by the Agency for the village, as a conceptual way of connecting their two programs. The first of these programs included the establishment, „Initiative for Land Management“, which aimed to highlight the problems faced by manufacturing, promoting the sustainable management of agricultural land. Rural capital is „the basis of rural development, rural villages and market towns“. On the one hand, this definition can be considered to some degree simplified, but it is worth describing in what rural capital as something that encompasses the various components of the village. This can be primarily natural components, such as wildlife, primarily constructed, such as rural settlements, or primarily social, as well as local cultural traditions. Furthermore, the main components of rural capital may be tangible or receptive. An integral elements of rural capital are:

- Landscape;
- Flora and Fauna;
- Biodiversity;
- Geology of soil;
- Air and air quality;
- Hedge and fencing fields;
- Agricultural buildings;
- The rural village of isolated settlements to market cities;
- The historical features, such as historic buildings, remnants of the industry;
- Trails, paths, streets and roads;
- Streams, rivers, ponds and lakes;
- Water and quality of water;
- Woodlands, forests and plantations;
- Distinctive local cultures, languages, costumes, food, crafts, festivals, traditions, way of life [6, pp 40].

On the different elements of rural capital can be thought of as key components of the value base of rural tourism. This means that the quality of the experience of rural tourism depends on the quality of rural capital that supports it. This is not to suggest that the rural capital of the only determinant of the quality of the experience of rural tourism. Another determining factor includes the availability of services, a wealth of information, a high standard of service and care of the visitor. It is also important to recognize the importance of rural capital goes further than its role in rural tourism. Here we identify four broad dimensions of the importance of rural capital:
1. Providing advantages in the market for agricultural producers, food processors and distributors;
2. Presentation of rural capital as a value in terms of cultural heritage related business;
3. Provision of primary services, for example, wind power, flood control and recreational resources, etc.;
4. The factor of attractiveness for inward investment [6].

2.2. Basic principles of rural tourism

The concept of sustainable tourism includes integration with nature and cultural environment, where activities undertaken have an acceptable impact on natural resources. In this framework, tourism activities should be environmentally, economically, socially, as well as the welfare and cultural sustainable in the long term.

Basic principles of rural tourism are:

- Ecological principles of protection of the environment:
  - Preserving nature and biodiversity conservation as a prerequisite for sustainable tourism. In this case, tourism activities should ensure integrity ecosystem and habitat conservation.
  - Tourism activities such as hiking and construction of infrastructure in rural areas that are likely to have a significant impact on nature and biodiversity should be subject to prior assessment of environmental impacts.
  - In protected and highly sensitive areas and other areas that require strict protection, tourism activities should be limited to a tolerable minimum.
  - In coastal areas special attention should be paid to the preservation of endangered areas, such as small islands, coastal wetlands, beaches, etc.
  - Tourism in mountain areas should be managed with the aim of preserving biodiversity.
  - Sustainable tourism should be based on ecological means of transportation, and special attention should be given to environmentally sensitive areas.
  - Sports activities, such as hunting and fishing, especially in environmentally sensitive areas should be managed in a way that meets the requirements of nature in accordance with existing regulations on conservation of the species.
Social Principles
- Ensure that tourism development protects and not destroys cultural diversity and local community - Active discourage forms of tourism that cause and contribute to social problems.

Cultural Principles (heritage)
- Develop tourism, which is typical of the (indigenous) - avoid duplication
- Promote unique characteristics of culture and heritage areas [7, pp 4].

Economic Principles
- Restrain the exodus from rural areas and create new employment;
- Conversion of productive activities towards more environment friendly strategies and the development of local and typical production;
- The development of new careers, new management approaches and new methods of production;
- Exploit of ecological resources through synergy and less conflicting relationship between agriculture and the environment;
- The economic development of local communities and the general improvement of quality of life [8].

3. OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL TOURISM IN SERBIA

Serbia has a good geographical, but also very sensitive geo-strategic position. The importance of traffic and geographical position is reflected in the fact that it passes through the territory of Serbia ancient corridor since ancient times Via Militaris which enable the shortest land route between Europe and Asia, or the Middle East. Serbia's geostrategic position is determined by the fact that Serbia is at the touch of large European region, ie at the crossroads to Central Europe - the Danube region, the Mediterranean - the Adriatic Sea and the Alps [9, pp 11].

Europe in the last few decades is the world's leading provider of rural tourism, and trends indicate that it will remain in the next 5-10 years. Serbia has a great potential of this product, because of the preserved nature and traditional and indigenous values [10, pp 90]. Focusing on other forms of tourism, overall environment in society and favoring other forms of tourism as opposed to rural tourism have led to rural tourism in Serbia has not been adequately developed and experienced their satisfaction [11].

Wealth, maintained and attractive natural resources, a large number of traditional agricultural households, as well as the growing interest of the international tourism market for rural tourism experiences are pretty solid foundation for the development of rural tourism in Serbia, especially in its south-western and south-eastern part.

In the Spatial Development Strategy of the Republic of Serbia (2009) mentioned areas with the conditions for the development of rural tourism, such as mountainous border line and other peripheral areas with poor natural resources for agriculture and other activities, and also the favorable geographic position and potential for tourism development and integration of complementary activities in the tourism offer. Together with the development of rural tourism, foresees the population and socio-economic policy, modernization and construction of appropriate infrastructure. In accordance with the basic long-term goals and criteria development and organization of the tourist offer, the development of rural tourism, as well as complementary to the overall tourist offer of Serbia, specifically binds to the following tourist regions: KopaonikGolija, Tara, Zlatibor,
Zlatar, Valjevo mountains and upper Tisa. Bearing in mind the above-mentioned position the tourist activity in the Spatial Development Strategy of the Republic of Serbia (2009-2020), can be expected to boost interest in Serbia for more intensive, more organized and better development of this form of tourism.

Rural tourism is an important product of the future of tourism in Serbia, that Serbia will demonstrate its orientation towards nature and sustainable tourism development. Rural tourism in Serbia through its highly dispersed regions and provides various forms of experience, both in visual terms (Architecture), and sentient (sights, smells). Marketing to create special packages with experiences farms, rural resort as well as a special kind of camping in rural areas [12, pp 25].

Lately in Serbia has been developing and rural tourism product which in different parts received various forms of offers. Thus, in the western part of Serbia, this product is formed on the basis of rural revitalization of old Serbian houses, while in Vojvodina increasingly recognized offer farms, as a typical Vojvodina rural experiences related activities [12, pp 14]. Key products of rural tourism in Serbia:

- Agritourism and rural experience in a rural area in different locations, especially in western and eastern Serbia;
- Eco-rural tourism;
- Ethno-rural tourism;
- The combined forms of rural tourism and special interests - eg. cycling tours through rural areas, visit the local village events, etc. [12, pp 136].

Given the current organizational structure of rural tourism, as a distinguished independent Serbian tourism product, adequate competitive strategy involves several interrelated steps:

- Creating a clear vision for the development of the product associated with the modern world trends of development of this product;
- Definition of key tourist areas of rural tourism;
- The gradual improvement of the quality of the existing offer, as well as the creation of a system of classification and categorization;
- Choice of three to four 'green field' 'an innovative project to develop the same model established and, possibly, the brand Serbian Rural Tourism;
- The market commercialization of the Internet and the system of direct sales or through specialized travel agencies.

Serbia has a chance to develop this product in new locations, to choose a strategy of differentiation, especially in mountainous areas and ecologically impeccable parts of Serbia related to the activities. Local tourism organizations should play a key role in the initial development of culture and affirmation of this product, as well as the initial training of the local rural population as a carrier. Due to the global expansion of rural tourism as a product of the future, as well as interregional and international cooperation is especially important here. Finally, the strong momentum in the development of the culture of rural tourism is not possible without a comprehensive national project and, for this purpose, the creation of the National Association for Rural Tourism.

In Belgrade, in 20.07.2010. year is founded the National Association for Rural Tourism, which will deal with the improvement, development and promotion of this type of tourism. National Association is a non-governmental organization, and its members can be all natural and legal persons who respect the principles of the association and pay their
dues. The aim of the association is to increase revenue Serbian natural and rural tourism. National Association will work to protect the cultural and historical heritage of Serbia, preparation of projects for the conservation and promotion of nature protection [13].

According to the Spatial Development Strategy of the Republic of Serbia (2009-2020), protection, development and sustainable use of natural and cultural heritage and natural resources, will form the basis for the identity of Serbia and its regional whole, but also the basis for future economic and tourism development. In accordance with the priorities of the spatial development of Serbia, it will be necessary to insist on the further development of networks of protected natural areas and cultural landscapes with special emphasis on environmentally and culturally sensitive areas. Natural and cultural heritage must be protected, edited and used in accordance with European standards with the special task to increase of protected natural areas and classification of cultural heritage, as well as the implementation of the Florentine Landscape Convention, European and international conventions on the protection of cultural heritage, conventions and declarations relating to biodiversity, natural subsystems and other documents ratified by the Republic of Serbia [9, pp 44].

Based on the completed evaluation of all the key success factors, currently achieved level of competitiveness of Serbia in the sphere of rural tourism is not very good, apart from the fact that for its development are all natural, cultural and social preconditions (natural resources, significant agricultural land, a significant number of active agricultural population traditional approach to agriculture, good potential for agro-tourism, non-contamination of soil chemical substances and the ability to produce healthy food, “good potential for the development of complementary activities such as horse riding, shooting a bow and arrow, traditional local gastronomic specialties, etc.”).

Bearing in mind the fact that this tourism product in large measure is intended to domestic population, and only with lesser extent to foreign guests, and is directly related to the degree of socio-economic development of the country and various forms of subsidies and other forms of direct stimulation of the development of rural areas. It is a product that should be developed in the longer term. Development, and then commercialize products "Rural tourism", not only will directly contribute to a more balanced economic development of the country and reduce inequalities in the distribution of social wealth between urban and rural areas, but will be an efficient way to protect the long term, and thus preserve valuable natural resources [12, pp 128].

SWOT analysis of rural tourism is indicated by the strong and weak points of rural tourism in Serbia, as well as the opportunities and threats in the environment. In order to as much as possible take advantage of opportunities, i.e. to rural tourism Serbia become recognizable in the international market, it is necessary to continuously work on providing high-quality leads. This means fulfilling a large number of elements, which are listed in the SWOT analysis. Although a number of weaknesses and threats, with the joint efforts of all stakeholders involved directly or indirectly in the creation and provision of services in rural tourism, they can be overcome in time. Swot analysis of rural tourism in Serbia is presented in Table 1.
Table 1. Swot analysis of rural tourism in Serbia

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>STRENGTHS</th>
<th>WEAKNESSES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Enormous number outstanding natural landscapes</td>
<td>• Inadequate waste management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Enormous potential for rural tourism</td>
<td>• Uncontrolled use of fertilizers and Pesticides</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Preserved local traditions and rural Landscapes</td>
<td>• Lack of entrepreneurship in rural Areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Unpolluted soil and water</td>
<td>• Weak economic diversification Activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The traditional Serbian people hospitality</td>
<td>• Inadequate infrastructure in rural Areas</td>
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<tr>
<td>• The low level of education and training</td>
<td>• The low level of education and training</td>
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<tr>
<td>• High unemployment rate</td>
<td>• Inadequate waste management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Inadequate infrastructure in rural Areas</td>
<td>• Uncontrolled use of fertilizers and Pesticides</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Low per capita income in rural areas, lack of social capital, lack of opportunities for employment in rural areas, high Rural poverty index</td>
<td>• The emergence of strong international brands in the increasingly integrated European market can be a threat to Serbian service activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Underdeveloped public awareness of concept and importance of rural development</td>
<td>• More delays in the development of Infrastructure</td>
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<tr>
<th>OPPORTUNITIES</th>
<th>THREATS</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Options for better protection of the environment</td>
<td>• Rapid changes in consumer demands and trends in consumption</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Conservation of agro-biodiversity and good soil and water quality</td>
<td>• Increasing competition in the International markets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Incentives for farmers to protect the environment and sustainable use of natural resources</td>
<td>• Shortage of work force in some specialized activities in rural economy (eg, tourism)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The growing international market Tourism, Rural / eco-tourism, etc.</td>
<td>• The emergence of strong international brands in the increasingly integrated European market can be a threat to Serbian service activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The development of small and medium-sized enterprises and entrepreneurship in rural areas</td>
<td>• More delays in the development of Infrastructure</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Better diversification of rural areas</td>
<td>• Lack of funding for support the implementation of agri-environmental measures</td>
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4. BASIC CHARACTERISTICS OF TOURIST DEMAND OF RURAL TOURISM

As significant characteristics of modern tourist demand that are essential for the development of tourism in rural areas of Serbia, are the following:

- Increasing demands for environmental quality and health-recreational function of rural areas;
- Returning human to nature and its original values;
- Tourist market recorded a growth of green consumer movement whose behavior is determined by ecological motives and values;
- Increasing the demand for destinations, non-urban rural and protected natural areas and villages with important cultural and historical values;
- Refreshment expressed through the contrast between urban village, lowland mountains;
- Demand for rural and agro-tourism, which requires accommodation in various types of facilities (rural houses, small hotels, motels, etc.);
Requests for clean and free space suitable for moving, self-expression and recreation;
- The growing interest for fun and leisure, religious and cultural features, ecological values (healthy environment and food);
- It is increasingly represented individual and family movement, which correspond to the manner of acceptance and accommodation in rural households;
- Greater domestic demand orientation towards rural areas, because of the economic situation and the low standard of living of the majority of the population.

It is difficult to determine the precise number of tourists who aspire to rural areas, although some estimates indicate that about 75% of world tourism demand is directed towards the natural values of the areas (in 2000, the number of participants in international tourist flows amounted to about 698 million, the realized foreign income from international tourism in the amount of 475.8 billion USD) [14. pp 189]. However, if we take into account the dominant requirements of demand, expressed selectivity and specificity motif, it can be concluded that a substantial part of its directed towards rural areas. This applies to those destinations in which this segment of the overall tourism product is at a higher level of development and organization. According to recent research, rural tourism is growing three times faster than classic tourism and it is expected that its share of the tourism market in Europe in the next 20 years will be greater than 20%.

Research in the United Kingdom market indicates that 25% of European tourists tend to stay in these areas. According to research in the United Kingdom an important influence on this type of tourism demand have, in addition to the general factors (leisure time, the general attitude towards nature as a tourist attraction), and social status (education, income volume, etc.), Ownership of the car, location of residence, age, gender. It is evident, based on the results of research that are more likely to participate in tourist movements towards the village of younger people, educated, in management positions, the car owners who live in areas surrounded by nature. In the mid nineties, studying shorter journeys European population has led to the following results: 19% of tourists used the circular tours, 10% traveled to the mountains when it was not ski season, 9% of tourists traveled for rest and recreation in rural areas [15, pp 54]. It indicates exceptional directivity of the European population to these areas.

However, given that neither the World Tourism Organization (WTO) or the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) have taken appropriate measures, there are several limitations to provide precise and logical data on rural tourism and recreation:
- The differences in the definition and identification of data among different nations of one state can only counted farm and nature in this type of tourism, while others may consider that many economic activities outside urban areas is also part of the rural tourism;
- Many rural tourists and recreationists are Excursionist (one visit) and do not belong to those who use the services of nights, and whose volume is in this case could at least to some extent measured;
- United dividity and fragmentation of rural tourism, with tens of thousands of entrepreneurs and public initiatives active throughout Europe, but only some of them were identified by local and regional bodies such as tourism boards [15, pp 54].
5. CONCLUSION

Rural tourism is a complex type of tourism, made up of different types of tourism that occur in rural areas. Rural areas represent the opposite of urban city area. It is an area which originally served as living and working space of farmers. It incurred a traditional village, rural units, traditional rural architecture and interior design items. Therefore, rural tourism can be an important instrument of economic development of Serbia. Mountain areas are very attractive to tourists, especially because of the advantages offered by combining the rural environment, history, ethnic, and geographic characteristics. Rural landscape, natural environment, traditional and cultural values are important preconditions for the creation of a competitive tourist attractions. Users of rural tourism are mostly highly educated people who prefer less known destinations and vacation in the off season, and are motivated by learning about the local culture, learn about local lifestyle and care for the environment.

LITERATURE:


