

# RURAL TOURISM IN SERBIA AND IMPACT ON ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

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**Abstract:** *Tourism plays an important role in the developing country's economy and is considered one of the main industries for the growth of the country's economy. Mass tourism is a thing of the past for tourism countries that want to develop their tourism in a good way and ensure sustainability in the future, and therefore alternative forms of tourism represent an essential orientation for the further development of tourism. Unique tourism products (among which the rural tourism product is especially distinguished) have become highly valued by tourists who want to escape the uniformity offered by globalization and the modern way of life in urban city centers. In a large number of countries, considerable attention is paid to rural tourism, which records a constant growth rate of tourist demand and makes it an important component of the development not only of tourism, but also of rural areas as a whole. The paper presents the historical development of rural tourism in Serbia, as well as the material base and tourist transport of rural tourism in Serbia. The aim of the paper is to examine the degree of development of rural tourism in Serbia and to determine its economic contribution to the economic and social development of the country, as well as to determine the limiting factors that prevent a more dynamic development of this economic activity in the country.*

**Keywords:** *alternative tourism, rural tourism, sustainable rural tourism, development of rural areas, benefits of rural tourism.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is generally regarded as one of the world's largest industries [1], [2] with continued economic growth [3], [4]. The countries registered 440 million tourist arrivals, representing 10% of the European gross domestic product and 20 million jobs [5], [4]. Adding to this is the fact that „domestic tourism traffic in the world is about 10 times higher than international ones, then it is clear that tourism has an important place in the overall economic development by each country” [6]. Rural tourism also provides a significant contribution to the rural areas of the economy and the wider tourism industry. Rural tourism has been experiencing expansion in recent years. For example, there are estimates that in rural England creates 380,000 jobs [7], [4]. It is a consequence of the increasing need of the city population for recreational stay in a different, rural environment. Rural demand for peace, leisure and recreation is a growing trend at the regional, national, European and international levels. In most countries, rural tourism takes a significant place in local development plans and policies.

Tourism is a major part of the change in the economic base of rural societies [8] that promote both rural vitality and sustainability [9]. Several authors believe that rural tourism is an economic activity that positively influences development in the economic, social, cultural and environmental spheres [10], [11], [12], [13]. Therefore, support for rural tourism has become an important tool for rural development policy at the European level in the 1990s.

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Rural tourism is defined as tourism that takes place in rural areas where it has a low population density and thus creates an impression of space [14]. For visitors, rural tourism offers something different from well-known tourism models. However, it is claimed that rural tourism is more than an alternative to other, more conventional forms: it is a state of mind when tourists are actively seeking experience in a rural environment. It has been found that rural tourism uses local communities in terms of their economic growth, social, cultural aspects, services, living standards and building positive attitudes and behavior of local communities towards the development of tourism [15]. In particular, small rural tourism is often regarded as one promising solution to support or initiate regional development in structurally poor rural areas - especially with politicians and administrators responsible for rural development [3], [16], [17], [18].

The most important factor for rural tourism are accommodation services with additional local facilities. Cultural and natural resources should be exploited according to the principle of sustainable development. The development of rural tourism in a particular area should not jeopardize natural, cultural and social resources, while at the same time it should stimulate economic development and increase the quality of the living space of the local population [19]. The sustainability of rural tourism is most often explained through: preserving the local culture and identity of the local community, preserving the countryside and the natural environment, preserving and sustainable development of the rural economy, highlighting the importance of supporting local, regional and national authorities, as well as the balance between tourism activities in rural areas activities [20].

## **2. THE FORMATION AND DEFINITION OF RURAL TOURISM**

Tourism in rural areas is not a phenomenon of today, as some believe, but it appears „during the period of the industrial revolution as a place of rest, where workers from urban areas came to rural areas for rest and recreation” [21] [22]. Over time, rural tourism has become more and more popular, and the intensive development started after the Second World War.

In the form it is understood today (as a factor in the reconstruction and development of the village and an integral part of the tourism product), rural tourism is developing in some European countries and the United States since the mid-sixties. The basis of his development was the increase of the free time fund and individual motorization. According to [24]. regarding this period of time, there can still be no talk of developed ecological awareness, aspirations for active and selective forms of tourism - factors that, along with the economic ones, are shaping world tourism trends today, and are especially related for rural areas.

Approximately, until the 1960s, recreation and tourism in rural areas were not subject to the laws of the free market, that is, the principles of supply and demand and were not influenced by the state. The interest of tourists was directed to the coastal and mountainous tourist destinations, as well as the cities. Land use in rural areas is rarely formed outside the framework of agriculture, forestry and water management. This relationship changed over time. Free time during weekends and public holidays is increasingly being used for holidays in rural areas and annual vacations for coastal and mountain centers. Gradually, the time spent in rural areas for the purpose of recreation or vacation was increasing. All this has led to rural tourism, a growing sector in the world's fastest-growing industry - tourism. Some authors [25] even state that it is „a cure for all problems in rural areas and a magic wand that speeds up economic progress.”

Rural tourism is the subject of numerous debates, and the consensus on its unique definition has not yet been achieved. The most common limiting factors are listed [26]:

- First, the areas in which rural tourism develops is difficult to define because different countries take into account different definition criteria;
- Secondly, all tourism activities in rural areas do not have to be strictly rural, but they can be urban in nature, and they only take place in rural areas;
- Thirdly, different regions develop different forms of rural tourism and it is therefore difficult to find common features for all countries;
- Fourth, rural areas have been affected by complex processes of change resulting from changes in the global market, especially in the area of modern information and communication technologies, which alter the market conditions and demand for traditional products.

In the literature there is no generally accepted definition of rural tourism. According to Eurogites (European Federation for the Development of Rural Tourism), the concept of rural tourism includes a large number of constituent elements, at the heart of which is the rural tourism community (Figure 1). Of the other components, rural tourism includes a natural environment, cultural and historical heritage, rural activities and rural lifestyles [27].

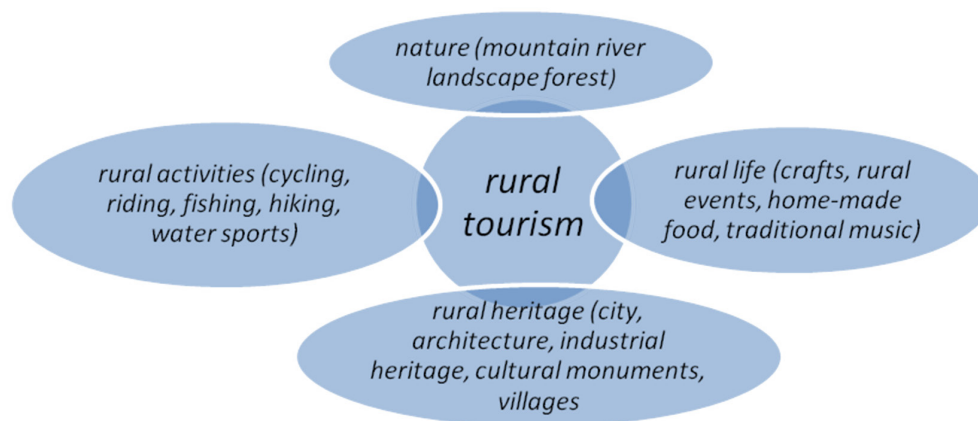


Figure 1: Elements of rural tourism [26], edited and adapted by the author.

According to the definition adopted in 1986 within the European Union, it includes all tourism activities in rural areas [27]. According to [28], „rural tourism describes the forms of tourist activities that take place in rural areas, which include local culture, tradition and economic activities as well as open-air activities and experiences that have been achieved in an uninhabited rural environment. In addition, the local community plays an important role in securing rural tourism products.”

Defined in the broadest sense, rural tourism combines over 19 different types of tourism: agro-tourism, residential tourism, homestead tourism, gastronomic tourism, wine tourism, hunting tourism, fishing tourism, cultural tourism, religious tourism, nautical tourism, sports and recreational tourism, educational tourism, adventure tourism, health tourism, eco-tourism, continental tourism, camping tourism, transit tourism, mixed and other types of tourism [28]. It should be emphasized that in addition to the listed forms of tourism, new forms of tourism in rural areas are created every day, adapted to the wishes and needs of individuals. Particularly distinguished among them are: ethno-tourism, eco-agritourism and “salaš” tourism. All this ultimately leads to an increase in the complexity of rural tourism.

On the other hand, some definitions simply, under rural tourism, include „tourism in areas of low population density”. However, what most authors agree with is that rural tourism is an alternative to mass tourism due to the fact that it attracts segments of tourists who are interested in rural culture and environmental quality and that it implies active participation of the local community in its development. The following table shows the key elements of rural tourism.

<b>Key elements of rural tourism</b>
located in rural areas
provides personalized contact
allows participation in the activities, tradition and way of life of the rural population
settlements and buildings are of small size (rural)
represents a complex pattern of the rural environment, economy, history and sites
a high share of tourism revenues used by the local community
grows slowly, in line with the local population
It is functionally rural: based on small entrepreneurship, open space and direct contact with nature, based on heritage and traditional activities

Table 1: Key elements of rural tourism [30].

Although rural tourism has been developed in many countries of the world, its definition is still sought. The problem is complicated by the fact that in addition to the term rural tourism in use and many other expressions, such as agrotourism and tourism in peasant farms. Namely, this is a wide range of circumstances that lead to different concepts, the content of which is often the cause of disagreements between their authors.

At the global level, there is no single definition of rural tourism, in practice it is evident that this segment of tourism is constantly growing. This is supported by the latest research, where it has been established that rural tourism is growing three times faster than traditional tourism with realistic expectations that its share in the European tourism market in the next 20 years will be more than 20% [31].

### **3. HISTORY OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL TOURISM IN SERBIA**

The idea of the development of rural tourism in the Republic of Serbia came about accidentally in 1972. Namely, the residents of the village of Devići, near Ivanjica, led by student Milivoje Raičević, wanted, according to experiences of some Scandinavian countries, from the village of Devići that slowly descends make the oasis to which tourists will come every year. In addition to the natural and climatic conditions, the traditional hospitality of the rural population, the bad road of 36 km and the exceptional entrepreneurship of the local community in Devići, were not available with any other conditions. It was „a year full of anxieties and joys” [32]. Nevertheless, their vision was that the positive experiences of the Scandinavian countries practically applied in their villages and tourists offer quality food, clean air, freshness of the forest, the smell of meadows and orchards, a nicely furnished room and a pleasant atmosphere. In this how they succeeded and thus became the first, not only in Serbia, but in all of Yugoslavia at the time.

In the first year, the village of Devići had around 40 tourists. Next, in 1973 the village was visited by 120 tourists and the accommodation was organized in 6 households. Although new households were not fully trained for this type of tourism, the great publicity and the public interest

in rural tourism made the villagers expand their capacities. As early as 1974 there were about 250 tourists, and in 1975 over 800 in the winter and summer season. The highest number was recorded in 1976 with 9,000 overnights in thirty households, which had 180 beds [33]. At that time, among the tourists there were actors, sculptors, singers, writers and other artists. Thus, the village of Devići became a pioneer of rural tourism in our country.

According to Devići, and other villages of the Ivanjica municipality, they turned to rural tourism (Maće, Katići, Lisa, Međurečje, Opaljenik, Kušići Bele Vode). Positive experiences have prompted the villages mentioned to include themselves in this new type of tourism. The village of Maće especially distinguished with regard to the motivation of locals for dealing with rural tourism. Village residents actively participated in seminars organized by a number of organizations dealing with home decor, culinary arts, landscaping, hygiene, food serving and treatment of guests. Also, in higher grades of elementary school, the subject of tourism was introduced as a form of supplementary education, which directed the awareness of the young people to the importance of this economic branch and its role. Under the influence of many seminars in the village, important changes occurred, starting from the behavior of the people who live there, to large-scale activities, which also demanded greater material investments, with the aim of faster development of rural tourism and greater satisfaction of tourists.

Procurement of rural tourism in the municipality of Ivanjica interested management bodies and started with more investments in rural areas. Simply, tourism has fundamentally changed the way of life of the rural population and broke the monotony of the village. In addition to tourism, agriculture as the main occupation of the population received a completely new dimension of development, and the period of prosperity was on, not only in the Ivanjica region but also throughout the country, especially during the eighties. The results were more than satisfactory. The development of rural tourism has contributed to the cultivation of the rural population, the economic strengthening of villages and the reduction of population migrations. According to information from the archives of tourist associations, in the late 1980s, rural households in the territory of the Republic of Serbia dealt with 800 households in 50 villages, which had about 3,000 beds [34].

The stagnation in the development of rural tourism took place in the nineties of the 20th century, due to the known events on the territory of our country. The long-standing period of isolation of the former Yugoslavia was not a suitable environment for the improvement of tourism development and tourist offer. At the level of the tourist offer, there were numerous and serious shortcomings, of which they especially stand out [35]:

- unsatisfactory and obsolete structure of total accommodation capacities;
- market incompatibility of accommodation capacities with the requirements of modern tourist demand;
- lack of diverse tourism products that could attract foreign demand;
- unsatisfactory availability of many parts of our country (non-existent and inadequate transport infrastructure) rich in natural, social and historical tourist values;
- unsatisfactory municipal infrastructure, etc.

At the beginning of the XXI century, as a result of a certain recovery, there was a slight increase in rural tourism, so organized rural tourism based on the information of the Tourist Organization of Serbia involved 154 households from 41 villages with a total capacity of 699 beds in 16 municipalities [36]. Given that rural tourism, as one of the leading alternative forms of tourism, occurs in regions and countries that have rural areas in abundance, the very fact represents a

great untapped potential for Serbia. However, in order to ensure adequate rural development, it is necessary to redefine tourism policies, both at the country level and in the region that will be in line with tourist demand and approach the operationalization of the set goals.

#### 4. MATERIAL BASE OF RURAL TOURISM AND TOURIST TRAFFIC IN THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

The rural tourism of the Republic of Serbia is in the initial stage of development. The fragmented and dispersed peasant poses, the orientation to other forms of tourism and massiveness, the insufficiently developed awareness of the value of the environment, are just some of the factors that have affected the poor development of rural tourism. Also, „the low incidence of rural tourism in the tourist offer of the Republic of Serbia has brought the present results” [29]

According to the internet portal ISTN (Internet Serbia Travel News), rural tourism was developed in the territory of the Republic of Serbia, primarily in the villages of Western Serbia and Sumadija, and only a certain number of villages successfully operate in the territory of the South and East Serbia region. The villages of the municipality of Ivanjica (Lisa, Kušići, Katići, Devići) are issued with their rural tourism offer, followed by the villages in the municipality of Kosjerić (Seča Reka, Mionica, Skakvci, Donji Taor). In the region of South and East Serbia for now, the leading villages located in the municipality of Knjaževac, such as the villages Kaona, Crni Vrh and Balta Berilovac.

Municipality	Villages engaged in rural tourism
Kosjerić	Seča Reka, Donji Taor, Mionica, Skakavci
Kragujevac	Ramaća, Stragari, Kamenica, Duleni
Ivanjica	Lisa, Kušići, Katići, Međurečje, Devići
Gornji Milanovac	Koštunići, Savinac, Pranjani, Brusnica
Valjevo	Petnica, Stave, Popučke
Kraljevo	Lopatnica
Čajetina	Gostilje, Trpkovo, Ljubiš, Sirogojno
Ljubovija	Ljubovija
Sokobanja	Trubarevac, Jošanica
Sombor	Bezdan, Doroslovo, Stapar
Knjaževac	Kalna

Table 2. Villages in Serbia with the most developed rural tourism [38]

Regarding data on accommodation in rural tourism, it is still not covered by official statistics. Available resources include the internet portal of rural tourism [39] and local tourist organizations [40]. In 2004, as a project of the National Association of Country Tourism of Serbia, the website [www.selo.rs](http://www.selo.rs) was set up with the idea to cover the total rural tourism offer of Serbia. Thanks to the results of this web portal, the National Association is a member and active representative of Serbia in the European Federation for the Development of Rural Tourism - EUROGITES [39].

The types of accommodation facilities in rural tourism, according to the information provided by the association, are shown in table 3. The information provided on the website includes an overview of the offer of 244 providers of rural tourism services.

Type of accommodation	Number of objects	%
Apartments	50	20,57
Crawfish and drill	26	10,69
Ethno village	1	0,42
Catering companies	42	17,28
Hostels	1	0,42
Motels	1	0,42
Pensions	5	2,06
Accommodation	5	2,06
Rural households	82	33,74
Rooms	7	2,88
Apartments	1	0,42
Tourist complexes	2	0,82
Tourist facilities	2	0,82
Cottages	9	3,7
Fairies	9	3,7
TOTAL:	243	100,00

Table 3. Rural accommodation capacities in the Republic of Serbia

The assumption is that the number of households engaged in rural tourism is much higher than the data presented in *Table 3*, but they deal with this activity independently, unregistered and unhindered so that they do not have precise information about them. Based on the data from *Table 14*, it can be concluded that in the total number of current providers of rural tourism services, the offer of which is shown on the website of the National Association of Country Tourism of Serbia, the largest are rural households, apartments and restaurants, with 174, which is 71,59% of the total number of rural accommodation capacities.

On the other hand, according to the assessment of local tourism organizations, rural tourism is supported with more than 32,000 registered and unregistered beds in rural areas, of which 10,000 are exclusively in the village [40].

In an effort to identify the similarities and differences between the rural areas of the Republic of Serbia, the rural cluster typology has been developed through the cluster of analyzes in the preparation of the Rural Development Strategy Plan. This analysis identified four homogeneous groups of municipalities (regions) as representative types of rural areas in the Republic of Serbia [50]:

**Region 1:** High-productive agriculture and an integrated economy - This region includes the northern part of the Republic of Serbia, i.e. the territory of Vojvodina and the north-western part of Central Serbia. Compared with other rural areas of the Republic of Serbia, the mentioned region has developed human potential, expressed entrepreneurship, diversified industrial sector and well-developed economic and physical infrastructure, which ultimately leads to favorable socio-economic indicators of overall economic development.

**Region 2:** Small urban economies with intensive work in agriculture - This region geographically extends through rural municipalities along the river valley and encompasses the environs of urban centers and larger cities (northern part of Central Serbia, Sumadija, parts of Sword and Stig). The overall economic structure and the productivity rate of certain sectors show better results in comparison with other rural areas.

**Region 3:** Predominantly mountain economy oriented towards natural resources - According to its geographic characteristics this region is very heterogeneous. It is basically a rural region with unused natural resources and tourist potential. Particular characteristics of the region are unfavorable demographic changes and lower population density. Municipalities belonging to the given region are: Veliko Gradište, Golubac, Malo Crniće, Petrovac, Kučevo, Bor, Majdanpek, Negotin, Kladovo, Despotovac, Žagubica, Boljevac, Knjaževac, Zaječar, Sokobanja, Ražanj, Svrljig, Babušnica, Dimitrovgrad, Vlasotince, Gadžin Han, Black Trava, Surdulica, Vladići Han, Vranje, Presevo, Bujanovac, Trgovište, Bosilegrad, Medveđa, Lebane, Bojnik, Prokuplje, Kuršumlija, Blace, Žitorađa, Merošina i Doljevac.

**Region 4:** Large tourist capacities and poor agricultural structure - This region comprises the western part of the Republic of Serbia and is characterized by the highest rate of participation of the tertiary sector in the economic structure. On the other hand, the structure of agriculture is underdeveloped and is mainly based on the use of natural resources.

At the same time as the formation of the regions for the needs of the National Rural Development Program of Serbia, at the proposal of the Ministry of Economy and Regional Development in 2010, Serbia is divided into five statistical regions. According to this division, the Region of South and Eastern Serbia coincides with the previous division.

The disaggregation of accommodation facilities in rural tourism in the Republic of Serbia is shown in Table 4. Based on the data, it can be concluded that the majority of rural accommodation capacities have the municipalities of Gornji Milanovac, Čajetina, Valjevo, Arilje, Kosjerić and Ljig.

Organized statistical monitoring in this segment of tourism is at the very beginning. Most countries, as well as the Republic of Serbia, do not collect statistical data in which rural tourism would be viewed in particular in relation to other forms of tourism. Accordingly, the current development of rural tourism in the Republic of Serbia can be analyzed on the basis of data published by the Statistical Office of Serbia and relates to tourist traffic observed from the aspect of the realized number of overnight stays.

Since according to the current classification of tourist sites in the Republic of Serbia there are no separate places for rural tourism, „tourism traffic in other tourist places and other places can be considered as tourism in rural tourism” [41].

According to the data from Table 5, it can be concluded that the average percentage of registered overnight stays in rural tourism was approximately 21.34% in the period from 2005 to 2014. In 2014, this percentage was the smallest since the number of overnight stays at the country level was 7.3% lower than in 2013.



Municipality	Number of accommodation facilities	%	Municipality	Number of accommodation facilities	%
<i>Aleksandrovac</i>	1	0,42	<i>Kučevo</i>	1	0,42
<i>Arandjelovac</i>	7	2,88	<i>Lazarevac</i>	1	0,42
<i>Arilje</i>	16	6,58	<i>Loznica</i>	5	2,06
<i>Apatin</i>	1	0,42	<i>Lučani</i>	1	0,42
<i>Bačka Palanka</i>	2	0,82	<i>Ljig</i>	14	5,76
<i>Bačka Topola</i>	1	0,42	<i>Ljubovija</i>	2	0,82
<i>Bela Palanka</i>	1	0,42	<i>Mionica</i>	11	4,53
<i>Bajina Bašta</i>	1	0,42	<i>Mladenovac</i>	1	0,42
<i>Bač</i>	1	0,42	<i>Mali Zvornik</i>	1	0,42
<i>Bor</i>	1	0,42	<i>Novi Sad</i>	2	0,82
<i>Bela Crkva</i>	1	0,42	<i>Nova Varoš</i>	2	0,82
<i>Valjevo</i>	17	6,99	<i>Pirot</i>	2	0,82
<i>Vrnjačka banja</i>	1	0,42	<i>Požega</i>	2	0,82
<i>Gornji Milanovac</i>	53	21,8	<i>Raška</i>	2	0,82
<i>Despotovac</i>	1	0,42	<i>Ruma</i>	1	0,42
<i>Dimitrovgrad</i>	1	0,42	<i>Sombor</i>	3	1,23
<i>Žagubica</i>	1	0,42	<i>Sopot</i>	2	0,82
<i>Zrenjanin</i>	1	0,42	<i>Sokobanja</i>	2	0,82
<i>Irig</i>	5	2,06	<i>Sremski Karlovci</i>	2	0,82
<i>Ivanjica</i>	6	2,47	<i>Sremska Mitrovica</i>	1	0,42
<i>Indija</i>	1	0,42	<i>Topola</i>	4	1,65
<i>Koceljeva</i>	1	0,42	<i>Užice</i>	7	2,88
<i>Kosjerić</i>	14	5,76	<i>Čačak</i>	2	0,82
<i>Knjaževac</i>	1	0,42	<i>Čajetina</i>	18	7,41
<i>Kragujevac</i>	7	2,88	<i>Šabac</i>	1	0,42
<i>Kraljevo</i>	7	2,88	<i>Šid</i>	2	0,82
<i>Kruševac</i>	1	0,42	<b>TOTAL:</b>	243	100

Table 4. Number of rural accommodation facilities in municipalities in the Republic of Serbia

Year	The number of overnight stays in all tourist places of the Republic of Serbia was realized	Overnight stays in other tourist places and other places (rural areas)	Participation of realized number of nights in rural tourism in the total number of overnight stays in all forms of tourism in the Republic of Serbia (%)
<b>2005</b>	6.499.352	1.411.305	21,71 %
<b>2006</b>	6.592.622	1.354.027	20,54 %
<b>2007</b>	7.328.692	1.528.389	20,85 %
<b>2008</b>	7.334.106	1.636.509	22,31 %
<b>2009</b>	6.776.763	1.453.792	21,45 %
<b>2010</b>	6.413.515	1.437.714	22,42 %
<b>2011</b>	6.644.738	1.383.947	20,83 %
<b>2012</b>	6.484.702	1.382.222	21,32 %
<b>2013</b>	6.567.460	1.356.633	20,66 %
<b>2014</b>	6.086.275	1.218.552	20,02 %
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>60.641.950</b>	<b>12.944.538</b>	<b>21,34 %</b>

Table 5. Estimated tourist turnover - realized number of overnight stays in rural tourism in the period 2005 – 2014

## **5. THE INFLUENCES OF TOURISM ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL AREAS IN THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA**

Tourism plays an important role in the development of the economy and society in the world. In recent decades, due to changes that have taken place on the demand side, tourism has been gaining increasing attention as one of the factors of the economic and social development of rural areas. In addition, rural tourism is seen as an economic and social development factor, which can help overcome the problems that rural areas face.

### **5.1. Economic contribution of rural tourism to the economic development of the Republic of Serbia**

The expectation that rural tourism contributes to the faster development and revitalization of rural areas of the Republic of Serbia is based on the possible economic effects of its development [42].

When it comes to rural tourism, the rule is that the development should start as modest as possible, in order to avoid bad and unnecessary investments. Namely, the development of rural tourism provides the opportunity for residents of rural areas to employ members of their household with minimal investments and thereby provide an additional source of income, i.e. to provide secondary income with relatively small capital and knowledge investments. According to the results of a survey conducted by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management of the Republic of Serbia in 2009, rural tourism employs, on average, two household members, while the average monthly net income from doing this activity is around 200 euros.

The quantification of the total direct economic contribution of rural tourism to economic development is limited and therefore it is possible to carry out only an assessment. Statistics that are missing in other sectors of activity, apart from accommodation, constitute a major limiting factor. Total revenues from rural tourism for 2010 amounted to 10.4 billion dinars or 16% of direct travel and tourism GDP, calculated by the World Travel and Tourism Council in the amount of 62.4 billion dinars [43]. Also, according to the forecasts of the Master Plan, the total direct economic contribution of rural tourism to the economic development of the Republic of Serbia will reach 45,000,000,000 dinars by 2020. Of course, the prerequisites for achieving these estimates are the increase in the number of tourists and overnight stays in rural areas, as well as the demand for rural accommodation capacities in the upcoming period. Likewise, with better utilization of natural and anthropogenic tourism potentials, participation could be significantly higher.

In this way, rural tourism would take a better and more important position. Thus, through the export of goods and services based on rural tourism, the final products and services of numerous activities would be realized and would have a positive impact on the country's balance of payments. Selling goods and services to domestic and foreign visitors is a significant opportunity to include all economic and non-commercial activities that provide an assortment of rural tourism in a particular rural area [44]. Therefore, rural tourism positively influences all economic and non-commercial activities (which are not part of the tourism industry, but are related - industry, construction, agriculture).

It should be emphasized that by encouraging the development of the basic activities of the tourism industry, rural tourism contributes to the increase in the volume of employment. In the world, every 10th employee is employed in tourism. This suggests that tourism is one of the leading generators of new jobs, which is of particular importance to rural tourism because it is

easy to employ structures that are otherwise difficult to employ: low profile, women, young and old. Based on conducted research in our country and the region, it is assumed that „a new direct employment is realized for every eight new tourists in rural areas, and twenty-five daily visitors are an opportunity for a new direct employment” [45].

The development of rural tourism, in addition to the aforementioned economic effects, contributes to the strengthening of local and regional economies, and therefore of the entire national economy.

## **5.2. The influences of rural tourism on the social development of the Republic of Serbia**

From a social point of view, the impact of rural tourism is multiple, since it affects culture, education, human health and so on. In addition, this impact can be positive and negative [21]

When it comes to the impact of rural tourism on culture, it should be emphasized that a large number of tourists are involved in tourist trips to rural areas, with the desire to become acquainted with the country’s cultural and historical heritage and the history of that nation [21]

For these reasons, tourists visit museums, cultural and historical monuments, ambient tourist values, rural ambient values, events (manifestations) and others.

Rural tourism also influences education because it allows you to get to know different cultures, customs, gastronomy, lifestyles, contributing to a better understanding of different nations, which increases the general cultural level of tourists. In the direct interaction between the rural population and tourists there is also the transfer of positive habits and customs. Through the social role of rural tourism, a sense of pride and self-awareness is given to the rural population, which is often felt marginalized. This particularly applies to women who have „significantly improved their position in the structure of rural workforce” by developing rural tourism [47].

Rural tourism, basically, enables recreation of tourists in physical and psychological terms, thus influencing the improvement of health and working abilities. This significantly influences the improvement of the health of tourists.

On the other hand, in addition to positive effects, tourism in rural communities can also cause negative effects (prejudice towards visitors, changes and development in general, the transmission of negative habits and customs, acceptance of negative habits and customs, etc.). Namely, tourism leads to the transformation of the previously innate culture of the rural population and the change of the traditional way of life, so in certain situations there can be an antagonism between the local population and tourists. However, it should be kept in mind that many cultures and rural areas would long ago disappear if there was no tourism.

Accordingly, one of the basic preconditions for successful planning and management of the sustainable development of rural tourism is the active involvement of the rural community, that is, the local population in the process. This involvement is necessary because the rural environment is an important factor in the overall quality of life of rural residents. Any use of tourism resources for the purpose of tourism development, without the consent of the local community, can be assessed by the local population as an abuse and represent a disincentive factor in the development of rural tourism [48].

In addition, in order to contribute to tourism for social development, certain cultural principles must be respected. These are: development of tourism that protects cultural diversity and local community, active discouragement of forms of tourism that cause and contribute to social problems, development of tourism characteristic for the area, promotion of unique culture and heritage of the rural area, preservation of the customs and return of old forgotten crafts.

### **5.3. Ecological influence of tourism on the development of rural areas of the Republic of Serbia**

Rural tourism and the environment represent two interconnected areas. Only a clean and unpolluted environment can be the basis of successful engagement with rural tourism. At the same time, tourism is the main user of the environment, because almost all tourists' activities are based on its use and are largely influenced by its quality.

Under the influence of tourism comes the transformation of rural areas and the results can be positive and negative. Positive effects of transformation, most commonly referred to in the literature [49]: restoration of existing historical sites, buildings and monuments; transformation of existing old buildings and places into tourist facilities; protection of natural resources; making various administrative and planning measures for the protection of individual areas; improving space availability and creating new ones; environmental consciousness building and so on.

On the other hand, the current negative impacts of tourism activities on the quality of the environment are caused by poor implementation of planning and construction regulations, lack of infrastructure for wastewater treatment, uncontrolled waste disposal, and inefficient management of protected natural resources. As far as the influence of tourism on the botanic world is concerned, it can be negative if the quest for plant sanctity leads to disturbances of ecological balance (removal of plants from the ecosystem). In addition to physical, it may also have an aesthetic dimension as a large number of plant and natural habitats in the Republic of Serbia are destroyed due to the development of rural tourism.

A similar problem is with the animal world, if it is threatened and if changes in their behavior are caused by long-term exposure to tourists. Also, problems arise due to poor animal treatment by certain tourists. This is particularly true of protected animal species.

According to [48], other positive effects imply the importance of rural areas and the negative gradual urbanization of rural areas, and the possibility of loss of control over the phenomenon of rural tourism.

The results as well as the projected tourist growth point to the necessity of strategic management, primarily in the direction of controlling further tourist growth and the implementation of measures to control the carrying capacity of the tourist destination. According to Slavkovic (Slavkovic, 2015), more needs to be done on the system of protection and preservation of the environment, as well as on the implementation of regulations. The awareness of the problems that rural tourism creates should be at a high level, due to the negative effects of tourism on the environment. In this context, the idea of sustainable development came to the fore, with the aim of preventing irreparable and enormous damages that arise in rural areas.

At the beginning of the 21st century the concept of sustainable development, within it sustainable tourism, was fully affirmed [46]. An important prerequisite for further development of tourism is the preserved and healthy environment. For this reason, rural environments are the basic

potentials for sustainable tourism development. Due to the natural and anthropogenic tourist values, as well as the ecological and environmental characteristics of the territory of the Republic of Serbia, different rural areas across the country represent significant resource potential for sustainable tourism development [21].

Generally, rural tourism as a selective form of tourism has not yet received the scope of mass tourism in the world, so the effects of tourism activities in rural areas cannot be said more widely. The fact is that the visitors who participate in this activity are largely in love with the rural areas, suggesting that their awareness of the protection of natural and anthropogenic resources is usually very high. All this is in favor of the fact that rural tourism in most countries is the opposite of mass tourism, i.e. its most significant forms.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Rural areas are currently undergoing significant economic and social changes, mainly caused by the liberalization of international trade, the development of information and communication technologies, and the strengthening of rural development policy. Rural areas on the territory of Serbia contain potentials, whether natural or anthropogenic, for the development of various activities that would speed up economic development. One of these activities is rural tourism. However, this form of tourism is in the region at the very beginning of development. The fact that 85% of the territory of the Republic of Serbia consists of rural areas, large geographical diversity (lowlands, mountainous regions), rich natural and anthropogenic resources, multiethnic population, etc. suggests that rural areas and more intensive tourism development could play a key role in the future economic development of the Republic of Serbia.

It is important to emphasize that rural areas of Serbia can respond to specific requirements for tourist recreation and form a tourist offer of special quality. Consequently, this would lead to the enrichment of the structure of business and the faster reaching of a certain degree of development in the economic and social terms. Rural tourism can significantly contribute to the rural economy. This contribution can be estimated not only in terms of gross production and the number of employees, but also in the wider economic benefits that it can afford. Tourism in rural environment, can serve to diversify the local economy; to provide new markets for local products and services; to provide new sources of income for farmers and others whose livelihood is endangered by changes in agriculture; and to encourage the creation of new businesses. Tourism can be a new „cash” in rural areas, altering the balance between primary industries such as agriculture and the tertiary or service sector.

Tourism can also bring social and cultural benefits to rural areas. They may include social and cultural contacts between local people and visitors; increased awareness, among visitors and local people, about the value of the heritage and the need for its protection; strengthening the identity and cohesion of the local community; and full use, and hence the greater sustainability of local transport and other services. At best, tourist camps help rural communities find new strengths in their local economy, while preserving the quality of life, heritage and social values. In order to achieve the expected effects of rural tourism, it is necessary to plan stimulus and organizational action in the construction of the village tourism offer. In addition, it is necessary that the rural tourism product be locally controlled, based on authenticity and promotion that highlights realistic expectations of using the product. All this would lead to a faster development of rural tourism in our country, which is currently below real opportunities.

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