

THE INFLUENCE OF VINE GROWING AND WINE PRODUCTION ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL TOURISM IN SERBIA¹

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Abstract

In this paper, we want out the influence that viticulture and the production of wines can have on developing rural tourism in Serbia. The value of grapes is seen when there is not enough of them and when there is a shortage of them, which in practice leads to an increase in prices. The value of grapes comes to the fore even more when it is related to wine production because viticulture and wine production are the face and the reverse of the same production-processing policy. Apart from providing grapes for wine production, it is also a key element that can contribute to rural development. Rural policy is for Serbia due to depopulation trends and the rapid evacuation of the population from rural areas. In this sense, the development of tourism in Serbia should be headed towards finding mechanisms to prevent the deterioration of villages and rural areas in the concept of tourism development (strengthening of infrastructure, increasing the attractiveness of the rural regions, enrichment of tourist content, diversification of the rural economy). The standardization implemented within the rural tourism sector and under wine tourism should lead to better integration of agriculture and tourism in planning documents. In that process, greater participation of the owners of rural households and wineries is necessary. Finally, it is vital to raise the education and awareness of the local population about the possibilities of rural and wine tourism (education continuously, not sporadically).

Key words: viticulture, wine production, rural tourism, wine tourism, Serbia.

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- 1 Article as research is financed by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia.
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Introduction

The document Tourism Development Strategy of the Republic of Serbia, under the term rural tourism, emphasizes that rural tourism implies and includes a range of activities and services add content organized by the rural population on family farms to attract tourists and generate additional income while respecting the principles of sustainable development and conservation of natural resources.⁴

The National Programme for the Integration of the Republic of Serbia into the EU, adopted by the Government (2008), highlights the section entitled Agriculture and Rural Development, which speaks of our clear commitment, both to this integration and to this concept. (Pejanovic et al., 2008, p.6). Accordingly, we emphasize that rural areas occupy about 85% of the territory of Serbia and that the rural population makes up more than half of the total population. This certainly creates a need for further investment in this area to improve social and economic conditions, both in isolated rural areas facing a tendency to depopulation and in suburban areas. Investing in the development of the rural economy and local communities is a vital factor in improving the quality of life in rural areas, primarily through better provision of public services, infrastructure development, and a more favourable business environment.

Creating conditions for better competitiveness in rural areas requires sustainable development and the creation of new employment opportunities, especially for the younger population, as well as providing access to modern information and communication technologies. Diversification of activities in rural areas into agricultural and non-agricultural activities, support for non-agricultural activities, and strengthening the connection between different spheres of rural development play a significant role in all this. (Roberts et al., 2004, p.253-263).

Rural areas suitable for tourism development in Serbia

Rural areas in Serbia are different in economic, social, and demographic. In the first place, these are geomorphological differences (mountainous, hilly, and plains areas), differences in population, economic structures, infrastructure, environmental conditions, transport accessibility, etc. Rural areas contain most of the country's natural resources: agricultural land, forests, and waters with rich ecosystems and biodiversity, including significant human

4 Стратегија развоја туризма Републике Србије, 2005, 69.

resources and economic activities, as well as important natural, cultural, and historical heritage. The diversity of rural areas of Serbia is a good opportunity but creates main problems for the planning of rural development and support as a whole.

Serbia's terrain ranges from the rich, fertile plains of the Pannonian Plain in the north, through limestone mountain ranges and basins in the east and west, to ancient volcanic massifs in the south. The north is dominated by the Danube River, the south is divided by the Sava River, and the Morava River basin reaches deep into the mountainous wilderness of the south. (Đorđević-Milošević, et al., 2013, p.33).

The northern plains of Vojvodina administratively belong to the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, which accounts for 28% of Serbia's total area and 26% of its total population. It is the wealthiest region and had a net population inflow for 1995–1999.

The hilly and mountainous regions of Central Serbia account for 29% of Serbia's total area and 44% of its population. It is the most diverse and densely populated of the three regions, partly due to the influence of Belgrade. The capital is an important market and source of employment. This region has the most developed infrastructure in the country. However, this does not mean that this infrastructure is complete and functional.

The mountains and valleys of Southern Serbia account for 44% of Serbia's total area. Southern Serbia is the largest of the three regions and the poorest and most underdeveloped region. Most of the area is mountainous, with 37% covered by forest and only 55% by agricultural land. The soil, except the valleys, is often poor and shallow, much of it on steep slopes. The head resources that sustained the local rural economy were the vast highland grasslands suitable for extensive livestock farming and the valley areas just for vegetable growing. Single parts of the region farm crop, fruit, and vines.

Serbian wine tourism relies on 17 wine routes that reveal the richness and diversity of Serbia's historical and wine traditions.

Serbia consists three regions: of Central Serbia, Vojvodina Kosovo, and Metohija. Within them, there are 22 wine-growing regions, which include 77 vineyards.

The Central Serbia region has 13 regions, 55 vineyards and the following 10 wine routes: Šumadija, Pomoravlje, Župa, Toplica, Leksovac, Vranje, Niš-Knjaževac, Negotinska krajina, Pocerina-Valjevo, Belgrade, Podunavlje.

The Vojvodina region has seven regions, 15 vineyards and five wine routes: Srem-Fruška gora, Bačka, Subotica, Vršac, Banat.

The Kosovo and Metohija region has two districts, seven vineyards, and two wine routes: Northern Metohija and Southern Metohija. In the wine regions of rural areas, especially in developed countries, tourism is highlighted as a product of rural tourism. Most wineries in Serbia are also trying to innovate by introducing new technologies and attractions into wine tourism. The wine tourism offer can be considered a complementary element of the tourist offer. Serbia has the potential to develop wine districts as attractive tourist destinations; most of these areas are in the zone of poor potential share of 46.88%. The areas of wine districts with good potential make up only 1.10% and need to be further improved. (Jovanović et al., 2023, p. 245).

The advantages of rural tourism, and therefore wine tourism, relate to the preservation of numerous natural resources, rich cultural and historical heritage, the number and diligence of rural settlements, the richness of local traditions, traditional hospitality, and diversification of the tourist product. The disadvantages are inadequate rural infrastructure, an “archaic” tourist product, an underdeveloped information system, an unsatisfactory level of quality of mixing and other services, a lack of training programs for farmers to ensure adequate quality of services, a lack of experience, a lack of motivation, and an underdeveloped awareness in rural areas of the economic and other benefits of the development of rural tourism. (Vuković, 2017, 55-56).

Development of wine tourism in rural areas

More reasonable familiarization of all those involved in agricultural production with this is significant and productive for the development of wine tourism. Rural areas of Serbia must respond to the many challenges that await it on its path to the EU. Therefore, a reform of the agricultural policy in Serbia should be implemented by including technical-technological and environmental standards. Agrarian reform should enable the creation of modern farm producers and entrepreneurs who would be competitive and equal with the same in the European Union.

Perhaps a solution for domestic agricultural producers who want to develop wine tourism would be their joint organization in the form of cooperatives or other associations of agricultural producers, all to make it easier to place their households on the tourist services market. Currently, cooperatives in Serbia are practical organizations. Most cooperatives in the modern way of doing business tend to think about fulfilling their current obligations. This way of thinking influences the cooperative movement to see the way forward. Today, the cooperative movement is introduced towards pragmatic turning off, reacting to given opportunities to adapt to changes. (Simonović et al., 2016, p. 275-293).

The development of rural tourism in Serbia should be organized on a sustainable basis. The sustainable development of rural tourism means development that meets the needs of current tourists while preserving the natural, social, cultural, and anthropogenic values of a tourist destination, but also enabling future generations to continue using these resources at the same, and if possible, at a higher level. Sustainable development of rural tourism has a significant impact on the development of agriculture, given that these activities are interconnected. The considering importance of the sustainable development of rural tourism and the large number of stakeholders participating, the Republic of Serbia must adopt a Rural Tourism Development Strategy based on the current Tourism Development Strategy and the Master Plan for the Sustainable Development of Rural Tourism. Development and successful operation of each rural area are significant to creating a Strategy development of rural tourism. The strategy should clearly define the mission, vision, and goal, as well as the necessary steps for the development and progress of rural tourism in that area. (Njegovan et al., 2015, p. 53). We believe that at this stage of the development of winemaking in Serbia, it is necessary to create a strategy that would relate to the development of wine tourism.

It is also necessary to develop a concept for managing the sustainable development of rural and wine tourism, the framework of which is in the Master Plan for the Sustainable Development of Rural Tourism in the Republic of Serbia. Specifically, the Master Plan should define the management obligations for each of the proposed clusters with all significant functions, i.e., planning, organizing, decision-making, and control. In Serbia, the proposed management concept should enable the transformation of comparative advantages (the potential for rural and wine tourism) into competitive ones in both the domestic and international tourist markets. In particular, attention should be to the quality of accommodation and food services and the offers of tourist content and tourist products. Among the above functions, the most complex

is the function of the organization, through which the work of several direct and indirect subjects participating in the development of rural tourism in the territory of the Republic of Serbia should be coordinated. Also, territorial, structural, and functional connectivity and cooperation of all relevant participants are necessary. Sustainable development of rural, though also wine tourism, is a continuous process that requires constant monitoring, i.e., control, and taking the necessary corrective or preventive measures. (Košić et al., 2013, p. 231-241).

On the potential opportunities for the development of gastronomic and wine rural tourism

Gastronomic and wine tourism has emerged as an area of interest in tourism studies, especially in rural regions. (Hall et al., 2001, p. 307-329). Food at a gastronomic event served as the strongest predictor of brand equity. The exception is the impact of event content, which destination image. Food at a gastronomic event has a forceful impact on destination loyalty. This suggests that this is the most significant component of attraction and repeat visits. (Čavić et al., 2023, p. 43). Part of this interest is connections to the increased awareness of the cultural importance of food in everyday life. Writing about wine and gastronomic tourism has also contributed to this interest, along with the measures taken in parallel by rural areas to innovate and diversify their rural tourism base. Since the early 1970s, rural regions in industrialized countries have been significantly affected by successive rounds of economic restructuring within the new globalized economy and society. In response to the abolition or privatization of government-provided services, the changed access regime to “traditional” markets, and the removal of tariffs and regional support mechanisms, rural areas have sought to diversify their economic base, with new agricultural products and tourism being two responses. Food tourism strategies are a significant instrument of regional development, in particular, because of the potential leverage between products from the two sectors. (Hall et al., 2003, p. 22-59).

In the increasingly competitive world of tourism, each region is constantly searching for a unique product that would differentiate itself from the products of competition. Local gastronomy and food are unique to a particular destination of the resources whose characteristics can be used to attract more visitors.

The focus of wine and gastronomic tourism is on new product development at the company and regional levels. For example, specialized products offer the

possibility of growth through services to visitors in village tours, direct purchases from the farm, specialized restaurant menus with an emphasis on local food, and homestays on such estates. (Bessière, 1998, 21-34). Indeed, in these circumstances, the interest of visitors, i.e., tourists, in local products can also serve to stimulate local awareness and interest and help not only in diversifying and maintaining plant and animal diversity but can also encourage community pride in strengthening local identity and culture. Therefore, some agencies and stakeholders see wine and food tourism as an important element in provincial economic development strategies due to the potential relationships between different industrial sectors, thus ensuring the long-term circulation of money in local economies and the development of new added value. (Hall, 2005).

Therefore, each region has authentic agricultural and food products, dishes, and wines that may be of interest to foreign tourists. These products are the fruit of producers who produce high-quality products with a protected brand based on traditional technologies and their raw materials, such as dairy and meat products, freshwater fish, compotes, candied fruits, fruit teas, natural fruit juices, select fruit brandies, grape products, primarily and indigenous wines, grape juices with added natural fruit aromas, products from various types of vegetables produced by hot and cold processing. (Simonović et al., 2024, p. 125).

Then, authentic agricultural and food products can also include products from manufacturers engaged in the production and processing of “ecological” products, i.e., healthy food and other products such as wholemeal flour and baked goods made from them, grainy “instant food” made from cereals with various additives such as dried fruit, honey, walnuts, hazelnuts, almonds, etc., natural honey and honey products, teas, medicinal herbs, etc.

When it comes to authentic agricultural and food products, it is worth mentioning the production of chicken eggs, broilers, the production of yeast, early fruits and vegetables in a protected area, special types of confectionery products, the production and processing of mushrooms, chickens, pheasant game and the breeding of other game, e.g. fallow deer for hunting tourism purposes, production and processing of snails and frogs, collection and processing of forest fruits such as boletus and chanterelles, and breeding and processing of fattening horses. (Maletić et al., 2011, p. 121-131). It is precisely the production of these products and their placement in the tourism market that can influence the development of underdeveloped regions in the country. (Kalenjuk et al., 2012, p. 136-146).

Conclusion

Serbia has significant natural and social resources that can contribute to the development of rural and wine tourism. Numerous existing tourist products such as farms, ethno-houses, wineries, wine fairs, and events provide tourists with a unique experience. However, despite all the predispositions, rural and wine tourism in Serbia still does not have an adequate position on the market.

For rural and wine tourism to develop further, the active involvement of social, political, and other institutions and individuals is necessary. Also, for adequate valuation of cultural and historical heritage, efforts should be increased to restore numerous sites and buildings, which requires the community to its area, customs, and heritage. The development of rural and wine tourism in Serbia must be on the principles of sustainable development. If a tourist destination decides to use rural and wine tourism as a development basis it must carefully plan and manage that will not only meet the needs of tourists but also ensure the sustainable development of the local community.

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