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**TOURISM
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DEVELOPMENTAL ASPECTS OF THE RURAL TOURISM IN SERBIA¹

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Abstract

Taking into consideration the economic problems many European countries face, it is quite understandable why the tourism and investing in the tourism has been “seen”, during nineties and at the beginning of the new millennium, as a possible starter of the national economies development, i.e. their rural areas, which have been unfairly neglected during the time. The rural tourism development, along with the expressed individualization of the tourist supply and its more significant focus on non-standard tourist products represent one of the bases for applying the concept of sustainable tourism development. As a very important economic branch of the national economy, the tourism represents a very important and significant economic activity for Serbia, which would result in adequate conditions, i.e. more favorable ones for the development of rural tourism. Unfortunately, since the beginning of nineties of the 20th century, the conditions for the realization of activities in the field of tourism have shown as very unfavorable. This paper's goal is to point out to the possibilities for improving life of the population in rural areas through the development of tourism and elimination of all negative tendencies, by which the Serbian village has been encumbered nowadays.

Keywords: *rural tourism, agriculture, competitiveness, tourist conjuncture.*

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Introduction

Thanks to the geographic position of Serbia, landscapes suitable for different forms of recreation, natural beauties, but also rich natural heritage and folklore, there are favorable conditions for the development of the rural tourism. According to such conditions, and also having in mind the insufficient economic development of the rural areas, it is necessary to support the long-term development of these areas by the diversification of rural economy, where the rural tourism is recognized as an attractive area and a factor to make these processes easier. However, Serbia is in the initial phase of the rural tourism development, although its significance in life conditions improvement of the population in rural areas has been noticed. This field should be made sufficiently recognizable in the Serbian tourist product, and also for making easier funding of entrepreneurial ideas, taking into consideration its numerous positive effects. The positive effects of the rural tourism development are: 1) the increase of the local population employment, 2) an additional income for rural households, 3) the development of production and catering activities, 4) the prevention of the village-town migrations, 5) the protection and preservation of the natural and cultural heritage, and 6) the integral development of rural areas.

Accordingly, as a very important economic branch of the national economy, a gross domestic product creator and a foothold of various rural areas development, tourism is for Serbia a very prosperous and significant economic activity, which would practice in adequate conditions, to be exact, more favorable for the development of rural, i.e. country tourism (Vukovic et al., 2008). Unfortunately, since the beginning of 1990s, the conditions for the realization of the activities in the field of tourism have shown to be very disadvantageous. Such a condition was affected by numerous reasons. The most important are: the lack of capital, the reduced size of tourist circulation, a small number of investments and the profound economic crisis in which our society happened to be in that period of time. Under the influence of these changes, the existing level of domestic tourism development is below the level of its real potential, which many respectable resources provide, both natural and social (anthropological). The tourism is becoming an important economic branch of a large number of countries worldwide, and in some it has already become even the leading one. The incomes they generate on the bases of tourism activities are the best indicator. Taking into consideration these tendencies, during 1990s, the European Union, in its

program of common agrarian policy (known as the CAP – Common Agricultural Policy) had promoted the multifunctional developmental concept, which had envisaged tourism as one of the developmental perspectives (Cvijanović et al., 2011c).

The peculiarities of the Serbian rural areas

According to the geographic, economic, social, infrastructural and other trends, one can notice a high differentiation level of the Serbian rural areas (Mihailovic et al., 2012). The homogenous rural regions have been defined, by using the cluster analysis⁴, on more than forty indicators, and they reflect to an acceptable degree the peculiarities of rural areas in Serbia (Official Gazette no. 15/2011).

- Region of high-intensive agricultural production and integrated economy is located in the northern part of Serbia, i.e. it encircles the territory of the AP of Vojvodina and the north-west part of Serbia (Mačva). This region is characterized by a lowland top-quality land and significant water resources: large rivers flowing through this region (the Danube, Sava and Tisa). In the area of around 21,000 km² are the reclaimed systems for water drainage. In accordance with the demographic characteristics, economic structure and development of this region, specific distinctions can be noticed between the western and the eastern areas. In the western part of the region, there is a greater concentration of population, increased investments and higher economic growth. The specific lowland landscapes, rivers, lakes, the National Parks of Fruška Gora and Deliblatska Peščara represent a basic part of this region tourist supply, and more than 200 natural resources are under the special protection.
- The region of small urban economies with the intensive agriculture encircles the north parts of the Central Serbia, Šumadija, the parts of Mačva and Stig. The area of this region is surrounded by big urban centres, which has an effect on demographic, economic and social trends of the region. The region of small urban economies with the intensive agriculture occupies 16.31% of the total Serbian territory, which makes this region partly homogenous in respect of the natural and geographic conditions. Since it is in the vicinity of big urban centres, it has quality infrastructural fit-out, as well as easier availability to public and municipal services. The road network is at

4 In defining the RD Program related to the project – Support to programming the rural development and the payment system in S&M.

the level of the national average and it is evenly distributed on the territory of the entire region.

- The mountainous region, with the economy based on natural wealth, is the largest rural region in Serbia and it encircles 29% of the territory. A significant part of this area encircles the parts of Serbia with the altitude over 500m, so it can be aligned with hilly-mountainous area. In the valleys of the Danube, South Morava and Timok lowland areas are located, where the diversity of landscapes and heterogeneous structure of natural resources have affected the pronouncedly diversified economy and agricultural structure. The basic limiting factors for the development of agriculture in this region are: the insufficiently utilized land potential, the lack of labor, an unorganized market and the lack of adequate rural infrastructure.
- The region of high tourism potential with the poor agricultural structure is the smallest rural region in Serbia and it encircles 14% of the territory, and taking into consideration the natural-geographic conditions, this region is relatively homogeneous. This region is one of the greatest assets for successful positioning of the Serbian tourism product, with precious combination of tradition, history and natural beauties. This region's developmental priority is the construction of Ibar highway. However, it should be done along with the synchronous protection and rational utilization of natural attractions and areas.

Recognizing the analyzed characteristics of the rural regions in Serbia, as dominant causes of their lethargic development, we can single out: the migration of the rural population to urban areas, the disadvantageous age structure, insufficient investments in rural areas, identification of agriculture with the development of rural areas with insufficient engagement in non-agricultural activities, etc. (Cvijanović et al., 2012a). The mentioned rural areas have the specific regional characteristics and different degree of rural development, therefore it is appropriate to take into consideration the situational, i.e. regional approach in defining the measures of support (Mihailovic et al., 2012).

The analysis of potentials for the development of rural tourism in Serbia

Agriculture in Serbia is not considered as a common economic branch, due to, on one side, the peculiarities of this kind of production and tradition related to it, and, on the other, great expectations (Mihailović et al, 2014a). The Republic of Serbia has favourable natural conditions for

the development of miscellaneous agricultural production, since it is located in the most favourable area of north latitude, which is characterized by four seasons and four climatic areas. Due to this, the development of diverse vegetable and livestock production was enabled, e.g. cereals, industrial plants, fruits and vegetables, seed and planting material, medicinal herbs, neat and small-size cattle. The north part of Serbia, Vojvodina, is mostly lowland area, while hilly and mountainous landscapes are located in the central and south parts of the Republic of Serbia. The lowland regions are in the Pannonia Plain and its peripheral parts – Mačva, Posavina, Pomoravlje, Stig and Negotinska Krajina (Mihailovic et al., 2009). Each of these regions is suitable for the specific form of agricultural production. Therefore, the lowland regions are suitable for mechanized crop and vegetable production, highland and hilly areas are ideal for fruit, viticulture and livestock production, and hilly-mountainous can be used for the development of sheep breeding, cattle breeding and forestry. Consequentially, Serbia has great potentials for the development of rural non-agricultural economy, especially in the following fields: the development of spa and rural tourism, the production and processing of organic products, and then the production of products made by the traditional recipes, the products with protected designation of origin (PDO) and the products with protected geographical indication (PGI).

The structure of employment and the rural population income point out to a fact that Serbia is dominated by “the afflicted” income diversification, as a reflection of disadvantageous economic environment and rural poverty (Bogdanov, 2007). The research of the UNPD in 2010 also showed that the highest level of agricultural income diversification was a characteristic of the holdings in West Serbia (which had a larger number of mixed holdings in regard to other areas), and the least diversified income from agriculture was found within the holdings in Vojvodina (Social Exclusion In Rural Areas In Serbia, 2010, p. 67-68). The modern tourism trends are characterized by increasing direction toward rural destinations, expressed personalization, increased special interests and focusing the tourists to non-standard tourist products. The results of the European tourism market research, in the mid-nineties, show that 9% of tourists on the European market were really interested in the rural tourism areas. Even 25% of tourists in Great Britain were showing the interest in rural regions. Owing to this, in high developed tourism countries today, an increasing attention is paid to the development of rural tourism. Nowadays it makes one of more important developmental components,

not only of tourism, but the integral and sustainable development as a whole (Comic, 2002). Migrations, disintegration of rural communities and leaving rural households are the characteristics of the Serbian village at the end of 20th century and the beginning of 21st century. The reasons are twofold: 1) the industrialization and technological progress have pulled the rural population to urban centres. Farmers left the land and went to factories, young people went for education, and then for work, while only the old stayed in villages. During time, it was followed by increasing decline in the birth-rate, i.e. the negative increase in population, which has additionally complicated the situation; 2) Economic poverty in last decades, sanctions, wars, and the world economic crisis have worsen the situation even more.

After the latest major investment in transport infrastructure, at the end of eighties and the further tourism development of some centres (Zlatibor, Kopaonik, Vrnjačka Banja, Palić, etc.), the surrounding villages have recieved the opportunity to keep young people and to see out the development of rural tourism. There are also the positive examples of the rural-mountainous tourism development in Ivanjica region, as well as numerous farmsteads (salaš) in Vojvodina (Social Exclusion In Rural Areas In Serbia, 2010, p. 67-68). Other villages, especially the remote mountainous villages, in the first place expect the government to undertake proper actions so they could get asphalted roads and phone lines, as well as the regular maintenance of the infrastructure, especially in winter months, taking into consideration ever more frequent weather disasters. This would enable the villages to survive, while the young would be retained in the villages; all this should be seen as a precondition for the development of rural tourism. Transformation of authentic rural values into tourism values could lead to opening of villages towards tourism trends, which would significantly differ by their size and quality from the previous tourist trends in the Republic of Serbia. It would bring in the dynamics into monotonous rural life, and stabilize further disintegration of villages, and open wide opportunities for employing the rural population and acquiring income (Stetic, 2004, p.146). The rural culture represents a factor of the rural tourism supply attractiveness. It encompasses (Vujovic et al., 2012):

- The culture of clothing, where the national (folk) costumes represent the entirety in which all individual elements, besides the aesthetic one, also have the instrumental content. The recent years have brought gradual withering away of the villages, the disappearance of traditional costumes and acceptance of the final industrial products,

which can lead to a complete extinction of folk costumes. As a reminder, during the First World War, a Serbian peasant was dressed in the traditional short sheepskin fur jacket.

- The housing culture, where a tourist on the farm experiences a different life compared to the hurried urban one, together with a hospitable host in an authentic, functionally and aesthetically shaped surrounding. Everything has its cultural value in it where a rural household represents a living museum. As it is important to preserve the national (folk) costumes, it is also important to preserve the traditional, authentic Serbian house.
- The spiritual cultural values of the village: 1) customs, mythological material, 2) folklore, the traditional and modern creative work in the countryside.

In recent decades, due to accelerated urbanization and industrialization, the urban population has been increasingly exposed to air pollution, excessive noise, lack of high-quality drinking water, and a fast pace of life, which all lead to psycho-physical exhaustion. Hereupon, there is an ever increasing need for the tourism trends towards areas of preserved natural and cultural values. In recent years, however, there has come to a gradual loss of the authenticity of well-known vacation centres. They slowly lose the primary characteristics and, by their character and structure, they start to resemble the physiognomy of urban settlements. In regard to the increased tourism needs and high prices of services in these centres, the recent years have brought the need for more intensive planning in rerouting the tourist demand to other parts of the Republic of Serbia. Activating a large tourism potential of these destinations through the tourist valuation can significantly contribute to faster overcoming the economic underdevelopment, which would result in a lot cheaper and more impressive vacation of the people from urban areas. A typical example is the development of tourism on Stara Planina and the potential development of the south-east of Serbia.

Sustainable development and rural tourism

A ground on which the future tourism development in Serbia should be based and planned is the resources of various rural regions that it has. A large number of different natural-geographic entities and their preserved ecosystems, then multiethnicity, and old handicrafts are a base for forming a rich out-pension supply of these areas. More precisely, tourism

and its multiple effects will reflect positively on the total economic life of these areas (Vujovic et al., 2012).

The goal of the sustainable development research is to pay attention to the impact of the total economic growth to the ecological processes and the environment quality. We think of sustainable tourism as a way of meeting the needs of the current generations, as tourists, as well as those of residents (hosts) without the pretentious interpretation of future generations' ability to satisfy their needs. In 1987, the World Conference for the Environment Protection and Development presented to the public its report "Our Common Future", known as "Bruntland – report", called after the Norwegian president, who presided the Commission. This report was a great incentive to the discussion on criteria and terms for the sustainable development, as a new concept of the global economic and ecological policy. The sustainable development as a possible stage toward the main goal of the global survival requires a thorough reorganization of ecological efficiency of all economic activities. A detailed description and defining the specific tasks can be found in the business charter of sustainable development, adopted at the Second Conference of the World Industry on Eco-management (Mihailović et al., 2014b, p.150). Most of the demands placed there have already been accepted by the current eco-management systems (BS 7750, EVRO-EMAS, ISO 14000) (Mihailovic, 2011, p. 126). What has also increased is the demand for the consulting services in the field of standardization of agricultural production (Mihailovic et al., 2010).

In the same time when the new globalization challenges have appeared, a significant interest has been directed to the development of new methods for solving manifold business influences in the society. Many of those influences are far-reaching and profound. Let's mention some of them: 1) the environment pollution caused by the production, transport and using automobiles, refrigerators or newspapers (newsprints). 2) Increasing problem with waste disposal and its management, as a result of the excessive packaging of products and the domination of so called "leaflet culture". 3) Devastating consequences for an individual and the local communities due to the closure of local companies, reduction of their size and a number of employees, experienced by countries all over Europe, from South Wales in Great Britain, to the countries of the Central and East Europe. 4) Erosion of the local cultures and environment, owing to the mass tourism breakthrough in places like: Mallorcan fishing villages,

Swiss alpine communities, as well as the ancient Roman monuments (Cvijanovic et al., 2012b).

Following these problems, the radical changes in formulation of business goals have been suggested. After the Earth Summit held in 1991 in Rio de Janeiro, one concept imposed as the one that should be applied widely (although not adopted unanimously). It is about the new conceptual framework for the evaluation of both business activity in particular, and the industrial and social development in general. This concept is the sustainability concept. Sustainability has become the usual expression in rhetorics which refers to the business ethics, so it is widely used by corporations, governments, consultants, scientists, etc. Despite its wide use, sustainability is a term which is used and interpreted in different ways (Dobson, 1996). Probably it is most used term regarding sustainable development, which is mostly defined in the following way: sustainable development is the development which satisfies the needs of today, without endangering the future generations' ability to satisfy their needs (World Commission of Environment and Development, 1987). Focusing on sustainable development and the future generations' potential to satisfy their needs, the sustainability also faces considerations on intergenerational capital, i.e. the equality between two generations. For a long time, the sustainability concept has substantially remained a synonym for the human environment sustainability. However, it was recently expanded to cover not only considerations on the environment, but also the economic and social development (Elkington, 1998). The expansion of the sustainability concept has originated primarily from the fact that it is impractical, sometimes even impossible, to analyze the sustainability of the natural environment without taking consideration of the social and economic aspects of the relevant social communities and their activities. The second argument in favour of this consideration is that, if the capital should be expanded to future generations, then it is logical that it should be expanded to the ones in the current generation too. Shaping sustainable development as a goal of the business activity of an enterprise has been fully described by the term "triple bottom line".

Perspectives related to the environment protection. For the sustainability concept, it is generally considered that it originated from the environment protection, especially in forestry, and later on it occurred in some other fields of the resources management. Indeed, at this moment, there is still a fairly widespread perception in business (although we believe it to be wrong) that sustainability is only the concept of the human environment

protection. The basic principles of sustainability in the human environment protection perspective comprise the effective management of physical resources, in a way to be preserved for the future (Mihailović&Paraušić, 2014c). All bio-systems are observed as the ones with limited resources and the final capacity, and thereby the sustainable human activity must work in a way not to jeopardize the health of endangered species. Even at the basic level, these problems point out to the need to remove a certain number of critical business problems, as the influences of industrialization to biological diversity, further utilization of non-renewable resources as oil, steel and coal, as well as the production of harmful polluters. Consequentially, an ecological factor gets its significance, which makes the demand for the special consulting services regarding projecting and installing the equipment for reduction/prevention of pollution (Cvijanovic&Mihailovic, 2010).

Economic perspectives. The economic sustainability perspective has originated from the economic growth model, which evaluates the Earth capacity borders. The idea that a continuous growth in population number, industrial activity, utilization of resources and the environment pollution can lead to the life standard decrease, has initiated the emergence of sustainability as a way of thinking, which would assure that the future generation will not be in unfavourable position due to the activities and options of the current generation. During time, the opinion on the improvement of sustainability macroeconomic comprehension has been invigorated. The economic environment contains factors and trends related to the size of income and the production of goods and services (Cvijanovic&Mihailovic, 2011b, p.37).

Social perspectives. The development of social perspective related to sustainability often goes behind the ecological and economic perspectives and stays relatively new as a phenomenon. An explicit integration of social issues in business discourse regarding the sustainability was recognised as a phenomenon during nineties, and there seemed that the response to concerns regarding the impacts of business activities to the autochthonous communities was in less developed countries and regions. Regardless the impressive progress of life standard, in 2005, the UN issued the Report on the Social Situation in the World, which identified the constant deepening of inequalities in the world. With 80% of the global gross domestic product, which belongs to 1 billion people living in high-developed countries, and the remaining 20% belong to 5 billion people living in developing countries, as it is stated in the report. It was

suggested that “settling inequalities must assure the social justice and better life conditions for all people, which is unattainable in this moment, and that communities, countries and regions are still vulnerable to the social, political and economic overthrow” (The Report of the World Social Situation, 2005, p.12). More precisely, the report states that there is an “increasing gap among skilled and unskilled workers, the gap between formal and informal economy, as well as the significant differences in health, education and the opportunities for social and political participations” (The Report of the World Social Situation, 2005, p. 3).

Thanks to the natural, ecological (Cvijanovic et al., 2011a) and environmental characteristics, different rural areas are very interesting and perspective space for the development of this specific form of tourism (Vukovic et al., 2010). Adequately built holiday houses in the countryside, characterized by peace and silence, are the real *oasis* for people from highly-urbanized, industrial centres. In the past, there was only a declarative support to the development of this form of tourism. However, some ideas have been revived recently. For example, in 2004, two standard farmsteads were constructed with all characteristics related to the life and customs on the territory of Vojvodina (Farmsteads 84 and 137), aiming to promote Serbia as the “transit destination” on a road to the “Athens Olympics”.

The farmsteads are included in the tourist map of Serbia. Numerous villages all over Serbia make the basis for further planning, especially having in mind the west trends of so called “return to the roots”, “healthy food” concept, old customs and handicrafts, increasing popularity of typically ethno contents – music, folklore, naive painting, etc. In that sense, as an integral part of the tourist supply increasingly promotes the local, regional and national. From this point of view, this also strengthens the role of rural households, and Serbia has great potentials for their development. This is in compliance with a fact that, at the end of the past decade, as an act of political commitment, the model of rural development (CAP) was promoted which prefers the multifunctional character of European agriculture and its developmental role in the economy and society as a whole (Cvijanovic et al., 2011d).

The concept of sustainable development based on natural resources, and demographic structure, which has been disturbed by depopulation, its multi-ethnicity wealth and the defined market to its target groups is a base and warranty of success in this form of tourism (Vujovic et al., 2012).

The perspectives which can fully contribute from the tourism out-pension supply point of view could be:

- Informing tourists about the tradition and customs of the nation and different nationalities, especially in areas where multi-ethnicity is present and makes the local communities wealth, which provides expansion for creativity in making different activities and the programs for stay,
- Gastronomy, i.e. the production of local specialties, as well as the preparation of “healthy food“or the organic food production, which is the official name. The concept has become very popular in highly urban countries in recent years and it can be the content of catering and other events with culinary contents (Simicevic&Stetic, 2011),
- Getting acquainted with the folklore and folk dances of all nations and nationalities. In accordance with everything previously said, a logical further step would be organization of numerous manifestations, which can make the cultural program during the whole year in different rural areas,
- Getting acquainted with old handicrafts and tools. One of the characteristics of modern tourist market is that unique products are highly appreciated and a modern tourist tends to escape from the uniformity offered by the globalization,
- Folk arts and crafts – multi-ethnicity wealth makes also wealth and diversity of folk arts and crafts which can seem exotic to foreign tourists. Almost every rural area can brag of some of their typical products, made as a product of valuable hands of people who live in that area,
- Cultural and sports events enrich and dignify forming the tourism supply assortment. Surely, they have to be organized in accordance with the sustainable development principles.

The important role in the improvement of some of these contents could be plaid by the private sector, i.e. small business. Creation of partial tourist programs deserves support, especially the fiscal and marketing support, because they could relatively rapidly enrich the out-pension tourist supply and contribute to the efficient representation and market valuation of the anthropological and other resources. This could enable the provision of fundamentals for the additional employment in the private sector without significant initial investments, which represents a common social interest.

Conclusion

The rural tourism has already been developed in some parts of Serbia, and the leaders are the regions of Vojvodina, Western and Central Serbia. Until now, a large number of master plans have been done for the development of some tourist destinations, with special emphasis on the rural tourism. This should also add the local developmental strategies of some municipalities in which the development of tourism is specifically accentuated. This shows that the society awareness and interest in rural tourism development is rising. What is characteristic of the rural tourism supply of Serbia is that there is no unique integrated supply. In this way, the marketing/management approach to development was disabled at the level of the local rural tourism destinations and the one of the state. This must be particularly taken into consideration in future. For now, there has not yet been developed a unique market approach, that would enable the positioning of Serbia on the international tourism market. With the unique approach, the differentiated tourism supply of rural areas would be presented, which would point out to a large variety of tourism supply of these areas through the unique sales proposals.

This observation points out the need to make and develop the unique integrated marketing plan, which would put the promotion and sale of rural tourism products to the forefront and make conditions for strengthening of supply quality. The other issue that must be taken into consideration is the supply quality. Every element in the tourism supply chain is evaluated by all subjects on the demand side - by tourists as final consumers, as well as the travel agencies which organize trips to these areas, and select the destinations they will offer to their clients.

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