

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF WINE AND RELIGIOUS TOURISM IN THE FRUŠKA GORA AREA

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Abstract

The area of Fruška Gora has great potential for the development of rural tourism, which has only been partially utilized. Wine and religious tourism in the area of Fruška Gora can be seen as the special forms of rural tourism, which, together with agrotourism, can form an authentic integrated tourist product of this area. Adequate promotion and sale of this product could contribute to an increase in the income of stakeholders. The aim of the paper is to present the potential integrated tourism product of Fruška Gora, as well as current incentives that can contribute to its economic sustainability. The research uses the methods of analysis, synthesis, desk research, as well as the descriptive method. The authors conclude that the proposed integrated tourism product, with adequate marketing activities, can contribute to the local sustainable economic development in the area of Fruška Gora, as well as to the reduction of the depopulation in these areas.

Key Words: *wine tourism, religious tourism, rural tourism, sustainable development, integrated tourism product, Fruška Gora*

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Introduction

By reforming the Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union – AGENDA 2000, rural tourism is recognized as the most important non-

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agricultural activity that can significantly contribute to the development of rural economies. The essence of this reform document was to realize the diversification of rural economies, so that they would not be based only on agriculture, as an activity that is burdened with numerous risks. For this purpose, it was defined that other activities, which are related to agriculture, can contribute to the growth of the living standards of the inhabitants of rural areas and the development of rural economies. To that end, the European Union allocated significant funds within the EAFRD, fund to support this activity, and several dozen forms of rural tourism were developed. Several forms are often integrated in the offer, which contributes to the quality and financially sustainable development of rural tourism at the local level.

Rural tourism in Serbia has been developing intensively since the beginning of the 21st century, that is, for more than two decades, although the beginnings of engaging in this activity of residents of rural areas were as early as the 70s of the 20th century. The problems in the entire development period were related to the lack of an adequate development document that would define rural tourism as a priority activity for the development of rural areas. Also, the lack of favorable sources of financing meant that the sustainable development of rural tourism was financed mostly from the own accumulation of residents of rural areas, and to a lesser extent with the financial support of the state, foreign donations and the like. This caused this activity to develop slowly, and only sporadically were extremely successful results recorded, which were, for the most part, the results of the work of successful associations or the realization of inventive projects.

Observed from the aspect of service providers in rural tourism in Serbia, in the previous period the problem was their insufficient connecting. Mostly every service provider tried to provide accommodation and food services to tourists. The catering offer was good, based on local authentic agricultural and food products. According to tourists, this aspect of the service represented the best part of the offer. Subjects of rural tourism in Serbia have insufficiently developed the offer of tourist content, they mostly expected that part of the offer to be developed by someone else. Examples of connecting service providers in certain forms of rural tourism were few. This is precisely why we believe that it is important to present the importance of connecting certain forms of rural tourism, that is, service providers, all with the aim of developing this activity and contributing to the economic sustainability of rural economies.

Literature review

Wine tourism means a tourist trip that includes visiting vineyards, wineries, wine festivals and wine exhibitions, where wine tasting and/or experiencing the attractions of the wine-growing region is the primary motive for the trip (Rabotić, 2013). Wine tourism in Europe is mostly developed through the forms of wine routes. According to Pivac (2012) „the wine road represents a special form of selling wine, catering, tourist and agricultural products of a wine region ... the tourist offer of the wine road also includes closer tourist attractions, which are not directly on the route of the road, and increase the ethno-tourism offer“ (p. 564). The stated position is important as a support for the proposal that we present in this paper for connecting the development of wine and religious tourism with the aim of sustainable rural development of the area of Fruška Gora. Meler (2015) emphasizes the importance of wine tourism for the development of rural tourism and says that in a strategic sense it is important to combine „complementary tourist attractions in a way that coordination, cooperation and partnership between different tourism entities bring about maximum effects in rural tourism operations“ (p. 197). Uña-Álvarez and Villarino-Pérez (2019) believe „the role played by synergies between wine culture, territorial identity and tourism may be crucial for rural development“ (p. 93). On the example of Romania, which is the sixth country in the Europe in terms of the area under vineyards, we can see that, although wine tourism has been developing rapidly in this country in recent years, Tănase et al. (2022) conclude that it has insufficient influence on the development of rural tourism, due to the weak connection of the winery owners with other providers of tourist services in the local economic community.

The situation is similar in Serbia, where wine tourism is developing rapidly, but also, as in the cited examples of other countries, it has not had a significant impact on rural development. The „Wine Routes of Serbia“ project, which was initiated by the Ministry of Economy of the Republic of Serbia at the end of the first decade of the 21st century, contributed to the sustainable development of wine tourism in recent years. Within the aforementioned project, ten wine routes were defined in the territory of Serbia, which are also on the tourist map of Europe. Also, wineries were located using GPS devices for mobile mapping and tourist and traffic signals were installed. The defined wine routes in the Republic of Serbia are: Fruška Gora, Vršac, Palić, Smederevo, Oplenac, Negotin, Knjaževac, Župa, Jagodina and Kosovo and Metohija. Defining wine routes is an

important initial step in the development of wine tourism in the Republic of Serbia. In order to further develop, a more significant promotion of this form of rural tourism is necessary. Radović and Pejanović (2013) believe that „wine tourism, as one of the forms of rural tourism, can significantly contribute to the sustainable development of tourism, but also enable the revitalization of viticulture and winemaking in Serbia“ (p. 147). Agrotourism is a commercial activity on an agricultural farm „which is carried out for the purpose of satisfying tourists and providing additional income to the owner“ (Štetić, 2007, p. 119). According to Ciani (2003), the emergence of rural tourism, i.e. agrotourism and the addition of these activities to existing agricultural ones, improves the quality of life on farms, but also increases the farmer's obligations in terms of the farmer's obligations to develop both activities on a sustainable basis. According to research results of group of authors (Radović, 2015; Radović & Vasiljević, 2018), agrotourism is the most prevalent form of rural tourism in Serbia.

In the area of Fruška Gora, there is a good basis for the sustainable development of an integrated tourist product, which would unite three forms of rural tourism: agrotourism, wine tourism and religious tourism. Within the Fruška Gora wine route, there is the largest concentration of wineries and monasteries, when looking at the entire territory of the Republic of Serbia. Medaković (2014) lists the characteristics and importance of 17 monasteries of Fruška Gora: Beočin, Bešenovo, Velika Remeta, Vrdnik (Ravanica), Grgeteg, Divša (Đipša), Jazak, Krušedol, Kuveždin, Mala Remeta, Novo Hopovo, Petkovića, Privina glava, Rakovac, Staro Hopovo, Fenek and Šišatovac. Therefore, we are of the opinion that a potential integrated tourism product, which we propose in this paper, could be developed in the area of Fruška Gora.

Methodology and data sources

The aim of the paper is to present the potential integrated tourism product of Fruška Gora, as well as the current incentives that can contribute to its economic sustainability i.e. sustainable development. Data sources are from available literature, as well as from the legal documentation (rules and regulations) of the Ministry of Tourism and Youth of the Republic of Serbia, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management of the Republic of Serbia and the Provincial Secretariat for Agriculture, Water Management and Forestry. The research uses the methods of analysis, synthesis, desk research, as well as the descriptive method.

A potential concept of an integrated tourism product

Thanks to the state incentives, as well as foreign donations (IPARD funds, grants, Programs of the cross-border cooperation), and incentives at the local level, the sustainable development of rural tourism in Serbia has been raised in the last decade, but it is still not sufficiently developed. The Tourism Development Strategy of the Republic of Serbia („Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia“, No 98/2016-6) defines rural tourism as a particularly differentiated tourist product that should be developed in accordance with the demand requirements on Fruška Gora as a tourist destination. The definition of a tourist product by Bakić (2011) implies the following: composed of several constructive parts, it can be seen as a product with various elements of tourism offer providers (hotel companies, travel agencies), represents a combination of original and derived elements of tourism offer, and can be viewed as a partial and integrated tourist product. The ultimate goal of consuming a tourist product is to satisfy the needs of consumers (tourists and visitors) based on the experiences they gain from travel. This includes the following benefits: physiological – comfortable bed, good food, environment, and surroundings, economic – value for money, fast service, good location, social – pleasant company, attentive service, and psychological – improved self-confidence, status, and security (Popesku, 2018, p. 186).

Based on the method of observation, it can be concluded that the tourist demand on Fruška Gora meets the above-mentioned criteria. However, the preferences of modern tourists are oriented towards consuming a more diverse tourism offer composed of complementary tourist products. This implies the creation of interactive content based on acquiring new skills and knowledge, getting to know the lifestyle of the local people, as well as an introduction of intangible cultural heritage of the destinations they visit. In this sense, rural tourism should include other elements of the tourist offer on Fruška Gora, namely wine tourism and religious tourism. An integrated (unified or complex) tourist product consists of the existing tourist offer with all economic and non-economic activities aimed at meeting the needs of tourists (Popesku, 2018). According to the authors Middleton (2009) and Popesku (2018), the elements of an integrated tourist product – i.e. their combination are: (a) destination attractiveness (natural and social advantages that influence the choice of destination), natural attractions (climate, relief, landscape, flora, fauna, and other natural resources), built attractions (tourist infrastructure, cultural monuments, modern architecture, marinas, parks, conference halls, etc.),

cultural attractions (religion, art, museums, folklore, music, games, festivals), and social attractions (lifestyle, customs of the local population, language); (b) conditions for staying in the destination (accommodation facilities, restaurants, taverns, local transport, sports facilities, shops, tourist agencies, souvenir shops, etc.); (c) destination accessibility (distance from emitting markets – measured by costs, speed, and comfort required to reach the destination).

The above mentioned implies that, besides accommodation services in agrotourism, the integrated tourist product of Fruška Gora could consist of complementary offerings within the cultural wine route and religious route of Fruška Gora. Creating a cultural wine route would involve connecting at least three municipalities with wineries where it would be possible to create interactive content for tourists such as participation in the wine bottling process, visits to wine museums and vineyards, as well as visits to the religious route on a specific theme of monasteries located on Fruška Gora. In order to create an integrated tourist product, it is necessary to connect all stakeholders in rural and wine tourism, both in the public and private sectors, with the obligatory participation of representatives of the monasteries on Fruška Gora. The challenge that stakeholders in tourism and agriculture would face in this case, would be that the entire idea remains at the level of mapped potentials without being introduced on the market. This would be overcome by engaging tourist organizations in the territory of Fruška Gora to participate in creating an integrated tourist product, coordinating all interested parties in tourism and agriculture, and finally promoting this product adequately. For sales in the market, it is necessary to involve tour agencies throughout Serbia and the region.

Financial incentives

Current financial incentives for the sustainable development of an integrated tourist product in the area of Fruška Gora could be subsidies (incentives) that will be paid during 2024 from the budget of the Ministry of Tourism and Youth of the Republic of Serbia, as well as subsidies that will also be paid during 2024 from the budget of the Secretariat for Agriculture, Water Management and Forestry of the Government of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina. The source of funding for the development of an integrated tourist product in the area of Fruška Gora could be the IPARD III program, i.e. Measure 7 of this program, and the first public call for tenders is expected in 2024.

The goal of approving incentives from the budget of the Ministry of Tourism and Youth of the RS is „increasing tourist traffic through the development of rural tourism, which will contribute to encouraging more even regional and local development, while preserving the natural environment and local culture, traditions and customs“ („Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia“, No. 10/2024-32, p. 1). The aforementioned goal is also defined in the proposal for the formation and sustainable development of an integrated tourist product of Fruška Gora, which would include the sustainable development of agrotourism, the wine and religious tourism, for whose development there are quality resources and conditions in this area. Rural tourist households, among others, have the right to apply for these subsidies, which are also the focus of our proposal. The maximum amount of incentives on this basis is 2.9 million dinars per project, and the user of the funds is obliged to provide their own funds amounting to at least 10% of the total value of the project („Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia“, No. 10/2024-32).

In the budget for 2024, the Secretariat for Agriculture, Water Management and Forestry of the Government of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina planned 20 million dinars for incentives for the sustainable development of rural tourism in the area of AP Vojvodina (Chamber of Commerce of Vojvodina, 2024). Incentives will be approved for different forms of rural tourism that can be developed in the area of Vojvodina. Within them, agrotourism is particularly important, as the primary form of rural tourism in this area, but also wine tourism, which is increasingly developing in the area of Vojvodina. All of the above suggests that this source could also be a potential way of financing the sustainable development of the proposed integrated tourist product of Fruška Gora.

The total planned investments in the development of agriculture, as well as rural development in the territory of the Republic of Serbia through the IPARD III Program, in the defined program period, will be 580 million euros, of which the contribution of the European Union is 288 million euros, and the other funds will be provided from national funds and user funds („Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia“, No. 118/2023-3). Table 1 shows the budget for Measure 7, within which incentives will be paid for the development of rural tourism, i.e. all its forms. In accordance with the conditions defined for this measure, the minimum amount of incentives for the development of rural tourism is 20,000 euros, and the maximum amount of incentives is 300,000 euros. Rural tourist

households are also potential beneficiaries of these incentives („Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia“, No. 118/2023-3).

Table 1: *Budget for Measure 7 of the IPARD 3 Program*

Contribution EU	National contribution	Total budget
51,840,000 €	17,280,000 €	69,120,000 €

Source: „Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia“, No. 118/2023-3.

In Serbia, there was a great interest of rural tourism entities in using incentives from the IPARD II program. According to one research (Radović et al., 2023) „utilization of available funds according to the First Call was 83%, according to the Second Call 89%, and when viewed in total, the utilization is 86% (p. 471). Bearing in mind the above, it can be expected that there will be a high utilization of available funds from the IPARD III program.

Conclusion

Rural and balanced regional sustainable development is very important due to reducing the depopulation of rural areas, increasing the standard of living of residents living in villages, as well as equalizing living conditions in rural and urban areas. To that end, the paper proposes the formation of an integrated tourist product in the area of Fruška Gora, which would be a synthesis of three forms of rural tourism: agrotourism, wine and religious tourism. Bearing in mind that there are adequate sources of financing, it is necessary to connect service providers in the mentioned forms of rural tourism, as well as to create an integrated tourist product, which should be realized by tourist organizations. Also, in order to create a demand for this product on the tourist market, adequate promotion and sales through travel agencies throughout Serbia and the region are needed.

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