An Overview of Agritourism Development in Serbia and European Union Countries

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ABSTRACT

The paper presents the status and potential development of agritourism in Serbia and in some countries of the European Union. The authors have analyzed the villages where the agritourism is the most developed, providing an overview of the number of registered agritourism units and the number of beds in four tourist clusters (91 municipalities) in Serbia. At the European Union level, the authors represented the LEADER program, which aims to connect rural economy and development activities in rural areas in the EU Member States. The paper also deals with the basic data and characteristics of agritourism development in countries where this type of tourism is highly developed (United Kingdom, France, Benelux states, Germany, Austria, Italy, Greece, Slovenia, Croatia, Romania and Hungary).

Keywords: Agritourism, EU Countries, LEADER Program, Serbia, Tourist Clusters

INTRODUCTION

In modern research of tourism globally, agritourism is very important and increasing segment of travel industry. Sznajder et al. (2009) suggest that agritourist activities involve the following: farm-stay, educational visits, recreational activities or selling agricultural and home-made products. On the other hand, Stojanović (2007), states that agritourism is part of so-called alternative types of tourism, which appeared in 1980s as a consequence of the so-called ‘green consumption’ trend, as well as a consequence of the awareness of travelling in accordance with the environmental protection.

In their papers on agritourism, Nilsson (2002) and Petrović (2013; 2014) define this type of tourism as a basic segment of rural tourism. According to Nilsson, rural tourism is based

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on rural environment in general, while agritourism is based exclusively on farms and farmers. Clarke (1996) explains that there are certain spatial differences in agritourism. Namely, if the accommodation is not on the farm, then it is agritourism, while farm-stay means that the agricultural environment and its offer are included in the product (e.g. being involved in agricultural work, riding a tractor, processing products, etc.). The problems in agricultural production have encouraged farmers and the creators of the agricultural policy to search for alternative activities. Agritourism is regarded as one of them (Illbery et al., 1998).

The paper deals with the status of agritourism activity in Serbia and in 13 member countries of the European Union. We analyzed the village settlements in Serbia where the agritourism is mostly developed and provided an overview of the number of registered agritourism units and the number of beds in 91 municipalities in Serbia. At the level of the EU, we represented the LEADER program, which aims to connect rural economy and development activities in rural areas in the EU member states.

**MAIN FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH**

**The State of Agritourism Development in Serbia**

The territory of Serbia possesses exceptional resources for the development of numerous aspects of (continental) tourist activities. With the inclusion of economic and non-economic activities, which are interested in the tourism development, tourism should become one of the generators of the economic development of the country. The tourism connected with special (selective) interests comprises a number of tourism aspects for which there is an appropriate demand. It shows a constant growth, with the expected tendency of even faster growth in the future. This comprises the interests for culture, archaeology, art, architecture, sport, music, hobbies, hunting and fishing, stay in the country, etc. This group of different interests is especially important in Serbia in those aspects of tourism in which a tourist product has already been formed to a certain extent. One of those aspects of tourism is tourism in rural areas. Concerning the statistical definition of rural settlements, in the Serbian practice there is no clear definition. According to the censuses from 1981 to 2011, the division on urban and other settlements in Serbia is based on the decisions of the municipalities, i.e. on the local level. A settlement that has a general urban plan could be awarded the status of an urban settlement. This is not justified, because all the settlements which were not declared as towns were classified as villages. According to this concept, about 70% of the territory of Serbia can be classified as rural territory, with 43% of the population who live there. For the needs of the Plan of rural development and in order to make a comparison with EU statistics, rural areas of Serbia are defined according to OECD criteria as municipalities with the population density below 150 inhabitants per 1 km². Based on that definition, 129 of 165 municipalities in Serbia are characterized as rural municipalities. In this case, rural areas cover up to 85% of the whole territory of Serbia with 55% of the population living there. The rural part of Serbia has about 3,900 settlements. In the rural regions of Serbia, defined according to OECD methodology, there are 1,365,000 households, which is 54% of the total number of households in Serbia (Đorđević-Milošević & Milovanović, 2012).

The development of tourist activities in the villages of Serbia does not have a long tradition. More organized flow of visitors in these areas began to take place about the middle of the 1970’s. However, at the beginning, it was not followed by adequate stimulation measures, nor it was given an appropriate significance. This was in the contrary to the available resources and the constant rise in the demand. That is the reason why significant results could not have been achieved, both in the structure and the quality of a tourist product, as well as the scope of the

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