Chapter 17

Sustainable Tourism Development of Rural Areas in Serbia as a Precondition to Competitiveness: Chances on the International Tourism Market

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ABSTRACT

Rural tourism has been developing in Serbia since the 1970s. However, from the beginning of the 1990s, the development stopped. The development trend was only continued in the second half of the 1990s, and fast-paced development began in 2006. Rural tourism presents in various forms in Serbia. They are conditioned by natural geographic terrain characteristics, social and cultural elements, and strategic plans for tourism development. What appears as a problem in the development of rural tourism is the question of its sustainable development. The development of rural tourism should under no circumstances jeopardise the natural and social environment in the rural areas, as these aspects are the very basic tourist attraction and the “push and pull” force that animates the tourist demand. The goal of this chapter is to investigate the resources available in Serbia and show the possible directions in the rural tourism development, mainly based on the principle of sustainable development, as a precondition for the country’s competitiveness on the tourism market.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-0451-1.ch017
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INTRODUCTION

The rapid industrial development in the second half of the twentieth century exhausted generic force for development. Since the 1970s, development of information and communication technologies and the service sector has been suggested as an alternative in order to provide the desired rate of economic growth. However, practice has shown they are not able to achieve the given goals.

The Industrial Revolution polluted the environment to a large extent. The concept of modern life in industrialised centres strengthens the tendencies of today’s people to spend their free time in the countryside, whereby rural areas are getting increasingly important. The World Tourism Organisation provides the fact that more than 75% of the total tourist demand is directed towards natural areas. However, it does not specify what percentage is directed towards rural areas. The Encyclopaedia of Tourism points out that rural tourism draws its sources for development in rural areas.

The Republic of Serbia has great potential for the development of rural tourism. More than 80% of the territory consists of rural areas, and these areas, according to the Census of Population, Households and Apartments in the Republic of Serbia 2011 (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2011), house about 44% of the total population. It should be added that there are substantial resources for the development of rural tourism in Serbia:

- Natural resources;
- Agricultural soil;
- Significant percentage of agricultural population;
- Traditional approach to agriculture;
- Solid basis for rural tourism;
- Good ecological preservation;
- Favourable conditions for organic production of “healthy” food, etc.

Expectations are that, through the implementation of the concept of sustainable tourism, preservation of tourism resources in rural areas could be managed, as well as improvements to the existing tourist offer. In this way, evidently available potentials for the development of rural tourism can be utilized as advantages, and the Republic of Serbia would become competitive as a tourist destination in the tourist market, both domestically and internationally.

BACKGROUND

The beginnings of the development of rural tourism recorded far back in history when the privileged social classes spent their leisure time in rural areas. This is confirmed by numerous buildings that were constructed and used for the purpose of stay and rest. These objects are present even today (summer houses, villas and buildings for similar purposes) (Vuković, Arsić, & Cvijanović, 2010, p. 48).

There is agreement among a large number of authors that massive migration of people from the rural areas began with the accelerated process of industrialisation. The authors Lane (1994), Feifer (1985), and Runte (1990) even mention the 19th century as a historical point in the development of rural tourism started. Its temporal localisation is mainly motivated by the number of tourists who began to visit rural areas in that time.