Multifunctional Agriculture as an Assumption and a Condition for Rural Development in Serbia: Special Turn to Rural Tourism

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ABSTRACT

Through its “synergic” character and multiplied effects which it has on total agricultural development in the environments in which it is being developed through the concept of agriculture’s multifunctionality, tourism offers a chance to alleviate negative tendencies and processes that burden villages in Serbia. Chronological review of the development of the concept of multifunctionality is determined within this work and it is pointed to the possibility of complementary development of agriculture and rural tourism. This work also points to recent accomplished results in Serbia.

Keywords: Agriculture, Multifunctional Agriculture, Multifunctionality, Rural Tourism, Sustainable Development

INTRODUCTION

The concept of multifunctionality of agriculture first appeared in 1992, at the conference in Rio de Janeiro (Brasil), and it was widely accepted in political and other documents related to conceptions of agricultural and village development during the nineties. The concept appeared as an excellent response to the necessity to represent a reformed European agrarian politics to the opponents of WTO in politically acceptable form. It should be emphasized that there has been no universally accepted definition of the concept since. In essence, multifunctionality confers that agricultural production should have, beside its basic functions, numerous non-production functions related to rural and sustainable development and strong social and demographic function as well.

In that sense, as an act of political choice, at the end of last decade the European Union conferred model of rural development known as “Common Agricultural Policy” which assumes multifunctional character of European agriculture and its role in economic and social development. Very important assumptions of
this model are institutional support and strong social consensus, because of great number of factors that determine this model.

Conventional understanding of agriculture which also included certain restrictions (integral, sustainable and organic) resulted in creation of a new concept which could unite primary agricultural production and its other important functions (social, demographic, cultural, etc.). Having in mind general social tendencies and choices that were presented in public, it is understandable why the concept took an important place in further strategic choices of agricultural development in Serbia.

THEORETICAL BASIS OF MULTIFUNCTIONALITY CONCEPT

During the sixties in the twentieth century certain estrangement from recent dominant traditional understanding of agriculture appeared. The reason for this lies in the fact that large number of authors noticed that agriculture was determined by large number of factors which hadn’t been treated adequately and which were, apart from its basic understanding, very important for its right understanding as well. In that sense, development of some alternative systems of agricultural production was started, like, for example, conventional, integral, sustainable, ecological or organic and multifunctional agriculture.

Multifunctionality of agriculture was described by “OECD” through the existence of production and non-production benefits which have appeared as a result of agricultural production. Non-production benefits have characteristics of externalities or public benefits, which are not directly measurable on the market. If this kind of interpretation is accepted, then it is necessary to analyze all functions of agriculture separately, in order to acquire right interpretation of the existence of production and non-production benefits that agriculture has on the society (Figure 1).

Functions could be divided on production, ecological and social.

a) Production function, the word itself describes, includes food production and raw material production for light industry and market. In that way certain food security is enabled and markets are well supplied with food whose quality is appropriate and whose prices are acceptable.

b) Social function means keeping population on rural areas, as well as even development of all parts of territories within a state. More precisely, agriculture represents generator of development in isolated areas where there is no possibility to employment population in industry or tertiary sector of agriculture.

c) Ecological function represents preservation of natural resources, as well as preservation of biodiversity function, but cultural inheritance of rural areas as well.

Large number of different points of view regarding multifunctionality of agriculture could be united in the standpoint that the concept was made by creators of certain agrarian, politic and economic measures. First and primary characteristic of presented attitudes was that they are subjective, ideologically and pragmatically motivated.

According to some opinions the concept appeared as a result of EU striving to justify and maintain agrarian subventions. The concept of multifunctional agriculture was discussed, in context of food production, conservation of space, environmental protection and planned land use, within documents of Special Committee on Agriculture of the EU, 1999. Later, appropriate functions were added to the interpretation of multifunctionality:

- Agricultural and production,
- Ecological,
- Cohesion (favours population integration, confers horizontal equality, but intercedes not to marginalize certain social groups),

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