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## IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING LOCAL POPULATION IN PROCESS OF DEVELOPMENT RURAL TOURISM IN SERBIA<sup>1</sup>

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**Summary:** *Since the mid-nineties of the twentieth century begins a rapid expansion of rural tourism in Serbia. In the first initial phase, the development has taken place without a clear plan and program. The first achieved positive results, influenced that Serbian Government since 2008 started with appropriate funding with aim to improve rural tourism development. Also, until 2008 there was no system of education and training sessions of the local population. Farmers were not educated and trained to provide adequate quality system services. On this way was undermined the competitiveness of rural tourist destination and positive results that rural tourism could bring. Expectations are that the implementation of appropriate methods of education and training could create conditions for providing better quality services, which will bring bigger effects of rural tourism and benefits to rural areas.*

**Keywords:** *rural tourism, destination, education, training, farmers.*

### INTRODUCTION

Rural development in Serbia has been defined as an economic, social and environmental priority by Government of Serbia. The diversification of the rural economy in a socially, economically and environmentally sustainable way is need order to improve the quality of life, to reduce the poverty level, as well as to fight against social and environmental degradation. Tourism has been identified as key sector which can drive the diversification of the rural economy and can support Serbia. (1) Rural areas cover more than 80% of Serbian territory and in these area lives approximately 44 % of total population (2). From this data could be concluded how important are this area for Serbian economy and society in all.

Serbia doesn't have natural sources to develop mass tourism (sea coast and adequate mountain resorts to develop ski tourism). In tourist development emphasis is on several tourist products: tourism in cities, wellness and spa tourism, culture tourism, tourism on the Danube River, rural tourism, tourism events and transit tourism. (3)

Expansion of rural tourism in Serbia began spontaneously in the 1970s. Starting process were in villages with longest tradition in central Serbia, but an increasing number of villages that developed rural tourism nowadays is located in the regions of eastern and western Serbia (the municipalities of Kosjerić, Knić, Valjevo, Brus, Gornji Milanovac, Ivanjica, Kraljevo, Lučani, Mionica, Požega, Prijepolje, Rača Kragujevačka, Sokobanja, Užice, Zlatibor, Čačak, Šabac as well as the traditional farming estates in Vojvodina). (4)

From the years 1990 – 2000 Serbia was passing through the dramatic period of tourism history. The number of tourist arrivals felt for ten times, as well as tourism income. The consequences of the international isolation and war strongly reflected on the level of tourism services, infrastructure and global supply, and political and economic problems hurt tourism image. The years after 2000 was starting by recovery of tourism industry and the comeback Serbia on the international market. (4)

Main tourist offer of rural tourism in Serbia are (5):

- The life in traditional and healthy way,
- Ethno villages (such as Sirogojno or Kostunici),

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- Nature, culture and hospitality at one single place,
- Villages tourism (agritourism),
- Ecoorganic tourism,
- Food tourism,
- Events (e.g. Guča),
- Hunting and fishing etc.

One of the main problem is how to achieve service quality standards prescribed by Serbian Law and some important tourist international organization (such as for example, WTO, EUROGITES etc.). On that way it is important to educate and training local population about importance of rural tourism as additional source of farm income and how to deliver adequate service quality to tourists.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The Institute of Agricultural Economics, Belgrade in period 2007-2008 realized project „*Tourism as chance to develop rural areas*“. Project was realized at the territory of City of Pančevo in framework of special project by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management of the Republic of Serbia. Aim of the Project was to educate inhabitants about all comparative advantages that rural tourism can bring them. Some of topic which has been presented to farmers:

- Tourism creating additional sources of income for farmers;
- Strengthening agriculture through sales of agricultural products to tourists;
- Preventing the depopulation process;
- Tourism as factor of development trade in rural areas;
- Tourism as factor of development traffic;
- Strengthening of the entire infrastructure through tourism development;
- Tourism as factor of development service sector;
- Revival of cultural, ethnic manifestational and all content in these areas etc.

Experience shows that tourism provide economic growth, financial and social security, etc. On the other hand, the specific of the project required consideration of certain topics, such as, for example:

- educate the population about the concept of tourism;
- pointing to the social, economic, the social importance of tourism development in rural areas;
- illustrate the complementarity of tourism and agriculture;
- creating conditions and showing how the organization of tourism in rural areas;
- education on marketing concept and its application in tourism;
- educate people about sustainable development of the Tourism;
- presentation of all forms of tourism that can be implemented in a given environment, etc.

This paper present results of the Project and through a concrete example make base for conclusions which would helpful to implement rural tourism in other regions in Serbia.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSIONS

Bearing in mind the trends in the tourism market to move away from the concept of mass tourism, recently posted an increase of interest in rural tourism and special interest tourism. This is consistent with the fact that in the last decade of twenty century as an act of political affiliation promoted model of rural development „CAP“ (*Common Agricultural Policy*) by EU, which assumes the multifunctional nature of European agriculture and its development role in the economy and society as a whole. Agriculture as a primary industry has far-reaching interest in complementary cooperation with all sectors of the economy. Also, with tourism. (6)

As an integral part of tourism is increasingly being promoted locally, regionally and nationally. Serbia has favorable conditions for the development rural tourism, which in the future

must necessarily use it. Seen from this perspective, it is necessary to strengthen the role of rural households. (7)

The first step in the process of stopping negative trends that characterized rural areas (migration from village to town, depopulation, negative economic rise etc.) is to develop rural tourism. Raising awareness of the local population must be organized in cooperation between Tourist Organization of Serbia (National Tourist Organization), local authorities and regional chambers of commerce.

Organization of appropriate courses have aim to show the importance of tourism in community development, where the focus is primarily to explained a way how to successfully implement rural tourism.

The quality of staff is one of the crucial components in acquiring and maintaining the competitiveness of the tourism market. From their knowledge and skills (know-how) how to meet the needs of consumers/tourist depends largely on the attractiveness of a destination.

Basically we can make differentiation between formal and informal system of education. (8) Today trends are to emphasize concept of education and training managers in all levels. WTO (2002) states that education and training is essential in the development of rural tourism, especially in the initial stage of development. Training and education are carried out at several management levels (9):

- 1) **Training the Trainers** – Training is necessary for individuals involved in leadership positions at local level (i.e. administration, product development, marketing). With the appropriate knowledge and skills, these individuals in turn are well positioned to train other individuals at an operational level.
- 2) **Training for Rural Tourism Providers** – Rural tourism product providers, or operators, require training and education in a range of subjects as follows:
  - Customer care
  - Language skills
  - Product standards
  - Understanding of partners needs
  - Product knowledge
  - Basic marketing
  - Internet
- 3) **Training for officials** – Many officials working at government or municipality level are unaware of the potential benefits of tourism. Training and educational programs are also necessary for this key group.

Baum, T., (1995) makes a distinction between competence (10):

- to manage with a problems of guests (tourists), with care and sensitivity;
- to communicate in written and oral form;
- to achieve a positive working atmosphere among the staff;
- to obtain professionalization in every aspect of tourist business;
- to achieve the positive attitude of consumers as well as positive relationships with them;
- the employee to submit to achieve the desired operation.

a) **Formal system of education** should be open to all management levels (top, operational and functional). All employees in management, doesn't matter, the private (companies, businesses, etc.) and public sector (government institutions, ministries, agencies, tourism organizations, chambers of commerce, etc.) must be led through formal system of education.

Depending on the needs and responsibilities depending on the needs ("required") level of education. In the private sector, for example, the owner of appropriate restaurants is desirable to have a university degree, although today in practice usually is not the case.

As a critique accomplished to the formal system of education is that a large percentage so far operated through the model of complete separation. An alternative model is a long-term cooperation between educational and institution of tourism. Also, the formal education system almost entirely a function of staff development for mass tourism, while other types of tourism were

marginalized. Given the fact that rural tourism in our country is still in the early stages of development cooperation (formal and non-formal education system) and their networking is, especially, is preferable. This would be made more positive results in practice.

Business in tourism today is characterized by constant innovation, and is therefore necessary that management at all levels, from "top" to the functional, has a formal education, but also to continue monitoring qualify for innovations that everyday occur in the tourism business.

**b) Informal education system.** In Republic of Serbia so far, in a very small percentage conducted training process of local population to provide appropriate quality services to tourists. This role should have implemented local tourism organizations, regional chambers of commerce and local government units, non-governmental organizations, etc.

Insistence on educating farmers, primarily holders developmentally oriented households, a condition in which must be based development in rural areas. A program to educate the population is a basis on which the future must be based tourism development.

It is expected that on this way of training will enable that acquired knowledge on the theoretical basis and practical exercises in mastering certain skills in the field of tourism, should enable farmers to planning, organizing and coordination tourist activities at their household, village, and local communities as small tourist resorts destinations.

In the later stages of the development of rural tourism in order to foster further development is necessary to implement appropriate extension services which will carry out education and the exchange of information with the owners of rural tourism households make a key contribution to the sustainable development of rural tourism in Serbia

**c) Experiences that Institute of Agricultural Economics, Belgrade had in process of education and training farmers.** Institute of Agricultural Economics, Belgrade (IAE, Belgrade) realized Project „*Tourism as a chance for rural development*“ at the territory of City of Pančevo. This project realized in three phases:

- preparatory phase,
- implementation phase, and
- the phase measurement of achieved results.

*The preparatory activities* have been carried out all necessary activities in order to start the process of education. Some of them were:

- field visits,
- discussion with farmers,
- establishment of working groups,
- drafting,
- printing of brochures and promotional material, both in writing and in electronic form.

*In second phases of direct education*, participants were informed in detail, with the program of lectures. Then, were chosen location for education, and finally teaching and training events were implemented.

Given the complexity and requirements of the program implementation, the educational activity was directed only to a certain number households. There were a competent holders or registered members developmentally oriented farms. Depending on the size of the settlement, the educational program included up to 20 participants.

Some of the activities were carried out in the first two phases are:

- meetings with a large number of farmers at the pilot area, and than were formed small working groups with the selected composition;
- IAE prepared and produced promotional material, in written and electronic form;
- organized and implemented a series of theoretical lectures with active participation of all attended;
- illustrated practical examples;
- during the teaching process, applied some form of testing to determined the content and the like;

- at the end, we summarized the results of the joint work, and eliminated possible ambiguities and insisted on further cooperation between all participants.

Practice showed that farmers on the basis of such education programs can:

- understand the place and role of available natural and human (anthropogenic) resource potential in tourism development;
- realize the impact of tourism and its application to social, economic, and rural development;
- evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of tourism in achieving their goals and interests;
- get all the necessary information about the experiences of other communities that have opted for this type of rural development;
- evaluate the available natural and heritage resources and predict own chances for tourist development;
- insights into the role of sustainable development for the environment;
- escape the consequences of neglect of natural and social resources of their own development;
- understand the importance of tourism in the overall social development.
- reduce the risks in creating their own income and others.

After the project, as time has passed, in research which IAE conducted, many farmers started to think how to implement rural tourism activities in their own households and how to prepare their farms for possible tourist visits. The main reason for this is that farmers want to raise farm income.

## CONCLUSION

Since 2008 Government of the Republic of Serbia, basically the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Works give support for rural tourism development. Also, with incentives Government support the expansion and improvement of economic activities in rural areas such as (11):

- Construction and renovation of buildings modeled on authentic farmhouse "salaši", "vajati" and other objects;
- Restoration of authentic buildings in the countryside - mills, wine cellars, cloth watermills, and the like.
- Procurement of equipment for the enrichment of content on offer rural tourism, promotion of rural tourism, events that foster women's associations in rural areas, as well as activities that are focused on women's employment in rural areas;
- Procurement of raw materials and equipment necessary for the maintenance of the old traditional crafts, arts, different farm skills and activities.

Different forms of tourism can develop complementary with rural tourism, such as, for example, tourism, events, hunting and fishing tourism, special interest tourism and they will together represent an opportunity to improve the overall economic and social state in rural areas. However, the development of tourism must not be left to chance, and to local ingenuity farmers. It must be the subject of serious analysis and planning at all levels.

All management levels from Government, relevant ministries, and officials at the regional and municipal levels up to the level of local communities, as well as a numerous tourism organizations and various business organizations, through the development of rural tourism can and must find their own economic interest in rural tourism development. For this reason, it is necessary a systematic approach, through process of education and training which representing certainly a starting point for future rural tourism development. It is essential that farmers build a special relationship with the tourism industry, to put its own resources into the function of its tourism development.

Expectations are that multiply positive effect that tourism can make, will have influence on the overall rural development and it can be quickly felt. It is necessary to educate and inform in

detail about the significance and consequences for use of natural and anthropogenic sources in the development of rural tourism all users. This process must take place continuously.

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