

ASPECTS REGARDING ECOTOURISM AND RURAL TOURISM IN SERBIA

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Abstract. In this paper authors present a point of view regarding rural and ecotourism development with reference on potentials of Serbia. This country can offer many natural beauties in which rural and ecotourism could be developed and there is no doubt that it would benefit both, the country itself and the tourists who visit it. Potential is there, actions are needed!

Key words: rural tourism, ecotourism, development strategies

INTRODUCTION

Ecotourism is a responsible path through an unaltered or partly changed natural area that protects the climate and enhances the socioeconomic status of local communities. Eco-tourists are environmentally aware people and organizations who work to mitigate the harmful impacts of mass tourism. [2]

Serbia, as a region without a coastline, must invest in eco-tourism, which would be high on the list of growth goals. The country is not dealing with this properly, but the subject is being addressed locally. It is undeniable that Serbia has a untouched environment and that amazing samples of nature's remnants for us to explore can be found all across the country.

Ecotourism is a tourist experience that involves visiting places with protected natural values in order to explore and rest while also encouraging the conservation and restoration of natural values. The ideals of sustainable tourism form the foundation of ecotourism. By the active involvement of the local population, it leads to the restoration and enhancement of the local area's natural and cultural heritage. [8]

Ecotourism is a subset of ecological nature-based tourism that includes rural and cultural components. Ecotourism entails responsible behavior on the part of all parties (service suppliers, visitors, etc.), with the aim of minimizing environmental impacts and meeting ecological, social, cultural, and economic sustainability requirements [1,12].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The main aim of this paperwork is to present the author's attitude toward evolution of a potentially highly profitable type of tourism on one side and relocating the people back to nature on the other side. In order to achieve that, they used SWOT analysis and different publications from the specialized literature, sources which were mentioned in the biography section and as research method-observation.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Ecotourism especially is still an undeveloped branch that can be improved through various methods and regulations. Considering the pandemic we are living with now, ecotourism is imposed as one of solutions in which tourist can satisfy their needs combining few crucial things such as: staying in healthy environment, being safe during pandemic and experiencing new kind of satisfaction caused by enjoying the natural beauties.



Figure 1. National park "Tara", Serbia



Figure 2. Nature park "Stara planina", Serbia

According to Robert Chambers: rural development is a strategy that enables a certain group of people, poor rural women and men, to get more for themselves and their children than they want and need. It includes assistance to the poorest among those seeking livelihoods in rural areas. The group includes small farmers, people without property and people without land. [3]

According to the concept of rural tourism provided in „Encyclopedia of Tourism“ (2000), rural area is a basic resource for the development of rural tourism, and the production of this form of tourism is induced by the need of urban residents for rest and recreation in rural areas. [6]

According to Nunkoo and Smith, tourism is credited with the power to encourage both socio-economic and economic development. There are several examples of whole areas where tourism is the primary activity. They also have competitive economic advantages over non-tourism developing areas, so it is not shocking that tourism is linked to development. [7]

Rural tourism, although still a minority tourism industry, contributes significantly to the rural economy. Its contribution can be expressed not only in financial terms, but also in terms of employment, commitments to funding sustainability, motivation to implement innovative work methods, and introducing new energy into sometimes-weak economies.

Churches have lost pastors, castles have lost battles, farm buildings have been too small for latest machinery, railway stations have lost trains, and there is no traffic, but those items can still be used, and that is tourism.

A wide range of benefits has been identified as a potential outcome associated with promoting the development of rural tourism such as:

- Expansion of farm operations
 - Using products on farms in new and innovative ways
 - Development of new niches of consumer markets
 - Raising awareness of local agricultural products
 - Providing incentives for the improvement of living and working space on farms, as well as leisure facilities
 - Increasing long-term sustainability for agricultural enterprises
- The WCU (World Conservation Union) pioneered the idea of ecotourism in 1996.

Table 1.

Rural tourism and benefits for rural development

Retention of jobs	Rural tourism revenue can help hold employment in industries such as retail, shipping, hospitality, and medical care. It may also provide extra revenue for farmers, as well as foresters and fishermen in some cases. Job preservation may not be as economically appealing as job creation, but by assisting in the sustainability of small communities, politics becomes critical to the wellbeing of marginalized communities.
The creation of new jobs	Job formation is most common in the hotel and catering industries, but it can also occur in a variety of other types of rural tourism, including festivals, travel guides, ethno museums, carriers, historians, medics, and many others.
New commercial prospects	Tourism generates new business markets for industry. Also rural businesses that are not actively interested in tourism can benefit from tourism activity by establishing strong partnerships with tourism facilities where local produce can be used as part of the local tourism deal. Rural tourism encourages the growth of complementary industries such as gas stations, as well as the establishment of new businesses to meet the needs of visitors in the areas of hospitality, leisure sports, and the arts.
Young People's Prospects	Tourism is often marketed as an innovative and rising industry that capitalizes on the excitement and passion of young people. Career prospects include increased training opportunities and direct participation in the operation of tourism companies, especially in small communities.
Community Diversification	Community diversity is an essential characteristic in many European mountainous areas. Forest regions have faced severe socioeconomic challenges in recent years, owing in part to the mechanization of felling and manufacturing, and in part to declining prices due to decreased demand for timber.
Increasing arts and crafts sales	Many regions and nations have a particular place in their traditional history for arts and crafts. Many studies have shown that tourism will benefit the arts and vice versa. Art and tourism collaboration will and must be a two-way street. Many cities are already using arts and crafts festivals as a publicity tool to entice people to visit their regions.
Landscape protection	Landscape restoration is becoming a more critical form of heritage preservation. The landscape is important for rural tourism. The use of tourists has political advantages as well as economic benefits, as it will create employment in the maintenance and repair of conventional ecosystems.
Historically built environment	Rural tourism can support a traditionally developed environment in two ways. Many historic buildings now charge a premium for maintenance and landscaping of their houses and gardens. Second, these are historical structures that have become obsolete and are no longer used for their intended function.

Source: Ramesh K.M.,2016 [9]

Ecotourism is on the increasing, according to a 2017 World Tourism Organization survey (UNWTO), and is quickly becoming one of the most common travel options.

Through its operations, ecotourism seeks to:

- Draw visitors to natural environments
- Have enjoyable and informative activities with the goal of biodiversity conservation
- Contribute to improving the local community's environmental consciousness
- Lead to the area's economic growth via the growth of entrepreneurship and growing the local population's job opportunities [14].

Ecotourism has many characteristic advantages (figure 3) [5].

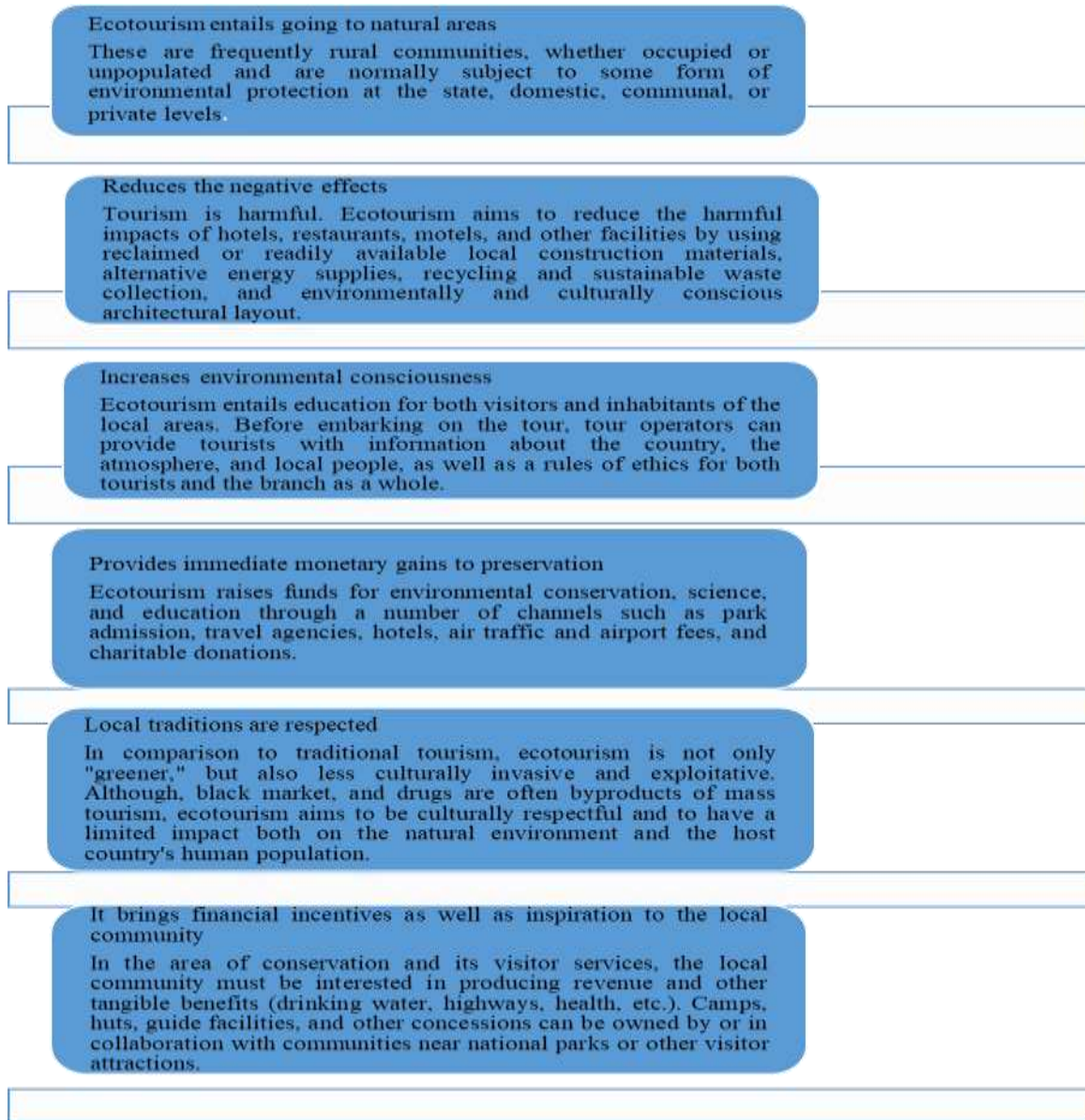


Figure 3. The importance of ecotourism

The extent of ecotourism growth in Serbia is not enviable. The causes for this are a lack of adequately integrated ecotourism centers, as well as a genuine effort to increase public consciousness about ecotourism.

Serbia has a lot of potential for ecotourism growth such as: 464 places of special significance for nature protection and improvement are legally protected in Serbia: 5 national parks, 177 nature parks, 16 outstanding landscapes, 71 stringent and rare nature reserves, 325 natural monuments (253 botanically significant natural monuments and 72 geological and hydrologically significant natural monuments), and 3 protected habitats. [11]

In addition to the above, Serbia has an abundance of mountains, rivers, and lakes, which represent a major opportunity for the growth of this form of tourism. Despite each of these potentials, nature is also being exploited, this cannot be positive because nature has its own equilibrium, on which we depend. Another cause for the slow growth of ecotourism is a lack of interest among both future creators of this tourist commodity and intermediaries. If things change in the coming years, ecotourism, as a small business,

should contribute significantly to tourism in Serbia, opening doors for all people seeking harmony and pure nature. [10]

Ecotourism destinations in Serbia that could be the beginning and support of the development of ecotourism are, for example, nature park Stara Planina, National park Djerdap, National park Tara. For now, ecotourism in Serbia is represented mainly in Vojvodina's farms and villages, and in a very small number in relation to the potential.

Table 2.

Swot Analysis of Ecotourism in Serbia

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Existence of major tourist resources (protected natural resources, developed sports facilities, ecotourism as a complementary type of rural, event, educational, wine, and other types of tourism) - Diverse flora and fauna, important for scientific research activities - A plethora of artistic and historical treasures - The presence of diverse content manifestations - Strong road layout and location - A pleasant climate conditions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A scarcity of lodging - There aren't enough specialized professionals - A scarcity of ancillary and support services (toilets, garbage disposal facilities) - The absence of a knowledge center - Ineffective tourism promotion - Absence of a web portal on eco-tourism - Insufficient camping area
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Incorporation of ecotourism in Serbia's tourist bid - Enhancing marketing efforts - A mixture of social and environmental factors - EU funds - Collaboration with the region's countries and make a joint bid in the promotion of ecotourism - Fairs devoted to ecotourism only 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Insufficient financial spending for park maintenance - Neglect of tourism by decision makers - Actually, there is a lack of interaction with nearby regions and countries (this parameter turns into opportunities in case of good cooperation) - The lack of consequence - Low focus on foreign markets

Special nature reserve Uvac as a potential leader of ecotourism in Serbia

It is a critically important natural commodity that is secured. Its geographical location is in southwestern Serbia, and it encompasses the municipalities of Nova Varos and Sjenica. This reserve has a total area of 7543 hectares. The meanders, which are around 100 meters high, are a rare attraction. The biggest draw of this natural park is that it is the only one of its kind in the Balkans, and it is home to griffon vultures. There are about 300 of them in the reserve, and they are vital to the environment. [15]

If case of visiting this reserve, following sites are crucial [13,4]:

- Uvacka region lakes: Zlatarsko, Uvacko and Radoinjsko lakes;
- Caves, which has a total of 5, namely: Usacka, Ledena, Tubića cave, Basdarska and Javorska;
- Ethno village Stikovo, which is located at the foot of Zlatar and is a kind of example of authentic ethno-motifs of this area. In this village there is a church and a school from the 19th century. A special attraction is the fact that the village preserves the culture and tradition of former times with houses and auxiliary facilities, as they were built more than 200 years ago;
- Monasteries and churches: Dubnica (15th century), Janja (late 13th and early 14th century), Holy Trinity Monastery in Stikovo (17th century), log cabin church and mosque in Nova Varos and Sjenica;
- Remains of Jerina's town (6th century);

- Stone bridge on Zvale, immovable cultural property.



Figure 4. Special nature reserve Uvac, Serbia

CONCLUSIONS

There are countless benefits of rural and eco-tourism but due to their unpopularity unfortunately this types of tourism are still quite underrepresented. There is no doubt that they require perhaps even more funds than "conventional" type of tourism, but the same thing happens with organic and conventional cultivation of agricultural products. The more people switch to organic production, the cheaper and more affordable it will become. This also refers to rural and ecotourism and as soon as the consciousness of the people themselves becomes different and we turn back to nature and spend time in it, then, for example, eco-tourism will become the normal "obligation" of every individual. Serbia with its natural beauties has a great potential in this area but the question still remains whether there will be enough political willingness and financial support toward investments in this area which will result in becoming more „green“ and more eco as a country in total.

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