

LIVING IN A RURAL TOURISM DESTINATION – THE LOCAL COMMUNITY'S PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Purpose – The paper investigates the residents' attitudes regarding the social, economic and environmental impact and the benefits of rural tourism activities in Vojvodina (Serbia) that implicates local community's support for further tourism development.

Methodology – A case study approach was adopted to allow deeper understanding of a "contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context". The paper is based on a survey of 254 local residents who live in rural tourism destinations in Vojvodina. These villages were selected based on several criteria. The survey was conducted between June and September 2016. Data was inserted in a SPSS database, permitting descriptive and inferential analysis.

Findings – The findings indicate that personal benefits from rural tourism development and community involvement have significant effects on positive impacts of rural tourism and can affect the quality of life and support for further tourism development in rural areas of Vojvodina. Also, the key results demonstrate a clear valorization of the economic and social over the environmental impacts.

Contribution – Empirical evidence demonstrates that residents have a positive attitude towards tourism and tourists, particularly valuing social interaction with tourists and the economic impacts and benefits of tourism activities. At the same time, through tourism, local inhabitants often feel a boost in their self-esteem, pride and sense of belonging to a special place. One of the main contributions of this paper is the actualization of the issue of residents' attitudes since it is under-researched topic in the Republic of Serbia.

Keywords residents' attitudes, rural tourism destination, tourism impact, Vojvodina (Serbia)

INTRODUCTION

The development of tourism in rural areas can produce many positive economic and non-economic effects for agritourism farms, but also for the entire local community. Rural tourism can encourage the development of underdeveloped areas, employing a large number of household members, exercising of "invisible exports", the placement of domestic products (embroidery, knitting, folk costumes, etc.), and therefore the preservation of customs and the return of old forgotten crafts, creating the possibilities for the return of the population in rural areas and others (Bošković 2012). Although it involves only a small part of the tourism market, rural tourism provides an important contribution to rural economies, not only in financial terms but also in terms of job creation, encouraging the adoption of new working practices, but can also serve as an "injection" of new vitality weakened economies of rural areas. Rural tourism enables the development of rural areas in the following ways (Knowd 2001; Irshad 2010): the retention of existing and creation of new jobs, opportunities for young people,

provision of services, the process of diversification of the community, rural tourism increases a sense of pride and revitalize rural communities, preservation of rural culture and heritage, increased sales of art and craft products, preservation (protection) of natural environments, improving living and working conditions.

While the development of rural tourism can bring numerous benefits, on the other hand, it can cause many problems (OECD 1994): *environmental threat* (peace, tranquility and authentic nature of rural areas could be seriously jeopardized, and it is essential that adequate management prevent any degradation), *socio-cultural threats* (more tourists may adversely affect the natural world, and thus can affect the socio-cultural world of rural communities). Social scientists have long considered that the impact of "advanced" culture to the "traditional" culture always brings changes in traditional culture, but not in the opposite direction). *The issue of housing* (some areas which successfully developed rural tourism, such as the South West of England, and areas of the Alps, have revealed that the success of the tourist market brought the problem with accommodation capacities), *"nonlocal entrepreneurs"* (some studies have shown that in extreme cases up to 80% of tourism enterprises in small towns and villages are owned or controlled by a person from outside these communities).

1. THE IMPACT OF TOURISM ON LOCAL COMMUNITY¶

The development of tourism contributes to changing economic, socio-cultural and ecological framework of an area. Socio-cultural changes indicate that tourism changes the local people, their culture and lifestyle, while the economic changes mostly reflect in the economic and trade potential of destinations. Very often, tourism brings changes in the nature and landscape of an ecosystem. Each of these groups will be explained.

1.1. The economic impact of tourism

Tourism is now one of the fastest growing and most dynamic economic sectors in many countries around the world. Significant rates of growth and development, foreign currency inflow, infrastructure development, new management techniques and training affect different sectors of the economy and have positive effects on the economic and social development of the country. Basic indicators that can be monitored, as a result of the economic effects of tourism development are: the number of tourists and overnights at facilities, destinations, regions, continents; number of employees and earnings of employees; achieved revenues of organizations that provide direct or indirect services to tourists, then the distribution of investment capital by region, etc. (Yunis 2009).

On the basis of the economic importance of tourism is the consumption of tourists on places they visit. The money they earned in places of permanent residence, tourists spend in the tourist areas, and as a result of this spending, generated economic effects occur on the economy of the countries from which tourists come, and thus on the economies of countries that tourists visit. In this way, tourism brings direct consumption effects on the economy (effects for the participants of the tourism industry that directly sell services to tourists) and indirect (effects for those that supply the tourism industry).

1.2. Socio-cultural impact of tourism

Social impacts of tourism include „changes in the quality of life of inhabitants in tourist destinations emerged as a result of the development of any kind of tourism on a destination“ (Wall and Mathieson 2006, 227). If these effects are widely regarded then we can talk to what extent tourism affect changes in systems of collective and individual values, behavior patterns, community structure, manner and quality of life (Hall and Lew 2009).

However, socio-cultural positive effects of tourism development are significant for a destination. Tourism connects people of all cultures, different religions and values. Travelling brings people into contact with each other, providing cultural exchange between guests and hosts, and promote understanding between people and cultures. This increases the chances that people develop mutual compassion, tolerance and understanding, but also reduces prejudices (Spanou 2007).

Tourism helps to raise awareness of the local financial value of natural and cultural attractions, and it can create a sense of pride in local and national heritage and interest in its preservation. In addition to the foregoing, the positive socio-cultural effects of tourism on the area in which it develops may be the next (Tomka 2012, 46): renewal and restoration of existing historical sites, buildings and monuments, the transformation of old buildings and places of tourist facilities, protection of natural resources, improving the aesthetic quality of the space, improving the availability of space, creating a new space, the protection of area from other activities that are in conflict with tourism. So, tourism brings many positive effects for the country, or to the area in which it is developed, however, tourism can produce a greater number of adverse socio-cultural effects on the local community if its development is not controlled. In poor and developing countries, these negative impacts are particularly pronounced because of the weakness of their economic and social system. These negative effects lead to the emergence of "less" serious problems such as congestion of area (large concentration of tourists leads to congestion of roads, streets, tourist centers, monuments, beaches, ski runs, ski lifts and generally to overload all resources and related infrastructure and superstructure, which affects the degradation of the area and the deteriorating quality of life (pollution, noise, crowds, etc.), to the serious problems that are reflected in the following (Terrero 2014): loss of local identity and values, displacement of the indigenous population, crime, child labor in tourism.

1.3. The environmental impact of tourism

One of the key elements in the development of tourism is the environment with which tourism is developing very complex relationships. During the beginning of the development of tourism, environment and tourism were restoring a relationship of coexistence which meant that tourism develops in space, changing it, but not in a negative sense. Since the seventies of the twentieth century with the advent of mass tourism, tourism is identified as one of the activities which has significant negative consequences and leads to the destruction of tourism resources (Holden 2000). In this sense, the relationship between tourism and the environment is increasingly marked as the relationship of conflict. It is well known that tourism activity is not homogeneous

and that the relationship between tourism and the environment variable from place to place, and we should bear in mind that tourism and the environment can achieve the relationship of symbiosis when both parties benefit from this relationship.

The development of tourism implies the existence (and construction) of the necessary infrastructure (roads, airports, electricity, hotels, restaurants, etc.), and the development of such systems often affects the environment. With the completion of construction of necessary infrastructure, the impact does not stop but continues through the organization of tourism. Tourism affects the environment in the following ways (Tomka 2012): air pollution, water pollution (seas, lakes, rivers), air pollution, ie. creating a noise, reduction of natural and agricultural land, destruction of flora and fauna, degradation of geological forms.

2. BASICS OF RURAL TOURISM OF VOJVODINA (SERBIA)

Autonomous Province of Vojvodina is the northern province of the Republic of Serbia and occupies an area of 21,500 km², which is 24.3% of the total area of the Republic of Serbia. According to the population census from 2011, in Vojvodina live 1,931,809 inhabitants (National Bureau of Statistics 2014). Vojvodina is divided into seven districts (North Banat, Central Banat, South Banat, South Backa, North Backa, West Backa and Srem), 45 municipalities and 467 settlement, of which 52 are urban and 415 are rural settlements (AP Vojvodina Socio-Economic Profile 2010). About 43% of the population live in rural areas. Rural households are currently in the process of significant changes that have an impact on rural development, as well as each member of the household by putting them in a position to adapt to economic survival.

In the second half of the twentieth century, rural households are experiencing significant changes. Changes in the demographic and socio-economic structures of the rural population have also had an impact on households. The number of total and active agricultural population is reduced, which leads to a reduction in the number of active population in family households. The average household is reduced because young people go to the cities in search for better conditions of life and work, and all this leads to changes in the structure of family households and farms.

In rural areas, agriculture is still the primary economic activity and main source of income. However, agriculture is characterized by low productivity and competitiveness, a high level of extensive production with low income per household. In addition, low-income agricultural producers, foreign direct investments in agriculture are below 1% of the total investment. The purchasing power of consumers is also very low (Andric Tomic and Tomić 2010). Gross domestic product in agriculture is higher than the gross domestic product in the food industry, which means that a significant part of agricultural production is consumed or exported in its raw state. The share of agricultural population in the total population of under 11%. Significant features of rural areas of Vojvodina are: the low level of diversification of economic activities, high unemployment rate (over 20%) (Pejanović 2010; Rodić et al. 2013; Regional Spatial Plan of AP Vojvodina 2011), and the rural population is faced with the poverty.

Because of all of this, there is a need for an additional source of income. The development of rural tourism is one of the possibilities. There are natural predisposition for such a development, but not well-designed social activities. For example, of the 415 rural settlements in Vojvodina, only 17 have been partially developing some forms of rural tourism (Jelic et al. 2010; Andric Tomic and Tomić 2010).

Rural development covers a much wider area of agriculture, rural development policy achievements beyond farms and producers. It can be understood as a collection of various socio-economic activities defined by rural policy. Essentially, these are activities that lead to the improvement of living and doing business in the country, the most common include: investment in means of agricultural production and processing, construction and rehabilitation of rural infrastructure, education and training of the rural population, promotion of rural tourism, promotion of traditional and cultural values, environmental protection. The main problems, which for many years are slowing down the development of rural areas are related to the migration of rural population to urban areas, unfavorable age structure of rural population, insufficient investment in rural development and rural life and others (National Programme agriculture Serbia 2010-2013 2010).

3. EFFECTS OF RURAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN VOJVODINA- RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Methodology

A case study approach was adopted to allow deeper understanding of a “contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context”. The paper is based on a survey of 254 local residents who live in rural tourism destinations in Vojvodina. These villages were selected based on several criteria - existing tourism accommodation, attractions, tourism demand and diversity of tourism products and resources. The survey was conducted between June and September 2016, by trained research assistants. Data was inserted in a SPSS database, permitting descriptive and inferential analysis.

3.2. The socio-demographic profile of the respondents in Vojvodina

The study involved 254 respondents from Vojvodina. We explored the socio-demographic characteristics that may be relevant to the subject. These characteristics are gender, age, education, status, income and length of life in the village.

The research involved a higher percentage of women (64%). The sample consisted of residents of Vojvodina between 18 and 65 years. The largest number of respondents was between 21 and 40 years old. Most of the respondents had high school (69%). According to the status, most of the respondents are employed (42%). When we consider the variable "income", the most respondents earn between 200 and 400 euros. Of importance is that the majority of the interviewed subjects live in the village for more than 15 years.

In addition to the distribution of respondents according to socio-demographic characteristics, and it is possible to partition the region, from which they come. Most of them come from the Backa region (103 respondents), while the least from Banat region (56 respondents).

3.3. Life in rural tourism destinations in Vojvodina - results

The questionnaire sought to establish views on the impacts that tourism has on the village in which respondents live. Respondents' answers will be shown below for each item, as well as the average response in each area impacts - environmental, economic and socio-cultural. We used descriptive statistics to describe the tendency of respondents' answers.

3.3.1. The environmental impact of tourism in rural villages in Vojvodina

Attitudes about the environmental impact can be read from respondents' answers to seven items and their average score. Descriptive statistics for the whole area and individual items are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for the scale *Environmental impact of rural tourism*

	Mean	Std. deviation	Skjunis	Kurtosis
Environmental impact	2.9887	.62593	-.286	.121
Tourism contributes to the increasement of traffic jams	3.11	1.350	-.185	-1.235
Tourism leads to increased noise in the village	3.16	1.281	-.338	-1.005
Tourism contributes to increasing the amount of waste and pollution (air, water ...)	3.15	1.241	-.254	-.931
Tourism reduces the quality of the local culture and landscape	2.17	1.218	.791	-.416
The development of tourism in the village should be avoided in order to better preserve the village	1.80	1.115	1.398	1.169
Tourism contributes to the construction of sports facilities, roads, health facilities..."	3.99	1.161	-1.050	.236
Tourism contributes to the preservation of natural resources (eg, rivers, forests, mountains ...)	3.54	1.197	-.402	-.705

Source: authors, based on analysis of data from the research

When we look at the overall environmental impact (evaluated as the average of the responses for each item) it can be seen that the arithmetic mean was 2.98, which indicates that the respondents are not sure of the environmental impact of tourism on their village. The standard deviation indicates that most of the answers range from *mostly do not agree* or *mostly agree*, but certainly the most oriented response is *I'm not sure*. Indicators of skewness and kurtosis distribution indicate that the distribution of responses does not deviate from normal.

Respondents mostly agreed with the statement "*Tourism contributes to the construction of sports facilities, roads, health facilities...*" (the arithmetic mean is 3.99). Agreement with this statement shows that residents of rural areas of Vojvodina believe that some of the revenue from tourism is invested in the construction of a general, and tourism infrastructure that can be used by tourists and the local community. Respondents also agree with the statement that "*Tourism contributes to the preservation of natural resources (eg, rivers, forests, mountains ...)*." On average, respondents answered with *I do not know* and *I mostly agree*. Using the natural environment by tourists brings economic benefits, and can secure retention and job creation, as well as the activation of abandoned spaces for recreational purposes.

According to the presented descriptive statistics, we can see that the respondents at least agree with the statement "*The development of tourism in the village should be avoided in order to better preserve the village*". The average of responses is 1.80, indicating that respondents generally or mostly disagreed with this statement. Also, measures of Skjunis and Kurtosis indicate that the distribution of answers to this question varies from the normal. Also, respondents mainly disagreed with the statement that "*Tourism reduces the quality of the local culture and landscape*". These results indicate that the local population supports the development of tourism and believes that tourism would not be jeopardized if the resources are developed in a sustainable way.

It may be mentioned that the items "*Tourism contributes to the increasement of traffic jams*" and "*Tourism leads to increased noise in the village*" indicate greater flatness of distribution and that on these issues replies accumulate on the very end of the distribution.

3.3.2. *The economic impact of tourism on villages in Vojvodina*

After the environmental impact of rural tourism, the attitudes of respondents on a scale that deals with the economic impact of rural tourism are described. Descriptive statistics for the entire scale and for the individual items is provided in the Table 2.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics for scale *Economic impact of rural tourism*

	Mean	Std. deviation	Skjunis	Kurtosis
Economic impact	3.8454	.67163	-1.176	2.342
Tourism affects the growth of the local economy because the money that tourists spend	4.17	1.066	-1.363	1.231
Tourism increases the number of new facilities (cafes, souvenir shops ..)	4.20	1.056	-1.301	1.014
Tourism brings more positive than negative economic effects	4.07	1.086	-1.198	.905
Tourism creates the conditions for new jobs for the local population	4.19	1.064	-1.545	2.005
Tourism contributes that people come back to the village	3.75	1.145	-.626	-.420
Tourism stimulates the development of agricultural production	3.77	1.087	-.756	-.059
Tourism brings benefits to only small number of people	2.98	1.199	.065	-.806
Tourism increases the price of real estate in the village	3.70	1.142	-.732	-.148
Tourism increases prices of certain local products and services	3.78	1.034	-.714	.112

Source: authors, based on analysis of data from the research

The economic impact of tourism is rated with the average score 3,845. This result indicates that respondents largely agree that there is an economic impact of tourism, although there are a number of respondents who are not sure.

When we look at individual items which describe the economic impact, it can be seen that the respondents mostly agree with the items "*Tourism affects the growth of the local economy because the money that tourists spend*", "*Tourism increases the number of new facilities (cafes, souvenir shops ..)*", "*Tourism brings more positive than negative economic effects*" and "*Tourism creates the conditions for new jobs for the local population*". The arithmetic means of these items are above 4, which indicate that some of the respondents completely agree with these statements. These results suggest that the population of rural areas agrees that tourism brings more positive than negative economic effects, in particular that tourism influences on creation of new jobs and on opening new facilities, which will also affect the number of employees and those who will remain in the village to live.

At least agreement is obtained with the statement "*Tourism brings benefits to only small number of people*". According to the values of standard deviation and arithmetic mean, it can be seen that the answers range from *mostly do not agree* or *mostly agree*,

while the average response is *I'm not sure*. This suggests that community members are not entirely sure to whom tourism brings benefits.

3.3.3. Socio-cultural impact of tourism in rural villages in Vojvodina

At the end is the descriptive statistics for socio-cultural impact of rural tourism. Descriptive statistics for the entire scale and the individual items is given in Table 3.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics for the scale *Socio-cultural impact of rural tourism*

	Mean	Std. deviation	Skjunis	Kurtosis
Socio-cultural impact	3.4518	.51573	-1.013	1.878
I would like to see more tourists in my village	4.28	.999	-1.428	1.428
Tourism reduces the feeling of isolation	3.73	1.154	-.718	-.189
Thanks to tourism, the locals are proud of their village	4.18	1.055	-1.339	1.139
I wish that my village is more known	4.38	.971	-1.749	2.666
Tourism provides funds for the restoration of historic buildings	3.87	1.099	-1.037	.658
Tourism allows tourists to learn a lot about the local culture and tradition	4.23	.986	-1.634	2.593
Tourism brings more good than bad things to the local culture	4.03	1.055	-1.137	.884
Thanks to tourism, I have learned new things	3.81	1.101	-.763	-.013
Tourism affects the local population to stay here to live	3.89	1.092	-.801	-.049
Tourism brings together community and encourage people to work together	3.85	1.047	-.714	-.032
Usually I do not pay attention to tourists in my village	2.43	1.241	.492	-.690
Tourism increases stress in life of local population	2.32	1.150	.486	-.518
Tourism causes changes in our local culture	2.59	1.139	.104	-.662
Thanks to tourism, the local population spends less time with family and friends	2.10	1.056	.492	-.721
Tourism causes the occurrence of crime (theft, vandalism ...)	2.10	1.146	.726	-.418

Source: authors, based on analysis of data from the research

Based on the results presented in Table 3 it can be seen that the average response to questions about the socio-cultural impact is between *I'm not sure* and *I mostly agree*.

Respondents mostly agree with the statement "*I wish that my village is more known*". Also, the distribution has a high Kurtosis indicating a small dispersion of responses. In addition to this statement, respondents highly agree with the statement "*I would like to see more tourists in my village*", "*Tourism allows tourists to learn a lot about the local culture and tradition*" and "*Thanks to tourism, the locals are proud of their village*". With all of these statements, respondents mostly agree or strongly agree.

On the other hand, the respondents at least agree with the items "*Thanks to tourism, the local population spends less time with family and friends*" and "*Tourism causes the occurrence of crime (theft, vandalism ...)*". The average respondent's answer is 2.10, or mostly disagree. The distribution of answers does not deviate much from the normal. For other statements respondents answered between *I'm not sure* and *mostly agree*. This indicates that there is a gentle agreement with statements concerning the socio-cultural impact of rural tourism.

CONCLUSIONS

Rural areas are very sensitive environment, and may undergo changes or damage due to the rapid changes of any kind. Tourism is one of the powerful means of change. Rural areas in many countries are "guardians" of the natural and cultural heritage, and research shows that "rurality" is a unique characteristic of rural areas, which can be important for attracting tourists, as they search for a high quality of unspoiled nature, peace, tranquility and personal contact that small, family businesses in rural areas could provide. The sharp rise in the number of tourists may lead to the so-called. urbanized impacts, and to the destruction of rural areas. Tourism, more than any other industry, relies on the "goodwill" of the local population, i.e. the ability of the community to contribute that tourists feel welcome. Local people should be satisfied with the fact that tourism is developing in their territory, to believe that tourists will not have a negative impact on their daily lives, it will not affect the increase in the cost of housing, and will not impose new and unwanted value systems.

In this paper authors explored some dimensions of the views of the inhabitants of villages in Vojvodina on tourism's cultural, environmental and economic impacts and benefits, as well as their perceptions about host-guest interaction.

The current development of tourism in rural areas of Vojvodina is not characterized by overcrowding and the presence of large number of tourists, and they do not disturb the peace of the community. If there is an increase in the number of rural tourists in the coming period, we must take care that they do not bring negative environmental effects on members of the local community.

Empirical evidence from the research demonstrates that residents in all villages have, in general, a positive attitude towards tourism and tourists, particularly valuing social interaction with tourists and the economic impacts and benefits of tourism activities.

The main economic impacts identified are related with the income generated by tourists and the business opportunities. However the distribution of economic benefits is seen as uneven, excluding farmers and the general population. The main beneficiaries of tourism activities identified by the inquired are the ones directly involved in those activities.

Environmental impacts are hardly perceived as negative. On the contrary, tourism activities are considered as a way to foster the preservation of natural resources, landscapes and the environment. The same can be said about cultural and social impacts which are perceived as very positive in almost all villages. In fact, local population seems to value interaction with tourists in a very positive manner, despite the superficiality of the contacts established (mainly occurring in public places and when giving information to tourists). Tourism is also seen as an opportunity to break the villages' isolation and to enjoy a lively atmosphere, through the possibility it opens of meeting diverse types of people and to learn on other cultures and ways of life.

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