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Natasha DANILOSKA¹⁾
Katerina HADZI NAUMOVA-MIHAILOVSKA²⁾

RURAL TOURISM AND SUSTAINABLE RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Abstract

Tourism is one of the largest and fastest growing industries today, characterized with immanent need for constant diversification of products and destinations offered. Recent trends in this industry indicate increased demand for new alternative types of tourism, among which most popular are nature-related and rural tourism.

This paper aims to increase an understanding of the importance of rural tourism for sustainable rural development and is therefore divided into two sections. In the first section the definition and main forms of rural tourism will be given. This section provides an overview of rural tourism, types of rural tourism, and its benefits for rural areas. Second part of the paper is dedicated to explanation of the concept and principles of sustainable rural development and identification of role of rural tourism in it. The paper concludes with recommendation of some ways of enhancing development of the rural tourism, which can contribute to the sustainable rural development. Main intention is to point out possible solutions and concepts that will revitalize rural area features and activities will make them tourist attractive and will incorporate rural tourism within the social, cultural, and economic elements of rural areas.

Key words: rural tourism, sustainable rural development

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¹⁾ PhD, Institute of economics – Skopje,
e-mail: natasha.daniloska@ek-inst.ukim.edu.mk

²⁾ PhD, Institute of economics – Skopje, e-mail: katerina@ek-inst.ukim.edu.mk

Introduction

The process of globalization, together with the dynamic development of modern technologies of mass communication erases boundaries between sovereign state, allowing unrestricted flow of goods, people, idea and capital. In such constellation, tourism has emerged as one of the most dynamic and fastest growing industries worldwide representing about 6% of international trade in goods and service and accounting for 30% of the world's export of commercial services. Globally, tourism also ranks fourth as an export category, after fuels, chemicals and automotive products.³ It is estimated that thanks to the touristic sector GDP globally will rise from 9.2% (US \$5,751 billion) in 2010 to 9.6% (US \$11,151 billion) by 2020. The contribution of tourism to employment is also expected to rise from 8.1%, or 235,758,000 jobs across the world in 2010, to 9.2%, or 303,019,000 jobs, by 2020.⁴ Along with this astonishing numbers, the tourism industry will also have cope with bigger responsibility for its wide impacts, on the economy, on the environment, on societies and on cultural sites.⁵

The complexity of tourism and tourism needs of the world population lead to the change of tourism demand. Various scholars emphasize that the motivations of tourists to visit destinations have changed dramatically and now tourists are more interested in specific things, enthusiastic activities and, most importantly, in the quality experience of touristic products and services. Recent trends in tourism industry indicate increased demand for new, alternative and specific types of tourism. These types of tourism must possess certain characteristics that are well known to the local population so they can be established and respected as a real touristic product. Such an offer should possess unique values that will emphasize authenticity, uniqueness, etc., and can be used for promotional activities. Also, it should be explored, researched and designed according to the requirements of specific customers. Alternative and specific types of tourism most commonly are realized through vacation activities and/or arrangements within special facilities or destinations that are interesting for some groups of people

³ World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) Tourism Highlights, 2010, available at: http://www.unwto.org/facts/eng/pdf/highlights/UNWTO_Highlights10_en_HR.pdf

⁴ Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), Progress and Priorities Report, 2010, available at: http://www.wttc.org/bin/pdf/original_pdf_file/pandp_final2_low_res.pdf

⁵ Dowling R., Moore S.A., Newsome D.: „Natural area tourism, ecology impacts and management”, Channel View, New York, 2001, pp.123-128.

with special interests or affinity (school and student youth, elderly people, women, persons with disabilities etc.), where tour operators provide all kinds of special facilities worldwide (nature, sports, wine, culture, painting, adventure, opera). In the same time, the development of the environmental movement in the 1980^s helped to the development and the increasement of the availability and the range of holiday types which was more environmentally friendly than these which was associated with traditional touristic offer. This environmentally friendly tourism types can be broadly defined “as forms of tourism that is made to be friendly to the environment and to respect social and cultural values of the communities, and which allow both hosts and guests to enjoy positive and worthwhile interaction and shared experiences”. All this gives a chance for rural areas to become equally involved with the contemporary tourism offer. Of course, such an offer has to be accompanied with a certain potential and adequate human resources who can engage those potentials on tourism market. All this puts rural tourism in a strategic position to make a positive contribution to the sustainability of rural areas and the development of the surroundings and their communities.

Rural Tourism

For tourism to be considered as rural tourism, it should have characteristics that are typical and specific to a rural area including small settlements, low population densities, agriculture-based economies and traditional societies. This type of tourism unites all special forms of tourism in rural areas. Main contextual characteristic of rural tourism is that it meets the needs of urban man for free space and gives him new experiences of nature and rural life and thus is in contrasts with urban space. Rural tourism is performed upon area that is originally used as a living and working space of rural population and agricultural producers that is area covered with arable, uncultivated and inhabited space outside the cities. It consists of the traditional village and rural architecture, together with entire rural landscape where traditional culture, specific knowledge and skills, habitation, clothing, nutrition, folk dances, songs and legends are developed, created and vivid. The unity of all this elements represents the distinctive and valuable part of the tourist value that should be integrated into rural tourism offer. This complexity of rural tourism resulted with many definition, each of them having specific aspect in focus. Namely, according to geographic and demographic

definitions, rural tourism is: “A multi-faced activity that takes place in an environment outside heavily urbanized areas. It is an industry sector characterized by small scale tourism business, set in areas where land use is dominated by agricultural pursuits, forestry or natural areas”. Product-related definitions point out that: “The rural tourism product could be segmented to include such product components as rural attractions, rural adventure tours, nature based tours, ecotourism tours, country towns, rural resorts and country-style accommodation, and farm holidays, together with festivals, events and agricultural education”, while tourist experience-related definitions see that: “Rural Tourism should be seen as offering a different range of experience to those offered in big cities” and that “the emphasis in rural tourism is on the tourist’s experience of the products and activities of the area”.⁶

Consequently, in an attempt to unite all previously mentioned definitions, rural tourism has to possess following characteristics:⁷

- Located in rural areas.
- Functionally rural-built upon the rural world’s special features of small and medium size enterprise, open space, contact with nature and the natural world, heritage, „traditional” societies and „traditional” practices.
- Rural in scale-both in terms of buildings and settlements-and, therefore, usually small-scale.
- Traditional in character, growing slowly and organically, and connected with local families. It will often be very largely controlled locally and developed for the long term good of the area.
- Of many different kinds, representing the complex pattern of rural environment, economy, history and location.

Together with above mentioned characteristics, one must bear in mind that most important element for development of rural tourism and rural areas are tourist activities. Yet, achieving sustainable rural development and establishment of attractive rural destinations requires far more than natural resources or favorable conditions for recreation in nature. Indeed, apart from the aforementioned potential, development and

⁶ Lane B.: „What is rural tourism”, *Journal of sustainable tourism*, Volume 2, No.7, 1994, pp. 63-72

⁷ Roberts, L., Hall, D.: „Rural Tourism and Recreation: Principles to Practice”, *Leisure and Tourism Management Department, Scottish Agricultural College, Ayr, UK, 2001*, p. 17.

sustainability of a rural tourist destination requires presence of different types of services to guests accompanied with systematic approach to preserving the environment.

The diversity of tourist activities included within rural tourism includes heritage tourism (sometimes also called cultural heritage tourism), nature-based tourism/ecotourism, agritourism, as well as partnership-based approaches, such as scenic byways and heritage areas.

Segments of rural tourism products:⁸

- Agrotourism, in which tourists see and participate in traditional agricultural practices without destroying the ecosystems, the host bases.
- Eco-tourism, as a form of tourism that presents natural resources while maintaining the values and local population welfare.
- Cultural, ethno or cultural heritage tourism, mainly related to culture, history and archeology of the area destination.
- Natural tourism, mainly preferred for its recreational value (hunting, fishing, horse riding etc.) or activities related to events, festivals, etc.

Major form of rural tourism is agritourism, which refers to the act of visiting a working farm or any agricultural, horticultural or agribusiness operation for the purpose of enjoyment, education, or active involvement in the activities of the farm or operation. It includes taking part in a broad range of farm-based activities, including food processing, farmers' markets, „petting” farms, roadside stands, and „pick-your-own” operations, shearing sheep, mowing, engaging in overnight farm stays and other farm visits, as well as visiting agriculture-related festivals, museums, and other similar attractions.⁹ Agrotourism became popular in the late nineteenth century and by the end of the twentieth century has become even more attractive. To an agricultural producers and farmers it represents a possible option to complement and increase revenue from the estate and also to diversify the risk associated with agribusiness in general. Agrotourism is common in many parts of the world and is becoming increasingly popular. In same time, agrotourism is very

⁸Smith V., Eadington W.: „Tourism alternatives, potentials and problems in the development of tourism”, Wiley, Chichester, 1992, p.32

⁹Ryan, C.: „Equity, management, power sharing and sustainability-issues of the “new tourism”. *Tourism Management*, 2002, pp. 17-26

important for rural communities as well as for urban areas. It can provide several advantages: income, employment, use accommodation, activities, natural resource conservation, recreation and education.

Despite its benefits, it is important to point out that agritourism is not an acceptable form of business activity for all agricultural producers and farmers. Namely, those wishing success in agrotourism must possess specific personal characteristics, as well as suitable resources within their households and premises where they wish to pursue this activity. Having necessary physical and natural resources and people who will provide needed service to the guests, is an absolute imperative. Additionally, there must be an adequate legal system that will enable establishment of a proper businesses entity, and the existence of the necessary support from the local community. In terms of personal characteristics, rural entrepreneurs (agricultural producers and farmers) primarily have to be open, very motivated for this job and ready to make their everyday life „shared” with guests, as well as to have some managerial skills. Of course, as for any other type of business, starting capital is needed, accessible location and adequate resources related to the character of the service offered.

Eco-tourism is one of the latest forms of rural tourism. Typically, it is primarily connected with protected areas, the use of simple lodging, the strict application of environmental legislation, and with a limited number of visitors. Eco-tourism can be developed in protected areas or even undiscovered areas, but main requirement that chosen locations must not be disturbed, that is, the environment, the natural harmony of the original appearance of the landscape remains untouched. Within the broader tourist industry eco-tourism is a growing market niche, with the ability to be an important tool for sustainable development. At the same time, it often operates quite different from other segments of the tourism industry, because eco-tourism is defined through its results in sustainable development: protection of nature, education of visitors about sustainability and benefits for the local people. The most common reasons offered by ecotourists for undertaking a given trip are a desire to enjoy scenery and nature, and to encounter new places and experiences with the imperative to „get away from it all” of less importance to the ecotourist than, say, the adventure tourist. What is typical for each eco-tourism is that eco-tourists usually seek experiences that give them a sense of closeness with the natural activities and the local population. At the same time, ecotourism generates income for conservation and economic benefits for communities living in rural and remote areas. The

attributes of ecotourism make it a valuable tool for conservation. Its implementation can:¹⁰

- give economic value to ecosystem services that protected areas provide;
- generate direct income for the conservation of protected areas;
- generate direct and indirect income for local stakeholders, creating incentives for conservation in local communities;
- build constituencies for conservation, locally, nationally and internationally;
- promote sustainable use of natural resources;
- reduce threats to biodiversity.

One of the risks of introducing ecotourism into a rural areas is that they can become dependant on tourism to generate income. This can be risky because tourism is a notoriously volatile economic activity, which is subject to booms and busts. Ecotourism is also very seasonal and the tourism market tends to fluctuate over time.

Cultural, ethno or cultural heritage tourism is one of modern tourism industry's most dynamically developing branches, in today's global tourism market both from the theoretical and the practical point of view. Cultural tourism in rural areas is mainly related to culture, history and archeology of the destination. This type of rural tourism concentrates on local traditions and people as the main attractions and can be divided into two types: The first and conventional type is where tourists experience culture through museums and formalized presentations of music and dance in theatres, hotels or occasionally in communities themselves. In many instances, this has lead to the „commodification” of culture as it becomes adapted for tourist consumption, often resulting in degradation of the hosts' cultural traditions. The second type is more anthropological and contains a strong visitor motivation for learning from indigenous culture rather than simply viewing an isolated manifestation of it. This type of tourism is often a companion to, or an element of, ecotourism. Interesting about this type of tourism is that it is considered to be domestic and international tourism with since for the both tourists it is enjoyable to visit historical monuments and monumental heritage, including cultural landscapes, which are located in the rural areas. In same time, cultural tourism gives them an opportunity to experience the

¹⁰ Conservation by Design: „A Framework for Mission Success : The Nature Conservancy" , Arlington, Virginia, 2001, p. 210

places and activities that authentically represent the cultural heritage of local communities.

Natural tourism, mainly preferred for its recreational value (hunting, fishing, horse riding etc.) or activities related to events, festivals, etc. Natural tourism mostly refers to the process of visiting rural areas for the purpose of enjoying the scenery, including plant and animal wildlife. Nature-based tourism may be either passive, in which observers tend to be strictly observers of nature, or active (increasingly popular in recent years), where participants take part in outdoor recreation or adventure travel activities.

Rural Tourism for a Sustainable Rural Development

The concept of sustainable development in general has been around for centuries but it was not until 1987 that official use of the term „sustainable development” received international attention and recognition, when it was defined as: „development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”.¹¹ After many years of research and practice, nowadays sustainable development is mostly understood as a holistic concept with complex interrelation between social, economic, and environmental aspects of development. Also, depending on the circumstances in which it is being applied, sustainable development can mean many different. In order to better understand its complexity, one popular framework, called „Sustainable Development Triangle”¹² shows sustainability issues as being classified into three broad categories: social/political, environmental and economic issues.

¹¹ World Commission on Environment and Development, called Brundtland Report in 1987

¹² World Conservation Strategy. Developed in partnership by The World Conservation Union (IUCN), United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP), World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF). (1991). World Conservation Union, available at: <http://www.gatewest.net/~green/from/11.html>

Figure 1. Sustainable Development Triangle



Source: World Conservation Union, 2003

From the Figure 1, we can clearly see that main aim of sustainable development is to provide a balance between the economy, the environment and society. As shown on Figure 1, principal idea is that all sides are interdependent and must coexist in order to promote successful long-term development. Clearly, within this broader understanding of sustainable development, we can place the definition for sustainable rural development, namely: „Rural Development is a deliberate process of sustained and sustainable economic, social, political, cultural and environmental change, designed to improve the quality of the life of local population of a rural region”¹³.

Although tourism in general is not mentioned into the original definition, it is not hard to conclude that it can be incorporated into sustainable development concept if it respects its three main principles. After our discussion about essence and types of rural tourism, it is not hard to see considerable overlapping between core principles of rural tourism and sustainable development. Thanks to its variety and holistic approach, rural tourism can make significant contribution to rural economies. In the context of sustainable rural development, its contribution can be seen not only in financial terms, but also in terms of

¹³ Dower, Michael: „Concepts and Principles for Sustainable Rural Development”, Paper on the Euroacademy Summer School. (Held from 9-21st of August, 2002, in Gotland). Developing Sustainable Rural Tourism *Thematic guide. Pan-European Summer Academy for Sustainable Rural Development*. 2002, p.16

jobs, nature conservation, adoption of new working practices, and the revitalization of passive and poor rural areas.

In financial terms, rural tourism not only provides additional income for agricultural producers and farmers, but it also contributes to both job retention and job creation for the population in rural areas. New jobs are typically available in hotel and catering services, but also in transport, retailing, and in information/heritage interpretation. While benefits of job creation are obvious, we must point out that job retention is not less valuable since for many families it is absolutely crucial for their survivor.

Since the rural tourism is interrelated with many services, it also can trigger expansion of complementary businesses. Even those rural businesses not directly involved in tourism can benefit from tourist activity through developing close relationships with tourist facilities where local foods can be used as part of the tourism offering in a locality.¹⁴ Together with the job creation, business opportunities that arouse from rural tourism are especially important for young rural population since they can secure their future.

Since the pleasant feeling of the guests is one of the most desired things to achieve, rural tourism encourages conformity to an ideal image of community which can result in growth of personal ties and community solidarity. Thus the basis for community solidarity shifts from shared cultural background to shared image.¹⁵ Additionally, in rural tourism the „sense of place" is a fundamental element in both the tourists' and host community's feelings of what makes the area attractive to visit and live in. This sense of place is maintained partly through rural museums which play a vital role in preserving heritage.¹⁶

Finally, one of the crucial preconditions for development of rural tourism is the landscape and its preservation. Only with protection of the environment and preservation of the unity of rural areas, rural tourism will bring previously mentioned economic and social benefits. Namely, rural tourism can work as a form of sustainable development if it is

¹⁴ Boo, E.: „Making Ecotourism Sustainable: Recommendations for Planning, Development, and Management". In T. Whelan (Ed), *Nature Tourism: Managing for the Environment*, Washington, DC: Island Press., 1999, pp. 187-199.

¹⁵ Honey, M.: „Ecotourism and Sustainable Development. Who owns Paradise?", Island Press, Washington D.C., 1999, p. 82

¹⁶ Lindberg, K.: „Economic Impacts. In D. B. Weaver (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Ecotourism*" (363-378). New York: CABI International, 2001, pp. 363-378.

includes all three areas of the sustainable development triangle and brings benefits to current and future generations.

Conclusion

In this paper we have made an attempt to outline the connection between rural tourism and sustainable rural development. Analysis and comparison of both concepts made it clear that rural tourism represents a real opportunity for the revival and sustainable development of rural areas. However, in order for rural tourism to fit within the patterns of sustainable development and bring benefits to the local communities, protect the environment, and be economically viable, it must be comprehensive and account for the complexity of issues that have been mentioned in this paper. Additionally, we must bear in mind that every rural area is special, but thanks to its many types, rural tourism can contribute to their developing as a tourist destination and as a place pleasant to live, work, visit and investment.

Development of rural tourism is influenced by many factors that varies greatly among rural regions and depends on a host of factors including work force qualifications, characteristics and seasonality issues. Therefore, not all rural areas are equally attractive to rural tourists and simply providing accommodation facilities does not guarantee success.

In fact, a positive outcome is by no means guaranteed without sincere and foolhardy participation of the local community. If rural population love and respect their landscape, their way of life, their dialect, their cuisine and their heritage-they will develop valuable touristic product that can support sustainable development of the area. However, it needs to be said that rural tourism is not the magical solution to all rural problems but thanks to its benefits, it certainly is one of the many opportunities that rural communities must consider when facing the challenge of sustainable rural development.

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