

EVENT TOURISM AS A POTENTIAL GENERATOR OF DEVELOPMENT OF THE RURAL TOURISM IN THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

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Abstract

Events certainly have their social role and are significant for preserving tradition and cultural heritage, but they could also have an economic effect if integrated into the tourist offer and promoted on both the domestic and international tourism market. According to the current data in the Republic of Serbia, there are around 1.000 registered events of various sorts, although the actual number is estimated to be even higher. The objective of this paper is to present ethnographic and gastronomic events held in the Republic of Serbia, and by identifying them and their most frequent destinations, point to the opportunity of the rural tourism development. If the events are chronologically and territorially integrated in the tourism product, there is a possibility to transform the comparative advantages into the competitive ones and valorize them on the tourism market.

Key words: *rural tourism, ethnographic and gastronomic events, Republic of Serbia.*

Introduction

Tourism is nowadays a leading service industry in the world. It makes 13% of the world's overall service industries, and it demonstrated quite vitality in the conditions of economic crisis. According to the data of the World Tourism Organization, tourism growth in 2011 was 5%, while in the first six months of 2012 it was 4%. As far as the financial ability is concerned, prevailing are the tourists who are on a lower to average financial ability scale, while when it comes to age structure, majority of them belong to the young and elderly age groups. It is estimated that in future tourists would be more oriented towards the continental tourism, while the seaside tourism will be neglected (Unkovic, 2012).

When it comes to development of continental tourism, we believe that in the Republic of Serbia advantage should be given to rural tourism development, taking into account that even 85% of the territory is rural and inhabited by 55% of the total population of Serbia. It should not be forgotten that rural tourism is given a priority in the Tourism Development Strategy of the Republic of Serbia¹ among other types of tourism related to special interests of the tourists. Rural tourism² is a type of tourism comprising all the tourist activities taking place in rural regions, which can be considered a tourist offer of the particular region in question. Most of the rural regions in the Republic of Serbia kept their traditional architecture, still possess valuable ethnic features, clean environment, rich cultural heritage and diverse gastronomic offer, while the people living in these areas are well-known for their hospitality.

According to the statistics of the tourist association's archives, rural tourism began to live in the Republic of Serbia during the 70s of the 20th century, when 50 villages i.e. 800

¹ *Tourism Development Strategy of the Republic of Serbia*, Official Gazette, RS No. 91/2006

² *Ruralni turizam*; Eng. Rural tourism; Ger. Ferien auf dem Land; Fr. Tourisme rural; Ital. Turismo rurale.

households offered the capacity of around 3000 beds (Muhi, 2009). According to the official statistics from 2009, a total of 145.354 overnight stays were registered specifically in rural tourism, while 2.556,128 overnight stays could fall under the category of rural tourism, which altogether makes 2.700,000 or 27% of the number of registered stays on the territory of Serbia in all of the tourism sectors. There are no official data on number of registered agricultural households dealing with village tourism but according to the estimation of local tourist organizations, Serbia possess the capacity of 10.567 beds in village households, and it is assumed that 32.747 more could be employed in rural tourism. In addition, according to the estimates, 10 billion dinars of income was generated from rural tourism in 2010, which makes 16% of the total of 62 billion dinars as the overall direct tourism gross domestic product for Serbia in 2010.³

According to the previously stated, it can be concluded that the Republic of Serbia does possess the comparative advantages, but they are insufficiently exploited for the purpose of rural tourism development. This is backed up by the fact that the average occupancy is only 4%, as well that it varies significantly throughout the year. In order to achieve the continuity of the tourist flow, it is necessary to connect the rural tourism offer with numerous various events that are held in the Republic of Serbia during the year. Ethnographic and gastronomic events are certainly considered the most important for the rural tourism offer, and therefore are the subject of study in this paper.

Meaning and significance of the events

Event (Lat. manifestatio) stands for a public performance or event (Klajn and Sipka, 2006). Tourism events mean public performance or displaying something in public, as for example exhibitions, celebrations, or various performances of human achievements. They are special for its uniqueness and ability to reach goals and effects of tourism, and are organized in places where there exists a special interest (Bjeljac, 2006).

Tourism values that are not of a monumental nature but represent people's spiritual heritage, are presented in the form of events. Numerous phenomena and objects can be called tourism values only when presented through the events. In addition, the value of each particular event is determined by its location and timing. This confirms that good traffic connection of the populated areas, together with other tourist attractions and event timing, directly influence successful organization of the event. Well-thought-out organization and strong logistics contribute to achieving any of the desired goals, be it a presentation of achievements, enrichment of the seasonal offer, keeping the residents together in the place of origin, or raising interest among the accidental visitors. The most common form of presentation and tourism offers is through commercial tourism events, folklore events, and business-oriented ethnographic events. Such events advertise their commercial products through entertainment, tradition, folklore, customs, and usually have the aim of selling products (Kosic, 2009).

Events are integrated in tourism and represent an undeniable part of human civilization from its beginnings. Moreover, they stand for a global phenomenon of growing importance through the means of the event industry. They are: (a) of social (cultural) importance, which is seen through preservation and promotion of tradition and cultural heritage; (b) income generators; (c) efficient means of attracting both foreign and domestic tourists; (d) an opportunity to mobilize local resources, contractors and entrepreneurs; (e) excellent means of promoting the destination, local culture and community values but also the country where the event takes place. Serbia is the only European country recording a 2% growth in foreign tourists' visits in 2009, in comparison to 2008, and the reasons can be found in the following

³ *Master plan održivog razvoja turizma Srbije*, www.mert.gov.rs, (11.09.2011.)

events: Universiade in Belgrade, traditional annual festivals like Guča, Exit, Belgrade Beer Fest, which altogether drew in around one million visitors, 10% of whom were from abroad (Delic, 2012).

Ministry of Finance and Economy of the Republic of Serbia recognized the importance of the events for tourism development and tends to continually raise investments in this type of tourism product. In 2007, the share of subsidies allocated to the events, in the overall budget for subsidizing the non-profit sector, was 33%, and in 2011, this share grew to 58% (Pindzo, 2012).

Events have social importance when it comes to preserving tradition and cultural heritage, but they can also have commercial value if integrated in a single tourism offer and purposefully promoted on domestic and foreign tourism markets. According to the data available in the Republic of Serbia, there are around 1.000 registered events of various sorts, although the actual number is estimated to be even higher. Considering this, Serbia can be rightfully called an event country. The best known ones record visits of 50.000 to even 150.000 tourists. We believe that in order to fully exploit the event tourism potential, it is necessary to connect (integrate) this type of tourism with another tourism product and create a unique offer for both the local and foreign tourism market, which would in turn have a favourable effect on balance of payments and reducing unemployment in Serbia. To be precise, if the event tourism is integrated with the rural tourism, which is further proposed in this paper, the result would be reducing unemployment in rural regions, ensuring survival of our villages, which would have a beneficial effect on the demographic picture, bearing in mind the fact that every fourth village in Serbia is simply dying out. On the other hand, rural tourism would increase tourists' spending on non-accommodation services. "Most revenues in tourism are generated through the accommodation services, serving food and beverages, while the accompanying services generate almost negligible income (Boskovic and Njegovan, 2012)

Table 1 shows results of the latest research on characteristics of the events in the Republic of Serbia, presented at the 45th Fair of Tourism in Novi Sad.

Table 1. SWOT analysis of tourism product/events in Serbia

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Human resources (educated staff, enthusiasm, voluntary work, willingness to work in teams); * Collaboration with other stakeholders on local level (educational and cultural institutions, local media, food manufacturers, etc.); * Opportunity to create interactive activities depending on the programme of events. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Inadequate staff expertise (planning, organization, management, monitoring, marketing); * Lack of motivation of staff employed in tourism; * Professionalism; * Lack of awareness among the local people of the importance of tourism events and cultural heritage; * Standardization of the programme and activities to match the type of event; * Inadequate product branding and profiling; * Unrealistic budget and financial analysis; * Lack of originality (tendency towards kitsch); * Unsustainability of events.
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Multiethnicity and multiculturality; * Wealth of natural and cultural heritage; * Increased number of tourists in Serbia; * Tendency of growth in number of tourists from abroad; * Growth in accommodating capacities; * Public-private partnership; * Existence of strategic paper regarding the development of this product on national level; * Networking, integration and clustering of 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Cumbersome procedures for getting various permits and slow local administration; * Danger of losing the local cultural identity due to inadequate programmes of the events; * Political changes; * Inadequate souvenir offer; * Inadequate product branding and profiling in the Law on Tourism; * Limited capacities of particular areas; * Devastation of environment;

events;	*Insufficient exploitation of existing funds;
*Educating the organizers of events and local tourism organizations;	*Inability to perceive tourism as important economic activity on a local level;
*Availability of EU funding;	*Having many different events at the same time;
*Revitalization of areas for agricultural production;	*Small-scale, poorly organized events damage the image of big and recognizable events, which are held in the same place but at different times.
*Revitalizing the tangible and intangible cultural heritage.	

Source: Research results: Improving the quality of tourism product/event, overall result of the workshops, which were conducted between December 2011 and September 2012 by the Ministry of Finance and Economy of the Republic of Serbia, Sector for Tourism, Chamber of Commerce of the Republic of Serbia, regional chamber of commerce and Tourist Organizations of the City of Novi Sad and Vršac, whose results were presented at the 45th Fair of Tourism in Novi Sad on September 27, 2012.

Importance of the events for rural tourism development

The appearance of rural tourism on the world tourism market is related to specific demands of the tourists, who regardless of the experience potentially acquired through the mass tourism, still wish to use this type of tourism to meet different cultures, customs, habits, food and way of life. The mentioned differences can best be seen in rural environments of particular states, having in mind that such environments are the guardians of tradition since they managed to preserve, despite the mass culture, all of the unique characteristics of certain peoples and nationalities. Ethnographic and gastronomic events, which are common in rural areas, are exactly the right guardians of tradition and perfectly reflect typical food and way of life of certain peoples. Therefore, they are invaluable in keeping the traditional agriculture, old crafts, richness of folklore, national costumes and folk celebrations.⁴

According to Dr. Demonja, in order to develop rural tourism, it is not only enough to have tourism economies but also the catering infrastructure together with well organized rural tourism destinations.⁵ On the other hand, according to the analysis done by Dr. Kušen, and under the assumption that tourists spend at least three days at the rural tourism household, after satisfying the basic subsistence needs, they have on average ten to fourteen spare hours a day for activities proposed by the host i.e. tourism product designer, to make their stay more pleasant and interesting.⁶ It is necessary to develop an integrated rural tourism product in the Republic of Serbia that would be based on comparative advantages that the country has for the development of rural tourism, but also on numerous ethnographic and gastronomic events held mostly in rural regions. Ethnographic⁷ events preserve the customs, culture and tradition of peoples, while gastronomic⁸ ones tend to keep the tricks of trade in preparing food. In order to highlight the originality of a certain locality, it is necessary to avoid having similar events in different places, but enhance exactly the event that is authentic for a certain region instead. It is recommended to territorially and chronologically connect several events, create an

⁴ Radović G., Pejanović R., Njegovan Z., (2012), *Etnografske i gastronomske manifestacije kao indikatori razvoja ruralnog turizma u Vojvodini*, Tematski zbornik radova, Sedmi naučni skup sa međunarodnim učešćem, Turizam: izazovi i mogućnosti, Trebinje, str.482.

⁵ Demonja D., Ružić P., (2010), *Ruralni turizam u Hrvatskoj s hrvatskim primjerima dobre prakse i evropskim iskustvima*, Meridijani, Zagreb.

⁶ Kušen E., (2007), *Kako ugostiti turiste na vlastitom imanju*, Institut za turizam, Zagreb.

⁷ Klajn I., Šipka M., (2006), *Veliki rečnik stranih reči i izraza*; Prometej, Novi Sad, str. 457, „Etnografski: koji pripada običajima, tradiciji i kulturi jednog naroda, koji je odlika jednog naroda.“

⁸ Klajn I., Šipka M.,(2006), *Veliki rečnik stranih reči i izraza*; Prometej, Novi Sad, str. 280, “Gastronomija: poznavanje veštine pripremanja jela, kult ukusne hrane, uživanje u hrani, sladočinstvo.“

integrated rural tourism product, which will rely on accommodating the guests in village households placed near the event localities.⁹

Table 2. Municipalities/cities possessing the greatest potential for development of the integrated rural tourism product

Bačka Palanka Etno šor; „Ala volim kolo da igram“, Štrudla fest; Dunavski bal Bostanijada
Novi Sad Festival meda; Dani mladog vina-portugizer; Festival folkloru; Interfest-festival vina; Šunka fest; Futoška kupusijada; Siroško prelo; Rumenačka pihitijada; Koviljska rakijada „Parastos dudu“
Titel Tradicionalna izložba ručnih radova; Etno manif. „Pokaži da ti ja pokažem“ Kotlić pod titelskim bregom
Subotica „Ukusi tradicije“; „Svinjokoljski dani“; Takmičenje žetelaca u ručnom košenju žita „Ris“; Dužijanica; „Interetno“; „Berbanski dani“; „Butkicijada“; „Paličke vinske svečansoti“; „Dani mladog vina“; Festival kulture sveta“; „Etnofest“; „Prvomajski uranak“; „Berbanski dani na Hajdukovu“; Festival belog luka u Šupljaku; Pasuljijada u Donjem Tavankutu; Festival bunjevačkih prela u Bajmoku
Sombor Festival vina i hrane „Ravan grad Wine Fest“; Somborski kotlić; „Bodrog fest“ u Bačkom Monoštoru; Izložba starih zanata u Sonti
Kikinda „Dani ludaje“; Festival gulaša u Ruskom selu; „Gusanijada“ u Mokrinu; Dani vina i vinograda, Sabor frulaša „Škripi đeram“ u Idošu; Dani jeseni u korpi; Severnobanatske žetvene svečanosti; Pitijada krompiruša u Novim Kozarcima
Žagubica Sabor vrela Homolja; Sabor frulaša; Dani zdrave hrane „Priveg“; Dani bilja i gljiva; Spasovdaski dani
Žitište „Pilefest“; „Pasuljijada“ u Ravnom Topolovcu; Banatska testijada u Srpskom Itebeju; „Karadorđevska prela“ u Banatskom Karadorđevu
Zrenjanin „Banatske vredne ruke“; Međunarodni festival folkloru „Lala“, Dani paradajza; Festival ljubavi i vina; Svetsko prvenstvo u kuvanju čobanskog paprikaša
Deliblato Etno manif. „Opušteno od srca“; Pihitijada; Etno bazar „Ne lomite mi bagrenje“, Berba grožđa; „Slaninijada“ u Kačarevu; „Gulašijada“ i Šunkafest u Omoljici; Žetelački dani u Vojlovici; „Paprikijada“ u Banatskom Brestovcu
Pančevo Zlatni kotlić, Takmičenje u kuvanju riblje čorbe; „Štrudlijada“; Dolovački sajam vina; Vinarijada Dolovo
Indija Pudarski dani; Dani meda; Sajam vojvođanskih vina; Etno festival; „Sremski peškir“; Etno manif. „Tradicionalno graditeljstvo kao srpski proizvod“; „Najbolja vina pod jednim krovom“ u Krčedinu; Zlatni kotlić u Beški; Etno manif. „Maradička jesen“
Irig Pudarski dani; „Guščevijada“; Etno manif. „Jesen ide dunjo moja, kukuruži već su zreli“; Dani vina; „Bostanijada“ u Rivici
Čajetina-Zlatibor Sabor trubača i smotra narodnog stvaralaštva; „Pršutijada“; Šljivovački sajam domaće rakije „Rakijada“; Etno manif. „Seoski višerboj“ u Jablanici
Valjevo Etno manif. „Zlatni opanak“, Festival duvan čvaraka; Dani maline u Brnkovini; „Prela i posela“ u Donjoj Toplici; Dani gljiva u Medvedniku; Dani kupine u Stavama
Krupanj

⁹ Radović G., Pejanović R., Njegovan Z., (2012), *Etnografske i gastronomske manifestacije kao indikatori razvoja ruralnog turizma u Vojvodini*, Tematski zbornik radova, Sedmi naučni skup sa međunarodnim učešćem, Turizam: izazovi i mogućnosti, Trebinje, str.488.

Dani krompira u Rađevini; Dani gljiva u Rađevini, „Krkušijada“; Etno manif. „Nadigravanje za dukat“ u Dobrom Potoku; Dani međaša u Mačkovom kamenu

Loznica

„Lazarice“; „Pekmezijada“
 Međunarodna izložba gljiva i gljivarijada“; Smorta narodnog stvaralaštva „Dodole“
 „Miholjski dani seoskog turizma“; Etno manif. „Moba“; „Savinsko prelo“
 Sajam vina i starih zanata

Topola

„Đurđevdanski dani vina i rakije“; Sabor narodnog stvaralaštva „Oplenačka berba grožđa“; Prvomajski uranak na Bukulji; „Šumadijski dani Šljive“ u Stragarima

Beograd

Festival folkloru Srba sa zapadne strane Drine; „Vinogastrofest“; Beogradski salon vina; Beogradski rakija festival; Festival slava i pravoslavlja „Slava gastro“; „Fishfest“; „Vinofest“ - Sajam gastronomije i vinskog turizma

Kraljevo

„Pasuljijada“; Dani meda; Smotra dečijeg folkloru i ansabala Srbije; „Projada“ i Smotra narodnog stvaralaštva dece Srbije u Ratini; „Dani borovnice“ na Kopaoniku

Niš

Etno sajam; Dani bureka; Rakija brend; Dani vina i meraka; Salon vina i čokolade „Dolče Vita“; „Pihtijada“ u Niškoj Banji

Source: Results of the research conducted within the paper called “Rural Tourism as Factor of Rural Economy Diversification in the Republic of Serbia” (see the list of references)

Table 2 shows municipalities and cities in the Republic of Serbia with the greatest number of registered ethnographic and gastronomic events throughout the year, according to the data from Tourism Organization of Serbia.¹⁰ These are at the same time the areas showing greatest potential for development of the integrated rural tourism product. According to the definition we proposed, IRTP¹¹ stands for the synergy of event tourism, based on ethnographic and gastronomic events, and rural tourism. It is therefore both justified and necessary to invest in the rural tourism offer development on the territories of municipalities and cities listed in Table 2. The process of identifying the events and creating the integrated rural tourism product should be conducted by the local economies together with local tourist organizations, and with strategic and financial support from governmental and provincial institutions, taking into account that the state “ought to create desirable ambience for promoting a certain concept of development (Pejanovic and Njegovan, 2012).

Conclusion

The Republic of Serbia possesses comparative advantages for rural tourism development, which are insufficiently exploited. Average occupancy of the accommodation facilities in the Republic of Serbia is only 4% in rural tourism, which suggests that in order to ensure a continuous flow of tourists and raise occupancy during the year, it is necessary to integrate rural tourism offer with numerous ethnographic and gastronomic events, i.e. create an integrated rural tourism product. Such product means to chronologically and territorially relate several events, which will rely on accommodating guests in rural households situated around the event localities. With the aim of highlighting the originality of a certain locality, it is necessary to avoid having similar events in different places, but instead, boost development of exactly those events that are authentic for a certain region. The greatest potential for integrated rural tourism product development are seen in Bačka Palanka, Titel, Subotica, Sombor, Kikinda, Žagubica, Žitište, Zrenjanin, Deliblato, Pančevo, Indija, Irig, Čajetina-

¹⁰ Radović G., Pejanović R., (2012), “Rural Tourism as Factor of Rural Economy Diversification in the Republic of Serbia” (see the list of references)

¹¹ IRTP=Integrated Rural Tourism Product

Zlatibor, Valjevo, Krupanj, Loznica, Topola, Kraljevo, Niš, as well as in areas surrounding the cities of Belgrade and Novi Sad.

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