

**STRATEGIC NEXSUS OF ECOTOURISM AND ECOLOGICAL FARMING IN
FUNCTION OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN RURAL AREAS OF
MONTENEGRO**

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Abstract

The demand for eco products grows in every part of life and work. Global ecologic trends are being reflected on tourism as an active component of society. This is how ecotourism became, one of the modern tourism forms that is less destructive than the other. It creates at the same time chance for development of underdeveloped, mostly rural regions. Ecotourism development has a positive effect on complementary branches of economy, agriculture before all. There are multiple positive reflexive ecotourism effects on ecological farming and vice versa. Intensive ecotourism development and its linking to agriculture creates possibility of additional revenue for agricultural households in rural areas which contributes to the quality of life and to suspending of the demographic downfall. Eco agricultural production significantly contributes to the competitiveness of ecotouristic product on one side, while on the other besides creating possibility for producers to directly place their products through ecotourism, also offers the possibility to valorize immaterial elements of offer: knowledge, skill, experience, hospitality, etc. Montenegrin agriculture is characterized by small households, unexploited ground, low usage levels of mineral fertilizers and pesticides, inability to use mechanization, water shortage and undeveloped infrastructure makes it uncompetitive in quantitative sense but presents an excellent base for its transformation from conventional to eco farming. Strategic linking of ecotourism with ecological farming presents real chance for sustainable development of rural areas in Montenegro.

Key words: ecotourism, ecological farming, sustainable development, rural areas, Montenegro

Introduction

Sustainable rural development represents a huge challenge for both developed and underdeveloped countries. With proper development policy in rural areas pressure is starting to decrease in urban areas. It is impossible to envisage development of rural areas through the development of agriculture, as it was done until now, we need a much broader approach. Apart from improvement of competitiveness of agriculture, it implies a diversification of economical activities, promotion of the environment in total improvement of the quality of life of the rural population. Agriculture will still remain the most dominant economy activity of the rural population but at the same time we should develop other complementary activities such as tourism, trade, craftsmanship, etc. Global trends of returning to the unspoiled nature and to healthy lifestyle, growing conscience on necessity for preservation of the environment have created ecotourism as an alternative to mass tourism and eco way of production as alternative to conventional agriculture. New tourists are becoming more and more demanding in every aspect, food as well. They are looking for quality and authentic local products. Research has shown that their expenditures for food and beverages make one third of travel

expenditure in total. In Montenegro there is significant potential for ecotourism development and ecological farming. However, establishing certain relations between these two economy branches is a long term process that requires synchronized action from every stakeholder. This action must be based on principles of sustainable economic development, preservation of the environment and diminishing poverty within the local community. Strategic interlinking of these two activities will provide sustainable management of natural resources and significantly contribute to sustainable development of rural areas.

Methodology and objectives

This paper analyzes views, both domestic and international authors, about the importance and characteristics of ecotourism and ecological farming development in rural areas. The main objective of this paper is to highlight the need and possibilities of the strategic nexus of these branches of the economy, in the function of sustainable development in rural areas of Montenegro. The study is based on secondary sources. The initial hypothesis is: In Montenegro there is significant potential for ecotourism development and ecological farming and their strategic nexus represents a real opportunity for sustainable development.

Ecotourism as mechanism for sustainable development

One of the most significant and the fastest growing forms of selective tourism worldwide is ecotourism. Ecotourism involves creation of synergetic relations between tourism, biodiversity and local community with appliance of adequate management strategy (Ross and Wall, 1999). Honey (1999) defines: „Ecotourism is travel to fragile, pristine and usually protected areas that strives to be low impact and usually small scale. It helps educate the traveler; provides funds for conservation; directly benefits the economic development and political empowerment of local communities; and fosters respect for different cultures and for human rights“.

Ecotourism is a term referring to ecological tourism and this concept of tourism is being implemented all around the world. Montenegro, especially protected areas, are very attractive for ecotourism development. Their biological and cultural diversity represents vast ecotourism potential (Bulatovic D. and Bulatovic A., 2012). When done in the right way, ecotourism is a mechanism for sustainable development. Ecotourism can give benefits to local communities, the benefits of economic and other value-added benefits, such as nature recreation, the value of beauty, aesthetics, scientific values, education and other social values. One of ecotourism's greatest strengths is that it helps to develop better cooperation between the tourism industry and agriculture. Ecotourism can provide a strong economic incentive to small farmers to commit to biodiversity-friendly agriculture management.

It is not always easy for an individual ecotourist to choose between competing products on environmental grounds (Buckley, 1995). Crucial marketing instrument for ecotourism are ecolabels. Marking of quality products with ecolabel is recognized as a way to differentiate quality of product within the meaning of environment protection, health or consummation acceptability. Montenegro, as a country striving towards European integrations, should accept and put in use some of the international ecolabelling programs related to tourism (Gren Globe, EU Ecotourism Labelling standard-EETLS), which will make it easier for Montenegro to obtain recognition as quality ecotourist destination.

Ecological farming and benefits for the development of rural areas

Ecological farming is a growing sector in World. Interest in ecologically produced food is increasing throughout the World. Food consumption patterns are changing as a result of health and environmental issues. Global demand for ecological products remains robust, with sales increasing by over five billion US dollars a year (Willer, Youssefi-Menzler and Sorensen, 2009). According FiBL/IFOAM survey (2009) all over the World there are 37.2 million hectares of ecological farming land. The regions with the largest areas of ecological farming land are Oceania (12.2 million hectares), Europe (9.3 million hectares), and Latin America (8.6 million hectares). The countries with the most ecological farming land are Australia, Argentina, and the United States. Currently 0.9 percent of the world's farming land is ecological. Compared with the previous survey since 2008, growth was strongest in Europe, where the area increased by almost one million hectares. The countries with the largest increases were Turkey and Spain. The countries with the largest markets are the US, Germany, and France; the highest per capita consumption is Denmark, Switzerland, and Austria (Willer and Lukas, 2011).

“Ecological farming“ is a broad descriptor for agricultural methods that seek to be more sustainable than conventional farming by avoiding negative unintended natural and social consequences (Killebrew, Cullelev and Anderson, 2009). The concept of time is central to ecological farming's definition. In reaction to conventional farming's implicit focus on the current period, ecological farming takes a long-term view. By using assets in a way that does not deplete them, ecological farming aims to maintain productivity and usefulness to society in perpetuity (Pretty, 1999; Rigby and Caceres, 2001). Ecological farming is supported in most European countries in the context of rural development programmes (Council Regulation (EC) No 1698, 2005). Most EU27/EEA states have implemented area payments to support conversion to and (in most cases) continued ecological production, with Bulgaria and Romania due to introduce support. However, payment rates, eligibility conditions and requirements vary considerably between countries (Tuson and Lampkin 2006). Some EU member states have even made the objectives of their support explicit, namely, that between 10 and 20 percent of total farm land should be organically cultivated in the near future (Schmid et al. 2008). Consumption of ecological food is 4.5 to 5.5% of the total food market in countries such as Denmark, Austria and Switzerland. However, while the area of ecological land has also expanded rapidly in many new EU member states as well as in candidate and potential EU candidate countries, with annual growth rates of up to 100%, consumption levels have remained very low in these countries (<1%).

Ecological farming practices are ideally suited for poor and smallholder farmers, as they require minimal or no external inputs, use locally and naturally available materials to produce high-quality products, and encourage a whole systemic approach to farming that is more diverse and resistant to stress (UNEP and UNCTAD, 2008). Ecological farming provides employment in poor rural areas without increasing farmer's costs: what she saves on chemicals, she can spend on labour. Lee (2005) and Shiferaw et al. (2009) find that labor availability impacts the adoption of ecological farming techniques, which are typically more labor intensive than conventional methods.

Tirado (2009) considered the main benefits of ecological farming:

- Ecological farming provides the ability of communities to feed themselves and ensures a future of healthy farming and healthy food to all people.
- Ecological farming protects soils from erosion and degradation, increases soil fertility, conserves water and natural habitats and reduces emission of greenhouse gases.
- Ecological farming is both a climate change mitigation and adaptation strategy. Ecological farming can provide large-scale carbon sinks and offer many other options

for mitigation of climate change. In addition, farming with biodiversity is the most effective strategy to adapt agriculture to future climatic conditions. A mix of different crops and varieties in one field is a proven and highly reliable farming method to increase resilience to erratic weather changes.

- Ecological farming both relies on and protects nature by taking advantage of natural goods and services, such as biodiversity, nutrient cycling, soil regeneration and natural enemies of pests, and integrating these natural goods into agroecological systems that ensure food for all today and tomorrow.

Ability of ecological farming to overcome local constraints hinges on the availability of education and training about selecting and implementing sustainable practices. Lee (2005) finds evidence that involving nongovernmental organizations, farmer-based organizations, outreach programs, and extension services in providing information and training to farmers significantly increases the successful adoption of sustainable agricultural practices.

Ecological farming in Montenegro

Eco or organic farming in Montenegro, despite some tangible efforts invested in it during last years, is still at the beginning. In Montenegro there is legal, institutional and strategic frame for ecological farming production that needs to be further developed and promoted. The State through Agro-budget is investing significant but insufficient assets in this area. The Law on organic agriculture was passed in 2004. („Sl. list RCG”, br. 49/04). Subordinate legislation is used to regulate certain aspects of organic productions. These regulations are largely conformed with EU regulations No. 31991R2092 i 31994R2381.

National food production and development of rural areas program for 2009-2013. represents an operative program for practicing agrarian policy and special place within this program is reserved for ecological production. One step further in promoting and supporting represents Action plan for development of organic production in Montenegro, set for the period from 2012 to 2017, this plan was written by Ministry of agriculture and rural development within the “Development program for organic agriculture” (OADP) project, which is being realized with the financial support from the Government of Kingdom of Denmark. Increase in interest for organic production was boosted due to another international project meant for small businesses in ecological farming-FAO project. Agricultural producers had an opportunity to obtain grants through stated projects for investments in ecological farming; trainings were conducted for producers, counselors and inspectors of certifying body. Faculty of Biotechnology has introduced a course in ecological farming for its students.

As a result of stated efforts during the last several years we can see an increase in interest for ecological farming in Montenegro. Whether the needed conditions for establishing ecologic farms are met and whether proper methods are applied is being verified by the Government founded organization named “Monteoragnica”. “Monteorganica” is also in charge for issuing certificates for products gained through ecological farming methods. It is founded in 2005 for managing issues such as control of the quality and providing certificates in ecological farming and it is operating under authority of Ministry of agriculture and rural development since 2006. In control and certification process in 2011 one hundred producers were involved. Surfaces under ecological farming in 2011 constitute 0.6% of plough land in total. Altogether, under organic production 3.068,07 ha of plough land was registered, where of 200,29 ha goes to arable land (farmers crops and cultivated medicinal plants 119,81ha; vegetables 2,29 ha; orchards 75,52 ha; vineyards 2,67 ha) and 2867,78ha are meadows and pastures. Apart from this, more than 139.000,00 ha are used for collecting medicinal herbs and sylvan products (Ministry of agriculture and rural development, 2012).

However, Montenegrin ecological products offer in market is still small, and same could be said for the demand of such products. This can be explained with the fact that process of transition from conventional to ecological farming lasts from one to three years, insufficient subventions, knowledge of production rules and marking of ecological products and with unsatisfactory promotion. Also, problem is low income of the buyers and their insufficient knowledge on benefits of ecological farming. However, it is certain that production of ecological agricultural products in time to come will grow and growing production needs growing market to make it economically sustainable. Experiences of other countries can not be applied directly but can be helpful. In strategic positioning of ecological farming assets gained through IPARD program can be of help, and so can any other opportunity for funding available through the joining process of Montenegro with EU.

The major comparative advantage of Montenegro when ecological farming is in question is suitable and diverse climatic conditions that enable production of various agricultural products, although in limited quantities. In general, Montenegro has got well preserved nature and significant number of traditional products, extensive system of agricultural production prevails with limited appliance of pesticides and fertilizers that makes transition to ecological or organic farming easier. This means that there is a tremendous potential to make significant part of agriculture ecological. In order to make Montenegro to turn its comparative advantages into competitive, certification and control process will come in more than handy. The goal of these processes is to confirm that the product is gained in accordance with the regulations in order to prevent fraud and to build confidence between the producers and the buyers. Further growth of domestic and foreign demand for eco farming products can be achieved through ecotourism, which is an important marketing channel, so it is necessary to conduct intensive activities to create tighter connection between agriculture and this sector. This connotes promotional and educational activities with tourism agents on importance of ecological food on the development and promotion of ecotourism offer and also education of food manufactures as an important part of tourism. Promotion should be based primarily on the interest of the buyers for quality, tasty and traditional food and for Montenegrin ecological products that differ from imported ones.

Strategic nexus of ecotourism and ecological farming-chance for sustainable development of rural areas

At the end of the 20th century the concept of rural development becomes equally important in developed countries and in countries undergoing transition. New policies of rural development are focused on defining efficient mechanisms which would secure coordination of agriculture development and other activities in rural areas in accordance with principles of sustainable development and all for the sake of improving population's life standards and quality (Bogdanov, 2007).

One of the activities that can be used to improve life standards and quality of life in rural areas certainly is ecotourism. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations - FAO views ecotourism as an opportunity for farmers and/or foresters to generate additional income, and at the same time as one of the most effective ways of preserving biodiversity. The symbiotic relationship between tourism and agriculture as a key element of an environmentally and socially responsible tourism. The best ecotourism project is certainly one that includes the local community, preserves the local environment, aspires towards local ownership, showcases innovative environmental practices and sources food and supplies from the local area.

Therefore, development of ecological farming is tightly linked to the development of ecotourism in Montenegro. It will support ecotourism development while ecotourism in

combination with it will open new jobs and improve life in rural areas. By opening new working positions in rural areas migration of population from rural areas to city centers will decline and so will the pressure on job market. Through connection between ecological farming with ecotourism, besides selling agricultural products, new opportunities for additional income will appear through providing touristic services at the farms. Ecotourists are often very interested in learning about the ways of life and work in local community and are very interested in active participation in performing farm jobs. However, establishing a proper bond between these two branches of economy is a long term process that demands synchronized action from both sides.

Conclusion

Ecotourism has presented itself as the most appropriate form of tourism development in rural areas worldwide, while ecological farming continually replaces the conventional. Rural areas of Montenegro are rich with natural beauty, cultural and historical attractions that represent extraordinary potential for ecotourism development. Also, they represent ecologically pure and diverse space with outstanding natural conditions for the development of ecological farming. However, ecotourism and ecological farming are still at the beginning when it comes to quantity and/or diversity of products while rural areas are poor, encumbered with depopulation and other problems. Strategic nexus of ecotourism and ecologic farming represents a chance to overcome these problems and chance for sustainable development of rural areas. Ecotourists mostly desire to try ecological, traditional and authentic high quality Montenegrin food while local agricultural products are able to provide a quality answer on such demands. In order to unleash developing potential of rural areas with sustainable usage of natural resources strategic approach and synchronized action of every stakeholder on taking various measures for promoting, encouraging and directing ecotourism development and ecological farming is needed. Among these measures, besides subventions from the government, very important role is entrusted to certification and control measures of ecotouristic and agricultural products.

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