

## RURAL RESOURCE AS A TOURIST ATTRACTOR

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### Abstract

*The development of tourism in destinations depends on its primary products as the main factors that attract tourists. This paper analyzes the quality of primary services in rural tourism. The authors of the paper investigated the quality of the existing supply in rural households in South Bačka by determining the difference between arithmetic means between pairs of importance and satisfaction. In this way, they identified potential segments for development, and identified the shortcomings that prevent the rapid development of this, in many ways, important branch of tourism in Serbia. The obtained data show the current unenviable position of rural tourism in Serbia.*

Key Words: *rural, tourism, development, South Bačka District*

JEL classification: *O13, Z32*

### Introduction

Given that rural tourism in Serbia is still development, rural areas have been identified as attractors for the potential development of this largely primary branch of tourism in Serbia. Over the last century, the development of rural tourism has been sporadic and unplanned. The state was not significantly concerned with this segment of supply, and intensive industrialization led to the aging of the Serbian village. In rural areas, tourism, based on natural resources, brings benefits, but not as much as agriculture contributes (Gajić et al, 2018a). The focus is on the quality of basic and primary services. Rural environments often use ecological and sociocultural values as their main attributes because of their availability

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and tourists expectations. Many of the attributes are tangible and can be evaluated, while many are intangible and are highly subjective. The paper assesses the quality of primary tourist services available to tourists in order to understand the importance of quality service in increasing tourist traffic and attracting tourists (Cvijanović & Gajić, 2018). There are many reasons for the importance of discovering the degree of quality of service, primarily because of the need to effect changes and improvements in the shortest possible time, thereby placing the rural product in a better position in the tourism market (Devesa et al., 2010).

Each destination has the opportunity to present a diverse resource offering, and in rural areas there is a concentration of products whose marketing must be intensified, whether through niche or mass tourism products in accordance with the desired market size. Rural tourism product enhances competitiveness by offering diverse experiences and activities, meeting individual needs and interests of visitors, and offering flexibility in responding to tourism tastes and demand. The goal is to form a model that would accelerate the development of rural tourism in order to achieve better quality accommodation and catering facilities in rural areas of Serbia. There is a need to find a way to achieve high quality in order for Serbia to reach European quality standards and join the European Association of Rural Countries, given that this association generates € 13 billion annually from rural supply, and by selling souvenirs up to € 17 billion (Fu et al., 2020).

The main aim and purpose of the research is to determine the existence of a relationship between the perceived and the expected (importance and satisfaction) of the quality of the tourist service through the collection and processing of primary and secondary data. The authors of the paper presented only data relevant to this work.

### **Literature review**

Rural space in most countries of the world is 80% to 85% of the total area of the territory, with exceptions as high as 95% and 99% (Gajić et al., 2018b). In the European Union, more than half of the total population lives in these areas, and over 40% of domestic products are produced there (Demirović et al., 2017). Rural areas are experiencing a global crisis in Serbia, primarily as traditional agriculture and culture are slowly disappearing under the influence of urbanization and modernization. People leave villages, go to cities to find jobs, education, medical services,

and their villages become completely deserted (Yasuo, 2007). In recent years, there has been an increasing number of scholars dealing with the topic of rural revitalization, through the study of the quality of existing services and their improvement. Rural recession is also a phenomenon in the world (Fu et al., 2020).

However, rural areas do not only have a traditional and cultural form, they are increasingly a place for excursions, recreation, tourism, food production. Rural tourism in its better development can bring many benefits in terms of economic profit, employment, stopping emigration, etc. Rural areas should be understood in a broader context, not only as a form of tourism and tourist attraction, but as a means of preserving rural society and the environment. The main task of all structures should be to preserve the Serbian village by involving the local community and developing awareness of the importance of rural areas, not only in attracting tourists, but in order to develop sustainably (Đurić et al., 2019). The traditional village should shift from purely agricultural production to broader socio-economic activities. So far, this is exclusively about traditional village revitalization (Fu et al., 2020). The development of rural tourism must embrace a more integrated and territorial approach that embraces sustainable development, thereby creating links between cultural, social, economic and environmental resources. Rural tourism has been recognized as a major catalyst for socio-economic regeneration in rural areas. Rural tourism encompasses various activities and interests on farms, nature, adventure, sport, health, education, art, tradition and culture, folklore, belief values and common heritage. There is a growing demand for rural tourism products in the world and in Europe, and it is considered to be a useful way of addressing the social and economic challenges at the time of the decline of the traditional agrarian industry (Jaakkola et al., 2015). Due to their distance and poor traffic development, many rural areas have limitations in economic development. Traditional ways of working are not enough, so alternative sources of income are sought. Tourism is becoming a good option for improving rural life, increasing employment, stopping emigration, and encouraging positive economic changes in the distribution of personal income. Rustic events, cultural attributes and resources shape the tourism product, which is diverse in nature (Fleicher & Tchetchik, 2005; Pantić & Milojević, 2019). Many missteps are being made in placing a rural product on the market. The preparation of plans for rural development relies mainly on the realization of only economic profit, and not on the realization of a better future for the local population and the environment (Wang & Pfister, 2008). Rural tourism is an insufficiently

valorised resource in Serbia, although it is becoming a daily necessity of the people, as well as a segment that can significantly contribute to the development of the economic sector in the future of the country. Regarding rural tourism in Serbia, it can be said that by the end of the 20th century, its development was rather out of sync with other sectors, and uncoordinated, with a very undifferentiated supply. In recent years, Serbia has had better planning in term of a better quality tourist offer in the villages (Cvijanović et al., 2017).

Table 1: *Key elements of rural tourism*

Located in rural areas
Provides personalized contact
It permits participation in the activities, traditions and lifestyle of the rural population
Small scale settlements and buildings (rural)
It is a complex sample of the rural environment, economy, history and locality
High share of tourism revenues benefiting the local community
It grows slowly, in keeping with the locals
Functionally rural: based on small entrepreneurship, outdoors and in direct contact with nature, based on heritage and traditional activities

Source: *Zagreb County Gazette, (2005). Razvoj seoskog turizma u Zagrebačkoj županiji [Rural Tourism Development in Zagreb County], No. 9, p. 9*

The following table provides an overview of the status and prediction of population distribution and rural participation on different continents of the world.

Table 2: *Population Distribution and Rural Participation*

	Population (in millions)						Rural participation (%)		
	1975.		2000.		2030.		1975.	2000.	2030.
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural			
Africa	102	304	295	498	787	702	75	63	47
Asia	592	1805	1376	2297	2697	227	75	63	46
South America	198	14	391	498	127	608	39	25	15
North America	180	64	243	71	335	61	26	23	16
Europe	455	221	534	193	540	131	33	27	20
Oceania	15	6	23	8	32	10	28	26	23
World	1542	2524	2826	3565	4500	3783	63	55	45

Source: *Choi et al., 2018*

The theorist Burns (1996) emphasize that there is no general definition of quality, and that different definitions have been used in different contexts in which quality has been observed. Product quality is a complex set of features that determine the degree of suitability for its purpose. Quality is an integral part of product properties. The quality of a product is a measure of its usefulness, that is, its suitability to meet consumer demands (Saleh & Ryan, 1991). Whatever way quality is defined, one thing that is certain for the consumer is only the quality that is in line with his expectations. However, for tourists themselves, the satisfaction that comes from staying in a destination depends not only on experience with specific tourist services, but also on more general factors such as hospitality, safety and security, sanitation and health conditions. traffic and customer service. A large number of elements influence how tourists accept the destination at the level of their pleasure, which results in the tourists' desire to repeat their visits and to recommend the destination to further potential visitors. In this regard, certain "quality topics" have been created, which must be taken into consideration when assessing the quality of a rural destination: Quality of the destination (sustainability of the local community, support to the local community, marketing and promotion, quality of welcome and safety and security (Bramwell & Lane, 2014). The quality of the tourism product consists of: air quality, water quality, quality of the local environment, communication that precedes arrival, accessibility, transportation, activities, information, accommodation and food and drink. Rural tourism and its development cannot be treated separately from community activities. Business management, cooperation and cooperation are prerequisites for establishing rural tourism development, networking business networking, partnerships and regional institutions (Choi et al., 2018; Mirčetić et al., 2019; Parasuraman et al, 1988). The development and realization of rural tourism must take place through cooperation not only at the level of local communities, but also through regional cooperation and integration into wider international programs. Liaison with national and international associations, whose activity is related not only to the development of rural tourism, but also to the integral and sustainable development as a whole, in addition to facilitating the exchange of information and experiences and the adoption of methodologies, contributes to effective marketing. The rural working-age population, compared to urban, has: higher rates of activity (60.9% and 59.5%) and employment (47.9% and 43.4%) and lower rates of unemployment (21.3 and 27%) and inactivity (39.1% and 40.5%, respectively) (Fu et al., 2020). This is due to the fact that rural areas provide greater employment opportunities for lower educated persons, which is especially true of their

work in agriculture. On the other hand, this type of work engagement indicates a significantly higher share of vulnerable employment in rural compared to the urban population (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2015).

Table 3: *Population distribution and rural participation population in the Republic of Serbia for 2011.*

	Urban population		Rural population	
	population	% participation	population	% participation
<b>Serbia</b>	3,965,884	55.49	3,181,542	44.51
<b>Vojvodina</b>	1,097,332	55.38	884,084	44.62
<b>Centr. Serbia</b>	3,025,984	57.50	2,236,516	42.50
<b>Belgrade area</b>	1,321,055	81.73	295,244	18.26
<b>The other part</b>	1,704,929	45.19	2,068,272	54.81

Source: *Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2011*

Table 4: *Number of overnights in rural tourism in the period 2005 - 2014 in the Republic of Serbia*

Year	Number of nights spent in all tourist places of the Republic of Serbia	Share of realized number of nights of rural tourism in the total number of nights in all types of tourism in the Republic of Serbia (%)	Number of nights spent in other tourist places and other places (rural areas)
<b>2005</b>	6,499,352	21.71 %	1,411,305
<b>2006</b>	6,592,622	20.54 %	1,354,027
<b>2007</b>	7,328,692	20.85 %	1,528,389
<b>2008</b>	7,334,106	22.31 %	1,636,509
<b>2009</b>	6,776,763	21.45 %	1,453,792
<b>2010</b>	6,413,515	22.42%	1,437,714
<b>2011</b>	6,644,738	20.83 %	1,383,947
<b>2012</b>	6,484,702	21.32 %	1,382,222
<b>2013</b>	6,567,460	20.66 %	1,356,633
<b>2014</b>	6,086,275	20.02 %	1,218,552
<b>Total</b>	60,641,950	21.34%	12,944,538

Source: *Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2015*

There are 6,158 settlements on the territory of the Republic of Serbia, of which 193 are urban (3.1%) and 5,965 are other settlements, which are considered rural by automatism. About 1,000 households are registered in Serbia in rural settlements providing catering and tourism services. Members of about 300 households are engaged in tourism as their primary activity. There are about 8,000 beds in the total offer. 750 to 1,500 overnight stays in one household. More than 1,000 nights a year, generates

60 households. About 240 establishments generate 700-1,000 overnight stays and 150 have 350-700 overnight stays. About 300 households earn less than 350 nights a year. The average length of stay of tourists in households is 2.8 days (Gajic et al., 2018).

The largest receptive, as well as broadcast, markets for rural tourism are France, Germany, Austria, the United Kingdom and Italy, which together account for over 77% of the total rural tourism market in Europe. Today, within the scope of rural tourism in Serbia there are 408,580 nights, or about 6.2% of the total number of nights in Serbia. Domestic visitors account for 100% of all rural tourists in Serbia (Tourism Development Strategy of the Republic of Serbia). The average price of accommodation in the mentioned accommodation facilities for rural tourists is 15 euros, which means that the average income of rural tourism on the basis of accommodation and catering capacities is about 6,200,000 euros. The development of tourist activity in rural settlements in Serbia began in the 1970s. However, at the beginning, this activity was not given adequate importance, and therefore, there were no adequate incentive measures to advance its development. In the Republic of Serbia, rural population makes up 43% of the total population. Table 2 presents data on the participation of rural population in 2011.

### **Methodology**

The following methods were used in the research of the given problem: the bibliographic-speculative method was used to collect, analyze and interpret the obtained data or to structure the theoretical part of the paper. A modified survey questionnaire was used as a means of testing in the implementation of the field survey. A model taken from surveys conducted by Albacete-Saez et al. (2007). The results were analyzed in SPSS 23.00 software, and a five-step Likert scale was used to investigate the views of tourists, visitors to rural households. The main and alternative hypotheses were set:

H0 - there is no statistically significant difference between the pairs of importance and satisfaction.

H1- there is a statistically significant difference between pairs of importance and satisfaction.

The survey was conducted from May to August 2019 in rural and catering establishments of rural character in the Southwest District: Bucin salaš

(Temerin), Babin salaš (Žabalj), Gnizdo (Bačka Palanka), Milov salaš (Vrbas), Tatić (Srbobran), Stremen (Titel).

### Results and discussion

Categorical variables are represented by relative (%) frequency. The central tendency of numerical features is represented by the arithmetic mean (m), and the scatter by standard deviation (sd). Frequency distribution of numerical characteristics was examined by indicators of skewness and elongation (kurtosis). Since all variables were normally distributed, parametric statistics methods were used. A t - test of pairs was used to test for differences, with Pearson correlation coefficient - r also shown. The significance level selected is 0.05. The results are presented in tables. A total of 234 respondents participated, of which 64.8% were men and 35.2% were women. In terms of age structure, the highest proportion of participants was middle-aged 35-40 years, 40.2%, with the highest secondary level of education. Table 5 lists all questions or scores for the importance and satisfaction pairs. Seven categories have been identified: personal responsibility, ancillary offers, relationships with tourists, basic requirements, material elements, security and empathy.

Table 5: *Items analysis of importance and satisfaction pairs*

Personal responsibility	The host is ready to fulfill all requirements The host does very well and knows his job The host always greets the guests The host deals with guest expectations The host is ready to approach the problem The host meets their guests without delay Constant presence in the household for help
An accompanying offer	The host provides quality meals The host assumes the role of tourist guide The host offers traditional home-made products The host involves tourists in both activity and domestic work
Relations with tourists	Members of the household know the traditions and customs The hosts make souvenirs, workshops The hosts give good tips and suggestions The hosts provide food information Hosts treat tourist with kindness The hosts are very friendly
Basic requirements	Rural furniture is preserved Rural space is comfortable Common areas preserved Marketing credible The price is in line with the quality



Material elements	The rural interior is cozy The exterior is rustic Host wear traditional clothes The rooms are clean The household is clean Extra space clean
Security	Security is provided The hosts care about security Every part of the household is marked The driveway is marked
Empathy	Locals know a foreign language The hosts try to make their guests understand The hosts take into consideration the wishes of the guests The host provides everyone with individual help

Source: *Author's research*

Table 6 gives an insight into the results of the survey, where average scores and standard deviations for given importance variables, or expectations are observed. It can be observed that tourists had high expectations of the services provided. In the category of personal responsibility, the highest value of the arithmetic mean is carried by the host variable without delay  $m = 4.76$  ( $sd = 0.435$ ). Then, the host ready to approach the problem carries a very good average score of  $m = 4.62$  ( $sd = 0.569$ ). The lowest value of the arithmetic mean is carried by the host always welcoming the guests ( $m = 3.66$ ;  $sd = 1.136$ ). In the category of accompanying offer the best rated score is *the host assumes the role of tourist guide* with an average rating of  $m = 4.74$  ( $sd = 0,590$ ). The lowest value of arithmetic mean is the question *the host offers traditional home-made products*  $m = 4.26$  ( $sd = 1.091$ ). However, it should be noted that all average grades above 4 are very well rated.

In the tourist relations category, all scores have an average score above 4. The highest average score is earned by the hosts, the hosts are treated with kindness ( $m = 4.88$ ;  $sd = 0.325$ ) and the hosts give good tips and suggestions ( $m = 4.88$ ;  $sd = 0.325$ ). Item in the basic requirements category carry very good grades. In the case of the hosts wear traditional clothes, of the material element category, bearing the lowest mean of the arithmetic mean  $m = 3.35$ ;  $sd = 1.496$ ). The best grade is given by interior and exterior scoring  $m = 4.44$ . As for the security category, the assumption is that security is at level I and that the hosts care for the safety of the guests. Empties are rated with an average score above 4. The hosts consider the wishes of the guests as  $m = 4.77$  ( $sd = 0.862$ ). The foreign language proficiency score  $m = 4.54$  was rated lower.

Table 6: *Item analysis for importance (m=arithmetic mean; sd=standard deviation)*

	m	sd
The host is ready to fulfill all requirements	3.68	1.238
The host does very well and knows his job	4.30	0.843
The host always greets the guests	3.66	1.344
The host deals with guest expectations	3.76	1.136
The host is ready to approach the problem	4.62	0.569
The host meets their guests without delay	4.76	0.435
Constant presence in the household for help	4.61	0.704
The host provides quality meals	4.66	0.695
The host assumes the role of tourist guide	4.74	0.590
The host offers local traditional products	4.26	1.091
The host involves tourists in both activity and domestic work	4.65	0.659
Members of the household know the traditions and customs	4.50	0.760
The hosts make souvenirs, workshops	4.72	0.576
The hosts give good tips and suggestions	4.88	0.325
The hosts provide food information	4.62	0.679
The Hosts treat tourist with kindness	4.88	0.325
The hosts are very friendly	4.21	1.259
Furniture is preserved	4.12	1.229
The space is comfortable	4.39	1.031
Common areas are preserved	4.39	0.993
Marketing is credible	4.43	0.970
Price is consistent with quality	4.40	0.989
The rural interior is cozy	4.44	0.971
The exterior is rustic	4.44	0.971
The hosts wear traditional clothes	3.35	1.496
The rooms are clean	4.08	1.473
The household is clean	4.79	0.533
Extra space is clean	4.52	0.885
Security is provided	3.47	1.621
The hosts take care of security	4.63	0.677
Every part of the household is marked	2.70	1.622
The driveway is marked	2.71	1.600
Locals know a foreign language	4.54	0.759
The hosts make every effort to make them understand	4.69	0.593
The hosts take into consideration the wishes of the guests	4.77	0.862
The host provides everyone with individual help	4.84	0.478

Source: *Author's research*

Table 7: *Item analysis for satisfaction (m=arithmetic mean; sd=standard deviation)*

	m	sd
The host is ready to fulfill all requirements	2.12	1.392
The host does very well and knows his job	2.85	1.437
The host always greets the guests	3.21	1.692
The host deals with guest expectations	3.81	1.693
The host is ready to approach the problem	3.59	1.719
The host meets their guests without delay	3.72	1.662
Constant presence in the household for help	3.55	1.770
The host provides quality meals	3.16	1.779
The host assumes the role of tourist guide	2.75	1.714
The host offers local traditional products	2.98	1.644
The host involves tourists in both activity and domestic work	2.68	1.533
Members of the household know the traditions and customs	4.10	1.482
The hosts make souvenirs, workshops	3.99	0.881
The hosts give good tips and suggestions	3.46	1.682
The hosts provide food information	3.57	1.576
Hosts treat tourist with kindness	4.01	1.361
The hosts are very friendly	3.92	1.404
Furniture is preserved	3.11	0.761
The space is comfortable	3.11	0.968
Common areas are preserved	4.43	1.196
Marketing is credible	3.93	1.294
Price consistent with quality	3.80	1.092
The rural interior is cozy	3.38	1.252
The exterior is rustic	3.72	1.338
The hosts wear traditional clothes	3.70	1.178
The rooms are clean	4.00	0.965
The household is clean	3.79	1.238
Extra space is clean	3.47	1.139
Security is provided	3.79	1.310
The host takes care of security	3.29	1.177
Every part of the household is marked	3.32	1.079
The driveway is marked	3.19	1.145
Locals know a foreign language	3.41	1.166
The hosts make every effort to make them understand	3.49	1.285
The hosts take into consideration the wishes of the guests	3.49	1.081
The host provides everyone with individual help	3.22	1.154

Source: *Author's research*

Table 7 gives results for satisfaction-related items after using the appropriate services. It is noted that the average grades are much lower than expected shown in the table. In the category of personal responsibility, the highest value of the arithmetic mean is borne by the host. The host deals with guest expectations  $m = 3.81$  ( $sd = 1.693$ ). The lowest grade is given to the host is ready to meet all the requirements  $m = 2.12$  ( $sd = 1.392$ ). In the accompanying offer, the best rated item is the host provides quality meal ( $m = 3.16$ ;  $sd = 1.7709$ ). The lowest rating in the same category bears the question the host includes tourists in activity and domestic affairs  $m = 2.68$ ;  $sd = 1.533$ ). The item the household members know the tradition and customs is rated 4.10, while the lowest rated is item host gives good advice and suggestions ( $m = 3.46$ ). Item the rooms are clean is rated with  $m = 4.00$  ( $sd = 0.965$ ). The lowest value of arithmetic mean is assigned to item rural interior is pleasant  $m = 3.38$  ( $sd = 1.252$ ). Tourists stated that the rooms were clean and rated very good. Security is rated very high ( $m = 3.79$ ;  $sd = 1.310$ ). The lowest mark is given to the item which describes the space of households  $m = 3.19$  ( $sd = 1.145$ ). From the category of empathy, the highest score is given to the understanding of tourist by the hosts ( $m = 4.49$ ), but the lowest mark is given to knowledge of foreign languages by the hosts  $m = 3.41$ .

Table 8 gives an insight into the correlation analysis of the dimensions importance and satisfaction. The correlation between the importance and satisfaction of personal responsibility is weak and negative ( $r = -.127$ ,  $p = .053$ ). The expected values of importance and satisfaction move in the opposite direction, but there is a statistically significant correlation. The correlation between the importance and satisfaction of the accompanying offer is positive  $r = 0.109$ . The dimension of importance of the relationship with tourists correlates poorly with the dimension of satisfaction with the relationship with tourists, there is a statistically significant difference ( $r = 0.189$ ;  $p = 0.004$ ). A statistically significant difference was observed in the dimension of importance meeting the basic requirements ( $r = 0.329$ ;  $p = 0.00$ ). The correlation is positive and medium strong. Correlation analysis of fifth pair importance - satisfaction with material elements shows that there is no statistically significant difference, correlation is weak positive. The correlation between the importance of safety and the dimension of safety satisfaction shows a statistically significant difference, but a weak positive correlation ( $r = 0.160$ ). The correlation of the last pair is weakly positive and indicates that there is no statistically significant difference between the pair and the importance of satisfaction with empathy.

Table 8: *Paired samples correlations*

Pairs of the importance of satisfaction		Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1	Personal responsibility	-0.127	0.053
Pair 2	An accompanying offer	0.109	0.097
Pair 3	Relations with tourists	0.189	0.004
Pair 4	Basic requirements	0.329	0.000
Pair 5	Material elements	0.085	0.193
Pair 6	security	0.160	0.014
Pair 7	empathy	0.138	0.035

Table 9: *t-test of statistical significance of difference of arithmetic mean of importance and satisfaction*

	mi	sd	ms	sd	ms-mi	t(234)	df	p	L95%	U95%
Personal responsibility	4,20	0,381	3,26	1,011	-0,933	12,694	233	,000	0,788	1,078
An accompanying offer	4,58	0,453	2,89	1,254	-1,687	20,062	233	,000	1,521	1,853
Attitude towards tourists	4,63	0,301	3,84	0,845	-0,792	14,390	233	,000	0,683	0,900
Basic requirements	4,34	0,857	3,67	0,724	-0,670	11,111	233	,000	0,551	0,789
Material offer	4,27	0,746	3,68	0,578	-0,596	10,089	233	,000	0,479	0,712
Security	3,38	1,016	3,40	0,652	0,023	-,308	233	0,759	-0,166	0,121
Empathy	4,71	0,373	3,40	0,810	-1,309	23,727	233	,000	1,200	1,417

\* mi = the arithmetic value of the pair importance; ms = the arithmetic value of the satisfaction pair; ms - mi = value of satisfaction gap and importance; t (234) = t value and degree of freedom; p = statistical significance; CI = confidence interval (L (lower), U (upper)).

The table 9 shows arithmetic values for the dimensions of importance and satisfaction, and the difference between the given dimensions. The importance of the personal responsibility dimension is rated very well (m = 4.20), while the satisfaction dimension is rated m = 3.26. A score difference of -0.933 was statistically significant and confirmed with a 95% confidence interval (t = 234; CI (L = 0.788, U = 1.078)). An accompanying offer has the arithmetic mean of importance m= 4.58, while satisfaction m = 2.89. There was a statistically significant difference in scores of -1,687 (p = 0.00; (t = 234; CI (L = 1.521; U = 1.852)). The difference between the points of the dimension attitude towards tourists of importance and satisfaction is -0,792. It proved statistically significant with a confidence interval of 95%. The dimension of basic requirements of importance carries an average score of m = 4.34 (sd = 0.857), while satisfaction m = 3.67 (sd = 0.724). The difference turned out to be statistically significant (CI = 95%, L = 0,551, U = 0,789, T = 234). The importance and satisfaction security subscale did not prove statistically significant (p = 0.759), while the empathy subscale in both categories had a statistically significant difference with a 95% confidence interval.

Based on the research and analysis of the results obtained, the starting hypothesis is rejected, and the alternative is accepted that there is a statistically significant difference between the pairs of importance and satisfaction.

### **Conclusion**

The level of competitiveness of Serbia in the field of rural tourism product is not particularly good, despite the fact that there are all prerequisites for its more expansive development (natural, cultural and social resources). Rural tourism is a significant instrument for the economic and social development of rural areas. These areas are attractive to tourists because of the advantages of a rural environment with historical tradition, ethnic and geographical characteristics. The authors of the paper conducted a search in several tourist and catering facilities in the rural area of the South Bačka District in order to investigate the existing quality of the services provided. The hypotheses of the research were raised as to whether there is a statistically significant difference between the arithmetic means of the pairs of importance and satisfaction. A modified questionnaire used in their research was presented by Albacete-Saez et al. (2007). There are seven categories of importance and satisfaction, with questions related to the quality of services offered. The importance questionnaire was related to pre-service research, while satisfaction was after using services in rural areas. The data obtained indicate insufficient quality of services, and there is a statistically significant difference between the average ratings of the importance and satisfaction pairs. This confirms the alternative hypothesis H1 and negates the initial or null hypothesis H0. Regardless of the fact that tourism is recognized as a development segment of the economy in Serbia, rural areas are still at an early stage of development, and it is necessary to strategically devise a plan and support all structures in order to see a significant shift, with maximum sustainable utilization of all resources. in this space. The resource base is insufficiently valorized, and all available resources need to be activated by tourism in order to achieve faster and better economic and social development. It is of key interest for further development that an action plan and strategic measures should be implemented to activate all the resource values that are a prerequisite for tourism development. Then, to establish cooperation at local, national and international level, because tourism is generally an insufficiently organized activity, whose development does not follow the opportunities and values at its disposal (Fu et al., 2020). The implementation of a multidisciplinary approach, with a predefined development plan and direction, as well as an

adequate national development program, would greatly contribute to a better placement on the tourism market. The formation of an authentic tourism product, as a future brand, will make rural areas recognizable in the regional and world markets. All the resources that are the basis and driver of tourism development must undergo adequate valorisation and, with the affirmation of support from the local population, can achieve significant results in the fight against competition and achieve long-term stable business in the market.

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