



“St. Kliment Ohridski” University – Bitola



FACULTY OF TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY – OHRID



University of Kragujevac

Faculty of Hotel Management and Tourism

Vrnjačka Banja



XV International Scientific Conference on Service sector

INSCOSES 2020

Ohrid 11-12 September 2020

Publisher:

Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality

Kej Macedonia 95, 6000 Ohrid, MACEDONIA

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www.ftu.uklo.edu.mk; conference.ftu.uklo.edu.mk

CIP - Каталогизација во публикација

Национална и универзитетска библиотека "Св. Климент Охридски", Скопје

338.48(062)

33(062)

INTERNATIONAL Scientific Conference on Service sector INSCOSES (15 ; 2020 ; Ohrid)

XV International Scientific Conference on Service sector INSCOSES 2020, Ohrid 11-12 September 2020 [Електронски извор] / [organizing committee Cvetko Andreeski ... и др.]. - Ohrid : Faculty of tourism and hospitality, 2020

Начин на пристапување (URL): <https://ftu.uklo.edu.mk/>. - Текст во PDF формат, содржи 89 стр., илустр. - Наслов преземен од екранот. - Опис на изворот на ден 09.12.2020. - Библиографија кон трудовите

ISBN 978-608-4676-01-0

а) Туризам -- Собири б) Економија -- Собири

COBISS.MK-ID 52648197

INTEGRATION OF SPA AND RURAL TOURISM – AFFIRMATION OF LEMEŠKA SPA IN A RURAL TOURIST ATTRACTION¹

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ABSTRACT

Rural tourism is an insufficiently valorized 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. The authors of the paper presented a research on the possibility of turning Lemeška Spa into an attraction that would affect rural tourism development. Lemeška Spa has not been in operation for many years, and since a feasibility study for its revitalization project has been made, the authors conducted a survey of the local population regarding the importance of the potential affirmation of the complex in the tourist market of spa tourism, as well as in the rural tourist attraction. Obtained data undoubtedly show support for the development and revitalization of spa tourism, which would trigger rural tourism of the area and environment.

KEY WORDS: integration, development, spa, rural tourism, Lemeška Spa

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is an escape from everyday life and habits, and especially if you look at the countryside, it is very attractive and suitable for tourist escapism from everyday life. Rural tourism is a tool to help develop the region (Aref et al., 2010). The concept of rural tourism is very often identified with recreational and leisure activities that are carried out. Rural areas in Serbia occupy about 85% of the territory, with about 44% of the total population (Petrović et al., 2017). However, despite the fact that

¹ The paper is part of the research at the project III-46006 “Sustainable agriculture and rural development in terms of the Republic of Serbia strategic goals realization within the Danube region”, financed by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia.

this form of tourism product is underdeveloped, rural areas of Serbia are considered to represent significant tourism potential for tourism development, but also for many other economic sectors of the country. The bad economic and political situation in the region during the 1990s caused stagnation in rural positioning in the tourism market. When considering the rural area and development of Serbia, it can be pointed out that the tourist infrastructure is completely unsatisfactory and very outdated, and that the accommodation capacities are not adjusted, either qualitatively or quantitatively, to contemporary market needs. However, even the transport infrastructure is not at an adequate level, and it needs enormous measures for improvement.

Near the town of Sombor, in the Western Bačka District, is the Lemeška Spa. It belongs to the municipality of Svetozar Miletić, and was founded in 1885 and was widely visited according to the then. Lemeška Spa has a favorable tourist position, which is evidenced by the relation to the sources of tourist demand, represented by large cities, the relation to the more important routes of road and rail roads, as well as the relation to competitive tourist values in the region. Lemeška Spa belongs to the Western Bačka District, and belongs to the area of Svetozar Miletić. It is located at an altitude of 93 m, in the area of Bačka diluvial terrace (Gajić et al., 2017). The Spa was open to visitors from 1885 until 1979, when it was completely closed. From the spa there is a collapsed central building that once housed a restaurant, sleeping rooms, as well as the remains of two swimming pools. The first pool was built in the 1950s, while the second, which had otherwise never been licensed and never officially operational, was completed in the 1980s. The tub building and changing rooms no longer exist. The size of the area covers about 20 hectares and is state-owned and the beneficiary is the Local Community (Gajić et al., 2018).

The authors of the paper have tried to point out the great interaction of the two forms of tourism, in this case spa and rural in Serbia. The process of developing a project for the revitalization of Lemeška Spa has been initiated, which will contribute to the development of more forms of tourism products. The importance of research is reflected primarily in the contribution to larger scientific research, especially when it comes to marketing a tourism product through an integrated business system. Namely, the development of one form of tourism inevitably entails some other forms of movement.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Rural tourism is a topical issue in all world research. With regard to 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, work has been planned on planning a better tourist offer in the villages. Serbia, have exceptional resource values as a basis for the development of rural tourism (Cvijanović et al., 2019). The development of tourism in rural areas contributes to the revitalization of abandoned communities, secures new jobs and returns young people (Dimitrovski et al., 2019). In addition, emphasis is placed on the conservation of natural resources as the primary objective of rural tourism development. A major player in the revitalization or restoration of small and dormant spatial environments, which creates economic, cultural conditions for better recovery is the rural tourism product. One of the goals of tourism in rural areas is to provide economic profit to the local population, or extra income, thereby improving the quality of life and stopping the abandonment of property and habitat, and eviction to urban areas (Andereck et al., 2000). Village revitalization can be achieved by developing tourism in these areas (Blažević et al., 2018). On the other hand, the need of the city's population for a recreational stay in a different, rural setting is increasingly being noticed.

The process of rural restructuring brings with it changes in the social and cultural perspective of the same communities (Luloff et al., 2012). When looking at the villages of the western states, we can see the changes that have significantly affected the cohesion and vitality of the rural communities, among them the influx of new and rich social structures, from urban areas that prefer vacation, relaxation in the countryside, a form of rural gentrification. Significant component of rural development can certainly be tourism in rural areas, because today there is a need for new tourism products and experiences, especially for the able-bodied and tourist-experienced tourism participants (Fleischer et. al, 2005). The main feature of modern tourism, which will dominate in the future, is the constant diversification and expansion of the demand structure towards rural tourism product. In order to develop tourism in villages, there is a need for this tourism product (Wang et al., 2000; Joshi et al., 2012). Demand factors are conditioned by the standard of living, which is related to the economic, social, political and other reasons of the state to promote tourism.

Regardless of the fact that tourism is recognized as a development segment of the economy, rural areas are still at an early stage of development, so it is necessary to plan strategically and enable the support of all structures in order to see a significant shift, with the maximum sustainable utilization of all resources on 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 (Burns, 1996; Flisher et al., 2000).

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 rural environment, economy, history and localities
High share of tourism revenue that benefits 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). Rural Tourism Development in Zagreb County, No. 9, pp. 9

Rural tourism develops a very complicated network of rural economy, environment, history and tradition (Williams et al., 2001; Jing et al., 2017). In many European areas, rural tourism is experiencing enormous growth, thanks to the influence of many factors and trends, but also to the conditions in which it develops alongside other complementary branches of the economy (Hal et al., 2005; Gajić et al., 2019).

The Republic of Serbia has 5.06 million hectares of agricultural land, 71% of which is intensively used, and 29% is natural grassland. According to the same results of the 2012 census, there are 631,522 agricultural holdings in the Republic of Serbia. According to the 2011 census report, there were 2,914,990 million inhabitants in rural areas of Serbia (7,058,322 of the total population), while population density was 62 square km². In the period 2002-2011, the total population decreased by 4.15%, primarily as a result of negative natural growth and going abroad. During this period, the rural population decreased by 311,139 inhabitants (10.9%), and now constitutes 40.6% of the total population of Serbia (Agriculture and Rural Development Strategy RS 2014-2024).

Table 2. The 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 Serbia	Number of nights spent in other tourist places and other places (rural areas)	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 (%)
2005	6,499,352	1,411,305	21.71 %
2006	6,592,622	1,354,027	20.54 %
2007	7,328,692	1,528,389	20.85 %
2008	7,334,106	1,636,509	22.31 %
2009	6,776,763	1,453,792	21.45 %
2010	6,413,515	1,437,714	22.42%
2011	6,644,738	1,383,947	20.83 %
2012	6,484,702	1,382,222	21.32 %
2013	6,567,460	1,356,633	20.66 %
2014	6,086,275	1,218,552	20.02 %
Total	60,641,950	12,944,538	21.34%

Source: www.gov.rs

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The first phase of the research included analysis of existing literature, documentation, and review of relevant data from the available Master Plan for Sustainable Rural Tourism, as well as all other relevant bibliographic sources that served as a basis for secondary research through comparative analysis. All survey data obtained were analyzed in SPSS software, version 23.00. The main sample of the survey is the local population of Svetozar Miletić municipality, with a total of 239 respondents. The starting hypothesis was: *The revitalization of Lemeska Spa makes it possible to achieve an integrated development of spa and rural tourism.*

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Categorical variables are represented by relative (%) frequencies. The central tendency of numerical features is represented by the arithmetic mean (m), and the scatter by standard deviation (sd). Since all variables were normally distributed, parametric statistics methods were used. One sample t - test was used to test the statistical significance of the arithmetic values. The significance level selected is 0.05. The results are presented in tables.

A total of 50.6% of men and 49.4% of women participated in the survey. Regarding the age structure, it is as follows: the most represented group is 18-30 years with a total of 28.9%, followed by the group of 31-45 years with a total of 41%. Over 46 years (group 46-60), 18.4% participated, and the group over 60 participated with 11.7%. In terms of cash income, the most represented category is participants with income of 200-400 euros (57.7%), followed by 400-600 euros in total 33.9%, and over 600 euros the least represented category with 8.4%. Considering the educational demographic structure, 14.6% of the research participants have only primary school, then 46.9% completed secondary school, 31.4% of faculties and 7.1% higher education MSc and PhD.

Table 3. Descriptive Item analysis (%)

	Yes	No	Maybe
<i>Rural Tourism should be more represented in the development of municipalities</i>	62.8	8.8	28.5
<i>Society needs more involvement in the development of rural tourism</i>	61.9	13.4	24.7
<i>The government needs to support the development of rural tourism more</i>	67.4	8.8	23.8
<i>Long-term planning reduces the negative effects of rural tourism development</i>	51.9	18.4	29.7
<i>We are involved in the planning and development of rural tourism</i>	22.2	45.6	31.2
<i>Rural tourism is creating new jobs</i>	46.0	15.1	38.9
<i>Rural tourism attracts new investment</i>	47.3	20.9	31.8
<i>Rural tourism raises the standard</i>	57.3	19.2	23.4
<i>Rural tourism brings new infrastructure construction</i>	24.7	51.5	23.8
<i>Local population suffers from the development of rural tourism</i>	19.7	62.8	17.6
<i>The development of rural tourism increases noise and pollution</i>	18.0	64.0	18.0
<i>Rural tourism increases the cost of living</i>	26.4	50.6	23.0
<i>Rural tourism increases crime</i>	25.5	57.7	16.7
<i>Whether the development of spa tourism will increase rural development</i>	60.3	35.1	4.6

Source: Author's research

The Table 3. gives an insight into the results of descriptive timeout analysis, namely relative frequency (%), arithmetic mean value (m) or average grade and standard deviation (sd). A three step scale was used in the study. The first item or the question of whether *rural tourism should be more represented in the development of the municipality* was estimated with an average score of $m = 1.66$ ($sd = 0.893$). Namely, 62.8% of the population that participated in the survey said that rural tourism should be more affirmed in the development of the municipality, while 8.8% were negative and 28.5% were undecided. The local population believes that society needs to be more involved in the development of tourism activities, as can be seen from the results of the relative frequency for this item: 61.9% gave a positive answer, 13.4% negative ($m = 1.63$; $sd = 0.855$).

The third point is that *The government should more support the development of rural tourism*, with an average score of $m = 1.56$ ($sd = 0.852$). It is noted that 67.4% gave affirmative answer, 8.8% negative and 23.8% undecided. The extent to which *Long-term planning reduces the negative effects of rural tourism development* is confirmed by the responses of the local population. About 51.9% of them claim to be correct, 18.4% deny ($m = 1.78$; $sd = 0.877$). However, the fact that the local population needs to be more involved in tourism development has not been confirmed in the survey. The average grade given by the survey participants was $m = 2.10$ ($sd = 0.732$). A total of 22.2% claim to be sufficiently involved in tourism development, while slightly more than 31.2% claim to the contrary. An industry that is not at an enviable level in Serbia, and in other countries contributes to the development and job creation, is tourism. The Item that confirms this was evaluated by the following values $m = 1.93$; $sd = 0.921$. A total of 46% endorsed the view that the development of rural tourism could affect job creation. Item *Rural tourism attracts new investments* received an average rating of $m = 1.85$ ($sd = 0.878$). The majority of the survey participants considered this fact to be correct (47.3% answered in the affirmative).

That the development of rural tourism brings new infrastructural construction is not in complete agreement with the opinion of the local population. About 24.7% answered yes and 51.5% answered negative ($m = 1.99$; $sd = 0.698$). However, local livelihoods suffer from the development of rural tourism, with an average of $m = 1.98$ ($sd = 0.611$). The locals are of the opinion that they do not suffer from the negative impact of rural tourism development. The largest percentage of the population claims that *The development of rural tourism does not contribute to the increase of noise and pollution* (64%). Also, *The development of rural tourism does not increase criminal in the municipality* (60.3%), but

therefore increases the cost of living ($m = 1.97$; $sd = 0.703$). The local population is of the opinion that the development of the Lemeška Spa can influence better rural tourism development as confirmed by the survey data (60.3% of the population answered yes; $m = 1.44$; $sd = 0.583$).

Table 4. Descriptive Item analysis (m=arithmetic mean, sd=standard deviation)		
	m	Sd
Rural Tourism should be more represented in the development of municipalities	1.66	0.893
Society needs more involvement in the development of rural tourism	1.63	0.855
The government needs to support the development of rural tourism more	1.56	0.852
Long-term planning reduces the negative effects of rural tourism development	1.78	0.877
We are involved in the planning and development of rural tourism	2.10	0.732
Rural tourism is creating new jobs	1.93	0.921
Rural tourism attracts new investment	1.85	0.878
Rural tourism raises the standard	1.66	0.834
Rural tourism brings new infrastructure construction	1.99	0.698
Local population suffers from the development of rural tourism	1.98	0.611
The development of rural tourism increases noise and pollution	2.00	0.601
Rural tourism increases the cost of living	1.97	0.703
Rural tourism increases crime	1.91	0.645
Whether the development of spa tourism will increase rural development	1.44	0.583

Source: Author's research

The Table 5. shows the t - test of the statistical significance of the arithmetic means of the corresponding points. It can be observed that the item *Rural Tourism should be more represented in the development of municipalities*, it gets statistical significance ($p < 0.05$; $df = 238$; $t = 28.679$; $L = 1.54$, $U = 1.77$) with 95% confidence interval. The obtained arithmetic value of the item society needs to be more involved in the development of tourism proved to be statistically significant ($p < 0.05$; $df = 238$; $t = 29.440$; $CI = 95\%$ ($L = 1.52$; $U = 1.74$)). Authorities need more support for tourism development is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) with CI of 95% ($L = 1.46$; $U = 1.67$) and t values ($t = 28.396$, $df = 238$). Decreasing the negative effects of tourism development has the following t values: $p < 0.05$; $CI = 95\%$ ($L = 1.67$, $U = 1.89$), $t = 31.330$.

The value of the arithmetic mean of the item we included in the planning and development of rural tourism proved to be statistically significant ($p < 0.05$, $df = 238$; $t = 44.349$), with a 95% confidence interval ($L = 2.01$; $U = 2.19$). Item rural tourism creates new jobs has a statistically significant value of arithmetic mean ($p < 0.05$, $df = 238$, $t = 32.385$; $L = 1.81$; $U = 2.05$). The t value for the variable tourism attracts new investments is $t = 32.507$, and the variable rural tourism raises the standard $t = 30.791$ and the variable rural tourism brings new infrastructure construction $t = 44-106$, with a 95% confidence interval. Significantly, the value of the plot proved to be statistically significant and the local population suffers from the development of rural tourism ($p < 0.05$, $t = 50.062$, $CI = 95\%$ ($L = 1.90$, $U = 2.06$)).

Rural tourism development increases noise and pollution carries the following t values: $p < 0.05$; $t = 51.436$; $L = 1.92$, $U = 2.08$. Also, rural tourism increases the cost of living and rural tourism increases crime have a significant arithmetic mean with a 95% confidence interval ($p < 0.05$). The key question to which the hypothesis applies is whether the development of spa tourism will increase the development of rural tourism, bearing the following values of the t test: $t = 38.256$, $L = 1.37$, $U = 1.52$, and it proved to be statistically significant of arithmetic mean of a given object. The hypothesis that *The revitalization of Lemeška Spa, makes it possible to achieve an integrated development of spa and rural tourism* is confirmed.

Table 5. T- test of the statistical significance of arithmetic mean scores					
Items	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference (CI)	
				Lower (L)	Upper (U)
Rural Tourism should be more represented in the development of municipalities	28.679	238	.000	1.54	1.77
Society needs more involvement in the development of rural tourism	29.440	238	.000	1.52	1.74
The government needs to support the development of ruralism more	28.396	238	.000	1.46	1.67
Long-term planning reduces the negative effects of rural tourism development	31.330	238	.000	1.67	1.89
We are involved in the planning and development of rural tourism	44.349	238	.000	2.01	2.19
Rural tourism is creating new jobs	32.385	238	.000	1.81	2.05
Rural tourism attracts new investment	32.507	238	.000	1.73	1.96
Rural tourism raises the standard	30.791	238	.000	1.55	1.77
Rural tourism brings new infrastructure construction	44.106	238	.000	1.90	2.08
Local population suffers from the development of rural tourism	50.062	238	.000	1.90	2.06
The development of rural tourism increases noise and pollution	51.436	238	.000	1.92	2.08
Rural tourism increases the cost of living	43.225	238	.000	1.88	2.06
Rural tourism increases crime	45.798	238	.000	1.83	1.99
Whether the development of spa tourism will increase rural development	38.256	238	.000	1.37	1.52

Source: Author's research

CONCLUSION

Rural tourism product is an important component of the revitalization of rural areas. 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 (Bramwell et al., 1994). Applying 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 the support of the local population, can achieve significant results in the fight against competition and achieve long-term stable business in the market (Long et al., 2011). The theme of rural tourism is very attractive and topical, as evidenced by the number of foreign and domestic authors who have dealt with it. Tourists expect a completely natural environment, and a visible blend of experience and return to nature, culture and getting to know the residents in typically rural areas. According to the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development), rural areas are those where the population density is below 150 inhabitants per km², while according to the European Union criterion, 100 inhabitants per km² is taken as the threshold. There is no strictly defined concept of rural tourism, but it is known to refer to areas dominated by the natural environment, rural environment, small settlements and villages, hamlets, isolated farms, where agriculture is the main development branch (Mason et al., 2000).

Rural development includes the activity and coordination of the whole system, all relevant economic and economic sectors as well as all social activities in the rural area. Some authors point out in their presentations that rural development is positioned above agrarian development by its size and complexity, since apart from the domain of agriculture it implies the development of the non-

agricultural sector, regardless of the fact that the agricultural sector is more dominant. In all rural development activities, emphasis is placed on interest in the environment, protected areas, sustainable tourism development. The key role of rural tourism is to preserve identity, heritage, tradition, in an adequate way, that creatively uses rural heritage, presenting it to visitors, through emphasizing the true value and importance of conservation. On the other hand, visitors to rural areas need to be offered a rural tourism product, with authentic, original and thorough experiences. Lemeška Spa will become a recognizable unique balneological destination, with very unique natural healing resources, with improved business standards and quality of services, traditional and cultural values, unique infrastructure that respects the principles of sustainability and ecology in the function of health and will be a recognizable brand of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina. With the establishment of business zones, the Spa and Svetozar Miletić will gain capacities that can provide significant tourist and economic activity and thus become one of the most attractive locations for the realization of investment projects, which will be based on available resources, investment potentials and a new proactive approach in creating a competitive and prestigious business environment. Choosing a location to build a tourist infrastructure and supporting content is crucial. All resource bases must be included in the site analysis as well as in the construction of tourist infrastructure. When analyzing the location of the center, it is necessary to analyze the location from the macro and micro aspects (Fotiadis, 2011).

The authors of the paper presented a part of the research related to the possibilities of revitalization of Lemeška Spa and, by activating spa tourism, to make Spa the main attractor for the development of rural tourism in the municipality and the surrounding area. The survey was conducted on a total sample of 239 respondents in the municipality of Svetozar Miletić. Respondents had the opportunity to state how much and to what extent tourism is desirable for the overall development of the municipality. In addition, the local population expressed their view of the extent to which the revitalization of Lemeška Spa and spa tourism will influence the better development of rural tourism in the area and the surrounding area. The obtained data undoubtedly confirm the hypothesis that it is possible to achieve integrated development of two forms of tourism product. In this case it is spa and rural tourism. The analyzed data highlight the importance of tourism development for the municipality and the surrounding area, and the negative impacts are negated. Given that the local population is one of the main initiators of tourism development in a particular destination, this research can be of significance and contribute to broader thematic research on a given issue.

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