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**IMPLEMENTING PRINCIPLES OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN
RURAL TOURISM IN CONTINENTAL CROATIA**

**PRIMJENA NAČELA ODRŽIVOG RAZVOJA U RURALNOM TURIZMU
KONTINENTALNE HRVATSKE**

ABSTRACT

Starting from the paradigm of sustainable development that the needs of contemporary generations for resources should be met in such a way as not to jeopardize the opportunities of meeting the needs of future generations, this paper investigates the problems and presents the principles of sustainable development of rural tourism in continental Croatia. The term and the principles of sustainable tourism are explained: the principles of ecological sustainability, socio-cultural, technological, as well as of economic sustainability. These principles are complementary in tourism, which means that it is only by means of their interactive implementation that the sustainable development of a tourist destination may be provided. The application of these principles is particularly important in rural tourism, whose development is based on cumulative attractions of natural, socio-cultural and economic resources that might ensure the sustainable development of rural areas only through interactive activities.

Rural tourism is the least developed kind of tourism in Croatia, although more than 90% of the area of Croatia is actually the rural area. This is the result of the past tourism policy which preferred maritime tourism, and neglected the so-called Green Croatia.

The accession of Croatia to the European Union creates new market and investment opportunities for the development of rural tourism through special interest tourism.

The goal of this paper is to investigate and explain the principles of sustainable development and to point out their possible implementation in rural tourism of continental Croatia.

The initial hypothesis in this paper is that for long-term sustainable development of rural tourism the implementation of interactive principles of sustainable development is necessary. This hypothesis is proven through the analysis of the results of past research by applying the desk research method, analysis method, synthesis method and comparison method.

Key words: sustainable development, rural tourism, special interest tourism, Croatia

SAŽETAK

Polazeći od paradigme održivog razvoja da se potrebe za resursima sadašnjih generacija trebaju zadovoljiti tako da se time ne ugrozi mogućnost zadovoljavanja potreba budućih generacija, u radu se analiziraju problemi i prezentiraju načela održivog razvoja ruralnog turizma kontinentalne Hrvatske. Objašnjava se pojam i načela održivog razvoja u turizmu: načela ekološke održivosti, sociokulturne, tehnološke te načela ekonomske održivosti. Ova načela u turizmu djeluju komplementarno što znači da se jedino njihovim usklađenim djelovanjem može osigurati održivi razvoj turističke destinacije. Primjena ovih načela osobito je važna u ruralnom turizmu, koji gradi svoj razvoj na kumulativnim atrakcijama prirodnih, sociokulturnih i ekonomskih resursa koji jedino usklađenim djelovanjem mogu osigurati dugoročni održivi razvoj ruralnih područja.

Ruralni turizam je najslabije razvijena vrsta turizma u Hrvatskoj, iako preko 90% prostora čini ruralno područje. To je posljedica dosadašnje turističke politike koja je favorizirala primorski turizam, a zapostavljala tzv. „zelenu“ Hrvatsku.

Ulaskom Republike Hrvatske u Europsku uniju otvaraju se nove tržišne i investicijske mogućnosti upravo za razvoj ruralnog turizma kroz brojne specifične oblike turizma.

Cilj je ovog rada istražiti i objasniti načela održivog razvoja te ukazati na njihovu implementaciju u ruralnom turizmu kontinentalne Hrvatske.

Polazna hipoteza ovog rada je: Za dugoročni održivi razvoj ruralnog turizma nužna je implementacija usklađenih načela održivog razvoja. Ovu se hipotezu dokazuje kroz analizu dosadašnjih rezultata istraživanja pomoću metode istraživanje za stolom (desk research), metodu analize i sinteze te metodu komparacije.

Ključne riječi: održivi razvoj, ruralni turizam, specifični oblici turizma, Republika Hrvatska

1. Introduction

The problems of growth and development are at the forefront of economic theory and practice. Growth denotes progress of a social or economic occurrence in the quantitative sense. On the other hand, development represents a new state and movement of an occurrence, new goals and prosperity we wish to achieve in the present and in the future.

The term 'sustainable development' stems from the concept of general development. Vukonić and Keča define sustainable development as changes in the structure of global production and expenditure which do not disturb the ecosystems (2001:190). This type of development is aligned with the ecosystems in which it takes place, so it should be long-term sustainable.

The problems of sustainable development manifest in all areas of human activity such as the ecological, cultural, social, economic, technological, political and similar domains. There are few human activities which do not affect sustainable development in an indirect or direct manner.

The problem of sustainability is nearly limitless, having a global significance in every domain of activity (Bartoluci, 2013.:130). For example, the production of nuclear energy is not only an issue of a certain region or country, rather it can have a world-wide significance. Another example is the impact the economic crisis in one country has on other countries thus directly or indirectly affecting the economic sustainability in all those countries.

Nonetheless, sustainable development does not have the same significance for every activity. Tourism and sustainable development are two codependent and conditioned phenomena. Tourism is in great part responsible for the acknowledgement of the need for sustainable development because it is extremely interested in the sustainability of all the resources which form the foundation of its own development and sustainability. It was the tourism experts who pointed out the problem of sustainability almost fifty years ago.

The concept of sustainable development of tourism was generated from the theory of sustainable development, which emerged as a reaction to the ever more noticeable ecological and socio-cultural problems humanity is facing, especially in urban areas. The application of the concept of sustainable development in tourism is supposed to ensure that uncontrolled development does not destroy or devastate the resources upon which tourism has begun to develop in a certain area. Such a developmental concept entails that the needs of contemporary generations are to be met in a manner that does not endanger the possibility of meeting the needs of future generations.

Therefore, the concept of sustainable development should be the developmental concept of tourism in the present and in the future permeating all levels of its development.

It is the goal of this paper to explain the problems of sustainable development in tourism and to analyze the specific features of sustainable development in Croatian rural tourism. Out of the research goal stems the basic hypothesis that the implementation of interactive principles of sustainable development is necessary for long-term sustainable development of rural tourism.

This paper is based on secondary sources of research and a case analysis in rural tourism. In this paper, general scientific methods of research were used including the desk research method, analysis, synthesis and the comparison method.

2. The principles of sustainable development in tourism

Sustainable development in tourism can be explained as the relations between different activities in tourism and all the components of sustainability in the ecological, socio- cultural and economic domain. The key element of said relations is the people who have different roles and perform different activities in tourism.

Tourists are the main customers – buyers of the products and services offered by tourism, but they are not simply buyers, rather they are active participants in all the events at a specific tourist destination who then, through their behavior, directly influence sustainability.

Employees are the numerous workers in different tourist activities such as hotels, restaurants, agencies, cultural, sporting and recreational and other activities. Through their actions and behaviors they all directly or indirectly affect the sustainability of the tourist destination.

Companies and public services also have a direct or indirect impact on the sustainability in the environmental or economic domain of the destination. They realize this role through their activities and functions in the destination via common interests and activities.

The local population has a vital role in the sustainability of the destination or tourist location whether they engage in business activities in the tourist sector (for example, renting out rooms) or in some other industry. They have a particular interest being that the sustainability of the destination directly manifests in the quality of life in a certain location.

Every other person who works or visits the destination has an active role in the sustainable development of tourism.

There are four main principles of sustainability listed in literature on tourism: the principles of ecological, socio-cultural, technological and economic sustainability. (Vukonić and Keča, 2001:190).

2.1. Principles of ecological tourism sustainability

Ecological sustainability entails development which is in tune with the sustainability of ecological processes, biological differences and resources. Within the framework of ecological sustainability there are different terms such as the environment, setting, ecology, environmental economics etc.

The term 'environment' refers to man's surroundings i.e. the natural geographical contents of the Earth's surface in a mixture of the lithosphere, the soil, hydrosphere, atmosphere and biosphere. The environment is all the values brought about through human labor. In this way the term of environment gains a broader spectrum of meaning entailing and defining man's place in the biosphere and his role in the transformation of space as a whole or some of its parts. (Bilen, 2011: 124).

The environment is not an entity apart from economy rather all the changes in economy have an effect on the environment and vice-a-versa. (Črnjar, 2002: 50).

There are numerous causes and conflicts in space. They are the result of 'demographic expansion, uncontrolled urbanization, the application of chemical and other means in agricultural production, the industrial production, the potent development of traffic, the devastation of war, etc. '(Bilen and Bučar, 2004: 86).

The consequences of those developments lead to the pollution of water, air, soil, flora, fauna and other natural resources which form the basis for the development of numerous industries, especially tourism.

Tourism is mostly interested in the long-term ecological sustainability because it is the environment and natural resources that are the basic conditions of its development. However, tourism is just one of the consumers of natural resources among other consumers from the same area that come from industrial, public and other domains. Therefore, the idea of protecting natural resources and the costs of sustainability should be maintained by all the participants in the environment, not just by the tourist industry.

This should be the main concern of 'environmental management' which implements different managerial know-hows, techniques and methods in managing industrial entities, keeping in mind the aim of preserving the environment, which is significant for business operations and has an essential importance for the survival of mankind. (Smolčić Jurdana, 2003: 9).

The environmental sustainability paradigm directs the contemporary generations to leave a resource basis in inheritance to the future generations which in its entirety is no smaller than the one they themselves inherited. However, the environment has many limitations in satisfying current and future needs for there are renewable (for example, water, earth, air, the Sun, etc.) and non-renewable resources (for example, oil, mines, forests, etc.).

Excessive use of renewable and non-renewable resources endangers the conditions needed for a continuous social and industrial development. It is therefore necessary to plan sustainable development in tourism in accordance with market demands while keeping in mind the ecological, socio-cultural and technological limitations of a certain tourist space.

The problem of environmental sustainability is of global importance as it is an issue for all countries world-wide, but also because of numerous negative influences and consequences which cross over the borders of a certain country. For example, a nuclear disaster is a problem for all mankind regardless of the country of origin. The disasters of Hiroshima and Chernobyl have confirmed this statement and, sadly, they are not the only ones.

Therefore, 'sustainable tourism' should be the best way of meeting the needs of tourists, while at the same time maintaining the long-term quality of the environment so that 'future generations in a certain community can develop tourism based on the fundamental characteristics and features of natural and anthropological resources'. (Bilen and Bučar, 2004: 90).

2.2. Principles of socio-cultural tourism sustainability

Socio-cultural sustainability stems from the so called social functions of tourism. It is known that tourism started its development based on social values which are classified in modern tourism as social or non-economic functions of tourism. (Cicvarić, 1990:30).

The social function of tourism indicates that tourism brings people together thus affecting the decrease of social differences between certain groups, classes, nations and races of people.

The cultural function of tourism denotes 'the influence that receptive tourist countries have in the cultural domain towards foreign and domestic visitors' (Vukonić and Čavlek, 2001; 185). Both of these functions affect the socio-cultural sustainability of tourism.

So, socio-cultural sustainability is based on social and cultural relations within tourism. 'Socio-cultural sustainability guarantees the compatibility of development with the preservation of culture and the system of people's values which is affected by development, and it guarantees maintaining and emphasizing the identity of the local community.' (Smolčić Jurdana, op.cit. 69). The interaction of various cultures between the local population and tourists begets reciprocal influences that can have positive and negative connotations. Getting to know the local cultures, languages, customs and cultural heritage can represent new values for tourists. The same goes for

the communication the local population has with the tourists, which can prove to be interesting through learning languages, cultural customs and events, etc.

Socio-cultural sustainability is subject to changes in accordance with the changes happening due to the development of society. Therefore, the preservation of socio-cultural values within the tourist destination cannot be a task meant for tourism alone, but for the whole society.

2.3. Principles of technological tourism sustainability

Technological sustainability demands the development and implementation of technology in the following manner:

- new technologies should provide exchangeable solutions for the usage of natural (especially non-renewable) resources;
- new technologies are implemented in the processes of waste water purification, waste disposal, recycling, etc.;
- new technologies should be oriented towards man and the prosperity of mankind.

We are witnessing an exceptional development of new technological solutions in all areas of human activity as well as in tourism. It is important for the implementation of the sustainable development concept that the new technologies are used solely for the benefit of mankind's prosperity.

2.4. Principles of economic tourism sustainability

Economic sustainability is based on a sound and economically efficient development which entails an optimal management of resources in a sustainable manner, so that they could be used by future generations. Economic sustainability in tourism is compatible with the ecological, socio-cultural and technological principles of sustainability.

Economic sustainability dictates that the so called natural capital be measured for economic value by including its value into the whole economic system. In this way, all public, economic and other subjects should participate in the costs of its protection and reproduction.

Socio-cultural sustainability also has a function within economic sustainability. Sustainable tourism is an advocate of active protection and socio-cultural sustainability because it implies a more responsible relation of man towards his setting and development. 'Sustainable tourism should be realized in the future, which is possible if all the participants strive towards it on both the sides of tourist demand and tourist supply. It entails a mutual understanding, solidarity and equality among all the participants of that phenomenon.' (Vukonić, 1994: 114).

Economic sustainability should pave the way for a successful economic development, and resources use and management should make sure they are preserved for future generations.

The principles of economic tourist sustainability are compatible with the other principles; however, in practice they may become incompatible. For example, the most important function for entrepreneurs is profit maximization, which they are prepared to achieve at the expense of ecological and socio-cultural principles of sustainability. The results of such behavior are evident

in building construction (unsanctioned construction, over-development, etc.) or the excessive commercialization of cultural and historical heritage and so on. (Bartoluci, 2013; 137).

Economic sustainability, as in sustainable tourism, has to be built in long-term by all the participants in a certain area, because that is the only way to preserve the quality of life in the present and in the future. Therefore, in the sustainable development policy all principles of sustainability should be equally taken into consideration, for they are mutually dependent and have an effect on tourism sustainability based on synergy.

It is necessary to establish a National Policy and Strategy of Sustainable Development stemming from the core principles of sustainable development in tourism in the Republic of Croatia, as was done in the countries of the European Union. Such a document is of vital importance for the protection of spatial, socio-cultural and other resources needed for the future development of tourism and the whole economic and social system, especially now that Croatia has become a full member of the EU.

The implementation of the principles of sustainable development should be carried out by public administration bodies, administrative bodies of the local self-governmental and governmental units and other legal entities charged with environmental protection.

Education and science play a vital part in raising awareness and spreading knowledge about the need to preserve the natural environment and cultural heritage. Curricula on all levels of education should cover the problem of environmental protection and cultural heritage preservation. Students at lower and higher levels studying to become workers in tourism should be informed about the importance of protecting nature and cultural heritage the process of developing tourism.

Sustainable development has a special significance in protected areas which are numerous in the Republic of Croatia.

The concept of sustainable development is not an 'anti- developmental' concept, but it does point out the limitations of development which should be in accordance with the development of tourism. (Bartoluci, 2013.;142)

3. Sustainable development of rural tourism

The historical development of tourism shows that throughout various time periods the countryside and rural areas were attractive sites for spending leisure-times and a comfortable life; however, during a prolonged period of major economic changes caused by industrialization, the development of the countryside was being neglected. The countryside has gone through numerous changes and is continually facing new economic and social changes.

Rural tourism, as a type of tourism, is an activity or even a movement in which the urban man is returning to nature (Ružić, 2009.: 17). Rural tourism is conceived as a clean economic activity which does no harm to the environment as opposed to production, mining, logging and intensive agricultural production which are massive polluters. Rural tourism entails numerous manifestations, as follows: village tourism (agricultural tourism), residential tourism, traditional regional tourism, sport and recreation tourism, adventure tourism, health tourism, educational

tourism, camping tourism, cultural tourism, religious tourism, hunting tourism, fishing tourism, wine tourism, gastronomic tourism, ecological tourism, etc. (Ružić, 2009.: 17).

Although all of the above mentioned forms can be considered as a special interest form of tourism, these forms can develop within a rural area which means that they are connected to rural tourism.

Rural tourism is a driving force for a number of economic and non-economic activities in a rural area, such as (Ružić, 2009:17):

- the cultivation of natural and healthy food which is continuously in high demand, especially in highly developed countries;
- it contributes to the revitalization of agricultural production on small surfaces, but on a new basis, taking into account the known market and consumers;
- it enables the tourists in rural areas to have an active relationship towards nature and agricultural production on family farms which are included into the rural forms of tourism;
- rural forms of tourism are measured against all the values provided by rural areas which offer man who is on the contemporary level of industrial and post-industrial society, a return to natural values and a relief from all the pressures and stress of the urban setting which in many ways constrict the value of man's freedom;
- the development of rural forms of tourism involves the entire rural setting with the whole ambience of countryside life: the ambience of living, architecture, vegetation and fauna, traditional culture and dress, etc.

The countryside ambience in rural tourism offers highly valuable elements for the organization of various activities needed for an active and quality vacation. Rural tourism gives value and animates the rural ambience and restores accompanying economic activities characteristic for the countryside which are in demand by the new consumer.

Being that village tourism is the most recognizable form in the rural domain, it will be briefly explained. Village tourism denotes an occasional stay in a village environment which offers to its visitors not only fresh air and a natural ambience, but also various chances to actively participate in the life and work on a village farm, various festivities and other events. (Kesar, 2011.:64). The basis for the development of rural tourism lies in the village or family agricultural farm or household that offers catering services based on its own agricultural production.

The conditions that have to be met, the variety of services it can offer, the number of customers, etc. are all regulated by law and other regulations.

It is this form of tourism that is especially developed in some countries of the EU like Austria, Italy, Slovenia, Hungary, etc. In Croatia, village tourism has been developing for the last ten years or so, and currently has 400 village households especially in certain parts of the Croatian Republic, for instance in the inland of Istra, in Medimurje, Baranja, etc.

The growth of this form of tourism is also stimulated through the measures undertaken by the tourism policy, the Ministry of Tourism, the Croatian Chamber of Economy and the Croatian Bank for Reconstruction and Development. However, there is still much room for the development of tourism, especially with the accession of the Republic of Croatia to the European Union. This is facilitated by the fact that the Republic of Croatia is predominantly a rural country

with over 90% of the continental part being rural areas, traditional villages with indigenous architecture and cultural and historical heritage. These are the basic resources needed for the development of various forms of rural tourism, especially village tourism. However, despite the dominant rural spaces in Croatia, the development of tourism in those parts is very much lagging behind the coastal part of Croatia which has been generating over 97% of the entire tourism turnover for years. (DZS, 2013). This is a result of the former tourist policy which has favored maritime tourism and neglected the so called 'Green' Croatia.

In the rural development projects, tourism and food production should be unified in order to hasten the development of rural tourism and also agriculture, which can generate additional economic effects.

The direct pressures rural tourism makes on the environment could be as follows (Črnjar, M., and Črnjar, K., 2009.;41-42):

- draining natural resources (drinkable fresh water, seafood, and so on),
- visual degradation of space,
- water pollution,
- air pollution, noise,
- inadequate communal and other waste disposal,
- damaging the natural and cultural heritage,
- endangering the local way of life and socio-cultural identity,
- uncontrolled construction of holiday homes etc.

It is therefore necessary to develop those forms of rural tourism which cause the least degradation to the environment and cultural and historical heritage, but can be sustainable in the economic sense. In continental Croatia, the same could be said for the following: village tourism, cultural, religious, sport and recreational, health tourism, etc.

Cultural events have a special place and significance in the development of cultural tourism. For example, Varaždin Baroque Evenings are tied with their tourist appeal to the baroque center of the city of Varaždin. In continental Croatia, there are many festivals and events (musical, theatrical, folklore, entertainment and such) which are attractive to tourists and excursionists. For example, the Renaissance Festival in Koprivnica, 'Đakovački Vezovi', the Zrinski event in Čakovac, the festival in Krapina ('Festival kajkavske popoevke') and such. The cultural events are the main motive behind the appeal to tourists to visit the so called cultural destination.

Religious events and pilgrimages are attracting a growing number of tourists. Religious events constitute a special form of tourism – religious tourism. They are primarily tied to religious holidays and pilgrimages, like the shrines of 'Velika Gospa' (Assumption of Mary) in Trsat, Sinj, Marija Bistrica, Ludbreg, Aljmaš, etc.

Apart from cultural and religious events, a special significance for the development of tourism is consisted in *sport events and happenings*, like the Olympic Games, 'Univerzijada', 'Mediterranske igre' or even world, European or national championships in popular sports like football, handball, basketball, athletic sports, tennis, water-polo, swimming, skiing and others. They all constitute sport tourism as a special interest form of tourism which is developed in all countries where both tourism and sport are developed, as is the case in Croatia. (Bartoluci and Čavlek, 2007).

Only some of the possibilities for developing special interest forms of tourism in sustainable development of rural tourism are mentioned here. In a primary research conducted at the beginning of January 2014, among 77 tourist experts, Bartoluci, Kesar and Hendija have established that the gastronomical, enological, village, ecological, cultural, health, sports and recreational, event, hunting and fishing tourisms are the most promising forms of tourism in rural Croatia. (Bartoluci and co., 2014.).

Rural tourism in Croatia is only at the beginning of its development. In the last ten years or so the development of rural tourism has been more forcefully enticed by the Croatian Ministry of Tourism through various forms and means of incentive. This resulted in new accommodation capacities, wine cellars and other attractive contents in Slavonija and Baranja, in the area surrounding Zagreb, in Zagorje and Međimurje, Istra and the Dubrovnik area interior. However, these are small capacities which make up less than 1% of the whole accommodation capacities of Croatian tourism. Besides, they are not connected to the market and do not compete in the European tourism market. On the other hand, the economic and wide-spread social positive effects of the development of rural tourism have been confirmed scientifically and without question through numerous researches (Bartoluci and Hendija, 2013: 199; Bartoluci, 2013:190; European Commission – EC, 1998:16; Fleisher and Pizam, 1997:368; Franić and Grgić: 2002:133; Grihault, 2003:19; Kušen, 2006:170; Petrić, 2006:140; Ružić, 2009:25; UNWTO: 1997: 62; UNWTO, 2004:14 and other authors). With the accession of the Republic of Croatia into the EU, new market and investment opportunities are opening for the development of rural tourism. The possibilities of financing projects in rural tourism from structural and other EU funds are open, and they should be used more often. In order for this to be realized, it is necessary to come up with expert investment projects that need to be managed based on the principles of sustainable development.

4. Conclusion

This paper has confirmed that rural tourism is the least developed form of tourism in Croatia, although over 90% of space is rural area. In the future development of tourism all principles of sustainable development should be implemented because Croatia has a rich natural and social basis of resources needed for the development of rural tourism over the whole expanse of Croatia. The economic sustainability of rural tourism is easier to achieve in the coastal part of continental Croatia where a larger extent of tourist demand is already present. The development of tourism in that part of continental Croatia will mostly depend on the level of development of the supply and its appeal and ability to attract the existing tourist customer base. However, in other parts of continental Croatia, there is no developed tourist demand, especially foreign, and the domestic demand is very limited. With the opening of the European market, the attraction of foreign tourist demand in the continental part of Croatia will be dependent on the appeal and competitiveness of the tourist supply in rural tourism. The basis of that development can be special interest forms of tourism which could be more comprehensively valued through rural tourism. However, to make this kind of development of rural tourism sustainable in the long-term, it is necessary to implement all principles of sustainable development: socio-cultural, ecological, technological and economic principles of sustainable development.

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