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CURRENT ISSUES IN DEVELOPMENT AND IMPROVEMENT OF RURAL TOURISM IN KNIC MUNICIPALITY

This paper aims to call attention to the natural beauties and resources in the municipality of Knic which are a great potential for development of rural tourism. Rural tourism in this region has long tradition that spans over 30 years. Households engaged in tourism as a complementary business activity in Knic municipality are situated in the villages of Borac, Zunje, Knic, Grabovac, Guberevac, Bare and Dragusica. Since the importance of rural tourism is recognized both by the state and the local authorities, the issues that rural households face are quickly solved. Therefore, the utilization of natural potentials is more efficient and the development of rural tourism in the municipality is improved.

Keywords: municipality of Knic; natural geographical features; rural tourism development; rural households.

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ПИТАННЯ РОЗВИТКУ І ПОКРАЩЕННЯ СІЛЬСЬКОГО ТУРИЗМУ В МУНІЦИПАЛІТЕТІ КНІЧ

У статті привертено увагу до природної краси і ресурсів муніципалітету Кніч (Сербія), в яких міститься великий потенціал для розвитку сільського туризму. Сільський туризм у цьому регіоні — традиція, що налічує більше 30 років. Господарства Кніча, залучені в туризм як у додаткову бізнес-діяльність, знаходяться в селах Борач, Зуне, Кніч, Грабовач, Губеревач, Барє і Драгушица. Оскільки важливість сільського туризму визнана як урядом, так і місцевими органами управління, проблеми сільських господарств вирішуються швидко. Таким чином, застосування природного потенціалу є більш ефективним і розвиток сільського туризму в муніципалітеті прискорюється.

Ключові слова: муніципалітет Кніч; природні географічні особливості; розвиток сільського туризму; сільські господарства.

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ВОПРОСЫ РАЗВИТИЯ И УЛУЧШЕНИЯ СЕЛЬСКОГО ТУРИЗМА В МУНИЦИПАЛИТЕТЕ КНИЧ

В статье привлечено внимание к природным красотам и ресурсам муниципалитета Книч (Сербия), в которых заключен большой потенциал для развития сельского туризма. Сельский туризм в этом регионе — традиция, насчитывающая более 30 лет. Хозяйства Книч, вовлеченные в туризм как в дополнительную бизнес-деятельность, находятся в селах Борач, Зуне, Книч, Грабовач, Губеревач, Барє и Драгушица. Поскольку важность сельского туризма признана как правительством, так и местными властями, проблемы сельских хозяйств решаются быстро. Таким образом, применение природного потенциала более эффективно и развитие сельского туризма в муниципалитете ускоряется.

Ключевые слова: муниципалитет Книч; природные географические особенности; развитие сельского туризма; сельские хозяйства.

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1. Introduction. Knic municipality has very favorable conditions for rural tourism development due to its unique landscapes, pristine nature of its villages and good road connection with neighboring towns and major cities in Serbia. The development of rural tourism can be achieved by revitalizing traditional and indigenous values and also by developing broad range of activities, services and attractive tourist products provided by rural population and grown on their family farms in order to attract tourists and generate additional income, while respecting the principles of sustainable development and conservation of natural resources. In the villages of the municipality of Knic, besides the beautiful scenery and traditional and authentic rural households, there are several anthropogenic and natural components that can be touristically valorized. The preserved traditional architecture, traditional farm organization, customs, local cuisine, hospitality and kindness of hosts make a unique tourist offer.

2. Methodology. The importance of rural tourism in Serbia is analyzed in the first part of the paper from the theoretical point of view. Then, by describing natural and geographical features of Knic municipality, the natural potential of this region for the development of rural tourism is examined. The analysis of the research results is carried out for the purpose of identification of certain groups of problems that rural households and the municipality itself face, as well as for suggesting possible solutions to these problems. The authors of the paper have used secondary data sources from books, scientific publications, articles and the Web related to rural tourism. Thus, the applied methodology represents a combination of theoretical work (description of natural features and characteristics of particular villages in Knic municipality) and empirical work (analysis of development of rural tourism in the municipality of Knic, classification of problems and provision of possible solutions).

3. Basic preconditions for the development of rural tourism. Rural tourism implies and includes a range of activities, services and accompanying tourism products, provided by rural communities in order to attract tourists and generate extra income. This type of tourism attracts guests by the traditional hospitality and environmental values of the local population. It is a lever for economic development and improves living standards in rural communities based on the principles of sustainable development and conservation of natural resources (Vujicic, 2008, p. 128).

The quality of natural landscape and appropriate infrastructure are just the basic conditions for the development of rural tourism. However, further development of rural tourism requires fulfillment of the following conditions: communicational connection between the village and the population; development of cultural and spiritual values of a village such as work culture and economic mentality, customs and folklore, traditional and contemporary art (Sakic, 1992, p. 47); better quality of accommodation facilities; development of road networks and communication with travel agencies and tour operators; measures to initiate and support the development of rural tourism at both macro and microlevel (Finci, 1987, p. 919).

As well as with other forms of special interest tourism, getting information about the needs, preferences and desires of potential consumers of tourist products that the rural tourism can offer is very important. Some of the sources of such information are (Hrabovski, Tomic, 2008, p. 93): interviews with guests, property-owners and people who work in rural households, as well as with businessmen engaged in business activ-

ities in rural areas; chamber of commerce, tourist boards, specialized magazines and newspapers, scientific and professional seminars, exhibitions and fairs; visits to successful rural households engaged in tourism; advertising of competitive rural destinations; various studies related to tourism.

Special features and advantages of rural areas in Serbia are reflected in (Todorovic, 2009, p. 66):

- 1) strong sense of identity and pride of the local population;
- 2) preserved customs and old crafts, production of handcrafted goods;
- 3) cultural activities, festivities, celebrations, fairs;
- 4) exceptional and well-preserved environment;
- 5) large number of cultural monuments and rich architectural heritage;
- 6) enthusiasm and optimism of local entrepreneurs;
- 7) readiness to cooperate.

Serbian villages undoubtedly have the natural potential for development of rural tourism. The problem is that such potentials are insufficiently exploited, thus Serbia cannot be properly positioned at the international rural tourism market. It is necessary to increase the attractiveness of tourism offer and focus on those products that have a global perspective and can be considered as a basis for building the global competitiveness. Sumadija district is located in the central part of the Republic of Serbia and consists of 6 municipalities: the city of Kragujevac (which is also the administrative center of Sumadija district), Knjic, Arandjelovac, Topola, Raca, Batocina and Lapovo. Rural tourism, which may be one of the drivers of development and diversification of rural economy and agricultural production, is the most developed in the villages that belong to Knjic municipality.

4. Distinctive features of the villages in Knjic municipality. Knjic municipality is located in central Serbia and belongs to Sumadija district. The distances between Knjic and major neighbouring towns and cities are: Knjic — Kragujevac = 20km, Knjic — Cacak = 41km, Knjic — Kraljevo = 43km, Knjic — Gornji Milanovac = 33km and Knjic — Belgrade (the capital city of the Republic of Serbia) = 140km. Important international railway corridor "Kragujevac — Kraljevo" passes through the territory of Knjic municipality, as well as two major roads that connect this municipality with the Ibar highway and the towns of Cacak and Gornji Milanovac. The areas with the most fertile soil are in the valley of the River Gruza and on the banks of its tributaries and they have an average altitude of 270 meters, while the altitude of the hills stretching towards Rudnik Mountain, the Gledic mountains, Kotlenik Mountain and other surrounding mountains are about 500 meters above the sea level. This part of southern Sumadija is rich in forests, water and fertile soil. This type of relief and fertile lands around the River Gruza makes the region suitable for growing crops, vegetables and fruit, as well as for farming. The climate of this area is characterized by moderately cold winters and moderately hot summers, which are the basic characteristics of the mild continental climate (Knjic Municipality, www.knjic.rs). As far as the natural beauties in the Knjic municipality are concerned, one must mention Gruza lake, which covers the area of 12 000 ha, the Gruza River and the Borac Karst. The most famous cultural and historical monuments in Knjic are: the ancient settlement in Borac, the church of St. Archangel Gabriel that dates back to the XIVth century and

the monastery Kamenac (the XVth century) which is the endowment of Despot Stefan Lazarevic. In addition to abovementioned attractions, there are also numerous cultural events that are traditionally organized in this municipality. Among the most important events in Knic, the following stand out: the art colony "Autumn in Gruza", which takes place in September, "Dancing Gruza" — folk dance festival, "Meetings of the villages of the Knic Municipality" — a competition in singing and folk dancing, the religious event "Palm Sunday" (famous for its trick-or-treat customs and scary costumes that children wear during trick or treating) and "Serbian Goulash Festival". Knic offers to tourists a variety of types and forms of tourism. The most developed types of tourism are rural tourism, recreation and sport tourism, hiking, hunting and fishing. Rural agricultural households in Knic municipality are significant food producers and their family homes have adequate facilities for guests accommodation. Almost every family house has spare rooms for relatives who come for a visit, and for guests — "guest rooms" (Vujcic, 1999, p. 57).

Rural household Aleksic — village Guberevac. Guberevac is located on the border between the municipalities of Knic and Kraljevo, along the main road Kraljevo-Kragujevac. It spreads through the valley of the River Gruza and along the slopes of Kotlenik Mountain. This village is famous for its hunting grounds. The village is rich in orchards — mostly plum and pear, which fruits are processed in a local distillery. "Gruzanska nit" (Gruza thread) brandy is produced in this distillery and it is the only plum brandy with registered brand name and geographic origin.

The rural household Aleksic offers 4 double rooms and one triple room to its guests. Accommodation is based on self-catered accommodation (no meals provided), bed and breakfast, half-board and full board. Aleksic household also organizes lunch parties for groups up to 50 persons, as well as visits to fruit brandy distillery "Gruzanska nit" with the possibility of brandy tasting (Regional Economic Development Agency for Sumadija and Pomoravlje, www.redasp.rs).

Rural household Tanasijevic — Zunje village. Zunje village is located along the shore of Lake Gruza and is an ideal holiday place for people who enjoy water sports and recreational fishing. The slopes of Kotlenik Mountain are in the vicinity of the village, thus staying in this village is perfect for tourists who enjoy walking, picking herbs and mushrooms, as well as other outdoor activities. In recent years the village Zunje has become a base for accommodating rowers, which is another indicator of the quality of services in rural tourism. This village is famous for the traditional event — the International Art Colony "Autumn in Gruza" whose participants stay at rural households.

In Tanasijevic rural household, which is only 150 meters away from Gruza lake, there are 3 triple and one single room with private bathrooms. Accommodation is based on self-catered accommodation (no meals provided), bed and breakfast, half-board and full board. The guests can also cook their meals, as well as prepare preserved foods for winter. Tanasijevic household also organizes lunch parties for groups up to 20 people (Regional Economic Development Agency for Sumadija and Pomoravlje, www.redasp.rs).

Rural Household Milosevic — Borac village. Borac is considered as one of the most interesting villages in Gruza. It is famous for its natural beauties and old tradition. The distance between the center of Knic municipality and Borac village is 13

km, while the distance between Borac and Kragujevac is 28 km. The whole area is dominated by the Borac Karst (515AMSL). The remains of the medieval town that dates to the time of Despot Stefan Lazarevic are located on the top of the hill. The church dedicated to the Archangel Gabriel was built in 1350 at the foot of the hill and is entirely built of Borac stone. It is surrounded by steep cliffs and ancient Tilia trees and is visible only when you come close to it. Borac Karst is also a lookout point with breathtaking views of the whole valley of the River Gruza. The Borac River, the tributary of the River Gruza stands out as a rare natural attraction. This river has inspired many painters and poets. Borac village offers to tourists a chance for recreation in the countryside, outdoor activities like picking herbs and mushrooms as well as hunting and fishing. Every year in early February a traditional fox hunt is organized here (Knic municipality, www.knic.rs).

The Milosevic rural household, which is located in the center of the village, offers to its guests 7 single rooms, 3 double rooms, one triple and one room with 4 beds. Accommodation is based on self-catered, bed and breakfast, half-board and full board. The menu is created in consultation with guests. Household also organizes lunch parties for groups up to 60 people, as well as visits to the Borac Karst (Regional Economic Development Agency for Sumadija and Pomoravlje, www.redasp.rs).

5. Research results. Based on the analysis of the results of the research, project proposals related to the revitalization and development of rural tourism in Knic and laws and regulations in the field of rural tourism, two key topics for discussion can be distinguished (Tourismologists Association of Serbia, 2010, p. 1-9):

1. Legislative Regulation of Rural Tourism — the first topic includes several problems faced by rural households. In fact, most of the problems appear when applying the Rulebook on Categorization of Accommodating Capacities because this Rulebook does not consider the special characteristics of rural tourism and rural households. The primary activity of rural households is agriculture, while tourism represents the complementary activity. Hence, there are no purposely built tourist facilities that could be categorized according to the aforementioned Rulebook. It is therefore necessary to harmonize the Rulebook with the real situation in the country and make it possible for households to include into the tourist offer already existing buildings that are impossible to categorize according to the Rulebook that is currently in effect. Another problem is charging fees for the services provided by rural households, since owners of rural households are required to issue fiscal receipts. Knic municipality in a way solved this problem in the following manner: tourists pay for their accommodation to a travel agency that has a fiscal cash register, while all expenses related to the meals are paid directly to a host. Given the fact that rural households sell their products to tourists, they are double taxed because the state charges tax on the already taxed agricultural products, which increases the likelihood of "black market tourism". Other problems include a conflict between the need to preserve the distinctive features of old rural households as a specific tourist attraction and standards to be met during the categorization of accommodation facilities, as well as a lack of education and trainings on laws and regulations in the field of rural tourism. In order to address the first group of problems, it is necessary to start the initiative to: amend the Rulebook on Categorization of Accommodating Capacities and harmonize it with the real situation in the country, make it possible for rural households to include old village buildings into tourist offers,

as well as to make an exception concerning the requirement for issuing fiscal receipts, solving the problem of double taxation, introduce incentives for rural tourism and organize educational programmes referring to the rural tourism development.

2. *Stimulation of the receptive travel agencies for rural tourism.* Problems faced by rural households and tourism organizations in stimulating the receptive agencies are: lack of education of rural households in making attractive tourist offer and itineraries that travel agencies could sell, as well as raising awareness about the benefits of the joint appearance on the tourism market as the cooperatives or host associations, the absence of measures provided by the state institutions which would stimulate travel agents to turn to the recipients; small number of projects for improvement of rural tourism. In order to solve the second group of problems, it is necessary to start the initiative to raise the awareness of hosts (property owners) on the opportunities and advantages of the establishment of cooperatives and associations and the joint appearance on the tourism market, introduce the incentives for travel agencies to focus their activities towards the recipients; increase the level of education concerning rural tourism by having the Serbian Chamber of Commerce organize suitable training programmes.

One should also mention the efforts of an independent organization called "Youth for Tourism" (team in charge of rural tourism within the Tourismologists Association of Serbia) which strives to promote rural tourism and all accompanying forms of tourism (ethno-tourism, eco-tourism, adventure tourism, hunting tourism, food tourism, event tourism, cultural tourism, health tourism, sports and recreation tourism etc.), especially among young people in Serbia and among all other people of good will. The team for rural tourism is also involved in organizing one-day trips and several-day excursions to the countryside, mostly of educational and professional character; informing general public on the current rural tourism offer and potential opportunities for rural tourism development in Serbia; organizing seminars, lectures, workshops and the like related to the rural tourism issues and topics; carrying out different research projects related to rural tourism (surveys, field research etc.); supporting various projects that promote the development of rural tourism; exchanging of ideas among its members, their experiences, attitudes etc.; raising awareness of young people on importance and impact of rural tourism; advocating the nature conservation and promoting the "green" forms of tourism while strengthening the environmental awareness among young people etc. (Tourismologists Association of Serbia, www.uts.rs).

The project "Promoting the Quality Improvement of Tourist Offer and Accommodation Facilities in Rural Tourism" was for the first time initiated by the NGO "Youth for Tourism". Through this project, "Youth for Tourism" involved tourism students in activities designed to improve the quality of tourist offer in the municipality of Knin. This project also aims to support rural households in overcoming current issues and problems, as much as possible, by offering advice, indicating the existing problems and comparative and competitive advantages. In addition, the tourism offer for each household is designed and complete report is made. The plan is to print leaflets and advertising materials based on these reports in the near future. Through this project, "Youth for Tourism" also wishes to establish cooperation with local tourist organizations, National Tourism Organization of Serbia, Ministry of Economy and Regional Development, receptive agencies and all related industries

that have effect on the quality of tourism in the region (Youth for Tourism, www.mladizaturizam.rs).

6. Conclusion. Based on the natural and geographic features and current development of agricultural production in Knic municipality, it can be concluded that natural resources of this municipality are insufficiently utilized. Since this region gravitates towards the larger cities in Serbia, there are numerous opportunities for transforming this municipality from unproductive to highly productive agricultural region. Positioning of the tourist offer of the villages in Knic municipality should be based on the diversity of tourism products, rich cultural heritage (architecture, tradition, old crafts), as well as hospitality and kindness of local population. Introducing rural households with establishing and running business, as well as with the main features of rural tourism and its promotion should be the milestones of the project aimed at developing this form of tourism. Furthermore, it is very important to establish a system of support for the development of rural tourism at the macro level, which can be defined as a long-term interest of a society to utilize the natural potential of this region by implementing adequate economic policy and preserving the environment. In order to promote tourism in villages that belong to Knic municipality, one can quote the message sent by the Tourist Organization of Knic Municipality: "... get away from concrete, asphalt and stress to the idyllic landscape of our villages. Return to your roots, take a walk through the fields of your childhood where your ancestors walked. Let our traditionally hospitable locals open their homes, their hearts and their souls to you ...".

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