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RURAL TOURISM MARKETING OF THE DANUBE REGION⁴

Abstract

Within tourism, as one of the largest and fastest-growing world industries, a prominent place is taken up by separate, selective forms of tourism. Rural tourism enables consumers to return to the natural setting and relief from pressure and stress emerging in urban environments. As eco-friendly travel into relatively well-preserved areas, rural tourism features as a significant element of sustainable tourism, economic and social development of rural areas. In view of this, the entire management, realization and implementation of the marketing strategy of developing rural tourism should be based on a compromise of interests of different and numerous stakeholders. The subject of this paper is the Danube Region and rural tourism of this region, and the objective is to emphasise the significance of further development of this special, selective form of tourism by applying marketing concept. Secondary data and methods of induction, deduction, synthesis and analysis were used for the purpose of this writing this paper

Keywords: tourism, rural tourism, marketing, the Danube region

JEL classification: M31, Z32

МАРКЕТИНГ РУРАЛНОГ ТУРИЗМА ДУНАВСКОГ РЕГИОНА

Апстракт

У оквиру туризма, као једне од највећих и најбрже растућих светских индустрија, издвајају се посебни, селективни облици туризма попут руралног туризма. Рурални туризам омогућава потрошачима повратак природном амбијенту и растерећење од притиска и стреса који настаје у урбаним срединама. Као еколошко путовање у релативно очувана подручја, рурални туризам представља значајан елемент одрживог туристичког, економског и социјалног развоја руралних области. При том, целокупно управљање, реализација и имплементација маркетинг стратегије развоја руралног туризма треба да се базира на компромису интереса различитих и многобројних стејкхолдера. Предмет рада

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представља Дунавски регион и рурални туризам тог региона а циљ се огледа у истицању значаја даљег развоја овог посебног, селективног облика туризма применом маркетинг концепта. За потребе писања рада спроведено је истраживање за столом, коришћени су секундарни подаци и методе индукције, дедуције, синтезе и анализе.

Кључне речи: туризам, рурални туризам, маркетинг, Дунавски регион

Introduction

Numerous changes on the market caused by industrialization have led to a significant trend – migration of inhabitants from villages to towns, resulting in the problem or deagrarization of numerous rural areas. A possible solution to the problem is to support sustainable rural development and to develop rural tourism as a special, selective form of tourism. The environmental aspects of rural tourism are one of the ways to contribute to solving this problem, the most important of them being: direct impact on preservation of and increase in agricultural areas, securing additional income to local population and job opportunities. (Franić & Grgić, 2002).

In accordance with the above, within the Danube Region, connection between sustainable agriculture, sustainable rural development and sustainable development of tourism, that is, its special form, rural tourism has a special significance. Such integrated approach to sustainable development of the Danube Region meets the basic objectives of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region – connectedness and communication, environmental protection, socio-economic and institutional development and strengthening regional cooperation (Štetić et al., 2014).

The subject of the paper is the Danube Region and development of a special form of tourism – rural tourism – in this area. The objective is reflected in pointing out the significance of development of rural tourism by applying marketing concept. Desk research was conducted for the purpose of writing the paper, and data from secondary sources were used. In addition to the introduction and the conclusion, the paper includes three wholes structured from general to specific content.

Rural tourism

Tourism is one of the world's greatest and fastest-growing industries, the development of which has resulted in diversification of tourist products and tourist destination (Pato & Kastenholz, 2017). New, selected forms of tourism have appeared as a consequence of the above mentioned processes. (Sharpley & Vass, 2006). The “new” forms of tourism aim to overcome problems generated by mass tourism (Weaver & Jin, 2016). As early as the in 1990s, Poon (1993) pointed to the emergence of the so-called “new, hybrid tourist”, seeking to experience something new and different, to travel independently and experience tourist destination without destroying them. Such “new” tourists differ from tourists – consumers of mass tourism. Table 1 shows the difference between the “new” and the “old” tourists.

Table 1. Characteristics of the “new” and the “old” tourists

Characteristics of the “new” tourists	Characteristics of the “old” tourists
Spontaneous behaviour with changes in the manner of choosing travel	Homogenous segments of predictable behaviour
With experience in travel and desire for adventure and entertainment	Travel is novelty for them
Have quality of the total experience in focus	Do not pay attention to the quality of tourist service
Wish to manage their own leisure time and willing to take risks	Feel secure as a part of a large group

Source: Adapted from Štetić et al. (2014) Posebni oblici turizma Dunavskog regiona Srbije. Institut za ekonomiku poljoprivrede, Beograd, str. 17.

In this sense, alternative, special forms of tourism such as eco-tourism, rural tourism, cultural tourism and others, fully targeted to consumers and their specific needs emerge as opposition to mass tourism (Mihailović & Moric, 2012). Demand for such, special forms of tourism has clearly manifest specific features: (a) expressed wish of tourists-consumers for authenticity; (b) expressed wish of tourists-consumers for experience in local setting and (c) expressed wish of tourists-consumers for appreciation of the host (Todorović & Štetić, 2009).

Rural tourism features as a significant element of sustainable tourist, economic and social development of rural areas (Krajnović et al., 2011). Sustainable development refers to a harmonious relationship between nature and ecology aimed at preserving natural resources for present and future generations, whereas sustainable tourism refers to tourist movements accompanied by meeting social and economic needs and preservation of cultural and historic heritage of destinations (Štetić, 2002). Given that sustainable tourism features as an essential element of socio-economic development of a country, Milenković (2006) finds the following to be necessary: (a) to base its development on the criterion of sustainability; (b) to raise the level of consumers’ awareness of tourism; (c) to define a program for providing sustainable development of tourism and (d) to disseminate knowledge on sustainable technologies in tourism.

The notion “rural” has transformed in recent decades from the traditionally “agrarian” notion into a notion increasingly related to social, cultural and economic context (Okech et al., 2012). Rural tourism can be defined as eco-friendly travel to relatively well-preserved areas for entertainment and enjoyment in nature (Radović et al., 2018). Similarly, Ružić (2009) states that rural tourism enables consumers to return to the natural setting and relief from pressure and stress appearing in urban environment. In addition to the above, the same author points out that developing rural tourism encompasses the entire rural environment connected with the comprehensive setting of rural life – architecture, plant and animal world, culture, tradition etc. On the other hand, rural tourism creates conditions for development of entrepreneurship and opens development opportunities for two groups of stakeholders. The first group comprises subject directly involved in this form of tourism (e.g. subjects involved in accommodation or food preparation), whereas the other group comprises subjects indirectly involved as part of rural tourism (e.g. variety shops) (Wilson et al., 2001). Okech, Haghiri & George (2012) state two basic reasons why it is essential to develop tourism in rural areas:

- Increasing the number of people (local population) involved in developing rural tourism – one of the ways to increase employment rates in rural areas is reflected in developing tourism in these areas.
- Providing wider benefits to rural areas – developing tourism in rural areas enables economic growth, stabilisation, employment, stops depopulation, builds infrastructure, revives old crafts, increases the opportunity of contact with local population, ensures environmental protection etc.

What separates rural tourism in comparison with other, special, selective forms of tourism is authenticity and tradition. Motives of consumers/tourists visiting rural tourism destination can be explained by push and pull factor theory (Dann, 1981). According to this theory, push factors are internal motives and urges driving consumers to travel, whereas pull factors includes all external forces and characteristics of a tourist destination attracting consumers to visit them. Thus, in the context of rural tourism, push factors represent consumers' desire to escape the everyday stressful urban life, whereas pull include peace, simplicity, authenticity, relaxation, greenery, clean air, local gastronomy and local customs (Urry, 2002). Similarly, Goeldner & Ritchie (2005) divide motives making rural tourism interesting to consumers/tourists into four groups: (1) physical (e.g. relaxation); (2) cultural (introduction to new cultures, customs and lifestyles); (3) interpersonal (meeting new people) and prestige (introspection and self-actualisation). However, one must bear in mind that although consumers/tourists enjoy the old-fashioned lifestyles during their visit to a rural tourist destination, its contents need to be adapted to their needs and expectation. Thus, the offer of the rural tourist destination should include a broad spectrum of activities such as hunting, fishing, horse riding, walking, eco-tourism, ethno-tourism, even elements of health and wellness tourism (Rodrigues et al., 2010).

The role of marketing in the development of rural tourism

Technological development and increasingly important application of the Internet change the methods of communicating and establishing consumer relationships. This trend gains significance in a situation when the offer – the product/service is dislocated in relation to the target segment, as in the case of rural tourism (Gossling & Lane, 2015). Also, it must be pointed out that the offer of rural tourist destination is based on appeal, individual approach and tradition. On the other hand, under the influence of the aforementioned trend, consumers/tourists are becoming increasingly independent and increasingly involved in the process of selecting tourist destinations (King, 2002). The link between supply and demand in this case can be marketing with the task to connect consumers/tourists and local tourist destination, as well as achieving customer loyalty.

Dinis (2006) states two basic objectives to be achieved by applying marketing in rural areas:

- to enable rural areas to be more competitive and
- provide conditions for higher quality of life for economically active population of the areas

Similarly, Kostić-Stanković (2013) points out the following objectives of application of marketing within rural development:

- creating and improving competitiveness by emphasising the differential advantages of rural areas
- strengthening local infrastructure,
- developing and promoting rural areas by pointing out initiatives and strategies of rural development
- attracting, building and maintaining long-term relations with foreign partners/ investors and
- protecting and improving the environment in accordance with sustainable rural development.

The specific features of applying marketing in rural tourism stems from the nature of tourist service (Mihailović, 2011). Above all, one must bear in mind the seasonal character of demand, where marketing's task is reflected in the attempt to extend the season, and the application of marketing method for adapting to its varying intensity. Furthermore, an unavoidable characteristic is high fixed costs arising from the attempt to satisfy consumers/ tourists visiting rural destinations, so that marketing managers' task is to create an offer that will absorb sufficient income to cover them. Finally, consumers/tourists expect offer consisting of tourist offers that will meet all their expectations and needs. This is an offer comprising a combination of not only of various services but also physical products, events and experiences.

Appreciating the specific features of tourist offer, Pato & Kastenholz (2017) propose a useful marketing approach to rural tourism. It is the demand management strategy in the context of integrated and sustainable marketing approach. Such an integrated marketing approach should be based on: (a) attempt to discover what it is that a rural tourist destination has to offer (what?), (b) which segment of consumers/tourists has the time, money and desire to travel and visit such a type of tourist destination (who?) and how to reach such consumers/ tourists, meet their expectations and needs and build loyalty (how?).

Marketing management in the area of rural tourism as a special, selective form of tourism is characterised by the following (Skoko & Jugo, 2007; Krajnović et al., 2011):

- The majority of subjects involved in tourist offer of rural areas are unable to apply various marketing methods, so that it is necessary to perform marketing networking of all stakeholders. Thus, marketing networking should be conducted at city or municipal levels, at tourist cluster level, at regional and national level.
- In addition to basic resources forming the tourist product and offer of a rural tourist destination – agricultural products, climate, natural attractions, local population, cultural landmarks, tradition, customs etc., - a very important role is also played by accompanying infrastructure – roads, signals, bicycle paths, walking paths etc. All of these lead to the conclusion on the importance of the role of the public sector in the development of rural tourism.

The entire management, realisation and implementation of marketing strategy of rural tourism development should be based on a compromise of interests of various stakeholders.

The basic guidelines of further development of rural tourism of the Danube Region by application of marketing concept

The Danube Region is a functionally connected space defined by its basin (Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, downloaded from https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/official/communic/danube/com2010_715_danube_sr.pdf). At its length of 2860 km, the Danube flows through 10 countries and extends to 19 countries, where the largest part of its basin belongs to Romania (29%). It is a region possessed of exceptional natural beauty, rich history, tradition and culture. The EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) encompasses 14 countries along the Danube (Austria, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Croatia, Hungary, Germany, Slovakia, Slovenia, Romania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Moldavia, Ukraine and Serbia), with over 112 inhabitants. The strategy is based on four pillars, within which specific actions for co-operation determine priority areas (Table 2). Table 2 clearly shows how promoting culture and tourism features as one of priority areas within the development of the Danube Region.

Table 2. 4 pillars of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR)

1. CONNECTING THE REGION
To improve mobility and transport connections
To encourage development of sustainable energy
To promote culture and tourism
2. PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT
To restore and maintaining the quality of waters
To manage environmental risks
To preserve biodiversity, landscapes and the quality of air and soils
3. BUILDING PROSPERITY
To develop knowledge society
To support competitiveness of enterprises
To invest in people and skills
4. STRENGTHENING THE REGION
To step up institutional capacity and cooperation
To work together to promote security and tackle organised and serious crime

Source: https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/official/communic/danube/com2010_715_danube_sr.pdf

The issue of rural development in the European Union (the majority of countries encompassed by the Strategy are EU members) is of great importance, especially bearing in mind the fact that about 90% of the territory of the EU comprises rural and medium rural areas (Đokić, 2019). The importance of rural tourism is reflected in the interaction of agricultural production, production of traditional products, preservation of historic and cultural heritage, tradition and traditional, local gastronomy. Wilson et al. (2001) point out that the development of tourism in rural areas is based on the following elements: total physical product, good local governance, support of local government, sources of finance for tourism, strategic planning, coordination and cooperation between stakeholders and local government, coordination and

cooperation between rural tourist entrepreneurs and wide support of the local community to development of tourism. In addition to all of the above, one must add the fact that Europe, with over 200,000 households and over 2 million beds in rural tourism, has completed the phase of developing rural tourism and faces the challenges of the subsequent phase, the most important being lack of high-quality and preserved areas (with increasing competition, need for integration within rural areas and need for building partnerships between all stakeholders in rural tourism (Štetić et al., 2013).

The Danube represents exceptional tourist potential. In order to position it on the market as successfully as possible, it is necessary to apply a development model that would provide the Danube with competitive advantage in relation to other rivers. Such a model is based on customer/tourist satisfaction, satisfaction of the local tourist community, preserving the quality of environment and sustainable development of tourism (Štetić et al., 2014). Further development of rural tourism in the Danube basin and its integration into the rural space attains numerous economic and non-economic effects influencing the development of the total local community. The above is reflected through: (a) developing underdeveloped areas and their inclusion into the tourist offer; (b) employing as many household members as possible; (c) achieving “invisible” export by placement of surplus products of rural households (d) selling traditional products – handicraft products; (e) creating opportunities for return of population into abandoned rural areas; (f) extending the base for developing tourism and increasing income and (g) creating a basis for expanding the real circle of tourist demand (Štetić, 2007). Viewed like this, tourism (and local tourism as its special form) should be one of priority industries providing the Danube basin (including Serbia, which belongs to this region) an opportunity to earn income, open new jobs and develop underdeveloped areas (Tomić & Stoiljković, 2015; 2013).

Conclusion

The role and importance for the economy of a country or a region are multiple. Its effects are expressed by showing tourist sales and income on the one hand and influence it achieves on complementary activities on the other (Štetić et al., 2014). Developing rural tourism features as one of the solution that would enable multiple positive effects in rural areas with appropriate economic, infrastructural, organisational, organisational and educational incentives.

Further development of rural tourism in the Danube region can, primarily, improve conditions of living in this area. Through an integrated approach and development model, this special, selective form of tourism connects agricultural production, services, restoration and maintenance of cultural, educational, communal and social infrastructure. This is a way to create a base for creating new jobs, additional income to local population, further improvement and education of local population and, generally, reviving the trend of return of population to smaller, rural areas.

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