

Concepts of Rural Tourism and Farm Tourism

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The analysis of environmental, social, and economic factors as vectors for the sustainable development of farm tourism is introduced.

farm tourism

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1. Introduction

Current tourism trends include outdoor activities in protected natural areas and rural environments and activities and recreation in indoor spaces, as well as exposure to cultural content ^{[1][2]}. In other words, people are not trying to dominate nature but are instead trying to find their place in it. With the popularization of tourist activities, rural areas are exposed to numerous pressures. They were, both around the world and in Serbia, particularly exposed to pressure during the COVID-19 pandemic ^{[3][4][5][6]}. The number of people who spend their travel time and holiday time outdoors has increased, as has the desire to preserve the environment and the actualization of issues of sustainable development in conditions of increasingly greater air pollution, water pollution, soil pollution, deforestation, fire, floods, and other catastrophes that have long-term effects on the climate of our planet ^{[7][8][9]}. That is why concepts of sustainable tourism, rural tourism, green tourism, ecotourism, nature-based tourism, low carbon tourism, and others have become dominant topics in the tourism literature ^{[10][11][12][13][14]}.

The sudden and sometimes chaotic development of tourism must be controlled in accordance with the concept of sustainable development. Sustainable tourism presents a concept of development that will balance out the ecological, socio-cultural, and economic components of the environment on the one hand and tourist satisfaction on the other. According to the definition provided by the World Tourist Organization, sustainable tourism limits current and future economic, social, and ecological impacts and provides optimum support for the needs of the tourists, those employed in tourism, and the local communities while preserving the natural environment ^[15]. "Sustainable tourism" often encompasses only tourism based on nature, or ecotourism, which is not acceptable. Sustainability must be a feature of all forms of tourism, especially mass tourism, as it potentially has the greatest impact on the economy, environment, and cultural heritage.

Rural tourism includes a broad spectrum of tourist attractions and activities that take place in rural areas. It reflects the need of tourists for authentic experiences, including interaction with the local population. This is why rural tourism is considered sustainable, as it mainly attracts a small number of visitors interested in the local culture and

traditions. However, sustainability is not always easily achieved, especially economic sustainability, as touristic demands are seasonal by nature, the accommodation capacities are not always full, and considerable investment is needed to build or adapt the tourist facilities in rural areas [16]. Based on the tourists' motives for visiting rural areas, it is possible to define various forms of rural tourism. For example, farm tourism is an authentic form of rural tourism in Vojvodina [17], which usually includes providing room and board on the farm itself as well as offering experience with farm work.

2. The Development of Rural Tourism

The development of rural tourism is receiving increasingly more attention, as it can contribute to the social and economic renewal of rural areas, provide supplemental income and employment, and also contribute to the possibility of repopulation and the elimination of social isolation in an area. In that sense, tourism is viewed as a way of overcoming a series of problems in the development of rural areas around the world. This statement is confirmed by a more intensive development of rural tourism, which has been enhanced by the COVID-19 pandemic [18][19][20]. Rural tourism is becoming the force behind economic development and the increase in the living standard in rural communities since it is based on principles of sustainable development and the preservation of natural resources [21][22]. The fundamental resource for the development of rural tourism is nature, and it is estimated that approximately three-quarters of the total global tourist demand is aimed precisely at natural values and "untouched" areas. The motives behind visiting rural areas include peace, quiet, pollution-free air and water, untouched nature, meeting local people, healthy food, a slower pace of life, leisure, and physical activity, all of which are responsible for the emergence of rural tourism, which focuses on the individual tourist and their needs [23][24]. Those needs and motives were considerably foregrounded during the pandemic, when public spaces attracted a larger number of domestic tourists.

Rural tourism is an activity that connects economic, social, and environmental components of sustainability and is strongly linked to the local communities and their attitudes towards tourism [25][26]. In addition, it can also be seen as an environmentally responsible way of traveling and visiting relatively untouched natural areas in order to enjoy them and show respect to all the accompanying cultural objects, characterized by the low impact of visitors. It can also enable the active social-economic inclusion of the local population [27]. There are indications that the development of rural tourism contributed to the creation of equality and more visible economic and social assistance, both for the local community and the broader environment; i.e., rural tourism is now being recognized as an important factor in the revitalization of rural areas [28]. These assumptions were also confirmed during the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, when a massive number of people turned to rural areas. This trend was noted in Serbia [18], but also in the Czech Republic, where the COVID-19 pandemic created new opportunities for the development of rural tourism. Several rural regions even noted an increase in the number of tourists compared to the pre-pandemic period [29].

Furthermore, rural tourism includes areas meant for outdoor recreational activities, designed to protect sensitive natural resources, improve accommodation facilities where welcoming staff offer true hospitality, provide a diversity of events celebrating the pride that members of the local community have for their natural surroundings and

cultural heritage, and promote the development of small local businesses, including food stalls and other types of tradecraft businesses whose owners are locals [30].

Some authors foreground rural tourism and farm tourism [31] as forms of tourism that contribute to visitors becoming increasingly aware of the environment and more ecologically oriented. By including environmental-oriented ideology in the field of tourism along with the increase in environmental awareness, it is reasonable to expect an increase in the importance of sustainable development in the field of tourism [32][33].

Rural tourism is one of the priorities of tourist development in numerous European countries [34][35][36][37][38][39][40], especially during and after the COVID-19 pandemic [29][41]. Today, one of the main uses of rural areas is tourism, which at the same time is probably the most important cause of change and rural development. It seems to be a suitable means of revitalizing abandoned rural areas and providing their sustainability for the future by preserving businesses or creating new jobs, increasing the diversity of occupations, the levels of preservation of landscapes and nature in general, or supporting the preservation of rural crafts, ethnic diversity, and food gastronomy as touristic attractions [42]. Rural tourism often provides support for the development of infrastructure, which in turn contributes to the growth of other economic activities in rural areas. There are multiple socio-cultural benefits of farm tourism, including the prevention of depopulation [43], the preservation of cultural heritage, and the improvement of social stability compared to farms that are not involved in tourism [44][45]. Additional advantages include an improved way of life, the revitalization of old trade crafts, customs, and culture, and the restoration of traditional buildings and the identity of the communities [43]. A special benefit of the development of rural tourism is increased opportunities for social interaction among local individuals, who often live relatively isolated lives in rural communities [46].

Farm Tourism: Issues and Challenges

Farm tourism is not a novel occurrence. It is a specific form of rural tourism that, in some destinations, dates back to the 1980s [47][48]. It has been on the rise in many parts of the world over the past few decades [49], including Serbia. Nilsson [50] cites that farm tourism is mostly small-scale, but in more popular tourist destinations, farm tourism could bring in a significant economic income. The general increase in tourism, caused, among other things, by introducing laws regarding holidays as well as an increase in income [51], also had an impact on farm tourism, which has recently been increasing steadily [52][53][54]. Despite strong non-material motivation, many farmers view farm tourism as an irreplaceable source of income for maintaining family agricultural land and the farming way of life [55].

Germany and Austria have a rich history of farm tourism. Austria is considered one of the leading countries in Europe with a developed farm tourism industry. Farmers founded the first tourist organizations in the Austrian Alps at the beginning of the 1970s [51]. State policies favorably oriented towards the development of tourist sites in rural areas and providing subventions and development programs can also be found in Italy [56] and France [57]. Traditionally, people from western countries move from the cities into more rural areas for recreation and rest.

However, due to globalization, farm tourism is facing an increasing demand for a variety of services, professionalism, flexibility, quality, and competence [58].

In addition to Europe, the significance of farms for the development of tourism has been pointed out by numerous studies in North America [59][60], Asia [61][62], and Oceania [63]. The development of farm tourism in Asian countries is most prevalent in China, which has become recognizable for its “Nong Jia Le: A Happy Farm-house” brand of tourism [64].

The development of rural tourism in Serbia, as well as the commercialization of traditional hospitality, began in the 1970s in certain parts of central Serbia (in approximately 50 villages), which offered accommodation for approximately 4000 guests. During the initial phase of development, only individual households took part in this type of tourism (approximately 800 households), and therefore the development of rural tourism was mostly aimed at local tourists. Additionally, more recently, they have also begun to attract foreign tourists to Serbia [16]. Rural tourism has, over time, gained increasing attention. In the meantime, promotional marketing has advertised Serbia under the slogan “A clean and green Serbia”, which can offer tourists an active holiday, including walking, rafting, spending time in rural households, healthy and organic food, culture, and everything that is on offer in an ecologically healthy rural environment [65], which indirectly affects the development of rural tourism.

In the autonomous province of Vojvodina (Northern Serbia), the dominant form of rural tourism is farm tourism. The concept of a “farm” includes a house that is meant to provide accommodation and the adjoining farm buildings and land on which people always, or only occasionally, spend time and whose existence is based on its own agricultural production [66].

The term *salaš* was first used in the 18th century and can be found in the languages of various peoples in the territories of Poland, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia, from Hungary to Azerbaijan and Turkey, and from the Ukraine to Romania, Bulgaria, and Serbia, and all the surrounding countries. Initially, they were temporary, and later they became permanent settlements for Hungarian nomads in the Pannonian Basin or Plain. On old Hungarian language monuments, the word “*szállás*” refers to an agricultural household with an organized economic yard, erected housing, and production facilities. Today, this term, when referring to a temporary type of settlement, has been retained only among the Slavic peoples, while among the Hungarians, since the beginning of the 18th century, it has been replaced by the term “*tanya*” [67]. In western culture, a suitable analogy to the *salaš* is the ranch, hacienda, etc.

Farms are independent agricultural households that are physically separate from the main settlement and were massively built during the 19th and 20th centuries in Vojvodina. In the beginning of the 20th century and later, during the 1950s and 1960s, these were very important and frequent forms of housing for the agricultural population. However, soon after, they were abandoned, and today most farms are completely empty, while some have been converted into ethnic museums or restaurants. To date, very few farms have been preserved, especially in their original functions. One way of reviving farms in Vojvodina is certainly their repurposing as touristic locations, which occurred at the beginning of the 21st century, when farms were added to the tourist map of Serbia.

Numerous farms have been redesigned and adapted to meet contemporary needs, primarily touristic, so they now include pools, sports fields, and other recreational content, including stables, zoos, ethno-museums, etc. Farms can offer many other attractive activities or additional services that complete the stay of the guests, such as workshops focusing on old crafts, cooking classes or workshops on how to prepare dishes, recreational riding, trips (walking tours, cycling tours, visits to cultural sites, fishing), and other activities [68].

The problems that farm tourism in Vojvodina is facing today are related to the integrative approach to the creation of a touristic product, since there are still problems regarding coordination between the local authorities, the government sector, and agencies for the development of tourism on the one hand and problems regarding cooperation between rural household associations on the other. In addition, it is difficult to achieve a complementary effect of all the activities relevant for farm tourism, such as agriculture, old trades and crafts, and good roads. Furthermore, there are considerable problems related to effective marketing (the web portal of the entire rural tourist offer, instructing the hosts on how to use the internet, opening local information centers), providing financial support and incentives for the development of farm tourism, as well as the standardization and categorization of facilities (all of the facilities need to be categorized, registered, marked, and monitored).

Rural tourism, and thus farm tourism as well, are often considered examples of tourism characterized by sustainability. Recently, the majority of studies have focused on the development of rural sustainable tourism [48][69][70], with an emphasis on its importance during the COVID-19 pandemic [71][72]. Sustainability refers to the ability of a destination to maintain production over time despite long-term limitations and pressures. It has been pointed out that rural tourism draws in very few visitors, that it does not need a developed infrastructure and suprastructure, and that the tourists are usually genuinely interested in the local culture and tradition [73][74][75]. However, the question is: are all these forms of rural tourism sustainable? Does the fact that a tourist attraction is located in a rural environment or in a protected nature reserve directly imply its sustainability? Therefore, the main research question of this research is the following: is farm tourism in the peri-urban area of the city of Novi Sad sustainable?

Previous studies have included a partial approach that analyzes farm tourism in the context of sustainable development from various points of view. The focus is mostly on the impact of visitors on the environment [76], economic activity and the contribution of farm tourism to achieving economic sustainability [77][78][79], gender and social equality [80][81], but also on how farms operate based on the principles of sustainable development.

Furthermore, the existing literature on farms in Vojvodina places emphasis on the importance of farms for the preservation of tradition, way of life, and business, their touristic valorization, the possibility of touristic activation and presentation, the visitor experience, and the gastronomic experience [66][82][83][84][85][86].

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