

Announcement

UDC: 338.48-44(497.11-22)(049.3)
005.412:338.48-44(497.11-22)(049.3)

TOURISM IN FUNCTION OF DEVELOPMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA – Tourism and Rural Development

Conclusions of the 5th International Scientific Conference held at the Faculty of Hotel Management and Tourism in Vrnjačka Banja on September 4th, 2020

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For the fifth consecutive year, the Conference “TOURISM IN THE FUNCTION OF DEVELOPMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA” was successfully held at the Faculty of Hotel Management and Tourism in Vrnjačka Banja on September 4th, 2020. The main conference theme - Tourism and Rural Development - was carefully selected, as in previous years, in accordance with the topic selected by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) for World Tourism Day 2020. Due to the adverse global conditions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the conference was held as a one-day event on September 4th, following epidemiological recommendations of the World Health Organization and the National Crisis Committee for the Control of Infectious Diseases. The scientific meeting was organized by the Faculty in partnership with numerous domestic and foreign institutions, with the support of the competent ministry of the Republic of Serbia. Given the gravity of the current situation, attendees participated in this one-day event strictly adhering to all epidemiological measures, including personal protective measures as well as those of physical distancing.

The meeting was officially opened by Prof. Dr. Nenad Filipović, the rector of the University of Kragujevac, after which Prof. Dr. Drago Cvijanović, the dean of the Faculty of Hotel Management and Tourism in Vrnjačka Banja, addressed the participants. In the plenary session, the attendees had an opportunity to hear three online lectures delivered by esteemed speakers. Prof. Dr. Marianna Sigala, a professor at the University of South Australia and the director of the Center for Tourism and Leisure Management, is a globally renowned researcher in the field of tourism and hospitality with particular focus on ICT application in these industries. Prof. Dr. Dimitri Ioannides, a professor of Social Geography at the University of Central Sweden, is primarily interested in the economic geography of tourism and tourism planning and sustainable development and has publications relating to both topics. Prof. Dr. Jože Podgoršek, State secretary at the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food of the Republic of Slovenia, together with his colleagues, has introduced new technological solutions to Slovenian vegetable growing farms. The video presentations of the plenary lecturers focused on “Culture in a bottle: Designing wine tourism experiences with a sustainable impact”, “Tourism in periphery: Obstacles & opportunities”, and “The role of agriculture in the development of tourism in Slovenia”.

The main focus of the conference was related to challenges and issues relating to rural tourism. The primary goal was to reach conclusions, through the exchange of ideas and experiences of participants, about the future development of Serbian tourism, with specific

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reference to the development of tourism in rural areas. The participants of this scientific meeting had the chance to hear practical experiences of lecturers from our country, along with theoretical presentations. Although the arrival of lecturers from numerous countries was announced, including Australia, Slovenia, Sweden, Romania, Republic of North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and many others, due to the specific circumstances related to the global pandemic of Covid-19, Conference was personally attended only by the participants from the Republic of Serbia.

The presentation of papers was organized into one session including: “Investigating experience of Chinese tourists with branded hotels in Serbia: A case study of *Booking.com*”, “Visitor management planning as a tool for sustainable tourism in protected areas in Serbia”, “Cultural tourism and folk architecture in the service of revitalization of rural space”, “Tourism as an opportunity for regional economic development of the Podunavlje District”, and “Perceptions of environmental impacts of tourism: A case study of Vrnjačka Banja”. The results of the conference are two thematic collections with a total of 60 scientific papers (113 authors/co-authors) which are available to the wider scientific audience (ISBN 978-86-89949-46-9, ISBN978-86-89949-47-6).

With the advancement of globalization and European integration processes, the needs and problems of rural tourism in the Republic of Serbia are becoming increasingly similar to the ones in other European countries. Taking account previous valuable experience of other European countries in regard to rural tourism, it is likely to expect that tourism would enhance development of rural areas of Serbia in an economic, social, cultural and ecological manner. The participants of the Conference came to the specific and general conclusions concerning rural tourism in the Republic of Serbia.

Specific conclusions from the Conference are that the Republic of Serbia has very favorable opportunities for the development of rural tourism (preserved nature, clean air, unpolluted rivers and lakes, mild climate, and rich flora and fauna). Tourists visiting rural areas are taking advantage of favorable opportunities, engaging themselves in different activities, including recreational and leisure activities (walking, playing sports, horseback riding, hiking, etc.), travel activities (taking organized trips/excursions to nearby natural attractions, such as caves and waterfalls), practical activities (some tourists show interest in involvement in agricultural work), learning activities (discovering customs and everyday habits of local residents, learning about cultural and historical monuments surrounding Serbian villages, engaging in guided cultural heritage tours, etc.) and creative activities (making products of old crafts and handicrafts). An engagement in various activities coupled with special kindness of hosts, hospitality and traditional Serbian food and drinks provides excellent grounds for enhancing rural tourism in the Republic of Serbia.

In general, the exchange of experiences and good practices led to the general conclusion that rural tourism in the Republic of Serbia could play a key role in: increasing tourism activities that will generate more jobs in tourism or related industries and reduce unemployment, diversifying the rural economy; protecting and improving natural and cultural resources and revitalizing the countryside. However, the biggest challenge at the moment is the Covid-19 virus pandemic, which is transforming everything applicable in tourism so far. Taking into an account unfavorable situation at the global level, rural tourism has potential to mitigate side-effects of Covid-19 pandemic, stimulate rural development and contribute to the efficient recovery of tourism and hospitality sector in Serbia and worldwide. Namely, tourists are increasingly turning to destinations in their own countries which are close to them and do not pose a health risk. This is supported by the fact that, according to the data by the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, the number of domestic tourist arrivals increased by 25.3% while the number of foreign tourist arrivals decreased by 87.1% in

August 2020, compared to August 2019. This situation should, conditionally speaking, be utilized to stimulate the development and promotion of rural tourism within the country. It can be concluded that, although the situation with the pandemic is very uncertain and that we cannot count on foreign tourists arrivals, domestic tourists interested in rural areas represent a potential that can sustain tourism in Serbian rural areas during these adverse conditions.