

# POSSIBILITY FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURIST DEVELOPMENT IN DANUBE REGION, REPUBLIC OF SERBIA<sup>1</sup>

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## *Abstract*

*Problems of polluted environment, ever growing alienation from nature, standardization and uniformity of the modern living, are all the reasons why recently more and more people are interested in return to nature and healthy way of life. Great diversity in rural areas that Danube region in the Republic of Serbia has is the foundation upon which its future tourist development can be based. Tourism itself and its multiplied effect will have positive influence on the economy in this area. The concept of sustainable development must play an important role in that process, and it should also be the pre-condition for all future plans and activities. The aim of this article is to show the directions and possibilities for future sustainable tourist development in rural area in Danube region based on eco-tourism, keeping in mind, above all, its highly preserved and respectable resources.*

**Key words:** *tourist destination, sustainable development, rural areas*

**JEL classification:** Q5, P32

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism in the initial phases was little care of the scope and manners of exploitation of natural resources. Environment protection was legally executed very selectively, partially and, most commonly, urgently, when it was perhaps already too late for the given area or region.

Taking into account the fact that tourism is incorporated into all aspects of industrial and social life, that is, taking into account the fact that it consists of a number of disciplines, we need to observe its influence on the environment too. In modern literature we often talk about tourism as ‘space devourer’.

The aim of sustainable development studies is to draw attention to the influence of industrial and total social growth on the ecological processes and quality of the environment itself. Term sustainable tourism describes the way to meet the needs of modern generations, tourists and residents, without too vain interpretation of the ability of the future generations to meet their needs.

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## 2. BASE FOR DEVELOPMENT OF SUTAINABLE TOURISM IN DANUBE REGION OF SERBIA

The model of fast industrial development exhausted basic generic forces and factors, and led to serious imbalance in natural ambient, i.e. to ecological pollution. The term sustainable development appeared in early nineteen-eighties and referred to establishing positive relations between human needs for higher quality lifestyle, industrial development and damaged environment. During these years, the document “*World Conservation Strategy*” was passed by “*International Union for Environment Protection*”, which defined the concept of *sustainable development*. Gradually, in the documents passed in years to come, the definition of sustainable development was amended and broadened. Thus, at present we have a set of documents passed on various conferences and meetings that deal with sustainable development.

Talking about sustainable development in tourism, it must recognize rights and needs of the residents, respect their resources (natural and social, anthropological), lifestyle, culture and the right for them to influence the destiny of the local resources, tourist and all other.

Danube region in the Republic of Serbia as a tourist destination generally has well-preserved natural ambient. There are two national parks that in their natural and antropogenous values are true gems. These are: Fruška Gora and Djerdap.

In Serbia many Acts regulate environment protection. Certainly one of the most important is *Act on Environment Protection*<sup>4</sup>, but also numerous by-laws, such as, *Enactment on Natural Rarities Protection*<sup>5</sup>, or *Enactment on Control of Use and Trade with Wild Flora and Fauna*<sup>6</sup>, as well as other numerous by-laws that regulate directly our attitude towards environment.

From the aspect of tourism and its role in preservation and protection of environment, the most important act is *Act on Tourism*<sup>7</sup>, and numerous by-laws that support this important document.

Detailed overview of the protected natural resources in Serbian Danube region is given in this Table.

Administrative Region	Protected area - type and number					
	Strict Nature Reserve	Special Nature Reserve	National park	Protected habitat	Area of exceptional importance	Park nature
City of Belgrade					2	
Wester Bač region		1				
South Bačregion						
Srem region	5	2	1			
Midle Banat region		2			1	1
South Banat region		1			1	1
Braničevo region			1*			
Bor			1*			

**Table 1. Protected areas in Danube region, the Republic of Serbia (except natural monuments).**

Remark: \* National park „Djerdap“ is locate on two administrative regions

Source: Register of protected Vojvodnia areas – <http://www.pzzp.rs> ;

[www.srbija.travel/priroda/predeli-izuzetnih-odlika/](http://www.srbija.travel/priroda/predeli-izuzetnih-odlika/)

<sup>4</sup>Official Gazette of RS, No.135/2004, 36/2009, 43/2011.

<sup>5</sup>Official Gazette of RS, No. 50/93.

<sup>6</sup>Official Gazette of RS, No. 31/2005 and 45/2005.

<sup>7</sup>Official Gazette of RS, No. 36/2009, 88/2010, 99/2011 and 93/2012.

In Serbia exist 42 IBA (*Important Bird Area*) and in Danube region exist 21 IBA areas (half of total number). Also, Serbia has 62 IPA (*Important Plant Areas*), and 40 PBA (*Prime Butterfly Area*). Form that number in Danube region exist 41 IPA and 8 PBA areas.<sup>5</sup>

Also, in Serbia exist 10 „*Ramsar areas*“ and in Danube region form total number is locate 7 (Table 2.).

Ramsar area	Year of proclamation	Area in hectares
Special reserve „ <i>Stari Begej – Carska bara</i> “	1996	1 767
Special reserve „ <i>Obedska bara</i> “	1977	17 501
Special reserve „ <i>Slano Kopovo</i> “	2004	976
„ <i>Labudovo okno</i> “	2006	3 733
Special reserve „ <i>Uper Danube</i> “	2007	22 480
Special reserve „ <i>Zasavica</i> “	2008	1 913
Special reserve „ <i>Petrovaradinski rit</i> “	2012	8 292

**Table 2. Ramsar areas in Danube region of Serbia**

Source: [www.zzp.rs](http://www.zzp.rs); [www.ramsar.org](http://www.ramsar.org)

Danube region also has a rich cultural and historical heritage, which should also be used to develop tourism in a sustainable manner. Due to the large number of cultural and historical monuments located in this area, it will be mentioned only some of them.

Monuments of culture are from different periods, includes: churches, monasteries, castles, forts, buildings, etc. Some of the most tourist popular in Danube region are: Belgrade castel, Smederevo castel, Golubac castel, Monument of the Unknown Soldier located at Avala mountain, 19 monastiries located in National Park „*Fruška Gora*“, Palace of Princess Ljubica etc.

Archaeological sites. In Serbia there is total of 171 archaeological site, which was declared immovable cultural property. Archaeological sites from different periods. The most tourist famous archaeological sites in this area are: „*Vinča*“, „*Lepenski vir*“, „*Viminacium*“, „*Sirmium*“, „*Čelarevo*“, etc.

Significant places include the memorial complex, monuments that commemorate significant historical events, places dedicated to important persons, places of important historical battles, etc. The most tourist famous are „*Radovanjski lug*“, „*The place of breakthrough Srem Front in World War II*“, etc.

Spatial cultural and historical sites. This area are very rich with this tourist attractions. Most famous are „*Skadarlija*“, „*Sremski Karlovci*“, „*Topčider*“, „*Knez Mihalnova street*“, etc.

All of these resources must be used in a sustainable and efficient way to develop of tourism.

### **3. ECO-COMPONENTAS A KEY ELEMENT FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURIST DEVELOPMENT**

Due to the well known developments in the nineteen-nineties (fall of SFRJ, wars, sanctions, deep economic crises etc.) Serbia was practically absent from tourism market.

<sup>5</sup> Štetić, S., Cvijanović, D. And Šumičević, D., (2014): „*Special forms of tourism in Danube region*“, Monography, Institute of Agricultural Economics, Belgrade, p. 41.

During this time, numerous changes occurred in tourism market, which made reintegration into modern tourism its priority.

The characteristic of modern tourism is incorporation of efficient ecological component into tourist product and its promotion, treating it as very important element for generating competitive position and condition for attracting new tourists. This is one more reason why incorporation of the ecological component is high priority task for the process of reintegration of Serbia into modern tourism and growth of its market competitiveness.

At this moment, more than 150 national tourist products are offered on world tourist market<sup>8</sup>. This data, in itself, is enough to understand the force of competition. The conclusion is, of course, that Total Quality Management, and above all ecological quality, is a key factor upon which Serbia must insist in order to achieve, and then preserve its competitive value and good position in the market.

Taking into account ecological quality, most of all preservation of natural ambient in Serbia, it is possible to provide better: market position, strong competitiveness, long-term sustainable development, and finally, greater profitability. On the other hand, if we take into account needs of tourists (viewing marketing concept as basic business function of all entities), we need to balance the wish to meet tourists' needs and environment protection.

Using principles of sustainable development focuses on the following issues:

- Understanding value and level of influence a number of factors have upon environment.
- Preservation, protection, and improvement of the quality of the existing natural, cultural, historical, and other resources.
- Insisting on planned regional aspect of development.
- Establishing strict standards in building tourist infrastructure.
- Good balance of economic, social, environmental and other objectives.

It is an imperative to successfully implement ecological components (environment and tourists, prioritizing the products organized in accordance with ecological standards) in conducting marketing activities of Serbian tourism in the future.

Strategically speaking, the development of tourism should highlight ecological, health and recreational values and specific features of reception area in Serbia. In all this EU market shall have a dominant position within the scope of developmental parameters.

Structural variety, ecological foundations, openness, adaptability, dynamics, spaciousness, complementation and integrity are the demands to perform quality marking of tourist products in Serbia. In this way functionality would be provided on a long-term basis regarding meeting the needs of different tourist demands and strengthening competitive demand in all markets permanently innovating it.

#### **4. RURAL TOURISM IN FUNCTION OF SUTAINABLE TOURISM**

With the appreciation of natural, ecological and ambient characteristics, different rural environments are very interesting and prospective area for development of the specific tourist type. Adequately built houses for vacation in the countryside, surrounded by piece and quiet, are true mirages for the people from highly urbanized industrial centers.

In the past the development of this type of tourism was generally supported, but only recently the revival of the ideas has started. For example, in 2004, Serbia was promoted as a 'transitional destination' on the way to 'Olympic Athens' so two village boarding-houses have been built with all the characteristics related to life and customs in the area of Vojvodina (farmstead 84 and 137). The farmstead are marked on the map. Numerous villages throughout Serbia, especially in Danube region, are the basis for further planning, especially regarding the trends in the West, so-called '*return to the origins*', the concept of '*healthy food*', old customs and crafts, increasing popularity of typical ethno elements – music, folklore, naive

painting, etc. In that sense, as a part of tourist offer, local, regional and national aspects are promoted quite frequently. In that aspect, the role of village households is increasing and Serbia has great potentials for their development.

This is in accordance with the fact that at the end of the last decade as an act of political preference, the model of rural development (CAP) has been promoted, which assumes multifunctional nature of European agriculture and its developmental role in commerce and society as a whole. Agriculture as primary commercial branch has far-reaching interest for complementary association with all the commercial sectors - tourism, as well.

The concept of sustainable development based on natural recourses, demographic structure that, to emphasize, in the Danube region of Serbia, spoiled with the decrease in population, multiethnic variety and market defined with its focus groups are the basis and guarantee of success in this type of tourism.

Prospective activities that can provide full contribution in the aspect of improvement of touristy non-boarding offer could be the following:

1. Introducing tourists to tradition and customs of nations and nationalities, especially in multinational areas and represents the wealth of local communities, which provides large area for creativity in making different types of tourist programs and activities;
2. Cuisine i.e. the production of local specialties such as preparing 'healthy food' or organic production of food, which is its official name. The concept is very popular in highly urbanized countries, lately and could make the contents of restaurant and other manifestations which include preparation of food;
3. Introduction to folklore and dances of all the nations and nationalities. According to the abovementioned it is a logical step to organize a lot of events that could be part of cultural program throughout the whole year indifferent rural environments;
4. Introduction to old crafts and tools. One of the characteristics of modern tourist market is that unique products are highly appreciated and that present and a modern tourist tends to escape from uniformity offered by globalization. Throughout the long history of human society many crafts and tools that played an important role in rural households, unfortunately are long forgotten and given up. These are the exact focus of interest of tourists from highly urbanized industrial countries and may significantly improve tourist offer. These crafts may survive only with collective efforts. Different organizations that operate in rural environment have a task to encourage local residents, to organize them, help them in acquiring raw material as well as placement of products and thus earning additional income for their families;
5. Traditional garments - Different nationalities create wealth variety of traditional garments that could look really exotic for foreign tourists. Almost each rural area may be proud of their typical products as a result of diligent work of locals. Traditional garments are a privilege of residents of rural area, who invest their time, skill and sense for beauty in such products. The products can become the foundation for development of special commercial branch in rural areas.
6. Cultural and sport events, also, improve and cultivate the variety of tourist offer. Certainly, they have to be organized in accordance with the concept of sustainable development.

## **5. VISIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF PROSPECTIVE FORMS OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN DANUBE REGION**

The Danube region has significant, but insufficiently activated potentials and territorial capital for tourism development, which are based on the following: exceptionally rich natural values and rarities; large and ecologically well-preserved rural areas; plenty of archeological sites; possibilities for a new approach to tourism development, taking into account that it has not been

activated on market to any greater extent. The vision of sustainable tourism is to increase its role in the development of, particularly peripheral, rural and cross-border areas, which will be based on preserved natural environment and tourism resources of international and national importance.

Pillars of tourism development are the following:

- completing and integrating the existing tourist offer in the region (the Danube River basin with the Djerdap Lake/NP" Djerdap", archeological sites of Felix Romuliana and Lepenski vir, Smederevo castle, etc.);
- planning and developing the tourism offer as well as the relating infrastructure, as major generators of all-year-round tourism offer of the region (nautical and tourism infrastructure on the Danube, diverse contents of offer for lakes, mountains, immovable cultural heritage, particularly ancient Roman archaeological sites , tourist centers -towns and places/traditional manifestations, spas, rural settlements and hunting grounds, transit waterway and road corridors, etc.;
- joint marketing and promotional activities for the development of a unified tourism offer and functional integration of offers in the region and with surrounding – neighboring regions in Serbia, Romania and Bulgaria;
- environmental improvement and protection, as well as protection and promotion of valuable natural heritage and preservation of areas with natural values of importance for biodiversity and environmental quality;
- protection and promotion of cultural and historical heritage, where it is necessary to advocate more intense valorization, presentation and use of cultural heritage, as well as their regulation (particularly related to archeological sites, churches and rural ethnic heritage).

For the purpose of realizing the concept of sustainable tourism development, it is necessary to obtain spatial-ecological support (reach the trade-offs in integration of development principles and documents, protection and development of tourism areas by optimally meeting the social, economic, spatial-ecological and cultural needs at national and local levels, as well as by meeting the interests of the market and conditions for cross-border and international cooperation) and institutional support at local, regional and national levels (Maksin et al., 2011).

Sustainable tourism development goals are the following (Popović et al., 2013):

- Introducing and respecting the principles of sustainable tourism development, primarily in relation to the rational use of natural resources and preservation, protection and improvement of natural environment and heritage;
- Complex valorization of natural and created tourism potentials, differentiated according to their values and contents in line with world and local demand trends, standards of international market and socio-economic interests of Serbia and local communities;
- Organizing the content-based and integrated offer of tourism areas, which contains recognizable motifs and enables affirmation of new tourism products of local and international demand, along with integrating the tourism development with complementary activities;
- Encouraging the development of tourism regions that provide the most favorable conditions for maximally extending the tourism season, as well as increasing the socio-economic effects of tourism;
- Improving the quality and quantity of tourist accommodation and catering capacities in destinations already affirmed to a certain extent, as well as activating the new areas containing tourism resources;
- Improving the conditions for tourism and recreation by opening and developing the picnic spots, building the marinas and wharfs on the Danube, etc., by developing the tourism and communal infrastructure in settlements, regulating the hunting grounds, cultural and

- historical entities, monuments, etc.; as well as enhancing their quality and accessibility by developing different modes of transportation;
- Educating the personnel for providing an adequate level of quality of tourism-related services;
- Improving efficiency in managing the development of tourism areas by coordinating the activities at the level of tourist settlements and tourism destination-region-cluster, by harmonizing interests in nature protection and tourism development; etc.

Based on the previously conducted analysis of conditions for tourism development, taking into account strategic directions of activities defined for this region at the national level, as well as overtaken international obligations in the field of sustainable tourism development in the Danube region, the following prospective forms of sustainable tourism development in the Danube region in Serbia can be identified:

- Cruising and nautical tourism on the Danube;
- MICE and business travel;
- Nature tourism (sport and recreational tourism and special interest tourism, including ecotourism);
- Rural and agro-ecotourism;
- Spa (health/balneological, climate, wellness/recreational and spa) tourism;
- Excursion mountain tourism;
- Touring (circular and linear tourist travel/tours/roads, national parks and other protected areas, mountains, gorges, caves, archeological sites, Roman palaces and monuments, monasteries, the Danube motifs, wine and gastronomy, EuroVelo 6 cycle route, walking, horse riding, hunting, fishing, etc.); and
- Manifestation tourism.

Local authorities initiate sustainable tourism development process, while the success depends on the realized partnership between wide range of stakeholders at the level of local communities, coordination between corresponding actors and policies at the national level and of cooperation and exchange of experiences with relevant international organizations<sup>6</sup>. Economic, social, political and other stakeholder power and influences overlap in this process, but significant benefits in tourism destination management are also created, while potential problems in cluster operations in destination are solved (Bakić, 2009: 2004).

Sustainable tourism provides an optimal contribution to local/regional economy in interaction with other activities through fostering a multi-sectoral and participative approach to sustainable development.

## **CONCLUSION**

Bearing in mind the situation in which there are rural areas in Serbia, it is necessary to define the national (social, community, economic, environmental and other) priorities. They must be determined by generally accepted models of our environment, and above all the European Union, given the publicly proclaimed commitment to Serbia's membership in it.

EU recognizes its interest in the concept of sustainable tourism development and defines the appropriate systems and measures to ensure the support of the same. The concept of sustainable development to preserve natural and social resources and at the same time provides competitive access to the tourism market. In this regard, it is important that each segment of the tourist offer adequate performance and offer the market. An important role in this game all the connections established businesses.

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<sup>6</sup>An organized cooperation at the local level is a precondition for using support funds for rural tourism development within the national policy for supporting the rural development. In this, producer associations, clusters and local action groups have a decisive role (Popović et al., 2007; Tomić et al., 2009).

One of possible steps is to form tourism cluster, i.e. to consider the Danube region in Serbia as a tourism area which will enable networking of the Serbian tourism destinations/zones and joining their efforts to complete and integrate the existing all-year-round tourism offer, develop relating infrastructure and marketing activities, and protect and promote valuable natural and cultural heritage of the region.

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