

CONSTRAINTS AND OPPORTUNITIES OF AGRO-TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA WITH THE SPECIAL STRESS ON SINJ REGION

Smiljana Pivcevic

Faculty of Economics

21 000 Split

Croatia

Phone: ++ 385-21-430-669; Fax: ++385-21-430-700

E-mail: smipi@efst.hr

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1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is, undoubtedly, one of the fastest growing world industries. Although growth is one of its main features, social and economic forces operating at the global level, coupled with new ideas and approaches to leisure and recreation time are encouraging new trends in tourism. The result is shift from mass tourism, based on «sun, sea, sand» koncept, towards the so-called «soft tourism», thus encouraging tourism development in rural areas. Such global economic restructuring has created a climate in which many local and rural economies have to adjust, in order to maintain or enhance their socio-economic viability.

2. DEFINING RURAL TOURISM AND AGRO-TOURISM

Although in recent times commonly used and for many «self-understood» term, rural tourism is not easy to define as it would seem at the first glance. Its definition has been subject of many debates in the literature without arriving at any firm consensus. The simplest definition describing it as the tourism that takes place in the countryside on deeper consideration rises many problems:

- rural areas are difficult to define since criteria used by different nations vary enormously (therefore posing limits to international comparisons);
- not all tourism which takes place in rural areas is strictly «rural» - it can be of urban nature and merely located in the rural area;
- different forms of rural tourism have developed in different regions and countries and hence it is hard to find features that are common to all of them;
- rural areas are in complex process of change due to the impact of global markets, communications and telecommunications that have changed market conditions and orientations for traditional products. Though many rural areas have experienced depopulation it can not be said for all of them for many are experiencing an inflow of residents due to different reasons: to retire, or develop new non-traditional business, to commute to work in urban centres. The once clear distinction between urban and

rural is now blurred by suburbanisation, long distance commuting and second home development ¹.

The distinguishing feature of tourism products in rural tourism is the wish to give visitors personalised contact, a taste of the physical and human environment of the countryside and to allow them to participate in the activities, traditions and lifestyles of local people. There is also a strong cultural and educational element in this form of leisure tourism. Hence a rural tourist destination could be defined as a wider area dominated by the natural and/or farmed/forested environments where specific natural, economic and socio-cultural features, such as tradition, local cooperation, trust and reciprocity are harmoniously embedded and as such create a unique tourist product that is predominantly small scaled, nature friendly and "ethno-coloured", in other words "sustainable".

Many definitions of rural tourism tend to focus on the type of activity visitors engage with in rural areas and that leads to labeling of different types of tourism. For example, forms associated with rural areas are agro tourism, eco tourism, green tourism, cultural tourism, heritage tourism, nature tourism and countryside tourism.

This way of defining rural tourism is very useful when trying to define the term agro-tourism. Namely, although many consider it to be synonymous to rural tourism, that is not true. The above list of types of activities rural tourism includes demonstrates that rural tourism is a wider concept, i.e. agro tourism is one of many forms of rural tourism.

But what exactly is agro tourism? The following list of definitions will help us understand.

Table 1. Definitions of farm tourism

"Any tourist or recreational enterprise on a working farm"	Dartington Amenity research trust (DART), 1974
"Tourism enterprises that are present on working farms and yet are largely supplementary to existing farm activities"	Frater, 1983
"Working farms, irrespective of type or size, where the primary activity is agriculture and where tourism is a supplementary activity"	Wales Tourist Board (WTB), 1986
"A trip, or overnight stay, in a countryside area which is either agricultural or natural and has a low density of population"	Gilbert and Tung, 1990
"A form of rural tourism whereby paying guests can share in farming life"	Davies and Gilbert, 1992
"Farm tourism is just tourism in farm setting"	Peebles, 1995
"Farm tourism as tourism products where the consumer, at a minimum, is aware of the farming environment"	Clarke, 1996a
"All tourism or recreation enterprises located on working farms"	Clarke, 1996b
"A farm that has diversified into tourism and still maintains agriculture as its primary function"	South West Tourism (SWT), 1999
"Rural tourism conducted on a working farm where the working environment forms part of the product from the perspective of the consumer"	Clarke, 1999

Source: Hill, R., Busby, G.: (2002), An Inspector Calls: Farm Accommodation Providers' Attitudes to Quality Assurance Schemes in the County of Devon, International Journal of Tourism Research, 4, 459-478.

¹ OECD (1994), Tourism strategies and rural development, General Distribution, OECD/GD (94) 49, 013927, Paris, pp.8-9.

Fundamentally, agro-tourism or farm tourism incorporates any provision of facilities for tourists on working farms and can be subdivided into three categories: accommodation, activity and day visitors.

The most important feature of agro-tourism which distinguishes it from all other forms of rural tourism is its dependence on agriculture. Namely, tourism on working farms is being developed as a supplementary activity to agriculture and it enables farmers to diversify their activities while enhancing the value of their products and property. It contributes to the survival and growth of agriculture and stock rearing and the forestry, hunting, fishing, fruit, mushroom growing, olive growing (in Mediterranean countries) and so on.

On the other hand, tourists who choose farm accommodation rather than other kinds of accommodation facilities look for genuine rural atmosphere where they can share intimacy of the household they live in, learn traditional crafts and skills with their hosts, make friends, which is a quality modern times have almost forgotten and above all enjoy home made food and drinks. Hence some specific food labels can help consumers establish what is a local produce and can be used as a selling points to tourists who want to taste home grown quality food and drink.

It is very important to note that agro-tourism is dependent of other forms of rural tourism, or to be more accurate, it can not be detached from it in any way. Namely, if the agro-tourism farm is to succeed, it is not enough that it fulfills accommodation and catering requirements set by the law and offers quality food and drink but, as important as that, it has to be situated in an area that possesses at least minimal tourist attractions. In other words, no agro-tourism farm situated "in the middle of nowhere" has chances to survive, whatever the quality of services provided.

Therefore, it is essential for agro-tourism farm to be situated in an area that offers other different forms of rural tourism which can complement it and thus create a complete experience i.e. create a complete tourism product. That is the reason why every serious discussion on agro-tourism has to be put in the wider concept of rural tourism.

3. RURAL AND AGROTOURISM AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Since the 1970s economic restructuring and the farm crisis through Europe and the USA have severely reduced rural communities' economic opportunities. Economic restructuring caused loss of rural manufacturing plants and many jobs. The farm crisis led to decline in numbers of farmers and restructured farm ownership forcing some farm families to augment their incomes with off farm jobs, to depart farming and rural communities. These changes weakened local economies of many rural areas, making them overdependent upon economic decisions made in distant cities.

All these changes limited rural communities' economic development options, making older development strategies such as manufacturing and agriculture less viable and forcing many to look for nontraditional ways to sustain themselves. One of the most popular rural development strategies has become tourism and many looked to it as a tool for promoting local jobs and raising the level of economic welfare.

Although the role of tourism as a tool for the economic regeneration of peripheral/rural regions has long been recognized by commentators from many disciplines, there are still

many dilemmas on whether it is a development strategy with more advantages or disadvantages for rural communities.

Namley, every reason for promoting tourism as a rural growth tool has a counter-reason for opposing this strategy. Thus, while tourism is heralded as job-generating, it is also blamed for creating low wages and only seasonal employment. When proponents claim that tourism is environmentally friendly, opponents counter that it degrades valuable and finite sources. The argument that it generates new demand in the local economy is challenged by the assertion that it displaces the existing demand. Further, the position that it generates new revenue sources for rural authorities is often challenged by assertions to the contrary: tourism development is a fiscal burden for many small, rural governments, exerting a disproportionate drain of the local service base.

OECD names 17 potential benefits tourism can bring to rural development, most important ones being job retention and creation, farm support, landscape and historic buildings conservation, preservation of rural crafts and arts, environmental improvements, increased role of women, new ideas and initiatives. But it also names several problems tourism based rural development can cause: environmental threat; socio-cultural threat; housing question; incoming entrepreneurs; traffic congestion and issues of planning, local control, public participation and partnership².

All these pro and contra reasons can also be attributed to agro-tourism, like to any other form of rural tourism. But, due to its interdependence on agriculture, agro-tourism can play specific and vital role in preserving the rural way of life in several ways:

- as an economic activity, agro-tourism contributes to the survival and growth of agriculture and stock-rearing and to forestry, hunting, fishing, fruit and vegetables growing etc.;
- the rural landscape has been shaped by agriculture; it is a contributory factor to the variety of crops and farms, houses and architectural styles (villages, rural housing and buildings, hedgerows, terraces, low walls, etc) and to historical and cultural heritage which merits preservation;
- agro-tourism enthusiasts are also buyers of natural agricultural products or craft produced products which are typical for the region. Agro-tourism thus contributes to value enhancement for local products;
- agriculture has been provided with an abundant ethnological heritage; tools and agricultural machinery, craft professions and workshops, smithies, joiner's workshops and quarries, dams in places where there is a risk of flooding – all of which may be of interest of tourists – highly varied architecture, rich folklore, wide-ranging culinary traditions and, last but not least, a broad cross-section of men and women;
- finally, agro-tourism also helps reconcile farming interests and environmental protection through integrated land management in which farmers continue to play a key role. Rural tourism consumers are attracted by a variety of agricultural and rural landscapes and fauna and flora. Their conservation is a prerequisite for the attraction of tourists to rural areas, but this often implies farming practices which are more costly or less profitable. Agro-tourism can offer a means to the farmer of obtaining a

² OECD (1994), Tourism strategies and rural development, General Distribution, OECD/GD (94) 49, 013927, Paris, pp.23-29.

return on investments in favor of environmental management and benefiting the community as a whole.

On the other hand, this form of rural tourism also encounters many specific problems. Farmers are critical in maintaining both the basic rural economy and the scenery on which rural tourism depends. Yet farmers have responded unevenly and often very slowly to the opportunities available through tourism. Some farmers are strongly anti-tourist, resenting visitors on their territory, especially where footpaths or riding trails cross their land. Many would prefer better prices for farm products rather than incentives to move into the visitor industry. When farmers do diversify into tourism, they often do so together with other farmers, rather than with local communities, and thus potential co-operative benefits are lost. At the root of many problems encountered in involving farmers in tourism is a basic question of knowledge and training. An hotelier would be incapable of working in the farming industry without a lengthy period of training, yet farmers (or their wives) are expected to diversify into providing visitor services of all kinds with little or no training.

Unfortunately, there is no precise formula by which it would be able to predict whether the advantages will outweigh the disadvantages or vice versa. Although there is still a deep lack of understanding of many fundamental features of tourism, one thing that is certain is the necessity of integral planning of tourism development in rural areas which will avoid many problems some established tourist destinations (especially sea-side resorts and cities) have experienced.

4. RURAL AND AGROTOURISM IN EUROPE

The growth of rural and agro-tourism is rather difficult to quantify because the statistics among countries vary and many neither detach rural tourism from other forms of tourism nor do they detach one from the other. Nevertheless, most national tourism boards confirm its growth. Although some are keen to call it just a fashionable trend, rural and agro-tourism can not be considered as an accidental and short-term phenomenon for their growth is supported by forces of long-term nature:

- increased levels of education;
- growing interest in heritage (natural and man-made);
- increased leisure time and disposable income;
- faster transport and better communications in general;
- health consciousness;
- better outdoor clothing;
- growing interest in gastronomic specialties and organic and bio-food;
- growing interest in «green» and «eco»;
- increased importance of authenticity;
- increased need for peace and tranquility;
- growing share of elder, active population;
- growing importance of REAL travel (journeys based on Rewarding, Enriching, Adventuresome and Learning elements);
- accent posed on individuality;
- growing number of agencies specialized in «rural» tourism offer.

In recent decades, Europe has experienced a growing interest towards rural tourism that has progressively led to the increase of demand and supply of infrastructure and services. Nowadays, this phenomenon, once marginal and spontaneous, is characterized by a segment of tourism demand and supply having a great economic and financial impact within the rural areas.

As emerged on the European Congress on Rural Tourism, approximately 200,000 entrepreneurs offering more than 2,000,000 bed-places have been recorded within Europe. The annual expenditure in rural tourism is about 12 billion EUR and taking into account added value and multiplier effects, this brings to the revenue of up to 26 billions. Furthermore, an estimated 500,000 jobs are created by rural tourism. Italy records over 1 million annual arrivals in agro-tourist firms which count for more than 5 million nights of stay³. Estimates suggest that over 10 % of English farms are now involved in some area of tourism (in some counties that number rises up to 23%) and around 10 000 farms offer bed and breakfast serviced accommodation⁴. The percentage of farms offering some kind of tourist accommodation stands at 10% in Austria (with more than 30 000 farms and 300 000 accommodation units), 8% in Germany and the Netherlands and 4% in France⁵.

Development of rural tourism with a special stress on agro or farm-tourism is the subject of many European countries' policies aimed at fostering global social and economic development of the rural areas which mostly suffer from the negative trends of deagrarianisation and depopulation. Some of these measures are illustrated in the following table.

Table 2. Incentives for rural/farm tourism development in some European countries

Country	Kind of incentive/help given by different sources aimed at rural/farm tourism development
Belgium	Regional governments subsidize accommodation facilities to up to 30% of the total cost of the project
Denmark	Government subsidizes national association for agro-tourism development with a fixed amount of money per year
France	Regional governments give incentives to the new entrepreneurs in rural areas; they also give professional help in marketing activities and making the feasibility studies; Departments, regions and national government subsidize different rural tourism associations with the fixed annual amounts
Greece	Rural tourism projects in region Petra Kesvos have been subsidized by the government, local authorities and EU
Ireland	Agency for development of tourism in the rural areas «Ballyhoura Failte Society»

³ Dettori, D.G., Paba, A., Pulina, M., (2004): European rural tourism: agrotouristic firms in Sardinia and their life cycle, Centro Ricerche Economiche Nord Sud, Università di Cagliari, Università di Sassari, Working Paper, p. 4.

⁴ Hill, R., Busby, G., (2002): An Inspector Calls: Farm Accommodation Providers' Attitudes to Quality Assurance Schemes in the County of Devon, *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 4: p 459, 460.

⁵ Petric, L., (2003): Constraints and possibilities of the rural tourism development with the special stress on the case of Croatia, in *43rd Congress of the European regional Science Association*, University of Jyväskylä, Finland, August 27-30, CD Rom

	is financed by the government, local authorities and the EU.
Italy	Agro-tourist Association has been financed by the national government on an annual basis
Netherlands	Some associations (such as «Vereniging Recreatie by de Boer») have been financed by their regional governments.
Germany	Incentives aimed at rural tourism development are distributed from different levels; Bayern has been financed by the regional government, Niedersachsen by regional government, Hessen by regional government, Baden-Wurtemberg by regional government, Rheinland Pfalz by regional and other sources, Schleswig-Holstein by regional government and other sources
Portugal	General tourist office has developed a system of subsidizing initial tourist investments in rural areas
Spain	Galice – investment subsidizing (up to 30% of the total cost of the investment, Catalogne and Canaries – subventions for the preservation of cultural and ethno heritage in the localities that have less than 2 000 inhabitants; Agro-tourism Basque Association has been financed by EU (the level of subsidy has reached 25-50% of the total amount subsidized by region)
Great Britain	There is a strong involvement of national and regional governments into development of rural areas; under Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) so called «Rural white paper» has been introduced with different schemes that also include rural tourism development (help includes education, grants and subsidies aimed at different projects – for more details see www.defra.gov.uk/erdp/erdphome.htm)
Austria	Government gives subsidies or loans with no interest rates for the new investors; there are also tax allowances
Slovenia	Government has subsidies first phase – implementation of the tourist facilities on farms (up to 50% of the total amount of the project) while in the second phase, when a farm started to deal with tourism activities, two thirds of the necessary amount were given by the government and the local communities while the rest had to be secured by the entrepreneur.

Source: Petric, L., (2003): Constraints and possibilities of the rural tourism development with the special stress on the case of Croatia, in 43rd Congress of the European regional Science Association, University of Jyväskylä, Finland, August 27-30, CD Rom

5. AGROTOURISM IN CROATIA

Following the changes in the tourist demand which shifted attention from “3S” products and “discovered” rural areas and “green” beaches of countryside as new tourism destinations, Croatia is trying to reposition its tourist product and to incorporate its valuable rural areas in tourist offer. Farm-based tourism is one of the pillars of that new strategy. Its development means additional revenues for farms, opportunity to sell their products and diversify their business and on the other hand it is a diversifying element of tourist offer of our country.

Although dominant features of Croatian regions differ significantly, it is possible to name general constraints and possibilities to agro-tourism development in Croatia.

Table 3. Constraints and possibilities for agro-tourism development in Croatia

Conditions	Possibilities	Constraints
Natural attractions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> vertical and horizontal diversity of relief pleasant climate heterogeneous and luxuriant fauna sea and numerous waters on the continent numerous sites of protected nature relatively unpolluted air, water and land absence of noise and vibrations in rural 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> limited number of farms that by size and organization present an economic and social unit a decrease in agricultural production and livestock on farms

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • areas • possibility of free movement of tourists • heterogeneous agricultural production on farms 	
Man-made attractions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • density of mobile and immobile cultural monuments • numerous and heterogeneous cultural institutions • traditional cultural manifestations and numerous local festivals • organization of many economic, entertainment and sport events • old crafts and folklore 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • inappropriate widening and organization of villages • devastation of cultural and natural heritage
Communication conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • favourable geographical position • good international traffic connections • road connections among settlements throughout the regions • small average distance from settlements to region centres • developed telephone communications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • low quality roads
Human potentials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • favourable sex structure of agricultural population • education of agricultural population • hospitality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • decrease in number of agricultural population • unfavourable age structure of agricultural population • low level of education of farmers in areas of hospitality service providing and managing agro-tourism farms
Receptive capacities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • availability of excess housing facilities to be used for receiving visitors • number of establishments with regional gastronomic offer • growing share of thematic products (for example wine roads, cycling and walking routes, etc) • possibility to engage in different sports activities, especially those that need no sport infrastructure • relatively good water and electricity supply (varies among regions) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • decrease in number of farms • dispersed farms • exteriors of the houses that do not correspond to the rural architecture • inadequately tidied up facilities and surroundings of farms involved in tourism activities • insufficient gas supply and sewage system development in rural areas • scarce offer of services in rural areas

Source: Source: Križman-Pavlovic, D. (2001): Turizam na seoskim gospodarstvima, Marketing, No.3, pp 18-25.

Although in many countries rural and agro-tourism are regarded as synonymous, that is not the case in Croatia where two concepts are distinct, agro-tourist activity being regarded as a special case of rural tourism.

The agro-tourism offer in Croatia is growing respectably. According to data collected by Croatian Chamber of Commerce the number of farms involved grew from 80 in 1999 to 177 in 2002 and reached the number of 251 at the end of 2003. Although growth rates are undoubtedly high, analysis shows that there are enormous differences among regions of country. Thus, data for 2002 show that Istrian County is leading in the number of farms involved with tourism activities (38.42%) followed by Dubrovnik County (22.03%), and Krapina-Zagorje County (7.34%). These three Counties have also registered highest growth rates during last two years. On the other hand, some other regions with highly developed

seaside tourism and excellent conditions for development of agro-tourism fall far behind. Thus, in 2002 the number of farms involved in tourism in three Dalmatian Counties (Zadar, Šibenik, Split) made only a third of agro-tourism farms registered in the leading Istrian County.

In 2002 the Croatian Chamber of Commerce (Sector for tourism and hospitality) has defined agro-tourism farm as a small-scale economic unit situated in an attractive area which provides the visitor with an authentic product or service with all family members being included in the business. For the purpose of promoting quality growth of agro-tourism households it introduced a set of rules (www.hgk.hr; www.biznet.hr) and proposed basic criteria to be met by them:

- the person who wants to open an agro-tourism business has to be a farmer, to live primarily on agriculture, meaning that at least 51% of its income should come from agricultural/livestock production;
- the lodging structure must be based on pre-existing facilities, which means that new facilities should not be build ex-novo;
- the rooms or apartments for the guests have to be found within the farm, and if possible within the main house or farming;
- food catering service (restaurant) has to be based mainly on agricultural products grown/produced on the farm. In some countries, the law says that 70% of what is consumed by the guests should be produced on the farm. In the case of Croatia, the farmer should meet only a 50% figure;
- additional facilities (camping, swimming pool, tennis court, etc.) have to be built at the minimal distance of 100 meters from the old existing facilities.

Apart from basic accommodation/food requirements, an agro-tourism farm can offer some other tourism related activities such as;

- organizing excursions in the countryside;
- catering organized groups (maximum 50 persons);
- camping on the farm,
- taking part in farm activities, etc.

5.1. Agro-tourism in Sinj region (Cetinska Krajina) – opportunities versus reality

Cetinska Krajina is name used for the area surrounding upper and middle flow of river Cetina, i.e. from its spring till the entrance in the canon below the city of Trilj. It is a fruitful valley surrounded by mountain chains of Dinara and Svilaja, situated only 30 kilometers from the regional center Split and the Adriatic coast.



Figure 1. Location of Split County and Cetinska Krajina

Next table gives us most important facts and figures about the region.

Table 4. Characteristics of Cetinska Krajina.

Some figures	Main attractions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Population of cca 49 000 (2001) Climate: semi Adriatic-Mediterranean climate Accommodation: 2 three stars hotels and 2 motels with cca 200 beds available plus small number of private accommodation units (number not available) 180 hospitality establishments 9 466 tourists that made 25 000 overnight stays in hotels and motels (2004), 26 % by foreign tourists 5 agro-tourism farms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> River Cetina with its attractions - old mills, the valley, surrounding hills and forests Clean and unpolluted environment Rural activities: walking, horse riding, fishing, swimming, hunting, cackacking, canjoning, bicycling, Offer of adventuresome sports: paragliding, parachouting, flying small sport aircrafts, free climbing, rafting, paintball Sanctuary of Gospa Sinjska – an important pilgrim destination Sinjska Alka – a traditional knight's competition with 300 years of tradition. Museum of Cetinska Krajina (ethnological, historical and cultural heritage of the region) Museum of Sinjska Alka Archeological Museum on St. Francis monastery Gardun: an archaeological site where roman military camp from the 1.century was discovered 11 fortresses on the river Cetina some dating from 14th century unique gastronomic offer closeness to the sea

Sources: www.dzs.hr; www.sinj.com.hr; Borkovic, V., (1995): Cetina, Ogranak Matice Hrvatske u Sinju, Sinj

As it can be seen from the list of attractions, the region is rich on valuable natural and anthropological resources that are quite preserved and unspoiled (Cetina is one of the cleanest rivers in Europe) and they form an excellent base for rural tourism development.

As far as the preconditions for agro-tourism are concerned, apart from the attractive countryside and quality tourism attractions in the area, sufficient number of agricultural land

and households is *conditio sine qua non* for agro-tourism development. Their number is shown in the following table.

Table 5. Agricultural population by towns and municipalities in Cetinska Krajina in 2003.

Town/ municipality	Total agricultural population	Active agricultural population			Supported agricultural population	
		Total	Working on their own farm without employees	Working on their own farm with employees	Women	Children
Sinj	488	388	259	1	9	88
Trilj	94	52	22	/	11	31
Vrlika	642	572	418	/	17	47
Hrvace	100	72	37	/	6	22
Otok	385	359	236	/	1	23
Total	1709	1443	972	1	44	211

Source: www.dzs.hr; Popis stanovništva 2001.

Table 6. Agricultural households in Cetinska Krajina with available land

Town/OPCINA	Number of households with agricultural land	Total available land area, ha	Land used for agricultural purposes, ha
Sinj	2 931	2 417,90	1 795,55
Trilj	1759	1 748,11	1 207,51
Vrlika	611	1 089,91	685,75
Hrvace	880	929,65	609,41
Otok	1 026	773,37	628,27
Total	7 207	6 958,94	4 926,49

Source: www.dzs.hr; Popis poljoprivrede 2003.

As it is obvious from the presented data, the region has excellent preconditions for development or agro-tourism. Yet, there are only five registered agro-tourism farms so the tourism figures are far below the possibilities.

What is the reason? Perhaps lack of state initiative and support? An investigation in this area proves to the contrary. Namely, there are several government initiatives and projects aimed at agro-tourism development, especially at the county level. Activities initiated by Split County include:

- a credit line aimed at fostering SME's development, developed in cooperation with the Ministry of crafts and small- and medium size entrepreneurship and commercial banks. Since agro-tourism farms belong to this sector, this option for financing entrepreneurial activity is also at their disposal but to our best knowledge, no farm from this area applied for this credit;
- Program of fostering tourism development in the rural areas of Split County launched at the beginning of 2003. The program was developed in cooperation with the local commercial bank and included credits with low interest rate which was subsidized by the County. There were 17 applicants for the credits (10 being from Cetinska Krajina) and the Program Commission within the County approved for 11 of them but, unfortunately, none of them was able to meet the criteria set by the bank. The new Program is being prepared;

- catalogue “Agro-tourism of middle Dalmatia”, done in cooperation with Split Tourist Board. The catalogue was presented on the farms included and the intention is to supplement it every year with new agro-tourism farms that can be applied by an on-line questionnaire;
- catalogue “Fortresses of River Cetina”- financed by the County, is being published;
- programme “Wine Routes of Split County” aimed at fostering rural tourism. So far Sinj region is not included in this project but its long wine production tradition certainly can be incorporated in such tourism package.

Also, Sinj Tourism Board has organized several seminars for those interested in agro-tourism. Guest speakers from Istria County, both agro-tourism farmers and Tourism Board representatives, spoke of their experience in agro-tourism and although the audience was respectably numerous, the results were poor.

Why is it so?

We believe that the reason is deep skepticism by the locals resulting from low level of awareness on the possibilities of agro-tourism development. Deeper considerations on the subject can explain that situation.

Namely, up until recently, tourism was an activity associated only with Croatian coastline. Due to the dominance of mass tourism and trends in international tourism demand oriented towards concept of “sun, sea and sand” supply, Croatia was promoted and developed solely as a seaside destination. Recent shift in tourism demand evident through gradual abandonment of mass-tourism and growth of interest in selective forms of tourism resulted in adjustments of tourism offer of many destinations striving to maintain and/or strengthen their market position.

Due to these new circumstances, Croatia is also trying to reposition its tourism product and image. Therefore areas once marginal from tourism point of view are now becoming Croatian new tourism pearls. Although this sounds very simple in theory, in practice it is far from it. Namely, national tourism policy and its priorities is one thing, but individual entrepreneurs are the ones creating tourism supply and the ones supposed to bear changes and act accordingly.

Therefore, when talking about agro-tourism or rural tourism in general as emerging market segment, education of the entrepreneurs in rural areas on its potentials and benefits seems to be of the utmost importance. Due to the fact that for almost 50 years tourism in Croatia has been predominantly concentrated on its coastal zone, and run almost exclusively by entrepreneurs from sea resorts, their counterparts in the continent are not familiar with it and not aware of the changes taking place. Therefore they are embracing it extremely slowly and with a lot of skepticism.

Another reason why education of farmers is important is the fact that most of them have little or no experience and formal education needed for providing tourism services and managing the agro-tourism farms. That is “terra incognita” from their point of view, so it is no wonder that they fear getting involved with it.

Therefore education of residents of the region on these subjects is the first and inevitable element of agro- and rural tourism development. We believe that it is not the case only in

Cetinska Krajina, but that it reflects the state that can be found in most other rural areas of the country where these tourism activities are poor developed.

No matter how favorable credits or promotion activities government or local authorities offer, they will not provoke expected interest by local people if they are not informed and aware of what they're getting involved with. That doesn't mean that these government initiatives are not useful or that they should be abolished. On the contrary, experiences of many European countries have proved that they are justified. But if they are to be successful, they must be accompanied with educational and training activities.

CONCLUSION

International tourism market evaluates destinations through its parameters. Thus Croatia is mostly perceived as a destination with limited tourism supply. Better market position can only be obtained by introducing new quality services and products, refocusing from mass tourism market to targeted market segments and replacing one traditional tourism product with several competitive ones. This brings rural areas in the focus of tourism.

Apart from their role in reviving and repositioning of Croatian tourism supply, rural tourism and agro-tourism play an important role in country's overall development for they are elements of economical, ecological and social development of Croatian rural areas. Knowing that these areas are nowadays mostly in poor economical condition, suffering from loss of rural manufacturing plants and severe agricultural crisis, possibility to reactivate them through selective and sustainable forms of tourism must not be missed.

Although rural and agro-tourism in Croatia have great potential, their development is surprisingly slow in regions, like in the case of Cetinska Krajina. The analysis shows that the missing link is education of locals. Namely, in most cases they are not acquainted with the opportunities new tourism trends have brought and therefore are not able to seize them. In addition, they lack experience and formal education in providing tourism services and operating agro-tourism farms. Thus, their education on these subjects is the first step towards achieving growth of agro-tourism segment.

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