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Relation between Traditional Food Products and Rural Tourism Development in Serbia

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Abstract

Rural development is crucial for overall national development in Serbia. Rural tourism can play a significant role in achieving sustainable rural development. For that it is necessary to be aware of factors and services that attract tourists to visit a rural area. The paper aims at analysing connection between tourists' interest in typical and traditional food products of a rural area and interest for visiting it thus fostering rural tourism development. In particular the paper sheds light on the importance of traditional and typical food products in rural areas attractiveness. The study was carried out in two phases through two questionnaire surveys. In the first phase, with 251 field questionnaires, was examined consumers' perception and interest in traditional food products, while in the second one, with 70 structured interviews, were analysed motivations for visiting rural areas. Both questionnaires were conducted in Serbia, in the period from July 2012 to March 2014. Results indicate a positive connection between interest for traditional food products and rural tourism development. In fact, results of the questionnaire survey show that almost 50% of the first phase surveyed Serbian people is very interested in typical products. Furthermore, attributes that people mostly associate to typical products are linked to tradition and support of local economy. Besides, there is a very high level of interest for visiting rural areas for tasting locally produced traditional food. These findings should be taken into consideration for the design of effective rural tourism development strategies and for better marketing of traditional products.

Keywords: rural tourism, typical food products, tradition, motivation, Serbia

Introduction

Agriculture still ranks among the most important sectors of Serbia's economy, with significant contributions to overall economic development and social stability (EC, 2011; Bogdanov and Bozić, 2010). The primary sector accounted for over 11% of GDP in 2013 (EC, 2014). Agricultural exports contributed about 24% of total Serbian exports in 2009 (EC, 2011). About 43% of the total population lives in rural areas (RDNS, 2010). Around a third of the active population depends at least partly on agriculture for their livelihood (EC, 2011). In rural areas more than 45% of the active population is employed in the primary sector (Stevanović *et al.*, 2005). Rural areas have suffered from intensive migrations and low levels of economic diversification. They lag behind urban areas in terms of service delivery and household

incomes (European Integration Office-Serbia, 2011).

Typical and traditional products and rural tourism are considered as important levers on which can be based long-term strategies for the development of Serbian rural areas.

In order to enter and survive on the market of the European union (EU), Serbia had to implement agricultural quality policy, and within it geographical indication policy. The Law on protected designations of origin in Serbia exists from 2010 (Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia № 18/2010). It is completely in line with EU regulation 510/2006. Work is ongoing towards revising the law on geographical indications (EC, 2014). As it is novelty on the market, there are not many certified products, but their number has been increasing.

According to Giovannucci *et al.* (2009), typical and traditional products are nowadays seen as a “*particularly interesting model for development*”. Some European countries (e.g. Italy, France and Spain) have approached very seriously the model of rural areas development based on typical products valorization.

Consumers come to associate geographically labelled foods with high quality products and their reputation (London Economics, 2008). Because of that, consumers have increased demand for products that have such quality designations like Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) or Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) (Fotopoulos *et al.*, 2009). Reasons for which consumers consider valuable labels are that they inform consumers that the expected quality of the product is provided and they reduce the risk connected to the purchase decision (Menapace *et al.*, 2009).

Products deriving from a limited geographical area undoubtedly contribute to increasing the quality of life, of both producers and consumers. Geographical indications (GIs) contribute to faster and sustainable development of rural areas (Bramley, 2011). Geographical indication products have positive effects on social features of communities, from which they derive by contributing to social cohesion, playing a positive role in lifting up local and national identity, and making producers and consumers proud of their unique traditional products (Belletti *et al.*, 2011).

By improving market access, GIs can lead to higher incomes through increasing the volume of goods sold (Barjolle and Sylvander, 2000). The economic benefits of geographical indications come mainly from differentiation: a special quality linked to the territory is acknowledged by consumers in the country and outside (Belletti *et al.*, 2011). GIs overcome the dimension of pure economic benefit for producers and expands the range of effects on consumers, rural areas, and to entire regions and countries (Bramley, 2011). It is widely articulated that protected GIs may contribute to rural development (cf. Van de Kop *et al.*, 2006). GIs potentially impact rural development in two ways. Firstly through the remuneration of specific assets directly used in the production process. Secondly, the GI qualification process itself, by defining product standards and signalling territorial values embedded in the GI product increases the ability of capturing price premiums.

Primary producers and rural communities have increasingly turned also to *tourism* as an alternative means of achieving sustainable development through diversification of economic activity (Hall, 1997). There is a great potential

through tourism, for resolution of many chronic dilemmas faced by rural communities (Knowd, 2001). Even if rural tourism may be minor in relation to the overall tourism market its importance to the development of specific rural areas may be critical. Thus, the multiplier effect is often more impacting in rural areas (Gopal *et al.*, 2008).

Many studies dealt with socio-cultural, economic and environmental impacts of rural tourism. Cohesive effect of the development of rural tourism includes tourism as a mechanism for developing a balanced regional development. The development of rural tourism significantly affects the preservation of local identity, traditions and customs, and other values in rural areas (Mrdalj and Todić, 2012). Tourism has a wide range of positive livelihood impacts, many of which go beyond monetary benefits. Tourism in rural areas offers a viable option for livelihood diversification. Moreover, tourism considerably expands rural households' economic prospects by improving education, health, physical amenities and financial assets (Shakya, 2011).

Rural tourism is considered as a form of alternative tourism. Alternative tourism can be viewed as being synonymous with the concept of sustainable tourism development (Holden, 2000). Rural tourism encompasses a huge range of activities, natural or manmade attractions, amenities and facilities (Sharpley and Sharpley, 1997 in Irshad, 2010). Tourism is termed rural when the rural culture is a key component of the product on offer (Gopal *et al.*, 2008). Rural tourism is not just farm-based tourism; it also comprises special interest nature holidays and ecotourism, walking, climbing and riding holidays, adventure, sport and health tourism, hunting and angling, educational travel, arts and heritage tourism, and ethnic tourism (Irshad, 2010). The distinguishing feature of rural tourism products is the wish to give visitors personalized contact, a taste of the physical and human environment of the villages and allow them to participate in the activities, traditions and lifestyles of local people (Gopal *et al.*, 2008).

The aim of this research is to analyse relation between interest in traditional food products of a rural area and motivation for visiting such a rural area and to explore potential for rural tourism development in Serbia.

Material and methods

The paper is based on an extensive review of secondary data from different sources and primary data collected in two phases through two questionnaire surveys.

In the first phase 251 interviews were carried out in order to collect different information about attitude

towards PDO/PGI products, specific PDO/PGI products, consumption habits, knowledge of and trust in food labels.

The questionnaire was written in Serbian, using a simple language in order to be understood by people at different education levels and with different degree of knowledge of the topic of interest. The questionnaire contained straightforward sentences to which the interviewee was asked to agree. A Likert scale with 5 options was used. The respondents were asked to choose one of the five responses. Possible choices were: 1) Strongly disagree, 2) Disagree, 3) Neutral, 4) Agree, and 5) Strongly Agree. Also, five categories were chosen for frequencies of actions: 1) Never, 2) Rarely, 3) Sometimes, 4) Often, and 5) Very frequently.

The survey was conducted between July and October 2012. Questionnaire was conducted both online (151 interviews) and face-to-face (100 interviews). Online questionnaire was provided to different kinds of respondents, no matter which part of Serbia they live in. Face-to-face interviews were carried out in two supermarkets and in three large fresh produce markets in the city of Novi Sad, Serbia.

The second-phase questionnaire, was conducted online in the period February-March 2014, and included 70 Serbian interviewees. In order to get information about motivation factors that influence willingness to visit rural areas, questions with Likert scale were used. A particular attention was paid to the importance given by respondents to the presence of typical and traditional products in the visited areas. In the first-phase questionnaire Likert scale provided five categories, with end points from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree".

Both questionnaires had a section for collecting personal information about respondents such as gender, income, education level, place of living – whether the respondent lives in a rural or urban area.

Data obtained were analysed statistically by calculating average means and frequencies. For data analysis was used SPSS Statistics 17.0 version. This paper presents data collected from both surveys that relate to interest in typical food products, opinion about them, and interest and motivation for visiting rural areas.

The main limitation of the study is the low number of respondents in second-phase survey, which is 70, but we consider it as a base for the future research in Serbia.

Results and discussion

Respondent profile

Majority of the sample are female persons. In the first survey 35.7% of respondents are male and 64.3% female, mostly because face-to-face interviews were done in supermarkets and markets where women mostly do shopping. While in the second survey, gender is almost equally balanced between male (48.6%) and female (51.4%).

In terms of age, mostly young people were interviewed. In the first sample more than a fourth (27%) are young people under 34 years old and almost one half of respondents (47%) are people between 35 and 49 years old; and in the second one the majority of the respondents are between 18 and 34 years old (58.6%).

The sample consisted of highly educated persons with university degree. According to the literature influence of education on behavior is pervasive. Many aspects of the behavior of the individual are seen to be closely associated with level of schooling. Income, choice of occupation, residential location, geographical mobility, consumption expenditures, would appear to be relatively strong correlates of education (Michael, 1975). Besides that, due to educational level, consumers in principle could have a propensity to new and complex quality attributes about food (Carbone et al., 2009). Thus, according to high level of highly educated people in both samples, it can be expected that interest in typical food products and rural tourism would be higher.

Furthermore, monthly income of the majority of persons is around average income in Serbia, and lower than 60,000 Serbian dinars (RSD, 1.00 EUR = 122 RSD). Monthly net income in the first sample of 39% of surveyed population is between 40,000 and 60,000 RSD, and 30.2% of respondents have income between 20,000 and 40,000 RSD. While, in the second sample 40.6% of persons have monthly income between 20,000 and 40,000 RSD, and 29.0% in the range from 40,000 to 60,000 RSD. According to the results, monthly income should be considered as a limiting factor for decision making whether to travel and visit some destination. According to the literature, tourists choose rural destinations because of their affordability (Tsephe and Eyono Obono, 2013).

The majority of the surveyed population live in cities in Serbia. Around 88% of persons from the first survey live in town, and 11.7% in rural areas. In the second survey, 92.4% of the sample live in the town, and only 7.6% in the village. According to these results, it is possible to expect that people who live in town would like to travel to some rural areas in order to escape from cities and to enjoy nature. In

fact, 70.6% of the people that were surveyed have already experienced rural tourism.

Interest in and attitude towards typical food products

It is assumed that attitude and opinion about typical food products is a base for interest for purchasing them. And furthermore, interest in typical food products is important for making decision to visit rural areas in order to eat typical and traditional food products.

Attributes that people associate to typical products, are linked to tradition and support of local economy. To explain better, 49% of persons totally agree that typical products are traditional. More than a half of the sample (65.2%) thinks that typical products support local economies. Furthermore, 54.2% of surveyed sample think that typical

products have better taste, and more than a half of the sample that they are healthy. These opinions about typical food products are important for willingness to buy them.

Persons from the sample have mostly neutral attitude when speaking about freshness and better aspect of typical food products. But, only 2.8% of them think that typical products don't have better aspect, and only 2.4% strongly believe that these products are not fresh.

According to these results, it can be said that people in Serbia have positive image and opinion about typical food products, and they believe in their quality and taste. This can have positive impact on willingness to visit the rural area of origin in order to taste the typical food made in a traditional way, which is considered healthier and tastier than food in city restaurants.

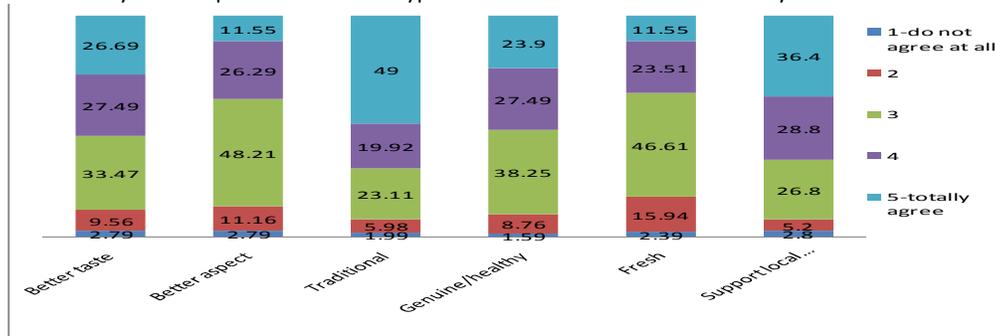


Figure 1. Opinions about attributes of typical products.

Source: Authors' elaboration of survey data. By analysing responses, it can be assumed that Serbian population has interest in typical food products, which can be described with the facts that 19.5% of the sample responded that they are interested very much (selected option "5"), and with option 4 on the Likert scale to 5, chosen by around 30% of respondents, which makes almost 50% of surveyed

population. High level of interest in typical food products gives opportunity to increase their production and sale. Beside, a part of surveyed population (36.2%) responded "neutral" concerning their interest for typical food products, with option 3 on scale from 1 to 5. This part of population can show interest with adequate promotion.

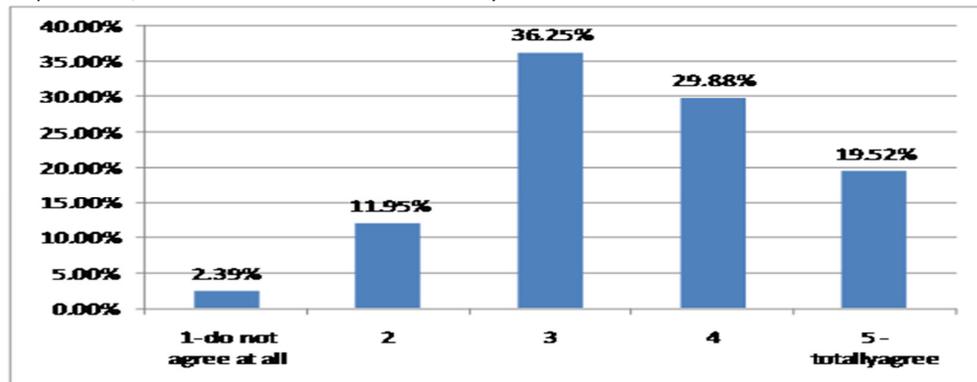


Figure 2. Level of interest towards typical food products. Source: Authors' elaboration of survey data.

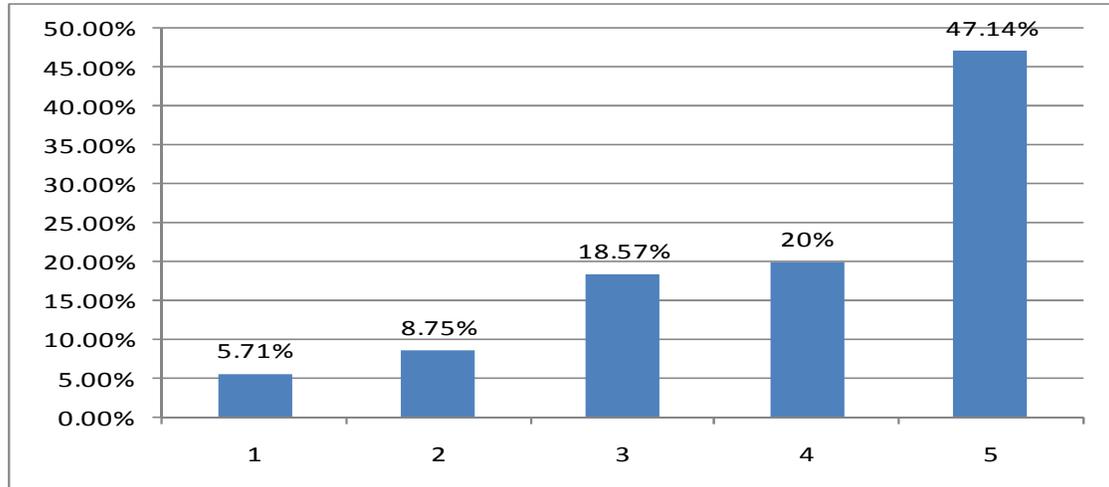
Typical products as a determinant to rural areas tourist attractiveness

By analysing motivation factors for visiting rural areas, consumption of locally produced typical

products was very important for the studied sample. Analyzing results gained for motivation factors importance, presented in calculated average values of responses (Likert scale from 1 to 5), these

motivation factors have values 3.94 and 3.99. Furthermore, 47.1% of persons responded with option 5 that they find a very important motivation factor consumption of locally produced typical products for visiting a rural area, and 20.4% responded with option 4. So, it can be said that

almost around 70% of the surveyed population would go to rural area in order to eat typical food products that are produced locally. Only 5.7% of the sample completely disagrees with this motivation



Source: Authors' elaboration of survey data.

Figure 3. Importance of locally produced typical food products consumption for visiting rural areas.

More than 70% of sample finds as a motivation factor for visiting a rural area organic food consumption, as on the scale from 1 to 5 with option 5 responded by 42.7% and with option 4 responded by 28.6% of the sample. This is in accordance with other studies, that showed that highly educated persons, as is the case in the present sample, are attracted to buy organic food by symbolic motives such as traditional products safeguard (Idda et al., 2008). Beside, according to the literature persons that live in cities are interested in organic food consumption because they want to re-establish a lost contact with rural areas and nature and the farmers, in contributing to preserving nature, typical products and the distinctive features of rural areas (Pugliese, 2001). These results also confirm that organic agriculture and rural tourism are closely linked and that gastronomic and natural tourism has a considerable role in the future development of rural areas (Privitera, 2010).

Conclusion

Rural tourism development may be a tool for improving incomes and potential economic development of small farmers and rural communities in Serbia. According to this research, Serbian population is interested in rural tourism as about two thirds of the sample has already visited some rural areas with rural tourism potential. This is very important for future activities, because

people have already shown interest and are already familiar with the concept of rural tourism. The important thing is to find a way how to motivate these persons to go more frequently and how to attract persons who have never been there.

This research showed that Serbian population is interested in typical and traditional food products. Marketing and promotional activities for rural tourism could be based on this interest. In order to promote rural tourism, accent should be put on positive aspects that persons connect with traditional and typical food, such as quality and taste. Aspect of tradition should be highlighted.

Connection between rural tourism and typical and traditional food product is shown in the fact that Serbian population finds motivation factors for visiting rural area in consumption of locally produced typical food products.

Rural areas can be considered as a tourist attraction and rural tourism can be developed by promotion of typical and traditional food products. Especially, it is necessary to put accent on heritage and tradition to attract tourists, as well as health aspect of traditionally produced food products.

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