

CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION, PROTECTED GEOGRAPHIC AREAS AND EXTENSIVE AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION IN SERBIA

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Abstract

The concept of Sustainable Agricultural and Rural Development (SARD) is based on resources effective usage that brings strengthen social cohesion of rural regions. Sustainable agro systems take care of natural resources conservation, as well as of economic and social aspects of rural economy. In order to advance complementary activities, agricultural sector has been often seen as the base for local economical diversification of capacities. The connections between agriculture, nature and tourism are especially important. The EU countries insist on this kind of connections which is the integral part of financial support of common funds, while the candidate countries are using the IPA assistance for rural development programs. Program of cross - border cooperation has been placed within this context, too.

The article, also, gives several examples of cross-border cooperation project that might include Serbia with some of the neighboring countries in the area of tourism and rural development. The most important elements of cooperation with comments and issues from the author's perspective of view are given in this paper.

Key words: multifunctional, extensive agriculture, SARD, cross-border cooperation, rural tourism, ecotourism, Serbia.

Introduction

The concept of Sustainable Rural Development means three aspects – social, economical and ecological. They suppose to act in synergy, but, at the same time, these aspects suppose to be in the concurrent opposition. Agriculture, as a

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traditional activity of rural economy, contributes to the sustainable development of rural areas only if there is adequate resources management. If not, there will be significant degradation of rural environment. These are the reasons why sustainable agriculture development is being emphasize, through which the productivity is maximize, and the negative effects on nature and human resources are minimize. In this context, the connection between agriculture and tourism exists, where this application of sustainable agricultural development concept produces extern effects connected to biodiversity protection and environment in rural areas.

On agreed and mutually accepted principles is based EU cooperation. The new member countries and candidates for membership are though the process of association and stabilization accepting and incorporating those principles. Through numerous programs of cross-border cooperation European Union supports them. In the area of tourism development in bordering protected areas, which includes both development of tourism promotion and development of complementary activities, special interest have been shown. In the areas of protected natural environment, cultural and historical heritage, especially interesting aspect is fitting rural development with creation of integral tourist offer. Republic of Serbia has numerous protected natural and cultural areas. Some of them are in border areas to neighboring countries. Taking into account options that EU IPA funds offer for joined projects of cross-border cooperation, tourism and rural development of those areas becomes very important factor of their overall economic growth.

1. Rural and eco-development

Sustainable development is development that satisfies the needs of present generations without jeopardizing the ability of future generations to meet their own needs is interpreted. As such, it comprises different aspects of sustainability – social, economic and ecological, which can, to a certain extent, develop synergy, but also be mutually unsupportive, that is, competitive in their accomplishment. The social dimension implies creating a satisfactory level of rural employment and enabling the quality of life in rural areas. The economic dimension of sustainability refers to diversification of rural economy leading towards efficient resource exploitation, competitiveness of rural areas and vitality of integral rural economy. The ecological dimension of sustainability refers to preservation of resources (natural, human and manufactured) in order to satisfy the needs of present and future generations in an adequate way. This aspect of sustainability was first discussed in the sense of rational usage of limited resources, but today, within the dimension of sustainability, there is more and more talk about external effects of different activities in rural areas connected to protection of countryside, habitats, biodiversity, as well as quality of water and air (*Tietenberg T., 2006*).

Agriculture plays a special role in the development of the SARD concept as the traditionally present activity of rural economy. Natural, human, manufactured, financial and local resources are all engaged in agricultural production. By means of politics, procedures and institutions, these resources are transformed not only into food as a visible product, but also into employment, welfare of local community, clean air, healthy environment, reduced crime rate in rural areas, strengthening of social cohesion et al. If resources are not managed adequately, it is possible that there occurs a degradation of the basis for rural economy development, which is most often seen in the form of depopulation of rural areas, uncontrolled forest cutting, soil and water pollution. Sustainable agro systems contribute to strengthening of positive effects on resources, thus contributing to the increased possibility to serve by their own activities to the accomplishment of needs of future generations (*James R. Kahn, 1998*). In the context of the connection between agriculture and the concept of sustainable rural development it is often emphasized that farmers exert significant influence on local, national and international economics and ecosystems – a positive or negative one. In the era of modernization of agriculture, special emphasis is on growing danger of losing biodiversity, and that is the reason why traditional farmers (the so-called rural world) are marked as guardians of natural environment. Experts of different profiles, dealing with analyses of agricultural production, all agree nowadays in saying that agro-sector provides a unique public service which no other economic sector can provide.

Sustainable agriculture is based on using technologies that maximize productivity and at the same time minimize the negative effects on natural (soil, water, air and biodiversity) and human resources (rural population and consumers). By finding the way to use resources most efficiently, sustainable agriculture leads towards strengthening of social cohesion – trust in partnership between the institutions on the local level. Not without reason, it is considered today that only agro systems of this kind (based on highly valued human and social resources) are also sustainable in the long run. The concept of sustainable agriculture was extended in 1989, and today it comprises sustainable agricultural and rural development (SARD). In that sense, SARD is defined as a concept of “management and preservation of natural resources and directing of technological and institutional changes in such a way as to enable achievement and continuous satisfaction of the needs of present and future generations. Such a development preserves soil, water, plant and animal resources, does not degrade the environment, it is technically convenient, economically proper and socially acceptable.” (*Jovanović Gavrilović B., 2004*). It should be mentioned that the concept of multi-functioning and sustainability of agriculture and rural development have a common basis. Both concepts rely on multidimensional conceptualization of the role of agriculture which yields market and non-market

results. Still, there is also an important difference between the afore-mentioned concepts. While sustainability insists on the efficient way of resource usage, multi-functioning is oriented towards analyzing the multiple product of agricultural activity (food, external effects and public goods) which deserves a more significant support of the so-called green box measures of agricultural budget. Agriculture is nowadays viewed as a basis for diversification of local economic capacities, in the sense of promotion of complementary activities. It is especially talked about the connection between agriculture, protection of plant and animal resources, intact nature and ecotourism.

2. Specific areas in Serbia applicable for the eco-rural-tourism cross-border programs

Through cross – border cooperation projects many aims could be reached, among which one of the leading places takes the aspiration for promotion of sustainable economical and social development in border regions. Knowing that these regions are usual passive and undeveloped, the projects of cross – border cooperation could induce development of those activities in local economy which could bring better living condition and economical prosperity on one hand and protection of environment, on the other. Examples of this kind of projects in Serbia are usually in rural and ecotourism development in specific areas with geographic protection.

Analysis is addressed to a Program perspective application in agriculture and tourism development (rural and eco tourism) based on different examples of cross – border cooperation between Serbia and EU or EU candidate countries. This kind of cross - border cooperation would mean common investments in infrastructure, space organization, protection of environment and joint presentation of tourist products and tourist offer on third markets.

Differences in natural resources and cultural heritage in border region in Serbia could be used in the development programs of these parts of the country: (1) Spatial nature reservation of «Upper Danube» region between Serbia, Croatia and Hungary; (2) Old Mountain between Serbia and Bulgaria; (3) «Djerdap» between Serbia and Romania. These projects would suppose development of ecotourism and rural tourism with joint action between economy and ecology, and through which the standard of local communities would be upraised and border region would be in position to develop faster.

Map 1 Protected areas in Serbia, neighboring countries and cross-border cooperation projects



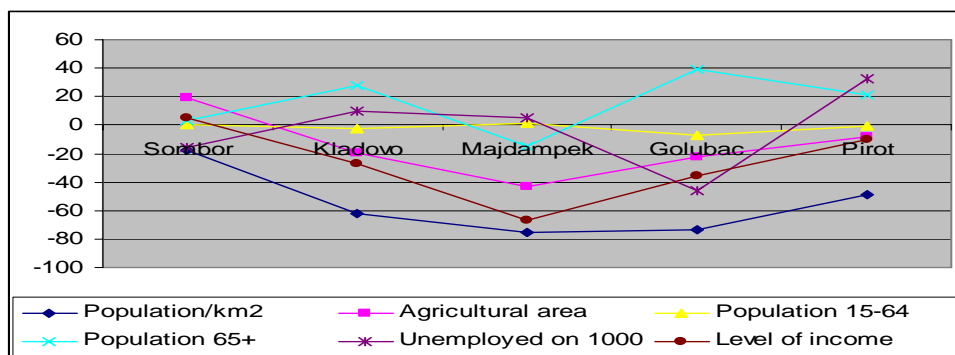
Table 1 Observed municipalities - general data

Municipality	Area	Population (2002)	Population change (2002-1991)
Sombor	1.33	1.32	3.00
Kladovo	0.71	0.3	-11.20
Majdanpek	1.06	0.29	-11.60
Golubac	0.42	0.13	-8.50
Pirot	1.39	0.83	-4.60
Total	4.91	2.87	-1.00

Source: Municipalities in numbers, Statistical Office of Serbia 2008.

The analysis is based on the different indicators of agricultural and rural economy development in specific areas chosen for the research. General data, vital statistics and both eco and economic indicators shows that chosen border municipalities are mostly overwhelmed with different kind of developmental problems – underdeveloped economy, unemployment, dominantly share of the primary sectors activities in GDP, significant share of elderly in total population ect. (Table 1, Graph 1). In others regions in Serbia, especially in region of Vojvodina under intensified agricultural production, there is degradation of soil or reduced biodiversity. According to Health Statistical Yearbook 2007, Zapadnobacki district (Sombor) had 2 times higher percentage of water samples noncompliant with Rulebook (physical-chemical safety), while Borski district (Majdampek and Kladovo) was on average for Serbia (19,87%), Branicevski district (Golubac) was two times lower and Pirotski district (Pirot) counted almost non significant water pollution at level 0,63%. Underdeveloped economy brought an important advantage – non polluted environment and perspective for rural sector development throughout ecotourism and extensive agricultural production especially to South region. Further analysis is addressed on specific regions of Serbia applicable for cross-border eco/rural tourism programs.

Graph 1 Observed municipalities selected data (Average for Serbia = 0)



Source: Municipalities in Serbia, Statistical Office of Serbia 2008

a) Case study I - Cross border cooperation in the area of Special nature reservation „Gornje Podunavlje”

Special nature reservation “Gornje Podunavlje” is very interesting for creating cross border cooperation in area of tourism development, especially rural and ecotourism between three countries, Serbia, Croatia and Hungary. It is located in western part of Bačka and is a part of the largest swamp area in Europe. Pan

European transport corridor 7 intersects with this area, which creates favorable conditions for cooperation and affirmation. All three countries introduced protection of this area, in Serbia it's Special nature reservation (SNR) „Gornje Podunavlje“, in Croatia it's Nature park „Kopački rit“ and in Hungary it's National park „Danube – Drava“. Diversity of nature, specific folklore elements, local architecture and location on the junction of border regions, are strong stimulus for establishment of cross border cooperation, especially through the tourism development programs and joined entry on other markets. The fact that given area is rural, tourism can be very important pull factor for development of other complementary activities, like agriculture and organic food growth. All three countries have recognized this potential and incorporated these ideas in some of their development documents (*NICEF, 2007*).

So far each country have been individually working on tourism development in these areas, with modest attempts to achieve cross border cooperation with one of neighboring countries their; none document identified any attempt of three parties cooperation of Serbia, Croatia and Hungary. Considering Serbia, tourism development in area of SNP “Gornje Podunavlje” is described in Master plan of “Tourist area Gornje Podunavlje” with focus on utilization of biodiversity, nautical potentials on Danube, swamps, channels, pastoral nature and surrounding rural areas (*Stojanović Ž., Manić E., 2009*). This document clearly identifies elements that will be the foundation for building tourism offer of this area: preserved nature, magical rivers, plain landscape and rural settlements – salaši. Good accessibility, dispersed attractions and infrastructure modeled those elements in two basic tourist products - recreational and rural tourism, but still without differentiated ecotourism products.

In the Nature park „Koparački rit“, Croatia has developed ecotourism products, such as residing at biological station, seminars organization, birds watching, photo-safari, as well as standard tourism products, such as recreational fishing, excursions to typical local farms, visits to Zoo or to Tikveš castle. Additionally, Croatia has already been involved in cross border cooperation with Hungary trough project of Euroregional cooperation „Dunav – Drava – Sava“, together with Bosnia and Herzegovina, while Serbia has observer status (www.crp.org.ba). During the period 2000-2002, municipalities from this area had joined presentations on tourist fair events. But, this cooperation didn't lead to creation of joined integral tourist product, which would unite all thee protected areas.

Still, there are some aspects of the cross- border cooperation in the area. Serbia and Hungary have over 40 years history of cross-border cooperation between brotherly cities of Sombor (Serbia) and Baja (Hungary) in various areas. Unfortunately this cooperation still doesn't include tourism development. Only

attempt in this direction is joined city guide of those cities, published in 2007. (*RASMSE, 2007*).

Cooperation of Serbia and Croatia in area of joined tourism product development and joined presentation on other markets is still very modest. Only one joined project has been realized so far: Bicycle tour “Panonian peace route” between cities of Sombor and Osijek. This project has been supported by non governmental organizations CRS and USAID, as well as cities of Sombor and Osijek. Bicycle tour that connects two cities is 80 km long and goes through protected areas SNP „Gornje Podunavlje“ and Nature park „Koparački rit”. Project has been realized as part of much bigger project “Development of cross border tourism on the Middle Danube”, financed by EU through “CARDS 2004” program. The goal of the project was Middle Danube region sustainable economical, social and tourist development. In that context we can monitor development of agriculture and countryside life, as an important part of the integrated tourist product.

b) Case Study II - Cross border cooperation opportunities between Serbia and Bulgaria in the area of Old Mountain

An interesting area for development of rural and ecotourism though cross-border cooperation is Southeastern Serbia, Pirot and Dimitrovgrad municipalities, which partly reside on Old Mountain area. Along the crest of Old Mountain is the border between Serbia and Bulgaria, which is seen in the future as a factor that connects tourism development of two countries in this area. Additional integration factor is the fact that these municipalities populate significant number of Bulgarian national minority members. Pirot and Dimitrovgrad are only around 60 km away from Bulgarian capital city Sofia, which is also very important factor for planning tourist offer and directing marketing activities.

Both municipalities have exceptional preconditions for ecotourism development. On Serbian side of Old Mountain, Strict Nature Reservation is established with a goal to protect numerous autochthon plant species, endemism, rare birds and venison. Additionally, Jerma canyon and valley of the river Temštica are protected as nature areas. This opens opportunity for organization of ecological schools, as well as performs classic eco tours. Numerous villages, such as Dojkinci, Brlog, Rsovac and Topli Do, with specific architecture, folklore and traditional handicrafts, give great opportunity for rural tourism development. Village households, local colors, dialect and authentic landscape are giving special flavor to the tourist offer of this area (*Glorigorjević M., Devedžić M., 2006*). On the other side, Bulgaria has been doing much more in the area of rural tourism development. This fact can be significant booster for cross border cooperation (*Radovanović M., Bjeljac Ž., 2004*).

So far there have been some contacts between municipality of Pirot with neighbouring Bulgarian municipalities, having similar folklore elements and handicrafts, but no specific project have been started in the area of tourism. Some joined projects supported by EU exist, but their focus is on local government improvement and economic development as a whole. During a few last years, Serbia has started project of forming Ski center „Old Mountain“, that can positively impact development of tourism, including ecotourism and rural tourism, as well. One of the project tasks is creation of cross border cooperation with Bulgaria.

c) Case Study III - National Park “Djerdap” and neighboring countries cross border cooperation

National Park “Djerdap” is the biggest national park in Serbia and one of the richest with natural and anthropogenic tourist resources. National park area is located over significant part of three municipalities’ territory: Golubac, Majdanpek and Kladovo. Additionally area protected by law includes big parts of few more neighboring municipalities. National park has vast of floral and animal diversity and its territory is significantly preserved from human influence. There are intensive ongoing activities in forming ranger service with aim to contribute to the National park preservation. Numerous monuments demonstrate rich cultural and historical heritage, which give additional value to the area. Finally, Danube as important European transport route, gives a special connection of this area to the rest of Europe.

Danube is also a country border with neighboring Romania and as such is seen as an important integration factor for cross-border tourism development. On the other side of National Park “Djerdap” and country border, we have National park “Iron gate” in Romania, also rich with various natural resources. This fact opens opportunity to unite protected areas which are combined with its location on major transport route and all that give an excellent predisposition for creation of joined integral tourist product that can be offered on other markets.

At the moment there are two regional cooperation projects ongoing with participation of Majdanpek municipality from Serbia and city Turn-Severin from Romania. First project “Danube without borders” is led by Tourist organization of Majdanpek and Pro Mehedinci from Turn-Severin and has budget of 70.800 EUR. Project goals are joined promotion of tourist offer from both sides of border, mapping tourist resources, making joined publications, participation on tourist fairs and providing equipment for tourist offices in Donji Milanovac and Turn-Severin (Severineanu R.S., Mirela M., 2007).

Second project “United tourist destination Djerdap” is led by Tourist organization of Majdanpek and Turn-Severin municipality. Project goals are

creation of joined promo material (film, catalog and map) and equipping both municipalities' info centers (the budget for this project is 165.000 EUR). Both projects are seen as basis for future applications to EU IPA funds.

One more cross border project is ongoing that has focus on tourism development in the area, with participation of Serbia, Bulgaria and Romania. Active participants in this project are municipalities of Majdanpek, Kladovo and Bor from Serbia, Vidin municipality from Bulgaria and Mehedinti district from Romania. Project goals are tourism development, creation of united integral tourist offer and uniting this area in one Euro region. They have an intention to produce several tourist products established on numerous tourist resources in those countries: speleological tourism, cultural tourism and sport events (including events on Danube). Tourism development requires significant investments in local infrastructure, agriculture, handcraft and ecology. Promotion and protection of natural and anthropogenic values in this area will contribute to tourism development, overall economic growth and improved cross border cooperation, resulting with sustainable development of whole area. Considering that in those municipalities and district dominate rural population with one urban center, this kind of cross-border cooperation would contribute to the rural development and its better overall integration in the whole Euro region.

3. Conclusion

Sustainable development considers three equally important components – economic, social and ecological. When we speak about sustainable development in the rural economy and tourism, we refer to all these elements. This research pointed out that underdeveloped economy brought an important advantage – non polluted environment and perspective for rural sector development throughout ecotourism and extensive agricultural production, especially to South region of Serbia.

The examples that are presented in the text confirmed common interests between sustainable, eco-rural development and cross-border cooperation programs. The projects that are being developed in Serbia in this area represent good foundation for future, much more fruitful cross-border cooperation in the area of tourism development, especially in protected areas, as well as in the agriculture and rural areas. Such projects would lead to investments in infrastructure, coastal areas regulation of the rivers, as well as presenting the integral tourist product on the third markets. Diversity of ethnical and national characteristics, as well as nature beauties is elements that should be utilized and offered on international market. Additional stimulus in this direction could be Cooperation Memorandum that signed Institute for Nature Protection of Serbia and International Union for

Conservation of Nature (IUCN), which includes opening an IUCN office for Southeastern Europe in Belgrade. This cooperation will open new opportunities for cross border cooperation in area of nature protection, establishment nature parks in border areas we mentioned, but also in other, such as Mountain Prokletije (Serbia and Albania) and Šar Mountain (Serbia and FYR Macedonia).

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