

INDICATORS OF TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN RURAL AREAS OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

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Abstract

The important role that contemporary tourism plays in the development of receptive areas determines it as the generator of economic growth, employment and numerous positive socio-cultural changes. This role of tourism is especially important in rural areas, which usually face depopulation, low job opportunities, low diversification of economic activities and other economic and social problems. The Republic of Serbia, with predominantly rural structure of settlements, population and territory, has excellent basis for the development of rural tourism. The aim of the paper is to evaluate the achieved level of this development, by monitoring the available indicators of tourist traffic and quantitative data on available accommodation capacities in rural areas of the Republic of Serbia. The research results indicate a tendency of increase in tourist' arrivals, overnight stays and available accommodation capacities in rural areas of the Republic of Serbia, while the average length of stay of tourists remains almost unchanged during the observed period.

Key Words: *tourism, rural areas, Serbia*

JEL classification: Z30, Z32

Introduction

Numerous direct, indirect and multiplied economic effects of tourism have led the tourism industry to be considered as the most propulsive activity in contemporary conditions, with positive effects both on the overall development of the country and on the development of individual regions and local territorial units. Almost all countries in the world have accepted

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the fact that tourism is one of the primary economic activities, becoming aware of the importance of tourism for economic and social development, and strives to develop it (Stanišić & Milutinović, 2016; Milutinović & Vasović, 2017). In such circumstances, the growth of the tourism sector is one of the key factors relevant to the 'health' of national economies (Krstić et al., 2016).

In the context of more balanced economic development on a global scale and more balanced regional economic development within the national territories of countries, the role of tourism in the redistribution of national income is particularly important. Namely, affirmation of tourism in less developed regions and areas is a chance for a positive flow of income spillovers to them. As rural areas are usually areas with lower levels of economic activity and development, this role of tourism becomes even more important in them.

Different forms of tourism return visitors of rural areas to nature, roots, originality and basic living values. These can be covered by the common name of rural tourism, which is becoming wider concept globally (Stanišić, 2019). This type of tourism includes not only rural holidays but also all other tourist activities in rural areas. Therefore, "rural tourism represents an opportunity for the involvement of different segments of the local community to participate in the realization of tourism development in rural area" (Vujović et al., 2012, p.193).

The high natural, ecological and environmental values of the rural areas of Serbia are recognized to some extent and contribute to the affirmation of rural tourism. This development, of course, is still not in line with the potentials available, but some positive trends are visible. As the Statistical Office of the Republic does not record tourist traffic in villages and rural areas of Serbia severally, some conclusions about rural tourism development can be drawn by monitoring tourist traffic in "other resorts".

In order to assess the level and dynamics of tourism development in rural areas of the Republic of Serbia, the paper analyzes data on tourist traffic and available accommodation capacities in other resorts. The aim is to analyze the tendencies of tourism development in rural areas by analyzing the available data in time dynamics, and to conclude on the role and importance of rural areas in tourism of Serbia by comparative analysis of relevant indicators by types of tourist places.

Literature review

Tourism activity in rural areas in particular gained in intensity in the mid-second half of the twentieth century and assumed a key role in their development. However, tourism in rural areas is not a recent phenomenon. In most Western countries, rural tourism has long been present. In fact, written evidence exists since the 19th century about the increasing interest displayed by medium to higher classes in visiting rural zones (Perales, 2002, p.1102). The rapid urban development especially in the 20th century, further contributes to the affirmation of rural areas as desirable holiday destinations. In accordance with the demands of modern tourists for authenticity, personalized experience and natural environment, rural areas today are destinations with great tourist potential. On the other hand, these are usually areas with developmental problems.

Experience in rural tourism involves a combination of attractions, activities and accommodation experiences. "The rural areas have a unique opportunity to attract tourists by the means of establishing a connection between rural areas and their cultural, historic, ethnic and geographical roots" (Dimitrovski et al., 2012, p.289). The clustering of activities and attractions in less developed areas stimulates cooperation and partnerships between communities in local and neighbouring regions and serves as a vehicle for the stimulation of economic development through tourism (Briedenhann & Wickens, 2004, p.72). Attributes of rural tourism accommodation in contemporary conditions vary from attributes similar to those of a hotel, e.g. the level of luxury of the unit or a special view, to some that are unique to rural tourism. "Assuming that the rural accommodations market is in equilibrium during the tourist season, the visitors' willingness to pay depends on the attributes of the unit" (Fleischer & Tchetchik, 2005, p.495). It should be emphasized that experiences of tourists who engage with natural or rural places is not seen at a physical level only, but also at deeper, more spiritual ones. This dimension of rural tourism is gaining in importance.

Sharpley & Jepson (2011) explores the degree to which a deeper significance or meaning beyond the experience of "rurality" may be attached to participation in nature-based tourism activities in rural areas. Therefore, they explore whether tourists of a particular rural area are, in a conscious or some other way, motivated by or achieve spiritual meaning or fulfillment through their visits and highlight the need for and focus of further research into the subject.

When it comes to development problems, rural areas are usually burdened by declining population, declining levels of economic activity and low job opportunities. Detrimental effects of rural decline are visible at many levels – social, economic, environmental, cultural, etc. Therefore, they "have been forcing society in general and government in particular to recognize the development problem of less favored areas as being of central and decisive importance, not just in regional or even national terms, but above all for the sake of territorial equilibrium and the future of survival of society as a whole" (Ribeiro & Marques, 2002, p.211). Tourism can play a significant role in solving rural development problems.

Rural tourism is a form of tourism that has a number of specific features. According to Lane (1994), rural tourism should be: located in rural areas; functionally rural – built upon the rural world's special features of small-scale enterprise, open space, contact with nature and the natural world, heritage, traditional societies and traditional practices; rural in scale – both in terms of buildings and settlements – and, therefore, usually small-scale; traditional in character, growing slowly and organically, and connected with local families; it will often be very largely controlled locally and developed for the long term good of the area. Tourism can be an important rural development option. Dimitrovski et al. (2012) emphasize that it is easier to organize rural tourism than manufacture, for example, and that the benefits of rural tourism development are not only those measured in money, but also derived from creation of new jobs which add vitality to a traditionally poor economy and eliminate social isolation of these areas. In addition to job creation, the role of rural tourism in job retention is also important. Namely, rural tourism cash flows can assist job retention in services such as retailing, transport, hospitality and medical care. "Job retention is not as politically glamorous as job creation, but, by helping the viability of small communities, it is critical to the survival of marginal areas" (Kulva & Rani, 2017, p. 39).

Like other economic development strategies, rural tourism requires several components to be successful. Tourism development involves: attractions - the natural and manmade features both within and adjacent to a community; promotion - the marketing of a community and its tourism attractions to potential tourists; tourism infrastructure - access facilities (roads, airports, trains, and buses), water and power services, parking, signs, and recreation facilities; services - lodging, restaurants, and various retail businesses needed to take care of tourists' needs; hospitality - how tourists are treated by both community residents and employees in tourism businesses and

attractions and active role of entrepreneurs in fostering these components (Gunn, 1988; Wilson et al., 2001).

Tourism in rural areas is a very important factor, which can positively influence regional development. Tourism, however, must be supported and conditions for its positive development have to be created (Šimková, 2007, p.264). The need for support can be justified by market failures. In the case of rural tourism, it is not difficult to appreciate why the market may fail with respect to many small-scale operations. These often are located in remote areas, from a low capital base, and function with low-level skills and little experience. Despite the fact that they might be viable business concerns, from the credit institution's perspective, they are of the wrong size (too small), the wrong vintage (too new), and in the wrong location (too remote) (Fleischer & Felsenstein, 2000, p.1010). All this points to the conclusion that the active role and support of the state are necessary in the development of tourism in rural areas.

Rural tourism is a chance for sustainable tourism development. In the context of economic and social sustainability, what has been mentioned is the impact of rural tourism in providing additional financial sources and creating new job positions for local people. In addition, rural tourism is also a very positive and ecological form of tourism. "Unlike the uncontrolled, mass and purely commercial tourism, these leisure activities have a very low negative impact on the environment" (Šimková, 2007, p.265). Sustainable tourism is the only type of tourism that can offer authentic countryside lifestyle, where one can relax and enjoy nature and country lifestyle, residing not in artificial tourism theatre created for exploitation, but a real scenario, where life is realistic and nature can be preserved by both local inhabitants and hosts at the same time (Fons et al., 2011, p.557).

Similar to global trends, rural tourism can be Serbia's development opportunity. The Republic of Serbia has at its disposal all the necessary resources for the development of rural tourism. Rural areas make up 85% of the total territory of the country, or 3,904 of the 4,715 settlements are rural and over 50% of the total population lives in them. Comparative advantages necessary for valuing a destination on the domestic and foreign tourism market through the concept of sustainable development of rural tourism include natural values, preserved rural architecture, diverse catering facilities, traditional hospitality, rich historical and cultural heritage, as well as attractive ethnic characteristics (Cvijanović et al., 2017, p.99). Rural areas of the Republic of Serbia are characterized by diversity

of landscapes and biodiversity, rich cultural heritage and natural resources. On the other hand, they suffer the consequences of demographic emptying. This is the reason for their developmental lag, the presence of all forms of deprivation and growing poverty. Their economy is reduced to exploitation, depletion and further degradation of natural resources, based on agriculture and leaning industries, with low supply of quality jobs and modest opportunities for generating external income (Government of the Republic of Serbia, 2014).

Rural tourism as a development opportunity of the Republic of Serbia is increasingly the subject of research by domestic authors. Ristić et al. (2016) point to "the role of tourism in the integration of rural areas into the national and international economy based on the analysis of the relevant rural development model and in terms of more efficient endogenous development". Medojević et al. (2011) emphasize that rural tourism development in Serbia in the function of village revitalization enables rural population to gain certain benefits at the micro-economic level, such as follows: starting economic activities of the region, additional financing of rural households, creation of personal and cultural exchanges among the population, motivating population for the aim of shared activities and projects, or rising of population enthusiasm for taking part in beneficial activities concerning all. In this way, "affirmation of rural tourism as one of the most important elements of the mosaic of the tourist offer of Serbia, can also be a motive for the survival of the population in rural areas" (Vujović et al., 2012, p.193).

Ristić (2013) points out the necessary conditions that must be provided for the more successful development of rural tourism in the Republic of Serbia (p.238): "investing in rural and tourist infrastructure, adapting or building accommodation facilities in accordance with traditional architecture or similar to authentic rural objects from the past, attracting investments in rural areas, conducting education of staff in rural tourism, strengthening public-private partnerships in rural tourism, organizing events, selling specific products of a particular area, introducing additional attractive contents appropriate to the differentiated requirements of tourists (swimming pools, water sports, internet access, etc.), adapting the tourist offer to specific requirements of health, child, youth, family tourism and so-called tourism of the 'third age', the creation of a database of entities interested in engaging in rural tourism activities".

Methodological framework and information base of research

The aim of the paper is to assess the achieved level of tourism development in rural resorts of the Republic of Serbia. In accordance with the defined aim of research, the paper assumes that there are positive tendencies in tourism development in rural areas of the Republic of Serbia. Quantitative data on tourists' arrivals, overnight stays, average length of stay of tourists and accommodation facilities in rural areas of the Republic of Serbia in ten years period (2009-2018) are analyzed. The sources of data are publications of the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia.

Since 1981, the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia has applied the administrative criterion for determining the type of settlements, according to which settlements are divided into "urban" and "other". The division was made on the basis of an administrative decision of the local self-government unit to declare a particular settlement urban. All other settlements that have not been declared urban are classified as "other" (Government of the Republic of Serbia, 2014). Official statistics on "other settlements" by the definition of the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia is used in this paper for monitoring the indicators of tourist traffic and quantitative data on accommodation capacities in rural areas of the Republic of Serbia.

The analysis of data in time dynamics is conducted by calculating the chain indexes of tourist traffic, while the comparative analysis is used to evaluate the position of rural areas on the tourist market of the Republic of Serbia in relation to other tourist places.

Results and discussion

In order to evaluate tourists' interest in rural areas of the Republic of Serbia, Table 1 provides information on tourists' arrivals in other resorts in the Republic of Serbia. Data on total arrivals and arrivals of domestic and foreign tourists in the period from 2009 to 2018 are analyzed separately. Besides, chain indices are calculated for each category. If total tourist arrivals are observed, 85,585 arrivals were recorded in the initial year of the analyzed period. Over the next three years, total tourist arrivals showed a negative trend, or decrease from year to year, which was most pronounced in 2012. From 2012 to 2018, the total number of tourists in rural areas of Serbia continuously increased. It reached the level of 159,486 in the last

year of the analyzed period which is also the year when the highest value of the chain index of 121.3 was recorded.

Table 1: *Tourists' arrivals in other resorts in the Republic of Serbia (2009-2018)*

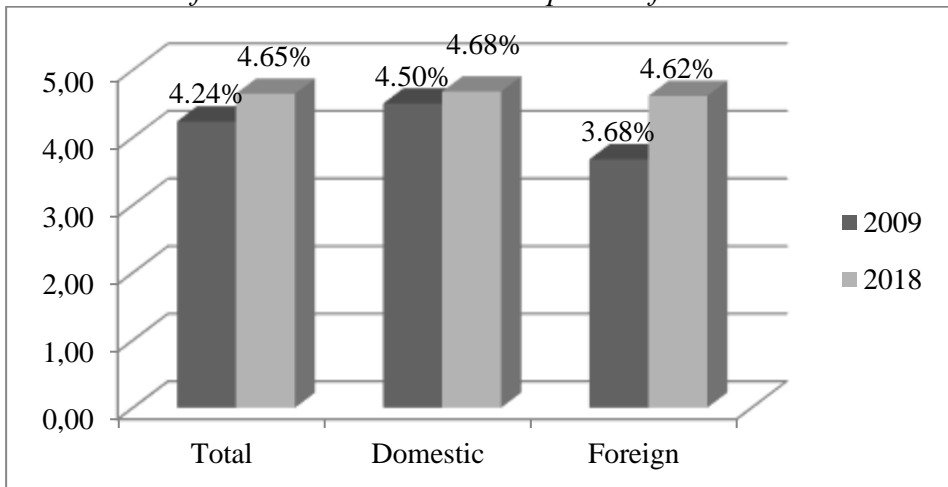
Year	Total		Domestic		Foreign	
	Number	Index	Number	Index	Number	Index
2009	85585	-	61852	-	23733	-
2010	81939	95.7	56291	91.0	25648	108.1
2011	81354	99.3	55750	99.0	25604	99.8
2012	75734	93.1	50175	90.0	25559	99.8
2013	88150	116.4	58805	117.2	29345	114.8
2014	93499	106.1	54953	93.4	38546	131.4
2015	101971	109.1	59530	108.3	42441	110.1
2016	113358	111.2	63085	106.0	50273	118.5
2017	131519	116.0	71009	112.6	60510	120.4
2018	159486	121.3	80516	113.4	78970	130.5

Source: *Authors, based on the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, (2010-2019), Municipalities and Regions of the Republic of Serbia, Belgrade.*

Domestic tourists make the dominant category of tourists in the remaining resorts. However, the number of domestic tourists was decreasing until 2012 and in 2014 compared to the previous year. After that, it grew, but with less intensity relative to the foreign tourists. The increasing number of foreign tourists interested in visiting rural areas is encouraging. At the beginning of the analyzed period, foreign tourists made up about one-third of the total number of tourists, and they accounted for almost half in 2018, with favorable growth dynamics.

If the percentage of tourists arrivals in other resorts in the total number of tourists' arrivals in the Republic of Serbia in the beginning and last year of the analyzed period (Figure 1) is observed, positive tendencies could be noticed. Namely, the share of total, domestic and foreign tourists in other places in the structure of total tourists in the Republic of Serbia was increasing. The most significant growth was recorded when it comes to the arrivals of foreign tourists.

Figure 1: *Percentage share of the tourists' arrivals in other resorts in the total number of tourists' arrivals in the Republic of Serbia*



Source: Authors, based on the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, (2010 - 2019), *Municipalities and Regions of the Republic of Serbia Belgrade*

Table 2 shows the data on movements of overnight stays in other resorts in the Republic of Serbia from 2009 to 2018.

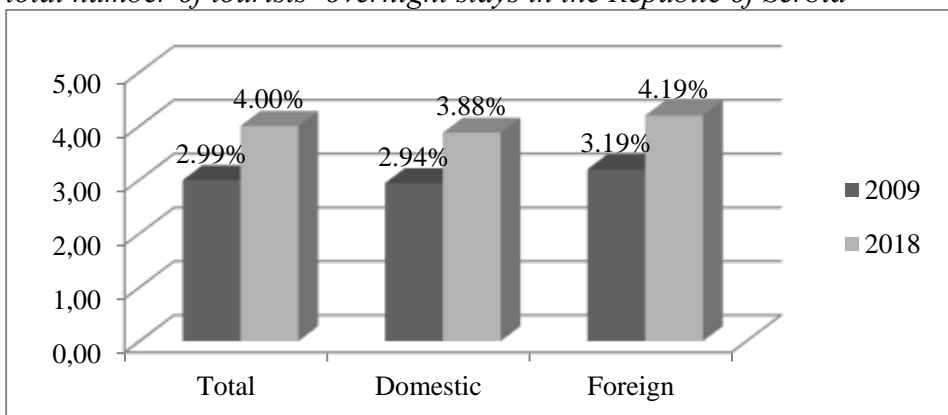
Table 2: *Overnight stays in other resorts in the Republic of Serbia (2009-2018)*

Year	Total		Domestic		Foreign	
	Number	Index	Number		Number	Index
2009	202383	-	155455		46928	-
2010	207563	102.6	159104	102.3	48459	103.3
2011	211034	101.7	163546	102.8	47488	98.0
2012	183234	86.8	132946	81.3	50288	105.9
2013	225634	123.1	162164	122.0	63470	126.2
2014	223220	98.9	137650	84.9	85570	134.8
2015	221990	99.4	139304	101.2	82686	96.6
2016	269663	121.5	170871	122.7	98792	119.5
2017	300980	111.6	182161	106.6	118819	120.3
2018	373552	124.1	220106	120.8	153446	129.1

Source: Authors, based on the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, (2010-2019), *Municipalities and Regions of the Republic of Serbia, Belgrade.*

With the exception of a couple of years, when negative growth rates of all observed categories (total, domestic and foreign) in comparison with the previous year are recorded, the overnight stays in other resorts in the Republic of Serbia can be positively evaluated. As with the previous indicator analyzed, according to this indicator the most pronounced positive tendencies are recorded when it comes to overnight stays of foreign tourists. Specifically, at the beginning of the analyzed period, 46,928 overnight stays of foreign tourists were recorded, and, at the end of the analyzed period, this number was 153,446, with a relatively high growth index compared to the previous year. Figure 2 shows that the share of overnight stays in other resorts in the total number of tourists' overnight stays in the Republic of Serbia increased in 2018 compared to 2009. This increase was more intense than the growth of tourists' arrivals.

Figure 2: *Percentage share of the overnight stays in other resorts in the total number of tourists' overnight stays in the Republic of Serbia*



Source: *Authors, based on the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, (2010 - 2019), Municipalities and Regions of the Republic of Serbia, Belgrade.*

The third indicator analyzed is the average length of stay of tourists in other resorts in the Republic of Serbia (Table 3). Unlike the positive tendencies observed in the previous two analyzed indicators, there is no significant change in the average length of stay of both domestic and foreign tourists in the observed period. The domestic tourists stay longer in other resorts compared to foreign tourists. The recorded average length of stay of domestic tourists in other places was 2.7 days in 2018, while the average length of stay of foreign tourists was 1.9 days in the same year.

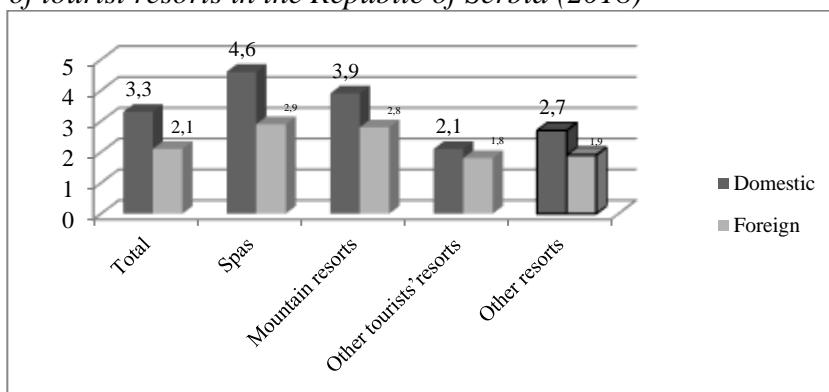
Table 3: *Average length of stay of tourists in other resorts in the Republic of Serbia (2009-2018)*

Year	Domestic	Foreign
2009	2.5	2.0
2010	2.8	1.9
2011	2.9	1.9
2012	2.6	2.0
2013	2.8	2.2
2014	2.5	2.2
2015	2.3	1.9
2016	2.7	2.0
2017	2.6	2.0
2018	2.7	1.9

Source: *Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, (2010-2019), Municipalities and Regions of the Republic of Serbia, Belgrade.*

Comparing the average length of stay of tourists in other resorts with the average length of stay of tourists in all other types of tourist places (Figure 3), it can be seen that other resorts are in disadvantage. Namely, the average length of tourist stay in other resorts is lower than the average length of tourist stay in the country as a whole, as well as in spas and mountain resorts. Other resorts have slightly higher average length of stay of tourists only than the average length of stay in other tourist' resorts (larger cities in the Republic of Serbia).

Figure 3: *Comparative overview of the average length of stay of tourists by type of tourist resorts in the Republic of Serbia (2018)*



Source: *Authors, based on the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, (2010 - 2019), Municipalities and Regions of the Republic of Serbia, Belgrade.*

In debates on the problems and limitations of rural tourism development in Serbia, an important place always belongs to accommodation capacities. Rural tourism is a combination of many different aspects of experiencing, sharing and presenting rural life. These rural experiences can be defined in terms of rural activities and accommodation experiences. The combination of these forms creates the essence of rural tourism (Master Plan for Sustainable Development of Rural Tourism in Serbia, 2011, p.12). Although the above statement refers primarily to the qualitative characteristics of accommodation capacities in rural areas, their quantity is equally significant, as a starting point for harmonizing their qualitative characteristics with the requirements and needs of contemporary rural tourists (Stanisić, 2019). Table 4 shows the available accommodation capacities in other places in the Republic of Serbia from 2009 to 2017 (there are still no available data on accommodation facilities in other resorts for 2018).

Table 4: *Accommodation facilities in other resorts in the Republic of Serbia (2009-2018)*

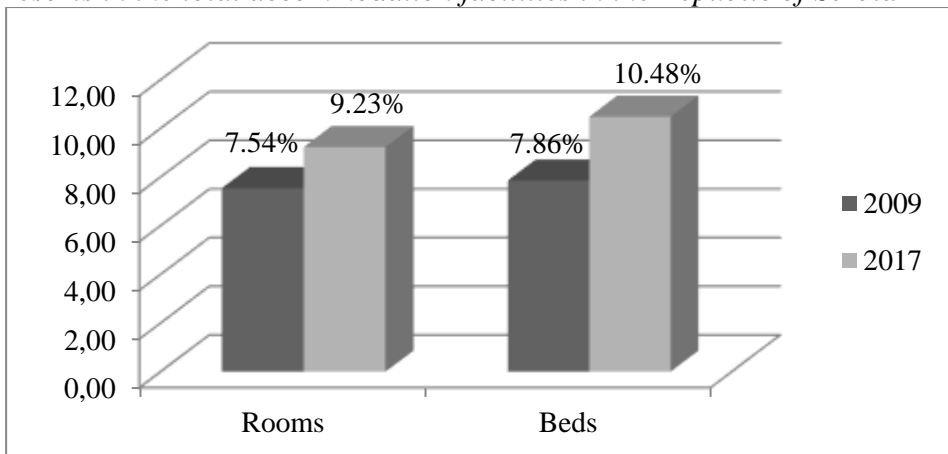
Year	Rooms	Beds
2009	3.422	8.868
2010	4.289	10.684
2011	4.351	10.765
2012	3.274	7.961
2013	4.290	13.015
2014	3.524	9.472
2015	4.055	10.453
2016	4.086	11.054
2017	4.133	11.111

Source: *Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, (2010-2018), Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Serbia, Belgrade.*

A certain positive tendencies could also be noticed in the field of available accommodation facilities in other resorts. The largest number of available rooms in the Republic of Serbia was recorded in 2011. For the next few years, no regularity in the movement of the number of rooms was observed. However, the number of available rooms increased over the last three years of the observed period, but in 2018 still did not reach the level of 2011. Similar tendencies could be observed in the number of beds. The highest number was recorded in 2013. The numbers recorded in 2017 were

significantly higher than in 2009, but still they were below the level recorded in 2013.

Figure 4: *Percentage share of available accommodation facilities in other resorts in the total accommodation facilities in the Republic of Serbia*



Source: Authors, based on the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, (2010 - 2018), *Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Serbia, Belgrade*.

When it comes to the percentage of available accommodation facilities in other resorts in the total accommodation facilities in the Republic of Serbia (Figure 4), there were some positive developments and an increase in this share was recorded in 2017 compared to 2009.

Conclusion

The monitoring of the trends of selected indicators of tourist development in the rural areas of the Republic of Serbia (tourists' arrivals, overnight stays, average length of stay and accommodation facilities) indicates generally the positive tendencies recorded in the last ten years. Namely, tourists' arrivals and overnight stays recorded growing in absolute terms in all categories (total, domestic and foreign tourists). A positive tendency that should be emphasized is the intensive growth of arrivals and overnight stays of foreign tourists. The increase in the absolute terms was also recorded by the available accommodation capacities (number of rooms and number of beds). Furthermore, all three mentioned categories increase their share in total tourist traffic, or total capacities at the country level as a whole. The fourth analyzed indicator, average length of stay of tourist, did not change significantly during the observed period. It is therefore singled

out as one of the critical factors for the future development of tourism in rural areas. For longer stay of tourists, it is necessary to enrich the content of the stay and to continuously improve the rural tourist offer.

The development of rural tourism in rural areas of Serbia can have a number of positive consequences of economic and non-economic nature, which are reflected, among other things, in the growth of income of the local population, opening up employment opportunities and survival in rural areas, conservation of ethnic elements and traditional architecture, creating a market for placing agricultural and other products, and the overall revitalization of rural areas. However, the current development is being burdened by numerous limitations, and future should be planned according to different preferences and motives of modern tourists. The analysis conducted in this paper is based only on quantitative indicators of tourism development of rural areas, which can be singled out as a key limitation of research. For a comprehensive picture of rural development, besides quantitative indicators, it would be necessary to monitor the qualitative indicators of this development, the qualitative characteristics, desires and interests of tourists themselves, as well as the qualitative characteristics of tourist offer. This may be a direction for future research.

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