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## THE POTENTIAL FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF AGROTOURISM AND ECOTOURISM IN THE TERRITORY OF THE MAČVA DISTRICT

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### Abstract

*The Mačva District, with its favorable geographical location, developed agriculture, rich history and tradition, has exceptionally favorable conditions for the development of rural tourism. By developing tourism in rural areas, the employment rate of rural populations increases, making rural tourism a driver of economic development which will raise the living standards in rural areas. There is a close connection between agriculture and rural tourism. Agricultural production is significant for tourism development while agriculture relies on consumers. The presence of tourism in rural areas provides opportunities for the development of various activities, the production of specific goods for tourism needs, and investment in infrastructure. In addition to its rich history, the Mačva District also boasts significant natural resources. Autochthonous species of domestic animals are those adapted to local conditions, representing a natural wealth of a country.*

Key Words: *agriculture, autochthonous species, tourism, Mačva*

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### Introduction

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The demand and offer of recreational activities on farms has increased over the last decades and promises increased growth in the future because of the benefits it brings to farmers and visitors. Brand names associated with recreation on farms are very important. Given the importance of branding in marketing services to consumers, and particularly tourism services and products, the variety of names used by practitioners and researchers in the tourism field to depict recreation on farms is concerning. The fact that recreation on farms umbrellas a wide spectrum of specific activities, ranging from mere contemplation (e.g. orchard tours) to hands-on participation (e.g. pick-your own) while crossing several industries (e.g. agriculture, tourism, hospitality, retailing), adds to the difficulty of crafting one brand name to capture such complexity. Currently, the most popular names used to depict recreation on farms include „agritourism” (Barbieri et al., 2016).

Tourism represents a promising economic activity whose development in the Mačva District would have significant importance. Its development would significantly improve the standard of living of the population in this District. Mačva has a good geographical location, transit routes, well-known spas, areas suitable for excursions and fishing, as well as border areas whose capacities need to be utilized. Climatic conditions, diversity of flora and fauna, and hydrographic structure give Mačva significant value. One can also find numerous settlements, monuments, and tourist events in Mačva. Farm tourism combines agricultural production activities and tourism activities, and thus is mutually appreciated by agricultural producers and tourists.

Therefore, many researchers have examined farm tourism from several perspectives, including developmental trends of farms (Di Domenico & Miller, 2012), the green advocacy of leisure farms (Wu & Cheng, 2017), the relationship between agricultural authenticity and tourists' perception of the agritourism experience (Daugstad & Kirchengast, 2013), economic, environment and social variables, as well as agritourism income, the definition and sustainability of agritourism (Gil Arroyo, Barbieri, & Rich, 2013), different nationalities' perceptions of farm service quality (e.g. Germany or France) (Rozman et al., 2009), and farm tourism image (Chen et al., 2016).

The farm tourism or agritourism with the viewpoints of residents, tourism organization, and tourists is very important for Mačva District.

Whether or not there is a significant difference between the co-branding effect of farm image and experience activities, this may imply that farm image setting could be designed not only by the tourism organization itself, but other sources as well, i.e. tourists; therefore, the second aim of this study is to offer important contributions for academic theory and farm tourism industries (Da Liang et al., 2020).

Ecotourism, as another important branch of tourism, continues to be embraced as the antithesis of mass tourism because of its promise of achieving sustainability through conservation, community development, education and learning, and the promotion of nature-based activities that are sensitive to both ecological and social systems (Fennell, 2020).

### **The agritouristic potential of the Mačva District**

Thanks to moderately warm summers, moderately cold winters, distinct transitional seasons, and moderate annual precipitation, Mačva is characterized by a temperate continental climate (Dukić, 1981). In the Mačva District, forests, grasslands, medicinal herbs, forest fruits, and mushrooms are prevalent. Even the names of a large number of settlements in this District, such as Dublje, Lipolist, Klenje, Drenovac, Glogovac, and Bukor, indicate a large presence of forests in the area (Grčić & Grčić, 2002).

In the marshy areas of Mačva along the Drina and Sava rivers – in Zasavica, Ribnjača, Popovica, Široka bara, and Jovača, plant species such as: marsh willow, red willow, white willow, gray willow, black poplar, white poplar, black alder, and gray alder can be found. In the valleys of the Sava and Drina rivers, one can encounter ash, elm, pedunculate oak, hornbeam, turkey oak, acacia, linden, ash, hawthorn, etc. Some legally protected bird species are also present in Mačva, such as turtledove, woodpecker, buzzard, robin, nightingale, blackbird, tit, raven, finch, starling, goldfinch, cuckoo, jackdaw, etc. Among the wild animals in Mačva, there is a fox, hare, badger, wolf, otter, weasel, roe deer, and deer (Grčić & Grčić, 2002).

A large number of agricultural households have been registered in Mačva. Various types of domestic animals are raised and different crops are cultivated within these agricultural households which should be utilized to build a larger number of ethno accommodation capacities, enabling nature lovers to enjoy longer stays in a natural environment of Mačva villages.

Existing ethno houses would provide tourists with a pleasant stay and tranquility while economically benefiting the hosts. The stay in these houses could be complemented by harvesting medicinal and aromatic herbs. Guests would have the opportunity to actively engage in agriculture during their vacation, as well as participate in activities such as raspberry and blackberry picking, animal feeding and care, milking and making traditional dishes such as ajvar, various juices, jams, and fruit brandies. A large number of urban children have never seen horses, cows or pigs up close, so agritourism represents an excellent way to combine nature, leisure and getting familiar with the culture and tradition of the Mačva region. It has been proven that children who grow up and spend time on farms have a lower prevalence of asthma, hay fever and atopic sensitization. The reason for this could be frequent contact with farm animals, consumption of fresh milk and exposure to endotoxins from gram-negative bacteria which can alter the immune response (Kilpelainen et al., 2000).

The Academy of Vocational Studies in Šabac provides the opportunity to train future skilled workers who can implement the acquired knowledge in their agricultural households, while also offering tourists a form of education and relaxation in which they will actively participate.

Agriculture, rural development, and environmental protection must and should act in synergy, which is reflected in establishing a connection between those who keep these domestic animals, entrepreneurs in tourism and creating a sustainable tourist offer. This collaboration needs to be enhanced and raised to a significantly higher level that would provide a tourist product within rural tourism. By organizing a network of farms, tourists should be welcomed throughout the year, and through the diversification of the economy, additional income should be provided to the farms. An important factor in preserving endangered breeds of domestic animals in Serbia is precisely the inclusion of farms in programs for breeding these animals.

Engaging in rural tourism enables residents of rural areas in particular to employ all members of the household, as well as to sell both the food and handmade crafts they have produced throughout the year. Traditional Serbian cuisine is an integral part of the rural tourist offer on farms which provide ethno-tourism services. Food is prepared in a traditional manner from products that are also traditionally made and processed. When it comes to tourist offers, particularly important factors are products of

indigenous varieties and breeds that typically inhabit a particular territory. The production of agricultural food products adds value, leading to higher prices. By producing and selling these products, the development of rural areas is encouraged while preserving the national identity and enriching the tourist offer of a specific region.

### **Tourist recognizability of the Mačva District**

The Mačva District is rich in cultural and historical monuments which, due to their historical, scientific, technical and cultural value, are considered cultural assets of special importance for the social community. Šabac Fortress (the Old Town) has an exceptional position, being located on the Sava River bank, and as such has significant tourist potential.

A significant number of cultural monuments are represented in the area of the Eparchy of Šabac. Among these monuments, churches and monasteries occupy a significant place as spiritual objects that have the longest construction tradition in these areas. Other cultural monuments in the Mačva District are mostly of recent date and appear sporadically depending on the type and place of the event that took place in this area.

In the Mačva District, there are monuments from the period of the First and Second Serbian Uprising. The following can be highlighted in terms of their significance: the monument to the Fallen Uprising Fighters in Čokešina, the monument in Mišar, Zeka Buljubaša's trench in Crna Bara, the temple and memorial ossuary in Dublje, the memorial ossuary at Mount Cer in the village of Tekeriš, the memorial chapel with ossuary in Prnjavor, monuments to the victims of the First World War in Prnjavor, the monument to fallen warriors and victims of the wars that took place between 1912 and 1918, monument in the church yard in Šabac, as well as numerous monuments in the surrounding villages dedicated to fallen residents who died during the Second World War (Grčić, 2009).

The District is also associated with various events. The flower festival 'Roses of Lipolist' is an event held every year in June since 1990 when the Rose Lovers Society in Serbia was founded. Visitors have the opportunity to attend various activities of the event such as flower exhibitions, expert lectures on rose cultivation and cultural and artistic programs. They can also visit rose nursery gardens, being driven in horse-drawn carriages (Ristanović et al., 2002).

The Šabac ‘Čivijada’ (Linchpin Festival) represents a festival of humor and satire with a special satirical program. A particular attraction of Čivijada is the drummer who, in traditional costume and carriage, informs the Linchpin Festival audience (‘Čivijaši’) about current events. The waving of the Čivijada flag during the Festival indicates the validity of the laws of the ‘Republic of Čivijada’ which ‘everyone’ must adhere to during the duration (three days) of this unique event. For the time being, evenings of humor and satire are organized, theater performances are held, and various special programs are arranged (Ristanović et al., 2002).

The Šabac Fair has a tradition dating back to Turkish times when it was a unique trading gathering. Today, the fair represents a large flea market where second-hand goods are brought from abroad. The Šabac Fair is held every year on the Feast of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary on September 21<sup>st</sup> and lasts for 4-5 days.

The ‘Summer on the Sava’ festival is an event created with the aim of making the nightlife of Šabac more interesting during the summer months. It takes place in the old town and consists of concerts by musical groups, film screenings, theatrical performances, and various lectures (Ristanović et al., 2002).

During this period, the international swimming marathon also takes place, held on the route from Jarak to Šabac. The length of the swimming course is 18.8 km. Numerous swimmers from all continents participate in it. Younger participants have the opportunity to take part in the marathon, which is 4 km long.

During the summer months, there is an event called ‘Bubijada’, which is a gathering of Volkswagen Beetle enthusiasts, while in the spring months, there is also ‘Fićijada’, a gathering of Fiat and Zastava 750 (‘Fića’) enthusiasts.

In the suburban settlement of ‘Letnjikovac’, from May 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup>, so-called ‘Motorcycle Gatherings’ are organized. On this occasion, drivers of various motorcycles from all over Serbia gather.

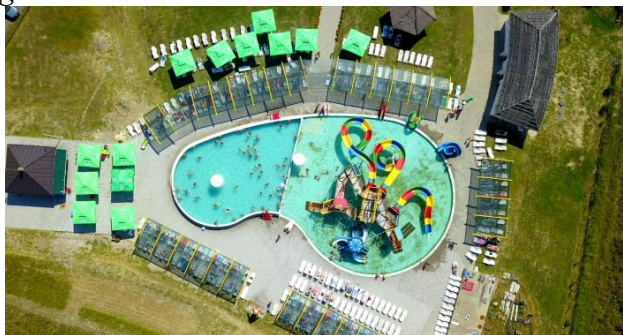
Among other events, notable ones include: the Metković Joyful Machine, Mačva Lilacs, Hajduk Evening, Battle at Dublje, Hajduk Regatta, Ivan's Days, Martin's Days, Art Colony in Sovljak, Pocerina Assembly - Rural Household Kalinovac, Drina Gastronomic Festival in Ljubovija, Drina

Regatta, Lamb Festival in Donja Ljuboviđa, and Pickling Festival in Koceljeva.

The municipality of Bogatić has great potential for the development of health and wellness tourism. Jokin Grab Spa and Mačva Hot Spring utilize geothermal water from well BB-2 and are frequently visited. The Dublje Spa Resort has existed for over 40 years but has never been utilized adequately and is completely devastated. It is now privately owned, and efforts have been initiated to revive it (Knežević et al., 2023).

The aqua park ‘Thermal Riviera’ (see Figure 1) in Bogatić utilizes thermal water with a temperature of 75°C, which is cooled as needed and according to the season. The aqua park features open-air pools, while slides and diving boards are available during summer. The water, with its composition, creates an exceptionally beneficial effect for the skin and human health. The Blue Star thermal complex is located in Salaš Noćajski and consists of two indoor and five outdoor pools (Knežević et al., 2023).

Figure 1: *Bogatić Thermal Riviera*



Source: *Knežević et al., 2023*

### **Potential for the development of eco-tourism in Mačva District**

The municipality of Bogatić has significant potential for the development of eco-tourism, which will be practically realized through the Project ‘Eco-tourism in the cross-border area between Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina: Birdwatching in the cross-border area’. The project aims to create, offer, and popularize new tourist attractions over the next two years (2024 and 2025). It will focus on birdwatching in the cross-border region between Serbia - an internationally important area for birds and biodiversity of the Lower Drina Valley, on one side, and Bosnia and Herzegovina - the landscape protected area of Konjuh, on the other side.

Nature-oriented forms of tourism are particularly relevant in today's conditions. There is an increasing demand for destinations offering eco-tourism products. Birdwatching as a part of eco-tourism programs is especially popular in North America and Western Europe (Afanasiev, 2022).

Avitourism (see Figure 2) is extremely popular and developed worldwide, and as a hobby, it has existed for over a century.

Figure 2: *Avitourism as a return to nature*



Source: <https://grange.audubon.org/programs/birdwatching-beginners>

This form of tourism would allow the rich world of birds in the municipality of Bogatić to be showcased, encouraging people to spend time in nature by observing and discovering it. Most birdwatchers expect and want to see wild birds in their natural environment, as opposed to species in ‘captivity’ (Steven et al., 2021).

### **Conclusion**

The combination of lush nature, favorable climate, rich history, interesting folklore and traditions, as well as abundant agricultural potential, makes the Mačva District a gem of northwestern Serbia. These blessings should be utilized to further enrich the tourist offer of the District through new forms of tourism such as avitourism and active rural tourism on farms and agricultural estates - thus contributing to their sustainable development. At the same time, it is important to strengthen cross-border cooperation with the regions of Semberija and Northeast

Bosnia, as there are already partnership projects in the field of tourism that should be expanded.

Furthermore, tourists' need for experience activities on farms has increased over the past decade. Perspective must be in to examine the best match between farm image and experience activities, and examined whether farm marketers can design farm experience activities based on different source.

The imperative of ecotourism is that it refers to the greenest form of tourism in the world. Ecotourism that takes place in underrepresented regions of the world needs to be improved. The Mačva District should have its own recognizable name for all types of tourism.

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