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RURAL TOURISM IN KONAVLE

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ABSTRACT

The importance of developing sustainable tourism in Konavle by implementing rural tourism. Considering that Konavle as a touristic destination possesses all supporting activities for the development of rural tourism. The purpose of this research paper investigates is how could rural tourism be developed in Konavle. A questionnaire was distributed online to all 27 OPG owners in Konavle to see how much they are familiar with the concept of rural tourism and would they be interested in upgrading their existing offer. The results have confirmed that OPG owners are interested in developing rural offers in Konavle and how rural tourism could be the next step for Konavles as a touristic destination. To conclude, the government of the Republic of Croatia should start considering raising money from EU funds for the development of rural tourism in Croatia.

Keywords – Development of rural tourism, agriculture, farm tourism, wine education

INTRODUCTION

Since the pandemic of Covid 19, every kind of tourism has suffered, including the types that are prevalent in Croatia. On account of this situation, I have decided to explore my homeland to find out what changes need to be done in order to improve the existing offers and even imagine new ones. My roots are from Konavle, so I started from Konavle due to my previous knowledge about that topic and because of my passion towards my homeland. After a long exploration, it was obvious to me that this landscape would be perfect for rural tourism, because it already possesses all supporting activities like agriculture, cultural heritage, natural reserves, hunting, cycling, etc. These activities could be the basis for the development of sustainable rural tourism. Consequently, the purpose of my research project is to focus on rural tourism development in Konavle as well as finding ways to implement new changes. Its purpose is also to explore what types of rural tourism are there as well as finding out whether the existing types can be combined in order to make a new tourist offer. Rural tourism could be defined as all tourist activities in non-urban areas. The emphasis lies on creating valuable customer experience that would be enjoyable and also very educative for the customer. With rural tourism, there must be supporting activities that would keep the customers occupied. These activities should also show all the grace that this landscape offers, for example, viewing scenic landscapes, walking in natural environments, climbing and riding opportunities, fishing, sport and health tourism, hunting and bird watching, educational travel, arts and visiting heritage places and even some culinary events. There are also many types of rural tourism, like green tourism, ecotourism, wilderness and forest tourism, farm tourism and agritourism. From these types of tourism, I would like to single out farm tourism and agritourism. Firstly, farm tourism is considered to be staying and actively involved in operations that are on the farm and seeking valuable experience. Another

type is agritourism which also involves staying at the destination, but only for a short period of time. Here the emphasis lies on the educational visits and the sale of domestic products and handicrafts. My idea would be to combine farm and agritourism types in order to make a new tourist offer that would create valuable experience and education about wine production. It would also involve storytelling by including the customer in the production of the wine, and taking them through each step of the procedure. At the end of their stay they would receive the bottle of wine that they produced as a souvenir as well as a token of appreciation as the main emphasis is on wine production. Through that process we could create a bond with the customers that would be hard to break, because such a souvenir will be something that will be remembered for a long time. Also in that way, we would extend the stay of the customers, because the service would be more personalized and, of course, the number of groups that are attending this kind of event would be smaller. The reason why I believe this could be applicable is because more and more people are deciding to live in some villages near a town and move away from the city. Due to the reason that they cannot stand city crowds and the ones who are stuck in the city they are willing to move to a village at least for a short time. The truth is that rural tourism is slowly coming to Konavle already and we can see that based on how many small private OPG's have opened, their offer is more or less similar. Everyone is offering the same products to sell or to taste, and after a short presentation, customers are already on their way home.

Method

The purpose of this specific data collection is to have a qualitative assessment of the situation and to investigate whether my idea can be implemented. In this survey 27 people participated. They all have their own OPG's and because of that I decided to focus only on them. Most respondents were older men, but there were also a few women who have actively worked in their OPG's for several years. In the beginning, I thought that I should ask as many people from Konavle as possible, but then, I realized that I should focus just on one group, so that my research could be more precise. At the beginning of the questionnaire, I introduce my mentor and myself, then I explain what the purpose of my research is and assure them that this questionnaire is totally anonymous. The questions were structured in 4 linear scales, 4 checkboxes, 2 multiple choice, one short answer and one open-ended question. I distributed my questions online due to the ease of sharing questions and the response rate was excellent as every participant answered my survey. Since I had to focus on one group especially, I conducted my survey via email. It took two weeks to distribute and collect all the responses and everything was recorded on Google forms. I tried to measure the knowledge of people about the concept of rural tourism and in what specific things they would be willing to invest in order to develop rural tourism in Konavle.

Results

My research question was whether rural tourism could be implemented in Konavle by combining farms and agritourism, in a way that tourists would come and be involved in wine production as well as using other activities that rural tourism offers. To investigate that question I constructed a questionnaire for the people that have their one OPG's in Konavle to see what are their responses and what they think about rural tourism implemented in Konavle. For the results section I prepared questions that I think are the most important for my research. Firstly, when questioned, "How much are you familiar with the concept of rural tourism?" 8 people or 29.6% of the respondents answered that they are fully familiar with the concept of rural tourism and also 8 out of 27 answered that they are familiar with the concept, which is not surprising, since I have asked people that have their own OPG's. Then, another 8 people answered that they are neither familiar nor familiar with this concept and 3 people said that they are not familiar. This fact can be surprising for some people, but I would say it's not because some OPG owners are a little bit older people and they are not really in step with the time. The next up question was "Which in your opinion is the biggest challenge for the development of rural tourism in Konavle" Here I got some interesting answers. The majority of people or 15 out of 27 people (55.6% of the respondents) said that education of the population would be the most important thing. This came after having 11 people (40.7%) say that the second most important challenge Right behind was the third answer with 10 (37%) people choosing financial possibilities and the possibilities to take credit as one of the challenges. Regarding the question, "Looking at the demographics of your guests, are they older or younger people?" I must say that my suspicions were confirmed, because 11 (40.7%) people answered that their guests are between 55 and 64 years of age and

also 11 (40.7%) people have answered that their guests are between 45 and 54 years of age. Only 5 (18.5%) people said that their guests are between 35 and 44 years of age. The next question was very interesting for me because it was very important for my research and the question was “With the exception of Covid19, if I had the financial resources would you invest them in infrastructure for accommodation units?” 11 (40.7%) people said that they are fully willing to invest in accommodation units, also 11 (40.7%) people said they are willing to invest in accommodation units, 4 (14.8%) people said that they don’t know and only one person said they wouldn’t invest in accommodation units. The following question was “When you would have financial resources, what would you invest in order to develop your OPG?” The unexpected thing for me was that the majority of the participants 17 (63%) answered that they would invest in expansion of their products, 10 (37%) people said that they would invest in marketing, 9 (33.3%) people said that they would invest in infrastructure units and 8 (29.6%) people said that they would invest in renovation. With the next question, I again confirm my assumptions about the implementation of rural tourism in Konavle. The question was “Would you be willing to take an incentive from EU funds for the development of rural tourism in Konavle?” 19 (70.4%) people said that they would be fully willing to take an incentive from EU funds, then 7 (25.9%) people said that they are willing to take it and only one person said that he doesn’t know if he is willing to take an incentive from EU funds. The next question was “Do you think that the introduction of rural tourism would prolong the season?” 18 (66.7%) of the participants are in full agreement with this statement, 7 (25.9%) of the participants agreed with this statement and only 2 (7.4%) of the participants said that they don’t know. This again confirmed my theory that with the implementation of rural tourism in Konavle, we would prolong the season. And the last question was “How long have you run your OPG?” 9 (33.3%) people have answered that they

run their OPG for 10 to 14 years, 7 (25.9%) have answered that they run it for 5 to 9 years. Then, 5 (18.5%) have answered that they run their OPG for 15 to 19 years followed by 4 (14.8%) people who have answered that they run it for 1 to 4 years and finally, 2 people have answered that they have run their OPG for over 20 years. This question was intended to make sure that I got answers from experienced OPG owners.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of rural tourism in general and how it could be implemented in Konavle. The results of the questionnaire gave solid support that rural tourism could be implemented in Konavle when resources are available. Regarding the question about the knowledge of the concept of rural tourism, we could see that most of our owners are familiar with this concept and some of them even started preparing since this type of tourism is viewed as the next level for them. It is to be noted that some owners are satisfied with the situation as it is now. The next question was about the challenges of developing rural tourism in Konavle. I found this question to be very interesting because at first, I thought that the obvious answer was going to be related to financial resources, but the results of the survey have shown otherwise. Education of the population has shown to be the main answer and it was obvious due to the fact that if you want to implement rural tourism, you firstly have to explain what it is and how we can all benefit from it. Considering the next question about the demographic of the guests, my hypothesis was confirmed. Indeed, the guests are older people or even older couples and because of that fact, they are also able to stay for a longer time at the OPG and are willing to educate themselves. The next two questions were really important for my research, because I wanted to prove my hypothesis regarding the possibility of developing accommodation with the OPG. More precisely, the first was whether the OPG owner would be willing to invest in building accommodation units and the second was, if financial resources were available, in what area would the owner invest in order to develop their OPG. Regarding the first question, I prove my point that owners would be willing to invest in accommodation units, but with the second

question, my hypothesis was questioned because the main answer on the second question about how owners would develop their OPG was an expansion of the products. These two questions taken together draw me to conclude that in Konavle there are only 2 or 3 bigger OPG's that have the potential to invest in accommodation units, while the small ones would rather expand their products and only after that they would be willing to invest in accommodation units. With the following question about taking an incentive from EU funds for the development of rural tourism in Konavle, I wanted to confirm my assumption that people from Konavle are ready and willing to develop rural tourism. With the last question, my purpose was to establish credibility considering the answers that OPG owners have given to me. In the end I asked a few open-ended questions about the development of rural tourism in Konavle. Here, I got some valuable answers that allowed me to know their real preferences and ideas, because it is coming directly from owners. By knowing their preferences, I realized that there are a lot of things to do in order to work all perfectly. Many things are there, but they are not presented well or maybe not promoted well like wine tours, horseback riding, hunting, fishing, organization of festivals or events (roasting brandy, making wine, picking fruit, mowing, making honey, preparing special dishes, making folk costumes, crafts, folklore, music). Furthermore, improvement of transport infrastructure, popularization of Konavle events, construction of traditional (similar to old Konavle houses) cottages, renovation and replenishment of natural resources (for example, gray falcon lookout, promenade along the river Ljuta, the popularization of Konavle landscape (cypresses, cottages), and the participation in the rural life of the environment, more precisely, the possibility of harvesting your own vegetable and fruit during your stay in the cottage, the possibility of participating in the grape harvest and the participation in workshops during the wine-making process. These are all desires of OPG owners and how they imagine Konavle

developing into a rural destination. I believe that, if there was no Covid, my results would have been better since I would have been able to share the questions personally and would consequently have got more honest results. Despite these limitations, this research can be seen as the first steps towards implementing rural tourism in Konavle and I hope that the current research will stimulate further investigation on this topic.

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