



# Dimensions of Integrated Tourism – Case Studies of Selected Villages in the Serbia-Romania Border Area

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**Keywords:** *integrated tourism, dimensions, border villages, Serbia, Romania*

## ABSTRACT

Integrated rural tourism provides new development opportunities for underdeveloped regions or villages and local clusters. It is defined as the type of tourism explicitly linked to the economic, social, cultural, natural and human resources and localities in which it takes place. In this context, the separation of all dimensions is significant, including all the elements of an integrated tourism product and referring to the networking of all stakeholders, level of tourism development in chronological and geographical terms, endogeneity, sustainability, embeddedness, complementarity and empowerment of the entire sector. These dimensions can be monitored over time as trends and levels, and can be spatially compared. The qualitative research is applied in the paper. It is based on case studies of selected rural settlements in Serbian border areas with Romania. We used logical analysis in various social situations and we explained the nature and manifestation forms of integrated tourism. By applying the comparative method we ascertained similarities and differences of the dimensions of integrated tourism in the rural settlements under study. The research results show that integrated rural tourism provides a greater likelihood of coordination and institutional policy of rural and regional development, and fosters partnering and pooling. Numerous factors affect the implementation of integrated tourism in rural areas, and the examples of villages analyzed in this paper show that their peripherality is not restrictive.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Lagging of villages and agrarian sector slows down the overall development, which has resulted in a more complex model of development policy towards village and rural society, a multidisciplinary based model of integrated rural development [1]. The strategy of integrated development implies involvement in an innovated development process of all the resources of local environment, universality, rationality and sustainable use of resources adapted to market demands and needs of the local population [2]. Cooperative entrepreneurship necessary in integral development has the support of economic development strategy, and it is particularly important in countries that are in transition processes [3].

The development benefit, which may be conditioned by integrated rural tourism, provides new opportunities for the lagging regions and local economic stakeholders [1]. The term integration is analyzed in various ways, such as:

- a). Spatial integration (in the areas where tourism is less developed) [4].
- b). Integration of human resources (referring to the working people in an economy, as a means to combat social exclusion and gain competitive advantages) [5].
- c). Institutional integration (agencies in a partnership or other semi-permanent structures) [6].
- d). Innovative integration (integration of new ideas and processes, in order to achieve the growth or competitive advantage of a tourism product) [7].

e). Economic integration (linking other economic sectors, particularly trade and agriculture, with tourism) [8].

f). Social integration (related to trends in socioeconomics: quality and environmental protection, sustainable development) [9].

g). Political integration (associating tourism with national and regional objectives of economic growth) [10].

h). Temporal integration (integration of past with present needs) [11].

i). Community integration (integration of tourists as guests in local communities so that they occupy the same physical spaces, satisfy their existential and material needs in the same way and become members of the local communities) [12].

The authors Jenkins and Oliver (2001) propose the concept of integrated rural tourism as a means of comprehensive thinking about the stakeholders, resources and relationships included in this industry [13]. The integration of economy and culture with tourism, in accordance with a defined percentage of the employed local population, the type and degree of participation, the authorities' decision-making on the ownership of resources in the local tourism industry helps the re-composition of rural population and diversification of agricultural families' income.

## 2. THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

The concept of integrated rural tourism (IRT) has been studied in the context of the SPRITE project, a research project of the European Union. SPRITE (Supporting and Promoting Integrated Tourism in Europe's Lagging Rural Regions) deals with the evaluation of dimensions which tourism is based on and provides recommendations on how such integrations can be further improved. SPRITE project is developed based on seven dimensions of integration that include measurement of environmental, economic, social, cultural and political effects of tourism. Variables can be quantified and monitored over time as trends and their levels can be compared in space and among stakeholders [14].

The guidelines for writing this paper are the dimensions of integrated tourism defined by SPRITE project. The paper applies conclusive research, whilst from the aspect of data character these are qualitative research. Data sources include secondary and external data, because, among other things, the reports of the project "The Wealth of Diversity" are used. The representation of various cultures in Vojvodina and the Danube Basin causes the creation of a unique product based on authenticity. The paper is based on case studies of the selected rural settlements in Serbian border areas with Romania. In various social situations

logical analysis is used, the character and manifestation forms of integrated tourism are explained.

Using the comparative method, similarities and differences regarding the dimensions of integrated tourism have been noted in the villages covered by the mentioned project. The comparison has been done in different areas, without chronological comparisons and based on the data of empirical origin. The degree of spatial resolution built into the methodology enabled us to test the hypothesis that integrated rural tourism is conditioned by the local resources, the possibilities of political and social cultures and that it plays the role of operational monitoring.

Seven dimensions of integrated tourism are:

a). *Networking*: the ability of people, companies and agencies in the settlement to work together on the development and management of tourism.

b). *Scale*: the level of tourism in one area as regards the distribution over time and geographically, bearing in mind all the thresholds related to the carrying capacity of the area.

c). *Endogeneity*: the extent to which tourism is recognized as it is based on realistic resources of a region.

d). *Sustainability*: the extent to which tourism does not harm and possibly improves the environment and environmental resources in the area.

e). *Embeddedness*: the role of tourism in politics, culture and life of the whole area and the population as a local priority.

f). *Complementariness*: the extent to which tourism provides funds to those who live in the local area, although they are not directly included in tourism.

g). *Empowerment*: a measure of political control over the tourism industry through ownership, law or planning, especially the control implemented at the local level.

The examination of each dimension shows how the concept can be developed in various places and forms. However, with the separation of individual benefits from the range, the project misses the point, so that progress can be achieved in all or in the majority of seven dimensions. The same development can affect life in several ways, such as the implied concept of integration [14].

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Qualitative application of integrated tourism dimensions was carried out on the examples of five rural settlements covered by the project "The Wealth of Diversity" in Serbian border area with Romania: two settlements are located in Vojvodina, three in the Lower Danube Basin in the Iron Gate Gorge. The project leader of "The Wealth of Diversity" is the Danube Tourism Cluster "Istar 21", and the idea of the project is

to present authentic rural settlements in Vojvodina/ the Danube Basin through the richness of cultures, customs, gastronomy, folklore and music of the people who live there, but also the characteristic architectural heritage of this region, respecting its natural environment [15].

The Dobra village in Golubac Municipality, in Eastern Serbia, is surrounded by the Šomrda Mountain. Dobra has about 200 households, with about 800 inhabitants. By the Dobranska River there is a promenade, and bridges are placed over the river. For now, there are signboards with the basic data on archaeological sites; the plan is to set up a detailed map of their location, so that the fans of walking and cycling could reach them. Ethno setting in this settlement is made of: items from various periods, furniture from antiquity, authentic Dobra's bag whose replicas are made by the women from the Association for Hand Weaving Preservation and Development. Summer-pasture mountain camp is a temporary habitat, where common grazing, milking and sheep milk products processing are carried out and presented to visitors at the same time. Natural beauty, good accommodation, vicinity of the sites of historic importance are only some of the opportunities that this settlement offers for tourists' stay. In the perspective, local residents should be educated about tourism, and the professional assistance of the employed in the Tourist Organization of Golubac is also necessary.

The dimensions of integrated tourism in the village Dobra are:

a). Proper organization of inhabitants and the association of citizens "Ethno-Eco – Lady's Whirlpool (Gospodin Vir)".

b). Tourism in its beginning, dominated by natural and geographical characteristics of the area.

c). Real tourism resources and activities: archaeological sites, ethno exhibition, cheese degustation, weekend cottages beside the Danube offering accommodation to tourists (a total of 40 beds in all accommodation facilities), the international cycling route EuroVelo 6, the plan is to make the camp in common mountain pasture huts, fair road infrastructure - road, water and forest roads; tourism is recognized as a real opportunity for the development of this rural settlement.

d). Cleanliness and tidiness of the place, especially clean water in the Dobranska River, developed awareness about ecology and nature preservation, repaired landfills, organized communal structure.

e). Initiatives, resources and enthusiasm of local people for tourism development exist, but this destination of rural tourism is not acknowledged. Tourism signalling and marking the site gives a belief that the development of tourism in this village has begun in an appropriate manner.

f). Funds from tourism are small; complementariness of tourism with livestock breeding.

g). Political control in tourist activities is not distinct [16].

Rural settlements of Velika Vrbica and Kostol in Kladovo Municipality, Eastern Serbia, are located by the Danube River and international cycling route EuroVelo 6. These settlements have not created a complete tourist product individually, but because of the service and small mutual distance they form a harmonious entirety that can be offered to tourists. In Kostol within easy reach of Kladovo there are the columns of Trajan's bridge, the largest one in the Roman Empire [17]. Velika Vrbica could have more accommodation facilities thus offering longer stay to tourists. The Danube River should be exploited more adequately, its beaches must be arranged, cycling routes and pedestrian paths may be constructed and marked, accommodation facilities should be categorized, education on providing accommodation services must be implemented, more diverse contents have to be created for tourists and the villages should be arranged.

The dimensions of integrated tourism in the village Velika Vrbica are:

a). There is the will and initiative of local population to improve infrastructure, but little concrete action, mostly the activities of individuals or individual families.

b). Tourism is an unrecognized activity, which needs the investments and connecting with tourist motives in the neighbouring rural settlements.

c). Tourism resources: the old and the new church, several households offering private accommodation, wine cellar, Wallachian customs, and ethno-restaurant "Wallachian house".

d). Ecological resources are evident, but the work on the renovation of the environment to make it more attractive for tourists is needed.

e). The role of tourism in the life of the population is negligibly small, even though taking into account the households that provide services to tourists.

f). Funds are provided by individuals participating in wine-making and bee-keeping, and not the broader community.

g). Political control over tourism does not exist [18].

The village of Velika Vrbica has 400 households or 1200 residents of which a considerable number works abroad. A significant number of young people interested in staying and working in the village lives in Velika Vrbica, contributing to the improvement of the entire infrastructure. The beach, where villagers and visitors of the village can go swimming, requires certain investments in arrangement and driveways. The tavern and the "Wallachian house" inn are authentic, with many items in the bedrooms and restaurant. Guests are offered the option of taking part in economic activities [19].

The rural settlement of Kostol is located on the Danube 3 km downstream from Kladovo, so that it can be considered a suburb of Kladovo. Kostol is a village of captains and boatmen, whose houses are characterized by the specific appearance of facades with authentic ornaments and symbols of anchors and ships. Women Association travels to festivals in the country competing in preparing traditional dishes for the feast of St. Trifun, and being engaged in humanitarian work. The site of Selište is the habitat of rare species of birds, with four lakes around which circular walking paths with watchtowers for observing birds as well as boards with maps of walkway routes are planned to be constructed. Besides the Kostol Fountain from the Ottoman period there is an excursion site with wooden benches. Two households with ten beds offer accommodation to tourists.

The dimensions of integrated tourism in the village Kostol are as follows:

a). Women Association "Creativa Mission", folklore section.

b). Tourism has just started developing; there is no possibility for disturbing the carrying capacity, with the conditions to connect with the surrounding rural settlements.

c). The production of souvenirs, handicraft exhibition of rural women, exhibition of paintings by Mića Skrlatović, a temple dedicated to the Holy Archangel Michael, excursion site at Kostol fountain, habitat of rare species of birds.

d). Ecological resources are well preserved, while tourism contributes to the regulation of locations Selište and Kostol fountain.

e). Tourism plays a minor role in the lives of local residents; it is an additional source of income for some of them.

f). Small funds from tourism, most locals are not directly involved in tourism, except those who produce souvenirs and offer accommodation.

g). Political control over tourism does not exist [20].

Češko Selo, a village in the municipality of Bela Crkva, Banat, has 40 residents. This village is inhabited by the representatives of Czech national community and the population is mostly engaged in agriculture. In Češko Selo there are 40 houses, 21 of them being inhabited. The conditions for tourists' accommodation do not exist, although visitors often come from Romania, the Czech Republic, Belgrade and from other places in the surroundings. In the school building there is a museum with the exhibition of traditional costumes, footwear and furniture from the old Czech houses as well as a great photo of the 49<sup>th</sup> regiment in the military camp in Raguza in 1917 with the ancestors of most of the residents of this village. There are also "painted windows to the world" in this museum, an exhibition of works painted with colours on the glass by

children. There are two double rooms with bathrooms, which will be equipped to accommodate tourists. The initiative, agility, professional knowledge and assistance are indispensable in order to make Češko Selo attractive for visitors, who do not stay here because there are no designed contents for tourists.

The dimensions of integrated tourism in Češko Selo:

a). Organization and networking in this village does not exist.

b). Tourism still is not developed.

c). The Catholic Church is dedicated to Jan Nepomuk, a museum setting.

d). If tourism were developed in this rural village, it could improve the quality of ecological resources.

e). Tourism has no role in politics, culture and life.

f). Tourism does not provide funds to inhabitants, possible complementariness with bee-keeping.

g). Political control at the local level does not exist [21].

On the slopes of Vršac vineyards, there is Gudurica, a rural settlement known for its vineyards. Gudurica was inhabited by Germans before World War II, and after the liberation in 1946, the Slovenes moved there, who accounted for the 99% of the population for some time. The locals from Gudurica inherited cellars and tradition of winemaking from Germans. The painter Robert Hamerštil was born in Vršac and lived in Gudurica. In his mother's former house there is a permanent exhibition with about 80 works, paintings and graphics that Hamerštil donated to Gudurica. About 600 visitors visit this museum annually. It is necessary to fix the asphalt and the facades of old buildings, renovate abandoned houses, determine their function and employ local residents in Gudurica. A detailed regulatory plan is required. The plan is to build a hotel with 16 bungalows (the investors are Germans), and the locals who live abroad restore the neglected buildings in the village. Hunting, wine and culinary events are held in Gudurica, cross-border cooperation with the Romanians is good, and the greatest curiosity of this settlement is the community of 16 people (for some time, members of 21 nationalities lived here). Long-time cohabitation has made that differences among the Serbs, Macedonians, Slovenes, Hungarians, Croats, Slovaks, Roma, Germans, Albanians, Czechs, and Ukrainians are not even noticed.

The dimensions of integrated tourism in the rural settlement of Gudurica:

a). Association of Winemakers, Cultural-artistic Society "Vineyards", Association of Macedonians, Association of Slovenes "Kula", Association of Hungarians, Association of Roma people.

b). Tourism is still unrecognized, but there are initiatives.

c). Permanent exhibitions of paintings and graphics, wine cellars.

d). Tourism neither harms, nor improves the environmental resources.

e). The role of tourism is most prominent in the life of winegrowers.

f). Complementariness of tourism with viticulture.

g). Political control at the local level does not exist [21].

Various people have lived, passed by and left traces of their existence in Mokrin. The Serbs remained the longest, and these areas were inhabited by Hungarians, Germans, Tzintzars, Vlachs, Russians, Roma. In the museum in Mokrin there are over 35,000 artefacts, paintings, books, copies and other items that speak about the rich history of this rural settlement. Until 1944, 1600 Germans and 800 Hungarians lived in the place, and now there is about 300 Catholics. The members of Mokrin Youth Club make artworks in baked clay, which they paint, make souvenirs giving them a use value. In one of the houses of Knežev family there is a hostel with 21 beds. The site of Pašnjaci is inhabited by great bustard, and in Mokrin there is a hunting ground visited by hunters that come from Italy, Austria, Germany, and Spain. The Hunting Lodge has a fair accommodation capacity. What makes this rural settlement different from others are the events: celebration of Easter, geese fighting, summer mini football tournament, memorial to the poet Miroslav Antić, rock festival, autumn folk festival, the Roma games.

The dimensions of integrated tourism in the village of Mokrin:

a). Mokrin Youth Club, tamboura orchestra, good organization and networking.

b). Event tourism has a long tradition.

c). Museum, hostel, hunting ground, hunting lodge, events.

d). Hunting should be controlled.

e). Tourism is recognized as an opportunity of the local community and its residents are continually engaged in its development.

f). Funds from tourism are largely brought by hunting and the complementary activity is agriculture (production of cheese, wine).

g). Political control over tourism is not evident [22].

Despite recognizing the importance of rural tourism as a possible means for the development of rural areas, this form of tourism is in its initial stage. Although there are positive examples, previous projects did not rest on national development programs for rural areas, but mainly on the private initiative of individuals and groups [23]. Integration of service to guests with natural and cultural values of rural areas and their protection not only that involves the engagement of

those that offer accommodation, but also implies those who are responsible for policy-making in rural tourism and the environment protection at both regional and national level [24]. In the process of directing funds of state aid, a system of coordination between institutions and entities involved in various aspects of rural development has not been established. In order to use the funds for rural development rationally it is necessary to build capacities at the local level and to empower local self-governments [25].

An integrated approach of the management of rural tourism involves the recognition of non-linear processes and linkages between stakeholders, activities and funds, a long-term perspective with a wide spatial focus recognizing the importance of human and cultural context and the diversity of values related to tourism development. Some rural areas have fewer resources, so that an intense dialogue and sharing responsibility among stakeholders are required [26].

Sustainable tourism bases strategic planning on a broader, holistic analysis of rural area, on integrated rural tourism and its dimensions, and it includes:

- an analysis of social, economic, environmental and cultural needs;

- an analysis of tourism potentials and results achieved in tourism development;

- strong local participation of local stakeholders in planning, implementation and execution of projects;

- taking into account the carrying capacity of a rural tourism destination and defining forms of tourism for various micro-locations;

- development based on marketing research;

- continuous training and education of all stakeholders in the tourism industry;

- the development of other economic activities that are “sustainable” in rural areas and would enable the “economic life” with rural tourism;

- financing rural tourism: publicly-funded projects (usually at the state level), commercial (private) projects, public-private projects, subsidized commercial projects [27].

The research in this paper shows that the most realistic opportunities for the development of rural tourism are related to Mokrin, a settlement in which this activity is becoming a tradition. Rural settlements of Gudurica and Dobra, each with its own specific characteristics are classified into the second group of the analyzed settlements, wherein the residents of Dobra are more quality engaged in the promotion of tourist motives. Although Velika Vrbica and Kostol have potential, they lack enthusiasm and professional help. Češko Selo does not possess clearly designed tourism contents, and its significant limitation is the depopulation. Generally speaking, the development is not based on a marketing survey; financial support and

education in rural tourism mostly lack, as well as stronger connections of tourism with complementary activities. After analysing each dimension of integrated tourism in the overall development it can be said that the most important role is played by endogeneity and networking, less significant are sustainability and scale, much less complementariness and embeddedness, which is evident only in the settlement Mokrin, and the empowerment does not have any role in rural tourism.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Tourism development on the principle of sustainability implies that it should be a long-term ecologically bearable, economically vital, ethically and socially equitable for local communities, integrated into the natural, cultural and human environment, activities and dynamics of each local community. Active contribution of tourism to sustainable development implies solidarity, mutual respect and participation of all stakeholders, both state and private, which points to the integrated tourism.

If we agree with Butler who made the detailed classification of tourist activities in rural tourism and divided them into the traditional and “new” activities and if we take into account the fact that rural tourism is quite “a young form of tourist movements” [28] then we can say that traditional activities represent a more passive experience of rural areas, while new activities involve active experience of rural areas with the use of modern requisites. According to Šimičević and Štetić (2011) rural tourism is developed within an area whose specific attributes enable different forms of tourism activities. These specific attributes are: preserved environment, rich flora and fauna, local community with its culture, heritage and gastronomy, with its multiculturalism [29].

In other words, the large variety of natural and socio-cultural environment allows tourists to live a unique experience through the diversification of tourism products within the rural areas.

Compared to the unique natural and cultural entities, it is necessary to establish different spatial and functional modalities of tourism development. This involves close cooperation and coordination at the level of a settlement and region, both within and outside the administrative borders, in accordance with spatial-functional, cultural and natural specific entities. The inventory of the existing values together with spatial-functional entities which are an integral part of a tourism offer imply the creation of quality standards and proposal of incentive measures (marketing, consulting, financial) for all stakeholders who implement these standards. Also, it is necessary to carry out permanent monitoring of the implementation of quality standards through local tourism organizations. Partnership approach provides added value moving

from formal arrangements and agreements to the concept of partnership culture in which conditions are created not only for public administrative structures, but also for the representatives of private sector, which directly or indirectly affect the development of rural tourism. If there is no partnership culture and public-private cooperation it will hardly be possible to achieve full utilization of natural and cultural values and all resources, including human resources, which rural settlements have at their disposal. The examples of settlements analyzed in this paper show that the dimensions of integrated rural tourism are linked to each other, that they condition each other, and that only their compliance can contribute to the development.

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