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THE INFLUENCE OF NATIONAL PARKS ON SUSTAINABLE RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE MEMBER STATES OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

Vladimir Miladinović¹, Mira Milinković², Vladan Ugrenović³

Abstract

National parks, which are natural areas undisturbed by human exploitation, in addition to preserving biodiversity and scientific development, provide the opportunity to develop tourism, recreation and use of natural resources for the purpose of sustainable rural development of the local community. Rich biodiversity contributes to the development of tourism in national parks, and the ecosystem services it provides make development more sustainable. This overview paper presents several national parks in four EU countries: France (Cévennes), Norway (Brehamen; Rahamen), Hungary (Orseg), Spain (Galicia) and their impact on the sustainable development of rural areas in their immediate vicinity. National parks provide the opportunities for the development of rural tourism, catering, production and sale of food. With the increase in the number of tourists, there is a need for the construction of infrastructure, roads and accommodation facilities in rural areas, and also to educate and train staff from the rural community for jobs in the field of tourism. In addition to the economic importance, it is of exceptional cultural and spiritual importance because by presenting ethnic heritage to visitors, the tradition and culture of the given area is preserved. All the mentioned factors provide the possibility of employment, cessation of population migration from rural areas and economic growth and development, and the experiences of these practices from EU countries are also applicable in the Republic of Serbia.

Key words: *national parks, sustainable development, rural tourism.*

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Introduction

The highest growing branch of tourism in Europe for years has been Natural-Based Tourism (NBT) (Balmford et al. 2009). In this regard, the year 2020 has been declared the year of tourism and rural development by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). The increase in the number of tourists in national parks, nature parks and preserved natural resources located in the rural environment gives the possibility of economic development of rural regions through the development of complementary economic branches in addition to tourism and catering such as, construction, trade and sales, cultural and spiritual exchange, etc. In general, there is a mutually positive dependence between tourism and nature conservation, but there are also negative impacts of intensive tourism on the park itself and its biodiversity, such as the potential urbanization of nature parks due to the intensification of the construction of building facilities, catering facilities, and economic facilities, then the increased number of new residents, potential pollution of the environment due to excessive fluctuation of people, unintended land use (Törn et al. 2007). Therefore, it is necessary to create sub-coordination between the local government, the administration of the national park and the departments of the ministries in order to ensure both nature preservation and economic development. At the EU level, a positive trend of sub-coordination of the mentioned factors has been clearly observed (Kovács et al. 2021). The sustainable development of rural regions in the area of national parks can be encouraged by the development of tourism, but tourism in its classic form is not enough. It is necessary to look at the capacities of the national park and the needs of the local community, in order to provide a tourism development strategy together with complementary economic branches based exclusively on ecological principles in order to preserve nature and biodiversity (Mellon et al. 2016).

The intention of developing sustainable tourism and therefore sustainable development in the regions surrounding national parks is to eliminate the negative trend in rural areas that dates back to 1980s in Europe, which represents the departure of young population, the change in age structure, decline of agricultural production, reduction of economic activities, etc (Agarwal et al. 2009). Through analyzing the potential development opportunities of rural regions, sustainable tourism in the area of national parks emerges as the greatest opportunity. The importance of the protected nature area and its preservation is presented as a central point of sustainable development. Tourism in national parks attracts a certain profile of tourists who are interested in visiting pre-

served natural landscapes in their original state. A large percentage of guests are interested in ecotourism, and also in conservation tourism. (Buckley, R. 2009) In addition to the mentioned aspects, guests can be offered various adventurous content, activities such as hiking, paragliding, rafting, hunting and fishing tourism, etc.

Orseg National Park, Hungary

Orseg National Park is one of ten Hungarian national parks. It is located in the border area of Hungary with Slovenia and Austria. The national park was founded in 2002. During a long historical period, the area of today's Orseg National Park was a relatively economically undeveloped border area. The primary activity of the population was agriculture, dominantly animal husbandry. There was a constant permanent departure of the population, mostly the younger population, to the more developed regions of Hungary. With the accession of Hungary to the European Union, the borders between neighboring Slovenia and Austria were abolished, and thus the benefits that the border settlements had as such disappeared (Csapó, O. 2007).

Population migrations of greater intensity began in the period after the Second World War. The Orsega region had 11,457 inhabitants in 1949, and the number of inhabitants was 5,056 in 2010 <https://www.ksh.hu/?lang=en> The consequences are a change in the age structure of the population, a decrease in the number of agricultural households, a decrease in agricultural production and economic profits. The primary goal of the establishment of the national park, in addition to nature conservation, was the development of sustainable tourism with an aspect of rural tourism, agriculture, and all complementary economic branches that would promote the creation of new jobs, economic growth and reduce the departure of the younger population (Csapó, O. 2007).

A serious environmental problem arose as a result of the change in the structure of employees. The decrease in the percentage of the population engaged in animal husbandry from 70% in 1930 to 11.3% in 2010 drastically reduced the livestock, which resulted in a marked reduction in grazing. Without grazing, pasture degradation occurs, as woody vegetation spreads. The total number of cattle is 908, and the absolute majority of households own between one and three cattle on average. Increasing livestock production is imposed as an imperative in order to maintain the ecological stability of the national park (Csapó, O. 2007).

The development of tourism is significant, especially rural tourism in private accommodation. The number of tourists in private accommodation in 2002 and 2003 was 1,864 and 2,195 guests respectively, and that number in 2009 and 2010 was 7,145 and 6,010 guests respectively, which is three times more in comparison. The number of overnight stays in private accommodation in 2002 and 2003 was 7,832 and 7,039, respectively, and in 2009 and 2010, 21,443 and 21,508 overnight stays were recorded, which is almost three times more. <https://www.ksh.hu/?lang=en> 17.6% of the population is engaged in tourism in the area, and of that 52.2% rent private accommodation to guests. More than half of the population sees tourism as a distinct possibility for the development of the region (Beluszky P. and Sikos T. 2011).

A positive trend has been recorded in the purchase of houses and rural properties by the settled city population, who want to settle in a naturally healthy environment. The percentage of the immigrated urban population is 29.6%. This group consists of highly educated, well situated people who bring their capital and, in addition to the economic development of the region, influence cultural and technological progress (Baranyai et al. 2012).

The establishment of the national park, in addition to the protection and preservation of nature, also contributed to the growth of the economy, tourism and economy in general. Many projects to support the development of animal husbandry and farming have been successfully implemented under the auspices of the national park. Local farmers are provided with the opportunity of continuous training in order to carry out agricultural production according to ecological and sustainable principles. Ecological tourism is the primary goal of the national park administration, because in this way the beauties of nature unique to the Orsega area are presented. Further plans for the development of national tourism and tourism are the discovery and presentation of new tourist destinations in the region. Organizing organic agriculture and branding local food products would give local agricultural producers the opportunity for further economic progress.

In addition to the study on Orseg National Park, a study (Kovács et al. 2021) was conducted on several national parks in Hungary, with an analysis of biodiversity conservation, tourism development potential, ecology, and economic and cultural progress. Tests found results similar to Orseg National Park. There is a high potential for the development of ecotourism, sustainable rural tourism and thus rural development, but there are also clearly visible short-

comings. A positive trend of continuous growth in the number of guests over the years and the number of overnight stays has been observed. So, for example, In 2011, Koroš Maroš National Park had 16,276 guests, and in 2019, there would be 96,801 guests, which is six times more in comparison (Kovács et al. 2021). As a result, an economic profit was achieved for the local community and the economy. Which gives the possibility of further economic development of the rural region in the area of the national park. The main shortcomings are insufficiently built NBT infrastructure, poor interaction of tourism complementary economic branches, small percentage of foreign guests, small number of “highly attractive” tourist destinations, insufficient sub-coordination between local government, the national park and competent ministries. By using the development funds of the European Union, these shortcomings were partially remedied, but the biggest problem remains insufficiently built infrastructure.

National Parks of Spain

Tourism represents one of the most important economic branches of Spain, according to tourist visits and total earnings from tourism, Spain is in second place in the world ranking list (OMT: Madrid, Spain, 2018). A significant share in the total tourist offer of Spain is represented by 15 national parks of exceptional attraction and great diversity, which is the cause of multi-million guest visits per year (Cordente-Rodríguez et al. 2014). Spain records a trend of annual increase in the number of guests in national parks, from 9.53 million guests in 2012 to 15.44 million guests in 2017 www.miteco.gob.es/es/sistema/includes/errores/404.aspx

The current law governing national parks in Spain has been valid since 2014. The review of the law clearly shows two basic directions of action, the first is the preservation of natural entities and biodiversity, and the second is the economic and social development of the area of national parks. There are a number of factors that influence the sustainable development of the tourist destination and the economic development of rural areas in the area of the national park. The perception of the local rural population about the quality of life and social development in the rural areas of the national park is extremely important, because it affects the retention of residence in the countryside (Kim et al. 2013). The empowerment of the local community significantly affects the development and preservation of the cultural and natural heritage of the village (Olya et al. 2018).

A scientific study (Pérez-Calderón et al. 2020) analyzed the effects of public use of all fifteen Spanish national parks on the development of rural areas and tourism in their immediate surroundings. The aim of this study is to determine the impact of the perception of economic development on the perception of sustainability, social life and quality of life of residents in rural areas in the vicinity of national parks. The study examined the impact of national parks on the economic, social, economic and cultural development of rural areas over a period of ten years. For the purposes of the research, a questionnaire was prepared and sent electronically to local authorities in rural areas. The local authorities of each of the fifteen regions conducted a survey for their population. The research sample consisted of 169 villages located in the immediate vicinity of the economic and social influence of national parks. Answers to the survey were received for 75 of the 169 villages of the initial sample, or for 44.38%.

The results of the survey on the perception of the economic development of the inhabitants of the village are that the economic standard of the population has increased, the offer of tourist services to guests is greater and the number of tourist activities is greater, which in the opinion of the inhabitants has led to an increase in the number of tourists.

The perception of the social development of the inhabitants is that the migration of the population from the village has been prevented and that the tradition and culture of the local community has been preserved, which also represents a significant tourist attraction for visitors. Residents of the village negatively perceive social development from the point of view of behavior and habits of tourists, such as the creation of noise, the amount of waste generated, etc.

When it comes to the quality of life, the perception of the villagers is that the received subsidies resulted in progress in the construction of infrastructure, communication technologies, and efficient consumption of resources, application of environmental standards and overall a significant improvement in the quality of life. The perception of the population's global satisfaction with the impact of the national park was made and the research showed that the residents are satisfied with the created social and economic opportunities, as well as that the establishment of the national park enabled the traditions and customs of the local community to be maintained.

The study analyzed the perception of economic development, social development and quality of life. Looking at the overall results of the effects of public use

of national parks, it is clearly observed that the quality of life is directly conditioned by economic development, and the perception of social development is directly dependent on the quality of life.

National Parks Rheinheimen and Breheimen, Norway

The subject of the study (Hidle, K. 2019) is the examination of the impact of the Rheinheimen and Breheimen national parks in the rural municipality of Skjak, established in 2007 and 2009, on the sustainable development of the region. In the mountainous regions of Norway, a process of reduced population numbers due to economic migration over a longer period of time is characteristic (Arnesen et al., 2010). The same is the case with the mountain municipality of Sjak, whose population in January 2018 was 2,179, compared to 2,612 in 1990 <https://www.ssb.no/en>. Basic economic activities are forestry, agriculture, hunting and fishing. With the reduction of the number of agricultural products in the period from 1992 to 2015 by 33%. (Skjeggedal et al., 2015). The ownership of agricultural and mountain land and forest in the municipality is the joint property of all agricultural producers who jointly bought the land in 1789 from a private owner and today it is the largest non-state property in Norway

For this reason, opposition to the establishment of national parks was expressed among the population of the municipality of Skjak. Although national parks have been established for many years, there is still strong opposition from part of the population. (Skjeggedal et al., 2015). The situation is changing in a positive sense when it comes to the attitude of the population towards nature conservation, as evidenced by several projects of the local government and individuals aimed at nature conservation and economic development.

According to the Norwegian Law on Nature Conservation, the role of national parks is to protect natural landscapes and biodiversity specific to each region, so that each national park has its own decision-making rules on the conservation of natural resources (Hidle, K. 2019). A change was made by the Norwegian Nature Authority in 2013, with the aim of decentralizing decision-making and a dynamic approach to the management of national parks (Overvåg et al., 2016). The new national park management system in Norway includes a bottom-up system of local governments, regional authorities and relevant ministries. With the fact that there are still disagreements and conflicts between local governments and competent state ministries, despite the intention to achieve quality

cooperation. (Overvåg et al., 2016). The biggest objection to the previous management system was the greater influence of decision-making in the management of national parks by the state, that is, the competent ministry compared to the local government (Overvåg et al., 2016). The new way of managing national parks puts the protection of natural resources and biodiversity in the foreground and the economic development of the local rural community in the background, which caused a negative ratio of the population of the rural areas of the municipal national park. The absence of the possibility of the local rural population to use the resources of the mountain in a traditional way in the sense of engaging in forestry, agriculture and hunting without limiting norms imposed by the protection of natural resources, was a strong argument against the establishment of national parks. The attitude of the local community has changed significantly in a positive sense after the implementation of the Municipal Master Plan for the period 2011-2020. This plan implemented a number of projects of economic, cultural and spiritual importance for the region. Investments were made in local infrastructure, catering and tourist facilities in the municipality of Skjak itself, followed by projects in the conservation of natural resources and raising the awareness of the local population about the importance of national parks both for the local community and beyond. The traditional summer “Skjak Park Festival” has been opened, the purpose of which is to promote the tourist offer of national parks and attract nature-loving guests.

Through the synergy of the projects of the local government, state institutions and the national park with the aim of simultaneous preservation of natural resources and economic development of the region, positive progress was achieved in their implementation. The main task of implementing the mentioned projects was to prevent the migration of residents from the municipality of Skjak, which still exists, so there is still a need to continue work on projects that would lead to the cessation of emigration of residents and eventually sample the immigration of new residents to the region (Hidle, K. 2019).

Seven National Park, France

The Seven National Park is one of the eight French national parks, located in the southern continental part of France. It represents the Mediterranean agropastoral ecosystem. Due to its exceptional cultural and spiritual heritage and preserved natural landscapes of exceptional beauty, it is on the UNESCO list of world cultural heritage. The rural population of the region is engaged in agriculture, animal husbandry, forestry and beekeeping.

The study (Berriet-Sollicec et al. 2018) presents an analysis of the management of the Seven National Park and rural areas in the surrounding area with the aim of achieving economic benefits through the use of public goods and quality ecosystem services aimed at preserving natural resources. As a result of the mutual synergy of the use of ecosystem services and public goods, a new term was defined that represents both of these concepts in one, namely “Environmentally and Socially Beneficial Outcomes - ESBOs” (Dwyer et al., 2016). Presented in a broader sense, the term “Ecological and social benefit” would represent the sustainable management of agroecosystems with the aim of: producing healthy food, sustainable amounts of energy, ensuring and maintaining high quality of water, air and soil, preserving biodiversity and natural landscapes, preserving cultural and spiritual heritage, possibility of recreation and treatment, improvement of rural life. (Maréchal et al. 2016)

During the implementation of the study, interviews were conducted with seven main stakeholders in the region, consisting of representatives of the local government, the national park administration, the association of regional farmers, the association of tourism professionals, the local higher education body and research body, and a decentralized state institution. The survey determined positive and negative factors in relation to ESBOs. Three negative factors were identified: climate change, the impact of the market and the consequences of using CAP funds of the European Union (CAP - The Common Agricultural Policy).

As a result of receiving subsidies from CAP funds, agricultural producers decide to convert natural mountain pastures into arable land. In this way, landscapes of previously preserved nature and soil become subject to the influence of pesticides and mineral fertilizers. Deep plowing has a negative impact on biodiversity, soil, landscape and also leads to the destruction of archeological remains that are characteristic of the national park area, such as old Neolithic graves, low walls from the ancient period, etc. Agricultural producers prefer to opt for agricultural subsidies rather than environmental payments for the preservation of cultural archaeological property on their properties due to the long and complex procedure of obtaining the necessary documentation.

The negative influence of the market economy and CAP funds is particularly evident in animal husbandry. The desire of farmers to make more money is changing the traditional way of herding in the region. Farmers stop taking cattle out for grazing and keep a larger number of cattle in barns, which causes

the spread of shrubby and woody species to part of the abandoned pastures, which leads to a change in the appearance of the natural landscape and thus the potential arrival of large game in areas where they did not live before, and the possibility of disrupting the agroecosystem. Climate change also has a negative impact on animal husbandry due to the frequent occurrence of drought over the years, therefore farmers are not able to provide the necessary amount of grass to feed the livestock. (Gautier, 2017) From the above, it can be seen that agricultural practices have changed in accordance with the impact of climate change and CAP funds.

Two positive factors were determined. The first is the immigration of the population from other parts of France to the area of the national park, and the second positive factor is the Seven National Park itself with its way of acting in practice. Due to the exceptional beauty of nature and good geographical location, there is a positive migration in the region. The arrival of a new population provides the opportunity to develop agriculture, tourism, and hospitality. New residents also bring capital, investment in infrastructure and economic development. The proximity of the big cities, Montpellier, Avignon, Nimes, two hours' drive away on average, provides the possibility of a constant influx of tourists and also the possibility of marketing the authentic products of the region on the market of the mentioned cities. The positive action of the Seven National Park is the preservation of natural resources, cultural and archaeological heritage under the protection of UNESCO and especially the implementation of the policy on sustainable tourism in protected areas.

Conclusion

According to the aforementioned studies, the establishment of national parks contributed to the preservation of protected areas of nature, biodiversity and partial economic progress of the rural regions where they are located. An extremely positive impact on the sustainable development of certain rural regions was made possible by the implementation of the policy on sustainable tourism in the protected area. The continuous growth of the number of tourists in the areas of national parks is a conscious trend. This is clearly confirmed by the particularly presented studies in Spain, France and Hungary. The development of tourism entails investment in the infrastructure of the local community. The European Union countries have the possibility of using funds for the development of rural regions, tourism and protected natural areas. The example of the Orseg National Park in Hungary shows that the use of funds for

the development of tourism has somewhat improved the tourist activity, but since there is no good cooperation between the local government, residents and state authorities on the capacities and possibilities for the implementation of projects, optimal results have not been achieved. In contrast to Hungary, a positive example of completed projects has been achieved in the sustainable development of rural regions of Spain's national parks. Practically, positive results were recorded in all parameters of development due to a good analysis of the situation on the ground, planning and successfully implemented sustainable development projects. There is a noticeable steady growth in the number of guests, higher earnings from tourism and economic progress. Citizens believe that their economic position and quality of life have improved. In this way, the negative migration of the population to other regions was prevented. One of the basic goals of sustainable development in rural regions is the intention to prevent the population from leaving rural areas. In addition to Spain, in the rural area of the French National Park Seven, the emigration of the domestic population has stopped due to economic progress, and there has been an immigration of the population from other parts of France. In contrast to the aforementioned two studies, in the Norwegian National Parks of Rheinheimen and Breheimen and Hungarian Orseg, negative population migrations continued. The reasons are different. With the establishment of the national park, the rural population of the Norwegian municipality of Skjak lost the possibility of traditional use of mountain resources, i.e. engaging in forestry, animal husbandry, hunting and fishing. These possibilities are significantly limited by the national park regulations. The possibility of reduced earnings of the rural population was a strong reason for the opposition of a part of the inhabitants of Skjak to the establishment of the national park, and in the first ten years of the national park, the income from sustainable tourism did not replace the income from the traditional use of mountain resources. Hungarian Orseg is traditionally a relatively poor border area and the development of rural and tourism in the national park is not sufficient to fully enable the economic perspective of all citizens, and negative migration is still present, despite the fact that a certain number of urban residents have permanently moved to the park area eager to live in areas of preserved nature.

Positive experiences of practices from EU countries are valuable because they are applicable in the Republic of Serbia as well. Rich biodiversity contributes significantly to the development of tourism in national parks, and the ecosystem services it provides make development more sustainable.

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