Agro/eco Tourism as a Tool for Sustainable Rural Development in Southeastern Serbia

Report and conclusion from seminar held from 8th to 10th June at Bor Lake

In the frame of the Project “Empower the powerless” Visegrad+ project dedicated to making small scale family farmers in Serbia more competitive, between the 8-10 of June, 24 small scale farmers, company representatives, NGOs and regional authority representatives took part in a seminar on “Agro Eco Tourism as a tool for sustainable rural development” on the shores of Bor Lake, Southeastern Serbia. The seminar, organized by CEEweb members Eko Centar, is part of a series of events CEEweb and its partners have already carried out within the framework of the Visegrad+ project.

Main partner in organization of the event was Regional Chamber of Zajecar, on which initiative Bor Lake was chosen for the venue of the Seminar. Experts from Chamber suggested topics and lectures tailored for the needs of small family farms in Southerneastern Serbia.

In the name of the organizers Dejan Zagorac, president of Eko centar greeted the participants and opened the seminar. Following topics were presented during two and a half day: Agricultural potentials of Timok region, Small –scale family farming in Serbia, IPARD, EU program – Possibilities for funding agricultural producers in Serbia, Guiding and management of nature protected area, Agro/eco tourism and sustainable development in Timok Region, Promotion and development of tourism in Djerdap National park, Education of forest fruits and medical herbs collectors, Small-scale family farming as a precondition for sustainable tourism development, and several good practice examples were presented: Rajačke Pivnice winery Villa Milenović, Villa „Babin zub“ on mountain Stara plana, "Ethno-house" Balta Berilovac, Production of wine –Family farm Nedeljković, Successful family farm Valakonja, Sladan Dimiš, Municipality of Boljevac.

During the discussions, in friendly atmosphere was emphasized that rural tourism is underdeveloped in Timok region, as well as in whole Southerneastern Serbia. People that are engaged in rural tourism face lot of challenges and problems. They got revenues mostly form accommodation fees, from selling food and drink, while in the same time incomes from other sources are insufficient. As a good sides and preconditions for developing a rural tourism, according to participants following aspects were mentioned: good accommodation, quality and good taste of food, natural beauties and arranged households. As bad sides participants noticed unsatisfied infrastructure, lack of additional tourist contents, non paying additional services, lack of tourist and sports events and performances.
Conclusions of the seminar

We need permanent and organized action in the promotion of the agro-eco tourism, supported by Government and other governmental bodies which will include all parts of Serbia. Such actions are needed at domestic, international level as well as among Serbs in diaspora.

Serbia’s agriculture is characterized by small agriculture assets, with often unsolved or unclear property rights, which is very unfavorable precondition for sustainable agriculture, either conventional nor organic. We need special laws, similar to those in other countries that will solve this problem. For example – one should live form agricultural land if one wants to inherit it. Such solution would motivate younger people to stay in village and enable them to work in agriculture and agro-eco tourism.

Closer cooperation of small family farms active in rural-eco tourism has crucial significance. Single farms have little capacities and can’t provide sufficient different contents and programs for longer stay of tourist. Each farm has something, but only all together have everything, that should become slogan of regional cooperation.

Tourist activities should be in accordance to the highest standard, in cleanness in environment protection in gastronomy. Local habits, local foods, language should be promoted, so the tourists have authentic touristic product. WI- FI connection and availability of hot water in any time are the must. Unreal promises concerning touristic offers should be avoided. It is better that tourists are positive than negative suppressed.

Better infrastruction facilities are necessary. We need more information desks and tables, billboards, milestones and other touristic signalization. It is very important to provide procedure for mountain rescue service, during whole year long.

One systematic solution of waste management is needed, which include ordinary waste, but also very important to solve management of animal waste and package of herbicides and pesticides. We need awareness raising campaign among local population about responsible and sustainable use of agro/technical measures and land use.

Organic agriculture and sale of organic products are big possibilities for economy development in Eastern Serbia, especially because there are lot of abounded lands, which are not treated for years, and as such are recourses for organic agriculture.
Women have a crucial role in developing agro-eco tourism, but they are often underprivileged and seldom have land in their own position. Further measures in promotion and implementation of women rights as important part of human rights are necessary.

We need further education and assistance for applying for IPARD and other EU programs and cooperation of farmers to applying and using of these program, which are mostly designed for bigger and more developed producers.

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