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SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT V

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IS RURAL TOURISM AN OPPORTUNITY FOR THE DEVELOPMENT AND REVITALIZATION OF THE MUNICIPALITY OF ARANĐELOVAC?

Sara Stanić Jovanović¹, Božo Ilić², Nevena Miletović³

Abstract

The Municipality of Aranđelovac, with Bukovička Banja, boasts a tradition of spa and health tourism spanning more than two centuries. Covering an area of 376 km², Aranđelovac is the third largest municipality in the Šumadija District and the second most populous, with 41,297 residents according to the 2022 census. Its relatively favorable traffic and tourism position along the regional road M4 is expected to significantly improve with the construction of the “Vožd Karađorđe” highway, which will undoubtedly enhance connectivity with major emitting markets and contribute to tourism development. Surrounded by the Bukulja and Venčac mountains, with 25.2% of its territory covered by forests, the municipality of Aranđelovac enjoys a temperate-continental climate that is particularly beneficial to human health in the higher altitudes. Aranđelovac is a well-known destination on Serbia’s tourist map, recognized for the Bukovička Banja Park (Special Hospital, Staro Zdanje, natural springs), the Risovača Cave, the “Marble and Sounds” art festival, the “Izvor” hotel, as well as the nearby historic site of Orašac, home to Marićevića Jaruga, where the First Serbian Uprising began. In recent years, the efforts of the Tourist Organization of the Municipality of Aranđelovac have been directed toward developing niche tourism forms, including wine and gastronomy routes, adventure tourism, fishing, events, and cultural-historical tours. A particularly notable aspect of these efforts is the promotion of rural tourism, which represents a significant opportunity and a growing trend in the tourism market. Rural tourism holds great potential not only as a driver

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of economic growth but also as a key strategy for revitalizing the municipality of Aranđelovac.

Key words: *Revitalization, tourism, rural areas, development, municipality of Aranđelovac.*

Introduction

Rural tourism is a broad concept that encompasses not only rural leisure but also all other tourist activities in rural areas (Todorović, Bjeljac, 2007). Derek H. and Greg R. (2002) particularly emphasize the existence of a pressure between successful tourism development (which generally means more visitors) and the attractiveness of rural regions (which implies peace and quiet). Tourism is one of the activities that can have a significant impact on the economic, social, functional, and physical structure of rural areas. The tourism function plays a significant role in the transformation of the physical appearance and functions of rural settlements. This phenomenon is the result of the growing need of urban populations for recreational stays in a different, rural environment (Stanković, Ćirković, 2003).

Tourism in rural areas represents a significant multifunctional space for rural development. Within the methodology of the “multifunctional scheme”, which outlines functional interrelations within the process of rural development and provides insight into specific reconfigurations in resource use such as land, labor, knowledge, and nature (Knickel, 1990), four distinct levels of rural development are identified: farm, agricultural household, region, and global space. Ružić (2009) states that rural tourism began developing in the 11th century. However, its growth accelerated significantly in the 18th century when wealthy residents could afford vacations in small settlements near cities, in well-maintained villas and houses. Switzerland became a major rural tourism destination during this period. The key characteristics of the development of rural tourism to date place Serbia in areas with significant resources but lacking sufficient tradition in tourism development. The development of rural tourism as an organized activity in Serbia began in the late 1970s. The beginnings of rural tourism are linked to intense urbanization and the spontaneous movement of tourists from urban, ecologically damaged areas to ecologically preserved rural environments. Initially, this form of tourism was practiced only by individual households (Čomić, 2002).

The term rural tourism has been adopted by the European Union and refers to all tourism activities in rural areas. Specific forms of rural tourism can include: agritourism, hunting, fishing, ecotourism, health tourism, sports and recreational tourism, residential (holiday homes), educational tourism, adventure tourism, transit tourism, camping tourism, continental nautical tourism, gastronomic and ethnogastronomic tourism, tourism in protected natural areas, cultural tourism, religious tourism, and other special forms (Košić, 2009).

Rural tourism implies a series of tourist activities taking place in the countryside. Rural tourism expanded in many parts of the world from the 1970s to the 1980s, both in terms of demand and supply. It happened due to the rise of a society led by lifestyle and leisure and the widespread mobilization of tourism as a strategy for rural development and revitalization (Silva, 2021). Due to their backwardness, the villages have preserved a significant part of their characteristic material and spiritual culture. It is partially maintained: in the form of village memorial buildings, traditional objects, traditional handicrafts, agricultural products, folk costumes, customs and the like (Štetić, Cvijanović and Šimičević 2014).

A prerequisite for the development of tourism is a well-developed agricultural production. (Stanić Jovanović, Vuković, Miletović). In the rural area of the Šumadija district there are many tourist attractions that can represent the unique tourism product of the tourist region Šumadija, which is the basis for the development of rural tourism, among many Arandjelovac municipality villages Garaši, Vrbica, Orašac, etc. (Matić, Djordjević, Vujić, 2019).

Municipality Arandjelovac

The municipality of Arandjelovac is one of the most attractive tourist destinations in the Šumadija District. Its rich cultural and historical heritage, along with spa tourism, occupy an important place in the municipality's tourism offerings. The most attractive tourist sites include: Orašac, the Risovača Cave, the park of Bukovička Banja with its springs, and the building of the Staro Zdanje (Dimitrovski, 2013).

Figure 1. *Park of Bukovička Banja*



Source: Tourist Organization of the Municipality of Arandjelovac

The Municipality of Arandjelovac is one of the seven municipalities in the Šumadija Administrative District. It covers the northwestern part of the district and spans 375.89 square kilometers, representing 15.75% of the total area of the Šumadija District. In addition to the administrative center of Arandjelovac, the municipality includes 18 rural settlements. The relief of this area is dominated in height by Bukulja (696 m) and Venčac (658 m), connected by a ridge with an average elevation of about 500 m. The territory of the Arandjelovac municipality is characterized by the regional climate type of the central part of Šumadija, namely a temperate continental climate, ranging from variable to the most pleasant moderate. The higher parts of its territory (Bukulja and Venčac) have a specific variety of milder, altitude-based subalpine climate, with relatively stable temperature conditions. The Arandjelovac climatic region is characterized by relatively cold winters, warmer autumns than spring, and moderately warm summers. The municipality of Arandjelovac is home to several mineral and thermomineral springs. Of particular significance are the mineral waters of Bukovička Banja, which are classified as rare cold waters and hypothermic (warm) healing waters (Program of Measures for Implementing Agricultural Policy and Rural Development Policy of the Municipality of Arandjelovac, 2018).

The favorable conditions for the development of spa tourism are largely due to its proximity to major emitting areas and its good connectivity. Health tour-

ism is based on the use of waters for prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation. The mild natural resources of the surrounding environment are well-suited for recreational activities, while cultural content is linked to events such as the “Marble and Sounds” artistic manifestation (Marinoski, Stamenković, Ilić, 2015). Nestled in the greenery of the Bukovička Banja Park, the “Staro Zdanje” is undoubtedly the most impressive building in Arandjelovac and perhaps one of the most beautiful architectural gems in the country. The construction of this building began in 1868. It became the summer residence of the Obrenović dynasty, whose members frequently visited Arandjelovac. In honor of its rich culture and tradition, several interesting events are held in Arandjelovac every year. The largest and most famous of these is the “Marble and Sounds” art festival, which takes place from early June to the end of September. This festival has a long tradition dating back to 1966 and consists of three forms of cultural and artistic activity: the “White Venčac” Sculpture Symposium, the “Marble and Sounds” Manifestation, and the International Festival of Ceramic Art. The significance of the “Marble and Sounds” symposium is emphasized by UNESCO, which ranks it among the most important global events in the field of visual arts. The National Museum preserves and displays numerous exhibits from the fields of paleontology, archaeology, ethnology, history, and art history, as evidence of the material and spiritual culture that developed in the Šumadija region. The village of Orašac, located near Arandjelovac, is best known as the site where the First Serbian Uprising was planned and where Karađorđe Petrović was declared the supreme leader (vožd) on Sretenje, February 15, 1804 (<https://arandjelovac.org/o-arandjelovac/>accessed: 09.12.2024.).

Tourist Traffic

As demonstrated in Table 1, the tourist traffic of the Municipality of Arandjelovac has fluctuated over the past six years, with 2023 marking the highest recorded tourist activity during the observed period. Expectedly, 2020 saw a decline in tourist traffic due to the global COVID-19 pandemic. By contrast, 2021 showed significant recovery, largely driven by international travel restrictions, which compelled tourists to explore domestic destinations. That year, Arandjelovac recorded 75,809 overnight stays, representing notable growth compared to 2020, though still not matching the figures of 2018. The surge in tourist traffic in 2023, which stands as the highest recorded during the analyzed period, can be attributed to enhancements in the local tourism offering and increased efforts by the Arandjelovac Tourism Organization, the Mu-

nicipality of Aranđelovac, and other public institutions in the region. These initiatives aimed to improve tourism infrastructure and create favorable conditions to attract tourists and encourage longer stays. A crucial point to consider is that official statistics on arrivals and overnight stays in Aranđelovac/Bukovička Banja do not include data from the Special Rehabilitation Hospital “Bukovička Banja” or the Children’s Holiday Center “Bukulja.” Annually, these two facilities account for between 30,000 and 40,000 overnight stays—a substantial figure that significantly alters the overall representation of tourist traffic in the Municipality of Aranđelovac.

Table 1. *Number of Overnight Stays in Aranđelovac (2018–2023)*

Year	Number of overnight stays
2018.	88.553
2019.	86.662
2020.	52.975
2021.	75.809
2022.	62.034
2023.	91.520

Source: Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia

The Tourist Organization of the Municipality of Aranđelovac (TO Aranđelovac) has maintained successful collaboration for many years, serving as an intermediary with private accommodation facilities. TO Aranđelovac collaborates with approximately 100 privately-owned accommodation providers through promotion and by acting as an intermediary, issuing invoices for tourist accommodations in rooms, apartments, and rural tourism households. Annually, more than 10,000 overnight stays are facilitated through the Tourist Organization, with the majority being realized via vouchers for subsidized vacations in Serbia. These vouchers are granted by the Government of the Republic of Serbia to Serbian citizens who meet the eligibility criteria defined by the government as a form of support for both tourists and accommodation providers. The year 2022 set a record for the number of overnight stays using government vouchers compared to previous years. Table 2 presents a comparison of the last six years in terms of overnight stays facilitated through these vouchers.

Table 2. *Number of Overnight Stays Using Government Vouchers in Aranđelovac (2018–2023)*

Year	Number of realized vouchers	Number of recorded overnight stays through vouchers
2018.	264	1.320
2019.	235	1.175
2020.	672	3.360
2021.	579	2.895
2022.	1461	10.227
2023.	728	3.640

Source: The Tourist Organisation Municipality Aranđelovac

As shown in Table 2, the number of overnight stays facilitated through TO Aranđelovac using vouchers issued by the Republic of Serbia has fluctuated over the past six years. Notably, 2022 recorded the highest number of overnight stays, which is significant from an economic perspective for TO Aranđelovac, considering that the commission charged for its intermediary role amounts to 5% of the total invoice for a given accommodation facility. However, a decline in the number of overnight stays was observed in 2023 compared to the previous year. This decrease can be attributed to the reduced value of vouchers; in 2022, the vouchers were worth 15,000 RSD, whereas in 2023, their value was reduced to 5,000 RSD.

Rural Tourism as an Opportunity for Development and Revitalization of the Municipality of Aranđelovac

The current state of tourist demand in Aranđelovac is far below the levels it reached in the 1980s and even the 1990s. The reasons for this include outdated infrastructure, inadequate accommodation capacities, disorganized ownership structures, and many other factors. However, the new circumstances that have led to a sudden increase in tourist traffic in Serbia, primarily from domestic tourists, over the last three years have also influenced tourism in Aranđelovac. The interest in the tourist offer of Aranđelovac and Bukovička Banja is growing, and the Aranđelovac Tourism Organization, as the umbrella organization for the city, is actively working on promoting Aranđelovac as an attractive tourist destination. Therefore, over the past three years, the number of privately-owned accommodation facilities has significantly increased, and a number of new projects have been initiated, which will greatly impact the tourism industry in Aranđelovac.

Figure 2. Rural Tourism Household “Vajati Bosutica”



Source: <https://bosutica.rs/>

In addition to spa tourism, which has been prominent in Aranđelovac for more than two centuries, new forms of tourism are constantly being developed. Recreational, cultural-historical, and event tourism are also well-represented in Aranđelovac, with congress tourism, urban and rural tourism, as well as gastronomic and wine tourism, experiencing significant growth in recent years. In the Municipality of Aranđelovac, the offer of rural tourism is quite modest, consisting of a small number of ethnic houses, ethnic restaurants, and a few individual rural tourism households. Despite the fact that the number of households engaged in rural tourism does not exceed ten, it should be noted that this form of tourism has been attracting increasing attention in recent years, both in Serbia and in Aranđelovac. For this reason, the number of rural tourism households increases every year, and the services offered by these households are also expanding.

Currently, six rural tourism households collaborate with the Aranđelovac Tourism Organization in the Municipality of Aranđelovac, namely: “Paunove stene” and “Garaške breze” in the village of Garaši, “Bukovički mir” in the

village of Bukovik, “Gajića konak” in the village of Orašac, “Vajati Bosutica” in the village of Bosuta, and “Kuća za odmor Gornja Trešnjevica” in the village of Gornja Trešnjevica. Implemented projects by the Arandelovac Tourism Organization (such as the construction of an observation point at the top of Bukulja, the installation of recreational furniture along the Bukulja hiking trail, and the reconstruction of tourist signage, among others), as well as a total of nine wineries from the Venčac wine region (wineries: “Tarpoš,” “Eden,” “Matijašević,” “Vladimir,” “Blagojević,” “Veličković,” “Legat 1903,” “Trilogija,” and the wine cellar “Grb”), along with well-known barbecue spots and ethnic restaurants in the municipality, contribute to enhancing the experience of tourists who choose to stay at rural households in the Municipality of Arandelovac.

Conclusion

The opportunities that the Municipality of Arandelovac offers as a tourist destination are significant for both domestic and international tourist markets. Favorable climatic conditions, along with interesting geomorphological features (such as the Risovača Cave and Bukulja Mountain), whose exploration and visits are ideal for various sports and recreational activities, along with the rich cultural heritage and long tradition (Orašac, the “Izvor” building, the “Marbe and Sounds” festival, sculptures in the Bukovička Banja park, etc.), as well as the recognition of spa tourism, contribute to the popularization of Arandelovac. Šumadija’s hospitality, local culinary specialties, and quality indigenous wines are just a few of the reasons why more and more tourists are eager to visit Arandelovac or choose to stay in rural households in this municipality, where, when you order a traditional coffee, it is served with mineral water (“Knjaz is not just water, it’s our pride”).

The significance of developing rural tourism in the Municipality of Arandelovac lies in the fact that it creates opportunities for self-employment within one’s own household, as well as generating additional income. Hosts, through rural tourism services, have the opportunity to sell surplus agricultural products, often at significantly higher prices than market rates. Another positive aspect of the development of rural tourism in the Arandelovac municipality is that it contributes to the retention of young people in rural areas, prevents the aging of villages, and influences the development of infrastructure, primarily roads, water supply, and sewage networks.

The development of rural tourism is gaining increasing importance due to its potential contribution to the social and economic renewal of rural areas and the revitalization of villages. Investment in the offer and promotion of rural tourism in the Aranđelovac municipality, through family farms and rural households, aims to attract as many tourists as possible and generate revenue. This form of tourism is based on sustainability principles, offering tourists elements of rural life, nature, and traditional hospitality. As such, rural tourism should serve as the foundation for economic development and improving the standard of living in the rural communities of Aranđelovac villages.

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