

POSSIBILITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL TOURISM AS AN ELEMENT OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT ON MOUNTAIN BJELAŠNICA

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Abstract

Bjelašnica is an Olympic mountain, situated about 30km away from the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sarajevo. For the last 30 years there has been an initiative to proclaim this area as a part of national park, due to rich biodiversity and cultural heritage. Local population of Bjelašnica is faced with high level of poverty and increased migrations. As a strategy for livelihood diversification, this paper proposes development of rural tourism; having in mind that rural tourism is being used as a force to revitalize rural areas in many countries.

The aim of the study was examining the attitudes of local population towards possible development of rural tourism in the area. As a theoretical method to guide the study, the sustainable livelihood approach was chosen; having in mind that this approach provides comprehensive insight of people's strengths (assets or capital endowments) and how they endeavor to convert these into positive livelihood outcomes. For data gathering, the study utilized method of household face-to-face survey; by which we identified the main livelihood activities of local people, as well as household livelihood assets. Findings have shown that local population is to a large degree interested in cooperation of rural tourism development, in which they see opportunities for income improvement and community development.

The analysis presented in the paper shows that different demographic and socioeconomic conditions influence positive attitudes towards rural tourism development, and further explains them.

Key words: *rural development, rural tourism, livelihood*

Introduction

Bjelašnica is an Olympic mountain, situated about 30km away from the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sarajevo. It is famous for its winter tourism; but also for rich biodiversity and cultural heritage; which is why for the last 30 years there has been initiative to proclaim this area as a part of national park. Cultural and historical heritage of Bjelašnica are among most unique and fascinating of all European mountain culture; but today local communities are faced with high level of poverty and increased migrations.

Rural areas around the world are going through considerable economic and social changes due to the decline in employment opportunities. It has been shown that average living standard, as expressed as Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per head, is generally lower in rural than in urban areas (EC, 2008). The rural development policy became increasingly important segment of economic policy in the Central and Eastern European countries, but in the Western Balkan countries as well. In recent years, rural development received priority status in policies in these countries, and this could be illustrated by the fact that some of the countries have adopted particular strategies as well as rural development programmes, which include special emphasize on support of small rural enterprises, rural tourism, creation of non-farm employment, development of the food stuff sector on the farms as well as the rural infrastructure (Ćejvanović, 2011). Literature on this topic shows that in order to overcome poor living conditions in rural areas, livelihood diversification needs to be done. In

order to fight against economic decline, rising unemployment rates, and the increased migration of younger population, many countries use the development of tourism as a force to revitalize these regions. Good planning and development of tourism product in the rural areas could be an avenue through which the livelihoods of the rural community can be improved (Obonyo, 2012). According to Sharpley and Tefler (2002), a variety of reasons may be suggested for the popularity of tourism as development option. These include the facts that development of tourism may lead to infrastructural improvements and the provision of the facilities that are of benefit to local community as well as tourists; that tourism often provides the justification for environmental protection, for example the designation of national parks and that tourism may encourage the revitalization of traditional cultural crafts and practices.

Since Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH), in its Strategy of Development, for the period 2010-2020 (EI, 2010), defined development of rural tourism as one of its strategic goals; it is certain that the rural areas can and should find their place, taking into account the natural beauty, tradition in tourism and the various possibilities for the development of different forms of tourism.

Materials and methods

The study was first of the kind in analyzed area that addressed these issues; and its exploratory nature could be seen from the fact that it seeks to contextualize and gain holistic understanding of the livelihood system of the rural communities in Bjelašnica.

In order to gain an understanding of the significance of the tourism to livelihood for the local communities on Bjelašnica, the study employed Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF) as a conceptual framework developed by the Department for International Development (DFID,1999), through which we gained insight of the main factors that affect people's livelihoods, and typical relationships between these; by analyzing five types of capitals/assets: natural, physical, social, human and financial. Different types of capitals were recognized as variables affecting people's willingness to engage in rural tourism development.

Table 1. Set of variables/capitals

Type of capital	Variable
Human	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gender - Age - Level of education - Number of household members - Employment - Foreign language skills
Natural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Forest ownership - Forest property size
Physical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Building facilities - Transport facilities - Agricultural plants - Livestock - Infrastructure - Antiquities
Financial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Level of monthly income
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cooperation with neighbors - Involvement in organization

Approach of the study was both quantitative and qualitative and in great part it relied on the production of primary data collected on the basis of structured questionnaires.

The study covered two local communities on Bjelašnica mountain: Šabići and Dejčići, in the period between 10th and 30th of June 2012. Unit of analysis was household, and out of the population size of 351 household in the communities, with confidence level of 95% and confidence interval 10, it was determined that sample size needed was 76 households. From simple proportion $x:100=y:76$; where 76 is sample size; „x“ number of households per village; we calculated „y“ which represents required number of households we were going to interview per village.

During the data collection, the principle of anonymity of respondents was respected; as well as impartiality of the researcher. Average time needed per one interview varied between 30 to 40 minutes. The head of the household, who are major decision makers and have influence in the daily livelihood of the household, were asked questions. Pre-testing of the questionnaire was done with limited number of Bjelasnica residents, in order to see if the questions are understood. The household face-to-face survey contained four groups of questions: 1. general characteristics of the respondents (gender, marital status, their age groups, education level and type of employment); 2. life within the household; 3. attitudes towards life in the village; 4. attitudes towards rural tourism development. The survey questionnaire included a mixture of open, fixed-response and multiple response questions.

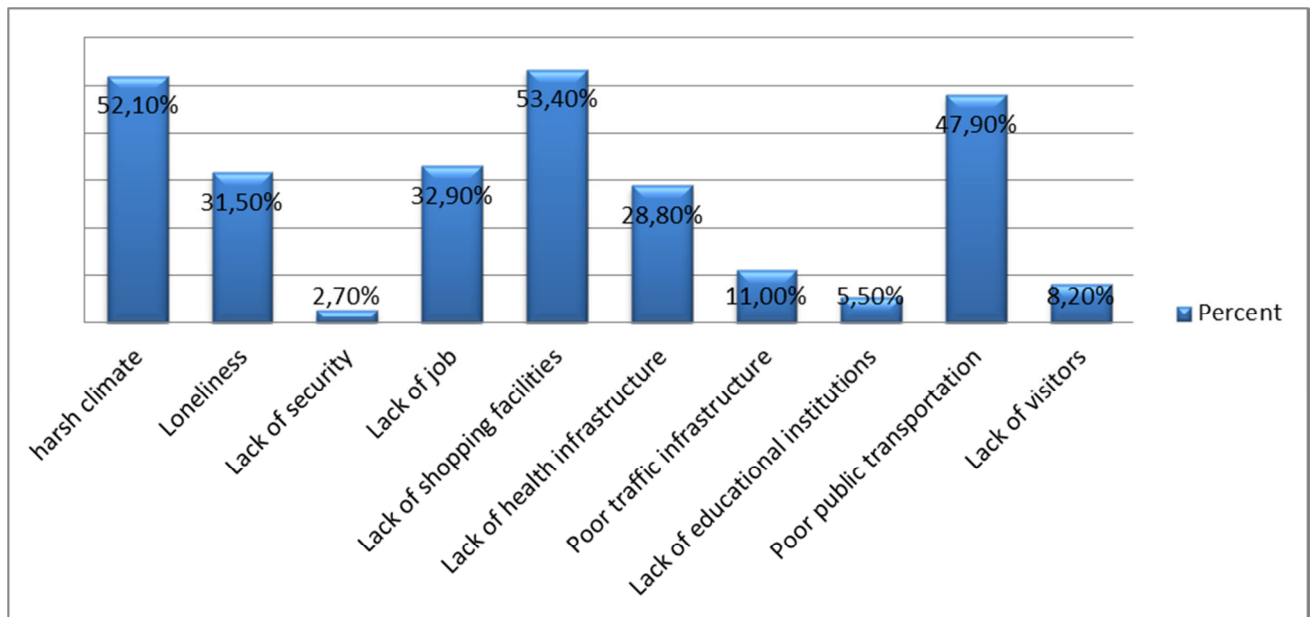
The study used quantitative analytic tools to organize, summarize and present research findings in relation to the study objectives. The statistics programme SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences PASW Statistics 18) was used. In order to bring structure to the data collected for this research, several independent variables were analyzed in relation to dependent variable - readiness for engagement in rural tourism. For analysis of correlation between the variables, we applied a nonparametric method of rank correlation with Spearman's rank coefficient.

Results and discussion

Based on a survey carried out in 76 households, the study identified that due to specific sampling method most of the respondents were men; out of the total of 76 respondents covered by the study, 61.6% were men and 38.4% were women. Most of the respondents were elderly and old population, 38.4% are people between the ages of 50 and 64; and 43.8% were residents older than 65.

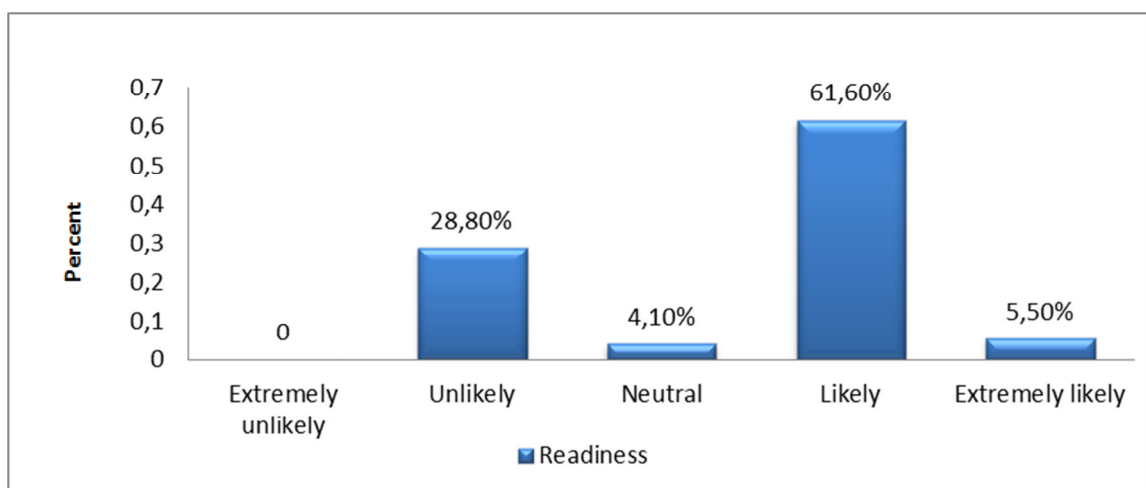
The study tried to investigate what are the specific problems that affect livelihoods of the people on Bjelašnica. Out of group of problems, respondents were asked to choose those directly affecting them and their household. According to these findings (Graph 1.), respondents pointed out as the major problems: harsh climate, no adequate labor market, dissatisfaction with health services, etc.

Graph 1.: Problems in the community (Q13: Which are the problems you are facing in the village?)



When asked if they are ready to participate and collaborate with local community regarding rural tourism development (Graph 2.), 61.6% of the respondents said they would likely be ready for involvement in such kind of development, which indicates high level of interest. Such findings are indicating that people in rural areas, with special reference on Bjelašnica locality; are aware of possible positive outcomes that this type of tourism can bring; and that they are ready to engage themselves in such kind of development.

Graph 2. Readiness to participate in rural tourism development of local population on Bjelašnica (Q22:How likely would you be to participate and collaborate with local community regarding rural tourism development?)



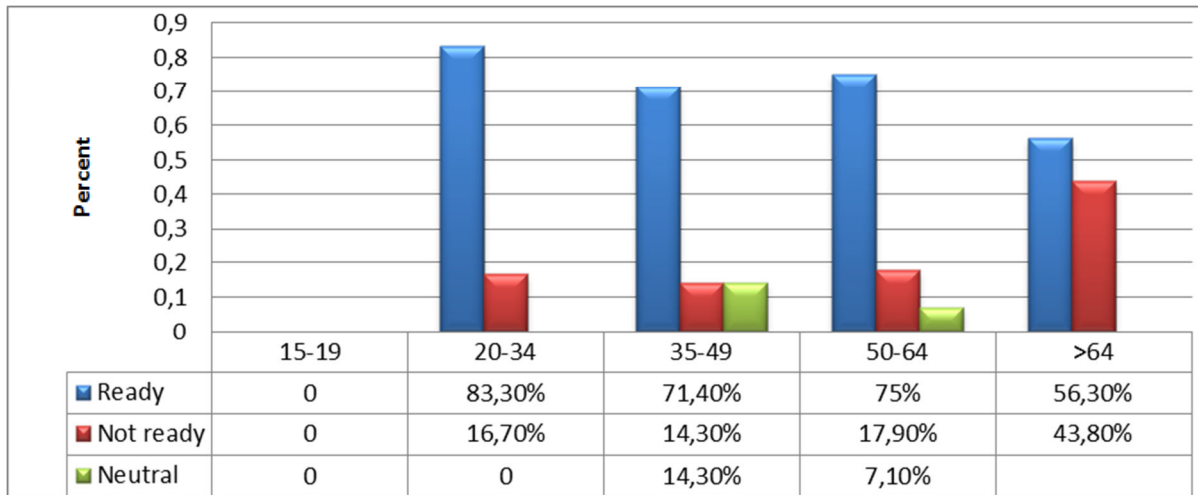
In order to determine which demographic and socio-economic variables influence readiness to get included in rural tourism on Bjelašnica, the nonparametric test of rank correlation was applied together with the Spearman rank correlation coefficient.

The Spearman rank correlation coefficient between the gender of respondents and readiness for rural tourism was -0.329^{**} ($df=76$, $p < 0.1$), which indicates that women showed less

interest for engaging in rural tourism development; and that men showed higher interest; 77.8% of men said they are ready, while only 50% of women said the same.

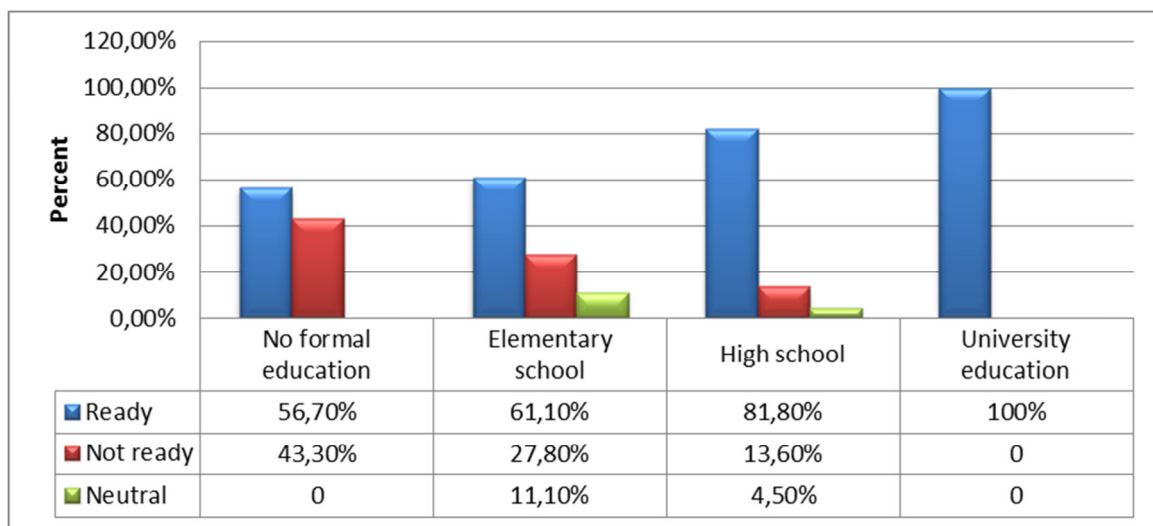
It was determined that age influences readiness for involvement in rural tourism. The correlation between the age of respondents and readiness for rural tourism was -0.319^{**} ($df=76$, $p < 0.1$), showing us that young people showed more positive attitude towards rural tourism development.

Graph 3. Readiness for rural tourism-age distribution



The variables education and readiness for rural tourism correlated with -0.319^{**} ($df=76$, $p < 0.1$), clearly showing that education has a significant influence on a positive attitude towards rural tourism development. A negative correlation means that the correlation is in the opposite direction of the set values of variables, which in a concrete situation means that more educated people have more positive attitudes towards rural tourism.

Graph 4. Readiness for rural tourism-education distribution



The following variable influencing attitude toward rural tourism development was number of household members. The number of household members and readiness for rural tourism correlated with 0.379^{**} ($df=76$, $p < 0.1$), indicating that large families, with more household members showed greater interest and a positive attitude towards rural tourism development.

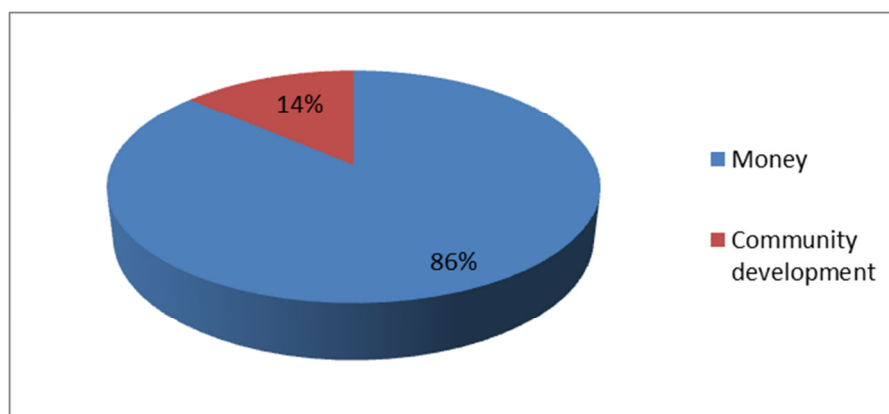
The correlation between variable that represents livestock breeding and attitude toward rural tourism development showed negative correlation: -0.231^* ($df=76$, $p < 0.5$), which in a

concrete situation means that people who take care of livestock breeding showed more negative attitude. The reason could be found in the fact that some of the respondents who said not to have livestock, explained it with lack of finances; and the opportunity for improving their financial status, they perhaps see in rural tourism.

In order to see how financial capital influences readiness for involvement in rural tourism, we compared it with income level households regularly receive. These two variables showed following correlation: $.307^*$ ($df=76$, $p < 0.5$), which means that respondents with higher income showed more positive attitudes towards rural tourism development.

Besides the factors that influence readiness in rural tourism involvement, study was also interested in motives. Therefore, respondents who answered they would be ready to involve themselves in rural tourism were asked to state their motives and 86.3% said they would do it basically for earning more money and improving their financial status; while 13.7% said they were not so much interested in just money but in community development, which would as a later consequence bring more improvement in every way for everyone in the community (Graph 5.).

Graph 5. Motives for engagement in rural tourism



The general purpose of this study was to provide analysis of possibilities for rural tourism development on Bjelašnica, and findings have shown that local population is to a large degree interested in cooperation of rural tourism development.

Local population showed they believe that tourism development can contribute positively to job opportunities and increased income generation. Through creation of employment and the generation of local revenue, rural tourism can lead to economic empowerment of local communities on Bjelašnica; which could as a consequence lead to poverty alleviation and creation of population stability. In this way tourism development on Bjelašnica can enhance the livelihoods of the local people. From this we can conclude that the development of rural tourism on Bjelašnica has the support of the local people as they believe that it can lead to economic improvement. In order for Bjelašnica to succeed in the development of rural tourism, it must be ensured that all the tourism related activities benefit the local communities, especially local people that would directly be involved in such kind of activities. Since Bjelašnica is very close to capital Sarajevo, initiative of rural tourism development could be of benefit not only for local communities, but for wider area of the city, and thus the state.

Having in mind that this type of tourism is recognized as one of the consequences of possible national park proclamation, the positive attitudes of local population towards this issue were of great importance too. The findings presented make a basis for academics and policymakers to consider the social value and economic potential of rural tourism in the area; in order to evaluate the success of rural tourism development based on the values and goals set by the communities.

Although the research findings are related to Bjelašnica, to some extent, they can also contribute to body of knowledge on the characteristics and goals of local population in rural hospitality, as well as to understand the difficulties they have to deal with.

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