

Wine Roads in the Development of Rural Tourism of North Western Croatia: Medjimurje Wine Road as Good Practice Example

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Abstract

Regarding the importance of specific segments of rural tourism, this article will analyze one example of good practice of Croatian continental wine roads, the Medjimurje Wine Road, its sustainability following its design/structure and implementation, until today, with an emphasis on inclusion and “coexistence” with heritage in the broadest sense (the culture of wine consumption, wine cellars, wine tasting, old crafts, gastronomy, tradition of the researched area, etc.). The article will also analyze the achieved results of the Medjimurje Wine Road, which can be used to develop this segment of rural tourism in other Croatian areas. Finally, the processed experiences will be extracted in terms of recommendations, guidelines for the promotion and development of the wine roads as one of the most important aspects of Croatian continental rural tourism.

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Keywords: Medjimurje County, Wine Roads, Rural Tourism, Medjimurje Wine Road.

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1 Introduction

The area of research in this paper is Medjmurje County, mainly agricultural and low-lying region, located in the far northern part of the Republic of Croatia, between the rivers Mura and Drava. Lowland landscape is characteristics of the Lower Medjmurje and mountainous of the Upper Medjmurje. On the north Medjmurje County borders with the Republic of Hungary, on the west with the Republic of Slovenia, on the south with the Varaždin County, and on the southeast with Koprivnica-Križevci County.

Thanks to the linking the tradition and culture, as well as the traditional rural way of life, some ten years ago in Medjmurje intensively began to develop rural tourism. Its development and expansion on the area of Medjmurje County positively influenced neighboring Slovenia, and the ideas and experiences of Medjmurje workers, who were returning from temporary work from Austria, Germany and Switzerland, where rural tourism came to life much earlier, and, with return home, they aimed to invest in Medjmurje. In addition, development of rural tourism in Medjmurje encourage also the individual family farms with the intention of preserving the existing resources of tradition, specific country estates, folk customs and traditional crafts, as well as the important fact that the natural environment was preserved on very high level, and river Mura was declared a protected area.

One of the important segments of the rural tourism in Medjmurje County are its wine roads/routes. The importance of the wine roads/routes of that County is reflected as an activity, which greatly contributes to the sustainable development of rural tourism on its territory. The wine roads/routes, except they have linked wine producers, offer other possibilities and benefits, especially those now so important, financing. In addition, these wine roads/routes confirmed to be a very acceptable way of providing vacation and consumption of native products, which, in turn, reflect, and keep, identity, tradition and culture, and, ultimately, the region's identity, but also the national one.

2 Methodology

Work methodology on the researched subject consisted of:

1. collection and analysis of existing relevant literature and documentation on rural tourism in Medjmurje,
2. collection and analysis of existing relevant literature on Medjmurje Wine Road,

3. field work and visits of facilities/farms and families, situated on Medjimurje Wine Road, and
4. writing a lecture/article on the basis of collected/obtained researched results.

In addition, it was also used a database founded on theoretical consulting the existing literature, as well as interpretation, comparison and analysis of data collected from other secondary sources, cartographic analysis, graphs, spatial plan of Medjimurje County, interviews with tourism professionals from Medjimurje County, as well as the internet.

3 Medjimurje Wine Road as a generator for the development of Medjimurje County

Winemaking has traditionally been one of the most important branches of the economy of Medjimurje County. The cultivation of grapes/grapevine, wine production and cultivation in the Upper Medjimurje area around Štrigova, Sveti Urban and Železna Gora, are known from antiquity, and, for example, from 15th century the Zrinski Counts generate highest income of wine in Medjimurje (the well known is the wine cellar of Nikola Šubić Zrinski in Štrigova). And because of wine growing, the most important and best known Medjimurje tourism products is wine road with the official name Medjimurje Wine Road. The initiative for its formation, in the year 1999, encouraged the Medjimurje Winegrowers and Winemakers Association "Hortus Croatiae" and Medjimurje County Tourist Association. This wine road outspread on the territory of Upper Medjimurje, hilly landscape on the northwest of Medjimurje County, with the highest elevation of 344 m, Mohokos, with woods, fields and meadows on the northern hillsides, while on the southern and southeastern hillsides have been planted about 1,100 hectares of vineyards, mostly owned by individuals, and small part, about 140 hectares, is owned by firm "Agromedjimurje". Sixty winegrowers produce wines with controlled origin, of which ten have the status of top quality wines that Medjimurje vineyard designated as one of the best in Croatia. The most important brands/sorts of Medjimurje vineyards are superb white sorts/brands (chardonnay, riesling, pinot gris and white, etc.) and red wine (pinot noir), and the predicates are also represented (selection of berries, ice harvest,...), as well as champagne. Because of growing these noble sorts/brands, Medjimurje vineyard is considered as one of the best cultivated parts of Croatia. Mentioned wine road, depending on the settlements which goes through, change its name. The purpose of its organization was, above all, the desire for development of rural tourism and ecological agriculture in Med-

Jimurje County. Also, Medjimurje Wine Road has duty to meet the tourists with quality of Medjimurje wines, and to promote grape growing and wine production.

According to the evaluation of the Institute for Tourism from Zagreb, Medjimurje Wine Road is defined as “a superior wine road of national importance. Thus it becomes one of the key tourist attractions, not just in this county, but in the whole Croatia”².

Medjimurje Wine Road encompasses exemplary structure of vineyards, production of excellent wines and tourist offer, and it is outspread, as star-like itinerary over 30 kilometers long, through beautiful scenery of the Upper Medjimurje, along there are special wine offers facilities (facilities with special authority and sign belonging to Medjimurje Wine Road: wine tasting facilities, wine shops and other facilities), cultural and natural tourist attractions, as well as the appropriate tourist/travel services. Medjimurje Wine Road is marked by signposts and welcome signs, since year 2003 with the “brown” tourist traffic signs, and its main routes pass through the villages/settlements Lopatinec, Železna Gora, Štrigova and Sveti Urban.

Emphasized development of Medjimurje vineyards start in early 90’s of the last century, when begin to develop a very small family farms, over fifteen of them, which, although on smaller areas, they start to place on market high-quality wines. On the Medjimurje Wine Road there are thirty excellent settled/organized facilities in which, individually or in groups, can enjoy a guided tasting of premium wines and traditional food specialties³. Guided tasting usually include five wines that represent a particular winemaker, but also the wine offer of the road/route where belonging. In addition to wine tasting, winemakers are talking about the characteristics of their wines, history of their family, heritage of the area, and more.

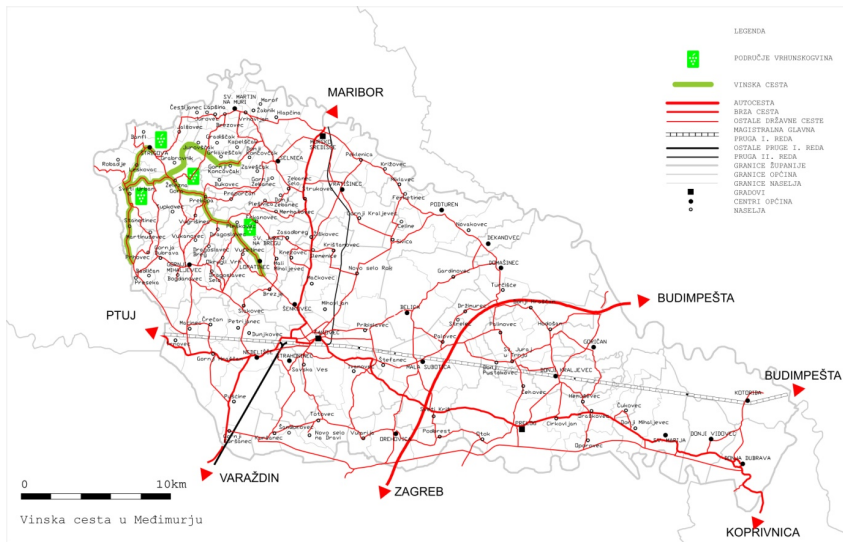
When tasting wines, with special attention visitors are sensitize the culture of wine drinking, so they become familiar with technology, characteristics of individual brands/sorts, proper ways of wine tasting, as well as with history, art, customs and, in general, with the way how the people of the region are living. In addition, during the year, on the wine road organized various wine festivals, especially those related to “wine saints” such as Vincekovo, Urbanovo or Sveti Martin. As it is evident from the above mentioned, in the last ten years Medjimurje winegrowers have recognized the richness and value of their own area/landscape, successfully went into improving the quality of production, so they are still in an ongoing process

²Kušen, E. (2003-2005) The system of marking and interpretation of tourist attractions of Medjimurje County, Institute for Tourism, Zagreb.

³List of wine tasting facilities and wine cellars on Medjimurje Wine Road see on: URL: <http://www.tzm.hr/article.php?g=45> (February 2011).

of transformation from successful producers toward designed placement through wine tasting facilities, wine shops and tourist rural family farms.

Figure 1: Medjimurje Wine Road (author: Rebeka Mesarić Žabčić)



3.1 Facilities for rural tourism on the Medjimurje WineRoad

Facilities with a wine offering on the Medjimurje Wine Road are classified into three categories: *P* – sales (one cluster of grapes), *D* – sales and tasting (two clusters of grapes) and *K* – sales and tasting in settled/organized tasting facility (three clusters of grapes).

Sales (P) of wines with controlled origin in cellars and on family farms is possible at the following locations: Horvat Family, Sveti Urban 279; Trstenjak Family, Banfi 31; Vladimir Knehtl, Sveti Urban 82; Novak Family, Banfi 202; Mirko Vlašić, Železna Gora 80; Dragutin Munđar, Frkanovec; Holcinger Family, Vukanovec 3; Bobnjar August, Robadje 130; Dvanajšćak-Kozol, Dragoslavec 81; Bojan Štampar, Sveti Urban 2 and Hažić Family, Jurovčak 72.

With *sales of premium wines and tasting (D)* dealing: Lebar-Židov Family, Železna Gora (premium wines); Belović Family, Železna Gora 2b (premium wines); Josip Zdravec, Sveti Urban 103d, Alojz Novak, Sveti Urban 70 (premium wines) and Jambrović Family, I. G. Kovačića 112, Lopatinec (top sparkling wines).

Tasting facilities and wine shops (K) are divided into two categories. The first category refers to the *supremely organized/settled facilities, premium wines and guided tastings*. In this category are: Wine House Lovrec, Sveti Urban 133; Wine House Cmrečnjak, Sveti Urban 273, and Wine cellar and tasting facility Terbotz, Železna Gora 113. The second category are *beautifully organized/settled facilities, premium wines and excellent guided tastings* in which they are listed: Branimir Jakopić, Železna Gora 92; Wine Shop Čanadi, Železna Gora 115; Wine Shop Kunčić, Banfi 125; Wine House Family Turk, Vučetinec 107b; Matanović-Provin, Sveti Urban and Winery Agromedjimurje, Štrigova bb.

As a large share of wine sales with controlled origin refers to the sale in wine cellars and on family farms, this is very important for economic development, self-employment of the population and sustainable development of the County.

According to the latest figures from the Sector for Tourism of Croatian Chamber of Economy from the year 2008⁴ in Medjimurje County was registered only eight tourist rural family farms, which were disposed with ten beds, and all offer meal service and they are wine shops, respectively wine tasting facilities. Probably too much legal requirements caused that small number of households are involved in the system of tourist rural family farms⁵.

The first facility of “real/true” rural tourism was Goričanec in Sveti Martin on Mura. Among other tourist rural farms on Medjimurje Wine Road, there are: “Potrti kotač” and “Jastreb” in Jurovčak, “Mala hiža” and “Hozjan” in Mačkovac, “Štefova klet” and “K Jeleni” in Gornja Dubrava.

Facilities on Medjimurje Wine Road are open all year round, and they are working by appointment or upon previous announcement.

3.2 “Modernization” of old houses for rural tourism on the Medjimurje Wine Road

Buildings of traditional construction, which among others include the so-called “kleti” (little house, cabin in vineyard), representing a richness of cultural contents and it should be treated carefully. Tourism in the rural economy, especially the wine one, which among others promotes the local gastronomy, traditional ar-

⁴This is a study “Actual state of tourism in Croatian rural areas in the year 2008”, Sector for Tourism, Croatian Chamber of Economy, Zagreb 2009. URL: <http://hgk.biznet.hr/hgk/fileovi/13081.ppt> (February 2011).

⁵Detailed in: Strategy for development of Croatian tourism to the year 2010 (2003) Zagreb: Ministry of Tourism of the Republic of Croatia. URL:<http://www.mint.hr/UserDocsImages/Strategija%20hrvatskog%20turizma%20-%20finalna%20verzija.pdf> (February 2011).

chitecture, ethnographic collections, etc., overall makes cultural tourism of the village/countryside, in the considered case Medjmurje, because it promotes the heritage of the past. And these houses are part of Croatian cultural offer, because on special, own way, they are based on the products of the human spirit, experience and have cultural and historical dimension. Their owners can not be seen merely as investors in the sequence of procedures and actions that may allow them to finance specific programs on their economy, in terms of becoming part of Medjmurje Wine Road, but they, without exception, should be the guardians and promoters of cultural values which are, often, ignored. They allow visitors a close relationship with the local culture, heritage, wanting to bring them closer to each other, and thereby indicate their importance. Therefore, examples of rural family farms on Medjmurje Wine Road, which work successfully, show how other forms of tourism in the country can, and must, have a market value that would be appropriately represented. For the corresponding relationship to traditional values, which include the appropriate “treatment” of Medjmurje old houses, which are included in the tourist offer, ensuring their survival and how long it will develop tourism, cultural and rural, in that area.

In Medjmurje, ten years back, thanks to the merging tradition and culture, the returning consciousness, the capital, the desire to achieve higher investment profits, but also the traditional way of life, were intensively started the “modernization” of old houses, so-called “kleti”, and in this way, gradually began development of rural tourism in this area. On this phenomenon, as already mentioned, are positively influenced neighboring Slovenia, Austria and Germany, where rural tourism is developed in the past. Medjmurje had the prerequisites for the development of rural tourism, above all, preserved traditional ambiance, but also raised population awareness about the need to protect natural and cultural landscapes. Directing individual economies to preserving the existing resources of tradition, renovation of specific rural properties in order to preserve authenticity, “nurturing” folk customs and traditional crafts, as well as the fact that preserve of the natural environment is at a high level, and designate a protected area of the Mura River, were additional incentives for individuals’ returnees, but also for the County, for such way of investment. “Modernization” and restoring of old houses for rural tourism is a recent occurrence in Medjmurje, consequently, at least for now, linked with a return of Medjmurje individuals from abroad. The survey results showed that the total number of returnees, 6 of them or 2.9%, are invested in this new form of tertiary activity⁶.

⁶More in: Mesarić Žabčić, R. (2005) Effect of migrations on the transformation of the settlements of Medjmurje (Doctoral dissertation).

3.3 Other types of tourism on the Medjmurje Wine Road

On Medjmurje Wine Road, it can be extracted several types of tourism, such as cultural, local history/homeland, wellness, hiking, hunting, fishing and gastronomy, all attractive, because their starting point is ambience and originality, some well developed, and the other at the beginning, but all are important factors of quality offer of that wine road.

Medjmurje region, from the earliest times, has attracted tourists from all regions, apart from its natural resources (vineyards, water, forests, etc.) also with cultural heritage. About the benefits for development of cultural and other forms of tourism in that region, evidenced numerous archeological findings from pre-historic times, antiquity and the Middle Ages. Most of today's settlements and marketplaces in Medjmurje was formed during the 13th century, confirmed by numerous documents which mention the multitude of royal, noble and church property. On Medjmurje Wine Road there is a valuable cultural heritage which includes churches some of them painted with frescoes, chapels and castles⁷.

As pointed out representatives of the Medjmurje County Tourist Board, when visiting Medjmurje tourists are particularly enthusiastic about natural beauty, organized hunting, driving on the "skela" (ferry) across the river Mura, Medjmurje carnival, harvest grapes in Štrigova and Železna Gora, the quality of wine, a tour and tasting the wine in wine tasting facilities, hospitality, rich domestic cuisine with unique specialties, horseback riding and visiting local attractions.

Rural tourism offer on the Medjmurje Wine Road completes a source of thermal water of high mineralization in the village Vučkovec. Today on this place is "Spa & Golf Resort Sveti Martin", which has become a unique destination in the continental part of Croatia for relaxation and wellness, sports and active holidays, conferences and team building, with superb gourmet experience and a wonderful nature. The quality of Spa Sveti Martin was recognized by the Croatian Chamber of Economy, which was awarded them with first prize in the category of thermal mineral spas for the year 2006⁸.

Although skiing is only in its initial phase of development on Medjmurje Wine Road, in villages Železna Gora, Prekopa and Jurovčak already exists two cable cars with several maintained ski trails and sledding area for the lovers of this sports.

When it is about hunting tourism, it carried on a rich hunting grounds of the 600 km, attracts numerous hunters from Italy, Austria and Germany and it is an excellent revenue generator. Hunting, as one of the economy branches in

⁷About all of these attractions of cultural and tourist offer on the Medjmurje Wine Road see more in: Kalšan, V. (2006) History of Medjmurje, Čakovec, pp. 41-46.

⁸More: URL:<http://www.toplicesvetimartin.hr/en> (February 2011).

Medjimurje, has registered over one thousand hunters, who are engaged in the preservation, protection, breeding and hunting wild animals. Sport fishing has been developed on the rivers Mura and Drava.

Folk customs are most notably in the way of building “hiža” (houses), traditional dress, wedding ceremonies, Medjimurje songs, music and dance. Medjimurje cultural societies have preserved many traditional customs, which “live” through a yearlong rich cultural program.

Food and its preparation is part of cultural history and thus part of the cultural, tourism offer on Medjimurje Wine Road. Gastronomy offer says about the traditional culture of particular region and about many other specifics (development of cultural, religious, social and other peculiarities). Food and wine, the production of local specialties, as well as preparing “healthy food”, is an important segment of tourism offer. It is attractive if it is the characteristic of a place or region in which the tourist-visitor primarily residence. Food offered on the Medjimurje Wine Road is native, marked by a number of simple, delicious meals/dishes. Every tourist rural family farm strives with its specific gastronomic offer to attract tourists, offering a variety of specialties, those who are truly specific to a particular area or part of family tradition, and often reaching out for knowledge and grandmothers recipes and the menus consist of already forgotten dishes. Also, caterers their own distinctive style nurtured by traditional dishes, which provide that special brand on the gastronomy offer on Medjimurje Wine Road.

3.4 Family agriculture/farming and production of ecological healthy food in the function of rural tourism on Medjimurje Wine Road

The conditions for agricultural production and related food industries in Medjimurje vary depending on creditworthiness and the quality of agricultural land. For Medjimurje, agriculture was one of the important factors for life survival in the past. Major parceling and small estates with a large number of landowners limit the significant results in the current agricultural production. Traditionally agricultural area with large arable land, which enables high-quality and ecological healthy agricultural production, infrastructure development, climatic conditions and the relative soil quality, evidence the existence of favorable conditions for adequate evaluation of the importance of family agriculture in the overall economy of Medjimurje County. For agricultural production only areas of the Lower Medjimurje are suitable, pleistocene plane and flat parts of the Upper Medjimurje. Although it is difficult to describe the most appropriate use of agricultural lands due to unregulated relations and lack of required data, it should be assumed that on the best areas the production of agricultural crops will be organized that pro-

vide higher income per unit area, i.e. fruits, vegetables, ornamental plants, and the like. According to data from the Medjmurje Chamber of Crafts for year 2002, most of the agricultural structure consists of small family farms which are approximately 21,000 with 37,000 hectares of belonging land, the average used size is about 1.75 hectares per farm, while agricultural land covers 495.4 km² or 67.9% of total territory of the Medjmurje County⁹. Although the existing agricultural areas still retain the intended purpose, and the space is used for agricultural purposes, there are some visible transformations, changes in the use of agricultural land (e.g. clustering, fallow), though still not to the extent expectations. Therefore, it is necessary to further encourage and guide/direct the existing farms, both because of natural conditions that exist in Upper Medjmurje, along Medjmurje Wine Road, on expected production of ecological healthy food, as well as of supplementing the content of tourism offer which would, inter alia, included the possibility of sales of food produced for the market, not only for their own needs or the needs of a small number of consumers and tourists, as is the case now.

4 Conclusion

Tourism of Medjmurje is based on traditional culture of Medjmurje village, and its modern components are preserved environment, healthy and untouched nature, food produced in fields that are uncontaminated with pesticides and herbicides, high-quality awarded wines, exploitation of the Mura river and its shoreline, hunting tourism, opening a wine tasting facilities, wine shops, and other forms of rural tourism. It should also be noted a gastronomy based on a traditional cuisine, linked to the movement of organic agriculture, which is represented on the Medjmurje Wine Road. Preserving indigenous culture of rural life is a modern and thoughtful way of developing tourism in Medjmurje, which is in accordance with the ICOMOS "Chart on Cultural Tourism"¹⁰ because it does not destroy culture and provides an opportunity for tourism sustainability, not just passively, preserving cultural forms, but above all, active, achieving economic aspects.

Importance of Medjmurje Wine Road is reflected in the fact that it is an integral part of the overall tourist offer of Medjmurje County, and with its organization, purpose and results it is set aside from, unfortunately, still present phenomenon in Croatia characterized by insufficient activity to identify contemporary trends in tourism, disorganized environment and facilities, insufficient education,

⁹Medjmurje Chamber of Crafts, data for year 2002. More: URL: <http://www.obrtnickakomora-medjmurja.hr> (February 2011).

¹⁰ICOMOS Charter of Cultural Tourism, Bruxelles, 1976. URL: http://www.icomos.org/tourism/tourism_charter.html (February 2011).

lack of diverse content, the required capital and entrepreneurship. Medjimurje Wine Road, that includes around twenty winegrowers and winemakers, is an example of good practice and well-kept wine road, which is active involved in the tourist offer. Although tourism in Medjimurje County is not a primary activity, it is interesting to note that the Medjimurje Wine Road is significantly involved in county's rural development.

Since the "opening" of Medjimurje Wine Road in 2004, after just three years, in 2007, the project was officially awarded with the "Green Flower" award, given by the Croatian National Tourist Board in the program/action "Green Flower", for the original tourist offer, as the best tourist product of continental Croatia¹¹. However, for this, above all, should create a "critical mass" of quality wines and improved wine tasting facilities, and Medjimurje never scarce with quality wines. Medjimurje Wine Road has a very positive reaction, and some of the most important are family farms higher interest for improving facilities for the guests reception and the increased interest in visiting Medjimurje Wine Road. The figure of sixty thousand visitors annually, who participate in tours on Medjimurje hills, more than ratings and opinions of the profession confirm the quality of Medjimurje Wine Road. It is not known the exact number of Medjimurje Wine Road visitors, but according to available data from the Central Bureau of Statistics, the number of tourist nights in Medjimurje County from year to year increases, so in the 2008 there were 73,296 overnight stays compared to 50,177 in the year 2006¹². The project itself was not developed in a desired speed, primarily because of the modest financial resources, since the only investor was Medjimurje County Tourist Board which has a very modest budget, but also because of very strict criteria for the "connection" to Medjimurje Wine Road, which is prescribed by the Council of Medjimurje Wine Road, professional body of Medjimurje County Tourist Board, the starter and main investor in infrastructure (labeling, etc.), that "manages" Medjimurje Wine Road. However, the key criterion or priority that it respects is quality, not quantity. That was the guiding principle which guided Medjimurje winegrowers that last ten years successfully raise the quality of production and effectively implement the process of transformation from successful producers to designed placement of the wine tasting facilities, wine taprooms and tourist rural family farms. Regarding the achieved success, the project Medjimurje Wine Road continued with labeling with a tourist "brown" signs, issuing promotional brochure-map, figuring out "The Wine Museum", permanent education of the subjects on Medjimurje Wine Road in order to raise the quality of services and

¹¹URL: <http://www.tzm.hr/article.php> (February 2011) and URL: <http://www.tzm.hr/article.php> (February 2011).

¹²Detailed on: URL: <http://www.medjimurska-zupanija.hr> (February 2011).

facilities arrangement, further encouraging subjects to participate in the system of tourist rural family farms, and the necessary systematic promotion and marketing. Plans for the future are numerous and relate to the increase in accommodation facilities, building a hotels and a viewpoints, and arranging ethnological collections and web pages which will include all necessary information.

Experiences that is possible to “extract” from the example of Medjimurje Wine Road, which could serve as a kind of recommendations for the deriving and development of wine roads/routes as one of the most important form of rural tourism in Croatia are as follows:

1. appreciation and use local features (specific production and products – wine) and comparative advantages (the tradition of wine production, ecological area, cultural and historical tradition) in order to achieve economic revitalization (economic revival of rural areas),
2. understanding the needs of the ambience and the necessity of regional and local government cooperation,
3. contribution to regional tourism development (regional heritage and the most developed economic sector as the need and opportunity to develop local community of the specific area, which is consistent with the objectives of sustainable tourism (development) and it is one of the essential elements of development the region in a whole),
4. wine roads/routes are an important factor in rural development whose legacy is inherited through the special and specific enological offer and authentic dishes,
5. wine roads/routes as a supplement to other tourist offer/attractions, to other tourist products and to already existed, developed products (thus reducing the costs of the promotion of the region),
6. “transferability” to other regions and/or states where is a similar quality of offer, which can attract visitors, where they want to take advantage of sustainable tourism (development) and, at the same time, preserve their own heritage,
7. promotion and development of sustainable tourism: the project Medjimurje Wine Road is focused on existing, natural resources of rural area,
8. design and development of wine roads/routes is often a major (re)orientation of the countryside to tourism which is, in fact, essential process to preserve

rural areas as a primary areas for producing the food and other goods, as well as areas with emphasized natural, traditional and cultural elements,

9. wine roads/routes represent a new offer and additional earnings from tourism for tourist rural family farms, which is realized by selling their own products, providing accommodation and food/meals, and means enriching the tourism with new contents,
10. “real” wine roads/routes require the active involvement of the whole family of one tourist rural family farm, which is particularly suitable now, in terms of high unemployment, poor condition of the country and the economic crisis, and
11. wine roads/routes improves the quality of life in the countryside, which is a prerequisite for the development of sustainable agriculture.

The development of (rural) tourism in Medjmurje County, because of traditional agricultural orientation, which is why residents have been searching for additional sources of income, emerged as a logical choice. It was also encouraged by the positive influences of neighboring Slovenia, Austria and Germany, where rural tourism is already come to life. In Medjmurje County rural tourism seeks to consolidate and rebuild county’s relatively well-organized space with its wide range, including the Medjmurje Wine Road, and offer it to the tourists as customers, while acknowledging the importance of the environment for the development of rural tourism. Rural tourism in Medjmurje County has the potential to meet the expectations of tourists, create additional income, employment and entrepreneurial opportunities of the local population, as well as serve as support for other economic activities. Current practice of development of rural tourism in Medjmurje County, especially the development of wine roads, proved to be very successful, especially in the development of small entrepreneurship by instituting tourist rural family farms, and since it was started deliberately and intentionally it could serve as an example of good practice of development of rural tourism in other Croatian regions, especially continental ones. To develop rural tourism in Medjmurje County successfully, especially its other forms, including the wine roads, it is important to work more on effective legislation and to try to remove administrative difficulties in establishing tourist rural family farms. Since Medjmurje Wine Road is developed in the Upper Medjmurje, it should explore the opportunities and the factors that rural tourism comes to life in the area of Lower Medjmurje. In all above mentioned activities, the active participation of local and regional communities, or county, particularly in securing the necessary, and yet still insufficient/inadequate, financial support, is very important.

As the presented example of the Medjimurje Wine Road showed, wine roads are part of the broad concept of rural tourism, which encompasses much more than just a holiday in the countryside. They are intended for targeted groups of consumers, tourists, lovers of wine and wine culture, and they are also important because it allows direct contact between producers and consumers using the products. Wine roads are promising option for a better future of rural communities, rich and good potential, which further possibilities for exploitation should be taken into account, because they make tourist offer special and richer in the area where they are existing. Maintenance the wine roads contribute to increasing security in rural areas, which are becoming a significant holder of numerous activities, improvement of agricultural production, as well as rural development and rural tourism in a whole.

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