

APITOURISM AS A DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITY FOR HEALTH TOURISM - A CASE STUDY OF SURČIN CITY MUNICIPALITY

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Abstract: *The city municipality of Surčin is the youngest municipality in Belgrade, which is an example of good practice when it comes to the development of special forms of tourism that exclude mass tourism, but are based on the specifics of the local community, preserved natural values and the inheritance of cultural heritage from the past. The Sava River, the protected natural asset Bojčin Forest, canals, ponds, hunting grounds and forest areas rich in flora and fauna, along with the Aviation Museum, the Fenek Monastery, the traditional event Bojčin Cultural Summer, but also numerous ethnographic features of the so-called Donji Srem (rural architecture, horse breeding, viticulture, gastronomy, Stajko's ethnic house, multi-ethnic communities of Slovaks and Serbs in Boljevci and Dobanovci), are just some of the motives that attract tourists to Surčin. Following international tourism trends, apitourism has been developing in Surčin in recent years, becoming an increasingly important development opportunity for health tourism. This type of tourism is more recent, and is translated as beekeeping tourism, and implies various benefits in the prevention of health, from consuming beekeeping products to staying in the direct vicinity of bees.*

Keywords: *apitourism, health tourism, opportunity, development, City Municipality of Surčin*

INTRODUCTION

It should be emphasized that, according to many authors, health is the oldest and strongest motive for tourist movements. Nowadays, the highly branched mutual interactions between tourism, health and health culture within the framework of contemporary social movements are particularly relevant [1].

Health tourism is one of the special forms of tourism, or in other words, one of the market niches. Although not as massive as some other types of tourism, health tourism has its audience, even dedicated devotees. Unlike other tourists, who first choose a travel destination, and then focus on the content of their stay, health tourists have in mind, first of all, their health needs which guide them in choosing a destination. A tourist, who is also a patient, buys a very specific service and it always has some health aspects [2].

According to the Dictionary of Tourism [3], health tourism is 'a temporary change of an individual's permanent residence to a certain more favorable climatic or bathing place for the purpose of health prevention, curative and rehabilitation. It is, therefore, a type of tourism in which the main motive of the tourist trip is the preservation of health'. In modern conditions, trips that are categorized as a form of health tourism are undertaken in order to maintain, stabilize and, if possible, restore physical and mental well-being, using natural healing factors, medical services, sports-recreational and wellness content outside the place of permanent residence. The goal of such a trip is to preserve health as long as possible and improve the individual's current state of health [4].

Health tourism is a global phenomenon of the 21st century. Millions of tourists from all over the world travel to different destinations in order to preserve and improve their psychophysical health [5]. Health tourism has the task of helping to preserve and improve health by means of natural factors of the environment [6]. The connection between health and tourism is succinctly expressed by Alfier, claiming that 'Health is in fact one of the oldest, most permanent and strongest motives for tourism, and that tourism in all its forms, more or less, always performs a health function' [7]. Health tourism is a type of tourism that has important specifics. On the one hand, what is very acceptable is the off-season character of this form of tourism. Health tourists travel throughout the year in search of improving some aspects of health (mental, physical, etc.), which significantly contributes to the continuity of the tourist offer. On the other hand, this type of tourism is quite demanding in terms of special, medical infrastructure and personnel, which is not the case in many other forms of tourism. It is mostly about very expensive content: real estate, technical devices, equipment, and especially the necessary professional staff. Considering the above, it is understandable that health tourism services are expensive [8].

THE APITOURISM CONCEPT

The word api-tourism comes from: the Latin word *apis* - bee (honey) and the English word *tour* - the pleasure of traveling and staying in different places. It indicates a destination where tourists will have the opportunity to find out and learn everything about bees, honey and beehives. It is a type of specific, i.e. selective or special forms of tourism (niche tourism), that is, it can be classified as a subtype of health tourism. Apitherapy as a branch of beekeeping is becoming an increasingly sought-after solution for preserving health, and along with it, apitourism has developed. Given that beekeepers are faced with new trials almost every day, primarily related to climate change, but also infectious and invasive bee diseases, it is evident that beekeeping is quite an insecure occupation if beekeeping production is not developed and the range of products and services is not expanded within the beekeeping household. It is precisely for this reason that with apitherapy and apitourism being included in the offer, every beekeeper without excessive initial investments (except for upgrading knowledge) could have a new additional source of income. The business of apitherapy and apitourism should be taken seriously, as well as any other job, with the awareness that in addition to wanting, knowledge, skill and ability are also necessary [9].

It can be said that apitourism is an innovative form of agrotourism, an alternative form of health or spa tourism. It deals with raising awareness about the importance of bees in the ecosystem and apiculture, and is becoming more and more popular due to the increased interest of people in apitherapy and wellness. This requires special organization, spatial advice and specific training of the api-host. Namely, a beekeeper engaged in apitourism must be educated in various fields: biology, zoology, chemistry, economics; and apitourism requires additional knowledge of marketing, catering, psychology and foreign languages, as well as the specific provision of first aid in case of bee stings and possibly the most severe, anaphylactic shock. This type of active vacation is the result of numerous studies, according to which beekeepers live longer compared to their peers who do other jobs.

Apitourism came into being in Slovenia in 2016, after the government of this country, at the suggestion of the beekeeping association, was the first to adopt a strategy of integrating beekeeping and tourism. Slovenia is the world's leading destination for beekeeping, the so-called apitourism, with more than 10,000 beekeeping farms and over 17,000 beekeeping colonies, and is one of the first countries with certified apitourism services. The Tourist Organization of Slovenia and the Slovenian Beekeeping Association have jointly designed a series of initiatives for a sustainable approach to apitourism. They provided support to tourist agencies in designing arrangements that offer tourists interesting combinations of rich eco-content, such as wellness vacations with local honey tastings. The trend spread around the world, so api-centers started to develop in many countries from Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia to Greece and America. Apitourism experienced a boom in Serbia and the region after the outbreak of the corona pandemic, when people started to turn to nature and a healthier way of life. At the proposal of the Slovenian Beekeeping Association, the UN General Assembly declared May 20, 2017 as World Bee Day. Serbia supported this initiative because its beekeeping is similar to the one in Slovenia. Beekeeping is at a very high level in these two countries and they represent an important agricultural branch. It is being celebrated all over the planet since 2018. The date commemorates the birthday of Anton Janša, the founder and teacher of modern beekeeping from the 18th century.

The court beekeeper of Empress Maria Theresa and academic painter, born in Breznica, today's Slovenia, in 1734. In his youth, he made a studio in a barn with his brothers. Soon afterwards, although illiterate, they went to Vienna and enrolled in the painting academy. He developed an interest in beekeeping since his father had 100 beehives. In 1770, Maria Theresa appointed him the court beekeeper and the first imperial instructor in the monarchy. He became the first appointed teacher of beekeeping. He kept bees in the imperial gardens, and he travelled presenting his observations on the migration of beehives to various pastures. After his death, Maria Theresa published his "Complete Guide to Beekeeping" and issued a decree obliging all beekeeping teachers to use his book [10].

Beekeeping tourism promotes the culture and traditions of rural communities in a sustainable way. It includes a visit to beekeeping farms, where guests can observe and participate in the activities of beekeepers (so-called active participation), learn something about this tradition, about the nutritional and healing properties of honey and can, in addition, taste and buy honey and numerous products made from it.



Figure 1: Anton Janša [10]

Slovenia was the first in the world to develop apitourism - an innovative tourist product that is a combination of tourism and beekeeping. It is a unique travel experience and a form of sustainable and responsible tourism linked to the tradition of beekeeping. Currently, there are already 45 certified providers of apitourism services in Slovenia and they are the only ones in the world to have beekeeping tourist guides [11].

Recently, attractive destinations for tourists have become places rich in beehives and bees. A big advantage is that apitourism is combined with other branches of tourism, such as village and rural tourism, as well as with excursion tourism by organizing trips for visitors. Apitourism, i.e. beekeeping tourism, refers to the concept of travel that is combined with getting to know bees and beekeeping. It is mostly chosen by weekend tourists who want to relax in nature and escape from the hustle and bustle of the city.

In California, there are already several api-centers that, in addition to the beekeeping experience, offer their guests enjoyment and relaxation in spa centers that are surrounded by an aerosol of beehives. In addition to honey massages and other health and beauty treatments with bee products, these specialized ranches offer stays in api-chambers, which are the equivalent of living in a beehive and where people breathe air from the hive that is rich in bioactive compounds. Visitors have the opportunity to get to know the world of bees on the spot in the apiary. The technique of honey production is presented to them, they can spin it and taste it. Workshops on the importance of bee products, making ointments, balms, creams, liqueurs and everything else that is obtained by combining honey and medicinal plants are organized.

BASIC CHARACTERISTICS OF SURČIN CITY MUNICIPALITY AS A TOURIST DESTINATION

The city municipality of Surčin is the youngest municipality in Belgrade, formed in 2004 from part of the municipality of Zemun. It includes the southern edge of the Pannonian Plain, along the Sava River, i.e. the western territorial parts of the city of Belgrade. Surčin is a Belgrade municipality characterized by an extremely favorable traffic position, which represents one of the most significant potentials for the development of tourism in the future. The municipality abounds in preserved natural potentials for the development of tourism (Bojčin Forest, Sava River, Bečmenska Bara and Živača ponds, hunting grounds, etc.), as well as interesting cultural heritage (Fenek Monastery, Aviation Museum, Stajko's ethno house, etc.).

In nautical village Biser in Boljevcu, there is a complex of houses for accommodation on the water, for all lovers of the Sava river, while in the protected natural asset Bojčin Forest in Progar, there are Bojčin log cabins. Since 2009, the traditional cultural and artistic manifestation Bojčin Cultural Summer has been organized on the open summer stage in Bojčin Forest in Progar, which has become a unique brand of Surčin on the tourism market of the capital. The municipality is rich in numerous preserved natural resources. In addition to the Sava River, the most significant natural potentials include Bojčinska Bara and Živača ponds and canals, the protected natural asset Bojčin Forest, forests Crni lug, Dobanovački zabran, Cerova greda and Zidine hunting grounds (Crni lug and Dobanovac). In addition to picnic areas in natural assets (Bojčin Forest with an open summer theater scene, Bojčin log cabins for accommodation, ethnic restaurant, trim trail, etc.), the City Municipality of Surčin has made significant efforts to revive certain spatial units (Nautical village Biser in Boljevcu with a total of 16 modernly equipped cottages for accommodation on the Sava River, a restaurant, a congress center, a marina, a Tourist Information Center and an arranged picnic area with summer cottages, a bicycle path, sports fields and a park for the youngest visitors).

There are numerous other capacities that are included in the material base for the development of tourism in the territory of the Surčin municipality: Stremen farm, Queen pools, S club, Sekulić and Majetić wineries, Bulić and Surčin stables, Živković pools, as well as numerous restaurants, hotels and other types of catering establishments, such as the Romanija

motel, Runolist restaurant, Živkin cafe and restaurant, Bojčin ethnic restaurant, Airport garni hotel, China town hotel and others [12].

When it comes to cultural and historical assets in the area of the municipality of Surčin, the Fenek monastery occupies an important place. The monastery belongs to the group of monasteries in Fruška Gora, although it is spatially dislocated. According to a legend, it was built by Stefan and Angelina Branković in the second half of the 15th century, while the first written record dates back to the 16th century (1563). On the right side of the road that leads from Jakov to Boljevcı is the Golden Cross, a stone monument, i.e. a boundary stone of the former property of the Fenek monastery erected in 1747. It got its name according to the legend that the range of the Turkish cannons that hit the Serbs fleeing across the Sava to the Habsburg Monarchy ended at this very place [13].



Figure 2: Fenek monastery, Source: Tourist Organization of the City Municipality of Surčin, 2022.

When it comes to recorded cultural assets in the area of the municipality of Surčin, the Aviation Museum stands out, actually the Museum of the Yugoslavian Air Force, founded in 1957, which today offers visitors the opportunity to walk through an entire century of aviation. According to the number of exhibits, it ranks among the 10 leading institutions of this kind in the world. It has over 200 aircrafts, 130 aircraft engines, several radars, missiles, aviation equipment, and over 50 types of original aircraft and other exhibits [14].

The Bojčin Forest is a protected natural resource of national importance. It is a real swampy forest between the Sava River and the Jarčina Canal, which has the status of a permanent, mandatory purpose, and today it is an attractive picnic area with a part equipped with park furniture, a summer stage and catering facilities. In one part of the forest there are dugouts and two memorials (partisan bases from the Second World War). An organized 1,800-meter-long trim track with 16 obstacles passes through the forest, and in 2008, a large summer stage with a capacity of 500 seats was built in it, where the event Bojčin Cultural Summer is held every year [15].

Formerly a suburban, but now an outskirts of the capital, Surčin is one of the city's municipalities that developed the fastest in the past period. The evaluation of the traffic-geographic position of the municipality of Surčin, both from the aspect of the current level of development of the traffic infrastructure on the territory of the municipality, and from the aspect of the planned projects of the construction of the traffic infrastructure, indicates that it is a municipality with a very good traffic position in the Republic of Serbia. The existing structure of tourist attractions in the southern part of the municipality, located about half an hour's drive from the city center, provides a good basis for strengthening the character of the rural shelter on the outskirts of Belgrade. In recent years, the City Municipality of Surčin has invested significant efforts in the development and tourist arrangement of the area, thanks to which the youngest municipality in Belgrade has positioned itself as a promising tourist destination on the excursion market of the capital. Preserved nature in the immediate surroundings of Belgrade, with the presence of anthropogenic tourism potential and the characteristic rural identity of the area, represent a good basis for the development of excursion, recreational, sports, demonstration, cultural and other types of small-scale tourism, while the Sava River, which flows through the southern part of the municipality, represents a significant resource for the development of nautical tourism. Following the changes in the development of tourist destinations on the world tourist market and bearing in mind the character and specifics of tourist products that dominate, Surčin has positioned itself as a sports-recreational destination of daily activities in nature with the authentic character of a rural suburb, with a perspective for the development and popularization of small-scale tourism [16].

APITURISM AS A DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITY FOR HEALTH TOURISM - CASE STUDY OF SURČIN CITY MUNICIPALITY

Following world development trends, when it comes to beekeeping and the development of tourism of various thematic forms, in the territory of the City Municipality of Surčin, in the village of Bečmen, the first api-chamber was opened in 2019, within the Bečmen Fun Park. Built in the form of a wooden house, with an unusual appearance, this api-chamber, with a total of six beehives, has been slowly attracting the interest of tourists, both from Surčin itself and from the immediate surrounding, for the full three years of its existence. So far, about a hundred visitors have visited this api-chamber. Among the visitors, families with children stand out the most, while the season is considered to be the period from the beginning of May, when bees are most active, until the end of September. The Bečmen api-chamber offers classic api-therapy, i.e. breathing air directly from the hives, as well as an offer of various bee products, consumption of honey, but also naturally squeezed juices and drinks. Visitors have a positive opinion after the treatment and the majority feel better, especially those who suffered from acute forms of allergies and similar respiratory diseases, but also as different treatments for the recovery of the entire organism from stress and the so-called managerial diseases.



Figure 3: Api-chamber Bečmen

Source: <https://informer.rs/vesti/drustvo/696938/lečenje-pcelinjim-proizvodima-apiterapija-kosnice-srbija>

The owner's idea is to carry out a research study in cooperation with renowned medical institutions on a certain sample of children who have health problems, and api-chamber treatments are included. In addition to the treatment of inhaling the energy of the beehive, the tourist offer of the Bečmen api-chamber also includes propolis, as a kind of home pharmacy, while on the table, of course, is a meal consisting of the consumption of homemade honey. Taking into account the natural motifs in the immediate vicinity of the api-chamber (pond Bečmenska bara in Bečmen), as well as in the immediate surroundings (the protected natural asset Bojčin Forest in Progar with an open summer scene where the cultural and artistic event Bojčin Cultural Summer is organized every year, the Sava river, Nautical village Biser in Boljevc, Živača pond, Crni lug and Zabran hunting grounds, etc.), but also preserved cultural heritage (Aircraft Museum in Surčin, Fenek monastery in Jakov, Stajko's ethnic house), as well as all the more frequented wineries, stables and swimming pools, it can be concluded that the Bečmen api-chamber has good predispositions for accelerated penetration on the tourist market of Belgrade and beyond, as well as opportunities for the development and connection of various special forms of tourism on the tourist market. Cooperation with health and healing institutions, pensioner and student associations, preschool and school institutions, as well as visiting international and domestic tourism and healthy food fairs, along with destination management organizations and local tourist agencies, is necessary as a form of connection and raising the visibility of the api-tourism product. In this regard, a visit to the Bečmen api-chamber is especially interesting for weekend visitors and families with small children.

Cooperation with the Tourism Organization of the City Municipality of Surčin is an example of good practice in the form of raising the visibility of api-tourism on the tourist map of Surčin, promoting health tourism at tourist fairs in the country and region, popularizing the tourist offer of the Bečmen api-chamber through specialized television shows and more.

In this way, the Bečmen api-chamber is becoming an increasingly interesting development opportunity for health tourism on the territory of the City Municipality of Surčin, as an outskirt municipality of Belgrade, occupying a special place in its tourist offer. River lovers, recreationists, boaters, sports tourists, but also visitors interested in cultural

heritage and local events (cultural-excursion tourism product), as well as gastronomic specialties of the so-called Donji Srem, are becoming more and more interested in visiting the Bečmen api-chamber and education on the topic of apitourism, as well as health benefits in prevention, treatment and preservation of the health of the entire human organism. In this regard, the education of tourists is the first but inevitable step in the marketing promotion strategy on the tourist market.

CONCLUSION

In recent years, the apitourism product has become more and more popular in the tourist offer of the City Municipality of Surčin. Api-chamber Bečmen is a pioneer in the development of apitourism as a development opportunity for health tourism in the territory of Surčin Municipality. Following modern world trends, the Tourism Organization of the City Municipality of Surčin saw the importance of this relatively new specific type of tourism in the integral tourist offer, giving it a special place in the framework of internet promotion, television guest appearances, but also as the host of a course for api-therapists.

Taking into account the significant number of natural and anthropogenic potentials for the development of tourism in the immediate environment, the Bečmen api-chamber has formed an interesting offer in the form of a half-day tourist product that includes a tour of the api-chamber and beehives, education about the life and importance of bees, the use of api-therapy (inhalation from hives), as well as additional content in the form of a healthy meal and drink consisting of honey, other bee products, squeezed fruit and vegetables, as well as souvenirs.

With the expansion of capacity, the Bečmen api-chamber has ideal prerequisites for the implementation of various thematic schools in nature, training of athletes, camps, team building, sports industry, but also for summer vacations in the rural environment in the form of extended weekends. The emergence of the pandemic caused changes in the consciousness of tourists in the sense of attaching increasing importance to health, especially care and interest in health prevention. In this regard, api-tourism represents an increasingly interesting and sought-after development opportunity for health tourism in the territory of the City Municipality of Surčin.

APITURIZAM KAO RAZVOJNA ŠANSZA ZDRAVSTVENOG TURIZMA - STUDIJA SLUČAJA GRADSKJE OPŠTINE SURČIN

dr Sara Stanić Jovanović, dr Dario Šimičević, dr Đorđe Mihailović

Sažetak: Gradska opština Surčin je najmlađa beogradska opština, koja predstavlja primer dobre prakse, kada je reč o razvoju posebnih oblika turizma koji isključuju masovnost, već se baziraju na specifičnostima lokalne zajednice, očuvanim prirodnim vrednostima i baštinjenju kulturnog nasleđa iz prošlih vremena. Reka Sava, zaštićeno prirodno dobro Bojčinska šuma, kanali, ribnjaci, lovišta i šumske površine bogate florom i faunom, uz Muzej vazduhoplovstva, manastir Fenek, tradicionalnu manifestaciju "Bojčinsko kulturno leto", ali i brojne etnografske karakteristike područja tzv. Donjeg Srema (seoska arhitektura, konjarstvo, vinogradarstvo, gastronomija, Stajkova etno kuća, multietničke zajednice Slovaka i Srba u Boljevcima i Dobanovcima), predstavljaju samo neke od motiva koji privlače turiste u Surčin. Prateći međunarodne turističke trendove u Surčinu se poslednjih godina razvija i apiturizam, postajući sve značajnija razvojna šansa zdravstvenog turizma. Ovaj vid turizma je novijeg datuma, a prevodi se kao pčelarski turizam i podrazumeva različite benefite u prevenciji zdravlja od konzumiranja pčelarskih proizvoda, do boravka u neposrednom krugu pčela.

Ključne reči: apiturizam, zdravstveni turizam, šansa, razvoj, gradska opština Surčin

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