

Mina Išpanović, student

Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality Management, Singidunum University, 11000, Belgrade, Serbia, Email: mina.ispanovic@gmail.com

ORCID 0009-0008-7031-7886

Aleksandra Vujko, Associate professor, Ph.D.

Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality Management, Singidunum University, 11000, Belgrade, Serbia, Email: avujko@singidunum.ac.rs

ORCID 0000-0001-8684-4228

Milena Turčinović, Ph.D. candidate

Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality Management, Singidunum University, 11000, Belgrade, Serbia, Email: mturcinovic@singidunum.ac.rs

ORCID 0009-0002-8710-6491

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EMPOWERING RURAL WOMEN: A KEY FACTOR IN SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

OSNAŽIVANJE RURALNIH ŽENA: KLJUČNI FAKTOR ODRŽIVOG RAZVOJA TURIZMA

Apstract: Empirical evidence suggests that the empowerment of rural women is an essential predictor of sustainable development in the tourism sector. As primary custodians of cultural capital and local traditions, their indispensable participation in community-based tourism initiatives significantly correlates with the improvement of economic sustainability, the preservation of cultural diversity, and the strengthening of social cohesion. This study investigates the causal relationship between the empowerment of rural women and tourism development, analyzes strategies for the amplification of their participation, and identifies inherent challenges. The central finding of the study implies that the empowerment of women is a key determinant of their inclination towards entrepreneurial activities within the domain of tourism.

Keywords: women, rural tourism, sustainability, rural areas

Apstrakt: Empirijski dokazi sugerišu da je osnaživanje žena u ruralnim područjima esencijalni prediktor održivog razvoja u sektoru turizma. Kao primarni nosioci kulturnog kapitala i lokalnih tradicija, njihovo nezamenljivo učešće u turističkim inicijativama zasnovanim na zajednici značajno korelira sa poboljšanjem ekonomske održivosti, očuvanjem kulturnog diverziteta i jačanjem socijalne kohezije. Ova studija istražuje uzročno-posledičnu vezu između osnaživanja ruralnih žena i razvoja turizma, analizira strategije za jačanje njihovog učešća i identifikuje inherentne izazove. Centralni nalaz studije implicira da je osnaživanje žena ključni determinator njihove sklonosti ka preduzetničkim aktivnostima u domenu turizma.

Ključne reči: žene, ruralni turizam, održivost, ruralna područja

Introduction

According to Firstianto et al. (2024) empowering rural women is a multifaceted endeavor that carries significant implications for the socio-economic development of communities worldwide. Defined as the process of increasing the capacity of women to make choices and transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes, empowerment encompasses a wide range of social, economic, and political dimensions. Empowerment, in this context, involves enabling women to gain control over their lives, make informed decisions, and participate actively in their communities (Jiang et al., 2024). Empowering women in rural regions is a complex undertaking with far-reaching consequences for the socio-economic advancement of communities globally. Within the realm of agritourism and rural tourism, women are instrumental as guardians of cultural patrimony, traditional practices, and indigenous customs. (Arroyo, C.G. et al, 2019) They are vital in maintaining the unique character of a destination and diversifying its appeal to visitors (Jo, Y et al., 2024). Their proactive engagement not only bolsters the financial viability of tourism initiatives but also encourages the safeguarding of cultural heritage and strengthens community bonds. As key stakeholders in agricultural production and household administration within rural economies, the empowerment of women also underpins broader community economic stability (Özçatalbaş, O., & Soguel, B., 2020). Rural women often serve as the backbone of agriculture and household management, contributing significantly to food production and economic stability. According to Kitole & Genda (2024), women account for approximately 43% of the agricultural labor force in developing countries. When rural women are empowered, their increased productivity and decision-making abilities lead to improved family nutrition, education, and health outcomes. For instance, research shows that when women have access to resources and training, they invest more in their children's

education and healthcare, resulting in a ripple effect that enhances community welfare. Thus, empowering rural women is not merely a gender issue; it is a vital component of sustainable development and poverty alleviation (Gao & Wu, 2017).

To effectively empower rural women, a variety of strategies must be implemented. One of the most critical avenues for empowerment is access to education and vocational training programs (Ling et al., 2013). Education equips women with the knowledge and skills necessary to participate in economic activities and make informed decisions. According to Vujko et al. (2019) programs that focus on literacy, numeracy, and vocational skills have proven successful in various rural settings. According to Sahrakorpi & Bandi (2021) initiatives in India have demonstrated that women who receive vocational training in areas such as sewing or agriculture are more likely to start their own businesses and improve their economic status. Additionally, microfinance has emerged as a powerful tool for fostering entrepreneurship among rural women. By providing small loans, women can invest in income-generating activities, thereby gaining financial independence and contributing to their families' well-being (Ljaljevic et al., 2023). Community organizations also play a pivotal role in supporting rural women by creating networks that offer resources, mentorship, and advocacy. These support systems can help women navigate the complexities of entrepreneurship and build confidence in their abilities (Pécot et al., 2024).

Access to information is a fundamental factor in empowering women entrepreneurs in rural tourism (Vujko et al., 2024a). Information equips these women with the knowledge necessary to make informed decisions about their business ventures, allowing them to identify opportunities that might otherwise remain hidden (Chen & Barcus, 2024). The connection between information access and community development is also profound; when women succeed in rural tourism, they contribute to the local economy, create jobs,

and inspire other women to pursue similar paths (Despotović et al., 2018). This ripple effect not only empowers individual women but also promotes broader social change, reinforcing the importance of ensuring that women in rural areas have the information they need to thrive (de Groot et al., 2017).

In rural areas, women play a particularly important role. After completing secondary education, many women either remain in their rural communities to start a family or, if they pursue higher education, move to larger cities or often do not return to their hometowns. The reasons for this vary. Primarily, women today lack sufficient support (Regmi et al., 2023). They are often discouraged from developing their ideas into initiatives that could benefit their households, local communities, and themselves. Many believe that municipal or local authorities will not provide them with the necessary financial or structural support (Rashwan et al., 2024).

Traditional craftsmanship and home-made products hold significant value in rural communities (Vujko et al., 2024b). Older generations have the opportunity to pass down knowledge of customs and traditions to younger women, fostering initiatives that contribute to local development, particularly in rural tourism. For example, older women create woolen products such as sweaters and socks, as well as various handicrafts and souvenirs. However, some women may hesitate to start their own businesses due to a fear of failure (Sutrisno et al., 2024). Sustaining rural tourism requires careful consideration to prevent environmental damage while preserving local traditions, culture, and customs. Women in rural areas possess the potential for successful entrepreneurship (Stanovčić et al., 2018). Many are already engaged in producing and selling traditional domestic products such as cheese, milk, honey, and winter preserves. With proper support, these entrepreneurial efforts could significantly contribute to the economic and cultural sustainability of rural communities.

They can also produce pottery, glass, or a certain type of jewelry (Zhang et al.,

2025). Women in rural areas are known as excellent housewives and can develop their own business by making various cakes and pastries. Today, we live in the so-called internet era, where everything is easily accessible and this in some way favors marketing, and certain small businesses can experience a level of expansion (Zhao et al., 2024). Education of the local population is also necessary. In addition to personal income, women can contribute to the economy and the local community, as well as to the rural environment, with their knowledge and craft skills. It is generally known that women are imaginative and that they can combine the beautiful and the useful, and with their knowledge and skill create something that does not exist in our area. Houses can be remodeled with traditional motifs and offered as such to potential tourists for accommodation. Of course, the support and permission of the municipality is necessary. The development of rural tourism is of great importance for every country and tourist destination. This also applies to Serbia (Vujko et al., 2024b).

The paper started from the initial hypothesis of paper H that the empowerment of women in the villages is a decisive factor in the sustainable development of rural destinations. Women are the “carriers” of tourist activities in villages, so the further development of rural tourism directly depends on the willingness of women to actively influence the creation of a sustainable tourist offer in rural destinations. The research was conducted on a sample of 217 rural women and showed that women in rural tourism most need information about funds and methods of financing, about ways of managing and registering their companies engaged in rural tourism, as well as empowerment as a direct influence on women entrepreneurship in rural destinations.

This research endeavors to investigate the significance of women’s empowerment in rural tourism, the strategies for enhancing their engagement, and the challenges hindering their advancement within this sec-

tor. A survey was conducted on a sample of 217 women residing in rural areas of Fruška Gora to identify the salient factors influencing their participation in rural tourism and the obstacles they encounter.

The central research hypothesis posits that the empowerment of women in rural communities constitutes a crucial determinant for the sustainable development of rural destinations. The study aimed to address the question of the primary requisites for increased female participation in rural tourism. To this end, three sub-hypotheses were formulated, focusing on the perceived need for information pertaining to financial resources, business registration procedures, and business management principles, as well as the overarching imperative of women's empowerment.

Methodology

The research sample comprised 217 female individuals recruited from various villages within the geographical area of Fruška Gora. The selection criteria included women participating in established local events, namely the "Sremska kulenijada" held in Erdevik, the "Banoštorski dani grožđa" in Banoštor, and the "Guščijada" in Šatrinči.

Data were collected through the administration of surveys at the respondents' designated exhibition spaces, where they displayed artisanal products or food items. The survey instrument was designed to garner insights into the current landscape of rural tourism within the investigated destinations, as perceived by women actively engaged in or possessing the potential for involvement in this sector.

The survey questions encompassed the following domains:

- **Awareness of Funding Opportunities:** This section addressed the respondents' knowledge of available funding sources, the procedures for application, and perceived barriers to accessing financial resources.
- **Knowledge of Business Registration and Management:** This area explored

the respondents' understanding of the regulatory frameworks for tourism-related business registration, as well as their familiarity with business management principles (including marketing, finance, and administration).

- **Motivation and Challenges in Engaging with Rural Tourism:** This domain investigated the respondents' motivations for participating in rural tourism, as well as perceived obstacles such as fear of failure, lack of self-confidence, and familial responsibilities.

The collected responses were subjected to analysis based on the age cohorts of the respondents to identify potential variations in their needs and attitudes across different generational groups. The Pearson Chi-Square test was employed for statistical data processing.

Results and discussion

Table 1 shows that the largest percentage of women have a problem with information about funds and ways of financing their ideas. According to Table 1 the lack of information on funding opportunities for women in rural tourism presents a significant barrier to their entrepreneurial success and, by extension, to the overall development of their communities. Access to information is not merely a logistical issue; it is a fundamental prerequisite for empowerment and economic progression. By identifying various sources of funding and understanding the barriers that inhibit women from accessing this information, we can begin to formulate strategies to support them more effectively. Enhancing information access for women in rural tourism is essential not only for their individual success but also for fostering sustainable community development. Therefore, it is imperative that stakeholders, including government entities, NGOs, and community organizations, collaborate to create an environment where women can thrive in rural tourism, ultimately leading to more vibrant and economically sound rural communities.

Table 1. Information on how to fund ideas

			Age				Total
			18-25	26-39	40-59	Over 60	
I need more information on how to fund ideas.	Tottaly agree	Count	11	35	37	18	101
		% of Total	5,1%	16,1%	17,1%	8,3%	46,5%
	Agreee	Count	8	23	28	17	76
		% of Total	3,7%	10,6%	12,9%	7,8%	35,0%
	No opinion	Count	3	10	11	5	29
		% of Total	1,4%	4,6%	5,1%	2,3%	13,4%
	Disagreee	Count	0	6	2	0	8
		% of Total	0,0%	2,8%	0,9%	0,0%	3,7%
	Tottaly disagree	Count	0	2	1	0	3
		% of Total	0,0%	0,9%	0,5%	0,0%	1,4%
Total		Count	22	76	79	40	217
		% of Total	10,1%	35,0%	36,4%	18,4%	100,0%

Source: Autor's research

Looking at table 2, it can be concluded that there is no statistical significance in the responses of the respondents in relation to age. This primarily means that the problem is uniform and that all women in the villages face it.

Table 2. Pearson Chi-square Test

	Value	Df	Significance (p)
Pearson Chi-Square	9,217	12	,684

Source: Autor's research

Project writing is essential in rural tourism as it serves as a blueprint for initiating and sustaining tourism initiatives that can significantly benefit local communities. At its core, project writing involves the systematic documentation of a project's purpose, goals, activities, and anticipated impacts. In the context of rural tourism, well-written projects are crucial for attracting funding from governmental and non-governmental organizations, as they demonstrate the viability and potential impact of proposed initiatives.

Table 3. Lack of information on how to write a project

			Age				Total
			18-25	26-39	40-59	Over 60	
I need more information on how to write a project that will be funded by the EU or the Ministry of Tourism.	Totally agree	Count	17	42	44	26	129
		% of Total	7,8%	19,4%	20,3%	12,0%	59,4%
	Agreee	Count	4	23	26	5	58
		% of Total	1,8%	10,6%	12,0%	2,3%	26,7%
	No opinion	Count	1	8	8	3	20
		% of Total	0,5%	3,7%	3,7%	1,4%	9,2%
	Disagree	Count	0	3	0	3	6
		% of Total	0,0%	1,4%	0,0%	1,4%	2,8%
Tottaly disagree	Count	0	0	1	3	4	
	% of Total	0,0%	0,0%	0,5%	1,4%	1,8%	
Total		Count	22	76	79	40	217
		% of Total	10.1%	35.0%	36.4%	18.4%	100.0%

Source: Autor's research

Despite the clear advantages of project writing, women in rural destinations often encounter numerous challenges that hinder their ability to engage in this vital activity (Table 3). One primary obstacle is the lack of access to training and educational resources that teach the skills necessary for effective project development. Many rural

areas lack formal educational institutions offering courses in project writing, leaving women without the tools they need to articulate their ideas effectively. Additionally, cultural and social barriers can further discourage women from participating in project writing initiatives.

Table 4. Pearson Chi-square Test

	Value	df	Significance (p)
Pearson Chi-Square	23,085	12	,027

Source: Autor's research

Table number 4 shows that there is a difference. Younger respondents want more information from the EU or the Ministry, while older women (over 60) do not. Respondents over the age of 60 may think that they have to study additionally, that is, to be educated, which for them represents an obstacle. They also assume that they must be proficient in the foreign language, and many women may not even speak another foreign language. Younger women find it easier because the education system enabled them to study (foreign language) and use modern technology (e.g. internet - MS Office).

By addressing the challenges faced by women through targeted training, mentorship, and the use of technology, we can empower them to articulate their visions effectively and contribute to the growth of rural tourism. As we move forward, it is essential to prioritize these efforts to ensure that women in rural areas can fully participate in and benefit from the opportunities that tourism can provide, ultimately fostering sustainable development and economic resilience in their communities. The data of these tables confirmed the sub-hypothesis of the work h1 - that women need information about the financing of their ideas in order to engage in rural tourism.

Table 5. Information about registration a company

			Age				Total
			18-25	26-39	40-59	Over 60	
I need information on how to register my company in tourism that deals with receptive tourism.	Tottaly agree	Count	20	41	43	20	124
		% of Total	9,2%	18,9%	19,8%	9,2%	57,1%
	Agreee	Count	1	27	19	15	62
		% of Total	0,5%	12,4%	8,8%	6,9%	28,6%
	No opinion	Count	1	8	9	5	23
		% of Total	0,5%	3,7%	4,1%	2,3%	10,6%
	Disagree	Count	0	0	5	0	5
		% of Total	0,0%	0,0%	2,3%	0,0%	2,3%
	Tottaly disagree	Count	0	0	3	0	3
		% of Total	0,0%	0,0%	1,4%	0,0%	1,4%
Total		Count	22	76	79	40	217
		% of Total	10,1%	35,0%	36,4%	18,4%	100,0%

Source: Autor's research

Table 5 shows whether information is required regarding the registration of a company engaged in receptive tourism. Receptive tourism is of great importance for the development of tourism of a certain destination. In addition to catering facilities for accommodation, receptive tourist agencies that will attract tourists to a certain destination, in this case Fruška Gora, can also be important. The respondents need additional education about receptive tourism. It should be explained what is meant by receptive tourism, what women can do,

how to do business if they work in a tourist agency, that is, how to attract tourists. In rural areas, it is necessary to establish a receptive tourist agency, because the task of a receptive tourist agency is to attract tourists, and an increase in the number of tourists leads to an increase in income, which will help the economy and the local community itself. Employees of a receptive tourist agency must know how to attract tourists or a group of tourists, without damaging the environment, which is why they need education.

Table 6. Pearson Chi-square Test

	Value	Df	Significance (p)
Pearson Chi-Square	27,316 ^a	12	,007

Source: Author's research

Table number 6 shows that there is a difference in answers in relation to age groups. The value is less than 0.05 ($p=0.007$). This difference may be due to the fact that the younger generations are more interested in changes and are engaged in tourism com-

pared to the older respondents. Also, the number of highly educated women is growing today, and the younger generations are interested in using their knowledge and education in the best way and in attracting tourists.

Table 7. Information on the categorization of accommodation capacities

			Age				Total
			18-25	26-39	40-59	Over 60	
I need information on how to categorize accommodation units that I can rent out as part of my household.	Totally agree	Count	14	48	37	25	124
		% of Total	6,5%	22,1%	17,1%	11,5%	57,1%
	Agreee	Count	5	16	31	13	65
		% of Total	2,3%	7,4%	14,3%	6,0%	30,0%
	No opinion	Count	1	11	6	2	20
		% of Total	0,5%	5,1%	2,8%	0,9%	9,2%
	Disagreee	Count	2	0	3	0	5
		% of Total	0,9%	0,0%	1,4%	0,0%	2,3%
	Totally disagree	Count	0	1	2	0	3
		% of Total	0,0%	0,5%	0,9%	0,0%	1,4%
Total		Count	22	76	79	40	217
		% of Total	10,1%	35,0%	36,4%	18,4%	100,0%

Source: Author's research

Table 7 shows whether our respondents need any additional information regarding the categorization of accommodation that they can rent out as part of their household. Slightly more than half of the respondents answered that they completely agree. This means that they do not have enough information about the categorization of accommodation. The reasons why the respondents do not agree or have no opinion may stem from insufficient information about the categorization of objects. They may consider that categorization is a

long process, that their household or part of the household cannot be categorized, or that they do not want to use part of their household as a catering facility for accommodation. It is necessary to provide certain information and point out all the conditions that must be fulfilled in order for a specific accommodation facility to be categorized according to the guidelines of the Ministry of Tourism. The involvement of governmental and non-governmental organizations in the categorization process can be crucial at this stage.

Table 8. *Pearson Chi-square Test*

	Value	df	Significance (p)
Pearson Chi-Square	20,314	12	,061

Source: Author's research

Table 8 shows that there is no significant difference in the responses of female respondents regardless of age ($p=0.061$). Respondents may have a certain perspective or idea of how to turn their household or part of the household into a catering facility for

accommodation, but they are not sufficiently informed about how to arrange it, what category of accommodation would be or how to categorize it. It is common knowledge that each catering facility for accommodation has a certain category.

Table 9. *Information on the registration of a company engaged in handicrafts*

			Age				Total
			18-25	26-39	40-59	Over 60	
I want to know if I can register entrepreneurship for the handicrafts I do.	Totally agree	Count	13	40	52	21	126
		% of Total	6,0%	18,4%	24,0%	9,7%	58,1%
	Agreee	Count	7	20	16	12	55
		% of Total	3,2%	9,2%	7,4%	5,5%	25,3%
	No opinion	Count	2	6	7	5	20
		% of Total	0,9%	2,8%	3,2%	2,3%	9,2%
	Disagree	Count	0	4	3	1	8
		% of Total	0,0%	1,8%	1,4%	0,5%	3,7%
Totally disagree	Count	0	6	1	1	8	
	% of Total	0,0%	2,8%	0,5%	0,5%	3,7%	
Total		Count	22	76	79	40	217
		% of Total	10,1%	35,0%	36,4%	18,4%	100,0%

Source: Author's research

Table 9 shows whether women have information about the registration of a company engaged in handicrafts. It is common knowledge that in rural areas, women are engaged in handicrafts. Women can produce certain products, such as souvenirs, magnets, knit sweaters, socks. What is important to them is precisely whether they can register their skill, that is, their entrepreneurship. Of

the total number of respondents, more than half (58.1%) completely agree. This means that they do not have enough information on how to register their hobby or occupation. Handicrafts are interesting, each product can be unique. Today, handicrafts are more like a hobby than a profession. That is why it is necessary to include the local organization, as well as non-governmental organizations.

Table 10. Pearson Chi-square Test

	Value	Df	Significance (p)
Pearson Chi-Square	10,937	12	,534

Source: Autor's research

The results of Table 10 show that the value exceeds 0.05 ($p=0.534$). The difference in answers is noticeable, but not significant, because as we have already mentioned, slightly more than half of the respondents answered

that they completely agree. Handcrafting of objects is characteristic of rural areas and therefore there is no statistically significant difference in the responses of the respondents in relation to their age.

Tabela 11. Information on dealing with special forms of tourism

			Age				Total
			18-25	26-39	40-59	Over 60	
I want to deal with organizing special forms of tourism (cycling, hiking, collecting medicinal plants, etc.), so I need additional information on how to register a business.	Totally agree	Count	7	24	44	20	95
		% of Total	3,2%	11,1%	20,3%	9,2%	43,8%
	Agreee	Count	12	28	12	14	66
		% of Total	5,5%	12,9%	5,5%	6,5%	30,4%
	No opinion	Count	3	14	18	2	37
		% of Total	1,4%	6,5%	8,3%	0,9%	17,1%
	Disagree	Count	0	6	3	3	12
		% of Total	0,0%	2,8%	1,4%	1,4%	5,5%
Totally disagree	Count	0	4	2	1	7	
	% of Total	0,0%	1,8%	0,9%	0,5%	3,2%	
Total		Count	22	76	79	40	217
		% of Total	10,1%	35,0%	36,4%	18,4%	100,0%

Source: Autor's research

Special forms of tourism in rural areas can be interesting and successful. Fruška gora, as a national park of Serbia, can offer various forms of tourism. The results of Table 11 show that slightly less than half of

the respondents fully agree that they need additional information about special forms of tourism (43.8%), while a certain number disagree (5.5%). Women should be educated about special forms of tourism, especially on

Fruška Gora. There are well-maintained hiking trails, and you can combine hiking with medicinal plant picking in this area. Some medicinal plants can be made into teas. Apart from teas, various skin balms and creams can also be made. It is necessary to provide all relevant information to interested women,

which plants exist, where they grow, which teas can be made from those plants and for what purposes those medicinal plants could be used. It is also necessary to provide information about the bicycle paths that exist through Fruška Gora, as well as the possibility of organizing competitions.

Table 12. *Pearson Chi-square Test*

	Value	df	Significance (p)
Pearson Chi-Square	27,316	12	,007

Source: Author's research

The results show that there is a statistical difference between the age generations (Table 12). Some respondents need additional information, while some do not. The

respondents, who do not need additional information, are probably interested in other forms of tourism, since Fruška gora is a real treasure for tourism.

Table 13. *Information about distribution channels*

			Age				Total
			18-25	26-39	40-59	Over 60	
I need the placement of the products I make (homemade food and drinks), as well as a distribution network with restaurants near me. That's what I'm particularly interested in when it comes to empowerment.	Totally agree	Count	14	23	27	11	75
		% of Total	6,5%	10,6%	12,4%	5,1%	34,6%
	Agreee	Count	4	28	34	26	92
		% of Total	1,8%	12,9%	15,7%	12,0%	42,4%
	No opinion	Count	2	20	14	2	38
		% of Total	0,9%	9,2%	6,5%	0,9%	17,5%
	Disagree	Count	0	4	3	0	7
		% of Total	0,0%	1,8%	1,4%	0,0%	3,2%
Totally disagree	Count	2	1	1	1	5	
	% of Total	0,9%	0,5%	0,5%	0,5%	2,3%	
Total		Count	22	76	79	40	217
		% of Total	10,1%	35,0%	36,4%	18,4%	100,0%

Source: Author's research

The table shows the results of the respondents on whether they need the placement of domestic products, that is, the food and drinks they produce, as well as cooperation with certain restaurants in the vicinity (Table 13). The table shows that the answers differ. The largest percentage of female respondents, slightly less than half, declared that they agreed with it. In rural areas, there are a small number of restau-

rants, which require home-made, unspoiled food. Women who have a large household are mainly engaged in the production of homemade food, in addition to food, they can also produce homemade drinks. If they produce homemade drinks, they can put stickers about their household and products on the bottles. Women in rural areas are known as excellent housewives. It would be a great opportunity for them to combine

the beautiful and the useful. Today, people take care of their diet, it is important for them to eat healthy, home-made food. It is necessary to involve the local community and provide the possibility of cooperation between the restaurant and a certain

household. In addition to cooperation with restaurants, products can also be sold in local stores. These data confirmed sub-hypothesis h2 - that women in villages lack information about registering and running a company for rural tourism.

Table 14. Pearson Chi-square Test

	Value	df	Significance (p)
Pearson Chi-Square	30,778	12	,002

Source: Autor's research

The value of the Pearson test shows that the responses between the age groups differ. This difference indicates that some of the respondents are not interested because they

are not engaged in that business, that is, they do not produce domestic products (food, drinks).

Table 15. Information about Women's Association

			Age				Total
			18-25	26-39	40-59	Over 60	
I am interested in joining the Women’s Association and membership for the purpose of promotion and joint performance.	Totally agree	Count	14	21	24	1	60
		% of Total	6,5%	9,7%	11,1%	0,5%	27,6%
	Agreeee	Count	4	33	29	17	83
		% of Total	1,8%	15,2%	13,4%	7,8%	38,2%
	No opinion	Count	4	13	15	8	40
		% of Total	1,8%	6,0%	6,9%	3,7%	18,4%
	Disagree	Count	0	6	10	8	24
		% of Total	0,0%	2,8%	4,6%	3,7%	11,1%
	Tottaly disagree	Count	0	3	1	6	10
		% of Total	0,0%	1,4%	0,5%	2,8%	4,6%
Total		Count	22	76	79	40	217
		% of Total	10,1%	35,0%	36,4%	18,4%	100,0%

Source: Autor's research

The last table shows whether the respondents have information and whether they are interested in joining a women's association for the purpose of promotion and joint efforts (Table 15). Women do not have enough information about the association, a certain number of women do not know that the association exists. Older women in rural areas take care of the household or are engaged in crafts, and therefore do not have enough time for some additional activities

or for education about a certain association. Women, who are just entering the world of entrepreneurship, need certain support and motivation, which will best be provided by successful women, entrepreneurs. Through the joint effort, women entrepreneurs will encourage women who are just entering the world of entrepreneurship, connect them with other successful women and help develop their entrepreneurship.

Table 16. Pearson Chi-square Test

	Value	Df	Significance (p)
Pearson Chi-Square	41,462	12	,000

Source: Author's research

Table 16 shows that there is a statistical difference in the responses. The young interviewees want to join the association in order to learn something and to progress in their business. Some women do not have the courage to perform. It is necessary to provide information and a chance to respondents who are interested in the association and if there is a possibility to provide all the necessary information to women who are not interested because they may change their opinion. The data of the last two tables confirm the sub-hypothesis of the work h3 - that women need empowerment to engage in rural tourism. All this gave an answer to the question posed and the answer is - information. Women need information to engage in rural tourism, which confirms the initial hypothesis H. Providing information is actually a direct form of empowering women, where they feel supported and have the feeling that someone supports them in their efforts to engage in entrepreneurship.

Conclusion

The empowerment of women in rural settings constitutes a critical nexus for the socio-economic advancement of communities. While their contributions to agricultural production and household management are fundamental to economic stability, these women frequently encounter structural impediments, notably restricted access to pertinent information, educational opportunities, and financial capital. Strategic interventions aimed at redressing these disparities encompass the provision of formal and vocational education, facilitated access to microfinance instruments, and the establishment of robust community support networks.

Empirical investigation within the Fruška Gora region reveals a significant infor-

mational deficit among female respondents, particularly those in rural locales, concerning the regulatory frameworks for tourism accommodation categorization (57.1% strongly agreed on this lack) and the formal registration of artisanal crafts as legitimate business enterprises (58.1% strongly agreed). Furthermore, a substantial proportion of respondents (46.5% strongly agreed) articulated a critical need for enhanced information regarding diverse tourism modalities and the effective promotion of locally produced goods, underscoring the imperative for targeted support and educational initiatives spearheaded by local and non-governmental organizations.

Analysis of the collected data indicates statistically significant variations in responses based on the age cohorts of the participants. Younger women demonstrated a greater propensity to actively seek support from entrepreneurial associations, suggesting a higher level of awareness and engagement with formal business support structures. Conversely, older women appeared to be less informed about such opportunities, potentially due to factors such as time constraints, limited digital literacy, or a lack of established connections with relevant support networks.

Synthesizing these findings with prior insights, the paramount importance of information dissemination as a pivotal mechanism for empowering women's engagement in rural tourism and entrepreneurship becomes evident. This informational empowerment, however, must be complemented by practical, skills-based training programs designed to enhance their operational capacities. For instance, younger cohorts expressing interest in local food and beverage production, pottery, or the creation of culturally relevant souvenirs require access to specialized workshops and mentorship opportunities. Similarly, women already engaged in tradi-

tional food production could benefit from facilitating interactive culinary workshops for tourists, thereby valorizing local gastronomic heritage and generating income. The potential for expanding the production and marketing of herbal teas and creams derived from locally sourced medicinal herbs also necessitates targeted training and business development support. Leveraging Fruška Gora's designation as a national park and its established appeal as a tourist destination through participation in local cultural and tourism events provides crucial market access. Strategic financial support is essential to enable these nascent entrepreneurs to transcend local markets and access broader consumer bases in urban centers and regional/national tourism fairs. This synergistic development of rural tourism in Fruška Gora aligns with the expressed interests of the female respondents and presents a sustainable pathway for female economic empowerment.

The realization of successful rural women's entrepreneurship necessitates a comprehensive and integrated support ecosystem. This system must encompass accessible and relevant educational programs, robust information dissemination networks, the fostering of synergistic collaborations with business and community organizations, and direct, enabling policy interventions from local administrative bodies. Addressing the specific challenges faced by youth in rural areas is equally critical. Understanding the drivers of rural out-migration and the resources required to incentivize their retention can inform the design of targeted policies, including job placement initiatives for those returning after completing their education. The underutilized asset of abandoned rural housing and properties presents an opportunity for revitalization as tourism accommodation, contingent upon the provision of financial and infrastructural support for renovation and regulatory compliance. In an increasingly digitized and urbanized global context, rural regions like Fruška Gora offer a unique value proposition for individuals

seeking respite and authentic experiences. Cultivating female entrepreneurship within these areas not only generates vital personal income for women but also significantly contributes to the broader economic resilience and vibrancy of the local community, facilitated by strategic investments in tourism infrastructure and the integration of digital technologies. Equipping women with digital marketing and e-commerce skills is crucial for expanding their market reach and fostering direct engagement with a wider customer base.

Ultimately, the sustainable development of rural tourism must be inextricably linked to the imperative of environmental stewardship. Educating both local residents and visitors on responsible tourism practices is fundamental to ensuring the long-term preservation of Fruška Gora's natural beauty, cultural traditions, and rich heritage for future generations. With a holistic and well-coordinated system of support, rural women are strategically positioned to assume a pivotal leadership role in shaping a more sustainable, equitable, and economically dynamic future for their communities.

Hypothesis of paper H that the empowerment of women in the villages is a decisive factor in the sustainable development of rural destinations, and that is confirmed by the received research results.

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