THE ROLE OF HORSE BREEDING IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL AND EQUESTRIAN TOURISM IN SLAVONIA AND BARANJA

ULOGA KONJOGOJSTVA U RAZVOJU RURALNOG I KONJIČKOG TURIZMA SLAVONIJE I BARANJE

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Abstract: The development of rural tourism can contribute to the economic revitalization of rural areas, particularly when tourism offerings are based on local resources, traditional heritage, natural features, and the active involvement of local communities. In this context, horse breeding is of particular importance, as it has been an integral part of agriculture, everyday life, and local identity in Slavonia and Baranja for centuries. Although horses were formerly used primarily for work and economic purposes, horse breeding is now increasingly associated with sporting, recreational, tourism-related, educational, and social activities. The long-standing tradition of horse breeding, together with stud farms, equestrian clubs, family farms, and horse-related events, provides a strong foundation for the development of equestrian tourism in Slavonia and Baranja. Such tourism offerings may include recreational and trail riding, endurance riding, riding schools, carriage driving, stud farm visits, educational programs, therapeutic activities, and participation in traditional events. Religious celebrations and festivities, cultural and folklore events, and folklore festivals held throughout Slavonia and Baranja frequently involve horses, traditional customs and traditional practices related to horse use and breeding. The affection for and attachment to horses, the care devoted to them, and the desire to present them at various events, irrespective of age, gender, or background, demonstrate their considerable importance and enduring significance within local communities.

An important contribution to the regional tourism offering is made by the Đakovo State Stud Farm, whose activities combine horse breeding, the preservation of the Lipizzaner breed, cultural heritage, and tourism. Endurance riding represents an additional area of potential, as it combines sporting and recreational activities with outdoor experiences in natural environments. The Hercules Equestrian Club from Baranja has played a prominent role in promoting this discipline, with one of its members having competed at international events, including the World Endurance Championship. Incorporating sporting achievements into the promotion of tourism products could enhance the visibility of the region and attract visitors interested in active holidays. There is also potential for introducing equestrian activities in the area surrounding Kopački Rit, provided that such activities are conducted along specifically designated trails and in accordance with nature conservation requirements. Horseback riding through the Baranja landscape enables visitors to experience the area from a different perspective, combining recreation with local equestrian heritage and natural values. The growing interest of youth in horse breeding and equestrian sports is particularly significant. In rural communities facing population decline and outmigration, stronger involvement of youth in horse breeding could contribute to the preservation of local heritage, stimulate the development of new entrepreneurial initiatives, and provide additional incentives for young people to remain in these areas. By becoming involved in horse breeding, breeders' associations, and traditional events, younger generations could help preserve and further develop horse breeding as an important component of the social and cultural identity of Slavonia and Baranja. Further development of equestrian tourism requires appropriate infrastructure, improved access to funding opportunities, more effective promotion, enhanced professional education and training, and stronger cooperation among horse breeders, equestrian clubs, tourism boards, and local government authorities. By integrating the region's horse-breeding tradition with tourism, sport, and distinctive natural features, the identity of Slavonia and Baranja could be further strengthened, the rural tourism offering diversified, and the active participation of youth encouraged.



15. Simpozij
Kopački rit:
Jučer, danas, sutra
2026