

The condition of the rural hospitality enterprises in rural tourism. The case of Serbia

Vujko, Aleksandra^{1,2,4}; Mirjana Penić³; Tamara Gajić¹

¹Novi Sad Business School (Vladimira Perića Valtera 4, 21000 Novi Sad, Serbia); ²South Ural State University, Institute of Sports, Tourism and Service (76 Lenin Ave., Chelyabinsk 454080, Russia) ³Faculty of Science, University of Novi Sad, Trg Dositeja Obradovića 3, 21000 Novi Sad, Serbia; ⁴aleksandravujko@yahoo.com

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Rural attractions has increasing opportunities to act as a basic resource for tourism, organised and sustained through locally owned small enterprises. Rural hospitality enterprises (RHEs) are a rapidly expanding and dynamic sector of the rural tourism industry, largely associated with the concept of sustainability in which local communities are increasingly proactive in facilitating the regional development. The research was aimed to determine the real condition of the accommodation capacity in rural tourism of Serbia. The authors employed a questionnaire to obtain data on the RHEs in thirteen (13) municipalities in Serbia. Thanks to the obtained results, the current condition of RHEs and potentials for more prosperous rural tourism development in the researched municipalities, can clearly be noticed.

Keywords: accommodation capacity, quality research, rural tourism, Serbia

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Las atracciones rurales tienen oportunidades cada vez mayores de actuar como un recurso básico para el turismo, organizado y sostenido a través de pequeñas empresas locales. Las empresas de hospitalidad rural (EHR) son un sector de industria del turismo rural dinámico y en rápida expansión, en gran medida asociado con el concepto de sostenibilidad dentro del cual las comunidades locales son cada vez más proactivas para facilitar el desarrollo regional. La investigación tuvo como objetivo determinar la condición real de la capacidad de alojamiento en el turismo rural de Serbia. Los autores emplearon un cuestionario para obtener datos sobre las EHR en trece (13) municipios de Serbia. Gracias a los resultados obtenidos, se puede observar claramente la condición actual de las EHR y las posibilidades de un desarrollo turístico rural más próspero en los municipios investigados.

Palabras clave: capacidad de alojamiento, investigación de calidad, turismo rural, Serbia

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INTRODUCTION

Rural tourism has the capacity to revitalize the culture and heritage of rural communities, and represent local people, societies, and lifestyles (Zhou 2014). Rural tourism is the significant factor of multifunctional rural development, which has been confirmed by numerous theoretical and empirical researches (Campbell 1999; Getz and Carlsen 2000; Gaddefors 2005; Getz and Carlsen 2005). The rural areas have a unique opportunity to attract tourists by the means of establishing a connection between rural areas and their cultural, historic, ethnic and geographical roots (Dimitrovski et al. 2012). Rural tourism is a factor of numerous changes in rural areas that are subject to changes, primarily due to the whole range of activities, services and complementary content, such as agro tourism, recreation, education, cultural events etc. (Randelli et al. 2014). According to Lane (1994), rural tourism should be based in those areas which are rural in all aspects. Lane (1994), suggests that rural tourism should include small companies owned by local families, thereby connecting the tourist services to the local agricultural production.

The rural tourism in Serbia is a new phenomenon, in which agricultural workers and people living in rural areas are looking for some alternative sources of income (Hall 2004; Dimitrovski et al. 2012; Petrović et al. 2017a). Milenković and Utvić (2013) highlighted that qualitative and quantitative methodologies of social sciences, with the emphasis on induction, conversion, multiplication, and questionnaires within statistical models should be applied in the research on rural tourism in Serbia. Furthermore, they emphasise that research with regard to rural area challenges in tourism activities must offer compatible results with the field work and define directions of rural tourism development in Serbia. Vujko and Gajić (2013) observes rural tourism as a key factor of rural areas revitalisation process with a special emphasis on problems and current condition of rural tourism in Serbia, assuming that such position is important in the new identity of Serbian village.

Rural hospitality enterprises (RHEs) are linked to a local/regional community via purchasing physical material (goods), business services and employment (Ateljevic 2009). According to Dimitrovski et al. (2012), rural accommodation is organized according to the type of the rural home. Some rural households are on agricultural land, and the owners, rarely stop their work while involved in rural tourism. The other, more common type, are rural homes not involved in agriculture, as well as small non-agricultural rural settlements, which may suggest that agriculture alone is not a necessary factor in rural tourism growth (Dimitrovski et al. 2012). According to the preliminary results of the census of agriculture in 2012, there are 631,122 agricultural establishments in Serbia. The dominant are the establishments with the average farm size of 2 hectares. Such establishments cannot become market competitive in production of agricultural products and food, but may develop additional, non-agricultural services such as rural tourism (Petrović 2014; Vujko et al. 2017; Petrović et al. 2017b).

According to the data obtained from the employees of the Association "Rural Tourism of Serbia", there were

970 registered objects that could be classified as Rural hospitality enterprises (RHEs) and objects intended for handicraft business in Serbia by the end of 2013. The owners of about 300 such RHEs have declared tourism as their primary business. Their RHEs are organised as various types of objects in rural tourism: ethno village, "salas" (farm), "vajat" (small wooden cottage), "konak" (mansion), villa or similar. The total number of beds in categorised objects is about 8,000. On average, the RHEs records between 750 and 1500 overnight stays annually, with certain RHEs reaching up to 3,000 overnight stays. Rural services, especially accommodation, are frequently included into the valorisation system with the aim of offering an objective estimation of the quality standard for the tourists (Pena et al., 2013; Gajić et al. 2017).

The aim of the paper is to determine the real condition of the accommodation capacity in rural tourism and based on that make proposals for more successful and higher quality RHEs development in Serbia in order to achieve its competitiveness at the tourism market. Questionnaire survey was conducted in 13 (thirteen) municipalities in Serbia on 164 respondents. The authors used descriptive statistics and multivariate analysis and data processing in IBM SPSS Statistics 19 programme which lead to certain conclusions. The obtained results will have wide application in numerous aspects of multifunctional agriculture and other economy segments in rural areas. The results of questionnaire survey will contribute to identify particular problems that have to be overcome and to follow directions to affirm rural tourism accommodation capacities in Serbia.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

There are 970 registered (Petrović 2014; Petrović et al. 2017a) RHEs in rural areas of Serbia that provide catering and tourism services. Members of about 300 RHEs take up tourism as their primary business. The total offer in rural tourism is approximately 8,000 beds. One RHEs records from 750 to 1,500 overnight stays, and 60 RHEs record over 1,000 overnight stays annually. About 240 objects record between 700-1,000 overnight stays, and 150 objects record between 350-700 overnight stays. About 300 RHEs record less than 350 overnight stays annually. Average stay of tourists in an RHEs is 2.8 days (Petrović 2014; Petrović et al. 2017b). Questionnaire survey comprised questions on satisfaction and tourist expectations on accommodation quality in rural areas and villages in Serbia, municipalities of Valjevo, Gornji Milanovac, Ivanjica, Knić, Knjaževac, Kosjerić, Kragujevac, Negotin, Užice, Čajetina, Subotica, Sombor and Novi Sad. Analysis of the data obtained through a questionnaire was conducted by application of the following statistical analyses: descriptive statistics for sample description and multivariate analysis – factor analysis. The data were processed in statistical programme IBM SPSS Statistics 19. The sample consisted of the total 164 respondents. There were almost even numbers of respondents from every region (Vojvodina - 66, south-eastern Serbia - 51, south-western Serbia- 46). Questionnaire for tourists – visitors of RHEs composed

for the purposes of this research was a non-standardised form consisting of the total of 47 questions. Ten closed-ended questions and one mixed type question was connected with socio-demographic characteristics of visitors to RHEs. The remaining 36 questions referred to ranking attitudes of tourists' with regard to the importance criteria and satisfaction from their points of view. The most significant sources of information will serve to make the concept of tourist product identity that will be measured based on the tourists' attitudes, associations they make with regard to the product, symbols that represent it and its characteristics. To establish the reliability of the research instrument we determined the Cronbach alpha coefficient of internal consistency of the questionnaire and Factor analysis. The new dimensions (factors) obtained following the EFA were interpreted as follows. Factor 1, personnel response, indicates rural accommodation employees' readiness to attend to customer demands quickly, reliably, and knowledgeably. Factor 2, complementary offer, gathered items reflecting possibility of involvement in surroundings and discovering local culture without losing high gastronomic quality. Factor 3, tourist relations included items on employee pleasantness and transmission of correct, interesting information. Factor 4, basic demands included items reflecting aspects of service that customers can evaluate from the outset to determine whether they meet prior demands. Factor 5, tangible elements, grouped items regarding tangibles. Factor 6, security included items referring to safety measures and customer ease in accessing the premise's installations without encountering dangerous or risky situations or feeling hesitation. Factor 7, empathy involved personalized treatment of customers (Carlos et al. 2007). In order to establish the number of significant factors the Guttman-Kaiser criterion was applied in the paper. Characteristic roots, alias eigenvalues (variance explained by the factor given in manifest variables) are the cornerstone for the estimations based on the Guttman-Kaiser root criterion. According to this criterion, the analysis should retain all the dimensions with the characteristic root higher than 1.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Gender structure analysis of the tourists' sample indicated the dominance of female tourists with 57.3% and a slightly smaller percentage of male tourists 42.7% of the total respondents in the questionnaire conducted in RHEs. Analysis of the respondents' structure reflects the dominance of the students with 42.1% of the sample. The share of respondents in primary tourism business was 26.2%, and the share of the respondent in agriculture and craft was 3% and 6.1% respectively. Almost a quarter of the respondents (22.6%) was engaged in some other business. Such structure of the respondents that visit RHEs was expected since the people with the lowest income in Serbia work in agriculture or craft business and cannot pay for more expensive tours. The age structure analysis suggested that among tourists visiting RHEs the most frequent age

group was 21 -50, precisely 50% were those aged 21-30. It is noticeable that the smallest share of tourist was the age group over 50, due to the dominance of the domestic tourists, the result was expected. Current economic conditions in Serbia prevent the people of this age group to spend money on tourism and travel. According to the education level, the analysis indicated that over half of the sample finished secondary education, i.e. 53.4% of the total. A quarter of respondents finished some form of higher education, 25.2%. The share of the respondents with master or magister degree was 8%, and the share of respondents with doctoral degree was 13.5% of the total. Respondents with low level or without any level of education were not recorded in the sample. The analysis of the sample according to the monthly income indicated that over half of the respondents, i.e. 58.2% had a monthly income up to 400 EUR, which is similar to the average income in Serbia. The percentage of the respondents with the monthly income of 600 to 1,000 EUR made 37.2% of the sample. The percentage of the respondents with monthly income exceeding 1,000 EUR was only 4.6% which was probably the feature of foreign tourists that took part in our questionnaire. The analysis also showed that tourists visiting RHEs mainly travel with family or friends (34.4% and 28.8% respectively). The number of respondents travelling most frequently with the spouse was 12.3%, whereas the number of respondents travelling with parents or alone was less significant. However, there was a certain number of tourist travelling differently, e.g. for business purposes. This research established that the most important source of information for tourist destination selection was the word of mouth by friends and family, 34.8% and 22% respectively. Internet has also gained importance in information distribution, with the dominance of a Facebook profile as a means of direct communication and information distribution.

3.1 Tourists' attitudes on accommodation quality

Factor analysis with extraction method – Principal Component Analysis (PCA) established one dimension and factor validity of every subscale. The key was designed by using the model from the research set by Carlos A. and his associates (Carlos A et al. 2007). According to high value of the Cronbach Alpha coefficient we determined high level of reliability of items for every subscale (Table 1). The analysis was continued by the assessment of factor structure of subscales (Table 2).

Validity of subscales was confirmed by factor analysis, main components method (Table 2). According to the Guttman – Kaiser Criterion, in the section Importance, the subscale "Personnel Response" the first two factors are important: the first factor comprises 43.8% of the variance, whereas the second factor comprises 16% of the variance. The subscale "Complementary Offer" as a characteristic tourist offer reveals the importance of only the first factor which comprises 45% of the variance. The subscale "Tourist Relations" highlights two factors, the first comprises 48% of the variance, and the second 21%. The subscale "Basic Demands" highlights only the first factor, which is 54% of the variance.

Table 1. Basic psychometric characteristic of instruments and the key to score calculation.

	Subscale	Items	Reliability Cronbach's Alpha	N items
Importance	Personnel Response	v1-v7	.784	7
	Complementary Offer	v8-v11	.566	4
	Tourist Relations	v12-v17	.751	6
	Basic Demands	v18-v22	.757	5
	Tangible Elements	v23-v28	.678	6
	Security	v29-v32	.712	4
	Empathy	v33-v36	.718	4
Pleasure	Personnel Response	z1-z7	.885	7
	Complementary Offer	z8-z11	.647	4
	Tourist Relations	z12-z17	.721	6
	Basic Demands	z18-z22	.845	5
	Tangible Elements	z23-z28	.683	6
	Security	z29-z32	.718	4
	Empathy	z33-z36	.746	4

The subscales "Tangible Elements", "Safety" and "Empathy" highlight the significance of the first factor only (45%, 53% and 55%). According to the Guttman – Kaiser Criterion, in the section Pleasure, the subscale "Personnel Response" indicates the importance of only the first factor, comprising 59.3% of the variance. The subscale "Complementary Offer" and "Tourist Relations" indicate pleasure in relation to two factors with the following percentage 49% and 27%; 44% and 21% respectively. The remaining subscales have only one important factor: "Basic Demands" (64% of the variance), "Empathy" (46% of the variance) and "Safety", (59% of the variance).

According to factor loading analysis, presented in Table 3, we may conclude that all items, with the exception of item "Hosts are wearing traditional costumes" which showed low factor loading, have significant values of factor loading which pointed out mutual measurement subject.

3.2 Descriptive statistics of extracted factors

This section of the paper analyses descriptive indicators for the scores with regard to importance and pleasure dimensions. All scores distributions tend to a normal distribution, with a slight negative skewness. Respondents tend to give more positive evaluation for all dimensions. Importance dimensions tend to group around mean value, whereas pleasure dimensions result show kurtosis trend with evenly dispersed results. The results of descriptive statistics are presented in the table where M - arithmetic mean value, SD - standard deviation, Me - mediana, Q - interquartile range, Min and Max - minimum and maximum values, s - skewness, k - kurtosis, and N - number of respondents.

According to descriptive indicators we conclude that the factor "Personnel Response" received the highest scores with regard to importance and pleasure aspects by the tourists visiting rural areas in Serbia (arithmetic

mean values are 31.33 and 29.94 respectively). The second and the third most significant importance factors are "Tangible Elements" and "Tourist Relations", whereas the order is reverse according to pleasure indicator. The lowest score was recorded for factor "Security" on both scales.

CONCLUSION

Rural tourism has moved into a more complex phase and today it is possible to point out different stages of development within European regions. There are a number of studies revealing that rural tourism provided economic and social benefits in various rural areas in Europe and elsewhere. In the EU, accommodation capacities are larger in rural regions (32.2%) compared to urban regions (25.3%). Rural tourism importance for the country is defined according to the share of beds in rural areas in the total average number of national accommodation capacity. In line with this parameter, France (27.8%), Greece (9.1%) and Austria (7.9%) are the countries in the EU with the highest rural accommodation capacities with regard to the average in total national accommodation capacities. In relation to Spain, for instance, Cañoves et al. (2004) and Paniagua (2002) pointed out that, over the last two decades, rural tourism contributed to mitigate emigration from rural areas and generated benefits diversifying the economy, through the cultural exchange which developed between urban and rural areas, and by adding new value to rural life.

In south-western and south-eastern Serbia the accommodation objects mainly fall within the second category, whereas in Vojvodina there is the dominance of tourist object of the third and then the second category. Significant share of tourism objects of the first category is recorded only in south-western Serbia.

Table 2. Value of the characteristic root and percentage comprise variance with the first and second factor for certain subscales.

Personnel Response			
	Component	Λ / Eigenvalue	% variance
Importance	1.	3.066	43.805
	2.	1.103	15.756
Pleasure	1.	4.152	59.317
	2.	0.718	10.260
Complementary Offer			
	Component	Λ / Eigenvalue	% variance
Importance	1.	1.795	44.88
	2.	0.881	22.03
Pleasure	1.	1.973	49.33
	2.	1.080	27.01
Tourist Relations			
	Component	Λ / Eigenvalue	% variance
Importance	1.	2.879	47.987
	2.	1.206	20.093
Pleasure	1.	2.637	43.945
	2.	1.286	21.441
Basic Demands			
	Component	Λ / Eigenvalue	% variance
Importance	1.	2.701	54.023
	2.	0.984	19.685
Pleasure	1.	3.194	63.877
	2.	0.772	15.439
Tangible Elements			
	Component	Λ / Eigenvalue	% variance
Importance	1.	2.720	45.340
	2.	1.341	22.348
Pleasure	1.	2.770	46.175
	2.	1.186	19.761
Safety			
	Component	Λ / Eigenvalue	% variance
Importance	1.	2.131	53.266
	2.	0.785	19.625
Pleasure	1.	2.160	53.995
	2.	0.816	20.392
Empathy			
	Component	Λ / Eigenvalue	% variance
Importance	1.	2.197	54.930
	2.	0.758	18.989
Pleasure	1.	2.359	58.987
	2.	0.703	17.571

The data indicate that houses in RHEs are older than 20 years (73%), but most of them have undergone renovation processes. About 63% of RHEs offer single beds, and 35% offer sofa beds which leads to a conclusion that the accommodation quality is not on high level in RHEs in Serbia, although it is sufficient for the process of categorisation to be conducted. Over 15% of owners claim that the categorisation process has been conducted unequally; since the authorities in charge of categorisation process have unaccomplished directives for categorisation (Vujko, Gajić 2014; Vujko et al. 2017).

According to Kim et al. (2012), individuals tend to remember positive experiences more easily than negative ones. In order to rural tourism it mean satisfaction that does not only mean RHEs with high quality service, but also accompanying guests during

passive activities such as enjoying the landscape and tasting regional produce, as well as during the active participation in activities linked to agriculture, handicrafts, cultural events and regional fairs. Although satisfaction does not guarantee loyalty, it is true that loyal customers are satisfied (Pena et al. 2013). We finds that satisfaction has a positive effect on loyalty. In the tourism context, the satisfaction may be recognized as a key of success, innovation and competitiveness (Correia-Loureiro 2014).

The results in the F1 (Table 3) show that respondents consider that hosts appropriately deal with potential problems, as the most important item. The results in Table 3 indicate that the most important item in the F2 is possibility of dealing with rural life (fruit gathering, domestic animals watching, homemade brandy or wine making, cooking, etc.).

Table 3. Factor Loading.

	Importance	Pleasure
Personnel Response F1		
Hosts deals with any request correctly and immediately.	.617	.782
Hosts know their job, do it well and do not make any mistakes.	.664	.774
Hosts go out of their way to solve problems customers may have.	.667	.787
Hosts always deal with guests' requests.	.693	.794
When a problem arises, hosts quickly deal with it.	.627	.799
Hosts attend to customer requests with no delay.	.714	.731
There is always someone available in the establishment to attend to our requests.	.645	.720
Complementary Offer F2		
Hosts provide quality cooking.	.641	.737
Hosts offer tourist guide services and provide information on available services.	.616	.576
Hosts provide traditional homemade cooking.	.762	.728
The services offered in the establishment include helping guests to form part of rural life (fruit gathering, domestic animals watching, homemade brandy or wine making, cooking, etc.)	.651	.754
Tourist Relations F3		
Establishment members know tradition, customs and history of the place.	.752	.748
Establishment members know other businesses that can offer us complementary services (natural material souvenirs, weaving and embroidery workshops, etc.)	.478	.509
Establishment members give us good advice regarding complementary activities that are available.	.737	.690
Establishment members give us good advice regarding gastronomy of the place.	.678	.612
Establishment members treat us politely and with warmth.	.743	.687
Establishment members treat us pleasantly.	.728	.705
Basic Demands F4		
Furniture and internal decoration of the establishment are well preserved and in good condition.	.728	.781
Individual areas (rooms) are comfortable.	.913	.922
Communal areas in the establishment (corridors, kitchen, dining room, lounge, etc.) are in good condition.	.896	.918
Advertising of the establishment is truthful.	.526	.651
Price is in accordance with the service provided.	.508	.684
Tangible Elements F5		
Internal decoration in the establishment (furniture, ceilings, lighting, floors, etc.) is pleasant, simple, homey and in harmony with the rural surroundings.	.768	.710
External decoration in the establishment (facade, garden, etc.) is attractive and in harmony with the rural surroundings	.747	.704
Hosts are wearing traditional costumes.	< 0.30	< 0.30
Individual areas (rooms) are clean.	.664	.755
Communal areas of the establishment are clean.	.728	.799
The areas attached (garden, terrace, barbecue facilities) are well kept.	.757	.747
Security F6		
The establishment is fitted with all necessary safety measures (money and values safe, etc.)	.737	.756
Hosts take care of guests' security.	.657	.582
All areas in the establishment are well indicated with signs.	.750	.771
The communication (access) routes to the establishment are well indicated with signs.	.770	.810
Empathy F7		
Hosts speak foreign languages.	.674	.660
Hosts go out of their way to make sure customers understand them.	.787	.805
Hosts attend to customers in a personalized manner.	.752	.803
If there is a group of customers, the hosts attend to customers individually.	.747	.794

The most important issue to the respondents in the F3 is that the establishment members know tradition, customs and history of the place. Results emphasized that individual areas (rooms) are comfortable is the most important one (F4). The results in Table 3 indicate

that the most important item in the F5 is internal decoration in the establishment, and for F6 it is the communication (access) routes. The most important issue to the respondents in the F7 is interaction and understanding.

Table 4. Descriptive indicators of scores on tourist offer quality aspects.

		M	SD	Me	Q	Min	Max	s	k	N
Importance	Personnel Response	31.33	3.45	32	6	21.00	35.00	-0.79	-0.16	164
	Complementary Offer	16.74	2.61	17	3.97	8.00	20.00	-0.99	0.89	164
	Tourist Relations	25.53	3.56	26	4.75	13.00	30.00	-0.98	0.90	164
	Basic Demands	21.81	2.82	22	4	12.00	25.31	-0.81	0.15	164
	Tangible Elements	25.59	3.05	26	4	17.00	30.30	-0.78	0.03	164
	Security	15.90	3.14	16	4.75	6.00	20.00	-0.69	0.03	164
	Empathy	16.79	2.90	17	4	6.00	20.00	-1.04	0.89	164
	Personnel Response	29.94	4.33	30.5	6	17.00	35.00	-0.78	-0.04	164
	Complementary Offer	16.38	2.78	17	5	9.00	20.00	-0.55	-0.50	164
	Tourist Relations	24.98	3.43	25.5	5	16.00	30.22	-0.53	-0.36	164
Pleasure	Basic Demands	20.11	3.74	20	5	9.00	25.65	-0.56	-0.33	164
	Tangible Elements	24.17	3.46	25	5	14.00	30.29	-0.61	-0.09	164
	Security	14.25	3.34	14	5	4.00	20.00	-0.26	-0.39	164
	Empathy	15.51	3.02	16	5	7.00	20.00	-0.34	-0.64	164

According to the our research, the service and accommodation quality in rural tourist destination in Serbia is not on satisfactory level due to the important difference in assessing the achieved pleasure according to tourist expectations. Moreover, the efforts of organisations, local and state authorities are insufficient for improvements in this sector and creating the base for sustainable rural tourism development in Serbia. The paper shows through the research data that the prescribed standards on accommodation categorisation of RHEs have been fully complied with in practice in rural tourism development. There are 84 tourist organisations in Serbia that have offers for RHEs. There has been a constant increase in the number of rural tourism establishments, as well as in the number of tourists and overnight stays in the last ten years. It is not only the owners of rural tourism establishments that make profit, but also the households that sell agricultural products (dairy, vegetables, ham, honey, brandy, wine, etc.) and old crafts products. Categorisation standards for rural tourism establishments have been established within four categories (one to four stars) and the categorisation expiration date is three years which is also the same as for other accommodation objects. From the obtained data we draw the conclusions on rural tourism development in Serbia. We can conclude that capacities in rural tourism are limited and cannot receive a lot of tourists, which in return limits the expansion of this tourism branch. But, rural tourism can become an important market segment, and by obeying the rules of sustainable development and by cherishing local tradition and culture, this aspect of tourism is becoming one of the strategic and most efficient ways of rural areas' development in transitional societies.

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