

THE USE OF LOCAL VALUES FOR TOURISM AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Katalin Herbály-Hekli

Department for Rural Development and Land Management
Szolnok University College H-5000 Szolnok, Tiszaligetű sétány, Hungary
e-mail: heklina@szolf.hu

ABSTRACT

After the change of the political-economic regime, since the 1990s, economic restructuring and subsequent crisis in agriculture have reduced the economic opportunities of rural communities. These - mostly negative - changes have limited rural communities' economic development options, making former development strategies less viable and forcing them to look for new ways to sustain themselves. One of the most popular, non-traditional rural development strategies has been tourism and its associated entrepreneurship/partnership opportunities because of tourism's ability to bring in money and to generate jobs and support economic growth. The purpose of this study is to identify and examine those factors that have helped or could still help rural communities to develop tourism.

A research work (with the help of surveys) was conducted with the participants of the tourism market. The results clearly demonstrate the importance of the community approach to tourism development and that rural tourism development and entrepreneurship cannot work without the participation and collaboration of the different partners (e.g. businesspeople, local governments, NGO-s, local people) directly and indirectly involved in tourism.

This paper also reviews, how the principles of sustainable tourism have special relevance to the development of rural tourism, and examines how those principles can be put into practice. It considers the advantages of this approach, and offers guide-lines for future practitioners.

Rural tourism is increasingly viewed as a panacea, increasing the economic viability of marginalised areas, stimulating social regeneration and improving the living conditions of rural settlements. Less developed areas, afflicted by debilitating rural poverty, have considerable potential in attracting tourists in search of new, authentic experiences in areas of unexploited natural and cultural riches. This paper proves - the above mentioned statement - that the clustering of activities and attractions, and the development of rural tourism routes, stimulates co-operation and partnerships between local people, institutions and mostly the neighbouring areas. The other aim of this paper is trying to outline the complexity of rural development processes that specifically relate to the phenomenon of multifunctionality.

Conclusions:

- local people were active in giving information about their work and plans
- they need help (e.g. EU support, education) in participating in the tourism market
- there are local values of the settlements that have not been utilized yet but can be developed into a tourism supply
- the surroundings (e.g. road infrastructure) of the settlements are very important

Aims:

- organise an attitude-shaping complex communication campaign serving the conceptual and framework system of sustainable tourism (e.g. to inform farmers or local people about how to start an agro-tourism business)
- compile a specific appeals register for the settlements/sub-regions
- design a leaflet with the most important information for tourists (Slovak example)

- organise and implement a profession-specific tourist cluster or Tourism Destination Management organisation (to strengthen co-operation).

1. INTRODUCTION

After the change of the political-economic regime, since the 1990s, economic restructuring and subsequent crisis in agriculture have reduced the economic opportunities of rural communities. These - mostly negative - changes have limited rural communities' economic development options, making former development strategies less viable and forcing them to look for new ways to sustain themselves. One of the most popular, non-traditional rural development strategies has been tourism and its associated entrepreneurship/partnership opportunities because of tourism's ability to bring in additional money and to generate jobs and support economic growth. The purpose of this study is to identify and examine those factors that have helped or could still help rural communities to develop tourism.

This paper also reviews how the principles of sustainable tourism have special relevance to the development of rural tourism (especially agro tourism), and examines how those principles can be put into practice. It considers the advantages of this approach and offers guidelines for future practitioners.

2. MATERIAL PERUSED

2.1 International examples proving the connection between rural development and rural tourism

Especially during the last decades, many countries considered tourism as a real and sustainable support for their economic development. Tourism was considered a real opportunity for Romania as well. Despite this, the contribution of travel and tourism economy to Romanian GDP varied around 2% in the period of the years between 1997 and 2007. Due to an underdeveloped and neglected road infrastructure, to the lack of financing sources and to the lack of interest on behalf of local and central authorities for tourism development, regions otherwise fit for ecotourism and rural tourism - like Maramures - failed to attract tourist, neither foreign, nor Romanian. The situation improved slowly since 1996, after the decision of the European Community to finance rural development (including rural tourism) in Romania through PHARE programs and - by the end of 1990s - through SAPARD programs. (Negrusa-Cosma-Bota, 2007)

Farm recreation simply includes any recreational activity enjoyed by guests for a few hours or a few days, while staying on a farm or ranch. It was first legally defined in the U.S. by the Wyoming Department of Public Health as "a ranch/farm facility containing or having under use agreement 160 acres or more which may for a charge to the public provide activities for not more than a daily average of 8 persons in any given 30 day period or may include sleeping facilities in not more than 4 sleeping units along with accompanying meals. Meals and lodging shall be considered an adjunct to the activities which take place on the farm and are not available to 'non-registered guests'. Recreation offered by a farmer or a rancher is a secondary activity to generate supplemental income. The activities offered are limited only by the imagination or resources available. These activities help the farm/ranch recreation industry to fit nicely into the travel industry's definitions of adventure travel, ecotourism, heritage or cultural travel and are generally thought of as a destination vacation. Space, aesthetics, new learning experiences, adventure, and the

opportunity for recreationists to do their own thing with a rural American family, away from crowds, are valuable resources and services which can be provided by farmers or ranchers. For potential guests in stressful jobs, and those wanting to get back to nature, rural recreation can provide a measure of wellness in today's health-conscious society." (Daniels-Powell-Rottman, 2001)

Another useful possibility for developing especially rural tourism - practiced by Slovakia - is to inform guests about the tourism supply of a settlement/region in printed leaflets (one side written in the home language and the other in English) with the following contents:

- General information
- History
- Ethnography
- Religion
- Economy
- Transportation infrastructure
- Natural features and protected areas
- UNESCO cultural and natural heritage sites
- Special places of interest (www.vupco.sk)

2.2. Area description

We suppose that education - especially higher education - can help in developing rural areas through rural tourism. Szolnok University College in Hungary represents one of those institutions that involve students in different research activities and in working out projects for different applications, related to tourism. The College offers eight first degree programmes, including Tourism & Catering, Commerce & Marketing and Economic & Rural Development Management.

The surroundings of the College are typically 'rural', with the town of Szolnok situated by the Tisza River at the heart of the Great Hungarian Plain, 100 km east of the capital, Budapest. From a largely agricultural community in the 18th century, Szolnok, due to its advantageous location and excellent road and rail links, by now it has developed into a tourism hub and a thriving commercial centre. The surrounding region is blessed with remarkable natural endowments: fertile soil, plenty of thermal water and a high number of sunny hours. Though largely agricultural, with the unique landscape of the Great Plain and the picturesque Tisza and Zagyva Rivers, it boasts many thermal and medicinal spas underpinning a growing tourism industry.

Two years ago a research project (with the help of surveys) was conducted with the participation of our students, with the aim of getting information on the activities and opinion of the hosts living in settlements our students came from; mostly in the eastern part of Hungary. (Thus the findings were not representative but gave useful information for students and for teachers alike about the way of thinking of the participants of the tourism market, as well.)

2.3. Findings of the research project

This paper highlights only some of the questions that are primarily related to the above-mentioned aim. The hosts (39 people) were asked whether they could mention some reasons that made their settlements and its surroundings attractive. Results show that (in most cases the rural) settlements and their environment (12.7%), the traditions (11.3%) and the existing tourist centres (10.0%) can be mentioned as the main elements of a desirable tourist supply. It is obvious that a various range of the natural environment and traditional

activities, existing even in our days, could be involved in the tourism supply in the eastern part of Hungary.

The hosts, who participate in the field of rural tourism, answered that only one-fifth of the houses were traditional peasants' homes. 67.7% of the houses have separate entrance but the kitchens are mostly (57.9%) used together with other guests or with the host family. They have been asked whether they could provide meals for the guests or not. Table 1. below shows the results.

Table 1. Types of meals provided by the hosts

Type of the meal	(%)
Only breakfast	5.1
Breakfast and dinner	10.3
Breakfast, lunch and dinner	51.3
No meal provided	33.3
Altogether	100.0

Resource: surveys

It is good to note that about half the hosts can provide full board but we consider a handicap that one-third of them offer only accommodation. From the point of view of developing rural areas through rural tourism it is distressing that 93.2% of them purchase the raw materials necessary for making food and only 6.8% can use their own products for this service.

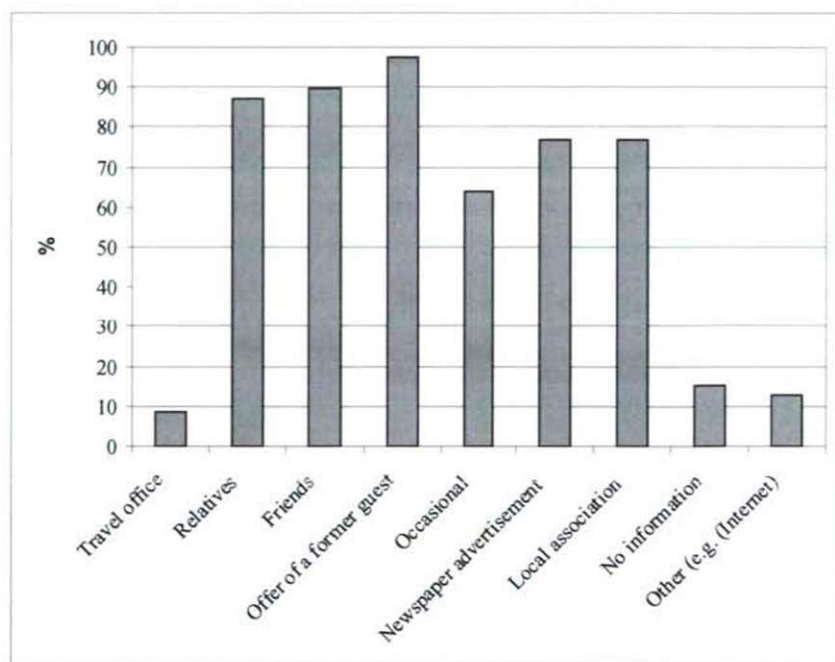
Another important expectation of tourism development is the ability to provide guests with more and more services (Table 2.) As the table below shows, the number of services is quite good and the tourism values and programmes of the surrounding settlements or regions are not being involved.

Table 2. Types of services provided by the hosts

Type of the service	(%)
Telephone	43.6
TV, radio	97.4
Washing machine	56.4
Refrigerator	97.4
Bedclothes	94.8
Bathing pool	12.8
Garden	76.9
Playground for children	46.1
Other (e.g. Internet)	2.5

Resource: surveys

Another important issue is to know the sources of intermediaries from where tourists can have information on the tourism supply of a region. It seems obvious that getting information with the help of former guests, friends or relatives was found the most common. We consider surprising the low level of Internet use as a source of information. (Figure 1.)



Resource: surveys

Figure 1. Type of the source of information

We wanted to get some information on the activities that they need help in. We got the list of the most common answers, like learning about the experiences of others working in the given field, market research, organising programmes, co-operation with others, etc. The findings to this question prove the importance of networking and taking part in different training programmes (like getting the latest information on the legal regulations, best practices, tenders, etc.) in the future.

2.3. Conclusions

The results clearly demonstrate the importance of the community approach to tourism development and that rural tourism development and entrepreneurship cannot work without the participation and collaboration of the different partners (e.g. businesspeople, local governments, NGO-s, local people) directly and indirectly involved in tourism.

The other aim of this paper is trying to outline the complexity of rural development processes that specifically relate to the phenomenon of multifunctionality. Multifunctionality is introduced as a means for visualizing the complex inter-relationships in rural development processes and to highlight the functional relationships in the use of local resources such as land, labour, knowledge, traditions and nature.

Conclusions:

- local people were active in giving information about their work and plans
- they need help (e.g. EU support, education) in participating in the tourism market
- there are local values of the settlements that have not been utilized yet but can be developed into a tourism supply

- the surroundings (e.g. road infrastructure) of the settlements are very important
- the necessity of developing agro-tourism in rural regions.

3. RECOMMEDATIONS

Drawing on the information from trade literature and the findings of the surveys we can conclude that it would be advisable to develop agro tourism first. In spite of the favourable conditions (good soil, the high number of sunny hours, indigenous plants and animals, traditions of agricultural production and food-processing) agro tourism in Hungary is not so well-known and developed as in Germany or in the U.S.

We must not forget that agro tourism is a commercial enterprise at a working farm, ranch, or agricultural plant conducted for the enjoyment of visitors that generates supplemental income for the owner. It is advisable to develop this form of tourism, because agro tourism enterprises might offer:

- Outdoor recreation (hunting, wildlife study, horseback riding).
- Educational experiences (cannery tours, cooking classes).
- Entertainment (harvest festivals or barn dances).
- Hospitality services (farm stays, guided tours or outfitter services).
- On-farm direct sales (u-pick operations or roadside stands).

Thus agro tourism constitutes subset of a larger industry called rural tourism that includes resorts, off-site farmers' markets, non-profit agricultural tours, and other leisure and hospitality businesses that attract visitors to the countryside. (Jolly, 2009)

First of all you have to find out whether the settlement or the region has a list about the unique tourism values, if not, it is advisable to compile a specific appeals register.

If one would like to enter the agro-tourism market, it is important to know how to get started from the idea, so an inventory must be taken as a first step:

- Check local and state laws
- Check insurance rates
- Set short and long-term goals
- Visit an existing farm, dealing with agro tourism
- Draw up a business/marketing plan
- Ask for advise (other operators and professionals)
- Using your business/marketing plan and with the help of appropriate professionals,
- Start your tourism/recreation business. (Daniels, Powell, Rottman, 2001)

Besides this useful advice you cannot avoid marketing and community partnerships in your region because establishing relationships and cooperative alliances with your community is a key element of long-term success. You can read the short summary of starting your own business and building partnerships in your neighbourhood. (Jolly,2009)

- Speak about your project early with neighbours, family, and local businesses. Share your ideas. Listen to their concerns and feedback. Address any problems early in the development of the project.
- Develop a comfortable level of public presentation. Have a clear focus of your mission and expected outcomes. Do not let yourself become overburdened by the

administrative aspects, the rules and procedures of your project. Keep your eye on the outcomes.

- Speak about your project at association meetings, and other gatherings. Get feedback and modify your presentation.
- See your shortcomings or weaknesses as future partnerships. Inventory your community and seek out those who have what you need to complete your goals. Return the favour.
- Define who shares potential customers with you. Align yourself with other businesses and attractions and openly discuss potential customers. Develop exchange promotions and track the source of your leads.
- Be innovative. The greatest achievements happen outside the “system.” Don’t break laws or burn bridges, just be creative.
- Regarding local ordinances: the government listens to commitments, not complaints, and so do your neighbours. If you cannot turn a negative situation into a positive passion, let it go. Work through compliance issues as required by law and in the spirit of cooperation with surrounding properties and interests.
- Engage any adversaries. Most people simply want to be heard or are afraid of the unknown impacts. Sit down with them one-on-one and listen. Address the concerns and do not whitewash them.
- Keep your business plan and marketing plan in the daylight. Make them work for you. If they are not working for you, then change them. Use your plans to support your actions and efforts.
- Work to foster a sense of community and personal responsibility among citizens.
- Manage physical growth of your operation to ensure quality of life for all citizens affected.
- Work with other businesses to encourage small town character and support of locally owned businesses.
- Build on the agricultural, timber and other resource based assets in the area.
- Maintain and enhance historic structures.

The above mentioned activities could serve as the beginnings of organising and implementing an up-to-date form of co-operation, namely a profession-specific tourist cluster. This form of the common work can help to use a qualifying and benchmarking system that is the key element of the good tourism supply. In the framework of each type of co-operation it is much easier to work out an education material with currently missing information for the members. If tourism organisations, local communities, individual experts, NGO-s, local entrepreneurs and residents join the cluster it can work effectively, taking the common interest of the members into consideration. Another form of co-operation that can be offered is organising a Tourism Destination Management organisation.

4. FINAL CONCLUSION

In case of Hungary it is advisable to make use of the local natural-, human resources and traditions for the development of rural (e.g. agro tourism). Rural tourism is increasingly viewed as a panacea, increasing the economic viability of marginalised areas, stimulating social regeneration and improving the living conditions of rural settlements. Less developed areas, afflicted by debilitating rural poverty, have considerable potential in attracting tourists in search of new, authentic experiences in areas of unexploited natural and cultural riches. This paper proves – the above mentioned statement - that the clustering

of activities and attractions, and the development of rural tourism routes, stimulates co-operation and partnerships between local people, institutions and mostly the neighbouring areas. Such meaningful community participation, together with public sector support, presents opportunities for the development of small-scale indigenous tourism projects in less developed areas.

We are convinced that this form of tourism – enjoying state or EU support - can at the same time contribute to the agricultural and rural development of the given settlement/region. From the point of view of all these activities developing transport infrastructure has a great importance. So as to implement all the above mentioned recommendations the following tasks are necessary to do:

- organise an attitude-shaping complex communication campaign serving the conceptual and framework system of sustainable tourism (e.g. to inform farmers or local people about how to start an agro-tourism business)
- compile a specific appeals register for the settlements/sub-regions
- design a leaflet with the most important information for tourists (Slovak example)
- work out an education material with currently missing information
- employ a qualifying and benchmarking system
- organise and implement a profession-specific tourist cluster or Tourism Destination Management organisation (to strengthen co-operation).

This paper also reviews how the principles of sustainable tourism have special relevance to the development of rural tourism, and examines how those principles can be put into practice. It considers the advantages of this approach and offers guidelines (using leaflets, giving advice how to improve infrastructure with the help of external - e.g. EU - funds and how to start an agro tourism business) for future practitioners.

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