

FEASIBILITY EXAMINATION OF ECO-VILLAGES IN ZEMPLÉN IN CONNECTION WITH RURAL TOURISM

BERNADETT SZABÓ – LÁSZLÓ POSTA

University of Debrecen, Faculty of Applied Economics and Rural Development
4032 Debrecen, Böszörményi St. 138.

bszabo@agr.unideb.hu

ABSTRACT

Eco-villages are of rural or city types, aiming at forming a model for the sustainable life-style and environmental consciousness. These villages may be new communities or already existing ones with new contribution. In our study we investigated seven communities in the Zemplén belonging to the most disadvantageous communities of Hungary from the aspect of rural development. Our objectives were to reveal and analyze the possibilities of the communities for self-sufficiency, their chances to become eco-villages, as well as to examine the connection points of sustainability and rural tourism. In order to reach our objectives critical interviews were made with the mayors of the communities and surveys were done among the population and rural hosts. We concluded that the communities have real chances to establish the conception of eco-villages by forming the self-sufficiency, furthermore, rural tourism may have a significant role in spreading the environmental consciousness to city-dwellers and in alternative profit source of local population.

ÖSSZEFOGLALÓ - Ökofalvak megvalósíthatósági vizsgálata a Zemplénben a falusi turizmus vonatkozásában

Az ökofalvak falusi vagy városi jellegűek lehetnek, melyek létrehozásának célja egy olyan modell kialakítása, ami a fenntartható és környezettudatos életformát testesíti meg. Ezek a települések lehetnek új közösségek, vagy már létezőek, melyek új szemlélettel bírnak. Tanulmányunkban vidékfejlesztési szempontok alapján hét zempléni települést vizsgáltunk, melyek Magyarország legelmaradottabb települései közé tartoznak. Célunk az volt, hogy feltárjuk és elemezzük e közösségek önellátásra való berendezkedési lehetőségeit, valamint esélyeiket arra vonatkozóan, hogy ökofalvakká válhassanak. Ezen kívül vizsgáltuk a fenntarthatóság és a falusi turizmus kapcsolódási pontjait is. Céljain eléréséhez a polgármesterek körében mélyinterjúkat készítettünk, melyeket kiegészítettünk a lakosság és a falusi vendéglátók körében végzett kérdőíves felmérésekkel. Megállapítottuk, hogy a vizsgált közösségeknek valós esélyeik vannak az ökofalvak koncepciójának megvalósítására, az önellátásra való berendezkedéssel, illetve a falusi turizmusnak meghatározó szerepe lehet a környezettudatosság elterjesztésében a városiak körében és a helyi lakosság számára alternatív jövedelemszerzési lehetőséget biztosíthat.

Keywords: eco-village, rural tourism, sustainability, self-sufficiency

INTRODUCTION

The idea of eco-villages came up for thirty to forty years, and then first communities called themselves as eco-villages formed in several parts of the world. The eco-village movement may be considered as a part of anti-globalization movement, which deals with establishing own sustainable settlements. The members of eco-villages are intentional communities formed by consciously where people live and work for reaching a single common objective (CAKE-DALY, 2009).

From another aspect eco-villages strive to form a sustainable life-style and environmental consciousness and examples of a development which maintains high living standard, saves the natural reserves and transfer a totally new approach including ecology, education, making decisions, green technology and business activities (SZABÓ-LÁSZLÓ, 2011).

Global Eco-village Network considers communities as eco-villages that are committed in the mission of eco-villages, reflect this in their organizational and community documents and reach progresses in this field. Eco-villages are generally bottom-up built, their members follow internal rules instead of external ones. They try to meet requirements of the harmonic co-existence of human beings and nature by changing their own lifestyle voluntarily (CAKE-DALY, 2009; HARI, 2008).

In definitions of relevant literature the principle of sustainability appears as a common pattern, in this way eco-villages are sustainable communities in the long run. The factors of sustainability may be classified from several aspects; however, sustainability is built upon four pillars, such as economic, ecological-environmental, social and spiritual ones. According to approaches in literature sustainability has economic, ecological-environmental and social aspects; however, the fourth so-called spiritual aspect has equally importance (SINGH, 2008), which may be observed mainly in the Eastern societies today, though its significance is increasing even in Western societies. Presently the communities of Agostyán, Drávafok, Galgahévíz, Gömörszőlős, Gyűrűfű, Máriahalom, Somogyvámos and Visnyeszéplak operate as eco-villages in Hungary, based on different conditions but aiming at reaching one objective, realizing the sustainability in practice.

In several other European countries, for example in Norway, rural tourism is linked to sustainability (HORVÁTH, 2009). In sharing and transferring the practical realization of sustainability and environmental consciousness, touristic activity being rural tourism or eco-tourism in eco-villages may have a great role. A community in eco-villages may support the retaining ability of rural areas and the ability to economically provide for a population, may serve jobs for less qualified labour force, moreover they may be examples for the visiting city-dwellers in the field of environmental consciousness and energy saving. But only a guest house may have a highlighted relevance in taking the environmental aspects into consideration and in transferring energy saving by using environmental friendly technologies. Such an initiation in a rural village may be a good community forming power, which may strengthen co-operation, improve responsibility for environment and may have roles in saving natural, cultural and traditional economic values in a sustainable way (SZABÓ, 2010).

RESEARCH METHOD

We examined the situation of rural tourism, the possibilities for self-sufficiency and the feasibility of eco-village concept in seven communities in the Zemplén, such as in Bózsza, Füzér, Füzérradvány, Hollóháza, Mikóháza, Pálháza and Telkibánya. The investigated area is located in the Northern Hungarian region in the north eastern part of Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén county. Though they belong to the most disadvantageous communities in Hungary, the area is abounded in natural, cultural and historical values helping the spread of rural tourism.

Our investigations were helped by critical interviews and surveys. The critical interview of mayors contained 26 questions detailing the chances to become eco-villages and willingness of the community to co-operate with each other besides the questions relating to conditions of population maintaining ability.

In the survey of the inhabitants, 1% of the total population got into the sample, representing the basic population in age, sex and education. The questionnaire contained 21 questions, and aimed at revealing willingness of population to carry out rural tourism, to cooperate with each other as well as to establish environmental conscious life forms in the future.

Altogether 20 rural hosts got into the sample during the survey, who represented 20% of the total hosts in the seven communities. The questionnaire contained 44 questions. During the survey besides being involved in the issues of the operation, we concentrated even on the facts that to what rate the tourism is linked to agriculture, whether the hosts have willingness to do bio-farming, and to create an environmental conscious life form. The survey was carried out in the summer of 2010 personally, as our aim was to have a deeper and more detailed look in the lives of the inhabitants and in the operation of rural hosts. The results were evaluated by Microsoft Excel program.

RESULTS

It is typical that the investigated communities have similar social and economic structures, rich natural values and built heritage and still existing traditions. These provide the basis for collaboration and cooperation of villages. There have been successful steps made for decreasing unfavorable processes typical to local society such as aging, depopulation and unemployment recently. Due to collaboration of communities based on partnership touristic, infrastructural and institutional developments have been realized, restructuring process is just about to appear in the fields of forestry, agricultural production, product processing and rural tourism, which may enhance living standard of local population, improve employment conditions, and expand the possibilities of profit sources. Developments reflect natural and environmental protection so the harmony of sustainable regional development and collaboration appears. By these we can rely on the fact that the unfavorable situation still typical to the communities will cease by the help of collaboration and subsidies, and as viable rural villages they will show good examples for population maintenance by saving natural, cultural and social values.

From the examined communities Mikóháza has the biggest chance to become an eco-village, because the village being developed significantly during the recent years shows a good example of self-sufficiency. The settlement became a touristic target, which is strengthened by the organized and flowered image as well. Thank to the nearness of Sátoraljaújhely many city dwellers settle here longing to peace and closeness to nature, which slows down the decrease of the population since 2004. In 2009 there were 578 inhabitants living in Mikóháza (KSH, 2009). Natural conditions are favourable for forestry and game management, but the agricultural feature of the village also survived coming from co-op past, which may be connected to rural tourism very well. The project won from the Norwegian Civil Support Fund is a good example, in which 30 families in Mikóháza received native Hungarian goose, turkey and hen species as well as traditional orchard varieties typical to the area aiming at helping the local production. Rural hosts participate in the project as well striving to establish the classical form of rural tourism. The condition of taking part in the project for farmers is to participate in village days and farmers' days with their own products. Further pursuits are planned to reconstruct mountain pastures, to establish farming close to nature and to keep traditional animal species. The objective is to arrange for self-sufficiency in the long run by maintaining crafts typical to landscape within a so-called social co-operative.

Within the Hungary-Slovakia Cross-Border Cooperation Program (2007-2013) the local government aims at developing wine and palinka tourism by renovating the historical cellars connecting with creating parking places, roads, resting areas, wine drinking pubs, exhibition rooms. During the cooperation the aim is to establish a high-level touristic supply, which helps the development of cross-border wine tourism. The multiplication effect of this development may be the strength of small and medium-

sized touristic enterprises, the increase of employment level and by this decrease of unemployment. Possibilities for accommodations have expanded in the village. Presently nine guest houses wait for tourists. Nowadays a camping with wellness and sauna service is under establishing.

Bringing local products to market may have a great significance. Relevance of animal breeding has decreased by the liquidation of agricultural co-ops. Milk, meat, cheese, palinka, trout, honey cake may have significant touristic role, which may create jobs and livelihood for the local and attraction for tourists. Walnut, raspberry, mulberry, currant, apple, apricot, grape are typical fruits to the Hegyköz. Fruit production, increasing the ratio of bio-products and processing may have strategic significance in local employment and in the increase of guest numbers.

Every mayor thinks of a working alternative in becoming an eco-village for longer period of time. Beside the necessary capital changing the aspect of the population is also needed. Every community uses wood chop firing and wood gazing furnace, solar energy collector and education for environmental consciousness is started already during the early childhood.

The ratio of inhabitants and rural hosts is dominant who are willing to establish an environmental conscious life form, so to use solar and wind energy, gain energy from biomass, utilize natural materials during their every-day-life and farm without chemicals. Regarding the willingness of the inhabitants and rural hosts to collaborate and cooperate with each other and basing on the mayors' opinions, we concluded that there is a real chance for the communities to realize the conception of eco-villages, which altogether with rural tourism may contribute to establishing global view approach and realizing the sustainable development, mentioned several times in theory, in practice. This could be linked to the social co-operatives according to the example in Mikóháza concentrating on landscape farming, using traditional animal and plant varieties, in which rural tourism might play an important role in spreading the concept to tourists and changing the view of city-dwellers.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Every eco-village is formed by its population, has an own developing tendency, a unique and local experimental place and a sustainable settlement. Eco-villages develop continuously and study from their mistakes. According to the eco-village movement the responsibility should be given to local communities instead of expensive and impersonal institutional systems, which results in reasonable jobs and higher living standard. By changing lifestyle and concentrating living and working places and recreation areas into one point, by reforming consuming habits as well as producing energy and food locally huge energy may be spared and significant environmental pollution may be avoided, while human well-fare does not decline but even rise. Many villages were formed by spiritual communities, but spirituality appears in places in time at any level, where it was not important earlier.

Creating eco-villages in the Zemplén, especially in the area of Hegyköz, would strengthen the three functions of rural development. From the economic aspect it may provide opportunity to sell product locally by expanding local markets; from the social aspect it may result in increasing living standards due to profit generation; from the ecological and environmental aspect it would represent the practical example of saving natural values in a sustainable way; all these giving possibilities to communities to recover from regional depression and to develop. All these would help in developing and strengthening the fourth, spiritual pillar of sustainability.

The rural guest table service may stimulate small-scale farmers and farming rural hosts to produce agricultural products typical to their areas by traditional processes, which may be sold to guests directly. On the basis of local specialties, onetime old traditional farming practices, former crafts may be recalled, which can be introduced to visiting guests during community and subregional events. All these may force inhabitants to co-operate with each other, may help in realizing inner identity consciousness, while rediscovering values of their living places.

Both the guest house and the host have a significant role in realizing environmental aspects by using environmental friendly technologies. For example if bigger part of the used energy comes from renewable energy sources, solar energy is utilized, heating is managed by up-to-date pellet-firing system, double isolation and heat isolated windows are chosen, motion detected light resource regulators, energy efficient bulbs, environmental friendly detergent are used, waste is collected selectively, or rain water is recycled.

Such an idea has a huge community forming power and stimulates for high-leveled co-operation even in the field of gaining subsidies for realization. As practical examples for eco-villages they can find solutions for maintaining population, as city-dwellers being disappointed from consumers' society would visit the settlements in a bigger number, which has an indirect effect on job creation in agriculture, tourism and service as well. By this the aim that inhabitants should not commute may be reached, their livelihood can be ensured by using local conditions, which reduces unemployment as well. These villages would also have conscious forming roles as a living eco-village may deeply reflect the place where sustainability may be realized. The guests may participate actively in practicing this life form, trusting in the fact that after leaving home they will further strive for environmental consciousness and energy saving in their households showing a good example to follow for their environment.

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